



Long Pieced Strips

Are you ready for something different?

This month we are making long pieced strips, any width from 3 inches up to 9.5 inches, and between 72 and 75 inches long (ideal is 72.5 inches). Please make sure the long edges are neat and even and the strip stays the same width the whole way along. Press seams. Use only quilting weight 100% cotton fabric, and as usual, avoid fabrics with licensed prints.

Apart from that, there are no other rules!

Go scrappy, go colour coordinated, use this month to practice flying geese or HSTs or any other small block, or sew together a whole lot of those small blocks or leftover triangles you don't know what to do with. Dig out those left over charm squares and jelly roll strips. Make a whole strip the same, or go totally random.

NEW TO QUILTING? Special instructions for first timers

Fabric: Make sure you are using 100 percent cotton, quilting weight fabrics (I really don't want to be cleaning melted polycottons off my iron when I go to do the final pressing of the quilt tops!). You can buy a small fat quarter pack of quilting cottons, or check the Fabric Friends group for mixed fabric packs. To get you started I have given you three skill-building but easy options for sewing that don't require specialist quilting rulers or cutters (just an ordinary ruler marked in inches, a sharp pencil and a pair of scissors that will cut fabric cleanly)

Option 1: The "no measuring at all" option. Print 3 copies of Template A. Follow the **instructions in pages 2,3.**

Option 2: Two at a time Half Square Triangles (HSTs). These start with pre-cut "charm squares" (5 inch squares) or any other size of accurately cut squares. **Instructions are on pages 4 and 5.**

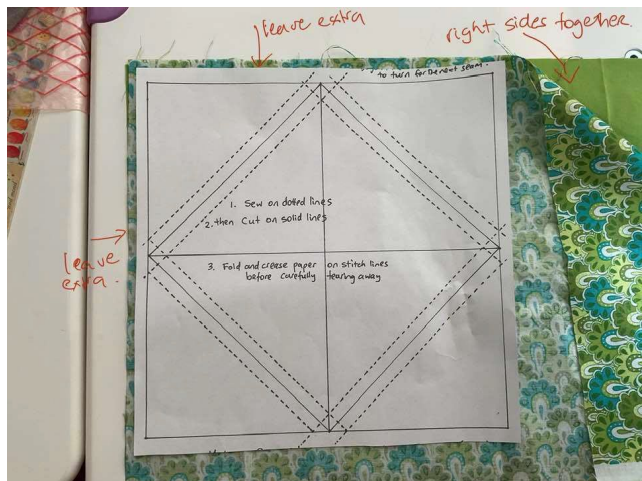
Option 3: Easy rail fence pattern. This is the one where you will learn the most, so worth having a go, if only to get to grips with a quilting $\frac{1}{4}$ inch seam (that will be important in future blocks). It needs careful cutting and measuring but can be done with ordinary ruler, pencil and sharp scissors if you don't have or haven't mastered cutting with rotary cutter and quilting rulers. **Full instructions for beginners are on pages 6 to 9.**

AN EXTRA NOTE FOR FIRST TIME BLOCK MAKERS – please don't get hung up on having to get everything perfect. As long as the stitching isn't going to fall apart it will be fine. Try your best, and send what you have made to me, even if you haven't been able to complete a full strip.

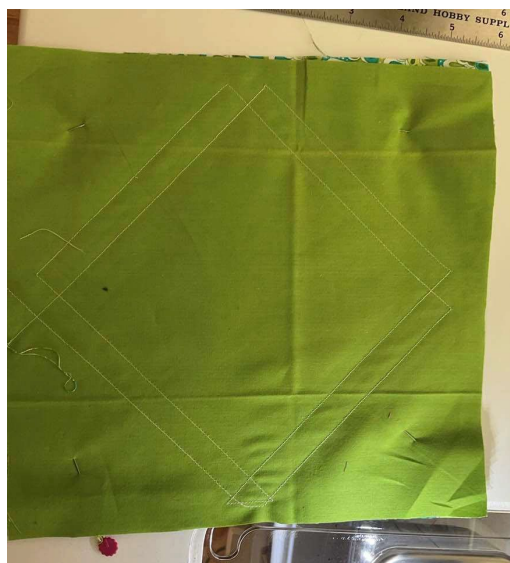
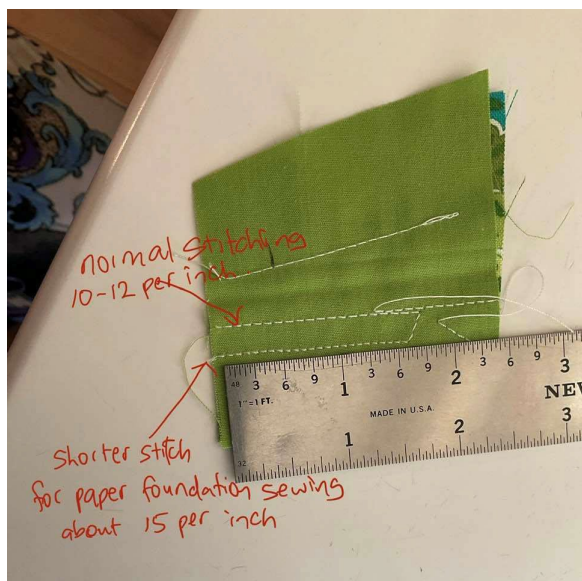
Q4CL Block Drive January 2023: Option 1 – The “no measuring HST option”

Print 3 copies of Template A (set print at 100%, A4 paper), and trim off the excess top and bottom of the page leaving about a quarter inch margin beyond the solid line all round.

Lay two pieces of fabric right sides together, and pin the template paper to the double layer of fabric at the corners. Try to keep it all as flat as you can when pinning. Cut away excess fabric.

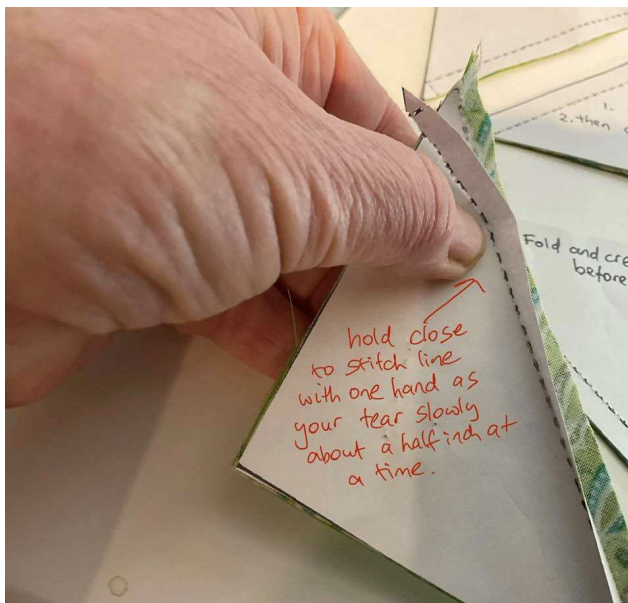
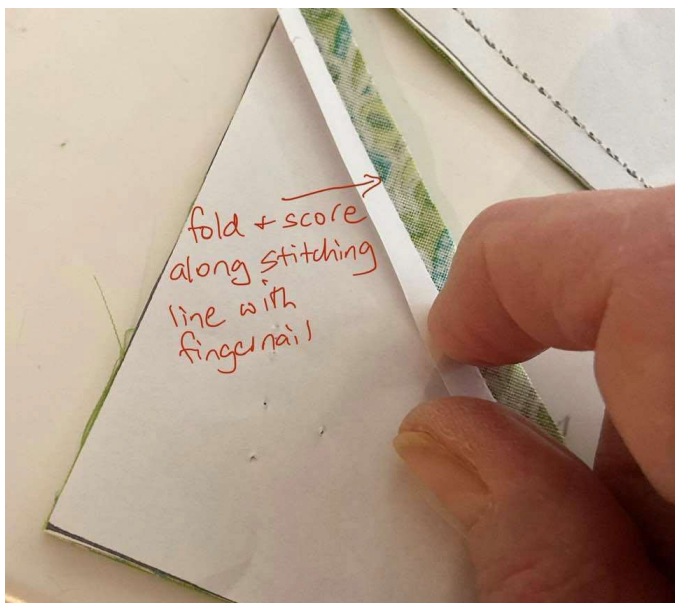


Set your sewing machine at a smaller than normal stitch. Normal on most machines will be a setting somewhere between 2.2 and 2.5 on the stitch length setting (about 10-12 stitches per inch). You need it to be smaller when sewing through paper – a setting of about 1.8 (at least 15 stitches per inch).

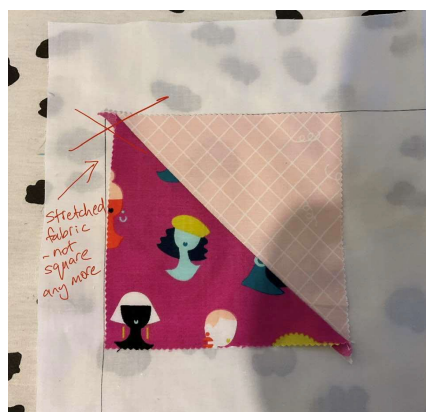


Now sew along all the dotted lines right through the paper and fabric. You can do this as a continuous line, but should end up being able to see a double stitching line on four sides when you look at the back. The way your corners end up doesn't matter as that gets cut off.

Cut carefully along the solid outer line first (you may need an extra pin or two), then cut all the other solid lines to give you 8 triangular sections. Carefully peel away the paper. Start by folding it along the stitch line and creasing it firmly with your finger nail. Hold just to the side of the stitch line while you slowly and carefully tear away the paper along the perforated stitch line. This stops it pulling at the stitches.



Press each section open to make a square. Use your fingernail to initially get the seam lying open (without stretching the fabric) then use a dry iron to press it. You can check it really is square with a piece of fabric or paper with lines drawn at right angles.



Trim off the little extra "ears" of fabric before you sew the blocks together in whatever pattern you like, using a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch seam (read the $\frac{1}{4}$ inch seam instructions in the Rail Fence block option). If you don't want to measure the strip length, just sew all 24 HSTs together in a long strip and send that to me (after pressing the seams).

Here are a few ideas for putting blocks together.



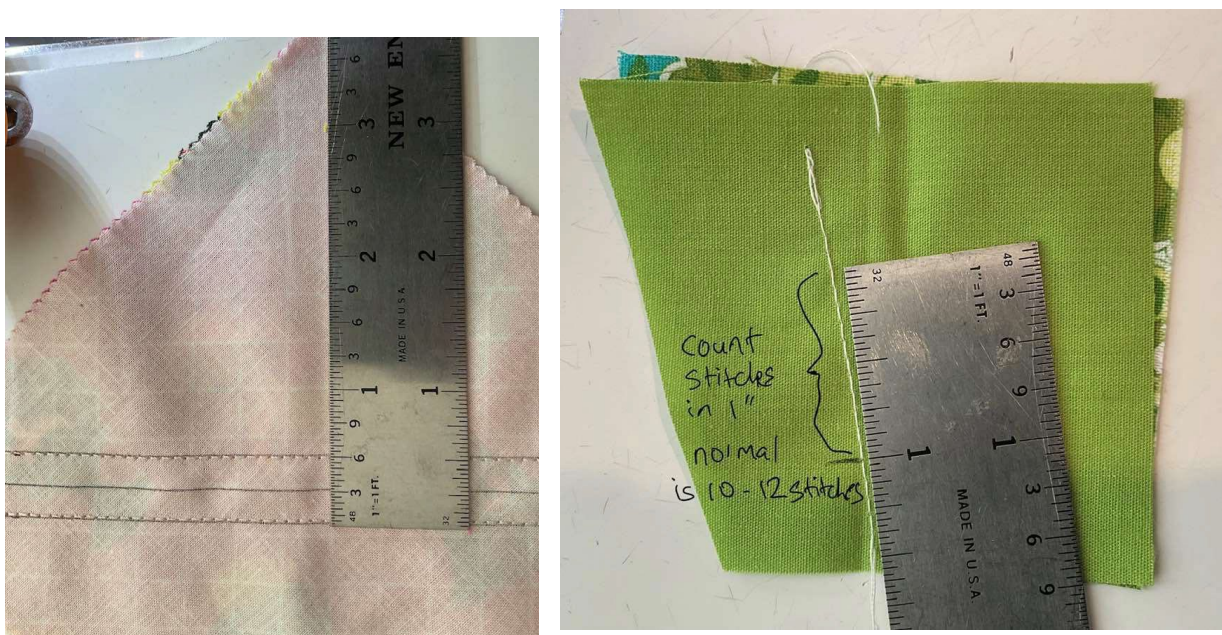
Q4CL Block Drive January 2023: Option 2 – Two at a time Half Square Triangles (HSTs)

You need two accurately cut squares of contrasting fabric, a ruler and a pencil. Precut 5 inch squares are ideal, (known as “charm squares” in quilting).

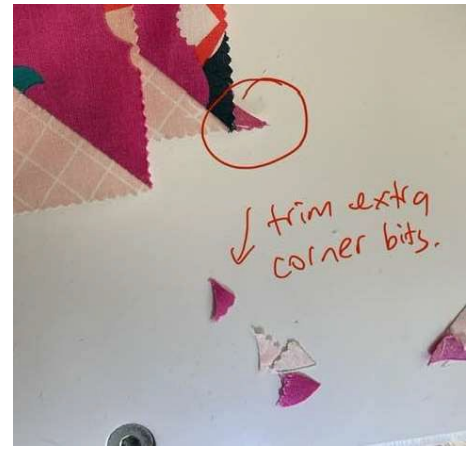
On the wrong side of one square draw a line across the diagonal from point to point. If you have precut squares that have that pinked (zigzag) edge that stops fraying, it may be a little harder to see, but just do your best. Now measure and mark dots $\frac{1}{4}$ inch each side of that centre line at two or three places on each side. You can then rule a line joining those dots, so you now have three lines, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch apart.



Place this marked square on top of a square of contrasting fabric, right sides together, all four sides lined up. Put a couple of pins in to help it stay in position.



Sew along the two outer lines (regular stitch length, stitch setting somewhere between 2.2 and 2.5 to give you about 10-12 stitches per inch). As a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch seam practice, your stitch line should have the needle going in just barely inside the line. You can now cut the two pieces apart along that marked centre line.



Carefully press (dry iron) open to a square without distorting the fabric. It can help to open out the seam a little by running your fingernail along it before you iron. I draw lines on a piece of plain fabric or paper to check my block is square as I am pressing it.

You will need about 18 of these blocks if you want to make a full length strip.

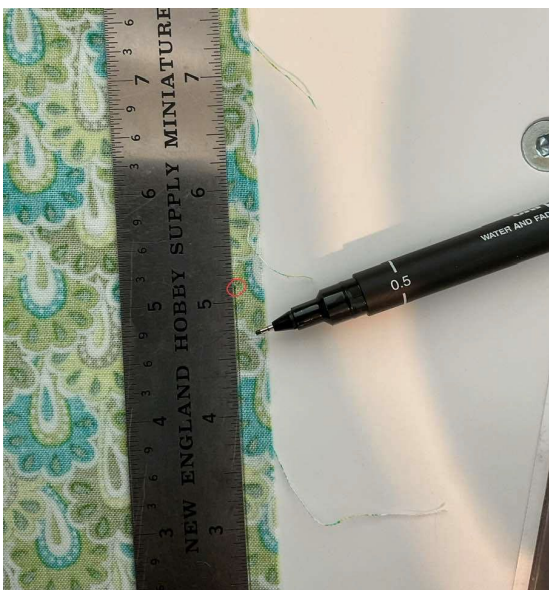
Q4CL Block Drive January 2023: Option 3 – A Rail Fence pattern



(with extra instructions for accurate cutting with scissors, and sewing a quarter inch seam)

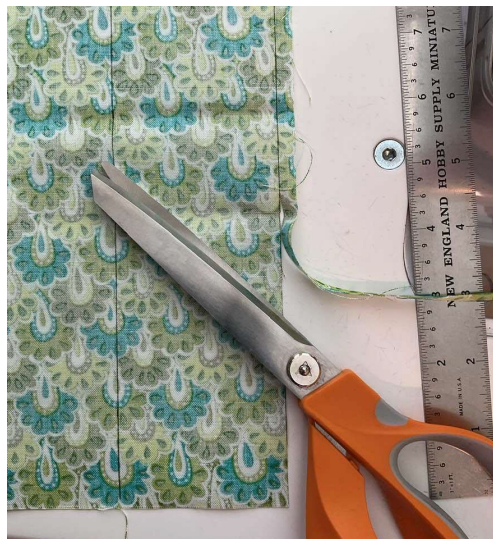
For the first part you need four pieces of fabric exactly 4.5 x 2.5 inches .

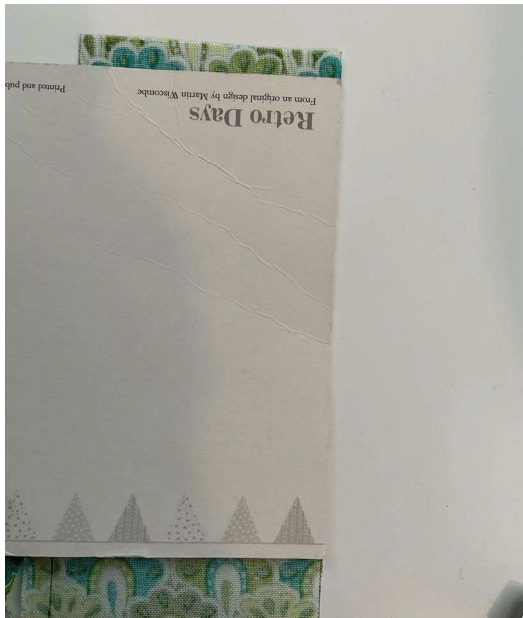
These can be cut without special quilting rulers or rotary cutter. You just need an ordinary ruler marked in inches, a sharp pencil, and a pair of scissors that will cut fabric cleanly.



Start by marking a straight edge on your fabric (the tightly woven selvedge of a fabric should always be cut off). If your ruler isn't long enough to draw a line along the whole edge, position it so it follows the thread lines (grain line) of the fabric, draw along as far as you can, then move it along, overlapping the line you have already drawn so you can check the line is staying straight. On the picture the red circle shows where I finished one part of the line and moved my ruler.

Now mark the width of your first strip (for this block it will be 2.5 inches) – make small marks 2.5 inches from your marked straight edge at several points along the line. Use your ruler to join up the marks and give you a cutting line. You can now cut the strip carefully with sharp scissors. I find that keeping the fabric on the table as I cut makes it easier to follow the line.





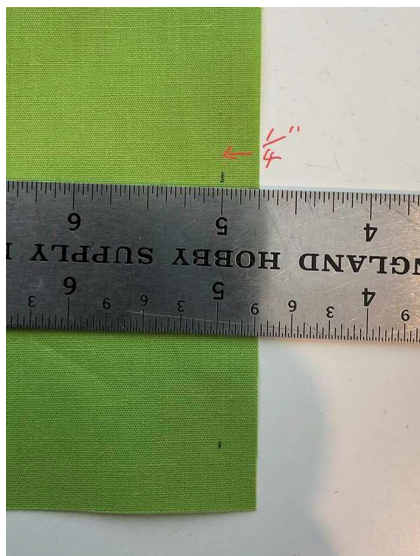
You will also need to square up the end of the strip. The easiest way to do this is to find something like a postcard, line up the edge along the long edge of the strip, and draw across the short edge to give you a cutting line.

You can now cut your strip into 4.5 inch sections. For accuracy, measure and mark both sides of the strip to be sure the cut end stays square.

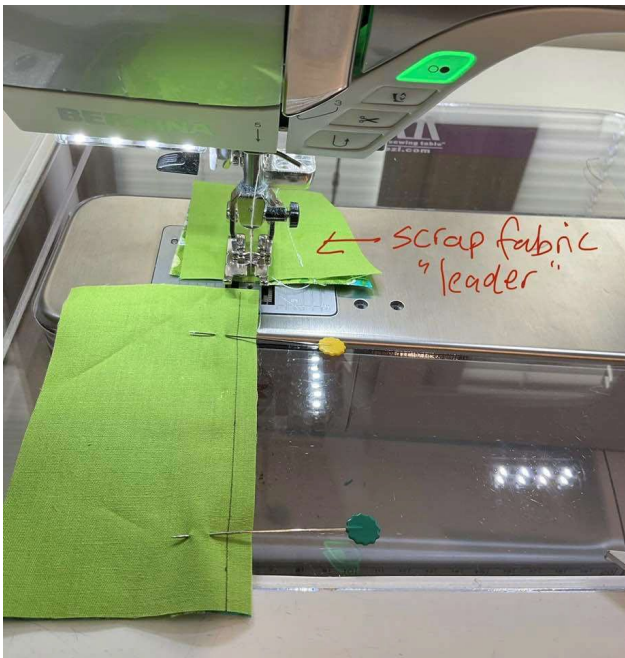
Getting an accurate ¼ inch seam

This is worth spending time on as it will mean you will be able to sew any block accurately in future.

Take three pieces of fabric accurately cut at 2.5 x 4.5 inches.

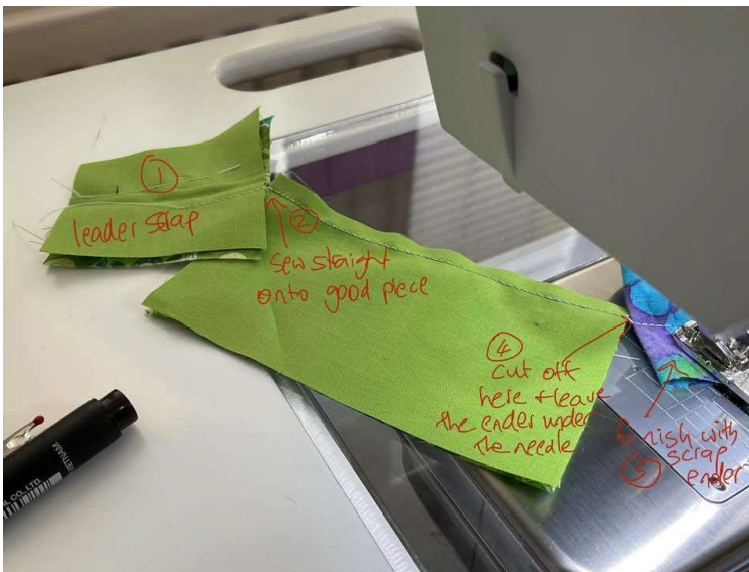


Measure and make a couple of marks ¼ inch in from one long edge on the wrong side of the fabric on one piece. Join up those marks to give you your first stitching line. Place this piece on another right sides together, matching all four edges.



Start sewing with a scrap of fabric under your needle (a “leader”), then continue onto your good piece aiming to have your needle go into the fabric just barely to the side of the drawn line, making your seam just a fraction less than ¼ inch from the edge.

Notice where the edge of your fabric lines up on your machine. This may be one of the marks on your needle plate, or it may be a mark on or the edge of your presser foot. This is important as you will be using this mark to line up your next seam (instead of drawing it).



Extra note: I “chain piece” sewing from one piece directly to the next without cutting my thread, and always ending up leaving a scrap piece under the needle ready to be my leader for the next bit of sewing. This saves a bit of thread, but it also means you don’t get thread nests and tangles when you start sewing small pieces. This is a “leaders and enders” technique, and if you are really organised you can keep a pile of small squares of fabric beside your machine and seam them in pairs as leaders and enders (for a jump start on your next scrap project!) instead of using waste scraps.

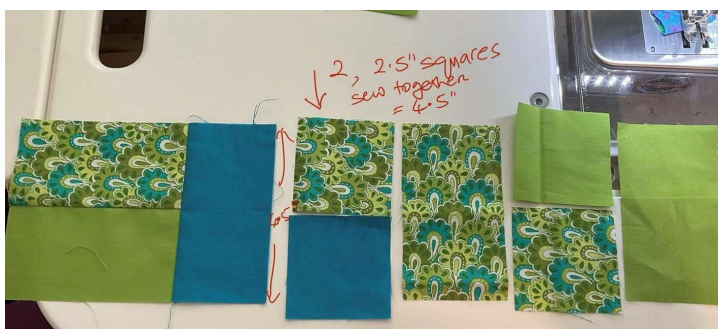


Open up the first piece you have sewn, and run your fingernail along the seam to make sure it is properly open (without stretching the seam) before pressing with a dry iron. In quilting, seams are usually pressed to one side rather than open, but do what works best for you.



Add your third piece across the top of the two already stitched together. If your seams have been accurate, it will fit exactly across with the edges perfectly lined up. Line up the edge with the same point on your foot or plate as you did for the first seam. If you have got it right, then when you open up and press the block it will measure exactly 6.5 inches long. You can add another strip in the same way to that last one to give you the beginnings of your rail fence.

Now that you can sew a good $\frac{1}{4}$ inch seam, it will be easier to make the rail fence by first sewing 36 strips in pairs to give 18 pairs. Start with a leader scrap, then chain piece a whole lot of these, then finish with an ender scrap and cut apart all the two-strip blocks for pressing in one go. Now sew those blocks into a long strip, alternating vertical and horizontal.



You can also substitute rectangles made from two 2.5 inch squares and make different patterns with these block units.

This month, seam accuracy is far less important, but for future months the more accurate you are, the easier it will be to get a finished block the right size. It is well worth taking the time this month to practice accuracy and get familiar with how to sew a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch seam on your machine. Remember that in quilting a quarter inch seam is usually stitched just barely less than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch away from the edge of the fabric (what is known as a "scant quarter inch"), as that takes into account the thickness of the fabric when the seam is pressed open.