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Sewing with Knits

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What is knit fabric? Knit fabric is made by interlocking loops of yarn. There are single and double knits. A double knit means two layers of single knit are made simultaneously with the loops interconnected. Names associated with knits include jersey, double knits, interlock, sweatshirt fleece, sweater knits, ribbing, knit terries, stretch velvets, mesh knits and velour. Fiber content may be cotton, cotton blend, wool, acrylic or polyester.

Pattern

Pattern choices are determined by the amount of stretch in the knit and the end use of the garment. Consider weight, texture and drape of fabric. Look for unstructured jackets, pull-on pants, sweatshirts, cardigans, t-shirts, t-dresses, skirts, swimwear, leggings and other sportswear.

Preshrink

Wash and dry the fabric as you would with the finished garment. Buy additional yardage for cotton knits as they do shrink. You may want to wash the cotton fabric more than once before sewing the fabric. If fabric ravels, zigzag or serge the raw edges first. Preshrink wool knits with a steam iron held 1/2 inch above the wool. Dry clean the finished wool garments.

Layout/Cutting

Square the ends of the fabric. If the middle crease in the fabric cannot be pressed out, revise the pattern layout. Check amount of stretch in the fabric before cutting. To determine stretch, fold fabric crosswise 3 inches from the edge. Measure and mark a 4-inch length on the foldline. Stable knits stretch less than 1/2 inch, moderate stretch knits stretch about 1 1/4 inches and super stretch knits stretch 2 inches or more. Use a "with nap" layout with the greatest stretch of the knit going around the body. Be sure fabric does not hang off the cutting table. The fabric weight can cause fabric to stretch off grain.

Marking

Use fabric markers, chalk, pins, soap slivers or snip at the notches. Test markers on fabric first.

Interfacing

Knit fabrics use little interfacing. If the knit fabric needs support for buttonholes, pockets, plackets

or necklines, use a fusible knit interfacing. Your choice of support depends upon the purpose for which it will be used and the type of knit. Consider the weight, stretch and the desired look provided by the interfacing.

Needles

The size of the sewing machine needle depends on the fabric weight. For knit fabrics use ballpoint needles which have rounded tips or universal needles which are modified ballpoint needles. For lightweight knits use 75/11, medium weight use 80/12 and heavy weight, 90/14. Do some practice sewing on your fashion fabric. Change to a new needle or try a stretch needle if stitches get skipped.

Sewing

Set the stitch length at 2 to 2.5 mm or 10 to 12 stitches per inch. Sew with polyester or cotton/polyester thread. Stretch as you sew with a straight stitch machine to build stretch into the stitch or use a narrow, short zigzag stitch, 1 to 1.5 mm. You may use a three- or a four-thread serger depending on the amount of stretch you want in the seam. A serger with a differential feed will help to prevent wavy seams. If the serger does not have a differential feed, try using your middle and index finger to hold the fabric against the back of the presser foot as it moves over the feed dog. You may also need to adjust the pressure of the presser foot.

Seam Finishes

Since knit fabric does not ravel, consider the type of seam to make. Seams can be double stitched, stitched using a double needle, a straight stitch plus a zigzag stitch, two rows of zigzag or with a serger. Test using different types of seams to find the one that best suits your fabric.

Pressing

Test on scraps of fabric for the amount of steam, heat and pressure you will need. Pressing means to lift and lower the iron. Do not slide the iron back and forth as you will stretch the fabric. To avoid seam imprints, use strips of brown paper under the seams. For some knits place the right side of the fabric down on a thick terry towel or velvaboard.

Hemming

Let the garment hang for 24 hours before hemming. Keep the width of hems narrow. Depending on the type of knit, finish the raw edge, then topstitch using a double or triple needle, blindstitch or catchstitch edge by hand. Other choices include machine blindstitch or zigzag blindstitch. On softer knits use a lettuce edging for a soft look. Neckline and sleeve edges may be finished with sheer nylon bias tape, ribbon, synthetic suede or self-fabric.

For additional information see NebGuide G1091, *Sewing With Knit Fabric*.

File NF415 under TEXTILES, CLOTHING AND DESIGN

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