

Learning to Spin on a Drop Spindle

People have been spinning wool to make thread and rope for thousands of years. No matter what you're spinning, and what tool you're using the basic principles remain the same. Fibre is made up of lots of individual hairs, untwisted those hairs slide past one another. Add some twist, and they lock together.

Take a small section of fibre, put your hands about 10cm apart and pull your hands away from one another. The fibres should slide past each other and you'll end up with 2 chunks. If it didn't work, try putting your hands slightly further apart.

Now try it again, but this time twist some of the fibres between your fingers, you might be able to pull the fibres apart, but it will take a lot more force.

This basic principle is what makes spinning work. Add twist and you can turn a cloud of fluff in to a strong thread.

Now take a closer look at the section of fibre you've just been playing with, try and pull out an individual hair, look at how long that hair is. This length is called the staple. Different fibre has different staple lengths, if you have your hands closer together than the length of the staple the hairs won't slide past each other, you'll be trying to pull the individual hairs, which is harder than it looks.

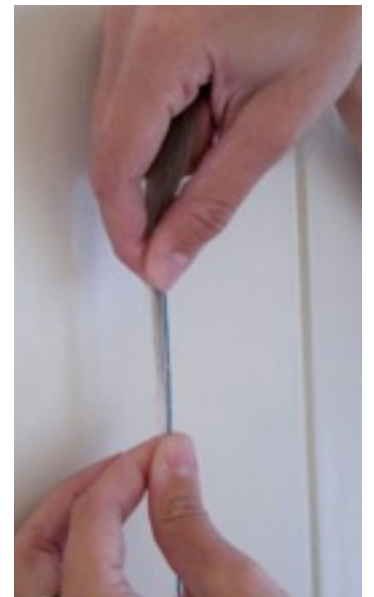


Now let's have a look at the spindle. At the top is a hook, attached on to a disc called a whorl, below that is the shaft of the spindle. Attached on to your spindle is a piece of yarn called a leader. We're going to use this to work out how the spindle works, and we'll use it to attach our fibre on to when we start spinning.



Unravel your leader from around the shaft, bring it up over the whorl and under the hook, wrap it round a couple of times. Let the spindle dangle from the leader and give the spindle a spin. You can either do this by rolling it with your fingers, or rolling it along your thigh. Your leader will twist, depending on the direction you spin the leader will either untwist, or twist tighter. Practise this a few times until you've got the hang of spinning the spindle.

Now we're going to carry on doing exactly the same thing but with the fibre attached. Overlap the end of your fibre with the leader, give the spindle a twist, and slide your hands apart, just like we did without the spindle. You are now drafting the fibre, use your bottom hand to stop the twist traveling in to your undrafted fibre. Remember, twisted fibres don't slide past each other.





Keep pulling your hands apart, and moving your bottom hand up to allow the twist to enter the drafted fibre. Eventually you will have spun enough yarn that you run out of arm length. When this happens unhook your leader, and wind everything you've spun around the shaft, leave about 6 inches of yarn unwrapped and hook it under your hook and go again

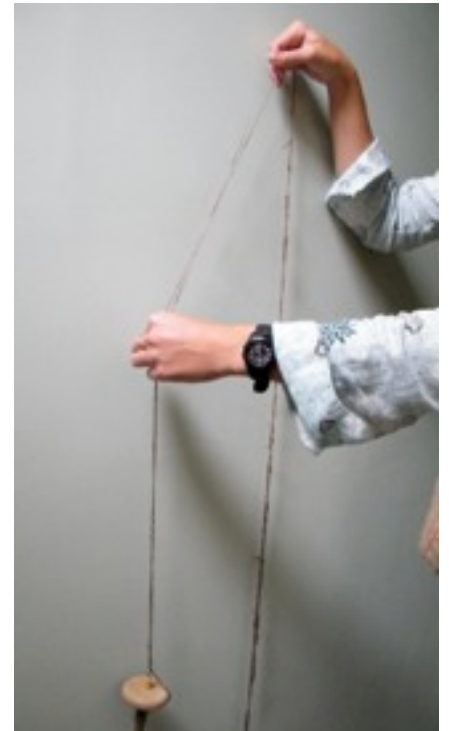
Eventually you'll have filled your spindle, or used half your fibre. Wind off the single (the yarn you've just spun), in to a ball, and repeat the process, just break the yarn where it joined the leader. When you have 2

balls of spun singles you are ready to ply and to make a finished yarn.

Put your 2 balls in to 2 containers, a bowl works fine, tie the ends of the singles to your leader. You are now ready to ply.

Spin your spindle in the opposite direction to the one in which you spun, and with your hands in the same position, slowly feed the 2 singles together. Your bottom hand pinches off the twist, and your top hand stops the singles from tangling together. Be careful not to over ply your singles, or you will untwist all the original twist you put in and end up dropping your spindle.

When you reach the ends of your balls you need to wind off your finished yarn. Wrap it around a chair back to make a skein. Tie some spare yarn around the skein in a figure of eight, repeat at the other end of the skein. Now wash your finished yarn, run a sink of hand warm water, add a bit of washing up liquid and put your skein in. Leave it to soak for 5 minutes, then rinse in hand warm water (cold water would felt your yarn). Squeeze out the excess water and put your hands through the skein, and pull them apart sharply, this snap shocks the fibres in to place and will help get rid of any kinks. Leave to dry, and admire.



If you're struggling, I have collected some video tutorials on my website
www.hilltopcloud.co.uk/videos



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