

TRANSCRIPT

Focus

Greatest challenges, whether we realize it or not, is that as fibre and yarn enthusiasts, there are lots of beautiful things that can be created from fibre and yarn. We might enjoy working with fibre and yarn because we like the comforting texture of the material or the satisfying things we can make, or maybe the meditative qualities of the process itself. But there are a lot of different ways that we can work with yarn and fibre from knitting and spinning to crochet and to weaving. And this naturally puts us in a position of having to choose what we do at any given time. So there are two ways that I want you to consider how you pick and choose what to focus your attention on. The first consideration is context, which is about what kind of activity is appropriate, given your environment and situation. And the second consideration is the concept of mastery and progression.

For some reason, I always like to think about crafts in relation to fishing. It's not like all kinds of fishing in all kinds of water, in all kinds of different fish are possible at any given time. If you're fly fishing, you're going to be in a particular river, you're going to catch a particular kind of fish. You're going to use a particular kind of fishing rod or a tool or a piece of equipment. The context of where you are in the world plus what time of year it is, what the weather is like, all of these things are going to affect what tools you choose and what kind of fishing you might do. Since the fibre arts is so flexible and versatile, we can do much of it anywhere. And so with that flexibility, it makes it more difficult to choose what to do when there are no constraints to tell us that we have to do this craft at this time and so we end up in this position where everything is possible. We don't want to choose. And then we do everything at the same time. So as a kid, my mother would always tell me this Chinese proverb. I don't actually remember the Chinese words for it, but it roughly translates to the idea that if you have one foot on two different boats, you will fall in the water. And I think it seems pretty fitting in this instance. The issue with trying to make all the things all the time is that it can make us feel frazzled and spread thin. When we work on multiple crafts or multiple projects at a time, it can feel like we are making almost no progress in our projects or that we're doing a lot of stuff, but nothing is happening. So multitasking, always results in slower progress.

So the first strategy when it comes to being this multicraftual maker is realizing that just because you love all of the crafts does not mean that you need to do all of them all at the same time. So choose your focus, focus on one thing at a time. Set some constraints for your creative energy. Like maybe every season you choose a different craft. It feels very natural to dye yarns and fibres outside of my backyard when the weather is sunny and it's warm and then to take those fibres and then spin them in the autumn and then weave cloth in the winter when I want to be inside and cozy in the attic with my loom. So dyeing yarn in my garage, in the winter, it's cold and uncomfortable. And also weaving here in the hot attic in the summer is equally uncomfortable. So it's a natural constraint to work with the seasons and what is appropriate for each season. In the winter I don't feel like I'm not a dyer I'm just a dyer who happens to take advantage of the good weather to dye outside.

Maybe every season you choose a different project to make, maybe in the autumn and winter, you can work on sweaters and blankets because that's what feels good sitting on your lap, keeping you cozy while you knit, but maybe in the spring, you knit lace because it feels lighter and cooler in your hands. But maybe that same lace project is a little bit less appealing in the summer when it's hot and it's muggy outside. Some other ideas are to

maybe choose one craft for different days, maybe have a monthly focus or an intention or a goal, or maybe work with different contexts, like one project that you work on when you have time and space to concentrate, different project that you can work on over coffee with friends or while watching television, and then one project that you can work on at home. And one project that you work on when you're out and about and doing errands.

Deep down, I believe that we all want to be good at the things that we do. We want our time spent in craft and making things to not feel like it was a waste of time, energy, or materials. We would like to make things that we have envisioned in our minds. And in my mind, I often see me making gorgeous hand knit, lace shawls, but I don't see mistakes where I dropped a loop or where I had to fix something. I see hand-woven blankets that are in beautiful colors and different color combinations, but I don't see skipped threads or treading errors or having to weave in weft ends all these kinds of things. Fibre arts projects require hours and hours of experience in multiple skills in order to get to the point of mastery. And we are all still working to get there.

Years and years and years ago, when I was learning how to snowboard, there was this beautiful vocabulary that snowboarders and skiers use to describe their learning. And that is the idea of progression. There's a natural progression in learning to snowboard or to ski, to learning to first sort of slipped down the mountain, stop on your backside, stop on your front side, learning how to turn, learning, how to carve. Then moving to being able to olly or jump or ride switch or whatever you want to do. Nobody is going to jump off the side of a cliff. You know, in Alaska, when they're starting out, it's something that you progress to because you have safety considerations. You don't want to hurt yourself. So you have to trust your skills and become comfortable with your abilities before you go on to the next skill. So while we don't have the same kind of safety considerations, when we're doing the fibre arts, we can still consider this idea of natural progression in everything we do. When we feel comfortable with the knit stitch, then we learn the purl stitch. When we feel comfortable with that, and stockinette knitting, then maybe we learn cables then maybe we go to lace. Progressing naturally and gradually allows us to minimize frustration and minimize the feeling of being overwhelmed.

Now, how do you progress faster to mastery? If you are familiar with the book *Outliers*, the author, Malcolm Gladwell talks about the concept of 10,000 hours to mastery. So basically the idea is that you need to put in 10,000 hours of work and intentional practice into whatever it is that you are doing in order to achieve a wealth of experience and mastery in the subject. So accumulating 10,000 hours works out to approximately 20 hours per week for about 10 years. So being a master of both spinning and weaving would supposedly take 20 years, all combined. Author, Tim Ferriss suggests that you can leverage technology and the right kind of training in order to bypass the 10,000 hour rule and to progress to mastery in a much quicker way. Either way, you'll develop mastery in whichever craft you choose to focus on. If I focused 40 hours a week on learning to weave, then I would likely be further ahead than I am now, where I spend only a couple hours a week on weaving. So consider where you are now in your skills and your abilities and where you would like to be. Then think about how you might like to bridge that gap between what you know and what you need to learn. There's nothing wrong with being a generalist versus being a specialist. Personally, I would rather be pretty good at spinning weaving, knitting and dying then to be the world's number one expert on one narrow aspect of the fibre arts, because I enjoy seeing the interconnectedness of everything, but I've resigned myself to spreading my focus across multiple skills and activities. So I understand and accept that by working on improving my skills in multiple areas, that my progress towards mastery will possibly be at a slower pace than if I dropped everything and focused a hundred percent of my effort on just one of these interests.

But in order to accommodate my multiple interests without feeling completely overwhelmed by them all, I do them one at a time. So I focus on one area at a time, depending on the context of my environment, season and situation. So I can be a spinner, weaver, knitter and dyer. I just dye in the summertime. I spin in the fall and winter time I knit when I'm out and about. And I weave when I'm at home. So I'd encourage you to draw yourself a mind map of all the crafts and activities you want to pursue. You can put yourself in the middle and then draw circles for each of the big craft topics that you want to do. So like knitting or spinning or sewing, and then with each one of those circles brainstorm and then brain dump, all the things that appeal to you about that topic. Like maybe for spinning, I'd really like to get more into spinning silk and luxury fibres. I'd like to learn to spin yarns specifically for weaving, which means that I need to learn how to spin yarn intentionally. Maybe I need to figure out how to spin to a certain diameter. Maybe I need to learn ways to spin more consistently or more efficiently. Maybe I need a way to spin more yardage, so I need to be more productive at the wheel because I need a lot of yarn for weaving. So there's lots and lots of topics around spinning that I could explore. And the more and more I fill up my mind map, the more and more I realize how much time, energy and resources is required of me. And so what I would encourage you to do is to simply choose one main focus to work on for a season, spend three months, really doing a deep dive into that topic. And then when you feel like that cycle is complete and you've explored a lot of the topics that you're interested in, then choose another topic to focus on.

My goal here is to relieve you from the feeling of overwhelm. There is so much to make and do, how will you ever do it all? The key is not to do it all at the same time. And by writing it all down on a piece of paper or in your journal, you can have some relief that you've captured, all your thoughts and ideas just by getting them out of your head and onto a piece of paper, you'll feel much more relaxed about the big picture of what you want to learn. Then you can go ahead and tackle your progression one step at a time.