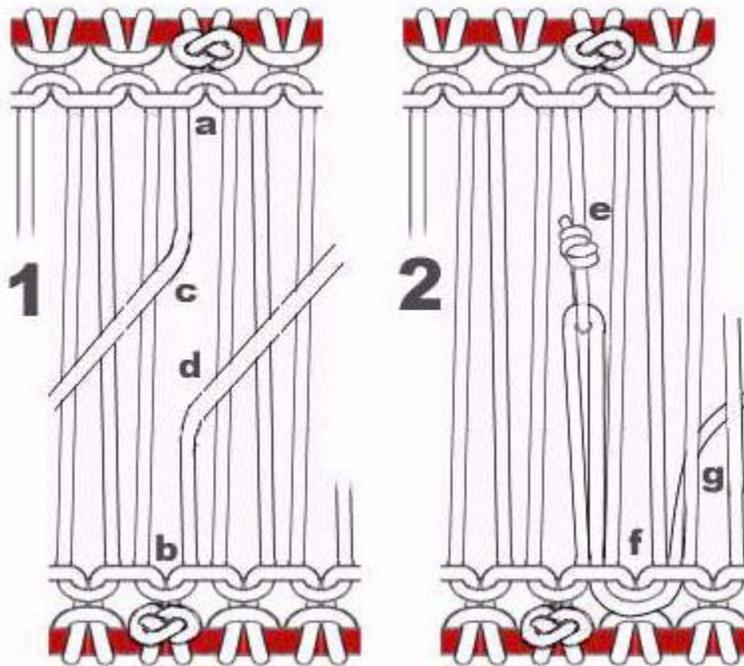


Tuning A Rope Djembe

(Right-click on any picture and select "Save image as..." to save the pictures and print them out.)

The verticals

The top and bottom rings and the verticals combined will keep everything in place, simply by tension and friction. If you are careful here, it will save you from having to redo later steps.



Knoting the top and bottom rings

Knот the top and bottom rings as shown in picture 1. Tie off the knotting with a simple flat knot as shown at points a and b. Contrary to what you might expect, there will be little stress on these knots - the rope between the rings is clamped by the rings, so the knot is only there to prevent some slippage, and it won't take the full stress of the verticals. Cut the ends short, and use a lighter to fuse the ends to the knot itself, or use some glue to prevent the knot from loosening.

Threading the verticals

Put the verticals in as shown in picture 1. At point c, tie a loop so that it looks like point e in picture 2. The end of the rope coming up from the bottom (point d in picture 1) goes through the loop, back down, underneath the loops on the bottom ring (point f), and then underneath the next verticals (point g). Pull the rope down so it is fairly tight under the verticals.

Tightening the verticals

Tighten the verticals as much as you can by hand, or [using a stick](#). Put your feet against the djembe and use plain muscle power. Try and keep both the top and bottom rings level. Make sure the verticals are evenly stretched. Pluck them like a string, and if one sounds higher than the other, pull the high one to even out the tension. Also, gently tap the skin all the way round the edge, to hear whether the tone is the same throughout (1). If one part of the skin sounds lower, pull the verticals there, then continue pulling the verticals, without adding much extra pull, until you come to point g again.

Any extra time and attention you spend at this point, will save you having to undo the Mali Weave later and starting here again!

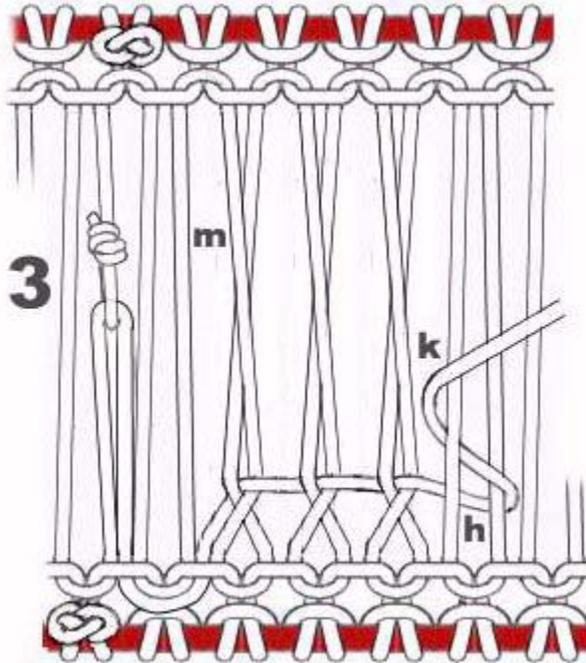
(1): To get the skin to sit properly, and take extra slack out of the verticals, even out any tension induced by friction etc: pound the skin with your fist all over! This will lower the tone considerably. Tension the verticals again.

Tip: You can use the lock stitch (see below) to take out all the slack from the verticals, and undo the lock stitch again if you like. Takes more time but less muscle power.

The lock stitch

The lock stitch is the first round of Mali Weave. This weave will "lock" the verticals in place. Any unevenly pulled verticals will no longer be able to even out their tension.

The rope goes under the next two verticals at point m. Then go over the right-hand vertical (as shown at point h), under the left-hand vertical (k) and to the right.



Rope burn

If you pull a long piece of rope under another in one place, whilst the rope is being clamped against the djembe, the rope will scar the djembe there like sandpaper. This is called rope burn. Try to avoid this by pulling the rope sideways, or lifting the rope it is being pulled under.

Pulling the cross

Pull the rope down below the imaginary horizontal line of the lock stitches. Point h is shown pulled down already. Do the same with point k. Once you pull the cross into the rope, you won't be able to pull the horizontal rope downwards anymore (upwards is still possible). Wind the rope end about three times around a short stick or your [rope pulling device](#). Put your two feet on the djembe which is lying on the floor, and pull the

rope in a 45 degree angle to the right and downwards, pulling the left vertical over the right vertical. Use pulling tension to position the horizontal rope neatly, and to position the cross neatly centered over the loop below. Check that the whole row of lock stitching stays neatly horizontal. The closer you stay to the bottom ring, the more slack you are taking out of the verticals!

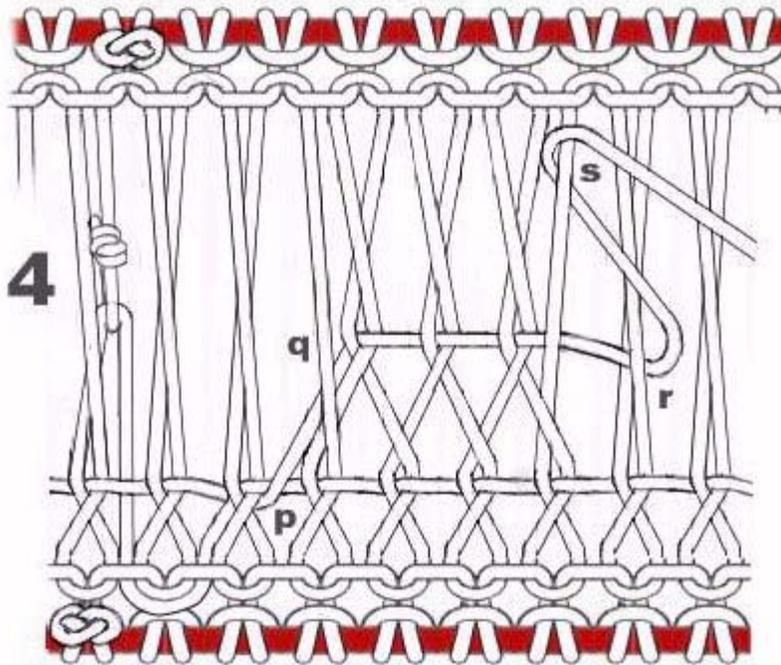
Finishing the lock stitch

You probably won't get the djembe up to playing pitch with less than a full round of lock stitch. To finish this round, go underneath the two verticals to the left of point p in figure 4. Then use some rope to lift the two verticals away from the djembe a bit, and go underneath the horizontal rope at point p. This way you finish the round neatly.

The Mali Weave

The Mali Weave is made just like the lock stitch. To start with, from point p, go underneath three verticals, back over the rightmost, underneath the middle one, and back over to the right. Pull the ropes way downwards below your wanted imaginary horizontal line. Remember, the closer to the lock stitch you are, the more difference each diamond will make in pitch.

Finally, pull the middle vertical across the rightmost vertical. It should now look like figure 4, point q.



Very tight verticals

If the crossed verticals spring back, you are probably tuned high enough. If you want to go higher, to prevent them from springing back, put your foot on the rope cross, stick the rope under the next two verticals, pull the rope down below the horizontal line, and pull it tight horizontally (like point r, but without doing s yet). This will keep the previous cross in place.

Finishing a round of Mali Weave

I've found that if your verticals are tightened properly, then one round

of lock stitch, and about half a round of Mali Weave, is sufficient to bring the djembe up to a fairly high pitch after putting a new skin on. In time however the skin may stretch, and you may want to tune it some more.

To finish a round of Mali Weave, stick the rope underneath the cross at point q. Lift the cross away from the djembe using the rope, and stick the rope underneath the horizontal rope. This is similar to finishing the round of lock stitch, illustrated at point p.

Round and round Some people say that you should only do complete rounds of Mali weave, to prevent the skin from being stretched unevenly and the djembe sounding "out of tune" with itself. There are various different ways of doing the Mali weave that will tighten the skin more, or less. Putting a round of Mali weave in close to the previous round, will tighten the skin a lot. Putting the round in higher up on the djembe will tighten the skin less. Using fancy patterns such as pulling the 1st and 4th ropes together will tighten the skin more. And so on. So select the type of Mali weave for the amount of tightening you want to do, if you want to complete a whole round.

Tuning your djembe only

If you only need to do a bit of tuning, here is what to do. Put the rope underneath the next two verticals (see figure 4, point r). Then up and back over the rightmost vertical, under the left vertical, and up over it to the right again (point s). Pull the rope as far down as you can, underneath the imaginary horizontal line coming from point q. In the picture, point r is already below that line. Do the same for s. Be careful not to make rope burns (see above) on the djembe shell.

Next, wind the rope three times around a short stick or your [rope pulling device](#), put your feet against the djembe, and pull the rope down at a 45 degree angle to your right, so you pull the left hand vertical over the right hand one. Then make the next diamond.

Evening out tensions

To even out tension introduced by friction etc. which is pulling the skin unevenly, pound the skin with your fist, simulating prolonged play. This will help pull the skin over the wood edge of the djembe and stretch it evenly.

Tying off excess rope

After the last cross, go under the next two verticals and pull the rope tight, so the last cross will not become undone. Now go straight down, wind the excess (1 to 2 yards extra is fine, more is just baggage) round the foot of the djembe, and use the last 5 inches to go up again and stick it under some rope to fasten it.

Rope pulling devices are available, I use an old drumstick.

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