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G99-1388 Seam Finishes for a Plain Seam

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Seam Finishes for a Plain Seam

This NebGuide covers seam finishes for a plain seam.

Rose Marie Tondl, Extension Clothing Specialist

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A plain seam is the basic element in all garment construction. It is created by stitching two pieces of fabric together, usually 5/8 inch from the cut edge using 10-12 stitches per inch. It is used with a variety of fabrics and found in all areas of a garment. Unless noted differently in the pattern instructions, the seam allowance is pressed open and an appropriate seam finish is used. For fabrics that ravel excessively, consider finishing the edge of the fabric before sewing the seam.

A seam finish lends a professional touch and an improved appearance to any garment. Finish seams to prevent woven threads from raveling and knit seams from curling. Seam finishes also strengthen seams and help them stand up to repeated washings and wearings, making the garment look new longer. A seam finish provides a neater appearance on the inside of the garment and makes the garment more comfortable.

If you are not sure which seam finish to use, try several finishes on a fabric scrap to see which works best.

Appearance of a Good Seam Finish

A good seam finish should have the following qualities:

- Neat, even stitches
- Smooth, without puckers
- Controls raveling
- Does not add too much bulk to the seam allowance
- Imprint of seam finish does not show on the right side of the garment
- Appropriate for the fabric and intended use of the garment

Considerations when determining the appropriate seam finish:

- *Tendency of fabric to ravel.* In general, woven fabrics ravel, knit fabrics do not. Tightly woven fabrics

do not tend to ravel. Some knit fabrics tend to curl or roll along the cut edge. A seam finish is needed to control the curling.

- *Bulk and weight of fabric and bulk of seam finish.* A goal of sewing is to reduce unnecessary bulk. If the fabric is bulky, do not choose a bulky seam finish. For lightweight fabric, a bulky finish will affect the hand/drape of the garment. Finishes that control excessive raveling are generally bulky.
- *Ability of the finish to control raveling.* Some finishes, such as stitched and pinked, control a limited amount of raveling. Bound finishes control almost any raveling.
- *Finished appearance of the garment.* Choose a seam finish that will not be visible on the outside of the garment or affect the hang/drape of the garment. On unlined jackets, choose a seam finish that will enhance the inside appearance of the jacket.
- *Type of garment; intended use or purpose of garment.* Garments worn and laundered frequently such as children's play clothes may need a more secure finish than a garment that is worn and laundered less frequently such as a prom dress.
- *Care requirements of fabrics.* Machine-laundered garments on a normal setting will have more abrasion and a greater tendency to ravel than garments laundered on a gentle cycle for a short period of time or dry-cleaned.

Seam Finishes

Seam finishes are added to raw edges of a seam allowance after the seam is stitched and pressed and before being crossed by another seam. If not, you won't be able to finish the entire seam. Finish curved seams before they are clipped or notched. Be certain the garment fits properly before applying a seam finish.

Seam finishes are divided into two groups: those that do not add any bulk to the garment; and those that add some bulk to the garment.

Seam Finishes That Do Not Add Bulk

Edge Stitch

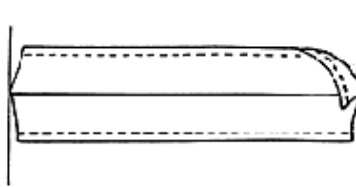


Figure 1. Edge stitch.

The edge stitch is the simplest finish to apply. Straight stitch 1/8 inch to 1/4 inch from the raw edge. Use this type of finish on firmly woven fabrics that ravel slightly, medium to firmly woven fabrics in lined garments to be dry-cleaned and knits that curl.

Stitch and Pink

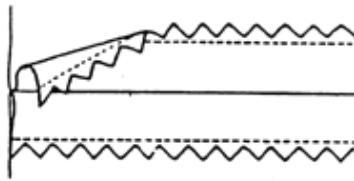


Figure 2. Stich and pink.

Stitch and Pink. Straight stitch 1/4 inch from the cut edge of the seam allowance. Trim the raw edge close to the stitching with pinking shears. Use this type of finish for firmly woven fabrics that have little tendency to ravel. Pinking alone without the stitching does not make a suitable finish.

Machine Zigzag

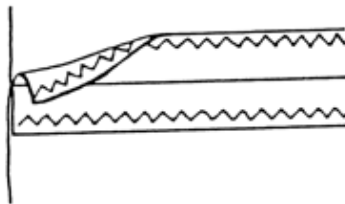


Figure 3. Machine zigzag.

Machine Zigzag. Use a smaller stitch for medium-weight fabrics that ravel and a larger stitch for heavier weight fabrics. Stitch close to each raw edge of the seam allowance. Since lightweight fabrics tend to bunch up and form a ridge, select a different seam finish. Try a multi-stitch zigzag setting for different weights of fabric.

Stitch and Pink

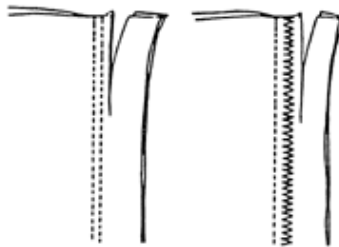


Figure 4. Double stitched.

Double Stitched. Raw edges of a plain seam are finished together. Stitch another row 1/8 inch from the first, or a medium-width zigzag, a multi-stitch zigzag or a blind stitch. Trim the seam allowances close to the stitching and press to one side. This prevents seam allowances from curling.

Serged

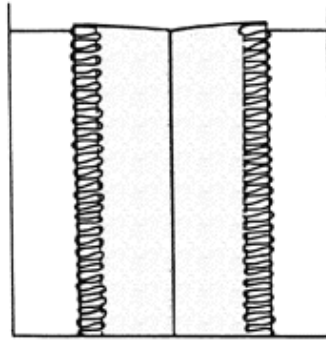


Figure 5. Serged.

Serged. The serger machine trims and overcasts the raw edges at the same time for a quality seam finish. Use a two- or three-thread balanced stitch on each raw edge. This finish is used for firmly woven fabrics that do not tend to ravel. The more thread used the stiffer the finish will be. A four-thread stitch has less stretch and adds more bulk.

Hand Overcast

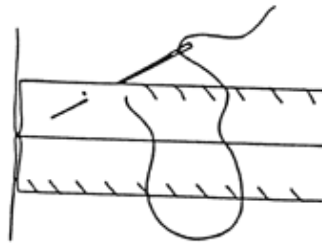


Figure 6. Hand overcast.

Hand Overcast. This seam finish takes time. It is suitable for most fabrics and is recommended for seams that are awkward to finish by machine. To do the overcast stitch, take stitches over the edge 1/8 inch to 1/4 inch deep and 1/4 inch apart. Slant the needle so stitches are at an angle. To help keep thread from knotting, pass the thread through some beeswax before starting

Liquid Seam Finish

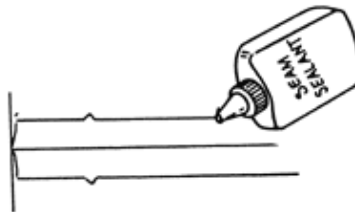


Figure 7. Liquid seam finish.

Liquid Seam Finish. Several liquid commercial products are available to use as a seam finish. Test liquid seam-finish products before using them. Check how far the product spreads on the fabric and if it changes the fabric color. The product should be easy to apply, control raveling and withstand several launderings. It works best on light to medium-weight fabrics. The product may stiffen the fabric but becomes softer after laundering or dry-cleaning. If used on crisp or stiff fabrics, it becomes scratchy, irritates the skin and may damage underwear.

Seam Finishes That Add Some Bulk

Turned and Stitched or Clean Finish

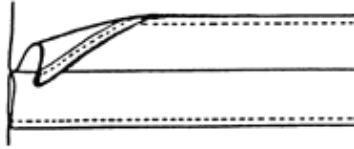


Figure 8. Turned and stitched or clean finished.

Turned and Stitched or Clean Finish. Press under 1/8 inch to 1/4 inch along the raw edge of the seam allowance. Machine stitch close to the folded edge. This is suitable for light to medium-weight fabrics that ravel. It gives a neat appearance to the inside of a garment. For hard to turn fabrics, stitch 1/8 inch or 1/4 inch from the raw edge to use as a guide for turning under the raw edges, then stitch in place.

Bound

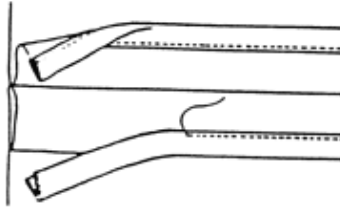


Figure 9. Bound.

Bound. The raw edge of the seam allowance is bound with other fabrics such as pre-folded lace, lightweight tricot seam binding, lace hem tape or custom-made lightweight fabric. Place narrow side of the binding on top. If making your own, press the binding so the bottom layer is 1/8 inch wider than the upper one. Edge stitch or zigzag through all thicknesses, catching underside of binding in the stitching. Use on unlined jackets and coats and fabrics that ravel excessively.

Hong Kong

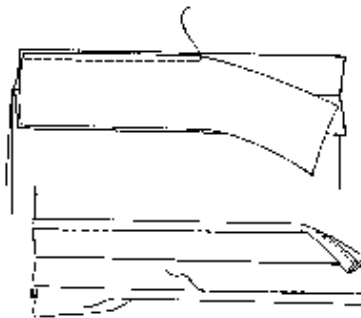


Figure 10. Hong Kong.

Hong Kong. Encase raw edges of fabric using single-fold bias tape or lining fabric cut in 1-inch strips on the bias. Lay bias strip on top of a seam allowance, right sides together. Stitch 1/4 inch from the raw edge; trim to 1/8 inch. Fold the bias over the raw edge to the back. From the top side, stitch in the ditch or groove formed by the previous stitching. This will secure the bias on the underside. Use this as an alternative to the bias-bound finish for unlined jackets and fabrics that

ravel excessively.

Other Seam Types

Some special seams also control raveling. These seams include: flat felled, mock felled, welt, double welt, French, and mock French. Check a sewing book for directions on making these types of seams.

Remember that there is not one "right" seam finish. Many seam finishes can control raveling adequately. Try several methods on your fashion fabric. Then select the seam finish that is most appropriate for the amount of raveling, bulkiness of fabric and desired finished appearance.

A plain seam on sheer fabric is not suitable since the seam allowances would show through on the right side. Select a different type of seam.

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