

Six-strand Mathew Walker Knot (MWK) Tutorial

1. Getting ready ~

The Mathew Walker Knot (MWK) was, for a very long time, the only knot named after an individual. He was a British Navy rigger and invented this elegant, almost mysterious, decorative knot. There are different versions depending on the number of strands. A three-strand knot can be relatively easy, the six-strand one we are tying here is said to be much more difficult. But the difficulty is really only in staying focused. We'll tie the knot as part of a lanyard – it serves as a transition from one type of braid or sinnet to another. In the photo you can see two MWK knots separating French Sinnet (on the left) from the braids with the Star Knot Button and then again separating the braids from the half-Round Sinnet (on the right). This tutorial with step-by-step photos should guide you to a very successful result.



Tools and techniques

Several tools and techniques are going to help you to tie this knot successfully. I use two kinds of pliers as the key tools. The smaller blue-handled pair I use for both making the space or pathway for another strand as you'll see below and sometimes for tightening a knot's individual strands. The parallel-jaw pliers I use exclusively for this knot because it helps the internal guts of the knot to fit better together and tighten up as you'll see below. You must make sure any such tool is either cleaned meticulously or used only for this task. Other tools may serve the same purposes – use what you're most comfortable with.



I use a Constrictor knot to hold any part of knot and lanyard work temporarily. So, for example when the braids above are complete and the second MWK needs to be added, I tie a constrictor around both braids to hold them securely. The following photos show the constrictor in three phases. Basically it is a clove hitch with an overhand knot under one strand. The first photo shows the clove hitch, the second shows the overhand knot tied underneath. The next one shows the knot partially snugged up; you'll need to tighten it so it's neat and the strands are close together. When in use for the MWK make sure it is snug – you don't want it slipping before you're ready!



Finally I've found there are a few *Secrets* that will help you tie this knot much more successfully. I'll indicate those below with asterisks so you'll know to pay special attention.

Six-strand Mathew Walker Knot (MWK) Tutorial

Keeping the strands straight

The asterisks show this is the first *secret* to success. The lanyard I am making starts with a three-strand braid – it's the loop that goes over the Star knot Button shown above. So here's the braid with a constrictor holding both halves. The constrictor is quite snug so there'll be no slipping. Notice the strands to the left of the constrictor are still slightly braided and need straightening. The second photo on the left shows the top view with strands not yet "seated" correctly.



This is where you must work some magic. The strands coming out of the constrictor must be neat and in their proper place. Go around several times pulling gently on two adjacent strands to see if one wants to move – it happens all the time. Make sure each strand is comfortable where it is – this will ensure a perfect start to your knot.

The third photo on the right shows everything where it should be – and all's right with the world!



Slow and steady!

This is not a time to rush! Take your time – I've made at least 100 of these and I still make mistakes and have to start over! I recommend trying to do it all in one sitting so you don't get distracted and aren't sure where you left off.

2. It's as easy as 1, 2, 3 ~

Okay, the strands have been seated and straightened and we're ready to get started. The MWK is a series of overhand knots one on top of the other. Each one after the first starts over the previous one then goes down and around and under all the previous knot strands then under its own strand. It's not as complicated as it sounds!

Here's the first overhand knot (right photo) with the first strand (choose any one to start) – I've left it quite loose so you can see how to form the knot.



To the left is the second one: take the next strand to the left coming out of the constrictor. Sometimes I have to wiggle or pull on a strand below the knot to check which one I just tied – then I move one left for the next knot. Start the loop on top of the first knot, go around behind from right to left then come up and go under the first knot strand and under the second's own loop – look closely to see it going under both strands. I've snugged up both strands now a bit – this must be done regularly to keep everything shipshape.

And now the third one has been tied using the next strand to the left – over the first two at the top, back and around, then up and under the first and second and then its own loop. See side and top view photos below.

Six-strand Mathew Walker Knot (MWK) Tutorial

Keep snugging - I am constantly snugging on each tied strand while holding the knot between my fingers, and then slightly loosening again. This helps to form the knot and keep the strands going around in the right place.



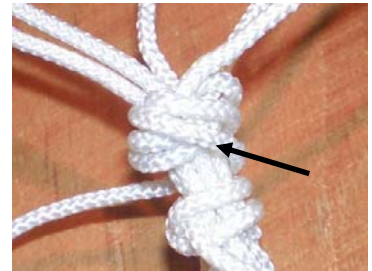
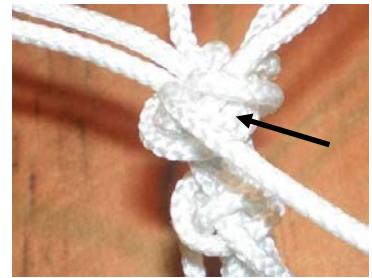
Notice how the strands are being managed – those already knotted are on the right, those still to go on the left.

3. Now 4, 5, 6 ~

Now it starts to get a bit more complicated. The photo on the right shows the beginning of the fourth knot – you can see the space waiting for the strand here; then it's in place in the second photo below on the right.



The strand goes around the back like the others and now we have to get it up through the three existing strands and its own loop. Here I use the small pliers – see the third photo on the left, and note that any similar tool will do.

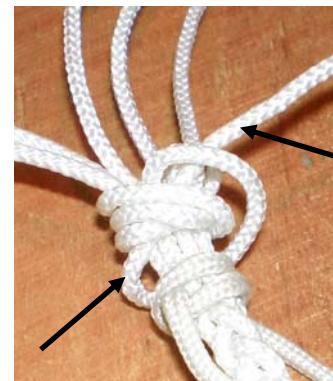


It's important to count carefully

Did you notice the second *secret*? I count down from the new loop at the top right – we need to go under four – the three strands we've kept on the right to remember the number of knots already tied and the new one. As they say in carpentry, "Measure – or count – twice!"

The fourth strand is now in the space made by the pliers in the photo on the right – arrows show where it starts to go under and the strand coming out.

As you do the same for the fifth and sixth strands you may find you'll need to make the path and run your strand up first under the previous wraps, then in a second shot under its own loop. I find sometimes the new loop seems too far to the right to get all in one try.



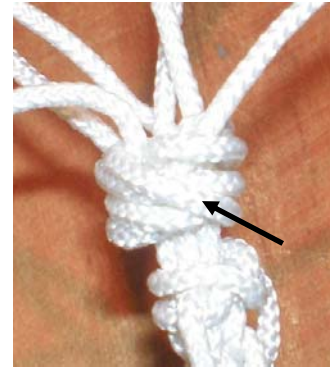
Six-strand Mathew Walker Knot (MWK) Tutorial

4. Fairing up ~



So here on the left, all knots have been tied – it's still a bit loose and it's time for a quality control check.

Look all around to see that everything is in place. In the photo on the right the arrow shows one wrap that's not. It needs to be moved over and up to be in the right spot.



Snugging slowly

I use my finger nail to hold the top on one knot while I'm snugging slightly each strand to even them all up.



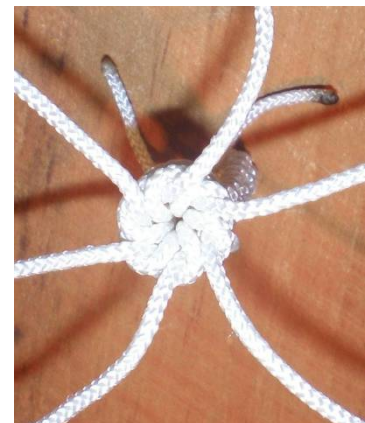
Then I use my thumb to hold the knot while I snug – slightly – one strand at a time all around – we need to leave it a bit loose but with all knots and strands looking the same.



Also look from the top down to be sure all strands coming out look right. If not, this is the time to correct – perhaps by pulling one strand out and starting that one over. It's not hard to miss one loop when you're going under with the 4th, 5th or 6th strands. At times I've had to start the whole thing over!

Your knot should look like this.

Now we're ready to move the knot into position.



Six-strand Mathew Walker Knot (MWK) Tutorial

5. Moving down ~

So now we have to move the knot down – there's a space above the constrictor, then there will be a small section of slack under the constrictor to take up.



Pump-push

I've found this technique to be very effective in getting this knot to where we want it to be.

In the photo on the right, I've taken the knot above, held all six strands in one hand and the constrictor (or lower) in my other and done what I call a series of small "pump-push" movements. Notice the knot is down to the constrictor and much looser.



So now it needs to be snugged up again using the technique discussed in step 4 above. Do it gently and with finger nail or thumb tighten one strand at a time. I go around clockwise once then counterclockwise once – pulling slightly on each strand.

The "slightly" is key to getting this right – tightening one strand too much at this stage knocks the whole knot off.

Then remove the constrictor and repeat this whole procedure – gently and slowly. When the knot is in the position you are happy with – no slack and looking good coming out of the braids we started with, you are ready for the final step.



Your knot should look like this on the right.



Six-strand Mathew Walker Knot (MWK) Tutorial

6. Finishing ~

The final tightening is just like we've been doing – with the **secret** techniques we've been using: **slowly** and **slightly** one strand at a time.

Hold the barrel

Again I hold the whole knot between my thumb and forefinger while tightening each strand.



Here's another, sort of side view.



Shape the knot

The next technique I've found very effective is to shape the knot as I tighten. I use the parallel jaw pliers because they are the right size and make it easy. Riggers working with larger knots of different types use wooden hammers. You could use a small hammer here if you like – just make sure as you drag it out of the tool bin that it's clean!

So go around and around the knot with the pliers or your hammer gently squeezing or hammering. Then snug all strands again – going around first clockwise, then squeezing or hammering, then counterclockwise.



Repeat, repeat, repeat – until it's hard and tight. The MWK's beauty is in the tight spiral it produces when there's no slack.

Congratulations! – We're done, and ready to continue the lanyard.

Some like to leave the barrel round; others like to make it oval – you can flatten it a bit with the pliers or a hammer.

