

Turk's Heads

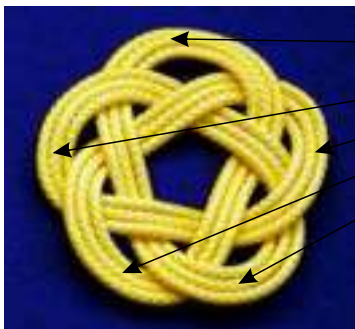
There are an infinite number of variations of Turk's Heads (and possibly just as many books written about them!)

I won't go into the mathematical theory behind them, but here's a brief introduction to tying these very pleasing knots ...

Some folks can tie simple turk's heads around their fingers, but typically a turk's head is tied around a tube or cylinder of some kind.

Let's start with a simple "5 bight, 3 lead" turk's head (bights are the number of "loops" at each end, and leads are the number of crossings in between - best illustrated in the following diagrams).

The two knots shown below are identical! The one on the left has simply been flattened.



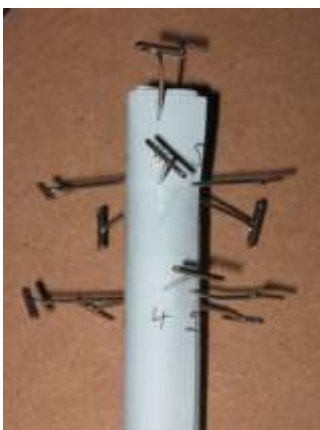
5 bights



I have drawn a vertical line through this one to show how many leads there are.

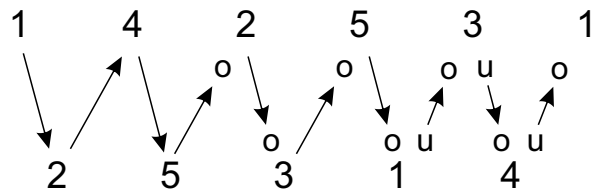
Enough theory!

We'll tie this knot around a cylinder. I often use a toilet roll holder (with paper packed in the middle to make it stronger) or one of those tubes used for insulating pipes. I'm sure you can adapt all sorts of things to make a cylinder. For this example I've rolled up some card and secured the cylinder shape by wrapping sticky tape around it.

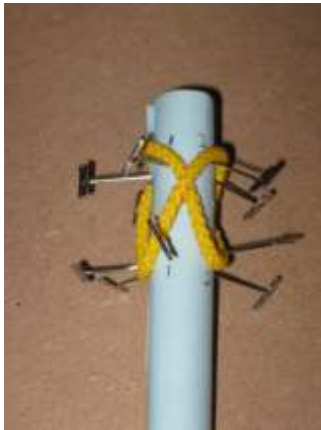


Because there are 5 bights, I've put 5 pins at the top of my cylinder and 5 at the bottom. These are spaced evenly apart, but only "by eye" (they don't need to be exact). I've also put an extra pin at the top to hold one end of my cord when I start tying. The pins are numbered 1 through 5 at each end - you'll see why in a moment ...

In this example, I am using a 1.5 metre length of 4mm yellow colourline cord. I will follow the tying instructions below -



What does this mean?



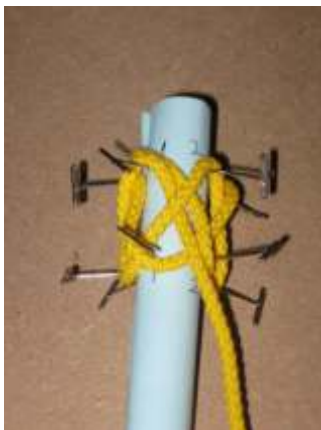
Well, to start with I am going to pass the cord from number 1 pin at the top to number 2 pin at the bottom.

Then pass from 2 at the bottom to 4 at the top.

Then pass from 4 at the top to 5 at the bottom.

Then 5 at the bottom to 2 at the top, but this time I encounter a lead on the way, so I pass the cord OVER this (hence the "o" in the instructions). Carry on following the instructions ...

Getting the idea now? You'll see from the instructions that when we go from 1 at the bottom to 3 at the top we will encounter two leads on the way up, and we go under the first one and over the second ("u" and "o" in the instructions).



The final move from 4 at the bottom to 1 at the top takes us back to the beginning. We can now start doubling the leads by following our first "pass". Before making a second pass, now is a good time to check that everything is correct (yes, we DO make mistakes!) ... starting from pin 1 at the top to pin 2 at the bottom, crossings should alternate between under and over, i.e. there should be no instances of "unders" or "overs" following each other.

If the plan is to produce a flat knot (see page 1, first image), slide the knot off the cylinder now whilst it is fairly loose and then follow the leads on a flat surface.

Looking good! Ok, let's double the leads. Once done, the structure of the knot is well established so I can remove the pins and start tightening up the knot.

Herein lies a very important rule when tying decorative knots (not just Turk's Heads) - DON'T RUSH!

It is a very good idea to get into the routine of being patient when tightening decorative knots. Do a little tightening at a time and repeat the process several times in order to maintain structure.

Treble the leads and this is the result -



The ends protruding from the knot can now be cut short and hidden (take care here - don't lose them!). Notice that the lead protruding from the bottom of the knot has been pulled through the middle.

Yes, there is some excess cord, but this is inevitable when one needs to tie a knot before tightening. Always use more than you need until you know how much is required.

Tied around a larger cylinder, this could be used as a napkin ring? Of course, the ends would be cut inside the napkin ring and glued or melted.

FAQs -

Q. How much cord/rope do I need?

A. Very much a case of trial and error, but if in doubt use MORE rather than less than you think is needed. A hint - in the above example, I knew that I needed to move 10 times between top and bottom for one pass (10 being 2x the number of bights). I also knew that I was going to do 3 passes, so I could estimate how much I would need after placing the pins in the cylinder.

Q. Do I have to use pins?

A. No. Using rubber bands for example at the top and bottom of the cylinder would work, but they would need cutting and removing before finishing the knot.

That was a simple Turk's Head, but the same principle applies to more complicated ones.

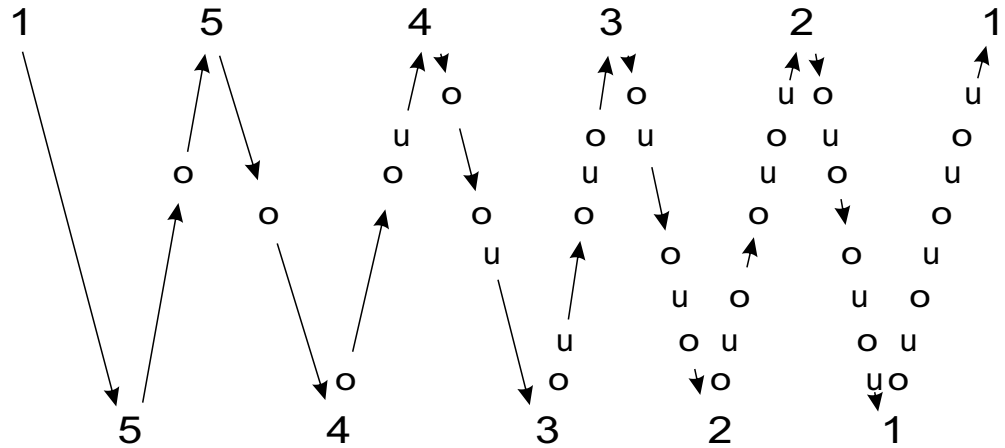
On the following page I give the instructions for another one ...

Two 5 bight, 9 lead turk's heads -



Two passes, one in yellow, one in red.

5 Bight 9 Lead

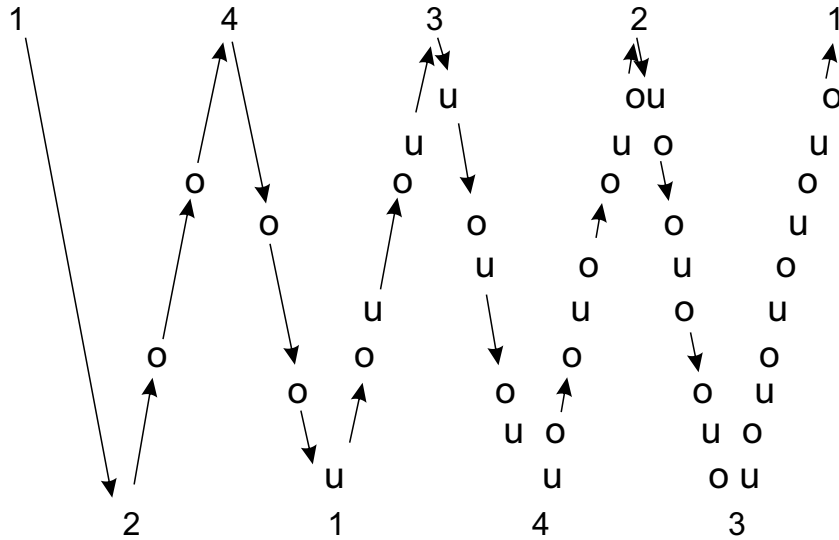


A very popular use for Turk's Heads is to cover the ends of other decorative knots (like French Hitching) -





4 Bight 11 Lead



Pass pin one
ONCE

Ok, I have given a few examples here. If you want to know more about Turk's Heads, check out Don Burrhus' site - www.knottool.com

Don has produced some absolutely fabulous books on Turk's Heads and "Globe" Knots.