

Julia's advice is relevant to teaching all types of jewellery making not just metal clay

Teaching metal clay

Have you been thinking about teaching, but not quite got to grips with what's involved? Julia Rai shows you the way

Metal clay is really taking off in the UK and many more people are hearing about this revolutionary material. That means they're looking for people to teach them, so if you want to teach metal clay, how do you go about it?

Know your brands

Let's start by clarifying the brand situation, as this is an area that often confuses people. Art Clay training worldwide follows a curriculum set by the manufacturer of Art Clay (Aida Chemicals). If you want to teach Art Clay specifically, you need to undertake the Art Clay Certification training that is only available from authorised instructors. PMC (Precious Metal Clay, Mitsubishi Materials) training is not controlled in the same way. The PMC Guild has some suggested guidelines for what should be included in training but they do not have a set curriculum, nor do they authorise PMC instructors or check the standard of teaching.

So if you want to say you teach Art Clay, you need to get the official Art Clay training. If you want to say you teach PMC or silver clay or metal clay, you don't need any training. The Art Clay Certification tests the standard of metal clay craftsmanship the candidate can achieve but does not include any training to teach or test teaching ability. Basically, anyone can teach metal clay with no teaching qualifications, no teaching experience and no one will complain – except maybe the poor students!

Teacher training

There are some providers of metal clay teacher training in the UK so if you're serious about running good quality classes look into these. Ask lots of questions about what the training covers and what teaching qualifications the teacher has, they should at least have a recognised teaching qualification and be running metal clay classes regularly if they're teaching you to teach. Make sure the training covers the topics listed in this article at the very least.

But teaching qualifications alone are not enough to run good quality classes. You need to be an experienced user of metal clay. Unless you've made the mistakes and found out how to rectify them, you will struggle to teach beginners, let alone more advanced students. And today, brand specific training is really not good enough to meet the needs of students. You may have a preferred brand but the best teachers have used both brands of silver clay and know the specific pros and cons of each. In my experience, more students are asking questions about bronze, copper and steel clay, so keeping up with the developments in the metal clay world is essential.

If you want to run metal clay classes, here are some things to think about.

Where will you teach?

Many people start at home but do you really want strangers coming into your home and do you have a dedicated area for teaching with enough equipment and set apart from your family? Children running around or family members coming and going isn't a professional way to run classes.

You must have insurance

Public liability insurance is required if you are teaching people, especially if you're going to teach torch firing. You should be familiar with health and safety legislation, basic first aid and complete a written risk assessment for all your classes.

Plan your lessons

Take into account the skill level of your students and plan projects that teach them basic skills while

producing something they can be proud of. Think about the different ways that people learn and plan how you will address these.

Plan your timing

Think about how long each segment of the class will take. Account for slower students but also make sure you have things for faster students to do while they're waiting. Having a good library of metal clay and jewellery books and some copies of Making Jewellery magazine will give people something to do if they finish quickly.

Provide information

Create a simple project handout and a supplier list. When you introduce people to metal clay, they're normally keen to do more so giving them supplier information is an easy thing to do that adds value to your classes. Make sure you have your name and website address on the handout – you want them to come back to you.

And finally, always ask students for feedback on your classes. The only way you'll improve as a teacher is if you ask students what worked for them and what could be done better in future. Good teachers are not afraid of student feedback and act on it to continuously improve their classes. Good luck!

You can find lots of useful free resources for metal clay teachers on the Metal Clay Academy website:
www.metalclayacademy.com

