

MASK MAKING

You can do this in an afternoon, mainly with supplies you have on hand, or you can splurge a bit and buy a few supplies.

Up front decision, is this a mask to wear, or hold on a stick? Weight limits are smaller for a mask you're going to wear vs. one on a stick... so check you weight as you make your creation.

Go to Party City, or any other party store and pick up on of those \$2 little masks, or pick up a few because it most fun to do with a friend (or can do it in front of the TV. Color doesn't matter. (We're going to cover it.)

Think about what color your mask needs to be to go with your outfit... and pick a metal color. Then depending on your outfit dig though glitter fabric scraps and find a couple of complementary colors. You're looking in your scrap pile for ribbons, flexible trim, gems, Christmas ornaments, paper, foil, colored paper doilies, feathers, sequins, strings of small beads, etc. All kinds of scraps and bit of color... doesn't matter what they were originally for... just get bits of color around you for brainstorming.

Prep the mask... Cut the eye holes bigger by at least 1/8 inch all around. If you're going to put any trim around the eyes (suggested), trim even more.

If you're going to use a stick to hold the mask, clip the elastic. If you're going to tie it... either exchange the little piddly elastic with ribbon or bigger elastic. You need to run the ribbon/elastic though from the back with the smallest hole possible and then reinforce the front side with a bit of cardboard, anything... just to make sure you don't get a tear through.

Next, do you want a simple shaped mask or want to make it a bit bigger. The easiest is to expand it up. It can be rounded, swirls, points, part can go down or you can stay with the basic.

Expand the shape with plastic canvas, cardboard (and if you wire it, a couple layers of stiff interfacing). Glue the extra on the mask from the inside. Hot glue or anything strong. Try the mask on, check the shape. If you need to wire anything, now is when to do it.

Now take and cover the mask with fabric... glue down from the inside out and shape carefully. (Fabric glue suggested, but you can punt - anything that dries clear.) The fabric may shrink a bit with the glue so ease it around the mask shapes. You want to trim in about 3/4 " past the edge. Trim the fabric to that point, clip the fabric to be able to fold and glue it down to the back side. Glue down well.

Carefully clip the eye area and fold that fabric around the eyes. If you clip too deep, smooth with a bit more glue.

Play with bits of other fabric you have, do you want to put in strips of fabric or ribbon or trim as part of the mask base??? Are you going to rim the top with feathers, fluted paper, bright doilies or something? Glue these on. I always like a mask that's a bit asymmetrical.

If you're going to be gluing on big shapes, or splashes or color, dots, diamonds, etc.

If you're skimping, you can skip the next step... but it adds a lot. Edge the eyes with a narrow cord or trim, preferable a bit or metallic. More

cord/trim can edge the mask, or if you don't have trim... bits of t-shirt paint glitter.

Let this dry a bit.

Now finish with bits to give it style... ribbon rosettes and some trailing ribbons??? Rhinestones in patterns? other glitter. Bits of Xmas ornaments. Layer. You can go a bit overboard decorating a mask, but don't get too crazy.

Let this all dry well, you can do the last step the next day.

If you're doing a stick... you need to have painted it, or wrapped it in fabric and glues. Glue this down with a good glow of hot glue. Let dry.

Take a piece of felt (I prefer black). This will line the inside of the mask that's probably stiff and scratchy with glue and gunk. Cut the eyes in the felt a bit wide. Glue eye and nose area down gently. Cut the felt a bit back from the edge of the mask. You may need to cut a slash for the elastic/ribbon (which won't be at the very edge). Neatness counts for the edges.

After it's dry, test it out by wearing it a while... make sure it's not too heavy and sliding. Make adjustments before the party.

Anyway... it's easy... you can't really mess this up.

Another comfort thing one can do for the eye holes is to take thin mole skin-you can find it in the foot support section and it is sticky on one side. Trace your eye holes and cut out around the eye holes making a donut type of section. After you glue your fabric on the underside of the eye hole section, you can apply gently pressure and secure the "donuts" to the eye section and it will make it more comfortable and, if you are like me and have sensitive eyes, will help to prevent fabric scratches. Also, for masks that are worn around the head, you can secure your mask to a headband for more comfort. I have found that when I am unsure about how much glue is too much as fabrics vary on the amount of glue needed to secure, I water down my fabric glue and make a test strip.

I bought the squares of white felt, as I didn't want to risk sweaty little tykes turning red or purple from running dye. Spools of 1/4" ribbon, packages of feathers, sequins(like 500 for a buck) packaged ribbon roses, Alene's white glue. We measured each face ,cut of fitted masks-so the eyeholes would match the girls heads...ran the ribbon thru slits cut in the felt (we backed the hole area with extra felt glued on to provide support) then set the girls loose. They came up with incredibly great designs. And as the mask were flexible and soft they didn't mind wearing them. We got "interesting" with our choice of "things" to decorate the masks with, One boy used dries lentil beans to make the scales of the snake, tufts of unwound yarn for fur, feathers of the real and tissue paper variety appeared. We used torn off randomly bit of masking tape that was applied to the base the lightly brushed over with thin brown paint for a leather look.

Offray Ribbon co. has a pamphlet at Michael's craft stores for mask construction using plastic bases and their ribbon trims .Its number 44.

Here is how I make masks the short version. Please ask if you have any questions. My current life mask is horribly out of date so I don't use it any more. There are numerous sites that have information on how to make them if you want to but I have been using as my base form those plastic masks that you can get at just about any crafts store. I call them neutral masks but that's my theatre background showing.

I do a non-drying clay sculpt of what I want the mask to look like on the plastic mask that I have taped to a piece of cardboard to give me something solid to sculpt on. I put masking tape on the cardboard before attaching the plastic mask because it makes it easier to do various things. So I finish the sculpt and then I mix up a batch of paper mache paste. I can't tell you my exact recipe again there are plenty on the web. Mine is just water and flour until it hits a consistency of white school glue. I tear up brown paper grocery sacks or brown shipping paper. Tearing is the key. It gives you the rough edge. That is how I blend the pieces together. I paper mache the sculpt and let it dry. I peel the mask from the sculpt.

Then I go one of two ways depending on what the final mask need to look like. I either felt it or paint it. Felting is a pain but done right it makes the mask look really good. The big thing to remember with either process is that you are getting your mask wet again so give yourself the time to let it dry between sessions or the mask can warp.

I've seen a couple of solutions to the mask-on-a-stick needing a hand solution. One was to have the edges of the mask on a chain, kind of like the glasses holder, and when the person needed both hands, the mask became a "necklace". I've also seen where the end of the stick could be tucked in the waistband of a garment.

The masks we use started out being the simple cloth and sizing domino masks, with the mop beard sewn to the bottom edge. Those masks grew soft over the years, after being sweaty and pushed in a kit bag with the rags. (those members who had to wear glasses actually appreciated that softness!) I saw one wind the little elastic around the ear pieces of his glasses to keep the mask eyeholes lined up more or less over his glasses) The red mask on the dancer in light green is still one of that vintage. More recently, one member discovered a source for a sturdier mask base, a molded plastic face with cotton tricot surfaces inside and out. These start as a full face mask, and we would trim off the lower part, and shape the top edge to fit in with the rag hood, then paint it and add the beard.

These are much longer-lasting so far. However, I don't know where to get them now, the place that used to carry them evidently doesn't any more. I guess I would look at a good party/costume store and possibly settle for something that had already been done up but minimally, and just redo it... the blanks were really great though.
