

Teaching in Your Shop

Part I: Class Planning

by Martha Beth Lewis

In-shop classes are one of the best ways to get customers into your shop. Classes energize stitchers and put them into direct contact with new materials, patterns, and special services you provide. Classes also can be great marketing and advertising tools. To maximize the benefits, planning is the key to a gangbuster class!

This article will address class planning. Following articles will discuss selecting the teacher and project, making kits, and writing the class handout.

Class Goal. What do you want the class to do? Get people into your shop so they can browse before and after class? Offer a value-added activity? Educate stitchers so they are unafraid to buy more complex designs and therefore enable you sell more exotic threads and fabrics? Acquaint stitchers with a certain designer's work, such as a class in conjunction with a trunk show? More than one goal? Know your goal before doing anything else.

Student Level. Will the class be aimed at a specific student level (beginners, such as Girl Scouts)? If so, which level? You'll probably have better registration, however, if the class appeals to several levels. When you take class sign-ups, ask how experienced the stitcher is. For example, knowing that there are some people who have never stitched on evenweave will be useful to the teacher so she can prepare adequately.

Kit Costs. How do you propose to cover costs for kit materials? Recoup your expenses based on wholesale prices? At list or perhaps at a slight discount?

Profit Projection. What is your financial target? Yours is not a charitable enterprise; for this reason you probably want to make a profit on this class.

- Enough to cover the kit materials at wholesale cost? At retail?
- Enough to cover only the teacher's fee?
- The teacher's fee plus your costs for kit materials?
- The teacher's fee and kit

materials, plus overhead?

- No profit at all because this is an experiment to see if your customers would be willing to take classes? (Note: Be aware, with this option, that you are setting a precedent in your shop and customers will expect free or, at the least, very inexpensive classes. I don't recommend this choice. Start the way you want to continue.)

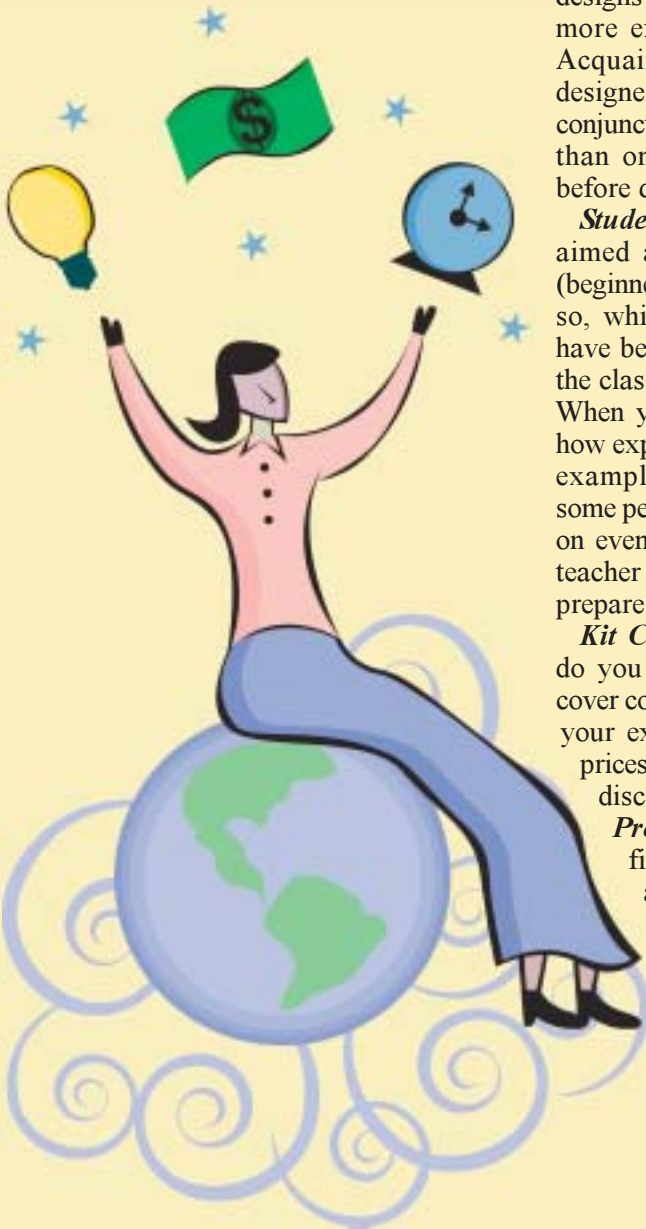
Class Type. What will actually go on during class? Choose one of the following class types and build the class around it.

- Teach stitches and techniques only. Start the piece if there is time.
- Put primary emphasis on stitching the piece. Starting correctly is always important, especially if the students must baste or do other preparation tasks before actually setting in stitches—or if there are challenging threads or fabrics or less-experienced stitchers.

- Choose a small project so it can be almost finished when students leave class. This is a particularly good option if you offer framing or other finishing in your shop and want to discuss in class how your customers might use these services on their almost-completed piece. It's a good option any way you slice it because it gives students the satisfaction of finishing something, and they'll be ready to buy a chart and materials for their next project.

Shop Disruption. Having a class in your shop will definitely cause a disruption, which may be unobtrusive or have a noticeable impact on retail activities. These interruptions, or the amount of them, may influence decisions you make about the class. Primary factors are logistics, class date and time, shop staff, and extent and duration of the disruption.

- Is there a place for the class where shoppers don't have to step around students to get to the merchandise?



•Is there a day of the week or time of the year that would cause the least disruption? A time of day?

•If shop personnel are teaching, how long can you get by short-handed? If you are teaching, how long can you be away from the business activities? How long a disruption is acceptable?

Class Length.

Class length may influence how good the registration is. It also determines whether your students need a break and how customers will feel about the class.



Very long classes will appeal to only a few customers. Some stitchers can stay focused for quite a while, but others become restless after two hours or so. Class length has a great deal to do with customer satisfaction with the class. You want stitchers to leave with warm feelings, not headaches! Class length also may dictate how involved you are in the class. If you are teaching, how long can you be away from your own duties? If a “crisis” arises, how long can you wait to deal with it? Do you have knowledgeable staff that can solve a problem or put it on hold successfully until you are finished teaching? You shouldn’t leave class to put out shop fires. Students are paying to study with you.

Breaks. Suppose you decide on a 4-hour class. In this case, you probably will need to give students a short break: 15 minutes at the most, but 10 minutes is better because a shorter break maximizes class time. You want your stitchers to leave happy. They’ll be happier the farther along in the project they are when they leave class.

Be aware that breaks tend to extend themselves, however, thus using up even more class time. Before the break, state that it will be “10 minutes only”, and that class will start again after that time. Give stitchers a “two-minute warning” so they can do whatever needs doing. At zero,

announce, “We’re starting! Come on!” and then do it!

Although it may seem inhospitable, I suggest that you not offer a snack during a break. This increases the chance for an over-long break and means allowing extra time for washing-up. And did I mention spills and crumbs in the shop? Smudges on your merchandise?

Last, breaks derail concentration. Some stitchers might even forget the new technique they were learning and/or be confused about what comes next. Make sure your students know that they may take breaks whenever they wish, but that there will be no formal break and class will continue. Usually stitchers will slip out during the stitch time, not the instruction time.

An all-day class (6 hours, broken into two parts) will need a lunch break: 30 minutes is about right. These folks have come to stitch. They can socialize after class while they’re selecting things in your shop they want to purchase! Again, lunch will tend to run overtime, so use the “warning” system.

Will you provide lunch? Will you serve drinks and/or dessert and ask the stitchers to bring whatever else they want (sandwich, salad)?

All this said, I recommend a 3-hour class! No break is needed, and, provided the project is not too complex, students can learn the techniques and begin the project. If the stitching project is easy-ish, your customers can be fairly far along when class ends. A class this length also decreases shop disruption.

When to Hold the Class. When the class is given will determine, in part, how good the registration is.

You don’t want to cancel the class because of low registration: a large part of your efforts will be wasted, and word will get out that the attempt to have a class was a bust—not very good for your shop’s reputation.

•If you anticipate the shop will seem crowded/noisy and perhaps uninviting to customers who are not

there for the class, perhaps “off hours” would be a good time to schedule the class: Sunday afternoon or an evening.

•Perhaps you have a day and/or time when the shop is historically less busy. If so, consider this, as long as you think it is convenient enough to attract students.

•Set a date and time that minimizes shop disruption but also maximizes the chance of filling the class.

•Bad times for classes: Not right before or after a commercial festival (such as CATS) or an EGA/ANG seminar (money may be gone and stitchers may be “stitched out” for a while). Not after the holidays (money is gone). Not just before or after tax time (ditto). *Perhaps* not in your slowest months (there may not be enough registrants).

More on planning in the next issue. See the sidebar for the other articles in this series.

“Class Planning”
(this issue)

“More on Class Planning”
(May/June issue)

“Selecting The Design and a Teacher”
(July/Aug. issue)

“Preparing the Kit”
(Sept./Oct. issue)

“Preparing the Written Directions”
(Nov./Dec. issue)

Martha Beth Lewis has taught at consumer festivals for seven years and writes for consumer needlework magazines. She is the author of *Handbook for Needlework Teachers: An Experienced Festival Teacher’s Advice* (marthabeth.comhandbook.html) For more on needlework, visit her site at www.marthabeth.com.

Martha Beth Lewis
4120 Canyon Crest Road West
San Ramon, CA 94583
925-735-3533 voice 735-6261 fax
marbeth@comcast.net e-mail

Teaching in Your Shop

Part II: More Class Planning

by Martha Beth Lewis

The previous article covered class length, profit, etc., but there are a few other points needing attention at the planning stage so your shop class is a fantastic success.



Teaching Area. If you are lucky, you have a dedicated teaching/casual stitching area in your shop. If not, can you clear a small space for a short time to make room for a table by moving spinners, etc.? Students shouldn't impede other customers' ability to move around in the shop.

Although you can hold class in an entirely different venue (library, community center), this negates the class's main *raison d'être*: to get those stitchers into your shop to buy!

Teaching Equipment. You must have a table. There's no way around this. Stitchers shouldn't be asked to balance things on their laps.

You must have good light. There's no way around this, either. Eyestrain and over-many mistakes because stitchers can't see won't reflect positively on the future of shop classes and on your business itself.

It is wonderful if you have lighted magnifiers for each student, but you probably don't, so:

- Bring in some table lamps and floor lamps from home and/or from staff members' homes.

- Failing this, position the table near a window. Is the table long enough so that no stitcher must sit back-to-the-window and thus cast a shadow on the work?

- Hold class outside—weather, breeze, bugs, and shade permitting, of course!

- Ask students to bring their own light and/or magnification.

Class Size. How many can the teaching accommodate? How many students do you (or your teacher) feel comfortable teaching? I recommend a maximum of 12.

It's better to have a class that could have been larger and have stitchers leave delighted at the personalized attention they received than to have a class so large that students feel lost in the shuffle. Remember, this class is a marketing tool. Make it as appealing as possible to your students!

What is the smallest number that would make the class worth the costs, prep, promotion, and shop disruption? The answer is usually 5.

What happens if you don't have sufficient registration to make the class a go? Reschedule the class? Cancel altogether? Have a plan.

Cancellation and Waiting List. Will you allow students to cancel? (You should.) Will you refund a fee in cash or in merchandise certificates? What date would you set? (A week before is standard, although you could take cancellations right up to class time if you refunded with merchandise certificates.)

When taking the waiting list, be sure to note the date along with the name.

Registration Cut-Off. You'll probably want to set a cutoff date because you'll need to order leaflets and/or make class kits. If the kit is not complicated, you can pull from your stock just before class and keep registration open right up to class time.

Advertising. You already know the general drill, but here are some ideas that relate specifically to an in-shop class.

Paintbrushes & Sawdust

Hand-painted
Treasure Boxes
and Frames with
matching
canvases



Phone 870-862-3304

www.paintbrushesandsawdust.com

Elegant Heirlooms

Christmas Stocking Kits for Knitters

Net 30 Terms
No Minimums
Trunk Shows Available

New product review, Vogue Knitting, Fall Issue

www.elegantheirlooms.com

888.828.4347 / 704.867.5808

Before the Ride...
Sugg. Retail \$70

Googleisms



Down the Chimney
Sugg. Retail \$32

- Have the stitched model where customers will see it, usually at the cash register, where it can be kept under a watchful eye at all times. Unfortunately, thefts occur. Try to have the model on display a month before the class.

- If your cash register is not in a place stitchers see upon entering the shop, use a color picture positioned so customers see it right away. An oversized color photocopy or enlarged photo are both good choices. If the piece is from a retail leaflet you could post the leaflet with its own cover picture, but a bigger picture is much better from an attention-getting aspect.

- Put information fliers for the taking at the cash register. Customers who didn't buy anything this time still will have the opportunity to pick up the information.

- Pack a flyer in each bag, pointing out what it is as you put it in.

- How about placing a stack of fliers beside the stacks of freebie charts?

- Describe the class to each customer leaving and entering and shop, as well as those you help on the floor. Your staff should do the same. Example: After describing the class, ask "Would you like to register?" Don't ask, "What do you think?" You don't want their opinion. You want their registration.

- If the class project is by a designer whose work you carry, display the project along with the artist's leaflets and any models you or customers might have.

- Don't forget that customers are a great source for models. Ready access for you and "name in lights" for them. Take care that customers' models are positioned in a place that is constantly monitored by staff.

- Talk up the class by reminding customers they can give gift certificates good for the class, as well as for merchandise/finishing. Put this suggestion in the flyer. If you're offering any discount to students, put this on the flyer, too.

- If you have a shop newsletter, give your class prominent play, starting as soon as the class is scheduled (or you know what month it will be). Advance notice is beneficial, even if you haven't firmed all details.

- Important note: If you're using an image of the design for any of these purposes, ask the copyright holder for permission (either the designer or the publisher).

Miscellaneous. Stitchers should bring their scissors (and their other

must-have stitching tools). Make sure this is clear in your advertising and reiterated at sign-up. Even so, some stitchers will forget their scissors. They can borrow from a neighbor, or you can have a pair on hand.

Particularly mention magnification at sign-up time if you will not furnish it.

If you sell magnification/stitching lights, consider making the lights available to students at a small discount on class day.

Consider discounting your high-end lighted magnifiers, too. Getting a class discount may be just the thing that nudges the fence-sitters into the substantial purchase.

If special tools are needed (or recommended) for the class, such as straight-bladed scissors for Hardanger, you might offer students a discount on these on class day.

How about other discounts for registrants? Do you want to offer a discount on all purchases made on class day? For purchases which meet or exceed some minimum?

Receiving a lower price on one purchase usually means the stitcher can rationalize buying something else with the money "saved," and often this second purchase is more expensive than the money not spent on the discounted item!

Telling your customers in advance that certain items will be discounted for students in the class can increase class registration, as well as producing after-class sales.

With careful planning, your class can generate great buzz about your shop and sales of other materials, as well as making the class itself an enjoyable activity.

Next issue: Choosing the design and the teacher. See the sidebar for the other articles in this series.

Martha Beth Lewis has taught at consumer festivals for eight years and writes for consumer needlework magazines. She is the author of *Handbook for Needlework Teachers: An Experienced Festival Teacher's Advice* (marthabeth.com/handbook.html) For more on needlework, visit her site at www.marthabeth.com.

"With careful planning, your class can generate great buzz about your shop!"



"Class Planning"
(March/April 2004)
"More on Class Planning"
(this issue)
"Selecting The Design and a Teacher"
(July/Aug. '04 issue)
"Preparing the Kit"
(Sept./Oct. '04 issue)
"Preparing the Written Directions"
(Nov./Dec. '04 issue)

Martha Beth Lewis
4120 Canyon Crest Road West
San Ramon, CA 94583
925-735-3533 voice
925-735-6261 fax
marbeth@comcast.net e-mail
<http://www.marthabeth.com> website

Teaching in Your Shop, Part III: Selecting The Design and a Teacher

by Martha Beth Lewis

You've done the logistical planning for your in-shop class. Now you're ready for the artistic decisions.

Teacher Choice. The teacher is a factor critical to class success and thus the class's effectiveness in promoting your shop and increasing your sales.

Teacher alternatives: you, a staff member, a guest teacher (a local "stitching celebrity", a professional teacher or knowledgeable customer), or a designer from out of town. Sometimes someone nationally-known will be nearby, at an EGA or ANG activity, for example, and will be amenable to teaching a shop class while in the area.

Another possibility is to invite an up-and-coming designer to teach one of her pieces. You may be able to negotiate her teaching for no fee in exchange for promoting her work in your shop. You will want to have a special display of her other designs and perhaps even a discount on them to encourage customers to buy the work of someone new. Ask her for stitched models and get them up at least a month in advance.

Select the teacher carefully. Considerations:

- How engaging is the teacher's personality? Many students take classes for the "entertainment value," as well as the educational value and the appeal of the project.
- How good is the teacher at *teaching*? We've all had intelligent instructors who were lousy at actual teaching.
- Is the teacher experienced with



groups the size you anticipate? Some designers have never taught a class before and may be reticent to teach. A small class may be enough inducement to bring them into the teaching fold!

And, now, money! Should you pay the teacher? Probably. Expect to pay a professional designer/teacher her standard fee—unless you are able to negotiate a smaller amount or a gratis arrangement. (What will you do for her in exchange?)

If one of your staff members teaches, pay an honorarium in compensation for the extra effort entailed—that is, an amount above the regular shop wage. If you pay

your staff in shop discounts, I suggest you offer a monetary teaching fee also.

Therefore, when researching guest teachers, one of the initial questions to be settled is the teaching fee. How does this fee, when added to kit costs, impact your desired profit? What about a pro from out of town? This can be expensive, as these teachers have additional fees for travel, accommodations, and meals. If you are piggybacking on another organization's invitation to the teacher, see what you can work out about sharing the fees.

For a teacher you don't know, ask for references and check them!

If you are able to find independent references, listen carefully for anything not in accord with what the teacher's own references have to say. If you are considering a non-staff teacher and the person does not state a dollar amount when you ask, be ready to suggest one. This way you can control this cost. Don't hem and haw with, "Well, I don't know. What do you think is fair?"

For a half-day class (not with a visiting pro), consider \$50 for teaching 10 students. If students pay \$15 for the class and the kits cost no more than \$5 each in materials, for 10 students, you'll have \$100 left. \$20 per student? So much the better. Even more? Great!

As noted, if your teacher is launching her design business, she might teach for no fee, just for the promotion value of the event. As to kits, you can make them from your stock, or, if the designer sells her work as kits and you do not carry her line, you might be able to negotiate to buy kits from her at below wholesale, sell them at retail as part of student fee, and still have her teach the class gratis. In this agreement, both parties will come away with something.

Teacher Contract. I strongly suggest a contract with a teacher. In fact, the teacher may require one. A contract spells out clearly what you expect, what the teacher expects, date and time of the class, all financial matters, and how contingencies are handled.

If you are unfamiliar with what should go into a teaching contract, get in touch with your local EGA/ANG chapters and ask if they would be kind enough to give you a sample of their contract. These contracts tend to be exceedingly detailed, so, for all but a professional, you probably can streamline it.

Design Selection. The design itself is a crucial element. If the project isn't appealing, the class won't fill, regardless of who's teaching it.

The pattern you choose can be anything from a style (primitive Americana, Victorian elegance) to local interest (landmark, sports team) to a holiday. You know what sells well in your shop. Select a project type that's a winner for you.

On the other hand, how about something different? Such a choice could work out well if you are introducing a new designer's work or a new line in the shop.

Some designs lend themselves more easily to a specific class type. For example, a band sampler is a good choice for a class whose goal is to teach stitches/techniques or introduce exotic materials.

If you are unsure how well the class project you're considering will "sell," ask your customers who buy a lot and/or whose judgment you trust. Students who attend consumer shows (such as CATS) also can offer feedback about which class types are popular.

Remember not to make the design so complex that it impedes substantial progress during class, even if the class is for advanced stitchers.

Design Source. Where will you get the chart? Here are some ideas:

- Use a retail chart from a designer whose work sells well in your shop. Perhaps you might teach a designer's newest piece as a class. Maybe something that you just bought at Nashville, as an enticement to visit the shop and see what else is new?
- Use a designer's freebie chart, either one available for unfettered distribution or one only a shop may photocopy. Freebies are used as a way to get stitchers into the shop. Why not use one of them as a class? Note: Contact the designer and tell her that you are interested in using the piece as an in-shop class, and, therefore, will need to kit it. Ask permission. Nearly all freebie charts state that the design may not be kitted or sold. What designer would say no to permission for this purpose?!

- Use a project you or one of your staff members designed.

Pre-Work. Will pre-work be required? Sometimes teachers ask for pre-work to save class time.

Pre-work is not a good idea for a shop class unless this is an advanced class and you *know* your registrants are fully capable of doing this particular type of pre-work correctly on their own, and even so, this is risky. Pre-work done incorrectly must be ripped, which slows down the stitcher and starts class on a sour note.

If the design is complex enough to need pre-work, it probably should not be considered as the project.

The next article will be on preparing the kit. See the side-bar for the other articles in this series.

Martha Beth Lewis has taught at consumer festivals for eight years and writes for consumer needlework magazines. She is the author of *Handbook for Needlework Teachers: An Experienced Festival Teacher's Advice* (marthabeth.com/handbook.html) For more on needlework, visit her site at www.marthabeth.com.

"Class Planning"
(March/April 2004)
"More on Class Planning"
(May/June 2004)
"Selecting The Design and a Teacher"
(This issue)
"Preparing the Kit"
(Sept./Oct. '04 issue)
"Preparing the Written Directions"
(Nov./Dec. '04 issue)

Martha Beth Lewis
4120 Canyon Crest Road West
San Ramon, CA 94582
925-735-3533 voice
925-735-6261 fax
marbeth@comcast.net e-mail
<http://www.marthabeth.com> website

Teaching in Your Shop, Part IV: Preparing the Kit

by Martha Beth Lewis

Previous articles discussed planning, plus selecting the design and the teacher. Let's look at the kit.

Importance of a Good Kit. The importance of a good kit should not be underestimated! Students first judge a class by the contents and quality of the kit. Students form their opinions the moment they see the kit, whether they've threaded their needles or the teacher has said a word. Are they predisposed to like this class? Other classes in your shop? Your shop as a whole?

Know Your Costs. Be sure to allow for costs of kit materials—including a needle and a plastic zipper bag—when contemplating the amount of income you want to generate with the class. (See the previous article for some examples of student fees and the first one for more about finances.)

Obtaining Kit Materials. One way or the other, you want the kit materials to generate sales:

- Using a ready-made kit is an excellent option. Everything is there, perhaps even the needle. Probably all you'll have to do is iron the fabric. Ready-made kits can drive up the class price, however, or reduce your proceeds.



Calculate carefully.

- Making kits is another option. This is probably the most common choice and is what you'll do if you're using a freebie chart.

- Having students purchase their own materials from a list you or the teacher provides is not really an option. Will the students buy the correct supplies? Will they buy them from *you*?!

Kit Contents. If you're using a ready-made kit, open each one and make sure everything is there. Iron the fabric.

Consider serging or zig-zagging the edges of the project cloth. Unfortunately, some kit fabric cuts are rather meager, and normal handling can result in fraying that dramatically reduces

the fabric margin left for finishing. Make sure the chart is readable. Don't assume it is!

Kitting hints:

- Don't make skimpy kits. Use full skeins of floss.
- Use double the number of beads the pattern calls for. Put them in a 2" x 2" plastic zipper bag or other container. The beads shouldn't roll around loose in the project bag. Buttons and charms generally are large enough to swim with the thread and fabric.
- Include a generous cut of fabric. The general rule is to add 6" to each dimension of the design

area. Example: The design area is 2" x 2", so the project cloth should be 8" x 8". Yes, this does seem excessive. A 6" x 6" project cloth will suffice for a project this small. However, a large design area, say, 8" x 8", needs the full 6" additional fabric (14" x 14").

- You may want to add a doodlecloth if there are some unusual stitches (and if it's a pre-made kit with a minimal fabric cut). Perhaps the project cloth is big enough and students can doodle in the margins?

- Check that the is chart legible, especially if you are copying from a copy.

- Use a 9" x 12" plastic zipper bag. If the fabric cut won't fit in the bag, distribute the fabric separately to each customer so you don't have to put it in the bag at all. Sometimes a gallon bag from the grocery store will work if there isn't too much paper. It might be amenable to put threads in a quart-sized grocery store bag, so you can give out the paper and fabric separately.

- If you're putting the entire kit in the bag, put the paper handout on the bottom of the pile. Place the chart on top, then the fabric, and finally the thread.

Assembling the Kit. Allot time and care to kit. Your time is worth a lot, however! If you "subcontract" this task to your kids, how reliable are they? Will you have to check their work? If so, it may take less time to make the kits yourself!

No matter how the kit is created, you must prep the fabric.

Will you prep the raw edges? Certainly, you'll have to iron the fabric. Here's a hint for removing

“Work systematically to insure accuracy. Put items in each kit in the same order so you don't miss anything.”

stubborn folds: Wet the fold thoroughly and place the fabric in the microwave for 30 seconds. Remove and iron. Take care! It's hot! You may need to repeat the process several times.

Work systematically to insure accuracy. Put items in each kit in the same order so you don't miss anything. To simplify this, make piles of needed materials and always work left-to-right (or vice versa), counting each item as you place it in the bag.

Count the pieces remaining in each pile every three kits so you don't have to paw through the all finished ones to find which is missing the skein of medium pink floss.

Other Considerations:

- The kits should be neat-looking and packed alike.

- The needle should not be parked in the project cloth! If there's a doodlecloth, put the needle there. Otherwise, put it through a small piece of paper or fabric. Have extra needles on hand during class.

- What about offering multiple colorways? If you make multiple colorways available, I suggest letting the students select thread

colors just before class time. If you make kits for students to choose at the beginning of class, inevitably someone will be unhappy because kits in the desired color already have been chosen. Avoid this aggravation. Identical kits are the way to go!

Next time, it's all about the printed class handout. See the side-bar for the other articles in this series.

Martha Beth Lewis has taught at consumer festivals for eight years and writes for consumer needlework magazines. She is also the author of *Handbook for Needlework Teachers: An Experienced Festival Teacher's Advice* (marthabeth.com/handbook.html) For more articles on needlework, visit her site at www.marthabeth.com

“Class Planning”

(March/April 2004)

“More on Class Planning”

(May/June 2004)

“Selecting The Design and a Teacher”

(July/Aug. 2004)

“Preparing the Kit”

(this issue)

“Preparing the Written Directions”

(Nov./Dec. '04 issue)

Martha Beth Lewis

4120 Canyon Crest Road West

San Ramon, CA 94583

925-735-3533 voice

925-735-6261 fax

marbeth@comcast.net e-mail

<http://www.marthabeth.com> website

Teaching in Your Shop, Part V: Preparing the Written Directions

Previous articles discussed planning, plus selecting the design and the teacher. Let's look at the written instructions.

by Martha Beth Lewis

Now we're down to the last step in preparing for an in-shop class: the written directions. These are for guidance during class, as well as for stitching at home.

Will you need them? There's a 90% chance you will.

What Written Directions Are Not. A chart. Or a chart and a couple stitch diagrams.

What Written Directions Are. The directions are a running commentary about stitching the project, as though the teacher were at home beside the student. Directions are particularly important if there are fancy stitches, areas stitched over one thread, advanced materials, etc.

Good directions create students who will be delighted with the class and will come back to the shop to see what else is planned, have you finish it, show off the completed piece, and/or buy materials for future projects. This is what the class is designed to do: get customers into the shop to buy! You've planned carefully, hired a great teacher, and made excellent kits. Don't shoot yourself in the foot by having poor—or no—directions.

You may not be able to rely on the directions in the leaflet because layout restrictions often mean the designer must sacrifice detail in the instructions. This is why you write extra directions: to amplify or fill in the holes.

Exception: A chart with cross stitches only and no specialty threads or embellishments probably will not need written directions.

On the other hand, don't work harder than you have to by repeating information already on the chart.

Student Level and Written Directions. Assume the students know nothing, even though you suspect they do know the basics. Ok, you don't have to include how to do a cross stitch (or perhaps a backstitch), but do all students know that all satin stitches should start "from the same end"? I'll bet they don't!

Content of the Directions. The directions should be clearly written and generously illustrated so students can finish the project successfully. Remember, your class is a marketing tool, and you want that tool to work!

Include stitch diagrams, other illustrations (such as location of basting lines), enlarged sections of the chart, and the master chart.

Obviously, if you are using a shop freebie, you'll have some writing to do.

If you're using a retail leaflet, you only may have to expand on some of the points the designer assumes the stitcher knows, such as how to make

kloster blocks. Perhaps you'll want to offer a few stitch diagrams or larger versions of them.

Accuracy. Make sure the directions are accurate! It's hard to imagine anything that could be more embarrassing!

Layout. After content accuracy, readability and clarity are the next most important concerns.

Sometimes commercial layout constraints require sacrifice of fine points such as stitch diagrams and enlarged charts of detailed portions of the design.

- Keep the typeface at 10.5 or 11 points. Anything less will be difficult to read.

- Do not use all capital letters. All caps impairs readability.

Stitch Diagrams. It's likely you will find yourself needing to draw stitch diagrams, either to illustrate a freebie chart or clarify a retail chart.

- Make them large and clear, not microscopic.

- If needed, show stitches in multiple steps, especially complex stitches, such as a row of eyelets.

Investigate *EasyGrapher Stitch*



Wiz (www.easygrapher.com), a program that draws stitch diagrams to rival those in magazines. There's even a needle! (Secret: Some magazines use this software!)

Unless you want to spend most of class mastering stitches, you'll want to zip through stitch-teaching as quickly as possible. You want students to leave class with as much stitching done on the project as possible! Happy stitchers = loyal customers who are frequent buyers.

Enlarged Detail Charts. Your students may have greater success with the project if highly-detailed areas of the design are enlarged. Ask the designer for permission to do this.

Extras. Perhaps you'll want to include a few finishing suggestions, though you needn't offer actual directions. (Would finishing this project make a good follow-up class?)

Writing the Directions. If you are stitching the model, make notes as you do the piece. Use these as the basis for the written directions.

- Where should the student start the design? What's the best way to find this place on the fabric?
- How many strands are best for the cross stitches?
- Is basting needed?
- Any helpful "tricks"? (Example: "Stitch the white outline of Santa's beard and fur trim and then do the red suit. Fill in the white areas last." This technique prevents the white thread from picking up red dye as it rubs against the red stitches, as well as keeping the white stitches clean because the hand doesn't touch them as the red areas are worked.)
- Are there any tools/gadgets that will make stitching go more smoothly? Note those. (Maybe you want to sell these to students at a discount on class day.)

Now it's time to "publish" your handout. These five tips will make your handout look professional:

- Use your computer. Don't hand-write.
- Put page numbers on the directions.
- Include a copyright line at the bottom of each page. These directions are your work!
- Make sure your shop name

and contact info is a prominent place on the handout. Do you have a shop logo? Make sure it's there, too.

- Photocopy double-sided and staple at the upper left corner.

Testing the Directions. You may wish to have a staff member or friend stitch the piece from your written directions to insure that everything is clear and complete! Are all the stitch diagrams there? Is everything written in the sequence the stitcher will follow? Leave nothing to chance! Better to have too much detail than too little. Students who don't need directions in such depth can skip over what they don't need, but those who do need extra help will bless you that they didn't have to raise their hands to get answers to what they are sure are basic questions "everyone else knows."

Let's tie up a couple of loose ends.

Evaluation. Your students will let you know how well they liked the class. Did you see smiles or disgruntled expressions during class? Perhaps you'd like to ask students what designers or types of projects they'd like to see in future classes.

Did students mention the class and/or the project when they were next in the shop? Did other customers say they heard about the class or saw the class piece?

If you like, circulate something among the students before class is out, asking them what sorts of designs or designers would interest them for further classes.

Follow-Up. A subsequent class on finishing the project has been mentioned. There are other things you can do to extend the impact of your class.

Why not have a couple of stitch nights specifically slanted toward this class design? You'll be there to help with stumbling blocks, and general customers who are in the shop can observe how you go to extra effort to help your customers ("This must be a wonderful shop! What great service!"), as well as how much fun these stitchers are having and will be interested in taking a class the next time one is offered!

If you've used a freebie chart, how about a class by the same de-

signer, using one of her retail charts?

As soon as you set the date for your next class, contact the students and ask for a sentence describing the previous class ("I'm so glad I took this class!" or "This was so much fun!" or "I loved it!"). Personal recommendation is the best kind of advertising there is!

Note: Ask permission to use these customers' comments in future advertising. Don't let them discover their words when they see the advertising flyer. I promise you they'll all say yes because they'll want to see their words and name in print!

Good in-shop classes result in more foot traffic, which increases the chances of improved sales.

Happy stitching and successful selling!

Sidebar:

"Class Planning"

(March/April '04 issue)

"More on Class Planning"

(May/June '04 issue)

"Selecting The Design and a Teacher"

(July/Aug. '04 issue)

"Preparing the Kit (Sept./Oct. issue)"

"Preparing the Written Directions" (this issue)

Biography: Martha Beth Lewis has taught at consumer festivals for eight years and writes for consumer needlework magazines. She is the author of *Handbook for Needlework Teachers: An Experienced Festival Teacher's Advice* (marthabeth.com/handbook.html)

For more on needlework, visit her site at www.marthabeth.com.

Martha Beth Lewis
4120 Canyon Crest Road W
San Ramon, CA 94583
Phone 925-735-3533
Fax 925-735-6261
marbeth@comcast.net
<http://www.marthabeth.com>