

# WEAVING WITH A TWIST



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From the picture in the National Gall  
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# GET READY TO FLIP, ROTATE, TURN

LINDA HENDRICKSON

*"I am obsessed with tablet weaving. My two 8-shaft floor looms are gathering dust because of little squares of cardboard. I love the almost-instant gratification of being able to make a warp and start weaving in 10 minutes. And to think of the possibilities for fiber, color, structure, pattern; the flipping, rotating, turning, transposing — it's dizzying!"*

**T**ablet weaving — also called card weaving — is an ancient off-loom technique for weaving narrow decorative bands and seamless tubes. It can be very simple or incredibly complex. At its most basic, it's a wonderful activity for children. My youngest students, some only five or six years old, can weave beautiful friendship bracelets. At the opposite end are techniques — such as double-faced 3/1 broken twill — so complicated they challenge even the most advanced weaver.

In this article, the first of a series, you'll learn the basics. The '10-minute warp' is the starting point for both the simplest and the most complex techniques, and it will be covered in detail. An easy-to-follow chart will show you how to flip, rotate, and turn the tablets to weave a variety of simple geometric patterns.

## TABLET WEAVING

'Tablet' weaving and 'card' weaving are two different words for the same technique. In *The Techniques of Tablet Weaving*, Peter Collingwood explains that both words were translated into English from other languages. Mary Atwater, who introduced the technique to America, translated the French term as 'card,' and Mabel Peach, who introduced it to Britain, translated the German term as 'tablet.' I think 'tablet' sounds a bit more interesting, and it's the word favored by the new organization TWINE (Tablet Weavers International News Exchange).

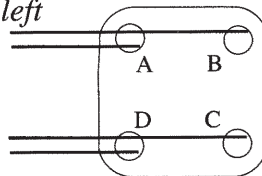
### The weaving process

Many of the terms and concepts for tablet weaving are the same as in other types of weaving. Warp yarn is held under

### 1. Threading direction

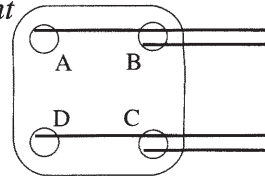
#### a. To the left

Strands of yarn are visible on the left side of the card.

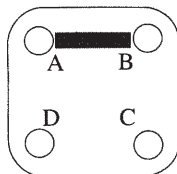


#### b. To the right

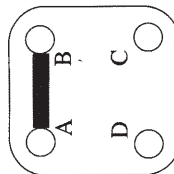
Strands of yarn are visible on the right side of the card.



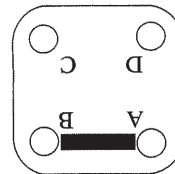
### 2. Position of the A-B line



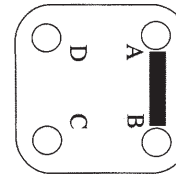
Top



Left



Bottom



Right

tension. The shed which results naturally from the threaded tablets is changed by turning them, and the weft is inserted after each change. A knife-edge shuttle carries the weft and beats it into place.

There is a fair amount of takeup in tablet weaving, not only because of the usual over and under path the warp takes, but also because of the twisting of the warp. This is a unique characteristic of tablet weaving. When the tablets are turned continually in one direction, the four warp threads of each tablet twist around each other to form a cord. The twist that accumulates beyond the tablets can be reversed by turning the tablets in the opposite direction.

The product of tablet weaving is properly called a band (never a braid!), and the instructions here are for simple warp-twined bands in which all the tablets are turned together either forward or backward.

## PATTERN VARIABLES

When weaving a band, you can change the pattern any time by rearranging the tablets. There are three variables, and I've developed a very simple, graphic way to think about them (see the chart p. 48). These variables interact and influence each other, but we won't worry about that right now!

### Threading direction

The first variable is threading direction, which influences the way a design will angle. The threading direction for any tablet can be either to the Left or to the Right as shown in 1, and can be changed from one to the other by *flipping* the tablet just like turning a page in a book.

### Position of warp colors

The second variable is the position of the warp colors, which can be represented by the position of the A-B line. The A-B line is changed by *rotating* the tablet. Before making the warp, draw a line with a wide, bright-colored felt-tipped marker between the A and B holes on both sides of every tablet. Any tablet can be rotated so this A-B line is in one of four different positions: Top, Left, Bottom, and Right as shown in 2.

### Turning direction

The third variable is the turning direction. The pack can be *turned* continuously forward or backward, or a certain number of turns one way and then the other. Different turning sequences result in different patterns.

With a little practice, you will soon memorize the combinations for your favorite patterns. I can definitely do chevrons in my sleep!

### Holding the tablets

The way you hold the tablets to turn them will depend on the size of your hands. People with large hands can place both thumbs against the tablets on top of the shed and the longest fingers below the shed. Some people with large hands can turn the tablets with just one hand. Be sure to hold the tablets apart while turning.

People with small hands may find it easier to place one hand against the edges of the tablets just above the shed and the other on the opposite edges underneath the shed. Straighten up the tablets carefully after turning so that the shed is clear.

## WEAVING WITH A TWIST

### Tools for tablet weaving

A few simple tools can make tablet weaving easier. A 'warping wand' helps keep the yarns from tangling during warping (see *Photo a*). This tool consists of a piece of wood, about 1" x 1" x 24", with four equally-spaced eye hooks screwed into it. When making the warp, thread the yarn through the eye hooks first, and then through the holes in the tablets. Ideally, the warping wand needs to be at about shoulder height. I keep mine clamped to the top of my spool rack, so I can move it around.

Another helpful tool is a 'warp spreader' (see *Photo b*), made of some scrap wood, a stretched spring, a piece of clothes-hanger wire, and a rubber band. Distribute the warp yarns so they are spread to about 1½ times the width of the band to keep the tablets slightly apart for easier turning.

Finally, you can make a very simple portable tablet-weaving loom from three 3" C-clamps and a piece of 1" x 4" lumber any length up to about 6'. Clamp the board to a table with one clamp, post end down, and then attach a clamp to each end of the board (or as far apart as the warp requires) with the posts facing up. Wrap the warp around the clamps. You can move the board easily without disturbing your work.

### THE 10-MINUTE WARP

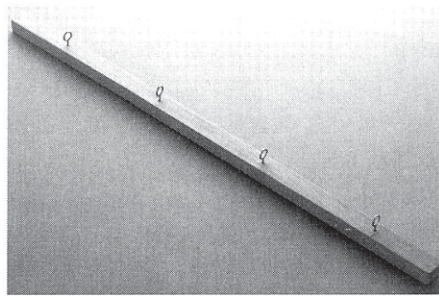
Like any skill demanding hand/eye coordination, your first warp will take more than ten minutes. Before you start to make the warp, be sure you have drawn the A-B line on both sides of every tablet. Don't skip this step! Warp tension is provided by the C-clamps. The distance between the C-clamps should be the length of the item you plan to weave plus 18" for waste and takeup.

Follow these steps to make eight bookmarks or a sampler of the designs on p. 49.

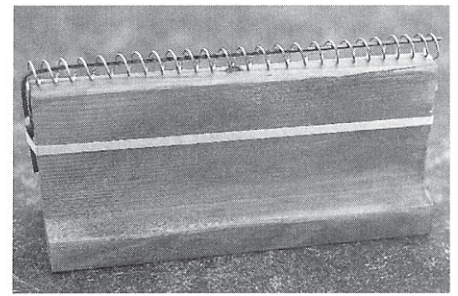
♦ **Equipment.** Two 3" C-clamps, 24 tablets, 1 mat board or stiff cardboard 1½" x 4", 1 warping wand, 1 warp spreader (optional).

♦ **Materials.** 10/2 cotton in 2, 3, or 4 colors wound into four balls of about 50 yds ea. Choose colors with high value contrast so the patterns show up well. Two strongly contrasting colors give the boldest patterns.

♦ **Prepare to warp** by tightening the C-clamps to the table (or to the ends of 1" x 4"), about 60" apart (warp length) with post ends facing up. The clamps exert tremendous pressure; be sure to protect your table. Arrange the tablets in a stack so they are all oriented the same way and place face down on the table. Place each of the four balls of warp yarn in a container on the floor, about



*a. The warping wand helps prevent the warp threads from tangling.*



*b. The warp spreader keeps the tablets apart for easier turning.*

6" apart in a row at the left-hand end of the table. Place the warping wand directly above the containers. Thread each end of yarn through the eye hook above it.

♦ Thread one warp end down through similarly placed holes in all the tablets at once. Pull the end of yarn about two feet past the tablets. Repeat with the other three ends. Even up and make a slipknot of the four ends with a 5" tail, loop over the right-hand clamp, and pull tight.

♦ To make the warp, you will pull the yarn through the tablets, in a clockwise direction around the clamps, and place tablets, one at a time, on alternate sides of the tensioned warp. Note: The pack doesn't circle the clamps — it just moves back and forth somewhat while the yarn is drawn through the tablets and around the clamps. Hold the tablets under tension in your left-hand so the pack is threaded to the left with the A-B line on top. Always keep them in this position. Do not rotate the deck, or the yarn will twist, making it difficult to continue warping. Keep the tension as even as possible while you make the warp.

Take the tablet at the bottom of the deck and leave it halfway between the clamps. Slide the pack of tablets along the warp toward the left-hand clamp.

When the pack reaches the left-hand clamp, use your right hand to grasp the four strands of yarn to the right of the tablets (or behind the tablets, depending on exactly which direction you're facing). Hold the tablets still while you pull out some yarn and wrap it around the clamp about 3½" above the table. Then pull the tablets along the warp toward the right-hand clamp. This will be easy if you face the left-hand clamp and walk backwards, adjusting your left wrist slightly as needed to allow the yarn to make a straight path from the left-hand clamp to the tablets.

Take the next tablet from the bottom of the pack and slide it into position near the

center of the warp. Let go of the tablet, but continue to hold onto the warp yarn. Keep the pack in your left hand still while you pull out more yarn and wrap it neatly around the right-hand clamp.

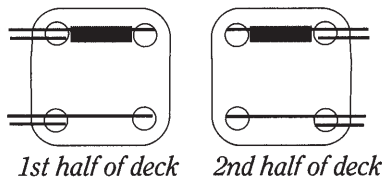
Repeat these steps, always wrapping the yarn in the same place on the clamps, until all of the tablets are hanging on the tensioned warp. After the last tablet is in position, cut the yarn several inches beyond the right-hand C-clamp, and tie the end to the beginning of the warp. Keep the tension even as you tie the knot. Straighten the tablets and push them to the left-hand end of the warp.

♦ Weave by first placing mat board in the shed up against the clamp and turn the tablets. Spread the warp. Use as weft a single strand of 10/2 cotton in one of the warp colors. Insert the weft; leave a short tail to join with the fringe. Turn and beat. As you insert the next weft, don't pull it all the way to the edge. Leave a small loop. The weaving sequence is as follows: turn tablets, beat, pull the shuttle through, pull the loop from the previous shot, make a new loop. When you pull the loop, first give it a little tug away from the band to pull up any loose tension. Put your finger under the band and pull the loop just to the edge. When you make the new loop, place the weft in the shed as close to the fell as you can.

Weave the designs as indicated on p. 49. If planning bookmarks, weave for 4½" and leave 2" unweaved between each bookmark. To weave each design: a) *flip the tablets* (like turning the pages of a book) so that the threading positions are 'to the right' or 'to the left' as indicated with the selected design, b) *rotate the tablets* so that the A-B lines appear as indicated, and c) *turn the tablets* as indicated inserting a weft after each turn.

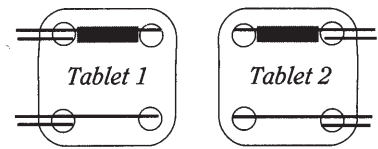
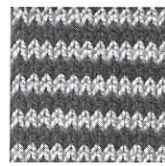
Once you understand how the three pattern variables interact, you can make up your own patterns. But watch out — you may soon want to spend all your spare time with little squares of cardboard! ☺

# SOME BASIC PATTERNS FOR TABLET WEAVING



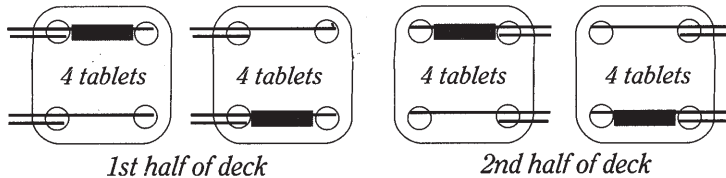
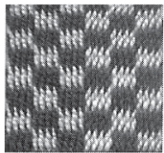
## Horizontal lines

- ◆ Threading direction. 1st half of deck to the Left, 2nd half to the Right.
- ◆ AB lines. All A-B lines on Top.
- ◆ Turning direction. Continuously in one direction.



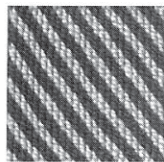
## 'Knitted' look

- ◆ Threading direction. Alternate tablets to the Left, to the Right; repeat.
- ◆ AB lines. All A-B lines on Top.
- ◆ Turning direction. Continuously in one direction.



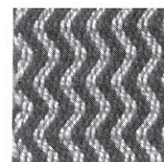
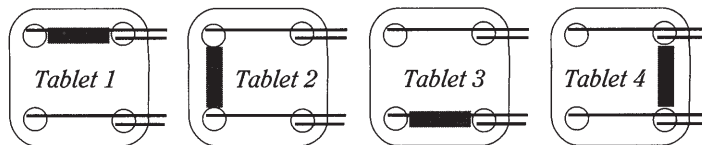
## Checkerboards

- ◆ Threading direction. 1st half of deck to the Left, 2nd half to the Right.
- ◆ AB lines. Four on Top; four on Bottom, repeat.
- ◆ Turning direction. Continuously in one direction.



## Diagonal lines

- ◆ Threading direction. All tablets threaded to the Right.
- ◆ AB lines. Top, Left, Bottom, Right, repeat.
- ◆ Turning direction. Continuously in one direction.



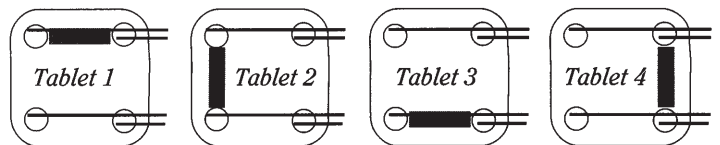
## Wavy lines

- ◆ Threading direction. All tablets threaded to the Right.
- ◆ AB lines. Top, Left, Bottom, Right, repeat.
- ◆ Turning direction. Four forward, four backward; repeat. (Start with A-B line on Top; reverse turning direction whenever A-B line is on Top.)



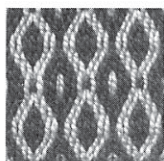
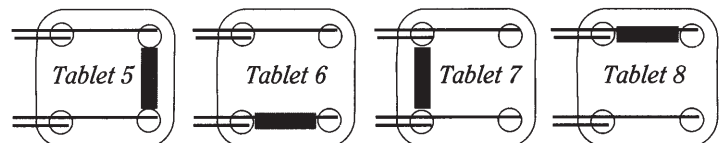
## 4/4 chevron

- ◆ Threading direction. Four to the Right, four to the Left; repeat.
- ◆ AB lines. Top, Left, Bottom, Right, Right, Bottom, Left, Top; repeat.
- ◆ Turning direction. Continuously in one direction.



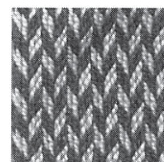
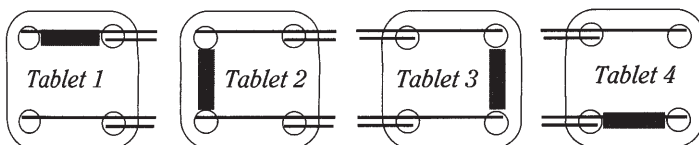
## 4/4 offset chevron

- ◆ Same as 4/4 chevron except
- ◆ AB lines. Change tablets 5-8 to: Left, Top, Right, Bottom.



## Diamonds

- ◆ Same as 4/4 chevron except
- ◆ Turning direction. Four forward, four backward; repeat.



## 2/2 offset chevron

- ◆ Threading direction. Two to the Right, two to the Left; repeat.
- ◆ AB lines. Top, Left, Right, Bottom.
- ◆ Turning direction. Continuously in one direction.