

GOT MYTHS?

20 POPULAR
MACHINE EMBROIDERY URBAN MYTHS
&
THEIR CORRESPONDING REALITIES



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About the Author



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lindee Goodall is the founder and former owner of Cactus Punch, the first independent company to design embroidery specifically for the home market. Combining a degree in art, a life long love of sewing and crafts, and a background in programming, Lindee melds the art with the science of creating a smooth running and creative design. With 15 years of digitizing experience, she now owns and operates Lindee G Embroidery, providing quality embroidery designs and educational products.

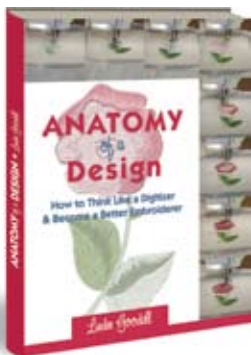


Lindee was an Impressions Magazine 1997 Digitizer of Distinction and won first place for Creative Use of Stock Designs as well as the overall Creativity Award in the 2002 Stitches Magazine Stitch-Off. She also won first place at METS in 1997 for best original digitized design.

She is the author of three self-published books on embroidery: *Anatomy of a Design: How to Think Like a Digitizer and Become a Better Embroiderer* (2009), *Poetry in Motion* (1995) and the *Embroidery Cookbook* (2004) and was a contributor to *Embroidery Machine Essentials* (2001) by Jeanine Twigg.

Lindee has given workshops and seminars on digitizing, embroidery techniques, and how to make money with embroidery. She has taught at numerous venues including: ISS Shows, Original Sewing & Quilt Expo, Creative Embroidery Conference, Houston Quilt Market, Viking, Pfaff, and Singer Conventions, Brother Back to School, Sewing & Stitchery Expo, Martha's School of Art and Fashion, Sydney Arts and Crafts Show, and Echidna Convention. Lindee has been a frequent guest on Martha's Sewing Room, America Sews, America Quilts, Quilting from the Heartland, and Quilting with Shar.

She has also written numerous articles on digitizing and embroidery techniques for Stitches Magazine, Profitable Embroiderer, Threads, Sew News, Creative Machine Embroidery, and Designs in Machine Embroidery.



Keep an eye on my YouTube site. I may not be taping any new PBS shows but here I can do my own mini-segments!

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Lindee G Embroidery
embroidery design & education

20 Popular Embroidery Myths

Over the years I have heard many common “myths” or “fallacies” about machine embroidery. These ideas are perpetuated in classes and especially on the internet. Here are 20 popular misconceptions and their corresponding truths. If you’ve heard an embroidery myth, I’d love to hear about it and add it to my list! Email your myth to imbroidr@gmail.com.

MYTH #1

I need to know how to sew to use an embroidery machine.

REALITY

It is entirely unnecessary to know how to construct a garment or even a pillow for that matter. Beyond threading the machine and loading a bobbin, there isn’t much in common between the two. With embroidery, the machine guides the fabric. My husband was my first “machine operator” and he didn’t know the first thing about sewing machines or sewing—nor could he tell a knit from a woven!—yet he quickly picked up the technique (after inserting the hoop upside down, a needle backwards, and a bobbin in wrong—very scary considering that machine cost as much as my first house!)

MYTH #2

When hooping, always stretch fabric tight as a drum in the hoop and tighten the screw as much as possible for embroidery.

Stretching fabric during hooping distorts most fabrics resulting in puckering once the fabric relaxes back to its natural size when it is removed from the hoop. This puckering is magnified when sewing with polyester thread, especially if your machine tensions are too tight and you are sewing at a high speed. Exceptions to the no stretching rule include Lycra and other fabrics that are worn stretched on the body, which should be stretched to that degree in the hoop.



- Read more on puckering: <http://lindeegembroidery.com/why-does-my-embroidery-pucker/>
- Read more on tensions: <http://lindeegembroidery.com/avoiding-embroidery-tension-headaches/>

Tightening the screw does not evenly distribute tension around the perimeter of the hoop. In fact, it actually loosens the fabric in the area of the screw! Don’t believe me? Try it yourself. Hoop a piece of fabric in a loosened hoop, then tighten the screw. Gently run your fingers over the hooped fabric and you’ll notice it feels spongy near the screw.

Got Myths?

MYTH #3

Use 1 tearaway for wovens, 2 for knits. The thinner the fabric, the heavier the stabilizer; the heavier the fabric, the thinner the stabilizer.

REALITY

Ahhh, if only it were this simple! However, there are no “rules” for selecting backings. Your choice should be based on fabric stability and the design selected. For example, sweat-shirts are thicker than nylon organza but sweatshirts are stretchy and organza is stable. You may only need stabilizer for organza to keep it from slipping through the hoop since it is so thin and slippery. Design size and stitch count and/or density also affect stabilizer choice. A “low impact” design such as redwork or appliqué requires less stabilization than a “high impact” design. The latter includes designs with registration critical details (running stitch outline) and/or designs with high stitch counts, large fills, layers of stitches (lots of shading and/or highlights), or fills running in many varying angles.

- **Tip:** if you are new, use cutaway for everything!

MYTH #4

Serger thread makes the perfect bobbin thread for embroidery.

REALITY

As in baking, the best embroidery is achieved when using appropriate “ingredients.” Bobbin thread for embroidery is

- The right weight (approximately 60 wt)
- The right strength
- Smooth and slub-free
- Made for embroidery!

Another tip about bobbin thread: find out if your machine can use pre-wound bobbins, which brand/type is recommended, or if some modification needs to be made to use pre-wounds.

20 Popular Embroidery Myths

MYTH #5

A good design sews out perfectly on

- Any machine
- Any fabric
- Any color
- Any texture
- Every time

If it doesn't then it is a digitizer problem ("bad" design).



REALITY

No design sews absolutely "perfectly"—ever! Embroidery is an art, art is not perfect. Consider, too, that the hoop is moving and the fabric is being distorted by the tension of the stitches pulling and pushing it. That said there is obviously a difference between "good" embroidery and "bad." Producing a professional looking result is a partnership between the digitizer and the embroiderer. Factors that can affect embroidery quality include:

- Needle can be deflected by previous stitches or the weave of the fabric forcing a stitch to be created "off"
- Thread tensions/jerks can cause a needle deflection
- An old/dull/damaged needle can cause skipped stitches
- Overly tight needle/bobbin can cause gaps and poor alignment, known as registration issues
- Poor hooping techniques can result in fabric slipping during embroidery
- Poor selection/use of backings and toppings can cause gaps and poor alignment
- The wrong fabric/design combination can result in a disaster, at worst
- Textured fabrics and high contrast colors require different digitizing techniques than "average" fabrics

Proper digitizing is only a small part of producing high quality embroidery!

Got Myths?

MYTH #6

When outlines are off, it always means a poorly digitized design.

REALITY

Reputable companies test their designs (how do you think they get the pictures of their embroidery for their catalogs?) Outlines may be misregistered due to:

- Fabric slipping in the hoop
- Backing breaking down and compromising stability before outline sews
- Backing not stable enough for fabric
- Needle/bobbin tensions too tight and causing excessive pulling

SOLUTIONS

- Test design on a stable, neutral colored fabric with the fabric grain running up and down.
- Make sure the machine is clean, tensions are “perfect,” and the needle is new
- Make sure the fabric does not slip in hoop
- Sew on kettle cloth, broadcloth, or the fabric recommended with 1 cutaway
- Don’t expect “perfection” but do demand quality
- Needle deflections will cause slight deviations

If it sews well, it is not a design problem.



The registration problem on the upper design was caused by rotating the fabric 90°.

MYTH #7

Always use a size 90 embroidery needle.

REALITY

You should use a needle that is large enough to carry the thread through the fabric without damage to either thread or fabric. This means finer threads/fabrics require a finer needle while heavier threads/fabrics use a heavier needle. I find that for heavy or sturdy fabrics, I switch to an 80 needle with 40 weight thread otherwise I most often use a size 75. I do use an embroidery needle for nearly every project, even when sewing with metallic threads.

20 Popular Embroidery Myths

MYTH #8

Heat-fusible and “sticky back” tearaways are the best solution for knits.

REALITY

Fusible tearaways offer a false sense of security because they will keep the fabric from stretching during the hooping process. However, as stitches perforate the tearaway, it no longer supports the fabric, which will then stretch. Instead, I prefer a light weight fusible cutaway for light weight knits (often combined with a crisp tearaway) and a medium to heavy cutaway with a temporary embroidery spray adhesive for heavier knits.

MYTH #9

Looping is caused by poor digitizing.

REALITY

Looping is caused by maladjusted machine tensions. Looping is usually more problematic in fills and running stitches with stitches > 3.5mm. Some home machines are not mechanically capable of longer stitches in fills and compensate by programming in tension. However, this generally only works on designs created in their software; “outside” or “converted” designs will not be corrected. (A good reason for choosing a multi-needle embroidery machine!)

Why do digitizers use longer stitches? Longer stitches (>3.0mm) in fills create more coverage with a softer feel, reduces stitch count, and help combat “bullet-proof” embroidery. Longer stitches may also be the result of enlarging a design.

MYTH #10

Bobbin thread pulled to the top is caused by a bad design/poor digitizing.

REALITY

If you have bobbin thread showing on the front of your embroidery, you have a tension problem. Look for a bobbin thread tension that is too loose and/or a needle thread tension that is too tight. You are most likely to find this more problematic in narrow satin columns and on the edges of fill areas where the stitches reverse direction. While there are touch-up pens that are great for occasional repairs, the best solution is balanced tensions. You may find it helpful to have a second bobbin case that is adjusted specifically for embroidery. And contrary to some dealers advice, you will not damage your machine if you adjust the tension screw on the bobbin case.

Got Myths?

MYTH #11

All thread breaks are due to bad (poorly digitized) designs.

REALITY

While a thread break can occur from digitizing techniques, many occur for other reasons unrelated to the design, including the following:

- Damaged needle
- Old, dry thread, cheap thread or “bruised” thread from rough handling or dropping
- Particular thread colors—some dyes weaken threads more (red, black)
- Rough spot on machine (hook, throat plate) from a needle break
- Poor thread feeding, jerk in thread during sewing



The two most common causes of design-related thread breaks are short stitches (<1mm) and overly tight densities (stitches packed too closely together). A handy gadget that is especially helpful for reducing thread breaks with twisty, kinky metallics is the Echidna Control-A-Twist thread stand. Read more about it:

- <http://lindeegembroidery.com/echidna-control-a-twist-thread-stand/>

MYTH #12

All needle breaks are due to bad (poorly digitized) designs.

REALITY

Like thread breaks, it is possible to break a needle in very thick areas but there are other reasons not related to the design:

- Damaged needle
- Cheap needles
- Needle too small for the fabric
- Overly tight tensions, or a jerk in the thread during sewing can cause the needle to bend and hit the throat plate
- Birdsnest, which is a wad of thread building up under the hoop due to a tension problem

I once broke a wing needle in a fil tiré pattern—and that was most definitely not a density issue!

20 Popular Embroidery Myths

MYTH #13

Coffee filters, dryer sheets, and freezer wrap are perfectly suited to backing and are more economical.

REALITY

Once again, quality ingredients produce quality embroidery! The best embroidery results are achieved when using appropriate supplies. Paper products can dull the needle and will not provide stability that proper backings can while dryer sheets have chemicals that may irritate sensitive skin. Stabilizers are inexpensive when purchased in quantity and contribute significantly to the final embroidery quality!

MYTH #14

You can sharpen dull needles with fine sand paper.

REALITY

Yes, believe it or not, I found this gem on the internet on a site dedicated to sewing. Needles are precision instruments that are a critical and integral part of the machine necessary to form proper stitches. Why waste your time? Needles purchased in bulk are very economical.

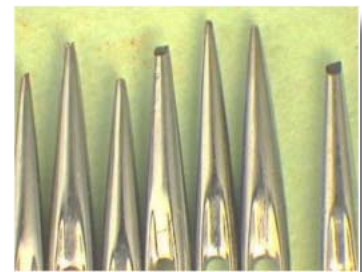


Photo courtesy of Schmeitz

MYTH #15

Testing designs is a waste of time; the designer has already thoroughly tested the design.

REALITY

The designer tested the design on her machine with her fabric and thread. Even when I personally digitized a design that has been sewn many times in the past, I still retest when sewing it anew. Testing is critical to make sure

- The design transferred properly to your machine. Card based machines are more susceptible to corrupted designs when the design has a high stitch count. If there is a power fluctuation (which could be an iron or air conditioner turning on), it may cause the design to transfer improperly. The larger the design, the longer the transfer time and the greater the potential for a glitch.
- That your machine is operating correctly (tension check)
- The design works well with chosen fabric texture/color (test for shrinkage!), thread colors, and backing and hooping methods

Got Myths?

MYTH #16

When making a practice piece, you can use regular sewing or serger thread, any fabric oriented willy-nilly in the hoop, and skip the backing. This conserves expensive embroidery supplies.

REALITY

Testing this way is a waste of time and resources. Purpose of a test is to make sure that all your selections work together successfully! So in this case, myth #15 would be correct.

MYTH #17

Any design can be scaled at least by half or double its original size and still sew with the same quality as the original. The digitizer should guarantee that the design can be scaled any size and with any brand of resizing program

REALITY

If digitizers had to guarantee this you would see pretty boring designs. Beautiful, intricate, and interesting designs are created with a wide range of stitch types and lengths, which can reduce the scalability of a design. For example, if the design has stitches of 1 mm, it should not be reduced in size. Stitches longer than 10-12 mm may cause sewing problems if the design is enlarged.

You will get the best results if you have the same software in which the design was created, which is quite rare unless you created the design yourself. The next best option is to use a good resizing program that has a stitch processor. Be aware that some stitch processors will cause the loss of custom stitch patterns in fills. Even with either of these scenarios, the industry guidelines for resizing are no more than 20% up or down. Scaling beyond 20% can result in details that are no longer proportionate, gaps/holes in designs where stitches are not properly recalculated, and outlines not registering properly.

Without a stitch processor, the recommended max is 10% up or down. Whatever amount you scale the design, know that you are altering that design from the way the digitizer created it and all bets are off, so to speak. Always test resized designs!

Resizing is probably the most oft-made change to a design and while you may think it is a trivial task, it can be quite a challenge when done in “foreign” software.

20 Popular Embroidery Myths

MYTH #18

Embroidery designs for home machines don't need underlay. (Hard to believe, but this one came from a competitor!)

REALITY

Machine type is not a determinant for underlay! Think of it this way: a shed needs support framework as does a mansion. Underlay requirements are primarily determined by:

- Stitch type
- Fabric type
- Desired effect
- Impact of upper stitches on the fabric



Unless a design was digitized in the same software you are using, it is unlikely you will be able to modify the underlay without some digitizing experience, and even then, its not likely to be easy.

A similar myth I'm now hearing in some on-line software classes is that if a design is too thick, you should just get rid of the underlay to lighten it up. Chances are that if a design is too thick, it is the upper layers of the design that are too dense and/or there are too many layers of stitches in an area. Removing the underlay is like taking the framework out of your house, it will only make the rest of the structure more shaky. Instead, reduce the density in the cover stitches and create voids ("holes") under stacks of elements.

MYTH #19

You must use the same brand and colors listed on the color sequence instructions for the design.

REALITY

There are no thread color police! You may use any brand, any color but make sure the thread size is the same. You can even interchange rayon and polyester threads without much issue (unless one is used for a special technique). To convert between thread brands, refer to thread color databases on the web or check your software. Be sure to test your color combinations first if the shading is critical, such as in a realistic animal or flower because there will be variations between brands. Note that if you substitute two-color twist (not variegated), these threads are typically 35 weight and will make your design feel slightly thicker and stiffer if the color sequence called for 40 weight.

20 Popular Embroidery Myths

MYTH #20

Embroidery is as simple as putting some fabric in the hoop, loading some embroidery thread, and pushing a few buttons

REALITY

Only if you are very lucky! Successful embroidery results require:

- Knowledge
- Patience
- Preparation
- Attention to detail!

PARTING COMMENTS

Don't believe everything you hear—especially off the internet! Be sure to evaluate the source of the information for reliability and experience. Even experienced teachers have learned incorrect information and techniques and may pass them on.

Be sure to use the supplies and accessories made for embroidery. This is the quickest and easiest way to improve your embroidery. Better supplies equals better embroidery, or as they say in the computer world, “garbage in, garbage out.”

Always keep in mind that embroidery is a process not an event! Start simple and small so that you can experience success and not frustration. Then proceed at your own pace and try to learn something new each session

As I always tell my students, “make it sew or you won't know.” I truly believe there are two kinds of embroiderers: those who test, and those who wish they had!

Practice doesn't make perfect but it does make you faster and better and it teaches you solutions to problems. Don't be afraid of mistakes, instead, use them as learning tools. Some of the coolest tricks I learned were from a “mistake!”

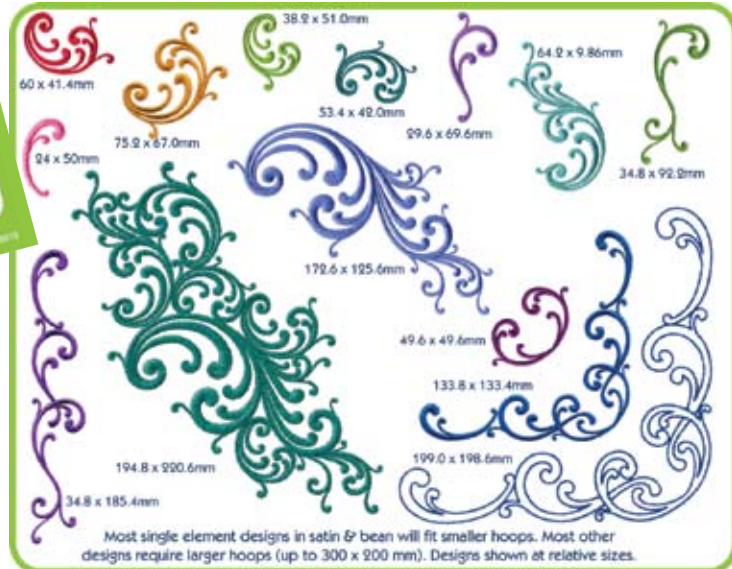
Featured Designs

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FRENCH CURVE CONNECTION

Elegant designs for combining in bean stitch, chain stitch, and satin. Perfect for fashion or home dec. Perfect pairing for crystals and embellishing with other embroideries.



GINGERY CHRISTMAS

Whip up a batch of high-fiber calorie-free ginger cookies that never go stale! Great for last minute gifts!

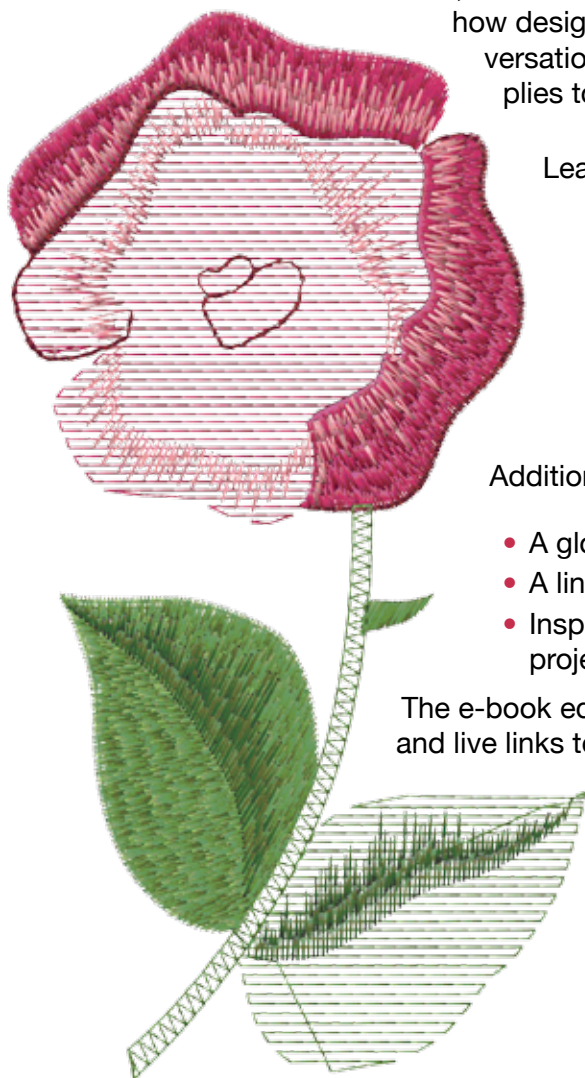


ANATOMY *of a* DESIGN

How to Think Like a Digitizer & Become a Better Embroiderer

Would you like to become a better embroiderer? The secret is understanding how designs are constructed and how that impacts fabric. In other words, you need to learn how to think like a digitizer.

In this book, readers will step into the mind of an experienced digitizer to learn how designs are composed. Written in an easy-to-understand conversational tone, Lindee explains technical jargon and how it applies to both the embroiderer and the digitizer.



Learn about

- Stitch properties including stitch types, length, density, angle, shortening, underlay, tie-offs and compensation
- Which properties are easy to change and which aren't
- How to analyze a design and what to look for
- How various stitch properties affect fabric, thread, and stabilizer selections

Additionally, **Anatomy of a Design** provides:

- A glossary of common terms
- A link to downloadable embroidery and graphic files
- Inspiration for moving beyond the basics into more advanced projects

The e-book edition provides virtual sew-outs to support chapter topics and live links to various web sites.

Visit theAnatomyOfaDesign.com
and watch a
**free video that reveals the
#1 secret to better embroidery!**



Lindee Goodall, a recognized expert in embroidery digitizing, teaches aspiring digitizers and embroiderers, as well as experienced embroiderers everything they need to know about how a design is constructed in order to achieve excellent results.