



Beginners Ultimate Guide To Cross Stitching

Written by Sophie Routhier
Maidenwood Embroidery Designs

Introduction

I caught my first glimpse of hand embroidery when I was about 7 or 8 years old, watching my grandmother work on a "petit point", during one particular summer vacation at my grandparent's farm house. I was hooked.

It didn't take long for me to start asking for small cross stitch kits for holidays and special occasions. Then a few of my aunts started sending me care packages containing old books of patterns, techniques, and extra supplies they no longer needed. And here I am today!

Cross stitching, along with many other styles of hand stitched embroidery, have been a constant part of my hobby repertoire for over 30 years and now I am beyond excited to be sharing this passion of mine with you. Even if you're brand new to this craft, the following pages contain everything you need to get started, so dive right in!

Each design that I create is truly a labor of love, often starting from hand drawn sketches or photography, then carefully transformed into finished patterns.

I truly hope that stitching Maidenwood patterns brings you comfort, inspiration and happiness.

Stay cozy!

A handwritten signature in a cursive script, reading "Sophie". The letters are fluid and connected, with a large initial 'S'.

Ultimate Beginners Guide to Cross Stitching

Embroidery is an umbrella term that by its simplest definition is the craft of decorating fabric by passing thread, yarn, ribbon or other embellishments through the fabric, generally with the help of a needle.

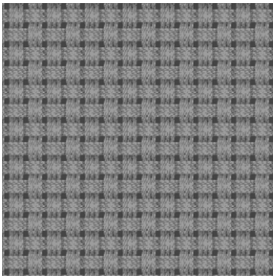
There are countless varieties of embroidery styles dating as far back as 30,000 BC and examples can be found in almost every culture around the globe. Originally developed as a means of mending and reinforcing fabrics, the craft has certainly evolved over time, however the basic principles still remain to this day.

Counted Cross Stitch is most commonly worked on a type of evenweave fabric which is called Aida. As the name implies, "evenweave" means that the threads that make up the fabric are woven in a very precise manner, resulting in a standard number of threads per inch.

Bedsheets are a common example of an evenweave fabric and are quantified by "threads count". Where Aida differs from everyday evenweave fabrics is in its precisely laid out construction, which leaves an opening, without thread, at regular intervals. This creates a fabric with an open basket weave effect.

Aida fabric is typically available in a few different sizes.

Size 11, 14, 16 and 18. 14 count Aida is the most commonly used size fabric in counted cross stitch. Each count or square is generally made up of 4 closely woven threads followed by a space.



This image shows what a 1"x1" square of 14 count Aida would look like.

There are 14 squares length wise and 14 squares height wise.

11 count Aida fabric would be 11 squares wide by 11 squares tall resulting in larger stitches and 18 count Aida fabric would be 18 squares wide by 18 squares tall, resulting in smaller stitches.

The choice of Aida count is up to you, depending on your personal preference for the look and size of the finished product.

A lower count Aida will result in a larger finished piece, with more easily visible stitches. The visual effect might even be called pixelated.

A higher count Aida will result in a smaller finished piece and the stitches will blend together visually, resulting in a smoother looking design. Neither option is better, it is entirely a matter of personal preference.

Aida fabric can commonly be found in most crafting supply stores, and will generally be available in basic colors such as white, ecru, oatmeal, red and black. There are also countless online options from which to source a much wider variety of Aida colors, including hand dyed options often offered by small businesses.

When selecting your fabric, you will want to keep a few details in mind. Primarily, you will want to consider the expected finished size of the pattern, and which fabric color might best compliment the design and your choice of thread colors. Most patterns will provide suggested guidelines for both elements, but feel free to change elements as you wish.

Once you have selected your fabric, you will need to cut it to the correct size. Always leave yourself ample space in all directions around the design to ensure that you have enough material remaining in order to frame your piece once finished. For the novice stitcher, an allowance of about 1-2 inches on every side will be plenty.

To calculate how much fabric you need, start by finding your designs specifications: Stitches wide x Stitches long.

EX: 98 x 120 You have chosen 14 count fabric

$98/14 = 7$ and $120/14 = 8.5$. Total Stitches area = 7×8.5 inches.

Add 4" to the height and width of your fabric.

Final canvas size should be about 11" x 12.5"

Embroidery hoops are made of wood or plastic and come in a wide variety of sizes. Its primary intent is to maintain even tension on the fabric, in order to allow for easier stitching.



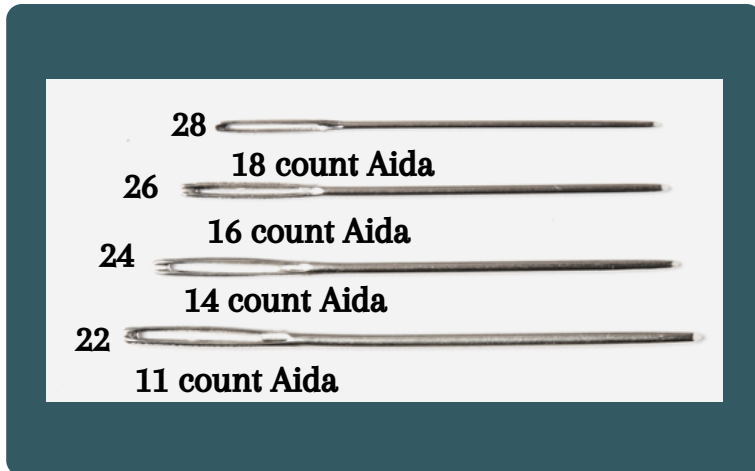
It's best to select a hoop that is smaller than your total fabric piece, though not so small as to require constant reposition to center your working area.

Some stitchers opt to work without a hoop, and will prefer to simply hold the fabric in their hand. So long as you are able to maintain even tension on your fabric and thread, this is also perfectly acceptable.

In order to secure your fabric in your hoop, you will need to loosen the screw at the top of the hoop. This will separate the two layers of your hoop. Set the inside hoop flat on a table, drape your fabric over it, then gently slide the top hoop over the fabric, capturing it in between the inside and outside hoop layers. Begin to tighten the screw, then gently pull on all 4 corners of your fabric, in order to create a smooth and taut working surface within the hoop. Finish tightening the outer hoop until secure.

Selecting your needles is going to be your next consideration.

Typically, counted cross stitch should be completed using tapestry needles. These are short, blunt ended needles with an elongated eye. Tapestry needles come in different sizes, with each size being best suited for a particular size of fabric weave.



The smaller the mesh size of your fabric, the smaller your needle should be and vice versa. And remember, the higher the needle number, the finer the needle will be.

For example, a 28 size needle will work best with 18 count Aida because the narrower width of a small needle will be able to pass through the smaller holes of a higher count fabric.

If a needle is too large, compared to the size of the weave of the fabric, it will distend and possibly rip the fabric.

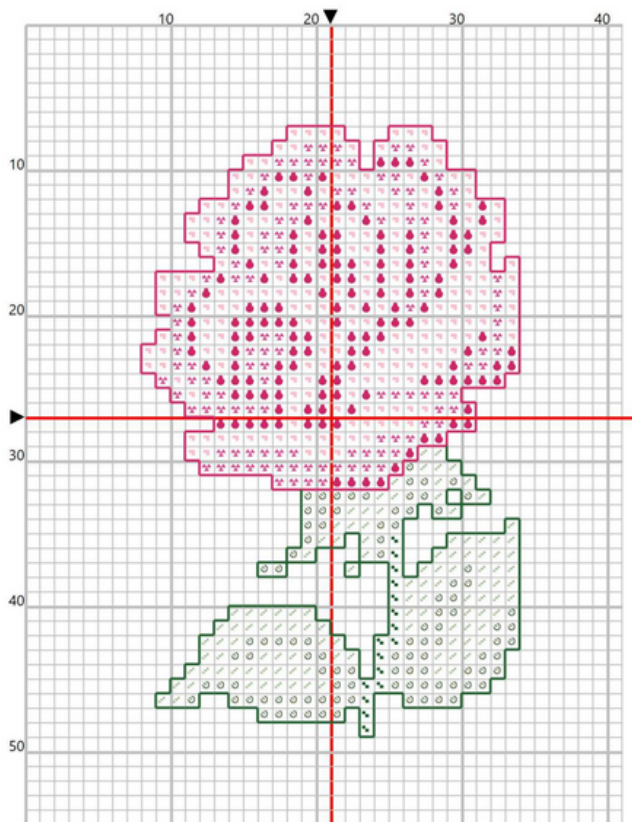
Reading your pattern is going to be your next step. Counted cross stitch is an embroidery design made up of uniform "X" stitches that together form an image, similar to pixels in a digital image.

Each thread color (called floss, in this case) is assigned a symbol, and then each square of the pattern is labeled with the corresponding symbol. Blank squares are left unstitched.

Each pattern is published with its own color key, providing you with the name of each color , the manufacturer ID, as well as the number of strands that must be used for each stitch type.

The grid corresponds to the weave of the fabric, meaning each square on the chart represents one square on the fabric.

Every 10th vertical line and every 10th row is noted with a darker line, to help you keep track of your position. Do not confuse these numbers with your fabric count. Center lines will also be highlighted.



All cross stitches: 2 strands
Back stitches: 1 strand

	Number	Description
▲	DMC 603	Pink Mauve Med
⊙	DMC 367	Pistachio Green dk
⊙	DMC 368	Pistachio Green lt
■	DMC 319	Pistachio Green vy dk
■	DMC 605	Cranberry vy lt
●	DMC 601	Cranberry dk
■	DMC 319	B/S
■	DMC 601	B/S

Symbols in the color key will tell you which color to use for each square of the grid.

Thread types, brand and colors are almost always listed out on counted cross stitch patterns, but feel free to change up the colors as you like! One of the most widely used varieties of thread, *DMC 6 Strand Embroidery Floss*, (pictured below) is available in hundreds of solid colors. But that is only a small portion of what is available on the market.



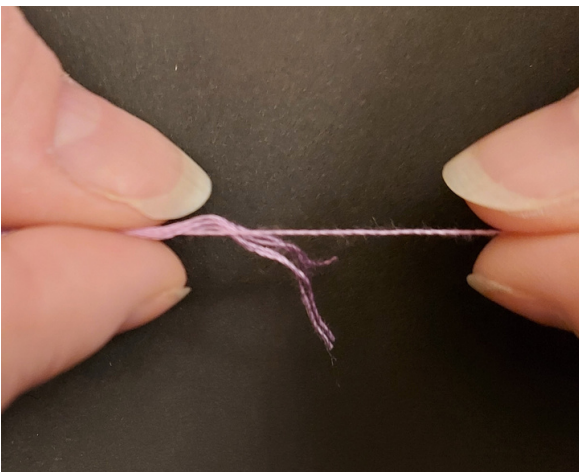
As mentioned in the *Reading your Pattern* section, the number of strands can vary, depending on the pattern and the type of stitches used. Separating floss into its individual strands can be trickier than expected, so there are a few tips to doing this as well.

Start by cutting a length of floss from the skein. Skeins are typically 8' long, and some stitchers prep all their floss ahead, by cutting each skein down into 1' lengths. This may be a bit too long for some, so a simple way to measure is to cut your working length so that it is slightly shorter than your arm, from fingers to shoulder.

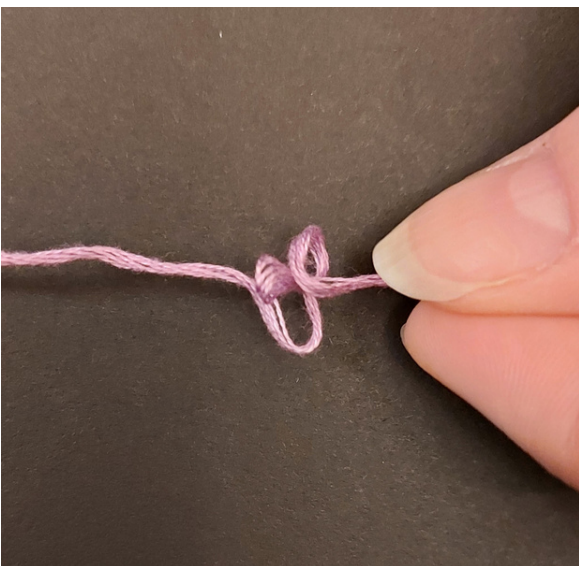
Separating 1 strand:



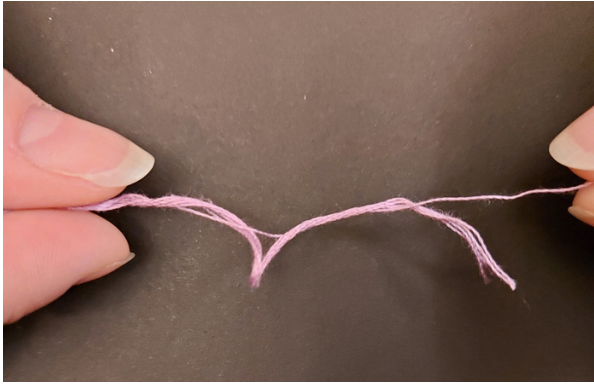
Start by isolating 1 strand from the thread.



Pinch this single strand between the thumb and index finger of your right hand, then gently run the fingers of your left hand down the main thread, pulling away.

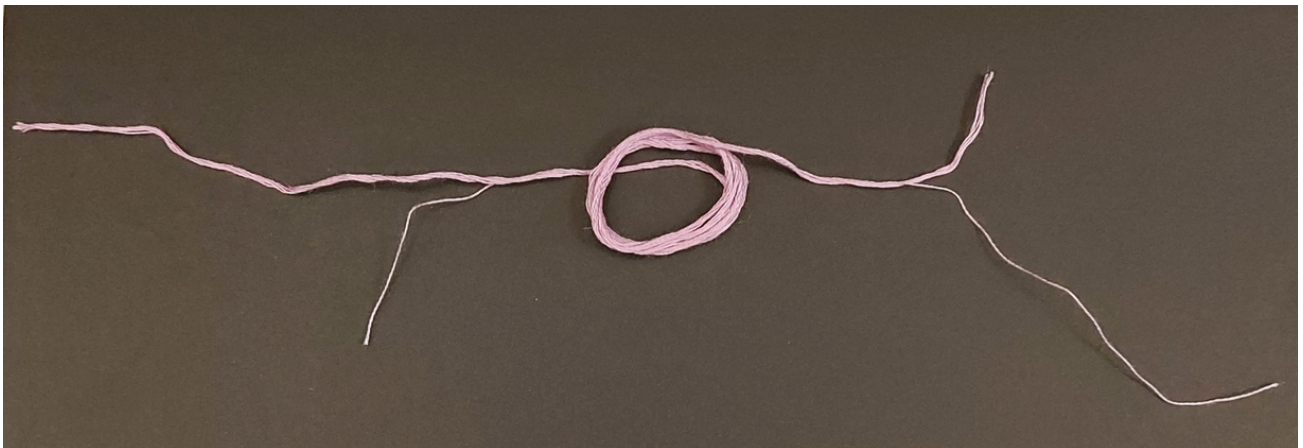


What should result is that the remaining threads will bunch up, down along the shaft of the single thread you are isolating.



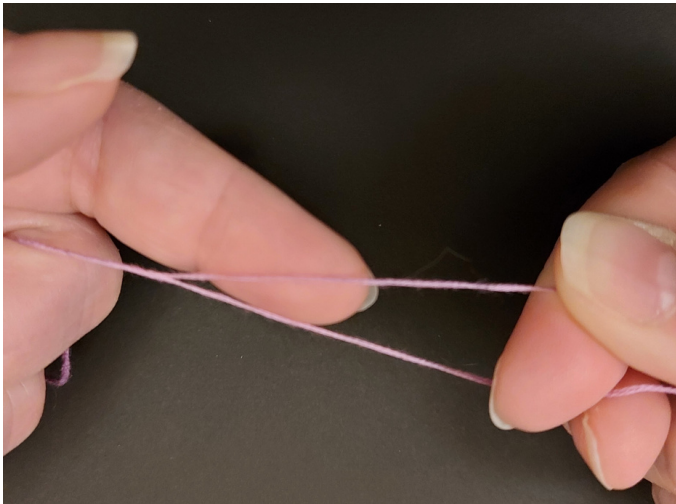
At this stage, simply move your fingers down the length of the thread, gently pulling towards the left. Stop as soon as you feel any resistance.

Continue repeating this process a few times, gently pulling and smoothing the threads further and further along down the length, until you reach the end of your thread.



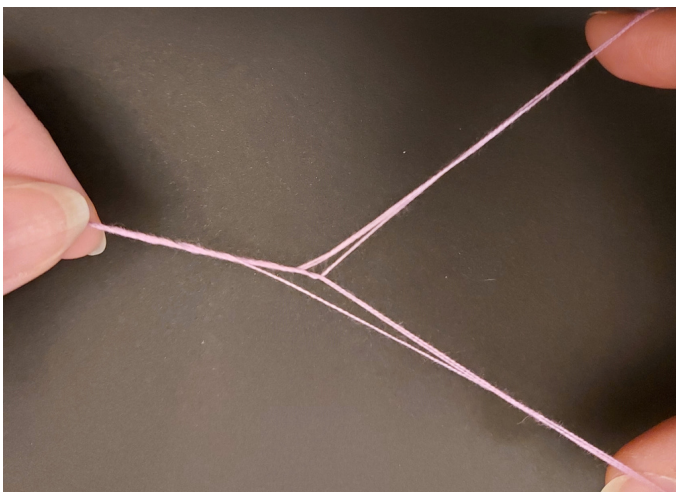
What you end up with should look similar to this example. Your single strand will be "shorter" on the left, and "longer" on the right. Once you reach this stage, you can firmly pinch the single strand with your right hand, and the remaining strands in your left, then pull steadily apart.

If a particular stitch calls for two strands, simply repeat the process in order to pull out a second single strand and then combine those two into your working thread. Trying to pull 2 strands at once sometimes works, but often ends up tangling your thread.



If a stitch calls for 3 strands, a more efficient way of separating those out is to simply divide your initial 6 strand thread into two 3 strand groups, then gently untwist them by running a finger down in between them.

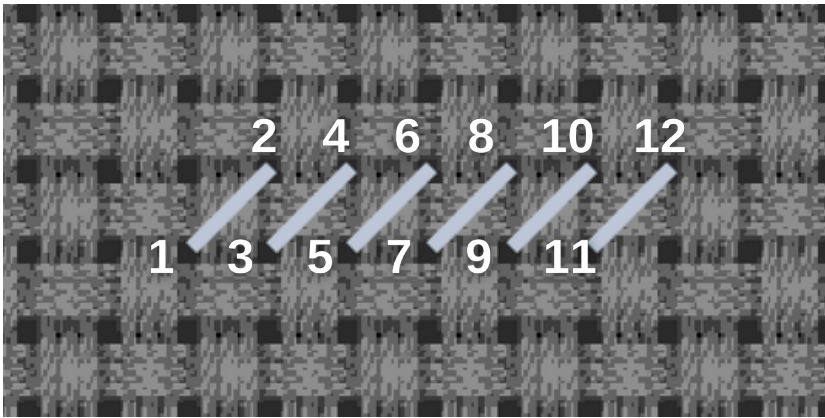
Drag your finger down in between the strands until you feel resistance.



Once you hit resistance, run your thumb and index finger down the length of the thread in order to smooth it out gently, then resume separating them with your index finger.

There exists a number of methods of starting and ending a new thread. My favorite method happens to work well in both instances and is called the *buried thread method*.

Once you have your needle threaded, you will start by bringing your needle up from the back of your fabric, through the bottom left corner of a square (pos. 1). Leave about a 1" tail of floss at the back, and hold it down against the fabric with the index finger of the hand you are holding your hoop or fabric in.

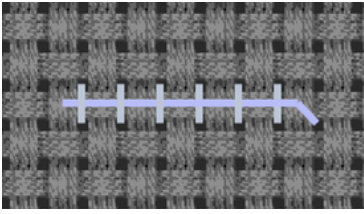


Next, bring your needle down, front to back, (pos. 2).

Work your way across the row, going down through the front in the top right corners, and back up through the back in the left corners directly below.g

Your stitches will be diagonal on the front and vertical on the back. The vertical stitches that form along the back of the fabric will the "capturing" the short tail length that you held onto with your finger at the start of your row.

View of back of fabric



Capture the tail underneath your first few stitches.

Secure the tail under your surrounding stitches, on the back of the fabric, passing over the tail and fastening it down as you work your normal stitches.

If you have existing stitches in your current working area, you can also simply run your needle in behind 5-6 of those existing stitches along the back side of your fabric, then pull your thread through until only the tail is captured under the existing stitches.

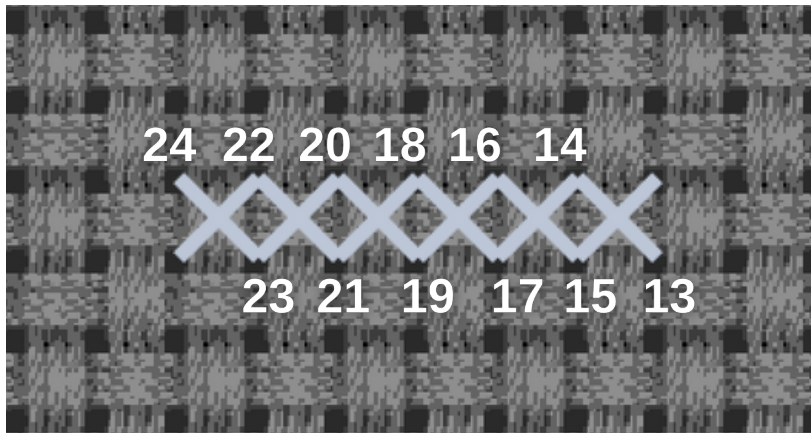
To secure the end of your thread, you can choose to capture it along with the starting tail of your next thread, or you can slip it under existing near stitches.

In the process of securing the beginning end of your thread, you will have also actually completed a row of **half stitches**.

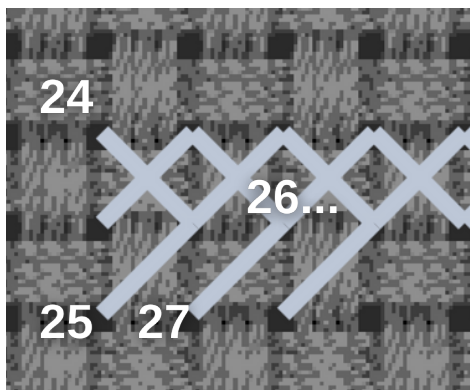
Half Stitch will always act as the foundational layer to your full cross stitches, but they can also be used as a stand alone stitches, often used to lightly fill in large areas of back ground to add texture and dimension.

Full Cross Stitch

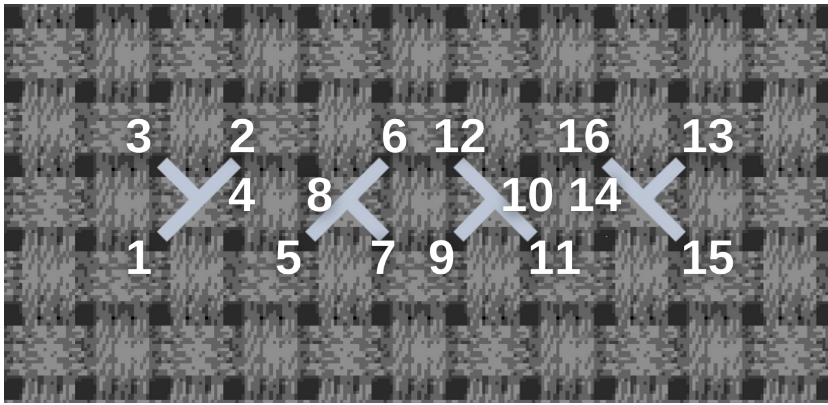
Once you have completed the first row in your working color, you will move down to the next row and continue forming stitches in the same fashion, first working left to right, then back over.



Once you get to the end of the row in your current working color, you are going to start back tracking and stitching towards the left.

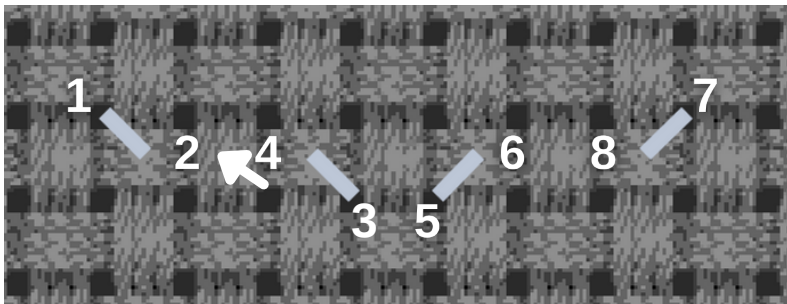


Come up from the back at the bottom right (pos. 13) then back down through the front at the top left. (pos. 14)



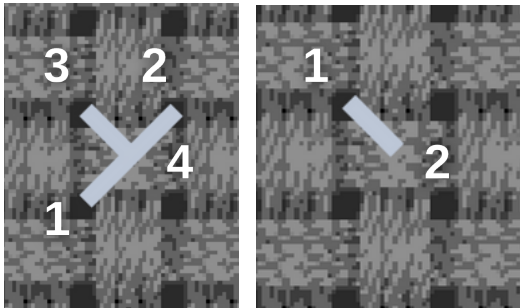
3/4 Stitch

Sometimes used to create precise color combinations and shapes.



1/4 Stitch

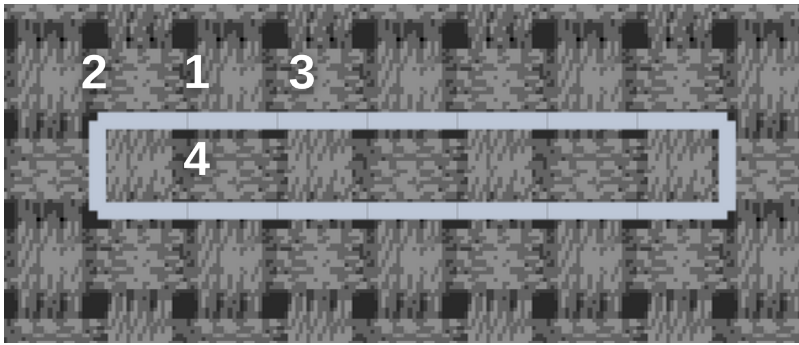
Used to create precise color combinations and shapes to add very fine details.



Extra note about fractional stitches

As you can see from this enlarged image of a 3/4 stitch and a 1/4 stitch, the thread is stitched in through the middle of the square.

The best order in which to stitch fractional stitches to ensure that the stitch that passes through the middle is done front to back. This will keep all strands of floss as tidy as possible. If you stitch up from the back, you risk pulling up surrounding bits of thread fibers along with your working floss. A pointed needle can be used for fractional stitches, if desired, in order to more easily pierce the tightly woven fabric center.



Back Stitch

Two steps forward,
one step back,
perfectly describes
back stitching.

Up at 1, down at 2. Up at 3, down at 4, and so on.

Start stitching your design as close to the center of the image as possible. This will ensure that your finished piece is centered on the fabric. The easiest way to find the center of your fabric is to fold it into quarters, length wise first, then again, width wise. The center corner of your folded fabric will line up with the middle of your fabric.

Once your design is centered, it will be up to you to determine the manner in which you want to work your design. Some stitchers choose to complete each color fully before moving on to the next while others prefer to work all stitches in a particular area before moving on to another section.

Regardless of where you choose to start, there is no universally accepted order in which to complete a cross stitch. There are, however, **a few best practices** to keep your work looking neat.

- Work all the main stitches first, then complete the back stitches last.
- Do not jump around or "carry" thread back and forth across large sections along the back of your fabric.
- Do not use knots to fasten your threads.

A Few Final Thoughts

My personal philosophy, when it comes to cross-stitching is that, above all else, it should be enjoyable and relaxing.

Pay attention to details, but don't get too caught up in making things "perfect". This is a handmade craft after all, and part of the beauty of handmade things is all those little details that make the finished product uniquely yours.

I hope that this guide has helped you gain confidence in your newfound hand-stitching skills!

Check out other Maidenwood Embroidery Designs by visiting:

www.maidenwood.ca

or follow me on Instagram

@maidenwood_embroidery_designs

