

Accurate Piecing and Squaring Up Units, Blocks, and Quilts

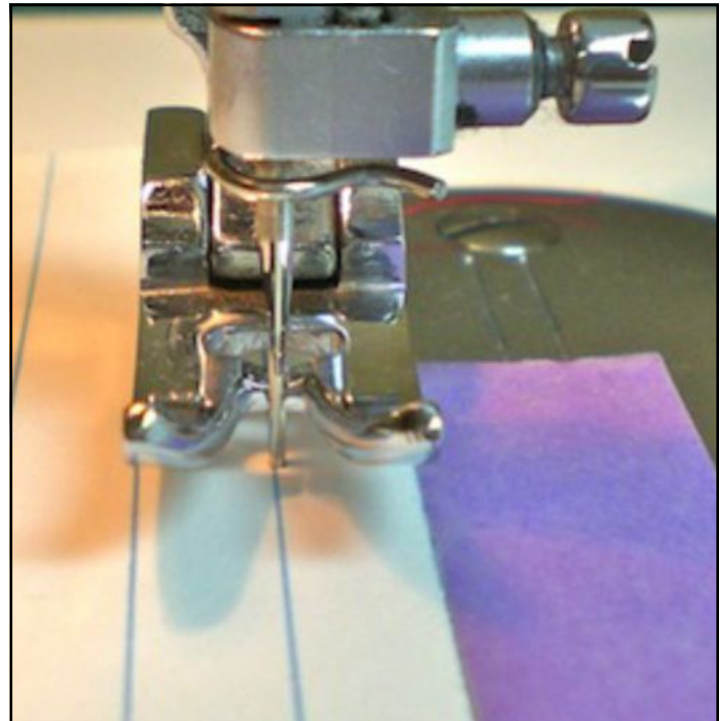
A common problem when piecing is having blocks that are too big or small when completed. We have all done this. This can happen for a variety of reasons; the fabric is not cut accurately, the fabric stretches when sewn or pressed, the seam allowance is not $\frac{1}{4}$ " and individual units have not been squared up before joining them.

Solutions

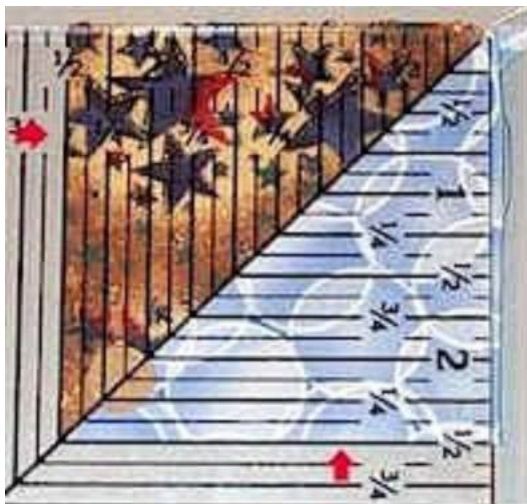
Apply sandpaper dots or another non-slip product to the back of your rulers to **prevent slippage when cutting**. The rotary cutter should be held perpendicular to the ruler and not at an angle. The black line of the ruler should be on the fabric not off the edge.

Spray the fabric with **spray starch** before cutting strips and other pieces. This stabilizes the fabric especially when pieces are cut on the bias like some sides of triangles which stretch more. The sizing in new fabric and spray sizing are not enough to stabilize it.

Use a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam. Take five note sheets from a pad of 3"x 3" "sticky" notes. Leave them together and cut a strip $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide off the sticky side to lay $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the right side of the needle. Use a ruler to measure this space. Be sure the strip is aligned square with the throat plate. Butt the edges of the pieces to be sewn against this strip. Check the accuracy of this placement after sewing two 3" squares together and pressing the seam open. Press with an up-down movement instead of ironing back and forth. The width of the two sewn squares should be $5\frac{1}{2}$ ". Adjust the guide strip if needed and secure with tape. Five layers of masking tape can also be used in place of the "sticky" note strip. Sometimes a "scant" $\frac{1}{4}$ " measurement is needed when folding and pressing of the seam reduces the size of the unit.



Here is an easier way to find the needle placement for a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam. Use a lined notecard. Cut off on a line. Place the needle slightly to the right of the line for a "scant" $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam.



Square up sewn units to match the intended size of the joined pieces. Use square rulers to check the size.

For example: Look at the interior of the ruler. This half-square triangle unit should be $2\frac{1}{2}$ ".

The fabric should be either ON the $2\frac{1}{2}$ " lines or extending slightly beyond it. If it is not big enough, the pieces were cut too small or have a seam allowance larger than $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

When squaring up a half-square triangle unit, the diagonal line will rest on the diagonal seam line. The first two sides have been trimmed and the unit has been rotated to trim the second two sides in the picture below.

Go to this website for more information and video on Squaring Up units, blocks, and quilts:
http://www.quiltuniversity.com/squaring_up.htm