

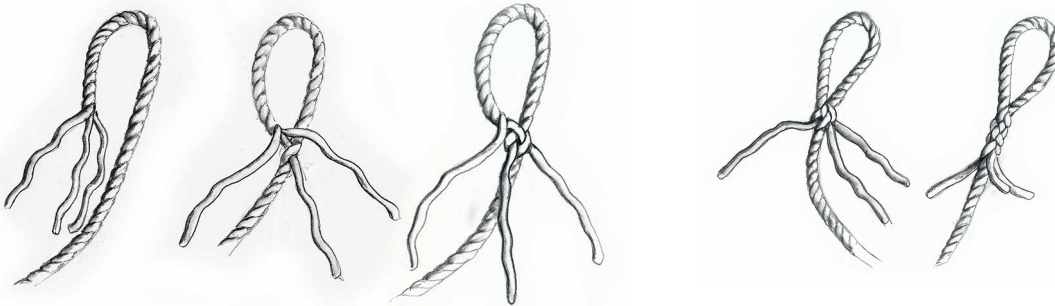
Marlinespike Seamanship

By Ted Walsh

Hollow fids

Splicing is one skill that goes along with the routine maintenance of a traditional sailing vessel. This is not a hugely difficult skill to learn and there are literally dozens of videos on the internet that demonstrate different splices (some videos are better than others).

Most of you reading this are familiar with splicing, and some of you are masters of the art. A diagram of a simple eye splice illustrates the basic principles of splicing, but neither it, nor those videos mentioned, deal with the most difficult aspect of splicing three strand rope, which is that it really is almost a three-handed operation.



Untwisting the strands of the standing part of the line, holding the strands open, and pulling through a strand to form each step of a splice, while keeping the yarns of the strands from catching on each other, are operations that all need to happen at almost the same time.

A hollow fid can make this job considerably easier. In essence, this tool becomes the third hand you need to make the process of threading the strands easy.

Inserting the fid between the strands to be separated spreads the strands, holds them apart, and provides a smooth, hollow surface through which to pass the strand you are working with. It also leaves both hands free to work the strand that is being spliced into correct position, and the smooth metal surface of the fid keeps the yarns of the different strands from catching one another and making a mess of your splice.

While simple and inexpensive, those of you familiar with this tool already know how valuable it is. The two most common sizes are 7" and 11", and of the two, the 7" is the most useful size. You can expect to pay between \$10 and \$20 for a 7" fid and it's well worth the price. In some instances the wooden handle is only attached with one rivet; a Turk's head knot will give you a more secure handle.

