

# Slab Basics

**NOTE: You will need a rolling tool. Tracks (shown below) are optional, but very helpful to roll even slabs. If you are a pro-pie maker, you should be all set.**

Rolling Tools: Rolling pin, straight sided bottle covered in paper, a thick dowel or pipe.

Tracks: 2 flat items at least a foot long and about  $\frac{1}{4}$  -  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch thick (ruler, dowel, etc.)

1. Pat clay into a thin brick shape about 1 inch thick.



2. Roll back and forth over the clay with downward pressure until it is about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick all over, then give the slab a 90 degree turn so you can roll in a direction perpendicular to what you were just rolling. Place tracks on either side of the slab close enough together that both ends of your rolling tool rest on the tracks.



3. Continue rolling back and forth with gentle downward pressure until the clay is the same thickness as the tracks. You might need to trim your clay and adjust the tracks as the clay changes shape.



4. Remove any texture and compress the slab by smoothing it out with a finger, old credit card, or a clay tool called a rib. Smooth out both sides.



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5. You can search for templates online or take apart a paper cup, but a simple rectangle with different heights and lengths can create many exciting things. Lay out stencils (if you have any) on the slab. Do your best to fit them all in so you don't have to roll another slab. Lightly trace each shape without cutting through. Remove stencils (if any).



6. Decorate! Use stamps, texture tools, found objects and drawing tools to create a design on the slab. Make sure you know which way is "up" if you are writing.



7. With the help of an adult, cut out the shape you traced earlier (a butter knife works!). If you did a lot of stamping it is a good idea to lay the stencil onto the design again to make sure the outline did not change too much. Peel away the extra clay and immediately wrap it in plastic to keep damp. If it is feeling stiff or dry, dip quickly in water or spray it down before wrapping.



8. Scratch and add slip to the side edges of the slab. See the "Tips for Success" Section below about attaching properly. Carefully pick up the walls and gently bend it into a cylinder.



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9. Gently squeeze the edges together. This step is very important! A tight connection between the two ensures your piece is less likely to crack in drying/firing.



10. Use your finger or the rounded edge of a wooden tool to smooth and compress the seam on the inside and outside. Support on the other side of the seam when compressing. There should be no evidence of the join line when you are done.



11. Turn the piece over to attach a bottom. Scratch and apply slip to the edges that will be touching. If you didn't make a template for a bottom, gently place your piece rightside up on top of a slab of clay and trace the shape of the base. Remove the piece, cut the bottom out and attach it. Cut off any excess clay with your clay knife. Make sure that edge is smooth, seams are sealed



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## Troubleshooting Slab Construction



**Clay too wet:** Sticky clay is tough to work with. Lots of dents and fingerprints, a slumping base and a wiggly rim are signs of a slab that was too wet. Floppy wet slabs can be hard to control, try letting your slab sit uncovered for 10 minutes after you roll it. You might also notice these problems if you are being too forceful with the clay.



**Clay too dry or not enough scratching/slip:** A split join can sometimes be corrected by more scratching and slip. However, if it is a deep seam AND there are cracks on the rim that go all the way through, your slab is too dry. You may need to start over. Get the clay very wet, wrap it tightly in plastic, and let it sit until the clay is workable again. Re-hydrate as needed and try to slip and score again.

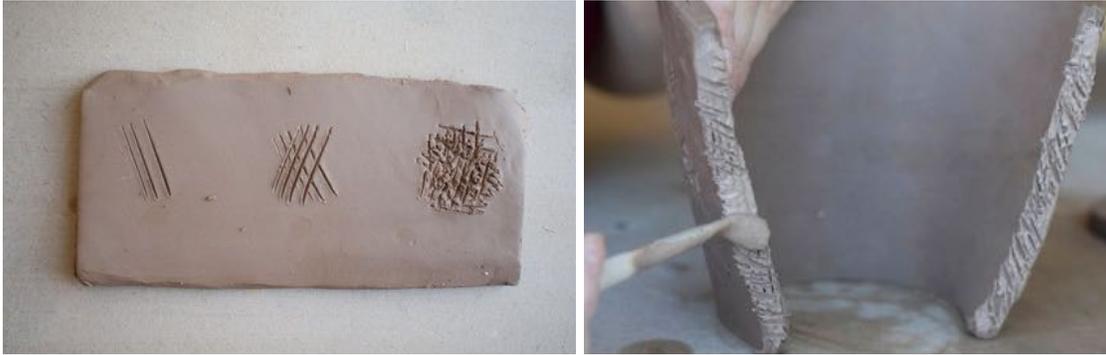


**Uneven slab:** Using an uneven slab will result in a pronounced and weak seam. Difference in thickness can also cause cracks during drying and firing. It also stands out as a mismatch, doesn't look as good.

# Basic Tips for Success

## How to attach clay to clay, and have it stay on.

1. Attach any clay handles/appendages/etc. when the clay is still wet (not stiff).
2. Attach clay of similar dampness (i.e. not wet clay with dry clay)
3. *Thoroughly* scratch both sides that are meant to be attached. See the image below. The left spot is NOT scratched enough. The middle spot is STILL NOT enough. The right spot is just right. Think of your clay like two rocks with a smooth face. You need to rough up the surface so they can lock together like Velcro or puzzle pieces.
4. Gently add clay slip so it does not smooth out your rough scratches. Firmly and thoroughly press together the parts being attached. Repeat with other parts.



## Rule of Thumb: Use Your thumb!

1. Long skinny spikes/tentacles/appendages will easily break off.
2. If it sticks straight out, make it shorter than your thumb and just thick or thicker.
3. If it needs to be longer or thinner than your thumb, it should be scratched and slipped thoroughly, and it should wrap around the piece. See example:



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## Gallery of Potential Projects

