

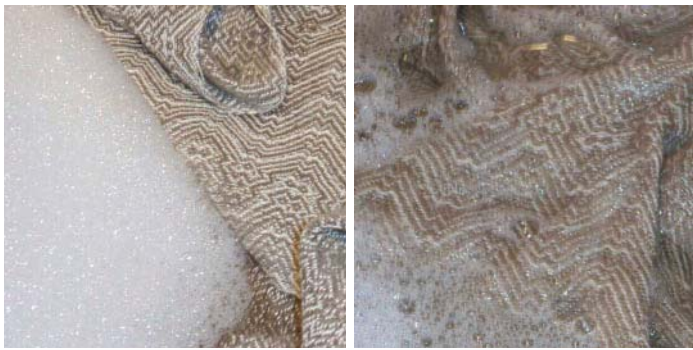
Laura Fry: It's never finished until it's wet finished!

Maybe all crafts can be viewed as metaphors for life. I'm not sure about that, but I follow four immutable rules regarding weaving, and they apply to my life as well.

Rule one Never use a knot where a bow will do.

There are many steps in the process of dressing a loom, and from time to time, securing things is required. If the level of security needed is temporary, using a knot will slow things down later on in the process. The knot may even cause problems because if I have to cut it away, I run the risk of cutting something that I don't want to cut. Like a warp thread.

Remembering to stop and think before I choose between tying a knot or a bow is a good exercise. It keeps me focused on the entire process and the consequences of each step, not just the situation before me at the moment.



Life is often like this, too. At times, situations arise that need to be dealt with, and while the temptation may be to resolve the situation with a permanent solution, there are times when it is best to step back, take a look at the big picture, and apply a temporary measure instead.

Rule two If you can't be perfect, be consistent.

Perfection is an elusive objective. I always know where my mistakes are, and in my heart, I know that I could almost always have done something better. By working consistently, I actually come much closer to perfection. For example, if I want to weave a fabric at twenty picks per inch but can only consistently manage eighteen picks, the final result will look much better if it is left at those eighteen picks instead of trying to cram two more picks into every inch by beating them much harder and forcing them to fit.

This also applies to my life. When I try too hard to be perfect, I wind up making myself (and my loved ones) a little bit crazy. Over the years, I've found that being consistent means that people know what to expect from me (and perfection isn't one of those things!). So I have stopped apologizing for the dust bunnies that live in my house, and my family has stopped expecting me to qualify for the Good Housekeeping Award.

Rule three A thread under tension is a thread under control.

A thread is a skinny, wiggly thing, apt to tangle if it is not disciplined with a little tension. Applying tension to a thread gives it a sense of purpose and lets it know what it is supposed to be doing and where it is supposed to be going. It is always so much better behaved with a little tension to keep it on track.

Life is full of tension, which is often viewed as a bad thing. But tension can also be good. Nervous energy before a public presentation can provide the focus to keep a speaker on track. Tension can be the motivating factor that keeps a project going forward—will it turn out? Can I make it better if I change this or that? Evaluating the textile both before and after it is finished can spark new ideas, and gentle changes in direction can make things turn out better than sticking to the original plan.



PHOTOS BY LAURA FRY

Rule four It isn't finished until it's wet finished.

Wet finishing is the final stage in the process of creating a fabric. Wet finishing takes individual threads and intermingles them, softens them, and transforms them into real cloth.

Placing the weaving into a tub of warm water with a little soap and agitating it for a while cleans the cloth, brightens the colors, and encourages the threads to move to areas of least resistance. With wet finishing, weave structures like lace and waffle weave develop to their full potential. Wet finishing causes woolen fabrics to full for greater stability and warmth and produces the desired hand, or drape, of almost any cloth.

Likewise, life has sometimes plunged me into a metaphoric tub of hot water and agitated me! It isn't much fun while it's happening, but when it's over, I am transformed. It is during times of adversity that inner strength becomes apparent. Characteristics I never thought I had—patience, organizational skills, or leadership qualities—can come to the fore. At the very least, I may gain a different perspective on what is really important in life. Sometimes we lose sight of what matters and need shaking up to be reminded.

These four rules have stood me in very good stead—in weaving and in life. 