

# Quilting Tips for Beginners

For this list, I thought about when I first started quilting and the quilting tips I wish I'd known when I first began. Keep in mind, some of these "tips" are more like suggestions.

*Quilting is an art and shouldn't have strict rules surrounding it.*

1. YOU DON'T NEED ALL OF THE GADGETS AT THE VERY BEGINNING.
2. ALWAYS USE A SEAM ALLOWANCE OF AT LEAST 1/4".
3. USE 100% QUILTING COTTON.
4. PREWASH OR NOT TO PREWASH YOUR FABRICS.
5. THE SEAM RIPPER: FRIEND OR FOE?
6. DOUBLE-CHECK YOUR MEASUREMENTS BEFORE YOU CUT.
7. TAKE IT SLOW WITH THE ROTARY CUTTER.
8. START WITH A SIMPLE PROJECT.
9. DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP.
10. KNOW YOUR NEEDLES.
11. IT'S BETTER TO HAVE TOO MUCH FABRIC THAN NOT ENOUGH.
12. IF YOU QUESTION YOUR FABRIC SELECTION, GET ANOTHER OPINION.
13. USE THE INTERNET FOR INSPIRATION.
14. CHECK OUT THE SKILL LEVEL REQUIREMENTS ON QUILT PATTERNS.
15. USE A STARCH SPRAY WHEN PRESSING YOUR FABRIC.
16. PRECUT FABRICS ARE A TIME SAVER.
17. QUILTING IS THE ACTUAL PROCESS OF SEWING THE LAYERS TOGETHER.
18. ONE STEP AT A TIME.
19. COMING UP WITH YOUR OWN TECHNIQUES IS FINE.

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## 1. You don't need all of the gadgets at the very beginning.

It's tempting to go to your local quilt shop or online to purchase a bunch of gadgets and fabric, but you don't need to invest a small fortune initially. You don't need to buy a fancy quilting machine to make gorgeous quilts. You can make something beautiful with the sewing machine you paid less than \$200 for on Black Friday.

I suggest purchasing a rotary cutter, cutting mat, reliable sewing machine, iron, scissors, thread, and just enough fabric for your first project. Buying too much fabric or too many gadgets can make you feel overwhelmed.

## 2. Always use a seam allowance of at least 1/4".

The standard when quilting is to use a 1/4" seam allowance on all your pieced blocks. Practice and measure. It is important to have consistent 1/4" seams.

A seam that's less than 1/4" can be problematic because any tension put on that seam could cause the fabric to fray and the seams to come undone.

Once you have sewn your seams be sure to press them. This is the second most important thing to do after sewing your 1/4" seams

## Pressing Instructions Steps:

(For Detailed Pressing Instruction see Item 11 in Annie's Quilting Secrets from A to Z)

## 3. Use 100% quilting cotton.

This suggestion is one of those vital beginner quilting tips that I wish I had known when I first started. I know it's tempting to purchase cheaper fabrics that aren't 100% cotton, but unfortunately, they won't last as long as 100% quilting cotton will.

That said, you don't have to buy expensive "designer" fabrics to make something beautiful and long-lasting. Most fabric shops or your local arts and crafts stores (such as Hobby Lobby or JoAnns) have a beautiful selection of fabrics that often go on sale.

## **4. Prewash or Not To Prewash, that is the question? (Updated 10/2022)**

This is totally personal preference.

Some quilters like to use their fabrics right away without pre-washing because when they wash the finished quilt, the fabric shrinks and gives that beautiful "quilt crinkle" texture. You may or may not want this to happen.

If you choose to prewash I recommend that you use Retayne, Synthrapol or Color Catcher the first time you wash your quilt.

When using Color Catchers don't be stingy, use at least half the box (12 to 24) catchers.

Color Catchers are available in the dryer aisle of most grocery stores.

Retayne to presoak fabric to set the dyes.

Synthrapol - Washing your finished quilt with Synthrapol will suspend any extra dyes so they don't deposit where they don't belong.

Retayne and Synthrapol is available in most Quilt Shops and on Amazon.

## **5. The seam ripper: friend or foe?**

It may seem like the seam ripper isn't a tool you'd want to use, but a seam ripper will soon become one of your favorite tools. When you are drawing a picture, sometimes you need to use an eraser, right?

Think of the seam ripper as the quilter's eraser. It is much easier to remove unwanted stitches with a seam ripper than trying to do it with a pair of scissors or by hand.

## **6. Double-check your measurements before you cut.**

This tip especially rings true for those who are just starting. It may take you a little longer to cut your pieces, but you will be happy when you've cut everything at the right size the first time.

## **7. Take it slow with the rotary cutter.**

When you're using your rotary cutter, be sure to take it slow. I've heard some pretty gruesome stories of quilter's going too fast and slicing a chunk of their fingertip off.

Also, if you are using a ruler, keep your blade against the ruler's edge and be sure not to stray. Going slow will help you to keep your cuts straight and neat.

## **8. Start with a simple project.**

When you are first starting, don't choose to create a king-sized quilt that you plan to be an heirloom piece for generations to come. This kind of project puts way too much pressure on you for your first few projects, and quilting should be fun, not stressful!

I suggest doing some small, simple projects like making up some potholders and placemats for yourself or a friend. Maybe progress to a mini quilt that you can hang on your wall or a simple baby quilt pattern.

## **9. Don't be afraid to ask for help.**

Every experienced quilter has been in your beginner's shoes. We know how you feel when you just can't get something to work or you don't understand how to proceed.

## **10. Know your needles.**

Not all needles are created equal, and some needles are better suited for quilting than others. Be sure to read the packaging of the different needles you're considering to ensure they work with your machine and are suitable for your projects.

Along with that, know when you should switch out your needle for a new one. I've seen many different suggestions for how often you should change your needle. However, it can rely heavily on the quality of the needle you purchase and how often you sew.

## **11. It's better to have too much fabric than not enough.**

When shopping for fabric, I always purchase slightly more than a specific pattern calls for:

I usually get 1/3 to 1/2 yard more of each fabric.

That may seem like a lot of extra fabric, but with the shrinkage factor and squaring it up, you'll need plenty of excess just in case you make a "whoppsy" with your cutting

You don't want to experience that sinking feeling when you realize you didn't purchase enough fabric for a project and then can't find the same fabric for the rest of your piece.

## **12. If you question your fabric selection, get another opinion.**

Fabric selection can be a bit overwhelming. So many colors, patterns, and textures to choose from can make choosing the right fabrics for your project difficult.

If you catch yourself just staring at your fabrics and wondering, "Do these work together?" I suggest getting a second opinion. It's always fun to shop with a friend. If your friend can't come along ask another shopper.

If you are in a fabric store and see another person looking at the quilting fabric, chances are they will be happy to give you their opinion on your choices. I've made several "5-minute friends" while fabric shopping. It's fun to get another person's perspective.

## **13. Use the internet for inspiration.**

Whether you are trying to find a quilt pattern or fabric inspiration, the internet is an excellent tool to find all kinds of ideas. Pinterest or Instagram can get you're guilty brain wheels turning in the right direction.

## **14. Check out the skill level requirements on quilt patterns.**

Did you know that most quilt pattern designers include skill-level requirements for their patterns? This info is extremely helpful when you're shopping around for your first or next quilt pattern.

If you cannot find that information, try sending a message to the pattern designer or asking an experienced quilting friend to help you with your selection.

## **15. Use a starch spray when pressing your fabric.**

I figured out this tip early on in my quilting journey, and it has helped me immensely when pressing my fabric in preparation to cut it. Starch spray such as Best Press is a fantastic choice, especially if you have stubborn wrinkles in your fabric.

## **16. Precut fabrics are a time saver.**

When you go to a fabric store, you will see a precut fabrics section. This section will consist of jellyrolls, layered cakes, fat quarters, charm packs, etc.

These different sized bundles are convenient — not only because they save time, but many quilt pattern designers create quilt designs specifically with these different bundles in mind.

## **17. Quilting is the actual process of sewing the layers together.**

Quilting is the actual process of sewing the layers of your quilt sandwich together.

## **18. One step at a time.**

Instead of focusing on the quilt as a whole, just focus on the block you are working on right now. Going step-by-step gives you the ability to focus on your current step without stressing about the future steps in your project.

## **19. Coming up with your own techniques is fine.**

Some quilters may act like there is only “one way” to do specific steps, but if you come up with a different way to do something, that is totally fine! I encourage you to find what works best for you and design and create the way you want. Quilting is an art form, not a rule book.

I love quilting and sewing, and I also love to see others pursue their paths in the wide world of quilting. There are so many different quilting styles, skill levels, and techniques. You are sure to find something that works for you and that will help you fall in love with the art of quilt making.

Have fun with it, and happy sewing!