

Part 6 Basic weaving, edge control and having fun with texture - Videos 27, 29 & 30

Balanced weave, warp faced and weft faced weave

Balanced weave is most often used for things that need drape or softness, such as scarves, throws and clothing. It is achieved by having a warp and weft of (more or less) equal thickness. A heddle that is suited to the yarn is also necessary. As a guide, Aran yarn needs a 5 dent heddle, double knitting a 7.5 dent heddle and 4 ply a 10 dent heddle to achieve this.

You can work it out for yourself but the techniques to do it are a bit hit and miss. The guide above will do the job. These days most yarns tell you the thickness anyway.

Weft faced weave means you can only see the weft threads, i.e. the ones that you weave from side to side (weft to wight, remember?). It is great for things like bags, woven tapestry and rugs but not so handy for scarves or other clothing, as it would be rather stiff! It is achieved by beating down the weft firmly and by having a wider warp spacing or finer warp.

Warp faced weave is achieved by doing the opposite of weft faced. The warp is very close together and the weft is pulled through firmly, drawing the warp threads even closer until only the warp is visible. Belts and straps are often made this way. It can easily be done on most looms, including a rigid heddle loom and it is not necessary to buy a specialised belt or 'inkle' loom in order to do this kind of weaving.

On this course we will talk mainly about balanced weave. Beginners often beat the weaving down too firmly and practising balanced weave is useful, as well as being great for making a scarf – a great beginner project. Achieving weft faced weave is therefore not likely to be a problem and warp faced warp is only used occasionally by most weavers.

How to wind a shuttle

Yarns are wound onto a shuttle before weaving when using this kind of loom. Stick shuttles are ideal for a rigid heddle loom and do not require any additional winding equipment. The shuttle does not need to be as wide as the weaving, just wide enough that you can push it through from one side and pull it out of the other. If doing a wider piece of weaving this is important, as using a smaller shuttle puts less strain on the shoulders.

To wind the shuttle, first tie the yarn onto one side of the shaped shuttle end, using a single knot only. This is enough to prevent the end from coming undone and getting in the way as you weave. Put the ball/cone of yarn on the floor. Wind the yarn around the shuttle, ideally in a figure of eight around one side of the shuttle.

You can also wind yarn onto the second side of the shuttle if desired for larger projects but for this first sample just wind on one side. Winding onto the sides of the shuttle prevents the shuttle from getting too wide and rubbing the warp as you weave.

Avoid winding too much yarn on and if you cannot work out how to wind in figure of eight fashion on the sides of the shuttle, simply wind onto the shuttle around and around in the most obvious way. Cut the yarn from the ball or cone once you have wound enough.

Starting the weaving

If you are using a folding loom, check that the small elbows behind the heddle are engaged in their slots before you start to weave. This will be explained fully in the instructions that came with the loom and is shown in the video. Non-folding looms do not have these.

Weaving position on a rigid heddle loom

Get into the correct position to begin weaving. If you are weaving against a table, this means pushing your chair back from the table and positioning the loom so that the large notches at the back of the loom are resting on the table. The front of the loom should rest on your knee, tucked in against your tummy. If it feels too low at the front, which can happen if you are small and slim, put a cushion on your knee and under the front of the loom.

The heddle will have been in the resting position whilst you were warping. (In this position it is neither up nor down but in the middle). Now put the heddle in the 'up' or highest position. Unwind a length of yarn from the shuttle that is about twice the width of the weaving.

The shuttle goes through the weaving so that the yarn tail follows on behind. Leave the tail sticking out about 4 inches/10cm at the side of the weaving - we will go back and deal with it once the first shot/row is complete. Tail ends of yarn are rarely left at the side in this kind of weaving, so this is just a temporary measure.

Gently push the weaving down into place with the heddle. Although this is called 'beating' the weft, in this kind of weaving you really do not want to beat it at all, so do be gentle with it. Try to do 'balanced weave' which means that the warp and weft threads are equally visible. This kind of weaving gives drape and is ideal for scarves and other garments. Doing balanced weave is good practise, as nearly everyone beats the weaving down too hard when they are learning. More about this soon.



Heddles in up and down positions.

How to deal with the tail

Change the heddle to the down position and weave the tail through, as if it was the next row. beat it down as well. Aim to get the edge neat, so that the weft is just touching the warp at the side but not tight. Weave the second shot with the shuttle as before, without changing the position of the heddle again. The tail and the second shot are therefore woven into the same shed. Although it may look untidy at this stage, once the subsequent rows lock this one into place, it will be barely visible.

In weaving, knots are a bad idea. They can stop the yarns from beating down properly and spoil the look of the weaving. The old and new ends are just overlapped from now on, whenever you change to a new yarn and this will be explained in more detail later. It is essentially the same as on the frame loom.



Tucking the tail into the next row gives a neater finish.

How to get the edges straight

Bubbling the weft is the secret to getting the edges straight. When you pass the weft through the weaving using the shuttle, it is going straight through. But as soon as it is beaten down, it has to go over and under the warp threads. This means it needs to be a bit longer, or the sides will pull in once it is beaten down. Bubbling the weft solves this problem because it means the weft is a little bit longer.

1. Take the weft through the weaving and hold it on the edge, where it touches the first warp thread.
2. Take the weft up at a 45 degree angle, then down again to make a curve.
3. On a wider piece of weaving, several bubbles can be made. Start by making one large bubble, then make it into several smaller ones by using your fingers or the shuttle to make indentations. Do this lightly, or it will make indentations in the actual weaving.
4. Make sure you do not actually pull the weft down against the weaving or you will make the weaving itself curve.



Bubbling the weft

If you have a little loop of weft sticking out at the side once you have beaten down the weaving, adjust it in the closed shed. To do this, change the heddle position so that it is ready for the next shot of weaving. Then pull on the weft thread from the end attached to the shuttle until the loop is gone. The edges may still be uneven for a while when you start weaving and practise is the best solution.

How to join in a new yarn



Joining new yarn in weaving is so simple that people often make it more complicated, leading to a messy look and problems with tension. Trust that the subsequent rows will lock the ends into place!

Finish the old yarn somewhere in the middle of the weaving, rather than at the edge.

Poke any remaining tail through to the back. If the weaving has a right and wrong side, this can just be snipped off later, leaving a 1 cm tail.

Ends are not considered a fault in weaving that has a right and wrong side. If the weaving will be seen from both sides, leave a longer tail which can be sewn in afterwards.

Wind the new yarn onto the shuttle as before, then put the shuttle through the weaving, from the same side and in the same shed, i.e. without changing the heddle position first.

The shuttle goes through so that you are pulling the tail behind as before. Continue pulling until the tail overlaps the old yarn by 0.5-1inch/1-2cm.

A long piece of weaving (part of a community group project) showing many colour changes and the use of fleece locks and fabric strips in the weft for texture.

Change shed and continue weaving. The tail will disappear and the ends will be locked into place as you weave. The only exception to this is when working with cotton or other non-flexible yarns, which may need a bit of help to disappear into the weaving. At present stick to woollen yarns as these are far better for learning and will produce nicer results.

Just keep weaving

The trick to getting better edges and confidence with the weaving is to keep doing it. So continue weaving for an hour now if you can. The edges will improve and the weaving itself become more even. Do not worry if the weaving begins to look different as you progress, that is why you are doing a practise piece.

Use several colours, winding no more than ten times around the shuttle with each one. Do only a few shots of each colour and practise changing yarns in the weaving. Just work with one shuttle for now. Working with two shuttles and doing alternate rows is something we will look at later on.

Then warp up again then weave some more. It really helps if you can warp up the loom again soon after doing it for the first time. Instead of being impatient to start weaving, treat the warping as part of the process and think of the project as half done once the loom is warped.

The second warp should also be a shortish one. After that try a longer one if you want to but stick to similar yarns to those we have been using so far. Those first two weaving samples are great as wall hangings or to use as a mat.

What to do when you run out of space to weave

When there is not much space left for the shuttle to go through, it is time to wind the warp towards the front of the loom. This is just the same as you did when winding the warp onto the loom earlier only you go in the opposite direction i.e. winding from the back of the loom to the front this time.

Undo the ratchet at the rear of the loom, whilst also holding onto the knob next to the ratchet. If you do not do this, all the warp will unroll on its own. Then with your other hand, wind the warp on at the front without undoing the front ratchet. On most looms this means your left hand reaches across to hold the back knob and your right hand winds on at the front.

Adding some texture

In the second sample, try adding some texture. This can be locks of fleece, wool or silk tops produced for spinners, short lengths of thicker or textured yarns or cut up fabric. Locks of curly fleece look especially good and can be bought online from small suppliers.

Try looking on Facebook first as many small suppliers do not have a website. There are a number of Facebook groups for weavers etc., such as our [Create With Fibre Community](#), [Weaving Supplies UK](#) and [Rigid Heddle Looms](#).



Use one 'lock' at a time and lay it into the next shed. Then weave over the top of it.

It works best if the fleece locks do not complete a whole row and they can even be laid into part of one row, pulled through to the front and then woven into a subsequent row.

Woven scarves showing a variety of different textures at play.

Do not worry if it makes the weaving uneven, that can actually look quite good and the weaving will even itself out again over subsequent rows. Try accentuating the unevenness by beating the weaving down more firmly on one side for a different effect. Once you know the basics, it is fun to experiment. A really nice wall hanging can be made simply by using different colours of weft yarn and adding locks of fleece.



Locks of curly, hand-dyed Wensleydale fleece are great for adding to weaving.

Wonky weaving

This can be developed further by weaving part way across a row. Weave to a point about two thirds of the way across. Bring the shuttle out to the front and change shed. Put the shuttle back in and weave back. On the next row, stop one or two warps sooner before weaving back again. Continue in this way and you will create a slope.

Then there are two options, which create a different look.

1. Weave all the way across then carry on as before. Eventually the weaving will even out again, leaving a nice slope for effect.
2. Take a different colour of yarn and do the same from the other side of the weaving to fill in the gap.



Wonky weaving in action on a rigid heddle loom: using Option 1 (left) and Option 2 (right).