



How to make a paper mache skull

Materials List

- [Resin skull from Anatomical Chart Company](#)

What?! Spend \$25 on a skull? Hear me out. A good quality resin skull will last indefinitely and its copies will look exceptionally good. You can make open or close-mouthed copies, and Elmer's glue doesn't stick very well to it so it's easier to peel.

I recommend the "Budget Two-Piece Skull" with intact, uncut calvarium. It's just easier. However, you can shave off about \$10 and get the "Budget Life-Size Skull (4th Quality)" for less. The downside is keeping track of the cut calvarium. Those damn things are constantly trying to escape. I saw one emptying dirt from one of its pants legs in the driveway the other day.

A relatively recent third option has become available. [Skeleton-Factory.com](#)sells a "Budget Two-Piece Skull" for \$15.95 that appears to be identical to ATC's. In fact, most of the lower-cost items ATC sells are also listed at Skeleton-Factory. We don't know anything about these guys, but they're definitely worth a look.

- [Modeling Clay](#)

Any modeling clay will work, though I prefer [Plasticine](#). It won't dry out and it's easy to work with.

- [Newspaper, Elmer's glue](#)

- [Expanding foam \(optional\)](#)

Step 1 - Fill in the blanks

Press modeling clay into large voids like the nasal cavity and the backs of the eye sockets. Wad up some newspaper and stuff into the open areas on either side of the skull where the jaw springs are mounted to the head, then cover these with clay. Also press clay into the gaps between the back teeth and the jaw. You



don't have to fill in every undercut and crevice. We're just trying to make it a little easier when it comes time to apply the newspaper strips.

If your skull copy wants a terrible gaping mouth, press clay in between the molars to hold the jaw open. Don't worry about working the underside of the skull. We'll only be applying strips over the top, sides, and front. If there are a few undercuts, that's okay. When the paper's dry we're going to slice this guy open like a bluegill.

Step 2 - Paper & glue

Plain old Elmer's glue has replaced carpet latex as my bonding agent of choice. It dries hard, and it's very durable.

For our skull copies, mix one part glue to one part water in a a big plastic bowl. Even better is a big plastic bowl with a snap-on lid so you can save any left over glue mixture. It won't store forever, but it should last a couple of days. Even better than that is a big bowl of popcorn. But it sticks to your fingers when they're all covered with glue.

Next, tear your newspaper to shreds. Make strips that are around 1"-2" wide by 6" long. Don't cut your strips with scissors. The edges don't blend well. Ragged edges are much easier to blend together.

Step 3 - Glue fingers together

Dab three fingers into the bowl of glue and apply to one side of a paper strip. Too much glue and it won't stick to the skull. Too little and you'll have trouble smoothing it out.

"Whoa! Wait a minute! No release agent? I just spent a bag of cash on this skull and we're not going to cover it with aluminum foil or plastic wrap or something?"

That's correct. Elmer's glue won't stick very well to whatever material this skull is made of. And if you dilute your glue a little more (add



more water), you'll have even less adhesion. I've done this half a dozen times without a problem. If you're still wary, then mix a thinner mixture of two parts water to one part glue.

Apply a couple of layers of paper strips. Tear thinner strips if you're having trouble smoothing out the paper. Wrap your strips to just below the jaw line. Don't try to cover the bottom of your skull. Just the sides and the top. If your skull's mouth is open, apply paper to the edge of the teeth. Add a little extra mass to the jaw line to help it keep its shape when it's pulled in the next step. Smooth out any air bubbles and as many wrinkles as you can. When laying down strips, try to criss-cross them so that they help to hold each other in place.

Allow to dry for 6-12 hours.



Step 4 - Peel & pray

Using a razor blade, make an incision beginning at the center top of the skull and all the way down the back. Next, make another incision on either side of the skull beginning at and perpendicular to the first cut.

Carefully insert a small flat-tip screw driver or a butter knife under any edge and slowly work it around until that edge pulls away from the skull. It might take a little effort, but keep moving around and eventually it will pop off. If you accidentally make a tear or hole, don't sweat it. You can always go back and touch it up with more paper mache.

Take particular care when removing paper from the front of the skull. This is where you're likely to run into any snags. Just go slowly and it will eventually pop right off of there.

Notice the exposed paper filling the gap on the side of my skull? Make sure to cover any gap filler with modeling clay. Otherwise your paper mache strips will stick to your gap filler and cause all sorts of problems. If you just can't seem to get the paper off without tearing it, then perhaps your glue mixture was a little thick. Try a thinner mixture.



Just take it slow. When the face finally does pop off, you'll smile. Up until that point you'll probably have a lot of mean things to say about me.

Step 5 - Shore it up

Tape the skull pieces back together by running duct tape along the seams on the inside. Then, if your skull needs a little more strength, add another layer of paper mache. Hold your skull up to the light. Anyplace that you can see through (well, that would be a hole) or lighter areas could probably use an extra layer.

If you covered your skull with the mouth open, add a little extra support around that area. A couple of strips along the inside might help to keep disaster from striking down the road.

Step 6 - Fill your skull with mush

If you're just going to use your skull all by itself, then you're finished. Give him a horrible paint job and you're all set. If you're going to use your skull as part of a prop, then you'll need some way to mount it, right? In that case, you'll want to fill the copy with something.

I was lucky enough to have some two-part urethane foam from Monster Makers on hand. Since that stuff can get expensive in a hurry, you might try some [Great Stuff](#).



Alternatively, try wadding up several napkins or paper towel and soaking in the glue mixture. Then pack inside the skull and allow to dry. This may take a while, so placing it in front of a fan should help. When dry, a shaft can be cut from the center. Insert your mount point (neck bone) into the shaft and hot glue it in place.





Step 7 - Finish out

Skin your skull or paint it. Then make sure to seal it before sending it outside to play.

Here is an example of a paper skull mounted on its neck bone, then a little while later...brrr. Creepy zombie. I hope yours are as creepy. If you found this write-up helpful, [please let us know!](#) Have fun haunting!

How many prop projects have you had to put on hold because you needed a skull, it was the middle of March, and your local Walgreens didn't have any in stock? You could have just bought something off eBay or from one of a zillion websites. But that costs money, and you have to wait for it to ship, and blarg, you need it now!

Wouldn't it be so much better to have your own inexhaustible supply of high-quality durable, practically free skulls? You're nodding your head and drooling a little. Okay. I'll show you how.

A foam skull from Big Lots or Walgreens costs about \$5.00. If you leave out expanding foam, you'll cover the cost of a \$25 skull with five copies. After that, further copies are practically free.

If it takes about an hour to cover the skull with paper mache and one more hour to peel and shore it up, you can make a new skull at the rate of about one per evening. Just cover the skull one night, peel the next and cover again.

It might take a little longer to build your army of darkness using this method, but it's not as technically challenging as a silicone mold and over time you'll spend a lot less cash.

Our pal "Nebula" notified us about [Skeleton-Factory.com](#) where they sell a "Budget Two-Piece Skull" for \$15.95. We don't have any experience with this site, but they appear to offer the exact same product line as ATC. Might be worth a look.