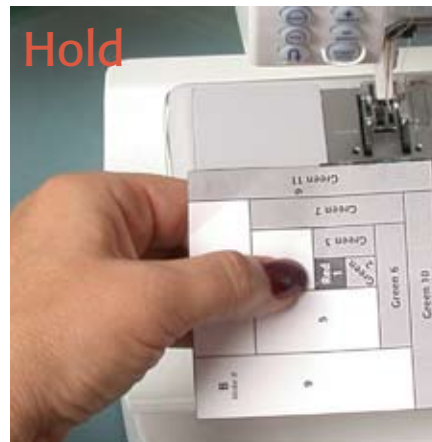


Foundation Piecing Primer

Get ready to try a quilting technique where quilters are expected to stitch their blocks backwards, upside-down and half-blind! Why would anyone choose this method? Because it's great for working with small pieces, odd angles, and for stitching very accurately.

Foundation piecing pro, Brenda Groelz, introduces you to the simplest form of foundation piecing, and provides tips and tricks for creating your own masterpiece. For free foundation-pieced patterns, just visit McCallsQuilting.com, click on *Blocks & Patterns* then *Pattern Index*.

1 Place #1 fabric on unprinted side of foundation, **wrong** side to the paper, centered behind #1 position and allowing approximately 1/4" seam allowance all around. Pin, glue or hold in place. (In photo, fabric #1 is red and fabric #2 is green.) Position #2 fabric **right** side to the paper, with approximately 1/4" extending into the #2 position. **Hold** with thumb and fingers or pin in place. **TIP:** The bulk of the new fabric should lie behind areas already covered. From now on, all pieces are added right side to the unprinted side of the paper foundation. Turn foundation over to printed side.



2 Using short stitch (15-18 stitches per inch), and beginning and ending 3-4 stitches beyond the ends of the seamline, **stitch** on the line between #1 & #2, through paper and both fabrics. Clip all threads front and back. A portable table (right) makes this easy. I simply lay my paper and positioned fabrics down in front of the feed dogs, lift the presser foot and needle, and slide it all into position.



Brenda's Favorite Tools for Foundation Piecing

- 1. Spray starch.** Saturate your fabric and press until it is as stiff as paper. It makes the fabric easy to place below the foundation and the small pieces won't fold back when you sew. Once you're sewing though, no steam and no starch. It will make the paper wrinkle.
- 2. Schmetz Microtex Sharp Needles, size 70/10** Larger needles don't help your paper tear away; a short stitch length does that. I like to use a small, sharp needle to keep my seams accurate.
- 3. Single-needle throat plate (not shown)** Tiny pieces can be pulled into a zigzag throat plate. This one has a tiny hole, just large enough for the needle. Saves tearing fabric out of the bobbin case and saves you from tearing out your hair!
- 4. Open Toe Foot (see Stitch photo)** So you can see where you're sewing!
- 5. Portable Sewing Table** It makes a perfect staging area and keeps the pieces flat as you feed them under the presser foot. I like to use it as a base for clipping threads between my pieces too.
- 6. Fiskars SofTouch® Micro-Tip® Scissors** They're the perfect size for clipping threads and trimming short seam allowances. Because they're spring loaded, you just squeeze to cut, and they pop back by themselves, saving your hand muscles half the work. (Great if you have arthritis.)
- 7. Revolving Cutting Mat.** A revolving base makes it easy to trim those final seam allowances without having to lift the block.



Brenda's Trimming Tips

☞ Deciding where to trim is half the battle, and where most beginners make a mistake. Here's a tip to help you remember: **Always trim underneath the highest number!** Do this, and you'll never trim away the wrong side of a seam.

☞ Don't trim the paper, just the fabric; always at least 2 layers, sometimes as many as 4 or more.

☞ One common error made by beginners is to trim "around the corner". Don't do it! **Trim all layers of fabric parallel to the latest seamline.**

☞ Aim for a 1/4" seam allowance, but don't fret if you're not exact. Your ability to "eyeball it" will surprise you! Sometimes, 1/8" is all you can get if the pieces are very small.

☞ To keep dark fabrics from showing through, grade your seams by trimming the dark seam allowances narrower than the lighter fabric seam allowances (see **photo** above).

☞ Sometimes a previous seam will get in the way when you're trying to trim the 1/4" seam allowance. That's easily taken care of. Simply tear the paper away from the stitches before trimming (see **photo** below).

☞ Finally, don't forget to trim as you go along, or you'll end up with a nice, thick potholder!

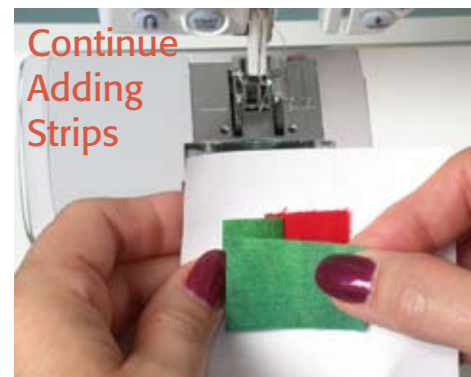


3 Slip scissors between paper and fabric and **trim** seam allowance to 1/4" (see **Brenda's Trimming Tips**, left). **Press** seam allowance flat from fabric side, then flip fabric to cover #2 position and press again. **Note:** If you have photocopied the foundation, avoid pressing the printed side. Toner will melt and transfer to your iron and fabrics.



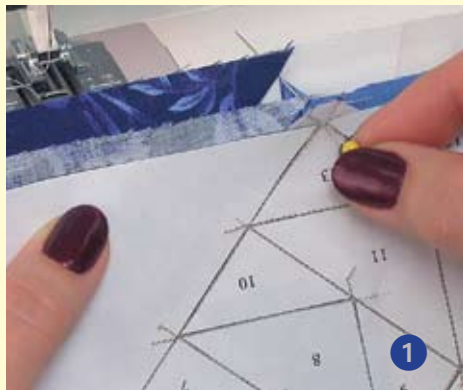
4 Place #3 fabric, right sides to unprinted side of foundation, along the printed seamline between #2 & #3, with approximately 1/4" of fabric extending behind and into the #3 position. Hold in place with fingers, turn foundation printed side up, and stitch along the line between #2 & #3. Trim seam allowance and press as before.

Continue adding pieces of fabric, following the number order, and always placing fabric strips with right sides to unprinted side of foundation. Remember that the bulk of the fabric being added will lie behind areas already covered. Only the fabric seam allowance will extend into the next numbered area.



5 **Note:** Do not cut fabric along edge of paper unless outer seam allowances are included on foundation! Turn block, paper side up, and align 1/4" mark of ruler along edge of paper foundation. Rotary cut away extra fabric on all four sides, creating a perfect 1/4" seam allowance. Leave paper in!



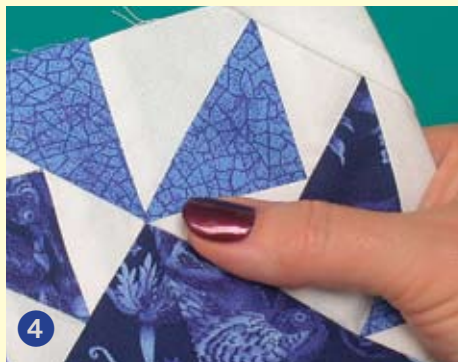
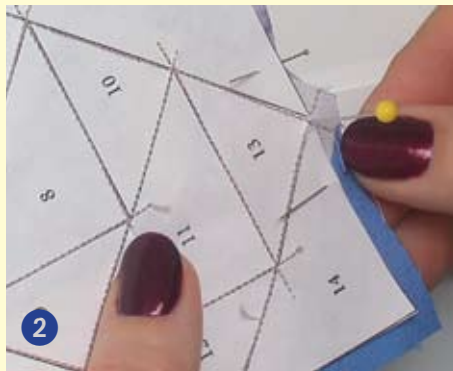


Matching Points and Joining Blocks

Many paper-pieced designs call for accuracy when joining blocks. Brenda uses long, thin pins to match points and hold her blocks together.

- 1 Push pin through match point of 1st block and then through match point of 2nd block. Leave pin poking straight through fabric.
- 2 Push pins through on either side of match point pin to hold blocks in place. Remove match point pin. Pin ends of block if needed. Brenda prefers 1 1/4" silk pins, which are long enough to hold well, and thin enough to stitch over if needed. **Note:** Stitch slowly if stitching over pins, and wear eye protection (you knew those bifocals would come in handy).
- 3 Change to normal stitch length (10-12 stitches per inch), and sew along edge of paper foundation (or on seam line if included on foundation). Short stitches are not necessary if you're not stitching through paper. Seamlines between blocks will iron flatter with the longer stitch length (and are easier to rip out, if your pinning was not successful).

4 Continue pinning and sewing blocks together to finish your quilt. Leave papers in until after borders have been added.



Assembly Line Piecing

When a quilt design calls for multiple, identical copies of a block, it's more efficient to sew assembly-line style. Adding the same piece to each block, one after the other, makes the sewing go faster. You only have to make one fabric placement decision, and then sew it over and over again.

- 1 Brenda uses her sewing machine's portable acrylic table as a staging area. Place the next fabrics needed in a stack to the right of the needle area. Then they're ready to grab as you stitch each foundation. Lift the presser foot, place the fabric, lower the presser foot, and stitch. Then lift the presser foot again, pull the stitched foundation away to the back, and place and stitch the next foundation.
- 2 After stitching the last one, clip the threads between each foundation by clipping at the surface of the fabric and paper. Stack foundations, trim and press each. It's much faster to do all your fabric placement, stitching, clipping, trimming, and pressing at once.

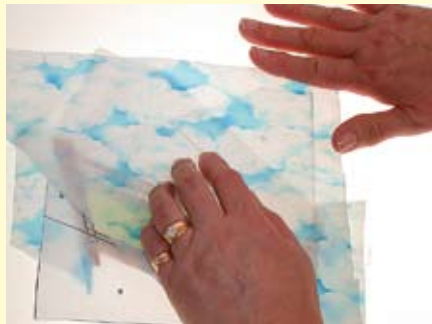
Quick Tip

Because foundations are printed the reverse of the final design, you can get confused about what fabric goes where. Using markers or colored pencils to color code each foundation keeps you straight. Or make just one guide by taping scraps of fabric in the proper position, and post it in your work area.

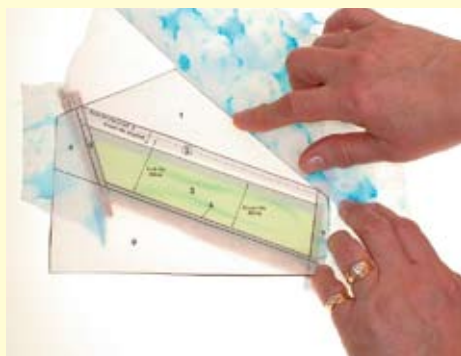


Controlling the Flip

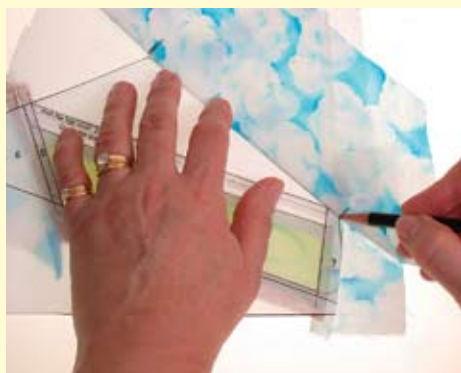
1 Place block, printed side up. Place fabric, right side down on top of marked position. Check for adequate seam allowance around the area you plan to cover and that your directional fabric is running the way you want. The way you place your fabric now is the way it will end up in the block.



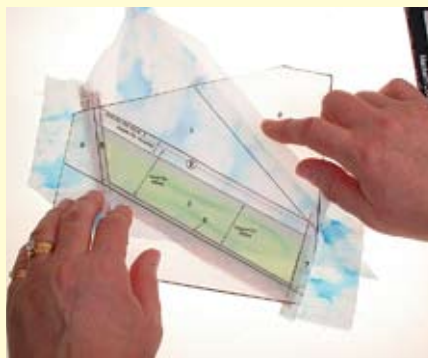
2 Fold fabric toward marked position along printed seamline. Finger crease fold all the way to edges of fabric.



3 Using pencil, mark ends of printed seamline on fabric. Then trim fabric approximately 1/2" beyond fold (top layer only).



4 Move foundation to top of fabric, open up fold, and match pencil marks to ends of printed seamline.



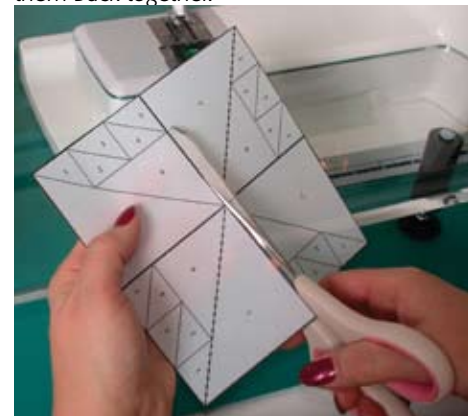
5 Sew seamline, trim and press as before.



This technique perfects the flip. You'll never rip again!

Piecing in Units and Joining Together

Many complex foundations are easier to piece when you cut them apart into units. We show you how to cut them apart and join them back together.



1 Make copies of paper foundation as indicated on pattern. Cut foundations apart into smaller units. Use basic instructions (pages 1 and 2) to foundation-piece units.



2 Lengthen stitch to normal sewing setting (10-12 stitches per inch) and sew foundations together along edge of paper.



3 Continue to join pieced foundations together to make block. Leave paper in until quilt has been assembled.