FACTS & LORE

about beads and beadwork

On this page I welcome
interesting facts, helpful hints, amusing anecdotes,
educated opinions, brilliant quotes, and clever ideas about beadwork.

A comparison of stitches
with right-angle weave commentary by expert Ruth Satterlee.
Link to beautiful bead poetry
The Hennenite Bead Cult
Beads per square inch

A Comparison of Techniques

The chart below outlines the pros and cons of five of the most popular of the "standalone" bead techniques: loomwork, square stitch, peyote stitch, brick stitch, and right angle weave. I'm least familiar with the last two techniques, so there are some blanks where I'd value the opinion of more experienced artists

	LOOMWORK	SQUARE STITCH	PEYOTE STITCH	BRICK STITCH	RIGHT-ANGLE WEAVE

SPEED	Fast--you add a whole row at a time. I don't know of a technique that develops faster.	Slow. The "double-back" version of the stitch is the slowest way I know to get beadwork done.	Fast. Almost as fast as loomwork, depending on whether you're following a pattern or working freehand.	Slow.	Slow.
FLEXIBILITY	Very flexible along the horizontal, fairly flexible along the vertical. Can be made quite rigid with the use of fine-gauge wire instead of thread for the warp.	Flexibility varies from stiff to fairly drapey, depending on the variation you choose and the thread-to-bead size ratio.	Very flexible. Peyote stitch is comparable to bias-cut fabric, flexible in both diagonal directions as well as vertically.	Generally stiffer than peyote, and lacking peyote's bias qualities. The flexibility is almost all along the horizontal.	Very soft and flexible.
	LOOMWORK	SQUARE STITCH	PEYOTE STITCH	BRICK STITCH	RIGHT-ANGLE WEAVE
STRENGTH	Weak, must be firmly mounted	Extremely strong. Stands on its own, does not necessarily need to be mounted. In the double-back version, each bead contains 5 threads.	Weak. Beads are linked to their neighbors above and their neighbors below by only one thread each. When a thread breaks, huge gaps open up instantly.	Strong. The majority of connections in brick stitch are "thread-to-thread" rather than "bead-to-thread," so there's limited potential for thread breakage.	Strong.
THREAD	Fairly thready, especially at the selvages. Warp thread DOES show throughout the work.	Quite thready. Every bead is flanked by enough passes of thread to affect considerably the number of beads in a horizontal inch.	Thread doesn't show at all, except along the side edges.	Thread is virtually invisible.	**Ruth says: "About as thready as peyote."**
	LOOMWORK	SQUARE STITCH	PEYOTE STITCH	BRICK STITCH	RIGHT-ANGLE WEAVE
DESIGNING	Easy--beads are in straight rows and columns. Use graph paper or any grid-pattern software to get started	Same as for loomwork.	The offset grid of peyote stitch makes it harder to design for than the straight-line grids of loom and squarestitch. Software is available, but not as readily as for in-line grids. A peyote grid pattern can be rather hard to follow, too.	Peyote stitch patterns can be turned sideways and replicated in brick stitch. The pattern is easier to read this way, because the working, horizontal row is solid rather than "toothed" and can easily be marked with a straight-edge.	**Ruth says: "Right angle weave is NOT any more difficult to design for than peyote stitch. Yes, you've got beads pointing in four different directions, but with peyote, you've got that jag on the horizontal. The good r-angle weave teachers, such as David Chatt, provide graph paper in their class handouts."**

WORKING FREEHAND	Not advised except in very narrow rows--visualizing the placement of an entire row of beads at a time is beyond THIS mortal mind.	Can be worked freehand since you add one bead at a time.	Excellent for developing designs in a freehand style. With each row or round you only fill in half a line of design, so patterns can grow fluidly and gradually.	What do you brick-stitchers think?	Might as well plan to work freehand in right-angle weave.
	LOOMWORK	SQUARE STITCH	PEYOTE STITCH	BRICK STITCH	RIGHT-ANGLE WEAVE
IN-THE-ROUND (cylindrical) AND CIRCULAR (flat-round or medallion)	Not easily worked in the round, but can be made into a tube after finishing. Circular (flat-round) is not possible with loomwork; circles can be formed with edge shaping only	Works well in the round, but don't "spiral" it--bring each round to a full stop before jumping up and beginning a new round. Can be worked circularly by following a careful formula.	Excellent in the round and in circular work. There's something about peyote stitch that just keeps going. It lends itself well to roundness of all kinds.	Excellent in the round. Theoretically possible in circular form: if you've tried it and developed a reliable formula, please let me know.	**Ruth says: "Does work well IN-THE-ROUND (cylindrical), although as I write this I realize that's an area that deserves some exploration. My friend is creating a necklace using a right angle weave cylinder that's on a bias. CIRCULAR - Works extremely well - but it takes practice. Hint - do each row in a different color."**
2D: SHAPING	Limited possibilities. Doesn't allow for deep indentations or steeply concave lines on the outer edges, and doesn't easily permit openings or windows in the body. Adapts well to simple geometric shapes.	With advance planning, you can make just about any shape. Decreasing at the edge is much, much easier than increasing, so it's advisable to start working from the widest part of your pattern.	Quite complex edge lines are possible with peyote, because increasing and decreasing at the ends of rows are both pretty easy. Internal openings are possible but hard to manage, and greatly weaken the fabric.	Complex edge lines are best achieved in another technique; however, if you want a shape that goes from narrow to wide and back to narrow with virtually no thread showing anywhere, brick stitch is your choice.	**Ruth says: "Is as versatile as the square stitch, IMHO"**
	LOOMWORK	SQUARE STITCH	PEYOTE STITCH	BRICK STITCH	RIGHT-ANGLE WEAVE
3D: FORMING	Not your best choice. Works well for constructed articles where individual pieces will be seamed together into a 3D form. NOTE: loomwork is the only technique I know of that can be worked directly over an armature (a wire-frame form).	Yes. You can form square stitch around objects. Increasing and decreasing within the body of the work is slightly less fluid than with peyote.	The bias-like stretchiness of the stitch makes peyote excellent for forming around complex and irregular objects. Its organic quality is perfect for building up sculptural forms as well.	Works well in the round and around regular cylindrical objects. Not at its best where frequent or irregular increases and decreases are necessary.	Works well in the round and circularly. Increases and decreases are tricky. Right angle weave may be the ideal technique if you want to build a foundation for complex sculptural and freeform work.

EMBELLISHMENT	Those warp ends are ideal for fringe. With careful planning it's possible to incorporate larger beads and stones by stringing them onto the warp and working short rows on either side of them. It's possible to build up the surface somewhat, but do it after the piece is mounted to avoid distortion of the warp.	It's easy to incorporate large beads and stones right into the work as you go. You can also leave "windows" in any shape. Building up the surface is possible, but remember that the beads get pretty full of thread the first time.	With practice, you can incorporate large beads and stones into the work. Windows and openings are possible but do weaken the fabric. Building up the surface is easy.	Adding embellishment stones or beads is possible: leave a window the size of your larger bead, then stitch it into the window vertically, anchoring it through the holes of the beads above and below the window.	You can incorporate large beads and stones into the work. Windows and openings are possible. Building up the surface is easy.
	LOOMWORK	SQUARE STITCH	PEYOTE STITCH	BRICK STITCH	RIGHT-ANGLE WEAVE
FINISHING	What to do with the warp ends may be the most vexing problem in all of beadwork. Finishing loomwork can eat up all the time you gained from its speed.	No finishing required. Square stitch finishes itself as you go.	Peyote finishes itself as you go along. Its "zipper tooth" upper and lower edges are a joy to link together. Flat, standalone pieces will need reinforcement.	Brick also finishes itself as you go along. The zipper teeth here are along the side edges.	Self-finishing.
MAJOR ADVANTAGES	It goes fast and you see your design emerging quickly.	It's very strong and enduring; you can actually cut sections of it off (horizontally, not vertically!) and it will retain its integrity.	Fast, fluid, flexible, "organic" in feel (as compared to the linear qualities of most other techniques).	Strong, can be made stiff, and the side edges are completely thread-free.	Unsurpassed combination of strength and flexibility. **Ruth says, "With flat right angle weave, you have a product that drapes."**
	LOOMWORK	SQUARE STITCH	PEYOTE STITCH	BRICK STITCH	RIGHT-ANGLE WEAVE
MAJOR DISADVANTAGES	Finishing the warp ends may drive you crazy.	It's slow. I mean, really, really "Zen of Beadwork" slow.	Somewhat weak on its own, hard to design for.	Slow enough and difficult enough to design for that its applications are limited.	Hard to master, hard to design for, and slow to work, and doesn't form a solid surface.
I WOULD CHOOSE THIS TECHNIQUE FIRST FOR	Very large expanses of beadwork, flat or mostly flat pieces that will be mounted or framed, making whole garments, decorating leather or denim clothes, testing design ideas, working over an armature, incorporating metal wire.	Small to mid-size pieces that must be strong without being mounted to a backing; designs calling for openings or windows in the middle of the work; covering symmetrical or fairly simple objects such as bottles.	Freehand work I want to design as I go, covering organic forms such as stones, sticks and bones, simple geometric repeating patterns, round and cylindrical objects.	Covering small, regular, rounded objects in simple repeat designs; flat triangular, diamond-shape, or circular shapes where a clean, thread-free edge is important.	Three-dimensional objects to be heavily built-up with layers of beads.

The Three Pillars of the Hennenite Cult

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Beeswax, white thread, and sharp needles: just say no!

Roni Hennen, the iconoclast who brought us Thread Heaven, is the unwitting founder of a bead religion. It has about three members so far. If you want to join, you have to take up at least two of the Three Pillars.

Beeswax is a moot point now that there's Thread Heaven. Try it for yourself. Everyone who's tried it gives up sticky, dust-gathering, bead-clogging beeswax 4-ever. back to pillars

White thread in beadwork shouts, "*LOOK AT ALL THIS THREAD!*" Matching your thread to your beads diminishes the spaces between beads so that the beads blur together. (Besides, if you use as many different colored beads as I do, you can't match the thread to the beads.)

Now, black thread, on the other hand, recedes into the shadows between beads, so each bead stands out brightly.

Remember the Sony Trinitron color picture tube? Colored dots--like beads--look more vivid in a matrix of black--like black thread--than in any other matrix.

So simplify your life--use black thread. (Possible exception: a mostly white or pale transparent project, where you could use a medium gray or "ash" colored thread.) back to pillars

What good is the point on your needle? It isn't. Cut it off. Beads already have holes.

For most types of on and off-loom beadwork, a blunt needle is best. (I'm told that brick-stitch is the exception here.) A blunt needle won't pierce and weaken your thread. You can undo stitches with it almost as easily as you can do them. And you won't poke yourself as much, either.

Snip the tip with wire-cutters, discard it carefully, and run the end of the needle across a ceramic or diamond nail file a few times to remove any burrs. back to pillars

How Many Beads?

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According to Our Founder Roni, one of the most experienced and talented beadwork designers in the United States, the following table will help you decide how many beads you need for a square stitch project, in some of the most popular beads.

The figures will be close--but not exact--for loomwork as well.

Bead Sizes-->	11° Czech	11° Japanese	Delica	14° Japanese
1" horizontal	18	14	18	21
1" vertical	11	12	15	16
1" square	198	168	270	336

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