

Tuning Instructions

by Matthew Marsolek



Take a close look at your drum. Notice that the tightening is done in horizontal rows that progress around the drum shell. Tension is given to the head by overlapping one vertical rope over another with a simple weave. The weaving rope and resulting overlaps create triangular shapes and two different patterns in the vertical ropes (These I'll talk about below). Many drummers call tuning a drum, "pulling diamonds" because as the rows progress, you see diamond patterns in the weave.

Get your extra rope (the weaving rope) unraveled, untangled, and ready to go. If it's frayed at the end, take a lighter and melt the end and shape it so it's easy to weave.

Follow your extra rope to where the last tightening was left off.

Looking at your drum, you'll notice that the previous tightening created one of two patterns in the vertical ropes.



"V" pattern

Each overlap makes a "V" in the vertical ropes.



"Line" pattern

Each overlap brings the ropes into a straight line.

These two patterns alternate with each new row of weaving and tightening. For example, if you finish an entire row of "Vs" the next row will be creating "Lines" and visa versa.

Go to page 2 to follow a "V" pattern.*

Go to page 4 to follow a "Line" pattern.*

Go to page 6 to learn a great knot for "pulling diamonds" with a stick and to find some additional tightening tips.

*The tightening process is the same for both patterns. I've included pictures of both sequences to make it easier to follow along.

“V” pattern weave

Get your drum positioned in front of you. It should look something like the picture to the right.

You can tighten a drum in either a right or left direction. The following sequence shows a drum being tightened to the right.



Memorize this phrase, “under two, back under the first.” Here’s why...



Find the next two vertical ropes after the last overlap.



Feed the end of your rope under those two verticals. In this case, from left to right.



Now, weave it back under the first rope. You’ve accomplished “under two, back under the first.”



Get ready to pull at an angle, down and to the right, to tighten.



The finished overlap. Repeat the sequence as many times as you need.

When you master the weave pattern, you can weave many pairs of vertical ropes in one sitting and then go back and overlap and tighten them one by one. This can save you a lot of time when tightening a new drum or a really loose head.

Finishing up: When your drum is tightened to your liking, weave one extra pattern. Rather, than pulling it into an overlap, just snug it up like the picture to the right. This will hold your work in place and leave a correct weave for you to begin with next time.



For some drums, you can bundle the extra rope together ...

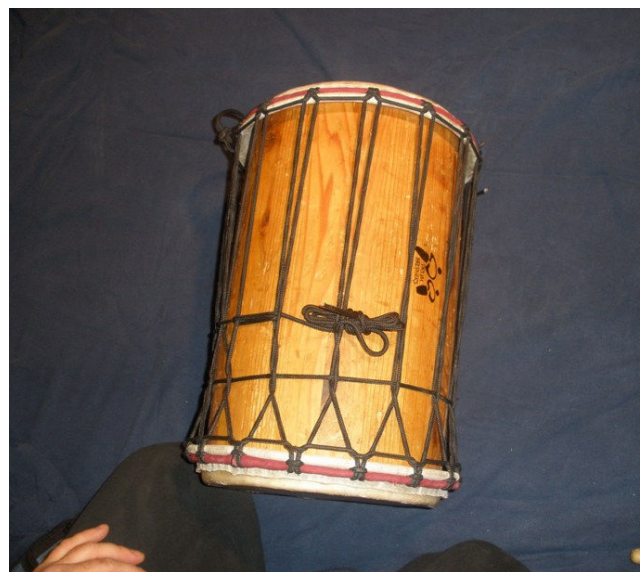
By pulling down and to the right, the new overlap matches the previous one. And the weaving rope makes a nice parallel line to the row below. If you don't pull down at an angle, each successive overlap will tend to creep up toward the top of the drum.

Many drums (djembes in particular) need a lot of force for tightening. If you need to, get on the floor, position the drum at an angle, put your feet squarely upon it, and pull. Let your legs do the work. You may need a friend to hold the finished overlap with a finger or vice grip.

Warning: When following the pattern, "under two, back under the first", make sure to go under the first rope from the correct side. If you go back over and then under the first rope by mistake, you won't be able to correctly overlap and tighten. Try it the wrong way once, and you'll see what I mean.



One extra weave to hold things in place.



and then tuck it under the vertical ropes. Or just wrap the extra around the drum. © 2009 by Matthew Marsolek

“Line” pattern weave

Get your drum positioned in front of you. It should look something like the picture to the right.

You can tighten a drum in either a right or left direction. The following sequence shows a drum being tightened to the right.



Memorize this phrase, “Under two, back under the first.” Here’s why...



Find the next two vertical ropes after the last overlap.



Feed the end of your rope under both and then back under the first.



Get ready to pull at an angle, down and to the right, to tighten.



The finished overlap. Repeat the sequence as many times as you need.



The finished overlap.

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When you're finished, add one extra weave to hold things in place.



and then tuck it under the vertical ropes. Or just wrap the extra around the drum. © 2009 by Matthew Marsolek

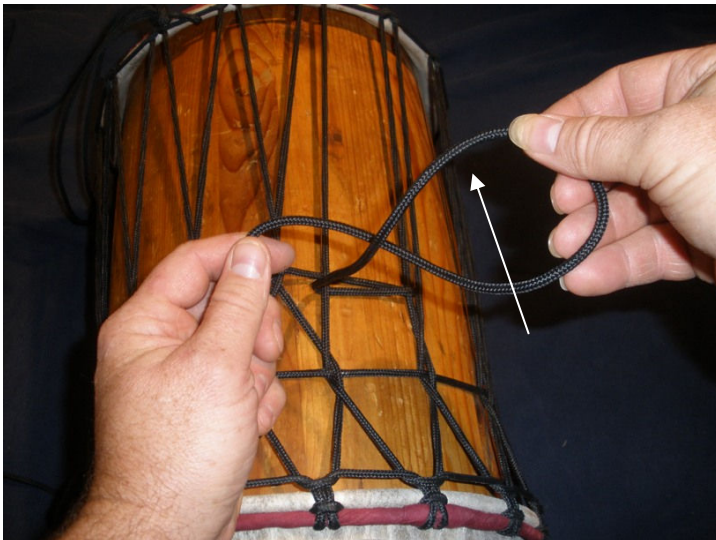
Pulling Diamonds with a stick

Here is a non-slip knot to hold a stick firmly when pulling a weave and tightening a drum. We thank Jeff Bodony in Poulsbo, Washington, for showing us this technique so many years ago.

It's easy to do and it will really save your hands!



With your weave ready to be pulled, make a loop in the rope close to the drum.



Twist the loop, by bringing the bottom piece up over the top.



Now take the twisted loop and lay it back over the rope, toward where it connects to the drum.



Feed your stick underneath the middle piece and over the top of the loop.



Snug the knot onto the stick.



Put your hand over the knot with the rope between your middle and ring fingers.

Additional Tips:

When doing the basic weave, “under two, back under the first”, weave your rope up toward the top of the drum where there’s the most room. Then when you tighten, pull each overlap down to where it needs to be.



Wooden Awl. When weaving, use this simple tool to make a space under the vertical ropes when they’re pressed tight against the drum shell and hard to get under (This is often the case with djembe drums). Just carve down a broken drum stick, a small branch from a tree, or an old wooden spoon.

Now you’re ready to pull.

For maximum force, sit on the floor and pull with both hands on the stick while your feet push against the drum.

When you’re done with a pull, just slide the stick out of the knot and let the rope unravel back to its regular shape. When done correctly, you shouldn’t need to untie the knot.



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Mali Weave

There is another style of weaving, commonly called the “Mali Weave”, which creates a locking overlap. Do an online search for “Mali Weave” to find more information. The pattern is, “over two, back around and over the first, under the second”. At Drum Brothers, we’ve found this weave to be a bit cumbersome when tuning or unlacing a drum. The locking overlaps are time consuming and sometimes difficult to take apart. Case in point is that we tune our dununs to a major chord and are often adding and taking out overlaps to get the drums exactly in tune. But if you don’t need to adjust or replace the head of your drum that often, you might want to give it a try.