

How to Attach Quilt Borders

Why are flat borders so important?

One, your longarm quilter will love you. 😊 Two, if something's worth doing, it's worth doing well. Properly fitting borders enhance your quilt's appearance and make your quilt square with very little extra effort. Don't believe that fallacy that "it will quilt out". While there are custom quilting techniques that can help ease in and disguise extra fabric, edge to edge/all over quilting can be very unforgiving of excess fabric.

Tips for achieving flat borders

There are two ways to measure for putting on straight (not mitered) borders or long sashing strips. We will refer to them as the Math Way and the No Math Way.

Both ways start with laying out your quilt top on the floor. Gently smooth out wrinkles and waves. If there are any remaining waves, correct them before moving on to attaching sashing and borders. One way to correct the waves is to gently adjust the seams. You can use a slightly bigger or smaller seam allowance to help a row end up the correct measurement. Pressing and using steam and/or spray starch may help too. If you have pieced a border (meaning you cut shapes and sewed them), you may need to press your seams open to get the border to fit correctly. Well-written patterns will tell you which way to press pieced borders for best results.

Ways to avoid waves

- Measure, cut, and sew as accurately as possible. Make sure you are actually sewing a ¼" seam! Be extremely careful with quilts that have a lot of bias edges on the block edges.
- Check your sewing machine's feed: cut two identical, 12" long strips. Sew them without pinning, then see if they are the same length. If not, use a walking foot and pins.
- Use your longest (24.5") ruler when measuring and cutting long pieces or borders.
- Make sure when cutting your borders that the short ends are completely straight across and make 90-degree angles with the sides. If the angle is not straight, it will affect how the border lays.
- Cut all sashing and border strips exactly the same length. DO NOT just use a long strip and cut it off as you sew. While minor (up to an inch total) waves will often "quilt out", big ones won't.
- Use pins.
- Match centers, quarters, and possibly even eighths of the quilt side and the border—use pins. Match the pins to one another and ease in any excess in between the pins. Be sure to pin at the beginning and end of each piece.
- Use a walking foot.
- Put the piece most likely to be stretched on the bottom while sewing.
- Slow down when sewing long seams to get a more even, accurate sewn seam.
- Backstitch at the beginning and end of your seams.
- If you are having a lot of trouble getting your border to fit correctly, you can always try this: start in the center and stitch out to the edge. Break the thread, then start in the center and sew the opposite direction.

Piecing and seaming borders

If you have to seam the fabric for the borders, use a straight seam. In the “olden days” it was generally recommended to join at an angle because it was less noticeable. However, you introduce bias edges when piecing at an angle and it can make your border stretchy and wavy. Plus, I find that with today’s prints, the straight angle is less noticeable. If you have enough extra fabric, you can even take the time to match up the pattern for a nearly invisible join!

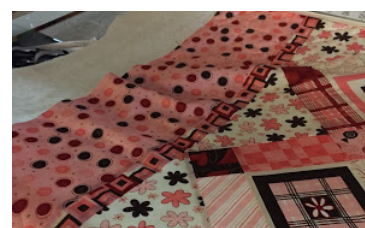
If you don’t want to seam your borders, buy a piece of fabric long enough to cut the longest border and then cut parallel to the selvedge. Some prints work and look good like this; some don’t.

If you have any piecing or seams at all in your border, it is a really good idea to stay stitch around the border 1/8” from the edge so that no seams pop during the quilting process. Same goes for a medallion quilt—any rounds with a lot of seams on the edges should be stay stitched 1/8” from the edge before moving to the next round. Not only does this help the quilt lay flat, but it also helps avoid holes opening in your pieced seams.

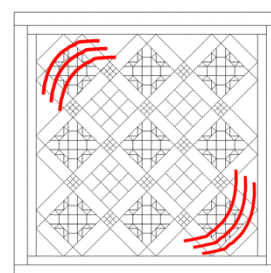
How to tell if your borders are the wrong size

Lay out your quilt top on the floor. Gently smooth out wrinkles and waves.

If your borders are too big, your quilt top will look rippled/ruffled on the edges. Side note: it is pretty difficult to attach borders when the outside edges of your quilt are cut on the bias. Proceed with the utmost caution.



If your borders are too small, the quilt will have ripples within the center of the quilt. They are typically diagonal from one another. If you pull one side flat, the diagonal corner will ripple. If all four corners ripple, all four of your borders are likely too small.



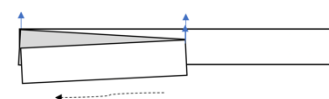
How to easily pin mark borders

This process is similar to how you may have learned to evenly fold strips of paper in elementary school.

Fold the piece exactly in half. Place a pin in the fold on the side you’re going to sew to mark the half. Please note that the ends of your fabric should line up exactly. The drawings are skewed for demonstration purposes.



Next, fold one side in to the center. Place a pin in the fold. Without moving your fabric, place another pin in the flat portion that is directly underneath the last pin. Your border is now marked in fourths. Follow the same process to mark the side of your quilt.

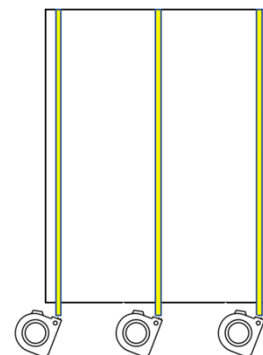


If you want to mark eighths, fold in the loose edges toward the center again. Pin in the fold and in each layer underneath at the fold. Repeat on other side.

Attaching Borders the Math Way:

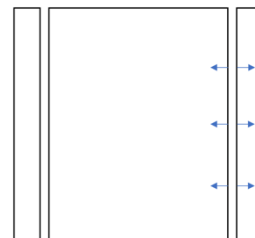
1. Lay out your quilt top flat on the floor. I generally attach side borders first, then the top and bottom. I find this method to be more visually pleasing, but if you prefer to do top and bottom first, then the sides, that's fine. It's your quilt and you are in charge of making the decisions for your quilt. Directions are given for measuring sides first.

2. Measure: I like to measure across the left, center, and right side of my top using a standard, 16-foot hardware store tape measure. (Cloth tape measures can stretch over time.) I generally use the average of the three measurements to cut my borders. Or, if two of the three are the same, I'll use that measurement. If your three measurements differ by more than 1", then you need to address the issue before moving along. Measure exactly from one edge to the other.



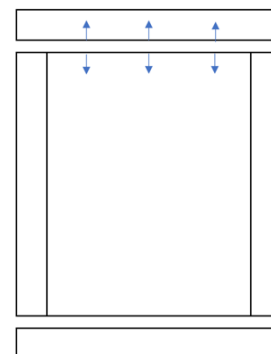
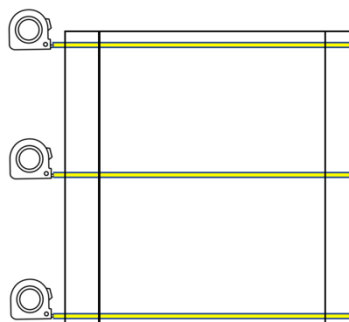
3. Note that some quilters only measure through the middle and use that measurement. I like to measure all three so that I can see if I'm going to have any problems I need to address. I mean, if you measure through the center and it's, say, 75", but your outer edges are 80", that's going to be a problem.

4. Sew on the side borders. I usually mark both the quilt top and the border with a pin at the center and at the quarters. If the quilt is large, I will mark eighths too. Match up the pins and then ease the parts in between to fit. If you have a lot of blouse, you know that the fatter side needs to go on the bottom while sewing to help ease in the excess fabric. I like to pin my borders quite a bit because I think it yields a better finished product. Don't be afraid to stretch the fabric *a bit* if needed to make it fit.



5. Press. Always press before adding another border. Most of the time I press outward on each border. It doesn't really matter as long as you are consistent. Double check that the edges make 90-degree angles before adding next borders.

6. Once you have your side borders attached, lay your quilt flat on the floor again. Repeat taking the three measurements, but this time go across the top, middle, and bottom. Take the average measurement and cut the borders to that measurement. Repeat above steps to attach.



No Math Way:

If you really don't want to measure, try this method provided by Clem Buzick.

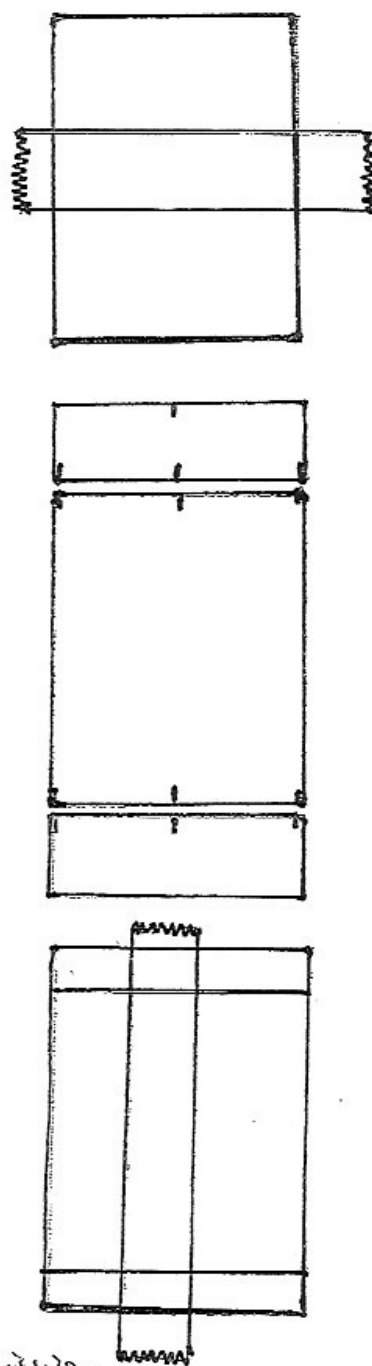
No Math Borders

Adding top and bottom borders:

- Lay quilt top on flat surface.
- Stack top & bottom border strips together and lay across center of quilt top.
- Cut strips even with sides of quilt top with rotary cutter and ruler.
- Mark center on border and quilt top
- Pin border to quilt top matching marks. Center & both ends matching.
- Continue pinning easing to fit.

Adding side borders:

- Use the same technique as top & bottom borders, making sure to lay strips for sides over body of quilt including the top & bottom borders just applied.



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