

Stages of Clay

Clay can be classified into seven different stages.

RAW CLAY

Clay is easy to spot out in nature - basically it's dirt that doesn't have anything growing on it. If dug up, this substance would usually be too difficult to work with, so throughout history we have learned how to create "recipes" for different clay bodies to use for different purposes. The pre-mixed clay we get is one of these clay bodies, pugged (free of air bubbles), and ready to go.

SLIP

This is clay that has enough water in it to make it smooth and runny. Used to attach clay parts. Slip can also be dried out to the right consistency and reused as clay.

PLASTIC

This is the stage of clay that most of the work is done, like throwing it on the wheel or handbuilding. Plastic clay is soft and easily workable.

LEATHER HARD

This is the stage of clay when it's halfway dry. Although it's still wet, it is strong enough to support itself, and strong enough to keep its shape when pressure is put on it. For throwing, this is the stage where trimming a foot on the pot takes place, handles and decorations are put on, and carving out holes or detail work can take place.

BONE DRY (OR GREEN)

Bone dry clay is when the pot has been exposed to air and all of the water has evaporated out of the clay, and it is left completely dried out. This is the stage in which it is put, very carefully, into the bisque kiln. This stage is when the clay is in its most fragile state. The most common destruction is when people pick up their pottery by a lip edge or handle and it breaks.

BISQUE

Bisque clay is clay that has been fired in a kiln, but it is still porous enough to absorb water. In this stage, no additions can be added to the pot, and it is almost complete. This is also the stage that you apply underglaze and glaze to the piece to prepare it for its final firing.

FIRED

After your pottery has been bisqued, it needs to be glazed and fired again. There are lots of different types of final firing: low firing, mid firing, high firing, raku, wood firing, gas firing has two type of firing: oxidation and reduction, salt firing, soda firing, pit firing, etc.