

Weaving on a Rigid Heddle Loom

By

Isabel Ulfsdottir



History

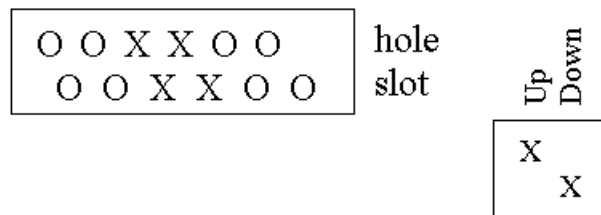
The rigid heddle is used to substitute for both the shed bar and the heddle rod in weaving. Some of the first rigid heddles known consisted of a series of short reeds or sticks held together at the top and bottom by cross bars. Each reed or stick has a small hole through its center. The warp yarns are threaded through the heddle alternating between the slots and the holes in the rigid heddle. When the heddle is pushed down one shed is formed and when the heddle is raised another shed is formed. Weaving is accomplished by alternating the down and up position of the heddle and passing a weft thread through the resulting sheds.

The origins of the rigid heddle is lost in antiquity. The rigid heddle is probably as old as weaving itself. The earliest representation of a rigid heddle comes from an early fourteenth-century manuscript. It was also used in ancient times in Scandinavia. The Scandinavians carved small heddles from bone and antler to create simple thin bands. For centuries the French and the Spanish used reeds to construct their heddles.

The Simple Rigid Heddle Loom

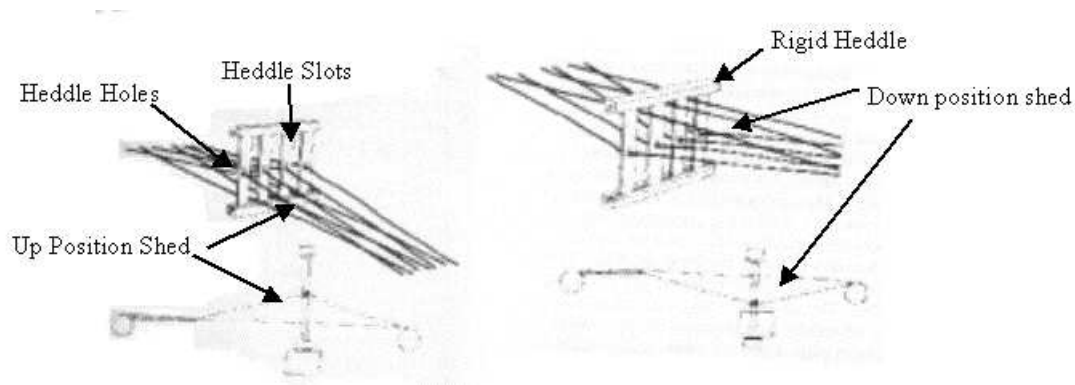
Learning to weave on a small simple heddle loom is an easy way to become familiar with weaving and understand the basic skills needed for weaving. We will use a simple rigid heddle with seven slots and six holes to learn the basic skills of weaving.

1. First we must thread the heddle to begin weaving. To thread the heddle we must be able to read a pattern draft. The pattern draft is the way that weavers record their ideas and pass those ideas on to other weavers. The pattern draft explains the warp sequence and the weft or weaving sequence. The horizontal box explains the warping sequence and the vertical box describes the weft sequence or how you will weave the pattern. The X's and O's in the below pattern draft indicate the different colors used in the weaving.

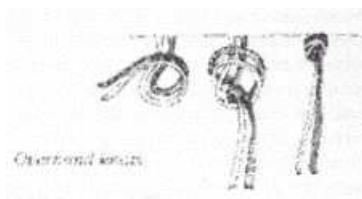


2. Once we understand the pattern draft we then must thread the heddle. It is best to thread the heddle from one side to the other. You can start from right to left or from left to right when threading the heddle. You must be able to keep track of your threading according to the draft.
3. Now that the heddle is threaded we must secure the threads. Tie a knot in the threads on the back side of the heddle and secure the knot to a sturdy object. Next move the heddle from the back knot toward you, untangling and straightening out the thread as you go. Once you reach the end of the thread pull the threads tight to give even tension on all threads. Tie a knot in the near end of the threads and secure the knot to your belt. You will now use your body to keep a constant tension on the threads.

4. We are ready to begin weaving. The long threads you just passed through the heddle is your warp. The thread that you will pass back and forth as you weave is the weft. Begin weaving by pushing down on the heddle. The space created between the threads or warp is the shed. Pass the weft yarn through the shed. Next raise the heddle to create the up position shed. Now pass the weft through this new shed. When you push the heddle down next beat the weft into place with a beater. Continue weaving until you reach the end of your warp.



1. Now you must finish the weaving. Cut the heddle from the weaving and lay your band on a flat table. If your starter weaving is uneven you can unweave the first couple of passes to gain a clean border. Then tie overhand knots in the warp threads at each end of the weaving. You may then braid the ends or add additional embellishments once the overhand knots are tied in the end.



I hope you enjoy weaving as much as I have. Below are some books that will be helpful in getting you started. Enjoy.

1. Betty Linn Davenport, *Hands on Rigid Heddle Weaving*, Interweave Press Inc. Loveland Colorado, 1987.
2. Eric Broudy, *The Book of Looms*, University Press of New England, Hanover, NH 1979.
3. Mary Meigs Atwater, *Byways in Handweaving*, Shuttlecraft Books Inc., Coupeville, WA 1988



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