

Elizabethan Double Plaited Braid Stitch: A Step-By-Step Photo Tutorial

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The Elizabethan Double Plaited Braid Stitch is a very lovely, intricate embroidery stitch that was used on coifs, sweet bags (purses), samplers in the 16th century. The braid stitch was usually done in gilt or silver-gilt thread. Examples can be found in the Victoria & Albert Museum (see T.28-1975, T.17-1957, and T.20-1913).

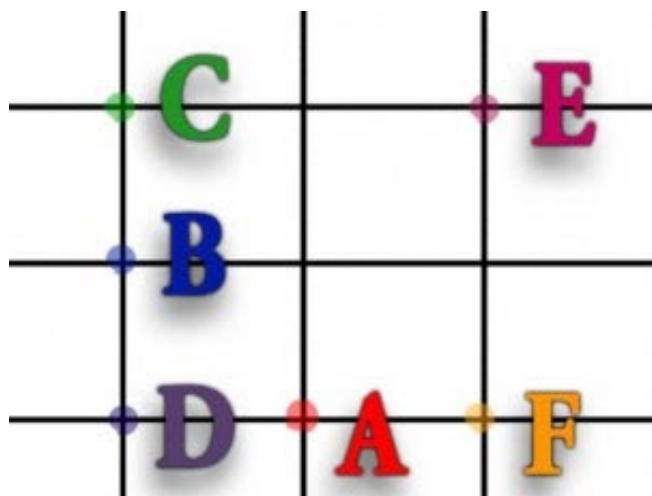
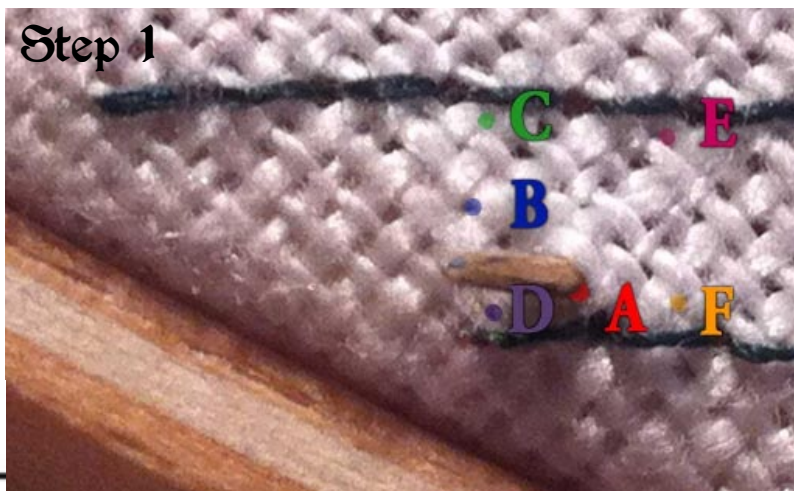
I tried for several weeks to master this braid stitch. My early attempts were close, but not quite right. Finally, after just keeping after it for a while, watching videos, studying photos of braid stitches, and scouring the web for ideas and tips, I finally figured it out. Here I present my method of working the Elizabethan double plaited braid stitch:

Materials

- Fabric (I'm using 32-count evenweave linen)
- Thread (I'm using DMC Gold Metallic)
- Blunt end needle (you want a blunt-end needle, NOT a sharp, so that the needle does not catch or pierce other threads — I'm using a tapestry needle)
- Stick pin

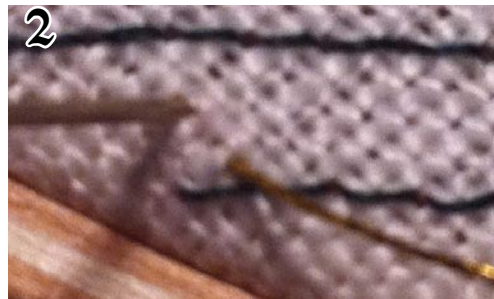
Starting the Stitch

1. First we need to get the stitch started. Thread your needle and mark your fabric with two parallel lines in some fashion, either by stitching it with thread (as I have done with the green in the photo below) or with a water-soluble marking pen. Bring your needle up at point A, as shown on my fabric in the photo to the right.



If you're having problems figuring out where each of these points are in your own fabric, here is a simpler chart of points A-F.

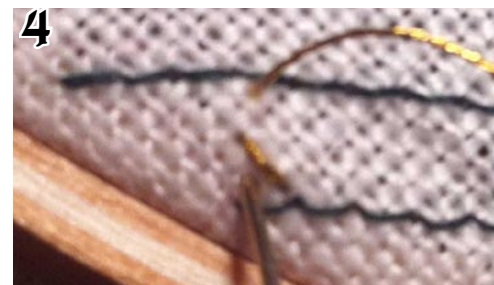
Step 2: Go down with your needle at point B, as shown in the photo on the right. Pull taut enough so the thread lies flat. (Sorry for the blurry photo!)



Step 3: Come up with your needle at point C. Again, pull taut.



Step 4: Go down with your needle at point D.



Step 5: Come up with your needle at point B (yes, you've already got thread in this hole, but you need to go back in here), as shown:



Step 6: Go down with your needle at point E. Pull taut.



Step 7: Come up with your needle at point F. Pull taut. All threads should lie flat, though you don't want anything TOO tight, as that will make it hard to braid and pucker your fabric.



Step 8. Now, identify the the TWO crossed threads at the top of your stitch shown in this first photo:



Slide your needle under this cross, going under both threads, from bottom to top as shown here:



Step 9: Next, identify the the THREE crossed threads at the bottom of your stitch shown in the photo and slide your needle through. The three threads are the very first one you created in steps 1 and 2 above, the one you made in steps 4 and 5, and the one you just made in step 8. It can be tricky to locate these three threads — you may need to move your threads around a bit with your needle. But it's important to go under all three threads, or your stitch won't properly braid.

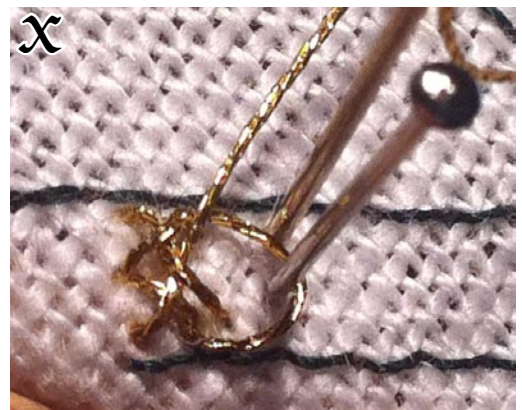


*Important Tip: See the straight pin sticking out in the above photo? I put that there, just ahead of my stitching, to keep the loop I create in step 9 large enough for future steps. **This was the key for making my braid look good.** I highly recommend using a pin when you're getting started.*

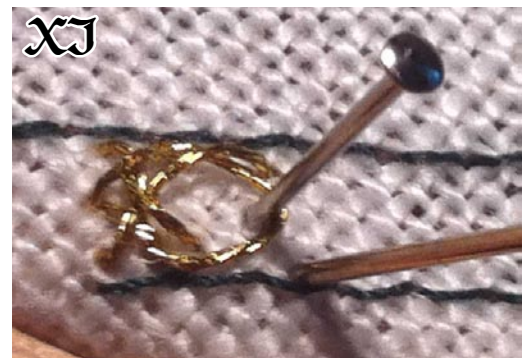
The Four Main Stitches

At this point, you've started your stitch! Now I will explain the four steps you will do immediately after this point, over and over, to continue stitching your braid. To differentiate from the above steps, I will use roman numerals.

Step X: Bring your needle down at the top left. Keep your needle in place if you're using one. You should pull taut, though not so tight that you strain your loop.



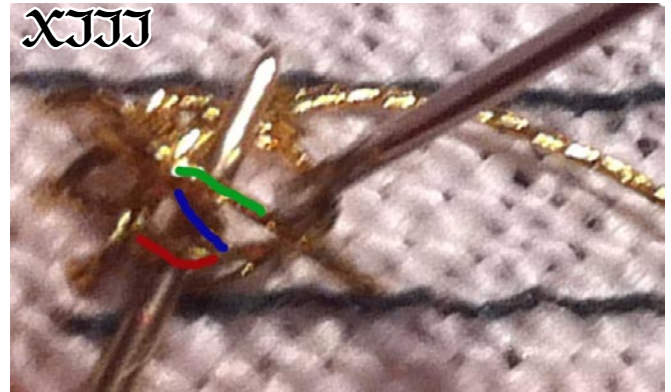
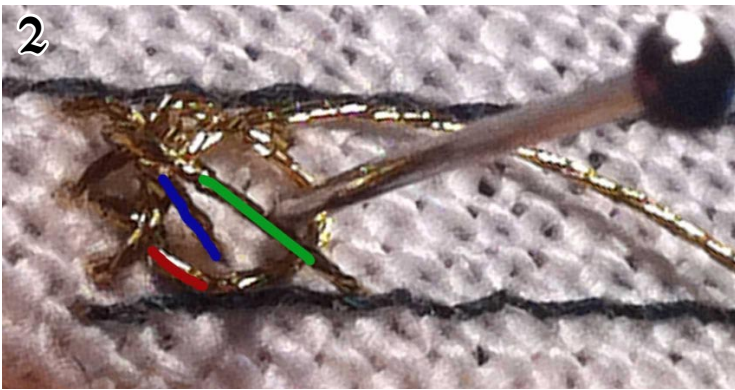
Step XI: Come up with your needle at the bottom left, as shown here:



Step XII: Slide your needle through the THREE crossed threads at the top of your stitch, as shown here. To help you identify these three threads (it can be tricky until you know what to look for), I've colored them in the photo to the right.



Step XIII: Bring your thread around in a loop to the right and slide your needle up under the THREE cross threads at the bottom. Again, it's hard to identify before you get practised, and I've colored the three threads again. (Note: My photo came out blurry, so I'm showing you two images — one with the threads before the needle goes through, to help you find them, and one with the needle sliding through.) If you're using a pin to keep your loop in place, you can now move it over to the left in preparation for the new loop you'll be making in this step.

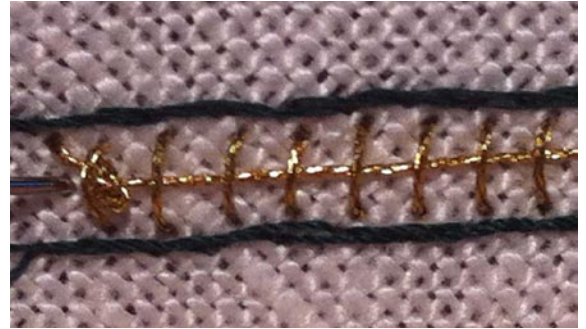


That's it'. Now you just repeat steps X-XIII until you're done! This is how it looks after several stitches:



Notes

- * Different threads will produce different results. The thin thread used here gives a looser looking braid — the metallic thread I'm using is pretty stiff. I like this. A thicker or fluffier thread would fill the braid in more (see photo lower on this page). I have ordered more thread and will experiment with different types! A thicker, yet more flexible, metallic thread would be nice!
- * As you go along, you may notice that your most recent stitches don't look like the older stitches, but don't worry. They aren't being pulled in the same manner because you haven't braided them yet. As you continue stitching, you'll see that things fall into place.
- * If you don't want to use a pin (it can be cumbersome — I like to hold it with the thumb and forefinger of my left hand, under my fabric, as I stitch), you could try using your right thumb to hold it in place and to stitch with your left hand. Or reverse the stitches and go in the other direction if you're right-handed.
- * If you run out of thread, stop after step X, knot your thread under your fabric, and slide your needle through the stitches in the back, as shown in the photo on the right.



Below you can see what the stitch looks like when done in a thicker thread. In the thicker thread (left photo), it's easier to see that the stitch matches the one in this extant coif from the 16th century (right photo):



Web Links

In Search of the Elusive Plaited Braid Stitch – Needle'n'Thread.com - <http://www.needlenthread.com/2008/01/in-search-of-elusive-plaited-braid.html>

Plaited Braid Stitch for Metallic Thread – YouTube - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AadMMpCfYk>

Plaited Braid Stitch – The Embroiderers Story - <http://blogs.plimoth.org/embroidery-blog/tag/plaited-braid-stitch/>

Sampler with Plaited Braid Stitch at the Victoria and Albert Museum - <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O70090/sampler/>



I hope this is helpful! Please let me know if you have any questions! You can e-mail me at genoveavonlubeck@gmail.com