

Educational Tidbit for November 2023

WHEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR QUILT TOP, IS IT REALLY READY TO BE QUILTED?

November is here. Get ready for Thanksgiving and holiday shopping, the fun never seems to end in November! Personally, I am still celebrating the availability of the wonderfully inexpensive and delicious Costco pumpkin pie.

As I mentioned in an earlier tidbit, I have been going to the quilt studio at Club House 4 (CH4) and sewing with other members of the Crazy Quilters. Several of our members have been quilting the quilt tops that have been donated through our philanthropy drives. Some have learned to use the new CH4 long arm quilting machine and others are using sewing machines to stipple or stitch in the ditch.

There have been times that some of the donated quilt tops have issues that must be dealt with before a successful quilting session can occur. This tidbit deals with some of those issues. Before you turn in your quilt top to the quilter, you need to take some time to look over the completed quilt top and make some adjustments to the quilt top to better prepare it to be sandwiched with batting and backing and finally quilted. In this tidbit, we will also talk a bit about sizing requirements for the batting and the backing.

Before you begin cutting the fabric for a quilt top, you should press the fabric flat. Good pressing will help to make the resultant quilt top flatter. You can see an example of fabric before and after pressing below. Once the fabric has been pressed, the pieces of cut fabric required to make the quilt top will be cut more precisely than if they were cut out of the wrinkled fabric. I like to use a dry iron for the initial press, then add steam to finalize. Press the fabric, don't iron back and forth like a rolling pin flattening dough.

Before pressing:



After pressing:



As you sew pieces together, check the quality of your seams, trim loose or hanging threads, and press flat as you go. The resultant blocks will be more precise and will sew together more precisely and flatter to create your beautiful quilt top.

When you have finished sewing your quilt top, take a good close look at it, front and back. Pressing is extremely important. The quilt top should be as flat as possible to help achieve a quality quilting experience. Don't rely on the quilter to fix boo boos.

(Look at the tail of the pink fish, top left.) This picture shows what can happen during the quilting process when fabric is not sewn down and pressed flat. In this particular quilt, the fish tails are not completely sewn down before quilting. I learned the hard way with this quilt, even though the pattern says you should leave the tails loose, do not leave loose fabric items on the quilt top. If I made this again, I would make sure each tail is securely sewn down prior to quilting.



Also, double check the borders. Are they lying flat, or do they flow up and ripple like a blouse ruffle? If they are not flat, or are ruffled, you have some work to do. Carefully unsew them. Measure the middle of the quilt top from top to bottom, then measure on the left side about 6 inches from the edge, top to bottom, and do the same on the right side, measuring from top to bottom. Average these three measurements. Cut your borders to this measurement. Press the edge of the quilt top to flatten it.

Before applying the border strips, carefully press the newly cut borders, making sure not to stretch them. As shown in the following picture, you can lay a metal ruler on the edge of the strip to ensure the borders remain straight as you press.



When you press, pick up the iron and place it, do not slide it around in circles or roll it up and down like a rolling pin rolling out dough. You do not want to stretch the border fabric or misshapen it. Once the border fabric is pressed flat, pin the borders on the side edges of the quilt top and sew them on once again.

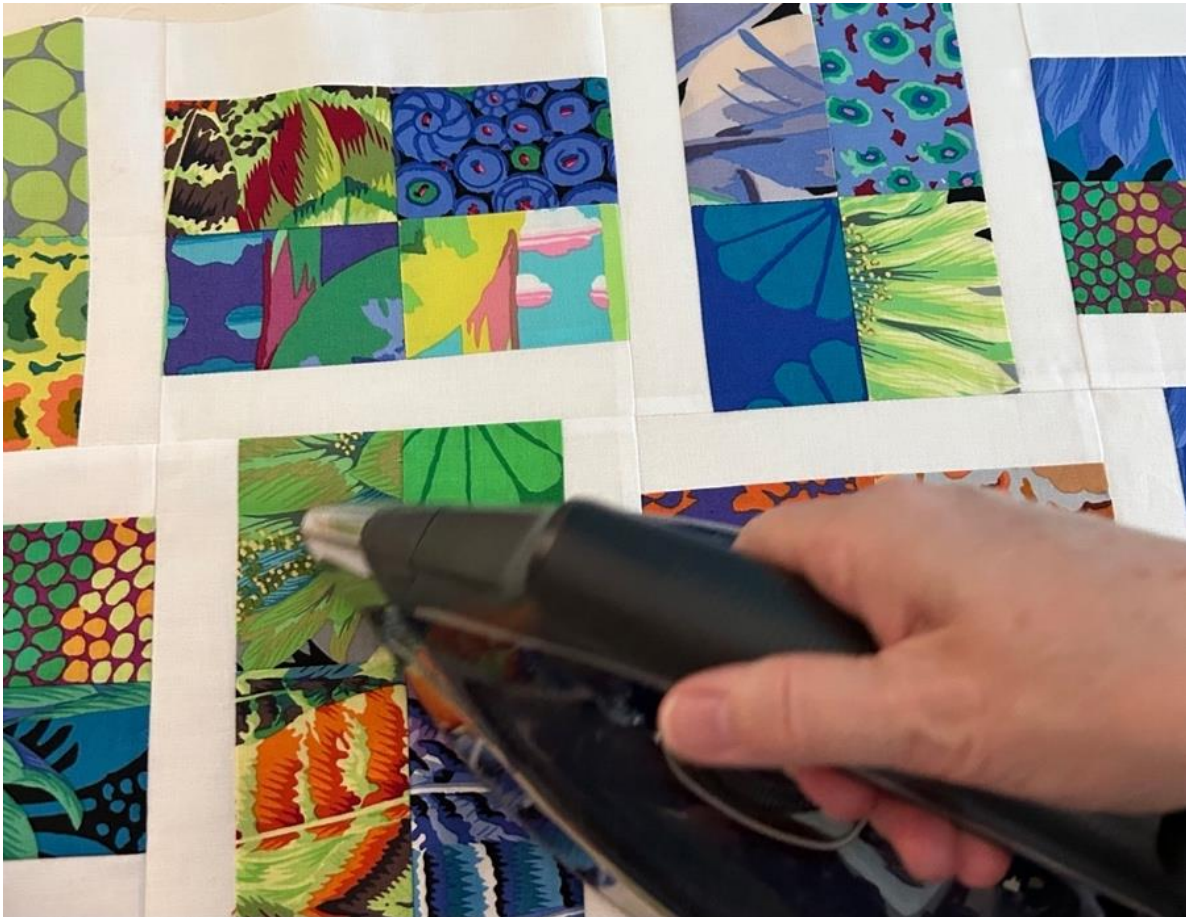
After you have reinstalled the side borders, carefully press them flat the length of the quilt. Then measure horizontally across the width of the quilt in the middle of the quilt top, across the side borders. Next measure across the quilt top in two places, first, 6 inches below the top, and the other, 6 inches above the bottom. Use the average of these three measurements to cut the top and bottom borders. As you did with the side borders, press them flat, pin and carefully sew them on the top and bottom, and finally press them flat.

In addition to the borders, let's continue the inspection of the rest of the quilt top. When you look at the front side of your quilt top, check all the block intersections. Are there any pleats? Do the blocks lay flat? Can you see any dark fabrics through the light fabrics?

In this picture, you can see that this seam has not been pressed flat. This quilt top is not ready for quilting. Without pressing this flat, you will end up with a pleat in your quilting.



This pressed seam will make a better result for your quilting efforts.



If a pleat exists in the seam that cannot be pressed flat, you may need to use a seam ripper to take out the stitches, realign the fabrics, and sew them together once again. Then press that newly sewn seam union flat.

While you are checking the integrity of your quilt top, look at the back of the quilt, inspect all the seams to ensure that both sides of the seams are securely sewn. Sometimes one side of a seam slips during sewing and may measure less than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Take time to repair any deficient seams you find. These short seams are not structurally sound and can fail. You do not want your quilt top to come apart during the quilting process and/or quilt use later by the recipient.

During your inspection of the quilt top, if you see any dark fabric through the light fabric, you can fix that issue by looking at the back of the quilt top and trimming off the dark fabric that is peeking through the light fabric, otherwise known as shadowing. Trim the dark fabric smaller than the light.



You should also go through and trim off any loose threads, especially dark threads that can show through the light fabric. Trim them off and remove them. Make sure to cut them, don't pull them. As this picture shows, a lint roller comes in handy during this process to pick up and remove the trimmed threads. You can see how many cut threads are stuck to that lint roller.



While looking at the back of the quilt top, look for any seams that may not lay flat due to the sewing process. As you can see here, instead of nesting, this seam opened up. You can take your snips and cut one side of the seam, press it, and make it lay flat.

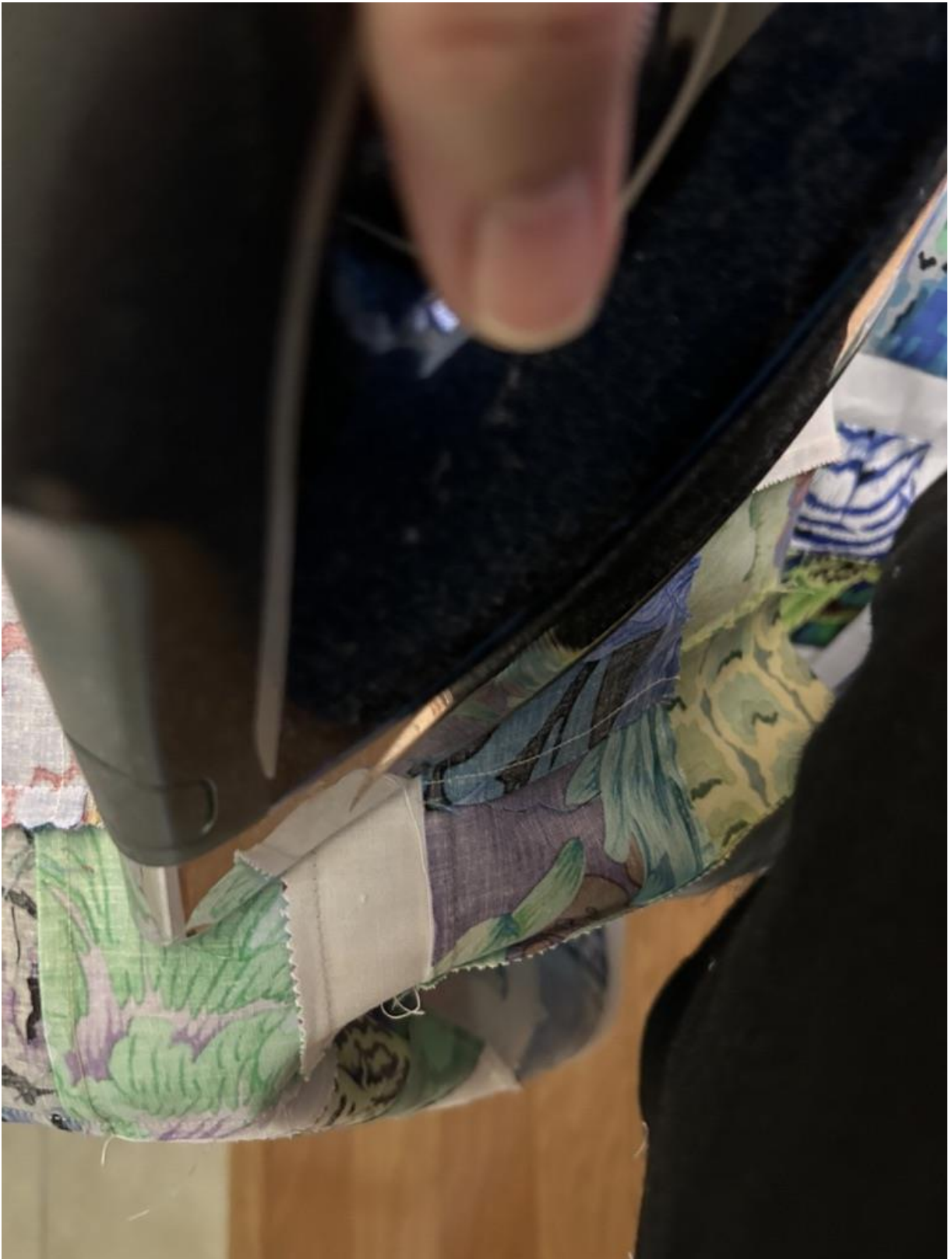
Otherwise, you can take a seam ripper and take out the stitches and go back to the sewing machine and make it nest properly. The fix is up to you.



Otherwise, carefully clip the open fabric, and flatten the seam with your fingers.



Press it flat.



Here is the result.



Go over your entire quilt top, front and back, make revisions to the quilt until you are satisfied that all the issues covered in this tidbit have been remedied.

Next, we need to look at the requirements for the backing. Measure your quilt top width and length. The quilt backing should be larger than the quilt top. For most long arm quilters, they prefer the backing to be 8 inches wider and 8 inches longer than the quilt top (4 inches wider and longer on each side). Some of our CH4 quilters will accept 6 inches wider and 6 inches longer (3 inches wider and longer on each side). You might want to check with the person who will be quilting for you to discover their preferences. Sometimes it depends on the type of quilting machine they will use. Also, you will need to note how many seams are in the backing and whether they run vertically or horizontally. The quilter will need to know this information. Backing seams can cause a lump in the quilt sandwich that the quilter will need to navigate during the quilting process.

If you are supplying the batting, then it will need to be cut larger than the quilt top but smaller than the quilt backing. I normally cut my batting 4 inches wider and 4 inches longer than the quilt top (2 inches longer and wider on all sides of the quilt top & smaller than the backing). Again, if you know who your quilter will be, check for that quilter's personal preferences in batting size.

Finally, you will need to provide binding. Normally, I use cross grain binding rather than bias binding. I cut my binding strip 2 ½ inches wide across the width of the fabric (WOF). Some quilters prefer a different measurement (i.e., 2 ¼ inches wide). As with the backing and batting, check with your quilter for preferences.

Many patterns will tell you how many strips to cut based on the size of quilt. However, to calculate on your own, measure the quilt's perimeter (add up the four sides) to determine how much binding is needed. Add an additional 12 or more inches to allow for mitered corners and joining the ends of strips together. Divide your total by 40 inches which is the approximate useable amount of fabric for each strip after the selvage is trimmed off. The result is the total number of 2 ½ inch by WOF strips you will need for your binding. I generally cut two additional strips just to be on the safe side.

Below is an example of this calculation based on a quilt top measuring 50 x 60 inches:

$$50 + 60 + 50 + 60 = 220 \text{ inches perimeter}$$

$$220 + 12 = 232$$

$$232/40 = 5.8$$

5.8, rounded to the next whole strip, shows you need 6 strips of 2 ½ inches by WOF for a 50 x 60 quilt.

After you have gone through all these steps, you should be ready to deliver your project to the quilter. Happy quilting!

I will be taking the month of December off and plan to have a new educational tidbit ready for you in January 2024. If you have any ideas for an upcoming tidbit, please see the "members only roster" section of the Crazy Quilter's Website and contact me. God bless you and your family. Happy Holidays! See you next year!