

Learning Miniature Punch Needle Embroidery

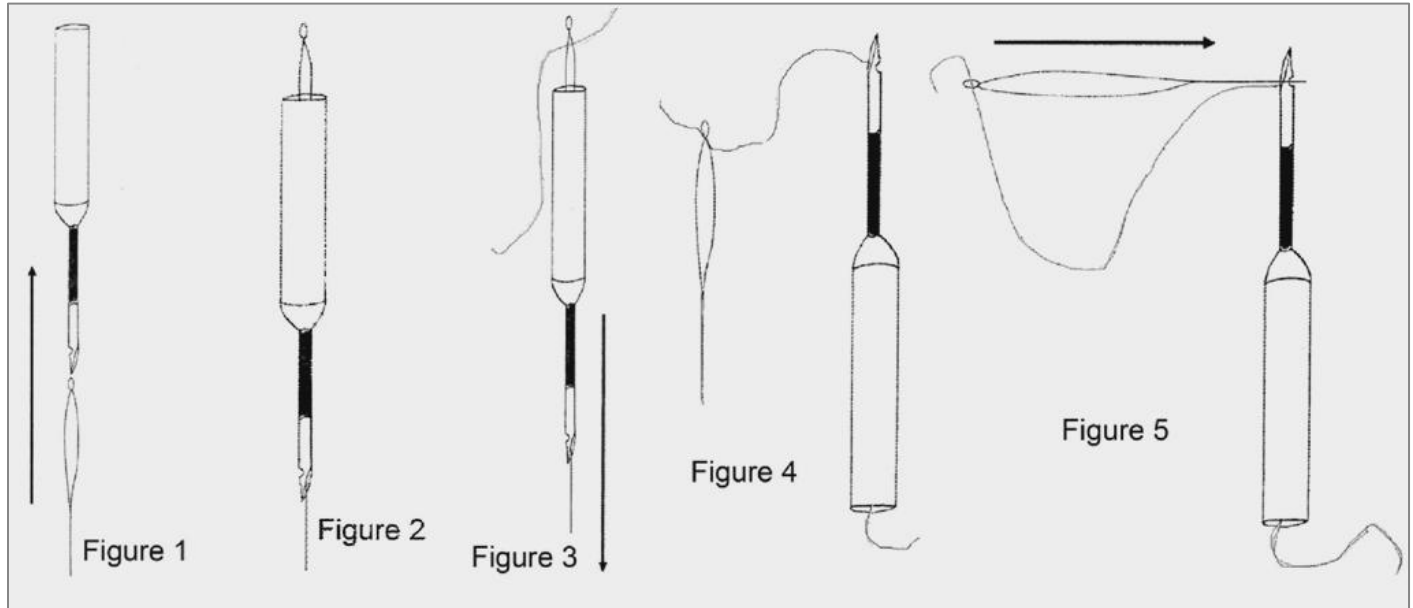
These instructions give you the basics of miniature, needle punch embroidery. Needles vary from one company to another, but the instructions are easily adapted for your style needle (read the instructions that come with your needle for specific instructions.) The following are your basic supplies:

- ❖ Punch needle
- ❖ Needle threader
- ❖ Threads (embroidery floss or other threads)
- ❖ Embroidery hoop with locking lip or gripper frame for needle punch
- ❖ Small, sharp embroidery scissors or thread snips
- ❖ Permanent marking pen (fine tip)
- ❖ Pattern marked on foundation fabric

Punch needle embroidery is an old needle art that is worked through a fabric pattern stretched in an embroidery hoop, forming loops of threads on the side opposite side of the working surface to create a design. A special needle tool with a hollow core holds and feeds the thread as you punch the needle through the fabric, from the back to the front. Depth gauges placed on the needle or adjusted to a preferred height stop the needle progress through the fabric to create loops of even height. Depending on the needle you select, a single strand of thread, or as many as six strands, can pass through the needle at one time. Typically, miniature needle punch embroidery uses one or two strands of thread and the finished work is quite fine and small. The finished results can resemble miniature hooked rugs but the pieces created are generally quite small in comparison, usually measuring less than 6 inches and oftentimes as small as an inch or two. By using up to six strands of thread, you can create larger pieces.

1 Threading the Needle

1. The needle is a hollow shaft with a sharp pointed end consisting of two sides. One side is beveled and the eye of the needle lies within the bevel. Insert the twisted or looped end of the threader through the tip of the needle until it comes out at the handle end. See Figure 1 and Figure 2.



2. Insert the required number of threads through the loop of the threader at the handle end. See Figure 3.
3. Pull the threader down through the handle from the needle end, exposing the threads. Do not remove the threads from the threader loop. Refer to Figure 4 and continue to bring the threader and the thread out the hole in the pointed end of the needle from the bowl of the bevel.
4. Now, pass the loop of the threader and the threads through the eye of the needle, going from inside the bevel to the back of the needle as shown in Figure 5.
5. Remove the thread from the threader loop. The ends of the threads are now on the back of the needle.

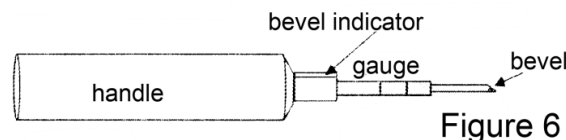
2 Preparing a Pattern

If you purchase a commercially available pattern, it will probably come to you already marked on the foundation fabric. If you wish to draw or transfer your own pattern, you can use an iron-on, fabric transfer pencil to trace a design and then transfer it to the foundation fabric, or draw a pattern directly on your foundation fabric with a water-proof, fine marking pen.

1. Transfer the pattern lines to the backside of the foundation fabric. Any mistakes in transferring or drawing the pattern are not visible in the finished work.
 - a. When using **weavers cloth** paying close attention to the stretch of the fabric. The stretch of weavers cloth can warp the design proportions; there is a stretch on the weft (cross-grain) of the weavers cloth, so be sure to transfer the pattern on the straight of grain with longer side of the pattern on the warp – the long grain or non-stretchy direction -- of the fabric.
 - b. If you want to use a **looser foundation fabric**, like tightly woven wool, place woven, fusible interfacing on top of the pattern with the non-adhesive side up. Tape the corners to hold in place. The weave of the interfacing is tight enough to hold the loops in the looser fabric. Note: When punching, adjust the length of the punched loops to compensate for this extra thick layer of fabric; just make your loop gauges a bit shorter, exposing more of the needle.
2. Align the straight outside pattern lines with the straight grain of the fabric. The threads and weave of the fabric hold the loops in place; if the loops pull out of your fabric, your choice of foundation fabric could be the problem.

3 Preparing to Work

1. Sit comfortably with your hooped pattern in your lap and all your supplies nearby. Be sure you have adequate lighting, and if you need one, a magnifier can help. Take care not to drop the fine wire threader — they can be really hard to find! A magnet helps to keep it in its place. Separate the threads (if necessary) into single strands about two yards long.
2. The depth gauge or setting, depending on the needle you use, changes the loop length on the front of the work. The more gauge material loaded onto the needle, the shorter the loops since the gauge stops the needle going through to the front. Always punch until the gauge touches the fabric to ensure consistent loop length.
3. Refer to Figure 6. Select the depth gauge required for your pattern. Generally, for a one-strand needle, use a depth gauge that leaves about ¼ -inch of needle exposed, measuring from the bottom of the gauge material to the eye of the needle. The more threads you use, or the larger the needle size, the more needle needs to be exposed, allowing a longer loop length on the front of the pattern. If the loops pull out as you punch, try a shorter gauge.



4. Thread your needle with the required number of threads in the color for the outermost outline of the pattern. Leave about 1/2 inch of thread pulled through the eye to ensure that the needle does not come unthreaded. Be sure that the length of thread is falling loose at the handle end (not trapped under your fingers or wound around the handle) so it feeds freely through the needle. It's a good habit to keep the thread lying freely over top of your index finger. Any impedance to the threads' movement through the needle will pull the loops out of your work, or not allow loops to form as you punch.

4 Loading the Pattern

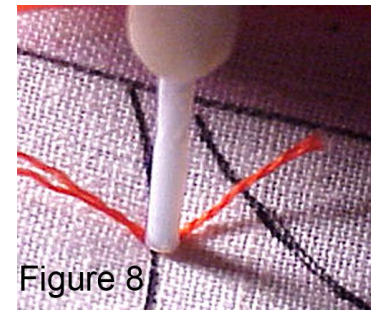
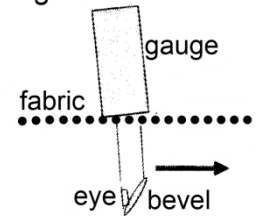
You can use a locking-lip embroidery hoop for now, and at some point you may want to try a gripper frame made for punch needle embroidery. Gripper frames hold the pattern very tight and do not loosen during your work as most hoops do. They are definitely worth the money!

1. Select an embroidery hoop in a size that encompasses the entire pattern — this should be as small as possible without cutting across the pattern lines at any point. For instance, if the largest outer measurement of your pattern is three inches, select a five-inch hoop. Lay the fabric over the inner ring of the hoop with the locking lip facing up. Center the pattern in the hoop opening, and then slide the larger hoop over the top.
2. Stretch the pattern tightly in the hoop as you continue to tighten the thumbscrew on the top hoop. Be sure to get the pattern stretched as tightly as you can for ease in punching and to ensure the most even loop height in your work. You will need to re-stretch and re-tighten it from time to time as you work. Take care to notice that the hoop does not pull out of shape as you tighten -- if it does, push on the sides and round it out again. Punching with the hoop out of round will cause your design to be distorted.
3. Hold the hoop with your thumb to the top side. Take care to keep your fingers away from the tip of the needle on the underside of the hoop as you punch! Punch needles are very sharp and cause puncture wounds very easily.

5 Working the Design

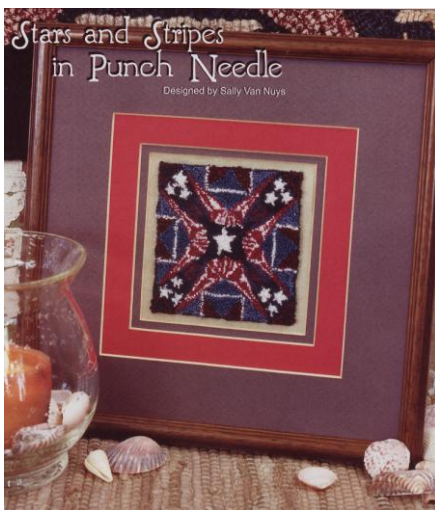
1. Refer to Figure 7. Hold the handle of the needle like a pencil with the needle perpendicular to the fabric. Don't rest your finger on the metal shaft of the needle. Face the bevel side of the needle in the direction you are moving the needle. You can make a mark on the bevel side of the handle to make it easier to see; the CTR Needleworks punch needles have metal bevel indicators on the handles to make it very easy to locate the bevel side of the needle.
 2. As you begin to work the design, first stitch the outline of an element following just inside the pattern line, then fill in with rows of appropriate colors. Work the main design elements first, starting in the center of the pattern and working outward. When the main design elements are completed, fill in the background.
 3. Align the needle tip just inside the pattern line, then punch straight down through the fabric until the depth gauge hits the fabric as shown in Figure 8. Slowly retract the needle straight back up and out of the fabric, but do not lift the tip of the needle off the face of the fabric. This part takes a little practice. Lifting the needle off the fabric can pull the loops on the front shorter and create loops on the back, or it can pull out the loops from the front altogether—just practice!
 4. With the needle still resting on the fabric, slide the needle forward over a 'couple' of threads in the foundation fabric; align it to the pattern, then punch the next loop. With practice, you'll begin to feel the needle skip over the threads as you move to the next punching position.
 5. Looking at your work thus far, you will see the 'tail' of the thread and one stitch in the fabric; the 2nd stitch is still obscured by the needle, which is in the 'down' position. Keep the stitches fairly close together as you punch from one stitch to the next. Repeat steps 3 and 4 as you continue working – **punch, lift, drag, punch**.
 6. When you come to the end of a row, leave your needle in the “down” position as show in Figure 8, with the tip pushed through to the front of the pattern. Turn the needle or turn the hoop so the bevel faces the direction you want to go next, and then begin again bringing the needle to the surface and punching the next row. You will begin the next row about a needle width away from the last row so you have a small amount of fabric showing between rows. Continue to follow the pattern line until the area you are working on is completed.
- Note: if working with one strand of thread, you won't leave as much space between rows; the more threads in the needle, the more space you'll need between rows. Check the finished side of the pattern and if you can see foundation fabric between the stitched rows, you are leaving too much space between rows.*
7. If you run out of thread, or you need to change colors, place your finger tip on the last stitch to hold it in place, and gently pull the needle to the side allowing about ½ -inch of thread to feed through the tip of the needle. Now, clip the thread ends close to the foundation fabric. Go back and clip the ends where you began that length of thread too, if you haven't already.
 8. Every so often, check your work on the finished side of your work. Check for uniform loop height and an overall even pile. If you notice any loose ends or errant loops, you can carefully clip them even with the pile of the design and they will blend right in and not fall out.
 9. If you are not happy with your results, don't take the threads out — practice a while and work several rows first. This makes a big difference in the finished look. It takes a little practice and you will slowly get a feel for the punching. Before you know it, you will be moving along and your work will begin to look more consistent. If you decide to take out some threads, slowly pull up on the end from the back of the foundation and the stitches will pop out one at a time. Do not try to re-use the threads; they are too kinked to properly feed through the needle again. Don't re-punch the same area more than twice or you will risk creating a hole in the foundation --that's irreparable and you'll have to start over with a new pattern.
 10. When the design elements are completed, punch a row of background color around each one, and then work the rest of the background. I like to work the background by visually dividing up the background into smaller “patches,” and then outline the elements in each patch with the background color and fill in the remaining background areas. Then I move to the next “patch”. I also find that I like to work the background in opposite corners (first upper right, then lower left, etc.); that way, if I should run out of background thread and need to use a different dye lot, it won't be as noticeable if the color is slightly off.
 11. When you have all the design areas completed, but before you remove it from the hoop, check the back for any loose threads or long tails and trim them close to the foundation fabric. Check the finished side for any areas that need to be filled in, and punch a few stitches to fill in those areas, and then look for long loops or loose ends to trim even with the pile.

Figure 7



6 Finishing Your Work

1. Remove the complete piece from the hoop. Press the fabric around the punched design, just up to the edge of the loops.
2. If your piece does not lie flat, you might have punched it too tightly (stitches too close together or not enough space between rows). If this happens, lay a damp press cloth over the back side of the piece and with a hot, dry iron barely touching the back, steam it slightly so it lays flatter (do not press down on the iron and crush the loops!)
3. **To create a pin:**
Trim the foundation fabric to about ¼ inch, turn it to the back, and then glue it down. When it is dry, cut a piece of color-coordinated matte board the same size as the finished piece and glue it to the back. Attach a pin back to the matte board. Sign and date the matte board!
4. **To frame your piece:**
Trim the foundation fabric to size and mount it to a corresponding size foam core or matte board for your frame. Place a matte around the piece if you wish, then install the mounted piece in the frame. Sign and date the matte beneath your work!
5. **To embellish an object:**
Trim the foundation fabric to about ¼ inch, turn it to the back, and then glue it down. When it is dry, apply glue to the back of the punched piece. Align the punching to the area where you wish it to be and lightly press into place – don't smash the loops down. You can use trim, such as yarn, soutache, or your favorite trim to embellish the edges of the punched piece and cover any foundation fabric that is showing.



Search online and watch some YouTube videos; you will find many techniques and ways of finishing not covered by the basics here. Explore, find new, and embrace what you love the best!

