

Piece by Piece

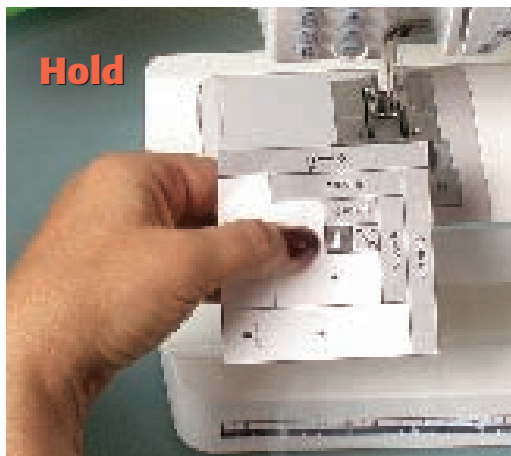
A Foundation Piecing Primer

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; working with consistent width, straight-of-grain strips of fabric, stitched to paper foundations. Read through the following steps and tips, then try your hand at piecing *O Tannenbaum*, a holiday log cabin quilt, on the following pages.



A With Fabrics #1 & #2 right sides together, place wrong side of #1 on unprinted side of foundation, directly behind the #1 position. Hold in place with fingers and thumb, and turn paper over so printed side is facing up. (A spot of glue stick could also be used to hold #1 in place.)



B 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. The portable table 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. Simple!

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.

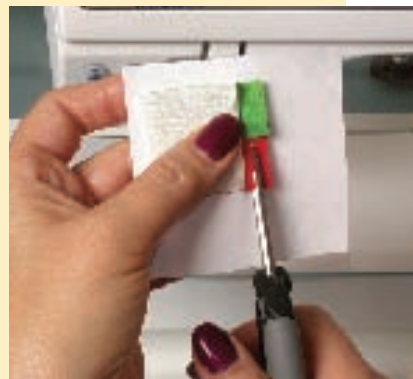
✂ Don't trim the paper, just the fabric; always at least 2 layers, sometimes as many as 4 or more.

✂ 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).

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



Trim



Press



C Trim seam allowance to $\frac{1}{4}$ " (see Brenda's Trimming Tips on preceding page). 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 the printed side. Toner will melt and transfer to your iron and fabrics.

D Place #3 fabric, right sides to unprinted side of foundation, along the printed seamline between #2 & #3, with approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ " 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.

Continue adding strips

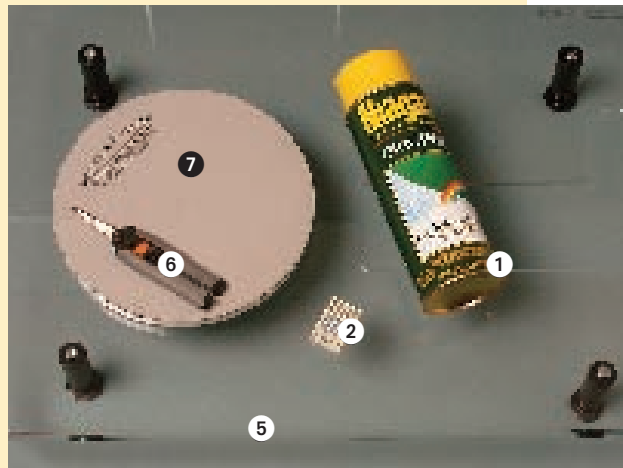


Trim finished block



E Upon reaching the perimeter of the foundation, it is especially important to have fabrics extend at least $\frac{1}{4}$ " beyond the edge of the foundation. Stitch all the way through the seam allowances.

After last piece has been added, press block from fabric side, flip over, and use a rotary cutter and ruler to trim fabric $\frac{1}{4}$ " away from the edge of the paper foundation.



Brenda's Favorite Tools for Foundation Piecing

- 1. Spray starch** Saturate your fabric and iron it 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 photo B) 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 SoftTouch® 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. Brooklyn Revolver** This rotary cutting mat is attached to a revolving base, making it easy to trim those final seam allowances without having to lift the block.