

Glossary of Basic Quilting Terms

Appliqué: A specific fabric shape sewn onto a larger background piece to create a decorative pattern or image. This technique functions like a fabric collage and can be achieved through delicate hand-stitching or faster machine methods.

Backing: The reverse side of a project is formed by this fabric layer. Often consisting of a single wide piece of cloth, it can also be constructed by sewing smaller remnants together to create a decorative look on the rear of the quilt.

Basting: Safety pins, long temporary stitches, or a specialized adhesive spray are used in this temporary stabilization method. It holds the layers together before final stitching to keep the fabric from sliding or bunching.

Batting: This middle layer of a quilt provides warmth and thickness. Common materials for batting include cotton, wool, or polyester, and the choice of fibre determines the weight and texture of the finished project.

Bias: The diagonal direction of a woven fabric, running at a 45-degree angle to the straight threads. Fabric cut on the bias stretches and bends more easily than fabric cut straight, which is why bias-cut strips are often used to wrap smoothly around curves.

Binding: A long strip of fabric that wraps around the raw, outer edges of the project to hide the seams. This final step provides a clean, professional finish and protects the edges from wear.

Block: A single square unit of a quilt top, sewn separately and then joined together in rows to create the final design.

Crosswise Grain: The threads of woven fabric that run perpendicular to the selvage.

Cutting Mat: A cutting surface that is self-healing. Used with fabric and rotary cutters.

Design Wall: A large vertical surface (felt board, flannel sheet, or batting tacked to the wall) used to temporarily place blocks in order to see the larger design.

Fat Quarter: A specialized cut of fabric measuring approximately 18 by 22 inches. It's made by cutting a half-yard of fabric in half the short way, creating a wider, more usable shape than a long strip.

Foundation Piecing: A method used to reinforce thin or delicate fabric. It is done by sewing the small pieces of fabric onto a foundation paper or fabric.

Free Motion Quilting: A technique where the quilter moves the fabric by hand while sewing instead of the machine feeding it automatically. This allows for drawing-like designs such as loops, swirls, or shapes.

Fussy Cut: Cutting fabric to centre a specific design or image within a block. The goal is to highlight a particular motif rather than cutting randomly.

Grain: The direction of the threads in woven fabric. Cutting and sewing along the straight grain helps prevent stretching and distortion over time.

Notions: Small tools needed for the craft, such as pins, acrylic rulers, needles, and seam rippers

Patchwork: Fabric pieces sewn together to form a larger design. This decorative piecing makes up the quilt top.

Pressing: Flattening a seam by placing the iron straight down and picking it up again, rather than sliding it back and forth. This prevents stretching the fabric and helps the pieces keep their shape.

Quilt Sandwich: The three-layer structure of a quilt: the top, the batting, and the backing. These layers are stitched together to complete the quilt.

Right Side and Wrong Side: the two sides of every fabric. A vivid print makes the difference obvious, but it can be very subtle as well.

Rotary Cutter: A cutting tool with a round blade used to cut fabric quickly and accurately. It's typically used with a ruler and a cutting mat.

Sashing: Strips of fabric sewn between quilt blocks. Sashing separates designs and can make a quilt appear larger and more organized.

Seam Allowance: The space between the fabric edge and the stitching line. Quilting patterns usually require a consistent quarter-inch seam allowance.

Seam Ripper: A tool used for picking or ripping out sewing stitches.

Selvage: The tightly woven edges of fabric made by the manufacturer. These edges are often trimmed off because they are rigid and often prevent fabric from draping properly when pieced.

Stash: Fabrics that have been accumulated for projects, or because you really liked it, or because you have a fabric addiction.

Template: A shape or design that is placed on fabric and is used as a pattern to trace or cut around. Often used as an appliqué when finished.

UFO Unfinished Object: A quilting project that you've started but have yet to finish - sometimes taking years.

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