

What type of work surface should I be working on? Teflon, Wax Paper, Plastic.

Almost any non-porous work surface is fine. I use wax paper, glass, Teflon sheet, Faux Bone, sheet plastic, Plexiglas, etc. The concrete will take on the finish of the surface against which it sets. If you let it set against glass, the surface of the concrete that set against the glass will have an almost polished look when cured.

For open back bezels, should I use packaging tape to seal the backs or just lay them flat on teflon, wax paper, whatever?

It's necessary to put some sort of tape on the back to stop any leaking of the concrete. If you just place it on Teflon or similar, the concrete will leak from underneath. I often use blue painters tape since it's designed to release easily from the surface once the concrete is cured. The tape will leave a bit of a texture on the cured concrete so it pays to try different types of tape to see which one prefers.

Do texture plates need to be coated with anything to get the cement to release? Do you let the cement harden on the plate and then remove it once dried?

Most texture sheets do not need any sort of release agent. Silicone never needs a release, nor do sheet-type rubber stamps/texture sheets; they both just need to be clean. Photo polymer plates (PPP's) texture sheets that are usually a bit stiffer may need a release agent depending on how they are made and how smooth the bottom of the texture. While it is not needed, one can, of course, use a spray release such as Par Film or similar on any of the sheets.

You need to let the concrete set and cure on the texture sheet and then peel the sheet off the concrete. On many of the texture sheets, when you invert the sheet the concrete will often fall right off.

Is it like Crystal Clay where you can embed objects in it and they will "stick" or do you need to go back and glue in the objects

Concrete is not like Crystal Clay is as much as it's not a malleable plastic that can be manipulated in your hands. It is also not what might be considered "sticky". However you can definitely embed objects in the concrete and they will be "trapped" permanently. The only caveat is that the concrete must cover the shoulder of the object: the shoulder being the widest part of the object. For instance, if you are embedding a round bead, the concrete must come up just past the equator (shoulder) of the bead. If you are embedding a stone like a cabochon, the flat bottom of the stone is the shoulder so the concrete needs to come up the sides of the cabochon only slightly. Wires, snap-sets, found objects, metal clay, epoxy resin, polymer clay, glass, etc., nearly any object or material can be set in the concrete. If there is ink on the object, such as ephemera or Xerox copies, the only precaution that needs to be taken is to put a coat of any PVA glue on it such as Mod Podge or yellow wood glue.

Any toxic odors where we need to work in a well ventilated space?

There are no toxic odors, however the concrete itself is a powder so if a great deal of it is going to be used, it's advisable to wear a particle mask or similar. At the jewelry scale where only a few teaspoonfuls are being used, I have never had the need for a mask nor have any of the hundreds of students I have had on class using the material.

Cement container says to add water with a dropper. Sarah is asking where is this dropper? Or can we just slowly drip water in and if that is the case, why does the package say dropper?

I'm not sure about the wording of the package but I just use a plastic spoon and add the water slowly incorporating each addition thoroughly before adding any more until I get the proper consistency.

Any shrinkage?

There is no appreciable shrinkage.