

# Jane's thoughts on good selvedges

There are many different ways to handle your selvedges. We employ special threadings, floating selvedges, denser edges, all in an attempt to get that perfect straight edge. You can use regular shuttles, open bottom shuttles, end feed shuttles or temples to aid you in your journey. I have trained a lot of weavers over the years and I have come to feel that some of the thoughts below are quite important so I'm sharing them with you.

**Thought #1: The Loom is my Instrument!** I always tell people that the loom is my instrument...it is my version of a violin. The shuttle is my bow and the cloth is my music. Any musician, especially any violinist knows that their bow needs to feel good in their hand and so my shuttle needs to feel good in my hand too. My favourite bow is the Schacht open bottom shuttle because it allows me to tension my bobbin from underneath each time I handle the shuttle. My shuttle fits my hand perfectly, it is not too big or too small and I use the same shuttles for all my weaving.

**Thought #2: Bigger isn't necessarily better!** Sometimes we weave with thin yarns, sometimes we weave with heavier and when we do we think we need to change the size of our bobbins in regards to the size of the yarn. If we use a bigger bobbin we can get more yarn on it and therefore weave for a lot longer. The choice of a longer bobbin necessitates the need for a longer and larger shuttle. Bobbin lengths increase by 1" of length. When you stop to figure out just how much more yarn you can get on that 1" longer bobbin, you will be surprised to find out that the answer is "Not Much". However, you now have to put that bobbin in a shuttle that is 2" longer than your favourite regular shuttle that fits your hand like a glove 4" bobbins (the regular kind) fit an 11" shuttle 5" bobbins fit a 13" shuttle 6" bobbins fit a 15" shuttle I'm glad they don't make longer bobbins because then we would be wielding lengths of 2x4. Any advantages we have gained from those 1" increases in bigger bobbin size can be quickly and dramatically lost because now our bow doesn't fit our hand as well and we can lose control of our technique.

**Thought #3. Sequence of Events** The sequence that you use to throw each pick is very very important. I throw the shuttle and then beat on an open shed. I leave the beater against the fell of the cloth while I change the shed and then I bring it back to the castle after I have changed the shed....so this is the sequence: Throw Beat on open shed Leave the Beater against the the fell of the cloth Change Beater back again..... Throw Beat (leave it) Change Beater Back See Thought #8 for the additional tug that could be given at this time again, and again and again and again. When you beat on an open shed, you allow the shed to take what the shed requires. The beater actually pulls yarn off the bobbin and into the shed. It stops when the beater touches the fell of the cloth and it has taken just the right amount. When we consider the alternate way of laying in a weft yarn, which is to bubble and beat on a closed shed, we have created a closed situation where you must create the same scenario exactly the same way each time you throw the shuttle and that is a very difficult thing to do. If your bubble is too high then the excess yarn squishes out the side at the selvage and if our bubble is too low then we don't have enough yarn in the

bubble to fit the shed and your selvages draw in. Try the method above and see how this little sequence solves so many selvedge problems.

**Thought #4: Wind a good bobbin!** I know that everyone reading this will have had this experience. You are weaving away and you get to towards the end of your bobbin and the yarn on your bobbin starts to jam up. When this happens all of our focus is on that stupid bobbin and yarn not coming off, but as we tug and pull we aren't paying much attention to the fact the other selvedge is being tugged and pulled. One of the reasons your yarn is stuck is because you filled the corners of the bobbin when you first started winding it and those corners have now collapsed like a mountain slide of scree.....I know, I know...we are all taught to do this, it is in every book you open. Here is an alternate approach that provides you with a situation where the yarn is able to leave the bobbin freely, right down to the last inch. Once upon a time, before there were plastic bobbins with ends bits there was the paper quill. Paper quills were wound with a firm straight movement from side to side, slowing moving away from the edges and winding closer to the centre with each pass. I love plastic bobbins with end bits, but I wind them the old fashioned way, like a paper quill. You wind straight across from side to side filling up the bobbin until it is half full, then with each successive pass I come a little closer to the centre creating a 'sausage' shape. As the bobbin fills you stay away from the sides and you wind them firmly with your fingers guiding the yarn onto the bobbin, right up close where you have the most control.

**Thought #5: Find the Sweet Spot!** It is so tempting to just go a little further before we advance the warp....we all do it, but it is a bad habit and it is a habit that is detrimental to your selvedge. When you weave too close to the beater you force your warp into a situation where it has to open its mouth too wide. It is yawning and when it yawns it pulls on the weft yarns that you have just put in. You don't notice this until you advance your warp and then you go,,,,,oh damm,,,,,look at that. My selvages are messed up, it must be the tension on my warp, or maybe it is the yarn I'm using that is slippery or heck, it must be the stupid looms fault.....WRONG! It's a bad habit. If you get into the good habit of advancing your warp frequently you won't be putting your warp into that stressful situation which makes your weft sloppy at the selvedge. SO CUT IT OUT! Weave in the sweet spot....that perfect little space in the middle where Goldie Locks lives and everything is juusstttt right!

**Thought #6: On Temples** Now I don't mean to be boastful and all, but I know how to get perfect selvages, people compliment me on my selvages all the time. They may think I need a good haircut or some new shoes, but I always get the nod on my selvages. I have never used a temple in my life. I can see their importance in rug weaving and Ikat weaving, but for the general 'run of the mill' type weaving that I do, they simply aren't necessary. The temple's main purpose is to prevent draw in. I think that a little bit of draw-in is desirable and necessary to aid in even weaving.... selvedge to selvedge. A little bit of draw-in is like having good firm walls holding up the roof of your house. Your selvages are the walls of your cloth and the rest of the warp is the interior studs. Your weft is the floor of your house. Your beginning hemstitching is the basement, strong and tight for you to build on. I don't use floating selvages unless I absolutely have to (like in a Twill) or basket weave or canvas weave because you have 2 picks in the same shed with those last 2 weave structures. With some weave structures you need to employ

different threadings to make the selvedge structurally secure, but in most weaving you don't need to do anything except use your good shuttle handling technique, proper throwing sequence, bobbin winding skills and warp advancement to get those great selvedges.

**Thought #7: Sibling Rivalry at the Edge!** One side of your weaving is often better than the other and it is usually the side opposite your predominant hand. Right handed weavers often have a better left selvedge and Left handed weavers often have a better right selvedge. This is because your predominant hand is often more confident and has stronger control than its lesser sibling. Your right hand is controlling the left selvedge and the left hand is controlling the right selvedge. This is of course not always the case but it often is. When you want to get both selvedges the same you need to pay careful attention to what one hand is doing that is different from the rest. Maybe it is a little wrist action before you throw your next shot or maybe your finger sits differently on the bobbin on one side and not on the other. Your job is to patiently and quietly look at what the good hand is doing and try to teach that to your other hand. Remember that your mind is controlling the whole show.

**Thought #8: What should I be looking at?** When I weave my eyes are moving back and forth between 3 different spots. When the shuttle hits my right hand my eye is watching the left selvedge because the right hand is controlling the tension on that left selvedge. My eye then travels to the centre of the loom and watches as the beater comes down with its weft yarn. I am often looking at the negative space in my weaving to get the proper picks per inch. If you are weaving a balanced fabric, then the negative space should always be forming a square. It is easy to watch for those squares. Just before the shuttle heads to the left I give the shuttle a teeny weeny little tug, my finger works like a brake on the bobbin and this little tug pulls out any sloppiness that might be at the edge as the weft yarn turns the corner. My eye is focused on that right side while my shuttle travels across to my left hand, then my eye goes to centre again to watch what the beater is doing. At the selvedge I give the Little tug, etc. etc. etc. I call this Intentional Weaving. I'm not just sitting there banging away, beating the living daylights out of my cloth, I am placing each weft yarn carefully and I am watching the selvedges form right before my very eyes. I don't fart around with the selvedges, manhandling them with every pick, it is all done by controlling the yarn on the bobbin and controlling the shuttle with my hands, and the most wondrous tools we have.

**Thought #9: Passing the torch!** When I put a shuttle into any new weaver's hand for the first time, I am mindful of how I do it. If you teach someone good technique right from the start you are giving them one of the greatest gifts you can. We all know how hard it is to change bad habits. If you learn to weave with bad technique....changing it later on can be quite difficult. Palms to the sky! Hold your shuttle with your palms up. That is what I always say to my students. Use the shuttle that fits your hand well and feels good, because you will be more confident with it. Go slowly at first, gain confidence and then bring up your speed. If you start to lose control then slow down until you find your comfort zone again. It is just like driving a car.

**In a Nut Shell** If you start with a good warp And wind a good bobbin And weave Intentionally paying attention to sequence You will have good selvedges without the need of extra tools, expensive shuttles or pirns. If I can get great selvedges out of a 7 year old in an hour, you can

have good selvages too. The easiest way to get there is to Practice. Put on a narrow warp, about 12" wide, with yarn that you have no to emotional attachment to and that you aren't planning to give away as a present and try some of the techniques above. By the end of that warp your selvages should be perfect! Happy Weaving, Jane