

CROSS STITCH FOR BEGINNERS *guide*



A Cross Stitch Glossary

Entering the world of cross stitch can be quite overwhelming for a beginner. You will start coming across words that you didn't even know existed such as "frogging". Or you may have heard of them, but you still have no idea what they actually are. This list is some of the most common words and phrases you will come across in this new world.

These are the basic terms you need to get started in cross stitch. If you want to find out even more you can read my blog post "[88 Cross Stitch Terms Every Stitcher Needs to Know](#)".

Aida - The most commonly used fabric for cross stitch, weaved evenly with holes in to make your "X".

Aida band - A strip of aida which has a pretty border on; used for bookmarks/towel edging etc.

Anchor - A popular brand of needlecraft supplies, particularly their selection of floss.

Beading Needle - A needle used to stitch seed beads onto your design.

Design Area - The size of your finished piece. It will be smaller on higher counts of aida.

DMC - Another popular brand of embroidery floss, but they also do other supplies such as aida, wool and hoops.

Embroidery hoop - These are used to help keep your fabric taught, and you can use them to frame your finished work too.

Evenweave/linen - Another common fabric used in cross stitch, but much softer and more flexible.

Fabric Count - This refers to the number of holes per inch (HPI) there are on the fabric. For example, on 14 count aida there are 14 holes per inch.

Floss - Another word for your thread; 6 strands of embroidery thread loosely wound together.

Fractional Stitch - A stitch that covers just one quarter or three quarters of the square.

Frogging - A term used when you make a mistake and have to unstitch/rip your floss. Named because you have to "rip-it, rip-it".

French Knot - A small knot that you make by wrapping the floss around your needle. It adds a bit of extra texture to your design, but they are a bit tricky to get the hang of at first.

Full Stitch - A full "X" stitch.

Half Stitch - Just one diagonal stitch going in either direction "\" "/".

Light Effects Thread - A type of thread from the brand DMC. There are metallic threads, neon and glow in the dark.

Motif - A small cross stitch pattern, usually of a single item such as a Christmas Tree or a bird, used to make Christmas cards or add onto clothes etc.

Needle Minder - A magnet that snaps onto your fabric to keep your needle safe.

Needle Threader - A tool used to help you thread your needle more easily.

Q-snaps - These seem very popular in America, but I don't see them being used much in the UK. They are plastic tubes that link together to hold your work while you are stitching.

Sampler - A type of cross stitch pattern made up of a variety of stitches.

Seed Beads - Small beads which you can add straight onto your stitch or add to your design after you have stitched it.

Skein - Usually around 8 metres of floss wound up into bundles/skeins.

Tapestry Needle - A blunt needle made specifically for cross stitch that comes in different sizes. For example, a size 24 can be used for 14 count aida or 28 count linen.

Thread Conditioner - Used to condition your thread so it glides through the aida more easily and make your thread last longer. I recommend always using this on Light Effects thread.

Waste Canvas - A type of fabric you can use to stitch onto clothes etc. and remove once you have finished stitching.

What Do You Need For Cross Stitch?



Fabric

The fabric used for cross stitch is usually **aida**, or **even weave/linen** (these two come in the same counts but are made of different materials; even weave is cotton and modal and obviously linen is linen).

These fabrics are perfect for cross stitch because they are **weaved evenly** so that there are small squares with holes on each corner for you to make your "X" over.

They each come in different "counts" and the higher the count the smaller your stitches will be, and so the smaller your overall design will be. **The count is the number of holes per inch (HPI)** of the fabric. The most common counts for aida are 14, 16 or 18 but they also come in 6, 8 and 11 and even weave/linen ranges from 22 to 36 count (the most popular are 28 and 32).

The difference between aida and even weave/linen is the feel of the fabric. Evenweave and linen are much softer and flexible, but aida is perfect if you are a beginner to cross stitch. The other difference is that **on aida you stitch from one hole to the next but on Evenweave and linen you "stitch over two"**, which means when you are making your stitch you miss a hole each time.

To make your design the same size on both aida and Evenweave/linen, you just double the count of the aida. For example, if your design calls for **14 count aida then you can stitch it on 28 count linen** and the size will stay the same.

The two brands of fabric I recommend are **DMC and Zweigart**. I personally use Zweigart; they have a huge range of colours and types and a little fun fact; you can tell if your fabric is Zweigart because they stitch **orange thread through the selvage**.

You can also get **waste canvas which is used to stitch onto towels, clothes etc.** You attach the waste canvas to the garment, stitch over it and then take the canvas off. For some you use water and it dissolves and others you have to pull the threads out.

Needles

The needles used for cross stitch tend to be called **cross stitch or tapestry needles** and they come in different sizes that relate to the thickness of the needle. The most commonly used size is 24 and this is perfect for 14 count aida and 28 count Evenweave/linen.

The bigger the count of your fabric, the bigger the size you want your needle (although this actually means that the needle will be thinner). For example, 16 count aida or 32 count Evenweave/linen needs a size 26 needle and 18 count aida or 36 count Evenweave/linen will need a size 28 needle.

There are so many brands of needle, but I think the King of cross stitch needles is John James needles.

Hoops/frames/q-snaps

Embroidery hoops or frames are used to **keep your fabric taught** while you are stitching on it. This makes it so much easier and quicker to stitch your design.

They come in a huge range of sizes and shapes and materials. You can get wooden or rubber (flexi) and q-snaps are plastic tubes rather than a hoop. They can be round, oval or rectangle and as small as 2 inch to a huge 12 inch. You can even get frames that are on a stand, so you don't even have to hold it while you are stitching - yay!

Although the main purpose of the hoop is to help you stitch, they also make great **frames for your finished work**. This works better for smaller pieces and gives your finished piece a bit of extra personality.

The brand of hoops that I use are **Elbese**. These are the best I have come across so far; they are thick, smooth and have a proper screw on top, so you can actually use a screw driver to tighten the hoop if you need to (I have no upper body strength at all so I use screwdrivers a lot on finished hoops).

Thread/floss

Ahh, my favourite part of cross stitch! I love the colours and types of floss you can get.

The main floss used for cross stitch is **stranded cotton**. Stranded cotton is made up of 6 strands of loosely twisted thread and for cross stitch you only need to use 2 of these strands, so you get a whole lot of stitches out of 1 skein of thread/floss.

There is also **Pearl cotton** which is just 1 strand of thread, but it's about as thick as 3 strands of cotton. This is mainly used for hand embroidery, but you can use it for cross stitch too.

I'm going to talk about a specific brand of floss now (DMC) but I know that other brands also do some of these types of floss. I just use DMC myself and know a lot more about their products than I do about Anchor for example (which is another popular brand of floss).

You can get DMC floss in most needle craft shops, both online and in brick and mortar. They have lots of types of thread; stranded cotton, Pearl, Light Effects and Variations (this is floss that has a few colours in 1 strand of thread so as you are stitching the colours change without you needing to change your thread).

They have over 500 colours in their collection and have recently released 35 new stranded cotton ones and 35 Etoile (glitter), both of which you can currently buy from Sew and So [here](#).

A Pattern

Patterns are usually **made up of symbols** and some are in colour and some are in black and white. There are benefits to both; I think colour ones are easier to follow but black and white are easier to mark off as you are stitching (a little tip; if you use pencil to mark off your stitches, you can rub it off when you are finished and start again!)

There will also be a **key near your pattern** telling you which colour each symbol is; making it super easy to buy the colours you need before you start.

There are so, so, so many cross stitch patterns in the world and they have never been easier to get hold of one. **Etsy is my favourite place** to find cross stitch patterns; you can search, buy and download with just a few clicks. And a little tip, depending on the size of the pattern, you might not even need to print it off. I very often just save the PDF to my phone as a photo and work from it on my screen. This doesn't really work for larger patterns that you need to mark off as you stitch but it's great for those small, quick projects.

Another place to find patterns is **magazines!** There are a few cross stitch magazines out now; Cross Stitch Crazy, Cross Stitcher and The World of Cross Stitching are 3 that I see in most shops that I go in. I put myself on a magazine buying ban because it was getting a bit silly how many I had, but I recently subscribed to Cross Stitch Crazy digital editions. It only cost me £24 for the year and I always get the new editions without even going to the shop! The only down side is that you don't get the

free gift, but if you are anything like me, I already have enough supplies to use for the patterns in there.

Scissors

And last, but not least, scissors. You might think these are the most boring part of cross stitch but not anymore!

You can get so many cute and funky embroidery scissors now; my favourite pair are my unicorn ones from [Cloud Craft](#). Or I have a small supply of [mermaid scissors](#) and [rose gold scissors](#).

Scissors are mainly only used to snip your thread; either to cut the skein to the lengths you need or to snip the trails at the back, which I recommend doing as you go along to save getting it all tangled at the back (yes, I'm speaking from experience). Embroidery scissors are the best thing to use as they are the easiest, but you can just use any pair of scissors you have around the house.

Extras

So those are the 6 things you absolutely need for cross stitch, but these extras will help make your stitching even easier and so, more fun!

- [A pencil](#) - use this to mark off the squares on your pattern that you have stitched. I don't always need to do this, it depends on the size of the pattern. And you can use a pen, but I always recommend a pencil for the reason I mentioned above; you can rub it out at the end and re-use the pattern.
- [A little pot or bag](#) - These are handy to have to put the trails of thread you snip off in.
- [A bigger bag](#) - Used to transport your kit and especially good if you stitch while commuting and great for keeping all your supplies in one place. I sell [colourful, cotton ones](#) or I can highly recommend [these craft pouches](#) from Sarah Ashford Studio.
- [A needle threader](#) - A helpful tool if you struggle to thread your needle.
- [A needle minder](#) - Perfect for keeping your needle safe in between stitches, if you need to put it down to make a cup of tea or grab a snack which leads nicely to my last extra...
- [Tea/coffee/cake](#) - These almost went in the top 6 needed. There's nothing better than getting cosy with a warm drink, a piece of cake and some cross stitch.

Reading A Pattern

All cross stitch patterns come on a **grid made up of small squares** (think back to the graph paper used in your maths class and you're along the right lines). The grid has numbers running along the top and side, usually in multiples of 10, that represent the number of squares on your aida. There are arrows in the middle of these numbers pointing to the centre square of the pattern, which is where you start stitching (sometimes the centre square is also marked). The numbers may start to decrease after the centre arrow, but they usually continue to increase.

On your grid will be the design, made up of lots (or maybe just a few) squares. Each square that is a stitch will be filled with something. It may just be a colour, or it may just be a symbol. Most commonly it is a **mixture of both squares and symbols**.

Near your pattern, either under, at the side or on the next page, will be your key. This shows you **what number of threads the colours/symbols represent**. The most commonly used thread is DMC or Anchor and patterns usually give you these numbers, sometimes both. For example, a pink heart on the pattern may represent DMC 3689.

If the **whole square is filled, this is a full X**. If just half of the square is filled, this is half an X and can go in either direction; / or \ - the pattern should make it clear which way to go. Then if just one quarter of the square is filled, this is a fractional kit. It is usually only bigger, more complicated patterns that include fractional stitches and most patterns will tell you what stitches are in it includes before you buy. I don't use fractional stitches in any of my designs. In fact, **most of my designs are made up of just full cross stitches**.

On top of the squares there may also be **back stitches**. These are represented by solid lines, usually in back but they may also be the colour you will stitch them in. Either way, the exact colour should be in your key.

Depending on the size of your pattern, it may fit on one page, or may be spread across a few pages. It could also be printed on larger paper.

The design should also have the finished dimensions on, as well as the name of the designer. Please remember that **cross stitch patterns are protected under copyright laws**, so don't re-sell them yourself or share the pattern; in particular don't share a photo of the pattern on social media.

You can see an example of a cross stitch pattern near the end of this eBook.

How To Cross Stitch – The Basics

How To Start Your Cross Stitch

You always **start stitching in the centre of your fabric** and you can find the centre by folding your fabric/aida in half length ways and width ways. Where they meet is your centre square and you can find the centre of your pattern by following the arrows. If there is no stitch in the centre of your pattern then count out to the nearest one.

Then pop your aida in the hoop ready to start stitching. **Pull the aida as tight** as you can get it, this will make it much easier to stitch on.

Next you may have to snip your thread. A quick way to do this is to gather all the **loops at the bottom of your skein and snip them**. You will be left with around 24 equal strands of thread. Some people do find these a little short, but I personally always use this method to snip my threads now, and it's particularly good if you are a beginner.



For your first stitch come up the **top left hole** of the square you are starting on and leave and hold about an inch of thread out at the back. Then go diagonally across into the **bottom right hole**.



Next, come back up the **top right hole** and back down into the **bottom left**. (For more details and video on how to do a cross stitch pop over to [this post](#)). As you are

stitching make sure your stitches are **going over the inch of thread at the back** to secure it. Repeat this until you come to the end of the thread or colour you are using.

There are of course other ways to do this. Some people prefer to go from right to left first, where I go from left to right. And some people do **lots of half cross stitches one way and come back over them the other way**, which I show you in [this video](#). If you find a different way to stitch, then go with whatever you find easiest; the important bit is to be consistent and do each stitch the same.

How to start cross stitch - an alternative "loop" method

This method is probably the easiest but is not the one I teach anymore, although I do recommend **using it when you are stitching with Light Effects thread**.

To start this way, take **1 strand of thread and fold it in half**. You should have a loop at one end; thread your needle at the other end. Come up on the square you are starting on and leave the loop sticking out of the back. When you go back down to make your first stitch, **put your needle through the loop** and pull gently. Your thread should now be secure.



How to tie off your thread

When you are coming to the end of the thread or you need to swap colours, simply turn your hoop over and **thread your needle under a few stitches at the back**.



If you have quite a bit of thread left when you come to the end the you can snip it off and keep it to use again or "**park it**" (slip it through an unused part of your fabric at the edge) to use later.

15 Extra Hints and Tips

1. **Don't pull your needle too tight** when doing your "x's" as this can make your stitches look flat. On some of my old projects you can see the pre-made holes on the aida even more prominently because I have pulled my needle so hard when I have been stitching. This is something I did when I was younger, but also when I found stitching again in later life. The trick is to pull it just tight enough, so the "X" sits flat on the aida.
2. **Snip the loose thread at the back** as you go to stop them getting caught in your new stitches, and have a little pot handy to put them in. If you save them all there are some pretty cool things you can make with them on Pinterest such as a phone case and little decorative cards.
3. Try and **stitch your design in natural light** if you can. This makes it much easier to see your stitches and puts less strain on your eyes. Or if (like me) you like cosy, late night stitching, sit next to a lamp or try popping a reading light on your hoop.
4. **Take the aida out of the hoop** when you are not using/stitching on it to reduce the creases from the hoop. This is particularly important if you are framing it using a traditional frame or canvas as it will be much easier to iron.
5. When you are ready to stitch the felt on the back, put **the side with the pencil marks on against your hoop** to hide them.
6. If you are going to iron your finished piece, put a **towel on your ironing board and put your aida right side down** so you are ironing the back. This will stop your stitches going flat. Or try and iron around your stitches if you can.
7. Most kits will come in a plastic bag or cardboard box (I use the latter) but if you would like something a little colourful and reusable, these [drawstring bags](#) are the perfect solution. You can even stitch on them which I have [another tutorial all about](#). Or I can highly recommend [Sarah Ashford's craft pouches](#).
8. If you want the same design to fit in a **smaller space, you can stitch it on a higher count of aida**. For example, one of my first designs was a rainbow in an 8 inch hoop. If I wanted to make this finished piece smaller, I could have stitched it on 16 or 18 count aida.

9. **Stitch contrasting colours of aida and thread on 16 count or higher aida.** For example, I had a Halloween kit that was black aida and glow in the dark thread (which is basically white). When I stitched this hoop, I used 14 count aida and you could see lots of the black aida through the white stitches. This also happened when I stitched some animals in all black thread on white, 14 count aida. You could see the white aida through the black stitches. At first, I considered using more than the usual 2 strands of thread to stitch it, but I don't think stitches look quite as neat when using more than 2 strands, so I didn't really want to do this. It took me a while to figure out that if I just stitched it on a higher count aida (16 count was fine) it eliminated this problem. This is because the stitches are more compact and closer together on higher counts so less aida shows through.
10. If you are creating a lot of patterns I recommend **buying cross stitch pattern software**. When I started designing my own patterns, to stitch commissions, I would use graph paper and Microsoft excel. This worked quite well because it was just for me. My commissions were usually announcements, new baby, weddings etc. so were just names and dates, and I would only really use excel so I could see the colours. I would make all the squares the same size (12px x 12px), then use the fill button to fill the squares with colour. When I started selling kits this wasn't ideal any more as it wasn't professional; the colours weren't true to the DMC ones and there were no symbols. I went onto the Etsy forums and found out about [PC Stitch](#). There is also MacStitch for Mac users and it was around £36 when I bought it. It has just recently updated so it has the new 35 colours and some variations. There are other software's out there that tend to be more expensive, but PCStitch works great for what I need it to do. There are so many features that I don't actually use too, such as importing photos and changing them into patterns. You can also make fonts, it has lots of speciality stitches and you can even blend colours.
11. **Wash your hands before you start stitching.** This is a pretty simple tip but could save you needing to wash your finished piece (unless, like me, you have kids who like to draw on your aida).
12. If you are prone to losing your needle, buy a needle minder! I don't know how I ever stitched without one! Many other needlecraft suppliers sell them including

me.

13. Your needle will probably twist as you are stitching. Just **drop it every now and then**, between your stitches, to untwist it.
14. A knot may form when you are stitching. To undo it, **thread your needle back through the knot** and it should come loose.
15. **Plan your pattern** before you start stitching and make sure you have all the supplies you need. There is nothing more annoying than running out of thread half way through your design.
You may have done so already, but if not, [sign up to my newsletter](#) and you will receive some pattern planning pintables to make it even easier for you. Or you can buy your own [personalised printed planner](#) too! I love mine, and again, it's something I can't believe I lived without.



And don't forget the biggest tip of all! **Put your feet up, relax, and enjoy your cross stitch journey.**

Making Mistakes

Mistakes are just part of life and they are *definitely* a part of cross stitch. Although cross stitch is pretty easy, it only takes **one missed stitch, or a little miscounting and it messes up your whole design.**

If you realise quite quickly that you have made a mistake, then it can be quite quick to fix too. It's just a case of unpicking a few stitches using your needle and then you can simply carry on. However, if you make a mistake and don't realise until nearing the end of your work or even after you have finished (it's happened to me before) then it's not so quick to fix.

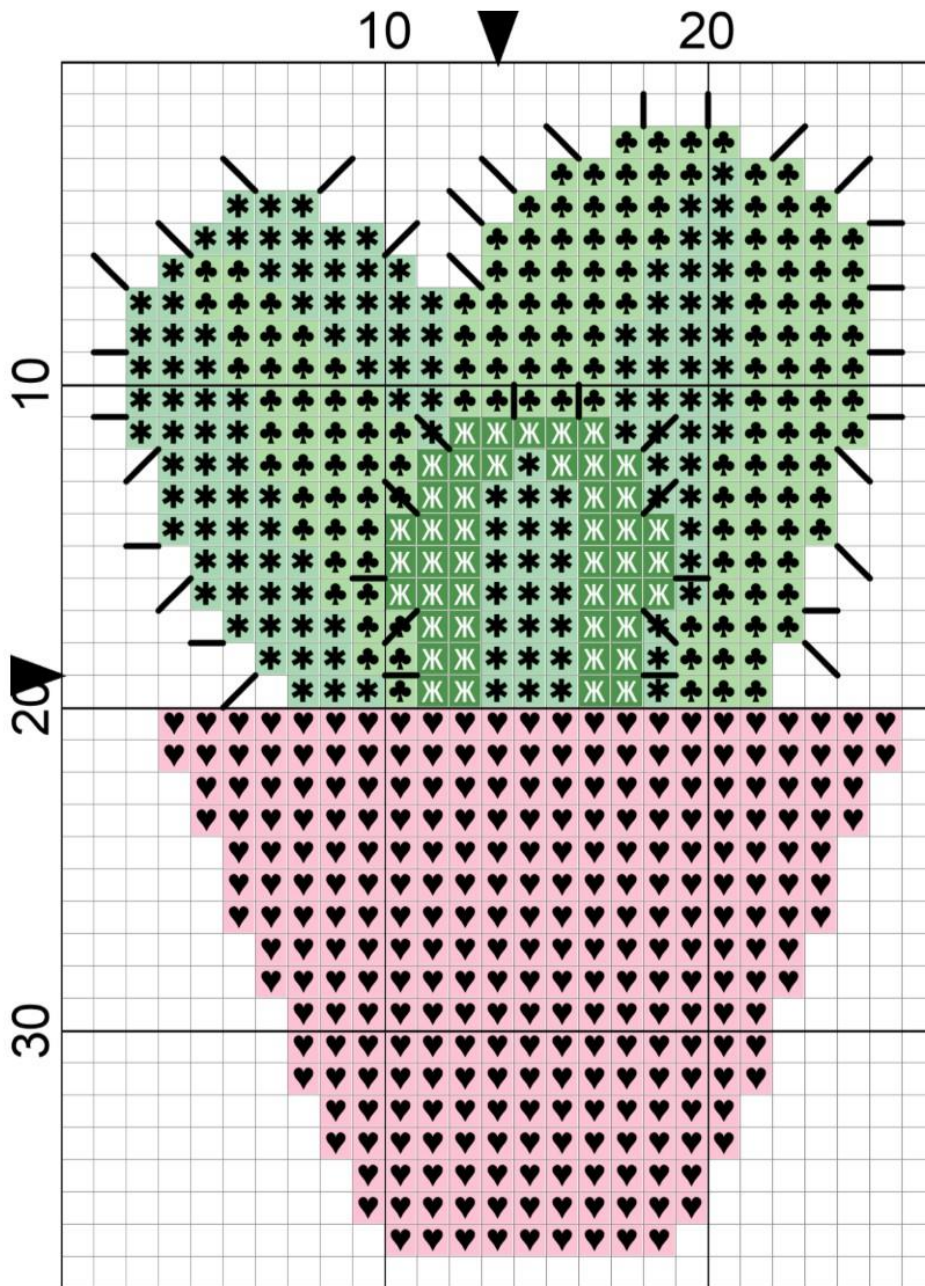
You have two options here really; if it's just a small, almost unrecognisable mistake you can **try and ignore it and hope no one points it out.** Or, if you are a bit of a perfectionist like me, then you are going to have to **unstash and start again.** You might not have to unstash everything (phew!) just the section where it's gone a bit wrong.

To do this I recommend **using a seam ripper;** you simply put the seam ripper under your stitches and glide it along. You can also use scissors to do this, just be careful you're not snipping any of the aida underneath.

A fun little fact; when you are ripping your stitches, it's called "frogging" because you have to "rip-it, rip-it". I know, cheesy, but true.

Once you have fixed your mistake, you may notice that some of the holes on your aida are now a lot bigger. Just move some of the weaving around the hole and try and put it back to its original shape if this is bothering you.

A Free Pattern



CROSS STITCHES

- Ж DMC 367
- ♣ DMC 368
- * DMC 966
- ♥ DMC 3689

BACK STITCHES

(2 STRANDS)

DMC 310

Title: Cactus

Author: Hannah Braniff

Copyright: Hannah Hand Makes 2017

Grid Size: 27W x 38H

Design Area: On 14 count aida - 1.79" x 2.57" (25 x 36 stitches) 4 inch hoop

Resources And Brands

Where to buy

[Hannah Hand Makes](#) for cross stitch kits for beginners, patterns, scissors, project planners, project bags and needle minders.

[Sew and So](#) for hoops, thread, patterns, needles and aida. Basically everything!

[Cloud Craft](#) for scissors, needle minders, hoops and Satsuma Street paper patterns.

[Hobby Craft](#)* for hoops and cross stitch kits.

[Willow Fabrics](#) for Zweigart Aida and scissors.

[Etsy](#) for cross stitch patterns.

Your **local craft stores**.

Thank You!

Thank you so much for reading **my first ever E-book guide!** I hope it has inspired you to start cross stitching or helped you on your cross stitch journey in some way.

I would love to connect with you personally, so why not come and join my [Facebook community](#)? If you are not on Facebook, you can also follow me on [Instagram](#), join my [Pinterest community](#) or [sign up to my newsletter](#).

Or do all 4! I can't wait to chat with you!

And If you want to dive even deeper into cross stitch, I have a whole course for you!

My how to cross stitch course for beginners will save you so much time and hassle of trying to find cross stitch tutorials all over the web. Instead you will have them all in one place! And every time you complete a lesson it will check it off for you so you can see your progress.

At the end of this course you will be able to officially call yourself a cross stitcher and you will have a new hobby that you can enjoy forever.

ENROL NOW

Happy stitching!

Hannah x