Jewelry Designs

Warren Feld — Jewelry Collections / Workshops / Classes

ETRUSCAN SQUARE STITCH BRACELET

*Today we will learn
to make a square stitch
bracelet
with a window (negative
space).*

Good Jewelry Design seeks to answer the question:

*Why Do Some Pieces Of Jewelry Draw Your Attention,
... And Others Do Not?*

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Etruscan Square Stitch Bracelet

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This is a fun bracelet project, using the square stitch.   This general design – square stitch with an open window – has appeared in many variations over the years, most recently (2008) with a free downloadable project from Beadwork magazine, and developed by Shelley Nybakke.   This Etruscan Square Stitch Bracelet is influenced by Shelley's version of the piece, particularly in the choice of the 3mm faceted brass cube beads.

This bracelet takes about 4-5 hours to complete.

PLANNING YOUR PROJECT

The Square Stitch is a very basic stitch.   The beads line up along a grid of parallel rows and perpendicular columns, where each square represents one bead. The Square Stitch can utilize patterns developed for Cross Stitch, Loom, or Knitting patterns.

A. Conceptualizing the piece

Ask yourself these questions:
Is this to be for a Woman (6 ½ - 7 ½”) or man (7 ½ - 8 ½”)? Size of wrist?
Given who is wearing the piece, what width should the bracelet be?
What types and materials of beads do you want to use?
What kinds of stringing materials do you want to use, and do you want to wax the cord?
What will the clasp assembly look like, and where and how will you attach the clasp?
What size of window (negative space) do you want? *(Size needs to accommodate the sizes of the beads you want to use to span this window)*
Do you want to use the same bead as the frame, or do you want to create a pattern?
What kind of pattern would you like to create within the window (negative space)?
What colors do I want to use? Metal colors?   Glass bead colors?
What is the Context/Setting the bracelet might be worn in?
How easily will the woven beads, once the project is finished, conform to and feel comfortable on the wrist?

> *(In this example, I created a 7” bracelet for a woman to wear.   The beadwork was 6 ½” and the clasp assembly added another ½”.   The bracelet was 8 – 3mm size beads wide (about 7/8”), and 67 – 3mm size beads long.*
>
> *My frame-borders around the window were each 2 – 3mm beads wide. My window (negative space) was the equivalent of 4 – 3mm beads wide.*
>
> *I wanted to have my frame constructed of one type of faceted bead, and to create a simple pattern of larger square beads along the window space.   I always like to bracket or frame my focal beads, so I put an 8/0 seed bead on either side of my focal square beads.*
>
> *I imagined that my bracelet could be worn casually, as well as a “little dressed up,” which is why I chose to use the metal and gemstone beads on the piece.*
>
> *I chose FireLine thread. The square stitch is a very loose stitch, and the FireLine keeps the thread tension more easily than Nymo or C-Lon thread. I waxed my thread, using bees wax, which also results in increased thread tension.*
>
> *I decided to begin my clasp assembly on top of each edge of the piece, rather than an extension from each edge.)*

B. Measurements

Ask yourself these questions:
What length and width bracelet do I want to end up with?
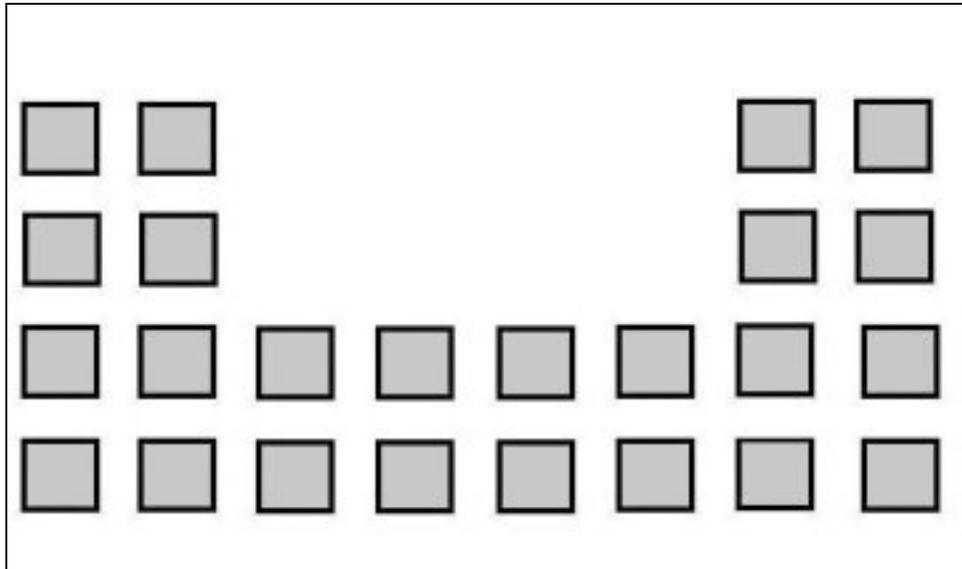What are the widths and lengths of each of the beads I want to use?
How many beads long?
How many beads wide? *(must be an even number)*
Size of window (negative space) within bracelet?
How much more length will clasp attachment create?
Will there be any variation in the actual sizes of the beads, from bead to bead?

The frame and window.
8 beads across
Window frame-borders are 2 beads wide
Window (negative space) is 4 beads wide

C. Sketching a Pattern

Prepare a Graph or general sketch.

Mark down what you are calling rows, columns, and cell (individual bead) numbers. *Do this so it makes sense for you, given the requirements of the particular type of bead-weaving stitch you are using. There are no pre-set rules here.*
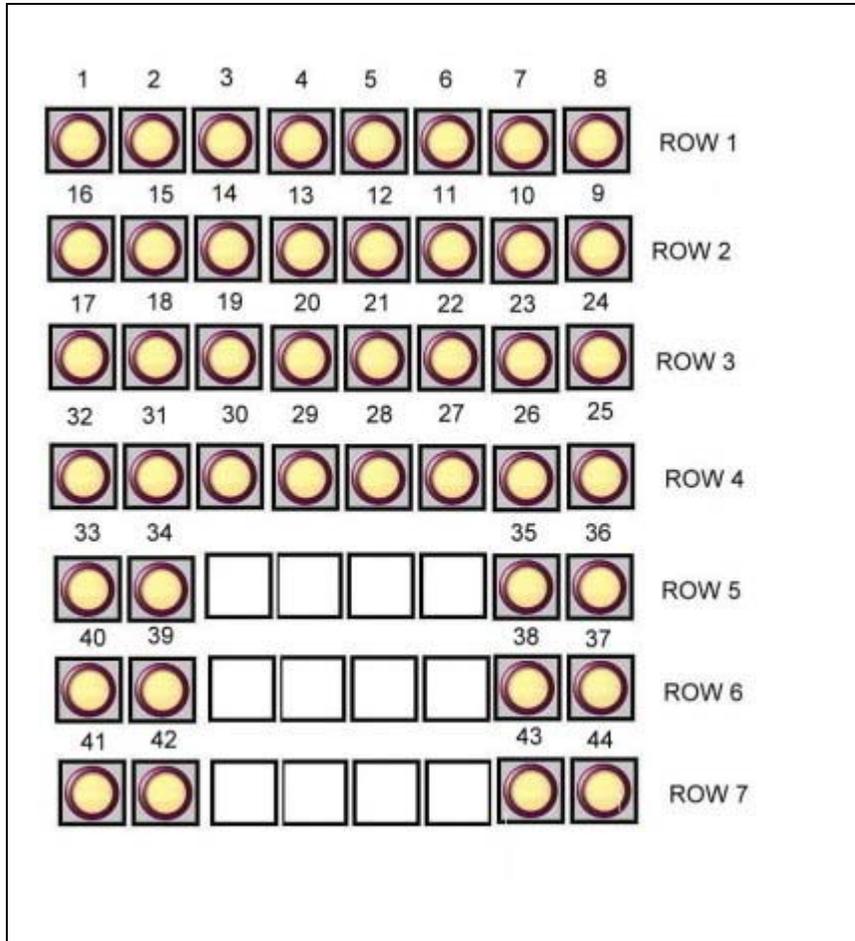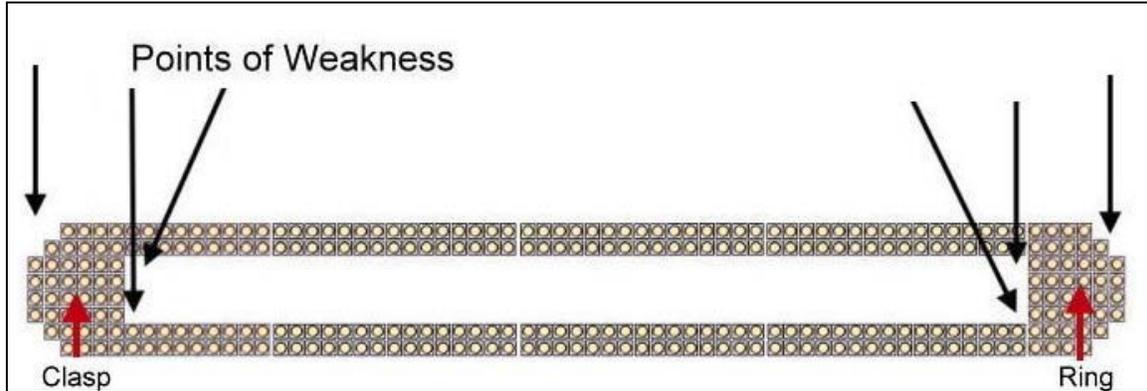

The Beginning of A Graph for The Etruscan Square Stitch Bracelet

Identify points of potential weakness, that will need reinforcing. In this piece, points of potential weakness include:

Inside corners
Each end of the bracelet
Narrow edges along window
The rows of decorative beads you string within the window

Identify where you want to place the clasp.

D. Selecting Materials

- 3mm or 4mm cube beads
- Beads drilled top to bottom, appropriate size, and in sufficient number, to fill in along the window space (negative space)
- Thread or Cable thread as stringing material, that will coordinate with the hole sizes of your beads. We will be making multiple passes through the same bead-holes.
- Clasp Assembly
- 3-4 Needles and bees wax, if desired
- Work surface, scissors, thread zapper or bic lighter
- Pen/pencil, paper, graph paper (8 squares to inch for 3mm cubes and 6 squares to inch for 4mm cubes)

*(In this example, for a 7" woman's bracelet, 7/8" wide, I used:*
- 310   3mm faceted brass cube beads
- 18 – 8mm puff squares and 36 8/0 seed beads. Each square was bracketed on each side by an 8/0 seed bead for a total of 36 8/0 seed beads.
- FireLine, size D (.008) cable-thread in smoke grey color.
 I like FireLine because it holds the thread tension better than other threads, and, its more abrasion-resistant – the metal beads tend to have sharp edges around the holes.
- One antique brass oxidized 13mm lobster claw
- Two 6mm brass oxidized jump rings
- 3-4 English beading needles, size #10
- Bees wax
 Waxing, in this case, makes the bracelet stiffer.   The square stitch tends to be a loose stitch so waxing is useful.
- Work surface, scissors, thread zapper, pen, paper.)

Holding the piece.   I work the piece over my fore-finger.   Thus, my finger becomes like a little easel. I use my thumb to hold the developing beadwork in place.   I am right-handed, so use my left hand and fore-finger as my easel, and work the needle and thread with my right hand.
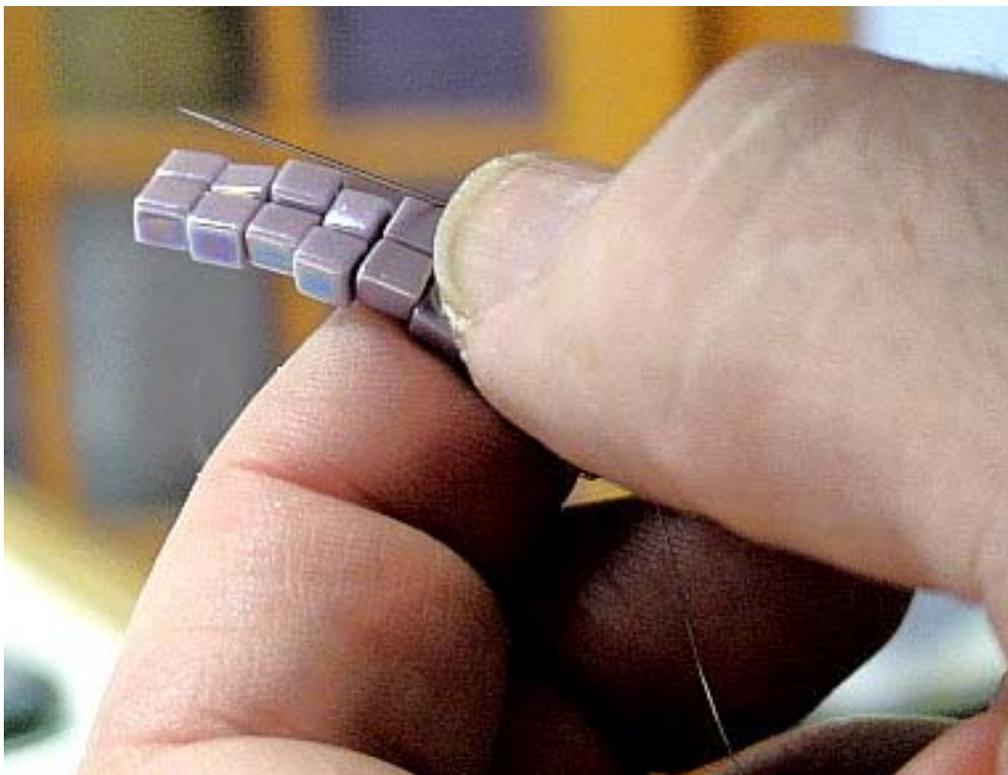
Points of weakness.   These are areas of your piece that will need reinforcement. *(See the graph-image above which identifies points of weakness in this project.   The two narrow frame-borders are points of weakness, as well.   These get reinforced as part of the process of filling in the negative space with beads.   Without reinforcement, the frame-borders would start to pull apart and stretch out.)*

In which direction do you want to work – away from you/towards you; towards you/away from you; side to side, clockwise, counterclockwise?
For this piece, I like to work in a counterclockwise direction, and work the beads going from close to my body towards away from my body.   When I get to the end of the row, I flip the piece, so that I can continue to work counterclockwise, and away from my body.

Where the thread goes in and where it comes out.
The square stitch involves making circles through the holes of two beads. I like to start each "circle" with the needle coming out the hole of the first bead, so the needle is pointing away from me.

Do you want to work from one end to the other, or complete the piece in stages, or create a series and components, and then attach them together?

In this example, you create the basic rectangular frame, and then, at the end, go back and create 2 decreasing rows on each end. Last, you add the clasp assembly.

Create a few sample rows. This gives you a chance to pre-test your ideas and strategies, before barging in to the full task.

Set your mantra going.
Organize the "flow" of your work in your mind. Create a pattern and rhythm in your head, utilizing such things as shapes, sizes, and colors, and noting where thread goes in and where thread comes out, and whether you are working clock-wise, counter-clock-wise or in a figure 8 motion.

In this example, my mantra went something like this:

> "Pick Up A Bead
> Complete a Circle
> Give A Tug
> Pick Up A Bead
>
> End of Row?
> Then, reinforce back row
> And, reinforce forward row
> Flip the beadwork
>
> Start Again… "

F. Organizing Your Work Space

Get your beads, stringing materials, tools, work surface, handy pen and paper, and the like, altogether in one place.

G. *Beginning Your Project: The Basic Steps*

The instructions below are for making a 7" long x 7/8" wide woman's bracelet, using 3mm cube beads.   For a man, you would probably both increase the length as well as the width. You might want to use a 4mm rather than a 3mm cube.   The basic steps would be the same.

BASIC STEPS:
1. Make Frame
2. Make decreased ends
3. Add inside-window beads
4. Add clasp assembly

1. Making the Frame

1. Cut an arm-to-arm's length of thread (about 6')
2. Put the needle on the thread, and leave an 8-10" tail
3. Wax the thread
4. Tie on a stop bead at the other end of the thread (opposite end to where the needle is), leaving an 8-10' tail


How To Add A Stop Bead

Add a bead – a bead that is large enough so that it will not slip into the holes of your regular project beads --, in an obviously-different-color, and pull down towards the end of your thread that does not have the needle on it. Leave about a 10" tail.   Using your needle, go in and out of the bead (*thus, make a circle*) 3 or 4 times.   This should keep the bead fixed in place, but allow you to move it up and down, if you need to adjust your thread tension, particularly for the first row of beads you put on.

When you have completed your project, you slide the stop bead off. You then thread the tail onto a needle, and weave it back through the finished piece, in a zig-zag style, snagging a thread-loop and tying a knot, either once or twice

5. Put 8 cube beads on the needle,
    and push these down to the stop bead
6. Pick up 1 cube bead (to begin Row 2, and this will become #9 bead).
    Push to end of thread.   Your needle is now coming out of bead #9.
7. Take your needle and go up through bead #8,
    then down through the new bead #9.

You've thus made a circle, and your thread is coming out bead # 9 again,
ready to put on bead #10.

Keep going.

9
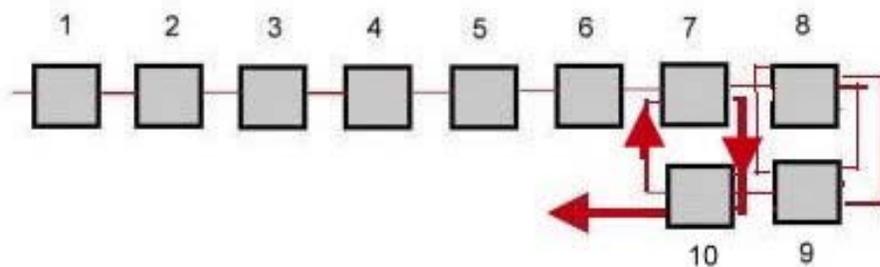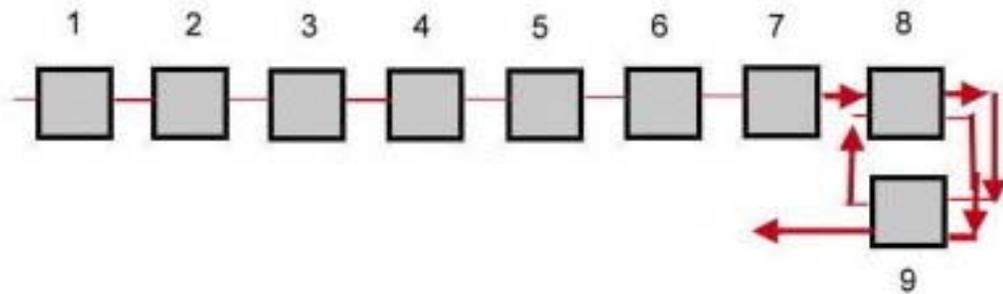
8. Pick up bead #10, and go up through bead #7,
    back around to bead #10,
    and down through #10.
    Your needle is now coming out of bead #10.
9. Repeat this circling stitching motion with beads #11/6, #12/5, #13/4, #14/3,
    #15/2, and #16/1.
    Your needle is now coming out of bead #16.
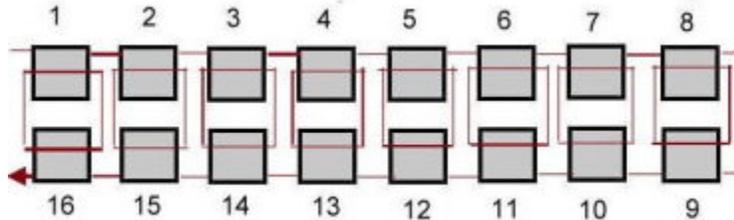
10. Reinforce Row 1 and Row 2.
    Take your needle, and take it through the entire first row (beads #1 thru 8), and
    back through the entire second row (beads #9 thru 16).

    *If you began with a Stop Bead, ignore this bead, when reinforcing your first
    row.*

    Keep your tension tight.   Give a good pull on the thread.   Snag a thread-loop at
   bead #16, and tie a knot.

How to SNAG A THREAD-LOOP

You will find thread-loops along each side of the piece, as well as
between each bead.   You want to work your needle under the
thread.   You DO NOT want your needle to pierce the thread,
because this will cause the thread to fray.

At this point, you can do one of two things.

Anchoring: One thing you can do, after you snag the thread-loop,
is tie an overhand knot around the thread, in order to anchor your
main thread to the piece.

Another thing you can do, after you snag the thread-loop, is double back with your needle and thread, to reverse direction on the same row.
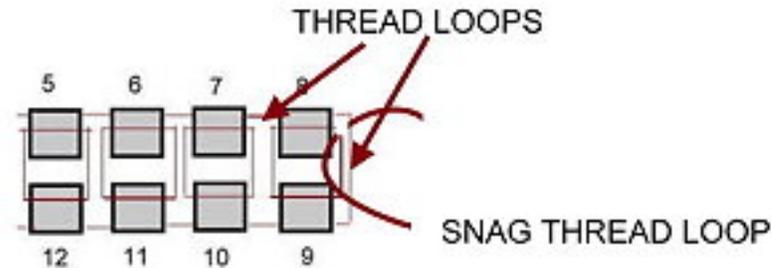
11. Continue making two more complete (8 beads) rows, going back to Step #6 through Step #10.

    At this point, I like to flip my bead work over, so that I am always working in the same direction. For this project, I like to work from my body outward, thus away from my body.

    So, you pick up bead #17,

    Take your needle and go up through bead #16, then down through the new bead #17.
    Pick up bead #18, then thru #15, and so forth to create row 3.

    Reinforce Row 2 and Row 3, as in Step #10.
    Then begin row 4.

12. We will now make the frame, leaving a 4-bead wide negative space.   The frame consists of a left and a right border, each made up of 55 rows, with 2 beads in each row.

13. Your needle should be coming out of Bead #32 (Row 4).
    Add a bead (#33), make your circle back through Bead #32, around and back through bead #33. Your needle is now coming out of bead #33.
    Add a bead (#34), make a circle with bead #31.   Your needle is now coming

out of bead #34.
Reinforce by circling through bead #31 and #32, the up through bead #33 and #34.

Because this corner is a point of weakness, make one more reinforcing circle (#34 to #31 to #32 to #33 back out through #34).

Pick up bead #39, make your circle.
Pick up bead #40, make your circle.
Reinforce the previous and current row.
And continue the pattern until you have made 55 rows.

14. At this point, you want to double check the length of your piece, before continuing. *Remember to take into account how much more length the addition of your clasp assembly will create.*

   To shorten the length, weave your thread backwards to take off some beads.

   To increase the length, you can do one of two things.
   A. Increase the number of 2-bead rows in your frame border.
   B. Or, add 8-bead rows to the beginning of your piece. REMEMBER, if this is your strategy, you'll be adding an equal "length" to the ending rows of your piece, as well.

15. After you are satisfied with what the length will be, check your thread tension. Give a tug on your thread. Snag a thread-loop and tie a knot. With this thread, circle down several rows, snag another thread-loop, tie another knot, circle down a few rows, and cut off the thread as close to the bead-hole as you can.

16. You are ready to make the other side of the frame border. Towards this end, we have to start with a second needle and thread.

   Cut an arm-to-arm's length of thread (about 6')
   Put the needle on the thread, and leave an 8-10" tail
   Wax the thread

   To add this thread, I like to start back a few rows from where I want to start bead weaving again.
   I snag a thread-loop, pull my thread all the way out, but leaving about an 8-10" tail, and then tying a knot. I zig-zig my way up to where I want to start the bead-weaving again.
   So, in this project, I would snag the thread-loop between beads #12 and 13, tie a knot there, but leaving an 8-10" tail. I would zig-zag with my

needle and thread from #12 through #11, then follow the diagonal, up to and thru #23, up and thru #25.   Now my needle is coming through bead #25.   Check your thread tension. Give a tug on the thread.

Add bead #36, make a circle through #25, add bead #35, make a circle through bead #26.
Reinforce #26 and #25 in Row 4, and #36 and #35 in row 5.

Snag Thread-Loop,
Tie Knot
Zig-Zag to Next Starting Point
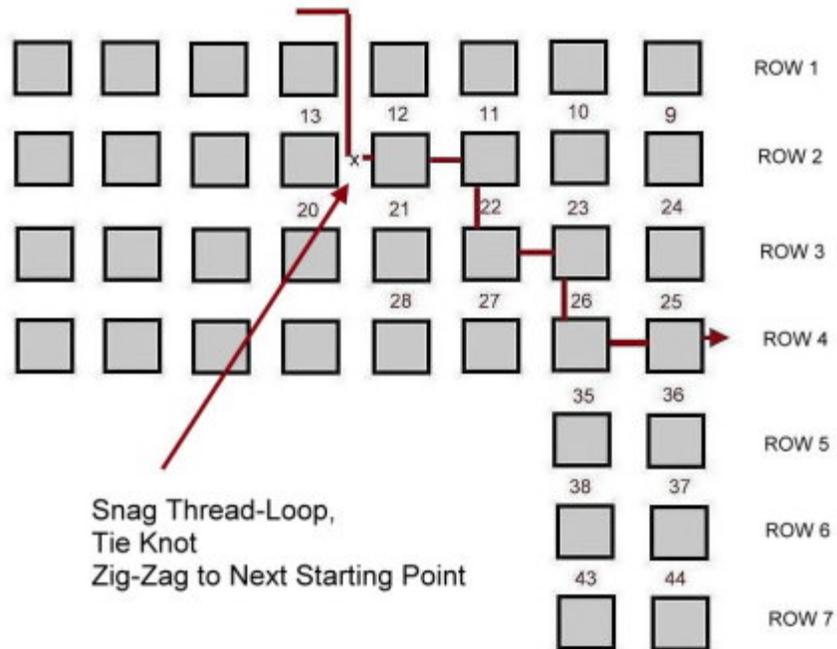
Continue making 2-bead rows, until you have completed 55 rows.

Double check that you have the same number of rows in both frame-borders.

If you still have your stop bead tied to your frame, this would be a good time to slide it off, and rework your tail zig-zagging through your piece. Along your pathway, catch two different thread-loops and tie knots.   Continue through a few more beads after your last knot, before trimming the tail.

17. Now we're going to join the two frame borders and add the final 4 complete (8 beads) rows.

Your thread should be coming out the bead on the outside of the frame border. *(If not, work your way to that point.)*

Add one bead, and circle around this and the previous bead, and back through this new bead.

Circle around again, to add reinforcement at this corner.
Add a bead, make a circle, come out this new bead.
Circle around again, to add reinforcement at this corner.

Further, reinforce these beads by weaving through the lower row, and then weaving through the beginnings of the upper row. You might do this a couple of times.

Add 5 beads. Make a circle with the fifth bead and the inner-most bead of the opposite frame border, and bring the thread out this new bead.
Circle around again, to add reinforcement to this corner.

Add a last bead to complete the row, make a circle, and come out this new bead. Circle around again, to add reinforcement at this corner.

Reinforce these beads by weaving through the lower row, then the top two beads in the top row, back through the lower row, and up again to the top row. Go back through the 2 outer beads on the top row. Snag a thread-loop, and go back through all 8 beads in the top row, to come out on the other end.

Check your thread tension. Pull tight. You might also snag a thread-loop and tie a knot.

Make 3 more square stitched rows of 8 beads across. Check your thread tension. Pull tight. Snag a thread-loop and tie a knot.
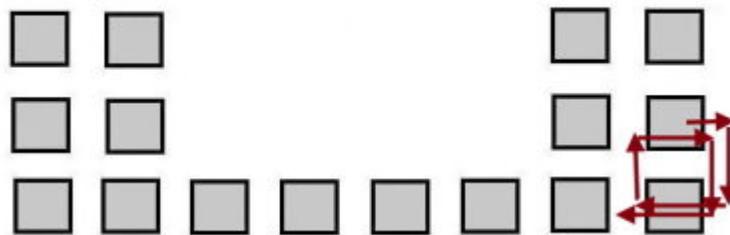
Position your needle and thread so that you are bringing your thread out from *the 2nd to the last bead* at the far left or right side of the top-most row.   We'll begin the next step from here.

2. Making the Decreased Ends

Double check the length one more time. Remember that addition of the clasp assembly will also add some length.   If you need to increase the length, you can add more 8-bead rows to either end. If you need to decrease the length, you can make 1 decreased row instead of 2, or leave off this step entirely.

Again, your needle/thread should be coming up between the 1st and the 2nd to the last bead in the row.

For this next row, we will be adding 6 more beads.
So, pick up a bead, and then continue to square stitch 6 beads across.
Reinforce the 6 central beads in the previous row and the 6 new beads in the current row.
Maneuver your needle and thread so you are exiting between the 1st and the 2nd to the last bead in this 6-bead row.

For this next row, we will be adding 4 more beads.
So square stitch 4 beads across.
Reinforce the 4 central beads in the previous row and the 4 new beads in the current row.
Make a reinforcing circle one more time, because the ends of the bracelet is a point of weakness.

Snag a thread loop, tie a knot, zig-zag a bit back through the piece.   Snag another thread loop, tie a knot, zig-zag a bit more, and then cut off the thread.

Come out between 1st and 2nd
to the last bead in the row
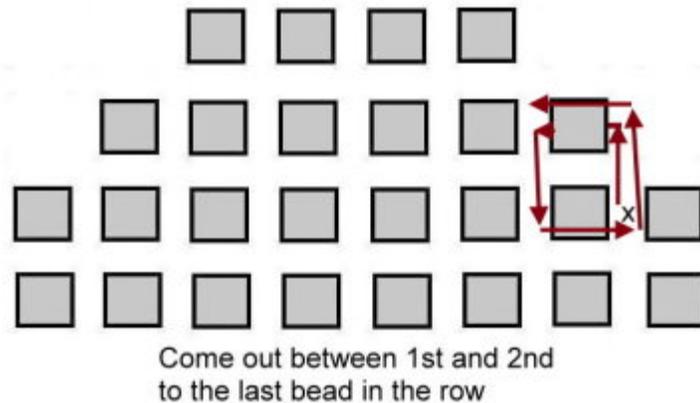
Tie on another thread near the other end.   Make the two decreased rows follow the same procedures as above.

3. Adding the Inside-Window Beads

Some Pre-Planning
You need to do some planning and measuring here, before adding your inside-window beads.

First, find the middle of the window (negative space).   In our project example, this would be between the 27th and 28th rows (out of 55 rows).   We'll use the 28th row as the center.

Measure the width of your widest or fattest bead.   In our project example, this would be 8mm for the 8mm puff square.   This is 1mm smaller than the space that three 3mm cubes takes up.

Determine what kind of spacing, if any, you want between each bead across this window (negative space). *I think the piece looks better when the inside beads are close to each other, even touching or slightly overlapping*.

NOTE: When someone wears this piece, it stretches out a bit, so the actual spacing, when worn, will be slightly larger than it is as you are creating and playing with it.

16

NOTE: Deal with any imperfect fit issues at each end of the window, near the clasp or ring.   You might need to increase some spacing, or decrease some spacing, to get all your beads on.   Do this at either end.   You want the middle, thus focal point, of the bracelet to be very evenly spaced.

R-25   R-28   R-31

R-28
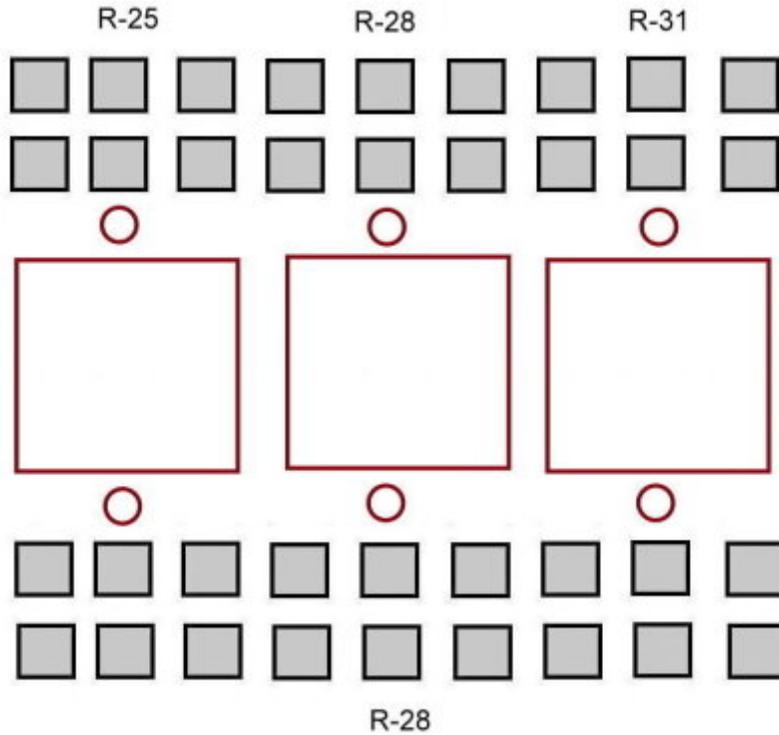
So, to begin the process.

Start with an arm's to arm's length of thread (about 6'). Wax your thread.   Tie it on a few rows below where you want the thread to come out, and zig zag to Row #27, so you are coming out the outside of the row, and ready to go up and into Row #28 headed to the inside of the window.

Add one 8/0 seed bead, one 8mm puff square, another 8/0 seed bead, and bring the thread from inside the window to outside the window or Row #28 on the opposite side from where you started.
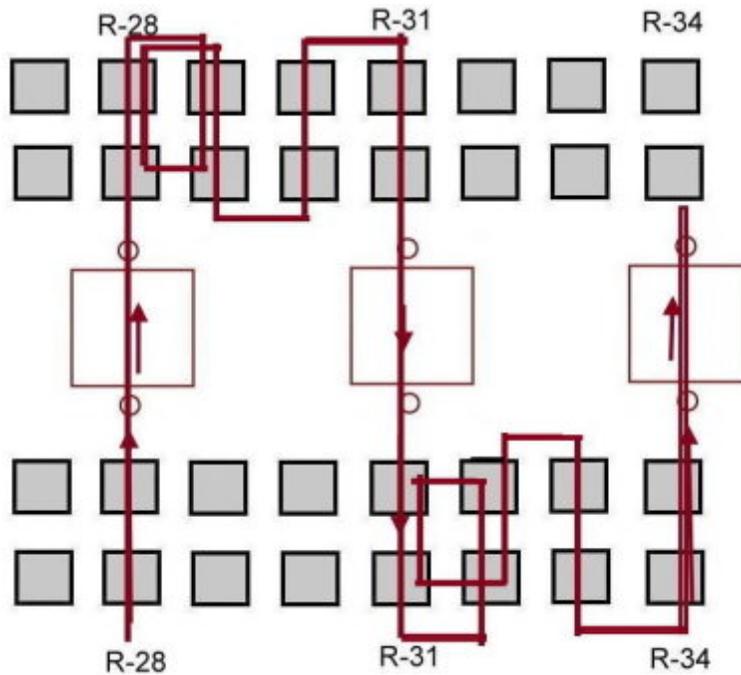
Come out of the outermost bead on Row #28.   Make a reinforcing circle, coming back through Row #29 towards window, then back to the outside through Row #28.

Bring the thread back down towards the inside through Row #29.   Bring the thread back up towards the outside through Row #30.   Then circle back down Row #31 towards the window.

Add an 8/0, a puff square, and another 8/0 bead, and bring the thread, from inside to outside of window, through Row #31 on opposite side.

Circle around to Row #32 inward, then Row #31 outward, then Row #32 inward, and then Row #33 outward, then Row #34 inward.

Add an 8/0, a puff square, and another 8/0 bead, and so forth.

Continue to add inside beads at rows 37, 40, 43, 46, 49, 52 and 55.

When you finish adding beads between the two Rows 55, you need to maneuver your needle/thread, so that you can retrace your steps backward.   This will reinforce all the window beads you've added so far.

And, to position yourself to complete the other half of the window, you'll exit outward at Row 28, then inward at Row 27, then outward at Row 26, and inward at Row 25. You'll add an 8/0, puff square, and another 8/0, and go outward through Row 25 on the other side of the window.

Work your way down this half of the window, adding window beads at Rows 21, 18, 15, 12, 9, 6 and 3.

When you finish adding beads between the two Rows 3, you need to maneuver your needle/thread, so that you can retrace your steps backward towards the center again. This will reinforce the rest of the window beads you've added.

Snag a thread-loop, tie a knot, zig-zag.   Snag another thread-loop, tie a knot, zig-zag and cut the thread.

4.   Adding the Clasp Assembly

I like to anchor my clasps a little bit in from the outside border of my pieces.   This creates a more secure anchoring.   It also helps to bring both ends of the bracelet together, when worn, and minimize any "skin" that might show between the two ends of the bracelet.
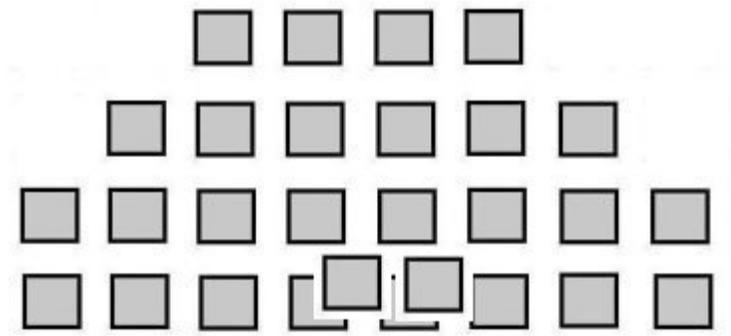
Here, I begin at the 2nd complete row from the end of 8 beads across.   I am going to add two new beads, which will sit on top of the 4th and 5th beads in this existing row.

I am going to tie on a thread, a couple rows back from where I want to start, and zig-zag my way so that I am coming up through the 4th bead (between the 4th and 5th beads) from the right of this Row #2 of 8 beads across..

I add one bead, and circle back around, so that my thread comes back through the 4th bead, and exits the 5th bead.
I add another bead, and circle around back through the 5th.
Now I circle a few more times to reinforce these two new sitting-on-top beads and the 4th and 5th beads in the existing 2nd complete row of 8 beads.

Repeat these steps on the other end of the bracelet.

On one side, you are going to add one of the 6mm jump rings, so that the ring goes through the two holes of the top-beads you've added.   Maneuver the ring so that the "gap" lies (thus is hidden) within the bead holes.

On the other side, first add the other jump ring to the loop on the clasp.   Then work the ring through the two holes of the top-beads you've added. Manuever the ring so that the "gap" lies (thus is hidden) within the bead holes.

NOTE: If adding a lobster claw, be sure the lever is facing up on top, and the hook is facing down.

H. Dealing with Contingencies – Things that may happen

1. Running out of thread – Adding Thread

When it looks like there is about 12" of thread left, I start to plan to tie it off and begin another thread.

To tie off the old thread, I snag a thread-loop, zig-zag through a few rows of beads, snag another thread-loop and tie another knot, zig-zag through a few more rows, and trim the tail of the thread.

To add a new thread, I start back a few rows.   I snag a thread-loop, tie a knot while leaving an 8-10" tail, and zig-zag up to where I want the thread to come out, and continue

where I left off.   When I am finished with the project, I put a needle on the tail, and zig-zag it through some rows of beads, before cutting off the tail.

2. *Some areas of your piece feel too loose, or are pulling apart*

I snag a thread-loop and tie off a new thread a few rows below where the problem is.   I zig-zag my way up to the problem area, and reinforce it, by weaving around and around and in and out, and across and back.   The more you fill the hole with thread, the tighter the piece will feel.

I. Finishing Touches

1. *The thread tails*
Be sure the tail has been anchored to the piece. If not, you'll need to tie a knot.   Slip a needle on, weave back through a few rows in a zig-zag pattern, and trim the tail.

2. *Embellishments and fringes*
You might want to add some 11/0 or 8/0 seed beads, or some mini fringe drops, along the edges.

Or, you might want to add some beads on the surface of the piece.

3. *Signature bead or embellishment*
I think it is always a good idea to use a signature bead in your projects.   This might be a unique bead added near the beginning or end of the piece, or an engraved tag added as part of the clasp assembly.   You want your signature bead to identify the piece as your own, but you don't want your signature bead to compete with or detract from your piece.

The general structure of this Square Stitch Bracelet has been around for decades.   Your personalization – choice of beads, choice of patterns, choice of window (negative space) treatment – are your own touches, and deserve your signature.

WARREN FELD
www.warrenfeldjewelry.com
Jewelry Designer

Director, Center for Beadwork & Jewelry Arts (www.landofodds.com/beadschool)
and www.LearnToBead.net

Owner, Land of Odds (www.landofodds.com) and Be Dazzled Beads
(www.bedazzledbeads.com)

For Warren Feld, Jewelry Designer, beading and jewelry making endeavors have
been wonderful adventures. These adventures, over the past 25 years, have taken
Warren from the basics of bead stringing and bead weaving, to wire working and
silver smithing, and onward to more complex jewelry designs which build on the
strengths of a full range of technical skills and experiences.