

How to Build the Dementia Friendly Music Player

22 December 2019, <http://DementiaMusicPlayer.org>, Ross Porter rosswesleyporter@gmail.com



I was inspired to design this by the documentary [Alive Inside](#) which shows the profound joy felt by some with dementia when listening to their favorite music.

My Dad could no longer operate the home stereo. But he could operate this music player because it operates like a familiar two-knob radio. The vintage style fit with his old intact memories – for most people with dementia, the old memories are the strong memories.

It's easier than you think to make one. Everything I did is open source. This document contains all the information you need. You can order the parts online, including the cut & engraved wood. It's a good family project – kids do well with this. It's also a project that friends would love to help you with.

Parts cost	~\$120 + tax + shipping
Music cost	Minimal as you should use the recipient's existing music collection
Build time	Can be done in an afternoon, once you have the parts & music
Parts source	All parts can be mail ordered, links below
Soldering?	No
Woodworking?	No
Laser cutter needed?	No, you can mail order the pre-cut pieces for the wood case
With a friend?	Good idea, especially if your friend has the basic tools required
Beverage?	I recommend a hoppy IPA while you are assembling



No warranty

USE THESE DEMENTIA FRIENDLY MUSIC PLAYER PLANS AND SYSTEM AT YOUR OWN RISK. THE DEMENTIA FRIENDLY MUSIC PLAYER PLANS ARE PROVIDED AS IS WITHOUT WARRANTY OF ANY KIND EITHER EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, THE IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY AND FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. THE ENTIRE RISK AS TO THE QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE OF THE PLANS AND SYSTEM IS WITH YOU. SHOULD THE PLANS OR SYSTEM PROVE DEFECTIVE, YOU ASSUME THE COST OF ALL NECESSARY SERVICING, REPAIR OR CORRECTION. IN NO EVENT WILL ANY PARTY BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR DAMAGES, INCLUDING ANY GENERAL, SPECIAL, INCIDENTAL OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES ARISING OUT OF THE USE OR INABILITY TO USE THE PLANS OR SYSTEM.

Acknowledgements

People were very generous with their time, and I really enjoyed the experience. This is certainly an incomplete list: Alex & Mike & others at [Ada's](#), the super smart staff at [Metrix](#), neighbor Randy, [Stephen Christopher Phillips](#), [Bob Rathbone](#), [Stephen Rusk](#), [Graham Hill](#), support at [Ponoko](#), [Florian Festi](#), and my son.

How it works



Preview of the steps

STEP 1: Order or make the case



STEP 2: Order parts



STEP 2: Assemble music



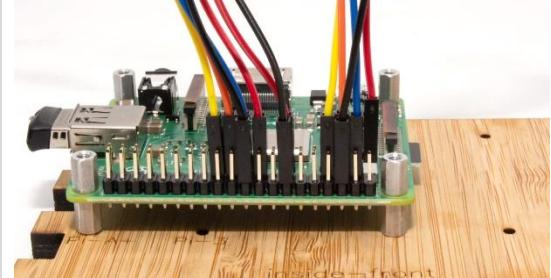
STEP 4: Flash the micro SD card



STEP 5: Add the Pi



STEP 6: Wire it



STEP 7: Test it



STEP 8: Glue it



STEP 9: Enjoy!



STEP 1: Find a friend to do this with



STEP 2: Decide about making vs. ordering the case



Ponoko is a company that laser cuts wood and sends you the precisely cut pieces. You don't need to use Ponoko – you are welcome to download my case design files from [github](#) and go to your local maker space and use the laser cutter there. Or buy yourself a laser cutter (if you do, will you be my friend?). In other words, Ponoko is convenient but not necessary. I have no affiliation with them, other than being a happy customer. Unless you are an experienced maker or woodworker, I recommend ordering the case – it will make the build process much easier.

STEP 3: Get the case file

1. Go to https://github.com/rosswesleyporter/dgmusicbox/tree/master/case/laser_cut/wood_headphones_only

2. Get the file you want:

If you are using LightBurn software to cut, like my friends at Seattle Makers

If you are using an Epilog laser cutter like my friends at the King County Library

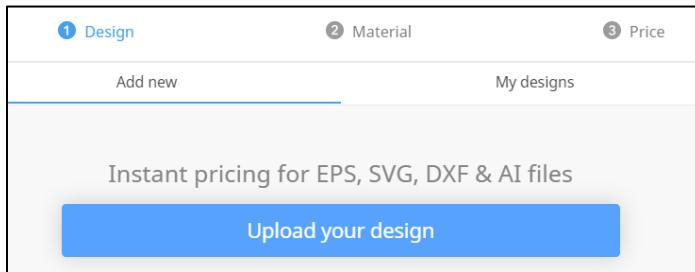
This is probably the file you are looking for - send to Ponoko

DementiaFriendlyMusicPlayer_3point5mm_Ponoko.svg
DementiaFriendlyMusicPlayer_5point2mm_BlackCat90W.lbrn
DementiaFriendlyMusicPlayer_5point2mm_BlackCat90W.svg
DementiaFriendlyMusicPlayer_5point2mm_Epilog_PlainSVG.svg
DementiaFriendlyMusicPlayer_5point7mm_Ponoko.svg
DementiaFriendlyMusicPlayer_6point7mm_Ponoko.svg
LICENSE.htm

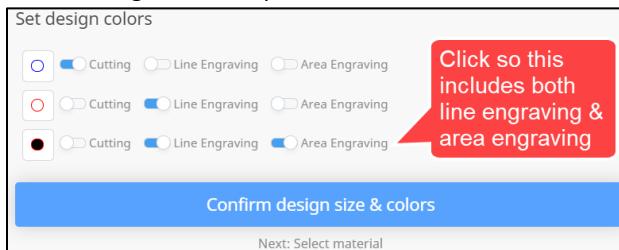
3. Right-click on the desired file, choose “Save link as...”

STEP 4: Order the case

1. Go to <https://www.ponoko.com/>
2. Login (create an account if you haven't already)
3. Choose “Upload your design” and upload the file that you downloaded just above

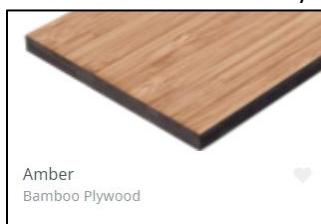


4. Set the design colors as per below:



5. Choose “Confirm design size & colors”

6. Choose “Amber Bamboo Plywood”



7. Choose thickness = 6.7mm and then “Confirm material”

Amber Bamboo Plywood

Thicknesses available:

<input type="radio"/> 0.9mm thick	\$34.79
<input type="radio"/> 1.8mm thick	\$36.41
<input type="radio"/> 2.7mm thick	\$37.51
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 6.7mm thick	\$55.30

Confirm material

8. Make sure that everything looks as expected especially the check that the horizontal bar above SONGS is colored in

DementiaFriendlyMusicPlayer_6point7mm_Ponoko.svg
365mm x 209.1mm

[Update design →](#)

Amber Bamboo Plywood
6.7mm

[Update material →](#)

Quantity: 1 Price USD: **\$55.31**

Quantity	Price USD	Savings
<input type="radio"/> 5	\$36.53	Save 34%
<input type="radio"/> 10	\$33.92	Save 39%
<input type="radio"/> 50	\$26.89	Save 51%
<input type="radio"/> 100	\$24.48	Save 56%
<input type="radio"/> 500	\$18.05	Save 67%
<input type="radio"/> 1,000	\$15.23	Save 72%
<input type="radio"/> 5,000	\$12.22	Save 78%

\$9 setup per order for human powered stuff

[Submit pricing feedback \(get 20% off\)](#)

Add to Cart

209.1mm

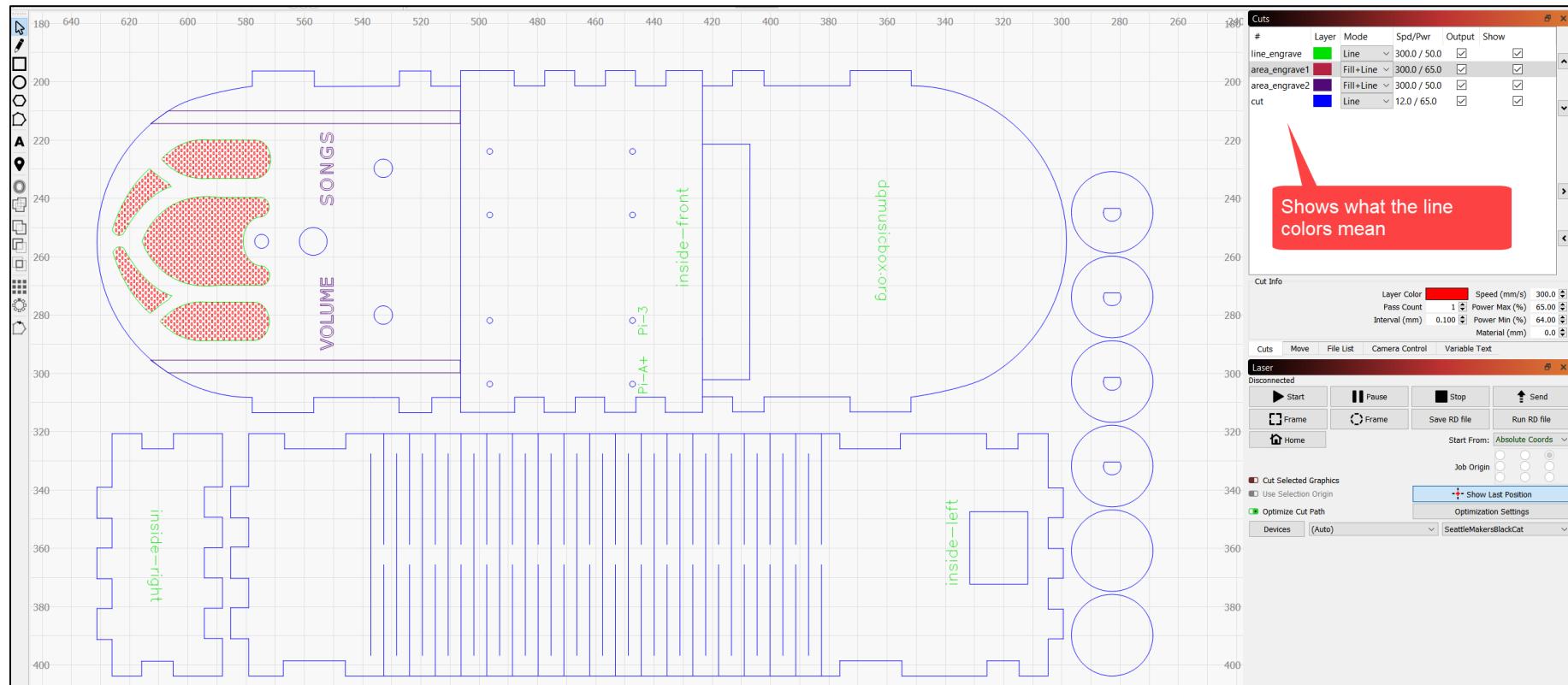
9. Click “Add to Cart”

STEP 5: Make the case (if you didn't order it)

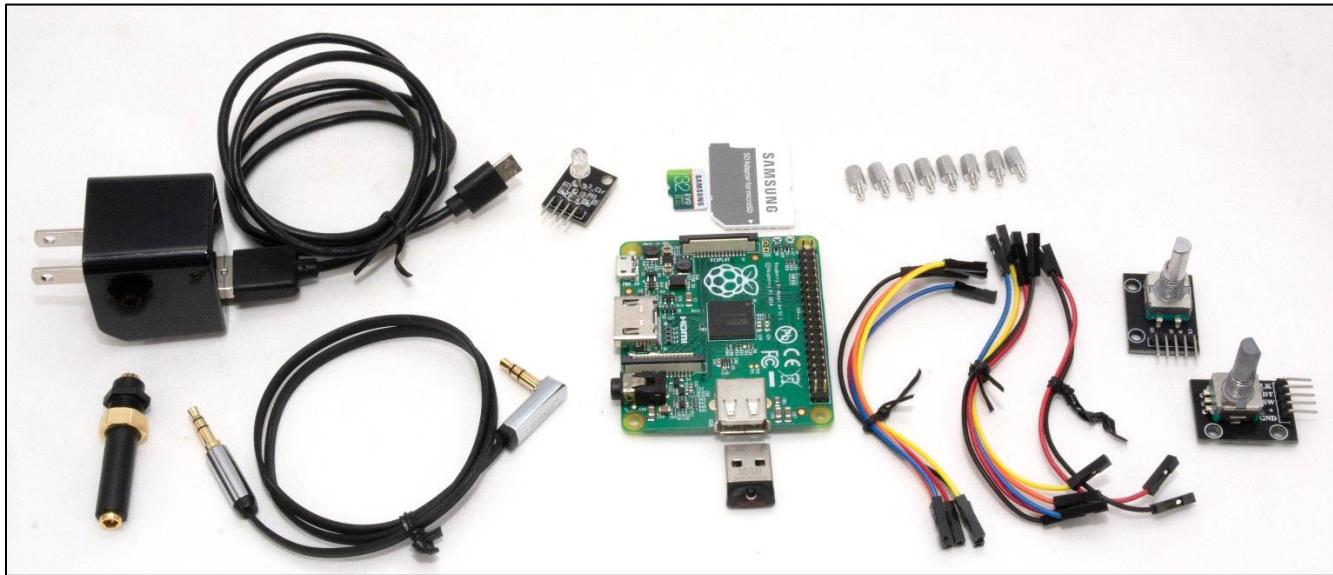
If you want to make the case rather than order the case:

1. Use the file that you downloaded earlier
2. If you like, you can customize the case
3. Cut on your laser cutter or go to a makerspace and use a laser cutter there

If you are curious, this is what a design file looks like (showing the .lbrn Lightburn file):



STEP 6: Order the parts



Item	Supplier	Cost	Notes & alternatives
Cherry case	Ponoko	\$55.17	See instructions above.
Raspberry Pi 1 A+ single board computer	Newark	\$20.00	Or upgrade to Pi 3A+ . Also tested with a 2B, 3A+, 3B, 3B+, 4B. Do not use Pi Zero.
Power supply	Newark	\$3.62	Or Newark T5582DV . Or order one for your region/plug. Any micro USB 2A supply will do.
Female-female jumper wires	Newark	\$3.95	Or buy Amazon B01L5ULRUA
Panel mount 3.5mm headphone jack	Newark	\$2.69	Or buy Amazon B004JX64FE
M2.5 standoffs (screws) – 8 of them	Newark	\$4.32	Or by Amazon B06XXV8RTR
Micro SD card	Amazon	\$3.99	Or upgrade to Amazon B06XWN9Q99 . Any brand name card that is 16GB or larger will do.
USB thumb drive	Amazon	\$5.79	This one is helpfully physically small, but many USB drives will work. Or Amazon B077Y149DL .
Audio cable	Amazon	\$5.79	Or Amazon B00SUIKMI8 . Or find a short audio cable with a right angle bend.
KY-016 indicator LED	Amazon	\$6.99	Or buy Amazon B07KJYR8K1 . Or search Amazon for KY-016.
KY-040 rotary encoders (knobs)	Amazon	\$7.99	Or buy Amazon B06XQTHDRR .
TOTAL		\$120.30	Prices will vary. Does not include tax, shipping.

STEP 7: Get headphones



Some headphone choices

Item	Cost	Notes and alternatives
The recipient's existing headphone	\$0.00	The best headphones are the headphones that the recipient is already used to.
Monoprice On-Ear headphones	\$10.99	Very good sound. High sensitivity (which is important). Also available from Amazon for a slightly higher price but with Prime shipping: B014399CWK .
Monoprice Over-the-Ear headphones	\$15.99	Amazing sound. High sensitivity (which is important). Also available from Amazon for a slightly higher price but with Prime shipping: B007SP2CO2 .
Other		Look for high sensitivity headphones, as the Pi's output is a bit weak.

STEP 8: Get wood finish product (optional)

Optional. Bamboo is quite nice unfinished. But you can give it a golden look and a bit of protection.

You only need one. If you don't have any wood finishes, you probably have a friend who does.



Easiest. Done in minutes. But needs re-application from time to time. Baby oil can also work if the main ingredient is mineral oil.

Fast. ~15 minutes of work spread across two hours.

Easy. One coat is enough, but best to let it dry overnight. Any linseed oil is fine, except raw linseed oil.

STEP 9: Gather tools & supplies



STEP 10: Get a computer with an SD card slot



You'll need a PC or Mac or Linux computer with an SD card slot. If you don't have one, you probably have a friend who does.

STEP 11: Assemble the personalized collection of music

Choosing the music – go for familiar favorites

This is the most important step. The personalized (familiar) music is the fundamental magic. You don't need much music, perhaps 6-10 albums. But only familiar favorites. In my case, my Mom mailed me my Dad's favorite CDs. It will take two weeks for the parts above to arrive, so you have time to do this well. Though it is easy to change the set of music later.

Put the music on the USB memory stick

Organize the digitized music into folders on the USB memory stick, one folder per album. MP3, iTunes, and FLAC files are supported i.e. files with extensions .mp3, .m4a, .flac. In the end, you should have a set of folders that looks something like this:

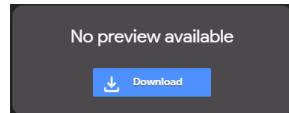
Name	Date modified	Type
A_Beethoven9	10/24/2015 6:25 PM	File folder
B_Eli_Porter_-_Eli_Porter	10/24/2015 6:25 PM	File folder
C_Mozart_-_Overtures	10/24/2015 6:25 PM	File folder
D_Tchaikovsky_-_Concerto for Violin i...	10/24/2015 6:25 PM	File folder
E_Vivaldi_Telemann_Bach_Mercadante...	10/24/2015 6:25 PM	File folder
F_Samuel Barber_-_Barber; Adagio for ...	10/24/2015 6:26 PM	File folder
G_James Galway_-_Serenade	10/24/2015 6:26 PM	File folder
H_Giacomo Puccini_-_Madama Butter...	10/24/2015 6:26 PM	File folder
I_Giacomo Puccini_-_Madama Butterfl...	10/24/2015 6:26 PM	File folder
J_Giacomo Puccini_-_Madama Butterfl...	10/24/2015 6:26 PM	File folder
K_Leontyne Price_-_Arias	10/24/2015 6:26 PM	File folder

STEP 12: Copy software to the micro-SD memory card

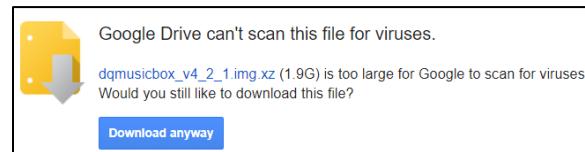
I prepared a disk image for you. It has all the required software. Your job is to download this disk image and then write it to the micro-SD card. The steps:

1. Install [Balena Etcher](#) on your PC or Mac or Linux computer. [Win32 Disk Imager](#) also works.

2. Download the [Dementia Friendly Music Player disk image](#).

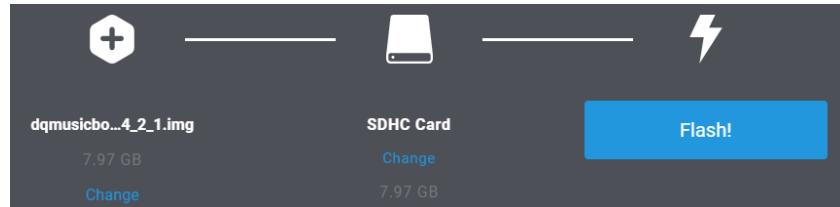


3. Confirm download – “Download anyway”



4. Put the micro-SD memory card & adapter into the SD reader/writer in your computer.

5. Start Balena Etcher, instruct it to write the image file to the SD card:



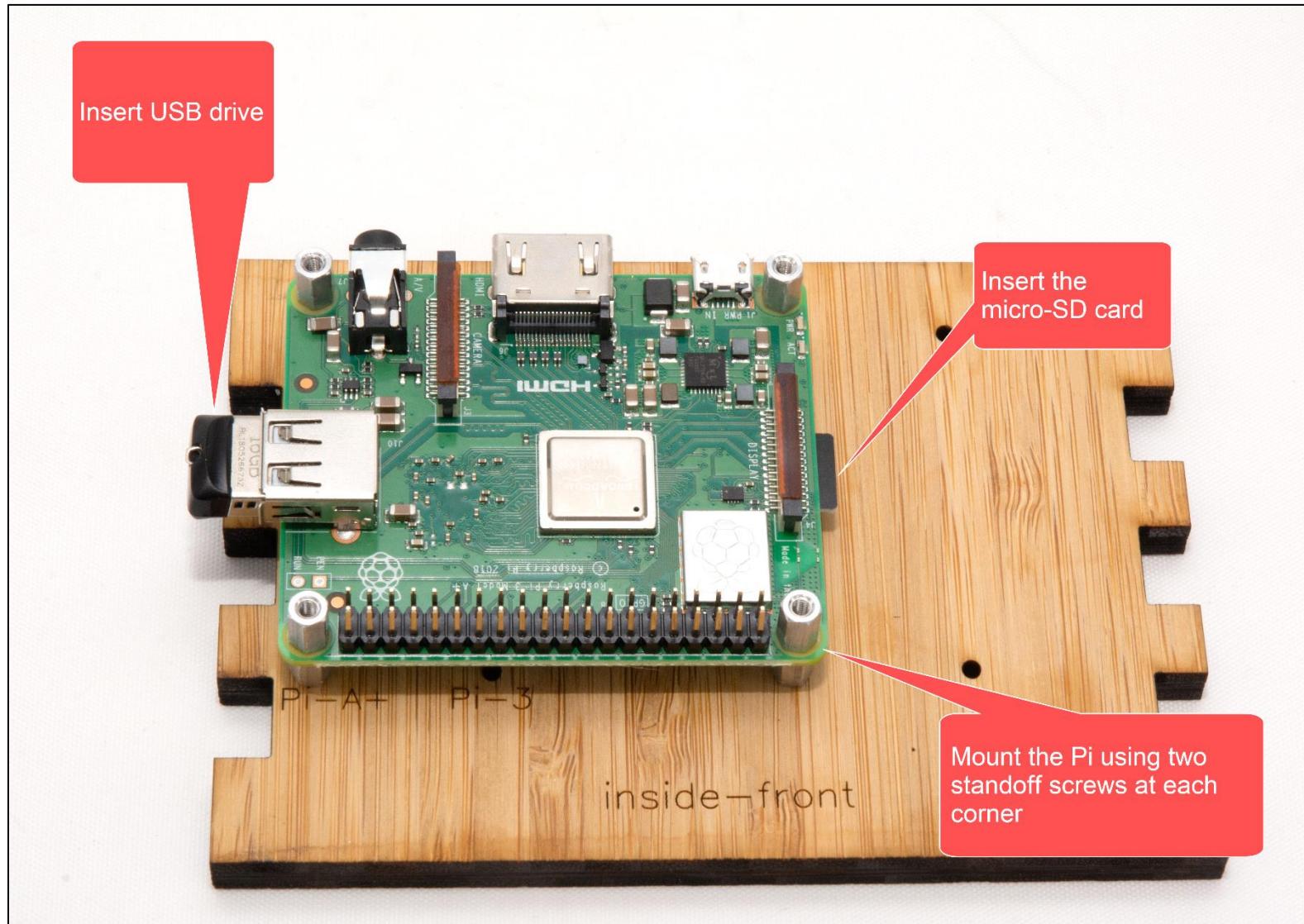
6. Wait for the writing to complete, ~10 minutes. This would be a good time to make a sandwich.

STEP 13: Apply a wood finish (optional)

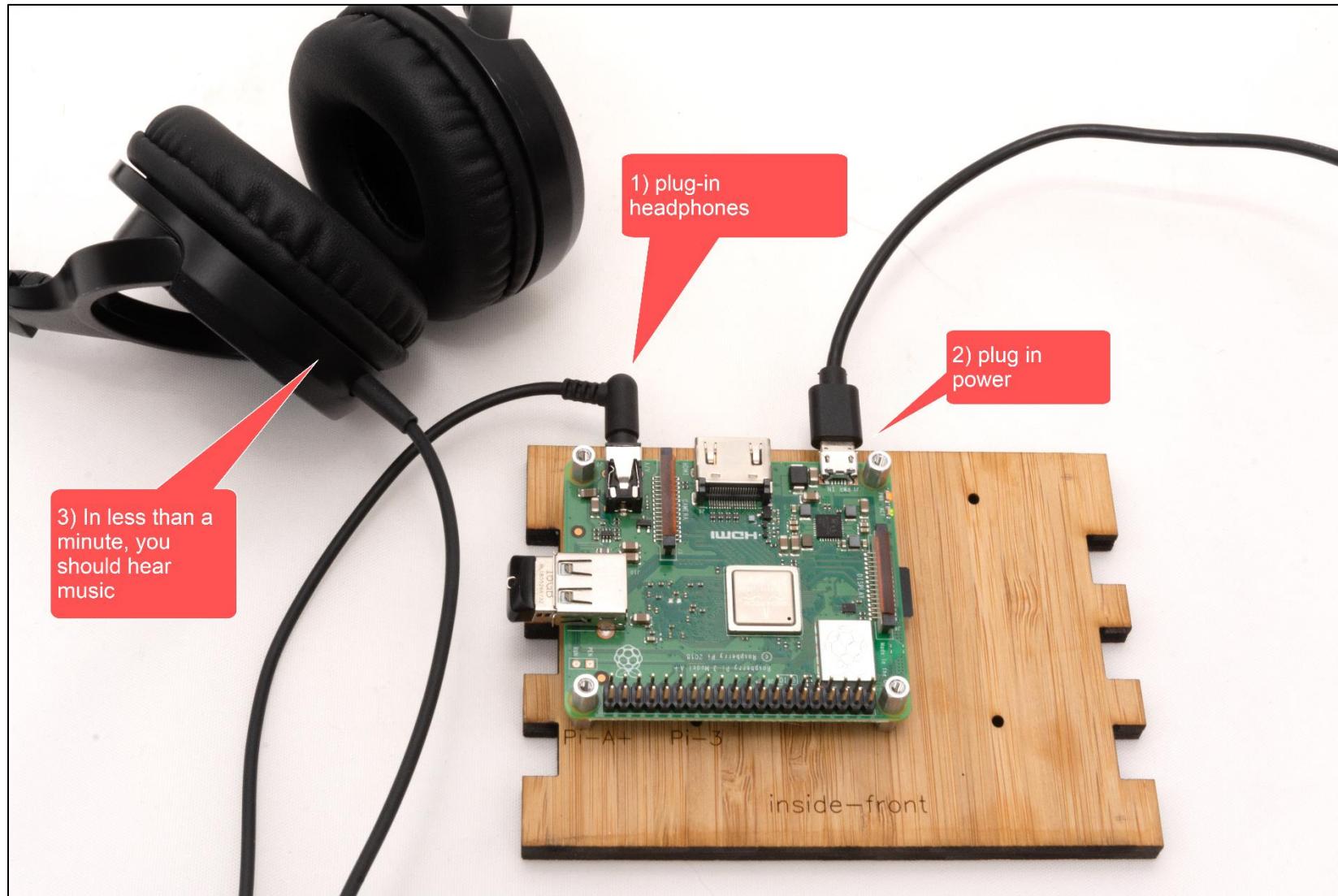


If you choose to use spray lacquer, see this [short video from Woodworking for Mere Mortals](#). The method shown is much faster than the instructions on the spray bottle. It takes about 15 minutes of work spread across two hours.

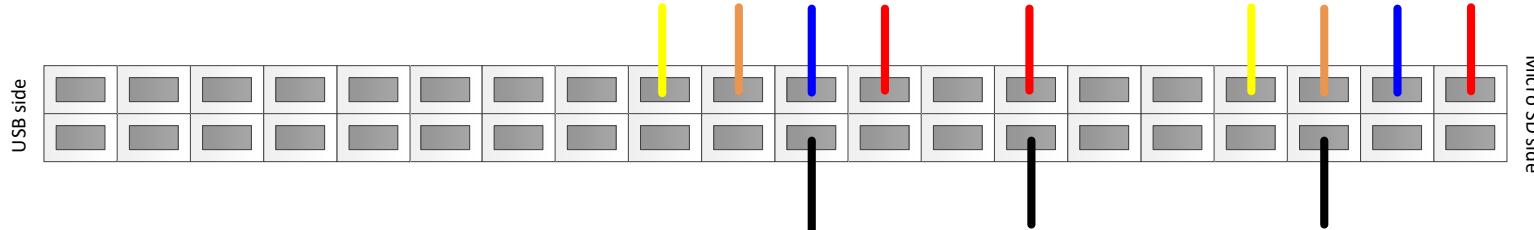
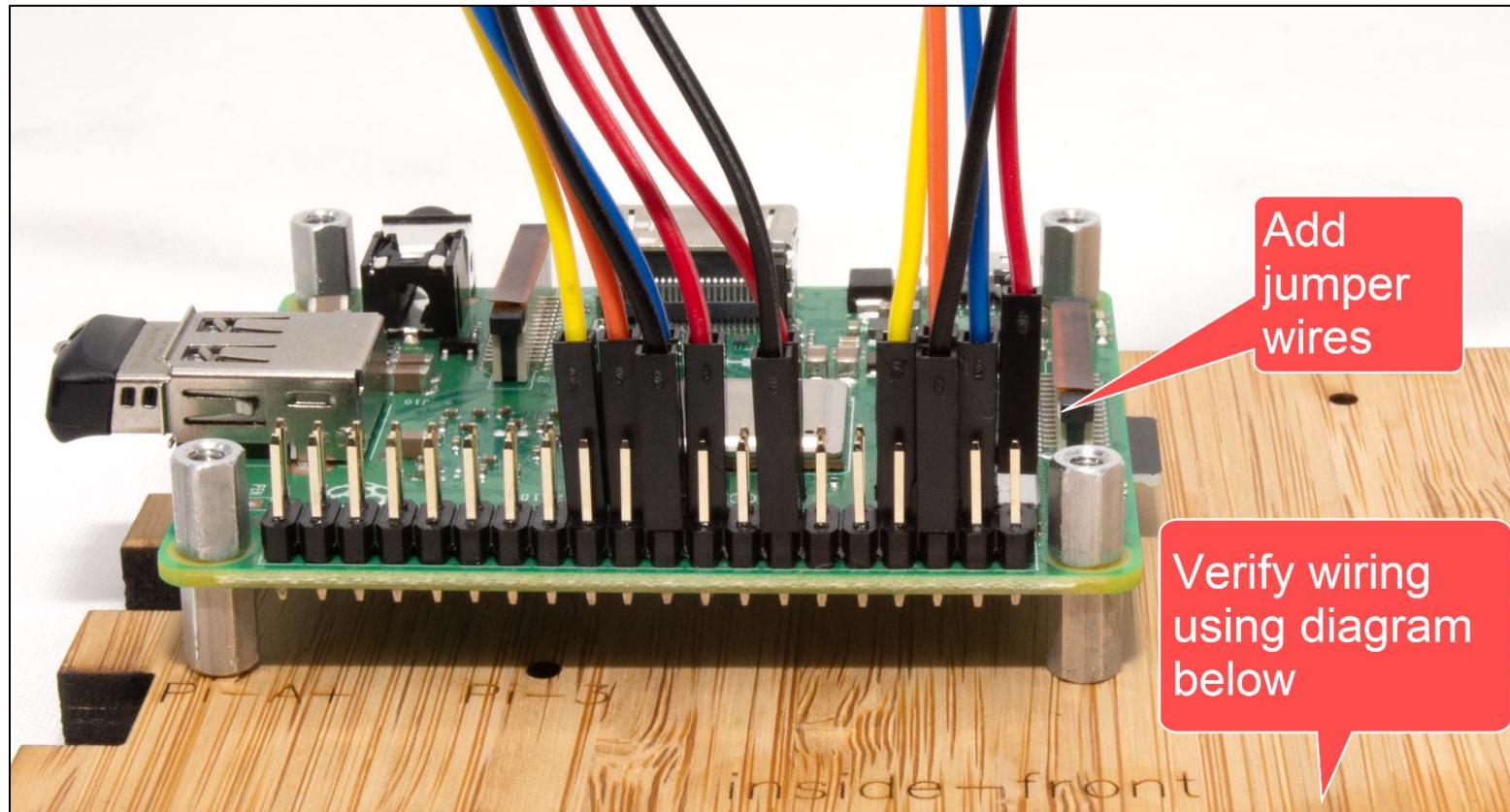
STEP 14: Add the Pi



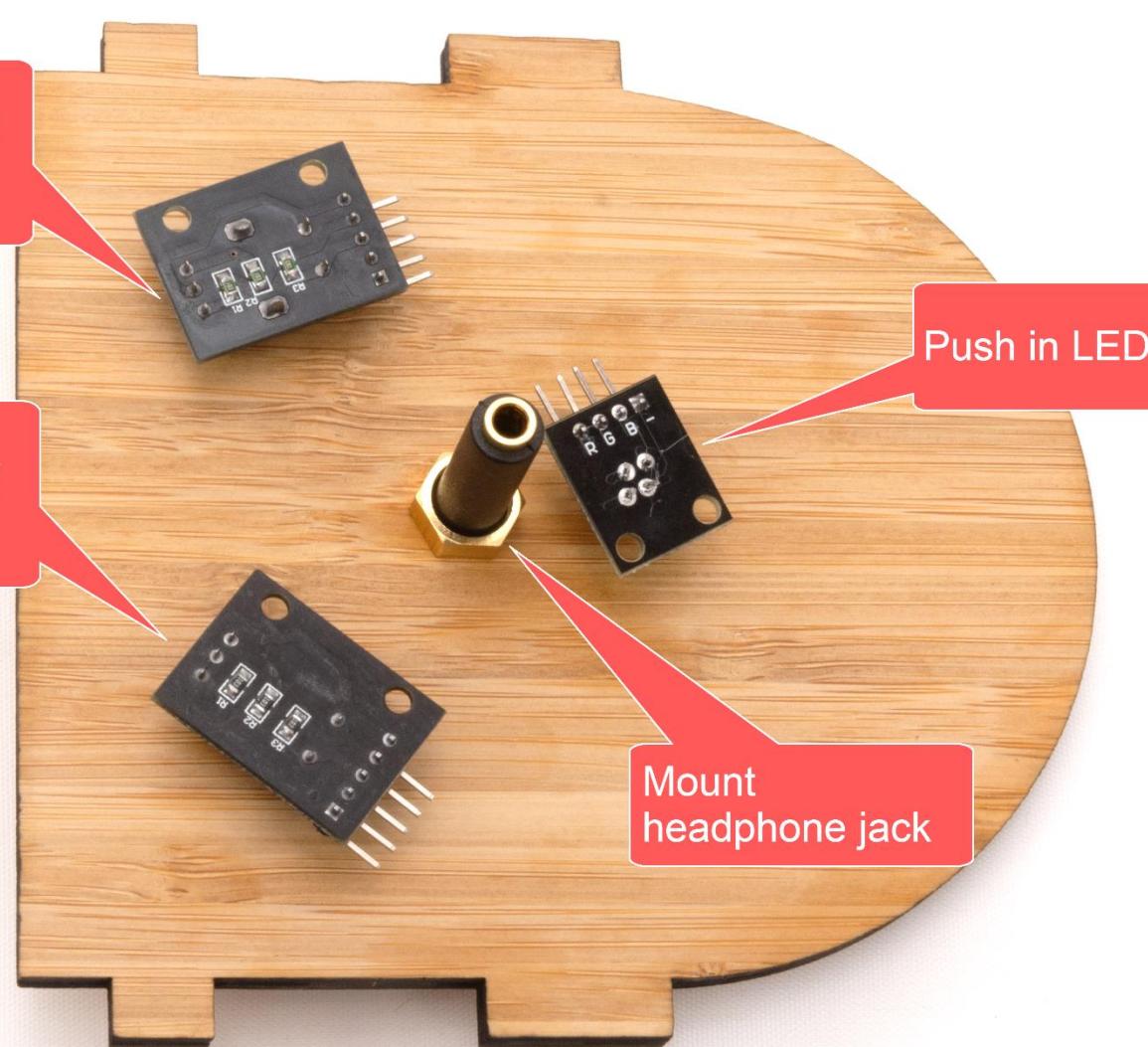
STEP 15: Test it



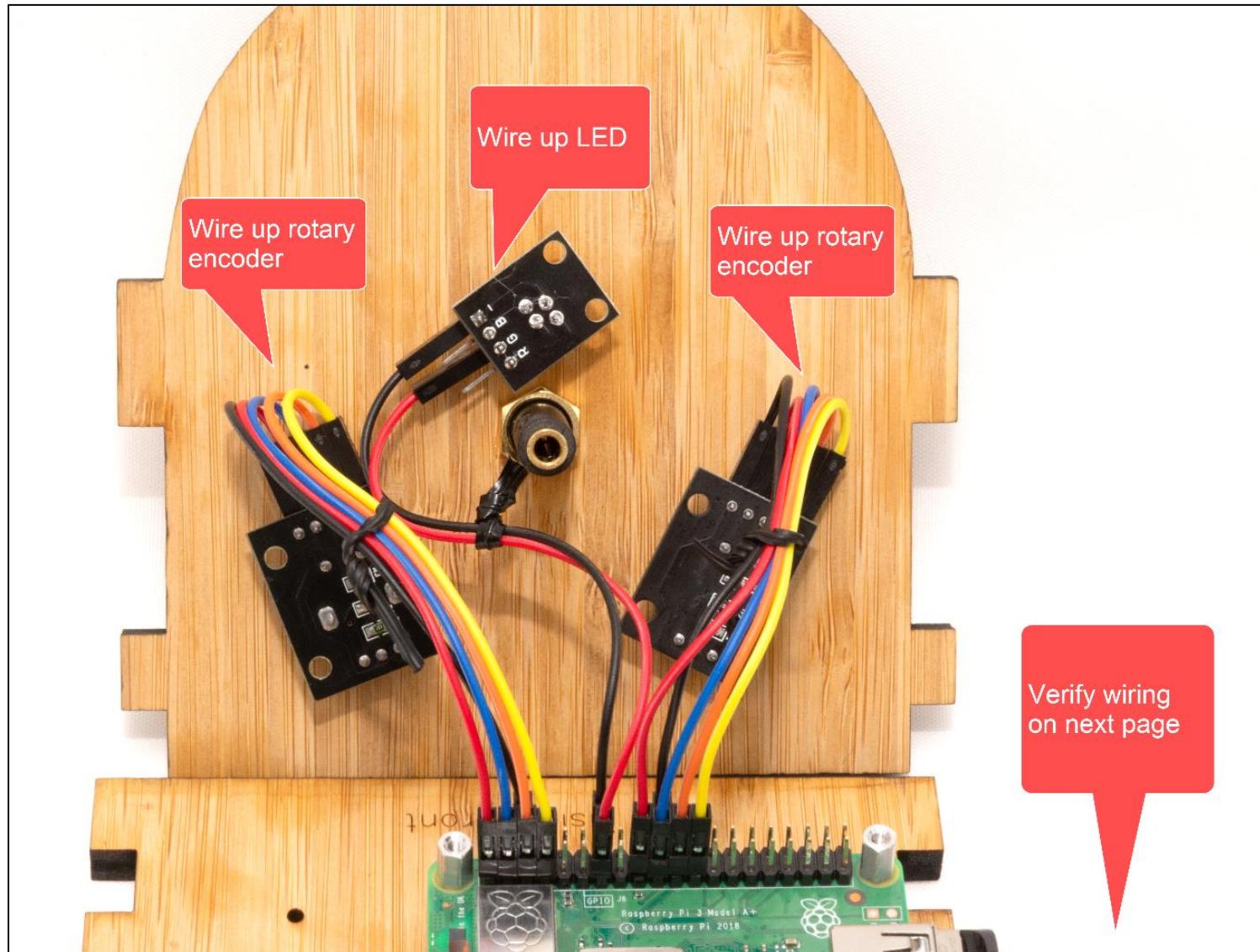
STEP 16: Wire it



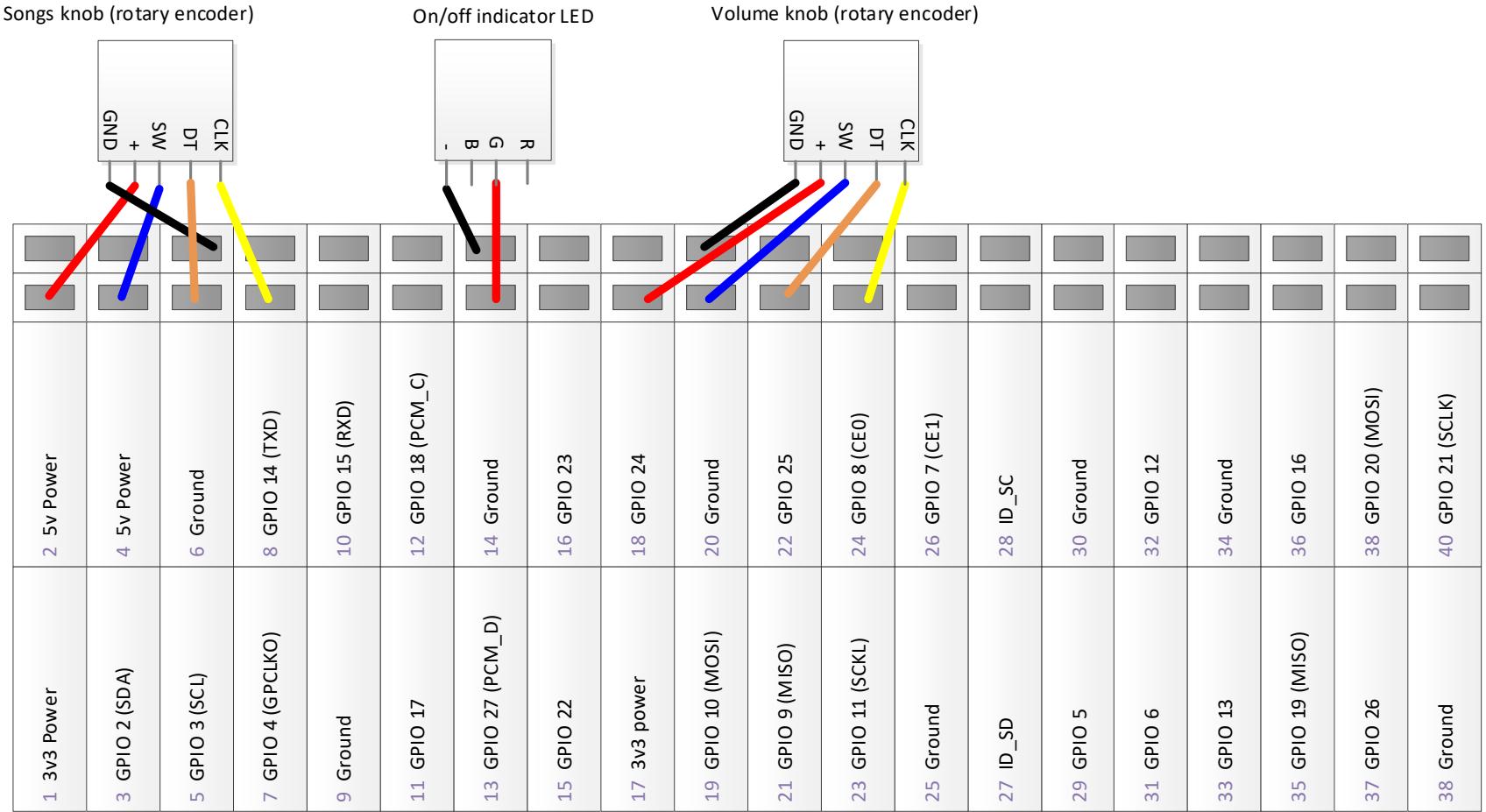
STEP 17: Add front panel components



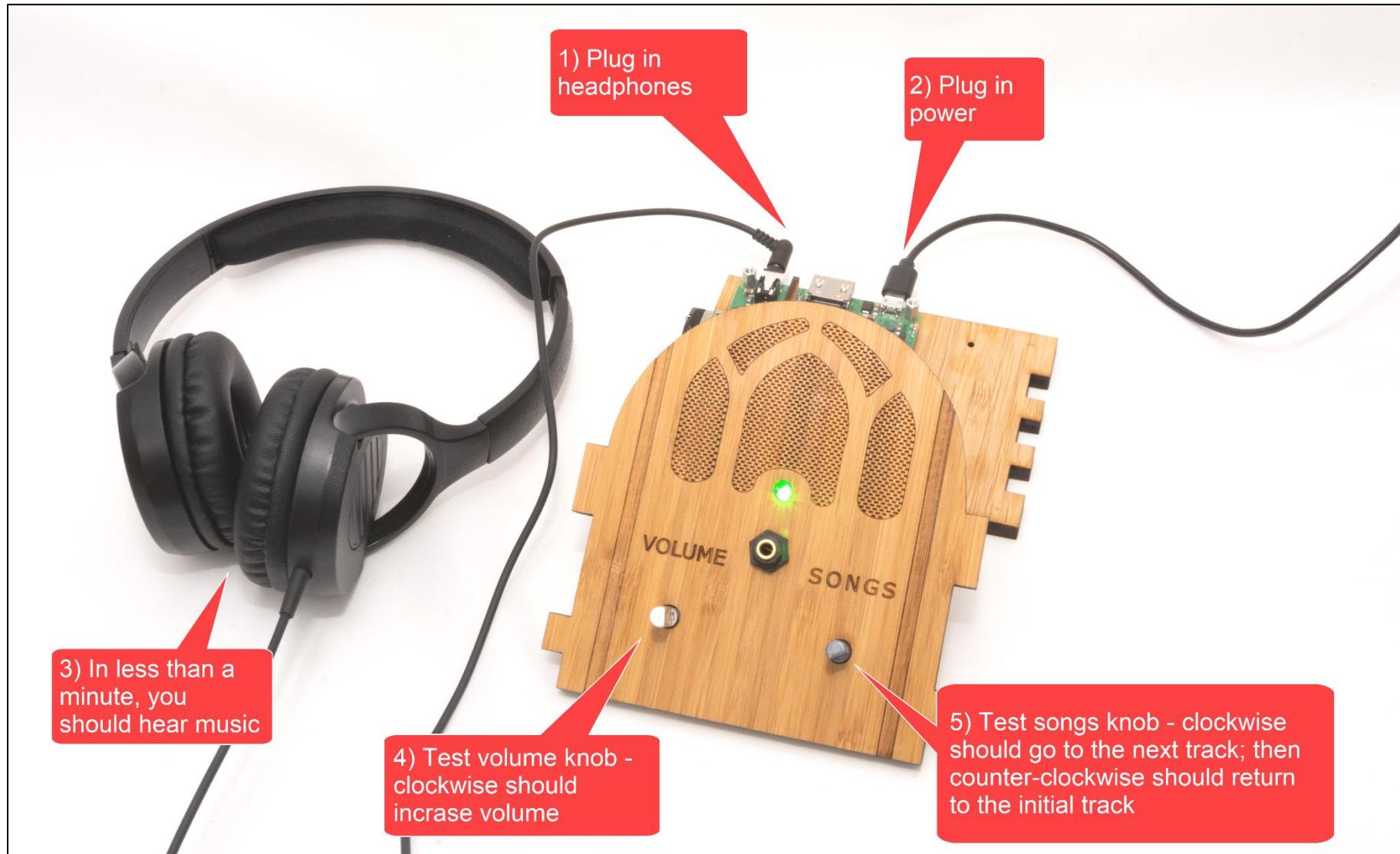
STEP 18: Wire up front panel components



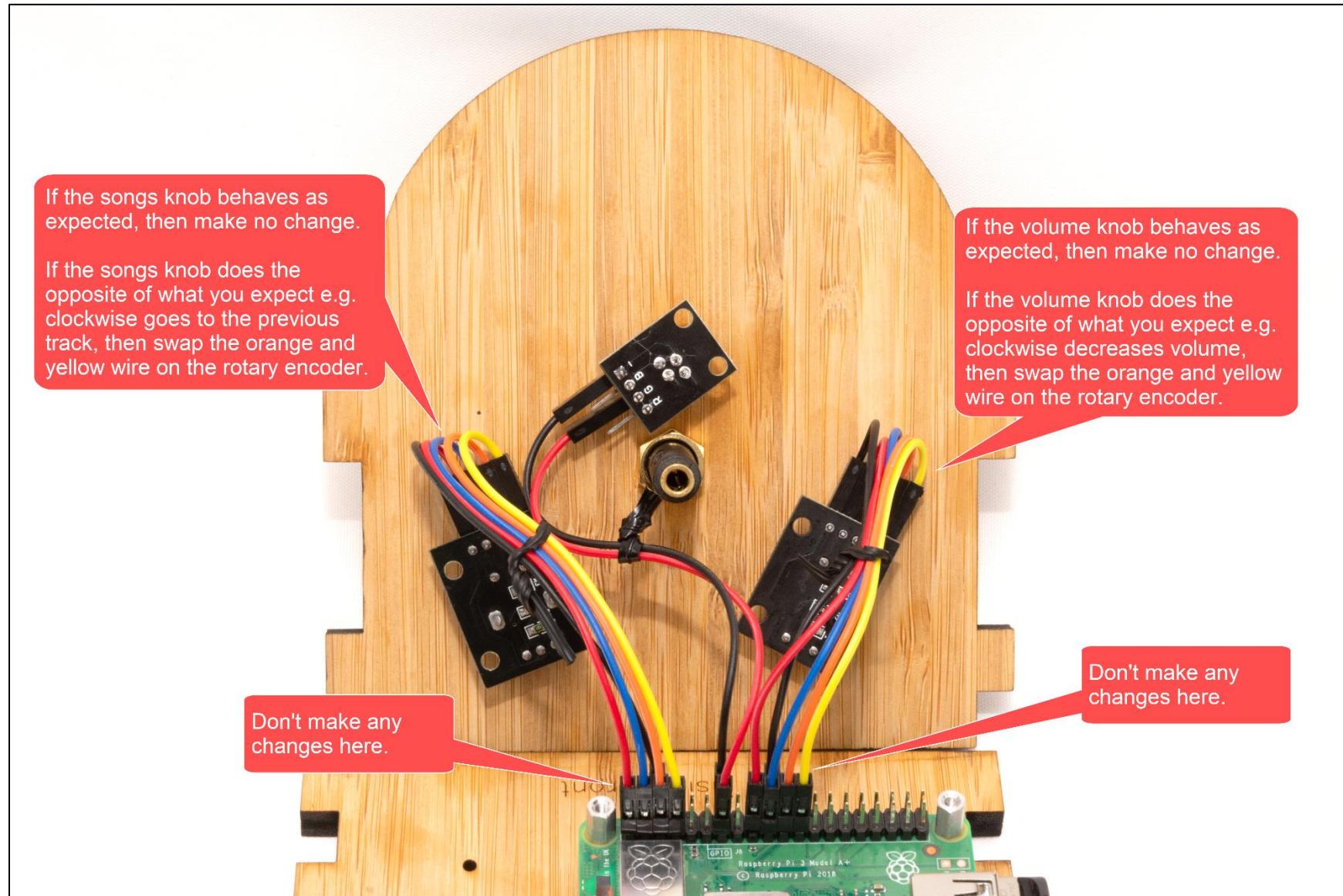
STEP 19: Verify wiring



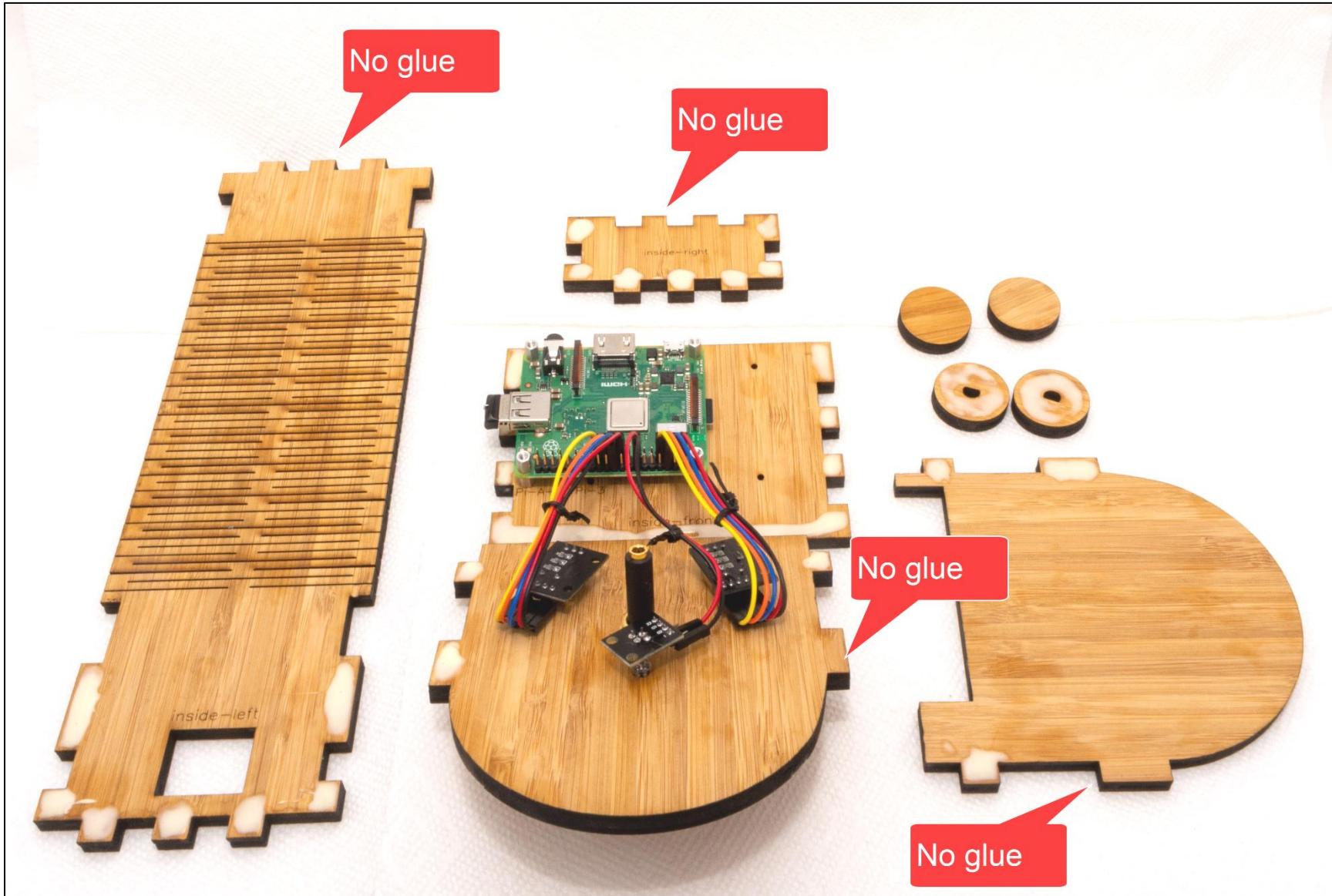
STEP 20: Test it again



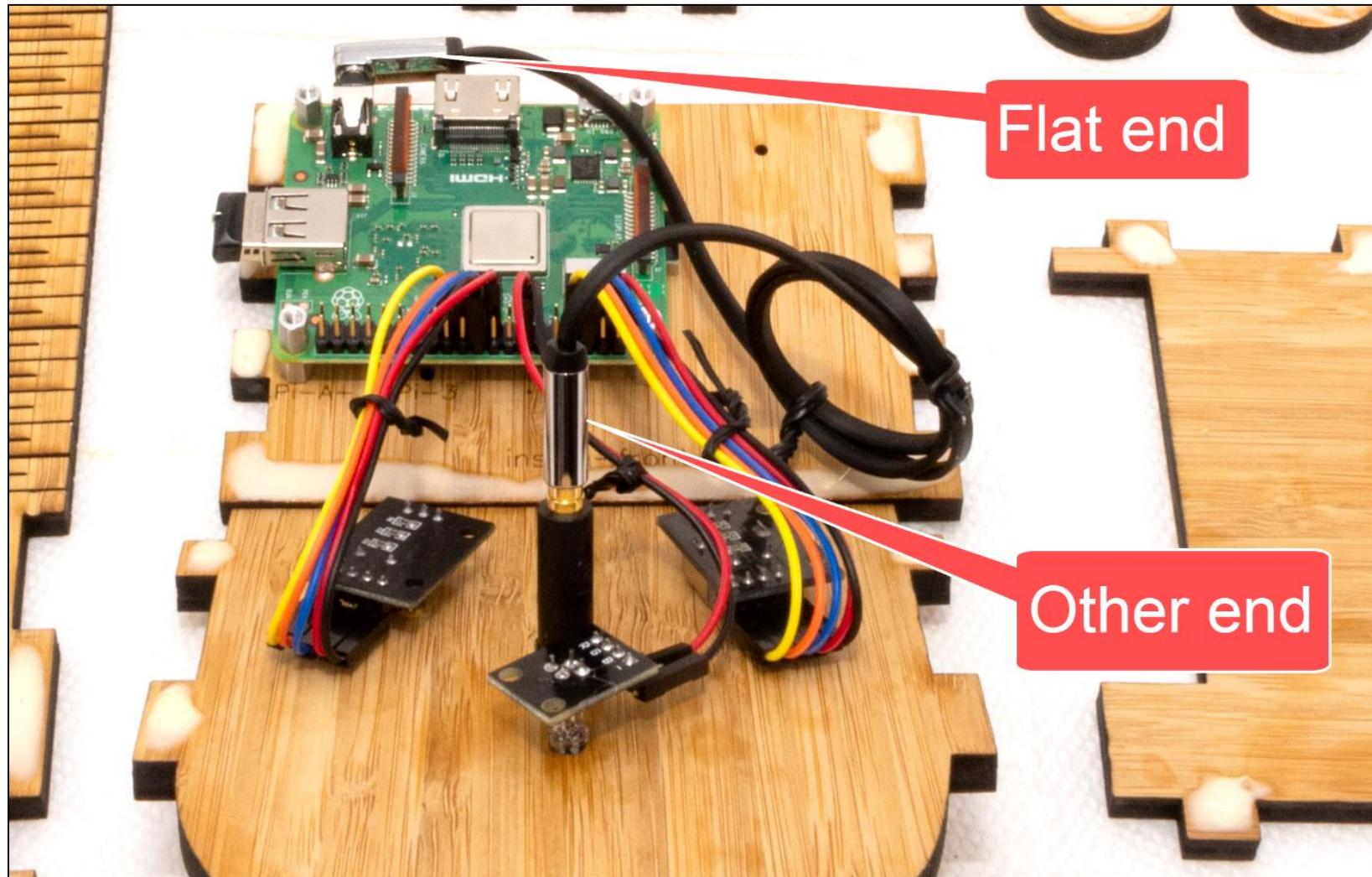
STEP 21: Adjust the knob wiring (if necessary)



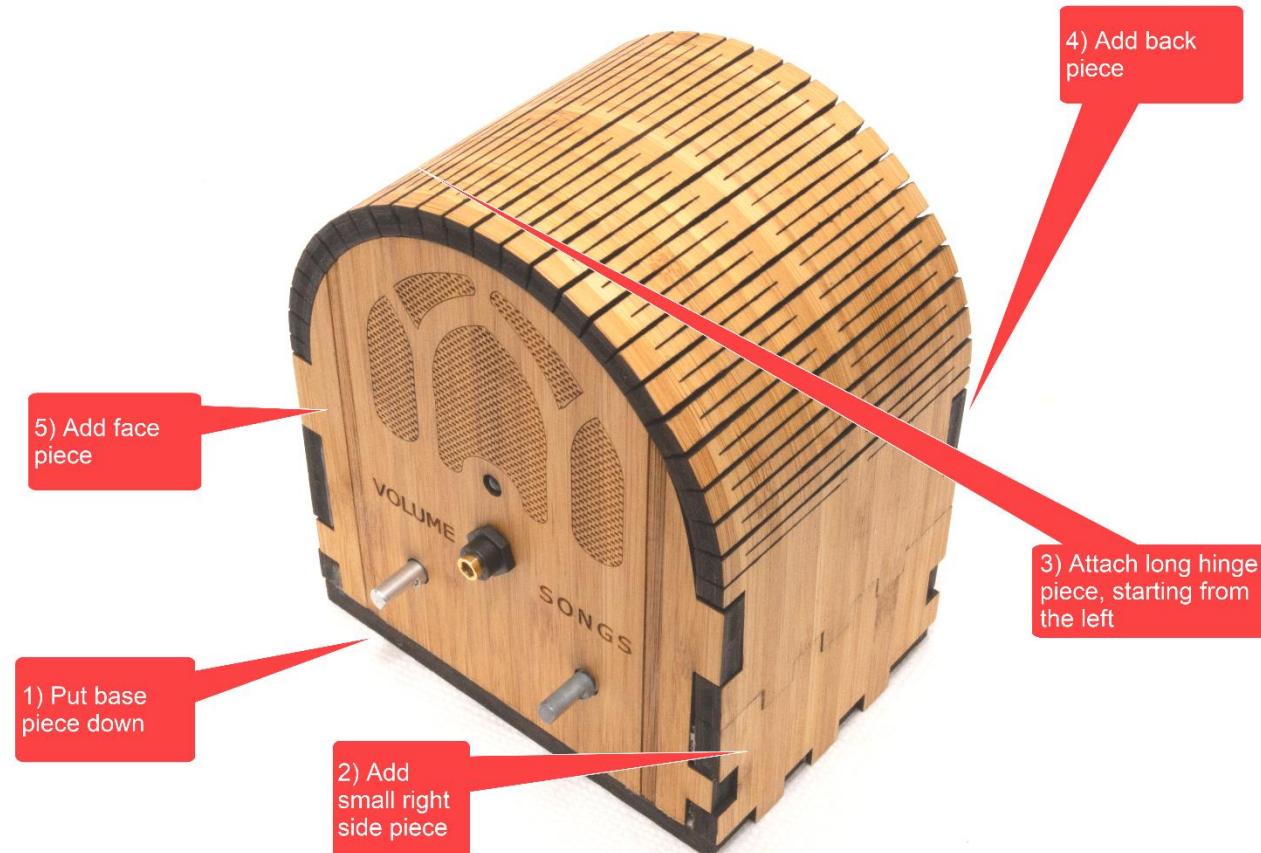
STEP 22: Add glue



STEP 23: Add audio cable

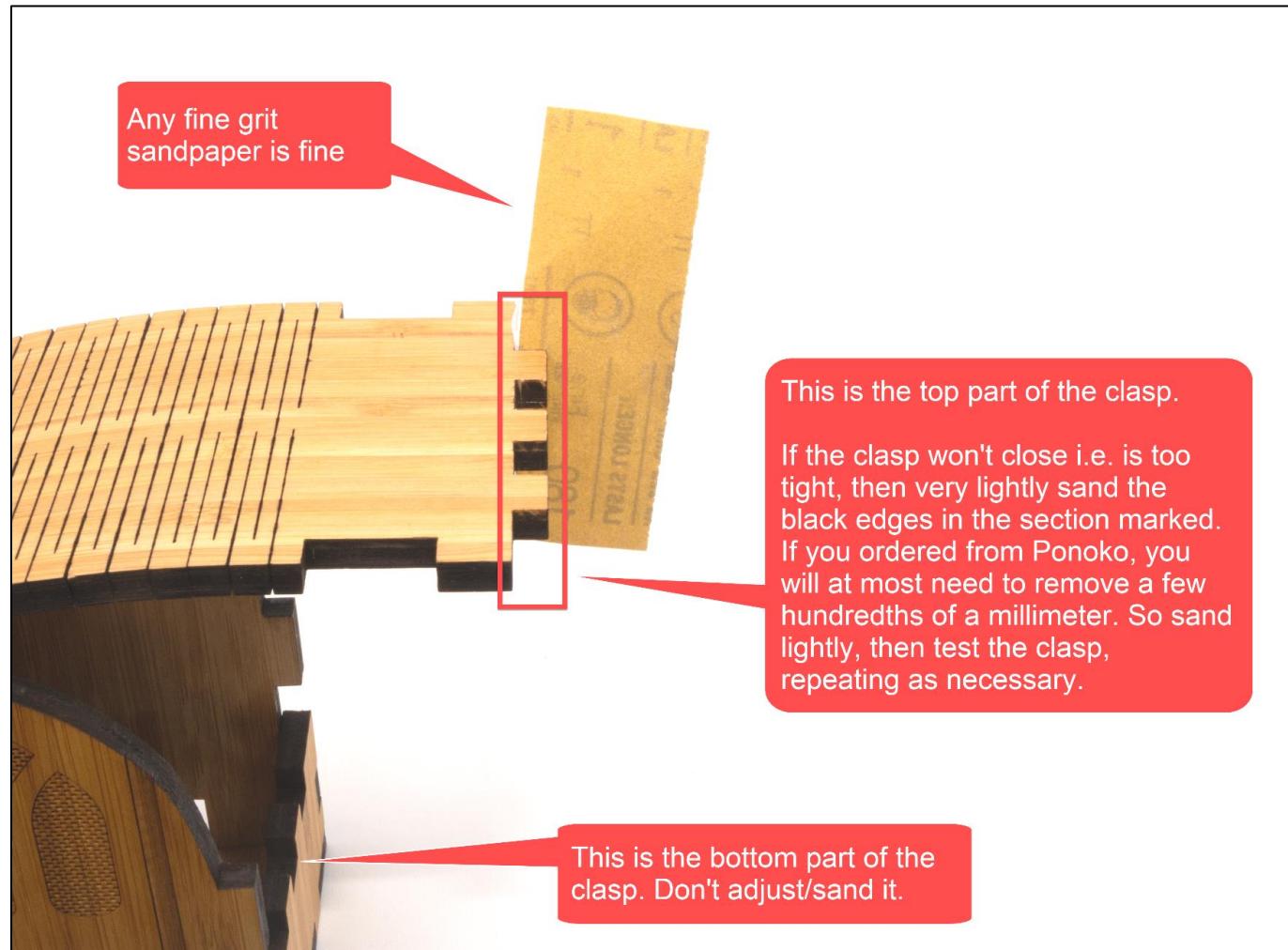


STEP 24: Glue it



STEP 25: Sand the clasp (if necessary)

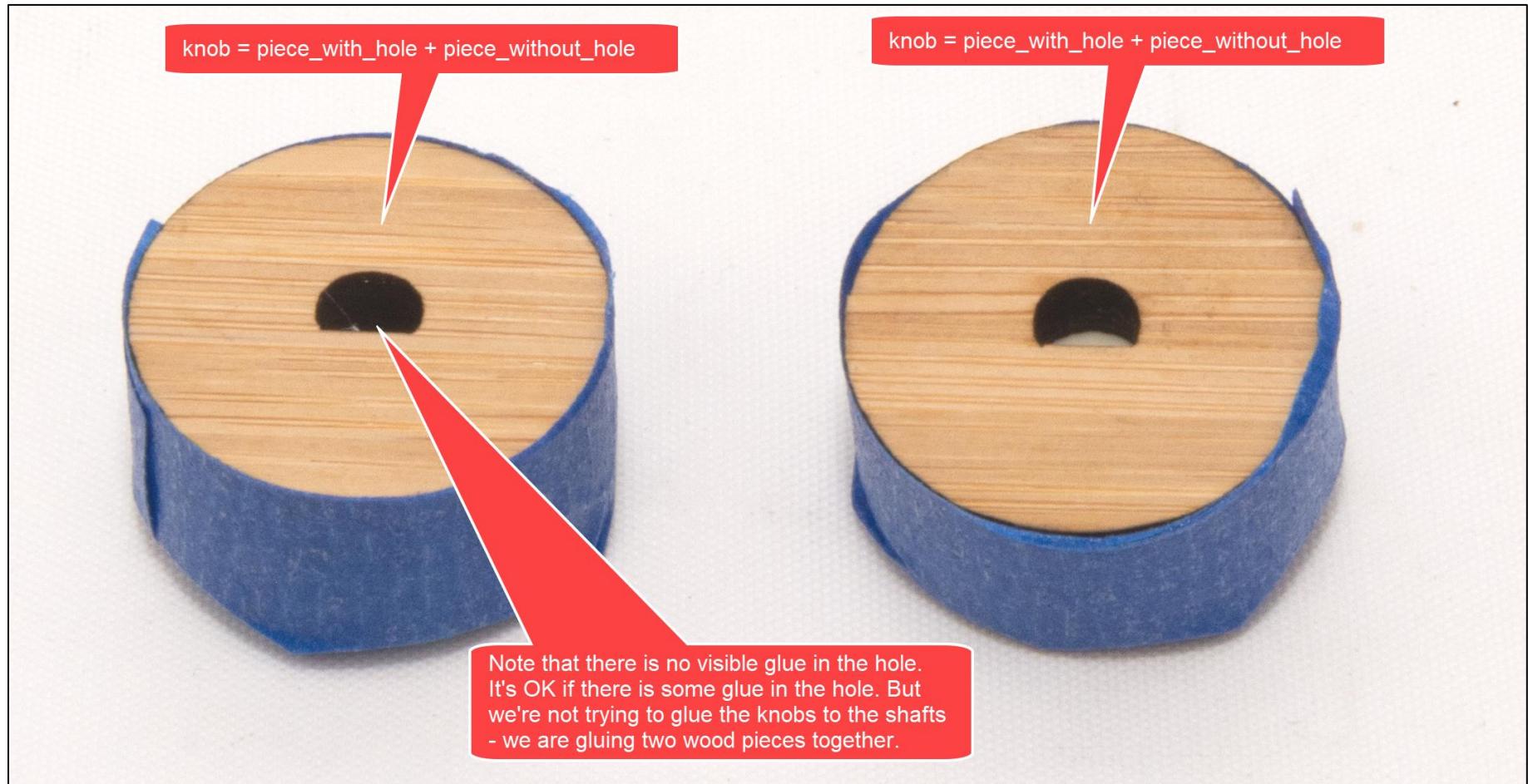
If the clasp won't close i.e. is too tight, then very lightly sand as per below. You can also do this after you have clamped & glued. So if your glue is starting to set as you read this, skip to the next step. Then return here after you take the clamp/tape off.



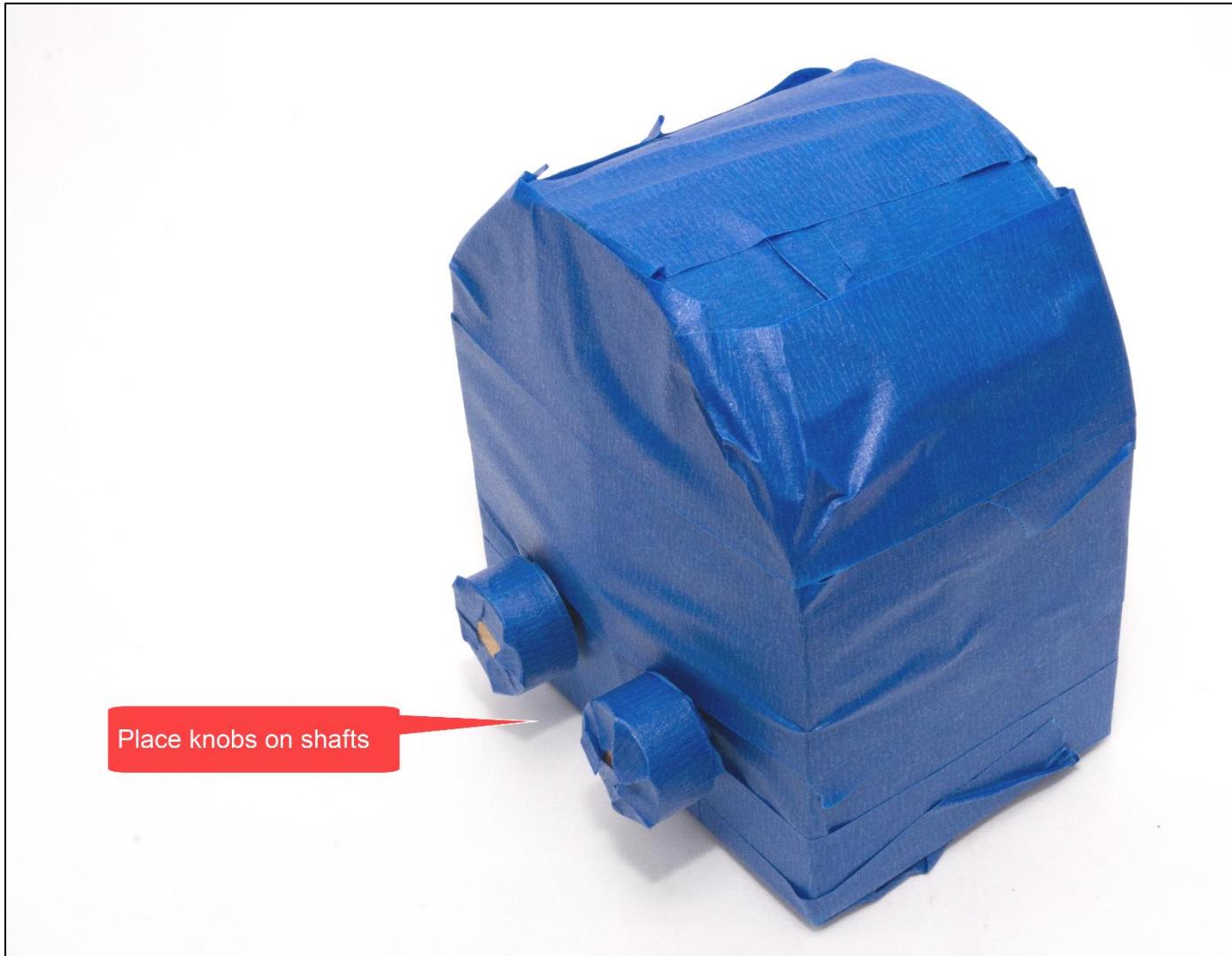
STEP 26: Clamp it



STEP 27: Glue the knobs



STEP 28: Place knobs on shafts



Place knobs on shafts

STEP 29: Let the glue dry

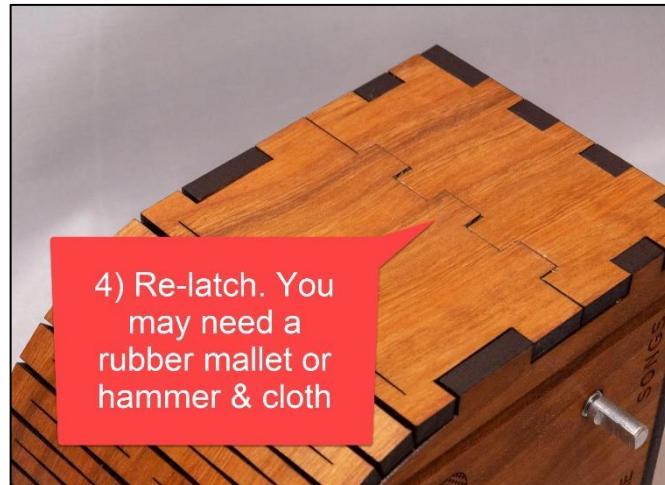
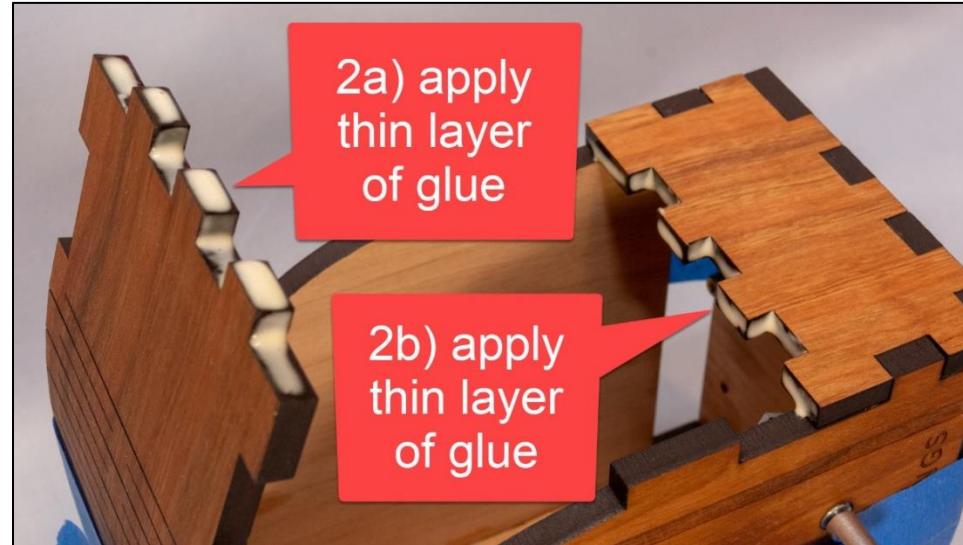


STEP 30: Remove the tape



STEP 31: Add glue to the clasp (if necessary)

If the clasp does not latch securely i.e. is a bit loose, then very slightly increase the size of the tabs by applying a thin layer of glue and allowing it to dry before re-latching. If you ordered from Ponoko, it's unlikely that you will have to do this. But if you do, then use a very thin layer of glue and perhaps only on the top of the latch. That is, if the Ponoko sizing is off, it's only going to be off by a fraction of a millimeter.



STEP 32: Adjust the knobs (if necessary)



STEP 33: Tape instructions

Print this page and tape the instructions in the box below to the bottom of your new Dementia Friendly Music Player:

To create personalized music

Organize the music on your computer

- A_Beethoven_9th
- B_AndrewsSisters_Hits
- C_GlennMiller_Hits

One folder per album. Use MP3 files, must have .mp3 file extension. Or iTunes files (.m4a). Or FLAC files (.flac). Optionally, use folder names prefixes to specify the play order e.g. A_, B_

Copy the music to the USB thumb drive



1. Unplug the Dementia Friendly Music Player.
2. Remove the USB thumb drive and place in your computer.
3. Copy music files from your computer to the USB thumb drive.
4. Put the USB thumb drive back in.
5. Plug in your Dementia Friendly Music Player.

STEP 34: Done!

Congratulations! You should have a fully functional Dementia Friendly Music Player.

Appendix 1: Change log

v1, November 2015	Original release
v2, September 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changed music storage from a micro-SD memory card to a conventional USB memory stick. Changed the base Operating System from full Raspbian to DietPi – much smaller, so faster to boot, and less to go wrong.
v3, January 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changed from USB audio to Pi built-in audio, including a firmware update for excellent audio quality.
v4, May 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Switched to bamboo for durability and use of standoffs. Switched to Pi A+ to lower cost. Made USB thumb drive externally accessible, to make it easier for the caregiver to organize music.
v4.01, 25 June 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor edits.
v4.01_1, 20 July 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor edits.
v4.01_2, 11 August 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added links for ordering parts in the UK. Added detailed instructions for write protecting a micro-SD card.
v4.01_3, 12 August 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor edits
v4.01_4, 12 August 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor edits
v4.01_5, 14 October 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Edited text and updated photographs to reflect the change from an HDD-style LED to a KY-016 LED module.
v4.01_6, 26 February 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated the links for purchasing the parts. No changes to the parts themselves, just the links. Minor change to the instructions, noting how the build can be accomplished in one sitting, if desired.
v4.1, 7 April 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflects that the software has been updated to support the new Raspberry Pi 3 B+. No new software features.
v4.1_1, 23 April 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated to reflect the new bamboo case design.
v4.1_2, 22 July 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated for the new cherry wood version
27 Jan 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated to note support for the Raspberry Pi 3A+.
v4.2, 1 March 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Switched to pmount for USB drive auto mounting.
v4.2, 7 April 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removed instructions for write protecting the SD card – rarely used and may cause certain rare problems
v4.2, 26 October 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated the parts list Updated Ponoko instructions
v4.2, 28 October 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated Ponoko instructions
v4.2.1, 30 October 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changed link to the new v4.2.1 of the software image Noted support for Pi 4 Updated Ponoko instructions to match Ponoko's updated user interface
v4.2.1, 19 December 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor update – naming conventions
v4.2.1, 22 December 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated to reflect the change from cherry to bamboo e.g. updated almost all of the photos. Added new steps to the instructions, particularly mid-point tests and troubleshooting.