



# Transferring your Design

Softie patterns from  
Bustle & Sew

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*Possibly the most frequent query I receive is "How do I transfer my embroidery design from the printed page to my fabric?" This is one of those questions where there isn't a single right or wrong answer – it's all about choosing the method that works best for you.*

The easiest method to transfer a design is of course an iron-on transfer, many of which used to be given away free with needlework magazines in the mid-20th century, printed in either blue or silver.

My grandmother had a huge collection of these transfers, all carefully stored in a biscuit box with a cute puppy and kitten picture on the lid. There were sunbonnet and crinoline ladies - too many to count - birds, bears and an infinite variety of flower patterns. If you enjoy stitching vintage, it's still easy to find these old designs in thrift shops, at jumble sales and of course on auction sites such as eBay.

But if you don't have a transfer and want to transfer a downloaded pattern (like those in this magazine) there are several different methods available to you, some of which are easier, and so perhaps more popular, than others.

If you're embroidering onto a pale coloured, light-weight fabric, then it's easy to trace your design onto it as though it was tracing paper. To do this, print your design in the usual way, then tape your printed sheet to a light source - most usually a light box or window pane. Position your fabric over it, right side up, making sure that the design is beneath

the position you have chosen for your finished embroidery.

Tape your fabric in place over the paper. Don't be tempted to try to hold it with one hand while tracing with the other - unless it's really small and simple your fabric is quite likely to slip out of position leading to frustration and a spoiled design (I am speaking from experience!). If you have some then masking tape is the best to use as it's easier to remove than sellotape and leaves less sticky residue. Use the smallest amount you actually need and keep it to the edges of your fabric, just in case.

When everything is securely held in place, trace over your design with a sharp pencil or a water soluble temporary fabric marker pen. I have read debate online about whether or not the marks from these pens can reappear over a period of time, spoiling your finished work. I haven't personally experienced this problem, but if in doubt then use a pencil. This will leave a permanent mark, but it won't bleed into other areas and should be covered by your stitching.

Another popular choice is to use dressmakers' carbon paper. This isn't at all the same as the old-fashioned carbon paper those of us of a certain age remember using when typing copies of a letter

on a typewriter. *(Aside: Did you know that typewriters are no longer manufactured anywhere in the world?)* Dressmakers' carbon paper is a thicker, waxier paper and doesn't smudge. It is available in different colours to suit different fabrics. This technique is only good for smooth fabrics.



Iron the fabric you want to stitch on and then place it right side up on a clean flat surface. Tape it securely to the surface. Choose the best colour carbon paper to show up on this fabric and tape this into place shiny side down. Then position your pattern on top of the carbon paper and again, tape (or pin) it to stop it slipping around as you work. Then take a pencil or ballpoint pen and draw carefully over the lines of the pattern.

Don't press too hard or you might tear the paper and spoil the design, but press firmly enough for your lines to show up on the fabric. You might want to test this first on a corner of the fabric. Once you've traced over all the lines, remove the tape and lift off the pattern and carbon paper - your design will then be ready to stitch.

You can also purchase transfer pencils - the lines these draw will iron onto your fabric in the same way as the old-fashioned transfers. For this method you will need to print the reversed pattern. Then on your printed sheet, draw over the pattern lines with the transfer pen. The sheet can then be turned over

and the design ironed onto your fabric - when of course it will be the right way round.

Prick and pounce is a time-honoured method that sounds like some kind of old-fashioned music hall act - in fact it's a very old tried and trusted method of transferring a design to fabric. It does take a little while, but is very effective. The pounce is a powder which comes in either black (crushed charcoal) or white (powdered cuttlefish - yes really!) - or you can mix the two to make grey.

You can purchase a special pad to apply the pounce, or make your own from a rolled up piece of felt. Then trace your design onto tracing paper and lay it on a folded cloth or ironing board. With a hat pin, pin in cork, or even another special tool you can purchase just for this purpose, prick a series of small holes closely together all along the design lines. Then tape your fabric onto a flat board or working surface and tape the pricked tracing paper onto the fabric. Dip your pad into the pounce powder and, with a circular motion, gently rub the pounce over the design.

Complete the whole design before removing the pricked tracing paper in a single nice clean movement. If you brush the pounce from the pricked paper it can be reused indefinitely. Now, following the pounce outline, paint a fine line all along the dotted outlines on the fabric, using a brush and watercolour paint, or very fine marker. Then un-tape and shake your fabric to remove the pounce.





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Tacking through tissue paper is another a time-honoured, fairly time consuming, method of transferring your design. It is great in that it leaves absolutely no marks on your fabric and is suitable for all kinds of fabric.

Carefully trace your design onto tissue paper. Then position your tracing on top of the fabric and secure in place around the edges. Tack around the outline starting and finishing your line securely. Make sure the stitches are not too small or they will be hard to remove, and not too big so that you miss parts of the design.

Once you've stitched over the whole design, carefully tear away the tissue paper, leaving the tacking on the fabric. (you can also buy water soluble paper to help in this stage). If you're working on a light or delicate fabric, then be very very careful when removing the paper so you don't damage the fabric. The tacking stitch outline can be removed as you progress, or after the embroidery is completed.

My favourite way is to print the design in reverse using my laser printer. Then I use heat to transfer the design to my fabric. I have an old heat press that is great for this as it applies the heat evenly and the press holds everything in place securely. This method only works for cotton and linen fabrics though as I have found that for the best results the transfer time needs to be in excess of 40 seconds and it requires a temperature of 195 degrees, so there is always a danger of scorching.

I don't know if this would be possible with an iron and would hesitate to recommend this method - but if you have access to a heat press and laser printer then you could experiment - once you've found the ideal settings it's a great method as even the tiniest details can be transferred without difficulty.

If you have successfully used another method, or have any hints you'd like to share then please do let me know so I can pass them on to Bustle & Sew readers. Meanwhile ... happy stitching!



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Why do we love to stitch? After all you can purchase mass-produced textile items at many high streets stores for very little cost. These days handmade means something special - a unique item created with love, a gift from the heart, not one that can be bought. Hand stitching is also a great way to personalise an item, or perhaps to breathe new life into an old favourite that has seen better days.

[Bustle & Sew](#) offers my own unique patterns, designed to appeal to all skill levels and bring out all your natural creativity. And you can keep up to date with all the latest news from Devon where I live as well as the newest patterns and much more over on the [Bustle & Sew Blog](#).

But none of this would mean anything without YOU, the stitcher. And it's lovely to be able to share hints, tips, techniques and patterns with other like-minded people. So ....



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