

Finishing your Quilt

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This picture tutorial is a guide for beginners for finishing your quilt. It talks about basting, free motion quilting, straight stitch quilting, squaring up your quilt top, and binding by hand or machine. Feel free to email me with any questions you might have! -Allison

In this tutorial we are finishing this quilt top:



Basting the quilt

“Basting” the quilt refers to making a quilt sandwich of backing, batting, and your quilt top. This is probably the most important step in making your quilt, because if it’s not done correctly it can ruin your quilt no matter how good you are at quilting! Take the time to make it as perfect as you can, and if it takes you a couple of times that’s ok. There are lots of ways to baste a quilt, but the following is the way I’ve done all of my quilts and it works great whether the quilt is large or small.

- First lay out your piece of batting, you’ll trim it to size later.
- Lay your pressed quilt top over the batting, smoothing out all the wrinkles.
- Trim the batting with scissors, leaving a 2” border of batting around the quilt top.
- Roll your batting/ quilt top up from the bottom up.



- Press your backing fabric.

- Lay your backing fabric on a table or hard floor and tape the edges taut with masking tape. Make sure there are no wrinkles or folds in your backing.
- Lay your batting roll down on the top end of your backing fabric. Slowly unroll the batting, gently smoothing the fabric with your hands as you unroll. Be careful not to stretch your quilt top.



- After you've unrolled all your batting & quilt top, smooth out any wrinkles with your hands until it looks and feels smooth.
- Using your basting pins, pin the quilt sandwich every 6-8", making sure you catch all layers with your pins. If you're new to free motion quilting you may want to use extra pins the first few times, really focusing on the edges and center.



- Trim any excess backing material, making sure to again leave 2-3" excess around the quilt top.
- Flip the quilt over and make sure there are no large wrinkles or tucks in the backing fabric. If there are, remove the pins and smooth them out before you start quilting.
- After your finished basting & trimming, roll up your quilt top on either side to prepare for quilting, or you can lay it flat until you're ready to quilt it.



Free Motion Quilting

Free motion quilting refers to moving the quilt sandwich under the foot, creating a quilting pattern. It holds the quilt sandwich together, and can increase the durability and longevity of your quilt. Free motion can be frustrating to learn if you're a beginner, but if you have patience & practice a lot you'll soon be a free motion pro!

- First you need to prepare your sewing machine.
 1. Attach your free motion quilting foot (a.k.a. darning foot, embroidery foot) I have one with a clear end & one with a metal end. Check to see if one came with your machine & if not, call your machine dealer to order one or see if a universal foot will fit. Below are pictures of both of mine:

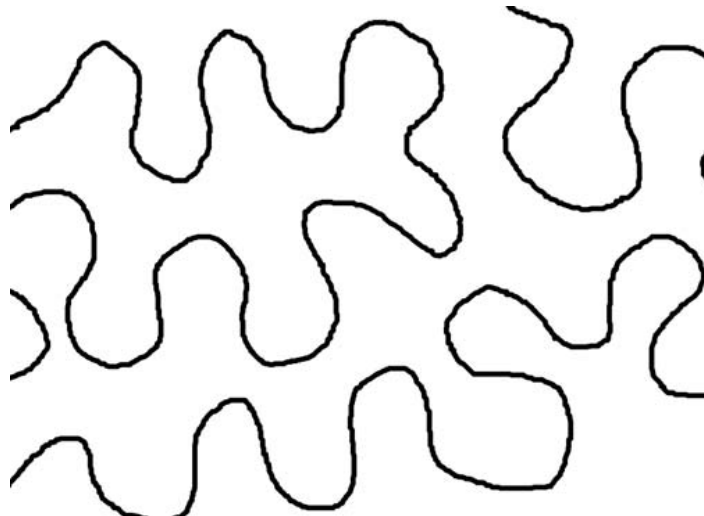


2. Lower the feed dogs on your machine.
3. Set the stitch length to 0.
4. Put in a fresh needle (I use a thick 90/14 needle when quilting, it's easier on the machine)
5. Put in a full bobbin, I use the same color for the top & bottom, keep reading for more info.
6. Set the thread tension. You'll probably want to slightly increase the thread tension (on my machine that means setting it from a 5 to a 3.5) but some machines may not need any tension changes. You'll want to play with this

while your practicing on scrap fabric so you know what to set your machine at. Your machine's manual might also tell you the settings for free motion quilting. Your thread tension may never be perfect, but using a light, busy fabric on the back of your quilt will help mask any imperfections until you find the best tension for your machine. Also use the same color thread for the top and bottom; this will also hide tension problems.

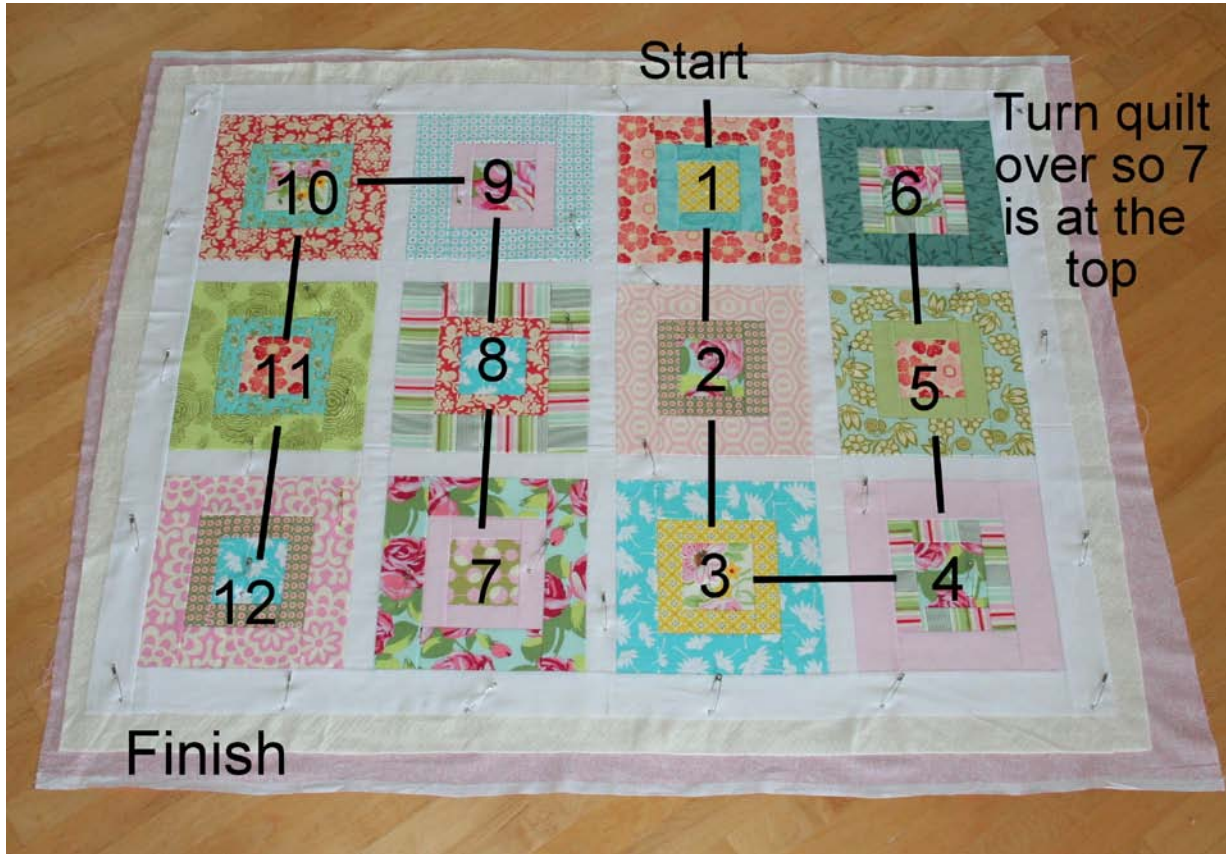
7. I use Gluterman 100% polyester thread when quilting. I find it disappears into the quilt much better than cotton thread since its much thinner. It also doesn't muck up my machine at all.

- The quilting design I use mostly is a meandering (a.k.a. stippling) pattern. I find it's easiest to learn with & once you've mastered it you can try harder patterns. You may want to start by drawing out the pattern on paper so your hands get the hang of it.



- If this is your 1st time doing free motion, make yourself a few quilt sandwiches (at least 12") to practice on before starting your real quilt.
- Press the pedal of your machine about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down when you're quilting. It takes the most practice to get the speed of your stitches and the speed of which you move the fabric just right so that your stitches aren't too big or too small.

- Below is the order in which I quilt. I always start in the middle on one end, work down and up until I finish the right side, then flip the quilt over, roll up the side to-be-quilted and repeat. Quilting from Left to Right is (I think) always easiest.



- Holding the quilt while quilting is *still* the hardest part for me. I like to have my right hand holding the quilt roll while my left hand lays flat by the quilting foot guiding the fabric and keeping it flat. It also helps if you are sewing on a large surface such as your kitchen table, so the weight of the quilt is supported and your quilt will have room.
- Most importantly, don't forget to RELAX!!! Remind yourself to relax your shoulders while you're quilting, you'll notice that your pattern always looks better and you won't get as many sharp points in your quilting. Also remember that it's OK if you cross over your stitches or get a sharp point or tuck here and there, eventually you won't even have to think when you're quilting and

until then you're the only person who will notice those little mistakes anyways!

- Once you've practiced and you have a good feel for the speed and pattern, start on your quilt. Always try to start and stop on the batting, unless your bobbin runs out. When your bobbin runs out, change it, then start a few stitches back from where it ran out and sew a few stitches in the same spot to secure the stitching. You then can start quilting normal again, but make sure you snip the long strands of thread on the front or back so they don't get caught in your quilting.



- One of the best quilting tools I've ever found is a good rubber palmed pair of gardening gloves (or you can buy quilting gloves). They work wonders when trying to grip and move the fabric around. If you're having trouble holding onto your quilt or keeping the quilt flat, you might want to try using gloves.



The quilt above shows the meandering pattern really well. Below is a picture of me quilting with my gloves. I promise they're cleaner than they look. ☺



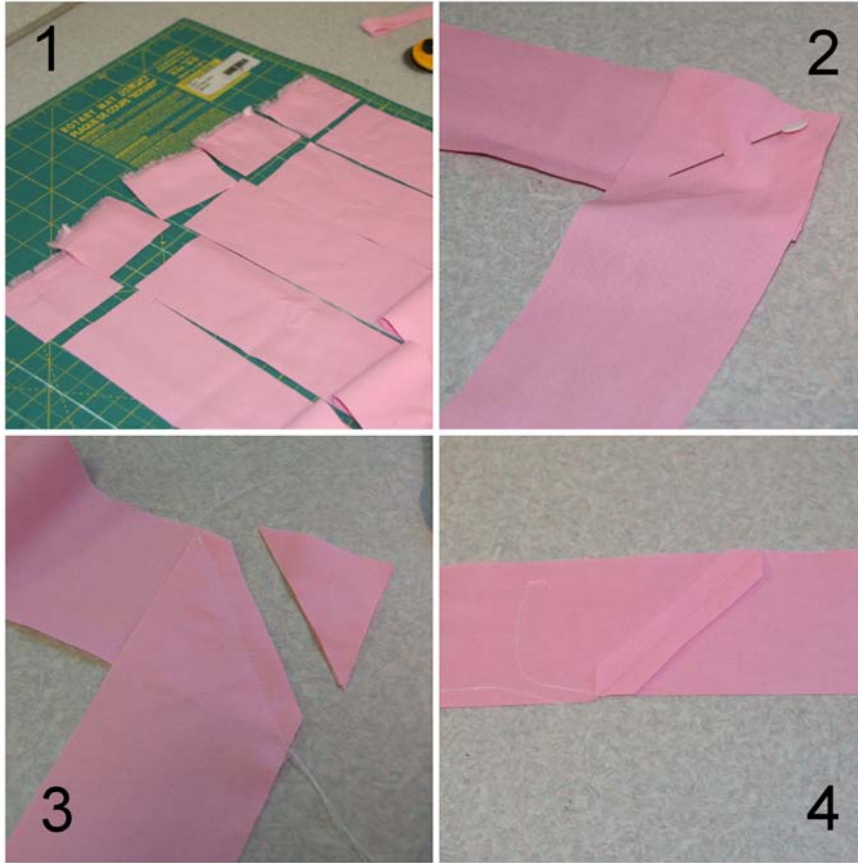
Making & Attaching the Binding (Hand Sewing Method)

- First you'll need to prepare your quilt. With your rotary mat, cutter and ruler, line up the 2" mark on the ruler with the edges off the blocks & cut off the excess batting. You will leave an exact 2" border around the blocks, making your quilt nice and square. This will also trim off any uneven border edges after quilting, letting your binding lie nice and flat.



- Now you'll make the binding strip:
 1. Grab your 2.5" binding strips, and cut the ends off making them nice and square.
 2. Lay the end of one strip perpendicular to the end of another strip, right sides together & pin.
 3. Using a smaller stitch length (1.5-2) sew from corner to corner as shown in the picture.
 4. Trim off the excess leaving $\frac{1}{4}$ " allowance & press open.

(see picture below)



- Now that your strips are one big strip, iron the one long strip in half wrong sides together, making 2.5" strip now 1.25".

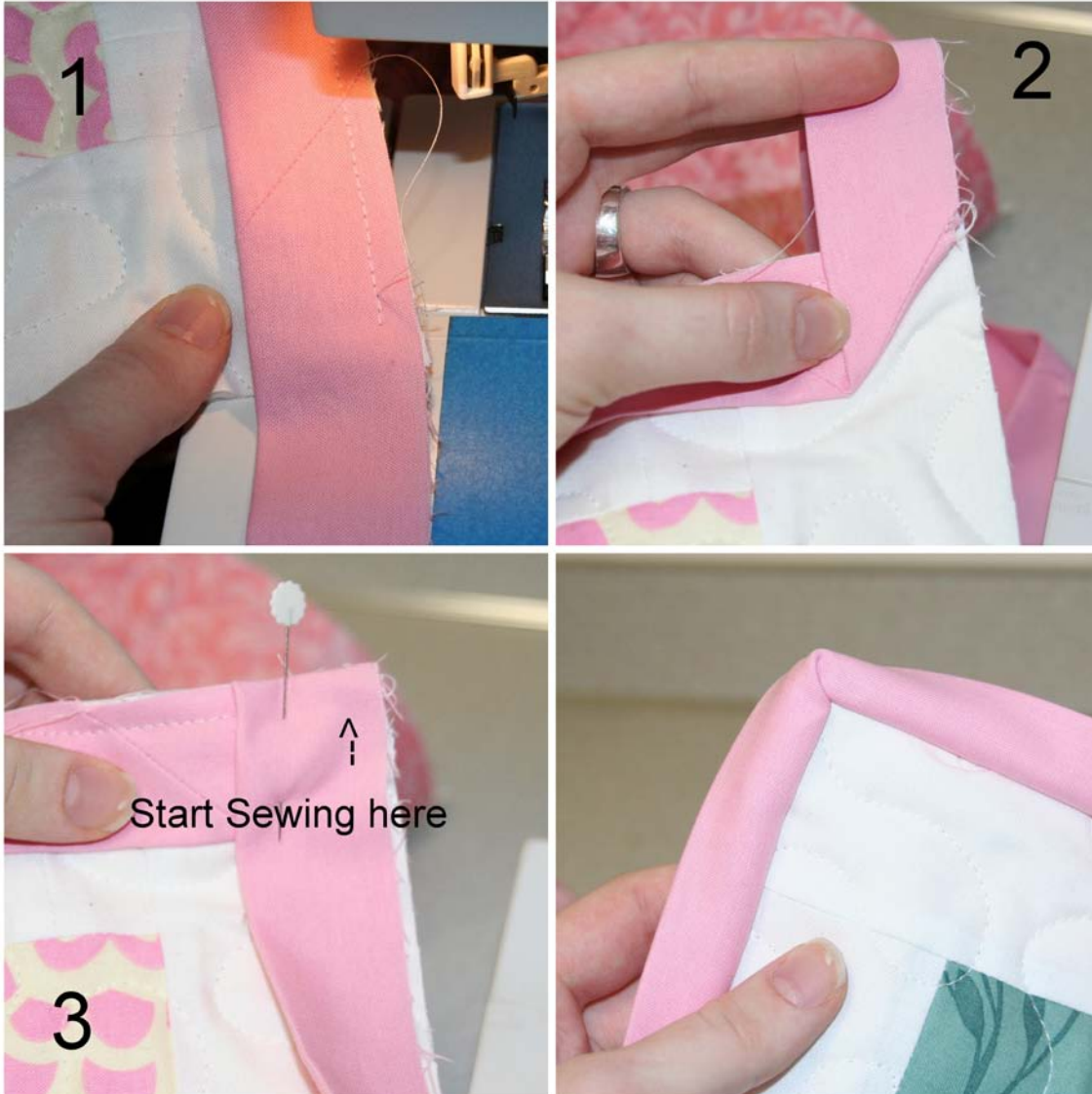


- Leaving a least 10" of extra binding at the beginning, start sewing the binding onto the FRONT of the quilt. Use a ¼" seam allowance and sew the strip down with the raw edges towards the edges of the quilt.
- *I don't include detailed instructions for machine finished a binding, but... if you want to machine stitch down your binding at the end instead of hand sewing it, you'll want to first sew the binding strip down to the BACK side of the quilt. I include brief machine binding instructions at the end of the binding section.*

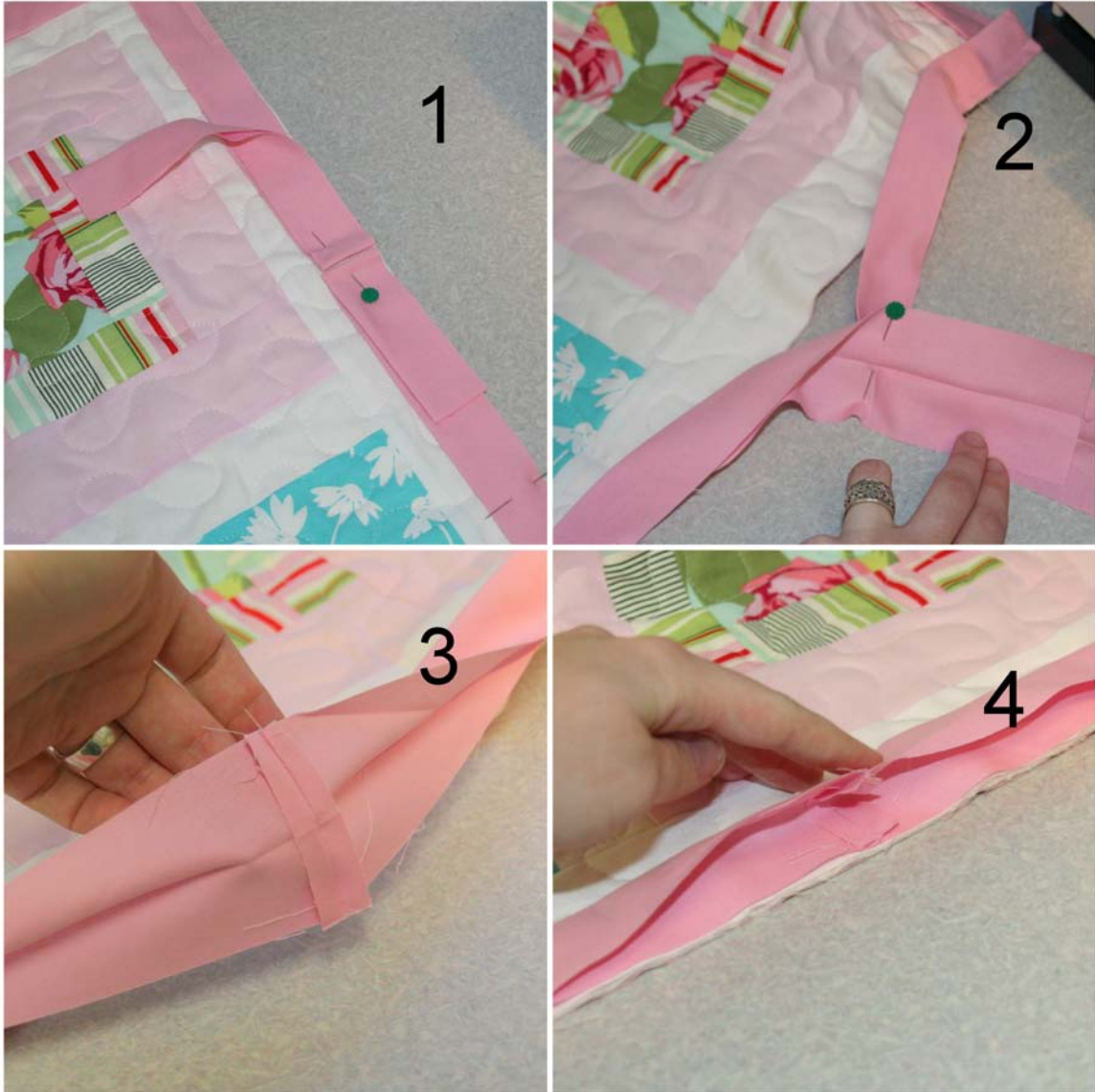


- When you reach a corner:
 1. Stop sewing & backstitch when you reach ¼" from the edge of the quilt.
 2. Turn the quilt, lift straight up on your binding strip, and lay it flat down along the un-sewn edge.
 3. Start sewing again with a ¼" allowance from the top edge of the new side down, and continue sewing normally until you reach the next corner.

(see picture below)



- To finish machine sewing the binding:
 1. Stop about 10" from your starting point, again leaving a long tail at the end.
 2. Fold the start and ending pieces to the middle of the un-sewn space until they meet. Pin & Press well to crease.
 3. Un-pin and unfold the binding pieces, match up the pressed creases right sides together and sew a straight line along the creases to join the strips. Cut off the excess leaving ¼" and press open.
 4. Re-fold & press binding strip down. Continue sewing where you stopped until you reach the starting point.



- Now its time to hand stitch the binding to the back of the quilt. Hand stitching takes more time, but doesn't show any stitches on the front of the quilt and gives it a more polished look.

- Attach the binding to the front
 1. Pin the binding to the front, just covering your stitch line.
 2. With a needle & matching thread that's been knotted at the end, blind stitch along the edges. I put a stitch every 1/8" to 1/4".
 3. When you reach a corner, pin both edges, then fold the edges in until you get a nice mitered corner. Pin & hand sew it down.
 4. When you reach the end of your thread, knot it underneath the binding to hide it and start a new thread.



If you'd like to machine attach your binding instead of hand sewing it, here are some brief instructions:

Machine attaching the binding:

- Prepare the binding strip the same way as above.
- Sew the binding strip to the **BACK** of the quilt instead of the front. Do everything else the same.
- Use a walking foot if you have one for your machine.
- When you're ready to sew the binding strip down to the front, barely cover the stitch line with your binding and sew down right along the edge. Sewing the binding down to the front ensures that you get a perfect stitch line on the *front* of your quilt.
- You may find it hard to keep the stitches from going on and off the binding strip on the back of the quilt, by stitching inside the seam allowance on the front of the quilt; you will also catch the binding on the back of the quilt.
- Finish sewing the binding and corners exactly like above instructions.



Congratulations, you're done!!!

Quilt Care:

- You can machine wash & dry your quilt if you like the “crinkly” quilt look that all quilts get over time due to the batting shrinking. You can expect your quilt to shrink 1-3”.
- If you don’t want your quilt to shrink up, wash it in cold water and lay it flat to dry. You can also pre-soak your batting to prevent shrinkage, but after trying both ways I didn’t notice that much of a difference and there was still shrinkage.