We use binding on many projects here at Sew4Home, and we always get lots of compliments about how nice it looks. We also get lots of questions about how we managed to pull that off! So, we decided to write a comprehensive binding tutorial you can refer to over and over. We cover how to cut your binding fabric, which way to press it, how to join it at the ends, and how to actually sew it to your project. If you're an "old hand" at the binding biz, this will be a nice refresher. If you're brand new, we encourage you to take each part of the process step by step. Before you know it, you'll be an "old hand" too.

Of course binding and quilting go together like cinnamon and sugar, but the technique applies to a variety of home decorating projects. Next time you go shopping, keep an eye out; you'll start to notice binding on all kinds of items, from baby bibs to tote bags to jackets. It's a great skill to have, and the best way to master it is, as always, practice!

Before you get going, you have some decisions to make

**Step 1: Decide which direction to cut your binding**

1. No matter how much binding you need, which depends on the overall size of the item to be bound, the techniques for creating it and attaching are the same. The following steps show you how to cut, prepare and attach what's known as *straight* binding. Straight binding can be cut across the fabric (*selvedge* to *selvedge* or *crossgrain*) or along the length of the fabric (parallel to the *selvedge* or on the *lengthwise* grain). The photo below shows us setting up for a crossgrain cut. **NOTE:** We used a *striped fabric* so you could easily see the direction of the *crossgrain* (*horizontal*) versus the *lengthwise grain* (*vertical*).
To complicate things a little more, there is also what’s known as bias binding. This is cut on a 45° angle from the selvedge. How do you know when to use which binding, straight or bias? If you have a square or rectangle shaped item, like a quilt or throw, you use straight binding. If you have something with a rounded edge, you use bias binding because the bias cut of the fabric allows it to stretch slightly for a nice fit around the curves. In our project tutorials, we will always tell you if we used bias or straight binding. And, we do have a tutorial on the bias variety.

Step 2: Decide which way to fold your binding

1. Besides direction, you also need to think about how you’re going to fold and press your binding. You can simply fold binding in half along the entire length, which is called double fold because it’s double the fabric when sewn. Or, you can fold each edge in to the center, which is called single fold; you guessed it, because it’s a single layer of fabric when sewn. So, what’s the basic difference? Double fold binding is thicker to sew due to the layers of fabric, yet stronger and wears well over time. Single fold is easier to sew, due to fewer layers, and is easier to miter at the corners. Deciding which type of fold to use is truly a personal choice, and often depends on your project’s weight and texture. We recommend trying each to see which one works for you.

2. The photo below shows double fold on the right and single fold on the left.

Step 3: Decide how wide you want your binding

1. There’s one more detail we should discuss, and that’s width. You need to decide how much binding you want to “see” around the edge of your project after its completed. In other words, does your project call for a thick or thin binding? You can use small scraps of fabric cut at different widths to “audition” various finished widths visually. For our sample, we wanted a finished reveal of ½”.
2. To calculate width for single fold, simply multiply the determined width (½" in our example) by 4. So, ½" x 4 = 2".
3. To figure width for a double fold, start with the seam allowance (we are using ¼"). This must be doubled because the fabric in folded in half (we're now at ½" in our sample). Then, take the finished reveal you've chosen (½" in our sample) and multiply that by four. So the entire story problem for our sample is: ½" + (½" x 4) = 2½".
4. For our sample, we are using a 2½" width, double fold, cut on the crossgrain.
5. We like to leave approximately ¼" of the backing and batting sticking out beyond the edge. This is a fairly common practice in the "quilting world." It gives a little extra filling for your binding. This extra is assumed in our decision to use 2½" binding.

6. Okay. Take a little breather and let your brain cool down.

**How much fabric do I buy?**

1. Calculating the fabric needed for your binding will require a little more math (yay!).
2. Measure your project after you've quilted it (if you are making a quilt) and trimmed any excess batting and backing.
3. Here's the simple formula: Measure each side. Let's pretend your project is a rectangular quilt that measures 60" on each side and 48" top and bottom. Get your trusty calculator and plug in the following: 60" + 48" + 60" + 48" = 216"
4. You need 216" of binding to get around your quilt. But, you actually need more than this because you have to turn the corners and join the edges together. Add a minimum of 12". This is a standard "rule of thumb" number; you could add in more, but you should have at least an extra 12" to work with: 216" actual size + 12" extra = 228"
5. The most common fabric width of decorative cotton (often referred to as quilting weight or quilting cotton) is 44/45". Therefore, we will assume this is what you are using for your binding. There is normally about 42" of actual usable fabric after cutting off the selvedge.
6. To figure out how many strips you need to cut across the fabric, divide the total binding length by the width of fabric. NOTE: If you use a different width of fabric, simply adjust the width of the fabric in the calculation. In addition, since a fabric's selvedge can vary in width, you may also need to adjust the number you use for the actual usable width.
7. The equation would be: 230" (total length needed) ÷ 42 (usable width of fabric) = 5.43 strips. Round the number to the next highest whole number, which would be 6 total strips in our sample.
8. Here's where your chosen width comes into play. In our sample, we chose 2½" wide strips. All you need is simple multiplication. Remember, we are cutting on the crossgrain!
9. We had 6 strips x 2½" width = 15" of fabric. In this example, you would need about a ½ yard of fabric (a half yard is 18").
10. Okay. Decisions have been made and fabric has been calculated and purchased. Let's make quilt binding!

**Cutting strips**

1. Press your fabric to remove any wrinkles or folds.
2. Lay your fabric on a flat surface.
3. Fold the fabric in half lengthwise, so the selvedges meet.
4. Using a quilt ruler, rotary cutter and cutting mat (much better for the task than scissors), cut the strips calculated above (SIX 2½" wide strips in our sample). Don't cut the fold.
Joining strips

1. We used a light color fabric with a dark, heavyweight thread so you could see each step clearly. When you make binding, you should select a fabric that coordinates with your quilt top and use a thread color that matches (or is a neutral) so you do not see the stitching.

2. The idea behind joining is to make the seams in the binding as "invisible" as possible. To do this, it's best to seam the strips at a 45° angle.

3. Place one strip on a flat surface, right side up. Place a second strip on top of the first one at a right angle. The ends of each strip should extend beyond each other by about a ½". Pin in place.
   
   NOTE: You place these strips ½" beyond each other because you want to be sure to eliminate any of the selvage from being sewn into the seam of the binding. As you remember, we cut our sample strips selvage to selvage.

4. Mark the angle from corner to corner with a ruler and fabric marking pen or pencil.

5. Using a straight stitch, sew along the drawn line across the intersection of the two strips.

6. Trim the seam allowance back to ¼".
7. Trim off the little points too.

8. Continue joining the remaining strips in the same manner until you have one long strip.

9. Press the seams open where you joined the strips end to end.

10. From the right side, your seams should look like the picture below.

11. Because we are using the double fold binding, at this point, we press the entire length of joined binding in half WRONG sides together, matching the raw edges.

12. If you are using single fold binding. Fold the piece in half as above, then unfold and fold in each long edge to meet in the middle at the crease line (see the examples above).
NOTE: Remember, your joined length of binding will be longer than you need. Leave that excess until you're finished attaching the binding. You'll trim it off later.

**Attaching the sewn strip to your project**

1. Set up your sewing machine for a straight stitch with a longer stitch length due to the layers. If you're unsure of your settings, test with some layers of scraps.

   NOTE: You can use a regular presser foot, an Even Feed or Walking foot or a Quarter Inch Seam foot. We chose the ¼” Seam foot.

2. On one 60” side, and leaving about 6” loose at the head, pin the binding to the right side of the quilt with raw edges even. In our example, that means the extra ¼” of batting will still be sticking out; just the raw fabric edges are flush.

   NOTE: You always start binding on the side of a project, never at a corner. You'll see why when it comes time to joining the ends. Also, you may feel compelled to pin the binding all the way around, however, it really works better if you leave the binding hanging loose and guide it into place as you sew.

3. Sew the binding to the quilt, using a ¼” seam allowance (again, that's ¼” from the raw fabric edges not the batting). Remember to lock your stitch at the beginning and to leave that 6” extra length unsewn at the head.

**Turning the corners**

1. You are doing great! Now it's time for your first corner. Stop sewing ¼” from the corner.

2. Pull the quilt out from under the presser foot to the left of the needle. Do not cut the threads.
3. To create the miter at the corner, bring the binding up, making a diagonal fold at the corner.

4. Keeping that diagonal fold in place, bring the binding straight down, so there is a straight fold even with the top raw edge and the raw edge of the binding is even with the raw edge on the next side of the quilt. Pin in place. Again, remember the batting is sticking out... it's the fabric edges that are flush.

5. You will be able to feel the angled corner fold underneath the binding.

6. Replace the project under the needle and continue sewing, starting ¼" from that top folded edge.
7. From the right side, the corner will look like this.

8. From the back side, the corner will look like this.

NOTE: We stopped our seam and pulled out the project sample to show you just the corner. You, on the other hand, would keep going down each side, repeating this process at the remaining three corners.

**Joining the ends**

1. You're in the home stretch now!
2. Continue sewing until you are approximately 12” from where you started along that first side.
3. At this point, you need to decide how you will join the edges (yes... there are many decisions in binding).
4. You can overlap the binding, one end inside the other, or you can sew the binding at an angle just as you did when you joined the strips.
5. Again, we recommend you try each to see what works best for you.

Overlap method

1. Fold in the head of the binding ½” (remember you have a 6” loose head and a 6” loose tail) and press in place to create a finished end.
2. With the finished end of the binding head flat, lay the binding tail inside the binding head. Trim excess binding from end so the binding lays nice and flat against the project.
3. Re-fold the finished end back into position. Pin the overlapped binding to the raw edge of the quilt.
4. Finish your seam, matching the previous stitching line and making sure the raw edges of the fabric are flush. Be sure to backstitch at the beginning and end of the seam.

Angle method

1. Place the loose head of the binding flat against the quilt with raw edges even. This is the extra 6” you left at the beginning.
2. Place the loose tail of the binding flat against quilt, which means you are laying it over the head of the binding.
3. Where the tail meets the head, fold the tail back on itself.
4. From this fold, measure back the same distance as the original cut width of your binding. In our example, that distance is 2½”.

5. Mark this point with a fabric pencil or pen. Trim any excess on this line.

6. Pull the ends of the binding away from the edge of the project, and place the ends right sides together at a 90˚ angle.

7. Mark the angle from the upper corner to the bottom corner, similarly to how you did the original joining of the strips but with all the edges flush rather than extending by ½”.

8. Take the project back your sewing machine, and with the binding still pulled away from the project, sew the ends of the binding together along this drawn line.
NOTE: This can be challenging, depending on the size of your project. You will have the weight of the project pulling to the side of your sewing machine. It's important to work on a large surface so your project has somewhere to rest while you're completing the binding.

9. Before trimming, check that your binding fits exactly. It should lay flat and smooth against the edge of the project. If it doesn't, take the time to rip out your seam, adjust it until it does lay flat and smooth, and restitch. You'll be glad you took the time to fix it if you need to... I promise.

10. When you are sure of the fit, trim the seam allowance back to ¼", just like you did when doing the original joining of the strips.

11. Re-fold the binding and match the raw edges of the binding with the raw edges of the quilt. Pin in place.

12. As above with the overlap method, finish your seam, matching the previous stitching line and making sure the raw edges of the fabric are flush. Be sure to backstitch at the beginning and end of the seam.

**Wrapping and stitching the binding in place**

1. On the front of your project, press the binding flat.
2. Starting along one side, wrap the folded edge of the binding around to the back of the project, making sure to go beyond the previous stitching line.
3. Pin the binding in place on the front of the project in the seam. This is also known as "in-the-ditch" of the seam.

4. At the corners, trim the excess batting and fabric at an angle to reduce the bulk.

5. When you get to the corners, you'll find that by bringing the binding up and over, a pretty diagonal miter automatically wants to form on the front of your project.

6. To create a miter on the back, fold the binding in on one side, making sure you are covering your stitching line. This will create a folded point at the corner. Place a pin on the front to hold the binding in place.
7. On the back of the quilt, fold the opposite side in the same manner. Bring the points together at the corner, creating a miter on the back.

8. Pin in place from the front side.

9. Once your binding is completely pinned all the way around the project, and your corners are mitered, pick a starting point along one side.

10. Stitch the binding in place “in-the-ditch” of the seam. As you sew, you will catch the folded edge on the back.

   NOTE: We like to use our Janome Ditch Quilting foot for this technique. It has a long guide on the front of the foot that
helps you stay in the seam.

11. Go slowly and carefully so you stay in line with the seam.

12. As you approach the corners, stop right in the corner and pivot, then continue sewing along the next side.

13. On the back, your stitching should look like this:

14. And on the front, it will look like this.
15. Remember, you can see our thread because we used dark thread on purpose, but when you use matching thread in your real project, you won't see it at all!

**Handstitching option**

1. Certain projects may call for the binding to be finished on the back by hand. Which ones you ask? Well, it's really a matter of "tradition" and personal choice. Certain quilt blocks and patterns are extremely traditional and are designed to be the focal point of the quilt. Bindings on these projects are normally handstitched on the back.
2. Some folks may tell you it's the only way to finish binding, but don't you be bullied... it's your choice.
3. There are a few different ways to do the handstitched binding. We like to make ours with a blind or slip stitch so you don't see the stitching at all.
4. Prepare and sew the binding to the quilt (by machine) in the manner described above.
5. Wrap the folded edge of the binding to the backside of the quilt, creating the mitered corners, again as we described above.
6. Thread a hand needle with a thread to match the binding fabric. Knot one end of the thread.
   **NOTE:** We like to run our thread through beeswax to strengthen the thread for hand sewing and allow it to glide more easily as you stitch.

7. Starting at a point along one side of the project, guide the needle through the quilt backing and batting, but NOT the quilt top. Go under the fold of the binding and inside the line of machine stitching. Pull the thread taut but not tight.
8. Create a hand backstitch by feeding the thread back through the same location.
9. Begin to attach the binding to the back of the quilt by guiding the needle back through where you ended the backstitch. As you go through the backing and batting, catch a tiny bit of the folded edge of the binding about a ¼" from where you started. Pull the thread taut.
10. Stitch back into the quilt under the binding where you came through the folded edge to start the next stitch. Make sure to maintain the spacing of your stitches; use the machine stitching line as your guide.

NOTE: As you stitch, keep your hand on the front of the quilt, if you start to go through the quilt top, you will feel the needle start to prick your finger and know it's time to stop!

11. Continue in this manner around the entire quilt. Of course, you will have to rethread your needle over and over. Simply tie off your thread each time, like you would if you were hand sewing a button. Plus, because you will be using matching thread, the stitches will seem to disappear between the binding and the back fabric.

Some additional hints and tips

1. Sewing in the "ditch" of the seam can be challenging. Like anything else, the more you practice the technique, the better you will be at catching the fold underneath. If you're having some trouble, try making your binding a little wider.

2. You can also try a different stitch on the front of the quilt, such as a Blind Hem stitch. It's a unique look that can add to the appearance of the finished edge, and the wider swing makes it easier to catch the back of the binding.
3. Try using your sewing machine's decorative stitches to embellish plain fabric, then cut your binding with this stitching centered to be beautiful accent.

4. Binding is a good opportunity to use leftover cuts of fabric. You can even create patchwork binding by sewing a variety of fabric strips together, then preparing your binding from this collage. It's a fun finish on a solid quilt.

5. If this technique was helpful, you might also like our tutorials on:
   - How to make clean corners on narrow hems

Contributors

Sample Creation and Instructional Outline: Jodi Kelly

Sewing Tips & Tricks

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