

The Canadian Society for Creative Leathercraft



Leathercraft Standards

Revised, April 2013

Foreword

This document is being provided to the membership of the CSCL to provide a set of widely accepted standards to compare their work to.

The Council of Fellows has been consulted for their input and revision will continue to this document as techniques and materials evolve.

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Workmanship

Leather:

- The leather chosen for the project must be appropriate for the function of said project
- Belts must not be too lightweight or they will stretch and distort; they must, conversely, not be too heavy (as to not be able to buckle readily or fit through belt loops) – usually of 6-7 oz., up to 9-10 oz.
- Molded cases should be made of a leather firm enough to hold its shape when empty and not crush
- Belt loops on cases and pouches should be firm and not floppy
- Pre-coloured (finished) leather should be chosen with harmony of colour in regards to other leathers used on the same project
- Thickness of leather built up on each other should be thinned in layering to prevent excess bulk in projects
- Hard leathers should be firm enough for edging and burnishing
- Layered leather may be glued, stitched, or riveted together as project needs dictate
- Future or extended use of piece should be taken into account before construction; a piece should not wear out too soon from average use
- Best quality material will result in the best quality work; ask for opinions and suggestions from the Fellows and Associates in this regard
- Leather for wallet interiors should be thin and firm; wallet backs should have more body
- Delicate leathers (such as snakeskin) should be used, as to not allow excessive wear
- If leather is to be stacked and burnished, it is best if all layers are from the same stock, as to have similar temper
- If leather plays a supportive role in a given piece, it should be made with leather of enough substance to do the job; stiffeners and reinforcing linings can be used to “build-up” substance and strength

Colouring & Finishing:

- Dyes must be evenly applied without spotting, blotching, or streaking
- Block dyeing (while irregular in nature) should be of an overall evenness
- If project opens and closes, dye and finish should not crack with use
- Finish should be evenly applied without streaking and running

Edges:

- All cut edges should be beveled, if in hard leather
- Dyes or edge finish compounds should be evenly applied without running over onto the front or back
- Hard leather edges should be burnished and polished until smooth
- Soft leather should have turned edges if possible and turnovers should be even and smooth

- If soft leather will have a cut edge showing, it should be coloured as the leather surface is coloured, in order to blend, unless a contrast is part of the design; this contrast should be obvious as to its application and not an excuse for an unfinished edge
- Multiple layers should line up and be even

Gluing:

- Cement should be evenly applied and neatly used
- There should be no glue oozing out between layers and no glue smears

Stitching:

Machine Stitching

- All machine stitching should be neat and even
- Stitch length should be appropriate for the material being sewn (not too fine or too close for light materials)
- Stitched borders should follow the edge evenly
- Loose thread ends should not be present (trimmed on the backside, where applicable)
- Thread “lock” should not show on the top of the bottom of the stitch line
- Appropriate needle size in relation to thread size should be maintained (see table)
- If multiple stitch lines are being employed for decorative application, they should be neat and even, and in keeping with the design employed

Hand Stitching

- All hand stitching must be neat and even
- Stitch length should be appropriate for the material being stitched
- Thread size, needle size, and awl size, should work in conjunction for the length of stitch being used (see table)
- Angles for awl stabs should be correct and even
- Stitching does not have to be grooved beforehand, with the exception of some instances (boot and shoe soles, saddlery parts) where protection of the seam takes precedence over loss of integral strength
- Ends should be back-stitched by at least one stitch and thread ends trimmed off close (and preferably on the back side)
- Seams along edges should be at least one leather thickness in from the edge
- Edge dye and burnishing should not discolour the stitching
- Back side of stitching should be neat, yet it is expected that the back may not look as neat as the front
- Butt stitched seams should be tight, with no gaps, and no tearing at the holes; stitching should not show on the inside of the butted edge
- Miter stitching should be evenly spaced on front and top (or bottom) of cylinders and either tighter spacing on top, or stitches dropped to even out stitching; the stitches should not show on the inside

- Corners on boxes should be stitched through (not overlapped) and should not be seen from inside the box
- Back stitching should be neat and even, starting between the layers, and the loop should be pulled to the same side for each stitch; long loop on back for strength and on front for decoration
- Paired seams (such as on buckle straps) may be two individual stitched seams, or one connected by twisting the two threads across the back
- Hand stitched threads should be waxed to keep the twist tight and to keep each stitch tight
- Stitching of lapped skives should extend past the skive by one stitch

Skiving:

- Edges being folded should be skived
- Skiving should be even and neat to give regular fold-overs
- Fold point should be at halfway point of skives
- Lap skives on straps should equal original thickness of strap, without lumps or thick/thin spots
- Light leathers being folded back on themselves at an edge should be “feather skived” (thinned evenly until paper thin at edge)
- Skives on straps should be tapering and not abrupt or steep (length should be about four times the width)
- Buckle and billet straps on Ranger Belts should have skived tips and the tips should be stitched down
- Hand stitched keeper loops should have the skived ends that same width as the strap they are made for
- Skived edges on overlapped edges should be even and smooth, without discernable bumps or drop-offs
- Buckle ends of straps should be skived if leather is heavier than 8-9 oz., or if the stiffness of the leather prevents an even fold over or transition to a single layer
- Multiple layers on fine wallets, wallet interiors, and other projects should have all edges, which will stack up on the outside edges, skived to keep thickness small and workable (to prevent bulk)
- Folds in heavy leathers should be relieved to allow a good fold; the gouge should have its sides skived down (to remove leather) and this should be even

Fitting and Assembly:

- Parts should match up well
- Edges should be smooth and even
- Gussets should match up well and function smoothly
- Stitching should match on projects (same length, colour, thread size) unless deemed necessary for strength, durability, or intended design)
- High stress areas on seams should be reinforced by rivets or by extra stitches

- Hardware should match or be complimentary; rings, buckles, snaps, and rivets should be scaled accordingly
- Hardware colour or tone should be matching (or as close as possible) unless part of the design; design use should be obvious
- Rivets, snaps, closures should be properly set, with the proper size for project and material in mind
- Projects should be functional (if not art pieces), use of projects (opening, closing, buckling/unbuckling) should not cause undo wear on project
- Knife sheaths should have spacer blocks on edge seams to prevent cutting of stitching, or be reinforced with rivets; safety straps should not contact knife edges during drawing/re-sheathing
- Belts loops on cases should be firm and strong; belt loops on holsters should hold them firmly to belt
- Holes on billet ends should have a range of holes, spaced at least $\frac{3}{4}$ " apart for waist belts, 1" apart being the usual standard (note, the spacing can be reduced on smaller straps); shoulder strap holes may be spaced farther apart
- The final hole (largest size) should allow the belt to buckle up and still have enough length to tuck fully under the keeper loop or loop side of buckle (usually three times the width of the strap)
- Round holes work in most straps, with oval holes preferred in heavy and extra heavy straps, for ease in buckling
- Buckle tongue slots and buckle holes should be dyed

Lacing:

- Lacing holes (or slits) must be evenly spaced
- Lacing should be neat and even
- Lacing should be done from the front side for double loop and triple loop
- Splices should be neatly done and take place between layers
- Lacing should be tapped flat and rubbed with a bone folder, in order to lay evenly and smoothly
- Terminal ends of lacing should end neatly without lace ends sticking out
- Type of lacing used should cover full edge of leather layers

Linings and Belt Backs:

- Waist belt backs should be left un-dyed or colour-fast
- Backside may be sanded, slicked and polished for an even surface
- Belts may be lined with leather or suede, provided they are colour-fast!
- Linings for pouches and handbags should be well attached, bottom and top to keep from shifting around
- Linings for hard cases should be well-glued and stitched across any open edges
- Stiffeners between leather and lining should have skived edges for a smooth transition

Surface Decoration:

- Stamping, tooling, and carving are to be neat and even
- Cut (incised) lines will be smooth and flowing as per pattern, without over-cuts
- Cut lines should follow traced lines from pattern and not be “jittery”
- Beveling will be even and not show individual tool marks
- Backgrounding should be as even as possible and not show individual tool marks
- Stamping impressions should be fairly deep and even; when multiple tools are used in conjunction, they should be stamped to similar depth
- Camouflage stamps should “nest” neatly into each other, without breaks in line or over stamps; if used on a belt, they should start at the belt tip
- Mule foot stamps for floral carving should be evenly spaced, tapering off in depth and should follow the curve of the flower stem being stamped
- Veiners and camouflage stamps on leaf stems should be appropriately spaced, angled, and follow the stem being stamped
- Pear shaders should be smoothly applied with no individual tool marks showing; shading should follow the curve of the design (e.g. the petal) without touching the edges or cut lines
- Basket stamps must be used at an even depth and “lock” neatly into one another; vertical lines (or weave) must also be maintained
- If there is any special facet to the basket stamp (star or heart in centre), it must always be used so the designs are “upright” or matching
- Decorative cuts should be fairly deep and follow the design (e.g. flower); they should taper off evenly and not overcut each other
- Modeling with spoons or stylus must be smooth and even and not show individual tool marks (unless intended for design)
- Embossed designs should be well supported from behind to prevent indentation (collapse) or work

Principles of Design

Not all of the below descriptions are directly applicable to leatherwork, but have been included from a design standpoint. These are principles applied to the elements of design that bring them together into one design. How one applies these principles determines how successful a design may be.

Unity

According to Alex White, author of *The Element of Graphic Design*, to achieve visual unity is a main goal of graphic design. When all elements are in agreement, a design is considered unified. No individual part is viewed as more important than the whole design. A good balance between unity and variety must be established to avoid a chaotic or a lifeless design.

Methods:

- Proximity
- Similarity
- Rhythm is achieved when recurring position, size, color, and use of a graphic element has a focal point interruption
- Altering the basic theme achieves unity and helps keep interest

Point, Line, and Plane

Point, Line, and Plane (PLP) are the three most basic shapes in visual design and a good design contains all three. The key to using PLP is making the shapes overlap and share elements.

Point: In design, a point can be the smallest unit of marking not simply a dot. Additionally, a point can be a small plane or a short line.

Line: The trace of a point in motion, a thin stroke, or even a narrow plane can be considered a line. Typed text automatically creates visual lines.

Plane: A plane can be perceived as a trace of a line in motion like dragging a piece of chalk across a blackboard sideways (long side down). Wide lines and large points may also create a plane.

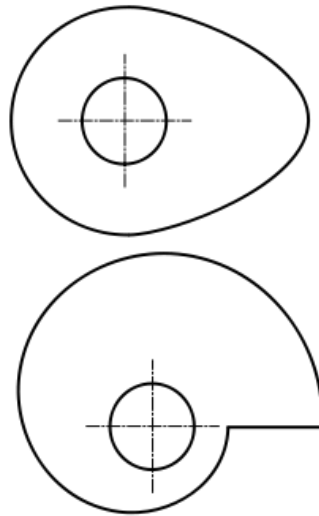
Balance

It is a state of equalized tension and equilibrium, which may not always be calm.[4]

Types:

- Symmetry
- Asymmetrical; it produces an informal balance that is attention attracting and dynamic
- Radial balance; this is arranged around a central element

- The elements placed in a radial balance seem to 'radiate' out from a central point in a circular fashion
- Overall; this is a mosaic form of balance which normally arises from too many elements being put on a page
 - Due to the lack of hierarchy and contrast, this form of balance can look noisy.
- Image below - The top image has symmetrical balance and the bottom image has asymmetrical balance



Hierarchy:

A good design contains elements that lead the reader through each element in order of its significance. The type and images should be expressed starting from most important to the least.

Scale:

Using the relative size of elements against each other can attract attention to a focal point. When elements are designed larger than life, scale is being used to show drama.

Dominance:

Dominance is created by contrasting size, positioning, color, style, or shape. The focal point should dominate the design with scale and contrast without sacrificing the unity of the whole.

Similarity and Contrast:

Planning a consistent and similar design is an important aspect of a designers work to make their focal point visible. Too much similarity is boring but without similarity important elements will not exist and an image without contrast is uneventful so the key is to find the balance between similarity and contrast.

Similar Environment:

There are several ways to develop a similar environment:

1. Build a unique internal organization structure
2. Manipulate shapes of images and text to correlate together
3. Express continuity from page to page in publications; items to watch include headers, themes, borders, and spaces
4. Develop a style manual and stick with the format

Contrasts:

- Space
 - o Filled vs Empty
 - o Near vs Far
 - o 2-D vs 3-D
- Position
 - o Left vs Right
 - o Isolated vs Grouped
 - o Centered vs Off Center
- Form
 - o Simple vs Complex
 - o Beauty vs Ugly
 - o Whole vs Broken
- Direction
 - o Stability vs Movement
- Structure
 - o Organized vs Chaotic
 - o Mechanical vs Hand Drawn
- Size
 - o Big vs Little
 - o Deep vs. Shallow
 - o fat vs. Thin
- Color
 - o Grayscale vs Color
 - o Light vs Dark
- Texture
 - o Fine vs Coarse
 - o Smooth vs Rough
 - o Sharp vs Dull
- Density
 - o Transparent vs Opaque
 - o Thick vs Thin
 - o Liquid vs Solid
- Gravity
 - o Light vs Heavy
 - o Stable vs Unstable

Movement is the path the viewer's eye takes through the artwork, often to focal areas. Such movement can be directed along lines edges, shape and color within the artwork.

Design is much harder to define in leatherwork than workmanship. Yet, it is a very integral part of workmanship.

Designs should be pleasing to the eye. They should show balance and proportion in scale, texture, colour, as well as creativity and inventiveness. The hardest thing to do in leatherwork is something new and original in design.

"Form Follows Function," is the old adage. Something that is to be handled should fit the hand, or body (be "ergonomic"). Its proportion should be correct and adequate (not too big, and not too small). For example, a shoulder strap should nest neatly onto the shoulder and be easily gripped.

Colours should compliment each other if they are different, and they should match if they are similar.

Design brings "art" to "craft" and not everyone will see your design your way. Such is art! Design is not an excuse for poor or unfinished work. The reason why certain aspects of a piece are the way they are should be obvious to the judges as well as to anyone looking over your work.

While carving and tooling can add another facet to a piece, care should be taken to ensure it is well done and in balance with an overall "look." Don't overdo it, unless it can be tastefully worked into your project. Leather is a canvas to be readily decorated, but excess can result in a piece that is impractical for use. This can have merit in its own right, but should be planned for in the design states of your project. Sketch your layout first and do some samples to be sure you like the final choice.

Try not to be too repetitive with your work. When you truly master a skill, try to employ it on different projects, or in different ways. Experiment with new techniques and work to master them. No one should ever stop learning the different ways to do this craft. Ever improving should be your goal.

And finally, the term "harmonious appearance" has been used in previous Leathercraft standards. It means that, with a given piece, all things come together and the piece is as good as it can be.

The nature of a competition is to bring forward your best work to be critically judged by experts on your field. Guild members are encouraged to take their work to chapter meetings to discuss how their work is progressing and if it is of a level for entry into competition.

The phrase “practice makes perfect” cannot be overstressed. Practice all facets of a given projects before doing the actual work on the project. Do your best to see that your piece is as good as can be, before you enter it for competition.

And please remember...the judges want you all to be the best leatherworkers you can be. We will be critical, but constructive in our criticism. We want to see the best work you can do. We want to help you to get to that point. Please make sure of every aspect of your project and ensure that every part that will be looked at is the best that you can make it.