

LEARNING MADE EASY



4th Edition

# Sewing

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**Jan Saunders Maresh**

Bestselling author, journalist, and  
lifelong sewing sherpa

**Foreword by Craig Conover**

Author, Lawyer, CCO &  
Co-founder of Sewing Down South  
Bravo's *Southern Charm* S1-10









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# Foreword

I can still remember that feeling when I turned my first pillowcase right side out. I felt fulfilled — joyous even. I was at a period in my life when not much made sense to me, but this simple act of creation quieted all that despairing noise. I could see the younger me, a seventh grader, sitting in Mrs. Hurley's Home Economics class while she explained how to use a sewing machine. The other boys were goofing off, but I was rapt. In my adolescent mind, sewing slid easily into the space reserved for my other “unmanly” interests, like cooking and gardening. I didn't expect I would turn to it when I was at a particularly low point in my late twenties; it just sort of happened. I also didn't expect that sewing that first pillowcase would change my life, but that too just sort of happened.

Whatever has led you to pick up sewing, I want to be the first to welcome you to this incredible community. After starting my home décor company, Sewing Down South, which focused in the beginning on —what else? — pillows, my business partner and I traveled the East Coast, selling our pillows at local boutiques where we met folks just like you. There was the high-school football player who showed me his creations with sheepish pride, and there was the young woman, fighting cancer and bound to a wheelchair, who just wanted to talk about sewing. It was then that I saw how a simple craft had the power to inspire and unite people — young and old, man and woman — from all walks of life. All of this happened because one day I sat down at a sewing machine. Pretty crazy, right?

We never know where our passions will lead us, but allow me to give you a preview of one of the many happy surprises that await. Do you know what's better than finishing your first sewing project? Giving it away as a gift. It's like sharing happiness. People understand that when they receive one of our sewn creations, they are getting more than a pillow or a hat or a blanket. They're getting the time, the focus, the *love* that we put into that item. Sewing is one of the few creative endeavors I know of that usually begins with the future owner in mind: a child, a spouse, or just us. We create *for someone*, and they will be just as happy to receive it as we were in making it. Trust me, you'll crush gift-giving over the holidays.

I didn't start to sew because one day I wanted to make it a business. I did it for the joy of creation, of using my hands to turn a collection of material into something useful. I think that gets to the heart of why sewing drew me in the way it did. It is an artistic process, but one that leads to something useful: the blanket to stay warm, the pillow to rest our head, or just a way to jazz up an old garment. As your


skills improve, the range of useful items you can craft will be limited only by your imagination — and perhaps time. When we do it right, the item enters our lives and becomes a part of us. We can create *permanence* with our sewing, salvaging what we own and creating what we need. Sewing stands out as both a skill and an artistic endeavor.

Everything in our modern world pushes us away from creating something ourselves. Most people will never need to know how to stitch a button, hem a dress, or fashion a curtain. By reading this book, you've chosen to rekindle an old-fashioned idea: to make what you use, what you give, and what you love. Whether as a hobby, a passion, or a business, sewing connects you to the act of creation. Embrace the passion that has led you here and get excited about the journey ahead. Sewing might not change your life like it changed mine, but I promise it will lead to many moments of joyful fulfillment.

**CRAIG CONOVER**  
**Cofounder, Sewing Down South**

# Introduction

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. Love. To. Sew.

First, there's the instant gratification of creating something unique and stylish using beautiful fabrics and cool tools. Then comes the glory — I get to bask in the praise for my handiwork from family and friends. Plus, whether it's an upstyled top for myself or a new bed skirt for the guestroom, I can make custom pieces that fit perfectly — and save some money in the process. What a hobby!

My goal for *Sewing For Dummies* is that, once you finish a couple of projects, you become as hooked on sewing as I am — or at least want to keep on learning because this book has piqued your interest.

Throughout my professional life and thousands of hours of sewing for myself, my family, and my home, I've gathered these sewing techniques and more — each contributing to my deep passion for the craft. Every time I sit in front of my sewing machine, I reignite this passion.

My deepest wish for you is that when reading this book, you hear my voice cheering you on. And then, the next time you have a beautiful piece of fabric in your hands, and you sit in front of your sewing machine, your passion for sewing will bloom like mine has. Enjoy every moment of your creative journey!

## About This Book

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*Sewing For Dummies*, 4th Edition, is a book for anyone who's ever said, "I want to learn how to sew." There's a lot to know about sewing, but I have only so many pages to work with in this book, so I've tried to organize things logically. First I walk you through the sewing process used in making clothing. Then I move on to ways to sew for your home and how to repair and remake existing clothing for a more sustainable wardrobe.

If you're a stone-cold beginner, don't worry — I've got you covered. I'll explain everything you need to know to tackle your first sewing project, starting with the basics. No prior experience is required.

If you've already tackled a variety of sewing projects, there's plenty in this book for you, too. It's packed with tips and tricks that took me *years* (and lots of mistakes) to learn. So, regardless of your skill level, you'll find a selection of projects to enjoy that will improve your sewing skills.

Because it's all about going green these days, I've also taken a fresh approach to this edition. Many projects now start with a pre-loved garment that, with a bit of sewing ingenuity, gets a new life. The rest have been designed to follow the latest fashion trends and our sleek, streamlined, clutter-free lives.

I wrote this book to be your ultimate sewing companion. Don't just shelve it away for future reference — make it a constant companion in your sewing adventures. Keep it within arm's reach so that when a pattern guide sheet instructs you to do something, you can refer to the way I suggest you do it. I promise you'll find the fastest and most efficient techniques to get the job done right.

Onto the best part — this book has more than 80 new instructive illustrations! They say a picture is worth a thousand words, and these visuals enhance the clear, no-nonsense instructions that *For Dummies* books are famous for, ensuring your success. Plus, you still get my favorite sewing techniques and clever shortcuts that took me years to master.

And don't worry — I've made every sewing mistake possible, so you won't have to! So, thread your needle, fire up your machine, and get ready to sew!

As you sew, you'll rely heavily on the trusty tools in your Sewing Survival Kit, which I detail in Chapter 2. I've written this book assuming you have and use these essential tools. So keep it handy and well stocked — you'll need it for just about every project in this book.

You'll also come across instructions you can complete using either a sewing machine or a serger (sometimes both). Now, let me tell you about the serger. This specialized machine is like the microwave oven of sewing. It sews the seam, overcasts the edge, and trims off the excess fabric all at once, saving you loads of time. Although you won't usually create an entire project on a serger, it's a game-changer for speeding up the sewing process.

# Foolish Assumptions

As I wrote this book, I made some assumptions about you and your needs:

- » You don't yet know how to sew or are looking for a refresher course.
- » You want to master the basics of sewing.
- » You're on the hunt for tips and tricks to make your sewing projects easier and more fun.
- » You're eager to start sewing as soon as possible.

If this sounds like you, you've picked up the right book!

## Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, I guide you toward important points by using the following icons:



AUTHOR  
SAYS

When I want to give you “my two cents,” I’ve included this icon. My comments range from important details to quick reminders or shortcuts to keep up your sewing momentum while learning and improving your skills.



NICE  
TO HAVE

Some sewing tools are essential to sewing, and others aren't essential but are still nice to have as you sew. Try out the tools mentioned next to this icon — you may find one that helps you quite a bit with the sort of projects you like to do.



REMEMBER

Next to this icon you find information you should keep in the back of your mind as you sew. These points are key to creative and efficient sewing.



TIP

The information next to this icon tells you how to do something in the quickest and best way possible.



WARNING

Make sure to read the text next to this icon. It can save you a lot of blood, sweat, and tears.

# Beyond the Book

Want another handy sewing tool? Then read my Cheat Sheet at [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) or even print it off and keep it where you can find it (like on the bulletin board or wall near your sewing station). This guide is packed with the information you need when you need it, such as how to shop and coordinate fabrics for an outfit and how to harmonize your fabrics to outfit your home. You'll also find a reference for choosing the right needle for specific fabrics in both the American and the European equivalent needle sizes. Handy. Handy. Handy. To get the Cheat Sheet, visit [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and type **Sewing For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the search box.

I created more fun sewing projects than this book could accommodate. Fortunately, they're available to you at [Dummies.com](http://Dummies.com)! Visit [www.dummies.com/go/sewingfd4e](http://www.dummies.com/go/sewingfd4e) to access the supply lists and instructions for the additional projects, including clutch handbags, pillow shams, a tablecloth, pajama bottoms, and more!

# Where to Go from Here

If you're new to sewing, begin your journey with chapters in Parts 1 and 2. These sections offer essential information to get you started. Once you've grasped the basics, feel free to jump around the book, exploring the different types of sewing and the projects that catch your eye.



**1**

**Ready...Set...Sew!**

### IN THIS PART . . .

Understand what tools will enable you to come out with a project that's the envy of your friend circle. I tell you about the most important sewing tools (out of thousands) so you can buy the best quality you can afford and have the most useful tools in your Sewing Survival Kit.

Figure out how to make your sewing machine purr, how to get needles that glide through the fabric without skipping a stitch, and what type of thread to use to tie it all together.

Discover the fabulous world of fabrics and patterns. This dynamic duo takes your journey from *meh* to *marvelous*!

- » Prioritizing sewing as your next “Big Thing”
- » Peeking at the sewing process — stitching, seaming, and finishing touches
- » Understanding the penny-wise perks and eco-friendly benefits of the craft

## Chapter **1**

# The World of Sewing from 30,000 Feet

**W**hy sew? For starters, it’s fun. There’s nothing quite like the thrill of making something useful and beautiful and then basking in the “oohs and aahs” from friends and family. Also, what you learn about fabrics, fibers, and fashion helps you in other areas of your life. I talk about this more in the “Understanding fabrics and fibers” section later in this chapter.

Sewing can be a rewarding hobby or a productive pastime. You can sew Halloween costumes, teddy bears, prom dresses, and purses. Think of the fashions in home décor. A tablescape isn’t complete without some great-looking linens — that you can make, of course. You can update your house by making a wardrobe of pillows with a set of covers for every season or by sewing a new duvet cover. And gifts? Prepare to be the hero who rolls up with a handmade throw or a basket brimming with hand-stitched napkins.

If you’re looking for more of a sewing challenge, you may want to learn about quilting. It’s a subset of sewing that’s popular and creative, and you end up with a beauty to wrap yourself in or a smaller wall-hanging. Because quilting is such a large part of the world of sewing, it has its own place in the *For Dummies* library. Check out *Quilting For Dummies* by Cheryl Fall (Wiley).

My hope is that after you get to know more about this creative endeavor and have some success with the projects in this book, you'll spread your wings and investigate the larger world of sewing.

If you are new to sewing, make sure to read this chapter. It's an overview of what you'll need for any sewing project — the tools and fabrics, plus a bit about your sewing machine. Next I cover the process —like preshrinking the fabric, choosing a pattern, and the importance of pressing as you sew. Finally, I explain the basics of turning a flat piece of fabric into a usable piece for yourself or your home or to upcycle an item that keeps it from the landfill a bit longer.

Sewing isn't just creating; it's adding your signature flair. So grab that thimble. It's time to make the mundane magnificent!

## Getting Started: Gathering Tools, Fabric, Pattern, and Your Sewing Machine

You could whip up a five-course meal over an open fire with old, beat-up pots and pans, but let's be honest — it wouldn't be much fun. The same goes for sewing. Trying to tackle a project with dull shears, crooked pins, and a basic hand needle might leave you less than inspired. In this section, I guide you through the essential tools and materials needed to make your sewing experience a success and a lot of fun.

### Using good tools

For me, the joy of sewing is having quality tools at my fingertips. Sure, good tools are an investment, but if you're serious about learning to sew, nothing gets you closer to success than the pleasure of using a quality tool that works perfectly every time you use it. Not sure if you'll like sewing but still want to try it? Take a sewing class at your local fabric store or sewing machine dealer where you can use great tools and quality equipment.

Besides the fabric and pattern, here's what will make your sewing experience a real pleasure:

» **Measuring tools for small and large areas of a project:** I love my 6-inch adjustable sewing gauge, my flexible vinyl tape measure, and the see-through 24-inch and 36-inch T-square rulers with ¼-inch increments.

- » **Cutting tools for cutting out your project:** I use 8-inch bent-handle dressmaking shears, 5-inch scissors for trimming smaller areas, and embroidery scissors for clipping and ripping out unwanted stitches. For long and straight cutting, the pizza cutter-type rotary cutter with a cutting mat to protect the table is the best.
- » **Marking tools to show you how to turn a flat, shapeless piece of fabric into something useful:** You need a marking tool for dark-colored fabrics and one for light-colored fabrics. I have two favorites. For dark fabrics I like the disappearing dressmaker's chalk that washes out with water. For light fabrics, I use an air-soluble marker. Keep in mind that the ink disappears within 24–48 hours, so don't mark your fabric and go on a two-week vacation!
- » **Pins and pin holders:** My favorite pins for 90 percent of the sewing I do are 1¼-inch glass-head pins often referred to as *quilting pins*. To keep my pins from ending up all over the place, I use two magnetic pin catchers: one for the ironing board and one on the cutting table. I also like a wrist pin cushion with a felt cushion so my pins are portable.
- » **New hand and machine needles:** After some use, needles wear out and need to be discarded. As far as hand needles go, specialty needles are available for just about every hand-sewing task. I most often use self-threading needles for basic hand sewing and easy repairs. I used these even before I needed reading glasses because the thread just clips into place — no squinting and poking thread ends through a microscopic eye required.
- » **Thread to hold everything together:** Be sure not to skimp on the thread — when you see three spools for \$1, run away. The quality of that thread isn't worth the spool it's wound on. Read more about choosing quality thread in Chapter 2.
- » **A good sewing machine to enjoy the sewing experience:** I said you need a *good* machine, not an *expensive* one — and it doesn't have to be new. Just buy it from a reputable sewing machine dealer that can offer you reliable service and lessons if you need them. Check out Chapter 21 for more information.
- » **A serger — if you discover that you like to sew and want to take your newfound skill to a new level you might want a serger.** You don't need a serger but it makes the sewing process faster and more streamlined, like the microwave oven does for cooking. For more on what a serger can do and why you might want one, see Chapter 5.
- » **Iron and ironing board:** If you want to sew, you must have an ironing board and a steam iron. When looking for a steam iron, find one that *does not* automatically shut off when you're not using it. If your iron shuts off automatically, then every time you want to press a seam, you must wait until the iron comes up to temperature, which is a real time-waster.



TIP

I spend some time in Chapter 2 sharing my favorite tools with you, so check it out.

## Understanding fabrics and fibers

Among the perks of learning to sew is gaining more knowledge about fabrics and fibers and how they respond to washing (or not), wearing, and pressing. Ultimately this knowledge makes you a savvier shopper of ready-to-wear garments. So what's the difference between *fiber* and *fabric*?

Fabrics are woven or knitted yarns, which are created by twisting fibers together. Whether the fabric is all wool or a cotton-polyester blend, each fiber has its unique advantages and disadvantages, which makes one better than others for a particular project. (See more specific information about the most common types of fibers and fabrics in Chapter 3.)

If you aren't sure about your fabric choice, the sales associate at your local fabric store is a great resource for locating just the right fabric for the project. Most have knowledge it would take you years to learn, so don't be shy. Ask for help, tell them what you want to make, and ask for their best advice. This can save you time and guide you on your way to success.



TIP

Your time and effort are worth something. Spend your sewing time wisely by buying the best fabric you can afford and the best fiber for your project and your lifestyle. See Chapter 3 for more on choosing the best fabric for a project.

## Getting the sewing notion

Most fabric stores have a notions wall that's full of specialty tools and sewing stuff. Notions range from pins, needles, scissors, shears, and measuring tools to buttons, bra hooks, collar stays, and iron-on knee patches. The notions needed for a particular project are listed on the back of your pattern envelope, so when in doubt, look there to find out what you need. Don't be afraid to ask for help locating things. What you need may be hidden in plain sight.

## Pondering the pattern

Fabric stores have over-the-counter displays and catalogs of patterns that you can browse through. The internet brings sewing patterns home and puts the right project just a keystroke away. Type in the project you want to make with **sewing pattern** after it to find tons of choices. Internet searches also make investigating independent pattern designers easy.





Choose a pattern designed for your skill set. If a pattern says it's easy, the instruction writers often still assume you have some knowledge of sewing, so if you're a true beginner, choose patterns for beginners. If you don't, you may become discouraged and never sew again! Simplicity Pattern Company (<https://simplicity.com>) is an umbrella for all the major pattern brands, such as "The Big 4" of Simplicity, McCall's, Vogue, and Butterick. When visiting this website, you also see Know Me, New Look, and Burda Style patterns.

After you choose the pattern, check out the front and back of the envelope for important information: what fabric works best to achieve the results pictured on the front of the envelope, how much fabric to buy for the garment size you're making, what you need in the way of trims and notions (see the preceding section), and the front and back views shown in easy-to-read line drawings.

Inside the envelope is an instruction sheet commonly referred to as the *pattern guide sheet*. It shows you which pattern pieces you need to use for a specific version of the pattern (several versions or views may be packaged in one pattern), shows you how to lay out the pattern pieces on the fabric, and gives you step-by-step instructions for putting the project together. Even though I've been sewing for years, I still refer to my pattern guide sheet to be sure that I haven't forgotten to do something. You can read more about working with patterns in Chapter 4.

Use this book to supplement the pattern guide sheet instructions. Many times pattern instruction writers assume that you know how to make a dart or sew in a zipper and may leave out information essential for your success. If the only darts you know about are those you throw, the "Shaping" section of this chapter can clue you in. And if you don't understand what the instructions on the guide sheet tell you, look up how I recommend you complete a particular technique. I'm confident that trying it my way will get 'er done, and you'll pick up the skills and the lingo as you work through the project.

So where to begin? In the following section I break things down and give you a general idea of where you're headed. Think of this as your sewing GPS at the mile-high view.

## Sizing Up the Sewing Process

Like any new endeavor, sewing has its own vocabulary, skill set, and process. After you decide on a project, select your pattern and fabric, and collect the notions and tools you need, the sewing process follows the basic steps outlined in this section to complete a project.

As you look over the rest of this chapter, it may occur to you that a lot happens before you actually sew things together. Have you noticed that it takes a long time for road crews to prepare to lay a new road and then almost overnight it's in and you're cruising smoothly along your merry way? That's how it is with sewing. When you get your fabric and pattern; lay out, pin it down, cut, and mark your pattern pieces; fuse on the interfacing; and finish the fabric edges; you're two-thirds of the way finished. But I'm ahead of myself.

Here's a quick breakdown of the sewing process and the creative journey of making a project from scratch.

## Preshrinking fabric

After getting home from fabric shopping, preshrink your washable fabrics so the finished project won't shrink any more after it's washed. (You can find the whys and hows of preshrinking in Chapter 3.)



TIP

If life gets in the way and you have to set your project aside temporarily, still preshrink the fabric when you bring it home. That way you don't have to remember whether the fabric is "needle ready" when you are.

## Finding the right pattern pieces

Most patterns have a couple of variations included. Each variation is called a *view* and requires specific pattern pieces. Check out the pattern guide sheet to see what pattern pieces are needed for the view you're making, and then cut those pattern pieces apart from the large sheet of printed pattern paper and set them aside. Read more in-depth about this in Chapter 4.

## Laying out the pattern on the fabric

Most fashion fabric comes in two widths: 45 inches or 60 inches wide. The pattern guide sheet has a suggested pattern-piece layout for the width of the fabric you're using. (See "Understanding fabrics and fibers" earlier in this chapter.) This is the most important step because if you lay out and cut something crookedly or incorrectly, no amount of sewing, ironing, begging, or pleading will make the fabric behave the way you want it to. Learn the dos and don'ts in Chapter 4.

## Pinning and cutting

When you have the pattern pieces arranged on the fabric, pin each pattern piece to the fabric ready for cutting. As you cut out each pattern piece, notice any special markings such as darts or larger-than-normal dots. If you see those, place the cut pieces that need to be marked in one stack and those that don't in another. Read on to learn why.

## Marking

Even though you may not know what the random pattern markings mean at this point, as you proceed through the project, the guide sheet instructions will tell you. When in doubt, transfer the mark from the pattern paper to the fabric. Chapter 4 gives you several methods to do this. If you don't, you'll waste a bunch of time sifting through the pattern paper pieces you've removed from the fabric to find and mark something you should have done in the first place. (Trust me here — I've made the mistakes so you don't have to.)

## Interfacing

After cutting out the pattern pieces and marking them, your guide sheet may tell you to cut interfacing for several of the pattern pieces. Some patterns even give you separate paper pattern pieces for the interfacing. But what's interfacing, and why should you care about it?

Certain places on a project need a little extra stability. Examples are collars, sleeve cuffs, waistbands, and the fronts of shirts or jackets that have buttons and buttonholes. If what you're wearing has a waistband, look at the two separate pieces of fabric creating the outside and the inside of the band. Between these two layers of fabric is a third piece of fabric called *interfacing* that keeps your waistband from stretching out of shape and that keeps the hooks and eyes, buttons, or snaps from pulling off the fabric. So even though this may seem like an unnecessary step and extra expense, interfacing gives your project a professional finish and provides excellent wear. Read more about interfacings and how to use them in Chapter 3.

## Pressing for the best shape

One of my tailoring professors at the New York Fashion Institute of Technology said, "As you sew, have a love affair with your iron." By that time I had been sewing for 14 years and didn't give my iron much thought, but she was right. The best way to ensure a professional-looking project is to press every seam and press it well. Learn more about this pressing subject in Chapter 5.

# Moving On to the Needle and Thread

Pieces of fabric are joined by using a needle and thread to stitch them together in a way that forms a shape. Stitches are done by hand or machine, and some stitches work better than others for a specific job. See Chapter 5 for the breakdown of the most common hand and machine stitches.

## Finishing the edges first

If you use a fabric that ravel, you need to treat the edges of the fabric in some way to stop it from raveling. This treatment is called *finishing* the edges, and you do it before you sew the seams. You can finish the edges either with pinking shears, for that delightful zigzag cut that's impervious to unraveling, or by overcasting the edges with a sewing machine or serger. Discover what works best for your project in Chapter 6.

## Shaping

You shape a piece of fabric — especially when sewing clothing — by nipping in a little here or letting out a little fabric there. So before you sew most pattern pieces together, you need to shape them with darts, gathers, or tucks so they conform to the particular body part they cover.

To both nip in and let out at the same time, you sew a *dart* — a little triangle-shaped wedge of fabric that's wide at one end and is stitched to a point at the other end. After the dart is pressed, it turns that flat, lifeless piece of fabric into something that conforms to the shape of your waist, bust, knee, or elbow so the fabric can move with you and be comfortable.

Need a nip here and a lot more fullness there? Then sew a tuck, which has a similar purpose to a dart except that the fabric is taken in, stitched in a straight line, and open (rather than coming to a point) on one or both ends. Adding gathers and elastic are other ways of putting shape where you want it. Learn all about these shape-shifting techniques in Chapter 9.

## Seaming

When two pieces of fabric are stitched together it is called a *seam*. Seams can be straight, curved, or turn a corner. After you sew a seam, you press and iron it into submission so that a flat piece of fabric can be transformed into something that follows the contours of your body or a piece of furniture. What happens if you make a mistake? No worries. Unwanted stitches can be ripped out in several ways. You can find out more about seaming, pressing, and ripping in Chapter 6.

## SEW SIMPLE AND SEW SMART: SEWING STARTER PROJECTS

As a way to practice what you're learning, I've tucked some fun projects for the kids, pets, and "the kid in you" in Chapter 8. These projects are very forgiving. So if they don't come out as beautifully as you may like them to, it doesn't matter. The idea is to allow you to sew something in a sitting or two. You will sew curves (for example, denim dog bone toy), gather a skirt for a tutu, or make someone in your circle feel like a superhero by creating a swooping cape for them.

### Closing

After your garment is made, you need a way to keep it on. You typically accomplish this with a zipper or buttons and buttonholes. Besides being practical, both closure methods can be incorporated as design elements. There are some tricks to sewing them well, though the pattern guide sheets rarely provide the instructions you need. Check out Chapter 10 for step-by-step guidance when installing zippers and to find out how sewing on a button can be a creative accent.

### Hemming

Unless you want to pay someone every time you need to have a hem altered, learning how to hem is a life skill, like sewing on a button. You probably know what a hem is (just in case, it's the folded-over and finished edge of a project), but did you know you can sew wide hems, narrow hems, cuffed hems, straight hems, curved hems, double hems, and blind hems? When you know how to hem and what hems look best on what projects, you're on your way to hemming success. Get the scoop on this life skill in Chapter 7.

## Adding Fashion Detail with Sleeves and Pockets

Even though fashions change, the basic how-tos of sewing sleeves and pockets remain the same. Sleeves come in many flavors and often add the detail that makes the outfit. They can be short, long, raglan, set-in, faced, split, cuffed, tapered, batwing, or butterfly; and they can be gathered, puffed, tucked, cuffed, or padded. (Phew!) You can finish off armholes with a decorative binding or face

them with a matching fabric. (Read more about facings in Chapter 11.) Stay tuned to find out what fashion will do to sleeves, but know this: When you learn the basics and feel comfortable with conventional sleeves, you've conquered the toughest part. When fashion changes, you'll be ready to tackle whatever trend comes a-knocking.

While pockets are far less fickle, they're a detail that can define a garment. Take a jeans back pocket, for example. Who knew derrières from every walk of life could wear so many designs? Read more about these little patches of inspiration in Chapter 12.

## **Sewing for the Home Is Where the Saving Is**

If you're a fan of home-interior makeover TV shows, you can hardly tune into a show without seeing someone using a sewing machine. What I love about sewing for my home is that I get the look I want at a fraction of the cost of having it custom-made. And the sewing goes quickly because most projects involve cutting and sewing straight lines.

What's different about sewing for your home versus sewing clothing is that you need more room to spread out and cut the fabric. You also use a 1/2-inch seam allowance rather than the 5/8-inch seam allowance for typical garment construction. Home décor fabrics are usually a little heavier and wider than apparel fabrics, and a whole set of trims and notions are specific to home décor projects.

If you're new to sewing projects for your home, try your hand at making the smaller projects for your table or throw pillows for your family room found in Chapters 13, 14, and 15. If a bedroom makeover is on your to-do list, then Chapter 16 is instrumental in your decorating success.

## **Doing Your Part for the Planet with a Sustainable Wardrobe**

My mom and grandma were always sewing. Besides making a lot of my clothes, both women fixed everyone else's clothes by hemming, rehemming, fixing split seams, replacing zippers, sewing on buttons, and adding embellishments. Adjusting and updating clothing was just a normal thing.

Fast-forward to the '80s, '90s, and early 2000s; the economy was cooking, and ready-to-wear clothing was inexpensive and easier to discard than repair. Thank goodness we've come to our senses and see the value in repairing, recycling, and repurposing things. Chapters 17, 18, and 19 give you the thrill of saving ill-fitting or damaged garments from the trash. You can make something fit and look better and get the satisfaction of completing it in one short sitting. Though these chapters come late in the book, repair work may be some of the first sewing you do, and hopefully, you'll discover right away that sewing is great fun. It's a creative outlet for crafting something useful, beautiful, or practical. It's also a hobby you can enjoy for a lifetime, so welcome to the world of sewing. I'm glad you're in it with me.





#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Knowing what's in your Sewing Survival Kit and why it's a sewer's best friend
- » Taking a look at the nice-to-have tools on your wish list that can wait
- » Presenting primo pressing paraphernalia and their primary purposes
- » Introducing the ins and outs of your sewing machine and serger

## Chapter 2

# Tooling Around: Assembling Your Sewing Kit

**L**ike most hobbies, successful sewing projects begin with a few good tools and a little know-how. Sure, you can find some of these tools around your house — those old scissors from the garage, the ruler from your desk drawer, pins scavenged from freshly opened dress shirts — but you'll have a better sewing experience by using tools intended for the job.

In this chapter, I introduce you to the necessities — the tools I use just about every time I sew and are essential for creating the projects in this book. I also give you some tips about additional tools that come in handy as your skills improve. Consider these tools part of your Sewing Survival Kit.



TIP

Keep your Sewing Survival Kit in a small fishing tackle box or use one of the many sewing or craft organizers available through your local fabric or craft store. Choose an organizer that has a handle and a secure latch so you can easily carry it without dumping stuff all over the place.

# Making a Sewing Survival Kit Inventory List

Use the following checklist when you round up the tools for your Sewing Survival Kit. The items are pictured in Figure 2-1, and the rest of this chapter explains each thing in more detail and offers additional suggestions for tools that are nice to have but not as necessary as the ones I list here:

- ☐ Tape measure
- ☐ Seam gauge
- ☐ Dressmaker's shears
- ☐ Trimming scissors
- ☐ Fabric markers for light and dark fabrics
- ☐ Glass-head pins and pincushion (wrist, magnetic, or both)
- ☐ Hand needles and thimbles
- ☐ Sewing machine needles
- ☐ Seam ripper



**FIGURE 2-1:**  
The indispensable  
contents of  
your Sewing  
Survival Kit.

# Measuring Up

“Measure twice, cut once” isn’t just an old adage; it’s essential to your sewing success. I use the following measuring tools every time I sew. Each one has a specific purpose based on how and what you’re measuring.



TIP

- » **Tape measure:** You use a tape measure for taking your measurements, checking measurements on a pattern, and other measuring tasks. (See Chapter 4 for more information on patterns.)

I recommend that you use a plastic-coated fabric tape measure. It doesn’t stretch, so you always get accurate measurements. Most tapes are  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch wide, the width of a standard seam allowance (see Chapter 6 for more on seams), and 60 inches long, like the tape measure in Figure 2-2. I also use a tape measure that goes up to 120 inches — great for home dec projects. Many tapes come with both metric and US customary measurements and are two-toned so you notice when the tape is twisted.

When I’m laying out a pattern, I prefer the type of tape measure I can drape around my neck rather than one in a retractable case so that it’s on hand (or neck) whenever I need to check a measurement while laying out and cutting. (See Chapter 4 for more about laying out your pattern.)



NICE  
TO HAVE

- » **Seam gauge:** A tape measure suffices for most measuring jobs, but for measuring small and narrow things, such as hems and buttonholes, use a seam gauge. This 6-inch ruler has an adjustable slide that moves up and down the length of the ruler, allowing you to check that hems or buttonholes are the desired size.
- » **Ruler:** The straight edge and quarter-inch increments on rulers are helpful when you need to mark even strips of fabric (as in many home décor projects). I have two clear rulers — one that’s 24 inches long and 5 inches wide, and another that’s 36 inches long and 4 inches wide. A ruler and a cutting mat (see the section “Cutting Up (without Cracking Up)” to find out more) work together like a T-square — helpful when marking and cutting perfect 90-degree squares or rectangles and for cutting strips, plus the fabric is easier to cut when the ruler provides a guide for a rotary cutter to run along. Look for rulers with a lip edge, which will hug the mat so the ruler doesn’t wiggle around. You can find a lot of clear rulers of varying lengths on the market, and you may find, like I do, that you want to use a ruler almost every time you sew.

# Cutting Up (without Cracking Up)

If I could have only two cutting tools, I'd use the following:

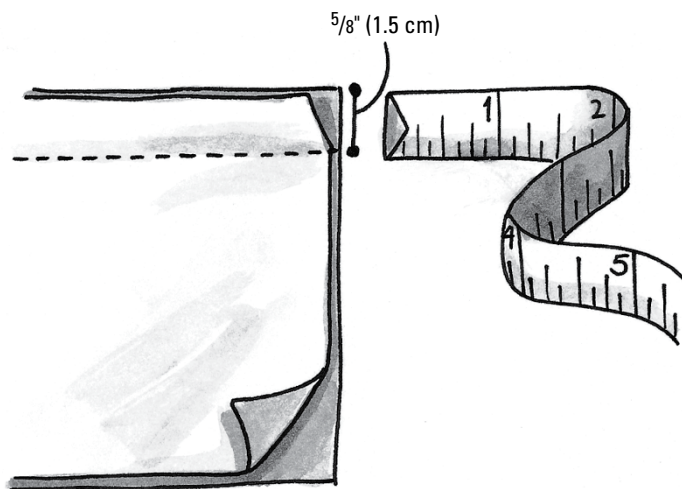
- » **8-inch bent dressmaker's shears:** Shears are the best tool for cutting fabric. They have one straight and one bent-angle blade, a round thumbhole, and an oblong finger hole for comfortable, accurate cutting. The bent-angle blade gives your index finger a place to rest when you have a long cutting job and allows you to cut without lifting the fabric off the table, ensuring a more accurate cut.
- » **5-inch trimming scissors:** These scissors have straight blades and two round holes for your finger and thumb. They come in handy for trimming smaller areas on a project and for clipping threads.



TIP

When shopping for shears or scissors, make sure you test them on a variety of fabrics. Good ones cut cleanly all the way to the tips of the blades.

Some brands of scissors and shears are made of lightweight aluminum alloy. The lightweight models generally fit more comfortably in your hand, are usually a little cheaper than other models, and can be resharpened several times. With some brands, the lighter-weight blades may not cut as easily through heavy fabrics or multiple fabric layers. Fiskars and Kai brands make lightweight, good quality, ergonomically comfortable cutting tools.



**FIGURE 2-2:**  
Tape measures  
are  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch  
wide and  
60 inches long.

Stainless steel scissors and shears are heavier, which means they easily cut through heavier fabrics and more fabric layers at once. Their heavier weight may make them less comfortable to use than their lighter-weight counterparts. They're also generally more expensive. Because each blade is made of one solid piece of steel, you can resharpen heavy scissors and shears more often than the light-weight variety, and they often stay sharper longer. A brand to look for is Gingher. Fiskars also makes a 9-inch stainless steel fabric shear.

Regardless of the weight, scissors and shears with a screw joining the blades generally cut heavier fabrics and more layers than those that are riveted.

I also often use a pair of 3-inch *embroidery scissors*. The pointed, thin blades are perfect for cutting out unwanted stitches and trimming laces, appliqués, and hard-to-reach places.



WARNING

After you plunk down money for a good pair of scissors and shears, don't let the family (or anyone else) get ahold of them to cut plastic, cardboard, wire, or anything you don't normally cut when sewing. These materials cause the blades to become rough and dull, and rough blades not only chew or snag your fabric but wear out your hand when you try to use them.



NICE  
TO HAVE

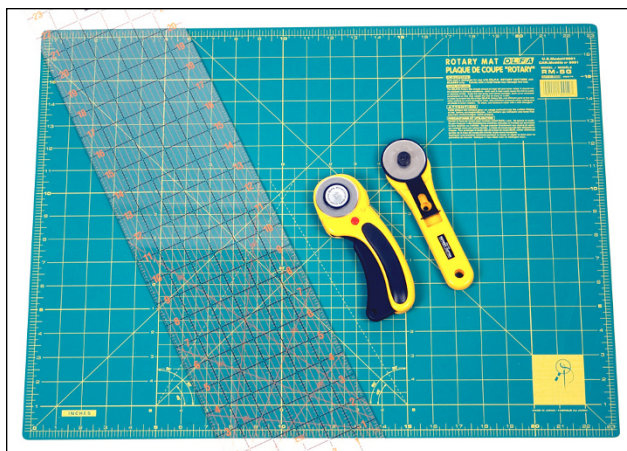
Upon deciding that you like to sew, treat yourself to a *rotary cutter*, which looks like a pizza cutter, and a *cutting mat*, which protects the table and helps keep the rotary blade sharp. You use these tools, shown in Figure 2-3, without lifting the fabric off the cutting mat, so you can cut lines very accurately. Rotary cutters come in several sizes. I like the largest model because you can cut more, faster.

## KEEPING YOUR SHEARS AND SCISSORS SHARP

Dull scissors can make cutting a real drag. You have to work twice as hard to use them, and the results aren't nearly as good. Keep your shears and scissors sharp so they're a pleasure to use. After all, cutting is a big part of sewing, and if it's a chore, you won't like to sew.

Most sewing machine dealers sharpen scissors and shears. In addition, many fabric stores have a scissors-sharpener who visits the store periodically. After the pro finishes sharpening your shears or scissors, check that they cut all the way to the tip of the blades.

**FIGURE 2-3:**  
Cut fabric quickly  
and accurately  
with a rotary  
cutter, cutting  
mat, and ruler.



You should also be aware of the innovative magnetic rotary mat and cutting system. You don't pin to hold the pattern pieces in place while you cut with the rotary cutter; instead, you use strong magnets. Because you aren't lifting the fabric off the flat surface of the table, cutting is faster and more accurate. This is also a wonderful tool when cutting slippery and stretchy fabric, such as chiffon and swimwear fabric. Check out <https://diystyleshop.com/products/diystyle-pattern-and-cutting-system> for more information.



TIP



NICE  
TO HAVE

Even if you do invest in a rotary cutter and mat, don't discard your shears. You need them for cutting intricate pattern pieces.

Cut edges can mean frayed edges, but you can put a stop to fraying on short edges such as ribbon ends with *seam sealant*, a liquid that dries soft and clear so that you don't see any residue on the fabric and it won't snag or scratch. It comes in a tube or small, plastic bottle with a tip for easy application. In addition to using sealant along cut edges of fabric, dot it on knots of thread to prevent them from coming out and dribble a bead down the cutting space of a buttonhole before cutting it open.

## Marking Up

When you sew, you must match up the pieces of your project precisely; otherwise, you get the left sleeve in the right armhole and end up feeling like you're walking backward. To help you match up your fabric pattern pieces exactly the right way,

the pattern for a project includes *match points*, called notches and dots, which are printed on the pattern tissue paper. (Chapter 4 has everything you need to know about patterns.) You use fabric markers to transfer these match points to the fabric.

Fabric markers made especially for sewing make transferring match points from the pattern tissue to the fabric quick and easy. Use one of the following markers (some of which appear in Figure 2-1), depending on the kind of fabric you want to mark:

- » **Disappearing dressmaker's chalk:** Excellent for marking dark fabrics, dressmaker's chalk disappears in about five days or when you wash or iron over the mark.
- » **Wash-out pencil:** This pencil shows up well when marking dark fabrics and erases with a drop of cold water. It looks like a regular pencil with white, pink, or light blue lead.
- » **Vanishing marker:** Best for marking light-colored fabrics, this felt-tipped marker usually has pink or purple ink that disappears in 12 to 24 hours, unless you live in a humid climate or sew in a damp basement where marks can disappear in minutes.
- » **Water-erasable marker:** This felt-tipped marker for light- to medium-colored fabrics has blue ink that disappears with water. This marker works better than the vanishing marker if you sew in a humid environment.

The ink in vanishing and water-erasable markers uses a chemical that may react to the dyes and chemicals in synthetic fabrics. Always test markers on a scrap of fabric to make sure that you can remove the mark and that it doesn't come back when you press the fabric.



WARNING



NICE  
TO HAVE

- » **Invisible or removable transparent tape:** These are useful but not essential marking tools. I prefer Scotch Brand Invisible tape, which has a cloudy appearance that you can easily see on most fabrics. Removable tape has the same adhesive as sticky notes and doesn't pull off the *nap* (fuzz) from velvet, corduroy, or velour. I use ½-inch-width invisible or removable tape as a stitching template for sewing in a zipper (covered in Chapter 10), as a guide for straight stitching (I talk about stitches in Chapter 5), and for a lot of other little jobs. Hide it from your family, though, or you may not be able to find it when you want it.

# Holding Down Your Projects

You need pins to sew. Period. You use them to pin the pattern to the fabric, pin the pieces of fabric together before sewing them, and for several other jobs. Because pins are such a constant companion when you sew, buy some that keep your fingers happy.

I recommend using long, fine, glass-head pins. The glass head fits comfortably in your fingers when you pin through multiple layers of fabric, and the extra length makes pinning more secure. Plus, if you accidentally press or iron over the glass heads, they don't melt like the plastic ones may.

You also need a place to keep your pins. Some pins come packaged in convenient plastic boxes that make great pin holders. But to save time, I wear a wrist pincushion (a pincushion attached to a strap that fastens snugly around my wrist) so that my pins stay with me wherever I go.



NICE  
TO HAVE

A magnetic pincushion, available in a wrist or tabletop model, is handy in your cutting area and at the ironing board. You can stick small scissors and a seam ripper to the magnetized surface so they're as handy as your pins. A magnetic pincushion is wonderful for picking up pins and stray metal objects that fall on the floor.



WARNING

Avoid getting a magnetic pincushion near some computerized sewing machines. They aren't as likely these days to be affected by magnets as they were in the past, but you don't want to risk wiping out the machine's memory.

## Getting to the Point with the Right Needles, Thimbles, and Seam Rippers

Needles come in hand and machine varieties, and you can find many shapes, sizes, and types within each one. The needle you select depends on the fabric you use and the project you want to sew.



REMEMBER

Generally, the finer the fabric you work with, the finer the needle, and the heavier the fabric, the heavier the needle.



## Selecting needles for hand sewing

When selecting hand needles, a variety pack supplies you with what you need for most basic hand-sewing projects. Variety packs vary from brand to brand but generally have from five to ten needles of various lengths and thicknesses. Some even have different-sized *eyes* (the holes that the thread goes through to keep it attached to the needle).

I also like to use self-threading needles, which have two eyes. The top eye has an open notch in it with a one-way hook. The notch lets you snap the thread into the eye from the top, whereas the hook prevents the thread from coming out of the needle. The second eye is used like a conventional needle, so if you're in the middle of hand sewing and the self-threading feature breaks, you have a backup plan. The top of a self-threading needle can be a little uncomfortable if you aren't using a thimble, but even so, once I discovered self-threading needles I never went back. Look for the different types of hand needles in your local fabric store. For a detailed illustration, check out Chapter 5.



REMEMBER

In a pinch, you can use any hand needle as long as the point can easily penetrate the fabric and the eye isn't so small that it shreds the thread. When either one of these things happens, discard the hand needle.

## Selecting needles for sewing machines

For machine needles, size #11 (in American sizing) or #12/80 (in European sizing) works well for general sewing on about 80 percent of today's fabrics.



TIP

To make sure that you have the right size needle for the fabric, read your sewing machine's operating manual or ask your local sewing machine dealer. Some needles offer different point types designed to handle different stitching techniques and fabric types. For most projects, though, a multipurpose or Universal point works beautifully. Buy a package or two of #11 American multipurpose or #12/80 Universal European sewing machine needles and you're all set.



TIP

When shopping for sewing machine needles, take the make and model number of your machine with you. Some models can use only their brand of needle without causing harm to the machine. When in doubt, ask your local sewing machine dealer what to buy.



REMEMBER

During the course of a project, a sewing machine needle gets used and abused, and when the needle becomes bent, blunt, or burred (like the hooked end of a burr on a thistle), the needle skips stitches and can snag the fabric. Unlike hand needles, your machine needle needs to be replaced frequently. The best machine needle for any project is a new one, so start each project with a new needle.

## Using a thimble: a maybe or a must?

Fingers are fabulous tools, but they leave a little to be desired when it comes to pushing a needle through heavy thicknesses of fabric. Protect the soft pads of your fingers from potential pain with a thimble, which is like a little hard hat for your finger.

Thimbles come in a variety of sizes, so choose a thimble that comfortably fits the middle finger on your dominant hand. Try on a variety of thimbles until you find one that's just right — then use it! It feels funny at first, but force yourself to use it. Your fingers will thank you.

## As ye sew, so shall ye rip

If you sew, you must rip out the occasional stitch. When you make mistakes, you correct them by ripping out the stitches, or unsewing. (See Chapter 6 for instructions.)

Make ripping out stitches as pleasant as possible. Buy a sharp *seam ripper*, a little tool with a point that lifts the stitch off the fabric and cuts the thread with a blade. (Refer to the ripper in Figure 2-1.)



WARNING

I've put too many unwanted holes in a project with a dull ripper because I had to push too hard to cut a stitch and ended up tearing right past the stitches into the fabric. When your seam ripper becomes dull, throw it away and buy another one. You can't sharpen them.

## Selecting Thread for Your Project

All-purpose sewing thread is the type and weight of thread that works well for most fabrics. You can find several all-purpose brands at your local fabric store or sewing machine dealer.



TIP

Some all-purpose threads are a cotton-covered polyester; other all-purpose threads are 100-percent polyester or 100-percent cotton. Ask your sewing machine dealer what thread brand works best in your machine. After you select the appropriate thread, unwrap a little bit from the spool and look closely at it. Check that it has a smooth, even appearance. Take that unwrapped strand of thread and place it on your fabric. You want the thread color to be slightly darker than your fabric for a good match.



TIP

Because the stitch lays on the top of the fabric, if the thread color is the same, the light reflecting off the thread makes it look lighter. So for a better match, you choose a thread that's a little darker.



WARNING

If you see five spools of thread for a dollar, run the other way. This “bargain” is promotional thread made with short fibers, which get lumpy and fuzzy very quickly. The lumps cause uneven thread tension, creating puckered seams that you can't press flat, and the extra fuzz lodges under the needle and may cause skipped stitches. So use good thread, and clean out fabric lint frequently where it collects for smooth, trouble-free sewing. (See your operating manual for cleaning directions.)

A serger, a special sewing machine used for certain tasks, uses its own type of thread. (You can find out about sergers in the later section “Real Machines: Sewing Machines and Sergers.”) All-purpose polyester, cotton, or cotton-covered polyester serger threads are fine, two-ply threads available in a few basic colors on cones that can hold 1,000 yards of thread or more. (A *ply* is a finer, slightly twisted strand used to make the thread.) When three, four, or five separate threads are used to serge a stitch, the finer serger thread creates a smoother seam finish than the three-ply all-purpose sewing thread used on a conventional sewing machine. Because it's a finer thread, serger thread should be used only on the serger and not for all-purpose sewing with your sewing machine. You can see examples of both types of thread in Figure 2-4.



**FIGURE 2-4:** Quality thread for the sewing machine and cone thread for the serger are specifically engineered for each machine.

# Pressing Issues

Why are you delighted when someone asks if your pie is homemade but insulted when someone points to your dress and asks, “Did you make that?” In sewing, if someone can immediately tell that your project is homemade, it’s probably because something just looks . . . wrong. Usually this happens because the project wasn’t properly pressed during construction. Good pressing tools mean the difference between a project that looks good and one that looks great.

The following list covers essential pressing tools and some points to consider when choosing them:



TIP

» **Iron:** You need a good iron. I didn’t say an *expensive* one — just a good one. Choose an iron that has a variety of heat settings and can make steam. Some irons automatically turn off after a few minutes, which is great when you’re done pressing a shirt but a real pain when you’re sewing because you have to wait for the iron to heat up every time you press a seam. So choose one that doesn’t have the automatic shut-off feature. Also, choose an iron that has a smooth *soleplate* (the part that heats up) and is easy to clean.

If you use *fusible products*, such as iron-on patches that melt when heated, you can easily gum up the iron. A nonstick soleplate is easy to clean and provides a smooth, slick surface for trouble-free pressing and ironing. If your iron doesn’t have a nonstick soleplate, you can buy one that snaps onto your iron and is easily removed for cleaning.

» **Ironing board:** Make sure you have a padded ironing board. Without the padding, seams and edges press against a hard surface that flattens the fabric so much that raw or finished edges show through to the right side. This “scarring” shadows through to the visible “right” side of the fabric, and can look like ski tracks going down either side of the seam. Hard surfaces can also cause the finished project to have a shiny, over-pressed look that’s tough — if not impossible — to remove.

Choose a muslin or nonreflective ironing board cover. The silver, reflector-type covers are too slippery and sometimes get too hot, causing unnecessary scorching on some synthetic fabrics.

» **Press cloth:** A *press cloth* is essential for pressing a variety of fabrics, from fine silks to heavier woolens and wool blends. You place the press cloth between the iron and the fabric to prevent shine and over-pressing. Use a clean, white or off-white, 100-percent cotton or linen tea towel or napkin, or purchase a press cloth.



WARNING



TIP

If you're considering a print or color-dyed fabric for a press cloth — don't do it. Dyes can bleed through and ruin your project. Terry cloth isn't a good choice, either. The napped surface of a terry cloth towel can leave its bumpy texture on the fabric.

A professional dressmaker friend of mine uses a cloth diaper for a press cloth. The diaper is white and holds as much or as little moisture as needed for the job, can be doubled or tripled depending on the use, and is a good size.

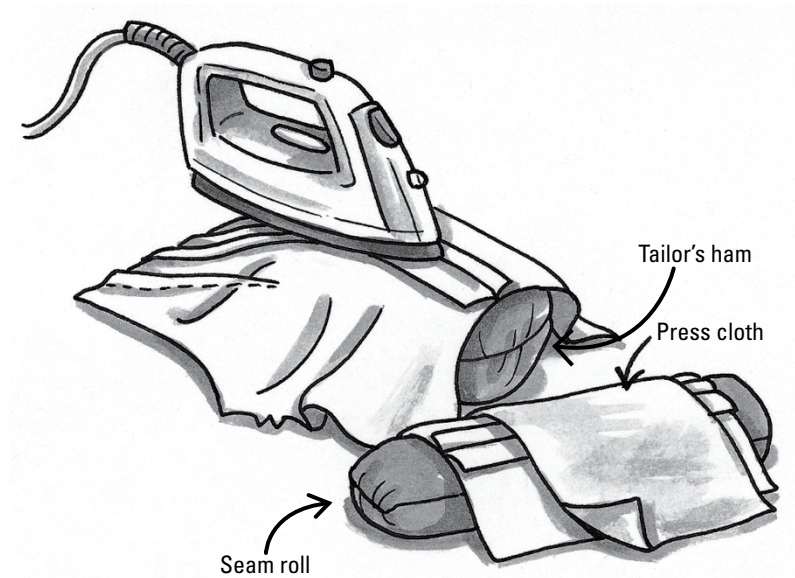
After you decide to make sewing a regular hobby and you feel comfortable investing a little extra money into your projects, consider purchasing the following tools shown in Figure 2-5:



NICE  
TO HAVE

» **Seam roll:** This fabric cylinder measures about 12 inches long by 3 inches in diameter. You place the roll underneath seams you're pressing, and the seam allowance (the fabric on the inside of the project that is on either side of the seam) falls down the sides of the seam roll, away from the iron. This prevents the iron from creating ski tracks on either side of the seam that show up on the visible side of the fabric.

» **Tailor's ham:** This stuffed, triangular-shaped cushion has several curves on it that simulate the curves on your body. You use the ham to press and shape seams along the side of the waist, sleeves, bust darts, and other curved areas on a garment.



**FIGURE 2-5:**  
Pressing tools  
that turn  
homemade into  
hand-tailored  
sewing projects.

When purchasing both the seam roll and the tailor's ham, be sure that each has a 100-percent cotton cloth side made out of heavy muslin-type fabric for pressing high-temperature fabrics such as cotton and linen, and a 100-percent wool side for pressing lower-temperature fabrics such as silks and synthetics.

## Real Machines: Sewing Machines and Sergers

If you want to boil water for tea, you have a couple of choices. You can use a kettle on the stove top or put a cup in the microwave. In the world of sewing, too, some tasks can be accomplished with two different machines: a sewing machine and a serger (sometimes called an *overlock machine*).

A sewing machine makes a stitch called a *lock stitch* with two separate threads — one threaded through the needle and one threaded on a bobbin that rests in the bobbin case under the needle. (Read more about the parts and working pieces of the sewing machine in the following section.) With a sewing machine, you have optimum maneuverability and can sew straight seams and curves, sew on buttons, and make buttonholes. You can also sew into corners, apply elastic, appliqué, embroider, and finish raw fabric edges. Some tasks, though, are time-consuming and tedious with a sewing machine and almost instantaneous with a serger.

A serger is a compact commercial-looking machine. The most common sergers use three or four threads to sew a 1/4-inch seam, overcast the *edge* by “knitting” the thread over the fabric edge using loopers, and cut off the excess fabric all in one quick step. (Look at an inside seam on what you're wearing; chances are a serger created the stitches.) Because the stitch formation is more complicated and the bed of the machine is smaller than a sewing machine, the fabric is less maneuverable using a serger. So the serger is great for sewing seams, finishing raw edges, and sewing wide curves. With practice, you can even blind hem and apply elastic with it, but it's much more limited than the sewing machine. And although you can make a project from beginning to end using a sewing machine, that's more difficult and sometimes impossible to do with a serger.

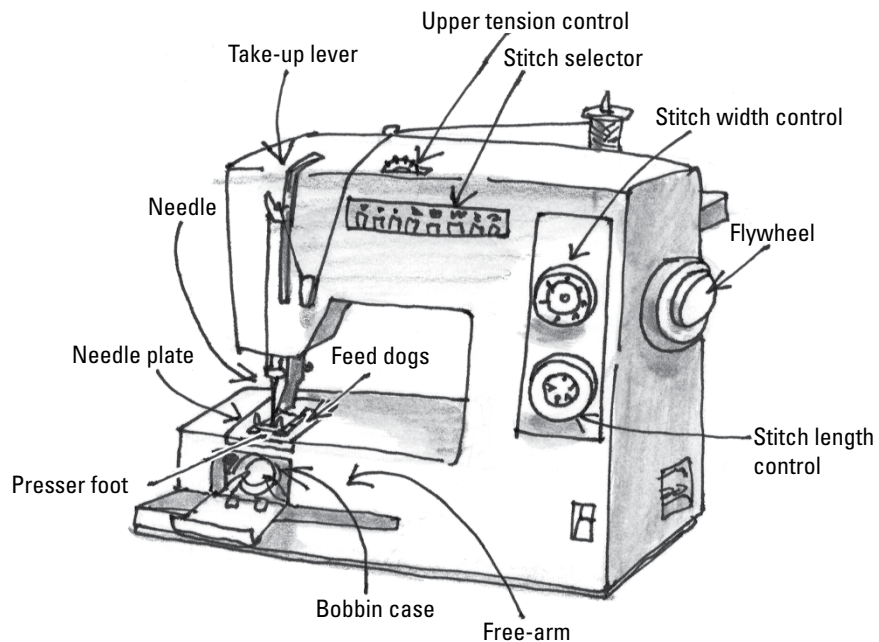
The following sections take a closer look at both machines so you can get a better understanding of each one.

### Working with a sewing machine

Just like your car, you want your sewing machine to be dependable. It doesn't need to be brand new, and it doesn't need every modern convenience known to man;

it just needs to work well. If you inherited Aunt Millie's old machine, have a knowledgeable dealer assess its condition to see if you can realistically count on using it. If you want to purchase a new machine, some dealers will allow you to test machines in the store or rent one to try.

Acquainting yourself with the parts of the sewing machine and knowing how it works keeps you and your sewing machine out of trouble. Consider this section of the book your road map to navigating a sewing machine. I tell you all about the parts on a typical machine (shown in Figure 2-6) and what you use them for.



**FIGURE 2-6:**  
A typical sewing  
machine and  
its parts.



**TIP**

Want to take a shortcut? Then take a class from your sewing machine dealer, especially after buying a new machine. This way you learn the special features of that specific brand and model and have a reliable go-to person if you need extra help or the machine needs to be serviced.



**REMEMBER**

Of course, your sewing machine may look a little different from what you see in Figure 2-6, or you may be working on a serger (in which case, check out the section “Finding your way around a serger” later in this chapter). If things on your machine don't correspond exactly to what I show you, consult the operating manual that comes with your machine to see how the parts compare.



## Needle

The most important part of the sewing machine is the needle. It's so important that I devote a section to it, "Selecting needles for sewing machines," earlier in this chapter.



REMEMBER

Always start a new project with a new sewing machine needle. A new needle won't skip stitches or snag the fabric, and changing your needle regularly may save you from an unnecessary trip to the dealer just to find out that all you need is a new needle. Most needles have a flat side and a rounded side and require the needle to be pushed all the way up into the needle bar. For machines with a side-loading bobbin (where the bobbin goes into the machine from the left side), the flat side of the needle is to the right. For top or front-loading bobbin machines (where the bobbin goes into the machine from the top or the front), the flat side of the needle goes to the back.

## Presser foot

Sometimes referred to as a pressure foot, the *presser foot* holds the fabric firmly against the feed dogs (check out the section "Feed dogs," later in this chapter to . . . well, find out about feed dogs) so that the fabric doesn't flap up and down with each stitch.

For most machines, you can buy different presser feet for specialty jobs. Most machines come with four or five of the most useful variations, including the following (shown in Figure 2-7):

- » **All-purpose foot:** This foot, which is usually metal, works well on a lot of fabrics. When you turn it over and look at the underside you'll see that it's smooth and flat behind the needle hole. The foot is often available with a Teflon coating for an even smoother sewing experience.
- » **Embroidery foot:** Sometimes referred to as the *appliqué foot*, the embroidery foot is often made of a transparent material. The high, wide groove carved out on the underside allows the foot to glide over decorative satin stitches without smashing them into the fabric.
- » **Blind hem foot:** This foot helps stitch a truly invisible hem. (You can read more about hems in Chapter 7.) The first two presser feet in this list have evenly sized toes on either side of the needle. The blind hem foot usually has a wide toe on the right and a narrow toe and guide (which may be adjustable) on the left. (Check out Figure 2-7 to see the difference.)
- » **Buttonhole foot:** Sewing machines usually come with their own buttonhole foot that can be proprietary to the model and brand. Figure 2-7 shows a generic version. As the buttonhole is being made, the foot slides so you can make varying buttonhole lengths. Check out your operating manual to see how your machine makes buttonholes. The foot you use may look a lot like this one.





WARNING

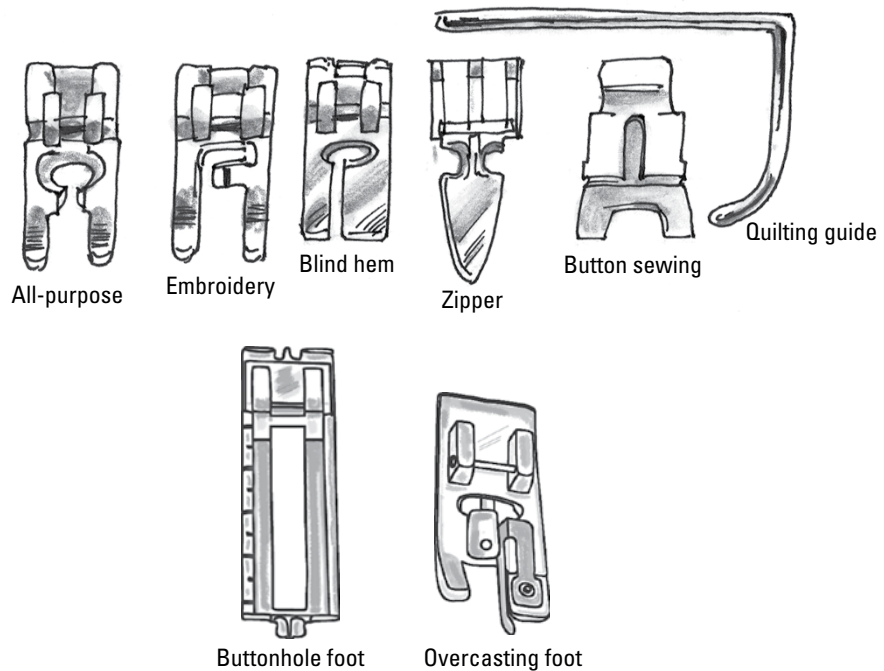
» **Button-sewing foot:** This foot usually has short toes and a nylon or rubber gripper designed to hold a button firmly in place. (See Chapter 10 for clever ways to sew on buttons by machine and hand.)

» **Overcasting foot:** Turn this foot over and you'll see a flat (usually metal) tab on the underside. This tab holds the fabric edge flat while the stitch zigzags over it. This foot is important because it prevents the fabric from tunneling under the stitch and creating a ridge that, when pressed, may show on the right side (outside) of the project.

When using the overcasting foot, be careful to set the overcasting stitch wide enough so that the needle avoids hitting the tab. If it does, the needle will probably break.

» **Quilting or edge guide:** This bar slides or screws on behind the ankle of the presser foot. The guide rides over the previous row of stitching for parallel rows of quilting or next to an edge for perfectly positioned topstitching. (See Chapter 5 to find out about topstitching.)

» **Zipper foot:** Not surprisingly, you use this foot to sew in a zipper. (See Chapter 10 for the details on zippers.) The foot has one toe, and you can adjust it either by sliding the foot over or by attaching it on the other side of the ankle.



**FIGURE 2-7:**  
Typical sewing  
machine  
presser feet.

## Presser foot lever

Located near the backside of the needle, the *presser foot lever* is used to raise the presser foot. Doing so releases the upper thread tension so that you can remove the fabric.



NICE  
TO HAVE

The time-saving knee-lift feature, common on commercial sewing machines, is available on some brands of household sewing machines. The knee lift allows you to lift the pressure foot without using your hands, keeping them free when removing the fabric from under the presser foot or when pivoting the fabric around a corner.

## Feed dogs

*Feed dogs*, sometimes referred to as *feed teeth*, are saw-shaped teeth or pads that move the fabric through the machine. You place the fabric under the presser foot and lower the foot onto the feed dogs. Then as the needle goes up and down, the feed dogs grab the fabric and move it under the foot with each stitch.

Most machines allow you to sew with the feed dogs up or down. You do most sewing with the feed dogs in the up position. You use the down position mostly for button sewing or for mending and free-machine embroidery, in which you move the fabric freely under the needle as it stitches.

## Needle plate

Sometimes referred to as a *throat plate*, the *needle plate* rests on the bed of the machine and fits over the feed dogs. It has either a small round hole or an oblong hole that the needle passes through. The needle plate often includes a series of lines that run in 1/4-inch increments from the needle. These lines guide you as you sew a seam allowance, which you can read more about in Chapter 6.



REMEMBER

For most sewing, you use the needle plate with the oblong hole so that the needle has the clearance it needs and doesn't break when you use a stitch that zigzags from side to side.

## Bobbin and company

A *bobbin* is a small spool that holds about 40 to 70 yards of thread. The machine uses the needle thread and the bobbin thread to make a stitch. Machines usually come with three to five bobbins that are specially made for the machine's make and model. Bobbins are wound (filled with thread) using a part of the machine called a *bobbin winder*. Check your operating manual for proper bobbin-winding and threading instructions. After you wind the thread around a bobbin, the bobbin fits into a *bobbin case*, and you can pull the thread up through the needle plate to ready it for stitching.



TIP

If you're winding a bobbin that has a hole in its side, fold over about an inch of thread and twist the thread end at the fold. Then poke the folded end of the thread through the hole from the inside of the bobbin out. Place the bobbin on the winder, holding the thread end tightly. Start winding until the thread breaks off. This way, when you get to the end of a bobbin, the wrong end of the thread doesn't accidentally get caught in the stitch.



TIP

When winding a bobbin, don't overfill it if you want smooth sewing and the best stitch quality.

## Free arm

A *free arm*, sometimes called an *open arm*, is a squared-off cylinder on the bed of the machine that lets you stitch around tubular areas, such as pant legs, sleeves, cuffs, and armholes, without ripping out a seam.

## Flywheel

The right end of the machine has a *flywheel*, or *hand wheel*, that turns when you sew. The flywheel drives the needle up and down and coordinates the needle movement with the feed dogs when creating a stitch. On certain machines, the flywheel allows you to manually control the needle, which helps you pivot fabric under the needle when sewing corners.



TIP

To pivot your fabric under the needle, simply turn the flywheel toward you so that the needle is down in the fabric, lift the presser foot, pivot the fabric, lower the presser foot, and then continue sewing. Some machines have a needle-up/needle-down function (discussed later in this chapter) that makes pivoting even easier.

Depending on the machine model, some flywheels have a *clutch* or button that you must release when winding a bobbin. Consult your operating manual for specific instructions on bobbin winding.

## Stitch-length control

The *stitch-length control* determines the distance the feed dogs move the fabric under the needle. When the feed dogs move with shorter strokes, the machine sews shorter stitches. When the feed dogs move with longer strokes, the stitches are longer. Your stitch-length control gives stitch lengths in one of the following two ways, depending on the make and model of the machine:

- » Millimeters (mm)
- » Stitches per inch (spi)

Throughout this book I give you stitch length settings in millimeters (mm) and stitches per inch (spi).



REMEMBER

The average stitch length for mid-weight fabrics is 2.5 to 3 mm/10 to 12 spi. For fine fabrics, use 1.5 to 2 mm/13 to 20 spi. (Anything shorter is almost impossible to rip out if/when you make a mistake.) For heavier fabrics, basting, or topstitching, use 3.5 to 6 mm/4 to 5 spi. (You can read more about basting and topstitching in Chapter 5.)

## Stitch-width control

The *stitch-width control* sets the distance the needle moves from side to side. You always measure this distance in millimeters (mm). Some sewing machines have a maximum stitch width of 4 to 5 mm. Others create stitches as wide as 9 mm. A 5-mm width does the trick for most utility sewing. (Throughout *Sewing For Dummies*, I give stitch-width settings in a range that works for most sewing machines.)

## Needle position

*Needle position* refers to the position of the needle in relationship to the hole in the needle plate. In center needle position, you center the needle over the oblong hole in the needle plate. In the left needle position, you set the needle to the left of center. In the right needle position, you put the needle to the right of center.

A few older, less expensive models have either a permanent left needle position or a permanent center needle position. Most models made in the past 25 years or so have an adjustable needle position, which comes in handy when you topstitch, sew on buttons, and sew in zippers. Instead of manually positioning the fabric under the needle, you simply move the needle into the correct spot. The needle position control is usually near or part of the stitch-width control. If you can't locate it, read your operating manual.

## Stitch selector

If your sewing machine does more than straight stitch and zigzag, it has a way for you to select a stitch. (See Chapter 5 for more information on basic sewing machine stitches.) The *stitch selectors* on older machines are dials, levers, buttons, or drop-in cams or discs. Newer, computerized/digital models have keys or touch pads that not only select the stitch but automatically set the stitch length and width.

## Upper tension control

To make uniform stitches, your machine requires a certain amount of tension on the thread as it sews. You adjust the tension using the *upper tension control*, which is usually located on the top or front of the machine.

The upper tension is usually marked in numbers — the higher the number, the tighter the tension, and the lower the number, the looser the tension. Some makes have the upper tension marked with a plus sign (+), meaning more tension, and a minus sign (–), meaning less tension.



WARNING

The old adage “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” definitely applies to the upper tension control. Unless you have major problems with the fabric puckering or the thread looping, leave the tension alone. If you experience these problems, consult your operating manual or a qualified sewing machine dealer for advice on adjusting the tension.

## Pressure adjustment

The *pressure adjustment*, which you can usually find above the bar that holds the presser foot, controls how much pressure the foot exerts against the fabric.



REMEMBER

For most sewing projects, you want to leave the pressure on the *full* setting. This way, the fabric doesn’t slip and slide around under the foot, creating crooked seams while you sew. For some jobs, like sewing through very heavy fabrics or multiple thicknesses or stitching complicated embroidery designs, lighter pressure works better. Consult your operating manual for specifics on your machine’s pressure control and when to adjust it.

## Take-up lever

The *take-up lever* is important in the threading and normal operation of the sewing machine. This lever pulls just enough thread off the spool for the next stitch.

## Needle-up/needle-down function

Some machines have a needle-up/needle-down function that automatically stops the needle in the up or down position without your having to manually turn the flywheel. Set this function on the “up” setting, and the needle stops out of the fabric. Set it for the “down” function, and the needle stops in the fabric for easy pivoting around corners.

## Speed control

Most machines have a *speed control*. (Check your operating manual to see if you have this feature on your machine and where it's located.) It works like the cruise control in your car by limiting how fast you can sew. You adjust the speed control to the fastest sewing speed that feels comfortable.

## Reverse button

At the beginning and end of seams, you often want to lock the stitches in some way so that they don't come out. You can tie off each seam by hand (ugh) or use your reverse button. Simply sew three or four stitches while touching the *reverse button*, and the feed dogs back up the fabric a couple of stitches. Release the button, and the machine resumes stitching forward. The stitches are then locked off and secured.

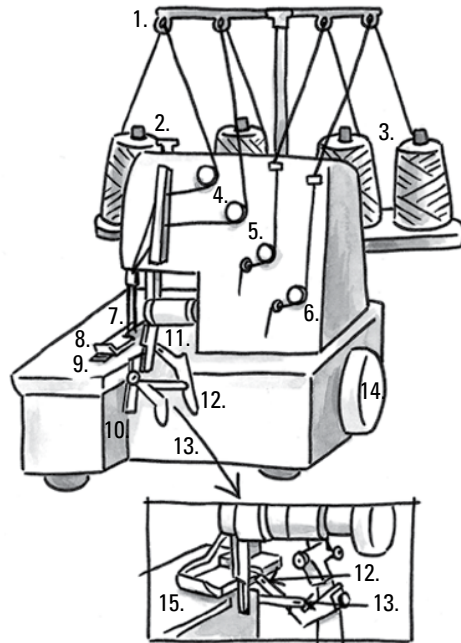
## Finding your way around a serger

A *serger* is to sewing as a microwave oven is to cooking. I love my serger because it really speeds up the sewing process by sewing a seam, finishing the edge (to keep it from fraying), and then cutting off the excess fabric in one step. You can use a serger to stitch a variety of fabrics. It works much faster than a standard sewing machine, but it isn't as versatile. For instance, you can't easily adjust the width of a seam allowance like you do with a sewing machine or sew a buttonhole with a serger.

A serger, shown in Figure 2-8, has most of the same parts and pieces as a sewing machine. But rather than using a bobbin, the serger uses loopers, threaded through the machine from a cone of thread, that essentially knit the thread over the raw edges of the fabric and give the inside of the garment a factory-made look.

If you want to give a serger a test drive before deciding whether to buy one of your own, visit your local sewing machine dealer and try one or sign up for a class.

Most beginners start off on standard sewing machines. However, in case you want to sew on a serger, I also give you serger instructions where you need them throughout this book.



1. Telescoping thread guide
2. Pressure regulator
3. Spool rod
4. Needle thread tensions
5. Upper looper tension
6. Lower looper tension
7. Needles
8. Presser foot
9. Feed dogs
10. Lower knife
11. Upper knife
12. Upper looper
13. Lower looper
14. Flywheel
15. Needle plate

**FIGURE 2-8:**  
A serger sews the  
seam, finishes the  
edge of the fabric,  
and cuts off the  
excess fabric in  
one easy step.





- » Finding fabulous fabric
- » Sleuthing for sewing notions
- » Picking the perfect interfacing
- » Giving your materials a preemptive shrink

## Chapter 3

# Fabrics, Findings, and Interfacings ... Oh My!

**R**emember how much fun you had shopping for back-to-school stuff when you were a kid? That's how I feel whenever I start a new sewing or decorating project. I envision the finished project, get excited about scrolling fabric websites or walking through a fabric store selecting just the right items for my project, and imagine the compliments I'll get from my friends and family when it's completed. And because you're the one choosing everything you sew and it's custom-made, you never have to return something because it isn't exactly what you wanted.

This chapter covers what you need to know about fabric and the findings — in sewing the fiber content has nothing to do with your breakfast cereal but everything to do with the how-tos of buying good fabric. I talk about what to consider when picking out decorative trims and findings and explain the purpose of a mysterious item called *interfacing* — the extra layer of specialized fabric that turns a limp, lifeless collar and cuffs into a crisply tailored masterpiece.

# Choosing the Right Fabric for Your Project

Have you ever bought a good-looking, great-fitting pair of pants on sale, thinking that you were getting a smokin' deal — only to find that after the first washing, the pants fell apart, shrank more than a full size, or suffered from terminal wrinkling? Chances are those bargain pants were plagued with poor fiber content.

You may wonder what makes a good piece of fabric and how to know whether you're getting the most for your fabric-buying dollar. This section educates you on the advantages and disadvantages of common fibers so that you can make the best choice for every project.



REMEMBER

You can often find a list of recommended fabrics on the back of pattern envelopes. This information about fibers and fabric comes in handy when you're selecting fabric (and when you're buying clothes off the rack). Don't stray from the advice about the choice of fabric on the back of a pattern envelope. If you do, you may get the color you want, but I promise that the final product won't look as good or fit as well as you intended.

## Figuring out fiber

*Fibers* are the raw ingredients used to make fabric. Fibers exist in natural or man-made form and are made into continuous yarns that are woven or knitted to make fabric. This is important because fibers determine a fabric's characteristics, including

- » **The feeling:** In the biz we call this the *hand* of the fabric. Will it be comfortable to wear? Does it drape well and keep its shape? Is it limp or stiff? There are different quality levels in the manufacture of fabrics. Often, you can feel this quality in the "hand" of the fabric.
- » **Weight:** Is it too heavy? Too light?
- » **Care:** Is it wash-and-wear or does it need to be dry-cleaned?
- » **Durability:** How does it hold color after being washed or dry-cleaned?

Basically, fibers break down into the following four categories:

- » **Natural:** These fibers include cotton, silk, linen, and wool. Natural fibers breathe, take dyes well, and drape beautifully. Good-quality natural fibers also perform well when they are cared for properly and are made from patterns designed for them. However, they can shrink and may wrinkle, which is why

preshrinking fabric before sewing is so important (refer to Chapter 1 and the end of this chapter for more on preshrinking).

- » **Man-made:** Acrylic, acetate, and rayon are high-profile members of the man-made fiber group, which uses materials from plants that make cellulose. Acrylic is soft, warm, and resistant to oil and chemical stains, but acrylic fibers may stretch out of shape and *pill* (form little fuzz balls) with wear. Acetate doesn't shrink, is moth-resistant, and drapes well; however, it can lose its color and shred with wear, perspiration, and dry cleaning. Rayon (which has been referred to as the poor man's silk) breathes, drapes, and dyes well. Not all rayons are created equal. Lower-quality rayon can shrink and wrinkle, so check the care instructions on the bolt end and follow those instructions once the project is complete.
- » **Synthetic:** Nylon, polyester, spandex, and microfibers are among the hundreds of synthetic fibers, which are produced from refined petroleum or natural gas. Nylon is exceptionally strong, elastic when wet, abrasion resistant, lustrous, and easy to wash with low moisture absorbency. Polyester doesn't shrink, wrinkle, stretch, or fade. It's stain- and chemical-resistant, dyes easily, and is easy to wash. But unless you buy all-polyester garments that are chemically engineered to breathe, you find that polyester is best when blended with natural fibers. Spandex (including Lycra, a widely recognizable brand of spandex) is lightweight, smooth, and soft and stronger than, more durable than, and just as elastic as rubber. Microfibers take dyes well, are washable and durable, have incredible strength, and drape well.
- » **Blends:** Fibers can be blended so the finished fabric has the advantages of the blended fibers. For example, a cotton/polyester blend washes, wears, and breathes because of the cotton, and it wrinkles less than 100-percent cotton because of the polyester. Popular fabrics for sportswear are cotton/spandex blends that allow for a snug, comfortable-fitting garment that moves and bends without strangling your legs or waist.



REMEMBER

You want fabric fibers to fit your needs and lifestyle. For example, my sister-in-law doesn't like ironing or taking things to the dry cleaners, so synthetic, easy-care fibers that are machine washable, dryable, and don't wrinkle are her fabrics of choice. My husband likes the breathable characteristics of cotton, linen, and wool. He doesn't mind going to the dry cleaners and paying to have his shirts laundered and his suits cleaned and pressed, so (you guessed it) he's a natural-fiber guy.

## Getting to know common fabric types

Millions of fabrics are produced worldwide every year. Most are used by manufacturers to make everything from the latest runway fashions to car seats, and only

a tiny percentage makes its way into your local fabric store. Even so, you have so many fabrics available by the yard to choose from that you may be overwhelmed. In this section, I give you an overview of the most common types of fabric, but first, you need to familiarize yourself with the two basic categories of fabrics: woven and knit.

## Finding out about woven fabrics

Woven fabrics are made on a loom similar to the one you may have used as a child to make potholders. The lengthwise yarns are called the *warp* and are the strongest yarns in the fabric. Crosswise yarns are called the *woof*, *weft*, or *filler*. Woven fabrics are stable in the lengthwise and crosswise directions but stretch a little when pulled on the *bias* — the diagonal between the lengthwise and crosswise grains.

Fabrics can be woven loosely or tightly. For a loosely woven, plain-weave fabric, think gauze or cheesecloth. When you hold these fabrics up to the light, you can almost see through them. For a closely woven, plain-weave fabric, think of boat canvas. It's evenly woven and heavier than the gauze because its yarns are closely or tightly woven together.

## Knowing more about knits

Knits are constructed with a series of lengthwise loops called *ribs* and crosswise stitches called *courses*. Because of this looped construction, you treat knits differently when sewing than you treat woven fabrics. Most knits have crosswise stretch and lengthwise stability, so they move and conform to the body. Like woven fabrics, there are various types of knits; the most common are single knits, which curl to one side when stretched across the grain, and double knits, which don't.

## Taking a look at common fabrics

The following list describes some of the most common fabrics available by the yard. (For descriptions of even more fabrics that you might use as you become a more accomplished sewer, check out the list online at [www.dummies.com/go/sewingfd4e](http://www.dummies.com/go/sewingfd4e)). Note that most are woven or knit, but some fabrics can come in either variety.

- » **Broadcloth:** A light- to mid-weight, evenly woven cotton, quilting cotton, silk, linen, or wool fabric used in men's shirts and fine suiting.
- » **Canvas:** A heavy, close, and evenly woven fabric usually made of cotton and used for director's chair backs and seats, tote bags, and other projects that require strong, tough, and long-wearing use.

- » **Chenille:** Derived from the French word for *caterpillar*, chenille is a plush, fuzzy yarn used to create fabrics for upholstery and bedding.
- » **Corduroy:** A mid- to heavyweight cotton *weft pile* (fuzzy ribbed) fabric that's woven, creating the distinct ribs on the lengthwise grain. Corduroy comes in various rib widths — solid and printed — and is commonly used in children's clothing and casual sportswear (not to be confused with “active” sportswear used for a gym workout).
- » **Denim:** A strong mid- to heavyweight, twill-weave fabric in which the warp yarn is a color (usually blue) and the filler yarn is white or off-white. Denim is available in many weights, depending on the end use, and is great for jeans, jackets, skirts, and home décor projects.
- » **Double knit:** A mid-weight, knitted fabric in which both sides are knitted identically. Double knit keeps its shape and has good recovery. Use double knit to make dresses, tops, skirts, and jackets.
- » **Eyelet:** An embroidered cotton available by the yard for blouses and dresses or in narrower widths as trim. The distinct embroidery has holes that are overcast with zigzag stitches.
- » **Flannel:** A light- to mid-weight, plain or twill-weave cotton or wool fabric. Cotton flannel that's brushed has a soft, fluffy surface and is used for work shirts and pajamas. Wool flannel isn't usually brushed and is used as suiting.
- » **Fleece:** A light- to heavyweight, *hydrophobic* (water-hating), double-sided polyester knit used in pullovers, jackets, mittens, booties, blankets, slippers, and scarves. A common trade name for this type of fleece is Polarfleece. You can also find sweatshirts in fleece made with cotton and cotton/polyester blends. See “Taking special care when working with fleece” later in this chapter.
- » **Gabardine:** A strong, mid- to heavyweight, twill-weave fabric made from several fibers or fiber blends. You see it in sportswear, suiting, raincoats, and pants.
- » **Interlock:** A fine lightweight knit used in T-shirts and other sportswear. Interlock is generally made of cotton and cotton blends and is very stretchy.
- » **Jersey:** A fine, light- to mid-weight knit used in better-quality sportswear, tops, and dresses. Jersey comes in solid colors, stripes, or prints.
- » **Poplin:** A mid- to heavyweight, tightly woven fabric with a fine horizontal rib. Poplin is usually made of cotton or a cotton blend and is wonderful for sportswear, children's clothing, and outerwear.
- » **Satin:** This term refers to a fabric's weave. Satin can be made of cotton, silk, synthetic fibers, and blends. Many types of satin fabrics are used on both clothing and home furnishings, but all have a distinct shiny appearance because of the way the fabric is woven.



TIP

- » **Tricot:** A fine, sheer, single knit with vertical ribs on the right side of the fabric and crosswise ribs on the wrong (back) side of the fabric. Stretch the fabric across the grain (see Chapter 4 for more on grainlines and why they're important) and it curls to the right side of the fabric. Use tricot for making lingerie. Tricot is also made into fusible interfacing. (See "Investigating Interfacing" later in this chapter for the details.)
- » **Tulle:** Open netting made of knotted, geometrically shaped holes. Made in several weights, tulle ranges from very fine, used in bridal and dancewear, to heavy nylon netting, used in other crafting projects. Tulle is made of silk or nylon and ranges in width from 45 inches to 120 inches.
- » **Velour:** A woven or knitted fabric with a thick, short pile and usually dyed into deep, dark colors. Use knitted velour for tops and robes and woven velour in home décor projects. Velour is a more casual fabric than velvet. Velour requires a *with nap* layout. (See the next section.)

A short pile, which you find in velour, velvet, and velveteen are short fibers that stand up on the surface of the fabric and give it a soft, fuzzy texture.

## Taking fabric nap into consideration

Fabric has shine, texture, design, color, and pattern to give a project interest. These factors create the *nap* and may require you to buy more fabric and take extra care when laying and cutting out the pattern.

### Determining whether the fabric has nap

Your fabric has nap if it falls into any of the following categories:

- » **Contains a one-way design:** With a directional floral design, if you cut out some of the pattern pieces in one direction and other pattern pieces in the opposite direction, you find your flowers right side up on part of the project and upside down on another part of the same project. You need extra fabric so that you can get all your flowers going (or growing) in the same direction.
- » **Has a fuzzy texture:** Fuzzy fabrics include velvet, corduroy, fleece, and some sweatshirt fleeces. When brushed in one direction, the fabric is smooth; in the other direction, it's rough. This texture difference translates into a color difference, so you need more fabric to cut out the pattern pieces laid out in the same direction.
- » **Contains an uneven stripe:** To match the stripes at the seams, you need extra fabric because you have to lay out the pattern in the same direction. See the section "Laying out plaids, stripes, and one-way designs" in Chapter 4, for more information.



TIP

- » **Contains an even or uneven plaid:** The color bars in a plaid must match both vertically and horizontally. If the color bars have the same spacing and are in the same order in both directions along the *selvage* (see Chapter 4 for more on selvages), the plaid is even, which means you can lay out the pattern pieces in both directions. If the color bars aren't symmetrical in one or both directions, the plaid is uneven, so you need to lay out all the pattern pieces going in the same direction. You need more fabric to make either kind of plaid match. Check out Chapter 4 to find out more about working with plaids.

The selvage (not to be confused with salvage) on a piece of fabric is the long, finished edge of the fabric where it comes off the loom. For more on selvages, see Chapter 4.

## Taking special care when working with fleece

Treat it right, and fleece provides you with durable projects that look as good as they feel. But as great as fleece is for home décor projects and clothing, it does require some special treatment.



TIP

Here are a few general dos and don'ts to help you get the best results when working with fleece:

- » **Do know the right from the wrong side of the fleece.** As fleece wears, the color ages differently on the right and the wrong sides of the fabric. This is no big deal unless you use two different sides for one project. To figure out which side is which, stretch it on the selvage — and the fleece curls to the right side. When stretched across the grain, it curls to the wrong side.
- » **Do mark the wrong side of the fabric by using a dressmaker's pencil or chalk after cutting out your pattern.** Mark the center front with a single hash mark and the center back with a double hash mark. If the front and back pattern pieces look similar to one another, you can tell them apart by the markings. Dressmaker's chalk and pencil mark fleece easily and don't smudge.
- » **Do mark notches with a chalk pencil instead of clipping into the seam allowance.** Most fleece projects use  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam allowances. If you clip too far into the seam allowance, the snip is hard to fix.
- » **Do wash your finished project by turning it inside out.** Use lukewarm water, the gentle wash cycle, and powdered detergent. Liquid detergents can damage the chemical finish on the lighter-weight fleeces, impairing their moisture-wicking capabilities.
- » **Don't prewash fleece.** Prewashing isn't necessary. Fleece is usually made of polyester or a polyester blend that doesn't shrink. You won't damage the fabric if you do preshrink it; you just don't need to do it.

» **Don't press fleece, even after you sew seams.** Placing a hot iron directly on the fabric crushes the nap and can melt the fibers. If somewhere down the road you find yourself with a pesky fleece seam that needs shaping, set the iron for *steam* and hold it 3 to 4 inches above the seamline, letting the steam penetrate the fibers. Finger-press the seam in shape by holding and patting your hand over it until the fabric cools.

## Considering fabric width and yardage needed

Fabric comes in different widths, and when you're buying fabric for your latest sewing project, you may need to do some conversion because the pattern you're using calls for something different than what you see in the store. Table 3-1 converts the yardage you need from one fabric width to another. For example, if your pattern calls for 1 yard of 60-inch-wide fabric and the fabric you want to use is only 45 inches wide, the table tells you that you need  $1\frac{3}{8}$  yards of the 45-inch wide fabric to make the project.

**TABLE 3-1**

**Fabric Yardage Conversion Table**

35 inches	45 inches	50 inches	54 inches	60 inches
$1\frac{3}{4}$	$1\frac{3}{8}$	$1\frac{1}{4}$	$1\frac{1}{8}$	1
2	$1\frac{5}{8}$	$1\frac{1}{2}$	$1\frac{3}{8}$	$1\frac{1}{4}$
$2\frac{1}{4}$	$1\frac{3}{4}$	$1\frac{5}{8}$	$1\frac{1}{2}$	$1\frac{3}{8}$
$2\frac{1}{2}$	$2\frac{1}{8}$	$1\frac{3}{4}$	$1\frac{3}{4}$	$1\frac{5}{8}$
$2\frac{7}{8}$	$2\frac{1}{4}$	2	$1\frac{7}{8}$	$1\frac{3}{4}$
$3\frac{1}{8}$	$2\frac{1}{2}$	$2\frac{1}{4}$	2	$1\frac{7}{8}$
$3\frac{3}{8}$	$2\frac{3}{4}$	$2\frac{3}{8}$	$2\frac{1}{4}$	2
$3\frac{3}{4}$	$2\frac{7}{8}$	$2\frac{5}{8}$	$2\frac{3}{8}$	$2\frac{1}{4}$
$4\frac{1}{4}$	$3\frac{1}{8}$	$2\frac{3}{4}$	$2\frac{5}{8}$	$2\frac{3}{8}$
$4\frac{1}{2}$	$3\frac{3}{8}$	3	$2\frac{3}{4}$	$2\frac{5}{8}$
$4\frac{3}{4}$	$3\frac{5}{8}$	$3\frac{1}{4}$	$2\frac{7}{8}$	$2\frac{3}{4}$
5	$3\frac{7}{8}$	$3\frac{3}{8}$	$3\frac{1}{8}$	$2\frac{7}{8}$



## Reading labels and bolt ends

In the fabric store, you see the fabric wrapped around *bolts* — cardboard flats or round tubes. Flat bolts of fabric stand at attention on tables, and tube-type bolts are stored upright in a rack or threaded with a wooden dowel and hung horizontally on a rack for easy viewing. At the end of flat bolts or on a hang tag, you find a label like the one you see in Figure 3-1 that tells you many important things about the fabric, including the fiber content, width of the fabric, care instructions, price per yard, and often the manufacturer.

**FIGURE 3-1:**  
Read the end of  
the bolt to find  
out necessary  
information  
about the fabric.



The fabric's width determines how much fabric you need to purchase for a particular project. Reading the back of your project's pattern envelope helps determine how much fabric to buy based on the fabric width. (See Chapter 4 for more information on reading pattern envelopes.)

The most common fabric widths are as follows:

- » **42 to 45 inches wide:** Most woven, silk, linen, cotton, cotton blends, novelty prints, dressmaking, and quilting fabrics come in this width.
- » **54 to 60 inches wide:** Many knits, woolens, and home décor fabrics come in this width.

Occasionally you find a fabric that's 72 inches wide, and sheer fabrics, such as bridal tulle, come up to 120 inches wide. Quilt backing (fabric that is used on the back of the quilt) and some sheer drapery fabrics are also available in the 120-inch width.

# Getting Notions about Findings

Tapes, trimmings, ribbons, piping, laces, elastics, and zippers are all lumped together under the category of *sewing notions* or *findings* — presumably because you need to find and gather them together before making a project.

The back of your pattern envelope tells you exactly which findings and notions you need for a particular project. (Chapter 4 tells you more about pattern envelopes.)

## Busting bias (tape) basics

Bias tape is a long, continuous strip of woven cotton/polyester blend fabric used to finish or cover up a raw fabric edge. Because the tape is cut on the bias, it conforms to a straight edge, such as a seam allowance, and can be easily shaped to fit a curve or hem edge. (Read more about what *bias* means in Chapter 4.)

Bias tape comes in several configurations, including single fold, extra wide, double fold, hem facing, and hem tape. Your project's pattern instructions/envelope tells you which type of bias tape you need.

## Going bonkers for braid

You use braid to cover an edge or to embellish a fabric's surface. Braids come in a variety of types. *Fold-over braid* is used to trim the edges. *Middy* and *soutache braids* are flat, narrow braids often seen on sailor suits and band uniforms. Middy braid has several fine ridges that run the length of the braid, and soutache braid has one deep groove in the center that runs the length of the braid.

## Expanding on elastic

Take a look at Figure 3-2 and see the many different types of elastics — and these are just a few of the popular types. The type and width you use for a specific project are determined by how you use it:

- » **Drawstring elastic:** This knitted elastic has a drawstring running through the center of it — perfect for use in drawstring shorts and sweatpants.
- » **Elastic braid:** This looks like middy braid but stretches. Use it in a casing at the wrist or waist. (See Chapter 9 for more information on casings.) Swimwear elastic is an elastic braid treated to resist wear in salt and chlorinated water.

- » **Elastic cord:** This cord is heavier than elastic thread and can be zigzagged over for a soft, stretchy wrist treatment.
- » **Elastic thread:** Use this for shirring fabric (see Chapter 4), for hemming swimwear (see Chapter 7), and for other decorative applications.
- » **Knitted elastic:** This elastic is soft and extremely stretchy. When you stretch knitted elastic while sewing, the needle slips through the loops of the knit so that the elastic doesn't break down or grow larger than the cut length during the application. Knitted elastic is great for waistbands in knitted apparel.
- » **Non-roll waistband elastic:** This elastic works wonderfully through a waistline casing or at the waistline of pull-on shorts, pants, or skirts. The ribs of this elastic keep the elastic rigid so that it doesn't bend or curl in the casing.



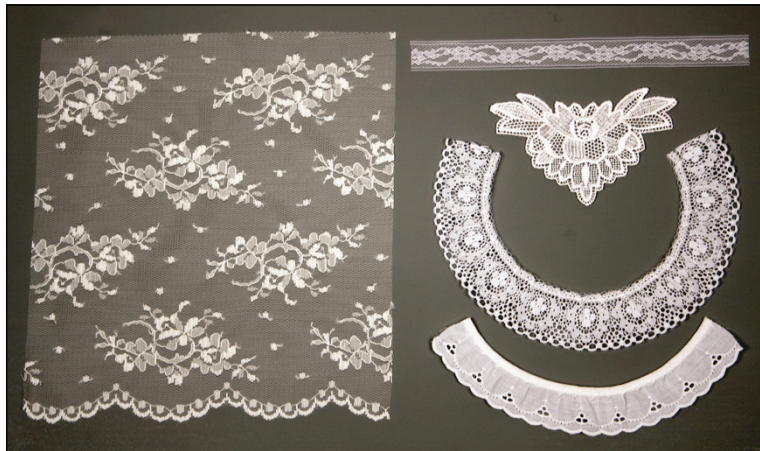
**FIGURE 3-2:** Elastic comes in a variety of types and widths depending on the end use.

## Loving lace

Lace shown in Figure 3-3 is sold by the yard and comes in these varieties and many, many more:

- » **Hem lace:** This lace is flimsy and straight on both edges like lace insertion (see later in this bulleted list). Because it's used on the inside of a garment at the hem edge, hem lace doesn't have to be expensive or sensational to do the job.
- » **Lace beading:** This machine-made lace trim has straight edges and a row of openwork holes running down the center so that ribbon can be woven through it. It's often used as a channel for a ribbon drawstring.

- » **Lace edging:** It can have either a straight edge or a scalloped edge. You use lace edging to trim a hem or cuff edge, most often in heirloom sewing (sewing done with old-fashioned styling). You also use lace edging to trim the edge of tucks. (Check out Chapter 9 for more about tucks.)
- » **Eyelet lace:** Eyelet lace is made of woven cotton or linen and features *eyelets*, little holes in the fabric, which are finished with short, narrow zigzag stitches called *satin stitches*. Eyelet lace can also be gathered onto a band and used as a hem edge.
- » **Lace insertion:** This narrow lace has straight edges so you can easily insert it between two other pieces of lace or fabric. Insertion lace is most often used on heirloom garments.



**FIGURE 3-3:**  
These are just a few common laces available.

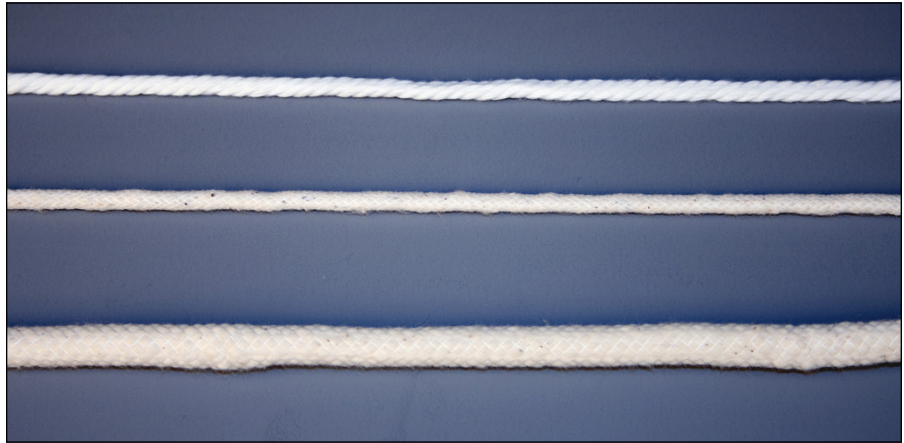
## Piping up for piping and cording

Piping and cording, like those shown in Figure 3-4, have lip edges and are sandwiched between two pieces of fabric at the seamline. A *lip edge* is a flat flap of fabric or braid that's attached to the edge of the cording for easy application. The most common types of piping and cording include the following:

- » **Cord-edge trim:** You use this trim mostly in home décor projects. One edge of this trim has a twisted cable cord; the other edge is a lip edge. The lip edge is stitched to the cable cord, and you can remove it by pulling one end of the chainstitch thread. (See Chapter 15 for more information on using cord-edge trim in your home décor projects.)

- » **Filler cord:** This cord fills the center of piping that's wrapped and stitched with fabric. Filler cord comes in a wide range of widths.
- » **Piping:** Piping is purely decorative. You use it to trim the edges of slipcovers, pillows, and cushions. In clothing, use piping at the edge of pockets, cuffs, collars, and yokes in seamlines.

**FIGURE 3-4:**  
Look for these  
when you need  
filler cords  
and piping.



## Running with ribbons

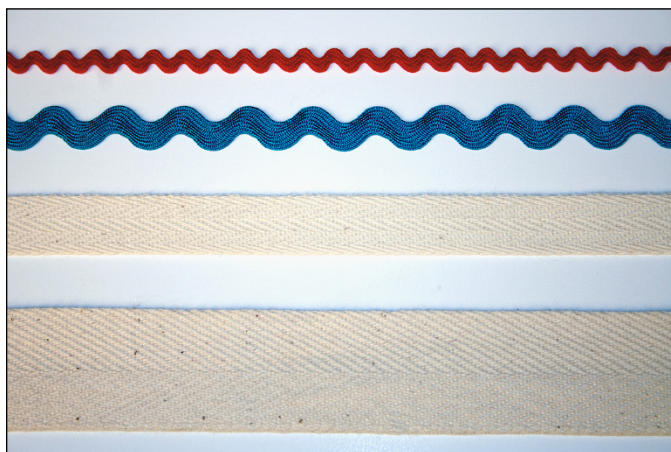
You can use ribbons for everything from trimming apparel to decorating floral arrangements. They come in hundreds, if not thousands, of configurations, fiber contents, widths, colors, finishes, textures, and edges. I list three common types of ribbon here, but you have a whole world of ribbons to explore:

- » **Grosgrain ribbon:** This ribbon — which is pronounced *grow*-grain — has a ribbed texture and is easy to sew. Use it for trim on something tailored or, because it doesn't snag easily, on children's clothing.
- » **Satin ribbon:** It has a smooth, shiny texture. Use it on more formal projects and where you need a dressier look.
- » **Silk ribbon:** Great for hand or machine embroidery, silk ribbon comes in various widths and is a popular ribbon for adorning handmade projects.

## Refreshing with rickrack and twill tape

Rickrack, a narrow zigzagging braid like you see in Figure 3-5, comes in many widths and colors. Use it on the surface of a garment to disguise a hem crease that

you can't press out, or use it to peek out at the edge of a pocket in a seam allowance for extra interest, as shown in the jumper in the color insert.



**FIGURE 3-5:**  
Rickrack and twill  
tape come in  
many widths  
and colors.

Twill tape as shown in Figure 3-5 is made with a twill weave. It comes in narrow, medium, and wider widths and is very stable. Because of its stability, you can use twill tape to stabilize shoulder seams and other areas in a garment that may stretch or droop out of shape.

## Getting the lowdown on drapery headers

Drapery header tape is used at the top of a drape to provide stability, stiffness, and sometimes a place to slip in drapery hooks. It usually comes in limited widths (from 4 to 5 inches) and can be made from woven or nonwoven material.

## Adding zip with zippers

Zippers come in a variety of types and configurations, including the following. (See Chapter 10 for all things zipper related.)

- » **Conventional nylon coil zipper:** The cool thing about this zipper, shown in Figure 3-6, is that it can heal itself — if the zipper splits, you simply zip the pull up and down, and the split *heals*. The zipper can handle only a few such splits, so use a coil zipper in non-stress areas of garments for adults.
- » **Invisible zipper:** When sewn in properly, an invisible zipper (see Figure 3-6) ends up looking like a seam.

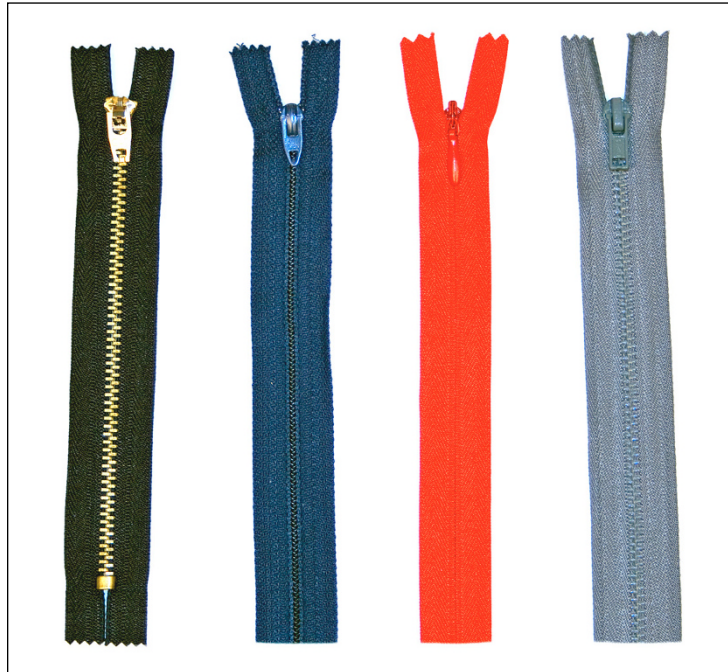




REMEMBER

To sew in an invisible zipper you need a special presser foot. When you buy your first invisible zipper, remember to take the make and model number of your sewing machine with you so you buy the right invisible zipper presser foot.

- » **Molded-tooth zipper:** This zipper has individual zipper teeth made either of metal or nylon. The molded-tooth zipper (shown in Figure 3-6) is quite durable, which makes it great for kids' clothing, outerwear, backpacks, jackets, and sleeping bags.



**FIGURE 3-6:** Common zipper types include (left to right) conventional metal-tooth, conventional nylon coil, invisible, and nylon molded-tooth.

## Investigating Interfacing

*Interfacing* is an additional layer of fabric used to give high-wear areas of a garment more shape and durability. Use interfacing inside cuffs, waistbands, neck facings, and front *plackets* (the parts of shirts where the buttons and buttonholes sit) so those areas hold their shape.



WARNING

If you think you can save some time and money by omitting the interfacing called for in the pattern, think again. Your project is sure to look, well, *awful*. Without interfacing, the fabric just doesn't hold up, the collar and cuffs on a garment wrinkle and pucker . . . you get the picture.

Like ribbons, interfacing comes in dozens of varieties, and the technology is constantly changing. When looking for interfacing, ask a sales associate in your local fabric store to help. The following are the most common categories:

- » **Knitted:** Made of nylon tricot, this interfacing is wonderful for use with knit fabrics because it has the same stretchy quality as the fabric. Lay out the pieces so the stretch goes in the same direction as the fabric pieces.
- » **Nonwoven:** This interfacing is the easiest to use because you can lay it out any way you please.
- » **Woven:** You lay out this interfacing along the same grainline as the fabric pieces. If your fabric pattern piece is cut on the lengthwise grain, the interfacing pattern piece should be cut on the lengthwise grain as well. (See Chapter 4 for the details on cutting out patterns.)

You can also choose between *fusible* interfacing, which you iron onto the fabric, and *sew-in* interfacing, which you apply the old-fashioned way — by sewing it onto the garment. I love fusible interfacing. After properly fused, it stays where you want it, and because fusible interfacing is used frequently in ready-to-wear garments, you get a more professional finish on your handmade originals.



TIP

What's the best type of interfacing to use? It depends on the fabric. If in doubt, consult the sales associate at the fabric store for help selecting an interfacing that's compatible with your fabric.

## Preshrinking Your Fabric: Why It Needs a Spa Day

Before laying and cutting out your project and before sewing a stitch, you must *preshrink* your washable fabric. Preshrinking allows you to see how your fabric behaves — it shows you how much your fabric shrinks, whether the colors run, how much it wrinkles, and other important characteristics.



The only exceptions are fleece, dry-clean-only fabrics such as wool and silk or wool and silk blends, and home décor fabrics and trims:

- » Fleece doesn't shrink when washed, so preshrinking isn't necessary. (See "Taking special care when working with fleece" earlier in this chapter.)
- » For dry-clean-only fabrics, trims, and zippers, set your steam iron for high steam. Hold the iron above the surface of the fabric, letting the steam penetrate the fibers, but without soaking the fabric or zipper. Line-dry the fabric and then iron the fabric flat with a dry iron (not set on the steam setting).
- » Home décor fabrics and trims can become dull-looking and limp when they're preshrunk — so don't do it. Check out the care instructions on the trim, hang tags, and bolt ends for more complete care instructions.



TIP

As soon as you get back from the fabric store, preshrink your fabric. If you preshrink and put off the project, you don't have to wonder later, "Did I preshrink my fabric already?"



TIP

## PRESHRINKING FUSIBLE INTERFACING

If fusible interfacing isn't fused according to the manufacturer's instructions, it can shrink after you wash the project, causing a rippled bubbly appearance. It can also detach from or become too crisp for the fabric, resulting in a stiff, boardy look that screams H-O-M-E-M-A-D-E.

Preshrinking woven or knitted fusible interfacing reduces the chances of such disasters. I preshrink these types of interfacings by soaking them in hot tap water until they're completely wet and then letting them drip, air, or line-dry.

Fusible tricot, which is a wonderful lightweight knitted interfacing, curls terribly when you preshrink it. So instead of preshrinking it, I cut out my interfacing pattern pieces on the bias (see more about the bias in Chapter 4), and the tricot behaves beautifully in the finished project. Other fusible interfacings that work well without preshrinking are the nonwoven variety, provided that you follow the manufacturer's instructions for application printed on the interleaving wrapped in the interfacing bolt. These directions tell you everything you need to know about using the product, including important information such as how to cut out the pattern pieces, how hot to set your iron, and how long to leave the iron on the fabric.

For washable fabrics, preshrink your fabric by washing it as you would the finished project. For example, if you plan to wash your finished garment in the washing machine with regular-strength detergent and then dry it in the dryer, wash and dry your fabric in the same way to preshrink it. To prevent nonstop raveling of woven fabrics, finish off the raw edges first using one of the sewing machine or serger stitches shown in Chapter 6. After you preshrink it, press your fabric smooth and flat. Now the fabric is ready for the layout and cutting process. (See Chapter 4.)



REMEMBER

Also preshrink any trims, tapes, and piping you plan to use with your project. Wrap them around your hand and remove your hand from the trim, creating a *hank*, or coil. Put a rubber band around the hank and wash it with your project's fabric.

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Hunting down the perfect pattern
- » Reading the pattern, the sizing information, and the pattern envelope
- » Laying out, pinning, and cutting out the pattern
- » Transferring important marks to the fabric

## Chapter 4

# Pondering Patterns in the 21st Century

**B**uckle up, rookie! The journey to your sewing success begins with good fabric and a pattern that fits your skill level. This chapter uncovers the secrets of laying out, cutting, and marking your pattern pieces so they seamlessly fit together. Figuring out these fundamentals is like building the foundation of a skyscraper. You'll use these skills time and time again, so when you practice and sharpen them, you'll be ready to conquer any sewing challenge that dares to cross your sewing machine. Let the adventure begin!

## Sewing Patterns in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Over the past few years, the sewing pattern scene has done a 180 — or should I say a full 360? I remember the days when I'd rummage through drawers of paper patterns only to find the one I wanted was out of stock. Enter the era of maverick digital patternmakers, who've turned the sewing world into their pattern playground with multiple-sized and downloadable PDF patterns.

That's right. I said PDF patterns. In addition to commercially paper-printed patterns, patternmakers have used technology in a whole new way — letting you click, download, and print faster than you can say “*Sewing For Dummies*.” From the cozy confines of your sewing corner, you can access patterns online, ranging from haute couture to why-didn't-I-think-of-that simplicity.



WARNING

Just be aware that PDF patterns can be more of a challenge than traditional paper patterns. Once you download a pattern, you need to print it on your typical 8½ by 11-inch paper. For patterns with a lot of pieces or several views (variations of one design), you may have to print 100 pages or more. Then you need to match up each sheet of paper with the next to create the pattern pieces. Even though PDFs may be cheaper than their printed paper counterparts, by the time you print, paste, and factor ink and paper into the pattern price, it may not be the bargain you thought it was. And if you want a printing service to print your pattern, the cost may be more than you want to pay. So unless you're making a small craft pattern (such as a small stuffed animal or doll clothes), use printed paper patterns until you're a more confident sewer. *For this book, I'm assuming that you'll be working with a printed paper pattern that you purchased in a paper envelope.*

The rise of these indie pattern designers has not only injected a hefty dose of creativity into the mix, it's influenced the commercial “Big Four” pattern companies (Simplicity, McCall's, Butterick, and Vogue) and the other players in the field (Know Me, New Look, and Burda Style to name a few). How? By turning sizing and style on its head.

Finally, both commercial and independent pattern designs cater to more than just the mannequin-sized few and are now celebrating every body type under the sun. To take a look, go to <https://simplicity.com/>.

As you thread your way through this chapter and the digital age, tip your thimble to these pattern pioneers. They've not only made sewing more accessible but have proven that, with the right pattern, anyone can turn their fabric into a fashion statement. The sewing pattern industry? As those in the industry say, “It's *sew* transformed, it's unrecognizable” — in the best way possible.

## Shopping for Patterns

Just as sewing patterns have evolved, the shopping experience has changed, too. I expect it will continue well past the printing of this book, so I'm giving you the best advice for choosing and shopping for patterns as of today. Here goes.

Besides visiting your local fabric store and perusing the physical pattern catalogs, you can view the huge selection of easy-to-sew patterns online. I'm a little old school and prefer looking for patterns in person, but if you aren't in an area that has a fabric store, you can browse to your heart's content by going online. Here's a good place to start: <https://simplicity.com>.

Once you get your hands on a catalog (either digital or paper), projects are grouped by category, ranging from dresses and children's clothing to crafts and home décor. Within those categories, you often find patterns with different degrees of difficulty, usually with emphasis placed on easy-to-sew projects. Websites make it easy to find your skill level by hyperlinking their "Easy-to-Sew" patterns to the home page of that category.



WARNING

Even though a pattern is labeled *quick*, it may be difficult and hard to fit for a rookie. Many pattern-instruction writers assume that you have a certain amount of general sewing knowledge. If you're a real beginner, look for patterns labeled *Easy to Sew* with few seams and simple lines.

## Sizing Up Things for Fashion Sewing

Determining your pattern size for a garment can be a humbling experience. Patterns for adults usually run smaller than the ready-to-wear sizes you find in clothing stores — sad but true. That means, for example, that if you usually wear a size 10 dress, you may find yourself buying a size 12 pattern. However, patterns for children have the opposite problem and run larger than ready-to-wear sizes. Note that patterns often come with three or more sizes printed on the pattern paper. You simply cut out the pattern on the specified cutting line for your size.

Unfortunately, I have more bad news: For measurement accuracy, someone else must take and record your measurements. You just can't get accurate measurements by yourself, so don't even try it. Find someone you trust, swear them to secrecy, and start measuring. (See Chapter 2 if you're in the market for a measuring tape to take your vital statistics.)



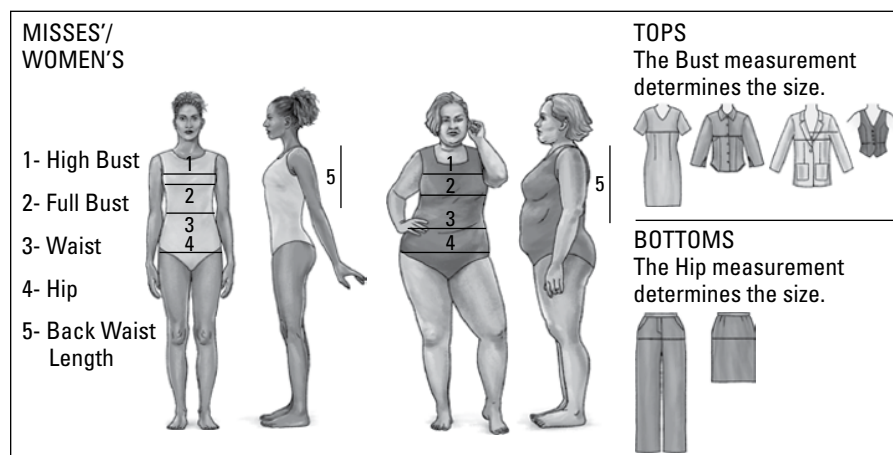
TIP

To take your measurements and decide your pattern size and figure type, you need to locate your *natural waistline*, which isn't necessarily where you wear your pants. To do so, dress in your underwear, a leotard, or yoga gear (as long as it sits at your true waist) and tie a piece of narrow ribbon or elastic around your waist. Don't cinch the ribbon too tight. Wiggle around until the ribbon or elastic finds your natural waistline — usually the narrowest part of your torso, about 7 to 9 inches above the fullest part of your hips.

Have your helper take the following six measurements. Figure 4-1 shows you the exact placement of each measurement:

- » High bust circumference (measured halfway between the collarbone and the full bust measurement): \_\_\_\_
- » Full bust circumference: \_\_\_\_
- » Waist circumference: \_\_\_\_
- » Hip circumference: \_\_\_\_
- » Back waist length (measured from the bone at the back of the neck to the waistline): \_\_\_\_

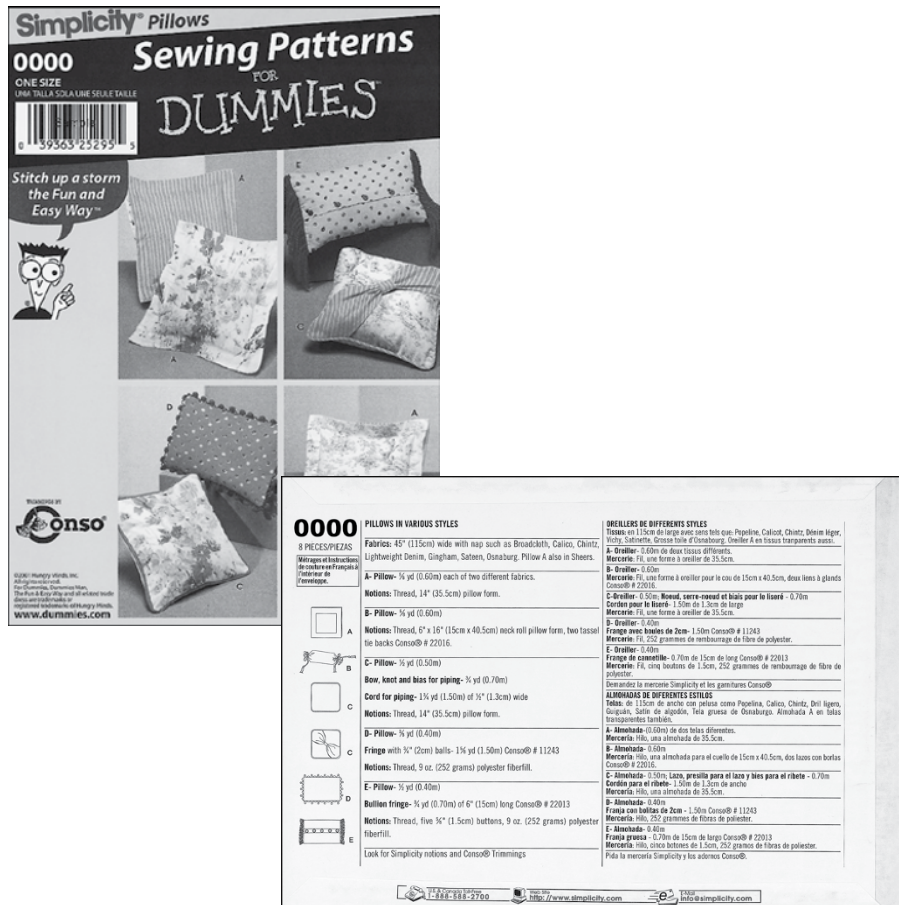
**FIGURE 4-1:**  
Determine  
the correct  
pattern size by  
taking these  
measurements.



If you're shopping for a pattern in a fabric store that carries fashion fabric and pattern catalogs, in the front or back of the pattern catalog you'll find measurement charts. Using your height and back waist length, determine your figure type (Junior, Misses/Miss petite, Child, Unisex, and so on), and then compare your other measurements with the charts to find the size that comes closest to your measurements. That's your pattern size. Write your size and the brand name of the pattern, and then record the number of the pattern you want to sew (usually a four-digit number). Add your pattern to the Shopping Cart or head to the retailer's pattern drawers or pattern rack. Stores file patterns numerically by brand. So, after you find the brand, the pattern number, and your size, pull the pattern from the drawer. Find your size on the chart on the back of the pattern envelope (or webpage) to see how much fabric you need to buy.

# Deciphering the Pattern and Its Parts

Nothing can be more intimidating than trying to figure out all the hieroglyphics on the various parts of a pattern envelope, as shown in Figure 4-2. In this section, I tell you just what you need to know about your pattern and its parts.



## Checking out the front of the pattern envelope

On the front of the pattern envelope, you often see several style variations of the same project. In the world of sewing, people call these style variations *views*. One view may have a collar, long sleeves, and cuffs. Another view may have a V-neck and short sleeves.

In home décor patterns, you may have several views in one pattern for a basic window treatment. Other patterns may have several pillow views or several options for chair covers. Views simply give you style options for creating the same basic project.

## Reading the chart on the back of the pattern envelope

The back of a pattern envelope contains the following information about your project:

- » **A detailed line drawing of the back view of the project:** The front of the pattern envelope usually just shows the front of your project, and the back of the envelope shows you the back of the project. A line drawing shows you the details like kick pleats or a back zipper and the seamlines that you may not be able to see from the photograph on the front— information that you want to know before choosing the pattern.
- » **A description of the project by view:** Drawings and photographs can deceive you, but this written description tells you exactly what you're getting so you can determine if it's within your skill set or not. For example, as a beginning sewer, a pattern with a raglan sleeve is easier to make than one with a set-in sleeve. (Find more about sleeve types in Chapter 11.)
- » **How much fabric to buy:** This information is based on the width of the fabric you choose, the view you make, your size, and whether your fabric has a nap. (See Chapter 3 for info on fabric width and nap.) The fabric is measured and priced by the yard as it comes off the bolt. So if you need 2 yards of fabric that's 54 inches wide but the fabric you choose only comes in a 45-inch width, you need 2½ yards for the same yield. Check out the fabric conversion chart in Chapter 3 to make sure you buy the right amount of fabric you need.
- » **List of notions needed for specific views:** This list may include information such as the number and size of buttons, the zipper length and type, the elastic width and length, the shoulder pad style and size (if any), hooks and eyes, and so on.

## It's what's inside that counts

Inside your pattern envelope, you find the following items necessary for your project:



- » **Pattern pieces:** Some pattern pieces are printed on large pieces of tissue paper. Others are printed on sturdy pieces of white paper called *master patterns*.
- » **Key and glossary:** These references help you decipher the markings on the pattern pieces.
- » **Pattern layout:** This guide shows you how to lay out the pattern pieces on the fabric yardage for each view.
- » **Step-by-step instructions for putting the project together:** Depending on your knowledge of sewing, you may find this *pattern guide sheet* clear as day — or as mud. Don't worry, though — this book tells you what you need to know to decipher the instructions.



TIP

The project instructions may run more than one page. If they do, staple the pages together so you don't lose any. Post the instructions in front of you or next to your sewing machine as you sew so you can easily check off each step as you finish it. Also, keep this book handy. If, for example, the pattern instructions tell you to insert a zipper, before reading the pattern instructions, look at the way I recommend you do it. My techniques are generally faster, easier, and more trouble-free because they're used in commercial/factory garment construction.



REMEMBER

Some home décor projects, such as pillow patterns, include tissue or paper pattern pieces. Others, such as sofa slipcovers and some window treatments, don't include a paper pattern because they don't use a standard size or style of sofa or window. In these patterns, you find just the step-by-step instructions.

## Preparing the pattern pieces

If you have a master pattern or a multisized tissue pattern, it has several sizes printed on the same paper. Rather than cutting it apart, trace off the size you need using pattern tracing material. Names for that material are Red Dot or Easy Pattern Tracing Material (by Pellon). There are several other products including tracing paper, but tracing material is sewable and can be basted together (see Chapter 5 for more on basting), and then you can try it on to check fit.

If you're using a multisized master pattern and want to preserve the option of making the project in a different size in the future, trace the pattern size you need on pattern tracing material, remembering to transfer all the pattern markings from the master pattern.

## Decoding the pattern pieces



When you look at your pattern pieces and see only one sleeve, half of a front top, half of a back top pattern, half of a collar, and so on, you may think that the company forgot to print the whole pattern. Not so. Because you fold the fabric in half the long way (usually with the right side of the fabric to the inside), you lay out the pattern pieces and cut them on a double fabric layer. So you usually need only half of the pattern to make a complete garment.

All pattern pieces have the following information printed on or near the center of each pattern piece:

- » **Pattern number:** If you accidentally mix together pattern pieces of different projects, these numbers can help you figure out which pieces belong to which projects.
- » **Name of the pattern piece:** These names are pretty straightforward — sleeve, front pant, and so on.
- » **Letter or number of the pattern piece:** These identifiers help you find all the pattern pieces for the view you're making. (See the earlier section "Checking out the front of the pattern envelope" for information about views.)
- » **Size:** Many pattern pieces show several sizes. Each size is marked clearly, so you shouldn't have too much trouble keeping them straight.
- » **Number of pieces you need to cut:** Often, you need to cut more than one of each pattern piece. For example, on the sleeve pattern you may see *cut 2* so you end up with both a right and left sleeve. If you lay and cut out the sleeve on a double layer of fabric (folded with the right sides together) it counts as two sleeves.

The following pattern markings listed here and shown in Figure 4-3 appear around the periphery of the pattern pieces:

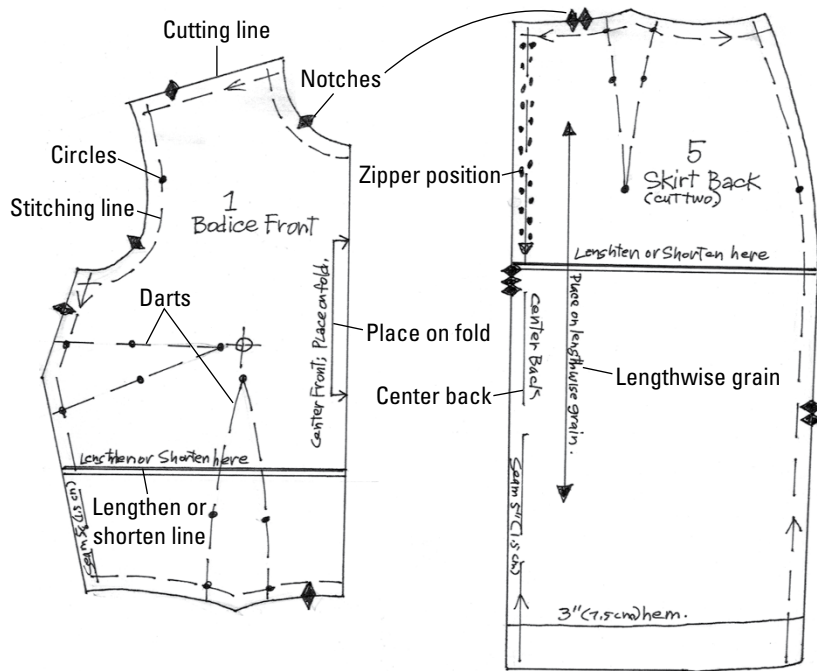
- » **Cutting line:** This heavy, outer line on the pattern piece lets you know where to cut and may feature scissors symbols.
- » **Seamline or stitching line:** You usually find this broken line  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch inside the cutting line. Multiple-sized patterns may not have a seamline printed on the pattern. Read the pattern guide sheet to determine the width of the seam allowance. (Chapter 6 tells you more about seams.)

- » **Notches:** You use these diamond-shaped match points on the cutting line for accurately joining one pattern piece to another. You may find single notches, double notches, and triple notches all in one pattern.
- » **Circles, dots, triangles, or squares:** No, this isn't a geometry lesson. These shapes indicate additional match points that aid in the construction, fit, and ease of putting the project together. For example, large dots on the pattern may indicate where you gather a waistline. The corresponding instruction on your pattern guide sheet may say something like, "Gather from large dot to large dot."
- » **Place-on-fold brackets or symbols:** Use these symbols to lay out the pattern piece exactly on the fold of the fabric, which is usually along the lengthwise grain of the fabric. When you cut out the pattern piece and remove the paper pattern, the fabric unfolds into a single piece that's twice the size of the pattern.
- » **Lengthen or shorten directives:** Based on your measurements, your body may be longer or shorter than the paper pattern piece. These lines show where you can cut the pattern apart to lengthen it or fold up the pattern piece to shorten it.
- » **Darts:** Darts are long narrow triangles that are folded and stitched to help shape the flat piece of fabric into a form-fitting one that fits the curves of the human body. (See Chapter 9.) Broken stitching lines meet at a point to create the dart. Some patterns also have a solid line that runs the length of the dart showing where you fold the fabric to create the dart.
- » **Center back and center front:** These directions are clearly labeled with a solid cutting line or place-on-fold symbol. (Refer to that item earlier in this list.) If the pattern has a solid cutting line, it means the garment has a seam down the center front or center back. If, instead, you place the center front or center back on the fold, you don't have a seam down the center front or the center back.
- » **Zipper position:** This symbol shows the zipper placement. The top and bottom markings (usually dots) show you the length of the zipper. (Chapter 10 covers putting in a zipper.)
- » **Grainline:** The grainline symbol is the most important pattern marking because it tells you how to position the pattern on the fabric so the garment hangs straight on your body. The grainline symbol is a straight line that may or may not have arrowheads at each end and that parallels the *selvages*

(finished edges) of the fabric. See the section “Placing the pattern pieces on-grain” later in this chapter to find out how and why this marking is critical for your sewing success.

- » **Directional-stitching symbols:** These symbols, which often look like small arrows, carrots, or presser foot symbols, indicate the direction you sew when sewing the seam.
- » **The hemline:** This direction on the pattern shows the recommended finished length of the project, which varies from person to person. Even though the hemline may vary, the *hem allowance* (the recommended distance from the hemline to the cut edge) doesn't. See Chapter 7 for more information on hem depths.

Figure 4-4 shows the full gamut of markings you may find on a pattern piece.



**FIGURE 4-3:** Markings on tissue pattern pieces are the road map to your project.

	Cutting line
	Multi-size cutting lines
	Grainlines
	Place on fold line
	Alteration lines
	Seamline or stitching line
	Seam allowance
	Center front or back
	Hem allowance Hemline
	Buttonhole
	Combined button and buttonhole
	Button position
	Dart
	Pleat
	Tuck
	Bust point or hipline
	Waist or hipline
	Markings to be transferred from pattern pieces to the fabric for matching or to indicate detail
	Single notches
	Double notches
	Triple notches
	Zipper placement

**FIGURE 4-4:**  
A listing and  
diagram of  
the universal  
symbols used on  
pattern pieces.

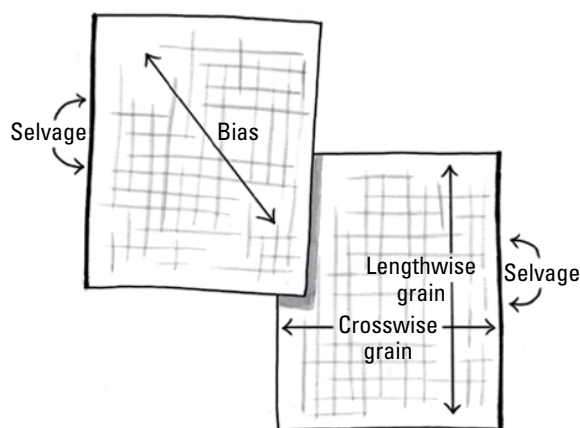
# Laying Out the Pattern

Before laying out the pattern on the fabric, you need to understand some basic fabric and pattern terminology, which I cover in this section.

## Getting to know your fabric

If you hear the word *grain* and think of oatmeal, you're not quite ready to lay out your pattern. Knowing your way around a piece of fabric is crucial to your sewing success. Take a look at Figure 4-5 to acquaint yourself with fabric's four key facets:

- » **Selvages:** The finished edges where the fabric comes off the loom, the selvages are parallel to the lengthwise grain.
- » **Lengthwise grain or grainline:** The grainline runs the length of the fabric, parallel to the selvages. On knit fabrics, the lengthwise grain is usually more stable and less stretchy than the crosswise grain.
- » **Crosswise grain:** This grain runs across the width of the fabric, from selvege to selvege, and perpendicular to the lengthwise grain. On knit fabrics, most of the stretch is usually across the grain.
- » **Bias:** Forty-five degrees between the lengthwise and crosswise grains. When you pull a woven fabric on the bias it stretches and is malleable. This is why bias tape (see Chapter 3) and trims that are cut on the bias can be easily shaped to follow a curved edge.



**FIGURE 4-5:**  
The parts of a  
piece of fabric.

## Preparing the fabric

Using fabric straight off the bolt is a little like eating an unbaked apple pie: You can do it, but the results won't be so good. You skip an important step if you don't preshrink and press your fabric before you begin. (See Chapter 3 for more information on preshrinking; you're on your own for the apple pie.)



TIP

Even after preshrinking and pressing your fabric, you may notice a crease where the fabric was folded on the bolt. You can press this pesky crease out of most fabrics by sprinkling equal parts of white vinegar and water on a press cloth and then laying the press cloth on the crease between the iron and the fabric, pressing until the fabric dries.

After you press the fabric, let it dry completely and then refold it to the original bolt fold so that the selvages are even. Then look at the fabric. When you fold it in half so the selvages are together, are the raw edges even with each other and perpendicular to the selvages and the selvages parallel to one another? If not, the fabric may have been cut off the bolt unevenly, or the fabric needs to be pulled back on-grain. To do so, unfold the fabric again, pull it on the bias (refer to Figure 4-4), and straighten it. If you have a large piece of fabric, get a helper to pull the yardage from one corner while you pull on the yardage from the opposite corner.

## Knowing right from wrong

The *right side* of the fabric is the pretty side that everyone sees. Most fabrics are folded or rolled on the bolt with the right side folded to the inside to keep it clean. The *wrong side* of the fabric is the inside that nobody sees when you wear the project. When you lay out the pattern for cutting, be sure that you lay out all the pattern pieces as shown in your pattern guide sheet instructions.



REMEMBER

The pattern guide sheet shows the right side of the fabric shaded in a darker color than the wrong side of the fabric so you can see what's going on in the step-by-step illustrations.

## Placing the pattern pieces on-grain

Each pattern piece shows a grainline (which can also be the place-on-fold symbol), which is also the lengthwise grain. See the section "Decoding the pattern pieces" earlier in this chapter for more information on the symbols you find on pattern pieces. The grainline allows you to cut the piece *on-grain*, meaning that the pattern piece lines up with the lengthwise grain of the fabric. Cutting your pattern pieces on-grain means that seams stay pressed and straight, pant legs

and sleeves don't twist when you wear them, and the creases in your pants and the stripes, plaid, and prints stay perpendicular to the ground.



If you don't have a large table or countertop to cut on, buy a foldable cutting board. It's a large, flat sheet of corrugated cardboard with a fold or two in the middle; it usually has a grid of inches and centimeters printed on it. Lay it on a small table, and you have an instant workable cutting space. When you finish using it, fold it up and slide it under your bed or behind your dresser.

Follow these steps to lay the pattern pieces on the fabric:

- 1. Find and cut apart the paper pattern pieces you need to make your project view; set them aside.**



When you cut the paper pattern pieces apart, don't cut them out right on the cutting line; leave a little of the paper past the cutting line. Leaving the extra paper makes cutting out the paper pieces faster and easier when you get it on the fabric.



Sometimes tissue pattern pieces are wrinkled or have stubborn crease lines that can affect your layout and, ultimately, the fit of the project. When this happens, set your iron on the "synthetic" setting and iron the tissue flat. *Don't use steam!* A flat tissue pattern is a lot easier to lay out of your fabric.

- 2. Locate the lengthwise grain or place-on-fold symbols on the paper pattern pieces.**

On a flat tabletop and before laying the pattern tissue on the fabric, mark over these symbols using a highlighter for easy reference.

- 3. Fold and then lay the fabric on a table or cutting board, as shown in the pattern guide sheet instructions.**

If the fabric is longer than your table or cutting board, prevent the excess fabric weight from stretching and pulling on your fabric by folding it and laying it on the end of the table.

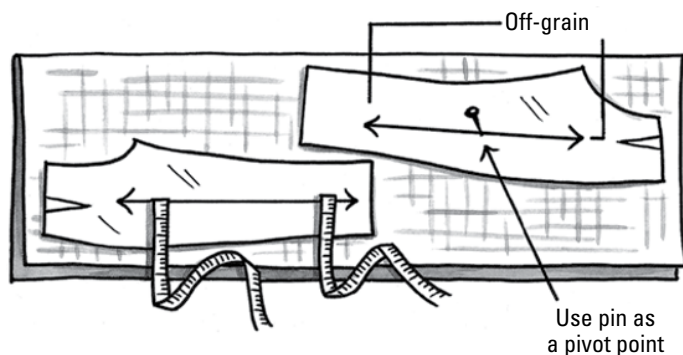
- 4. Following the suggested layout found on the pattern guide sheet, lay out the pattern on-grain, making sure that the grainline is parallel to the selvages, as shown in Figure 4-6.**



Remember to use this technique only if a cutting board or table pad protects your tabletop. Check that each pattern piece is placed precisely on-grain by poking a pin straight down into the grainline, measuring the distance straight across from one end of the grainline to the selvage, and then measuring the distance from the other end of the grainline straight across to the same selvage. Be sure to pivot the paper pattern so that each end of the pattern piece is equidistant from the selvage.



**FIGURE 4-6:**  
The grainline of  
your pattern  
tissue should be  
parallel to the  
fabric selvages.



## Laying out plaids, stripes, and one-way designs

You don't often see perfectly matched plaids and stripes in ready-to-wear garments — unless you want to spend a lot of money. Garment manufacturers find it tough to match designs because they stack many layers of fabric as high as 12 inches and then cut out each pattern piece with a jigsaw. That system lets them cut 100 left sleeves at once, but it leaves little room for precision. As a home sewer, though, you cut one garment at a time, so you can more easily get a perfect match with a one-way design, stripe, or plaid.



**WARNING**

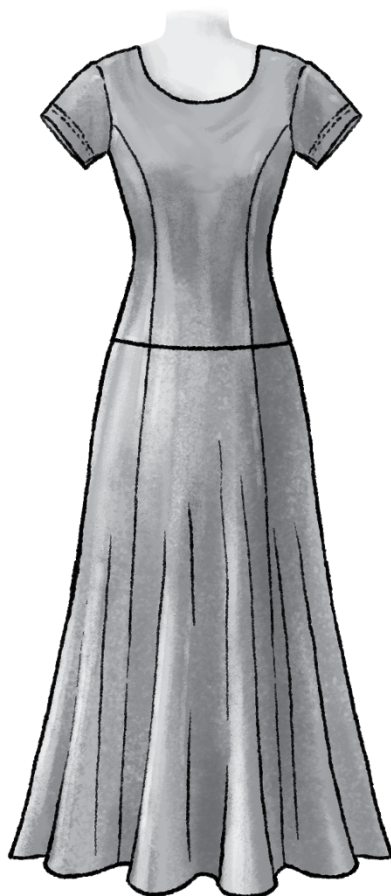
If you're just learning to sew, save yourself a major headache: Don't buy plaid, stripes, or one-way design fabrics. Also, don't buy a pattern with *princess line seams* (seams that run from the shoulder seam, over the bust, and down to the waistline or hemline), as shown in Figure 4-7. These seams are difficult to match so the design/pattern flows from one pattern piece to the next and from seam to seam around the body.

Once you have more projects under your belt, you'll be ready to tackle the following fabrics.

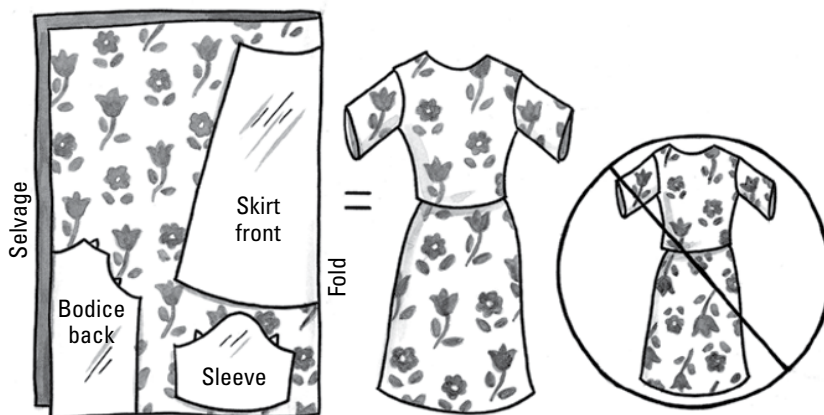
### One-way designs

Your fabric contains a one-way design if the pattern makes sense only when you view it from one direction. For example, fabric printed with a directional floral design makes sense only if all the flowers point up. To make them right side up all over the project, you have to lay out all the pattern pieces in the same direction, as shown in Figure 4-8.

**FIGURE 4-7:**  
Don't buy a pattern with princess line seams (seams that run from the shoulder seam, over the bust, and down to the waistline or hemline) until you are a more experienced sewer.



**FIGURE 4-8:**  
For a one-way design, lay out pattern pieces so they run in the same direction — think “this side up.”



When working with a one-way design, consider the following factors:



WARNING

- » **Size of each design in the print:** If the fabric has a small-scale, all-over print (meaning that the print has a design where it runs in all directions), you don't need to worry so much about matching the design. If the scale of the print is large — say 2½ to 3 inches in any direction — you want the design to match across the front, over to the sleeves, and to the back of the garment.

Placement is important when working with a large-scale print, too, so think before you cut. For example, you don't want a print with big red balloons to end up with a balloon at both bust points. You also don't want sailing ships positioned over your derriere because it may seem like some major waves are tossing up and down when you walk.

- » **Size of the repeat of the pattern:** This size means the distance between each repeating design on the fabric. If the repeat is ½ inch, a small example, you may not have to match it. If the repeat is 4 inches, though, it's large and should be matched.

## Even and uneven stripes

Stripes have bars of color printed, knitted, or woven either horizontally or vertically in the fabric. Stripes come in two varieties:

- » **Even stripe:** This pattern has an even number of color bars, and all the color bars are the same width. Think of a T-shirt knit with alternating 1-inch white stripes and 1-inch blue stripes. When working with an even stripe, you can lay out pattern pieces in either direction (with the top edge of the pattern at the top of the fabric or the top edge of the pattern at the bottom of the fabric), and the stripes match.
- » **Uneven stripe:** This pattern has the same-width stripes and an odd number of color bars, or different-width stripes with an odd or even number of color bars. For example, a T-shirt knit with horizontal stripes with a 1-inch red stripe, a ½-inch white stripe, and a 1-inch blue stripe has an uneven stripe pattern. If you cut the pattern pieces in opposite directions, the stripes don't match: The color bars line up as red, white, and blue on one piece and as blue, white, and red on the other piece.



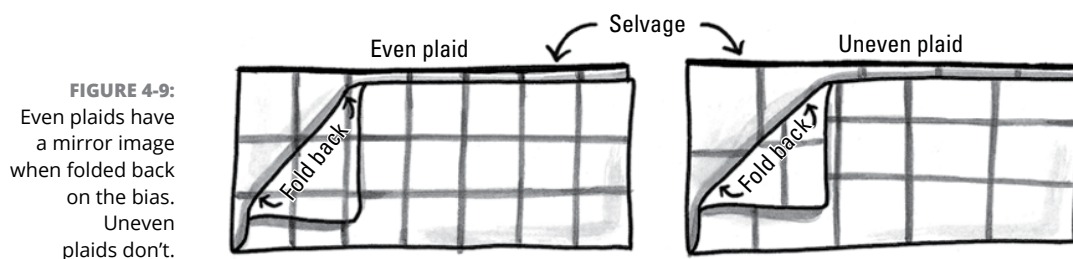
WARNING

As a beginning sewer, you need to steer clear of uneven stripes. If you're unsure whether the fabric you chose is an even or an uneven stripe, ask the fabric store sales associate to identify it for you. If you don't, you're asking for A.S.F.S. — Acute Sewing Frustration Syndrome.

## Even and uneven plaids

Plaid fabrics have color bars printed or woven into the fabric both horizontally and vertically. As you can see in Figure 4-9, plaids come in two different flavors:

- » **Even plaid:** The color bars in an even plaid match in the lengthwise and crosswise directions. To check for an even plaid, fold the fabric in half the long way (like when you lay out the pattern for cutting) and then turn back a corner, folding it on the bias. (See the section “Getting to know your fabric,” earlier in this chapter, for information on the bias.) If the top layer of the plaid forms a mirror image of the bottom layer, you have an even plaid. You can match even plaids more easily than uneven plaids.
- » **Uneven plaid:** This plaid doesn’t match in one or both directions and is more difficult to work with. Use the test in the preceding “Even plaid” bullet to determine whether you have an even or uneven plaid on your hands. Until you have considerable experience in laying out and cutting fabric, avoid uneven plaids.



**WARNING**

Uneven plaids present problems for the beginning sewer because of the matching difficulty they present. If you're unsure whether a fabric is an uneven plaid, ask the fabric store sales associate to identify it for you. As your skills improve, start with a small, even plaid and gain some confidence before tackling uneven plaids.

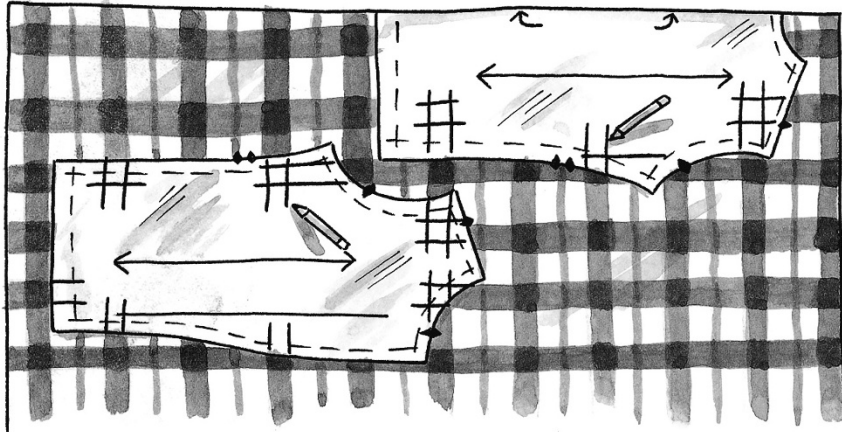


**TIP**

After pinning the pattern piece to the fabric (described later in “Pinning and Cutting Out the Pieces”), use an air-soluble marker to draw the design onto the pattern tissue, following the dominant color bars at or near the notches. (The air-soluble marker lines will disappear after 24–48 hours, so if you use this pattern on another plaid, your marks won't be confusing.) In Figure 4-10, you can see the back and front blouse pieces and find the single and double notches at the side seams. By drawing the plaid on the pattern tissue, you can easily see how to position the pattern pieces so that when the seams are sewn together, the design matches. If you need to cut each pattern piece separately on a single layer of

fabric, remove the pattern tissue that you drew over, flip it over so you're cutting the other side of the pattern piece, and place it on the fabric so that the color bars on the plaid or stripe you see marked on the pattern paper match those on the fabric.

**FIGURE 4-10:** Match a plaid by drawing over the design on the pattern tissue at or near the notches.



## Lay out twice and cut once



**TIP**

The following tips help in laying out a pattern for large, one-way designs, stripes, and even plaids:

- » **Centering:** Decide what you want in the center of the project and fold the fabric there, matching the stripes, plaid, or one-way designs across the width and length of the fabric. Doing so may mean that the selvages aren't even. You may also have to pin the fabric together every few inches or so to keep it from shifting when you lay it out and cut it according to the pattern.
- » **Placement:** Generally, you place the dominant stripe or color bar in a project directly on, or as close as possible to, the hemline edge. This arrangement means placing the hemline marked on the pattern tissue along the dominant color bar of the fabric. Avoid placing the dominant stripe, color bar, big, round or colorful prints across the bust or at the fullest part of the hips.
- » **Crosswise matching:** Use the notches on the pattern pieces to match the fabric design from piece to piece. For example, to match the design at the shoulder seams, notice where the notches on the pattern pieces fall on a particular color bar and within the plaid itself.

Crosswise matching is easiest when you center the first pattern piece on the fabric where you want it. After you center the pattern, take the pattern piece you want to match the fabric to and place it over the first, matching the notches.



REMEMBER

When you become more experienced and are working with plaids, stripes, one-way designs, and princess line patterns, you need more fabric. So, when reading the back of the pattern envelope, remember to use the *with nap* yardage requirements. (See Chapter 3 for more on nap.)

## Pinning and Cutting Out the Pieces

Pin the pattern piece to the doubled layer of fabric so that the pins go through both fabric layers and are perpendicular to and inside the cutting line. This prevents the fabric from shifting as you cut. (See the section “Laying Out the Pattern,” earlier in this chapter, for more information on folding your fabric to create a double layer.)

My grandmother taught me to pin parallel to the cutting line. While researching the *right* way to pin for this book, I realized I’d been doing it wrong all these years but still had beautiful results. So here’s the message: Whenever you find a way of doing anything in sewing that you like and that works, use it.



TIP

You don’t need to pin every inch. Just pin at the notches and everywhere the pattern changes direction. On long, straight edges, such as pant legs and sleeve seams, place pins every 4 inches or so.

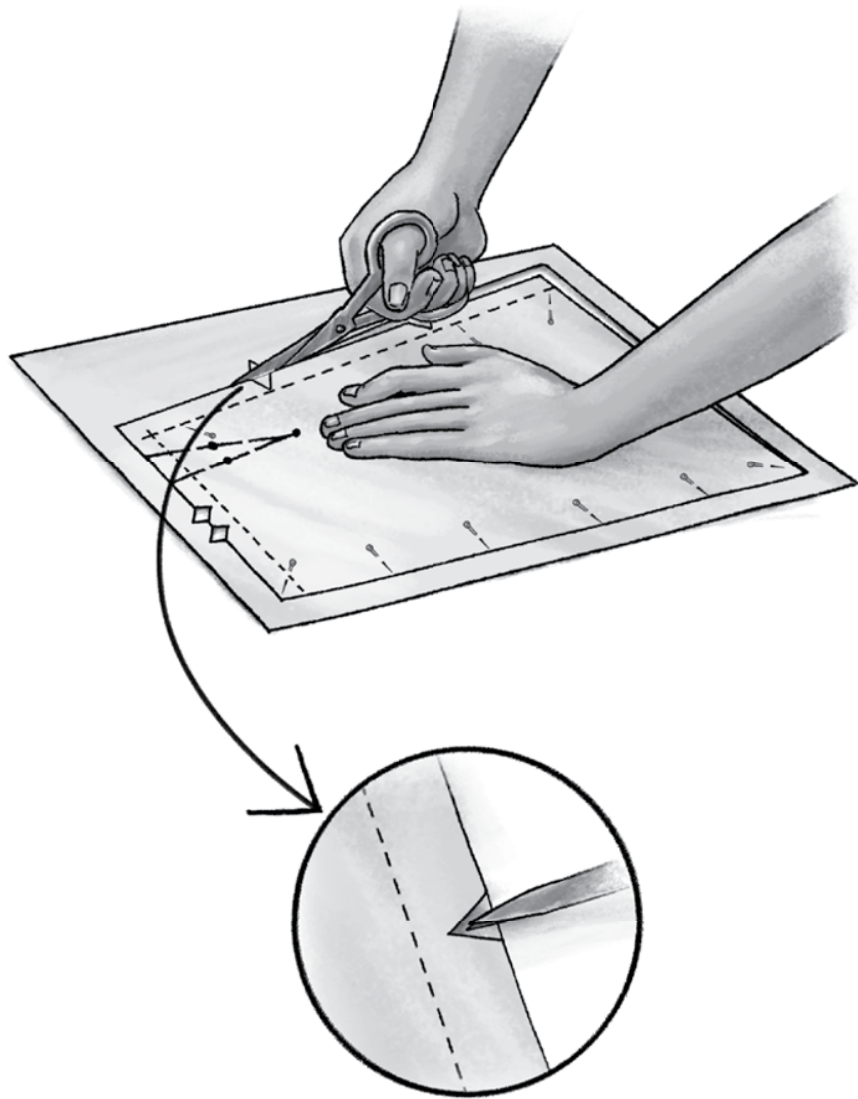
Cut out your pattern pieces using a pair of sharp dressmaker’s shears. (See Chapter 2 for more information on choosing the right scissors for cutting.) For accuracy, cut in the middle of the solid cutting line marked on the pattern tissue, trying not to lift the fabric off the table too much when cutting.

If you have a rotary cutter and mat, you may want to use them to cut out your pattern pieces. The nice thing about cutting this way is that you’re not lifting the fabric to cut it and can therefore get a very accurate cut. And instead of using pins to secure the pattern to the fabric, you can use weights. (See Chapter 2 for more on cutting projects with a rotary cutter and mat.)



TIP

Rather than cutting around each notch, save time by cutting straight across the notches on the cutting line. After you completely cut out the pattern piece, go back and, with the tips of your sharp scissors, snip into the notch about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch. A single notch gets one snip in the center of the notch; a double notch gets two snips, one in the center of each notch; a triple notch gets three snips. (See the insert for Figure 4-11.) When you go to match up the pattern pieces at the notches, just match up the snips — a fast and accurate task.



**FIGURE 4-11:**  
Pin perpendicular  
to the cutting line  
and then clip  
notches using  
your scissor tips.

## Making Your Mark

After you cut out the pattern pieces and cut out and fuse on any necessary interfacing (see Chapter 3 for more about using fusible interfacing), you're ready for marking. Marking is important because you don't want to get halfway through a project, notice that the pattern guide sheet tells you to sew from this mark to that mark, and realize that you forgot to mark something (or thought it wasn't important). Save yourself time and frustration by marking the dots, circles,



squares, or triangles, even if you think you won't need them later. (Trust me, you will — ask me how I know.)

## Marking what matters

You need to mark the following things from your pattern pieces onto your fabric:

- » Dots, circles, triangles, and squares (see the section “Decoding the pattern pieces,” earlier in this chapter)
- » Darts (see Chapter 9)
- » Pleats (see Chapter 9)
- » Tucks



When you begin constructing a project, you transfer the pattern marks indicating darts, tucks, pleats, and the other symbols to your fabric pattern pieces for a very good reason: to see and understand what the drawings and text in the pattern guide sheet mean for you to do. For example, when marking a pleat, tuck, or dart, instead of marking the entire stitching line, simply mark the dots on the stitching lines. When you put the right sides together for sewing, pin the project together by matching the dots; sew from dot to dot (pin to pin). For specific instructions on marking and sewing darts, tucks, and pleats, see your pattern guide sheet instructions.

## Using the right tool at the right time

You can find many marking tools on the market, but using pins, disappearing dressmaking chalk, and an air- or water-soluble marking pen is the easiest way to go. Chapter 2 gives you more information on these tools.

Use the following marking techniques, depending on the type of fabric you use in a project:

- » **Mark light-colored fabrics by using your air- or water-soluble marker.** Place the point of the marker on the tissue pattern at the dot or circle, as shown in Figure 4-12. The ink bleeds through the pattern tissue, the first layer of fabric, and then to the second layer of fabric for an accurate mark. You can easily remove the marks from either marker with water.
- » **Mark dark fabrics by using your disappearing dressmaker's chalk.** Push pins through the pattern paper and both fabric layers at the dots, as shown in

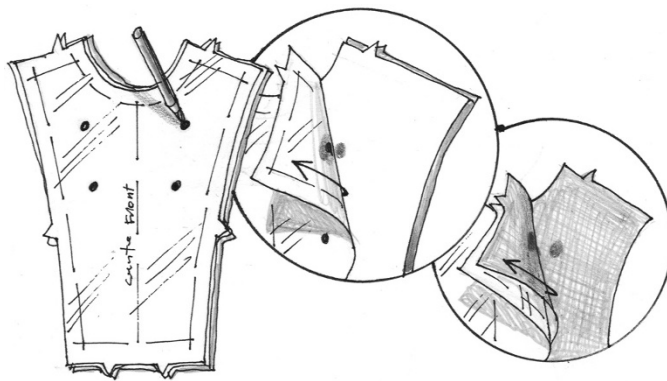


Figure 4-13. Open the fabric between the layers and mark both layers where the pins enter the fabric.

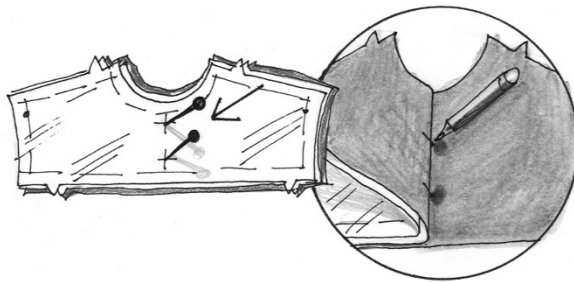
When marking with chalk, I prefer marking the wrong side of the fabric, where the mark is easier to see and doesn't show on the right side of the fabric. But be careful: The steam from an iron can remove the mark, which is okay when you want it to disappear and maddening when it happens accidentally.

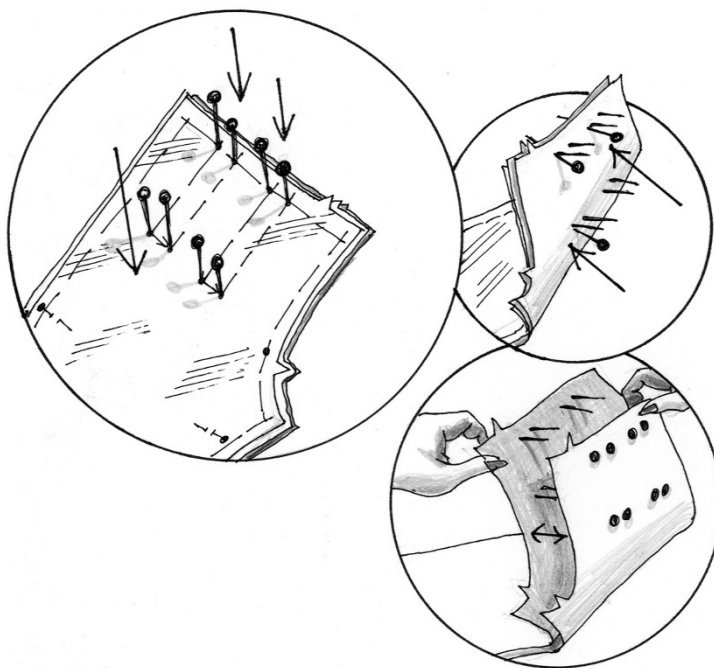
» **Mark hard-to-mark fabrics by pin-marking.** Two pins are inserted from opposite sides so that they remain in each piece when the pattern pieces are pulled apart. To do this, push the pin straight through both fabric layers and then flip over the fabric and repeat the process. Carefully remove the pattern tissue or pattern tracing material from one side by tearing it over the pin heads, and then pull apart the fabric layers. The pins pull right up to the heads and accurately mark the fabric, as you can see in Figure 4-14. Then adjust the pins so they go through the fabric normally, with the place where the pin enters the fabric marking the spot. Then leave them pinned into place until you complete the step that uses the mark.

**FIGURE 4-12:**  
Mark light-colored fabrics with an air- or water-soluble marker.



**FIGURE 4-13:**  
Mark dark fabric with pins and disappearing dressmaker's chalk or marker.





**FIGURE 4-14:**  
Mark pattern pieces by pushing pins straight through both fabric layers at the dots marked on the pattern tissue.



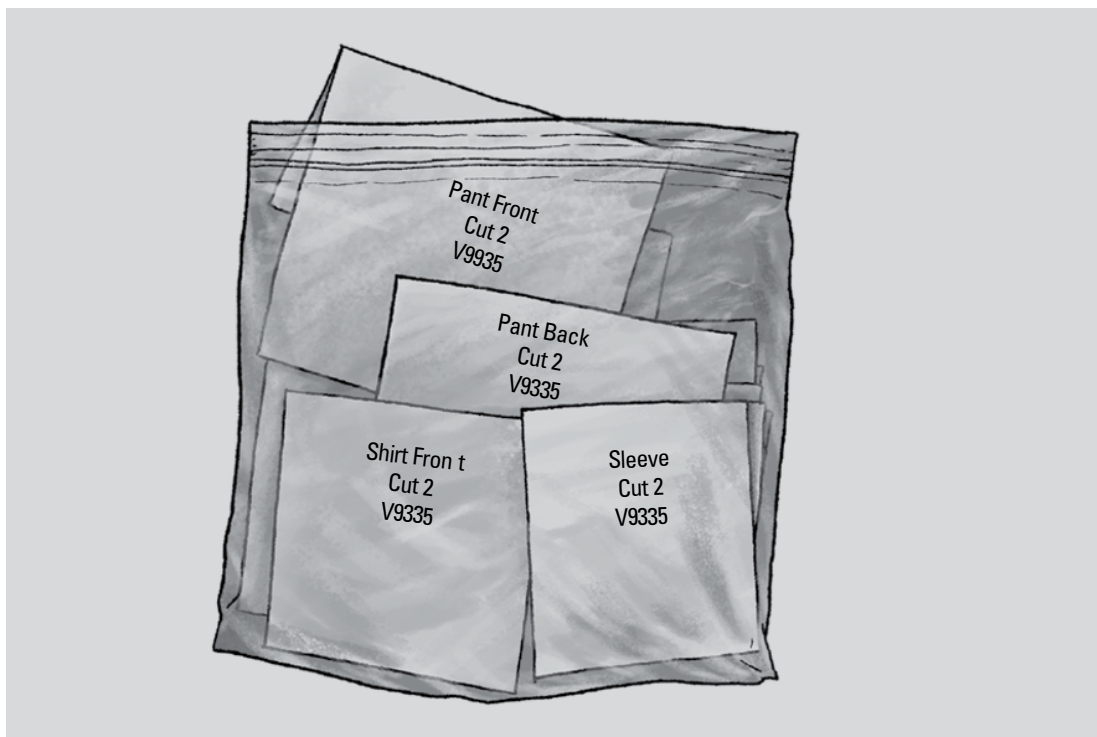
**TIP**

## PATTERN PIECE STORAGE MADE EASY

Trying to put the pattern pieces back into the envelope after using them is like putting toothpaste back into the tube. Instead, tape a gallon-sized plastic freezer bag onto the table right next to your sewing machine. Put the pattern envelope, extra pattern pieces, and guide sheet into this bag — I find it much easier than using the pattern envelope, and everything fits.

When you finish with each pattern piece, fold it so that the pattern number, name, and company name show, as in the illustration. This way, if you forget to mark something, you can see it through the freezer bag and locate it easily without unfolding and shuffling through multiple paper pattern pieces.

After you finish the project, store the bag and pattern with your other patterns.





# 2

## **Going to Sewing School: Getting the Hang of the Basic Skills**

## IN THIS PART . . .

Dive headfirst into what I like to call *Threading the Needle: A Survivor's Guide* by learning common hand and machine stitches and taking a bird's-eye view of patterns and fabrics.

Figure out how to put things together at the seams — cut them, pin them, shape them, and rip them out (but only if you need to).

Arm yourself with all the best tricks and techniques for hemming. When you know the how-tos, you'll never "shorten" a skirt by rolling up the waistband again.

Enter a world of play and imagination by creating your first projects for a child, a pet, or yourself!

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Wedding needle and thread
- » Tying knots that last
- » Sewing stitches by hand and machine
- » Basting your projects together (and save the turkeys for the oven)
- » Ironing vs. pressing — there really is a difference
- » Stitching a sampler pin cushion

## Chapter 5

# Taking the First Steps of Your Sewing Adventure

**S**tarting a new sewing project is like packing your bags for vacation. There's the anticipation of finding unexplored territories — or in sewing terms, imagining what the project will be once it's finished. You may picture the cheers and accolades from friends and family members when they see the final product. The most satisfying part is that with just a few stitches, you have tangible results you can either use or give as a gift.

Whether you're mending, making clothes or costumes, embroidering, or quilting, your sewing essentials include a needle, thread, fabric, a sewing machine, and a sprinkle of sewing savvy. This chapter is your guidebook, offering the fundamentals for a successful sewing adventure. By the way, if you do wander off course, you can't go far. Just look up where you left off and "sew with the flow."

# Threading the Needle: A Survivors' Guide

When a motorist *threads the needle* on the freeway, they weave in and out of traffic, almost hitting other cars in the process. Although threading the needle in sewing is much less dangerous, it does require some skill. It's also a task that differs depending on the type of needle you're working with — hand or machine.

## Hand needles

To begin threading a hand needle, reel off a strand of thread about 18 to 20 inches long. (Longer threads tend to tangle and wear out before you use them up.) Starting with the end of the thread that comes off the spool first, cut the thread cleanly and at an angle with a sharp pair of scissors. Cutting at an angle puts a little point on the thread so that it slips easily through the eye.



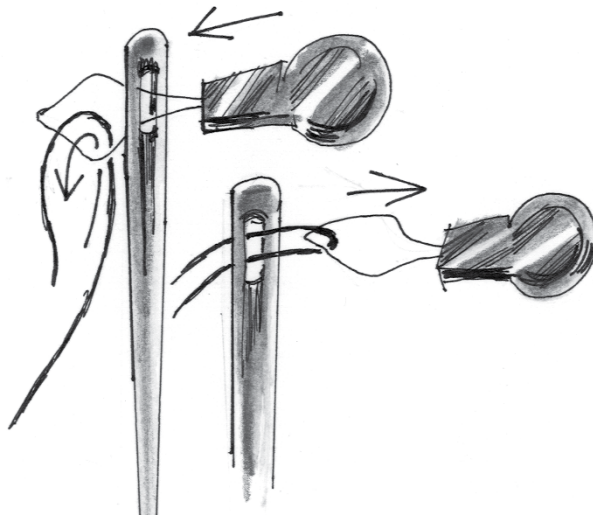
TIP

The cheapest sewing notion on the market is your own saliva. Moisten the thread end to help it glide right through the needle's eye.



NICE  
TO HAVE

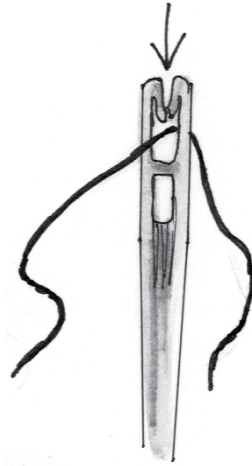
Because certain needles have small eyes and some people have poor eyesight, a *needle threader*, which you can find at your local sewing store or website, can help with tight threading situations. To use a needle threader, poke the fine wire loop through the eye of the needle, push the thread end through the wire loop, and then pull on the threader. The wire grabs the thread and pulls it through the needle's eye, as shown in Figure 5-1.



**FIGURE 5-1:**  
Threading a hand  
needle with a  
needle threader.



Self-threading hand needles make threading even easier. To use a self-threading needle, hold the needle and a length of thread in one hand. Pull the thread end across the self-threading eye with the other hand so that the thread lies in the notch. Then snap the thread into the notch until it clips into place, as shown in Figure 5-2. If the thread keeps coming unthreaded after using the needle many times, you've worn out the self-threading eye, so throw away the needle and use a new one. Note that you can use the eye below the self-threading eye like a regular hand needle.

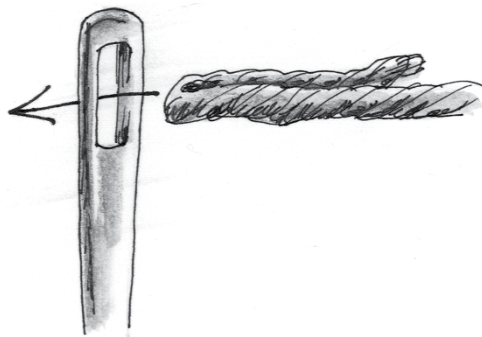


**FIGURE 5-2:**  
Threading  
a self-threading  
needle.



**TIP**

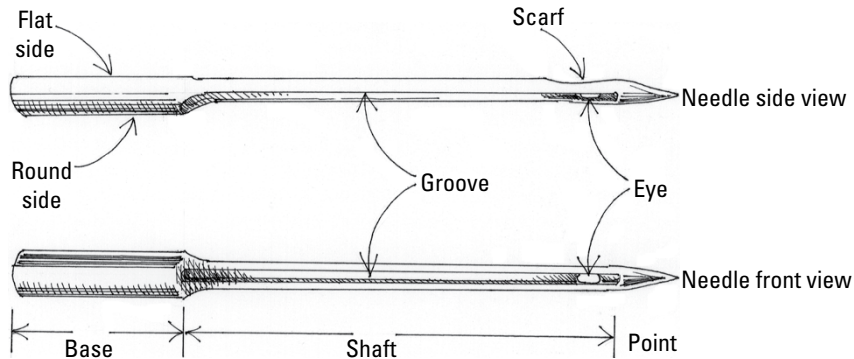
No amount of spit helps thread a tapestry needle because the embroidery floss or yarn commonly used with these needles tends to get frizzy at the end. Just fold over the end of the floss or yarn and poke it through the eye, as shown in Figure 5-3.



**FIGURE 5-3:**  
Getting yarn  
or embroidery  
floss through a  
tapestry needle.

# Machine needles

A *machine needle*, meaning a needle for a standard sewing machine and most sergers, has a round and a flat side, as shown in Figure 5-4. (See Chapter 2 for more information on sewing machines and sergers.)



**FIGURE 5-4:**  
A needle for a  
sewing machine  
and most sergers.

For sewing machines with a *side-loading bobbin* (meaning the bobbin goes in the left side of the machine), the flat side of the needle base faces to the right. For most sergers and sewing machines with *front-* and *top-loading bobbins* (meaning that the bobbin goes in the front or drops into the top of the machine's bed where the fabric rests on the machine when sewing), the flat side of the needle base faces to the back.



**WARNING**

Make sure you position the needle properly for your machine. The long groove running the length of the shaft protects the thread as it stitches up and down through the fabric. The *scarf*, the little indentation behind the eye, creates a loop that enables the bobbin thread to lock with the top thread, making a stitch. If you put the needle in the machine backward, nothing works right.

The anatomy of a machine needle makes threading it easier than threading a hand needle. Instead of spitting on the thread, just follow these steps:

1. **Lick your finger and then rub it behind the eye of the needle.**
2. **Cut the end of the thread cleanly and at an angle.**
3. **Starting just above the eye, run the end of the thread down the shaft in the front groove until the thread pokes through the eye.**

When the thread hits the eye, the moisture pulls the thread through it, and you're ready to pull the thread through the eye of the needle.

4. **Pull four to five inches of thread through the needle so it won't come unthreaded as you start sewing.**

## Serger Needles

Most of the sergers on the market today have needle threaders either built-in or as a separate tool. A serger has a small area where the needle(s) are threaded by either a separate needle threader or a built-in threader. Because it's tough to get your hand in this small area to thread the needle, either system is a lifesaver.

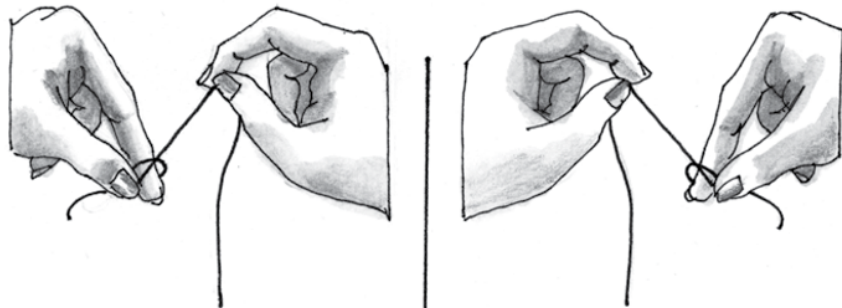
## Tying a Sewing Knot

I was ready to sew on a button for the first time when my grandmother asked if I wanted to have a knot tied in my thread. Using my 7-year-old wisdom, I indignantly said, "No." (Why would I ever want to do that?) Then I took a stitch, and the thread pulled all the way through and out of my project. (Oh, that's why I'd want a knot!) When my grandmother again asked, "Want me to tie a knot?" I said, "Yes please!"

When preparing to write this book, I took an unofficial poll of my sewing buddies to discover whether right-handed sewers tie a sewing knot with their right hand. (I'm right-handed, and I do.) I found out that how you tie a knot doesn't seem to have a thing to do with the dominant hand; what feels natural when it comes to knot tying depends on the way you were taught.

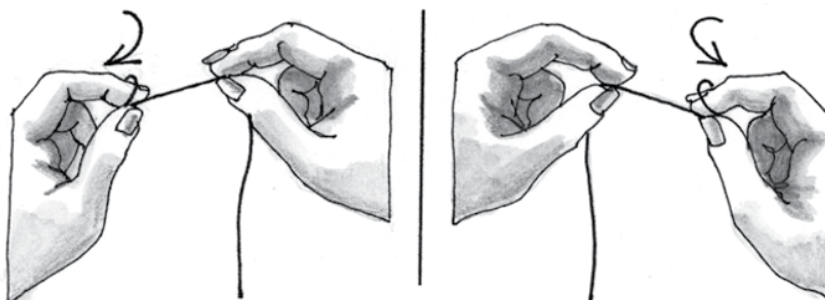
Using whichever hand you prefer (I show you both the left- and right-handed steps so you can try it both ways), follow these steps to tie a sewing knot. And don't get discouraged if you don't get it at first; it does take some practice:

- 1. Hold the thread between your thumb and index fingers and wrap a loop of thread, about two inches from the end of the thread, around the tip of your opposite index finger, as shown in Figure 5-5.**



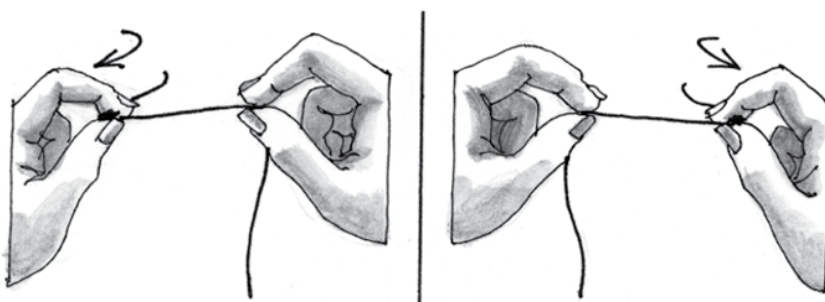
**FIGURE 5-5:**  
Make a loop.

2. Roll the loop between your finger and against your thumb so that the loop twists, as shown in Figure 5-6.



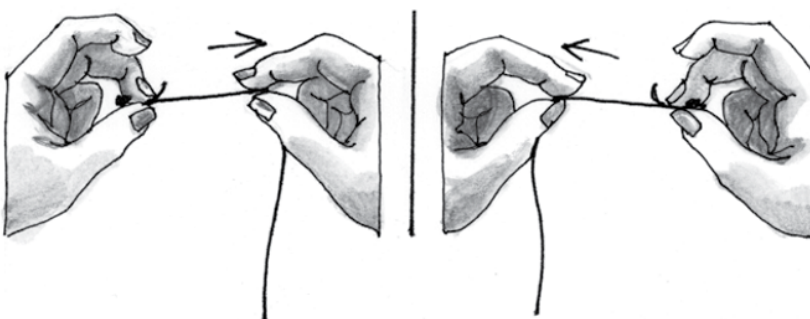
**FIGURE 5-6:**  
Twist the loop.

3. Slide your index finger back while rolling the thread until the loop is almost off your finger, as shown in Figure 5-7.



**FIGURE 5-7:**  
Roll the loop to  
the end of  
your finger.

4. Bring your middle finger to the rolled end of the loop, remove your index finger, and firmly place the middle finger in front of the rolled thread against the thumb, as shown in Figure 5-8.



**FIGURE 5-8:**  
Secure the loop  
end with your  
middle finger,  
and then  
tighten the knot.

5. Pull on the thread with the opposite hand to close the loop and form the knot.



TIP

For another way to tie a knot, watch the “How to Tie a Knot at the End of Sewing Thread” video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAGVN75GzOY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAGVN75GzOY).

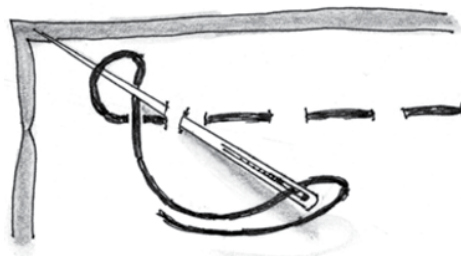
## Choosing and Using the Proper Hand Stitches

Any given sewing job may entail several types of stitches, and you definitely need the correct stitch for the job. For example, don’t use a hand-basting stitch to permanently sew together a pair of overalls; the stitches are too far apart, and your overalls will fall apart the first time you attempt to tote that barge or lift that bale. In this section, I familiarize you with the basic hand stitches and their uses.

### The securing stitch

In hand sewing, one end of the thread is knotted (see the section “Tying a Sewing Knot” earlier in this chapter), and you secure the other end of the stitched row by sewing a knot — regardless of the stitch. To sew a knot, take a small backstitch and form a loop over the point of the needle. When you pull the thread through the loop, it cinches the thread and secures a knot at the base of the fabric. (See Figure 5-9.) When securing a high-stress area, sew two knots.

**FIGURE 5-9:**  
Use this technique to securely fasten a row of hand-sewn stitches.

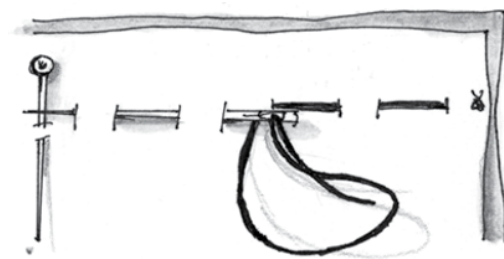


### The hand-basting stitch

You use hand-basting stitches to temporarily hold two or more layers of fabric together. (See the section “Basting Projects for a Better Fit,” later in this chapter, for more information on its purpose.) If you use thread of a contrasting color from

the fabric, the stitches are easier to see and pull out after you sew in the permanent stitches.

Working from right to left (for right-handers) or from left to right (for left-handers), weave the point of the needle in and out of the fabric for several stitches before pulling the thread through the fabric. (See Figure 5-10.) Make each basting stitch about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch long with less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch in between each stitch.

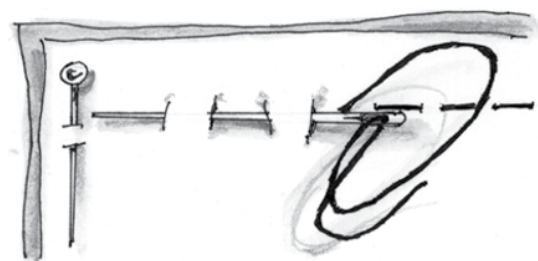


**FIGURE 5-10:**  
You baste by simply weaving the needle in and out of the fabric.

## The running stitch

You use this short, even stitch for fine seaming, mending, and gathering. The stitch is short and tight and, as a result, is usually permanent. I use it to quickly (or temporarily) repair a seam that comes apart.

To make a running stitch, weave the point of the needle in and out of the fabric making short ( $\frac{1}{16}$  inch), even stitches before pulling the rest of the needle through the fabric. (See Figure 5-11.)

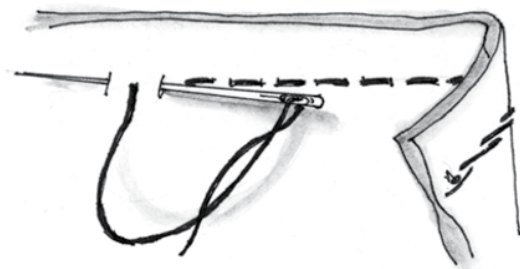


**FIGURE 5-11:**  
Use short, even stitches when fashioning running stitches.

## The even backstitch

The even backstitch is the strongest hand stitch. Because of its durability, you use this stitch when repairing a seam on dense, heavier fabrics more often than you would repair something with the running stitch.

To create the even backstitch, pull the needle up through all layers of the fabric. Next poke the needle back into the fabric half a stitch behind where the thread first emerged. Finally, bring the needle up half a stitch in front of where the thread emerged in the previous stitch. (See Figure 5-12.) Repeat for the length of the seam.



**FIGURE 5-12:**  
The even  
backstitch is  
extremely strong.

## The blind hemming stitch

You sew these stitches inside the hem allowance between the hem and the garment. (See Chapter 7 for more information on the fine points of hemming.) With a little practice, a fine needle, and fine thread, good blind hemming stitches don't show on the right side — hence the name *blind*.



REMEMBER

You need to turn up the hem allowance and press it into place before you use the blind hemming stitch. You should also finish the edge of the hem by pinking or overcasting the edge. (See Chapter 6 for more on edge finishes.)

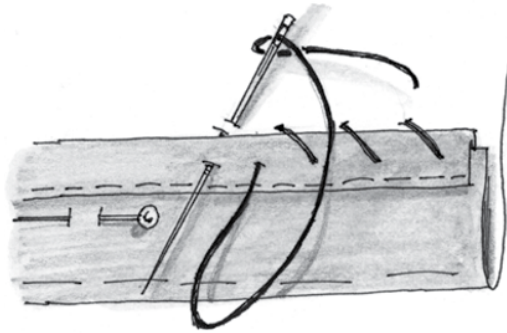
Fold the hem allowance back  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch and take the first short stitch  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the hem edge. Take the next short stitch by catching only a thread of the fabric. Continue with stitches spaced about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch apart, catching the hem allowance in a stitch and taking as fine a stitch as possible into the garment. Stitch back and forth between the hem allowance and the garment around the hemline until you complete the blind hemming. (See Figure 5-13.)



**FIGURE 5-13:**  
Blind hems  
require fine  
stitches about  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  inch apart.

## The slant hemming or whip stitch

This stitch is the fastest — but least durable — of the hemming stitches because so much thread is on the surface of the hem edge. (If you've ever caught your heel in your hem and pulled it out, you may be the victim of a slant hemming stitch.) Use the slant hemming stitch only if you're in a hurry and you're hemming the bottom of a blouse that you tuck in. Take a stitch around the hem edge and then up through the garment, catching only a thread of the garment fabric. (See Figure 5-14.)

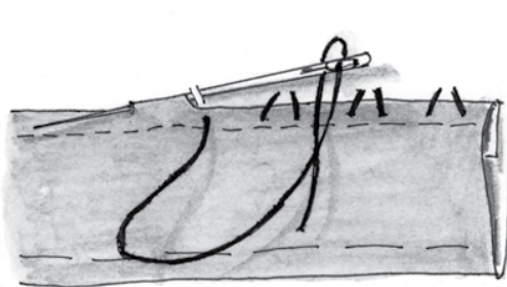


**FIGURE 5-14:** The slant or whip stitch is quick and easy but not too durable.

## The hemming slipstitch

You use the hemming slipstitch when working with (guess what?) a folded hem edge. This stitch is durable and almost invisible. (See Chapter 7 for more information about hemming.)

Fasten the thread to the hem allowance by poking the needle through the fold of the hem edge and bringing it up through the hem allowance. With the point of the needle, pick up one thread from the garment and work the needle back into the fold of the hem edge. (See Figure 5-15.) Then repeat the process.



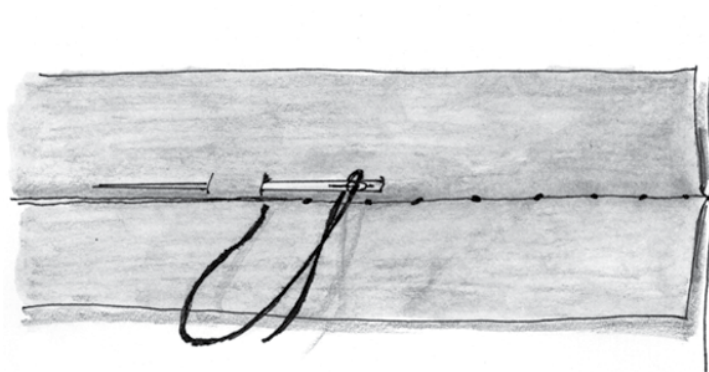
**FIGURE 5-15:** The hemming slipstitch is durable and nearly invisible.



## The even slipstitch

You can join two folded edges by using the even slipstitch. Most often, this stitch comes into play when you want to repair a seam from the right side because the seam is difficult to reach from the wrong side of the project.

Fasten the thread and bring it out at the edge of the fold. Taking fine stitches, slip the needle through the fold on one edge and draw the thread taut. Take another stitch, slipping the needle through the opposite folded edge. (See Figure 5-16.)



**FIGURE 5-16:**  
Use the slipstitch  
to join two folded  
edges or  
seamlines.

## Using Machine Stitches

When I clinched my high school diploma, my folks decided a sewing machine was the perfect grad gift. After threading the machine, I took it for a test drive and tried every stitch, but I had no idea what any of them did. Fast-forward through college and my professional training with White Sewing Machine Company — and boom! Those mysterious stitches? They weren't just for show. They were like tiny, time-saving superheroes that kicked up my projects to couture-level cool.

How? Let me take you back to the time I completed my first entirely machine-sewn dress. I made a dress where everything was machine sewn — a real “no-hands” project.

The buttons? Who needed to sew them on by hand when a zigzag stitch turned them into fashion accessories that outlasted the project itself? As for the raw edges that needed a tedious finish, I discovered the overcasting stitches described in this section and used in Chapter 6. They're real time-savers, trust me. Hems done by machine in less time than answering your email? Absolutely.

Discovering the full potential of these stitches was like finding out that the machine had a built-in turbo setting. I'm here to pass on this wisdom, so you, too, can whip up your next project with a bit of machine-created finesse. Get ready to have your sewing world gently rocked when you learn these machine techniques!

## Examining the basic machine stitches

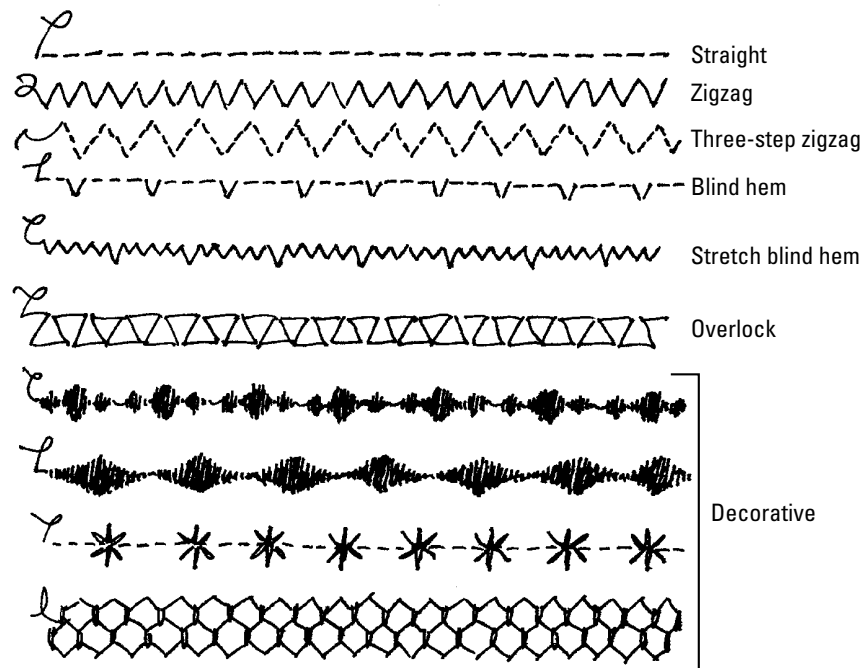
Figure 5-17 shows the basic machine stitches. Of course, your machine may offer more or fewer of these stitches. Most machines have a good selection, though, so compare what's available on your sewing machine with these:

- » **Straight:** You use the straight stitch for basting, seaming, and topstitching.
- » **Zigzag:** Increase the stitch width to make zigzag stitches. The fabric moves under the presser foot while the needle moves from side to side. You use the zigzag stitch for stitching around appliqués, making buttonholes, sewing on buttons, and embroidering. The zigzag stitch is as practical as it is fun.
- » **Three-step zigzag:** When used on the widest width, the ordinary zigzag stitch described in the preceding bullet pulls the fabric into a tunnel, and the fabric rolls under the stitch, which isn't very desirable. The three-step zigzag stitch eliminates this problem. The needle takes three stitches to one side and then three stitches to the other side, keeping the fabric flat and tunnel-free. Use the three-step zigzag for finishing raw edges, sewing on elastic, mending tears, and making decorative effects.
- » **Blind hem and stretch blind hem:** The blind hem stitch is designed to hem woven fabrics so that the stitches are almost invisible when you look at the right side of the garment. The stretch blind hem stitch has an extra zigzag or two that stretches to invisibly hem knit fabrics. Both stitches have decorative applications, too.
- » **Overlock:** Many of the overlock-type stitches on today's sewing machines are designed to stitch and finish seams in one step, simulating the overlock stitches that you see on ready-to-wear garments. Some of these stitches work well on woven fabrics; some work better on knits.
- » **Decorative:** Decorative stitches fall into two basic categories: closed, satin-type stitches (such as the ball and diamond) and open, tracery-type stitches (such as the daisy and honeycomb). You can program many newer machines to combine these stitches with other stitches, elongate the designs for a bolder decorative effect, and even stitch someone's name.



NICE  
TO HAVE

This is a beginning sewing book, and although advanced sewing machines are available, I'm assuming that you're using a more basic model with a handful of the stitches I mention in the list. When you're in the market for an upgrade, check out Chapter 21.



**FIGURE 5-17:**  
Basic  
machine stitches.

The newest high-end sewing machines also create intricate embroidery designs (like the ones you see on ready-to-wear garments) by using embroidery cards, touch screen programs, and apps. Some machines also offer scanners, which allow you to add additional patterns to the machine's stitch library. Still others do embroidery and quilting stitches generated from a computer. After the printing of this book, sewing machines will continue evolving with even more sophisticated features. Contact machine manufacturers or your local sewing machine retailer to find out about the many options.

## Selecting a sewing machine stitch

If your sewing machine does more than straight stitch and zigzag, the machine must give you some way to select the stitch you want to use.

Older machines have dials, levers, buttons, or drop-in cams as stitch selectors. Newer, computerized models have keys or touch pads that not only select the stitch but also can automatically set the stitch length and width. Consult the operating manual that comes with your sewing machine to get the specifics on how to select a stitch type.

# Choosing the length of the stitch

The length of the stitch determines the stitch's durability. Short stitches (2 to 3 mm, 9 to 13 stitches per inch, abbreviated as "spi") are strong and are meant to be permanent. Longer stitches are usually temporary or used as a decorative topstitch. (See the section "Topstitching" later in this chapter.)

The distance the feed dogs move the fabric under the needle determines the stitch length. When the feed dogs move with shorter strokes, stitches are short. When they move with longer strokes, stitches are longer. (See Chapter 2 for more information on feed dogs.)



REMEMBER

You measure stitch length two different ways — in millimeters (mm) and in stitches per inch (spi). The setting used depends on the brand and model of your machine.

Throughout this book, I give you the necessary stitch length settings both ways. Check out Table 5-1 if you want to compare stitch length in millimeters to stitch length in stitches per inch.

TABLE 5-1

## Converting Stitch Lengths

Stitch Length in Millimeters	Stitch Length in Stitches per Inch
0.5	60 (fine setting)
1	24
2	13
3	9
4	6
5	5
6	4



REMEMBER

Use the following general rules for stitch lengths:

- » The average stitch length for mid-weight fabrics is 2.5 to 3 mm/10 to 12 spi.
- » The average stitch length for fine fabrics is 2 mm/13 to 20 spi.
- » For heavier fabrics, basting, or topstitching, use 4 to 5 mm/5 to 6 spi.

## Setting the stitch width

The *stitch-width* control sets the distance the needle moves from side to side while creating a stitch. You don't need to worry about the stitch width when sewing straight stitches — just set it to 0 (zero).

All machines measure the stitch width in millimeters (mm). Some makes and models have a maximum stitch width of 4 to 6 mm. Others create stitches as wide as 9 mm.

Is wider better? When it comes to decorative stitches, it usually is. For the more practical stitches used in seam finishing, blind hemming, or making buttonholes, a narrower (2- to 6-mm) width works better.

Throughout this book, I give machine stitch-width settings in a range that works for most makes and models.

## Taking a Look at Essential Serger Stitches

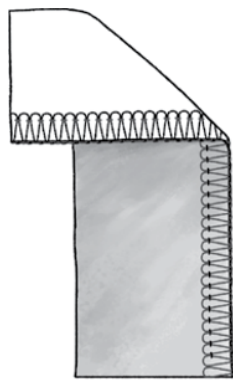
I think of my serger as the microwave of my sewing area: It can do a lot of seaming and finishing, but like the microwave, I rarely use it to make an entire project.

Sergers come in several flavors based on the number of threads used in each operation:

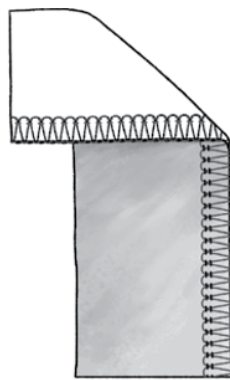
- » A 2- to 4-thread serger uses two, three, or four threads for seaming, finishing, and creating a narrow rolled edge/hem finish.
- » A 3- to 4-thread serger uses three or four threads both for seaming and finishing raw edges.
- » A 5-thread serger uses three threads for the overlocked edge and two for the seamline.

When you use a serger, you need to choose the stitch to use. The stitches in the following list (and shown in Figure 5-18) are just a few of the most common:

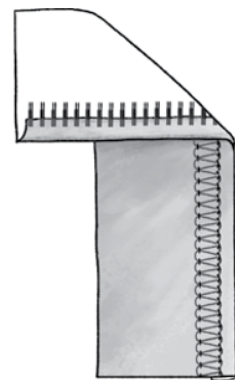
- » **3-thread overlock:** Used for finishing raw edges. Can be either wide (using the left needle) or narrower (using the right needle).
- » **3-<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-thread safety overlock:** Commonly used as a <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-inch seam. Using four threads, the right needle sews a straight “safety” stitch, so if the first row of stitching in the seam breaks, the seam will still stay together.



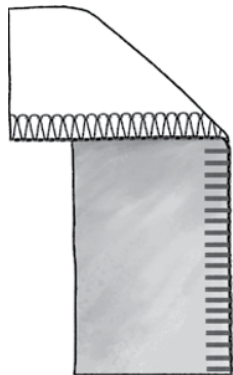
3-thread overlock



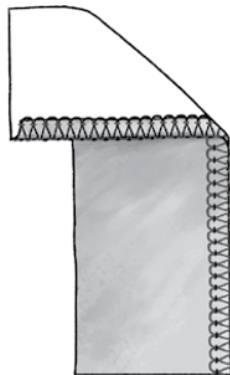
3/4-thread safety overlock



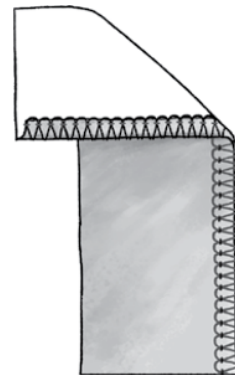
3-thread flatlock



3-thread blanket stitch



3-thread narrow hem



3-thread rolled hem

**FIGURE 5-18:**  
The most  
common  
serger stitches.

- » **3-thread flatlock:** Used as a decorative treatment in areas that don't get a lot of wear.
- » **3-thread blanket:** Because the lower looper is threaded with a heavier thread, the 3-thread blanket stitch is usually applied as a decorative treatment on an edge.
- » **3-thread narrow hem:** Used as a beautiful hem finish for lightweight cottons and shirting fabrics.
- » **3-thread rolled edge:** Similar to the narrow hem, but because of the serger settings, the fabric "rolls" under the stitch.



*Threads* magazine has an excellent article that provides a lot of additional information about sergers and how they differ from one another. You can check it out at [www.threadsmagazine.com/2022/04/04/what-kind-of-serger-is-right-for-you](http://www.threadsmagazine.com/2022/04/04/what-kind-of-serger-is-right-for-you).

## Starting and Stopping

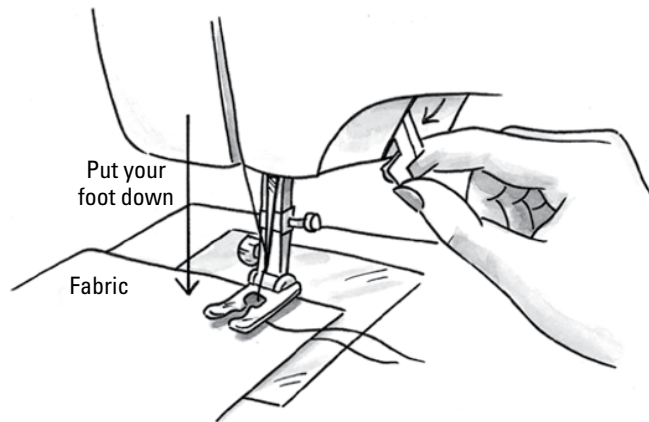
Make sure that you properly start and stop your sewing machine and serger to prevent hurting your equipment or ruining your fabric. For smooth and easy sewing, follow these techniques for starting and stopping stitches.

### ... with your sewing machine

Pull the top and bobbin threads to the right or to the left of the needle before lowering the foot. This way, the foot pressure holds the threads firmly, and they don't tangle or jam at the beginning of a row of stitching.

Lower the presser foot onto the fabric before sewing a stitch, as shown in Figure 5-19. If you don't, the fabric flops all over the place as the needle goes up and down, and you don't get anywhere. You may even jam up the machine, which is a real bummer. After a few seams, lowering the foot becomes second nature.

**FIGURE 5-19:** Putting the presser foot down keeps the fabric from flopping up and down with every stitch.



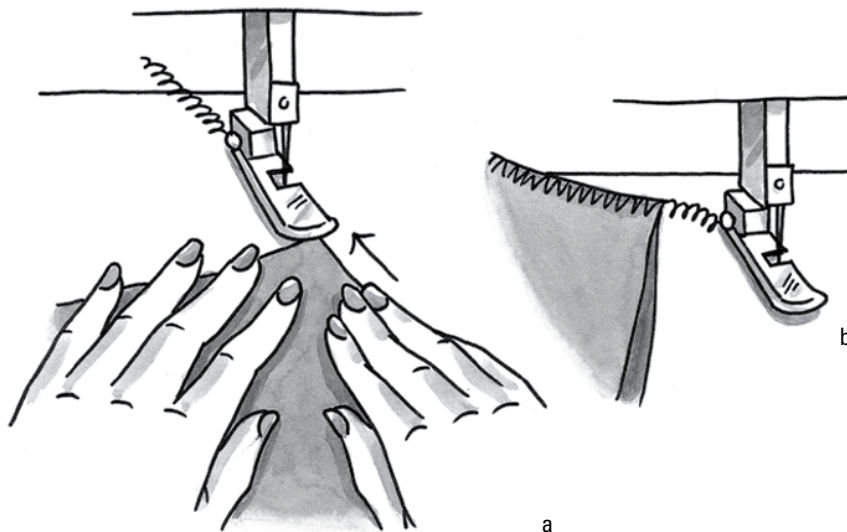
Stop sewing at the end of the fabric, stopping with the take-up lever at the highest position. (See Chapter 2 for more on the take-up lever.) If you don't, you may unthread the needle with the next stitch. Some machines automatically stop with the needle up or down, so check your operating manual to see if yours is one of them. Next, lift the presser foot and pull the fabric away from the machine, pulling out several inches of thread with it. Cut the threads, leaving a 6- to 8-inch thread tail on the fabric and 2 to 3 inches of thread to one side or the other of the foot. Most machines have a thread cutter near the needle, or you can cut threads with a pair of scissors.

## ... with your serger

Starting and stopping with a serger is easier than with a sewing machine because a serger is designed for speed and durability. Leaving the presser foot down and with a short thread chain coming off the back of the foot, you simply butt the fabric edges under the toe of the foot and step on the foot pedal. When the serger starts, it grabs the fabric — and you're off and running.

To stop, gently pull the fabric as it comes out of the serger behind the foot, keeping constant, gentle tautness. Serge off the edge, creating a thread chain behind the foot. Stop serging and cut the thread chain, leaving enough on the fabric to tie off threads or to weave back under the stitches. See how to serge on and serge off in Figure 5-20.

**FIGURE 5-20:** Butt the fabric up under the presser foot of your serger (a) and step on the gas; then, while holding the project, chain off the fabric to stop (b).





# Basting Projects for a Better Fit

Basting in sewing is nothing like basting a turkey in the kitchen. In sewing, *basting* means temporarily holding pieces of a project together. You can hold them together with your hands (called *finger-basting*), with long hand or machine stitches (called *hand-basting* or *machine-basting*), or with pins (called *pin-basting*). The long stitches and pins are easy to remove, so you can check and adjust the fit before permanently sewing the seam together.

My seventh-grade home economics teacher made me hand-baste an entire project before machine stitching. It took forever, and I thought it was a real waste of time. (No wonder a lot of my classmates never sewed again.) Now I don't baste whole projects together, but I do pin- or machine-baste in the following circumstances and suggest that you do, too:

- » When you're not sure how one pattern piece fits into another
- » When you need to check and adjust the fit of the project
- » When one slightly larger fabric piece has to be eased onto another slightly smaller one



TIP

Use a contrasting thread color to find and pull out your basting more easily. If you're machine-basting, use contrasting thread in the bobbin. (See Chapter 2 for more information on the bobbin.)

To baste two pattern pieces together, start by placing and pinning the right sides together and then use either of the following methods shown in Figure 5-21:

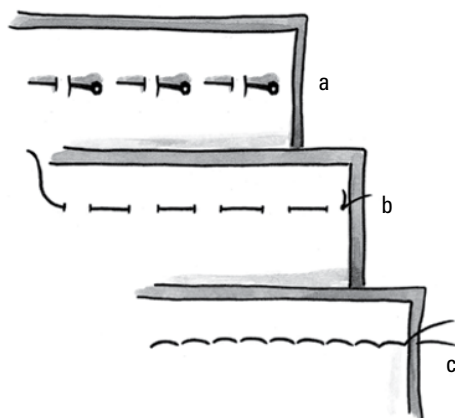
- » **Pin-basting:** Pin parallel to and  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch from the cut edge. For small areas, such as a shoulder seam, pin every 1 to 2 inches. For larger areas, such as the side seam on a pair of pants, pin every 3 to 4 inches.
- » **Hand-basting:** Thread your hand needle and run a row of hand-basting stitches along the seamline.
- » **Machine-basting:** Set the stitch length to a long 4-mm/6-spi straight stitch and slightly loosen the upper thread tension. Stitch along the seamlines. Remember to put the tension back to normal when you finish basting.



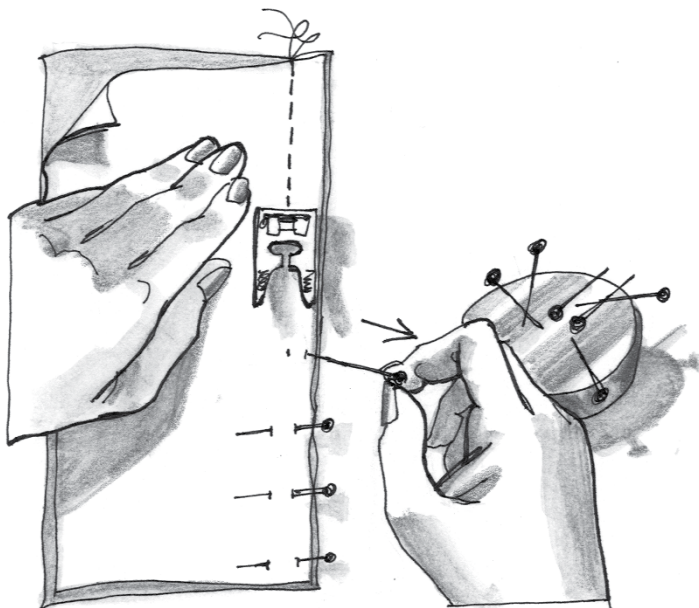
TIP

Some sewing machines have an automatic machine-basting function that makes stitches from about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to 1 inch long. If your machine has this function, remember to use it. It can save you time and effort.

To prevent needle breakage when machine-basting or sewing, remove the pins before the foot reaches them, as shown in Figure 5-22.



**FIGURE 5-21:** Pin-baste (a), hand-baste (b), or machine-baste (c) your project together to check the fit.



**FIGURE 5-22:** Remove pins before running over them with your sewing machine.



**TIP**

If you're working on a fairly close-fitting project, add all elements that affect the fit of the project before basting. If you don't, your basting won't give you an accurate picture of what the project will look like. For example, you may work on a dress bodice that includes darts and shoulder pads. You should first sew and gently press the darts, as shown in the pattern guide sheet. Next, pin in the shoulder

pads and then baste the side seams together. You can then try on the bodice and get a fairly good idea of what the final product will look like.

## Pressing Matters

What's the difference between ironing and pressing?

- » You *iron* by pushing and pulling a hot iron across the fabric in a side-to-side motion to smooth out wrinkles in woven fabrics.
- » You *press* by using an up-and-down motion as you firmly push down on an area of the fabric with an iron. Pressing is most commonly used to shape an area when sewing or when removing wrinkles in a knit.



When smoothing out wrinkles on knits such as T-shirts, use the up-and-down pressing motion. Ironing knits distorts and stretches the fabric out of shape, sometimes permanently.

## Why press and iron as you sew?

Sewing changes the texture of the fabric wherever stitching occurs. Seams pucker a bit due to the thread, the fabric, the stitch used, or the shape of the pattern pieces, so for the seam to look good after sewing, you must smooth it out by pressing.

Pressing up and down with the iron sets the stitches so that they become part of the fabric. Ironing back and forth smooths the seam and puts the fabric back as close to its prestitched state as possible. If you don't press and iron while constructing a project, the seams stay as they come out of the sewing machine or serger and the project has a rough, puckered, unfinished look.



A seam stick is a handy tool. It's a smooth, hardwood dowel that's curved like a seam roll on one side and flat on the other side. (See Chapter 2 for more on pressing tools.) The stick is much longer and narrower than a seam roll so you can easily slip it into a sleeve or pant leg and press these longer seams without repositioning the tool a bunch of times. Check it out at [www.wawak.com/pressing-spotting/pressing-accessories/wooden-seam-stick-16/#sku=pm12](http://www.wawak.com/pressing-spotting/pressing-accessories/wooden-seam-stick-16/#sku=pm12).

## When and where to press

Press every seam right after you sew it and every time the pattern guide sheet tells you to.



TIP

Use a hotter steam setting for natural fibers, such as silk, cotton, wool, and linen. Use lower synthetic-temperature settings for man-made and synthetic fiber fabrics. Depending on your iron, you may or may not be able to use steam at these cooler settings. If you're in doubt about what works best on your fabric, do a test-press on a fabric scrap using the iron with and without steam.

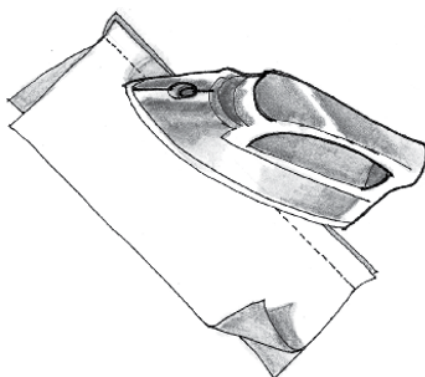


WARNING

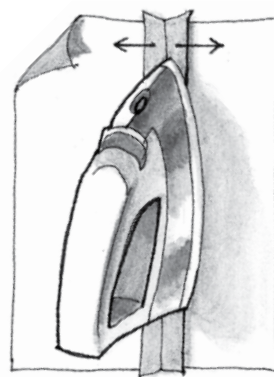
Be careful to set your iron for the appropriate temperature for the fiber content of your fabric and/or use a press cloth. (See Chapter 3 to read about fiber content.) An iron that's too hot melts the fiber and creates unwanted shine that never presses out.

Follow these steps to properly press a seam. Because the seam is inside, be sure the ironing and pressing take place on the wrong side of the fabric:

1. **Iron the seam flat and together, setting or “blending” the stitches into the fabric.**
2. **Position one long edge of the iron at the stitching line and press the seam allowance together and then out toward the edge, as shown in Figure 5-23a.**
3. **Press a  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam open over a seam roll (see Figure 5-23b), and press a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seam to one side.**



a



b

**FIGURE 5-23:**

Press along the seamline to set the stitches (a).

Press seams open over a seam roll or to one side (b).

Your pattern guide sheet may instruct you to press other items throughout the course of a project. Don't try to cut corners by skipping these instructions.



TIP

Make pressing easy by setting up your pressing area close to your sewing area. If your chair is on wheels, lower the ironing board to a comfortable height so that you can use your iron and ironing board from a seated position.

## Pressing napped fabrics

Napped fabrics like velvet, velour, corduroy, and polyester fleece all have a fuzzy texture that can crush under iron pressure. Follow these tips when pressing napped fabrics:



TIP

Drape a big piece of wool flannel over your ironing board with a towel underneath so you don't crush the nap.

- » **Corduroy:** Press and iron corduroy from the wrong side of the fabric.
- » **Polyester fleece:** Don't press fleece!
- » **Upholstery velvet:** Upholstery velvet is designed for sitting, so the nap doesn't crush as easily as it does with dressmaking velvet and cotton velveteen. Nonetheless, you should press upholstery velvet from the wrong side using a press cloth.
- » **Velour:** Lightly press velour using a good deal of steam and press from the wrong side using a press cloth.
- » **Velvet:** Velvet practically crushes when you look at it. Lay a large scrap of velvet or a terry cloth towel on the ironing board, nap side up. Lay the napped side of the velvet you're pressing against the napped side of the velvet or towel and lightly press it from the wrong side.



NICE  
TO HAVE

If you sew a lot of napped fabrics, invest in a press cloth designed for pressing napped fabrics. It has a thick, dense texture so that when you put the right side of the napped fabric against it, you won't damage the fabric when applying iron pressure.

## Sew Simple Project: Stitch Sampler Pin Cushion

Whether sewing a little or a lot, you need a pin cushion. This little cutie is designed for two purposes. First, it's your sewing machine's dance partner, helping you practice a medley of practical and decorative stitches. Second, it's a tool you'll reach for every time you dive into your sewing adventures. Get ready to turn your practice into a practical tool you'll use with every pin you place.

This project enables you to get acquainted with your sewing machine by winding bobbins of different colors, threading and rethreading the machine with each stitch you select, and changing presser feet.

Because you have a long strip of ticking to work with, you practice each stitch on the majority of the white stripes until you feel confident. Then you select the stitches you want to showcase on the pin cushion. Check out Figure 5-17 earlier in the chapter for your stitch inspiration.

## Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

To make this project, you need the following materials, including your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2.)

- » Fabric:  $\frac{1}{4}$  yard firm pillow-ticking (a narrow-striped fabric often used as a fabric covering for sleeping pillows).
- » Five colors of thread.
- » Polyester fiberfill: My personal favorite is made by Fairfield ([www.fairfieldworld.com/polyfil-premium-fiber-fill](http://www.fairfieldworld.com/polyfil-premium-fiber-fill)), which comes in as small an amount as 2 ounces.

## Instructions

### 1. Cut off a 10-inch piece of ticking and set it aside.

You'll be using this piece to make your pin cushion. The rest of the pillow-ticking fabric is used for practice. Note: Because the instructions call for  $\frac{1}{4}$  yard, this piece of ticking should measure 10 inches by 9 inches.

### 2. Wind bobbins of each thread color and set them aside.

### 3. Thread your machine and bobbin with the first color.

### 4. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch*: Straight
- *Length*: 2.5–4 mm/8–10 spi
- *Width*: 0 mm
- *Foot*: All-purpose

**5. Using the larger piece of ticking for test-stitching, lower the presser foot so you are sewing on one of the white stripes.**

As you are sewing, move the stitch-length control/button or touch the screen so you can see the difference between a short stitch and a longer stitch. For more practice, sew a couple of rows of straight stitching on the other stripes so you get the hang of the fabric moving through the machine and sewing straight.

**6. Grab the 10-inch piece of pillow ticking (what you're using to make the pin cushion) and sew a row of straight stitches down one of the white stripes (using the stitch setting from step 5), and then set it aside.**

**7. Rethread your machine with a different color top and bobbin.**

**8. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Zigzag
- *Length:* 0.5–3 mm/16–10 spi
- *Width:* 2 mm to widest
- *Foot:* Embroidery

**9. Using the larger test piece of ticking, sew down another white stripe and practice using the zigzag stitch by changing the stitch length and width.**

Finish your practice on a 1-mm length and 3-mm width. Repeat this until you see and understand what happens when you change the width and length.

**10. Pick up the 10-inch piece of pillow ticking again and sew a row of zigzag stitches down another one of the white stripes using the stitch setting from step 9.**

**11. Repeat this exercise with the following stitches. (See the finished project in the color insert and refer to Figure 5-17 and your operating manual for stitch settings. Remember, these stitches may be automatically set when you select the stitch.)**

- Three-step zigzag
- Blind hem
- Stretch blind hem
- Overlock
- Your choice of decorative stitches



REMEMBER



TIP

- 12. Once you have sewn each stitch to your liking on the practice fabric, go ahead and stitch it onto the 10-inch piece of pin cushion fabric.**

Change the thread colors for each stitch so your pin cushion stitch sampler is colorful.

- 13. Cut the pin cushion sampler fabric into a 10-inch by 5-inch wide strip.**

Sometimes the starting and stopping parts of your stitching may not look as nice as the stitches in the middle. So, when trimming your pin cushion ticking, the 5-inch wide strip may look best in the middle.

- 14. Fold and pin the fabric so that the right sides are together. (See Figure 5-24 and refer to Chapter 4 for information on putting “right sides together.”)**

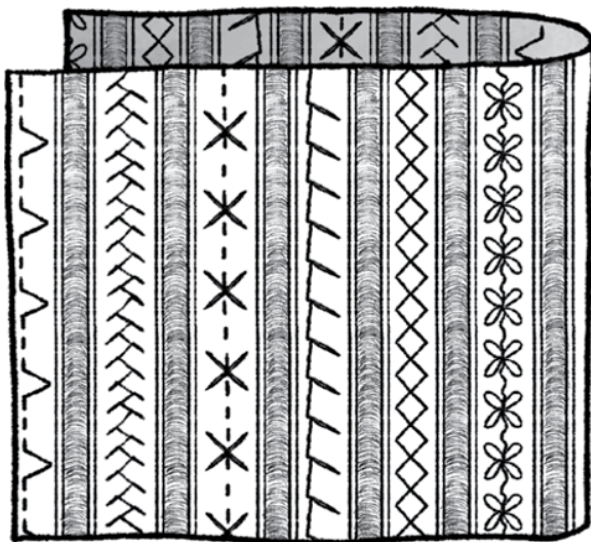
- 15. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/10–12 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

- 16. Sew a ½-inch seam from the folded edge to the open end of the pin cushion, backstitching at both ends, as shown in Figure 5-25.**

See Chapter 6 for more on backstitching with your sewing machine.

- 17. Repeat on the other side, as shown in Figure 5-25.**



**FIGURE 5-24:**  
Fold the sampler in half by bringing the short ends together with the right sides together.

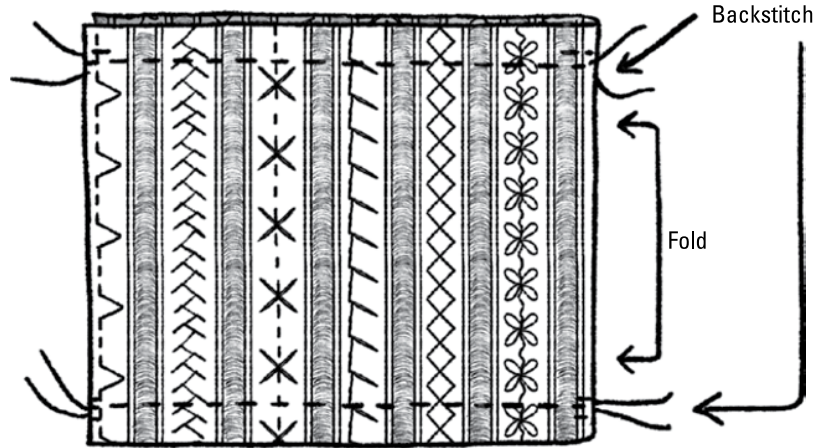


18. Fold and press a ½-inch seam allowance as shown in Figure 5-26a.
19. Turn the pin cushion right side out (see Figure 5-26a) and press again.
20. Push several handfuls of fiberfill through the opening of the pin cushion (see Figure 5-26b) until it's stuffed to your liking.

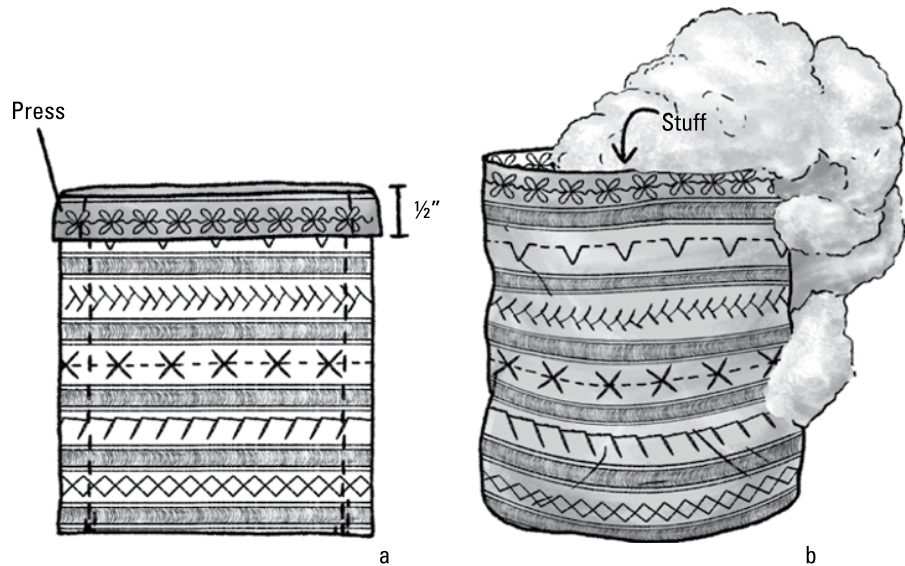


TIP

Fiberfill is pliable, so I use as much fill as I can by pushing it to the bottom and then working my way up.



**FIGURE 5-25:**  
Sew a ½-inch  
seam  
on  
each side.

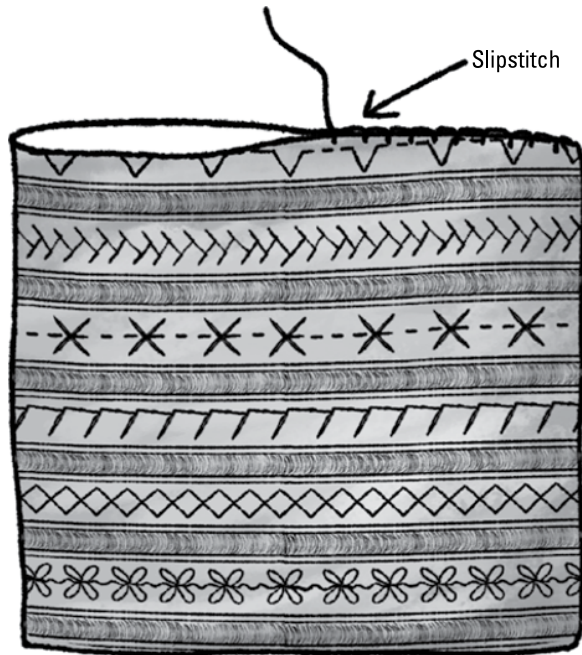


**FIGURE 5-26:**  
Fold and press a  
½-inch seam  
allowance (a) and  
then turn the pin  
cushion right side  
out and stuff  
with polyester  
fiberfill (b).

**21.** Pin the open end closed.

**22.** Thread a hand needle with a 15-inch length of thread; tie a knot at the end and use an even slipstitch to close the opening, as shown in Figure 5-27.

Refer to “The even slipstitch” section earlier in this chapter for more on this hand stitch.



**FIGURE 5-27:**  
Hand sew the  
opening closed  
using a hand  
slipstitch.

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Finishing the seams and edges before you start
- » Keeping your seams in place
- » Sewing on the straight and narrow (and curvy turns, too)
- » Unsewing: the art of the do-over
- » Smoothing seams with shaping shortcuts
- » Repurposing a sports jersey into a pillow sham

## Chapter 6

# Securing Sensational Seams

**S**imply put, a seam is what you get when you buddy up two pieces of fabric. You need straight seams, curved seams, and corner seams to build a project. After you've sewn a seam, it's time for a little tough love as you press, snip, and machine that seam into shape so your project fits and looks, well, professional.

But hold your horses. Before introducing fabric piece A to fabric piece B, there's a bit of a sewing paradox. You "finish" the raw edges before you put them together in a seam. It may feel like putting on your shoes and then your socks — peculiar — yet in the world of sewing it's just part of the construction process.

# Finishing the Edges First

You *finish* the raw edges on a cut-out, ready-to-stitch-together fabric pattern piece so that the *seam allowance* (the fabric from the seam to the cut edge) doesn't ravel up to the *seamline* — the line of stitching that joins the fabric pieces to make a seam. *Note:* Sewing terminology can get confusing at times, so going forward, the paper pattern piece that is pinned to the fabric before cutting is referred to as the “paper pattern piece.” The cut-out, ready-to-stitch-together fabric pattern piece is referred to as the “fabric pattern piece.”

The seam finishes in this section are for woven fabrics. If you're working on a knit, skip ahead to the section “Seaming Fabrics” later in the chapter. There you see how you can stitch and finish the seams of knit fabrics in just one step. But before seaming your knits, be sure to review the information on knit fabrics in Chapter 3.

## Pinking your edges

*Pinking* the raw *woven* fabric edges is a quick way to finish a seam. You pink the edges by trimming the raw edge of a single layer of fabric with a pair of *pinking shears*, which are shears with a zigzag pattern on the blades. Pinking shears work best on woven fabrics because the blades cut clean little zigzags into the fabric, thereby preventing the raw edges from raveling. *Note:* If you have a sewing machine or serger with one of the overcasting stitches described in Chapter 5, skip to the next section. Overcasting using a stitch is a much better way to finish a seam than pinking an edge.



WARNING

Don't use pinking shears on a knit fabric unless you're okay with the blades chewing up and snagging the fabric beyond recognition. Skip ahead to the section “Seaming Fabrics” for information on sewing seams on knits.



WARNING

Don't cut out a project with pinking shears and think that you're saving a step — a pinked cutting line isn't accurate, which means your project won't fit correctly. Instead, cut out your pattern pieces using your dressmaker's shears. Then remove the paper pattern and pink the raw edges of each pattern piece, pinking one layer of fabric at a time. Even though you're cutting away some fabric with this finish, you still use a standard seam allowance, so be sure you pink on the edge of the fabric.

## Using your sewing machine or serger

Woven fabrics ravel, so you can finish the edges by *overcasting* with stitches on your sewing machine or your serger. Knits don't ravel, but the edges on some

knits curl and are hard to press flat, so you handle the seams a bit differently. (See “Seaming Fabrics” later in this chapter.)

Follow these steps to finish woven fabric edges, as shown in Figure 6-1:

**1. Set your sewing machine like this:**

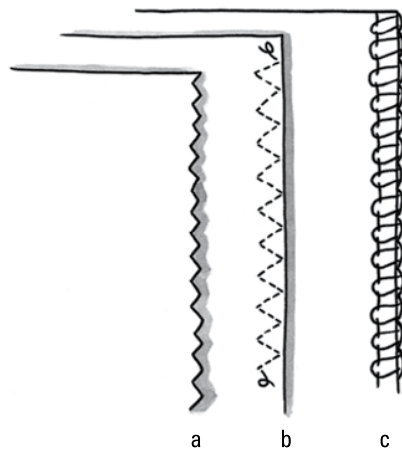
- *Stitch:* Three-step zigzag
- *Length:* 1–1.5 mm/20 spi or fine
- *Width:* 4–6 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

If you’re using a serger, set your serger like this:

- *Stitch:* Three-thread overlock
- *Length:* 3 mm
- *Width:* 5 mm
- *Foot:* Standard

**2. With either the right or the wrong side up, start sewing or serging the raw edge, guiding the fabric so that the stitches catch the fabric on the left, and sew just off the raw edge at the right.**

Because you use these stitches to finish the edge of the fabric rather than to construct a seam, you don’t backstitch. (See the “Securing Your Seams” section to find out more about backstitching.)



**FIGURE 6-1:** Better than pinking a raw edge (a), use the three-step zigzag stitch (b) or three-thread overlock stitch (c) are available on most sewing machines and sergers.

# Securing Your Seams

When sewing a seam with a straight stitch, you want to secure the stitches at the beginning and end so that the stitches don't pull out during construction. You can prevent stitches from coming unstitched in two ways:

- » By backstitching at the beginning and end of the seam
- » By tying off the threads

## Backstitching: yes or no?

Most machines have a backstitch or reverse button, lever, or function. (See Chapter 2.) To secure a seam with backstitching, simply sew the first two or three stitches and then touch the reverse button while stepping on the foot pedal. The machine automatically sews backward until you release it. Backstitch at the beginning and at the end of a seamline (see Figure 6-2), and you have all the stitch security you need!



WARNING

Only backstitch when using a straight stitch. Backstitching with a zigzag or more complex stitch globs up the thread, creates knots that you can never rip out if you make a mistake, and may damage your sewing machine.

Removing stitches that haven't been backstitched is easier, so when you aren't sure that you want a seam to be permanent, just sew the seam without backstitching and leave the thread tails free at both ends of the seam.

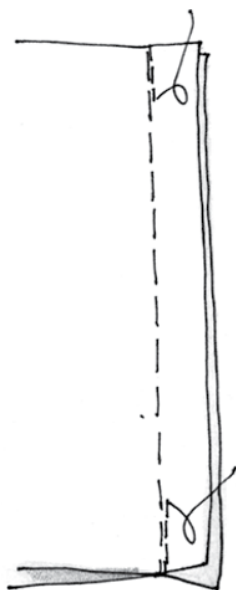
## THE STANDARD SEAM ALLOWANCES

A paper pattern piece indicates the seam allowance by a line that shows you where to stitch the fabric pattern pieces together. As a rule, you can count on the following seam allowances as industry standards:

- $\frac{5}{8}$  inch for woven garments
- $\frac{1}{2}$  inch for home-decorating projects
- $\frac{1}{4}$  inch for knit fabrics

Look on your project's pattern guide sheet if you're unsure about the seam allowances for your project.

**FIGURE 6-2:**  
Keep your seams  
in place with  
backstitching.



## Tying off threads

You may want to tie off threads rather than backstitching at the point of a dart or at the beginning and end of a line of topstitching. Tying off the threads is less bulky — important at the point of a dart — and it just plain looks better than backstitching.

Rather than tying an overhand knot that often comes untied, I prefer the method in this section because the knot won't come out. It takes a little practice, but after you get it down, it will take you about a millisecond to tie off thread ends.

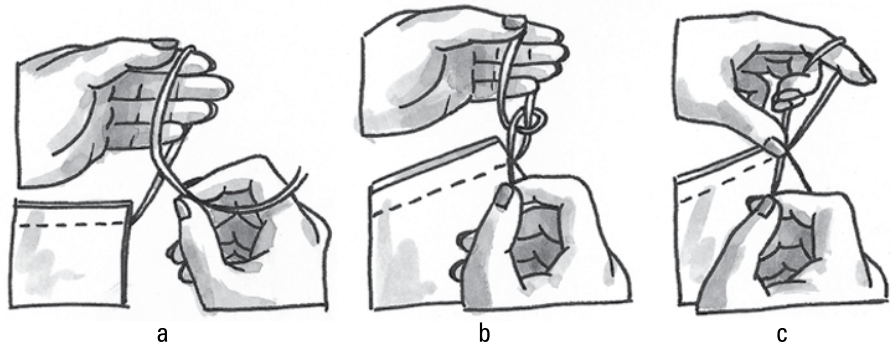
First, you need to get the top and bobbin threads to the same side of the fabric. Lift the presser foot and remove the fabric, pulling off and cutting a length of thread at least 8 inches long. Then, from the wrong side of the stitching line, pull up on the bobbin thread. The pulled thread brings a loop to the wrong side of the fabric. Now grab the loop and pull it through until both threads are on the same side of the fabric. Tie off the threads as follows:

- 1. Starting with thread tails at least 8 inches long, hold the threads together and form a loop, as shown in Figure 6-3a.**  

If using threads shorter than 8 inches, this tie-off method is difficult to practice and learn. Remember — longer is better (and easier).
- 2. Bring both threads around and through the loop, working the loop to the base of the stitch, as shown in Figure 6-3b.**

3. **Holding the threads with your thumb against a flat surface like a tabletop, pull them taut so that the loop forms a knot at the base of the fabric at the stitching line, as shown in Figure 6-3c.**

**FIGURE 6-3:**  
Tie off threads  
so they  
don't unravel.



## Seaming Fabrics

Sewing a seam is kind of like driving a car. I passed my driver's test on the sewing machine before I could sew a stitch (or drive a car). I had to prove that I could control the sewing machine — that I could start, stop, maneuver both inside and outside curves, and turn corners safely. Thank goodness I didn't have to parallel park!

Consider this next section your driving test. It's time to put the pedal to the metal and sew some seams.

### Sewing straight seams

For straight seams every time, follow these steps:

1. **Set your machine like this for woven fabrics:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/10–12 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

This traditional seaming technique is used mostly on woven fabrics when applying a  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam allowance. Knit fabrics usually are constructed using  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seams, as I show you in the upcoming section “Sewing  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seams.”



**2. Place and pin your fabric pattern pieces so that the right sides of the fabric are together. (See Figure 6-4.)**

In instructions, this is what *place the right sides together* means. Use as many pins as it takes to hold the edges together so that they don't slide around. The more you sew, the closer you can estimate how many pins you need for a particular job.



**TIP**

For easy pin removal, pin perpendicular to the seamline so that the pin heads are toward your dominant hand and the pins either enter or exit the fabric about ¼ inch from the edge of the fabric, as shown in Figure 6-4.

**3. Place the seam under the presser foot and line up the edges of the fabric with the appropriate seamline marked on the needle plate.**

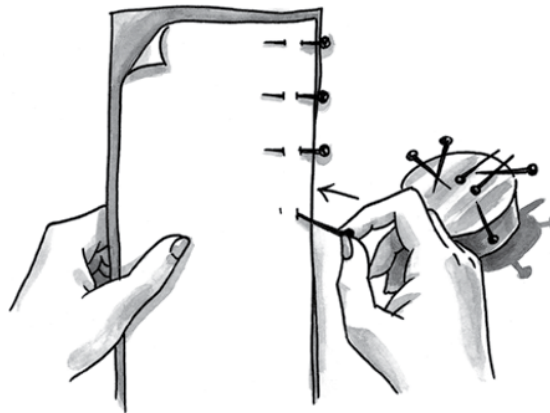
On the needle plate, look for a set of lines to the right of the needle. Depending on your machine, the lines may be marked as  $\frac{5}{8}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$ , and so on; sometimes you find just plain old lines or lines with whole numbers next to them (3, 4, 5, and 6). When the needle is in the center needle position, the distance to the #3 line is  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch, to the #4 line is  $\frac{4}{8}$  inch, to the #5 line is  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch; to the #6 line  $\frac{6}{8}$  inch.

Placing the bulk of the fabric to the left, line up the raw edges of your fabric along the  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch line. If you have everything lined up properly, the needle should be poised to hit the fabric right on the  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seamline.



**TIP**

If your needle plate has unmarked lines, place your sewing tape measure under the needle so that the long length of the tape is to the left. Poke the needle into the measuring tape at the  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch mark and lower the foot. The edge of the short end of the measuring tape is where the  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch line is in the needle plate. Note which line is needed for the  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seamline or place a strip of transparent tape along the  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch line.



**FIGURE 6-4:**  
Place the right sides of the fabric together and pin so the pin heads are perpendicular to the seamline and toward your dominant hand.

**4. Lower the presser foot onto the fabric and stitch, backstitching at the beginning and end of the seam.**

See “Backstitching: yes or no?” earlier in this chapter, for more information.

If the needle hits a pin, both can break, sending shards all over the place. Unless you plan on wearing safety goggles when you sew, pull out the pins before sewing over them.

Slow down when you seam a curve. Using the line in your needle plate, guide the edges along the appropriate line for an even sewing distance along the length of the curve. Stop every now and then, put the needle all the way down, raise the presser foot, and slightly pivot the fabric to get a smooth curve.

**5. Press the seam flat and together; then, from the wrong side, press the seam open. (See Chapter 5 for more information on pressing.)**



WARNING

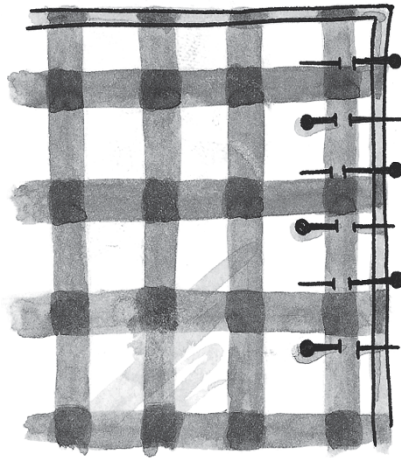


TIP



TIP

To match a plaid perfectly when seaming, put one pin on every other color bar so one pin goes in from *east to west* and the next goes in from *west to east*, like in Figure 6-5. (Check out Chapter 4 for more about matching plaids.) As with any other seam, remember to pull out the pins before sewing over them.



**FIGURE 6-5:**  
Pin plaids or stripes on color bars with pins alternating *east to west* and then *west to east* for a perfect match.

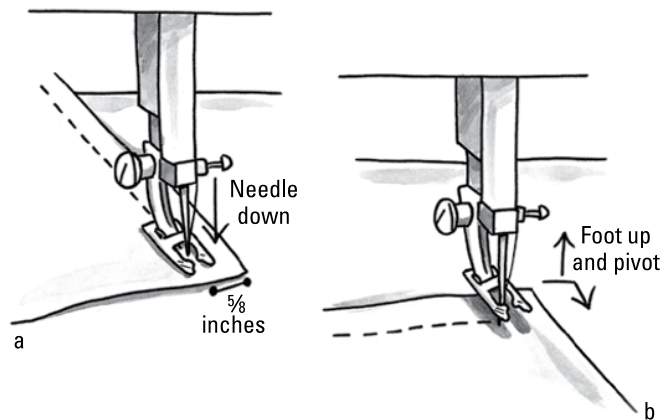
## Turning corners

When turning a corner in the car, you slow down and stop, look both ways, and then turn. You do the same when turning a corner in sewing. Follow these steps for good-looking corners every time:

1. **Using a fabric marker, mark the corner on the wrong side of the fabric with a dot so that you know exactly where to stop and pivot.**  
After you stitch several corners, you have a good idea of where to stop sewing to turn a corner without marking the corner first.
2. **As you approach the corner, slow down and stop with the needle all the way into the fabric, as shown in Figure 6-6.**
3. **Leaving the needle in the fabric so the needle is at the dead lowest point, lift the presser foot and pivot the fabric around the needle so that the other edge of the fabric lines up with the appropriate line in the needle plate.**

By stopping with the needle at the “dead lowest point,” the stitch cycle is complete, and you won’t end up with a skipped stitch at the corner.

4. **Lower the presser foot and start sewing again. Easy, isn’t it?**



**FIGURE 6-6:**  
To turn a corner, stop sewing with the needle all the way in the fabric to pivot.

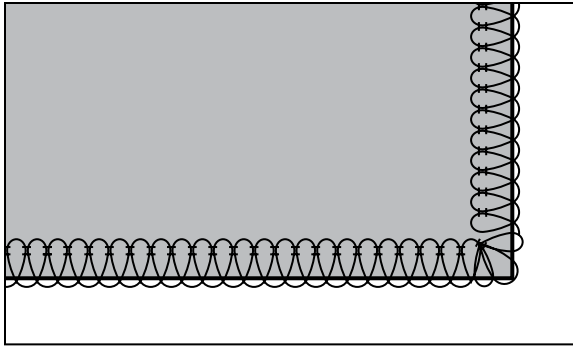
## Serging outside and inside corners

Use the following steps to serge inside and outside corners.

### Outside corner

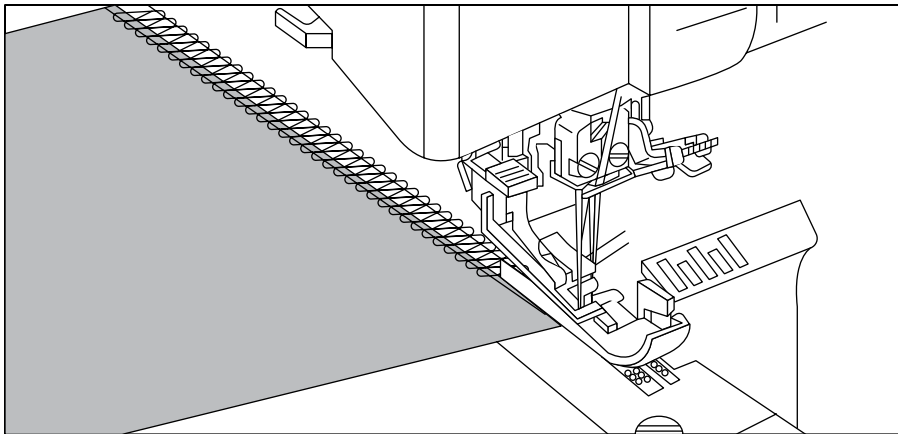
Figure 6-7 shows a serged outside corner, which you can do by following these steps.

**FIGURE 6-7:**  
A serged  
outside corner.

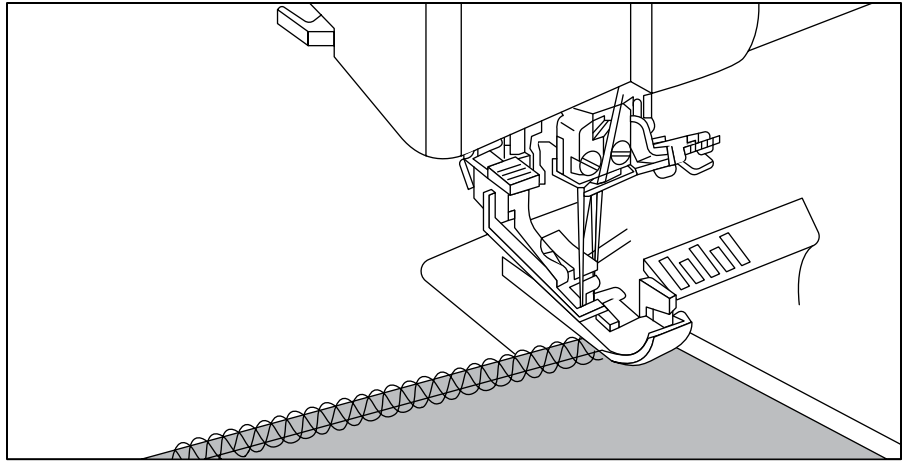


1. Stitch along one fabric edge until you reach the corner as shown in Figure 6-8, and then take one stitch off the edge of the fabric.
2. Raise the needle(s) to the highest position.
3. Raise the presser foot.
4. Manually pull a couple of stitches off the stitch fingers (from the needle plate).
5. Rotate the fabric 90 degrees and reposition the needles so they're even with the previous row of stitching, as shown in Figure 6-9.
6. Gently pull up on all the threads, removing the slack.
7. Lower the presser foot and resume serging.

**FIGURE 6-8:**  
Stitch until  
you get to the  
corner and then  
manually pull  
a couple of  
stitches off the  
stitch fingers..

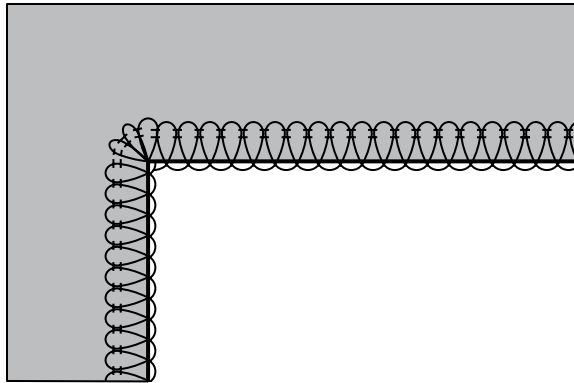


**FIGURE 6-9:**  
Rotate the fabric  
and reposition  
the needles.



## Inside Corner

This technique for an inside corner (see Figure 6-10) takes a little practice, so try this on a scrap before using it on your project.



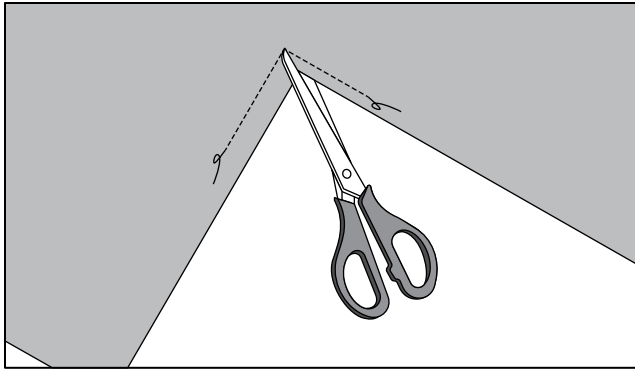
**FIGURE 6-10:**  
A serged  
inside corner.

1. If you haven't done it already, trim the inside corner to a ¼-inch seam allowance.
2. Staystitch the inside corner with your sewing machine and clip into the corner, as shown in Figure 6-11.
3. Align the fabric edge with the blade and serge until the blade (not the needles) reaches the corner, as shown in Figure 6-12.

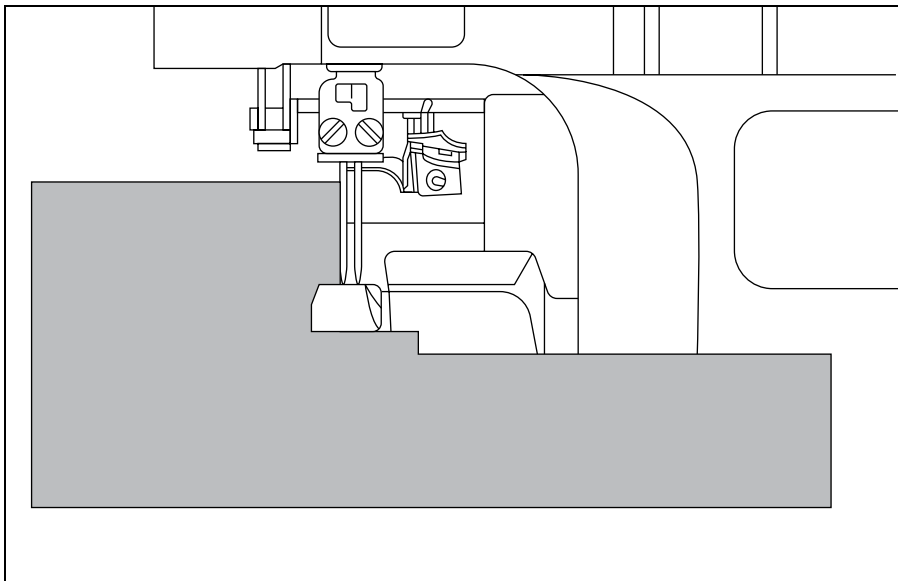
Don't cut into the corner.



**WARNING**



**FIGURE 6-11:**  
Clip into  
the corner.

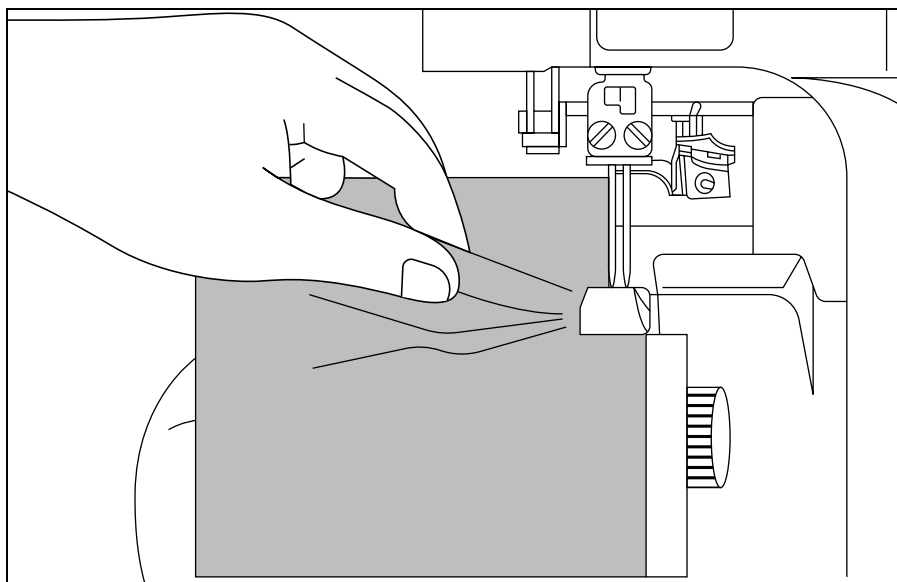


**FIGURE 6-12:**  
Serge until the  
blade reaches  
the corner.

4. Lower the needles to anchor the fabric.
5. Raise the presser foot and pinch the fabric, forming a small pleat in the corner, as shown in Figure 6-13.
6. Making sure the stitching line is straight, lower the presser foot and continue serging the remaining edge.

When you do this correctly, the pleat disappears. (Refer to Figure 6-10.)

**FIGURE 6-13:**  
A small pleat  
forms when you  
raise the foot  
and straighten  
the fabric.



## Sewing 1/4-inch seams

When seaming a T-shirt, sweatshirt, and other active knit sportswear fabrics, you usually stitch and press a 1/4-inch seam to one side. Why? Knit fabrics stretch and many curl, so you want the seam to be both secure and smooth.



**REMEMBER**

Some patterns call for 1/4-inch seam allowances; others call for 5/8-inch seam allowances. If the pattern you're working with calls for the wider seam allowance, instead of trimming it to 1/4 inch, leave it wider to allow for fitting and then trim it off later. Exceptions are those areas where you apply ribbing at the neck edge and cuffs — trim those to 1/4 inch before sewing. You can make 1/4 inch seams in one or two steps, depending on your sewing machine's capabilities.

This technique for seaming knits is called the *two-step* method because you sew the seam with two separate passes through the sewing machine. It works better on most fabrics to use 5/8-inch seam allowances and then trim them to 1/4-inch after fitting and sewing.

Follow these steps to make 1/4-inch seams:

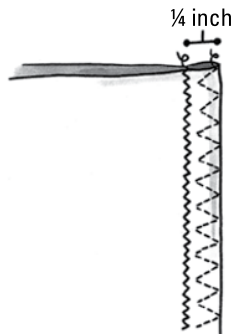
### 1. Set your sewing machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Zigzag

You are using a tiny zigzag stitch because it stretches when the knit stretches as you wear it.

- *Length:* 1.5–2 mm/13–20 spi
  - *Width:* 1–1.5 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
2. **Place and pin your fabric pattern pieces so that the right sides of the fabric are together.**
  3. **Place the seam under the presser foot so that the needle stitches either  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch or  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch from the raw edge and sew.**
  4. **Set your sewing machine like this:**
    - *Stitch:* Three-step zigzag
    - *Length:* 1–1.5 mm/13–24 spi
    - *Width:* 4–5 mm
    - *Foot:* All-purpose
  5. **Guiding to the immediate right of the tiny zigzag stitches, sew the second row of stitching with the three-step zigzag stitch, as shown in Figure 6-14.**
- If you used a  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam allowance, trim the excess fabric up to, but not through, the stitches.
6. **Press the seam to one side.**

See Chapter 5 for details about pressing a seam.



**FIGURE 6-14:**  
Two-step  
 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seam.

## Serging $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seams

You can serge  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seams in one step on your serger by using a four-thread overlock stitch. The four-thread overlock has an extra stitch within the seam allowance as an insurance policy: If you pop a seam, the extra row of stitching prevents the seam from coming completely unraveled.





TIP

I test my serger settings on a fabric scrap first to make sure the seam will look the way I want it to. Using scraps of the project fabric, I duplicate the scenario — if the seam is sewn on the lengthwise grain, I cut two fabric scraps on the lengthwise grain, place the right sides together, and then serge a few inches. If the fabric waves or puckers, I adjust the stitch length appropriately until I get the results I'm looking for.

### 1. Set your serger like this:

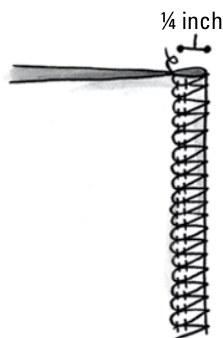
- *Stitch:* Four-thread overlock
- *Length:* 3.0–3.5 mm/8–10 spi
- *Width:* 4–5 mm
- *Foot:* Standard

### 2. Place and pin the seam, right sides together, so the pins are parallel to the seamline and about 1 inch from the cut edge.

This way you don't accidentally serge over pins and ruin your serger.

### 3. Serge the seam, guiding the raw edge along either the ¼-inch or ⅝-inch line on the needle plate of your serger.

The serger automatically trims off the excess seam allowance, giving a nice, ¼-inch finished seam. (See Figure 6-15.)



**FIGURE 6-15:**  
¼-inch seam  
sewn with a  
four-thread  
overlock stitch on  
the serger.



TIP

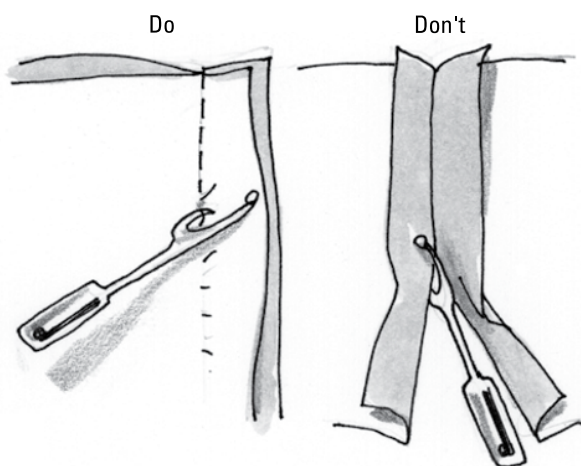
*Differential feed*, abbreviated D.F., is a feature on many sergers that prevents the unnecessary stretching of the seams of stretchy fabrics. Without D.F., serged knit seams can distort, ending up longer than they should. These distorted seams throw off the look and fit of a garment. If you're in the market for a new serger, buy a model that has this feature. Check out your operating manual to find out how it works.

# Ripping into Un-seamly Mistakes

You may think that if you're a careful sewer you won't make mistakes that you need to rip out. *Wrong*. Ripping is part of sewing, no matter how experienced you are. But I do have a rule: Don't rip it out if you can live with it. The mistake may actually look worse after your fix. So sleep on it, look at your project with new eyes in the morning, and then decide if a do-over is worth the extra effort.

My two favorite methods for ripping out stitches are using a seam ripper (see Chapter 2 to read more about a seam ripper) and pulling the needle and bobbin threads.

A *seam ripper* has a sharp point that lifts a stitch away from the fabric and a knife-edge that cuts the thread in one smooth motion. Work the point of the ripper under the stitch and cut through the thread. After you cut the stitch, gently tug open the seam until another stitch holds the seam closed. Cut this stitch with the ripper and pull the seam open as before until you have *unsewn* the distance you want to open. (See Figure 6-16.)



**FIGURE 6-16:** Rip out unwanted stitches using a seam ripper.



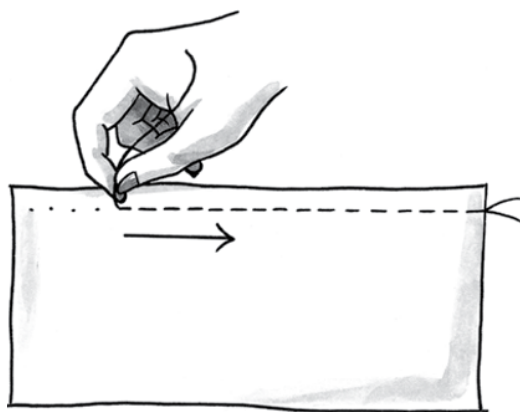
**WARNING**

A seam ripper is sharp enough to cut fabric. So don't push the ripper and cut through a whole line of stitching at once, or you may cut a slit in the fabric, right next to the seamline — an almost impossible place to fix. (Refer to Figure 6-16.)

If you prefer to rip out stitches without the aid of a seam ripper, follow these steps:

1. **Loosen the stitches enough to have about a 2-inch thread tail.**
2. **Holding the project in one hand, yank the thread tail back toward the stitching line, against the stitches, with your other hand, as shown in Figure 6-17.**  
This action breaks four to six stitches at once.
3. **Turn the project over and pull out the bobbin thread tail.**
4. **Yank on the bobbin thread tail, pulling against the stitches and breaking another four to six stitches.**
5. **Keep pulling the top thread and then the bobbin thread until you have unsewn as much stitching as needed.**

**FIGURE 6-17:**  
Pull sharply on  
the thread tail  
back toward the  
stitching line to  
rip out several  
stitches at once.



## Shaping Up the Seams

When it comes to sewing, the devil is most certainly in the details. Sewing would be wonderful (but very boring) if all the seams were straight. No such luck. In this section, you see how to take curved seams and whip them into shape by using your sewing machine and scissors. You use these techniques time and time again in many aspects of sewing, so mark this spot in the book with a sticky note and refer to it often.

# Starting by stitching the seam on your sewing machine

The five stitching techniques in this section —staystitching, understitching, edgestitching, stitching-in-the-ditch, and topstitching — help you smooth and shape seams into doing what you need them to do.

## Staystitching

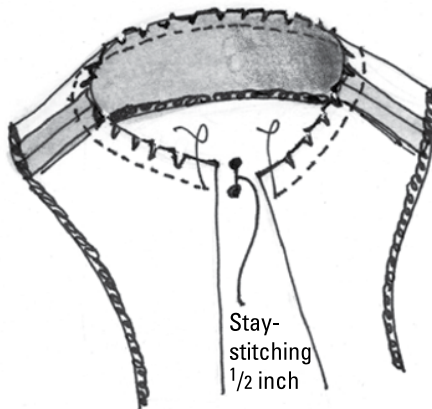
*Staystitching* is a technique that you can use on a single layer of fabric inside the seam allowance to *stay* or prevent curved fabric edges from stretching out of shape while you work on a project. Staystitch neckline curves, armhole curves, and edges cut on the bias. (See Chapter 4 to read more about the bias.)



REMEMBER

Unless a knit fabric is very lightweight or stretchy, most knits recover their normal shape after being stretched and rarely need to be staystitched.

To staystitch an edge, use a regular straight stitch and sew a row of stitching  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the raw edge, as shown in Figure 6-18. If you're not sure whether to staystitch an area, see your pattern guide sheet for a recommendation.



**FIGURE 6-18:** Staystitch curves to keep the fabric from stretching out as you handle the project.



WARNING

If you're inclined *not* to staystitch an area recommended in the pattern instructions (like I was when I was learning), restrain the urge and save yourself some time. If you skip it, the pattern pieces won't fit together the way they should and you'll struggle unnecessarily.

## Understitching

*Understitching* is a line of stitching found under or on the inside of a project close to the seamline. You understitch collars and facings so that they stay in shape and

conform to the opening you sew them into. You can't see understitching, but without it, armhole and neckline facings pull out of their openings, and collar seams roll and look, well, tacky and homemade.

You finish curved seams, like those on an armhole or neckline, with another piece of fabric called a *facing*. After you sew the facing to the neckline or armhole, you clip the seam allowance as shown in your pattern guide sheet instructions. Then press the seam allowance to one side, toward the facing. After you press, understitch the seam allowance to compress the bulk created by the extra thickness of the seam allowance and to conform to the curve's shape.

You can understitch with a straight stitch, but on mid-weight to heavy fabrics, the stitch doesn't really compress all that bulk. Using the three-step zigzag stitch flattens the seam allowance and gives you beautifully finished edges.

To understitch, do the following:

**1. After sewing the seam, press the entire seam allowance to one side.**

For a neckline or armhole that has a facing stitched to the opening, press the seam allowance toward the facing.

**2. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Three-step zigzag
- *Length:* 1–1.5 mm/20–24 spi
- *Width:* 4–5 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

**3. Place the fabric right side up under the presser foot so that the ditch of the seamline is to one side of the needle or the other, as shown in Figure 6-19.**

Which side? The side where you pressed the seam allowance. When the right side of the project is up and you press the seam to the right, the needle should be to the right side of the seamline. When you press to the left, the needle should be to the left side of the seamline.

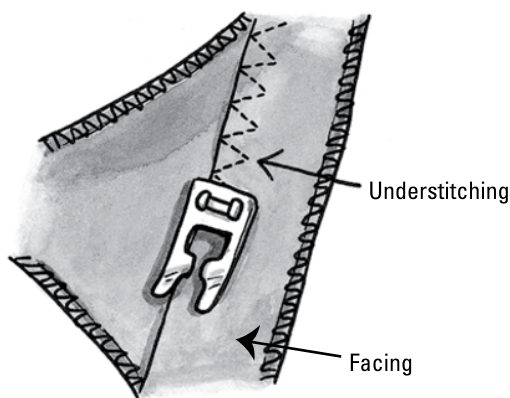
**4. Sew, guiding the needle so that when it travels over to the left side of the stitch it comes to within  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch of the seamline.**



TIP

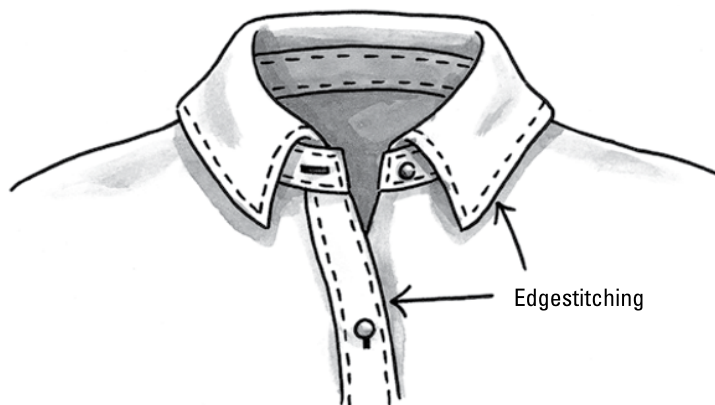
As you sew, grasp the facing and seam allowance in your right hand with your thumb under the facing. By periodically peeking under the fabric, check that you're pushing the seam allowance toward the facing side of the seam. This way, you catch all the bulk of the seam allowance in the understitching.

**FIGURE 6-19:** Understitch to manage the bulk in seam allowances and keep facings in line.



## Edgestitching

*Edgestitching* is *topstitching* (stitching sewn on the top or right side of the fabric) that is close to the finished edge. You find edgestitching on the edge of collars, cuffs, pockets, waistbands, front shirt plackets, and other edges where you want a crisp, tailored look, as shown in Figure 6-20. Even though you can edgestitch with an all-purpose presser foot, sewing in a straight line is tricky because you sew so close to the fabric's edge.



**FIGURE 6-20:** Edgestitch the edge of shirt pockets, collars, and cuffs to create a crisp, tailored look.

This technique uses the blind hem or edgestitch foot (see Chapter 2) as a guide, enabling you to edgestitch quickly, accurately, and professionally:

### 1. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 2–3 mm/9–13 spi

- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* Blind hem or edgestitch
- *Optional:* Near left needle position (check your operating manual)

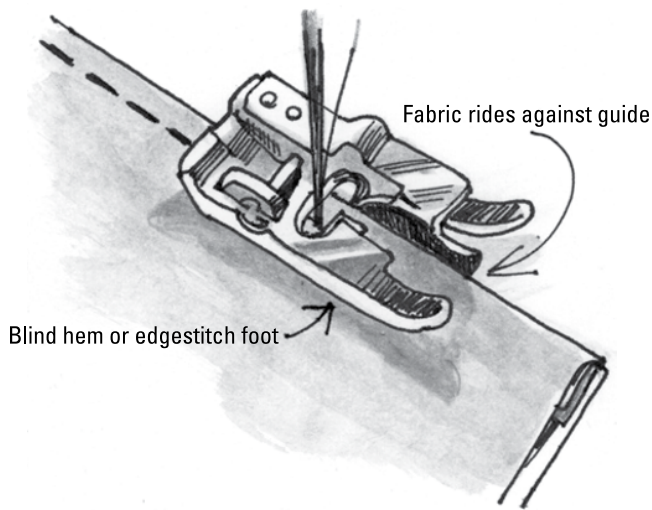
**2. Place the guide in the foot along the finished edge and sew, as shown in Figure 6-21.**

Instead of backstitching, pull the threads to the underside of the project and tie them off. (See “Tying off threads” earlier in this chapter for more information.)



**TIP**

If you don't have a blind hem foot and a variable needle position, place the fabric under the foot so that when the needle is in the fabric, the edge of the fabric is about  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch from the needle. Notice where the edge of the fabric is in relationship to the foot. (This spot could be at the edge of the needle hole, where you see a line in the foot, or where the foot changes direction.) Sewing slowly, guide the edge of the fabric by that spot on the foot.



**FIGURE 6-21:** Snug the fabric edge against the guide in the foot to make even edge-stitching a snap.

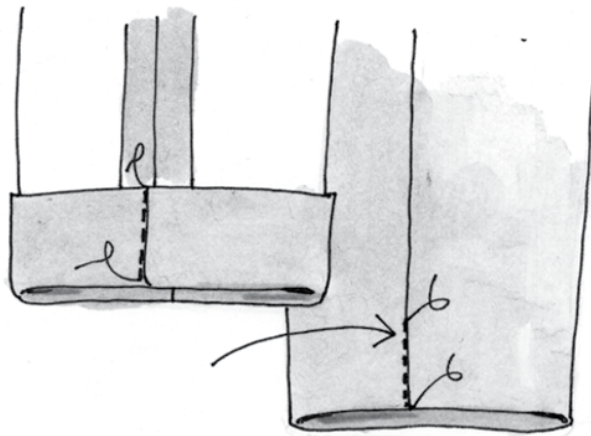
## Stitching-in-the-ditch

You use this simple technique to tack down facings and to tack up a quick cuff or hem. Just follow these steps:

- 1. Place the ditch of the seam right side up and perpendicular to the presser foot so that the needle is poised over the seamline.**

2. **Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 3 mm/9 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
3. **Using a straight stitch, sew so that the stitches bury themselves in the ditch of the seam, as shown in Figure 6-22.**
4. **Instead of backstitching, pull the threads to the wrong side of the project and tie them off.**

See “Tying off threads” earlier in this chapter for more information.



**FIGURE 6-22:**  
Secure cuffs  
and facings by  
stitching-in-  
the-ditch.



**TIP**

## MOVING THE NEEDLE POSITION

When stitching in the ditch, staystitching, topstitching, and understitching, sometimes you'll want to move the needle just a little to the right or the left. Well, you can do that on most sewing machines. It's not a prominent adjustment, so you may have to look up “changing needle position” in your operating manual to see if your machine has it. If it does, get used to using it. Many times, it's easier to move the needle position than to move the fabric or your project under the needle and presser foot.



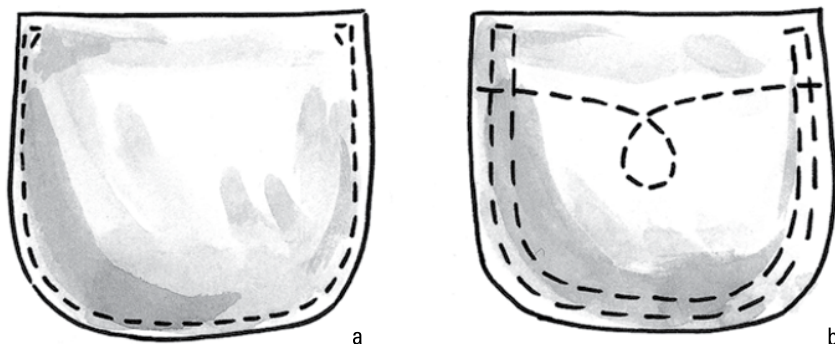
## Topstitching

Topstitching is an extra line of stitching sewn on the right side of the fabric that parallels a seamline or sews a hem. You see topstitching on the right side of a project, as on the pocket shown in Figure 6-23, so it needs to look good. Your pattern instructions tell you exactly where on the project to topstitch.

Set your machine like this:

- » *Stitch:* Straight
- » *Length:* 4–5 mm/6–9 spi
- » *Width:* 0 mm
- » *Foot:* All-purpose

**FIGURE 6-23:**  
Use topstitching  
to attach a pocket  
to a shirt (a) or  
pair of jeans (b).



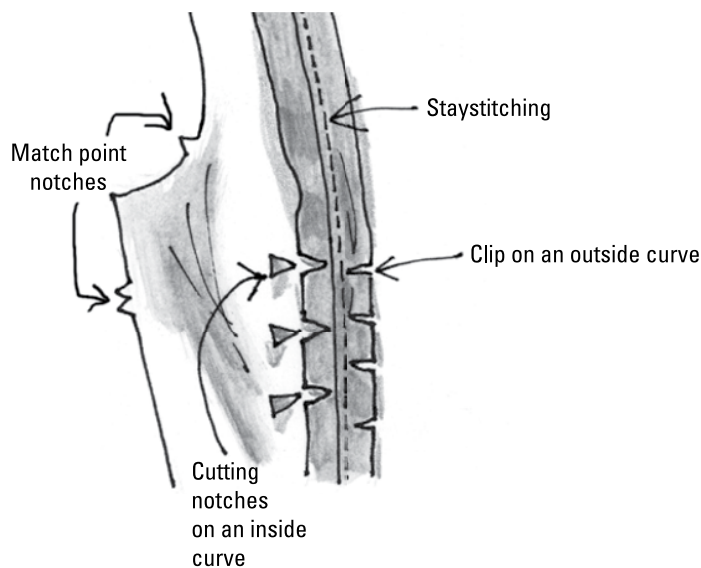
To execute the topstitch, place the project under the needle, right side up, and stitch at the right spot. Because topstitching is usually an important part of the overall garment design, you use a longer stitch length than for seaming, and you pull threads to the underside and tie them off (see “Tying off threads” earlier in this chapter) instead of backstitching at the end of each topstitched seam.

## Clipping the curve with your scissors

*Clipping a seam* to the staystitching or seamline releases the seam allowance on a curve, making it flexible enough to spread open. This way, after you stitch the armhole or neckline facing, for example, the facing turns smoothly to the inside of the garment. If you didn’t clip the seam, when you turn the facing to the inside of the armhole or neck edge, the seam would be stiff and bunchy, and the facings would pop out of the opening and bind.

When clipping, use very sharp scissor tips. Cut clips in the fabric perpendicular to the seamline and to within  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch to  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch of the staystitching or seamline, as shown in Figure 6-24. Rather than holding the seam allowance closed and clipping both seam allowances simultaneously, clip each seam allowance separately, alternating the clips across the seamline from one another. This surefire clipping technique pads the seam allowance, creating the smoothest curved seam ever.

*Notching a seam* to the staystitching or seamline is just the opposite of clipping. You notch a seam to reduce the bulk in the seam allowance of an inside curve, such as the inside edge of a collar, or an inside curve, such as a princess seamline. (See Figure 6-24.)



**FIGURE 6-24:** Clip the seam allowance to the staystitching on an outside curve; notch the seam allowance on an inside curve.



**WARNING**

Don't confuse notches that are match points marked on the pattern paper with notches you cut out of the seam allowance at a curve. (Refer to Figure 6-24. And see Chapter 4 for more on notches and match point notches.) Even though the word is the same, the notches in these instances represent two different sewing concepts.

Notch a seam allowance by cutting away little triangular-shaped pieces of fabric. Rather than holding the seam allowance closed and notching both seam allowances simultaneously, use your scissor tips to cut one notch out of a seam allowance separately, alternating notches across the seamline from one another. Cut away each notch to within  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch of the seamline.

Cut away small notches from inside curves that are spaced about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch apart. Cut away larger notches from larger curves spaced from about  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch apart.

After some experience, you find that cutting away more notches is usually better than cutting fewer, bigger ones. This way, when you stitch, notch, turn, and press an affected area, the seam allowance fits and presses smoothly — without unwanted lumps or bumps.



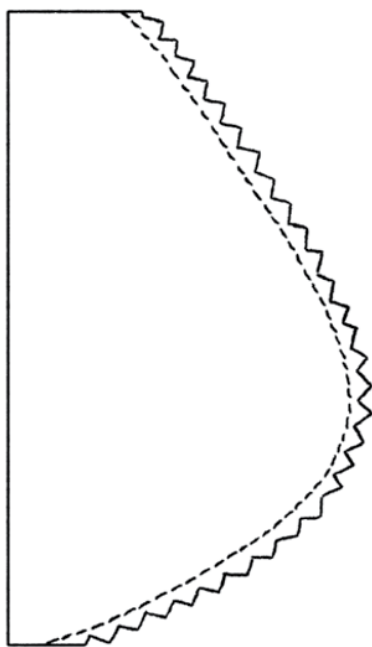
WARNING

When notching an edge, don't cut through the stitching at the seamline or you'll end up with a hole that's tough to repair.



TIP

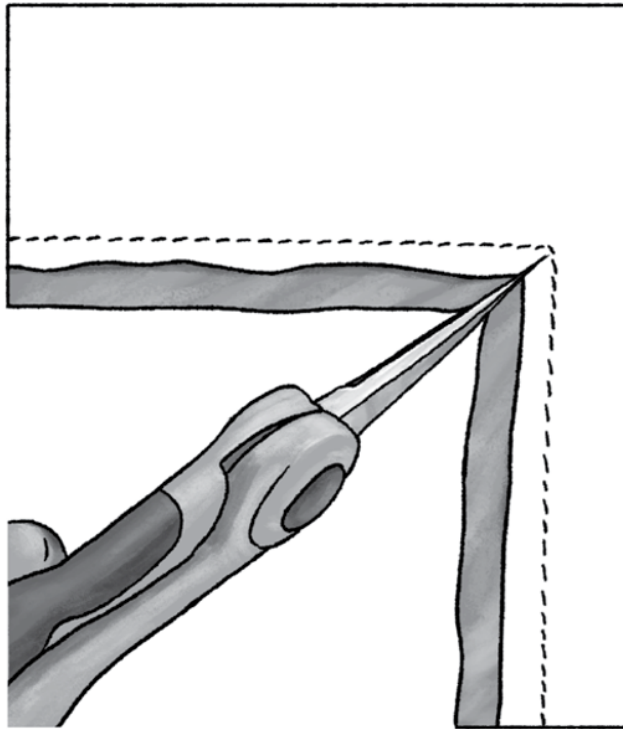
My favorite way to notch an edge on light- to mid-weight woven fabric is by using my pinking shears. I trim or grade the seam with the pinking shears, cutting to within  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch of the stitching line. (See Figure 6-25.) Pinking automatically notches the edge, so I'm on to the next step in no time.



**FIGURE 6-25:**  
Notching a curve  
with pinking  
shears is fast  
and efficient.

The seam allowance can also be trimmed  
at  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch (.3 cm) with pinking shears

*Trimming seams* eliminates bulk from the seam allowances that you stitch and then turn right side out so that the seamline is on the edge — like on the edge of a collar or cuff. When do you trim these seams? Only when your pattern instructions tell you to! To do this, trim about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch from the stitching line, leaving enough seam allowance that the stitches don't pull off the fabric. (See Figure 6-26.)

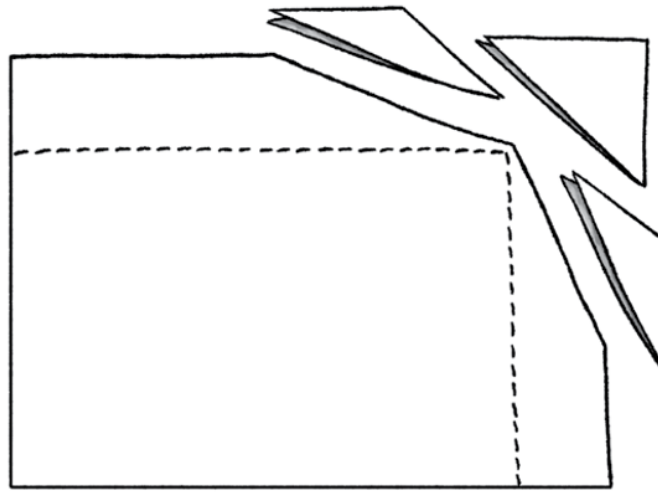


**FIGURE 6-26:**  
Trim seam allowances to eliminate bulk when your pattern instructions tell you to.

Be careful not to cut through the stitching

*Trimming corners* is another use for your scissors in shaping a piece of fabric. After you've sewn a corner, like at a pocket corner or collar point, you turn your project right side out and press it into submission. But if you leave all the fabric created by the seam allowance in the corners, you often end up with an unsightly wad in the corner. You can prevent this by clipping away a little triangle at the corner, as shown in Figure 6-27.

**FIGURE 6-27:**  
Prevent a wad  
in a corner  
by clipping  
away a little  
triangle there.



Be careful not to cut through the stitching

## Sew Simple Project: Repurposed Sport Jersey Pillow

When our son went away to college, he left several of his sports jerseys behind. I couldn't bring myself to give them away, so I made pillow shams out of them. (See the color insert.) You can preserve that lucky, memorable shirt or jersey by repurposing it into something else and presenting it as a gift.

To make this project, you need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2.)



**TIP**

- » A flannel shirt, cotton blouse, or team jersey
- » A throw pillow that coordinates with and fits inside the shirt

Fold the shirt into a square until it looks the way you want it to on the final pillow, measure it, and then use a pillow that's closest to that size.

- » Thread that matches the fabric

Follow these steps to transform a shirt into a personalized pillow cover:

**1. Button the front of the shirt.**

If the shirt isn't a button-up style, skip to step 4.

**2. Set your machine like this:**

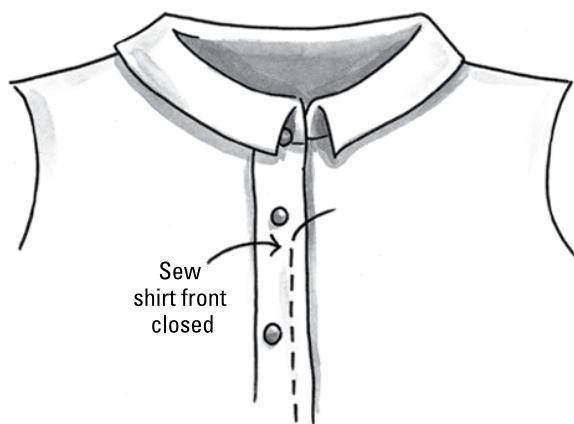
- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3 mm/9 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

**3. Sew the front opening of the shirt closed, sewing next to the buttons, as you see in Figure 6-28.**

If the shirt already has a row of topstitching, just sew over it. If the foot keeps running into the buttons, reposition the needle to the far right or far left, if you can. This way, just a skinny part of the foot rides next to and not over the buttons.

**4. Turn the shirt inside out and lay the sleeves across the back of the shirt; then hand-baste them together at the wrist ends.**

When the pillow is in place, the armhole ends make wonderful hiding places for action figures, toy cars, special rocks, and the remote control.



**FIGURE 6-28:**  
Stitch the shirt  
front closed.

**5. Pop in the fabric-covered pillow through the open shirttail end.**

Snug the pillow up to the neck and into the shoulders to see where to pin the shirttail closed so it fits the pillow.

**6. Pin the shirttail shut, pinning next to the bottom of the pillow from side seam to side seam.**

This pinning marks the stitching line for the bottom of the pillow cover, so use a fabric or chalk marker from your Sewing Survival Kit to mark where this stitching will be.

**7. Remove the pillow.**

**8. Pivot the pins at the shirttail, pinning perpendicular to the pin marks made in Step 6.**

**9. Using the machine settings from Step 2, sew the shirttail closed (see Figure 6-29), pulling out the pins as you get to them and making sure to backstitch at the beginning and the end of the seam.**

Depending on how much of a shirttail your shirt has, you may want to trim it off, leaving about a 5/8-inch seam allowance.

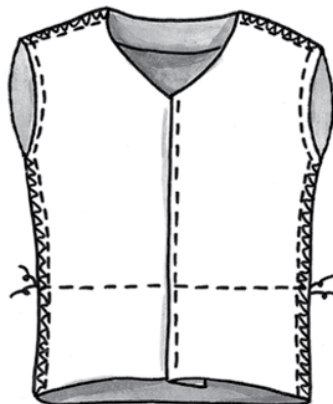
**10. Turn the shirt right side out and pop in the pillow from the neckline end (see Figure 6-30) and push the hem allowance and sleeves back up and into the pillow cover.**

By the way, the sleeves are a great place to store a TV remote, toy car, doll, or video game controller.



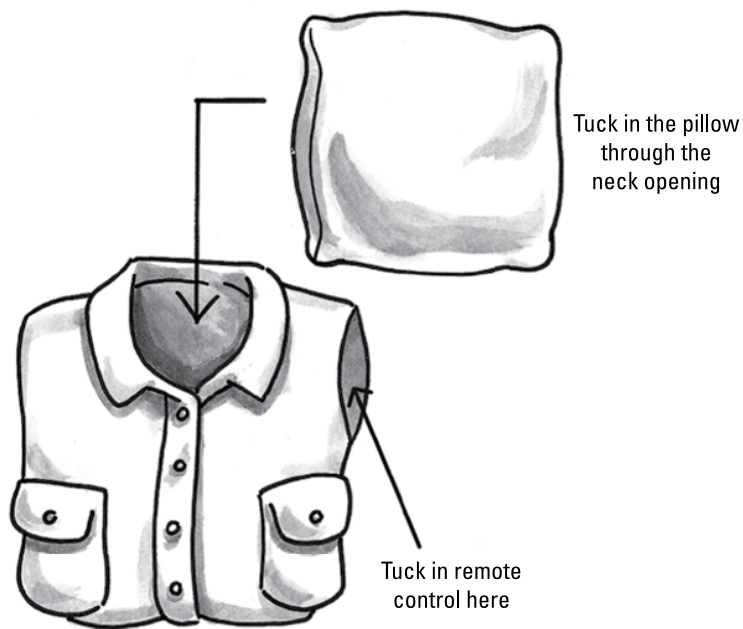
**TIP**

Want to up your game? Make your own pillow cover for a pillow insert from the craft store. Maybe pick a theme fabric that matches the sport or activity printed on the shirt. This is a great way to practice turning corners and some helpful handwork! For more on pillow-making, see Chapter 15.



**FIGURE 6-29:** Fit the shirt pillow cover to the pillow by marking it across the shirt-tail and then sewing it closed.

**FIGURE 6-30:**  
Turn the shirt  
right side out and  
pop in the pillow  
through the  
neck hole.





- » Marking where the hem should go
- » Determining how much hem allowance to leave
- » Tidying up the raw edges of a hem
- » Taking a look at invisible hemming by hand or machine
- » Hemming hacks for pants and stretchy stuff

## Chapter 7

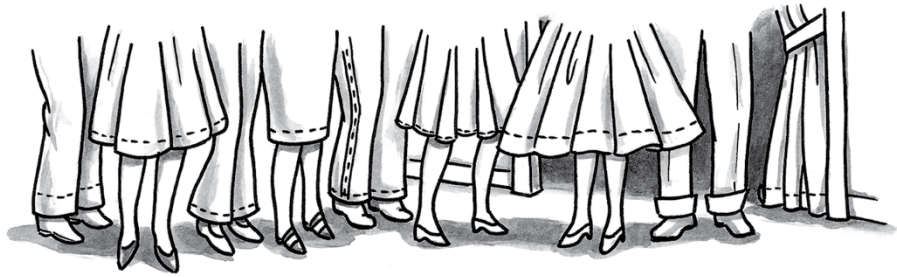
# Hemming Almost Anything by Hand and Machine

**H**ave you ever bought a pair of pants that were too long, only for them to languish in your closet until they're practically vintage? Or have your kiddos grown like beanstalks while their new jeans turned into flood pants? If this hits close to home, this chapter's for you.

A *hem* is that fold at the bottom of skirts, pants, and even your living room drapes that not only tidies up the edge but adds weight to it, so the garment or drapery hangs better with a hem than without one. Take a peek at Figure 7-1 for a runway show of hem styles.

Gear up for a blend of hemming wisdom, tricks of the trade, and know-how that I personally swear by. What I share in this chapter may kick your hem-hawing habit and keep you from procrastinating the next time a new outfit hits the “to fix” pile.

**FIGURE 7-1:**  
Hems can be narrow, wide, topstitched, cuffed, tapered, flared, straight, or doubled.



## Marking the Hem's Placement

Before you can sew a hem, you need to mark it. When you're hemming clothing, to get a hem an even distance from the floor, you also need a helper. (My husband, although reluctant, became a really good helper after he understood what he had to do.) You and your helper take the roles of hem-ee and hemmer.

### If you're the hem-ee

As the hem-ee, you wear the garment, so the hemmer marks the hem to fit you. Here's what you do:

- 1. Try on the garment, right side out, wearing the same underwear and shoes that you'll normally wear with the garment.**

There's nothing more frustrating than hemming a project and finding out afterward that it's too long or short because you didn't wear the correct shoes. As far as the underwear issue . . . this applies more to women. If you plan to wear control undergarments or control-top pantyhose, for example, these undergarments can smooth over curves that may lift or drop a hem up to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch.

- 2. Stand on a hard floor, table, or stool.**

Carpet can distort the measurements.

- 3. Stand up straight with your hands down at your sides, and don't lock your knees.**

When I was a kid, I locked my knees once when my mom was the hemmer, and I passed out. Quite a shock for both of us!

# If you're the hemmer

As the hemmer, your job is to measure and mark the hem of the garment worn by the hem-ee. Here's what you do:

## 1. Find a pleasing hem length by temporarily pinning up the hemline.

By temporarily pinning up a section of the garment at the proper length, you create a *hem fold*. This fold allows you to measure the hem for the rest of the garment more accurately.

When determining the hem fold on a skirt or dress, you don't have to pin all the way around, just pin up about 12 inches or so in the front to make sure you have the right length.

For slacks, pin both pant-leg hems all the way around, making them even with each other at the heel and creases. Typically, the standard length has the leg creases break slightly at the top of the shoe, but if you prefer a different length, simply compare it to a pair of pants with the hem length you want.

## 2. Using a yardstick, measure the distance from the floor to the hem fold and tightly wrap a thin rubber band around the yardstick the proper distance from the floor.



If you find yourself doing a lot of hemming, you'll save time with a wonderful hemming tool that looks like a yardstick in a stand. The hem marker has a little tripod on the bottom that rests on the floor and a guide that adjusts up and down along the yardstick. The guide is a scissor-type clamp that has a horizontal slot where a pin slides through easily to mark the hem fold perfectly parallel to the floor. To make it easier for the hem-er, have the hem-ee stand on a stool, as shown in Figure 7-2. Adjust this cool tool to the correct height, and hem marking goes a lot faster.

## 3. Pin through a single thickness at the hem fold by using two pins and pinning parallel to the floor. Remove the rest of the pins so that the hemline hangs free.

The pins mark the hem fold like drawing a straight line.

## 4. Using the rubber band on the yardstick as a guide, pin-mark the hemline even with the rubber band, pinning all the way around the garment.

Place pins about every 2 to 3 inches, pinning parallel to the floor. Pin-mark a few inches, move, and then measure and pin-mark again until you mark the entire hemline.



Move around the hem-ee rather than the other way around. This way, the hem-ee doesn't shift weight and distort the hemline.



**FIGURE 7-2:**  
This hem marker  
makes marking a  
hem fast, easy,  
and accurate.

## Deciding on the Hem Allowance

After you measure and mark the hemline, decide how deep you want the *hem allowance* — the distance from the folded hemline to the finished edge of the hem. Hem allowances for clothing range from  $\frac{1}{4}$  to 3 inches depending on the type of garment and the fabric. Drapery and curtain hems range from about 2 to 3 inches in the lining to 4 to 6 inches for longer drapes. Drapery hems are made by turning up the hem twice, called *double hemming*. So for a 4-inch hem, you turn up the hem 4 inches and then turn it up again another 4 inches. The extra weight in the hem helps keep the bottom of the drapery straight and even.

When you sew a project, look for the hem allowance marked on the pattern. If you're preparing to alter a ready-made garment and are clueless about the best hem allowance for your project, refer to Table 7-1 for some general guidelines.

**TABLE 7-1**      **Recommended Hem Allowances**

Garment or Item	Recommended Finished Hem Allowance
T-shirts, sleeves	¾ to 1¼ inches
Shorts, slacks	1¼ to 1½ inches
Jackets	1½ to 2 inches
Straight skirts and coats	2 to 3 inches
Curtains and drapery linings	2- to 3-inch double hems
Drapery hems	4- to 6-inch double hems

## Finishing the Raw Edges of the Hem

After you measure and mark the hemline and determine the proper hem allowance, the next step is to press the hem and then even up the hem allowance and finish the hem edge.

Even up the hem allowance by measuring from the hemline to the raw edge. Say that you need the hem allowance to be 2½ inches. On your project, the hem depth varies from 2½ to 3 inches, so measure down from the hemline 2½ inches and mark around the hem edge by using a fabric marker. Trim off the excess fabric so that the hem allowance measures an even 2½ inches all the way around.

You finish the hem edge of each fabric type differently:

- » Knits that don't ravel don't need finished hem edges, although a finished hem may look better. If you choose not to finish the hem edge, skip ahead to the section "Securing the Hem" later in this chapter.
- » You hem knits that curl, such as T-shirt knits and fleeces, with twin needles; skip to the section "Hemming Knits with Twin Needles" later in this chapter for instructions.
- » Finish the raw hem edges on woven fabrics so that they don't ravel by using one of the methods in the following sections.

### Using a straight stitch

If your sewing machine has only a straight and zigzag stitch, finish the hem edge by sewing on hem tape or hem lace. If you "zigzagged" to finish the hem edge, the stitch can cause tunneling. This is where the fabric pulls up under the stitch and

creates a ridge. When the hem is pressed, the ridge creates an unwanted mark on the right side of the project. Using either hem tape or hem lace provides a clean, flat finish for the hem edge — no unwanted press marks. Here's what you do:

**1. Pin the hem tape to the hem edge.**

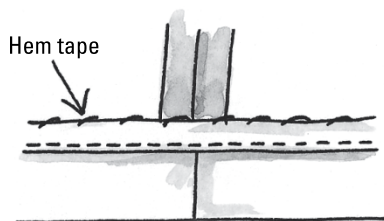
Place the hem tape or lace on the right side of the fabric, overlapping the raw hem edge about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch. Pin-baste the tape to the hem edge. (After you really know what you're doing, you can sew on the tape or lace without pin-basting.)

**2. Set your machine like this:**

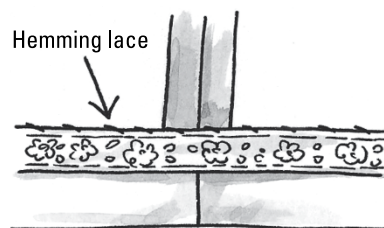
- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* Appropriate for the fabric (see Chapter 5)
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

**3. Sewing with the right side of the fabric up, stitch the hem tape or lace in place without stretching it, as shown in Figures 7-3 and 7-4.**

**FIGURE 7-3:** Overlap the raw hem edge with hem tape, and then pin and topstitch it to the hem edge.



**FIGURE 7-4:** Overlap the raw edge with hem lace, and then pin and topstitch  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the hem edge.



## QUICK-FIX HEMMING WITH RES-Q-TAPE

You're getting ready for work and reach in the closet for the only suit that isn't at the cleaners. With one leg in the trousers, you slip and catch your big toe in the hem and rip it out. You really don't know one end of the needle from the other, so you grab the Res-Q-Tape. You fix the hem and walk out the door in five minutes.

Res-Q-Tape ([www.handicraft.com/products/426](http://www.handicraft.com/products/426)) is a sticky, double-faced tape that doesn't harm fabric. Find it on the notions wall of your local fabric store or through your favorite online sewing source.

Why is it called Res-Q-Tape? Because it's the quick-fix superhero: It holds up strapless dresses, fixes gaps, keeps shoulder pads in place, and holds spaghetti straps on padded hangers. It also holds ties and scarves in place, secures bra straps, keeps leather belt ends from flapping, and tapes up the loose lining.

Don't iron over Res-Q-Tape because it melts. Res-Q-Tape isn't washable or dry-cleanable, so remove it before cleaning your garment, and unless you want to reapply the tape every time, use one of the hemming techniques found in this chapter to repair a loose hem.

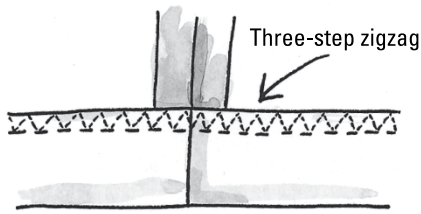
## Using a three-step zigzag or overlock stitch

If your sewing machine has a three-step zigzag or an overlock stitch, finish the hem edge by following these steps:

- 1. Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Three-step zigzag or overlock
  - *Length:* 1 mm/24 spi (three-step zigzag) or longest (overlock)
  - *Width:* 4–5 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
- 2. Sewing with the right side of the fabric up, overcast the edge by guiding the needle so the stitch catches the fabric on the left and stitches just over the raw edge on the right.**

Figure 7-5 shows the three-step zigzag finish.

**FIGURE 7-5:** Finish hem edges with a three-step zigzag stitch on a sewing machine.

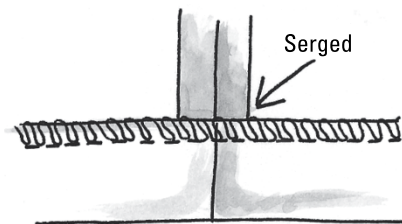


## Using a serger

If you have a serger, finish the hem edge by following these steps:

- 1. Set your serger like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Three-thread overlock
  - *Length:* 2–2.5 mm/10–12 spi
  - *Width:* 3–5 mm
  - *Foot:* Standard
- 2. Sewing with the right side of the fabric up, serge-finish the edge by guiding the needle so the stitch catches the fabric on the left and stitches just over the raw edge on the right, as shown in Figure 7-6.**

**FIGURE 7-6:** Finish a hem edge with your serger by using a three-thread overlock stitch.



## Securing the Hem

After you mark the hem, even up the hem allowance, and finish the raw edge, you're ready to pin up the hem and either fuse or sew it in place.



**TIP**

If you're not following pattern instructions or are rehemming, refer to Table 7-1 earlier in this chapter to find the right hem depth for your project.



# No-sew hemming

Fuse up a quick, permanent hem using paper-backed fusible web. (This is available through your local fabric store or online sewing sources.)



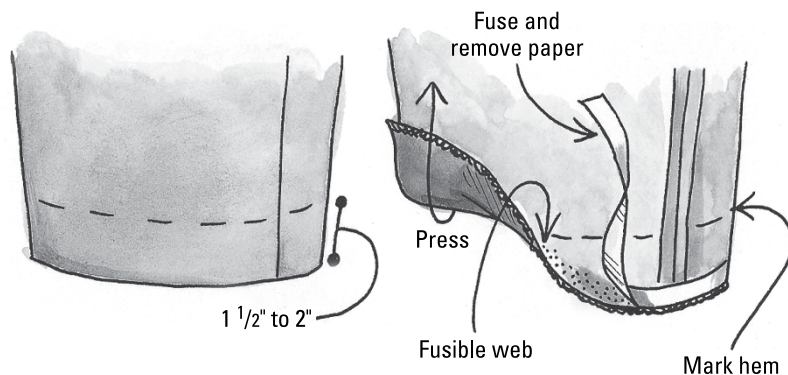
WARNING

A fused hem is almost impossible to change because adhesive residue sticks all over the place when you try to unfuse it. If you foresee a hem change later, skip ahead to the sections “Hand blind hemming” and “Machine blind hemming” later in this chapter.

1. Measure, mark, and finish the hem as described in the previous sections of this chapter.
2. Fold up and pin the hem, placing the pins at the hemline.
3. Press the hem edge without pressing over the pins, pressing firmly enough so that you see the hem fold when you're done.
4. Place the project on the ironing board with the inside facing you.
5. Remove the pins and open the hem.
6. Fuse the paper-backed fusible web to the wrong side of the hem edge following the manufacturer's instructions.

You place the exposed fusible side against the fabric. The paper side faces up against the iron.

7. Let the release paper cool and then remove it.
8. Fuse up the hem as shown in Figure 7-7, following the manufacturer's instructions.



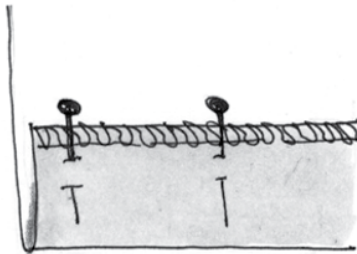
**FIGURE 7-7:**  
No-sew hemming  
with fusible web.

## Pinning up the hem for hand or machine hemming

For an almost invisibly stitched hand or machine blind hem, the stitches end up between the hem allowance and the inside of the project itself — tricky to do unless you pin your hem this way. What's cool is that you pin the same way for both hand and machine blind hemming.

After pressing and evening up the hem allowance, the trick is to pin through both fabric layers,  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch from and *perpendicular* to the finished edge, as shown in Figure 7-8. This way, when you fold the hem allowance back for stitching, the fold naturally stops where the pins enter the fabric.

**FIGURE 7-8:**  
Pin the hem the same way, whether blind hemming by hand or machine.



## Hand blind hemming

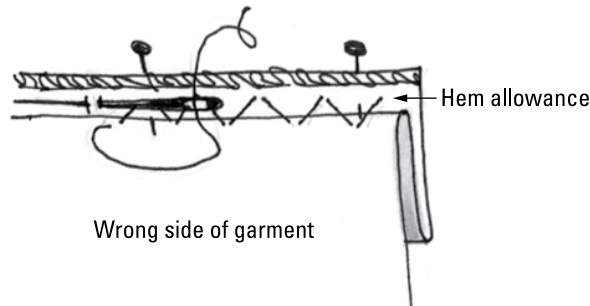
If you don't have a blind hem stitch on your machine, or until you master blind hemming by machine, stitch your hems this way by hand:

- 1. Thread the needle with a 15- to 18-inch length of thread one shade darker than the fabric.**  
If the thread is much longer, it tangles and wears out before you use all of it.
- 2. Tie a knot on the end of the thread as shown in Chapter 5.**  
To make an invisible blind hem, you will be using a single strand of thread.
- 3. Lay the hem across your lap wrong side up so that the inside of the garment is up. Fold the hem allowance back to where the pins enter the fabric so the finished edge is away from you (see Figure 7-9).**  
Approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch of the hem allowance is showing.
- 4. Take the first stitch on the single layer of the hem allowance, poking the point of the needle down into the fabric and then bringing it up no farther than  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch from where it entered (see Figure 7-9).**

5. **Stitching from right to left (if you're right-handed) or left to right (if you're left-handed), take another stitch, picking up one fine thread (at the edge of the fold and where the pins enter the fabric) from the garment fabric.**

You want to make the stitches as invisible as possible on the right side of the project, so take the finest stitch you can on the wrong side of the garment fabric.

6. **Continue stitching all the way around the hem, taking one stitch on the hem allowance and then taking the next stitch on the garment fabric where the hem is folded back to the pins.**



**FIGURE 7-9:**  
Hand blind  
hemming.



**TIP**

Take shorter stitches on finer fabrics, sewing a stitch  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch on the project,  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch on the hem edge. Take longer stitches on heavier fabrics, spacing them about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch apart.

## Machine blind hemming

After you use your sewing machine to blind hem, I bet you don't go back to doing it by hand. Here's how you do it by machine:

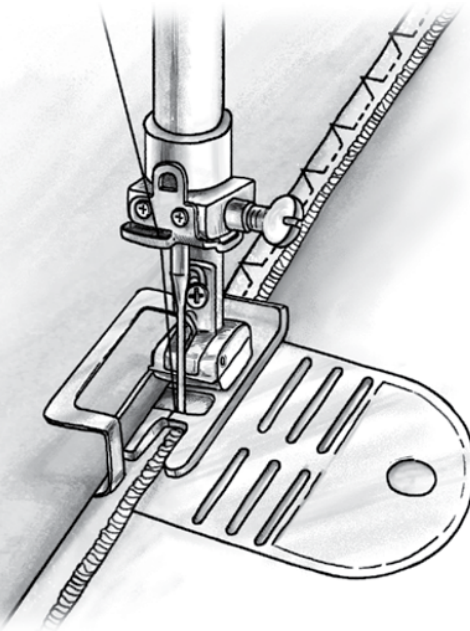
1. **Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Blind hem
  - *Length:* 2–2.5 mm/10–12 spi
  - *Width:* 2–2.5 mm
  - *Foot:* Blind hem
2. **Fold the hem allowance back to where the pins enter the fabric and place it under the blind hem foot.**

The right side of the project is against the *feed dogs* (the teeth that grip and feed the underside of the fabric through the machine; see Chapter 2), the wrong side is up, and the hem fold snuggles up against the guide in the foot.

3. **Make the first few stitches on the hem allowance; the zigzag bites into the fold, as shown in Figure 7-10.**

You want to create invisible stitches here (just like with hand blind hemming), so if the stitch grabs too much of the hem fold, you've made it too wide. Use a narrower stitch width. Using the blind hem foot made to fit your machine helps you guide the fabric more uniformly so the needle bites into the hem fold the same amount with every stitch.

4. **Remove the project, pull the threads to one side of the fabric, and tie them off.**
5. **Gently press the hem allowance from the wrong side of the project in an up-and-down motion and apply more iron pressure on the hem fold than on the top of the hem allowance.**



**FIGURE 7-10:**  
Machine blind hem, snugging the guide in the foot against and letting the stitch barely bite into the hem fold.



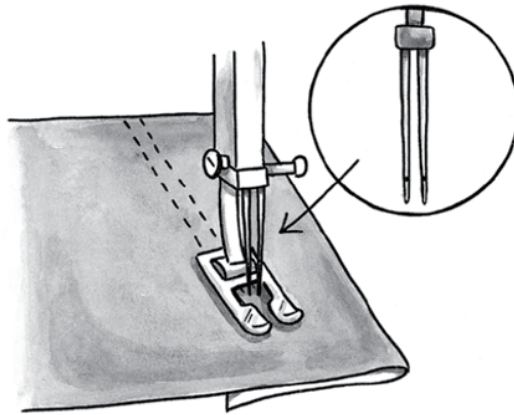
**WARNING**

Over-pressing the hem causes the finished edge of the hem to shadow through to the right side of the project, so use a press cloth to prevent this. (See Chapter 2 for more on using a press cloth.)

# Hemming Knits with Twin Needles

Knits stretch. Because of this tendency, traditional hand and machine blind hemming techniques often don't hold up to a lot of wear. Commercial hemming techniques keep your knits looking good for a long time. You can duplicate these techniques by hemming knits using your twin needles.

Twin needles have one shank that fits up into the sewing machine and a bar that holds two needles. To use them, thread each needle separately, lower the presser foot, and sew. If you turn over the fabric and look at the wrong side of the stitch, you see that the bobbin thread shares itself between the two top threads, creating a zigzag stitch that stretches with the fabric so you don't pop stitches. You can see a twin needle in Figure 7-11.



**FIGURE 7-11:**  
Use twin needles  
for durable hems  
on knit fabric.

Twin needles are sized in three ways: by the distance the needles are from one another, by the needle size, and by the point type. You use twin needles with narrower widths on lightweight fabrics and wider widths on heavier fabric. A *4.0 80/12 Universal twin needle* tells you the following information:

- » You have two needles that are 4 millimeters apart.
- » Each needle is a size 80 (European sizing) or 12 (American sizing).
- » Each needle has a Universal point.



**TIP**

When shopping for twin needles, take your machine's all-purpose presser foot to the store with you. Some needles are too wide for the opening in some feet, so check before you buy.



WARNING

Only sewing machines with top- or front-loading bobbins (a category that includes most machines) can use twin needles. If your bobbin goes in the side, the needles sit in the machine sideways and don't work. If you can't use twin needles in your machine, fuse the hem by using fusible web. (See "No-sew hemming" earlier in this chapter.)

Follow these steps to make a twin-needle hem:



WARNING

**1. Mark, press, and pin up the hem, as I describe in previous sections.**

When pressing a knit hem, use an up-and-down pressing motion rather than sliding the iron from side to side. If you slide, you may stretch out the hem permanently.

**2. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3–4 mm/6–9 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* Embroidery
- *Needle:* 4.0 mm 80/12 Universal twin



TIP

If you notice that your hem has some skipped stitches (several normal-length stitches and then an occasional long one), try using a *Stretch* twin needle. The tips on the needles are specially designed to slip through the loops of knit fabrics, preventing skipped stitches. You can also use a strip of adding machine paper (available at your local office supply store) under the hem where you are sewing. The paper stabilizes the fabric and is easy to remove after sewing.

**3. Thread your twin needle by following the instructions in your operating manual.**

**4. With the right side of the project up, place the hem so that the presser foot rests completely on a double layer of fabric (the hem allowance and the garment) and sew, as shown in Figure 7-11.**

Sewing straight and even is easier when the foot rests completely on a double layer of fabric.

**5. After sewing around the hem, pull all the threads to the wrong side and tie them off securely. (See Chapter 6.)**

**6. Press the hem using an up-and-down pressing motion.**

**7. Carefully trim away the excess hem allowance above the stitch, as shown in Figure 7-12.**

**FIGURE 7-12:**  
Trim off the  
excess hem  
allowance.



The scissors shown in Figure 7-12 are called appliqué or “duck bill” scissors. They come in handy when trimming one layer of fabric away from another (like you do when you’re appliquéing or trimming away excess fabric from hem allowances). The wider “duck bill” blade prevents you from cutting an unwanted hole in the fabric. Simply place the blade against the back of garment, and then trim the excess hem allowance away. If you’re doing a lot of knit hems or appliqué work, these babies are a super investment.

## SEW SIMPLE PROJECT: UPCYCLED CHILD’S JUMPER

My next-door neighbor’s daughter had a favorite jumper. Her torso size hadn’t changed, but her legs grew and the jumper was too short. Her mom and I took her to the fabric store to let her pick out  $\frac{1}{4}$  yard of printed fabric plus a package of yellow rickrack trim. We added a ruffle to the length of the jumper (see the color insert). Between the ruffle and the hem edge, we added the rickrack for color. We also added rickrack to the side of the front pocket, under the seamline, and at the back of the suspenders. This little jumper looked better after the re-do than it did before, and her daughter got another several months of wear from it.

Review the information in Chapter 9 for the how-to’s on gathering — an easy way to make a ruffle.



WARNING

Although you can serge a blind hem, it takes extra skill (which I haven't mastered yet) and, in my opinion, doesn't look that great. There's also a fabulous serged hemming technique called a *cover hem*, but it requires a spendy serger with eight threads, which is certainly not a beginning machine or technique. If you want to know more, this hemming technique is covered in more advanced books and YouTube videos.



- » Sewing for imaginative play
- » Giving your dog a (denim) bone
- » Crafting a pillow-style pet bed
- » Playing around with cornhole bags and a tote

## Chapter 8

# Playing Around: Sewing for Kids, Pets, and the Kid in You

**W**elcome! This chapter is your gateway to a world of, well, play. Imagine stitching together a superhero cape that helps your little one conquer the villains and a tutu that helps your dancer swirl with elegance. How about a denim dog bone and plush pet bed that pampers your furry companion, and cornhole bags that nest in their travel tote — ready for outdoor family fun.

Cut your sewing chops by making these projects. If they don't turn out perfectly, no biggie. Pets, especially, aren't judgy, and your kids will be thrilled with anything catering to their sense of fun. Besides, you'll gain more sewing experience and muster up more confidence, readying yourself to tackle something more challenging.

Enough fooling around. It's time to dive in and bring out the kid in you.

# Getting into Costume

Ready to play dress-up? This section has everything your kids need to spark their imagination!

## Sew simple project: ballet tutu

This tulle tutu (see the color insert) makes a welcome addition to any play clothes box. Plus it will let you practice working with a lot of fabric and putting elastic in a casing. The good news is that it will grow with whoever is wearing it, and it's no big deal if the sewing isn't perfect.

### Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

To make the tutu, you need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2.)

- » 1 yard of 108-inch-wide tulle

To get this project to turn out as full as possible, don't settle for narrower tulle. I had to order it online to get the 108-inch variety.

- » 1 yard of 1-inch-wide satin ribbon
- »  $\frac{3}{4}$  yard of 1-inch-wide non-roll waistband elastic
- » Thread to match the fabric
- » Bobby pin or safety pin

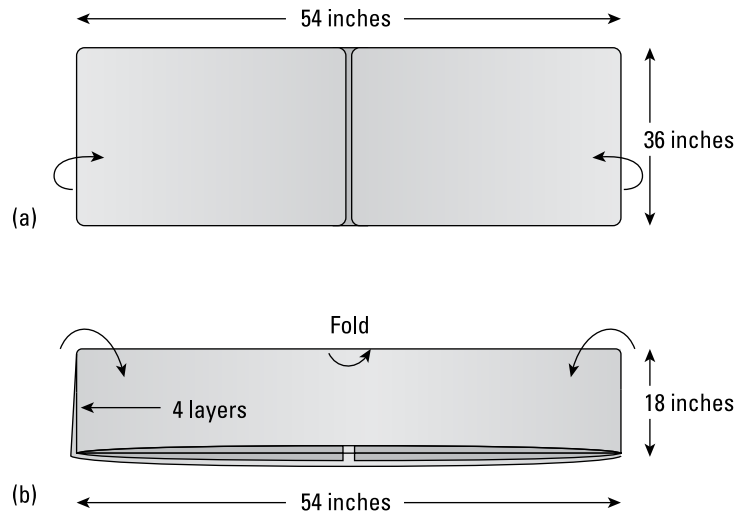
### Instructions

Follow these steps to make the tutu:

#### 1. Open the tulle flat and refold it.

This is a lot of fabric, so you may want to lay it out on a clean, flat surface. Fold the cut (36-inch) edges so that they meet in the center, as shown in Figure 8-1a. Fold the tulle in half again, this time the long way so that you have four layers of tulle, with the long fold at the top, as shown in Figure 8-1b. Press the long folded edge.

#### 2. Cut the ribbon in half the short way into two 18-inch pieces and set it aside.



**FIGURE 8-1:** Fold the tulle in half, and in half again, and then gently press along the long fold.

### 3. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 2.5 mm/10 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

### 4. Edgestitch $\frac{1}{8}$ inch from the top of the fold of the tulle, backstitching to secure the stitches at both ends.

See Chapter 6 for more information on edgestitching.

### 5. Sew a second row of stitching $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches from the first, creating a casing for the elastic and ribbon to slide through, as shown in Figure 8-2.

### 6. Thread the elastic through the casing, as shown in Figure 8-3.

To make threading the elastic easier, cut a small slit at the end and slide the bobby pin through the slit. Pull the elastic through the casing by working the bobby pin down the length of the casing.

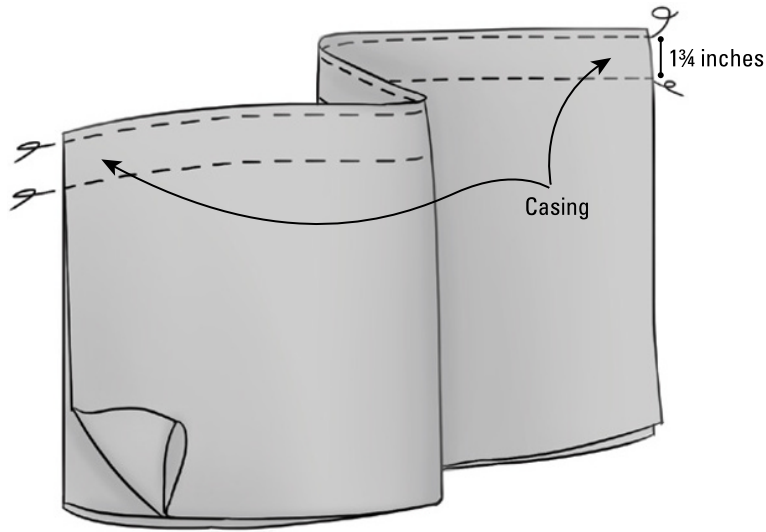


**WARNING**

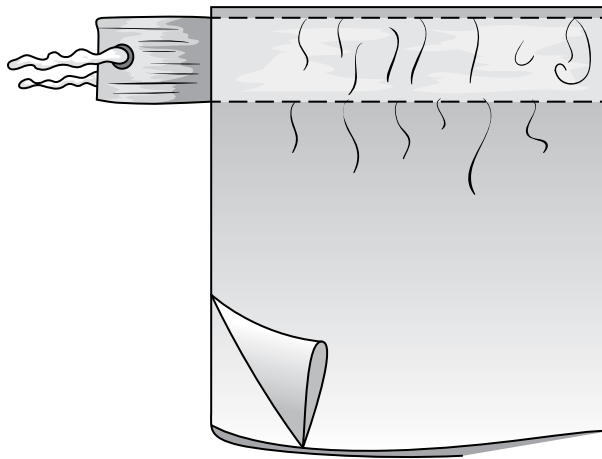
The casing is 54 inches, but the elastic is shorter, so as you're pulling on the bobby pin, remember to pin the other end of the elastic to the casing before it pulls through the other end. (If it does, you'll only make this mistake once — ask me how I know.)

### 7. Stitch one of the lengths of ribbon to the non-bobby-pinned end of the elastic, backstitching across it.

### 8. Pull the elastic through the casing, so the tulle is shirred into soft gathers.



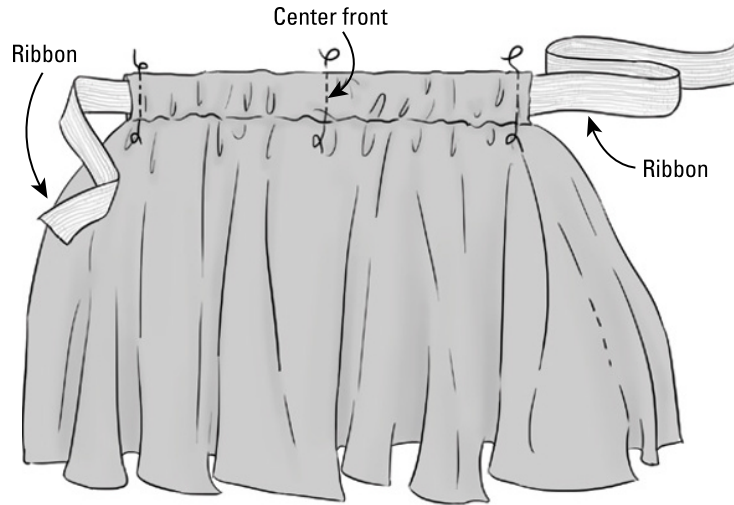
**FIGURE 8-2:**  
Create a casing  
for the elastic and  
ribbon to  
slide through.



**FIGURE 8-3:**  
Thread the  
elastic through  
the casing using a  
bobby pin.

9. Snug up the ribbon end of the elastic to one end of the casing opening; pull and adjust the other end of the elastic so the tutu fits comfortably around the waist, as shown in Figure 8-4.
10. Pin both ends of the elastic at each end of the casing. You'll be cutting the elastic to fit your little dancer and don't want the elastic to slide out the casing accidentally.
11. Sew the other length of ribbon to the free end of the elastic, backstitching it securely on the end of the elastic.

- 12.** Pin and stitch through the elastic at each casing opening (as shown in Figure 8-4) so it won't accidentally slide out of the casing while you're working with it (and when your child is playing with it).



**FIGURE 8-4:**  
Adjust the elastic  
so the tutu fits  
comfortably  
around your  
child's waist.

Once you finish this one, you may want to make other tutus using other fabrics like the cherry-laden one in the color insert.

## Sew smart project: The superhero cape

This cape transformed our son from a mild-mannered 4-year-old into Batman, Superman, Zorro, The Devil, Dracula, a bullfighter, and anyone else his imagination could dream up. (I have the photos — printed on paper — to prove it.) He even wore it to our wedding reception. I made it washable and reversible — black on one side, and red on the other.

In this project, I used black on one side, silver on the other, and an optional appliqué for a little extra pizzazz.

### Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

To make the superhero cape, you need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2.)

- » ¾ yard of 45-inch wide, lightweight polyester or satin-type fabric in black
- » ¾ yard of 45-inch wide, lightweight polyester or satin-type fabric in gold, silver, red, or the color of your choice
- » 1 yard of ¾-inch-wide grosgrain ribbon in black
- » 25 inches of kite string
- » 1 red felt square (optional)
- » 1 yellow felt square (optional)
- » ¼-inch-wide Wash Away Wonder Tape (for the optional applique)
- » Pinking shears (optional)
- » Tracing paper
- » Thread to match the fabrics

Follow these steps to make the Superhero Cape.

## Drawing and cutting out the pieces

Use 5/8-inch seam allowances for this project.

### 1. Make a large compass.

Tie the dressmaker's chalk (or a pencil) to the end of the kite string. The string should measure 22½ inches long from the chalk/pencil point to the end of the string.

### 2. Draw the hem edge onto the black fabric.

Place the fabric on a flat surface so the fold is on your left. Place the free end of the string on the upper-left corner and then, using the chalk/pencil like a compass, draw the outside edge of the cape, as shown in Figure 8-5.

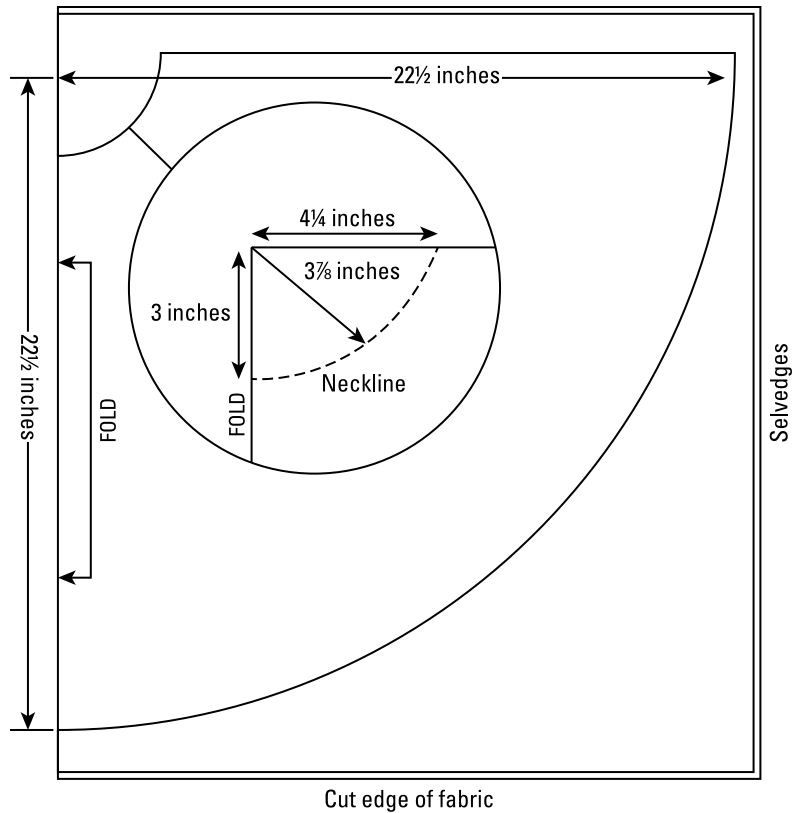
### 3. Cut the neckline.

In the upper-left corner, use your measuring tape and dressmaker's chalk/pencil to mark the curved neckline following the measurements shown in Figure 8-5.

### 4. Cut out the cape, cutting along the chalk/pencil lines you made in Steps 2 and 3.

### 5. Repeat Steps 1 through 4 for the other, contrasting "lining" fabric.

Even though this project is reversible, I refer to the contrasting fabric in these instructions as the *lining*.

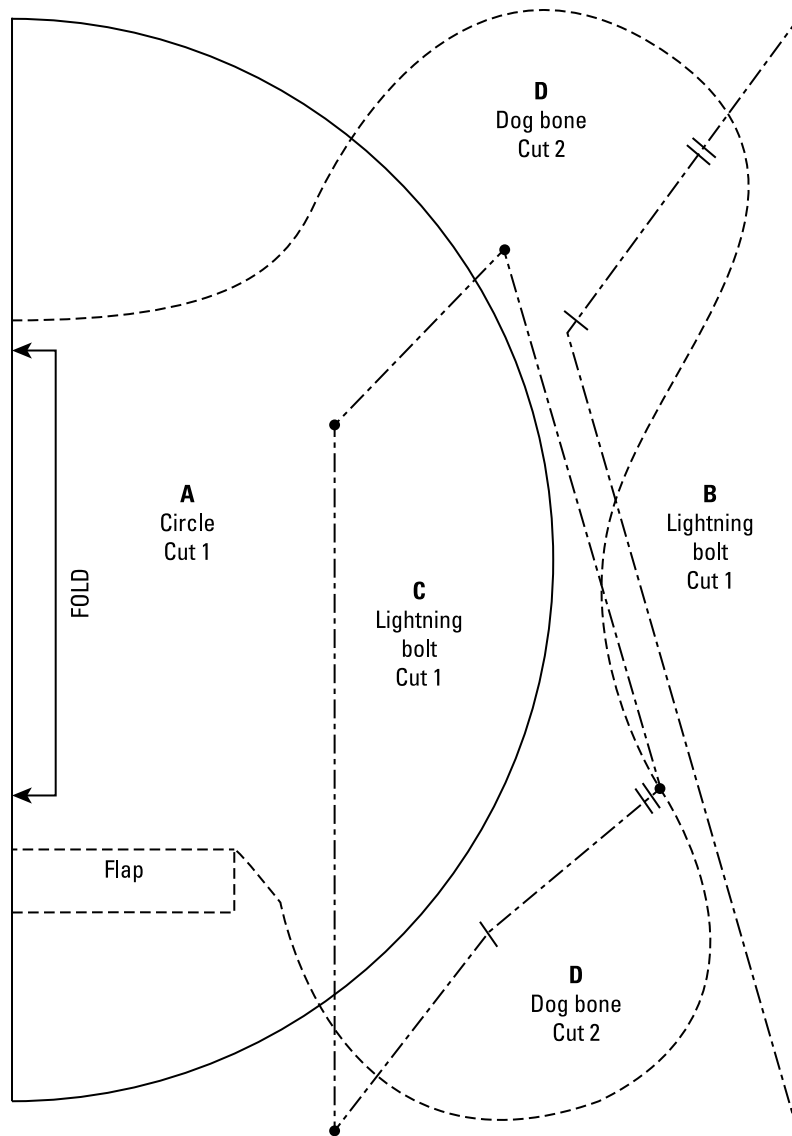


**FIGURE 8-5:**  
Use these  
measurements to  
cut out the cape.

## Cutting the optional appliqué

If you want to use the appliqué, follow these steps to cut it out.

1. Using the pattern from Figure 8-6, trace off and cut out the circle (a) from the red felt square.
2. Trace off the lightning bolt pieces (b and c) and put together the pieces of the lightning bolt, matching the single and double notches (represented as single and double hash marks), as shown in Figure 8-7.
3. Cut out the lightning bolt from the yellow felt square, as shown in Figure 8-7.



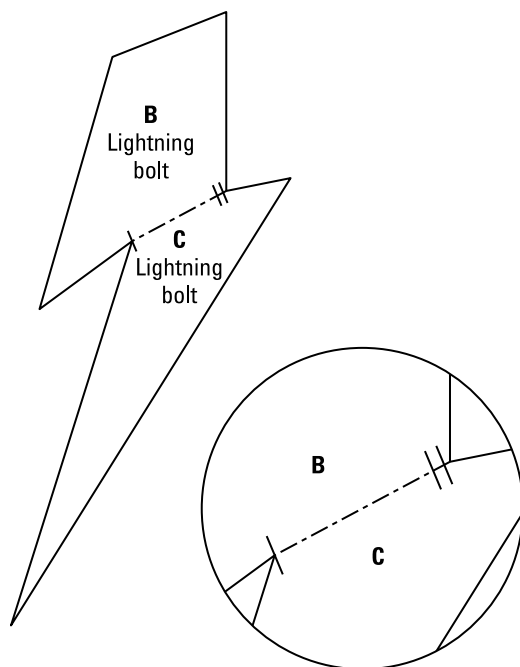
**FIGURE 8-6:**  
Trace off the  
Circle (a),  
Lightning Bolt (b  
and c), and Dog  
Bone (d) pattern  
pieces using  
this template.

**Key:**

- = Circle (A)
- - - - = Lightning bolt (B, C)
- - - - = Dog bone (D)



**FIGURE 8-7:**  
Tape the  
Lightning Bolt  
pattern pieces B  
and C together,  
matching the  
single and  
double  
notches.



## Sewing on the appliqué (optional)

If you're using the appliqué, use the following steps to sew it to the cape:

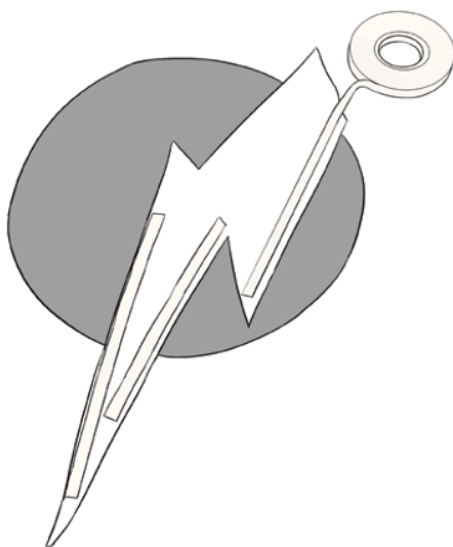
1. **Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/10 spi–12 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* Embroidery
2. **Center, pin, and stitch the felt circle onto the black cape piece.**
3. **On the wrong side of the lightning bolt piece, place strips of Wash Away Wonder Tape along the straight sides, as shown in Figure 8-8.**

Wonder Tape is a great product to use instead of pinning — especially for this application. It's a narrow double-stick tape, so simply cut a strip the length of one of the straight edges of the appliqué. Next, place the sticky side on the wrong side of the appliqué and remove the paper backing. Now stick the appliqué to the base fabric. Once you sew on the appliqué, the Wonder Tape dissolves when washed.
4. **Place and sew the lightning bolt appliqué over the circle, as shown in the color insert.**



**TIP**

**FIGURE 8-8:**  
On the wrong side of the lightning bolt, cut strips of Wash Away Wonder Tape and place it along the straight sides of the appliqué.



## Putting the cape pieces together

Use these steps to put the pieces of the cape together:

### 1. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/10 spi–12 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose



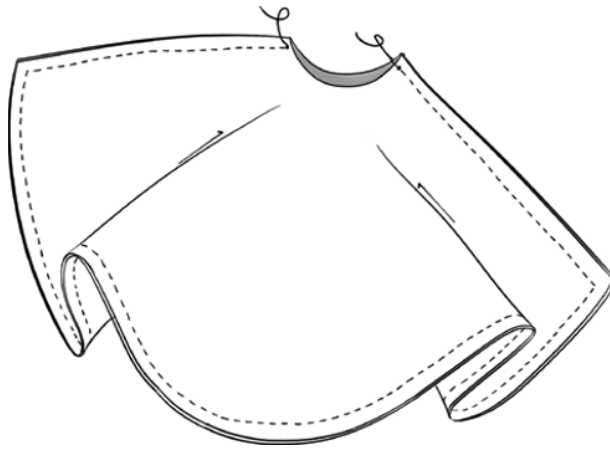
**AUTHOR  
SAYS**

If you have a serger, you can save a lot of time. Instead of notching and trimming the curved seam, the serger trims away the excess fabric for you and notching isn't necessary. Set your serger like this:

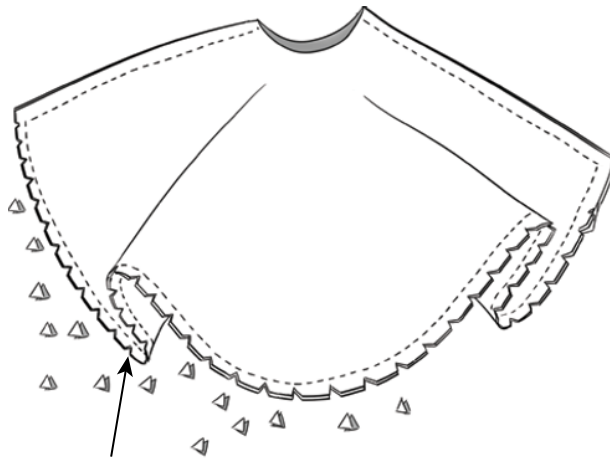
- *Stitch:* 4-thread overlock
- *Length:* 2.5–3.5 mm
- *Width:* 4–5 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

### 2. Pin and stitch the two cape pieces together using a 5/8-inch seam allowance, leaving the neck edge open, as shown in Figure 8-9.

### 3. If you've used a sewing machine, trim (or pink; see the following Warning) the seam allowance to 1/4 inch and then notch into the seam allowance every inch or so, as shown in Figure 8-10.



**FIGURE 8-9:**  
Stitch around  
the three sides  
of the cape,  
leaving the neck  
edge open.



**FIGURE 8-10:**  
Trim and notch  
the curved seam,  
helping to  
smooth the seam  
once the cape  
is turned to the  
right side  
and pressed.



**WARNING**

A shortcut to trimming and notching is to pink the seam allowance using pinking shears. However, before doing this on your project, test your pinking shears on your cape fabrics to make sure they don't snag.

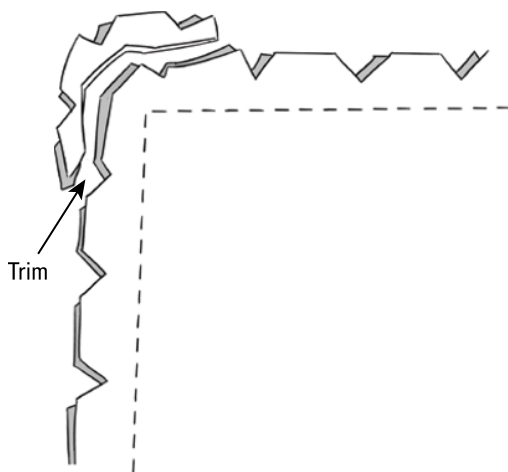
**4. Trim the seam allowance close to the seamline in the corners, as shown in Figure 8-11.**

See Chapter 6 for more on sewing corners.

**5. Using the thread that matches the cape lining, understitch the seam allowance toward the lining side of the cape.**

See Chapter 6 for the how-to's on understitching.

**FIGURE 8-11:** Trimming the corners eliminates unnecessary bulk from the seam allowances so that the corners look sharp when the project is turned right side out.



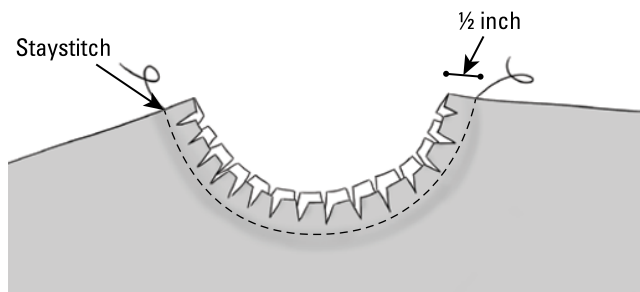
Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/10–12 spi
- *Width:* 0
- *Foot:* All-purpose

Understitching allows the fabric to turn more easily. The edges will be smooth and crisp after pressing. Note that you can't get all the way into the corners, so understitch as far as you can, stop, and then pick up again, understitching to the other side of the corner.

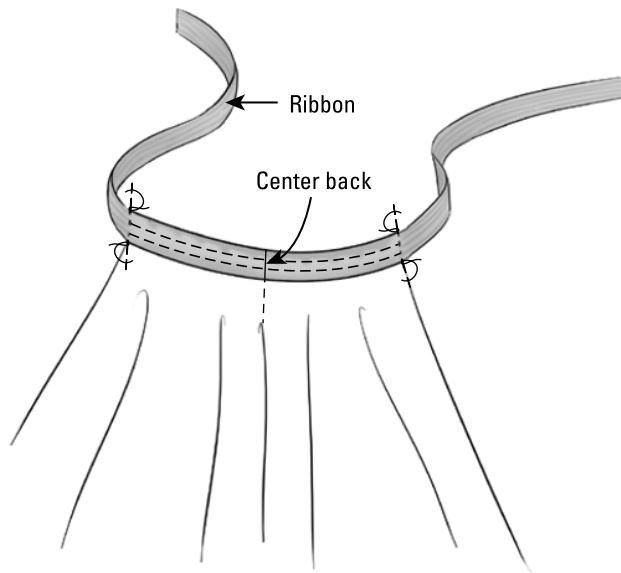
6. **Turn the cape right side out, gently pushing out the corners with curve bladed scissors; press.**
7. **Staystitch the neck edge  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the cut edges, (See Chapter 6 for tips on staystitching.)**
8. **Clip into the seam allowance up to but not through the staystitching as shown in Figure 8-12.**

**FIGURE 8-12:** Clip into the seam allowance of the neck edge to about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch from the row of staystitching.



9. Fold the cape in half and pin-mark the center back at the neck edge.
  10. Fold the grosgrain ribbon in half the short way to find the center of the length of ribbon; then finger-press a crease in the center of the ribbon.
  11. Place and pin the ribbon onto the neck edge covering the seam allowance with the center marks matched, as shown in Figure 8-13. *Note:* When the ribbon is stitched into the neckline, it is topstitched to and covers the seam allowance. This way, the ribbon lays flat against the superhero's neck.
- Because you clipped the neck edge, you're able to straighten out the neckline curve and easily pin and stitch the ribbon to this curved seam.
12. Stitch the ribbon to the neckline, sewing it onto the seamline.
  13. Fold down the ribbon in to the neckline and sew a second row of stitching through it, guiding  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch away from the first, backstitching at both ends, as in Figure 8-13.
  14. Press.

**FIGURE 8-13:** Stitch the ribbon onto the outside of the neck edge and over the seam allowance, matching the center marks; then fold the ribbon into the neckline and sew a second pass.



By attaching the neckline ribbon this way, you've made the cape reversible. Now don your little hero in their new duds and let their imagination soar.

# Sew Simple Project: Recycled Denim Dog Bone

I'll admit it. I saw this project on Instagram and thought I'd make one or more for our rescue doggy, Polly. I tried it three times until I found the easiest way to make one. Here's how.

## Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

To make this dog bone, you need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2.)

» 9×12-inch piece of denim

I used leftover recycled jeans for the three bones you see in the color insert. I also included a partial pocket in one of them to allow me to tuck in a treat.

» Tracing paper and pencil

» Sharp pinking shears

» Polyester stuffing for filling the bone

» Thread to match the fabric

» Squeaker for the inside of the dog bone (optional)

## Instructions

- 1. Trace off the dog bone pattern in Figure 8-6.**
- 2. Cut out two dog bone pieces from the recycled jeans using conventional shears, and then pink the edges of each piece separately, except for the flap.**
- 3. Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 3 to 4 mm/6 to 9 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose, Teflon, or roller

- *Needle:* Size #90/14 Jeans
- *Accessories:* Wedge (sometimes called a button reed) or a Jean-A-Ma-Jig (brand name)

**4. Place the *wrong* sides together and pin, backstitching at both ends of the flap, as shown in Figure 8-14.**

When you're using recycled jeans, random seams and other details are thick and difficult to sew over. That's why this project is made by sewing with the *wrong sides together*. This way, you don't have to deal with sewing, turning, and pressing the curves in the project.

I also added the flap so that the bone is easier to stuff and close up. Once stuffed, the flap is trimmed off using the pinking shears.

When sewing up and over thick seams, refer to the "Shortening jeans" section in Chapter 17.



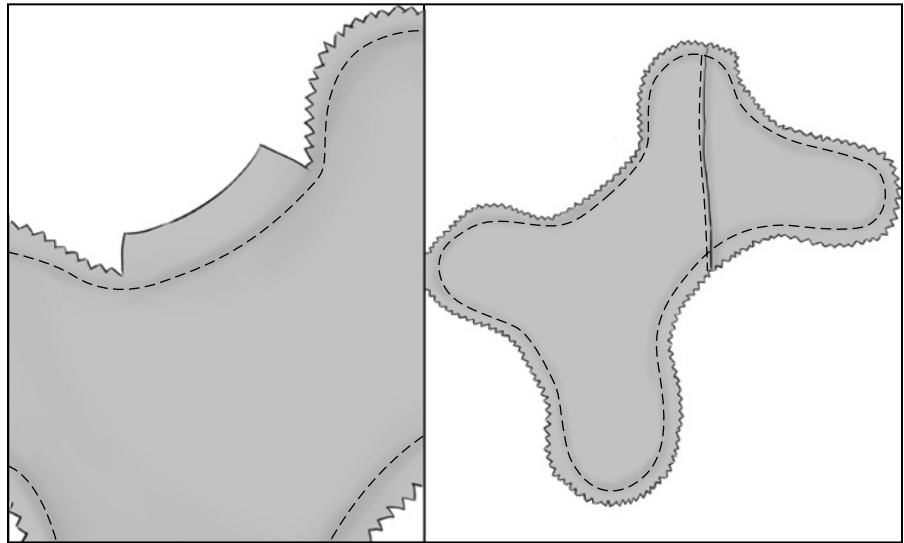
TIP

**5. Stuff the bone nicely full of polyester stuffing.**

If you're using a squeaker, also find a nice spot to put it so Fluffy can give it a chew.

**6. Pin and stitch the opening closed, backstitching at both ends of the flap.**

**7. Cut off and pink the denim flap edges so the toy looks like those pictured in the color insert.**



**FIGURE 8-14:** Place the bone pieces together with the wrong sides facing, and backstitch at both ends of the flap.

# Sew Smart Project: Plush Pet Bed

Get ready to pamper your pet with a cozy fleece pet bed. Designed by the creative minds at DIYStyle (<https://diystyleshop.com>), this project is as easy as it is adorable. You'll be amazed at what you can create with just a few simple steps and your newfound sewing skills. The best part? Your furry companion will thank you with a wagging tail and endless cuddles!



WARNING

This bed is for a small pet — one that fits comfortably on an 18-inch square pillow. If your furry friend is larger, I've also given a materials list for a medium-sized pet because you can readily find up to a 30×30-inch pillow form. If your pet is larger than that, you may have to search for or make your own pillow insert to fit your cuddle-baby.

## Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

You need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2 for the kit rundown.)

### Small Pet Bed

- » One 18-inch pillow form
- » 1 yard of 45-inch washable cotton/polyester print or Polarfleece (usually 60 inches wide) fabric for the bolster
- »  $\frac{5}{8}$  yard Polarfleece to cover the pillow
- » 1 bag of polyester stuffing
- »  $\frac{1}{4}$  yard (9 inches) of hook-and-loop fastener
- » Thread that matches the fabric

### Medium Pet Bed

- » One 28- to 30-inch pillow form
- » 2 yards washable cotton/polyester print fabric or Polarfleece for the bolster
- » 2 yards Polarfleece to cover the pillow
- » 2 bags of polyester stuffing for the bolster
- » 11 inches of hook-and-loop fastener
- » Thread that matches the fabric



# Instructions

You create this project in two sections — the bolster and then the bed — making both pieces easy to construct and launder.



TIP

Use ½-inch seam allowances on this project.

## Making the bolster

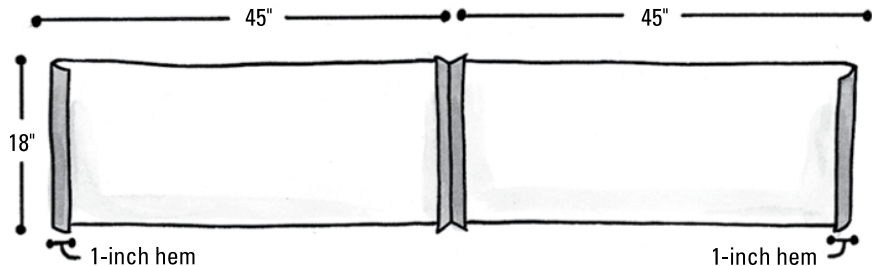


TIP

If you're using print, cotton/poly fabric, preshrink it so it's washable. Polarfleece doesn't shrink, so preshrinking isn't necessary.

1. Cut the print, bolster fabric into two 18×45-inch pieces.
2. Set your machine like this:
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* Appropriate for the fabric (see Chapter 5)
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
3. Place the two pieces of bolster fabric right sides together. Pin and sew them together on one of the short ends using a ½-inch seam allowance, as shown in Figure 8-15.
4. Press and pin 1-inch hems on the remaining short ends, as shown in Figure 8-15.
5. Fold the strip made in Step 4 in half lengthwise and with right sides together.
6. Place, pin, and stitch the long seam, right sides together, leaving an 8-inch opening, as shown in Figure 8-16.

**FIGURE 8-15:** Place, pin, and sew two short ends of print together. Press 1-inch hems on the remaining two short ends.

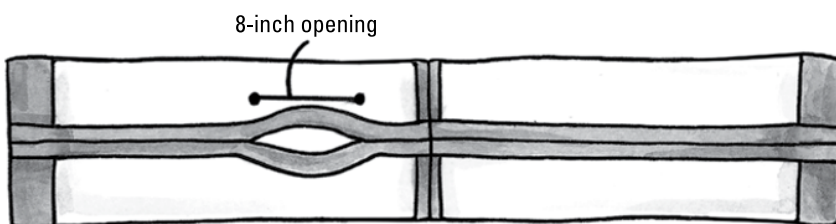


7. Press the long seam open and so it is centered in the strip, as shown in Figure 8-16.

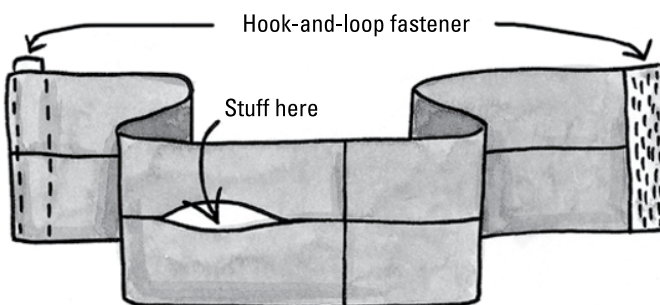
This piece (used to make the bolster of the bed) should look like a long inside-out skinny tube.

8. Turn the tube right side out through one of the openings at either end.
9. Stitch each end closed, and then sew the hook-and-loop strips to both ends of the tube, as shown in Figure 8-17.
10. Stuff the bolster with polyester stuffing and set it aside until you've completed the fleece bed cover that fits around the pillow form in the following section.

**FIGURE 8-16:** Sew the bolster fabric into a long skinny tube, leaving an opening to put the stuffing through.



**FIGURE 8-17:** Turn the tube right side out and sew the hook-and-loop fastener on both ends.



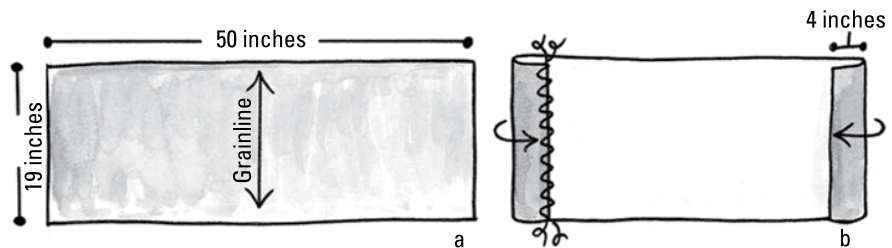
## Creating the fleece bed pillow cover

The bolster from the previous section fits around the cozy fleece bed (pillow form) that you create by following these steps. Note that instead of stitching two pieces together to make the cover, this pillow cover wraps around the pillow form.

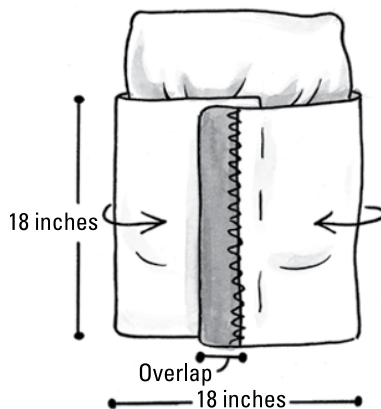
1. Cut the Polarfleece so it measures 19×50 inches, as shown in Figure 8-18.
2. Set your machine like this:
  - *Stitch:* Zigzag
  - *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/9–11 spi

- *Width:* 4–5 mm
  - *Foot:* Embroidery
3. Turn under one short end of the fleece yardage to create a 4-inch hem. Pin and stitch the hem using a zigzag stitch, as shown in Figure 8-18.
  4. Repeat Step 3 on the other short end of the fleece.
  5. With right sides together, lap the fleece over the pillow form, as shown in Figure 8-19; pin the cover in place, and then slip out the pillow form.
  6. Set your machine like this:
    - *Stitch:* Zigzag
    - *Length:* 3–4 mm/6–9 spi
    - *Width:* 1 mm
    - *Foot:* All-purpose
  7. Sew a ½-inch seam along the top and bottom openings of the pillow cover, backstitching at both ends of each seam, and take out the pins holding the overlapped flaps together.

**FIGURE 8-18:** Fold and zigzag stitch 4-inch hems on both short ends of the fleece yardage.



**FIGURE 8-19:** From the wrong side, fold and overlap the short ends of the pillow cover, pin them together, and then remove the pillow form.



The stitching at the top and bottom holds the bed cover in shape, and the overlapping fabric flaps form an “envelope” that you can insert the pillow form through.

8. **Turn the bed cover right side out and pop the pillow form into the cover through the overlapping opening in the back.**

## Putting the bed together

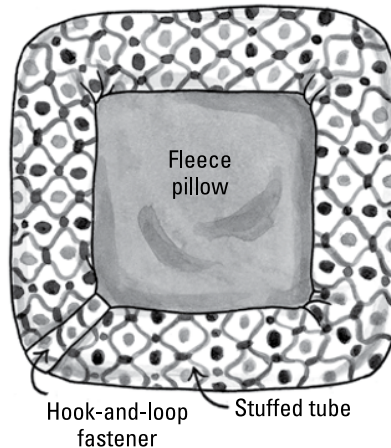
Here comes the fun part: putting everything together. Your little prince or princess will be napping in a new bed in no time.

1. **Connect the hook-and-loop fastener on the two short ends of the bolster, creating a skinny fabric inner tube.**

2. **Firmly push the bolster over the fleece-covered bed.**

You may need to squish the pillow form in and pull it up into the bolster a little bit to get the bed to look like Figure 8-20.

3. **Remove the bolster from around the pillow and add or remove some polyester fill so the bolster fits; then adjust the hook-and-loop fastener if it's too snug or too loose around the center pillow.**
4. **Securely slipstitch the stuffing opening of the bolster closed (see Chapter 5 for more on slipstitching) and then reposition it around the bed.**



**FIGURE 8-20:** Push the bolster over the bed, and voilà — a cool and comfy pet bed.

# Sew Simple Project: Cornhole Bags

You've probably heard of cornhole. It's a game in which you toss a bag filled with corn into a hole. The game, reportedly invented by a 14th century cabinetmaker after watching kids toss rocks into a groundhog hole, is a national sensation. Anyone of any age and skill level can play.

So, while I won't be showing you how to make a cornhole board, in this section, I'll give you all the info you need to make regulation bags and an easy-to-make tote so you look good traveling to tournaments (or at least to your neighbor's house) for a game.

## Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

Manufactured bags are water-resistant and are made without corn so the squirrels don't chew into the bags if you leave them outside. However, when making this version, we're going old-school and using popcorn kernels for stuffing the water-resistant canvas bag.

You need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2 for the kit rundown.)

» ¼ yard of water-resistant/proof canvas in one color

I used a medium-weight nylon that had a urethane coating on the back. This fabric has a nice smooth face and is highly water-resistant because of the urethane coating. If you can't find it locally, you may want to order it from [www.seattlefabrics.com](http://www.seattlefabrics.com).

» ¼ yard of water-resistant/proof canvas in a second color

» ½ yard of water-resistant/proof canvas in a third color for the tote bag

» 2 yards of ¼-inch nylon cord for the drawstring in black

» Thread to match the three fabric colors

» 8 pounds of popcorn kernels (for two sets of four corn bags)

» Scale to measure the corn kernels (exactly 1 pound each)

» Funnel

» Bobby pin

## WHAT'S CORNHOLE?

When I decided to make a cornhole set for this book, friends from the West Coast wrinkled their noses and said, “Cornhole? Is that something they play in the Midwest?” Well, it is, but cornhole is enough of a big deal that you can become a member of the American Cornhole Association ([www.playcornhole.org](http://www.playcornhole.org)) or several other organizations. They have official rules for the game and regulations regarding the size and weight of the bags. There’s even an X Games version broadcast on ESPN. Who knew?

## Instructions for the bags

Follow these steps to put the bags together:

**1. Cut four, 7×14-inch-long strips of the first color canvas.**

**2. Repeat that for the second color canvas.**

These strips become finished, 6-inch bags that hold the popcorn kernels.

**3. Starting with the first color, fold and pin the strips in half the short way, as shown in Figure 8-21.**

**4. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3–3.5 mm; 6–8 spi
- *Width:* 0
- *Foot:* All-purpose, Teflon
- *Needle:* Size #90/14 Denim



TIP

A fast way to seam a lot of pieces at once is to do this. Pin each bag at both the open and the folded ends. Start sewing, backstitching at the beginning and the end of the seam, and then feed each bag, one right after the other, under the presser foot, so that it looks like the bags are tied to a kite string, as shown in Figure 8-21. Then turn everything around and repeat the process for the other side seams. Next, clip the threads between the bags and — voilà — you’re done with the seaming.

**5. Turn the bags right side out.**

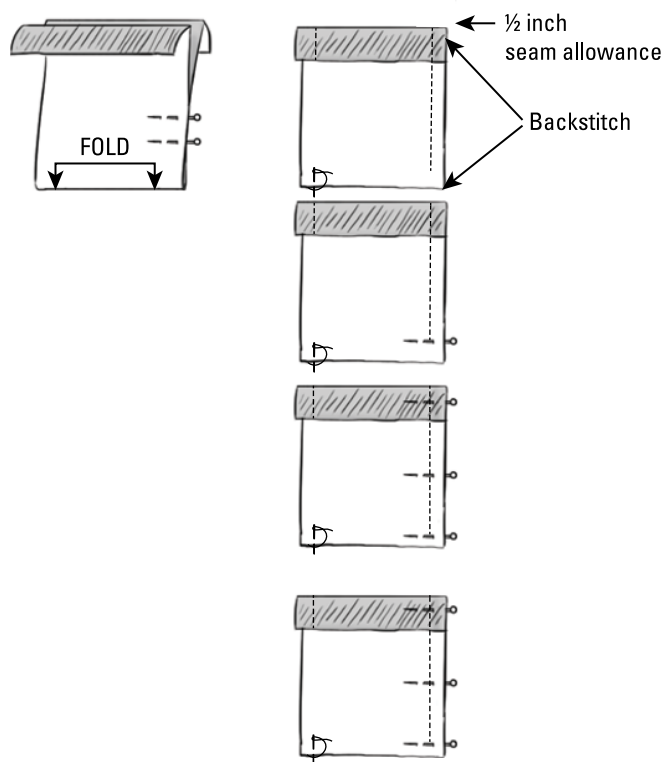
Because this fabric has a urethane backing, pressing it on the wrong side will melt the backing and gum up your iron. So, whether you’re pressing from the right or the wrong side, use a press cloth.



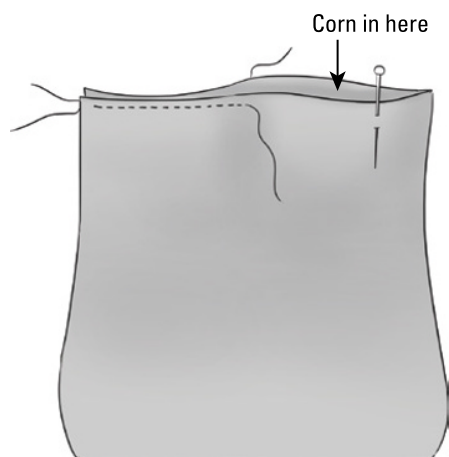
WARNING

**6. Using the scale, measure 1 pound of corn kernels, funnel the kernels into the open end of each bag, and pin each shut.**

7. Sew the open ends of each bag closed, securely backstitching at each end of the seam, as shown in Figure 8-22.



**FIGURE 8-21:**  
Fold, pin, and  
stitch both sides  
of the corn bags.



**FIGURE 8-22:**  
Sew the open  
ends of each bag  
closed, securely  
backstitching at  
each end  
of the seam.

# Instructions for the tote

Follow these steps to make a waterproof travel tote for easy transport of your cornhole bags:

**1. Cut two, 12×18-inch pieces of the third color canvas for the tote bag.**

**2. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* 3-step zigzag
- *Length:* 1.5 mm/15–24 spi
- *Width:* 0
- *Foot:* All-purpose, Teflon
- *Needle:* Size #90/14 Denim

Set your serger like this:

- *Stitch:* 3-thread overlock
- *Length:* 2.5 mm
- *Width:* 7
- *Foot:* All-purpose

**3. Overcast the two short edges of the tote.**

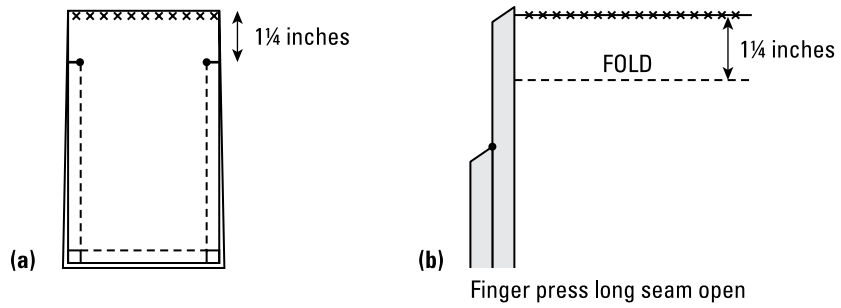
**4. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3–3.5 mm/6–9 spi
- *Width:* 0
- *Foot:* All-purpose, Teflon
- *Needle:* Size #90/14 Denim

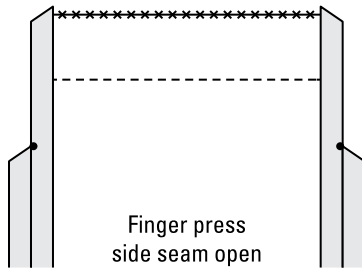
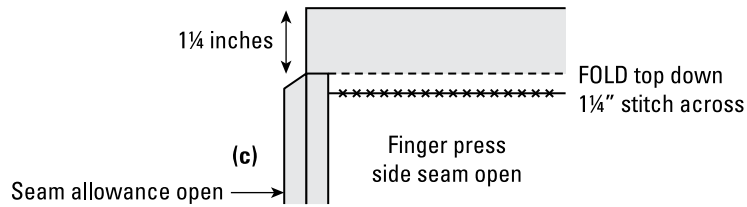
**5. Fold down a 1¼-inch hem on the short sides of the tote, and stitch across each, creating a casing for the drawstring, as shown in Figure 8-23.**

**6. Sew around all three sides of the tote, leaving a ½-inch opening at each casing end for the drawstring to slip through, as shown in Figure 8-24, and backstitch securely.**

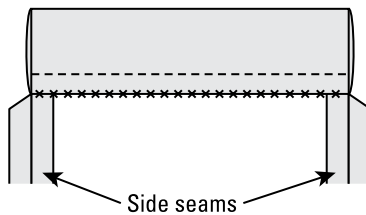




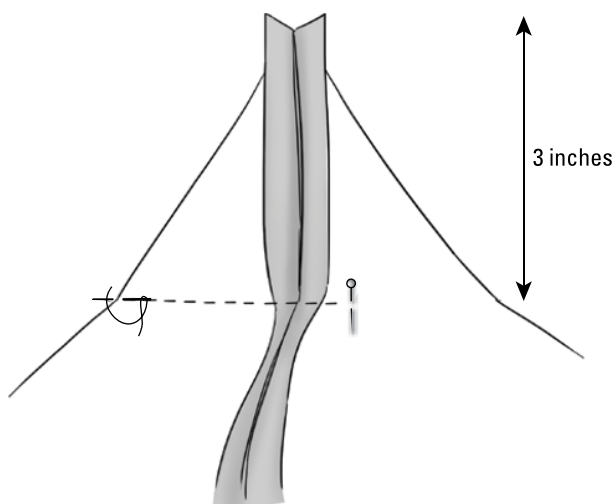
**FIGURE 8-23:**  
Fold down a 1 1/4-inch hem on the short sides of the tote, and stitch across each, creating a casing for the drawstring.



**FIGURE 8-24:**  
Sew around all three sides of the tote, leaving a 1/2-inch opening at each casing end for the drawstring to slide through.



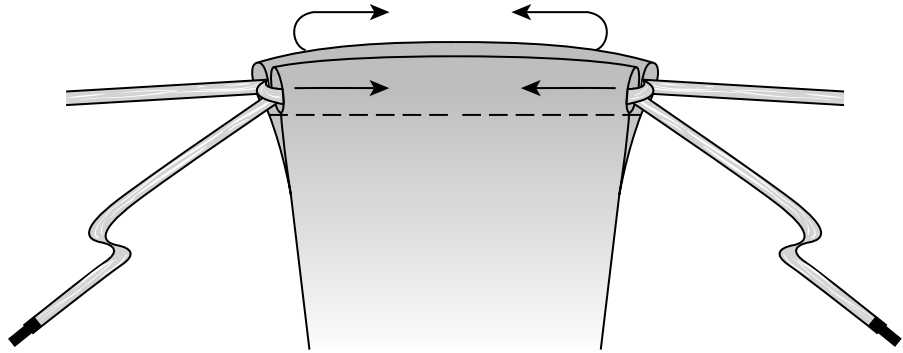
- 7. To box the bottom of the tote so it sits upright, fold the bottom toward the side seam, 3 inches from the point, as shown in Figure 8-25.**



**FIGURE 8-25:** “Box” the bottom of the cornhole tote so it sits up straight, and the cornhole bags stack inside the tote for compact storage.

- 8. Sew across the triangle, backstitching securely at both ends. Repeat for the other bottom side.**
- 9. Turn the tote right side out.**
- 10. Cut the ¼-inch cord in half so you have two, 36-inch pieces.**  
To easily open and close the top of the travel tote, you need two lengths of slippery nylon cord.
- 11. Tie a knot on one end of each of the cords.**
- 12. Push one of the protected ends of the bobby pin through the cord so the knot end snugs into the curve of the bobby pin.**  
This keeps the cord from pulling off the bobby pin when you’re threading it through the casings.
- 13. Thread the first corded bobby pin through the left casing and then around and back through the second casing so the two free ends are on one end, as shown in Figure 8-26.**

**FIGURE 8-26:**  
Thread the first  
corded bobby pin  
through the first  
casing then  
around and back  
through the  
second casing so  
the two free ends  
are on one end.



**14.** Repeat for the other cord, threading it through the second right casing in the *opposite direction* and so the free ends are on the other end.

**15.** Even up the nylon cords, and knot each free end, separately.

**16.** Now pull!

When you pull on the cords, the top of the tote closes. (See what it looks like in the color insert.) It may be tough the first few times you open and close the tote, but the fabric loosens up over time.





# **Strutting the Runway: Fashion Sewing 101**

### **IN THIS PART . . .**

Find out how marking and making darts, pinching and pinning pleats, and adding ruffles and elastic transform a rather shapeless piece of fabric into something form-fitting and fabulous.

Set aside your fears about sewing in zippers and adding buttonholes to keep your clothing and accessories fastened up as they should be.

Take your fashion sewing to the next level as you discover how to finish sleeveless armholes, sew raglan sleeves, and set-in sleeves.

Prepare yourself to respond to compliments with, "Thanks, it even has pockets!" by perfecting pocket proficiency.

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Shaping things up with darts and gathers
- » Creating softness and shape with gathers
- » Crafting a ruffled apron
- » Folding in some pleats
- » Stretching your elastic skills

## Chapter 9

# Shaping Your Silhouette

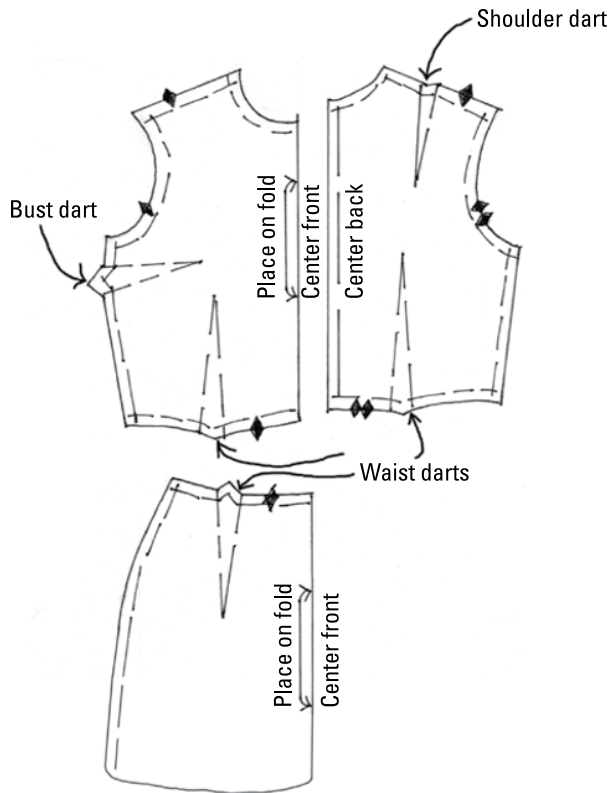
**E**ver wondered how mere darts, gathers, pleats, and elastic can transform a plain old potato sack into something chic and comfy? This chapter dives into the art of fitting and shaping. Whether you're constructing a garment or crafting some other fabric-related thing, these techniques will help you create something that actually fits. For hands-on practice of your fabric-shaping skills, you can make a cute little apron or two.

## Darting Around

*Darts* are little wedges of fabric that you pinch out and stitch to shape pattern pieces at the waistline, shoulder, bustline, and hips, as shown in Figure 9-1.

Paper patterns mark darts with stitching lines and sometimes a fold line that converges to the point of the dart. (See Chapter 4 for more information on how to decipher the markings on patterns.)

You may come across two dart types. If the project has a horizontal waistline seam, as shown in Figure 9-1, fabric needs to be “nipped in” to follow the natural curve at the waistline. So the darts on the bodice and the skirt have a wider amount of fabric taken out of the fabric at one end of the dart and then taper off at the point: a *straight dart*.



**FIGURE 9-1:**  
Darts help your  
projects  
take shape.

If you need to nip in the waistline on a garment without a horizontal waistline seam, such as a blouse with a contoured waistline or a drop-waist or one-piece dress, then you make a dart that's wide in the middle and is stitched to points at either end: a *contoured dart*.

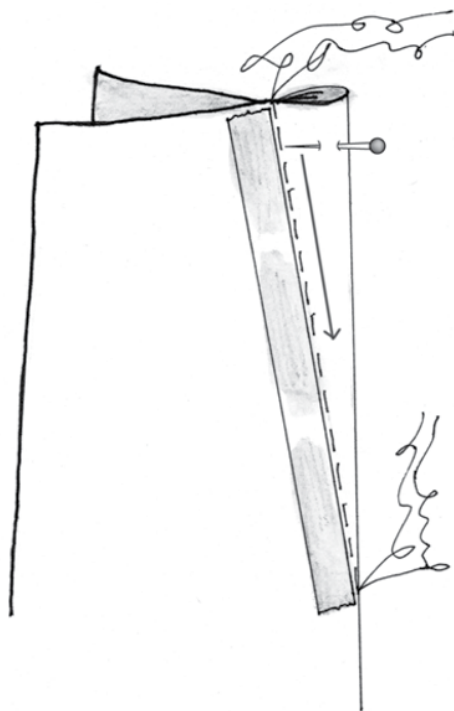
## Sewing the straight dart

To construct perfect straight darts every time, follow these steps:

- 1. Mark the dart with pins or a fabric marker.**  
See Chapter 4 for more about marking elements from a pattern.
- 2. Fold the dart, right sides together, matching at the fold line and pinning perpendicular to the stitching line at the dots marked on the pattern piece.**
- 3. Place a strip of invisible tape the length of the dart, next to the stitching line, as shown in Figure 9-2.**

The tape forms a stitching template that helps to keep your sewing straight.





**FIGURE 9-2:**  
Use tape as a stitching template and sew from the wide end to the point of the dart.

**4. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/10–12 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

**5. Starting at the wide end of the dart, lower the presser foot and sew next to the tape for a perfectly straight dart, pulling out the pins as you sew.**



**WARNING**

Don't make a dart by starting at the point and sewing to the wide end or by backstitching at the point. If you do, it won't be shaped properly and will probably bulge at the point.

**6. Tie off the threads at the point.**

Read more about tying off threads in Chapter 6.

# Sewing the contour dart

Without bust and back waist darts, your project hangs on you like a flour sack. Follow these steps to turn those flat, lifeless pieces of fabric into parts of a shapely top or dress you love to wear:

## 1. Mark the contour darts using your dressmaker's chalk or pins.

Check out the information in Chapter 4 for all the marking details. Review the information earlier in this chapter in the “Sewing the straight dart” section for more on sewing the perfect dart.

## 2. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/10–12 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

## 3. Starting at the widest part of the dart, sew to the point in one direction, and then turn the dart around and repeat for the other end of the dart, as shown in Figure 9-3.

This two-step method makes the dart smooth and perfectly tapered at both ends.

## 4. Tie off threads at both ends and in the middle of the dart.

See Chapter 6 for more on tying off threads.

# Finishing the dart

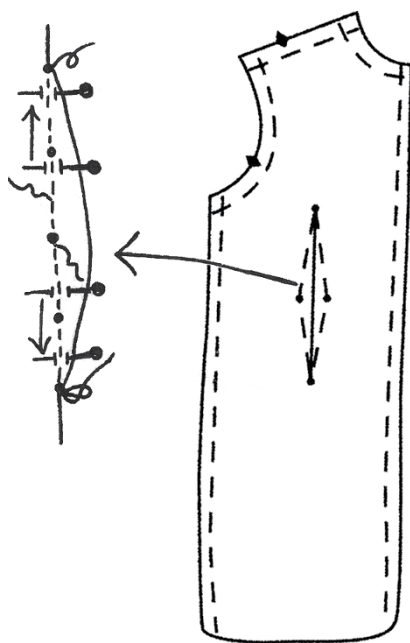
After sewing your dart, press it so that the dart forms a clean, smooth line in the fabric. Just follow these easy steps:

## 1. Remove the tape and press the dart flat and together.

Place the dart on the ironing board with the wrong side of the fabric up. Place one edge of the iron over the stitching line with the rest of the iron over the fold of the dart; press the dart flat from the stitching line out to the fold. Sewers refer to this procedure as *pressing the dart flat and together*. By pressing over the seamline, you set the stitches so that they blend well into the fabric.

## 2. Press the dart to one side of the inside of the garment.

Press horizontal darts so that the bulk of the dart is down. Press vertical darts so that the bulk of the dart is toward the center of the garment. If you have a tailor's ham, press the darts over a ham so when the dart is pressed it mimics the body curves. Check out Chapter 2 to learn more about pressing with a ham.



**FIGURE 9-3:**  
Mark and sew the  
contour dart in  
two steps.



**WARNING**

*Don't* use a too-hot iron for your fabric. *Do* use a press cloth. Some fabric is tricky to work with because, if pressed with a too-hot iron or without a press cloth, it can shine, and the seam allowances create *shadows* on either side of the seamline. If you're not sure about the iron's heat setting and what it does to your fabric, use a press cloth and test-press on a fabric scrap.

## Gathering Fabric from One Piece into Another

Gathering adds softness and shape to a project. Picture a gently gathered waistline and puffed sleeve in a child's dress, soft gathers above a shirt cuff, or a skirt gathered onto a waistband. All these examples use gathers to fit a larger fabric piece, such as a skirt, into another, smaller fabric piece like a waistband, armhole, or dress bodice. In this section, I show you two methods for gathering fabric. The method you use depends on the type of fabric you're working with.

### Gathering with two threads

The two-thread method works best for creating fine, controlled gathers on light-weight fabrics, such as batiste, challis, charmeuse, gauze, gingham, georgette,

lace, silk broadcloth, and voile. (See Chapter 3 for more information on these fabrics.) Follow these steps:

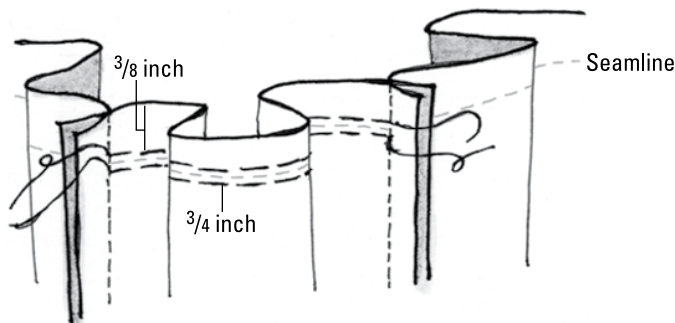
- 1. Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/9–13 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose or embroidery
  - *Upper tension:* Loosen slightly
- 2. Thread your needle with the thread you used for sewing your project together; thread your bobbin with a contrasting thread color.**

Using a different thread color in the bobbin makes these stitches easier to find when you're ready to pull up the gathers.
- 3. From the *right side* of the fabric, sew a row of gathering stitches  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the raw edge, leaving at least a 2-inch thread tail at the beginning and end.**

Don't backstitch at the beginning or end.

The gathering stitches for a seam sewn together at  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch are just inside the seam allowance and don't show on the outside of the project.
- 4. Sew a second row of gathering stitches  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch from the raw edge, leaving at least a 2-inch thread tail at the beginning and end, as shown in Figure 9-4.**

Be careful not to cross the stitching lines.
- 5. Pin-mark the gathering piece into quarters and repeat for the flat piece the gathering piece will be attached to.**



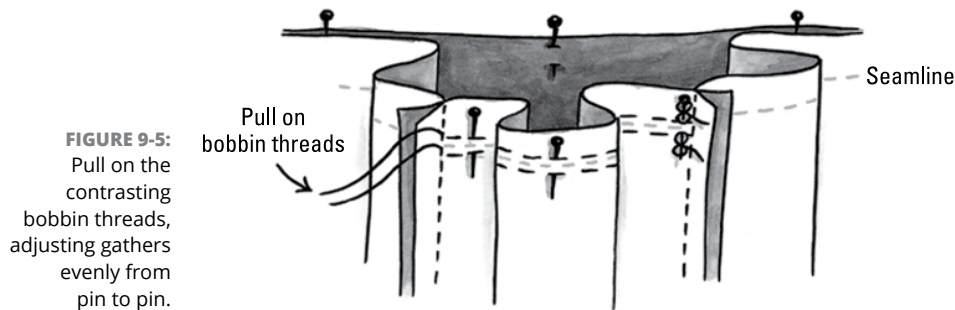
**FIGURE 9-4:** Sew gathering stitches so one row is inside the seamline and one is outside the seamline.

6. **Pin the seam allowances of the gathered piece and the flat piece of fabric together, matching the quartered pin marks.**
7. **Pull up the gathers by pulling on the contrasting bobbin threads, adjusting the gathering evenly from pin to pin, as shown in Figure 9-5.**

Working from the ends toward the center, hold the bobbin threads taut in one hand while sliding the fabric along the stitches with the other. Adjust the gathers as needed for the fullness you desire. Not only are the gathers even, but using two threads gives you a backup thread if the first one breaks. Remember to put your upper tension back to the normal setting before you sew the gathered and straight pieces together.

8. **Anchor the gathering threads by wrapping them in a figure eight around the pins at each end (see Figure 9-5).**

When the gathers are adjusted, place a pin into each end of (and perpendicular to) the gathering stitches. By wrapping them in a figure eight around each pin, the stitches won't pull out.



## Gathering over a cord

You can use gathering over a cord as a terrific way to gather mid- to heavyweight fabrics, such as chambray, chintz, corduroy, lightweight denim, linen and wool suiting, oxford, pique, poplin, and seersucker. (See Chapter 3 for more information on these fabrics.) The cord technique also works well when you gather yards of fabric all at once when sewing ruffles. Use these steps:

1. **Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Zigzag
  - *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/9–13 spi
  - *Width:* 3–4 mm
  - *Foot:* Embroidery

2. Cut a strand of *pearl cotton* (a type of twisted embroidery floss), dental floss, or three or four strands of any thread long enough to accommodate the length you want to gather.

For example, if you're gathering 10 inches, the cord should be 12 to 14 inches long. If you're using thread, slightly twist the strands together — making a sort of cord.

3. Place the fabric under the needle with the wrong side up.
4. Leaving the foot up, pierce the fabric with the needle  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the raw edge.
5. Center the cord lengthwise under the foot and lower the presser foot.
6. Zigzag over the cord, as shown in Figure 9-6.



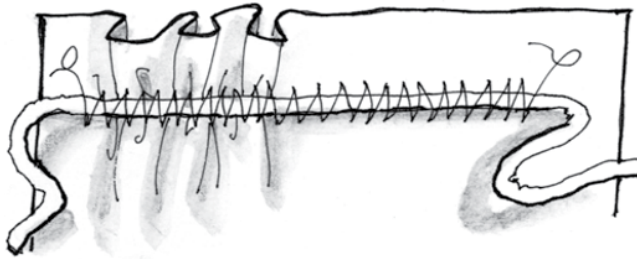
WARNING

Be careful not to sew through the cord when zigzagging over it. The zigzag stitches create a channel for the cord to slide through, and if you sew through the cord, it won't be able to slide.

7. Pull up the gathers by sliding the fabric down the cord.

You can easily adjust the gathers. The cord won't break when working the stitches up and down for dense gathering.

**FIGURE 9-6:**  
Zigzag over the  
cord for fast,  
strong, and easy  
gathering.



## Sew Simple Project: Ruffled Apron

Aprons are practical and fun to make. For inspiration, look for the cute numbers showing up on Etsy ([www.etsy.com](http://www.etsy.com)). The “Mommy and Me” aprons make great gifts and give you an opportunity to practice your gathering skills. By starting with a short denim skirt, which has a finished waistband, belt loops, and pockets, your project is half done before you start. I found several wonderful apron candidates at my local Goodwill and Salvation Army stores — simply add some ruffles and a tie belt, and voilà! You have a cute apron that’s a snap to make. Check out a photo of the finished project in the color insert.

To make this project, you need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2.)

- » A short denim skirt with belt loops at the waistline. (Choose a skirt that when laid flat is the width you want your final apron to be. Don't worry about whether it fits you.)
- » 1 yard each of three woven prints that complement each other. (After making the ruffles for this project, you'll have enough of each of the prints left over to make matching napkins. See Chapter 14 for more on making napkins.)
- » Thread that matches the fabric.
- » Pinking shears for cutting apart the skirt and preventing the denim from raveling.



TIP

A good pair of pinking shears is an investment, but a great tool to add to your Sewing Survival Kit. Once you have them, you'll find many opportunities to use them.



AUTHOR  
SAYS

You may be wondering why you need a yard of each print for making narrow ruffles. I designed this project so it's easy and to show you what happens to a fabric when cut on the "true" bias. (See the instructions in the "Cutting out the apron parts" section for more on the true bias.) When you cut a woven fabric on the bias, it won't ravel, and you won't have to edge-finish. Easy peasy!

## Cutting out the apron parts

Follow these steps to get the parts of your apron ready for sewing:

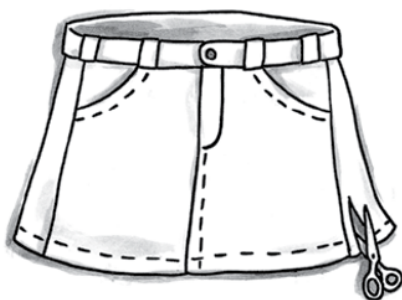
- 1. Lay the skirt flat on a tabletop, smoothing it from the center to the side seams.**
- 2. Cut the front and back of the skirt apart where it folds at the sides.**

Depending on your skirt, this may be slightly behind the seams.  
(See Figure 9-7.)

It's fashionable to leave denim seams unfinished. If you don't finish the edges, they ravel, so cut the skirt apart using pinking shears. You don't need the back half of the skirt for this project, but if you like the way it looks (like what you see in the color insert), you can make another apron out of it. (See "Tying up the apron strings" instructions later in this chapter.)

- 3. Choose one of your prints for the apron sash. Cut two additional strips across the grain that are four times the width of the skirt waistband and as long as the fabric allows.**

**FIGURE 9-7:**  
Cut the skirt  
apart at the  
side fold (not  
necessarily on  
the side seams).



For example, if the skirt's waistband is 1½ inches, make the sash strips 6 inches wide. See "Tying up the apron strings" later in this chapter.

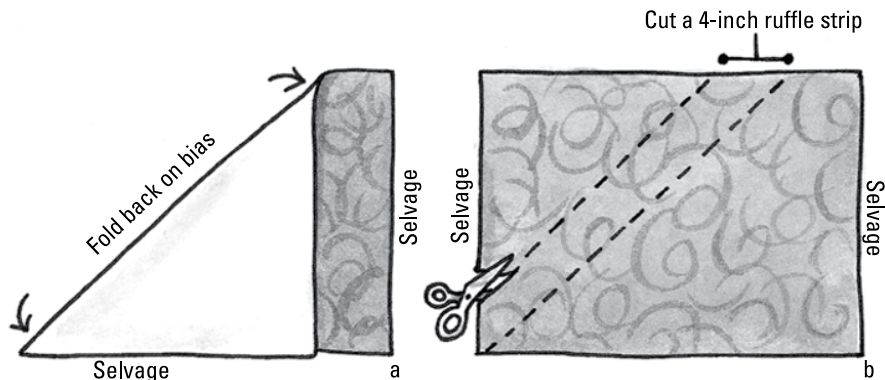
- 4. Open one of the print fabrics so it's flat and find the "true" bias (the diagonal grain) by folding one selvage down so it's even with one cut edge; press the fold.**

When you unfold the fabric, the bias makes a perfect diagonal, as shown in Figure 9-8. The pressed fold becomes one of your cutting lines.

- 5. Open the fabric so it's flat again and cut one strip 4 inches wide by the length of the pressed bias crease (see Figure 9-8).**
- 6. Repeat Steps 4 and 5 for the other print fabrics.**

By cutting out the ruffles on the bias, you won't have to finish any of the raw edges because they won't ravel. (See Chapter 4 for more on finding true bias.) The raw edges also give the apron a cool handmade look you'll love.

**FIGURE 9-8:**  
Fold the fabric  
to find the true  
bias (a); then cut  
a 4-inch strip  
from along  
the fold (b).



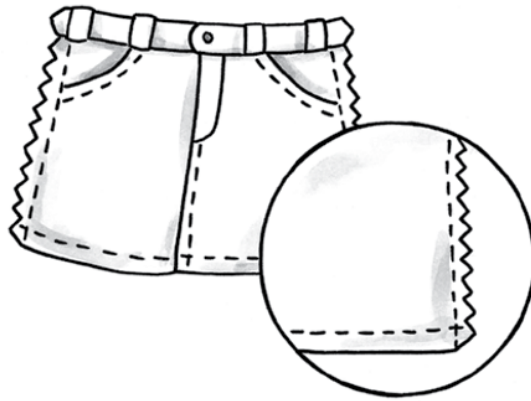


## Finishing the apron side seams

For an easy edge finish, you pink and stitch the edges of the apron. Here's how:

1. **Pink the side edges of the denim apron front by cutting with pinking shears to prevent raveling.**
2. **Set your machine this way:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 4 mm/6 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
3. **Straight stitch just inside the pinked edges, as shown in Figure 9-9.**

Instead of backstitching at the top and bottom of the edge, pull the threads to the back of the project and tie them off. (For more on tying off threads, see Chapter 6.)



**FIGURE 9-9:** Pink and stitch the side edges of the apron for a smooth, finished look.

## Gathering and attaching the ruffle strips

Gather each ruffle and sew it to the apron front. Here's how:

1. **Square up the ends of each ruffle piece so the short ends are cut perpendicular to the long edges of each ruffle strip.**
2. **Run two rows of gathering stitches at the top of each ruffle strip as described in "Gathering with two threads" earlier in this chapter.**
3. **Pin-mark the bottom of the skirt and the first ruffle strip into fourths.**

4. Match the pin marks of the ruffle strip to the pin marks on the skirt front, pinning the ruffle so it lays on top of and overlaps the denim by about 1 inch, as shown in Figure 9-10.
5. Start gathering from pin to pin by pulling on the two bobbin threads and evenly adjusting the fullness along the gathering stitches.
6. Set your machine like this:
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/6–8 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
7. Stitch on the ruffle strip, guiding the presser foot so you're sewing **between** the two rows of gathering stitches.

Remember to backstitch at the beginning and end of each ruffle. *Note:* the finished length of the apron will equal the skirt length plus 2–3 inches after the first ruffle is applied.
8. Pull out the two rows of gathering stitches sewn in Step 2 by pulling out the bobbin threads.
9. Repeat this section for each subsequent ruffle, placing the bottom of the ruffle slightly over the gathered stitches of the one below it.

**FIGURE 9-10:**  
Gather the ruffle to fit the front of the apron by adjusting fullness from pin to pin. Then repeat for the other two ruffles.

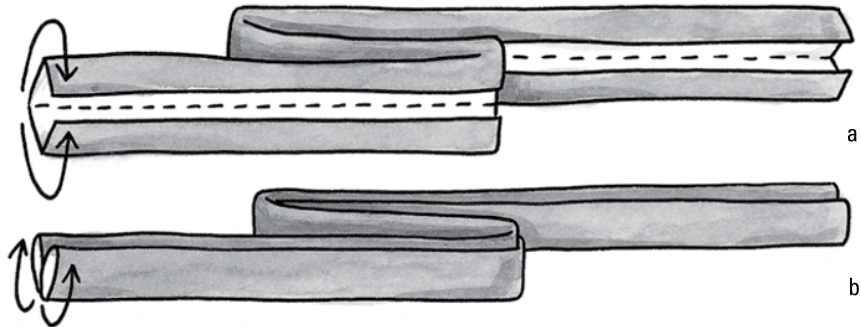


## Tying up the apron strings

This method is not only great for making the apron tie for this project, but works well for making straps for a tote bag or sundress.

- 1. Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/6–8 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
- 2. Using the two sash strips cut in “Cutting out the apron parts,” lay the strips short end to short end and seam together with a  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam allowance.**
- 3. Trim the unsewn ends so that the sash is two and a half times your waist measurement.**

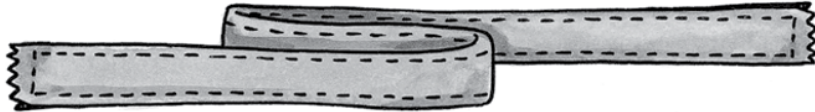
For example, if your waist measurement is 30 inches, the sash needs to be 75 inches.
- 4. Fold the apron sash strip in half the short way, pressing a crease down the length of the long strip (see Figure 9-11a).**
- 5. Open your fabric strip at the ironing board, and with the wrong side up, fold and press the two long edges to the center crease and refold along the center, as shown in Figure 9-11b.**



**FIGURE 9-11:**  
The two-step  
process of folding  
and pressing the  
apron tie makes it  
strong and stable.

6. **Stitch around all four sides of the apron tie, guiding the foot  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the edge.**
7. **Pink the two short edges of the apron tie, as shown in Figure 9-12.**
8. **Thread the apron tie through the belt loops on the apron skirt and put it on.**

**FIGURE 9-12:**  
After sewing around all four edges of the apron string, pink the short edges for a quick, easy finish.



Once you've made one apron string, make another one from another print and turn the back of the skirt into another apron.



**TIP**

If you have only two belt loops on the front of your apron, stitch the tie at each end of the waistband to secure it.

## Completing Pleats

*Pleats* are folds in the fabric that control fullness. You find pleats in all sorts of places, including the following:

- » Around a whole garment, like on a pleated skirt
- » In sections, such as at the waistline of a pair of trousers
- » As a single pleat, like a kick pleat in the back of a skirt

You make most pleats by folding a continuous piece of fabric and then stitching the folds to hold them in place. Beginner and easy sewing projects don't often have pleats, but many intermediate and advanced patterns do. The pattern guide sheet explains how to fold and construct pleats for a particular project; refer to it often.

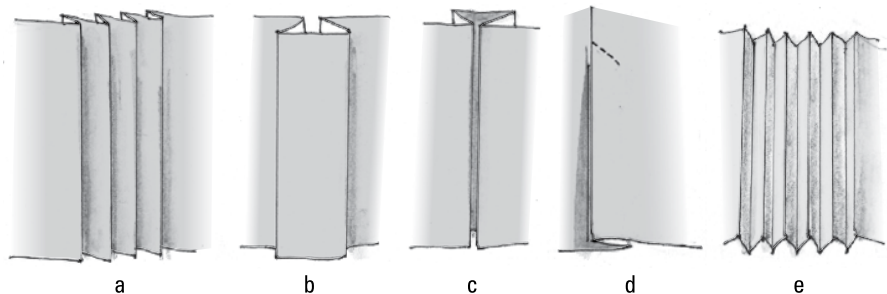
To make a pleat, mark it as you would a dart or other symbol found on the pattern tissue. (See Chapter 4 for marking instructions.) Fold the pleat on the fold line and stitch the pleat on the stitching line.

## Defining the types of pleats

When you look online or through pattern catalogs and fashion magazines (and probably your own closet), you see a variety of pleats. Become familiar with the different types (see Figure 9-13) and where you find them on clothing:

- » **Knife pleats:** These pleats have one fold line and one placement line and are pleated in one direction. You often find several knife pleats clustered together on each side of a garment, where one cluster faces one direction and the other cluster faces the opposite direction — like at the top of a pair of trousers.
- » **Box pleats:** These pleats have two fold lines and two placement lines. The folds of each pleat face away from each other, and the backside of the folds may or may not meet. You most commonly see box pleats down the center front of a dress or skirt and in bed skirts.
- » **Inverted pleats:** You find two fold lines in these pleats, but they come together at a common placement line. Like box pleats, you most commonly find inverted pleats down the center front of a dress or skirt and in bed skirts.
- » **Kick pleats:** These pleats have one fold line and one placement line, and you usually find them at the hem edge at center back of a slim skirt. Besides adding style, kick pleats give the skirt enough room for comfortable walking.
- » **Accordion pleats:** Sorry, but you can't make these pleats at home. Accordion pleats look like the bellows of an accordion, providing a kicky, flared effect. Commercial pleaters permanently set these pleats into the fabric using a combination of heat and steam. You can purchase accordion pleated fabric by the yard.

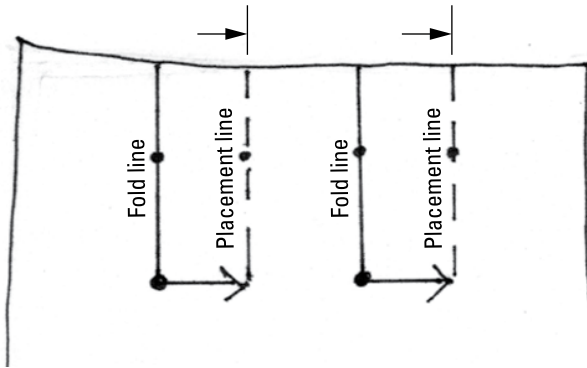
**FIGURE 9-13:**  
Look for  
knife pleats (a),  
box pleats (b),  
inverted pleats (c),  
kick pleats (d),  
and accordion  
pleats (e)  
in garments.



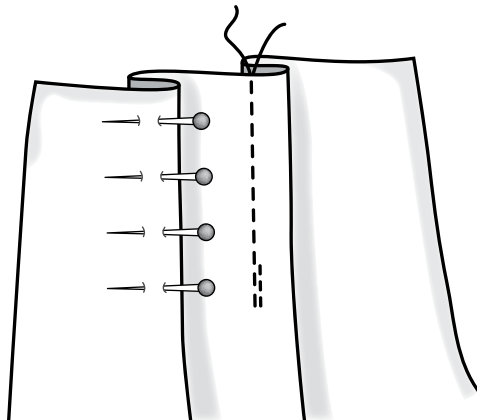
# Making a pleat

Regardless of the type of pleat you make, except for the accordion pleat, you make all pleats just about the same. After you know how to make a knife pleat, you have the basic skills you need to make the others. Follow these steps:

1. Mark the pleats at the dots as directed on your project's pattern guide sheet, as shown in Figure 9-14.
2. Fold and pin the pleat, bringing the fold line over to meet the placement line.
3. Stitch the pleat on the stitching line, as shown in Figure 9-15.



**FIGURE 9-14:**  
Marking pleats.



**FIGURE 9-15:**  
Fold pleat to  
placement line  
and stitch.

# Adding Stretch and Comfort with Elastic

Besides adding shape and form to a project, elastic usually makes a garment more comfortable to wear. It comes in a variety of configurations, each of which are appropriate for a different use. Refer to Chapter 3 for more information on the different types of elastic and which type may be appropriate for your project.

In this section, you discover the easy way to put elastic through a casing. A *casing* is a fabric tunnel that holds a drawstring or elastic at waistlines, wrists, and ankles to shape a garment. Traditionally, you create a casing in one of the following two ways:

- » By folding down and stitching a casing, using fabric at the top of a waistline. You often see and use this method for the waistband on pull-on pants or shorts.
- » By sewing a separate strip of fabric to the wrong side of the fabric, creating a casing for the elastic to slide through. This method is popular at the waistlines of dresses and at the back of jackets.

In this section you make a casing by using the fold-down method. Pattern instructions often tell you to create the casing and then thread the elastic through the casing with a large safety pin or *bodkin* (a little tool that pinches together over the end of the elastic like a pair of tweezers with teeth).

I've made hundreds of casings, and I can't tell you how many times I've gotten to within 2 inches of the end and given the elastic one last tug, just to have the safety pin or bodkin pull off the end before the elastic was all the way through the casing. If that didn't happen, the safety pin or bodkin got hung up in the seam allowances. By the time the elastic was through the casing, I felt like I had acute arthritis in both hands. Painful and frustrating!

So my friend Karyl Garbow devised the following technique for creating elastic casings. This technique takes about the same amount of time as the conventional method, but you don't lose the elastic or stress out your hands in the process. The trick is to start with a length of elastic that's longer than the circumference it's going into. Manufacturers often package elastic in multiple-yard lengths, so you get enough elastic for several treatments.

Try this fold-down method at the wrist of a sleeve or ankle of a pair of pants. You can also use this method for the waistline of pull-on shorts, pants, and skirts:

## 1. Add ¼ inch to the cut edge of the casing.

This extra ¼ inch gives you a little “wiggle room” that is taken up when you do the edgestitching in Step 4.

## 2. Overcast the raw edge of the casing so the fabric doesn't ravel.

To *overcast*, guide the fabric so that the stitches catch the fabric on the left and sew just off the edge at the right.

Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch*: Three-step zigzag
- *Length*: 1–1.5 mm/25 spi or fine
- *Width*: 4–5 mm
- *Foot*: All-purpose

If you're using a serger, use the following settings:

- *Stitch*: Three-thread overlock
- *Length*: 3 mm
- *Width*: 5 mm
- *Foot*: Standard

## 3. To form the casing, fold down the top of the fabric toward the inside of the project the width of the elastic plus $\frac{3}{8}$ inch; press the casing into place.

Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch*: Straight
- *Length*: 2.5–3 mm/10–12 spi
- *Width*: 0 mm
- *Foot*: All-purpose or edgestitch
- Needle position: Left (optional)

## 4. Edgestitch around the top of the casing, sewing $\frac{1}{8}$ inch from the folded edge.

See Chapter 6 for more on edgestitching.

The edgestitch foot has a guide in it that keeps your sewing straight. It's not a standard foot, so ask your dealer whether they make one for your machine.



## 5. Leaving the elastic in one long strip, place and pin the elastic into the casing, snugging it up against the edgestitched fold, as shown in Figure 9-16.

Pin parallel to and just under the elastic. A lot of elastic hangs off either end of the casing, which you cut to fit later.

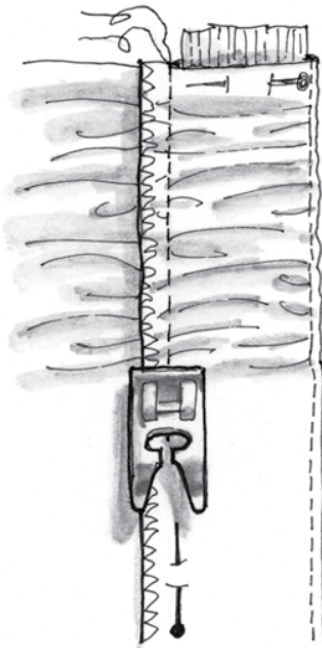
## 6. Anchor one loose end of the elastic with a pin. Using your all-purpose foot, stitch under (but not through!) the elastic, as shown in Figure 9-17.

Instead of stitching the casing down all the way around, leave a 2-inch opening in the casing for the elastic ends to pull through.





**FIGURE 9-16:**  
Pin the casing  
close to  
the elastic.



**FIGURE 9-17:**  
Be careful not to  
stitch through the  
elastic when you  
sew the casing.

**7. Pull the elastic taut through the opening in the casing until it fits comfortably around your waist.**

**8. Pin the elastic ends together.**



**WARNING**

Don't cut off the elastic until you check that it stretches enough to fit over your hips. Nothing is worse than sewing in the elastic and then discovering that you can't pull up your pants.

**9. Before cutting the elastic, add 1 inch at each end for overlap.**

**10. Overlap one end of the elastic over the other 1 inch and sew a square across the top, down the side, across the bottom, and then up to really secure the ends.**



**TIP**

When you work with a shorter piece of elastic or replace worn-out elastic, thread the elastic through the casing. Instead of using a safety pin or bodkin, which can pull off the end or get hung up on the seam allowances, cut a small slit in the elastic at least ½ inch from the end and thread a bobby pin through it. The bobby pin has smooth ends and is narrow enough to easily slide through almost any casing.

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Installing zippers without breaking a sweat
- » Creating buttonholes
- » Sewing buttons
- » Taking a look at other types of fasteners
- » Crafting an easy fold-over clutch with a button or embellishment

## Chapter 10

# Zip It. Button It. Close It.

**E**arly in my sewing career, I remember searching through the catalogs for patterns without zippers or buttonholes. This yielded a closet-full of plain Jane's. I needed to get over myself. So I held my nose, took a deep breath, and surfaced with a handful of zipper and buttonhole hacks that wowed-up my wardrobe.

In this chapter, I show you the easiest and best-looking ways of sewing in both centered and invisible zippers. Next stop: buttonholes. I explain how to make them fit any button and look great. Think buttons are boring? Find out how to attach buttons so they stay put and give a creative boost to most any garment. For the grand finale, I give you instructions for stitching up a fold-over clutch that'll take only minutes to make.

## No-Sweat Zippers

Pattern guide sheet instructions often assume that you have some knowledge of sewing, and they've been recommending the same zipper application techniques for decades. In my search for an easier way, I ran across some great factory methods that I share with you in this section, along with information on using invisible zippers.

At first glance, these techniques may look complicated, but they overcome the typical roadblocks most folks have when sewing in zippers. So follow along with me step by step to create a professional-looking project with a zipper.

You can use several methods to sew in zippers. The two easiest and most popular methods are

- » **Centered application:** Center the zipper teeth at the seamline, such as down the center back of a dress or skirt. This type of zipper is also fun and easy to put in craft projects like totes and backpacks.
- » **Invisible application:** When sewn in a seam, this fabulous zipper invention looks just like the seam itself. Use invisible zippers at side seams, center back seams, and for closing up a simple pillow cover.

## Putting in a centered zipper



TIP

Trust me: The following tips can save you a lot of frustration when sewing in a centered zipper:

- » **Use a longer zipper than necessary.** How much longer doesn't really matter — just go longer. This way, the *zipper pull* (the part you tug on to open and close the zipper) is out of the presser foot's way when you sew the top of the zipper. The result? Nice, even stitching at the top of the zipper. After you finish sewing on the neckline, waistband, or facing, you simply cut the zipper tape to fit.
- » **Use ½-inch tape — like Scotch Magic Mending Tape — and baste in the zipper across the back without using pins.** The tape holds everything flat and in place, and sewing through it doesn't damage the needle or the fabric.
- » **Use ¼-inch basting tape, such as Steam-A-Seam 2 or Dritz Wash-Away Wonder Tape.** Check out this video for a tutorial on using it to install a zipper: <https://madamsew.com/blogs/sewing-blog/how-to-install-a-centered-zipper>.
- » **Use the ½-inch transparent tape on the right side of the project as a topstitching guide/template when sewing in the zipper.** This way, the stitching lines are parallel, and the zipper application looks as good as in ready-made clothing. (Who cares whether the zipper looks good from the wrong side, anyway?)

Sewing in a centered zipper is as easy as following these steps:

**1. Before taking the paper pattern off the fabric, use the points of your scissors to clip into both layers of the seam allowance  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch to mark the bottom of the zipper placement, as shown in the inset for Figure 10-1.**

**2. Remove the pattern paper from the fabric and then place and pin the seam, right sides together.**

In the seamline, put two pins parallel and close together at the zipper placement marks you clipped in Step 1 and as shown in Figure 10-1. The pins act as a reminder to stop sewing when you get to them.

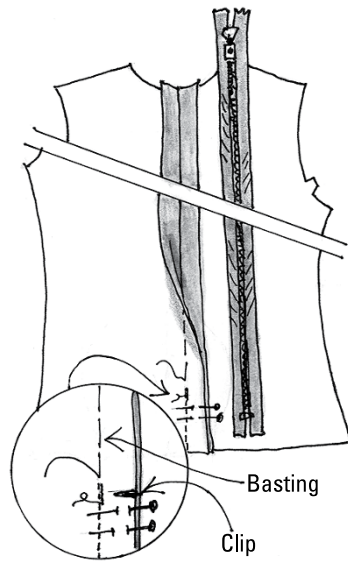
**3. Starting from the bottom of the seamline and using a  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 mm (10 to 12 spi) stitch length, sew the 58-inch seam.**

Stop and securely backstitch at the bottom of the zipper placement clip and double pins.

**4. Remove the project from the sewing machine, cutting the threads off at the fabric.**

**5. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 4–6 mm/4 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose
- *Upper tension:* Loosen slightly



**FIGURE 10-1:**  
Position the  
bottom of the  
zipper at the clip  
you made at the  
bottom of the  
seam allowance.

**6.** Starting at the backstitching, baste the remainder of the seam together at the  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seamline, leaving generous thread tails.

**7.** Remove the pins, press the seam flat and together, and then press the seam open.

See Chapter 5 for the best way to press seams open.

**8.** From the wrong side, match the bottom of the zipper with the clips in the seam allowance, centering the zipper teeth over the seamline.

**9.** Using  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch Scotch Magic Mending tape, tape across the zipper every inch or so.

The zipper pull should be up on the zipper tape, out of the way.

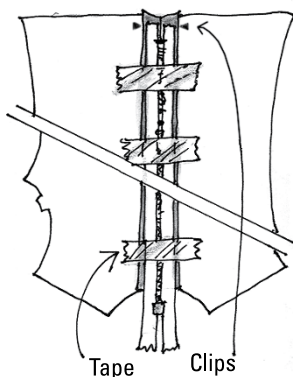
(See Figure 10-2.)

**10.** On the right side of the fabric, place a strip of  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch Scotch Magic Mending tape over the basted seamline, centering the seamline under the tape.

This tape is your stitching guide or template.

**11.** Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* Appropriate for the fabric (see Chapter 5)
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* Zipper
- *Upper tension:* Return to normal



**FIGURE 10-2:**  
Tape the zipper over the seam allowance with the zipper pulled up and out of the way.

**12. Move your zipper foot so that the toe of the foot is to one side of the needle.**

A zipper foot has one toe (rather than two toes like the all-purpose foot) so that you can move it from one side of the needle to the other for easy zipper application. Moving the toe in this step prevents the foot from riding over the zipper teeth. (See your operating manual and Figure 10-3.)

**13. Starting on the right side of the fabric and at the bottom of the zipper, stitch next to the tape template (refer to Figure 10-3), sewing across the bottom and then up one side of the zipper.**

Don't backstitch; you pull the threads through to the wrong side and tie them off later.

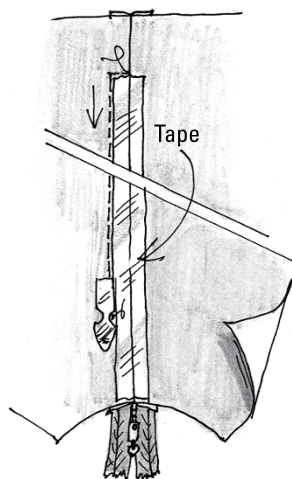
**14. Move the toe of the foot to the other side of the needle. Starting at the bottom of the zipper again, sew the other side of the zipper, guiding next to the tape template.**

Sew next to the tape template, starting back at the bottom and sewing up the other side of the zipper.



**TIP**

You may be concerned that you're damaging the needle by sewing through the tape and getting the sticky stuff on the needle. If this happens, the needle may start skipping stitches. To fix this, put a *little bit* of fingernail polish remover on a couple layers of paper towel and sew through it a few times. This should remove the adhesive so you're good to go.



**FIGURE 10-3:** Starting on the right side of the garment, sew from the bottom up, stitching next to the tape.

**15. Pull off the tape from both sides of the project and remove the basting stitches from the seam by pulling on the bobbin thread.**

Because you loosened the upper thread tension, the stitches should pull out easily.

**16. Tug the zipper pull to the bottom of the zipper.**

This is a very important step! If you don't do this, you will cut off the zipper pull — and may have to put in a new zipper. That said, if it does happen, check out the “Putting a zipper pull back on” section later in this chapter.



WARNING

**17. Place, pin, and stitch the facing or waistband, intersecting the seam at the  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seamline, and securely backstitch over the zipper coil at the top of the zipper, as shown in Figure 10-4.**

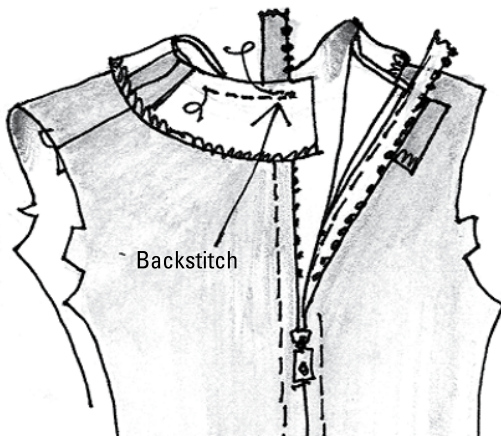
Backstitching prevents the zipper pull from coming off the track so that you can safely cut off the zipper tape. When you sew the rest of the project together, the intersecting seam at the top of the zipper tape that crosses over the teeth or coil prevents the pull from coming off the track.

**18. Cut off excess zipper tape.**

If you cut off the excess zipper tape without backstitching over the zipper teeth or coil first, you run the risk of pulling off the zipper pull, and you may have to rip out and replace the zipper.



WARNING



**FIGURE 10-4:** Backstitch over the zipper coil before cutting off the zipper.



## Putting a zipper pull back on



TIP

If the zipper pull comes off, I have a trick you should try before you replace the zipper completely: Backstitch over the top of the zipper across the coil or teeth and carefully remove the bottom stop by prying it off the zipper tape. (The nut pick from a nutcracker set works best, but if you don't have one, use a *very* sturdy pair of tweezers.) Then try zipping on the pull from the bottom and pulling up. If this works, great — you saved yourself some time. (If not, you'll never make this mistake again!) Just remember to put the bottom zipper stop back in its place. If it's too mangled to fit back into place, hand or machine sew a few zigzag stitches over the bottom of the zipper coil so the pull won't come off the bottom of the zipper when you pull it down.

## Putting in an invisible zipper

Invisible zippers are easy to apply once you have one under your belt — so to speak. The cool thing about the invisible zipper is that it looks like a seam, and only the small pull is visible from the right side of the project. *You do need a special invisible zipper foot*, so make sure you purchase one for your machine at your local fabric store, sewing machine dealer, or online notion resource.

Unlike conventional zipper applications, you sew an invisible zipper in an open seam, before any of the seam has been sewn together, and you use a zipper that's the same length as the opening. Here are the steps:

- 1. Before taking the paper pattern off the fabric, use the points of your scissors to clip into both layers of the seam allowance  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch to mark the bottom of the zipper placement. Remove the pattern paper.**
- 2. Lay the invisible zipper wrong side up on your ironing board, and with your iron set to the synthetic setting, place its tip against the coil and press the zipper tape smoothly on both sides of the coils.**

This helps the coils stand away from the zipper tape and makes it easier for the foot to sew as close to the zipper coils as possible. It also lets you achieve a good-looking seam.

- 3. Place and pin the open zipper to one side of the seam, right sides together and with the coil along the seamline (where the seam will be sewn), as shown in Figure 10-5.**

Match the bottom of the zipper with the clips in the seam allowance.

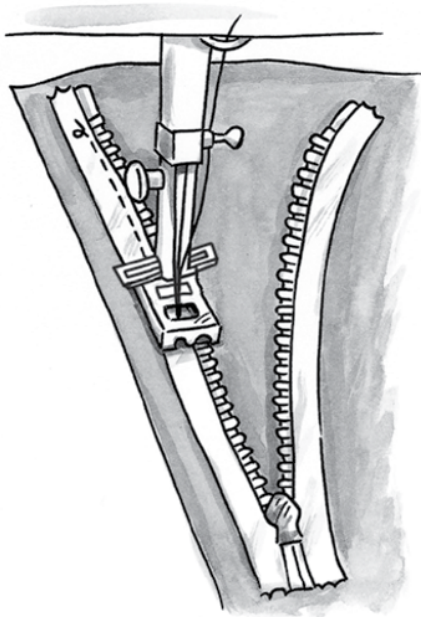
#### 4. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* Appropriate for the fabric (see Chapter 5)
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* Invisible zipper

The invisible zipper foot has tracks for each side of the zipper. The coil rides in the track, making stitching accurate and helping to hold the zipper in place.

#### 5. Sliding the foot over to avoid sewing over the zipper coil, sew the first side of the zipper, starting from the top stop and sewing as close to the pull as you can, as shown in Figure 10-5.

To prevent the zipper tape from flopping around while you sew, gently grasp the seam allowance and zipper in front of and behind the presser foot. Remember to backstitch at the bottom of the zipper.



**FIGURE 10-5:** Sew along the left side of the zipper coils from the top to the zipper pull.

- 6. Pin and sew the unstitched side of the zipper to the right side of the other seam allowance, as shown in Figure 10-6.**

Remember to slide the foot over to avoid sewing through the zipper coil and then sew from the top stop to the zipper pull as you did in Step 5.

- 7. Change the presser foot from the invisible zipper to the zipper foot that fits your machine, moving the one toe to the left of the needle.**

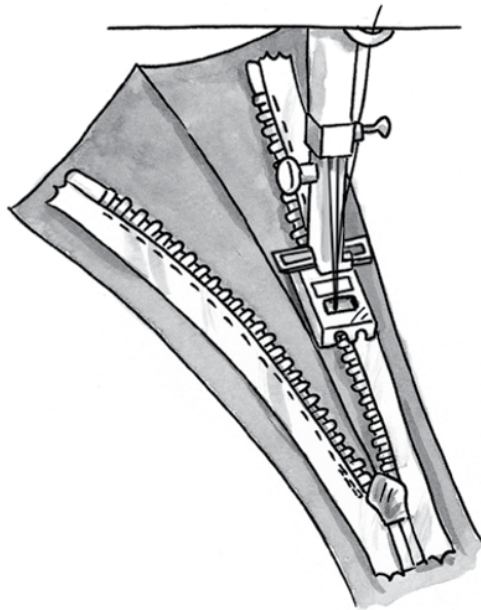
- 8. Close the zipper and pin the seam allowance together.**

- 9. Starting where you backstitched at the bottom of the zipper, sew the rest of the seam closed, as shown in Figure 10-7.**

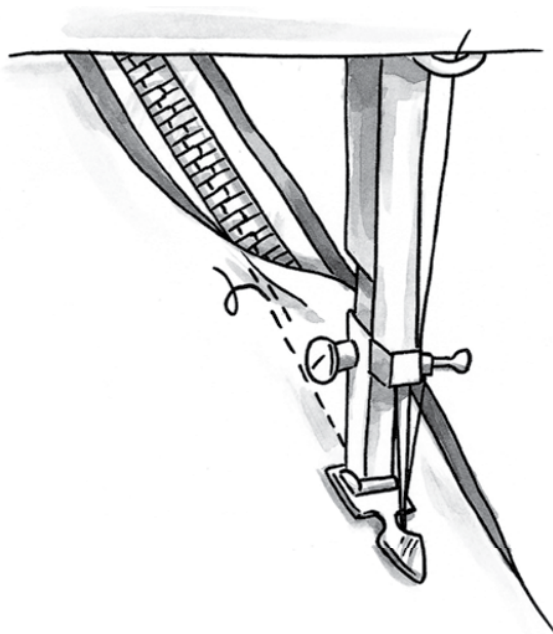
Rather than backstitching, securely tie off the thread ends where the seam and the bottom of the zipper come together.

- 10. With the zipper open, stitch across the top end of each side of the zipper tape so the coil is in the “rolled back” position, as shown in Figure 10-8.**

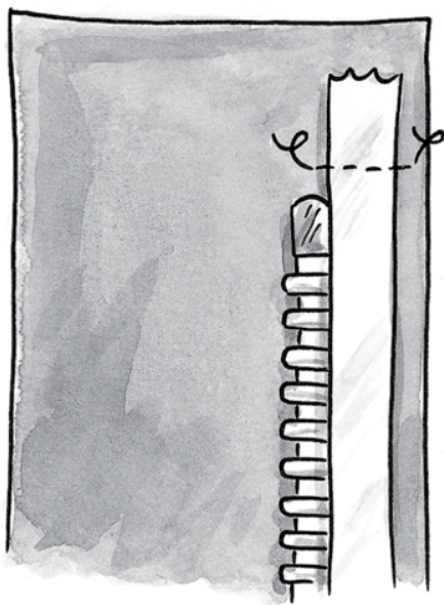
This stitch keeps the zipper tape smooth and flat and the coil rolled back into its original position for easy sliding.



**FIGURE 10-6:**  
Move the foot over to the right and sew the second side of the zipper, sewing from the top down to the pull.



**FIGURE 10-7:**  
Sew the rest of  
the seam using  
the conventional  
zipper foot.



**FIGURE 10-8:**  
Stitch over the  
ends of the zipper  
tape so the coil is  
in the "rolled  
back" position.

# Buttonhole Basics

Buttons (and their corresponding buttonholes) close a garment, and they may have a decorative function as well. When shopping for buttons, decide whether you want a bold statement or a subtle one. Keep in mind that contrasting buttons draw the eye vertically or horizontally, and tone-on-tone buttons usually don't draw the eye anywhere, which may be exactly what you want for a particular project.

Many folks think buttonholes are difficult to make, but modern sewing machines make them easier than ever. As long as you buy the correct sized buttons for the project (found on the back of your pattern envelope), mark the buttonhole placement (shown on the pattern paper), and follow my directions for marking, making, and cutting open your buttonholes, you can't go wrong. It may sound like a lot of steps, but after you make a few buttonholes, you'll never avoid them again.

## Sizing buttonholes

What comes first: the button or buttonhole? To make the buttonholes, you need to know the size of the buttons. That means you have to have the buttons for your project before you can make the buttonholes.



TIP

Buy buttons the size that the back of the pattern envelope recommends. Following the pattern instruction ensures that the buttons are in the best proportion to the garment and give you the best fit and look.

Even two buttons that measure  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch may not fit through the same-sized buttonhole. The difference is in the shape: Thicker buttons need longer buttonholes than flatter ones. For example, a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch, half-round, ball button needs a longer buttonhole than a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch, flat, four-hole button. The fastest and easiest way to determine how long to make buttonholes is to do the following:

- 1. Cut a strip of paper  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch wide by about 5 to 8 inches long.**  
Cut a longer strip when working with larger buttons.
- 2. Fold the paper strip in half and snug one edge of the button, at its widest diameter, against the fold in the paper strip.**
- 3. Pin-mark the edge of the button on the other end of the paper strip.**
- 4. Pull the button out of the paper strip, flatten the paper strip, and then measure the length from the fold to the pin, as shown in Figure 10-9.**

The buttonhole must be this length for the button to easily slip through it.

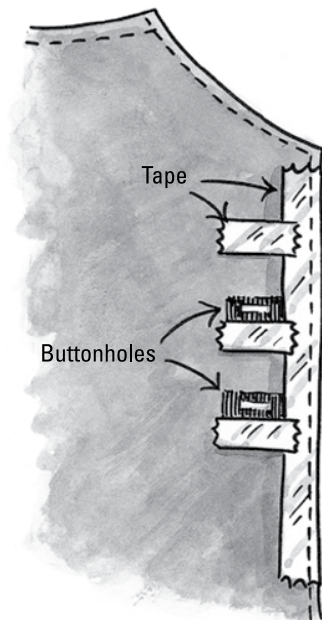
**FIGURE 10-9:**  
Use a folded  
paper strip to  
determine  
the correct  
buttonhole size.



## Marking buttonholes

Buttonholes have become easier to make because sewing machine companies are manufacturing sewing machines that have easy-to-sew built-in buttonhole functions. Some models even have several buttonhole styles to choose from based on the fabric you're working with. So the only tricky part about making buttonholes these days is measuring and marking them correctly.

For most projects, position buttonholes  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the finished edge. The exception is when buttons are larger than an inch — sew these buttonholes as directed by your pattern guide sheet. To prevent sewing a buttonhole too close to the edge, stick a strip of  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-wide tape along the length of the opening that requires buttons with one straight edge of the tape even with the finished edge of the opening, as shown in Figure 10-10.



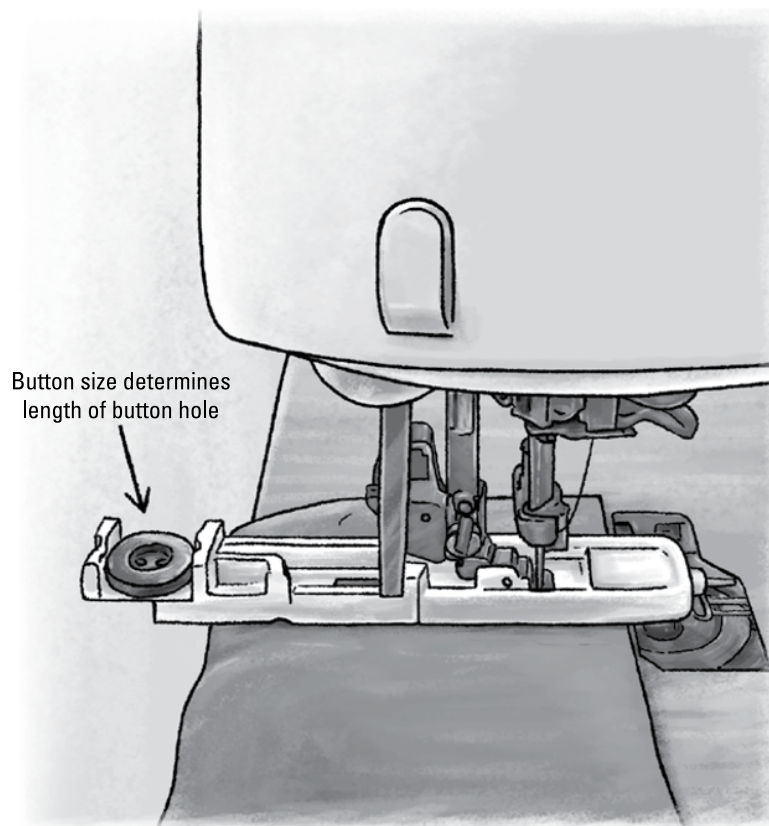
**FIGURE 10-10:**  
Use tape to mark  
your buttonhole  
placement.



When making your first few buttonholes, you may want to place a second piece of tape perpendicular to the first. This keeps you on track so all your buttonholes are straight and parallel. Wondering whether to make a horizontal or vertical buttonhole? I always go with what the pattern guide sheet tells me to do!

## Sewing beautiful buttonholes

You can probably make buttonholes by hand, but unless you have the practiced hand of a master tailor, your buttonholes just don't look right. The sewing machine companies have done a wonderful job of making buttonholes easier to create, and each brand and model has a special way of making them. (See Figure 10-11.)



**FIGURE 10-11:**  
You may have  
a special  
buttonhole foot  
that looks  
like this one.

Buttonholes consist of two long sides made with short, narrow zigzag stitches called *satins*, and with wider zigzag stitches, called *bartacks*, on the ends. Even basic sewing machines have some kind of an automatic buttonhole function

(meaning that you make the buttonhole without turning the fabric), so read your operating manual to determine how the process works with your make and model.



TIP

On a scrap of your fabric, mark and stitch a test buttonhole or two, using your buttonhole foot and the same thread and interfacing that you use in the project. Make sure the scrap is large enough to make a couple of buttonholes because you may not get the length right on the first pass. Then cut open the buttonhole and check to see that the button slides smoothly through the hole. This way, you know that the buttonhole is long enough to fit the button.



REMEMBER

When making a buttonhole, don't backstitch at the beginning and end like you do when sewing a seam. Instead, pull all the threads to the wrong side of the fabric and tie them off. (See Chapter 6 for more on tying off threads.)

## Cutting open buttonholes

Buttonholes are cut open after they're sewn. I open buttonholes two ways: by using the seam ripper, or by using a buttonhole cutter and block. If you plan on making a lot of buttonholes, buy a cutter and block. This tool saves you time and cuts open buttonholes very accurately.



TIP

Prevent your buttonholes from coming undone before their time. Put a drop of seam sealant, such as Fray Check, on the knot on the backside of the buttonhole by dotting it on the thread. Before cutting open the buttonhole, dribble a thin bead of the sealant on the cutting space between the two sides of the buttonhole. Let it dry and then cut open the buttonholes. This way if you accidentally cut a stitch, it won't ravel.

## Using a ripper

Carefully cut open your buttonholes with a ripper by following these steps:

1. **Score the cutting space by running the backside of the ripper blade between the two rows of buttonhole stitches.**

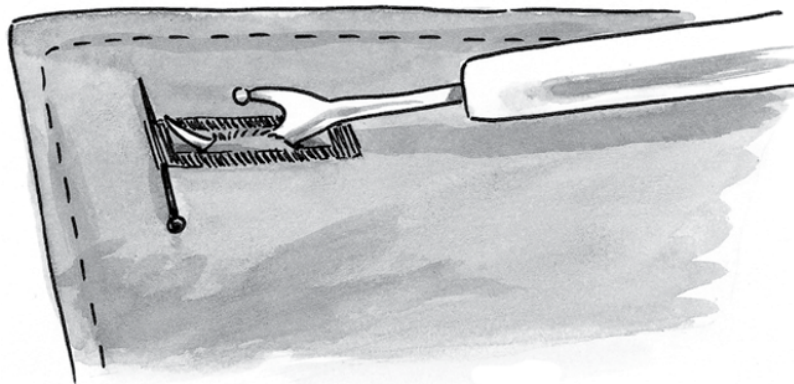
Doing so separates the threads, allowing you to cut the buttonhole open easily without cutting the buttonhole stitches.

2. **Place a pin at the inside edge of one of the bartacks.**

The pin acts like a brake and prevents you from cutting open the buttonhole past the bartack.



3. Starting at the inside edge of the opposite bartack, push the point of the ripper down through the fabric, bringing the point up and through the cutting space in front of the pin, using the same motion you use when pinning.
4. With the point of the ripper up through the cutting space, push hard, cutting the fabric between the sides of the buttonhole, as shown in Figure 10-12.



**FIGURE 10-12:**  
Cut open  
buttonholes  
carefully using a  
seam ripper.



**WARNING**

When cutting open a buttonhole with a seam ripper, make sure it is sharp. A dull ripper can pull and snag the threads between the buttonhole stitches, and if you're impatient, you may even cut too hard and ruin your project.

## Using a cutter and block

These little tools are really great. You can find them through your local sewing machine dealer or online notion source.

Follow these steps to cut open your buttonholes using a cutter and block:

1. **Score the cutting space by running the backside of the ripper blade between the two rows of buttonhole stitches.**

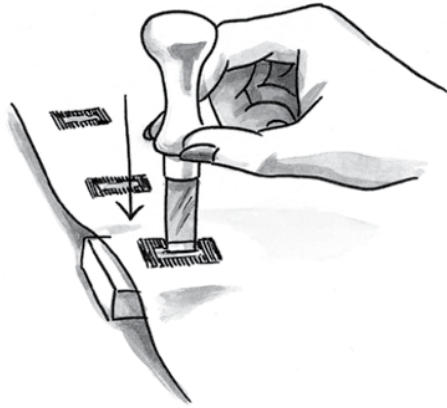
Doing so separates the threads, allowing you to cut the buttonhole open more easily without cutting the buttonhole stitches.

2. **Center the buttonhole over the little wood block.**
3. **Center the cutter blade over the cutting space in the buttonhole, as shown in Figure 10-13.**

4. **Push down firmly on the cutter, cutting through the fabric to the wood block. For heavier fabrics, use one hand to position the cutter and the other to press down firmly on the top for a clean cut.**



With the cutter and block, you can cut open small buttonholes easily by wrapping the buttonhole over one of the edges of the block. You have great control over the small cut.



**FIGURE 10-13:**  
Using a  
buttonhole cutter  
and block cuts  
clean buttonholes  
every time.

## Figuring out button placement



You can mark the button placement before removing the paper pattern piece, but I like marking the button placement *after* I make and cut open the buttonholes because the mark is more accurate.

Follow these steps to mark the button placement:

1. **Hold the project so that the buttonholes and button opening are wrong sides together.**

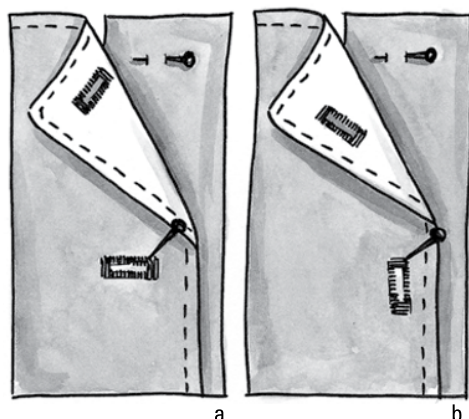
If the project has an overlapping front *placket* (a band of fabric that has topstitching on both sides of the buttonholes like you find on the front of a dress shirt), hold it as though the front placket is buttoned.

2. **Mark the end of the cutting space at the bartack.**

From the buttonhole side of the opening, push a pin straight through the project so that it goes in at the buttonhole opening, right next to the bartack. (See Figure 10-14.) Using a fabric marker, mark the button placement at the pin.

- For horizontal buttonholes, mark button placement just before the bartack. (See Figure 10-14.)

- For vertical buttonholes, mark button placement so that all the buttons are placed at the top of the bartack or are centered between the top and bottom bartacks.
3. **Before sewing on the button by hand or machine (which I cover in the next section), double-check that the button is three-fourths to a full button-diameter's distance from the finished edge and then adjust the placement as needed.**



**FIGURE 10-14:**  
Use a pin to mark  
button placement  
for horizontal (a)  
and vertical (b)  
buttonholes.

## Attaching buttons

For many people, sewing on a button is an introduction into the world of sewing. It's a great way to get started because it shows you the importance of technique when doing anything with a needle and thread — even something small.

You can avoid a mishap by correctly sewing on a button, which you can do either by hand or by using the sewing machine. If I replace or move one button, I sew it on by hand. If I make something that requires sewing on several buttons at once (the front of a shirt or along the top of the button strip used on a duvet cover, as explained in Chapter 16), I use my machine.

### By hand

Follow these steps to sew on a button of any size by hand:

1. **Using a fabric marker or dressmaker's chalk, mark the spot on the project where you want the button to go.**
2. **Pull off a strand of thread 18 to 24 inches long.**

A thread that's longer than 24 inches may tangle and break before you finish sewing on the button.

- 3. Thread the needle (as described in Chapter 5), pulling one end of the thread to meet the other so that you have a double thread.**
- 4. Knot the ends of the thread, as described in Chapter 5.**
- 5. From the top-right side of the project, stab the needle all the way through the fabric so that the knot ends up on the mark.**
- 6. Bring the needle back up and all the way through the fabric, a short stitch (not more than  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch) away from the knot.**
- 7. Place the button over the spot marked by the stitches.**
- 8. Thread the needle through the button's left hole, pushing the button firmly against the surface of the fabric, and then pull the thread up, as shown in Figure 10-15a.**
- 9. Create a *spacer* by placing a toothpick, matchstick, or hand-tapestry needle on top of the button between the holes.**

This technique gives you enough thread to raise the button off the fabric's surface so that you have room to button the buttonhole. The extra room the spacer creates is called a *thread shank*.



TIP

If you're sewing on a button with a built-on shank (a little loop on the underside of a blazer button, for example), the shank of the button acts as an automatic spacer, raising the button off the surface of the garment for easy buttoning, so you don't need the toothpick.

- 10. Push the needle down through the hole on the right (the one directly opposite the hole you started with — see Figure 10-15b). Pull the thread tight.**

Repeat this process, stitching up through the left hole and down through the right hole one more time for each set of holes so that you secure the button with two passes of the needle.

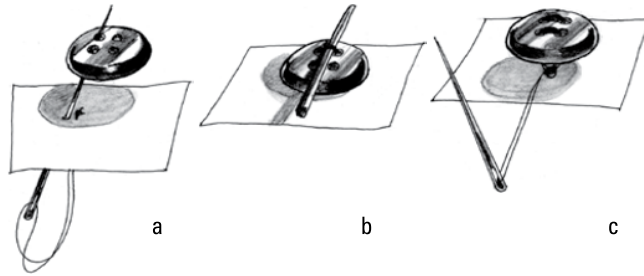
- 11. After you stitch the button on, remove the spacer.**
- 12. Poke the needle through a hole in the button (it doesn't matter which one) so that the needle comes out between the button and the fabric.**

Take a look at what's going on between the button and the fabric: Those connecting threads running out the back of the button into the fabric make the base of the thread shank.

- 13. Wrap the thread around these connecting threads three times or so to secure the thread shank, as shown in Figure 10-15c.**

- 14.** Tie a knot by pushing the needle through a thread loop as it goes around the shank and pulling the thread tight.
- 15.** Repeat Step 14 to make another knot and clip the thread close to the shank.

**FIGURE 10-15:**  
Thread the button on the needle (a), use a spacer to make a thread shank (b), and create a thread shank (c).



## By machine

If you have several buttons to sew on at one time, consider using your machine to help you with the job. To use this technique, you need a glue stick, a button-sewing foot for your machine, or a presser foot shank with a removable presser foot sole. (Check your operating manual to see if your model has this feature.)

- 1.** Using a fabric marker or dressmaker's chalk, mark the spot(s) on the project where you want the button(s) to go.
- 2.** Dab the back of the button with a glue stick and place the first button over the mark.
- 3.** Set your machine like this:
  - *Stitch:* Zigzag
  - *Length:* 0 mm/0 spi
  - *Width:* 4 mm
  - *Foot:* Button-sewing, all-purpose, or foot shank without the sole
  - *Feed dogs:* Down
  - *Needle position:* Left (see Chapter 2)
- 4.** With the presser foot up, turn the flywheel by hand, stabbing the needle through the left hole in the button; lower the presser foot or the foot shank.

For a four-hole button, start with the holes farthest away from you.

- 5. Slide a toothpick, matchstick, or tapestry needle over the button, between the holes and perpendicular to the foot or the foot shank.**

Adding this spacer raises the button off the fabric's surface so that the buttonhole doesn't gap and lies smoothly under the button.

Sometimes the foot has a helpful little groove that holds the spacer in place.

- 6. Verify the needle clears the holes in the button by moving the flywheel by hand to take a couple of zigzag stitches (see Figure 10-16).**

Adjust the stitch width, if necessary.

- 7. Slowly step on the foot control and stitch, counting five stitches — zig left, zag right, zig left, zag right, zig left.**

For a four-hole button, lift the foot and move the project so that the needle is over the front two holes, and then sew five more zigzags to secure the front of the button.

- 8. Move the stitch width to 0 (zero), place the needle over one of the holes, and step on the foot control again, taking 4 to 5 stitches in the same hole.**

This step helps to secure and knot the stitches.

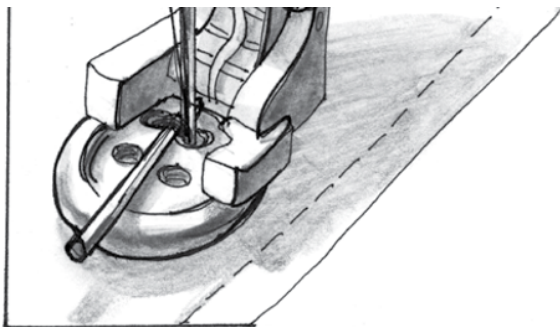
- 9. Lift the foot and remove the project, reeling off a 7- to 8-inch tail of thread.**

- 10. Remove the spacer and save it for reuse.**

- 11. Proceed to the rest of the buttons, repeating Steps 1 through 10 until you've sewn on all the buttons.**

- 12. Pull the needle and bobbin threads between the button and the fabric so that you're ready to create a thread shank, as follows:**

- a. Thread a large-eye tapestry needle with the long thread tail from the needle and, between the button and the fabric, pull the tail through any hole in the button.**



**FIGURE 10-16:**  
Make sure that  
the needle clears  
the buttonholes.

- b. Thread a large-eye tapestry needle with the long thread tail from the bobbin and pull the tail through the fabric between the button and the fabric.*
- c. Thread both tails through the needle's eye and wrap the thread tails around the connecting threads three times or so, creating a thread shank to secure the button.*

**13. Push the needle through a thread loop as it goes around the shank, pulling the thread tight.**

This action ties a knot.

**14. Repeat Step 13 and then clip the thread close to the connecting threads.**

## Three decorative ways to sew on a button

I collect buttons and have a lot of one or two of a kind. So before shopping for buttons, I look through my collection to see if I can create something unique for my project from it. My favorite types of buttons are those with two or four holes. This way I can stack them together and sew them on using floss, pearl cotton, silk ribbon, or yarn. I've even added a bead to the stack for more interest.

You can also sew four-hole buttons on by hand or machine in the traditional “x” or “bartack” style and in an “arrow” or “z” pattern. Check out Figure 10-17 for some interesting ways to sew on buttons.

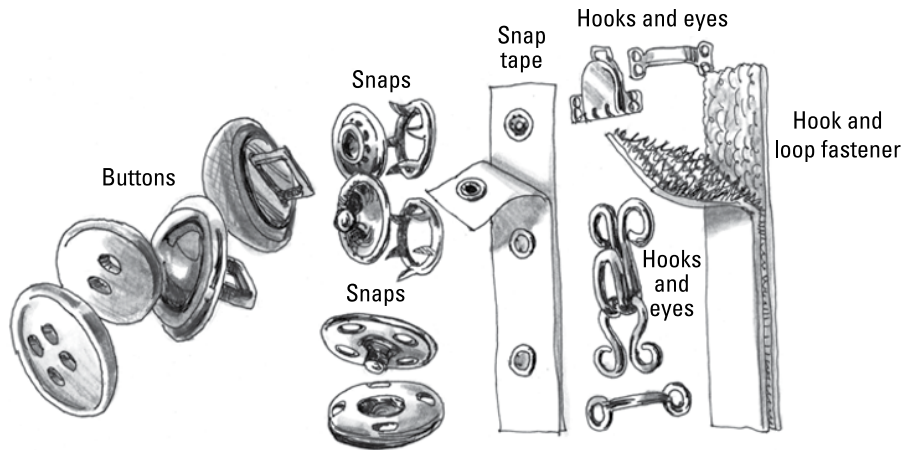


**FIGURE 10-17:**  
Three ways to  
sew on a button.

## Other Fasteners

Without the fasteners described in this section (and shown in Figure 10-18), you couldn't keep your pants up or your shirt closed. In this section, I give you a brief introduction to these closers. You find the specific use and application of many of the fasteners I list here in the projects throughout the book.

**FIGURE 10-18:**  
You find fasteners of all shapes and sizes at your local fabric or online notions store.



All the following fasteners come in a variety of sizes, shapes, and colors. The back of your pattern envelope tells you which (if any) of these fasteners you need and exactly which type and size of fastener to use.

Without further ado, I give you some fabulous fasteners:

- » **Snap:** You use sew-on snaps to close necklines on dresses, blouses, and baby clothes, among other uses. You use the *gripper-type* sport snaps on active sportswear and outerwear.
- » **Snap tape:** Snap tape is a soft twill tape with a row of snaps running its length. Snap tape is as fast to undo as a hook-and-loop fastener and much more flexible. You use it on baby clothes and home décor projects.
- » **Hooks and eyes:** You use hooks and eyes at the top of a zipper to keep the neckline closed and in shape. You can also use a specially designed hook and eye at the waistband of skirts and pants.
- » **Hook-and-loop fastener:** Better known by the trade name Velcro, hook-and-loop fastener comes in many weights, colors, and widths. Some types of this fastener are sew-on, some are fusible; others even have a peel-and-stick backing.



- » Getting around to armhole facings
- » Wrangling with raglan sleeves
- » Discovering the secrets to set-in sleeves

## Chapter **11**

# What's Up Your Sleeves?

**W**hy is it that when you make a “homemade” pie it’s a good thing, but when a top you made looks “homemade,” it’s not? It’s probably because the top doesn’t look like it’s ready- or custom-made, which means the difference between getting comments like, “Oh. . .did you make that?” or compliments like, “Wow, where did you buy that?” Bottom line: More than any part of a garment, sleeves scream *homemade* when you don’t know what you’re doing but can be a breeze with the right know-how.

I start this chapter with a clever cheat: skip the sleeve! Instead, stitch a sleeveless armhole by practicing some basic sewing techniques such as interfacing and stay-stitching. (Hit up Chapters 3 and 6 if you’re scratching your head at these terms.) Next up, I explain how to wrangle the raglan sleeve. It may not be a shoo-in for every shoulder shape, but with the right shoulder pad, it’s a knockout. The grand finale is setting in a sleeve with a factory technique that, with practice, will have you churning out professional-looking sleeves every time.



AUTHOR  
SAYS

Shoulder pads. Really? At the time of writing, they’re making a comeback but with a twist. Instead of putting shoulder pads in every piece of clothing — as they were in the 1980s — today’s designers are using some restraint. Shoulder pads in drapery tops — certainly not. But you’ll find them in power suits, which are also making a comeback.

# Finishing Sleeveless Armholes

Have you ever cut off the sleeves of a T-shirt or sweatshirt to make it sleeveless? Cutting off the sleeves does give you extra room and ventilation, but after a while, the armhole stretches out, never to be the same size again. It's for this reason that when you're making a sleeveless shirt, top, or blouse, you want to finish the armholes with either a facing or binding. Either technique keeps those armholes in shape and looking good for the life of the garment.

## Facing sleeveless armholes

This section focuses on the most common method of finishing off an armhole by facing it for a clean, smooth finish.

If you are using a sewing pattern showing a sleeveless view, a *facing* is a piece of fabric that you reinforce with an extra piece of special fabric called *interfacing*. Interfacing is lighter weight and may be woven or knitted and fusible or not. Its job is to stabilize and reinforce an opening so it won't stretch out of shape. (See Chapter 3 for more on interfacing and how to use them.) You attach an interfacing to a facing; then you stitch the facing to the opening and turn it back toward the inside of the project to finish off the opening. You can attach facings not only to armholes but also to other areas, such as necklines and some hem edges.

Follow these easy steps for the best-finished armholes in town:

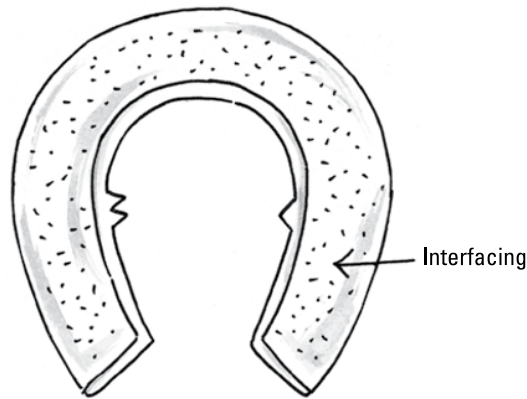
- 1. Cut out and interface the armhole facing using fusible interfacing onto the wrong side of the facing, as shown on your pattern guide sheet instructions and in Figure 11-1.**
- 2. Staystitch the facing and the armhole, as described in your pattern guide sheet.**  
For more on staystitching, see Chapter 6.
- 3. After placing the right sides together and matching the notches, pin and sew the facing together, as shown in Figure 11-2, backstitching at the top and bottom of the seam.**
- 4. Overcast the outside edges of your facing using one of the seam finishes described in Chapter 6.**
- 5. Place the facing in the armhole, right sides together and matching the notches.**



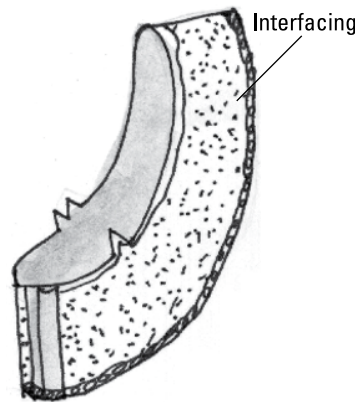
REMEMBER

Double notches are at the back of the armhole; single notches are at the front of the armhole. The seam allowances have different curves, so if you mistakenly place the left facing into the right armhole, the pieces don't match.

**FIGURE 11-1:**  
Interfacing added  
to the wrong side  
of the armhole  
facing provides  
stability.



**FIGURE 11-2:**  
Sew the facing  
together before  
pinning it to  
the armhole.

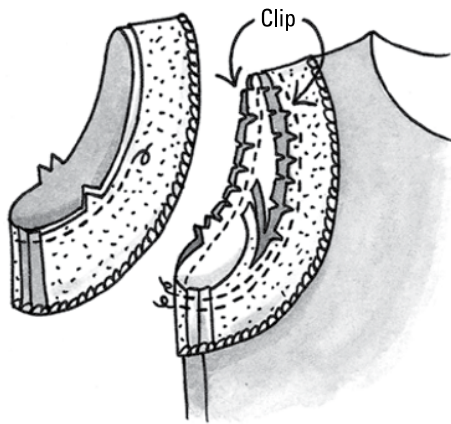


- 6. Starting at the underarm seam, sew the facing on the armhole at the  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seamline.**
- 7. Clip the seam allowance at the inside curves to the staystitching within  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch of the seamline, as shown in Figure 11-3.**

Use your scissor tips to clip almost to the stitching line at the front and back of the armhole. (See your pattern guide sheet and Chapter 6 for info on clipping seams.) Armholes and armhole facings are inside curves, so clipping releases the seam allowance so that it doesn't bunch up when you turn and press the facing to the inside of the garment.

- 8. Trim the facing seam allowance to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch, making it  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch narrower than the other seam allowance.**

Trimming one seam allowance narrower than another is called *grading the seam*. The facing falls automatically toward the narrower seam allowance, making it easier to turn and press the facing.

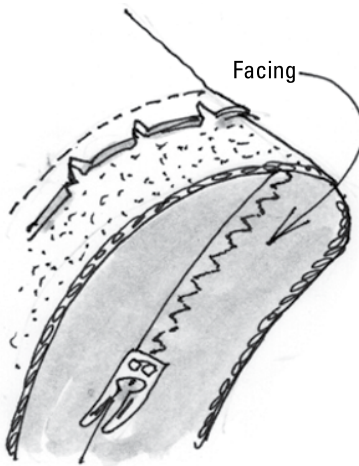


**FIGURE 11-3:**  
Clip into the seam allowance around the armhole and facing.

- 9.** From the wrong side of the fabric, press the seam allowance toward the facing.
- 10.** Understitch the facing seam, sewing  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch away from the seamline on the facing side of the seam allowance, as shown in Figure 11-4.
- 11.** Press the facing toward the inside of the garment and tack down the facing by stitching-in-the-ditch.

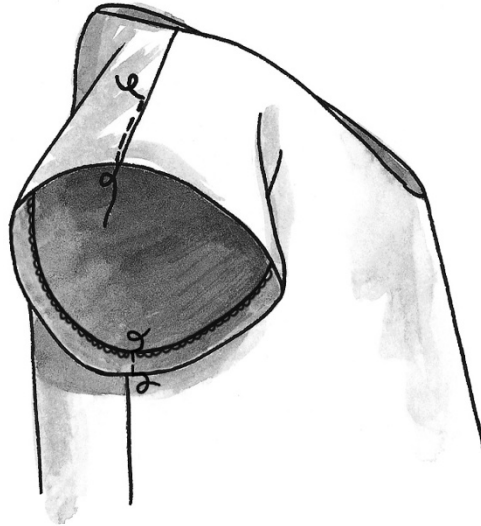
Understitching helps the facing turn toward the inside of the garment and stay there. (See Chapter 6 for more information on understitching.)

See Figure 11-5 for an illustration, and check out Chapter 6 for more stitching-in-the-ditch info.



**FIGURE 11-4:**  
Understitch the facing seam.

Sewing from the right side of the garment, center the ditch of the seam under the needle. Sew, guiding the stitches so that they bury themselves in the ditch of the seam. Don't backstitch; simply pull the threads to the facing side and tie them off. (See Chapter 6 for the best way to tie off threads.)



**FIGURE 11-5:**  
Secure the  
armhole facing by  
stitching-  
in-the-ditch.

## Sewing exposed binding to sleeveless armholes

You can use binding as a particularly clean way to finish an edge on an armhole, neckline, or other hem edge. You sew a doubled band of fabric to the wrong side of the garment, bring the folded edge of the binding over the seam allowance toward the right side of the garment, and edgestitch it in place. This commercial binding method ensures a sensational ready-to-wear look on any bound edge.



REMEMBER

This technique works best on light- to mid-weight fabrics.

### Choosing the binding fabric

The best type of binding to use is a bias-cut woven fabric or a knit that's cut across the grain and preferably the same fabric as the project (woven for wovens and knit for knits) or slightly lighter in weight.

Which type of fabric should you choose? Look at the fabric you're working with and match the trim with the fabric by color, fiber content (see Chapter 3 for more

on fibers), and *hand* (how well it drapes after you put it on the edge of the project). Also read the back of the pattern envelope to see what the pattern company recommends. Bias-cut woven fabric and cross-grain knit stretch, so either can shape smoothly to a curved edge such as an armhole or neckline. (Check out Chapter 4 to find out more about bias and grainlines.)

## Cutting the binding

When cutting your own binding, cut woven fabric on the bias or knits across the grain. Cut the fabric into a strip four times the finished width, plus another  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch for the seam allowances (two  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seam allowances =  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch). So for a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch finished binding width, you start with a strip that's  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide. I always cut the binding a little longer than I need so I don't run out.

## Sewing the binding

Follow these steps to construct the binding that goes around the edge of the armhole:

### 1. Trim the garment armhole seam allowance to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch.

When working with a woven fabric, use pinking shears for trimming because “pinkers” automatically notch the seam allowance for you, making it easier to work with. (See Chapter 6 for more information on notching seams.)

When working on knits, trim the seam using straight cut scissors or shears. If you use pinking shears, they will snag and tear at the fabric and ruin your project.



WARNING

### 2. Staystitch around the trimmed armhole under the arm from notch to notch, as shown in Figure 11-6.

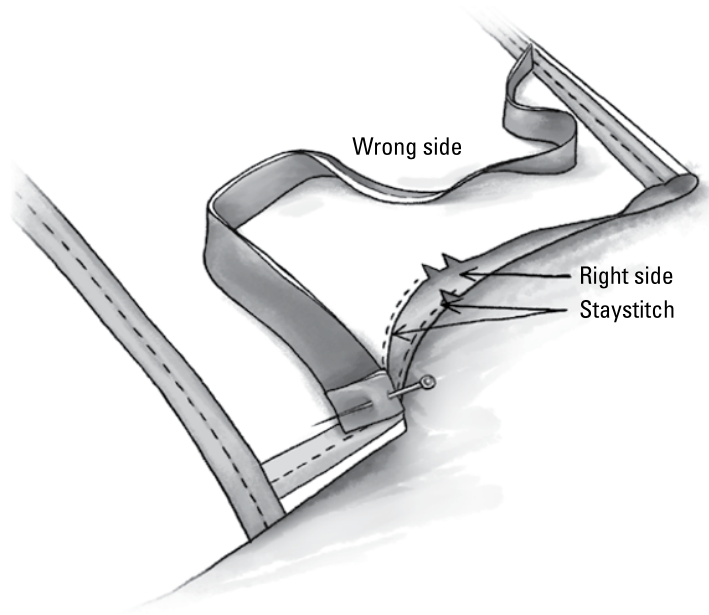
Chapter 6 tells you more about staystitching.

### 3. Fold and press the binding in half the long way so that the *wrong* sides of the fabric are together.

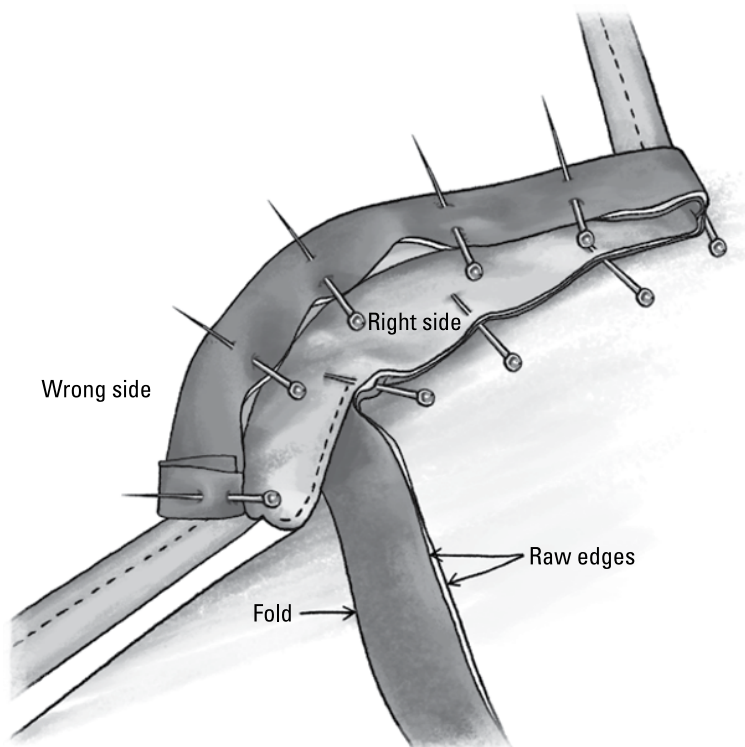
### 4. Fold over one short end of the binding $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, and press.

This end overlaps the binding at the other end, giving the opening a clean, finished look. (Refer to Figure 11-6.)

### 5. Starting slightly to the backside of the underarm seam (and with the folded end first), pin the binding to the *wrong side* of the garment so that all the raw edges are even, as shown in Figure 11-7.



**FIGURE 11-6:**  
Staystitch from  
notch to notch  
under the arm.



**FIGURE 11-7:**  
Fold, press, and  
pin the binding to  
the wrong side  
of the garment  
so the raw  
edges are even.

6. When you get back to where you started pinning on the binding, overlap the free end over the folded end of the binding by about ½ inch, and cut off the excess from the free end of the binding strip, as shown in Figure 11-8.

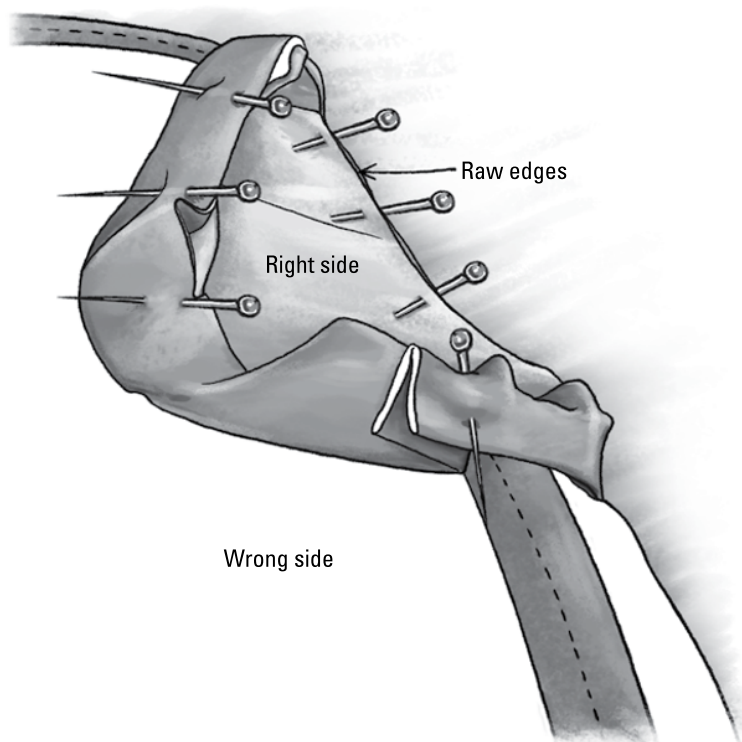
7. Set your machine like this:

For a woven fabric:

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 2.5–3.5 mm/10–12 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

For a knit fabric: (this small zigzag stretches when the seam is stretched)

- *Stitch:* Zigzag
- *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/8–10 spi
- *Width:* 1 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

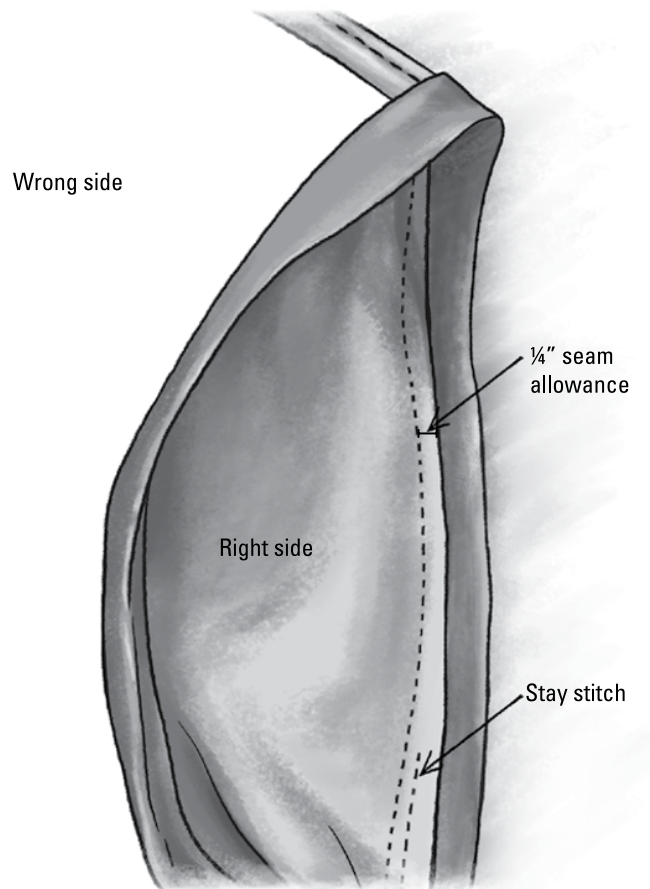


**FIGURE 11-8:**  
Overlap the  
free end over  
the folded end of  
the binding by  
about ½ inch.

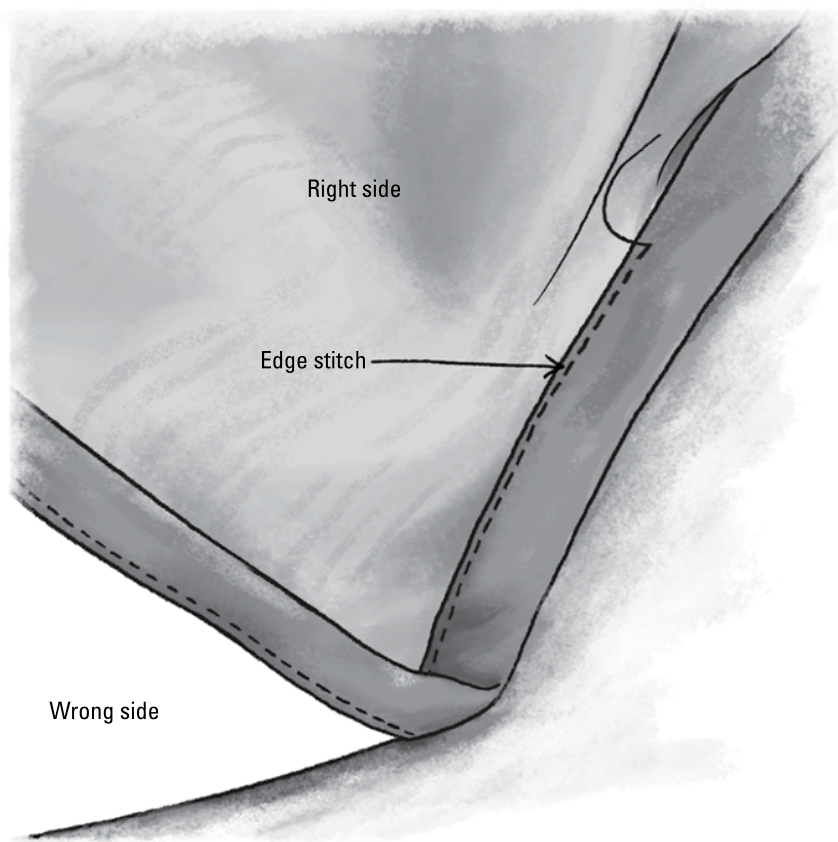


- 8.** Sew the binding to the armhole using a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seam allowance, backstitching at the end of the seam, as shown in Figure 11-9.
  - 9.** With the wrong side of the garment up, press the seam allowance toward the binding side.
  - 10.** Fold, pin, and press the band in shape around the armhole opening.

Fold the edge of the band over the opening, toward the right side of the project, so that the folded edge of the band covers the seam allowance and the previous stitching line.
  - 11.** Edgestitch the band to the opening, as shown in Figure 11-10, guiding  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch from the folded edge of the band.
- See Chapter 6 for more on edgestitching.



**FIGURE 11-9:**  
Sew the binding  
to the armhole  
using a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch  
seam allowance.



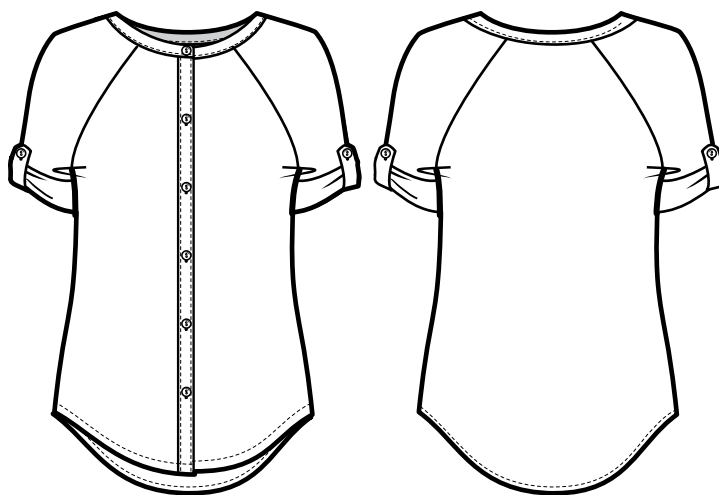
**FIGURE 11-10:**  
Edgestitch the  
band to  
the opening.

After edgestitching the exposed band around the armhole, turn your project right side out and press. Gorgeous!

## Rarin' to Sew Raglan Sleeves

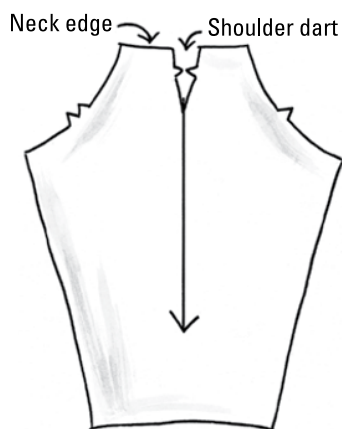
You find raglan sleeves on garment tops from sweatshirts to cashmere sweater sets. What makes them different from traditional set-in sleeves? The seams on the front run from the neck edge diagonally across to the underarm and up the back to the neckline, making them a lot easier to sew than set-in sleeves. Check out the shirt with finished raglan sleeves in Figure 11-11.

Because the raglan sleeve covers the shoulder, when you're working on a woven fabric, a seam or dart shapes the top of the sleeve so that it fits smoothly at the shoulder line. The pattern piece for a raglan sleeve in Figure 11-12 shows a dart sewn at the top, the most common way of shaping it to your shoulder.



**FIGURE 11-11:**  
The raglan sleeve  
is easy to sew  
and very comfy.

*Fathima Flats/Adobe Stock Photos*



**FIGURE 11-12:**  
When you're  
working with  
woven fabrics,  
the raglan sleeve  
pattern piece  
includes a dart in  
the middle so it  
conforms to  
your shoulder.

Follow these steps to sew in a raglan sleeve:

**1. Sew the shoulder dart and press it open so it looks like Figure 11-13.**

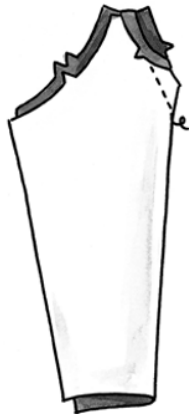
Placing the right sides together, pin the shoulder dart, as shown in your pattern guide sheet. Sew the dart, starting from the wide end and stitching to the point. (See Chapter 9 for more information on sewing darts.)

**2. Pin the sleeve to the garment by matching the notches and pinning the right sides together.**

When you're pinning the raglan sleeves to the front and back pattern fabric pieces, the project can get large and unwieldy. Make it easier on yourself and pin it together on a large tabletop.



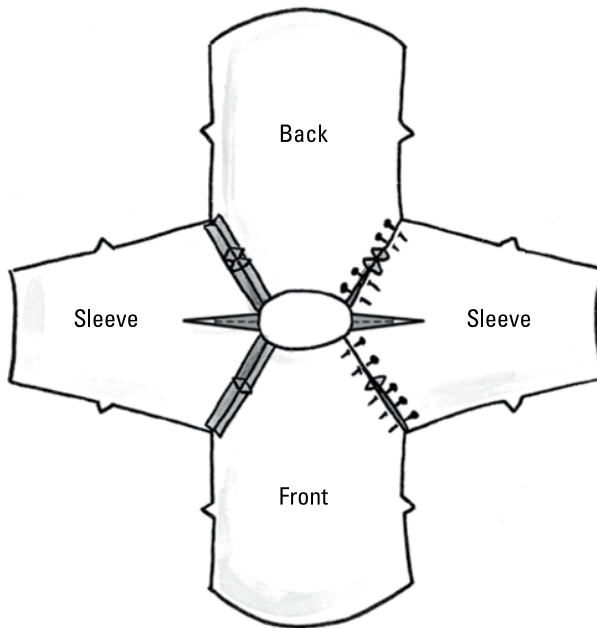
**TIP**



**FIGURE 11-13:**  
Sew the dart and  
press it open for  
a smooth fit.

- 3. Sew the sleeve to the garment at the recommended seam allowance, as shown in Figure 11-14.**

*Note:* The figure shows notches on the sleeves, front, and back of the garment, but most simple knit patterns no longer include notches.



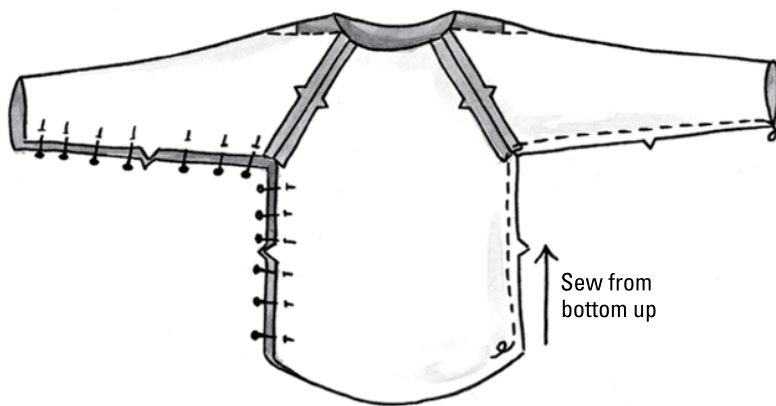
**FIGURE 11-14:**  
After you sew  
raglan sleeves  
onto the front  
and back pattern  
pieces, your  
top really  
takes shape.

4. **Starting at the bottom and with the right sides together, sew the garment side seams at the recommended seam allowance, and backstitch on both ends of the seam, as shown in Figure 11-15.**

By sewing the side seams after putting in the sleeve, the underarm seam won't bunch up and cut off the circulation under your arm.

5. **Press the front and back shoulder seams open, from the notches up to the neckline.**

See Chapter 5 for tips and tricks for perfect pressing.



**FIGURE 11-15:**  
Sew the project  
together from the  
bottom up.

## Taking On Set-In Sleeves

Set-in sleeves have a seam that goes all the way around your arm where your arm connects to your torso. Instead of going diagonally across your body from the neckline, as with raglan sleeves, a set-in sleeve starts at the underarm (or arm-pit), travels up, runs over your shoulder, and then goes straight back down again to the underarm. Figure 11-16 shows a typical set-in sleeve.

Here's the big news: Set-in sleeves are bigger than the armholes they go into so you can comfortably move your arms around. This extra fabric in the sleeves causes a lot of sewers major sleeve-setting difficulties. So how do you get the sleeve in there? Shrink it? Yes and no. In this section I share some tricks with you to help make set-in sleeves less mysterious. The following easestitch-plus is one of my favorite tried-and-true methods of getting a set-in sleeve ready for the armhole.

**FIGURE 11-16:**  
The seam of a set-in sleeve circles around the top of your arm and down to the underarm.



## Using easestitch-plus to prepare traditional set-in sleeves

Traditional set-in sleeves are the most challenging because you have to make the circumference of the sleeve smaller to fit into the armhole opening *without* gathering the sleeve to fit. You can accomplish this feat by a type of *easestitching*. In this section, I show you a more extreme version called *easestitch-plus*, in which you manipulate the fabric to get it to shrink enough so that the sleeve fits the armhole.

Easestitching-plus varies from gathering because instead of seeing a visible line of gathering, you see a line of stitching that slightly cinches in the sleeve cap — looking like a little pucker — without the pinched-in look of gathers. This way when the sleeve is set in the armhole, it stands slightly away from the sleeve seam, providing the necessary room for your arm to move comfortably in the garment. Here's how to use this easy technique to get your sleeves ready to set into the armholes:

- 1. Using a fabric marker, transfer the dots on the armhole and sleeve seamlines from the paper pattern pieces to the fabric. Also mark the top of the sleeve cap.**

These dots are additional match points. If you don't find a dot at the top of the sleeve cap pattern, just mark one there or make a tiny clip into the seam allowance. This way, when you put in the sleeve, the mark at the top of the sleeve cap matches up with the shoulder seam.

## 2. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 2.5 mm/12 spi for fine fabrics; 3.5 mm/10 spi for mid-weight to heavy fabrics
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose
- *Upper tension:* Tighten slightly
- *Needle position (optional):* Far right

## 3. Position the sleeve under the needle so that the wrong side faces up and the needle starts at one of the notches on the sleeve.

You do easestitching-plus inside the seam allowance. Guide the sleeve so that you sew ½ inch from the raw edge.

If you decide to move the needle position on your machine all the way to the right, when using the ⅝-inch guide on the needle plate, you will actually be sewing ½ inch from the raw edge and inside the seam allowance.



## 4. Lower the presser foot, and as you begin sewing, hold your index finger firmly behind the foot so that the fabric bunches and piles up behind it, as shown in Figure 11-17.

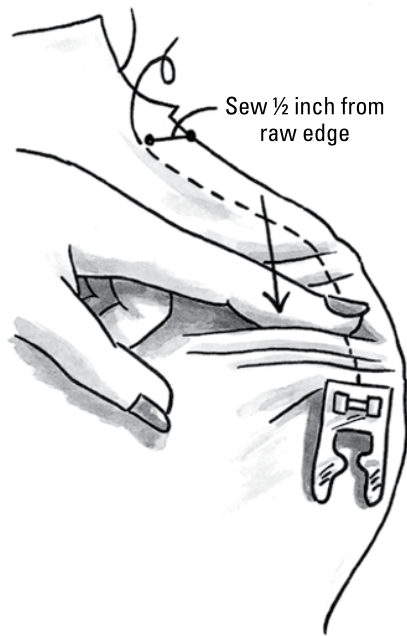
## 5. When the fabric piles up to the point you can't hold it any longer, release the fabric, and then repeat the process until you easestitch-plus the sleeve cap from notch to notch.

This technique eases in the fabric automatically without stitching in unwanted tucks or gathers. Your sleeve will look like Figure 11-18.

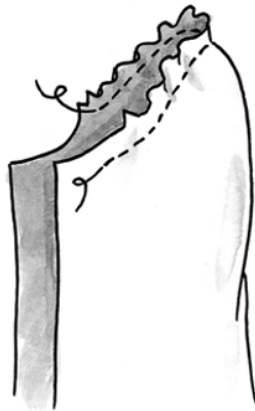
Now that your sleeve is ready to sew into the armhole, you have a choice of whether you want to sew the sleeve in flat or sew it in the round. Both methods have advantages and disadvantages.

- » It's easier to sew a set-in sleeve flat.
- » The project generally fits better and is easier to alter when the sleeve is set in the round.

See the following sections for the best way to do both.



**FIGURE 11-17:**  
Hold your finger firmly behind the presser foot so the fabric bunches up.



**FIGURE 11-18:**  
Your set-in sleeve cap is eased in so it fits into the smaller armhole opening.

## Setting sleeves in flat

*Setting sleeves in flat* means that the side seams of the shirt or bodice are open (not sewn yet) and the sleeves aren't sewn into a tube. Even if the pattern says to sew the underarm sleeve seam first, try this simple flat method. By sewing with the sleeve against the feed dogs of your sewing machine (rather than the other way around), the excess sleeve fabric works itself into the armhole seam almost automatically. Follow these steps to relieve your sleeve-sewing worries:



1. **Sew and press the shoulder seam of the shirt as the pattern instructs you and then open the shirt flat so that the right side of the fabric is up.**
2. **Pin the sleeve to the shirt, right sides together, matching the front and back notches and centering the sleeve cap at the shoulder seam.**

You may want to use a lot of pins until you have sewn a few sleeves.



REMEMBER

Double notches are at the back of the armhole and sleeve; single notches are at the front of the armhole and sleeve. The seam allowances have different curves, so if you get the left sleeve into the right armhole, the pieces don't match, and the garment really feels funny when you wear it. (Ask me how I know this.)

3. **Sewing with the sleeve side down against the feed dogs, stitch the sleeve into the shirt at the  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch seamline.**



TIP

The feed dogs, which are directly under the presser foot, feed the underlayer of fabric a little faster than the top layer of fabric. So by sewing with the sleeve side down, the feed dogs ease in just enough fullness so the sleeve fits perfectly into the armhole.

4. **Trim the seam allowance to  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch under the arm from the notch to the underarm seam only. Repeat for the second sleeve.**
5. **Overcast the edges of both trimmed seam allowances together by using the three-step zigzag on your sewing machine or serging them together.**

Overcasting this narrow seam allowance together gives the underarm more strength and overall comfort.

See Chapter 6 for the details of overcasting.

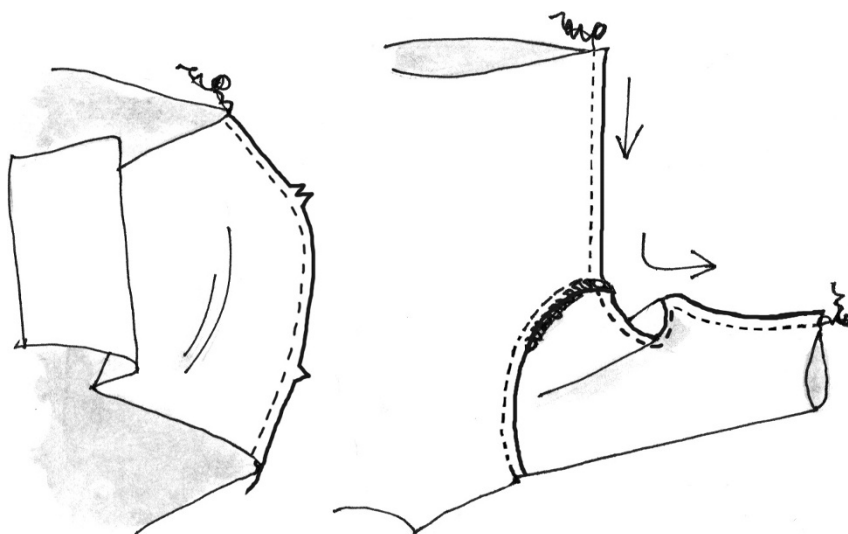
6. **Pin and sew the garment side seam and underarm at the  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch or  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch seamline, sewing the entire side seam and underarm sleeve seam in one step.**

Start sewing the seam from the project's hem edge and up through the underarm seam, as shown in Figure 11-19. At the intersection of the two seams under the arm, for light-to mid-weight fabrics, pin the seam allowance toward the sleeve; for heavier fabrics, pin the intersecting seam open.

## Setting sleeves in the round

*Setting sleeves in the round* means that you sew together the side seams of the shirt or bodice, stitch the sleeves into tubes at the underarm seam, and then attach the sleeves to the garment.

**FIGURE 11-19:**  
Start sewing the  
side and sleeve  
seam starting at  
the hem edge.



The information in this section may look more involved than what you see in the pattern guide sheet instructions, but by providing you with these easy steps, I assure you success:

1. **Cut, mark, and easestitch-plus your sleeves, as described in the earlier section “Using easestitch-plus to prepare traditional set-in sleeves.”**
2. **Place, pin, and sew the garment, right sides together, at the side and shoulder seams.**
3. **Place, pin, and sew the sleeve, right sides together, following your pattern guide sheet instructions.**
4. **Press the side seams and sleeve seams open or to one side.**

See Chapter 5 for more on pressing seams.

5. **Pin the sleeve into the armhole, right sides together, pinning at the notches, dots, and underarm seams, as shown in Figure 11-20.**

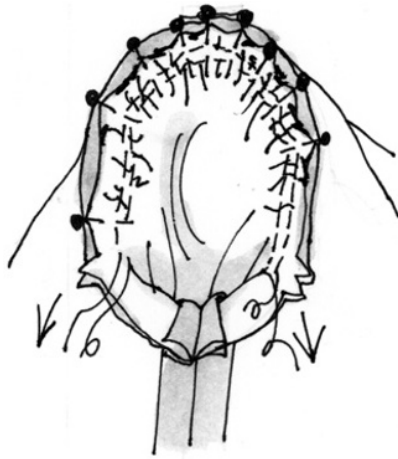


**REMEMBER**

Make sure you match notches on the correct side of the garment: double notches at the back of the armhole and sleeve; single notches at the front of the armhole and sleeve. The garment won't look or feel right if you sew in the sleeves backward.

6. **Stitch the sleeve to the armhole at the  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seamline, all the way around.**

If your sewing machine has a free arm, slip the sleeve over it, garment side up, and sew. Be sure that the stitches at the beginning and end of the seam cross one another to prevent the underarm seam from coming unstitched.



**FIGURE 11-20:**  
Pin the sleeve  
into the armhole,  
matching dots  
and front and  
back notches.

- 7. Starting at the notches, clip into the seam allowance, clipping to within  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch of the seamline at the inside curves under the arm.**
- 8. Trim the seam allowance to  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch from notch to notch, cutting away the excess seam allowance from both the garment and the sleeve *at the underarm seam only*.**

This way, the sleeve fits comfortably and you don't cut off the circulation under your arms.

- 9. Overcast the trimmed underarm seams together from notch to notch. Tie off threads at either end of the overcast edges.**

Overcast the raw edges together by using a three-step zigzag stitch with your sewing machine or three-thread overlock with your serger. (See Chapter 6 for more on overcasting.)

- 10. Press the sleeve seam flat and together all the way around, pressing from the seamline out to the raw edge, and then press the seam open. Gently press the seam back together.**

This pressing process gives the sleeve the proper shape and finish at the shoulder line.

If you have a pressing ham, press the armhole seam over the curves of the ham. This handy tool helps to comfortably shape the sleeve into the armhole.



#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Putting on patch pockets that hold everything from pennies to a puppy
- » Preparing pocket patterns for practically every ensemble
- » Adding pockets aplenty to a winter scarf — because mittens need a home too

## Chapter **12**

# Pockets: More Than Just a Place to Put Your Hands

**P**ockets are perfect pouches sewn into everything from pants to PJs. Their purpose? Popular places for your portable paraphernalia. Although there's a plethora of pocket types, in this book I focus on patch pockets. Placed on a project like a knee patch, one side of the patch is left open so you can pocket your precious possessions.

Stick with me, as I also show you how to sew up pockets of all proportions using shortcuts straight from the pros. And for the grand finale, an easy project that adds pocket panache and practicality to a pretty winter scarf.

## Putting Together Patch Pockets

In this section you cut, shape, and stitch unlined patch pockets, one with square corners and another with curved corners. Then you discover the most professional pocket-application technique ever.



TIP

But how do you know what pocket style is best to make? Here's my formula: If you want to de-emphasize a round body type, select a pocket and garment style that has square and rectangular lines. To fill out a thin and angular figure, choose pocket and garment styles that are curved and rounded.

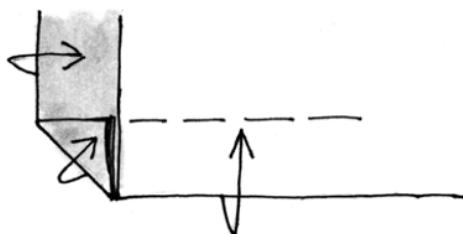
Pocket placement is also an important consideration. If you're busty, placing a curved pocket over the bust is a bad choice. Or you may want to omit the pocket altogether. For those of us with generous backsides, don't even think about sewing curved patch pockets in that area of the physique — they just emphasize the obvious.

## Making unlined patch pockets with square corners

I like sewing this pocket on shirts, even when the pattern doesn't call for one. This corner mitering technique works really well, so you can have the squarest corners going. Just follow these steps:

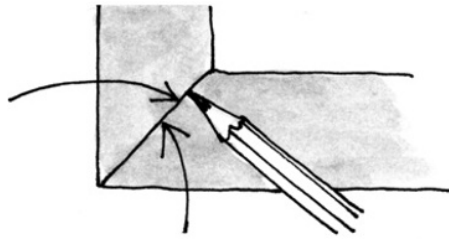
1. **Cut out the square-corner pocket by following the pattern guide sheet instructions or by using one of the pocket patterns found in this chapter. (See the section "Using Your Own Pocket Patterns" later in this chapter.)**
2. **Using your sewing machine, overcast the top edge of the pocket facing.**  
See Chapter 6 for more information on finishing raw edges.
3. **Press the pocket side seams toward the wrong side of the pocket.**
4. **Begin to *miter* each corner by folding up and pressing a triangle the width of the seam allowance at both pocket corners, as shown in Figure 12-1.**
5. **Fold up and press the bottom of the pocket on the seamline, enclosing the triangle in the seam allowance, as shown in Figure 12-2.**

This is *mitering* a corner. You can use this technique in many different ways when sewing.



**FIGURE 12-1:**  
Fold up and press  
a triangle at both  
pocket corners.

**FIGURE 12-2:**  
Fold to enclose  
the triangle in the  
seam allowance.



**6. Mark the angle of the miter, including both the edge of the fold and the angle (refer to Figure 12-2).**

The best marker for this is a *fabric marker* with a felt-tipped point because the ink rubs off all around the felt tip. Draw a line following the angle of the miter so that the ink of the marker touches both fabric edges on the angle.

**7. Unfold one pocket corner as shown in Figure 12-3, and darken the marks made in Step 6; this line marks the stitching line.**

When connected, the marked lines make a large triangle in the corner, which becomes the *stitching line* of the miter.

**8. Trim the seam allowance to ¼ inch, as shown in Figure 12-3.**

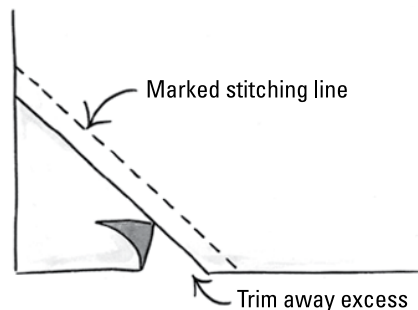
**9. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* Appropriate for the fabric (see Chapter 5)
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

**10. Fold the triangle in half so that the side and bottom pocket seams are right sides together; stitch the miter on the marked line.**

Turn the corner right side out and check that the miter is at a right angle. If not, rip out the seam, adjust, and re sew.

**FIGURE 12-3:**  
Trim the seam  
allowance to  
¼ inch at the  
pocket corners.



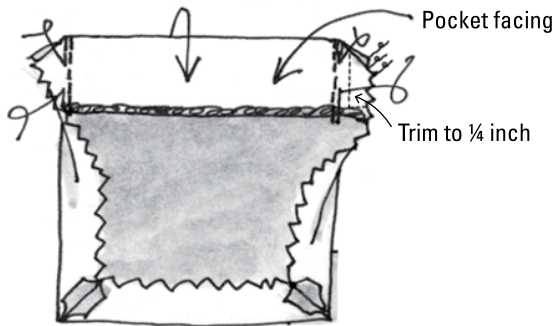
- 11.** Repeat for the other corner of the pocket. Press the corner seams open.
- 12.** Fold the pocket facing (the top edge of the pocket) on the fold line toward the right side of the pocket. Sew the seams at both sides of the pocket, backstitching at the top and bottom, as shown in Figure 12-4.

The “facing” for this pocket is simply the hem at the top of the pocket giving it a clean, finished look.

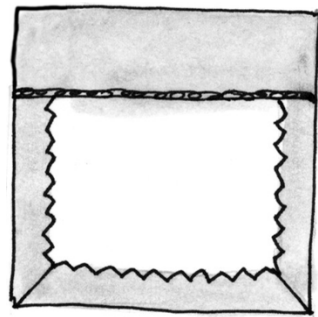
- 13.** Trim away the excess seam allowance at the facing corners, as shown in Figure 12-4.

This removes the extra bulk so you don't have an unsightly lump in the corners when you turn the pocket right side out.

- 14.** Turn the pocket right side out, as shown in Figure 12-5, and press before attaching it to your project.



**FIGURE 12-4:**  
Fold the pocket facing toward the right side and stitch.



**FIGURE 12-5:**  
Turn the pocket right side out and press before attaching it to your project.



**TIP**

To get nice square corners in a pocket, use a tool called a pocket or point turner. First, turn the pocket right side out. Then gently push the point of the tool into a corner. The point of the tool pushes and flattens out the excess seam allowance to square up each corner before you press it. Look for this handy tool at your local fabric store or favorite online sewing supply source.



# Making unlined patch pockets with curved corners

The biggest challenge with a curved-corner pocket is making both curves the same shape. Follow these steps and see how easy the job becomes when you use the right tools:

**1. Cut out the curved-corner pocket by following the pattern guide sheet instructions or by using one of the pocket patterns found in “Using Your Own Pocket Patterns” later in this chapter.**

**2. Using your sewing machine or serger, overcast the top edge of the pocket facing.**

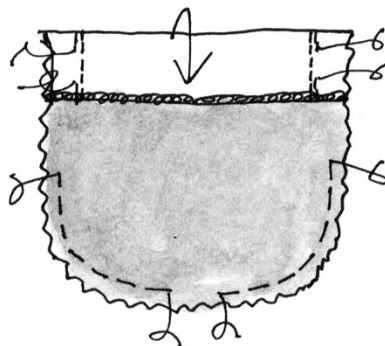
See Chapter 6 for more information on finishing raw edges.

**3. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* Appropriate for the fabric (see Chapter 5)
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

**4. Fold the pocket facing (the top edge of the pocket) on the fold line toward the right side of the pocket. Sew the seams at both sides of the pocket, backstitching at the top and bottom, as shown in Figure 12-6.**

This hem at the top of the pocket serves as a facing, giving your pocket a clean, finished look.



**FIGURE 12-6:**  
Easestitch-plus  
around each  
pocket corner.

## 5. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch*: Straight
- *Length*: 3.5–4 mm/6–7 spi
- *Width*: 0 mm
- *Foot*: All-purpose



TIP

## 6. Easestitch-plus to shape the curved corners, as shown in Figure 12-6.

Check out Chapter 11 for instructions on easestitch-plus.

Sewing with the wrong side of the fabric up, easestitch-plus from about 1½ inches above the curve to 1½ inches to the other side of the curve, sewing ¼ inch from the raw edge; then repeat for the other pocket corner.

## 7. Press and shape the corners of the pocket around a pocket former.



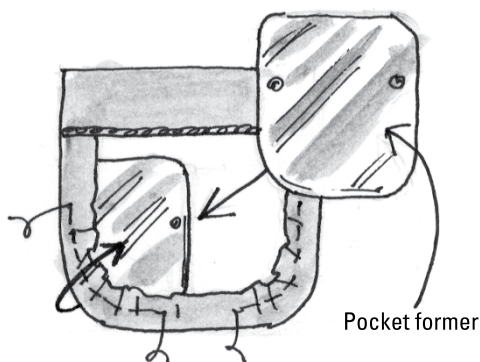
AUTHOR  
SAYS

Making sure that both pocket corners come out in exactly the same shape is a challenge — to say the least. My favorite tool for this task is a *pocket former*, a flat 4-inch aluminum square that has different curves on each corner. (Check it out in Figure 12-7.) You can find pocket formers at your local fabric store or online sewing supply source.



TIP

If you can't locate a pocket former, make one out of a piece of cardboard. Cut a 4- $\times$ -4-inch square of cardboard. (Cardboard found on the back of pads of paper or a piece of a manila folder work well.) Set a small round saltshaker or other round container in the corner and then trace around the bottom curve of the container with a pencil, creating a smooth curve at the corner. Trim the corner by following your pencil line; the resulting pattern is your pocket former. The cardboard deteriorates after a few uses, so if you find yourself making a lot of pockets, buy a pocket former tool.



**FIGURE 12-7:**  
Use a pocket  
former to shape  
your corners.

With the wrong side of the pocket up, snug the gentlest curve of the pocket former into one of the corners and gently steam-press the seam allowance up to the seamline, shaping the curve of the pocket corner around the curve of the pocket former.

8. **Trim away the excess seam allowance at the corners.** (You can read more about trimming outside corners in Chapter 6.)
9. **Turn the pocket right side out and press before sewing it to your project.**

## Attaching patch pockets

Attach your pocket the easy way by edgestitching it in place by following these steps:

1. **Pin your finished patch pocket to the project by following your pattern guide instructions.**

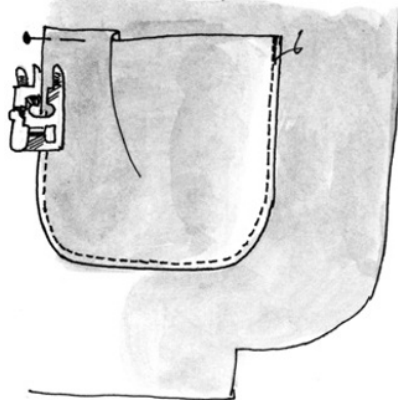


TIP

Patch pockets are usually intended to hold something, so instead of placing them so that you have to stitch them flat as a pancake to the project, position them so that they have a little slack at the top, as shown in Figure 12-8.

2. **Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* Appropriate for the fabric (see Chapter 5)
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* Edgestitch or blind hem
- *Needle position (optional):* Adjust the needle position so that you sew  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch from the edge of the pocket



**FIGURE 12-8:**  
Leave a little slack at the top of the pocket to make sure it's functional.



TIP

### 3. Edgestitch around the pocket.

Read more about edgestitching in Chapter 6.

Guide the edge of the pocket along the blade in the foot, backstitching at the top of the pocket. If you topstitched this pocket and don't see it getting a lot of tough wear and tear, don't backstitch. Instead, pull the threads to the back and tie them off. (See Chapter 6 for more information on backstitching and tying off threads.)

## Using Your Own Pocket Patterns

Sometimes I just want to put a pocket on a project, even though the pocket's not part of the original pattern. When the inspiration strikes, I don't rifle through other patterns or buy another pattern to find just the right pocket; instead, I dig into my reserve of pocket patterns. In this section, I show you how to make three different pocket patterns.

For instance, you can make three different pocket patterns from the shirt pocket pattern in Figure 12-9: rectangular, rounded, and chevron.

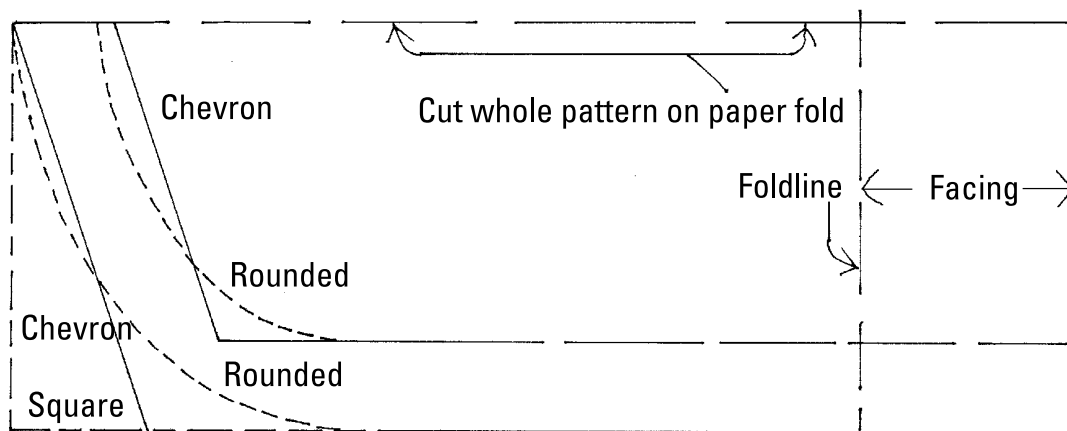
1. Find a piece of pattern tracing material or leftover pattern tissue that's at least the length of the pocket patterns in Figure 12-9. Fold it in half so that the fold is vertical.
2. Place the pocket pattern under the pattern paper, lining up the pattern on the fold of the pattern paper.
3. Trace off the desired pocket by following the key in Figure 12-10.
4. Cut out your pocket pattern on the cutting line and open up the pattern flat, as shown in Figure 12-10.



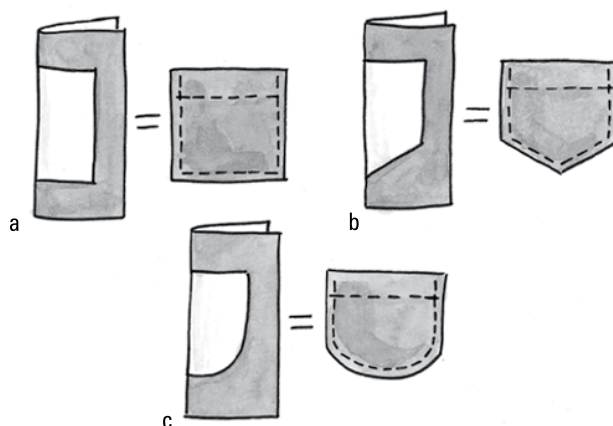
TIP

While you're at it, why not trace off all three styles? You can have a ready pocket pattern resource for any shape when you need it! After you trace off these pocket patterns, safely store them between the pages of this chapter.

**FIGURE 12-9:**  
Use this guide to  
pattern your  
pocket in a  
rectangular,  
rounded, or  
chevron shape.



**FIGURE 12-10:**  
Cut out and  
unfold your  
pocket patterns  
to reveal  
square (a),  
chevron (b), and  
rounded (c)  
pocket shapes.



## Sew Simple Project: Four-Pocket Winter Scarf

Prepare to wrap your neck in a cozy cocoon with this four-pocket scarf project. Imagine a scarf so smart, it carries your essentials while keeping you toasty warm. This isn't just a scarf; it's a snack-stasher, cell phone carrier, and chilly day champion, all rolled into one stylish accessory. So, grab your sewing machine and let's pocket up those scarf ends and brave the frost with flair!

### Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

True confession: I saw a scarf like this online and thought, "Well, I can make *that*." So, when thrifting, I found this \$3.00 "like cashmere" acrylic scarf that looked like it had never been worn. Score! Then, in about 30 minutes (give or take), I stitched up the four-pocket scarf you see in the color insert.

Here's what you need:

- » Sewing Survival Kit
- » A fringed neck scarf 55–60 inches long or longer including the fringe (the longer the scarf the better) and approximately 6–8 inches wide



**TIP**

For easy sewing, find a woven scarf. Knit scarves are a pain to work with because they stretch and distort when sewing. And if you plan on washing the scarf, try to find one that's washable. If it's wool, you'll need to send it to the dry cleaner.

# Instructions

Follow these steps to create your two- to four-pocket scarf:

1. Lay out the scarf on a long, flat surface.
2. Turn up one end about 7½ inches and pin, as shown in Figure 12-11a.

This will become a pocket at the end of the scarf.

3. Fold down a 1½-inch cuff and pin, as shown in Figure 12-11b.

If your scarf has fringe, measure your cuff from the cuff fold to where the fringe starts, as in Figure 12-11a.

4. Gently press both folded edges using a coolish iron.

When pressing, match the iron temperature to the fiber content of the scarf. If you're using a thrifted scarf and aren't sure of the fiber content, err on the side of a cooler iron.

5. Fold the scarf in half the long way, wrong sides together, and pin-mark the center fold of the pocket, as shown in Figure 12-12.

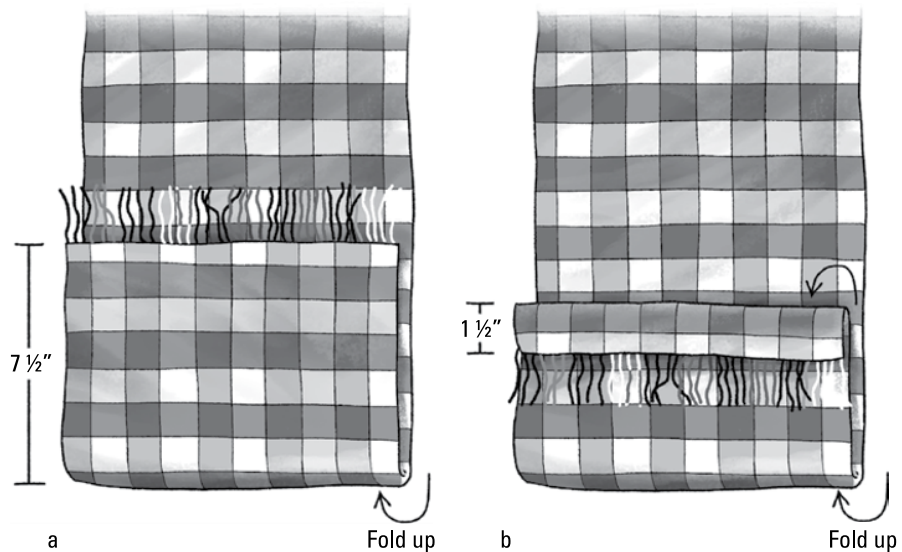
Push pins straight through the fold and then open up the scarf so the pins lay down flat. This pin-marking defines where to stitch down the center of the large pocket.



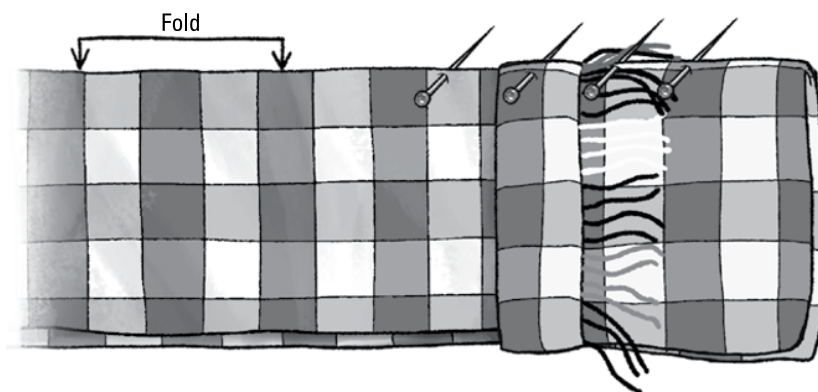
REMEMBER

**FIGURE 12-11A, B:**

Fold up one end to make the pocket; then fold down the top to make the cuff (so the fringe hangs down).



**FIGURE 12-12:**  
Fold the scarf in  
half the long way  
and pin-mark  
the center fold.



- 6. Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 3 mm or 8–9 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
- 7. Unfold the scarf and then sew a ¼-inch seam from the top of the cuff fold to the bottom pocket fold as shown in Figure 12-13 on both sides of the pocket, backstitching at the top and bottom of the seam.**

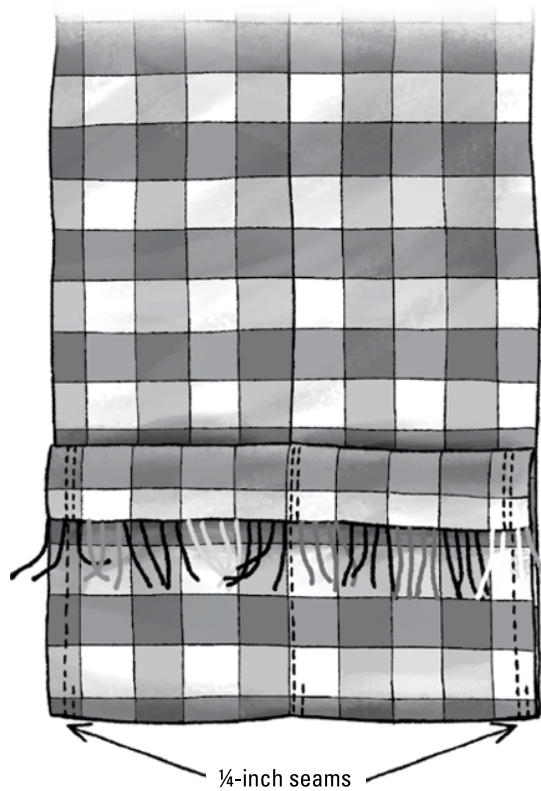
By sewing from the top of the pocket, down, the fabric won't shift.
- 8. Sew down the center of the pocket where it's pin-marked. Press.**

The center stitching line, as shown in Figure 12-13, divides the one long pocket into two, stabilizing both so they don't droop.
- 9. Fold the scarf in half the long way, put it around your neck, and take a look.**

Now it's decision time: Do you want two more pockets at the other end of your scarf, or are you fine with just the two? Try loading your pockets with gloves, your phone, your key fob, and so on. Want more room? Then repeat what you just did on the other end.



**FIGURE 12-13:**  
Sew a ¼-inch  
seam on both  
ends and down  
the center of the  
pocket, back-  
stitching securely  
on both ends of  
each pocket.





# **4**

## **Casa Couture: Sewing for Your Home**

### IN THIS PART . . .

Prepare yourself for a home makeover marathon right from your sewing station by finding out the secrets of the home décor experts. What are the secrets of using color and the best fabrics for making over your home? I'll tell you.

Forget store-bought homewares. Give napkins, table runners, and tablecloths a personal touch you won't find in any big box store.

Piece together pillows and make them extra pretty with piping, cording, and fringe.

Design your own duvet cover, bed skirt, and pillow sham to revive a bedroom in your home.

- » Getting over your fear of decorating
- » Understanding how home décor fabrics are unique
- » Giving your bathroom a makeover with a new shower curtain that screams “Spa Day”

## Chapter **13**

# Decorating on Demand: Home Décor Sewing

**E**ver watch those home makeover shows and think, “Hey, my den could be on TV too, if it weren’t for the laundry pile in the corner and the “whatever *that* is” stain on the sofa. Never fear; your decorating coach is here! This chapter’s all about sewing for your home — the easiest way to save money when decorating.

First up, this chapter tackles décoraphobia. Yes, it’s a thing — like the fear of long words, but with throw pillows and paint swatches. Next, the chapter unveils the secret of your home’s style, mixing and matching colors, and then creating color flow from one room to the next.

Buckle up. This chapter is going to mix stripes with plaids with prints and make it look like they’re best buddies. Seriously, by the end of this, you’ll be throwing around color swatches like confetti at a parade!

## Overcoming Décoraphobia

Ever bought a piece of clothing and gotten it home only to find out you picked the wrong color or size? You can return that little mistake to the store, no harm done. But a decorating mistake in your home haunts your days and nights until you can afford to change it. Enter décoraphobia. . .

*Décoraphobia* (noun) 1) a paralyzing malady that leads people into living in a bland, colorless environment of “contractor cream” or “builder beige”; 2) the fear of choosing the wrong color. . . or one that’s too dark; 3) the fear of making a big decorating mistake that’s out for all the world to see.

Once *décoraphobia* sets in for some folks, they never, *ever* get over their fear of decorating.

Avoiding costly mistakes (and acute *décoraphobia*) requires simple planning strategies. It’s as easy as

- » Understanding how color works
- » Figuring out your home’s complexion
- » Decorating with the correct color ratios

In this section, I walk you through these three color concepts so you can overcome your fear of making a *big* decorating mistake.

## Understanding color

There’s more to color than meets the eye. For example, every color has either a blue (cool) base or a yellow (warm) base. Picture a Red Delicious apple compared to a Beefsteak tomato. Both are red, but when you put them side by side, your eyes tell you that they clash. The apple has a blue color base, making it a *cool* red. The tomato has a yellow color base and is considered a *warm* red.



REMEMBER

Every color — even blue and yellow — has both a warm and a cool version. When shopping for home *décor* fabrics, you usually find they’re grouped according to their color bases.

How do you identify the warm and cool bases? Pay attention to the background colors on a piece of fabric. You find the color cues by identifying the warm and cool neutral colors in the background.

- » Warm neutrals (yellow base) have off-white backgrounds that look like they’ve been aged and are slightly “yellowed” by being in your grandmother’s trunk.
- » Cool neutrals (blue bases) have crisp white backgrounds that look like they’ve been bleached and whitened by the sun.

When you put both cool-based colors and warm-based colors in the same room, they clash — just like the apple and the tomato. Your warm-based sofa looks dirty

against the cool-based pillows thrown on top of it. So before hiking off to the paint or fabric store, determine the color base of your home — what I call your home's complexion — and then work with the right cool-base or warm-base colors throughout your home.

## Unmasking your home's complexion

Unless you have the budget to decorate from scratch, work with what you have. Look at the largest surfaces — the ones that are more difficult and expensive to change — such as the flooring, countertops, sinks, kitchen appliances, and kitchen and bathroom cabinets. The color of these surfaces determines the complexion of your home.

In general, your home complexion is cool if your

- » Carpet and tile colors are blue, gray, white, or black.
- » Cabinets are painted white, whitewashed, pickled (a finish that bleaches the wood to a light gray), maple, stained very dark (such as aged cherry), or painted black.
- » Countertops are blue, black, gray, or white.
- » Sinks and kitchen appliances are blue, white, or black.



TIP

Imagine a crisp white sail against the big, blue sea. When selecting print, striped, or plaid fabrics for a cool-complexioned room, choose those with a white background (like the sail).

Your room probably has a yellow-based, or warm, complexion if your

- » Carpet and tile colors are coffee, mustard, off-white, beige, or terra cotta.
- » Cabinets are warm-toned woods such as natural oak, pine, or birch.
- » Countertops are brown or tan.
- » Sinks and kitchen appliances are almond, tan, or off-white.



TIP

When selecting print, striped, or plaid fabrics for a warm-complexioned room, choose those with an off-white or cream-colored background.

When you use one color base throughout your entire home, your colors work together from room to room.



AUTHOR  
SAYS

You say your appliances are stainless steel? Even though silver is considered a cool metal, decorating shows have conditioned us to the “commercial kitchen” aesthetic for our home kitchens. So, here’s where you can break the rule: Stainless and chrome metals work for both warm and cool complexions.

## Determining your color odds

When selecting the color scheme for your home, think odd — odd numbers, that is. Start your color scheme using three colors: Use two dominant colors and one accent color. As you gain experience, you can add more colors, but remember that an odd number looks more interesting.



TIP

Suppose you want to redo your bedroom and master bath using the color scheme in the fabric on your bedspread — blue and white with lemon-yellow accents. Choosing paint to match a piece of fabric is a whole lot easier than the other way around, so use your bedspread as your inspiration piece and choose your wall paint, pillows, and accessories by following the color cues in the bedspread. This way your color bases won’t clash and you get a custom-decorated look to the room.

Your carpet and ceiling are white (the first dominant color), so paint the walls blue (the second dominant color). Find blue and white throw pillows for the bed. Add one yellow pillow as the accent. The lamps on the night tables are blue and white, so you can add yellow tassels as the accent. The draperies match the bedspread, so you can add yellow tiebacks. Place a yellow tulip arrangement in a blue vase on the dresser.



TIP

Reverse the colors to keep the scheme flowing through the whole house. Make the accent color in your bedroom the dominant color in your bathroom, for example.

Stumped because you don’t have a color scheme? Find something with three colors that you love — a dish, a piece of clothing, a throw pillow, maybe even a picture in a magazine. If it has nothing to do with home décor, that’s okay — you’re looking for the colors you like and nothing else. Go to the paint store with your treasure and find paint chips that match these same three colors. Now you have your color scheme!

## Homing In on Home Décor Fabric

All fabrics are not created equal. The best fabrics for home décor projects are home décor fabrics, for a number of reasons:



- » Many home décor fabrics are heavier and more durable than apparel fabrics.
- » They run 54 to 60 inches wide, which is 9 to 15 inches wider than apparel fabrics. The additional width is a real advantage for your home décor projects because you get better coverage with a yard of wider home décor fabric than with narrower dressmaking fabric. Sheer home decor fabrics can run as wide as 120 inches, providing the extra width needed for a wide window.
- » Many home décor fabrics are chemically treated to resist stains and sun damage. Due to the extra width and chemical treatment, decorator fabrics are generally more expensive than apparel fabrics. Expect to pay from \$25 to \$75+ per yard.
- » Most home décor fabrics have a color strip that may have a circle with a plus sign through it printed on the *selvages* (the finished edges on the long sides of the fabric), so you simply match the color bars or symbol when seaming one panel to the next, and the design matches perfectly at the seamline.



REMEMBER

Always check the bolt end or hang tag of your home décor fabrics for proper cleaning and care instructions, which differ widely from fabric to fabric. See Chapter 3 for more info on specific fabrics used in home décor.

## Sew Smart Project: Easiest Shower Curtain Ever

Welcome to a delightful sewing project that combines creativity, thriftiness, and practicality — all wrapped into one! In this project, you take a gently used sheet from a thrift store and transform it into an eye-catching shower curtain that will brighten up your bathroom.

Embarking on this project also contributes to a more sustainable lifestyle by repurposing and reducing waste. Further, it can be economical; the whole sheet set (top, bottom, and pillowcase) used to make the shower curtain you see in the color insert was only \$3 at my local thrift store. Score!

Get ready to transform a simple sheet into a functional accessory for your bathroom and a proud reminder of your DIY skills!

### Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

Thrift stores are treasure troves of potential, filled with fabrics that beg to be given a new life. Look for colors and patterns that resonate with your style and

how they'll fit into your existing décor. Whether it's a retro polka dot pattern, a soothing pastel, or a bold, modern design, find a sheet that reflects your personal aesthetic.

Shower curtains usually measure 72 inches wide by 72 inches long — and occasionally up to 80 inches long. When you make a shower curtain from a twin sheet, you have all the width and length you need to make a custom shower curtain for your space with a little bit to spare.



WARNING

In Chapter 3, you read about the nap of the fabric. In the case of your shower curtain, you need to pay attention to the direction of the print. Pick an all over design instead of a one-way print. The top hem of the sheet will be the bottom hem of your shower curtain, so a one-way pattern would be upside down.

To make this shower curtain, you need your Sewing Survival Kit (which I tell you about in Chapter 2), plus the following items:

- » Thread that matches your sheet
- » Shower curtain liner
- » Package of 12 shower curtain rings
- » Shower curtain rod

## Instructions

Follow these steps to make your custom shower curtain:

- 1. Cut your curtain 80 inches long so the wide hem is at the bottom of the curtain.**
- 2. Make the double side hems, as shown in Figure 13-1.**

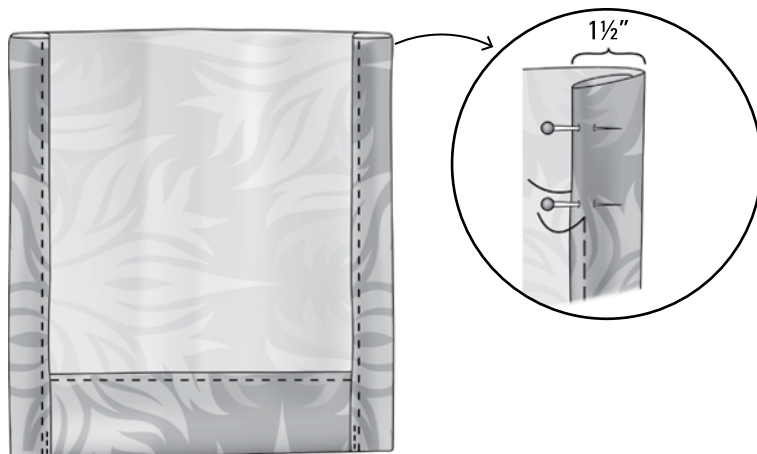
There are narrow hems on both long sides of the curtain. To give the curtain more stability, fold, pin and press a 1½-inch hem on both long sides.

*Note:* In the home décor biz, these double-folded edges on each side of the curtain are called *side hems*.

- 3. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3 mm/9 spi
- *Width:* 0
- *Foot:* All-purpose

**FIGURE 13-1:**  
Make double  
side hems  
1½ inches wide.



- 4. Sewing with the wrong side up, topstitch along the side hem edge, backstitching at each end.**

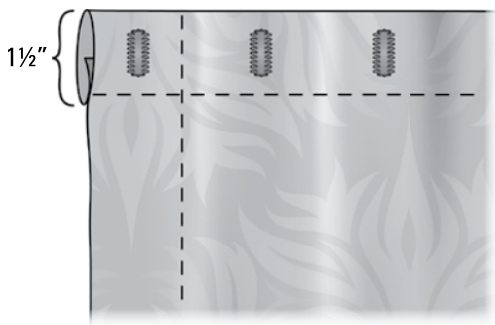
See Chapter 6 for more on topstitching and backstitching.

- 5. Repeat Step 4 for the other side.**

- 6. Make the heading: At the top of the curtain, fold and press the raw edge under ½ inch and then fold the heading over another 1½ inches before pinning and pressing the heading in place, as shown in Figure 13-2.**

This is the part where the buttonholes go so you can hang the curtain up with shower hooks.

- 7. Topstitch the heading from the wrong side like you did for the side hems in Steps 3 and 4.**
- 8. Using your fabric marker or dressmaker's chalk and seam gauge, mark the buttonhole placement, centering one buttonhole on each side hem, as shown in Figure 13-2, and spacing out the remaining 10 buttonholes across the curtain heading.**



**FIGURE 13-2:**  
Mark the  
buttonhole  
placement.

**9. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Zigzag or buttonhole (see your operating manual)
- *Length:* 0.5 mm/fine or 60 spi
- *Width:* For buttonholes
- *Foot:* Buttonhole

**10. Make ½- to ¾-inch buttonholes by following the instructions in your machine operating manual.**

**See Chapter 10 for the how-to's on buttonholes.**

**11. Press your shower curtain and hang it up with the liner and rings.**

- » Picking the best fabrics for your table toppers
- » Creating all sorts of napkins
- » Cranking out a chalk-it-up table runner

## Chapter **14**

# Tablescaping with Terrific Table Toppers

**W**ant a colorful way to cozy up dinner time? Make the table toppers in this chapter. Picture napkins folded for fun and a table runner you can actually write on. These projects will “dismiss the dull” from your dine-in experience!

I know what you’re thinking: Cloth napkins are for special occasions. But I say every day that the family eats together is a special occasion and should be applauded. And — who knows — table manners may improve. Plus, fabric napkins keep all that paper out of the landfill. The chalkboard fabric (you read it right) in the table runner transforms blah into ta-da. In this chapter, I cover the fastest and easiest construction techniques so you can make your toppers and set your table with them in just one afternoon.

# Finding, Selecting, and Measuring Fabric for Table Toppers

Thanks to my friend Terry Craig, I've become quite the thrifter. If you haven't been to your local thrift store lately, go! Not only do they have clothing, but you'll find drapes, sheets, bedding, and all things fabric. The napkins and table runner shown in the color insert were made from an all-cotton drapery. The color, texture, and design were just what I wanted, and it was only \$8.00. What a bargain! Better yet, I saved it from going in the landfill.

Keep the following tips in mind when you're looking for the right fabrics for your home.



TIP

- » Before buying a fabric because you like the color or design, consider the fiber content, the fabric finish, and what you want to make. Fabrics such as all-cotton or all-linen are absorbent but wrinkle-prone, so you may want to choose fabrics blended with a little polyester. A fabric finish such as Scotchgard repels stains and spills, so a fabric that has been Scotchgarded may not have the absorbency needed for napkins but works great as a tablecloth.
- » Don't use fabrics that consist of more than 50 percent synthetic or man-made fiber. These fabrics aren't absorbent, and stains and odors remain even after repeated washings.
- » Providing that the fabric is printed on-grain, using fabrics with preprinted stripes, plaids, or checks helps you cut straight, and hemming is as easy as following the lines in the fabric.
- » Don't use knits. Tightly woven fabrics work better and last longer as napkins and tablecloths.
- » Look at the wrong side of the print. Does it limit your napkin-folding possibilities because it's not appealing? If so, choose another fabric or use it for something where the wrong side doesn't matter.
- » For napkins, stick with small prints or textures so you don't have to worry about matching a design from one napkin to another when you cut them out.
- » If you want a light- to medium-weight fabric that works well for napkin-making, look for bandanas, broadcloth, calico prints, chambray, chintz, duck, gingham, kettle or weaver's cloth, light- to mid-weight linen, and denim, muslin, percale, poplin, and seersucker.
- » For heavier-weight fabrics better suited for tablecloths, look for damask, double-sided fabrics, linen, sailcloth, and terry cloth.

# Sew Simple Project: Dinner-Ready Napkins

Friends and family members usually expect handmade gifts from me, and I've made some gorgeous things through the years. But the most appreciated gifts were also the simplest — cloth napkins that I made several years ago. I sewed 160 napkins (20 sets of 8) one holiday season. I used fabric that coordinated with my friends' color schemes and lifestyles. Sally works with chimpanzees, so she got a jungle print. My classically tailored pal Carol got the black and white stripes. I used a cheerful juvenile print for our son's day-care provider. I then paired the napkins with my homemade pumpkin bread (including the recipe) and wrapped everything in gift basket cellophane. Voilà — a real crowd pleaser.

Cloth napkins are fast and easy to make, and they're better for the environment to boot. The following sections talk you through how much fabric you need to purchase and how to create napkins in a few different ways.

## Fabrics, findings, and raw materials: figuring out fabric yardage

If you're just making fabric napkins for your own use, you may take advantage of an opportunity to use up some decent-size scraps of fabric you already have. But if your goal is to make a matching set or give the napkins as gifts, you probably want to shop for new fabric or stop by the thrift store to see what might be in the home goods section.

Tables 14-1 and 14-2 tell you how much fabric you need to make napkins of various sizes, including a little extra for shrinkage and evening up the squares. The size of each unfinished napkin is listed in inches; the amount of fabric for each set of napkins is listed in yards.

**TABLE 14-1** Yardage for 45-Inch Fabric

Unfinished Napkin Size	6 Napkins	8 Napkins	10 Napkins	12 Napkins
15 inches	$\frac{7}{8}$	$1\frac{1}{8}$	$1\frac{3}{4}$	$1\frac{3}{4}$
18 inches	$1\frac{5}{8}$	$2\frac{1}{8}$	$2\frac{5}{8}$	$3\frac{1}{8}$
20 inches	$1\frac{3}{4}$	$2\frac{1}{4}$	$2\frac{7}{8}$	$3\frac{1}{2}$
22½ inches	2	$2\frac{5}{8}$	$3\frac{1}{4}$	$3\frac{5}{8}$

**TABLE 14-2** Yardage for 54- to 55-Inch Fabric

Unfinished Napkin Size	6 Napkins	8 Napkins	10 Napkins	12 Napkins
15 inches	$\frac{7}{8}$	$1\frac{3}{8}$	$1\frac{3}{4}$	$1\frac{3}{4}$
18 inches	$1\frac{1}{8}$	$1\frac{5}{8}$	$2\frac{1}{8}$	$2\frac{1}{8}$
20 inches	$1\frac{3}{4}$	$2\frac{1}{4}$	$2\frac{7}{8}$	$3\frac{3}{8}$
24 inches	$2\frac{1}{8}$	$2\frac{3}{4}$	$3\frac{3}{8}$	$4\frac{1}{8}$

## Instructions

I discovered a fast, efficient way to make napkins while I was cranking out 160 of them for the holidays. These little beauties come together so quickly that you may be tempted to create sets for special dinner parties, family celebrations, and holidays.

### Sewing basic table napkins

To make these napkins, you need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2.)

- » Napkin fabric (refer to Tables 14-1 and 14-2 for yardage)
- » Thread that matches the napkin fabric

Follow these steps to create napkins in no time:

- 1. Cut the napkin squares according to the unfinished napkin sizes listed in Tables 14-1 and 14-2.**
- 2. Set your sewing machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Three-step zigzag
  - *Length:* 1–1.5 mm/24–30 spi
  - *Width:* 5 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose

If you're using a serger, set your serger like this:

- *Stitch:* Balanced three-thread overlock
- *Length:* 2 mm
- *Width:* 3–5 mm
- *Foot:* Standard



3. **Overcast the opposite edges of the fabric squares by placing the raw edge under the foot so that the needle catches the fabric on the left and swings off the raw edge at the right.**

See Chapter 6 for more information on overcasting raw fabric edges.

4. **Repeat Step 3 on the other two opposite edges of each napkin.**
5. **Pin and press a ¼-inch hem on two opposite edges of the fabric square.**

When you pin the hems on opposite edges, the corners turn out sharp and square.

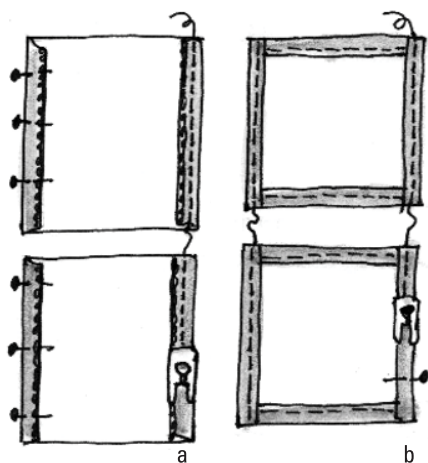
6. **Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3.5 mm/9 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

7. **With the wrong side of the fabric up, topstitch a ¼-inch hem on the opposite edges, as shown in Figure 14-1a.**

8. **Continue sewing from one napkin to the next without cutting the threads in between, as shown in Figure 14-1b.**

Stringing the napkins together this way saves time and lets you hem several of them at once.



**FIGURE 14-1:** Sew a ¼-inch hem (a), and sew from one napkin to the next without cutting the threads (b).

9. Cut the connecting threads between each napkin at the fabric.
10. Repeat Steps 7 and 8 for the opposite hem edges, backstitching at the end of each corner.
11. Cut the connecting threads between each napkin at the corners.

## Serging napkins with narrow rolled edges

Have you ever noticed the neatly finished edges on restaurant napkins? If you have a serger, you can duplicate this finish and have a basket full of napkins done in no time.

To make these napkins, you need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2.)

- » Napkin fabric (refer to Tables 14-1 and 14-2 for yardage)
- » Serger thread that matches the napkin fabric
- » Seam sealant (such as Fray Check)

Read your operating manual to set your serger for a narrow rolled edge, and then follow these steps:

### 1. Set your serger like this:

- *Stitch*: Three-thread
- *Length*: 1.0–1.5 mm
- *Foot*: Narrow rolled edge
- *Needle plate*: Narrow rolled edge
- *Upper looper*: Loosen so that you see the stitches form a smooth row of satin stitches
- *Lower looper*: Tighten so that you see a straight line of stitching forming on the underside of the stitch



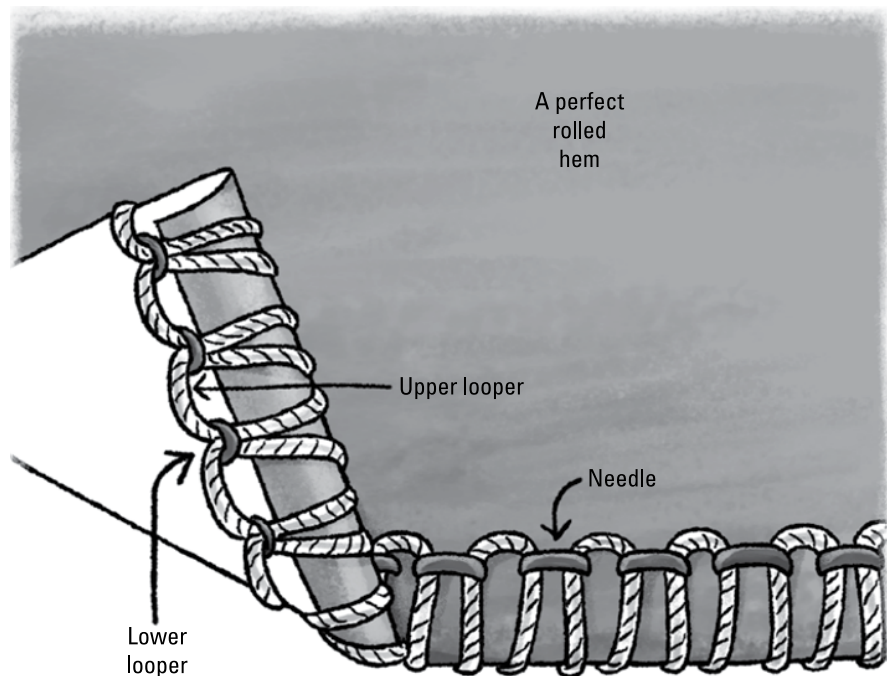
REMEMBER

### 2. Before starting your narrow rolled edges, test the edge finish on a scrap to get the perfect stitch that looks like Figure 14-2.

### 3. Cut out your napkin squares using your favorite cutting tools. (Refer to Tables 14-1 and 14-2 for yardage requirements.)

The narrow rolled edge takes up about a ¼-inch hem allowance all the way around, so remember to cut your napkins large enough so that they end up the desired finished size.

**FIGURE 14-2:**  
This is what  
your rolled edge  
should look like.



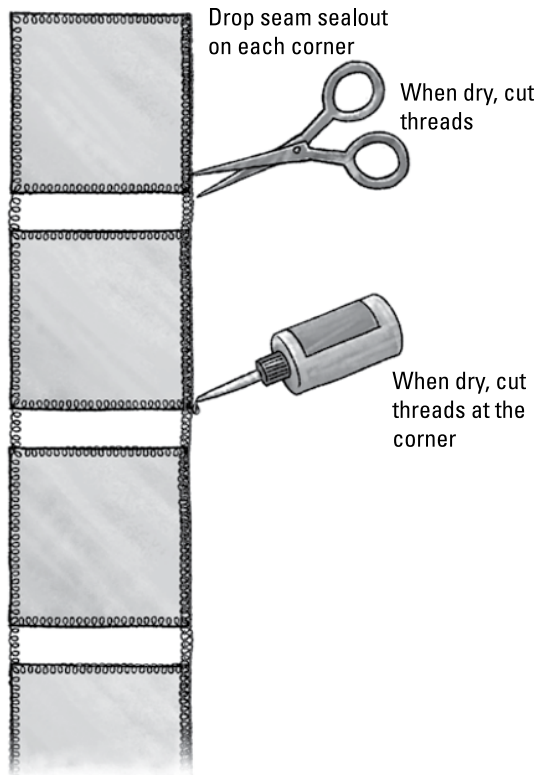
4. Place all the napkin squares in your lap so that the right side of the fabric faces up.
5. Place the first napkin edge under the foot so that when you serge, you trim away about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch.

This fabric placement ensures proper stitch formation and prevents the stitches from pulling off the edge of the fabric with repeated washings.

6. Serge the first edge of the napkin and then, in a continuous step, butt the next napkin up to the first and finish one edge of the second napkin as shown in Figure 14-3.

Continue in this way, butting one napkin up to the next, until you finish off one side of all the napkin squares in your lap. Your napkins resemble a kite tail connected with serged thread chains.

7. Repeat Steps 4 through 6 for the opposite (parallel) side of the napkin squares.
8. Apply a drop of seam sealant (like Fray Check) at the base of the chain at each corner of the napkin squares.



**FIGURE 14-3:**  
Serge the napkins  
on both sides  
in a chain, apply  
sealant at the  
corners, and  
then cut apart  
the napkins.

**9. After the seam sealant dries, cut apart the napkins, cutting the chains at the base of each corner (refer to 14-3).**

Serging opposite edges makes the corners turn out square as shown in Figure 14-3.

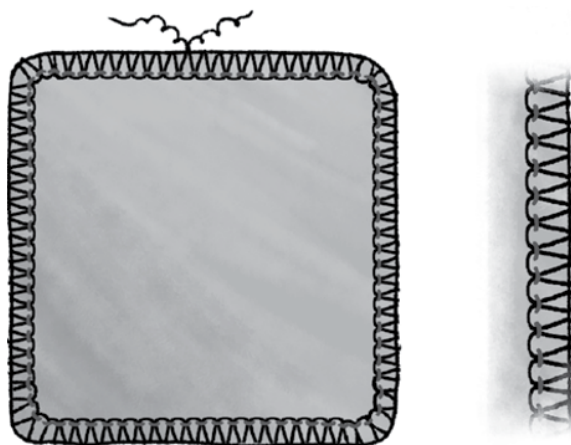


**TIP**

To serge each napkin individually and create round corners, as shown in Figure 14-4, start by tracing around a dime at each corner. Trim off the excess fabric in the corners, cutting on the traced line. Starting in the center of one napkin edge, serge carefully, guiding the rolled edge toward and then around each corner.

**FIGURE 14-4:**

Serged  
edges with  
rounded  
corners.



## Sew Simple Project: Chalk-It-Up Reversible Table Runner

Try your hand at making this easy table runner. You can create this runner to run either the width or the length of a table. Use it instead of place mats or a tablecloth.

### Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

Typical table runners can measure from 45 to 108 inches long. The size depends on the table it'll adorn. I wrote the instructions in the next section so you can use the full width of the home décor fabric or drapery panel. For a longer runner, you can use the full length of the drapery panel.



**TIP**

For this project to turn out the right size, you need to work with 54- to 60-inch wide home décor fabric.

This project also uses Chalkcloth ([www.onlinefabricstore.com/black-chalkcloth-fabric-.htm](http://www.onlinefabricstore.com/black-chalkcloth-fabric-.htm)). You can use the black Chalkcloth as you would a chalkboard, which means it has a lot of creative and fun uses.

If you're making the runner from fabric yardage, you need the following amount of fabric. If you're using a drapery panel, you can get both a table runner and napkins out of one panel.

## CHARMING USES FOR CHALKCLOTH

The following is a list of ideas for using Chalkcloth from [www.onlinefabricstore.com](http://www.onlinefabricstore.com) (a favorite website of mine and where I bought the fabric):

- Kids' place mats, sit-upons, indoor hopscotch
- A kid's headboard so you can write special messages to them (Happy Birthday, You Got This, Congratulations, Great Game, and so on)
- Fun aprons where the cook's name can change just by erasing and writing the name of the new cook
- Reusable name cards that can be erased and used again for another event with different guests
- A timeout bench you can personalize with the time necessary and name

Other uses for Chalkcloth include craft projects, such as gift wrap, picture frame molding, and tote bags. Your options are limited only by your imagination!

You need the following supplies (in addition to the tools in the Sewing Survival Kit that I tell you about in Chapter 2):

- » ½ yard of solid-colored home décor fabric or Chalkcloth
- » ⅔ yard of print home décor fabric or an all-cotton drapery panel
- » Thread that matches the fabric
- » One yardstick or metal measuring tape (like you get at home improvement stores)
- » Fabric clips (available through your local fabric store or online sewing notion resources)



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SAYS

Because Chalkcloth has a vinyl surface, you can use pins to join the runner pieces, but you may prefer using fabric clips to prevent pin holes in the Chalkcloth.

## Instructions

Follow these steps to make your runner:

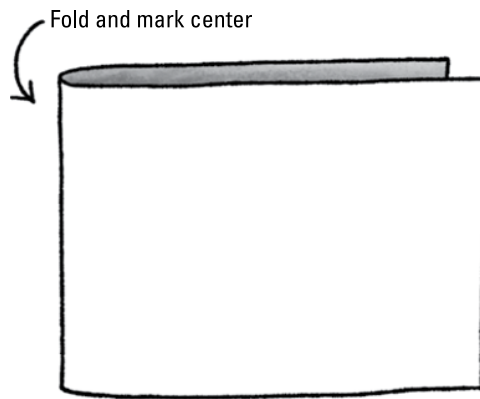
- 1. Cut a piece of Chalkcloth or solid-colored fabric 16 inches by the width of the fabric (typically 47 or 48 inches).**



TIP

You need to “season” Chalkcloth before you can write on it. The instructions on the website say to lay a piece of chalk on its side on the surface of the Chalkcloth. Rub the chalk all over — side to side and top to bottom. Repeat this process again. Sponge the chalk off the cloth with water. Now your Chalkcloth is ready for use.

2. **Cut a piece of the home décor print fabric or drapery panel 24 inches by the width of the fabric.**
3. **Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 3 mm/8 to 9 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
4. **Fold both fabrics in half lengthwise and mark the center, as shown in Figure 14-5.**



**FIGURE 14-5:**  
Fold each piece in  
half the long way  
and mark  
the center.

5. **Starting at the center marks, place the right sides together; then using either fabric clips or pins, secure and sew together the two long sides of the runner, as shown in Figure 14-6.**

Because the two pieces of fabric are different widths, the wider piece has extra slack.

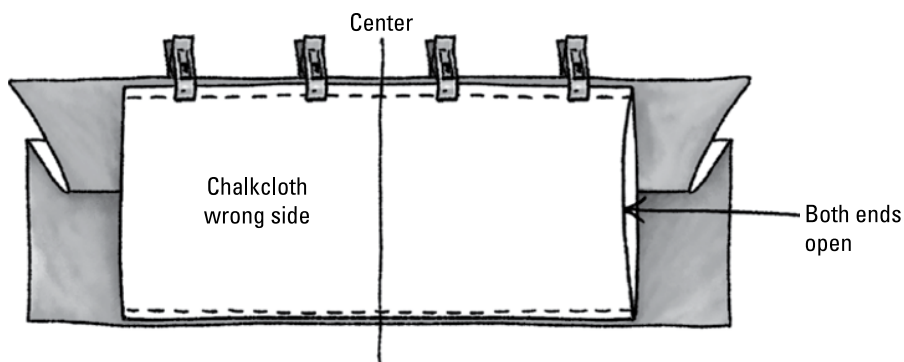
After sewing the seams and turning the runner right side out the extra print fabric creates slack that pulls to the front. This creates a contrasting band on both long sides of the runner. (Check out the color insert for a closer look.)

The Chalkcloth is a vinyl-coated product, so when you use your iron, use a medium-weight press cloth to cover the vinyl so it won't melt.



WARNING

**FIGURE 14-6:**  
Starting at the center marks, clip or pin and sew the long sides of the table runner together.

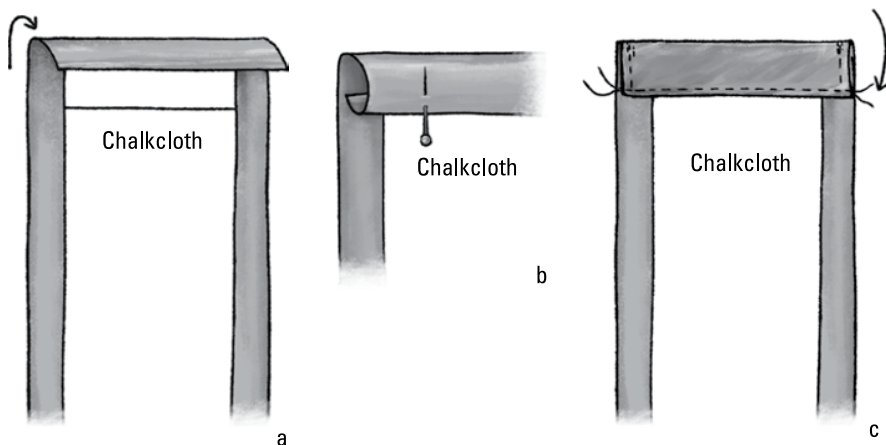


- 6.** Using a press cloth, press the long seams to one side toward the outside edges of the runner.
- 7.** Both ends of the runner are open, so choose one end, and pull the runner, right side out through the opening and press.
- 8.** To finish each end, fold over a ½-inch hem and press, as shown in Figure 14-7a.
- 9.** Fold the hemmed end over again so that the print fabric covers the cut end of the Chalkcloth, as shown in Figure 14-7b.

Then repeat for the other end of the runner.

- 10.** Topstitch across each end, as shown in Figure 14-7c.

**FIGURE 14-7:**  
Fold and then press and pin each end of the runner (a, b) so the ends cover the cut edge of the Chalkcloth to create the rest of the border; then topstitch each end (c).





#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Starting with the proper pillows and provisions
- » Taming braids, cords, trims, and fringes
- » Making cording and piping like a pro
- » Covering a pillow form

## Chapter **15**

# Personalizing Praiseworthy Pillows

**P**illows can prop you up, cushion your fall, and comfort your weary head. They're also perfect palettes for playing with shape, color, texture, and design, and you can easily put together a pillow project in one stress-free sitting. In this chapter you discover the secrets of making praiseworthy pillows perfect for yourself and your people.

## Selecting Materials for Pillows

Achieving pillow perfection starts with using the right materials. Keep these tips in mind as you shop for pillow materials:

- » **Fabrics:** For easy-care pillows, buy home décor fabrics that have a cotton fiber content of 50 percent or more. Also look for washable cotton/polyester blends and Polarfleece. Fabric napkins are another fabric option (and a great shortcut).



REMEMBER



TIP



WARNING

If you use a cotton novelty print, corduroy, denim, duck, chintz, twill, or poplin to make your pillow, preshrink the fabric before making the pillow cover.

The amount of fabric you need depends on the size of the pillow you want to cover and the kind of pillow cover you want to make. Because pillow forms are soft and pliable, you cut the pillow cover pieces the same size as the pillow form without seam allowances (so a cover made to fit a 16-inch pillow form is 16 inches square). Adding seam allowances to your pillow covers makes them too big. So the finished size of the sewn pillow will be 15 inches (using ½-inch seams), and the pillow will be nice and full once the 16-inch form is put in.

- » **Thread:** You need all-purpose thread to match your pillow fabric.
  - » **Trims:** You need to use trims that are compatible with your fabric from a fiber and washability standpoint. When in doubt, have a sales associate at your local fabric store take a look at your trim and fabric choices to confirm their compatibility.
- Many home décor fabrics recommend dry-clean-only care. If you choose such a fabric, make the pillow covers removable by adding a zipper or buttons and buttonholes (see Chapter 10 for specifics on several types of closures) and have them dry-cleaned to preserve their appearance. If you don't, fabrics may shrink, trims may disintegrate, and you may find that you spent all your time and creative energy for nothing.
- » **Pillow forms:** The easiest stuffing to work with is a premade pillow form. This time-saving fabric-covered pillow is a given size, shape, density, and stuffing type (polyester or goose down) and pops into a decorative pillow cover. You can find pillow forms in many sizes and a variety of price ranges.
  - » **Stuffing:** For creating more free-formed pillow shapes, you need loose stuffing for filling and shaping. It comes in bags, and I refer to it as polyfill because the loose fibers are made of polyester.

## Tackling Trim

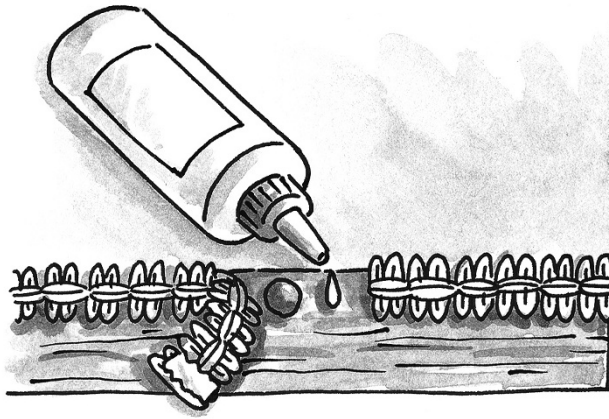
Decorator trim is the icing on your home-decorating cake and comes in three basic styles: braid, cord, and fringe. In this section I show you some cool ways to use each one.

## Braving braid basics

*Braid* is a flat home décor trim with two finished edges. The two most common types of braid are

- » **Gimp:** This flat braid is usually glued to furniture to conceal upholstery tacks. (See Figure 15-1.) You can also stitch gimp to the edge of decorator cord-edge trim. (See the following section for the details on cord.)
- » **Mandarin:** A dressier, ½-inch dimensional gimp (meaning that it has a texture), this braid is great for outlining pillows, place mats, and other home décor projects. You can also use mandarin braid in crafting by gluing it to handmade boxes and lampshades.

**FIGURE 15-1:** Use gimp to cover a join where the upholstery attaches to the furniture frame.



## Conquering cord

*Cord* is a round, twisted strand of fibers that looks like rope. It can be anywhere from ⅛ inch to 1¾ inch in diameter and is made out of cotton, shiny rayon, spun satiny rayon, or a combination of fibers, each with a unique texture. See what the different cords look like in Figure 15-2.

The most common kinds of cord include the following:

- » **Cable cord:** A twisted cotton or cotton/polyester cord used as a filling for fabric-covered *pip*ing (or *wel*ting). (See the following section for more information on piping.) Preshrink the cable cord before you use it in a project. You



TIP

make piping by covering the cable cord with a strip of fabric called a *casing*. The casing has a ¼-inch to ½-inch seam allowance so that you can sew it into the seam at the edge of a pillow, slipcover, or sofa cushion cover. Piping gives a crisp, tailored finish to the edge.

To preshrink cable cord, wrap it around your hand to create a wrapped wad called a hank. Pull the hank off your hand, put a rubber band around the center of it, and throw it in the wash with other fabrics of similar fiber content.

- » **Filler cord:** You use this web-covered, cotton-filled cord inside piping. Filler is softer and fatter than cable cord because of the loose cotton filling. You can find filler cord in diameters up to 1¾ inches thick.



WARNING

Because of loose construction, you can't wash filler cord or it turns into a lumpy mess. That means you don't preshrink filler cord before you cover it, and you should dry-clean projects made with this cord instead of washing them.

- » **Cord-edge trim:** A twisted cord with a lip edge of flat gimp sewn to it, cord-edge trim is pretty by itself. You don't have to cover it with a casing like cable or filler cord. The lip edge makes it easy to insert the trim at a seam in a pillow.

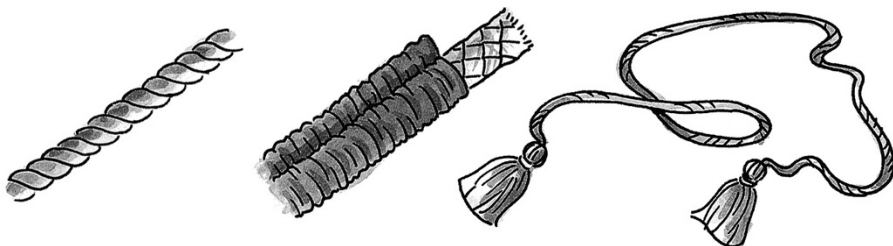


REMEMBER

Cord-edge trim is dry-clean-only. So even though you may use it with a washable fabric, dry-clean your project to properly care for it.

- » **Chair tie:** A twisted decorator cord 27 to 30 inches long with tassels on both ends, chair ties are traditionally used to attach cushions to chairs. Chair ties also make nice drapery tiebacks.
- » **Tassel tieback:** This twisted decorator cord is shaped into a three-sectioned loop. A color-coordinating ring cinches the loop so that the tassel hangs in the center loop. The side loops encircle a drapery and hold it back by looping over the hardware attached to the wall.

**FIGURE 15-2:**  
Cable cord,  
filler cord, and  
chair tie.



## Figuring out fringe

*Fringe* is a decorative edging made of packed yarns that hang from a band, kind of like a hula skirt. Decorator fringes are a lot of fun to work with and add richness and value to your home décor projects.

Look for these common types of fringe, some of which appear in Figure 15-3, when you want to add a little flair to a project:

- » **Ball fringe:** This decorative fringe is constructed with a gimp edge and cotton pompoms. Use it to trim whimsical home décor projects, children's rooms, and costumes.
- » **Boucle fringe:** A fringe constructed with permanently kinked, nubby yarns called *boucle yarns*. Boucle fringe can be short, long, looped, or bullion.
- » **Bullion fringe:** Sewers use this long fringe with twisted, looped ends on pillows, upholstery, and slipcovers.
- » **Butterfly fringe:** This fringe has cut edges on two sides connected by an open threaded area. When you fold butterfly fringe in half the long way and stitch it to a project, you create a double-thick row of fringe.
- » **Chainette fringe:** Constructed of many short or long chainette ends, this fringe is great for the edge of pillows, window treatments, and table toppers. (See Chapter 14 for instructions on making table toppers.)
- » **Moss fringe:** This short, cut fringe looks like a brush after you sew it into a pillow or slipcover and remove the chainstitch from the edges.
- » **Tassel fringe:** This fringe has many tiny tassels attached to a length of gimp.



WARNING

A clear chainstitch is found on the edge of several types of trims to keep the fringe flat for easy sewing. As tempted as you may be to pull that thread tail, don't do it. If you do, this trim is almost impossible to work with because the little fringe fibers get stuck in the seam.

## Dealing with decorator trims

Here are some sewing guidelines to keep in mind as you sew home décor trims onto your projects:

- » Use a size 14/90 to 16/100 Universal point or sharp needle in your sewing machine. Home décor fabrics can get quite thick under the presser foot and need a sharp, heavy needle.



**FIGURE 15-3:**  
When selecting  
fringe and  
decorative trims,  
you have a lot of  
great choices.



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SAYS**

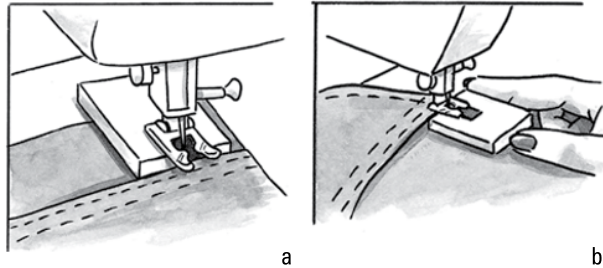
- » Use a little longer stitch length (3 to 3.5 mm or 6 to 8 spi) than for garment sewing. The longer stitch length makes sewing the extra thicknesses created by the fabric and trim a lot easier.
- » In certain cases when the fabric moves sluggishly under the presser foot, lighten up the foot pressure. (See your operating manual for instructions.)
- » When sewing uneven thicknesses (such as when hemming jeans or attaching decorator trim by sewing up and over the thickness and then back down to the level hem or seam allowance), use a wedge under the presser foot to level it when approaching *and* coming off the heavy seams. You can find wedges like the one shown in Figure 15-4 through your local sewing machine dealer, fabric store, or online sewing source. Look for them by the brand names of Jean-A-Ma-Jig or Hump-Jumper.

If you don't want to buy a wedge, make one by cutting out a 6-inch square of denim. Fold it in half and then in half again until the wedge is thick enough to keep the foot level when it rests on the wedge and the thick seam.

- » Prevent unnecessary needle breakage by sewing slowly over thick areas.
- » Start sewing trim at the center of any side of a pillow or cushion unless the project instructions say explicitly to do otherwise.

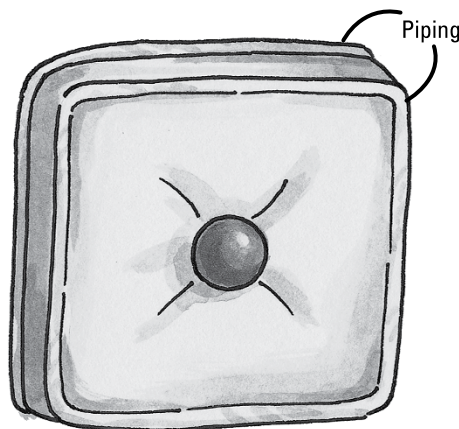
- » Fabric and trim must be equal lengths. If you pull or stretch the trim to fit an edge, the edge puckers, and no amount of pressing can straighten it out.
- » When making pillows and slipcovers or covering cushions, sew the trim to the top pillow piece first. Sew the back pillow piece to the trimmed front fabric piece afterward. This way, if you get any stitch distortion, it shows on the back, rather than the front, of the project.

**FIGURE 15-4:**  
Use a wedge  
under the  
presser  
foot when  
sewing uneven  
thicknesses.



## Attaching Piping, Cording, and Fringe

Call me crazy, but I love sewing piping and cording in a seam. I like the way these trims set off style lines in a garment, and I love seeing trim or fringe at the edge of a pillow or cushion because it says *quality*. (See Figure 15-5.)



**FIGURE 15-5:**  
Piping gives  
this pillow a  
finished look.



# Making your own piping

If you're lucky enough to find piping to match your project, buy it. If not, this section tells you how to make your own piping to match your project.

You make piping by covering a cable or filler cord with a strip of fabric called a *casing*. (Refer to “Conquering cord,” earlier in this chapter, for more about cable and filler cord.) The casing has a 1/4-inch to 1/2-inch seam allowance so that you can sew the casing into the seam at the edge of a pillow, slipcover, or sofa cushion cover. If you make bias trim from a coordinating stripe or plaid fabric, the design looks like a barber pole.

To make your own piping, follow these steps:

- 1. Measure the perimeter of the area you want to pipe and add 2 inches or so for overlap and seaming for each length of piping you want to insert.**

For example, if you want to pipe the edge of a pillow that has a perimeter of 30 inches, you need 32 inches of piping.

- 2. Preshrink your cable cord (refer to “Conquering cord,” earlier, for instructions) and cut it to the measurement you determined in Step 1.**

You can also use filler cord, but remember *not* to preshrink it. (I explain the difference between cable cord and filler cord in the earlier section “Conquering cord.”)



TIP

Prevent the cable or filler cord from uncontrolled fraying by taping around the end of the cord with masking tape before cutting through it. As long as you use masking tape, the tape can stay on the project, but other types of tape get gummy, deteriorate, and melt with cleaning.

- 3. To determine how wide to cut the fabric casing that covers the cording, find the circumference of the cord and add 1 inch for seam allowances.**

Wrap your tape measure snugly around the cording. The circumference of the cord is the length you measure.

- 4. Cut a fabric strip long enough to cover the length of the cable or filler cord.**

If you can't cut one strip of fabric long enough to cover the entire length of the cord, cut as many small strips as you need and sew them together with a 1/2-inch seam allowance.



REMEMBER

You cover cable or filler cord with either a straight- or a bias-cut fabric casing, depending on the shape of the seam you put it in.

- If you want to sew the piping to straight seams (such as the edges of a rectangular slipcover or square pillow), cut the fabric into strips either across the grain or on the lengthwise grain. (See Chapter 4 for more information on grainlines.)

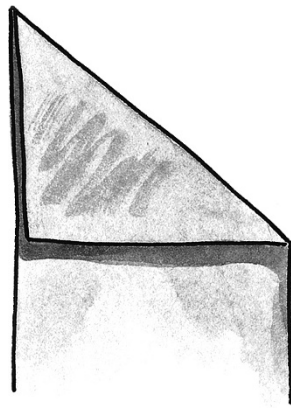


- If you want to sew the piping to a curved edge, like a round pillow, cut the fabric strips on the bias. (The next section tells you exactly how to do this.)

## Cutting bias strips for covering cable cord

Cut bias fabric strips the easy way following these steps:

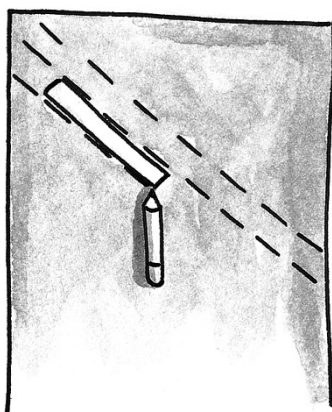
1. **Fold down a corner of the fabric so that the cut edge is parallel to and even with the selvage and then press a crease in the fold, as shown in Figure 15-6.**



**FIGURE 15-6:**  
Find the bias.

2. **Open the fold; the fold line marks the cutting line.**
3. **Using the fold line as a starting point, measure the width of the strip desired and mark off more strips, using a straight edge and pencil or dressmakers' chalk.**
4. **Cut the fabric strips along the marks you made in Step 3 and as shown in Figure 15-7.**
5. **Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 3 mm/9 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose

**FIGURE 15-7:**  
Use a straight  
edge when  
you mark  
cutting lines.

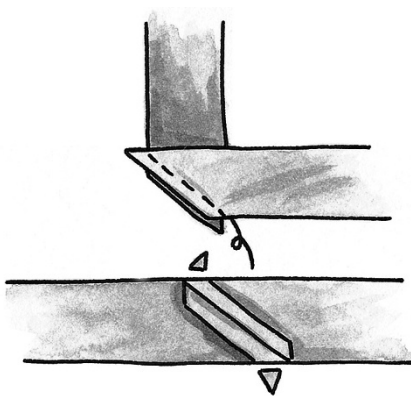


- 6. Place the short ends of the two fabric strips right sides together and at right angles and seam them using a ½-inch seam allowance (see Figure 15-8).**

Repeat this step with each strip, creating a long chain, until you have a fabric strip of the proper length.

- 7. Press open the seams.**
- 8. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3 mm/9 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* Zipper or piping



**FIGURE 15-8:**  
Seam bias-cut  
fabric strips to  
create a casing  
for piping.



AUTHOR  
SAYS

If you sew on a lot of piping, buy a piping foot. The underside of the foot has a deep groove that automatically guides over the cording for straight sewing and even piping application. I like and use the Pearls & Piping Foot manufactured by Creative Feet. It's designed to fit any brand of sewing machine model. Visit [www.creativefeet.com](http://www.creativefeet.com) for more information.

**9. Starting at one end, sandwich the cord in the casing — like you would put a hot dog in a bun.**

The cord nestles into the wrong side of the fabric; the right side faces out.

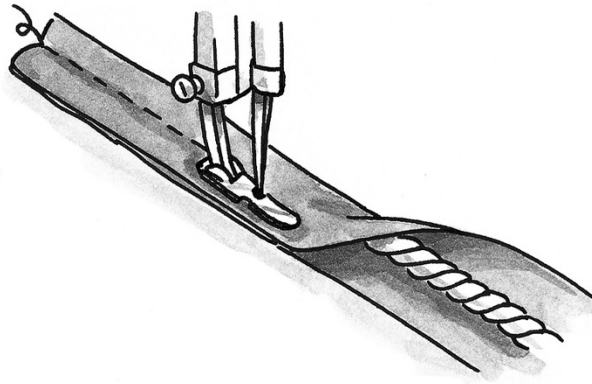
**10. Working at a slow and steady pace, sew the casing closed along the length of the cord by snugging the zipper foot against the cord, as shown in Figure 15-9.**

Use your hands to guide the fabric and cording together as you sew.

Don't pin the casing around the length of the cable cord before sewing. Pinning takes forever, and you'll never want to look at another piece of piping as long as you live.



WARNING



**FIGURE 15-9:**  
Sew the  
cording into the  
fabric casing.

## Sewing on piping and fringe

Piping and fringe add pizzazz to your pillows and home décor projects. Both trims have a lip edge that's sandwiched between two seams to hold them in place, but because fringe has a braid as its lip edge, you can also sew it to the surface of a project as a decorative treatment where the braid shows.

## Getting started and turning corners



REMEMBER

When attaching piping, fringe, or other decorator trim to a pillow or cushion, attach the trim to the front piece first and then sew the pillow back to the front.



WARNING

1. **Starting at the bottom, pin the cording, piping, or fringe to the right side of the fabric so that the lip edges of the piping or fringe and the fabric are almost even.**

Keep the trim in one long length until you're absolutely sure that you have enough to go around the project.

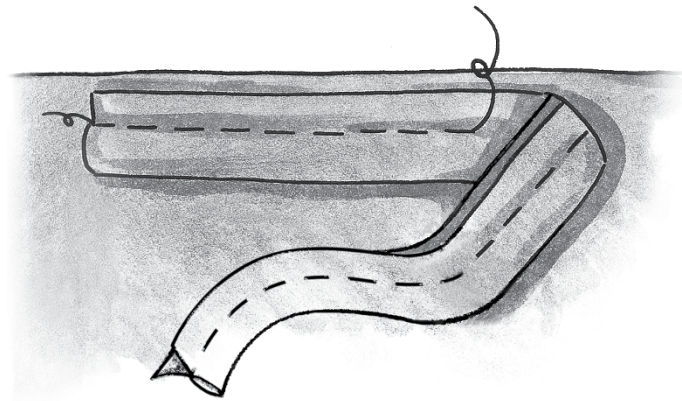
Don't stretch the trim to fit the edge, or the seamline ends up puckered.

2. **Set your sewing machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3 mm/9 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* Zipper or piping

3. **Sew on the trim at the ½-inch seamline, as shown in Figure 15-10, pulling out the pins as you get to them. Stop sewing about 2 inches before the end of the trim.**

If you're sewing trim to a straight edge, skip to Step 6 under "Join cording ends in a casing."



**FIGURE 15-10:** Sew the covered cording/piping onto the right side of the base fabric.

4. **When you reach a corner, clip the seam allowance of the lip edge up to, but not through, the stitching line, as shown in Figure 15-11. (See more about clipping into seam allowances in Chapter 6.)**

This allows the lip edge of the trim to easily bend around the corner without buckling.

## 5. Sew around the corner.

- *If you're using piping:* Stop sewing with the needle in the fabric, raise the foot and pivot slightly, nudging your index finger into the corner of the piping so that it bends around your finger and away from the needle.

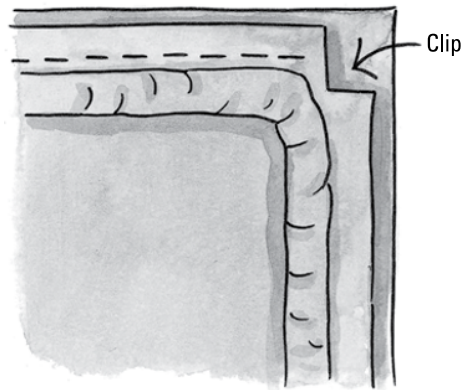
The thicker the piping, the more snips you have to make to get it around the corner. And thicker piping will naturally create a curve instead of a sharp corner.

- *If you're using fringe:* Stop sewing with the needle in the fabric, raise the foot, and pivot the fabric, pulling the fringe around the corner so the lip edge is even with the raw fabric edge.

Lower the presser foot and continue stitching. You may have to stitch a gentle curve rather than a sharp corner to accommodate the bulk of the piping or fringe.



REMEMBER



**FIGURE 15-11:**

Using your scissor tips, clip through the piping or fringe seam allowance to turn the trim around the corners.

When you reach the starting point of the fringe, overlap the two ends. If you're using moss or brush fringe, just put the fringe ends next to each other at the join so that you don't make it so thick.

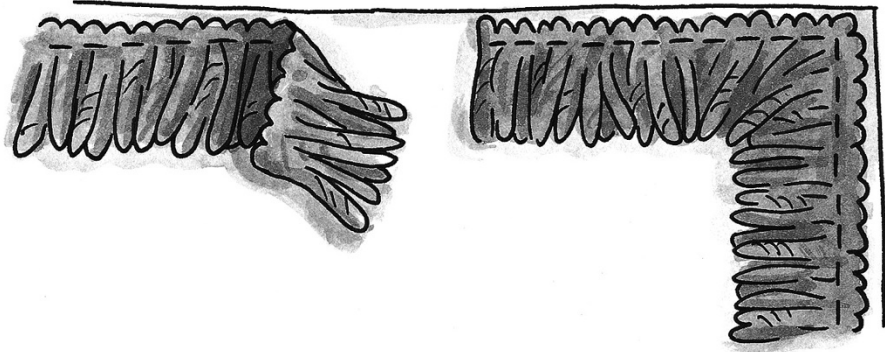
## Joining fringe ends

Fringe is the easiest trim to join. When you reach the starting point around a pillow, tablecloth, or cushion, place the fringe ends together at the join and simply pin and sew the fringe in place, sewing  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the raw edge and backstitching.



**WARNING**

Remember to start sewing the fringe and bring the ends together on a straight edge, as shown in Figure 15-12. If you start in a corner, the trim creates too much bulk when you turn the project right side out, and you'll end up with an unsightly bulge in the corner.

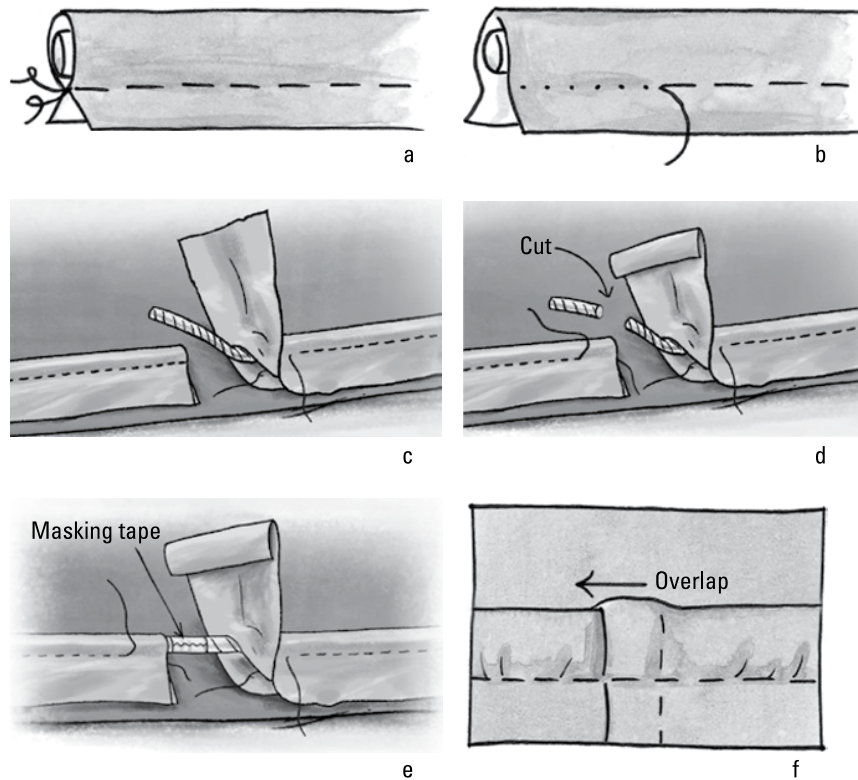


**FIGURE 15-12:** Sew cording to the outside edge of a project, beginning and ending on a straight side.

## Joining cord ends in a casing

This join is a little trickier than the one you use for fringe (and I've tried a lot of different techniques). When making a project where the piping goes around an edge (such as on a pillow or slipcover) the ends of the piping overlap. For a smooth, almost invisible join, the following process works and looks best:

1. Follow Steps 1 to 3 from the earlier section "Getting started and turning corners."
2. Open the casing about 1 inch on both ends by ripping out the stitching that holds the fabric casing around the cable or filler cord, as shown in Figures 15-13a and b.
3. Cut one end of the cable cord so that it butts the other end, and then join the ends of the cable cord with masking tape, as shown in Figures 15-13c and d.
4. Turn under one short end of the casing, overlapping the folded end over the flat end (shown in Figures 15-13e and f); pin the casing at the overlap.
5. Finish stitching on the rest of the piping so that you secure it around the perimeter of the project.



**FIGURE 15-13:**  
Cut and join the  
cord ends with  
masking tape.

- 6. Pin the piped seam allowance to the non-piped seam allowance of the back piece of the project, with the right sides together and at the ½-inch seamline.**
- 7. Place the project under the presser foot so that the stitching from Step 5 is where you can see it, and start sewing.**

The needle should fall just to the left of the stitching line. You want to sew close enough to the piping or fringe that the previous row of stitching doesn't show when you turn the project right side out.

## Attaching and joining cord-edge trim

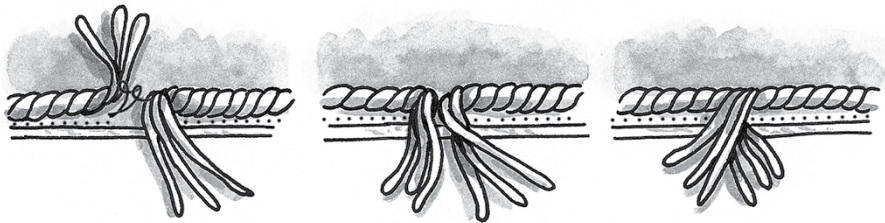
You attach cord-edge trim the same way you attach piping and fringe. (See the preceding section.) The difference is that when you reach the starting point to join the trim, you need to overlap the two ends of the cord rather than placing them end-to-end so they don't fray.



Follow these steps to make a clean join with your cord-edge trim:

- 1. Using a tape measure and your scissors, cut the cord-edge trim 6 inches longer than the finished area it must go into.**  
The trim has a 3-inch tail on each end that you can overlap and beautifully finish.
- 2. On the 3-inch tail pieces, separate the lip edge from the cord with a seam ripper.**
- 3. After the cord is cut, the plies of the cord want to unwind from each other and unravel, so gently separate and wrap masking tape around the end of each ply to prevent raveling.**
- 4. Trim each lip to 1 inch, leaving enough to overlap on each end; tape each lip end with masking tape.**
- 5. Arrange the plies of the decorative cord so they look like twisted plies of one continuous decorative cord, as shown in Figure 15-14.**  
Pull the right-side plies under the lips, twisting and arranging the cord until it returns to the original shape. Secure with tape.
- 6. Set your sewing machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 3–4 mm/6–9 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* Zipper or piping
- 7. Stitch through all the layers to secure the cord-edge trim and loose plies to the fabric at the ½-inch seam allowance.**

**FIGURE 15-14:** Attach the cord-edge trim by overlapping and wrapping the loose plies at the ends.



The pillow front is now prepared to be sewn to the back pillow piece, as described in the next section.



# Finding a Fit for a Pillow Form

In this section, you see how easy making a pillow cover from start to finish can be. This pillow cover is the easiest way pillow covers are made. It uses front and back pillow pieces that are stitched together. An opening is left large enough for the pillow form to slip through, and then the cover is slipstitched closed by hand. (See Chapter 5 for more on slipstitching.) When you want to wash or clean the pillow cover, you just loosen the hand stitching and remove the pillow.



TIP

The amount of fabric you need for this project depends on the size of the pillow you want to cover. Measure your pillow form (see the next section), or take it with you to the fabric store and ask the sales associate to cut enough yardage so you can cut two fabric squares exactly the size of your pillow form.

## Measuring your pillow form and cutting the pillow cover pieces

Measure your premade pillow form from seam to seam across the middle before cutting the fabric for the pillow cover. For example, even though the package may say the pillow form is a 16-inch square, dimensions do vary.

After you measure your pillow form, cut two squares the same size as the pillow form. For example, if you have a 16-inch pillow form, you cut two squares of fabric 16×16 inches — one for the front and one for the back. When you sew the seams, the pillow cover will be slightly smaller than the pillow so the pillow looks full.

## Sewing the seams

Follow these steps to put the pillow cover together:

- 1. If you want cord-edge trim, fringe, a ruffle, or piping sewn on the edge of the pillow, sew it onto the front pillow piece.**

Read more about cutting, sewing, and joining these trims earlier in this chapter in the “Attaching Piping, Cording, and Fringe” section.

- 2. Place and pin the pillow front and back right sides together, leaving an opening half the width of the pillow form on one side of the cover.**

If you’re making a 16-inch pillow cover, leave an 8-inch opening. Note: I leave the opening on the bottom of every project, especially when the fabric has a one-way design. The piping join, overlap, or hand-sewn seam are all hidden there.

**3. Set your sewing machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3–3.5 mm/8–10 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

**4. Using a ½-inch seam allowance, sew the seam opposite the opening; then sew the side with the opening, backstitching on either side of the opening, as shown in Figure 15-15a.**

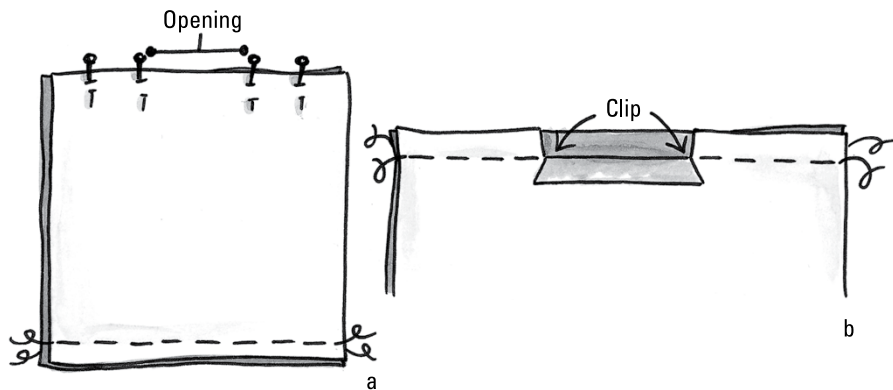


REMEMBER

**5. Press the seams flat and together. Using your scissor tips, clip through one seam allowance to within ¼ inch of the backstitching on both sides of the opening. (See Figure 15-15b.)**

This clipping trick makes it easier to slipstitch the opening closed, as you see later in the project. (See Chapter 6 for more on clipping using your scissor tips.)

**FIGURE 15-15:** Sew opposite sides of the pillow cover, leaving an opening for the pillow form to slip through (a). Clip through (a). Clip through one fabric layer at each end of the backstitched opening (b).



## Wrapping the corners

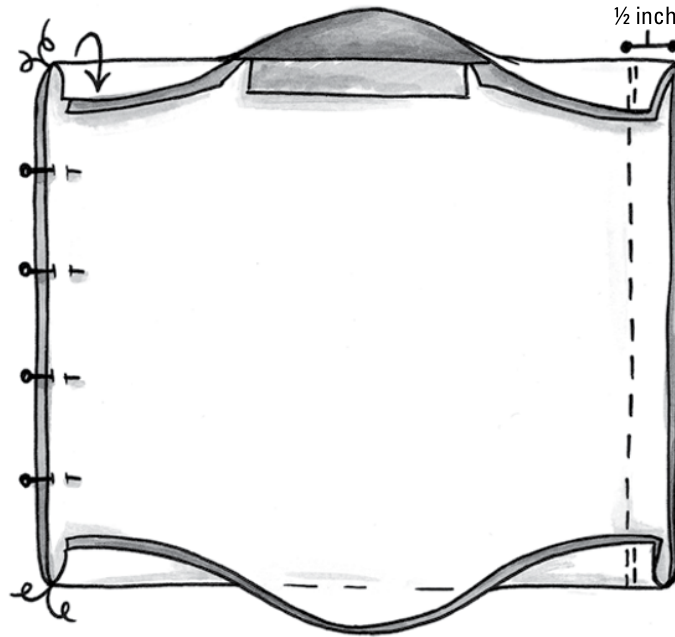
You want nice-looking corners on your pillow covers, and this wrapped corner technique is one of my personal favorites. I love it because it's fast and easy, and you're guaranteed to get square corners every time.



REMEMBER

This technique is used *only* for corners without piping or cording.

1. Fold over and pin each corner at the stitching line (see Figure 15-16).



**FIGURE 15-16:** Fold the corners at the stitching line, and then sew the other two seams.

2. With a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch seam allowance and the same machine settings as before, sew the two remaining seams, as shown in Figure 15-16, backstitching at the beginning and at the end of each seam.

Press the seams flat and together.

3. Put your hand through the opening and turn the pillow cover right side out, smoothing and squaring up the seams in each corner with your thumb and index finger.

## Stitching the closure

Because you clipped through one layer of the opening seam allowance in “Sewing the seams” earlier in this chapter, stitching the closure is a snap.

1. Put the pillow form into the pillow cover through the opening on one side of the pillow cover.

**2. Pin and hand sew an even slipstitch to close the opening:**

- a.** *Thread a hand needle and fasten the thread, bringing the needle out at the edge of the fold. (See Chapter 5 to find out about fastening the thread.)*
- b.** *Taking fine stitches, slip the needle through the fold on one edge and draw the thread taut.*
- c.** *Take another stitch, slipping the needle through the opposite folded edge. (See Chapter 5 for an illustration.)*
- d.** *Continue to the end of the opening; then fasten the thread and trim the excess.*

- » Sewing the world's simplest bed skirt (so straightforward you'll never buy one again)
- » Crafting your own duvet cover
- » Fashioning a no-sweat pillow sham

## Chapter **16**

# Brightening Up Your Bedroom

**F**ace it: The bed is the diva of the bedroom. Want to spruce up your bedroom with minimal drama? Then start with the star of the show — your bedding! Swap out that bed skirt, duvet cover, shams, and yes, even those throw pillows that somehow multiply when you're not looking. Think these projects sound tough? They're surprisingly easy, and you'll be so proud of your revamped digs you'll want to give tours.

In this chapter, I guide you through making a bed skirt and a simple duvet cover using flat sheets. (Check them out in the color insert.) To complete your bedroom makeover, check out the projects online at [www.dummies.com/go/sewingfd4e](http://www.dummies.com/go/sewingfd4e) to create a clever reversible accent pillow using your leftover bedding fabric. Trust me, this is the easiest way to make your room look like it's had a visit from one of those home makeover shows — without the camera crew and the overly enthusiastic host.

## Sew Simple Project: Flat Panel Bed Skirt

So you're considering one of those “bed-in-a-bag” deals from your local superstore? Sure, they're wallet-friendly, but you're often stuck with a bed skirt — sometimes called a dust ruffle — that's too short and flimsy or the wrong color.

But no worries. Grab a couple of flat sheets or your favorite home décor fabric and DIY your own bed skirt. Why? Because sheets are large, so you don't need to do a lot of matching or seaming, and they're available in a variety of colors and designs. Plus, if you thrift your sheets, you may find what you're looking for at a real bargain.

Thanks to my friend Devin Knuu, owner of dk design studio in Toronto, Canada (and designer and Certified Staging Professional par excellence), this clever bed skirt is not only easy to make, but easy to press. Most bed skirts have a large, flat piece of fabric positioned between the mattress and box spring with a skirt around three sides. When storing or moving this type of bed skirt, you can't fold everything flat or hang it on a hanger, so it wrinkles easily. Then when you try pressing it, the bulky flat piece of fabric weighs everything down and the skirt slides off the ironing board, making it tough to press out all the wrinkles. This bed skirt does away with the large, flat middle section, making it easier to store and press with minimal wrinkling and a snap to put on the bed.

## Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

You need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2.)

- » Solid-colored woven fabric. (See Table 16-1 to find out the right amount of fabric for your bed size.)
- » Thread that matches the fabric.
- » A heavy, ultrafirm, nonwoven stabilizer (a stiff, almost cardboard-like fabric available in the interfacing section of your local fabric store or online resource) like Pellon's Peltex70. (See "Buying your fabric or sheets" later in this chapter to find out how much you need.)

Some nonwoven stabilizers have a fusible (iron-on) coating on one or both sides. Be sure to use nonfusible stabilizer so you don't gunk up your iron.

- » Twist pins. (They look like a pin with a little pigtail.)
- » Masking tape.



**WARNING**

## Measuring the box spring

To make sure the skirt entirely covers the box spring and the space beneath the bed, you need to take the measurements shown in Figure 16-1. Remove the mattress from your bed and measure and write down the measurements of the box spring on the bed. You're looking for the width, the length, and the *drop*, which is the measurement from the top of your box spring to the floor.

» Width: \_\_\_\_

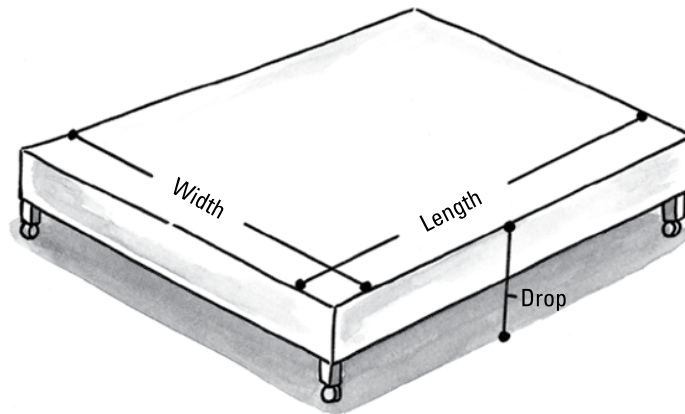
» Length: \_\_\_\_

» Drop: \_\_\_\_



TIP

Even though these measurements are somewhat standard, they can vary depending on the bed and bedframe. To make sure your project will fit your bed, you need these measurements to determine how much fabric to buy and cut out for the base and the skirt. Once you're done measuring, compare the measurements to those on the *Sewing For Dummies*, 4th Edition Cheat Sheet at [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com). If the measurements are close, print off the Cheat Sheet and use the rest of the measurements there for reference.



**FIGURE 16-1:**  
For a perfect fit,  
measure your  
box spring after  
removing  
the mattress.



WARNING

Don't think you can shortcut this measuring step by leaving the mattress on the box spring, or you'll end up scrapping the first bed skirt and starting over. (Ask me how I know!)

## Buying your fabric or sheets

To provide structure to this bed skirt, you need a stiff nonwoven base I call a “fabric stabilizer.” (Buy 2 yards for twin- and full-sized mattresses; buy 2¼ yards for queen- and king-sized mattresses.) I used a product called Peltex70 by Pellon. This stiff fabric is cut into 6½-inch strips, stitched to the edge of the skirt, and then attached to the box spring. You need something firm and stable.

You make the skirt itself by sewing strips of fabric together. The amount of fabric you need depends on the size of your bed and the width of your fabric. For this project, when using a quality home décor fabric it's at least 54 inches wide.

Narrower fabrics don't work unless you want to waste a lot of fabric. When using a sheet, the smallest twin sheet is around 66 inches wide; the other sheets are wider of course (refer to the *Sewing For Dummies*, 4th Edition Cheat Sheet at [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) for more sheet dimensions). Based on the size mattress you're "skirting," sheets give you plenty of fabric to work with.

A normal drop (the distance the bed skirt measures from the top of the box spring to the floor) is 14 inches.

Both a sheet and 54-inch wide fabric allow you to cut lengthwise strips that are at least 18 inches long and allow for nice 2-inch double hems. Why double hems? Because they give a crisp hem to the bed skirt, and the extra weight prevents wrinkles and unnecessary ironing.

I recommend that you stick to polyester-cotton blends (for easy care) in solid colors or textures — easy to find when using sheets. (Tasks get more complicated when you have to match patterns.) Using the guidelines in Table 16-1, buy enough fabric to fit your bed. Note that I err on the side of too much, so you have a little left over just in case you make a mistake.

**Note:** The approximate size of each mattress is listed in Table 16-1. Compare these measurements to the box spring measurements you took to make sure they're the same. If your measurements are larger, go for the higher amount of fabric in the range. If yours are smaller, stick to the smaller end of the range.

**TABLE 16-1**      **Bed Skirt Yardage Chart**

Bed Size	Length of 54- to 60-Inch-Wide Home Décor Fabric Needed
Twin (38 x 75 inches)	2½ yards
Full (54 x 75 inches)	2½ to 2¾ yards
Queen (60 x 80 inches)	2¾ to 3 yards
King (76 x 80 inches)	3 to 3¼ yards
California king (72 x 84 inches)	3 to 3¼ yards

## Cutting the fabric

The skirt part of the bed skirt is constructed using five separate fabric strips — three straight sides with a faux pleat positioned at each corner at the foot of the bed. Because you want each side of the bed skirt to be made of a long continuous piece of fabric, you lay out and cut the fabric or sheet the long way — parallel with



the selvages. In the biz, we call this *railroading* the fabric because you cut long continuous pieces of fabric, like a railroad track.



AUTHOR  
SAYS

This bed skirt is three-sided (the headboard side doesn't have a skirt on it) and designed for a bed without posts or a footboard. If your bed has either a footboard or posts, you can omit the faux pleats altogether or buy a bed skirt pattern specifically suited to fit a bed with those features.



TIP

The biggest challenge with most home décor projects is handling the length, bulk, and weight of the larger pieces of fabric. Before you jump into this project, clear away some space on the floor, move everything off the dining room table, and gather up an extra folding table and ironing board before you get to sewing. If you don't, you'll be scrambling at the last minute trying to find this extra space, so plan on it now to save some frustration later.

## Cutting the width of the skirt and pleat pieces

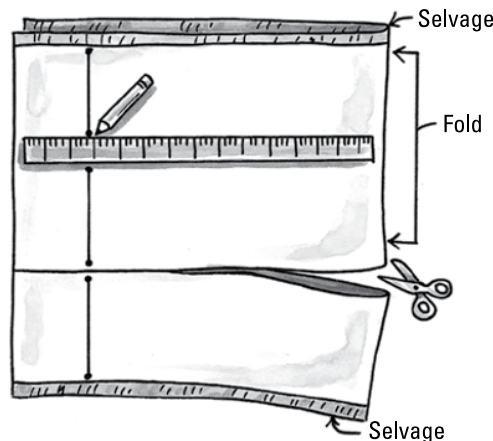
Use these guidelines to cut the fabric strips:

### 1. Cut three 6½-inch wide strips of fabric stabilizer.

Peltex is 20 inches wide, so cut three strips by folding the Peltex in half (as shown in Figure 16-2) and cutting three equally wide strips the length of the fabric.

### 2. Cut three 18- to 20-inch-wide fabric strips.

Home décor fabric is 54 to 60 inches wide, so cut three 18- to 20-inch-wide strips by folding it in half (as shown in Figure 16-2) and cutting three equally wide strips the length of the fabric. You'll have a little fabric left over from the part of the skirt that's at the foot of the bed to make the two pleat pieces that go in the corners.



**FIGURE 16-2:** Cut three long strips of fabric stabilizer and home décor fabric parallel with the selvages.

## Cutting the length of the skirt and pleat pieces

Table 16-2 indicates how to finish cutting the home décor fabric strips you cut in the preceding section. You may think the measurements are too large, but these dimensions ensure you have enough fabric to turn double side and lower hems. Rather than creating traditional pleats at the foot of the bed (way too much trouble and very bulky), you cut, hem, and attach separate, faux pleat pieces to give the illusion of a pleat with much less work. Because of this, you'll be making separate double hems on all five of the skirt pieces.

**Note:** To get the measurements in Table 16-2, I added 4 inches to the width and the length of the box spring to allow for the seam and side hems. This gives you enough fabric to turn generous 1-inch double side hems and a 2-inch double lower hem.



WARNING

Before cutting the home décor fabric strips to length, remember to double-check that the box spring dimensions in Table 16-1 are the same as yours. I've added an extra inch to the standard measurements to accommodate the seam allowances.

**TABLE 16-2**

**Cutting Lengths for Bed Skirt and Pleats**

Bed Size	Cut 1 Strip (For the foot of the bed skirt)	Cut 2 Strips (For the sides of the bed skirt)	Cut 2 Strips (For the pleats)
Twin	42 inches	79 inches	12 inches
Full	58 inches	79 inches	12 inches
Queen	64 inches	84 inches	12 inches
King	80 inches	84 inches	12 inches
California king	76 inches	88 inches	12 inches

## Double hemming the skirt and pleats

Home-decorating projects are made with double side and lower hems. Because these hems are turned up twice, you don't need to finish the edge before hemming. All the home décor fabric strips that you cut get two side hems and one lower hem. This gives the fabric extra weight at the hem edges and a professional, finished look and extra weight to prevent wrinkling.



TIP

When working with extra-long seams and hems like those in this chapter's projects, hold the fabric taut in front of and behind the presser foot as you sew. Sew a few inches and then reposition your hands, keeping even tautness in front of and behind the presser foot as you proceed along the length of the seam/hem. Doing

so maintains the flatness of the seams, makes them easier to press, and keeps the excess fabric out of your way.

## Double hem the short sides

Double hem both sides of each strip first. The goal is for the foot and side strips to match the box spring size you recorded earlier in the chapter. (See “Measuring the box spring.”) For example, if your cut side strip for a twin bed is 42 inches, by double hemming each short end 1 inch, the finished strip measures the desired 38 inches. Follow these steps for both sides of all five fabric strips:

1. **Place the fabric on the ironing board wrong side up so that the side hem edge is on the board the short way.**
2. **Press up the width of the finished side hem (approximately 1 inch).**
3. **Turn up and press the side hem again so that it's doubled. Pin it in place.**

Your finished side hem width should be approximately 1 inch.

4. **Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3 mm/9 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

5. **Sewing with the wrong side of the fabric strip up, topstitch your double hem, guiding an even distance from the hem edge.**

For a 1-inch hem, guide approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch from the folded hem edge. For more on hemming, see Chapter 7.



TIP

To guide you, stick a strip of masking tape across the bed of the machine so that the left edge of the tape is the finished hem width to the right of the needle and parallel to the lines marked in the needle plate. Use the edge of the tape as your stitching guide.

6. **Iron over the hem to smooth out the stitching.**

## Double hem the long edges



TIP

Before double hemming the long edges of your bed skirt, try it on the bed for size. Pin up the lower edge 4 inches of a strip to simulate a 2-inch double lower hem. Starting at the raw top edge, measure down  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch and mark. Hold the strip so the mark is even with the top edge of the box spring and let it hang down to the floor. If the length isn't right, lengthen or shorten your hem allowance as needed.

so that the hem edge touches the floor. Then hem the skirt and pleat pieces according to the following steps:

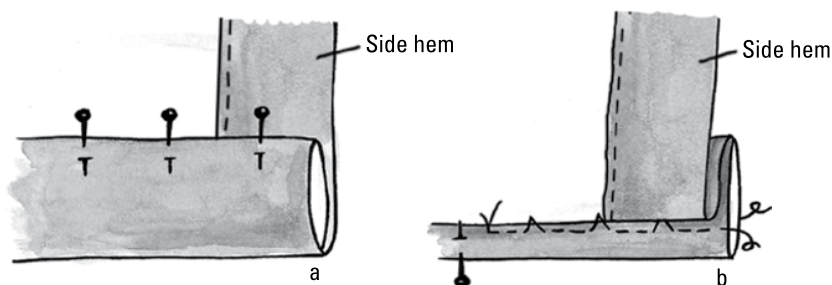
1. Place the fabric on the ironing board wrong side up so that the hem edge is on the board the long way.
2. Press up the width of the finished hem width (approximately 2 inches) along the length of the strip.
3. Turn up and press the hem again so that it's doubled, and pin it in place, as shown in Figure 16-3a.

Your finished hem width should be approximately 2 inches.

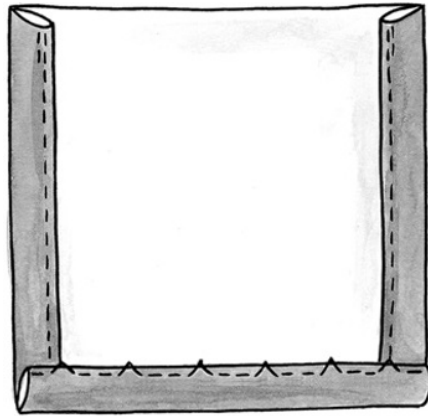
4. Set your machine like this:
  - *Stitch*: Blind hem
  - *Length*: 3 mm/9 spi
  - *Width*: 2–2.5 mm
  - *Foot*: Blind hem
5. Sewing with the wrong side of the skirt strip up, blind hem the lower hem, as shown in Figure 16-3b.
6. Iron over the hem to smooth out the stitching.

The completed hems on a pleat piece are shown in Figure 16-4.

**FIGURE 16-3:** Double the lower hem by pressing, pinning (a), and blind hemming (b).



**FIGURE 16-4:**  
The completed  
hems, as shown  
on the faux  
pleat piece.



## Attaching the skirt and pleats to the fabric stabilizer

As you follow these steps, you join the five fabric pieces to form a long strip. As the skirt takes shape, fold it up and let it rest in your lap to keep it out of the way when you sew.

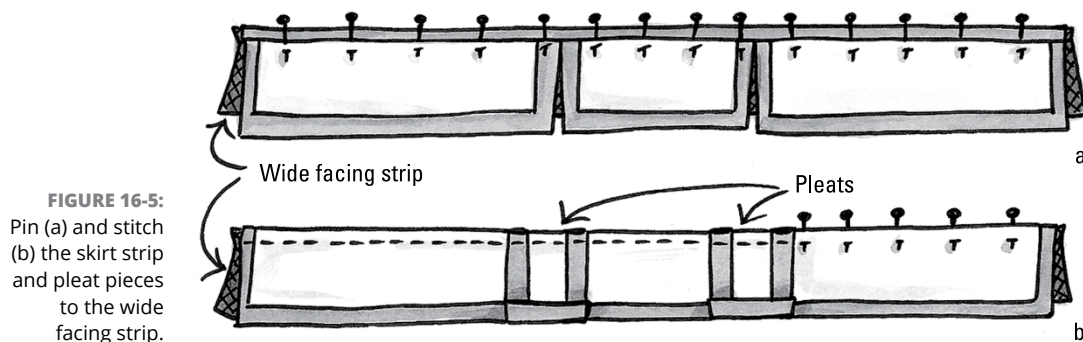
- 1. Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 3.5–4 mm/6–8 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
- 2. Sew the Peltex fabric stabilizer strips together end to end so you have a long, skinny strip.**

This creates the facing strip that the skirt is attached to. Because this strip can end up over 250 inches long, you need to trim it to length after sewing on the skirt pieces.
- 3. Pin the fabric stabilizer facing strip to the three hemmed skirt strips, right sides together, as shown in Figure 16-5a.**
- 4. Place and pin the faux pleat pieces right side down on the wrong sides of the skirt strips, centering them where the short and long strips adjoin, as shown in Figure 16-5b.**

5. **Sew the skirt and pleat pieces to the facing strip using a ½-inch seam allowance.**

Hold the fabric taut in front of and behind the presser foot as you sew. Sew a few inches, removing pins or clips before sewing over them. Then reposition your hands, keeping even tautness in front of and behind the presser foot and along the length of the seam so the seam is smooth and pucker-free.

6. **Press the long seam to one side so it's smooth and straight.**



## Positioning the bed skirt on the box spring

This is the exciting part: attaching the finished project to the box spring. It's as easy as 1, 2, 3:

1. **Place the foot of the bed skirt on the box spring. Using a twist pin, pin the skirt to the box spring at the foot of the bed and at each pleat, as shown in Figure 16-6.**



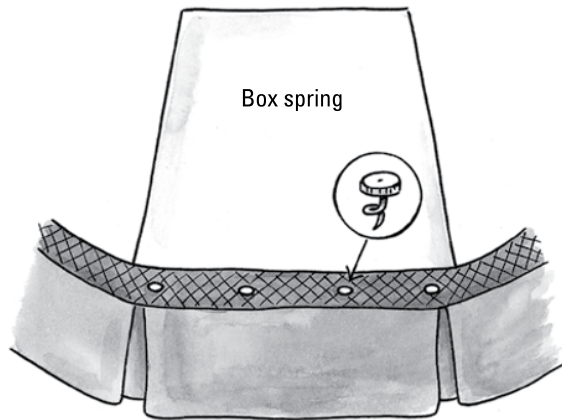
TIP

Turn the twist pins clockwise into the fabric just like you turn a small screw.

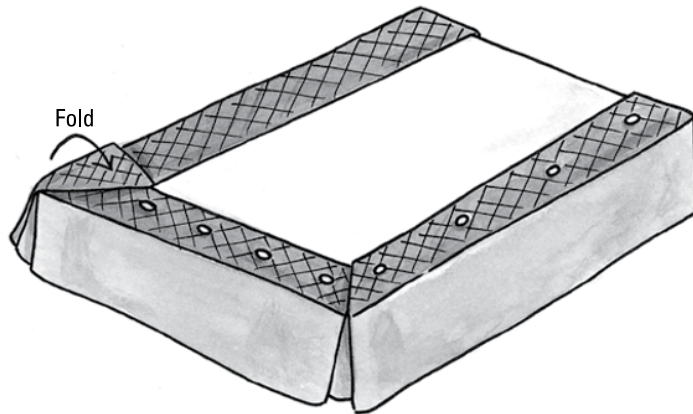
You may need more twist pins per side for the larger dust skirts.

2. **To turn the corners, pinch up the excess facing strip at each corner and fold it down, as shown in Figure 16-7.**
3. **Secure the remaining sides of the skirt with twist pins.**

**FIGURE 16-6:**  
Place the wide  
facing piece on  
the box spring so  
the skirt drops to  
the floor; then  
put twist pins at  
the foot and at  
each pleat.



**FIGURE 16-7:**  
Pinch and pin the  
facing strip at  
each corner and  
at the sides to  
attach the bed  
skirt to the  
box spring.



## Sew Simple Project: Custom Duvet Cover

A *duvet* is a fluffy cotton-covered comforter filled with natural or synthetic down that you slip into a separate, decorative duvet cover — like putting the comforter in a bag. The cover made in this section starts with flat bed sheets and has a buttoned envelope closure. The finished sheets save work by eliminating seaming and hemming steps; they're also as easy to care for as the sheets on your bed. You utilize the finished hems on both ends of the sheet as firm and stable places to sew on buttons and make buttonholes.

Handcrafted duvet covers are much cheaper than a duvet itself, so you can afford to have several color-coordinated covers — a wardrobe of room accessories to match your moods or the changing seasons.

Before you start, measure the length and width of the duvet you intend to cover. (There's no industry standard, so duvets vary in size from brand to brand.) You need this measurement to buy sheets in the right size.



TIP

Call me crazy, but I love to check out the sheets when I'm at a home goods-type store or thrifting — I never know when I'm ready to make over a room.

## Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

To make this custom duvet cover, you need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2.)

- » Two flat king sheets larger than the length and width of your duvet
- » Thread that matches the sheets
- » Six to eight ¾-inch buttons that coordinate with the fabric

## Cutting out the front duvet cover piece

Follow these simple steps to make the front duvet cover piece:

1. **Cut off the side hems of both the sheets; set aside the sheet that will become the back duvet cover piece.**
2. **Lay the front cover piece on the table or floor, wrong side up, and place your duvet comforter on the sheet so that the bottom of the comforter and the bottom of the sheet are even.**
3. **Cut the sheet on each long side so that each side is ½ inch wider than the duvet comforter.**

This piece is the duvet front.

4. **Measure both the length of the sheet and the length of the duvet comforter from top to bottom and record the measurements.**

This is the amount at the top of the sheet (where the wide hem is) that you'll fold down to create the "buttonhole hem," as shown in Figure 16-8.

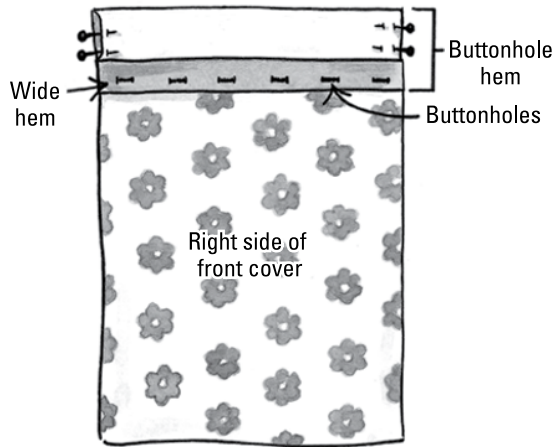
- *Sheet length* \_\_\_\_
- *Duvet length* \_\_\_\_
- *Buttonhole hem fold-down* \_\_\_\_



- 5. Mark and make six to eight buttonholes spaced evenly across the buttonhole hem and parallel to the hem edge.**

See Figure 16-8 to see the buttonhole placement. See Chapter 10 for more on marking and making buttonholes.

- 6. Once the buttonholes are made, fold down the buttonhole hem the amount calculated in Step 4 and pin-baste toward the right side, as shown in Figure 16-8.**



**FIGURE 16-8:**  
Make the  
buttonholes  
on the  
“buttonhole hem.”

## Constructing the back duvet cover piece

Follow these steps to make the back of your duvet cover:

- 1. On the table or floor, lay the front cover piece right side up so the buttonhole strip is toward the wrong side (like it would be in the finished duvet cover).**

You will see the folded-over band with the wrong side of the buttonholes facing you.

- 2. Lay the second sheet flat and on top of the front cover piece with the right sides together.**

The hem edge of the back cover piece should be even with the buttonhole hem on the front cover piece. (See Figure 16-9.) The hems are a sturdy place for the buttonholes and to sew on the buttons.



WARNING

3. Using the front cover piece as a pattern, trim the *second sheet* piece as needed to match the size of the front cover piece, as shown in Figure 16-9.

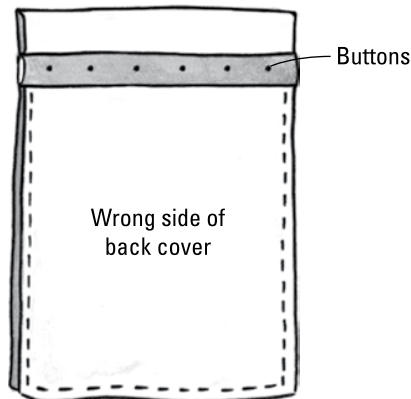
*Don't cut the top or bottom.*

4. Overlap the hems enough to allow room for buttons. The buttons are sewn to the narrow hem of the second sheet so they won't pull off with the wear and tear of sleeping and bed-making.
5. Using the buttonholes as a guide, mark and sew the buttons on the right side of the hem of the back duvet cover piece.



TIP

Position the buttons so they're centered rather than at either end of the buttonholes for less stress on the button thread. (See Chapter 10 for more on marking and sewing on buttons.)



**FIGURE 16-9:** Cut the back cover piece using the front cover piece as a pattern.

## Putting everything together

Follow these steps to put your duvet cover together. Remember, the side with the buttons and buttonholes is the back of the duvet cover.

1. With right sides together, button the front and back duvet cover pieces together.
2. Pin the sides and bottom of the front and back cover pieces together.
3. Set your machine like this:
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 3–3.5 mm/8–9 spi

- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

**4. Using a ½-inch seam allowance, sew down one side, across the bottom, and up the other side of the duvet cover, as shown in Figure 16-9.**

Iron all the seams smooth and flat.

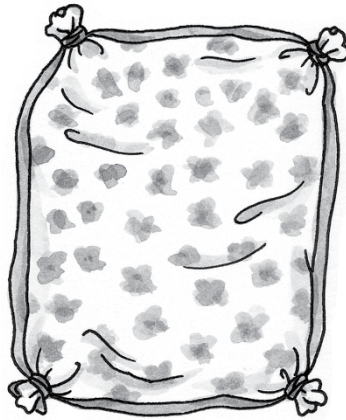
**5. Unbutton the buttons, and before you turn your duvet cover right side out, you may want to try the following tip and put your duvet into its very cool new cover.**



**TIP**

If you struggle getting the duvet into the cover, try this: Place the duvet cover wrong side out on the floor, and then place the duvet on top. Wrap rubber bands around the cover and the comforter at each corner (like you would wrap a ponytail; see Figure 16-10). Wrap the corners tightly. Then turn the duvet cover right side out through the opening. The rubber bands keep the corners of the comforter and the corners of the cover together and prevent the duvet from moving around and bunching up inside the cover.

**6. Put your new duvet cover on your bed, stand back and admire your work for a moment, and then hop in for a nap.**



**FIGURE 16-10:** Rubber-band the corners of your duvet to the cover before turning the cover right side out.



# **5 Makeover Magic: Mending, Alterations, and Quick Fixes for a Sustainable Wardrobe**

### **IN THIS PART . . .**

Keep your treasured threads out of the trash bin and your local thrift store by staging a rescue mission to repair or upstyle them. Find out how to let things out, take them in, bring them up, and let them down.

Perform clothing CPR to repair seams, patch holes and rips, and mend tears.

Release your inner designer by taking something old and reworking it into something new.

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Adjusting hemlines up, down, and all around
- » Expanding a waistband
- » Cinching up those slacks
- » Adding some breathing room in jackets and pants
- » Upcycling and restyling a jacket

## Chapter 17

# Fitting Finesse: Altering Clothes for All Shapes and Sizes

**A**re you suffering from the *terrible toos*? You know, clothes that are too long, too short, too tight, or too loose? I have the toughest time getting rid of clothes that are still wearable, especially when I know if I just lose five pounds, they'll fit. So, if you're like me and don't want to throw away perfectly good clothes despite their imperfect fit, you can use the creative shortcuts in this chapter to whip them back into shape — into your shape, that is.

## When It's Too Short



TIP

You can reduce shrinkage of most fabrics by not cooking washable fabrics in the dryer on the hottest, cotton setting. Fabrics last longer and don't shrink as much when you dry them on your dryer's permanent-press setting.

But what if that information is water under the bridge and your garment is too short to be respectable? Read on to find out what to do.

## Cutting off pant legs and rehemming them

You can turn some short pants into capri-length pants or shorts by simply cutting off the legs and rehemming them. (See Chapter 7 for more information on hemming.) Look at the width of the pant legs and imagine them cut off at the length where you normally wear your cropped pants or shorts. Are the pant legs in question full enough for you to cut off? Or are they narrow like you like them? The answer lies in your personal preference. As for the fabrics, stick with woven fabrics, such as denim, corduroy, gabardine, or poplin.

## Letting down and facing the hem

Pants or skirt a little too short? Take a look at the hem allowance. It may be generous enough that you can let it down and increase the length of your garment:

- » Is the hem double turned and then stitched?
- » Is the hem allowance a generous 2 inches or more?

If so, you may be able to let down the hem, giving you the extra hem depth (minus a 1/4-inch seam allowance needed to attach the bias hem facing).

For this project, you need bias *hem facing tape*, which you can find at your local fabric store or online source. The tape is made of a lightweight cotton/polyester blend woven fabric, has prepressed 1/4-inch hems on both long edges, and is almost 2 inches wide. It's cut on the bias so you can sew it on and press it to conform to almost any hem edge. The color choice is limited, but you should be able to find one that's close to the color of your project.

Follow these steps to lengthen your hem by facing it:

- 1. Using your seam ripper, rip out your existing hem. (See more about ripping in Chapter 6.)**
- 2. Using a steam iron, press over the hem to eliminate the old hem crease.**



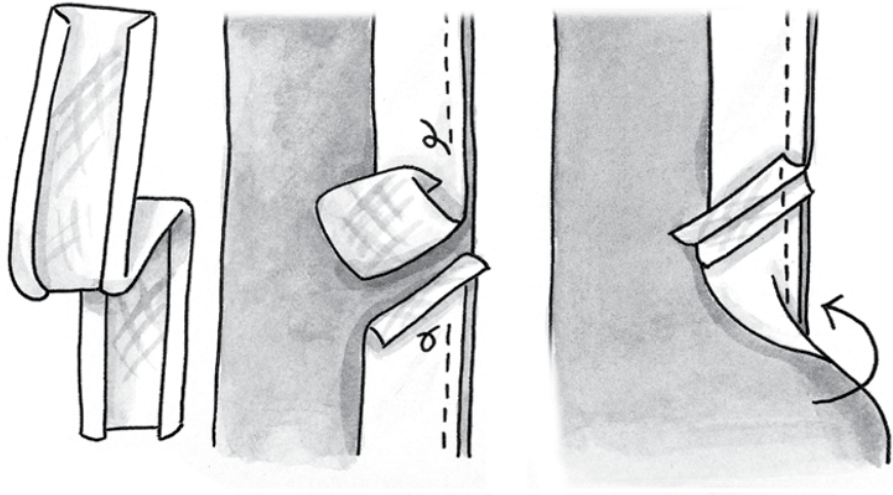
TIP

Sometimes the hem crease doesn't disappear entirely. You can usually press out a tough crease by sprinkling a mixture of equal parts white vinegar and water on a press cloth (see Chapter 2), laying the dampened press cloth over the hem crease, and then pressing until the press cloth is dry.



3. **Unfold one edge of the prefolded hem facing tape and pin the tape edge even with the hem edge, placing the right sides together, as shown in Figure 17-1.**

**FIGURE 17-1:** Unfold the hem facing tape, sew it to the hem edge, and then sew the ends of the hem facing tape together.



**TIP**

Leave the hem tape in one long piece. You cut it off after you seam the ends.

4. **Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* Appropriate for the fabric (try some test stitches to find the one that most closely matches the stitch length used in the other seamlines)
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
5. **Starting an inch from the end of the tape, stitch around the hem on the fold of the hem tape, with the tape side up, as in Figure 17-1.**
6. **Stop sewing on the tape about 1 inch from where you started.**

Don't cut the tape yet. Remove your work and head to the ironing board.
7. **Fold up the faced hem the width of the tape and, using a steam iron, gently press over the hem facing.**

Press from the wrong side of the garment, using a little steam and a press cloth, to help shape the hem facing so it becomes part of the garment.
8. **Cut off the extra length of hem facing tape, leaving enough length on each end for a seam allowance.**

9. Sew together the ends of the hem facing tape, press the seam open, and then finish stitching the hem facing to the hem edge, as in Figure 17-1.
10. Rehem the garment using one of the hemming methods I describe in Chapter 7.

## Adding ribbing into an opening

The knitted bands found on the necklines and cuffs of T-shirts and sweatshirts are called *ribbing*. My favorite type of ribbing has spandex blended with cotton or nylon (see more about fibers and fabrics in Chapter 3) and doesn't bag out of shape with a lot of washing and rough wear.

When my son was little and had frequent growth spurts, my favorite way to add length to a pair of pants or a shirtsleeve was to let down the hems and add ribbing. After doing this a couple of times for him, I ended up using the same technique for myself with great results.

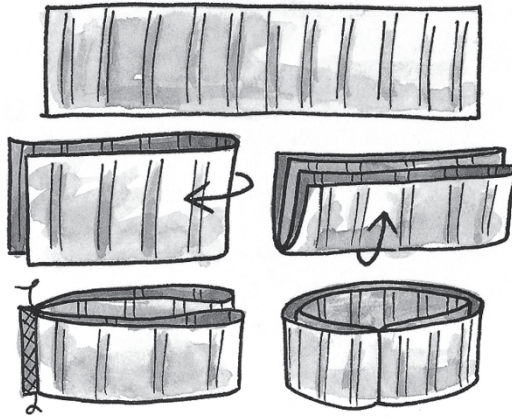
### Seaming knit ribbing

Before you can use ribbing to fix the problem of a garment being too short, you have to prepare the ribbing for the opening by seaming it. The following steps show you how to create the flattest and most invisible seam for ribbing:

1. **Cut the ribbing the proper width and length:**
  - *Ribbing length:* For necklines, cut the ribbing three-fourths the length of the opening's circumference. (If the opening is 20 inches around, cut the ribbing 15 inches long.) Stand your tape measure on one edge to easily follow the neckline as you're measuring. For sleeves, ankles, and waistlines, cut the ribbing two-thirds the length of the opening's circumference. (If the opening is 12 inches around, cut the ribbing 8 inches long.)
  - *Ribbing width:* Double the desired finished width and add ½ inch for seam allowances. If you want a 2-inch finished width, cut the ribbing 4½ inches wide.
2. **Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Overlock
  - *Length:* Longest
  - *Width:* 5–6 mm
  - *Foot:* Embroidery

3. **Fold the ribbing as shown in Figure 17-2 and, using a ¼-inch seam allowance, sew the short ends together.**

**FIGURE 17-2:** Fold the band in half the long way and then fold the band up creating a V-shaped fold on both ends; seam the narrow cut ends and turn them right side out.



4. **Finger-press the seam to one side, and then turn the ribbing so, when turned right side out, it makes a circle with the seam on the inside of the band.**

## Sewing or serging ribbing into place

When you see how fast and easy applying ribbing into an opening is, you'll want to put ribbing on everything in sight.

Follow these steps to attach your ribbing like a pro:

1. **Use pins to mark off the opening into quarters.**

This process is called *quarter marking*.

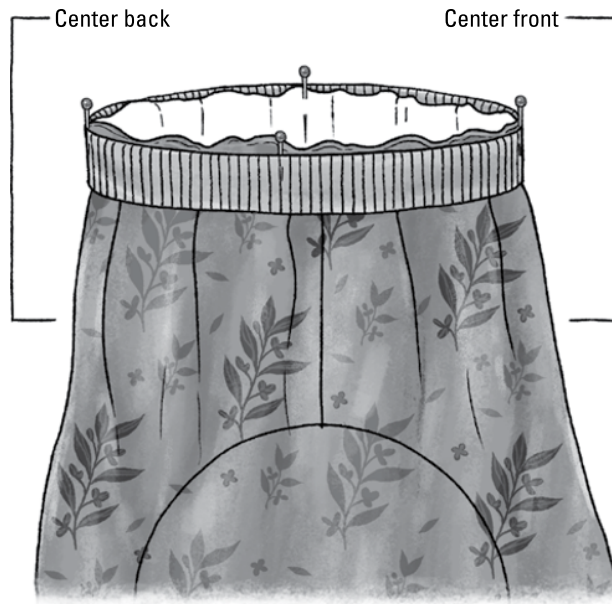
Until you get more practice, you may find that marking the opening and ribbing into eight equal parts, rather than four, is easier.



**TIP**

2. **Quarter mark the ribbing.**
3. **Place the garment opening and ribbing with right sides together.**

With the garment right side out, place the ribbing on the outside of the opening so the right sides are together. Line up and pin together the ribbing and the opening so the seams and pin marks match up. See Figure 17-3.



**FIGURE 17-3:**  
Quarter mark the  
ribbing and  
garment opening.

**4. Set your sewing machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Overlock
- *Length:* Longest
- *Width:* 5–6 mm
- *Foot:* Embroidery

Or set your serger like this:

- *Stitch:* Four-thread overlock
- *Length:* 2.5–3 mm
- *Width:* 4 mm
- *Foot:* Standard

**5. Turn the project inside out, then sew a ¼-inch seam with your sewing machine or serger, following the steps outlined in Chapter 6.**

With the band side up, pull the band with your right hand while guiding the seamline with your left for a smooth application.

# When It's Too Long

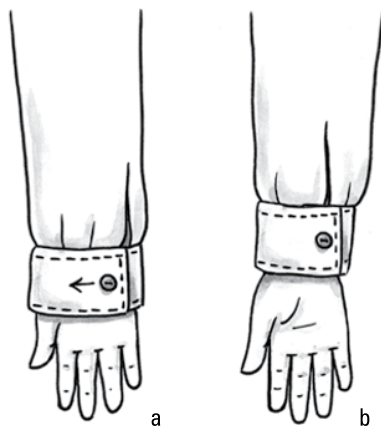
Of course, you can simply rehem pants and skirts to the right length if they're too long. (See Chapter 7.) But when it comes to sleeves and thicker fabrics like denim, the following solutions are my favorite ways to solve the too-long problem.

## Moving the button on a sleeve cuff

A fast way to take care of a slightly too-long sleeve on a dress shirt is to move the button over so that the cuff fits snugly around the wrist. This adjustment keeps the cuff from sliding over your hand, as shown in Figure 17-4.

Review the information in Chapter 10 on the ways to sew on a button.

**FIGURE 17-4:**  
Move the button  
over to shorten a  
too-long sleeve:  
before (a) and  
after (b).



## Removing the cuff to shorten the sleeve

My husband's arms are shorter than manufacturers think they should be, so I constantly shorten shirtsleeves for him by moving the cuff higher up the sleeve. (I offered to take up some tucks in his sleeves, but he just wasn't interested — "a little too puffy and pirate-y," he said — go figure!)

You can easily shorten sleeves at the cuff when you follow these steps:

- 1. Using a seam ripper, rip off the cuff, carefully cutting the stitches that hold it onto the sleeve.**

Leave the cuff with the seam allowance pressed toward the inside.



TIP

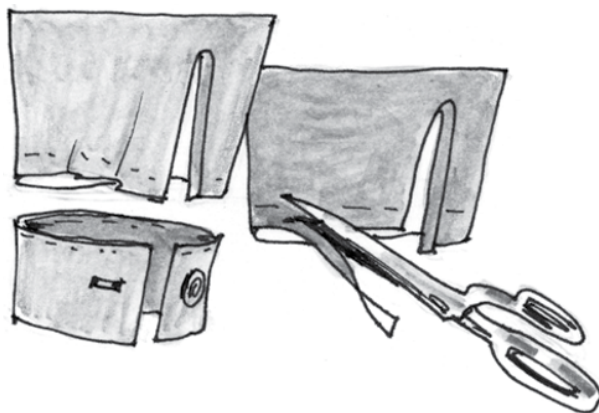
As a frame of reference, remove one cuff at a time. This way, if you need to check how the shirt manufacturer stitched the cuff on in the first place, you can check the one that you haven't removed. Plus you won't get them mixed up and put the cuff on the wrong sleeve.

2. **Pin the cuff back onto the sleeve so that the finished edge of the cuff is in the desired position.**

Try on the shirt and bend your arm to be sure that the cuff is positioned in exactly the right spot.

3. **Using a fabric marker, mark along the top of the cuff, establishing the new cuff position.**

4. **Unpin the cuff and cut away the excess sleeve fabric, leaving a ½-inch seam allowance at the bottom of the sleeve, below the cuff placement marks that you made in Step 3, as shown in Figure 17-5.**



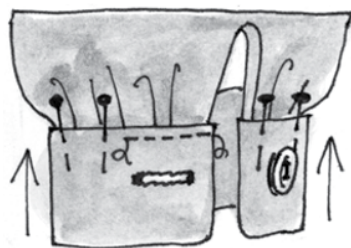
**FIGURE 17-5:**  
Mark the new cuff  
position and trim  
off the excess  
sleeve fabric.

5. **Re-pleat and pin the bottom of the sleeve, using the original pleats as a guide and deepening the pleats as needed to fit the fullness of the sleeve to the cuff.**
6. **After shortening one cuff, repeat Steps 1 through 5 for the other cuff.**

Double-check that you pleated the other sleeve like the first. (Read more about pleats in Chapter 9.)

7. **Pin on the cuff (see Figure 17-6) so the seamline is even with the marks you made in Step 3.**

Take a quick look on the underside to make sure that the cuff pleats will be caught in the stitching.



**FIGURE 17-6:**  
Pin on the cuff.

### 8. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/10–12 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose or edgestitch

### 9. Edgestitch the cuff to the sleeve, guiding the stitches so that they sew over the original stitching line.

See Chapter 6 for more on edgestitching.

### 10. Repeat for the other sleeve.

## Shortening jeans

Shortening and rehemming jeans presents some real challenges unless you have the right tools and technique. Some doubled jean seams cannot fit under the presser foot of home-use sewing machines. And if the presser foot coasts down off the thicknesses, you have a big mess on your hands — unless you use a wedge.



**AUTHOR  
SAYS**

You put a wedge under the presser foot to help you sew over an uneven fabric thickness. Sewing wedges, which come in several varieties, work like a shim under a dresser leg by stabilizing the presser foot as it travels over troublesome seams.

Follow these steps to shorten too-long jeans:

### 1. Before taking up the hem on your jeans, wash and dry them on the high or regular cotton setting.



**REMEMBER**

After rehemming, wash and dry your jeans on the permanent-press setting to ensure that they don't shrink any further.

### 2. Measure and mark the desired hemline with your dressmaker's chalk.

### 3. Cut off the excess fabric, leaving at least ½ to ⅝ inch for the hem allowance.

**4. Finish the raw edge, using one of the overcasting stitches on your sewing machine or a three-thread overlock on your serger.**

See Chapter 7 for the best way to finish raw edges.

**5. Fold up and press the hem allowance on the mark you made in Step 2.**

Even though your jeans may have been double-hemmed, this excess thickness is often too much for many sewing machines. You can sew your hem more easily, and it looks better if you turn it up only once.

**6. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3–4 mm/6–9 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose, Teflon, or roller
- *Needle:* Size #90/14 Jeans
- *Accessories:* Wedge (sometimes called a button reed) or a Jean-A-Ma-Jig (brand name)

**7. Sew the hem, starting in either the front or the back of the leg (not at an inseam or outseam).**

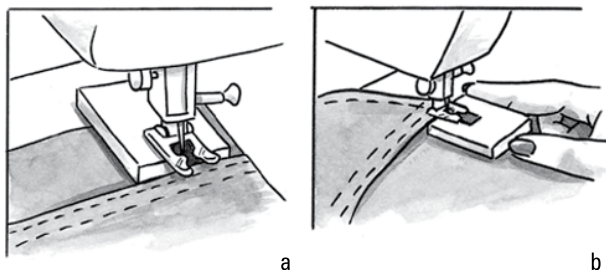
**8. When you get to an inseam or outseam, sew until the presser foot toe tips up on the fabric thicknesses created by the seam allowances; stop with the needle in the fabric and lift the foot.**

**9. Place the wedge under the heel of the presser foot and then lower it.**

The wedge lifts up the back of the foot so that the foot is elevated to the thickness and is parallel to the fabric.

**10. Stitch across the thickness until the toes start tipping down. Stop with the needle in the fabric and lift the foot again.**

**11. Remove the wedge from under the heel, place it under the toe of the foot, and lower the presser foot, as shown in Figure 17-7.**



**FIGURE 17-7:**  
Use a wedge to  
maneuver over  
thick seams.



**12. Sew until the needle and the back of the foot are off the thickness.**

As you come off the thickness, the wedge levels the foot for even feeding and even better stitching.

**13. Lift the foot and remove the wedge, and then lower the foot and sew until you get to the next thick seam.**

Repeat Steps 8 through 13 until you finish hemming.

## When It's Too Tight

The gems in this section can give your clothes a new lease on life — no diets or dreaded gym memberships required.

### Moving the buttons on a jacket

An easy way to get more room in a jacket is simply to move the buttons. Moving a button even 1/2 inch makes a big difference in the way a garment looks and feels.



TIP

Turn a double-breasted jacket into a single-breasted one by eliminating one row of buttons and moving the other row so that the buttons and buttonholes are centered. (See Figure 17-8.) You get more room, and the single-breasted styling is usually more slimming. (See Chapter 10 to find out about sewing buttons by hand and machine.)



**FIGURE 17-8:**  
Add room to a double-breasted jacket by moving the buttons.

## Adding room to the waistband

You typically cut waistbands on the lengthwise grain. (See Chapter 4 for more information on grainlines.) When washed and dried on the high cotton setting, fabric often shrinks on the lengthwise grain, and it keeps shrinking even after you've washed the garment several times. No wonder those waistbands feel a little tight lately. (It really isn't you!) Here's how to give yourself up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch of extra room:

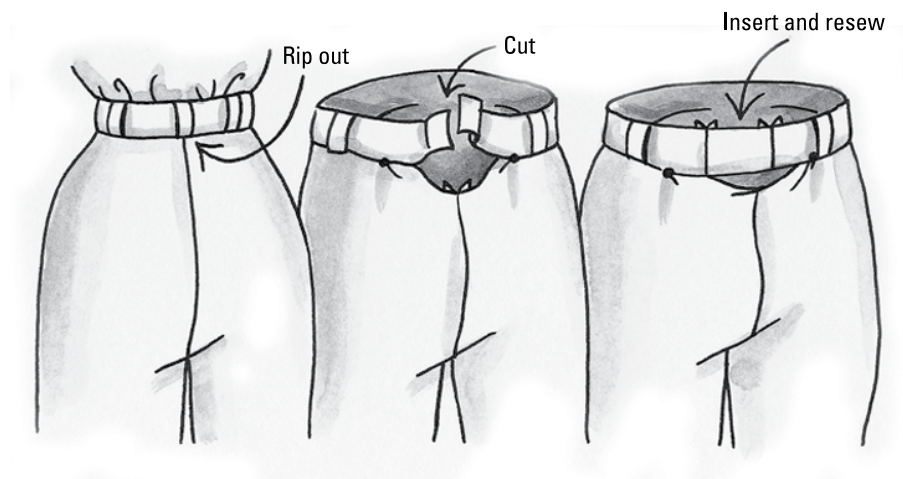
1. **Find a place in the garment where you can steal a little bit of fabric to make an extension.**

Extra hem allowance, an extra belt loop, or the lower edge of an inseam pocket (if it matches the garment fabric) all work well.

2. **Cut the extension as long as possible and the same width as the waistband, and interface it with fusible interfacing (see Chapter 3 for more on interfacing).**
3. **At the back of the pants, carefully rip out any belt loops that might be in the way.**

See Chapter 6 for more on safely ripping out stitches.

4. **Rip out the stitching that holds the waistband to the waistline, removing the stitching 3 to 4 inches on either side of the center back. Cut through the waistband the short way, as shown in Figure 17-9.**



**FIGURE 17-9:** Waistband too tight? Add a fabric extension to the center back.

## 5. Cut your fabric extension.

Try on the garment and figure out how much of an extension (up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch) you need. Cut the extension long enough to fit the waistband *plus* the seam allowances.



REMEMBER

Add generous seam allowances so that you can press open the seams on both ends of the extension, making the extended waistband smooth and comfortable. If you need to add  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch, cut the extension  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch plus 1 extra inch. This allows for  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch seam allowances on each side of the extension and  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch seam allowances on the waistband.

## 6. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* Appropriate for the fabric (try some test stitches to find the one that most closely matches the stitch length used in the other seamlines)
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

## 7. Sew the extension to the center back of the waistband, as shown in Figure 17-9.

Place the right side of the short, open end of the waistband to the right side of the interfaced extension and sew a seam. Repeat for the other end of the extension.

## 8. Sew the waistband back on and attach any belt loops as they were before.

Because the original waistband shrinks and the waistline of the garment doesn't, adding this little bit of length to the waistband "relaxes" the fit so you have extra room and comfort.

# When It's Too Loose

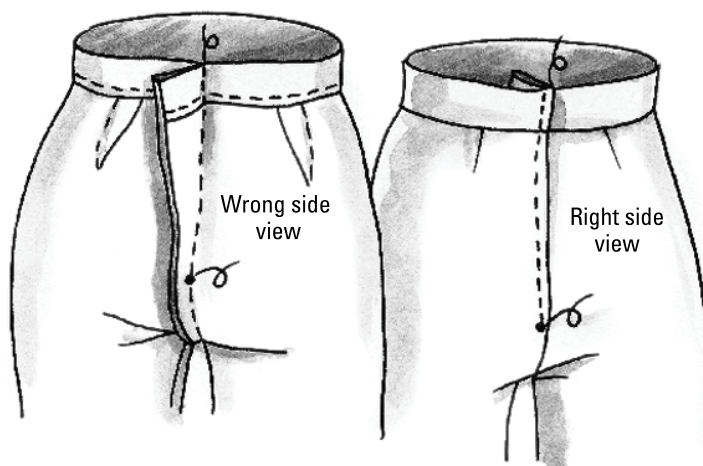
Here's a trick I use when things are too loose. When hips are proportionally bigger than the waistline, this quick fix takes in the waistline.

Taking in the waistline works well when taking in casual men's or ladies' slacks that have a front zipper and that don't have the traditional center back seam in the waistband. Just follow these steps:

1. **With the pants inside out, pinch in and pin-baste the necessary amount out of the center back, from the waistband down as far as needed.**

To pin-baste, place the pins close together and along the new seamline. You may also want to mark the new seamline with dressmaker's chalk.

2. **Sew along your pin line, taking in as much fabric as needed for the fit determined in Step 1.**
3. **Starting at the crotch and sewing up through the waistband, edgestitch (see Chapter 6 for more about edgestitching) next to the seamline (see Figure 17-10), which causes the seam allowance to lay down smoothly and to one side.**



**FIGURE 17-10:**  
Waistline too loose? Take it in.

## Sew Smart Project: Restyled Jacket with Ribbing Insets (Gussets) in the Side Seams

I recently stumbled upon this Harvé Benard boiled wool jacket at a thrift store. It was a little snug — but only \$8.00. For that price, I knew I could make it work — somehow. At checkout, I spotted moth holes aplenty, and the clerk dropped the price to \$3.00. Bargain of the century! So I jazzed up my jacket with ribbing on each side seam to add breathing room and decked out the moth holes with beads

and sequins. Voilà! Designer fashion with a personal twist. Take a peek at this haute-couture hack in the color insert.

According to Google, a *gusset* “is a triangular or diamond-shaped piece of fabric that is sewn into a seam to add width, strength, or comfort to a garment.” And that’s exactly what you’ll be adding to your jacket to make it stylish and comfy.

## Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

Gather the following supplies before you get started:

- » Sewing Survival Kit
- » A slightly too-small jacket with a set-in sleeve (see Chapter 11 for more on set-in sleeves)
- » Sweater ribbing that’s finished on one end or a knit fabric that’s similar in weight to the jacket

*Note:* The type of ribbing to look for is used for sweater collars, cuffs, or waistbands. I got mine at [www.moodfabrics.com](http://www.moodfabrics.com). If you have a sweater that you want to retire and don’t mind cutting up, use the bottom part of the sweater (where the waist ribbing is) as your gusset fabric.

- » Tracing paper
- » Ruler
- » Pencil and eraser

## Instructions



I’ve included instructions both for sweater ribbing and knit fabric installation. Make it easier on yourself and read through the instructions for the gusset material you’re using before sewing. Here’s how to do it:

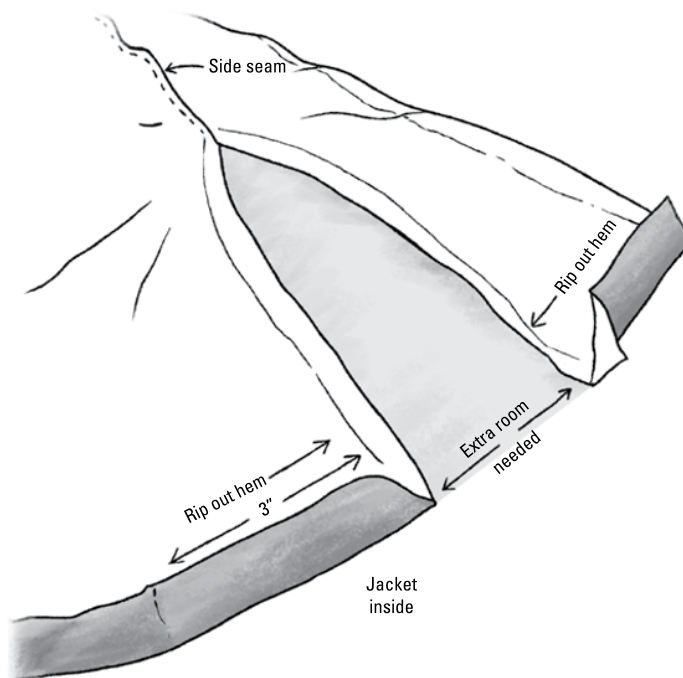
- 1. Carefully rip out both side seams in the jacket up to where you no longer need the extra room, as shown in Figure 17-11.**

On my jacket, that spot ended up about 2 inches below the underarm seam. If you need room in the bust, continue ripping out the seams up into the sleeves.

- 2. Press the side seams to the wrong side.**

If you’re using ribbing, skip ahead to Step 5.

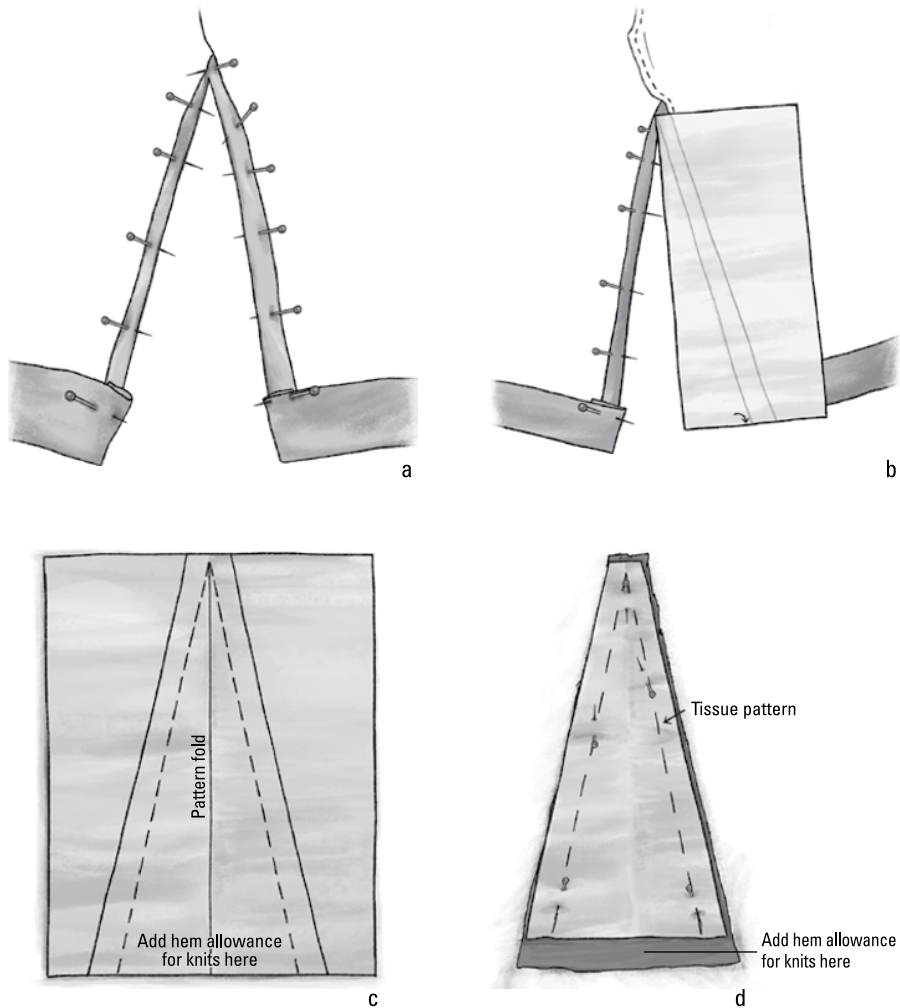
**FIGURE 17-11:**  
After ripping out the side seam up to where you no longer need extra room, spread the jacket open; the split opening will look like a triangle.



3. If you're using knit fabric, rip out the hem allowance of your jacket about 3 inches on either side of the side seam.
4. Try on the jacket and then measure and write down how much extra room you need on each side at the hem edge.
5. Place the jacket on a large flat surface, wrong side up, and then spread open one side seam the amount needed to fit you (refer to Figure 17-11); the opening will look like a triangle.

For example, if you need a total of 6 extra inches, spread open each side by 3 inches. You'll have a triangle that's 3 inches at the bottom by where the side seam goes up and resumes its journey to the underarm seam see Figure 17-12a.

6. Fold the tracing paper in half the long way and place it over the triangular split, marking the points of the triangle, as shown in Figure 17-12b. Open the tracing paper and repeat the marking for the other side.
  - For a ribbing gusset: The pattern is laid out so the bottom of the triangle is at the hem edge.(See Figure 17-12c.)
  - For a knit gusset: Add a hem allowance to the pattern so the allowance is the same depth as the jacket.



**FIGURE 17-12:**  
Make the pattern  
for the gusset  
and cut it out.

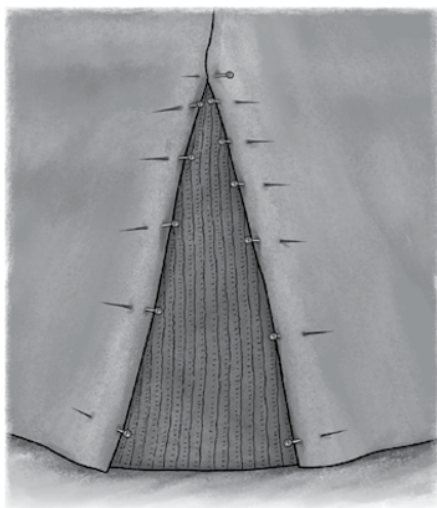
## 7. Lay out and cut the gusset;

- *For the ribbing gusset:* Place the finished edge of the ribbing at the hem edge of the pattern and cut.
- *For a knit gusset:* Cut out the gusset including the hem allowance (See Figure 17-12d).

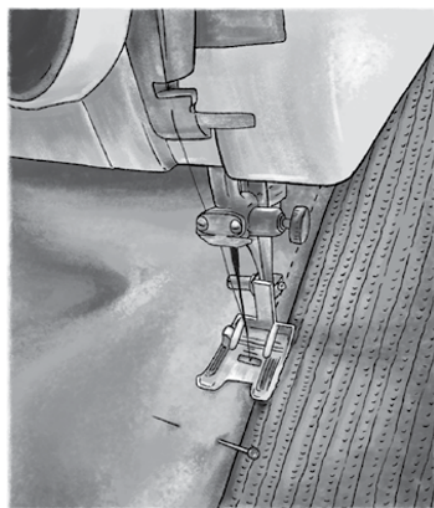
## 8. Lay the gusset right side up on a flat surface.

## 9. Lay the jacket on top of the gusset so the right sides are up and pin them together, as shown in Figure 17-13a.

**FIGURE 17-13:**  
Lay the jacket opening over the gusset (with the wrong side of the jacket to the right side of the gusset), pin, and edgestitch.



a



b

## 10. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3–4 mm or 6–9 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* All-purpose

If you're using knit fabric, skip to Step 13.

## 11. If you're using sweater ribbing, edgestitch the gusset in place, as shown in Figure 17-13b. Repeat for the other gusset.

## 12. Press and you're done!

## 13. If you're using knit fabric, open up the hem allowance on both the gusset and the jacket and edgestitch from the hem edge up.

## 14. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Stretch blind hem
- *Length:* 3 mm/9 spi
- *Width:* 2–2.5 mm
- *Foot:* Blind hem

## 15. Pin up and blind hem the jacket and gusset hem, as shown in Chapter 7, and press.

## 16. Repeat for the other gusset.



- » Fixing split seams
- » Covering holes the easy way
- » Closing up tears
- » Making a visible mend pretty

## Chapter **18**

# Sewing SOS: “Help, I Ripped My \_\_\_\_\_”

**E**ver opened your closet only to find your go-to pieces are falling apart at the seams — literally? Whether it’s your favorite shirt crying over a split seam or your trusty jeans begging for a knee patch, don’t worry. You’re not destined to shop for replacements just yet. This chapter is designed to slash that repair pile and breathe new life into your wardrobe. Dive in to discover quick fixes for split seams, remedies for tears, and even a masterclass on stitching a visible mend that’ll get your friends thinking you’re a creative genius. And hey, if it’s just a button you’re missing, skip to Chapter 10. Ripped out hems? Go to Chapter 7.

## Repairing a Split Seam

If you have a simple split seam, where the stitches in a seam are ripped or broken, your repair job is an easy one. The type of fabric — woven or knit — determines the stitches you use to repair the seam. I cover the possibilities in the following sections.



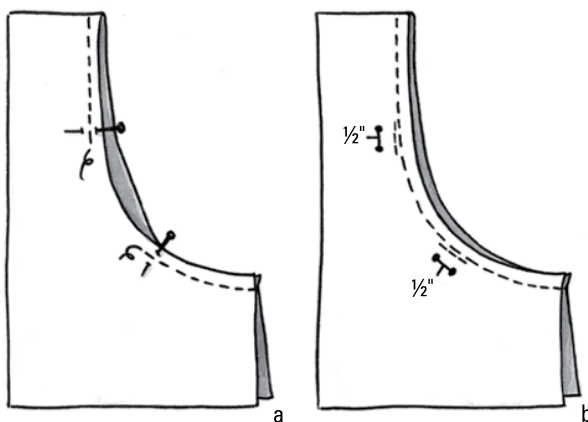
If the fabric has deteriorated and is pulling away from the stitches or is totally obliterated at or around the seam allowance, you use a different technique than these to fix things up. Check out “Patching Holes and Rips,” later on in this chapter, for more information.

## Repairing a split seam on woven fabrics

Follow these steps to repair a simple ripped seam in woven fabric, which doesn’t have much, if any, stretch:

1. Turn the item inside out so that you can easily access the seam allowances.
2. Using your seam ripper and embroidery scissors, remove the broken and ripped stitches. (For more on unsewing, see Chapter 6.)
3. Pin the seam allowances back together in their original position, as shown in Figure 18-1a.
4. Set your machine like this:
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/10–12 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
5. Starting  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch before the split in the seam, sew over the intact seam, over the split, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch over the intact seam on the other side of the split, as shown in Figure 18-1b.

Backstitch at the beginning and the end of the repairing stitches.



**FIGURE 18-1:** Pin (a) and sew the split together, sewing  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch before and beyond the split (b).

## Repairing a split seam on knit fabrics

Knit fabrics have varying degrees of stretch to them. To keep the stretch in a repaired seam, you have to use a zigzag stitch. For a very secure mend, follow these steps:

- 1. Turn the item inside out so that you can easily access the seam allowances.**
- 2. Using your seam ripper and embroidery scissors, remove the broken and ripped stitches. (For more on unsewing, see Chapter 6.)**
- 3. Pin the seam allowances back together in their original position.**
- 4. Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Zigzag
  - *Length:* 1–1.5 mm/20 to 24 spi
  - *Width:* 1–1.5 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose or embroidery
- 5. Starting ½ inch before the split in the seam, sew over the intact seam, over the split, and ½ inch over the intact seam on the other side of the split.**

## Patching Holes and Rips

My brother is a commercial salmon fisherman in Alaska. Before he was married, he handed me a pile of mending whenever I visited. Talk about holes! He had so many shirts with holes in the elbows that he finally gave up and started cutting the sleeves off his long-sleeved shirts before they could get holey.

Even if you don't give your clothes quite the workout that a fisherman does, you may find holes that need patching in your clothes and other sewing projects from time to time.

### Covering holes with patches

I find the following technique to be the best way to patch holes. You can use this method to patch over holes in elbows, knees, or anywhere that holes find their

way into a piece of fabric. *Note:* If you need to repair the hole or you need to place a patch on a knee or sleeve, use the free arm feature on your sewing machine to slip over your repair. *Note:* Even with the free arm, a patch might need to be done in two steps by entering the garment from two openings. The last resort? A seam may need to be unsewn for knee or elbow access.



TIP

You can make large or small patches and arrange them artfully to cover other messes besides holes.



WARNING

Iron-on patches are too good to be true: Experience has taught me that, after a little washing and wearing, the adhesive quits and the patch falls off. If you're using iron-on patches, also stitch them.

Follow these steps to sew on a patch:

**1. Find a fabric similar to the garment you're patching.**

If possible, steal some of the original fabric by stitching shut a pocket that doesn't get a lot of use and cutting away the fabric from underneath.



TIP

Save worn-out jeans so that you have a plentiful supply of used denim for patching.

**2. Cut out a patch  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch larger than the hole, all the way around. You can cut the patch to any shape that you like.**

Before cutting the patch to size, inspect the fabric around the hole. You may decide that you need a bigger patch to cover any frays in the area.

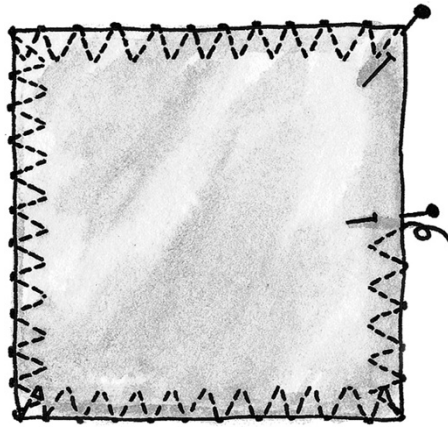
**3. Pin the patch in place, centering it over the hole so that the right side of the patch fabric is up, as shown in Figure 18-2.**

Pin around the edges of the patch, through the patch and the garment underneath.

**4. Set your sewing machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Three-step zigzag
- *Length:* 0.5–0.8 mm/fine setting or 60 spi
- *Width:* 5 mm (or the widest width you have)
- *Foot:* Embroidery
- *Needle:* #90/14 HJ denim or jeans (for heavy fabrics); #80/12H Universal for everything else

**FIGURE 18-2:**  
Pin the patch in  
place and sew it  
on with a  
three-step  
zigzag stitch.



- 5. Place the garment and patch under the presser foot, right side up.**  
The patch should be under the foot so the edge is slightly to the right of the needle.
- 6. Start sewing so that when the needle travels across the patch fabric to the right, the last stitch formed is on the outside edge of the patch.**  
Remember to pull out the pins before sewing over them. This stitch is very dense and helps to meld the two pieces of fabric together so the patch is as strong as the fabric it patches.
- 7. If the patch is a circle, sew all the way around it. If the patch is a rectangle or square, sew to the corner and pivot by following these steps:**
  - a. Sew to the corner, stopping with the needle in the far-right side of the stitch.**  
Doing so positions the patch so that you reinforce it in the corner.
  - b. Lift the foot, pivot 90 degrees, lower the foot, and sew the second side of the patch, again stopping with the needle in the far-right side of the stitch and pivoting.**
  - c. Continue like this until you've sewn around the patch.**
- 8. Pull the threads to the back of the fabric and tie them off.**  
See Chapter 6 for more information on tying off threads.)

## Patching with appliqués

You can get creative by making or purchasing a ready-made *appliqué* — a shaped piece of fabric that may be partially or completely covered by embroidery stitches and that may have a row of close-together zigzag stitches called *satin stitches* on the edge. Use it as a patch in a low-stress area. Before patching with an appliqué,

though, consider where you want to position it on the garment. Appliqués usually aren't large enough for patching knees, elbows, and other high-wear areas, and they can be lumpy and not very comfortable. Your best bet is to use them to disguise small holes.



If you have a friend who has one of those spendy “Big Boy” embroidery machines, they may have some practice embroidery or appliqué pieces they’d be willing to give you for patching.

Appliqués make short work of repairing holes. Just follow these steps to patch with an appliqué:

**1. Pin the appliqué over the hole.**

If the appliqué is too thick to pin through, temporarily glue it into place, using your fabric glue stick.

**2. Set your sewing machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight
- *Length:* 3 mm/10 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* Embroidery

**3. Using thread that matches the appliqué, straight stitch around it, sewing just inside the satin-stitched edge.**

**4. Pull the threads to the wrong side and tie them off.**



Sometimes you can disguise your appliqués and make them look like decorations. For example, I’ve patched a hole with an appliqué and then placed another appliqué or two on the garment in other places so that the appliqués looked like they were on the garment all along.

## Mending Tears in Fabric

The goal in mending a tear is to make the repair as flat and invisible as possible. You accomplish this smooth repair using the three-step zigzag stitch and some lightweight fusible interfacing. (See Chapter 3 for more information on interfacing.)



TIP

If you find a lightweight cotton darning or embroidery thread through your local sewing machine dealer or online resource in the color that matches your garment, use that instead of all-purpose sewing thread. This finer weight of thread works beautifully for a comfortable and an almost invisible repair.

To mend tears on woven fabric, just follow these steps:



TIP

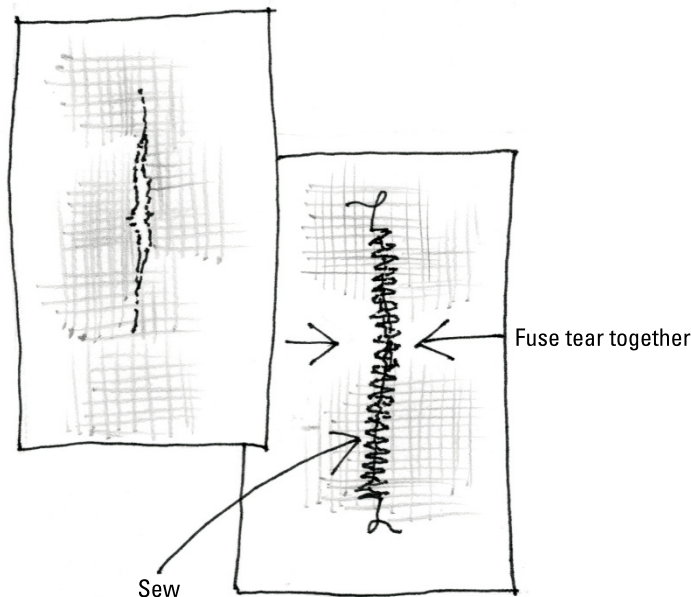
1. **Cut a ½-inch-wide strip of lightweight fusible interfacing the length of the tear plus 1 inch.**

For a more invisible mend, use a pair of pinking shears and pink the edges of the interfacing. The irregular edge is less noticeable and may not shadow through to the right side of the fabric when pressed.

2. **Trim off the loose threads from the tear.**
3. **Lay the repair wrong side out on the ironing board.**
4. **Push the raw edges of the tear together; place the interfacing over the tear.**
5. **Using your iron, fuse the interfacing to the back of the tear according to the manufacturer's instructions.**
6. **Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Three-step zigzag
  - *Length:* 0.5–0.8 mm/fine setting or 60 spi
  - *Width:* 5–7 mm
  - *Foot:* Embroidery
7. **With the fabric right side up, position your needle ¼ inch before one end of the tear and lower the foot, centering it over the tear.**
8. **Sew so that the stitches go back and forth over and ¼ inch below the tear, as shown in Figure 18-3.**

If the tear is wider than the width of the mending stitch, sew two rows of stitching next to each other so that the second row meshes into the first.

9. **Pull the threads to the back and tie them off.**



**FIGURE 18-3:**  
Fuse the tear with  
interfacing before  
sewing over it.

## Visible Mending

Along with some fabric, pearl cotton embroidery cord, and hand stitches, add a patch or two and make the mend part of the overall garment design. The most common wear area on a pair of pants is the knee; on sleeves, it's the elbow (thus the invention of the preemptive elbow patch).

To do this type of repair, you work from the right side, and place the patch on the wrong side. It sounds counterintuitive, but once you pin everything together, you'll understand.

### Fabric, findings, and raw materials

Have the following supplies handy before you start:

- » Sewing Survival Kit
- » Hand needle with a large enough eye that it can accommodate embroidery floss or #8 pearl cotton (which looks like a twisted embroidery floss)
- » Embroidery hoop

Contrasting patch fabric similar in weight and fiber content (so the washing/cleaning process is the same for both the repaired project and the patch)



# Instructions

Follow these steps to do your visible mending:

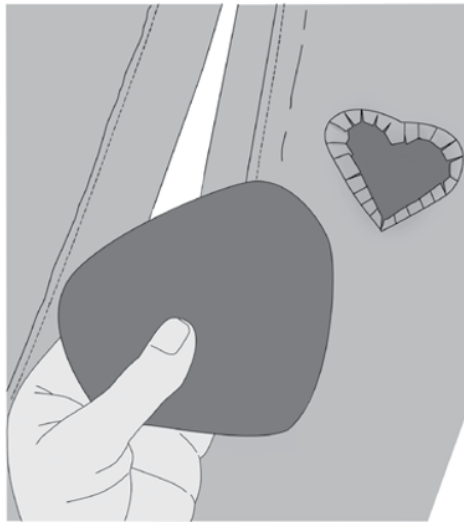


TIP

1. **Cut out a patch that's  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 inch larger than the hole all the way around, so the patch fits comfortably *under the hole*.**

Be sure to inspect the fabric around the hole to make sure you have a big enough patch.

2. **Pin the patch in place, centering it under the hole so that the right side of the patch fabric and the hole is up, as shown in Figure 18-4.**



**FIGURE 18-4:**  
Pin the patch, centering it under the hole, so that the right side of the patch fabric and repair is up.

3. **Using your scissor tips, make  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch clips into and around the shape of the hole.**
4. **Fold under the raw edges of the hole being repaired and pin the turned-back edges to the patch, as shown in Figure 18-5.**



TIP

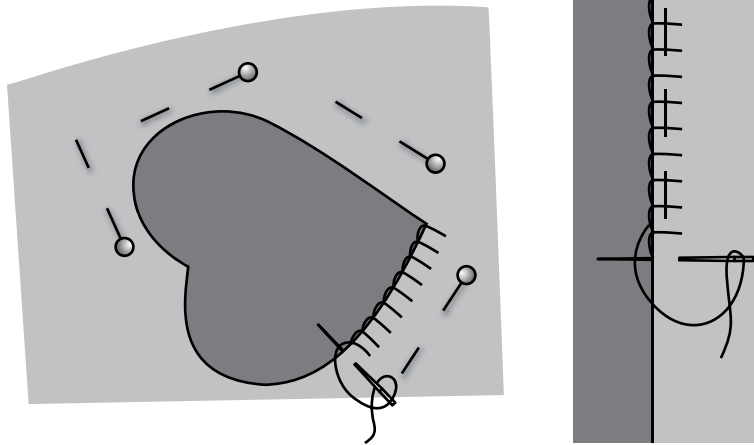
If you're able to get this pinned patch into an embroidery hoop so that most or all the patch is hooped, you'll find that this repair will be easier to work with and that the fabric won't pucker with the hand-embroidery stitching.

5. **Thread your hand needle with an 18-inch length of floss or pearl cotton, and then tie a knot on one end.**
6. **Working from left to right with the hand needle and folded edge of the project toward you, push the needle through the right side of the fabric**

**and bring it out, as shown in Figure 18-5, so the point of the needle is at the bottom edge of the fold.**

Keep the floss from the previous stitch under the point of the needle. Proceed around the edge of the patch until you reach the beginning. Then tie off the floss or pearl cotton.

**FIGURE 18-5:** Push the needle through the right side of the fabric and bring the point out at the bottom of the fold so the needle goes in front of the previous stitch.



The blanket stitch is just one of the many hand-embroidery stitches you can use for visible mending. When you get the hang of this you may want to try some others, like a cross or feather stitch.

## Sew Simple Project: Best Sewing Tool Ever — “Sew Help Me” Lanyard

With all the mending going on in this chapter, I want to introduce you to a handy tool I use every time I need to do any hand sewing. I’ve had one of these for years and have made them for my friends and family members because everything needed for a quick repair is at their fingertips.

What is it? The “Sew Help Me” lanyard is like the lanyard you’d wear at work to hold your ID, but it holds a hand needle, pins, seam ripper, seam gauge, and embroidery scissors. There’s even a little pocket that holds your thimble. (Check out the photo in the color insert to get the idea.)

# Fabric, findings, and raw materials

Gather these supplies before you start:

- » Sewing Survival Kit.
- » 1½ yards of 2-inch-wide braid. I had a hard time finding this locally so I used a 1½-inch-wide striped grosgrain ribbon. That said, the wider ribbon or braid is easier to work with. I searched for “braid” on Etsy and found an amazing supplier in India but was unable to get it to my studio in enough time to get it into the book. If you have the time to search for a wider braid, you may want to take a look.
- » 1½ yards of solid-colored grosgrain ribbon that coordinates with and is the same width as the ribbon or braid above.
- » ½ yard ¾-inch-wide coordinating ribbon.
- » 1 coordinating felt square. I found one that was printed in red and black buffalo squares. If you can’t find a felt square in a print you like, choose a solid color.
- » Polyester fill to stuff a small pin cushion.
- » Optional: Embroidery floss or #8 pearl cotton in a coordinating color.
- » A thimble, fabric/vinyl tape measure, embroidery scissors, seam gauge, and seam ripper.

## Instructions



As you look over the instructions, please don’t be overwhelmed. Yes, there are a lot of steps, but once you start putting the parts together, it goes quickly. After I made the first one, I made two in about 90 minutes. You’re going to love it.

## Cutting out the parts

Follow these steps to cut out the pieces for the lanyard:

- 1. Cut the tape measure to 36 inches.**
- 2. Cut the striped ribbon or braid to 44 inches and set it aside.**

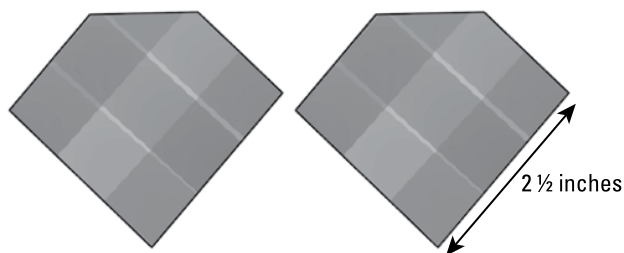
Set aside the extra length of the measuring tape and braid and use them for stitch testing.
- 3. Cut the solid-colored ribbon 44 inches.**
- 4. Cut the ¾-inch-wide ribbon in half so you have two 9-inch lengths.**

5. **Cut a rectangle of felt the width of the widest ribbon/braid by 5½ inches.**

This is the pocket that holds both the seam gauge and seam ripper.

6. **Cut two felt pieces that make the thimble pocket 2½ inches square; then clip off one corner on each, as shown in Figure 18-6.**

**FIGURE 18-6:**  
Cut two felt pieces that make the thimble pocket 2½ inches square; then clip off one corner on each.



## Attaching the measuring tape

Follow these steps to sew the measuring tape onto the ribbon:

1. **Place the tape measure on the solid-colored ribbon with the metal end 1 inch from one of the short ends of the ribbon, centering and pinning it the length of the ribbon.**

The tape measure will not be as long as the ribbon.

2. **Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Straight stitch
- *Length:* 2.5–3.0 mm/10 spi
- *Width:* 0 mm
- *Foot:* Multipurpose

3. **Starting at the metal end of the measuring tape, sew around the three sides to attach it to the ribbon as shown in Figure 18-7.**
4. **Press the ribbon from the wrong side with a cool iron and a press cloth.**

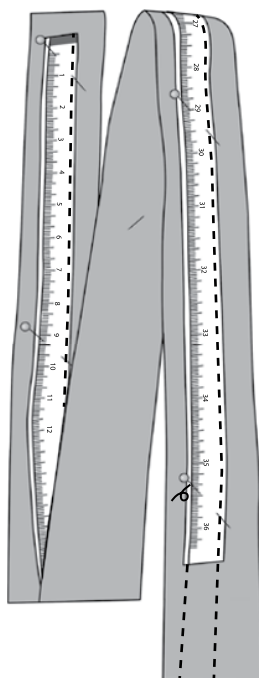
This is the backside of your lanyard.

## Making the felt seam gauge and ripper pocket

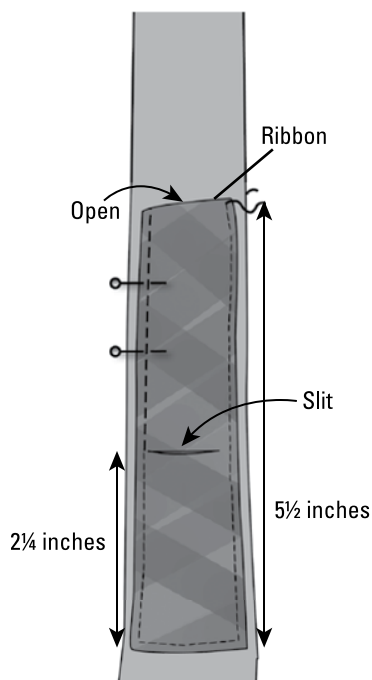
Use the following steps to make the seam gauge and ripper pocket:

1. **With a sharp pair of embroidery scissors, cut a small slit 2¼ inches from one short end of the felt pocket piece, as shown in Figure 18-8.**

**FIGURE 18-7:**  
Start at the metal  
end of the  
measuring tape  
to pin and sew  
around three  
sides to attach it  
to the ribbon.



**FIGURE 18-8:**  
Cut a small slit  
into the felt  
pocket piece and  
then stitch the  
pocket to  
the ribbon.



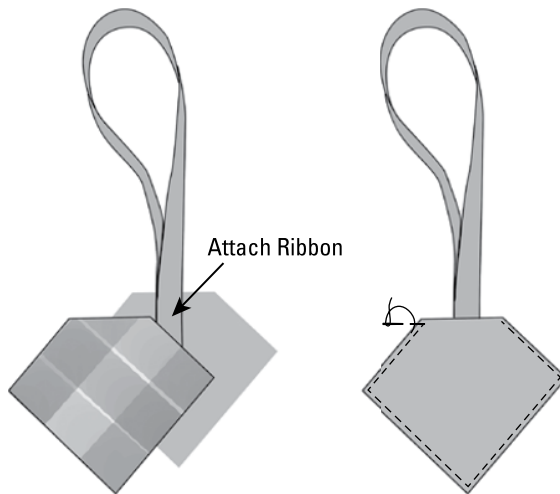
2. Place the felt rectangle on the striped ribbon/braid 1 ¼ inches from one short end and then pin, and stitch around three sides of the rectangle (leaving the top end of the pocket open) to attach it as shown in Figure 18-8; then set aside.

## Making the felt thimble pocket and attaching the embroidery scissors

Make the thimble pocket and attach the embroidery scissors by following these steps:

1. Fold one of the ¾-inch ribbons in half and place it on the inside of one of the thimble pocket pieces, as shown in Figure 18-9.

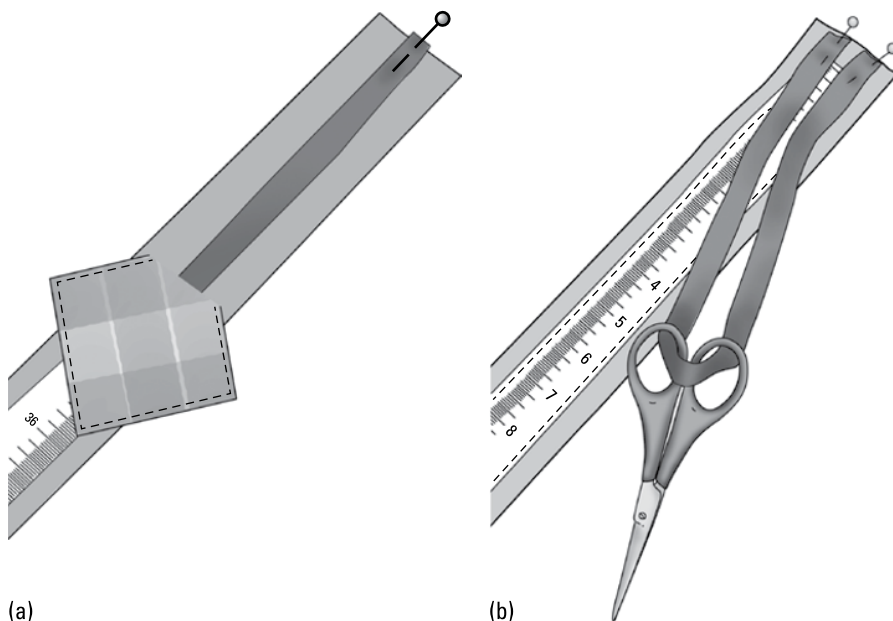
**FIGURE 18-9:** Fold the narrow ribbon in half, placing it on the inside of one thimble pocket piece and attaching the ribbon to the felt; pin and stitch the other felt piece to the first, creating the thimble pocket.



2. Sew the other thimble pocket piece onto the first, leaving a pocket opening large enough for the thimble to fit through.
3. Set your machine like this:
  - *Stitch:* Straight stitch
  - *Length:* 2.5–3.0 mm/10 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* Multipurpose
  - Topstitch about ⅛ inch around all sides of the pocket except the angled side where the thimble goes in.

4. On one end of the lanyard, pin the thimble pocket ribbon to the wider ribbon (with the measuring tape), as shown in Figure 18-10a.
5. Thread the narrow ribbon through the finger holes of the embroidery scissors, as shown in Figure 18-10b; then pin it to the other end of the wider ribbon (with the measuring tape).

**FIGURE 18-10:** Pin the thimble pocket ribbon to the end of a wider ribbon with the tape measure; the scissors hang from a ribbon pinned to the right side of the wider ribbon.

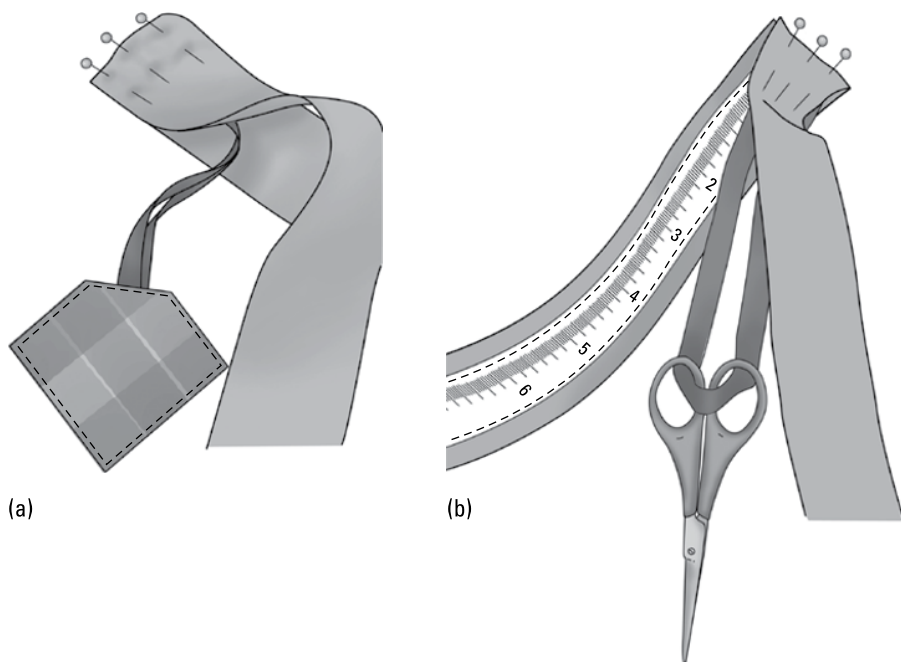


## Putting it all together

1. Pin the right sides of the wider ribbon/braid together at the short ends, so the thimble pocket and embroidery scissor ribbons are sandwiched between the two ends, as shown in Figure 18-11.
2. Stitch across the short ends of the wider ribbon, using a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch seam allowance, and then turn the project right side out.
3. Press the seam flat with a cool iron and press cloth.
4. From the end of the lanyard with the thimble pocket, measure up 6 inches and stitch across the wider ribbon.

This forms one end of the pin cushion.

**FIGURE 18-11:**  
Pin the ends of  
the wider ribbon  
together so the  
(a) thimble pocket  
and scissor  
ribbons (b) are  
sandwiched  
in between.



5. **Pin and topstitch both wide ribbons together around all four sides close to the ribbon edges and leaving a small opening, as shown in Figure 18-12.**
6. **Push the polyester fill through the opening between the ribbon/braid until it's nicely filled.**
7. **Close the opening with a slip stitch. (See Chapter 5 for more on slip-stitching.)**

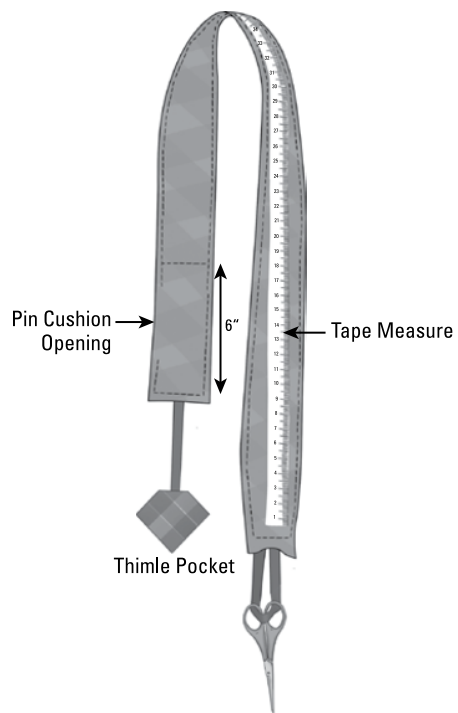
Optional: For this project, I wanted the pin cushion to stand out, so after slipstitching the opening closed, I used a blanket stitch (shown earlier in this chapter) to stitch around the edge with contrasting thread. Check out the color insert to see how you like this extra touch.

**8. Load the lanyard with your tools:**

- Slip the seam gauge into the felt pocket.
- Slide the seam ripper through the slit in the felt pocket. If the slit is too tight, cut it a little wider.
- Place your favorite thimble in the thimble pocket.
- Put a few pins and a hand needle in the pin cushion.

Now drape the lanyard over your neck and you're ready for your next project.





**FIGURE 18-12:** Stitch around the perimeter of the ribbon/braid, leaving a small opening for stuffing the pin cushion.



#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Transforming that accidentally felted wool sweater into a hat that says, “I meant to do that!”
- » Glamming up a jean jacket to rock a grocery store run and garage band gig
- » Mashing up a sweatshirt with Levi’s 501s for a top that screams “casual cool”

## Chapter **19**

# Sustainable Restyling: Giving Existing Garments New Life

**L**et’s get serious for a minute — maybe two.

In the fashion world, “Green is the new black” signals more than a trend — it marks a shift toward sustainability that’s becoming essential. Society’s growing consciousness about conservation encourages planting of gardens, exploring of thrift shops, and looking at recycling with renewed enthusiasm. I take after my mom and grandma, survivors of the Great Depression, and have a knack for reinventing fashion that’s environmentally friendly and a fun exercise in thinking creatively. Here’s why it’s simple: When leveraging the features of existing garments, the hard stuff is already done for you. You save time and end up with a stylish, repurposed piece that stays out of the landfill a while longer.

In this chapter, I share three sustainably restyled projects with you. The first is a felted wool hat made from one of my wool sweaters that was accidentally machine-washed and dried. The second project replaces the front and back yokes of a run-of-the-mill jean jacket with lace insets. The third project upgrades a boring sweatshirt by adding a button-fly side slit that will have your friends wondering where you bought it.

## Sew Smart Project: Felted Wool Hat

What do you do with a wool sweater that accidentally made a trip through the wash and dry cycle? Recycle it. Whether intentional or not, the washing and drying can result in *felted wool*, which is a wonderful material for making everything from tea cozies and oven mitts to this warm, easy-to-make hat. Thanks much to the Simplicity Pattern Company (<https://simplicity.com>) for supplying the pattern for this cool project.

### Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

Besides your Sewing Survival Kit (see Chapter 2), you need the following materials for this project:

- » One 100-percent wool sweater ready to be felted (or that's already felted)
- » A 2-inch button that coordinates with the sweater
- » ½ yard of yarn or narrow trim that complements the hat
- » All-purpose, cotton/poly thread to match
- » Tracing paper
- » Pencil

### Sourcing and preparing the wool

I remember learning in elementary school about how wool is sheared off sheep and then combed to clean and straighten the wool fibers so they can be spun into yarn for sweaters and woven into fabric. Wool shrinks and felts when washed in hot water because it returns to its curly, original shape — like it grows on a sheep. For this project, you use a felted sweater. The looped nature of knitted wool when it's washed and dried creates a smooth, thick, and thus excellent piece of fabric to work with.



TIP

If you don't have a felted sweater on hand (or one in your closet that you're willing to felt for the cause), check out your local thrift stores, yard and estate sales, and the back of your friends' and family's closets. Make sure the sweater you use is wool because synthetic fibers and cashmere don't felt — at least not as well as wool. Some wool fibers felt better than others, so use these guidelines to achieve the look you're going for:

- » Lambswool and angora/lambswool combos make fine and soft felted wool.
- » Blends of lambswool, angora, and nylon can be used as long as the nylon fiber content is 20 percent or less.
- » Merino and alpaca wool are favorites of the felting pros because of the silky felted texture.
- » Shetland wool creates a rougher, thicker felt.
- » Icelandic wool — like the naturally colored angler knit sweaters of Iceland — produce thick felted wool that's tough to get under the presser foot of the sewing machine, so steer clear for this project.

## Felting the wool

Follow these steps to felt one wool sweater:

1. **Slip the sleeves into the body of the sweater, but keep the sweater turned right side out.**
2. **Set your washer on the hot water setting and run the first wash cycle three to five times until you get the desired felted texture.**

You don't need detergent when felting a sweater. Unless, of course, the sweater is dirty.



WARNING

Stop the washer every few minutes either to clean out the lint from your washer's lint trap or to skim the lint from the surface of the water. If you don't, you may wreck your washer with continued unfiltered feltings.

3. **Machine-dry the sweater in a moderately hot dryer.**



TIP

For a supply of felted wool fabric, you can felt multiple sweaters simultaneously. Depending on their size, you can wash six to ten sweaters at a time. Divide them into lights and darks to wash each color group separately (as you would do for regular laundry). Then follow the same steps as for felting one sweater.

# Instructions

Follow these steps for a warm felted hat.

## Laying out and cutting the hat pieces

The first task is to cut out the pieces. Follow these steps:

1. **Using tracing paper and a pencil, trace off the hat pattern in Figure 19-1.**

The pattern is the actual cut size (including the  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam allowances) you need to make a hat that will fit nearly any head size.

You need to cut six hat pattern pieces, so I recommend that you trace off three pattern pieces. This way you can lay them out on the doubled sweater and cut two pieces at a time.



TIP

2. **Cut off the ribbing from the bottom of the sweater and set it aside for use later in the project.**
3. **Lay the sweater flat on a table; then place, pin, and cut out the six hat pattern pieces, as shown in Figure 19-2.**

If the sweater has a knitted pattern in it like the cable-knit example in Figure 19-2, you may want to cut each piece separately to be able to center the knitted pattern.

## Assembling the hat

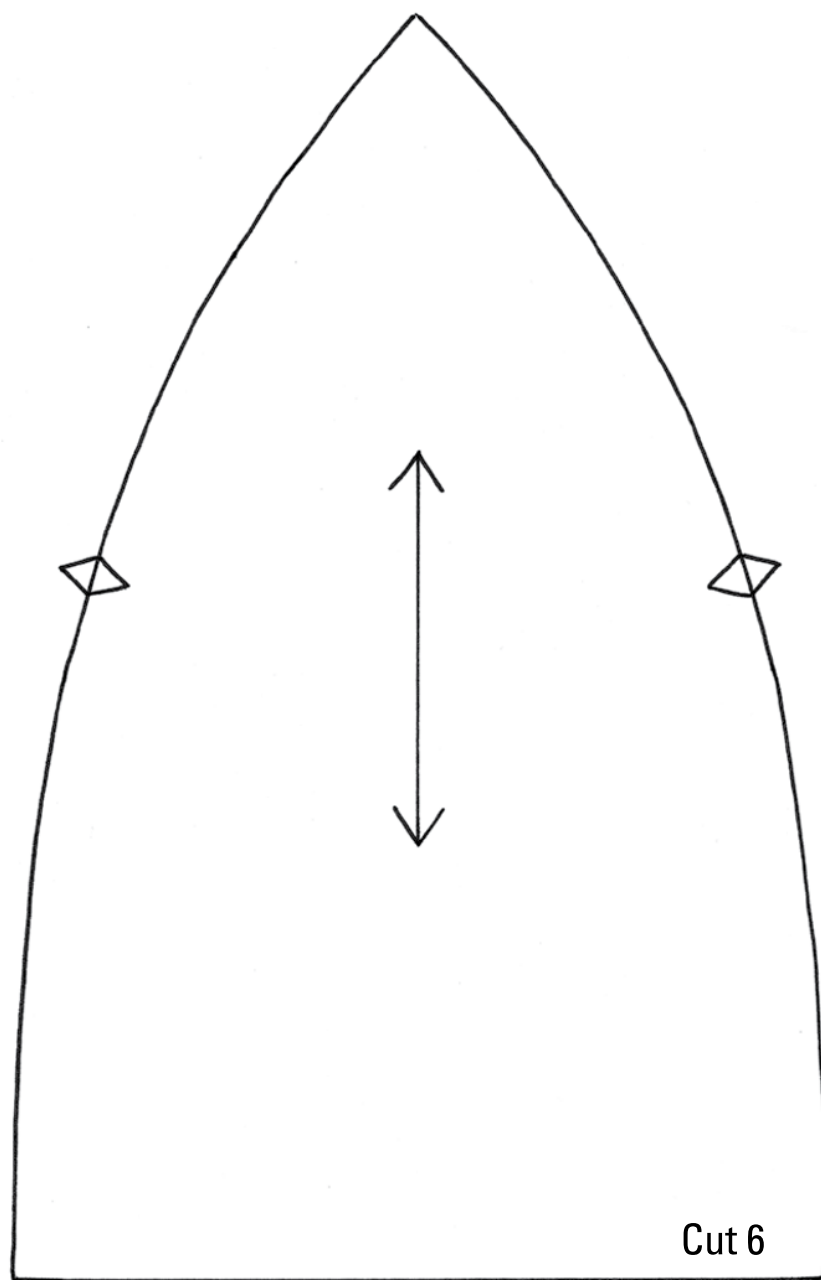
You can assemble this simple yet chic project in one short sitting. First you sew three pattern pieces together to create one side of the crown, and then you repeat to make the other half of the crown. After that, you sew both halves together at the center front and back.

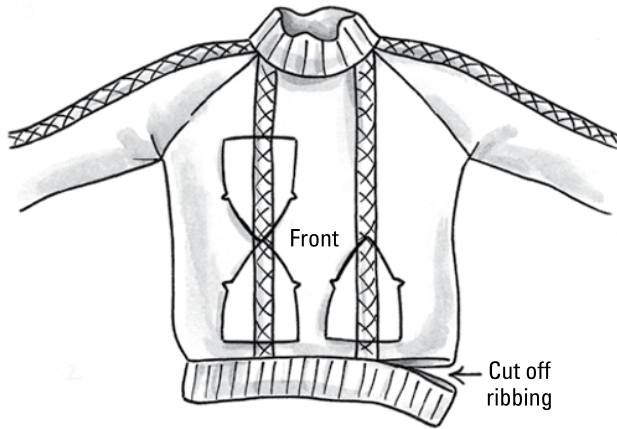
### MAKING THE TWO HALVES

Follow these steps to create two halves of the hat:

1. **Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Slight zigzag
  - *Length:* 3.5–4 mm/4–6 spi
  - *Width:* 1 mm
  - *Foot:* Embroidery or all-purpose

**FIGURE 19-1:**  
Trace off the hat  
pattern piece.





**FIGURE 19-2:** Cut six hat pieces from the front and back of the felted sweater.



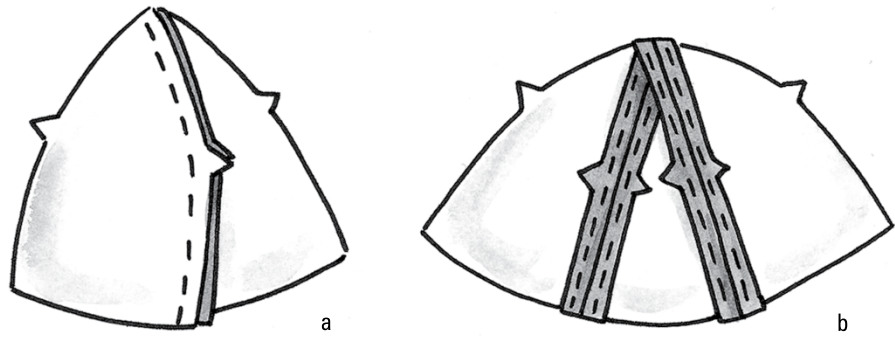
**TIP**

Felted sweater thicknesses vary, so test your stitch length on a scrap. If the fabric puckers, lengthen the stitch; if it waves out of shape, shorten the stitch length.

2. **Place the right sides of two of your hat pattern pieces together, matching the notches as shown in Figure 19-3a, and then sew them together using a  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam allowance.**
3. **Press the seam open using steam and a slight up-and-down pressing motion.**  
For more on pressing, see Chapter 5.
4. **Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 3–4 mm/3.5–6 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* Embroidery or all-purpose
5. **From the wrong side, topstitch on either side of the seam guiding the raw edge even with the edge of the presser foot.**  
See Chapter 5 for more on topstitching tips and tricks.
6. **Repeat Steps 1 to 5 to sew the third hat piece to the first two; this creates one side of the hat, as shown in Figure 19-3b.**
7. **Repeat Steps 1 to 6 with the remaining three hat pattern pieces to create the other half of the hat.**



**FIGURE 19-3:**  
Make each side of the hat separately, sewing and topstitching three pattern pieces to create each side.



## SEWING THE HALVES TOGETHER

When you have the two halves of your felted wool hat, you put them together to create a smooth crown.



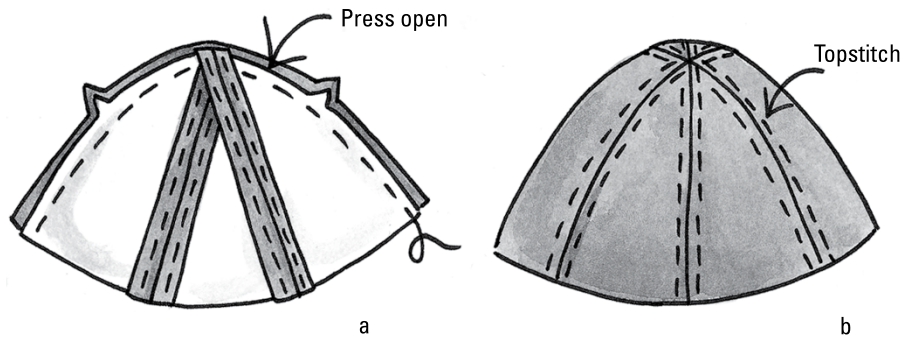
To save some time, sew three sections together and topstitch each seam. Then repeat for the other three sections. When you do it this way, you need to make fewer machine adjustments.

Just follow these steps:

- 1. Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Slight zigzag
  - *Length:* 3.5–4 mm/4–6 spi
  - *Width:* 1 mm
  - *Foot:* Embroidery or all-purpose
- 2. Place the two pieces of the hat right sides together, matching the notches, and then sew the sides together by starting at one edge and sewing a  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam up and over the crown and down to the opposite edge, as shown in Figure 19-4a.**
- 3. Press the seam open.**
- 4. Set your machine like this:**
  - *Stitch:* Straight
  - *Length:* 3–4 mm/3.5–6 spi
  - *Width:* 0 mm
  - *Foot:* Embroidery or all-purpose

5. Turn the hat right side out and topstitch on either side of the seam, as shown in Figure 19-4b.

**FIGURE 19-4:** Sew the two hat halves together (a), press the seam open, and then topstitch (b).



## ADDING THE RIBBING

You use the ribbing you cut off the bottom of the sweater to create the hat band, which you sew to the bottom of the hat following these easy steps:

1. Stretch the ribbing around your head to determine the length needed for a snug, comfortable fit, and then cut it to length, adding  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch to allow for the seam allowance.
2. Using a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seam allowance, seam the two short ends together using the slight zigzag stitch you used to seam the hat pieces together (see Step 1 in “Sewing the halves together”), and then press the seam open.
3. Pin-mark both the hat opening and the ribbing into eighths, as shown in Figure 19-5.
4. With the hat right side out, pin the ribbing to the bottom edge of the hat, matching the pin marks and aligning the ribbing seam at the center back of the hat.

To find the center back, examine the two seams that join the two hat halves. If one seam looks better than the other, use it for the center front.

5. Set your machine like this:

- *Stitch:* Wide zigzag stitch
- *Length:* Longest
- *Width:* 5–6 mm
- *Foot:* Embroidery
- *Upper tension:* Loosen

**6. Using a ¼-inch seam allowance, machine-baste the ribbing to the body of the hat.**

By basting the ribbing on first, you can check the fit and make the appropriate adjustments before you do the final stitching.

**7. Set your machine like this:**

- *Stitch:* Overlock
- *Length:* Longest
- *Width:* 5–6 mm
- *Foot:* Embroidery
- *Upper tension:* Normal

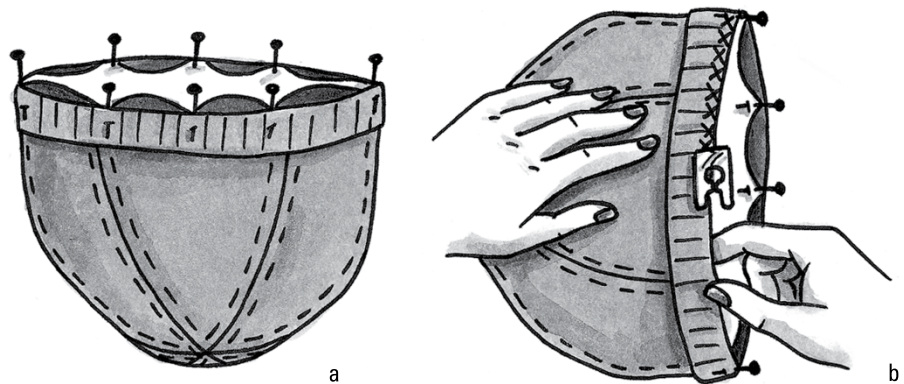
If you're using a serger, use these settings:

- *Stitch:* ¾ thread
- *Length:* Appropriate for the fabric
- *Width:* 4 mm
- *Foot:* Standard

**8. Using a ¼-inch seam allowance, sew or serge the ribbing and hat together, as shown in Figure 19-5**

For more on sewing ribbing, see Chapter 6.

**9. Hand sew the button on the crown where all the hat pieces come together using the yarn or decorative trim. Use one of the button-sewing methods shown in Chapter 10.**



**FIGURE 19-5:** Pin the ribbing to the hat. Then sew (a) or serge it (b) using a ¼-inch seam allowance.

# Sew Smart Project: Jean Jacket with Lace Tulle Insets

Give your jean jacket a lace lift! Swap out the front and back yokes with embroidered tulle or lace to turn that thrifted or trusty old denim jacket into an upscaled hybrid like the one shown in the color insert.



TIP

In case you're wondering, front yokes are the parts on a shirt or jacket above the pockets that connect to the collar and shoulder seam. A back yoke runs across the back of the jacket, connecting to the collar at the neck edge and seamed from shoulder blade to shoulder blade to the rest of the jacket/shirt back.

## Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

To upstyle this jean jacket, you need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2.)

» ¾ yard of lace or embroidered lace tulle

Tulle is a fine netting like bridal netting that's the base fabric for most laces. The tulle I used was embroidered with a heavier cord and adorned with sequins. At the writing of this book, you can find a wide variety of colors and styles at your local JoAnn Fabrics ([www.joann.com](http://www.joann.com)) store.

» Jean jacket with a front and back yoke

» Thread to match the jacket

» Optional: Appliqué scissors (also known as duck bill scissors)

## Instructions

**1. (Optional) Cut the waistband from the bottom of the jacket.**

The jacket I found didn't have a bottom band, so if you want to replace the band with the tulle, cut off the band.

**2. Lay out the jacket, turning up the collar so it's off the front yoke.**

This way you can position the lace tulle over the front yokes.

**3. Using your scissor tips, cut a ½-inch slit into each denim yoke piece.**

This makes it easier to get your scissors back in to trim away the denim after the lace is stitched on.

4. Lay a lace piece over one of the front yokes and then pin it parallel to the seamlines, as shown in Figure 19-6.
5. Repeat for the other side.

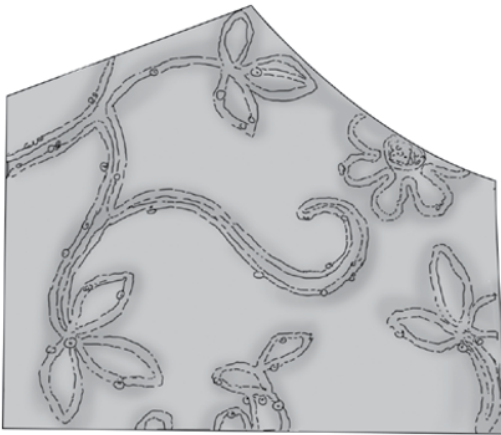


**FIGURE 19-6:**  
Place the lace  
over the front  
yokes so you can  
determine the  
shape you need.

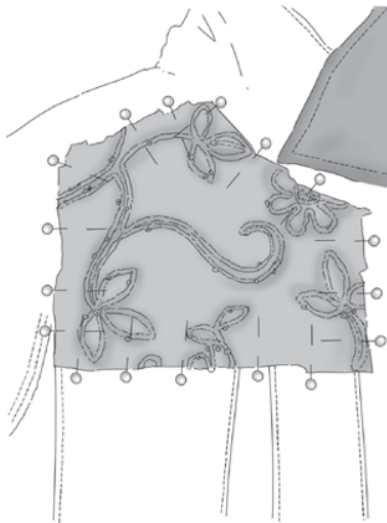
6. Using the jacket yoke seamlines as a guide, trim the lace to fit over the yokes, leaving a generous inch or two seam allowance around the perimeter and avoiding the buttons or snaps, as shown in Figure 19-7.
7. Repeat for the back yoke.
8. Set your machine like this:
  - *Stitch:* Slight zigzag
  - *Length:* 2.5–3 mm/9–10 spi
  - *Width:* 2 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose or Teflon
9. Turn the jacket inside out and then place the lace over each yoke so the right side of the lace is facing the wrong side of the jacket yoke, as shown in Figure 19-8a.

This way, when the denim is trimmed away, the embroidered side of the lace is away from your body and showing as the right side of the jacket.
10. Once pinned in place, turn the jacket to the right side, and repin the lace from that side of the jacket, as shown in Figure 19-8b.

**FIGURE 19-7:**  
Trim the lace to fit over the yokes, making it large enough that it can have a generous inch or two seam allowance.



**FIGURE 19-8:**  
Place and pin the lace over each yoke so the right side of the lace is to the wrong side of the jacket yoke (a); then repin from the right side (b).



(a)



(b)

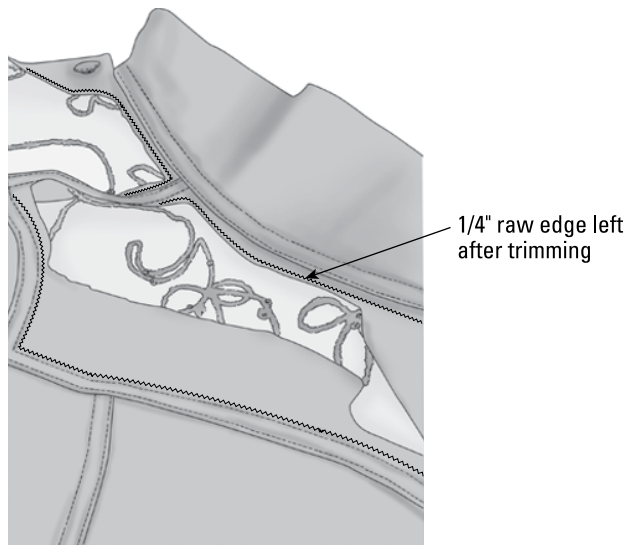
- 11.** With the jacket still turned to the right side, sew around each yoke piece, guiding close to the jacket yoke seamlines, avoiding the buttons and buttonholes, and backstitching at the join.
- 12.** Using your scissors (appliqué scissors, if you have them), clip through the slit you made in the denim in Step 3 and cut away the denim yokes, leaving a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -seam allowance, as in Figure 19-9.



**TIP**

If you accidentally clip into the lace and make a hole, make the quick repair using a hand needle, thread, and a couple of stitches to fix the hole. The good news is that the repair won't be very visible because the hole is in the lace.

**FIGURE 19-9:** Clip through the denim yoke slit and then cut away the denim yoke pieces to expose the lace.



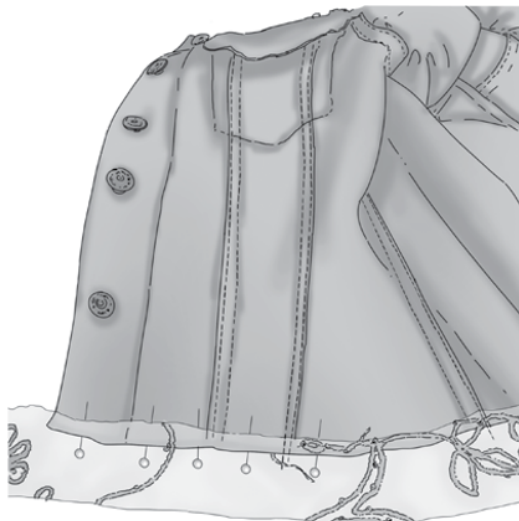
**13.** From the wrong side of the jacket, trim away the excess lace to within  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of the stitching.

**14.** Cut the lace band.

Measure and cut the lace the desired width plus a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch seam allowance by a length long enough to go across the bottom of the jacket plus an extra inch.

**15.** Overlap the lace on the bottom of the jacket by  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch, pin it, and then stitch, as shown in Figure 19-10.

**16.** Trim the lace ends even with the button placket.



**FIGURE 19-10:** Attach the lace to the bottom of the jacket.

# Sew Smart Project: Restyled Sweatshirt with a Button-Fly Side Slit

Make over a sweatshirt where comfort-meets-cool — because why choose between your favorite jeans and your go-to pullover when you can wear both at once? It's the perfect mash-up for those who take their relaxation seriously.

## Fabrics, findings, and raw materials

To restyle your sweatshirt, you need the following materials in addition to your Sewing Survival Kit. (See Chapter 2.)

- » 1 sweatshirt you want to cut up
  - » 1 pair of button-fly jeans (such as Levi 501) that are large enough to go around the bottom of the sweatshirt
- I found a pair of waist size 38 at the local resale shop that worked with my sweatshirt. If you can't find a pair of jeans with a button fly, a pair of jeans with a zipper will work.
- » Thread to match the fabrics
  - » Optional: Decorative button

## Instructions

This project is fun and forgiving: fun because you sew the top of the jeans onto the bottom of a sweatshirt utilizing (and decorating) the existing jean pockets; forgiving because fit really isn't an issue.

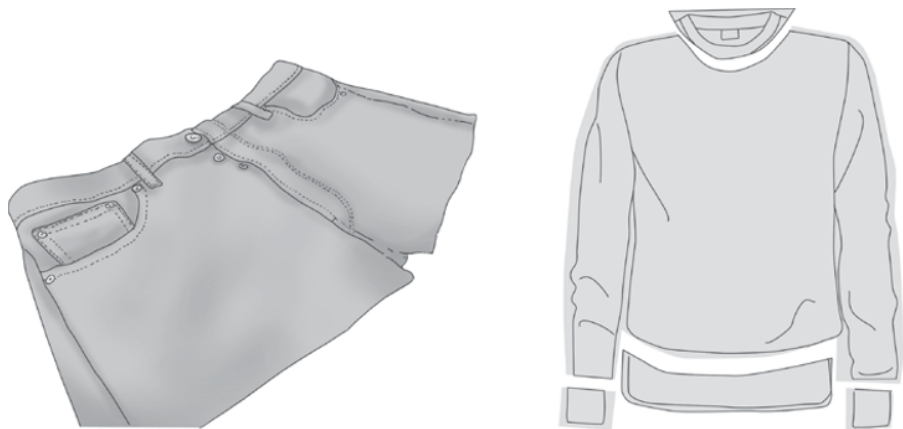
### Cutting

1. **Cut off the sweatshirt bands at the neckline, sleeves, and bottom and cut off the jeans just below the crotch. (See Figure 19-11.)**
2. **Cut through the crotch and the center back seam, as shown in Figure 19-12a.**

After cutting through the center back seam, you will have two jean pieces. The jean piece with the buttons is for the sweatshirt front; the other jean piece is for the back of the sweatshirt.

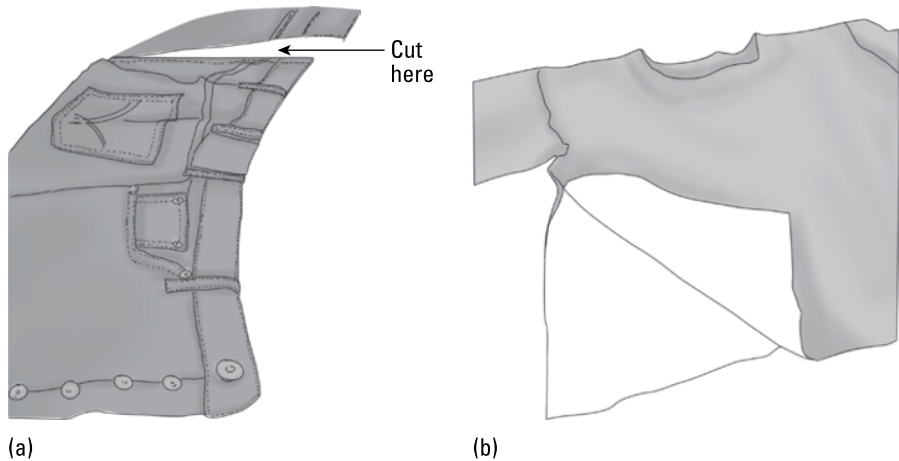


**FIGURE 19-11:**  
Cut off the  
sweatshirt bands;  
cut the jeans just  
below the crotch.



3. **On the sweatshirt, cut open both seams almost to the armhole as shown in Figure 19-12b.**

**FIGURE 19-12:**  
Cut through the  
jeans so you have  
two jean sections  
(a), and cut the  
sweatshirt at the  
side seams so  
everything can lay  
out flat  
and open (b).



**TIP**

Some sweatshirt bodies are made into a tube and are without side seams. When this is the case, estimate where the side seam would be and cut the slit as described in Step 4.

4. **Put on the sweatshirt.**
5. **Decide where you want the front and back jean sections placed on the sweatshirt, and then mark location of the jean placement.**

This step helps determine where the jeans will be sewn into the sweatshirt and how much the sweatshirt will be cut off for the jeans to fit into the shirt.

You're attaching the jean sections to the bottom of the sweatshirt, so you may need to trim several inches from the sweatshirt to get the look you want. For example, on my project, the jeans start about 12 inches from the center front neckline.

## Stitching together the mash-up

Use the following steps to bring everything together:

1. **Place the jeans on a flat surface with the waistband nearest you.**
2. **Pin and position jeans into the bottom of the sweatshirt so the raw sweatshirt edge is to the right side of the jeans, as shown in Figure 19-13.**

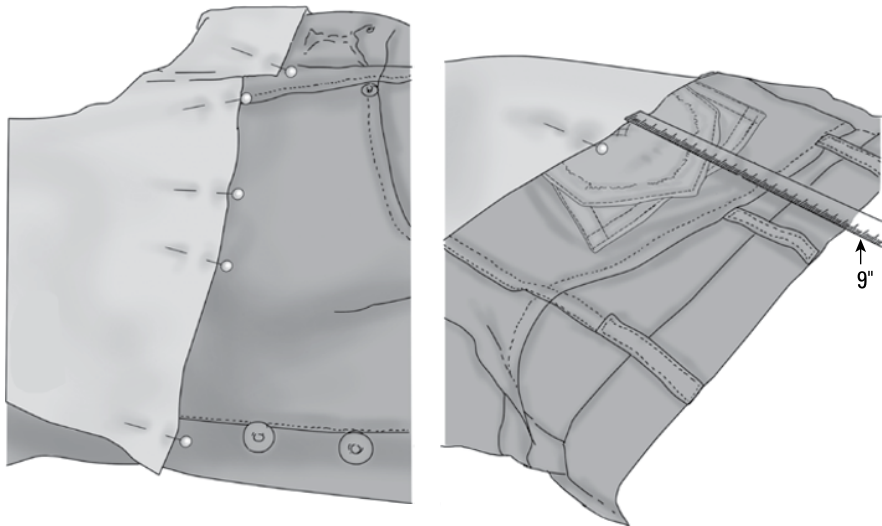
When positioned this way, there will be one back patch pocket on the front of the project and one on the back. (See Chapter 12 for more on patch pockets.)

3. **Pin-baste the jeans into the sweatshirt and adjust them up or down as desired.**

On my project, the jeans show 9 inches below the edge of the sweatshirt.

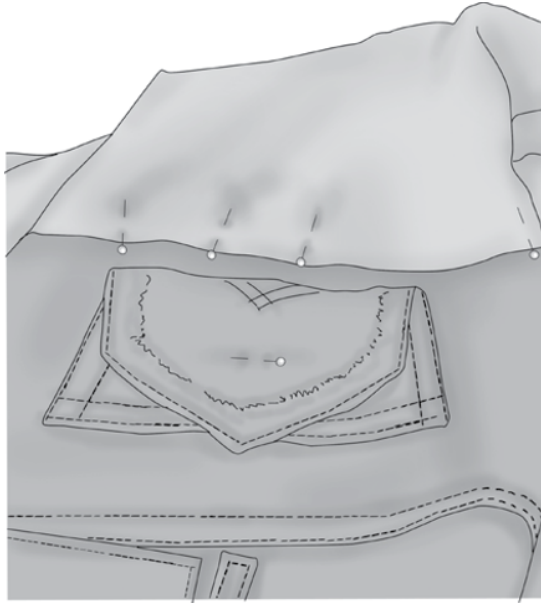
4. **Continue pinning the jeans to the bottom of the sweatshirt all the way around.**

**FIGURE 19-13:** Pin the jean sections to the bottom of the sweatshirt so about 9 inches of the jeans show below the edge of the sweatshirt.



- 5. On both the front and the back pieces of jeans, carefully rip the pocket topstitching up to where it meets the sweatshirt, as shown in Figure 19-14.**

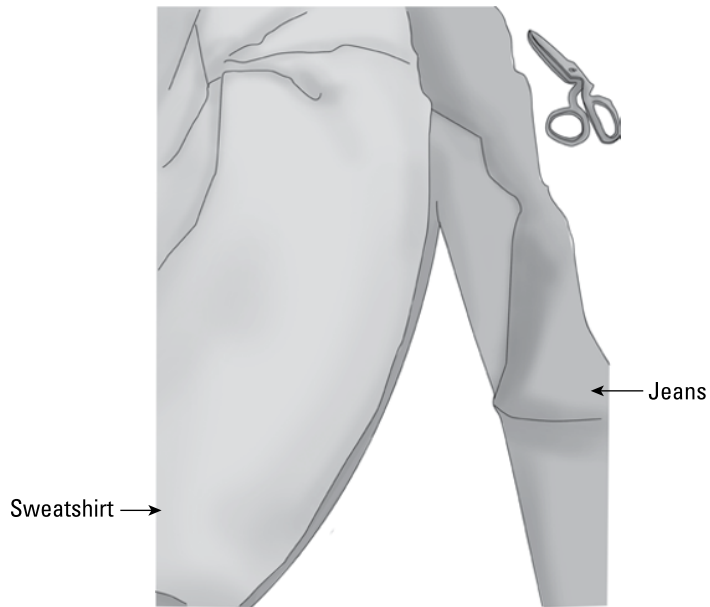
Because the jeans are upside down (with the waistband at the bottom of the project), the back pockets are upside down, too.



**FIGURE 19-14:**  
Carefully rip the pocket topstitching to the point where it meets the sweatshirt.

- 6. Set your machine like this:**
- *Stitch:* Slight zigzag
  - *Length:* 2 mm/13 spi
  - *Width:* 1 mm
  - *Foot:* All-purpose
- 7. Sew the jeans into the sweatshirt and then cut off the excess length of jeans fabric, as shown in Figure 19-15.**
- 8. Resew the sweatshirt side seams from the jeans up to the armholes.**
- 9. On the front jeans pocket, press the ripped pocket so that, when the bottom of the pocket is folded down, it makes a flap like you see in Figure 19-16.**

**FIGURE 19-15:**  
Sew the jeans  
into the  
sweatshirt and  
cut off the extra  
jeans fabric.

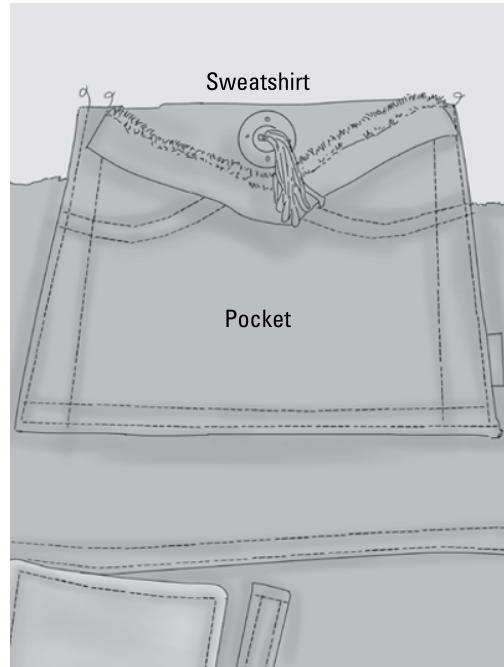


**FIGURE 19-16:**  
Press the ripped  
pocket down so it  
makes a flap.



**10. Sew the bottom of that pocket closed and add an optional button, as shown in Figure 19-17.**

See more on sewing on buttons in Chapter 10.



**FIGURE 19-17:** Sew the bottom of the pocket closed and add an optional button.



**AUTHOR  
SAYS**



**TIP**

As I was cutting the jeans apart, I found an inside pocket lining with a printed message about jeans. So, I turned the pocket into a pocket flap.

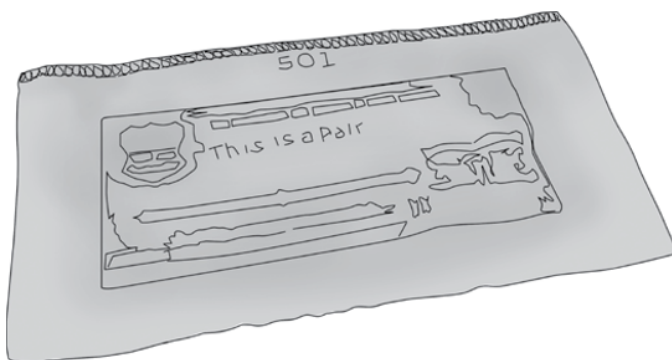
(Optional) When attaching the jean and sweatshirt backs together, the back pocket is upside down (as mentioned in Step 4). If you want to make this into a working pocket, rip it off completely, turn it 180 degrees and continue to follow Steps 11–13.

**11. (Optional) Fold ½ inch at the top of the printed pocket lining to the wrong side (the unprinted side) to make a pocket flap, as shown in Figure 19-18 and press.**

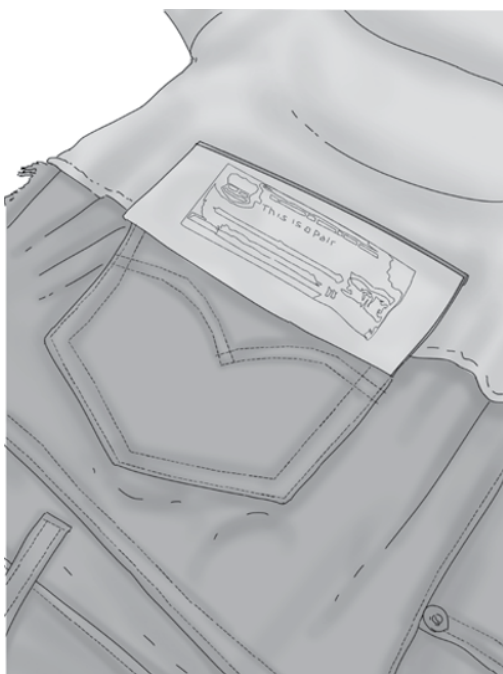
In the jeans I used, this piece was sewn on three sides, so all I did was square it up so it was an even rectangle; then I finished the raw edge. (See Chapter 6 for more on finishing seams and edges.)

**FIGURE 19-18:**

Preparing the printed pocket flap.



- 12. (Optional) Pin, place, and stitch the flap to the back pocket.**
- 13. (Optional) Pin, and stitch the pocket in place so it's over the bottom of the sweatshirt, as shown in Figure 19-19.**



**FIGURE 19-19:**

Fold, pin, and stitch the pocket in place; then tack down the flap by hand or machine so it stays flat.

# 6

## **The Part of Tens**

### **IN THIS PART . . .**

Find out the 10 mistakes to avoid when you're getting your feet wet in the world of sewing.

Shop for a new sewing machine or serger like a pro by being armed with 10 tips that'll keep you from getting more or less than you bargained for.

Discover 10 fundamental guidelines that'll make your sewing adventures more soothing and less scary.



- » Picking projects that play nice with your skill set
- » Steering clear of challenging fabrics and unflattering styles
- » Avoiding common sewing pitfalls
- » Giving yourself a break

## Chapter **20**

# Ten Rookie Sewing Mistakes to Avoid

**T**he journey of sewing is like taking a well-worn path: The more you travel it, the smoother it becomes, and the more enjoyable your destinations. By knowing the common mistakes and pitfalls to watch for, you're more likely to have an enjoyable sewing experience.

This chapter alerts you to ten of the most common stumbling blocks that my students and I have tripped over and — after regaining our footing — resulted in improved skills and better results.

## Attempting a Project Beyond Your Skill Level

I like challenges as much as the next person, but when it comes to sewing, I draw a fine line between challenging and frustrating. The bottom line for your first project: Don't even think about making a suit jacket with notched lapels out of an uneven wool plaid. Starting at that level is a recipe for disaster. You'll probably

waste your time and money — and you may never wear the thing after you finish it. You may never even sew again. Instead, look for projects with few seams, such as the table runner in Chapter 14, which has just a few seams or hems and doesn't need fitting.

Also know that the first time you make something, you're on a learning curve, and the result probably won't be perfect. You may never wear or use the project, which is okay. Your skills improve with every project. After you master the basics, you can move on to more challenging projects that have a little bit more style.

## Choosing Difficult Fabrics to Work With

Don't choose fabrics that may be too heavy, too fine, too complicated (such as plaids, stripes, and 1-inch gingham checks), or too expensive (with the proviso that using the best fabrics you can afford adds to the tactile experience of sewing). Read the information on fabrics and fibers in Chapter 3, and choose fabrics that work with your lifestyle, personal style, and sense of comfort.

Also stay away from lightweight slippery fabrics such as polyester faille, silk crepe or charmeuse, sand-washed rayon, acetate linings, and the entire category of microfibers. (Again, read more about these fabrics in Chapter 3.) These fabrics scoot around during cutting, attract static electricity, slip when you pin them together, and need special handling during sewing and pressing.

Because of their *nap*, or fuzzy texture, fabrics such as corduroy and velvet are challenging because you can lay out and cut the pattern pieces in only one direction. When you have more experience, use corduroys and velvets. But when you're starting out, stick with easier fabrics like cotton poplin, chambray, and cotton twill. (Read more about fabrics in Chapter 3.)

## Choosing an Unflattering Style

When choosing clothing patterns, go for styles that you already know from experience look good on you. Chances are that if elastic-waist, pull-on pants from your local department store don't look good on you, elastic-waist, pull-on pants that you make for yourself won't look good on you, either.

## Using the Wrong Fabric for the Pattern

If the pattern says, “For knits only” and you decide to use a woven poplin because you love the color, the project won’t fit. Knits stretch and contribute to the overall fit of the garment. If you choose a pattern that says, “Not suitable for plaids” and you decide to ignore this instruction, you’re setting yourself up for failure.



REMEMBER

Always read the back of the pattern envelope and choose from the list of recommended fabrics.

## Laying Out the Fabric Incorrectly

Have you ever had your pants’ legs twist uncomfortably around your legs while walking? And perhaps this same pair of pants makes you look bowlegged even when you carefully press the creases. Chances are good that the fabric was cut off-grain.

Before cutting, lay out the pattern as your pattern guide sheet instructions recommend and read Chapter 4. Also, use plenty of pins or pattern weights (or large 2-inch washers) to keep the pattern completely flat. To avoid costly mistakes, remember the adage: Measure twice and cut once.

## Neglecting to Use Interfacing

I remember my mom complaining about using interfacing in projects. “After all, it really doesn’t show,” she’d say, “and I don’t want to spend the money on it.” We agreed to disagree.

*Interfacing* is a layer of fabric that gives body and oomph to collars, cuffs, and front plackets. It doesn’t show on the outside of the garment, but it makes a world of difference in the project’s final look. If I’m spending my time and effort making something, I want it to look as professional as possible. Interfacing helps me do that. See Chapter 3 for information about interfacing, and plan on using it in your next project. You’ll love the results.

# Failing to Press as You Sew

I remember one of my favorite college professors at the New York's Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT for short) telling me to “have a love affair with your iron.” I never really thought too much about the value of pressing garments-in-progress until she said it, but she was right. When you press a project after each seam, you shape a flat, shapeless piece of fabric into something that fits the forms and curves of whatever is under it — almost like pressing the fabric into submission. To start your own love affair with your iron, follow the pressing tips in Chapter 5.

## Using an Old, Beat-Up Sewing Machine

I work with a friend who used to sew and has an oldie but moldy sewing machine. It has been hidden away in the garage, never seeing the light of day for the past 10 to 15 years. Every so often I hear her say, “I think I’ll dig out the machine and start sewing again.” She never does, and I can only imagine how badly it works after all this time in retirement.

When I sew, part of the joy for me is sitting down in front of the machine, knowing that it works perfectly every time. So, instead of borrowing Grandma’s old clunker, get a sewing machine that sews in good working order by

- » Renting or borrowing a machine from your local sewing machine dealer.
- » Taking a sewing class and doing all your sewing on the classroom machines.
- » Buying a new or reconditioned machine from a sewing machine dealer. A used sewing machine sold by a reputable dealer has undergone a thorough mechanical inspection, so you can be sure it works well.

You don’t have to buy one of those \$8,000 do-everything models. You just need one that provides good, reliable service. Trade up to a better model as your skills improve and as your budget permits.

When you use a machine that sews in good working order, you also need to maintain it to keep it that way. Read your operating manual to see how to care for your machine, and then treat yours with the TLC it deserves.

## Neglecting to Use a New Needle

I once met a woman who complained about her needle unthreading each time she sewed. She brought me the machine so I could diagnose the problem, and I discovered that she'd worn the needle down to the eye. Really! We put in a new needle, and the machine worked perfectly.

I worked with another woman who had a terrible time with skipped stitches — when you sew a little bit and then have a long stitch instead of the steady row of stitches of the same length. She tried replacing the needle with a different one out of her pin cushion, but she experienced the same problem. She was ready to take the machine to the local service center until I insisted that she use a brand-new needle from the package — no more skipped stitches.

Even though the needle looks perfect to the naked eye, the point bends and gets all boogered up, becoming scratched and rough when used over lots of thickness, and just plain wears out with use, like a razor blade. So throw the old needle away after each project and change to a new one for each new project.

## Refusing to Cut Yourself Some Slack

Remember when you first started riding a bike? You weren't perfect, were you? I spent my first bike-riding summer with scabs on both knees until I figured out what I was doing.

Sewing is like anything new. You can't be perfect from the get-go, so be gentle with yourself. If you can live with a sewing mistake, *don't* rip it out.



#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Matching your skill level with your equipment
- » Dodging common purchasing pitfalls
- » Ensuring you have after-the-sale assistance
- » Treating your machine like a pet

## Chapter **21**

# Ten Tips for Buying and Maintaining a Sewing Machine and Serger

**A**h, the wonderful world of sewing. With all the sewing machine and serger options, it's enough to make your head spin. But fear not, intrepid sewer. Here are ten tips to help you navigate the maze of sewing equipment and emerge victorious in your quest for the perfect machine.

## Knowing Your Current Equipment

Did you get a sewing machine as a gift and have yet to take it out for a spin? Has the machine been in your guestroom closet for a year and you want to get it out and make a simple gift but don't know what to do first? Or do you have the machine but don't know how to thread it and are afraid to plug it in?

You need some help. Here are some ideas to help you discover what it is you like (or don't like) about the craft so it's easier to narrow down both your project and your equipment choices:

- » Get the machine out of your closet and into the dealer for service to see if it's in good working order and is a good fit for you.
- » Take a class at your local dealer. This way, you get to use a sewing machine in good working order and have the benefit of live instruction when you run into a problem.
- » For inspiration, check out Etsy, sewing websites, and social media to see what other creators are making.
- » Does your current machine suit your needs? If so, great! If not, then you may be able to trade it in for a machine that can.

## Deciding What Kind of Sewing You Want to Do

What do you want to make? A costume for your kids or grandkids? Maybe a table runner for the next family event? Some new pj's? (Look at the projects in the color insert.) If this is the case, then a basic sewing machine with a reasonable number of features is a good choice. (Read more in “Determining What Machine Features Are Important to You” later in this chapter.)

But maybe you want to learn quilting or embroidery. Each of these sewing “sub-sets” requires different machine features — and you have a lot of choices at a variety of price points. So even though you can research online, if you live in an area that has a local sewing machine dealer or two, do your research but also talk with a pro. They know the industry and, once you know what you want to make, they can narrow down your choices and find a machine that fits your needs.



AUTHOR  
SAYS

To investigate further, look for online sewing programs, including some good options from public television channels. When looking for specific techniques, check out YouTube videos, too.



# Picking the Right Price Point for Your Machine

Before diving into the dizzying realm of sewing equipment, you may think going cheap is your best move. That way, if you don't like it, you don't have a lot invested. That thinking may lead to websites like Facebook Marketplace, eBay, or Craigslist. But remember this. Whether buying new or used, you can shop those sites and save some money — maybe. But you *must know* what you're looking for.

For example, I wanted to replace my serger and found one I thought would work and at a great price on Craigslist — but it didn't come with a foot pedal (you know, that thing you plug into the machine and then into the wall to get electricity). Turns out the seller was the son of a woman going into assisted living, and he didn't know there should have been a foot pedal with the machine. If I didn't know what I was looking for, I may have bought either a defective or an incomplete product. So, while it's crucial to establish your budget, be realistic about what you're willing to spend. It may be a little more than you thought, but you'll probably be happier in the end.

# Thinking Granny's Castoff Is Just What You Need

I've overheard this comment dozens of times: "Grandma's old clunker is 'good enough' for Little Suzie, right?" If the machine has been sitting without use for month or years, it could have all kinds of problems, and if it hasn't been maintained properly, it may not work at all. When in doubt, see your local sewing machine dealer.

One more thing: Sewing on a good-quality, well-maintained machine is a joy. If you want to really love the craft (or you want another beginner to love it), sew on a machine that's a joy to use.

# Establishing Where to Buy Your Machine

Sure, you can buy a machine online; then you need to learn how to use it. If you decide to go that route, YouTube sewing videos can help, but they're also time-consuming and provide no feedback when you make a mistake.

Bottom line? If you're not sure, rely on the experience and expertise of your local sewing machine dealer. Not only will they be able to pinpoint the best machine for you, they'll most likely have free lessons to teach you how to use it. Plus, the dealer may offer some classes to give you an even better experience with your new machine.

If you live nowhere near a dealer, many from all over the world have an online presence with helpful information about the brands they carry. You can also make an old-fashioned phone call and talk to a dealer about their products, service, warranty, and shipping options.

## Determining What Machine Features Are Important to You

Buying a sewing machine or serger is a lot like buying a car. What features are you looking for, how easy is the maintenance, and what kind of after-sale training do you get? (For more on sewing machines, see Chapter 2.)

For a beginner, you'll want to have at least some of these features on your sewing machine:

- » **Easy to use:** Make sure you're not getting a lot of features you won't use.
- » **Easy-to-see stitch selection and settings:** This can be on a dial, lever, or touch screen.
- » **Easy threading and bobbin-winding:** Although most sewing machines thread about the same, some have open-slot or lay-in threading; some even come with a built-in needle threader. Some self-threaders are easier to use than others, so remember to try before you buy.
- » **Free arm:** This enables you to slip a sleeve or pant leg around the free arm without taking out the inseam.
- » **Needle-up/needle-down:** When you stop sewing, in the needle-up setting, the needle automatically stops up so you don't unthread the needle, and it's ready for the next stitch. When you select the needle-down feature, the needle stops in the fabric so you can easily turn a corner, for example.
- » **Snap-/plug-on/-off presser feet:** The snap- or plug-on presser feet make it quick and easy to change the foot when you need to.

- » **Automatic buttonhole:** This feature makes it easy to choose patterns with buttonholes because the automatic buttonhole feature can make the buttonholes the correct length, automatically — no complicated measuring and marking necessary.
- » **Some decorative stitches:** There are times when creativity strikes and you want to add a little extra something to a project. Decorative stitches range from a simple ball to a more complicated daisy stitch. Check out Chapter 5 and make the Stitch Sampler Pin Cushion using your decorative stitches (also pictured on the color pages).

For a beginner, you'll want to have at least some of these features on your serger (for more on sergers, see Chapter 2):

- » **Two needles that use three or four threads:** Doesn't make sense, does it? Because a serger doesn't use a bobbin, as a beginner you use three or four threads at once to create the most used stitches for edge finishing and seaming.
- » **Easy, color-coded threading:** Because you are using three or four threads at once, having color-coded threading makes it easier to tell which thread goes where.
- » **Adjustable stitch length and width:** You need this when selecting which stitch to use on your project fabric.
- » **Adjustable differential feed:** This feature prevents seams and edges on stretchy fabrics from stretching or ruffling out of shape.
- » **Snap-on feet:** Because there's less room for your hand near the presser foot on a serger, snap-on feet are easier to change.
- » **Built-in carry handle:** Although it's not necessary, this feature is really handy.

## Finding the Right Stitch Options . . . but Not Too Much

Variety is the spice of sewing, but do you need *all* those stitches? Look for a machine that offers what we call in the biz “practical stitches.” These are both the sewing machine and the serger stitches I recommend and use throughout this

book. Can you get by with a simple straight stitch and zigzag? You can, but you'll have better, more professional results when these practical stitches are at your fingertips. (You don't want an engineering degree to operate the puppy.) For more on these stitches, flip to Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

## Testing Out That Baby

Don't be afraid to be hands-on! Before committing to a sewing machine or serger, bring several fabrics with you and take the machine for a test drive. Play with the stitches, adjust the settings, and see how it handles different fabrics. You want a machine that feels like an extension of your creative self.

## Counting On Your Customer Service

You're not just buying the machine; you're buying the dealer. Before deciding on the dealer, you may want to run down this checklist:

- » Have they had factory training on the brands they sell? If they have, chances are you'll see the word *Authorized* in front of the brand they represent, such as Authorized Husqvarna Dealer or Authorized Bernina Dealer.
- » What happens if the machine breaks? What kind of warranty do they offer on their machines for parts and labor?
- » Once you have your machine for a while and a few projects under your belt, you may be ready to trade up to a better model. How would a trade-in work? Some dealers will give up to the original selling price of the machine (for up to a year or two) when you trade up to a more advanced model.
- » Do they have an Owner's Club? This is when owners of a specific make or model of machine get together and learn specifically about their machine and the extra accessories and tools available for it.
- » What other classes are they offering to you?
- » Are they active in the Sewing and Vacuum Dealers Trade Association (SDTA/VDTA)? This organization provides independent vacuum and sewing retailers resources and opportunities to grow their businesses through its national business network.

Also, check those warranties, read those reviews, and choose a machine that's backed by a team that cares as much about your sewing journey as you do.

## Understanding That Your Machine Needs TLC

Once you've invested in your equipment, take the owner classes, read the operating manual, and learn how to maintain your machine. Here's a list of tasks you need to know to keep everything in tip-top shape:

- » Change the needle with every project. You may think this is extreme, but what you can't see will hurt your project. After a few hours of sewing, the needle dulls, and you may start hearing a click with each stitch. Stitches start skipping (where it looks like there are a few regular-sized stitches, and then a long one), and the overall stitch quality suffers.
- » Check your operating manual to see if your machine needs to be oiled. Some do, some don't. If yours needs oiling, be sure to do this as directed. Only use sewing machine oil. Other lubricants, such as WD40, gum up the works — literally — and slow down the performance. Sewing machine oil is fine and doesn't contain additives.
- » After every project (and while you're changing the needle), remove the bobbin case and the needle plate to dust out the lint. You'll be amazed how much lint collects there. It affects stitch quality and can clog up the needle.
- » Lint can also collect between the tension discs. (See Chapter 2 for more on the thread tension discs.) To remove the unwanted lint, take a piece of unwaxed dental floss and run it through, in and around the tension discs a few times. This removes fine, unwanted lint for better operating performance.
- » If you have a local dealer, let them service your machine once a year. Again, like a car, an annual checkup can prevent problems down the road.



- » Streamlining your sewing by remembering some basic rules
- » Experiencing “The Joy of Sewing” by following these fun-damentals

## Chapter 22

# Ten ABCs of Sewing

In this chapter, I give you some tips that I wish someone had shared with me when I started sewing. Post these hints on the wall in front of you when you sew, or write them on sticky notes and put them on your sewing machine.

## Buying the Best Fabric You Can Afford

Sewing is a tactile craft. For me, one of the pleasures of sewing is working with the best fabric I can afford. Better fabrics are easier to work with; are woven, knitted, or printed on-grain; hold up to frequent washing, cleaning and wearing; and usually produce a better finished product. (See Chapter 4 for more information about fabrics that are printed on-grain.)

Find out if a fabric makes the cut by

- » **Checking the fiber content.** Chapter 3 covers fabrics and fiber content. This information (which appears on the end of the fabric bolt) will help you with your fabric purchase so that you buy the right type for the project and know how to care for it. If you're a wash-and-wear kind of person, you don't want to buy fabrics you need to take to the dry cleaners.
- » **Considering what you pay per yard.** Although I can think of exceptions, I've discovered that you usually get what you pay for.

» **Examining the fabric's hand.** The way the fabric feels and drapes in your hand or against your body is its *hand*. Gather up a width of fabric in one hand and then drape a length of it over your arm, around your neck, or over one shoulder. Does it drape in smooth folds or bend in stiff creases? Does it bend at all? If it drapes in smooth folds, it has a soft hand. If it bends and creases or doesn't bend at all, it has a hard or stiff hand. Depending on what you're making, either type may work.



TIP

When making a garment, I usually buy the yardage recommended on the back of the pattern envelope because the pattern companies are generous with their recommendations. When it comes to home décor projects, though, I usually buy fabric for one more pattern repeat than I think I need. (See Chapter 4 for determining the pattern repeat in a fabric.)

## Understanding Your Fabric Terminology

Fabrics have *selvages*, a *crosswise grain*, a *lengthwise grain*, and a *bias*. You need to know these terms to understand how to lay out the pattern and cut the fabric, how to construct the project, how to buy the proper amount of fabric, and how to plan your project. Here's the rundown:

- » **Selvages:** The finished edges of the fabric. Selvages run the length of the fabric.
- » **Crosswise grain:** The width of the fabric, perpendicular to the selvages.
- » **Lengthwise grain:** The length of the fabric from one cut end to the other cut end, parallel to the selvages.
- » **Bias:** The 45-degree angle between the crosswise grain and the lengthwise grain.

See Chapter 4 for more details on these terms.

## Knowing the Difference between Right and Wrong

After one of my two-hour seminars for beginning sewers, a guy stood up in the back of the room and said (with the most perplexed expression on his face), "What's all this about the right and the wrong sides? I think it would be better if you said the top and the bottom, or the front and the back. I don't get it."



This experience reminded me never to skip over the basics with someone new to the craft. Here's the lowdown on the right and wrong sides:

- » **The right side of the fabric:** The pretty side that faces the outside of the project and usually has the brightest colors and more defined textures. The right side of the fabric is folded to the inside when it's wrapped on the bolt or roll to keep the fabric clean.
- » **The wrong side of the fabric:** The side that faces the inside of the project where the seams are.



WARNING

Some fabrics look the same on both sides, and that's something you need to be aware of when laying out the fabric. So after cutting out the fabric pieces from the pattern, it's a good idea to put a pin or mark on the right side of each piece.



TIP

If you're working with a single knit, it curls to the right side of the fabric when you stretch it across the grain. Other fabrics look similar on both sides, but the wrong side may be a different color combination than the right side, so choose the side you like the best for your project.

When sewing, place the right sides of the fabric together to make a seam. This concept is as basic to sewing as the needle and thread. In other words, place the right side of one piece of fabric against the right side of another piece of fabric (usually matching the notches along the seamline). See Chapter 6 for more information on making perfect seams.

## Putting Your Foot Down before Sewing

Put the presser foot down, that is. The presser foot firmly holds the fabric under the needle. Without the presser foot, the fabric just flops around and you can't sew straight. When you lower the foot onto the fabric, the upper thread tension also engages so that the stitches form properly.

Lower the foot when you start to sew, and raise the foot to pivot at a corner or to remove your work after you finish sewing.

Remember that your sewing machine comes with several presser feet designed for different uses. Review your machine's operating manual and Chapter 2 to find out the benefits of sewing with different feet.

# Stopping and Starting — the Right Way

I can't think of anything more frustrating than getting ready to sew a nice long seam, stomping on the foot pedal, and having the needle come unthreaded. Many of the newer, more sophisticated machines automatically stop with the needle up — or the needle down depending on what you're sewing — so you won't have this problem. (Check your operating manual to see if you have the “needle-up or needle-down” feature.)

The following tips help you stop and start sewing the right way to avoid this problem:

- » Stop sewing at the end of the stitch cycle, which is when the needle is out of the fabric and the take-up lever is at the highest position. If you don't stop there, the take-up lever pulls out a length of thread for the next stitch and unthreads the needle.

When you need to stop your sewing manually, release the foot pedal, and then manually turn the flywheel counterclockwise until the needle is out of the fabric and the take-up lever is at its highest position. (See Chapter 2 for more on sewing machine parts.)

- » When stitching a corner, stop with the needle in the dead lowest position before raising the presser foot and pivoting at the corner to avoid a skipped stitch.
- » Start sewing by pulling the threads to the right-hand side of the presser foot, parallel to the front bed of the machine, and then put your presser foot down on the edge of the fabric. This way the pressure created by the presser foot holding the fabric in place also holds the threads firmly so they don't tangle when taking the first stitch. (See Chapter 5 for more information on taking the first stitch.)

## Righty, Tighty; Lefty, Loosey

This little rhyme refers to the tension knobs on your sewing machine and serger. Turning the tension dials to the right makes the stitches tighter. Turning them to the left makes the stitches looser. This trick works with pickle and peanut butter jars, too. (You can find more about balancing thread tensions in Chapter 2.) Throughout this book I provide machine settings and occasionally instructions to tighten or loosen the thread tension to make a particular sewing technique work better.

# Test-Stitching First

When sewing, you want the seams and buttonholes to turn out as flat and as good-looking as possible so that you aren't fighting with them when you press. The best way to make sure that the seamlines behave is to test the stitch you intend to use for the seam on a scrap piece of fabric before you sew the real deal.

After you do a test-stitch, use the following guidelines to help you adjust the stitch length as necessary:

- » **If your fabric puckers, shorten the stitch length.** Shortening the stitch length puts more thread into stitches so that the fabric stays relaxed in its original shape.
- » **If your fabric waves out of shape, lengthen the stitch.** Lengthening the stitch puts less thread in the stitch so that the fabric retains its original shape.

## Sewing from the Bottom Up and the Center Out

To keep your fabric pattern pieces in good shape for easy pressing and fitting, remember these hard and fast rules when working with vertical seams and horizontal seams on any project:

- » When you sew a vertical seam (like a side seam on a skirt or a pair of pants), sew from the hem edge up to the waistline.
- » When you sew a horizontal seam (like a shoulder seam), sew from the outside edges toward the center.
- » When you sew a collar or facing, sew from the center out to the point or raw edge on one side, and then from the center out to the point or raw edge on the other side.

# Pressing Seams Together and then Open or to One Side

Proper pressing and ironing techniques transform homemade projects into custom-made masterpieces. (To understand the important differences between pressing and ironing, turn to Chapter 5.) Your project's instructions may tell you to press in any of the following ways:

- » **Press the seam flat and together:** Place the project on your ironing board with the wrong side up (right sides together) and the seamline showing — like the seam looks when sewing. Press the iron over the seamline from the wrong side of the fabric. Doing so sets or *blends* the thread and stitches in the fabric. Position the iron so that you press the seam allowance together from the seamline out toward the raw or finished edge.
- » **Press the seam open:** Press a  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam from the wrong side of the fabric so that one seam allowance falls to the right and the other seam allowance falls to the left. The seamline itself ends up centered between the seam allowances. Using a seam roll makes it easier to press seams open. (See Chapter 2 for more on pressing tools.)
- » **Press the seam to one side:** When pressing seam allowances to one side, especially  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seams, a smooth look is created by pressing the fabric to one side or the other so that the ditch of the seam faces the back of the project.

## Clipping with Your Scissor Tips

Don't cut a hole in your project where you don't want one! Any time you cut from an edge into a seam allowance (for example, when you clip or notch a curve; see Chapter 6 for info on clipping and notching) and toward a seamline, use the tips of your scissors or shears. This way, you don't accidentally cut into the seamline.



TIP

When you notice that the scissor tips aren't cutting to the tips, it's time to have your scissors sharpened. Many times, you can find traveling scissors-sharpeners that make the rounds to your local fabric and quilting stores.

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## About the Author

**Jan Saunders Maresh** is a nationally known sewing journalist, an interior redeigner, and certified color and staging professional. After graduating from Adrian College in Michigan, she became the education director of one of the largest sewing machine companies in the country, and then the director of consumer education for the largest fabric chain in the country. Both professional experiences give her a solid foundation in the home sewing industry and for running her successful consulting business.

During her decades-long career, she has written 20 books and became a regular contributor to both major trade and consumer sewing publications. As a solopreneur, Jan not only ran a successful consulting business that served sewing, design, and staging industries but also coached other business owners on how best to market their businesses by giving talks that sell (without being sales-ey or weird). When she's not working, Jan keeps busy with DIY projects for her home and community.

Jan and her husband of 32 years are snowbirds and proud parents of their rocket-scientist son. (Yes. .he's actually a rocket scientist.) They split their time between Arizona and Washington, where they live with their crazy rescue dog, Polly. She (Jan, not Polly) loves almost anything mid-century modern, dark chocolate, and everything her husband cooks.

## Dedication

To Ted: You make everything work.

## Acknowledgments

I've been sewing since I was seven years old, and I've been writing about sewing for almost as long. I have a lot of people to thank for my journey, and that would run pages long. (See my acknowledgments in previous editions.) For this edition, I want to recognize those who may not realize how important they've been to me. Here goes.

First is Bertha Gold, who hired me as a sewing machine “demonstrator” at White Sewing Machine Company. The training I got there was the reason I wrote my first book, *Speed Sewing*. After many rejection letters, it was Bertha who suggested I write to her college roommate, Rita Weiss. Rita worked for a New York publisher and suggested I write to six publishers. One of them said yes. The book went on to

become a Book of the Month Main Selection. This is when I started writing about sewing.

Next is Robbie Fanning, my first book editor. Your patience and encouragement helped me with my writing skills — and believe me, I needed a lot of help. I still hear her saying, “Is that *really* necessary?” when I’d use an exclamation point.

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**Jacket a little tight? Add extra room (see Chapter 17 to learn how) and then change out the buttons and cover moth holes with beading. Voilà! An upcycled jacket.**

**Turn jeans upside down and give your sweatshirt a side split with a zipper or button-front fly. Instructions and the technique are in Chapter 19.**



**Get your shears ready! In Chapter 19, see how to mash up a sweatshirt with a pair of button-fly jeans and boost your casual wardrobe.**





**Do you have a jean jacket that needs a lift? Replace the front and back yokes with embroidered lace. Practice pinning, placement, cutting, and sewing for working with lace and other delicate fabrics in Chapter 19.**



**This jean jacket rocks both coming and going. (See Chapter 19.)**



**Practice your machine skills by making this Stitch Sampler Pin Cushion in Chapter 2. The So Help Me Lanyard holds everything you need for hand sewing. Make one to keep or give away as described in Chapter 5.**



PHOTO BY LISA HYSTER PHOTOGRAPHY

**A gathered ruffle adds length to a too-short jumper, and don't forget to add the back detail. See the easiest ways to gather a ruffle in Chapter 7.**



PHOTO BY LISA HYSTER PHOTOGRAPHY

**Tutus make great costumes that your little dancer can grow with. See how easy it is to work with ribbon, elastic, and tulle in Chapter 8.**





**Add ruffles and sashes to a thrifted denim skirt to make a Mommy and Me apron set in Chapter 9.**



**When you start with a ready-made garment, all the tough-to-sew detail — such as the zipper, waistband, belt loops, and pleats — is done. You simply add the flair. Take a closer look at the how to's and make these aprons in Chapter 9.**



**Give your bedroom a makeover with new bedding. Make a striking envelope pillow that's easy, easy, easy and a dust skirt you can make in less time than shopping for a new one. Plus, it stays pressed and will not droop like ready-mades. (See Chapter 16.)**



**Create a duvet and matching pillow shams using the attributes of a ready-made sheet set to speed up the project. Get all the how-to's in Chapter 16 (the duvet) and online at [www.dummies.com/go/sewingfd4e](http://www.dummies.com/go/sewingfd4e).**



Liven up Taco Tuesday by making a table runner that is write-on ready. Chalkcloth is fun to sew and write on; learn how to work with it in Chapter 14. This table runner and eight-piece napkin set was fashioned out of a thrifted drapery panel. The flatware holders were trimmed off the back of denim shorts.

“Dogs are people too,” and they deserve something you’ve made with love, like this denim dog bone — complete with treat pocket. Find the pattern in Chapter 8.







**I tried several construction methods when making these bones. The process in Chapter 8 is the fastest and easiest way.**



**Want a new shower curtain? Turn a twin-sized flat sheet upside down, add buttonholes, and insert hooks and you're done. You'll find a lot of flat sheet options at your local Goodwill and shower curtain instructions in Chapter 13.**



**Cornhole anyone? Make a custom set for yourself or your family. The instructions for regulation-size and -weight bags (plus the lore of how the cornhole craze started) is in Chapter 8.**



**Every cornhole set needs a matching tote. This tote (in Chapter 8) has a boxed bottom so it stands up on its own, and the corn bags fit comfortably inside when you're ready to take your game on the road.**



**If you have any sports jerseys you can't part with, turn them into pillow covers for the family room, bedroom, or rec room. Instructions for making your version using simple hand and machine stitches are in Chapter 6.**





No sports jerseys or shirts of any kind have been harmed in the making of this project because cutting isn't required! See how in Chapter 6.



Everyone needs extra pockets. Turn a long winter scarf into a practical place to stash an extra pair of gloves, your key fob, or a favorite toy. Check out the how to's in Chapter 12.



Superheroes and capes are like peanut butter and jelly. When making this project, you learn how to stitch on an appliqué, sew a curve, and make a ribbon tie so the cape is reversible. The pattern and instructions are in Chapter 8 (bubbles are optional).



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