German Bell Ornament, updated

This beautiful ornament, known as a German bell, is crafted from a square of lightweight card stock, then embellished with trims and bead dangles, making each one unique.

I've been making these ornaments for a few years now, inspired by my crafty sister Gwen.

The bell is made from a single square of card, using a series of simple folds. Although there are several steps, the folds themselves are not complicated to do. Once you've made a few of them, you'll find that the bells make up fairly quickly.
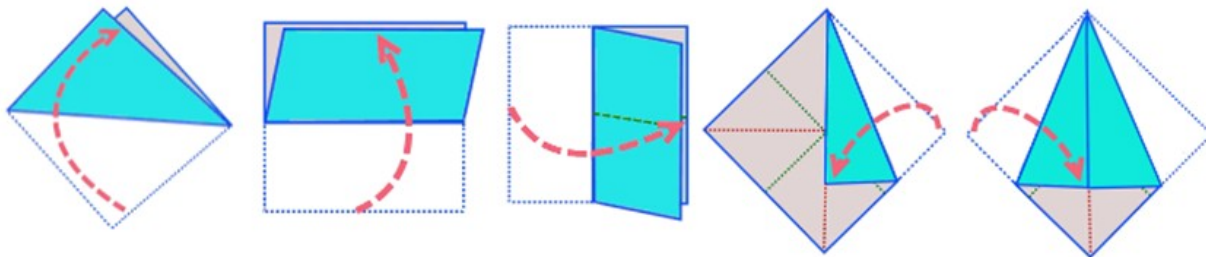
Follow me as I make up a basic German bell ornament, then see some of the variations that I've made using trims and beads as embellishments.

The basic German bell ornament is folded from a single square of lightweight card, strung with a thin cord or ribbon for hanging, with a jingle bell dangling from the point at the bottom, like the one shown at right. I'll demonstrate exactly how I made this one, using the printed front of a greeting card.

You can make these ornaments in a variety of sizes, but I find that a square between 4" and 5" is ideal. The card I'm using for my blue ornament is just over 4" wide, giving a 4" square when trimmed. This size of square produces a finished bell about 2.5" tall.
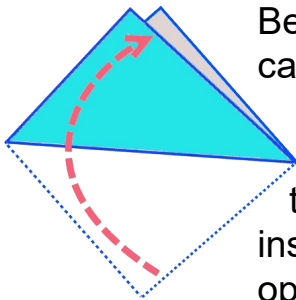
Begin by trimming your card to a square. Fold the card diagonally from corner to corner, with the plain side to the inside. Repeat with the opposite corner.
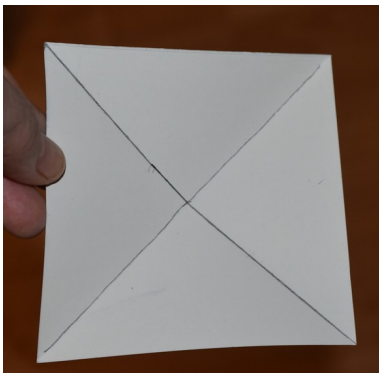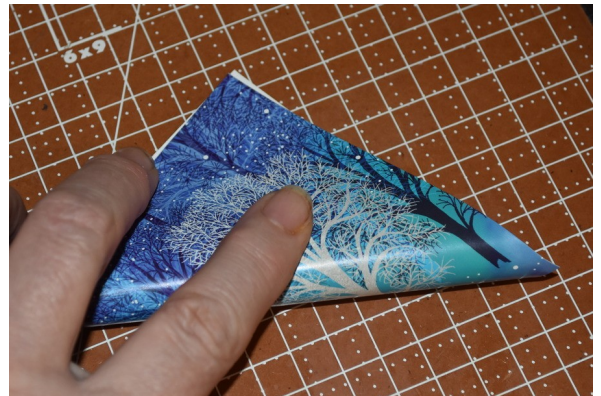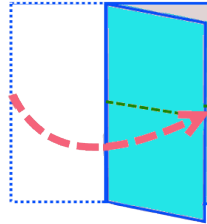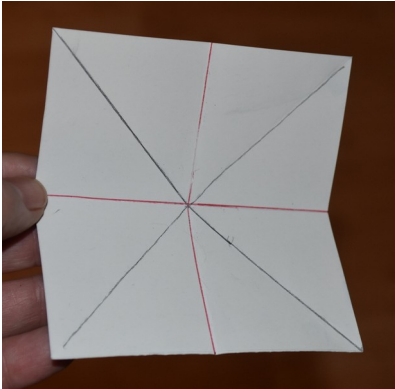
When the card is opened flat, you should see fold lines running from corner to corner, forming an "X" across the middle of the card. (In the photo at left, I have traced the fold lines with a pencil to make them easier to see.)
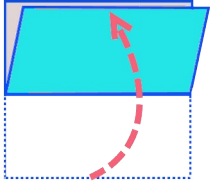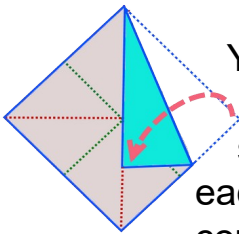
Next, fold the card in half, matching the edges. Fold once more, this time in the other direction, so that the fold lines form a cross in the centre of the card.

When the card is opened flat, you should see a second set of fold lines running from side to side, through the middle of the card (left). I've traced them in red for easier visibility.

You will need to make one more set of folds, at each of the four corners. To begin, lay the square on the table face down as shown. Bring the right-hand corner to the middle, so that the edge of the square aligns along the centre
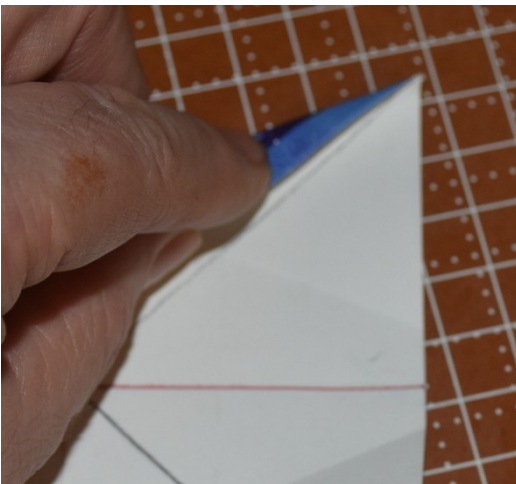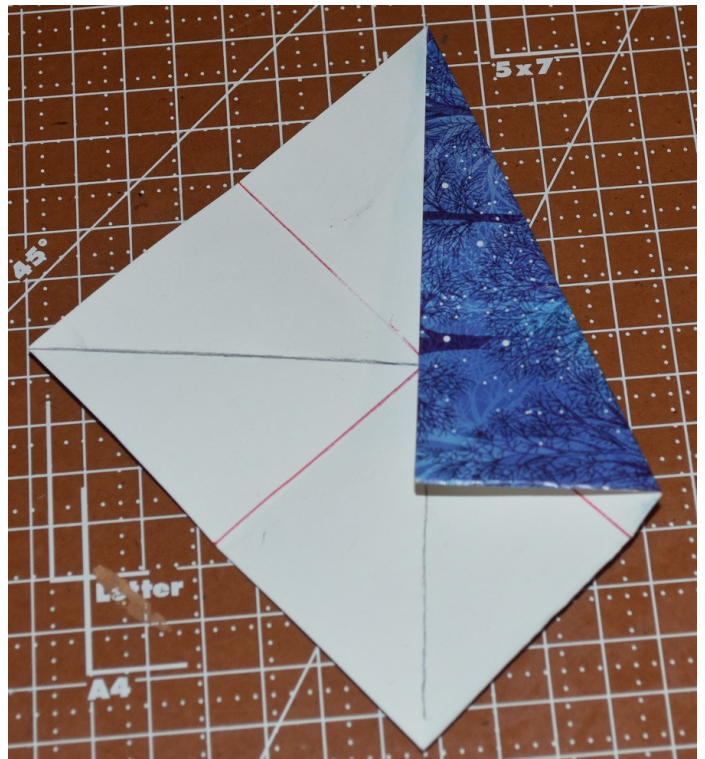
line, just as though you were making a paper airplane. Take care with your folding, especially at the points of the corners; they need to line up exactly with the centre line.
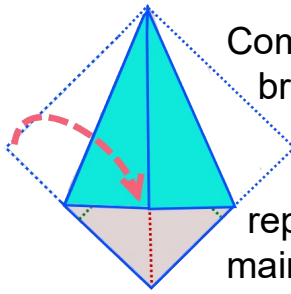
Complete the airplane fold by bringing the other corner to the centre. Crease both folds. Open the paper out flat, then repeat this process for the remaining corners.

When you have finished making all of the folds, open the square out flat. You will be able to see the criss-crossing folds (mine are enhanced for visibility):
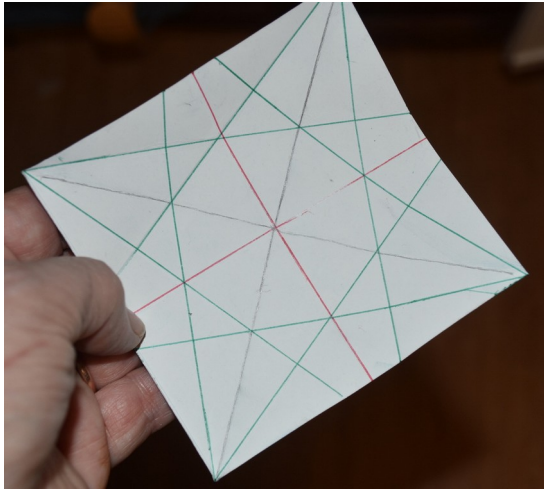
With the folding complete, press lightly on the sides of the card; the bell will begin to take shape. Before gluing, add a string for hanging.
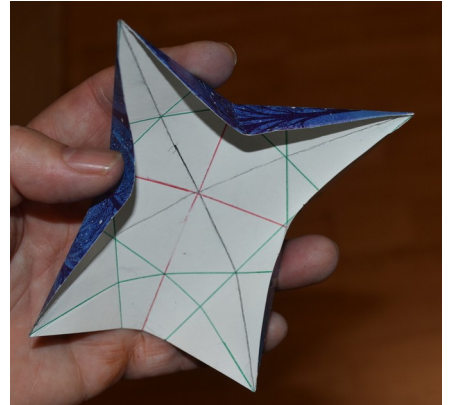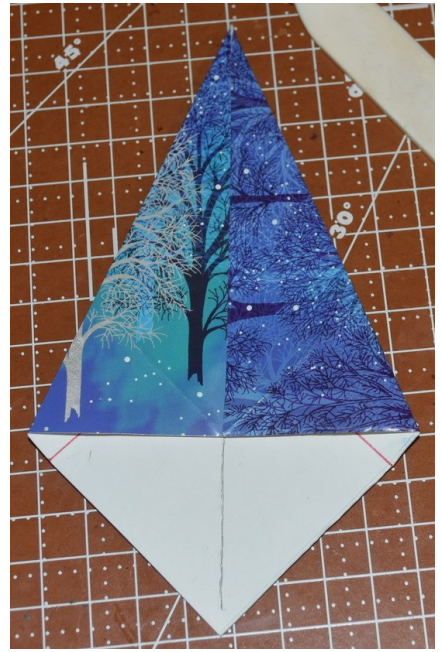
Traditionally, the German bell ornament has a jingle bell attached to a string that runs up through the centre of the ornament and forms a loop for hanging. I've tied my jingle bell to a length of string, which I've threaded through a large needle. I pushed the needle up through the centre of the bell where the fold lines cross, leaving the long string tails to form the hanging loop.
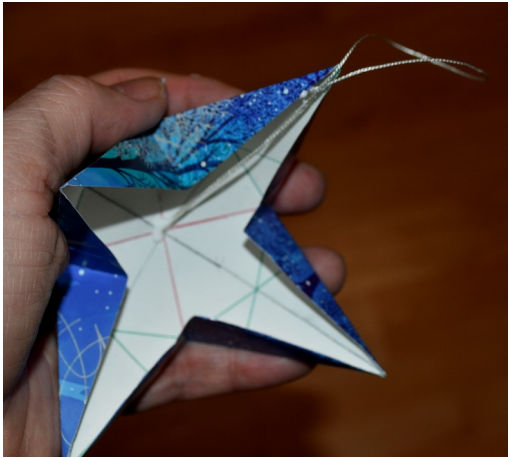
I tied a knot in the string, then tucked the string into one of the four points and added a drop of glue to keep it in place.

The bell is formed by gluing the flaps together. Spread glue on the flap, all the way to the tip, and press the sides together, lining up the edges carefully and holding until the glue grabs. I'm using Beacon Magna-tac, which sets fairly quickly. Next, glue the flaps of the opposite point together. At this stage the ornament will look like the photo at right. Spread glue on the remaining two flaps, right to the top.

Bring the ornament together and hold until the glue grabs, being sure to line up the edges. Unless you'd like to add embellishments, you're done!

Depending on the card you selected, the simple finished bell ornament can be quite lovely. But it's also possible to embellish it further using glitter, braid, beads, and dangles.

On the ornament at left, I've used a loop of wire in place of the string, so I can attach a beaded dangle, a ribbon, or an ornament hook. This bell itself is trimmed with gold rickrack and beaded trim.

On my bells I've used ribbons, beads, tinsel, and glitter. I like to cover the seams with some kind of trim: fused beads, braid, or ribbon. On some, I've added beaded dangles in place of the jingle bell.

All three of these ornaments are made from recycled Christmas cards, and all have additional embellishments. The red one shows a beaded dangle; the green one features a cluster of small jingle bells; the gold one is decorated with paillettes.

For a different look, you can hang the ornament pointed-end down, like the one at left. This ornament was also made from a recycled card. I used a tinsel stem to make the trim. To attach the dangles, I inserted small wire loops at the points before the gluing the bell together, to provide an anchor for the jump rings.

I tried varying the size too: this teeny Ho Ho Santa is made from a 3" square of patterned card stock. The size is a bit fiddly to work with, but it's super cute.

Once I'd made several bells from recycled Christmas cards, I decided to try printing my own custom designs on a laser printer. I made several personalized ornaments, and even made a special one for my Looney Tunes tree.

These bell ornaments are quite lightweight, so they can safely hang even at the tips of tree branches. Best of all, you can vary them almost infinitely with with your choice of fancy card stock, beads, and trims, and even personalize them so that no two need ever be alike! Pretty, pretty, pretty!