

Pottery Terminology

Handbuilding Terms

Handbuilding

This term refers to the one of several techniques of building pots using the only the hands and simple tools rather than the potters wheel. The term used for creating pottery using the potter's wheel is "throwing".

Pinch

"Pinch" in ceramics is a method of shaping clay by inserting the thumb of one hand into the clay and lightly pinching with the thumb and fingers while slowly rotating the ball in the palm of the other hand.

Coil

This is the technique of building ceramic forms by rolling out coils, or ropes, of clay and joining them together with the fingers or a tool.

Slip

Slip is liquid clay. The easiest way to make slip is to gradually sift or spoon dry, powder clay into a small cup of water. Stir well as you add because it will tend to thicken up after it sits for a minute or two. You want it to be about the consistency of thick cream.

Score and Slip

Score and slip refers to a method of joining two pieces of clay together. First, score the clay; this means that you make scratches in the surfaces that will be sticking together. Then you slip it; that is you wet the surface with some slip, using it like glue. Next, you press the two pieces together. It is very important to always score and slip clay that is leather hard. If you do not, the pieces will likely pop apart when they are fired.

Molding

In this technique, flat slabs of clay are pressed into molds in order to create various shapes or forms.

Stages of Dryness

When speaking of clay, we refer to three basic stages of dryness: wet, leather hard and bone dry. They are self-explanatory, but descriptions of each are:

Wet: Clay that is currently being worked with and has not had time to dry out.

Leather Hard: Clay that is dry enough to work with with out bending when you carefully pick it up, but still has enough moisture in it to easily cut and join together using appropriate techniques. Clay is carved best at this stage of dryness also.

Bone Dry: Completely dry, unfired clay.

Firing Processes and Terms

Firing: This is the process of heating the pottery to a specific temperature in order to bring about a particular change in the clay or the surface.

Bisque: The term bisque refers to ceramic ware that has been fired once without glaze.

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Greenware: This refers to ceramic ware that has not been fired.

Glaze: A glass-like surface coating for ceramics that is used to decorate and seal the pores of the fired clay

Oxidation: A kiln firing with a full supply of oxygen (as opposed to a reduction firing). Electric kilns are this type.

Pottery Tools



Potter's Needles

These long heavy needles set into wooden, metal, or plastic handles are one of the most versatile tools in pottery. Just a few of their uses are trimming the top edges of ware while on the wheel and for scoring slabs and coils when hand building.



Cut-Off Wires

Probably the most common ones have two hardwood handles at either end. Fishing line and uncoiled springs can also be used as cut-off wires. These tools are useful in cutting large lumps of clay and also in removing thrown ware from the potter's wheel.



Fettling Knives

These thin-bladed knives come in either a hard temper or soft. The hard ones are inflexible, while the soft fettling knives are flexible and can be bent into desired angles and curves. They were first developed to remove the fettle (the ridge of material left where pieces of the mold join when a piece has been cast). They are also very useful for trimming slabs and thrown pots.



Ribs and Scrappers

Used in throwing, these tools can help shape and smooth pots as they are being formed on the wheel. They are also used in hand building to smooth surfaces.



Loop, Wire and Ribbon Tools

Just generally useful, these tools are handy for trimming greenware and for use in handbuilding. Wire and ribbon varieties are not recommended for use during throwing; they are too fragile.



Wooden Modeling Tools

Wooden modeling tools come in an astounding variety of shapes, useful in all sorts of handbuilding. Although called modeling tools, the triangular-headed varieties are also excellent trimming tools while throwing on the wheel.