Continuous Bias Binding – Revisited!

Introduction

Deb Ewing's excellent presentation of Continuous Bias Binding in 2019 gave me the incentive to finally give it a try. The basic 1-page instructions published by The Sewing Loft Blog are excellent, and I will reference them during this presentation. You can download them from our website: **Continuous Bias Binding** under **Quilt Tips**.

But before you can start actually making your continuous bias binding, you need to determine how much fabric you need, and this is what I found difficult. With "The Continuous Bias Binding Formula" in hand I spent a fair amount of time trying to figure the formula out, and, once I did, why the formula works. In the course of this a light bulb went off in my head, and I realized that I didn't need to use the formula at all! In fact, if you understand the concept of "area" (think square footage of your house, or acreage of land) you can very easily determine how much fabric you need to make whatever your desired length of bias binding. All you need to be able to do is compute "area" using simple arithmetic.

Step 1: Determine the length of binding needed.

Using the method easiest for you, measure the length of binding needed for your project, and add about 25" for overlapping your binding ends and providing wiggle room for any mitered corners or other contingencies that may arise.

For the tree skirt I used a flexible measuring tape to measure the outside perimeter of the skirt (162") plus the perimeter of the small inside circle (13") plus two times the length of the straight edge opening (2 x 24.5" = 49"). To this total of 224" I added the 25" overlap and wiggle room, and rounded up to 250".

You can be clever and use geometry to calculate the perimeter of the big circle (pi x R squared), or you can fold the circle in half or quarters to make measuring easier, but remember you always want to err on the side of extra length in your binding, and these other methods may understate the length needed due to the folds in the fabric or other issues.

For our tree skirt we want **250"** of continuous bias binding.

Step 2: Determine the AREA of fabric you need for your binding.

Binding is most often made with a 2½" strip of fabric. However, I like to use a completely machine-sewn binding that uses a 2" strip which makes a very narrow binding. (Subject of another presentation, perhaps.) In this example I will be making a 2" wide binding strip.

The **area** of my binding strip is 250" long x 2" wide = **500 sq inches** (500" square)

Step 3: Determine the size of the fabric square you need to make your binding.

To make sure our bias binding is on the true bias, we should cut our fabric strips corner to corner from a **square** of fabric, one side of which is on the straight of grain (such as the selvage).

Besides being so much easier than cutting many bias strips from a square, this method of making continuous bias binding results in virtually no wasted fabric.

Therefore, all we need to know is: **what size square of fabric do I need to have at least 500 square inches?** Easy peasy:

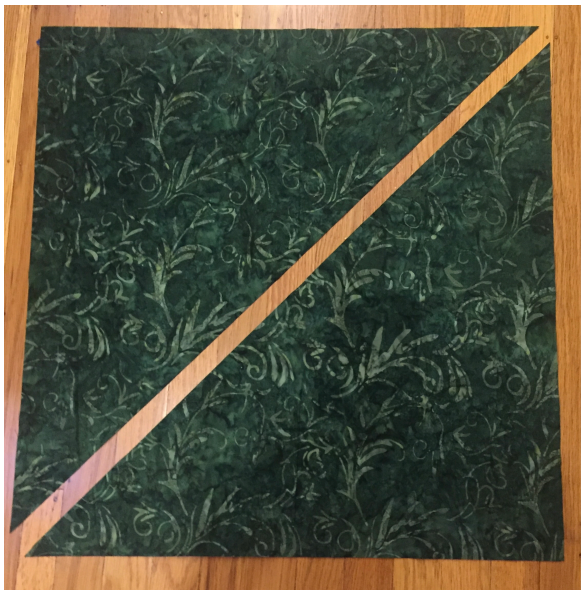
> Is a 20" square big enough? 20" x 20" = 400 square inches (Not big enough.)
>
> How about 25" x 25" = 625 square inches (More than I need.)
>
> Try **23" x 23" = 529 square inches**: Perfect! No formula or worksheet needed!

We want a square of fabric of 23" on each side, cut on the straight of grain.

The remaining instructions explain how to do this wonderful method to produce continuous bias binding from your square of fabric. These instructions correspond to those included on **Continuous Bias Binding** published by The Sewing Loft Blog and available to download from the MMQ website.

Step 4: With your fabric square right side up, cut it corner to corner.

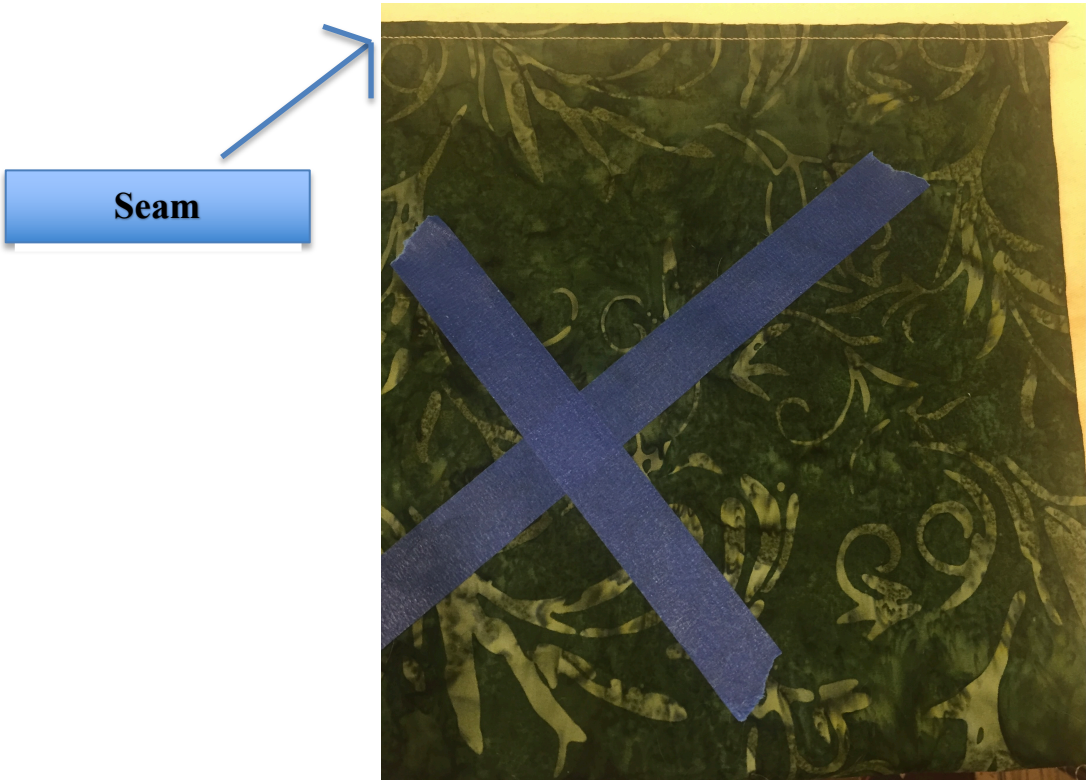
It does not matter at which corner you start your cut.



Step 5: Flip 1 side up & over to meet its opposite, with fabric right sides together.

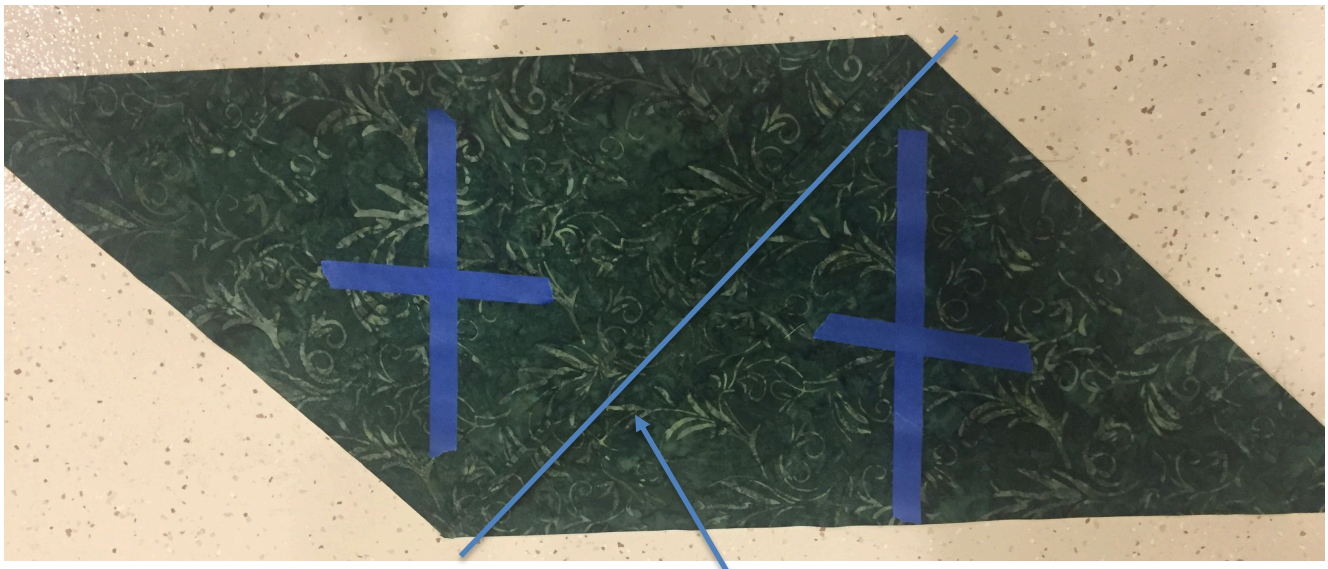
The result is a two-pronged pennant, and two dog ears will appear at the top corners of the fabrics.
Since you started with a square, it doesn't matter which side you flip up and over to meet its opposite.
Since my photos are of batik fabric, I have marked the wrong side of the fabric pieces with blue tape X's for clarity.

Step 6: Pin and stitch a 1/4” seam along this (top) edge.



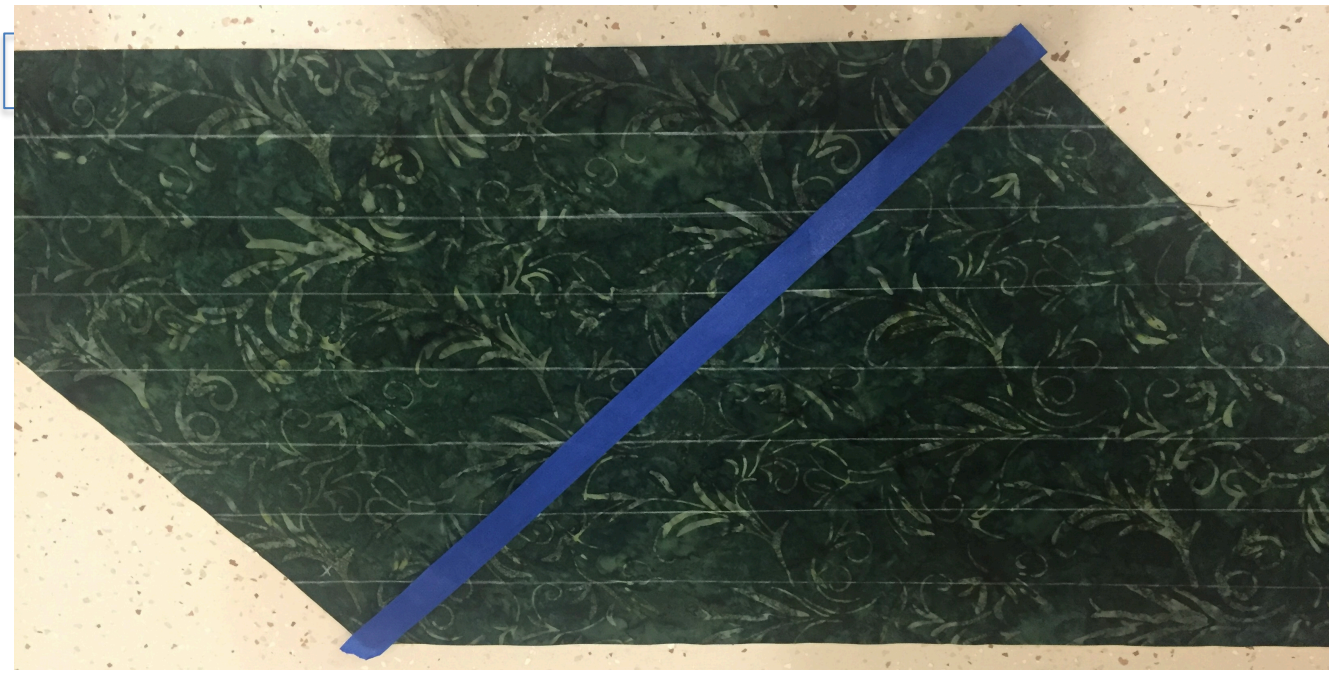
After stitching, unfold and press the seam open. Clip off the dog ears.

You now have a parallelogram with two long sides (the bias edges) and two short sides (former sides of the fabric square.) The picture shows the fabric wrong-side up, revealing the pressed-open seam.



Step 7: On the wrong side, draw (Do Not Cut) lines the width of the unfinished binding.

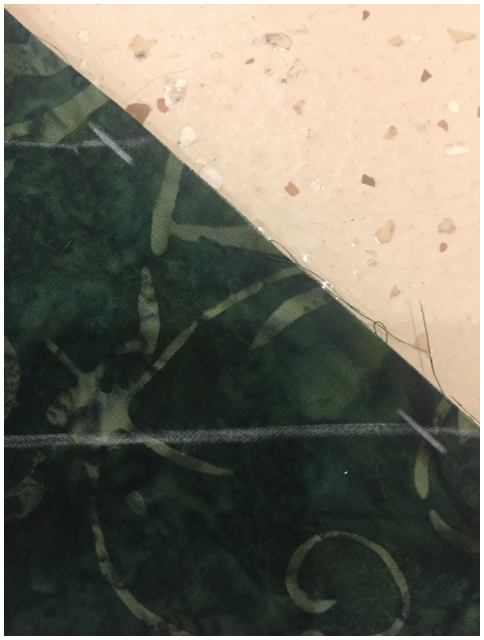
Use a marking pen to draw your lines parallel to the long (bias) edges. These lines will cross the seam at a 45-degree angle. Any type of marker is fine as these lines will be hidden within the folded binding. (The pressed-open seam is underneath the blue tape.)



The lines shown are 2” apart, the width of the unfinished binding strip.

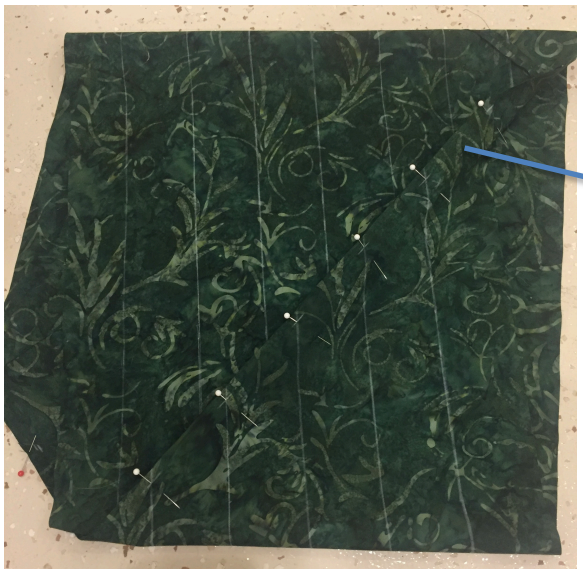
Step 8: Draw a line ¼" from both short sides, crossing all the marked cutting lines.

This need not be a solid line; its purpose is to show where ¼" is from the fabric edge along each marked cutting line. These marks on the cutting lines are the "X's".



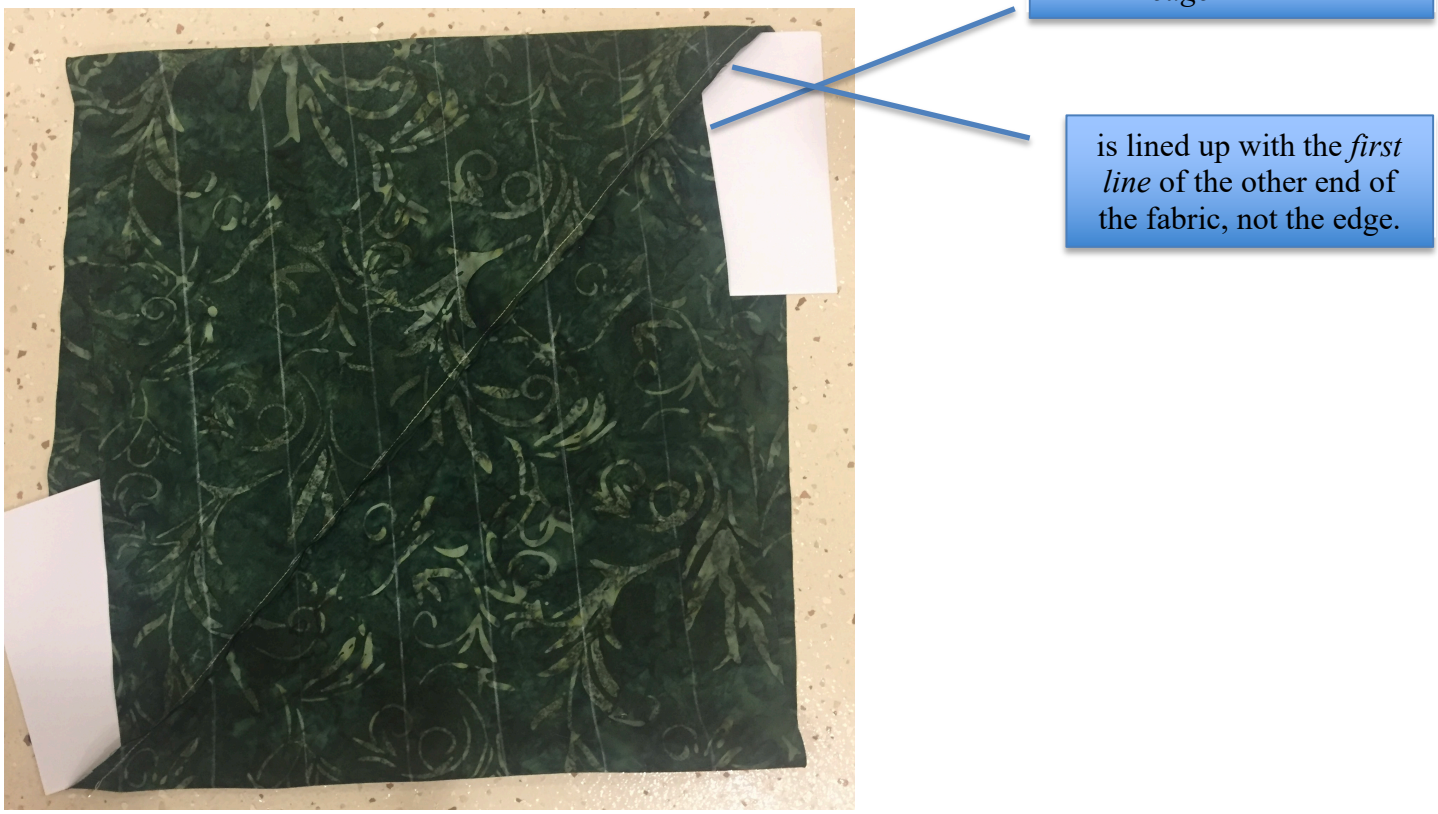
Step 9: Pin the two short sides right sides together, matching the X's with your pins, with the two fabric pieces offset by 1 strip in either direction.

This maneuver can be tricky to complete, much like pinning together opposite curves. The resulting "tube" is wonky by one strip width, and may appear twisted, but it should not *be* twisted.



Pinned seam, X's aligned.

The following shows more clearly how the cutting lines are offset by one unit, making start and end points to what will be one long fabric strip when cut.



Step 10: As shown above, stitch a ¼" seam, but DO NOT PRESS.

You need to be able to see all of your lines in order to cut the binding, especially where the lines cross the seam.

Step 11: Cut your binding with scissors as one long strip, following the marked lines.

Start at one end and cut slowly and carefully, following closely the now-continuous line. Open the seam by hand to stay on a straight line as you cut through the seam with each pass. Don't worry if your cutting line is a bit wobbly; the edges are hidden within the folded binding.

Step 12: Press your binding in half lengthwise to finish, pressing open the unpressed seams as you go along.

Your binding is finished! Press carefully, do not iron, so you do not stretch your bias binding. You'll need that stretch later as you apply the binding to a curved edge.