



It's time for long and short shading!

I hope you have been enjoying stitching up your birds and seeing them come to life!

And now for the technique which a lot of people dread - long and short stitch shading!

One thing I found when working the Robin, was that Nicola's example didn't have as much shading as what I wanted. This is more a personal preference than anything else. The way Nicola also explains long and short shading in her notes is to work each colour in full before moving to the next. I find when I work this stitch that I can't get the shading I like if I work the stitch like this. So again, try a few different methods, and use what works for you!

Work from the back to the front

This is where you need to look at the image and your piece, and work out where the 'elements' sit in comparison with each other.

By working the elements from behind first, it helps you to create a sense of dimension.

Also be aware of the way the leaves fold - sometimes the fold will create an area which is on top of the first section of the leaf.



To start - split stitch!

Are we getting tired of split stitch yet?!

As with satin stitch, to begin, we stitch in a line of small, tight split stitches.

If an element sits on top of another one, only stitch in the split stitch line of the lower element. Once the lower section is stitched in long and short shading, you will then stitch the top element's split stitch line.

I tend to work split stitch on the section I'm about to work, rather than doing all the split stitch first. Again, a personal choice!

As the split stitch does wear the thread down considerably, don't use the same thread to stitch your long and short stitch as your split stitch. You will be pleased you took the time to change your thread!

When putting in your split stitch line on the areas which sit in front, it is best to put in the stitch so it just sits on top of your previous long and short stitches. This helps to minimise any fabric showing through when you stitch the top element.

Direction lines

It's almost time to start stitching and shading! But before you do, have a look at your direction lines. Work out how you want each section to flow, and draw in some direction lines. I use a



pencil or fabric chalk, and draw in my direction lines. You may however prefer to stitch them in. One word of warning on stitching your lines in though - they might not actually 'fit' in with your stitches when you reach that point. It's not a big deal, and you can generally work with it. It is more something to be aware of.

The first 'row'

To get a more blended look of your long and short shading, you do want to try and avoid thinking about 'rows'. However, it does also help to an extent!

Your first row will be worked over your split stitched line, by coming up inside your shape, and over the split stitch line. Just like with satin stitch, angle your needle under your split stitch line to get a smooth edge.

Whilst you don't want to cram your stitches in so much they are sitting on top of each other, you do want a reasonably dense first row of stitches. It just helps when adding in the next row, as you are less likely to have the fabric show through. But it is a delicate balance between too many and not enough stitches!

Remember when stitching this stitch that you don't want your short stitches to be too short. I recently watched one of [Sarah Homfray's YouTube videos](#) about long and short shading. In it, she recommends your long stitches be about 1cm long, and your short stitches about 0.8cm (so not much shorter!). I would say if you are stitching in wool, you could make your stitches a little longer than this.



Also remember that wool does 'spread' a little when stitched. This is a good thing as it helps to cover the fabric a little more, and it also helps the appearance of blending. So crewelwork long and short shading tends to be easier than working it in cotton or silk threads.

Subsequent Rows

Each subsequent 'row' is worked by coming up into your previous stitches, and down into your fabric. I find it helps to think that the first row is always in a different direction to the subsequent rows!

Try and keep your stitches slightly staggered in length, but you don't need to think about one long one short one long etc. Work the stitch length to the design shape. Each stitch will be roughly the same length, but it is where the stitch starts that creates the effect of the long and short stitch. Some of these shapes have 'interesting' direction lines, so you might find you are working continually shorter and shorter stitches to work your way around the shape.

When coming up in your previous stitch, you will need to come up further into the stitch than what you might imagine. This is because as the stitch lies down on the stitches and fabric, it 'disappears' a little when it is first brought up. So if you want a stitch to appear that it 'starts' at one point, bring the thread up a couple of millimeters further into the previous stitch than this point.



I find it a bit tricky to naturally stagger where each stitch starts, to create the natural blending. It is an awareness thing more than anything. If you notice you are creating a line with any row - just start a few stitches in a slightly different place, and go back and squeeze a few extra ones in.

Working multiple colours

This is where the way I stitch this section differs from Nicola's instructions. Nicola says to work each colour in full, and then move onto the next colour.

However, I like to blend the stitches a little more than the way Nicola has in her birds, and the way I find works best is to have all the colours threaded up and ready to work at once. This can get very messy, and you will need to keep all threads you aren't actively working with on top of your work to avoid complete chaos!

Working with multiple colours like this allows you a bit more flexibility in how you blend your colours, as you aren't stitching in 'blocks' so much. You may find you stitch three stitches in one colour, then change to a couple in another, before going back to the first colour. With our birds, all you may find you need to do is to bring up one coloured section a little further than another to achieve the shading you feel is pleasing.

So take a deep breath....

This is a stitch which I find takes a while to get into the swing of things. You've got colour changes, direction changes and stitch



length all to consider at once. But once you have found your rhythm, it can grow quite quickly (especially in the wool!).

....And try and enjoy it!