

Quilting Tips & Tricks

Relax and have FUN! Quilting should be fun. If you mess up, shake it off and move on. Take your time and don't rush. You will learn something new with each quilt you make and use that knowledge in your next quilt. If you're new, your skills will improve and the only way to learn and improve is to DO.

TIPS from the QGP Board and Members:

- Embrace imperfections, the beauty of a handmade quilt is not in its perfection. Acknowledge that it is okay to make a mistake. The Amish say "it shows that we are not perfect". However, it is also important to know you can fix it. Once your quilt is finished, you will find the small imperfections won't show.
- If you are a new quilter, don't bite off more than you can chew. Try a small project that uses quilting tasks like piecing, trimming and binding (such as a potholder, mug rug or a placemat). You will practice techniques and be able to finish a project. Work up to larger and more advanced projects when ready.
- Keep your sewing machine free of lint and dust. Take out bobbin tray and brush out lint (don't use canned air as it will blow the lint deeper into machine). Have your machine serviced once a year.
- Iron, iron, iron! Start with wrinkle free fabric to ensure clean, even cuts. Always press your seams as you go. When ironing the seams, PRESS don't iron them.
- Clean the fibers out of your self-healing cutting mat using warm water, soft brush and gentle soap. Air-dry flat.
- Save 1 ½ inch salvage strips for a future project or use as leaders and enders.
- Before taking your quilt top to be quilted, press and de-thread the top.
- Pin seams going through both sides of batted seams.
- Buy all of the fabric that you need at the same time.
- Glue baste the binding and the mitered corners down before sewing. Also use glue on the nested seams for perfect pin-free matching of seams.
- If you make repeated cuts, use masking tape on your ruler to create an edge for your fabric to butt up against.
- Take a photo with your phone and look at the picture in black and white. It helps with light and dark placement. Also helps with remembering where you want the blocks to go.
- Use jean fabric or other dark fabric to check for the right side of white-on-white fabric.
- Make your quilt the way you want it, whether it matches the pattern or not.
- Put minky fabric in dryer with a damp cloth for a few minutes to get all the fluffy edges off.
- There is perfection and there is my ability. Embrace the errors.
- Twirl the seams on the back of a 4-patch, 9-patch, etc. It will help with the bulkiness.
- Stand when you cutting with a rotary cutter, relieves strain on your shoulder.
- Use a pump garden mister to ease wrinkles in quilt blocks, top, and backing.
- Stray basting your quilt top, batting, and backing before quilting.
- Measure twice or three times and cut ONCE!
- Use a curtain rod and hoops to hang a completed quilt to take pictures.
- A dryer sheet and paper towel will clean the sticky gunk off your iron.
- Use black sashing to separate blocks that don't line up well next to each other.
- Use leaders and enders when you start to sew to prevent the first piece from getting jammed in your feed dogs. An ender will keep the last seam on your "chain pieced" blocks straight.
- Some quilters have a bonus scrap projects started by using them as leaders and enders. Leaders/enders also gives you something to stitch in between the lines of chain-stitching other things. These little units are made as "sew-betweens" instead of using a folded over, thread covered throw away scrap to keep your piecing continuous and leaving "something" under the presser foot of your machine to hold your place.
- Keep a chunk of masking or painter's tape near your machine to collect those stray strands of thread.
- Post-its on the back of your ruler act as bumpers when you are cutting strips.
- 2 ½ gallon clear bags work well as project bags. Keeps everything you need in one place.
- Don't iron fold-over binding and it will ease in easier and not pucker.

- Keep a small container near your cutting mat to collect scraps as you create them. When the bin is full, put the larger scraps in your scrap bin and throw away the tiny trimmings. Cut your scraps into useable strips and squares for future scrap busting projects.
- Square up your fabric before cutting. It is important the grains are running perpendicular to each other (lengthwise grain is parallel to selvedge and crosswise grain is the WOF (up and down).
- Sew a perfect ¼ inch seam allowance. Quilt patterns are like puzzle pieces, if your seam allowance is not exactly ¼ inch your quilt block will not line up properly. Use a ¼ inch presser foot or use painter's tape to mark ¼ inch on your machine. A "scant ¼ inch" seam allowance, means it is one thread line less than ¼ inch (the line is on the inside of the ruler, not on the outside of the ruler).
- Pay attention to the direction of your fabric. If your fabric is directional, the fabric will be at an angle when your quilt block is done. For some parts of a quilt, it DOES matter which way the fabric lays. Before you cut out your fabric, make sure your fabric will be in the correct direction when the block is constructed.
- Always trim and square up your blocks. If you want an 8" x 8" block, it should be exactly 8" x 8". The best way to get a quilt block the size you want to trim it down after it has been pieced. When you're trimming, just remember you can always trim more, but you can't add fabric back on.
- Measure block components as you build a block, it will save time in the long run.
- Nesting your seams is what makes those perfect points and matching up of fabrics. The trick is pressing the seams to one side (not splitting them open). When combining rows, iron seams one way for one row and then ironing them the opposite way for the next row. Match up seams at the seam allowance, pin in place then sew rows together. The corners will nest or almost interlock with each other creating near perfect corners.
- Work in batches and chain piece when possible. It takes longer to make one block from start to finish and then repeat the process 40 times. When you start sewing a seam and get to the end of the fabric, put the next piece under the presser foot and keep sewing. You'll save time and thread by not cutting your thread each time.
- When you have to take out stitching (it happens to the best of us) pick every 4th or 5th stitch from the bobbin side. This is a really quick way to easily pull out all the stitches so you can quickly start over. Another tip is to rip out the seam over an ironing board. Then use a soft toothbrush to brush the seam so the bits of thread come off (brush straight off the edge at 90 degrees, not at any angle or the threads may unravel at the edge). Swipe the toothbrush across the ironing board to gather up the thread bits and it's in one nice little wad to throw away.
- Use coffee mug tree to hang all your scissors. Keep it off to the side of your work area to organize/hang the scissors by size/use. It has a nice small footprint and it is easy to see which pair you want to grab.

Having the right quilting supplies, makes quilting easier.

Rotary cutters. A 45 mm rotary cutter is an all-purpose size for most cutting. Always close and/or lock your rotary cutter when not in use. If you find yourself having to repeat cuts or use more pressure while cutting, change your blade. **Slow down** and be careful as you are working with very sharp blades! Make sure you have a good hold on your ruler and that your fingers are out of the way before slicing the fabric.

Acrylic rulers. 24" x 3" ruler will allow you to cut long strips of fabric. Other size rulers that are recommended are 12" x 6", 6" square and 12.5" square ruler. Use painter's or washi tape to mark the size you need on your ruler. This helps with accurate cutting and squaring off your blocks.

Quilting pins. These are longer and stronger and designed to pierce through layers of fabric and batting. A tip for keeping your pins together is to glue a strong magnet to the bottom of your pin dish. Or buy a magnetic pin holder.

Machine needles. Use the right size needle for your project. Change your needle every 8 hours of sewing or when starting a new project.

Thread. Quality matters, if you use cheap thread, it will break and also produce a lot of lint buildup in your machine. Coats and Clark thread is fine but Gutermann or Aurefil thread is even better. Use 100% cotton thread when quilting. Use the same fiber content as your project (cotton thread for cotton fabric). If unsure, use all-purpose thread.

Batting. If you choose polyester batting, sewing will feel like the equivalent of nails on a chalkboard. Using 100% cotton batting gives the quilt a nice weight and warmth and also very pleasant to quilt.

ENJOY AND KEEP ON QUILTING!