



# **3 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR FREE MOTION QUILTING**

**by Chatterbox Quilts**



## 3 Ways to Improve Your Free Motion Quilting



I believe that every quilter should know how to free motion quilt. It can be the most creative part of the quilting process and it is a shame that so many quilters are hesitant to do it. It's just another technique like the others that quilters learn so why is there so much resistance and hesitation to doing it?

A lot of the obstacles that stop people from doing free motion quilting come from a fear of failure. Whether it's not knowing where to start, the risk of "ruining" a quilt or the concern that the result won't compare favourably against someone else's quilt. Most reluctance in doing free motion quilting, whether it's manifested as "fear" or "not enough time" is really a reflection of the quilter's feeling of lack of control because they're not certain of a successful outcome. The only way to solve this dilemma is to gain knowledge and experience so that you can confidently free motion quilt, knowing that your efforts will be successful.



I'm going to give you 3 ways to quickly improve your free motion quilting so that you can develop the confidence to use it in your quilting.

Click [here](#) to watch the video.



## **1. Set Up Your Machine**

The first thing you want to learn is how to set up your sewing machine for free motion quilting. It does not matter how skilled you are if your machine is not set up properly. Quilting will be frustrating and the results will be poor which will only reinforce the feeling that you are incapable of learning the technique. Here is a quick list of things to consider when setting up your machine:

- Choose the correct needle and thread
- Wind your bobbin with the same thread as you are using in the top
- Ensure that the feed dogs are down or are covered up
- Have a straight stitch needle plate installed
- Use a slippery surface over the bed of the machine to let the quilt sandwich slide easily
- Use gloves or paddles on top of your quilt to ensure that you can control your quilt sandwich
- Use speed control on your machine (if it has it) to eliminate the need to control the speed of the sewing machine. That way you can focus on controlling the speed of moving the fabric to get the stitch length you want.

## **2. Build Your Confidence with Quick Wins**

Building confidence in your abilities is key to being successful at free motion quilting and to enjoy doing it. The greater your confidence, the more likely you will use this technique and the better you will become at it. Confidence will also allow you to become more creative and experimental.

Confidence doesn't show up overnight, you have to build it by practicing free motion quilting. Here's a list of ways to build your confidence and also reduce the risk of morale-destroying disasters:

- KISS – Keep It Sew Simple Start simple and get fancy later in your project, motifs, design and materials
- Choose simple, low risk smaller projects when you are first learning. Don't start on large, intricate quilts! This way you can get good results using your smaller repertoire of designs that you know and, if something goes wrong, you won't have wasted time or money.
- Do not put yourself in a position where you are on a tight deadline. You definitely do not want to be trying something new or unfamiliar when under time pressure.



- Do not attempt free motion quilting on your extra special heirloom project until you have developed enough skill to do it justice. If you need it completed before you are ready, get someone else to quilt it for you.
- Finally, do not compare your results to anyone else's. There is no faster way to destroy the pleasure you get from quilting than to compare your work to others. Don't do it!

### **3. Practice the Right Things**

Free motion quilting is a lot like playing a musical instrument in that it involves your brain and your muscles equally. You can't learn the piano by just reading a book or watching a video, you have to actually have to play to develop the "muscle memory" that allows you to hit the right keys at the right time. When it comes to free motion quilting the more muscle memory you develop, the better your results will be. Unfortunately, the only way to develop muscle memory is to practice, however not all practice is equally effective. Here are some ways to increase the effectiveness of your practice:

- When you are first learning free motion quilting make a lot of what I call "cat blankets". This is where you practice on scrap fabric or low value projects so that if things don't work out (and they won't the first time you try) then the project can be "repurposed" as a cat or dog blanket.
- Have some practice sandwiches (2 fat quarters plus batting) made up and the sewing machine set up ahead of time so that you can do some practice during periods when time is limited. You can make significant progress by practicing just 15 minutes per day.
- Use contrasting thread so you can see your free motion quilting progress.
- Choose a limited repertoire of quilting motifs that you like and practice them until you are "good" at them. You can then use these motifs when you are working on your project. It is better to be good at a few motifs than mediocre at many.
- Finally, always practice your quilt motif on a scrap quilt sandwich before stitching it on your "real" project. This allows you to warm up, rediscover your "muscle memory" for the motif, and ensure that your machine is "behaving" before getting started. It also allows you to check your thread tension before you start the real quilting.



- Remember “**Practice Makes Progress**”. When learning free motion quilting, it’s important to concentrate on progression rather than striving for, and being disappointed when you don’t attain, perfection.

## **In Conclusion**

If you apply these three ways to improve your free motion quilting, you will not only improve your technique but also your confidence. The combination of technical competence and personal confidence will be what helps you achieve awesome results and really enjoy the complete quilting process.

Good luck and have fun free motion quilting!

Click [here](#) to watch Kim’s video:



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