

HANDCRAFTED
EST
1949
BROOKLYN·NY

Utrecht
ASK THE EXPERTS

Studio Craft: Bread as an Eraser?



Bread with crusts removed, prepared for use as erasers

Ask the Experts: “One of my teachers calls the crumbly gum erasers “bread erasers”, and I saw online that the term for kneaded erasers translates to “bread erasers” in French. I looked it up, and discovered that people used to use actual bread for erasing??? Does that actually work? Is there a reason why we stopped using bread?”

A: Today, erasers are made of natural or synthetic rubber, nylon, or other man-made materials, but before rubber erasers were invented, stale bread was used for removing errant marks from paper. Rubber was so-named in the 18th century by the English chemist Joseph Priestley precisely for its effectiveness in “rubbing out” marks on paper, and rubber erasers soon supplanted bread as the world’s favorite correction tool.

Bread even had a role in cleaning art, including a 17th c. restoration of Michelangelo’s frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Conservation professionals warn against using bread for erasing or cleaning art, because doing so can damage the surface of paper, and leave deposits of wheat gluten residue, which becomes more difficult to remove as it ages.

The technique for using bread as an eraser is very simple: use a basic loaf made with flour, water, salt, and yeast (no oil) and remove the crusts. Knead into a workable dough, and rub across the paper surface.



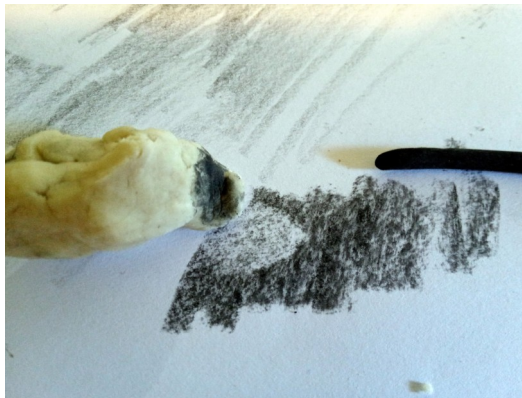
Drawing media, modern kneaded rubber erasers, and bread erasers

We evaluated the effectiveness of bread for erasing charcoal and graphite from smooth bond paper. Bread proved to be good for removing graphite, but in our tests, it was less effective at removing charcoal. While we were unable to achieve full erasure to white paper, a fair amount of drawing medium was removed.



Partial erasure of graphite with bread

Where the bread eraser really falls short is the degree to which it alters the paper surface. Erased passages would not accept more medium, and looked patchy; the paper felt "loaded up" where we had applied the bread.



Where charcoal was applied more heavily, it appeared that the bread combined with some of the medium and fixed it to the paper, creating a stain that would not yield.



Visible stain left after the bread would remove no more charcoal

All modern erasers alter paper surface to some degree, and the bread did not appear to be as abrasive as some of the more aggressive pencil erasers. Bread, however, performed relatively poorly compared to kneaded rubber, gum, and vinyl erasers in terms of achieving clean removal and yielding a workable surface after erasing. Our tests demonstrated that bread would have been serviceable when no alternative erasers were available, but it's obvious why bread was replaced as an artist's tool.

Ask the Experts is intended for entertainment and/or informational purposes only. Dick Blick Holdings/Utrecht Art Supplies makes no warranties of any kind with respect to the information or any use of the information provided herein, and is not responsible for any losses or damages of any kind incurred as a result of the use, misuse, or reliance upon the information and content herein. Any action taken in connection with or reliance upon the information provided is strictly at your own risk. Observe all product package instructions and warnings. © Copyright 2022 [Dick Blick Holdings Inc.](#) All rights reserved.