

Deck Baluster Layout Jig

Guardrail post spacing isn't always precise. You can hide any discrepancy by microadjusting the baluster spacing between posts using an easy to make jig. No math, no fudging and fast.

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Make a Layout Jig

Buy a roll of $\frac{3}{4}$ in. 'non-roll' elastic fabric band. The type used in clothing. A roll costs about \$1.

- Cut the band in half and stretch across a bench or floor.
- Pin one end and pull the band until the elastic is stretched to its maximum and then relax it 8 in.
- Pin the loose end and give the band a snap to equalize the elastic along the length.
- Make a starting mark and register a tape measure to it.
- Make marks at the $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. ($1\frac{1}{2}$ in. baluster + 4 in. max space between balusters) increments along the entire length with a fine tip marker or pen.

The elastic will equally stretch and relax along the length of the band and automatically adjust the distance between the scale of marks equally making layout a breeze.

Using the Layout Jig to Mark out Railings

- Cut railing sections to fit between guard posts
- Screw a scrap piece of baluster at one end of a railing section. (This adjusts the alignment of the marks to the baluster edge positions)
- Align a mark on the elastic to outside edge of the scrap piece of baluster and pin down.
- Stretch the elastic along the railing and align a mark on the elastic to the other end of the railing. Pin the elastic at the end.
- Check the distance between marks to see that it is no greater than the narrowest measurement of the baluster (think turned baluster) plus a scant 4 in. (max baluster spacing).
- Snap the elastic to equalize the stretch along the length.
- Mark baluster locations onto the railing.

Resources:

Deck Construction Based on the 2009 International Residential Code®

<http://www.iccsafe.org/Store/Pages/Product.aspx?id=4140S09>

Free Download:

Prescriptive Residential Wood Deck Construction Guide (Based on the 2009 International Residential Code)

<http://www.awc.org/Publications/DCA/DCA6/DCA6-09.pdf>