

With the exception of belts and very small canvases (less than 3 in square), my preference as a needlepointer is to work with my canvas attached to stretcher bars. Bars help keep the canvas and threads clean and mitigate the biasing that often accompanies working in hand. It helps with tension when working specialty stitches other than basketweave or continental. It also allows me to use both hands (one above and one below) and also to use a laying tool.

Wait a minute. If I'm using both hands, who is holding the stretcher bars for me? It sure would be nice if I could get my favorite movie star to sit in front of me and hold my stretcher bars while I stitch, but I don't hold out much hope that will happen. I could just prop them up on my knees or on the arms of my sofa, but I'm afraid that I'm not as flexible as I used to be and I'd be regretting such contortions for a long time afterward. Fortunately, I have other options. Frames and stands to the rescue!

There are many different options for holding your canvas and they each have their own uses. The simplest tool is a frame weight. This allows you to sit at a table and position your canvas so that the area you are working on lies over the edge. The weight sits on the upper edge of the piece, holding it down on the table and cantilevering the weight so that the lower edges are unsupported. Frame weights can be anything from handmade and decorative items such as stuffed toys filled with BBs to simple weighted objects such as stack of coffee coasters. Another option for working at a table is to use C-clamps from the hardware store to clamp the upper edges of your stretcher bars to the edge of the table. Be sure they are large enough to clear the edge of your table and have padded or plastic covers on the clamps so as not to mar your furniture.

Another option is to use a stand. I own 2 System 4 stands; one is a floor stand and the other is a lap (or travel) stand. With the lap stand, I can easily recline on my sofa and adjust the stand for a comfortable stitching position. I use my floor stand when working on projects where I need a lot of space for my supplies (threads, stitch guides, tools, etc) around me. I can use it sitting at a table or sitting upright on my sofa. Both stands can use a small extension bar that helps me position my canvas exactly where I want it, avoiding stress and tension, keeping my posture and my body mechanics in good form. Other brands of stands have some of the same benefits. Many can be adapted to work with accessories such as lights, magnifiers, and thread organizers. The best way to find the right stand for you is to go to the shop and test drive them. Here at Louise's, we have a number of stands that you are welcome to use while you are here. Once you find the one you like, we would be happy to order it for you, complete with any available accessories you might want to have as well.

Other options exist for frame/stands. Roller frames are also useful for large pieces such as Christmas stockings. If you are working on an extremely large piece, such as a rug, there are speciality stands such as trestle tables and large embroidery frames that can be custom made to accommodate such large pieces.

You might not need a stand for every piece of needlework you do. But when you do, you will wonder how you ever did without one!