

How to Embroider on Knits

By *Michelle of Abigail Michelle Embroidery*

I embroider a lot of knit T-shirts for my customers and have found the best result comes from doing a few different things.

1) **Try to never hoop your knit fabric.** There are two reasons for this. The first is because it may leave hoop marks and they are sometimes extremely hard to get out. The second is because you can't get a "true" tight fit in the hoop because the fabric will stretch too much. This will cause your embroidery to be off base and/or have puckers all around it.

The best way is to hoop your stabilizer only and "float" your knit on top. The next paragraph will explain.

2) **Use a "sticky" stabilizer in the hoop.** Since knit shirts stretch there is a good chance the needle will "push" the fabric around in the hoop, leaving the embroidery design distorted and it will not line up correctly with any outlines or other design features. By using the sticky stabilizer, it gives your project a good chance of "staying put." Think of it as using a large piece of tape under your fabric.... it will, in essence, temporarily turn your knit fabric into a stable "woven" type by not letting it move around too much. Of course, you can never be 100% sure that your knit shirt won't move around at all, but it gives the best insurance that it will keep it to a minimum.

You can either use an actual sticky type stabilizer (you hoop the stabilizer, score the top sheet gently, then rip off the top sheet, exposing the sticky layer underneath), or a spray adhesive (you use a regular stabilizer, but spray a light layer of this onto the stabilizer itself), or you can even use a stabilizer that gets sticky when you wet it.

Most of these items are available at your local sewing store or machine dealer and even online.

3) When embroidering on knits, **use a "cut-away" stabilizer** instead of a "tear-away" one. This is because once the embroidery is done, you will want it to stay put through washings and wearings. Tear-away can work well while embroidering, but cut-away assures you a more lasting result.

4) **If your embroidery machine has a built-in design area basting stitch, I highly recommend using it.** Essentially, what it does is run a square basting stitch (with long stitches that you will remove when your design is done) all around the area where your design will be. This is done in the hoop immediately before stitching your design. The advantage to using this feature is that it is yet another way to keep the pesky knit fabric from wandering all over your hoop and having your design distorted.

Even if your machine doesn't have this feature built in, you can always get a freestanding basting design and just run that "design" first in the hoop, then embroider your design without unhooping it again. It will serve the same purpose, just with one more step. If you would like one of these basting designs, you can find them in our free section at SWAKembroidery.com.

5) The last thing I like to do is to **use a "wash-away" film on TOP of my design** while it's stitching. It is mainly just a thin, clear layer of stabilizer that you can "float" on top of the hoop just prior to stitching. There is no real need to hoop it with your other stabilizer since it would most likely rip because it's so thin. This is used to prevent the stitches from sinking into the knit fabric and "disappearing." The film leaves a small gap between the fabric and your stitching, assuring all your stitches will remain where they're supposed to and keep them there even after the film has washed away. Once your embroidery is done, gently tear the loose film away from the edges. If there is any left in small spaces or around the edges, simply give a little spray of water. This will also wash out in the laundry, too. They also sell a film like this that uses a warm iron to melt it instead of water.