Bare Hand Knitting

Tool-Free Knitting at Its Finest

Volume I

by
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Printed with support from the Waldorf Curriculum Fund

Published by:
Waldorf Publications at the
Research Institute for Waldorf Education
351 Fairview Avenue, Suite 625
Hudson, NY 12534

Title: *Bare Hand Knitting: Tool-Free Knitting at Its Finest*
Volume I
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Proofreader: Ruth Reigel
Layout: Ann Erwin

ISBN # 978-1-943582-90-7

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my beloved grandmother, Virginia Harvey Mathias. She had not thought herself skilled at handwork until, at age ninety-nine, she was happily surprised to discover she could knit a scarf with her bare hands. She always encouraged the creative spirit in her children and grandchildren and appreciated what made each one of us into unique individuals.

This book is also dedicated to all the children who will be shaping a better future with their bare hands.

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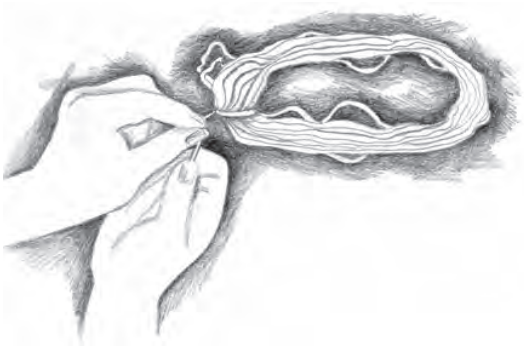


Introduction
A Story of Healing

I introduce here a new and developing art that I call Bare Hand Knitting. This handcraft begins as simple finger knitting, but expands to utilize all ten fingers and countless variations of stitches and patterns. Some of the basic techniques, which I describe here, are fairly widely known. Others, I have invented—or, quite likely, re-invented, as they may well have been discovered at other times lost in the mists of pre-history. In vain I have searched for the origins of this craft but, indeed, without tools or an artifact such as the tiny bronze figurine what evidence could exist?

> So far we have no known representations of looms or weaving before the late Neolithic period … although we have narrow textiles quite early.[1]

E.J.W. Barber goes on to describe "a bronze figurine from Yunnan China from the Early Han Dynasty (late first millennium BC) of a "woman weaving on a backstrap loom with tension controlled by the toes."

As our ancient ancestors developed handcrafts to meet the practical needs of everyday life, they designed various tools for greater efficiency and uniformity. More elaborate devices followed. Today, anyone who wants a sweater or scarf or socks, never needs to pick up a pair of knitting needles—giant machines somewhere turn out these articles en masse. And yet, people still spin, weave, sew, and knit for the personal satisfaction such acts of creation bring. I have found that gratification is greatest when there is no extraneous tool between myself and the work—to have my fingers simply move within the wool and bring forth amazing creations feels like an act of profound magic.

Bare Hand Knitting is the art of transforming natural fibers and yarns into practical garments, accessories, or works of art, through a linked-stitch process. Barehand felting, beading, finger-knitting, and macramé are what I am referring to when I use the term *barehand crafts*.

It is appropriate that Bare Hand Knitting and crafts should emerge at this time. Cultural pockets of the modern world are eagerly returning to the fiber arts and other traditional handcrafts. There is a renewed interest in handmade items for their quality and aesthetic value. The therapeutic benefits of working with the hands are, now more than ever, being recognized. There is a growing movement away from dependency on large and foreign sources of goods for our everyday needs and toward an increase in independent and local community-based economies.

So how did this craft find its way into my life, personally? As an eleven-year-old child I discovered for myself an interesting method for knitting on the five fingers of one hand. I showed the technique to my crafts teacher, and I remember filling an entire summer with the happy exploration of this new kind of play.

Twenty years later I was intrigued to find the children in a small Waldorf school in Russia, where I was then teaching, engaging in a similar method.

Many more years went by. I was now living in New England with my three children, while completing my master's degree in education. I had all but forgotten my childhood yarn-play, when a nearly devastating crisis brought it back into my life. My oldest daughter, Daniella, who had been wearing a plastic retainer, developed a strong autoimmune response as a result of prolonged exposure to the plasticizers. The powerful allergic reaction caused her lips to repeatedly swell and peel, and also began to affect her mental stability. Even after we identified the problem and got rid of the retainer, she had become sensitized to many types of plastics. Even a sandwich from the cafeteria wrapped in plastic film would set her off. After an incident at school, she was placed in a mental hospital, from which, it turned out, it was difficult to have her released. We were demoralized by the treatment that she received. My institutionalized daughter was offered little in the way of recreation, but only the opportunity to view a television or pace a small hallway. She was continually drugged. She was not allowed outside for over a year.

I brought her knitting needles and yarn, and a staffer reported to me that my daughter spent many quiet, happy hours working on a colorful scarf. Then, while I was on an 80-mile walk for Mental Health Awareness, I received a sad call from Daniella telling me that all the knitting needles of the patients had been confiscated—there was an administrative decision that they might be unsafe.

It felt to us as though the very last, good thing had been taken from her. She was so sad, so helpless. It was only faith that kept us going; good friends and family that held us together. That is when my childhood barehand method came to mind. During our visits, I showed her some of the stitches I remembered, and she resumed knitting without the needles. At home, I began to develop new techniques, and during our visits I would share them with her.

Using the thick, soft, and colorful wool yarns that I brought to her (many of the skeins were donated by friends and by members of our church community) Daniella began to create beautiful and useful knitted pieces. This proved to be the turning point in her healing process,and brought my own life new meaning.

I continued to explore the possibilities throughout my ongoing winter visits with my daughter. We rolled balls of yarn and shared new discoveries with each other. The work she did with her hands was not only beautiful; it had a therapeutic effect on her. She created scarves, hair-pieces, and wet-felted wool jewelry. I created dolls, mermaids, and hats. The most amazing thing is, we were having fun! A sense of joy returned to us, and we both began to feel hope again—as if we had retaken the threads of our destinies back into our own hands.

My daughter's beautiful scarves were soon being worn by family and friends. A sense of connection to the world outside helped Daniella to rebuild her self-esteem and to connect with folks back home, even during her isolation.

I believe that the integrative aspect of Bare Hand Knitting also worked as an effective treatment for her. Studies show that activities that require both hemispheres of the brain to work together have a therapeutic effect in cases of phobia and PTSD. A well-accepted therapy called EMDR, involves focusing the eyes on a moving image that passes from side-to-side across the midline, or listening with earphones to sounds that go from one ear to the other, or a vibration passing from one hand to the other, in order to integrate both hemispheres of the brain while simultaneously bringing up traumatic memories.[2]

It is not unreasonable to suggest that more engaging midline-crossing activity shouldn't work as well or better. Japanese researcher, Ryuta Kawashima, has shown that the thoughtful and creative activity of finger-knitting lights up far more areas of the brain than does the mindless act of twiddling the fingers. Furthermore, the methods that were used in his study, which give such remarkable results, were the most basic of bare-hand techniques found in the first part of this book.

And, as far as child development goes, researchers have repeatedly shown that handwork stimulates intelligence and cognitive development.[3]

The beautiful colors and soft natural fibers offered the only alternative to the cold, harsh, and stale surroundings of my daughter's unit. She shared her donated yarn with other patients in her ward and began teaching them, and even some of the staffers, how to knit with their bare hands. Soon, during my visits, I saw new smiles on what had previously been some very morose faces. I remember one older, long-term patient beaming with pride as she showed me the scarf she had just made.

After a lot of Bare Hand Knitting, as well as prayer, by springtime, my daughter had made enough progress to defy the pessimistic expectation of her psychiatrist. She now has a normal life in California, attending our local community college and getting good grades.

This book is your entry into what I hope you will find to be a very pleasant recreational art form. While the use of extraneous tools is an important aspect of being human, our own hands are the most amazing tools we have. It is also my hope that this craft will reach many of those who are closed off in mental hospitals and prisons, where they may not have access to pointed knitting needles and who, as a result, have not been able to benefit from the therapeutic effects of fiber-handwork.

Young children traditionally enjoy playing countless hand movement games, and for good reason. I trained and worked as a Waldorf teacher, and Waldorf educators look to hand and finger play as an important aspect of the curriculum in Early Childhood and beyond and as a tool for awakening the various capacities of the mind. More challenging finger activities such as cat's-cradle and large-needle knitting are taught to first-graders. Such activities have been found to facilitate literacy. Gross-motor and fine-motor movements of varying types and degrees are important for overall learning and healthy

development. Specific movement patterns are known to be therapeutic and integrative.[4,5,7]

In Hindu tradition, the stimulation of various mudra points on our fingers is believed to be healing, and recent studies have lent support to these claims.[6] Many of the barehand methods seem to invoke hand-yoga, and who knows what mystical connection might lie therein.

I find it truly amazing that in practical application, virtually anything that can be created by knitting and crocheting can also be made by the bare hands alone. (Even a custom-fitted five-fingered glove!) And new barehand methods, patterns, and techniques—such as cooperative knitting-circles, combined wet-felting/barehand techniques, and combined-macramé—continue to develop through my work.

While this book is primarily aimed at a general audience, as an experienced teacher with a Master's Degree in Education from Antioch University, I have taken special care to consider the pedagogical aspect of each stitch and pattern I introduce. Certain tasks and movements are appropriate for specific stages of childhood development, and so I have provided a Curriculum section at the beginning of the book that includes my age recommendations.

For the last fifteen years, both before and after obtaining my degree, I have taught art and other special subjects in Waldorf schools in the US and Russia, as well as being a main-lesson teacher. For the past six years I have included instruction in barehand techniques, when and where it was helpful and appropriate. I am very encouraged with what I have seen. The rich and broad handwork curriculum already in place in Waldorf schools provides the students with important life skills. This creates a foundation for my work in barehand methods. Certain barehand techniques are also helpful in preparing children for traditional handwork skill sets. I see this form of handwork as a complement to all of the other valuable crafts that are so important in the development of the child, supporting their growth as capable, confident, and whole individuals.

At the end of each chapter you will find a vocabulary review for the new terms you will need to know. You will find it helpful to become familiar with the new words introduced in each chapter before going to the next.

The hands and minds of new practitioners must be given time to increase in dexterity and flexibility. Using this book, you will have the best results by moving through it chapter-by-chapter to build upon a new lexicon and skill set. This is a process that cannot be rushed. Be patient with yourself. Barehand crafts, just as any other worthwhile skill, cannot be learned overnight. It may help you to consider that it has taken me many years to progress to the point where I am now. There is much that I am able to accomplish quite easily now, that would have been impossible for me just one year ago. And I continue in exploring uncharted territory and improving my skills.

What I find beautiful in a barehand piece, I attribute not only to the intricate pattern of the stitching, but to the care and focus that went into it. There is an intention that calls to the spirit in this art form. The natural look and feel of it brings us back to ancient earth-friendly and people-loving fiber arts. The use of minimally processed and nontoxic fibers, dyes, and beads plays an important role in this.

Developing skills for making things with her own hands was emancipating for my daughter, and it is for me as well. Our culture, as a whole, has become so nervous, jangly, computer-driven, and tech-dependent. Bare Hand Knitting is, for me, the anti-tech antidote. It is like taking a vacation from the modern world. I wear an obsidian arrowhead necklace piece when I knit as a useful cutting implement that honors my ancestral roots and the non-consumer foundations of this art.

ENDNOTES

1. Barber, E.J.W. *Prehistoric Textiles: The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages with Special Reference to the Aegean*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991. Print, page 81.
2. EMDR Institute, "What Is EMDR?" "Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy," *What Is EMDR Comments*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Jan. 2017.
3. Wilson, Frank R. *The Hand: How Its Use Shapes the Brain, Language, and Human Culture*. New York: Pantheon, 1998. Print.
4. Hess, Lory Widmer. "Spinning Straw into Gold: The Healing Potential Of Handwork" *Lilipoh* 16.62 (2011): 60-60. Consumer Health Complete – EBSCOhost. Web. 2 August 2014. (with reference to the following text in her Foreword): "Technical movements such as typing, are an intellectual construct that does not have the same effect. One of our course participants remarked that through spinning she could start to 'feel the brain' in a new way, having done clerical work with her hands in the past."
5. Weigle, M. *Spiders & Spinsters: Women and Mythology*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. 1982. "An account from a contemporary folklorist visiting a Navajo family. In reference to his question as to the origins of cat's cradle, or 'nettles shields' as they were called by the Native people.

   "During this conversation the mother has gone back to weaving momentarily and the other children are still doing string fingers. 'The spider woman taught us all these designs as a way of helping us to think. You learn to think when you make these.' 'And she taught us about weaving too,' a teenage girl puts in. 'If you can think well,' the first boy adds, 'you won't get into trouble or get lost. Anyway, that's what our father says.'"
6. Menen, Rajendar. *The Healing Power of Mudras: The Yoga of the Hands*. London: Singing Dragon, 2010. Print.
7. "Enduring Legacies Native Case Studies." Enduring Legacies Native Cases: N.p., n.d. Web, 12 January 2017.

chapter one

Barehand Handwork Curriculum Year by Year

Overview of Child Development

Handwork for the First Seven Years

Handwork enhances the mind of the developing child, and its rhythmic movements are calming to the nerves. With the emergence of so many children with special needs in classrooms today, how timely it is to bring in more fiber arts. We need very little to get started along this path. Just some natural fibers and our own two hands.

The entirety of what is taught in school has to do with the straight and the curved line and a relationship between the two. Handwork has traditionally been a child-friendly activity as it was practiced for millennia in its various forms within the home. With children present to observe and imitate them, parents and caregivers have gone busily about their daily tasks to provide food, shelter, and clothing. Spinning, weaving, felting, and knitting can also be summed up as manipulations of the straight line and a curved line. Our capacity for language and thought bear a relationship to the very movements that we make with our bodies and hands.

There is purpose behind these movements. Even today, handwork is practical for life. To follow this thread of logic, not only does handwork produce fabric, clothing, and shelter, but also the undertaking of a project creates pathways for human intelligence. There is also a social element to the fiber arts. Just as the warmth from the fire has helped make human connections by drawing people together and seeding civilizations with the fruits of cultural enrichment, traditional handwork techniques have required people to work together for efficiency to achieve the best results. Even the simple activity of rolling a ball of yarn from a hank, is carried out, most efficiently, between two people. The art of cloth-making has consumed an enormous portion of humanity's waking time, until very recently.

Looking to their caregivers, as well as at their peers, young children learn by imitating what goes on around them. The developing mind of the young child is intrinsically linked to the physical activity of the body and is informed by all of the senses.

Young children learn naturally in a warm, safe, and welcoming space that supports the daily rhythm of a well-functioning home life. Just as it is important to provide basic healthy foods to nourish a young body, an optimal educational program will also incorporate a vast array of opportunities for movements.

Engaging in indoor and outdoor free play is an important part of childhood. Activities such as circle games and nature walks involve large-motor movements. Stepping along a log, swinging, or riding a seesaw, develop balance. Activities such as folding napkins, picking berries, and engaging in handwork of all kinds involve fine motor movements and develop hand-eye coordination. Setting a regular time each day for growing children to rest is necessary. When children in their first seven years of life are in our care, and we, the parents or educators, engage in meaningful work, we provide for them the greatest lesson of all.

It is sad, indeed is a tragedy, that so much of what young people do and see today involves interfacing with a cold and lifeless screen. Screens, no matter what is on them, give us a flattened and deadened version of reality and do not develop the young mind. The power is within our hands to turn this around. As we, the adults, find our way back to meaningful work, the inner artisan can once again be reawakened for the generations to follow.

During those formative years, balance connects to our ability to hear, movement informs the development of speech recognition, warmth enlivens our interest in the world around us, and touch awakens our sense of self.

In the Waldorf early childhood classroom, children take part in cooking, cleaning, gardening, song, and dance. Meal preparation, basic household chores, and traditional artisans' crafts make up the foundation stones for the curriculum and are built into the natural flow of each day's routine. This means that, as teachers, we ourselves are practicing these skills with the children—we cook, we clean, we garden, and we engage in handcrafts. We tell stories; we create puppet shows; we are social. We strive to surround ourselves with beauty and leave room for the imagination in the children's objects for play. This rich curriculum provides the children with something worthy of imitation. All of this strengthens the very fabric of our beings.

When my youngest daughter Abby entered first grade, she already knew how to knit on large needles, which surprised both her teacher and me, because no one had actually taught her how to knit and she had never picked up knitting needles before. When asked how she was able to knit, she simply said that her kindergarten teacher, Miss Lisa, knitted, and that she liked to watch her. I shared this with Miss Lisa, who remembered that Abby had often sat by her side during outdoor free-play time as she, her teacher, knitted. But even Lisa had not realized that Abby had so carefully observed her in her technique. To this day, Abby enjoys all sorts of handcrafts.

This educational model reminds of us of what once existed as folk wisdom. It is a mistake to push book learning and abstractions on children too early—as is done in the majority of kindergartens today, where, a misguided effort to jump-start academic learning is deeply entrenched.

All activities for this age group can better be seen as a precursor to academic learning. A strong will and a sense of truth, beauty, and goodness are needed for sorting through the challenges that lay ahead—for the academics as well as for life itself. The significance of what we bring and the mood in which they are carried out is part of the teacher training.

A Complement to a Full Handwork Curriculum

Bare Hand Knitting is for everyone. The techniques in this book are fun for children and adults alike. I encourage you to learn and teach them freely, bringing your own inspirations into the mix. The classroom is another wonderful place to do handwork. It is very much encouraged that teachers of a variety of subjects consider integrating some barehand crafting into the lesson.

Opportunities to weave in related lessons in math, geometry, and art are very much present. Some examples for this will be pointed out along the way. Furthermore, students of all ages might enjoy having a project involving a simple activity, such

as finger knitting or yarn winding, close at hand while in school. Engaging in simple handwork stimulates the vestibular system and has been shown to have positive effects. This calming activity also heightens the ability to listen. As a result of this phenomenon, simple activities such as modeling with beeswax or finger-knitting are sometimes used to enhance focus and memory-retention during story-time or spoken lessons.

As early childhood and elementary school teaching has been such a focus in my life, some recommendations have been laid out below for parents, homeschool instructors, and teachers, who carry the responsibility for bringing in lessons at the age-appropriate level.

Age Recommendations

The barehand curriculum has been designed as a complement to a full handwork curriculum as an enrichment to, rather than a replacement for, traditional crafting skills. In certain special situations, barehand methods may be helpful as a preparation for a tool-based method.

There is a lot to take into consideration when assigning an appropriate age level to a given handwork skill. Below, recommendations are given for a child-development-sensitive approach. In general, Volume I deals with introductory level techniques, geared mainly toward the first nine years of life and beyond, to build a foundation for intermediate and advanced barehand techniques to be found in Volume II. Within each category,

there is some degree of flexibility for these age recommendations, depending on the level of support that is provided by a teacher or parent. However, for the most part, the intermediate and advanced techniques found in Volume II should not be taught directly to this young age group. The micro-movements required become increasingly complex for the young developing mind. Dominance is often still being sorted out in younger children. That being said, there is much still to be learned and researched on the barehand crafting front and, as these methods become more widely used, more will be learned from classroom observation.

Our brain treats the tools that we use like an extension of our own body. So, from this perspective, it makes sense to introduce handwork techniques with barehand methods.

Barehand Handwork Curriculum Year by Year

Birth to Age 6

Children should not be expected to produce a utilitarian "product" at this tender age. By modeling meaningful and life-sustaining work such as gardening, crafting, washing, harvesting, and food preparation, we give young children a wealth of activities to imitate. Their imitative play will also require access to earth and sand, wool and water, pots and pans and dough, and the like.

When it comes to handwork, the availability of a variety of natural materials helps to develop the sense of touch and the sense of life.

During the fifth year, a gradual transition can begin from pure play to process-oriented crafting. Early Childhood teachers have had success with this age group in a variety of basic crafting projects such as rolling of a ball of yarn (chapter 2), finger-knitting (chapter 4), and wet-felting balls (chapter 8).

Age 6

By the age of six, children are likely more than ready for the introduction of *Basic Hand Knitting* (also sometime called *Hand-Weaving*) (chapter 5), which is a nice way to ease them into the very useful and also pro-literacy activity of large-needle knitting.

In first- and second-grade handwork classes, vast amounts of small, logistical knitting problems do arise and must be worked through, in order for the projects to proceed. Research has established that knitting teaches logic in part through this problem-solving activity.

Basic Hand Knitting, although it carries a logic of its own, also requires hand-eye coordination and sequencing, both of which prepare the developing child for the activity of reading. Bulky yarns are preferable, as fine-motor skills are still developing. Tactile development and a sense of beauty and esthetics are best served by the use of natural fibers and colors derived from plant dyes.

Age 7

You will find that this age group is capable of taking on slightly more involved handwork projects. When it comes to traditional large-needle knitting, with help and encouragement, children of this age can already follow well-thought-out and clearly defined patterns. It should be expected that projects be brought to a point of completion by children by this age.

Projects involving the alternation of *chain* and *knit* (chapter 6) can be done at this age. Second-graders become very excited when there is a rich choice of colors to work with and are more likely to be self-motivated to see a project through to the end. The materials should still be soft, preferably on the thicker side, and natural.

Age 8

In general, eight-year-olds are lively and fun to work with. Begin with some basic projects that require *barehand whip-stitching* (chapter 7). Some more-complex *wet-felting* projects (chapter 8) can be undertaken in small groups and with support.

Looking Ahead

Figuratively speaking, nine-year-olds are at a point of stepping out of the almost magical dream-like consciousness of early childhood. Possibly one of the best ways we can offer them a sense of security is to give them some basic tools and fundamental skills for life. There are many useful and meaningful crafts that can be taught to this very able age group. Among these are lessons in the basics of fiber arts.

Basic handwork skills such as spinning, weaving, and plant-dying can make up an important part of a developmentally appropriate and childhood-enhancing curriculum for third graders. The concept of "sheep to shawl" is perfect for this age.

New Terms

In order to bring you this written instructional guide for Bare Hand Knitting, it was necessary to create a new lexicon. The new terms relate to the many, yet unfamiliar, micro-movements we will be doing with our fingers. Wherever possible, established knitting terminology has been adopted. Both the sequence-stories and the new vocabulary developed quite naturally from the intrinsic connections between images from nature and the form and movements of the human hand. (It sometimes seems to me, when describing hand movements in terms of nature, I am only responding to the handprints of our Creator.) Some barehand terms are introduced in chapter 2, and others appear throughout the book. A full glossary of terms is laid out at the end of each.

Once a technique has been introduced, it is broken down into the bare-bones steps that are listed in abbreviated form in the chapter review. The introduction of techniques is chronological, and you will want to be familiar with the terms of one chapter before moving along to the next.

In addition to the abbreviated breakdown for each technique, there is a visual component. Here, the illustrated version of the steps is mapped out in a very simplified reminder code. This code is used in place of the illustrated step-by-step instructions whenever a previously introduced concept occurs. In other words, each step is broken down and explained in detail only one time. After that, you must rely on the reminder codes which become the building blocks for learning new techniques. This system will continue for advanced techniques in Volume II.

Stitch Stories

You will notice that each foundational Bare Hand Knitting technique is introduced here along with a story or rhyme. Using stories and verses to pass along cultural information has been practiced since ancient times. Many progressive educators have re-introduced this learning tool for teaching children today. Adults can also benefit from these memory-aids when learning new techniques.

For teachers, bringing in a stitch story as preparation for a new handwork technique helps the lesson to go along fluidly and helps the children to remember the steps. The little sequence-stories shared in this book have been developed through my own teaching experience. Inspired by the stories told by Waldorf handwork teachers over the years, I have created little tales drawn from nature that fit with the micro-movements required of the fingers and hands for each method. You may use these or come up with your own.

If you have the chance to work with a group of children in advance of the handwork lesson, it works nicely to begin on the day prior by telling the story or rhyme for the following day's lesson. The next day, have the students retell the story. This would be a good moment to introduce a shortened version or rhyme if there is one, in conjunction with a demonstration of the finger gestures for the technique being learned.

Do not hesitate to repeat the story while showing them the corresponding steps. Soon, short key-word reminders that are purely instructional, such as cinch, pluck-up, and scooch, will be all that is necessary to suggest the next step. As the story fades away, the child is left with a new skill-set.

Kindergarten teachers will find that it is especially necessary to offer some one-on-one help to at least a handful of the children, at which point, peer-learning, if quietly supported, is likely to take off.

You may also want to consider showing the exercise to a few members of the class in advance. You may perhaps choose those who could benefit from an opportunity to develop leadership skills and build confidence. This helps create enthusiasm and makes for a more efficient use of classroom time. Students enjoy teaching one another. Peer-learning stands behind a good deal of actual classroom learning.

For children under 11 years-old, handwork techniques, such as those found in this book, are best introduced by way of real-time, real-space, demonstration, and not directly from a set of instructions or through some type of electronic media. Students 11 and older may find printed matter helpful when used in combination with live instruction.

I have had new students come into my classroom with serious learning challenges who demonstrated a talent for handwork when it was introduced and thereafter dramatically improved in attitude and confidence.

Below is a set of stories that relate directly to techniques you will learn in this book and that serve as a backdrop for the stories and rhymes accompanying particular lessons. This material is intended to help teachers flesh out any narratives they may wish to expand on or create themselves.

The Land of Hand

The Mysterious Land of Hand is filled with folk as honest and hardworking as one might hope to find. There are also many animals, including those of the sea and sky. If you are lucky, you might meet a gnome or a fairy, or even catch a glimpse of a mermaid.

The Fisherman and the Seagull

The fisherman has put out his net in the hopes of catching some fish. Mr. Cat sits nearby and watches the net with curiosity. The fisherman does not linger, because he prefers to spend his time mending fishing nets or being witty with his friends, instead of sitting around all day waiting for a fish.

In his absence, a seagull flies overhead and spies a wiggly fish that is caught in his net.

The bird swoops down and catches the thin, slippery fish in her sharp beak. There is a bit of a struggle and, to prevent the fish from slipping away, the seagull flips it a bit to get a good hold on the top-fin; then away she flies with her meal.

Children have a natural respect for meaningful work, and handwork thereby cultivates in them a respect for their elders. Technological replacements for a teacher only rob a child of this opportunity for connection. Completely abstract digital manipulations, such as the pushing of buttons, and passive activities, such as staring into screens, however alluring, are essentially meaningless to a developing mind and only further isolate growing children from the real world. Developing practical skills through hands-on experience imbues the ability to cope with a variety of difficulties we encounter in life.

The curious cat moves in closer, wondering if anything is in the net for him. Just then, the fisherman, taking a break from his gabbing, returns to discover that his net is quite empty and all pulled loose, as well. He cinches it up tight and returns to his merry company.

No sooner does he leave than another seagull, with her keen eyesight, sees a fish wiggling in the net. She swoops down to snatch it up. She struggles momentarily to get a good hold on the fish and flies up and away to feed her young.

Again, the curious cat moves in closer just as the fisherman returns and, finding no fish, cinches up his net again.

And so, the story continues: The seagulls help themselves to all the fish they find in the fisherman's net, bringing them back to feed their chicks, all through the fall season. The cat must be getting something out of the arrangement for he is rather fat and lingers nearby. The fisherman however, never does get his catch.

The fisherman provides a story picture later for "Casting Off."

When winter comes the river begins to freeze. The fisherman cuts his net free. He stuffs the net away in its sack for the winter. He pulls the sack tight. As the seagulls fly away south, their shadows pass over the bottom-feeders who slink and burrow away to hide from their sharp eyes.

⁎ For the rhyme about The Fisherman and the Seagull, see chapter 4.

The Rogue Sheep

(A Story for Basic Knitting)

(Weave-On)

One fine day, a young shepherdess led her sheep to a fine grazing spot. She hung the hook of her crook on the fence, sat in the shade to rest, and dozed off. She did not notice when one of her sheep strayed away.

When she awoke, she noticed that one sheep was missing. Not wanting to stray too far from the rest of her flock, she only wandered a short distance off, calling there…and calling here…and there… and here…. She called all around. She did not see the lost sheep anywhere, and so, again, she called out there…and here…and there…until she finally came back to where she had started.

Where did she find her wandering sheep but resting under the very same fence where she had been sleeping. So surprised was the shepherdess to see her lost sheep lying there, that she let out a gasp in surprise.

So startled was the sheep by its keeper's cry that it awoke with a start. It pulled itself up onto its feet and stepped up on a rock to make ready to jump. And up it leaped, right over the top of the fence.

It went running off again, with the shepherdess calling after it. By the time the shepherdess returned with that one, the other sheep were all bleating loudly for her.

(Rows)

By the time the exasperated shepherdess had finally gotten them all calmed down, it was getting late and the sheep were eager to be safe in their pen again. As she herded them along toward home, the rogue sheep thought of the water-trough and a bed of straw to lie on, and he did not wait to be let in by the gate. Having discovered the strength of his legs earlier that day, there was no going back. Nearing the gate, the howl of old Brother Wolf could be heard in the distance and reached the ears of the sheep. The rogue sheep pulled back from the others, climbed onto a slab of rock where he steadied himself, and up it leaped, right over the fence, landing in the barnyard.

In the morning the rogue sheep let himself be let out through the gate.

After learning this new trick, all the sheep made it a habit of jumping over the fence in the evening until they were all safely inside the barn. But in the

morning, each sheep waited to be let out through the gate.

This shepherdess took care not to sleep on the job after that long day, but the sheep had already learned their new trick.

⁎ For the rhyme about the Rogue Sheep, see chapter 5.

Teaching Handwork to Groups of Young Children

When teaching any kind of handwork to young children, it is good to have an assistant, especially one who has a fair degree of experience in the art, as one-on-one help will often be needed. If you teach a class over a period of time, try to establish a rhythm so that students know what to expect.

Starting handwork classes with a fitting verse or song helps to set the tone. It is also recommended to do some basic finger warm-ups.

Each teacher's rhythm will vary, and each class brings something new. The example class presented here is derived from countless observations in classrooms in many different schools over the course of several decades, which were found to have worked well. Any variety of nice verses, nursery rhymes, and songs can be used.

Example of how a class might go

The teacher stands before her class and waits for silence. With her hands, she gestures for the students to rise and join her in saying a verse.

Following the verse there is a brief—five minutes or so—lesson. Depending at what stage the class is, this lesson time might consist of an introduction to a new project or a new skill for a project that is already in progress. This would be a good time to share a new stitch story, if needed. The teacher might use this moment to give a brief craft-related lesson in color, to showcase a handcrafted piece, or even teach a new song relating to the lesson.

Hand Warm-ups

Following the lesson comes the hand warm-ups. Any basic nursery rhyme or song can be adapted to accompany the finger play for the warm ups. Here are two basic exercises as illustrated above. First, have them spread open the notches between fingers, one-at-a-time. Next, have them bend down each finger in turn to touch the thumb, squeezing them together, then gently rub the tips together in a circular motion: pointer to thumb, middle finger to thumb, ring finger to thumb, and pinky to thumb. It is advisable to start out on one hand and work up to doing the warmups on both hands, as the weeks and months progress. That which seems difficult and even undoable at first, will soon become fluid. Such movements are helpful training for playing instruments as well.

One trick for a child who has difficulty in doing these exercises, is to have them start with the hands flat against a surface such as a desk or table. After just a few repetitions the hands can accomplish the same movements in the air.

Following the brief warm-ups, the work is brought out. The children's work should have been checked since the previous class and some issues may

have been found and noted, or even fixed, by the teacher, who will very briefly share her notes before the class prior to handing out the cloth handwork bags or baskets to each child seated quietly and ready to begin.

Silent Working

Children work quietly in their groups for a time as the adults help to answer any questions and get things moving along. After ten minutes or so of silent working, a song or soft chime may indicate that quiet conversation may now ensue, so long as work continues. Alternatively, if there is enough adult assistance, this can be a nice time to read a handwork-related story to the class or to invite a music student to play softly as the students work in continued silence. When mistakes are caught, the work is undone and redone under guidance.

Troubleshooting

By second grade and beyond, handwork projects, including Bare Hand Knitting, can be mapped-out in large colorful, hand-drawn patterns that are laid out as a reference for students and helpers. The teacher may choose to move around the classroom herself, rather than to have the students jumping up when assistance is needed. Some teachers sit at the desk and have the children come up to have problems solved.

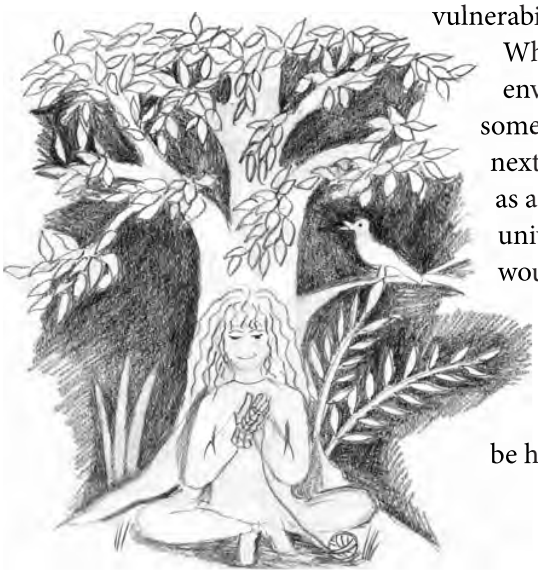
As the class progresses, so do the projects. Teachers help to troubleshoot problems and assist students. It is advisable to have a "go-to" activity such as a chain-knitting project available to every child for those occasions when a student runs into a break in the work, for whatever reason. Little by little, week-by-week, a quiet enthusiasm builds as colorful and challenging, satisfying, projects are brought to completion.

Closing

As the lesson comes to an end, the teacher plays a few familiar notes on her chimes, or otherwise gently gives notification, and the children work a bit longer to bring their work to a good resting place. One by one, the children return their projects to their bags or baskets. A student leader can now be chosen from each group or row to collect the handwork bags. The teacher might lead a final song as the bags are passed in and students make ready for the closing verse.

Knitting puts us into a meditative state. It calms the mind and opens a space deep within, where healing can occur. A state such as this offers an opportunity. To what extent one is able to utilize this, depends a great deal upon the surroundings as well as the intention of the individual. There is a lot to be said for a therapeutic environment.

I once met a woman who had grown up wearing the items knitted by her mother's own hands. She cherished those memories and decided, in her late thirties, to take up knitting herself. As we conversed over lunch, at a wool festival in Northern California, she also went on to share that her mother had suffered from anxiety. The two pictures just didn't go together and, almost before the thought had formed, a question left my lips "Did your mother knit while watching the evening news?" I asked. "Yes, every evening, that is what she did!" Why didn't this answer surprise me?



The moment of creating new pathways for thought leaves us open, and there is an inherent vulnerability in this openness. What constitutes a healing environment may differ somewhat from one person to the next and could be approached as a topic all on its own. Some universal themes to work with would be safety, calmness, warmth, beauty, nature, song, and joy. If healing for the mind is what you seek, there is medicine to be had in handwork.

chapter two

Getting Started

Geography of the Hand

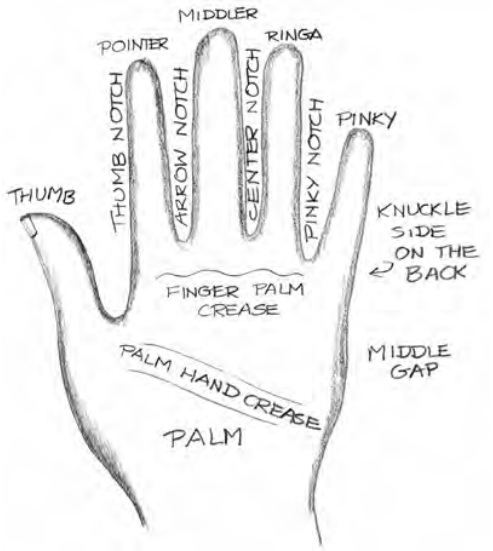
To become acquainted with terms used to describe specific areas on your hand, let us take a closer look: Open flat your left hand against your lap or a table. Imagine that this hand is an island, 20 miles wide, floating in the sea. There are several thousand inhabitants on this island, living in villages or scattered cottages about the countryside. In the bays and inlets, fishing boats are anchored.

The inhabitants have names for the important geographical features for their island. These names are capitalized, just as we capitalize the distinctive locations in the regions where we live. There are five distinct peninsulas, named: Thumb, Pointer, Middler, Ringa, and Pinky. There are bays and inlets that have the names of: Thumb-Notch, Arrow-Notch, Center-Notch, and Pinky-Notch.

There is a great central plain where field crops are grown, called Palm. There is a narrow valley that runs from notch-to-notch across the bases of the peninsulas, called the Finger-Palm Crease.

In Bare Hand Knitting, our hands are our tools, and we must have a simple and obvious terminology for describing their interplay with the yarn. Many of the terms used are mapped out below, and some of them may be already familiar to you. Others we have had to invent. Still others will appear as needed.

Throughout the book we must designate individual fingers. The Thumb, Pointer, and Pinky all have simple, well-known names, but the designations for middle finger and ring finger are wordier and, in fact, could waste a good deal of extra ink just printing the word "finger" a few thousand times—not to mention loss of simplicity and clarity. Therefore, for these two fingers, we take the liberty of using obvious nicknames: The middle finger, we shorten to "Middler," and the ring finger to "Ringa." ("Middler" also distinguishes it from "middle," a word we might sometimes use in instructions.) Here is how we designate our fingers:

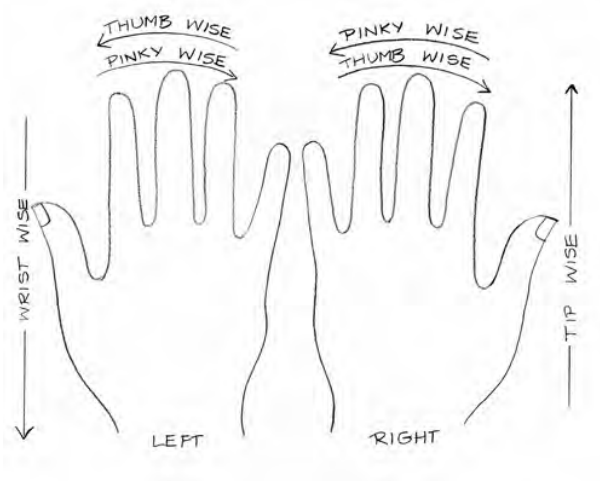


Moving around the Hand

Palm-side: inside of the hand
Pad-side: palm-side or inside of the finger
Knuckle-side: back or knuckle-side of the finger
Thumb-Notch: where Thumb and Pointer join
Arrow-Notch: where Pointer and Middler join
Center-Notch: where Middler and Ringa join
Pinky-Notch: where Ringa and Pinky join
Finger-Palm Crease: the arched crease between fingers & palm

If an inhabitant wants to say he is traveling along the Finger-Palm Crease toward the Pinky, he says he is heading "Pinkywise." If his wife goes in the opposite direction to meet him, she is traveling "Thumbwise."

Thumbwise: moving in a line from the Pinky to Pointer
Pinkywise: moving in a line from the Pointer to Pinky
Tipwise: moving along a digit toward the tip
Wristwise: moving along a digit toward the wrist

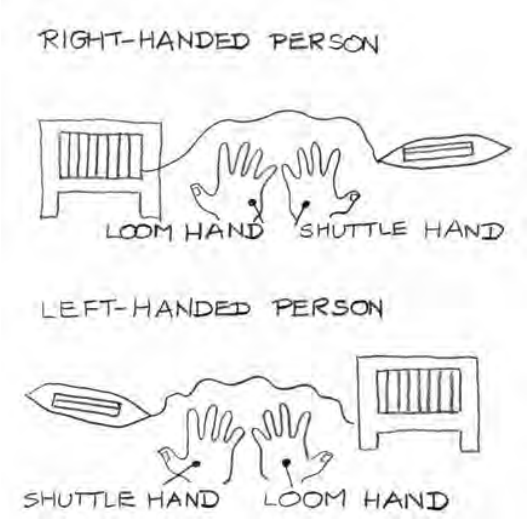


Right and Left Handedness

Whether the reader is right-handed or left-handed, these instructions will work for both. Your dominant hand, we call your "Shuttle Hand," and your passive, or non-dominant hand, is the "Loom Hand." These terms come from weaving, where the loom holds your work and the shuttle moves in and out. In other words, if you are right-handed, your "Shuttle" is your active right hand, while your "Loom" refers to your passive left hand. If you are left-handed, the opposite applies—"Shuttle," in that case, refers to your left hand and "Loom" to your right. Take a moment to get to know your hands by the names I will be addressing them.

Any movement toward the Loom Hand is called Loomwise and movement toward your Shuttle Hand is called Shuttlewise.

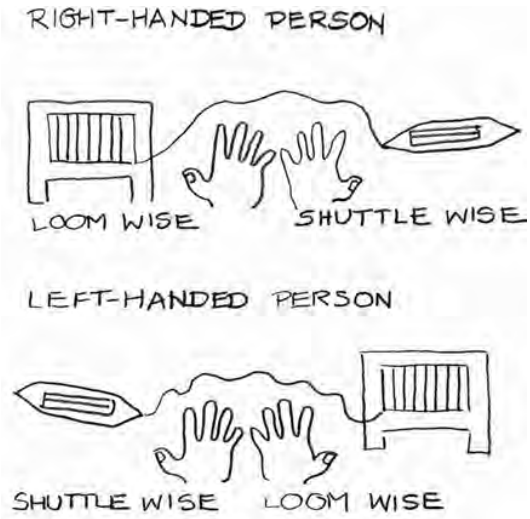
In a classroom setting, this terminology clears up confusion by eliminating the necessity of having to give a reversed set of instructions for left-handed students—who will appreciate not being made to feel different. With this system, all the children catch on with no problem. This is the terminology used throughout this book, except for certain chapters on two-hand techniques, where both hands are equally active, and it is easier and more to the point to signify "Left" and "Right" to identify the hands when they are held side-by-side.



Shuttlewise: moving in a Loom-to-Shuttle direction

Loomwise: moving in a Shuttle-to-Loom direction

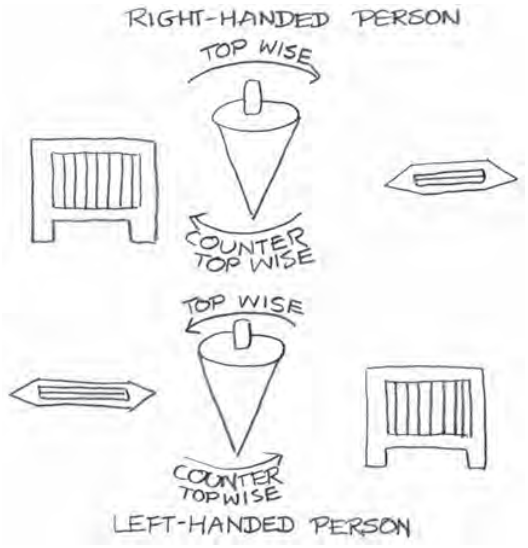
(These directional terms are independent of any fixed location. Stitches on your Shuttle Hand can move Shuttlewise because they are moving along an arrow going from Loom to Shuttle.)



Clockwise & Counterclockwise

If Rita, a right-handed student, is told to take a short length of yarn, attach it to her Loom Thumb with a slipknot, and then wrap it around that Thumb clockwise a few times, the end of the yarn will end up hanging across her Palm. But if Lenny, a left-handed student, followed the same instruction, the yarn-end would hang down the back of his hand, behind his Thumb-Notch.

To go along with Loom and Shuttle, a rotational designation is needed that automatically adjusts for left- and right-handed children. Here is the solution: imagine picking up a small spindle-top—the children's toy that is spun between the fingers and thumb. A right-handed child will naturally twirl the top so that it spins in a clockwise direction; a left-handed child will spin it counterclockwise. Therefore, instead of 'clockwise' and 'counterclockwise' we will use the terms 'topwise' and 'countertopwise.' For the right-handed, 'topwise' is the same as 'clockwise;' for the left-handed, it is just the opposite. If you ever forget, just imagine twirling a top between your fingers, and it will be made clear.



Pinches

The main pinch that will be used for plucking and holding yarn is the *bird-pinch,* which comes most naturally. As your Bare Hand Knitting progresses, others will be called in for specialized actions.

Bird-pinch: thumb-tip touches tip of Pointer.
Fox-pinch: thumb-tip touches tip of Middler

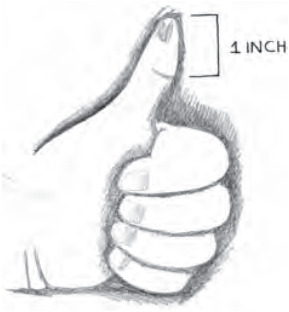
Bird-pinch

Fox-pinch

Measurements

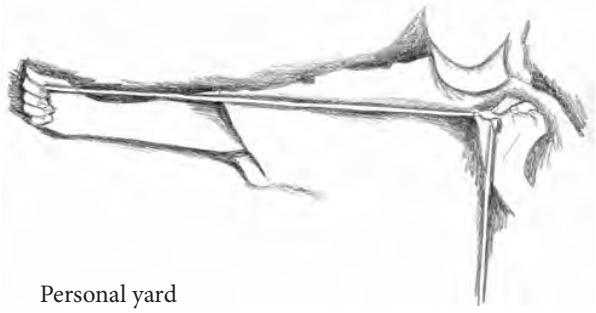
Many common measurements—the inch, the foot, the yard—were originally based on body dimensions. Later these were standardized when there was a need for increased precision for interchangeability and fair trade. In most cases, you will not need standardized measuring instruments, as those based on your own body proportions will serve as well. These individualized measurements are designated with the word *personal:* a *personal inch,* a *personal foot,* a *personal yard.*

Your personal inch can be measured off with the top segment of your thumb.



Personal inch

Personal foot



Personal yard

Your personal foot can be measured out by your foot or, perhaps more easily, by the distance from wrist to elbow.

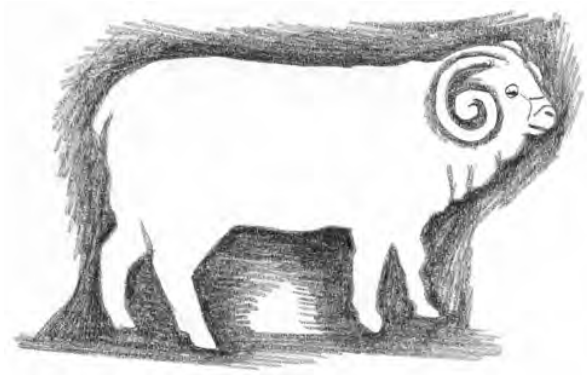
Your personal yard can be measured as the distance from your chin or mid chest, to the tip of the thumb of your outstretched hand. This makes it very easy then, when you want, say, 6 yards of yarn, to loosely hold the running strand in your off-hand, resting against your chin, while your active hand—your Shuttle Hand— draws out the yarn to the full distance your arm stretches. Draw out the yarn to full length, count one, drop the yarn from your Shuttle Hand and re-pinch it where it emerges from your off-hand, draw it out again—doing this procedure six times.

Choosing Your Materials

"Wool is a special gift to mankind from one of the gentlest animals on earth. For more than 10,000 years, the docility and flocking instincts of sheep have made it one of the most prominent animals in folklore. In ancient times, the sheep were driven through thickets and the fleece was picked off the thorns and gathered for hand spinning."

– Dana Kraemer

When choosing materials for a project, it is important to keep in mind that our hands and fingers are continuously in direct skin-contact with the fibers. The naturally-spiraling fibers of wool allow for countless hours of pleasurable, tactile engagement, with minimal strain. These constant gentle massaging micro-movements have a pleasant and warming effect on the hands. The naturally occurring lanolin in the wool, especially abundant in fisherman's yarn, softens the skin. Using mostly 100% pure wool, and occasionally other rougher fibers such as hemp and linen, even corn husks, raffia, nettle, or recycled silks are preferable.



You can knit for hours on end, year after year, and your fingers and hands will feel better than ever.

At one point, I tried a synthetics/wool mix, but it was unpleasant and had to be abandoned. This is a touch-intensive medium, for which synthetics are not desirable.

Pure and unmixed wool fibers have yet another wonderful attribute: They can be felted down in size, creating an unbroken, thick, soft matted material. Fulling applies the same procedures to a fabric that has first been woven or knitted, giving it flexibility. Fulling results in shrinkage and can be an important final step in the creation of a knitted

piece. Thanks to the possibility for shrinkage inherent in woolen fibers, the final determining factor for stitch size for a completed barehand piece does not have to be the size of our fingers. Many other animal-hair products, such as alpaca, angora, and camel hair behave in a similar way. Felting is a whole amazing craft in itself, which works beautifully with many barehand projects.

Decor

Decorative fringes, linings, and such can be added to our pieces using silk ribbons, hemp, linen, cotton, or recycled materials. In general, cotton, silk, hemp, and such yarns are less flexible, and you will want to work up to extensive Bare Hand Knitting with them over time as you learn to work with the extra tension and your hands gain in strength. Fibers vary greatly in this way, and you will find yourself making minute adjustments in how you work with each.

Yarn Thickness

If you want a thin item with larger holes you can use thinner yarn. For thicker and tighter garments use thicker yarn or felt-down the finished piece. Combining several strands of thinner yarn when creating a large piece creates a still different result from that of Bulky or Fluffy yarns. Huge skeins of thin coarse yarn, used for making wool rugs, are probably the least expensive natural material that you will find. This may not seem like a desirable material to use, but it is possible to felt right through the resulting pieces, with fabulous results. Working with thick hemp cordage in certain instances where its qualities are called for—such as for the underside of a large knitting bag—is effective. But staying attentive to the comfort of your hands usually limits working with such coarse fibers to a few hours at a time.

It is good to be aware of the origins of the materials: the fibers, buttons, and beads you use. Products made closer to home and processed without the use of toxic materials or slave labor and those lacking huge smokestack industries in the chain of their manufacture are most satisfying. This helps to heal the earth, heal our society, and keep us healthy too.

Yarn Colors

For a cheerful project needing bright and lively hues, or for reproducible, standardized colors, you will find commercially-dyed yarns most readily available and satisfactory—though you would be amazed at the variety of colors natural dyes can produce. And artisans are expanding on these techniques every day. When your projects are suited to vibrant, if often milder colors and more varied hues, you might consider plant-dyed or un-dyed yarns, with their warm browns, soft grays, and creamy whites.

Using bulkier yarns when learning new techniques is helpful for overall ease and success.

Once you have mastered a technique, you will enjoy knitting with all sizes of yarns, making the necessary adjustments to your tensions on a fine motor level almost without thinking about it.

Yarn Sizes

Universally accepted yarn sizes have been designated as follows:

1. Super Fine (also called Sock, Fingering, and Baby)
2. Fine (also called Sport and Baby)
3. Light (also called DK and Light-Worsted)
4. Medium (also called Worsted, Afghan, and Aran)
5. Bulky (also called Chunky, Craft, and Rug)
6. Super Bulky (also called Bulky and Roving)

Sources for Wool

Fiber Shed is an organization that can help connect knitters to local suppliers of yarn and wool. A list of Fiber Shed locations is included in the back of this book. Look for upcoming wool festivals in your local area, where you can buy directly from local suppliers. Also, check out your local yarn shop.

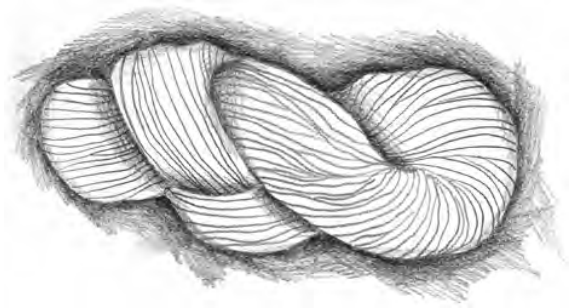
For larger amounts of yarn, you can often get discounts when buying directly from suppliers in bulk. Several handwork teachers order in bulk at a discount from Brown Sheep Co., which carries 100% wool yarn from US sheep. Thrift stores will often have some new skeins available; check them out from time to time.

And, if you really get serious: before you get totally swept away with the enchantment of Bare Hand Knitting, you might even want to take up spinning! There may be a group in your area, where you can learn the skill, as well as find new sources of wool.

Rolling a Ball of Yarn

To roll a ball of yarn is really a lovely activity. The circular movements involved have a calming effect. In the kindergarten classroom, there would sometimes be a whole row of children lined up to roll their yarn balls at story time before their naps. They could hardly wait for their chance to do this and it worked like a charm. As their balls wound up, they wound down. All Bare Hand Knitting begins with a ball of yarn.

Hand-spun yarns come in a hank for storage. To try to knit directly from a hank would spell a disastrous tangle. But even the slick machine-made skeins, or giant yarn-cones for weaving yarn, must first be re-wound into balls for our purposes. Knitting from a ball puts just the right tension into the yarn, keeping our stitches even and helping to prevent tangles.



To roll from a machine-wound spool, you may just want to sit while you form your ball. Generally, the yarn pulls out from the center of the spool. If you have an upright cylinder skein, be sure that you are seated above the spool, in order to prevent the yarn from catching on itself as it is unwound.

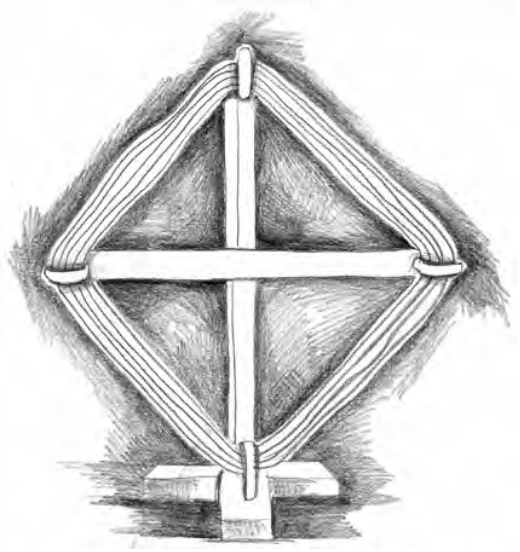
Methods for Rolling a Ball of Yarn from a Hank

If you have no one there to help you, here are three good options:

(1) Place two dining-chairs back-to-back so that the posts at the corners of the backs are the right space apart to hold the skein.

Yarn-Swift

(2) Obtain an age-old device called a yarn-swift, which is specifically-designed to hold a skein in place while you roll.



Barefoot Yarn-Swift

(3) Simply sit flat on the floor with your legs stretched out in front and place the skein across your two feet, spreading them as needed to keep the hank taut, and wind away!

The time-honored method of rolling a ball from a hank involves two people. This brings a social element to our task—but is also actually quite efficient.

The Team Method

Untwist the skein and open it up. You will be left with a big oval loop of yarn.

Place it on a flat surface in order to remove the skein dividers (most homemade skeins will have threaded divider-points which were put there to prevent tangling and must be severed before you begin to roll).

The ends of the yarn are often tied around the loop of yarn to keep the hank together. Sometimes a contrasting thread is used for this purpose. If the yarn itself has been used to tie the yarn together, you'll want to gently untie those knots. If you find this impossible, cut the yarn as close to the knot as possible making sure you don't cut your working yarn in the process.

Begin by having your helper hold out their arms as if they were about to give you a big hug. Hang the yarn skein on your helper's arms.

Taking up the yarn with your Shuttle Hand, pinch the end between the fingers of your Loom Hand, and then start rolling it around your whole Loom Hand.

Wind in one direction, around your hand about 6 times.

Slip the clump of yarn off your hand and continue to roll, but now crosswise to the strands, roughly the same number of times.

Twist it at the middle forming the shape of an 8.

Fold it back over itself to form a circle again.

Continue wrapping the yarn around and around, rotating the ball as you go, to make a nice even ball. Do not wind the yarn too tight, as you do not want to overstretch the fibers. Continue until the yarn is all wound up.

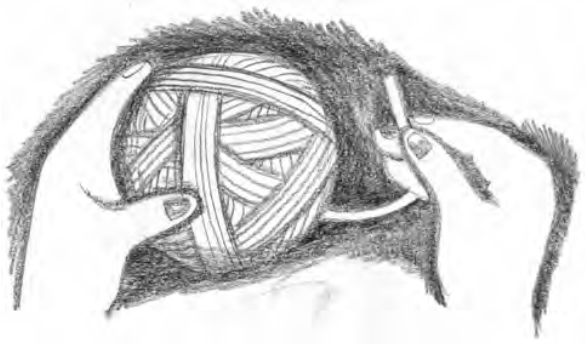
Your assistant can help the process by slowly rocking their arms back and forth tracing a figure eight in the air while moving each hand in a small circle to aid the yarn in slipping off. Most of these movements will come naturally to you both as you work together as a team.

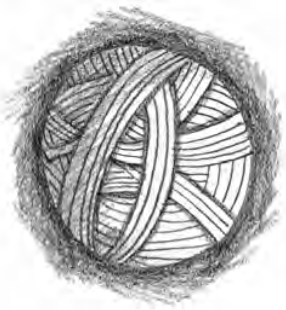
Tucking in Your Ends

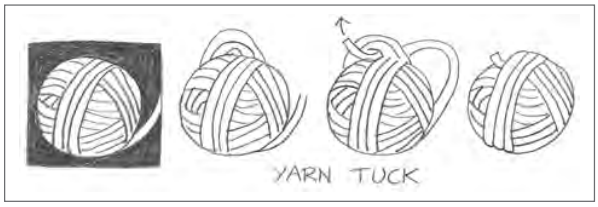
Always keep your balls of yarn with the ends tucked under when not in use—it is amazing the trouble that can be caused by loose ends!

As a preparation to tucking in your loose end, it is helpful to wind your last several clumps of yarn so as to form a star. To do this, use your loom thumb as a marking point.

Once the ball is complete, lift a clump of yarn at the middle of the star form, poke the loose end under, and draw it through.







Yarn Terminology

Working-yarn: The strand of yarn between your work and the yarn-ball. As we work, we unroll this yarn from the ball and stitch it into our work.

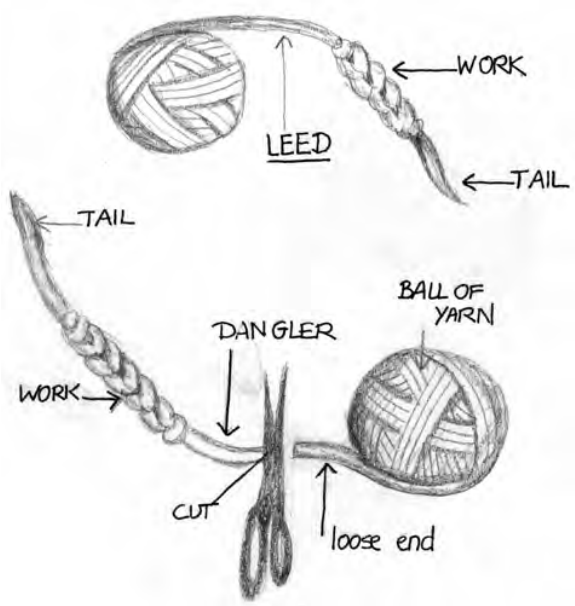
Leed: A synonym for, and meaning exactly the same as, "working-yarn." Working barehanded, we are constantly referring to the working-yarn itself, rather than knitting needles or crochet hooks, we have a need for this simple, shorter word that means the same as "working-yarn." Although *leed* is derived from and similar in meaning to the word "lead" that is pronounced the same way, we spell it differently in this craft to avoid confusion. ("Lead" is a word that already comes with a confusing burden of meanings and pronunciations.)

Tail: The short strand hanging from your work opposite the Ball-Side, later to be woven back into the work.

Dangler or **Dangling-End**: The remaining strand hanging from your knitted piece after the working strand has been cut, either to switch colors, to end the work, or for any other purpose.

Loose End: The outer end on a ball of yarn, which should be kept tucked in.

Bight: A bend or loop or half-loop created in the middle—rather than at one end—of a strand of yarn or rope. This is a common nautical term.



Wherever possible we have used traditional knitting terms, but in some cases new terms had to be created for this medium. In the vocabulary review at the end of each chapter, you will find a listing of newly introduced terms that will be built upon in future chapters. New concepts will be placed in the following categories and in this order:

Knitting Terms

Operations: specific movements relating to Bare Hand Knitting
Elements: individual moves (likened to letters)
Stitches: made up of one or two elements (likened to words)
Polystitches: groups of elements or stitches in a certain order (likened to sentences)
Sequences: longer grouping of stitches or polystitches (likened to paragraphs)
Rows: repeating series of stitches or polystitches (likened to lists)

Chapter Review for "Getting Started"

Terms

- hank
- skein
- leed
- tail
- dangler
- loose end
- bight
- weave

Hand-Related Terms

- Thumb
- Pointer
- Middler
- Ringa
- Pinky
- Bird-pinch
- Fox-pinch
- Coyote-pinch
- Peacock-pinch

Barehand Geography

- Thumb-Notch
- Arrow-Notch
- Center-Notch
- Pinky-Notch
- Palm
- Finger-Palm Crease
- Palm-side
- Pad-side

Definitions

- Bird-Pinch: Thumb-tip touches tip of Pointer.
- Fox-Pinch: Thumb-tip touches tip of Middler

Directions

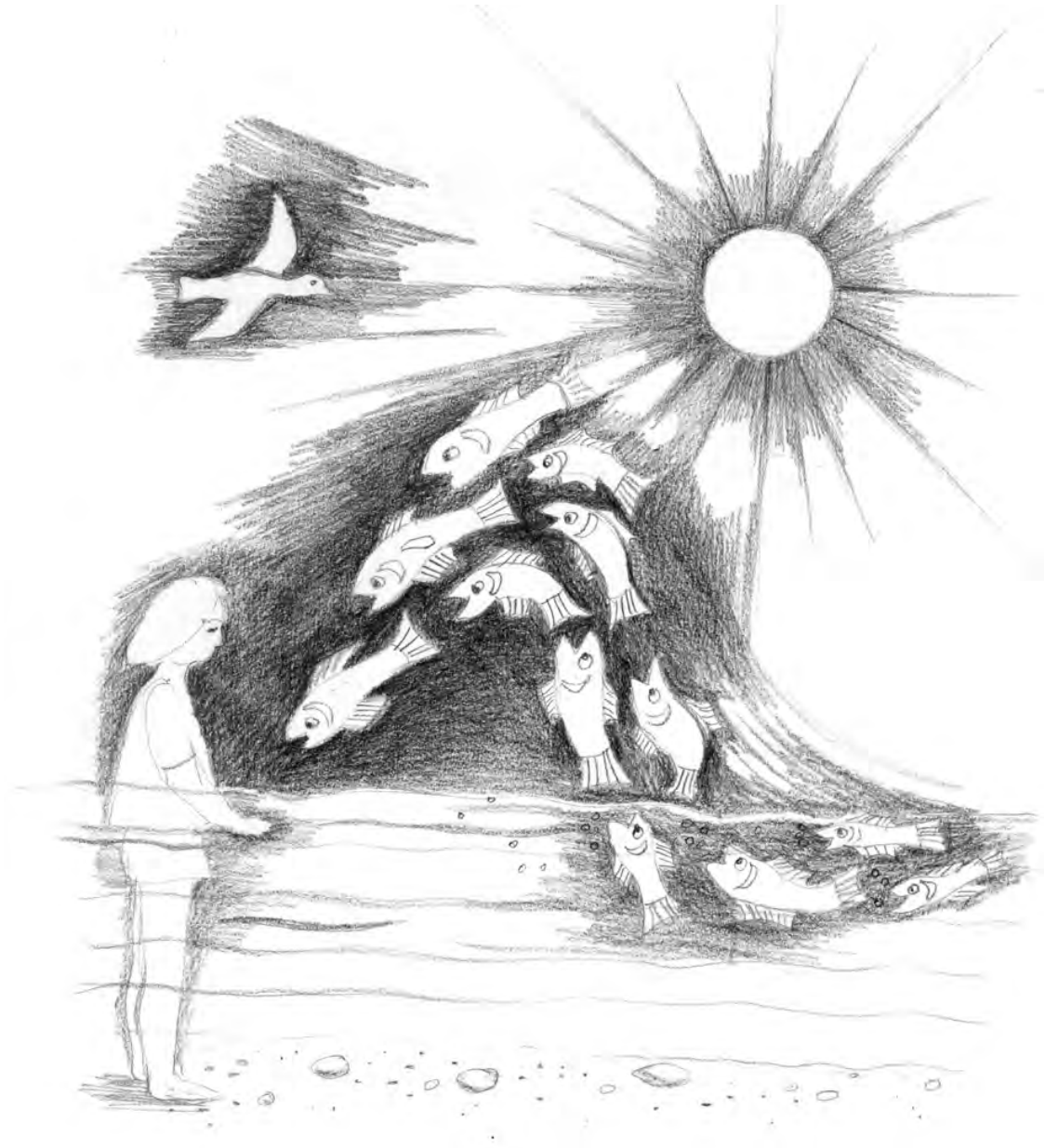
- Pinkywise
- Thumbwise
- topwise
- countertopwise
- in
- out

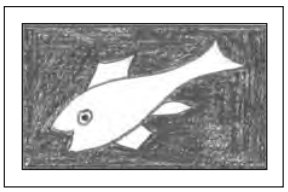
Body-Based Measurements

- personal yard
- personal foot
- personal inch

chapter three

Braiding and Knotting





Braiding is a simple and beautiful method for entwining long pieces together. The braiding or plaiting of hair is just one of its many uses. Head crowns can be braided from vines and stems, belts can be braided from fibers and cloth of all kinds. A braid gathers its parts together in a decorative pattern. This technique can be learned at a very young age. In cozy warm kitchens, children can learn to braid with strips of dough, forming beautiful loaves of fresh-baked bread.

"The Flying Fish" A Story for Braiding

One day, when the ocean was warm and flat, a young boy named Gabriel was wading near the shore, waist deep. He watched as a school of silver fish approached, gliding toward him like a shimmering cloud. Suddenly, he heard a quick series of flapping sounds on the surface of the water, flip, flap, flip, flap. The entire school of fish had in a moment leapt into the air, only to splash back down again. They did this with perfect fluidity.

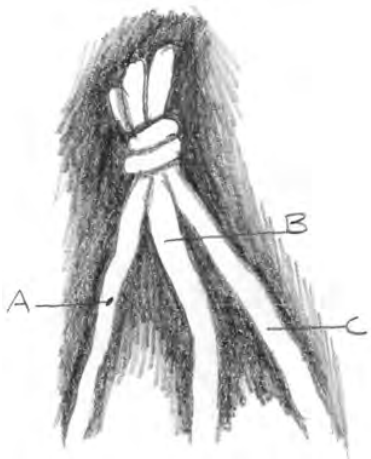
The boy watched in awe as the shimmering school of fish moved away from him. Still evenly spaced and moving in perfect symmetry. Gabriel thought to himself, "I wonder how all those little fishes flew through the air and landed together again, without bumping into each other or getting mixed up." How he loved to watch them go by!

And as he braided the edges of his fishing nets, Gabriel had only to remember the fluid movements of the silvery fish, as they flew up out of the water at brief intervals, only to land back, splash, and swim under water again.

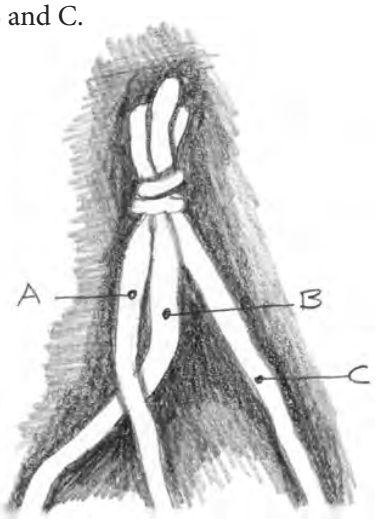
Up out of the water, then splash, back under the water again.

Braiding

Prepare three strings for a practice piece.

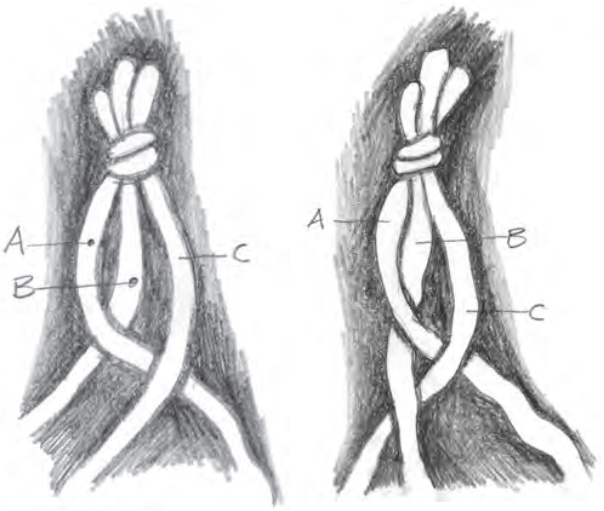


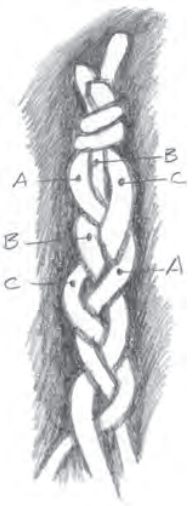
Lift A, moving shuttlewise pass over B, set down between B and C.

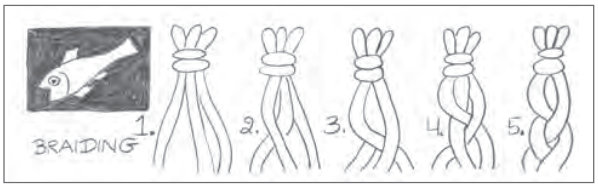


Lift C moving loomwise pass over A, set down between A and B.

Lift C moving shuttlewise move under B. Then repeat these steps for full braid.





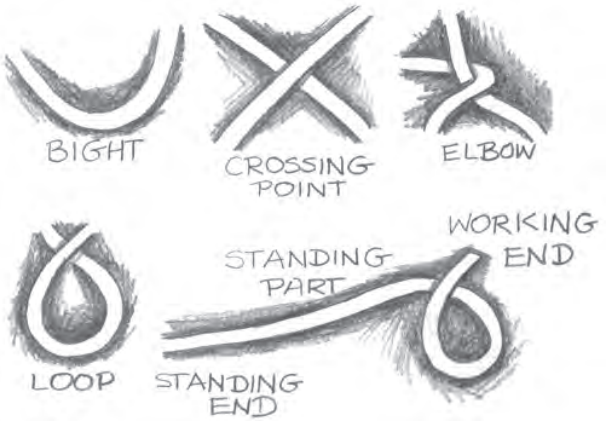


Knots

Here you will be introduced to some basic knots, all of which are used in this book. You will learn the *lark's head knot*, the *overhand knot*, the s*quare knot*, the *bow knot,* and the *magic knot*. The *slipknot* is introduced in chapter four. Sets of instructions for other knots may or may not be shown with the hands making them, depending on whether a view of the hands doing the work seems helpful or distracting. Once each knot is introduced, step by step, all of the knotting instructions are distilled into a simplified illustration sequence, which is used wherever the knot is called for throughout the book. Many of the knots will require adult assistance for young children doing the projects using them. Learning a new kind of knot is like learning a new word. You will suddenly notice the surprising frequency of its use and an opportunity for its application may present itself at any time.

Let's begin with a review of some standard knot terms that may be used anywhere in the book.

Standard Knot Terms



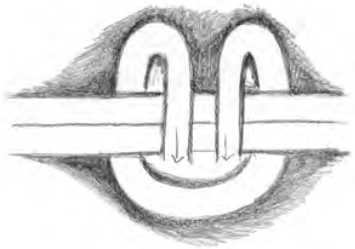
Lark's Head Knot

This knot is commonly used in macramé to attach one strand at right angles to another. It is one of the quickest and easiest knots to learn.

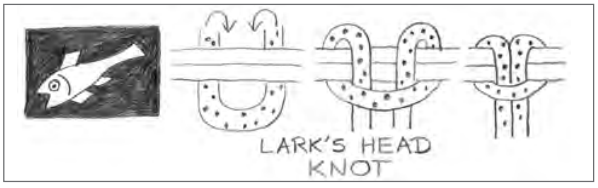
Instructions

In our example pictured below, we are attaching a single strand to a double strand. Double the single strand, forming a bight, and slip the loop of the bight under the doubled strand.

Pinching the ends of the single strand together, wrap them over the doubled strands and thread them through the loop.



Tug until snug.



Overhand Knot

The *overhand knot*, also called a *single knot*, uses a separate standing part, such as the hand or a finger to wrap around, for the creation of the knot. This standing part is then removed.

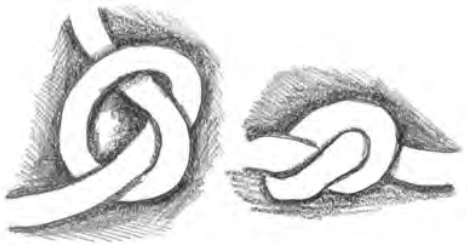
When an overhand knot is placed into two parallel strands, we refer to this as a *two-strand overhand knot*.

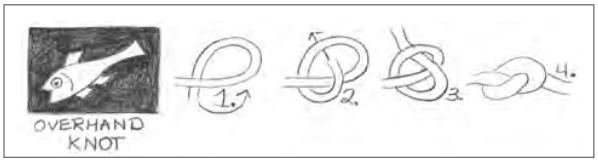
Instructions

One end of the strand is wound around the finger so that it crosses back over itself.

One end is then tucked into and drawn through the loop.

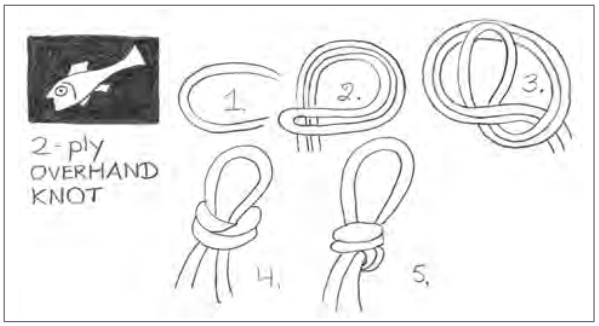
Tug until snug.





Two-Strand Overhand Knot

This knot is a simple and strong way to join two strands.



Square Knot

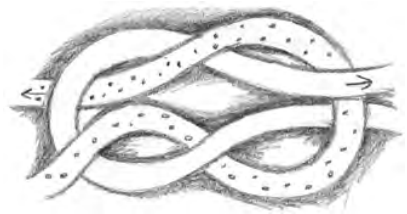
A *square knot*, also called a *reef knot*, is one way to tie two yarn-ends together. It is also sometimes referred to as a *full knot,* as it is comprised of two *half knots*; a half-knot being the first step when you begin to tie your shoelaces in a bow knot.

It doesn't matter which end comes out on top when you make the first half-knot, but when you tie the second half-knot on top, make sure the strands on the left emerge either both going over or both go under the loop, so that they lie neatly alongside each other. The same goes for the strands on the right.

To practice you will need two strands. It helps is they are different colors. We will call the strand which starts on your shuttle side, strand A which is dotted and the strand that starts on the Loom side and is plain, strand B.

Instructions

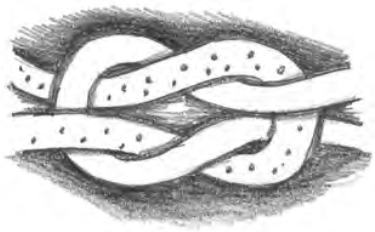
Make a half-knot by wrapping strand A over, under and back up from strand B.

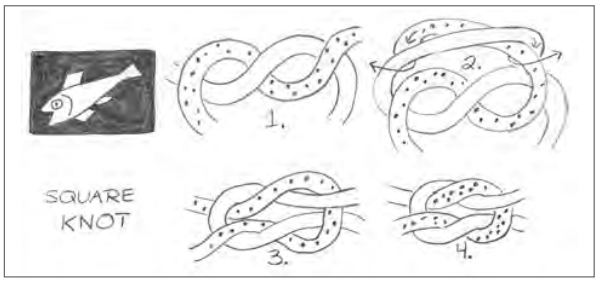


Make a crossing of the two strands A and B and wrap them under each other in such a way that when one end goes to the left and the other to the right, the strands on the right pass either both over or both under the loop. The same for the leftmost strands. A little ditty to keep it going in the right direction is: "Right over left and under; left over right and under."

Strand A and strand B are tugged until the square knot is snug.

Practice the square knot a few times, and you will soon get the hang of it.





Bow Knot

Also referred to as the *rabbit-ears knot*, this knot offers a commonly used method for tying shoelaces. It starts out with a half knot just as does the square knot and any number of other knots.

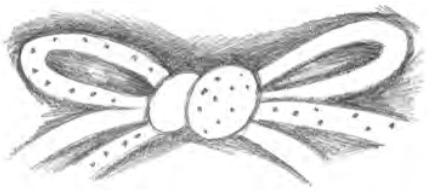
Instructions

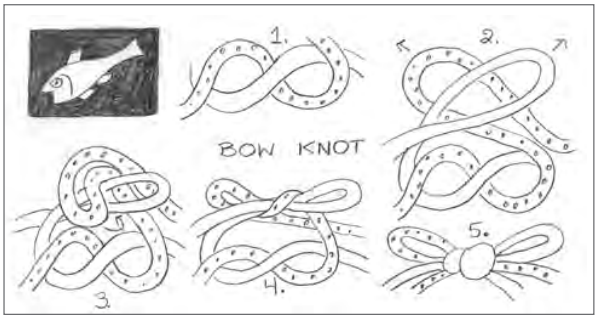
Make a half -knot as with the square knot.

Strands A and B are now folded over to form loops.

Bring loop A forward over loop B, down and back out through the open space between the two loops.

Tug both loops until the knot is snug.





Magic Knot

This knot is known as the magic knot because it simply cannot be pulled out. This is the knot I like to use for thinner yarns or the stiffer and more slippery yarns of hemp and linen and silk.

You may have had the experience of wearing Chinese finger cuffs on your fingers and found that the harder you pull, the tighter they get. This knot works by the same principle. Because the tensions are moving in opposite directions, tugging at the knot only serves to strengthen it, rather than to loosen it. For this knot to work, it must be done exactly right. It is a tricky knot to learn but once you have it down it is ever so useful. Because of the level of complexity and the sense of direction required, I would not ask young children to struggle with this knot, but rather do it for them.

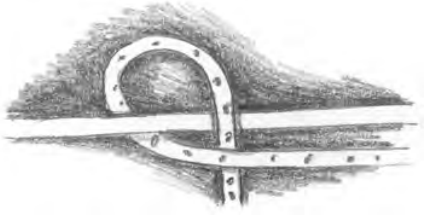
The magic knot can be used to do yarn-changes where a felt splice is either not possible or unwanted. The knot is very secure and can hardly be seen. It works well for *alternating plain-and-chain* (chapter 6) because, unlike other knots, it is smooth enough to chain-knit through.

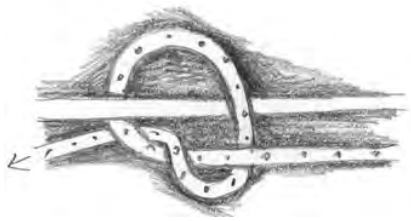
Instructions

To attach a new thread of yarn onto your working yarn, follow these steps:

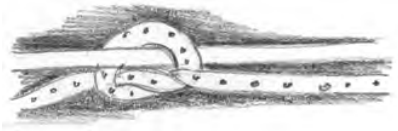
Find a flat surface to work on. Leave 8 inches of working yarn—strand A. Place new strand B parallel alongside strand A.

Thread strand B under strand A, curve over to the right over strand A and under itself.



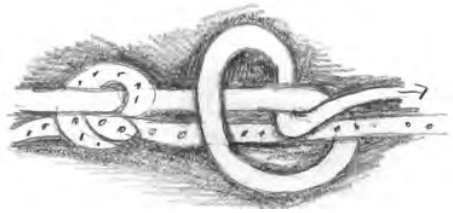


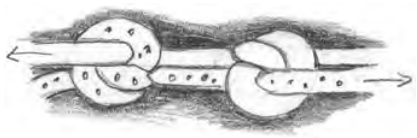
Thread strand B to the left over and under the same strand and pull to the left. Notice that strand B is still on the same side as originally placed.



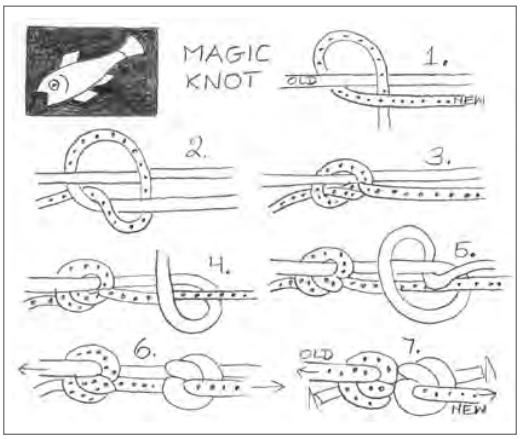
Pull semi snug.

Repeat this process with strand A, only this time the knot will be the opposite of the first knot.





The two knots should be next to each other. Tug on the old strand A and the new strand B simultaneously and the two knots will draw together and snug-up nicely.



Test out your knot by tugging firmly on the long strands on either side of the new knot. If the knot is secure, you have done everything properly and may cut the two dangling ends right up close to your magic knot.

Slipknot

The *slipknot* will be explained in the following chapter and lead directly to finger knitting.