

Foundation Paper Piecing Tutorial

Tools & Equipment Needed

Good tools and equipment can make a big difference in the quality of your work. They can also make your work easier and quicker.

Invest in quality equipment and tools for the best results.

Those tools, equipment and supplies that are suggested in this book are what the author uses and recommends.



Fabric: Quality Fabric with high-thread-count is recommended. Most cuts will be on the bias of the fabric. You will want fabric that will hold its shape while handling and doesn't become unraveled easily.

Olfa Rotary Cutters, Rulers, Blades, & Mats: You will need 6" x 18" ruler, a large 15" x 15" gridded ruler, a large mat, and a large rotary cutter with a good blade.

(Tip) To ensure that your ruler does not slip as you cut, use the small clear plastic stick-ons on the back of your rulers. I have them on all my rulers.)

Rowenta Iron: Puts out a lot of steam and is great for pressing seams. This is a quality iron that is highly recommended.

Gingher curve-blade scissors: allows you to get very close to the thread without clipping paper or fabric.

12" or 6" Add a Quarter Ruler (CM Designs): Used for trimming the fabric with a 1/4" seam to know exactly where to place the next piece of fabric. Used with your rotary cutter it is an indispensable tool for paper-piecing.

Plastic Template Sheet: Use a strip of this to fold back the foundation paper on a straight line. Cut a 2" x 12" piece with your rotary cutter. I recommend plastic because it keeps its edge nice and sharp even with numerous uses.

Fine, Glass-Head, Silk Pins: Slips through fabric and paper easily with less distortion of the fabric. Glass head pins will not melt if you happen to iron over a pin. You will be pinning whenever you need to match two foundation sections together before sewing.

Scotch-brand Removable Tape: For repairing a paper-piecing template or to re-sew a seam.
Paper: Many different types of paper can be used. However, it is recommended that you use a paper that can easily be torn away without distorting the seams once the piecing is finished.

Olfa Touch Knife: For ripping out seams. Very sharp and makes the work of ripping out seams very fast. (We ALL have to rip out seams sometime!)

Tweezers: To remove those hard-to-reach pieces of paper left behind in the seams.

Fabric Glue: To lightly hold the fabric in position before sewing.

Size 90/14 Universal sewing machine needles: The larger needle size punches a slightly bigger hole, making it easier to remove the paper.

Presser Foot with Clear Bottom: Aids in visibility while sewing directly on the line.

Straight Stitch Throat Plate: Keeps fabric from being pushed down into the throat plate. Provides greater stability in sewing small seams.

Standard All-purpose sewing thread: Because you will be sewing smaller seams (18 stitches per inch) you really don't need to change thread colors with each fabric. Use a color that is the base color of your fabric. A medium taupe color blends with many fabrics. Otherwise, basic black and white are all the colors you will most likely need.

Copies of your patterns: Print originals of the blocks you need. You will need one copy for each unit that you use. (For example, if you decide to do a quilt that has 16 units, you will need 16 copies of each unit printed out.) Copy only the original printout.

Vellum Paper: Use a thin paper that does not add a lot of bulk. Vellum is a great choice for Foundation paper piecing. It is also readily available, see-thru, and prints well.



(Note: do not use vellum card stock.)



Lightbox: (Optional) Convenient, used for seeing through your pattern to make sure the fabric covers the entire section. (You can use a desk lamp or outside window as well, but the lightbox makes it SO convenient.)

Foundation Paper Piecing Technique

The great thing about foundation paper piecing is that you make simple blocks the same way that you make complex blocks. You sew on a line each time you piece. Just follow the numbers for each section and piece in that order. For more complex blocks, you sew the units together to form the completed block. Now let's begin.

Definitions:

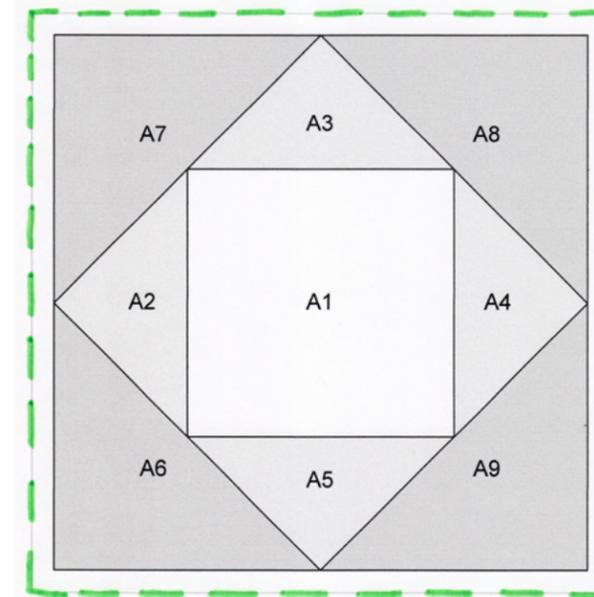
- Section: Each numbered area on a printed design.
- Unit: A group of completed Sections make a unit.
- Block: A group of completed Units that comprise each block.

Paper Copies:

Make a paper copy of each block. You will need to make paper copies of each Unit for each Block. Use thin paper that is easy to remove. Using regular copy paper on some blocks can add too much bulk. A good paper choice for foundation paper piecing is a light weight vellum. It can be purchased at most office supply stores. Do not make a copy of a copy. Copiers distort slightly and each copy of a copy will make that distortion even greater. This may make your pattern not fit together when sewn. Print each block instead, or make a copy from the same master.



(Note: You may need to feed in one sheet at a time depending on your particular printer setup if using vellum.)



1. We will use an "Economy Patch" block to begin. This is a variation on a "Diamond In A Square" block. This particular block is made all in one unit. You will just need to cut out one unit per block.

(Tip: If you were doing blocks with multiple units, you will need one each of the number of units used in each block. Pin 4-5 units together, lining up the sections and rotary cut around the outside of the seam allowance to speed up the process.)

Cut just slightly beyond the dashed outside lines which are the seam allowance. Make sure that you do not cut into the seam allowance.

You can see I have highlighted the seam allowance in green.

(See Figure 1)

Figure 1

(Tip: I use a small rotary cutter just for cutting paper. I have been using the same blade for several years now. It still works fine without any noticeable dulling.)

Fabric:

Now you are ready to cut the fabric. You will want to make sure that each fabric shape will completely cover the section you are piecing **PLUS the 1/4" seam allowance beyond**. For our sample block, we will be giving you the approximate cutting measurements.

1. Cut your fabric for the first area (A1). You will need a 4" square. (Note: It does not need to be exact. Just make it at least 4" or slightly larger.) Make sure that when you are using a triangle or other odd shape, that you have the fabric centered. Those sections are bigger than they look.
2. For areas A2-A5, cut one square 5". Cut this square into fourths by cutting each corner to corner. This will give you four triangles that you need for this block.
3. For areas A6-A9, cut (two) 5 1/2" squares. Cut these in half, corner to corner. This will give you four triangles total. Now you should have all the fabric shapes



(Note: It is not necessary to pre-cut the fabric unless you prefer to do it that way. Otherwise, use a piece of fabric such as a scrap that is big enough to cover the section and seam allowance. Foundation paper piecing is an excellent way to use up those scraps!)

Sewing the Block:

4. Use a 90/14 needle and set your machine to sew approximately 18-20 stitches per inch. With this needle and these settings you will be able to perforate the paper for easier removal once the block is completed later.

It will not be necessary to backstitch when using this size of stitches. The small stitches will keep the pieces from pulling apart later. However, as you stitch each line, make sure that you go 1 or 2 stitches beyond the section. That way your seams will cross and have further stability.

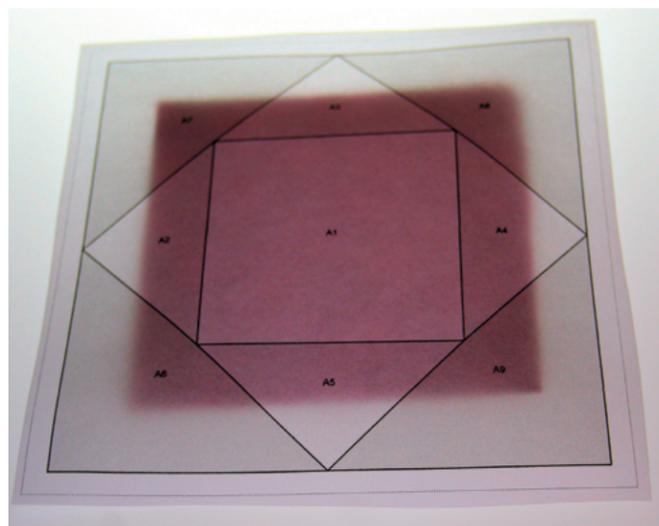


Figure 2

5. Place the first square in the center (A1) **Right-side up**. Make sure that it covers the complete section PLUS the seam allowance.

When you are sure that it is in the proper position, lift up one side and place a small amount of glue on the backside of the fabric and press it to the paper to temporarily hold in place. Use a glue stick or other glue that lightly adheres the fabric. (You will want to remove this paper later, so it is best not to use a strong glue.)

(See Figure 2)

(Tip: Use your lightbox to aid you in positioning your fabric.)

Trimming the fabric:

6. Flip the entire piece over so that the fabric is on the underside and the numbered paper is facing you.
7. With the paper facing up, line up the edge of your piece of template plastic along the line between A1 and A2. Fold back the paper over the edge of the plastic in a straight line.
(See Figure 3)

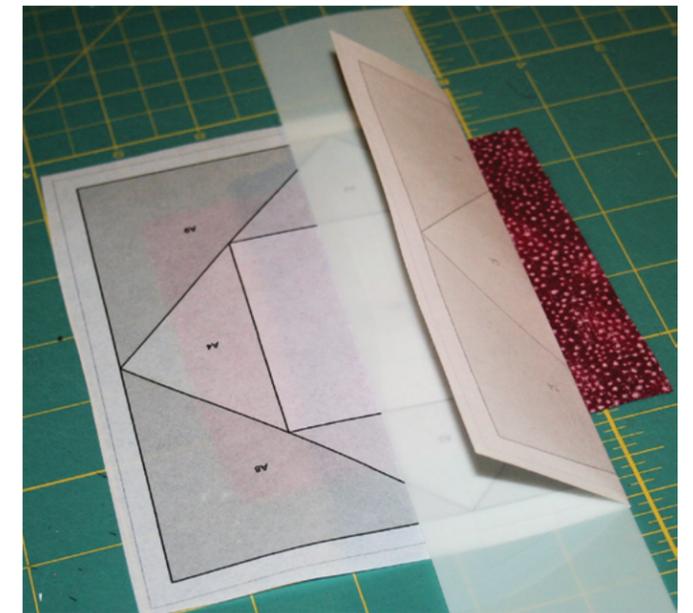


Figure 3

8. Place your "Add-a-quarter" ruler next to the folded back section of the paper and trim the exposed fabric with your rotary cutter, leaving a quarter inch seam allowance. Make sure the ruler is used with the lip side down. The trimmed edge will aid you in placing the next piece of fabric.
(See Figure 4)

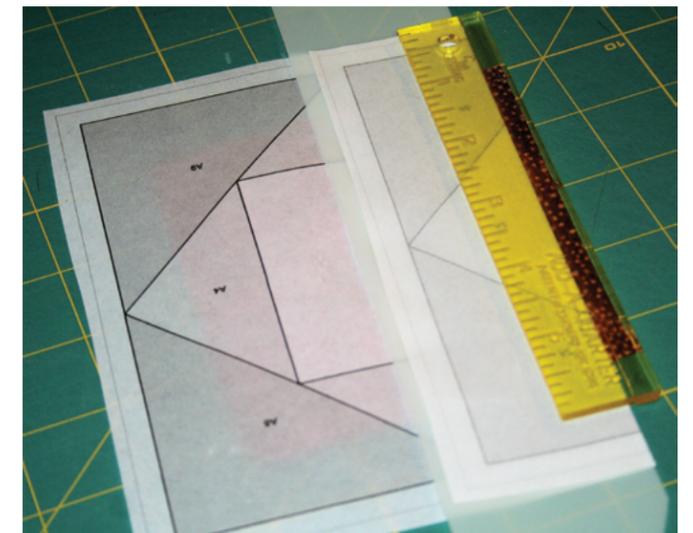


Figure 4

9. Place the next piece of fabric face-down on top of the first piece of fabric, matching raw edges.
(See Figure 5)

10. Pin into place if necessary. (Be careful to remove the pin before you sew over it!) Flip the entire Unit over and sew on line 1. Remember, you do not need to backstitch.



Figure 5

- As each piece is sewn, flip the fabric open and press along the seam line.



(Note: Do not use steam for pressing blocks with paper until after the papers have been removed. Then PRESS, the blocks. Don't Iron.) (It also makes vellum curl when using steam.)

In our example, you can see how you do not need to be exact in your placement of each piece. Just as long as it covers the entire section, plus the seam allowance.

This is one of the things that makes Foundation Paper Piecing so easy!

(See Figure 6)

Repeat steps 1-10 for each section.

We have flipped the block over in our next picture and you can see that the fabric is covering the sections as well as the seam allowance.

(See Figure 7)

- Trim away all the excess fabric beyond the dashed seam allowance line.

- Press. Trim Threads.

Congratulations! You have just completed your first block!

(See Figure 8)



Figure 6

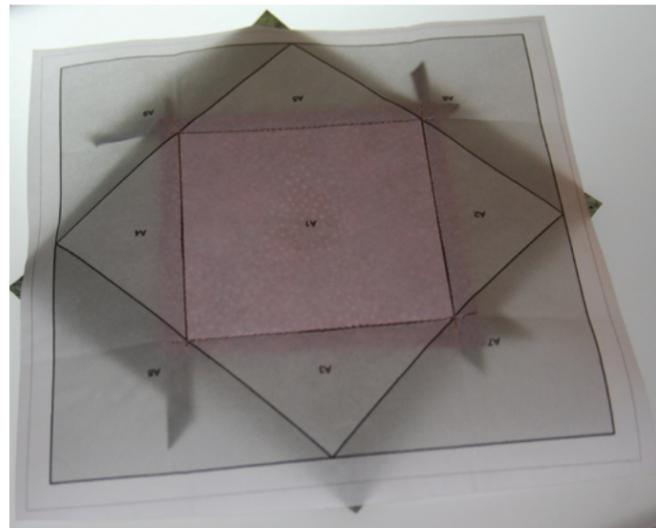


Figure 7



Figure 8

Joining Multiple Units to Create One Block:

- For blocks that have more than one unit:

Follow steps 1-13 to sew each section of each unit. Continue until you have completed all sections for each unit, and all units for each block.



(Note: Do NOT remove the paper at this time. You will remove it later after the units are sewn together into each block.)

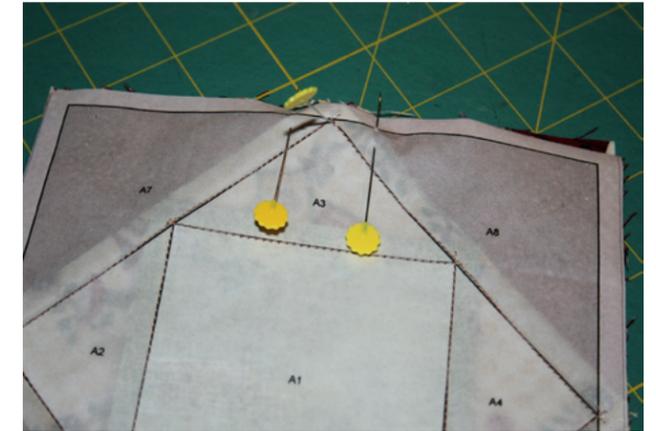


Figure 9

Tip: (See the Blow-Apart Diagram of each block for how units should be sewn together.)

- When joining Units in which more than two seams cross, pierce a pin, first through the seam intersection of one paper unit and then the seam intersection of the second paper unit. Make sure the pin is in the intersection of the seam. *(See Figure 9)*

- Leave this first pin sticking straight through the fabric of both units. Now place a pin on each side of the first pin, making sure the fabric does not slip. Remove the first pin. You should have one pin to each side of the intersection. This will ensure your seams meet for precise piecing. Continue to pin across. *(See Figure 10)*

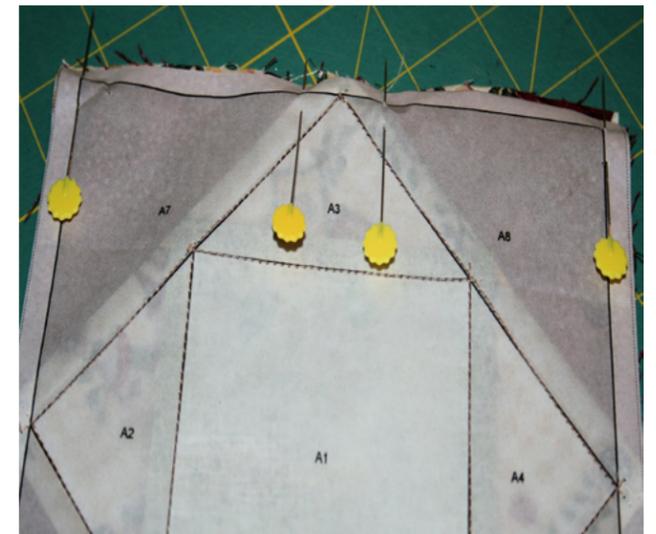


Figure 10

- Sew together along seam allowances.
- Press. *(See Figure 11)*

Repeat steps 1-11 for each section.



Figure 11

- Press again. Using steam at this point can really make your blocks look nice.

Measuring and Cutting Shapes:

When determining what size of fabric to pre-cut, follow these guidelines:

1. Use rotary cutting techniques such as those used in the sample block to cut your basic shapes such as triangles, squares, and rectangles.

Below is listed the formulas for half and quarter square triangles.

- a) **Half Square Triangles:** Measure the seam on the short side of the triangle and add 1 1/2" to that measurement.

Tip: I like to add 1/2 inch more than the standard measurement given in most instructions. It gives me more wiggle room.

The short side of triangle plus 1 1/2" = size of square. For example, the short side of the triangle is 3" long. You would cut a square 3"+1 1/2"= 4 1/2". Cut a square that size and then cut diagonally once to make two half-square triangles.

See Figure 12

- b) **Quarter Squares Triangles:** Measure the seam of the longest side. Add 1 3/4" to that measurement.

For example, the longest side of the triangle is 6 inches. 6" plus 1 3/4 inches = 7 3/4" square. Cut that down the middle diagonally twice to make four quarter-square triangles.

See Figure 13



Figure 12

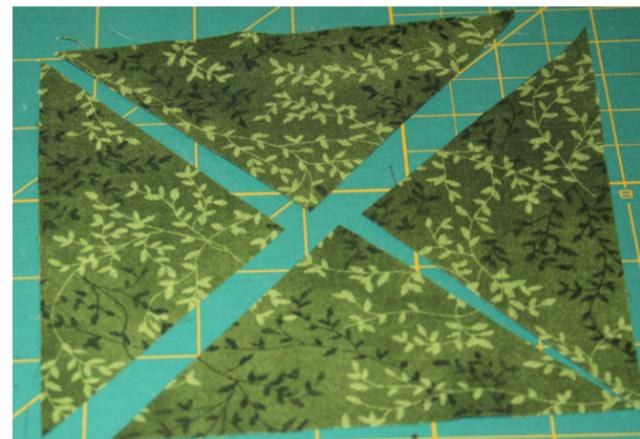


Figure 13

2. Imagine a square or rectangle around the shape. Measure along the longest edge plus about 1 3/4" to this measurement and you roughly have the size you should pre-cut.

I suggest adding such a large amount to make sure that when you have an odd section it covers the entire area when it is sewn and flipped over.

Odd shapes and angles are sometimes hard to determine sizes. In the example we are measuring section A6.

(See Figure 14)

Tip: One of my favorite methods for foundation paper piecing is to just grab a scrap that looks like it is "big enough". I try it out, bending on the seam line and if it covers everything, then I sew it on.

No pre-cutting and no pre-measuring. Just go for it! It doesn't have to even be the same shape, just as long as it is big enough to cover the section, plus the seam allowance beyond.

That is all there is to it. Now you should be able to complete even complex foundation paper pieced blocks with ease.

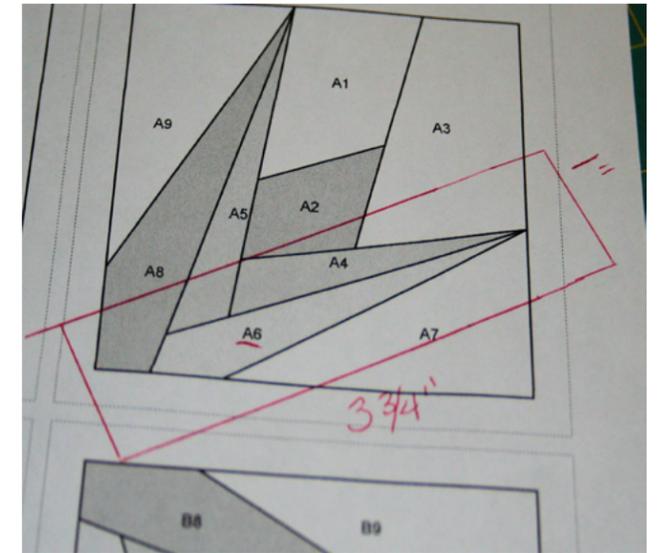


Figure 14

