

Royal School of Needlework  
**Canvas Stitches - Certificate**  
Academic year 2025/26

**Canvas work is a form of counted thread embroidery worked on even weave canvas fabric. Traditionally canvas work used Tent Stitch for hardwearing cushions and chair covers. Contemporary pieces are more adventurous using a wide variety of stitches and threads to represent texture, scale, shading etc. so creating an embroidery that is rich in colour and has depth and movement.**

**Aim**

To design, work and mount a piece of canvas work demonstrating technical assurance and an understanding of stitches, threads, colour, colour blending, shading, texture and perspective. The finished piece will include shading throughout, appropriate to the design, and at least one area of gradual transition between two or more stitches.

**Materials and equipment**

There is no starter kit for this module. "Antique" canvas, Appleton's crewel wool, stranded cottons and needles can be purchased from the RSN.

Fabric: Zweigart 18 threads per inch canvas. Use shade 'Antique' which is a light brown colour, if obtainable.

Needles: Tapestry 20, 22 and 24. Embroidery needles if adding surface embellishment.

Threads: This is an opportunity to use the threads you may have in your stash at home and to try new types of threads beyond Appleton's and stranded cottons. Perlé, coton a broder, knitting yarn, silk, metallic thread, ribbon, linen yarn etc. can be included.

Other: Waterproof black pen for drawing on the design, such as Staedtler Permanent Lumocolor.

**Reasonable adjustments**

If there is a reason you may have difficulty completing the module e.g. visual impairment, allergy to some materials, please discuss this with the tutor and the C and D team before starting. Adjustments are possible.

## **Essential requirements**

### Design area

- The final design should be no more than A5 in size, 21 x 15 cm (6 x 8 inches) or equivalent. It may be landscape or portrait in orientation.

### Stitches

- There must be a minimum of twelve different stitches.
- Required stitches - 6.
  - at least two stitches from each of the categories; straight (vertical or horizontal), diagonal, and cross stitches.
- Stitch choices – at least 6  
Choose at least six more stitches. There are many counted stitches to choose from. Visit the RSN Stitch Bank [www.rsnstitchbank.org](http://www.rsnstitchbank.org) and/or use a stitch book to find other choices. The RSN Stitch Bank is free to use.

### Transitional stitches

- In at least one area there should be a gradual transition from one stitch to another worked so that there is no obvious change between the two. This can be worked across a larger area of the design and is more successful where stitch and colour transition at different points.

Surface embellishment may also be included. For example, textural stitches such as French Knots and Whipped or Woven Wheels or the addition of beads or ribbons. These optional elements will not be assessed, but can help to recreate the image.

## **Achieving realism**

### Scale

- Stitch choices should be used to reflect scale/perspective in the design.

### Texture

- Thread and stitch choices should be used to reflect the textural variety in the design.

### Use of colour and shading

- There should be colour shading throughout the piece. The light source of the original design should be reflected to create a sense of depth and dimension. Subtle shading can be achieved through mixing colours in the needle. The colours used should reflect the original image.

## Technical

### Canvas coverage

- The canvas must be fully covered. There should be no unstitched areas or canvas visible between stitched areas.

### Edges and partial stitches

- Where patterns meet, partial stitches should be used to achieve accurate boundaries between each pattern or shape.

### Thread types

- A variety of thread types, at least three, should be used e.g. matt/shiny, smooth/rough, different fibres, different weights.

### Border (optional)

- A small border may be stitched for a more uniform finish to the edges. Optional elements will not be assessed.

### Finishing

- The finished work will be mounted on card and backed with sateen. The mounted work should have an equal rebate of open canvas around the embroidery, with no threads or thread ends visible.

## **Getting started – before class**

It is not necessary to arrive at the first class with a finalised design, but you should come with some ideas. For examples of work by other C and D students look at the C and D gallery on the website. <https://royal-needlework.org.uk/courses/certificate-diploma/canddgallery/>.

## **Getting started – in class**

### Preparatory work

Preparation prior to stitching is an important part of the learning process. Your tutor will give guidance to prepare the following:

- An outline drawing. This will be photocopied several times and used to create:
- A stitch plan
  - To ensure that the mandatory stitches are included,
  - To ensure that there is a good variety of other stitches,
  - To identify the stitch transition area and
  - To identify areas with scope for shading, texture and scale variation
  - Incorporating stitch direction representing the movement in the design and can also help inform the choice of stitches.
- Colour study(ies) will help to understand the necessary colours/colour blends, particularly in complex areas.
- An order of work (where to start and finish).

The original outline drawing will be used to transfer the design to the canvas using a waterproof pen.

Initial plans can be amended as the embroidery progresses. If you choose to have your work formally assessed, you should submit the preparatory work listed above together with your source / inspiration material. All this paperwork will form part of the assessment.

### Things to think about when planning the embroidery

- There are many subjects that will work on canvas such as still life, abstract art, sky lines and landscapes.
- The source image should have depth, texture and shading. Flat graphic designs will need additional work to include shading, texture etc.
- It is important to include different thread textures, a variety of stitches of different scales, and colour shading. This technique is an opportunity to explore different threads, beyond Appleton's and stranded cottons. Different textures are a way of adding interest and dimension.
- Have larger scale stitches in the foreground for the nearest elements, reducing in size as the image recedes.
- Fine detail can be included in canvas stitches. Do not be daunted by the grid of the canvas, although sometimes designs may need to be adapted to read well.
- Consider additional embellishment carefully and use it as a decoration rather than a main feature.
- A good balance of large and fine areas offers the opportunity to experiment with a wide range of stitches and threads.
- When stitching, avoid carrying light thread under dark areas and vice versa.
- When framing up, use long and short stitch to attach the canvas to the top and bottom of your slate frame. This avoids creating a line of weakness in the canvas when put under tension.
- Think about whether a small border is needed. There can be ragged edges when many different types of stitches finish at the edge of the work.

### Intellectual property

The final design must be original to you. Use of your own visual media (photographs, drawings) is encouraged. Referencing and interpreting other visual media is acceptable. Copying is not. The intellectual property of others must be respected.

### Additional information

Additional information on the following can be downloaded from the website.

- Good Embroidery Practices - Make sure you have a copy of this leaflet. Following this guidance will help you develop good stitching habits.
- Resources - Websites, Books, Suppliers for C&D