



HOW TO TRANSFER YOUR DESIGN



From cuttlefish to inkjet printer, transfer paper and the power of light - a look at some ways to transfer your design from paper to fabric.

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 idea of transferring your pattern (especially if it’s a downloadable one) to fabric can often seem rather intimidating. But don’t despair, there are lots of ways to approach this, and though some require more steps than others, and some are better for different types of fabrics than others, none are particularly complicated.

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-twentieth 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 available from [Bustle & Sew](#)) there are several different methods available to you, some of which are easier, and so perhaps more popular, than others.

Tracing your Design

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 at the correct size for your project. If you are using a pattern in a book, you may want to make a copy so that text or other elements don’t show through from the reverse side of your image.
- 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 sticky tape 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. For large projects that will take you some time to complete, you could also use an extra-fine permanent marking pen. Both of these tools create permanent lines, which means you need to trace accurately and cover the markings with your stitches.

- You can also use your tablet as a lightbox and there are various apps that enable you to do this.

Dressmakers' Carbon Paper

Another 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! 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. ?
- Position your pattern on top of the carbon paper and again, tape (or pin) it to stop it slipping around as you work.
- 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.

Use a Transfer Pencil

You can also purchase transfer pencils - the lines these draw will iron onto your fabric in the same way as the old-fashioned transfers.

- Print the pattern in reverse.
- Then on your printed sheet, draw over the pattern lines with the transfer pen.
- Turn the sheet over and iron the design onto your fabric - when of course it will be the right way round.

Prick and Pounce

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, and is probably the most complicated method described here. It is however, very effective which is probably why it's still used today. 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.
- 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 a 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.

Tacking through Tissue Paper

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. 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.

Self Adhesive Water Soluble Transfer Paper

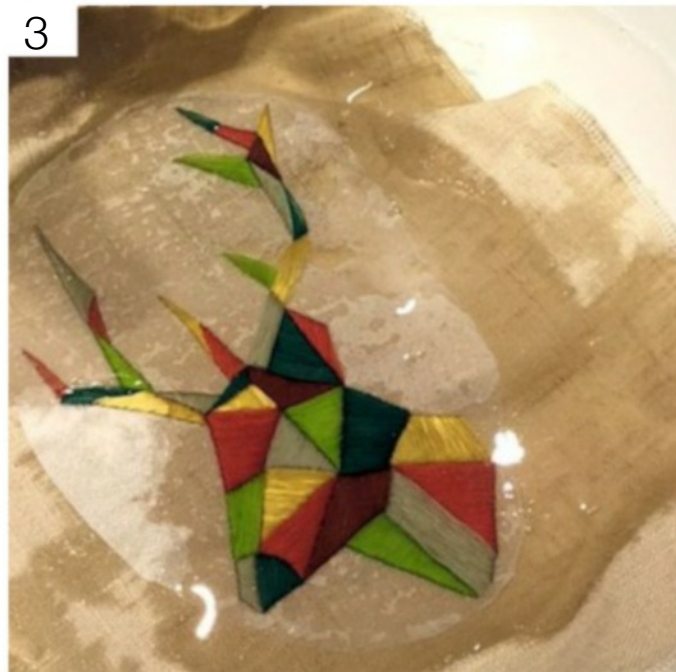
I'm a lover of this product which has definitely revolutionised the way I work, especially for more complex patterns.

You can purchase water soluble transfer paper in two forms – either on a roll or as 10" x 8" sheets. I have tried both, and whilst the roll is certainly more economical as you need only use the exact amount for your design, for me it has one major drawback – which is that you still have to trace the design. This is because the curl of the roll has made it impossible for me to successfully get my printer to print on it. So I always purchase the sheets which are readily available from Amazon, and elsewhere online.

The sheets are made up of two layers – a paper backing layer and a non- woven fabric-type layer. This is the side that you print on. Yes – print!! Whoopieee!! No more tedious tracing – this product makes it possible to transfer even the most intricate designs totally accurately.

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One issue I've found with this method (I do wish they'd think of a shorter name!) is that you can't properly see the colour of your background fabric through the stabiliser. (1) This isn't a problem when embroidering on white or cream of course, or if you're working from a pattern, but can be a little more challenging when you're making it up as you go along designing a new pattern! You can see above that I was working on a beautifully rich gold-coloured linen background. I'm sure you can see the problem – it's really hard to see how the finished design will look – until I turn my work over (2) and then the colours really sing!

The fabric layer has a sticky back, so when you've printed your design you simply peel it away from the paper backing and press into place on your background fabric where you want your design to be. Unlike some other stitchers, I haven't found a problem with sticky residue on my needle at all.

Using this product also makes it easy to transfer your design to thicker fabrics that you can't trace the pattern onto, as well as textured or dark coloured fabrics. When you've completed your stitching you simply immerse your work in cold water - this is a drawback of

using this method - you must be stitching on a background fabric that can be soaked in water for at least an hour, and preferably longer.

I usually put mine into the water upside down so any residue, and printer ink particles, can disperse to the bottom of the basin, but here it's the right way up so you can see how the stabiliser is beginning to curl and disappear (3).

In image (4) it's been in the water for about five minutes. I usually leave mine face down for at least an hour to make sure every little bit has dissolved away, and then I rinse thoroughly. (do check that your fabric won't shrink though – and be sure to pre-wash if you're in any doubt at all).

The only issue I've had is if I don't rinse thoroughly, and leave any printed particles behind, then my printer inkjet inks can bleed into my background fabric. But that really is my fault for not rinsing and these days I'm super careful to make sure every particle of ink has dissolved out of the design.

Freezer Paper

I have achieved excellent results with this method. A disclaimer though - you must have an inkjet printer and be comfortable with the idea of putting fabric through it. There have been some reports online of fibres from the fabric clogging the printer mechanism. I personally have not found this to be a problem, but please do be aware of this potential issue.

- Purchase pre-cut freezer paper sheets. These are available online from craft websites and cost around a third of the price of Sulky Sticky Fabri Solvy. If you can't get pre-cut sheets then you could cut a larger piece to size, depending on how temperamental your printer is.

- Cut your fabric a little larger than the freezer paper and iron the wrong side of the fabric to the wax coated side of the freezer paper. Don't use steam as this will prevent the paper sticking. Your iron should be set to hot and you should hold it in place for ten seconds or so to make sure the wax has adhered to the paper. Pay special attention around the edges, especially the leading edge when you put it in the printer as if the fabric and paper separate your printer will jam.
- Trim your fabric along the sides of the freezer paper. Make sure there are no little frayed threads sticking out – again this may jam your printer. Iron once more to make sure everything is secure.
- Place in your printer tray with the fabric side ready to be printed – yes, you are going to print directly onto the fabric. You **MUST HAVE AN INK JET PRINTER** for this to work.

Once the page is printed, peel away the freezer paper and you are left with a printed pattern to stitch.

There are limitations to this method however.....

- You can only use a fairly lightweight fabric.
- A4 is the limit of the size of design (and surrounding fabric) you can put through the printer,
- The pattern is permanent so you need to be careful when stitching over the lines.
- You must have a fairly tolerant (ie not too temperamental) printer that doesn't mind taking the fabric/paper sandwich.





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 Somerset where I live as well as the newest patterns and much more over on the Bustle & Sew Blog.



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Helen xx

