

Changing a String

Strings do break occasionally, sometimes for no apparent reason, even when you take very good care of your harp. Knowing how to change a string is an important part of harp maintenance, since strings should be changed periodically, usually every year or two. To change your strings, remove no more than three strings from your harp. Replace those strings and bring the new ones up to pitch before removing the next three strings from your harp. In this way, you keep the tension on the soundboard of your harp consistent, which is better for it. Be sure to use strings that your harpmaker recommends for your harp - each harp takes different gauge (width) strings, with different tensions. Using strings that were not intended for your harp could damage it.

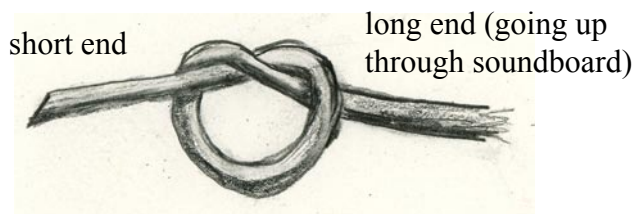
If your harp has wire or wrapped nylon strings, changing those is quite easy, since they have their own knot (usually with a piece of leather attached) at the bottom of the string. Simply insert the string from the back of the soundboard, pull through until the string knot is tight against the back of the soundboard, then attach the string to the tuning pin.

An additional step is required for monofilament nylon strings - these come with no bottom knot attached, and you must tie your own. How to do that is shown below. There are several different ways to do this, but you must make sure that your knot is large enough to keep the string from slipping through the soundhole.

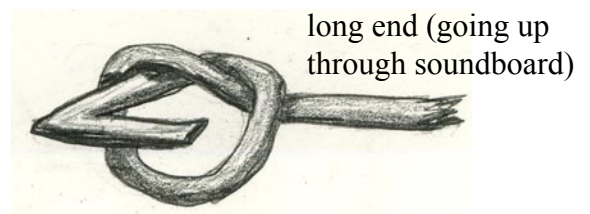
Tying a Bottom String Knot

Handy tip: Stick the unknotted string into the soundboard hole from the front, and pull about 5 inches out the back of the harp. This allows you to tie the knot, then just pull on the string from the top of the soundboard. No need to try to feed the string in from the back! This only works with monofilament nylon strings, which don't already have a knot in them. Also, if you need to beef up the knot, use a 3/4 inch piece of leather cut from a leather shoelace (see below for where to use this).

1) Tie a regular knot, leaving the knot hole loop loose, and a short end of about an inch

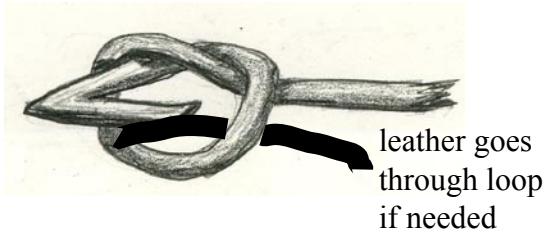


2) Fold the short end in half, so the end sticks back through the knot hole loop.

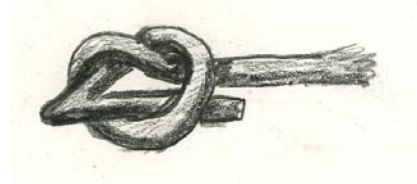


Changing a String (cont'd)

3) If the string is an .036 gauge or smaller (.032, .028, or .025), insert a small piece of leather in the knot hole loop.



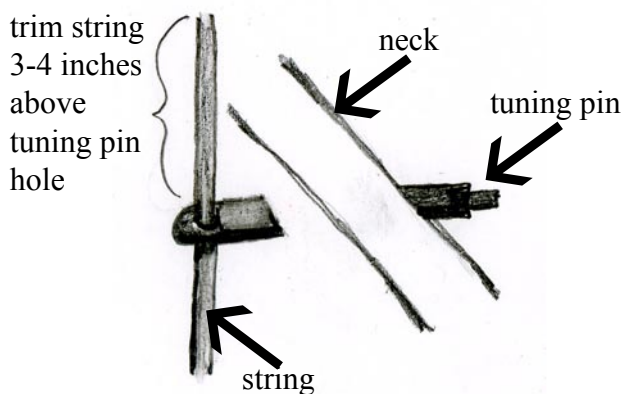
4) Pull on the long end, tightening the knot hole loop.



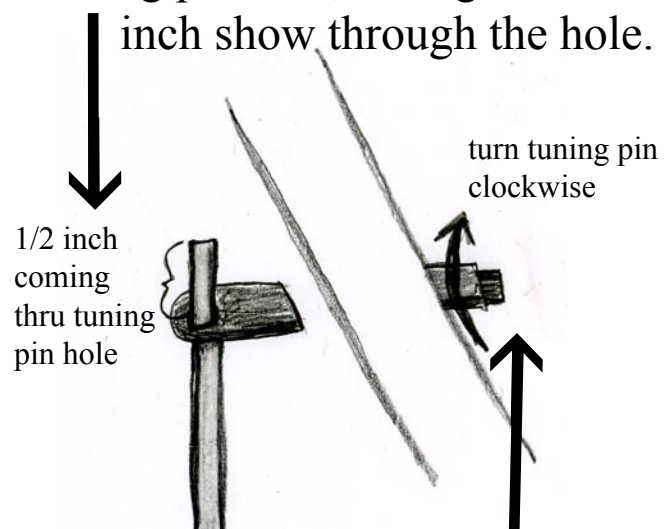
Congratulations! You've done the first half of re-stringing a string. At this point, you should have a string with a knot at the end of it, in the soundbox, and the long end coming up through the soundboard.

Attaching a String to a Tuning Pin

1) Pull the string tight up to the tuning pin, and trim it about 3-4 inches longer than the pin.



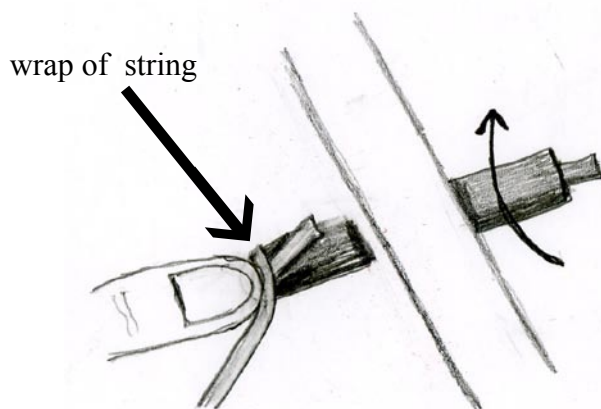
2) Insert the string in the tuning pin hole, letting about 1/2 inch show through the hole.



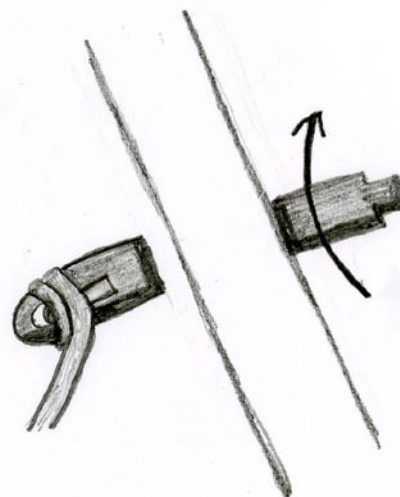
3) Using your tuning wrench (not shown in drawing), begin to turn the tuning pin, and use your finger to hold the loose end in place.

Changing a String (cont'd)

4) As you turn, guide the wraps of the string over the loose end.



5) Continue to turn, letting the wraps 'lock down' the loose end.



6) When the string is tight enough to hold itself in place, tune it 'by ear' to the string below it.

7) Use your electronic tuner to bring it to exact pitch.

Note: Tugging on the string will stretch it out - then re-tune, tug again, and tune again. This will help the string 'hold pitch' more quickly. When you change a string or re-string your harp, expect the new strings to take anywhere from several days to a week to 'hold pitch'. The more you tune and play, the more quickly your harp will stay in tune!

8) Wire strings are different - because they are so thick and stiff, you do not need to leave the 1/2 inch of string exposed, and cover it with the wraps. Instead, just have the end of the string go through the hole to the end of the hole, and wrap as directed above. The wire strings will hold.

Many harps use tapered tuning pins. These pins are held in their holes by friction alone, not threads (like screws have). Occasionally these pins will loosen, and must be pushed back in their holes in order to hold the string at pitch. This is most common with the longer wire or wrapped nylon strings, which have considerable tension on them. If you try to tune a string, and the pin unwraps, your pin may be loose. Here's how to fix that:

Stand behind your harp, as you would if you were tuning it. Put your tuning wrench on the tuning pin. Place your left hand on the neck of the harp, and your right hand on the tuning wrench. Turn the wrench back and forth slightly, as though you were tuning the string, and push the tuning pin more deeply in the hole, while holding the neck with your left hand. You may see the tuning pin 'seat' more deeply in the hole, or appear to move from right to left. After this you should be able to tune the string normally.