Piggyback Hooping

Carol A. Brown

Sometimes an embroidery hoop has far more room than I need for the embroidery design I wish to stitch. It seems a shame to discard the leftover stabilizer, so I figured out a way to plan room for more than one design right from the start. There will be some arithmetic involved, so be prepared.

Instead of embroidering in the middle of the hoop area, I make centering lines to the left and right of vertical center or to the top and bottom of horizontal center, depending on the size and shape of the hoop I am using and of the designs I am planning. In bigger hoops I can even stitch an additional design at the center.

Before I can embroider I must determine how to space the designs in the hoop. The easy way is to assign each design a fraction of the hoop. If I think that three designs will fit in the hoop I need only know that each design will be less than 1/3 of the total height of the hoop. My hoop is 150 mm wide by 240 mm high. Since 240 mm is just over 9", that gives me an average of 3" for each design. My designs can be up to 150 mm (6") wide.

For this lesson, I used the designs pictured at right. The two "Carol" designs (in my Contour Script and Fancy Jumbles alphabets, respectively) are each 43mm high (rounded up from 42.5), while "WEB" (in Pinstripes Vertical) is 69 mm high positioned sideways (rounded up from 68.4). Each of these designs is less than 75 mm (the metric equivalent of 3") in height, so the division of hoop space worked just fine. I put the largest (69 mm) design in the middle. Since the smaller ones took less of their "share" of the hoop this arrangement left more space between the designs. I advise leaving at least 10 mm between designs.

The middle third extends 1 1/2" above and below the center of the design. The centers of the top and bottom thirds are each another 1 1/2" away from the center of the hoop, for a total distance of 3". Drawing parallel lines 3" above and below the center line is easy to manage with a clear flexible ruler, available in any office supply store. My ruler is 2" wide, so I needed to draw light lines 1 1/2" from the center and then draw my centering lines 1 1/2" from those lines. The 1/8" grid keeps the lines parallel. This ruler's 12" length is suitable for most hoops, but the new giant hoops might need 18".
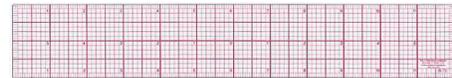
Photo courtesy of www.cthruruler.com

Other sizes of hoops may allow only two designs to be embroidered in one hooping. If that is the case, you will draw your additional centering lines halfway between the center line and the outer limit of the embroidery area. For the 150mm x 150mm (6" square) hoop, the lines would be 1 1/2" above and below the center lines. For the 130mm x 180mm (approximately 5" x 7") hoop, each half hoop is about 2 1/2" so the centering lines would be about 1 1/4" to each side of center.
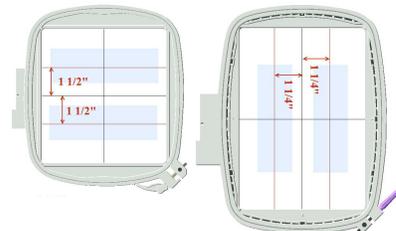
If the space required by the designs is closer to the limit in the hoop, it may be necessary to determine design spacing directly from measurements. For example, if I had one design 66 mm high and three designs 44 mm high, the total height needed is 66 + 10 + 44 + 10 + 44 + 10 + 44 = 228 mm. These designs will fit in the 240 mm hoop with just 11 mm extra space. The halfway point is 114 mm from an end.

The diagram at right shows the space needed for each design plus the spaces between the designs. I wrote in the measurements for each half-height and for the spaces between. I then added up from the bottom to the number 114, the halfway point determined above. In this example, the halfway point is 6 mm up from the bottom of the second design. It is marked with a purple line. To plan the centering lines, I added numbers from center to each line. The centering line for the top design is 81 mm above center. The next one is a mere 16 mm above the center. I leave it to you to calculate positions for lines A and B. Make cross marks where you want the lines to go and then use the flexible ruler to mark the lines. Keep the perpendicular centering line

parallel to one of the grid lines. If you don't have a metric ruler, you can convert to inches. Each inch has about 25 mm. The diagram helped me keep track of which design goes where and also made the arithmetic easy to do. All the numbers were right there in front of me.

Now that we know how to fit our designs into the hoop, we are ready to begin embroidering.

1. Hoop your stabilizer. Draw centering lines as determined above. Most hoops have little raised lines showing the center of each hoop edge. You can connect opposite pairs with a flexible ruler and then draw lines along the edge of the ruler. (See black lines in photo.)
2. Mark your stabilizer as explained above. I have marked lines 3" above and below the horizontal center so that I have room for 3 designs. You will mark yours according to the plan you made above. If your centering lines are not evenly spaced, be sure that you stitch your designs in the intended order.

3. Prepare fabric for embroidery. Consult your pattern or determine where you would like to place your embroidery design. On the right side of the fabric, mark centering lines with a marker that fades or can be washed away. (Instead of a marker, you could use tailor's chalk.) See the illustration at right.
4. Place four pins on your marked lines. Each pin point should face away from the design center. From the right side of the fabric, place the pin in, out, then in the fabric. The pin point will emerge on the wrong side of the fabric as shown in the illustration at far right.
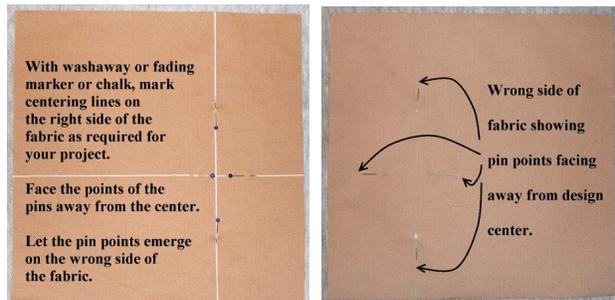
5. Lightly spray the wrong side of the fabric with temporary basting spray. Spray only in the area of the pins.
6. Fold the fabric toward you so that you can see three of the four pins. Align the pins over the centering lines for the first embroidery. Let the fabric fall into place. Check the fourth pin. If it is also aligned with the centering line, then smooth the fabric in place. If not, shift the fabric until all four pins are aligned and the centering lines are straight. Pin the fabric to the stabilizer and remove the centering pins.

7. Select your first embroidery design. Use the functions of your embroidery machine to scoot the design into the proper position to be centered as planned on your fabric. Also make sure the design will face the proper direction for your project. Baste around the design area if you have that feature on your machine. Otherwise, baste by hand to prevent shifting. Stitch the design.
8. Fold the excess fabric over the embroidery to reveal the next centering location. Position the next fabric and embroider it following the steps above. Repeat until you have stitched all the designs you planned.
9. Remove fabric and stabilizer from the hoop. Carefully remove excess stabilizer. Consult your project instructions for cutting details before removing your centering lines. They may be needed for positioning the pattern on the fabric.