

Polymer Clay Blanks

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Please note that this is how I create these blanks, but there are other possible ways to do this.

With this tutorial, you can create 2 sets of blanks, which you can use for different pens.

What is Polymer Clay?

Polymer Clay is a Plasticised compound which cooks to a relatively hard material once baked for the required time in an oven. It does not require Kiln temperatures. The temperature may vary slightly between the different brands of Polymer Clay.

I prefer to use "KATO" brand polymer clay for my pens, which I have found to work best for me. I have no interest in any of the numerous brands, just this one works best in my case. Maybe cooler climate conditions would need a different brand. That's something I cannot control.

Requirements and tools.

- A variety of Polymer Clay colour packs. Baking details are on the packs.
- Tile or glass at least 6inches square. Mine is 8 x 12.
- Baking paper.
- Some sort of roller about 1inch thick and 6inches long.
- Craft tissue blade about 6 inches long. You will need this to gently remove the clay pieces from your tile or glass.
- Pasta Machine. Not necessary but very, very handy, (Borrow one from your kitchen if you're game).

Step 1 – Condition the Clay.

The single most important step is to "CONDITION" the clay, otherwise it will crumble and be extremely difficult to work. Polymer clay tends to harden slightly in its packaging, and to overcome this you have to condition the clay so that it is all nice and pliable and soft. This can be achieved by gradually warming the clay and working it like you would make bread dough.

DO NOT AT ANY TIME, USE A MICROWAVE OVEN OR OTHER OVEN TO CONDITION THE CLAY.

You can use a roller or Pasta Machine to roll it with. If it's too hard to start with then put it under your arm pit, or between your thighs, there are other bodily places that work as well, or maybe better, but I will let you decide that.

You can flatten, fold and then flatten again with the roller, over and over until the clay is VERY pliable. **(This bit is difficult to explain just how soft it should be, but it does need to be very soft.)** The clay begins to become slightly sticky when ready. The more you work it the softer it gets.

You need to keep the different colours separate at this stage.

Step 2 - Choosing your Colours.

Here is where you become your own Artist. In the blanks on this pen there are 7 or 8 colours, but I usually only use 4 or 5. These blanks were made from the left over pieces from 2 different sets of blanks, that's why there are so many colours in this one.

You will also need a background colour. But, that's up to you, there is no restriction on how many you use.

Step 3 - Rolling out the Layers.

Now that the colours have been selected and conditioned, it is time to roll out the layers. I use a Pasta machine but that is not necessary, you can use a roller if you want. The finished stack needs to be approximately 2.5 inches x 3 to 3.5 inches in size, that obviously depends on what type of pen you are making. When the layers are all stacked on top of each other, roll them out and cut into 2 halves.

Place one on top of the other, making sure that the connecting colours are not the same, roll again and cut and stack. If you simply fold the stack in half, you will have two layers of the same colour together. Repeat this process several times. The reason for this is to give you a heap of very thin layers. The final stack needs to be about 3/32 inches thick. If you have a pasta machine this final thickness is the widest setting on the machine. (No. 7 in Australia.)

You will also need to roll out a paper thin "skin" piece to apply the peeled off pieces to, see **Step 6**. This will be your background colour and can be any colour, probably one of the 4 or 5 selected colours would be easiest.

Step 4 - Creating the Texture.

Select a number of items that have different shaped surfaces, like a pen or pencil, meat skewer, meat tenderiser, the cap from a pen, stamp or texture plate etc., just to give you a variety of different shapes.

Gently push these objects about halfway through your stack, being careful not to go all the way through. Again this is not critical, a bit of variation in depth, overlay etc. will all add to the end result.

More is less or vice versa, it's up to your individual creativity.

Step 5 - Shaving the Stack.

This is where the fun starts. Now you have to shave about half of the clay from the stack. I use a craft tissue blade, that is about 6 inches long, and with the blade curved between your two hands gently peel off bits from the stack. It does not need to be done in one pass, as this is almost impossible, and the curved blade makes for more texture and colour at the end.

Keep the peeled pieces very thin, and you will notice that they all come off with holes or pieces missing from them. They will not be complete shavings, only random shapes. This is how you get the final pattern on your blank. As each piece comes off the stack carefully remove it from the blade and place it separately on some Baking paper, because these pieces are what I used to make my special blanks. As you shave off the pieces you will start to see the created pattern, and you need to work your way through the stack until it is thin enough to wrap around the roughened brass tubes of the *other* pen you will make.

Carefully wrap the tubes and cut to size. Then gently, very gently roll the tube on your flat surface (Tile or glass) to make sure that it is nice and flat, or shaped if you wish. If you use too much pressure at this stage the clay will come away from the tube, so take care. I use a meat skewer through the tube for this part. As the clay extends over the end of the tube, you can slice it off with the blade. Be aware that you may not have any overhang so be very careful with the final end trim.

You can leave a bit of overhang if you wish, it's easier to remove after baking than trying to cover a tiny bit of tube. If you don't want to turn the blank then make sure it is slightly smaller than the required size, you can build it up with CA later. If you want to turn it then it doesn't matter at all, as long as the clay is less than 1/8th inch thick. It **will not** cook properly if it's thicker than 1/8th inch. Be aware here that the pattern will change as you remove the clay from the tube.

Now you have a set of blanks which are nothing like the ones I made, the process used so far is called, I believe, Mokume Gane. But I may have that wrong. Here are some images of what your stack should look like now.



Step 6 - Making the blanks.

Take your roughened tubes and carefully attach the paper thin skin, and then attach the very thin peeled off pieces to *CREATE YOUR UNIQUE PATTERN*. Because these pieces are all holes and odd shapes, you have the ability to fill them with other bits which will disguise any joints, and because there is only a random pattern there are no rules here.

It is not critical but try to keep the clay as even as you can, or even make it a bit thicker in the middle. It will have to be very gently rolled to smooth it out again, you can make your shape at this point. When it is to your required size, it's time to bake in the oven. ***Please make sure you follow the time and temperature as stated on the Clay packet and pre warm the oven.***

I use a ceramic tile covered with baking paper and stand the tubes upright on their ends, with enough space between them so they won't touch if they tip over.

Step 7 - Finishing.

Sand to your own standard and I use a CA finish, because the baked Polymer Clay is not as hard as Resin or plastic blanks. But again, that is your choice. Have fun. I've kept the instructions simple as this was a first for me. **If you have any problems, please do not hesitate to ask me.**

Here are some images of the process, I've used 5 colours which do not go together, they are random small scrap pieces that were left from a previous Polyclay construction, and were used solely for this demonstration. I did the roll and cut 5 times, which was too many with this colour combination. Probably 2 or 3 times would be best. When you make your 2nd cut you will be able to see the thickness of the layers, and decide how you want to proceed, maybe one more roll.

They will be in the bin very soon.



The original 5 colours.



Shaving off with the curved tissue blade.



Shaved off pieces.



More shaved off pieces. These are what you use to create the "Special Effect".