

Foundation Paper Piecing Tutorial

By: Kate Basti

Pattern Used: Economy Block FPP Quilt Block

Block Size: 6" x 6"



The Basics

Foundation paper piecing, or FPP, is a sewing technique that allows quilters to create shapes and patterns that would be quite tricky to create otherwise. FPP does not require pre-cutting, cutting instructions or assembly instructions like traditional sewing patterns, but it does require patience and little practice. Once you learn the FPP technique, you should be able to tackle any FPP pattern you wish. Though some patterns are more intricate or detailed than others, the method is the same.

Recommended Materials and Notions

To learn the FPP technique, I highly recommend having the following materials on hand.

- FPP Paper: There are many FPP paper options to choose from, ranging from regular printer paper to freezer paper to specialty paper made specifically for FPP. I've tried many different kinds of papers, and my favorite is June Tailor Perfect Piecing Foundation Sheets. You can purchase these in bulk from Amazon or Joann. They are lightweight, printer friendly, and transparent enough to see through so that I can ensure my fussy cuts are right where I want them to be.
- Add-a-Quarter Ruler: This handy little notion helps ensure a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam when trimming after each step of the FPP process. You'll notice that one of the long edges is thicker than the rest of the ruler. This is so you'll have a built-in $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam each time you trim. You can find these rulers in many online quilt shops, Amazon, and Joann.
- Card Stock: You'll need a small piece of card stock or thick paper approximately 4" x 6" in size. If you happen to have a Quilt With Kate notecard on hand, they work wonderfully for FPP.

Important Items to Note About FPP Patterns (A Must-Read Before Starting)

- When working with a FPP pattern, you will be stitching on the printed side of the paper while the fabric will be on the back side (non printed side). You will be aligning the pieces of fabric on the back side of the paper, pinching them in place and then flipping the paper over to stitch on the printed lines. This sounds tricky, and it many feel that way at first, but you'll likely find a rhythm after a bit of practice.
- The solid lines are the lines on which you'll be stitching. The dashed line around the perimeter of the pattern is your final trim line. The space between the outer solid line and dashed trim line is the final block's seam allowance.
- The fabric you choose for each section of the block must be at least $\frac{1}{4}$ " larger than the section it will be covering.
- When stitching a FPP pattern, shorten your stitch length a bit, and be sure to backstitch at the beginning and end of each stitched line. This helps ensure that your stitches won't rip out when removing the papers after your project is assembled and finished.
- I recommend waiting to remove papers until all blocks of a project are stitched together and assembled, or until you've added sashing or borders. When making a FPP quilt, I remove papers when my entire quilt top is assembled.

The FPP Process: Pre-cutting Fabric for a Fussy Cut

Gather all of your necessary materials: fabric scraps, scissors, rotary cutter, Add-a-Quarter ruler, and card stock. Once you've printed your pattern template page, I recommend trimming around the dashed line, providing a generous margin, to remove the extra unnecessary paper so that it isn't in your way while sewing (Fig. 1).

We begin the FPP process with sections 1 and 2, labeled on the printed template, and will work our way up to the highest number. While fussy cutting is a personal choice and not required, I want to fussy cut a piece of fabric for section 1 of my block, so I'm going to show you an easy way to pre-cut a piece of fabric for a fussy cut. First, place the desired scrap for section 1 face up on your cutting mat. Next, place the pattern template, printed side down, on top of the fabric and align the area you wish to showcase within the area of section 1. The scrap should extend at least $\frac{1}{4}$ " past all lines surrounding section 1 (Fig. 2). (**NOTE:** Because I'm right handed and it's easier to trim fabric on the right hand side, I have rotated the pattern template to be upside down so that the line between sections 1 and 2 is on my right.)

Next, we're going to pre-cut a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance for the fabric of section 1 using the line between sections 1 and 2. To do this, place your card stock on top of the paper, aligning the edge of the card stock with the line between sections 1 and 2 (Fig. 3). While holding the card stock in place to prevent shifting, fold the paper backward and over the card stock, making a nice crease. Then place your Add-a-Quarter ruler on top of the paper and card stock so that the thicker edge of the ruler is slotted against the piece of card stock (Fig. 4). Holding the ruler firmly in place, use a rotary cutter to trim the excess fabric (Fig. 5).

Fig. 1

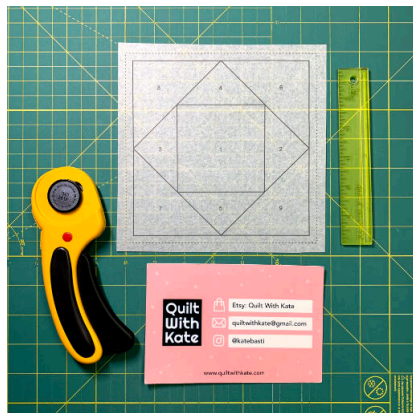


Fig. 2

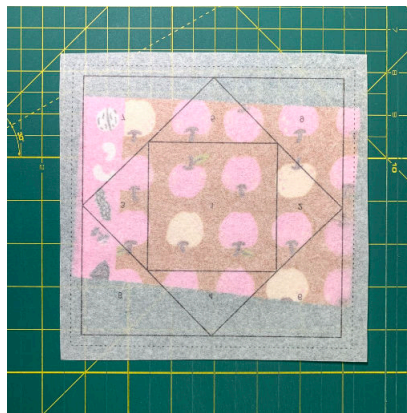


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



The FPP Process: Piecing Sections 1 and 2

We're now ready to stitch the fabrics for sections 1 and 2 together. If you chose not to fussy cut the fabric for section 1, you can simply grab a scrap of fabric for that section. You'll also need a scrap for section 2. (**REMEMBER:** All fabrics used in foundation paper piecing must be at least $\frac{1}{4}$ " larger on all sides than the section it will be covering. Personally, I like a little wiggle room and use scraps that are at least a $\frac{1}{2}$ " larger on all sides.)

To begin, place the paper template printed side down on your work surface. Arrange the fabric for section 1, right side up, on top of the paper so that the fabric extends over the line between sections 1 and 2. You want the fabric for section 1 to extend over the line and into section 2 by $\frac{1}{4}$ " as this will be the seam allowance for section 1.

Next, place the fabric for section 2, right side down, on top of the fabric for section 1, aligning the edges just as if you were getting ready to stitch two pieces of fabric together using traditional sewing methods (Fig. 6). Again, these aligned edges should be extending into section 2 by $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

Carefully pick up the paper and fabric pieces, using your fingers to pinch the fabric edges and paper together to prevent any shifting, and carry it to your sewing machine. Gently flip the paper and fabric sandwich over so that the paper template is printed side up, and position the paper and fabric sandwich under your needle to stitch the line between sections 1 and 2. (If you look closely at Fig. 7, you can see through my paper template. Notice the edges of the fabric extending $\frac{1}{4}$ " into section 2. That's the seam allowance, just as if you were sewing the traditional way.)

Stitch along the line between sections 1 and 2 (highlighted in red in the photo), backstitching at the beginning and end to lock your stitches in place (Fig. 7). Open and press fabric 2 to the side with a hot iron for a nice, crisp seam (Fig. 8).

Fig. 6



Fig. 7

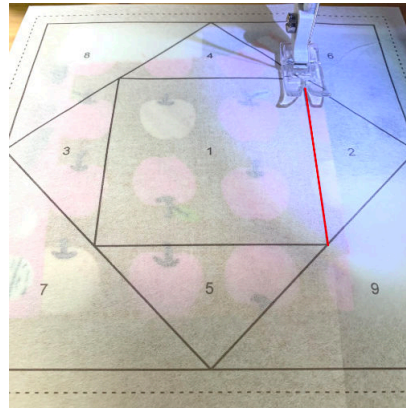


Fig. 8



The FPP Process: Piecing Sections 1 and 2 (Continued)

Now we need to trim the excess fabric before piecing section 3. First, place the paper template printed side up and place your card stock on top of the paper, aligning the edge of the card stock with the line between sections 1 and 3 (Fig. 9). While holding the card stock in place to prevent shifting, fold the paper backward and over the card stock, making a nice crease. Then place your Add-a-Quarter ruler on top of the paper and card stock so that the thicker edge of the ruler is slotted against the piece of card stock (Fig. 10). Holding the ruler firmly in place, use a rotary cutter to trim the excess fabric (Fig. 11). You've just created a seam allowance for adding your next piece, section 3.

Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



The FPP Process: Piecing Section 3

Time to piece section 3. Place the paper template printed side down on your work surface. Next, place the fabric for section 3, right side down, on top of the fabric for section 1, aligning the edges just as you did when getting ready to piece sections 1 and 2 (Fig. 12). These aligned edges should be extending into section 3 by $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

Just as you did before, carefully pick up the template and fabric, using your fingers to pinch the fabric edges and paper together to prevent any shifting, and carry it to your sewing machine. Gently flip the paper and fabric sandwich over so that the paper template is printed side up, and position the paper and fabric sandwich under your needle to stitch the line between sections 1 and 3. Stitch along the line between sections 1 and 3 (highlighted in red in the photo), backstitching at the beginning and end to lock your stitches in place (Fig. 13). Open and press fabric 3 to the side with your iron. (Fig. 14).

Fig. 12

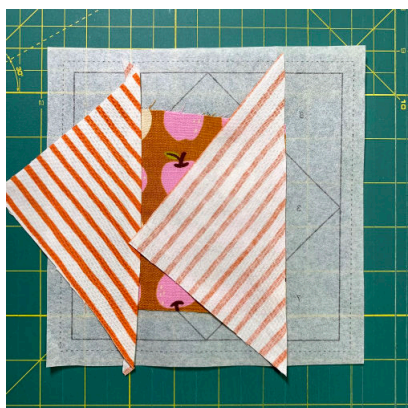


Fig. 13

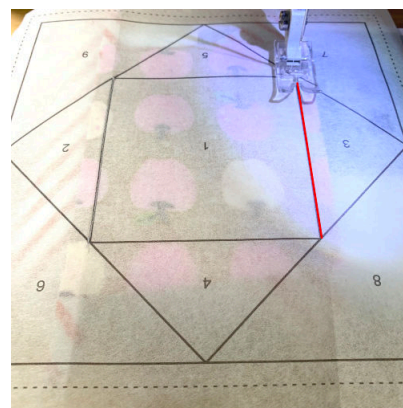


Fig. 14



The FPP Process: Piecing Section 3 (Continued)

Now we need to trim the excess fabric before piecing section 4. Place the paper template printed side up and place your card stock on top of the paper, aligning the edge of the card stock with the line between sections 1 and 4 (Fig. 15). (**NOTE:** Because I'm right handed, I rotate the template so that the pieces I'm trimming are on the right hand side. Be sure to rotate the template however you need to make cutting easier for you depending on whether you're right or left handed.)

While holding the card stock in place to prevent shifting, fold the paper backward and over the card stock, making a nice crease. Then place your Add-a-Quarter ruler on top of the paper and card stock so that the thicker edge of the ruler is slotted against the piece of card stock (Fig. 16). Holding the ruler firmly in place, use a rotary cutter to trim the excess fabric (Fig. 17). You've just created a seam allowance for adding your next piece, section 4.

Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



The FPP Process: Piecing Section 4

Now we're ready to piece section 4. Place the paper template printed side down on your work surface. Next, place the fabric for section 4, right side down, on top of the fabric for section 1, aligning the edges just as you did for the other sections (Fig. 18). These aligned edges should be extending into section 4 by 1/4".

Just as before, carefully pick up the template and fabric, and carry it to your sewing machine. Gently flip the paper and fabric sandwich over so that the paper template is printed side up, and position the paper and fabric sandwich under your needle to stitch the line between sections 1 and 4. Stitch along the line between sections 1 and 4 (highlighted in red in the photo), backstitching at the beginning and end to lock your stitches in place (Fig. 19). Open and press fabric 4 to the side with your iron. (Fig. 20).

Fig. 18



Fig. 19

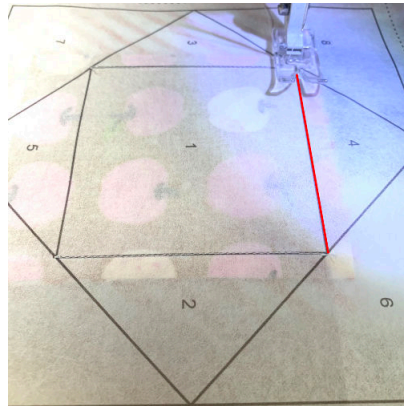


Fig. 20



The FPP Process: Piecing Section 4 (Continued)

Now we need to trim the excess fabric before piecing section 5. First, place the paper template printed side up and place your card stock on top of the paper, aligning the edge of the card stock with the line between sections 1 and 5 (Fig. 21). While holding the card stock in place to prevent shifting, fold the paper backward and over the card stock, making a nice crease. Then place your Add-a-Quarter ruler on top of the paper and card stock so that the thicker edge of the ruler is slotted against the piece of card stock (Fig. 22). Holding the ruler firmly in place, use a rotary cutter to trim the excess fabric (Fig. 23). You've just created a seam allowance for adding your next piece, section 5.

Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



The FPP Process: Piecing Section 5

Time to piece section 5. Place the paper template printed side down on your work surface. Next, place the fabric for section 5, right side down, on top of the fabric for section 1, aligning the edges just as you did with the previous sections (Fig. 24). These aligned edges should be extending into section 5 by $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

Carefully pick up the template and fabric, using your fingers to pinch the fabric edges and paper together to prevent any shifting, and carry it to your sewing machine. Gently flip the paper and fabric sandwich over so that the paper template is printed side up, and position the paper and fabric sandwich under your needle to stitch the line between sections 1 and 5. Stitch along the line between sections 1 and 5 (highlighted in red in the photo), backstitching at the beginning and end to lock your stitches in place (Fig. 25). Open and press fabric 5 to the side with your iron. (Fig. 26).

Fig. 24



Fig. 25

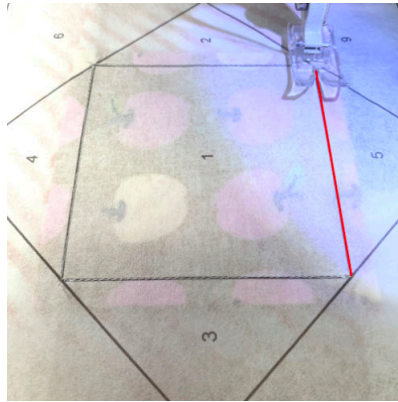


Fig. 26



Next, we need to trim the excess fabric before piecing section 6. First, place the paper template printed side up and place your card stock on top of the paper, aligning the edge of the card stock with the line next to section 6 (Fig. 27). While holding the card stock in place to prevent shifting, fold the paper backward and over the card stock, making a nice crease. Then place your Add-a-Quarter ruler on top of the paper and card stock so that the thicker edge of the ruler is slotted against the piece of card stock (Fig. 28). Holding the ruler firmly in place, use a rotary cutter to trim the excess fabric (Fig. 29). You've just created a seam allowance for adding your next piece, section 6.

Fig. 27



Fig. 28



Fig. 29



The FPP Process: Piecing Section 6

We're ready to piece section 6. Place the paper template printed side down on your work surface. Next, place the fabric for section 6, right side down, aligning the edge with the clean edge you just finished trimming (Fig. 30). These aligned edges should be extending into section 6 by $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

Carefully pick up the template and fabric, using your fingers to pinch the fabric edges and paper together to prevent any shifting, and carry it to your sewing machine. Gently flip the paper and fabric sandwich over so that the paper template is printed side up, and position the paper and fabric sandwich under your needle to stitch the line next to section 6. Stitch along the line next to section 6 (highlighted in red in the photo), backstitching at the beginning and end to lock your stitches in place (Fig. 31). Open and press fabric 6 to the side with your iron. (Fig. 32).

Fig. 30



Fig. 31

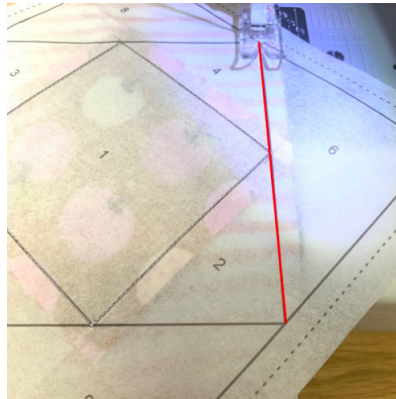


Fig. 32



Now it's time to trim the excess fabric before piecing section 7. First, place the paper template printed side up and place your card stock on top of the paper, aligning the edge of the card stock with the line next to section 7 (Fig. 33). While holding the card stock in place to prevent shifting, fold the paper backward and over the card stock, making a nice crease. Then place your Add-a-Quarter ruler on top of the paper and card stock so that the thicker edge of the ruler is slotted against the piece of card stock (Fig. 34). Holding the ruler firmly in place, use a rotary cutter to trim the excess fabric (Fig. 35). You've just created a seam allowance for adding your next piece, section 7.

Fig. 33



Fig. 34



Fig. 35



The FPP Process: Piecing Section 7

Moving on to piece section 7. Place the paper template printed side down on your work surface. Next, place the fabric for section 7, right side down, aligning the edge with the clean edge you just finished trimming (Fig. 36). These aligned edges should be extending into section 7 by $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

As before, carefully pick up the template and fabric, using your fingers to pinch the fabric edges and paper together to prevent any shifting, and carry it to your sewing machine. Gently flip the paper and fabric sandwich over so that the paper template is printed side up, and position the paper and fabric sandwich under your needle to stitch the line next to section 7. Stitch along the line next to section 7 (highlighted in red in the photo), backstitching at the beginning and end to lock your stitches in place (Fig. 37). Open and press fabric 7 to the side with your iron. (Fig. 38).

Fig. 36



Fig. 37

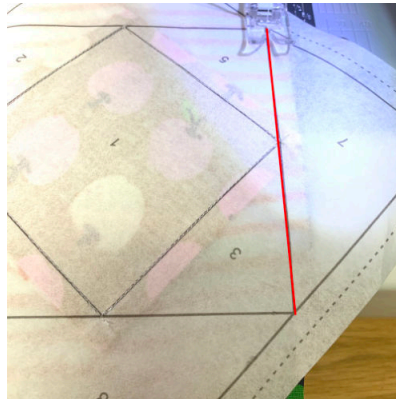


Fig. 38



Next, we need to trim the excess fabric before piecing section 8. Place the paper template printed side up and place your card stock on top of the paper, aligning the edge of the card stock with the line next to section 8 (Fig. 39). While holding the card stock in place to prevent shifting, fold the paper backward and over the card stock, making a nice crease. Then place your Add-a-Quarter ruler on top of the paper and card stock so that the thicker edge of the ruler is slotted against the piece of card stock (Fig. 40). Holding the ruler firmly in place, use a rotary cutter to trim the excess fabric (Fig. 41). You've just created a seam allowance for adding your next piece, section 8.

Fig. 39



Fig. 40



Fig. 41



The FPP Process: Piecing Section 8

Time to piece section 8. Place the paper template printed side down on your work surface. Next, place the fabric for section 8, right side down, aligning the edge with the clean edge you just finished trimming (Fig. 42). These aligned edges should be extending into section 8 by $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

Carefully pick up the template and fabric, using your fingers to pinch the fabric edges and paper together to prevent any shifting, and carry it to your sewing machine. Gently flip the paper and fabric sandwich over so that the paper template is printed side up, and position the paper and fabric sandwich under your needle to stitch the line next to section 8. Stitch along the line next to section 8 (highlighted in red in the photo), backstitching at the beginning and end to lock your stitches in place (Fig. 43). Open and press fabric 8 to the side with your iron. (Fig. 44).

Fig. 42



Fig. 43

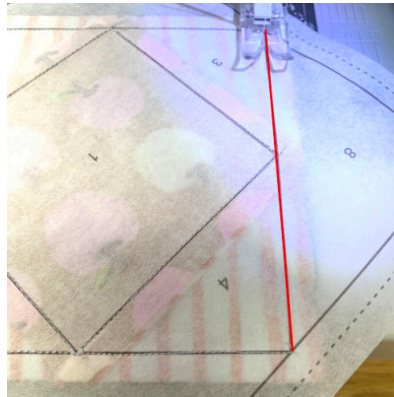


Fig. 44



Now, we need to trim the excess fabric before piecing the final section, section 9. Place the paper template printed side up and place your card stock on top of the paper, aligning the edge of the card stock with the line next to section 9 (Fig. 45). While holding the card stock in place to prevent shifting, fold the paper backward and over the card stock, making a nice crease. Then place your Add-a-Quarter ruler on top of the paper and card stock so that the thicker edge of the ruler is slotted against the piece of card stock (Fig. 46). Holding the ruler firmly in place, use a rotary cutter to trim the excess fabric (Fig. 47). You've just created a seam allowance for adding your next piece, section 9.

Fig. 45



Fig. 46



Fig. 47



The FPP Process: Piecing Section 9

Time to piece the final section, number 9. Place the paper template printed side down on your work surface. Next, place the fabric for section 9, right side down, aligning the edge with the clean edge you just finished trimming (Fig. 48). These aligned edges should be extending into section 9 by ¼”.

Carefully pick up the template and fabric, using your fingers to pinch the fabric edges and paper together to prevent any shifting, and carry it to your sewing machine. Gently flip the paper and fabric sandwich over so that the paper template is printed side up, and position the paper and fabric sandwich under your needle to stitch the line next to section 9. Stitch along the line next to section 9 (highlighted in red in the photo), backstitching at the beginning and end to lock your stitches in place (Fig. 49). Open and press fabric 9 to the side with your iron. (Fig. 50).

Fig. 48



Fig. 49

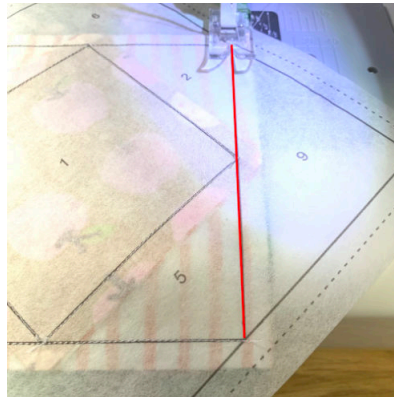


Fig. 50



Congratulations! You've foundation paper pieced an entire Economy Block! It's time to trim the edges of the finished block. To do this, you'll need to trim around the entire block on the dashed line. Grab a large ruler, align the edge with the dashed line and trim away the excess fabric (Fig. 51) on each side of the block until all four sides are neatly trimmed (Fig. 52). Now flip your block right side up (Fig. 53) and take pride in what you've just accomplished!

Fig. 51

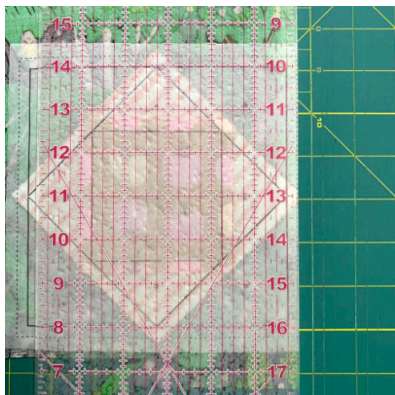


Fig. 52

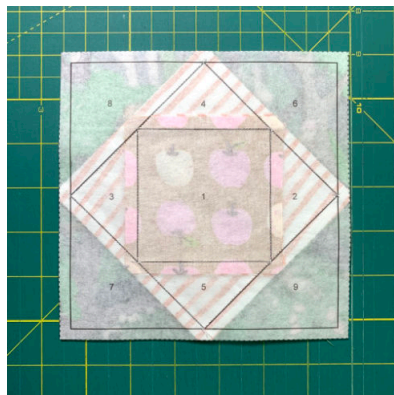


Fig. 53



Final Notes

This FPP pattern is a basic pattern that doesn't require stitching and joining multiple templates. Many detailed and intricate patterns will require you to join together two or more templates, but not to worry! The method for piecing a more detailed pattern is the very same.

When tackling a pattern with multiple templates, the templates will likely be labeled with letters as well as numbers. The letters denote the name of the template (A, B, C, etc.) while the numbers indicate the order in which you're to piece each section. (Always start with section 1 and work your way up.) Piece each template using the same technique as used in this tutorial. Trim and set aside each template aside as you finish piecing them, and when all templates are complete, follow the pattern's assembly instructions to join the templates together. (**Note:** When joining templates, you sew on the solid lines, not the dashed lines.)

Finally, on a personal note, I want to mention that there is a learning curve to foundation paper piecing, just as there is a learning curve to any other method of sewing. Learning a new technique takes practice. Don't be surprised if you find yourself referring back to this guide every so often until you get the hang of the process. And if you find this tutorial completely confusing, I recommend searching Google or YouTube and watching a few video tutorials about FPP. There are many, many tutorials online, and one may make more sense to you than another.

I hope you've found this tutorial helpful and the FPP process a little fun!