

The Five-Star Method for Testing the ¼ Inch Seam

This month we are discussing a “back to basics” concept from Quilter’s World Magazine in an article called “The ¼” Seam: A Worthy Adversary”, by Chloe Anderson and Colleen Reale of Toadusew Creative Concepts. Because the article was so well written, I am including excerpts from that article in italics. The article introduces a Five-Star method to check five areas that could be affecting the accuracy of our ¼” seam allowance.

The other day in the Clubhouse 4 Quilting Studio, I was asked to bring up this topic as this month’s educational tidbit because some blocks that have been turned in for the block of the month program have not been measuring the same as other blocks.

It is very difficult to sew blocks together to create a quilt when each block measures something other than what the pattern has required. Some of the blocks have had to be taken apart and resewn in order to use them.

We have room for improvement. In order to do better, we need to examine what we are doing and make some changes.

So, let’s review this Five-Star method.

The Five-Star method *...test accounts for five major variables that affect the seam to make it top notch, just like a five-star hotel.*

These variables are:

Thread: weight, ply and quality

Fabric: type, thickness and quality

Cutting: accuracy and consistency

Pressing: pressure and amount of steam

Needle: distance adjustment, size and condition.

To test your seams, cut three 1-½” x 5” strips. Sew the pieces, right sides together along the 5” edges using a ¼” seam. Press all the seams in the same direction. Pressing should be done using either a wet or dry iron, whichever is your norm. The finished unit should measure exactly 3 ½” x 5”.

The article recommends that we perform this Five Star test at the beginning of each new project to ensure we consistently sew an accurate ¼” seam.

If the block is too small, something is causing the seam allowance to be too big.

Likewise, if the test block is too big, the seam is too small.

Examine the test block and workspace setup to determine the most likely culprit.

Is the block truly pressed flat?

Were the strips cut accurately?

Does the needle need to be moved in (decreasing the seam allowance) or out (increasing the seam allowance)?

Once all the adjustments have been made, remake the test block.

Repeating the process several times may be necessary in order to achieve perfection, but the few minutes taken now are well worth the time saved later.

You can also use a sewing guide to aid in sewing a consistent $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam. The article points out that you can use a presser foot with a built-in guide, or you can apply a straight strip of painter's tape.

I hope this discussion helps you to find a way to gain control of your $\frac{1}{4}$ " adversary.

Please try the Five-Star method test and see if you can make adjustments before you sew, and ultimately save yourself a lot of unsewing.

Happy Sewing and Quilting!