



Hand Papermaking Glossary

caliper: the thickness of an individual sheet of paper. Measurements are expressed in thousandths of an inch, or in microns in the metric system.

casting paper: a technique where paper pulp or fiber is formed using a mold and allowed to dry, making a dimensional surface or copy of a form.

charging: term used when pulp is added to the vat.

cotton linters: the fibers that stick to the cotton seeds of the cotton plant after ginning, which is used as the raw material in cotton papers. They are cotton fibers too short for thread-spinning, but useful for making paper. Usually sold in sheets or pre-shredded.

couching: pronounced “koo-ching.” Method of transferring a newly formed sheet of paper from a papermaking screen onto a felt or other couching sheet. In order to create a multi-layered sheet, newly formed sheets of paper are couched onto one another.

deckle: a wooden frame that sits on top of the mold, which acts as a rim and determines the dimensions and thickness of a sheet of paper. A deckle is the removable top part of a hand mold.

deckle edges: the rough edges on handmade paper, resulting from where the deckle and mold meet when pulling a sheet of paper. Although the deckle edge was originally considered an imperfection, it has become popular with the renewal of the handcraft tradition.

felt: animal fibers that are pressed together, originally wool, but now often synthetic, used to carry newly formed sheets of paper, which are then pressed to remove water.

fiber: a cellulose fiber produced by a plant and used to make paper. Cellulose is produced through the process of photosynthesis, creating fiber which can be separated from the plant via chemical or mechanical means.

hand mold: the basic tool in hand papermaking, on which a sheet of paper is formed. It consists of a frame with a mesh screen stretched across. Used with the deckle to form the sheet of wet pulp. When dipped and raised from a vat it creates a sieve-like action catching the fiber on the screen while the water drains.

hogging: a term used when mixing the fibrous pulp in water to create a suspension in preparation of pulling a sheet of paper in hand-papermaking. Generally a ratio of 5% paper pulp to 95% water is used.

post: a stack of wet felts, with newly formed sheets of paper resting between the felts, historically a 2 ½ foot tall stack.

pulling: a term used to refer to the act of dipping and raising a mold and deckle in a charged vat to create a sheet of paper in hand-papermaking.

pulp: the material used for papermaking in its fibrous, macerated, disintegrated, wet state.

pulping: process of macerating plant materials into pulp using either hand or mechanized methods.

pressing: submitting newly formed sheets of paper to pressure in order to squeeze out excess water. Often done with a post of wet papers and wet felts, but can be done by hand.

recycled papermaking: blending existing torn and beaten pieces of paper with water to disperse the fibers into wet pulp. The pulp is then used to make a new sheet of paper. This process can be done with a blender at home, however, a blender cuts the paper fibers instead of breaking them down.

sizing: the application of a material like gelatin or cornstarch to paper to provide water resistance, making the paper surface more receptive to ink, paint or other wet substances. This is generally done during manufacturing of paper with the use of rosin, alum or other synthetic materials, unless hand-making paper.

slurry: water with fibers or pulp in it.

vat: the container which holds the slurry (pulp and water), must be large enough to accommodate the mold and the papermakers' hands.

watermark: an image seen in a sheet of when held up to the light. Watermarks are created by weaving a design in fine wire on the upper side of the mold screen. The design is slightly raised off the surface in relief. When a sheet of paper is pulled, the pulp sits thinner on the raised area, resulting in thick and thin areas of the paper. The paper is pressed to a uniform thickness, but the density of the fiber is thinner at the watermark. Once dry, the less dense area is more translucent when held up to light. Usually the design is a logo or other image.