



by DAWN CAVANAUGH

National Director of Education  
for American Professional  
Quilting Systems.

Contact: [dawn@apqs.com](mailto:dawn@apqs.com)  
[apqs.com](http://apqs.com)

# Write This Down...

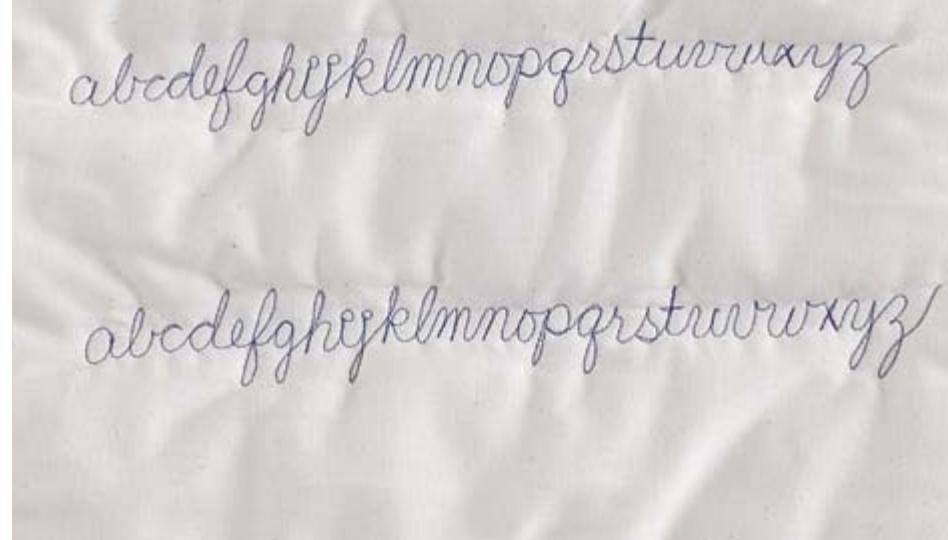
Machine quilting requires some practice before you tackle your first project. Even doing something as simple as writing the alphabet with your machine will help you develop the muscle memory to create your own spectacular quilts.

## WEB EXTRA

To download instructions for this ABC Quilt, go to [FonsandPorter.com/ABCQuilt](http://FonsandPorter.com/ABCQuilt)



PHOTO A



*I* LOVE quilt shows! As I stroll through the aisles, each quilt draws me in to tell its story. Before I machine quilted, my eyes focused on the patchwork design and the overall presence of each quilt. But once I owned a longarm, my focus changed and I notice the quilting stitches even before I see the quilt's piecing or color.

When I'm working in the booth at quilt shows, quilters who have been inspired by the quilts they've seen stop by to try a longarm machine for themselves. They are excited about the possibility of quilting their own projects like those they've seen in the show. Yet, once they are at the machine, they suddenly

become shy and ask, "What should I quilt?" With lots of throat space and perfect stitches at their fingertips, minds that are normally filled with creative quilting ideas immediately go blank. That's when I suggest they try something that is so natural they can do it with their eyes closed—write their name!

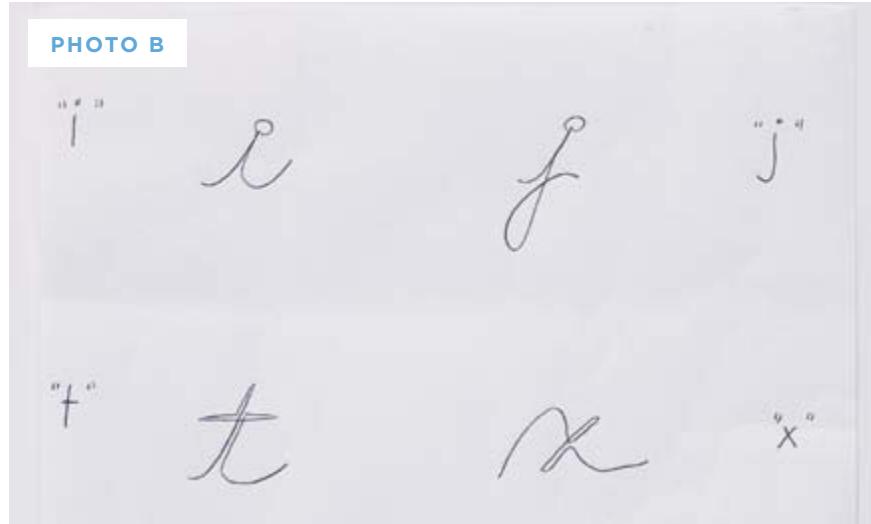
The shyness melts away; they gleefully autograph the practice fabric, and then they relax and smile—it's easier and even more fun than they imagined! Soon they're doodling leaves, stars, or even simple loops and are having a great time.

Every letter in the English alphabet can be stitched as a continuous line in lower

case format (*Photo A*). Since these shapes have been ingrained in your brain since you were young, you'll find instant success when you try quilting the letters. Grab some lined paper and practice your penmanship, just as you did as a child. Work your way through the alphabet, practicing only one letter at a time. Fill several lines with the letter "a", connecting the letters together. Then move on to "b" and "c", and fill your notebook with the rest of the alphabet.

You'll need a little ingenuity when you get to the letters "i" and "j". I simply make a circle at the top of each shape to represent the dot normally added in handwriting (*Photo B*). When it's time to cross the letters

PHOTO B





"t" and "x", simply retrace your motion at the crossovers to create the letter.

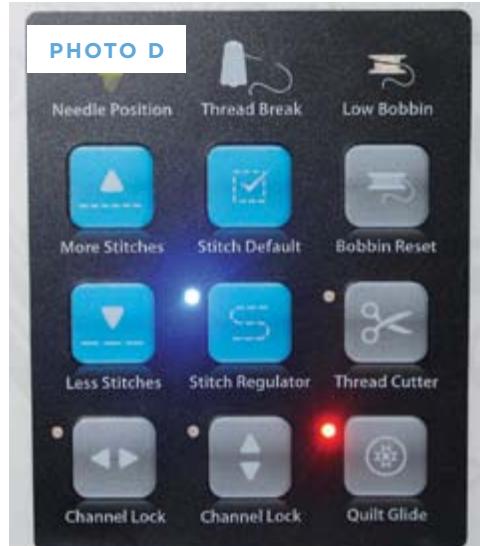
As you practice, you'll find that your spacing changes with repetition of the letters. They may tend to crowd together as you gain momentum. Since you're going to use these letters for actual quilting designs, you'll want the spacing to be more consistent. Try practicing on graph paper to help with that, planting a letter inside each square (or two squares based on the width of the letter). Repeat this exercise several times until your hand automatically starts inserting the appropriate amount of space between the letters to keep them consistent.

Once you've practiced on paper, it's time to move to your machine and let your needle be your pencil. An open toe foot, if available, will give you more visibility and make the letters easier to see (*Photo C*). If you're using the letters as a background fill as shown, decrease

your stitch length so you can change directions quickly. If your machine has the Quilt Glide feature (*Photo D*), use it to make your needle move constantly, even though stitch regulation is engaged, and increase the smoothness and fluidity of detail quilting.

Start by drawing lines on your fabric if necessary. Quilt your letters on the lines just as if you were drawing them on paper. Unless you're a whiz at writing your name backwards, either quilt your way back to the beginning, or end the stitching with securing stitches and then cut your thread and return to the left to repeat another row. Since longarm machines prefer stitching from left to right on the needle side of the machine, I quilt a subtle wavy line back to the start of my letters so I can begin again (*Photo C*).

In my *ABC Quilt* (page 80), I've used the letters that correspond to the appliquéd pieces as background fill. You



can make your projects extra special by quilting in names, monograms, or even messages to the recipient. If you want the letters to be more noticeable, use thread that contrasts with the fabric to make it stand out.

With a little imagination, you can also start to embellish your letters. Think about how calligraphers add swirls, loops, and lavish curves to their letters. Experiment with adding flourish to your letters—an extra hook, another loop, or even passing twice around part of a letter can add extra pizzazz. Consider autographing each of your quilt projects with your own special signature, just as painters do. Not only will it add to the quilt's provenance, but it will also help identify the quilt if it ever becomes separated from you unexpectedly. Go ahead—write it down—on your quilt!