

How to make Perfect Quilt Binding

By

Tracey Pereira

*A guide that takes the bind
out of binding quilts!*

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Introduction:

For many quilters 'binding' is the least liked part of the quilt-making process and many also confess to rushing the job to get it done as quickly as possible. If I'm honest – its my least favourite part too but I also know that binding is the last chance I will have to make my quilt look the best it can, so for me 'binding' is a very important step in the quilt making process. With my easy to follow 6 Step guide I will help you take the bind out of binding and finish a quilt you will be proud of!

Hallmarks of a good binding:

There are many choices of binding available to you; double French-fold binding, single-fold binding and English edge-turned binding are just three possible options. You could then go on to select bias or straight-grain, piped or laced. The list goes on with one thing in common ... a successful quilt is determined by how skilfully the finish is applied. As a qualified quilt judge I can tell you how upsetting it is to see a beautiful quilt let down by a poorly applied binding. But good binding should not be reserved for show quilts alone, our ordinary well-loved utility quilts also deserve the best.

A good binding displays the following hallmarks:

Binding serves several purposes. Primarily it is a functional way to tidy up the edge of the quilt, conceal raw edges and stop the quilt filling from falling out! It can also add a flash of colour and texture to the quilt so it becomes part of the overall design, but it is also the boundary or fence within which the quilt sits and as such it should be straight and true with square corners, have neatly concealed joins and look good on both front and back of the quilt.

In summary a good binding displays the following characteristics.

1. The quilt edge fills the binding and there is no empty space at the outer edge.
2. The corners are square and mitred at 45^a on the front and back of the quilt.
3. Any fabric joins in the binding are concealed and smooth and the joins should not be lumpy or highly noticeable.
4. Ideally the binding should be of equal width on the front and back of the quilt and neatly applied by either hand or machine.

Take your time to learn a binding method that works for you. My preferred binding method is to prepare and apply a 1/2" (1.25cm) finished double-fold straight grain binding.

Follow my easy 6-step guide and take the bind out of binding.

Happy Quilting!

Step 1: Preparing the Quilt for Binding

As you quilt your patchwork top the combination of quilting design and batting (wadding) will 'draw in' the quilt and reduce it in size.

Ideally the quilting design and density should be fairly even all over the quilt top and reduce the quilt uniformly across its length and width. This is not always the case though and sometimes one area will draw in more than another leaving the finished quilt with hills and valleys around its edges.

Additionally, the quilting may pull the edges out of square leaving them to dip in and out across the width. In most cases this will be minimal and can be treated before binding. If left uncorrected though these dips, hills and valleys will only be exaggerated. The same effect is true in the corners of the quilt and often the quilted top will have out-of-square corners, particularly if the borders have not been applied correctly.

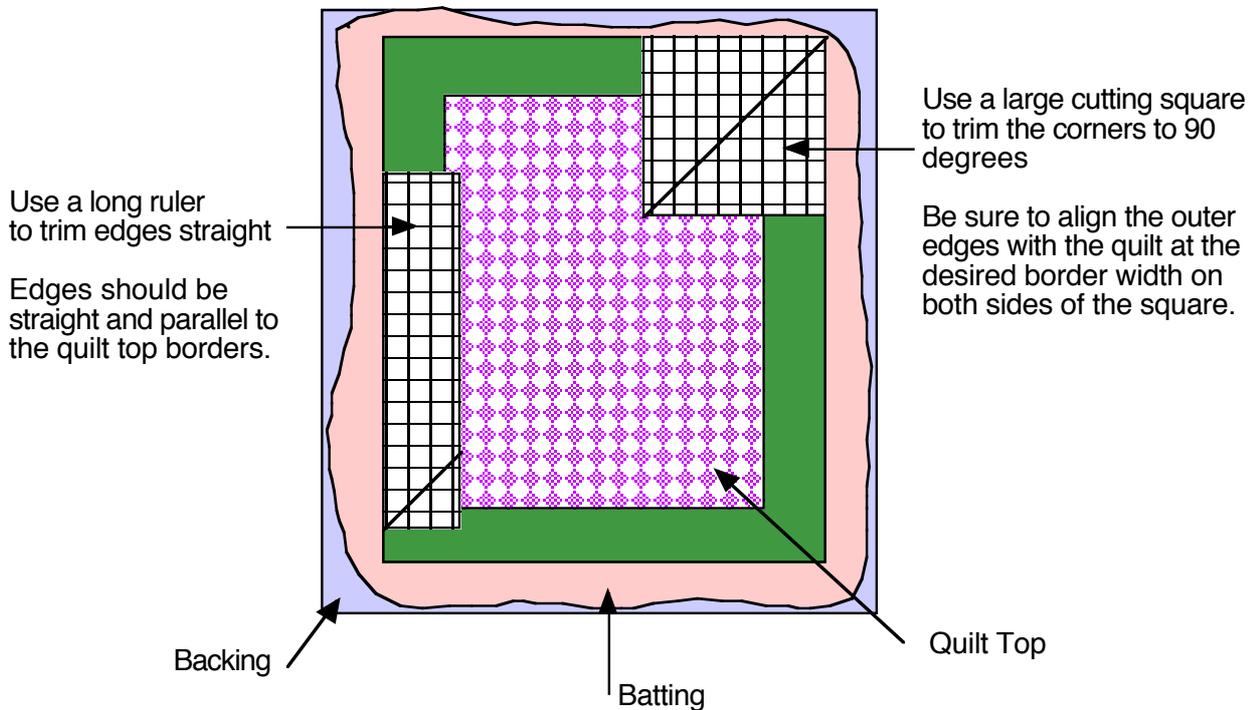
Before binding we must therefore square, trim and stabilise the quilt.

Step 1 - Preparing the quilt consists of 2 discrete phases. Both must be carried.

1. Square the Quilt
2. Stabilise and Baste the Quilt

Step 1 - Preparing the Quilt for Binding

Square the Quilt



1. Hand-block the Quilt:

Lay the quilt on a large flat cutting surface. Smooth out the quilt as much as possible. Gently square the corners and tease the edges straight and parallel to the quilt body with your hands.

2. Trim the corner square:

Using a large 12" or 15" square ruler align the edges of the square with the outer edges of the quilt at your chosen border width. If necessary, gently tease the quilt to get the corner as square as possible. When you are happy trim the outer edge on both sides of the square. The corner should be 90 degrees and both borders should be the same width (Unless you have deliberately chosen otherwise).

3. Trim the edges straight:

Using a long 6"x 24" ruler work down the border. Align the ruler at the desired border width as before. Carefully trim off the excess fabric. (If your border is greater than 6" continue around the quilt use a larger square). The edges should be straight, smooth and ripple free. If necessary you may need to trim away small slivers of the border itself to make the edge nice and straight. This can only be done on plain borders. To compensate for any waviness on pieced borders you will only be able to square the back and batting.

Step 1 - Preparing the Quilt for Binding

Baste the Quilt

Lay the quilt on a flat surface and look carefully at the edges in relation to the work surface. Most likely you will see a gently wave. This is normal and can be removed by basting the edges. Basting will make the edges flat.



This quilt had very wavy edges prior to binding.

Basting the quilt edge with a small running stitch around the edge draws it up and pulls the quilt flat.



To baste the edges use a longish needle and thread with a good quality cotton.

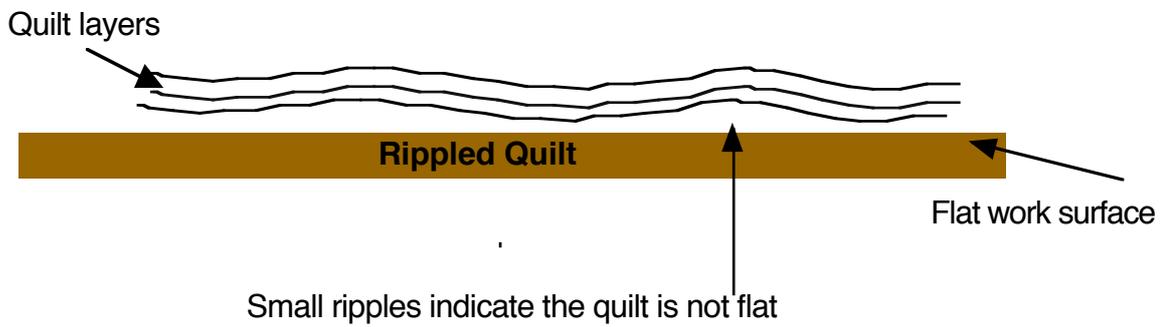
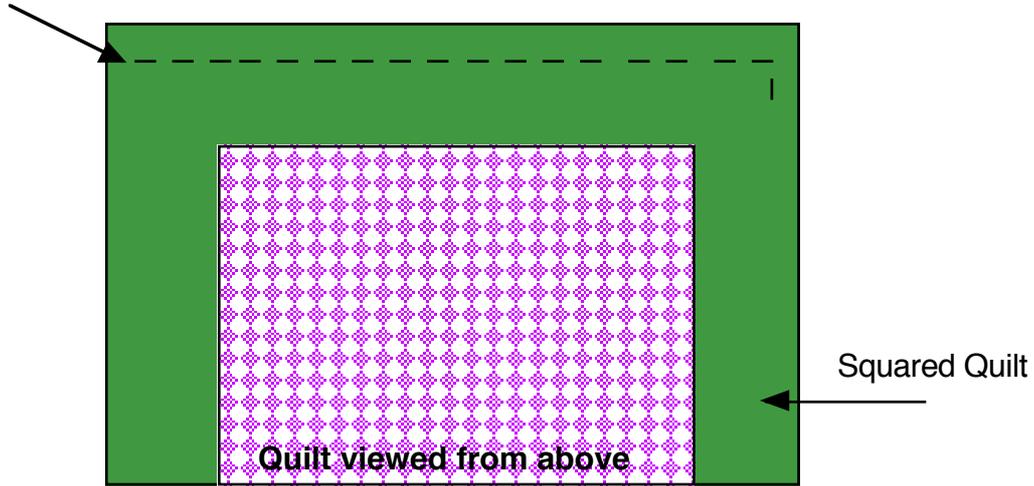
Using a medium length stitch hand sew a short running stitch from corner to corner.

At each corner point stop stitching and gently pull the thread to ease out any of the ripples. Check to see that the quilt lies flat on the table. When you are happy lock your stitches and go on to the next edge.

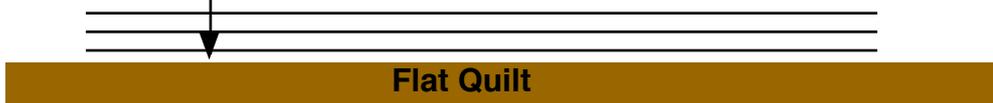
Step 1 – Preparing the Quilt for Binding Baste the Quilt

Baste the Quilt

Hand sew a small running stitch from corner to corner



Correct the ripples before binding by drawing-in the basting stitches until the quilt lies flat against the work surface



Quilt Viewed from the side

Step 2 – Determine How much binding you will Need

How much binding will you need?

Usually I always make more binding than I need for two reasons:

1. I know I won't run out while I am applying it.
2. I can use the extra binding for small projects (like pot holders) later on.

Left over bindings also look good on scrappy quilts.

Lengthwise Grain

Where possible I also try to use binding cut from the lengthwise grain. This is because lengthwise grain is more stable than crosswise grain and does not stretch as much. However, if fabric is at a premium the crosswise grain can be used but you will need to be just that little bit more careful with it.

For Double Fold Straight cut Binding

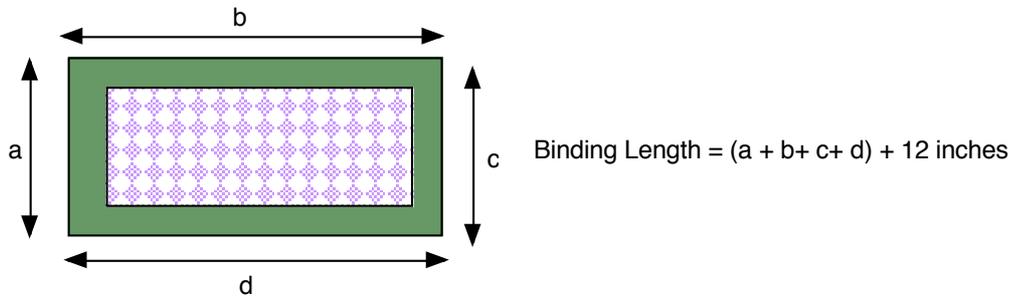
For 9 out of 10 quilts you will probably want to apply a *continuous double-fold straight cut binding*. Also called a **French Binding**. This binding is made from one layer of fabric cut on the straight grain - either lengthwise or cross-grain and then folded in half. It is a durable, neat and attractive looking binding that is also very easy to work with. Occasionally you may to cut the fabric on the bias, but this is usually only necessary when working around curves or with striped fabric. *(I find single bindings and edge turned bindings more difficult to work with so rarely apply them unless I really have too!)*

In most cases I cut fabric strips 2.5" (6.25cm) wide.
This makes a 1/2" (1.25cm) finished binding.

Fabric requirements for Double-fold Straight cut binding:

1. Determine the total length of the binding:

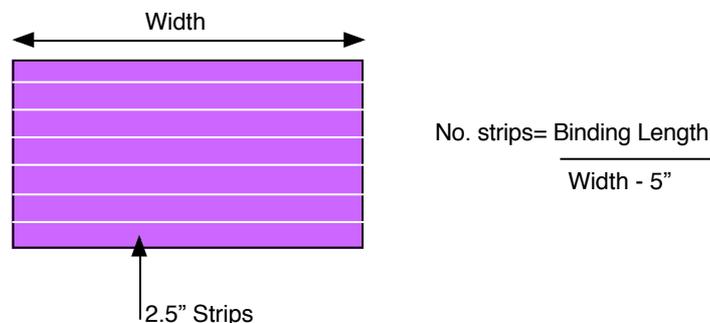
- Measure all four edges of the quilt.
- Add 30 cm (12") to this measurement to allow for seams, turning corners, and joining the beginning to the end.



For example a 20" x 40" quilt will need 132" of binding.
 $(2 \times 20") + (2 \times 40") + 12" = 132"$

2. Determine the number of 2.5" fabric strips you will need:

- Measure the width of the fabric you have available and subtract 5"
(This allows for joining strips together to form one continuous binding at each end of the width of fabric.)
- Divide the length of the finished binding by this width to determine the no. of strips.



In our example if we have 44" fabric we will need $132 / (44 - 5) = 3.38$ strips.

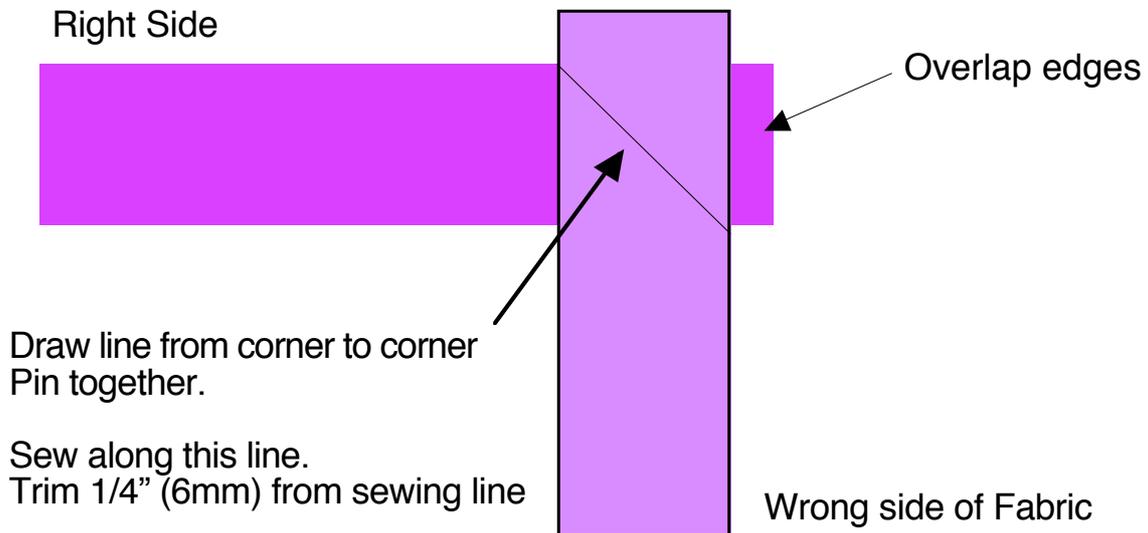
Round up to the next whole number of strips = 4 strips.
Add 1 extra to be safe = 5

3. Determine how much fabric this equates too:

The number of strips x width of binding strip = amount of fabric needed for the binding:

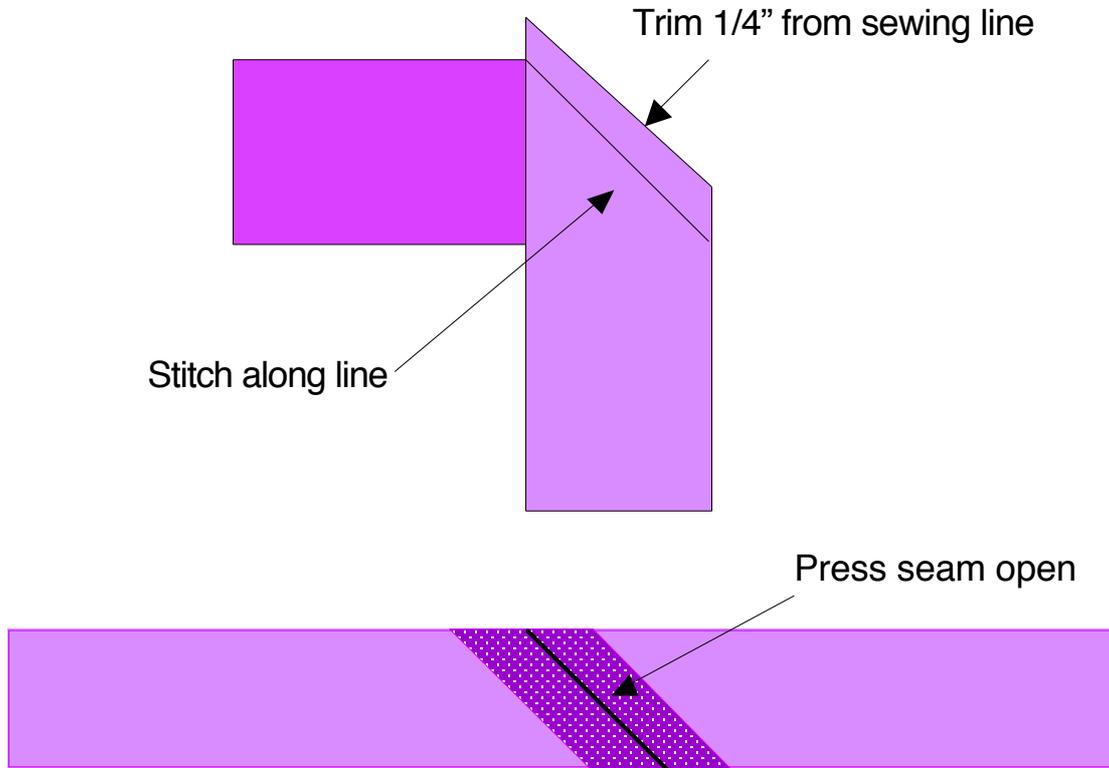
Eg: $5 \times 2.5" = 12.5"$ piece of fabric will be required.

Step 3 - Join and fold the Binding strips



1. With right sides together place one binding strip at right angles to the other.
2. Overlap the edges slightly. Be sure that the vertical strip is **wrong side up**.
3. Using a marker draw a line from corner to corner on the wrong side of the vertical strip.
4. Using a smallish stitch length and a matching thread sew the two bindings strips together along the drawn line.
5. Using a ruler and rotary cutter trim 1/4" (6mm) away from the sewing line.
6. Open up the binding and **press the seam open**. (*This will reduce bulk in the seam*)

How to make Perfect Quilt Binding



7. Continue to join strips until you have one continuous length of binding.
8. Fold the binding in half and press along its length.
If your strips have been cut on the crosswise grain you may find it helps the finished look of the quilt if you very slightly stretch the binding while pressing,

Step 4 - Sew the binding to the Quilt

Some Basic Information first:

Walking Foot: I always use a walking foot attachment on my sewing machine to stitch the bindings to the quilt. A walking foot is an indispensable accessory that works by providing an upper set of feed dogs. Working in conjunction with the machine feed dogs beneath the needle plate this clever device helps to ensure both the upper and lower layers of fabric layers move together at the same time and so prevents them from sliding. If your sewing machine has an integrated dual feed then engage this option.

(A walking foot is fantastic for matching plaids and may also help if you are having trouble matching your seams)

Using Pins: I only use a few pins throughout the whole process of adding the binding to the quilt. You may however find that you prefer to pin the binding as you go. I don't because I find the binding can shift as I stitch and I always end up having to remove the pins and relocate them.

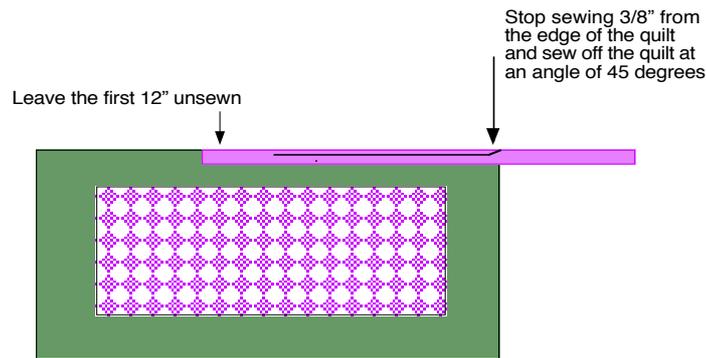
Stitch length: I use a slightly longer stitch to apply my bindings than I do when sewing a seam. This is because I am sewing through at least 5 layers of fabric and possibly many more if I have pieced borders. The extra stitch length allows the thread to move more freely through these extra layers and form a good quality stitch.

Needle: Needles are relatively cheap in comparison to the fabric we use in a quilt. Be sure to change your needle regularly. You will be sewing through many layers of fabric and your needle will need to be sharp in order to pass through them with ease. I prefer to use a size 12 quilting needle when applying bindings. The quilting needle is designed with a specially shaped shank to allow it to move through the layers and create a space for the thread to pass through it.

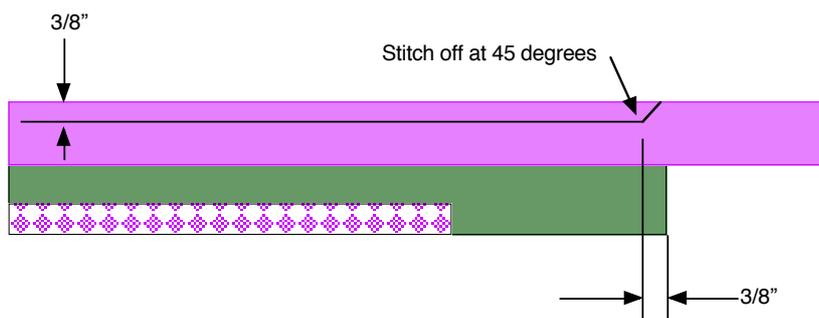
Seam Allowance:

To keep a consistent width on my seam allowance I use a small strip of self adhesive foot care cushioning (Scholl produce a nice one!) It is about 1/4" thick and it can easily be cut into small strips. I remove the self-adhesive backing and stick the strip to my machine sole plate - 3/8" away from needle. This provides a firm support against which I butt my quilt and binding. It is a simple and effective solution for constant seam widths.

Step 4 - Sew the binding to the Quilt



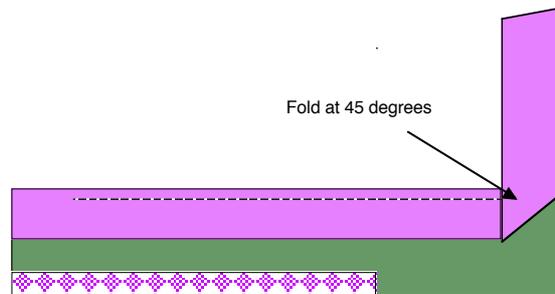
1. Start by aligning the raw edge of the binding with the edge of the stabilised quilt.
2. Leave at least 12" free. (I always start on one of the long edges of the quilt around just over the half mark.)
3. Using a $\frac{3}{8}$ " seam allowance sew the binding onto the quilt. (A $\frac{3}{8}$ " allowance will produce a finish binding of $\frac{1}{2}$ " by the time you have folded your binding over to the back of the quilt). As you stitch pull very slightly on the binding strip only. This helps to eliminate any stretch in the binding and any wavy edges or ripples left on the quilt edges. Do not force the binding and quilt through the machine - let the walking foot and feed dogs do the work for you.
4. Keep sewing until you approach the first corner. Stop sewing $\frac{3}{8}$ " in from the end. Check you are in the correct stop position. Leaving the needle down lift the presser foot and rotate the quilt and binding through 90 degrees. The edges of the quilt and binding should be $\frac{3}{8}$ " from the needle or butted up to your seam guide if you are using one.
5. Spin the quilt and binding back to the original position. Now rotate through just 45 degrees. Lower the presser foot and sew off the quilt at 45 degrees.
6. Remove the quilt from the sewing machine.



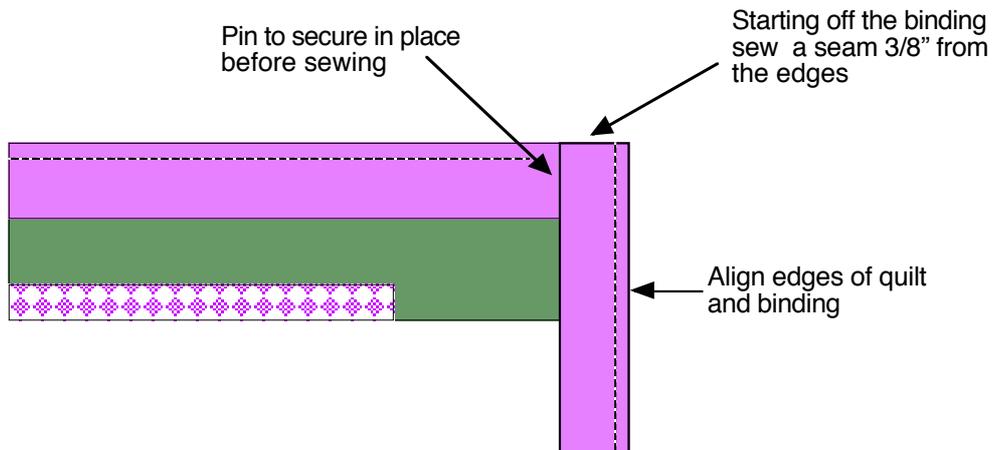
Step 4 - Sew the Binding to the Quilt

Turning the corner and making the mitre

1. Using the 45^a line you have just sewn as a guide fold the binding up and away from the quilt so that it is at 90 degrees to the section already sewn onto the quilt.

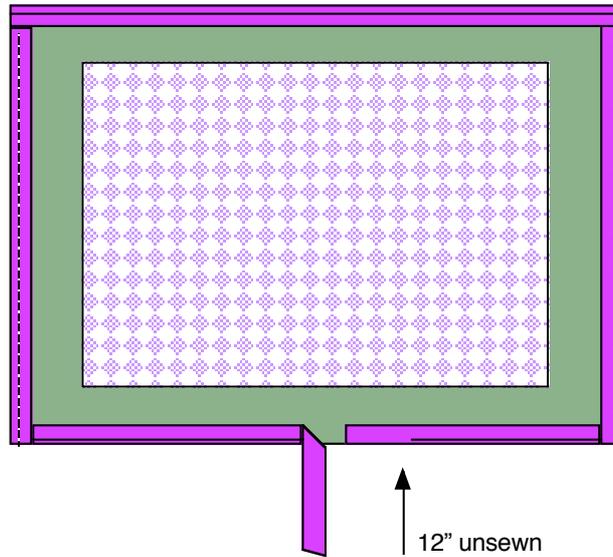


2. Now fold the binding down and align the edges with the quilt. Secure the binding in position with a couple of pins. You have now formed a mitred corner.

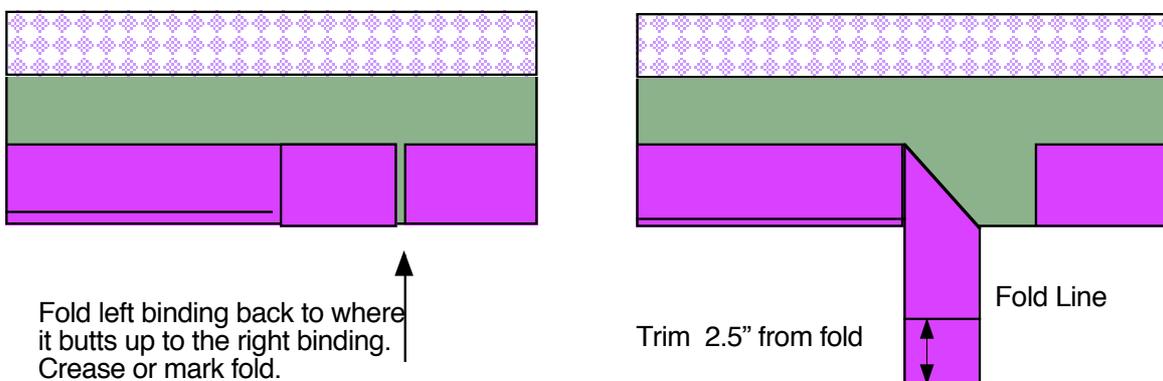


3. Return the quilt and binding to your sewing machine. Check to make sure you are still stitching a 3/8" seam allowance and start to sew the next edge in place. Hold your thread tails as you start to sew as you will be working at the very edge of the folded binding. (if you don't hold the thread tails they can disappear into your machine and get tangled up in your bobbin race).
4. Continue to make your way around the remaining 4 corners. Stop when you have completed the fourth corner and have sewn to within 12" of your starting point.
5. Remove the quilt from your sewing machine.

Step 5 - Joining the ends of the Binding

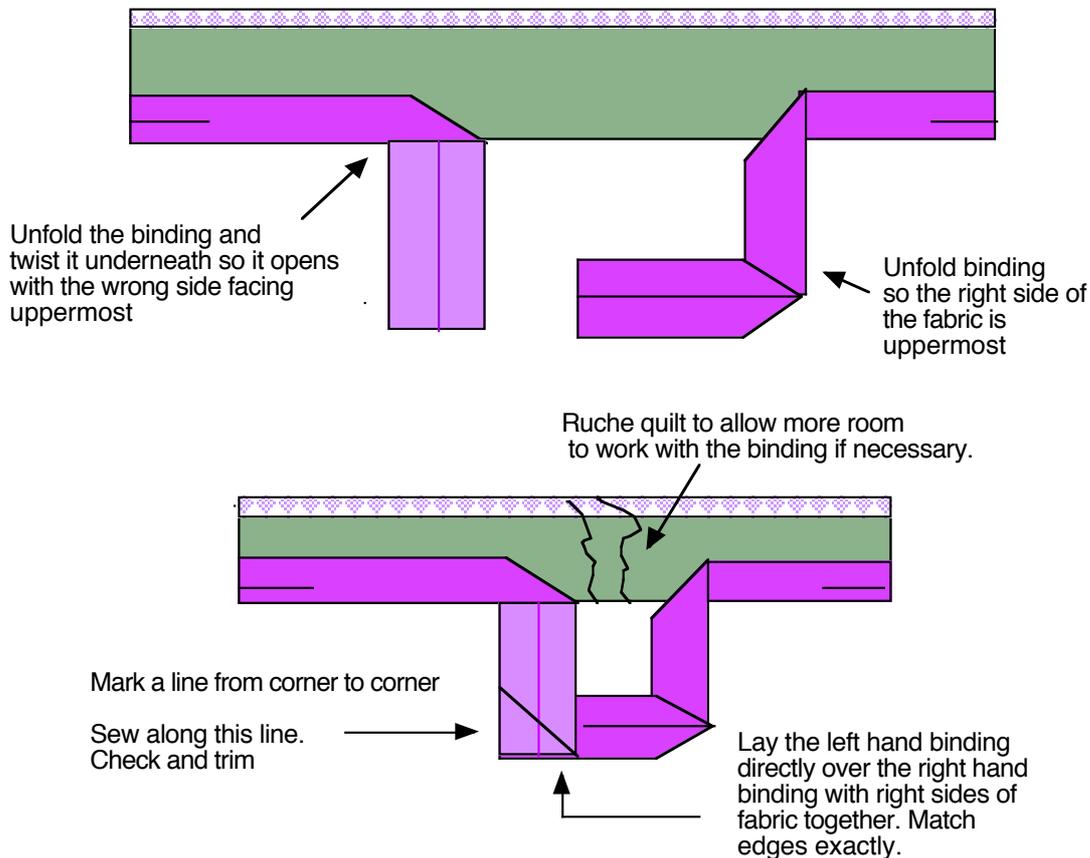


1. Place the quilt on a flat cutting surface with the free ends of the binding closest to you.
2. Dealing with the right-hand end first. Align the edges with the quilt and smooth out any wrinkles.
3. Now dealing with the left-hand binding section. Align the edges with the quilt. The left-hand binding should now overlap the right-hand binding.
4. Fold back the left hand binding so that it just butts against the right-hand end.
5. Make sure you have no slack in the binding fabric on either side at this point.
6. Crease the fold so you can see it. Mark if necessary.
7. Lift the left-hand binding from the quilt and place it on a cutting mat.
8. Measure 2.5" from the fold line and trim the binding strip.



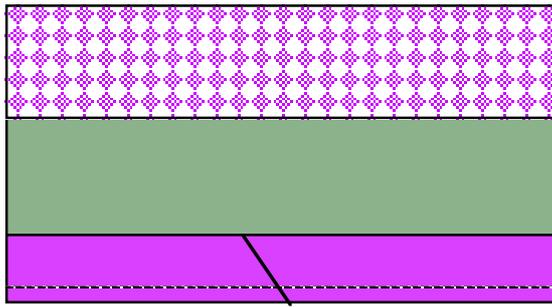
Step 5 - Joining the ends of the Binding

This next stage is probably the trickiest...but don't panic...after doing a few times you soon get the knack. Persevere with this technique because it does produce a nice lumpless finish.

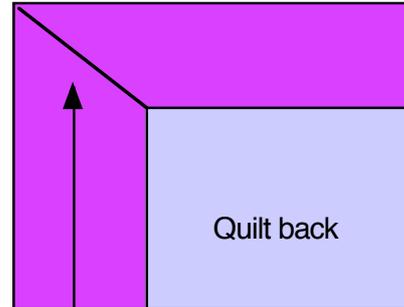


1. Unfold both of the binding strips so that they are a single layer of fabric.
2. Lift the bindings away from the quilt. Hopefully you will have left enough unsewn binding so that you have sufficient free fabric to join them comfortably. (If you haven't then ruche up the quilt behind the bindings to provide a little more room to work. Pin the ruche to stop it getting in your way.)
3. Lay the right-hand binding flat on your work surface with the fold opened up and the right side of the fabric showing. Make sure the binding is laying parallel to the quilt.
4. Open out the left-hand binding and un-fold it. Twist it underneath itself so that you can see the wrong side of the fabric. It should be coming towards you and be at 90^a to the quilt.
5. Keeping the left-hand binding wrong side up place it directly on top of the right-hand binding. They should be at right angles to each other. Carefully match the edges. Do not overlap them. Pin to secure in place.
6. Using a ruler mark a line at 45^a from outside corner to outside corner. Sew along this line.

Step 6 - Finish the binding



Match the edges of the binding to the quilt and sew a 3/8" line to finish attaching the binding



Mitres should look neat on the back and front of the quilt. Corners should be folded to meet at 45 degrees

1. Check the binding is joined correctly then trim off the excess fabric so you have a 3/8" seam allowance.
2. Finger press the seam open and fold the binding in half again.
3. Match the edge of the binding with the quilt. Using a couple of pins to hold the binding in place sew a 3/8" seam. I sometimes find I need to very slightly stretch the binding to make it fit. This is ok and much better than having too much quilt to ease in.
4. The binding is now attached to the quilt. The next few steps finish the binding process.
5. Fold the binding over the raw edges of the quilt so the double-fold of the binding just covers the stitching line. Pin in place. I use a couple of pins at this stage to make sure the binding is turned over neatly before I hand sew. I find that the binding can shift and twist slightly making it look rippled if I do not pin it in place before hand stitching.
6. To neaten the corners unfold the mitre and push the edge of the quilt into the corner of it. With a little persuasion the binding will want to fold naturally into a mitre at the back too. Use your thumb to hold one of the corners down then fold the other side in to complete the mitre. The edges should match and be at 45^a to each other.
7. You may also find that you get a neater looking mitre with the fabric folded one way over the other. You will need to play with the mitre to find which way lies the flattest. Once you like the look of the mitre on both sides of the quilt pin it in place.
8. Using a concealed stitch or an appliqué stitch if you prefer, hand sew the binding to the back of the quilt. Take care at the corners to make sure the mitres meet up exactly and that you secure them properly.
9. Your quilt is now bound and will look stunning. Don't forget to label it!