

# Corpsing A Skeleton: Part 1

From: My Ghoulish Friday, with additions from Suzanne Coberly, especially on the cat skeleton:

[http://www.ghoulfriday.com/how\\_to/corpsing\\_skeleton\\_part\\_1](http://www.ghoulfriday.com/how_to/corpsing_skeleton_part_1)



## Materials:

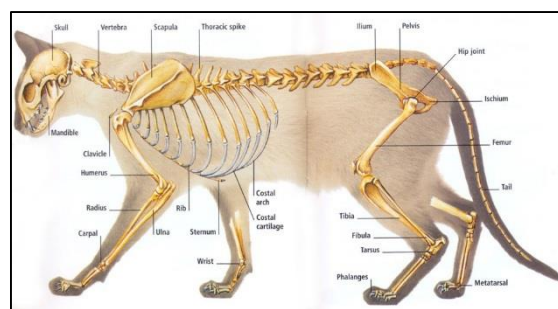
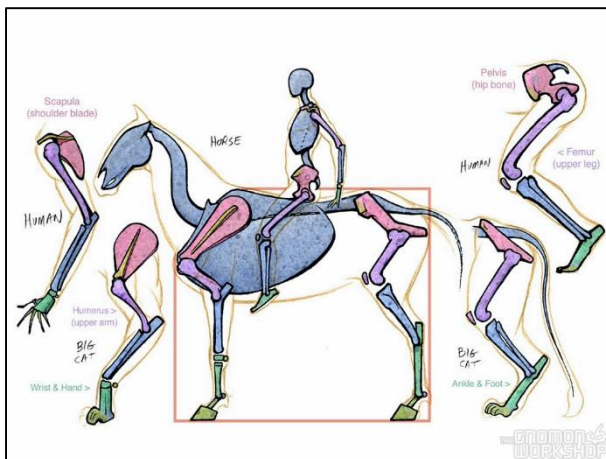
- Skeleton- **human or cat**
- **Miniwax Gel Wood Stain (note, other types of wood stain that don't say "work on all surfaces" tend to chip off the plastic)**
- Paint Brush/s &/or Rag for painting gel coating (something inexpensive you won't mind throwing away as it is very hard to completely clean).
- Heavy Duty/Protective Latex Gloves
- Heat Gun
- Thin, clear plastic tarp (**0.7mm painter's drop cloth works best for corpsing. Can use any kind of plastic, however, and if you want to make "muscles", can use bubble wrap or plastic bags knotted.**)
- Acrylic paints for dry-brushing
- Spray Glue or **shipping tape (without fibers, just plastic)**
- **Scissors to cut plastic**



There are many ways to corpse a skeleton, but usually it involves liquid latex. The year I did this project, I had come across a [video by Stiltbeast Studios](#) showing a lesser known approach using plastic sheeting and a heat gun. I highly recommend the video (I watched it 4 times before I tried it out myself). Here I'll recap my experience and throw in some tips/tidbits that might be helpful for anyone who is attempting this for the first time.

I used a [5 foot posable skeleton from buycostumes.com](#). **(SKC: We got the cat skeleton at Fun Express for \$13.65 with shipping (wholesale) as the dog skeleton was sold out.**  
<http://www.funexpress.com/plastic-halloween-skeleton-cat-a2-13709666.fltr?prodCatId=551752>)

**SKC: This is one of the best write ups of this process I've found, so I've copied it while giving credit. While the cat skeleton is smaller, & a little different (see cat skeleton pic above next to human skeleton and cat vs human anatomy below), the corpsing is basically done the same way. Unfortunately, our cat skeleton does not have movable joints; while this makes it in some ways easier to corpse, it isn't quite as good to pose in a scene.**



### **Things to remember:**

**1) A proper heat gun is hot.** I mean *volcano hot* (unlike the craft heat guns you use for embossing). In the video, our host catches himself making the serious error of putting his hand in front of the heat gun to (for whatever reason) check if it's hot yet. This is not a hair dryer. The gun heats up fast. There's no need to do this. Please don't.

2) Make sure the surface you put your skeleton on is, for lack of a better word, industrial strength. Something tough, like a work bench. Or your back concrete patio. I worked on a slab of wood covered with a tarp (which I melted in three spot).

**3) SKC: Actually, if you are careful and don't point your heat gun at the wooden surface for too long, a wooden potting or work bench covered with dry newspaper is better than a plastic tarp, which will melt much faster.**

## Part 1: Wrapped in Plastic

In a well ventilated area, set up your materials. The vapor from the melting plastic itself isn't too bad, but when you start working with the stain (and even that spray glue) it can get strong and unpleasant to say the least. (SKC: I agree- don't do it indoors if at all possible.)

I bought two 8 ft x 12 ft plastic drop sheets that were .75 ml thick. I used one and a half on this skeleton.

### The LIMBS- Making muscles

**SKC: Especially with the smaller cat or dog, I've found that it is better to make all muscles if you wish to do so, before you wrap anything (see cat with muscles below). Even with human skeletons, this can make life easier. After you create the muscles, I would then go onto the wrapping, starting with the TORSO as below.**

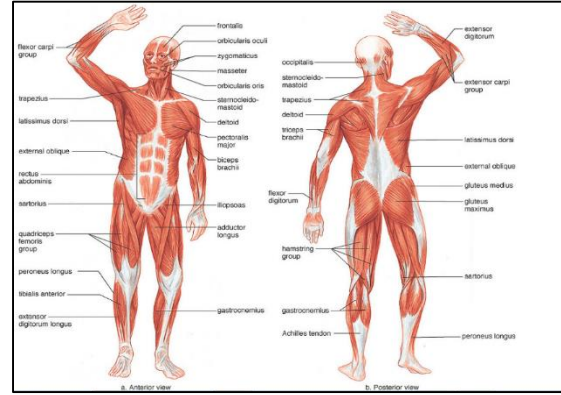
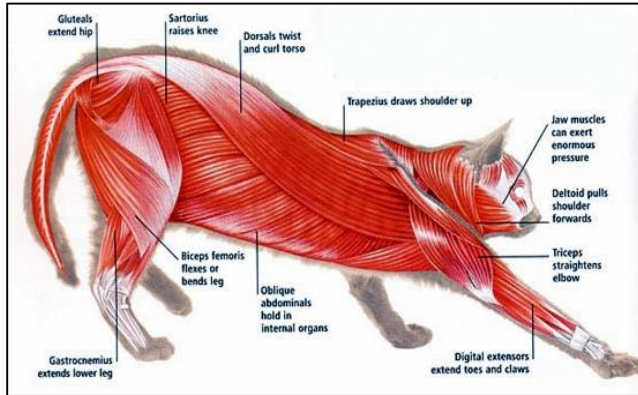
### Here's how you make muscles:

As shown in the video, you can build up muscles (like biceps) by putting knots in a length of plastic, attaching it to the skeleton with spray glue, and then wrapping it in plastic (as pictured below) before



melting it in place.

**SKC: The cat or dog muscles can be done the same way - put muscles in place as as makes sense to move the limbs correctly (use your own arms and legs as reference – the pictures below are of the real muscles, but more complex than you need). You can also add some “muscles” to fill out the chest, hips, neck and even the jaws before you wrap the limb or body section, depending upon how “fresh” you want your dead cat, dog or human. I sometimes find it easier to do all the muscles first before wrapping any of the body.**



**SKC: See the pictures to the left and below for an idea of how I did the cat muscles before wrapping it. (The bubble wrap wrapping the new cat skeleton can be easily used to make muscles).**



## Wrapping the Body -The TORSO:



**Tip:** partially unfold the plastic sheet so it's at its width (8 ft) and then cut the whole pile in half (so you have 2 piles of 4 ft x 12 ft sheets). This will save you time later when you're cutting up pieces to wrap around your skeleton. To make life a little easier, coat the rib cage and hip bone with a little spray glue and press one end of the plastic against it (top image). **(SKC: Or you can wrap tightly and tape with shipping tape; this will also shrink with heat.)**

Bring the plastic around the torso, under the arms and over the pelvis (second image). It doesn't have to be taut. In fact, I found having the plastic a little loose created a better wrinkling effect. **(SKC: Do the same for the cat.)**

If you have a heat gun with different heat levels, play around a bit until you get a feel for the process. I started at 550 F until I got my feet then cranked it up to 950 F and higher later on.

You want to hold the heat gun a few inches away from the plastic (the hotter the temperature, the further away you need to hold it) and keep it moving. If you're too close or stay in one spot too long, you'll melt a hole (and maybe your skeleton). The heat shrink wraps the skeleton in

the plastic.

Don't worry if you make holes. You can patch them (later you will purposely make holes).

Flip over your skeleton, and do the same melting technique to the back.



I started to play around with folding the plastic in areas. You can see (to the left) how it creates long sinewy textures in the "skin".

**Tip:** While wearing your super protective heavy duty latex gloves (specially made for paint stripping), you can manipulate the plastic a little with your hand, pressing down edges after you've hit them with heat.



Take another long sheet of plastic and wrap it around the torso two more times.

Apply heat. Repeat if you like. (SKC: Best to repeat a couple of times, as the more plastic you add, the sturdier it will be and the more wrinkles you get.

In fact, while strengthening the layers around the shoulder joint by using long thick folds of plastic to wrap over and around where the arm meets the shoulder, I discovered the melt effect to be quite cool.



## Wrapping the body- The Limbs:

Keep in mind that while the limbs of your skeleton will have some movement to it when you're done, you might want to consider bending the arm or leg into a position before you melt the plastic. I always find having the limbs of creatures at different angles makes a piece more interesting. **(SKC: I make sure that any movable joint I want to be able to move has the plastic cut/melted enough behind it to move the joint – you can keep testing this as you wrap.)**

So take a moment and play with the position of the limbs. **(SKC: Unfortunately, this cannot be done with the cat, as there are no movable joints in the limb; the only movable joints are the jaw, neck/head, and tail. The dog has more movable joints, and obviously, human skeletons will have some movable joints depending upon the type of skeleton you have bought.)**

Make sure hands and feet line up with arms and legs and are facing the right way. **SKC: Also, before you move onto wrapping the body, use the heat gun to melt the muscles slightly onto the skeleton, as this reduces bulk and helps keep them on the skeleton.**



**plastic skeletons).**

The toughest part for me were the hands (below). After wrapping the plastic around the hands, melting them, cutting the excess off the tips and cutting slits between the fingers, you go back in with the heat gun. If you're wearing heavy duty gloves, you can try to form the plastic around the fingers (melt, squish, melt, squish, repeat). I decided I could be happy with having very boney hands.

**(SKC: The dog or cat will not have this problem, as the paw is pretty solid and doesn't have obviously "fingers" in these**



## Wrapping the Body- The Head:

All that's left is the head which is done the same way as the rest of the body.

**(SKC: Actually, when you have a movable jaw, particularly if you have the dog and the batteries for the movement, you either want to wrap the lower jaw separately or cut the plastic over the mouth enough to allow movement of the lower jaw and/or access to the battery compartment.)**

You'll want to partially melt the nose area and the eyes. Later I'll be popping some eyeballs in there (I didn't want them to melt during this process).

I tucked the plastic back into the mouth before I melted it. Tip: be mindful where that hot air is going. I was melting out a bit of the cheekbone, and didn't notice the hot air was escaping out the mouth, melting a big hole in the jaw plastic that I didn't intend to have. It's like you create a wind tunnel and it comes out another side, so keep an eye out that while you're working on the eye socket, you aren't melting a spot under his chin at the same time.



## Part 2: Staining

This is where it gets interesting. Something happens when you add the stain to the plastic and then apply heat. It's like an accelerator-shrinker, and adds even more wrinkles.

I decided I wanted two layers of color. This first was a red color called "Bombay Mahogany". I brushed it on, then wiped some of it off with a rag. If and when I do this again, I won't cover the whole body with the red. Instead, I would just pick the meatiest places. I found that a lot of the red - while cool - kind of gave my corpse a bit of a BBQ sauce feel.



Once the stain was applied, I used the heat gun to start melting holes through to the bone in places. The heat gun also helps speed along drying times.



Time to add the brown stain using the same technique: paint on, rag off, melt. I used "Dark Walnut".



Tip: If you get some stain on your hands, you can scrub it off using cooking oil (I used sunflower oil) and then wash your hands with soap.



For the record, it being my first time corpsing a full skeleton, this project took me somewhere in the neighborhood of 3 to 4 hours.

And while the heat gun dried most of the stain, it was still a bit tacky. Let it dry overnight before moving onto the next section.

## Corpsing A Skeleton: Part 2

From: My Ghoul Friday:

[http://www.ghoulfriday.com/how\\_to/corpsing\\_skeleton\\_part\\_2](http://www.ghoulfriday.com/how_to/corpsing_skeleton_part_2)



### Materials:

- hot glue gun
- white glue or "Sculpt or Coat"
- styrofoam ball
- acrylic paint
- wig
- scissors
- epoxy

Here we'll look at the difference some dry brushing, a little hair and an eyeball can make.

## Part 1: Dry Brushing



Take a bit of white acrylic paint and mix it with just a touch of dark brown.

You want a light color that looks almost grey.

This is your highlight. It is going to bring out all the ridges and raised edges on your corpse. **(SKC: I've found a soft yellow mixed with cream or light brown also is nice for this, depending on your corpse base color.)**



Dab the tiniest bit of paint onto your brush (you may even want to wipe some off onto newspaper) and then drag the brush ever so lightly along the surface of the skin.

You don't want to get the paint into any cracks or crevices.

Resist the urge to put a lot of paint on the brush. If you want more highlight on an area, simply dry brush over it a number of times.

Focus on bumps and knots and twists.

The pictures here were taken outside in the sunlight, so you can *really* see the white highlights. It isn't as noticeable under regular lighting (you'll see that in later images) and in a dark room, it won't even register as white but those raised edges will stand out.



## Part 2: Adding Hair

You can get an old wig at Value Village or another second hand store for next to nothing. Cut a lock of hair from the wig. Take a small clump of strands and hold them against the skull. With a paint brush, apply white glue (I used a product called Sculpt or Coat) to the ends against the skull (about 2 inches worth). Be generous but level it all out. The glue will dry clear.



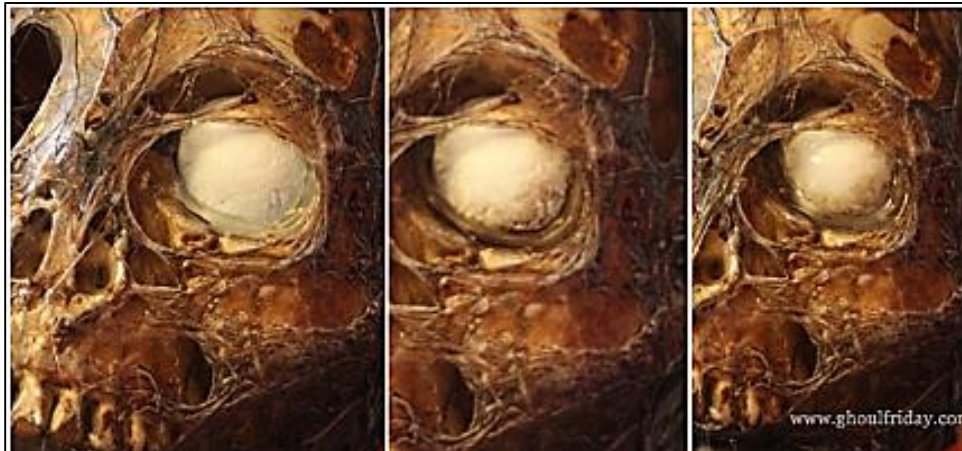
## Part 3: Adding an Eyeball



I used a styrofoam ball for my eyeball. I cut it in half then tested how it fit in the eye socket. It was still too big so I cut it in half again (leaving me with a 1/4 of a styrofoam ball).

I painted the base a very light blue. When it dried, I painted white overtop (but let some of the blue still be visible).

I warmed up my glue gun, added glue to the socket, then slipped the eyeball into place.



I added a line of glue around the edge of the eye (below, left image). Then I dabbed some dark brown paint over the dried glue, watered down the paint on my brush, and added a brown wash to the outside edges of the eyeball itself.

Finally, I took some quick drying epoxy (you could use a high gloss varnish) and coated the eyeball to make it shiny.



## Final Product:

This is the final product.

I removed some of the plastic skin from the teeth (and even sliced a hole into one front tooth to make it look decayed...well, *more* decayed).

She'll be a welcome addition to many Halloweens in this house.