

EPP basics

There are many different ways to do English Paper Piecing (EPP). I show two: stitching with thread, and using a combination of freezer paper, starch, and an iron.

Stitching with thread is the most common method. 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.

Materials

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

Stitching: cardstock or a double layer of freezer paper, a needle and thread, an iron, and scissors.

Starching: cardstock or a double layer of 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.

Making templates

Choose a block size: 4", 6", 9", or 12". Your finished block will be slightly larger than this because of the thickness of the fabric. If you'd prefer a different size block, you can easily scale the templates. For example, if you'd like an 18" block, copy the 12" block at 150%.

Then, photocopy the template sheet(s) onto cardstock. You can also use a double layer of freezer paper if you prefer.

After you print the template sheets, 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.

Basting your fabric

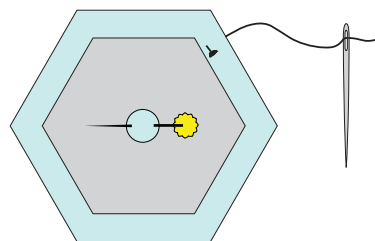
After describing the two basic techniques, I show how to deal with shapes that need a different approach, such as sharp points, inset points, and curves.

Note that 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.

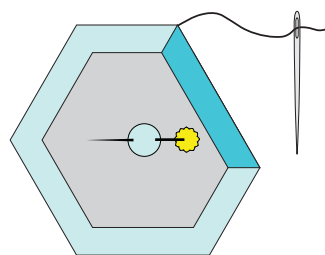
Stitching with thread

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 will find that stitching through the paper when you tack down your corners helps the fabric lie flatter.

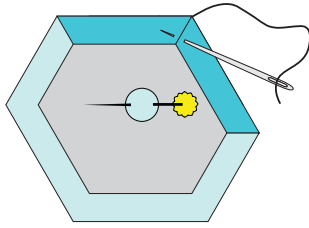
- 1 Pin your template to the wrong side of your fabric and trim around the shape, leaving at least a ¼" seam allowance beyond the edge of the template on all sides. I find that for larger or fiddly shapes, ⅜" extra works a little better.
- 2 Tie a knot in the end of your thread, and start your thread with the knot on the wrong side of the fabric close to a corner.



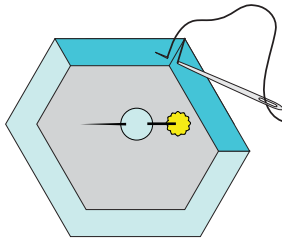
- 3 Carefully and neatly fold one edge of the fabric over the edge of the template.



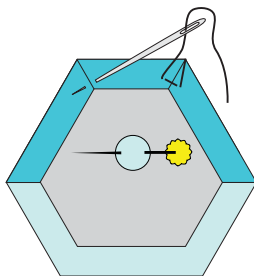
- 4** Fold the next edge down over the paper, mitering the corner neatly (tuck the extra corner fabric under the edge as you fold it down). Take a small stitch through all the layers of fabric, but not through the paper. Pull the stitch through.



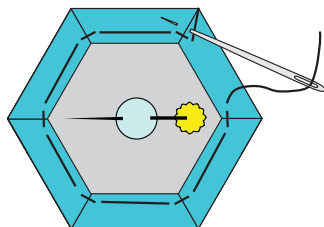
- 5** Take another small stitch to secure the corner.



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

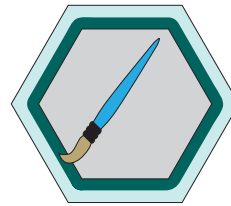


- 7** Continue stitching until all of the corners are tacked down. Take one more stitch back through the beginning. You do not need to knot your thread; trim it, leaving a small tail. Remove the pin and press with a dry iron from the front to set your creases and flatten your shape.

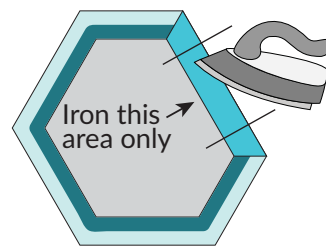


Starching

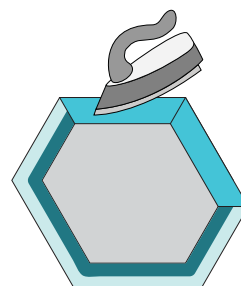
- 1** Center your freezer paper on the wrong side of your fabric piece and iron it to get it to stick. Trim the fabric around the shape, leaving at least a ¼" seam allowance beyond the edge of the template on all sides. I find that for larger fiddly shapes, ⅜" extra works a little better.
- 2** Dip a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



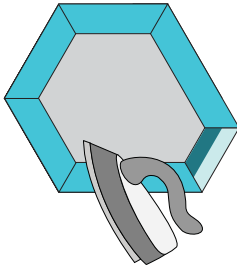
- 3** Very carefully turn the first edge of your fabric up and over the edge of the paper with your fingers. You might need to pick it up and pinch it with your fingers to crease it a little. Use a stiletto or pin to hold the edge down and iron only the center area of the edge until the starch is dry.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



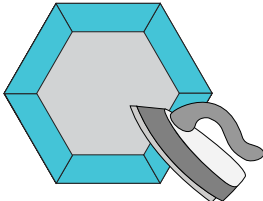
- 4** With your fingers, fold the next edge down, neatly mitering the corner (tuck the extra corner fabric under the edge as you fold it down). Again holding down the fabric with a stiletto, iron the center of this edge and the corner that is mitered until it is dry.



- 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.

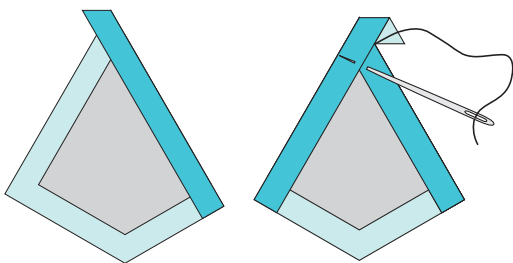


Working with sharp points

A sharp point is any point that is less than about 90°. Be careful—the template tends to want to curl and bend underneath.

Fold down and baste your edges as described in the previous sections. The sharp 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 the point will be on the edge of the block, you can tuck the flap under the point and either tack it down with another stitch or two or bit of extra starch.

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

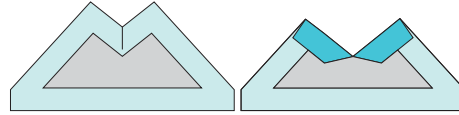


Working with inset points

Inset points need a slightly different technique. After you've secured your template to the fabric, snip a notch into each inset point to within 1/16" of the template.

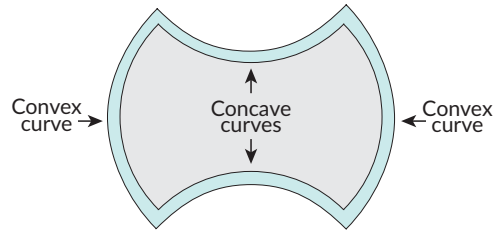
Don't cut right up to the template.

Then, baste over the template as usual. You might need to stitch through the template to make sure the point lies flat.



Working with curves

There are two types of curves: convex and concave. You'll stitch each differently.

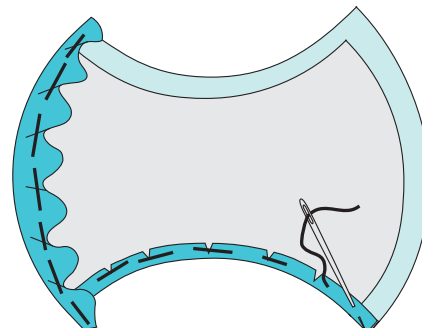


Convex curve

If you're stitching, sew a small basting stitch along the convex curved edge and gather it to pull it over the edge of the paper template. If you're starching, make sure that the folded edge of the curve is very smooth with no tucks in it. If there are dog ears sticking out beyond the template, they will be tucked under the adjacent shape when you stitch your block together.

Concave curve

If you're stitching, you will 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 won't lie flat, cut small notches in the fabric to within 1/16" of the template before basting. **Don't cut right up to the template.**



Stitching your pieces together

Use a whip stitch or ladder stitch to join your pieces. The whip stitch is stronger, but the ladder stitch is less visible. I'll sometimes switch back and forth between the two in the same seam if there is a section where the thread will show much more.

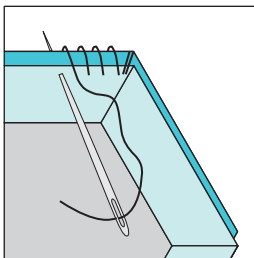
Start by placing your pieces right sides together. However, when you stitch curved or inset pieces together, you might find it easier to have the pieces flat with the seams side-by-side instead.

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.

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.

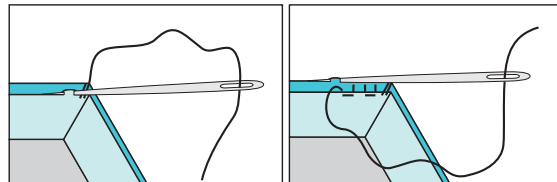
Whip stitch

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.

- **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. Baste and quilt. 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 front EPP piece (right sides together). Remove the templates, flip the ring to the back, and hand stitch the ring to the backing.
- **Knife edge:** Layer your piece with batting and backing in the normal way. Quilt as desired, but leave about 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 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!