

How to be a Prolific Quilter – Cheryl Petreman

People seem to get the impression that I sit home all day doing nothing but sew. While it's true that I have neither a job nor children, I only average about an hour per day in the sewing room. The productivity gain comes from some of the techniques that I've learned along the way:

- It is absolutely essential that you find somewhere that you can leave your sewing machine, ironing station & cutting board set up & ready for use at all times. My first "sewing room" was literally the closet in the guest bedroom – just because I've now taken over the "master" bedroom doesn't mean that I couldn't get by with less! Hang a curtain or buy a screen, but don't waste time taking things out & putting them back everytime you want to sew!
- Sew at least 15 minutes everyday! Don't wait until you manage to clear an entire day and/or afternoon to sew... life has a nasty way of changing your plans. Suppose you want 9-Patch blocks – break it down into daily tasks & you'll have several completed at the end of the week:
 1. Cut strips
 2. Sew strips together
 3. Press strip-sets open
 4. Subcut strip-sets
 5. Sew 9-Patch blocks
 6. Press blocks open
- Have multiple projects of various skill levels on the go at any one time. You need at least one hand-project to work on while waiting in doctor's offices, etc. There are days when you absolutely cannot concentrate, and you should just sew strips or do something else rather mindless. Other times, you're bored and need the challenge of paper-piecing, etc.
- Stop being a perfectionist! From 2+ feet away, nobody will be able to tell if your seams don't match... There are **NO QUILT POLICE!**
- Ripping out stitching takes time... If you just can't bear to live with a mistake, it's much faster to cut new fabric & re-sew the block. However, after giving away 100 quilts+, I have **never** had anyone say: "oh, look at that mistake"... they are generally thrilled to receive something unique!
- Learn to sew without pins... You can press the seam allowances so that they lock together. Ask an experienced quilter to show you how.
- The more sewing that can be done before you cut, the faster the quilt goes together... Just think about making ½ square triangle blocks. Previously, one would cut two triangles, stack them on top of each other & sew on the diagonal edge. It's faster to iron a square in ½ diagonally, stack it on another square, sew on either side of the diagonal, & cut them appart. Checkout other methods in "How do you like your HSTs?" in May's newsletter. To be even more efficient use Anita Hallock's *Fast Patch* method to go straight from squares to rows of HSTs or flying geese.
- Following the same observation that time is wasted while stacking one piece on top of another, Debbie Caffery has come up with *Power Cutting*. Suppose you want to make 4-patches & have sewn a light strip to a dark strip twice. Normally, you'd probably go ahead and subcut each of the strips & then stack the 'pairs' individually. With power cutting, you carefully position the two strip sets right sides together, matching the centre seam & **then** subcut. The pieces can go straight under the needle without any more fussing.
- Stack your strips before you sub-cut. With a sharp blade in your rotary cutter & you should be able to go through 6-8 layers of fabric at a time.

How to be a Prolific Quilter (continued)

- Cutting is time consuming... If you have extra pre-cut strips at the end of a project, then **sort** them into zip-lock bags by strip-width. When a large ziplock (27x28cm) is full, add a couple metres of tone-on-tone background & there's enough fabric to make a scrappy single bed quilt or couch throw.
- If you have an overflowing scrap bag, then either get rid of it (donate it to a new quilter) or cut it up into usable sizes while watching TV. The definition of "usable size" is up to you... it depends on which scrap quilt you'd like to make next... I personally keep bags of 1½", 2", 2½", ..., 6", 6½" strips/squares. Bonnie Hunter has lots of ideas in her *Scrap User's System*.
- Threading your machine & dealing with knots on the bobbin side is time consuming... I'd say that 85% of sewing machine problems have to do with the thread jumping out of the take up lever... 10% of the remaining are due to the needle unthreading itself... If you chain piece and **always** leave a piece of fabric under the needle, then you can avoid both of these.

Taking it one step further is Bonnie Hunter's *Leaders & Enders* idea. While working on other projects, she always has a box of 2" squares beside her machine. When done chain-piecing during any step of her project, she simply pairs up 2 squares and sews off her project & onto the squares. When ready to start again, she sews off the squares & onto the project fabric. Over the course of time, she completes an entire scrap quilt without consciously working on it...

References:

Making Time to Quilt by Carol Miller (http://www.quiltuniversity.com/making_time.htm)
10-20-30 Minutes to Sewing or *10-20-30 Minutes to Quilt* by Nancy Zieman (*Sewing with Nancy*)
Sew Fast, Faster, Fastest by Sue Hausman (*America Sews*)
Anita Hallock's *Fast Patch* books (<http://www.pacinfo.com/~hallock>)
Power Cutting by Debbie Caffrey
Linda MacPhee's classes & videos (<http://www.macpheeworkshop.com>)
Kaye Wood's Quilting Friends TV Show & Books (<http://www.kayewood.com>)
Bonnie Hunter's *Scrap Users System* and *Leaders & Enders* (<http://www.quiltville.com>)
Rodale's Successful Quilting Library – titles include *Perfect Piecing*, *Applique Made Easy*, etc.