

Soft-Block Carving 101

Soft-block carving is a fun way to make your own stamps. You can carve images from very simple to incredibly detailed. All it takes are a few tools, some practice, and your creative imagination.

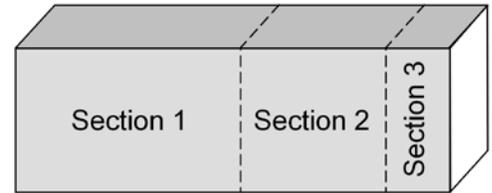
For even more information, and to see my own gallery with some of my soft-block carvings, check out my Soft-Block Carving Web site and gallery: www.ruthannzaroff.com/carving/.

Supplies and Tools

- Eraser (ideally a white vinyl or polymer eraser), approximately 1 x 3 x 1/3-inch
- X-Acto craft knife
- Speedball linoleum cutter with gouges 1 and 5
- Pencil
- Ink pad
- Scrap paper

Before You Begin Carving

Use your X-Acto knife to cut the eraser into three sections, as shown at right. Section 3 is as long as the *thickness* of the eraser (about 1/3 inch). Section 2 is as long as the *width* of the eraser (about 1 inch). Section 1 is the remainder.

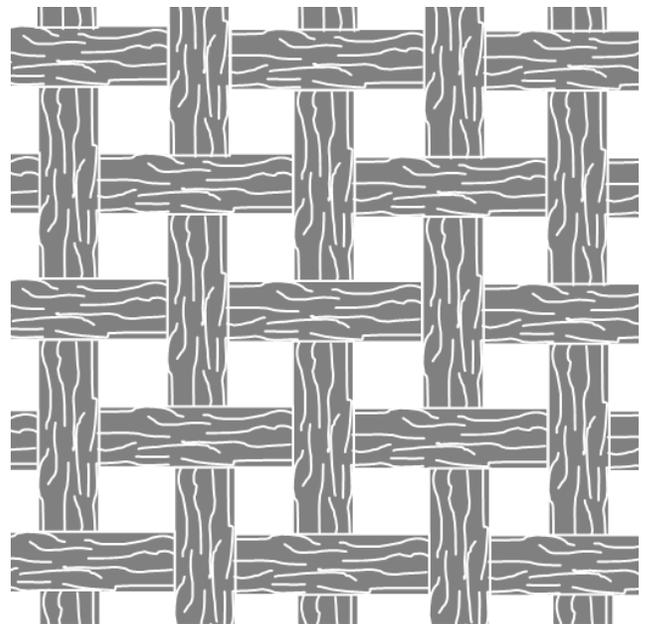


Exercise 1 – Simple Strokes With Gouge 1 (the smallest Speedball “V” gouge)

Use gouge 1 to make parallel strokes along the long *side* of Section 1 of the eraser (the largest piece), as shown below. Make strokes from both ends. The strokes should not be even—simply get the feel of how the gouge glides through the eraser.



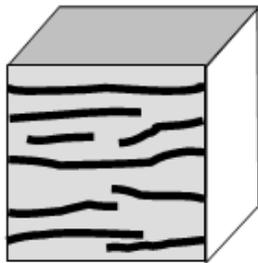
Ink the carved area and experiment making basket weaves on your scrap paper, similar to the one below. Experiment with your own patterns, too.



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Exercise 2 – Simple Strokes With Gouge 5 (the largest Speedball “U” gouge)

Use gouge 5 to make parallel strokes along the *main* (square) surface of Section 2 of the eraser (the medium piece), as shown below. Make strokes from both ends. The strokes should not be even—simply get the feel of how the gouge glides through the eraser. It will feel a bit different from the size 1 gouge.

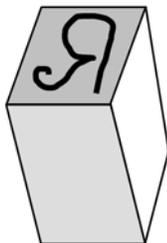


Ink the carved area and experiment making basket weaves on your scrap paper, similar to the one below. You can alternate colors of ink for a completely different effect.



Exercise 3 – Creating a Simple Monogram

Use a pencil to draw your initials on either end of Section 3 (the smallest piece). Remember to draw a mirror image of the letters! If you prefer, you can make small designs instead, such as a heart or a spiral. Use gouge 1 to carve away your pencil marks, leaving the bulk of the block behind. This carving will be a negative image.



Ink the carved area and check out your new monogram stamp. If necessary, make improvements to your carving, a little bit at a time.



Now you can be creative and carve all of the other sides of the blocks!

Always remember, whatever you carve must be the mirror image of what you want to print.