

Pressing Issues! How to Press Quilt Seams

By Diane Knott

One of the most common causes of frustration for quilters is a result of pressing issues. The process of quilting involves pressing the fabric first, pressing seam allowances either open or to one side and then pressing patchwork that has been pieced together. If errors occur during each of those stages, things could go badly in a

Here are a few tips for how to press quilt seams:



The basics

Which brand of iron is the best? Should I use steam? Should I use starch? Why is my straight seam now a curve? These are very common questions that quilters ask. Any brand of iron that gets hot and stays hot will work! Steam is personal preference. Some folks use steam, others use a dry iron with a spray bottle of water or spray product.



Press before cutting

Pressing fabric yardage that has been cut off the bolt, or small scraps that have been bunched up in a bin is important before cutting into it. The fabric that has been on the bolt is often creased at the fold and sometimes pulled or twisted near the selvage.

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Many quilters won't cut into fabric before it's been washed, and pressing is definitely needed when fabric comes out of the dryer. Pressing with steam or starch, if done correctly, can really help avoid problems later. Even if the fabric doesn't look like it needs pressing, giving it a good press with a hot iron will make it easier to cut more accurately. Creases or folds in fabric will reduce accuracy of rotary cutting and can lead to problems later when sewing those pieces together.



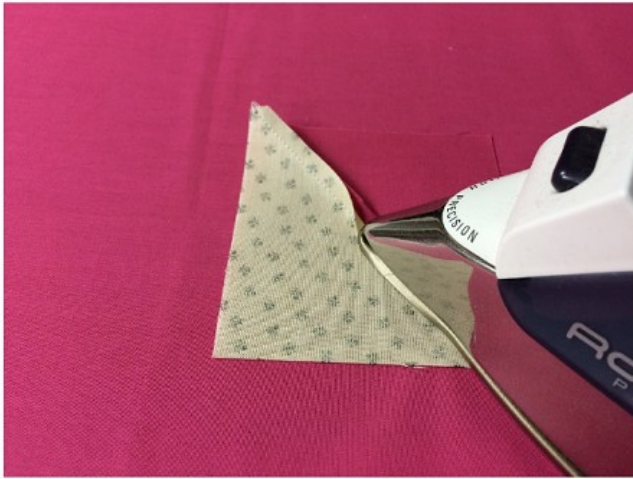
Setting the stitches

One method to help achieve nice, flat seams is to press the seam closed before pressing either open or to the side. By pressing the seam closed, the stitches are set in place and the seam is nice and flat. Doing this will become habit and takes only a few seconds.



Pressing seam allowances to the dark side

Patterns and instructions usually designate seams to be pressed toward the dark fabric. This prevents the darker colors from "shadowing through" the lighter colors when the quilt is finished. It also typically means that seams pressed toward the darker fabric with then face away from the other seam allowances that they will be sewn together with. Having seams nest or face away from each other at intersections helps to reduce bulk and increase accuracy. Lumpy patchwork is much less likely to be the exact correct measurement than flat patchwork.



Pressing seam allowances open

When the pattern call for pressing seam open, don't panic! So many quilters have a fear of pressing seams open and it's not scary at all. Using the tip of the iron, or a long stilleto or tool to open the seam will prevent burns to finger tips. Also, pressing seams open, is easy if done slowly, and without pushing the iron across the seam. Too much pressure will create wonky seams and wrinkled seam allowance, both things to avoid!

Slow steady pressure with a light hand will open the seam and set it perfectly. Flip the patchwork over and press again from the front to really set everything into place. Open seams make for much easier hand or machine quilting later because the bulk is so greatly reduced.



Pressing seam intersections

Reducing bulk at intersections will make so many things easier and results more accurate. By pressing the seams away from each other at the intersections, layers of fabric will be reduced, resulting in a flatter, more accurate piece of patchwork. Hand quilters know this makes hand stitching much easier and many long arm quilters require this method of pressing before they will accept a quilt.



Avoiding the curve

If straight seams are now curved, or strip sets are no longer straight, then too much pressure is being applied and the iron is being pushed across the fabric. This will create problems when cutting and stitching further steps.

If you see seams curving, stop and repress the seams with less pressure. Also, laying the patchwork on top of a striped fabric will let you know if things are not staying straight. Lining up strip sets with printed stripes will let you know if things are going off to one side or the other.



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