

HOW TO SANDWICH QUILT LAYERS

Courtesy of The Quilt Board, October 2018

To learn to sandwich quilt layers, first practice on a small project such as a wall quilt or baby quilt. The method for sandwiching and basting small projects is exactly the same as for larger projects. Once you get comfortable with small quilt sandwiches then try sandwiching a larger quilt.

When sandwiching a small quilt simply tape the backing fabric wrong side up to the table using masking tape. Don't stretch the backing as you are taping, it needs to be firm and smooth as when it is ironed but not stretched.

Then lay the batting on the backing and sort of "pat" the batting in place. You don't want to stretch the batting. If you need move the batting "lift" and replace. If the batting is stretched when it is laid on the quilt it will "spring back" when the backing tape is released causing the quilt to pucker.

Place the quilt top over the batting. When you are placing the quilt top on the batting pull it towards the outside by lifting and pulling not by pressing down and smoothing, thus stretching the batting again.

It helps to place a few long straight pins along the edge and a throughout the quilt until the basting safety pins are in place. For best results, place small safety pins approximately 4" - 6" apart.

Layer And Baste A Large Quilt

To sandwich a large bed-size quilt you will need two or three large "banquet" size tables placed together. This works well for layering and basting a quilt and is easier on your back. Check out a church, library, or community room and ask if you can use their tables to baste your quilt. It might be a good idea to have a friend who will help especially if you have a very large quilt. You could work together and pin baste two quilts in an afternoon.

One of our local groups meets in a church hall with banquet tables. The standard height of the tables are low and cause back strain so we cut 16" lengths of 2" diameter PVC plumbing pipe and placed one of them under each table leg to raise the table so we don't have to bend and strain our backs. The length you cut your PVC pipe is determined by how long the table legs are in comparison to the height you would like to have the tables. You may want to cut them a little longer and shorten them as necessary.

Place the backing fabric on the table with the wrong side of the fabric up. Tape the edges of the backing to the edge of the table using masking tape. Your backing fabric needs to be firm but not stretched. It is important for your backing to be smooth or you will have puckers when you quilt.

The next layer is the batting. Take the batting out of the package and unroll it or unfold it and let it rest at least overnight. Or you may fluff it in the clothes dryer for a few minutes to take out the wrinkles. Read the package directions for fluffing in the dryer or for pre-shrinking instructions. Some cotton battings will shrink after the first washing. If you want the antique crinkled look of your quilt don't pre-shrink cotton and cotton blend battings. If you do not want the batting to shrink, pre-shrink your batting as recommended by the batting manufacturer and use the instructions printed on the batting package. Different brands of batting have different methods for pre-shrinking. Do not pre-shrink polyester batting; only fluff it in the dryer.

Layer the batting on top of the backing by spreading it carefully and not stretching it. You will want to sort of "pat" it out on the backing to get it flat and smooth. If the batting is stretched slightly, it will relax when the quilt is taken off the basting table and cause puckers when quilting.

Then layer the quilt top -- right side up. Smooth the quilt top carefully so you don't stretch the batting under it. Place long quilt straight pins about six to eight inches apart along the outside edge of the quilt top through all three layers.

Baste the quilt with safety pins. You will need several hundred for a large quilt. Be sure to buy good quality safety pins that are rustproof. Inexpensive pins that rust on your quilt are not a bargain. There are some safety pins available that are "bent" especially for quilt basting and they are easier to use...



With safety pins, start pinning in the middle of the quilt. Place the safety pins approximately four to six inches apart depending on the type of batting you are using. Polyester batting is slippery and would need the pins to be closer whereas cotton batting clings to the cotton fabric so six inches apart would be plenty. As you pin from the center, smooth the quilt top toward the outer edge and continue pinning. When you get to the edge of the quilt, remove the straight pins and replace them with safety pins. I don't close the safety pins until the entire quilt is pinned. Then I go back and close all the pins. That way if you need to move pins to smooth out an area they are easier to move.

When closing the pins, your fingers might get sore and tired. I use the serrated edge of a grapefruit spoon to help me close the pins. Just place the serrated part of the spoon under the point of the pin to bring it toward the pin latch to close. The grapefruit spoon does help you from getting sore fingers.

When you have pinned the entire quilt, remove tape from table and you are ready to quilt. Begin by quilting in the center of the quilt and quilt toward the outside edge. As you are quilting a specific area you may remove pins as needed to facilitate quilting.

Foundation Piecing On Muslin

Do you enjoy paper foundation piecing but dislike removing all those little paper fragments with tweezers? Try foundation piecing on muslin. Foundation piecing on muslin is very easy and the only difference would be the finished product. When foundation piecing we don't always pay attention to the grain line of the small pieces of fabric so the edges of our foundation may be on the bias and cause stretching. With a muslin foundation your finished block will be more stable along the edges because of the grain lines of the muslin and reduce stretching. And best of all you will save a lot of time and frustration not having to remove all those little pieces of paper.

Muslin foundations don't need to be hand traced. They can be made on the copier. Simple directions for making your own muslin foundations are listed below.

To Make Muslin Foundations

You will need lightweight inexpensive bleached or unbleached muslin -- 40" wide, freezer paper, rotary cutter, mat, 12 1/2" or larger square ruler, and an iron and ironing surface.

Rough cut freezer paper into approximately 9" x 12" sheets. Most freezer paper comes 18" wide so this is fairly simple. Fold a length of freezer paper in half lengthwise and cut into 12" lengths with a rotary cutter or scissors. Then cut at the fold. Remember to use a rotary cutter with a dull blade or paper scissors to cut the freezer paper. The paper only needs to be rough cut at this stage.

Set the iron to wool setting and allow it to heat. Iron the long edge of the shiny side of the freezer paper to the muslin parallel to the selvage. Do not use the selvage area. Place the next piece of freezer paper about a half inch from the first one. You can place three sheets across the width of fabric with little waste at the opposite selvage edge. Continue ironing more rows of freezer paper to the muslin. After two or three rows you might want to rough cut the muslin apart with shears. You only need to cut the muslin between the freezer papers -- again a rough cut.

Go back and iron each sheet thoroughly. You need to have a good fuse between the freezer paper and muslin so it will go through the copier without jamming.

Take the ironed paper and muslin units back to the cutting table. Use a large square ruler. Carefully trim all four edges with rotary cutter and ruler making the paper/muslin units exactly 8 1/2" x 11". These will go through the copy machine. Don't handle the sheets excessively being careful of the edges so the threads don't begin to fray. Once they have been through the copier you don't need to worry anymore about the edges.

Look at your original foundation pattern. If there are dark numbers on the pattern and you are going to use a light colored fabric in your piecing you need to remove these numbers before copying. You can either make one accurate tracing without the numbers, or use typing correction fluid to cover the numbers before copying.

Take your original foundation pattern and the prepared muslin/paper sheets to the copy machine. A standard copier is fine. The toner is heat set so even though the ink may not be permanent it will last long enough for your stitching to be completed.

If the copier that has a "bypass" feed or a "sheet" feed -- this would be ideal as the muslin/paper sheets do not have to be loaded into a tray below and then curled as they come into the copier. With muslin side up, feed the prepared muslin/paper sheets into the copier using the bypass or sheet feed option. Feed ONE sheet through at a time. Don't try to stack the sheets. The muslin/paper sheets are allowed to go directly into the copier and don't need to turn over as they come through a feeding system. The printed muslin may be heat set if desired but is not necessary.

If the copier does not have a "bypass" feed or "sheet" feed -- simply place one muslin/paper sheet face down in the paper tray. If you stack the muslin/papers the copier could take more than one sheet and cause a paper jam.

An inkjet printer will work as well but the ink would need to be heat set if you wanted it to be more stable but it is not necessary. Many inkjet printers need to have the muslin be face down and then turn over before it is printed. Remember to only place one sheet in the feed tray at a time to avoid jams.

After copying is finished the freezer paper may be peeled away. The freezer paper may be reused for other projects or discarded. You now have your printed muslin foundation. Use these muslin foundations in the same way as paper foundations. You just don't have to remove all the paper fragments and your piecing will be stabilized by the muslin.