

The challenge in putting together a T Shirt quilt lies in the fact that any given design will vary in size. How to resolve by joining the different sizes without a lot of math that includes fractions and seam allowances and angst. Watching my grandson playing with Lego blocks that all interlock because they are sizes that fit together gave me an idea. Building a quilt layout with “blocks” that will all fit together was an easy solution.

Prepare T Shirt Designs for Piecing

Gather the shirts and launder them to remove any soil and stains. Some defects or stains can be camouflaged in the final project. Cut out the printed designs from the shirts by cutting away the collar and sleeves. Leave a generous border of unprinted shirt around the design. Printed designs on both the front, back and sleeves can all be useful so remove them all. The knit fabric needs to be stabilized with a woven fusible interfacing.

Cut the interfacing larger than the finished trimmed design. Fuse the interfacing to the back of the cut-out design by centering the design. Note that screen printed or polyester shirts with sublimation designs may not tolerate heat. Follow manufacturer's directions to completely fuse the interfacing to the back of the design. Trim the now stabilized design to the largest **even number measurement plus ½”** for seam allowances. The design can be further trimmed to fit into the optimum layout as necessary.

Design a Layout with “Building Blocks”

The trimmed designs are now a variety of sizes, but each are an even measurement. After the layout of the large units is set, join them with fabric in smaller even measurement units. For example, if a 12” finished design block needs to be 16” finished for the layout add a 4” in fabric units to the block. Any configuration of adding the 4” to any part of the original 12”

block works. The added fabric could be a strip, or a series of squares or even another design from a t shirt. After the smaller block has been upsized, join it to the larger block. Continue the process until the layout is complete. But before you start sewing, decide on a layout plan.



The layout plan starts with the large blocks of interfaced t shirt designs. Find an area on the floor or table or design wall that is as large as your desired finished size. Place the large pieces to determine the look you like. It may take several configurations to find a good layout, and you may discover that you need more large pieces or you have too many. Try to be flexible in making a decision because adding fabric to join the blocks will always make the layout look better. (Happens every time, seriously!) To check

layout options, find a placement of large pieces you like and take a photo. Leave the layout (if possible) as it is and stay away for 15-20 minutes. Clear your mind and return to the layout. What is your first split second decision? Revise what you didn't like and keep what you like. Take another photo and repeat the process. When the layout of the larger pieces is set, keep that photo and delete the rest or send the photos to friends and ask for second opinions. In the end, keep only the photo of the final decision.

The photo is insurance if the physical layout is disturbed or you just have to pick it up. A printed copy or the design drawn on graph paper (each square equals 2") can be very helpful, but not always necessary. Now to finish the layout, you need connector fabrics.

Fabric Connections

The "mortar" that holds these blocks together is fabric in even units. The key to success is an accurate seam to ensure that these units truly finish to even multiples. Determine that your seam allowance is accurate, cut two 2 ½" fabric squares. Sew the squares together with a ¼" seam. Open the pieces and press the seam allowance to one side. Measure from side to side. The measurement from raw edge to raw edge should be 4 ½" inches. If it is not, keep

repeating until you have an accurate seam allowance. (Refer to the Sewing Tech Talk handout “Quilters Dream of a Quarter Inch Seam” for detailed information on this topic.) Choose 100% cotton quilting fabrics for the connectors. If making a memorial quilt from clothing, launder the clothing and press well using a product to add body back to the fabric such as starch, sizing or Mary Ellen’s Best Press 2. Choose fabric colors and themes to complement the designs. Be bold with fabric choices! Remember that fabrics tend to really look like they belong together when they are sewn together. (Surprising, but true!) Look at the layout and choose a place to start. Cut fabrics to fit the blocks together as described above using ***even number measurement plus ½”***.

If you have a confirmed plan for piecing the connector fabrics begin with the necessary pieces around a block. Sew the entire block and connector pieces together and check the piecing by laying out the quilt again. If things look good, piece everything and then assemble the quilt or cut and piece a large block at a time. Pay attention to how the blocks fit together as some will need to be constructed or partially constructed before assembly.