Beginner's Guide to Minimal Equipment Tablet Weaving

Taught by: Taliesin

Ok, so you saw this *really* awesome trim and now you want to, no HAVE to, learn how to recreate it. But where in the hell do you start? Do you start with the awesome laser etched looms on Etsy? Well, before you go dropping $90-$500 on a new loom, why don't we try tablet weaving and make sure you like it? There are a few methods of minimal equipment looms you can do!

I'll cover two looms in this handout as well as books that are great resources, websites with patterns (even less expensive than books!), and pattern generating programs for your computer.

Part One: Equipment

Come on Taliesin! I want to get started like yesterday! Just tell me what I need to get started.

Well then… ok I will. To get started you need string (duh, I know), cards (more on that in a moment), a belt, a shuttle, and…. A doorknob. Seriously this is the cheapest, easiest way to start weaving. Especially if you wanted to start yesterday because you are that excited.
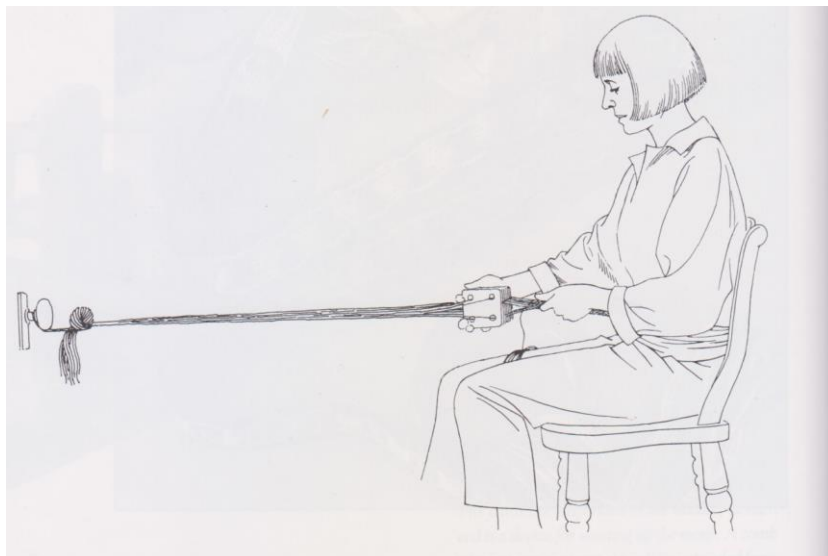

Figure 1 From Card Weaving Page 32

So, how do you get from the list of equipment to that finished product and to your first finished bit of trim?

The first thing you need to do is determine the length of your finished trim. "But Taliesin," you say, "I haven't even gotten started! How am I supposed to know how long the finished product will be?"

Well, with this technique you will be limited by a couple of factors: The distance you can get from the doorknob, and the amount of time you are willing to spend weaving. Don't ask me how I know, but if you are using the belt method and you decide to eat, pee, or get more beverage the string will discover String Theory and no matter how careful you are it will be become a HUGE mess.

"But then," you ask, you nosey person you, "why would I bother with this technique to begin with?!" Well, I'll tell you. It is the best way to commit to small project, and decide if you *really* want to invest in a loom. Just because the loom can make it easier doesn't mean it will. Among other reasons, set up is the biggest pain in the butt no matter what method you use for large projects. So if you get halfway through an eight card warp and decide you hate it, well then you are just out the cost of string, and maybe cards. But back to the math….

Part Two: Math!

Before you freak out about hating math and numbers know that its important once you decide to try a belt or a piece of trim that you need to have a certain amount of. The math isn't that hard, its just some simple algebra I promise it won't jump out with a rattan and beat you over the head or anything, so lets take a look at it.

$$WL = 1.2PL+4$$

Where WL is your Warp Length equal to your Project Length times 20% plus 4 inches.

We add so much to the project length (4 inches plus 20% of the total length) because card weaving is a way of twisting threads around each other to create a pattern, and as such it uses more thread than we expect.

For example, let's say we want a finished product of 75 inches. Then the equation would look like this: WL= 1.2*75+4 which equals our total Warp Length as 94 inches.

See? That wasn't even painful! You didn't even stick yourself with a needle! Now, how do we get the damned strings on the cards?

Part Three: Warping the Cards

In my opinion the best pattern to start with is a simple greek key. It involves merely turning the cards forward. That's it. So below is the pattern from Mimbles.com:
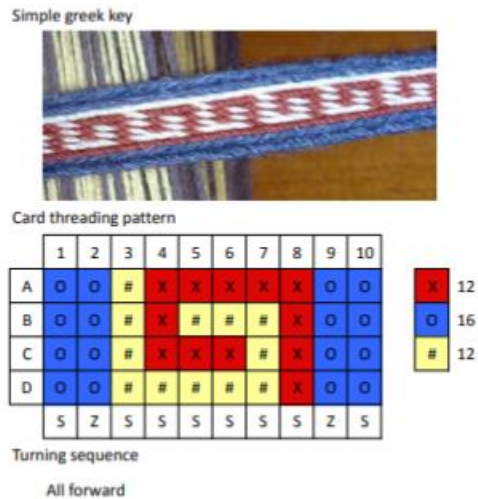
So, how do you read this? Well, we start with the picture which tells us what the pattern will look like, then take a look at the graph, followed by the turning sequence. The way you read a tablet weaving pattern is from the bottom up and left to right. It seems a bit counter intuitive, but when you are weaving the pattern will appear from the bottom up (as long as your cards are warped correctly). You'll notice at the bottom of the pattern are Z's and S's. This denotes the warping of the cards which is the huge part of this portion. This will dictate which way the threads twists against each other.
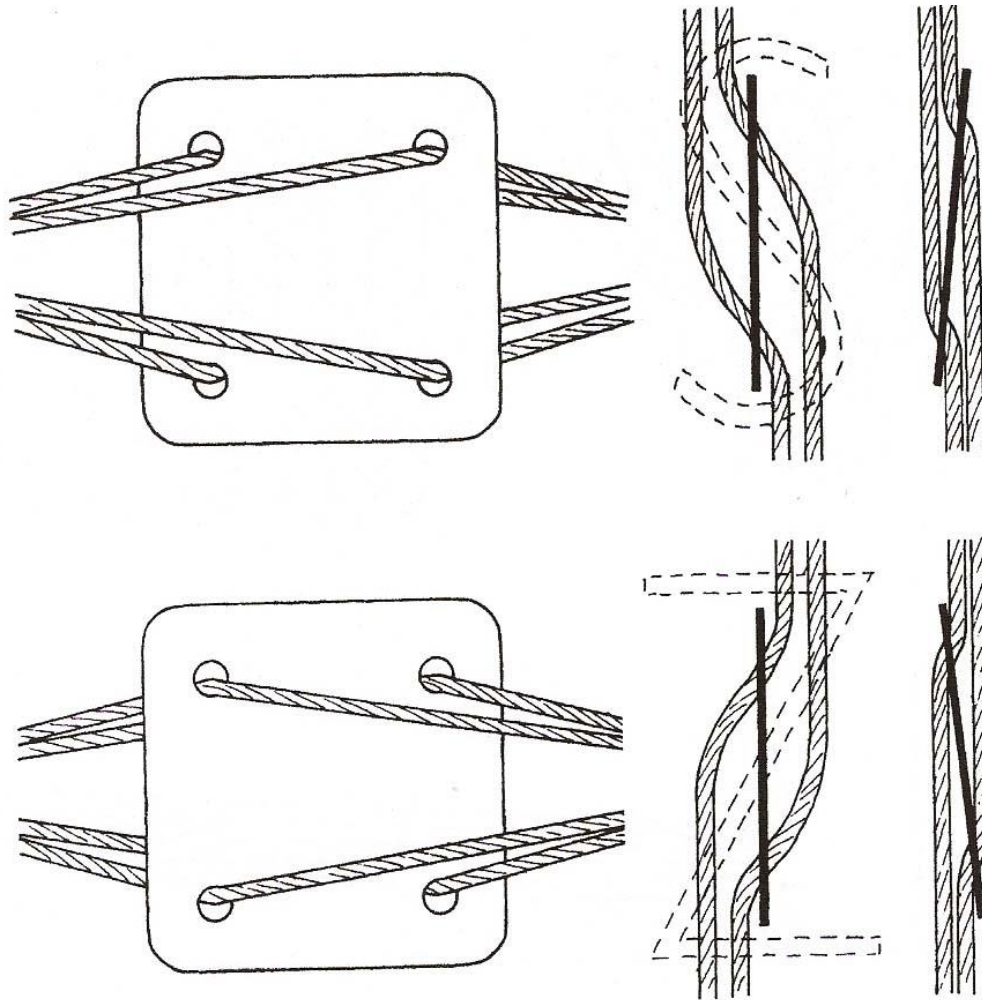
Figure 2 Techniques of Tablet Weaving page 54

I left the previous page blank except for the graphic because I find it useful to keep a copy above the area I typically weave so that I can see the warp positions while I am warping my cards.

You will find that most patterns like the one above have two extra cards on the sides one having S and one having Z threading. This causes a nice braid like effect on the edge of the trim and like garter stitch on the sides of stockinette knitting the cards keep the finished project from curling.

So starting with Card 1 and either hole A or D (I prefer A, but that's me) you would warp all the way around the card and then do the next card until you have them all warped. Then you….

Part Four: Attaching to your Loom

Now you have all of your cards loaded and set carefully aside so they don't discover String Theory, so what do you do? The first thing is to determine a way to anchor it down. You can do this to a doorknob (in Fig 1), or what I did was I used a C-Clamp attached to my desk and then rolled my chair back as far as I could.

You can either tie the knotted yarn directly to the doorknob or use a rubber band, or extra piece of thread. Then you need to tie the ends together on the other side of the shed and put secure it with a piece of string to your belt. Think of how a Turkish knot is used to hold HE notebook in her belt, this is very similar. Then you can….

Part Five: Weave!

Now is the time to follow the turning sequence! Yay, its time to actually weave something! In our example above the only turning sequence is forward so you'll grab ALL of your cards and make a one quarter turn toward yourself. Then beat the shed with your shuttle (could be as simple as a piece of cardboard or as elaborate as a piece of burl), and pass your weft through the space between the upper threads and lower threads. Rinse and repeat! That's it! The set up always takes ten times longer than the actual process, just like in sewing.

Once you are finished you can either cut off enough extra thread for tassels, or you can cut up to the end of the pattern. If you do the first option I would knot the ends so that it does not come undone. If you chose the second I recommend using fray stop to glue the ends down so that it doesn't come undone.

Part Six: The Other Loom Method

But wait Taliesin! You said you had two methods of minimal equipment looms! That is true I did. The second one is super simple as well, but it allows you not only not to be tied to your project (literally), you can also warp more length.

You'll need: 4 C Clamps, 4 Pieces of Wood, a table, strings, and a shuttle.

You'll take your precut and threaded cards and lay it across the table. Then you will place one piece of wood at each end and two pieces on the center of the table leaving at least 6 inches in between the pieces of wood in the center of your table (this is our work space). Then you'll want to clamp the piece of wood at the edge of the table closest to you over the warp and stretch the remaining warp over the middle two pieces. Place it under the last piece of wood and start clamping it down as well. While tightening your clamps you will need to pull on the warp in order to tension your warp. Once the cards are standing vertically you'll have enough tension to start weaving. As you run out of space to work you just loosen the end pieces of wood and advance the loom as needed.

Epilogue: Goodies!

Beware for here lie monsters! And by monsters I mean of course Monstrous time sinks. I have included books, pattern library websites, and two pattern programs where you can create your own patterns.

Books:

1. *Card Weaving* by Candace Crockett – This book is GREAT for beginners. The only problem is that after your first few projects you'll really outgrow it. It only deals with very simple patterns like the one I included above. Having said that, I love keeping it around as a reference or teaching guide.

2.   *Applesies and Fox Noses* by Maikki Karisto and Mervi Pasanen – This book is great and walks you through from beginning weaving through to advanced. It's not the easiest book to find, I believe it's online available online, but if you locate it its worth a place in your library.

3.   *The Techniques of Tablet Weaving* by Peter Collingwood – This book is AMAZING and a hell of a rabbit hole. It goes through everything that happens when you are weaving and different very adavanced patterns and pattern making.

4.   *Please Weave a Message* by Linda Hendrickson – This book deals with weaving messages into your weaving and offers many different fonts to work with. Not necessarily for beginners, but I really love this book.

Websites

1.   Woolery.com – A great resource for thread, cards, and other weaving supplies.

2.   Webs.com – Another yarn store, this is where I got *Please Weave a Message*.

3.   http://mimbles.com/tablet-weaving/pattern-library/ - A pattern Library

4.   http://www.silkewerk.com/tabletweaving/diagonal.html - basics of tablet weaving

5.   http://www.theloomybin.com/cw/libindex.html - A pattern Library

6.   http://www.steinmaus.de/Mittelalter/weben/muster/schnurbindung/index_e.html - A Pattern Library

7.   http://www.stringpage.com/tw/twtheory.html - An in depth delve into the theory of Tablet Weaving

Programs:

1.   http://www.theloomybin.com/cw/index.html - this is one of two that I use for making patterns.

2.   http://www.guntram.co.za/tabletweaving/gtt.htm - This is my preferred program, it is important to remember however that he has the S and Z backward in the program, so when warping you have to do the opposite.