

# GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR PAPER FOUNDATION PIECING

## **Things you will need:**

**Fabric:** 100 % cotton is recommended. Prewash fabric in warm water with very little detergent and NO FABRIC SOFTENER. Dry in dryer, remove while still slightly damp and press. Since paper piecing involves a lot of small pieces, small non-directional prints work best, but pieces of larger motifs can add interest and texture.

**Sewing Machine:** Any straight stitch machine will work. Use a size 90/14 machine needle and set stitch length at 15 -20 stitches per inch -- these two things will perforate the paper foundation and make it easier to remove. Use an open-toe presser foot or one that makes it easy to see the sewing line.

**Paper for foundation:** You will need to trace or photocopy the foundation patterns -- one for each block or unit of a block. You can purchase special foundation paper through quilt supply stores and catalogs -- is easy to see through, but expensive. I use very cheap typing paper from the local discount store, it's see through, stands up to the heat of the iron and it's ... well... cheap!

**Rotary cutting equipment:** Self-healing mat, rotary cutter and acrylic rulers. If all you have is a 6" x 12" ruler that is sufficient. Also nice to have for working with smaller blocks, is a 6" square ruler and a 6 or 8" Bias Square for squaring up.

**Lamp:** A small lamp or light source that will help you see through the paper.

**Thread:** Cotton thread is best, cotton wrapped polyester is O.K. Stay away from all polyester threads -- they melt! Use a neutral color, such as light brown or gray.

**Iron and pressing surface:** Use no steam (it will curl your papers) and press gently. Protect your ironing surface from the ink with a large square of muslin.

**Pins:** Flexible thin silk pins are best or use pins that will not bend the paper too much.

**Seam ripper:** Almost a must in paper piecing! Use for removing mistakes and paper from tight spaces.

**Scotch Brand Removable Magic Tape:** Just in case the paper tears and needs repaired. This tape won't melt under the heat of the iron and is easily removed.

## **Sewing with paper foundations:**

1. You will need one paper foundation for each block or for each unit of a block. *The marked side is the sewing side* -- the numbers are your piecing order and the lines are your sewing lines. The reverse side is where the fabrics will be placed. Cut the foundation pattern out just outside the seam edge. Trimming will be done later.

2. Locate piece #1 on the foundation. *With the printed side of the foundation towards you*, place a scrap of fabric -- wrong side to paper -- over #1 on the unmarked side, making sure the edges of the scrap extend well beyond the sewing lines. In general -- BIGGER IS BETTER. Holding it up to a light will help you place it correctly. Pin it in place away from the sewing line.

3. Select a scrap for piece #2, checking to be sure it covers the area and extends well beyond the sewing lines. With right sides together flip the piece back over #1 fabric [fig.1], re-pin holding both in place. *With the printed side up*, stitch on the line between #1 and #2, beginning and ending a few stitches beyond the line [fig. 2]. Clip threads. Turn over and trim the seam allowance 1/8 " to 1/4" [fig.3], being careful not to cut the paper. Flip the piece up into place and press with dry iron [fig. 4].

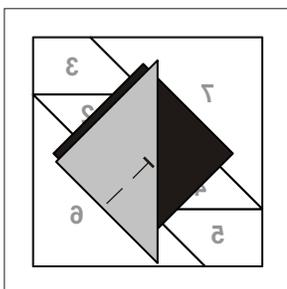
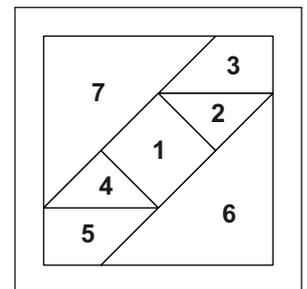


fig. 1

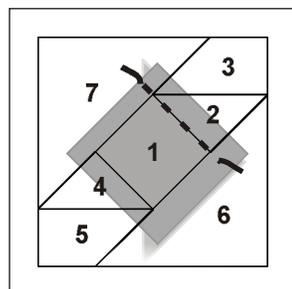


fig. 2

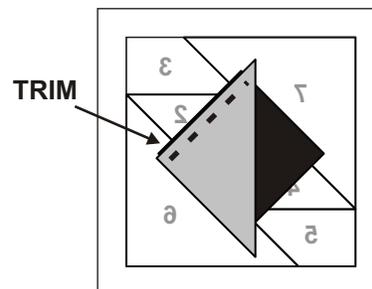


fig. 3

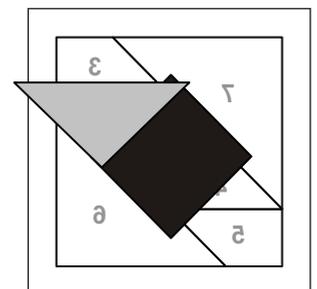


fig. 4

4. Continue adding pieces in this manner until block is complete. Pieces around the outside of the block should extend well beyond the 1/4" seam allowance. It may look strange but this will all be trimmed off later.

5. With a longer machine stitch, machine baste [fig. 5] through all layers within the outside seam allowance -- 1 inch across all points that come out to the edge or any other spots that seem to need the strength. If your block edges are not along the grain line, you will need to baste all the way around the block. This will prevent any stretching.

6. Now you can trim your block. With the paper side up lay block on mat, align ruler with the outside edge of the 1/4" seam allowance and trim [fig. 6]. You may need to press down a little harder on your ruler to prevent slipping. DO NOT remove paper unless it will NOT be sewn to another unit or paper pieced block. You will need the lines to match up the pieces. After these are sewn together, remove long machine basting and then remove the paper carefully. You may need to coax small pieces in tight corners with the point of a seam ripper or large needle.

7. Now take a look at you handiwork!

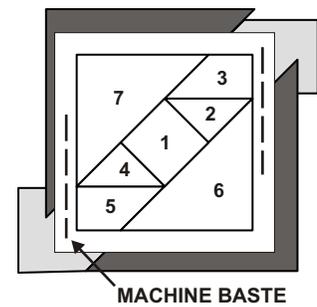
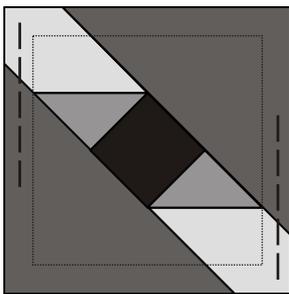


fig. 5

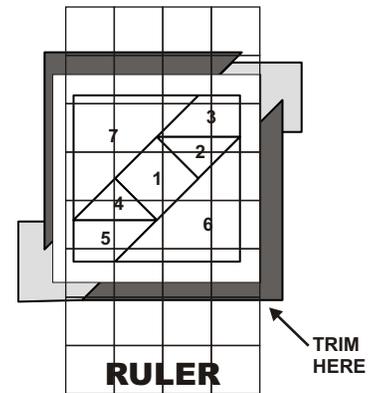


fig. 6

### Hints & Helps:

**Blocks with separate units:** Paper piece each unit separately, but DO NOT remove paper. With right sides together, pin at matching points and stitch units together. Trim block.

**Grain lines:** Pieces within in the block will not necessarily need to follow any grain lines. However, I like to have the grain lines fall on the outside edges of the blocks to minimize stretching. Use Method #2 below, but have at least one straight edge across the top of your fabric scrap.

**Odd angled pieces:** Getting the pieces the correct shape for odd angled pieces is probably the most frustrating thing you will encounter in paper foundation piecing. Here are three methods that will help:

**Method #1:** "Pin and Flip". Lay the piece as if you were going to sew it, placing a pin straight on the sewing line. Flip the fabric up into place, hold it up to the light and see if it covers the area.

**Method #2:** "Ruler Align". Lay your block down on the cutting mat -- *paper/numbered side up* -- and the fabric scrap just below it -- *wrong side up*. Align a longer ruler with the sewing line and so that it also falls onto the scrap below. Cut the scrap at this angle and be careful -- you don't want to cut you foundation! You may need to move the block or the fabric scrap a bit to make sure you are cutting a big enough piece. You should still "pin & flip" to make sure you have it turned the correct angle.

**Method #3:** "Almost Foolproof". Make extra copies of the foundation patterns and cut apart to use as cutting guides. You will still need to trim the fabric at least 1/2" around these, because they will not include seam allowances.

