

How to Measure and Sew Straight Borders on Your Quilt

What Are Straight Sewn Borders?

Straight sewn quilt borders, also called butted borders, are quick and easy to sew--that's probably why they are the most popular. Borders are sewn to the sides of the quilt, then to the top and bottom edges, extending straight across the ends of the first borders.

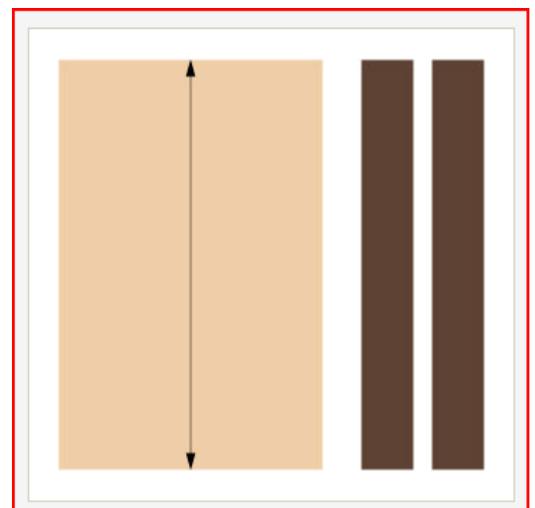
It's not unusual for the four edges of an unfinished quilt top to all be slightly different lengths, because they're often stretched out of shape a bit from handling. Never measure a quilt's outer edges to determine border length. Sewing on borders of varying lengths will make the differences even more obvious.

We'll use a method that helps the borders support and square up the entire quilt.

Determine the Length of Side Borders

1. Measure the quilt from top to bottom through its vertical midpoint. Measure several places; if the measurements differ, use the average measurement for Step 2.
2. Cut two border strips that match the measurement exactly, using the width you've already determined looks best with the quilt. Borders made with crosswise grain strips are somewhat more stretchy than lengthwise grain border strips, but either type is suitable.

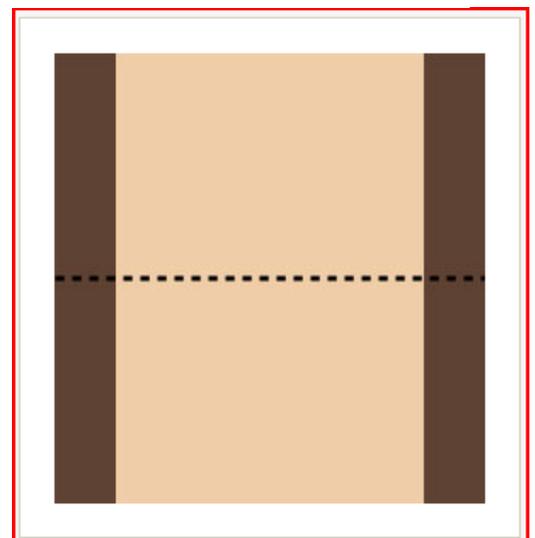
Piecing for Length: If necessary, piece border strips end-to-end to achieve length. Strips lose 1/4" for each seam it takes to stitch them together, so allow a little extra length when cutting. Sew the strips together along their ends, press seam allowances open to reduce bulk, then trim the strip so that its length matches the measurement in Step 1.



Measure the quilt from top to bottom through its vertical midpoint. Cut or piece two borders to match that length.

Sew Side Borders to the Quilt

1. Fold one of the borders in half crosswise to find its midpoint, using your fingers to crease it slightly at that spot. Find the quilt's horizontal midpoint.
2. Place the border along the side of the quilt, right sides together and midpoints matched. Pin through both layers at the match to keep them from shifting.
3. Match and pin the bottom end of the border to the bottom edge of the quilt, then match and pin the other end to the top edge of the quilt.
4. Continue matching and pinning the border to the entire side of the quilt, pinning at close intervals if you must ease in fullness to coax the two lengths to match. Raw edges should be aligned along the quilt's entire side. A walking foot may help you sew the layers without shifting.
5. Sew the border to the quilt with a 1/4" seam allowance, removing pins as the needle approaches them. If you had to ease in fullness, sew with the longest piece next to the feed dogs.
6. Press the seam allowance towards the border.
7. Use the same method to sew the remaining border to the opposite side of the quilt.

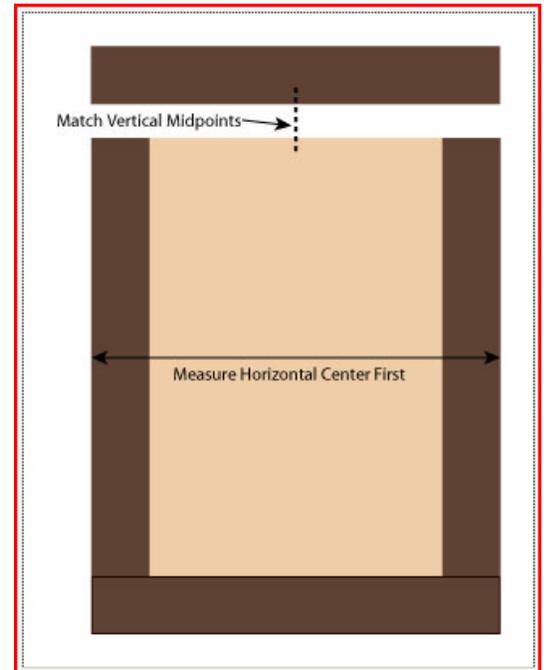


Side borders shown matched and sewn to the quilt's horizontal midpoint.

Determine Top & Bottom Border Length

1. Measure the quilt from side-to-side through its horizontal midpoint, including the width of the side borders. Cut or piece two borders that length.
2. Fold a border in half crosswise and crease. Pin the midpoint of the border to the vertical midpoint at the top of the quilt, right sides together and raw edges matched.
3. Continue matching and pinning the border to the quilt just as you did side borders, working with ends first then matching and pinning the remaining length.
4. Sew the border to the quilt with a 1/4" seam allowance. Press the seam allowance towards the border.
5. Repeat to sew the bottom border to the quilt.
6. Repeat all steps if you want to add another border around the first.

Measure the quilt's horizontal midpoint to determine top and bottom border length. Match borders to quilt at vertical midpoint, then finish matching and sewing as you did side borders.



Straight Border Alternatives

- It's fine to sew the top and bottom borders to the quilt before you add the side borders, just flip-flop the instructions, measuring through the quilt's horizontal midpoint first.
- Some quilters like to piece border strips together like they do binding strips, with seams that move diagonally across the border instead of the side-by-side orientation produced when strips are sewn together at their ends.



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