

Looming

A Little Story About My Grandma

My grandma didn't get to go super far in formal education but still managed to take courses and get professional certificates in several areas. She is a sewer, painter, knitter, hairdresser and an amazing cook. She usually says she does a little of everything but nothing really professional. That's what -she- says. She started sewing and knitting when she was still a kid. After fourth grade, she was sent to live with her older sister in a bigger city in order to help and learn to take care of the house. Having to come back home after a couple of years, she just couldn't live under her parent's strict rules and the limitations of a small village. She used her skills as a sewer to make some money, pack her stuff and leave to get married to my grandpa when she was just 16 (she still wonders where her granddaughters got the rebellious attitude from). They had a rough start back in the big city and things probably got even trickier when she had my dad at the age of 18. My grandpa always kept control of the family's finances, so my grandma found on craft business and hairdressing a way to have her own things. She could attend courses and buy supplies to improve work. This money also allowed her to take decisions in gift giving, which is something that seems to please her a lot. Since I can remember, I've been following my grandma around and learning a bit of everything she does. However, she wasn't merely teaching me to weave, to sew or bake. She was sharing her own paths of fighting for personal independence.

In the absence of inheritance, we leave legacy.

- Lurdez da Luz (translated from Portuguese)

Looming

The Frame Loom



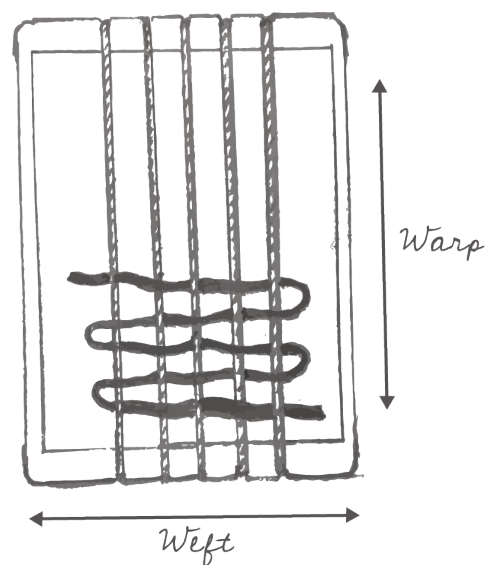
A frame loom can be a very affordable and easy way to start weaving. In order to try it out, we can start using very cheap materials like cardboard or scraps of wood.

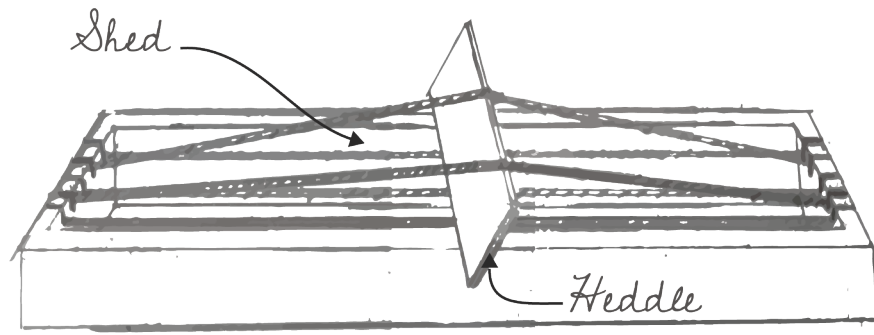
The loom is what will hold and give tension to your weaving. You can remove your fabric from the loom after finishing or it can be part of your design as a frame. It is also common to remove the design of the loom and just frame or hang it in a different structure later.

A Bit of Weaving Vocabulary

Warp Thread: This is the base thread that is passed vertically on the loom and holds the tension as you weave.

Weft Thread: The thread that you weave horizontally between the warp threads, going under and over. This is what you use to create patterns and will give form to your design.





Shed: The space that is formed between the warp threads when you are weaving with the weft thread (the spacing between the lower and upper threads).

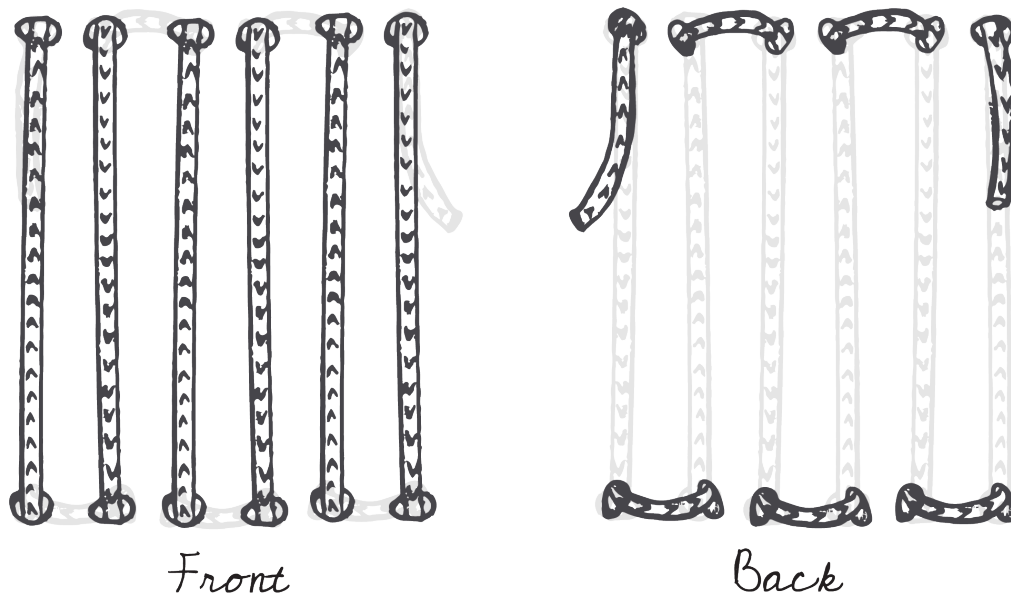
Heddle: The tool used to separate the warp in two sets and create the shed in which you will pass the weft thread through. Some lap looms come with a rotating heddle that will lift the warp threads alternating. You can also use a piece of cardboard or a ruler, passing it through every warp thread weaving it alternating under and over and turning it on the side to lift the threads.

Warping the Loom

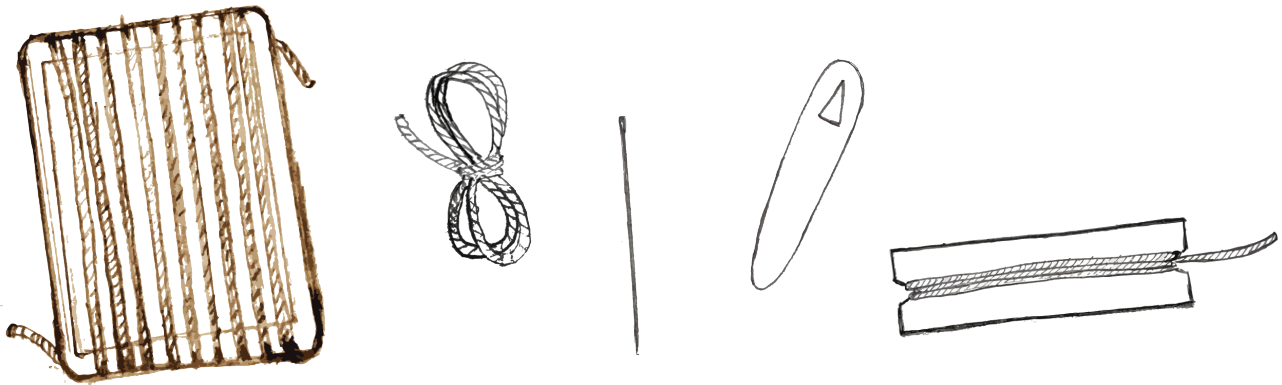
We will start out with a somewhat special loom. We will weave right here, on our book pages! The principles are the same as other looms, we just need some adjustments. First, take a pencil, nail or something sharp and thin to make the holes following the drawings.

In order to warp the loom, start from one edge and secure the thread with tape on the back of the paper. Now you will weave the warp thread along the holes following the numbers. Note that the weave on the back is different from the front. Continue doing this sort of zig-zag until you reach the last hole. Secure the remaining thread with tape on the back, just the same way you did in the beginning. Your base, the warp threads, is ready!

Schematic for warping thread on a sheet of paper:



Weaving - The Plain Weave

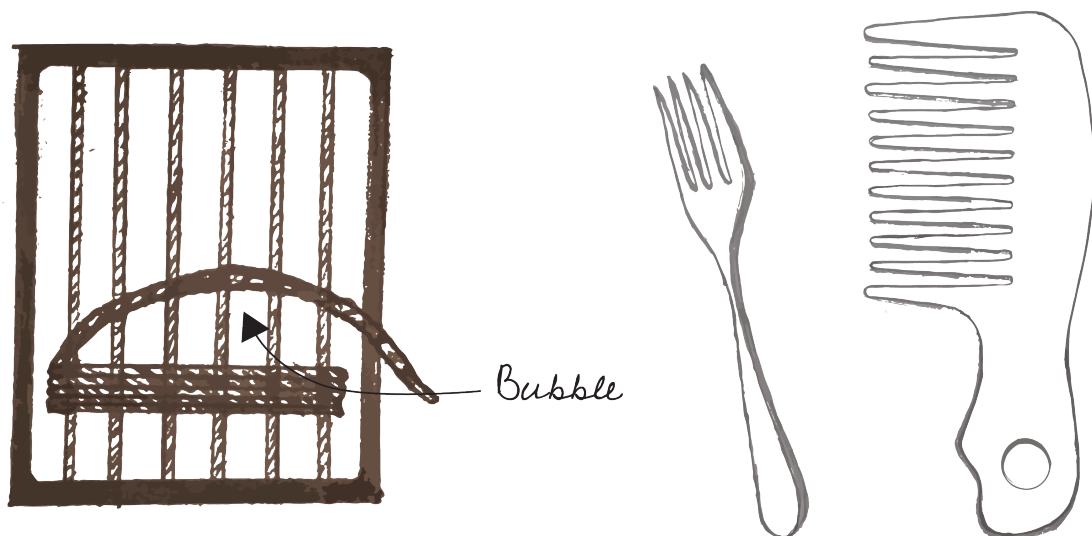


The most basic technique you can use is the plain weave. It consists of interweaving the weft thread (horizontal) through the warp thread (vertical) alternating under and over. In order to form the fabric, when you come back to the opposite direction, you just do the inverse. What was going under, goes over and vice-versa.

There are a few methods to easily pass the weft thread through the warp. The most simple is to make a butterfly bobbin and use it to pass through the warp. Another possibility is to make a shuttle out of cardboard. For smaller details, like when you are working on patterns, it is better to have a tapestry needle. To make passing the thread faster, you can use a heddle to create a space (the shed) between the upper and lower threads. You can also make the heddle out of cardboard or use a ruler.

Keeping the Edges Straight

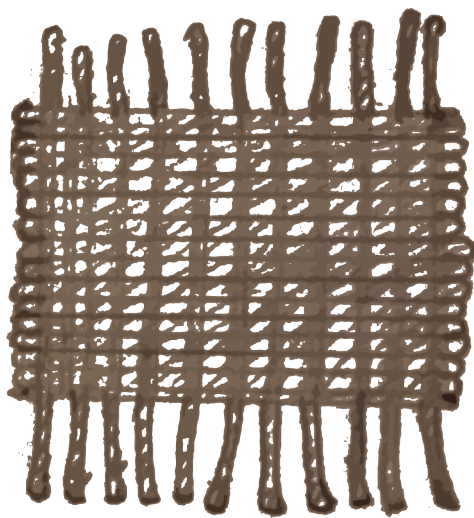
One common struggle is keeping the edges of the fabric straight. As you pull the thread, it usually happens that you put too much strength and after some time, you realize the edges are all crooked. Avoiding this is easy. When passing the weft thread, create a sort of bubbly pattern. Do not push the thread until it is straight. This will leave enough thread so your design won't be too tight and will keep a uniform tension across the edges. It also helps to keep your design flat if you remove it out of the frame, as the threads are sufficiently loose. Something that helps a lot in this process is using a fork or comb to push the weft threads down. Sounds stupid but seriously, the fork will be your best friend.



Changing Colors and Finishing

In order to change the weave you are working on, you can simply take the thread to the back of the fabric and cut leaving a piece that is long enough to be sewn back. When you finish your design, you will have to weave each hanging thread into the back of the fabric. Remember to follow the patterns of your fabric, going under and over. There are many other ways to do this and it is very dependant on the kind of thread and design. This one is fairly simple to start with but feel free to try out and follow your instinct. It's supposed to be fun. No stress.

After taking care of all the hanging threads in the back of your fabric, it's time to remove it (or not) from the frame. In the case of our book page frame, it is possible to weave until the top and bottom edges and then cut the paper out in the end. If you want to have a fringe, leave a few centimeters (enough so you can make a knot) on the top and bottom. Then cut the threads out of the paper and tie off the warp threads in pairs. Done!





Samples of formats that can be warped on a page of paper.

Holes are made with a sharp object, like a needle.

