all points patchwork

English Paper Piecing
Beyond the Hexagon
for Quilts &
Small Projects

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Basic EPP Sewing Techniques

In EPP, sewing happens one segment at a time. You can sew two patches of the same shape or different shapes together, but you’ll always be sewing two edges of the same length together.

Begin by placing the right sides of the patches together. Check to make sure that the edges of the patches are exactly the same length. If they’re slightly different, which can sometimes happen, try rotating one patch or the other until you get a perfect match.

(If rotating isn’t an option, you can do a little easing in your seam to help the edges match, as shown on page 56.)

It’s important to keep the ends of the patches in alignment while you’re sewing. You can always hold them in place with your fingers, but some EPPers find it easier to use some kind of clips. Paper clips and binder clips work well. (See Resources, page 204 for more information.)

MIND YOUR MUSCLES

If you’re new to EPP, keep in mind that as you baste and sew, you may be using your hand, arm, and shoulder muscles in new ways. After your first couple of sessions, you may notice a little muscle soreness in these areas — but don’t worry, it will soon pass. You can help eliminate the soreness if you stop sewing periodically and stretch your hands and arms a bit. I do this whenever I need to rethread my needle; it’s a good little pause point.
How to Make a Whipstitch

The most common stitch for joining patches is the whipstitch, which is very easy to do.

1. Knot the thread. Begin by passing your needle through the edges of both patches, catching just a few threads of each. If you’re using a firm template, such as cardstock or plastic, you’ll be able to feel the right location for your needle easily; the edges of the templates will resist your needle, so the spot where it passes through easily is the edge of the fabric — and the right spot. Paper templates, of course, won’t resist your needle much, so just try to keep your stitches very close to the edges of the fabric.

2. Pull the thread through, and then pass the needle through the edges of the patches again in the same direction, quite close to your first stitch. Pull the thread through again, and keep repeating that process. Try to keep your stitches about 1/16” apart.

A nice whipstitch seam should be invisible on the right side of the fabric. If your stitches are showing, try these fixes:

- Keep your stitches closer together.
- Make sure you’re only catching a tiny bit of fabric in your stitches. Remember to feel around for the point where the needle passes easily through the fabric, not the template.
- Pull your stitches slightly tighter as you sew.
- Switch to a thread color that blends more closely with your fabrics.
- If the needle you’re using is too thick, that can sometimes result in visible stitches. Try a thinner needle.
**Other EPP Stitches**
Most EPPers use a whipstitch, but there are some who prefer to join their patches with one of these stitches instead. Give them a try and see what you think.

**Backstitch.** I find this stitch to be a bit more work than the whipstitch, and it leaves a tiny ridge between patches, which can get in the way if you’re quilting your project. It does, however, allow you to join patches with fewer stitches overall, and some EPPers like the slightly looser connection it forms between patches.

**Ladder Stitch.** This stitch passes back in forth in the space between patches, catching a few threads from the edge of each. Done well, it can make a very smooth join between patches, but if the stitches are too big, they can create weak spots in your finished project. I find the ladder stitch a bit fiddly for joining patches, but I love using it for appliqué (which we’ll cover on page 63).

**HIDING YOUR KNOT**
You may find that as you’re making your first few whipstitches, your thread keeps catching on the knot at the start of the seam. If you like, you can always move that knot out of your way by passing your needle into the seam allowance a short distance from where you plan to start sewing, and then bringing it out at the starting point.

Place the knot in the thread away from the start of the seam.
How to End a Seam Securely

Perhaps the most crucial hand-sewing skill is being able to tie a secure knot in your thread at the end of a seam. You don’t want all that careful stitching to pull out as soon as you start using your creation! Here’s how to make a secure knot:

1. Take one last stitch in your seam, leaving a little loop of thread.

2. Pass your needle through that loop two times in the same direction. Two times is very important! If you pass your needle through only once, you won’t have a secure knot.

3. Pull the thread tight and then cut it close to the knot.

Oops! Removing a Seam

Don’t worry; sooner or later everyone accidentally sews a patch in the wrong place. Since you’re sewing with tiny stitches very close together, you’ll need to pick these errant seams apart carefully or you could easily damage the fabric. Here’s a safe way to remove an EPP seam.

Start at either end of the seam, and look for a stitch that’s easy to grab with your seam ripper. Slide the point of the seam ripper under this one stitch only and then carefully cut it. Now, gently pull the two patches apart; the stitches will begin to pull out on their own. Use the seam ripper to help ease the stitches out one by one. If the thread resists pulling out at any point, cut it again with the seam ripper and keep pulling until the two patches are separated.