

Polymer Clay Buttons

Making something small that holds everything together.

Supply List

Clay

- Polymer clay — Sculpey 3, Sculpey Premo, or a craft store house brand all work. One color is fine; you can always paint it later.
- Baby oil (if your clay is too stiff to condition easily)

Tools

- Razor blade or craft knife (dedicated to clay — not for food use)
- Roller or brayer — or a pasta machine dedicated to clay
- Ceramic tile, glass, or silicone mat (work surface)
- Small circle cutters, bottle caps, or mini cookie cutters
- Plastic wrap (for smoother, rounded button edges)
- Toothpick or small clay piercing tool (for buttonholes)
- Craft sticks or bamboo skewers (optional, as thickness guides)
- Wire brush or toothbrush (optional, for surface texture)
- Baby wipes (for cleaning hands and tools between colors)
- Parchment paper + baking sheet

Note: Polymer clay is a petroleum product. Wash hands thoroughly after use. Not suitable for food-contact items. If children participate, supervise closely.

For the closure

- Canvas scrap or heavy fabric (approx. 2" × 2") for a backing piece
- Waxed thread and needle
- Ribbon — something that feels like you
- Strong adhesive (E6000 or similar)
- Your envelope journal or art journal

Optional finishes

- Posca pens or acrylic paint (can be applied before or after baking)
- Wax stamp or texture tool (press into clay before baking)
- Acrylic spray finish (recommended if wearing on a garment)

Where Art Meets Your Inner Voice

Insight Art Journal is a meditative practice designed to turn the page into a mirror. Through our "Listening Page" process, we use simple creative tools to bypass the noise and access clarity, calm, and genuine self-discovery.

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Pam Hauser

Polymer Clay Buttons

Instructions

Guided Insight Practice:

1. The Arrival (Preparation)

Set out your clay and tools. Check the baking instructions on your clay wrapper before you open it — temperatures vary by brand (Sculpey is typically 275°F for 15 minutes per 1/4 inch of depth). If the wrapper tears, look it up online before you start.

The Breath: Close your eyes and take three deep, grounding breaths. Notice any tension you are carrying and allow it to soften.

The Intention: Set a simple intention for your buttons—perhaps to be curious, or to simply let the colors and even the shape lead the way.

2. Choosing Your Clay

Pick one color or a few. You don't need to know why. Notice which ones draw your eye.

Cut or tear the clay into small pieces. Begin pressing, folding, and pushing — this is conditioning, and it's most of the work. If the clay is stiff, keep going; it will soften. If it's too stiff even after working it, a small amount of baby oil helps. If it's too soft (some brands and colors run very soft), a few minutes in the refrigerator firms it up.

A note on color transfer: Clay picks up color from your hands and tools. If you're blending intentionally, fold colors together slowly and run through the pasta machine (folded side first, to push out air) or roll by hand. The moment the colors fully merge into one new color, stop — or keep going if that's what you want. Either way, all of it is welcome.

3. Shaping the Buttons

Roll or press your clay to an even thickness — use craft sticks or bamboo skewers on either side as guides if you want uniformity. A good button thickness is roughly 3–5mm.

Press your cutter or bottle cap straight down to cut a shape. For smoother, more rounded edges: lay a piece of plastic wrap over the clay first, then press the cutter through it. Peel away the plastic wrap after cutting. Press in any rough edges with your fingertip.



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Instructions (continued)

To layer: cut a larger shape as a base, then a smaller shape in a contrasting color and press it on top with a firm pat. Use the pasta machine on a thinner setting for the top layer so the finished button isn't too thick.

Surface texture (optional): Press a wire brush, toothbrush, toothpick, or wax stamp into the face of the button before baking. Abstract lines, small divots, an impression — all of it works.

The holes: Use a toothpick or clay tool to press two or four holes through the button. Pierce from both sides to make sure they go all the way through. Make them generous — your needle and thread need to pass through later.

A razor blade slides cleanly under finished buttons to lift them from your surface. Don't cut on an acrylic sheet; use your ceramic tile or glass.

4. Baking

Place buttons on parchment on a baking sheet. Bake according to your clay's instructions — typically 275°F (130°C), 15 minutes per 1/4 inch of thickness. Don't overbake. Let cool completely before handling.

While they bake, prep your journal. Decide where the closure will go. Cut your canvas backing piece — roughly 2" square, or whatever fits your cover.

5. Assembling the Closure

Thread your needle with waxed thread. Sew the button onto the canvas backing piece, leaving the button slightly loose — you'll be wrapping ribbon around its base, so it needs room. Knot securely on the back.

Tie your ribbon around the base of the button. Cut a length long enough to wrap around your journal with a little left over. Glue the canvas piece to the front cover of your journal, press firmly, and let it cure.

To close: wrap the ribbon around the journal and loop or tie it around the button. The knot is part of the design.

Save any leftover clay — scraps and mixed colors are useful for handles, test molds, or something you haven't thought of yet.



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Sacred Scraps

A Reflection on Closure

You just made something functional out of almost nothing — a small block of clay, some ribbon, a scrap of canvas. And now that small thing holds your journal shut.

A closure is a quiet ceremony. It marks the boundary between what is inside and what meets the world. The act of wrapping the ribbon, looping it around a button you made yourself is a gesture that says: the contents of this journal is being held with tenderness and respect. It's a way of honoring your work in the journal.

In Buddhist practice we often speak of the container — the conditions that make a practice possible. The journal is a container. The closure is part of it. So is the button. So are your hands.

What do you want to hold? What do you want to protect? What do you want to be able to open again? If you wish, sit with your closed journal for a moment. Notice how it feels to hold something you made and filled (or intend to fill). Notice whether there is joy, or anticipation, or something else entirely.

Reflection Questions:

- When you picked your colors, what drew you to them? Did anything surprise you?
- What did your hands figure out while you were working that your mind hadn't planned?
- Is there anything in your life right now that is asking for a container — something held, set aside, protected until you're ready to return to it?
- What does it mean to close something with something you made yourself?

I'd love to see what you made. Share it at www.insightartjournal.com.



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