

# Happy Endings: *Turning Kumi Braids Into Necklaces and Bracelets*

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When I started to learn the craft of Kumihimo, I produced many thin braids of between 8 and 16 strands, usually about 1/8 of an inch in thickness. I wanted to add end caps and clasps so I could use these braids for my jewelry. Unfortunately, though the books and articles showed photos of kumi braids turned into jewelry, very few techniques for adding findings and clasps were explained in detail.

After some experimentation, I have found several ways of turning braids into jewelry by using findings that can easily be purchased at a craft/hobby store, mail order, or in a local bead shop. Most of these techniques can be performed using a basic pair of pliers and the finding itself but some require more specialized tools and additional wire.

I hope this article gives you, the Kumihimo enthusiast, additional options to consider when you plan to turn your braids into jewelry.

## **Preparation**

Finishing braids for jewelry generally means adhering some sort of metal end with a loop attached so a hook or clasp can be added. To make attaching the metal end easier, you will need to stabilize the ends of the braids.

When I first started out, I used clear nail polish to do this. I put a dot of it on the braid to keep it from raveling and narrow enough to fit through my findings.

When the polish was dry, I cut through this “bead” with an Xacto knife leaving only the nail polish “bead” on the end of the braid. However, I found that this technique didn’t work as well on thicker braids and had a tendency to discolor the ends of some fibers.

Going back through my books, I decided that I should “revisit” the traditional method of wrapping the braids. This is usually done by using the same thread for the wrap as used in the braid, however, if the thread is not thin you will be forced to use an end cap that is much larger than the braid.

If a thinner—or a less slippery—fiber is needed, I use sewing thread. It comes in many, many colors, is readily available and very inexpensive. It also comes in cotton and silk of various weights. I found I could match the color of a braid very closely, just in case the wrap should peak out from under the end cap.

## **To Wrap a Braid**

1. Cut about 6-8 inches of regular sewing thread that matches or coordinates with your braid. *(The thread in the illustration is a heavier buttonhole twist in a contrasting color so you can see how it's done.)*
2. Fold about an inch or so of your thread back against itself forming a small loop.
3. Lay the loop on one end of your braid with the loop toward the longest part of the braid and the ends towards the unbraided portion of the braid.
4. Wrap the thread around the braid as close to the braided, but unfinished end of as possible, keeping it taut so the braided threads are secured.
5. Wrap as many times as needed. *(I usually wrap so that about an eighth of an inch of the braid is covered in one layer of thread.)*
6. Insert the end you have been wrapping with through the loop.
7. Pull the OTHER end of the stabilizing thread so that the loop and the wrapping part of the thread disappear under the wrapping.
8. Cut both ends of the thread as close to wrap as you can without cutting into the wrap. *(I use a dab of clear nail polish on the side of the wrapped area where the ends are pulled under, just to be sure it doesn't come loose.)*



You can leave a bit of fringe hanging or trim the ends as close to the stabilizing wrap as possible without actually cutting into the wrapped thread. Trimming will make it easier to use in most jewelry findings.

### Before You Start Adding Your Findings...

After you stabilize the ends of your braid and decide which findings you are going to use, take a minute to decide if you are going to be adding a pendant to your necklace, or a dangle to your bracelet.

If you are, remember to put slip on any bails you intend to use before finishing the second end of your braid!

## Cord Crimp Ends



The first endings I tried were meant for leather cords. They feature a hole and an open band. To use these, you simply slip the cord (or braid) in the band part and close it with a pair of pliers. This is called “crimping.”

You then add the clasp to the hole using jump rings.

## Fold Over Crimp Ends



The easiest to use of these cord crimp ends are the fold-over kind. The band is pre-bent to look like 3 sides of a square. No special tools are needed. The crimp ends can be closed with any pair of pliers.

To use them:

1. Lay the crimp end on your work surface with the middle flat and the side sticking up.
2. Apply glue to the finding. *(Since these ends don't usually have teeth to grip the braid, I have found glue a necessity to keep the braid from sliding.)*
3. Lay the prepared, trimmed end of your braid on the fold-over cord crimp end with the end of the braid just at the top of the band. *(Do not cover the hole at the end of the band!)*
4. Using flat pliers, fold one side of the band over the braid, securing it as tightly as needed so it doesn't shift.
5. Fold the other side of the band so it covers the first side.
6. Adjust the braid if needed and the crimp as tightly as you can.



Fold-over cord crimp ends work well on flat braids, but require a bit of dexterity to look good on round braids.

## Formed Crimp Ends

Crimp ends also come in a pre-bent form. These need to be closed using special pliers that will drive the edges of the band into the cord to make it very secure.

Crimping pliers have notches on their tips: three on the top, two on the bottom. To use them:

1. Place the crimp end on innermost notch of the bottom tip, bent part down, open part up.

2. Place the braid on top of the crimp end. *(You might want to put a dab of glue between the crimp end and the braid at this point for extra security.)*
3. Close the crimping pliers, making sure each edge of the crimp end is caught by the smaller notches in the upper tip of the pliers. *(The edges of the crimp end should bend down into the braid.)*
4. Open the pliers.
5. Move the crimp end/braid to the outer notch of the pliers, rotating it 90°.
6. Close the pliers. *(This should squeeze the two sides of the crimp end together and form a cylinder.)*



Unfortunately, the cord ends I found that were big enough to secure my braids were too wide for my crimping pliers and they left unattractive marks. I ended up modifying the technique of folding one edge over the braid and then the other—similar to method for the flat crimp ends. With practice and care, you should be able to keep the cord end cylindrical while crimping it tightly enough to keep your braid from slipping.

I started with the cording crimp ends because they are very easy to find in inexpensive base metals. With a little work, you can also find them plated metals or silver, but they seem to be rarely available in copper, vermeil or gold.

### Using Ribbon or Choker Clamps



Also related to cord end caps, are ribbon or choker clamps. These findings have teeth on the bottom and clamp down on the braid. I use them only for wider, flat braids because I have only found them in sizes ranging from 1/4" to 1".

Unfortunately, I have found that finishing flat braids by wrapping makes it harder to use ribbon clamps so I use a sewing machine to stabilize and flatten the ends of the braid.

1. Prevent the flat braid from raveling and stretching by stitching a straight line through the braid as close to the end as you can.
2. Add a narrow band of zigzag stitching. *(If your machine tries to "eat" your braid, place a small piece of light water-soluble stabilizer underneath it.)*



3. Trim the braid as close to the zigzag as you can. *(If you have used a stabilizer, remove it according to the directions...make sure it is dry before you continue on with the procedure.)*

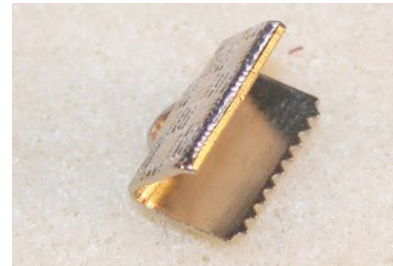
4. Place the ribbon clamp on your work surface

5. Put glue on inside the bottom of clamp facing the braid.

6. Place the braid on the bottom of the ribbon clamp.

7. Put glue on the inside of the top of the clamp.

8. Fold the two halves of the clamp together using flat pliers.



### **Tube Shaped Crimp Ends Intended for Cords**



Round plastic and leather cords have become popular necklaces for pendants these days, and so a number cord ends in the shape of tubes with rings on the ends have become more commonly available.

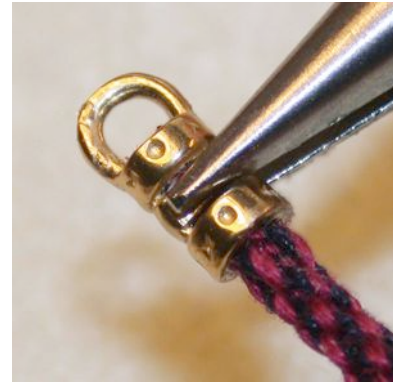
These come in a variety of widths and metals, but the biggest I've found is 3.8mm. You can find these with both a loop end and a hook end, but I usually just buy the loop ends and add whatever clasp looks good to me.

#### **Center Crimp Tubes**

My favorite of these are the center crimp tubes. To use them:

1. Stabilize the ends of the braid by wrapping and trim as close to the wrapping as you can.

2. Select a center crimp tube that has an interior diameter as close to dimension of the outer diameter of the braid as you can find.
3. Push the stabilized end of the braid into the non-loop side of the tube, making sure the end of the braid is even with the top of the tube, but does not block the loop itself. *(I usually put a drop of glue-in the tube before I put the braid in, but this is not essential.)*
4. Once you have the braid placed, use a narrow pair of pliers and flatten the middle of the tube as tightly as you can. *(You will know you have crimped the center tight enough because the braid will not be able to slide, no matter how hard you tug on it.)*



### Coil Wire Tube Ends

Tube ends made from of wire coils with the top round “flipped up” to make a loop are also widely available. These can be attached using a similar method to the center crimp tube ends, but I would suggest you crimp the bottom of the wire instead of the middle.

An even better way to stabilize these coil wire ends is to turn the end of the wire with your pliers so it is embedded into the braid as well as clamping down on it.



### **Flats and Cylinder Endings Needing Glue**



In many Kumihimo books aimed at beginners, the findings pictured for jewelry are glue-in cord ends. These are usually cylindrical or bell-shaped and widely available in base, plated, and fine metals. They have a loop on the end to attach a clasp and are very easy to use.

## Glue-in Cylindrical Cord Ends

In the past couple of years, more decorative cylindrical glue-in cord endings have come on the market in a wider range of metals, finishes and sizes. They are all attached using this process:

1. Stabilize the ends by wrapping them in thread.
2. Trim the fringed end of braid as close to the wrap as you can without cutting it.
3. Squirt some glue-into the finding.
4. Insert the wrapped end of the braid.

When I started out making jewelry, these cord ends were only available in gold, silver and plated base metals. Since I worked in copper a great deal, I had to explore other options for glue-in findings.



## Flat Double-Leaf Bails



Another old standard of jewelry making is the Double-Leaf Bail. They are very easy to use and understand, but need to be used with a good contact cement or epoxy since the glue is what holds the braid (or cord, or pendant) in the finding.

The double-leaf bail usually comes flat and consists of two shapes with a thin linking strip of metal between them. *(In the illustration, the ends of the bail are shaped like leaves, but I've seen them in other shapes and sizes as well.)*

I like these for small, flat braids, although with a little bit of shaping, I think they would also look good on any braid.

To use them:

1. Grip the center part of the bail with a pair of round nose pliers.
2. Bend around the nose of the pliers until the shapes align, leaving some space between. *(This will leave a loop similar to the other cord ends.)*
3. Prepare the braid as usual, trimming it close to the wrap.
4. Coat each inside shape of the bail with glue. *(Just the part which will come into contact with the braid.)*
5. If you are using a contact cement, coat the braid with glue also.



6. Place the braid on the bottom inside of the bail, on the shape, leaving the “bridge” between the shapes clear.
7. Bend the top down so that it is in contact with the braid.
8. Crimp until flat and glue dries.

A similar procedure can be used with the chain end caps sold to add clasps to rope or bead-chain chains which are sometimes sold formed in cylinders like the crimp ends.

I have also stumbled upon another glue-in ending which looks very sophisticated with thin, flat braids. It has a fold-over chain-end style, but includes a fold-over clasp. The benefit of this unit is that the entire unit, including the clasp looks like a strip of metal, leaving the focus on the braid instead of the clasp.



### **Cones and Bead Caps**



Bead caps offer the greatest variety of design options and sizes, but, of course, they do not have a loop to add a clasp. With a little bit of practice (and some wire, of course), you can add a loop to any cone or bead cap and use it to finish your braids.

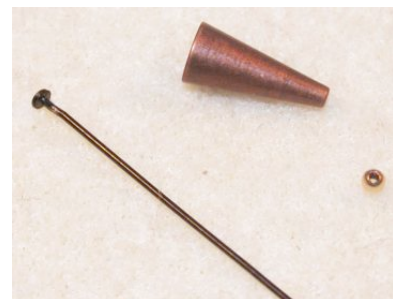
While I recommend cone-shaped bead caps, shallower hemi-spherical bead caps can also be used in the same way.

*I would strongly suggest investing in a nice pair of round-nose pliers if you plan to use any of the techniques from here on.*

### **Creating a Glue-In End Cap using a Headpin**

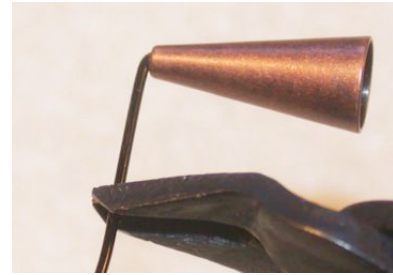
The easiest way to turn the cone or bead cap into a glue-in end cap is by adding a loop using a head pin:

1. Find a matching headpin with a head large enough that it will not pull all the way through the cone or bead cap. *(If you do not have headpin with a flat head large enough, put a small bead on the end.)*
2. Feed the headpin through the bead cap from the large end to the small end. *(The head of the head pin should be “caught” in the top of the bead cap.)*





3. Bend the head pin in a 90 degree angle at the top of the cone or bead cap
4. Estimate the amount of wire you will need to form a loop—usually about a quarter to half an inch.
5. Cut the headpin so that much wire is exposed.
6. Form a loop with your round-nosed pliers.
7. Finish the braid using the same procedure as detailed in the section on glue-in endings.



#### “Wiring In” Your Braid While Creating an End Cap

While using a headpin will enable you to turn any bead cap or cone in which your braid will fit into a glue-in finding, I dislike depending on glue to hold the end cap (or bead cap) onto the end of the braid.

If you are comfortable working with wire, you can “wire in” the braid:

1. Prepare your braid as usual, trimming it close to the wrap.
2. Cut a length of wire with which you are comfortable working (*I usually use about 3-4 inches.*)
3. Form a hook in one end.



4. Use the hook to grab the braid.



5. Crimp the wire hook to keep it embedded in the braid. *(If you are at all uncertain about whether the wire hook will hold the braid, you can add glue to be cone or braid or both before you...)*

6. Pull the braid through cone or bead cap until it stops. *(At this point, you can form the loop in the same way you did with the head pin in the preceding directions, or...)*



7. Bend the wire at the top of the cone or bead cap.



8. Form a loop.

9. Wrap wire around base of the loop two or three times to form a short coil.

10. Cut wire as close to coil as you can.

11. Press wire against coil so it won't snag. (You can use the outer notches of your crimping pliers to curve the end of the coil against the inside wire.)



## Bead Tips/Knot Covers



Another design possibility requiring a little work is to use the knot covers intended for the ends of beaded necklaces. These are sometimes referred to as bead tips, and are available in very small sizes, or larger, more decorative ones, and in a variety of metals. They work best on braids with flattened sides, but can also be used on round braids.

### Mixing Double-Leaf Crimp And “Wiring In” Loop Procedures

1. Prepare your knot cover by snipping off the hook. *(Most of these hooks are placed so that they go in the wrong direction for our purposes.)*
2. File the cut edge of the knot cover so it is smooth and will not cut the threads of your braid.
3. Prepare your braid as usual, trimming close to the wrap.
4. Cut a piece of wire, shape it and hook your braid as detailed in the “wiring in” procedure.
5. Feed the wire through the hole between the knot cover caps.
6. Apply glue on the inside of both caps of the knot cover.
7. Place the braid on the bottom knot cover cap so that the top of the braid does not “peek out” of the knot cover and the wire and end of the braid are completely covered by the knot cover cap.
8. Fold the top knot cover cap down over the braid.
9. Crimp the whole unit together and hold until the glue holds.



10. Wait until the glue cures.

11. Form and finish the loose end of the wire as instructed in the “wiring in” procedure.



## Wire Work



Lastly, if you can find no other way to end your kumi braids that fit their character and size, you can create your own ends with wire. The big benefit of this is that you can use any color wire, including copper, silver, gold or even color-coated or anodized wires and you can leave the ends fringed, if you desire.

I use two basic types of wire work endings: the “fold and wrap” method, and a coiled cylinder cord end method.

If you have not made wrapped findings before, I suggest you read the section entirely first, and then practice with either leather cord or rattail and 22g or 24g copper wire to get an understanding of the procedure. You probably won't want to use a good braid or fine metal wire until you are confident you can produce a finished effort worthy of your braid!

### “Fold And Wrap”

I generally use this method on thin, flatter braids when I want to use a big clasp, or large jumprings.

1. Finish the braid as usual. (*You may leave a short, fringed end or cut the end even with the thread wrap using this technique, as desired.*)
2. Choose a clasp (or a jump ring) that the braid will be able to fit through.
3. Cut a piece of wire about 6-8 inches long.
4. Fold the wire in half and set it aside.



5. Open the clasp. *(You will be working with one half of the clasp.)*

6. Insert the braid into the “chain-side” of the clasp. *(The end where the chain would ordinarily be attached.)*

7. Fold the braid over itself about ½ inch. *(You can fold it more if you are planning on using a fringe at the end of the braid.)*

8. Place the bent wire about midway down the doubled portion of the braid. *(This will be about the middle of the wrap when you’re done.)*

9. Wrap the wire around the doubled section of the braid.

10. Take hold of the end of the wire closest to the clasp piece. Wrap wire around the two layers several times, being careful to keep the wire parallel to itself and tight enough that the braid doesn’t slip.

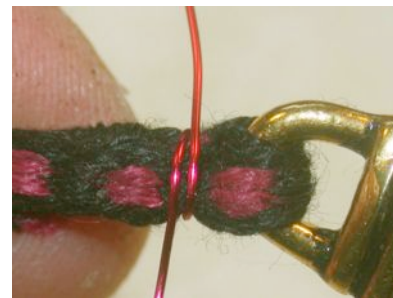
11. Slip the wire between the two layers of braid.

12. Clip the wire as close to the braid as you can.

13. Take hold of the remaining end of the wire.

14. Wrap the wire around the two layers of the braid until you have secured them, and made a coil as long as you wish.

15. When you have completely covered the double layer of braid (or covered enough of it to leave the length of tassel you want), cut the wire close to the coil you have made.



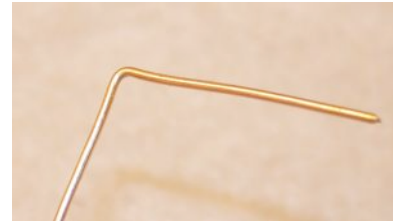
16. Slip the end of the wire between the layers or turn it into the braid and crimp it as described in the section on coil crimp cord ends.

### Create Your Own Wire Coil Cord Ends



As you have probably noticed, the “fold and wrap” method requires clasps or jump rings that your braids can fit through. On the other hand, creating your own coiled cord ends allows you to use whatever clasps you want.

1. Finish your braid as usual.
2. Cut a 6” piece of wire.
3. Make a 90° bend about an inch from one end.
4. Make a loop after the bend. *(The right angle bend will enable the loop to sit on top in the middle of the wire, rather than bend towards the side.)*
5. Place the wrapped end of the braid through the loop.
6. Hold the loop and the braid with a pair of pliers.
7. Wrap the long end of wire around the braid and the short end of the wire three or four times.



8. Cut the shorter end of wire so that it is the same length as the coil you have just made. (*DO NOT cut the braid or the longer end of the wire!*)



9. Wrap the longer end of the wire around the braid several more times.

10. Cut the long end of the wire flush with your braid.



11. Turn and crimp the end of the wire so that it embeds itself into the braid.

12. Trim the part of the braid that is over the wire wrapped coil. (*DO NOT cut the wire loop!*)



### ***After Finishing Your Braid...***

Once you have added findings to both ends of your braid, your choices for clasps are almost greater than for endings. They can be used as a focal point for your jewelry piece, or simply as a way to get it off or on.

Of course, I have not covered every method you can use to turn add closures to your braids, but I hope I have at least given you some new options to try.

Any of the techniques in this article can be adapted to be used with most jewelry findings. With so many findings and clasps available through craft stores, bead shops, mail order and over the Internet, there's no need to limit yourself in your designs.