

Make a Papel Picado Banner

Papel picado ("perforated paper") is the Mexican art of paper cutting into elaborate designs. The designs are commonly cut from tissue paper using a guide and small chisels, creating as many as forty banners at a time. Common themes include birds, floral designs, and skeletons. They are commonly displayed for holidays and celebrations.

Color schemes selected for papel picado are frequently linked with specific festivities. For example, vibrant pink, orange, and purple are used for the Day of the Dead (El Dia de los Muertos) and rainbow hues for Christmas and non religious celebrations.

Papel picado can also be made by folding the tissue paper and using small, sharp scissors. (Provide young children with round-tip scissors.)

Materials:

- colored tissue paper
- scissors
- string or yarn
- a pencil
- a gluestick

Procedure:

1. Place your tissue paper in front of you so that the longest side is at the top. From the top of the paper fold down approximately one inch and form a crease. This first fold is called the "string fold". The string will be glued inside this fold when you are finished cutting the paper. You must always remember to keep this fold in sight so as not to cut through it.
2. Turn your tissue paper over so that the "string fold" is facing down on the table. Bring the upper left edge over to the upper right edge and fold the paper in half forming a crease down the center.
3. Repeat the process of folding the paper in half lengthwise two more times, aligning and creasing the edges each time you fold.

4. Cut notches along side edge (left fold) and bottom edge being certain to leave space between the cuts. The best control over the materials can be gained sitting up straight with the paper and scissors at eye level and by rotating the paper rather than the scissors. Edges may also be fringed or scalloped.

5. Unfold the paper once to expose the side edges (left fold again) and cut notches along this edge. Repeat this process with each of the side edges remembering to not cut through the "string fold".

6. When you have finished cutting all your notches carefully unfold the banner leaving the "string edge" folded. Repeat steps 1 through 6 until you have 5 - 6 small banners cut from tissue.

7. Once you have completed your cutouts you will then glue them to a piece of string or yarn. Lay your cut outs face down on a table in the order that you would like them to hang. Make certain that the "string fold" is facing up. Measure and cut the string so that it is about 4 feet longer than the length of your paper banners. Take your glue stick and carefully swipe it down both sides of the interior of the "string fold". Holding both edges of the "string fold" place the cut paper over the string so that it fits in the crease. Using your thumb and forefinger run your hand down both sides of the crease so that the paper adheres to itself. Repeat this process with each of your cutouts leaving a space of about 2 - 3 inches between each sheet of paper.

Thank you to the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico for their instructions on making papel picado. (www.moifa.org)

For very simple instructions with a diagram, go to the PBS Kids website, <http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/do/papelpicado.html>.