

# *As a quilter, is there anything you have learned, that you wish someone had told you?*

## **em's scrapbag said...**

That it is more important to enjoy the process than to have a perfect quilt

## **Valerie said...**

I taught/am teaching myself to sew and quilt, so a lot of things I learned the hard way. A few things I wish I would've known when I first started:

- {1} The wonders of spray basting (I hate pins!)
- {2} Pressing a seam to "set it" before ironing the seam allowance keeps most of my blocks from being unintentionally wonky.
- {3} It's ok to mix and match your fabrics in the same quilt. You don't have to stick to one colorway by one designer! \*grin\*
- {4} When joining rows, start with your seams...not the edges.
- {5} Freezer paper is highly under-rated!

I'm sure there are others, but those came to mind first.

## **Dana - Old Red Barn Co. said...**

Most of what I have learned has been self taught. And as such, I have such pride of ownership over my quilting and each aspect of it.

But, I wish in the very beginning someone would have told me that when lining up and pinning blocks or rows or whatever that I can push and pull and tug my fabric a bit if necessary. Of course accurate cutting and accurate sewing are paramount to a successfully lined up seam. However, fabric does have a bit of give in it and you can finagle it a bit for absolute perfect seams. When I was just beginning I let so many seams be a tad off when they didn't have to be.

## **grendelskin said...**

1. Press before cutting!

1a. Press, don't iron.

2. As with anything else, good tools make a huge difference. Buy that 1/4-inch foot and the good rotary cutter.

2a. If you machine sew, learn the machine. You'll be glad you did!

3. Learn to lie, or at least fudge a little, regarding your hobby. You will almost certainly exceed your original budget! We have a "don't ask, don't tell" policy in my house and it works out well.

## **Rafael's Mum said...**

I just wish I had come across Dana's excellent Old Red Barn Co tutorial a lot earlier!

Nobody taught me how to press... so I fingerpressed a king sized quilt and ironed it on the good side only to find it would not lie flat...did I know?? Now I do!! thanks Dana!

For that and all the other stuff you taught us I did not know.. like how to line up seams, to pin correctly, do the binding, mitre corners etc etc etc... Eternally grateful!

## **CitricSugar said...**

Oh, let's see.... Of the many things:

Even the pros don't always get their points matched perfectly.

Not all machines are capable of FMQ so don't tear your hair out.

Larger quilts are more than double the work to quilt!!

Cheap is not the same as inexpensive and cheap looks cheap when you're finished.

You can get buy without a walking foot but it's something you should eventually invest in.

If I think of others, I'll let you know.

**Sherri said...**

Well, as an absolute newbie I'd say rotary cutter and mat are essential (I actually cut up my first squares with scissors and disastrous results! Ha! I can laugh about it now).

Line up seams when joining rows/blocks and let the rest work itself out.

Don't obsess over perfection.

I agree with the previous budget comment! ;-)  
My stash doesn't get discussed in my house either.

It's worth it to work with fabrics that you LOVE. Makes it so much more rewarding when it's done!

**Chl said...**

When I teach a beg. class to newbies, I always tell them that I am not perfect, but I was raised to strive towards that goal.

#1 - to press the fabric first and sometimes I will even lightly starch it a bit. This will help with less stretching and wobbly pieces.

#2 - if I have to unpick and re sew a seam or intersection, I will only do it, no more than 3 times. Any more than this, and you take the chance of distorting your fabric beyond recognition.

#3 - TRY TRY try to sew accurately and straight!! (If you choose to sew a slightly larger seam, of which this one lady did and still does, always keep it the same.) Yes her finished project were smaller, but everything fit.

#4 - Pressing and ironing. You would be amazed at how many people don't know the difference!

#5 - I PIN! I know a lot of people that don't, that's their choice.

I could go on and on. There really isn't just one thing.....

**Sara said...**

Attach the hanging sleeve along WITH the binding on the top of the quilt. That eliminates one bit of hand sewing.

Then push the sleeve up so that it is folded on the top EDGE of the quilt before sewing the bottom edge down. This will create a small "bubble" of fabric that gives room for the hanging rod.

Previously, if possible, make the sleeve a width that is a smidge (technical term) larger than the first border on the right side, or that will land its edge in a place where you can put a quilting line. This will allow you to sew in the ditch on the right side, or make a quilting line that will catch the sleeve on the back, and VOILA! no hand sewing at all!

**QuiltSue said...**

To trust your own feelings when choosing fabrics and colours. It is difficult to make a quilt if you aren't happy with the fabrics in it.

**Delilah****said...**

One thing I learned from your website is pressing seams open. I wish I would have known that before I completed my stars quilt and flying geese quilt. I started pressing my seams open on my zig zag quilt and it is a night and day difference. It is more time consuming but well worth it.

Also, when I do little patchwork or a pin cushion, etc. I always change my stitch to 2" (instead of 2.5") It really makes a great difference.

**Dresden Quilter said...**

I learned this last year from Eleanor Burns and I wish I had learned it years earlier. When you are putting blocks sets together, say a 9 patch block and a background block, make the 9 patches first. Then measure your blocks. If you are having a problem with your 1/4 inch seam, you can always adjust the size of your background blocks when you cut them out.

**Amy B said...**

OK, so I am learning as I go. Getting tips and hints from all the blogs out there.

And a theme in the posts is the difference between pressing and ironing.

Yeah, what's the difference? Can someone explain or send me a link to a tutorial??  
Much appreciated :)

**Candied Fabrics said...**

Yup These are all great pointers! What I can add:

1) Even better than spray basting is fusible batting! GO GET SOME! (Hobbs 80% cotton is my fave)

2) Press often WHILE you're free motion quilting! Big AHA moment for me!

**Cindy said...**

That the "plaid cottons" will NOT lay perfect in every piece of every block.

Since I began as a garment sewer - making plaids MATCH was essential!

**Diana said...**

This is a great topic; I've learned a bunch today. Something I wished someone had told me is that when you join a triangle to a square, there will be a little "ear" hanging off either one or both sides. The first time I had to do that, I thought I had cut all my triangles too big!

**Susana said...**

This post isn't in the least boring. I'll certainly be checking it often for more lessons.

The big lessons I've learned, aside from the press, don't iron bit (which, in fact, applies to clothes ironing, too), are: the perfect is the enemy of the good (which applies to life, but I keep forgetting it) and you can marry clashing shades of a color by throwing more shades at them. Which is a part of the bigger lessons: don't be afraid of colors, and they change next to each other.

**AnnieO said...**

I have been machine sewing clothing since I was 11 and got deeper into quilting about 10 years

ago. I wish someone had told me that there were quilting blogs--I only found them about 18 months ago! Since I'm sewing alone 99% of the time, I really enjoy being able to share my quilting obsession with other bloggers (including you of course!)

**jlk said...**

Take shortcuts when you can. Things like triangles on a roll and thangles were invented to help us get more work done with better results.

**Jessica said...**

i wish i would have pre-washed all my fabrics from the beginning. now i have tons of scraps from the early years and i don't know if I ever washed them or not..

and another which I'm only now learning to follow: buy it when you see it. I left so many beautiful fabrics at the shop thinking i could always go back and get them later, ha!

**Crystal Hendrix said...**

the 1/4" seam line matters!

**Vicki said...**

I wish I had taken a lesson in color theory before making a few of my very first quilts. VALUE is the darkness or lightness of the color of your fabric, and it is more important than the actual color.

**Ahava Jora said...**

I wish somebody had taught me how to use a walking foot (for both straight line quilting and other types of sewing) years ago. I had one sitting in a box of notions that was given to me as a teenager, but it was weird and intimidating, so for years I overlooked it. Now, I can't live without it.

**BaileyGirl5 said..**

When I first starting sewing for a hobby last year I was reading blogs and instructions and seeing the cutting mats and rotary cutters. After spending two hours cutting out 10 five inch squares with my scissors, marking pen and a yardstick I decided it was time to try these out.

I didn't really understand how they worked and I didn't want to go overboard in the expensive supplies department so I went to Walmart and purchased a tiny little mat set that came with a small ruler and cheap rotary cutter. The mat was hard and only six inches wide. After only a few attempt to use it I realized with was just unusable because it was way too small. Then I went out and bought a giant self-healing mat at Joanne's and a bigger ruler. That was a lot better but my ruler constantly slipped while I was cutting my fabric. I tried gluing non-slip pads on it and buying different size handles to hold it but to no avail ... still slipped all the time ruining my cuts. And to top that off my rotary cutter constantly bunched up my fabric. Finally got a nice new large rotary cutter with some replacement blades. Ahhh ... that part was much better but still the slipping problem. When I was at a quilt shop one day I mentioned to the woman cutting that my ruler slipped all the time and she said, "Why don't you get a ruler with a lip at the bottom to hold it in place?" Why don't I?? I didn't know they made such a thing! I went out and bought one immediately and viola! No more slipping problem.

I have two friends at work that are starting quilting and the first thing I told them is to go right for the big mat, the nice rotary cutter with some fresh blades, the ruler with the lip, and the big handle from the hardware store meant to stick on a bathroom wall. They think I'm so wise! I feel great that I can guide them a little, but I don't feel that wise when I'm thinking about all the money I spent on items that are useless to me now.

**Teresa said...**

I just wish I had been taught not to fear touching the tension on a sewing machine. My mother was, and still is, terrified of adjusting the tension.

I understand my machine and am so happy I know how to get the tension just right. My machine doesn't scare me now!!

**Peggy said...**

For Moda pre-cuts, there's no need to wash them. I didn't know this until I read it on the Moda site. more small frayed pieces to iron!

**Greg said...**

I've learned that no matter how skilled the quilter, EVERY quilt has issues. I have since stopped trying to get every piece perfect and am now enjoying the quilt making process much more knowing that I'm not perfect and neither is anyone else. Relax, enjoy the process, an if you make a mistake, learn from it, pass it along and remember every quilt has issues.

**I Love Baby Quilts! said...**

There are different kinds of felt. If you try to iron the kind from Hobby Lobby, it will instantly melt and smear black all over adjoining fabric.

**lisa said...**

there habve been so many "ah ha/ well why didn't anyone just tell me that!" moments lately, most notably how great trimmed up hst's and other things can be, pressing tips, binding is not that hellish (I kept making it so much harder in my mind than it really is and now have a stack of projects to bind =)

**Cheryl said...**

1. Free motion quilting doesn't come easily for anyone right out of the gate. Get some good practice in and eventually you will realize you don't have it, and maybe you'll even like it!

2. DON'T buy cheap fabric!

**Rita @ Mochi Studios said...**

Thanks for bringing up this topic, Amy! I've learned alot from the replies already. I'm also a self-taught quilter and I love trying new techniques on small projects first, like a pillow or wallhanging, before trying a big quilt. Keeping all my scraps help me with experimenting and trying new things which is fun and exciting. Also, quilting is not always a solitary effort and I would encourage new quilters to find a community, online or offline, to quilt with, to keep challenging and inspiring

each other, to work on collaborative projects together, to give back to the community and to have fun!

**jodi @ Pleasant Home said...**

I've learned everything from other quilters. But if there was something I wished I would have learned right up front it would be that imperfection in a quilt is perfection. ;o)

**Patty said...**

I always felt that I needed more help with picking colors. I seem to be to matchy-matchy. Sometimes you need that "off" piece of fabric to make your quilt look great.

**Duff said...**

I remember the fashion today--tight tops and baggy bottoms. this reminds me which side I want by the feed dogs if one piece is larger than the other.

For anyone new to this--put the baggy piece on the bottom and hold the top piece with a little stiffness--your feed dogs will pull the bottom piece through a little bit more so the two pieces end up lining up perfectly by the end!

**Laura said...**

In my many years of sewing and quilting, I've learned that most of us are too hard on ourselves, and tend to be too critical of our own work! We notice the tiniest things that no one else would unless we point the "flaws" out. And I just want to say that internet blogs are the best source of information for quilters of all types, it's made me realize that there are thousands of people out there who share my interests!

**Terriaw said...**

When I first learned to quilt, I took a series of classes at a local quilt shop. They taught me every single step. But they never mentioned spray basting, which I love now because I really hate pinning. I also never learned how to attach a binding by machine. Another point would be that clothing uses a 1/2 inch seam and quilting uses 1/4 inch.

**Lauren said...**

I have a lot to learn it seems! What's a walking foot and what on earth is the difference between ironing and pressing?!?! I think I will google those things right now!

One thing I have learned/ got drilled into my head by my Mum is that you should always always pre-wash your fabric.

**Amy - Park City Girl said...**

Lauren - you aren't alone :)  
Essentially pressing is lifting the iron, instead of sliding it along. The sliding may distort the grain.  
Amy

**MadeByMeaghan said...**

I love this question! I learned that fabrics online don't always look the same in person...plus, support your local quilt shop! I have also learned how awesome butting your seams against each other is - if you're not pressing seams open. I also learned that if you don't want to pre-wash, you don't have to, just don't combine washed with unwashed. And, a slightly imperfect quilt just shows that it was hand-made, which is the best kind. Who cares if it's "perfect"?

**ktquilts said...**

That "making do" with what I have often forces me to be creative and I end up liking the quilt better!

**Polly said...**

Just a few-  
There are NO quilt police.  
Don't point out every mistake on your quilts. Life is busy, but try to do something creative every day.  
And relax, and enjoy the process as much as the product! Polly :-)

**SheilaC said...**

GREAT post and I love all the info being shared here. I am self taught and learned many of the tricks mentioned here from reading every quilt book I could get my hands on. I got quilt books

for my bday, mothers day and Christmas... got some from the library and watched Alex Anderson on PBS. :) I am a visual/hands on learner and I have to see pictures as I am doing it.

Now that I have found the blogging world I am learning SO much more from SO many wonderful people. All these tidbits, learned from actual experience are priceless to me.

{BTW, my first quilt, which is warming my lap as I speak, was cut with a rotary cutter.... BUT I didn't but the "expensive" ruler, instead I used a YARDSTICK (wooden!) hysterical.....(now) }  
Many thanks - SheilaC

**Katie B. said...**

Well, I still don't know the answer to this one! When joining rows, how do I get the seams from flipping over when they go under my foot? If I'm joining two rows together, the seams facing the feed dogs always get flipped over. I'm sure there's a trick to this that I haven't thought of!

**Amy - Park City Girl said...**

Katie - I usually pin on both sides of my seam to "help" with this. I like to press open for this reason, less bulk to push through and possibly get pushed in the wrong direction. And I always slow down just before the seam hits my sewing table to make sure I have a chance to lay it flat, prior to hitting the feed dogs.

I hope this helps!

Amy

**Karen said...**

When buying pins buy the best you can afford (like Clover brand pins). They go through the fabric like butter and do less damage to fabric as they are lovely and sharp and thin. The only downside is that the sharper they are the more damage they can do to your fingers.

**eriven said...**

I didn't discover this myself but learned from another quilter ... if you don't have a 1/4" foot

(crazy I know, but I'm a newbie on a budget!) you can just move the needle position. Simple once you know the answer :)

**Make Do & Mend said...**

What a great blog post! I have learnt lots! I think theres a book in this thread alone - it would be the only book you ever needed!

My top tips are i) When tracing template shape onto fabric put fine grade sandpaper under the fabric and your pencil won't pull the fabric and distort the shape  
ii) when you need to make a layout decision take a digital photograph of the options and look at them on the screen - it makes it so much clearer which layout is the one to go with.  
Thanks for all the tips everyone!

**Lesly said...**

All really great tips! Here's one I haven't seen mentioned: Use a stiletto to help guide the fabric while stitching. It is a good alternative if you don't like to pin, and it can help with making sure those seams don't get flipped over on the bottom. It also helps you get that very last bit of seam to align when you can't hold onto it anymore. Clover makes a nice one.

**WendyLou said...**

Took me all day to come up with a tip :) I've found that ironing the binding away from the quilt top after it's been sewn to the front really helps me get a nice, tight line. It's so much easier to turn to the back once it's been ironed.

Can't wait to read everyone's comments!!

**Chl said...**

speaking of sharp fine pins - which are the best by the way -- is if you happen to stab yourself and bleed on your fabric, use your own spit on a cotton swab and dab at it till its gone. Or you could use hydrogen peroxide.

Ironing: is when you rub the iron over the fabric which causes friction and can distort/stretch your fabric. This is mainly used when ironing clothes.

Pressing: is placing the iron on the seam or fabric and just sitting it there for a sec or two. Lift it up and move it to a different location and set it down again.

Hope this helps the ironing/pressing question. Also, I don't recommend steam. Use a dry iron. Steam can shrink fabrics, especially if it hasn't been pre-shrunk (which I don't do for quilts but I do for clothes), and steam can distort the shape.

**Mainly a midwife said...**

Love your header by the way.. Here I am entering a comment :)

Thanks. I'm headed over to check out the blog.

**Stephanie said...**

I really wish that someone had told me that you should drop your needle and pull up your bobbin thread when starting a line of free motion quilting. When I discovered that little tidbit I was so shocked and happy!

**Erin said...**

You know, I wasn't going to post because I am still such a new quilter, and figured I didn't have any important words of wisdom to share. I was wrong. I am currently doing some straight line quilting on my less-than-powerful machine.

You absolutely, most definitely, NEED to keep your quilt rolled up into a neat little springroll wrap. It makes it ridiculously easier to move the bulk of the quilt through the neck of the machine and through the feed dogs.

I used to ignore this advice. And I used to sit in front of my TV, sulking and whining to my husband, while pulling out *hundreds* of quilting stitches. Don't join my club!

**Amanda said...**

I was taught to cut my templates from a shoebox! No surprise when the blocks got smaller and smaller... then I found plastic templates! It's amazing how well the blocks turn out.

~~ Amanda

**BJ said...**

I don't always add borders to my many quilts but I have a quilter "friend" who is frustrated because I don't pre-cut my borders and then make them fit the way it is supposed to be done. My borders are wavy, which doesn't bother me. I have always added the border and then trimmed the ends off, which is the wrong way, apparently. So, if you are making a wall hanging, measure the center of the quilt and cut your border to that length, and then ease the quilt to make it fit. That way, your borders will sit flat, rather than wavy.

**Mod Charm said...**

The tip I learned after many attempts at quilting was to press seams in the opposite direction when matching up strips. It's a lot easier to match up patchwork. LOVE this question!

**aniza said...**

Considering myself as a preschooler in quilting , in the beginning I didn't know about :

a)needles for machines. I mean I used it until it just snap and broken. And it comes in variety for various functions too just like handsewing needles they comes in different sizes and shapes. Reading up and paying attention to machine dealers/quilters explaining about needles does a great help.

b)what a big difference is between a polyfiber batting and natural cotton batting until I quilted my 1st quilt. It's so much more easier to quilt on cotton batting and drapes nicely.

c)That good quilting machine works great. No regret.

e)Basting with pins does make quilting much more easier that basting with threads.

**TheaM said...**

There are some wonderful hints already here - but I'd like to add my two cents worth - literally!

In my efforts to sew accurately and keep all the seam allowances going in the right directions I

have sewed through my index finger THREE times!

Now I use a bamboo skewer from the grocery store to guide my seam allowances and hold my work together as it travels under the presser foot - MUCH SAFER!

If someone had told me about this sooner it would have saved me several trips to the emergency room.

**I am Arizona; a person, not a place. said...**

1. Starch is your friend when fabrics become to soft (if you've prewashed).

2. There are as many ways to make a quilt as there are quilters. In other words, just because one person does something one way and it works for her (or him), it doesn't necessarily mean it will work for you. So, don't be afraid to try something in a different way. There are no quilt police.

3. Use a new needle for each quilt. I use a new needle to piece the quilt top and another new needle for the actual quilting. If the quilt is really big I go through 2 needles during the quilting process.

:)

**Joanna said...**

Thanks for the heads up about this post because I have learned alot from the comments. I have sewed since grammar school, but never got into quilting until recently. I began with simple things like placemats, but I knew I was in new territory and needed to learn things I just didn't know. After buying magazines and following blogs, I finally signed up for a mystery quilt along. It was a small project, but we did it in stages each week for about four weeks. I ended up making two projects because my original fabric choices weren't right. For me, it was the best way to learn since there aren't any quilt stores or lessons in my area. Thank God for bloggers who share their expertise! I know more now than I did a month ago, and if I

want to continue. Although I still enjoy the sewing more than the quilting part.

**Magnolia Designs said...**

If there is a fabric that you have chosen and cut for your quilt that doesn't sit right while you're laying out the design/piecing...don't use it! I learned the hard way, thinking it would grow on me in the quilt that I made for my daughter's first birthday, and to this day, I hate it in the quilt. Don't hate the fabric itself, but in that quilt, it doesn't work. So as not to "waste" that 1/2 yard of fabric, it has cost me so much more in the long run.

**Georgina said...**

I learnt the hard way that if you quilt with Silk fabric, make 1/2 inch seams as it frays very easily. When you hand quilt, a hoop frame helps if you want tiny stitches and also if you tend to overtighten your thread!

**Sooz said...**

Thanks so much for this question and this collection of terrific advice!

I learned myself:

...to love basting spray.

...to take the time to be at least a little more accurate.

...it is fine to love your fabrics almost too much.

...to know my machine, take care of it, and not be precious with the tension "setting".

...to use a design "wall" (mine is a floor) with a grid for easier measuring while laying out.

...to use more solid colors. They bring out fun designs more.

...to revel in the joy of loving fabric and quilting.

Thanks, again, Amy. Best always.