

Cross stitch: beginner's guide



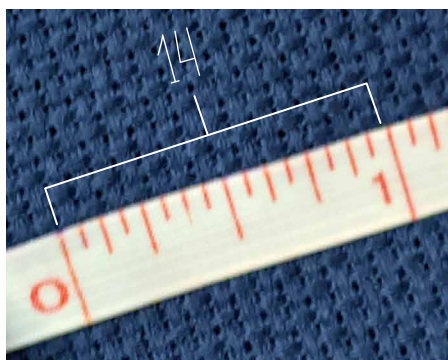
There is no wrong way to do this, but the following is the best method I've found to achieve good results with minimal mistakes!

To cross-stitch, your main goal will be to form an "X" on the squares made by the fabric, with colored thread to match the pattern's corresponding squares.





Getting started

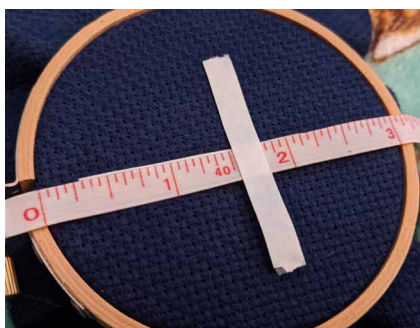


To begin, make sure your embroidery hoop/cross stitch fabric combination has enough room to fit the pattern. Cross stitch fabric comes in different sizes, such as “14 ct,” which designates how many squares the fabric has per inch. At your pattern’s largest point, count the number of squares across, and divide by the square count of the fabric you’re using to find the size hoop you will need. It’s always best to go larger than smaller.



Once you have the size figured out, fit your cross stitch fabric in your embroidery hoop, so that the fabric is pulled tight in the frame. Next, you will want to find the center of your hoop/fabric. This is the best place to start cross stitching, to make sure your design is centered.

To do this, measure halfway across the fabric in the hoop both horizontally and vertically. I place a strip of tape to mark my center, but there are a variety of ways to do this. Find what works best for you!



Next, prepare your thread for stitching. If your pattern has multiple colors, choose a color that you can start working on near the center. Again, this does not have to be where you start, but wherever you do, make sure you can feel confident knowing where you are on the fabric relative to the pattern.

To figure out what color to use for each square, match the color or design on the square to the “color key” on the pattern. Embroidery thread is numbered, usually based on the DMC company’s color chart, and the “color key” designates which number thread to use.



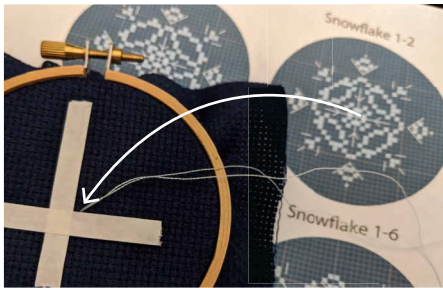
The color of the square may not match the actual color of the thread, since this is often changed to differentiate more easily between them as you read the pattern.

I usually keep my thread on a binder ring to keep it organized, in the order I want to use them.

The most common way to use standard six-strand embroidery thread is to cut it to a length twice that of your arm, and then separate out an individual strand of the six to thread into your needle. Once the needle is threaded, pinch the two ends between your fingers and pull the needle to the center point on the strand. Your thread will be “doubled” as you work in this way.

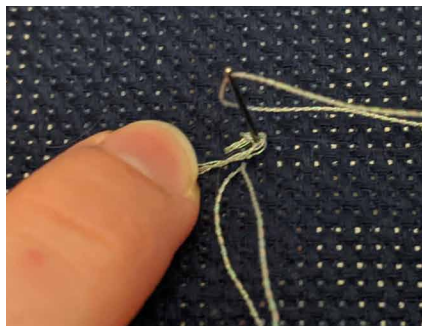
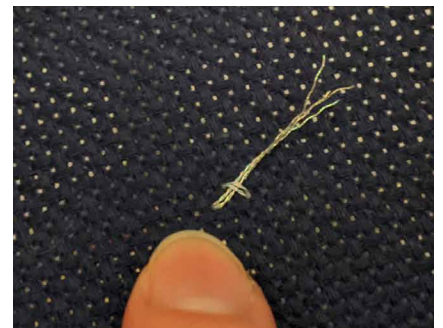
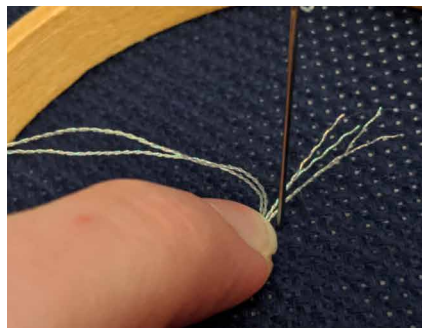


Cross stitching



To start stitching, find a point on your pattern near the center that you want to begin. Where doesn't matter, but make sure you feel comfortable counting the stitches on the fabric relative to the pattern. Starting at one diagonal point of this square, draw your thread using your needle through the fabric, back to front.

Pull the thread through until you have only a small length of thread left at the back, and hold it with your finger so it doesn't get drawn through to the front. In cross stitch, you generally don't make knots to tie off thread- both so that your design lays flat, and because the fabric by design has larger holes than normal fabric and knots may get pulled through.. Instead, as you stitch the design on the front, try to move the thread end that you're holding down under the thread being pulled through to the front. This will hold the thread end tight with no knots needed.



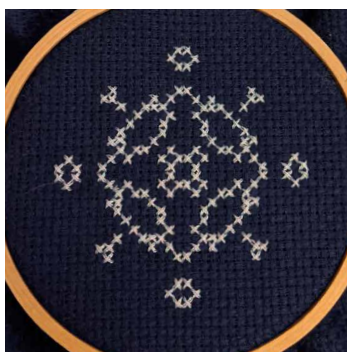
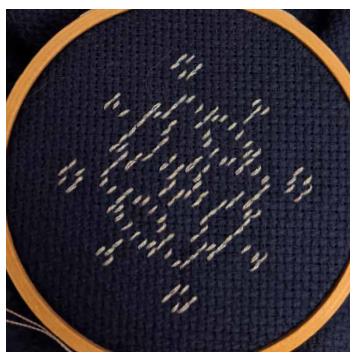
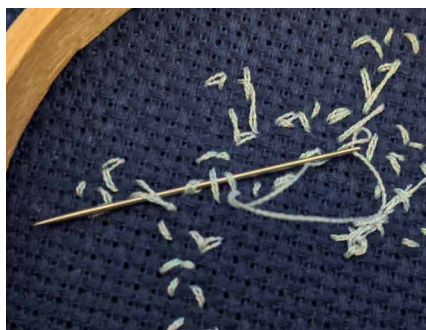
I always choose one diagonal direction to stitch all at once, and then go back to fill in the other diagonal on each square. There are two reasons for this, though you certainly don't have to do it this way!



The first reason is that if you make a mistake and find you have to pull out stitches, it's much easier to do if only one diagonal is stitched.

The other reason is that cross stitch generally looks nicer if all the "top" diagonal stitches on each square are facing the same way- this is an easy way to remember which stitch goes first on each square..

Keep stitching, following the your pattern, until you reach the end of your length of thread. To tie off the thread, you will do kind of the same action as when you started. You want to draw your needle through stitches on the back, so that when you pull your needle through, the end of the thread is caught under those stitches. This will keep the stitches tight on both sides.



If you have decided to only do one diagonal of each square at a time, once you have stitched all squares, go back through the pattern and add the "top" diagonal to each square of this color.

I call this stage of cross stitching the "fill" - if you have multiple colors, complete each color as above.

Back stitching



Once all the "fill" is completed, you can move on to "linework", if your pattern has any. Instead of filling in squares using the diagonals, line work is meant to soften the edges and accent the fill. The basics of this stage is to stitch a line using the cross stitch fabric holes as anchor points.

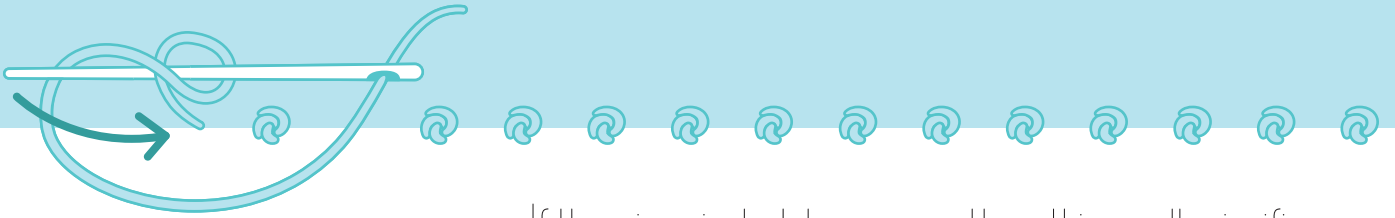


The stitches can go across one side of a square, or one diagonal, or even cross multiple squares to get the right angle for the line.

Finish the linework- if you have multiple line-work colors, repeat the process for each one.

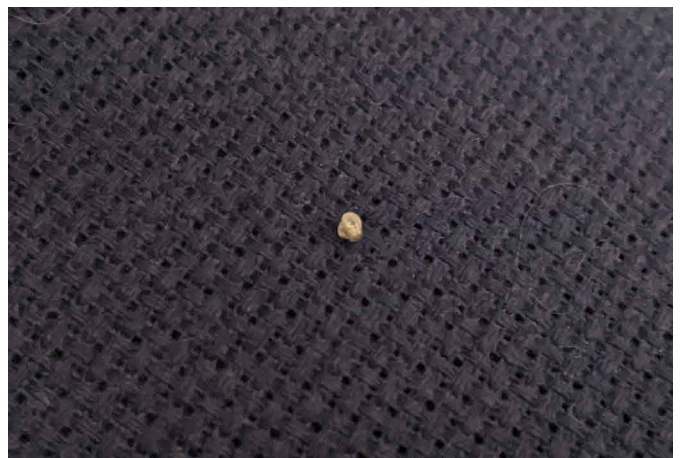
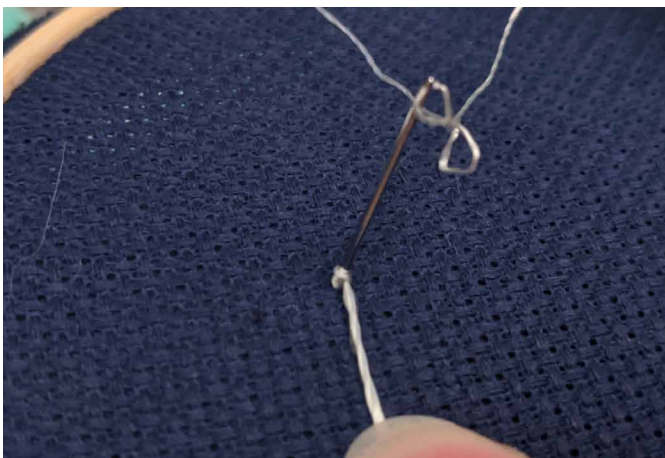
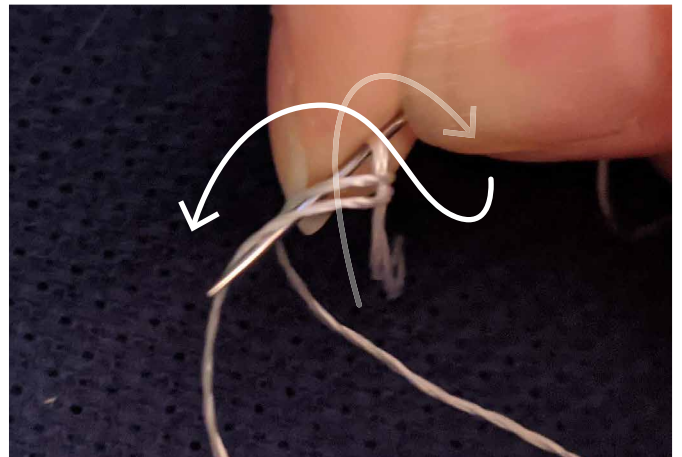
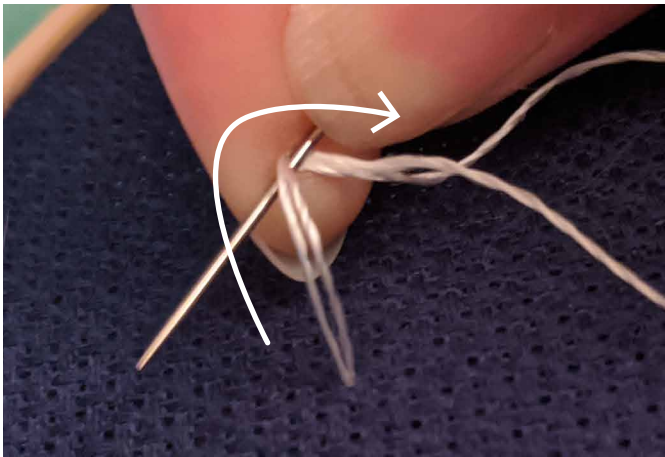


French Knot



If there is a single dot on your pattern, this usually signifies a "French knot"-any knot of this type is okay to make, as long as you're happy with the result.

The basics of a French knot are wrapping thread around your needle, and pulling the thread through so that it catches around itself, forming an even knot. You may find that video tutorials can help you understand how to better form it.



Finishing



Once all the stitching is complete, you can finish your piece off nicely by adding felt to the back using a "Blanket Stitch". This keeps your fabric tight so it doesn't loosen, and protects the back if you decide to hang it on the wall.

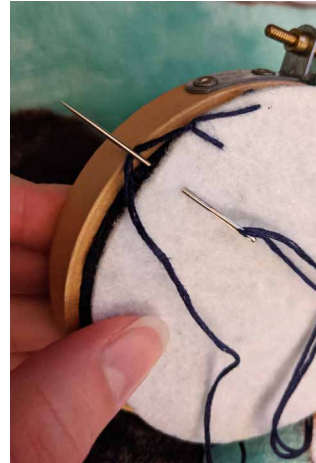
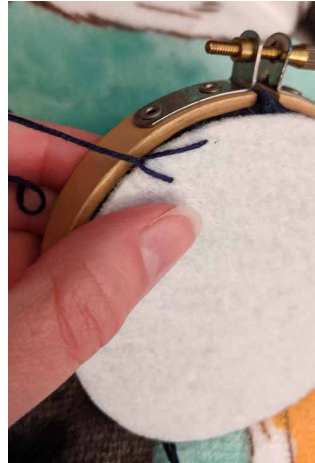
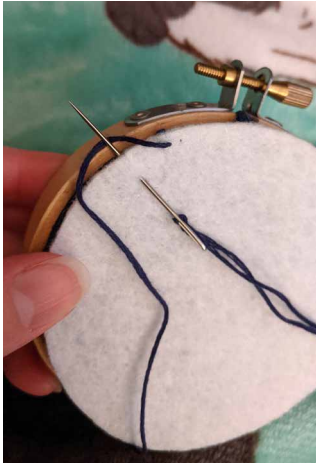


You will need thread, whatever color you think best, a piece of felt cut to the same size as your embroidery hoop, and a needle with a hole large enough to get all 6 strands of the embroidery thread through. For this stage, I usually cut my thread length to 4x the circumference of the embroidery hoop (this does not have to be exact, but I would go longer rather than shorter, if possible), and I do not separate the thread. Also contrary to prior stages, I do not pull the ends of my thread even, instead leaving one end shorter and loose so it does not get sewn in with the stitch.



Make a large knot on the long end of your thread, and pull the needle and thread through near the edge of your felt round. You will want the knot at the back, and for the tail of your thread to be pointing inward, hidden.

Next, attach the felt round to your embroidery hoop by lining them up, backs facing each other, and making a stitch going from the outside in, making sure to catch your cross stitch material in the stitch along the back. Make sure your thread is looped as demonstrated in the pictures on the next page, and repeat the process, so that the thread forms a line along the edge.



Keep running this stitch along the edge of your piece, making sure your cross stitch fabric is pulled tight and tucked underneath the felt. Once you finish stitching around the piece, finish off the first stitch you made by drawing the needle under the stitch and pulling it tightly upward.



Knot the end by tying it to the thread already in place, and draw your thread under some of the stitches to hide the end. Trim the thread, and tuck in the end. Now, it should be hard to tell where your stitching began and ended. Flip your embroidery hoop back over, and you should have a nicely finished piece, which can be hung or placed as you like.

