



## HOW TO SERIES: APPLIQUÉ BASICS

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*Appliqué with your embroidery machine is fun and easy once you know a few tricks!*

### WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- How to use simple yet creative techniques to expand your embroidery options
- How to create a template for appliqué
- How easy and versatile appliqués are with embroidery

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Applique design with a template file (pdf)
- Fusible Tearaway Stabilizer
- Computer with Adobe Acrobat Reader and an ink jet printer
- Temporary embroidery spray adhesive (“TESA”) and/or fusible web (I prefer Steam-A-Seam II)
- Threads—I used the following [Hemingworth](#) colors:
- [Tweezers](#)
- [Double curve appliqué scissors](#)

### WHY APPLIQUÉ?

Machine embroidered applique is one of my favorite techniques! I love the added texture, dimension, color, and pattern that fabric adds to the embroidery that simply cannot be achieved by thread alone. It's easy, it offers design variety, and it works on a wider range of fabrics and textures than standard appliqué. How else could you embroider a white snowman on a fluffy red towel and not have it turn out pink? Plus, appliqué with the embroidery machine comes out with perfect curves and corners every time!

You may have done machine embroidered appliqué by placing a patch of fabric over a stitched outline, stitching the fabric over the outline by running that stitch a second time, and then removing the hoop and trimming away the fabric. Once I learned the method described below from the professional embroidery world, I never went back to that method again. This way of creating appliqué will give a clean, professional look with no “pokies” that scream “amateur.”

**Note:** There are times when the stick/sew/snip method works (I'll use it when working with dimensional effects like putting batting under a large, simply shaped appliqué). To accommodate this method with my designs, simply back up one color after placing the fabric to sew the placement line again. Remove the hoop, trim away excess fabric (keep in mind the satin stitch only extends beyond this line 1mm so trim closely!), replace the hoop and continue sewing. Whenever using this method, you must take extreme care not to distort the hooped fabric when trimming the excess appliqué away. This becomes increasingly more difficult with intricate shapes and/or multiple appliqués.

## Notes

**STEP 1—PREPARE FABRICS**

- Your appliqués will stay smooth and crisp if you preshrink both the appliqué fabrics and the background fabrics. Pre-shrinking all the fabrics will help avoid any uneven shrinkage after your project is assembled. Be sure to smoothly press fabrics before the next fabric steps. I also find that starching the fabrics makes them easier to work with and reduces shifting during the sewing proces.

**STEP 2—PRINT APPLIQUE TEMPLATES & ANY GUIDES**

- Print out PDF appliqué templates, making sure to print them at actual size. Notice that each piece has the design file name and possibly a number. On multiple piece appliqués this number is the sequence number for placing the appliqué.
- I prefer to print my templates on a lightweight fusible tearaway like Sulky Totally Stable. I cut an 11” piece of stabilizer from an 8” roll (about the size of a sheet of paper) and lightly fuse the edges to a sheet of printer paper to help it move through my ink jet printer smoothly (and make sure I print on the non-fusible side!).
- I find that using heat fusible pattern pieces provides more sticking power over a longer period of time than templates printed on plain paper and held in place with temporary embroidery spray adhesive (“TESA”). If your pattern shifts during cutting, you will not be able to cut out an accurate piece and this technique definitely requires precision. I also find that I get more accuracy with this method than when tracing onto the fusible web. Some fusible webs have a waxy coating on the protective sheet and often shift around easily, especially when working with larger or more intricate shapes. With this technique, accuracy is definitely the name of the game.

**Tip: TESA is an acronym I made up for temporary embroidery spray adhesive. It sure is easier to say and type!**

**STEP 3—CUT OUT PIECES**

- Separate your paper template pieces by cutting loosely around the outlines.

**STEP 4—APPLY TEMPLATES TO FABRIC.**

- Press the cut out pieces, **right side up to the right side** of the corresponding appliqué fabric.

**STEP 5—APPLY FUSIBLE WEB**

- I prefer double-stick fusible web (Steam-A-Seam II). Remove the looser paper sheet and arrange your appliqué fabrics on the web. Cut out around the web. I like to *very lightly* press them with an iron to help the fusible stick to the fabric.

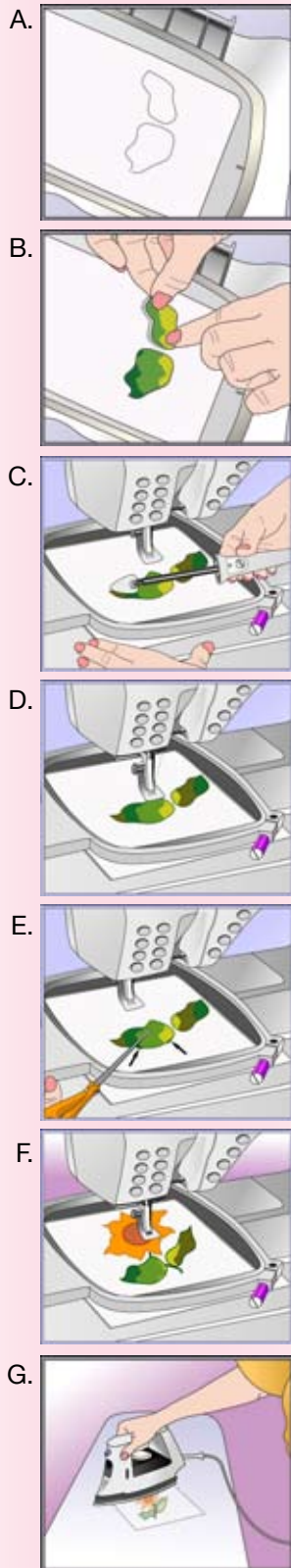
**STEP 6—CUT OUT APPLIQUE PIECES.**

- Carefully and precisely cut along the *outside edge* of each appliqué piece. If I’m preparing for a design I will sew immediately, I like to stick the pieces to a plastic sheet protector in which I’ve place a printout of my design information. Otherwise, I keep them in snack size zipper-type plastic bags. This is especially useful if you are cutting a number of pieces for a large project or multiple projects.

**STEP 7—EMBROIDER DESIGN**

- If you’re embroidering on quilt-weight cottons, a medium tearaway should be sufficient for embroidery designs that are composed of predominantly appliqué that may also have additional light detail stitching. These types of designs are

**Tip: Spray starch is one way to improve the stability of washable light-weight wovens.**



- generally “low impact” and do not require extensive or heavy stabilizing. Make sure your fabric is secure in the hoop and that it will not slip during sewing. If your fabric slips, raw edges of appliqué fabrics may be exposed.
- As your design sews, the machine will stitch a running stitch guideline for you to place your fabric and then stop to allow you to position the fabric (*figure a*).
- Many machines may move the hoop forward to make it easier for you to do this while others will simply stop. If your machine just stops, you may wish to remove the hoop to place your fabrics. Be careful not to disturb the hoop tension and make sure your hoop is correctly attached each time to avoid registration problems (where stitches don’t line up with previous ones).
- Carefully place the fabric within the stitched line (*figure b*) and lightly fuse the center of the appliqué with an appliqué iron (*figure c*). If you fuse the edges too tightly, you will not be able to trim them off later if they extend beyond your stitching.
- Continue sewing and the machine will zigzag around the edge of the fabric (*figure d*). Many other digitizers will use a straight stitch for this step; I find a zigzag more forgiving of slight miscuts and misplacements and less likely to push the fabric out of place.
- Stop after the tackdown and inspect your work. If you see that fabric is sticking out beyond these stitches, stop the machine and carefully trim the fabric away or it will be exposed after the final satin stitching is complete (*figure e*). Also check for any “pokies”—raveled fabric threads that may have been freed by the action of the needle.
- Continue placing each piece as called for in the color sequence until the design is complete (*figure f*).
- Press embroidery from the back to complete the fusing (*figure g*).

**Note 1:** Printable templates only work with designs sewn at actual size. If you resize your embroidery designs, you will have to make your own templates by sewing the positioning outlines on template stock and cutting them out for tracing pieces. To embroider on template stock (mylar quilter’s template or card stock), tape a piece of the template material to the bottom of your hoop and sew without thread in the needle. The perforations are the “outlines” you see on the actual size printed PDF templates. Cut out the template and trace (template face down) on the fusible web paper on the back of your prepared fabric. Mylar quilter’s template will retain crisp edges and corners—and therefore accuracy—with more uses than card stock. Be sure to label your template with a design name, sequence order, and a guide arrow to denote the top.

**Note 2:** These instructions are for medium-weight woven fabrics that can tolerate heat. Loftier fabrics such as polar fleece may need to be cut slightly further away from the template line to accommodate their thickness and also will melt when pressed with an iron. Instead of using fusible web, use a temporary embroidery spray adhesive to hold in place during the sewing process. While a fusible web will permanently fuse an appliqué in place and reduce raveling puckering over washing and wearing, polar fleece, which is a knit, doesn’t ravel and due to the stretchy properties, will not pucker if sewn smoothly in the first place.

- Once you’re certain the TESA is completely gone, soak away water soluble stabilizer, dry, press smooth. Your ornament is ready to brighten up your tree, a package, or the face of a lucky recipient!

*Notes*

