

French Fold Binding

After making the quilt sandwich (quilt top, batting and backing) and quilting the layers together, a binding is applied to finish the raw edges of the quilt. Some of this technique is described in the January/February 2001 issue of [Fons and Porter's For the Love of Quilting](#). With this method of binding, I get consistent, excellent mitered corners with moderate effort so I like it a lot.

Before proceeding, I must mention that the binding process that I describe is all machine stitched. I think it holds up well to repeated machine washing and drying.



If you prefer to hand finish your binding, there are some differences in the process. I will point out the *differences in italicized text* during the explanation that follows.

We'll cover the binding process in 3 steps:

- Preparation
- Application
- Finishing

Preparation of the Binding

For a binding that appears 1" wide on the front and ¼" wide on the back, you need to start with a strip that is 3" wide. *If you are hand finishing, these instructions will result in ¼" wide binding in front and 1" in back.* Please note that some of the width of the binding will be taken up by the seam allowance and the thickness of the quilt sandwich so the finished measurements will actually be a bit more or less.

After you understand the process, you can make adjustments in the seam allowance and the width of the binding strip to achieve the results that you want for your quilts.

The binding strip should be long enough to line the perimeter of the quilt plus 12 inches or so. To create a strip that long, you'll need to piece it from shorter strips. How many short strips to cut? How much fabric do you need? You can use the handy [Binding Calculator in Lily Street Quilts, Tech Tips](#).

Or here's how to figure it out yourself: Measure the width and length of the quilt to bind. The total strip length equals the width plus length; multiply by 2 then add 12 inches. For example, a quilt measuring 60 inches by 70 inches:

Total binding strip length = $((60 + 70) \times 2) + 12 = 272$ inches

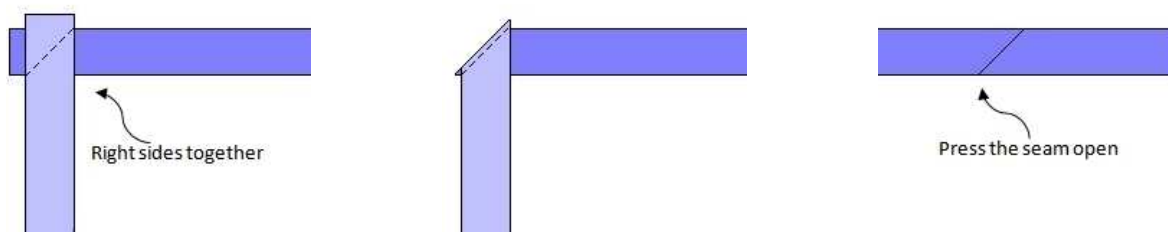
How many strips do you need? If you are cutting the strips from the width of your fabric, each short strip will be about 42 inches. Divide the total binding strip length by the length of each short strip. Be sure to round up to the next whole number. For our example above:

Number of short strips = $272'' / 42'' = 6.5$ short strips; round up to **7 strips**

How much fabric do you need? Multiply the number of short strips times the width of the binding. Example:

Fabric needed = 7 short strips x 3 inches = **21 inches**

After you have cut the short strips, piece them together to create one long binding strip. I like to piece the strips together on the bias.



Finally, press the long binding strip in half along the entire length of the strip.



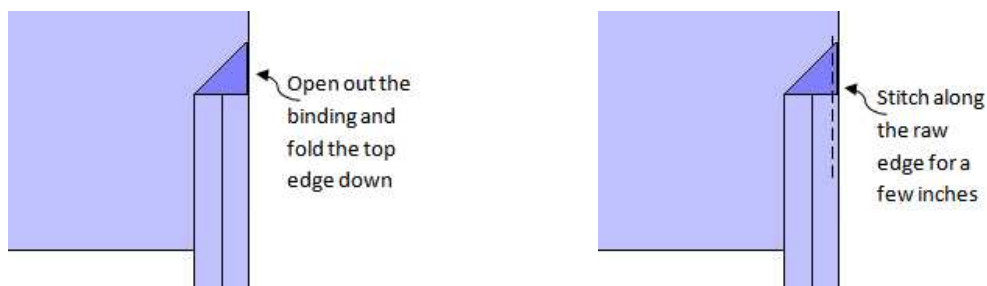
Application of the Binding

Since I finish the binding with a machine stitch, I apply the binding strip to the **BACK** of the quilt. *If you prefer to hand finish the binding, then you should apply the binding strip to the **FRONT** of the quilt.*

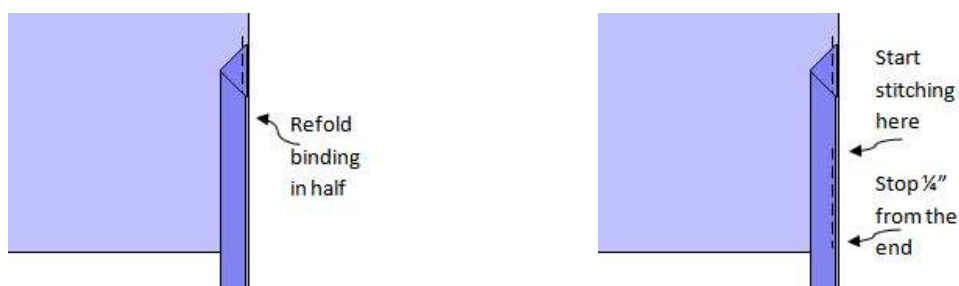
Because I'm sewing through a lot of layers, I use a walking foot to stitch the binding to the quilt. Start applying the binding strip along one side of the quilt, about a third of the way up from the bottom.



Open the binding and fold the top end down on a 45 degree angle and press. Stitch the binding to the quilt with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam along the raw edge of the binding for a few inches.



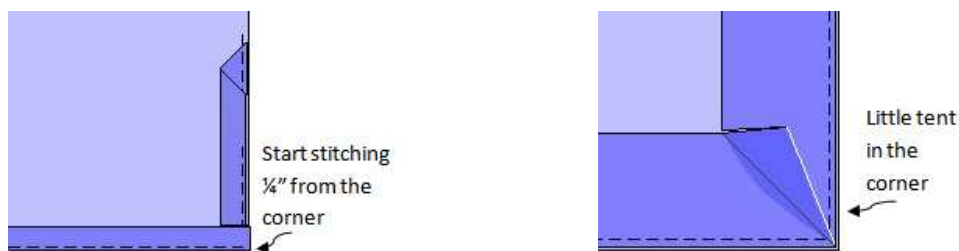
Now, refold the binding in half and press. Then, beginning where the previous stitching left off, sew both raw edges of the binding to the quilt with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam. Stop $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the end of the quilt.



Make a 45 degree fold in the binding, away from the quilt. And then fold it back over itself.

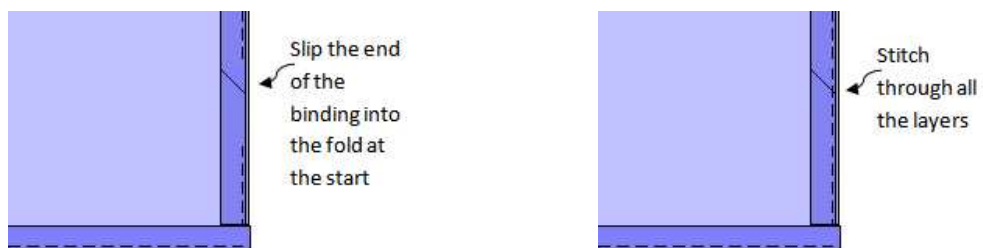


Stitch the raw edges of the quilt binding to the quilt with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam starting $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the corner. In the corner, you should have a fold of fabric that looks like a little tent.



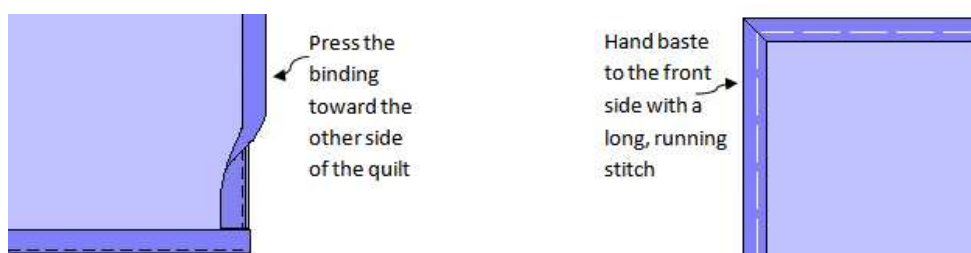
Repeat the corner treatment for each corner of the quilt, stopping and starting the stitching $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the edge of the corner.

When you have completed all four corners, you will have arrived at the side where your binding starts. Continue stitching up to within a couple of inches of the starting point and then cut the binding strip so that it overlaps the folded edge of the start. Slip the cut end into the fold of the start and then stitch through all layers to close the seam.

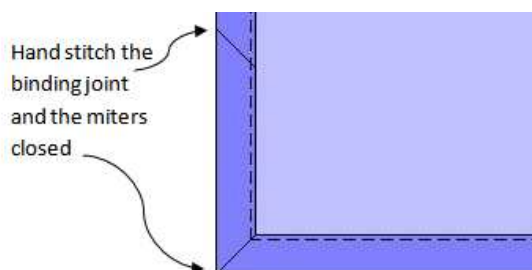


Finishing the Binding

Once the binding has been applied to the back (*or the front*) of the quilt, press it toward the other side. Continue rolling the binding to the other side of the quilt. At this point, I like to hand baste the binding to the front side of the quilt with long, running stitches. *If you are hand finishing, now is the time to hand stitch the binding to the back of the quilt.* Adjust the fabric in each corner as you stitch, to create the mitered fold.



With a walking foot, machine sew the binding to the front of the quilt. After machine stitching around the entire quilt, I like to hand sew the mitered corners closed. Also, I add a few hand stitches to close the seam where the end of the binding is folded into the beginning of the strip.



And you're done! It may seem like a lot of work the first time that you bind a quilt but it gets easier with a little practice and the reward is worth it. You have a practical, usable item with a beautiful finish. It has become one of my favorite parts of the quilting process.