

Applique techniques

Collected by Maggie Forest

The basic premise of applique is simple – cutting a shape out of one fabric and sewing that shape onto another fabric. Sounds easy....

But there are many issues you have to resolve. What materials do you use? What are you going to do with the edges? Do you want to hand sew or machine sew it? What do you do to stop the fraying edges? Do you want a three dimensional effect or not?

There are a number of 'cheats' available to us. You can use double-sided iron-on fusing, or some product like Fray Stop to avoid hemming your motifs and yet stop fraying. Felt can be used to pad a motif to make it stand out more.

The first thing to do is consider what you are making. If you are making a war flag, you want drape, you want it to be hardy and withstand the occasional mud bath. You probably don't want to spend 100 hours hand sewing and embroidering when you will then drag it through the mud.

If you are making a heraldic garment in velvet and silk, you probably want to make it as spiffy as is humanly possible. But you still want drape.

If you are creating a wall banner or tabard, you want a fairly stiff applique, but probably a 3D effect for additional spiff-factor.

Flags you don't want to pad, because it will redistribute weight, and you don't want to use fusing because you would make it stiff. Both will make the flag hang funny. Anything where you want to preserve drape, you want to be careful with what you do to the weight distribution.

Flags, fighters' tabards – machine sew them! They will be abused, hit, dirty, washed, dirty again... you want it to hold, and you want to spend as little time on them as possible, because you will eventually break them.

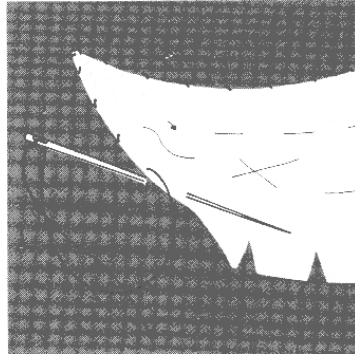
A herald's court tabard is meant to be stiff, it's often done in expensive materials which means the maker will likely kill anyone who spills candle wax or wine on it! On the one I'm currently making I have decided to treat the sleeves and the body quite differently.

The sleeves have smaller motifs, so I decided to use cording over the edges, but that isn't necessarily very strong and doesn't do much for fraying, so I've used the double sided fusing.

On the body, I intend to have padded charges with a great deal extra detail. The charges will be hemmed down and then have cord couched down on top. I will use the same technique with the banners! Again, they are designed to hang flat against a wall, and will be made from expensive materials.

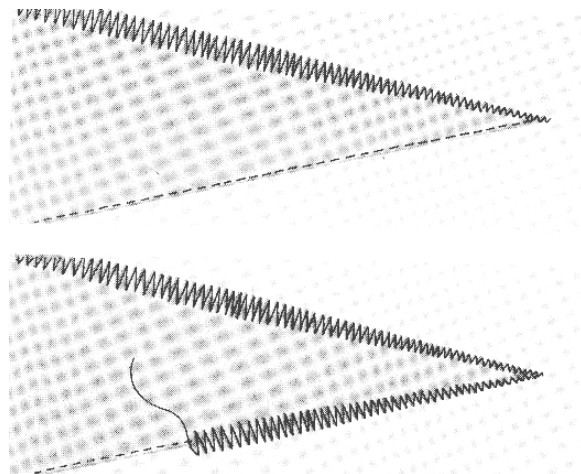
Some techniques you can use:

1. Always transfer the pattern both to the pattern fabric and the background fabric – otherwise you won't know where to put the things, and you won't notice the design is off balance until you're finished!
2. If you're using fusing, transfer the pattern onto there, then iron on and cut out last!
3. If you're going to hem the edges, cut your motif with a decent seam allowance. Baste stitch the hem down before you attach the motif to the background fabric and then hem it down.

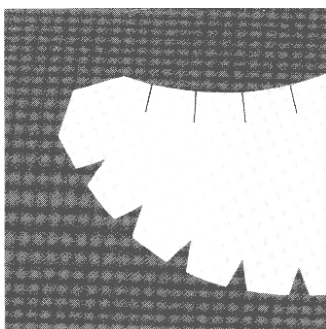


4. If you're zig zagging the edges, there are tricks to going round corners.

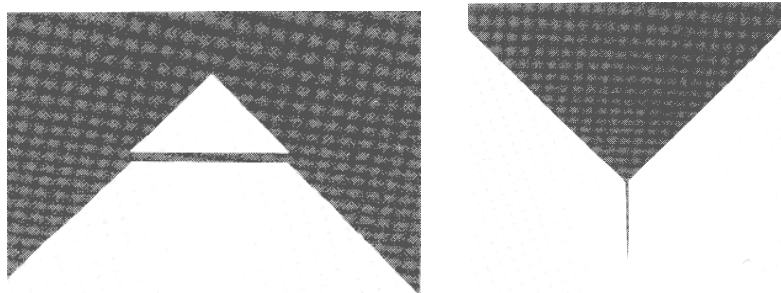
5. If you are zig zagging a sharp point, make the stitch width progressively narrower as you reach the point.



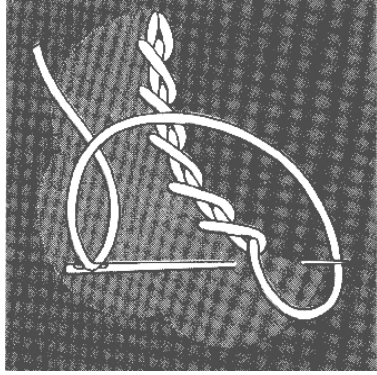
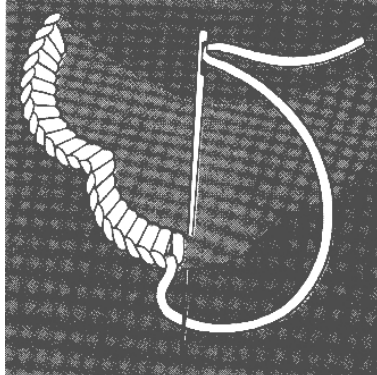
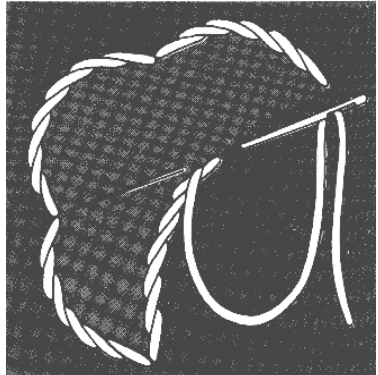
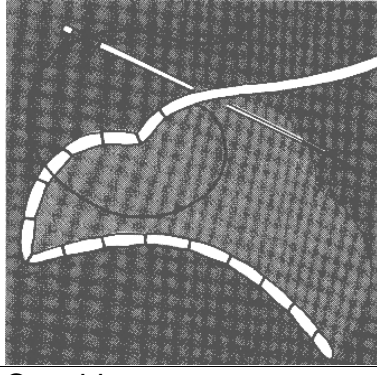
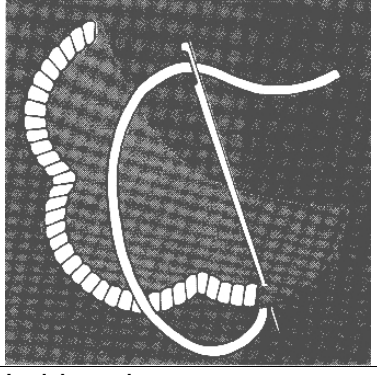
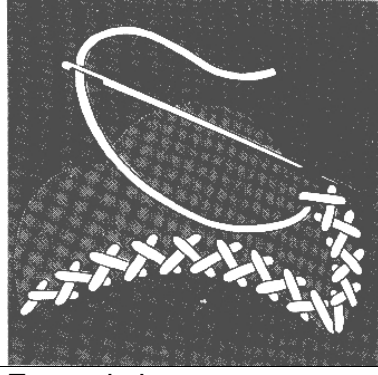
6. Clip curves if you're going to fold things under.



7. Be very careful at corners, if you're going to be able to get them sharp. Corollary: avoid sharp corners if you can!



8. Once your motif is on, whatever way you choose to do that, do something with the edge. You can machine over with a very tight zigzag, or you can choose to hand embroider. The following stitches all work well.

		
Chain stitch (straight or twisted)	Buttonhole stitch	Stem stitch
		
Couching	Laid work	Fern stitch