

How to Make a Tassel

Tassels are a useful addition to many needlework projects. Christmas ornaments and pillows come to mind right away! Also bellpulls, banners, and other wall hangings. They're useful for pulls on windowshades and ceiling fans and strictly as a "decorator" item on doorknobs and drawpulls. I have a lot of string instruments hanging on my walls, and I looped a fat tassel on a long cord around the scroll of the instruments and used that as a hanging loop on a nail; I think it looks kinda neat!

To make a tassel, cut a piece of cardboard 1/2" longer than you want the tassel to be. Wrap the floss or pearl cotton around the cardboard until it's as full as you like (remember that you see only half the tassel on one side of the cardboard; it'll be twice as thick when you're finished).

Thread a piece of floss (at least 6" long) between the cardboard and the floss loops and tie a knot. This will be the hanging thread for the tassel. Slip the loops off the cardboard carefully.

Now you need to bind the tassel at the top, just below the hanging loop. A simple way to do this is to wrap the floss around and then thread each end in a needle and "bury" it. A second way is to find an old salt and have her show you how to "seize the end of a line." It's a clever method of laying a loop on first, then doing the winding, threading the final cut end of the thread through the loop and pulling on the first cut end so both cut ends are neatly buried. (If I can draw it well enough, I'll put up a gif here later.)

After completing the winding, cut the other end of the loops and trim the ends so they're even. You're done!

Experiment by putting metallics or other interesting fibers in your tassel. Especially if you are using twisted cord of more than one color for your project, you might want a multi-colored tassel, too. Consider the addition of beads and other items.

From time to time, needlework magazines have articles on fancy tassels or instructions are included as a finishing technique for another project. Also see Thérèse de Dillmont's "Encyclopedia of Needlework" (DMC) for exotic tassel styles.

How to Finish a Bellpull

The idea of the bellpull was that one yanked on it, and through a series of Rube Goldberg pulleys and whatnot (I'm no engineer and some days I can't even spell it), a bell rang in the servants' quarters to let them know A Person of the House needed assistance. Now they are used simply as wall decor. (Well, MOST people use them that way! I guess there are a few people who call servants with them!)

To mount your finished bellpull, you need what amounts to a doll-clothes hanger for the top. This keeps the top nice and even and also helps distribute the weight of the piece so it doesn't "hang" out of shape. This top piece also serves as the hanging point--a loop, hole, hook, etc.--for attaching bellpull to a nail on the wall.

A decorative piece may be mounted at the end of the bellpull--symmetry, donchasee? Sometimes there's even a bell (!) mounted on the bottom piece. The extra weight at the bottom also helps the bellpull hang straight. If you prefer, sew a tassel on the end of the bellpull itself (and forget the bottom part of the hardware).

Needlepoint shops and general needlework supply houses have bellpull hardware (ex: Mary Maxim, Herrschner's, Nordic Needle). If you can't find any, you might be able to fashion some from wire; or use lengths of dowel rod, perhaps with a decorative knob on the ends.

After stitching the bellpull, line it completely. (This also helps it to hang well.) If you are not using anything decorative on the bottom, consider slipping drapery weights that look like a string of beads into the bottom between the bellpull itself and the lining; this will substitute for the weight of the bottom half of the hardware.

Flop the top end of the lined bellpull through the slot in the upper part of the hardware and sew the fabric in place to keep it there. Mount the bottom half of the hardware in the same way or substitute a tassel, etc. (If you want to be fancy, flop the bellpull thru the hanger and then tack the lining in place over the "flop" so your mechanics are covered. My mom says, "Always cover your mechanics.")

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