



Deb Karasik's Top Tips

Starch

I use a lot of starch. (I recommend Mary Ellen's Best Press)

I starch prior to *cutting fabric*.

I starch my *blocks* as they are finished and the paper is removed.

I starch the *quilt top* once assembled.

I starch the *quilt back*, prior to basting.

Why? It stabilizes the fabric by minimizing stretching and distortion. This results in a much more precise final product.

Dry Iron

I don't own a steam iron; I only use a dry iron. Steam puts moisture into fabric which can contribute to fabric distortion.

Small Stitch Length

I recommend a tight stitch length (1.4 – 1.6) for piecing. If you use a small stitch length, your work will be more accurate, your quilt will go together easier and smoother, and it makes for easier paper removal. Also, when judging, one of the things I look for is visible threads in the seams, which can result in deducted points. A tight stitch length will minimize this.

Double Sticky Tape

Whenever I have to cut out templates (for inner and outer arcs for example) I use double sided tape on the template. It will sit smoothly on the fabric, eliminating bumps and lumps from pinning, ensuring a perfect template. With this method, I find I can cut multiple layers with ease.

Titanium-Coated Topstitch Needles

I always use these needles, for piecing AND quilting. They are stronger than conventional needles; designed to sew between the threads of your fabric (rather than cutting through it) and almost all threads play nice with topstitch needles!

Rotary Blades

I always start my day with a sharp rotary blade. I replace them frequently. I will try to sharpen a dull blade, but if there are any nicks I replace it. If you have to press hard to cut fabric, your blade needs replacing! It's not about getting the most miles out of each blade, it's about ergonomics and safety! It is safer and more comfortable to cut with sharp blades than dull ones! Also, make sure that your blade is properly installed and secured!

Small Bits of Paper

One of the less glamorous steps in paper piecing is the paper removal. My paper comes off very easily, but there are those times when small bits remain in the corners. Now...you could sit for hours removing them with tweezers, but I find that once completed and I've removed as much paper as I can, I throw my top in my dryer (no heat) for about 5 minutes and all the little remaining pieces come off. Remember to clean your dryer filter!

Carry an Extension Cord or Power Strip

I've taught quite a few classes. Sometimes, power outlets are in short supply. I suggest that you carry an extra extension cord or power strip in your travel bag or your car trunk. That way you're never in a 'no outlet' situation!

Baste Your Quilt with Pinmoors

Pinmoors are a small, silicone product that is placed over the point of a straight pin which keeps the pin from falling out (or stabbing me). I have tried many ways to baste, from fusible battings to spray adhesives to the ever popular torture devices called curved safety pins. When I discovered Pinmoors, basting became easier (basting a quilt in a quarter of the time it would take me with safety pins), smoother, (no pleats on the back safety pins can cause) and much easier to maneuver around when quilting! Further, the large shafts of safety pins resulted in holes in my quilt; the shaft of a straight pin is much narrower, eliminating the holes.

Pre-Washing

I use Hoffman of California Batiks almost exclusively. Hoffman Batiks get washed a minimum of 4 times before they are shipped from the factory. I can quilt with confidence that my pieces are color safe (and are pre-shrunk too).

Hard Edge Tools

Paper Piecing is all about precision. We fold our paper over a thin straight-edge, and we can do this hundreds of times for each quilt. I find that template plastic works best for this purpose. It's thin, stable, and does not wear down with repeated use like postcards or cardboard do.

Wooden Seam Roller

I always use a wood seam presser when paper piecing. It eliminates repetitive stress on your wrist from picking up and putting down an iron at each seam, it eliminates the need for electricity, and won't stain your seams with finger oils like finger pressing can. You also won't get tiny pleats or stretching that occur with those wood or plastic sticks.

Thread Size

For the flattest seams, I use a 50 weight thread (Superiors' Masterpiece). It's strong, thin and comes in a zillion colors.

Quilt Bindings

When I judge, I find that a good binding enhances a quilt. If you would like to learn my Binding technique, download my free tutorial at www.DebKarasik.com. Click on "**Free Stuff**" and then scroll down and click on "[Deb's Binding Tutorial](#)".

Questions or comments? Please email me at: Deb@DebKarasik.com