

Hand Positioning

The positioning of your hands is very important to the accuracy of your quilting. There are no hard-fast rules, just guidelines. I have the Machingers quilting gloves on.

You will be using the pads of your thumb, index and middle fingers to tension your quilt.

I occasionally have to use all five fingers on both hands if I have an especially difficult quilt.



You need to acquire an embroidery hoop style tensioning for your quilting. In order to achieve this, lightly pull in opposing directions with your finger pads and pull down with your thumbs. Keep a slightly firm pressure with your fingers without sucking your entire hand down to hold the quilt. This will give you more flexibility and control. .



I use the above hand position and tensioning when I am quilting my larger designs. When I quilt smaller designs such as feathers and backgrounds I use a different technique. I sit a little closer to my machine, drop my right elbow, and use just the tips of my right fingers to move the quilt sandwich. You get more flexibility this way and it makes it easier to do the little stuff.



Remember there are no hard and fast rules...just guidelines. You want flexibility, control and tension on your fabric and you may achieve this any way you wish.

Getting the “HummmPurrr” Rhythm

When I am in the classroom, the biggest stress to my students is getting their rhythm. It seems you have to be able to pat your head and rub your belly at the same time in order to get it right. I have been teaching the “getting your rhythm” part differently for over 15 years and without fail everyone gets it within 10-15 minutes. No pressure!

Before starting to free motion quilt there are a few hints. Make sure you are positioned properly at the machine...i.e., chair height is correct, your arms are resting flat on your machine, your body is centered to the needle, foot pedal is in front of you (not beside you). Make sure you have good lighting. Make sure you have some type of traction on your hands to aide in pushing your quilt sandwich through the machine.

The secret to a good rhythm and stitch length is the SOUND of your machine. Put a blank practice panel in your machine and just start sewing loopy lines and swirls. Bring your machine up to a good, steady medium range speed...I call it a humm-purr. It's not slow and choppy...it's not a high pitch fast...it's a good comfortable rhythm. You'll know it when you get it...you can almost relax and it feels good. Some students have said it reminds them of a train. If you have a hearing impairment you will be able to feel the rhythm/sound with your hands. Once you get that sound you must memorize it with your ears and hands. Sew like this for at least 10-15 minutes completely focusing on the sound and how it feels with your hands. This will place this sound/feeling in your muscle memory and every single time you sit down to quilt you will automatically bring your machine up to this same rhythm without even being aware of it. This becomes your “medium range” hummm-purrr speed. You will eventually have a high-speed humm-purr and a low-speed humm-purrr but it is the sound and feel that is the key.

The only thing you have to work on now is the movement of your hands. A good free motion stitch length is one that would match your piecing stitch length. Bring your machine up to that nice hum-purr and very slowly move your hands. See how tiny your stitches are? Now keeping your machine at the same exact sound move your hands a little bit faster...this should increase your stitch length. Keep adjusting your hand movement until your stitch length is the right size and is consistent.

Now bring your machine up to the hum-purr and move your hands quickly...see how large and choppy your stitches are? Keeping your machine at the same sound slow your hands down...your stitch length should get smaller.

Practice!

We all get SO tired of hearing that word but honestly, it's the best way to get your rhythm and stitch length where you want it to be. When I was learning I spent about 30 minutes each evening quilting the same designs over and over again. I would do straight lines going from left to right...and then do them right to left. I would do circles going clockwise and then counterclockwise, etc. You will use different muscles and different parts of your brain to go in different directions. You are literally retraining your brain...and for some of us it takes a little longer!

There are two kinds of free motion quilters...those that love lines as their guide and those that don't. I'm the one who loves lines...I'm an heirloom quilter and I rely on lines to give me guides and keep me accurate. Since I started out as a hand quilter I learned to quilt right on my marked lines and I took those lessons with me when I learned to free motion quilt on the machine. Learning to quilt without lines has been very difficult and I'm still trying to learn to relax and just "go for it".

Then there are those quilters, whom I'm very envious of, who can just grab a blank piece of fabric and quilt whatever is inside their head. Seriously, how DO they do that??? I can always identify those types of quilters in my classroom because they're already doodling on their practice panel before we even get to the part where they quilt traced designs from stencils. Once they try and follow the stenciled patterns they become frustrated.

Soooo, when you're practicing each day determine what kind of quilter YOU are...each is fine and there's nothing wrong with being either type. If you are type of quilter that loves the lines, I would challenge you to use the marked designs as a guide only...do your own thing with them. If you learn to do this from the beginning you will have a much easier journey than I've had.

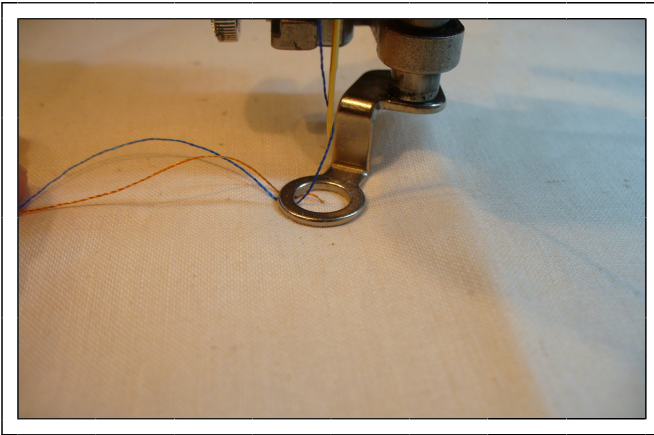
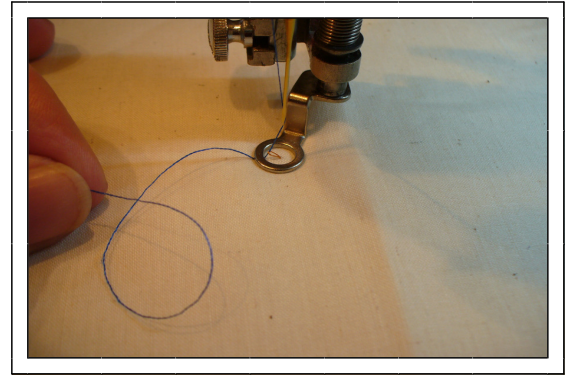
Another valuable tool to learn a particular motion or rhythm is to draw it first...over and over again. I invested in a small dry erase board and non-smelly markers and would start drawing my quilting designs over and over again. I didn't care if the design was perfect, I was simply trying to get the rhythm from my hand to my head. It's also the best way to learn feathers too.

Be patient with the process...it's a fabulous journey! Play good music, relax, enjoy the sound and feel of your new-found hummm-purrrr rhythm. :)

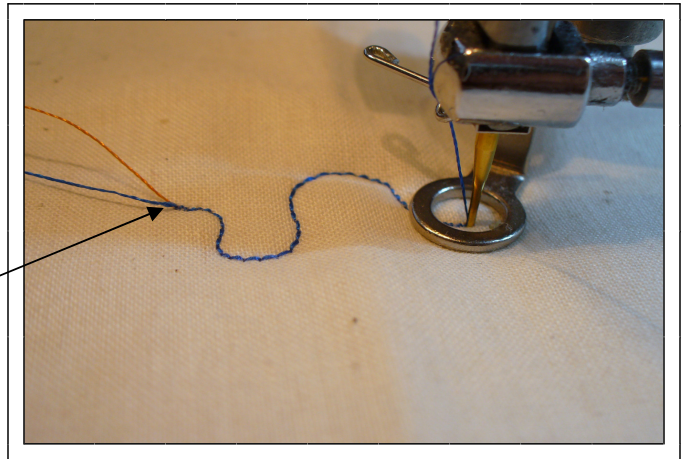
Beginning-Ending Lines

This is an easy way of starting and stopping your quilting lines ensuring a quilt back that looks as good as the front! It may take a bit to get your rhythm but once achieved it is easy as pie. [I filmed a YouTube video with Craftsy.com and this is posted on my website.](#)

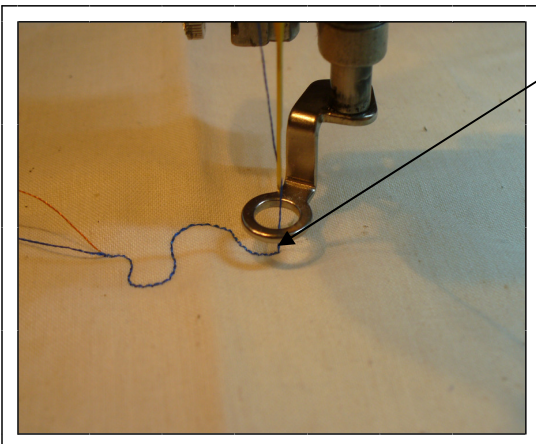
1. With your darning foot in the down position, lightly hold the top thread with your left thumb and index finger. Drop the needle down and bring it back up. Lightly pull on your top thread...this pulls up your bobbin thread.



2. Use your scissors to snag the bobbin thread and pull both threads over to the left and lightly hold down with your left index finger.

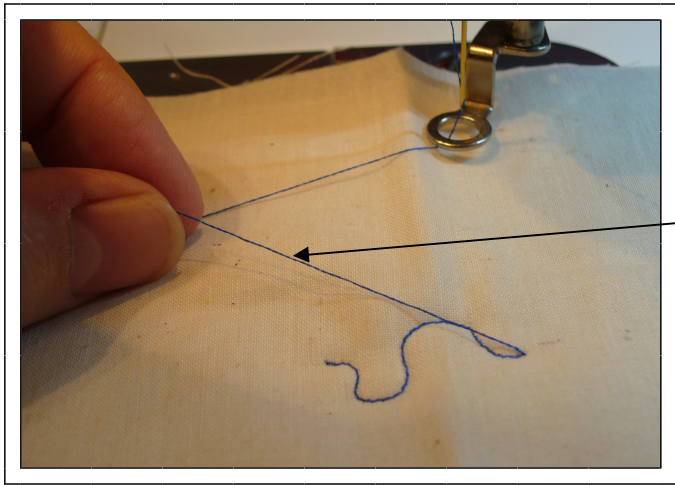
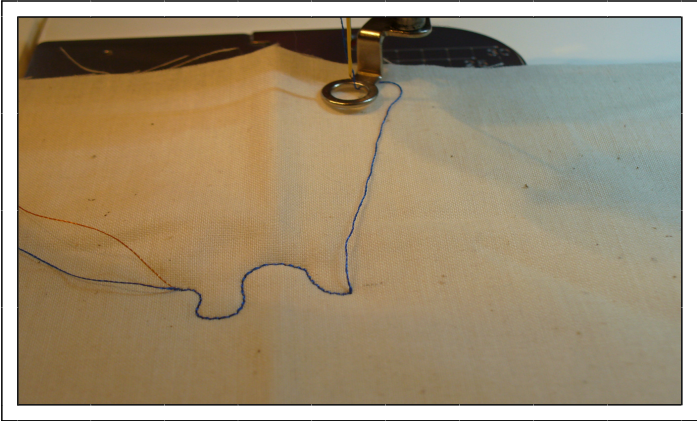


3. Take very tiny microstitches stacked **NEXT** to each other to begin your quilting line. I usually take about 4-5. You want them to be so small you could never rip them out. This will ensure that they will never fall out. Now start quilting normally.



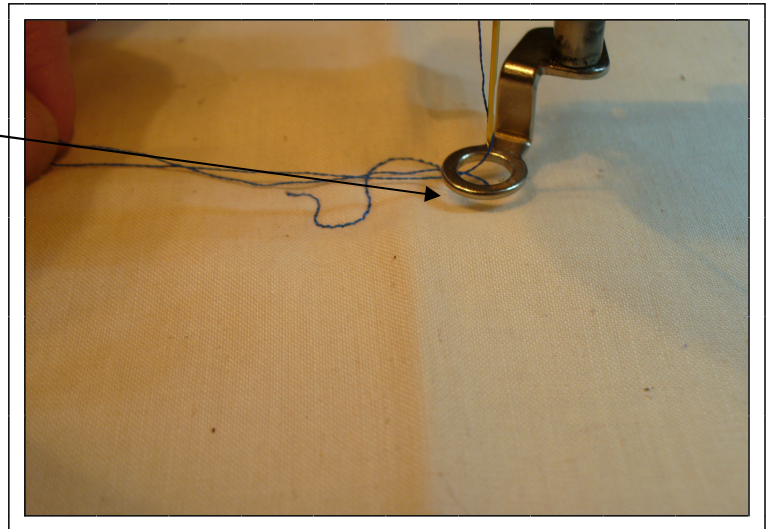
4. When you are ready to complete your quilting line, take the same very tiny microstitches that you did at the beginning of your line. Because your stitches are stacked so tight it will be almost impossible to bring up your bobbin thread here. Lift up your presser foot.

5. With your presser foot in the UP position, push your quilt sandwich back about 6". This puts slack in the top/bottom threads.

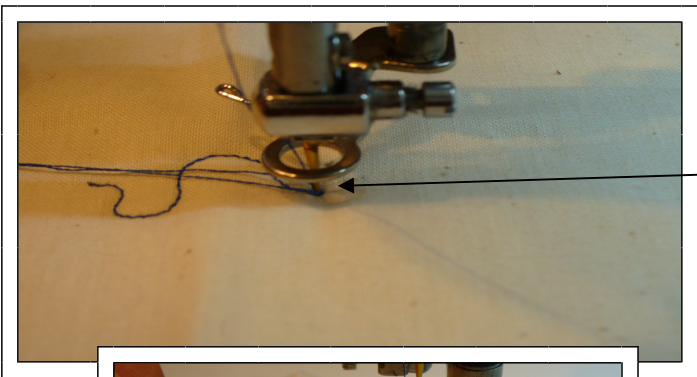


6. Grab the loose top thread with your left thumb and index finger and pull to the left.

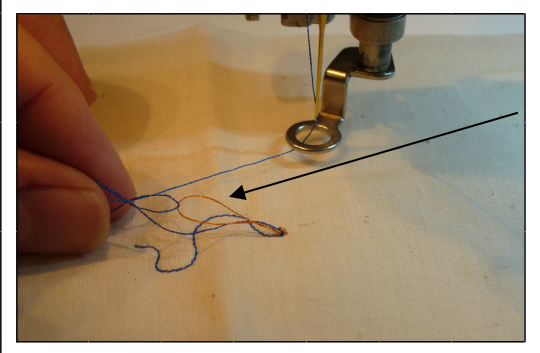
7. Reposition your quilt sandwich so the needle is right on top of the hole where your last stitch was taken. Remember to *lightly* hold on to the loop of thread.



8. With your presser foot either in the up or down position (differs with each machine), drop your needle and bring it back up again. Remember to very lightly hold on to the loop of thread.

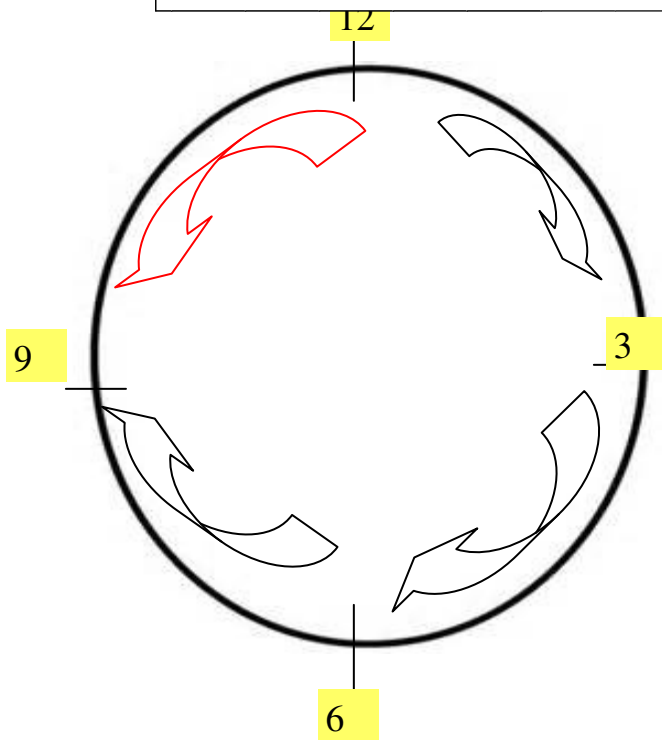


9. Pull on the top threads and the bobbin thread should easily pull up.



10. With your small scissors clip the threads at both ends of your quilting line right next to the fabric.

Hints for Quilting Designs

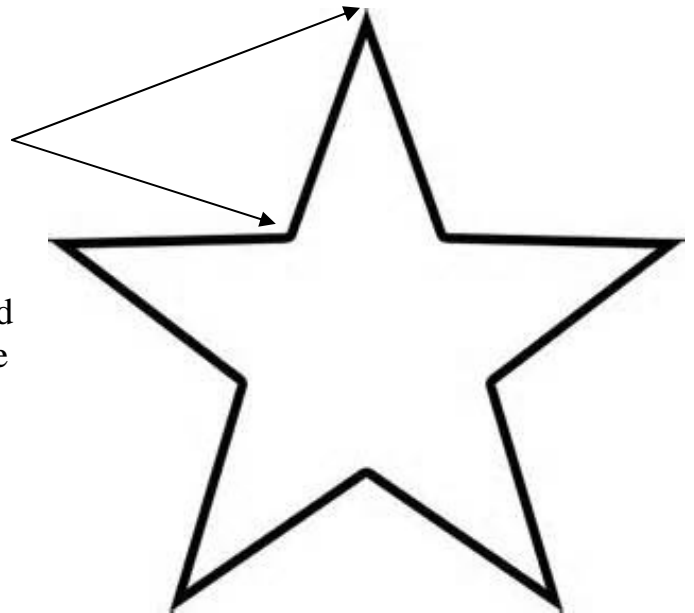


I consider circles one of the harder designs to do. I always felt I had to quilt the entire circle without stopping and I was never completely successful... plus the circle never ended up round! I recommend that you divide and conquer the circle into four parts. I compare this to the face of a clock...divide it into 12 o'clock, 3 o'clock, 6 o'clock and 9 o'clock. Position your hands so that you can quilt from 12-3 o'clock without stopping. Stopping with the needle in the down position, reposition your hands and quilt from 3-6. Now quilt from 6-9. Quilting from 9-12 is difficult because you can't see very well. If you have a small quilt you may lift up your presser foot (needle in the down position), and turn your quilt so you can finish the last quadrant.

If you have a large quilt in your machine, I recommend that you cut your threads, go back up to 12 o'clock and quilt counterclockwise back down to 9 o'clock. You have full visibility and full control if you quilt your designs coming towards you rather than going backwards. You're also allowed to tip your quilt to the left or to the right to gain better visibility. Do what works for you and what is comfortable for you. Remember YOU are the boss of your quilt!

When you are quilting a design with points I recommend that you take two stitches in place to achieve a sharp point. By taking the two stitches, this locks your bobbin thread and top thread together tightly and you don't get a soft rounded curve. This is a great place to stop and change your hand position in order to get to the next point.

I recommend that you always start/stop at a junction where two lines cross or join. You are less likely to see a little bobble.



Practical Tips

Be sure your workspace is set up properly so you are comfortable at your machine...have good lighting and a comfortable chair.

Make sure you have some sort of traction on your hands, i.e. gloves, etc.

Turn on some good music and relax.

Always start and stop your quilting designs where a line joins or crosses and always stop with the needle in the down position.

If you are having difficulty quilting a large design, this tip may help...Think of your design as the face of a clock and visually break it up into four parts...12,3,6 and 9 o'clock.

Start quilting the design at 12 o'clock and quilt it clockwise coming down to about 3 o'clock-ish. Position your hands so you can get from 12-3 without stopping (*always start and stop where lines join or intersect*).

Once you get to 3 o'clock-ish, stop and reposition your hands so you can get to 6 o'clock-ish. Stop...reposition your hands and quilt up towards 9 o'clock and stop when you no longer have good visibility.

Secure and clip your threads and go back up to 12 o'clock. Now position your hands so you can get from 12-9 o'clock-ish and quilt counter-clockwise to complete your design. If you have a large quilt in your machine don't try to rotate the quilt around to complete the design. If you have a little quilt you are more than welcome to spin your piece around to finish your design to avoid clipping and restarting.

Remember to secure your threads every time you begin or end a line. Remember to bring up your bobbin thread at the beginning and ending of each line.

Don't turn the quilt while you are quilting...this makes it ten times harder. Float the quilt to the right, left, up and down to quilt your designs.

Don't be stressed about staying on your marked designs. Use your marked lines as a "guide" where your quilting designs **could** be but do your own thing! Stitch over designs 2-3 times to add depth and dimension missing the lines each time. Add your own inspirations and details.

Practice about 30 minutes a day...go from right to left and then left to right. Quilt your designs clockwise and then counter-clockwise. Quilt them going upwards and then bring them back down. You will use different muscles for each direction you sew. You are literally retraining your brain to work differently and this is what the practice is for. Be patient with yourself and celebrate all the little accomplishments along the way! You are going to love it!