

Tips & FAQs from microSticthery

Tip #1 and the MOST IMPORTANT!

Have PROPER lighting! With proper lighting you will find that less, or even no magnification is needed. A table lamp with an incandescent bulb will not do the job and it also causes eyestrain. Invest in a magnifying lamp that has a magnifying glass with a light **BENEATH** it. You need the light shining directly down on your stitching surface (the silk gauze) so there won't be any shadows. A lamp that has the light source above or behind the magnifying glass defeats the purpose because light rays are decreased going through the glass not increased.

These lights are available in price ranges from about \$35 to \$295. Even Staples carries a perfectly good lamp for about \$35, I believe, and they even put them on sale for less.* With a such a magnifying lamp you will be amazed at how well you can see the gauze ... and splinters too!

If you are fortunate enough to not need any magnification at all, be sure to still have a strong, intense light shining directly onto your gauze to avoid eyestrain. If needed, you can also wear drug store reading (magnifying) glasses as well. The aim is to allow your eyes to see without strain. Strain is detrimental not only to your eyes but also to your enjoyment and patience!

*Entering "magnifying lamp" into a search engine such as Google will give you several results and therefore offer the opportunity to shop around before making your purchase.

Tip #2

Always wash your hands before stitching or handling the silk gauze or threads because dirt and perspiration accumulate easily, which isn't always noticeable until later. This is especially true when stitching light colored backgrounds. If you notice that your finished piece looks soiled or dingy, gently wash in a small container with a few drops of Woolite and cool water. Rinse thoroughly and block. **DO NOT DO THIS TO SILK BECAUSE IT IS GENERALLY NOT COLORFAST!**

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: *What does mesh or count mean?*

Answer: Mesh and count are just two terms referring to the same thing - the number of stitches in a horizontal inch.

Question: *What is the difference between needlepoint and petitpoint?*

Answer: Petitpoint is simply a small (petite) version of needlepoint because it is stitched on a finer or smaller count, generally starting at 22/24 and going up to 112 count. Needlepoint is 10-18 count, or thereabouts.

Question: *Do I have to do something with my gauze before I start stitching?*

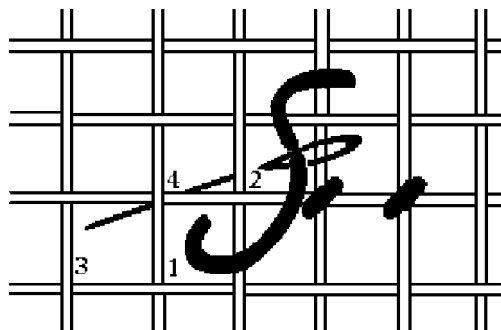
Answer: Mount your piece of silk gauze in a matboard or frame. Secure it to the back of the frame with masking tape. The opening of the frame should be about 1-1/2" - 2" smaller than the dimensions of the piece of gauze. Frames can be found in the picture frame section of stores like Wal-Mart, Target, Joann's, AC Moore, Michael's, etc. They are made for matting pictures or photos before framing. You can also easily make frames out of scrap cardboard yourself by cutting out the window with a utility knife. I prefer this because you can have frames of many, many sizes at no expense. There are those who say the cardboard must be acid free. This is not necessary unless the gauze is going to be in contact with the cardboard for decades or centuries. I hope you stitch faster than that!

Question: *What length of thread is good for stitching?*

Answer: About 12 inches is good. If the length is too long it will get frayed being pulled through the holes so many times and therefore get thinner. Silk gauze is an abrasive fabric.

Question: *What stitch do I use and how do I begin stitching?*

The Continental Stitch



Answer: Use the Continental Stitch illustrated above. It is worked horizontally from right to left. When you get to the end of a row, turn the piece around, 180 degrees, and begin the next row.

To begin stitching, come up from the underneath side of the silk gauze (at #1) to the topside, leaving a half-inch tail of floss on the underside. You will anchor that with the next couple of subsequent stitches so hold it in place until that's accomplished. Never knot the floss or you will see the bump after blocking.

Now poke your needle down in hole #2, come up in hole #3, poke down in #4, etc. Each finished stitch will be a diagonal (/) and it will cover one intersection of the vertical and horizontal threads of the gauze. All your stitches should slope in the same direction (/////).

When your length of floss becomes too short to work with, run the thread under several stitches on the back to secure it and then clip it short so you don't leave "tails". Always run the thread under stitches either horizontally or vertically, never diagonally because that may be detected from the front.

Question: *Where do I begin stitching ... what do I stitch first?*

Answer: Where to begin a particular pattern really varies, depending on the pattern, but generally speaking, begin either in the center with the central motif (especially with rugs), or with the main subject of the pattern (if it isn't in the center of the chart) and work outward.

Use what has already been stitched as a benchmark for what you are about to stitch. This keeps the counting to a minimum. Therefore, in case you've counted wrong, you can always fudge a flower or something minor if you find you're 1 row off somewhere. It is important that the main subject is done properly.

Question: *What do the squares on the chart represent?*

Answer: Each square represents one stitch. On my charts, the thread color of that stitch is indicated by the color and symbol in the square, which is shown in the Color Key accompanying the chart.

Question: *Do you do a large amount of one color at a time, on a rug, or do you have several needles threaded and work with the colors as you come to them?*

Answer: I suggest having several needles threaded, one for each color. Work the nearby stitches of one color, end it, then pick up the needle with the next color and work that. The multiple needles save time re-threading the same needle. Don't try to work several areas of the same color at the same time unless they are close to each other. Doing this results in 2 things: You must "travel" your thread from one area to the next, which isn't good, but more importantly, you will have a lot of counting to do and that can easily result in errors.

Question: *Why are my finished pieces always somewhat out of shape even though I use a cardboard frame?*

Answer: You are stitching too tightly. It takes practice to be consistent with your tension. You don't want loose or loopy stitches, yet you don't want overly tight ones either. You should just "lay" the stitches down.

Question: *Why does the back of my piece always look so messy when I'm finished?*

Answer: Work the pattern an area at a time. End a color by running the needle (on the back) under about 4 adjacent stitches (either horizontally or vertically, not diagonally). Cut the threads close so you don't leave any tails. Your backs will be nice and neat.

Question: *How many plies do I stitch with on the various counts and what size needles do I use?*

Answer: ("ply" or "plies" refers to DMC cotton embroidery floss)
24 count = 3 plies - # 26 Tapestry needle (blunt point)
32 count = 2 plies - #26 Tapestry needle (blunt point)
40 count = 1 ply - #26 Tapestry (blunt) or #10 Crewel (sharp point)
48 count = 1 ply - #10 Crewel (sharp point)
54* - 72 counts - use silk thread and #12 Sharps needles
*Floss can be used on 54 count but the stitching will be tight.

Question: *Some of my threads don't "cover" as well as others. Why?*

Answer: Sometimes darker floss/thread is thinner because the process for dyeing dark colors is tougher on the fibers. Two plies of a light color thread may sufficiently cover 32 count silk gauze but you may need 3 plies of a dark color to cover. Also, the dark colors may have thick and thin spots, so quickly inspect the floss before threading your needle and avoid having to take out stitches later. It's also worth noting that if you block your finished piece by holding a steam iron over it, the steam will "plump" your stitches.

Question: *Why does it take me so much longer to stitch than others I know?*

Answer: It seems to me that being able to quickly and easily read the chart would be primary. In my charts each square includes the thread color and the thread symbol and to me that means a "quick read". If you have a black and white chart with only symbols, you could use colored pencils to color the squares, assigning a different pencil color to each thread on the accompanying Thread Key.

Another essential thing is being sure that your chart is large enough to easily read the symbols and colors, without hesitation. If it's from a book, then have a color copy made. If necessary, have them blow it up a bit, even if it ends up being on 2 or 4 pages instead of 1. You can either tape them together or work a page at a time.

Question: *How do I remove "mistakes"?*

Answer: Don't worry if you make a mistake. Use the "eye" end of an unthreaded needle to carefully remove the incorrect stitches. Using the "more blunt" end of the needle helps to avoid damaging adjacent stitches.

Question: *Is it good to highlight, on the chart, the stitches you've already worked?*

Answer: I never highlight completed stitches on a chart. Charts with both colors and symbols make it easy to see what has been done and what still needs to be done. Marking or highlighting just takes extra time and also renders the chart useless for future use ;) The completed stitches on your gauze are a 3-D chart of your progress.

Question: *I know it is recommended to use a frame of sorts but I can't work with a frame. I prefer to work with the gauze as is, just in my hand.*

Answer: Me too, but you must be experienced to do this. You must instinctively, without thinking about it, be able to stitch along knowing that your stitch tension is correct. If you can do this, your piece won't be any more out of shape than if you used a frame. The big plus for this method is that it takes about half the time to stitch because you don't have two motions (poke up/poke down) to get one stitch. I always cover the edges of the gauze with masking tape, and round off the corners, so the thread doesn't catch on it.

Many years ago, when my business was custom finished pieces for collectors, I taught myself to use this method to keep the prices down since they were based on the amount of time it took me to stitch a piece. I do not, however, recommend this method for everyone!

Question: *How can I calculate the finished size of a piece on various counts?*

Answer: To calculate the finished size of a pattern, divide the number of stitches in the pattern width by the gauze count and do the same with the lengthwise stitches. That gives you the finished size. Example: the chart is 74w x 97h and you'd like to work it on 40 count. Divide 74 by 40 (1.85") and divide 97 by 40 (2.43") so the finished size will be about 1.85"w x 2.43"h.

Question: *I am only able to stitch for short periods of time because I get tired and uncomfortable. What am I doing wrong?*

Answer: To me that immediately means that you have to evaluate your stitching "environment". You have to sit in something very comfortable. I used to use a comfy wingback chair with an ottoman and now it's a loveseat with a coffee table in front of it. I find that being able to put my feet up or down on something is relaxing and it also changes the angle of the spine, which prevents tension. Also, having a small pillow handy to put in the small of your back is helpful. I can stitch for 6 or 8 hours at a time like this. It is advisable though, to get up every hour or 2 and go do something else for a few minutes.

Be sure that your light source is bright and focused ON THE TOP OF THE GAUZE and your magnifying "appliance" is comfortable and adjusted so **YOU** don't have to move to get to **IT**. I am a strong advocate of a magnifying lamp with a circular fluorescent light under the magnifying glass. With this type of lamp there is only 1 thing to adjust and where you put it is where it remains until you change it. Make things easy for yourself!

The final issue in this topic would be where you put your chart. Again, I can only speak from personal experience. Twenty years ago I bought a magnetic chart holder which is simply a thin metal tablet, 8-1/2" by 11", that came with 4 narrow magnetic strips of varying lengths. I put the paper chart on the tablet with the area I want to stitch at the top of the tablet, put the longest strip under the area I want to stitch and use another strip towards the bottom of the page just to hold it securely. I put the tablet on my lap and situate it so I can see the area of the chart I'm working on through the top part of the magnifier. In the bottom half of the magnifier I see my gauze and where I'm currently stitching so all I have to do is move my eyes up and down to stitch. After I've stitched what I want to in that particular area, I move the chart and the strip on the tablet.

Question: *I thought I might use the Basketweave Stitch for my 1/12th scale petitpoint rug backgrounds. I also do cross-stitch and Basketweave seems closer to the neatness of that. Would this be OK?*

Answer: Basketweave is generally not recommended for 1/12th petitpoint. Besides, it is the backside (wrong side) of a piece worked in Basketweave that has the woven pattern. The top or right side looks like rows of regular, slanted, single, needlepoint stitches (1/2 of a cross stitch - /////). Basketweave is recommended for full size needlepoint because it is thicker and long-wearing so withstands "use" as in rugs, pillows and such, that full-size people walk on, plump, sit on, etc. "Use" is not something for consideration in 1/12th scale. The Continental Stitch, also called Tent Stitch, is the recommended background stitch (illustrated previously).

The second issue with Basketweave for miniatures, especially in rugs, goes to the thickness factor. Basketweave adds thickness (for wearability, as described above) which is not desirable for this scale. The third issue is the discernible, diagonal striations that appear in finished Basketweave stitch work. Look at the background of a full-size woven Aubusson or

Oriental rug. Particularly, in Orientals, you see a definite HORIZONTAL striation, not diagonal. In the best hand-woven rugs where hand-dyed yarns are used, you even see that the horizontal striations are not of EXACTLY the same color (hand dyed yarns have no quality control for dye lots). A red background may actually include rows of red/orange, garnet/red and other variations. The point is, to have your rug look as "real" as possible, which is the thrust of museum quality work, and in "real" life, you would not see any diagonal lines. As for Basketweave and cross-stitch being close for "neatness", there is nothing untidy about needlepoint. When worked well, it is difficult to tell the front from the back!

Question: *What does "true" scale and thickness have to do with anything?*

Answer: It is generally accepted that Museum Quality, 1/12th rugs, for instance, are not in "true" scale unless worked on, at least, 40 count silk gauze. First, silk gauze is a much thinner medium than cloth or canvas, thus producing a thinner finished product. Even pieces needlepointed on 24 or 32 count silk gauze are closer to scale than if stitched on 24 or 32 count canvas even though you use 2 or 3 ply of floss.

I think it is probably difficult to make anything in cross stitch that is to "true" scale except, perhaps, with 40 or more count linen using very fine silk thread like 100 wt. I haven't done it, however, so that's only a guess. The very nature of cross-stitch (2 stitches to make 1 stitch) contradicts the thinness issue. Also, there is the matter of some of the cloth color "grinning" through which doesn't produce a sharp, clear-cut pattern.

Question: *Please explain "true" scale when talking about miniatures.*

Answer: Admittedly, Museum Quality is not necessarily the aim of the majority of miniature stitchers ... fun and the sense of accomplishment is, which I am all for. However, knowledge is a good thing, so I'll try to illustrate an example of "true" scale. Look at a picture of one of the Thorne Rooms displayed in Chicago's Art Institute (URLs below) and notice that everything in that room is so in scale that it appears to be a photograph of a room in a full-size home instead of a 1/12th scale miniature. Paying attention to the rugs, you see that they appear to be the same thickness as rugs in your home. If you placed a needlepoint rug in a Thorne Room that was worked on 24 or 32 count silk gauze, you would immediately notice that you would have to "step up" onto the rug because it is too thick. With a good eye for scale, things jump out at you that are not "true" scale.

2 Thorne rooms shown at: http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/eurdec/48pc_thorne.html

7 rooms shown at: <http://www.wttw.com/artbeat/thorne.html>

Question: *How does 40 count silk gauze relate to cross-stitch sizes?*

Answer: Though I don't do cross-stitch, I'd would imagine that the count of cloth or evenweave fabric means the same as it does with canvas or silk gauze ... so many horizontal and vertical stitches or threads to the inch. 40 count silk gauze is 40 stitch to the horizontal inch by 40 stitches to the vertical inch or 1600 stitches per square inch.