

67 Quick Tips for Quilters

1. She who has the most wins! The most important tool for quilting is your fabric collection. Build a good stash and then you'll always be able to find that special piece you need to complete a project.
2. Carefully press the seams in quilt blocks by lifting the iron and placing it down on each new area without moving the iron across the fabric so you avoid stretching or distorting your fabric.
3. Use plain water only when washing out water soluble marker pens from your fabric, and hand wash well, as detergents and ironing may set the ink permanently.
4. Take photos and keep a written record of all your completed quilts. Make sure you label each of your quilts properly too on the back, so there is always a permanent record of who, when, and for whom the quilt was made.
5. When photographing quilts out of doors, ideally choose a flat, vertical surface for your quilt to rest against so that it will not move with the breeze and blur in your photo.
6. Use different widths of masking tape to guide you in an easy way to quilt parallel lines without marking the quilt top.
7. Make sure you always use only cotton thread when stitching older fabrics because synthetic threads (even cotton-covered polyester) are likely to damage or cut the fabric.
8. Better to buy more fabric than you think you need for a quilt, rather than too little, as this allows room for mistakes, shrinkage or making a sample block, and for building your stash.
9. Look around you - when designing patterns for your quilt, don't forget you can use everyday items to draw around. Plates, cups and saucers and even cookie cutters all make great templates.
10. Always bring the bobbin thread to the top of the quilt before beginning to sew so you can avoid any tangling on the back.
11. Use a rotary cutter for the most accurate cutting, as this should help the accuracy of your piecing, and thus the overall appearance of your quilt.
12. Purchase the largest rotary cutting mat you can afford and have room for. Also try and purchase one marked in inches, as many are now available for other craft purposes, and different markings on them may be confusing.
13. If possible, lay your batting out flat somewhere for a couple of days to allow it to relax before you quilt it, so you don't get caught with wrinkles or creases.
14. Just iron your fusible web around the edges of your larger appliqué shapes, and you can then cut away the centre portion to get rid of excess bulk and stiffness, which will make appliquéing easier, and your finished quilt softer.
15. Everyone has UFOs (Unfinished Projects). Make the effort to go through them and decide what you do actually want to finish, then you can cull the rest and either give them to friends or charity, or sell them.
16. Ensure your binding goes on smoothly by running a row of stitching around the edge of the quilt to hold all three layers together, before you attach it.
17. Quilts made of wools or fancy fabrics should be dry cleaned to avoid any damage. Use a Wedding Dress cleaning specialist, as they are used to handling fabrics delicately.
18. Quilting can be good exercise too! Keep your ironing board well away from your machine and get in the habit of getting up to press every seam as you sew.

19. If you are a new quilter take the time to learn good practices and techniques, and once you have the basics right, your skills will naturally develop.
20. Make your quilt rod / hanging sleeve from a patchwork of all the fabric used in your quilt. Then, if you need to repair anything on the quilt top later, you will have a selection of the right fabrics to use.
21. When doing stitch-in-the-ditch machine quilting, stitch as close to the seam as possible, so that your quilting stitch remains largely invisible.
22. To make it easier to manoeuvre your quilt when Machine Quilting, fold the bulk of the quilt into accordion pleats and clip together with large pegs or bulldog clips.
23. Speaking from experience...Choose the quilting design that will look the best on your quilt without worrying too much about how long it will take, (or how much it may be to have it done professionally). After all the work you have put in to sewing the top, it will be a long-term source of regret if you short-change yourself on the actual quilting and it never looks as good as it could have.
24. For invisible machine appliqué, use the blind-hem stitch on your machine set at 20 stitches per inch and an open-toe appliqué foot.
25. Use small stitches and the correct thread tension when appliquéing, so as to not distort the shapes of smaller pieces.
26. It pays to practise your quilting stitches on a practice piece before you begin a new quilting session on your actual quilt.
27. Do not prewash your fabric when piecing miniature quilts, as the sizing in the fabric will help make it easier to piece.
28. Be careful to press seams that meet in opposite directions so as to reduce the bulkiness, and allow more accurate machine piecing.
29. Mark the edges of your clear plastic templates with a large permanent felt marker and this will help you see where to place them (and cut) your fabric.
30. When measuring a quilt for borders, take several measurements lengthwise and crosswise - especially going through the quilt centre. You will need to square up your quilt at this point so your borders will sit properly when they are joined.
31. If you press your pieced seams open, the block will be flatter and the points sharper, which makes it more easy to then match up your seams accurately.
32. Have several patterns put aside to do, and make sure you have enough fabric and threads to get started. Then, when you've finished one project, you have several more to choose from to get your next one under way!
33. It is recommended that you use between 20-25 stitches per inch when sewing paper foundation piecing blocks, as this makes it easier to remove the paper later.
34. Add embellishments such as beads or braid after the quilting is done so they won't get caught up in the quilting. It makes the task of quilting easier, and avoids them being squashed.
35. Keep your quilt borders simple. Too elaborate a border can overwhelm the central sections and make your quilt appear unbalanced. Often using similar shapes and colours as those in the rest of the quilt can help your border blend better with the overall look of your quilt.
36. A quick tip for needle turn appliqué - many find that using a wooden toothpick to turn the seam allowance under works best, as the wood grips the fabric better than a metal needle.
37. Aside from looking at the overall balance of your quilt, and the quilting on it, be aware also that concentrated patches of stitching may make your quilt lay differently and perhaps unevenly. Spread areas of concentrated stitching such as stippling evenly through the quilting design to avoid this.

38. To piece together two curved patches (like a Drunkards Path block), it is easier to sew with the convex (outer) curved patch on the top.
39. Using spray starch on the backing of your quilt is a popular trick to help the quilt move more easily through your machine when quilting by machine.
40. Another trick is to spray wax on your machine sewing surface and even table top to help the quilt move easily whilst you are machine quilting it. This may not be for everyone though.
41. Many quilters have discovered that rubber gloves work very well for helping grip the quilt when machine quilting. Either rubber dishwashing gloves, or gardening gloves with rubber dots on the palm work equally well.
42. When Machine Quilting, make sure you stop with the needle down in the quilt before shifting the quilt for further stitching so you can keep your stitches even.
43. Be sure to wipe the blade and clean your rotary cutter properly after each cutting session, otherwise lint will build up on it and effect its cutting performance.
44. It is best to select a busy print for the backing if you want your quilting stitches to be less easily seen from that side.
45. For best results when using invisible thread, use a clear thread for light coloured fabrics, and a darker colour for darker fabrics.
46. Used carefully, it is possible to mark patterns on dark fabric with small pieces of regular hand soap.
47. Keep a careful touch on your quilt when machine quilting. Use light pressure and move it gently, letting the machine and your walking foot do the pulling. If you are too heavy-handed, the quilt will drag and cause the stitches to become uneven.
48. When appliquéing, use thread that matches the colour of the patch and not the background fabric.
49. Maintain your machine - there's nothing more frustrating than a breakdown when you're in the middle of sewing. The quickest job is to keep the bobbin case clean from lint - a quick brush and you're right to continue.
50. If you want to show off special quilting threads, such as multi-coloured or metallic ones, increase your stitch length slightly to leave more thread on the top of your quilt.
51. When you begin a machine-quilting session, warm up on a practice piece first, before you start on your quilt.
52. Make sure you mark your quilting pattern clearly on the quilt top, so you have a good idea of where you are going when you are actually quilting it. This will lead to fewer mistakes, and less unpicking.
53. Draw these quilting designs in the order you will stitch them also, as this too will help make your quilting smoother and more trouble-free.
54. Select a light to medium density wadding for quilts that are to be hand quilted, as high density waddings often won't compress enough for you to make small enough quilting stitches.
55. Wool wadding is a good choice for hand quilting, as the lanolin in the wool helps the needle slide through more easily.
56. Prewash your fabrics to remove any sizing or excess dye, and prevent any shrinkage later that could damage the look of your finished quilt.
57. When sewing by hand, if your thread tends to kink, you may be rolling the needle. The easiest way to prevent this is to rotate the needle every few stitches to 'unwind' the thread as you go.
58. For tangle free thread when hand stitching, make sure to pull the thread wide in a circular motion away from your body, so that the thread rests easily and will not become caught up with your next stitch.

59. When sewing appliqué by hand, stitch closely to, or just under the fold of the piece being appliquéd, which will help hide the stitching.
60. An oldie but a goodie - for smoother sewing or pinning, run the needle through your hair to oil the metal a bit.
61. To prevent tangled knots when hand sewing, hold your thumb over the point where the thread is being pulled through until the thread is taut.
62. Before you start cutting fabric for your blocks, look for pattern pieces that can be chain pieced or strip pieced together to save you time
63. When loading the needle in your hand quilting, you can use the visible bits of the needle to check on the evenness of your stitches. It is easier to withdraw the needle and correct it at this point rather than having to unpick stitches you have just made.
64. Make sure the wadding you select for your hand quilted project is smooth and even in texture, without lumps or otherwise to interrupt the flow of your stitches.
65. To have your quilted stitches more clearly visible on lighter coloured fabrics, pull the thread slightly more taut than usual.
66. If at all possible, try and keep a special place just for quilting, so you can leave your tools and projects out, and don't have the hassles of constantly pulling them out, and putting them away again at the end of that session.
67. Finally, just remember there are no rules about what you can create through quilting. Experiment, learn new skills, practice them, and HAVE FUN.