

# A Visual Guide to Making a Simple Single Signature Guest Book

# d

This tutorial will guide you through the steps of creating a simple bound single signature guest book. You may use blank sheets for your book or preprinted sheets. For the example, I printed photos from an engagement photo shoot along with words and lines, for guests to put their name and address on, onto both sides of five pages of 5 1/2" x 17" double sided matte paper.

## Tools Needed:

Ruler  
Craft Knife (I like the ones with the snap off blades)  
Scissors  
Bone Folder for pressing and scoring (optional but helpful)  
Needle (a large eyed tapestry needle will do)  
Brush for gluing (a 1" foam brush works fine)  
Awl for punching holes  
Board & weights or book press  
(Please see my tutorial for making a simple bookpress at <http://www.tjbookarts.com/tutorials.html>)

## Materials Needed:

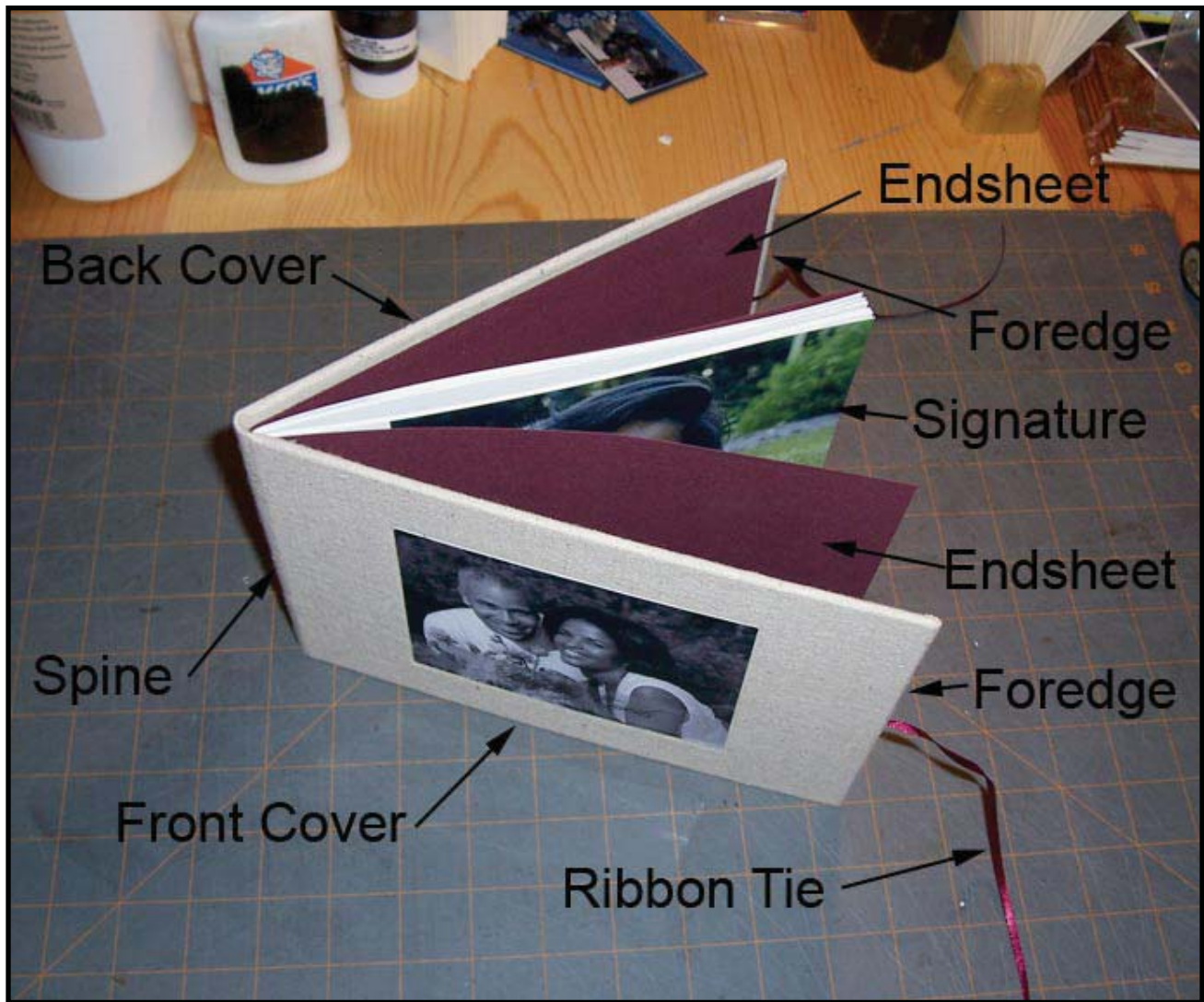
Paper for inside pages  
Board for covers - Davey board, medium weight illustration board, chipboard or heavy weight matboard  
Fabric or decorative paper for cover  
Paper for endsheets  
Thread (white cotton crochet thread works fine)  
Beeswax (or a white candle for waxing thread before sewing)  
Ribbon (optional)  
PVA Glue (Sobo is a PVA THAT can be found at local craft stores)  
Wheat Paste to mix with PVA (optional)  
Wax paper  
Waste paper (used for gluing)



Some of the basic tools needed

## A Note On Paper Grain

All commercially made paper has a grain. This means that the fibers in the paper tend to line up in one direction. Grained papers should always be folded along the grain. In a book, all grained papers and boards should be aligned vertically, with the grain parallel to the spine of the book. This is to avoid wrinkling and warping. There are several ways to test the grain of a paper. One way is to cut a small square and lightly wet one side. The paper will curl around the grain. The other way is to lay the sheet of paper on a table and bend it gently in both directions. The grain of the paper has a distinct feel, meaning that the paper will bend more easily along the grain and you will feel more resistance to the bending against the grain.



### **Parts of the book**

The above photo shows the basic parts of a book. Familiarizing yourself with the various parts will help you understand the process of putting one together.

Please read through the whole tutorial before starting to make sure that you have all the materials to hand and have a basic understanding of all the steps involved.



## Step 1 - Prepare your inside pages:

Note: If you are making this book with blank pages, skip to the “\*”.

Before you do anything else, make a crude mockup of your book to help place the pages on the correct sheet for printing. Without this step it could get confusing when trying to print your book pages in the proper order.

To make the mockup, cut 5 sheets of 8-1/2”x11” bond paper in half width wise. Take 5 sheets and fold them in half together so you have a small booklet. Number each page starting at the front 1,2,3 and so on. (figure 1)

Next, put a description of what will be put on each page as well as the page number. Then separate the sheets. Now you can see what pages need to be printed together. (figure 2)

If you are using printing your own pages you’ll want to print them and let them dry overnight.

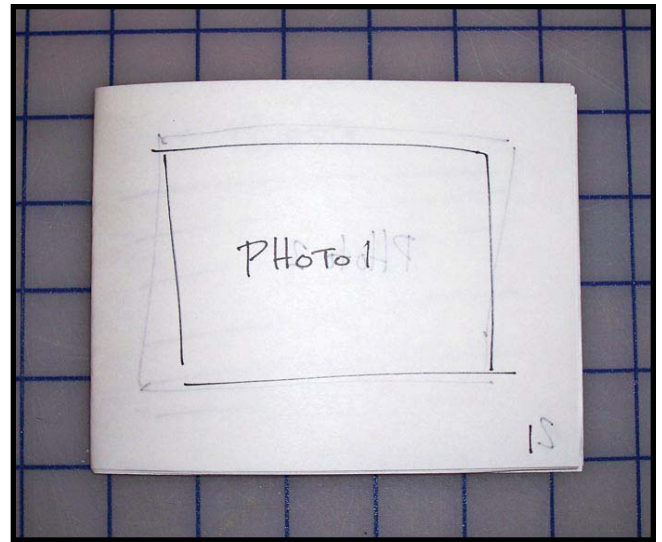
When printing my book pages, I use Duo Brite Matte double sided paper available from InkjetArt (see links at the end of the tutorial). I buy the 11”x17” sheets with the grain running on the short side and cut them in half width wise so that my sheets measure 5-1/2”x17”.

In Photoshop, setup your sheet at 5-1/2”x17” and make sure to leave a minimum of 1/4” border along the outside edge for trimming. I also make sure to leave a 1/4” or so margin in the middle to take into account the fold. If you want a photo that spans the width of both pages you can leave out this margin. When they are ready, put the sheets in order and even them up. (You can email me if you would like a copy of my basic Photoshop guestbook templates)

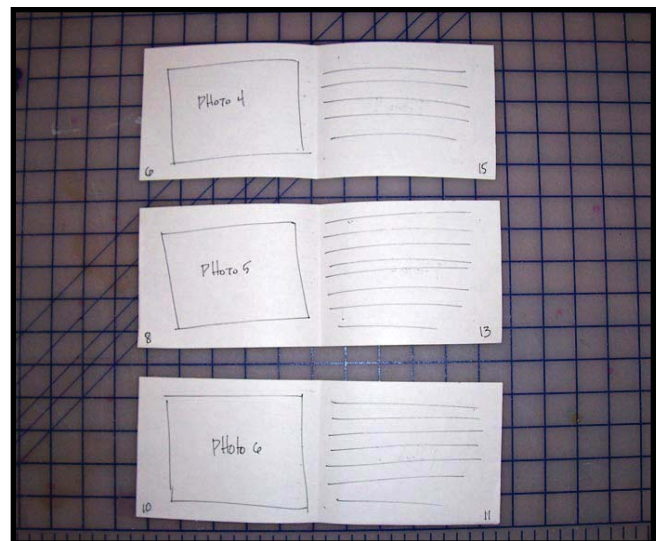
\*If making a book with blank pages you will need 5 or 6 sheets of paper 5-1/2” x 17” with the grain running parallel to the short edge.

Next, fold the pages in half together as a group. (figure 3)

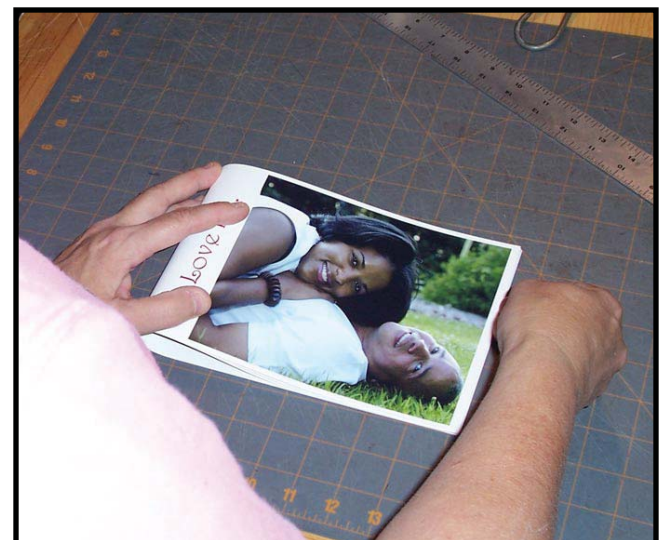
(Note: When sheets are folded together like this they are called a signature. A signature can have one or multiple pages in it and a book can have one or multiple signatures in it.)



**Figure 1**



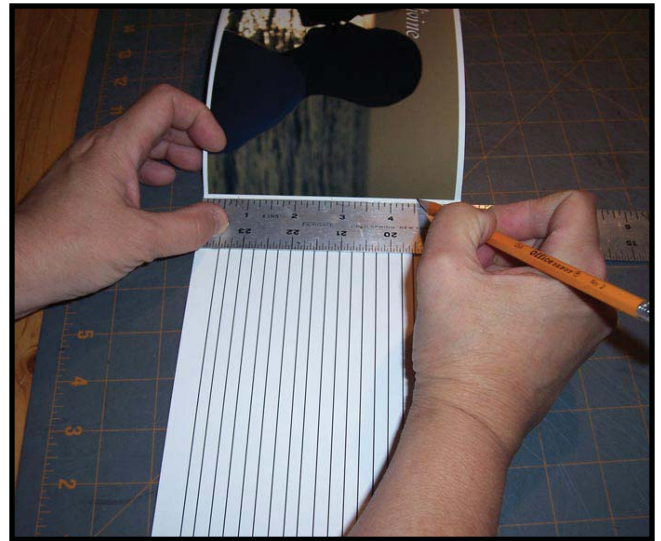
**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**

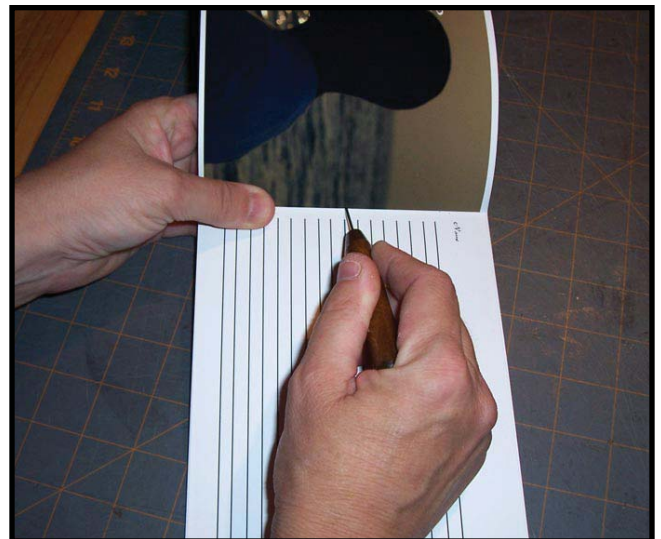
## Step 2 - Sewing your inside pages:

Open the signature and measure off the sewing hole placement on the inside fold. Since this book is only made up of one signature a three hole sewing sequence will be enough. Put a dot in the fold at 3/4" from each edge and one in the middle. (figure 4)  
You should have 3 dots.



**Figure 4**

Using the awl, poke holes all the way through the signature at each mark. (figure 4)



**Figure 5**

Cut a length of thread about 18" and run it through the wax a few times. The wax helps the thread slide through the holes easier and keeps the knot in place when done. Thread your needle with a single thread (not double) and do not knot the end.(figure 6)



**Figure 6**



Starting on the outside of the fold, sew through the center hole first. (figure 7)  
Bring the thread all the way through leaving approx. a 4" tail on the outside.  
On the inside come up through one of the holes on the end and bring the needle back through to the outside. Pull the thread to tighten being careful not to pull the tail through.  
Next, bring the needle down to the hole on the opposite end, passing the center hole, and sew into the hole to the inside.



**Figure 7**

From the inside, bring the needle back through the center hole to the outside, making sure to bring the needle through on the opposite side from the tail. (figure 8)



**Figure 8**

Pull thread ends to tighten thread and tie a knot with the two ends. Trim ends leaving about 1/2". (figure 9)



**Figure 9**

### **Step 3 - Adding end sheets and trimming edges:**

Before trimming the book edges you will want to add the end sheets.

For the example, you'll need to cut two sheets of the paper you will be using for end sheets to 5.5" x 17". Make sure the grain of the paper is running parallel with the short side of each piece.

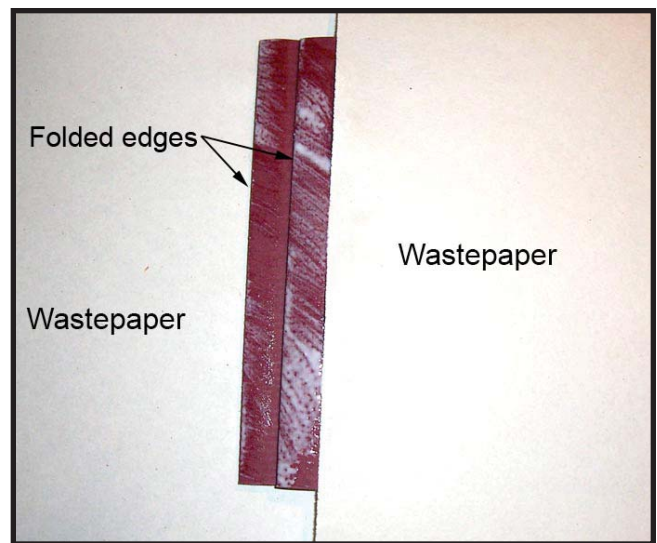
Fold each end sheet piece in half and add a half inch strip of PVA glue along one side of the endsheet at the fold. A quick way to glue both end sheets at the same time is to lay one folded end sheet on top of the other with 1/2" distance between the folded edges. Next put a sheet of waste paper 1/2" down from the top end sheet fold and glue both at one time by brushing from the waste sheet towards the folded edges. (figure 10)

With glue side down, glue an end sheet to one side of the book signature matching up the fold of the end sheet with the fold of the signature but making sure to leave about 1/8" space between the end sheet and signature as shown in figure 11.

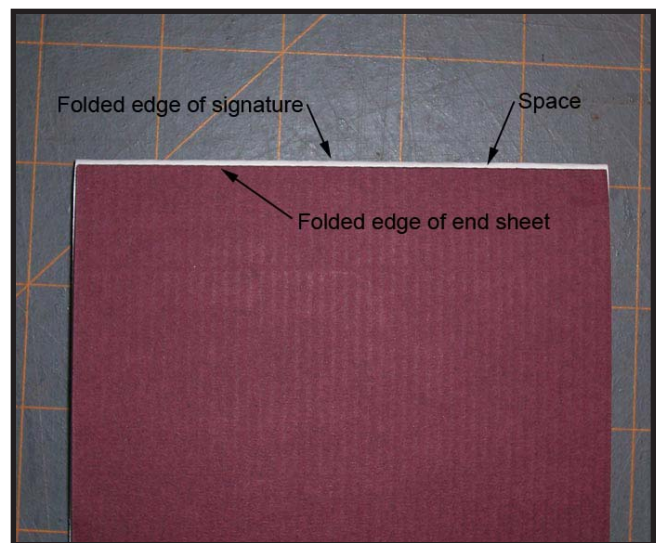
Turn the signature over and apply the second on in the same way. Press both sides with the bone folder, put a piece of wax paper on the inside of the folded end sheet paper on each side (figure 12) and leave the signature under a board with weight to dry.

Once dry, you can trim the edges. The front edge of the signature will be uneven and will need to be trimmed. It's up to you if you want to trim the top and bottom edges. I usually trim about 1/4" off of the front edge and 1/8" off the top and bottom.

For trimming you can use a guillotine type cutter if you have one. Or, since the signature is fairly thin all you need is a metal straight edge and a sharp blade for trimming. Make sure to take shallow cuts. Meaning, don't try to cut through the signature in one pass. The chances of the edge being uneven are greater if you try to rush the cutting.



**Figure 10**



**Figure 11**



**Figure 12**



#### **Step 4 - Cutting and preparing the boards:**

Once the signature is trimmed it's time to take the measurements for cutting the boards.

For the boards, measure the height and width of the signature and add 1/4" to the height measurement. For the example, if the measurements of the signature are 5-1/4" height and 8-1/4" width the board measurements will be 5-1/2" height by 8-1/4" width.

**Note:** The extra 1/4" in height allows the board to extend 1/8" above and below the signature. There is no need to add any extra to the width as that will be taken care of when the boards are attached together.

Before cutting your boards, pay attention to the grain of the board. The grain should run parallel to the height. (figure 13)

**Note:** If you will be putting an indent in the front cover for adding a photo after the cover material is applied, do it before the next step. (See end of tutorial for a brief description on how to do this.)

Once the boards have been cut you will attach them together using a piece of white bond paper.

To do this, cut a piece of paper the height of the boards by 2 1/2" wide. Make sure that your paper grain is parallel to the height of the boards.

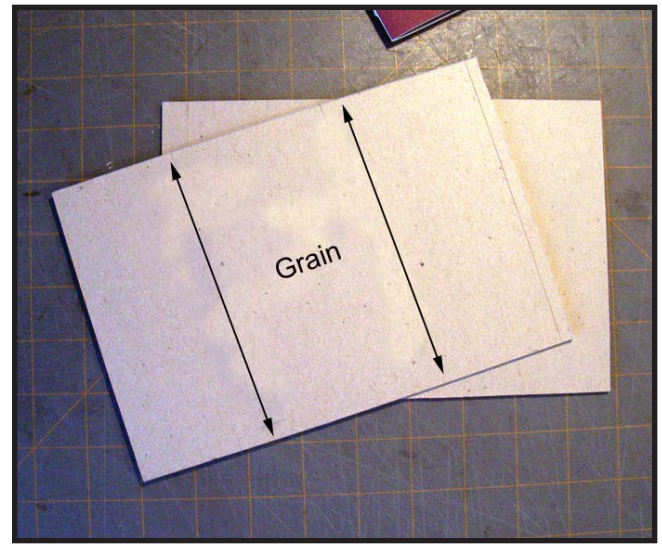
**Note:** With standard printer papers the grain always runs in the long direction. i.e. for 8-1/2" x 11" paper the grain runs along the 11".

Find the center of the paper and draw a line down it. Next, mark off 1/4" on each side of the center and draw a line. (figure 14)

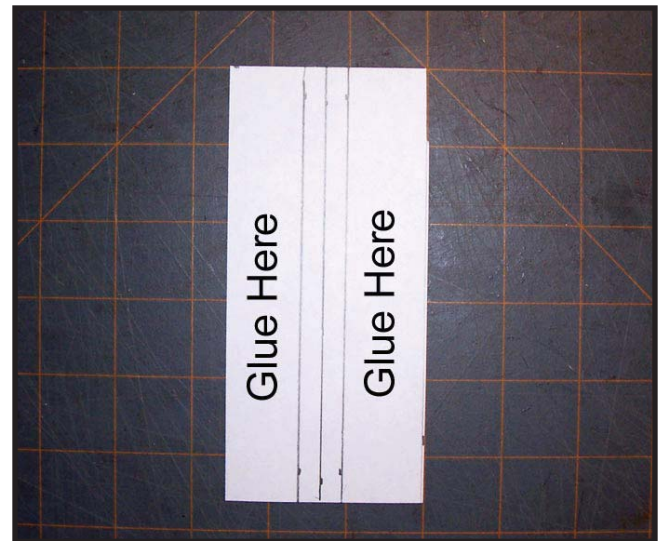
Leaving the 1/2" area in the center dry, apply glue to the paper as shown in figure 14.

Line the boards up with the lines that you made (one on each side) and press them onto the glued paper. Using a bone folder, smooth the paper onto the board.

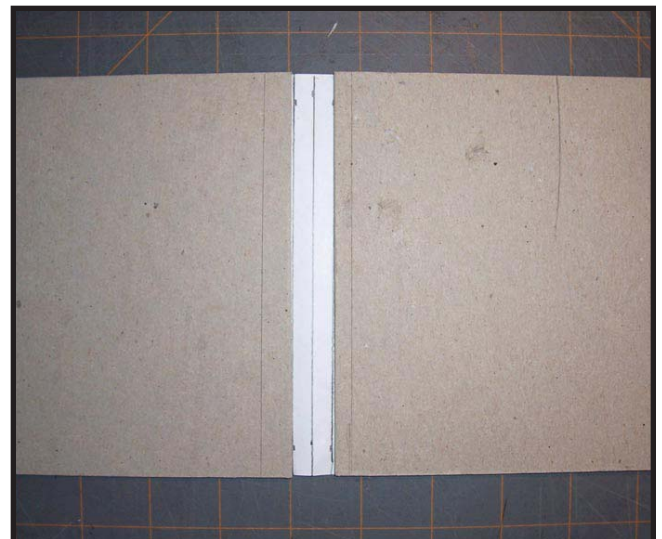
You should now have both boards glued onto the paper with 1/2" of paper showing between them. (figure 15)  
Set the boards aside under some weight to dry.



**Figure 13**



**Figure 14**



**Figure 15**

## **Step 5 - Covering the boards:**

Now you'll need to measure the boards and cut the cover material.

If you are using paper, make sure the grain of the paper runs parallel to the height of the boards.

**Note:** Some handmade papers will not have any discerable grain. It's ok to use it regardless of the direction.

For cloth cover material you may buy already prepared book cloth from one of the suppliers listed at the end of this tutorial or you may use fabric you prepare yourself. Please see the end of this tutorial for two methods of preparing fabric for book covers.

Before measuring for your cover material you'll need to test the case for fit. To do this just wrap the boards around your signature and make sure that the overhang is approx. 1/8" on the front and top and bottom. (figure 16)

If the overhang is fine on the top and bottom but too short on the front edge you will have to add a little more space between the boards. Do this by tearing off the piece of bond and repeating the process but leaving more than 1/2" between the boards.

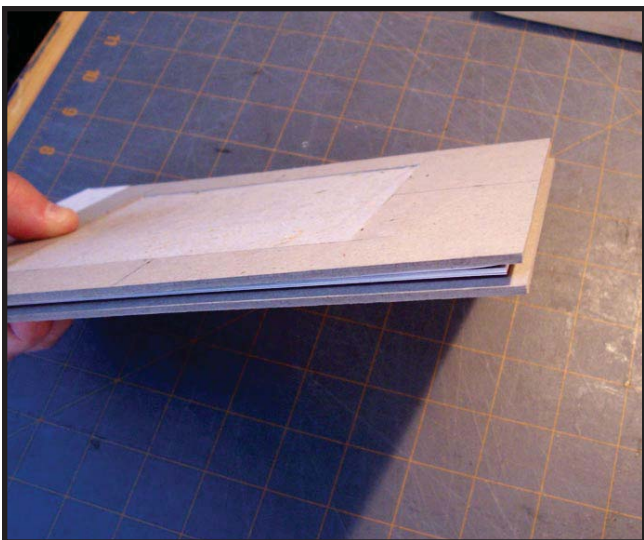
After you have tested the fit and everything looks good, lay out the boards and measure the height and overall width. Add 1-1/2" to the height and the width measurements. (figure 17)

For the example my overall measurements were 5-1/2" x 17". Adding 1-1/2" to each measurement makes my overall measurements for cutting the cover material 7" x 18-1/2". This allows a 3/4" margin all around the boards for folding the material to the inside.

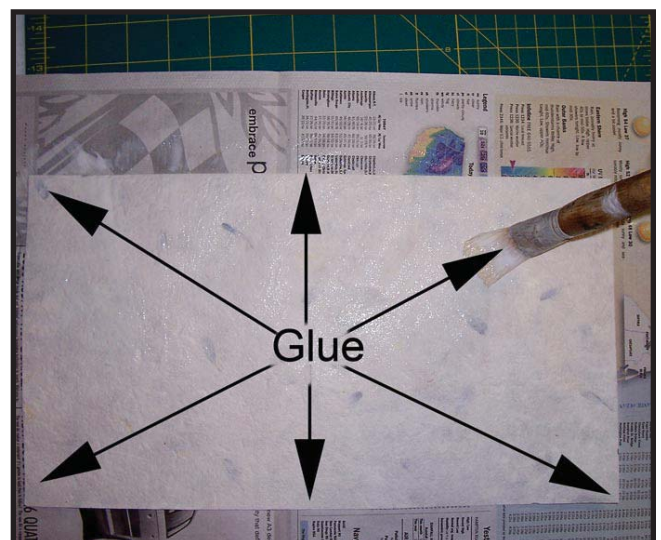
For glueing the cover onto the boards you have a choice between using straight PVA or a PVA/wheat paste mixture. The advantage to using the mixture is that it gives you more time for glueing and is more forgiving if you need to line the boards and the cloth up after you've layed the boards down on the cloth. The disadvantage is that it is slower to dry.

Once the paper is cut and ready to go, lay it on some waste paper face up.

Using PVA or a mix of PVA and wheat paste, paste the whole surface of the material. You should start on the inside and brush towards the outside. (figure 17) If you're using straight PVA you'll want to work at a fairly steady pace.



**Figure 16**



**Figure 17**

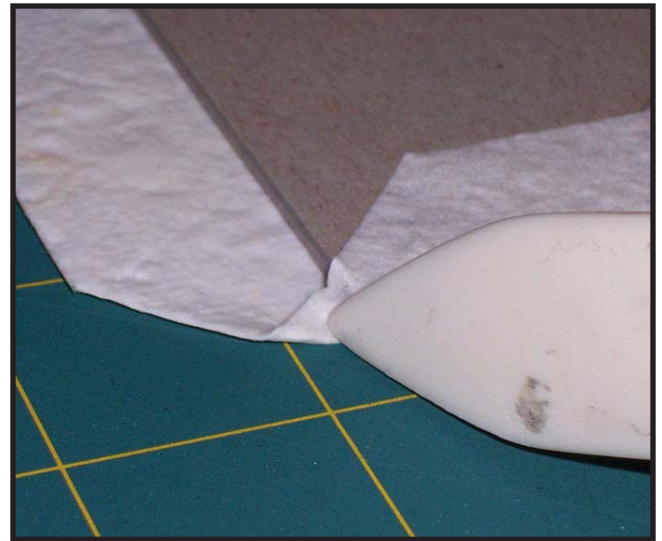


Make sure that the surface of the material is evenly coated. When the entire surface is covered, remove the waste paper underneath the material and center the boards on top making sure that there is 3/4" material showing all the way around the boards. Next, trim the corners at a 45 degree angle leaving a min. 1/8" material at the corners. (figure 18)



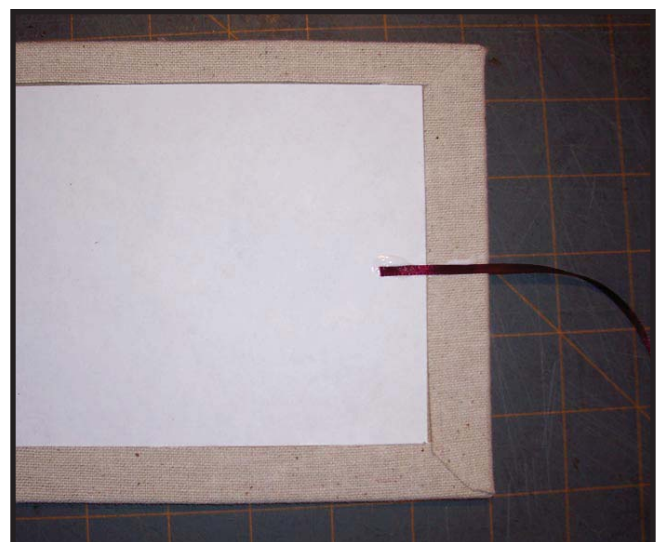
**Figure 18**

Fold the long edges over first and press them down. Using the bone folder, press in the material at the corners (figure 19)



**Figure 19**

Fold the short ends over and press down. Turn the case over and smooth out the material on the front side. If you'd like ribbon ties at the front edge you can apply them before you put the cover under weights to dry. For ribbon ties, just cut 2 pieces of ribbon in a size you'd like. I use thin 1/8" ribbon. Then find the center of each front edge and using straight PVA glue the ribbons about 1" in. (figure 20)



**Figure 20**

Place a piece of wax paper underneath and on top of the unfolded cover and let dry under a board and weights. If you used a PVA wheat paste mixture you will want to let this dry for several hours. Overnight is best.

### **Step 6 - Finishing:**

When the cover is dry, fold it and place the signature inside.

Lay it on the table, front side up and fold back the cover.

Place a sheet of waste paper between the end sheet pages and glue up the end sheet. Make sure that you brush from the center outwards so as not to get glue between the end sheet pages. (figure 21)

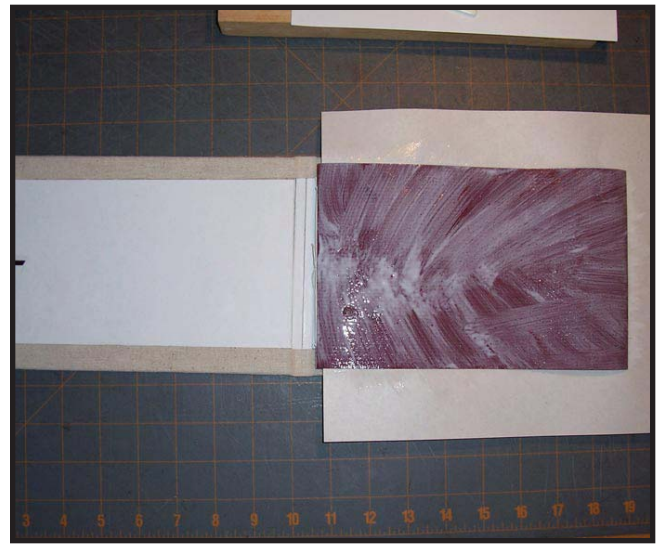
Once the end sheet has been glued, carefully remove the waste paper and, making sure the signature is lined up evenly and the fold of the signature is pushed back snugly into the fold of the cover, close the top cover carefully and press gently.

Place a piece of wax paper under the cover and flip the whole book over. Repeat the above procedure on the other side.

Place wax paper under and on top of the book and leave under weight to dry.

**Note:** Weights can be anything that is heavy, such as a brick or as in the picture at left an old iron. You could also use one of those hand weightfor excercising. If it's like my house, that's the only work out they get. (figure 22)

Once dry, add a photo on the cover and trim the ribbons to size and your book is finished.



**Figure 21**



**Figure 22**



**Finished Book!**



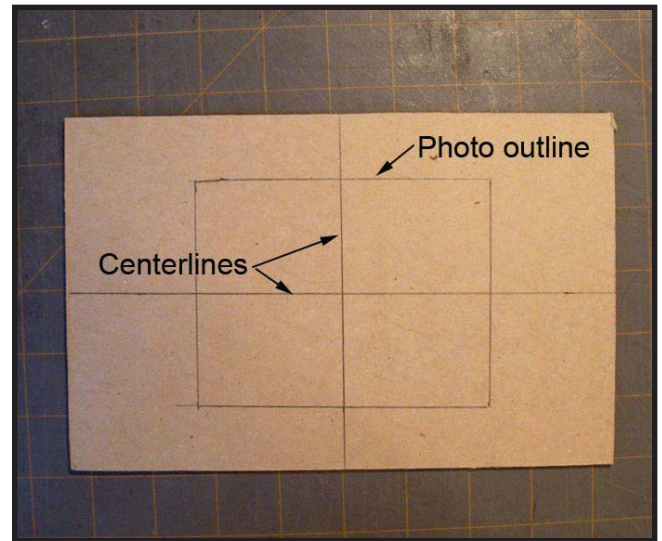
## **Cutting a photo frame in the cover board**

If you'd like to have a flushmount photo on the front cover of your guest book you can cut a groove in the front cover for the photo to sit in.

To do this you'll need to cut a groove in the front cover board before attaching it to the paper strip. You should be able to do this with any board but test out a piece before attempting to do it with your cut cover boards.

First you'll need to find mark the center height and width of the board and draw lines indicating both.

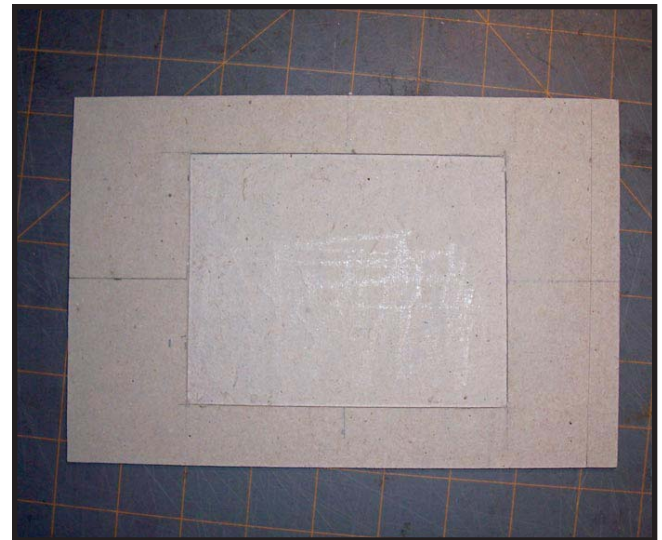
Next, measure your photo and add a little ease all around. Transfer those measurements to your board using the center measurements to center your lines. (figure 24)



**Figure 24**

Using a sharp blade cut a shallow groove all the way around the outline of the photo on the board. Using the knife pry up a few layers of board. Do this one layer at a time until you have achieved the depth you want. I usually pry up about 3 or 4 layers. (figure 25)

When applying your cover material make sure to use your bone folder and press the material into the groove on the front.



**Figure 25**

## **Two ways to prepare fabric for covering a book**

### **Method 1—Pasting fabric to paper:**

Cut your fabric approx. 2" bigger than the finished size you will need all around then iron it. You'll need a large sheet of drawing paper or tissue paper. Make sure your paper is no thicker than regular printer paper. Cut your paper a little bigger than the fabric piece you cut. Tape the paper to your work surface and brush on a layer of straight wheat paste (recipe below). Lay your fabric over the pasted paper and gently smooth it down making sure to get out all the bubbles. Try not to press too hard. I use a clean 2–3" wide paint brush to smooth the fabric down. Leave until dry. Then trim to size.

### **Method 2—Ironing fabric to paper:**

Cut your fabric to the size you'll need to cover your book with. Cut a piece of lightweight iron on adhesive such as Heat N Bond Lite or Wonder Under (available from any fabric store). Iron onto fabric according to directions. Strip off the backup paper. Iron on the drawing or tissue paper.

### **Wheat paste recipe:**

2 cups water  
1/2 cup unbleached flour

Put water in a sauce pan  
Stir flour into water with a whisk if you have one  
Let sit for a few mins.  
Put pan on med/hi heat  
Stir constantly until the mixture starts to boil  
Let boil for 5 mins still stirring constantly  
Take off of heat and transfer the paste to a plastic container  
Let cool in a pan of cool water stirring occasionally  
If the paste thickens too much during the cooling you can add a little water.  
You want the consistency to be like heavy cream or thick gravy.  
Will keep for about 2 days without refrigeration a few more with.  
When mixing with PVA, you'll want to use a mixture of half wheat paste and half PVA. Make sure to stir it up well. This mixture will keep a few days without refrigerations. Make sure to keep a cover on it.

### **Supply Links:**

Double sided matte paper: <http://www.inkjetart.com/> (I use the Duo Brite Max paper for printing pages)

Book board, Book Cloth/PVA: <http://talasonline.com/>

Jerry's Artarama carries some bookmaking supplies. <http://www.jerrysartarama.com/>

Also, check your local art supply stores for many of the supplies listed in this tutorial.

I do sell small bookbinding kits that include bone folders, awls, beeswax, needles, thread as well as some other useful items. Please email me for info.

### **Additional Education:**

To learn more about bookbinding check your local art coops, galleries and museums to see if they offer classes in book arts in your area.

If you are near or in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia, I do offer book arts classes at several of our local art galleries. I also offer on going and two day intensive one on one workshops in my home studio in album and bookmaking. Please feel free to contact me (Jackie Poutasse) via email ([jackie@tjbookarts.com](mailto:jackie@tjbookarts.com)) or by phone (757-577-2721).