

## **Borders 101:** **Your quilt doesn't have to wear a ruffled skirt.**

There are several types of borders you can put on a quilt. There are the obvious and commonly used straight borders, which depending on size, sometimes require piecing and sometimes do not. Then there are pieced borders, which have entire books written about them, so I'll leave that area mostly to the experts, but there are a few little tips I'll give you for making them fit and putting them on.

Straight borders also often come in pairs. If you have a skinny little border and then a larger final border, the inner one is often called a zinger. I love zingers and use them in most of my quilts because they give you an opportunity to highlight something in the quilt that maybe got a little lost in the piecing. Straight borders can also utilize striped and directional prints that otherwise may be difficult to use. If you are going to use a stripe or directional print, make sure you get enough *length* to cut one big long piece for the border (e.g.: if your quilt is 100" and you're going to put on 6" wide borders, you will need about 3.5 yds or 126" in case you want to miter, which you probably will).

Let's clarify some border terms:

**Mitering:** Sewing a seam on a 45 degree angle either to achieve continuity in a long, pieced strip (you should do this if you're piecing a straight border from width of fabric strips) or to meet stripes or just to give a different look than butted borders would.

**Butted or Straight borders:** These are borders that you put on the sides or top, and then the other (depending on which order you put them on).

**Cornerstone:** A block in the corner allowing you to measure the width and length of your quilt and cut your borders that length by then sewing a block onto the ends of your top (or side) border strips. They are also an excellent alternative if you have a print that should be mitered but you don't want to miter.

**Zinger:** A skinny, usually bold, border between the quilt body and another border.

**Stay-stitching:** Using a longer (say 3.0) stitch to bast around the edge of your quilt and/or borders to keep them from distorting with handling. I particularly recommend this with difficult fabrics and pieced borders, but it's also helpful if you have a very intricately pieced center of your quilt top, I stay stitch before putting borders on.

The most common problem for quilters with borders is that they distort when you sew them onto the quilt. The root of the problem is often in the piecing of the quilt itself as most quilts are just not "square", or to be more specific, the measurements at the top, middle and bottom are not the same, and the measurements of the left, middle, and right are not the same. So, how do we deal with this problem? We're going to have to do some math (GASP!). It'll be okay, I will walk you through it, and my husband will be proud.

Let's start with a nice flat surface, a partner if you can find one, and a measuring tape. If you can't

find a partner, a nice stiff measuring tape will do the trick. Lay your top out and smooth it down so it's as flat as possible. If it is already looking like the frothy top of a crock pot stew, you're probably not going to get all that distortion to "quilt out", so be realistic in your expectations when you quilt it or have someone quilt it. If you really want to take it apart and square up the components and carefully put them back together, you can, but there's only so much you can do.

Let's assume, however, that your quilt lays relatively flat. Get a sticky note and measure the width across the top (in a straight line), across the middle (straight again!), and the bottom. Average these three numbers (if you don't know how to average, add up all three measurements and divide by the number of measurements you took, in this case,  $\text{top} + \text{middle} + \text{bottom} / 3$ ). Write that magical number down. If there is more than an inch discrepancy between these numbers, your quilt is probably not going to lay super flat even with your borders applied correctly: this is okay! Quilts are works of art, they are not perfect, and contrary to popular belief, you will not be arrested by the quilt police. It's just important to have realistic expectations. You will then cut your borders to fit the sides using this averaged measurement.

If you're piecing straight borders, make sure you do mitered seams if you have enough fabric (you will lose about the width of the border on each seam, so this can really add up with fat borders). To miter seams on large borders, it's important to draw your 45 degree line, otherwise you can increase your border issues by having a wobbly bias seam. If you're using the length of fabric, cut two borders this length.

Once your borders are the appropriate average length, mark the center of your borders and the center of your quilt. Some people like to use pins here, but I prefer to use washable school glue. Either way, begin securing the border to the quilt from the center out. It's helpful to secure the very center, and then either end, that way you know how much, if any, easing you will have to do. Easing is a cinch with glue, but can cause problems when pinned.

If you're going to miter, you won't cut your borders to the length you measured, but you will mark that length out from the middle of your border. You will also mark 1/4" in from that mark on either end. Make sure you have the length of your side plus two times your border width, plus a few inches extra on either end.

Once you've glued or pinned your borders on, go ahead and sew them on with a quarter inch seam. If you're mitering, sew from that inner mark EXACTLY (also make sure you lock or back stitch) to the other inner mark EXACTLY. Press your borders open and repeat the process going the other direction (depending on whether you sewed top/bottom or side/side on first).

If you have butted borders, you're done! If you're doing mitered borders, you've still got the miter to do, which I will show you, but not attempt to write without pictures. Soon, I will post a video to YouTube, so check back at [www.ltquilts.com](http://www.ltquilts.com) often for a link to that.

For pieced borders, I recommend the Border Workbook. I also recommend stay stitching and the use of zingers to make your math come out right.