



American Academy of Bookbinding
COMPREHENSIVE BINDING PROGRAM
Diploma Program Guidelines

December 2024

*The American Academy of Bookbinding
is an internationally known degree-oriented bookbinding and book conservation school that offers book enthusiasts of
all levels the opportunity to initiate and improve their skills in a generous and supportive learning environment.*

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AMERICAN ACADEMY OF BOOKBINDING

Founded in Telluride, Colorado, in 1993 by Tini Miura, Eimen Miura, and Daniel Tucker, the American Academy of Bookbinding is an internationally known diploma-oriented bookbinding school where students of all levels have the opportunity to initiate and improve their skills in a generous and supportive learning environment. A program of the Ah Haa School for the Arts, the American Academy of Bookbinding conducts intensive courses in the art of fine leather binding, book repair, paper conservation, book history, and other related subjects. Our goal is to provide a superior bookbinding education and to award professional-level diplomas to those students who develop the knowledge and skills to produce the highest quality of work.

The American Academy of Bookbinding is unique in the United States in its ability to offer a flexible low-residency diploma program in bookbinding, taught by some of the world's most experienced and highly regarded bookbinders and conservators. Students can progress through the diploma program at a pace that works best for their circumstances, attending classes as often as their busy lives allow. The training that students receive at the American Academy of Bookbinding will provide them with a level of skill and understanding that ensures quality and confidence in their work, whether they are already established professionals or are just getting started in the field.

This document will outline the requirements for a Diploma in Comprehensive Binding.

OVERVIEW

In the Comprehensive Binding Program (CBP), formerly known as the Integrated Studies Program, students will develop a firm base of knowledge and skills required to operate a bindery, including traditional and historical binding methods, conservation and restoration, edition binding, and studio management.

This bindery-centered program consists of coursework and independent study to immerse students in the traditional craft of bookbinding. Each course consists of intensive one- to two-week in-class study, followed by specific homework assignments encouraging students to develop their skills independently. Students are required to take a minimum of fourteen courses at AAB, and to complete ten projects in class and ten projects at home to fulfill the homework requirements.

CBP core courses are required for all students pursuing the diploma. Electives, which vary from year to year, allow students to pursue a wide range of interests and skills.

COURSEWORK AND HOMEWORK

Coursework for the Comprehensive Bookbinding Program is structured in three progressive levels, plus elective courses ([See sample transcript](#) for reference). These levels are meant to reflect the increasing growth and specialization of courses as students progress, and provide a “road map” for completing the diploma. During these courses, students will complete ten in-class book projects for the diploma.

Students who are new to bookbinding will begin with Introduction to Bookbinding Levels 1 and 2. These courses are meant to prepare students for the Fundamentals courses by introducing bookbinding tools, materials, and basic structures.

Students with bookbinding experience will have the opportunity to submit photos of their work to ensure placement in courses that will be sufficiently challenging, but not daunting.

While it is recommended that students take Level I courses before moving on to Level II and so on, “detours” are available, and students will have the opportunity to choose which courses to take, and in what order, in consultation with their faculty mentor and the Managing Director.

Ten homework projects are also required to complete the diploma. These projects are based on a student’s coursework and are reviewed by a faculty mentor. See “Homework Review & Requirements” below for more detailed information.

INTRODUCTION TO BOOKBINDING

Note: *These courses are not required for the diploma but are necessary for students with no prior bookbinding experience to prepare for the Level I Fundamentals courses.*

INTRODUCTION TO BOOKBINDING 1

1 week

Description: If you are new to bookbinding, this class is for you! This one-week class is an introduction to the fundamental building blocks of bookmaking. Each student gains an understanding of paper and paper grain, tearing and folding, cutting, gathering, and sewing. Best practices, posture, and essential aspects of materials are covered. The class begins with a simple pamphlet binding, expanding into double-section bindings and casework, and ends with various multi-signature flatback case binding constructions. The foundational considerations of design, tools, and materials are taught in this introductory course. Tools and materials common to bookbinding are covered, with many opportunities to explore the variety of results they offer. The last part of the class discusses essential tools for a home studio in order for students to practice and explore the bookbinding skills they have developed.

Prerequisites: None

INTRODUCTION TO BOOKBINDING 2

1 week

Description: This course is for students who have taken Introduction to Bookbinding I or for those who have some prior experience with paper, multi-section sewing, and case binding. In this one-week class, students are introduced to bookblock preparation, the principles of a rounded spine, basic top-edge coloring, hand-tied endbands, and basic leather work. The resulting structure is a modified Millimeter Binding. Students will take a textblock from a book-in-sheets to a finished binding. Beginning with principles of design and harmony of materials, students will work from forwarding through leather paring with both paring knives and the Shärfix machine. The course also includes a discussion of best practices with tools and materials for the home studio.

Prerequisites: Introduction to Bookbinding Level 1 or experience with multi-signature sewing and case binding.

LEVEL ONE COURSES

FUNDAMENTALS OF TRADITIONAL LEATHER BINDING

2 weeks

Description: This core course is a foundation for the Fine Binding and Comprehensive Binding programs. This course introduces students to half-leather bindings, a standard of the 19th-century trade shop. These bindings feature leather on the spine and corners, with a cloth or decorative paper on the remaining area of the cover boards of the book. The books are sewn on raised cords, laced in, and endbanded. In this class, students can try different tools and techniques for paring, including English and Swiss knives, spokeshaves, and the Schärfix. A particular emphasis is placed on paring leather, sharpening paring knives, and proper forwarding techniques. The finished product is a visually exciting book with a full-leather binding strength, still popular today. Students will complete at least one half-leather binding in this course.

Prerequisites: Introduction to Bookbinding Level 2 or experience with multi-signature sewing, case binding, and leather.

Diploma Homework: 2 half-leather bindings, sewn on raised cords.

FUNDAMENTALS OF FINE LEATHER BINDING

2 weeks

Description: This core course is a foundation for the Fine Binding and Comprehensive Binding programs. Over two weeks, students will complete at least one full-leather book using traditional bookbinding techniques interpreted for the 21st century. Students will become familiar with hand sewing using a sewing frame, rounding and backing, preparing top edges for decoration, weaving headbands, leather paring, chamfering, and applying leather to their books. At all stages of the class, students will be exposed to design options (some minor, some major) that directly inform the look and feel of the finished binding. They will also be introduced to simple decorative techniques such as raised and recessed boards and freehand tooling.

The class will focus on learning and reinforcing sound leather bookbinding practices, particularly forwarding. Students will leave prepared to continue their studies in the diploma program and in other elective and design courses at the Academy.

Prerequisites: Introduction to Bookbinding Level 2 or experience with multi-signature sewing and case binding; some experience working with leather preferred.

Diploma Homework: 2 full-leather bindings.

LEVEL TWO COURSES

PAPER CONSERVATION 1

1 week

Description: This course will focus on repairing tears, filling losses on different types of papers, and guarding a bookblock pulled apart in preparation for rebinding. Participants will learn when and how to apply the various repair methods and will gain an understanding of the behavior of the repair papers and adhesives used. In addition, participants will learn how to make solvent-set repair tissue and cast pulp repair paper using simple equipment. This workshop will also address the pros and cons of humidification and washing and the importance of various flattening and drying methods. Morning lectures will cover the history of papermaking, introductory paper chemistry, material studies, damage analysis, and condition reports. This course aims to apply considerable theory behind hands-on treatments and provide ample time for practice under supervision.

Prerequisites: This course is open to students with little or no prior conservation experience. Introduction to Bookbinding Level 1 & 2 or experience in basic bookbinding is required.

Homework: Students will receive a package of 3 papers to repair at home. These repairs, along with condition reports and treatment logs, will be

reviewed by the instructor. Repair kits will be provided for students as part of their materials fee.

INTERMEDIATE BOOK REPAIR: CLOTH & PAPER

1 Week

Description: This course introduces basic cloth-bound and paper-bound book conservation methods in the bindery. We will use reversibility concepts and a “less is better than more” approach. The reasons for performing or not performing these treatments will be addressed. Books brought in by the students will be discussed with the entire class, so each gets to see issues presented by individual books and possible treatments for them. They will learn to repair damaged cloth and paper bindings, rebuild the book’s structure, dye and color materials to affect sympathetic repairs, and enhance usability. Students will learn the theory and practice of using appropriate materials to achieve stability and strength in their bindings. Japanese paper, linen, and various adhesives will be explored and used as students progress through the class. Students will complete a minimum of two binding treatments by the week’s end.

Prerequisites: Introduction to Bookbinding Level 2 or experience in case binding.

Homework: Students will repair two cloth or paper case bindings, chosen in collaboration with the instructor. Repairs should demonstrate harmony between the new and original materials and the integrity of the structure. Students will document the repair process with photos and complete a condition report and treatment log for each book.

TECHNIQUE: TOOLING & TITLING

2 weeks

Description: This course will focus on the traditional production style of tooling and titling in the bindery. This method allows the binder to tool books in the least time necessary. It uses minimal guides, primarily relying upon the eye for tool placement. The precision of the finished product depends upon the skill of the binder. The area being worked is sized overall, the leaf is laid on, and the book is tooled directly. This is the most efficient way of tooling common leatherwork. Tooling will be practiced on both bindings and plaquettes.

Prerequisites: Fundamentals of Fine Leather Binding or Fundamentals of Traditional Leather Binding, or experience with laced-in book structures and leather paring.

Homework: Students will demonstrate tooling and/or titling on two of their homework books.

BOX MAKING

1 Week

Description: Protective and decorative boxes are a bindery staple for fine binding and book conservation. During this course, students will make a variety of preservation enclosures. Students will learn the qualities of materials used for presentation and preservation of books and papers. Measuring and making appropriate-sized enclosures will be discussed and practiced. Enclosures will include the clamshell box, phase boxes (including clear spines), self-closing wrapper, corrugated clamshell box, and insets for small items.

Prerequisites: Introduction to Bookbinding Level 1 or familiarity with board cutting and working with cloth and adhesives.

Homework: Boxmaking does not have its own homework project, but boxes or enclosures are required for all homework books submitted for review. See “Submitting Homework Books” below for more information.

LEVEL THREE COURSES

SEWING STRUCTURES

1 Week

Description: Sewing is one of the most important structural features of a book. The sewing connects and secures the gatherings and allows the book to be opened and closed. Over the centuries, sewing techniques and materials have varied. Still, the principles have remained the same: gatherings are joined by sewing through the folds with thread onto a support such as cord, alum-tawed skin, leather, parchment, or fabric.

Students will learn and practice all-along, abbreviated, and bypass sewing on single and double cords. They will learn how the various techniques and sewing supports can affect the book's swell and opening properties. If time permits, link-stitch, knot-tack sewing, herringbone sewing will also be demonstrated. Students will also learn common endpaper construction, spine linings, and board attachments.

This class will give students the necessary knowledge to identify historical sewing techniques and understand how sewing affects the overall function and longevity of a binding structure. A variety of historical bindings will be examined in class to illustrate binding history.

Prerequisites: Introduction to Bookbinding Levels 1 & 2, or experience in basic bookbinding.

HISTORIC STRUCTURES - VARIOUS COURSES

1-2 Weeks

Description: These intensive courses introduce students to challenges in book structure and design, and how those challenges have been met over 1800 years of the codex form. Topics will vary from year to year, but can include clasps, endbands, and other specific historical techniques. Courses in specific historic structures, including Gothic Wooden Boards, Slotted Spine Bindings, and Limp Parchment Bindings, are offered as electives and can also count toward a second week of required historic structures.

Prerequisites: Fundamentals of Fine Leather Binding or Fundamentals of Traditional Leather Binding, or experience in laced-in leather bindings.

Diploma Homework: Varies by course; students will need to complete at least one historical model.

INTERMEDIATE BOOK REPAIR: LEATHER

1 Week

Description: This class is devoted to the restoration of leather bindings. Students will

evaluate and make appropriate decisions for treatment, including rebacking, corner repair, rebuilding of end sections, and minor paper repair. The course emphasizes stabilizing the binding structure and using basic conservation techniques to bring the book to a useable state. Leather books are usually structurally different from cased-in paper or cloth bindings, requiring a clear understanding of both material and technique to produce good results. Books brought in by the students will be discussed with the entire class so each gets to see issues presented by individual books and possible treatments for them. Students will also learn to successfully assess a binding's problems and choose solutions based on observation and accepted preservation practices.

Prerequisites: Intermediate Book Repair: Cloth & Paper, or some experience in case binding and repairing cloth and paper bindings.

Homework: Students will complete two homework book repairs, consisting of rebacking and corner repairs on leather bindings from the 18th to the 19th century. Their work should demonstrate a reasoned approach, harmony with the original binding, and craftsmanship. Students will document the repair process with photos and complete a condition report and treatment log for each book.

EDITION BINDING

2 Weeks

Description: Creating an edition requires a wide range of skills, from budgeting and planning to design and production techniques. This two-week course will guide students through the process of creating a small edition of case-bound books. Students will select materials based on a given budget, create a project proposal that plans for the cost of materials, design and craft a prototype, make jigs, and complete their books. They will also practice using a Kensol for labels and review basic type design principles.

This course is designed to prepare students not only with the hand skills they'll need to produce beautiful small editions but also with the planning and business skills to help make those skills profitable.

Prerequisites: Fundamentals of Fine Leather Binding or Fundamentals of Traditional Leather Binding.

Diploma Homework: Students will complete one edition of a minimum of five identical books. Each edition counts as a single “binding project” for homework and will be planned in consultation with the faculty mentor. Students can produce editions of printed books, guest books, or blank journals. Editions can range from 5-25 volumes, depending on the complexity of the project.

PAPER CONSERVATION 2

1 Week

Description: Paper Conservation Level 2 is designed to allow students to expand and deepen their knowledge through practical application, working with projects of the student’s choice. The main focus points are reviewing existing knowledge, humidification methods, washing techniques, and advanced flattening and drying techniques. Participants will learn more advanced repair techniques, basic lining methods, the importance of sizing, and the toning of repair papers. They will improve their skills in identifying printmaking techniques from 1500–1800 and analyzing the relationship between printed images and printed text to preserve them better. Issues of the layout of images in books, their insertion, sophistication, coloring, and the paper on which they were printed will also be addressed.

Projects may include books, maps, prints, drawings, and other two-dimensional paper objects. Working with the instructor, treatment options will be discussed and determinations for treatment will be made. Projects should be achievable within the scope of the student’s current working knowledge and experience and the time allotted. Students will be expected to prepare pre-treatment reports along with “before” photos prior to class.

Prerequisites: Paper Conservation 1 or experience with basic paper repair.

Homework: None required.

LEVEL FOUR COURSES

TRADITIONAL LEATHER BINDING: ADVANCED

2 Weeks

Description: Advanced students will take the Fundamentals of Traditional Leather Binding a second time, but with a focus on independent practice. These students will complete a full-leather binding in a traditional binding style. Students will receive one-on-one guidance from the instructor as they pursue individual projects with critical attention to detail in forwarding. Depending on students' interest, some finishing skills can be practiced as well.

Prerequisites: Fundamentals of Traditional Leather Binding **and** Fundamentals of Fine Leather Binding, plus at least two half-leather homework books.

Diploma Homework: All students will be required to produce at least one full leather binding.

ELECTIVES

1-2 Weeks

Electives give students the opportunity to choose courses that interest them specifically. We recommend that students take two electives from the Comprehensive Binding Program and one from the Fine Binding program, but this can be discussed with the faculty mentor. The goal is to enhance training in areas that interest and excite students. While three different electives are required, students are encouraged to take as many as their resources allow. If a student wishes to take the same elective twice, the second time will not count on the transcript as an elective.

Options for elective courses change annually. Common offerings include: Edge decoration, inlay & onlay, doublures, alternative book structures, miniature bindings, design courses, paper decoration, and others.

THE DIPLOMA PROCESS

DECLARING THE DIPLOMA

Beginning in 2025, students who wish to pursue a diploma, and who have completed both Fundamentals of Full Leather and Fundamentals of Half Leather, will fill out a [Diploma Declaration Form](#). Students who have declared their diploma emphasis will be considered active diploma students for as long as they remain in AAB, and will be entitled to the benefits provided for diploma students as long as they are current with their diploma fee.

DIPLOMA PROGRAM BENEFITS

Completing the Diploma Declaration entitles students to the following:

Ongoing communication and support from a faculty mentor: As students complete their homework books, they are encouraged to ask for suggestions and guidance from faculty mentors.

An annual meeting with the Program Director and Managing Director: Whether the student is able to attend class in a given year or not, a meeting will be scheduled to discuss their progress and make a plan for future diploma completion.

Priority registration: Diploma students are given priority class placement during the initial registration period each year (one month after registration opens)

Access to monthly Diploma Student meetings: One hour meetings with useful presenters, program updates, and questions and answers from faculty.

DIPLOMA FEE

In order to fairly compensate our faculty, and to help cover the administrative costs of maintaining student communication and files, AAB is implementing an annual diploma fee of \$100.

DURING THE DIPLOMA

Course Consultations

A review with the instructor is held at the end of each graded course to assist a diploma student in understanding his or her skills. During this review, the student's work receives a numerical grade from 1 – 5, with 5 being excellent (See sample CBP binding and repair grading sheets for examples). The instructor bases a student's grade on the understanding of technique, quality of the work, ability to handle the materials, and skill development.

A student's strengths and areas needing improvement are discussed during this review. Homework assignments and areas of focus related to this course are determined during this discussion.

These consultations also allow us to review the student's transcript and ensure that a graduation plan is in place.

Annual Consultation

Once a year, diploma students meet with their faculty advisor and the Managing Director. At this meeting, students will look over their work with their mentor, plan homework and courses for the following year, and review their transcripts. If the student attends a class, this meeting will occur during the Course Consultation described above. If the student does not attend courses or courses that aren't graded, the consultation will be held virtually.

HOMEWORK REVIEW & REQUIREMENTS

Homework project approval

Students **must** get approval from their faculty mentor before beginning homework projects to ensure that the work is substantial enough to challenge the student but not so difficult that it exceeds the student's skill level. Students can propose potential homework projects either in class or virtually. While homework plans can be made at the course consultation and annual review, students are responsible for initiating their projects and contacting their mentors for approval.

Submitting homework for review

PROTECTIVE ENCLOSURE REQUIREMENT: Students are strongly encouraged to submit **all** homework books in clamshell boxes, but we recognize that students who haven't yet taken the boxmaking course may not have them in their repertoire. Students in Fundamentals courses will be taught a simple protective enclosure which will suffice until they learn to make a clamshell box.

At least five homework books **must** be submitted in clamshell boxes. These boxes will only be graded if the student has taken (or tested out of) boxmaking.

Homework can be reviewed at any time throughout the year. Students can bring their homework to courses for grading and review.

Students can also ship their work to their instructor for review. Students should arrange a shipping time with their instructors beforehand, so instructors know to look out for them. Students are responsible for the cost of shipping. When shipping to your instructor, make sure to provide them with a paid return label, either printed or by email.

CBP Homework Requirements	
Course Title	Homework
Fundamentals of Traditional Leather Binding	2 half-leather books, sewn on raised cords
Fundamentals of Fine Leather Binding	1 full leather book with flat cords
Paper Conservation 1	Homework packet project: 3 paper repairs, condition report and treatment log
Intermediate Book Repair: Cloth & Paper	2 cloth or paper case binding repairs, condition report and treatment log
Tooling & Titling	2 homework books must have tooling/titling

Boxmaking	<p>All homework books submitted for faculty review should be in protective enclosures.</p> <p>Five books must be in clamshell boxes.</p> <p>For large editions, this may not be practical, so discuss with the faculty mentor.</p>
Historical Structures	1 historical model
Intermediate Book Repair: Leather	Repair 2 leather bindings, with condition report and treatment log
Editions	1 edition binding project, a minimum of 5 books
Paper Conservation 2	Not required
Advanced Binding	1 full leather traditional binding

COMPLETING THE DIPLOMA: FINAL YEAR

Final Review & Faculty Support

After the required coursework is completed, the Director and candidate meet to discuss the student's readiness to be a Diploma Candidate. This meeting occurs a year in advance of the student's expected graduation date. The Program Director must approve the student's proposal to begin their final year. A student will only be approved as a candidate for the Diploma when they demonstrate a level of skill and proficiency that will ensure success before the jury. If the Program Director finds that the student needs more homework or coursework before beginning their Diploma Project, this practice will be planned during the meeting.

If it is determined that the candidate is ready to begin work on their final year Diploma Project, the project is discussed, and approximate dates for the jury process are proposed. This enables the candidate, as well as the Director and staff of the Academy, to prepare for this process. The candidate will have approximately one year to produce their Diploma Project.

The schedule for the diploma project jurying varies slightly from year to year based on the GBW Standards of Excellence Conference dates. These dates will be determined at the student's final review meeting or as soon as possible after the dates for Standards are announced.

During their final year, diploma students will meet monthly with the Program Director to review their progress, answer questions, and provide support.

Students are required to pay a diploma fee, determined annually, to cover the cost of monthly faculty meetings and shipping books to the jury.

Diploma Project

The student is required to produce the following for their diploma project:

-One traditional full leather binding, demonstrating edge decoration and gold tooling, in a historical style.

-One repaired binding, including a detailed condition report, photo documentation, and treatment log, demonstrating a sound, sympathetic treatment. The book will be provided by AAB.

-One re-backed binding using the original cover, approved by the Program Director.

-One additional conservation binding, full leather binding, or edition. This project is individualized, based on the students' areas of expertise and interest. This project will be determined in consultation with the Program Director and faculty mentor.

Supportive Materials: Optional

The candidate is given the opportunity to discuss with the director the option of including additional supportive materials for their presentation to the jury. These may include bindings or repairs that demonstrate a particular skill not seen in the diploma project materials. Though these materials are not judged as part of the diploma project, they may be offered as further demonstration of the candidate's skill and understanding.

Submitting the Diploma Project

The candidate is strongly encouraged to send his/her finished Diploma Project to the Program Director at least 8 weeks prior to jurying, for review and suggestions for improvement (if necessary).

If the Director has reviewed all of the candidate's materials and determined them to be of high quality and complete, the work is shipped to AAB. If the Director believes further work is necessary, the work is shipped back to the student in time to complete the recommended work, before the books are due to the jury.

Jurying Process

In the spring of the candidate's graduation year, the CBP Director selects a panel of three or four qualified evaluators to serve as a jury. Jury members are prominent in the field of bookbinding and/or conservation and are not necessarily associated with AAB. Members of the jury will receive the student's completed Diploma Project by mail, will complete evaluations of the work, and will either confirm their recommendation of the candidate for graduation or decline and recommend further work. The Program Director is not a juror but is available to the jurors to answer questions.

If a majority of jurors recommend the candidate for graduation, then a diploma will be issued.

Awarding the Diploma

The candidate is informed of the jury's decision immediately after the final juror has completed their evaluation. Candidates will receive their projects back in the mail, and will also be given access to the evaluations written by each juror.

The diploma itself will be awarded to the student at the Guild of Bookworkers Standards of Excellence conference. AAB is very proud of our graduates and we celebrate in style! If the graduate is unable to attend the Standards conference, the diploma will be mailed, and the student celebrated at a subsequent conference if they're able to attend.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Leave of Absence: Returning to AAB

For students whose most recent class was after 2016: The diploma guidelines that were in place when the student began taking classes at AAB will be used to determine the student's requirements. Questions about individual courses can be discussed with the Program Director and Managing Director.

For students whose most recent class was prior to 2016: Guidelines have changed since the program began in 1993. All courses that a student has taken at AAB count toward the diploma and will continue to do so, but these courses will be applied toward the current diploma requirements, revised in 2024. All prior lists of requirements will be considered null.

Individual students who want to return and complete their diploma will meet with the Program Director and Managing Director to review their coursework and homework and create a plan of completion.

As with all diploma students, the Program Director must approve a student's request to begin their diploma year. Upon approval, the diploma year begins and the fee is paid.

At least 5 of a returning student's homework books must have been completed recently within the last 5 years in order to be approved as diploma work.

Independent Study Outside of AAB

Students in the diploma program are encouraged to learn as much as they can, in as many places as possible. Independent study with AAB faculty or other teachers can broaden a student's skill set and help students create a network of support. Independent study does not replace in-class work, and all students pursuing the diploma are required to take a minimum of 19 course weeks in Telluride. If a student studies a required skill —tooling, for example— and wishes to test out of that course, they are welcome to submit work for review, but will need to take another elective in place of the required course.

APPENDIX: HELPFUL DOCUMENTS

[Comprehensive Binding Program Sample Transcript](#)

CBP grading sheet(s)

[Diploma Declaration Form](#)

Sample Condition Report

Sample Treatment log

Juror evaluation