

The Coptic Stitch

Instructions and Illustrations

by Sharilyn Miller

These instructions illustrate how to bind books using a Coptic Stitch.

Note: Before stitching, you will need to punch holes in the covers and signatures of your book.

The beginning of this article includes basic instructions for making a hole template and preparing the covers and signatures for binding.

If you already have your holes punched, go directly to the Coptic Stitch tutorial.

Making a hole template

note: When using the Coptic binding method to bind your book, you may use as many holes as you like for stitching. It makes no difference whether it's an even or odd number of holes for this binding. For the sample, I measured in from one edge $\frac{1}{2}$ " and then marked dots every $\frac{1}{4}$ " three times. I measured down $\frac{3}{4}$ ", then marked every $\frac{1}{4}$ " three times again. I repeated this one more time with the last hole $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the edge of the paper.

materials FOR COPTIC STITCH

- Waxed linen thread
- Bookbinding needle

materials FOR MAKING A BOOK

- Scratch paper and pencil for template
- Scissors
- Ruler
- Awl
- Paper
- Bone folder
- Covers



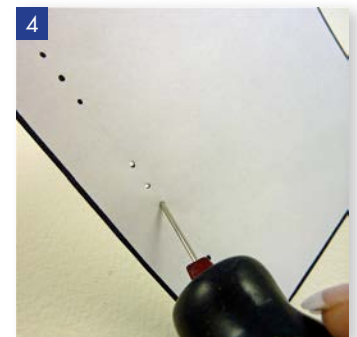
1. First, create a paper template for punching holes in the covers for binding. Measure and cut out a scrap paper piece the same size and shape as the covers.



2. Using a ruler and pencil, measure in from one edge about a $\frac{1}{2}$ " and draw a line.



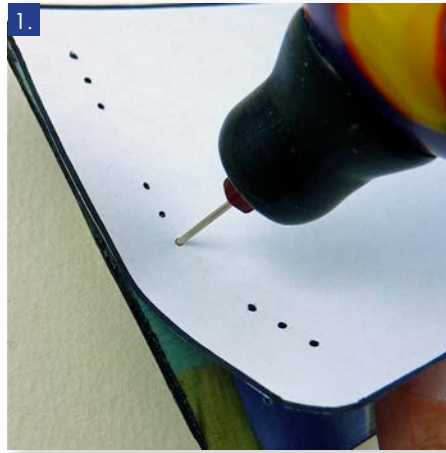
3. Measure along this line and draw a dot every $\frac{1}{4}$ "– $\frac{1}{2}$ " or so.



4. Use a bookbinding needle or an awl to punch a hole at each mark. I typically punch holes on a self-healing cutting mat, but an old wooden cutting board will serve as well.

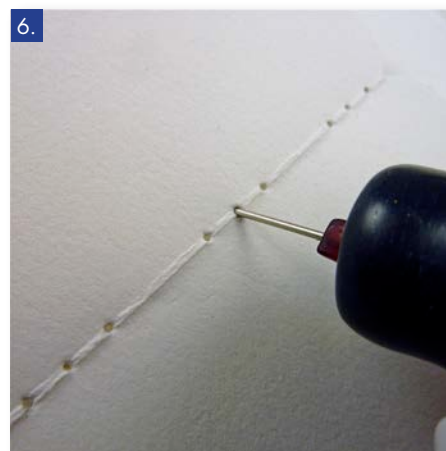
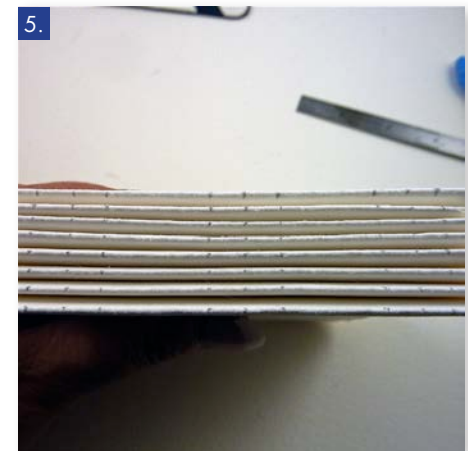
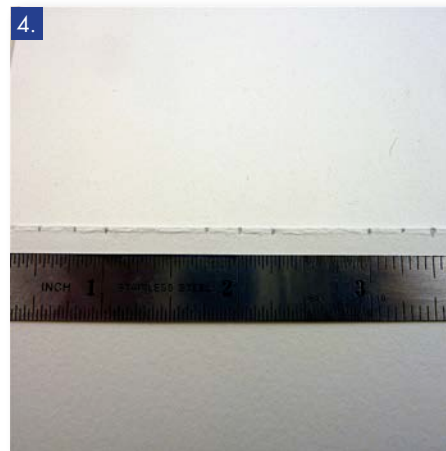
Preparing the covers

1. Place the paper template on the front cover, with the holes along the left-hand side. Use an awl to punch holes through the cover at each marked spot.
2. Place the paper template on the back cover, this time with the holes along the right-hand side, and again use an awl to punch holes through the cover at each marked spot. Set both covers aside for now.



Preparing the signatures

1. Use paper suitable for bookbinding (i.e. it can be folded without cracking). Cut or tear as many pages as you prefer, making them twice the width of the cover and slightly smaller than its height.
2. Fold all the papers in half. Use a bone folder to press along the fold.
3. Folded pages can be used as-is for signatures, or you can nest 2–3 folded pages inside each other to create each signature. Stack them neatly with all folded edges on one side.
4. Use a ruler and pencil to make tiny tick marks along the folded edge of one signature, matching the measurements used on the hole template.
5. Place the marked signature on top of the stack of remaining signatures. Use the marks to guide you as you run the pencil up the edges of all the signatures. A straightedge will help keep the marks lined up.
6. Now that the hole placements have been marked on the folded edge of each signature, use an awl or a bookbinder's needle to poke a small hole through each one, from the inside of the fold out. Take care not to poke very large holes.
7. Restack the signatures as before, and you're ready to bind the book.



Coptic stitch tutorial

1. Cut 6' of waxed linen thread, and thread the bookbinding needle. Place the back cover on the worktable facedown with 1 paper signature on top of it, all holes lined up and facing you.

2. Starting on the left-hand side of the signature, poke the needle into the first hole in the signature, from the inside going out.

3. Pull the thread through, leaving a 2" tail inside the folded pages.

4. Bring the needle to the outside of the book cover, and poke the needle up through the pierced hole in the cover, to the right of the thread. Pull firmly.

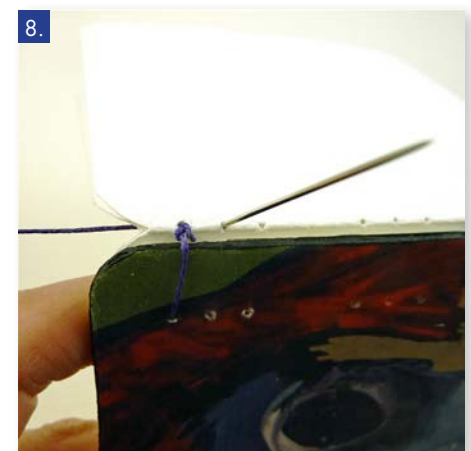
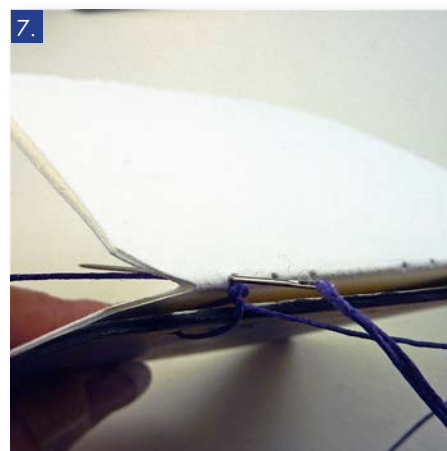
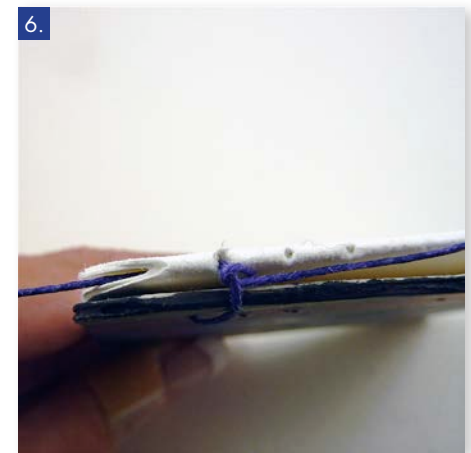
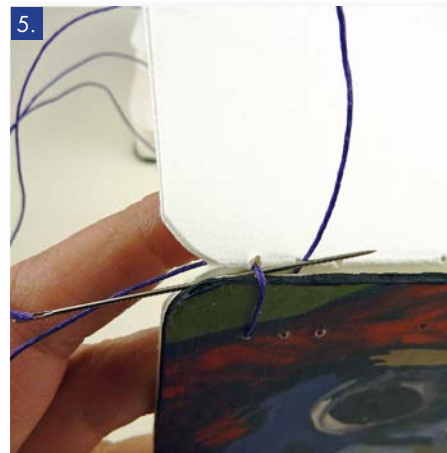
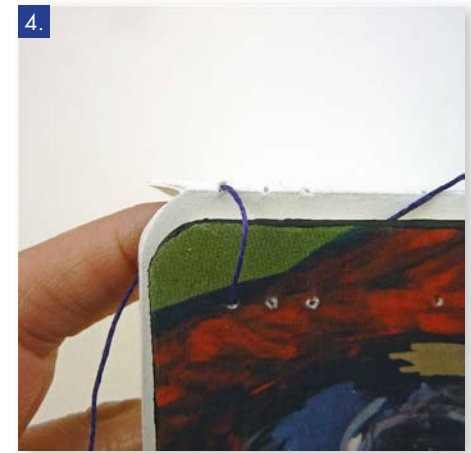
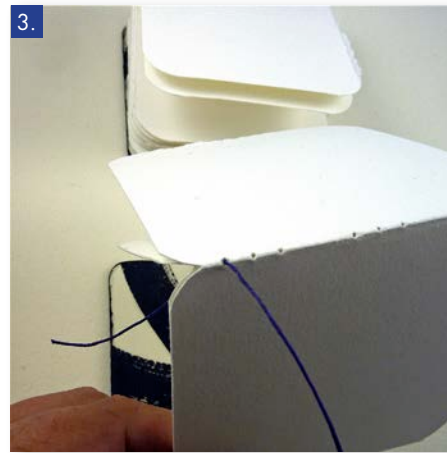
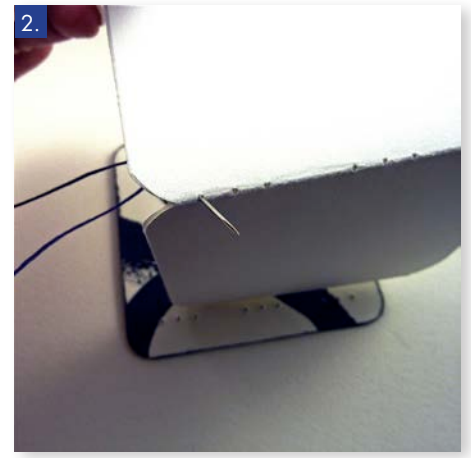
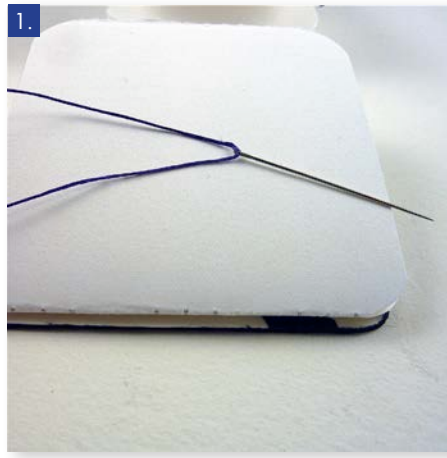
5. Bring the needle to the left and run it behind the thread loop, with the needle tip facing right.

6. Pull tight. This creates a knot.

7. Run the needle back into the first hole on the left in the paper signature, this time poking the needle into the signature from the outside.

8. Pull the thread all the way through. Move to the right and poke the needle through the next hole, from the inside. Pull the thread through to the outside.

9. Take the needle to the outside of the cover as before. Poke the needle up



through the hole, from the outside of the cover to the inside. Pull the thread through, bringing the thread to the right.

10. Placing the needle to the left of this stitch, point the needle to the right. Run it behind the thread loop, needle tip facing right. Pull tight. This creates a knot.

11. Insert the needle back into the second hole on the left in the signature, this time poking the needle in from the outside.

12. Continue this process through to the last hole in the first signature. However, to end it you will now insert the needle into the first hole from the outside, on the right in the second signature.

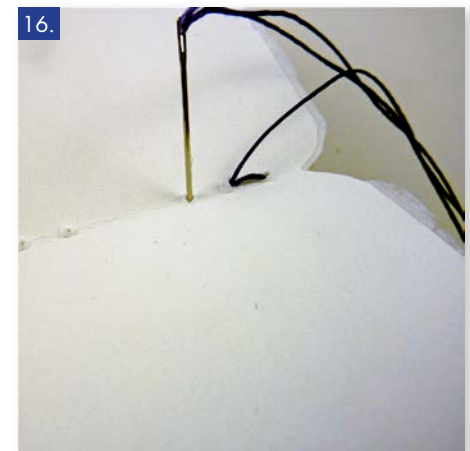
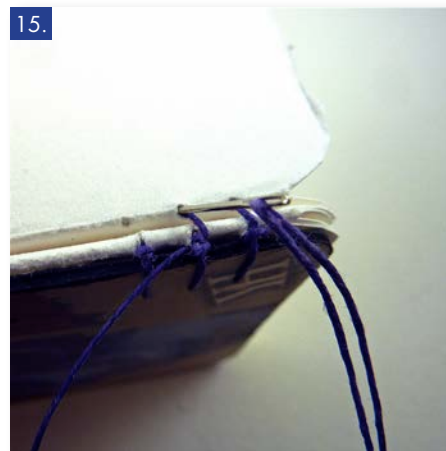
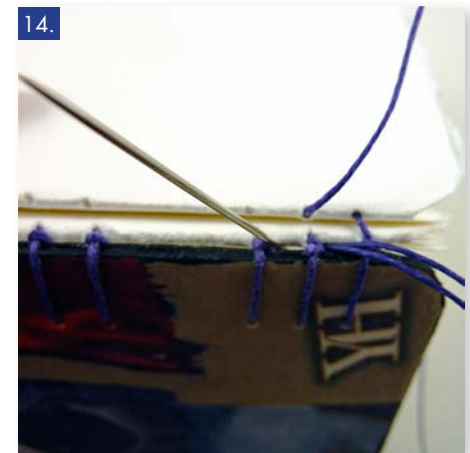
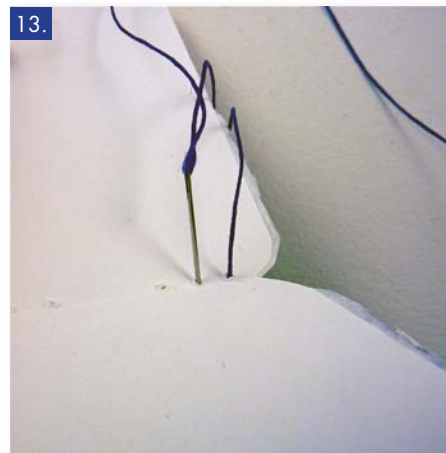
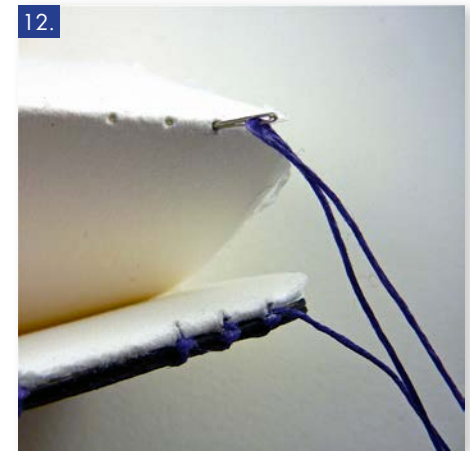
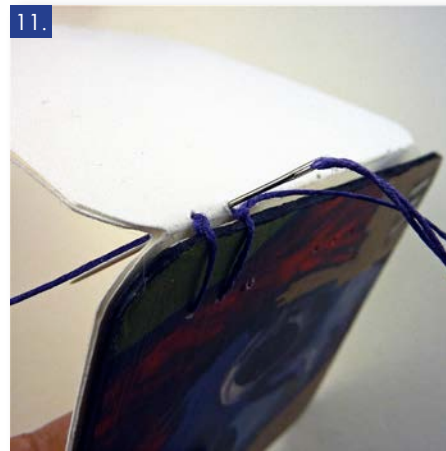
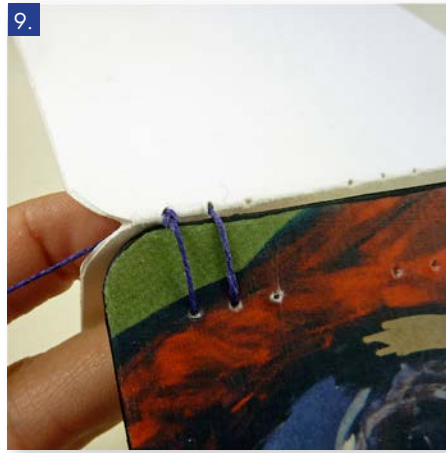
13. Pull the thread through. Poke the needle out through the next hole on the left in the second signature. Pull the thread through.

14. Run the needle right to left around the bottom stitch. Pull the thread through.

15. Poke the needle, from the outside in, through the same hole in the second signature. Pull the thread through.

16. Poke the needle out through the next hole on the left in the second signature. Pull the thread through. Continue until you reach the last hole on the second signature.

17. When you reach the last hole, poke the needle out and pull the thread as before. Loop the thread from right to left



behind the stitch on the first signature. Pull the thread through.

18. Return the needle into the third signature, poking the needle from the outside to the inside.

19. Continue with the same stitching method as before, but this time loop around the second signature's stitch.

20. Repeat this binding pattern until you've attached all the signatures except the very last one.

Binding the last signature

1. Place the last signature on top of the bound signatures and place the front cover on top of it with all the holes lining up.

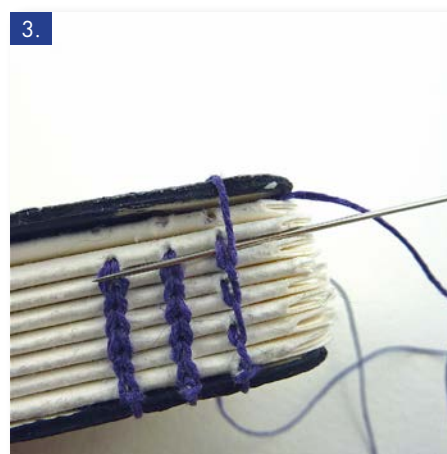
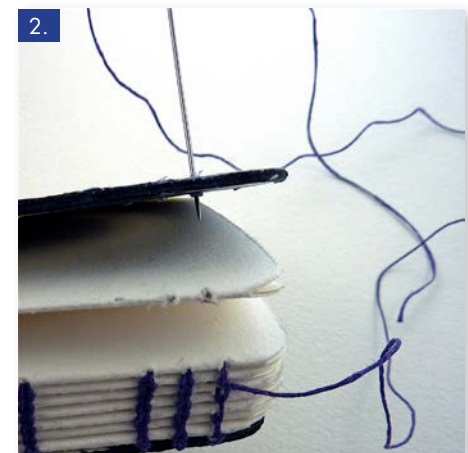
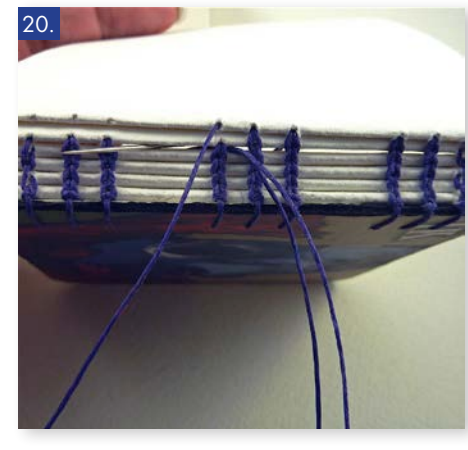
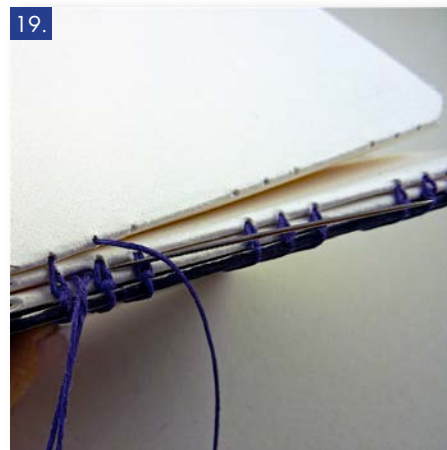
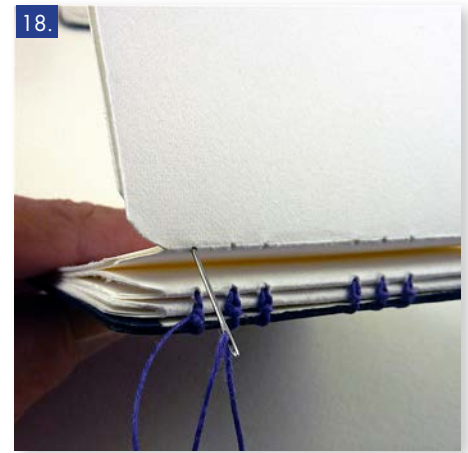
2. Poke the needle down through the last hole at the end of the cover. Pull the thread through.

3. Loop through the previous stitch as before and pull the thread through.

note: So far, the last paper signature has not yet been attached to the book.

4. Poke the needle into the corresponding signature hole and pull the thread through.

5. Poke the needle out of the next signature hole.



6. Loop the thread around the previous stitch.

7. Poke the needle down through the next hole in the cover and pull the thread through.

8. Loop around the most recent stitch.

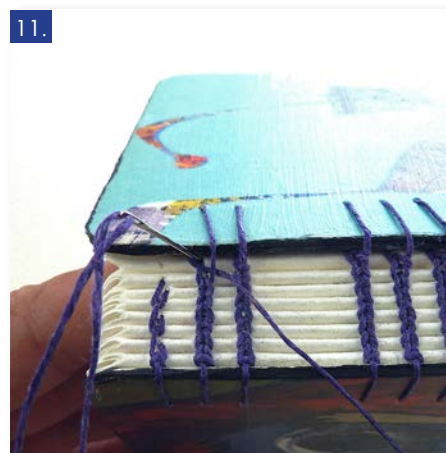
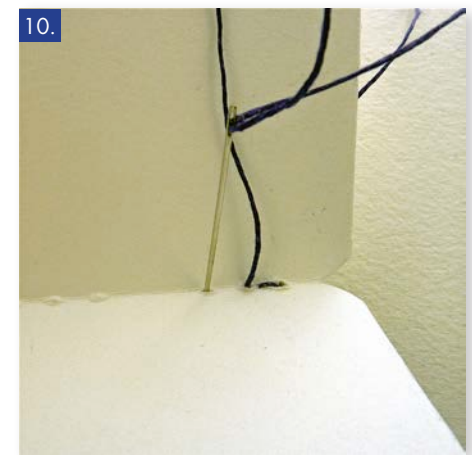
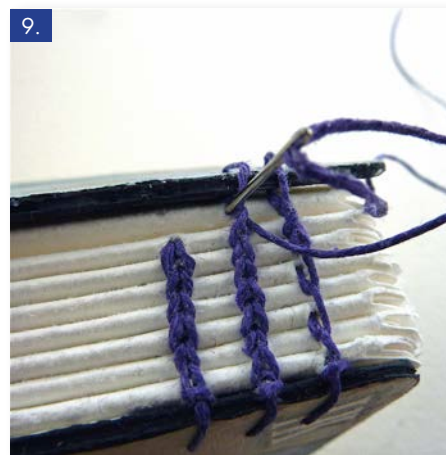
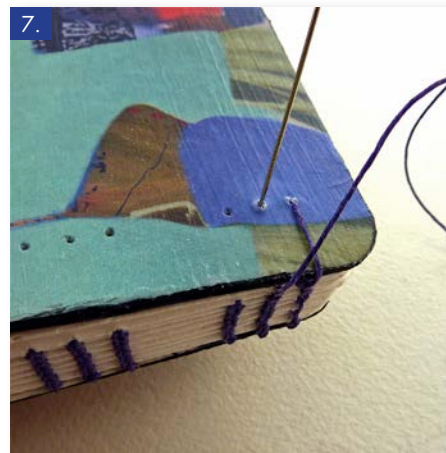
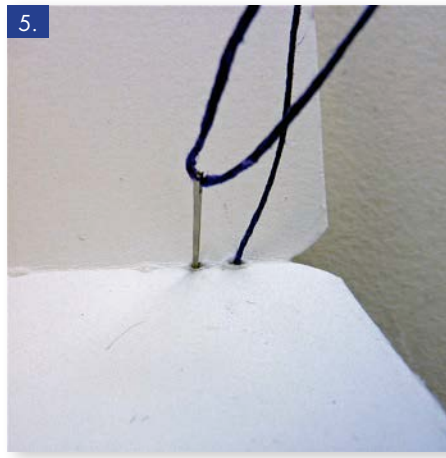
9. Poke the needle back into the same signature hole. Pull the thread through.

10. Poke the needle out through the next hole in the same signature and pull the thread through.

11. Continue with this binding pattern. When you reach the last hole in the book cover and its signature, follow the same method.

12. End by poking the needle into the very last signature hole, pulling the thread through.

13. Weave the thread through the stitched threads inside the book and pull firmly but not too tightly.



14. Tie a small overhand knot in the thread inside to secure it and trim the thread.

Sharilyn Miller is an artist, instructor, and author of 11 books, including the ARTY JEWELRY series.

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To see the full instructions for coptic stitched book, check out Sharilyn's, "Coaster Covers" in PAGES, Summer 2013 at shop.clothpaperscissors.com.

