

NORTHCOTE POTTERY  
TECHNICAL TIPS AND PRODUCT INFORMATION #2

## CERAMIC TESTING & TRIALS

**POTTERY IS 50% CREATIVITY AND 50% SCIENCE.  
ARE YOU GIVING 50% OF YOUR ATTENTION TO THE SCIENCE ASPECT?**

Understanding your pottery materials is essential if you want to have control of them. This includes not only knowing their best characteristics and performance, but also their worst and most temperamental. Just like humans, every material (clay, glaze, colorant, raw material, etc) has its own character and will not be identical in performance to others PLEASE KEEP THIS IN MIND.

All pottery products are based on **raw materials occurring in nature and they are therefore all variable all of the time. There is nothing more constant than change.** Your materials, your kiln performance and your methods are always variable and sometimes something as simple as water quality or weather will change the performance of pottery products.

Always read the instructions on a product thoroughly before use – even if you've been doing the same thing for 20 years.

Test any product under your conditions in your studio, as used by you and fired in your kiln for your specific purposes before committing yourself to a body of work.

If you have any problems, it helps to know exactly what you've done with the product – that means keeping track of things like firing schedules, using pyrometric cones, keeping samples of the unsuccessful work, the original container the material came in with the batch number etc.

If you are using a new product for the first time it's best to read the instructions, talk to your supplier, do a number of test pieces and consider reading up on other artists' experiences and uses for that material. Often the Internet will have some very relevant information worth downloading and keeping.

Beware of decanting materials into new containers – it's vital that you re-label them with all relevant information including product code.

**IMPORTANT!** Ceramic decorating materials (glazes, underglazes, oxides, stains etc) are not paints. They don't necessarily blend together well, and they certainly don't perform the same way as blended paints. Test your color mixing theory on a small scale first before embarking on the finished work.

Keep a technical diary or logbook to record your experiments.

Always have a supply of pre-prepared, numbered test rings/tiles about the studio to do tests quickly.

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