

Feltscaping Technique Guide

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**Written
for Brother
by Kathy MacMannis**

Feltscaping Technique Guide

Foreword

The sewing machines of the Brother PQ Series have long been favorites of mine. My sewing projects are diverse, and I don't like being limited by fabric finish, weight, or layer bulk when I am trying to bring a dream project to reality. The PQ machine is my dream machine. The Feltscaper, an embellishing attachment designed exclusively for these machines, makes a good thing even better!

Bringing this exciting new tool to you has taken us on a long journey. Our journey began in Atlanta several years ago when I first saw a Brother industrial felting machine. Adapting an industrial process to suit a home machine is always challenging. Our engineers worked hard to listen to those of us on the creative side, and the process continued until we had developed the Feltscaper we offer you today.

Although I have had a great time playing and experimenting with this fun tool, I know that our best ideas are ahead of us and will come from you, our creative crafters, as you begin to explore this new world of Feltscaping. In the process of bringing this product to you, we interviewed several authors of crafts books. All of these imaginative women offered wonderful possibilities. Kathy MacMannis, with her innovative work with wool, stood out as the best person to develop this technique book for you.

I'm sure you will enjoy working with Kathy's techniques and will use them as inspiration to create your own style, stretch your imagination, and use your new Feltscaping tool to create exquisite works of your own design.

Best regards,

Nel Howard Jones

Accessory Product Manager

Brother International Corporation

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Congratulations on your purchase of the Feltscaper, the most powerful embellishing tool in the sewing industry. Brother's Feltscaper is based on a hand technique called needle felting or punching in which a barbed needle is pushed through wool roving, causing the fibers to mesh. Needle punching by hand is a painstaking, time consuming process and although the results are beautiful, the time involved to create such fiber art is unfortunately unrealistic for many of us in our fast-paced lives.

The key to Brother's Feltscaper is the needle assembly which houses five barbed needles. This unique needle, coupled with the power of the PQ1500S sewing machine, is the perfect needle felting tool.

If you are new to the machine, you'll find that the PQ1500S is extremely powerful and fast. The speed of 1500 stitches per minute allows the Feltscaper to punch up to 25 times a second. It is precisely this power and speed which will enable you to create fiber art in a fraction of the time that it would take to create by hand. In addition, many of the techniques are unique to the Feltscaper and could never be reproduced by hand since they rely upon both the machine speed and fabric manipulation to create the different effects.

This technique guide is designed to help you create, quickly and easily, your first Feltscaping project. It will also give you an idea of the unlimited embellishing possibilities that can be done with the Feltscaper. Give your imagination free reign. You now own an incredible tool which will provide you with countless hours of fun and discovery in your creative endeavors.

Machine Setup

- Assemble your Feltscaper according to the instruction manual. The presser foot should be high enough so that the base fabric/roving moves freely beneath the foot. Make sure that all screws have been securely tightened.
- The sewing machine should have the extension table attached and the knee lift inserted. Getting in the habit of using the knee lift to raise the presser foot will minimize the times that your hands will leave the fabric.
- When the machine is initially turned on, the automatic needle down position is illuminated. For the majority of Feltscaper techniques, it is more convenient if this feature is turned off. Keep in mind that with five needles, you are unable to pivot the material with the needles in the down position, so always have the needles in the highest position before moving the fabric. Use the hand wheel or tap the foot pedal once to raise the needles to the highest position.

Fibers for the Feltscaper

One of the most exciting aspects of the Feltscaper is its versatility and the many different media that can be used. Experimenting with different fibers and materials will be the best way for you to get to know your Feltscaper. Some materials and fibers will work better than others, but half of the fun will be trying out all the different possibilities. The following is a brief overview of just some of the many choices.

Wool roving

Roving, a soft and fluffy material, represents the last step in processing animal fleece before it is spun into yarn. Roving is traditionally used for needle felting since its fibers mesh into one another when punched with the needle. Of all natural fibers, wool has the most scale or tooth which, under a microscope, is similar to the bark of a tree. Each fiber is surrounded by this scale. The scale on individual fibers tends to catch and hold on to each other when agitated or rubbed together, much like Velcro®. This natural action is used by the needle felting needles to lock the fibers on the top of the fabric by matting the fibers with each other below the fabric. Wool will hold your creations more securely than synthetic fibers which do not share the natural rough surface texture of wool fibers.

If you are new to this fiber, you're in for a treat. Not only will you be able to use it to create incredible designs, but it will actually serve as mortar to bond materials together. Your Brother dealer has a large selection of roving available that coordinates with the "Country Yarn" collection of threads. For the most design freedom, try to develop a full palette of colors that includes different shades and tones.

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Decorative yarns

A trip to your local yarn shop will provide you with a wide selection of fibers that are perfect for the Feltscaper. Many of the following techniques use various types of yarns ranging from inexpensive acrylic blends to pricier 100 percent wools. The beauty of using even the most expensive yarn is that the price per yard is probably the cheapest embellishing you'll find.

Keep in mind when selecting yarns that the Feltscaper needs to be able to punch the fibers into the base fabric, so yarns that are loosely spun or fluffy tend to work well. Once you realize the embellishing potential of the Feltscaper you'll look at yarn in a totally new way.

Fabrics

The power of the felting needles allows you to punch fabrics into one another, further increasing the design potential. Fabrics that have a texture such as wool, wool felt, and some knits, tend to work well. Like roving and yarns, the fibers of the fabric need to be able to mesh with the base fabric. Experimenting with combinations of different top fabrics and base fabrics will give you unexpected results. The ways in which you can use fabric for the top will be explored in the technique section.

Base materials and fabric

The Feltscaper must always be used with a base material. Just as your fiber selection is limitless so are the choices of base fabric and much will be determined by the technique you choose. The needles of the Feltscaper need to be able to easily pierce the base fabric, so stay clear of extremely dense fabrics that might damage the needles. For these types of fabrics you are better off using the appliqué technique that will be described later. A few suggestions for the base material are: wool, wool felt, knit materials, denims, burlap, knitted garments, polar fleece, paper, and non-woven, water-soluble stabilizer.

Choosing Designs

For some, finding sources and inspirations for creating designs is sometimes the greatest hurdle, especially when you are asked to become the artist, while for others, project design comes with little effort. It is extremely important to remember that although imitation might be the greatest form of flattery, copying someone else's work without permission is illegal. Be sure to always read the fine print. Many designers place restrictions on the use of their designs which may specify that the design be used for personal use only. Fortunately, there are many sources for designs which comply with the copyright laws.

When choosing or creating a design, strive for designs that are simple and recognizable by their shape. The following is a list of sources where you can obtain design ideas and patterns. (If you have Internet access, simple searches of these topics will provide you with unlimited choices.)

- Non-copyrighted graphic design clip art offers an endless selection and these can usually be resized and printed to suit your needs. Only use copyright free clip art.
- Rug hooking patterns preprinted on burlap, monk's cloth or linen. This is a wonderful source since all of the drawing has been done for you! This will be further explored in the technique section.
- Generic coloring books that might have common farm animals, plants, flowers and trees. Be careful to stay away from registered and copyrighted designs.
- Penny rug designs. Penny rugs are created using a folk art technique for appliquéing wool, and are making a huge comeback. The primitive style designs lend themselves perfectly to the Feltscaper. Most patterns come with full size templates that you may cut out and trace onto whatever fabric you choose. Perfect for the Feltscaper!
- Appliqué patterns from quilt books, etc. Like the previous suggestions, their generic shapes offer a wonderful design source for the Feltscaper. Books that feature landscape quilts will also provide you a wealth of patterns and ideas.
- Embroidery machine designs. If you own an embroidery machine, you will be able to combine techniques and give your designs more dimension. We will further explore these design possibilities in the technique section

Getting Started

Before we explore the various techniques, let's spend some time getting acquainted with the Feltscaper. The general instructions that came with your Feltscaper give you basic information on how to pull the roving apart and place it on the base fabric. The properties of the roving allow you to easily manipulate the fibers into flowing forms and shapes. As you play with the roving, you'll find that a little bit of roving will go a long way, and that different effects can be created by manipulating the fibers. Use scraps of different materials and the included roving to experiment punching at various speeds while continuously moving the fabric. Notice that the faster the machine runs, the more punches will occur in that area. The slower the machine runs, the fewer the punches and you will achieve a basting or tacking effect, extremely useful in many feltscaping techniques. Be sure to turn the material over to see how the fibers have been punched through. In many of the techniques, the underside will become the finished side.

Fiber painting, couching, fabric overlay and fiber shadowing

To learn the basic techniques of fiber painting, couching, fabric overlay, and fiber shadowing, we'll create three different flowers with the Feltscaper. You should have several different colors of roving, some yarn, and either felted wool or pre-washed wool felt. Don't worry about colors; these can be totally abstract and crazy flowers!

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- To begin, cut out a 12" x 18" piece of a light colored base fabric such as felt, wool felt, or wool. Use either a piece of chalk or water-soluble marker to draw three 4" squares across the top of the fabric having the squares 3" apart (leave an inch at the top for a border). (Fig. 1)
- In the first square draw a simple tulip, the second a daisy, and the third a sunflower. The flower heads should take up the majority of each square, and can even extend if necessary (Fig. 2). Don't worry if they're not perfect, these are just for practice.
- Now give each flower a stem by simply drawing down to the bottom of the fabric. Add a different set of leaves to each stem, making some pointy and some round. Your fabric should look similar to Fig. 2.

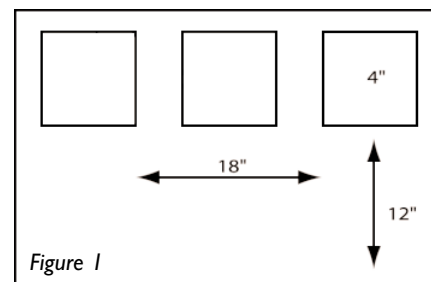


Figure 1

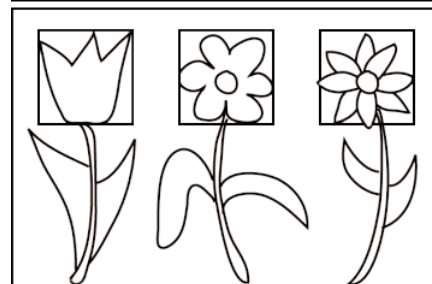


Figure 2

Fiber shadowed daisy

Tear off several small pieces of roving the size of a quarter. Start in the center of the daisy and tack a piece of roving in place. We'll frequently be referring to tacking, which simply means running the Feltscaper quickly over the area to set the fibers. I've found it much easier to initially tack the pieces and then to thoroughly punch them in place when the design is set. Continue placing and tacking the roving from the center out to the edges. You'll notice that when you pull the roving apart you will have raw edges flying in all directions. To help keep these under control and more manageable, simply fold them under as needed.

- Add small pieces of roving to fill in any areas that seem to need more fiber or to shape an edge. As you get closer to the edges, you'll have to use smaller pieces of roving and, at times, only a few fibers will be necessary.
- When you've finished with the basic shape of the daisy, add a contrasting color of roving to create the center spot. This can be added directly over the previous roving. When the entire design is set, use the Feltscaper to thoroughly punch the top side of the daisy.

Stems and leaves

Take a long piece of roving the thickness of a pencil and lay it over the stem line you have drawn. Tack the fiber in place. Continue to layer the roving until you've covered the entire stem length. Use the same color roving to create the leaves. For the daisy, we've purposely used the fiber to create a very simple design.

Take a look at the design. It probably looks great as it is. However, at this point we are going to complete the design in what I call **fiber shadowing**. As you have noticed, when you punch the

fibers from the top, they are pushed through to the back of the base fabric creating a fuzzy appearance. Most likely there will be areas that are fuzzier than others. In the fiber shadowing technique, the underside of the base fabric will become the finished side, making the piece reversible. Therefore, we will continue to punch the fibers to create a consistent fuzzy appearance. From the topside, run the Feltscaper at the highest speed while slowly moving the fabric to cover all areas of the daisy. Check the backside frequently and repeat the process to fill in any needed areas. For a more intense effect it might be necessary to add additional fiber to the top fabric. Now your first flower and technique are completed. The top side is needle felted and the underside shows the completed flower in a fiber shadow technique. Either side or technique could be used as the "right" side or combined to create texture.

Using the fiber shadowing technique with roving and yarns will create unlimited embellishing and fiber art possibilities. Try combining techniques and adding texture interest by turning your base fabric over for only some of the design areas.

Fiber painted tulip

For the tulip, begin tacking the roving in the center and working your way out to the edges as you did with the daisy. Because of the nature of the roving, it can be tricky to create points and sharp defined edges.

- To define the edges and to create the needed angles of the tulip, take a slightly larger piece of roving that will extend beyond the drawn outline and use the Feltscaper to tack it right up to the outline and stop. Lift the presser foot and twist the roving to create a point. Lower the presser foot and tack the point. Clip the excess roving from your point. Use the same technique to finish the tulip shape. Thoroughly punch all areas.
- To give the tulip a wispiest transparent look, take a small piece of contrasting roving and spread the fibers with your fingers so that it looks like a cobweb. Place it across the top of the tulip and punch in place.
- To create veins in the tulip pull a few fibers from a third contrasting piece of roving and twist between your fingers to create a fine thin yarn.

Stems and leaves

Create the stem and leaves with a single color roving. To make veins on the leaves use the same technique that was used for the tulip veins and apply with the Feltscaper. Take a third contrasting piece of roving and use the cobweb technique to create the veins.

Your finished tulip should appear hazy with a mingling of colors. By simply adding the transparent layer of fiber and the accent veins, your tulip suddenly transforms into something special. When using the **fiber painting** techniques of layering colors and accent pieces, you can create beautiful fiber art, unique to the Feltscaper.

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Sunflower

The sunflower will be created from the outside in by outlining the shape first with either yarn or roving. To create your own yarn from the roving, pull out a long piece that is approximately the width of a pencil and twist it loosely between your fingers. For a chunkier effect use a wider width of roving; for a fine yarn use a thinner piece and twist it tightly.

Begin the sunflower by placing a length of twisted fiber over the drawn outline and tack in place with the Feltscaper. The technique of applying the yarn or twisted roving on the base fabric with the Feltscaper is called **couching**. You will find unlimited embellishing possibilities where couching can be used.

- To create the sharp tips of the petals, use the same technique that was used in the tulip to turn the corners. Tack the yarn up to the point, stop, raise the presser foot and needles, and turn the yarn and material in the direction that you need to go. Lower the presser foot and continue. When you have returned to the beginning of the outline, slightly overlap the two ends. If your fiber does not reach the end of your outline, punch the end in to tack it down. Take another piece of roving yarn and overlap the first end, tacking it in place.
- Fill in the remaining part of the sunflower with either a contrasting color roving or yarn. For a more subtle effect, use the same fiber that was used for the outline. When the design is fully set, punch in the entire design using the Feltscaper.
- To create the contrasting center, cut out a circle of fabric from either a piece of wool or wool felt and use the Feltscaper to **appliqué** the fabric in place. You may either punch the perimeter of the circle or the entire surface area. Using the Feltscaper to appliqué or bond fabrics together is another technique for many embellishing and craft projects.

Stems and leaves

For a slight twist, create the stem from braided yarns or roving and apply with the Feltscaper. Outline the leaves with the braided yarns and then fill in with a contrasting roving. To ensure a proper bond when couching yarns and roving, it is very important that you thoroughly punch all areas. An added benefit is that you also simultaneously create a fiber shadow effect on the reverse side. Don't worry if you find that your base fabric puckers. Wool is very malleable when damp or steamed. Simply dampen or steam the finished piece, stretch the fabric, and press out the puckers.

Pattern Inspirations and Ideas

After you've played with the different roving and yarns and experimented with the various techniques, you're ready to start creating your own projects. As mentioned before, there is a wealth of designs available which, together with your Feltscaper, will make it very easy for you to become a fiber artist. For the most part, you can simply draw designs directly to a base fabric or cut out design shapes and trace them to the base. Here are some explanations for a couple of earlier suggestions.

Rug hooking designs, pre-printed on burlap or linen

If you are unfamiliar with this traditional technique, rug hooking is a folk art craft in which strips of wool fabric are pulled up through a burlap canvas to create fabric loops. The canvas typically has a silk-screened outlined design, perfect for the Feltscaper. The canvas looks very similar to a large coloring book. When you purchase a canvas, many times it is accompanied by a color photo which makes it that much easier for you to envision the finished product. Prior to starting your project, use crayons to lightly color the different areas. This makes your work easier and prevents accidentally using the wrong color. When placing the roving, it is easier to start in the center and work your way to the outside, making sure that all areas butt up snugly against each other. Be sure that you completely cover the printed lines with the roving. Depending upon your personal taste, determine how you wish to fill in the background areas. For a more primitive Americana look, you may simply leave the burlap areas exposed. The other option is to fill in the background areas with roving. Just keep in mind that this will take a fair amount of fiber. To finish the edges of the burlap, you can create a double folded hem by ironing over a 1/2" and then turning this again. Use the Feltscaper to mesh the layers of burlap together.

Embroidery machine owners

If you own an embroidery machine, you will be able to combine techniques and designs to create unique embellishments. When choosing an embroidery design, choose one in which the roving can be used in place of thread to create more dimension. For example, if choosing a Santa design, use white roving for the embroidered beard or replace an embroidered flower at the end of the stem with one made out of roving. Brother's memory card #39, with its variety of doll faces, is a fun choice with lots of possibilities for the Feltscaper. With this card you can sew a variety of different facial expressions and then embellish with roving to create hair, eyebrows, and beards. Another good choice for designs is the Brother Redwork memory card, # 65. The simplicity of redwork provides open areas that can be further embellished with roving to create a new look. Most embroidery designs have outlines around filled areas. When you start looking at your embroidery designs with a new eye, you'll begin to see the feltscaping potential!

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Creating Stand Alone Appliqués

Some fabrics are difficult to punch, some can dull your needles easily. Seams or pockets may make it impossible to use traditional Feltscaper techniques. Creating appliqués is the perfect way to create embellishment for these fabrics or difficult areas. It is often considerably easier to create appliqués for ready-made garments rather than trying to embellish directly on the garment itself. Remember, you are not limited to just fabrics since appliqués can be placed on virtually anything.

- To create appliqués for heavy garments such as denim or for non-fabric items (baskets, wood), felt is the perfect base fabric since it is non-woven. This allows you to cut very close to the outline of the design without having the fabric unravel. For best results, choose a felt that coordinates with the roving or yarn that you'll be using.
- On a piece of paper, draw and cut out a simple, easily recognizable design such as a star or heart. Trace the paper design on the felt with a washable marker or chalk, leaving at least 1" between all designs.
- Pull apart a long thin piece of roving (you may use yarn instead) and twist it between your fingers to create a bulky yarn. Place the twisted roving or yarn over the traced outline and use the Feltscaper to tack it in place. Add lengths of yarn as needed to complete the outline of the design.
- Fill in the center of the design with either yarn or roving and use the Feltscaper to punch all areas, including the border. Check the back of the felt to ensure that you have sufficiently and evenly covered all areas.
- Use a sharp pair of scissors to cut out the appliqué very close to the outline. From the topside you should not be able to see any of the base felt.
- Apply the appliqués using either invisible thread, snaps, glue or even the Feltscaper. If the needles of the Feltscaper can penetrate the item that will be receiving the appliqué, the Feltscaper may be used to tack the appliqué in place so that it's easier to sew, or to permanently attach the appliqué. If you use the Feltscaper to permanently attach the appliqué, be sure that all areas have been punched. If in doubt, use invisible thread to anchor the appliqué.
- **Appliqué variation:** There are times when the weight of felt is too heavy for the garment you wish to embellish. For example, a knit sweater will hang and drape better if it doesn't include the bulkiness of the felt. To create a more pliable lighter appliqué, use a non-woven water-soluble stabilizer for the base fabric. The steps are the same as those above; with the exception of trimming the appliqué. You don't have to remove all of the backing since it can easily be washed away. Only use this variation if you are able to use the Feltscaper to directly apply the appliqué to the garment.

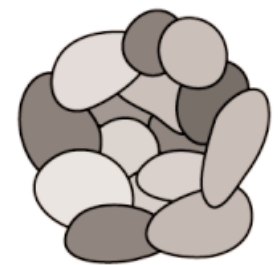
When rinsing the stabilizer out of the appliqué, soak the appliqué in water until you can see or feel that the stabilizer is completely dissolved. Most water solubles have a noticeable, slippery feel. Remove the appliqué from the water and lay flat on a towel, folding the edges of the towel over the appliqué if possible. Roll the appliqué and towel tightly to remove excess water. Unroll the towel and remove the appliqué. Lay the appliqué flat to dry, taking care that you don't stretch the appliqué.

Wet or steamed wool is very pliable and can be shaped. This can be a useful creative tool in some instances.

Creating Your Own fabrics

Beyond its many embellishing possibilities, the Feltscaper provides the incredible ability to create your own unique fabrics out of roving and yarns. The key ingredient of this technique is the use of a strong water-soluble stabilizer for the base fabric which can be rinsed away, leaving the meshed fibers. When experimenting with the following two techniques, begin with small sample pieces to get the feel of the process. Keep in mind that creating your own fabric will require larger quantities of roving.

- **Creating Beautiful Felted Wool Fabric From Roving:** Begin by cutting out an 8" square of a strong non-woven water-soluble stabilizer. You may also use 2-3 layers of a "film" type water-soluble.
- Tear half dollar size pieces of roving in various colors and place on top of the water-soluble. Use the Feltscaper to tack the fibers onto the stabilizer.
- Continue to tack pieces of roving to the top, having them overlap in all directions. The key to creating your own fabric is that all the fibers need to be meshed together to create the needed stability when the stabilizer is rinsed away. This is done by simply overlapping the fibers and pounding with the Feltscaper. The goal is to achieve a consistent depth of roving throughout the entire piece, without any holes. An easy way to find thin areas is to hold the piece up to a light. Continue to add pieces of roving as needed to fill lighter areas and to ensure that all areas have been meshed together.
- You can further embellish the new fabric by using some of the basic thread painting techniques that have been covered, and by using decorative yarns. Don't forget that while you're creating the top layer, you're simultaneously creating the underside that will have a totally different effect after washing. Sandwiching a color between layers of the same color will create a heather-toned underside, slightly different in color from the top side. Experiment with ways to create color texture and interest to your felt.



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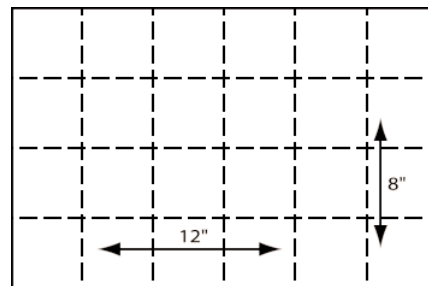
- When all areas have been punched uniformly, bring the sample to the sink and thoroughly wash away the stabilizer in warm water. To further felt the new material, add a little bit of Ivory soap and squeeze throughout the material. Soap has a different effect on wool than does detergent.
- Rinse well and either air dry or toss in the dryer for 20 minutes. Placing in the dryer will further tighten the fibers. When dry, you may fill in any needed areas with additional roving.
- Adding yarns or threads to either the top side or underside of your roving can be done after the roving has been compressed to a more felt-like consistency. Layering additional fibers may require another layer of water soluble stabilizer to keep the new fibers in place.

Your finished felt can be used as a finished project, a base for a finished project or cut and used as dimensional elements or appliqués on other projects.

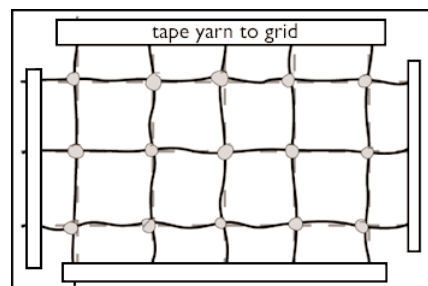
Creating Open Weave Fabrics

One of the more unique techniques that can be done with the Feltscaper is the beautiful open weave fabric that can be created with decorative yarns. Again, the key is to use a base fabric of water-soluble stabilizer that can be rinsed away when finished. When choosing yarns it's very important that they are strong but fluffy enough so that the fibers can be meshed together with the Feltscaper. To get you familiar with this technique, we'll create a small sample.

- Begin with a 12" x 8" piece of non-woven water-soluble stabilizer. With a marker draw a 2" grid over the stabilizer.
- Cut the following lengths of yarn to coordinate with the grid: three, 12" pieces and four, 8" pieces. Use cellophane tape and tape the pieces of yarn to the stabilizer so that they cover the grid lines.
- When the yarn is taped, you'll notice that there are areas where the yarns intersect with each other. Using the Feltscaper, fuse the fibers at these intersections.
- To help fuse the joints, take a small piece of roving and place between the intersecting yarns. The roving can either coordinate with the yarn or you can use a contrasting color for an accent. Use the Feltscaper to thoroughly fuse each joint.

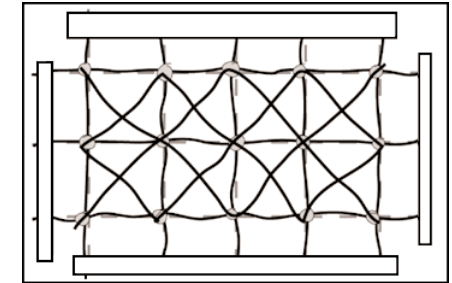


Draw a 2" grid on water-soluble stabilizer

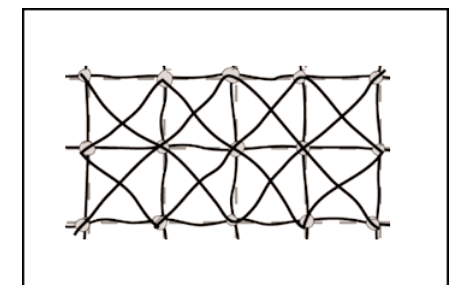


Place pieces of roving at each junction

- Use either the same yarn or a contrasting yarn and run diagonally from one joint to the next, fusing the new yarn over the previous joints. To create an "X", run the yarn diagonally in the opposite direction. At each intersection of the "X", use the Feltscaper to fuse the center.
- When you have finished fusing all intersections, trim the extensions where the yarn had been taped to 1/2". Flip the yarn end over the joint and fuse with the Feltscaper.
- Thoroughly rinse away the stabilizer and air dry.



Run yarn diagonally, pounding at all intersections.



Remove tape and trim yarn to 1/2". Flip ends over and needle felt the intersections.

Hopefully after reviewing and experimenting with the various techniques, you will realize the immense design potential of the Feltscaper and you'll begin to create additional embellishing techniques of your own. "You will be amazed at what you can do" with your new Brother Feltscaper!