

Applique 101



Applique is, simply put, the sewing of one fabric on top of another fabric for decorative purposes.

Throughout the history, since the invention of fabric really, applique was used to decorate any and all fabrics from clothing to curtains to bedding to saddle blankets.

It could be extremely elaborate or as simple as a stripe of one color fabric sewn to another to hide the seam on a sleeve. The unworn sections of a piece of fabric or the embellished parts were often cut from the worn out fabric and applied to another new fabric. In this way fabric or decorations were recycled.

There are many choices and methods where applique is concerned, none of them are wrong. It's all a matter of personal preference.

Fabric Choice

A non stretch fabric is preferred. Cotton is often the easiest to work with particularly if you are new to applique. A slick fabric like a satin or rayon will be slippery and difficult for the first timer to applique. Ideally, you want fabrics that will stick together a little and not slip when you're sewing.

Machine Applique

Begin with a background fabric that is the size of your finished project. On this you will lay your applique pieces. Depending on the stitch you plan to use to sew the pieces down, you may or may not want to add a seam allowance when you cut out your applique pieces.

If you use a straight stitch, you will want to leave a seam allowance and turn it under, pinning it down before you sew the pieces to the background fabric.

If you use a satin or buttonhole stitch, you don't have to leave a seam allowance. You can cut out the pieces to the exact size. Or you can leave a seam allowance to turn under. Be careful if you are not leaving a seam allowance, make sure that your fabric does not ravel easily or you risk the fabric ravelling out of the sewn seam when you wash the finished item. If you think the fabric might be prone to ravelling, you should seriously consider leaving a seam allowance to turn under.

There are several ways to affix the applique to the background fabric before you sew it down. The pieces may be basted or pinned in position. When using pins, I prefer to do applique using sequin pins because they are smaller and tend to catch on things

less than larger pins. You can also use a fusible material to affix the pieces to the background such as iron on interfacing or Wonder Under. I have not had good luck using the traditional iron-on options. They also make the applique very stiff. I do recommend Steam-A-Seam. It costs a little more but does not stiffen the applique and you can pull it off and reposition the applique which is an advantage.

I usually choose a color of thread that will match the applique. If you are planning on using satin stitch, you will want to choose a quality thread because cheaper threads will break. If you have many colors that you are applique-ing, you might consider using an invisible thread, again, a quality thread will make the difference. The invisible thread that is sold in the quilting department of the fabric store is often better quality. Also, the invisible thread works better if you use the invisible thread in the top of the machine and a regular cotton thread in the bobbin.

When I am doing machine applique, particularly with potentially difficult fabrics, I will leave a seam allowance and pin the appliques in position folding under the seam allowance. Then, I will straight stitch the edges, removing the pins. Then, I will satin stitch the edges of the applique. The satin stitch takes some practice to get the tension right. Don't be surprised to find some puckers or tiny folds the first few times you attempt this method of applique. It goes quickly but it does take some practice. Stick with it and you'll get the feel for it eventually.

Hand Applique - Needle Turn Method

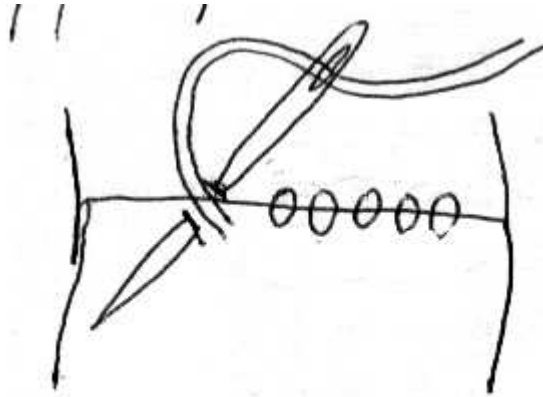
Like with the Machine method, we begin with a background fabric. I usually draw or trace the applique on the fabric, so that I have a line in light pencil showing me where the edge of the applique should be. I usually leave a quarter inch seam allowance when I cut out the applique.

For needle turn applique, I baste the applique in position by sewing about 2-3 inches in from each edge. When I choose to use pins, I use sequin pins because they are smaller and are less likely to catch on the thread as I'm making my stitches. In this method, you do not need to turn under the seam allowance ahead of time, you will do that as you sew.

Choose a thread that matches either the applique or the background. I usually match the applique. I do not use invisible thread for hand sewing and I do not recommend it. I have tried it and I recommend that you don't go there. I normally applique with a good quality sharp-type needle. I also use straw needles. I favorite needle to applique with are Roxanne's Applique Sharps. Once you've tried hand sewing with a quality needle, you won't go back to the cheaper made needles. They really do make a difference.

Thread 18 to 24 inches of thread onto the needle and knot one end. Using your needle, fold under the seam allowance. Pull the thread through the fabric from the back of the background fabric. Bring the needle up through the edge of the applique. Go down through the background fabric right beside where the last stitch came up.

Bring the needle up through the background fabric through the edge of the applique about an eighth or a quarter of an inch away. Continue to use the needle to fold under the seam allowance as you work around the applique. You will want to fold under a couple of inches ahead of where you are sewing. As you sew the stitches a few stitches back should be pulled under and disappear. Be careful to sew as closely to the edge of the fold on the applique as you can so that your stitches will disappear or will nearly disappear.



You will need to carefully clip the seam allowance around curves or points and your stitches will need to be closer together when sewing curves or points.

Points: turn under the right side of the point and sew up to the point. Then, clip the seam allowance straight across to remove the bulk being careful not to cut into the seam line. Then, turn under the left side and continue sewing.

Inverted Points: before you get to the point, clip once straight into the point being careful not to cut the seam line. Then, turn under and sew around the point.

Curves: clip the curve as you clipped the inverted point. Make your clips as close as they need to be to keep the fabric from buckling as you turn under and sew.

When your thread is nearly ran out, pull the thread to the back of the background fabric and tie it off by looping it through the last couple of stitches or an adjacent line of stitches and knot. Then begin a new thread as before.

Freeze paper may also be used to form a pattern for your appliques. You can find instructions for this method here: <http://www.nmia.com/~mgdesign/qor/begin/applique.htm>

Reverse Applique

Is basically the same as regular applique except that you have cut away an inside portion of the applique and are revealing the background fabric beneath.

Books to buy:

Applique the Basics and Beyond: The Complete Guide to Successful Machine and Hand Techniques with Dozens of Designs to Mix and Match by Janet Pittman

Applique! Applique!! Applique!!! The Complete Guide to Hand Applique by Laurene Sinema.

That Invisible Stitch: The Five Elements of Flawless Needleturn and Channel Applique by Dierdra McElroy

Mastering Machine Applique: The Complete Guide Including Invisible Machine Applique, Satin Stitch, Blanket Stitch & Much More by Harriet Hargrave

Machine Applique: A Sampler of Techniques by Sue Nickels

Websites to visit:

<http://www.quilterscache.com/StartQuiltingPages/startquiltingfour.html> (basic instructions)

<http://www.geocities.com/ceryndip/medarts.htm> (quilting in the Middle Ages)

<http://www.quilt.com/> World Wide Quilting Page

<http://www.quiltuniversity.com/> Quilt University (information and online classes)

<http://www.keepsakequilting.com> Keepsake Quilting (quilting supplies)

<http://www.quiltconnection.com> (quilting supplies)

<http://www.clotilde.com> (sewing notions and quilting supplies)

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