

Handout for Bias Stem Workshop – Sue Glass

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1. Intro:
 - a. Stems in Quilts
 - i. Can be bias or straight
 - ii. Can be many colors and textures not just green or brown
 - iii. How much to make?
 - iv. How long should the pieces be
 - v. How wide
 - vi. Tools to use
2. Uses:
 - a. Flower Stems, borders and leaves, fencing, or any type of embellishment
 - b. Circles or spirals, etc.
3. Bias or straight grain? Depends on how it will be used - Curved or wavy as in a vine needs to be bias. Fabric motif will be different with bias cut or straight of grain
4. Color or print:
 - a. You can use anything, from solids to Kaffe.
 - b. Batiks work very well and provide movement and texture
 - c. Word or script fabrics work well too and look different in bias or straight
 - d. Don't have to use the same stem fabric all over. For instance, with a vase of flowers, each flower could have its own stem fabric.
5. Length and width: Check the pattern, and figure out approximately how long your stem pieces need to be, and what the recommended width is. Look at the pattern itself and see if there are places to hide stem breaks (like a flower or leaf) or is one long piece required? Do you like the width? You can make it any size you want.
6. Tools:
 - a. Freezer Paper, or
 - b. Clover Bias Stem maker – see instructions for each size maker (included on the packaging, or
 - c. Press Bars
 - i. Use heat resistant plastic ones not metal which gets HOT.
 - ii. Check thickness – thicker means a wider finished stem. Karen Kay Buckley makes some as do others. Usually available at local quilt shops and Joann.

How to Use Bias Stem tools/methods:

To use freezer paper: Cut a piece about 2 feet long x width of the box, and then cut in half across the width. Place Piece #1 shiny side down on ironing surface (best to use the Teflon sheets under it), then piece #2 shiny side down on top of #1. Iron with hot iron until the pieces are well stuck together. Use your rotary cutter and ruler to cut strips at whatever width you want. Remember freezer paper does not have a grain, so you can cut it any direction.

Make several strips or templates at your chosen width. Using a pencil mark several times on the paper side of the freezer paper template. It is hard to tell the paper side from the shiny side when you are trying to iron templates. If it is marked you will be able to tell easily, and you won't iron it to the bottom of your iron.

Cut your fabric bias strips $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wider than your freezer paper template, whatever that width is because you need a seam allowance on each side to turn over. For instance, if you have $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide templates, cut your fabric $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide. Your templates will probably not be the same length as your fabric, so you can use two pieces of template or you can cut your fabric to match the template, or adjust in some other way.

Set up your ironing surface. Use one of your "unusable" pieces of fabric folded in two to cover the surface. Preheat your iron on cotton.

Place your fabric strip right side down against the ironing surface. Place the freezer paper strip in the middle, marked paper side up, shiny side down against the wrong side of the fabric. Iron the freezer paper slowly, so that it adheres to the fabric. You will have a seam allowance extending out from each side of the freezer paper.

Next, paint the seam allowance on one side with water, liquified spray sizing or liquified spray starch. Use enough so it is damp, not soaking. Fold the damp fabric over the freezer paper so that it is tight against the edge of the paper, iron it dry. Repeat with the other seam allowance. Once you are sure it is ironed dry on both sides, remove the freezer paper, and iron the strip again making sure the edges remain folded in place. You should have a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide strip (or whatever your chosen width is) of bias stem with the raw edges folded under the backside. Your freezer paper template can be used 3-4 times before you need a new one.

To use the Clover bias stem maker. Set up your ironing surface, covering it with two layers of extra fabric. You'll need a pin as well. Cut a small bias corner off one end of your strip. With the wrong side of the fabric up, insert the point into the larger end of the stem maker and move it through and out the small end. Use a pin to help move it along through the slot in the metal tube if possible. It should come out the small end with the sides folded over to the middle of the strip. When you get a couple of inches out, iron it so that the folds are ironed into the middle. Pin the strip at the end to hold it firmly. Now you can move the stem maker back along the strip, ironing it as it emerges from the stem maker. Use steam if you can to insure it is really ironed down well.

To use the press bars.

Cut your fabric strips 1 ¼ inch wide on the bias, making as many as you think you will need. It is not necessary to sew them together unless you need a long piece for a vine or something like it. If you are making really wide stems (1/2 inch or wider), cut your strips wider, perhaps 1 ½ inch wide.

Choose the press bar that is the closest to your chosen width. There are usually 5-7 bars of varying widths in a set. Choose a thread and bobbin that are about the same as the color of your fabric strips. It doesn't have to match, but don't use a high contrast thread as it may show up through the finished stem.

Set your machine up using your regular presser foot. Lay the press bar you have selected under the presser foot so that the left side of the bar is exactly under the left side of the presser foot. Adjust the needle so it clears the right side of the press bar by maybe 1/32 of an inch or a thread or two more. Move the foot back up, and remove the presser bar. If your machine does not have an adjustable needle, move the press bar over under the foot until it is the right distance from the needle. You might need to put some blue tape or a post-it note on the machine surface in front of the feed dogs to mark where the press bar left edge would be.

Choose a bias strip to test. Fold the strip lengthwise wrong sides together, and pin every couple of inches horizontally across the strip. Place the folded edge of the strip exactly under the left edge of the presser foot (or at your marked place), and lower the presser foot to hold the strip in place. You can use a header piece of fabric if needed. Sew about 4-5 inches and stop with your needle in the fabric. Take the press bar and insert it into the casing that has come out of the machine to check that your spacing is correct. If it needs to be wider, you will have to take out the seam you just sewed but if it needs to be narrower, you can just adjust and sew it again. Finish sewing the seam.

Using this method, sew as many strips as you think you will need, plus another couple of feet. You don't want to be short and have to set everything up again just to make one stem!

Trim the seam allowance on each strip down to about a 16th of an inch from the seam. When that is done, turn on your iron and set to medium up to cotton. Insert the press bar into one end of the casing, rolling the seam allowance to the center on the back side of the bar, so that you are ironing the seam allowance flat and the fabric tube flat. You can use steam or not. Iron the length of the bar, then move the bar up through the tube another length, iron as before, and continue until the entire seam and tube are ironed down. Remove the bar and re-iron the stem until it is good and flat. You can also paint it with the liquified starch or sizing while the bar is in the tube. Be sure to iron it dry as you go along. Repeat with all of the prepared strips until you have enough bias stem for your project.

Store your finished bias stems by wrapping them on a section of a pool noodle or by wrapping them around your hand and then putting the bundle in a baggie.