

Educational Tidbit for September 2026

FIVE HABITS THAT CAN MAKE YOUR SEWING AND QUILTING OUTCOMES MORE ENJOYABLE

Welcome back. I hope you had a wonderful summer. Several of us Crazy Quilters spent an enjoyable summer in the Clubhouse 4 Quilt Studio. We had so much fun taking free classes, learning new skills, creating beautiful quilts, and spending quality time with our quilty friends. Sewing together with friends is such a great way to learn from each other as we relax and enjoy our hobby. Thank you to our skilled and talented Quilt Studio supervisors teaching these free classes and to the guild members who attended the classes. The resultant class project quilt outcomes are stunning.

Since I took off from tidbits during the summer, I am a bit rusty in my writing habits, as I usually write my tidbits mid-month of the preceding month. However, here I am on August 27, 2026, trying to organize my thoughts for the September 1, 2026 tidbit. Once I get into the swing of things, I am sure I will get back in the groove really fast. As I have asked in the past, if there is any topic you would like covered in a future tidbit, please let me know. I want to thank Shari Riter for this one. This month I am simply paraphrasing and adding my own comments to ideas from an article Shari sent to me and I give all credit to: Lindas.com, "Small Sewing Habits that Save Hours of Frustration". Lindas.com is one of the online vendors listed in the Shopping tab on the Crazy Quilters Guild website. I personally have frequented that site for reasonably priced batting and fabric purchases.

So, here we go, with the 5 habits that can make your sewing and quilting outcomes more enjoyable:

1. Test your stitch before sewing the real fabric - Check stitch length, thread tension, thread color, needle choice, and make sure you have a full bobbin. Test sew on 2 layers of fabric that is similar to your project fabric. Sew for about 30 seconds, then stop and see how the stitch looks on the top and bobbin side of the fabric. This can save you lots of unsewing on the real project. Also, during this step you can adjust your seam allowance guides so you can sew an accurate 1/4-inch seam. Refer to the March 2020 tidbit, entitled: The 5-Star Method for Testing the 1/4 Inch Seam.

Lately, I have been using diagonal seam tape to improve my 1/4-inch accuracy. To install the tape, first, remove the presser foot. Second, put the needle down. Then, apply the tape so that the middle red line on the tape lines up with your sewing machine needle. Make sure the tape does not cover the feed dogs, then reinstall the presser foot. When you sew, line up the edge of the fabric with the black lines on the tape. Test your seam accuracy on a scrap before sewing your actual project. You may need to line up the fabric on the inside of the black line, or on the outside of the black line, or some place in the middle. You will need to sew the seam and measure it. On my machine, I apply the tape from the sewing machine needle all the way out to the edge of my desk. This helps me to keep my fabric straight as I sew.

If you are using a 1/4-inch presser foot, you should test it out to see if it really delivers a 1/4-inch seam. Make any adjustments necessary for project success. I found that I had an adjustment screw on the presser foot that needed adjusting to achieve an accurate 1/4-inch. My 1/4-inch presser foot, straight out of the package, sewed at about 5/16 of an inch.

Unfortunately, I did not catch this early on. I trusted that a 1/4-inch presser foot would create a 1/4-inch seam. I had quite a bit of unsewing to do before I figured out how to make the adjustment to the "1/4-inch" presser foot.

2. Press every seam before moving on - Pressing is not the same as ironing. Ironing slides the iron across the fabric, like rolling out dough with a rolling pin. Pressing lifts and lowers the iron onto the fabric in order to set stitches, reduce wrinkles, and flatten seams. Pressing does not stretch or distort the fabric, but ironing does. Professional looking garments and quilts always have one thing in common: every seam was pressed as it was sewn.

Get in the habit of pressing as you go. Pressing as you go not only makes your project better, it also helps to get you up and out of your chair periodically. I count pressing as I go as getting a bit of physical exercise as I sew. There are a variety of tidbits on the Crazy Quilter's Website on the topic of pressing.

3. Measure twice and cut once - Fabric is one of the few sewing supplies you cannot put back after it is cut. Plus, the price of fabric continues to go up, so we cannot afford to waste our fabric due to cutting errors. To increase your cutting accuracy, make sure to press the fabric before you cut it. Also, before you cut, take a moment to confirm: your pattern piece is facing the correct direction; the grainline is properly aligned; seam allowances are included; and measurements are correct. This extra 30 seconds can save the entire project.

Before cutting out your quilt, check on-line to see if the pattern writer has made corrections or made any other supplemental changes. Incorporate the changes into your pattern and read through the pattern to make sure you understand all the pattern requirements. Cut out one block using scrap fabric and sew it up following the pattern. Compare the end result with the pattern to make sure the block measures the same as the pattern directions. Make adjustments accordingly. Then cut out the quilt using the "real" fabrics for your project.

Make sure to save all your scraps until you have completed the project. If you have made a mistake in cutting, that mistake may not become obvious to you until you are sewing the project. Once the project is complete, then incorporate the scraps into your scrap collection and or pass them on to someone else. I have learned this the hard way, so I now wait until the quilt is quilted and the binding is sewn on before processing the scraps. For ideas to process and use scraps, there are a variety of tidbits on scraps: Nov 2019, Jun 2020, Sep 2020, Feb 2023, Oct 2024, Nov 2024, and Jun 2025.

4. Clean your sewing machine regularly - Every project leaves behind debris consisting of tiny fibers, threads, and lint. Over time this builds up inside the machine around the bobbin case and feed dogs. This buildup can cause uneven stitches, thread jams, tension problems, and extra wear on your machine. A quick brush after every project and a deeper periodic clean helps keep your sewing machine sewing smoothly.

In addition to cleaning out the crud that builds up, some machines require oiling. Make sure to refer to your sewing machine manual to discover your particular sewing machine's maintenance requirements. To further assist you, see the April 2020 tidbit for my recommendations on cleaning your machine using a mini vacuum and microfiber cleaners. You can use cotton buds, also known as Q-tips, to help get out stubborn and unreachable fuzz. Take your machine in for an annual checkup with a qualified sewing machine mechanic.

5. Start every project with a fresh needle - A worn, damaged, or bent needle can cause many sewing issues. After 6 to 8 hours of sewing the needle tip begins to dull. Sewing over a pin can damage or bend the needle. A dull, bent, or damaged needle can lead to skipped stitches, puckered seams, broken thread, snags in fabrics, and it can mess with the thread tension. Replacing your needle at the start of a project is a good habit to get into. Refer to the January 2026 tidbit with an extensive write up on sewing machine needles.

Well, that is all for now. Please enjoy your sewing and quilting projects in September. We start up our Crazy Quilter Guild meetings again the second Wednesday of the month, Sep 9, 2026, I hope to see you there. Remember, if you have any ideas for an October tidbit, please let me know. Blessings to you and your family.