STEADLEAF PRESS
MAKE / PRINTING, STENCILS & COLOR

Print a Repeat Border on Fabric



SIX MOTIFS / ONE TESTED BORDER

14 practical steps · Mark · print · compare

Original diagrams and two printable maker records

Illustrative plans — not physical test results

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Before you start

A border can change the character of a plain fabric panel without covering the whole surface. This guide uses one repeat stamp to place six motifs near one long edge of a small, prewashed cloth. The important extra step is to use printing ink explicitly made for the fabric, then compare sacrificial swatches after the product’s required cure. A successful home observation does not establish a formal colourfastness grade or certify a textile for skin contact, laundering with other items or food use.

Materials: one plain 300 x 150 mm woven cotton craft panel, matching offcuts from the same fabric, a purpose-made small stamp suitable for fabric printing (up to about 30 x 30 mm), a fabric-compatible block printing ink and recommended applicator, protected flat work surface, scrap barriers, ruler, removable guide tape or pencil suitable for the intended fabric, plain white witness cloth and a dedicated wash container if the ink instructions permit hand washing. Read all product labels. This is an adult decorative practice panel, not a garment or food-contact textile.

Plan the project

Use a 300 x 150 mm panel, measured after prewashing and drying as its care instructions permit. Place six centres at x = 50, 90, 130, 170, 210 and 250 mm from the left; y = 35 mm from the upper edge. The 40 mm pitch leaves 10 mm between 30 mm motifs along the row, 35 mm side margins at both ends and 20 mm minimum upper margin, assuming the illustrated square footprint. Recalculate if the fabric shrinks or the actual stamp is larger. A separate guide strip with six marks avoids marking the finished face.

Prepare three matching offcuts: P for a printed unwashed reference, W for a printed sample to wash, and C as an unprinted fabric control. Print P and W with the same method. Dry and cure both exactly as the ink requires. For example, Speedball Fabric Block Printing Ink is water-washable oil-based, requires no heat setting, and its maker recommends waiting a full week before washing or wetting. Other inks may require heat; do not copy that schedule across products. Choose a no-heat system if you cannot safely follow a heat-setting procedure. Compare only after the actual labelled conditions have been met.

Steps 01–02

1. Choose the intended decorative fabric

Use a stable plain woven fabric with known fibre and care instructions, such as cotton suitable for the chosen ink. The project is a flat decorative panel or sample, not a wearable item. Avoid unknown finishes, delicate valuable textiles, coated fabric and stretch cloth for this first repeat. Obtain enough matching offcut material for the trial samples.

2. Select the correct printing ink

Read the exact ink product label and confirm compatibility with the actual fibre and printing tool. Paper relief ink is not automatically textile ink. Record whether the product needs heat setting, its cure time, washing conditions and cleanup. If the process is beyond your safe setup, choose another documented product rather than inventing a setting.

Steps 03–04

3. Prepare the fabric before measuring

Prewash, dry and smooth the cloth according to its care instructions and the ink maker’s advice. Do not use fabric conditioner if the ink maker discourages it. Measure the actual dried panel; the plan uses 300 x 150 mm after preparation. If the panel is smaller, reduce the motif count or pitch with sufficient margins. Keep the matching offcuts in the same condition.

4. Prepare a flat supported printing surface

Place the panel flat on a clean protected surface with a suitable barrier underneath so any bleed-through does not stain the table. Use the support recommended by the ink and stamp makers. Hold the fabric gently flat without stretching it. Confirm that it can remain undisturbed until the wet print is ready to move.

Steps 05–06

5. Map the six-centre border

Sketch the post-prewash panel dimensions and mark the six positions from the plan. With a 30 mm footprint, adjacent centres 40 mm apart leave a nominal 10 mm gap. Mark a separate guide along the edge, indicating the consistent 35 mm offset. Test the stamp size and angle against this layout before inking.

6. Make and label the trial swatches

Cut or obtain three matching sacrificial pieces, for example 80 x 80 mm each. Label their reverse or attached paper tags P, W and C before printing. P is the unwashed printed reference; W will be washed; C stays unprinted and will be washed separately as a fabric baseline. Do not use a printed swatch before the ink has fully cured.

Steps 07–08

7. Trial the stamp on matching offcuts

Apply a small, even film of compatible ink using the recommended tool. Place the stamp straight down on a spare scrap, press evenly according to its maker and lift without sliding. Inspect actual coverage after appropriate drying. If the weave shows gaps, adjust ink amount or contact separately rather than flooding the cloth. Record the chosen method.

8. Print the matched P and W specimens

Print the same single motif at the centre of P and W using the chosen method. Keep C unprinted. Label the ink batch and date and leave the two prints flat under the required drying conditions. Do not mistake touch dryness for complete cure. If the two impressions differ substantially before washing, repeat with fresh matched swatches.

Steps 09–10

9. Print the six border positions

Use the same method on the panel, starting at x = 50, y = 35 mm and working along the row. Re-ink consistently as needed. Lift vertically and avoid stretching the cloth while lifting. Keep hands off wet motifs and do not double-print a blurred area. Leave any intentional variation documented in the record.

10. Follow the exact curing schedule

Keep the panel and swatches under the manufacturer’s specified conditions. The Speedball fabric ink example requires no heat and recommends a full week before wetting; this is not a general rule. If using a different product, follow its complete cure and fabric instructions. Do not improvise a hot iron, dryer or oven. Mark HOLD if the required cure is incomplete or unknown.

Steps 11–12

11. Observe ordinary transfer on sacrificial material

After full cure, use a small area of W or another identically printed scrap for a gentle dry-contact observation with clean white cloth, using the same modest contact for each comparison. If the label permits damp contact after cure, repeat on a separate sample with a lightly dampened white cloth. Avoid aggressive abrasion. Record visible transfer, none observed or NOT CHECKED. Keep the P reference intact.

12. Wash the W and control specimens

Only after the full stated cure, wash W as the fabric and ink makers permit, separately from valuable textiles, with a clean white witness cloth if appropriate to the care method. Wash the unprinted C separately using comparable permitted conditions. Record water conditions, detergent, cycle or hand method, time and actual witness staining. Do not wash P. Dry all according to the relevant instructions.

Steps 13–14

13. Compare the dry results

Place P, W and C under the same diffuse light after drying. Compare W with its pre-wash photo and P for visible colour loss, bleeding, cracks or shape change; use C to help identify changes due to the fabric itself. A stained witness or concerning change means HOLD or change the ink and repeat on scrap. Even no observed transfer does not prove wash-fastness over repeated cycles.

14. Record the border and future care

Complete the final record with actual dimensions, six positions, ink, cure, dry/damp contact observations, wash method and results. Mark READY FOR LIMITED DECORATIVE USE, CHANGE/REMAKE or HOLD. Do not wash the main panel with other laundry until a suitable care method is established. Store flat and dry away from strong sunlight. Follow label cleanup and local disposal instructions.

Fix, care and preserve

Border drifts. Re-establish the guide on unstretched fabric.

Ink bleeds through. Use a supported barrier and a thinner film on scrap.

Print looks pale. Compare film and contact individually on matching scrap.

Swatch transfers colour. Hold the panel; change ink or method and repeat after correct cure.

Fabric shrinks. Measure after preparation and recalculate the border.

Source & evidence boundary

Original Steadleaf English prose, calculations, vector artwork, diagrams and maker records. The following sources provide factual context, not certification of this design. Follow actual product instructions and local disposal guidance.

Speedball, Fabric Block Printing Inks - Black, product FAQ

https://www.speedballart.com/fabric-block-printing-inks-black/

Health Canada, Arts and crafts safety

https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/home-garden-safety/use-arts-crafts-materials-safely.html

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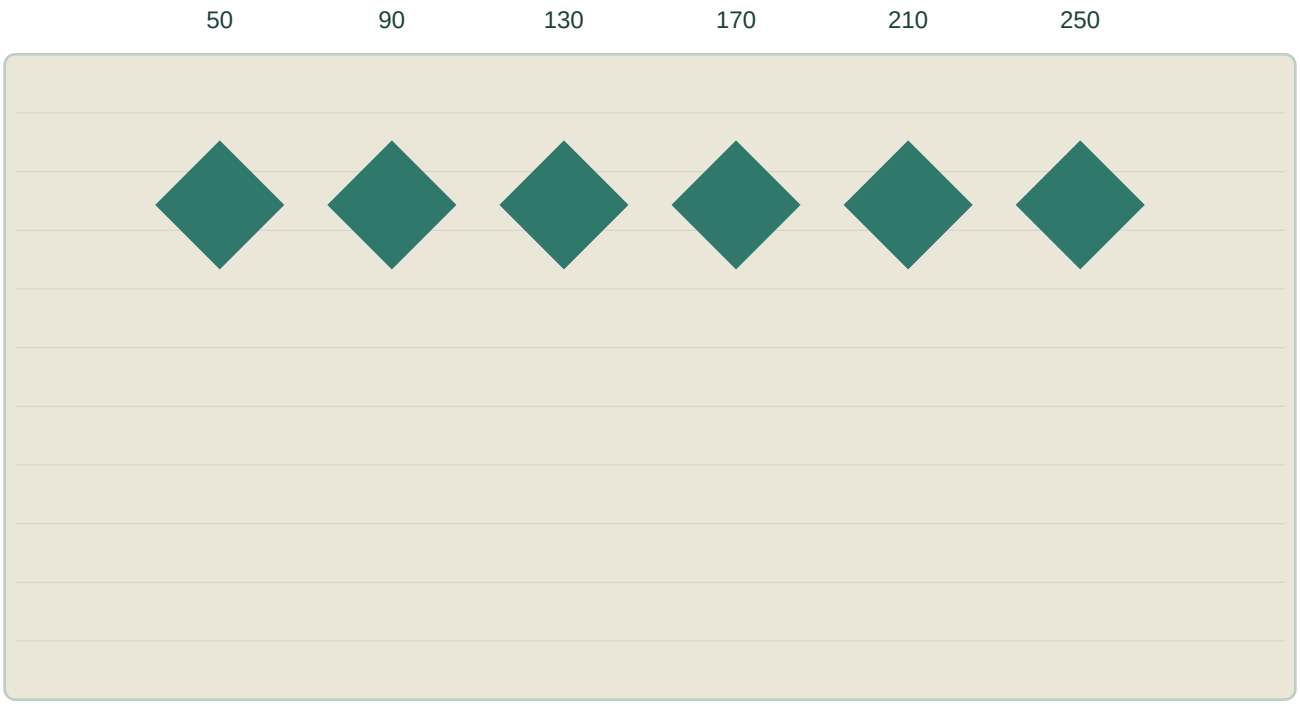
Six-centre fabric border

300 x 150 mm panel; six centres x = 50, 90, 130, 170, 210, 250; y = 35 mm. 40 mm pitch and 30 mm sample footprint.

A / BORDER PLAN (AFTER PREWASH)



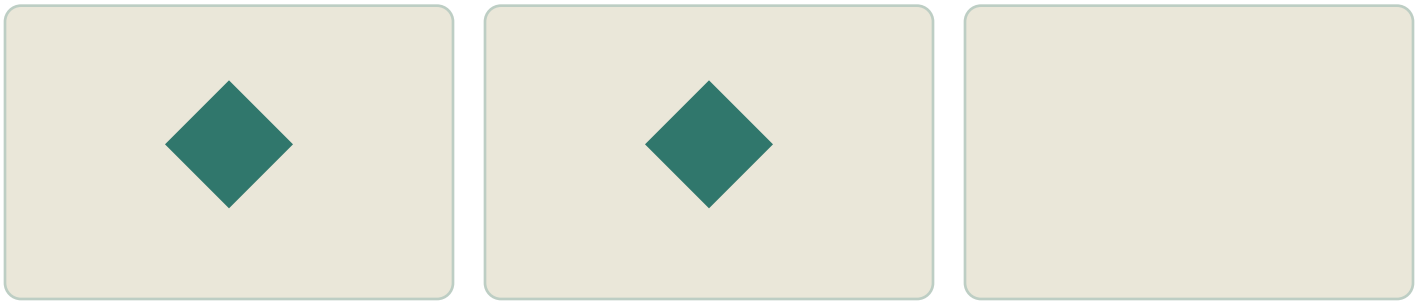
300 × 150 mm · centres y = 35 mm

40 mm pitch – 30 mm footprint = 10 mm gap

Cured swatch comparison

P = printed unwashed reference; W = matched printed wash sample; C = unprinted wash control. Cure before contact or wash; compare the dry results and any white witness cloth.

A / MATCHED SWATCHES



P
Printed / unwashed

W
Printed / wash

C
Unprinted / wash

Cure P and W before contact or washing. Wash W and C separately as permitted. Keep P unwashed; compare dry swatches and actual white witness cloth.

Fabric and border plan

Enter actual observations only. Mark missing information UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED. This is a craft record, not a safety or performance certificate.

Fabric / care label / prewash

Actual panel size / motif footprint

Ink product / batch / permitted fibre

Cure instructions / wash restriction

Actual centres and pitch

Trial contact / film / observation

P / W / C preparation and date

Decision: PROCEED / CHANGE / HOLD

Colour transfer and wash observation

Enter actual observations only. Mark missing information UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED. This is a craft record, not a safety or performance certificate.

Actual cure conditions / completion date

Dry contact / white cloth result

Damp contact if permitted / result

W wash method / witness observation

C wash method / baseline observation

P versus dry W / colour or damage

Disposition: LIMITED USE / CHANGE-REMAKE / HOLD

Care / date / unresolved issue