

Quick tips for sewers and anyone working with fabric

EQUIPMENT

1. To prevent your machine foot pedal from sliding on carpet, press the hook side of a strip of self-stick Velcro to the bottom of your pedal.
2. To keep the foot pedal from moving on hardwood or tile, try a piece of webbing sold to keep dishes from moving on shelves or in a RV.
3. Furry pipe cleaners and Q tips are great for getting thread lint out of your machine.
4. Zip lock bags:
 - a. Snack size to corral thread and bobbin when putting a project aside
 - b. Sandwich size, with sharpie label, for each size component piece, do this when when cutting out a quilt.
 - c. Storage size for larger pieces, and another for the remnants and boarder yardage. Copy and keep a copy of the pattern, with your notes, in another bag or page protector sleeve. Cheap bags at the dollar store.
5. Numbers: Before moving your quilt from the design wall or floor, pin numbers written on fabric scraps or paper to every square, and if possible take a picture. If interrupted, you can go back later (even a long time later) and finish your assembly.
6. Templates
 - a. if making small templates from Mylar, try some spray adhesive on the back to help keep them in position. Try Goo-Be Gone to remove the adhesive if you want to save the template.
 - b. Large templates can be made of layers of freezer paper stapled together.
7. Rotary Cutter:
 - a. Yes, replace the blade.
 - b. No one reported having success self-sharpening the blades.
 - c. If your blade is not nicked, you may get a little more life by flipping the blade in your cutter. The edge that rubs against the rulers gets dull faster than the one that doesn't.
8. Needles
 - a. Yes replace these too, 8 hrs of sewing time is suggested per needle.
 - b. When you first open a needle package use a colored sharpie to draw a line of color across the shaft, a different color for each size (have you ever tried to read those size markings?)
 - c. Create a system to store your needles between uses. If you use different needles during a project, it should indicate what needle style (ie jeans/denim or universal) and the size. Some, but not all, needles are color-coded for each style, if you use these colors as part of your system you are ahead of the game!
 - d. One quilter indicates, by placing a flower headed pin, which needle has been removed and is in the machine.

- e. If you have trouble positioning your needle to insert it into the machine, stick it into an old school eraser. It makes easier to hold the eraser. Using it, move the top of the needle into and all the way up in the machine.
 - f. Size of hand-sewing needles dictates the length of stitches, a 7 between (common size) gives about a 1/4" stitch length, the 10-12 appliqué needle yields about 1/8"stitch.
9. Sewing bird
- a. This is the Victorian object that would hold one end of a strip of fabric to free up both hands for ripping or pinning. Very handy if you have one.
 - b. Today make a "third hand" to stabilize the end of your fabric with your sewing machine needle and presser foot.
10. Color Catcher is a product available in the grocery store to add to your washer to catch any excess dye that releases from your fabric.
11. String: Use the trimmed off selvedge edges of fabric as string, it is quite strong.
12. Household racks
- a. Folding wooden clothes rack can be used to hold multiple fabric strips so that they are all visible and accessible.
 - b. A tie rack can be used to store a smaller stash of strips
13. Clean and oil your machine(s), they will work better.
14. In addition to plastic rulers, carpenters metal L and T shaped rulers help to achieve square corners and straight sides.

DESIGNING

1. A design "wall" can be made from a variety of materials. It is really helpful for almost any pattern or idea so you can see how your individual fabrics are going to "play" with each other. Consider also how your project will be used, it will look different flat on a bed or on a wall. However, if a design isn't working well, try a different position to give it a "fresh" look. That may help.
2. Use mirrors to achieve multiple repeats to get more of a view of the finished project without having to make so much.

THREAD

1. Orient the thread correctly, for cones the thread should lift off of the top, the regular spools can unwind from the side.
2. Be sure the thread feeds smoothly, make the hole for the spindle smooth, be sure the thread doesn't catch on texture in the spool.

SEWING / FABRIC

1. Fabric stretches more on the cross grain, less on the length, many patterns call for cutting borders or bindings first from the length of the fabric to provide the most stable borders and bindings.
2. Adding borders or binding, sew with pieced piece on top to avoid sewing across points.

3. If you need to ease in a longer piece put it on the bottom, the feed dogs will ease it in. Think “fat bottom” if humor helps you remember.
4. Sometimes when sewing a narrow piece to a wide piece, often the narrow will pucker. Try sewing with the wider piece on the top.
5. Check that your machine tension is correct, there should be no loops on the top or bottom when sewing. It is easiest to achieve even tension with the same weight thread in the top and bobbin.
6. Bias cuts
 - a. These cuts angle across the fabric result in unstable edges
 - b. Handle bias carefully, don't stretch or let hang over an edge.
 - c. Sew bias edges without pulling or stretching, when sewing a bias and a straight grain piece experiment with your machine to see whether the bias should be on the top or bottom layer usually it works best with the bias on the bottom, the feed dogs help move it without stretching.
7. Stabilize fabric before cutting by spraying with Best Press, sizing, or starch (though starch may attract bugs), and pressing the fabric. 3 coats of spray is often suggested.

PRESSING

1. Pressing is like a two-step dance, place iron down, lift it up, repeat (sliding the iron like is done for ironing clothing can stretch your piece)
2. Use Best Press, sizing, or spray starch to stabilize and give crisp folds.
3. Press each seam before stitching across it, then press the new seam etc.
4. Press the seam as stitched, then in the desired direction. This not only sets the stitches, it also makes it easier to get a crisp pressing.

CUTTING.

1. Listen to the carpenters, measure twice, cut once.
2. Some people only use the lines printed on their cutting boards, others always use their ruler. Most always, the key to accuracy is to use one system and set of tools consistently. If your goal is to be very precise, re-measure your cut pieces, the mat may not be entirely accurate, or your ruler has a depth which might change where the edge is placed. Also for ultimate accuracy check how you stand and place your cutter and ruler in relation to the fabric to be cut, and check again after sewing each seam.
3. Plan ahead, if triangles are cut so that the non-bias edge ends up on the outside edge of the quilt it will be easier to achieve and maintain a straight edge
4. A heavy weight on the far end of a long ruler helps stabilize it when cutting.

HAND SEWING

1. Hide hand stitching thread starts and stops.
2. Use a blind hem stitch to finish your binding. Attach the beginning knot to the seam allowance under the binding, then take an anchor stitch. At the end of your thread take an anchor stitch

and tie off using a surgeons knot (run the needle through the loop of thread twice, then tighten) then run your needle under the binding for about ½ inch to hide the ending thread. Thread endings will be hidden. This method is used by hand quilters and appliqué quilters alike.

3. A dab of liquid bandage on tender quilting fingers will protect them.
4. Sometimes moistening the needle (not the thread) will help threading the needle
5. Sometimes in hand-sewing needles one side of the eye is a tiny bit rough, try turning the needle over.

ASSEMBLY

1. Heavily creased batting may benefit from a brief time in the dryer to warm it, and then spread on a flat surface.
2. When washing or dampening the piece and there is a color that you are not sure whether it is entirely color fast, dry that section with a hair dryer, the rest can be left to air dry.
3. Snip threads for a professional look, and then you won't have to trim them off of the front of your piece.
4. It helps accuracy to trim dog-ears, and reduces bulk.
5. Especially for stars and kaleidoscope pieces with several angled pieces joining at the center, sew in pairs, then re-measure for the exact angle called for, trim if needed, this helps to avoid the "D" cup star. You won't be able to quilt out that mound.
6. Borders
 - a. For accurate borders, measure 3-4 times across the piece for the length, cut both boarder strips the average measurement. Repeat for the width. Pin the center of the boarder to the center of the quilt side, and then out to the corner. This helps to preserve the squareness of your quilt.
 - b. "Square up" your piece before adding borders, again before adding binding.
 - c. There is no substitute for measuring, across, length, and then corner to corner to achieve a square result.
7. Stabilize the outside edge with twill tape before adding the binding, if the piece is constructed with biased edges, might stabilize it before adding a boarder.
8. If finishing the piece with a facing consider fusing a shirt-weight interfacing to that facing to give more body and a flatter quilt.

FAVORITE PRODUCTS

1. "Best Press", Lila suggests ordering from Mary Ellen Products.com (they have unscented and larger quantities)
2. June Taylor makes a ruler with several slots, very helpful for cutting a lot of strips as the ruler does not have to be repositioned as much.
3. Hair clips, use these instead of pins to secure bindings as you sew, no pin pricks. This is especially good if sewing while traveling.

PREPARING QUILTS FOR THE SHOW

1. Use your vacuum to clean your quilt. Tulle or a nylon stocking over the hose will prevent the quilt being sucked into the vacuum tube. Or use the dusting brush.
2. Some pieces benefit from a short spin in the dryer with a damp towel.
3. If you have used wool batting, steam from an iron held above the quilt will help restore the loft.