

WHAT EVERY QUILTER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BINDING AND FINISHING QUILTS

a free resource from

The Scissortail Quilting Company

www.scissortailquilting.com

Binding a quilt is a lot like wrapping a gift. It's that finishing touch that makes your quilt truly special. Some quilters struggle with this final process, allowing quilts to sit unfinished in closets. Some quilters are so ready to get the thing finished that they rush through the process.

Spending just a little time to think through those finishing touches can help your quilt go from good to fantastic! This little document is designed to help you think through those final touches and gives you a roadmap for how to get through the binding and finishing process.

First, know why you're binding:

- To cover the raw edges
- To protect the quilt stitching and hold all the layers together.
- To frame your design, adding to the beauty of your quilt

Cutting Binding Strips

There are three basic ways to cut binding: straight grain, cross grain and bias grain. Several factors go into deciding which one of these ways you should choose. To make that decision, it helps to know a few things about how the fabric will behave with each type of cut.

Cross Grain

Strips are cut perpendicular to the selvedge (Figure 1)

- Easy to calculate, easy to cut
- Most economical use of fabric

Straight Grain

Strips are cut parallel to the selvedge (Figure 2)

- Has almost no give
- Best choice if your border or edges are pieced and have bias edges

Bias Grain

Strips cut at a 45° angle to the selvedge (Figure 3)

- Stronger than straight grain binding; more durable, edges less likely to fray.
- Tends to lie flat and smooth in any situation
- Works well on any quilt, but because of it's stretchiness it's a necessity on quilts with scallops or rounded corners.

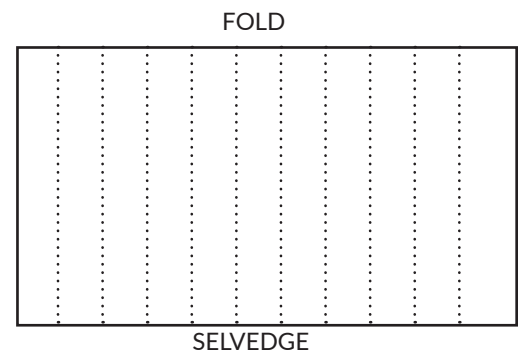


Figure 1. Lines indicate way to cut fabric for Cross Grain Binding strips

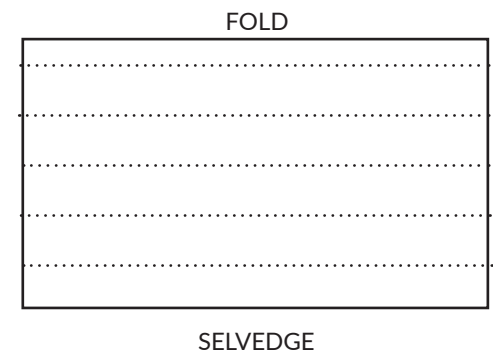


Figure 2. Lines indicate way to cut fabric for Straight Grain Binding strips

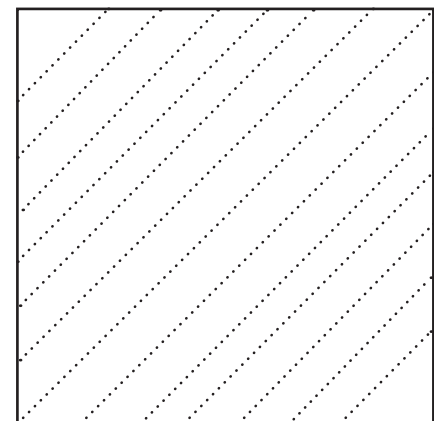


Figure 3. A square of fabric showing lines for cutting Bias Binding strips

Remember: You can bind any quilt with Bias edge binding if you want to, but you **MUST** use bias binding if your quilt has curved edges.

PREPARING BINDING

How many inches of binding do I need to go all the way around my quilt?

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{AMOUNT} \\ \text{OF BINDING} \\ \text{(in inches)} \end{array} = \begin{array}{l} (2 \times \text{the width of the quilt}) \\ + (2 \times \text{the length of the quilt}) \\ + 15'' \end{array}$$

Example: For a quilt measuring 75 x 80, you need
 $2 \times 75 + 2 \times 80 + 15 = 325$ inches of binding.

How wide do I cut my strips? (Binding Width)

The most common binding widths are 2.5" & 2.25". The width you choose is really a matter of personal preference. Your decision will also be influenced by the thickness of your quilt and how you plan to attach your binding.

How much fabric do I need?

This will depend on which type of strip you are cutting....

For Cross Grain Binding cuts:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Fabric} \\ \text{required} \\ \text{(in inches)} = \end{array} \quad (\text{AMOUNT OF BINDING} / \text{WOF}) \times \text{the width of you want to make your strips}$$

Example: For 325 inches of 2.5" binding if our fabric is 40" wide, then $325 / 40 \times 2.5 = 20$ " of 40" wide fabric (a little over half a yard.)

For Straight Grain Binding cuts:

Fabric required (in inches) =

Step 1: Determine how many strips you can get from the width of your fabric by dividing the width of your fabric by the width you want your strips. Example: $40 / 2.5 = 16$ strips.

Step 2: Divide the AMOUNT OF BINDING you need by the number you get in Step 1. This will tell you how many inches of fabric you need.

Example: For 325 inches of 2.5" binding if our fabric is 40" wide, then $325 / 16 = 20.3$ inches of 40" wide fabric)

For Bias Binding,

Step 1: AMOUNT OF BINDING \times Width of strips
Step 2: Find the square root of the number you got in step 1 above to determine the size square of fabric you will need to cut your bias strips.

Example: For $325 \times 2.5 = 812.5$
The square root of 812.5 = 28.5

Skip the math and use my online
Binding Calculator!

[https://scissortailquilting.com/
binding-calculations/](https://scissortailquilting.com/binding-calculations/)

Cutting the strips

CROSS AND STRAIGHT GRAIN STRIPS

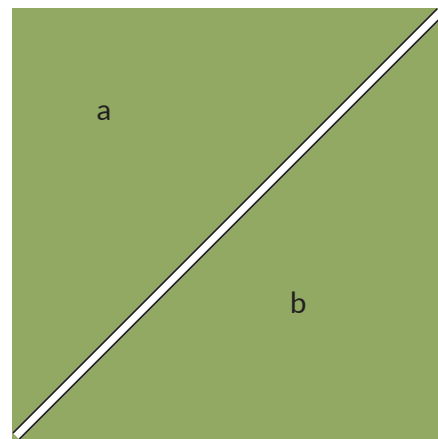
For cross-grain and Straight-grain binding, simply square up the edge of your fabric, then line up your rotary ruler to measure the desired width of the strip. Cut and repeat for however many strips you need. Figures 1 and 2 on page 2 indicate the direction you would cut for each type of binding strip.

BIAS GRAIN STRIPS

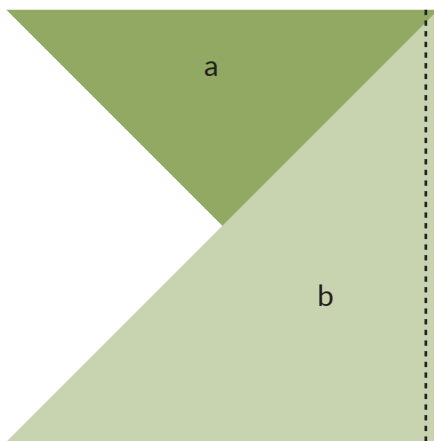
There are two ways to cut bias binding strips. The first method is to simply cut them on the diagonal as shown in Figure 3 on page 2, then sew them all back together. An alternative method requires only one seam. It's called the Continuous Strip Method.

Here is how you do it:

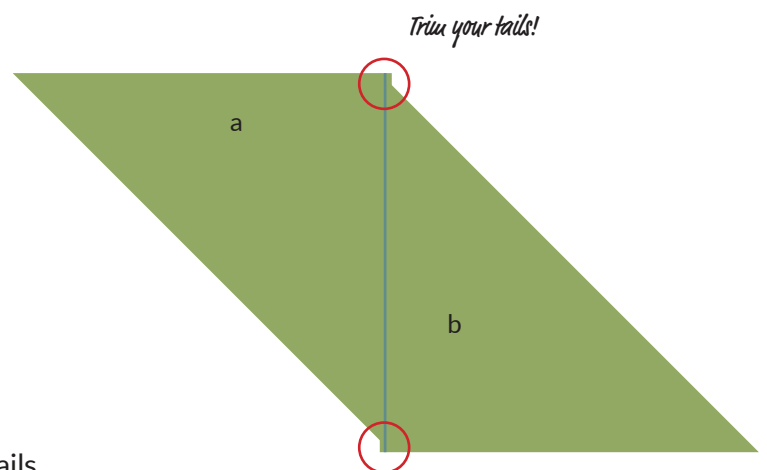
- 1.) Cut a perfect square of fabric. Use the calculators referenced on page 3 to determine how large of a square to cut.
- 2.) Cut your square in half along the diagonal.
- 3) Place your two triangles right sides together, with straight sides going opposite ways as shown below. Sew together with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam. Press the seam open.



Steps 1 & 2

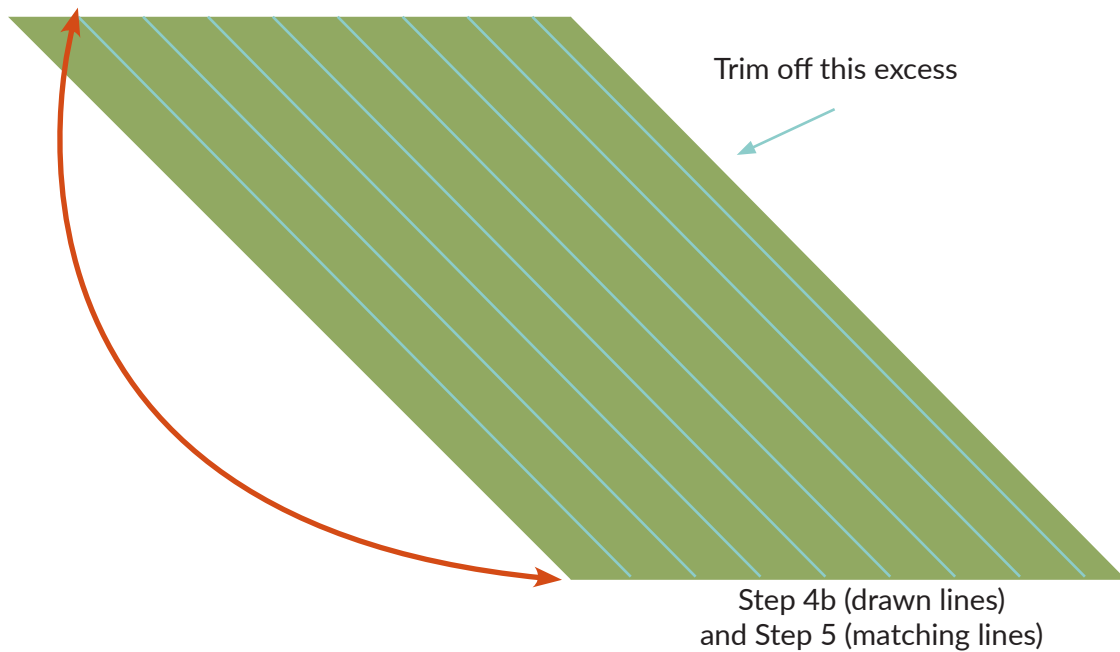


Step 3



Step 4

- 4.) Lay fabric right side up on a flat surface. Trim the tails from your seam (Red circles in the image at right). Flip the piece over and on the WRONG side of fabric mark the width of your strips (i.e. 2.5") with lines running parallel to the left bias edge (top to bottom). When you get to the other bias edge, cut off any excess.



5.) With right sides facing, bring the short edges (top and bottom) together. Match the raw edges so that the first drawn line of the top side meets the left corner of the bottom side.

6.) Matching the lines in Step 5 will form a tube. Pin the edges so that a pin goes through each matching line all the way across. Sew together with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam and press open.

7.) Use sharp scissors to cut on the lines of the tube. It should cut off in one continuous strip.

Sewing the strips into continuous binding

After you have cut your strips, they need to be sewn into one long continuous piece. The preferred technique is to sew them with bias seams (on the diagonal). This way, there is less bulk in your binding, as opposed to sewing straight seams.:

Place ends of two strips perpendicular to each other so that right sides are together, making sure they overlap slightly. (See figure at right.) Pin in place.

Mark a diagonal line from corner to corner where the two strips intersect. To be as accurate as possible, make sure the ends of your line fall exactly in the corner where the two fabrics meet. Another way to do this is simply to press a diagonal line instead of marking it, and sew in the crease. Sew the strips together by carefully sewing just a thread's width to the **INSIDE** of the marked line.

(After you've made these a few times, you'll realize you can do it without creasing or marking.)

As soon as those two strips are sewn together, repeat with the next strip (chain piecing) until all your strips are joined end to end.

Tip: As you are chain piecing your binding, make sure you do not twist the strips as you sew them together or your binding may have some strips sewn facing the wrong way!

Once all your strips are sewn together, trim your seams to $\frac{1}{4}$ " and press the seams open. Opening the seams will further reduce any bulk in your binding

Using a hot iron, fold the continuous binding strip in half lengthwise wrong sides together and press. (This is known as French Fold Binding)

Roll your binding strip into a ball and pin until ready to use.



HOW TO ATTACH BINDING TO YOUR QUILT

Three methods for attaching binding are shown below. For all of these methods, you should use a walking foot, unless your machine has Dual Feed Technology. Also, make sure your quilt is trimmed and as square as possible.

There are a few things you should first think about before you sew the binding on...

1.) Where should you start sewing the binding? Well, it's important that you NOT start in a location where the quilt is likely to be folded as that will be a stress point later in the quilt's life. This is sometimes hard to determine, but I shoot for about 1/3 of the way up from the bottom on any side.

2.) Stage the binding around the edges of the entire quilt and make sure that none of your seam points are going to end up in a corner of the quilt. This would make for a bulky mess in the corner. Adjust where you plan to start in order to eliminate this complication from happening.

Pro tip: Choose a thread that is the same color as your binding.

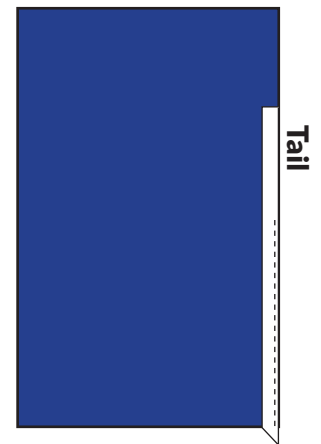
Traditional Method (Show Quality)

Traditional binding is sewn onto the front of the quilt using your sewing machine, then folded over and hand stitched to the back side.

After you've determined the best spot to start, align the raw edges of your binding to the raw edges of the FRONT SIDE of your quilt, leaving about a 10" tail in front of where you begin to stitch. Using a 1/4" seam, first make a securing stitch, then continue sewing along the edge of the quilt. As you come to each corner, stop 1/4" before you get to the edge. Turn the quilt slightly at an angle so that you can backstitch off the quilt. Remove the quilt from the machine and trim the threads.

Rotate your quilt 90 degrees. To create the miter, fold the binding up making a 45 degree fold. Then fold it straight down so that the fold of the binding is perfectly even with the edge of the quilt. Begin stitching from the top edge and continue sewing to the next corner. (You may want to make a securing stitch when you begin.). Repeat on all corners.

After you round the last corner, continue stitching until you get about 10-12 inches from where you began. Backstitch to secure, then remove quilt from the machine and take to a table where you can work with it. Follow the instruction on the following page to "Close the tails."



To make the mitered corner, first fold up to make a 45 degree angle.



To finish the mitered corner, next fold the binding straight down, holding the 45 degree fold in place, making sure binding is even with edge of quilt.

Machine Methods

Note: these methods work best if your machine has dual feed technology and can use these special feet. However, you can experiment with similar techniques using any walking foot. Don't be afraid to play and figure out what your machine can do! I sometimes use these techniques on baby quilts, because I think a machine binding will stand up better to heavier washing and abuse. When using machine binding methods, you may want to experiment with tighter or larger binding strip widths. I typically use a slightly wider binding when machine binding.

Machine Method 1

(Uses Stitch in the Ditch Foot)

Align raw edges of binding to raw edges of FRONT SIDE of quilt. Attach using a 1/4" seam, and proceed around the quilt as you would for traditional binding, mitering corners, etc.

Press front of quilt, pressing binding out flat. Fold over, and baste in place with pins. The pins should be on the FRONT SIDE of the quilt and for best results should run parallel to the ditch. Make sure the pin catches the binding on the other side. With the front side of your quilt up, stitch in the ditch of the seam created when you attached the binding. Seam should catch the binding on the back side. Since you cannot see what you are doing, it is critical to pin well, and make sure the binding is pulled nice and straight when you pin.

Machine Method 2

(Use Bi-Level Top Stitch Foot or a dec stitch foot)

Align raw edges of binding to raw edges of BACK SIDE of quilt. Attach using a 1/4" seam, and proceed as you would for traditional binding, mitering corners, etc.

Press Back side of quilt, pressing binding out flat. Fold over, baste in place with pins or clips on the FRONT SIDE of the quilt.

The Pin Stitch works very well, but you can use any decorative stitch. With the front side up, start in any corner, positioning needle slightly inside the edge of the binding. Start with a securing stitch, then sew until you get to the next corner, making sure to stop with your needle down and making sure you have caught both sides of binding, then turn and proceed to next corner. Repeat until you have finished all four sides.

CLOSING THE TAILS

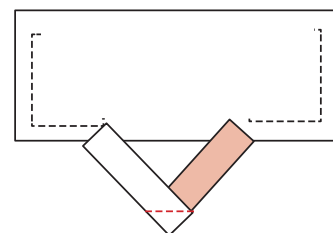
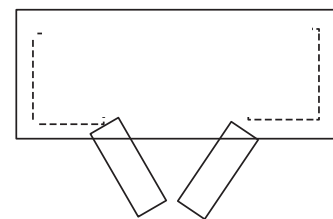
Lay the bulk of the quilt away from you with the open edge directly in front of you. Overlap your ending tail (right side) on top of the beginning tail (left side). Cut the top/right tail so that it's about 1/3 of the distance from the stitched starting point. Mark a line on the bottom/left tail that matches where you cut the top tail.

From this line, measure to the right the exact width of your binding strip and mark again. I like to open up my cut piece of binding to use as my measurement. After you make the 2nd marking, cut the bottom strip on this second marked line. Fold the end of this tail at a 45 degree angle and finger press to mark your stitching line or mark line on the diagonal

Unfold the right side tail and lay right side up. Unfold left tail and place on top of right tail so that right sides of fabric are together. Match the corners so that tails form a "V." Pin, then stitch on your marked/creased line. Lay it flat on your quilt and make sure it was sewn correctly. If all is good, then trim the seam and press it OPEN.

The binding should now fit perfectly on your quilt. Line the raw edges of the attached binding with the raw edges of your quilt and finish stitching the binding to the quilt. Press the front of quilt, pressing binding out flat. Fold over and secure with a blindstitch.

If you find you get a slight pucker when you sew the final seam, don't stress. Most times the pucker only appears on the top side and will not show when the binding is folded over. This is less likely to happen if you use straight grain strips, since they have less stretch.



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS WHEN FINISHING YOUR QUILT

If you don't mind people seeing where your binding begins and ends, you can use one of these foldover techniques instead of the "Closing the Tails" method on the previous page.

- **The plain foldover method** - Leave only a small tail when you start. When you approach the beginning of the binding, fold the beginning end of your binding over so you do not have a raw edge exposed. Lay the end of your binding so that it goes inside the fold of the beginning binding. Continue to stitch through all layers, of the binding until the binding is completely attached and you have closed the seam.
- **The Angled foldover method** - Similar to the method above, except you fold the raw edge of the tail back at a 45° angle.

Attaching Bias Binding.

Not much different from other methods, but here are a few tips to keep in mind. First, be careful not to stretch the bias binding as you are attaching it. If you stretch it when attaching to a curved edge (as in a scalloped quilt) the edges of the quilt will cup and not lie flat.

Also, when you get to an inside curve (such as between two scallops) raise your presser foot between the curves to avoid getting a pucker or pleat..

Labels

It's a good idea to make a label for your quilt, and attach it when you attach your binding. A label documents who made the quilt and when it was made. ModernYardage.com is an excellent resource for making high quality custom labels. If you are entering your quilt in a competition there may be special requirements for information to include in your label which will be communicated to you in the show requirements.

Hanging Sleeves

For competition quilts or wall hangings, a sleeve is a must. The show will usually give instructions for how they want sleeves attached. But quilts I display in my home, this is the method I use:

- 1.) Measure the width of the top. Subtract 1". Cut a piece of fabric that is 7" x the width you just calculated.
- 2.) Make a 1/4" double fold hem on each short side and machine stitch in place.
- 3.) Fold fabric in half lengthwise, right sides together, to form a tube. Machine stitch down the length of the tube. Press seam open and turn inside out. Press tube flat.
- 4.) Use a blindstitch to secure top and bottom of tube to top of quilt on the back side of the quilt, making sure you only go through the backing and batting (and not the top of the quilt!)

ALTERNATE METHOD:

Follow steps 1 & 2, but for step 3, fold fabric wrong sides tother. You can baste long edge if desired, but pin to top raw edge of quilt before you add binding, so that hanging sleeve is secured in the binding. Secure bottom of tube with blindstitch on back of quilt, making sure you only go through the backing and batting