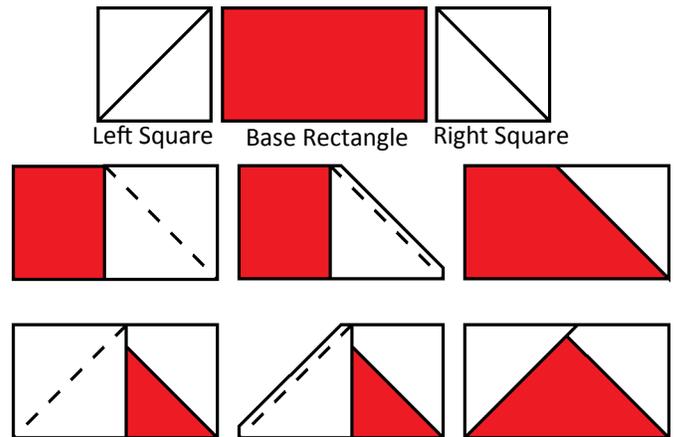


Tips and Techniques for Successful “Flying Geese” Units

by Helle-May Cheney

“Flying Geese” units are a common element in quilts. They can be used alone, in groups, as well as, an integral part of many popular quilt blocks. Many quilters have learned to construct a “Flying Geese” unit by drawing a diagonal line (corner to corner) on the back of 2 squares.

The squares are then sewn together with the rectangular base on the diagonal lines. Once the seam allowance is trimmed and triangles are pressed over, the resulting unit should be the same size as the base rectangle.



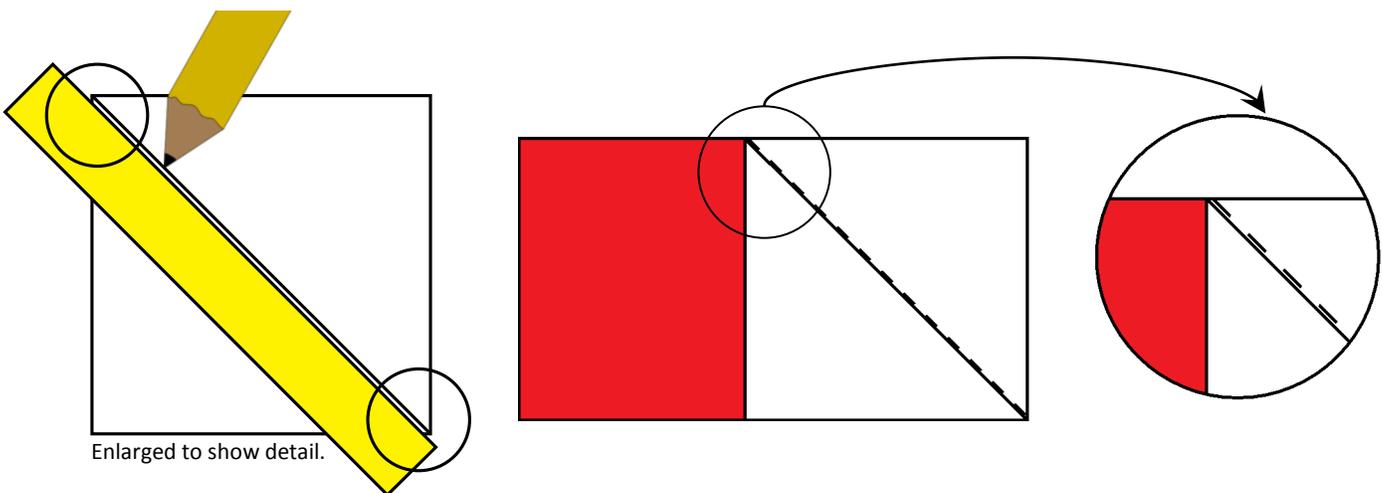
The challenge many quilters face is that these units often end up slightly smaller than they should be or not quite rectangular. Why?

If you draw the line exactly through the corners of each square and sew exactly on that line, there is no compensation or allowance for the small amount of fabric taken up in the fold when the triangle is pressed over. The thickness of the fabric and/or the thickness of the thread factor into the amount of fabric taken up.

This can affect the size and even the shape of the finished unit. It’s not a lot, but every quilter knows how even a small variation can add up after a while!

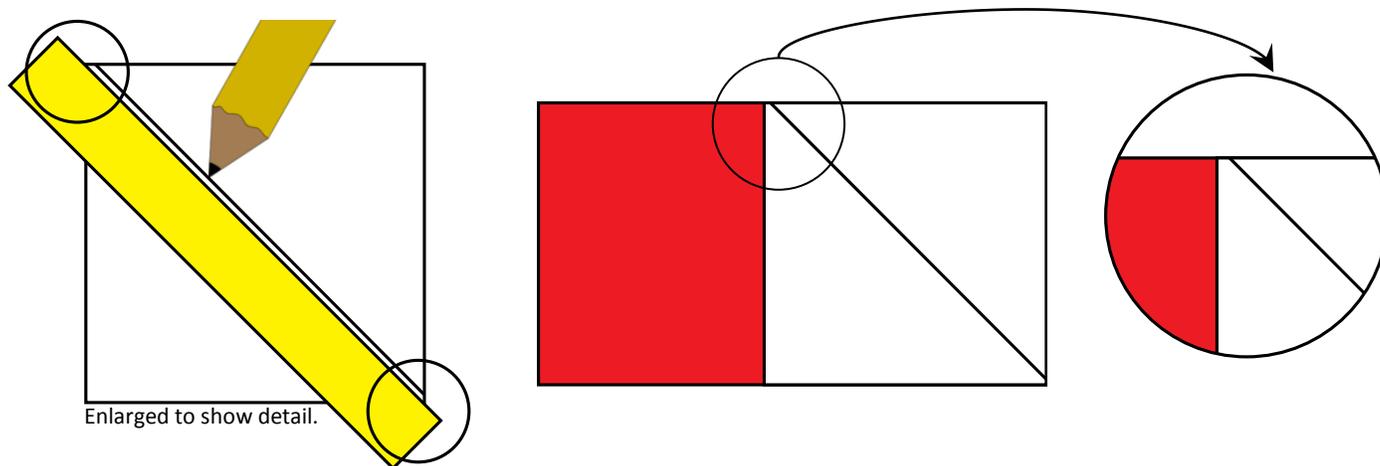
I offer two slightly different marking techniques to guide the placement of the diagonal seam in order to compensate for the fold. Try both and pick the one that works best for you!

Technique 1: Align your ruler or straight-edge so that the edge is set equally distant from two diagonal corners of each square to allow room to place your marking tool exactly at the corner. Draw a line extending exactly through both diagonal corners. With right sides together, align the right square on the rectangle as shown. Adjust your needle or simply “eyeball it” so that you can sew a seam just to the side of the line. The seam should extend from the top edge of the square/rectangle to the bottom of the side edge. Repeat with the left square.



Tips and Techniques for Successful “Flying Geese” Units (cont.)

Technique 2: Align your ruler/straight-edge so that its edge lies exactly through the two diagonal corners and draw a line. Your line will not extend through the corners as in Technique 1, it will lie just to the side. Depending on the width of your marking tool, the placement of the line should add just enough allowance for the fold, but you will have to test this. (My preferred marking tool is a mechanical pencil with ceramic lead. There are several brands available.) With right sides together, align the right square on the rectangle as shown and sew directly on the line. Repeat with the left square. Note: When aligning either square on the rectangle, make sure the line/seam extends from the top edge of the square/rectangle to the bottom of the side edge.



Regardless of which method you choose, I always recommend sewing one sample **before** sewing (or marking) the rest of the units. It is always better to work out the right technique on a sample before finding out that all of the units are off. You may need to make additional adjustments due to factors such as the thickness of the fabric, the thickness of the thread or the thickness of your marking device.

With both techniques: You must press and trim the first square open before sewing the second square to the rectangle!

I like to press each seam **before** trimming - with a **DRY** iron! I can use the underlying rectangle to make sure I'm not distorting the corner triangle when pressing and I can double check that my units finish the correct size. If you have sewn the squares to the rectangle with enough allowance for the fold, the edges of the resulting triangles should align exactly with the rectangle below. If it's a little past that's ok too – you can trim to match the rectangle. You just don't want it to be shorter!

One last tip: If the underlying rectangle is a darker color than the squares, trim the seam allowance for the rectangle slightly shorter than the seam allowance for the square. This will prevent the darker rectangle from possibly showing through under the lighter triangles.

I hope that these tips and techniques will help you master your “Geese” and help you continue to improve your skills as a quilter!