

Quilting Tips & Tuts #2 – That Quarter Inch!

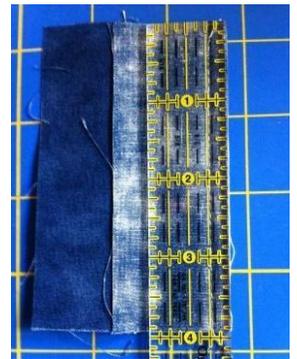
Why is it so important?!?

by Pam Wingate

This month is all about that Quarter Inch!

The quarter inch is the standard seam allowance for all types of quilting. It's big enough to hold the patches together and small enough to reduce bulk and save fabric. You'll enjoy your quilting experience so much more when your quilt blocks fit together easily, finish up square, and are easier to quilt because they lay flat. All because of an accurate seam.

When a Quarter Inch Isn't a Quarter Inch - When quilters refer to the quarter inch seam allowance they are really talking about a "scant" quarter inch. The term scant means just a thread shy of a 1/4" (see picture). When quilting, the seam is stitched, then pressed closed to set the seam, and then opened and pressed with the seam allowance generally towards the darker fabric. The pressed fold and your thread actually take up a wee bit of space and when you add all the wee bits together it results in blocks being short of their required size. Thicker fabrics (think flannel) will take up even more space and you may need to use an even "scanter" seam!

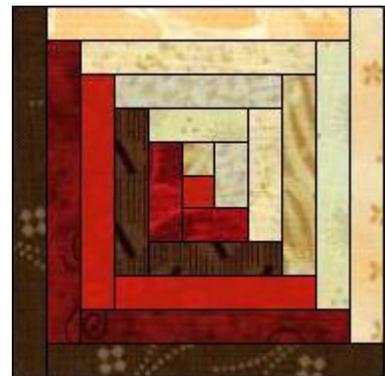


Scant Quarter Inch

An Example: A log cabin block finishes to 11-1/2" before it is sewn into a quilt. It has 10 seams top to bottom and left to right. If every seam stitched is off by a mere 1/16", your block would be off by...

$$10 \text{ seams} \times 1/16" = 5/8"$$

Your block would measure either 10-7/8" if the seam was too big or 12-1/8" if the seam was too small. That's a lot to be off for one block.



The solution is simple – pick a seam guide and test for accuracy!

Spending just a few minutes to ensure you have an accurate scant 1/4" can save you hours of frustration from trying to piece a quilt that just won't go together. There are several tools and tricks available to help with this. The guide lines on the throat plate are not always accurate and even if your machine has a quarter inch foot, do not trust these measurements without testing first.

Step 1 - Choose a Seam Guide – they aren't just for beginners

1/4" presser foot: Most newer machines come with a quarter inch foot, but many older machines do not. If you don't have a quarter inch foot for your sewing machine, it is worth the investment. The quarter-inch foot allows you to line up fabric with the edge of the foot to achieve a quarter-inch seam. Each quarter-inch foot might be a little different so use a ruler to see where exactly on your foot the seam falls. Gently use the flywheel to lower the needle until it touches the ruler at the quarter-inch mark. Is it just inside the foot, right at the edge or just outside?



Adhesive: A quarter-inch foot will help your seam allowances, but if you find your seams are still off, you can make a guide with adhesive. You can make your own with blue painters tape, mole skin, or use a commercial adhesive guide such as PM Quilting's Seam Allowance Ruler.

To make your own, first lower the feed dogs so that the measuring device will lay perfectly flat, position a ruler on the bed of your machine and slowly lower your needle to the center of the 1/4" mark. Keeping your ruler straight, position the tape along the right edge of the ruler. Build up a ridge with three to four layers of



up a ridge with three to four layers of tape for the fabric to butt

up against.

You can also use Glow-Line tape to mark the your machine, Taping gives you a much longer edge for lining up your fabric.

quarter-inch seam on longer edge for lining up

Step 2 – Check for accuracy

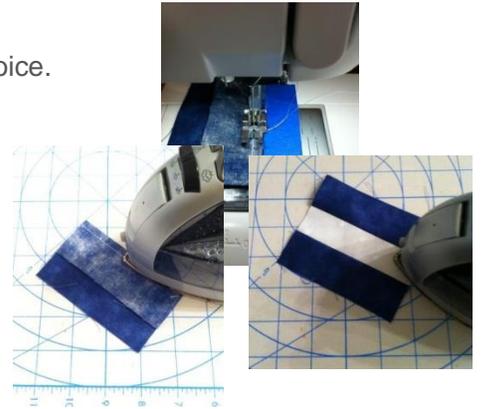
Regardless of what you use for a seam guide, you'll need to do a simple "sewing test" to check for accuracy. It's easy to do.

- Using fabric from your project, cut three strips - each 1-1/2" wide by about 3-4 inches long. Using different colors will make it easier to see.



- Sew them together lengthwise using your sewing guide of choice.

- Press the strip set carefully. Press the sewn unit flat to set the seam, then press the patch open, with seam allowances pressed towards the darker fabric.

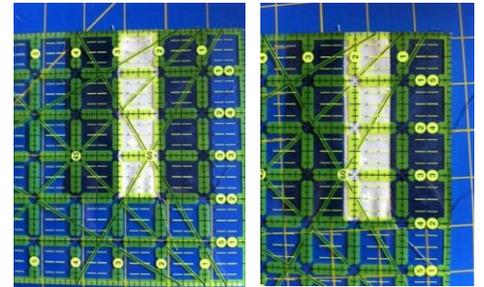


- Measure the center strip. It should measure 1 inch EXACTLY!
The whole unit should measure 3 ½ " from side to side.

If the strips are too wide, your seam allowance is too small, increase it.

If the strips are too narrow, your seam allowance is too big, reduce it.

Adjust the tape or move the needle (if your machine has this option) until your measured strips are accurate.



Taking a little time to test your seam allowance will save you hours in the long run so if you haven't been doing this test – *try it, you'll like it!*