

Perfecting Your Piecing

Prewash or not

- I started out a faithful pre-washer but then we got precuts! So my rule is all or nothing.
- Prefer to prewash reds and purples.
- Products: Synthrapol, Retayne and Color catchers
 - Synthrapol is a cleanser for dyeing fabrics. It can be used as both a prewash and after dyeing. This cleanser is supposed to be good at removing procion dyes as well as preventing different dark-colored dyes from losing their color.
 - Retayne is a fixative used to prevent dye bleeding.
 - Color catchers look like dryer sheets but go in the washing machine. Their purpose is to prevent excess dye from escaping colored clothes, causing **color** runs into any white clothes you have mixed in with the same load.
- If I prewash I serge the raw edges first. This prevents raveling and tangling of the fabrics. Bonus – if fabric in the stash is serged I know it has been prewashed.
- Definitely wash fabric from a big box store, shrinkage can be inconsistent.
- In my experience wide backs can also have more shrinkage than regular quilting fabric. Normal quilt store quality cottons shrink 2-3%, cotton battings 3-4%. In my experience the general shrinkage with wide backs is 6-8%, I have had a few shrink as much as 10%.
- A final thought how will you care for the quilt after it is completed?
- Include care instructions if quilt is a gift.

What to do with your selvages

- CUT THEM OFF! They have a different weave structure and they may shrink more than the rest of the fabric.

Grain; Straight, cross, bias

- Straight grain is the length of the fabric; it is the most stable grain.
- Cross grain is the width of fabric (WOF). It has slightly more stretch than the lengthwise grain.
- Bias: needs to be controlled! Best Press is recommended when stitching on the bias. Also consider using a walking foot or a dual feed system if your machine has one.

Cutting

- How to fold fabric for accurate cutting, avoid the V and W
- Develop good rotary cutting skills
- Use the same brand of rulers. Cut by the ruler not the mat.
- Don't leave the line on the table!

Needles

- Change it!
- Size and type, Schmetz has a wonderful website with tons of useful information. For piecing I use a Microtex 11, for machine quilting (on a domestic machine) a Microtex 14.
- [Sewing Machine Needle Education – SCHMETZneedles](#)

Pressing matters

- to one side vs. open
- Nesting
- Pinwheel
- check your seams – don't lose the bottom layer
- Best Press or other light starches

Piecing, how to get the perfect ¼" seam,

- Options for ¼" feet, with and without a guide, seam guides.
- 3 strip test, cut 3 - 1.5" wide stripes of fabric, sew and press seam to the dark side. Lay a ruler over the center stripe of fabric, it should measure 1" the entire length of the stripe.
- Thread choices;
 - Polyester or cotton?
 - Are you piecing or quilting?
 - Weight
 - Stacked or cross wound. How to handle cross wound spools on a vintage machine or stack wound on a newer machines.
 - Cheap thread is not a bargain, thread quality matters!
- Points, how to pin and sew so you can see them
- Curves, minimize use of pins
- Squaring up blocks
- Don't lose the bottom layer!

Borders

- How to (and how not to) – measure both sides and center, average the number and cut borders that length. Pin both ends and center, then ease the rest to fit.

Backing

- Square – see first bullet point for accurate cutting.

Binding

- Straight vs bias
- Striped fabric
- Pin before you stitch
- How to join binding – miter then press open
- Mitering your corners