

Not Just Knots How To

How to Make a Knot Board

Skill level: beginner, immediate, advanced

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Knot boards are a very effective way to display knots. If constructed carefully, a knot board is a permanent display that informs others or simply showcases a knot tyer's careful and beautiful work. These instructions review some knot board designs, consider the advantages and disadvantages of each, and provide suggestions for making your knot board the best it can be. Don't hesitate to be creative though—there are as many ways to design knot boards as there are individuals!

Purpose of the Knot Board

Generally speaking, knot boards are made for one of three purposes: to teach, to inform, or to showcase knots as art.

If you are making your knot board for teaching, think carefully about the specific purpose. Is it to teach someone how to tie a certain knot? If so, step-by-step instructions are very helpful. Is it to teach someone about handy knots for camping? If so, you may want to label each knot with its use.

Using a knot board to inform others usually involves grouping knots, or showing knots that have something in common. The featured knots share some characteristic. The camping example from above works here too. Other examples include displaying knots that are commonly used in farming, climbing, or boating. Another approach might be to feature knots that function the same way, such as bends or hitches.

Finally, artistic knot boards display a knot or group of knots for maximum visual artistic effect, sometimes with other components or decorations.

The Knots

Of course, the knots are the stars of the show when it comes to knot boards. Typically, knots are neatly identified with name labels. Knots made with natural fiber cordage should have the ends whipped. The ends of synthetic fiber cordage should be whipped or fused.

Generally speaking, an effective display includes knots tied to 3 or 4 square inches, making them big enough to be seen but small enough to handle and mount.

For knots that are easy to handle and long lasting, consider preserving them in a mixture of white glue and water. See *Preserve Knots* for more information. Hint: Knots tied with natural fiber last longer if they are soaked in water repellent solutions. Once dried the knot has a set position and is easier to mount.



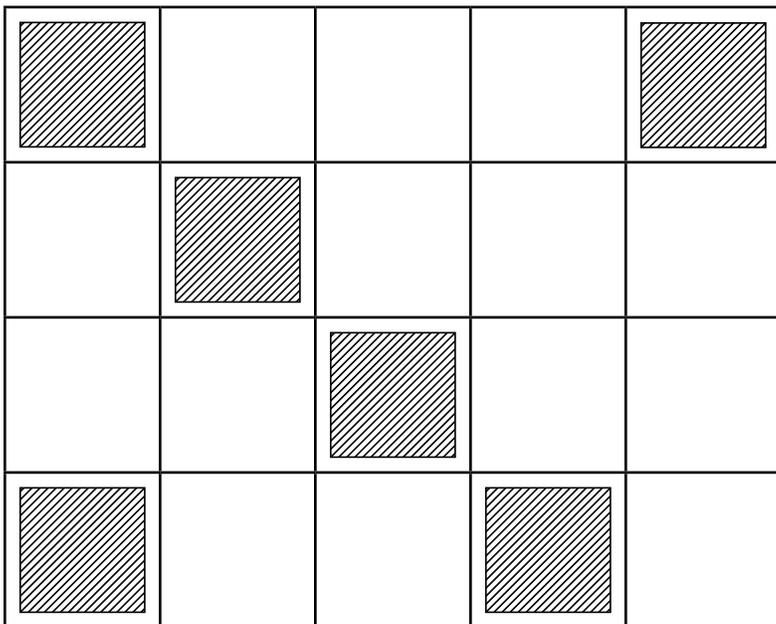
Board Design and Layout

As a first step, carefully plan your board's layout before you buy materials and certainly before you begin affixing anything to a board. You may find you need much more or much less space than you thought. As you plan, allow enough space for each knot and its label, and for enough space between the knots so the board does not appear crowded.

A knot board that is well laid out is very pleasing to look at. Here are some reliable approaches that are good for projects of all levels:

- The structured **rectangular grid** or pigeon hole layout is easy to work with because each knot has only a certain amount of space. The size of that space is determined based on the size of the largest knot. NOTE: If your display includes a sheep shank or other similarly long knot, simply allow two spaces for each one.
- Arranging knots in an obvious **sequence** is important if you intend the viewer to follow steps or are arranging the knots in order of importance or complexity.
- A arrangement that places small knots around a larger **centerpiece** knot is useful for showcasing something special. Knots are sometimes layed out around a centerpiece in an "invisible X."
- If it's done neatly, even a **random** layout can be effective. It is easy because there are no structured borders. If you use a random layout, avoid confusion by making sure your labels are close to the knots they describe.

Each arrangement has advantages and disadvantages, and each can be done very well. As you gain experience in displaying your knots, consider using artistic rules such as the rule of thirds or the golden mean in making your design decisions.



Rectangular grid or pigeon hole layout

Consider enhancing your display by adding a border made with paint, tape, or even cordage.



Display Medium

Permanent knot boards are usually mounted on sturdy material such as hardboard, pegboard, or thin plywood. To help you select the best one for your project, think about your answers to these questions:

- Is your display going to be for judging, exhibiting, or both?
- How many knots are you going to display?
- Will your display have a theme?
- How are you going to mount your knots?
- How are you going to transport your display?

Temporary (as opposed to permanent) knot boards can be made with almost any type of material including cut cardboard, pre-folded cardboard, display board, and fiber board. These boards are easily taken apart once the viewing or judging is completed.

Background and Color

Because the knots are the stars of the show, the board, or background, should present the knot in the best possible way. Light colored cordage shows up best against a dark background, and dark cordage shows up best against a light background. Although both materials are attractive by themselves, natural fiber cordage against a natural wood surface (wood or plywood) presents very little contrast and is not be the best combination.

Caution: If you use pegboard as your background to take advantage of the pre-punched holes for mounting, be advised the lighter the background shade, the more the hole shadows create visual clutter.

Mounting the Knots

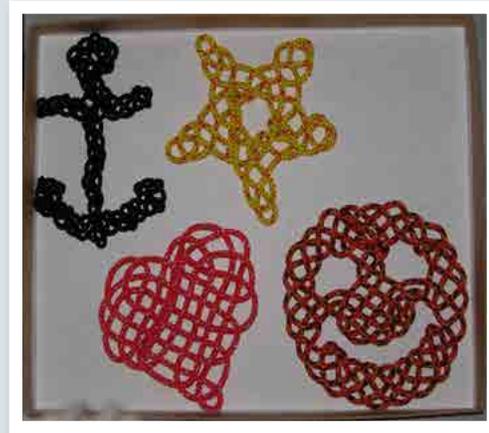
When mounting your knots, find a method that does not interfere with the physical shape of the knot the least. Glue or hot glue usually works well. Small wire or plastic cable ties secure knots nicely, but you will have to drill small holes in the display to attach them. Small nails and small pins get the job done too, but they may detract from the board's overall appearance.

Knot Identification

Labels range from names carefully written on the display medium to printed and laminated labels carefully glued. As long as the work is accurately and neatly done, it is not necessary to spend a lot of money on labeling supplies. Decorative knots often do not have descriptions because they are displayed for the visual appeal.



This collection of decorative knots is mounted inside of a large shoebox lid. Great idea!



Here's another decorative presentation, this one using a wooden frame and a pleasing color combination.



This small nylon cordage knot collection is inside a CD case.

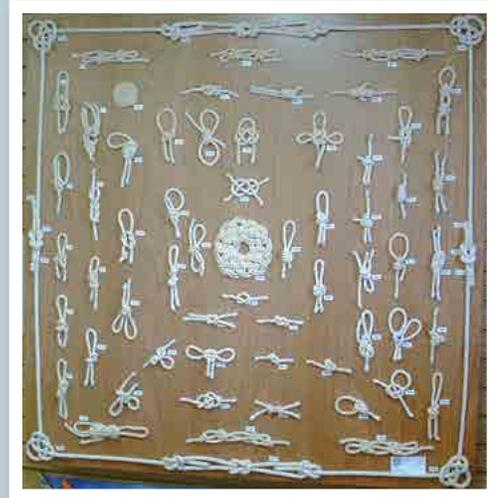


This large board, which includes 67 natural-fiber knots and is 48 inches square, features a centerpiece, an “invisible X” layout, and a decorative border. Approximately 100 hours was required to tie the 67 natural fiber knots, including whipping the ends and preserving the knots. The large center knot took over three hours to complete.

Knot board arrangement theme and location of knots involved six hours. Final mounting of knots was eight hours.

Each knot is identified with a small number label to reduce the ‘cluttered’ appearance. An index sheet (wall mounted—not shown) helps the viewer identify each knot.

Complete construction time was six weeks including knot research, cordage selection, knot construction, knot finishing, mounting board selection, board construction, board finishing, and final board mounting.



This advanced knot board is still under construction. The material is ¼” plywood cut to 48” x 24”. The plywood has been primed, painted, and mounted on a support frame. This teaching aid design illustrates a borderless display with light colored cordage on a dark background.

The theme is a combination of complex sheep shanks and joining bends. After the identification labels have been properly attached the temporary hanging name tags will be removed



