

Preparing a Quilt for Longarm Quilting

Our goal at The Quilt Loft is to help you create a wonderful quilt that you will adore and cherish for many years to come. Like piecing, longarm quilting is an art, it is not a science. To achieve the most artful results you will need to use good piecing techniques. These are long held best practices in quilting will help you achieve wonderful results. Remember, how you complete your quilt top and backing can make big difference in your results, especially when you send your quilts to us or any other longarm quilter.

Longarm quilting is different than hand quilting or quilting on your own sewing machine. Because of this you will need to observe some good general practices when planning to take your quilt to a longarm quilter.

1. Make sure your quilt top is squared and even on all four sides. This ensures the quilt loads onto the longarm straight; this is important for keeping the design square on your top
2. Press your quilt top from the back, making sure seams are pressed well and stray threads are clipped. Your quilt top and back should be as wrinkle free as possible when you take them to a longarm quilter.
3. If you have a pieced or scrappy back it should also be squared up and even on all four sides.
4. Do not pin your quilt, batting and backing. This is not how quilting is done on a longarm machine. Any work you do pinning your quilt will need to be taken out.
5. Longarm quilting does not usually include stitching fabric together for your quilt backing. Expect to pay extra for services such as this.
6. Loose and stray threads, pet dander and other foreign material should be removed from your quilt top and back before taking them to any quilter. Stray threads and other materials can show through and are difficult to remove once quilted.
7. Cut off any selvage edges before stitching the seam of your backing. Selvage does not stretch the same as fabric.
8. Quilt backs taken to a longarm quilter should be 3-4" longer on all 4 sides than the quilt top itself. So if your quilt top measures 70" x 80" your quilt back should measure at least 76"x 86". This will give the longarm quilter enough material to hold down the quilt back and create a taut surface during quilting.
9. Make sure you press backing seams open. Because there's no way you can predict exactly where seam lines on the backing will fall in relation to the quilt top seams and because most seams on the quilt top are pressed in one direction, pressing backing seams open prevents bulk where seams might overlap. Use a 1/2" seam or a true 1/4" seam for the backing seams.
10. Because of how quilts are set up on the longarm it is impossible to adjust the quilt back to an exact position in relation to the quilt top. The quilt back is attached upside down to the machine and is not adjustable once loaded on the longarm machine. Longarm quilters can "guesstimate" the position of the top, but that's about all. If you are making a scrappy or artistic back make sure you understand the limitations of longarm quilting concerning the placement of the quilt back in relation to the quilt top. Discuss this with your longarm quilter so you have an understanding of what is possible and that your longarm quilter has an understanding of your vision of your completed quilt.

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11. Fabric stretches, and understanding how it stretches and how to overcome this when sewing borders is very important. Backings with borders not sewn correctly can cause the backing to stretch under the weight of the fabric even when the sides are taught. This can cause too much material to collect towards the center of the quilt back resulting in pleats sewn into the back of the quilt. Borders on quilt tops that are sewn incorrectly can create too much fabric in some areas contributing to the possibility of pleats or folds on the quilt top when quilted.
12. It is important to apply your borders squarely using the following method; if the borders are longer than the top, or are put on without accurate measurement, the top will not lay flat. Pleats and puckers will develop during the machine quilting process.

To apply borders properly:

- Measure your pieced top (before the borders are added). Lay your top out on a flat surface and measure at least three different places across the width and length.
 - If these measurements are not equal, calculate the average measurement and use this result to cut the borders.
 - Apply the border to the quilt top evenly – divide the top and border into quarters (or eighths) and ease or slightly stretch the border to fit.
 - Fullness and or puckers within a border cannot be quilted out. Longarm quilters cannot guarantee that puckers and tucks will not be sewn in. Just remember, the flatter your quilt top lays, the better your finished quilt will look.
13. Additional services such as attaching the quilt binding, and stitching the binding are usually available and will have appropriate fees.
 14. Ask yourself how your quilt will be used. Do you want the quilting to show or simply hold the quilt together? The batting choice can make a difference, and a good quality batting is very important. A loftier batting will show off the quilting more than a dense batting. Comparing Hobbs 80/20 batting to 100% Warm and Natural batting, both appear to be the same thickness; however, there is a difference in the loftiness and/or density. Hobbs provides more loft and enhances the quilting.
 15. Discuss a turnaround time. Realize that certain times of the year, such as Christmas or graduation seasons, tend to be busier.
 16. After critically examining your quilt top, discuss any possible problems with your long arm quilter, realizing that some things simply cannot be "quilted out." Wavy borders, multiple fabric types, and bias edges (which can easily stretch) all can lead to problems during the quilting process.
 17. Remember, the condition your quilt looks when you bring it to a longarm quilter is the way you will get it back, only it will be quilted. You cannot quilt away problems!