

Cutting Tips

I am always surprised, every time I teach a workshop, at how nervous people get to cut their fabric. I always remind them that there is nothing to worry about, and that in the worst case scenario, they can always get more.

But, I get it! Cutting your fabric can be daunting. Especially when you need to cut fabric for a block, such as mine. I admit, there are a lot of pieces, but, it is SO worth it!

Below, you will find the tips and tricks I have adopted for cutting my fabric for traditionally pieced blocks.

1. Iron your fabric BEFORE you cut.

I know it is tempting to just jump right in to your cutting...BUT, please, whatever you do, iron out those wrinkles and those creases before you start cutting. WHY? I'm glad you asked. When you are piecing smaller pieces together, the smallest inconsistency can make a big difference in your completed block. Some times if we try ironing out a piece once it is cut, you can distort the shape of your block by stretching those threads, and even throw off your grain.

Of course, this is even more true if you pre-wash your fabric...but that's a conversation for another day...

2. Divide your fabric into manageable chunks.

I don't mean, just arbitrarily dividing your fabric into random amounts, I mean cutting off what your pattern is indicating you will need for the particular block you are making. The pattern might indicate you will need 3 m of a certain fabric to complete the whole quilt top, but one block might only need 1/4 m. 1/4 m will be much more manageable to cut, and flip around than 3 m, not to mention that sometimes, if you are trying to cut many pieces from a long length of fabric, the weight of the fabric can be fighting against you...especially if your work surface area is small.

3. Cut your larger pieces first.

I always look at the list of required pieces and find the largest, tallest, or widest one. I start by cutting those first. By doing this, you will avoid ever being left short on your required fabric. You can always cut an off-cut down, but adding to it is a different story!

4. Label your pieces...no, really...LABEL YOUR PIECES!

If there is one thing to take away from this, it is this tip. You might be tempted to just cut a piece, and move on to the next one. You might tell yourself, "I'll remember what piece this is!" But you won't, at least not all the time. I cannot tell you how many times I have sewn the wrong piece to another because I didn't label my pieces. I mean, in the heat of piecing, are you really going to be able to tell the difference between a piece that is 3" x 4.25" and one that is 3.25" x 4". Probably not. Give your seam ripper a break, and label those pieces.

5. Cut your borders/sashing first.

If you are cutting your fabric for a quilt that contains border or sashing, cut these out first, especially if you don't want to piece them. Many times, a pattern will call for enough fabric that allows for you to cut your borders out without piecing them. Take advantage of this, if you can avoid having a distracting seam breaking up your borders, why wouldn't you?

7. Give yourself a fresh cut.

When you get your fabric home from the shop, and you are ready to cut, cut yourself a fresh edge. Even if you edge already looks straight, you'd be surprised how wobbly that edge might be. I'm not saying your local quilt shop cut wobbly...no of course not...I mean maybe it was the journey home!

6. Cutting on the fold.

New quilters are often scared to do this, but it is such a time/space saver. If you have multiple pieces to cut that are the same size, fold your fabric, cut 2 at once. When your fabric is folded, you can treat that fold as if it were a straight edge to keep everything square.

7. Cut good side up.

When placing your ruler on your fabric, make sure your printing is right side up. It might not seem like it would make a difference, but that printing on the back of your ruler actually helps the ruler grip the fabric, and help avoid ruler slippage.

8. Ignore those mat grids when you can.

You will save a lot of time if you only use the measurements on your ruler when you can. This means, if you are cutting a piece smaller than the width of your ruler, there is no need to line up your fabric on the grid of your mat. Just use the lines on the ruler, you'll get the same result, but much quicker.

9. Last, but certainly not least...replace your blade.

They're expensive, I get it...but if your blade is dull, replace it! You will enjoy your cutting process SO much more. Just watch those digits!

Thank you for hearing me out on these tips. Hopefully you've picked up a trick or two to adding to your fabric cutting arsenal. Let me know how they've worked out for you!