

Finish a Quilt with a Facing

by Sarah Ann Smith

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Faced edges or facings come to quilting from garment making. They provide a clean edge where the quilt design runs all the way to the edge and is not interrupted by a solid line of binding. They are easy to apply and can help finish irregular edges easily and neatly. This tutorial will address only straight edges, but the process is the same for irregular and curved edges, just a little more fussy to sew.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut a strip of fabric on the grain. I prefer a wider facing, so I cut mine 2½" wide and about 2" longer than the side of the quilt. Particularly on large quilts and quilts that I have had to block into flatness, cutting the strips on the lengthwise grain is preferable because the fabric doesn't stretch as it does on the crosswise grain.
2. Iron the strip in half lengthwise with the wrong sides together.
3. Decide where you want the edges of your quilt to be. Cut at least ½" OUTSIDE of that spot because you will be turning at least ½" of the quilt to the back. How much you turn to the back is a personal choice. I prefer at least ¼" in addition to what is inside the seam allowance.
4. Cut the facing strips about 2" longer than each of the sides of the quilt. Place facings on the top and bottom edges of your quilt with the raw edges on the outside. Pin.
5. Sew the facing to the quilt with a ¼" seam allowance.
6. Press the seam AS SEWN. Then, press the facing out over the seam allowance. To prevent the seam allowance from curling and trying to straighten back out, edgestitch ⅛"–1/8" to the right of the seamline, locking the facing and seam allowance together. I use my zipper foot to do this; I align the left edge of the foot with the folded edge of the facing; this helps me to keep the distance between the seam and the edgestitching (also called understitching) even. I use a matching thread.
7. Repeat this process with the top and bottom facings.
8. Turn the top and bottom facings (not the sides) to the back, pinning in place. I like to "favor" the edge; this means rolling at least ⅛" or more of the top to the back side of the quilt. I prefer to turn ¼" or more. The reason to turn this much to the back means that when the quilt is displayed, if you look at it from the side, there is no risk of seeing the facing, just a continuation of the design from the front wrapping around the sides.

9. Press. If you have a small block of wood or clapper (a wooden sewing tool used at the ironing board—I improvised by purchasing a 24" length of wooden stair railing), press (up and down motion, not sliding the iron) a section of the facing, remove the iron, and place the wood on top until the heat dissipates (just a few moments). This will help set the edge in place so it doesn't curl. When you're done pressing all the way around, re-adjust the pins so the facing is smooth.
10. Sew the top and bottom facings to the back of the quilt by hand, making sure the stitches do not show on the front.
11. Repeat the process for the sides. I do not try to miter the corners. My quilts are very densely stitched and the corners look sharper when I simply overlap the edges. The corners may be a bit thicker. If needed, you can use tweezers to remove some of the batting to lessen the bulk, but with the way I quilt, this usually is not possible. 

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