

Long & Short stitch

Long & Short stitch (Also known as *soft shading*, *thread painting*, *needle painting* or *silk shading*) is used for creating graduating colour and shade effects in a design either by using several colours or different values of one colour. The name describes the stitch where the first row is made up of alternating long and short stitches.

This type of embroidery should always be worked with the fabric held taut in a hoop or frame, keeping your fabric drum tight while you stitch. The ground fabric should be firm and closely woven to hold the dense stitching. Backing the ground fabric with lightweight cotton such as calico or homespun will help support the embroidery.

Stitching: Always use your needle in a stabbing motion - scooping or sewing through the fabric will stretch the weave and cause puckering.

Tension: Keep the tension on your stitches even. Too tight and they will cause the fabric to pucker – too loose and they will 'float' above the fabric. The stitch should just hug the fabric.

Colour: Choose the required number of shades of thread – a minimum of 3 or 4 usually works well. This can be light to dark shades of the same hue or shading through a range of colours.

Basic Long & Short stitch (tapestry shading)

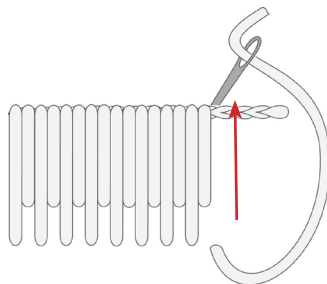
This type of shading is always worked following the grain of the fabric. When complete this technique resembles a woven tapestry, hence the name. This technique is useful for filling in back grounds or embroidering figures and similar objects.

It is ideal to practise this kind of shading to understand the principles of long and short stitch before moving on to directional long and short stitch.

1. Outline. Start by outlining the area to be worked with split stitch. This gives a good edge to the shape and should always be used to raise one design edge over another.

2. Foundation row (first row).

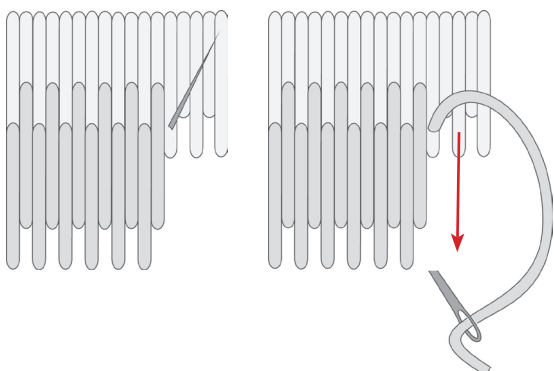
Embroider long and short stitch along one edge. For the first row, bring the needle to the front inside the shape and take it to the back over the split stitch outline.



Alternate the length of the stitches so that the short stitches are about $\frac{2}{3}$ the length of the long ones. Take care not to make these stitches too short, keeping in mind that the following row will partially cover them.

3. Subsequent rows. From this point, all the stitches should be similar in length to the long stitches in the first row.

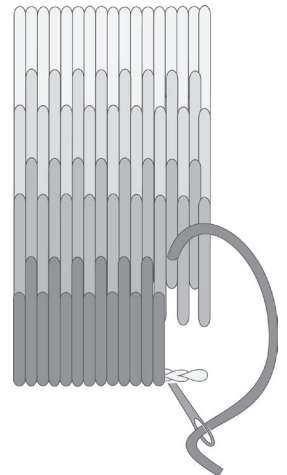
Bring the needle to the front through the end of the stitches in the first row, splitting them about $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ up. The new stitches become extensions of the previous.



Embroider the third and subsequent rows in the same way.

Remember that some of the length of the stitches will be lost when the following row is worked, so take care not to get the stitches too short. For broader bands of colour, it may be necessary to work more than one row of a colour.

4. Finish the last row with long and short stitches, taking the needle to the back over the split stitch outline.

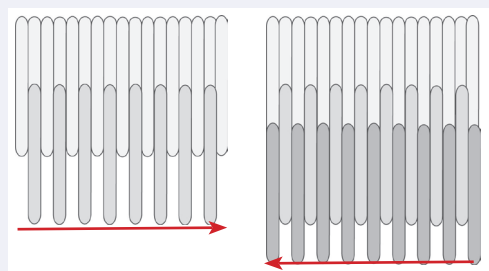


SUMMARY:

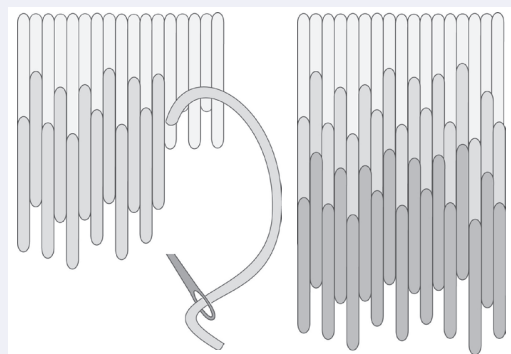
The stitches in the first row are different lengths – long and short. From this point forward, the stitches are all long and similar in length.

HINTS - Perfecting your long and short stitch

While you are learning, you can work into the short stitches first, then the long stitches.



To avoid ridges across the shape, slightly vary the lengths of the stitches and the points where they split the previous. This will create a softer, more natural shading and graduation of colour.



Long & Short stitch

Directional Long & Short stitch (natural shading)

This type of shading follows the movement or direction of a shape, such as petals, leaves, feathers and fur.

Directional long and short stitch is worked using the same principals as basic long and short stitch but the aim is to create gentle lines, movement and smooth blending of tones.

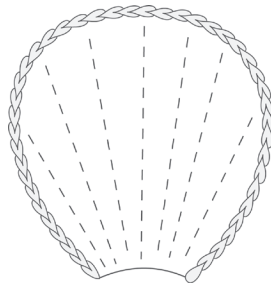
The direction of stitches is most important and must follow the movement of the shape. If you look closely at a leaf or a petal you will see that it most often tapers towards the centre.

1. Outline the shape, omitting any edges that fits below subsequent areas eg. the base of a petal.

Usually split stitch is used for the outline to slightly raise and define the edges. Stem stitch can also be used - this will result in a slightly more raised edge.

2. Directional lines. Study the shape to decide how the movement or flow of it falls.

While you practise, you may like to lightly mark these 'guidelines' with a sharp pencil. Mark the centre line first, then divide each half again, and mark these sections midway again.



As you become more experienced you will find that you need less guidelines or will be able to stitch the entire piece 'on the eye'.

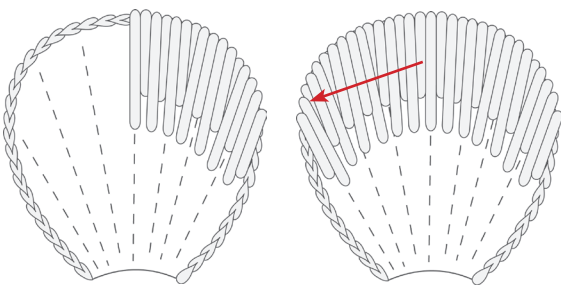
3. Foundation row. The first row provides the foundation to all subsequent rows.

Always start midway along an edge and stitch to one side at a time. Where possible stitch from the wider edge towards the narrow end of a shape – it is easier to decrease than increase the number of stitches.

For the first row, always bring the needle to the front inside the shape and take it to the back over the outline.

The short stitches should be roughly $\frac{2}{3}$ the length of the long stitches. As you near the side, you may need to shorten the stitches slightly.

Remember to keep the stitches of good length, as they will be partly covered by the subsequent row. If the stitches become too short the result will appear lumpy and uneven.



Return to the centre and complete the first row, stitching to the opposite side.

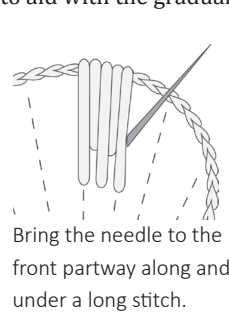
HINT- Stitch length guide

As a guide, approximately 10mm for the long stitches and 7mm for the short works well for one strand of silk or cotton. When stitching with wool lengthen the stitches to about 12-15mm and 8-10mm.

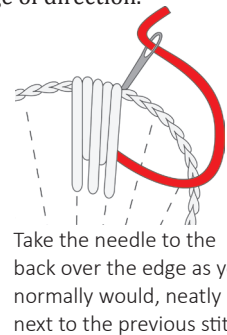
Changing direction

The changing of direction should be gradual - sudden and drastic changes to the angle of the stitches will disrupt and spoil the flow.

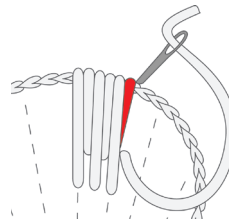
Keep your long stitches in line with your guidelines as you near the curve and use your short stitches and additional **Fill-in stitches** to alter the angle of the stitches. **Fill-in stitches** are extra short stitches that are added among the regular long and short stitch to aid with the gradual change of direction.



Bring the needle to the front partway along and under a long stitch.

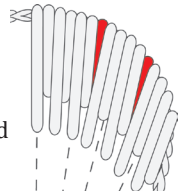


Take the needle to the back over the edge as you normally would, neatly next to the previous stitch.



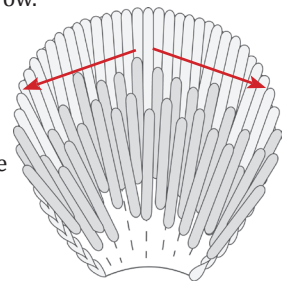
Emerge next to the long and just in front of the fill-in stitch for the following short stitch. The end of the short stitch covers the end of the filling stitch and they merge as one at the base. At the top they will sit side by side.

By inserting fill-in stitches at intervals you will gradually swing the long and short stitch around a curve. Only ever place one filling stitch at a time and always use short stitches.



4. Subsequent rows. Again starting from the centre and working to one side at a time, stitch the second row.

Bring the needle to the front splitting the stitch in the previous row - about one-third back - and down into the shape. Vary the points where the needle emerges (to avoid forming ridges) and keep all the stitches similar in length to the long stitches in the first row. As the new stitches flow from the staggered ends in the first row, the new edge will naturally become staggered.



HINT- If you find it difficult to place the stitches correctly across the shape at first, start by working into the short stitches first – or into every third or fourth stitch relating to the guidelines while you practise. Work back along the row and fill in the gaps.

