Broken Stitches: How to Repair a Hole in One Row of Fabric

In the previous article of the series, we discussed how to repair split, but not broken, stitches in finished items by using duplicate stitch to cover the split. But what happens if the stitch breaks completely and leaves a hole in the finished fabric? The hole could be a result of a snag or a pull, or possibly could be a result of moths. This article will focus on how to fix a hole that has occurred in only one row of the fabric and I will show you how to graft the loose stitches to form a new partial row.

If the break in the fabric is only on one row you are lucky, as intact stitches will remain both above and below the broken yarn and this is a relatively easy repair. You may need to unravel the row a bit to make the hole larger to be able to completely see all the stitches. That’s OK to make the hole larger as it will be easier to work and to see. Figure 1 shows an example of a one row break in finished fabric. I have unraveled the row by 6 stitches so you can see it clearly. There are 6 live stitches in the row above the break and 6 live stitches in the row below the break that are hanging free. We will use the Kitchener method, or what is commonly referred to as grafting, to repair this one row break. Grafting is what we do to close toes of socks, tops of mittens, etc., and the result of grafting is a seamless look on the public side of the fabric. Grafting will allow you to make a new row of Stockinette stitches where the broken stitches originally were and you will not be able to see the repair.

If you are lucky enough to have the same yarn as the original garment, you will use that yarn for grafting. If you do not have the same yarn, it is my feeling that using a similar weight yarn of a similar color to the original yarn is appropriate. What happens if you have an heirloom sweater from your grandmother that you want to continue to wear? A repair with a yarn close in color to the original yarn may not be ideal, but you still have a wearable garment and have preserved the sweater.

In order to begin to graft we need to prepare the area. Figure 2 shows the non-public side of the swatch. Note that I have moved the free ends of the yarn to the wrong side and have secured them temporarily so they are completely out of the way of the hole. I took a piece of sewing thread and tacked them to the sides. This thread will be removed later and the ends will be woven in as best as possible.

Now we will graft the free stitches. Thread a tapestry needle with either a new strand of the same yarn as the garment or something close to the same yarn and begin to graft the free stitches together. See Figure 3. Note that as I graft across the row, I am actually making a new row of stitches. For purposes of the article, I am using a different color yarn so you can see the grafted row easily. I have included some resources for you in the Reference Section on how to do the Kitchener technique.

Figure 4 shows 3 new stitches across the row with my needle placed to form the next grafted stitch. Figure 5 shows that the one row hole is now repaired with the newly formed row of stitches on the public side. Figure 6 shows the non-public side with all tails ready to be woven in. There are two tails from the grafting yarn and two ends of the broken fabric yarn that need to be woven in.

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And finally, Figure 7 shows the non-public side after using the duplicate stitch method of weaving in yarn tails. Note that the two yarn tails from the new yarn that was used for grafting are woven into the original stitches of the fabric. The yarn tails from the broken stitch are woven into the newly formed stitches and not into the original fabric.

Hopefully this method will help give you the confidence you need to fix that hole in your favorite sweater. The next article in the series will concentrate on fixing larger, multi-row holes in finished fabric.

References
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Holladay, Arenda. Decorative Duplicate Stitch https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94c_56L-g2U