

The 7 Steps of Throwing on the Potter's Wheel

1. Stick the clay to the bat or wheel

- Slam the clay to the surface of the bat or wheel head, making sure it is as close to the center as possible.
- Spin the wheel slowly, at the same time, slap the clay with both hands from opposite sides
- Get into position 1 (stabilized arm locked onto body). Spin the wheel at full speed. Get your hands wet, and apply water to the clay. With reasonable pressure, lean forward to apply force to the side of the clay. At the same time, lock your forming hand to your stabilized hand by wrapping thumbs. Apply reasonable pressure downward using your forming hand.
- Apply pressure from both hands until the clay is firmly attached, about 3-5 seconds

2. Coning—wheel at full speed

- Stay in position 1. Move your forming hand to the edge of the top so that the pressure is now coming in at a diagonal towards the center of the clay. This will create a “dome” or pointed middle, so that the center of the clay is the highest point.
- Now move your forming hand down so that it is parallel with your stabilized hand. Apply equal pressure from both hands and pull your hands up at the same time. The form should resemble a sloping cone (not a column or mound).
- Cone at least twice, but no more than three times.

3. Centering—wheel at full speed

- Stay in position 1. Apply equal pressure from both hands: forward pressure from your stabilized hand, and downward pressure from your forming hand.
- Maintain pressure until the clay centers and holds perfect symmetry (they clay should rotate smoothly in your hands without any wobble, vibrations, or bulging). The clay should be round and cake-like, with proper wall-to-top proportions.

4. Opening—wheel at full speed

- Stay in position 1. Mark the center of the top with a divot using the thumb on your stabilized hand.
- Keep your thumb in the same position. Take the index and middle fingers on your forming hand and place them on top of the thumb of the stabilized hand. Move the index and middle fingers slightly forward and then straight down the center to the desired depth (1/4” for a cylinder, 3/4” - 1” for a bowl). Check the depth using the needle tool if necessary, with the wheel stopped. Curl the middle finger under the thumb to create a ridge or bead on the inside wall.
- **For a cylinder:** With the same fingers-on-thumb position, pull the clay back, towards your body making sure the fingers create a flat bottom. Open the clay to the desired diameter.
- **For a bowl:** With the same fingers-on-thumb position, pull the clay back and up at a slope towards your body making a concave, hyperbolic bottom. Open the clay to the desired diameter.
- **For a cylinder:** Compress the bottom of the form with the right angle of the wooden rib. Apply pressure straight down and slightly against the side wall, holding the rib at an approximate 45 degree angle to the wheelhead.

- **For a bowl:** Compress the bottom of the form with the curved edge of the wooden rib, or by using a bowl rib. Apply pressure straight down and slightly against the side wall, holding the rib at an approximate 45 degree angle to the wheelhead.

5. Pulling- slow the wheel to about half the speed you were going.

- Change to position 2 (forming hand on the outside with the stabilized hand on the inside).
- Using plenty of water, pull the clay up by compressing the clay with your forming hand on the outside against the stabilized hand on the inside while lifting up at the same time. The exact points of touching between the clay and your skin should be as small as possible; experiment using various parts of each hand to find out what is most comfortable for you.
- Follow-through each pull, making sure you pull all the way through the lip.
- Compress the lip after each pull by gently, yet firmly, pinching the lip with the thumb and index finger of the stabilized hand while at the same time compressing down with the index finger of the forming hand.
- Pull up and in if making a cylindrical form, or up and out for a bowl form. Do not pull too far out in diameter and control the centrifugal force. Greater volume can be created during shaping.
- Pull no more than 2 times per 1 pound of clay.

6. Shaping—wheel about half speed

- Stay in position 2. Using pressure from the inside, add volume to the vessel—make sure not to add too much at once.
- Decrease volume by collaring or using the “6 points” technique. Bottle necks and closed forms can be created by collaring in and then using the “spider leg” technique.
- Use ribs or other tools to create outlines on the profile of the form and/or to add texture.

7. Cleaning and Trimming—wheel at half to slow speed

- Use a rib (I prefer the metal rib) to clean off slip from the outside of the vessel and to compress the walls. Once you are confident with this, repeat the process on the inside as well.
- Address the lip of the vessel: use a piece of chamois, small strip of plastic bag, or sponge to create a proper lip per the function of the vessel. Remember that the lip creates a line that is highly visible and often a focal point.
- Use the wooden knife tool to remove the extra bulk of clay at the base of the form. Hold the wooden knife like a pencil with your dominant hand and add support by using your other hand to hold your dominant hand. Cut in at a diagonal with the blade of the wooden knife facing against the direction that the wheel is spinning. Cut down to the bat or wheelhead and let it rotate a couple times. Stop the wheel, make a perpendicular cut through the clay that was separated. Spin the wheel and angle the wooden knife so that the separated clay can ride up the bevel of the blade. Remove this excess clay.
- Turn the wooden knife so that the blade runs perpendicular to the wheelhead and shave off any unwanted clay, knits, or uneven edges.
- Using the wire tool, disconnect the vessel from the bat or wheel head by dragging the wire across the base of the form.
- Set the vessel aside and let the surface dry to the point at which it is no longer “sticky”. Turn the vessel over and let it set to leatherhard.