

Embroidery — Workbook

This workbook turns the embroidery course into hands-on practice and project records you can reuse on every piece. Each section matches a course module, moving from hoop and fabric setup to pattern transfer, the core line and fill stitches, and texture stitches and finishing. Work through the exercises with real cotton, floss, and a hoop in front of you, and keep the worksheets and templates as a project log so your second piece is easier than your first.

Hoop, Fabric, and Setting Up

Match fabric, floss, needle, and hoop to your project, bind and stabilise the cloth, and mount it drum-tight with a straight grain.

Worksheet: Project and materials plan

Pick a small beginner design, then decide fabric, floss, needle, and hoop before buying anything. Choose a tightly woven cotton and the strand counts you will use for outlines versus fills, and size the hoop a little larger than the design.

Design name / source

Finished design size (width x height in cm)

Fabric type and weight (quilting cotton / Kona / calico, gsm)

Hoop size (15 / 18 / 20 cm)

Needle size (crewel 7 for 2 strands / 5 for 3-4)

Strands for outlines / strands for satin fill

DMC colour numbers needed (from the design)

Stabiliser plan (iron-on interfacing / tear-away / none)

Exercise: Needle-and-strand match test

Cut a 45 cm length of one DMC colour. Separate strands one at a time and recombine. On a scrap of your chosen fabric, pass a size 7 and a size 5 crewel needle threaded with 2 and 3 strands and watch each entry hole.

- Which needle and strand pairing made a soft, even pass with no fabric pucker?
- What happened to the thread when you pulled two strands out at once instead of one at a time?

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- Did any pairing leave a visible hole after the thread passed, meaning the needle was too large?
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- Which pairing will you use for outlines, and which for satin fill, on this project?
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Checklist: Hoop-bind and fabric-mount check

- Inner hoop ring bound with cotton twill tape, no bare wood showing
- Fabric pre-washed and pressed flat with no creases
- Lightweight iron-on interfacing fused to the back if stitching is dense
- Fabric cut at least 5 cm larger than the hoop on all four sides
- Mounted with warp and weft running straight, not skewed
- Surface tightened drum-tight, taut enough to bounce a fingertip
- Floss kept on labelled bobbins or a project card with DMC numbers

Transferring Patterns and Threading Up

Choose the right transfer method for your fabric, get a clean accurate design onto the cloth, and start thread so no knot shows on the front.

Worksheet: Transfer method decision sheet

Decide the transfer method from your fabric, then plan the marking tool and removal. Use see-through tracing for light thin fabric, wash-away stabiliser for dark or thick fabric, and always test the marker on a scrap first.

Fabric colour (light / medium / dark)

Fabric opacity (can you see a printout through it? yes / no)

Chosen transfer method (window trace / wash-away stabiliser / carbon paper)

Marking tool (blue water-soluble pen / purple air-erasable / transfer pencil)

Removal method planned (rinse / fade / dissolve)

Scrap test result (line visible? removes cleanly?)

Reminder noted: no ironing over water-soluble marks (yes / no)

Exercise: Transfer a design two ways

Transfer the same small motif onto two scraps: once by taping the printout and fabric to a bright window and tracing with a water-soluble pen, and once onto a printable wash-away stabiliser stuck to the fabric. Compare visibility and accuracy.

- Which method gave you lines you could follow most easily while stitching?
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- Did any traced line go missing, and how would a missing line show up once you stitch?
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- Did the stabiliser sit flat with no bubbles, and did it dissolve fully and rinse clear?
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- Which method will you use for your actual project fabric, and why?
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Exercise: Knotless start-and-end drill

On a hooped scrap, start three short lines of stitching using a different method each time: an away waste knot, anchoring the tail under the first stitches, and ending by weaving under the back stitches. Then check the reverse side.

- Could you see any knot or loose tail from the front of any of the three?

- Which starting method felt most secure and fastest for you?

- Did the away waste knot's trapped tail hold once you snipped the knot off?

- How tidy was the back compared with simply knotting the thread end?

Checklist: Transfer-and-thread readiness check

- Marker tested on a fabric scrap and confirmed removable
- Design transferred with thin, complete lines, nothing missing
- Stabiliser (if used) smoothed flat with no trapped bubbles
- Working length cut to about 45 to 50 cm
- Strands separated one at a time and recombined to the planned count
- Thread started knotless (away waste knot or anchored tail)
- Plan in place to end by weaving under three to four back stitches

Core Stitches: Lines and Fills

Build even backstitch and stem-stitch lines and smooth satin-stitch fills, the workhorse stitches behind almost every design.

Exercise: Even-length backstitch line

Draw a 10 cm straight line and a gentle curve on a hooped scrap. Backstitch both, aiming for consistent 2 to 3 mm stitches, shortening the stitches on the curve. Compare them against the traced line.

- Were your stitch lengths consistent, or did they drift longer as you sped up?

- Did shorter stitches follow the curve more smoothly than long ones?

- Was any stitch pulled tight enough to furrow the fabric, and how did you fix it?

- Would ticking even marks along the line help you keep length consistent next time?

Exercise: Stem stitch and satin fill sampler

Stitch a curved stem in stem stitch keeping the working thread on one consistent side, then satin-fill a small leaf shape after first outlining it in split stitch. Inspect the rope of the stem and the edges of the fill.

- Did keeping the thread on one side give an even rope, or did the twist break anywhere?

- Did the split-stitch outline give the satin fill a crisper, raised edge?

- Were your satin stitches parallel and at one angle, with no fabric showing through?

- Did any satin stitch sag because it was longer than about 1 cm?

Worksheet: Stitch-for-shape planning sheet

Take your project design and list each shape, then assign the stitch it wants and the strand count. Lines take backstitch or stem stitch, solid shapes take satin stitch over a split-stitch outline, and note the stitch angle for each fill.

Shape / element name

Shape type (line / curve / solid fill / dot / petal)

Stitch chosen (backstitch / stem / split / satin)

DMC colour number

Strand count

Satin angle / direction (if a fill)

Outline first in split stitch? (yes / no)

Checklist: Line-and-fill quality check

- Backstitch length consistent at roughly 2 to 3 mm
- Stitches shortened on curves so lines follow the bend
- Stem stitch worked with the thread on one consistent side throughout
- Solid shapes outlined in split or backstitch before satin filling
- Satin stitches parallel and at a single angle across each shape
- No fabric showing between satin stitches and no stitch over about 1 cm
- Floss let to untwist so stitches lie flat rather than as ridges

Texture Stitches and Finishing

Work French knots and lazy daisy that hold their shape, combine stitches into a motif, then press and mount the finished piece taut in its hoop.

Exercise: French knot consistency drill

Stitch a row of ten French knots with two strands and two wraps, keeping the thread taut and going down beside the entry hole each time, not into it. Then stitch three more with three strands to see size change.

- Did any knot pull through to the back, and did going down beside the hole fix it?

- Were the ten knots even in size, or did tension vary between them?

- What changed when you used three strands instead of adding a third wrap?

- Which strand-and-wrap combination will you fix as your standard knot?

Exercise: Build a flower motif

Combine stitches into one small flower: five or six lazy daisy petals around a cluster of French knots, with a stem-stitch stalk and lazy daisy leaves. Keep the daisy loops open and rounded, not pulled tight.

- Did any lazy daisy petal collapse into a sliver because the loop was pulled too tight?

- Did the French knot cluster read as a tidy flower centre?

- Which stitch did you choose for each part, and did each suit its shape?

- What would you change about stitch choice or tension on the next motif?

Worksheet: Finishing and mounting record

Plan the finish before you take the piece off the frame. Record how you removed transfer marks, how you pressed, and how you will mount and back the hoop so it displays taut.

Transfer marks removed before any heat? (rinsed / faded / dissolved)

Pressed face-down on a towel from the back? (yes / no)

Re-hooped drum-tight and square? (yes / no)

Excess fabric gathered with running stitch about 2 cm out? (yes / no)

Back finish (glued felt circle / laced gathers / none)

Fabric trimmed so no more than about 2 cm sits behind the ring? (yes / no)

Hoop screw fully tightened before hanging? (yes / no)

Checklist: Finished-piece check

- Every transfer mark removed before pressing (no heat-set lines)
- Pressed face-down on a towel so French knots and satin keep their dimension
- Front checked: stitches plump, fabric crease-free
- Re-hooped drum-tight with the grain square
- Excess fabric gathered evenly behind the ring with no bulk poking past
- Back covered with a felt circle or laced for a clean finish
- Screw fully tightened and piece kept out of direct sun for display

Your Action Plan

1. Pick a small beginner design and complete the project and materials plan, choosing a tightly woven cotton and your outline and fill strand counts.
2. Bind the inner hoop ring with cotton twill tape and fuse lightweight interfacing to the back if the stitching will be dense.
3. Pre-wash and press the fabric, then mount it drum-tight with the grain running straight.
4. Choose a transfer method from your fabric, test the marker on a scrap, and transfer the design with thin, complete lines.
5. Cut a 45 to 50 cm length, separate strands one at a time, and start the thread knotless with an away waste knot or an anchored tail.
6. Outline shapes and stitch lines in backstitch and stem stitch, keeping stitches even and the thread on one side for stem stitch.
7. Outline solid shapes in split stitch, then satin-fill them parallel at one angle with no stitch over about 1 cm.
8. Add French knots with a fixed strand and wrap count and lazy daisy petals kept open and rounded; build any motifs.
9. Remove all transfer marks, then press face-down on a towel so the texture stitches keep their dimension.
10. Re-hoop drum-tight, gather the excess fabric behind the ring, back it with felt or lacing, and tighten the screw fully for display.

