

What's all the fuss about?

Strategies for fussy cutting modern quilt blocks.

by Laura Loewen

The definition of fussy cutting is, *to cut pieces of fabric so that a particular part of the printed design is centered or featured* (Wiktionary). Fussy cutting is more than cutting pictures from novelty fabric. It is the intentional use of prints or patterns from within a fabric. You can become a precision fussy cutter and never use a novelty fabric.



Tools recommended for fussy cutting:

Cutting mat – fixed or rotating

Rotary cutter – large + small

Fabric scissors

Paper scissors

Pencil

Fabric pens – erasable

Sharpie markers

Washi tape

Acrylic rulers

Acrylic templates

Vinyl template paper

Printer paper or cardstock

Freezer paper

Parchment paper

Double stick tape or glue

Fabric!

Fabric Considerations when Isolating Motifs

It is important to know how to isolate motifs when working with fussy cuts. When choosing fabric for fussy cutting, there are many considerations, including directionality, repeat, and scale. A fabric can have a single direction print or multiple directions. Commonly, there are two-way prints, four-way prints, and tossed prints, or prints with no defined direction. The repeat will determine how often the motif appears within a cut of fabric. A fabric with a more frequent repeat will allow you to get more fussy cuts out of the same piece. A fabric with a less frequent repeat may offer more diversity in the print or may just require more yardage to get the same number of fussy cuts. The scale of the print should be considered when choosing which motif to isolate for a specific cut. If your fabric features a larger print or pattern, you will want to select it for a block that requires a larger fussy cut.

Fussy cutting basic shapes - squares, rectangles, half-square triangles, flying geese, and hexagons



There are many commercial templates available for fussy cutting. These are usually acrylic and include a marked $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance ($\frac{3}{8}$ " seam allowance for EPP shapes). If you have a specific pattern that requires the same shape and size repeated, commercial templates can be a good investment. You can also use your regular acrylic ruler to create your own template. Several good sized rulers useful for fussy cutting are, 3.5", 6.5", and 8.5" squares. You can use the ruler as is and use the pre-marked measurements as guidelines. Another option to frame your motif more clearly is to mark the ruler with washi tape or sharpie marker. The washi tape removes easily or a Mr. Clean magic eraser should remove the permanent marker lines. Always be mindful of your $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance.



Laura's trick for using acrylic rulers to fussy cut squares or rectangles. First, isolate the motif you'd like to fussy cut and line up the ruler minding $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowances. Second, cut side and top against the ruler edge at the measurement of your cut dimension. Flip the fabric 180 degrees and turn up the body of the fabric to reveal the cut area you made. Then, line up your ruler to the cut edges on the correct measurement markings for your fussy cut dimensions. Finish by cutting side and top against the ruler edge.

Creating Your Own Templates

HSTs

For HST templates, I draw a square 1" larger than the finished HST square. Then I draw a diagonal line from corner to corner in one direction. From there, I add $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowances inside of my original drawn shape and on one side of the center diagonal. These seam allowance lines create a window for viewing what will be featured as a fussy cut. Cut out the shape and the window to finish your template. You can choose to use a full square with one triangle window cut out or to cut it at the diagonal creating a single triangle template. Remember as you are selecting your featured motif that you will be trimming your final HST to the correct unfinished size. Keep any details that you do not want to lose towards the diagonal (or long side of the triangle).



FG

Create templates for flying geese by drawing the finished rectangle unit size. Add $\frac{3}{8}$ " seam allowance around the edge outside of the "finished" rectangle. Then, add the diagonal "sky" lines by drawing a diagonal line from the center of the finished unit line and extending to the outer corners. You will create a goose template and can cut out the outer rectangle, and cut out the inner triangle window. Your goose can then be constructed with the single flying geese method using 1 rectangle and 2 squares (squares should measure the short length of the goose rectangle template). This method allows some wiggle room for trimming.

Fussy Cutting for Directionality



Many fabrics feature a directional print. You can intentionally cut your pieces to keep the directionality the same across your block (or quilt). This is an easy detail to be mindful of, just take care to cut any rectangles that are horizontal vs vertical correctly. Squares can easily be rotated to gain correct directionality.

HSTs can be more difficult if you are not paying attention. Creating HSTs with directionality can be achieved by sewing your diagonal lines in the correct direction, top left to bottom right or top right to bottom left. If you have a block that has 4 HSTs set in opposite corners you will need to sew diagonal lines in opposite directions on your 2 sets of HSTs. If you have HSTs that line up all in the same direction, you will need to line up your fabric directionality and sew the diagonals the same. Be mindful before sewing or trimming. You can always double check by first flipping your fabric back and taking a peek at how the finished directionality will appear.

Fussy Cutting to Create Secondary Patterns



Patterns can be isolated from a fabric and then used within a block to create a secondary pattern. A secondary pattern is using pieces of fabrics to make a pattern that does not already occur within the print. This is common practice in English Paper Piecing blocks but can also be used for standard machine sewn blocks. It is important to focus on the scale and directionality of the motif selected. A combination of fussy cut motifs and color blocking can achieve an even more complex effect.

Basic Blocks That Easily Feature Fussy Cut Motifs



- Economy Block
- Sawtooth Star Block
- Wonky Star
- Churndash
- Bear Claw
- Rocky Mountain Puzzle Block
- Flying Geese
- Half Square Triangle
- Snowball Block

Fussy Cutting for Improv or Wonky Piecing



You can easily incorporate fussy cuts into improvisational piecing. It just becomes slightly less improv, and a little fussier. You can choose specific areas where to feature motifs. A great way to make an improv fussy cut feel more organic is intentionally off-set the motif. You will be able to capture the motif you want featured while also keeping a very unintentional feeling. As with all improv piecing, you should be prepared, and flexible, for your fussy cut to not show in the finished product as you may have first envisioned.

Fussy Cutting Letters, Text, and Words



The minding your $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowances and being aware of letter height, especially when letters are taller or lower, are the most important things to consider when fussy cutting letters. There are many fabrics available on the market with a grid of letters or where the letters are spaced further apart. It is best to learn with these fabrics and work towards fabrics where letters are closer together or are written in cursive. Make sure to cut fabrics with $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance all the way around each letter. Base your height on the tallest, or extending down the most, letter or you are going to end up having to piece in fillers or chopping off the taller letter.

Advanced Fussy Cutting for Pattern Matching

In certain circumstances it is useful to know how to pattern match. For example, when your print runs off the edge of the fabric and you can recover it by matching another partial motif to complete the fussy cut you are looking for. You can also use pattern matching on a broad scale when making pieced backgrounds or backings where the piece required is larger than manufactured fabric. I find it pointless, however, to pattern match

“just for fun.” In fact, it actually wastes a lot of fabric when you fussy cut pattern match something that could very easily be made from a single fussy cut. (This is my personal opinion. If you like this approach, please have all the fabric and fussy fun you’d like!)

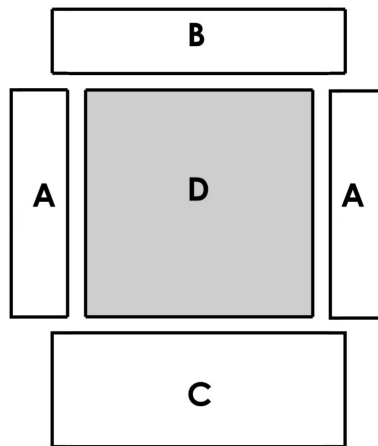


Polaroid Block Swap!

A fun introduction to fussy cutting is to make Polaroid blocks. These small blocks with 3” fussy cuts finish at 3.5”x4.25”. This is a fun little block to get you fussy! BMQG will host a Polaroid block swap at our May 2018 evening meeting. Get your Kona White at an upcoming meeting or open sew.



POLAROID QUILT BLOCK TUTORIAL



From Kona White
cut A(2) 3.5" x 1"
cut B(1) 4.5" x 1"
cut C(1) 4.5" x 1.75"

From Fussy Center
cut D(1) 3.5" x 3.5"

- 1) Assemble pieces A to either side of piece D.
- 2) Press.
- 3) Assemble piece B to top of piece A/D/A. And piece C to bottom.
- 4) Press.
- 5) Block will now measure 4.5"W x 5.25"H. Trim unfinished block to measure 4"W x 4.75"H, taking care to create .5" wide strips on left, right, and top of block, and 1.25" wide strip at bottom (finished block will measure 3.5"W x 4.25"H).

