Educational Tidbit for November 2026

MORE TIPS FOR A BETTER QUILTING OUTCOME FROM THE LONGARM QUILTER POINT OF VIEW

It is November already! I feel like Rip Van Winkle this year, where did 2026 go? I hope you have a wonderfully enjoyable November. We have Thanksgiving and Black Friday Sales to look forward to at the end of the month. But to start off the month, we change the clocks. I think this time it is fall back. I get mixed up on the clock changes, so I have to say that little mantra, spring forward, fall back.

For some real fun, you can attend the yearly Village Bonanza Sale at Clubhouse 4, November 7th and 8th. The Bonanza is scheduled for the second weekend of November this year, and we do not have the change of time in the middle of the Bonanza weekend. The time change always seems to happen right in the middle of the Bonanza. Volunteers and attendees on Sunday can get confused about opening time and what time to begin volunteer shifts. It should be much better this year.

After last month's tidbit publication, Donna Karbach, a good quilty friend and long arm quilter, approached me and asked me to cover some more topics to create a better quilting outcome from a long arm quilter's perspective.

To begin the research on the topics Donna wanted you to know about, I decided to look at what a long arm quilter goes through to load the quilt top, batting, and backing on a long arm quilt machine in preparation to actually do the quilting. I wanted to better understand the process, so I could understand how the issues impacted the outcome. And I wanted to understand some of the complexities faced by our long arm quilters.

I went on YouTube and watched a bunch of "Long Arm Quilting How to" videos. I really learned a lot. Most of my quilts are quilted on a long arm. In the past, I have given the long arm quilter the quilt top and backing, and sometimes the batting, and then happily awaited the outcome. I never really even watched the long arm quilter do the process. Duh, I have been totally clueless. I recommend that all of you check out the process as well. It was kind of a "walk a mile in my shoes" transformation for me. I was totally dumbfounded by all the work long arm quilters go through to load a quilt on a quilt machine in order to even begin quilting the quilt. I will attempt to give you snapshots of what I learned. I apologize to any long arm quilters reading this if I use the wrong terms for all things long arm, I am still learning about it.

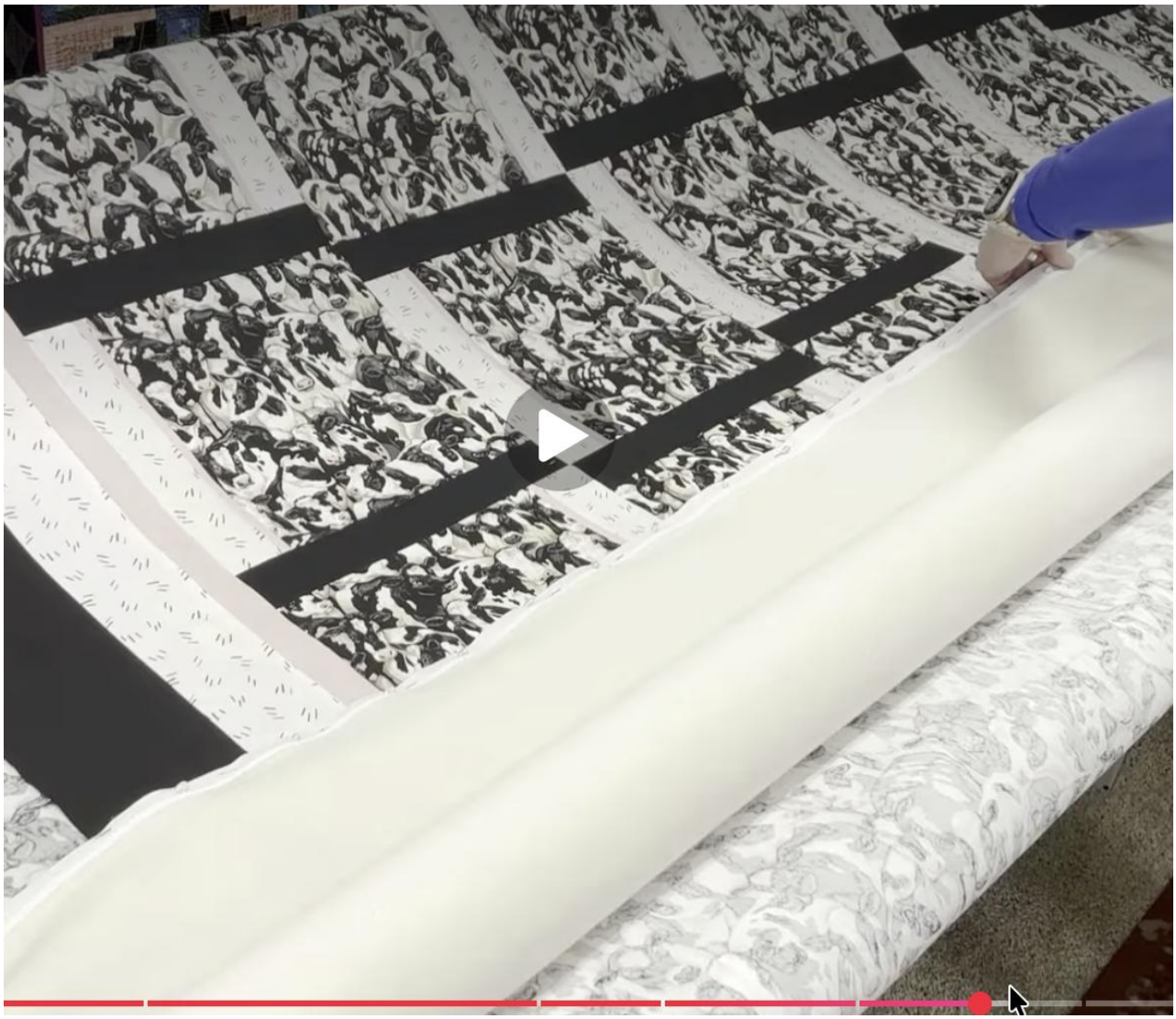
The following screen grabs were taken from a YouTube video entitled "AQPS Loading a Quilt Using Pins". I was unsuccessful in obtaining a good picture of the basting process because it is a moving picture. I suggest you watch a video or watch a long arm quilter in action to see the basting process done after the quilt, batting, and backing are loaded and before the actual quilting begins.

To begin to load the quilt on the long arm, the backing is attached to leaders on rollers in front and back of the machine, and "loaded" on the machine by rolling the backing up onto those rollers. This can be done with sturdy pins or snap-on clamps. To properly load the backing, the quilter lines up the center of the backing with the center of the leader and then pins the backing fabric wrong side up. The long arm quilter must constantly smooth out the backing

fabric as it is rolled up on the rollers. It is very important to keep everything smooth and straight. The quilter pins from the center in one direction all the way to the end and then begins in the center and pins in the other direction. Each quilter makes sure all the pins are installed in the same direction, head to point, to ensure that fingers or hands are not impaled by errant pins.



Next the quilt top is attached to the leaders on another set of rollers and "loaded" on the machine, in the same fashion, beginning in the center of the top and matching it to the center of the leader.



The batting can be placed on the backing before or after the top is loaded. It gets kind of tucked between the belly rollers on the front of the machine. I think those are called belly rollers because they are belly high on the quilter. After the batting is in place, the top of the quilt top is smoothed over the batting. Some quilters pin the quilt top at this point and others do not. This next picture shows why the backing and batting are longer than the quilt top. We will go over this later as I cover the issues Donna wanted us to know about.



The quilter can then baste the batting on the backing or let it float. The quilt sandwich is generally basted to keep everything in place and straight before the quilting commences. During the entire loading process, the quilter is going back and forth smoothing the various fabrics as they are rolled up on the rollers or rolled out from the rollers. After all of this loading and basting, the quilting can commence.

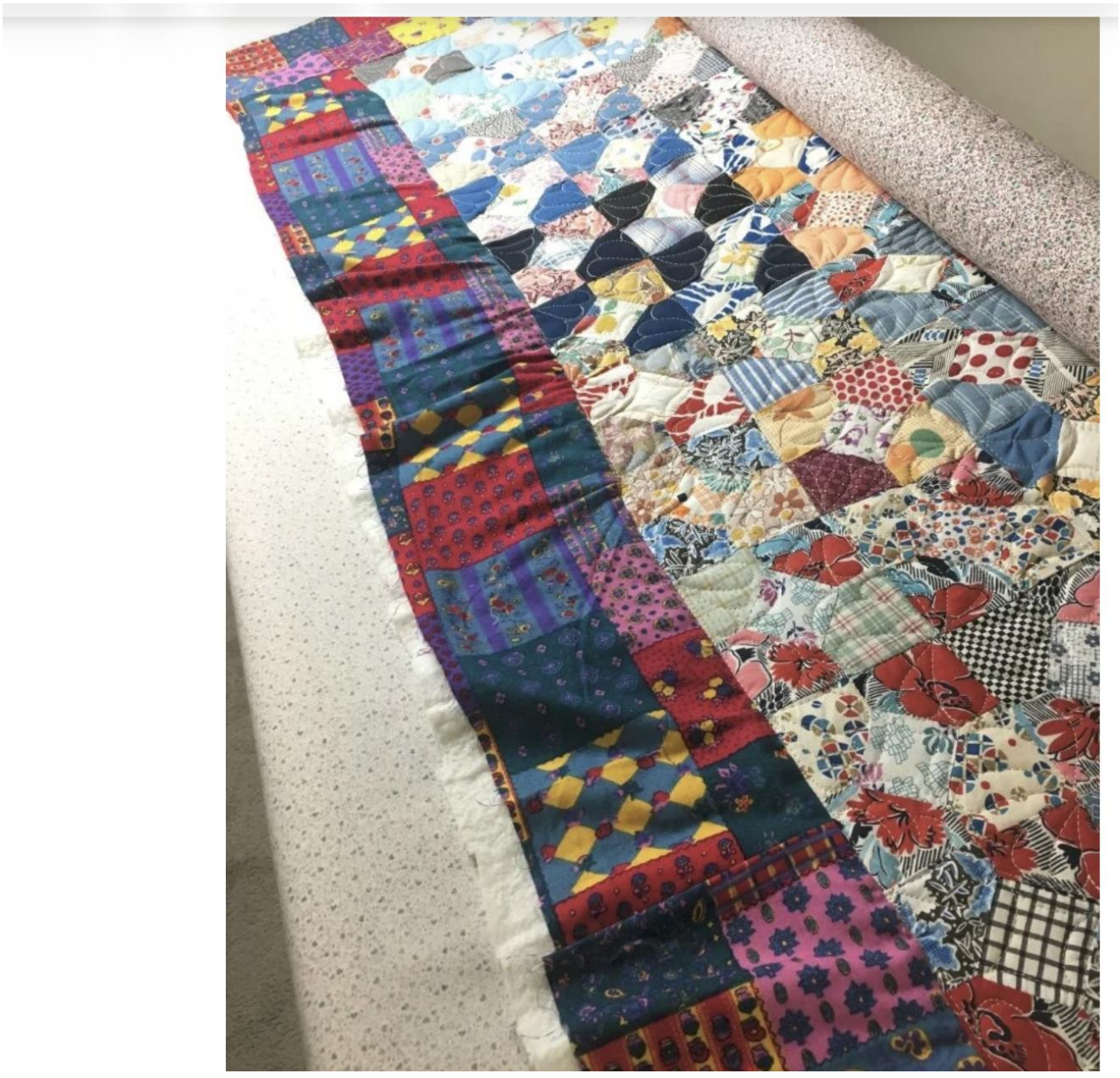
For this loading of the backing, the backing had been cut straight at the front roller, but not quite cut straight on the back roller, so in this video, this quilter lined it up straight on the back roller and after the pinning process, she trimmed off the excess hang over part. One thing I learned after watching all these videos is that each quilter does a few things a bit differently from one another. However, the basics are pretty much the same. To quilt the sandwich, the quilter ensures that all three layers are smooth, flat, and taut. The quilter moves between the front of the machine and the back of the machine to make needed adjustments.

Now let us move on to those universal issues we need to take care of before expecting our long arm quilter to create a beautiful quilt for us. The issues fall into 3 categories, (1) a flat quilt top, (2) the borders, and (3) the backing.

1. A FLAT QUILT TOP - Make sure to press your quilt top each step of the way. Press as you sew your blocks. Press as you sew blocks into rows. Press as you sew rows into the quilt top. A flat quilt top is the goal. Make sure all your seams are sound and not in danger of

separating during the quilting process. Repair any problems before handing the quilt top to the long arm quilter. Also, cut off any hanging threads.

2. THE BORDERS - If you get finished piecing your quilt top and simply sew on your borders hurriedly without measuring or pinning, the borders can come out all wavy and puckery. There is a myth that I have heard; "Oh, don't worry about that sewing error, it will 'quilt out'." Nope, it will not. It causes headaches for your quilter, whether it is quilted on a standard sewing machine, or the long arm. Those flowing gathered up borders will simply become obvious crooked pleats in your quilt. The picture below is an example of a wavy border mistake. This picture is from stringandstory.com article called "How to Quilt Wavy Borders", written by HollyAnne Knight. The article goes on to explain a method of fixing this type of error after the quilt is quilted, as long as the borders have not been quilted.



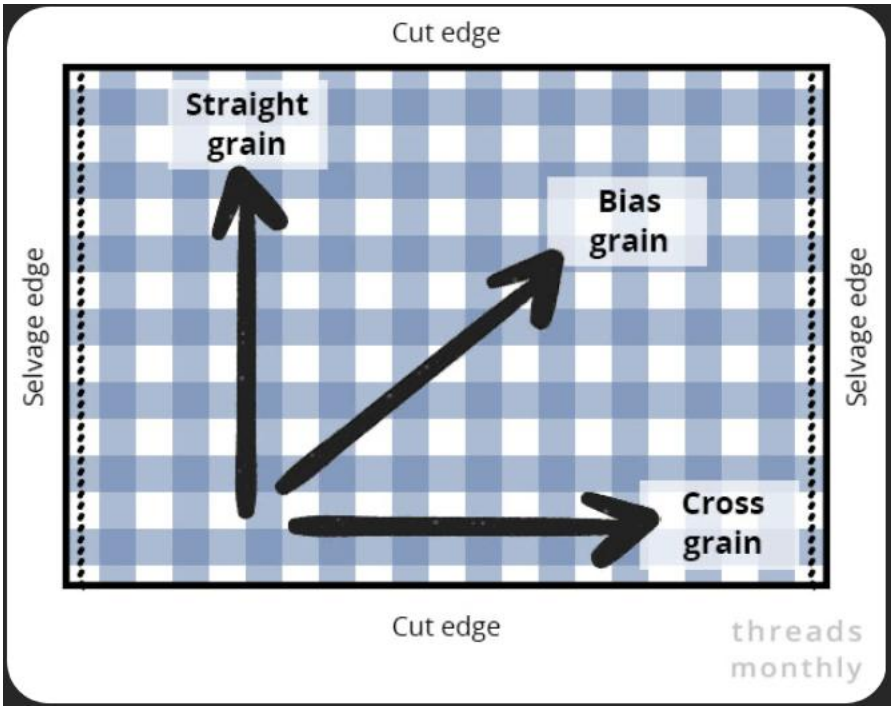
To avoid this kind of mistake, take the time to measure your quilt top length in three places, average those measurements, and cut your side borders to that measurement. Apply your borders along the sides of the quilt top. Next get ready to apply the top and bottom borders. Measure the width in three places across from side border to side border, average the measurements, cut the borders to that measurement, and apply the top and bottom borders. Before sewing on any border, make sure to pin the borders flat, and then sew the borders without stretching the quilt top or the borders. Press the borders flat after you sew them to the quilt top.

Make sure to finish your borders by trimming the ends even with the quilt top. Don't leave any extra fabric extending out from the borders, otherwise an overhanging border piece can negatively impact the long arm quilting process.

I found an 8 1/2 minute video on YouTube, "Learn How to Add Borders to Your Quilt and Square It Up", by Lori Bosecke of Lori's Country Cottage. Lori tells you and shows you how to properly add borders in a short and precise video. To improve your border application experience, I highly recommend you watch this video.

3. THE BACKING

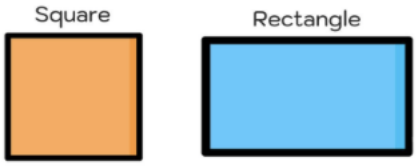
a. Pay attention to fabric grain and cross grain.



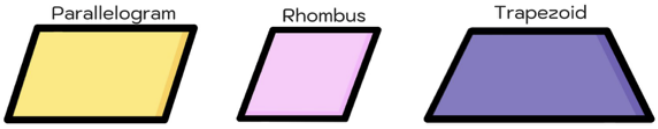
When piecing the backing, sew each piece of the backing so there are no conflicts with grain, cross grain, and bias. Grain is very stable. Cross grain has more give than grain, in other words it stretches more. If you piece your backing, the length should be with the grain, and the width should be cross grain. Otherwise, the pieces of the backing will fight with each other and cause problems for your quilter. Stay away from backing fabric cut on the bias. There is simply too much give to create a stable backing.

b. Make all four of the backing edges straight. When you cut and sew your backing create a square or rectangle. Make sure to cut straight edges on all four sides of the backing.

Like this:



Not this:



Ask your long arm quilter how much larger the backing should be from the quilt top. Generally, it will be 6 or 8 inches, in other words 3 or 4 inches larger along all sides.

3 inch example: add 6 inches to the width and length for the backing.
For a quilt top measuring 68 inches by 72 inches, you would make the backing 74 inches wide and 78 inches long.

4 inch example: add 8 inches to the width and length for the backing .
For a quilt top measuring 68 inches by 72 inches, you would make the backing 76 inches wide and 80 inches long.

c. Piece backing with a horizontal seams if possible.

If your backing will be pieced by sewing fabric together to get the total size you need for the backing, it is preferrable to most long arm quilters that you make a horizontal seam rather than vertical. As you saw in the pictures of the quilter loading the backing on the long arm, the example showed a vertical seam. As the quilter rolls up the backing on the rollers, that seam builds up a bulge on the roller and can distort the backing fabric as the quilting progresses. In this case the seam was pressed open, if you press the seam to one side, the bulge would be 3 fabric layers deep each roll on the roller, while the open seam only yields a 2 layer deep bulge.

Sometimes the bulge from a vertical seam can negatively impact the quilting. The long arm quilter cannot tell what is happening with the backing during the actual quilting because it is underneath and out of sight. Sometimes the backing can be skewed a bit without anyone catching it. If you make a horizontal seam, the seam will run parallel to the rollers and will make a much smaller impact. A vertical seam will be quilted over and over again as the quilt is quilted, a horizontal seam is only in play once. Again, check with your long arm quilter for preference of vertical or horizontal seams, seam pressed open or seam pressed to one side.

d. Press the backing. Just like the quilt top, it is important to make your backing as flat and as wrinkle free as possible. Press your backing before giving it to the long arm quilter.

Well, that is all for now. Please enjoy your sewing and quilting projects in this month. This tidbit is the last for 2026. I plan to be back with something for you in January 2027. Have a great November and December. Blessings to you and your family.