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How To Fold A Paper Crane

PUBLISHED
November 25, 2026

REFERENCE
#1795583449234850

The Art of Patience: A Complete Guide on How To Fold A Paper Crane

There is something almost magical about transforming a flat, square sheet of paper into a three-dimensional creature with wings that seem ready to take flight. The paper crane, or *orizuru*in Japanese, is perhaps the most iconic symbol of the ancient art of origami. More than just a charming craft, it represents peace, hope, and healing—a legacy cemented by the story of Sadako Sasaki, a young girl who folded over a thousand cranes in her wish for recovery from radiation sickness. Learning how to fold a paper crane is a rite of passage for origami enthusiasts, a meditative practice that builds focus and fine motor skills, and a wonderful way to create a meaningful gift.

This guide will take you through every single step with clarity and patience. Whether you are a complete beginner picking up origami paper for the first time or someone looking to refine their technique, you will find everything you need here. We will move slowly, define all key folds, and discuss common pitfalls so you can achieve a crisp, beautiful crane on your very first attempt. Let us begin this rewarding journey into the world of paper folding.

Why the Paper Crane? The Meaning Behind the Fold

Before we dive into the mechanics of how to fold a paper crane, it is worth understanding why this particular model holds such profound significance. In Japanese culture, the crane (*tsuru*) is a mythical creature said to live for a thousand years. It is a symbol of longevity, good fortune, and fidelity. The tradition of folding a thousand cranes (*senbazuru*) became internationally recognized through the story of Sadako Sasaki, a victim of the Hiroshima atomic bombing. Her story transformed the paper crane into an enduring global symbol of peace and a prayer for recovery.

When you learn how to fold a paper crane, you are not just learning a sequence of folds. You are connecting with a tradition of mindfulness, hope, and artistic expression. Each precise crease is a small act of intention. Many people fold cranes to send good wishes to a sick friend, to celebrate a wedding, or simply as a calming ritual. The process itself is as rewarding as the finished product.

What You Will Need: Materials and Preparation

One of the most beautiful aspects of origami is its simplicity. You do not need a craft room full of supplies. To learn how to fold a paper crane, you need only two things:

- One square sheet of origami paper: Traditional origami paper is thin, crisp, and colored on one side with white on the other. This helps distinguish the inside and outside of the model. However, any square paper will work. Printer paper cut into a perfect square is a great starting point. Avoid thick paper like cardstock for your first attempt, as it is difficult to crease precisely.
- A flat, hard surface: A table or desk is ideal. Folding in your lap can work, but a firm surface allows for

sharper, more accurate creases.

I recommend starting with a 15 cm x 15 cm (6 inch x 6 inch) piece of paper. This is a standard size that is large enough for beginner hands to manipulate comfortably. As you become more experienced, you can try smaller paper or beautifully patterned *chiyogami* paper.

Understanding the Basic Folds (The Vocabulary of Origami)

Before we begin the step-by-step guide on how to fold a paper crane, let us familiarize ourselves with a few foundational folds. Knowing these terms will make the instructions much easier to follow.

- Valley Fold: The most common fold. You fold the paper towards you, creating a crease that looks like a valley. It is often shown as a dashed line in diagrams.
- Mountain Fold: The opposite of a valley fold. You fold the paper away from you, creating a crease that points upward like a mountain. It is often shown as a dotted-dashed line.
- Preliminary Base: A foundational shape used for many origami models, including the crane. It involves folding the paper in half diagonally both ways, then collapsing it into a smaller square with flaps.
- Petal Fold: A technique where you lift a flap of paper, open it slightly, and flatten it down into a new shape. This is the trickiest part of learning how to fold a paper crane.
- Squash Fold: Similar to a petal fold, where you open a pocket of paper and press it flat into a symmetrical shape.

Step-by-Step Guide: How To Fold A Paper Crane

Now, let us get to the heart of the matter. Follow each step carefully. Take your time. The goal is not speed, but precision. A sharp crease is your best friend in origami. Use your fingernail or the back of a spoon to run along each fold to make it crisp.

Step 1: Start with the Paper Diamond Style (Color Side Down)

Place your square paper on your work surface with the colored side facing down. Rotate it so that it looks like a diamond, with one corner pointing towards you and one pointing away from you. This orientation is standard for this model.

Step 2: Make the Initial Diagonal Creases

Fold the bottom corner up to meet the top corner, crease well, and unfold. You should now have a diagonal crease running from the top point to the bottom point. Next, fold the left corner over to meet the right corner, crease well, and unfold. You now have an "X" shaped crease across your paper.

Step 3: Fold in Half Horizontally and Vertically

Turn the paper over so the white side is now facing up (or the other side of your paper). Fold the bottom edge up to the top edge, crease well, and unfold. Then, fold the left edge over to the right edge, crease well, and unfold. You now have a plus sign (+) crease on top of your existing X crease. This combination of folds is essential for the next step.

Step 4: Collapse into the Preliminary Base

This is the first challenging step. With the colored side facing you again, take the left and right side corners and push them inwards towards the center. Simultaneously, fold the top and bottom corners towards each other. The goal is to collapse the paper along all the creases you just made into a smaller square. You should end up with a square shape that has two flaps on the right and two flaps on the left, each pointing toward the bottom open point. This is the Preliminary Base. Pat yourself on the back—you have just completed one of the most fundamental shapes in origami.

Step 5: Fold the Outer Edges to the Center Crease

With the open end of the square pointing towards you, take the top layer of the left diagonal edge and fold it inward so it aligns perfectly with the vertical center crease. Repeat this with the top layer of the right diagonal edge. The result should look like a kite shape, with a triangular flap at the top. Crease these folds firmly.

Step 6: Fold the Top Triangle Down

Take the top triangular flap that was created by the previous step and fold it down over the two flaps you just folded. Crease it well. This triangle will serve as a guide.

Step 7: Unfold Everything from Steps 5 and 6

Now, unfold the top triangle. Then, unfold the left and right flaps from Step 5. You are returning to the Preliminary Base, but now you have a clear set of crease lines that will guide the next crucial fold.

Step 8: Perform the Petal Fold

This is the heart of learning how to fold a paper crane. Lift the bottom point of the top layer of paper (the single layer at the open end) up towards the top point. As you lift, the side edges will begin to fold inward along the creases you just made. Continue lifting until the bottom point reaches the top point, and then flatten the sides down. This creates a long, diamond-like shape. This is called a Petal Fold. It is the most important step in the entire process. Take your time and make sure both sides are symmetrical.

Step 9: Turn Over and Repeat

Flip the paper over, from left to right, so the back side is now facing you. Repeat Steps 5 through 8 on this side. First, fold the left and right edges of the top layer to the center crease. Then, fold the top triangle down. Unfold everything, and then perform the Petal Fold by lifting the bottom point up to the top point. You should now have a shape that looks like a long diamond with two "legs" at the bottom. These will become the crane's tail and neck.

Step 10: Fold the Legs Up

Take the top layer of the two bottom points (the "legs") and fold one of them up and outward so that it aligns with the outer edge of the diamond. The fold should start at the bottom-most point of the diamond. Repeat this on the other side. You are essentially "splitting" the bottom of the diamond into two separate points.

Step 11: Inside Reverse Fold the Neck and Tail

Choose one of the points to be the head and one to be the tail. We will work on the head first. Using an inside reverse fold, gently open the chosen point, push the tip inward, and fold it down to create the neck. The tip should end up pointing downward at a slight angle. Repeat this process on the other point for the tail, bending it upward. An inside reverse fold is a common technique in origami where you fold a point inward between two layers of paper.

Step 12: Form the Head

Take the tip of the neck and perform another inside reverse fold to create the head. Bend the tip of the neck downward. This will give your crane its distinctive beak.

Step 13: Shape the Wings

Gently fold the wings down. Hold the crane by the base of the neck and the tail, and gently pull the wings outward and downward until they are perpendicular to the body. Crease the wings at the point where they meet the body. This is the final shaping step. You may also want to curve the wings slightly by running them over the edge of a table or your finger.

Step 14: Inflate the Body (Optional)

If your paper is thin enough, you can gently blow into a small hole at the base of the crane's body (underneath where the tail and neck meet) to inflate it slightly. This gives the body a rounded, three-dimensional look. If your paper is thick, skip this step to avoid tearing. Congratulations! You have successfully learned how to fold a paper crane.

Common Problems and How to Fix Them

Even with the best instructions, things can go wrong. Here are some of the most common issues beginners face when learning how to fold a paper crane, along with simple solutions.

My Paper Keeps Tearing

This usually happens because you are using paper that is too thick or because you are creasing too aggressively. Use standard origami paper, and be gentle. When performing reverse folds, make sure you are opening the layers fully before pushing the tip inside.

My Crane is Lopsided

Asymmetry is usually caused by imprecise folds in the early steps. If your diagonal edges do not align perfectly in Step 5, the entire model will be off. Focus on making each crease exact. Use the corners of the paper as your guide and align them meticulously.

I Got Stuck on the Petal Fold

The Petal Fold is the most challenging part of how to fold a paper crane. If it does not work, unfold and try again. Make sure your creases from Steps 5 and 6 are very sharp. When you lift the bottom flap, guide the paper with your fingers to help it fall into place along the existing creases. Practice this step multiple times on scrap paper before

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