

EXTENDING THE LINES

A FRESH APPROACH TO FOUNDATION PAPER PIECING

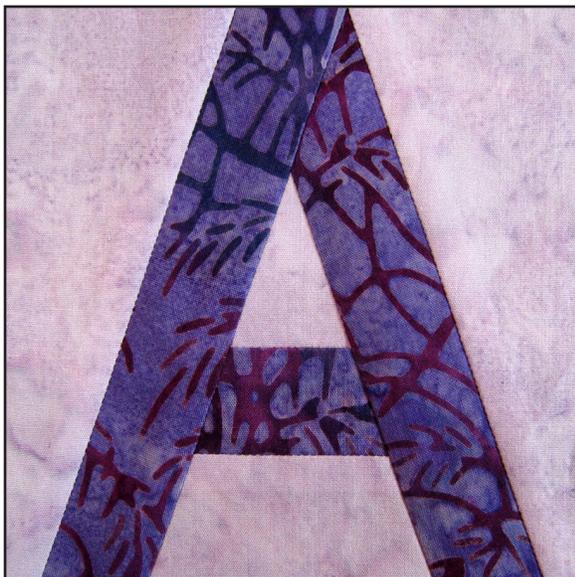
by Annis Clapp



Week 1



Week 2



Week 3



Week 4

BLOCK OF THE WEEK

WEEK 1 - GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS, EASY LOG CABIN

INTRODUCTION

Foundation paper piecing has taken many twists and turns over the past few decades. In the oldest method of foundation piecing, pieces of fabric were stitched together on top of a foundation. The top piece was pressed open against the foundation and more pieces were added and pressed open until the foundation was covered. Some of the other ways that quilters are now foundation piecing their blocks include under pressed piecing which is the most popular, folded foundations, piecing with strips, and single template piecing.

My introduction to paper piecing started in late 2004. Although I had been familiar with the under pressed method for sometime, the thoughts of cutting random pieces of fabric to fill odd shapes, placing them on the back side of a piece of paper, and trying to keep them in position while flipping the paper over to sew on a line did not appeal to me.

I had recently developed a seam guide for the sewing machine, and one day I had an inspiration. What if all of those lines ended at the edge of the paper? I would cut the fabric pieces close to the size needed, place them in position on the paper with the printed side facing up, line up the beginning of the line at the edge of the fabric with the needle, line up the end of the line with the sewing line on the seam guide and sew the pieces together just as if I were sewing them without paper, except I wouldn't have to sew accurate $\frac{1}{4}$ " seams. This would be similar to the corner to corner method that has long been used for sewing angles without marking.

Using a piece of graph paper, I made my first log cabin block. Then I made a miniature log cabin, a square in a square, and several blocks using different shapes. This method of foundation paper piecing soon became one of my favorite ways to piece quilt blocks.

Since then I have taken classes from national quilt teachers who use under pressed piecing and have purchased patterns that use single template piecing. But I still find myself changing the instructions and piecing the blocks with my top piecing method.

For the first few years I cut my pieces for $\frac{1}{4}$ " seams and only added extra for triangles, odd shapes, and outside edge pieces. After teaching a few classes, I discovered some of my students were having a hard time lining up the pieces, so now I add $\frac{3}{8}$ " to all sides.

I call this method Reverse Paper Piecing, since the blocks are worked backwards from the method most used today. It is also a form of top pressed piecing. There is no need for mirror images and the fabric waste is minimal.

I hope you will give this top piecing method a try. You may be pleasantly surprised at how easy it is. If you choose not to use this method, I am including templates for each block that can be used for the foundation piecing method of your choice. All of the blocks will finish at $4\frac{1}{2}$ " and will include letters and numbers along with a variety of mostly traditional quilt blocks.

References:

The Experts' Guide to Foundation Piecing by Jane Hall
EQ6 Block Book

TOOLS AND SUPPLIES

The following is a list of most of the tools used for my paper piecing method. There may be others that you will find useful as well.

Rulers: A narrow ruler works best for trimming seam allowances. I prefer the Olfa brand and seldom use my Add-A-Quarter ruler. Assorted rotary rulers are needed for cutting the fabric pieces depending on the size and shape.

Sandpaper grips: Place these stick-on circles on the back of your ruler if you are having trouble with slippage. InvisiGrip by Omnigridd also works but does not cling to the frosted Olfa rulers.

Rotary cutter and rotary mat: A 45mm cutter is the size most often used. A large 24" x 36" mat is best for cutting strips of fabric. A smaller mat can be used for trimming seams and squaring blocks.

Sewing machine: A sewing machine with a flat surface works better than a curved surface. An open toe walking foot is needed for good visibility and to help the fabric feed evenly. If you are using a Pfaff, which is what I use most of the time, use an open toe applique foot and engage the dual feed. If you choose not to use a walking foot, you will need to pin the fabric pieces before sewing and the results may not be as accurate.

Needles: A size 90/14 needle will help perforate the paper foundation and make it easier to remove. Change to a size 75/11 after the paper has been removed.

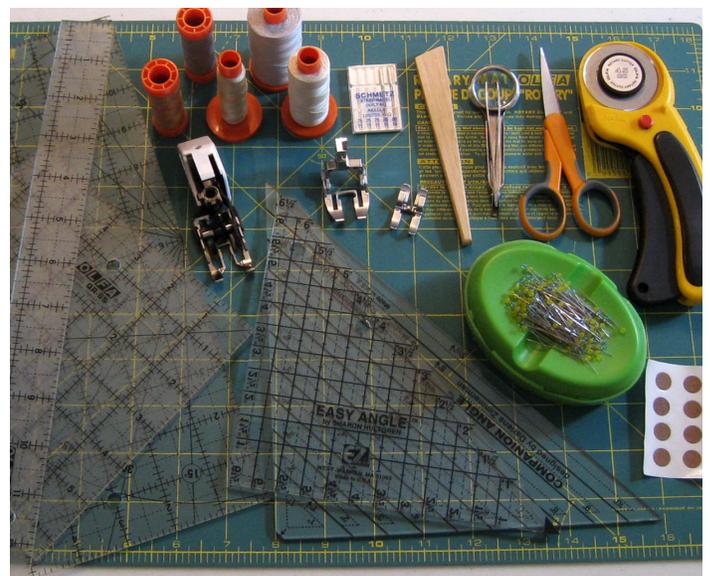
Thread: Use standard 50-weight thread in neutral colors that blend with all fabrics. If the fabrics are mostly medium and dark, choose a darker thread. If they are mostly light or medium, choose a lighter thread.

Straight pins: Fine silk pins with a small head will make pinning the fabric to the paper easier. Place them on a magnetic pin holder for easy access.

Scissors: Use a small pair of scissors to clip threads from the foundation. There are also thread clippers made for this purpose.

Tweezers: These are used to remove small pieces of paper that get caught in the seams. The magnifying glass isn't necessary, but the pointed tips on these grab the paper easier than standard tweezers.

Pressing: Use a wooden pressing tool if you are just making one block and having to get up to press often. When making multiple blocks, chain sew and use a hot, dry iron. Do not use steam until all of the paper has been removed.



Seam Guide: The fast2sew™ Ultimate Seam Guide will give you the line in front of the needle that makes this paper piecing method possible. If you need a longer line, draw a red line down the center of a gridded index card, laminate the card, and place it under the front of the seam guide, lining up the red line with the red sewing line on the seam guide. Tape the seam guide in place with Scrapbooking tape, which does not leave a sticky residue. Do not use removable tape. It will come loose and end up in your seams.

Full sheet removable label: If you are placing the seam guide on a clear surface, adhere a white label to the back of it to eliminate glare. You could also slide a piece of white cardstock underneath the guide.

Full sheet permanent label: I use these often for templates. Print the templates onto the label, cut them out and place them on the fabric for cutting odd shapes. They stick to the fabric better than freezer paper, and you don't need to use an iron. The removable labels would also work but do not stick as well. Use the clear labels for fussy cutting motifs that can be placed accurately in Location #1 on the foundations.

Freezer paper: Use freezer paper for making templates when you just need a few or don't have access to a printer.

Zipper bags: Organize your fabric pieces in plastic bags.

Labels: Return address labels stick to the plastic bags for easy labeling. They can also be used to label the fabric pieces.

Foundation paper: A see-thru foundation is best for this paper piecing method. My favorite is Office Depot translucent vellum paper. It is available in a 50 sheet pad of 11" x 17" or 100 sheet pad of 8½" x 11" paper. Simply tear them from the pad and cut the larger sheets in half. Be sure to trim the sticky edge from the top so you won't get a paper jam. There is no guarantee it will work with every printer, but I've used it successfully with an HP, an Epson, and a Canon printer.

Scotch brand removable tape: Use this tape sparingly to repair foundations when the paper separates or tears after unsewing seams or for other reasons.

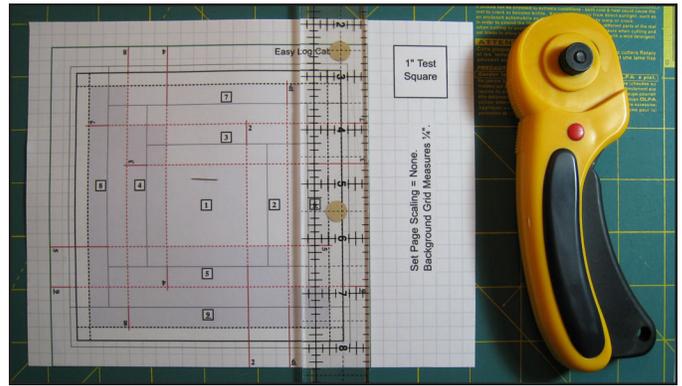
Glue stick: Using a glue stick is optional for holding Location #1 in position. If you are making multiple blocks you may find this easier than pinning. Be sure to pull the glued fabric loose from the paper after the first seam is sewn.

Stapler and staple remover: Staple multiple copies of foundations together before cutting. This makes cutting out the templates go much faster.



MAKING FOUNDATIONS

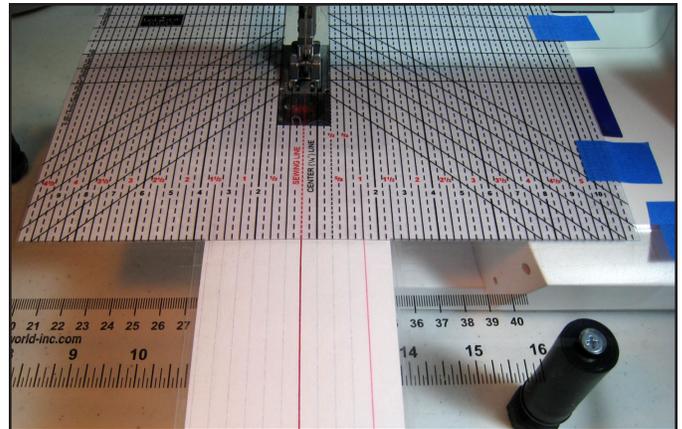
1. Print the pattern template (Page 12 for the Log Cabin block) on foundation paper using an inkjet printer. Choose Do Not Scale and check the first copy to make sure it printed accurately by measuring the 1" test square before making multiple copies.
2. Use a rotary cutter and ruler to cut out the copies on the green solid lines. Staple matching copies together for faster cutting.



PREPARING TO SEW

Using an Ultimate Seam Guide will give you a smoother sewing surface and longer, easy to see seam allowance markings for more accurate piecing. It covers the uneven surface between the needle plate and sewing machine cabinet or tray so your fabric will feed smoothly and evenly.

1. Place the Seam Guide on the sewing machine. (Follow instructions to cut opening for needle and feed dogs.) Line up the needle with the red sewing line on the Seam Guide and tape in place. I like using acrylic tables, so once the seam guide is taped in place it is always ready to use and it doesn't have to be removed to change the bobbin. I place a Sewing Edge to the right of the seam guide on the sewing machine surface and tape the table and seam guide to the machine on the right side so it doesn't shift. The index card extension is also always in place. For this machine I have a line extending 7½" in front of the needle. For any seam longer than that I would turn the paper over and sew on the line.



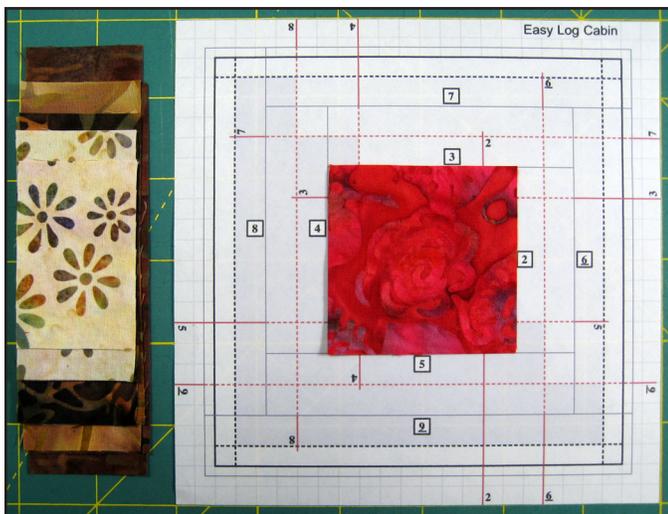
2. Set sewing machine stitch length to 18-20 stitches per inch (1.5 on some sewing machines). Use an open toe walking foot for best results. If you are sewing with a Pfaff sewing machine with dual feed, use an open toe appliqué foot and engage the dual feed.
3. The red dashed lines on the block patterns are the sewing lines. You will not be able to see these lines as you sew because the fabric will be covering them. The red solid lines extending from the dashed lines will be used to line up the dashed lines with the needle and the red sewing line on the Seam Guide. The numbers beside these lines coincide with the same numbered fabric piece. The ¼" space outside the shaded block area is the seam allowance for sewing the blocks together. See page 11 for more information on "Understanding the Foundation Templates".

CUTTING FABRIC PIECES

Refer to the Cutting List on Page 12 to cut the fabric pieces. For the Log Cabin block you will only need a center square and rectangles. For future blocks there will be various shapes and I will give you cutting suggestions as needed. The Cutting List gives the size shape to cut, but not the number of pieces needed. If there are 2 locations for that shape, cut 2 fabric pieces. For this block they need to be from different fabrics with different values.

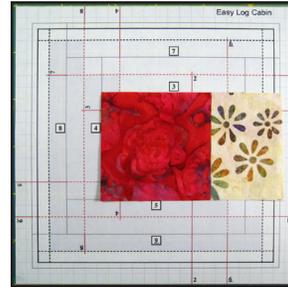
PIECING THE BLOCKS

1. Place the fabric piece for Location #1 right side up on the **printed** side of the paper, lining it up with the guidelines which are $\frac{3}{8}$ " from the seams. You may use a straight pin or a washable glue stick to hold it in place.

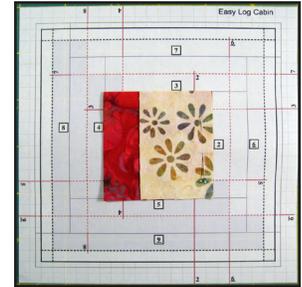


Tip: When making a single block stack the pieces in the order needed with Location #1 on top. When sewing multiple blocks at the same time, stack the pieces for each location separately and label the top fabric in each stack with the location number.

2. Place the fabric piece for Location #2 in the finished position on the paper and then flip it over to place in the sewing position. It should line up with the same guidelines as piece #1.



Finished Position



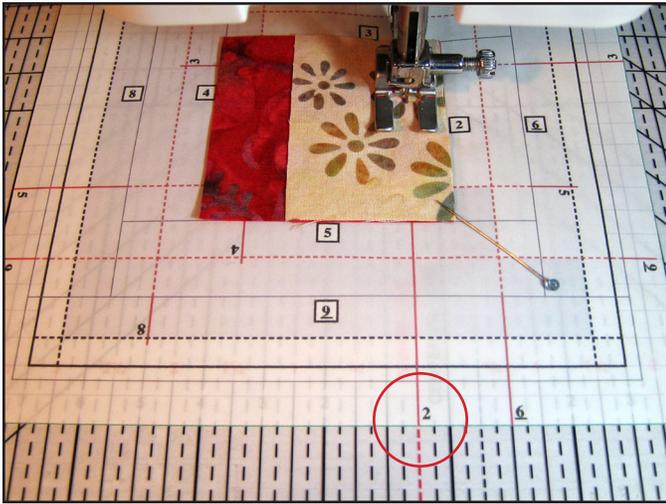
Sewing Position

3. Holding the fabrics in place (or pin in place if you want to prepare multiple units before sewing), align the needle at the edge of the fabric on the short extended red solid line #2 and put the needle in the down position centered on the line near the edge of the fabric.



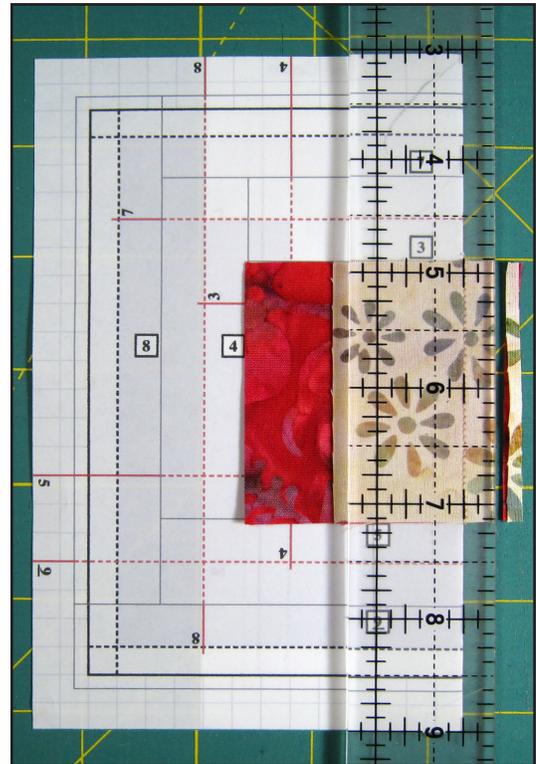
Note: The sewing machine I am using for this block does not work as well with the dual feed as the machine I normally use, so I chose not to use the dual feed and am pinning instead. Most of the time I do not use pins unless sewing long pieces or odd angles. Try it both ways to see which works best for you.

- Align the long extended red solid line with the red sewing line on the Seam Guide. Sew seam, making sure the red solid line stays on the sewing line of the Seam Guide until the seam is sewn. When making multiple blocks, repeat for each block without cutting the thread between them until pieces #1 and #2 are sewn on all blocks.



Tip: After removing the pin, I use it for an awl to hold the fabric in place for sewing.

- Trim threads, fold paper back on seam line and trim seams by placing the $\frac{1}{4}$ " line of a ruler on the seam and using a rotary cutter. You will be trimming approximately $\frac{1}{8}$ " off the raw edge.



First Seam Sewn

- Open up piece #2 and press with a dry iron on cotton setting.



7. Rotate block as needed and place fabric piece for Location #3 in the sewn position, then flip over onto pieces #1/2, lining up the right edge with the guidelines. Keep in mind that the number placement for the line you will be sewing on is always to the right side of the line. Sometimes you will be sewing with most of the fabric to the right of the needle and sometimes to the left of the needle, whichever is the shortest distance to the edge of the paper. For this block the fabric will always be to the left of the needle. Repeat Steps 2 thru 6 using sewing line #3.



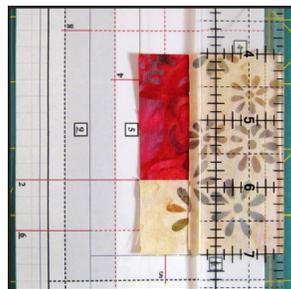
Finished Position



Sewing Position



Seam Sewn



Seam Trimmed



Seam
Pressed

8. Repeat this process until all pieces are sewn.

Note: I like to pin lengthwise in the seam allowance so I can fold the piece over along the seamline before sewing to make sure it will cover the space, especially for triangles and odd shapes, and it doesn't distort the paper as much as pinning sideways does. Also, if I'm sewing a long seam and choose to sew on the line on the back side, it is easier to remove the pins as I sew with the head of the pin facing towards me.



Pinned



Checking Placement



Location #4

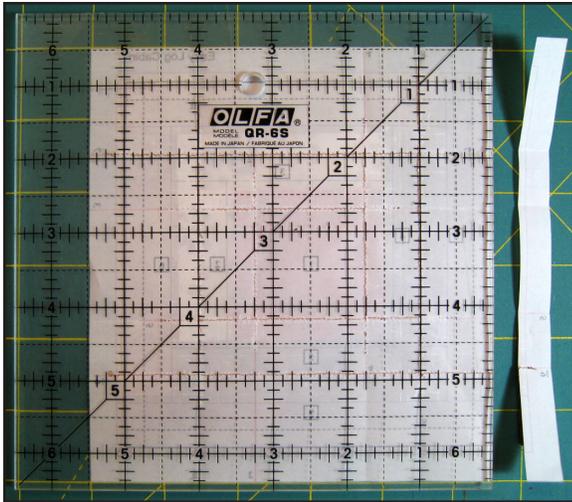


Location #8

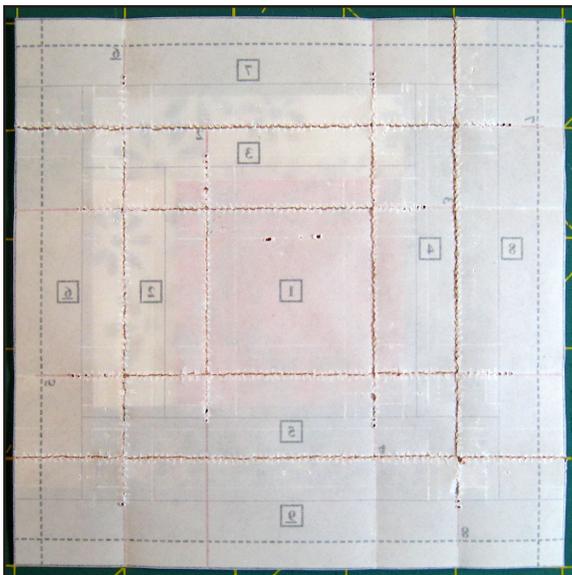


Location #9

9. Turn the block over and trim by placing the ¼" line of a ruler on the outside dashed seam line. If you are not using vellum paper and can't see the lines clearly on the back side of the paper, place over a light box and mark the corners of the seam lines with a pencil before trimming. Make sure the fabric is smooth on the underneath side so you don't accidentally cut off any fabric corners.



You can use any ruler for trimming that has ¼" lines. I usually use the narrow ruler I use for trimming seams, but a wider ruler works better on some blocks. Your cutting mat should be on a hard, level surface, not a lightweight folding table.



10. Remove paper. Folding on the line first helps, or stretching the block slightly diagonally. If there are any bias edges on the outside edge, or odd angles to match, leave the paper on until the blocks are assembled.



Tip: Leave the paper on the center section when making a scrappy or sampler quilt and use the paper to number the blocks to keep them in order for assembly.



TIPS

For best results remember to:

P - position carefully

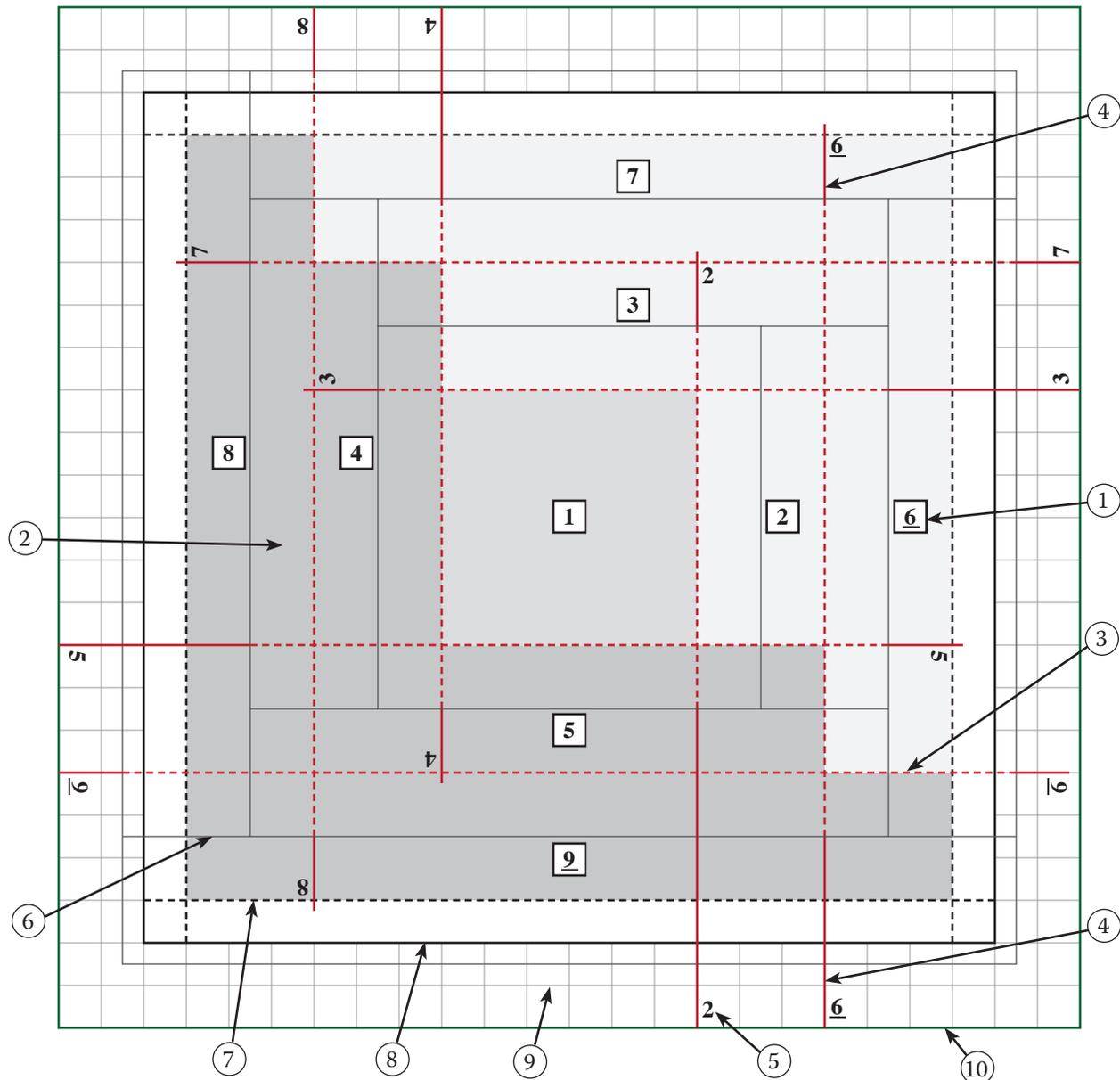
S - sew accurately

T - trim evenly

P - press crisply

- *Positioning the template in the direction the seam will be sewn will make it easier to position the fabric pieces.*
- Always place the fabric piece right side up in the finished position before flipping over to sew. This is especially important for triangles as they can easily be turned in the wrong direction.
- *As you near the end of the fabric, change your focus to the red solid line at the edge of the fabric and eyeball the last few stitches, ending on the solid line. Use a long straight pin or awl to hold the fabric edge so it will feed evenly.*
- Sometimes a bumpy seam or a previous seam that's partially under the presser foot will cause it to shift and stray from the line. If this happens simply turn the template over and re sew on the line, assuming the shifting is within the seam allowance. Holding the foundation steady with your left hand close to the presser foot helps.
- *If you need to unsew a seam for any reason, place a small piece of tape on the seam line to keep the paper from falling apart. There is no need to tape the full seam. Do not let a hot iron touch the tape.*
- For longer seams or where there are points to match, you may prefer to turn the paper over and sew on the line.
- *Before folding the paper to trim seams, you will need to pull previously sewn seams loose from the paper at seam allowances. Be careful not to pull the stitches loose from the fabric.*
- If you're using vellum paper, you can turn the block over and check the accuracy of your seams before trimming and pressing.
- *Do not place iron directly on printed side of paper when pressing seams. Use only the tip or edge of the iron. Carefully pressed seams are important. You may also use a wooden pressing tool. Finger pressing first makes it easier.*
- When there are no bias edges on the finished block units, it is easier to remove the paper before quilt assembly. It should tear away easily. Use a pair of tweezers to remove tiny pieces that may be left in seams.
- *If you choose to leave the paper on until the blocks are assembled, remove the paper from the seam allowances as you sew each seam and before pressing. There may be quite a few tiny pieces to remove for blocks that have multiple pieces.*
- All fabric pieces allow for a $\frac{3}{8}$ " seam allowance. This should give you plenty of extra for minor misplacements. If you increase the size of the seam allowance it will cover the guidelines and make it more difficult to line up the pieces for sewing.
- *Different sewing machines may give different results. If you have access to more than one sewing machine, try them all to see which one works best for you, with or without a walking foot, and pinning or not pinning. And remember: the more you practice, the faster and easier it is to piece your quilt blocks.*

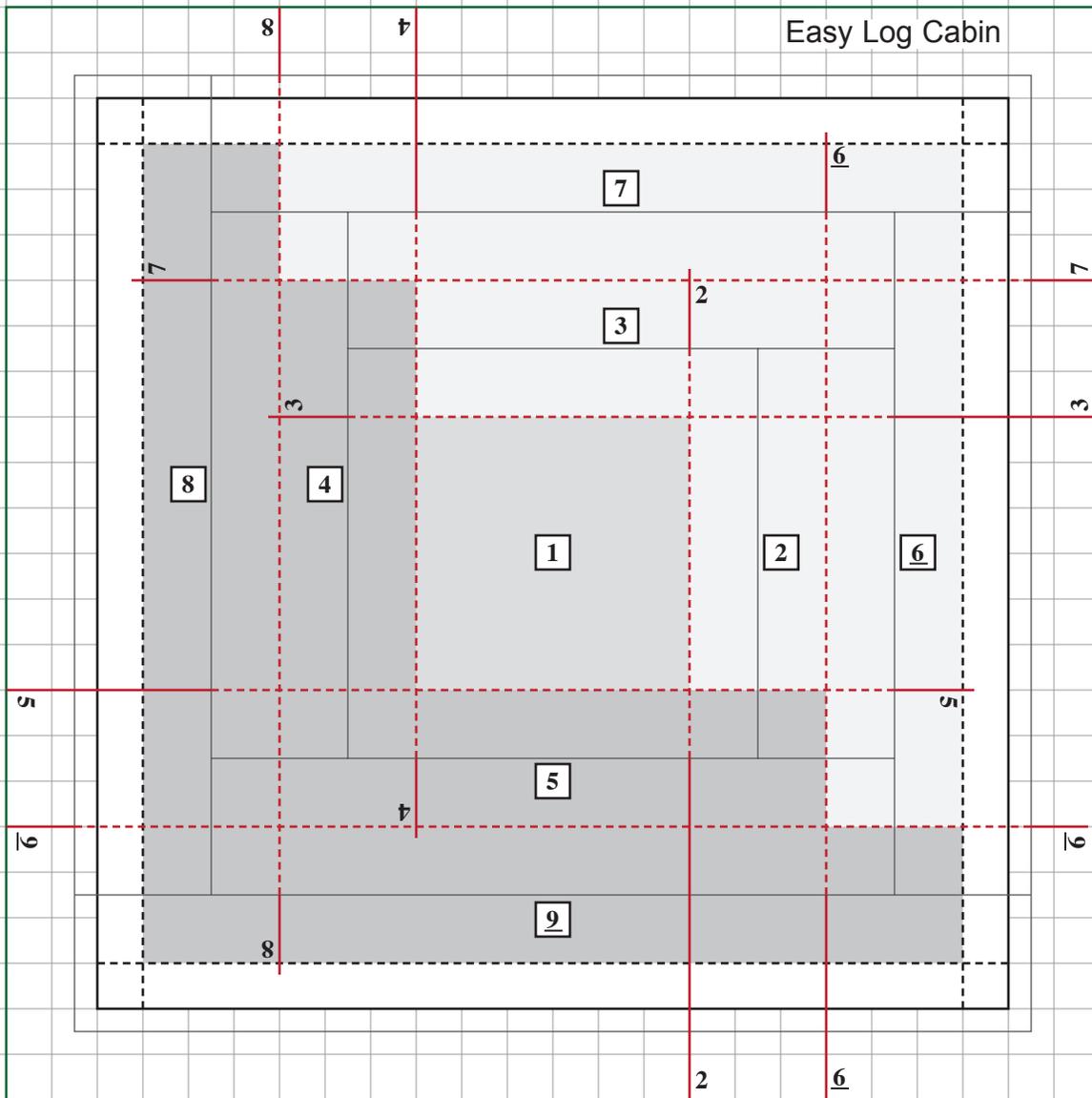
UNDERSTANDING THE FOUNDATION TEMPLATES



- 1 - Location #.
- 2 - Shaded finished block.
- 3 - Red dashed sewing line.
- 4 - Red solid lines for aligning needle with red dashed lines for sewing. Shorter lines at beginning of line, longer lines ending at edge of paper at end of lines.
- 5 - Location # of piece you will be sewing, always to right side of red solid line.
- 6 - Guidelines for positioning fabrics allowing for $\frac{3}{8}$ " seam allowance which will be trimmed to $\frac{1}{4}$ " after sewing. Sometimes

these lines will extend to the edge of the paper to help position fabric pieces accurately.

- 7 - Black dashed lines for sewing block units together. Also used for aligning $\frac{1}{4}$ " line on ruler to trim block to size.
- 8 - Outside edge of unfinished block.
- 9 - Extra space to allow for extended lines, with grid lines to help position fabric pieces accurately.
- 10 - Green line for cutting out template.



1" Test Square

Set Page Scaling = None.
Background Grid Measures 1/4".

EASY LOG CABIN

4 1/2" Finished

CUTTING LIST

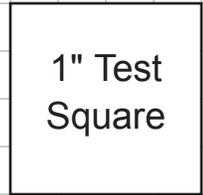
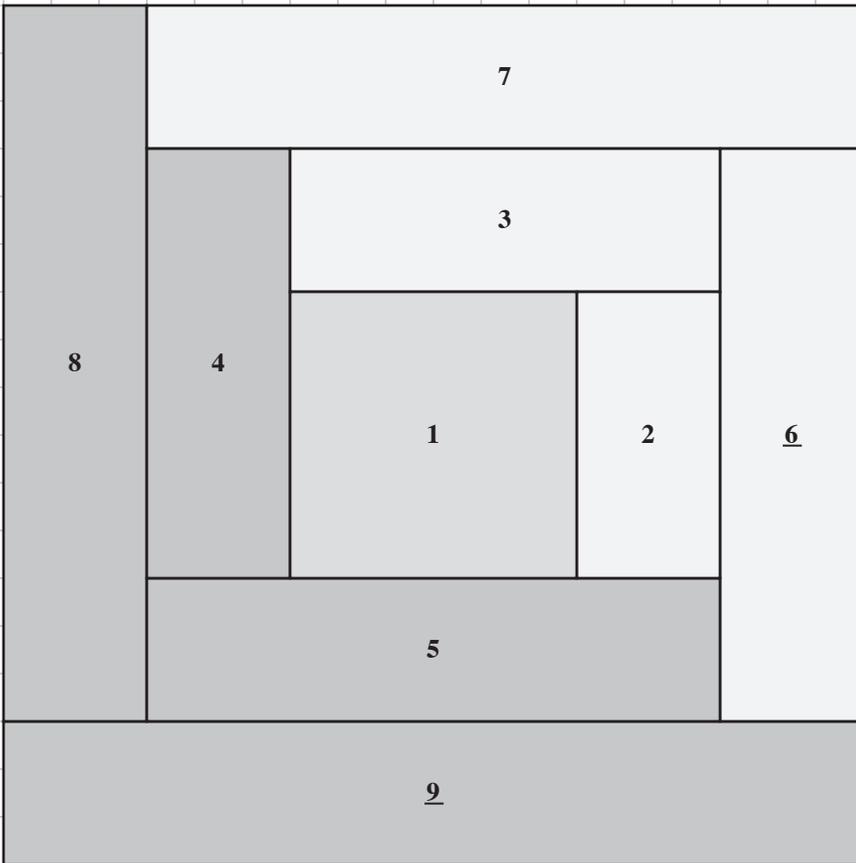
Location	Size to Cut
1	2 1/4" x 2 1/4"
2	2 1/4" x 1 1/2"
3, 4	3" x 1 1/2"
5, 6	3 3/4" x 1 1/2"
7, 8	4 1/2" x 1 1/2"
9	5 1/4" x 1 1/2"

The bottom half of page 13 is intentionally left blank to save paper when making copies for templates on adhesive label sheets. Feed the paper in one direction, then turn the paper and feed in another direction to make two copies, or to make a copy of a different block design.

When making multiple blocks, make a cutting chart first for each separate location and the size, quantity, and fabric to use for each location. That will make it easier to figure the yardage needed.

EASY LOG CABIN

4½" Finished



Set Page Scaling = None.
Background Grid Measures ¼".

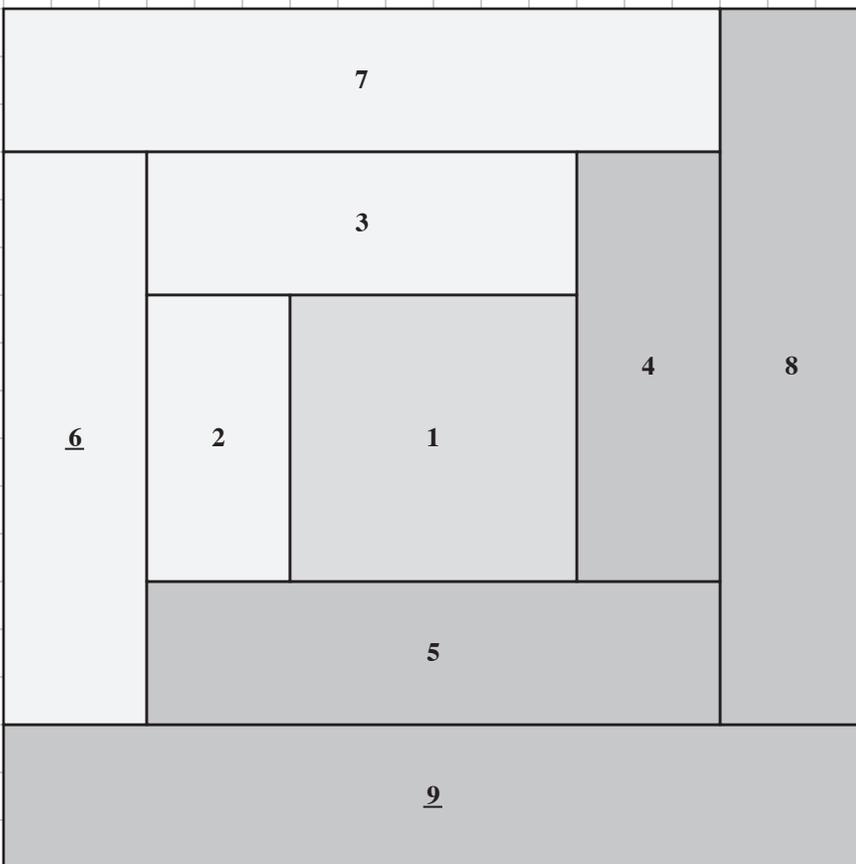
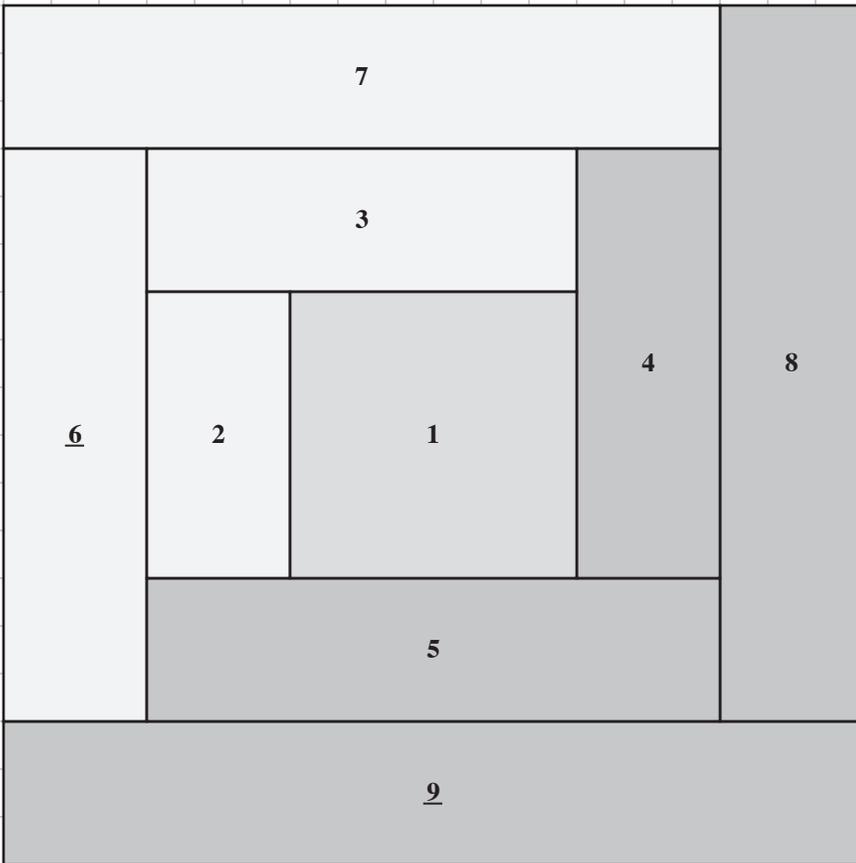
EASY LOG CABIN

4½" Finished

Mirrored

1" Test
Square

Set Page Scaling = None.
Background Grid Measures ¼".



Use these mirrored templates for
other paper piecing methods.