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1. The longest line in the inch is in the middle. This is the half-inch mark and there is only one.
2. The next shortest line is the  $1/4$ " (one quarter of an inch) inch mark and there are only two of these.
3. The third shortest line is the  $1/8$ " (one eighth of an inch) mark and there are four of these.
4. The fourth shortest is the  $1/16$ " (one sixteenth of an inch) mark and there are eight of these.
5. Some rulers will go a step further, down to  $1/32$ " but this is often more precise than most woodworking cuts need to be.

On the typical ruler the basic (smallest) unit of measurement is  $1/16$ ". If you count the distance between two inch marks (one inch) you will find sixteen lines. This is because an inch is  $16/16$ th of an inch long. Because we like to express fractional numbers in the largest unit possible we call it one inch. So it follows that if you have 8 lines, or  $8/16$ " you have a half-inch or  $1/2$ ".

And likewise, if you have 4 little lines, or  $4/16$ " you have a quarter inch and so on.

At first it can be a little cumbersome to count these lines but over time you will learn to recognize the lengths and the different units of measurements they represent. This often starts with the  $1/2$ " mark and progresses down the line. Over time a measurements like  $3/8$ " or  $5/16$ " can be located quickly.

