

String Quilts – 6/21/2025 – Linus Session

String quilts are very improvisational. They can be extremely easy and very fast to make, but they can also be more intricate based on your own color and/or design choices, or an easily copied design from pictures on the web. The quilts are made with fabric strips sequentially sewn onto square blocks of light weight paper (unprinted newsprint) or fabric blocks. When building a string block, use light weight paper or fabric as backing to stabilize the block, as many strips can be cut on the bias.

Fabric Backing - When using fabric for stabilizing your squares, you must use plain **light** fabric for your backing as deeper color backings could show thru light fabric strips that you sew on the fabric block. The extra layer of fabric will add extra weight to the quilt as you are adding another permanent layer of fabric to each block. Some online designers do not use batting before adding the full backing to their quilts. This is a quilter's preference regarding how they like their finished quilts to look. I always use batting when I use fabric for my block backings.

Paper Backing - Carol Doak's Foundation Paper comes in a 100, 8.5" by 11" sheet pack. Poppys and many other quilt companies carry it. I regularly use a 500-sheet packet of Pacon unprinted newsprint sheets from either Amazon or the Officedepot.com web sites. I usually order the 8.5" by 11" size and square off each sheet to a 8.5" square block for most of my charity string quilts. You can order different size paper based on whatever preferences you have for your square block size. Avoid using printer paper, as it is thicker, does not pull off as easily and can pull out the stitches on the edges of your finished sewn block. **Always** use a smaller stitch size like 1.8 or 1.9 when using paper backing so you don't pull out stitches on your block's edges when you rip away your paper strips. You can pull your paper strips off from the middle, as it creates less stress on the edge's stitches.

Quilts with string blocks with no traveling middle strip. This is the design I usually use for charity quilts as, as noted, it's very simple, quickly made, you can use available scraps and this format appeals to girls and boys. I usually use this format with 24, 8.5" blocks with 4 square blocks separated by sashing – with the tip ends of each of the 4 squares all pointing to the center to form a wonky diamond design. I use a glue stick to lightly glue down the first middle diagonal strip (which can be any depth). I then pin additional strips of varying depths to both sides of the middle strip going outward to each corner. **Iron each strip** open as you add each strip to keep the fabric flat. It is very important to make sure each strip **very fully** overlaps the square's edges, so you have no divets peeking into your sewn square blocks, as blocks always shrink after all its strips are sewn to the its fabric or paper square block. You can experiment making your blocks with different colors, and you can sew your blocks together with or without sashing. Avoid using very small scraps for your tips, as they will get eaten up by the corner's 2 seams and your block's tips will look very tiny.

Quilts with a traveling middle strip. You can make string quilts with blocks that have a traveling middle strip that creates a geometric appearance in the finished quilt. You must use the **exact** same color and depth for this middle diagonal strip for every square block in your quilt. This quilt format does not use sashing. The blocks must be sewn together so that the middle strip travels geometrically throughout the quilt. Don't let the color of your dominant traveling middle strip get muddied by the color choices of the adjoining strips or it will ruin the geometric impact of the traveling center strip. It's easy to adjust the size of most string quilt formats by adding additional rows and/or columns.

You MUST square off your blocks from the fabric front, NOT from the back or you will wind up with smaller unfinished blocks. Google "String Quilts" on the web. Also search on Pinterest and you will find tons of string quilt variations with good color and format ideas that are very easy to copy.