
Make a Ribbon Quilt Top with Sarah Bond

Chapter 1 - Make a Ribbon Quilt Top

Overview

(gentle music) - A ribbon quilt is a traditional quilt form that layers fabric strip by strip and row by row upon other fabric. My name is Sarah Bond. I'm a quilt maker, and I've been making quilts for many years. I love traditional quilt forms, and I love to take those traditional quilt forms and interpret them in new ways where I can play with color and pattern to see what can come together. We will be making fabric constructions by piecing strips of various fabrics together in different rhythms, in different sizes, and then we will take those constructions, and we will cut them up and reassemble them into the quilt composition of your choice. This class is a little bit different from a class where you're following a pattern and you're coming to an ultimate result. With ribbon quilts each quilt evolves on its own and no two are the same. Ribbon quilts are focused on process rather than the product. And through that process you will learn about color, you will learn about pattern, and the more color and the more pattern that you put together in these constructions, the more you will learn and the more vibrant and interesting your final quilt will be.

Materials

- Let's take a look at the materials for sewing the ribbon quilt. When you look at this table with all of this fabric, you might be thinking that this is an awful lot of fabric, and that is true, it is a lot of fabric, but you can start this project with a much more abbreviated palette of fabric, but it's nice to hit a few key points. So over here you can see we have a lot of solid colors and you can see that there's a few gradations of color. Say here we're going from orange into red into purple and then into pink. And then up here we have us going, you know, through a few rounds of greens and some blues. You'd like to have a few sort of collections of solids where you have a span of colors from one hue to another. And I'm gonna say that it's really nice if you have a real, good, clear gradation with a bunch of steps in there. But you don't have to. You can use whatever it is you have. You can use what might come in a particular bundle of solids. And in among the solids, it's important to work with some neutrals. Neutrals are kind of important when you're working with color because they break things up and they give the eye a place to rest if you have a busy composition. I like a lot of color, I like a lot of action. It actually is kind of nice to have a foil for all of that color. When I was taking a class with a teacher all about color and composition, one of the things she told me was that I needed to put in some neutrals so there would be a place for the eye to rest. And I, you know, thought to myself, "You know, if you really need to rest, you could close your eyes for a minute." But she was actually right that it's nice to have something to counteract all of this riot of color. So see if you can get some neutrals. It can be white to black with gray shades in between. It could be a cream to a dark brown with, you know, tan and neutral shades in between. Just something that's a little bit quieter and that can sort of dilute the complexity of color that you might have. Another group of fabrics that we like to have is something we call blenders. I don't have a huge pile here, but these are things that have a little bit of texture to them, so you can see I have this orange here. I can't remember, I think this might be a grunge. So, you know, it gives you the feel of a pure color, but there's a little more texture and depth to it that just makes for a little bit of variety in your composition. Here I have sort of a brown with some thready business running through it. I don't remember where I got this, but I love to pick up woven fabrics that have, you know, some texture to

them, something that, you know, draws the eye in. And then this one, I'm not sure it really fits in this category but I love it because it's got a bunch of sort of faux stitching running through it, and I love that kind of texture. Another category of fabrics that I love to work with is stripes. You can see here I have stripes in a bunch of different colors and textures. Some of them are very straight and linear, others are more sort of chunky or painterly maybe. I like to use them in wide strips in my compositions and also in little narrow strips. It lends sort of a punctuation, sort of an interest when you have a row of fabrics sewn together. It's a lot of fun. I'll show you a little bit. Here you see a number of strips that are cut of various kinds of fabric. As I work in this particular quilt genre, I often end up with strips that I have cut that I don't use in the current project, but I tuck them away so that I can use them later on in another composition. And if you take to this, if you like it, I think you probably will end up with bits that you're gonna carry from project to project. And so I just tuck them in a Ziploc bag or a little box or something so I have them ready the next time I need to work with some strips. One difference about this class in relation to other classes that I teach is that there's not a specific pattern for pieces that you're going to make, but there are instructions relating to the fabric recipes and the ways that you can go about putting together your composition. And you can download that from the PDF section. Another thing that I like to have available is some paper, either a notebook or just some sheets of paper, and a pen just to take notes as I'm thinking about things and as I'm putting colors together. Maybe I'm looking at my colors and I might think, "Well, I want to do this, this, this, and this combination," and I'll just jot those down so I can remember them and tick them off as I move through my process. Other tools that we're gonna be using, we have scissors and rotary cutters. I've included several sizes of rotary cutters because some of them are better for certain tasks than others. This is really my go-to which is the 45 millimeter, but some people really prefer the larger 60 millimeter for cutting those long strips of fabric from selvage to selvage, so I included that here also. And then sometimes a little one is nice for cutting on the pieces after you've sectioned them and are working on your composition. It's just nice to have something small that's a little bit more manageable. One tool that I always, always have available is my seam ripper. I make mistakes all the time. I sew things together backwards, upside down, front to back when they should be back to front. I always need a seam ripper and I have a couple of options here. Here's your sort of regular traditional number, and then this one is actually an eyebrow shaver. The blade, you can see under here, the blade is wrapped so you can't cut yourself and you're less likely to cut your fabric. But it does run right through those stitches fairly easily, which I find to be really nice. Everybody's got their favorite. Give this one a try. You might like it. Thread I always piece with just plain sort of a medium to light gray thread. It matches all the colors that you might wanna use, and it sort of blends in nicely. And that just saves me from having, you know, a multitude of spools of thread and having to change out between colors as I'm assembling my strip sets. This might seem like an odd piece of equipment for a quilt composition, but I really use my phone quite a lot, particularly after I am in the process of composition. It's also useful when I'm putting my colors together because sometimes the colors will look different when you've taken a picture of them than when you're looking at them with the naked eye. I'm not sure why that is, but it does help me to see what's going on with the colors. And also if you are interested in trying to determine what the value of the different color choices that you've made, what the values on those colors are, you can take a picture of those fabrics and then you can convert that picture to black and white, and then you can see the color value, how light and how dark the different colors are. And that will give you some idea of how those colors are gonna contrast with one another in your final composition. We also have rulers. I have a smaller one for

when I'm sectioning smaller pieces, and then the larger one for when I'm cutting those big long strips. I do use a ruler when I'm cutting. Many people like to cut freehand, which you certainly can do. My particular preference in terms of style for myself is a lot of straight lines and small sections, and so I really do need the ruler for that. But if you have a different aesthetic and you want to have some more curves, a little variation, and the lines not so straight, you certainly can cut without a ruler. We have these funny little bottle caps here. I use these for spot pressing. It just is a nice little item. My fingernails aren't that strong, so I use these to finger press. I do a lot also of standing up and pressing my strip sets because we really do need them to lay flat when we're going to put them into the final composition. And so I do go to the iron to press, but I like to crease them first, give them an initial press as I'm building them together. And then I will go to the iron to give it a good hard press. And then of course your sewing machine, whatever machine that you like. Just make sure it's well oiled, that you have a few extra needles in case you break one, and that, you know, you've cleaned some of the excess of lint out of there sometime recently. Sometimes I'm not so good at that and I end up with a lot of fluff when I try to clean that out. So this is sort of the breadth of things that you'll need as we move on in this class. Again, you don't need quite the volume of colors and different fabrics that I have here, but, you know, more is always fun.

Color discussion

- As we look at our fabrics, and start to think about how to put them together, I just wanna say a little something about color. I am not classically trained in art. I didn't go to art school, I'm a little salty about that sometimes. And I've always sort of thrown colors together, and not really thought too hard about how I was doing it. It always sort of comes out, almost all the time it comes out to my liking. And I was for years nervous about actually reading about color, and learning about color, because I was sort of afraid I would break whatever this magic was that I had, in terms of putting colors together. But I've gotten a little bit (laughing), after, you know, 20 or 30 years, I got a little braver. And I thought, "Well, let me just learn a few things about color." So one of the things that people talk about with color a lot is value. So value is how light or how dark a color is. And value has a lot to do with how the contrast is happening between fabrics in your constructions. And while value is not everything, it is a lot of what makes that contrast, and what makes things interesting. So I, you know, decided to do a little bit of investigation with color. And one of the things that I do with respect to color and value is if I have a particular run of colors, if I'm looking, say at this light orange, to orange, to red, to purple, you know, whatever your run is, and again, it does not have to be a strict gradation, but whatever run of colors you're working with, if you wanna know how those colors are ordering, in terms of value, you can take your handy dandy phone. You can do this with your iPhone, or with your Android, whatever, and you can just take a picture of those colors. And then you can really, sometimes just with your naked eye, you can say, "Okay, I like it better if this color is here, this color is there." But you can also take that, and you can edit that photo, and you can go down to the bottom here, and choose to change those colors. And you can go to one of the black and white options. Silver tone is a good one, then save that picture, and then you can see with that picture which colors have what values, so which ones are really darker, which ones are really lighter. And sometimes it will be what you thought it would be. And other times it won't, it won't. And I know that there are other folks who have a talent for looking at a stack of fabric, and ordering it according to value. And that's not something that I'm very good at. So I do like this little trick. It's not always my decision maker, but it's something that I can look at when I'm thinking about a range of colors, and thinking about how to put them together. Another thing to think about with respect

to color is, you know, the actual color, the hue, right? So you can look at it, and you can say, "Okay, I want to look at some reds and oranges and yellows. I want to look at some greens, from, you know, a light green into a dark green, and going into blue." You can, you know, look at your color wheel, and order according to the color wheel if you want to, because that you would be ordering according to the actual hue, the color of the fabric. And another thing is saturation. And I love really strong, really rich, saturated colors. And that's something that I work with a lot. But I know that I'm not getting the full potential of color if I'm only focusing on those colors. So sometimes I really take some time, and I say, "Okay, I'm gonna put some of these lighter, less saturated colors in, you know, some light pinks instead of that deep red, or some, you know, light greens instead of those, you know, jumpy, those funky greens, those chartreuses." I love them, but here's something that's a little bit more minty, and a little bit lighter. And using some of those colors that I'm not necessarily drawn to maximizes, it increases the color play that I have going on, and it gets things to be more interesting. So I'll look at other people's work, and I'll see what colors they're using. And sometimes the colors are really not the ones that I would choose, but I try to bring them in, because I like the effect that these other artists are having. And then finally, I would say that if there are certain colors that you really are not drawn to, or certain things that you think are, let's just say ugly, use them once in a while, because they add to the conversation. You know, a mixture of colors is interesting, because some of them are different, because some of them maybe are fighting with each other a little bit. And so sometimes I like to bring those other things in when I am putting together a color palette for a composition. So those are just some things to think about with respect to color, as you're looking at what you have collected here, and thinking about how that you're gonna use it.

Process overview

- I'd like to talk now for a few minutes about the overall process that we're gonna be going through before we get a little bit more specific. So, what we're gonna be doing is making fabric constructions. And, what I mean by that is we're gonna be sewing strips of fabric together based on different concepts. I'm gonna offer you a few, sort of, recipes that you can use that will give you an interesting contrast, and an interesting run of colors, things that will look nice. But, you can put together whatever kinds of combinations that you like. Once you, you know, try a few of these recipes, that might spark something for you. Maybe you write it down on your little list, thinking of things that you wanna do, and then you come back and you do a construction based on that. So, you can see here I have a table full of various kinds of fabric that I've made, you know, constructions of different colors, in different sizes, different combinations of various fabrics. So, this would be, you know, the fabric from which I would pull to start my composition. So, when you're thinking about your composition, one of the first things I think about is infrastructure. I have trouble if I have too many choices, right? So, if I have, you know, the ultimate list of 100 things I could possibly do, it's really hard for me to pick what I want. So, I usually like to go in and choose some parameters and then go with those. So, I've eliminated some choices, so I can let my mind expand into the framework that I'm thinking about, right? Other people can think about all the possibilities, and it doesn't befuddle them, but it's daunting for me. So, I like to sort of narrow things down so that I know, you know, what I'm working with, and then I can expand within that framework. One of the things you need to think about when you're thinking about getting your composition together, is infrastructure. And, by that I mean what are the shapes, or sizes, or how am I gonna put this together? How am I going to construct it? What are the building blocks that I'm going to use? And, that will help me determine what size am I going to cut pieces of these constructions that I've made,

and how am I gonna put those together? So, I wanna come back and look at a couple of these quilts and talk about how the infrastructure of those, you know, has guided how I put them together. Just so you can get an idea of, you know, how we get from point A to point B, to point C. Let's talk about this quilt for a minute. This quilt is built on an infrastructure of triangles. You can see here that I have triangles of color, and that the strips of fabric run different directions depending on which triangle I'm talking about. When I was formulating how to do this quilt, I set myself the task of using all of the colors that were in a certain line of fabric. These are shot cottons, this is peppered cottons. But, you know, there are a lot of different shot cottons. They're nice because you have a different fabric on the warp, versus the weft. So, you get this really sort of deep color. And, there were a lot, a lot of colors in this line. And, as I was saying before, you know, I think we tend, I know I tend, to gravitate towards certain colors, so I like to challenge myself sometimes to bring in those colors that are less favorites of mine. So, I wanted to use all of the colors in this line of fabric. And so, what I did was I made these fabric constructions of the colors with various intentions. You know, sometimes it was about colors in a family, sometimes it was about trying to contrast light with dark. And, I sort of moved the color around on the quilt, and I was working a lot with fat quarters. So, I was working with 22 inches wide. And so, I made these fabric constructions, nine and a half inches, I think, I don't recall exactly, but nine inches, and then the 22 inches on the fat quarter. And so, that gave me two good squares out of each fabric construction. And so, I cut my squares, and then I cut my triangles from those squares, and I made sure to change the angle that I cut on the various squares, so that I would end up with different directional running of the stripes on the various triangles. And then, I put the triangles together into a building block of these, let's see, eight triangles. And then, I built those on my design wall in my studio. I have a studio with great tall walls. This quilt happens to be 107 by 107. So, this is a stepladder quilt. I had to have, use my stepladder to build this quilt on the wall. And, sometimes, you know, when you're working with one of these, you get kind of stuck and you know, it takes a little while. This one, I just was in this fugue state, and I just, that's all I did. I mean, I went to work, and fed people, and slept. But other than that, that's all I did. And, I put this together within about six weeks, which was pretty fast for me. A lot of times it takes longer for a quilt to evolve. So anyway, with respect to infrastructure, this is built on these triangles, which then are built into squares, which then are built on top of each other. So, my infrastructure on here was these right triangles. So, this quilt is actually related to this quilt. When I cut my squares and then my triangles, I had left just this, sort of, variably small piece. Sometimes it was two inches wide, sometimes it was even more narrow. And, so you can see, if you were to look here, these little strips are from the ends of these pieces here. So, I had this little pile of, you know, these delicious colors, and I just could not throw them away. So, I pulled out some linens, and some other sort of neutrals, and I decided to start building something from those little pieces. And, what I ended up deciding to do was go with an infrastructure where I built these narrow pieces into squares, and then built from the square. Now, again, this is an ordered sort of way to do this, which is helpful for me and my creative process. Other folks like to be a little more freeform, maybe they just build them all together. But, I like to have, I like to have a building block that's the same size so that I can get the whole quilt together, it'll lay flat, and you know, everything sort of works. I sort of did a similar color migration, maybe, I don't know if you wanna call it that, but I have, you know, reds and oranges down in this corner, and they sort of transition up here into the greens, and then, over here into these blues. So, there's a little bit of flow in terms of color, but then it's all mixed in with these linens, and some gray cross weaves. And then, some funny little wovens that I found in various places. This quilt actually, for me, is a kind of a small quilt. I have a hard time editing, that is not one of my

strengths. This quilt sort of self edited, because there was a limited number of these delicious little strips of color. So, anyway, the point here is that the infrastructure on this, for me, was these squares built from these narrow little strips. And so, that helped me, you know, it helps to narrow my focus so that then I can create within that framework. So, here my infrastructure was strips and squares. Here it was triangles. Once you've thought about your infrastructure, then when you come back to your constructions that you've made, you're gonna think about how can I take these constructions and cut them in such a way that they fit with the infrastructure. So, if you've decided that you wanna, you know, use columns in your piece, in your composition, then you're gonna cut these in certain shapes where you can build them into the columns that you want. Or if you are going to use triangles, then you're gonna take a look at what you have and how can I cut the square from this in order to cut the triangles that I want? And, sometimes if you've made a decision about your infrastructure after you've already started making your constructions, then you might have to add a little bit to some of them to get them to the right size, or you might have to reduce some of them. With the quilt behind me, I started my constructions before I made a decision about my infrastructure. So, in that case, some of those I had to add to them to get them to the right size, so I could cut my squares and then get my triangles. Some of them, I had to rip out a little bit, so I would have the pieces, the right size. So, you have to be willing to make some adjustments to the things that you have put together, in order to get them to fit the infrastructure that you've chosen.

Make fabric constructions

- Let's cut some strips, and then I will show you how to sew them together to get a nice smooth finish, to try to avoid that curl that you sometimes get when you're sewing strips together, and just to get the best result that we can, the nicest and smoothest result. I'm going to be working with some neutrals here. I do love those neutrals and I like to mix them in with my vivid colors. I have a variety of pieces here, and this is what happens when you've been at this for a while and you've been cutting strips. So I have some narrower strips here of the dark gray, this light gray, and the white. I have a little bit more yardage here of this more charcoal color, and this medium gray I have quite a bit, and I end up with these varying sizes of pieces, and it's usually easier to cut them in concert in terms of the size that they are. So first I'm gonna cut from these narrow pieces. Sometimes I need to even up the edges. They might get a little ravelly or it's possible that the last time I cut, I didn't cut completely straight. So I'm just gonna line these up a little bit so I can see what's going on, and then go ahead and cut my pieces. So let me line these up, and then just because it makes it a little bit easier to cut them, I'm going to line these up along the vertical line on my mat. I think this edge is pretty good, so I'm not gonna worry too much about that. I don't think I need to recut this edge. When I'm cutting these strips, I wanna think about seam allowance. So if you look at this section here, these strips are finishing at a half inch, and they were cut originally at an inch, so if I want these narrow strips, then I'm gonna go ahead and cut my pieces at an inch, say. If I want something a little chunkier, say I want an inch to show on the finished strip, then I'm gonna have to cut this at an inch and a half to allow for that seam allowance, right? So you have to, when you're cutting your strips, you wanna think a little bit about how wide do I want these to be? What kind of size variation am I interested in seeing in this particular fabric construction? I think I'm gonna cut these narrow because I do love those little narrow bits, and I also already have some strips cut that are in a larger size, so if I wanna vary my size, I can mix these in with those. So I wanna go ahead and line this up. Again, I've lined up the edge of my fabric with the vertical line, and now I am lining up the lines on the ruler with the lines on the mat, and that's just so I get a good, even cut and

that it's even all the way along. If I tilt that ruler, then my piece is gonna be a little bit out of alignment. Again, that is not a tragedy, and if you're looking for something that's a little bit more freeform, then you may not need to be as specific about how you cut it. But I do like my things to line up, so I'm just gonna take a little look before I go ahead and cut. Alright, this guy moved a little bit. I'm just gonna move him back. So there are various things that people use. Sometimes people use a handle. They like to put a handle on their ruler, and for them, it helps to keep the ruler stationary while they're cutting. When you're cutting a long length of the ruler, the ruler is gonna tend to move a little bit. It just wants to. I handle that by just moving my hand along the ruler as I do that cut. Other people like to use maybe a little, a sticky. You can buy these little sticky buttons and put them on the underside of the ruler, and that helps the ruler not to move while you're doing a long cut. But I'm just gonna travel with my hand. So I'm just cutting, and then I'm moving my hand as I cut. So my aim here is to get a little progression in terms of colors in these neutrals. So I'm cutting these guys. This is, if I remember correctly, there's a white in here, and this sort of light gray that I have here, and then this darker gray that's underneath. I have these two strips cut. I'm going to move those out and I have a little bit left here. I'm gonna get the biggest strip that I can from what I have left here, which I think looks like maybe about an inch and a quarter. So I'm gonna lay that in there. I'm gonna walk my hand down. And I'm always happy when this is the waste that I have, 'cause I can just throw that away. Okay, so I have cut these three colors. I have this sort of light, medium gray, this white, and this darker gray, and now I'm going to cut these two that I have a little bit more yardage. One thing about working with these grays that I have found is that if you are working with a sequence of grays, maybe from white to black, and maybe you have 10 colors in there, or eight or whatever. When you look at those grays, you're gonna find that they vary a lot in terms of the colors that they have mixed in. So you have some of your grays that are kind of pinky, some of them are a little bit brown, some of them are purplish, some of them are bluish. So when you're choosing a combination of neutrals from white to black, you have to sort of think about whether you wanna be particular about whether they're all sort of in the same color family, or whether you feel flexible in terms of how those grays are gonna play out across that spectrum. I'm not gonna be too fussy about whether they're all blue-grays or pinky-grays. Sometimes one will really stick out and I might eliminate it, but mostly I try to just go with whatever it is that I can see. But that was something that I remember being a little surprised about when I first started working with grays, that there was so much variation in those colors. Here sometimes I try to remember what colors I'm working with. If you're working with prints, there's always something along the selvedge that will tell you what that fabric is, you know, what fabric house it comes from, and maybe who the designer is, that sort of thing. But with solids, there's no selvedge identification, so sometimes I'll put a little sticker on there so I can see what it is so that I can pick the same color the next time if I really like it. The truth is, I'm not really very successful about keeping track of those things, but every once in a while, I try. Sometimes people ask me what my favorite solids are, and I'm really driven by color. Different fabrics have a different hand. Some of them are very flowy and soft. Some of them are a little bit more stalwart, a little more sturdy. Some of 'em are more ravelly than others, and you know, I guess I have preferences as far as those things go, but mostly I'm driven by color. So if I'm looking for a specific color, I usually don't really care who made it or whether it matches the other manufacturers that I'm using in that particular composition, because the color, color is king for me. When I have yardage, I want to line up the bottom. Here, I happen to have the fold for both of these fabrics along this bottom line. I wanna keep that straight, smooth it out, and I'm gonna want to clean up this edge here because you can see, although it's a little bit

hard, because this lower gray is about the same color as the mat, but this is extending out a little bit, so I wanna even that up. So I'm just gonna lay this in here, and I wanna take off the smallest amount possible so that I get the most out of my fabric, but I definitely wanna make sure I get both, you know, all the layers evenly. Okay, so, and you know, one of those wisdoms that people like to repeat is measure twice and cut once. It's relatively easy to get off line and cut not on a even line, so I like to look at it a couple times. Alright, that looks good. I'm gonna take my little trash end off there. I'm gonna cut a couple of one-inch pieces because I have these one-inch ones over here, and then I'm gonna cut one that's one and a quarter. That way, I'll have a similar selection of sizes. It really is fine if you do have that variation. You don't have to be, you know, super all the same, same, same. It's fine if your sizes vary a little bit, but I like to have some options to work with. Alright, I'm gonna cut two little one-inchers, and then we'll start some sewing. Sometimes I'll run it a second time if my blade is not at its peak cutting capacity. And my last one here. And sometimes it will migrate a little bit. Alrighty. So there are my strips in my neutrals. I have five colors in there. Now I'm going to go ahead to the sewing machine and start to sew those together. Sewing my strips together, I usually like to have them laid out here so I can see what I'm working with so that I can remember what the sequence is, and sometimes if I am feeling a little absent-minded or if I have a lot going on, I might even just take a picture of that so I know what the order is of this strip set that I am gonna work with. I think I'm okay. I only have five colors here. I'm going to also notice here that these two guys are probably about the same value, so I'm not sure that I'm really getting a pure progression in these colors, but I don't really care. I like the grays, so I'm just trying to get this sort of selection of grays. I'm keeping this here to look at just so that we can remember with one-inch pieces of fabric, I'm going to get these narrow finished visible lines. So it's going to be a fairly narrow piece that I finish up with. As I put these together, I wanna mention that one of the things that sometimes will happen is that if I am sewing a bunch of strips together, sometimes the pressure on the presser foot in combination with the backwards pull of the feed dogs will, sometimes it'll stretch the top layer just a little bit, and that creates sort of a curve in your finished piece. There's a few different ways to attack that problem. One is to try to alternate the direction of the seams. So if I sew this seam from the top to bottom, then when I sew the next one, I might wanna sew from the bottom. That's a little bit hard for me to keep track of, but I have found that this second workaround works well for me. I put my finger in between the two, my index finger between the two layers as I'm sewing, and that means that this lower layer is going between these two fingers and it puts a little bit of drag on that lower piece, which sort of functions to ease some of that pressure difference. It might or might not work for you, but you could try it if you have a problem with curling. The other thing, though, is that, since we are cutting all of these pieces up in order to make our compositions, you can adjust for some of that curl as you cut them. You can sort of even them out, so it's not really a huge issue if you have some curling on your strip. Alright, I'm just gonna get my foot pedal moving here, and then drop this in. I'm trying to maintain a fairly constant seam allowance. It's a good thing for uniformity in your finished strip, but it's also good for the integrity of the piece when you're finished. If you have a whole lot of variation in terms of seam allowance, if your seam allowance gets too narrow in some spots, sometimes it'll pop, particularly if you have a fabric that tends to ravel, so you wanna keep that quarter inch as constant as you can. Alright, so I'm just going to go along. I'm keeping my edges even, (sewing machine whirring) and I'm trying to hit the same spot all the time in terms of where the edge of the fabric hits the marks on the throat plate, and whatever it is, you know, I often say that when you're working with seam allowances, you wanna make sure that the machine you're working on, you have a reasonable quarter-inch relationship with that machine. I

have some machines where it's difficult for me to get a constant seam allowance. I really don't know why. It's probably me and not the machine. And I have other machines where it's really very easy for me. So when I'm doing a lot of seam allowance sewing, I try to make sure that I have the good machine for that. (sewing machine whirring) And I'm just, again, trying to make sure (sewing machine whirring) that I keep these edges even. (sewing machine whirring) And if you're sewing selvedge to selvedge, this part can get a little boring, because it's a long way from one end to the other. (sewing machine whirring) You know, the longer pieces you sew, (sewing machine whirring) the more construction you have to work with. So it's sort of a payoff. (sewing machine whirring) (sewing machine whirring) (sewing machine whirring) Alright, so there we are. We have the first pair sewn together. When I am sewing these strips together, I try to be conscious of which way I am pressing. If I'm working a two-color strip here, like this one, I'm gonna press toward the dark, because if I press the other way, I risk some show through of that black edge under the white. If I have a progression of colors, I will usually try to press them all the same way. It helps when you get to the end and you wanna cut them and sew them together. It helps if they're all pressing in the same direction. So I'm going to just do a little initial finger press on this. So I'm just rolling that seam and just creasing it a little bit with my thumb. I have the bottle cap, which I love to use, but when I'm just doing a twin here, like two fabrics, it's a little bit easier to just roll it between my fingers and just get that crease in. I'm not, you know, creasing it forever and all time. I'm just making sure that I open that seam up and get all of it laid to one side. Alright, so there's my first set. I'm gonna go ahead and sew my other pairs and then sew this together, so you can see what it looks like when I have it all done. I have two pairs sewn together here in my little run from white to dark gray. Generally, I like to sew my pairs together. I'm gonna join these two, and then I'll add my fifth strip onto that construction. Often I am putting together more colors at a time. I might have a run of 10, or you know, whatever number. I generally like to go in pairs and then join my pairs together. It just works well for my brain. Also, if you do find that you want to try to control that curl by alternating the direction of your seams, then sewing in pairs is convenient, because it gives you a place to change direction. Here we go. (sewing machine whirring) (sewing machine whirring) I'm just gonna give this a little press as I go along, and then I will hit it with the iron a little bit later. And once I get this press in, then I can add my last color there, and then I'll have my five-color progression. And here's all my colors. And again, you can see this is a pretty narrow strip set. The nice thing about this when we get to the composition phase is I can cut sections of this and run them together. So I can take a fairly short section of strips and add them to each other to get a longer piece. So it doesn't only have to cover this three or four inches of space that we have here. Okay, and there it is. You get that nice progression of color from the light into the dark gray. And once it's pressed, it will lay nice and flat, and we can do lots of things with it. Keep making your fabric constructions, and I will talk to you about some other options for sequencing your fabrics in those constructions.

Fabric construction options

- I have a bunch of suggestions for you in terms of the kinds of fabric constructions that you can do. You can of course use whatever kinds of fabrics that you wanna use in any order, but I have a few suggestions, a few recipes that will help you get started, and will give you some nice effects in terms of the colors and the fabrics that you're gonna put together. The first option I have here is a straight color gradation. Up here we have a red, through the pinks into orange. We have a sort of an earth tone gradation. We have blues. It does not have to be a strictly perfect step gradation from one color to another. You can use what you have on hand, or you can use what you want to see.

Again, here I have a bunch of different options that you can use to get a gradation going. One of the things that's fun about this is then as you start to put things together, you can take that same gradation and you can reverse the order on it so that you get a little bit of tension between the colors as these are running up and these are running down. Here we have those neutrals that we were sewing before. Here's a wider option and an even wider option. You can mix all of those different scales of constructions, and of course, you can mix your neutrals in with your colors as well. Here I have a combination of these two. So I have this color gradation from this sort of olive green to the lighter green to yellow, to orange, to darker orange to red, but at the same time, in the same construction, I have a neutral gradation running here from black to gray, lighter gray, lighter, lighter and into white. And the play of those neutrals against the colors gradation is really interesting. It really sort of draws the eye. It's kind of iridescent. It's a great little trick for pulling those colors out and sort of manipulating them so that they really sing. Here I have gradations again, but now what I am doing is spacing those gradations with another color. So here I have sort of a brown to tawny yellow gradation, and I'm breaking that up with little narrow bits of gray. Here I have a slightly darker earthy color gradation, and I'm breaking that up with this orange. And here I have a blue to a green, and I kick this sort of brickly red in with that. So sometimes I will try something and I'm not really sure how much I'm gonna like it. I'm still thinking about this one and trying to figure out whether I like it or not. But sometimes I wanna be bold and I wanna throw something in there that's kind of unpredictable. Sometimes it works out fabulous, and other times, you know, I'm not so sure. So I'm still kind of looking at this one and trying to figure out whether that's a favorite or not. Here I have, I have a couple things going on. So I have a gradation here with this green to this aqua and turquoise, and then yellow. And again, it doesn't have to be necessarily a logical gradation, you just have a progression of colors. But I'm also running a gradation the other way, similar to this one where I have the white and the black and the gray running this way. And then through all of it, I have this turquoise. So if you have, you know, a favorite color and you wanna take three different kinds of gradations and sort of tie them together, one of the ways to do that is to just represent a little bit of that color in each of your runs. Here I have an example of playing with size. So if you look here, this one has some large expanses of color separated by these very narrow lines of black. Here I have just some repetitive lines, very narrow. And what I usually do with these, because it's a little tedious to salvage, you know, a whole lot of these little tiny lines. I'll do a line of this, and then after I cut it up, I'll join them on top of each other. So I get a repetitive line of those narrow sections, which is really nice. And then here, you know, there's a little bit of variety here in my sizing. And here again, I have some narrow sizing. Here's some examples of introducing some prints and stripes. I love stripes, I love stripes, and I love a little narrow line of stripes interrupting something else. So here I have some color gradations. Here we have this little orange to the pink to the purple. And this one is separated with a very nice little gray and white stripe, which is pretty, a fairly regular stripe. Here I have a gradation from the green to the blue, and this is a little linen woven stripe. When I use that, I get not only that stripe, but also the texture from the woven stripe. It's really very pleasing. And then here I have, you know, some more gradations with stripes. And here just a white with a little black and white stripe in there. And again, it just makes the colors jump, it makes an impact on the eye that's really, really pleasing. And then here, these two piles are just sort of random stripe compositions, sweet little colors. Here I've got a lot of texture with some linen, and this stripy woven, it has some dark threads running through it. It gives me, you know, nice texture and it's sort of rough. And I love to work with linens and with wovens that have something going on. And then here I just have some neutrals that have no particular pattern. I've just run a

bunch of neutrals together. Here I have some white on white, which again gives me a little bit of texture, but it's subtle. And then I have it running with some linen, which also gives me texture and is fun. And then here I am introducing some large scale prints. This is one of my favorites. And what I like about doing this is if I cut one inch strips of whatever fabrics that I wanna run through here, if I split the print and then make sure I keep it in order, then I can sew these strips in with those strips of the pattern fabric. And because I'm using up a quarter inch of this fabric and a quarter inch of the print fabric, it looks as though I'm just laying color on top of the print. So here I have this black and white print, which I love. This is an old one by Sony Ruffin, and I think I've bought all of it that's out there, so sorry. And I'm running different kinds of red through that. So I get a subtle difference with the different reds, and I get to retain the print that I have going on here. I don't always put prints in when I am working on a ribbon quilt, but sometimes I like to throw them in. And you get the same sort of rich, textured result with prints that you do with solids. So you know, give them a try once in a while just to see what they do for you. And once you've accumulated enough of the constructions, you have enough variety, you have the colors that you like, then you can move on to determining your infrastructure and then cutting and sewing together your constructions into your final composition.

Build your composition

- Now here I am with a big old pile over here of fabric constructions that I can use to start on my composition. I'm gonna start with this little neutral one that we did together earlier, and I've decided that I'm gonna build my composition in columns. So I'm going to be going sort of vertically and I'm going to be building vertically and horizontally and then putting my columns together into a final composition. Now I'm just gonna let you know that I don't know what this is gonna look like when I get finished. I know there are some folks who maybe have a vision of what their composition will look like when they're finished. I have some ideas about how I wanna get to that point, but I don't really have a vision in my head of what this quilt will look like. We're gonna go there together and we'll all be surprised, pleasantly, I hope. Here's the piece that we were working on earlier. This is a neutral gradation, and since I'm gonna be working with columns, I wanna build this up in a sort of a vertical direction. So I'm going to cut some pieces of this and join them together so I can get a more vertical representation. So let's just go ahead and do that. I can see that I have a little bit of narrowing along here, so I'm going to take that piece off so I have a more uniform line of stuff to work with. And since I'm gonna be doing a fairly small composition for the purposes of this class, I'm usually a very big quilt girl, as you can see behind me. But since I'm gonna be using smaller pieces, I'm gonna cut three inch sections of this and I'm gonna stack 'em up and see how they look. My ruler is conveniently three inches wide, so we might be repeating this as we go along, 'cause it's handy. And I'm just lining this up. I'm gonna line up the edge of my ruler against the vertical lines on the mat, just to try to keep it as square as possible. And I'm just gonna go ahead and lop these off. So once I get a few of these cut, then I can stack them up and just sort of look at them. Sometimes I will build this sort of thing on a design wall, but since we're making a small composition, I'm just gonna build it on the tabletop so we can just look at it and see how it's coming together. So let's see. I've cut 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 of these and we're just gonna stack them in the same sequence, and that's giving me a nice long piece. So I think I'm good with that. Another thing I could think about if I wanted to would be to alternate and switch the direction so that the gradation would be going from dark to light, light to dark, dark to light, light to dark, dark to light. You can slice these bits up and then use that gradation to create whatever kind of directional event that you wanna create. I'm

gonna move these over here to the sort of design portion and then talk about some other options that you have. So I wanna reach over here and pick one of my color gradations. I'll just pick this one because it's handy. One of the things that I like to do is to run a reverse on a gradation, and I'll show you what I mean by that. So I'm gonna stack them. So I have two layers here, and I'm gonna go with this same three inch width for right now. And I'm gonna give myself a couple of these. You'll notice that I am, I am not cutting all of the pieces of a particular construction at the same time. I wanna retain some of these larger pieces in case I need them later on for, you know, some other, some other thing. So when I take these and if I lay them against each other where one side is running one direction and the other side is running the other, I can get sort of a tension between those colors as they interact with each other and it gives me a sort of a nice effect. So let's take this over here and just sort of play with it there. Another thing I like to do, and you can see I've done it here, is if I have a construction, you know, that has a particular run, sometimes I want to insert something else into that action so I get a little bit of a, I don't know, I get interaction between this piece and the surrounding area and it gives me a nice interest. And I can also reference this against a repeat of this particular sequence elsewhere in the composition. So I'm gonna move this over here and let's try that. So let's see what color we wanna go with. I think I'm going to use this blue to green gradation. And let me fold this and I'm going to, you can see I have a little bit of an uneven situation going on here. So I wanna lop off a little bit of that just to even it up 'cause I want a nice straight line along this edge. So I'm gonna do that insertion there. And say, I want to insert a piece of this construction that has the stripes with the white and say, I wanna stick that in the middle of that. So what I need to do is to give myself a piece of that. I'm going to even up my edge and let's stick with that three inch situation. And I'm just coming up with a random width. So here's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 inches. So I'm gonna take a six inch piece of this construction, and let's say I wanna put this in here. What I would like to do with this, as I look at it, I see that the sizing on these pieces is slightly different, and I would really like it if those stripes will come in at a different place than the stripes that are in the background. So I'm just gonna position this in such a way as to try to get a little variation there. I'm gonna need my seam ripper, and what I'm gonna do is figure out where along here I want to break into this part. I'm gonna do that right here. And this is again, my favorite friend, and I'm just gonna pop this out here down to about there, and I'm gonna pop this out. So basically I am taking out the stitching on a couple of lines here. Then I'm going to trim out that middle piece. And if I were feeling particularly, you know, exact in terms of proportion, I might, you know, do some measuring to make this exactly in the middle. I don't really care about that. So I'm gonna fold those back and I'm gonna cut out a piece of this part that's in the background. Then I'm gonna sew this in here, and then I'll come back in and resow this bit onto here and then resow these seams. So I'll have that nice insert of that other set of strips in there. So I'm just gonna move this over to the "I'll be sewing it shortly" area. So I think at this point it's a good time for me to start putting some of these pieces together and then I can lay them out and look at them and then think about what my next action will be when I'm putting together a quilt like this. That's usually how I do it. I will sew some bits and then put them together, take a look at it, sew some more bits, put those together until I reach the end of my piece. Again, I'm going to be building this in columns, so I'm going to start from this end and just build out as I go along. So I wanna do some sewing now so that you can see the technique to do these inserts. And then we will take a look at how it's coming together and think about what we wanna add next. I'm chain piecing these neutrals together so I can get a nice long stretch to put in on one of my columns. I wanna make sure that I'm putting them in in the same order so I get the same pattern. Add this one into this one, this guy off the end, add him into this one. So you can see,

I'm getting this nice progression of pieces that I can run down one side. So there's our neutral spot for the eye to rest. I finished piecing this long neutral piece. Now I'm going to engineer getting this black and white inserted into this other piece here. So I've already picked out these stitches and I gave myself a cut. Here's the other piece from this section of that, and now I'm going to sew this fella in here. Then I'll sew this end back on this end and close up the seams that I've cut and then trim it off. So here we go. I'm gonna pull that out so it doesn't get in the way. Okay, I'm gonna add this on here and then when I sew everything together, I'll crop that little bit off. All righty, because this is got so much white in it, I'm gonna make sure that when I press this, I'm gonna press away from the white so I don't get any show through on this white fabric, right there. I'll use my little finger pressing tool to press that. And again, I wanna press towards these darker colors so I don't get any show through on that white. Now I can flip this back, flip this out. I'm going to re sew that seam and I'm gonna re sew this seam and then I'll trim off what's left over here. And this is just a nice way to showcase one of the constructions against the other there. So now you see I've re sewn those seams that I had picked out to get this in there, and now I can take my ruler and just trim off this excess. And I have that nice insert of that white against this color gradation here. So I can use this anywhere I want in this composition. Let's sew these two together so we get some of that working against the grain as it were. So I'm gonna get those color gradations working against one another. You get a little bit of tension. I'm gonna give this a little press. My composition is starting to come together a bit. I think I need maybe another piece of this in here. And then this is sort of interesting how this color is gonna run into its sibling here. So I'm gonna stick something else in there. Perhaps one of these. All right? So this is the process that I go through when I'm building a composition. I will add some bits together and then take a look at them and then think about what other features I would like to see, which ones I want to repeat and whether I want to put a new feature in along with what I already have. So I'm gonna give this a little press and there we are there. And how convenient that that's the same size. So I can go ahead, flip this, sew this together, and I'm starting to build my column down here. What I'm gonna do as I do this is I'm going to build them long enough so that then I can stack them horizontally. So I'm gonna add a little something more to this piece so I can reach down toward the end of this. I'm gonna build that out and then I'm gonna start building this one down with some of these extra features. If I were to decide that I wanted to put this down at the bottom here, I would think about what kind of feature I would wanna add in here. Maybe I would wanna repeat this black and white at this edge here. Let's see what that looks like so that I get that black and white popping in the middle of this piece and then repeating here along the side. And that will get me down to the bottom here. And then I can look at this and see, okay, what do I wanna see happening in here with this piece? So I'm gonna work on this one a little bit more and we'll see how it develops as we move along towards the right to finish up the composition. (bright music) I've been working on this composition for a little while and I think I've gotten to where I want to be. I have this nice strip of this neutral here. Then I have three quadrants of these sort of inset bits. We have some color gradations here. We have some colors with the stripes in here. And then here I've popped in some more gradations and a little bit of this sort of neutral brown and gold, a little bit of white with the black and white and finishing off with the neutral brown and gold and a few inserts of some smaller stripes. So I'm loving the way this is looking, and right now it's in four different pieces. I have my black and white here. I have this piece here. I have third column here. All right, four pieces, five pieces, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. And this last bit here, I'm gonna join these together. Now this piece here is a little bit tall, and so what I'm going to do is sew this along this line and then whatever excess I have up here, I'm just gonna pick that part away and

then put whatever is left back in my reservoir of fabric constructions. Then I will come over here. Sew this piece on, then I'll sew this and sew this, and as I sew them on, I'm going to just keep an eye on what's going on up here in terms of how the pieces are coming together and matching so that I can crop that up there at a reasonable spot that makes sense for continuity. Most of the piecing that I've been doing so far, I have not been using pins, but I am going to do a little bit of pinning as I sew these longer pieces together because I don't wanna have a situation where I have some stretch going on on one of the pieces and that I end up with an uneven meet between those pieces. Okay, so I'm gonna start from here and I'm gonna join as I go across. I'll pick this out after my first join, and I should be at the end of my small composition and I'm looking forward to seeing it all together. Here we go. Here we are with the last seam, just keeping my eye on that quarter inch. Again, I do like to pin as I'm sewing these pieces together, just so I don't get any distortion from a stretch. Right here comes our big ta-da, and here we are. Compositionally, the things that we have done here. We wanted to put a little bit of neutral along this edge to sort of quiet down some of the color that was happening in here. Same here, a little bit of white to quiet things down. We did some insets so that we get that nice contrast between the background gradations and the insets. Here we have this lovely little piece where we have the color gradation going one way and the neutral gradation going the other, and I think it all comes together pretty nicely. I'm going to need to trim off this end just to get it even and give it a good press. And then that's our piece. I have some other examples, small examples to show you. Here, I have a black and white composition, very simple, all black and white, and a limited number of different variations on the stripping. Here we have a piece where I've used those strips to try to mimic the energy and the rhythm that's happening in this fabric, which I particularly like. So you can combine your pieced sections with large print sections of fabric if you have some particular ones that you really like. And then I have here a test piece for the triangle infrastructure. So here I had really not regular color gradations at all. I was combining the greens with purple and yellow, and I just sort of tried to distribute and scatter those colors all around that piece. So you see, you can go with something that has a whole lot of colors like this one or very few like the black and white, or this one, which has really a pretty limited palette, and yet you can still get some impact and some interest with those colors that you run together. As you can see, there's not a limit to the kinds of combinations that you can come up with. There's not a strict pattern as to how to put these together. It really has to do with the constructions that you have to work with and how you decide to put them together. So the one that we have done here is built on a column infrastructure. So we have straight columns joined together vertically and then join together horizontally to give us that full composition. Again, you can choose from among any number of different infrastructures to put together your composition.