

Episode 8 Class Notes: Set Up Your Sewing Machine for Success

A Simpler Way to Quilt: The Controlled Quilting Technique

This technique is a game-changer for many people. I know so many quilters who have tried Free Motion Quilting without success, so I started experimenting with my machine to see if there was another way to quilt - one that would work hand in hand with my Quilt As You Go technique.

Let me help you understand how to adjust your sewing machine so you can quilt most designs in a simple, controlled way.

In my opinion, the biggest challenge with Free Motion Quilting is getting the stitch length right, since the machine does not regulate stitch length when the feed dogs are dropped. Another common issue is maintaining consistent pressure on the quilt as you move it under the needle. Without even pressure, the stitches can jump to the side.

With my Controlled Quilting technique, these issues disappear. You'll be quilting with the feed dogs up and your stitch length set to exactly what you need, making the process easier and more precise.

Quilting the Blocks

In this episode, we will be quilting blocks B2, B1, A3, and C2. You may notice that I have used blocks A2 and A3 interchangeably; this won't affect the finished result of your quilt.

Start by choosing the block you want to quilt first. If you are new to quilting or have never tried the Controlled Quilting technique, I recommend starting with a simpler design to build confidence.

Once you've selected your block, follow the directions below to set up your machine and get started.



Setting up the Machine:

To make quilting easier, we need to make a simple adjustment to the sewing machine. However, since all machines are different, I can't guarantee that every machine will have the same adjustment options. I suggest checking your machine manual or visiting your machine dealer for assistance.

For this technique, use an Open Toe Foot—this is the same foot used for Blanket Stitch Appliqué. It has an open front, allowing you to clearly see the lines you need to quilt.



The Bernina 20C Open Toe Foot I use on my machine.

Machine Settings:

1. Set the stitch length to 3 (or your preferred stitch length)
2. Keep the feed dogs up
3. Adjust the pressure of the foot (refer to your machine manual for instructions on this adjustment)

Why Adjust the Pressure of the Foot?

Adjusting the presser foot pressure allows for smooth stitching around curves without lifting the foot. This prevents fabric puckering, which often happens when too much downward pressure is applied.

Testing & Fine-Tuning the Settings:

- Draw a few straight and curved lines on fabric
- As you stitch along these shapes, adjust the foot pressure until you achieve a smooth, easy flow
- Take note of the pressure settings for different types of curves, this will help you quickly adjust for future quilting
- ***Tighter curves require less pressure***
- If the fabric becomes uncontrollable, it means too much foot pressure has been removed, and you need to increase it slightly.

With these simple adjustments, your fabric will glide freely under the needle, making quilting smoother and more controlled.

Threads and Notions I Use in This Quilt

Thread Choices

I like to use [Wonderfil DecoBob 80wt](#) on the top thread and [Superior Clear MonoPoly thread](#) in the bobbin.

Setting Up DecoBob Thread

I highly recommend using the [Wonderfil Thread Dispenser](#). It's a brilliant little tool that helps the thread unwind smoothly and eliminates any twists from thread memory.

1. Place the thread dispenser on the upright thread post of your machine
2. Feed the thread through the split on the side of the dispenser
3. Thread the machine as normal

You'll notice as you sew that the bottom part of the thread dispenser rotates, preventing the thread from unraveling too quickly, which helps eliminate thread splitting.

Sew Slip Mat

The [Sew Slip Mat](#) is fantastic for helping fabric glide smoothly under the needle.

- Make sure to use the mat with the rectangle cutout for the feed dogs to stay up
- The mat with the small circle cutout will not work with this quilting method

Winding the Bobbin with MonoPoly Thread

When winding the bobbin with [MonoPoly thread](#), it's essential to wind at a much slower speed.

- This thread is very fine, and if it is wound too fast, it can catch underneath the previous layers, causing issues.
- Only fill the bobbin halfway—because it's so fine, a half-filled bobbin of MonoPoly is equivalent to a full bobbin of regular thread. Overfilling the bobbin can lead to tension problems.

Door Wedges for Machine Tilt

Door wedges are an unexpected but fantastic tool for quilting!

- Placing wedges under the back of the machine tilts it forward, giving you a better view of the stitching line.
- Another great benefit of this tilt is that it helps relieve strain on your neck and shoulders by reducing the need to bend forward to see the needle and lines clearly.

Practice Piece

Before starting your quilt, I recommend preparing a practice piece.

1. Cut a good-sized square from your quilt sandwich (top fabric, batting, and backing).
2. Iron the three layers together.
3. Draw a few different quilting designs on the fabric and practice stitching along the lines.
4. Work on adjusting the pressure of the sewing foot until you feel it is no longer pushing the fabric as you stitch.
5. Check your stitch length and thread tension—make small adjustments until you're happy with the result.

Practicing first helps you fine-tune your machine settings before moving on to your quilt!

Stay tuned for the next episode to quilt the next blocks – Pauline 