

EPP Basics

a little crispy pattern

Blocks designed and sewn by Kristin Lawson.
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Getting started

This pattern assumes that you have basic quilting knowledge. It doesn't provide directions for basic quilting techniques such as appliqué, basting, quilting, or binding.

There are many different ways to do English Paper Piecing (EPP). The trick is to find the method that works best for you! I will describe two methods here: first is the traditional method of stitching with thread, and second uses a combination of freezer paper, starch, and an iron.

Traditional stitching with thread is the most common way of making your pieces. It is slower than the starch method, but it is portable, and that is probably why it is more popular. The starch and freezer paper method is faster than the stitching method, but it does tie you down to an iron. It is fun to do in front of the TV, though!

Check out my latest patterns and other info at alittlecrispy.com. If you have questions or comments, you can contact me at kristin@alittlecrispy.com.

Materials

The materials you'll need will depend on which technique you choose.

Stitching: cardstock, template plastic, or freezer paper; a needle and thread, an iron, and scissors. Template plastic only works well for small shapes (2-3" or less) and does not work well with inset points or concave curves.

Starching: freezer paper, heavy starch, a paintbrush, a small iron (such as a Clover mini iron), a stiletto, scissors, and a needle and thread. You can find heavy starch in a blue bottle at many stores near the laundry detergent. You can dilute it 50:50 with water to extend it even further.

Fabric

The most common fabric to use for EPP is 100% cotton quilting-weight fabric, but any fabric that is thin enough to baste around a template is suitable. Especially nice is cotton lawn or voile. Often, the tighter the weave, the better—the fabric will fray less when being handled.

Making your templates

Before you get started, you need to prepare your templates:

Choose a block size: 4", 6", 9", or 12". Note that your finished block will be slightly larger than this because of the thickness of the fabric over so many pieces. Also, if you prefer a different size block, you can easily scale the templates when printing them. For example, if you'd like an 18" block, print the 12" block at 150%.

Then, print the template sheet(s):

- onto cardstock if you'll be using paper templates,
- onto copy paper if you're using template plastic, or
- either onto copy paper or directly onto freezer paper sheets if you're using freezer paper. **If you're printing directly onto freezer paper sheets, you need to use an inkjet printer, not a laser printer, or you'll fuse the paper to the printer and ruin both.**

Another option is to print the templates onto copy paper and then photocopy them onto a sheet of cardstock or freezer paper.

After you print the template sheets, cut out the shapes:

- **from cardstock:** Cut out the shapes carefully on the lines. Optional: punch a hole in the center of each shape with a paper hole punch to make it easier to pin the fabric to the template.
- **from template plastic:** Tack the printout to the template plastic with a glue stick and carefully cut out the shapes on the lines. Punch a hole in the center of each shape with a paper hole punch so that you can pin your fabric to the template.
- **from freezer paper:** If you are using a roll of freezer paper (as opposed to sheets that you printed on in the previous step), you will need to pre-shrink it first: cut off a length of paper and iron it, shiny side down, to your ironing board. Peel off to remove.

Then, layer two sheets of pre-shrunk freezer paper together, both shiny side down, and iron on the dull side to stick the two sheets together. This makes a double thickness of paper that is sturdy but flexible.

Layer the template printout sheet with one or more pieces of double layer freezer paper and tack them together with a glue stick or staples. If you use staples, avoid stapling inside the shapes so that you don't have to remove staples from the shapes. Carefully cut out the shapes on the lines.

Basting your fabric

The next step is to baste your fabric around the template.

After describing the two basic techniques, I show how to deal with shapes that need a different approach, such as sharp points, inset points, and curves.

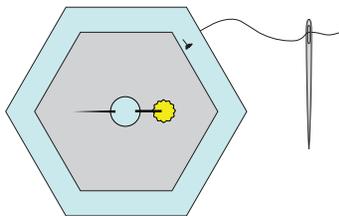
Some of the template pieces are mirror images. They have an R or L printed on them. When you are basting, make sure that you consistently have the R or L printed side of the template facing away from the fabric.

Traditional stitching with thread

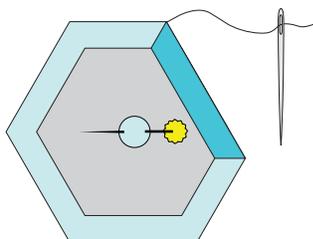
Even within this method there are many variations in technique. Below I don't have you sewing through the templates, because with small pieces it is much less work and then doesn't damage the papers. However, if you are using pieces that are about 2" to 3" or larger, you might find that stitching through the paper when you tack down your corners helps the fabric lie flatter.

1 Pin your template to the wrong side of your fabric and trim around the shape, leaving at least a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance beyond the edge of the template on all sides. I find that for larger or fiddly shapes, $\frac{3}{8}$ " extra works a little better.

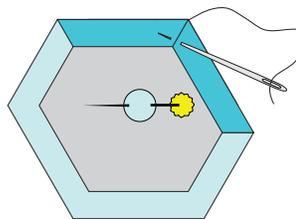
2 Tie a knot in the end of your thread, and start your thread with the knot on the wrong side of the fabric close to a corner.



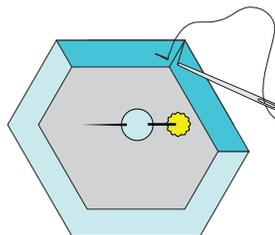
3 Carefully and neatly fold one edge of the fabric over the edge of the template.



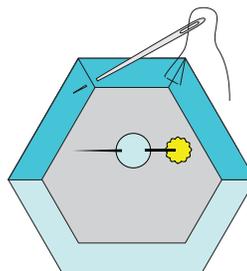
4 Fold the next edge down over the paper, mitering the corner neatly (tuck the extra corner fabric under the edge as you fold it down). Take a small stitch through all the layers of fabric, but not through the paper. Pull the stitch through.



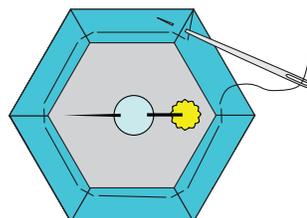
5 Take another small stitch to secure the corner.



6 Fold the next edge down, again mitering the corner, and stitch to tack the corner down.



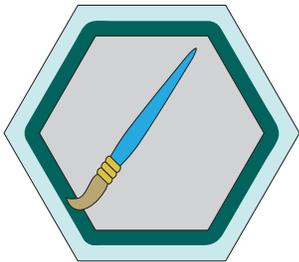
7 Continue stitching until all of the corners are tacked down. Take one more stitch back through the beginning. You do not need to knot your thread; trim it, leaving a small tail. Remove the pin and press with a dry iron from the front to set your creases and flatten your shape.



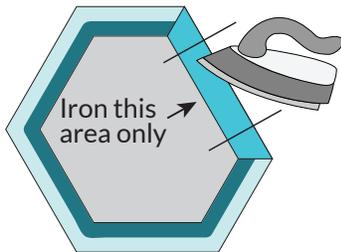
Starch, freezer paper, and iron

1 Center your freezer paper on the wrong side of your fabric piece and iron it to get it to stick. Trim the fabric around the shape, leaving at least a ¼" seam allowance beyond the edge of the template on all sides. I find that for larger fiddly shapes, ⅜" extra works a little better.

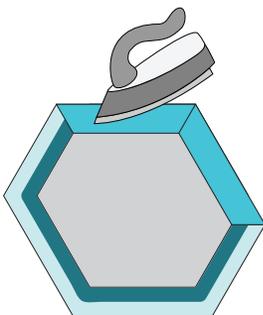
2 Dip a paintbrush in heavy spray starch. Wet the fabric all the way around where the edge of the paper is. Try not to wet the template too much.



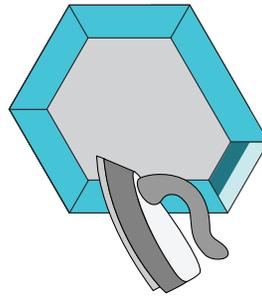
3 Very carefully turn the first edge of your fabric up and over the edge of the paper with your fingers. You might need to pick it up and pinch it with your fingers to crease it a little. Use a stiletto or pin to hold the edge down and iron only the center area of the edge until the starch is dry. If you iron right to the edges they will dry stiff and flat instead of folded over the paper.



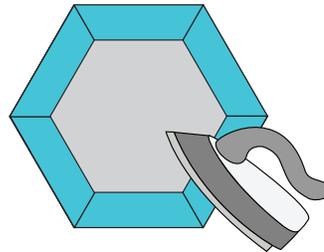
4 With your fingers, fold the next edge down, neatly mitering the corner (tuck the extra corner fabric under the edge as you fold it down). Again holding down the fabric with a stiletto, iron the center of this edge and the corner that is mitered until it is dry.



5 Continue folding over the edges and ironing them until they are dry.



6 When you fold up the last edge, make sure that both of the last corners are mitered neatly and then iron the whole edge dry. Iron the whole shape from both sides to make sure that it is very dry. You can remove the paper at this point if you'd like. The fabric will keep its shape as long as it doesn't get wet or steamed.

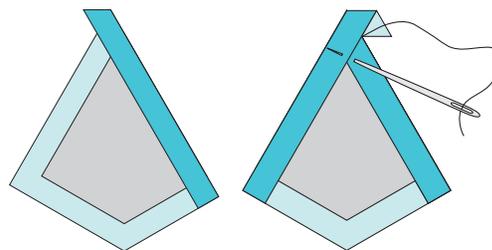


Working with sharp points

A sharp point is any point that is less than about 90°.

Fold down and baste your edges as described in the previous sections. The sharper angle will create a little "dog ear" (flap) that sticks out from the piece. **Do not trim off the dog ear.** If this is an interior point in the block, just leave the flap loose and continue basting around. If this is an exterior point that will be on the edge of the block, you can make one additional fold to tuck the flap under the point and either tack it down with another stitch or two, or use a little bit of extra starch and iron it down.

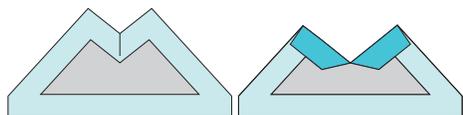
If you are doing many pieces the same, for each piece fold the edges in the same order so that when you are stitching them together all the dog ears are pointing the same direction. This will help the pieces line up well and reduce bulk in your finished piece.



Working with inset points

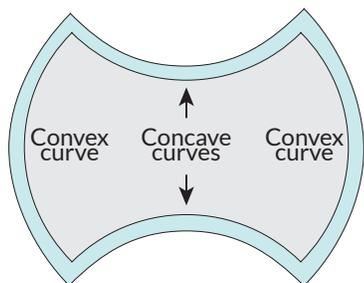
Inset points are like a reverse point and need a slightly different technique. After you've secured your template to the fabric, snip a notch into each inset point to within $\frac{1}{16}$ " of the template. **Don't cut right up to the template.**

Then, stitch down or iron your fabric edge over the template as usual, taking special care that the inset point is lying flat. You might need to stitch through the template to secure the fabric.



Working with curves

Working with curves is very similar to working with straight edges. There are two types of curves: convex and concave. You'll stitch each differently.

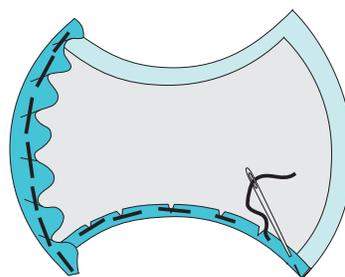


Convex curve

If you're stitching, sew a running stitch along the convex curved edge and gather it to pull it over the edge of the paper template as shown below. If you are starching, make sure that the outside edge of the curve is very smooth with no tucks in it. It does not matter if the fabric is tucked and gathered in the seam allowance on the wrong side of the piece. If there are dog ears sticking out beyond the template, just leave them be. They will be tucked under the adjacent shape when you stitch your block together.

Concave curve

If you're stitching, you will likely need to stitch through the template to secure the edge of the fabric over the edge of the template. If you're starching, you can iron the edge over as usual. If the fabric will not lie flat or is puckering the template, cut small notches in the fabric to within $\frac{1}{16}$ " of the paper template before stitching or ironing. **Don't cut right up to the template.**



Stitching your pieces together

You have a couple of different choices for your joining stitch: whip stitch or ladder stitch, both of which are shown on the next page. Try out both and see which you prefer. The whip stitch is stronger, but the ladder stitch tends to be less visible. I use both, depending on how visible my stitches are with the thread I'm using. I will even switch back and forth between the two stitches in the same seam if there is a section where the thread will show much more than the rest of the seam.

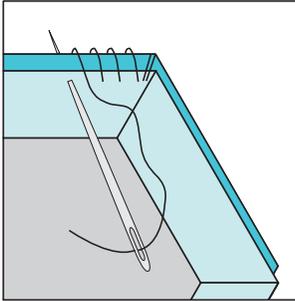
Normally you'll start by placing your pieces right sides together. However, when you stitch curved or inset pieces together, you might find it easier to have the pieces flat with the seams side-by-side instead.

With either stitch, after you have stitched a piece together on all sides, you can remove the basting stitches (if you sewed through the template) and remove the template. You can also leave in the templates until the end if you prefer.

To minimize how visible your stitches are on the front of the block, match the thread as best you can to your fabric. If you are connecting a dark and a light piece, choose a darker thread. Also, take the smallest "bite" possible of each side—just a few threads right at the edge. Pull your stitches tight after every few stitches, but not so tight that it puckers the fabrics.

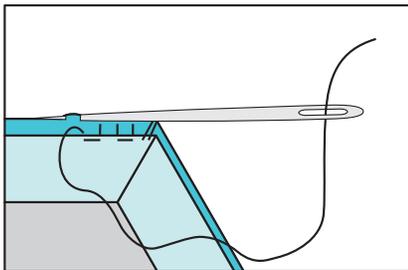
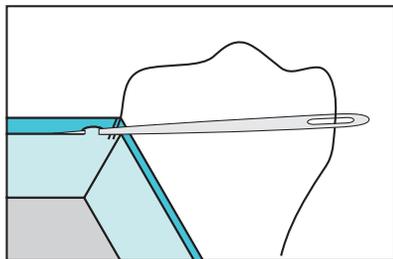
Whip stitch

Knot your thread at the corner of one piece and take a couple of small stitches through the corners of both pieces, tacking them together for security. Then, pass through the edge of one piece and go through the other edge, stitching nearly perpendicular to the seam. Stitch across the seam and make a few more tacking stitches in the other corner to secure the corners together. Tie a knot and trim your thread.



Ladder stitch

Knot your thread at the corner of one piece and take a couple of small stitches through the corners of both pieces, tacking them together for security. Take a stitch along one edge and pull the thread through. Then move slightly further down the seam and to the other edge and take another stitch along the edge. Pull the thread through. Stitch across the seam, going back and forth, and make a few more tacking stitches in the other corner to secure the corners together. Tie a knot and trim your thread.



Finishing your EPP

There are a few different ways to finish your piece, depending on what you plan to do with it. Here are a few options. Refer to the other PDF included with this pattern for step-by-step instructions if you are finishing your block into a pincushion or a pillow.

- **Normal binding:** Square up the edges (or not), baste, quilt, and bind your quilt or other item as you normally would. Use a bias binding to cover irregular edges.
- **Appliqué:** stitch your piece onto a border or background fabric, then finish like a normal quilt.
- **Facing:** Layer your piece with batting and backing in the normal way. Baste and quilt as desired. Trim the batting and backing to match the front. Make a ring of EPP shapes that matches the outer ring of the front block. Whipstitch this ring around the outside of the EPP piece (right sides together). Remove the templates, turn the ring to the back, and hand stitch the ring pieces down to the backing.
- **Knife edge:** Layer your piece with batting and backing in the normal way. Quilt as desired, but leave about $\frac{1}{4}$ " of the outer edge unquilted. Trim the batting to the same size as the EPP piece all the way around, and trim the backing to about $\frac{1}{4}$ " larger than the EPP piece. Fold the backing over the batting, tucking it between the batting and the front, and slipstitch the edge closed all the way around.

Enjoy your hard work!