

Loop Braiding Tutorial, Part 1: *[left-handed version]*



A Two-loop Braid (and instructions for the SPIRAL Braid method)

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for the Braids_and_Bands on-line discussion group of the Braid Society

The 2-Loop Braid is a flat, 4-element braid with a bit of twist.

It is very fast and fun, and its basic move is also the basic move for the Spiral Braids.

Attention right and left-handers:

I have prepared right-handed and left-handed directions for the 2 loop braid *only*.

This is the left-handed version.

These directions will also be necessary for learning the Spiral Braids. All 4 Spiral braids use the same basic move shown in the photo-sequence that follows. (The photo sequence for this move won't be repeated, you will have to refer to it here.)



The 2-loop braid makes a nice, curly ribbon, or can be pressed or blocked to be flatter. In the photo above, the 2 relatively straight braids were gently pressed.

The pink and grey braid is of wool knitting yarn (worsted or DK weight), and the darker straight braid is dark wool and a variegated silk knitting yarn.

I was surprised at how nice the puffy wool knitting yarn looked when braided as a 2-loop braid. (I rarely use this type of wool for braiding.) This could be an instant trim or string for a pair of mittens, or any knitted item.

The warp ends of the little weaving are all 2-loop braids, each braid made from 4 warp ends, tied into 2 loops. Single color 2-loop braids make pretty, slightly curly ribbons—for hair, gift wrapping, etc. Using only one color camouflages any tension irregularities.

Other color patterns than the ones in the photos are possible. Using 2 different-colored loops gives the chevron design of the pink and grey braid. (If you ‘uncurl’ your braid and block or press it you will see this design more clearly.)

But each loop comprises 2 braiding elements, and a loop *can* have 2 different colors—just tie them together at the bottom of the loop. The purple and variegated braid in the header photo had 2 identical ‘bicolor loops’—each loop had 1 purple and 1 variegated shank. This results in more of a zigzag pattern (though the variegated yarn obscures this a bit.) I haven’t tried the other possible combinations—3 shanks of one color, and a 4th of a contrasting color; or 4 completely different colors.

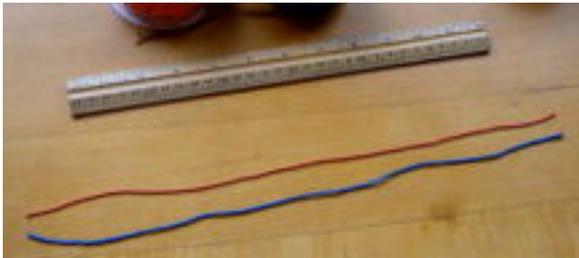
Most of the braids in the photos were made from mercerized cotton knitting yarn (elann.com Lara, or Millifili fine, or similar brands) and a silk variegated knitting yarn, both about sport weight. I used those same cottons in the following photo-tutorial.

My other favorite braiding yarns are embroidery floss, and #3 crochet cotton (‘Aunt Lydia’s Fashion Crochet’ , or ‘Royale #3’ in the U.S., and Circulo ‘Anne’ [*more colors!*] in the UK and elsewhere). I use wool, linen, silk, and bonded nylon beading cord as well, but cotton is the easiest to work with.

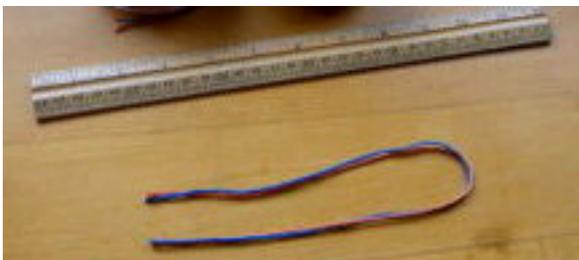
Loop set-up and instructions for the Two-loop braid (using *short* loops)

The instructions that follow are also important for the **Spiral braid** of 4, 6, 8, or 10 loops—the basic move is the same. (I won't be repeating this detailed photo-series in Part 2 on Spiral braids, you will need to refer to it here.)

Two-loop braids with *longer* loops go better using hand-held loops—I'll show that method below this one. It is only useful for 2-loop braids, not for the Spiral braids.



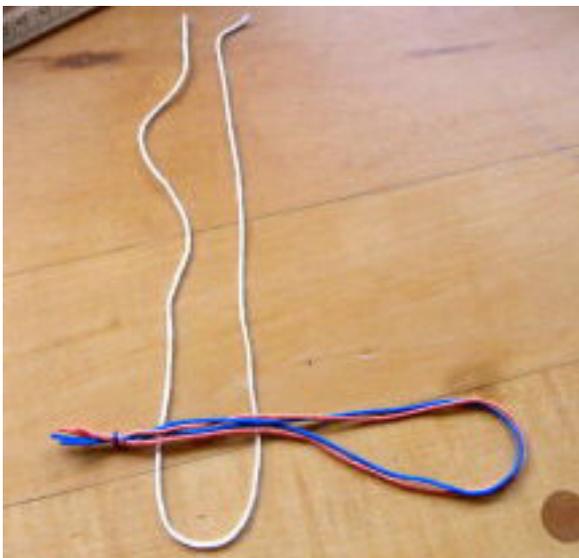
Cut fairly short lengths of 2 contrasting colors.



Fold them in half.



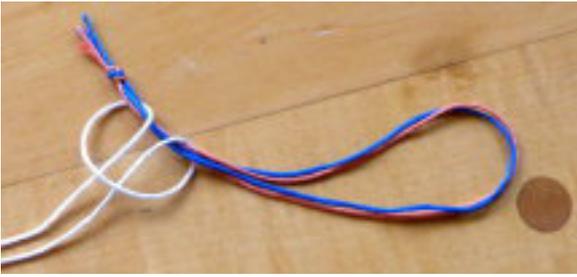
Tie ends together in an overhand knot.



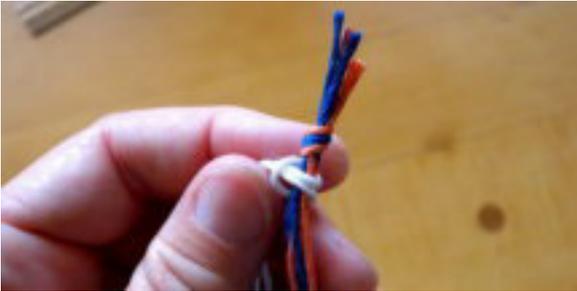
Cut a header cord.

You will be attaching it to a firm, fixed point.

Allow for some length of header cord *between* the braid and the attachment point.



A larks-head knot will make the header cord easy to remove later.



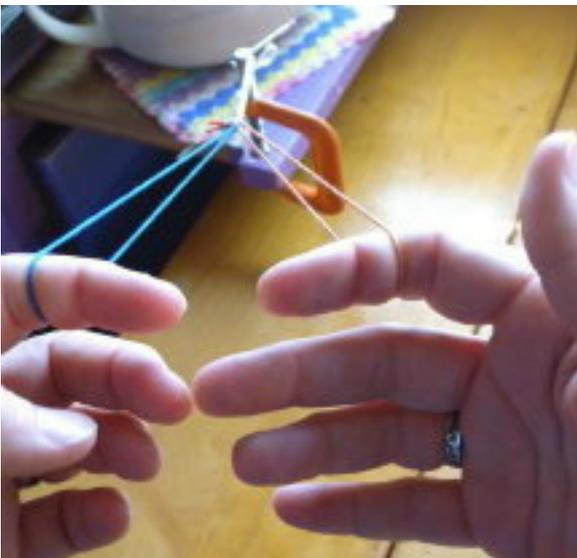
The header cord is fastened onto the loop-bundle just below the overhand knot.



The two ends of the header cord can be tied together and hung/looped around the top bar of a C-clamp or a doorknob...

Or a longer header cord can be tied around a chair or other object.

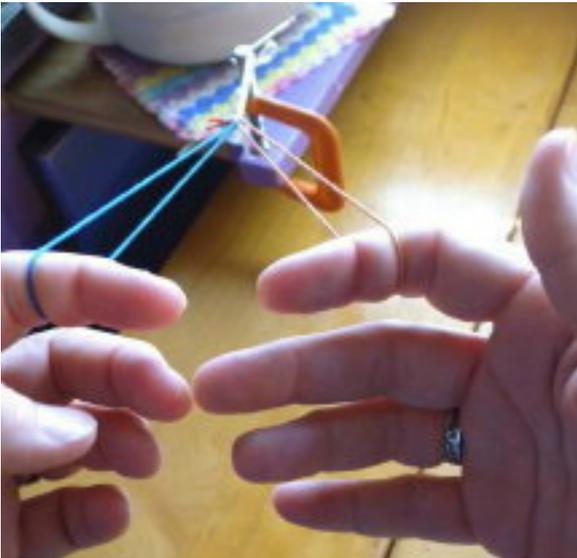
The attachment should be between waist and shoulder height.



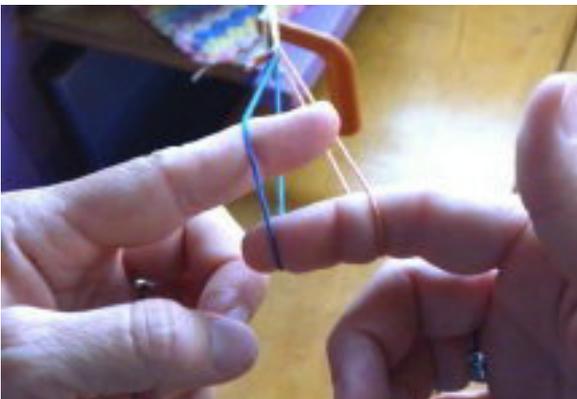
Here, the header cord is the blurry white length linking the loop bundle to the C-clamp.

Left-handed instructions for the 2-loop braid: (basic move for the Spiral Braids)

There is one simple braiding move, which gets repeated over and over:



Start with one loop on each index finger.

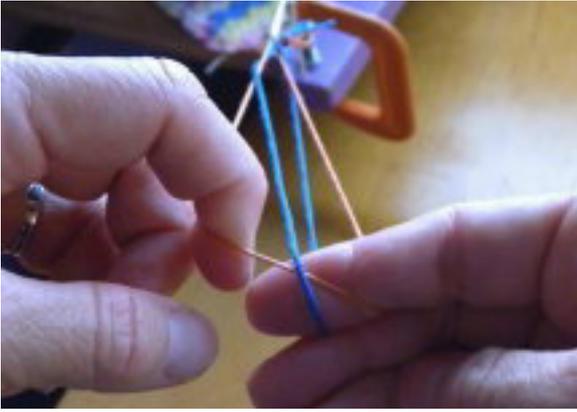


Place the left loop onto the right index, keeping the left finger *inside* the loop.

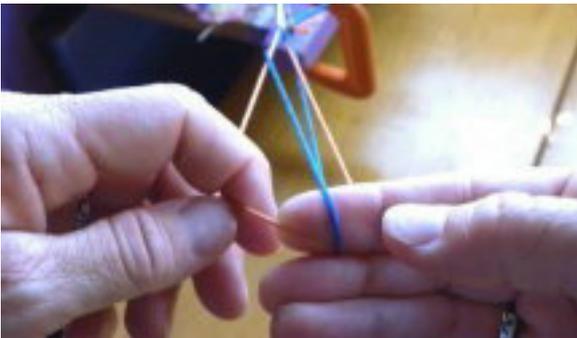
Raise the left index upward, and reach out over the top of the right loop



Hook down onto the upper shank of the right loop.



Pull the right loop through the left loop, easing it off the right finger.



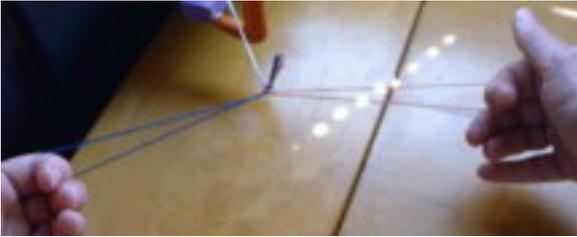
You will have to pull the right loop toward you a bit, to ease it over the tip of the right finger.



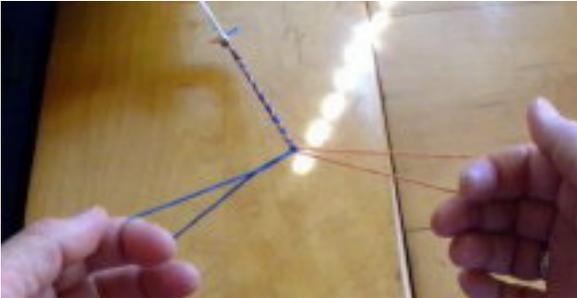
The loops are switching fingers, right loop through left loop. Taking that right loop by hooking it from above makes it turn over as it passes to its new finger.



The right loop arrives onto the left finger with a half-twist in a counter-clockwise direction.



Tighten by bringing loops apart, into a straight or nearly straight line from left to right. Don't pull hard, but do open loops widely apart.



Now repeat these moves from the beginning, again pulling the right loop through the left loop. The right loop is *always* pulled through the left loop, never the other way around.



When the braid is done, there is usually enough twist in the loops that you won't need to tie a knot at the base of the braid.

(Tie a knot before trimming off the ends of the loops, as that will let out their twist.)

Variations in Braiding Method:

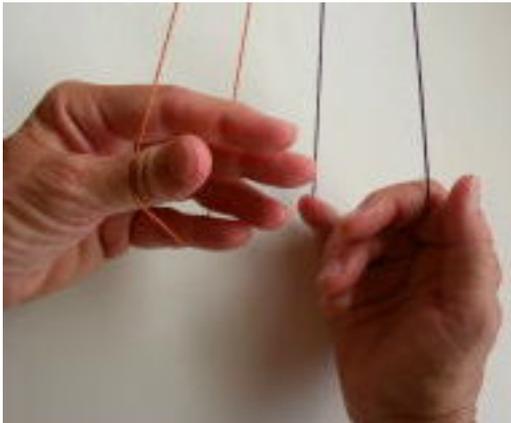
There are several ways to effect these same loop movements. As long as the right loop comes through the left loop, *with a half-turn*, it is fine if you find a different way to do it. I often use slightly different ways myself. Since there are only two loops in the braid, you have a lot of freedom to use more than one finger per loop. Below I'll show a way using hand-held loops, which is very useful for longer loops.

Other ways may not be useful for the Spiral braids! Do learn this basic move, as shown above, if you will be following the Spiral Braid portion of this tutorial.

The hand-held loop method below may be the best one to teach to a child (I have to admit that so far I have only taught the upcoming 3-loop braid to young children).

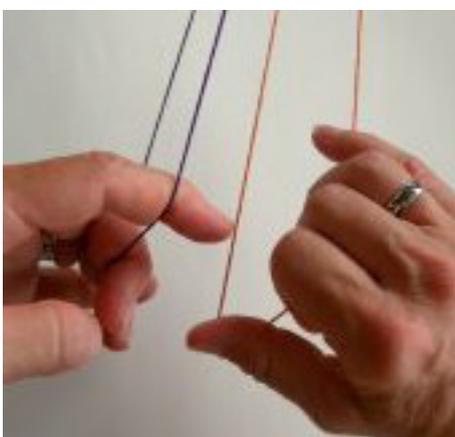
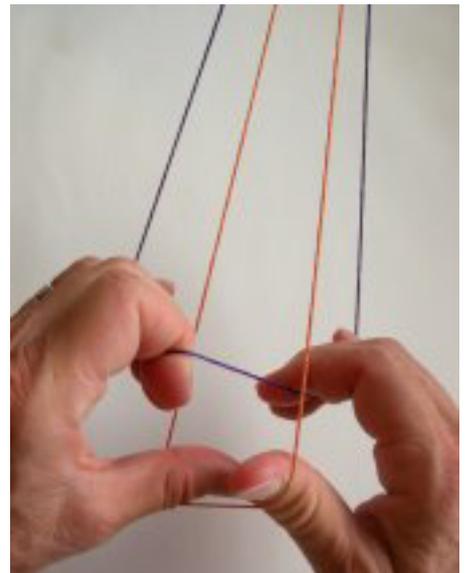
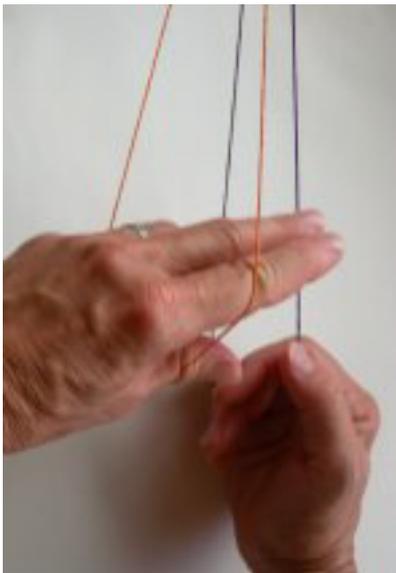
Note: The 2-loop braid is not a braid for perfectionists! It is very easy to make, but willful and a little hard to control. It's best to just relax and enjoy it...

Directions for a 2-loop braid, using *longer loops* [left-handed]



With longer loops, holding each loop with your whole hand will give you more control, plus it's very fun and fast. When the loops get shorter, switch back to holding them as finger-held loops. (see previous set of directions)

If you can keep the loops from sagging during the braiding procedure, it will result in a neater pattern.



Above, I am reaching through the left loop, grabbing onto the *upper* part of the right loop, and pulling it through the left one.

Meanwhile, my right hand acquires the left loop, and lets go of its original loop. Any way you want to do this is fine! It doesn't have to be exactly the way I show these moves.

Now the loops have switched hands, the blue one turning over during that process.



Tighten by spreading the loops widely and gently. There is no need to pull hard.

Holding the loops like this around the whole hand creates a big angle in the loop (relative to the fell, or base, of the braid).

This helps control the fell, and the tension of the braid, which otherwise is hard to control with longer loops.



The finished braid is a flat, 4-strand braid with some twist to it. The loop-ends also have a lot of built-up twist, and will coil on themselves when you let them go. It makes a nice, curly ribbon, or can be pressed or blocked to be flatter.

Loops of two different colors will produce a chevron design, as in the photos above. Other patterns are possible, too.

I haven't tried all the pattern possibilities—each of the 4 shanks could be a different color, or 3 shanks could be of one color with a 4th contrasting shank, etc.

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