

Charming Station

Quilt Project

Sashing 101



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Sashing 101

As we begin the process of assembling our quilt top we are going to look at one specific way to do this. There are lots of different “settings” possible for your blocks. We are going to use “sashing” for this quilt.

Sashing: strips of fabric that frame your blocks

There are two main reasons for doing sashing in this quilt:

1. This makes the quilt a little bit bigger in a balanced way. You could also make the quilt bigger by adding an additional border around the outside but this may overpower the blocks in the center.
2. This also helps to “square up” your quilt. When you follow the directions for sashing correctly, your blocks will all be the same size. Then when you assemble the top, the corners will all be 90 degrees (which is a good thing).



A quilt top with no sashing between the blocks.



A quilt top with sashing between the blocks.

After you have become comfortable with the kind of setting that we are using in this project, you'll be able to branch out and try other things.

Cutting your Fabric

You need to be thinking like a quilter now. If you want your finished sashing strip to be 1 inch wide, you will cut strips of fabric that are 1½ inch wide. That is so that when you sew ¼" on each side of the strip, the part that is left will be 1 inch.

Simple math: for whatever size sashing strip you want in the finished quilt, add ½ inch to that number to get the size to cut.

- Make sure your fabric is folded in half (the way it came off of the bolt) and then folded in half again. It is much easier to rotary cut a straight line that is 10 or 11 inches long than one that is 22 inches long.
- Use your rotary cutter to trim the edge so that it is even (review the rotary cutting section around page 57 if you aren't sure how to do this)
- Turn your mat around so that the straight edge is now on the opposite side.
- Use your ruler to cut a strip that is 1½" wide.

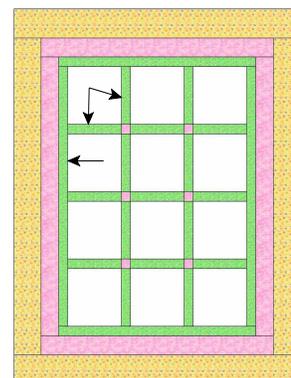
Since this is your first time, I would suggest that you take this strip and open it up. Lay it on the cutting mat and take a look at it. Is it even all the way down or is there an edge that is a little "wavy"?

- If it isn't even, your ruler probably slipped just a little as you cut.
- This could be a problem as you sew things together so set this strip aside and cut another one.
- Check to make sure this next one is even.

How Many Strips

You need to cut the following 1½ inch strips:

- Cut 3 for the sashing between the blocks
- Cut 4 for the first border (which matches the sashing).
- Set the 4 for the border aside. These will be used in the next lesson.



Cross Cuts

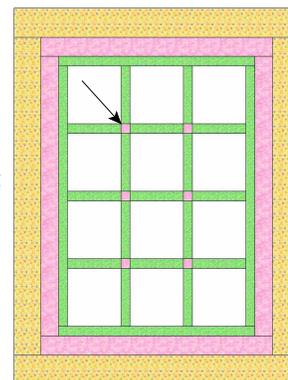
You can review page 58 of the Rotary Cutting section if you need a refresher here. We need to "cross cut" the first 3 strips for use between blocks.

- Open out one of the folded strips.
- Use your ruler to trim off the selvage at the ends of the strip (you never use the selvage anywhere in your quilt!)
- Now cut this strip into 6½ inch long pieces. (Remember our finished block will be 6 inches so we add ½ to allow for the seams)
- Continue to cut 6½ inch long pieces - you will need a total of 17 for the "frames" around the blocks

Corner Stones

At this time, we should also cut the corner stones for the quilt. We use the same fabric for these as the second border (you can have an alternate color if you want).

- Square up the edge of the fabric (you'll do this any time you start to cut anything)
- Turn your mat around and cut one strip that is 1½" wide.
- Open this strip so that it is folded only once.
- Trim off the selvage
- Cross cut 1½" squares (you need a total of 6).



Strip Piecing

Did you know when we started this that we were going to teach you how to strip? Well, how to strip piece anyway.

What we mean is that there are some steps that are very repetitive so it makes sense to line those up and do them all at the same time. Outstanding quilt teachers, like Eleanor Burns, have made an art form out of this technique and it can save you hours and hours of time.

For this baby quilt, we are going to sew sashing strips to blocks without cutting in between things and we're going to ask you to follow the instructions with a little faith - it really does work!

Unsewing

Every once in a while you will need to "unsew" something. You can use any technique that you are comfortable with. Keep a small pair of scissors or seam ripper handy. If you make a mistake (and we all do occasionally!), use your preferred method to remove the stitches and then try again.

If this happens, remember that you are working with very small pieces of fabric and that these are not very stable. If you tug or pull on them, you might be stretching them out of shape. Handle these gently and you will be able to re-use the pieces you have already cut. If you accidentally put a hole in something or stretch it out of shape, you'll want to cut a new piece to use instead.

Layout - Creating a Design Wall

Now that you are getting ready to assemble your quilt top, you need to figure out exactly how you want the blocks to be lined up. If your quilt was being made from a series of identical blocks, this step doesn't matter. But, since we are using embroidery in our blocks there are some design considerations here for you to work through:

1. Which way does the picture in your block "look"?



Here are the 12 designs in the Baby Animal Pals set. Notice how some are looking to the left, some are looking to the right and some are facing you straight on. On the top row, the little duck is looking to the right - but is placed on the right side of the layout. It looks as though he's about to walk out of the frame and off the quilt. The same thing happens with the little giraffe on the bottom row - just going the other way.

Even if you are not using designs with faces like these, you want to be aware of the way they "flow". Things should surround the middle and flow or look toward the middle of the quilt.



Now take a look at this layout. I have moved the designs around so that everyone is looking toward the middle of the quilt or directly at you. This makes it look like everyone is “joining in the fun”.

Other layout considerations:

2. Are there similar characters? In my example here, there are two puppies, so I put one in the first row and one in the third row so it isn't so obvious.
3. Is there a color cluster? That's my term for having all of the things with one predominant color too close to each other. I used a similar thread color on the elephant and the baby penguin so I wanted them split up. I used different shades of gray on the kitten and the panda but they are still close so I put them on different rows too. By scattering the colors around, your eye is not drawn to any one place on the quilt when you look at it.
4. Is there a design that is smaller than the others? The teddy bear on the bottom row, peeking out from under the blanket is not as tall as any of the other designs. I placed this one on the bottom row so that it is less noticeable.

Building a Design Wall

This is one of those really fun things that you get to do when you are a quilter. You need a space to layout your blocks (obviously) and it really helps if you can step back and view your blocks from a little distance.

You can do this on by laying them on a table but that gives you a slightly skewed look (the blocks closer to where you are standing are going to appear larger as you look across the table).

A better way to do this is to be able to hang your blocks on a wall so that you can step back and look at them evenly. If you happen to have a large extra bedroom that you can use for a quilting studio - that's great. You can build a permanent design wall there. If not, there are still some easy options available to you.

A design wall is usually made with a large piece of flannel. The texture of the flannel allows you to place a block (almost as though it had velcro on it) on the wall and it will stay there (sort of). I also use fleece for this - with similar results. You could put a straight pin in to hold things in place if necessary.

Anywhere that you can hang this piece of flannel will work. For baby quilts, a door (into or out of the room or a closet) may be a large enough area. I don't have a lot of space so I often use some duct tape to tape a piece of fleece or flannel (whatever is handy) to the back of my bedroom door.

You could sew a casing across the top of the piece of flannel and use a dowel rod through the casing to hang it up. If you use a thick dowel rod, this could also go over a door and hang there while you need it but be rolled up and put away when not in use.

If you need something easy and portable - consider picking up a **flannel backed table cloth**. This would allow you to tack or hang it up and position your blocks. You can then roll it up (the flannel side will hold your blocks) and put it away when you aren't working on it! This preserves your layout for you until you have time to pull it out again.

The key is to place this in a location where you will be able to step back five or six (or more) paces and look at your quilt top layout

Once you decide where to do this, hang up or layout your flannel. Then put all of your quilt blocks on it - three columns and four rows just like your quilt will be. Using the design suggestions, move the blocks around until you get them where you want them.

When you get them where you think they look best, step back five or six paces and look again. Do any colors jump out at you glaringly? Do things look right to you? If you need to move things around, go ahead and try a different arrangement. Step back and look again. There are often things that you see when you are a few feet away that you don't notice close up.

Do you wear glasses? For once, that's a good thing! Take your glasses off and back up from the quilt. Since your eye won't see a lot of detail, what you might notice is a color cluster or something like that, that wasn't obvious with your glasses on!

Another tip for working with your design wall is to walk out of the room, or turn away from it and go do something else for a few minutes. Then come back and take a quick look (almost as if you were walking by a store and glancing into a window). Does the quilt still look right to you? Did you spot something you didn't see last time - if so, go ahead and change it.

I often hang up blocks and let them sit for a day or two. Each time I walk past, I glance at them briefly and only let it register if something "jumps out at me". After a day or two, I am usually satisfied that I have things in the order that I really want them. Of course, if time is not an option, you can do this step more quickly.

Transferring from the design wall

Once you get your blocks exactly where you want them, we are going to stack them in a very specific order. If you follow these steps exactly, your quilt top will end up sewn in the order you placed them on the design wall.

1. Start at the **bottom** of the first column.
2. Take the bottom square off the wall and hold it in your hand.
3. Now take the one just above it off and put it **on top of** the first one.
4. Now take the one above that and place it **on top of** the stack.
5. Now take the last one in the first column and place it on top of the stack.
6. Set this stack down near your sewing machine.

I often keep a small pad of post it notes near where I'm working. You can use one to label this column one. That will keep the stacks from getting mixed up.

7. Now repeat these steps - starting at the bottom of the column and placing the others on top of it - for each column. Label them column 2 and column 3.

Here comes the strip piecing part

You now have three stacks of embroidered squares. You also have a stack of strips that are 6½" long by 1½" wide and 6 corner stones.

I usually have a small portable table that I set next to me while I'm at the sewing machine. I put my three stacks of blocks on that table along with the strips and corner stones. You can place these any where that it is easy for you to reach them.

You do not need to lock the stitches at the beginning or the end of each row or set that you sew. In fact, if there is any error, it will be much easier to "unsew" if you haven't back stitched to lock in the seam.

Don't worry that anything will come apart. As the quilt is constructed, every seam will be crossed by another one anchoring everything down.

We are start piecing everything together. Follow these steps and **don't cut anything unless the instructions tell you to cut!**

1. Pick up the top square from column 1 and pick up one of the 6½" strips.
2. With right sides together, sew a ¼" seam down this pair.



3. When you get to the end of this **STOP - do not cut anything and do not remove it from your sewing machine.**
4. If your machine has the ability to stop with the needle down in the fabric automatically, turn this on (it's just a helpful hint). If your machine doesn't do this, don't worry. It isn't crucial.
5. Now reach over and take the second square from column 1 and another 6½" strip.
6. Line these up right sides together and place it on your sewing machine just after the one you have already sewn.



7. Step on your foot pedal and sew on down this block stopping at the end. **Do not cut anything and do not remove this from your machine.**
8. Pick up the next block from column one, line it up with a strip and continue sewing.
9. Do this one last time for the final block in column one.



Welcome to strip piecing! You now have this series of blocks connected like a little row of flags by the thread in between the blocks. The neat part is that this helps you keep everything in the order you laid it out on your design wall.

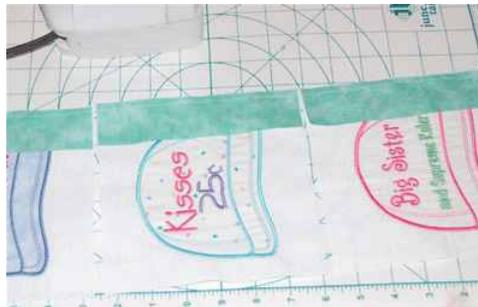
Pressing as you go

Many people hate to iron. In quilting though, it is essential that you use your iron as you go. If you have room, you might want to get a small ironing pad and set it on the table next to your sewing machine. That way you don't have to walk somewhere else each time you need to press something.

A small ironing pad will be sufficient for most of the work you do with your blocks, even when they are together in these chains. Later when you are trying to press an entire top, you may want to use a full size ironing board.

Take the strip of blocks that you just pieced and lay them on your mat or ironing board. Place them so that the larger embroidery square is on the bottom and the strip is on the top. Using a dry iron, just set it down on the seam of each block for a second or two and the lift it up.

- Pressing your block while it is closed helps to “set” the seam.
- Let the weight of your iron do the pressing - you don't need to slide the iron around or push down too hard.
- Use a down and up motion - that will keep the fabrics from getting stretched
- Some people swear by steam - but you will be handling the fabric right after you press it. Steam stays with the fabric longer than the heat from a dry iron and you could find that you burn your fingers if you aren't careful.
- Steam can also cause distortion in your fabric if you aren't careful.



Now, start at one end of your strip and use your fingers to open the sashing strip. You will be looking at the right side of the fabric and both sides of the seam underneath will be pushed to one side.

Getting the seams to both go the same way is the key to being able to assemble your quilt top and having the corners meeting exactly.

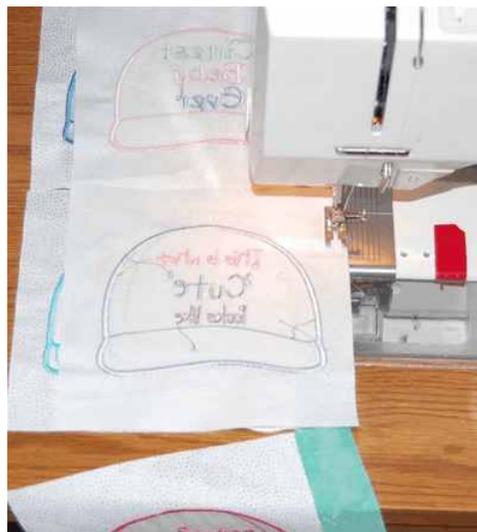
Press this first block open and make sure the seams are both on one side.

Now open the next block on your chain and do the same thing. Keep going until you have pressed open all of the blocks.



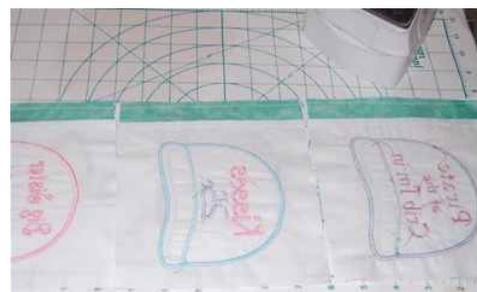
Adding the next strip

- Take this back to your sewing machine.
- Pick up the top block from column two and line it up with the edge of the sashing strip that is sewn to column one.
- Sew down this seam and stop at the end, **but do not cut the thread or remove it from the machine.**
- Continue adding squares to the chain you have until you get to the end of column two.



Take your “chain” back to the ironing board. This time, lay it down so that the embroidered square you just added is on **bottom**.

Just like you did before, first press the closed seams and then open the blocks and press again so that the seams underneath are pushed to the same side as before.



If you are following the directions correctly, your seams will be pressed in toward your sashing strip.



The next column

Take your “chain” back to the sewing machine. This time, you are adding sashing strips. Sew each one to a block as before.

When you have finished sewing, lay this one on the ironing board or mat with the sashing side up. Press to set the seams and then press the blocks open so the seams go toward one side as before.

The last column

Take this back to your sewing machine and add on the last blocks. When you place this on your ironing board, be sure to place it so that the sashing strip is on top. This means that most of what you have will be on top and only the last embroidery square is on the bottom.

The seams will go toward which ever side of the block is on top when you press. For this part of the quilt top, you want to make sure that the sashing strip is on top each time you press.

Does this look weird or what! Just set this aside for a minute. We have another set of strips we need to sew!

Another Set of Strips

You may have noticed that we just put sashing strips between the blocks going across in the row but not between the blocks going down in the column. We'll do a second set of strips to take care of that:

- Start with one 6½" strip and place a cornerstone on the end of it.
- Sew this with a ¼" seam (just like sewing the sashing to the blocks).
- **Do not remove it from the machine and do not cut the thread**
- pair up another strip and corner stone and sew on down across that one
- do a third set the exact same way
- Now take it to your ironing board and place it so the sashing is on top.
- Press to set the seam and then open it and press it again so that both seams are pointing toward the sashing.
- Do this for all three parts of your "chain"



Take it back to the sewing machine and add a sashing strip. Sew on all three, press and go back to the sewing machine. Continue in this same way until you have sewn all of the columns.

When you open this out, you should have three rows each with the following pattern:

sash stone sash stone sash

Make sure that all of the seams are pressed toward to the sashing strip - if not, go back and redo them so that they are.

Matching Corners

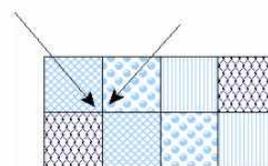
Before we start this part, we need to talk a little bit about what is going to happen next. The next step is to actually assemble the rows of your quilt with the rows of sashing that you have created.

If you have sewn a perfect $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam each time, your rows are going to go together just fine. If you are off by one or two threads on each block, you could have a problem. Since almost everybody I have ever met is off by one or two threads per block, we are going to assume that we need to piece these rows together carefully to make things work.

The goal here is to get your corners to match up so that when you look at the front of the quilt you see lovely, perfect intersections

In other words, we want to line up the rows so that the points in the corners match perfectly. Sounds easy - but it actually is going to take a little work.

You have done part of the work by pressing both sides of a seam in one direction.



When you put two rows right-side together they will actually fit almost like an interlock. After several different attempts to try to describe this in writing and to find pictures that would accurately show you what we mean, I realize that this is something that is much easier to understand if you could see it as a video.

Please type this link into your browser and watch this video on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOJFc8yS5cs>

(This is free - it does not require any kind of account. Use upper and lower case letters just like you see it here.)

Notice how the seams are pressed in opposite directions when you put the blocks together and that they "snuggle up" to each other fairly easily.

This video only showed you one set of blocks being sewn together. What we are going to do is sew a sashing/cornerstone strip set to a block/sashing strip set. That means we will have several intersections to match up on each row.

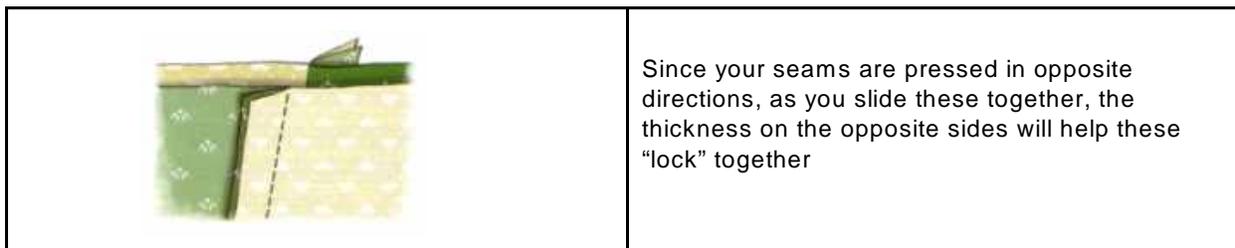
1. Take your block/sashing strip set and trim the threads between each row.
2. Stack the rows up on your table so that the top row is on the top of your stack.
3. Put the second row under that, the third under that, etc.
4. Now trim the sashing/cornerstone rows the same way.
5. Stack these up (the order doesn't matter because they are all the same).
6. Now pick up the top row of blocks and one row of the sashing strip.
7. Put them right sides together at the bottom of the embroidery blocks.

To pin or not to pin

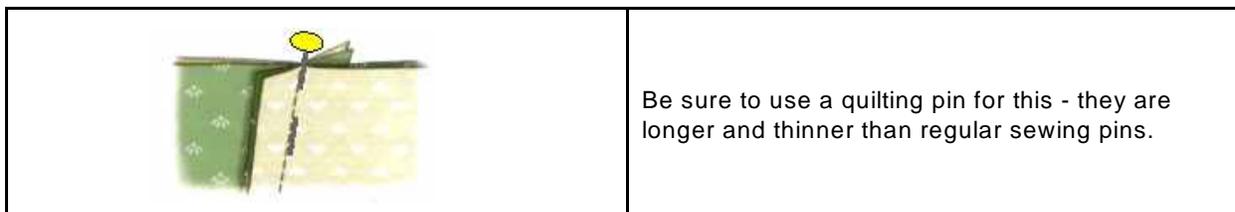
Pinning at this point is another one of those things quilters love to argue about. Some will tell you it's totally unnecessary and they never do it. God Bless 'em.

I suggest that you pin carefully until you are absolutely sure that you can sew perfectly matching corners without them. (I've been quilting for years and still use pins to be sure!)

1. Start with the first intersection on the row. Using the technique shown in the video, snuggle the two sides together. You will actually be able to feel that it fits with your fingertips.



2. When the edges are matched up, slip a pin through to hold things in place. If you go through the multiple layers of the seam, it can pull the snuggled edges apart. I try to put the pin right exactly into the seam on both sides to hold them together..



3. Now move to the next intersection.
4. Snuggle these two together and pin
5. Keep going down the row and pin each intersection the same way. You'll have two pins for each side of a cornerstone.

Keep your pin cushion handy - as you sew, you want to remove the pins before they go under your presser foot. Never sew over a pin - that's a terrible accident just waiting to happen!

6. Now take this to your sewing machine and sew the entire length.
7. Remember to remove the pins before sewing over them.
8. You do not need to lock the stitches as you are sewing.



I use white thread on top and in the bobbin for all of this. Since seams will never be seen, you don't need to match thread colors to the fabric. And, if you accidentally sew something wrong, then "unsewing" is a lot easier with a contrasting color thread!

You might want to loosen your stitch just a little bit too - make the stitch length a little longer than you would normally use for garments.

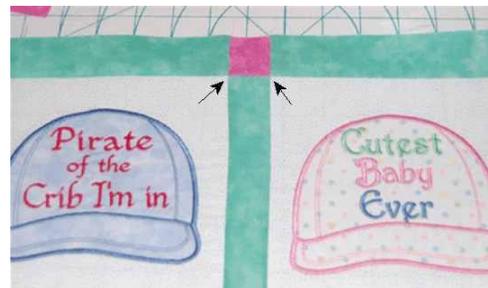
In a garment, the seams get stressed (especially if the garment is a bit small). That doesn't happen in quilting so the stitching doesn't have to be as tight.

And, if you accidentally sew something wrong, then "unsewing" is a lot easier with larger stitches than with smaller ones!

9. When you are finished sewing across this row, open it out and check your corners.

10. If you are very close or perfectly even - congratulations!

11. If you are noticeably off, you probably ought to "unsew" that row and try again.



The Three Foot Rule

Don't worry if you don't get it perfectly right the first time or two (or three or four!). Many quilters have to work at this for a while to get their points to match up nicely.

At this point in every class I've taught, we introduce the:

“Three Foot Rule”

This rule is: have someone hold your quilt/top/row/column up for you so you can stand back three feet (or pin it to your design wall and stand back three feet).

Can you see a mismatched corner from there? If not, go on to the next step - you'll have plenty of chances to continue to practice matching corners as you go through the rest of this top.

If you do see something from 3 feet away, you might want to go back and fix it.

Remember - only you can determine what is acceptable at this point and what isn't. If you are making a baby quilt that is going to be used and dragged around for the first two years of a baby's life, does one slightly unmatched corner really matter? Sure - aim for the best you can do but don't get too upset if the first time you try this, yours isn't a blue ribbon best-of-show quilt!

Another tip: never explain to your friends what a perfect match for the seams really is, otherwise they will start looking for your mistakes instead of appreciating all the hard work you do.

If you think you really blew it and it's not worth continuing, I want you to go to this website:

<http://www.amisimms.com/>

Ami Simms is one of the funniest quilt teachers you will ever hear about. She started her quilting career by making the absolutely worst quilt in the world (so she says). One of the links on the left side of her home page is about the Worst Quilt in the World Contest. Go look at some of the entrants in that contest and you'll realize that everyone has to work at this a little bit!

Time to Press Again

Once you get this row sewn the way you want it, take this to the ironing board and press this seam open. You will want to lay it on the ironing board with the sashing strip on top so that the seams go toward the sashing.

This time as you press, though, be sure that you aren't unpressing the seams that have already been pressed in one direction or another.

Keep going

Now match up all of the intersections on the sashing strip at the bottom with the next row of blocks/sashing.

Continue to sew rows together - alternating between your blocks and your sashing rows. It's much easier if you press after sewing each row as well.

When you are finished, the inner portion of your top should be assembled.



You still have some 1½" strips that have not been used. These will be added in the next lesson because they are actually part of the borders.