

Squaring a back

Creating a piece to be a back;

Piecing a back:

Selvages:

- If you are making a back from two widths of narrow fabric it is ok to leave the outside selvedge edges. Remove the selvedge edges from the sides of the fabric which will be sewn together.
- If you are creating a back by piecing many smaller pieces all the selvedge edges that would be inside the back should be removed. They will shrink at a different rate than the rest of your fabric.

Piecing:

- Pieces being sewn together to make a back should be flat, squared up and in good condition. Piecing a back should be done as carefully as piecing your quilt top. Usually the quilter, (either you or your longarm professional), is focused on the quilt top while they are doing the quilting. The back needs to be flat and solid so the attention can be placed on achieving a good quilting design not on making sure the issues in the back are overcome.
- If you are going to piece a back you should use fabrics of similar quality and hand. Backs that have stiff and soft or thick and thin fabrics next to each other do not behave well on the longarm. This kind of disparity can lead to tucks of fabric on the back of your quilt. Also fabrics with a lot of stretch such as knits or Minky don't work as well as sturdy woven fabrics.

Yardage:

Allow extra:

- It is wise when buying fabric for your project to allow a little extra yardage to make up for needing to square your pieces. The wider the fabric the more you may lose when squaring up a piece.
- A longarm quilter will want your back to be 3 or 4 inches bigger than your quilt top on each side. This is a total of 6 to 8 inches bigger than the top. This extra fabric is used to hold and support your quilt while it is on the quilting machine. It will come back to you after the quilting process is complete and could be used for binding or for another project.

Squaring up:

Straight Sides:

- Once you have a piece large enough to be your back you need to make sure you have two sides which are straight and parallel to each other. If you have made a piece that doesn't have any straight sides begin by trimming one side to be straight. Fold the piece in half using this straight side and then trim the opposite side to be straight using a mat and rotary cutter. (You will fold the first straight side in half lining this side up with itself as many times as you need to get a piece you can cut on your mat.)
- When you have 2 straight parallel sides fold the back in the other direction and begin to fold it again and again until it will fit on your mat to cut the last two sides. The key when you are folding is to not have any diagonal wrinkles as you fold. You may need to slide the two pieces of fabric back and forth until you have a piece that hangs straight. When you fold the second time this same process is necessary to ensure you have folded the piece straight. Now cut the last two sides with the mat and rotary cutter to ensure you have 90 degree corners and straight sides. The narrowest part of your pieced back is the maximum size you have to work with so be sure this size is big enough.

Tearing vs Cutting:

- I think there is confusion about having a fabric be “square” and having it be “on grain”. I have noticed a lot more people tearing their fabrics lately. Tearing will produce a fabric that is on the straight of grain but these tears are not necessarily “square”. The grain of the fabric is not guaranteed to be at a right angle to the selvages of the fabric and in my experience is usually not square to the sides of the fabric.
- Tearing can stretch the fabric along the tear.
- A straight of grain tear allows the fabric to unravel from one edge of the fabric to the other and these threads can cause you lots of frustration. It's the opposite of using pinking shears to cut down on the unraveling nature of cloth.

