

Blockprinting: Stamping Your Fabric Glossary, Tips, and Tricks

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BLOCK PRINTING GLOSSARY

Block (also Stamp, Woodcut) – A piece of thick material with a flat smooth surface into which a design is carved; used to print repeated impressions of the design.

Baren – For hand printing (usually on paper, but could also be used for fabric). The baren surface is usually padded. The use of a printmaking baren evenly distributes pressure across the surface of the material from beneath, creating a better stamp.

Brayer – A small roller used to spread pigment onto the block's surface for printing.

Dauber (also Dabber) – Similar to a brayer, in period and sometimes employed today this is a wool pad covered with soft leather (deer skin) bundled around it – or today it could be a foam or sponge dauber, used to manually transfer pigment onto the block.

Flocking – The process of printing onto fabric, then immediately applying finely chopped textile materials (often powdered wool or finely cut silk), dusted across the wet pigment immediately after pressing it onto the fabric. This is done to create a faux velvet look. The resulting print is soft and often has less than crisp edges because the flocking blurs the lines.

Gilding – The process of applying gold (flakes or thin sheets) to a surface in order to create a gold surface in the shape(s) desired.

Motif (also Pattern) – This is the design that is on your block that will be used to create your individual print or repeated pattern on your fabric.

Stamp Pad – This is a saturated fabric with a small pool of pigment beneath that is used to evenly coat the surface of the block with that pigment for printing.

Pigment – This is the colored liquid or paste (paint, ink, stain, or dye) that will be transferred to your fabric via your block.

Print (also Transfer, Impression) – An image or motif that has been transferred with pigment from a block onto a surface (fabric, paper, wall). Technically, this excludes painting, resist dyeing, and even stenciling because none of those techniques involve the transfer of an image from one surface to another, which is the very definition of a print.

Relief – The image is printed from the raised surface of the block, which stands “in relief” above the rest of the carved woodblock.

Registration – Lining up the blocks, screens, or stencils to properly align your prints for the desired effect. This is usually achieved by drawing chalk lines or using Painter's Tape to use as a guide for block placement.

Xylography – The art of making woodcuts for the purposes of printing. This is a modern term, first put into a dictionary in 1816, and is often used to refer to woodcuts for specific purpose of paper printing, however it's an important term for research and learning some universal “How To's” in carving wood (and linoleum) blocks.

TROUBLE SHOOTING GUIDE



ISSUE: EMPTY GROOVES OR EMPTY CHANNELS IN THE PRINT

Tip: Make sure your fabric is ironed, completely free of any wrinkles.

Tip: Make sure your fabric is pulled taut to prevent creases and folds from happening under the block as you stamp it down.



ISSUE: DOUBLED OR BLURRED PRINT

Tip: If this has happened, it likely means that your block has bounced or moved while you are repeatedly applying pressure against it onto your fabric. This is particularly likely if you're using a mallet.

Tip: Never touch the block down, then lift up quickly to reposition your block. Once you have touched the fabric, commit to the print, even if it will be imperfect.



ISSUE: INADVERTENT TRANSFER OF PIGMENT ONTO PARTS OF THE FABRIC

Tip: This means that your fabric is likely puckered or raised up in some fashion and not completely taut against the stamping surface. If this is the case, the block momentarily rubbed against the fabric before coming to rest in its final place. Be sure to anchor your fabric more tautly. This can be done by taping your fabric down, weighing it down in some fashion, or having a partner hold the fabric flat for you.





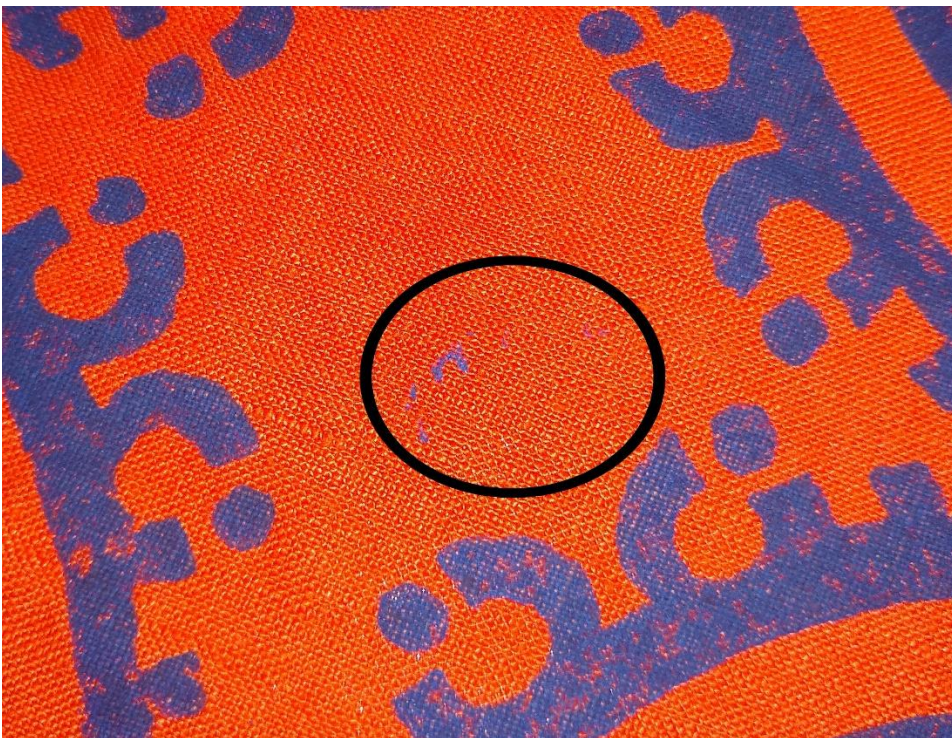
ISSUE: EXTRA PIGMENT TRANSFER AROUND OR WITHIN THE PRINT

Tip: Check the very edge(s) or side(s) of your block to make sure that a small amount of pigment hasn't accidentally been picked up and is being transferred by the edges.

Tip: Consider carving deeper and/or beveling down the corners and edges of your block so that the pigment doesn't get picked up by these areas.

Tip: If pigment is transferring from within the inside of the design motif (other areas not intended to transfer), carve these areas deeper.

Tip: If it is not possible to carve those areas any deeper, be sure to wipe away any extra pigment with your hands before stamping.





ISSUE: LIGHT OR SLOTTCHY COVERAGE IN THE PRINT

Tip: Make sure to evenly apply your pigment on all parts of your block, particularly on the edges and corners, which are most susceptible to be missed. Additionally, make sure that your block doesn't just have "color" but is sufficiently covered with paint for some of it to stick to the block and some to transfer.

Tip: Make sure to "rock" your block back and forth, side-to-side, and at any other points or corners on the block, to be sure to properly transfer all of your pigment from your block onto your fabric.

Tip: Ensure that the surface upon which you are stamping your fabric is even and flat and that all layers of cushion are also evenly distributed beneath your stamping surface.



Tip: Consider using a mallet, if you aren't already, to help transfer as much of the pigment as possible.

Tip: If you have been printing for a few hours, your paint may be getting tacky and therefore having a harder time transferring from your block onto your fabric, consider dumping and refreshing your pigment.



ISSUE: EXTRA PIGMENT WELLING UP ALONG ELEMENTS OF YOUR PRINT

Tip: Be careful while using the dauber, stamp pad, or brayer not to apply too much pigment to the block, when the pigment will start to drip down the sides of the carved design and well up in the relief areas.

Tip: Clear these areas of extra pigment with either a small paint brush or Q-Tip, so that that pigment does not get transferred to your fabric.

Tip: Whenever possible, carve down these bordering relief areas as deeply as you can without compromising the design.





ISSUE: PIGMENT BLEEDING BETWEEN DESIGN ELEMENTS OF YOUR PRINT

There are two main reasons that you might get this type of bleeding: either there is too much pigment being applied to the block or the spaces between the elements are simply not wide enough.

Tip: Especially if using the stamp pad or daubing method, make sure that your “pool” of pigment isn’t too deep or that you aren’t putting too much paint on the dauber and therefore having the pigment “sinking” down in the channels between your elements.

Tip: If you have carved your block, consider carving these spaces between elements bigger or wider – at least 1/16”, but 1/8” or more is ideal.

Tip: Consider using a brayer for more intricately carved blocks that have elements that you cannot carve any wider.

ADDITIONAL TRICKS & SUGGESTIONS



TRICK: You *can* touch your print with a paint brush, but be prepared that this very difficult to do without a very obvious difference in pigment coverage between printed and painted, as can be seen above. Only paint when absolutely necessary, using as little pigment as possible and ensuring that you evenly apply pigment across the individual motif – or it is very obvious where you painted.



TRICK: In order to have block motifs butt up against each other – or – to prevent the block from transferring to unintended areas, use packing tape over the areas that you do not want your print to transfer to. In this example, this area is a shoulder with no seam and the block is very directional. To prevent the print from overlapping to the other side and the top half appearing upside down, the top half of the block was prevented from printing on the fabric with the application of the packing tape. Be certain to make sure the first part is completely dried before applying the tape.



TRICK: When doing offset rows of a motif, consider doing all of the rows that will be parallel with each other first, then do the offset rows. This allows you to perfectly center and space the offset rows.