

Tips for Accurate Cuts with the Accuquilt GO

Many of the questions that come up about using the Accuquilt GO have to do with how to get accurate cuts and what to do when your cut is just a bit off. I want to address some of those questions. Since we all have our own way of doing things, I'm sure I won't answer them all nor will the answers satisfy some of you--but I'll try. Many of these suggestions would also apply to rotary cutting, so if you don't have a GO yet, give them some thought when you're using your rotary cutter.

Many of the Accuquilt GO users are new to quilting and thus, some of the information below is basic to quilting methods. This is information and support you would likely get if you are making your purchases at a local quilt shop. However, many of you don't have a local quilt shop or only have a JoAnn's or another chain store or the internet for fabric purchases. The GO is sold primarily at shops like JoAnn's where the discount is greater than a local quilt shops can afford. If you buy from JoAnn's or the internet, then you will have to search online for support. There are many videos on Youtube. I have a few which are listed in the Instructions tab above. You can also look for Ebony's Quilt Possible and LoveBugStudios videos. Some of her videos are for the Studio cutter, but many are for the Accuquilt GO. The best place to find videos is on the <http://www.accuquilt.com> website.

Be sure to read through all the tips as they're all applicable and there is no particular order. This is my take on cutting with the Accuquilt GO. Others may have different advice. Read everything you can and then develop your own methods that work for you. Remember, it's the process and the challenge that make it fun. Life isn't perfect and neither are 1/4 inch seams or fabric grains.

1. Prepare your fabric first. I always wash, dry, and steam press my fabric before cutting. This is something I learned back in the days when the dyes were not fixed as well and there were very strong smelling chemicals in the fabric from the dyes. It was imperative to wash and dry fabric first. Washing and drying helps the fibers settle into the weave and takes some of the stretchiness out of the fabric. I find the cuts don't fray as much and my cuts are much more accurate.

1. Make a test cut. If your die is new, you may want to take a piece of paper and then measure the paper that you have cut with a ruler to be sure the die itself is accurate. If it is, then make a test cut with the fabric you are going to use and make the same measurements .

2. Make a test block. Would you make cupcakes for 1000 people before testing the recipe first? The same thing applies to cutting out a whole quilt before making a test block. Yes, it takes extra time, but "measure twice and cut once" is the old saying. Measure the pieces before you stitch them together and then measure the finished block. Did the block come out to the expected size. If not, can you adjust your seam allowance so that it does come out to the expected size? If not, can you adjust the block size for the whole quilt?

For example: when I make 6 inch pinwheels from 3 1/2 inch half square triangles, my blocks (matching centers and corner points) come out best when I take an ample 1/4 inch seam. Thus, my blocks come out at 6 1/4 inch which is less than the expected size. So, I square them up to 6 inches which is the expected finished size. My finished size then becomes 5 1/2 inches. It means that the sash length has to be adjusted. If I were setting them differently, I might have to make other adjustments. All of this wouldn't matter if I didn't want perfect pinwheels, but I do want perfect pinwheels.

3. Not all fabric is created equal. Accept that not all pieces will cut to exactly the same size based on the fabric you are using. The fibers that are used in fabrics are variable as is the thread count. Batiks have a high thread count and a hard finish because of the wax used in them. I get the most accurate cuts from batiks. Sometimes the highest quality quilting fabric has a little more give and the cuts are a bit more variable. Do the fabric preparation you need to do and remember, quilting is so much more fun when we learn to accept this variability and work with it.

4. Cut on the lengthwise grain when possible. The lengthwise grain has less give and will stretch less as it goes through the roller. Try to cut on the lengthwise grain when you can. That is not always possible and that is all right. Just learn to work with it. This is much more important for dies that are squares, rectangles, and other shapes (like double wedding ring and drunkard's path) than it is for the strip dies.

5. Mark your dies. This allows you to be sure you are cutting on the grainline. Cutting on the grainline - either lengthwise or crosswise - is far less likely to have off-size cuts than cutting on the bias. I find that a black Sharpie works very well for this. The silver Sharpie is bought seems to rub off on the bottom layer of fabric even after many, many cuts. Others have not had this problem - but test on one die before marking all your dies.

6. Learn to ease the seam so the beginning and end match. It is quite easy to ease in 1/8 inch for pieces 2 1/2 inches and larger. Remember, you are working with fabric, not wood; and fabric has give. You can use a stiletto or chopstick or anything that helps you hold those ends together. Nothing means more to me than a flat, square quilt top. Making sure each block measures the same size is the way I achieve that. Easing the pieces into the blocks makes sure that the triangles all have nice points into the corner seams.

7. To starch or not to starch. I don't starch until a block is made. I find I can't ease my seams as well when the pieces are starched. However, some people do and that is their preference. Thus, no advice from me here except to try it both ways and see what works for you.

8. To use paper or not to use paper. I do not use paper when cutting. My cuts are good, so there is no reason to use paper. For those who prefer not to wash and press their fabric first, this may be necessary. Again, this is a suggestion from some, but there is no advice from me except that you can try it both ways and see what works for you.

9. Number of layers. I always use six layers unless I have a fabric with thicker fibers and it won't go through the roller. **Never** force a die and six layers through the roller if it doesn't go with medium pressure. Back off and use fewer layers and remember to cut all of that fabric with fewer layers. The number of layers that go through the die with medium pressure gives me nice cuts.

Happy Quilting!