

The Quarter Inch Seam Test

Five minutes that decide whether your corners meet.

Quilting uses a quarter inch seam allowance and every pattern assumes it. Four seams hold five strips together, and every seam has two seam allowances in it, so the piece loses eight times whatever each allowance is out by. That is why an error too small to see on one seam becomes half an inch across a row. Test the machine before you cut into good fabric.

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In the print dialog choose Actual size or Scale 100%, never Fit to page. Then check the scale below.



What you need

Five strips of cotton, each 1½ inches by 5½ inches. Scraps are perfect, and they do not need to match. Thread, an iron, and the ruler you normally use.

The test

- 1 Cut five strips, each 1½ inches by 5½ inches.
- 2 Sew all five together along their long edges, using whatever quarter inch mark your machine has. Keep an even speed.
- 3 Press. You cannot measure this accurately until it is pressed. Press the seams all one way; for a test the direction does not matter.
- 4 Measure the width. Lay the pressed piece on the bar overleaf, or use your own ruler.

A true quarter inch seam gives a piece exactly 5½ inches wide.

Anything narrower means the seam is too wide. Turn over to read the result.



The same five strips, sewn twice

The lower piece was sewn with a true quarter inch seam. The upper one was sewn on the machine's printed mark and finished narrower. Nothing else changed. That gap is what this test is looking for, and it is why blocks stop fitting each other.

Measure against this bar

Lay the pressed piece flat with its left edge on the left mark. Only valid if the page printed at 100%.



Reading the result

Your piece measures	It is short by	Each seam allowance is
5½ in	nothing	true. Go and sew.
5⅜ in	⅛ in	about 1/64 in too wide
5¼ in	¼ in	about 1/32 in too wide
5⅓ in	⅜ in	about 3/64 in too wide
5 in	½ in	about 1/16 in too wide
over 5½ in	it is long	too narrow, correct the other way

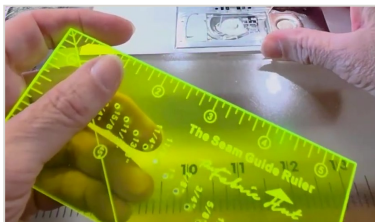
When Yvonne ran this test on camera her piece came out almost half an inch short, which is a seam allowance one sixteenth of an inch too wide. She has been quilting for over fifty years, which is the point: the mark on your machine is a guess, not a measurement.

The two fixes

Move the needle. If your machine lets you shift the needle position, nudge it toward the fabric edge and test again. The marks on the needle plate assume a centred needle.

Give the fabric an edge to run against. A physical guide beats a printed line, because you stop having to watch it. Our Seam Guide Ruler drops the needle through a quarter inch hole and comes with a magnetic guide that clamps to the needle plate. If you do not have one, stack seven or eight layers of 1½ inch painter's tape, trim it straight, cut a quarter inch strip and stick it just in front of the feed dogs.

Expect to correct twice: a test, a small adjustment, a second test. Mark the final position on the machine bed with a fine line so you can set it again in seconds.



The Seam Guide Ruler

Drop the needle through the quarter inch hole, set the ruler, then clamp the magnetic guide against its edge. The fabric then runs along the magnet, not along a line you have to watch.



Scan to see the ruler