



## SEW-lutions Guidelines

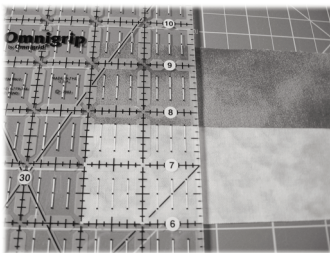
Your Guide  
to  
Successful  
Sewing

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Today's quilter has many tools to streamline cutting, piecing and quilting their projects.



### Cutting tools

The rotary cutter has revolutionized the art of quilting more than any other tool. Whether you choose a cutter with a small or large blade, the time saved over scissor cutting is considerable. Along with a rotary cutter, you need a special mat to avoid damaging the tabletop. Invest in the largest mat you can afford and a smaller one for taking to classes.

Clear rulers and cutting templates are also partners for rotary cutting equipment, allowing you to trim right up against the edges with the cutting blade.

Rotary cutters haven't totally replaced scissors in the sewing room and they never will. A pair of long-blade dressmaker shears (with offset handles so the lower blade skims flat on the cutting surface) is essential for cutting batting or cloth when a rotary cutter isn't practical. Keep a small pair of scissors or thread snips handy at the sewing machine for trimming thread tails.

Small, sharp scissors are also needed for cutting intricate shapes. Appliqué (or "pelican bill") scissors are handy for trimming machine appliqué close to the stitching line.

### Templates

Templates are thin, flexible shapes of cardboard or plastic-like material used to trace patchwork or appliqué outlines onto fabric. Thicker, rigid acrylic shapes may be used in the same manner, but more commonly these are used with a rotary cutter, just like a clear ruler. Look for custom-cut template sets for complex patchwork patterns such as Drunkard's

Path, Winding Ways or Grandmother's Flower Garden.

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*Because most piecing is done by machine today, templates usually have 1/4"-wide seam allowances included, but be sure to double check before cutting.*

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### Marking Tools

Marking tools are handy for a number of purposes, like drawing seamlines or pivot points for sewing reference, making notes on the back of a block regarding direction or placement, or marking stitching lines for quilting. There are several types of fabric markers, so be sure to test both marking and removal on a fabric scrap before using one on your project.

Soapstone requires frequent sharpening and produces talcum-like markings easily brushed away. Powdered chalk dispensers also produce fine lines that brush away readily, although the markings may not last long enough for the handling of a typical quilting project; expect to re-draw chalk lines as needed.

For longer-lasting lines, opt for fabric marking pencils in a variety of light and pastel colors. Brushing or dampening may be required in order to remove these lines.

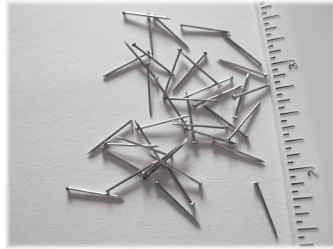
Felt-tip "disappearing" markers are popular with quilters. Some are designed to fade within hours or days; others require dampening or soaking for removal. Humidity affects the marker longevity and may cause lines to fade before the project is completed. Caution: Don't press over the lines before removing or they may be permanent!

Hand quilters often prefer to mark straight quilting lines with tape and 1/4"-wide masking tape can be found where quilting supplies are sold. It's temporary, repositionable and handy when hand quilting 1/4" on either side of a seamline.

## Pins

Quilter's pins are extremely sharp with large heads so they're easy to handle and extra-long to skewer in and out of multiple layers of cloth.

For hand appliqué look for appliqué pins, which are just long enough to hold shapes in place, but short enough to stay out of the way during stitching.



Safety pins substitute for laboriously hand basting layers in preparation for hand or machine quilting. For machine quilting, safety pins are a must as basting stitches get caught on the presser foot toes. To avoid permanent holes in the fabric, choose size 1 or 2 safety pins made from non-rustable metal. Quilter's safety pins are curved and designed to skim in and out of the quilt layers in a single motion.

## Needles

Stitch quality may be improved by switching to a machine quilting needle specially configured to handle the thickness of the project and/or a specific type of thread. For example, a metallic needle has a large eye to handle metallic threads without shredding.

For most machine appliqué methods, a size 80/12 needle is ideal. A smaller needle (size 60/8 or 70/10) produces better results for invisible-stitch appliqué because you can stitch closer to the folded fabric edge.

If you plan to hand quilt, look for needles labeled expressly for that purpose. Expect to find a variety of needle length and shaft sizes, and to spend time experimenting to find the one that's comfortable in your hand.

Most hand quilters find it necessary to protect the needle-pushing fingertip and the fingers on the underneath hand. In addition to the familiar dimple-topped metal thimbles, a wide variety of adhesive pads, tapes and soft flexible thimbles are made especially to protect fingers when hand quilting.

## Sewing Machine

For traditional patchwork and quilting, the only requirement is the ability to sew a straight stitch. For

machine appliqué, a machine with zigzag capabilities and utility stitches like satin, blindhem and blanket/buttonhole stitches is helpful.

A walking foot is useful for machine quilting to avoid the puckering and distortion that sometimes results from using a regular presser foot to quilt multiple layers. Also helpful is a quilting bar, a spacing guide that attaches to the presser foot. To sew parallel rows, simply channel the guide along a previous stitching line. A quarter-inch foot helps accurately join patches with precise 1/4" seams.

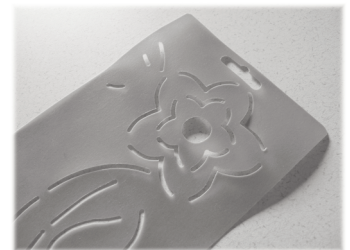
## Pressing Aids

Look for appliqué template material that can also be used as a pressing template. For Celtic or stained glass appliqué, heat-resistant bias bars help press accurate, even tubes.

To avoid repeated trips to the ironing board, consider investing in a table-top mini iron and ironing pad to press patchwork seams machine-side, or use a hand-held tool called a wooden iron to score the seamline.

## Stencils

Stencils are used to mark quilting lines on a quilt top. Those especially designed for continuous line stitching have the fewest starts and stops, avoiding the need to



tie off thread tails in the middle of the quilt design. Use the quilting stencil in conjunction with any of the marking devices mentioned above.

## Measuring Tools

A 6" seam gauge is invaluable for checking accuracy of seam allowances and block dimensions. A dressmaker-type 60" long tape measure is handy for calculating yardage, but tapes in lengths of 120" or more are made especially for quilters.

For more information on quilting tools, also see the following Guidelines: 1.130 Scissors and Shears; 1.133 Rotary Cutters; 1.135 Measuring Tools; 1.145 Marking Tools; 2.115 Pressing Equipment; 6.120 Hand-sewing Needles; 6.130 Machine Needles; 9.125 Quilting Notions; and 22.130 Presser Feet Chart.