

Quilt Notions for Beginning Quilters

By TK Harrison

Social media is a great place to meet and greet other quilters, quilt professionals and manufacturers or distributors of quilt-related merchandise. Where else can you have 2000 friends and only a couple dozen are family members? Where else can you get (mostly) positive feedback on something you've accomplished and want to show it off to the your quilt world?

It's also a great place to pick quilter's brains! Recently, I took an informal poll and asked my Facebook quilt friends: "What are the TOP FIVE quilt notions you would recommend for a beginning quilter?" The results were somewhat varied but what it really did was to make me put some thought into my own top five quilt notions I would suggest to a beginning quilter.

This is a smattering of suggestions from my poll:

- Scissors, seam ripper, sewing machine, rotary cutter, and mat.
- Fine glass head pins
- Rotary cutter, mat, 6.5" ruler, Purple Thang®, beginner book
- Quality thread
- Seam ripper, rotary cutter, cutting mat, 1/4" inch foot/guide, Aurifil® thread
- Curved pins as well
- Rotary cutter and spare blades, fabric, patterns, ruler and mat, 1/4 inch [presser] foot for your machine
- Scissors, rotary cutter and mat, seam ripper, 6"x24" ruler, Fine glass head pins
- 1/4 inch [presser] foot for sure! Quality fabric and quality thread. Start with the best and you'll be happy with the end result every time.

I took a trip on my quilting memory train to recall what I started with, as a quilter. 30+ years ago, there were no rotary cutters, no mats and very few actual quilt shops, at least in the area where I lived. I didn't have a sewing machine, either. So, I called on a few friends and one offered to loan me her grandma's old Singer®. It did take electricity but it only had a straight stitch that went forward or backwards. I could adjust the tension and the stitch length and that was it. But that's all I really needed as I had no clue what else I would need yet.

I was not a sewer although I had had limited experience sewing. One of my foster mothers and my aunt both sewed and I watched them, usually while talking to them, so I could understand what they were doing. At my aunt's house, I started small (and I do mean small) by sewing Barbie® clothes for my cousin's Barbie® dolls. Then I attempted to make a robe out of bath towels but it was REALLY hard to rip out my stitches on terry cloth and I ended up just cutting that part of the towels off...and I did it more than once so I ended up with a robe that would only fit a five-year-old! I also made a kilt for one of the musical productions at the high school I attended. I think that's about it. That was my sewing experience before I started quilting.

I started simply and took a sheet that was beyond its usefulness on my bed. I cut the usable parts it into squares and added some fabric scraps that my grandma had given me and made a four-patch baby doll quilt. I didn't quilt it, though. Didn't know that's what you were supposed to do! I copied a quilt that I had purchased from a friend's grandma and tied my first creation. I just made it to see if I could do it. I could - and it wasn't half bad considering I didn't have a clue about pressing, matching up seams, etc.

After a few more trial-and-error small quilt projects, I thought I was ready for the big time! I purchased a Georgia Bonesteel quilt book that had templates with it. I didn't make a lot of money working so after setting up a budget that took my rent, fuel and food off the top, it left me with about \$10 a month to purchase fabric. I was too excited about my new-found craft that I couldn't save that money and go fabric shopping once a month. Oh no, that just wasn't possible! So each week, I had Sundays and Mondays off of work and that was when I went to purchase fabric. I really concentrated on making wise choices for the fabric I was able to purchase on such a small budget. Then I'd do that ritual that I now know most quilters do - looking at the fabric, touching the fabric, stroking the fabric, moving the fabrics around to change the sequence of the colors and letting the fabric speak to me so I would know what to make with it.

Enter the templates. I didn't want to cut them out of the book! I wanted to make a template *from* the templates. I tried paper (too flimsy), I tried cardboard (when the edges were used a lot they began to lose their straight edges) and I tried copying already-cut pieces (dumb idea). Someone I knew suggested I try to use pre-exposed x-ray film. That would have never crossed my mind! I was a cosmetologist and a bartender - nowhere near any medical field. She brought me a box of the film and showed me the difference between good film and bad film. The bad film was exposed to something prior to even arriving at the hospital. The x-ray film was useless to a radiologist so they threw boxes and boxes of the pre-exposed films away. My friend managed to snag two or three different sized boxes of pre-exposed films for me and she was right - they were perfect to make quilt templates with!

That's how I started quilting. Patterns with templates, scissors, a seam ripper, quality thread and a ruler. And that answers my own question of the top five quilt notions I would suggest for a beginning quilter. In my opinion, my approach may be outdated to some quilters but if you can create a quilt project following in my beginner footsteps and then advance to using a rotary cutter and mat, you will succeed!

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