

Four strands, four ways

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Most people can do a three strand plait, so the aim of this article is to show the diversity of what you can do by adding just one more strand.

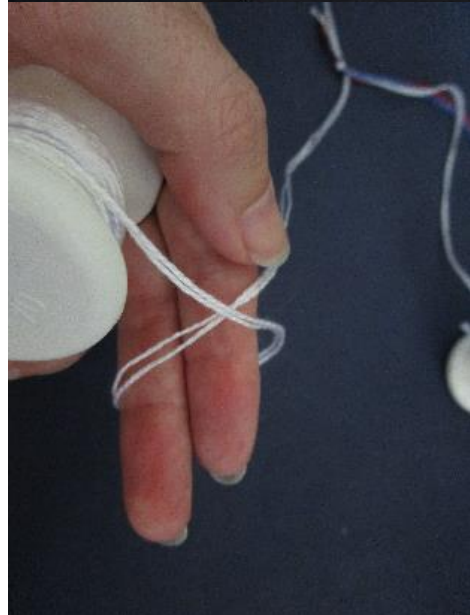
Equipment:

- Thread (I used Milford Satin 2 ply Perle no.5)
- Scissors
- 1 large paper clip
- 4 empty cotton reels/weighted tama(bobbins)
- A helper cat (optional)

Setting up

For these cords, I used doubled strands so that it was easier to see them in photographs. In all of the cords I used two strands of white, one of red and one of blue.

- Measure out your threads. I started with lengths of approximately 1.2m.
- Tie them together using an overhand knot at one end.
- Separate the blue threads and tie them to a bobbin. I used tama (weighted bobbins for kumihimo) with a strand tied onto them, however Gutermann brand empty thread bobbins will work very well because they have grooves to lock the threads in. If you don't have access to any of these, you could use pieces of cardboard with slots cut into them to secure the threads (like the ones used for embroidery threads). Because I use tama, I wrap the threads around them and secure them with a hitch knot, which allows me to easily unwind them as I braid.
- Continue this for all four doubled threads.
- Take a large paperclip and bend it into an S shape. Use it to suspend the threads from a stable object. In this case I used the stair bannister, but I often use a clothes horse.

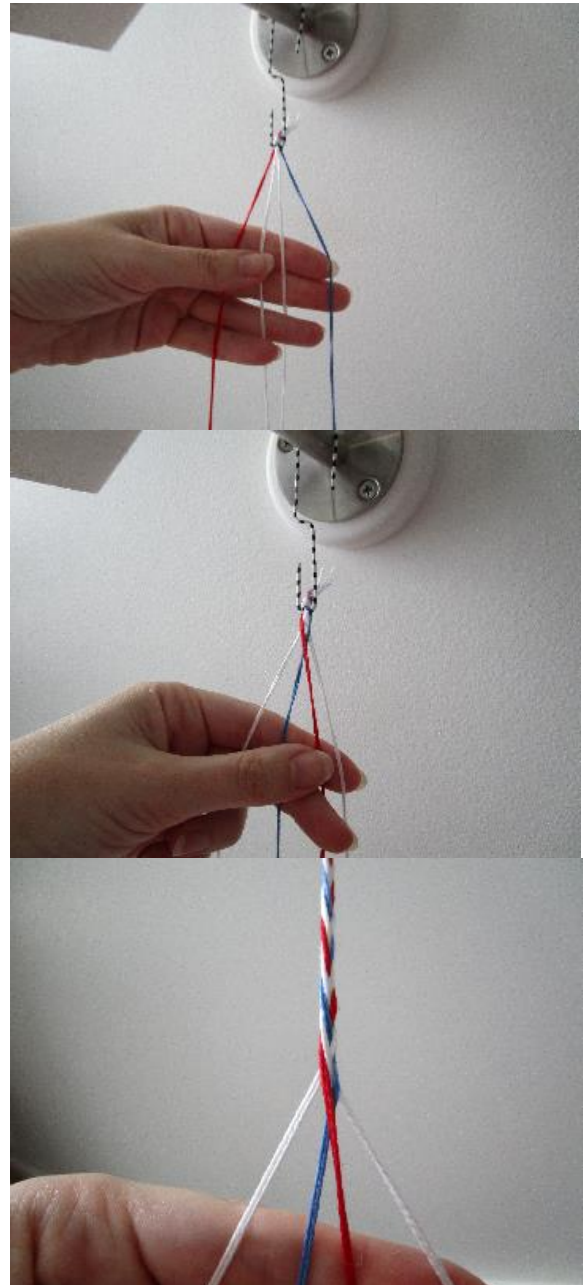


Method 1

This will produce a flat braid.

1. Start with the white threads in the middle, and the red and blue threads on the outside.
2. Bring the outside threads into the middle and cross them over, with the thread from the right side going behind the thread from the left side.
3. Repeat.
4. When you need to, let more of the threads out from the bobbins. As the braid gets longer, you will have to move further away from the paperclip – I moved further down the stairs.
5. When you have braided enough, cut the bobbins off and tie a knot in the end so the braid doesn't unravel.

You'll see that the structure resembles that of a three stranded plait, but allows for more interesting patterns when using different colours.

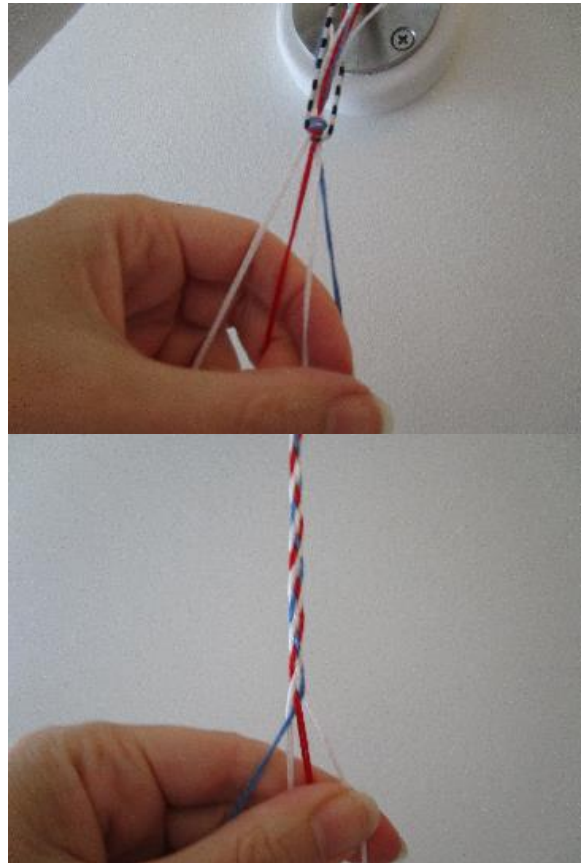


Method 2

This will also produce a flat braid, but with a different pattern.

1. Start with white, red, white, blue (from left to right).
2. Take the right hand thread (blue) and weave it over the white thread next to it, under the red thread, then over the far white thread. It has now travelled from the far right to the far left.
3. Repeat with the white thread which is now at the far right (over under over towards the left).
4. Repeat.

With this braid, each of the strands works its way from right to left and then back again.

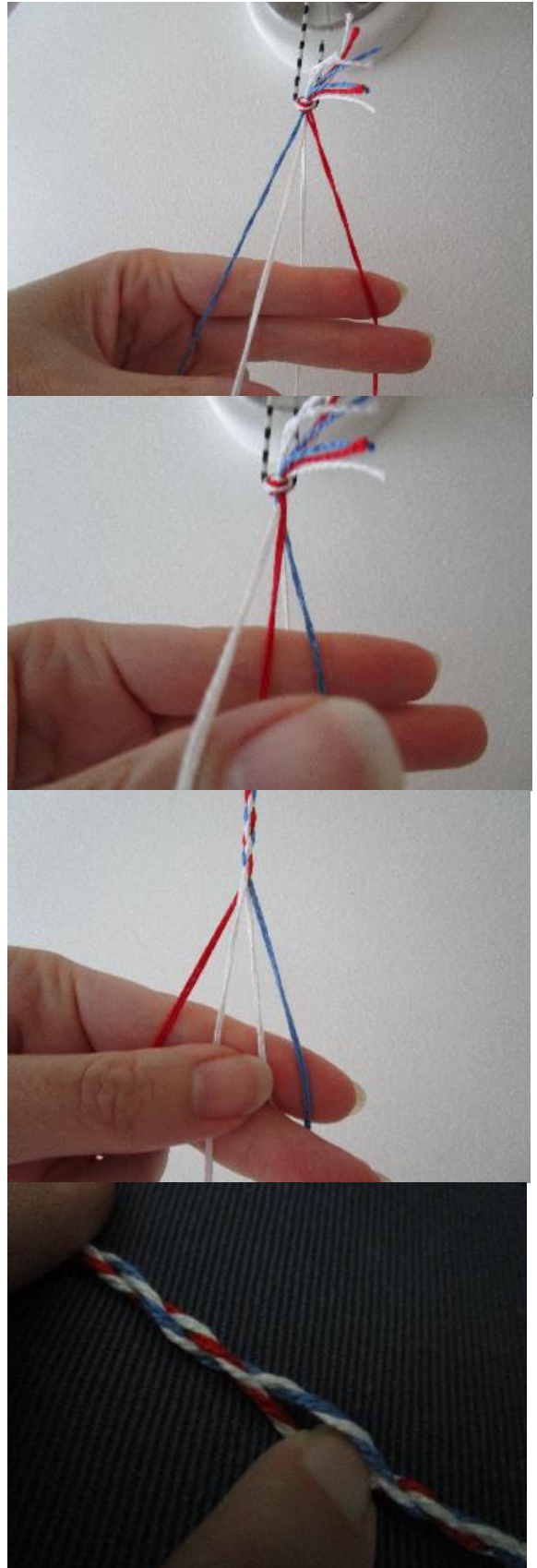


Method 3

This produces a round braid. Spinners will recognise that this is plying the strands together.

1. Arrange the threads so they are at the cardinal compass points – North (white), East (red), South (white), West (blue).
2. Swap the east/west threads, passing the west thread behind the east thread.
3. Swap the north/south threads, passing the north thread to the right of the south thread.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3.

The final structure will be a blue and white thread twisted around each other, and a red and white thread twisted around each other, all plied together.

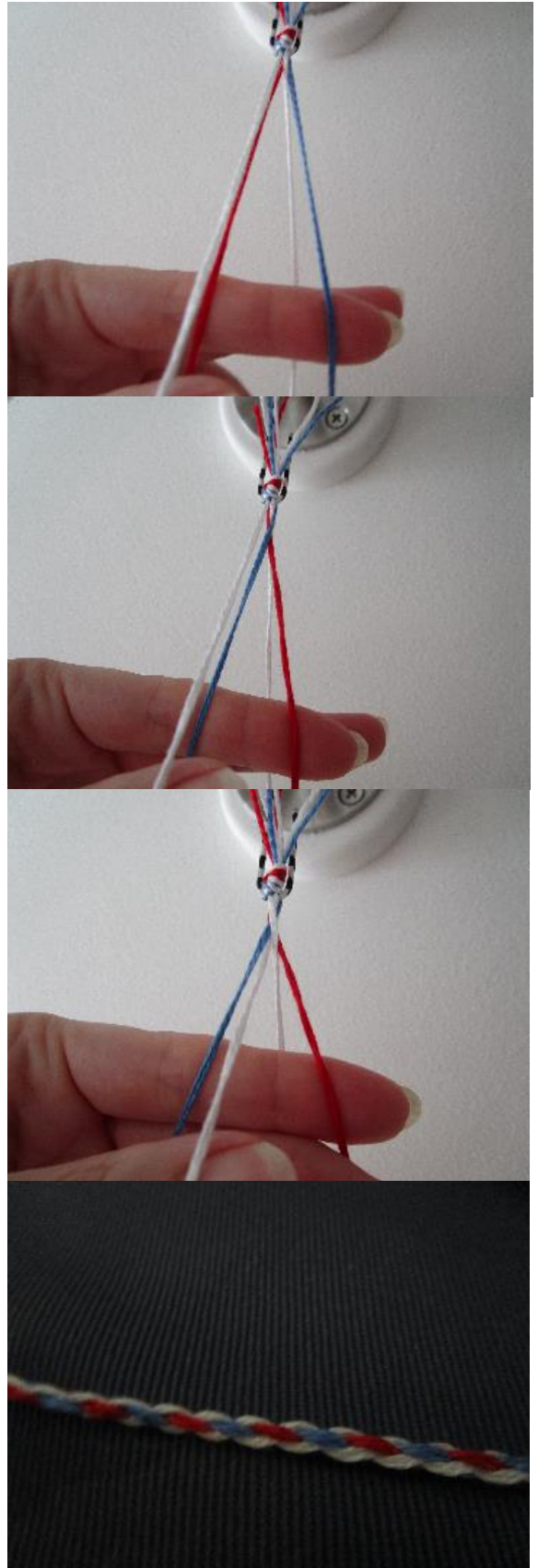


Method 4.

This produces a round braid called a whipcord (Hald).

1. Arrange the threads so they are at the cardinal compass points – North (white), East (red), South (white), West (blue).
2. Swap the east/west threads, passing the west thread behind the east thread.
3. Swap the North/south threads, passing the north thread to the left of the south thread.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3.

While braid 3 can be separated by untwisting the plied threads, in this method crossing the threads locks the braid together.



The helper cat: having a helper cat is optional. This one is called Hermes.

Reference:

'Ancient Danish Textiles from Bogs and Burials : A Comparative Study of Costume and Iron Age Textiles' by Margrethe Hald. Published by Nationalmuseets Forlag, 1980.

