Fabrics 101: Embroidering on Sweatshirts

A sweatshirt is like a blank canvas, ready for you to embroider and create a custom, personal look. This tutorial shares stitching tips and placement ideas to help you get picture-perfect results.

Project Needs and Notes

- Sweatshirt
- Medium-weight (2.5 ounce) cutaway stabilizer
- Air-erase pen
- Temporary spray adhesive
  (like Gunold's KK100)

Special Notes:
Sweatshirts are made of cotton, or a cotton-polyester blend. Begin by washing and drying the sweatshirt to preshrink it, and to remove excess dye.

This project was featured in the following:
Embroidering on Sweatshirts Lookbook

Plan where you want to stitch the design. A template is a printout of a design, and it's an excellent tool for placement.

Print a template of the design from embroidery software. Then, arrange that on the sweatshirt until the placement looks good to you.

If you don't have software,

Wilcom's TrueSizer is a free program that can print templates.

Borders, trios, and designs that are horizontal are very popular choices for sweatshirts.

Traditionally these designs are placed so the top of the design is 3" down from the neck.

If working with a smaller size, like a child's size sweatshirt, you may find that placing the design closer to the neck looks better.

In this example, a smaller size of the design is positioned 2 1/2" down from the neck of this child-size sweatshirt.

After the template is positioned where you want to stitch, mark the center point, as well as the vertical and horizontal axis lines.

These marks will be used for hooping.

Turn the sweatshirt inside out.

Spray a piece of cutaway stabilizer with temporary adhesive, and smooth that on the back of the area that will be embroidered.

Turn the sweatshirt right side out.

Slide the outer hoop inside the shirt.

Press the inner hoop in place, lining up the marks that you made on the shirt with the marks on the hoop.

Roll the excess sweatshirt up and around so nothing gets caught on the machine while embroidering.

Use clips to keep the excess sweatshirt out of the way.

Embroider the design. Use a size 11 or 75/11 sewing or embroidery needle.

After embroidering, turn the shirt inside out, and cut the excess stabilizer away.

Leave about 1/2" around the design.

Cutaway stabilizer will soften after a wash or two.

And here's the finished result: a sparkling snowflake sweatshirt, ready to add a warm and cozy look to your winter wardrobe.

The design used in this example is the Frosty Filigree Snowflake Border.

The above is an example of traditional design placement on a sweatshirt. Let your creativity run wild to come up with unique and non-traditional results, too!
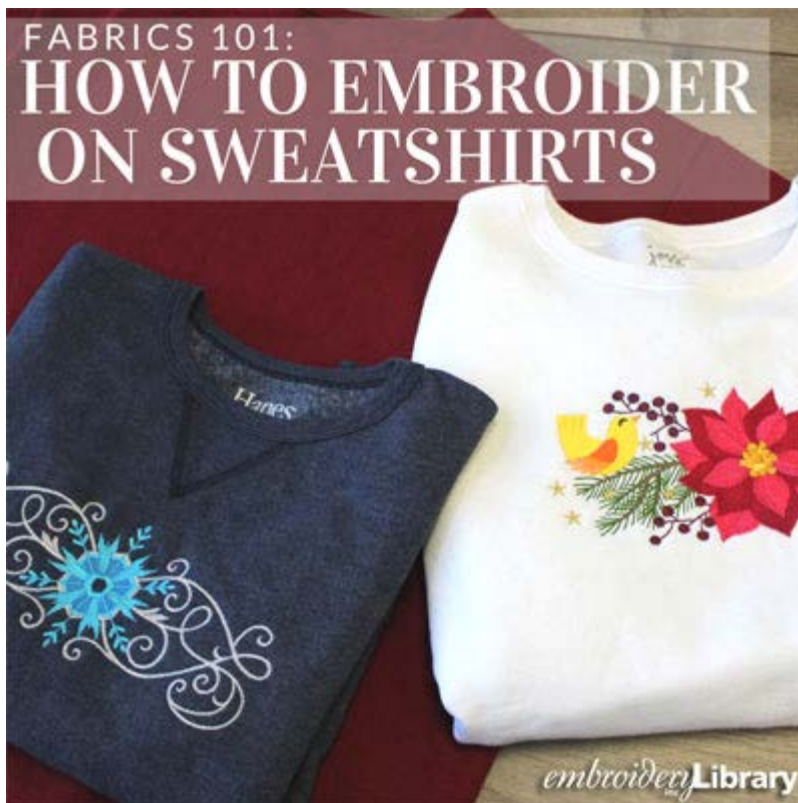
This sweatshirt cardigan has the Filigree Sewing Machine 1 on the pocket, and the Chocolate Nouveau Border on the sleeve.

The Fall Feathers Wedge design cascades gracefully down the front of this zippered hoodie.

This button-down sweatshirt cardigan has the Lovebird Heart Border on the back, Lovebird Heart on the front, and the matching corner on the pocket.

This project is featured on the Embroidery Library Pinterest page.

Pin it yourself using the "Pin It" button on this page.

Stitching tips for sweatshirts:

Needle	75/11 or size 11 sewing or embroidery needle
Stabilizer	A medium-weight cutaway stabilizer (2.5 ounces) is the best choice. Do not use tear-away stabilizer or water-soluble stabilizer.
Design Choice	Medium complexity designs work well, but consider the design size and shape for appropriate draping. A large "block" of stitches will not drape well on the fabric when worn.

Why use cutaway stabilizer?

Earlier you read that cutaway stabilizer is recommended, and that tear-away stabilizer is not advised.

If using tear-away stabilizer, the needle perforations weaken the stabilizer. Essentially it tears away while embroidering, and while wearing and washing, too. That leaves nothing behind to support the fabric.

You may also experience thread tension issues when using tear-away stabilizer, such as thread nesting, knotting, and looping.

To demonstrate the difference in quality, we embroidered a simple design onto a sweatshirt, and used tear-away stabilizer.

Note the gaps, and how the fill is pulling away from the satin stitches. This occurs because the tear-away stabilizer gets weaker and weaker as the needle penetrates it.

You can also see the shirt is puckered. This will get worse over time as the shirt is worn and washed.

This is the same design, on the sweatshirt. Cutaway stabilizer was used, rather than tear-away. There's no puckering, no shifting, no

gapping -- the results are picture-perfect.

Questions or comments? Let us know! Send an email to us; the address is stitch@emblibrary.com.