Dedicated to providing you with the best hat blocks you can buy – here at Guy Morse-Brown, our focus is firmly on working with you to make your own personal creations.

To make things with your hands is a fundamental part of human nature and whether it is the weaver, the felt maker, the block maker, or you the milliner, we are all part of a process that culminates in something that is more than just an object to admire – it is a statement, an expression that enriches the life of the wearer and creator alike.

Preparing a Leather Sweatband

Learn how to prepare a leather sweatband ready to be sewn into a hat.

Leather sweatbands come with a stitched empire tape band around the lower edge and within this is a nylon reed. The reed gives the bottom edge rigidity but, if used in the correct way, also allows you to create a more comfortable fit for the wearer.

What You Will Need:

- Leather Sweatband
- Sharp Scissors
- Tape Measure or Band Block
- Masking tape
- Metal ferrule

- Wire cutters
- Strong Needle
- Thread
- Small Nail
- Wooden Board

The first step is to measure and cut the sweatband to length. The exact length should be the wearer's head size and you will have made your felt hat larger than this to accommodate the sweatband. The size must be a comfortable fit rather than a tight measurement.

There are two ways to measure the length; either simply with a tape measure or using a CO3 band block of the correct size.

Next, you need to trim one end of the sweatband to the correct angle. If you were to cut it a 90°, once the ends were stitched together, you would have a band that stood up straight at 90°. This may be fine if the sides of your hat are vertical, but it is more common that they will have a slight taper to them. In this case, you need to cut the leather at an angle such that once the ends are connected, the sweatband will have the same angle as the sides of the hat. It is a good idea to create a template for future use and to help you cut both ends the same.

Before cutting one end, you must pull the nylon reed from the other end so that when you cut through the band, you do not cut the reed also. Then, once you have determined the angle to cut, cut the other end nice and straight with a pair of sharp scissors.
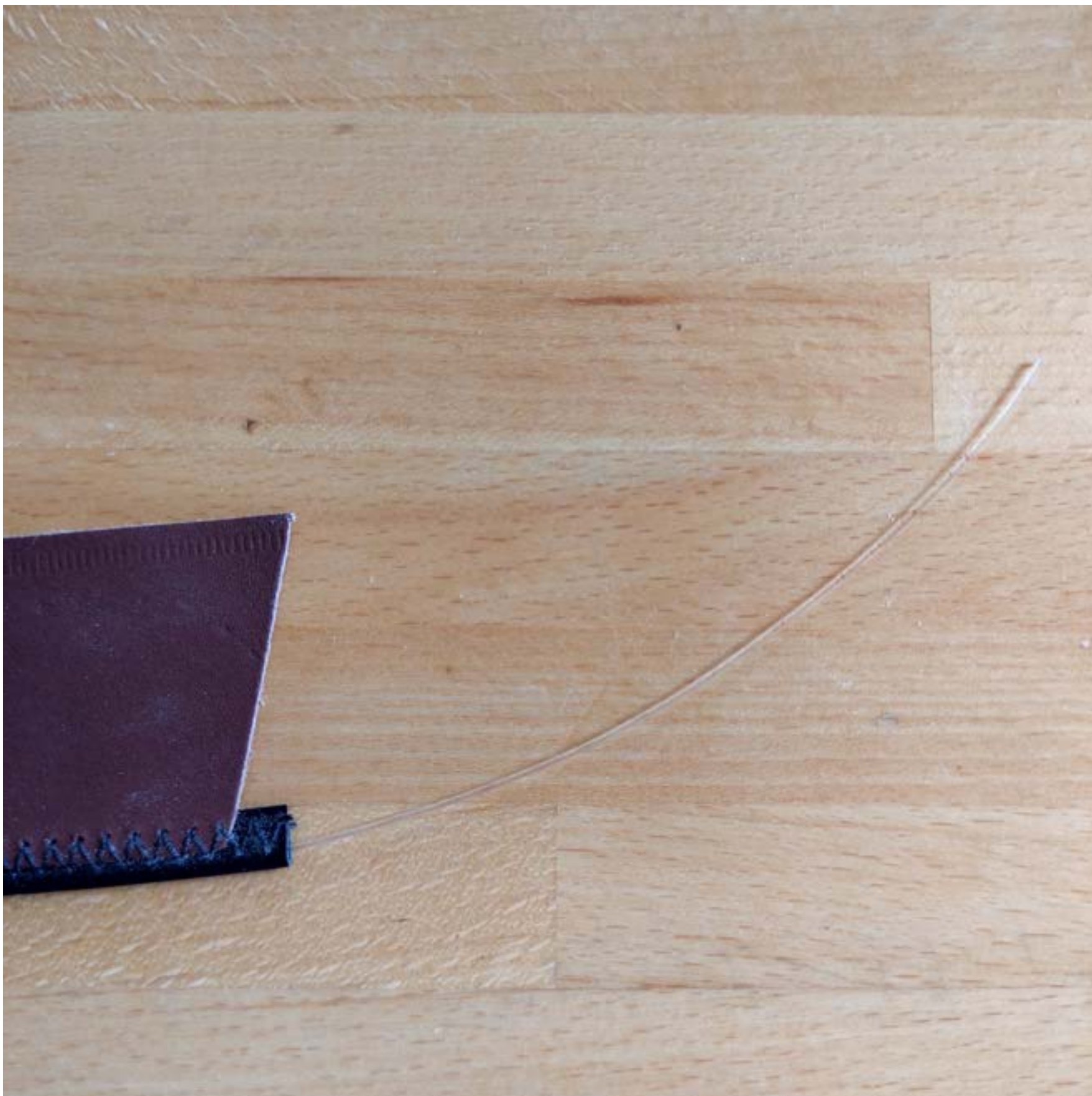
Reed pushed through

Other end cut at an angle

Now measure the length from the cut end.

If using a tape measure, simply measure the length and mark it carefully on the leather. If using a band block, wrap the leather around the block overlapping and taping it at the end and then mark the length carefully. In both cases, the measurement should be taken at the bottom of the leather, not at the bottom of the reed. If using a band block, then you must place the bottom of the leather at the bottom of the band block leaving the reed overlapping.

Measuring the leather

Sweatband taped onto the band block

Sweatband on the band block showing the tape and reed overlapping the bottom
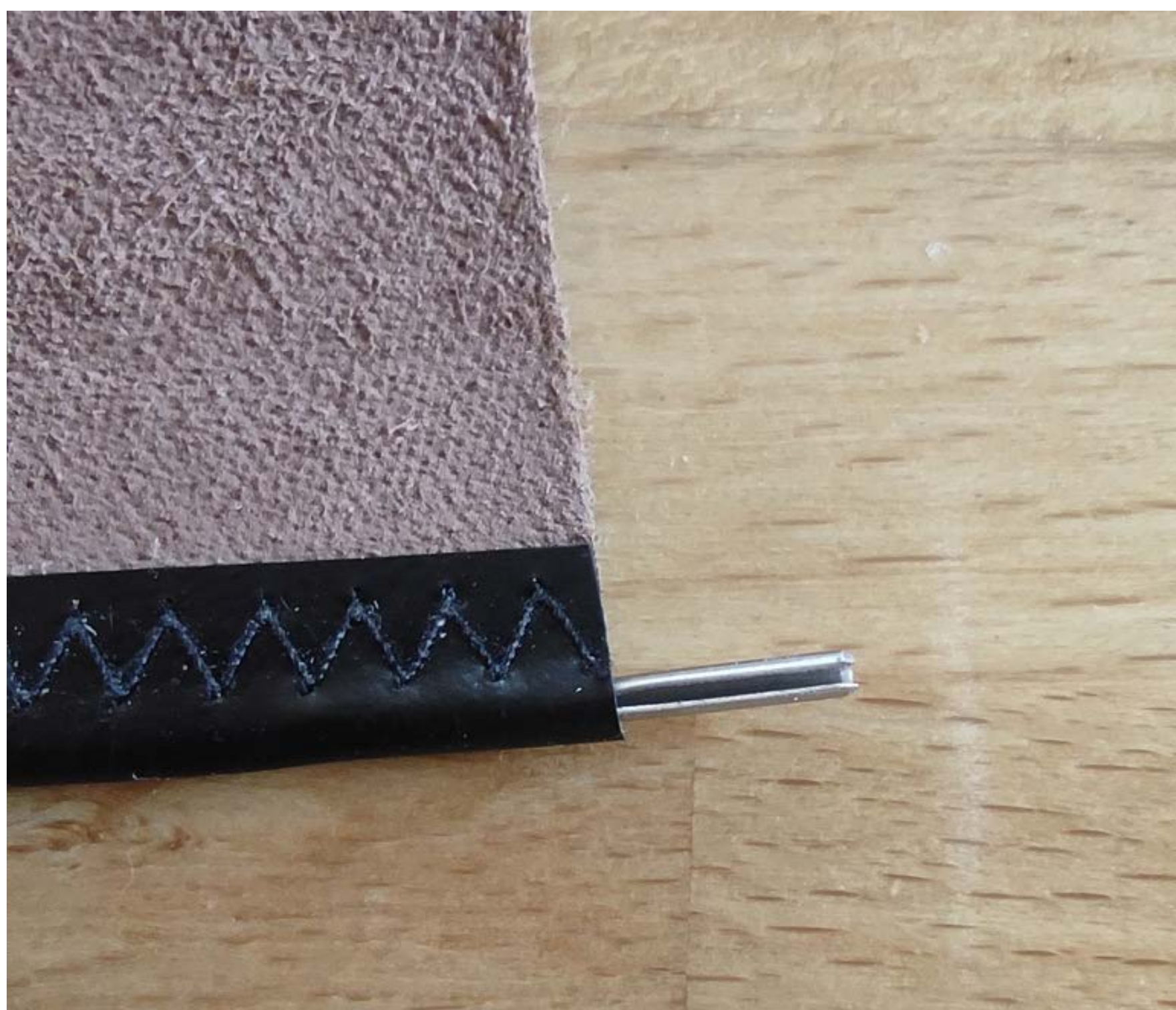
Once the other end is marked, use your template to mark the angle and cut it as before.

Now push the reed through from either end so that it is flush. At the other end, cut it off 1cm longer than the sweatband.

Next you will need a metal ferrule, the kind used for joining spring steel wire together for brim edges.

Take a pair of wire cutters and lightly squash the centre of the ferrule in order to close it up. It doesn't need to be fully closed but enough so that the reed will not pass through.

Reed is left 1cm longer

Closing the centre of the ferrule

Push the ferrule onto one end of the reed and insert it into the sweatband tape so that it is sticking out half of its length.

Take some doubled thread on a strong needle and tie it onto the tape just above the reed at the same end. Ideally the knot would be at the back, so it remains hidden.

Ferrule inserted into the tape.
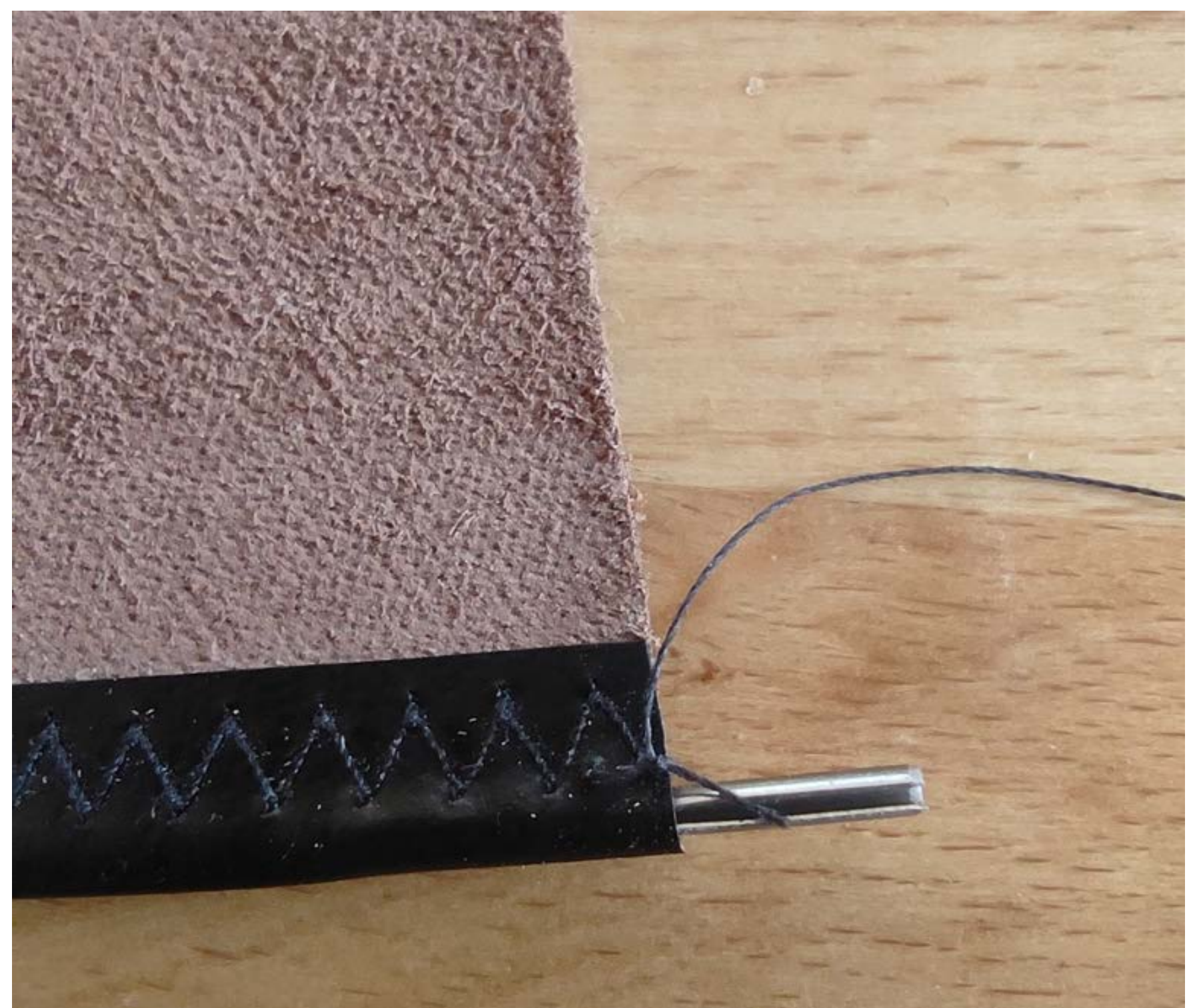
Thread tied onto the tape

Now bring the ends of the sweatband together, push the reed into the ferrule and stitch through the tape at the other end of the band. Go back and forth a couple of times and then pull tightly to draw the ends together fully before tying off the thread. It takes a bit of force to do this and a little practice to tie it off whilst keeping the joint closed.

Drawing the ends together tightly

The effect of this process is that while the leather is the correct length, the tape and reed are pushed outwards to a slightly greater circumference. This creates a slight flare to the sweatband which makes the fit more comfortable on the wearer's head – they should not be able to feel the tape and its stitching but only the leather against their head.

Next the leather itself is stitched together. It is possible to do with a leather needle and a thimble, but it is easier to punch some holes first with a small nail on a wooden board.

Typically, a sweatband bow is sewn over the join at the top before the sweatband is sewn into the hat. When sewing the sweatband into the hat, you can sew through the existing holes in the tape.

One useful tip is that the sweatband can be tried on the customer's head before that hat is made. You could even keep bands of different sizes to be tried on. Also, if the band is placed back on the band block, you can use a tape measure to measure around the outside of the leather to determine the exact size of hat block that you should use to block the hat.

Guy
Morse-Brown