

Dear Friend in Quilting,

If you are a new quilter, please do not be intimidated or feel that the tips below are a requirement. They are not. The tips below provide a framework of skills to which we aspire. The most important advice I can give you is QUILT and keep quilting. We get better with each project. Another disclaimer is that the smaller the project the more forgiving the long-arm quilting machine can be. However, if you have a large project and it is not “square,” forgiveness may be found by having a much larger back with a simple or no design at all. Also, I can quilt just about anything and if I cannot, I will tell you up front. My only limitation is if the backing is too small – I need the backing length and width to be 6-8” bigger than the top. In other words, I need 3-4” on all four sides of the backing to mount the quilt to my machine.

Now, I would like to make some suggestions to help you achieve the best end product, which is your finished quilt. I hope these suggestions will be taken as intended, which is to help you become the best piecer that you can be. There are links inserted to some U-tube videos that are short and to the point. U-tube is a great source of helpful videos and libraries are filled with books that can help kick-start both imagination and skills!

1. The ¼” seam. Having a consistent ¼” seam will mean your blocks will be square and your points and seams will line up every time for every block and row of blocks. The video shows how to make a ¼” guide line. <http://tinyurl.com/yjt652q>
2. Pressing seams. Most, but not all patterns, will tell you which way to press your seams. If they don't it is usually safe to press to the darker fabric. Pressing seams after you stitch each section of your block will help to keep your blocks from having what I call lumps. Lumps happen when (after the top is assembled) the seam goes one way at the top seam and the other way at the bottom seam. This causes your finished top to have lumps at the seams. Pay special note to the part about “butting seams” in the 2nd video. <http://tinyurl.com/yhnmc67>
<http://tinyurl.com/yz7sh5c>
3. Squaring each block. Before you start to make your rows of blocks to assemble your top, make sure that all the blocks are the same size. I use a “square up ruler” for this. This is a square ruler and they come in various sizes 6-1/2, 9-1/2, 14-1/2, 19-1/2 etc. The grid marks on the ruler allows you to square all size blocks within that size group. The half sizes on all these rulers allow for the ¼” seam allowance on all sides. If your finished block is 6” then you square the block to 6-1/2”.
4. Square up your quilt top. What is important is that the top is square prior to adding borders and quilting. If each block is squared prior to stitching your rows together then when you have your top completed only minor trimming is required to square the top. We longarmers don't like to cut your top because we know how precious it is after all the hours spent to make it. This video presents the final squaring up process, **which I do for you after quilting**, however if you use the same process for your quilt top it makes my job and your finished quilt come out perfect. <http://tinyurl.com/yzwsnjv>
5. Squaring the backing. Longarmers use a quilting table that we attach the backing and then layer the batting and the top. This is the reason why we need that extra 6-8” of fabric all the way around the backing. The backing should be squared prior to quilting. If you have a pieced back using different fabrics it is important to square the back to make sure all the pieces are

straight, so it will quilt straight. We want the quilt to be just as beautiful on the back as on the top. If the fabric is pieced with the same fabric I can square it for you no problem.

<http://tinyurl.com/ykul6ax>

6. Applying borders. This is what I do. Once the top is squared using the method in #4, measure the center across (horizontal) on a seam. Measure again at about 1/3 from the top on a seam if possible, measure again 2/3 down on a seam if possible. Take those 3 measurements add them together then divide by 3. This will be your border fabric length for those 2 sides. Always pin border fabric so if you need to ease fabric in or pull it out a tad, at any place, you will know before you start stitching. Do the same for the vertical borders. The videos are a little different but the concept is the same. <http://tinyurl.com/yhatxt2> <http://tinyurl.com/yhmdpaw>

Please do not feel intimidated in any way by these suggestions. I believe in the philosophy that my customers are my friends and we learn together. My second love (after long arm quilting) is helping someone to take this wonderful craft, of piecing and quilting, and become the best that they can be. It is always good to take classes and/or join a guild. I learn so much and am continually blessed by the diversity of my quilting buddies.

Note: This document was written by Jonnie Grimm and posted to an international Statler Stitcher Users' Group to use and share. I have made a few modifications, but the credit should go to Jonnie Grimm for taking the time to draft these instructions.