

Number of Strands to Use for Cross Stitch

What are skeins and strands?

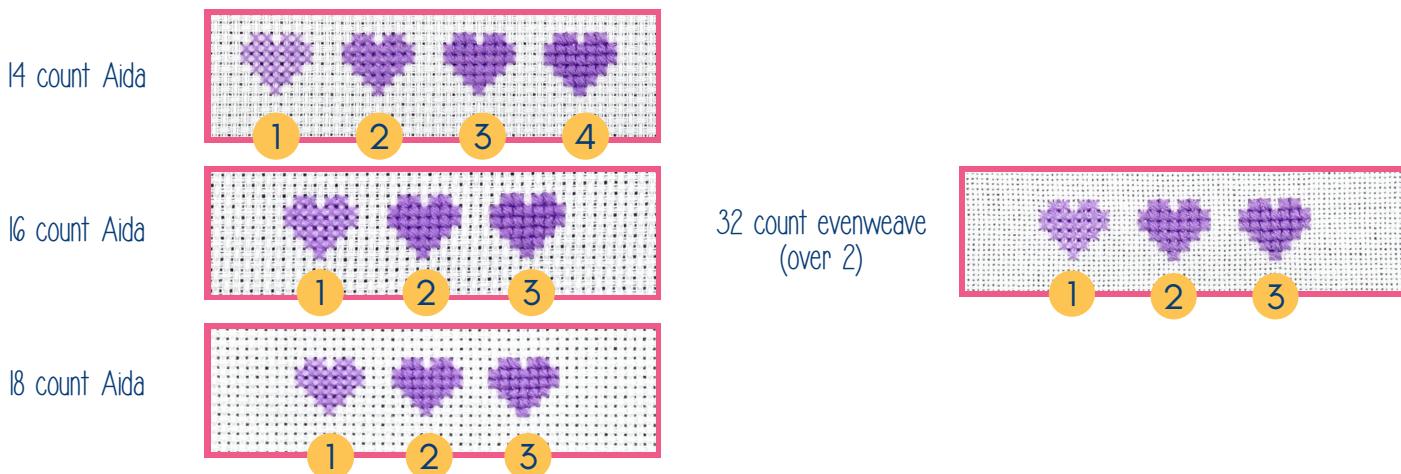
Each skein of embroidery thread (or floss), also known as stranded cotton, is made up of 6 individual strands.

To cross stitch you will separate each individual strand out and then combine however many you are going to use back together.

What difference does number of strands make?

#1 - fabric coverage and stitch density

The more strands you use, the more the fabric will be covered and the denser your cross stitches will look.



#2 - ease of stitching

Using more strands, especially on higher count fabrics which have smaller holes, can make it harder to pull the needle and thread through the fabric because of the increased thread thickness, and it might make threading your needle harder too.

What is stitching 'X' over 'Y'

X = the number of embroidery thread strands you are using

Y = the number of fabric threads (or grid squares) that you make each cross stitch over

On Aida: this has blocks of fabric, so you generally make each full cross stitch across 1 block (or grid square) of fabric i.e. stitching 'over 1.' The number of strands you use may vary so using 2 strands of thread over 1 block of Aida would be stitching '2 over 1.'

On evenweave or linen: these have individual fabric threads rather than blocks, so you can make each of your full cross stitches over 1 or 2 thread(s) of the fabric.

Using 1 strand of thread over 1 thread of fabric would be '1 over 1' and using 2 strands of thread over 2 threads of fabric would be '2 over 2.'

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Recommendations for number of strands for full cross stitches

I recommend you use this as a starting point and then adjust to your personal preference

11 count	3 or 4 strands	Some sources recommend up to 6 strands!
14 count Aida 28 count evenweave/linen (over 2)	2 or 3 strands	I use 2 strands as it's easier and I accept slightly less good coverage, but I railroad both arms*
16 count Aida 32 count evenweave/linen (over 2)	2 strands	I use 2 strands
18 count Aida	1 or 2 strands	I use 2 strands
22 count hardanger	1 strand	
25 count evenweave/linen (over 1)	1 or 2 strands	I use 1 strand as 2 is very hard work!



When it can be helpful to use more strands

- Stitching on 14 count perforated paper, because the holes are bigger than 14 count Aida, and using 3 strands make these holes, and the paper underneath less visible
- Stitching on dark fabrics, because the fabric is more easily visible, especially when using light colours on dark fabric
- For 'thin' feeling threads such as unbranded threads, BUT remember to be careful using more strands than recommended in a kit because you could run out of thread!

Backstitch

It is often a good idea to stick to the kit/pattern recommendations for number of strands to use for backstitch as this has often been chosen to create the best finished effect, and some designs may use different numbers of strands for different sections to create dimension, so some patterns may use 1, 2 or 3 strands all in the same design.

A good rule of thumb is that if you use a higher number of strands for full cross stitches then you may want to use a higher number of strands for backstitch, so it doesn't get 'lost' in the cross stitching.

For example, if using 3 strands to cross stitch on 14 count Aida or perforated paper, 2 strands may look better for the backstitch than 1 strand.

Summary

- Check the recommendations in your kit or pattern first!
- Use the guideline table as a starting point, then adjust to suit your personal preference
- When working from a kit, if you use more than the recommended number of strands you might run out!
- If you are unsure, make a few test stitches with different numbers of strands on a corner of your chosen fabric to help you find the best combination of how it looks and ease of stitching