

## ENGLISH PAPER PIECING

Courtesy of Quilt Board



English paper piecing is a technique that is usually done by hand. It is easy to do and the end results are very accurate. English paper piecing is simply basting over a foundation of paper or lightweight cardstock. The pieces are then hand stitched together.

The foundations may be made from medium weight card stock, or heavy paper. Some recommend using a double layer of freezer paper. Simply press two layers of freezer paper together with a warm iron. The convenience of freezer paper is it can be temporarily adhered to the fabric with a warm iron and doesn't slip avoiding the use of pins.

To make your foundations you might wish to make a master on paper and then photocopy onto card stock to cut out your foundation pattern pieces. Or cut a pattern from template plastic to trace on freezer paper or card stock. Some find the subscription cards that come in magazines are the desired weight to use for pattern pieces. They are readily available and at no cost.

There are precut papers and templates for English paper piecing available on the market. Check your local quilt shop or online store. A quilter can English paper piece hexagons, baby blocks, diamonds, and stars using this method.

To English paper piece, cut freezer paper, heavy paper or card stock in desired shapes. Do not add seam allowance to pattern pieces. Press freezer paper to fabric or pin card stock in place on wrong side of fabric. Cut the fabric using a 1/4" seam allowance. The seam allowance can be "eyeballed" for width.

Fold fabric over the edges of pattern piece, mitering the corners. With needle and thread tack the corners together through all folds making at least two tacks in each corner. Make sure to avoid catching the paper. Move needle and thread to the next corner. You don't need to cut thread between corners. Thread will be on the inside when pieces are joined. Prepare several pieces at one time. Then press with a warm iron if you wish.

To join pieces - hold pieces right sides together with edges lined up. With needle and thread, whip stitch the edges together. Don't remove paper until you are finished joining all the pieces. The paper will stabilize the piece and keep your edges crisp.

When finished, simply pop papers out. You may use your paper templates again.

This is a great project to carry in a small zip close bag in your purse or tote. Whenever you have a few minutes to spare simply take it out and stitch together. You will be amazed at how much you can accomplish in a few minutes that would usually be wasted.

## **Reverse Stitching**

Most quilters do not like to "reverse stitch". No matter how precise or careful you stitch there will always be a time that you will need to take out stitching.

Find a quilting friend and offer to rip her mistakes if she will rip yours. Part of the problem with ripping is the psychological feeling of taking out all that work! If you rip for her piecing and she rips for your piecing it isn't such a chore when you are not emotionally involved in the stitching.

When I teach quilting classes I do all ripping for students. This way they can continue stitching.

Use your sense of humor and give your ripper a funny name. Some quilter's name their seam ripper "rippit-rippit" or other cute name. I call my ripper "Jack" (the ripper)! That name is always good for a few laughs.

First, purchase a good seam ripper that fits in your hand. Seam rippers come in several sizes and qualities. A good ripper should be sharp to cut through the thread easily. A good seam ripper is not always the most expensive designer tool. You "get what you pay for" when buying quilting tools. So buy good brand and try it out. If it is not exactly to your liking, purchase another. You will soon find a size and style that fits your hand.

### How To Rip

The seam rippers come with a pointed "finger". Place the point under the stitch and slide it till the "cutting area" reaches the stitch and cuts. Cut every fourth or fifth stitch. Turn the piece over and pull on the bobbin thread. It will pull away in one piece. You will have a few short lengths of thread to remove and you are all set and ready to re-sew.

If you have a very large piece to remove the little threads, take a piece of tape and wrap it around your hand. Use the tape to pick up the stray threads. When threads are all picked off the fabric, discard the tape.

Sometimes if the pieces are very small, simply discard them and cut new pieces. The frustration factor is not worth a few small pieces of fabric. Ripping can be fun and the satisfaction of taking out a mistake and re-sewing is well worth the time spent.

### **Making A Large Ironing Surface**

Standard size ironing boards come in an odd shape for quilters. It is great for ironing clothing but for pressing large quilts or large pieces of fabric a rectangular ironing surface is more desirable.

Ironing surfaces that simply set on top of your existing ironing boards are available for purchase but they can also be easily made using materials that are readily available. The type of materials you use will depend on your specific needs.

Customize your ironing surface

First decide what size you would like your ironing surface to be. I would suggest the width of your ironing surface be 18 inches to 30 inches wide. Decide the width by standing with your iron in hand and reach across a table or other flat surface. Your ironing surface doesn't need to be any wider than you can comfortably reach with an iron in your hand.

The length should be at least 48" so you can accommodate pressing 44" fabric easily. If you have the space and will be pressing 90" wide fabric and large quilts often, you might wish to make your surface longer.

### **Materials needed**

Purchase a piece of inexpensive grade plywood at the size you need. Knotholes are OK as you will be covering the plywood with batting and fabric.

Buy enough cotton batting without scrim to cover your plywood and wrap around the back. Purchase the same amount of smooth, sturdy cotton fabric to cover the batting.

If you have a staple gun available with 3/16" staples, use that. If not you can purchase small upholstery tacks and put them in with a hammer.

Center the batting over plywood. Place the fabric over the batting and pull it taut, wrapping it around to the underside of plywood. With a staple gun and 3/6" staples tack the fabric and batting and place. Or use upholstery tacks and a small hammer.



Lightweight alternative -- purchase a 24" x 48" piece of ceiling tile. They are from a lightweight fibrous material and inexpensive to purchase. It won't be as sturdy but is very light weight and will last several years. I was able to staple into this fibrous material with a stapler from my desk drawer purchased from the office supply. Later if the fibrous material breaks simply take the cotton cover and batting off and place it on another ceiling tile.

Place your new ironing surface anywhere you like. You can place it on your existing ironing board but you may want to place small pieces of wood to keep it from slipping off. Also your ironing board may not be sturdy enough to support the weight of the plywood.

Try placing your new rectangular ironing board on two small file cabinets or on two small book shelves. Use your imagination. Storage baskets or storage systems could be placed underneath for a very usable pressing station.

You will find that the larger rectangular pressing surface will save you time and frustration when pressing large pieces of fabric and large quilt tops. Enjoy!

