

Sewing Tips from Nancy Zieman and Friends!

Last week I posted 50 of my favorite sewing and quilting tips, plus asked you to add your ideas to Sew Smart & Sew Kind. My hope was to receive 50 additional ideas. As you can tell from the heading, I received more than requested—in just four days. My tips are listed first, then the new ideas are listing from #51 through #109. Thank you to all of you when added a tips! What a fun project!

- #1 When you receive a compliment on something you've sewn, quilted, or embroidered, graciously say, "Thank you." Please don't point out the flaw that only you can find.
- #2 Support your local sewing and quilting stores.
- #3 Teach your kids or grandkids to sew on a button and fix a hem. Give them a small sewing kit when they leave for college. (If they can master texting, they can certainly sew on a button.)
- #4 Tie a tag on your best sewing scissors that's labeled "For fabric cutting only." Or, keep it in a box in the freezer with the label, "Chicken Livers." (This hint is attributed to Nancy Harp, Aurora, MN.)
- #5 Store unfinished projects in clear, plastic bins that have snap-on covers. All pieces will stay together and you'll not lose sight what's inside.
- #6 Give a small sewing kit to a member of a bridal party: thread (white, black, and the color of the attendant's dresses), needles, and scissor (or nail clippers to cut threads).
- #7 Keep a small sewing repair kit in the glove box of your car.
- #8 Join a guild or sewing group. You'll find inspiration and friendship.
- #9 Make and give away something every year to someone you'll never meet. The gift is in the giving. Use the best fabric that your budget affords. The project that you made may be the only made-with-love gift that person receives in his/her life. See www.creativekindness.com for a listing of volunteer projects and/or organizations.
- #10 Use a calendar to quickly keep track of what you've sewn or quilted in a year. Pin a swatch of fabric at the date completed along with a few notes. You might amaze yourself with what you accomplished in a year.
- #11 Start a new sewing or quilting project by cleaning/oiling your machine and changing the needle. An ounce of prevention . . .
- #12 Donate aged fabric to a [charitable sewing group](#). If you haven't used it in five or more years, it's likely you never will. You'll feel good about cleaning out your fabric stash and the recipients will appreciate the donation.
- #13 Listen to books on tape (or CD) while sewing or quilting.
- #14 Keep water-soluble stabilizer in a zip-lock plastic bag to prevent it from drying out.
- #15 Plug your sewing machine(s), iron and light into an electrical strip. When leaving your sewing area, you'll

just have one switch to turn off and you'll never wonder if you left the iron turned on!

#16 A seam sealant like Fray Block or Fray Check is a must to seal all serger thread tails or edges. If squeezed directly to the fabric, you may get more than you bargained for. Apply the sealant to a Q-tip and then drab your fabric for greater control.

#17 To save time later, wind several bobbins of thread before starting a project.

#18 Don't waste your money on buying cheap thread—you get what you pay for.

#19 Make it a habit to clip the corner of fabric that you've pre-washed. This little demarcation will save you time and your sanity.

#20 Schedule a sewing escape each year, such as an evening class, a 3-day event, or a quilt show. It will get your creative juices flowing!

#21 Thank the person who taught you to sew or quilt.

#22 Cut elastic to the needed length after inserting it into a casing. It will be easier to handle and less elusive!

#23 Every time you sew or quilt look for some small way to improve the process.

#24 Write the pattern number or book reference of your project inside the hem or another inconspicuous area, using a permanent fabric-marking pen such as Pigma Pen. That reference might come in handy some day!

#25 Add a label to every sewn-with-love project given away. Besides writing or stitching your name, add the date and occasion.

#26 If you're not going to use your fabric purchase right away, write the yardage on an Avery label (or another type of sticker) and apply to the fabric. It will save time when you're mulling through your fabric stash, determining if you have enough yardage for your next project.

#27 Keep several tubes of paper glue stick at hand. The glue works as a basting or tacking aid when positioning trim or "pinning" hems. Not to worry, the glue dries clear and will not gum-up your machine.

#28 Use tiny clothespins or paper clips as pin alternatives when working with thick fabrics or multi-layers of fabric.

#29 Cans of tuna or caviar are excellent pattern weights.

#30 Start sewing for the holidays in September. Some recommend July, I just can't get interested in Christmas gifts when it's more enjoyable to be out of doors. Besides, we already missed that date! September works for me.

#31 If you garden as well as sew or quilt, use leftover crosswise quilt strips to tie tomato vines to a supportive post. The soft fabric doesn't damage the vine.

#32 Enjoy the sewing process. It's therapeutic!

- #33 Keep a small empty container that once housed, for example, vitamins in your sewing area. Use it to dispose of worn-out needles. Your garbage collector will thank you.
- #34 Position your ironing board away from the sewing machine. Getting up, walking, and stretching will keep your back happy.
- #35 Don't hide your sewing machine in a closet. Assign a corner of a bedroom, great room, or office as your space. After all, we keep our computers at easy access!
- #36 For an almost instant raised cutting table, cut (or have someone help you cut) four, 6-8" lengths of PVC pipe. Slide the pipes over the legs of a heavy-duty folding table. Presto!
- #37 Read the pattern or project instructions, start to finish, before beginning a project. (Sometime I just "read" the illustrations and then read the instructions if the step looked confusing.) You'll be able to head-off confusion if you have an idea of the entire process before you begin.
- #38 To mark a point where you need to stop stitching, insert two pins close together. It works for me just like a stop sign.
- #39 A bar of soap with the paper covering intact is a pleasant-smelling pincushion substitute.
- #40 If the thread in your sewing machine breaks, here are two tips that solve the problem 90% of the time: 1) Totally rethread the machine. 2) If #1 doesn't work, change to a larger size needle.
- #41 Attention Embroiderers: Use strips of Blue Painter Tape to position a project to the hooped stabilizer.
- #42 When combining fabrics, the inclination is to choose all medium shades. Combining light, medium, and dark fabrics will give your project more eye-appeal.
- #43 Use Sticky Notes to mark frequently used cutting lines on your quilting rulers. These visual markings will improve your accuracy.
- #44 Use a flannel-backed vinyl tablecloth as a temporary design wall. Pin under a casing at one end of the tablecloth, thread a curtain rod through the casing, and hang the design wall with two small nails at each end of the rod.
- #45 If you don't have a lot of cupboard or drawer space, use a cutlery carrier to store frequently used sewing notions.
- #46 For knot-free hand sewing, run a threaded needle through a dryer sheet a few times. The anti-cling solution will give you smooth hand sewing.
- #47 Cut drinking straws in half and place over the spool pins of your thread rack to increase the capacity.
- #48 Give a start-to-sew kit to a friend. Include scissors, tape measure, pins, pincushion, seam ripper, and a coupon for a personalized sewing lesson with you!

#49# Keep a roll of paper toweling near the ironing board. When fusing web or interfacing, place sheets of the toweling on the ironing board. If the fusible sticks to the paper towels, simply toss!

#50 Count your blessings. Be thankful for the gift of creating with your hands.

New Tips from my Blog Friends

#51 from Gloria Wright. Be sure to watch Sewing With Nancy for some great instruction and wonderful shortcuts and ideas!

#52 from Jennifer Carson. Try something new! If you've never sewn a doll or stuffed animal give it a try! How about a shirt or a spiffy Halloween costume? When you give a new type of project a try, you learn techniques that are helpful for all kinds of projects!

#53 from Michele Ricci. When preparing a sewing project with many pieces and steps, label the pre-cut pieces with notes ahead of time in the order that you will be using them. Include the step numbers of the project. If you pin the notes with similar pieces stacked together, they will be easier to organize if you have to stop the project for some reason and start again.

#54 from boning. Don't sew when you are tired. Things go wrong and you're not on top of your game. Ask me how I know; the seam ripper is your best friend when you are tired.

#55 from Stephanie. An SOS pad tightly tied inside an old sock will help keep your needles and pins clean & sharp.

#56 from Linda. ALWAYS make a sample quilt square before cutting all the pieces out. Make sure all cut pieces are the correct size and you understand how to assemble the block. I learned this tip the hard way. I cut one small block piece the wrong size and didn't catch it till it was too late. See tip #54.

#57 from Marsha. Recycle and repurpose. Fabric is fabric. If the fabric is great, but the style is wrong or there is a stain, consider using it for another purpose. For example: I made my new favorite summer blouse out of a cotton shower curtain. I also repurposed an outdated silk dress into luxurious eye pillows.

#58 from Karrie Pennington. I just finished binding my first quilt. I broke 4 needles in the process. Someone on a craft show mentioned that you should check and tighten your needle often when using special sewing feet (She was using a ruffler). I tried this with my even feed foot and did not break another needle. I am passing this advice to my mom whose complex embroideries often result in broken needles. I wish I could remember whose tip this is, but I want to share it anyway. Being kind to your machine is being kind to yourself.

#59 from Kathy. Use an extra-large gift bag as a trash can in your sewing area. The bag holds up well for the lightweight fabric scraps and sewing bits and pieces. It looks pretty as well.

#60 from Patti. I was just going to write this and I see that Jennifer, above, beat me to it. Sew a doll, a doll dress, a teddy bear, or a cloth book. Give it to your child, grandchild, niece or nephew. If you don't have someone to give it to, save it for the next time a friend or acquaintance has a baby. Sewing toys is a great break from sewing more time consuming items, and they bring a smile to your face when they are finished!

#61 from Caro. Never decide that a project is awful until it's finished - I have nearly thrown out a blouse, because without its sleeves, it looked like it would never fit. But it finished as one of my favorites.

#62 from Mary Mulari. My bobbin-filling tip goes along with #17: With a bobbin-filling machine such as the Side Winder, you can easily fill bobbins while watching television. I also like to fill many bobbins with neutral colors-several shades of gray and tan-which often blend well with top thread colors when it's not important that the bobbin thread match the fabric exactly.

#63 from Ellen. In addition to your #15 tip, Use a strip of light fabric tied to each cord, labeled with fabric marker to identify which equipment the cord is for.

#64 from Ellen. Save empty thread spools to wind your quilt binding. Secure to spool with blue masking tape. When ready to bind, insert the spool on spool holder, No more twisted, tangled, and stretched binding to deal with.

#66 Nancy Owens. Best tip I got just today, I was complaining to my Chiropractor that I could only sew for 2 hours a day (my 60+ body wants to sew like my 20 year old body!) His suggestion was to break it up into smaller

chunks, and I would probably be able to do more. That reminded me of Nancy's book, "10, 20, 30 Minutes to Sew". So that is my goal. I still wish I could sew for 8 to 10 hours at a time like I used to.....Oh well, onward and upward!

#67 from Marilyn McCurdy. Always press a seam after sewing it. Pressing before going to the next step will insure your project will go together much easier and in the end will look great too.

#68 from Marie. Sometimes during "mid-night sewing" I come up with some great sewing solutions. Need a quick temporary stabilizer? Reach for the recycle bin and stabilize with some paper or envelopes.

#69 from Marty Smith. When you have just a little left on those pre-wound bobbins. I use them to baste embroidery in the hoop.

#70 from Laura Jean. Keep your sense of humor! Yes, sometimes things don't go exactly as planned, and I wind up ripping more than I sew. (So for me I find a good seam ripper, pair of tweezers, and magnifying glass are absolutely essential.) Then I picture how goofy the dress would look with backward sleeves or the skirt with an inside out panel or a quilt column with the flannel on the outside. It really does help if you can keep your "funny side" up!

#71 from Nancy Axmacher. Keep a lint roller at your cutting table! It cleans all the little scraps and threads off the cutting mat. You can also use it to pick up all the little threads on a project after you've "unsewn" a seam! (Hint: Roll it across the finished block, all those pesky threadlets are pulled away)!

#72 from Jen in Oz. If you're as obsessive as me, keep a list or spreadsheet (on your phone?) of all the sewing patterns in your stash (and/or all your fabric stash too). You could also keep scans of the pattern fronts and backs and images of the fabric, so that a) you don't duplicate when you're at the sewing store and b) you can match a fabric you want to a pattern you already have or vice versa.

#73 from June B. Never quit learning, use the internet, books, and friends to ever increase your knowledge of this wonderful craft. I have been sewing for over 40 years and still learn something every day and love life!

#74 from Brenda Kish. Before changing a machine needle, place a scrap of fabric or paper over the feed dogs. If you drop the needle it won't end up in the bobbin case.

#75 from Dorene. When cleaning the bobbin area of my machine and under it, I use pipe cleaners. They pull out all the lint that gets stuck underneath. Here's another bobbin tip I learned in a class. When filling a bobbin, insert the thread end into the little hole. Then pull the thread and insert it through the big hole leaving a tail. When finished filling, just clip at the little hole and there is a smooth thread cut. Not necessary to stop the machine before filling is complete.

#76 from Elizabeth Romano. When working with sewing patterns.... keep a gallon size zipper lock bag handy. When you are done sewing for the session, store the pattern, notions, threads etc. in the bag. They will all be together in one place for the next day or session. Also this tip works great when quilting with charm square. It keeps those charms, or 1/2 square triangles or honey buns in order.

#77 from Vicki. Keep sewing thread reel and bobbin with matching thread together when you store them away, I use bobbin mates (Mum used to put reel on bobbin on the same nail). Next time you need to sew with that color no need to search through a separate bobbin container. Especially important for those special threads when you machine sew with silk, 100% cotton etc instead of poly cotton.

#78 from Cindy. If your dress form bust cup size is not large enough, put one of your bras on her and stuff it. I used old shoulder pads. Cover with snug fitting T-shirt. Now you have a dress form that works for no additional cost!

#79 from Robbin. Photo albums, "brag books" with plastic pockets that only cost a dollar or two are great organizing tools. You can carry one in your purse to hold small fabric/thread/yarn swatches, coupons from your favorite fabric stores, shopping lists and notes, etc. I also keep index cards in mine with measurements for people I've done sewing/alterations for.

#80 from Sheryl. Purchase those long, plastic, foam-like "noodles" (used for swimming pool floating devices) and cut in lengths to roll up your in-process appliqué projects. Also can be used for rolling wall hangings or small quilts for transporting instead of folding them. Not sure about long-term storage possibilities for use with textiles, but they are lightweight, inexpensive and convenient for short-term usage.

#80 ½ from Patricia Hersl. If you change your throat plates, use a small sticky note to remind you “No Zig-Zag” when you’ve installed the single needle plate. Always take that first stitch slowly, just in case.

#81 from Cathy. Keep a can of Compressed Gasduster at your sewing machine. When I’m done for the day and ready to clean up, I remove the bobbin and spray out the fabric particles. This works really well on my Serger, then I wipe everything down and vacuum.

#82 from JoAn Godrey. For a quick gift keep the parts of a table runner or similar item cut and ready to sew in a bin with your stash. Then you just have to sew instead of pick a pattern, cut, then sew. I have a favorite table runner pattern that goes together easily. I keep several “kits” in holiday and everyday fabrics ready to go. Makes it even easier to give a special thank-you to someone.

#83 from Bonne Swett. Sew with a friend. Whether fabric shopping, attending classes or events, or actually sewing together...you’ll have double the fun!

#84 from Karen Prince. Cardboard manila file folders can be made into templates for marking hems. Cut both square edges and rounded edges (for straight garments or those with some flair at the hemline). Then measure up 1/2”, 1”, 1-1/4, 1-1/2” etc and permanently mark lines on the template to indicate the hem depth. Place the cardboard template at the hemline (wrong side) and turn up the hem to the desired measurement; then press into place around the hemline. The template stabilizes the hem as you press. Saves fingers from being burned, and makes for an easy consistent hem depth.

#85 from Sharon Mathewson. When buying a new ironing board cover, choose one with straight stripes or plaids. Use these straight lines when pinning, placement, and other tasks that require a straight line. It saves a lot if time. Most plaids are 1 inch, but check yours to be sure. When cutting lengths of cord, fabric, binding, ribbon, or any thing, you can easily guesstimate length by using the pattern on the cover.

#86 from Sue S. Keep your supplies organized and try to put things away promptly! If you keep things together, either in project specific bags or in bins, you’ll be able to find things when you need them. I keep things like zippers and bias tape in clear plastic containers so when I need one I know where to look. No more running to the store to buy a black zipper because I can’t find the bag I brought home last week!

#87 from Lynn Butler. I use the small slivers of soap for marking. The edges are usually fairly sharp and the marks brush away.

#88 from Bridgit Montgomery. I used my phone to keep a database of the patterns I have at home and I check it before buying patterns at my local fabric store. Before I started doing this, I would buy the same pattern 2 or 3 times because it was one I really wanted to make or I would go home without it because I was sure I already had it in my stash. I even have a folder of “patterns I think I might like to make” for future purchases.

#89 from Sue Johnson. Cut out many projects at one time and keep in plastic boxes or bags and when you are ready to sew you can take your pick of project. Also when giving a quilt as a gift make a matching pillowcase to wrap it in.

#90 from JoAn Godrey. A simple tip. When you finish with a hand-sewing needle, leave it threaded and tie a knot with both ends of the thread. If the needle gets pushed all the way into your pincushion (or the arm of your favorite chair or couch...lol) the knot will stay outside and give you a “handle” to work the needle back out.

#91 Lois Dorrell. When removing tear-away stabilizer from the back of a machine-embroidered design, I use a double-eyed needle to get into the tight places. Works great to just slide it under the stabilizer and lift it up slightly to tear it away.

#92 from Lita Marishak. For heavier fabrics, instead of sewing two lines of gathering stitches, zigzag over strands of heavy upholstery thread or even fishing line in two lines. The thread will not break when you are pulling up the gathers.

#93 from Lita Marishak. For each new fabric, use a swatch to test the thread, needle size, stitch type, stitch length (and width), tension, and foot pressure. This will allow you to determine the optimum combination necessary to sew properly without ruining the actual project. You might be surprised at how many fabrics these days show large needle holes or other abnormalities when using standard needles and settings.

#94 from Lita Marishak. For joining elastic ends together, use a three-step zigzag stitch in several directions. The elastic will never come apart, no matter how much tension is applied.

#95 from Jay Mulder. A great gift to yourself is an annual cleaning/tune-up on your machine. Getting it back running smoothly and all tuned up gives you that feeling of having a new machine all over again.

#96 from Jeri Lynn Downs. When I find something cute and fun to make, that is equally usable, I make up extras. I've made in-the-hoop project bags, and key fobs and given them to friends. It's more fun to share and it's a great way to use up that extra little bit of fabric. I also like to make freestanding-lace crosses and bookmarks. I give them to the ladies at church who aren't sewing any longer. It brings a smile to their faces and warms my heart.

#97 from Patti. If I am making a garment that requires gathering or basting threads, I set up both of my sewing machines, the second with a contrasting color to what I am sewing the garment with. I sew the basting or gathering thread on the other machine. When it comes time to take out the basting thread, it is so much easier to take it out a bright thread of a different color. Of course you can keep switching threads on one machine too, but this is a good tip for those who have two machines.

#98 from Pam Ziny. Mine goes along with #72, I print up one sheet for each pattern. Then after I have sewn that pattern, I attach a fabric sample to the page along with notes about the pattern. I also take a photo of the finished project and attach it to the sheet. All this is kept in a notebook (or 2) for easy reference.

#99 from Britt-Inger Bjørsvik. When the weather allows, bring your sewing machine and the things you need for your project outdoor. There are several advantages with sewing outdoor: you see everything much better in the daylight; you get fresh air, and the dust, thread ends and small fabric scraps stay outside when you're finished.

#100 from Carol Capps. Use a stand-alone paper towel holder as a quilt binding holder. Save the cardboard tube from the paper towels and wind your quilt binding around it. Then sit the paper towel holder on the floor or on your sewing table. The binding dispenses easily and without tangles.

#101 from Sheriann D. I use a single 'Post It Note' to cover my throat plate when I am changing needles on my sewing machines. I never have to worry about the needle falling down into the machine.

#102 from Becky Locke. Pass your love of sewing to the younger generation. This fall I am planning to teach a friend of mine's daughter to sew. She is so eager to begin. I learned to sew from my Mom and have cherished the experience.

#103 from Barbara McKenzie. If you need to steam press a very small item (hem, bias binding, etc.) avoid burned fingers by turning off the steam, positioning the fabric and iron, moving your "holding" hand, and hitting the burst of steam. It has saved my fingers many times!

#104 from Paula Knight. I like to keep one of those micro cloths in my ironing supplies. When I take out a seam with my seam ripper, it helps to pick up the threads on the garment, kind of like a magnet. It also picks up threads that are laying on the carpet and my ironing board. Also I use a daisy razor to "shave" my embroidery on the backside. It helps to release threads if I make a mistake and have to take the embroidery out. I'm a beginner embroider and do a lot of practice runs.

#105 from Denise. This kind of takes #61 a bit further. If after I finish a project, it just doesn't look right. All the little things seem to be glaring at me. I set it aside for the next day. Project looks so much better the next day. Saves me a lot of ripping out that really wasn't necessary.

#106 from Jordan Nuques. Next time you eat Chinese food, save those chopsticks. They make great point turners for crisp corners!

#107 from Jessie. I took a 12" length of 5/8" garden hose and cut a slit all the way down the side. The hose spreads apart to accept bobbins, which snap easily in and out. It holds about 40 bobbins, and since the sides are showing, you always know what color they are! I have a separate holder for specialty thread bobbins.

#108 from Karen Downs. My hint is for hand appliqué. Lay a pillow on your lap as you appliqué. The project fabric lies nicely on the pillow, and appliquéing is easier to see and makes it easier to appliqué.

#109 from Pat West. If you trace a lot of patterns, use wedding runner that's available in 50 to 100 foot rolls. There are plain and white-on-white print varieties and both are sheer enough to see through but strong enough to endure

many fittings and pinnings.

What is your favorite tip from the listing?

Just a note below in the comment section, letting me know which tip is your favorite!

...and the
WINNER is...

Thank you to all of you who posted a tip! As promised, a random tip was chosen and the winner will receive a package of my **notecard collection**. The winner is—JoAn Godrey, tip #90. Congrats!



Bye for now,



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