Finger loop braiding tutorial — Three-loop braids
Including how to start a braid with no loose ends at the top of the braid

by Ingrid Crickmore
http://loopbraider.com/2012/08/02/easy-3-loop-braids/
http://loopbraider.com/tutorials/
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3-loop braids, in three basic forms: Square, divided, and flat

These braids are fast, strong, pretty braids, that are twice as interwoven as a pigtail braid, but just about as easy to make—even an eight-year-old can learn the square version (and a few 7-year-olds, if they are patient and determined!)

This braid can be made in 3 shapes:
**square**—actually **rounded/triangular** (compared to 5 and 7-loop square braids)
**flat**—a more ribbon-like shape
**divided**—two little braids that develop at the same time.
The thick-thin braids above are **square braids** made with two different yarn types.

*Children younger than 7 don’t have the necessary physical finger development, even if they already know how to knit or crochet, and are very smart/precocious—wait til they are older to teach it to them. (Otherwise it’ll be frustrating instead of fun!)*
**Start #1—Simple start:** The top of the braid will have a knot and 6 ends of yarn.

**Start #2—Smooth loop start:** The top of the braid will have *no* knot and *no* ends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cut 3 lengths of yarn or string.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Put them together, fold in half, and tie all 6 ends together in an overhand knot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tie a header cord around the loop bundle, just under the knot.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A larks-head knot is easy to undo later.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fasten the header cord onto a firm, fixed object.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>(Don’t braid over the top of a table! off the edge of one, or hang header cord around a doorknob, back of a chair, etc)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Begin braiding with either square, divided or flat braid moves (see below).</td>
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**Start #2—Smooth loop start:** The top of the braid will have no knot and no ends of yarn. It can be stub-like, or be a loop. This demo shows the loop version.

| Smooth loop start: Cut 3 equal lengths, and tie 2 of them into loops. |
| --- | --- |
| Loop the third length through the first two loops. |
| Tie it into a loop that is linked through the first two loops. |
| Pick up all the loops together. |
Hang them over the bar of a C-clamp.

(Or thread a sturdy cord through them, and tie this header cord around any firm, fixed object—a clamp, or the back of a kitchen chair, etc. My video shows the “header-cord” way to start this same braid. This is not the same as my header in the earlier photos!)

Separate loops and place onto 3 fingers.

The upper shank of each loop must go from the top of the bar to the top of a finger, and the lower shank of each loop goes from the underside of the bar to the underside of a finger. Check to be sure no loop forms a figure-8 around the bar and a finger.

Move one loop over onto the right index finger, without turning it over.

Upper shank must still be in upper position on the new finger.

Begin braiding a DIVIDED braid (instructions next page).

The braid will grow as two braids at once!—looped around the bar of the c-clamp.

(or looped around a header cord, as I demo in my video).

http://loopbraider.com/2012/08/02/easy-3-loop-braids/
Divided braiding moves (for making two small braids at the same time):

When the divided area is long enough, begin braiding a square braid (instructions below, following divided braid instructions).

This will join the upper and lower layers of the divided braid into one solid braid.

Start with 2 loops on the Left hand and 1 on the Right hand.

Right middle finger has no loop.

It will be the active finger—the ‘operator’ finger—for the first move.

1\textsuperscript{st} loop transfer

Right middle finger goes through L middle loop and L index loop.

Then it tugs downwardly on the L index loop’s lower shank, and pulls it through the L middle finger loop.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Left index releases the loop, which now transfers over to the Right middle finger. The transferring loop goes over to the new finger with <em>no turn</em>—this is very important for making a divided braid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Remaining Left loop is shifted upward to the index finger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Now the Left middle finger is free of loops, and ready to be the next operator finger.</td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><strong>Tighten loops.</strong> Spread left and right loops widely apart. CAREFULLY for this first tightening move, so you don’t lose any loops over the edge of the bar. (Not a problem if using a header-cord)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><strong>2⁰ loop transfer:</strong> Left middle finger is the operator. It goes through both Right loops: R middle finger loop (here, the red loop) and through R index finger loop.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Then it tugs downwardly on the R index loop’s lower shank—

and pulls it through the R middle finger loop.

Right index releases the loop, which now has transferred over to the L middle finger. It transferred over without being turned. (All upper shanks on fingers still lead to the upper side of the bar of the C-clamp)

Remaining Right loop (red) is shifted upward to the index finger.

Now the Right middle finger holds no loop and is ready to be the next operator finger.
**Tighten loops.** After this, start to tighten more firmly so the braid won’t be “flabby” and loose. (One of my 3-loop videos shows a great trick for better tightening.)

**One braiding cycle is completed.** (Now the cycle begins over again from the first loop transfer above)

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**Square braiding moves:**

| Start with 2 loops on the Left hand and 1 on the Right hand. |
| Right middle finger has no loop. |
| It will be the active finger—the ‘operator’ finger—for the first move. |

**1st loop transfer**

Right middle finger goes through L middle loop and rises above L index loop.

Do not put the operator finger through the index loop.

The R middle finger hooks down on the top shank of the L index loop—hooking it from above the loop.

This will give the loop a turn as it transfers over to the Right hand.
Left index releases the loop, which now transfers over to the Right middle finger.

Remaining Left loop is shifted upward to the index finger.

That frees the Left middle finger of its loop, so it can be the next operator finger.

Tighten loops, and repeat these moves in mirror-image fashion for the next loop transfer on the opposite side.

For a square braid, you will keep taking the upper shank of the loop from above—which turns it over as it passes to the other hand. I only show this on one side here, but be sure to do it on both sides of the braid.

**Flat braid moves**—Combination of divided and square braid moves:
Follow the square braid instructions (above) for the **Left side** loop transfers.
Follow the divided braid instructions (further above) for the **Right side** loop transfers.

*If this is unclear, watch the video supplements to the tutorial, in link below.*

A 3-loop braid can be difficult to tighten firmly—it tends to crumple. My videos demo a trick for tightening 3-loop braids in a slightly different way than other braids, to get a very firm, evenly-tensioned braid:

[http://loopbraider.com/2012/08/02/easy-3-loop-braids/]
Loop set-ups for above braids:

**Purple and gold braids:**
The purple braids all have one dark purple loop, one light purple loop, and one gold loop. With only three loops, the order of these colors doesn’t make a difference to the pattern. These are a mid-weight mercerised cotton yarn, for a smooth silky look. Any yarn that is smooth (not bumpy) will work.

The leftmost purple braid (between the two thick-thin braids) is a square braid. The 2 rightmost are flat braids (one braided more tightly than the other). The thin, loosely knotted purple braid is a divided braid. It was started as in Start #2—the “smooth loop start”, and braided as two braids for the whole length of the braid. After braiding, the knots were cut off the bottom of the loops, completely separating the top and bottom layers into one, doubly-long, 3-strand braid.

**Red, black and yellow braid:**

This braid is a square braid of 3 bicolor loops**—each loop had one black shank and one red or yellow shank. These were wool—the black and red yarns were tapestry wool, and the yellow yarn was a similar weight but different type of wool. Two black + red loops; one black + yellow loop. See photos below for how to arrange these loops on the fingers for the pattern shown in the photo:
Tie the bicolor shanks together at the bottom of each loop, then tie all the ends of the loops together in one knot at the top of the loop bundle (see next photo).

Black shanks are in **lower position** on one hand and in **upper position** on the other hand. The order of the red and yellow doesn’t matter for this pattern.

The lengthwise black striping pattern will only be produced by braiding with square braiding moves and this loop arrangement. For different patterns, start with black shanks in upper position on both hands, or braid a flat braid.
Textural/ Bumpy braids:
These 2 braids had 5 finer, thinner shanks, and one puffy woolen shank. In other words, two of the loops were made out of single strands of one color/ one type of yarn. The third loop was made from two different types of yarn. One shank was like the other loops, but the other shank was of a puffy woolen yarn. These two shanks were tied together as shown in the photos below:

Be careful when tightening—this type of wool singles yarn is weaker than the cotton yarn, and can break if pulled too hard.

**Bicolor Loop tutorial:  
http://loopbraider.com/2011/03/17/bicolor-loop-magic-instructions/**

List of all my website tutorials:  
http://loopbraider.com/tutorials/

Videos supplements for this tutorial are posted on my website:  
http://loopbraider.com/2012/08/02/easy-3-loop-braids/

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Happy braiding!