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Hooping Essentials

Proper hooping is much more than keeping embroiderable goods in the hoop until stitching is complete. For textile products, the goods should be held as flat to the machine table as possible, with an even tension across the fabric, without distorting the grain. And from an efficiency viewpoint, the garments to be run on the next machine cycle should always be ready for their turn under the needle before the end of the current cycle or run.

Poor hooping, or framing, can actually cost you garment losses that are easily avoided by substituting better hooping habits. For example, if a knit shirt is hooped too loosely, design elements may not line up, resulting in poor registration. The same shirt, stretched too tightly during hooping may exhibit such symptoms as puckering or even needle cutting along stitching edges. You can avoid such mishaps by following a few sound hooping principles outlined here; they should help you understand how dramatically hooping affects the end product.

Hoop Selection

Generally, you should select the smallest frame that will comfortably accommodate the size of the embroidery design. Try not to be paranoid about choosing a size that is a close fit, so long as it's not too close. (Remember that the back of the presser foot needs more room to clear the hoop than the front or sides because it is larger.)

Hoop Shape

Round or oval hoops provide the most even tensioning on fabric, and sometimes a trade off is made – a reduced sewing area is accepted to achieve this benefit. When round hoops are made of wood, rather than metal or plastic, both parts may need to be marked with alignment marks. This will assure that this shaped, rather than molded, hoop will match up to its best fit.

Hooping Aids

There are some exceptions, but generally you will want your selected backing to be held in all edges of the embroidery hoop. Especially in instances when the fabric is not completely in the hoop. Be sure that the backing protrudes all the way around the bottom hoop.

Hooping Techniques

There should be a light surface tension to the hooped piece. If the hoop is properly adjusted before it is applied, then the tension is created automatically. Tightening the adjusting screw after the inner hoop is applied doesn't help add tension, but it could add to the impression left on the goods once the hoop is removed. If hoops are adjusted too tightly, surface ripples can appear from the inner hoop, pushing the fabric toward the center of the hoop. On the other hand, if the hoop is adjusted too loosely, design elements may not line up. Here are some hoop application pointers for various types of goods.



Knits

Proper hoping of a knit begins with knowing in which direction the fabric has the most stretch. When you place the goods in the hoop, apply a slight tension with your free hand in the direction having the least stretch. When done correctly, this will not stress or distort the knit. (Stretching too much can result in fiber bursting and needle cutting.) The fabric will then be held tautly, but not necessarily tightly.

Over-tightening of the adjusting screw can actually result in hoop burn, the impression of the hoop that remains on the garment after the hoop has been removed. In extreme cases, the fibers are actually damaged by the hoop. More commonly the inner ring does not slip easily into the outer ring; rather, it must be forced in. This pushes excess fabric toward the center of the hoop, which can result in surface ripples.

Your natural instincts may be to gently pull on the fabric's edges to relieve the wrinkles. This may get rid of the wrinkles, but the design could also look puckered once the fabric is no longer held in a stretched position. The yarn's memory will cause the fibers to go back to their original position – that is all of the fibers except those that have been nailed down by the embroidery stitches.

Rather than pulling on the fabric, you may be able to avoid re-hooping by recessing the inner hoop so that it is slightly lower than the outer hoop. This will place a gentle amount of tension on the knit, remove the surface wrinkle and place the garment flatter to the machine table.

It is important for the framed piece to rest completely flat against the machine table. When there is "air" between the framed goods and the machine table, flagging can result. Flagging is the up and down motion of the fabric, so named because it resembles the waving of a flag. Press on the fabric, and if you must push it down to the table top, the hoop needs to be placed flatter to the machine table.

On two way stretch knits, stretch them to the extent that they will be stretched when they are worn during hoping. For example, you will want to slightly stretch socks and bike shorts but not a turtleneck collar.

Bulky Items

Bulky items may be held best with holding fixtures rather than hoops. There are magnetic holders and other ingenious devices that have been created for such purposes, but some items a horse blanket or a sheepskin lined jacket for example may be better secured in a conventional hoop. Hooping bulky items is the only time you should consider tightening the hoop after it has been applied.

Loosen the hoop's adjusting screw as much as is necessary to accommodate the thickness of the goods. Sometimes the screw simply isn't long enough to allow the outer hoop to open wide enough to accept the goods. If you are able to open the screw sufficiently, apply the top of the hoop first then the bottom. With the adjusting screw at the bottom of the hoop, it is usually possible to press the bottom of the inner ring into place. It may now be necessary to tighten the screw to hold the piece securely throughout the stitching process.

Satin & Nylon

These slippery goods can be hard for the tissue which provides a buffer preventing the fabric from making direct contact with the hoop. This is significant if your hoops have splinters or nicks that could damage delicate fibers a hoop to get a grip on and you help may be required. Many embroiderers wrap the inner hoop with athletic gauze, which is slightly tacky. This gauze will provide a cushioned grip for hard to hold goods and is easily removed when you don't need it any longer.

Another technique is to hoop a piece of tissue paper right on top of the garment, with the glossy side toward the garment and the matte side toward the hoop. Next, tear out a window where the embroidery will be applied. The hoop then grips

Proper Foundation

Good hoping techniques help create a foundation for the goods to receive the embroidery stitch. At times, you may look high and low for an explanation for poor stitch formation, fiddling with tensions, needles and backings for hours. However, in many instances, you need not look further than the hoping methods used. Work with the guidelines here and experiment at developing your own special techniques to assure that your work always looks just as good out of the hoop as it does in the machine.