

Coptic binding

By Emma Jane Hogbin

This binding is based on the books made by the Copts in the 4th Century. The books held the gospel of Thomas were small and carried concealed within robes. It is perfect as a sketch book as it lies perfectly flat when opened.



This structure can be completed in one of two ways. The first is to use a single needle and sew along the spine, hooking down to the previous signature at every hole. The second, a two-needle Coptic sewing, uses a pair of holes and the sewing is completed across the spine. The instructions are for the two-needle Coptic sewing method.



Along the spine (one needle). The needle enters each hole, creates a tie to the previous section and moves *along* to the next hole within the same signature.

Across the spine (two needles). Each needle enters only one hole per signature before it climbs *across* the spine to the next signature. For this sewing you must have an even number of holes.



This journal is easy to make with a little practice. You can use either wood covers (which is a little more traditional and fancy), or plain board (such as mat board) without the angled holes. My personal journal is currently a Coptic-bound journal with collaged mat board for the front and back covers.

Tools

- two needles
- awl (a sharp, pointed tool used for punching holes. a really thick sewing needle, or a sharp finishing nail will work as well)
- scissors
- drill for wood covers
- cloth for applying furniture paste to wood covers

Materials

- pages (suggested: five or more signatures)
- cover (wood or covered mat board)
- heavy weight thread or very light twine
- furniture paste for wood covers



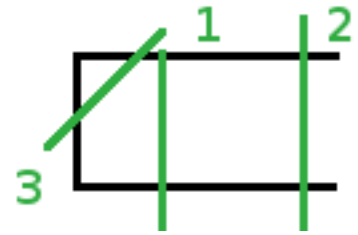
Instructions

Preparing the cover and inside pages

1. The first step is to decide what size your pages will be. All other decisions are made based on the size of the folded page. The easiest to use is sheets of 8.5x11" paper cut in half and then folded in half. Of course if you are using wooden covers and don't have a saw, the size of the cover will dictate the size of your pages.
2. Fold the sheets together into "signatures." I group eight sheets for each signature when I'm using regular photocopy paper, and as few as one sheet if I'm using heavy watercolor paper.
3. Next, prepare the cover for your book.
 1. If you are making a wood cover journal, sand the wood using the coarse sandpaper (lower number) and then the finer sandpaper (higher number). Always sand in the same direction as the grain of the wood (along the stripes, not across them). When you are satisfied with your sanding apply the furniture paste with the fancy cloth.
 2. If you are making a collage cover, do the collage now and set the cover aside to dry.
4. Once the cover has been prepared you are ready to drill the holes. This step has already been completed for you if you are using the wood cover kit. Drilled holes should be no more than one inch from the top and bottom and no more three inches apart. If your cover is too big to accommodate this, you will need to do a four-needle Coptic binding (or make a smaller book).
5. Drilling the holes for a wood cover:
 1. If you are making a wood cover journal you will need to drill three holes

into the cover for each thread (a two-needle Coptic would have two sets of three holes each). In the very top photograph of this instruction set you can see all three holes. Two on the cover and one through the back edge.

2. The first hole is closest to the edge of the spine. It should be approximately 1/8" from the edge (half the depth of your board).
3. The second hole is furthest away from the edge. This will anchor the threads into place when you attach the cover to the pages. It can be as far away as you'd like, but typically 1/2" (or one thumb width) is fine.
4. The third hole is the trickiest. It goes from the back middle edge of the book and up through the outside of the first hole, creating a hole at a 45 degree angle from the spine of the book into the outside of the cover. Be sure to make your front cover and back cover holes slant in opposite directions.
5. If you are using a thin board (e.g. mat board), omit the third hole (step #4).



Marking the sewing stations, and punching the holes

6. Stack all of your signatures into a single pile. Draw a guide across the back of all signatures to match the holes in your cover. Punch corresponding holes. Make sure that your needle and thread will pass through each of the holes.

Attaching the Cover

7. In bookbinding you never want to use a piece of thread that is longer than what you can reach. For this sewing, however, we start by hooking the middle of the thread into the middle of the first signature making our thread half as long. As a result you should use a length of thread that is *twice* the length of your arm. Put a needle on both ends of the thread.
8. Open the first signature to the middle. Thread one needle through each of the holes from the inside to the outside. Make sure that each needle is pulled through the same amount and that the two lengths of thread on the outside are even.
9. Attach the cover of your book to the first signature. Using one needle at a time, go through the slanting hole #3 to the outside of the cover. Go down hole #1 and into the inside of the cover. Pass along to hole #2 and bring the needle back to the outside of the cover. Loop through #1 and #2 again and finally back out through the 45 degree hole to the back of the book. Repeat with the second needle.
10. Thread the needle back into the signature, across the middle and out the other hole.
11. Repeat steps #9 and #10 with the second needle.

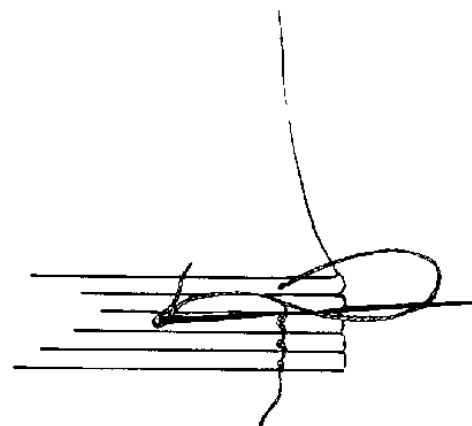
Sewing

12. Place the next signature on top of the first signature. “Climb” up into this new signature with one needle (insert the needle into the new signature), pass along the inside of the pages and out the second hole. Repeat with the second needle going in the opposite direction. You have essentially “flipped” the side the needle is on.

13. Next we need to lock this new signature to the previous one. For this we'll use a “kettle stitch.” This stitch is basically a half-hitch

(a loop with the end pulled through to create a lock). Starting with one needle, stretch down to the space between the cover board and the first signature (for subsequent signatures you will be reaching down one signature instead of all the way down to the cover). Lift the signature up and wrap your needle around the back (inside the book), returning to the front. Before you pull the thread tight, pass the needle through the loop that was just formed. Pull tight to secure the knot (but not so tight that you rip the pages). Repeat with the second needle on the other side. (Kettle stitch illustration from <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/don/dt/dt1945.html>)

KETTLE STITCH



14. Repeat steps #11 and #12, adding one new signature each time.

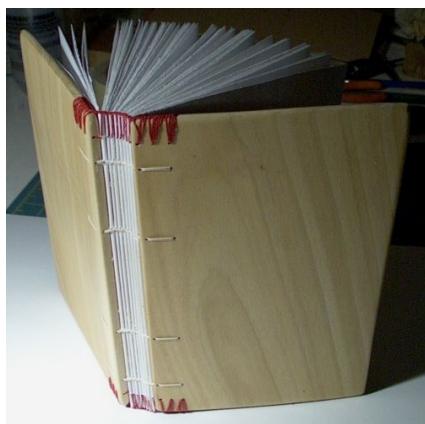
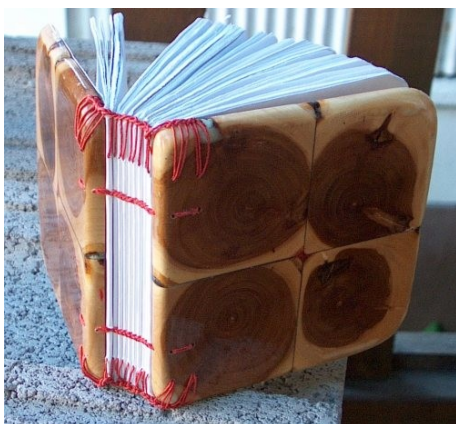
15. When you have reached the final signature you need to add the second cover. Use step #9 from the above instructions for “Attaching the Cover.”

16. Once the cover is attached, thread the needle back into the middle of the last signature and tie off. I tie off by using two or three half-hitch knots. (Half-hitch illustration from:

<http://www.troop7.org/Knots/Half.html>)



Emma Jane Hogbin is a Canadian technical author and instructor. She divides her time between teaching web technologies and bookbinding workshops. For more information please visit www.strangelittlegirl.com.



Apple wood Coptic book (left) Crimson and Clover (right). Instructions for the headband are available from *Making and Keeping Creative Journals* by Suzanne Tourtillott (Lark Books); and/or *Headbands and How to Work Them* by Jane Greenfield and Jenny Hille (Oak Knoll Press).