

How do they get the letters in rock?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Break a stick of seaside rock anywhere along its length and the same words appear. It looks like a magic trick, but it comes down to one simple idea: build the pattern big, then stretch it small.

Building each letter by hand

Once the boiled sugar has cooled enough to handle, the maker cuts it into thin strips. Some strips are coloured, often red, and some are white. A letter is built by laying these strips side by side, the way you might draw a letter on squared paper. An E, for example, is a coloured upright with three coloured bars, packed out with white so the whole block keeps a square outline.

Each letter starts out large. The Rock Sweet Company describes them as roughly the size of a 2p coin, which gives the maker enough room to get the shape right.

Why the letters are made in a set order

Letters are not made in the order they appear in the word. Makers build them by shape. Square letters such as B, E, F, H, M, N, T and W come first because they hold their form well while the sugar is soft. Pointed letters, A and V, and round letters such as C, O, S and U are made last, so they spend less time slumping out of shape before the rock is assembled.

Putting the word together

When every letter is ready, they are laid out in spelling order with strips of white sugar between them to act as spaces. For a stick that says Blackpool Rock, the two words are built separately and extra white is added between them.

The white, pulled centre of the rock is packed around the letters, then the coloured casing, rolled out flat, is wrapped around the outside. The result is a thick log of warm sugar with the whole message running through it.

Stretching it down to size

The log goes into a batch roller, which keeps it warm, and the maker pulls it out into a long rope. Because the whole log stretches evenly, the letters shrink with it and keep their shape. A message that started as big as a coin ends up only a few millimetres tall, and it runs through every stick cut from that rope.

That is also why a stick of rock is always a little different from the next one. The letters are made by a person with hot sugar and a pair of shears, so no two batches are exactly alike.

The same trick for pictures

Makers use the same method to put pictures and logos inside rock, and to make personalised rock with names or dates for weddings and birthdays. The rule is always the same: build it big, then stretch it down. Read how the rest of the stick comes together in [how seaside rock is made](#).

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