

BH4 - Basic Methods

There are many ways to make most of the common elements in a quilt block, and the only thing that matters is that you find the method that works best for you.

For the purposes of the Blockheads 4, the instructions have been written for elements that are pieced to size, or that use a technique best-suited for that particular block and block size. The size of the pieced units is included in the instructions if you'd like to use a different method. There are also "Piecing and Cutting Notes" included on many of the blocks that cite the method being used, and options. This is also intended to clarify some of the terminology being used.

Many of the Blockheads designers will be sharing their favorite methods along the way, on social media or in blog posts. Some of their methods differ from what is in the instructions - and we're happy about that! We hope you'll share some of your favorite methods too.

Seam Allowance

Unless specified otherwise, all seams will be sewn with a scant 1/4" seam.

What does that mean? It means that there is a difference between a perfect 1/4" seam, and one that is just a little bit less than that, one or two threads width smaller. When the edge of a ruler is placed on the edge of the fabric on a stitched seam, the stitching line should be just inside the 1/4" line. Why? That allows for the thickness of the fabric when it is pressed. There are many factors that can affect the size of the joined pieces, including the weight of the fabric, the weight/thickness of the thread being used, and whether the seams are pressed to one side or pressed open.

Can you rely on the 1/4" presser foot on a sewing machine? Some of the time. Many manufacturers now make presser feet that will result in an accurate scant 1/4" seam. Some machines also have a mark on the sewing machine throat plate as a guide for the fabric.

Does this all matter? Yes. While the first step to getting good results is a straight, consistent seam, piecing with a scant 1/4" seam allowance will result in greater accuracy, and blocks that are the same size, no matter how many seams are involved.

How can a thread's width matter? A seam that is one or two threads bigger or smaller than ideal might amount to only 1/32", but that's on both sides of the seam, on each piece of fabric. That can add up to as much as 1/16". Minor, right? Not noticeable. But when there are two or three seams joining a block, that can quickly be 1/8". A few more seams and it can be 1/4". That's not a problem when all the blocks are similar, but when the blocks are a sawtooth star and a postage stamp block - two seams vs. nine seams across - one or two threads' width difference quickly becomes a big variance in the size of the finished blocks. So achieving a *perfect* scant 1/4" seam allowance is time well-spent.

Making a Test Strip.

Cut 3 strips of fabric - 1 1/2" x 3".

Join the three strips as shown.

Press the seams to one side.

Measure the finished piece - it should measure 3 1/2" x 3".

If it's less than 3 1/2", the seam allowance is too big. If it's more than 3 1/2", the seam allowance is too small.



Pressing seams open. If you routinely press the seams open, make a second test strip using the same fabrics. Does it measure 3 1/2"? And is it the same size as the first test strip?

- It is worth making a second test strip just to see that there can be a difference.

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How to adjust the seam allowance.

- Use a presser foot designed for quilting and a scant $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance - and test it.
- Move the needle position.
- Use a stitching guide, e.g., Diagonal Seam Tape by Cluck Cluck Sew.
- Add a piece of tape to the plate of the machine to serve as a guide for fabric placement when stitching. (This is very "old-school", a common practice before accurate presser feet made for quilting were available.)

Test Blocks

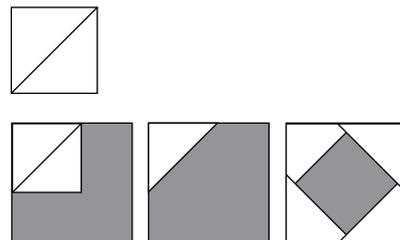
Making a test block is always a good idea. It's even more so when the block uses a technique or method that is new. Just use some of your scraps.

- **BH Tip:** Make test blocks using the same color palette as a way of accumulating blocks for a seasonal or two-color sampler quilt.

Connector Corners

Also known as flip-and-sew corners and folded corners.

1. Draw a line on the wrong side of the smaller square from one corner to the opposing corner.
2. With right sides together, align the smaller square in the corner of the larger square or rectangle as shown.
3. Stitch on the line. Trim seam to $\frac{1}{4}$ " and press the seam to the triangle.



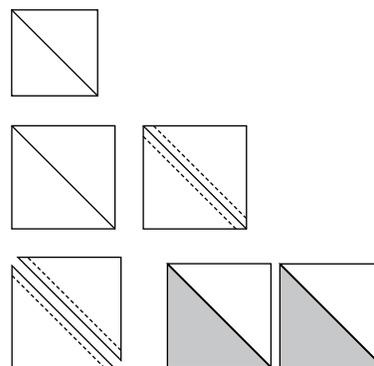
Tools & Options:

- Instead of drawing the line, use Diagonal Seam Tape or Clearly Perfect Angles as the stitching guide.
- Use the Simple Folded Corner Ruler - Regular or Mini - by Antler Quilt Designs. This ruler allows for trimming the triangle before stitching, and includes instructions for over-sizing the corner triangles so the finished unit can be squared-up.
- Instead of stitching on the line, stitch one-to-two threads' width next to it on the corner triangle side of the line. For some fabrics and threads, that will result in a more accurate finished unit.
- **BH Tip:** After stitching on the line, stitch a second seam $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the first. Cut between the two lines of stitching to yield (1) connector corner unit and (1) bonus half-triangle square.

Half-Triangle Squares

Also known as half-square triangles, and yes, that is the more popular term.

1. On the wrong side of the lighter square, draw a line from one corner to the opposing corner as shown.
2. With right sides together, align the two squares as shown. Stitch a scant $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam on both sides of the line. Cut the square apart on the line and press the seam to the darker triangle.



Squaring-up or trimming to size. Many of us achieve better results by cutting the squares for HTSs larger than needed, and trimming the finished HTS to the size required.

- To square-up or trim to size, cut the squares for HTSs $\frac{1}{8}$ " to $\frac{1}{4}$ " larger than specified - $\frac{1}{4}$ " is recommended.

Tools & Optional Methods:

- A square ruler is recommended for squaring-up - one with an $\frac{1}{8}$ " grid is even better.
- Bloc-Loc rulers for trimming HTSs to size are a favorite of many quilters.
- Triangle papers like ISE Triangle On A Roll, Primitive Gatherings Triangle Paper, and Spinning Stars Triangle Paper are all excellent ways to make HTSs.

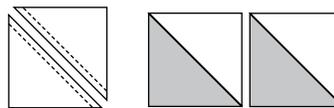
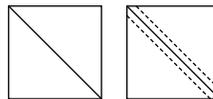
Quarter-Triangle Squares

Also known as quarter-square triangles. (At some point, we will share the quirk behind this.)

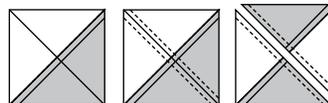
1. On the wrong side of the lighter square - or squares - draw a line from one corner to the opposing corner.



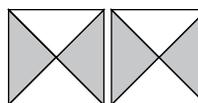
2. With right sides together, align the contrasting squares. Stitch a scant $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam on both sides of the line. Cut the square apart on the line and press the seam to the darker triangle.



3. On the wrong side of one HTS, draw a line from one corner to the opposing corner as shown. Align one HTS to a second HTS with the contrasting triangles on opposite sides.



Stitch a scant $\frac{1}{4}$ " on both sides of the line. Cut the square apart on the line. Trim seam to $\frac{1}{4}$ " and press the seam to one side.



Squaring-up or trimming to size - Cut the squares for QTSs $\frac{1}{4}$ " larger than specified.

Tools & Optional Methods:

- A $4\frac{1}{2}$ " or $6\frac{1}{2}$ " square ruler with a 45° line is recommended for squaring-up. For the small blocks, a ruler with an $\frac{1}{8}$ " grid is highly recommended.
- To trim the QTS to size, align the 45° line on the seam, with the corners on the trim-to-size, and the center "X" of the QTS aligned with the point that is half the size of the trimmed QTS. E.g., if trimming to $3\frac{1}{2}$ " square, align the $1\frac{3}{4}$ " point on the ruler with the center.
- Bloc-Loc rulers are also excellent for trimming QTSs to size.

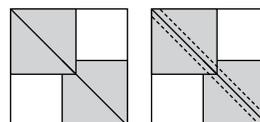
Flying Geese

This is known as the "no-waste method".

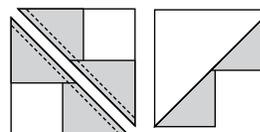
1. Draw a line on the wrong side of the (4) smaller squares from one corner to the opposing corner.



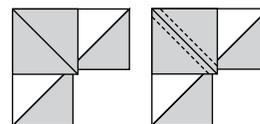
2. With right sides together, align (2) small squares in opposite corner of the large square as shown.



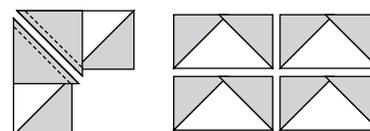
Using a scant $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam, stitch on both sides of the drawn lines as shown. Cut the square apart on the line. Press the seams to the small triangles.



3. With right sides together, align (1) small square in the corner of each triangle as shown.



Using a scant $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam, stitch on both sides of the drawn lines as shown. Cut the triangle/square apart on the line. Press the seams to the small triangles.



Each set of squares will make four matching flying geese units.

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Tools & Optional Methods:

- Flying Geese can also be made using the connector corner/flip-and-sew method.
 - **Note:** For a few of the blocks in Blockheads 4, the size of the finished flying geese is quite small, so the flying geese are made using that method.
- Bloc-Loc rulers for trimming Flying Geese to size are a favorite of many quilters.

Squaring-up & Trimming to Size

In a perfect quilting world, we would all be able to piece our units exactly to size, with perfect results every. single. time. Since many of us don't live in that kind of quilting world, getting the best results possible probably means that we should over-size our pieces, and trim them to the size needed. Aka squaring-up.

Does this waste fabric? Technically, yes. But it's rarely as much as you think it would be. More importantly, only you can decide if the time needed to trim each unit, and the cost of a bit of additional fabric, is worth it.

I will share an example... many years ago, I wrote a pattern for a quilt made almost entirely of flying geese in two sizes. The pattern was written for the no-waste method used here, but it also included cutting instructions for a popular trim-down flying geese ruler. The quilt measured 75" x 75", and the difference in yardage for the two methods was a ½-yard - 2 fat quarters. At the time, fabric was \$9.00 a yard - those were the days! - and FQs were often \$2.50 or \$2.75 each. So at worst, the added cost for fabric was \$5.50.

Each of us makes quilting decisions based on a variety of factors, and there shouldn't ever be any judgement on those choices. I only know that I would happily spend the money, and the time trimming HTSs and flying geese, if it meant that my blocks were square and flat. And that flying geese border I just had to have was straight and even.

In the end, only you can decide if the time and expense is worth it.

Full disclosure. You should also know that the most joyful quilter I have ever met, pieced the wonkiest, most misshapen quilt I've ever seen. Flat? A steamroller wouldn't have made a difference.

Do what will make you happy.

Pressing Matters

Most of us have known a quilter who never pressed a single seam until the quilt top was finished. And the results were amazing. And perfect. We wish we knew their secret. For most of us, pressing after every seam makes a huge difference in the accuracy, and quality, of our results. So a few thoughts about pressing...

To the side vs. open. For many years, quilters were taught to press seams to one side. Why? There were several reasons, most of which don't apply now. Simply put, our fabrics are better - more tightly woven - our threads and battings are better, and most of our quilts are machine-pieced.

Feel free to mix it up - a block can have some seams that are pressed to one side, and others that are pressed open. E.g., seams on flying geese and HTSs are pressed to one side, while the seams joining the units to complete the block are pressed open. Use the method that gives you the best results.

Pressing with steam. Do it! But only if you have pressed your fabrics with steam before you begin cutting and sewing, or if you have "prepped" your fabric. (More on that in a moment.) Fabric can still shrink after it's been cut and stitched.

Pressing sticks. This is a piece of wood with a curved surface and a flat base that makes pressing seams open much easier. They come in a variety of lengths and styles, covered with fabric or wool.

B L O C K H E A D S 4

Prepping Fabrics Before Cutting

Pre-washing. Starching. Pressing fabrics with steam.

Pre-washing. This used to be a standard practice but it is less common now. There are good reasons for pre-washing, and equally good reasons not to. If you have allergy or chemical-sensitivity issues, then pre-washing fabrics is necessary.

Starching. This serves several purposes - starched fabric is crisp, making accurate cutting and piecing easier for many quilters. It also shrinks the fabric.

“Starch” includes traditional starch products - aerosol and non-aerosol, home-made starch, Stay-Flo, Best Press, Magic Sizing, starch-alternatives made for quilting and crafting, and so on.

To starch fabric - spray the fabric until it is at least damp, or completely saturated. (That’s Lisa Bongean’s preference.) Let dry. Then press the fabric before cutting.

- If you’re in a hurry, the fabric can be pressed dry.

A couple of things to note...

- If you’re new to starching, test your chosen product on a fabric swatch before spraying the entire piece of fabric. Try different products. Start with a small project.
- If you’re trying a new-to-you starch product, test it on a fabric swatch first.
- Starching is the same as wetting the fabric, so pay attention to whether there is color-bleed with the fabric.

Paper and Foundation Piecing

One of the blocks in this round requires paper/foundation piecing for the unit.

Printing the foundation. Make sure that the printer is set on 100% sizing. Then measure the 1” test square on the page. And yes, print a few extra sheets for a test block.

Stitching. Fabrics are placed on the wrong side of the foundation, and stitched on the top. Fold the paper back to trim the seam to ¼”. When complete, trim the pieced unit to size on the cutting line.

Appliqué

There are two appliqué blocks in Blockheads 4. They can be done with hand- or machine-applique, using your preferred method. The pieces for one block do not include seam allowance, the pieces for the other block do.

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