

Charming Station

Quilt Project

Borders 101



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Borders 101

After you have completed your quilt top, you are ready to add borders. For our project, borders should complement your top and add a “frame” so that your quilt appears finished.

There are lots of ways to add borders and there are entire books about adding borders made from pieced blocks and fancy edges. For this first quilt, though, we are going to use plain strips of fabric and add them with the old 1, 2, 3 rule. Basically, here’s how it works:

- decide on the width for your first border (the one right next to the squares in your top).
- your second border will be twice as wide.
- your third border will be the sum of the first and second border

This is not as complicated as it sounds:

- the first border will be 1 inch wide (finished)
- the second border will be twice that wide or 2" which finished.
- the third border will be the sum of the first two, or 3" wide when finished.

If you started with a 2 inch border, your borders would be 2, 4 and 6 inches wide. That would probably be what you would use for a twin or double bed size quilt.

Straight Strip Borders

Since this is a first quilt for many people, we are going to use the simplest, straight strip border technique that is available.

When you work with any 100% cotton fabric, you will notice that the fabric has a tiny bit of stretch if you pull on it one way and a bit more stretch if you pull on it the other way. If you happen to cut on the diagonal, you will have a LOT more stretch and that is something you don’t want for your borders.

The two directions we want to consider for borders are the straight-across and the up-and-down cuts:

42" - the width coming off the bolt



36" - the yard you have the store cut for you.

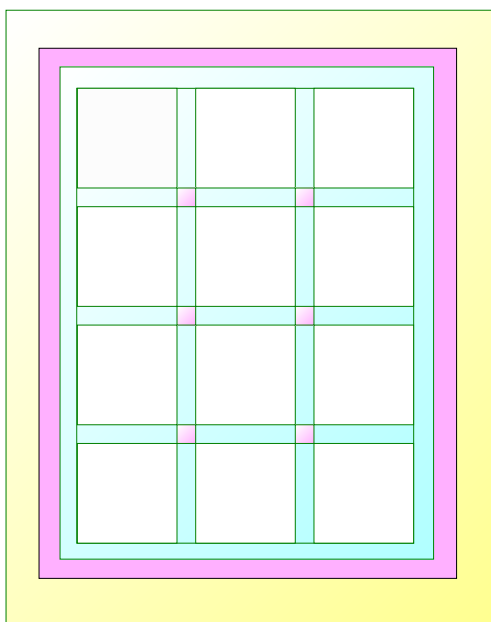
When we say “straight-across” we are talking about the 42" to 44" width from selvage to selvage. This direction has a small amount of stretch to it.

The “up-and-down” cut, is the length of the fabric that you have cut at the store. That could be 1 yard, 1 1/4 yards, 2 yards, 3 yards, etc. This direction has the least amount of stretch.

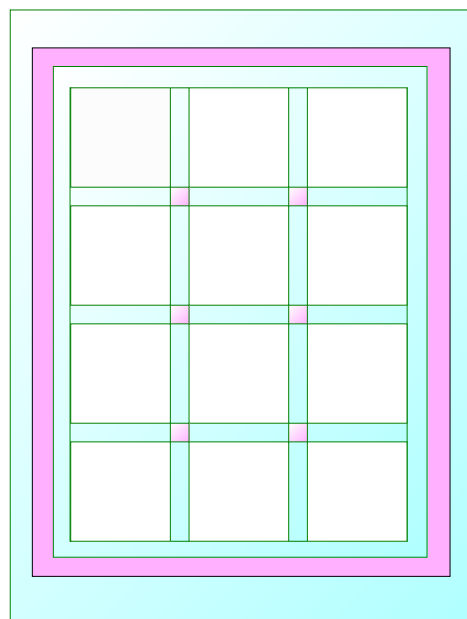
What you need to know: the smaller the quilt, the less you need to worry about the stretch of the borders. So for this quilt we should be able to cut all of our borders “straight-across”. If you were doing a full size or queen size bed quilt, you would want to buy the extra fabric required and cut those long borders “up-and-down” to minimize the stretch.

Which Format did you Choose?

Way back, in the primer, we described two different styles for your borders:



3 different fabrics



2 different fabrics

The first style is to use three different coordinating fabrics for your borders (on the left). The second style is to use two different fabrics, the inner border and the outer-most border are the same while the middle border is different.

It doesn't matter which ones you choose here, we will be assembling the borders the same way for each style.

From this point on we will just call these:

- **Border 1 - the narrow frame right around your squares**
- **Border 2 - the middle border**
- **Border 3 - the outer border**

Please check your fabric selections and choose which ones will be borders 1, 2 and 3. Stick a post-it note on them if you need to, so you will remember which one is which.

Side-Side, Top-Bottom

There are a number of different ways to attach your borders. We are going to use a very simple system where you will sew on both side borders and then sew on your top and bottom borders in each round. Once you have finished this project, you can move on and experiment with other styles but this is a simple one to get you going.

Don't Forget the extra ½ inch

Remember that if we want our finished border to be 1 inch, we need to cut a strip that is 1½" wide. Then when you have sewn it on using your ¼" foot, it will only be 1¼" wide. When you sew on the next border using your ¼" foot, what is left is a finished 1" border.

Measure Twice, Cut Once

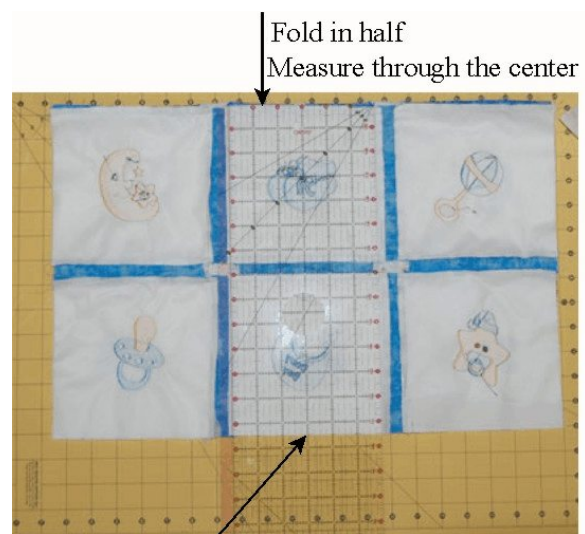
There is a very specific way to measure how long your borders should be. One of the goals for this quilt (and most quilts that you will make) is that the corners should end up being 90 degrees (or square). If one side of your quilt is even a tiny bit smaller than the other side, your corners won't be even.

This really is a "trust me - it works!" situation. If we were in a classroom, I could demonstrate this for you. Since we are doing our classes this way, please read through this set of instructions before you actually start to cut or sew. This way you'll understand what we are trying to do.

Side Border 1

To find out how long to cut the first border:

- fold your quilt top in half the long way (so that side border is folded in half).
- Place a long ruler or a tape measure **in the middle of the quilt**. If your ruler is not long enough to do this in one measurement, use a tape measure. That is more accurate than moving a ruler around.
- Start at the fold and measure the distance to the outer edge of the quilt **in the middle of the quilt**.
- Please use this photo as a guide.
- This measurement is **Half of the length of your side border**.



This is the measurement we want to use

Why? If you measured each side of the quilt, you would likely get a different measurement. If you cut both borders to one length when you sew them on, you will be **equalizing** the two sides.

By measuring down the middle you get the average and this will help you square up your quilt.

Other Borders

You won't know how long to cut the next border until this pair has been sewn onto your top. We'll come back and measure for the next one after we have finished sewing this pair.

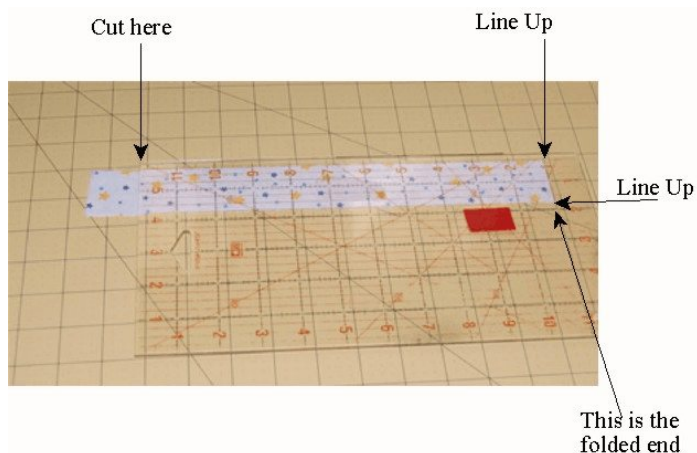
Cutting Your Borders

If your border measurement is less than 42 inches, you can cut “straight-across”. Never include the selvage in the border strip. If your fabric is not wide enough, you can cut “up and down”.

These directions are assuming that you have a general all-over pattern for the print on your fabric. If you have a one-way pattern or a stripe, you will need to figure out how to cut the fabric so that the pattern is going the correct way when sewn on.

For our project, you will easily be able to cut all of your borders “straight-across” the width of your fabric.

- Use your ruler to cut two strips that are 1½" wide by the width of your fabric.
- Fold each of these strips so that there is one fold in the center
- Now stack these two strips so that the folded end matches and the edges are as even in possible.
- Lay these carefully on your cutting board.



Since these are folded in half, you need to use the measurement we just took for Half of the length of your side border.

- Use your ruler to measure down from the fold whatever that side measurement is
- Carefully line your ruler up so that one edge of the strip is even with a line on your ruler and the fold is also even with a line.
- Cut the strips to the measurement you need.

(Be careful here - be sure you are cutting the end that has the four pieces of selvage showing. If you cut the wrong end (the end with the fold) you will have four pieces instead of two! I know, I've done it plenty of times!)

By cutting your two strips at the same time, you should have two pieces that are exactly the same size.

Press the border strips

Use your iron to press these strips. Be careful that you don't stretch anything as you press these!

Pinning your Border to the Quilt Top

The biggest mistake quilters make when adding borders is to just start sewing without pinning the borders in place. Remember that your feed dogs (from the bottom) are pushing fabric through under the needle. If you are holding the border strip on the top with even the tiniest bit of tension, your border will stretch out and end up longer than the top being pushed through underneath.

Save yourself a big headache and take a few minutes to follow these easy steps:

- Find the middle point of your border strip (mark it with a pin if necessary)
- Find the middle point of one side of your quilt top.
- Put the right side of the border fabric together with the right side of the quilt
- Match that middle point on the quilt with the one on your border strip and pin that in place.
- Now go to one end of your quilt and pin the end of the border strip to at that edge.
- Repeat this at the other end of your quilt, matching the end of the border strip to the edge of the quilt.
- Now, working from the middle to one end, add pins every few inches (4 or 5) going to the end. Distribute any excess fabric, either in the border or in the quilt so that there is not one big pucker or lump.
- Repeat from the middle to the other edge of the quilt.
- Remember that the underside of your quilt has seams that have been pressed to one side or the other. You may want to pin these seams to make sure that you keep them going the right way.

Sewing on this pair of borders

If your quilt top is exactly square, your border and the side of the top will match exactly. If they don't match, welcome to the rest of the world! Almost no one can get this work perfectly!

There is a simple trick that will help you sew the border on and get rid of any slight puckering:

- If the edge of your quilt was slightly longer than your border, place it on your sewing machine with the edge of the quilt down and the border on top
- If the edge of your quilt was slightly shorter than your border, place it on your sewing machine with the quilt edge on top and the border on the bottom.

When you sew this, your feed dogs will push the bottom level of fabric through the machine slightly faster than the top level. That will equalize that two sets and puckering will be at a minimum.

To Pull or Not to Pull

Some people have learned to sew by putting one hand in front of the needle and the other hand behind the machine. They use the hand behind the machine to pull the sewn part through.

If this is the way you usually sew things, try to avoid doing that as you work on a quilt. You should be able to simply guide things through from the front. If you are pulling from the back, you may be defeating the natural help the feed dogs are giving you.

Sew the Borders

Sew the borders on each side with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam. Remember to remove pins as you go - never sew over a pin!

Press the Borders

Just like the blocks in the center of your quilt, you want to press the seams of the borders to one side. In almost all cases, this would be toward the border. Usually the border is a dark fabric and the embroidered squares are light or white fabric. Pressing the seams toward the darker fabric makes them less noticeable in the finished quilt.

Next Set of Borders: Top and Bottom of Border 1

Now we will repeat the same steps for measuring that we did on page [102](#).

- fold your quilt top in half the other way so that you can measure the other direction
- Place a long ruler or a tape measure *in the middle of the quilt*. If your ruler is not long enough to do this in one measurement, use a tape measure. That is more accurate than moving a ruler around.
- Start at the fold and measure the distance to the outer edge of the quilt *in the middle of the quilt*.

This is the measurement for the top and bottom borders.

- Use the same cutting steps to cut strips 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide by the length of the measurement (remember to fold the strips in half)
- Following the same steps as for the sides, find the center of each border and pin it to the center of the edge of the quilt.
- Pin the two ends of each border and then distribute any extra material between the pins.
- You may want to pin the seams on your embroidered blocks.
- Sew these on with the $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam. Remember to put the side with any excess fabric on the bottom as you put it in the sewing machine.

Middle Border

All you need to do is repeat all these steps for the middle border.

- Cut these strips 2 ½" wide (so they will be two inches wide when finished).
- Do the side borders first
- Then do the top and bottom borders

Outer Border

Just do the same exact steps with the outer border. Cut these strips 3 and ½ inches wide.

Did you notice?	The side borders are longer than the top and bottom border. By cutting them first, then doing the top and bottom for each set of borders, you actually save fabric!
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Your Finished Quilt Top

At this point, your top is completely assembled. Now is the time to do a little trimming in preparation for make the quilt "sandwich".

Lay your quilt top out so that you are looking at the back. This is your last chance to clean things up:

- remove any excess stabilizer so that it doesn't show through the top
- trim any thread (especially dark colors!) that might show through the top. Jump threads on the back of the embroidery may need to be trimmed back.
- press your seams so that they are all going the same direction on a row (if possible). If you find one row that is crossed over, don't panic. You are the only one who will really know and it won't ruin the quilt! It just looks a little nicer on the top when all the seams are pressed in the same direction.
- trim any excess seam threads still trailing off the sides

The Next Step

The next step will be to sandwich your top to your batting and backing. If you haven't purchased the fabric for your backing yet, you will want to do so now. You also need 50 to 100 curved safety pins for basting the quilt together.

You can get the pins at Joann's for \$2.99 for 50 (less if you have a coupon). You want to get size 1 (about 1 and 1/16" long) and you want to get the nickel plated pins (silver looking not gold). You can use longer pins but they leave a more noticeable hole in the quilt top.



There is also a handy device called a Kwik Klip that was invented by Eleanor Burns (www.quiltinaday.com) that you might want to pick up. This helps you close all those safety pins you will be using. Until you have done 20 or 30 pins with just your fingers you won't realize how handy this is. Joann's doesn't carry it anymore but you can order it online if you would like.



We will be discussing the pros and cons of various kinds of batting in the next section and give you time to make a choice about what you want to use.