



# How To Use Your Tape Loom



For the purposes of these instructions, I'm going to assume that you do not have a warping board or warping pegs and don't know how to warp a loom or weave. That equipment is nice to have but is not necessary for a narrow warp, so I'll show you how to set your loom up without it.

If you are already an experienced weaver, you likely have a warping board or warping pegs and can use your usual method to set up the warp.

Yarn: Use a yarn that slides easily in the holes and slots. I'm using 8/2 cotton here. If you are making tape for 18th century clothing, you'll probably want to use 16/2 linen, but 8/2 or 10/2 cotton is inexpensive and more forgiving for learning to weave. Cottolin yarn is also good.

Setup: Put the loom on a table where you can run the yarn from the front of the room to a tie-off point (chair, doorknob, etc) about 10-12 feet in front of the loom.

You will also need: scissors, a blunt tapestry or yarn needle for threading the yarn through the heddle, and a knitting needle or dowel rod.

Parts:

Warp beam: the round cylinder in the back around which the warp is wrapped

Ratchet: the gear at the side of the warp beam

Pawl: acts as a brake to keep the ratchet from rotating

Heddle: has the slots and holes (or eyes) that determine which threads move up and down





Tape loom tied to table leg  
(dog optional)

**Setting Up The Loom for Warping:**

Tie your loom to a table leg to keep it from sliding across the table as you set up the warp. Many old tape looms have a hole, nail, peg, or other method of securing the back of the loom.

On the front of the heddle, find the middle hole and mark it. This will help you center your warp.

PLEASE NOTE: If your loom has two rows of holes, you will only be using the lower row of holes. The top row for weaving patterned bands using floats, which you may choose to explore later.

**Choosing Your Pattern:**

Several books on tape weaving are listed at the end. Here is a simple checkerboard pattern.

Checkerboard									
w	w	w	w	w	b	b	b	b	w
w	b	b	b	b	w	w	w	w	w

w = white                      20 threads  
b = blue

The total number of warp threads this loom will accommodate is 35.  
Most surviving 18th c. tapes were 30 threads wide or less.

Divide the total number of threads in the warp pattern in half; count from the center hole to the left by that number of spaces. For the pattern below,  $20 / 2 = 10$ , so count left by 10 total spaces (holes and slots each count as a space). Because there are 35 spaces in this loom's heddle, an even-numbered pattern will be one space off-center, which is ok.

Using a tapestry needle, thread the first thread in the draft above from the front of the heddle to the back. Tie the thread behind the heddle to a dowel rod or knitting needle.

In front of the loom, wind the thread around a peg, chair, doorknob, or other convenient point about 10 - 12 feet in front of the loom.

Read the draft from left to right and thread one thread from the top row, then the next thread from the bottom row.

Don't worry about warp tension at this point, we'll adjust that when we wind the warp onto the loom.



### Box Looms: Winding On The Warp:



Once your warp is measured out, untie the ends behind from the heddle from the dowel or knitting needle. Divide into four bundles. Tie an overhand knot in the end of each bundle, then tie each bundle to one of the leader strings on the warp beam.



The leader strings are made of crochet cotton. Any sturdy yarn will do.

**(NOTE:** Since I wrote this I've tried using just one leader string, and it also works just fine.)

The paper mentioned here is optional. Weavers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century seem not to have used it – they just wound the warp on as evenly as possible. One expert I spoke with says that she uses pieces of rye straw to separate the layers of warp if something is needed.

Wind the warp on for a couple of turns, with the warp going over the warp beam.

Next, take paper cut to the just under the width of the warp beam (4-3/4", here) and insert it under the leader strings so that the strings catch the leading edge of the paper. Continue to wind the warp on, inserting

new pieces of paper once the old one is covered. Comb the warp out with your fingers in front of the heddle (on the other side from the warp beam) as needed. From time to time, pull the warp away from the warp beam (again, on the other side of the heddle from the warp beam) so that the warp is wound on snugly.



You can use typing paper, craft paper, wallpaper, or anything stiff enough to keep the layers of warp separated. If the top layers of the warp sink into the lower layers, you can get tension problems as you weave.

When all but the last 15" or so of the warp is wound on, tie an overhand knot in the end.

Wind yarn onto the shuttle (included). Use a color that matches the edge color of the warp, unless you want to have a small dot of the weft color peeking out at the edges.

If your loom is at the back of a wide table, as mine is in the above pictures, move it to the front edge of the table. You can tie a longer tie to the short ones included with the loom, move to a narrower table, or tie the back of the loom to a stationary object behind the loom. This is to keep the loom from moving when you put tension on the warp while you're weaving.

### **Paddle Looms: Chain The Warp**

If you are using the paddle loom, you can warp it the same way, clamping the heddle upright to the back of a chair or other similar object.



Make a loose crochet-style chain of the warp starting at the end furthest from the loom. Tie the last loop of the chain to the warp with a ribbon or string; you will untie this to release more warp as you weave. Tie the chained warp to a chair, doorknob or other stationary object at about the height of the paddle (i.e. not too high or low). Tie the other end to your waist using a spare piece of tape or string.





You are now ready to start weaving!

## The Shuttle:



The enclosed shuttle has two special features.

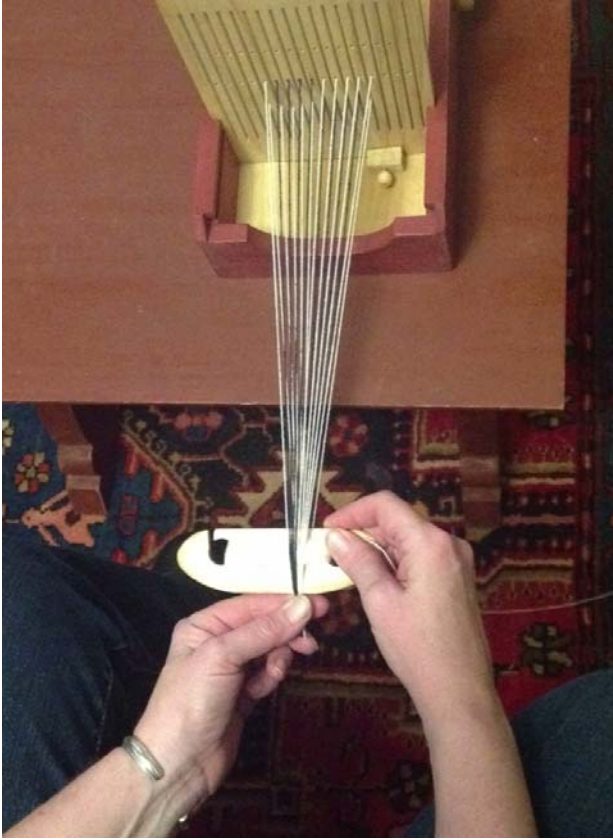
The first is a small hole through which the weft is threaded. This keeps the shuttle from unwinding if you drop it. Unwind the weft over the back side of the shuttle (the side opposite the hole). You don't have to use this if you find it annoying.

The second is a beveled front edge. This is for beating in the weft as you weave.

## Weaving:

You will be weaving about 10" – 12" in front of the heddle. Working closer in makes it harder to draw the weft in firmly.

With your left hand, hold the knot at the end of the warp down, putting moderate tension on the yarn. This will open up a gap between the yarn going through the holes and the yarn going through the slots. This gap is called the shed. Pass the shuttle through the shed, pressing the beveled (pointed) edge toward the knot. Every time you pass the shuttle through the shed, pull the edge of the shuttle toward you to beat in the yarn from the previous pass.



At the same time, hold the tail of the yarn at the knot so it doesn't pull through.

Pull the knot up to open the opposite shed (i.e. all the threads that were lowered are now raised, and vice versa). Pass the shuttle through from left to right, remembering to beat in the previous pass and to pull the yarn snug for a tight, even selvage (border).

Continuing to weave, maintaining tension on the warp, beating the weft in as you pass the shuttle through the shed, and pulling the weft snug at the end of each throw. It may help you to weave an even tape if you use a ruler or piece of cardboard with the width of your tape marked on it and check your tape periodically for consistency.

When you run out of weft on your shuttle, pass the old weft and new weft through together two or three times, then continue weaving as before. Cut off the “tails” after you’ve woven another inch or so.

Some period illustrations show the tape attached to the weaver's torso at either the chest or waist level to help maintain tension. This may or may not work for you; give it a try.

Happy weaving!

**Other Notes:**

If you are starting a new warp that has the same number of threads as the previous warp, you can tie the new warp threads to the old ones in front of the heddle, gently pull the knots through the heddle to the warp beam side, and wind on as usual.

## Tape Patterns:



Vertical Stripes																		18 threads
b	w	b	w	b	w	b	w	b										w = white
	b	w	b	w	b	w	b	w	b									b = blue



Horizontal Stripe																		18 threads
b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b										b = blue
	w	w	w	w	w	w	w	w	w									w = white



Alternate Ladder																		14 threads
b	b	b	b	w	w	w												b = blue
	w	w	w	b	b	b	b											w = white



Stripe and Dot										17 threads
b	c	r	t	c	t	r	c	b		b = brown
	b	c	r	t	t	r	c	b		c = cream
										r = rust
										t = tan



Dots										23 threads		
b	y	y	y	b	b	b	b	y	y	y	b	b = blue
	b	b	b	b	y	y	y	b	b	b	b	y = yellow



Checks										16 threads
w	w	b	b	w	w	b	b			b = blue
	b	b	w	w	b	b	w	w		w = white



**A Note About the Word Inkle and Inkle Looms:**

The term "inkle" is an old Scots word that simply means a narrow woven band. So, any narrow tape can also be called "inkle". Narrow tapes were woven on small box looms, paddle looms and simple rigid heddles for centuries; I've seen a rigid heddle that dates back to the Roman era.

In the early 20th century, the modern "inkle loom" was invented. Its advantage is that it is easy to make with basic woodworking tools. Simple warp-faced bands woven on an inkle loom are structurally the same as those woven on a box or paddle loom, but the loom shape itself is modern.

**Other Resources:**

The Braids & Bands Society: <http://www.braidsociety.com/>

**Books** (Ranked in order of recommendation, not alphabetically):

Weidert, Bonnie R., [Tape Looms Past and Present](#)

Neher, Evelyn, [Inkle](#)

Dixon, Anne, [The Weaver's Inkle Pattern Directory](#) (the simpler & narrower patterns included in this book will work on this loom)

Bress, Helene, [Inkle Weaving](#)

**For more advanced pattern weaving, also see:**

Foulkes, Susan J., [Sami Band Weaving](#)

Torgenrud, Heather, [Norwegian Pick-Up](#)

**Yarn Sources:**

Halcyon Yarn: [halcyonyarn.com](http://halcyonyarn.com)

Webs: [yarn.com](http://yarn.com)

The Yarn Barn: [www.yarnbarn-ks.com](http://www.yarnbarn-ks.com)

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