Pottery Tutorial
Slab Construction

In this section you will learn how to put clay slabs together to make a piece of pottery. Slab construction can have great results if you take your time and do not rush the process.

(Spreading the clay)

Step 1

Begin with a smooth flat surface. Place newspaper or cloth over the surface to prevent the clay from sticking to your work surface. Spread the clay out by patting it with your whole hand.

(Flipping the clay)

Combine both steps 1 and 2 with one drawing:

Step 2

To flip the clay over - carefully hold top and bottom of the clay with the palms of your hands. This will prevent the clay from tearing while you are flipping it.

(Rolling out the clay)

Step 3

To help you roll your clay to an even thickness, place a yard stick on each side and roll out until the clay is the same thickness as your yard stick.
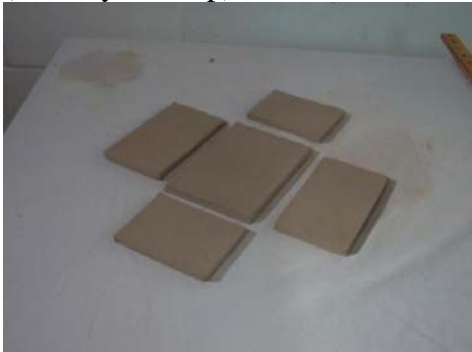
(Cutting your slabs)

Step 4

Use a ruler to help you cut a straight line. (Tip: If you want a 90` corner - lay a piece of paper over the clay to show the 90' corner.)

(Let clay firm-up)

Step 5

After you cut out your bottom and sides, let them sit until the clay is leather hard. For most clay's this will take about an hour.

(Score or Scratch the edges)

Step 6

When your clay is leather hard use a needle or sharp pencil to scratch the edges of the clay where the clay will be joined together. A criss-cross pattern works well for this.

(Apply slip to edges)

Step 7

Make some slip by watering down a small amount of clay until it is the consistency of yogurt. Apply the slip to the areas you just scratched.

(Applying the slip)

Step 8

Some potters use white vinegar instead of slip. I have not had good experiences with vinegar. I find I get more cracking in my pieces so I mainly use slip.
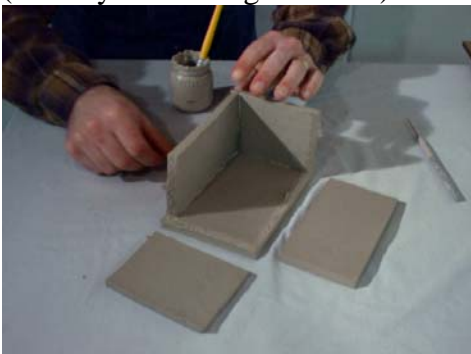
(Joining the pottery)

Step 9

When placing the edges together slide the two surfaces together in a slight back and forth motion to strengthen the bond between the surfaces.
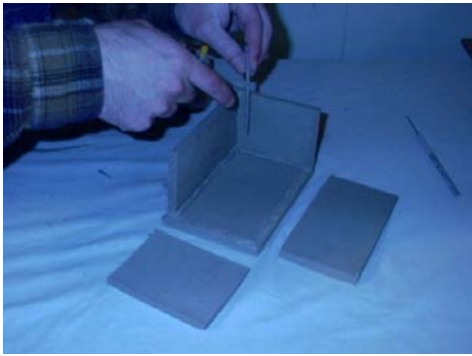
(When you have a good bond)

Step 10

With experience you will get the feel of a good bond. You will know you have a good bond when most of the slip has squeezed out between the two surfaces being joined together. Also, the clay will not want to slide back and forth easily.

(Add a coil to the inside seam)

Combine steps 10 and 11

Step 11

To make the seem stronger place a coil in the corners of the piece. Gently press the coil into the corner. Be careful not to break your corner away.

(Smoothing out the coil)

I like to use the top end of a brush to smooth out the corners. Notice my other hand holding the corner so I don't break it away.

(The final touches - Corners)

Step 12

I use a damp brush to smooth out all the corners so the seams are no longer visible.

The final touches - Top edge)

Step 13

To smooth out the top edge use a wet paper towel and carefully slid the towel up and down the length of each edge. This will round the edges so they will not be sharp.

Combine steps 13 and 14

(Measuring for a top)

Step 14

If you plan to make a lid measure the length and width of the piece and write down the measurements. The piece will shrink as it dries and you will need these measurements to make the lid.

(Finishing touch - Handles)

Do not draw this step...
we will not be adding
handles.

Rather than a lid I decided to place handles on each side. The handles give the piece a focal point and makes it more interesting to look at. For more information about how to attach handles, check out the tutorial for making and attaching handles.

Once you have completed your hand built slab piece, you will need to dry it thoroughly before firing it. It is important to dry the piece slowly and evenly.   Handles tend to dry faster than the rest of the piece and that will lead to cracking. If the piece dries too quickly it may crack or warp. A good way to dry your piece is to cover it evenly with a newspaper tent this will allow the moisture to escape slowly. The slower the piece dries the better.

Back to the tutorial page.

  Back to the JHPottery Home Page