

# LILY'S FAST AND ACCURATE CUTTING RULES

- **Change your blade! Do not muck up a \$10-\$12/yard piece of fabric for want of a \$7 blade. You will make your life, your fabric's life, and your mat's life miserable. I change my blade every three projects, or whenever I'm doing something that requires cutting through serious layers (6+). Sharp blade = accuracy = fun times while cutting!**
- Never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, use your mat for measuring your cuts. If you can't resist those seemingly innocent lines and numbers, flip the sucker over and use the blank side. The numbers are good for quilt shop workers measuring yardage to lop off, not to make a precise cut. Every time your "self-healing" mat takes one for the team on a particular line, it pushes those lines around and pretty soon you're off an eighth of an inch here, there, and everywhere.
- **Always use the shortest ruler possible to get the job done. You'd be amazed how many wobbly strips and trapezoidal rectangles you will make when your unnecessarily long ruler bends off to the side oh-so-sneakily as you cut. The 8.5"x12.5" is my favorite. 4"x14" is my second favorite.**
- Do not be afraid to fold your fabric to get a straight edge and to shorten the distance you have to cut. Fabric loves to fold on the grain, so it will naturally line up the fibers up for you.
- **With the rare exception of stripes, I always fold my fabric once more than the way it comes off the bolt, so folded edge to selvage edge. This gives you a cutting distance of 10-11" which gives you a significantly better chance of making it from one edge to the other without the wobble-wobbles.**
- Always push DOWN on your cutter, never forward. It is a wheel, if you push down on it, with it at a slight angle, it will naturally roll forward, but instead of rolling over your fabric, it will cut through it.
- **NEVER cut toward yourself. All health and amputation hazards aside, this is inaccurate, sloppy and you're much better off just running the cut from beginning to end again rather than end to beginning.**
- Do not be embarrassed to own 86 or more specialty rulers. I love rulers and I'm a very fast cutter in no small part because I have the perfect ruler for every task. Please put your initials on them before you come to class, or be prepared to inadvertently leave them at the Ruler Orphanage, aka Little Timber Quilts & Candy.
- **If you refuse to own that many cutting tools, and if you only treat yourself to one specialty cutting item, buy yourself June Taylor's Shape-Cut Plus. It is the first tool I bought, and still the one I use the most.**
- Your rulers would prefer if you didn't put them in a pile, and I would too. It's impossible to be a true speed cutter when you have to sift through a stack of your umpteen rulers. Buy or make a slotted ruler holder so you can quickly and easily select the one you want. Nails in the wall or peg board are also great, especially for floppier tools, like the Shape-Cut. Piling can distort your rulers. Flat rulers are also a fast way to destroy a rotary blade (you hit the side of one of those puppies with any momentum and that blade is finished).
- **Try a 45mm and a 60mm cutter. You'd be surprised how it changes the feel of cutting. I can't cut accurately with a 60mm cutter because it's too big to be comfortable in my hands. Other quilters find that a 45mm is uncomfortably small to hold. I also have to have a straight cutter so I can flip it from left to right. If you have an ergonomic cutter, consider getting a matching set, lefty and righty.**
- Eight layers of fabric is about the most you can cut through and still have ACCURACY. If you're lopping up chunks to paper piece or to fuse onto Quiltsmart or if it's something that doesn't need to be exactly 4 5/8", by all means, cut through as many as 16 at a time...I've even gotten through 24 with a 60mm blade!

- **If you feel up for a challenge, learn to use your left hand (or right, if you're a lefty). The biggest challenge to cutting quickly AND accurately is fabric movement. If you can cut on either end of the fabric comfortably, you'll be faster and more accurate.**
- If you aren't up for a challenge, cut in a space that allows you to stand on multiple sides of your cutting surface. If you can't maneuver around your cutting surface, try either a rotating mat, or manually rotating your regular mat. Be careful not to shift your fabric when you do this.
- **Do not cut on your kitchen table, cut on your kitchen counter. Height is important not only to accuracy and strength, but to your poor back! Kitchen counters are designed to be a comfortable height to stand at, tables are a comfortable height to *sit* at.**
- When possible, cut and subcut without moving the fabric. For example, if I need 60 2" squares, I know that I can get about 20 out of each strip, so I'll zip off three strips (I won't lie, I'd use my handy Shape-Cut), then either spin my mat so the side of the strips I just cut was now toward me, then I'd cut 5 2" "strips and voila! 60 squares, 10 cuts.
- **Beware of the 1/2" that lurks on one side of your ruler. If you're new to using your ruler to measure, that little 1/2" can really be a burr in your buttocks. If you have trouble remembering to notice, use a permanent highlighter marker and color the 1/2" in, this will help you keep your sides straight.**
- Once you've moved your fabric, you have to square up again. Bummer. This is why lazy quilters strive to move their fabric as little as possible – Accuracy. Also laziness.
- **If you're unfamiliar with using your ruler to measure, you square up one side by lining up your bottom fold (remember, our fabric is folded again, fold to selvedge) along any chosen horizontal line on your ruler. Then, press firmly down on your ruler and cut on the LEFT hand side (or right, if you're a lefty). Then you can use that nice square edge by lining up the size you want (say, the 5" line) along that tidy new edge and your chosen horizontal line is still along the fold, then you cut with your RIGHT hand, having never moved anything but the ruler. Lefties will cut with their LEFT hands. If you need to make multiple strips and don't have a shape-cut, just keep on sliding your ruler down the line until that 5" vertical line and your chosen horizontal line are on the side cut and the bottom fold, respectively.**
- If you have issues putting enough force into your cuts to get through layers and even a new blade doesn't help, you may be flexing the wrong muscle. Good cutting comes from the core, not the arm. While having a nice strong shoulder won't hurt, the real ticket is to flex your abs and use them to put your body weight into cutting rather than making your arm go it alone.
- **If you have carpal tunnel or arthritis or poor hand strength, an ergonomic cutter might make all the difference in your accuracy and endurance.**
- Close your blade! I don't care if you're in the privacy of your own home, don't have any pets or children or cohabitants, close that blade! Eventually you will lop off your toe when you knock it off your counter onto your foot, and yes, I have seen someone's toe lopped off by her cutter. She brought it in in a little box of ice to show me on her way to the ER. Quilters, close your blades, I don't want to see your toes on ice!
- **Use the tips of your fingers, not your palm, to hold your ruler. Again if you have weak hands, carpal tunnel, or arthritis, the amazing people who keep coming up with fun toys have invented the Gypsy Gripper for you, which is basically like having two big salamander fingers to hold your ruler with.**

- Gripper dots are your friend. They are cheap and are particularly useful on oddly shaped rulers that don't already have “grippiness” on the back.
- **If you really shred something by sawing back and forth with a dull blade, these pieces will not be accurate and that effect will ripple through your entire quilt. I have taught a lot of classes where much misery could have been averted by buying an extra fat quarter and cutting a couple new pieces rather than limping along with misshapen troll pieces. Getting a little extra fabric never hurts.**
- When cutting a series of strips or pieces, always move the piece you just cut, not the piece you are going to cut.
- **Exceptionally skinny triangles and curves do not like to be layered too much. 4-6 is probably plenty. In some cases, I daresay 2 is even the maximum. The only thing slower than cutting 2 layers at a time is having to cut everything twice because it was so inaccurate the first time. Know when to accept defeat and cut a measly 2 layers at once.**
- When layering pieced things to cut, interlock their seams like you would while sewing. In some situations this can work out just dandy—like making four or nine-patches from strip-pieced units. Cut them and they're all ready to be sewn!
- **Cutting quickly gets you to the sewing and the finished product faster. Cutting accurately saves you all sorts of agony, expense, and easing. Happy cutting!**