
Basic Appliqué Beading

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Preface

When I started to bead, about the only thing that I had to guide me was a website that had a few different types of beading described. Three types were described, and none of them were the type that I have come to do regularly. The closest one was the double needle appliqué stitch which they used to make a rosette. One of the other two was loom beadwork. Both of these two techniques looked hard, so I started off with the worst possible stitch I could have. This stitch was the gourd stitch.

I became quite good at doing beadwork with the gourd stitch, and was receiving all types of praise for my work until my good friend Andy Mueller decided to educate himself on matters of regalia, and found out that I really shouldn't be using the gourd stitch in the Northwest. To my dismay, Andy had just told me that I had done all of the beautiful work for naught. It took me awhile to really believe him, but eventually I came around to his way of thinking; after all, he is the master.

It's been a few years now since I started to do appliqué beadwork, and I have been told that I stitch a mean row. Now that I look back at the beginning of my bead career, I see that it would have been really nice to have had a guide to tell me how to do things right the first time around.

I am going to make an attempt now to help new beaders avoid my mistakes in their beading adventures. The information that I am about to dole out has been passed on to me by such greats as Scott Thompson and Andy Mueller with bits that I have puzzled out on my own. It isn't perfect, but it should provide you with some juicy tidbits that will spur on your interest in beading, and hopefully it can help you get past some of those more onerous parts of your pieces.

Good luck in your beading endeavors.

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Introduction

The first two pieces of appliqué beadwork I made were rosettes. One had a wolf head on it, and the other had a buffalo head. My third piece that included some appliqué beading was a leather bag that had a wolf head and the setting sun. At least that is what I think they have on them. Even I can't be quite sure anymore. I included pictures of these three things so that you could laugh at them; I know I do when I am not groaning because of how horrible they are. I have also included these pictures to give a comparison and hope. I did a couple of "practice" pieces in between the pouch and my next piece, and it was in this time that I made a realization that has made beading much easier for me, and will help you. It may sound corny, but I learned to submit to the will of the beads. After this realization I made a piece that is so much better that it isn't even funny. This should give you hope because in a relatively short period of time I went from horrible to fairly good.

If your first piece wasn't as good as that museum piece that you saw, please don't despair. It takes time to become that good. It's not fair to new beaders that we don't get to see other people's first pieces. If you don't keep trying then you can never become better.

To become better at beading, it is going to a lot of practice and a lot of know-how. The practice is the more important of the two. This is because you have to practice the things I am going to tell you for them to do you any good. The know-how is also very important. There isn't much I can do to help you with the practice except to tell you that it will get better with time. I can help you with the "ins and outs" of beading. In this guide I will tell you just about everything I know about beading, from how to do the basic stitch to how to get the beads to lay flat.

The Basic Appliqué Stitch

Appliqué beadwork is a very versatile form of beadwork. It is also often the most useful type of beadwork. Appliqué beadwork is used to make the most detailed patterns. It is stronger than other types of beadwork, and it is easier to repair if the strings get damaged. It sticks less to a predefined pattern which gives the beader an increased range of freedom. Slightly irregular beads can be incorporated into the beadwork without causing problems, unlike loom work and gourd stitch. The fact that appliqué is so versatile is the reason I will be explaining it to you.

There are two types of basic appliqué stitch. The first one, which I will explain in detail, I like to call the running appliqué stitch because of its resemblance to a running stitch in sewing. The second is called the double needle appliqué stitch. I will explain the first in more detail for several reasons, but the main reason is that is an overall better stitch.

Both stitches take about the same amount of time to do. In fact the double needle stitch may be a little faster, but the running stitch will produce a much stronger and better looking product for beginners. Before I go into a discussion of the pros and cons of these stitches I will explain how to do them.

❖ *Running Appliqué Stitch*

The running appliqué stitch is a way to tack down every two beads on your piece. This is done by first sewing down four beads, and then going back through the last two. I have included diagrams of this stitch at the end of this section. To start the stitch a piece of thread is knotted at the end with a couple of overhand knots. The actual type of knot really doesn't matter; the main thing is that it can't pull through the fabric. The thread is then passed through the fabric and four beads are put onto it as in figure 1-A and 1-B. The four beads are then sewn down to the fabric as in figure 1-C. This is done by first laying the beads in the position that you want them in when the stitch is done, and then placing the needle at the end of the row of beads. This will get you a nice tight stitch. I don't suggest pulling the stitch tight at this point because if you do you will just have to loosen it later. At this point it is easiest to turn the piece over and position the needle halfway in between the knot and the where you came through the fabric. You will then go back up through the fabric as in figure 1-D. If the string is not directly between the 2nd and 3rd bead don't sweat it; just as long you

are not in front of the 3rd bead at all you will be fine. If the string is in front of the 3rd bead it will separate the 1st and 2nd from the 3rd and 4th, which does not look good because you will have a gap. Now that the string is back on the top side of the piece, you pass the string through the 3rd and 4th beads as in figure 1-E, and pull the stitch tight. To do another stitch, simply put another four beads on the string and repeats the steps in figure 1-C through 1-E. At the end of your second stitch your beads should look like figure 1-F. When you start to run out of thread, wait until you are on the underside of the piece, and then run your needle under one of the previous stitches before you tie off the thread.

❖ Double Needle Appliqué Stitch

This stitch serves the same purpose, but it takes more experience and is weaker. This stitch is done by stringing all the beads that you will need for a line and then sewing it down in a single stitch. A second needle and thread is then taken to sew over the main thread between every other two beads. If you are good at bringing the needle up through the fabric in the correct place without a whole lot of guesswork then this could be the stitch for you. Make sure that before you sew the line of beads down that you lay the beads out in their final position to make sure that you have enough.

❖ Pros and Cons

Which of these two stitches is the best for you? Most likely it will be the running stitch. Of the two stitches the running stitch is easier to make alterations in direction and length in a pattern. With the double needle stitch you are limited to the original design after you have sewn down the row of beads. If you change the way the beads lay too much from what was originally intended you will have either too many or too few beads on the thread at the end. Strength and ease of repair is another big factor when choosing a stitch. Both stitches have about the same strength, and if you try to fill the bead up with as much thread as you can the strength will be the same for both; I will talk about this technique later on in this guide. The ease of repair is the big thing here. Due to the nature of the stitch if a string is broken in the running stitch you will only lose about eight beads while if a string is broken in the double needle stitch then many more beads will be lost before it can be fixed. Not everything about the double needle stitch is bad. If you are experienced with a needle the double needle stitch can save you a lot of time.

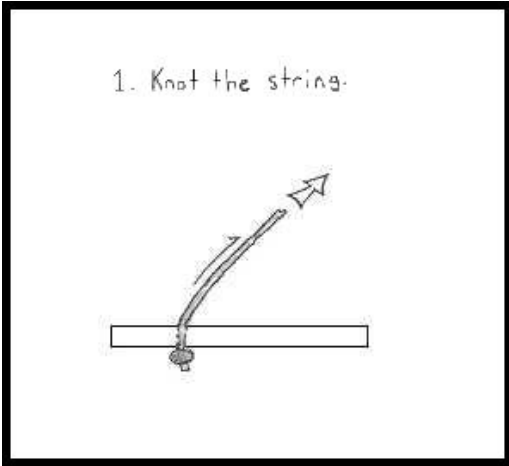


Figure 1-A

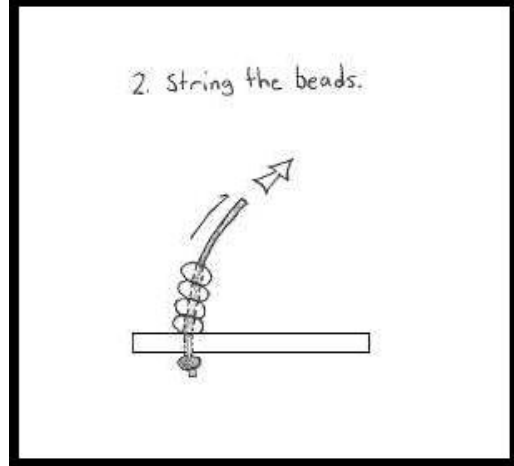


Figure 1-B

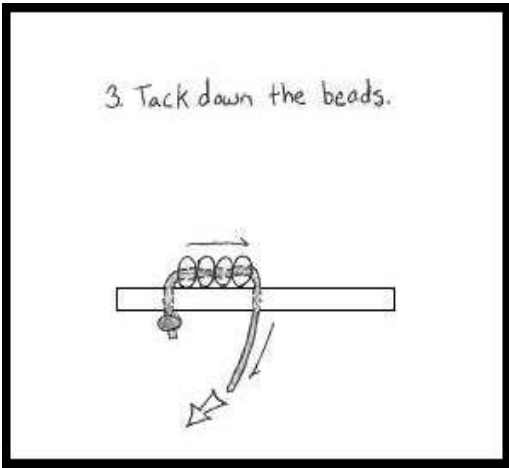


Figure 1-C

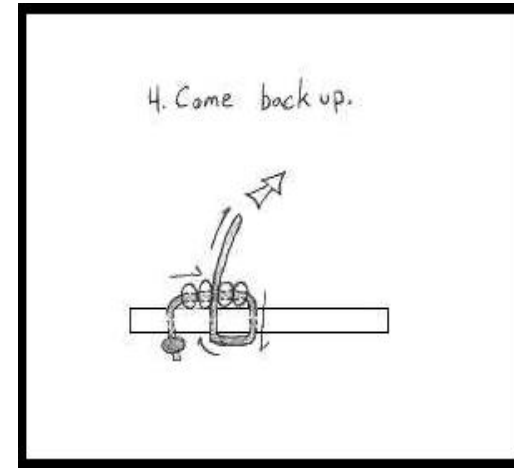


Figure 1-D

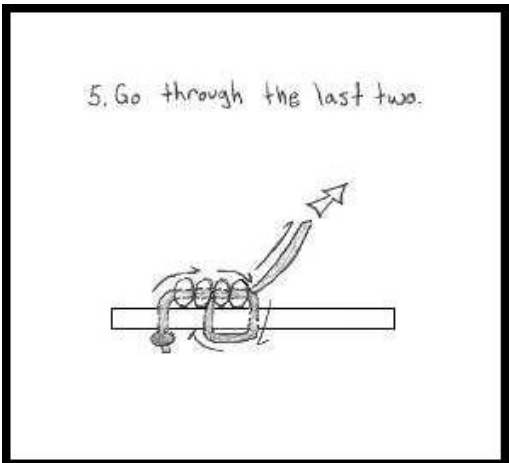


Figure 1-E

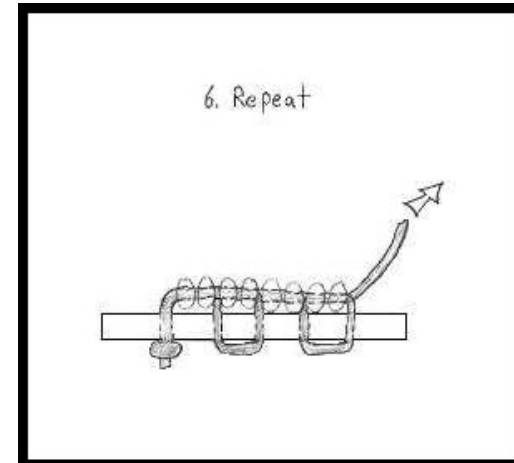


Figure 1-F

Materials

Before I go over a discussion of how to put your piece together I will talk about the different materials you will be using. Having the proper materials will help you greatly towards having a quality piece. Having the proper materials will also prevent a lot of frustration as you are putting your piece together. Having the proper thread will make threading the needle much easier. The right bead size can also make your job much easier. Knowing your materials inside and out will save you a lot of hassle in the long run.

❖ *Beads*

Beads are a great way to spice up a project that you are working on. They add a unique texture and intricate patterns which can make your piece much more interesting. There are many different ways to decorate with beads, and with many different types of beads for that matter, but we are focused on appliqué beading, which means that we will be talking about the seed bead.

Seed beads look like little seeds, and are sold in several different ways. One of the more common ways that you will see if you buy your beads through a bead store or catalogue is beads by the hank. A hank is a bundle of 12 strands each about 12" long. Another common way to buy beads is by the ounce. I strongly suggest that you buy your beads from either a bead store or a catalogue. You will find better quality beads at a better price than if you were to buy them at a normal craft store.

When you're looking at a bunch of beads there are some pitfalls that you should look out for. First of all you should look to see if all of the beads have approximately the same width. How regular you need them to be will depend on what you are doing with them. For the appliqué stitch your beads do not have to be perfect, but if you were doing loom work they would need to be very close to the same. The second thing you should look for is irregularity in the beads. If there are a lot of beads that have slanted sides or are abnormally long you should get a different bunch. These abnormal beads can make your work look really bad, and will just have to be thrown away. A third consideration is whether the color is consistent throughout the bunch. I wouldn't worry about this too much though. Colors being slightly off can be a good thing. If you were out in the woods, and you ran out of a certain color, you sometimes just had to make due with what you had at hand. A slightly off color could add a little bit of character and a splash of a story to your piece.

Sizes on beads can seem rather complex when you first start out, but they aren't very hard. The different sizes of beads are number depending on the size of the hole. As the size of the hole decreases the number of the bead increases. Common sizes of seed beads range from 8-15, with 8 being large and 15 being tiny. Sizes 10 and 11 are probably the most common sizes, and are what you will want to start out with. A word to the wise is the larger the bead, the easier it is to use, but you must remember that when you use larger beads, you will have more problems with making them lie where you want, and you will have more gaps in your work. This is acceptable though when you don't want, or need, to spend as much time on a piece of beadwork.

❖ Thread

The proper choice of thread can make your beading experience much more enjoyable. Many beaders become frustrated with beading because they cannot thread the needle. The culprit may be that they have chosen the wrong type of thread. Don't feel discouraged though because this is a very easy thing to do. There are so many different types and sizes that it is hard to pick the right kind. With a little knowledge about thread can make all the difference.

Let us first look at different types of thread. The most common type of thread is the polyester sewing thread. This is the type that you would use in a sewing machine. I would caution you to stay away from this type of thread. The appeal to the thread is that it is inexpensive and strong, but the downfall is that it is difficult to thread on a beading needle. This type of thread is made from two separate strands that are twisted together to make a single thread. This makes it hard when you go to thread the needle because the two like to separate. If you only get one strand through the eye you will have to pull the thread out and probably cut off that end before you go in for another try. As an alternative you can find single strand threads which are much easier to thread onto a needle. The downfall of these is that they are more expensive. It is worth the extra price. This type of thread is commonly known as nymo, and you can find it at beading stores. A third type of thread that you would use if you want your pieces to be truly authentic is cotton thread. Beware though because this type of thread is not as strong, and will start to rot away long before the synthetic fibers.

If you decide to go with the nymo thread you will find that it comes in different sizes, and different sizes of spools. The sizes work very similarly to bead sizes with

letters replacing the numbers. The largest size is OO with O being the next smallest, and A being after that. A good size to get is around D. Two considerations should be made when you are picking the size of the thread. The first is whether you will be able to thread it on the needle. Size D thread is pretty easy to thread on a standard beading needle while A is pretty hard. The second is the amount of space the thread will fill. You want to try to fill the entire hole of the bead to really keep it in place. Remember that your thread will be double over so you will have four strands going through one bead. With size 11 beads you can only get around six strands of size D thread through a hole. If you try size A with a size 11 bead you might end up breaking your needle or the bead trying to pull the needle through the second time. When you are looking at how much of the nymo thread you will need one of the small spools should be enough to do about 50 square inches of beadwork.

A material that is very closely related to thread is bees wax. They will have this at the bead store and in the catalogues. This is a requirement if you want your piece to last for any amount of time without repair. Run the thread through the wax either before or after you thread the needle. The wax will hold together the fibers of the thread to make it stronger, and it will make the thread more resistant to moisture. When the wax starts to rub away as you bead just run the thread back through the wax. This will also help keep the thread from tangling up as you bead. Don't worry about not getting enough because a little wax will go a long way.

❖ Needles

Whoever thought of using a needle for beading should first be thanked and then be shot. This thin piece of metal is a necessary evil for the beader. Don't worry about those pricked and bleeding fingers; they will heal in time. Like the other categories of materials there are many to choose from. The right choice of a needle can make or break a beader. Here are some tips to help you in your quest for the correct one.

Different lengths and sizes of needles occur just like with beads, and thread. The numbering system for needles is the same as with beads. The number of the needle corresponds with the eye that will fit through the bead. For example you can use a number 11 needle with number 11 beads. As a general rule of thumb you should use a needle that is one size smaller than the beads you are using because of irregularities in whole size (#12 needles for #11 beads). Needles come in two general lengths, long and short. Which one you use depends on what you are doing. In

general the short is a better needle because they do not break as much. The down fall of the short is that they can be harder to grasp. On the up side they are easier to maneuver than the long. The main pro for the long needle is that you can get a better grip on it. The problem with it is that they break more easily than the shorts. When you go to the beading store, you are going to want to get at least 10 needles. If you have beaded for any length of time you should know that you will break needles, and you will break a lot of them. They are not very expensive though so it is okay.

❖ Backing Material

A good choice of backing materials is the first step towards having an excellent piece. The backing material is what holds the piece together. It is also one of the main factors in whether your piece will be flat or bowed. The main types of backing materials that you will be working with are canvas, leather, wool, and clothes such as calico, cotton, felt, trade cloth, etc. I will also add denim to this list because of its availability and qualities even though it is not a period material.

When looking for a backing material you want something that is stiff and easy to sew through. Very often these two things exclude each other. One material that has these characteristics is canvas. This thick cloth is very good for beading. The weaving of canvas will keep your needle in the place you want it, unlike wool which we will look at later. A similar attribute of canvas is that it resists bunching when you pull your thread tight. It also works well in layers with other types of materials. The main thing that would turn you away from canvas is the fact that you can really only bead through two layers with ease. After two it becomes very hard to bead. Here is a word of warning when you go to the fabric store. You are looking for the off white almost yellow type of canvas. There is a canvas that is completely white, but you do not need this. This is a painter's canvas, and it will cost you more and will be finer than anything that you will ever work on.

Beadwork on leather looks really good, but can be very hard to do. Leather is a fairly good material to bead on because you most likely will only need one layer depending on the thickness of your leather. The appeal of leather is that when you pull down on the thread the beads will push down into the leather, and the leather will help to hold them in place. It is also very strong. You will have to be careful to avoid bunching, but that is not too much of a problem. The main problem with leather is that it is hard to sew through. Expect to break a lot of needles and thread if you are doing a project on leather.

Here is a word of warning before I start the section on wool. Do not use only wool in any of your beadwork. You can bead onto wool, but make sure that there is a layer of canvas or some stiffer material behind the wool. Wool by itself bunches horribly. It is also hard to get the needle to go to exact place you want it because of how the fibers are woven together. There are ways to fix this that I will talk about later.

The other fabrics I mention (calico, cotton, felt, trade cloth, etc.) excluding denim should not be used to bead on. They will not add any strength to your beadwork, and if you were to be directly on to one of these fabrics you will have wasted your time because it will not last very long. They can be used to add decorative splashes to your beadwork though. You can substitute a small area of color in your beadwork with a piece of cloth. This will add an interesting texture to your piece. These fabrics are also going for edging around your beadwork if that fits into your design for the overall piece.

I added denim to this list of backing material because of its availability and its qualities. If you are making regalia you should be careful with your denim use because it is a fairly new material. Denim will work very well if you hide it. You can use layers of denim behind layers of canvas or wool, and it will add to the strength of your piece. Denim has roughly the properties of canvas with the added fact that it is more flexible. A couple layers of denim will have about the same effect as a layer of canvas.

❖ Summary of Materials

When you first start out, knowing which materials are the best to use is a bit flustering. Here is a list of what you should probably get.

- Size 10 or 11 seed beads (you shouldn't need more than one hank per color).
- A roll of size D nymo thread.
- A lump of bees wax.
- A package of short size 12 needles.
- Sufficient backing material for your project.
- With these materials you should be on your way to doing your first piece of beadwork.

Beading Class Outline

IV. Setup

- A. A good setup is the first step to a good piece
- B. Plan ahead
 - 1. Anticipate problems in the design
 - 2. Consider beading on to a piece rather than sewing it on later
- C. Layers
 - 1. Layers are essential
 - 2. Thick enough to hold, but thin enough to go through
 - 3. Depends on material available and piece on which you are beading
 - 4. Good rule of thumb is 3 or 4 layers
 - 5. Advantages
 - a. Piece is stronger
 - b. Needle stays straighter
 - c. Piece lasts longer
- D. Pattern
 - 1. Draw in outline of everything
 - 2. Stay away from sharp bend or curves at first
 - 3. Straight lines can be hard to keep straight
 - 4. Curves are easy to pucker or leave gaps

E. Putting it together

- 1. Thread
 - a. Tacking it together ok method
 - b. Takes longest
 - c. Easy to sew through
 - d. Easy to make it pucker
- 2. Glue
 - a. Best method
 - b. Makes it harder to sew through
 - c. Strengthens piece
 - d. Easier to keep flat
- 3. Embroidery hoops and frames
 - a. Best method if you have one that is big enough
 - b. Keeps piece flat
 - c. Keeps fabric in place
 - d. Can be easier to handle

V. Mechanics (procedure for appliqué)

- A. Plan the total piece
- B. Draw pattern
- C. Put together backing
- D. Bead the outline
- E. Fill in the foreground
- F. Fill in the background
- G. Edge the piece

-
1. Cloth edge
 2. Wrapped bead edge
- VI. Techniques (this is the extra .5)
- A. Keeping it flat
 1. Don't shove lines together.
 2. Watch out for irregular beads.
 3. Go back through beads to fill the hole with thread as much as possible
 4. Plan ahead so that there will not be any gaps to fill
 5. Be selective in the gaps you fill
 6. Can really only come with practice
 - B. Filling Gaps
 1. Find the smallest bead you can and turn it to fit the gap
 2. Not every hole is worth filling, can make the piece pucker
 - C. Signature Bead
 1. Makes a mistake so that the piece is not perfect
 2. Tells people who the piece is made by (pink, light blue, pink)
 - D. Keeping things straight
 1. Lines
 - a. To keep lines straight the first line must be straight
 - b. Masking tape is a good guide to keep your first line straight
 2. Sides
 - a. Masking tape for starting side
 - b. Don't worry about finishing side too much (near impossible to keep straight).
 3. Needle
 - a. A paper pattern on top of the piece helps to hold the needle in place.
 - b. Pattern doesn't smudge.
 - E. Making things strong

VII. Conclusion-

So what if your first piece of bead work wasn't perfect. There are very few things that you will be able to do well the first time you do them. The biggest piece of advice I can give you on how to become a better beader is to practice. You'll get frustrated, and you'll prick your finger, and those darned beads won't stay flat, but with each piece you finish I promise that you will see improvement. Hopefully I have given you some building blocks that will help you on your road to beading mastery, but only you can get yourself there. So when you are feeling glum because you just can't get it right remember that I was there with you once, and if I could do it with these shaky hands then you can do it too.

This is stuff I've already done

I. Introduction-

- A. How many have beaded?
- B. How many were happy with what you did?
- C. Keep practicing
 - 1. *Show Wolf bag and armband*
 - 2. Practice makes perfect
 - 3. There is hope

II. Mechanics- (basic appliqué stitch)

- A. *Materials- hula hoops and rope*
- B. Appliqué Demo
 - 1. Call someone up to hold hoops and someone to be a knot
 - 2. Do basic stitch
 - 3. Call up second volunteer and do second stitch

III. Materials-

- A. Beads
 - 1. Size
 - a. *Pass around hanks*
 - b. Vary from 8-15
 - c. Hole size is smaller as number gets larger
 - d. My preferred size (11) vs. theirs (10)
 - e. Irregular shapes
 - 2. **Color**
 - a. Backgrounds- white, light blue, pink
 - b. Low contrast (black and white photo)
 - c. Yellow centers

B. Thread

- 1. Type
 - a. Specialty vs. regular
 - b. Sizes (OO, O, A, B, C, D, E, F)
 - c. Size to hole ratio
- 2. Characteristics
 - a. Strong
 - b. Single strand
- 3. Wax
 - a. Wax thread before you start
 - b. Lengthens life of piece

C. Needle

- 1. *Hold up a needle and ask who can see it?*
- 2. Types
 - a. Long vs. short
 - b. Eye sizes
 - i. At least one size smaller than the bead
 - ii. Larger number means smaller eye

3. Tips for threading

- a. Patience
- b. Try, try, and try again
- c. Buy thread made for beading
- d. Wet the tip of the string, but don't soak it

D. Backing material

1. Types

- a. Cloth (calico, cotton, felt, (trade cloth))
 - i. Too thin alone
 - ii. Good for decorative touches and edging
- b. Wool
 - i. Good in layers
 - ii. Easy to bead through
 - iii. Wandering needles
 - iv. Has to be on frame or it bunches
- c. Canvas (my favorite)
 - i. Excellent in layers
 - ii. Holds the needle in place
 - iii. Can be hard to sew through
 - iv. Strong
- d. Leather
 - i. Hardest to work with
 - ii. Looks good
 - iii. Strong
 - iv. Can bunch
- e. Denim
 - i. Good for a middle layer
 - ii. Can't be visible in the end product
 - iii. About the same quality as canvas but more flexible