

Machine Quilting Tips

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General Tips

1. PRACTICE PRACTIC PRACTICE "...with a capital P and that rhymes with T and that stands for trouble". Yes, we think of it as Trouble. Decide whether to practice on real projects or on sample batts, or both, but you can't avoid the old saying "practice makes perfect".
2. Try one of the quilting-as-you-sew methods to either quilt to batting or quilt in smaller sections through all the layers. This could make it easier to focus on developing quilting skills while working on real projects.
3. If you are going to wash and dry the quilt later, do it before you add the binding. This allows the quilt to shrink evenly (without the binding holding the edges in place while the middle shrinks) and it allows you to block the quilt. This is not just a Wendy Hill thing. For example, Barbara Copeland, award winning machine quilter from Culver, does this. So do many others.
4. When the quilting is dense or perhaps has uneven density (more quilting in some places than others), block and square-up the quilt before adding the binding or facing. Do this while washing the quilt (see above), or by misting and steaming with your iron.
5. When thread texturing and quilting at the same time, do most of the thread texturing first*, then layer with the batting and backing and add more quilting through all the layers. This allows you to block and square-up first. The backing fabric will "lock" the quilt in place. This is a good method for wall quilts that won't be used as a blanket.

* For more stability, use a layer of flannel or some kind of machine embroidery stabilizer (wash away, tear away, burn away) during the thread texturing stage. Thread texture fabric first to make "new" fabric, or do this through all the layers. Choices abound!
6. Be sure to baste the layers of the quilt securely before starting. If the quilt is secure, you can handle the heck out of it without getting into trouble.
 - * safety pins
 - * basting thread- with big hand done stitches
 - * spray baste (such as 505, an acid free product from France, blue & orange can)
 - * water soluble thread- hand or machine grids (Superior Vanish, YLI Wash Away)
 - * spray baste and water soluble thread together
7. Match the needle to your thread and the weight of the quilt. Change the needle often. How often? Every 3-4 hours of actual stitching! (NOTE: Some people change the needle with each new project. But not all projects take equal amounts of time...You don't drive with a flat tire- don't sew with a "flat" needle.

Free Motion Quilting

1. If you are getting a "jerk stitch" after stopping, then *stop with the needle down*. Put the needle in the *up position before stitching*.
2. You always hear that you should not let the quilt drag as you are quilting or that you should wear something slick so the quilt slides off of you more easily. All good. If your quilt is well basted, and if the weight of the quilt is stable, then you only have to pay attention to the area right around the needle. Let the quilt come into this area like a pile of mashed potatoes- the quilt will want to go under the needle.
3. Continuous line quilting does NOT mean continuous sewing. If in doubt, stop.
4. Free motion quilting does NOT mean pedal to the metal all the time. Different patterns require different speeds. Yes, you do need to coordinate your hand and motor speeds. Yes, it's helpful to be able to set the machine at half speed. But sometimes you'll sew a lot slower while other times you'll sew faster.
5. Warm up before the real thing. Before working on your quilt, spend a few minutes free motion quilting on a practice batt. You'll make mistakes and get in the groove on the sample, not your quilt.
6. Try out ideas on paper, then a practice batt. If you can draw it on paper, then you'll be able to draw it with your needle. But you'll need to let your brain switch from moving a pen around on paper to moving the quilt around under the needle.

Walking Foot Quilting

1. You can hand steer your quilt under the needle to do big wavy lines. Pretend you are driving a car: hold the quilt at 10am and 2pm, and steer your car around cones. Or pretend you are a downhill skier: ski tight curves around poles or longer slalom curves.
2. Use your walking foot as a guide. Draw the first line (chalk, masking tape) and sew along the edge. Then use your walking foot to space the rest of the lines. You must focus or *you will drive off the road*.
- 2A. Use your walking foot as a guide to quilting circles. Start with a freezer paper circle or a chalk marked circle. Sew around the circle (yes, feed dogs engaged). When you get to the beginning of the circle, gradually move the quilt so the edge of the foot is going along the edge of the stitched circle. Now you just keep going around and around and around for as long as you like, with perfect stitches and smooth round curves.
3. Use masking tape to mark lines. You can mark straight lines or zigzagging lines. Sew along the edge of the tape or sew down the space between the tapes. NOTE: don't leave the quilt in a hot room or in the sun with masking tape on it.
4. Check out your sewing machine for decorative stitches that could be used for quilting. There is a "default" setting, which might work fine, but try altering the stitch length and width. If you have a Bernina, check out stitch #4- by altering the length and width you'll get graceful curvy lines.

