

Getting Knots Squared Away!

Tying the Square Knot with Nick Kerpan

One of the most frustrating things in scouting to both learn and teach would be tying knots: on both ends, things tend to get tangled. As someone who still has to make an “L” with my hands to reaffirm left vs. right, I had trouble as a scout tying...the square knot.



Tired: The Mnemonic

“Right over left, left over right” is the standard phrase people use to explain the knot. Unfortunately, like all mnemonics, this is most helpful *after* you've learned how to tie the knot, as a refresher. While teaching the knot, conversely, this phrase leads to confusion, especially as the rope ends move from side to side.

Wired: Using Colors

By coloring the ends of the rope, a key point of the square knot (and many others) become much easier to explain: One end of the rope is doing all the work. “Red over black, red over black” makes it clear that the same end of the rope is the one crossing over both times, which cuts down significantly on granny knot productions.

You can use marker or tape to personalize the colors, or even colored twine/thread if you have to whip the ends of your rope.



Learning Technical Terms Early

Standing End: the end of a rope that isn't moving.

Working End: the end of the rope actively being used to tie the knot

Because most practical uses of knots have one end of the rope secured to something, or bearing weight, learning how to tie knots by only manipulating the moving end can help a scout tie the knots in the field. For some scouts, starting right away with technical terms might be the best way to go. For others, starting with colors (“red side doesn't move”) is a way to practice the skill without front-loading the technical information.

At Home Challenge: Stationary Square Knot

Secure one end of your rope (or shoelace if you don't have rope lying around) to an object (chair leg, doorknob, etc.). Try tying a square knot without ever letting the standing end move—you should be moving around the standing end as you do this.

[Stationary Square Knot Video](#)

Additional Knot Resource: Animated Knots

If you're looking for a simple, visual way to learn the knots, check out:

<https://www.animatedknots.com/>

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Nick Kerpan,

COPE/Climbing instructor for The Spirit of Adventure Council