

There are many ways to block or “dress” a lace shawl to bring it to its full glory. Different lace-knitting cultures have worked out their own methods, some of which seem much more complicated than others! The end goal is the same, however, which is to open up the knitting to a beautiful, airy confection, and show the true beauty of the lace. This pdf describes how I like to block a shawl or scarf using wires (blocking with pins only is described in a different pdf). I’m using my Winter Scarf (from the Four Seasons Scarves) as an example.

1. Immerse the item in tepid water until it is thoroughly wet. You can use a mild soap suitable for delicates or woolens if it needs cleaning or freshening up. Drain the water and supporting the item, squeeze out the excess moisture, being careful not to wring the fabric. If you wish, roll it in a towel to further absorb moisture. I usually skip this step as I find it dries out quite quickly anyway. If it begins to dry out as you are working with it, spritz it with water to keep it moist.
2. Blocking surface: Choose a clean, flat surface to block your item. This could be a carpet or rug in an area that can be closed off from children and pets (note that if you are blocking a dark-coloured item, colour could transfer, so covering the blocking area with an old sheet is advisable). Some people use their bed (a good reason to roll the item in a towel first to absorb extra moisture). I like to use foam jig-saw floor mats. The ones I have are about two feet square and can be interlocked into any number of configurations to fit the particular scarf or shawl I’m blocking.
3. Blocking wires and pins: I use stainless steel, rust-proof wires and glass-headed dressmaker’s pins.
4. Next I start weaving a wire through the edge stitches of the item, catching a couple of threads and weaving in and out every $\frac{1}{4}$ inch or so. Some people like to weave the wires into the item before wetting, and I agree that it is easier to do. But the wetting process

becomes more complicated. How do you wet a scarf or shawl that is all wired up? The bathtub would be the obvious choice, but the one time I tried this method, I did not find it easy to squeeze the excess water out afterwards, and I found that the wires tended to poke themselves where they weren’t meant to be, leading to tangling and snagging. So I now wet the item first and apply the wires afterwards.



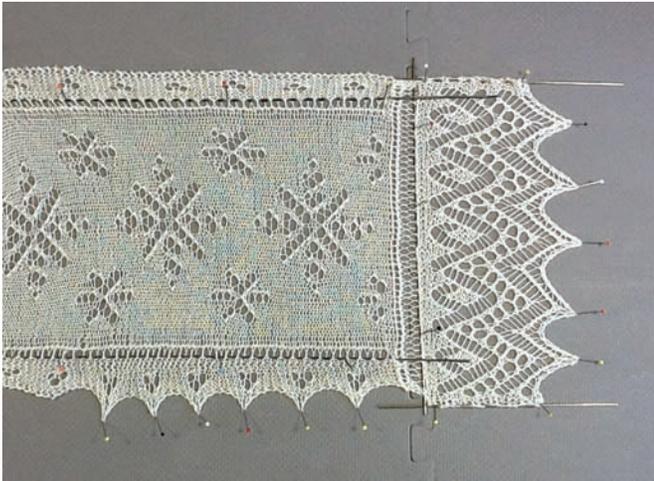
Here is a wire being inserted into the edge stitches of the scarf.

5. Once you have the wires inserted, simply pull them taut in the configuration you want. Pin along the edges of the wires to hold the fabric in place. I pin every 6 to 8 inches to keep the wires from bending and distorting the straight line I am creating.



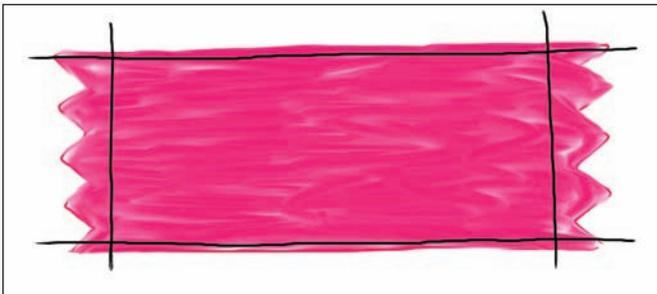
The scarf has been wired along both long edges and also through the faggotting separating the pointed lace edging from the body of the scarf. It maintains a straight line and allows the points to be pinned out evenly.

6. Note that if you have a long edge in which to insert wires, you may find that one wire will not be enough. In that case, overlap them by a few inches of weaving.

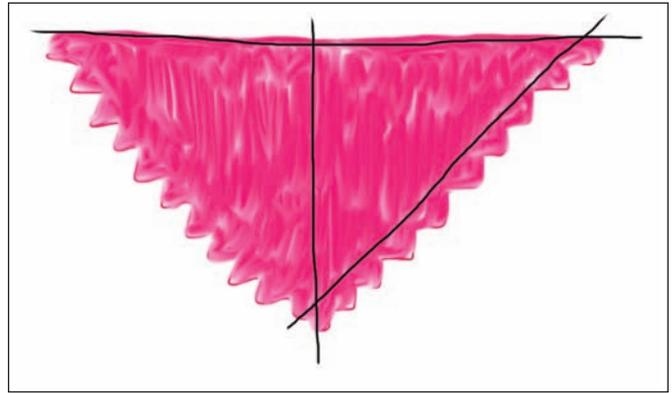


Here is another option. The scarf has been wired along the eyelet rows on each long edge and then, shown on the lower edge in the photo, side points have been pulled out and pinned evenly.

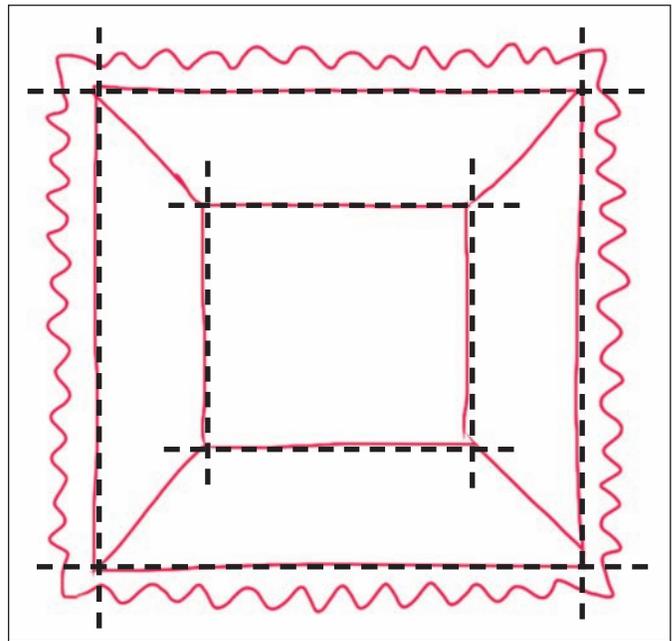
7. Here are a few configurations for inserting wires into different scarf and shawl shapes. Don't think that you can only insert wires along the edges of a shape. Insert anywhere you want to create a straight line, but make sure to follow rows of eyelets or faggotting. Inserting through a pattern motif would probably distort the motif once the wires are stretched.



Insert wires along straight side edges and at the ends inside the lace edging.



The triangle-shaped shawl has wires along the top edge and down the middle line. In addition, there is a wire along the right-side long edge, creating a straight line from which the points can be pinned. Or for a more fluid shape, leave the wire off the side edge (as on the left) and pin points.



A square shawl can be wired multiple times (dotted lines above) to give the crispest, cleanest lines.

8. As usual, wait for the item to dry, then carefully remove pins and wires.