

Lesson Three – Quilting

A quilt is three layers - top, batting, and backing adhered together with quilting stitches.

Choosing Batting

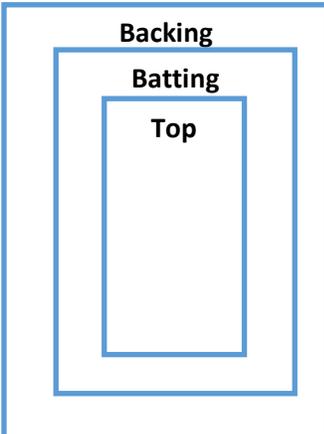
Your quilt purpose will help determine what kind of batting you choose for your quilt. For a wall hanging you may choose a very thin batting but for a bed quilt you may choose cotton batting which is actually warmer than wool batting which allows air to circulate. Or, if you want a “fluffy” look for your quilt then you would choose a high-loft (fat) batting. If your quilt has a lot of dark colors you may want to choose a black batting. If it for a child, purchase flame fire-retardant batting.

If you purchase batting in a package, press the creases gently with a warm iron or a very low heat setting on your dryer. This step goes easier if you spread the batting on a bed for a few days/hours to let the creases relax a little.

Remember you are trying to make a very flat surface for the quilting so you do not want any creases in the batting. Also, if you quilt a deep crease in the quilt, the lump may show on the front and may even be uncomfortable when used for sleeping.

Adhering the Three Layers

Affix the back of the quilt to a flat surface; use tape if you are working on a wood floor or table; use pins if you are doing it on a carpeted floor.



Lay the batting on the backing with the rough side to the batting; if you can see the manufacturer punched pins holes that is the back side; the top side will feel much smoother; you should have at least four inches of backing fabric beyond the batting.

Lay the top down on the batting.

Now is the time to check to be sure you have extra batting beyond the top and extra backing beyond the batting. You need these extra amounts because the quilting will draw up some of the fabrics and batting.

Pin the quilt using a grid pattern that will hold the three layers together; usually a four-inch grid will work for most quilts.



Buy the special curved pins to make the pinning easier on your hands; just stick the pins in on the first round and then go back and close the pins. Use the back of a spoon or a special closing tool called Kwip Klip available in fabric stores for closing pins.



Spray glue – many quilters use the basting glues to hold the three layers together. The 505 sprays works very well but others that cost less work well also. Always spray fabric, not batting; the batting is rough and the spray will only cover the raised areas, not all the area you are spraying.

Marking Quilt Top for Quilting

Use chalk when you can because it is easy to remove from the quilt top.

If you have just a short distance to mark you can use a creaser.

Use markings on your sewing machine to judge the quilting lines.

If you use a marker that is supposed to wash out or iron out, mark the top before you do the sandwich; this avoids the marking going to the batting level; it will wash or iron out more easily if the markings do not go onto the batting.

The blue markers that disappear with heat will return if the quilt is placed or stored in a very cold area; think carefully where the quilt will be used before using the blue markers.

Setting Up Your Machine for Quilting

Many newer machines have settings for quilting but you still need to choose a needle size that will work with the thread weight that you plan to use. Many quilters use a thread with weight 50 with needle size 80/40. Your goal is to choose a needle size that is appropriate for the thread you are using that will pierce all three layers of the quilt. Choose a stitch length to use.

Making a Quilting Sample

This is most important. Make a small layer of the fabric used in your top, the batting you plan to use, and the backing fabric. (If you made a practice block when assembling the quilt top you can use it.) Then practice the quilting pattern/stitch length you have chosen. This small sample will alert you to many potential problems with the tension setting on your machine. What you are aiming for is to have the two threads meeting and hooking together in the batting layer with as minimum amount of the bobbin thread showing on the top or the top thread showing on the backing. Keep working with your sample until you are satisfied. *You will not regret any time that you spend on this step!*

Choosing Quilting Patterns for Novice Quilters



Stitch-in-the ditch – quilting that is kept in the seam lines of the quilt top. The stitching should not show; it is easier to do this with a sewing machine attachment that has a metal guide to place on the seam as you stitch.



Stitch close to the seam – quilting that is usually $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the seam.



Cross-hatch stitching – quilting that forms an “X” in each block of the quilt.



Parallel line stitching – quilting that is straight lines evenly spaced across the quilt top.



Free-motion stitching – quilting that the quilter is in control of the stitch length and moving the fabric so the stitches are placed on the quilt; to do drop the feed-dogs on your machine so they no longer control the fabric moving under the needle; then you move the fabric where you want the stitching and try to move in a smooth motion so that the stitches are the same length; on many newer machines there are special settings for free-motion quilting. The meandering stitch called “stippling” shown to the right is an easy free-motion design for the less experienced quilter to use.

Quilting with rulers – quilting that is done with specially designed rulers that allow you to stitch around the rulers to make a pattern.

Quilting

Begin by stitching your top to the batting and backing; one way is to stitch-in-the-ditch along all horizontal and vertical seam lines. Also, you can stitch a large grid pattern on the quilt using basting length stitches which you will later pull out.

Your quilting stitches will not show as much on the backing fabric if you have chosen a “busy” design for the backing.

When pieces of a top or patchwork is joined the blocks will form both horizontal and vertical lines. These lines should appear straight after quilting.

When quilting the border take in account that you will be adding binding to the quilt later. Usually, the binding shows at least $\frac{1}{4}$ on the top front of a quilt.

An all-over quilting design will cross over the edges of any piece of the top or patchwork block. However, if you use a quilting pattern that is contained in each part or block, the pattern should fill the part or block but not creep over the edges.

Using the “Right Amount” of Quilting

It is important to use the amount of quilting stitches that will help the quilt stay “square.” There should be as much quilting horizontally as there is vertically. Even if your batting package says that your quilting stitches can be as far apart as ten inches, it is better to use the standard of your stitches being a “hand-width” apart. This standard helps keep your quilt straight.

Good Habits to Develop

When you experience any type of problem with quilting or general sewing put in a new needle and rethread your machine – it is startling how many situations are resolved with this action.

Quilting takes a while for most projects – observe proper ergonomics with your sitting and hand movements to relieve fatigue.

Bury your thread ends as you go – you will be glad you did when you finish the quilting!

Preparing for the Long-arm quilter

If your quilt will be quilted by a long-arm quilter prepare it this way:

Discuss with you long-arm quilter what designs and thread that will be used on your quilt; ask what you need to do to prepare your quilt for the quilting.

Square up your backing fabric and press neatly.

Measure your backing fabric to be sure that it extends at least four inches if not more beyond your quilt top. Add fabric strips to each side of the quilt to obtain four inches or more.

Press your quilt top neatly; remove any thread ends.

Stay stitch around the edges of your top.

Note: a good way to transport your top and backing is to place them on a hanger underneath a plastic covering.

Be sure to label each piece you are taking to the long-arm quilter with your name, address, and phone number and any special instructions that you previously worked out with the long-arm quilter.

Comments for Quilting Improvements from 2019 Quilt Show Judge

Remove markings for quilting before entering for judging

Quilting should be in scale to overall size of piece

Different quilting and/or thread choice would enhance the attractiveness of the quilt top

Quilting should stay within the intended design areas; also it should fill the designated space

Strive for consistent stitch length in machine quilting; care needed in changing direction of quilting

More precision needed in starts and stops of machine quilting; starts and stops should be secure

More consistency in machine tension needs to be achieved

Additional quilting would add to the stability and durability of the quilt

Some skipped stitches noted in quilting

More care needed in repeating shapes of the quilting motifs

More consistency needed in spacing of parallel lines

More consistency in machine retracing of quilting lines

Additional quilting could minimize surface distortion

Quilting has caused puckers on borders

Strive for consistent stitch length in hand-quilting

Internet information:

Dictionary of Quilting Terms - <https://www.allpeoplequilt.com/how-to-quilt/quilting-basics/complete-list-common-quilting-terms>

Star Quilters Guild.org - List of long-arm quilters