

# Binding a Quilt

## How to Finish the Edges

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## Binding Quilts

Binding finishes the edges of a quilt and there are quite a few variations on how it can be done. The majority of quilters use double-fold straight-grain binding unless the quilt has curved edges, in which case they opt for bias binding. Quilters also use bias binding for special effects: a stripe magically becomes a barber's pole and plaids form little V shapes. Bias binding is made in the same manner as straight-grain binding, except the strips are cut at a 45° angle to the selvage instead of straight from selvage to selvage. Cutting on the bias allows the binding to stretch and bend around curves without making puckers or kinks.

### Yardage Needed for ½"-Wide (Finished) Bias Binding

Cut your strips 2½" wide to yield ½"-wide finished binding.

Binding Length	Yardage Needed
115" _____	¼ yard*
180" _____	⅜ yard*
255" _____	½ yard
320" _____	⅝ yard
400" _____	¾ yard
465" _____	⅞ yard

\*If you want fewer seams in your binding, start with ½ yard instead so that you can cut longer strips.

### How to Calculate Binding Cut from Straight-Grain Strips

In quilt patterns, the directions usually tell you how wide to cut the strips for binding and how many strips you'll need. But what if you're not working from a pattern? Binding strips are generally cut anywhere from 2" to 2½" wide, depending on personal preference and the thickness of the batting used. To bind a quilt, you need enough strips to go around the perimeter plus 12". To calculate the total inches, first measure the length, and then the width of the quilt top; add those two numbers together. Multiply the total by two and add 12" to the total. That is the total length of binding you'll need. To find out how many strips of fabric you need to cut, divide the number you just calculated by 40" (a little less than the usable width of purchased yardage). To make it easy for you, there is a "Binding Worksheet" at the end of this article.

For example, if your quilted masterpiece measures 60½" x 90", first add 60½" to 90", which equals 150½". Next, multiply 150½" by 2 to determine the quilt's circumference (150½" x 2 = 301"). Add 12" to 301" to account for turning corners and piecing strips

together, to total 313". This is the total length of binding you need. How many strips do you cut and how much fabric do you need? Assume that your fabric has 40" of usable width with selvages cut off. So 313" ÷ 40" per strip = 7.825 strips. You need to round up, so cut 8 strips of binding the width you prefer. If you cut each strip 2½" wide, you need a minimum of 20" (2½" x 8 strips = 20") of fabric for the binding. Now I don't know about you, but the moment I try and get by with the minimum amount of fabric, I make a horrendous miscut or a major math error, so I always try and have enough extra fabric to cut at least one or two extra strips. Whew. The math is done. Now you can play!

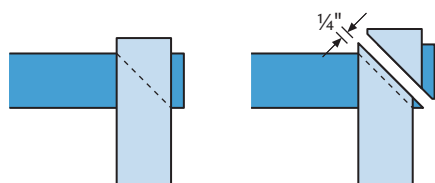
### How to Bind a Quilt

Before binding the edges—and after the quilting is complete—trim the excess batting and backing even with the quilt top, squaring the corners and straightening the sides if needed. Now you're ready to apply the binding. There are two common methods for sewing the binding to the quilt, and I find most quilters are passionate about which technique is the best. I'm not going to commit myself here. The methods are identical except for how the end of the binding is sewn to the beginning. The seamed-finish method results in perfectly smooth binding but is a little fussier than using a tucked-in finish, because you have to fiddle with the binding ends while dealing with the bulk of the quilt. When finished, the join is so smooth no one will be able to tell at which seam you started the binding. I use this method if I'm making a quilt that other quilters will examine critically.

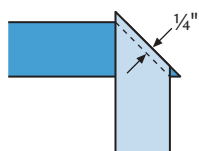
### How to Make Binding with a Seamed Finish

**1** Sew the strips together end to end to make one long piece of binding. The seams need to be at a 45° angle, not straight across the binding. (If the seams are straight, when the binding is folded all the seam allowances stack up and form a huge lump.) If your strips are cut selvage to selvage, make a 45° angle seam by placing the strips right sides together at right angles and stitching from corner to corner in the direction shown (see page 3). If you stitch from the opposite direction, you end up with the strips joined at right angles. That is not useful. I know this from repeated experience and it surprises me every time! Trim the excess fabric, leaving about a ¼" seam allowance. If your strips are cut on the bias, the ends will already be cut at a 45° angle, but make sure the angles all slant in the same direction so that your binding looks nice and tidy. Press the seam allowances open. Pressing the

seam allowances open also keeps the binding as flat and lump-free as possible.



Joining straight-cut strips



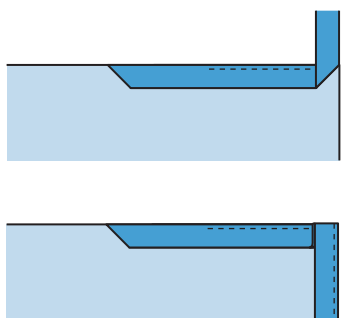
Joining bias strips

**2** Trim the selvage end from the beginning of the binding strip. Fold the strip in half lengthwise, wrong sides together, and press.



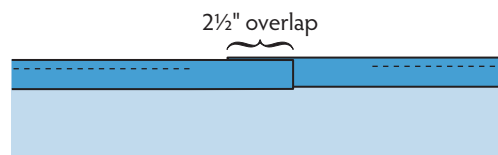
**3** Starting at the middle on one side and aligning the raw edges, place an end of the binding strip on the right side of the quilt. Begin stitching 4" to 5" from the start of the binding using a  $\frac{1}{4}$ "-wide seam allowance. (Using a walking foot to sew through all of those layers makes this job easier and prevents the layers from shifting as you sew.) End the stitching  $\frac{1}{4}$ " from a corner of the quilt and backstitch a stitch or two.

**4** Lift the presser foot and turn the quilt so that you'll be stitching along the next side. Fold the binding up, away from the quilt; then fold it back down onto itself, even with the raw edge of the quilt top.



**5** Stitch from the fold of the binding along the edge of the quilt top, stopping  $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the corner as before. (Some quilters don't like to start stitching from the fold but instead start  $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the corner and take a backstitch. My machine does not object to starting at the fold, so that's the way I do it.) Repeat the mitering and stitching process on the remaining edges and corners.

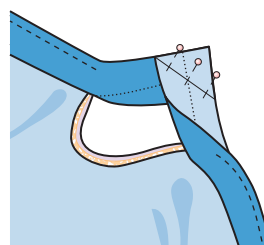
**6** Stop stitching 5" to 6" from the starting point and remove the quilt from the machine. Lay the quilt edge flat and overlap the starting and ending binding tails. Trim the tails perpendicular to the quilt edge so that they overlap by *exactly* the same width as your binding strips. For example, if you started with  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " binding strips, you'd overlap the strips by  $2\frac{1}{2}$ ".



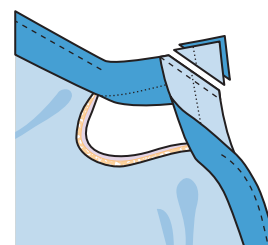
### QUICK TIP

If you are like me and can't remember how wide you cut your binding by the time you get around to sewing it, an easy way to determine the binding width is to use the trimmed-off selvage edge from the tail of the binding strip. It's the same width as the binding, it doesn't stretch out of shape, and you always have it handy—no searching for a ruler!

**7** This is where sewing may get a little awkward. Remove the quilt from the machine. Unfold the binding strips and place them right sides together, perpendicular to one another, just as you did when sewing all those binding strips together end to end. I like to draw a line from corner to corner on the wrong side of one of the binding strips and pin before stitching. I then double-check that I'm stitching the seam in the correct direction. It gets very nasty very quickly if you stitch on the wrong diagonal and trim before you realize what an idiot you've been. (Yes I speak from experience, and of course I didn't have any extra fabric.) Stitch across the corner diagonally, from one point to the other where the binding strips intersect, as shown. Check that your binding is just the right length for the quilt, then trim the excess corner, leaving a generous  $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance.

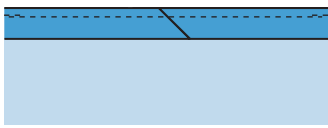


Draw diagonal line. Pin ends together, matching corners.



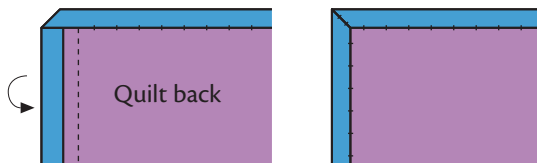
Stitch along line and trim excess.

**8** Finger-press the seam and refold the binding. Stitch the last few inches of the binding to the quilt, overlapping the beginning stitches. Ideally the binding will fit the quilt exactly, but if your measuring and stitching accuracy were a little off, you can ease in or slightly stretch the binding so no puckers or tucks form.



Refold binding and finish stitching to the quilt top.

**9** Fold the binding over the raw edges of the quilt to the back, with the folded edge covering the row of machine stitching. Some people like to pin the binding in place, and others use binding clips. I don't bother with either, but instead hold it in place with my left hand while stitching with my right. Hand stitch in place using a modified tack stitch. Make a knot at the end of your thread and hide it in the fold. Take a little stitch in the backing fabric and pull the thread through. Run the needle in along the fold of the binding for about ¼"; then nip a tiny piece of the backing. Continue in this manner until just past the machine-stitched corner; then fold the next side to the back so it forms a mitered corner. Tack the miter in place and continue stitching. The corners on the front of the quilt miter automatically.



### How to Make Binding with a Tucked-in Finish

The second method for sewing binding is almost identical to the first, except that the end of the binding is simply tucked into the beginning. It is easy and quick, with no measuring, but where the beginning of the binding joins the end there is a little bump that you may or may not find objectionable. If I'm making a small project like place mats, or a quilt that will be loved to death, I often opt for this technique. OK, it forms a bump. But it is a small bump that only a critical quilter will notice, and it does not mean that you love your six-month-old baby or 87-year-old grandfather any less because you give him a quilt made this way!

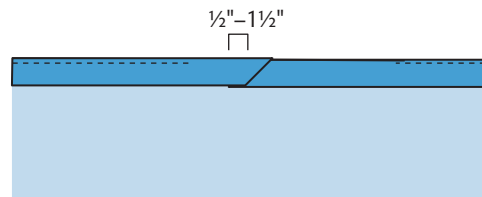
**1** Make a binding strip to fit your project as described in step 1 of "How to Make Binding with a Seamed Finish" (see page 2).

**2** Trim one end of the binding strip at a 45° angle that slants in the same direction as the angle of the seams in the binding strip. Turn under ¼" and press. Fold the strip in half lengthwise, wrong sides together, and press.

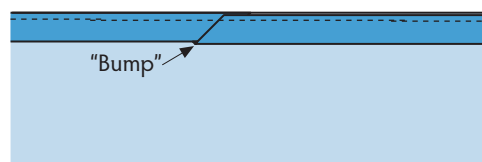


**3** Follow steps 3–5 of "How to Make Binding with a Seamed Finish" to stitch the binding to the quilt, except begin stitching only 3" to 4" from the end of the binding.

**4** Stop 3" to 4" before the starting point and remove the quilt from the machine. Lay the end of the binding over the beginning and trim the end at an angle so it overlaps the beginning by about ½" to 1½". I usually mark the angle with a pencil and just use a pair of scissors to cut, because it does not need to be exact. (Please don't do what I've done and trim it in the wrong direction. It was nasty to fix.) Now simply tuck the end of the binding inside the fold of the beginning edge and finish stitching the binding to the quilt.



Trim.



Tuck end of the binding in the beginning and continue sewing to the quilt.

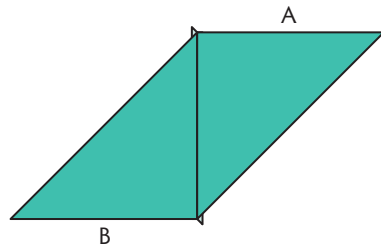
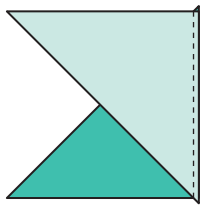
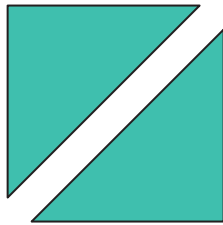
**5** Before you fold the binding to the quilt back and stitch it as in step 9 of "How to Make Binding with a Seamed Finish," opposite, take a few hand stitches along the beginning edge's fold so it is anchored to the end. Then fold the binding to the back of the quilt and continue stitching.

## How to Make Continuous Bias Strips

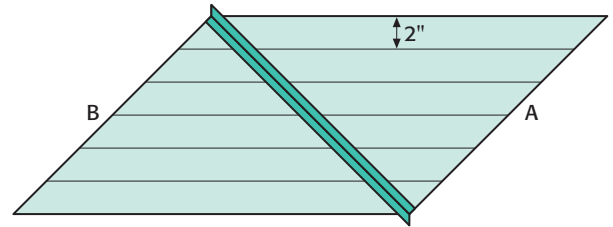
Quilters seem to either love making continuous bias strips or disdain it. Try it at least once and see what your opinion is.

**1** Cut a square the size needed (a chart on page 6 shows various square sizes and how many inches of bias strips each size yields). When deciding how big to make your square, remember that it's easiest if the square's dimensions are evenly divided by the width you want your cut strips to be. For example, if you're cutting 2½" strips, you'll want a square that's evenly divided by 2.5, such as 25". (25 ÷ 2.5 = 10.)

**2** Cut the square in half diagonally and then sew the two halves back together along their short edges, as shown, to make a parallelogram. (Don't worry; you don't need to know geometry!) Notice that when aligning the triangles, the tip of one triangle should extend beyond the edge of the other triangle. The pieces should intersect ¼" from the edges.

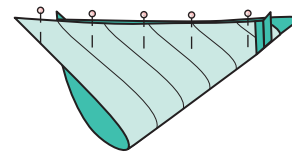
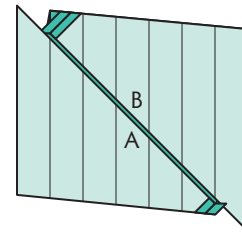


**3** Press the seam allowances open. Working on the wrong side of the fabric, measure and mark parallel lines that equal the width of your desired binding strip. Because you're marking on the bias, take care not to stretch the fabric as you mark. When you reach the end of the fabric, if you have any left over that would be narrower than the width of your binding strip, simply trim it off.

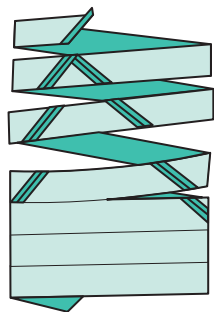


**4** Bring together the two straight-grain ends of the fabric (marked A and B in the diagram). The fabric should be right sides together and will form a tube when you hold the ends together. Shift end A so that it matches the first line on end B, and then pin the two ends together with the raw edges even. If the fabric feels a bit awkward and won't lay flat, then you've done everything correctly!

Using a ¼" seam allowance, stitch the ends together and press the seam allowances open.



5 Using scissors (sorry, a rotary cutter would spell disaster here!), cut on the marked lines, starting at one uneven end of the tube. Cut continuously through the entire tube—you'll end up with enough bias binding for your project.



Cut along lines to form a continuous strip.



6 Fold the binding in half, wrong sides together like any other binding, and press. You're ready to apply the binding to your quilt!

Continuous Bias Fabric Requirements				
Standard Quilt Size	Quilt Dimensions	Binding Needed in Inches*	Size of Fabric Square Needed	
			For 2" Binding Strip	For 2½" Binding Strip
Crib	45" x 60"	220"	22" x 22"	25" x 25"
Twin	63" x 99"	334"	26" x 26"	30" x 30"
Full	78" x 99"	364"	28" x 28"	32½" x 32½"
Queen	84" x 104"	386"	30" x 30"	35" x 35"
King	100" x 104"	418"	32" x 32"	37½" x 37½"

\*The amount of binding given is generous; it includes 10" extra for seaming and turning corners.

## Start-to-Finish Machine Binding

If you dislike or have difficulty stitching by hand, you can sew the binding completely by machine! There are a couple of ways to do it. The first way works like this: Instead of hand stitching the binding to the quilt back, use your machine, stopping with the needle down when you reach a corner. Raise the presser foot and rotate the quilt, positioning it to stitch along the next side. Make sure the corner is tucked in and mitered before you lower the presser foot and continue stitching. When done well, the stitching line disappears in the little crevice between the binding and the quilt top. (Mine wobbles all over the place and is ugly.)

The second way to finish by machine is to first sew the binding to the back of the quilt instead of the front. Then fold the binding to the front so the edge just covers the stitching line and pin in place. Stitch barely inside the edge of the binding, using monofilament thread that matches the binding, or even a decorative stitch. I need a little more practice at sewing binding to the back of the quilt, but it has definite possibilities, especially for items that get used and abused like place mats and hot pads.

### Binding Work Sheet

Quilt length \_\_\_\_\_

+

Quilt width \_\_\_\_\_

=

Total \_\_\_\_\_

× 2 =

Total circumference \_\_\_\_\_

+ 12" =

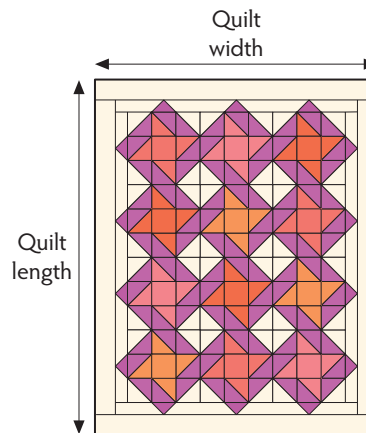
Total length of binding \_\_\_\_\_

÷ 40" =

Number of strips to cut (round up) \_\_\_\_\_

× 2.5 (cut width of binding in inches) =

Minimum yardage \_\_\_\_\_



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