

LEARN TO SPIN

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Spinning is taking fibers, stretching them out to an even thickness, and adding twist to make them stick together.

90% of spinning is muscle memory. Today is about understanding the basic process. To really learn to spin, you need to practice. It's best to practice in short bursts, and not when you're frustrated. When things start to go wrong, put down your spindle and walk away. Come back later when you don't want to injure others with your spindle. Remember, historically, people learned to spin as children. As children, we expect to not get things the first try. Do not demand the impossible of yourself as an adult. Your hands may understand this in 10 minutes, 10 days, or 10 months.

Remember, the most important thing is that you enjoy what you're doing. Next important is ending up with yarn. There's no right or wrong way to make yarn. (There are established techniques to create specific types of yarn, but that's another story.)

PREPPING YOUR FIBER

There are whole classes, entire books, and multiple videos available on how to prep fiber for spinning. When you want to make specific yarns, how you prepare your fiber really, really matters. That is a long subject you can explore later.

Basics to remember:

To spin you need to pull fibers out in an even thickness. This is called drafting.

Know how long your fibers are. Different fiber types, breeds, preparations all have different lengths. In general, most wool is 2"-5" long. When drafting, make sure your hands are farther apart than your fiber length. If you don't, you're pulling on both ends of the same fiber, and you can't actually pull it apart.

See how hard it is to pull your fiber apart. If your fiber is well prepared, it will glide apart effortlessly. If your fiber is not as well prepared or mildly felted, you might want to tease your fiber apart so that it will pull apart easily when spinning. Just use your fingers. If you like it, you can start investing in fiber prep tools.

If it's easier for you, you can "pre-draft", i.e. draft your fiber down to (almost) the thickness you want to spin. This can separate the drafting from the spinning.

PARK AND DRAFT

When spinning at speed, you are doing the following:

- Keeping your spinning tool spinning in the correct direction (spindle or wheel)
- Draft fibers out evenly, making sure they're roughly even thickness/amount and that the fibers overlap so that the yarn doesn't break.
- Pick out inconsistencies such as "Vegetable matter" (VM), and neps, nubs, or noils (all small bits of fiber you don't want to spin).
- Keeping track of how much twist is going in to your yarn. Too much and your yarn gets overly kinky or breaks if too thin. Too little and your yarn drifts apart.
- Winding your yarn onto your spinning tool.

That's a lot to keep track of.

Park and draft lets you break these bits down into separate steps.

1. Have about 6" of leader (already spun yarn coming out of your spinning tool) coming off your spinning tool.
2. Spin your spinning tool.
Get way, way too much twist into your leader.
3. Pinch the end of your fiber with hand 1 to hold the twist.
4. Park your spinning tool.
Hold your spindle between your legs, stop treadling.
5. Pull out some fibers and lay them along the end of the leader.
About half your fiber length.
6. Pinch your fiber supply with your other hand (hand 2).
This prevents twist from travelling from leader to your fiber supply.
7. Release the pinch on the leader (hand 1).
The twist will jump from the over twisted part to the less twisted part.
8. With hand 1, pinch the fiber+leader bit.
Once again, twist can't travel from the over twisted leader to the fiber supply.
9. With hand 2, pull out (draft) some more fibers.
10. Repeat steps 6-9 until the 'too much twist' is spread evenly across your yarn and/or you can't reach any more.
(This is called a "make")
11. Wind your yarn onto your spinning tool, leaving about 6" of new leader.
12. Repeat steps 2-11. (Skip step 5, unless your yarn breaks.)

Ta-dah! You are spinning!

Over time, you will no longer need to park your spinning tool (except when you need to stop and fix something). That can be in 10 minutes, or 10 months.

Tips:

It doesn't matter which direction you spin (clockwise or counter-clockwise), as long as you spin the same way for the whole project. I find it easier to spin one way and ply the other, so I can pick up any of my spindles after a period of time and just be able to keep going.

As soon as you add twist to fiber, it's hard to draft it apart. Watch to make sure you don't get extra twist in your fiber supply. If you do, untwist it.

Twist really likes to jump to untwisted parts, and it tends to like thinner parts over thicker parts.

Don't be afraid of joins (where you attach fiber to yarn). You're going to need to do it all the time. You can join fiber to yarn, or fiber to fiber, but not yarn to yarn.

RESOURCES

There are a ton of You Tube videos out there that show people spinning. Find ones that work for you.

<http://interweave.com/> has a lot of fabulous books and videos available about all sorts of crafts, including spinning.

Abby Franquemont <http://abbysyarns.com/>, author of "Respect the Spindle" has been most inspirational to me. I've also enjoyed the works of Stephanie Gaustad, Alden Almos, Norman Kennedy, and many others.

<http://www.ravelry.com> has many groups dedicated to spinning, with many, many people willing to offer advice and answer your questions.