How to Make Continuous Bias Binding

Sewing is a continually evolving art. Learning new and interesting techniques is one of the best ways to build upon your current knowledge. It keeps your skills fresh and your ideas lively. We have two great how-to articles on binding in general: Bias Binding: Figuring Yardage, Cutting, Making and Attaching and A Complete Step-by-Step for Binding Quilts & Throws. In this article, we’re continuing our journey down the binding path to a “sub-set” technique called: continuous bias binding. It’s a little bit like the ancient art of origami. You start out with a flat square (or rectangle), and after a few folds...
First, a brief recap of why we use binding and the difference between straight and bias.

When you have an exposed raw edge, for instance, around the edge of a quilt, you need to finish it in some way. Binding, whether straight or bias, is ideal for covering the raw edges while creating a decorative finish at the same time. Of course, like anything, there are pros and cons to each type of binding. Straight grain binding uses less fabric and is quick and easy to make. However, it’s not as strong as bias binding, and is best for straight edges only. Bias binding, which is traditionally cut at a 45° angle, is stronger and more durable than straight grain binding, and is pliable (due to the stretch of the bias), allowing it to go more smoothly around all kinds of shapes – especially curves. However, it requires more fabric and is a little more challenging to make.
Soooo… what is *continuous* bias binding? It’s one of those “two birds with one stone” techniques. Simply stated, it’s a technique for pre-sewing bias binding strips before you actually cut them. The process eliminates having to sew a bunch of strips together end-to-end to get the length you need to go around your project. The best way to understand it is to just show you.

If you are new to working with binding, as we mentioned above, please see our tutorial: [Bias Binding: Figuring Yardage, Cutting, Making, Attaching](#). It gives you all the handy formulas, tips, and techniques for the four key steps outlined in its title, discusses single fold versus double fold, and lists the tools to have on hand.

Once you’ve done the “fabric math” (using our tutorial or your own experienced brain power)... onward we go to continuous bias binding.

**Continuous method**

If you review continuous bias binding methods in quilt books, as well as on websites and blogs, you’ll find a few variations in the actual steps for the technique. Using our experience, we captured what we feel is the best of the bunch: a single set of steps that provides a clear and simple approach.

**NOTE:** *We’re using a plain fabric and a permanent marker so you can clearly see the marking steps.*
However, YOU should use a fabric pen or pencil that can be easily removed.

1. Lay your fabric on a cutting mat, right side down.
2. Cut the predetermined size square from your binding fabric (again, the tutorial mentioned above gives you the formulas needed to determine this size). Your figuring should include removing the selvage edges. We trimmed our fabric to a 21” x 21” square.

3. To find the true bias, fold the square at a diagonal. Press the fold in place.

4. Open the fabric back up so you can see the crease. The fabric should still be right side down.
5. Mark the left side of your square with an “A,” the right side with a “B.”
6. Using a see-through ruler and a rotary cutter, cut along the diagonal crease line.

7. Carefully place the “B” triangle to one side.
8. Carefully flip over the “A” triangle so it is now right side up.
9. Place triangle “B” on top of triangle “A” so they are right sides together and the bias cut edges form an “X” as shown in the photo below.

10. Place pins along the straight edge.
    NOTE: The points of the triangles will extend slightly beyond the right angle at either end. This is correct.
11. Carefully bring your fabric to your sewing machine.
12. Using a straight stitch and a ¼” seam allowance, sew along the straight edge, removing the pins as you go.
13. Press the seam open.
14. All the marking is done on the wrong side of the fabric, so place your fabric back on the cutting mat right side down. Your sewn fabric should now look a parallelogram and your seam should be vertical.

15. With your fabric pencil and see-through ruler, mark seam lines ¼” in from the raw edges along the top and bottom of the parallelogram.
16. Working from left to right, mark the pre-determined width of your binding strips (our pre-determined binding width was 2” – again, you can refer to the previously mentioned tutorial to see how to figure that out).

17. These lines should intersect with the \( \frac{1}{4} \)" seam lines marked at the top and bottom.

18. Continue to mark in this matter across the entire parallelogram.

19. If you have excess width at the end that does not equal the cut width of your bias strips, mark it with a bunch of Xs so you remember to trim it off and discard it at the end of the process.
20. Along the top of the parallelogram, number your lines: 0, 1, 2, 3, etc. until all the lines are numbered. Yep... start with zero along the top.

21. Along the bottom of the parallelogram, number your lines: 1, 2, 3, etc. until all lines are numbered. Yes, along the bottom, you start with 1.
22. Fold the parallelogram right sides together, carefully matching the top and bottom numbers...1 to 1, 2 to 2, 3 to 3, etc. pinning in place as you go.
NOTE: You will match the “0″ to the raw edge. This is your starting point where you will begin to sew in the following steps.

23. If you look closely, when you match up the numbered points, the drawn lines create an “X”.
   (We put a light behind our fabric in the photo below so you can see what we’re talking about.)
24. When you're completely done pinning, your parallelogram should look like an odd shaped tube. If it's flat, something is wrong.

25. Bring the fabric tube to your sewing machine.
26. Sew along the drawn ¼” seam line where you matched the numbers. Begin to sew at the zero - at the intersecting first seam. Stop at your last marked number. Our last marked number was 5.
NOTE: Since you will be cutting across this seam, shorten your stitch length to help keep the stitching intact. We used 1.8mm. Also, you will have to slightly manipulate the positioning of the tube as you sew this seam; be sure to handle the fabric gently so it doesn’t stretch out of shape.

27. Press the seam open. You will have to rotate the tube as you press the seam.

28. With fabric scissors, cut along the marked line, starting at zero.

29. Continue around and around, cutting along the drawn line, spiraling around the tube, until you get to the end.
30. Congratulations! You just made continuous bias binding.
31. Remember that extra section we marked with Xs? Now’s the time to cut it off.

32. At this point, you will press your binding into a single or double fold then sew it to your project. Again, we recommend reviewing our other binding articles for detailed steps on attaching binding and additional helpful links.

**Hints and Tips**

1. Before you actually cut your square, you should determine if you need to preshrink or prewash your fabric.
2. If calculating your yardage is overwhelming, there are charts available online (search “calculate
bias binding”), in books, and as laminated cards.

3. To make longer continuous bias binding, you can use a rectangle instead of a square or cut two squares on the bias and sew them together to make a larger parallelogram.

4. Look for sale and clearance fabrics that would make great binding. Buy a yard and pre-make binding for future projects.

5. If you are binding a project with batting between the layers of fabric, such as a quilt, you may need to add ¼” to your strip’s cut width to account for the thickness or type of batting used.

6. If your project has more than one layer, again like a quilt, before attaching the binding, it’s a good idea to baste the edges together. This keeps any of the layers from folding back away from the edge in the sewing process. Otherwise, you would have to rip out your binding stitches and re-do those specific areas.

7. You can use a fat quarter for binding, there are charts available on the Internet that do the math for you and explain how much binding you will get depending on the cut width of the strips.

8. If your tube is wide enough, you can insert a small cutting mat inside it and use a rotary cutter to cut the final continuous strip. This works even better if you place the cutting mat on the small end of your ironing board, and slip the tube around your ironing board.

9. If you make your markings on the right side, you can use a rotary cutter and mat in the traditional manner, you’ll just have to keep turning the tube and cutting a little at a time. Even doing that, it’s still faster than using scissors as described above.

Contributors

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