



**Japanese Stab Binding –  
A Bookbinding Tutorial  
By Bley Hack, [bibliophile.etsy.com](http://bibliophile.etsy.com)**



**Japanese stab bindings are simple and fun to make, and are great for journals, sketchbooks, scrapbooks, and guest books. They make unique, one of a kind gifts too!**

**Materials:**

Gather all your materials before you start to work. Make sure you have a space where you can cut using a utility knife; an old piece of plywood makes a good cutting and work surface.

- Book board, available from art supply stores (enough to cut two covers, the size of the book you want)
- PVA glue (available from art supply stores)
- Utility knife
- T-square or metal ruler
- Glue brush (I like to buy cheap brushes on sale, then I can throw them away when they get nasty)

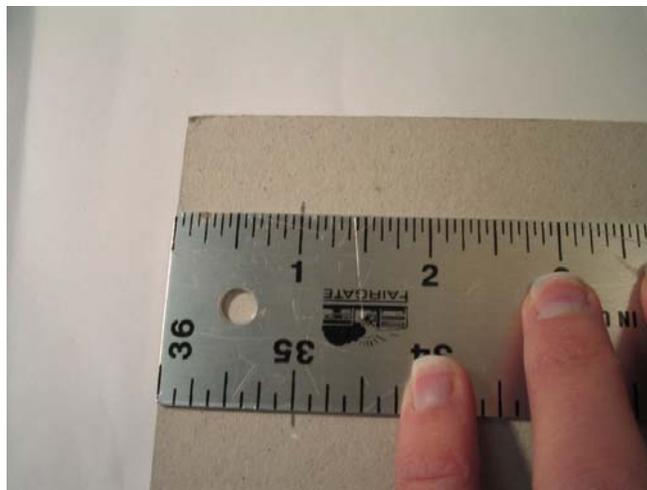
- A container to pour small amounts of glue into (an old sour cream container or the like)
- Drill, such as a Dremel tool, OR an awl
- Decorative paper for the covers and optional endpapers
- 1/16 inch ribbon to coordinate with the cover paper
- Large yarn darning needle
- Any miscellaneous papers you may want to decorate the cover with
- Paper for the inside pages of your book, however many you may want

### Step 1: Prepare the front and back covers

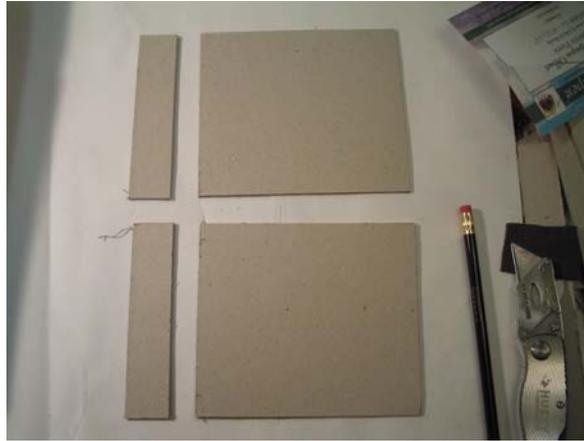
Using your ruler, mark your book board to the correct size of the book you want to make; my book measures  $6 \frac{3}{4} \times 4 \frac{1}{2}$  inches. With the straight edge of your ruler and utility knife, cut the two pieces of book board to the correct size. **N.B. Book board is very dense, you will have to score it many times to cut all the way through.**



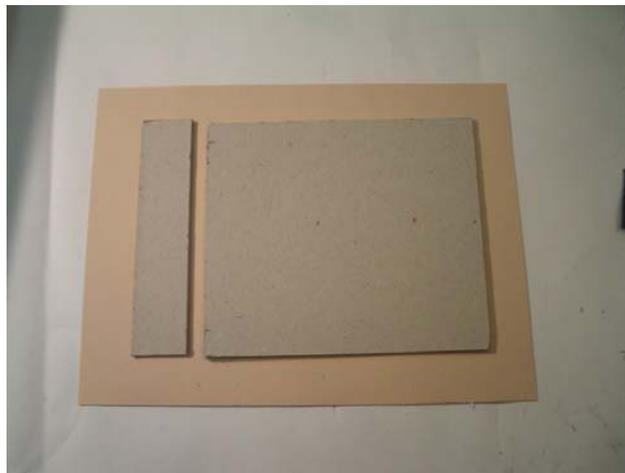
With the two cover pieces in the correct size laying landscape style, measure one inch in from the left edge of both boards.



Again, with your straight edge and utility knife, cut off the inch sections from both boards; you will end up with something like this:



Take out your decorative paper, and cut it to rectangles that are 2 inches wider in each dimension than your book board. These two pieces of decorative paper will cover your book board. Center the book board on the decorative paper so you know where you want to glue. The small one inch section should be spaced approximately 1/8-1/4 inch from the larger section.



Get your glue ready: pour some glue into your throw-away container and have your brush on hand. Starting with the larger section of book board first, spread glue with your brush all over the surface.

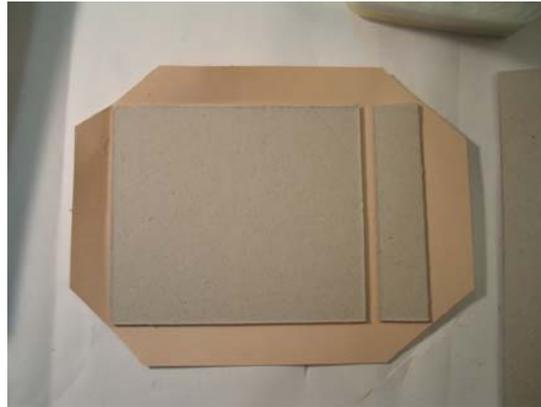


Once both pieces are covered in glue, carefully invert and center them onto the wrong side of the decorative paper, making sure you leave a 1/8-1/4 inch space between the two sections.

Now, you're ready to cut the corners: using a small piece of scrap book board, hold this diagonally across the corner. Using the utility knife and the scrap book board as the straight edge, cut the triangles off all four corners. This is an easy way to make sure you don't cut off too much.

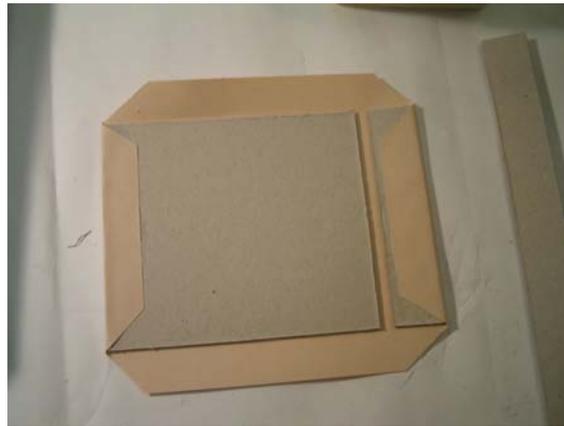


Now, your cover should look something like this:



It is helpful at this point to turn the cover over, and make sure there are no air bubbles apparent in the cover paper. Just press them out with your fingers. PVA is a very good glue, and most decorative papers will dry without air bubbles, but it's always good to check.

Starting with the two short sides, spread glue onto the cover paper, and glue around the book board.



Then, glue the two long edges.

Now, you're almost finished with your first cover. If you chose decorative paper for your endpapers (the inside cover paper), then cut it to fit the inside cover. Otherwise, you can always use the paper you will use for the pages, and cut it to size.

Glue it over the inside of the cover, covering up the unfinished book board:



Now repeat the directions for all of step one to finish the back cover.

### **Step 2: Prepare the endpapers and pages**

This step is easy: simply cut the paper for your pages to the same size as your covers MINUS  $\frac{1}{4}$  -  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch. If you are doing decorative endpapers (these are the first and last pages in your book), then cut them to the same size as your inside pages.

### **Step 3: Drill your holes to prepare for binding**

Now, take your stack of inside pages, with endpapers on the top and bottom, if desired, and turn them portrait style, so one of the short ends is facing you. Measure  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in towards the middle, and draw a line across the short end:



Next, make four marks, evenly spaced down the short side, centered on the line that you've just drawn, ½ inch from the edge:



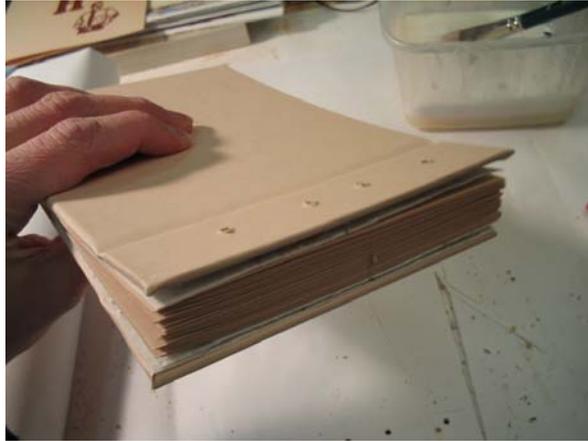
Now, using your drill, or awl, drill through all layers of paper, to make four holes. These holes will be used for the binding.



Take the top sheet from the pages you've just drilled, and use it as a guide to mark where the holes should go on both covers. Holes should be marked on the edge of the covers with the one inch book board section. Then drill holes in the two covers:



Sandwich the pages between the two covers, lining up the holes.

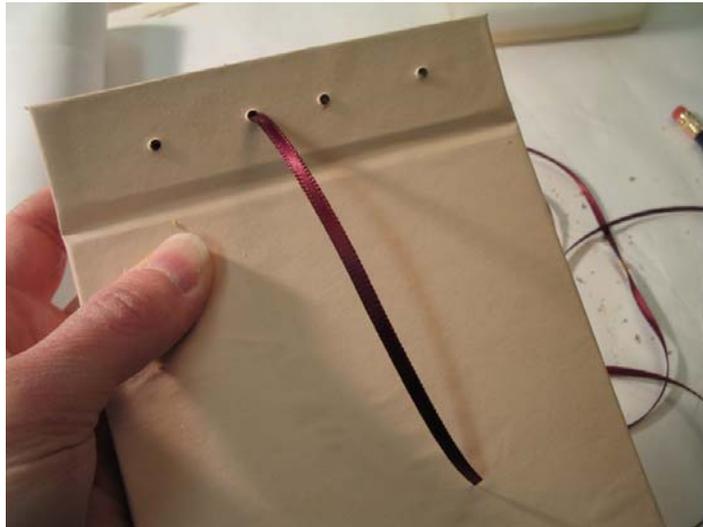


**You're ready to bind!**

#### **Step 4: Sewing the binding**

First, cut a length of ribbon, at least one yard long, longer if you want, you can always cut off the extra. Thread a needle onto one of end of the ribbon.

Holding your book in one hand, put the needle through the hole that is second from the left. Pull the ribbon through, leaving a few inches of ribbon at the end.



Now, wrap the ribbon **AROUND** the spine, to re-enter the hole you've just been through. Pull the ribbon through until snug.



From the side where the needle is, enter the next hole, second from the right:



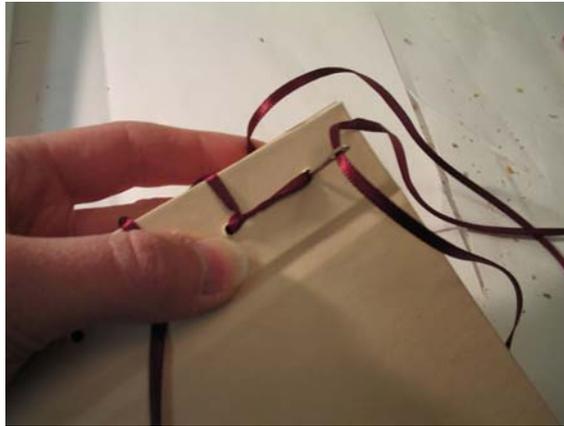
Then, wrap the ribbon around the spine, as before, and re-enter the same hole:



Now the needle is on the other side of the book. Enter the right most hole:



As before, wrap the ribbon around the spine, and re-enter the right hole from the same side as before:



Now, wrap the ribbon around the right EDGE of the spine, and re-enter the right hole, yet again:



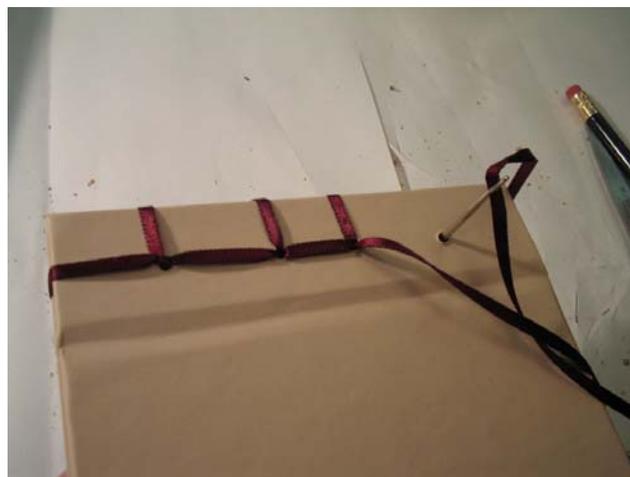
Now the needle will be on the other side; turn the book over, and travel with the ribbon to the next hole:



The needle will be on the opposite side, turn the book over, and enter the next hole, the hole we started in:



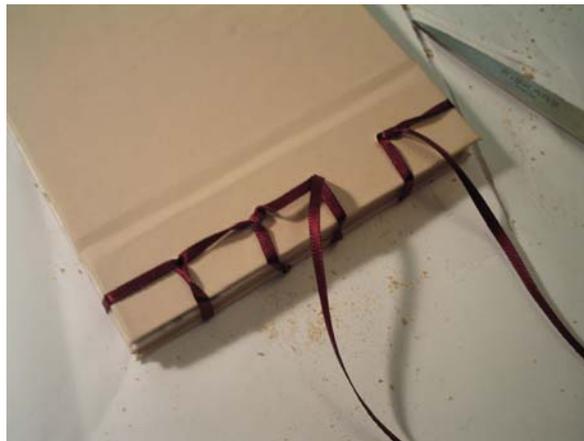
By now, you're getting the hang of this binding. Travel with the ribbon to the next hole, the only hole we haven't been through yet.



Once again, wrap the ribbon around the spine, and re-enter the last hole. Then again, wrap the ribbon around the side EDGE of the spine, and re-enter the same hole, as on the previous edge:



Now, flip the book over, and make a square knot to tie off the loose ends:





Remember to leave at least 3 inches at the ends of the ribbon, ribbon is somewhat slippery, and may come loose at your knot. Tie the ends into a bow if you like. Or add beads to the ribbon ends; they can be extra decoration.

Now, you can decorate the cover with other decorative papers, or just leave it plain. Use the ribbon ends for decoration or not; the possibilities are endless. Here is how I finished mine:



And the decorative endpapers...



**Congratulations! You've finished your one of a kind Japanese stab bound book. These books are great for journals, sketchbooks, scrapbooks, or guest books. Play around with different materials, you can also use fabric for covers, and various other things for the binding. Try other ribbons, or yarn, raffia, anything that you can thread!**

**Here's an example of an African themed book using the same technique:**



**Please contact [www.bibliophile.etsy.com](http://www.bibliophile.etsy.com), with any questions or pictures of your finished creations!**

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