
Patchwork Improv: Working with Shapes with Sherri Lynn Wood

Chapter 1 - Working with shapes

Overview

(gentle piano music) - Hi, I'm Sherri Lynn Wood. I am an artist, an improviser, a maker, and author of *The Improv Handbook for Modern Quilters*. In this class we are going to be improvising with squares. We are going to learn the basic, ruler free technique for piecing together any kind of shape, especially squares, as well as how to work with the idea of a score or a flexible pattern. In other words, to set up a set of limits that we can expand and contract in order to find your flow. This is a great class if you've never done improv before because squares are the building block of all patchwork.

Materials

- The wonderful thing about improv is you can use just about anything to make your quilt with. I like to use whatever scraps I have in my scrap bin. Sometimes small, sometimes large, sometimes medium scraps. Anything will work. I also like working with clothing, and I have a bunch of mens shirts here. I've got a little bit of pieced scrap from my pieced scrap bin. And I even have some charm squares that a friend gave me a while back, which are great to use, especially when we're doing square patch work. I'll be using a rotary cutter and a self-healing mat, but no ruler. A pair of sharp scissors. Possibly a seam ripper. Pins. I like to use tailor's chalk, or something to mark my materials with. And you'll need a sewing machine with neutral thread, and an ironing station.

Preparing squares without rulers

- When I'm improvising with squares, I like to begin by pre-cutting my squares. Today I'm gonna start with working with a men's shirt, cut it apart, and then cutting it into some squares and we're gonna do all of this ruler-free. I love working with men's shirts. It's great fabric and I am working with a lot of those today, so I wanted to show you how I like to cut up a men's shirt. Typically I will begin by just cutting off this placket, although you can always use different sections, but I don't like to use this section mainly 'cause it's a little bit bulky. So I kind of try to cut out all the bulky stuff. Then along the seams. I like to cut out the arms and use those for curve piecing, so a lot of times I will cut the arms out and set them aside for some other project. We'll cut this off at the shoulder. So now I have a nice section here that I can cut into squares or strips or something else. Sometimes I do just go ahead and cut off the little seam on the end. The back is a great section to use 'cause it's usually pretty wide. This one had a pleat in it that I had. This was a tailored shirt and it had a pleat in it that I had to kind of seam rip to get it open, which I've done already. Again, cut around the arms. And this one kind of ripped as I was cutting the pleat apart, so I'm just gonna go ahead and cut that off, and I'll go ahead and cut this piece off. So all these little sections I can cut shapes out of. Whether it's squares or whatever I might be using. Today we'll be working with squares so it'll probably be cut into squares or I might use this as filler fabric to piece the squares together later on. But that's a nice big sheet of fabric that I can use. I'd really love using the buttons, so I'm gonna show you a trick with that, so let's cut this section out. All right. So we have this section here. Now I really love the buttons and I love keeping the buttons in if I can, and so here's a trick on how you can easily piece these buttons. If you turn it over, you want to cut the bottom seam off. This bottom seam too is often a good curve shape to use if you're doing curved patchwork. Now I'll go into the

placket, open it up, go in, and you can see where these buttons are sewn on. I'm going to eyeball it. It's about 1/4 of an inch, actually, so I'm gonna cut it in about 1/4 of an inch from the fold line of the edge of the placket right on the inside of the buttons where the buttons are sewn on. And then you can see, I can take it to the ironing board later and I can iron this open and that gives me a good 1/4 inch seam so that I can easily piece this into some patchwork without having to worry about hitting buttons with my sewing machine or anything like that, so it's a nice trick. And one last part of the shirt that I sometimes like to use. Again, I save the sleeves for later. I typically don't use the collar but I wouldn't say you couldn't try and experiment with it. Sometimes the collars have a lot of stiffness in them. But this part is kind of fun. I'm not sure what this is called. The yoke, the back yoke maybe. Often you can just rip these seams out. They just come out real easily. Not all the time but sometimes. And sometimes I use my seam ripper too to get it started. This one doesn't want to rip very easily, so I'll try and rip it with a seam ripper. Let's see what happens here. Eh, sometimes I'll just rip it. The seam ripper can help get it started sometimes. Okay, and then this can be ironed open as well but I've been enjoying using these little things and making little squares out of them because in a way they're already a square within a square or a rectangle within a square. Then you have these shapes that could be used for angles later on possibly. Once I have my shirt cut up into sections, I'm gonna take some of the sections and cut them into smaller squares. Okay, so I can use my rotary cutter for this, and I'm immediately going to look at special features like this pocket. I kind of would like to have that pocket sewn as a square into the patchwork. So I'm gonna trim up the pocket and it's kind of squarish. If I really want to get a true square I can just bend it over like this and cut off the difference. Again you don't need any kind of ruler for that. You can just do it by hand. It doesn't have to be exact. Then I can do these like this. Just fold it over again. I can decide how big. I'm gonna try to get as many big squares out of this as I can, or medium squares. Again, they don't have to be exact and they don't have to be perfect squares. They have to be squarish. That's nice with the little button in there. Okay, this piece is gonna be some little squares here. You can also just eyeball your square. If you're really into minis, mini quilting, you can get some pretty teeny squares. That's a little rectangular. There we go. Again, how little can we go? Let's see. Don't cut your fingers with the rotary cutter. Be careful about that. You can even use your scissors to cut the squares up. All right, let's go back to these bigger squares here. Again, I can make one big one, and then I'll have some smaller ones, or I can decide I want more of a medium one. Oh, I like this. It's something printed on the shirt, so I'm gonna cut that into a square. A lot of times I just let the features of whatever I'm cutting up dictate the shapes of my squares or the size of my squares. They're all the same shape. They're squares. These are two squares. They're not exact, but they're good enough for this. They're square enough. And then now I've got this larger square I can fold over. This is a little rectangular for me so I will cut that off. All right, so I have several different squares out of this, just one part of the men's shirt. I'm gonna cut up some of these charm pack squares into squares. I could just use them as big squares, and I might, but I might like to have some other variable sizes, and again I can just fold over at an angle and cut these up real quickly. And again, you can also get used to just kind of eyeballing your square. So there's some nice squares in the greens. In terms of how many squares I cut up, it's just whatever I feel like. I might want to begin just simply with a few, and then I can add new colors, but if I decide I'm gonna make a big king size quilt, I might make bigger squares and a lot more of them. Again, you don't have to have everything figured out. You'll just start somewhere and you can always add more. You can always cut in new squares, bring in new colors as you progress going forward, but it might be helpful to have in mind, like today you may just want to experiment so you're just going to work with some kind of

baby-sized quilt, something small, or you might decide, I have to get a wedding quilt done next week. Maybe I'll use this technique for that. Then you might want to cut up more squares and bigger squares and just think about the scale of your project overall.

Sewing squares together

- I have a bunch of squares already cut, all different sizes, all done without a ruler. And now it's time to put them together. So the basic score or flexible pattern for these squares is the idea that you're going to have squares of very different sizes. So some are gonna be small; some are gonna be big. When you join two squares together that are of unequal size, the score says or the flexible pattern says, which is like a procedure that you do over and over again, is that you're gonna add a filler fabric to equal out the length of the two squares. So I'm gonna use this dark blue as my filler fabric. And I'm going to add it here. In this way, once I sew these two together, then I can trim away the extra blue. This way, I keep my squares as squares, and I don't have any partial seams. So let's do that right now. Whatever you're using as your filler fabric, you're welcome to cut it into smaller pieces. You can have strips or whatever. Or you can just cut it off of a big chunk, like I'm doing here. (sewing machine whirs) I have a quarter-inch seam allowance. I didn't have to cut these to match because they were both pretty straight-edged. It's small enough that the two lines were pretty straight. So I just sewed it. Again improv is not about perfection, so everything doesn't have to be exact. It just has to be close enough. Now I've got this sewn on here. I wanna cut this to match. I'm gonna line that up. And you can see now, I have enough length here. And I might over cut it a little bit 'cause I can always trim it later. Okay and then, again these two pieces here match up like a puzzle piece. That's the key to improv piecing without a ruler is that you wanna make sure that whatever you're piecing, they butt up like a puzzle piece, and they match. Now if one of these pieces was a little bit curved, I'd recut it. But because we're still working pretty small, I don't need to do any cutting at this point. And I'm just gonna flip now, right sides together, and sew. (sewing machine whirs) So I've made one component. You see, my two squares are intact. I'm gonna trim off this little bit of extra blue. I don't really need to trim too much on this side. And I've got my two squares intact and sewn together. They kinda make a rectangle. But you can see they're two distinct squares with a filler. Now that's one segment. We have two squares sewn together with a filler. And that's one segment. Now we can continue to build on this, using that same procedure. Whenever you have two sections you're adding together, if you have one that's smaller than the other, you're going to add a filler fabric before joining it. You add the filler fabric to the smaller one and then, join the two pieces and then, cut the filler fabric away. Now I have some more options here. I can either decide to add another square onto this piece, using a filler fabric. I can use a bigger square and do that. Or I can decide to piece a few more segments together with just a square and a filler. So I'm gonna do that. I'm gonna piece a couple more segments together, using this same procedure. So to make this easier, because I'm working a little bit smaller, I'm gonna tear my little (fabric rips) filler fabric into a strip, and it'll make it easier to sew. Again when I'm working this small, as long as the lines are pretty straight and they meet up like a puzzle piece, I don't really need to trim it. I can just start sewing it. (sewing machine whirs) (scissors clank) I always want to keep the integrity of the score which is the idea of keeping the squares intact. You can see I have. These both look like squares now. But this is my filler fabric. So I'm gonna keep that in mind that when I add this, I wanna trim off the filler, not the add. But you know what? If you forget that and you actually add it like this and then, you have to trim off the pink instead of the gray filler, whoopee, it's okay. There's no problem with that. Again the idea of the flexible pattern is that it just gives you a guideline to keep

things a little bit focused. It's okay that you wander out of it. But you can use this idea of, I'm always gonna use the same filler fabric. And I'm always trim away the filler. And I'm always gonna try to maintain the integrity of my squares, my precut squares, as a way to stay focused if you start to feel overwhelmed, like things are just startin' to look crazy. So the score is there to alter and to change but also to bring you back in line if you've wandered away. It's kind of like a jazz tune where the sax player will take a riff off the melody but then, he'll come back to it at some point. (sewing machine whirs) I'll trim that away. Now I can decide that I'm going to just add a big piece of filler right here. Or I could add this to another piece. Why don't I add it? Oh look, now this actually matches up exactly. I don't even need to add filler to sew these two pieces together because they're already the same length. And look at this. They're a natural fit too. There's a slight curve. This is not a perfectly cut square. But they look like they've been cut to match. So I'm just gonna naturally sew that. I always love it when I see these natural fits because that is a way that I'm collaborating (sewing machine whirs) with my patchwork. I'm allowing the patchwork to guide me rather than me controlling the patchwork. All right. And as you can see, it just can keep building this way. And even within kind of narrow confines of the score which is just sewing squares together using a filler, there's a multitude of decisions you can continue to make as you go forward. How much filler you wanna use, like I could put a big chunk of filler here. Or I could decide I don't really wanna use a lot of filler. So I'm gonna continue to add squares onto here before I add this. Or I could look and see. Oh I could add it this direction. So I'm gonna play around with it. And how do I decide which direction to add it in? Well one way to do it is to look for the natural fit. So you can see, here's another natural fit. There's always gonna be these natural fits. It's like serendipity. I love this part of improv. So you can see, if I turn it this way, how awkward that is. And I would have to get my rotary cutter out and line this up and recut it and trim a lot off. It has a bit more of an awkward feel. But when I flip it this way, it looks like I've already cut it before I even turned it that way. You see how it's got a natural line. So that just tells me, I wanna do that. Okay so you see now. I will need to sew the filler. Oh and look, here's another natural serendipity thing. My little strip's almost the exact same length as this. This just tells me, I'm in my flow. So I'm going to. Now this does not need to be cut. It's pretty straight. This strip's pretty straight. So my filler on. (sewing machine whirs) Let's open it up. Okay. Now regarding ironing, I'm not ironing it right now because it's still pretty small. And as long as I feel like I'm in control and can see where the natural lines are, I'll just go for a little longer without ironing. But once it starts to get bigger, I mean, I think after this seam, I will wanna iron. I think this is a pretty natural fit. It looks like maybe I will trim it a little bit. You see how this kind of veers away just a little bit. By just gently putting this end so there's in line and recutting that line, it'll lie flatter than if I don't. So I'm gonna go ahead and recut that. It's pretty minuscule, but you can see the amount that I've cut away here, just a little bit okay. So they're cut to match, like a puzzle piece, right sides up, cut to match. And then, you flip right sides together and sew. (sewing machine whirs) Okay so when I'm sewing over seams, I usually try to just have 'em go in one direction. And now that we've got this section done, I think it's time to take it to the ironing board. You can see from the back of this that I'm not overly concerned about which direction my seams are going in, just as long as they're going in one direction. But sometimes, they get turned. And improv doesn't have to be perfect. So that doesn't really concern me. And oftentimes, when seams curve on the back, I get a nice curvy seam on the front which I like. So I'm not overly concerned. I try to mainly get them to go in one direction. And typically, I just kind of decide. Like this is gonna go in this direction. And I sew from the top front. And if some seams get twisted, I don't worry about it too much. And I can just kinda feel it by hand. You know, I can tell that the seam is going that way. And then, of course, I

want this seam to go out. My goal with ironing is just to get it to lie as flat as possible. Now if you're used to precision piecing, you're never going to get your improv to lie as flat as precision piecing. It's just not designed to do that. It will be flat enough though so that when you go to quilt it, it will be fine. So now I'm going to trim this section off, my filler fabric. Sometimes I let it be a little bigger. I never know how things are gonna line up later on. So I can continue to build onto this section. I could add another piece and more filler. I could start to decide, you know, I'm gonna start adding some other colors. So how do I make these decisions? I kinda listen to my internal cues. If I'm still in the flow and enjoying the colors I'm working with and it's feeling good and I'm engaged and I'm curious, then I'll just keep working on that. At some point though, I'll often start to feel bored or uninspired. And that's when I decide, I'm gonna change it up. And I might bring in a third color. I might change my filler fabric. Or I might switch to a total different color way altogether. I just make a decision based on what I'm feeling internally. There's no right or wrong. It's just whatever you wanna discover in the moment and explore. (lighthearted keyboard music) So follow your curiosity. Listen to your internal cues. When you're bored, it's time to make a change. If you're in your flow and engaged, keep doing it until you aren't feeling that way. (sewing machine whirs) (sewing machine whirs) (soothing orchestra music) (sewing machine whirs) (sewing machine whirs) (sewing machine whirs) So I can see right here that this really needs to be cut to match. I can see that there is some overlap. If I bring the center to match, there's overlap on both the edges. So I'm gonna butt the center up together. And then, I will take my rotary cutter. Or if my piece is bigger than my cutting mat, I could use scissors. I could also take a piece of chalk. If this is a very long piece, I might wanna do that. And I can use the chalk to do the outline of where I need to cut. And then, I can come back and cut with my scissors. So that's how you would join pieces that start to get bigger than your rotary mat. You never need to actually use a ruler to square things up, even as your seams get longer and longer. The other thing is, is if your pieces are overlapped, you can always cut through both layers as long as there's an overlap. So I'm gonna cut through the top layer just slightly as well as the bottom layer on both edges. Then I'm gonna take away (rotary cutter clanks) the extra, and you can see under here. I'm gonna take away some extra too. And now it's cut to match. Just to keep me registered a little bit, I'm going to go ahead and trim this. And that one, I'll leave. I'm gonna start on this edge. Now that they're cut to match, right sides up, cut to match, I'm gonna flip right sides together and again, sew my quarter-inch seam. And you can see, there's a bit of a bow 'cause there's a little bit of a curve here. But as I sew, I'll just straighten those two lines up because they're cut to match. And so they'll both come to the edge. And I'll do my quarter-inch seam. (sewing machine whirs) Okay so now I have a pretty good square. You can see kinda the process. And I can just keep building. It gives me the effect of different bleeds, and my seams get, become unclear where my seams actually are. Like this seam gets kind of disguised because this point comes out because of the bleeds of the different colors into each other. Now I can keep building on that with more and more squares. But I'm gonna go ahead and get a little more complex and make my squares start to get a little more complex. So there's some different things I can do to my squares. Right now, we're just using plain squares. But let's do some variations on the square itself.

Square variations

- So if you get bored with working with just straight-up squares, you can begin to make square variations. One of the classic square variations is square within a square, which is basically like a log cabin. It's strips set around a square. Although you don't have to go all the way around the square.

You can have a strip on one side of the square, two sides of the square, three sides of the square, four sides of the square. So let's make some square within the square variations. I'm gonna continue using my filler fabric as my strips to go around my squares to give some continuity to the piece that I was just working on. And I'm gonna go ahead and cut a few strips, maybe some different widths so that they'll just be easily accessible and don't interrupt my flow. And I'm just gonna begin to add some squares around. You know what, I'm gonna start with one of these itty bitty squares just for the fun of it. I mean this is the teeniest little square I cut. (laughing) So let's see what we can do with that. (machine whirring) You can see my strip is bigger than the square itself. (machine whirring) Okay, I might just leave that one with three strips on three sides rather than go all the way four. Now let's pick up another one. I'll use a big one this time. (machine whirring) All right, that one's kinda crooked. It's okay, wonky. I'll do two sides on this one. (machine whirring) It's okay that I don't know where I'm going or how I'm gonna use these squares. I'm just gonna enjoy making the squares as I make them, just out of my own curiosity. Some of 'em may end up in the final piece, and some of 'em may not. And I don't need to know where they're gonna go. Part of the improv is just making the variations. Now this one I think I'm just gonna add another color strip for just whatever reason. I feel like I want some other color in it, so I'm just gonna pull some other strips that I just have in my collection of strips to add some other strips just because I don't know why, just because internally I feel like it. I think some of it is because this is such a slant. I'm going to line it up a little bit to take out my slant just slightly. (machine whirring) I'm gonna go back to putting, oh I'm gonna just go ahead and add more of this green on the other side. I like to just play around, listen to my internal cues, and sometimes it just tells me to add something new. Just go for it. Just explore, have fun and see what you come up with, and just be in the flow with it and enjoy wherever it takes you. (machine whirring) Once I get all these squares made, I'll take 'em all to the ironing board. (machine whirring) Gonna work on this one some more. (laughing) Just feel like it. This one, I'm gonna clean this edge a little bit up. (machine whirring) And now I'm feeling a little burdened by this darker color, so I'm just gonna switch to a bright color to make a few squares with some bright strips this time. So let me get some brighter colors outta here. Here's some nice blues and greens and a pink. (machine whirring) And while I've got this pink out, I think I'm gonna, I'm gonna sew this one on. (machine whirring) And now, I feel like maybe making some crosses, getting a little bored with just doing the square with the square. So I'm gonna make some crosses in my square. And I'm gonna pretend like this is the whole square rather than this is the whole square, and I'm just giving it a little crease just to see where that would be the center. And I'm gonna do that, and then I'm gonna make this a high-contrast one. So I'm gonna pull out a little bit of my black from a men's shirt. And I want some narrow strips in here, so I'm gonna cut thinner strips. Remember whenever you sew seams, you're gonna lose 1/2 an inch. So you're gonna lose 1/4 inch on each side. So you can kind of anticipate that, not as a way to be exact, but when you're thinking about how thick or thin you want something, you may wanna take that into consideration. So I know when I sew my strip in the center, it's going to be basically a 1/2 an inch smaller than what I actually cut it after it's been sewn. (machine whirring) So you can see I'm gonna trim this up, and I'll trim that side too. And now I can just add this. Now this flares out a little bit, so I'm gonna trim this to match just a bit. I'll get that little flare out, and I'm gonna sew this. (machine whirring) Now my intention was just to cut this into a grid. I don't know, I kinda like it just cut like that for some reason. Now I have to make a decision whether I wanna stay with my original idea of cutting the grid or if I wanna just make a few pieces with just some strips through it. I am gonna just make at least one more with just a strip through it like that. And you know that's where you go to pattern and variation. You can keep playing with

these ideas until you're ready to switch to something else. And sometimes things happen that you like that you didn't intend, and you just decide to go with that flow. It's all about following your own curiosity. (machine whirring) Okay let's see, here's a big square. I'm gonna go ahead and just do a cross in this one. (machine whirring) Okay that's darker than I wanted it to be, so I'm gonna pick another brighter color to mix in with it. I'm gonna go ahead and sew a little bit of this around. I'm gonna make a square within a square. (machine whirring) I'm gonna add my lighter one. I'm gonna add the green instead. (machine whirring) Okay, I'm gonna end this with a green on the other side. (machine whirring) I'm gonna do one more, and then I'm gonna take it to the ironing board. I'm gonna do one more pink one with some green around it. (machine whirring) I'm just gonna leave it like that. So I'm gonna take these to the ironing board and iron them as flat as possible. So I'm gonna take my variations to the table and look at them a little bit and see what I've done. And I'm going to kind of put 'em out little bit in the order that they were made just to see what I call the rhythm of attention. When you follow your curiosity, there'll be a natural line of exploration and discovery that starts to happen. And even though it may look chaotic at the time, there is an internal logic and the other people will see that as well, even though it might not be spelled out exactly. If your natural flow is following your curiosity, there'll be a sense of curiosity in your quilt. So no matter what your rhythm of attention is during your improvisational piecing process, whether it's curiosity, joy, frustration, or getting lost and finding your way, it's very likely that will translate into your finished piece.

Continuing to compose

- So now that I have some more complex squares made I'm gonna continue to build on the section of squares that I already started composing. So I'm gonna start playing with my squares at first just to see what catches my attention in terms of the layout. I'll just randomly put them out here and see if anything looks interesting to me. I have some things with some oranges. Okay, one of the things I like to look for are bleeds where things bleed in. That's kind of nice right there. I like to look for natural fits. I see a natural fit there. Okay, I've got some bigger ones here. So you can think a couple steps ahead. I mean, with squares you can sometimes layout the whole thing, but the thing is is every time I sew and make a commitment it's gonna change some. So I might wanna build a couple of sections and then see how I wanna add the sections. I'm gonna build these sections together first. Let's see what happens if I turn this this way. That's kind of interesting. I'd like to fit this little guy in there somewhere. And you see I'm working right here a lot with this gray bleed to create its own shape. I'm kind of playing around with that some and seeing if I can find anything that kind of works. You can even line up little spots if you want. I'm not gonna line that up though. Okay, so let's see here. What else can we do with this green? I kind of like how once I turn this from here something clicked inside of me that just was like, oh, I like that. And I'm listening to my internal cues, seeing what excites me, what makes me kind of perk up. And so as soon as I turn this, first of all, before I turn it you can see it doesn't have a natural fit. Nothing really is lining up, but as soon as I turn it I have a couple things happening all at once that make me think, wow, this works. One is that I have some bleeds here, so this bleeds in and this bleeds in, so it creates some interesting, a thin line that kind of goes over this. And then I also have a little bleed on the pink, my eye picks that up. So I'm good with that. If I shift this up that might work as well to have it shifted up a little bit just to have better alignment. And then, as far as this other area goes I'm not sure yet. I'm gonna just decide what I wanna do with this I think before I go any further in here. Although, again, I have some more lines I could, this green kind of lines up nicely with that. But I'm not gonna think too much further

than this row here at this point. I do need to make some things to fill in right there. So again, I can go back to using a filler fabric idea with squares. So I'm gonna use the pink as my filler now instead of the gray. All right, that seems to line up with this. Okay, so I'm gonna go ahead and sew this. Okay, I'm gonna iron it open. All right, so I like that. Now I think I am going to arrange this in some way. I'm not quite sure whether I wanna put it down here or have it go up here. I might go ahead and figure this out a little bit. So I'm not exactly sure where I'm going with this right now, so I'm just gonna go back and trust the score and I'm going to choose a black filler fabric to begin to join these additional squares. All right. Again, I'm gonna cut this to match. I'll trim off the little bits. All right, so now I'm gonna cut this to match. I'll go ahead and trim that off. All right, so I'm liking how this is looking, how things are bleeding into each other and creating new frames. One of the things about the order of sewing is that you really don't want any insets, so I'm really trying to think of what can I do to complete this row? And then I'll start working on the rest of the rows. Maybe think a little bit ahead on certain, oh, that's a nice fit. Get another frame here. The thing is is do I want another line of black there? I'm not sure. I think I'm gonna put my black filler on this edge. A question. So I can audition it by putting the black in behind it and looking at it. Do I like that better? Do I like that better? Another option is to build down this way and then maybe make a longer row here. So maybe I'll do that, because I do know that I wanna put this about right here. So let's see, and let's see what other parts I have to work with. Oh, that's kind of interesting. Bringing in more of this black and I have some red here. Okay, I think that's a good commitment right there. It's almost the same size and I can just trim off this green, so I'm gonna make this commitment, even though I'm not exactly sure what I'm gonna do with this area here. Again, I'm gonna cut to match, so that when I flip it and sew it it'll lie flat. The thing about improv is you can't see the finished end result before it's finished, so you have to make the best relationships that you can in the present moment. Be present, pay attention to what you're seeing, when you see a relationship you like or that thrills you, excites you, then go ahead and commit to it. And committing means sew it down. The other thing is once I start working on something I'm always sometimes like to just turn it around and look at it in different relationships just to see if there's anything I like better. 'Cause until I've actually sewn it down I haven't committed. But actually, I don't see anything I like better right now. I like this so far. But again, any component I can turn around. Like that's not bad, right? That's kind of nice. Okay, I'm just gonna keep going with the direction that I was in. I have this kind of cool piece and I like this, because it's bringing in some more colors. But of course, at some point you gotta decide where is it going to end? I think I'm gonna just need to commit to this somehow. So let's go back to this part and I'm just gonna put some bright color in. Some unexpected color. Oh, let's do that. Look at that. And then put the black around it. That'll look great. Let's make sure, I'm gonna do it this way, 'cause once I sew the seam in it's gonna make it narrower. All right, I'm gonna iron it. All right. Okay, now I'm gonna commit these two. I'm liking this. Back to the iron. So now I've pulled this back and I've put it in in the opposite direction and I kind of like it in the opposite direction. It makes it a little more complex that way. It's not the way it's designed, but it fits. Kind of makes it a little more complex. Let me turn it back the way I designed it and see if I wanna stick with it the way I designed it or if I wanna go to. I'm gonna stick with the way I designed it, I think. The other thing to remember is if you're ever sew something on backwards, like it's very common to do this where you bring something off, you put it back on to cut it and all of a sudden you realize you've sewed it in backwards. Just go whoopee, because you've made a mistake and that's a good thing, because there really are no mistakes. It's just you learning more. Whenever you have a moment like that it's your mind saying, I just wanna mix it up a little bit and just go with that flow. Especially if you've

already sewn it together, because once it's sewn it's committed. And you wanna always build onto your commitment and allow it to continue to flow. It's called yes, and. Okay, so now I'm just going to, oh, see, look. I didn't realize that. I was building it all this way, but I made that mistake and now I've turned it and look at this nice, natural fit that brings the corner in, connects up the black, and shifts into a new colorway. So here it is, our intuitive process or our intuitive flow just happens almost on an unconscious level. So a lot of time our decision making, our planning, our designing gets in the way. And so when you have something that's like a mistake moment and you go ahead and commit to that you don't know what incredible thing is going to unfold that you didn't plan for. And that's going with the flow. Now I'm gonna decide what I need to fill in and how I wanna finish this off as a larger segment. I really like having some of these other colors in. I also think I would like to have some blank space or some more open space. Let's see what happens if I scoot this up here. And I'm going to put this down here. I'm gonna turn it this way, so I have more of it on my mat. Okay, again, I'm gonna look for natural fits. I don't, even though that's more of a natural fit, I don't really like the setting of it. I kind of like how these squares kind of jump here, this relationship. As apposed to having them kind of all even. I don't know why, I just like it. So I'm gonna go ahead and put that here. I'm gonna need to use some filler here. And then I'm gonna put something on this edge. Let's see what we can do with this. Okay, that kind of looks good, that fits. See that nice, natural fit? But now I've got some chunks here. Sometimes when I have chunks I just wanna put in something plain. I could go lighter here. That's not bad. I think I'm just gonna do that. All right, so I'm gonna need to add some filler here. And I'm going to, I'm gonna get this row done, then I'm gonna get this row done, and then this'll be my final seam and I'll cut off some of this. But I don't wanna cut off this interesting stuff, so I'm gonna fill in right here. Well, maybe now, maybe I'll put in a little more yellow. Oh yeah, let's put that yellow in. I had an immediate reaction to the yellow. So I'm gonna sew this yellow in here. Okay, now I'm gonna sew these two together. They kind of already fit. I don't really need to cut them, there's so many natural fits. That's what I love. We've been taught for so long that we need to use rulers to make everything match. And it's amazing how our free hand naturally cuts things without our even being conscious of it. Okay, I'm going to iron this and then I'm just going to continue sewing. Okay, next I'll sew this. And then I'll iron. And next I'm gonna sew this. Okay. All right, so I have this row finished. I have this section ready to go. This section ready to go. I just wanna add something right on here that kind of borders this a little bit and finishes up the edge, mainly 'cause it's kind of wonky and awkward. So I'm gonna actually pull out some of my piece scraps to add something right here. These pastels look really good here, they're the right, just about the right length. So I'm gonna line this up. I'm gonna put this piece aside for now and line this up. Oh, look at that, that's a good natural fit. I like it right here. See, I love how this light pink bleeds right into that light pink line. It's exact same width. I just love it when this happens. I'm cutting it to match. Right sides up, cut to match. I'm gonna take away this extra here. That goes back into my piece scrap bag. All right, now I will fold this to sew it. Now sometimes when I have larger pieces, especially if I'm getting into a big quilt, I'm gonna make a mark right across the seam to register, so as I go down I'm gonna pin in these places and that'll keep this registered up. Because you see there are a little bit of curves. I went with that natural edge, which was a little bit curvy. If I have my marks in place I can go through and just line these up. And where I see the chalk lines meeting I'll just put a pin. If I have a lot of seams and I'm concerned about them coming open at all sometimes, especially if it's a really long piece I might pin in every seam just to keep them in place. You can pin as much as you need to to support your best sewing. If you don't need to pin so much you don't have to. It's really, there's no one way to pin or iron in improv, you do what you need to

do to meet your goals and to match your skill level. If you find that pieces are separating as you sew them, cross seams are separating, then you probably want to go to a tighter stitch width on your machine. All right, let's go back to our order of sewing. These two pieces are gonna get sewn together and then our very last seam is going to be this one. I'm gonna go ahead and trim this a little bit, just so I see the line. Often I will trim my sections just the most minimal amount, just so I can see what the line really is without any little things poking off. Okay, and I can do the same with this one. Okay. This is probably gonna overlap a little bit. And then I'm gonna want this to come out here, so that I have enough room to cover this whole edge. So that shows me where that's gonna go. I'll just put a little clip or I can use my chalk to just give me a gauge of where my edge is gonna be here. I'm gonna line this up and I'm gonna go ahead and cut this to match. Okay. All right, and then I'm just gonna cut this a little bit big, so I can go back and trim it down to the side that I want. All right. Okay, let's sew it together. Again, if you need to make registration marks you can, if you don't, you don't have to. So I have a little bubble in here, so let's do some troubleshooting and take that bubble out. Now here I can see where the bubble is. This bubbling happens sometimes because I tried to cut it to match, it didn't quite match, or I didn't pin. Probably if I pinned I would've gotten a more accurate seam or did my registration. But no matter, it's very easy to take something like this out. So what I'm doing is I'm finding where the bubble wants to naturally go and I'm gonna take a dart on the seam. Occasionally I, I could take a dart over the seam, like this, if I wanted to, but when I can take it on the seam I prefer to do that, because then you don't see any dart at all. And I can see this is naturally gonna wanna fold right here. To take a dart you want your seams to be going in the opposite direction of your dart. So if they're not ironed in the way that is the opposite direction then you might need to reiron. But as you can see, my seams are going in that direction. And I want my dart to come in this direction. And you can see I can finger press it. The other thing to do when you need to take a dart you really need to have your piece on a flat surface, because if it's not on a flat surface you're not gonna be able to get an accurate dart. So if it's bigger than your ironing board you probably wanna take it back to your table. And put a few pins in it or finger press it. Then you can take it back to your ironing board and press that crease in. So when you turn it over you can see that crease line. Now this is very, very hard to see on this one, because the crease is following that little white thread line actually, but there's a little crease in there and I'm gonna follow it right up to the seam about to here. So I'm gonna start my machine right in line with my line of sewing that's already existing, and then you can see that crease right, going right to the left of the white line. And I'm gonna follow that as best as I can. Now I'm gonna go back to the ironing board and press it again. All right, no more bubble, it's nice and flat. I can turn it back over now. I mean, this is so narrow I don't think I even need to trim, but if it was a wider seam I might trim it back down to 1/4 inch seam. All right, let's do our last, our very last line of sewing and then we'll trim it all up, this section up. So let's take this piece back. It's fitting very well right here. I am going to line up that up. Again, I will show you how to do it with a piece of chalk this time. I think it's pretty good over here, but actually this part I'm gonna use the rotary cutter, 'cause it's on the mat. I'm cutting it to match, right sides up, cut to match. And I guess I'll go all the way down, well, let me show you just so you know how to do this if it's a bigger piece. Again, you can take it and do a chalk line, right, if it's bigger than your mat. And then you can go back and cut along that chalk line. That's another way you can cut it to match. Now this has got some tricky curves and things like that, so I am gonna do some registration lines. To, sometimes I just do it where seams actually cross over. Let's do one right here. And let's do one right where this green one is. Okay, so now I can flip this. And I'm gonna put some pins in. A lot of seams back here, so I'm gonna pin on some of those seams. I'm looking for

those cross marks, make sure they're registered. If I've got a bunch of seams that are kind of bunching up and making some bulk I might just finger press them in the opposite direction, just so it lies flatter after I sew it. I don't really mind if my seams twist sometimes. I'm more concerned about how much bulk I have in that line of sewing. The thing with improv is that it never, you're not making things line up and match and be precise. So sometimes your seams can go, you never know where they're gonna be. So if they start to bulk up too much just turn them. All right, we're ready to sew. Okay. So let's take it to the table and trim it up. I'm just gonna trim it initially as kind of straight as I can. And follow that line around. Okay, let's get this one. This side kind of curves around, so I'm gonna just trim it a little straighter. I always eyeball it, I never use a ruler to square off my pieces, although that's an option you have. You certainly can do that if you'd prefer that. I like to have mine just be natural shape.

Evaluation

- Now it's time to do a final evaluation. So, I find it very helpful with improv not to think about whether things are good or bad, or right or wrong, because there really is no way to judge it. We don't have any external example that we need to follow to be able to make a judgment like that. So, what I find helpful is to do this simple evaluation process, which allows me to think about what I actually learned from this process, and be able then to take that on into the next piece. So, my evaluation process, I ask four questions. One is, what surprised me? What happened that I did not expect, either about the process or the outcome? It could be about color, it could be about technique. Anything about the process or the flow of improv, or what the final piece looks like. I also ask myself what did I discover or learn about the process or the outcome, something I didn't know before. The other thing I ask is what was satisfying about the process or the outcome, and finally what was dissatisfying about the process or the outcome, and if I have a dissatisfaction, what would I want to do differently next time to be more satisfied. Now, you don't have to have all of those questions answered, but if any of those questions come up in your evaluation, it's helpful to identify them. Surprise, discovery, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction. So, let's take a look at this piece. What surprises me about this piece are the brightness of the colors. I think when I first started working with these mostly men's shirts and things, I know I brought in the bright colors pretty soon, but in my mind I was thinking I was gonna do something much more muted. And it's a delightful surprise at how these colors work. I also like a few of these little bits here that are kind of unexpected. They are just these little bits of color kind of floating, and how this X is a little teeny square, and interacts with the black. I just like some of these relationships. I also kinda discovered a little bit about bordering. I kinda like how there's this big, more open, simple space, but then this kinda creates an interesting border with these frames. I really love this move of having the squares kinda lined up, but offset. It creates a great rhythm. I like this open space. That's a good move, I think as an improviser, to go from this busy border to a simple border. So, I'm pretty happy with a lot of these moves, and I really like the way the color kind of creates shapes and lines in different places, and how you have multiple lines intersecting. So, overall I'm pretty satisfied with how this piece came together. I am a little bit dissatisfied with this final piece here. I'm not sure, actually, it's not awful, and I would never take it out. Now, some people like to do this. They think improv, anything goes. You can just cut it out and start over, or whack it apart and reposition it. I am not a proponent of that. Personally, I like to stick with this very basic improv rule that is across the board for every type of improv, and that's the rule of yes and. And yes and says I'm always going to say yes, I'm going to affirm what's there, and I'm gonna build on it. The flip side of yes and is yes but, and yes but is I like

all of this, but I don't really like these stripes. Okay, so what happens when I say yes but in my improv instead of yes and, is that as soon as I say yes but, I've cut my flow. I start doubting myself and I'm going to stop flowing, because I'm gonna be focused on something negative rather than the positive. So, to get over the yes but, if you've done something and you're like, I like everything in this but that little piece of yellow in the middle, or everything but these stripes, you can either do something that makes you like the stripes or the yellow better, like adding more yellow or more stripes, or you could just not focus on that part and focus on the parts you do like, and build on the parts you do like and just ignore the parts that you're not so keen on. Another thing when people yes but themselves, a lot of times I've noticed in the classes that I teach, it's often when the person is on some new territory where they are unfamiliar with. So, they've done something really great. Everybody else in the class is like, what, you don't like that yellow? That's my favorite part of the piece, but the person that did it doesn't like the yellow, or doesn't like the stripes because it's something so different for them. It's something that's right on their edge, their growth edge, so their immediate reaction is to doubt it and to do a yes but. So, that's another reason not to do a yes but, but to just do a yes and and keep going, because you may like a thing that you don't like so much even more later on. So, now that you've had some experience improvising with squares, you can take what you've made and you can build on it. You can learn from it. You can continue to make it grow, or you can just take it as a stepping stone onto your next piece.