

Working With Clay

The vocabulary

- There's more to working with clay than being good with your hands.
- Knowing the proper terms can help you understand the process and improve your technique.



What is Clay?



● Clay:

- A basic substance that comes from Mother Earth. It's made up of decomposed rock; when combined with water, clay is plastic enough to be shaped; when subject to high heat, it becomes hard and rock-like.

● Grog:

- Ground-up fired clay that is mixed into soft clay; Strengthens and aids in even drying and firing; Creates a rough texture in the clay

What is pottery?



Pottery is earthenware objects – especially pots – which are made of fired clay.

Pots are functional objects like plates, bowls, cups, jars, vases, pitchers, bottles, and boxes.

How We Use Clay

● Plasticity:

- The quality of clay that allows it to be manipulated.



● Wedging:

- Kneading the clay to remove all air bubbles

(Improper or lack of wedging could lead to a piece exploding or breaking in the kiln) ☹️

How We Use Clay

Score and Slip:

- The method used to attach two pieces of clay together.
 1. First, *score* the clay; this means creating scratches in the surfaces that will be stuck together.
 2. Then *slip* it; that is wetting the surface with some “slip”, using it as glue.
 3. Next, *press* the two surfaces together.
- (It is very important to always *score and slip*. Without scoring and slipping, the pieces will likely pop apart when they are fired. ☹)



How We Use Clay

2 Basic Pottery Building Techniques

● **Wheel Thrown:**

- To "throw" a pot is to form the clay on a potter's wheel as it is spinning.



OR

● **Hand-Building:**

- Building pottery using only the hands and simple tools rather than the potter's wheel.



How We Use Clay

- Partial List of **hand building** (building clay pieces *without* the use of a potters wheel) techniques:

1. Pinch Construction



2. Coil Construction



3. Slab Construction



Other important terms

- **Kiln** –the type of "oven" used throughout the firing process.
- **Fire** –the cooking of the clay in the kiln, sometimes for as long as 20 hours.
- **Glaze** –a form of liquid glass put on bisqueware to have a decorative coating or finish



Stages of Dryness

- **Slip** - liquid clay
- **Plastic** - easily workable clay
- **Leather Hard** - partially dry but still able to carve; attach decorative pieces, handles, etc.
- **Bone Dry** or **Green ware** - completely dry, no longer workable, very fragile, lighter in color
- **Bisque** - clay that has been fired in a kiln but is still porous (vitrified)

Morphology of a Vase



