



Blackwork Journey

Techniques

TQ0006

Scissors and Cutting Tools



The Working Environment by Liz Almond

Techniques

SCISSORS AND CUTTING TOOLS

The history of scissors is as long and varied as that of needles and thimbles and like many embroidery tools, they are widely collected and valued.

The earliest scissors were made of bronze in Egypt around 1500 BC and the earliest cross-bladed scissors were invented in about 100 AD by the Romans. In 1761, Robert Hinchliffe of Sheffield began to use steel to make scissors which proved to be both effective and durable.

Modern high quality scissors are made of stainless steel and are designed to ensure the blades cut and shear at the exact point where the blades meet. The aim being to cut, not tear the fabric or threads, which is particularly important to the needlewoman and if used with care and properly maintained, they will last for many years.



Fig.1 Bronze scissors from the Metropolitan Museum in New York USA thought to be from 2nd century A.D. NE Turkey. Modern scissors snips are very similar.

(Photographed by: Yannick Trottier and Elizabeth Almond)

Choosing the right scissors

Over time, needle workers collect a variety of scissors, each designed for different tasks. Knowing exactly which ones to choose can save unnecessary

and sometimes, costly mistakes. They should be comfortable to hold with a sufficiently large handle to allow two or three fingers to fit smoothly into the bottom opening and the thumb in the top one, so they can be gripped firmly.



Fig.2 Scissors currently available for needlework

General purpose scissors for sewing and crafts are usually designed with ergonomic handles for comfort and control with an adjustable screw at the centre to maintain the cutting performance.

13 cm Microtip scissors are useful for intricate and delicate sewing with their curved, fine pointed tips designed to cut lightweight materials and threads.

10cm Precision straight scissors are for intricate and delicate sewing. I find these particularly useful because of their long fine points.

Classic Clip scissors can also be used for intricate and delicate sewing. The cutting blades are spring loaded which makes them ideal for unpicking stitches, trimming seam allowances and loose threads as they can cut close to the fabric without catching the fabric.

All these scissors have high quality stainless steel blades providing long-lasting performance.

When deciding the most suitable pair to use, consider the size, blades, points, design of the handles and the intended task. Specialised scissors often have one sharp point and one blunt point - is that what you need? Whatever your choice, be prepared to buy good quality scissors that remain sharp and serve you well for many years.

Whilst most scissors are designed for right-handed people, left-handed ones are also widely available. With these, the handles are shaped so as to be comfortable to the left hand and the blades are reversed so that the user can see the line of the cut as it is being made. If you are left-handed, I suggest you try them out to see the difference they can make!



Fig.3 Petite, decorative, folding, general, 7 inch and 5 inch scissors cover most requirements

Lift n' snip and hardanger scissors

These scissors can be used to catch and snip unwanted threads easily whilst hardanger scissors are ideal for kloster blocks with their angled blades. A pair of curved nail scissors also comes in useful for cutting tight curves.



Fig.4 Lift n'snip and Hardhanger scissors

Other scissors and cutting tools have been developed for people who, for a variety of reasons, find difficulty in using standard scissors. Use the Internet to research different types of scissors and use this article to find the ones most suited to your personal requirements.



Fig.5 Loop scissors and padded handles for comfort and ease.

Loop scissors

These scissors require the minimum grip and the self opening handles are ideal for people with arthritis or thumb injuries, as the textured polypropylene handles are contoured to fit comfortably in the hand and they cut easily with just a gentle squeeze.

Applying padding to the handles of conventional scissors is also worth considering if your joints are sore.



The difference between left and right handed scissors lies in the direction of the blades. Because scissors have overlapping blades, they are not symmetric. Some left handed people are comfortable using right handed scissors, others find them very difficult to use and may find using specialist scissors preferable.

Thread and yarn cutters.

The limitations that have now been imposed by most airlines, prevents scissors and cutting tools from being carried on to aircraft and given the thought of having my precious scissors confiscated is unbearable and so on long haul flights, I resort to using a thread and yarn cutter.



Fig.6 Thread and yarn cutters

The cutter contains a sharp circular blade housed safely inside an attractive case. It can be hung around the neck on a cord. However, I always cut the floss into lengths before travelling so that only the ends need to be snipped en route.

Craft Knife and Rotary cutter

There is a place for craft knives with general sewing equipment, especially when cutting mounts or neatening edges on card, whilst a rotary cutter is useful when cutting large amounts of fabric. I also carry an emery board to smooth rough edges on card mounts.

Scissor and cutter safety and maintenance

As I have said, having the right cutting tool for the job can make a task easier, but there is also a need to maintain and store them correctly and safely.

For example, try not to drop your scissors as it can bend the blades or damage the cutting edges. Clean them regularly with a soft cloth and carefully check the blade tension, adjusting the screw as necessary. If the blades are too tight they will grind together. If they are too loose, they will not be aligned correctly.

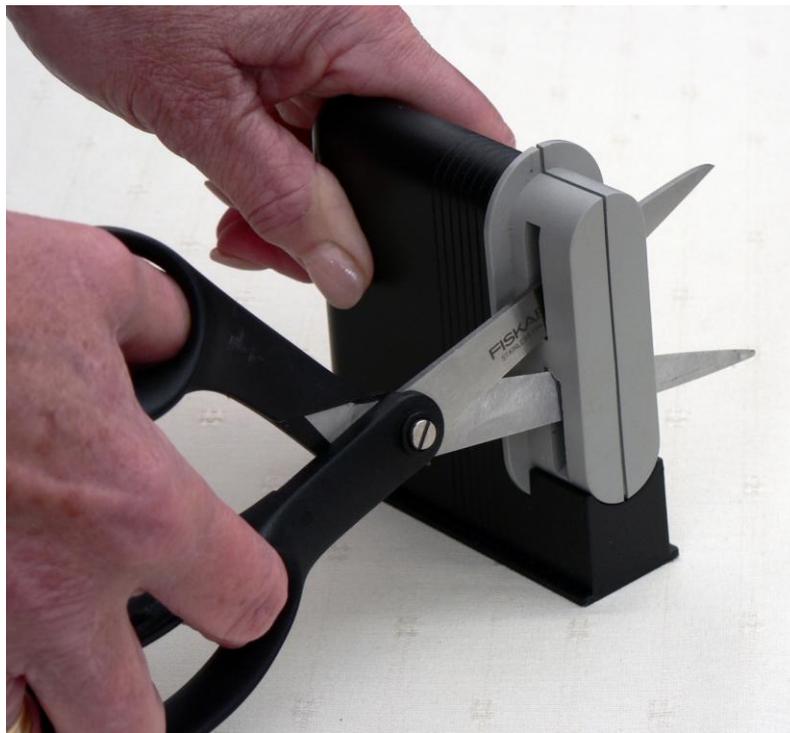


Fig.7 Scissor sharpener

Store your scissors in the closed position and protect the blades in a case where they cannot be damaged. Avoid placing them loose in a sewing box where other tools can cause unnecessary damage. A scissor roll is useful.

Ensure your scissors are kept rust free and sharp. You may choose to have them sharpened by an ironmonger or possibly use one of the simple sharpening devices on the market.

Remember that your scissors are amongst your most valuable assets and should not be used by other people for cutting paper or “the odd job.”

Adding a scissor fob makes small scissors attractive and less likely to disappear down the side of the chair and you may wish to consider making one as explained below.



Fig.8 Decorative scissors and fobs make attractive additions to the sewing box

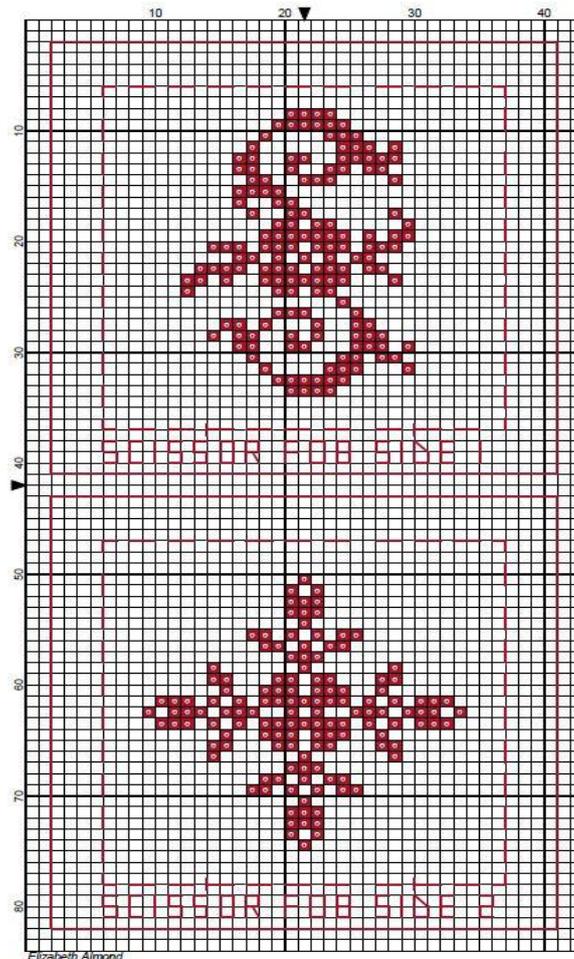


Fig.9 Chart for a scissor fob - CH0251 A.B.C. Sampler Set

Two pieces of 14 count Aida or 28 count evenweave, 5 x 5 inches

Design area:-39 x 39 stitches, 2.79 x 2.79 inches, including turning

DMC 498 Christmas red, one skein, Tapestry needle No.24

Filling, fine ribbon for hanging

Stitches used: Back stitch, cross stitch

Work the pieces for the scissor fob using TWO strands of cotton for the cross stitch. Use TWO strands for the back stitched squares. The outer line will be used when hand stitching the sections together.

Making up:

Carefully cut out the pieces, leaving a border of at least four blocks of Aida or eight threads away from the lines of back stitch. Using TWO strands of cotton

slip stitch the two pieces together starting at a corner leaving a two inch gap open for stuffing. Attach the cord and close the gap with slip stitch after the fob has been stuffed.

Note: To slip stitch together correctly there **MUST** be the same number of backstitches on each piece of fabric, or they will not match up when stitching!



Fig.10 Safety first – all points and blades should be covered after use

Encouraging children

I believe that where possible, we should try to introduce our children and grandchildren to the joy of needlework and as a first step, encourage them to create their own workbox and work alongside an adult on a project using their “own” tools. Children's scissors, which have dull blades and rounded corners are safe to use and can be used when introducing them to simple embroidery and crafts.

Happy stitching!

Liz