

# **Re-backing**

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**INF 393C.1: Book Lab**  
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## **Re-backing**

Re-backing is done when the spine or hinges of a book are worn down or torn. The spine and hinges can be replaced while leaving the majority of the front and back cover the same. There are four general steps to the process:

1. Remove the old spine from the book.
2. Prepare a new spine.
3. Attach the new spine to the book.
4. Finish the new spine.

### Materials

Spine strips  
Book cloth  
PVA

### Equipment

Sharp blade  
Microspatula  
Bone knife  
Glue brush  
Mylar  
Wax paper

### Optional Equipment:

Book press  
Ace bandage  
Sand paper

## 1. Remove the old spine from the book.

Slice the cover fabric from head to tail, parallel to the spine, approximately an eighth of an inch from the edge of the board. Do this to both the front and back covers.

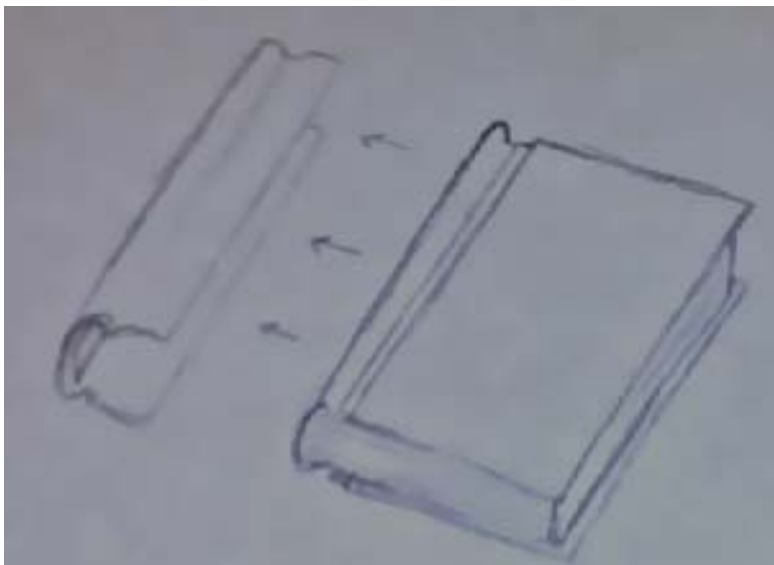
*Note:* Be careful not to slice into the board itself.



Using a microspatula, separate the eighth of an inch of fabric from the boards, both front and back.

*Note:* I have found it easier to use a knife blade to first separate the fabric from the board in such a way as to make room for the microspatula to be inserted and separate the rest.

Open the back cover of the book. With the spine pulled away from the boards, you should be able to see last bit of turned-in cover fabric at both the head and the tail. Slice it, being careful not to cut the endsheets, the boards, or the text block. Repeat this step for the front cover. This should leave the spine entirely separate from the rest of the book.



Put the old spine aside until the fourth step, finishing the new spine.

Open the back cover of the book. An inch away from the hinge and parallel to it, make a small slice the endsheet (and the fabric underneath it) from the tail of the book to just past the turn-in of the fabric underneath it. Make a duplicate slice in the endsheet (and the fabric underneath it) from the head of the book to just past the turn-in of the fabric underneath it. Repeat this step for the front cover.

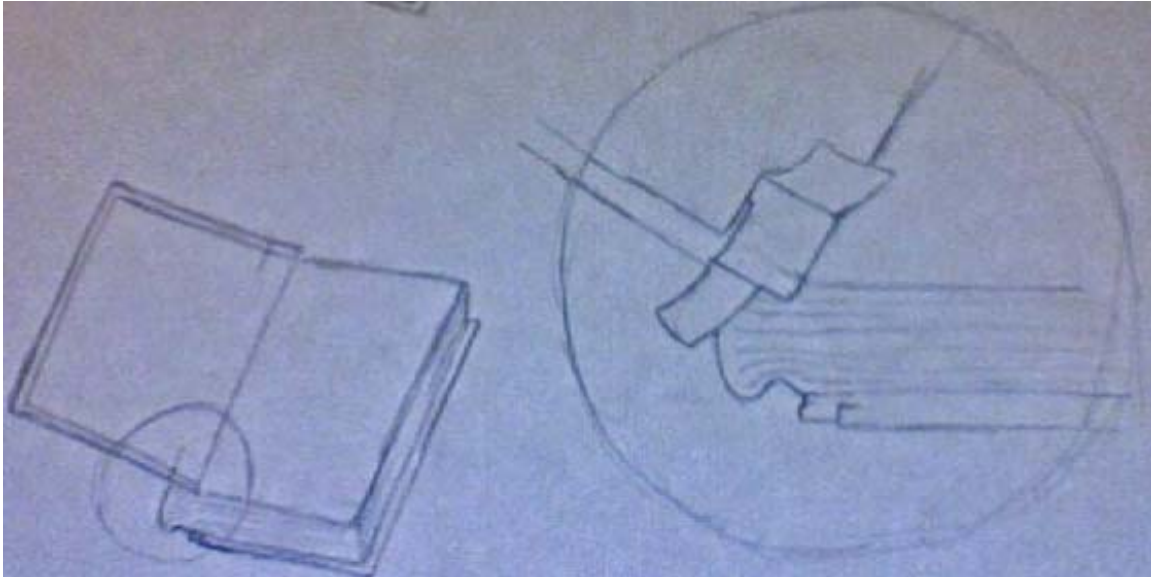
*Note:* Be careful not to cut the board underneath the endsheet.

Carefully lift the sections of endsheet between the hinges and the slices.

*Note:* Endsheets are notoriously difficult to lift. Be careful, be patient, and be prepared to have imperfections in the pieces of endsheets lifted.

Using a microspatula lift the fabric away from the boards three fourths of an inch all along the edge.

*Note:* this includes lifting the fabric that was turned in and was previously covered by the section of end sheet that you just lifted.



*If necessary, trim the head and tail of the lifted fabric so that it is straight.*

## **2. Prepare a new spine.**

Cut a spine strip the width of the spine text-block from shoulder to shoulder and the height of the boards. The grain should go along the height of the strip.

Cut a piece of book cloth for the new spine. The piece should be an inch taller than the height of the boards and wide enough to wrap around the spine and cover the visible boards with an extra inch and a quarter to tuck under the lifted fabric on both front and back covers.

*Note:* You can also use a larger piece of book cloth and trim it down later.

Brush the spine strip with PVA and glue to the wrong side of the book cloth, with half an inch of book cloth at the head and tail and an even amount of book cloth on both sides. Use a bone folder to press the spine strip down.

Note: Brush the glue on in an outward pattern, from the center to the edges.

*If the text block is rounded, you should now round the spine strip you have just created by rolling it gently against longways against the edge of your table or any suitable cylinder you have available.*

*If you are using a larger piece of book cloth and intending to trim down, now is the time. Trim the head and tail to leave half an inch of excess. Then hold the spine strip against the spine of the text block and see how far the book cloth on the sides can be inserted into the available space between the front and back boards and the lifted fabric. Trim the excess book cloth so that it goes as far into that available space as possible while still remaining taught and unwrinkled in the stretch around the spine.*

### **3. Attach the new spine to the book.**

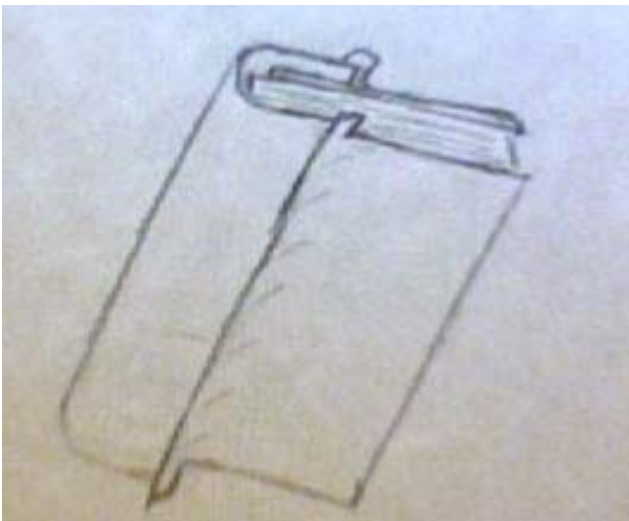
First hold the new spine you have created to the spine of the text block. Make sure you are comfortable with how it sits.

Brush PVA to the exposed board on the front cover. Holding the new spine in place with one hand, press the book cloth against the board, attaching the new spine to the old case. Repeat this step for the back cover.

*Note:* Make sure that the PVA covers the entirety of the exposed board underneath the lifted fabric.

*Note:* Be careful not to drip excess PVA into the hinge of the book.

*Note:* Be careful not to get PVA on the lifted fabric which will be glued down later.

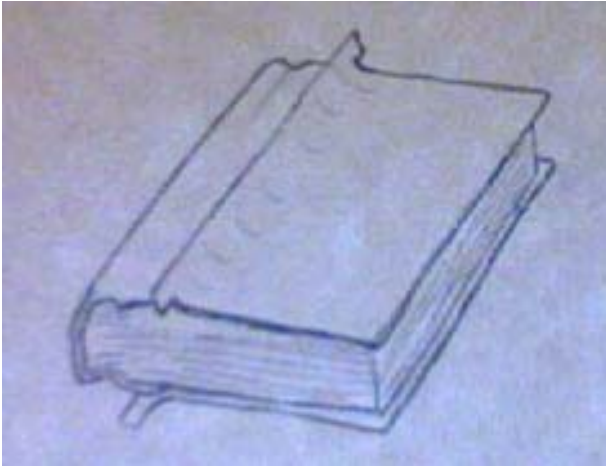


Brush PVA onto the excess book cloth at the head of the spine. Using a microspatula, carefully turn that book cloth down so that it wraps around the spine strip and the boards but does not touch the text block or the lifted fabric or lifted endsheets. Repeat this process for the tail of the spine.

*Note:* Be careful to turn the book cloth at just the edge of the spine strip and boards so that the spine is the same height as the rest of the case.

*Note:* This is easier if you start turning it in at the center of the spine and then work outwards towards the edges.

*Note:* This is easier if you do a dry run first, and then repeat the process with the PVA brushed on.



Get a piece of Mylar that is longer than the book is tall and a couple of inches wide. Apply a thin layer PVA to the Mylar. Insert the Mylar, PVA side up, under the lifted fabric of the front cover. Press the lifted fabric down onto the Mylar. Then pull the Mylar out without lifting the fabric, which should leave the PVA behind. Use a bone knife to press the fabric down smoothly. Repeat the process with the back cover.

*Note:* With experience, you will find that you can apply just enough PVA to the Mylar for the effect you want without covering the entire piece.

Brush PVA onto the fabric that is still loose at the tail of the back cover and carefully fold it over the edge of the board and press onto the interior cover, underneath the still-lifted piece of endsheet. Repeat three times, for the head of the back cover and for the head and the tail of the front cover.

*Note:* You may find it easier to apply the PVA with your finger instead of a brush.

Brush PVA onto the lifted piece of endsheet at the tail of the interior of the back cover and press back into its original place. Use a bone knife to press smooth.

*Note:* You may find it easier to apply the PVA with your finger rather than a brush.

*Note:* Given how difficult the endsheets are to lift, the lifted piece may be torn or in parts. Be careful to reconstruct the endsheets as smoothly as possible, but you may find it necessary to slice the lifted section off entirely and replace with another square that is cut to fit the space.

Use a bone knife to set the hinges.

Place pieces of wax paper between the covers and the text blocks to prevent the PVA from gluing more than it should. Place the book in a book press for a few minutes while the PVA dries.

#### **4. Finish the new spine.**

The new spine now needs a label. Retrieve the old spine removed from the book in the first step. Carefully remove the paper spine strip until only the fabric is left.

*Note:* if the paper does not peel off, you can use sandpaper to remove it, although you will need to be careful not to wear away the fabric.

*Note:* depending on the condition of the old spine, you may need to create a new label entirely. A new label is generally made by printing on Permalife paper.

Trim down the label so that it contains all of the text that was on it but is no wider than necessary and can be laid against the spine without interfering with the gutters.

Nock the corners of the label so that there are no 90 degree angles.

*Note:* this is because 90 degree and smaller angles are more likely to peel off easily than a more rounded corner.

Glue out the label with PVA. Place label onto spine, ensuring that it is positioned right-side up.

*Note:* If the label does not want to stick, you can wrap the entire book in an ace bandage in order to keep the label in place as the PVA dries.

