



Weaving Metal Clay Paper - Precious Metal Clay / PMC Sheet or Art Clay Silver Paper Type

by [MSchindel](#)



Techniques for weaving metal clay paper or sheet type

[PMC Sheet and Art Clay Paper type](#) metal clay can be used for a variety of applications, including fine silver bezels, appliqués, origami and braiding. One of the most versatile applications is to weave strips into "fabric." This technique requires some patience and precision to get the best results, but it is not difficult to master and is another way to add texture to your metal clay designs.

Notes:

1. For the sake of simplicity, I'll refer to both PMC Sheet and Art Clay Silver Paper type as metal clay "paper," regardless of which brand you decide to use in your woven piece.
2. This technique is much harder to describe than to do, and metal clay paper is expensive and can't be reconstituted. (Some people toss small amounts of leftover metal clay paper scraps into their paste jars without a problem, but the manufacturers of both brands advise against it.) So if you're not 100% comfortable with any of the directions, you might want to try them out with plain paper first (use glue instead of water to attach the strips) so you don't waste any of your valuable metal clay paper.

Acknowledgments: In addition to my own experience, this tutorial also incorporates tips and techniques from several other extremely talented metal clay artists and instructors, including Celie Fago and Jennifer Kahn (who taught me to weave metal clay paper during my PMC certification course), Priscilla Vassão, Tonya Davidson, Lora Hart, Elaine Luther and Jo Fraser, along with my own experience. As always, I am grateful to them for sharing their experiences and expertise so generously.

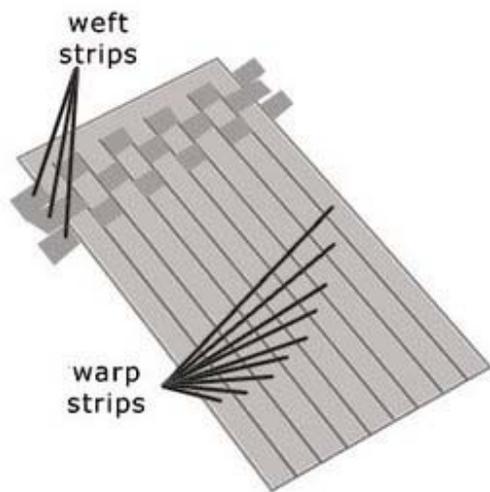
Weaving Terminology: Warp and Weft

Since weaving any material involves interlacing two different sets of strips - horizontal and vertical - I'm going to borrow the textile weaving terms as shorthand for distinguishing between them.

Fabrics are made by weaving two sets of yarns or threads in an interlocking pattern:

- The **warp** is a set of parallel yarns or threads that are stretched tightly across a loom to create a firm base for the fabric.
- The **weft** is a separate yarn or thread that is worked at right angles to the warp. The weft is woven *over and*

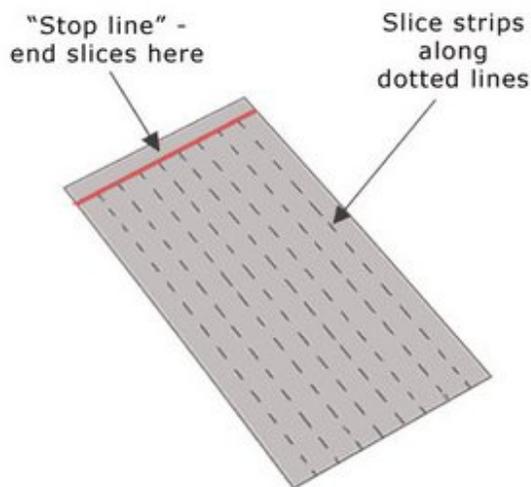
under the warp threads on one row, and then *under and over* the same threads on the next row. This alternating pattern interlocks the threads to create the woven fabric.



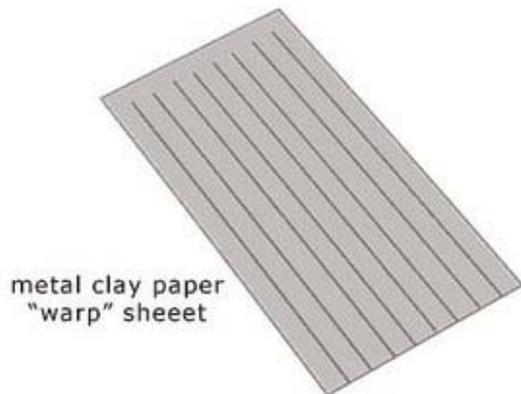
Preparing the Metal Clay Paper Warp

To create your warp, trim a sheet of metal clay paper to be as wide as - and somewhat longer than - you want your finished fine silver weaving (or "fabric") to be *before firing*, allowing for shrinkage during firing.*

Decide how wide you want your strips to be. (You can divide the warp sheet into as many strips as you wish as long as they're all the same width.) Measure and mark cutting guidelines for the strip lightly with a pencil. Also measure and lightly pencil in a perpendicular line one strip-width in from one of the short edges; this will be your "stop" line for cutting the strips.



Slice your strips along the penciled guidelines using a ruler and a sharp cutting blade, being careful not to cut past the "stop" line. Or you can glue wooden craft sticks to either side of the unsharpened edge of a rigid tissue blade's , line it up along a penciled guideline, and press down firmly on both ends of the blade. To make the cleanest cut, wiggle the craft-stick-stabilized edge while continuing to press down on it, then lift the blade straight up to remove. (Many thanks to Jen Kahn for sharing this trick, which works beautifully for cutting any type of clay with a stabilized tissue blade.) make stopping the cut about one strip's-width from the end so the strips remain attached securely (like fringes). You can make all the strips the same width for a neat, even weave, or vary them for an uneven weave. (I recommend starting out with uniform widths until you're comfortable with this weaving technique.)



Tip: Chris Darway's "Gang Blade Stripping Tool" has five blades to cut perfectly even strips with a single slice. It comes with spacers so it's easy to adjust the width of your strips. It's available exclusively from Chris's company, [PMC Tool and Supply](#).

*The amount of shrinkage will vary based on the [metal clay brands and formulas](#) you use. The clay used for the backing sheet will largely determine shrinkage of the finished piece.

Preparing the Weft Strips

To create your "weft" strips, cut individual strips of MC paper the same width as your "warp" strips/fringes, but longer than the width of the "warp" (the weaving process will take up some of the length).

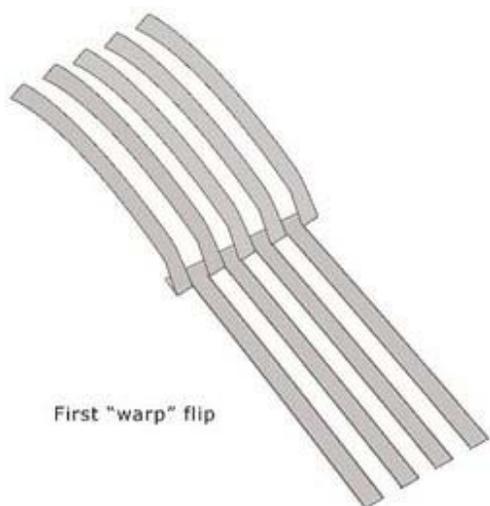
Tips:

- Cut and weave a single weft strip to **test the length before you cut the rest of the strips**.
- **Try texturing your strips**, if desired, by *lightly* impressing the paper with metal embossing tools, ball burnishers, or even aspic cutters. Sacrifice some metal clay paper first to experiment with how much pressure to apply. It's easy to cut or punch through the paper accidentally. Also, remember that you're creating thin spots with these texturing methods, and you need to be extra careful when moistening the strips so they don't disintegrate in the thin spots.

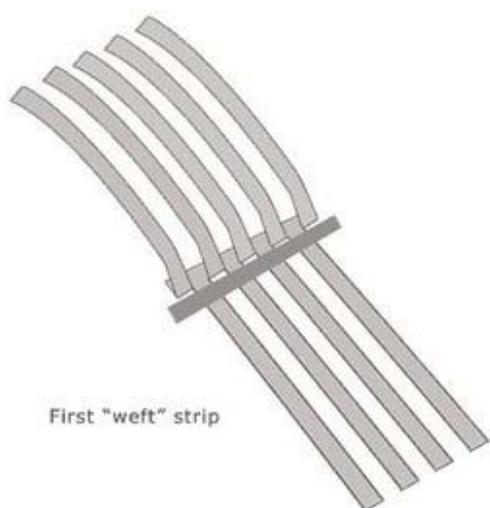
Weaving the Strips: The "Flip and Skip" Method

Although some people are comfortable threading each weft strip over and under the warp strips and alternating the "over and under" sequence for each new row, I find the "**flip and skip**" method much easier:

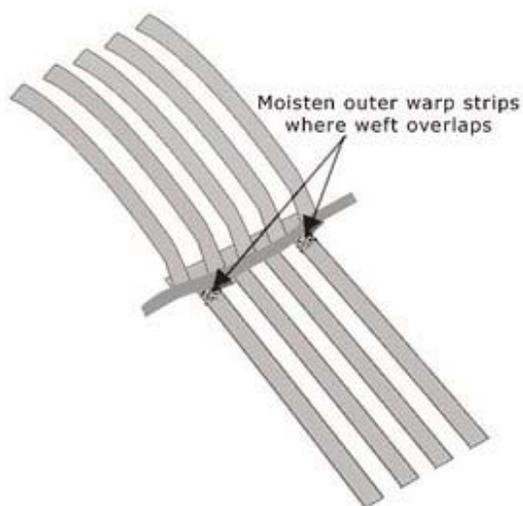
1. **Flip back every other warp strip** out of the way. **Flip one, skip one, flip one, skip one...** repeating all the way across (see illustration below).



2. Lay a weft strip across the remaining warp strips and snug it up against the base of the flipped-back warp strips.



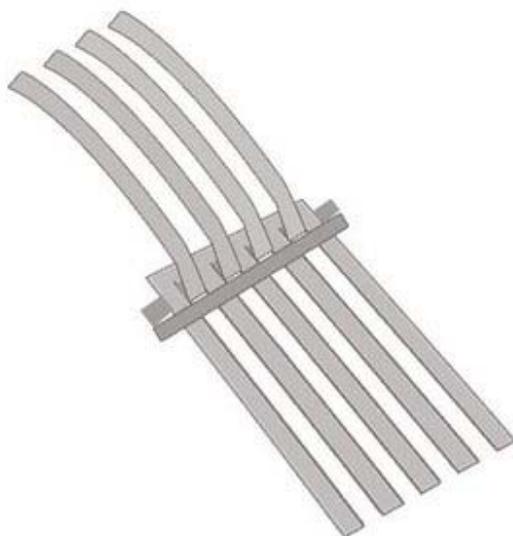
3. Lift the ends of the weft strip and **lightly moisten the outer warp strips with a damp brush just where the weft strips overlap them**. Lay the ends of the weft strip back down and press firmly to attach them to the dampened areas.



4. Lay the "flipped" warp strips back down to complete the first row...

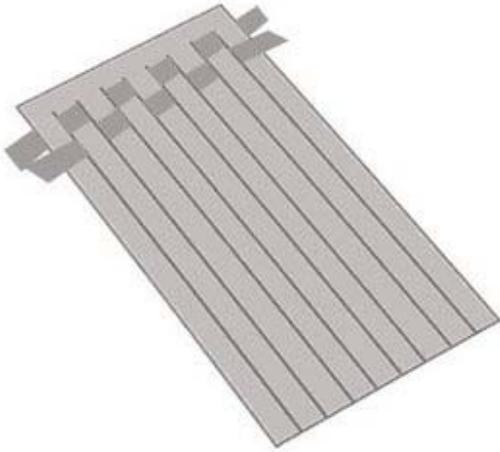


5. ...then flip back the warp strips you "skipped" on the previous row and lay down a weft strip to start the next row.



Repeat the process of snugging the weft strip and attaching the ends to the warp as before...

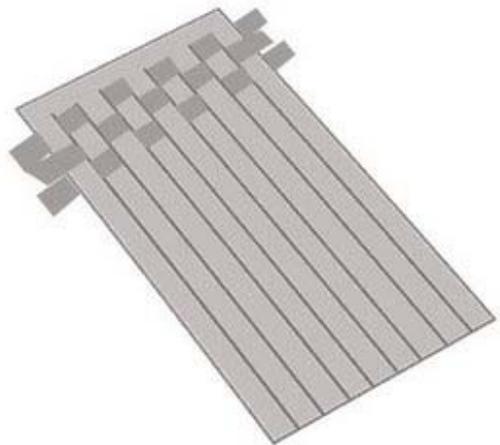
...then lay the "flipped" warp strips back down again.



Snug the weft strip again and flip back the alternate warp strips again...



...repeating the "flip and skip" for each new row.



Note: For the flattest weaving, moisten & attach the weft strip to every warp strip vs. just the ends.

Securing The Reverse Side and Trimming The Woven "Fabric"

Double-check to make sure the edges of each weft strip still are attached securely to the warp, and then carefully flip the woven "fabric" over. Attach all the loose ends on this side, again checking to make sure each one is secure.

Trim the weaving to the desired size and reattach the newly-cut loose ends securely. (If you are very careful when you trim, you can get another usable "weft" strip from the solid edge of the "warp.") Again, secure all the ends on one side first and then flip over the "fabric" to secure the ends on the second side.

It's MUCH easier to do this with a square or rectangular design, but it is possible to cut a circle from the "fabric." You just need to cut it one strip at a time and secure each new loose end before cutting the next.

Adding A Backing Sheet

If you are using PMC+ sheet for the weaving, your backing sheet can be made of PMC+ or PMC3 lump clay (which have similar shrinkage rates to the PMC+ sheet) if you want your finished piece to remain relatively flat. If you'd like to create a domed effect, you can use Original PMC for the backing sheet, since it will shrink much more than the woven PMC+ "fabric". PMC and Art Clay formulas have different shrinkage rates, so I assume that if you are using Art Clay paper type for the weaving, you should use one of the Art Clay formulas for the backing to keep the finished piece fairly flat, or back it with Original PMC to get the domed effect.

Roll out the clay of your choice for the backing sheet. I generally prefer a backing sheet that's approximately 1 to 2 cards thick, but use whatever thickness will work best for your piece. You can also texture the backing sheet clay and then flip it over so you can attach the weaving to the untextured side.

Moisten the top lightly with water - not so much that the sheet/paper clay will get mushy when it's attached, but enough to ensure that the entire surface of the woven "fabric" will be attached to it securely. Decide which side of your "fabric" looks nicest and, with that side facing up, place it on the moistened backing sheet. Press it down firmly to attach it to the backing, starting at the center and working your way out evenly all the way to the edges to avoid creating air pockets that could puff up during firing and ruin your piece. Trim the backing to the size of the woven "fabric."

Sealing The Edges

Jen Kahn taught us this nifty trick during my PMC certification class. To seal the edges of the weaving completely, dampen a "bright" (flat) brush and stroke it ACROSS the edge of the piece at right angles (so that each stroke is only as wide as the brush). Repeat this several times in the same spot until the edges of the paper become invisible and appear to merge with the backing clay. The edge should look like it's made from a single piece of clay. (Be careful that the brush is only damp vs. wet or you'll risk wetting the top of the woven paper and turning it into mush.) Then seal the adjacent section of the edge the same way. Continue to seal the edges of the paper to the backing all the way around perimeter of the piece.

Note: If you're making earrings or a pendant or anything else that requires a hole, this is a good time to add it (or them).

Firing The Woven Metal Clay "Fabric"

Firing Schedules:

Fire according to the time/temperature schedule for the metal clay formula you used for the backing sheet. For example, if you used Original PMC for the backing sheet in order to create a domed effect, you'll need to kiln-fire your piece at 1650 F (900 C) for a full two hours.

Tip: You can find firing schedules and options for all the PMC and Art Clay formulas on my [Metal Clay Brands and Formulas](#) lens.

Kiln Firing:

I prefer to fire flat-backed pieces directly on a kiln shelf, rather than in vermiculite or on fiber blanket. If you are not trying to keep the backs flat, you can fire them on a bed of vermiculite or fiber blanket, if you wish.

Tip: To keep the back of your piece as flat and even as possible, it helps to sprinkle a little alumina hydrate on the kiln shelf first. This reduces the friction between the backing sheet and the shelf and lets the metal clay move freely as it shrinks during the sintering process.

You can fire your woven MC paper pieces in a JEC Ultralite beehive kiln with the ceramic insert (as long as your backing sheet is not made of Original/Standard PMC).

Torch Firing:

You also can torch-fire woven metal clay paper pieces successfully, but **extra care must be taken to sinter the thin "paper" strips fully without melting them.** To avoid heating any one spot too much or too quickly, keep the torch moving constantly and at a moderate speed in concentric circles (or a spiral pattern) to heat the entire piece evenly and at the same speed. Once you have brought the entire piece to an even, salmon-peach-pink color, continue to move the torch in the same circular pattern for another 3 to 5 minutes to ensure that all the metal clay is sintered fully. **Tip:** To avoid marring the delicate, softened surface of metal clay paper that is still glowing with heat (i.e., salmon-pink-peach color), don't touch it with tweezers, tongs or anything else until after it has cooled for at least 30 seconds. Then you can quench it in water.

Tip: You can fire woven metal clay paper "fabric" successfully with a crème brûlée torch. Alternatively, you can use a torch with an air-flow regulator, which gives you more control over the heat and provides a larger flame so you can heat the entire piece more quickly and evenly. Be sure to adjust the flame to be

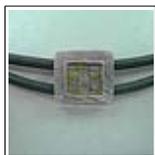
Finishing Your Fine Silver "Fabric" Piece

Like any fine silver items, fired woven metal clay designs can be finished any way you prefer. Adding a Liver of Sulfur (or other) patina really brings out the woven effect. Apply the patina solution and then removing as much of it as possible with a polishing pad, so that only patina "shadows" remain in the crevices.

Examples of jewelry made with woven metal clay paper



Simple woven
PMC+ Sheet
rectangle drop



Donna Lewis's
2-hole focal bead
with woven metal



Metal clay tube
bead earrings
with woven PMC

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Recommended Suppliers for Metal Clay Weaving

[PMC Tool and Supply](#)

Chris Darway sells a "Gang Blade Stripping Tool" made of five extremely-sharp steel razor blades that make it fast and easy to cut metal clay paper into perfect strips of identical width. It comes with 24 brass spacer washers so you can change the width of the strips you're cutting.

Chris also makes and sells a very sharp ".008" Stainless Steel Angle Tool" that has both a 90° angle end and a 60° tip. This versatile tool is thin, flexible and sharp, so it can be used to cut your strips and/or to lift thin strips of metal clay paper easily.

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Hi, I'm MSchindel



I design unique handcrafted jewelry, so precious metal clay allows me to create truly one-of-a-kind jewelry designs with unique handcrafted beads and findings I...

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