

# Molly's Sketchbook: A Rotary Cutting Tutorial

February 14, 2008

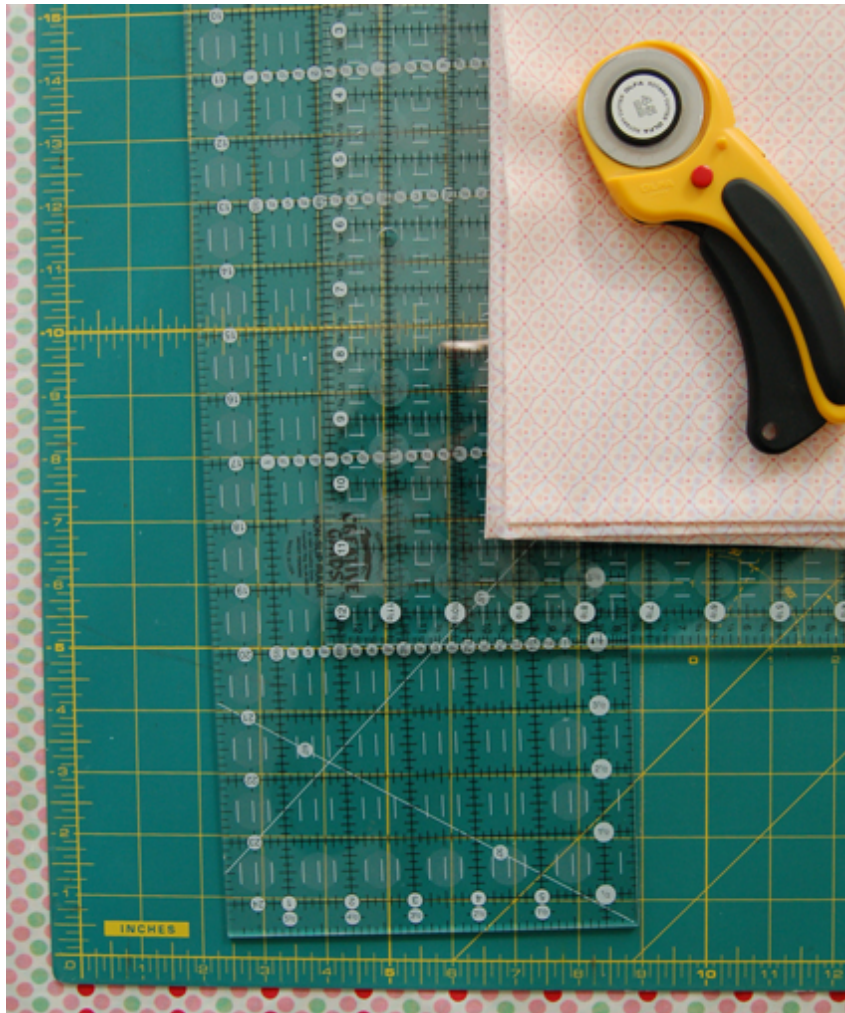
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Rotary cutting can be intimidating to the uninitiated but with a few instructions and tips it can be both safe and easy. Rotary cutting is a true time saver and makes such clean and accurate cuts that once you learn how to do it you'll never look back! --Molly



## Materials



- Safety Lock 45mm Rotary Cutter
- 24-inch x 36-inch Self-Healing Cutting Mat (you can certainly use a smaller cutting mat but using the biggest mat you can fit on your table will make the process much more manageable)
- 6.5-inch x 24-inch Non-Slip Ruler (it is very important to use a non-slip ruler made for rotary cutting, **for your safety, do not attempt to rotary cut with a regular ruler**)
- 12.5-inch x 12.5-inch square Non-Slip Ruler
- 1/2 to 1 yard of fabric.

### Tips Before You Start



This is a **Rotary Cutter**. It's basically a razor blade wheel so you will want to be thoughtful and careful when handling it. The rotary cutters we sell all have a safety lock, it's the little red button. In the above picture the button is pushed to the left so the safety lock is engaged. While it's locked it will not allow you to squeeze the black lever on the bottom which pushes out the blade. To ensure safe handling always engage the safety immediately after cutting.

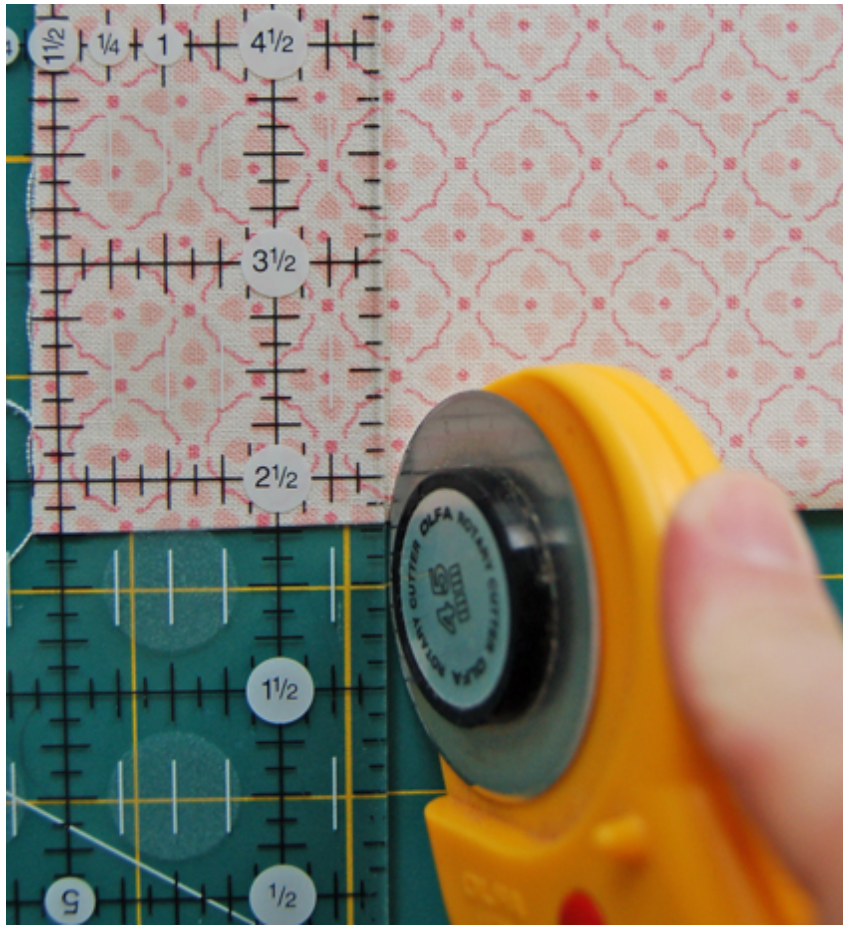
I'm right handed so these pictures and instructions are for righties. If you're left handed be sure to set up your rotary cutter for left handed cutting and reverse left and right in all these directions.





Here is the cutter and my hand in cutting position. The safety is off and I am squeezing the black lever, which pushes out the blade. My hand and wrist make a nice straight line and my index finger is pressing against the non-slip section on the top. Some people prefer to keep their index finger on the right side of the cutter or against the black lever, but whichever way you prefer it's important to keep your wrist straight. This will help prevent a repetitive motion injury.





When you are ready to make your cuts there are a few important things to remember:

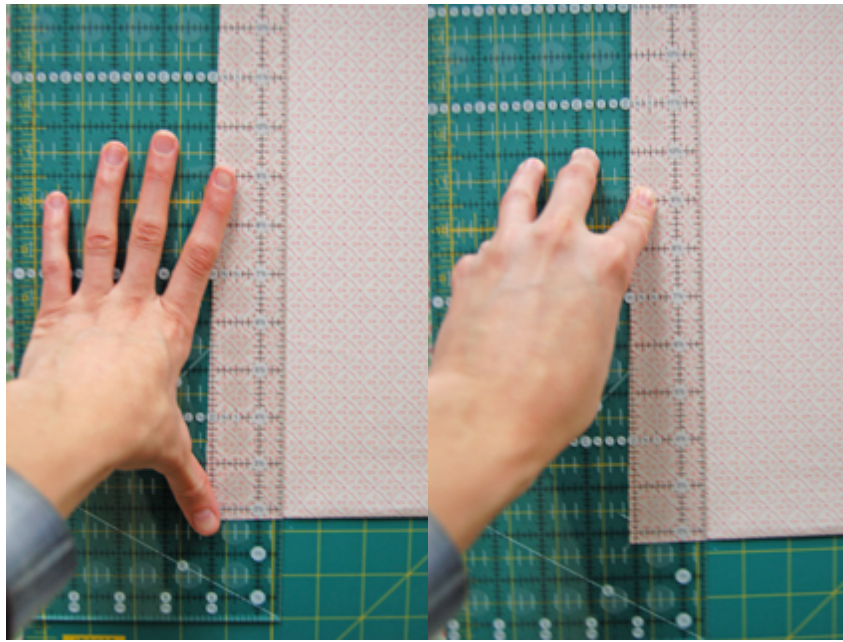
- Always cut away from yourself!
- Apply constant, even pressure when cutting. (When first learning to use the rotary cutter people are often afraid of the blade and so they don't push hard enough or sometimes they push too hard, which can be dangerous. You don't have to push super hard but you do have to apply pressure. Don't worry if you need to try it a few times to get it right.)
- Make sure to place your blade against the edge of your ruler before you start cutting. If the blade is too far away your cut will be wobbly and if you start with your blade on your ruler you could seriously cut your ruler hand.





- Never, ever, ever, let one of your fingers hang off of the edge of the ruler as you are cutting.





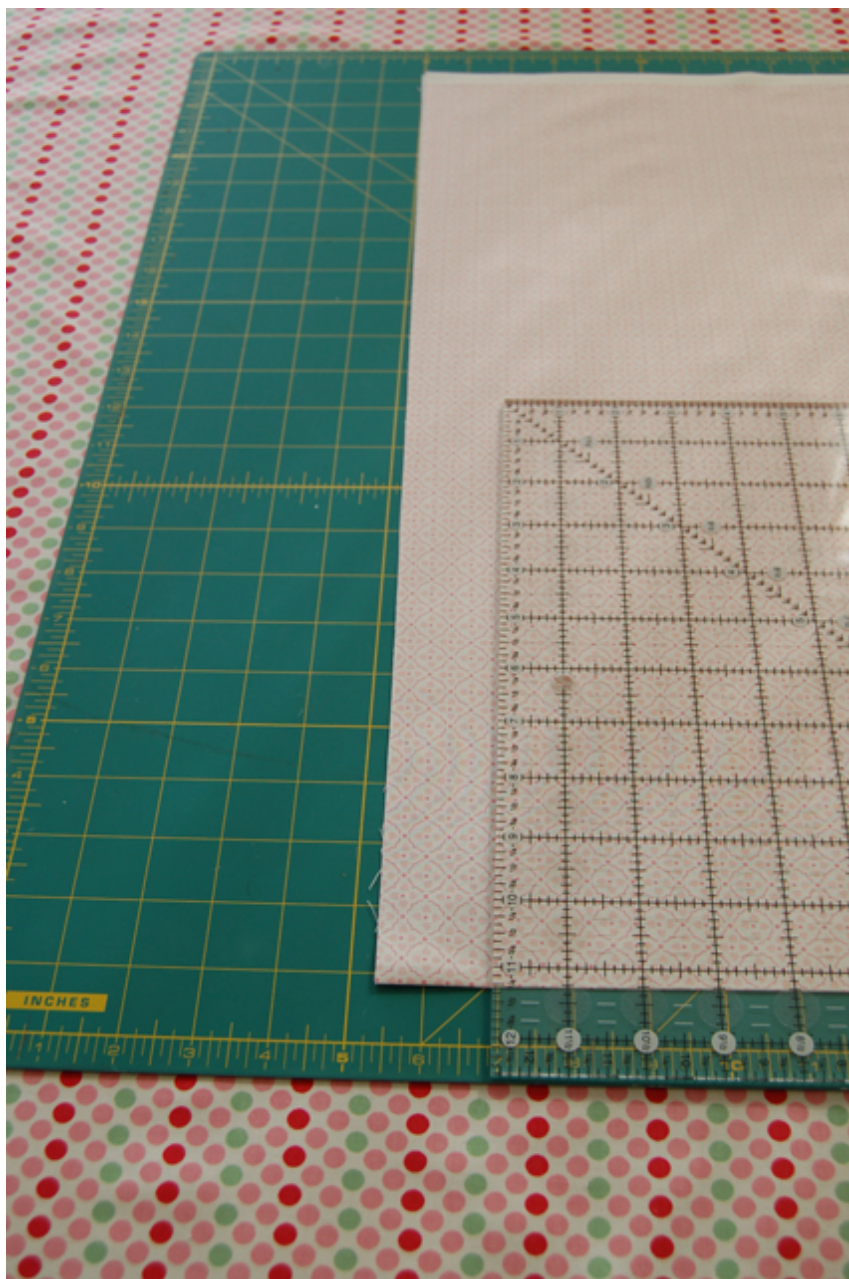
- In order to keep your cuts straight push the ruler down firmly with the whole length of your left hand. Inch your hand like an inchworm up the ruler as you cut to keep it in place, as shown in the pictures above.
- Keep the rotary cutter away from and out of the reach of children at all times.
- Change your blade as soon as it shows signs of becoming dull.

## Squaring Up



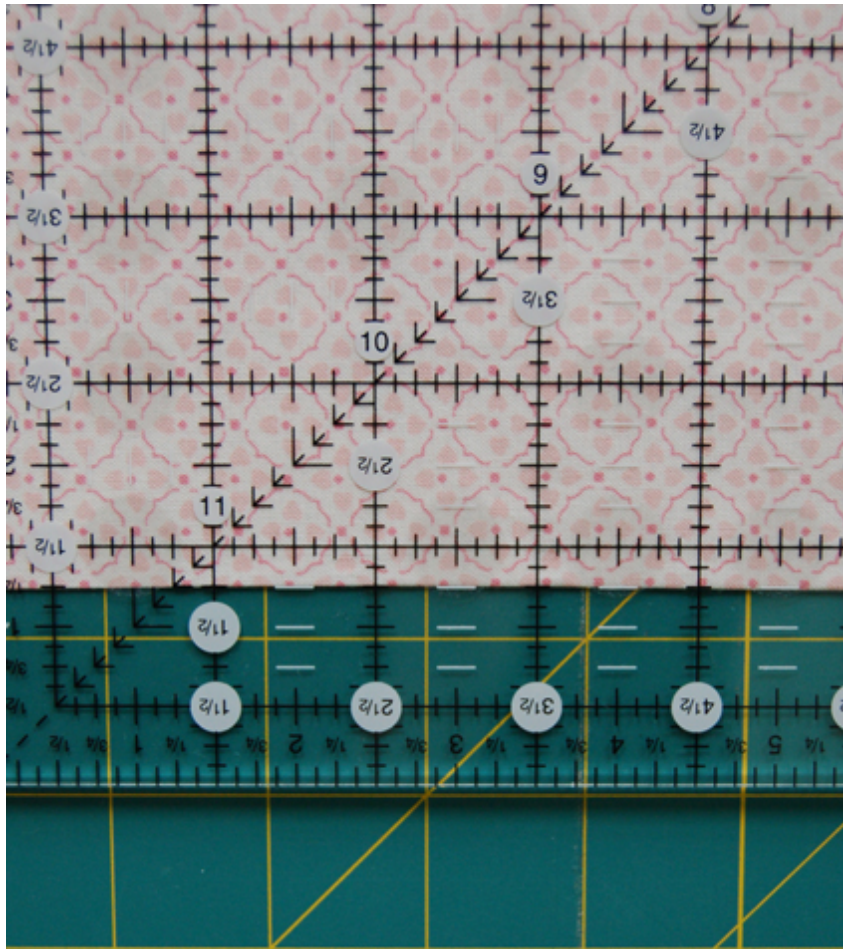
Fold your fabric selvage to selvage and place it on the cutting mat with the fold at the bottom and the selvages at the top.

**Note:** You will not be using the grid on your cutting mat to measure where to cut so it doesn't matter where you place the fabric in relation to that grid.

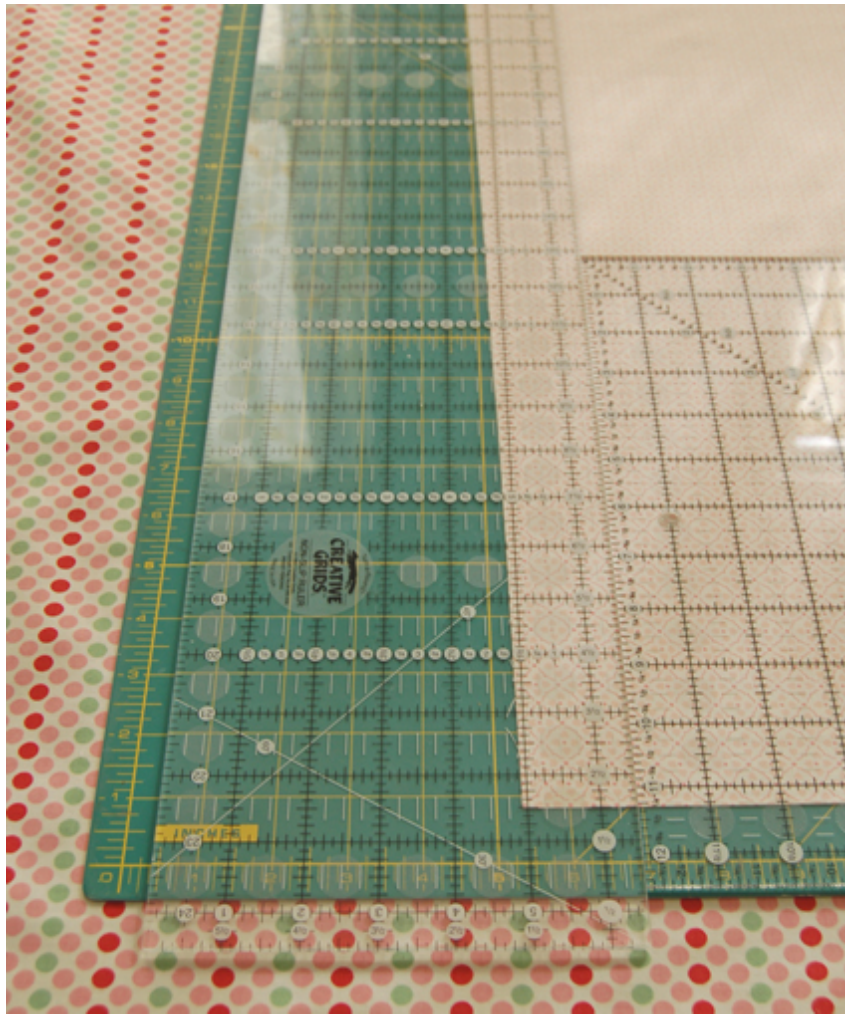


Place the 12.5-inch square ruler along the bottom of the fold, with it's left edge about 1.5-inches from the left edge of the fabric. Make sure that the ruler is exactly straight against the fold as show in the picture below:

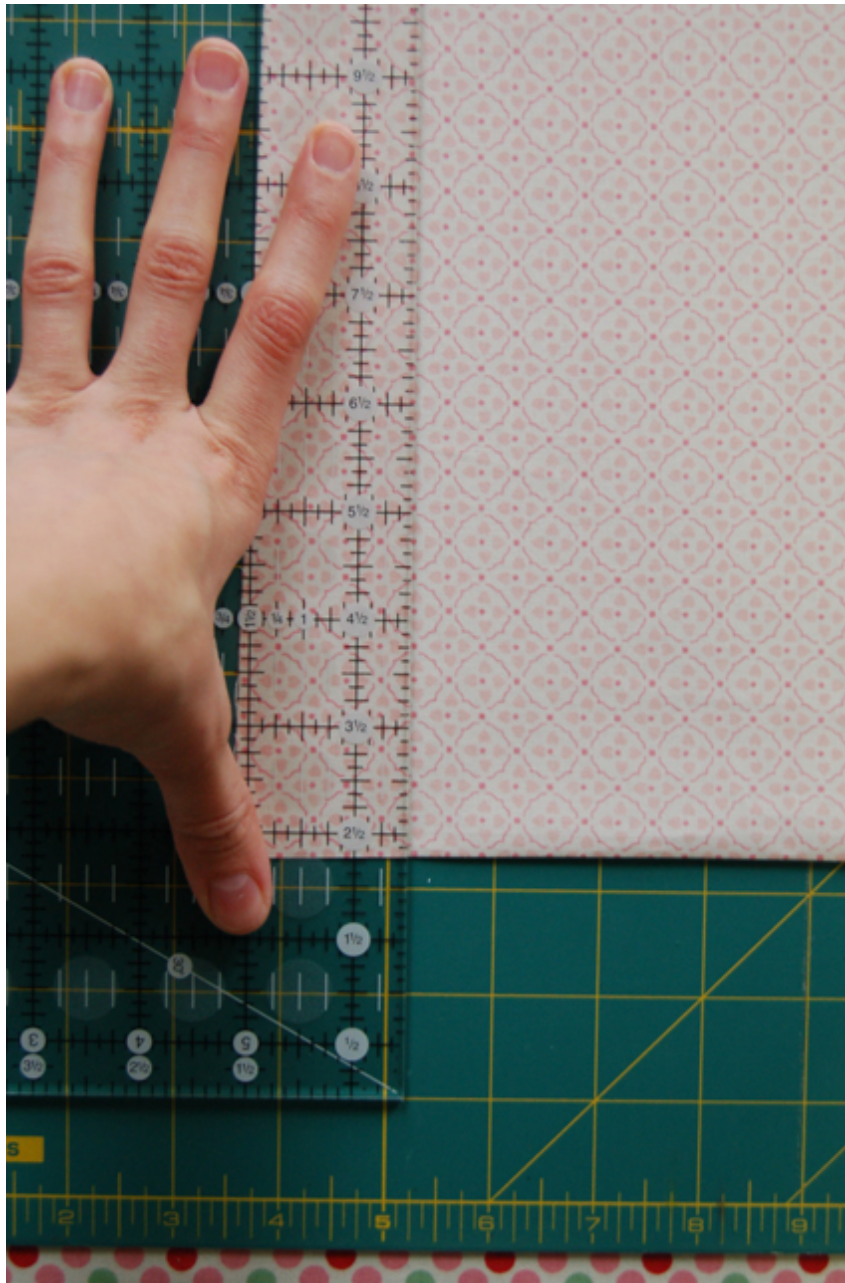




I lined up the third white line from the bottom on the 12.5-inch square ruler perfectly with the fold. Make sure you line this up very carefully (it doesn't matter what line you use on the ruler, you're just getting a straight line, not taking a measurement.)

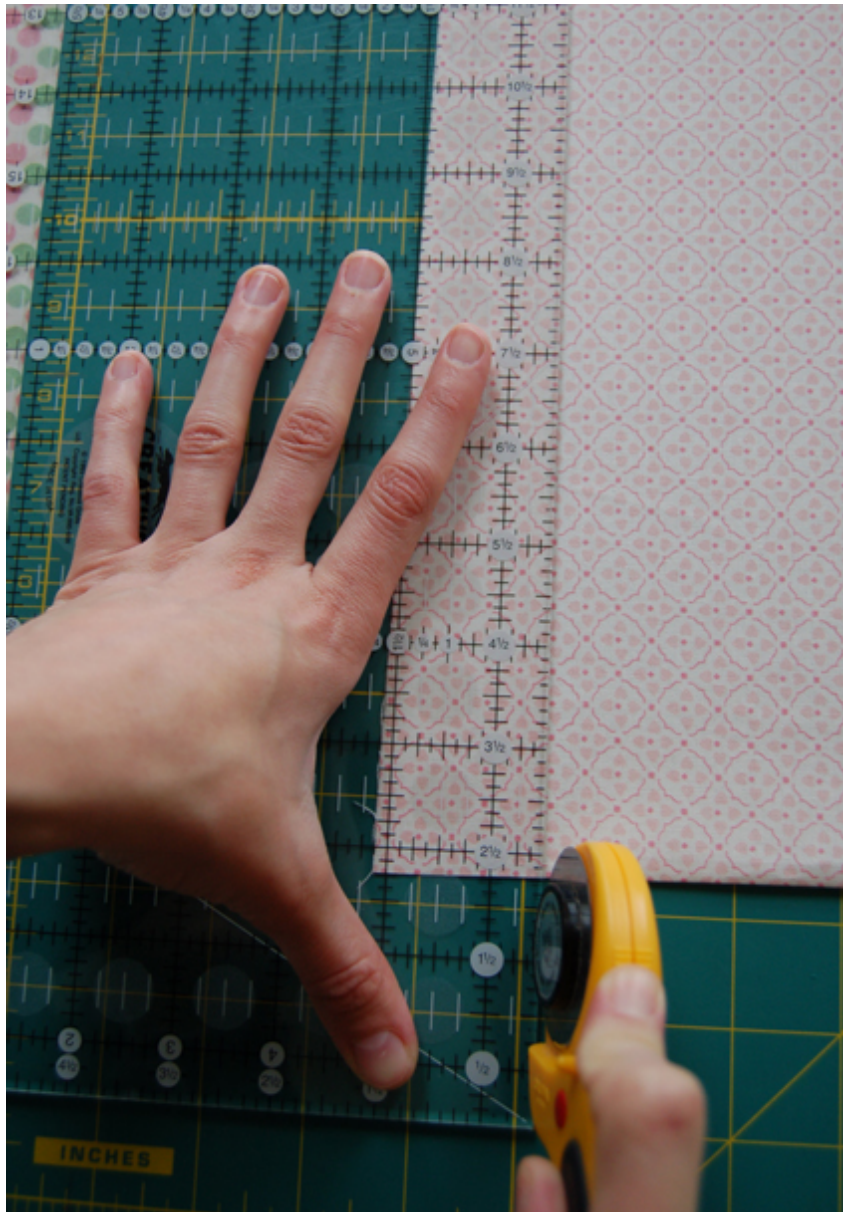


Place your 6.5-inch x 24.5-inch ruler vertically against the left hand side of the square ruler. Be careful not to jostle the square ruler as you place the long ruler.



Place your hand on the long ruler to anchor it and remove the square ruler.





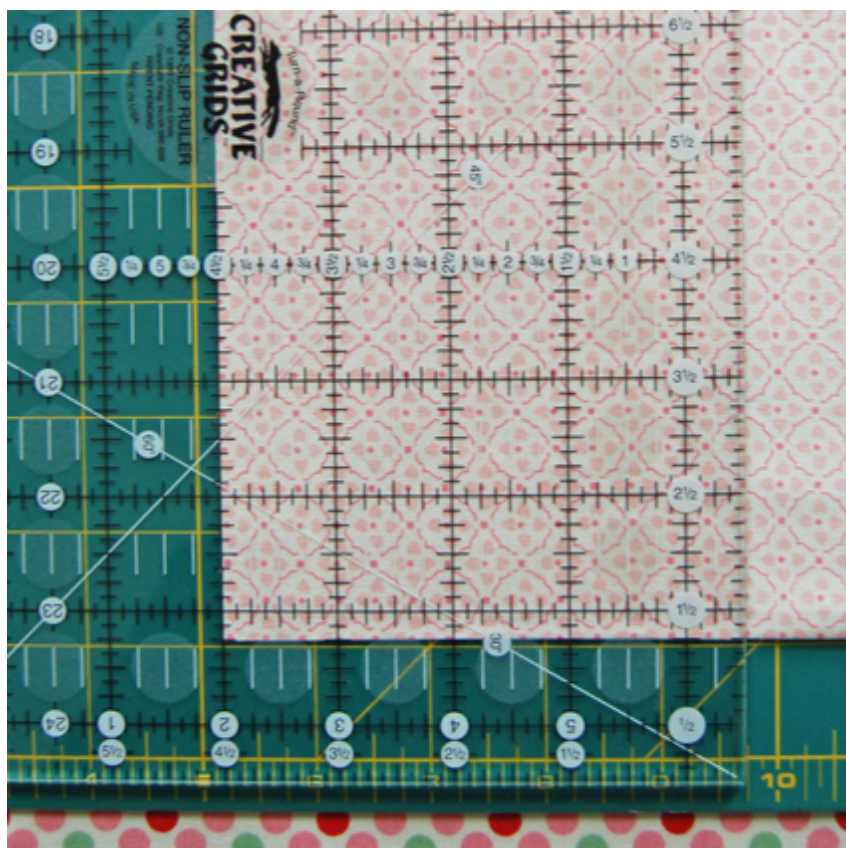
Pick up your rotary cutter and cut along the right side of your long ruler. Your fabric is now "squared up" with the fold meaning it's been cut at a perfect 90 degree angle.



## Cutting Strips

The next step in rotary cutting is usually cutting a strip. This strip can either be used in strip piecing - where strips are sewn together along their long sides and then these sewn strips are cut together - or the strips can be cut again into rectangles or squares as I show in the next section.

For this tutorial I cut 4.5-inch strips, but the same directions will apply regardless of the size of your particular strips.



Place your long ruler exactly 4.5-inches (or however wide you need your strips) from the left edge of the fabric. Make sure that the fabric's edge lines up with the 4.5-inch mark on the ruler along the entire length of the left side of fabric, from the fold to the selvage. Use the marks on the bottom horizontal edge of the ruler to make sure the folded side is also perfectly straight. If both the left side and the bottom folded size of the fabric are lined up correctly you're ready to cut your strip.

**Note:** The rotary rulers can seem confusing to measure with at first. One side starts with a 1/2-inch measurement and the other side starts with a whole inch. In addition to this there are a lot of numbers going in different directions. In the picture above notice that the fabric is lined up with the 4-1/2-inch mark but also an upside-down 2-inch mark. It's good to double check that you've lined up to the correct place before you cut. It takes a little practice to get the hang of it, but once you do, you'll appreciate all of the markings, I promise!

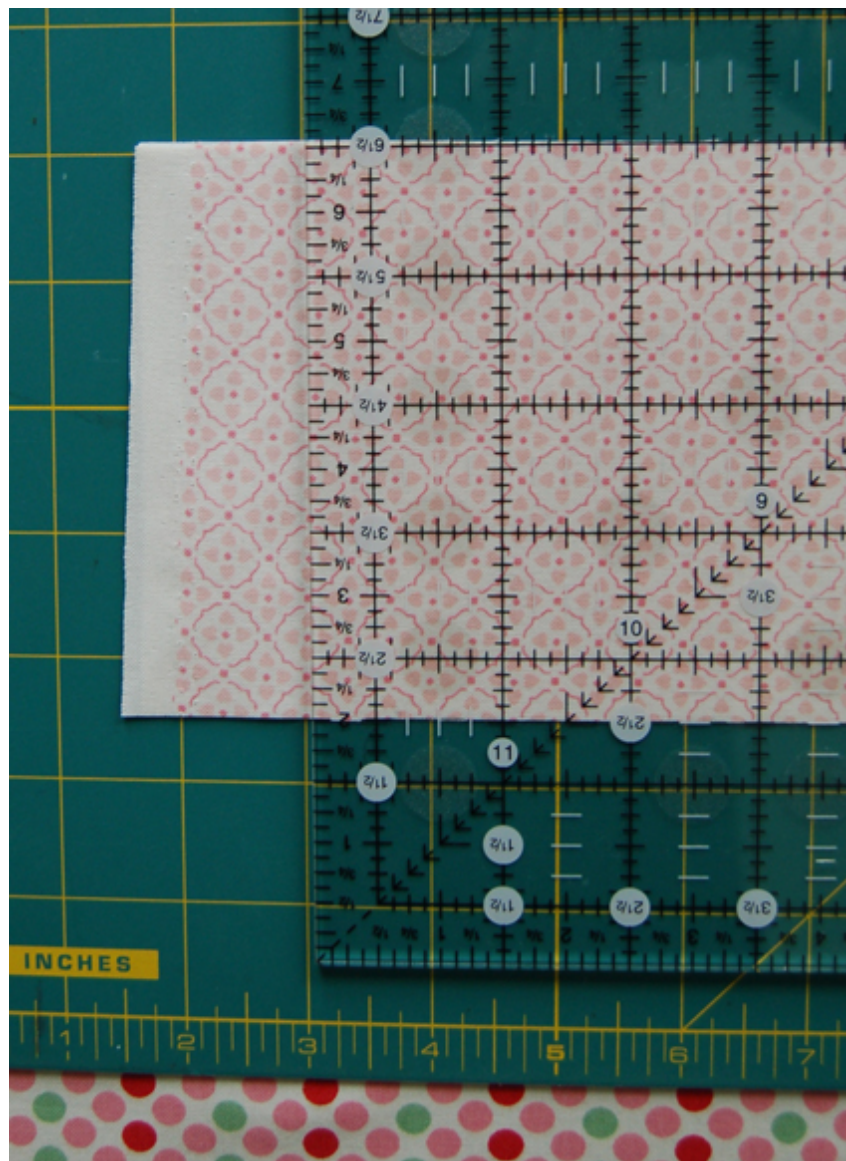




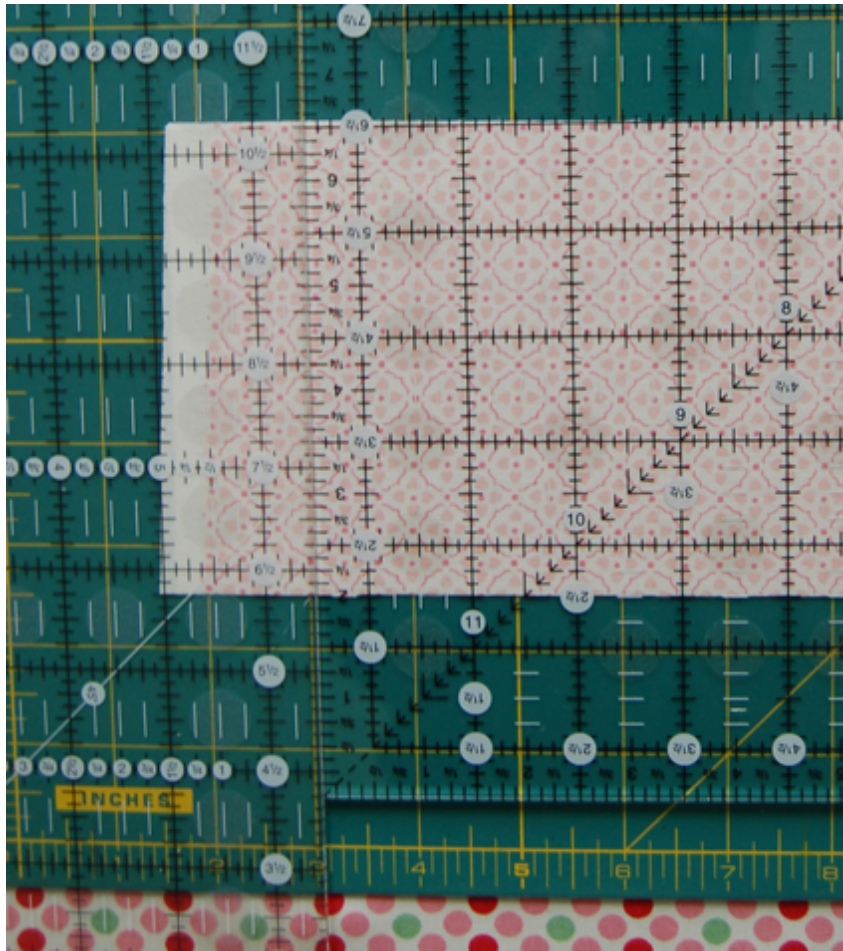
Cut your fabric from fold to selvage and you'll have a 4.5-inch strip.

## Cutting from the Strips

I cut 4.5-inch squares for this tutorial but the same instructions can be used to cut any size square or rectangle.

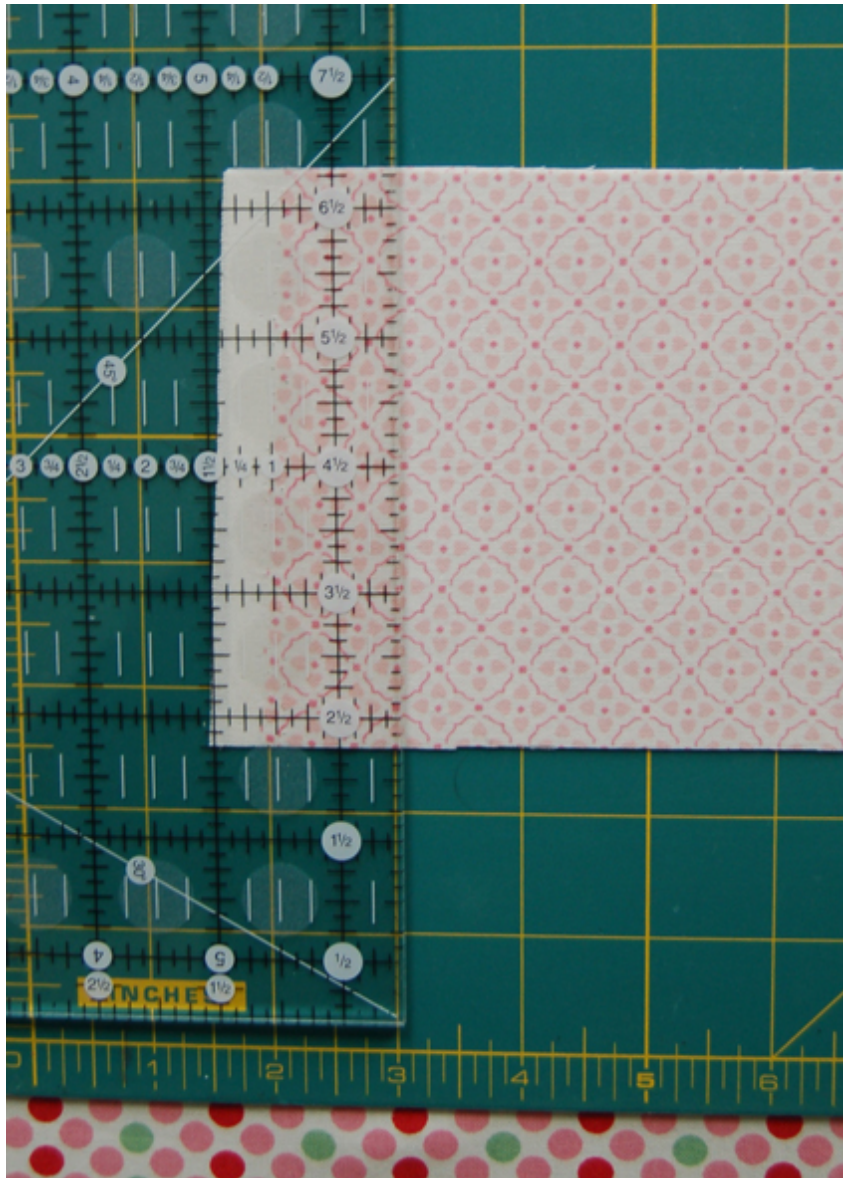


Carefully move your strip so that it is horizontal, with selvages on the left. Keep the strip folded together. Line up the square ruler as you did in the "squaring up" section along the bottom edge of the strip, about 2-inches to the left of the selvage.



Now, again as you did in the "squaring up" section, place the long ruler against the left edge of the square ruler.

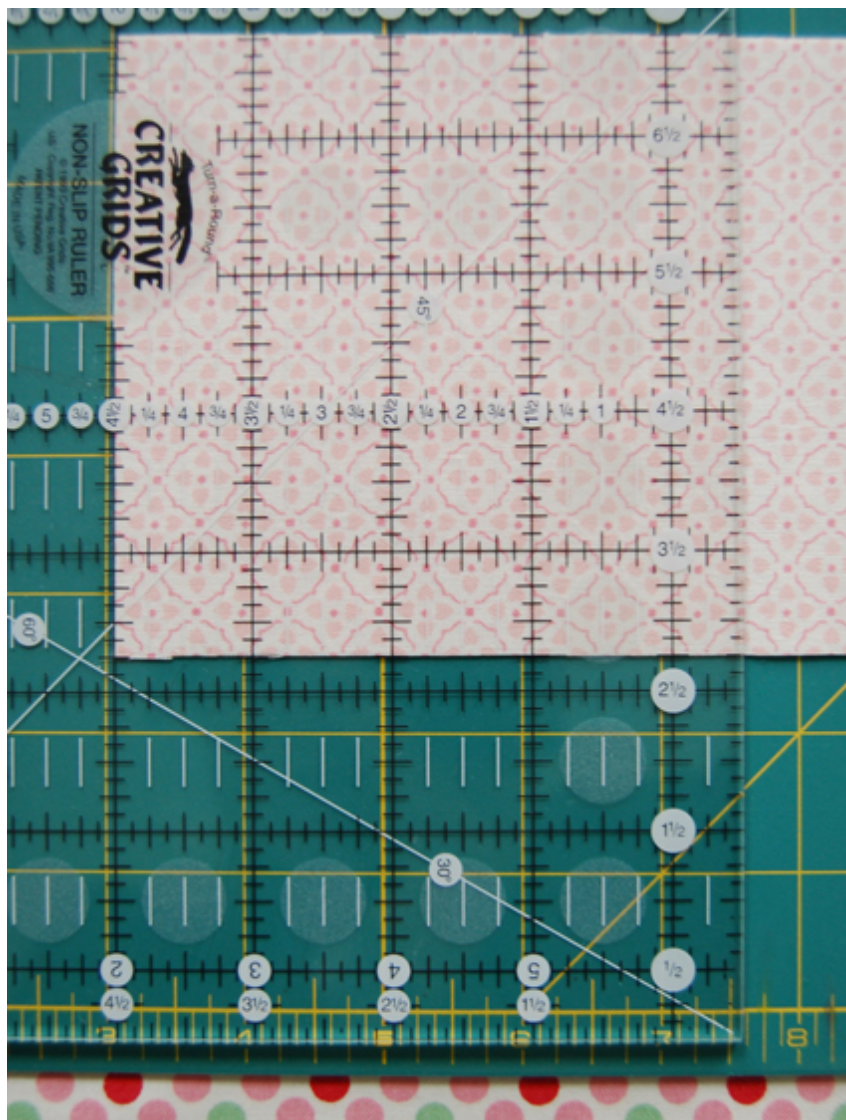




Carefully remove the square ruler.



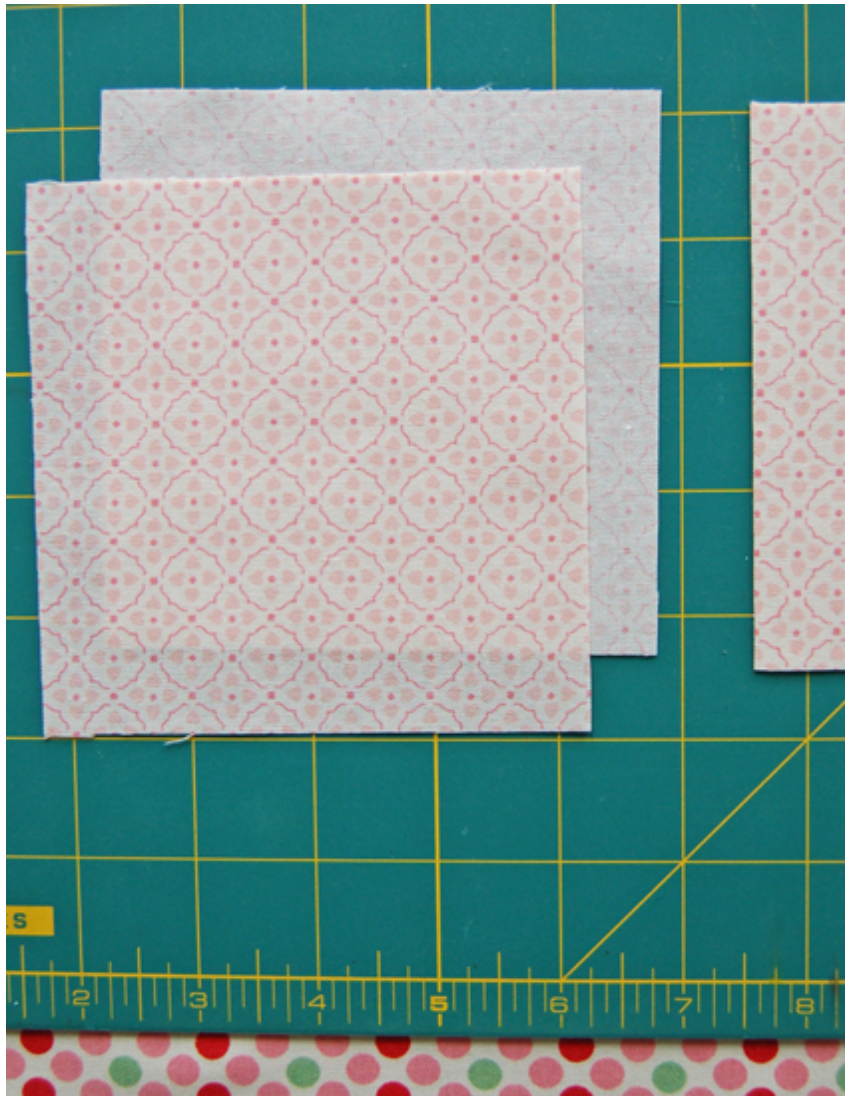
Cut along the right side of the ruler and discard the selvages. The left and bottom edges are now at a perfect 90 degree angle.



Lay your long ruler on top of your strip lengthwise. Line up the left edge of the fabric with the 4.5-inch mark on the ruler. Cut along the right side of the ruler.







Separate the two fabric layers and you have two perfect 4.5-inch squares. Repeat these steps to make as many squares or rectangles as you need.

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