

## Making Soft-Slab Cups and Boxes

Vince Pitelka, 2021

1. Select a size or template for the form you wish to make.
2. Roll out a slab and apply impressed relief pattern or texture if you wish.
3. For cups and mugs, use slabs no thicker than  $\frac{1}{4}$ " unless you have a specific reason to make them thicker.
4. Small and medium-sized slab boxes work fine with  $\frac{1}{4}$ " slabs, but make them thicker if you wish.
5. For a cylindrical form with no taper, Cut a strip of slab as wide as the desired height of the cylinder and as long as the desired circumference. If you are making a series of matching forms, make a template from posterboard or manila folder. Score both ends of the strip thoroughly, apply slurry, and join to form a cylinder.
6. Note that when making straight or tapered cylindrical slab forms, a smooth curve is easy to achieve around most of the circumference but difficult to achieve at the ends of the slab strip where it tends to remain straight. To counteract this, while the cut strip is still flat on the table surface, lay a short length of 1" dowel, broom handle, or similar round material against the ends of the strip and curve the end up slightly around the dowel.
7. When forming a cylinder, it is generally easiest to stand the strip on edge and create the curve with the cylinder vertical. That way it is self-supporting, and you can use both hands to resolve the curve and join the ends.
8. You may wish to form the slabs around a removable core such as an empty soda can.
  - a. Cut a strip of slab, wrap it around the removable core and mark the length.
  - b. Lay the strip back down on the table, cut it to length and score both ends and apply slurry to one end.
  - c. Tightly wrap an appropriate width and length of dry newspaper or paper towel around the tube or can. Don't omit this step because the slab will stick to the can. The core must be removed immediately before the cylinder starts to shrink, and the paper layer allows that.
  - d. Wrap the slab strip around newspaper-covered can and press ends firmly together.
  - e. Once the ends are well-joined, cradle cylinder in one hand, pull or push out the core, and remove newspaper.
9. Set the cylinder vertically on a flat piece of slab and mark lightly around the bottom circumference with any tool.
10. Set the cylinder aside and score and slurry the base slab inside the marked line.
11. Score the end of the cylinder, apply slurry, turn it over, and set the scored end in place. Don't try to press down forcefully because you will distort the shape.
12. Remove excess slurry from the joint inside and out with a small flat brush of the type made for oils or acrylics.
13. Cut away excess slab but don't try to make the finish cut flush with the cylinder wall. That is better done after the piece has stiffened to leatherhard.
14. Carefully pick up the form using the broad surfaces of your hand.
15. Turn the form upside-down, set it down and gently tap the bottom slab around the edges to push out the excess slurry and join it more firmly to the cylinder. If any appreciable amount of slurry is expelled from the joint, clean it again with the brush.
16. If you're making a slab box, consider attaching the cylinder to a base slab  $\frac{1}{2}$ " or even  $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick. When leather hard, you can carve or shave clay from the underside to create arched openings, leaving four raised feet.
17. If the form is distorted, use a dowel held inside the form to gently press it back into shape.

18. If making a box, score and slurry upper edge and add a flat or domed top to create a closed form.
19. Set the form aside to stiffen.
20. If a box, when soft-leatherhard, mark and cut the line separating the lid. Imbed a ball-point pen in a large, stationary lump of clay and rotate the form against the tip of the pen to mark a level line. Do a straight cut all the way around if you plan to add a gallery strip. Otherwise cut a line with keys to index the lid onto the vessel.
21. For a mug or a box, when soft-to-medium leatherhard, create a beveled edge at the bottom, either by doing a rolled edge, or by paddling the edge to create a slight bevel at the base.
22. For a mug, paddle a bevel around the rim and gently work with a sponge to remove any sharp edges.
23. For a mug, add a handle made from a flattened carrot of clay. The cross-section of the handle should be a flat oval.
24. If a slab box, consider adding feet.