



# *Blackwork Journey*

## *Techniques*

TQ0002

### **Frames**



*The Working Environment by Liz Almond*

# TECHNIQUES

## The Working Environment by Liz Almond

### Part 2 Frames

#### **Frames, rings and floor stands, a luxury or a necessity?**

The phrase, "Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin." which was popularised by the 1950 – 1982 BBC Radio series *Listen with Mother*, seems very appropriate for the second article in my series. Sitting in a comfortable, but relaxed position is essential when you are stitching and especially so when using a frame.

If you are new to embroidery and have never used a frame before you may ask – “Do I really need a frame and will it make any difference to my work? What are the advantages of using one and which type of frame will be best suited to my needs?”

The main purposes behind using some form of frame is to keep the tension even and prevent fabric distortion, both of which help to keep the stitches even and the embroidery under control.

I have an extensive collection of frames and rings which I had bought over the years and have found some more effective than others.

When I buy a frame I consider where I will be stitching, the seating and the lighting, as this determines the type of frame I purchase. For example;

- *What type of fabric will I be working on? What stitches will I be using and does the full work area need to be visible?*
- *What does it weigh? Medical problems with hands, arms, back and neck can affect your choice of frame.*
- *Is it simple to assemble and dismantle?*
- *Is it portable and easy to store?*
- *Has it got any parts that need screwing together, tightening, twisting and can I manage them?*

- *Is it suitable for where I will be working and flexible enough to be used for other projects?*
- *Can it be used on a stand?*
- *Do I need to stitch the fabric on to the frame?*
- *Is it washable or easy to clean?*
- *Will it warp?*
- *Is it reasonably priced?*

There are so many different variations, each with their own advantages and disadvantages, so I will introduce you to some of the more common types.

### ***Embroidery rings***

Embroidery rings may be made of wood, metal or plastic and come in a range of sizes from 3” to 12” diameter. I find the 6”, 8” and 10” rings are the most useful because they are easier to hold. They are typically  $\frac{3}{4}$ ” deep. Anything larger than a 10” hoop can be difficult to hold for any length of time and can cause your hands to ache as you work around the frame. 10” and 12” quilting rings are also suitable. They have a 1” lip and are more substantial to hold

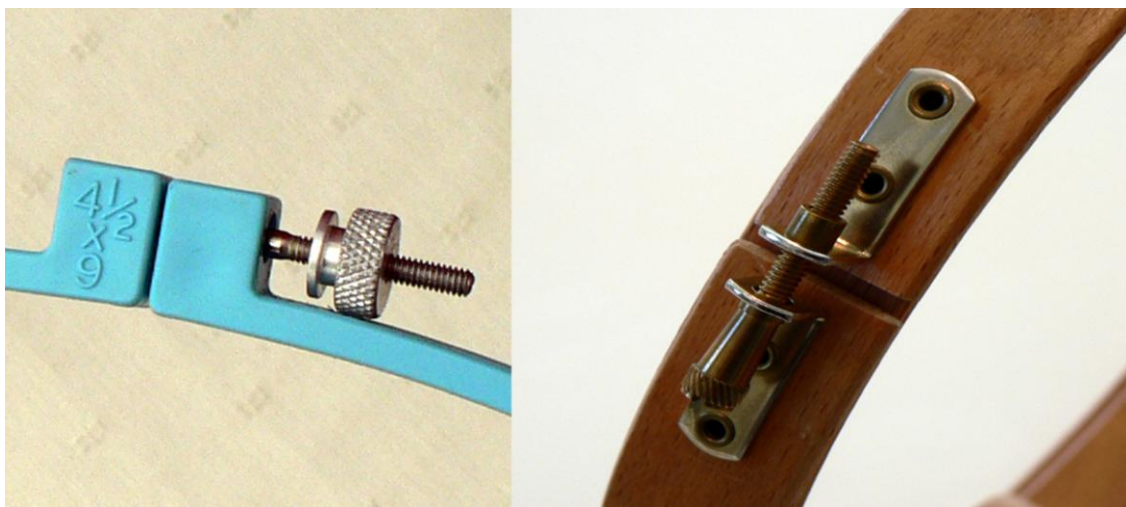


*Fig1 Wooden embroidery rings*

Ideally, the ring should be big enough to enclose the whole working area and are best suited to small projects.

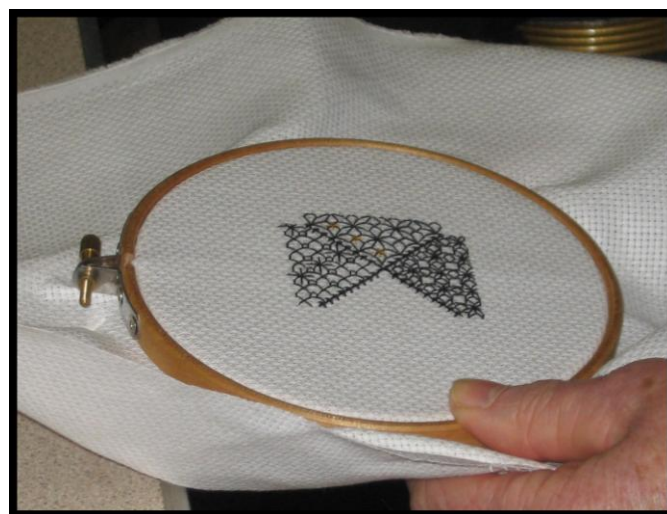
Most people buy a simple wooden embroidery ring which is cheap, portable and easy to use, but before you buy, check that the wood is smooth and will not splinter or snag the fabric when you take the ring on and off.

If you buy a ring frame, check how the hoop tightens for ease of use. Most of them use a thumb screw to tighten the frame to the required tension. However, if you experience difficulty tightening small screws, I suggest you carry a small screwdriver in your needlework kit.



*Fig.2 Ring frame fasteners*

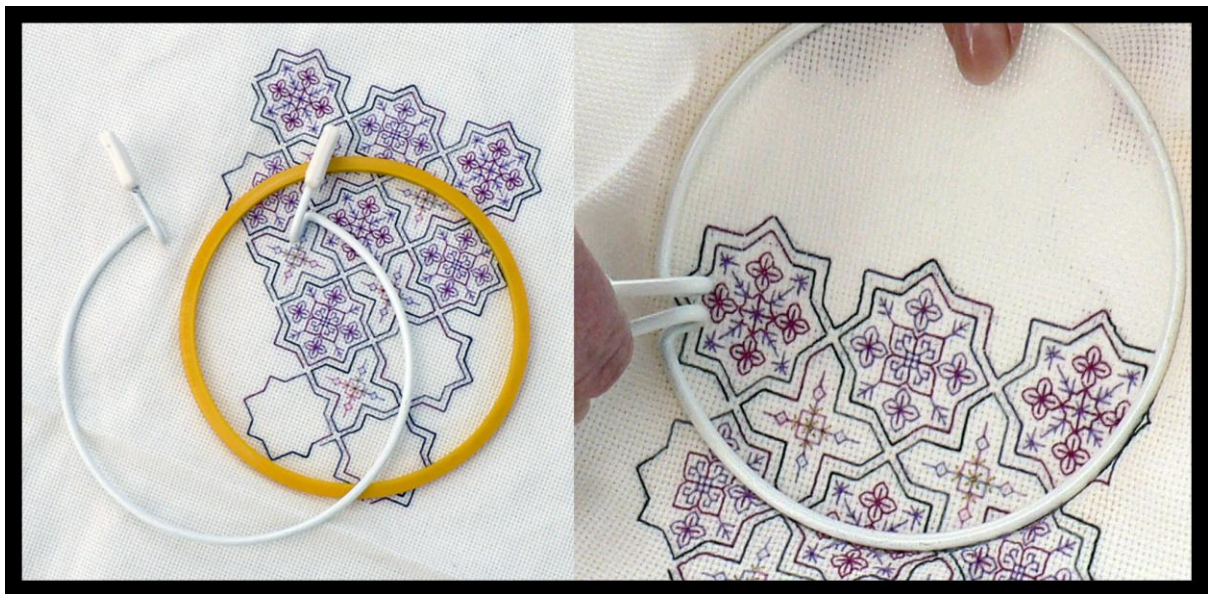
The tension needs to be released at the end of every session to prevent marking the fabric. It also helps to bind the inside ring with bias binding, or a similar material as it grips the fabric much better.



*Fig.3 Wooden hoop hold fabric with the correct tension*

### ***Sprung hoops***

I have several plastic and metal spring hoops which are used by squeezing the handles of the metal inner ring together and placing the fabric over it and then feeding it back into the outside hoop to create the appropriate tension. They are available in different sizes from 3” to 7” therefore suitable for small projects.



*Fig.4 Using a sprung hoop*

*The hoop is placed with the embroidery facing upwards. The tension is drum tight. The handles may prove a problem because threads can wrap round the handles.*

There is no need to bind these and whilst they are cheap, portable and lightweight, I sometimes find them difficult to use because I cannot always control my thread and spend half the time unwinding it from the handles. It is essential that you remove the hoop after each stitching session to prevent ring marks.

### ***Floor Frames***

There is a wide range of these frames on the market.

A good example of a floor frame is my Lowery frame, which I have been using for many years. It is made of steel and incorporates large levers to adjust both the height and angle and with its broad base, which fits conveniently under the leg of a chair for extra stability, is very versatile.

It contains all the fittings I need to work comfortably and without strain as it is strong enough to take the weight of the work and leaves me free to stitch with both hands. I use it for a range of projects from cross stitch to quilting and it copes with anything I ask of it!



*Lowery Workstands*

The Silver Grey Workstand is made from steel, powder coated Silver Grey.

**Details**

- The 'L' adjusting bars are available in different lengths to suit your requirements
- With half a turn of a lever screw, your Workstand will [swing away when](#) you take a break
- The clamphead can turn 360° allowing easy access to the back of your work
- Easy turn stainless steel [lever screws](#) makes the workstand fully adjustable
- Comes with a hard grade aluminium base to rest under your chair, sofa or bed
- Adjustment: up and down 910-500mm (36"-20") in and out 150-230mm (6"-9").



*c. Side adjusting clip frame*

*d. Light bracket with easy adjust screw and tightening lever*



*Fig.6 Floor frame in use Chart CH0218 Bukhara*

*The embroidery hoop is held by the metal bracket and can be positioned easily. The metal components make this a very strong and versatile frame*

Not all the attachments are necessary, but it is essential when choosing a floor frame that it is adjustable in height, capable of holding a variety of rings for different types of projects and comfortable to use.

### ***Wooden Floor Frames***

Again there are many variations on the market, but if you consider the design of the floor frame and its components that I have mentioned previously, then it will give you a good idea what to look for in a wooden floor frame. Stability is one of the most important aspects. When a scroll frame or ring is attached with other



accessories, will it fall over, are the legs wide enough to support the weight and will it fit comfortably into the area where you will be working?

Floor frames are bulkier, often heavier, may be more time consuming to set up or take down and occupy more space. These factors may determine your choice.



*Fig.7 A typical wooden frame and accessories (Stitchmaster)*

If necessary, try several different styles out in the store to find one that is suited to your requirements. If you are looking to purchase a floor frame, I suggest you consider the size of the projects you undertake, as you may find smaller, alternative frames will be perfectly

## Variations on a theme

### *Embroidery Scroll Frames*

There are several advantages of using a frame for cross stitch, as against an embroidery hoop. They are reasonably priced, readily available and the frames come in various sizes, usually consisting of 12" side bars and a pair of rollers. The top of the needlework is attached to the top and bottom bars usually by stitching it to the canvas strip provided, although different makes of frame use different methods of attaching the material. This makes it easy with larger projects, to "roll up" the next section for stitching, rather than having to remove the fabric from the hoop to reposition it, thus keeping the work flat. It also avoids the circular marks on the finished cross stitch project which often result from using a hoop. However, attaching the embroidery fabric to the canvas strips can be difficult and it is sometimes necessary to re-stitch the fabric to the strips if the work becomes loose.

These frames tend to be heavy and wing nuts are frequently used in the assembly of these frames. These can be difficult to tighten with the fingers and if so, you can buy a simple wooden tightening block to help.



*Fig.8 Wing nut and tightening block*

New types of scroll frames have come onto the market recently whereby the fabric is held firmly in place with low profile clips allowing projects to be

changed quickly and easily and eliminates the need to stitch the fabric to canvas strips.

When these frames are used in combination with a floor frame, then they become a far more practical proposition, although the size of your chair may determine the size of the scroll frame you can use. Whilst I use a scroll frame for needlepoint, I seldom use one for cross stitch, as I prefer a round frame which is more suited to where I sit to do my embroidery.

### *Seat Frame, Barrel clamps and Table frames*

The seat frame (sometimes called a “fanny frame”), is an unusual frame which tucks under your bottom or between your legs. It has an 8” or 10” diameter wooden ring, a screw fastener and a single column between the base and the ring. The embroidery fabric is mounted over the ring and tensioned until it is drum tight. The base of the frame is then tucked under your bottom or between your legs, leaving both hands free to stitch and because the frame is raised, there is no stooping and nothing to hold to make your hands ache! I have had a fanny frame for many years and it has become one of my favourite items of equipment.



*Fig.9 Seat frame*



*Fig.10 Stitching with two hands free is a feature of the seat frame but the fabric tension needs to be tighter to be really effective!*

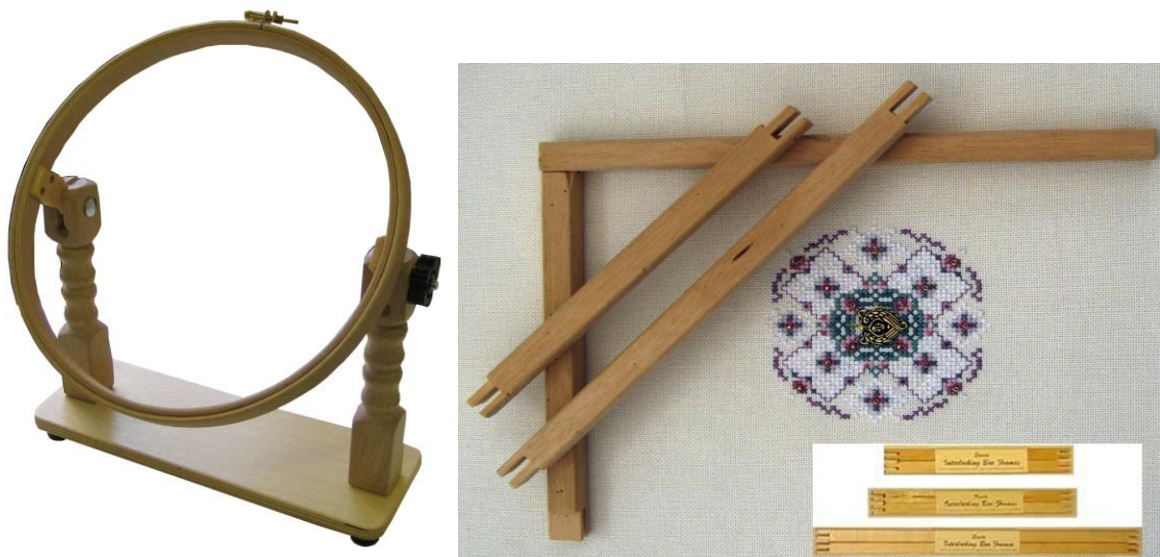
### **Barrel Clamps**

Barrel clamps are also useful if you are able to clamp them to a suitable table. Like the fanny frame, your hands are free to work, but the locations in which you can use them may be limited as they need to be secured to a table, or surface that enables you to work at the correct height.



*.Fig.11 Barrel frame in use*

The same applies to small table frames. The working height has to be correct, or your neck and arms could be at the wrong angle leading to strained and aching muscles.



*Fig.12 Table frame and Interlocking bar frames*

### *Interlocking Bar Frames*

These consist of a range of interlocking wooden frames which fit together at right angles to each other to make a strong, lightweight working frame suitable for cross-stitch. Masking tape is then used to edge the fabric, which is then attached to the frame by drawing pins or staples. Whilst they are easy to assemble, some pressure is required to push the drawing pins into the wood.

Interlocking bar frames are sold in pairs, so you need two pairs to make a frame. For example, if you require a frame 12" x 6" you will need 1 pair of 12" and 1 pair of 6" frames.

### *Plastic snap frames or Q-Snaps*

These are some of the most practical frames I use. They are plastic, lightweight and washable! The plastic tubes can be configured into rectangular or square frames of varying sizes by means of easily fitted plastic elbows to meet the size of the specific project. Fabric is laid in position and the plastic clips or tensioners are then pushed into place over the material and tubing using minimal pressure. The whole working area can be viewed. They are suitable for most fabrics and there are no screws to tighten and the tensioners do not leave marks on the fabric.



*Fig.13 Standard arrangement for snap frame*



*Fig.14 Plastic snap frames are available in different shapes and sizes*

Whilst they are slightly bulkier to hold, I use them for anything from quilting to small hand pieces. The pieces are interchangeable so I make up whatever size frame I need for the specific project. They range in size from 6" to full size quilting frames which can be assembled and dismantled in minutes. I have used them when working with older students because they were ideal for working in a communal environment such as sheltered housing, community groups or a classroom, where equipment needs to be assembled quickly and dismantled for storage at the end of a session.

***Plastic Flexi-Hoop/Picture frames - not really embroidery frames  
but.....***

For a small piece of embroidery, an 8” circular plastic picture frame, normally used to mount and display embroideries on a wall is one of my favourite items of equipment. After removing the hanging hook, I mount my fabric over the inner frame and then fit the outer ring over the fabric and frame by just using my thumbs. It doesn’t mark the fabric, is washable, has no screws, creates the right tension and can easily be removed. This is ideal to pack in a handbag for stitching on the move.

However, a word of caution - if you choose to use a picture frame of this type, select a white or pastel colour to avoid colour leeching into the fabric from the plastic.

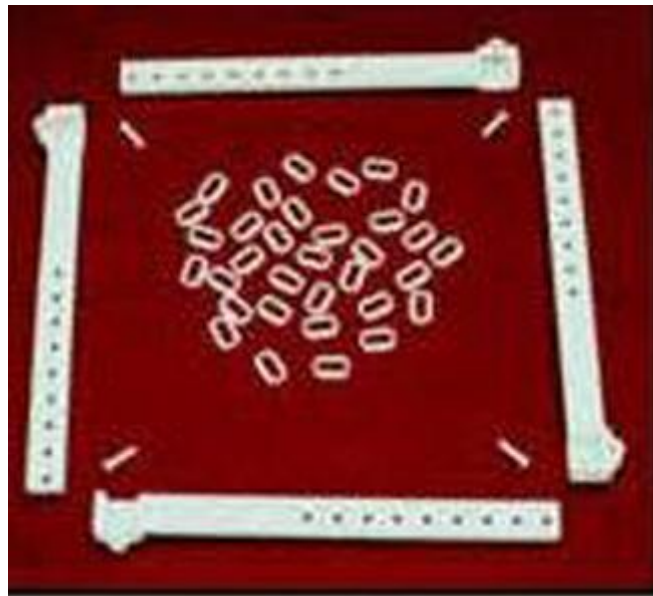




*Fig.15 Plastic flexi-hoop picture frames can be used for both working and framing embroidery*

### ***Able Stretcher***

Whilst I have not used this plastic frame personally, I have seen one demonstrated and was impressed by its versatility. It is available in four sizes 9", 12", 16" and 20" each of which can be adjusted in size. There is no stitching or stapling involved and it clips together quickly holding the fabric taut in all directions. The clips are easy to handle, large and slot into a groove in the frame



*Fig. 16 Able stretcher frame with clips which push into place holding the embroidery firmly in position*

However, whatever type of frame you are using, always remember your posture. Sit well back in the chair with your lower back supported and bring the embroidery up to you. Do not stoop over it, as over time you could develop rounded shoulders and possibly a sore neck!

Happy stitching!

Liz