

BASIC CLOTHS USED IN CONSTRUCTION OF BOOKS

By Catherine Burkhard

There are several cloths, other than decorative or colored book cloths, which are used in the construction of most books, though most are generally hidden from view once the book is bound. Since they are all used in the spine/hinge area of the book, it can get confusing. The book can be a new binding, or one that is being restored. I hope this helps to shed some light on their uses, specifically in relation to case bound books.

* Please note: Most case bound books will require super. Hinge cloth is used to make most all my case covers to create stronger hinges. The other materials have more specialized uses.

Super (also called crash or mull)

This open weave, heavily sized material (similar to cheesecloth, but stiffer) is used to attach the text block to the case in case bound books. It should be cut so that it will extend 1 to 2" on both sides of the spine. Its height is about 1" less than the height of the text block -- allowing for placement of endbands. If end sheets are to be tipped on, this is done prior to applying the super.

The super is centered and glued to the spine, and then allowed to dry. Once the book is ready for its cover, the part of the super that extends past the sides of the spine will get glued to the cover boards when the casing-in task is done. The pastedowns of the end sheets are then glued down on to the inside of the cover boards hiding the super.

Super is manufactured in several degrees of openness in the weave. I prefer to use the one with the tightest weave that is generally available.

Hinge Cloth

This cloth is used to create a stronger hinge. The boards of the case are glued to the sides of a piece of hinge cloth that is cut following careful measuring of the text block. The boards with hinge cloth and a support piece down the spine are now one full piece, and are then glued to the covering material.

Not all binders take the added step to use hinge cloth to increase the strength of the hinge. Since the hinge is usually the part of a binding that fails first, I take the extra time. With bindings that will have a flexible cover, I use a thinner material called "Fraynot" rather than regular hinge cloth. Most of the time a flexi-cover is done on study Bibles.

Stretch Linen

This material is used to create a tube that will be used in a hollow back binding, especially when a case binding structure is used. Stretch linen stretches in only one direction. The stretch is to be perpendicular to the length of the spine. Cut a piece a bit more than three times the width of your spine, and the height of the text block. You fold one third over the far third and glue to form a tube. I use straight PVA so as to not dampen the stretch linen anymore than is necessary.

The tube now has two layers on one side and one layer on the other side. The side with only one layer is glued to the text block's spine (*It may help to remember the saying "one on -- two off".*) I always put a mark on the one-layer side.

When the cover is ready for casing, the spine of the cover is first glued to the hollow that is now on the text block. Once glued I burnish the spine very well using a Teflon folder, and then hold the book under my arm to be sure the tube is adhering to the cover. I use a Teflon spatula or long knitting needle to go down inside the tube (one end at a time) and push the tube against the cover. Lay the book aside with a press board on top and a weight for about one hour for a good bond. The hollow-back technique is particularly good for adhesive bound books.

Irish Linen

Lightweight Irish linen is preferred for use as spine support or as a spine lining on fragile books -- especially very old ones. For use in total rebacking, the linen is adhered to the back of Oriental paper, usually Moriki. The linen is excellent when used for fan-glued bindings. For any use, it's best to cut the amount needed (height of spine usually) going parallel to the selvage of the linen.

When applying this linen as a lining or as support material for a spine I use Mixit (PVA and paste mixture). Same for when I apply Oriental paper to back the linen. But when I use the linen for the fan-gluing process, I use straight PVA.

Once the linen is applied and has dried, super is still used over the linen, as described above.

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