

Binding a Quilt

Plain Binding Technique
An MQSC Basic Skills Class
Revised December 5, 2018
Deb Gomes, Instructor
deb.gomes@sbcglobal.net / 849-0047

Obtaining a square quilt with a great binding actually starts at the very beginning of construction!

- Check for an accurate scant $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. It's not always the same! Fabrics vary.
- Check for accurate unit measurements as you go in the body of the quilt.
- Measure borders exactly. Halve and quarter them and your quilt and match them up to obtain equal lengths on sides, top and bottom.
- Iron your quilt top to make sure the seams go the way they're supposed to.
- Starch or Best Press the wrong side if you wish.
- Stay stitch $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the edge if you have small units such as piano keys, half square triangles, or quarter square triangles at the very edge to keep them from stretching or pulling apart during quilting.

Batting: Cotton, bamboo, wool, 80-20 cotton/polyester work well. Bamboo and wool are hairy and a little more tricky to work with, but well worth it. I don't recommend a double layer of wool. It slashes and shifts! If you steam and smash the layers to get them to cling, do NOT use polyester! It will melt.

Squaring up: Essential for square corners and straight sides! There are 2 ways to square up.

1. If you have a small quilt, you can draw a line, sew on binding, and then trim. The drawback is the possibility of nicking your binding at the corners.
2. If your quilt is larger than a small wall hanging, squaring up first before sewing on binding is the way to go in my opinion. Use the largest square you can get your hands on and square up the corners first. I use a $16 \frac{1}{2}$ " Creative Grids square or a $20 \frac{1}{2}$ " Omigrid square, depending on the size of the quilt. A $12 \frac{1}{2}$ " square will do for a cat cuddle. Then use a 6 " x 24 " or $8 \frac{1}{2}$ " x $24 \frac{1}{2}$ " ruler to connect the corners.

Binding Width: For smaller quilts or quilts with thin batting, a 2 " or $2 \frac{1}{4}$ " binding is sufficient. A $2 \frac{1}{2}$ " binding works well for larger quilts. It's wider on the back (or front), making it much easier to avoid the seam when hand sewing, or allowing for more room for decorative stitching for sewing by machine on the front.

Binding Length: Measure perimeter of quilt and add 20 " for use with binding tool, 15 " for mitering the tails without the binding tool.

Three types of Binding:

1. Straight of grain strips, sewn end to end. Drawback: bumps! Press seams open to smooth out a little.
2. Straight of grain strips, sewn together mitered. The mitered seam distributes the bulk and gives a smoother binding and is stronger.
3. Binding cut on the bias. A must when sewing curved binding such as scalloped edges. Advantage: when used on a straight edge quilt, there are many more threads at the very edge, making the binding stronger and less likely to wear out as soon as straight of grain bindings.

Sew and Press Binding Strips Together: Lay 1st strip horizontally, right side up, 2nd strip vertically right side down. Overlap about 1/8" so that you can sew from notch to notch. Some mark the line, others eyeball it. Use a small stitch length, 1.5-1.9, so that it doesn't pull apart during quilting. When you have all your strips sewn together, press wrong sides together. Take care to use a color thread that does not show great contrast in case your stitches do show! For example, use black thread on black fabric. If for example, you get your quilt quilted and you DID goof and white thread shows on black, don't worry, just color the threads with a black sharpie! Same for other color threads where you have a Sharpie to color the offending threads with.

Sewing the binding: Start about 2/3 of the way down the side of the top of your quilt, leaving 7 to 10" for sewing tails at the end. Use a 2.0 length stitch. (Any shorter, it's hard to advance the stitching. Any longer, and your stitches may show when stitching the binding to the back.) This will make joining the tails easier, giving yourself more room to maneuver. **Go slow, taking great care to maintain a 1/4" seam.** Sewing the best, most consistent seam possible will give you a straight binding and allow for a consistent "filled or stuffed" binding. STOP 1/4" from the corner. Some people measure and mark that point, some "eyeball" it, and some have a mark on their 1/4" foot. Pivot 45 degrees, sew to the point. Cut threads. Fold binding away from body of quilt forming a straight line with the new side to be sewn. Maintain a 45 degree fold in the corner, pin, then reverse the direction of the binding. Line up the binding with the new side to be stitched, being careful that the fold at the corner is not too short of the corner, nor longer than the corner. Secure with one or two pins if desired. Continue stitching to the next corner and repeat. Sew all around past the last corner and stop short so that you have a good long space to maneuver when joining the tails. On a lap quilt, I usually stop about 6-8" after turning the last corner. This gives me about 20"-30" or so to finish up.

Joining the Tails: Overlap your binding the cut width plus 1/4" and cut. For example, if you have a 2 1/2" binding, cut $2\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} = 2\frac{3}{4}$ ". This allows a 1/8" overlap when placing the two opened ends together at right angles, right sides together. "Kiss, twist, and wiggle!" to quote Susan Cleveland. Makes it easier to see exactly where to sew. Use Susan's mental picture when deciding at which angle to sew. Sew **across** the jeans, not down through the crotch! Pin first and pull to fold around the edge to assure yourself that you've got it right, then sew. Or use my little jingle: Twist away once, twist away twice, sew the diagonal, nice, nice, nice! I'll be demonstrating this during class.

Hand Sew to Back: Flip binding to back, pulling snug so that there is no loose fabric at the very edge. Secure with binding clips. If you choose to only clip 15 or 20 clips at a time, skip ahead to the corners and secure them all with a clip at the tip. This will crease the fabric and make it easier to sew when you get there. Make sure that you fold the binding in the opposite direction of the seam, distributing the bulk to both sides. This is what gives you a nice, square corner! You can use a thin needle, or a nice sturdy one. Choose a thread that matches the binding as much as possible, not the backing. Use a hidden stitch with stitches about 1/8"-3/16" in length. Holding the binding securely with your non-dominant hand while you sew will "fill" the binding. The quilt should lie in your lap with the bulk at your feet. This keeps your wrist ergonomically straight and prevents wrist pain!

Alternate Method: You can sew the binding to the back and flip to the front and secure with a straight or decorative stitch. If shifting is a concern, you can secure with 1/4" wide Easy Steam II, Lapel Stick (basically glue stick), or drops of Roxanne Glue Baste-It. Press first before stitching by machine.

Resources:

- **Craftsy Class:** The Perfect Finish: How to Bind a Quilt by Susan Cleveland (\$20 or less when they have a special) By far the best, most comprehensive video class I have seen. You can go back to it again and again and ask Susan questions, which she promptly answers.

Free YouTube Classes: Lots of these! Just do a search for binding a quilt. Four that I watched are:

- How to Bind a Quilt by Machine by Rob Appell at Mansewing. He demos the Binding Tool.
- How to Bind a Quilt With a Sewing Machine by Jenny Doan at the Missouri Star Quilt Co. She also demos the Binding Tool.
- Quilting 101: How to Bind a Quilt by Erica Arndt. Shows end to end and bias binding, and prefers end to end binding. She's a "bent wrist binder"!
- Joe Cunningham Quilter "How to Use a Facing"

Books:

- Piping Hot Binding and Piping Hot Curves by Susan Cleveland
- All-In-One Quilter's Reference Tool by Harriet Hargrave, Sharyn Craig, Alex Anderson, and Liz Aneloski

Materials:

- Wonder Clips available at Village or online
- Various makes of 16 1/2" and 20 1/2" square rulers available online