



How To Guide - Punch Needle

An easy way to create fun and fuzzy images, and a great way to relieve stress, punch needling is really gaining in popularity! Imagine a creative mix of embroidery and needle felting - punch needling uses a needle threaded with yarn which is repeatedly pushed through a piece of fabric to create loops that fill space and form a picture. Satisfying and deceptively simple, punch needling is a great place to start if you've never done any needle crafting.



We've put together this short guide to help you get started on your fantastic needle punching journey!

Getting Started

The best place to start if you're a beginner is with a kit. Most kits will contain everything you'll need for one project: fabric, a punch needle tool, a hoop or frame, and all the yarn you will need.



Kit contents

If you are not starting with a kit, please see our [How to Guide](#) on choosing fabric for your needlecraft project here.

To begin, you'll need to thread your needle and decide which part of the design you would like to begin with. There's no specific place that punch needling needs to be started, though you may find that, as you become more familiar with the craft, starting at a certain point in the design will make it easier for you to work.

Setting up your hoop: A hoop or frame with a strong grip is best for punch needling, as you put a fair amount of pressure on the fabric and need to rely on the frame to stop everything from immediately slipping. The kind of hoops used for cross stitch and embroidery may not be best for punch needling – a more robust one would be a better choice.

To set up your project in a rubber or strong grip hoop, take the fabric you will be working with and place it over the central half of your hoop. Place the outer hoop over the top of the fabric and press down until the fabric sits between the outer and inner hoop. If you're finding it difficult to fit the hoops together, try loosening the outer hoop a little: you can always tighten the hoop once it has fitted onto the inner one. Once the hoop is set up, gently pull the fabric edges to ensure that the surface of the fabric is taut – this will make it easier for you to punch through and avoid any injury or strain. It will also widen the fabric ever so slightly, making the weave more visible.



Hoop incorrectly set up with wrinkled fabric

Hoop correctly set up with taut fabric



To thread your tool: Your needle punch tool should come with a threader which will look like an ordinary needle threader, but much longer.



Push your threader through the opening of the metal tube of your needle until you see wire appear at the other end (the base of the handle). Pull your starting yarn through the wire hook, then pull the wire (and yarn) back up through the tool. Once you have grabbed the end of the yarn, remove the threader and place it through the hole in the tip of the needle; pull the yarn through in the same way. The yarn will now be threaded through the tool. Keep a tail of a few inches when you start each new piece of yarn to firmly anchor your stitches.



To start: Choose a section of your pattern as a starting area – you could work outwards from the centre, from one corner across to the other, or simply start begin at the top and work your way down to the bottom. You might find a way of working that suits you best, or you may find that it will change depending on the design. Keeping a yarn tail behind the needle as you work, punch the needle straight down through the fabric at the starting point and gently bring it out again; there should be a loop of yarn left in the hole you just punched through. The tension of the fabric weave will hold your stitch in place, which is why keeping the fabric taut is so important. Continue in this manner, working away from your first loop, until you have filled the section you are working on. Be sure to keep the tip of the needle close to the fabric as you pull it out – moving the needle too far out from the fabric can cause you to pull out the loop you have just worked.



Working on your project

Once you have the basic idea of how you are creating the image, working your way through the piece should be relatively easy. Follow the instructions and the image guide, switching colours in the right place, and you will probably find that the project comes together pretty quickly. If you do find some aspects are causing difficulties, make sure to check the following:

A smooth and constant motion is key to success. Stopping and starting will create loops of different sizes, making an uneven picture. Figure out the most comfortable way to hold the tool, think ahead to where you're going next, and try to punch through at an even pace – this method is more likely to create a string of even and smoothly worked loops.



Try to make sure you're punching straight down as you work – punching at an angle makes it more likely that you will catch loops you have already created and pull out existing stitches.



Try not to underfill or overfill. Underfilled images will have gaps and will look patchy, but overfilled frames will bulge in odd places, creating an uneven image. Getting the correct number of loops can take practice and it might differ depending on the fabric or the thickness of the yarn you're using. Once you have some experience, you'll start to develop a feel for it and should be able to tell how many loops you'll need in a particular area.



You can, of course, pull out your loops and rework them, but be careful not to do this too often as you may find the fabric begins to show signs of damage (small gaps or holes that do not close up tightly).

If the loops you have created look a little uneven once you have finished a section, you can tease each loop from the back and front to even up their size. Be very gentle and work carefully, though – you don't want to risk pulling out your loops completely and undoing all your work!



Punch needle pieces can look messy whilst you are working on them, and don't look right until you have finished. If you're working from the back to create an image with loops, your stitches will not stand straight until everything is filled in, meaning your image might look uneven at that time. Don't panic! Just keep working.



Finishing

Punch needling is quite forgiving when it comes to sewing in ends. As the stitches themselves are delicately held, pulling the ends firmly to weave them in or knot them is more likely to pull out stitches rather than secure them. How you deal with your ends will depend on the kind of design you are working on – looped or flat stitches.

Looped stitches: To secure the yarn end with looped stitches (both start and finishing ends), pull the end through to the right side and trim it to make it even with your loops. The end will be held in position by the tension in the fabric, just as your loops are. Alternatively, you can cut the yarn on the wrong side and gently weave your end in under the flat stitches on the back – be careful not to pull your loops through as you do this.



Weaving in ends on back of project

Flat stitches: If your design is worked from the front and has the loops on the back (wrong side) of your fabric, it is best to cut the yarn on the wrong side and trim your end to sit evenly with the loops. Alternatively, you could cut the yarn on the right side of the fabric and, using a tapestry needle, pull the end through to the back of the fabric.



What to do with your finished piece

How you finish your piece will depend on what your project was intended for. To make a rug, you would fold under the edges of your fabric and sew them into place; while, for a cushion, sew on a piece of fabric for the back and insert a cushion pad. For decorative pieces that you want to display, you could place your work in a frame or secure it in a needlework hoop ready for display. To do this, trim your fabric so there is an approximate 1" (2.5cm) border of excess fabric around the hoop, work a running stitch around the fabric about halfway between the hoop and the edge of the fabric excess, then gently pull on the thread to gather the fabric at the back of the hoop.



You could add a circle of felt as a backing, to hide the gathering stitches and excess fabric. Maybe take a look at our [How to Guide on Finishing your Needlework Project](#) for additional ideas and information.

Fast, easy and fun, punch needling is a great choice for the casual crafter, or for the more advanced artist who wants to experiment mixing media. Whatever your experience and whatever you decide to do with your work, you might just find you have a brand new craft obsession on your hands!



If you find any of these points unclear, or you just need a little extra help, don't hesitate to email us at sales@woolwarehouse.co.uk or give us a call on 01926 88 28 18.

