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## EC77-401 Hems for Skirts

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EC 77-401  
(Replaces EC 63-433)



# HEMS

## For Skirts

Extension work in "Agriculture, Home Economics and Subjects relating thereto,"  
The Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Agriculture and Natural  
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# Hems For Skirts

By Jane Speece  
Former Extension Specialist (Clothing)

There are many ways to hem a garment, but each hem should have certain features:

- . The lower edge hangs an even distance from the floor.
- . It is not obvious from the right side of the garment.
- . It looks smooth and flat.
- . The hem width is even all the way around.
- . The stitch holding a hem in place does not show on the right side unless it is intended to be part of the garment design.
- . The hem of a straight skirt should be on the grainline. A circle skirt will not be.

## Width of Hems Varies

The width of a hem varies according to the fabric and pattern style. Consider the proportion of the hem width to the total skirt length. Garments moderately flared look nice with hems two to three inches deep (5-7.5 cm). Hems wider than that look clumsy on narrower skirts or those of heavy fabrics.

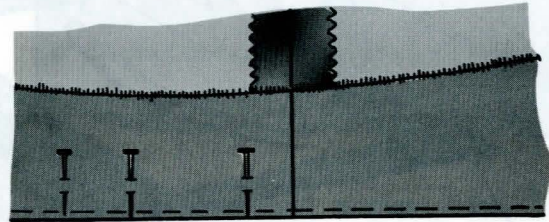
On full skirts of lightweight or sheer fabrics, hems as wide as 10 inches (25.5 cm) are sometimes used for design effects. Flared and circular skirts may require narrower hems, sometimes as narrow as an inch (2.5 cm) or less.

## Basic Steps for Hemming

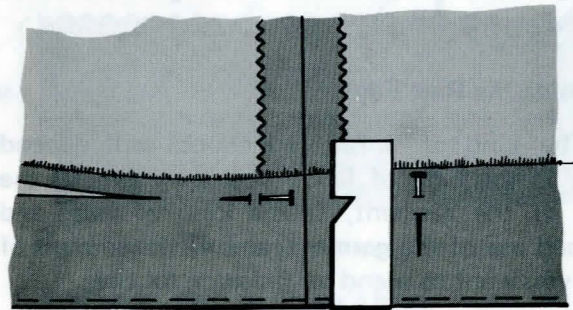
1. Measure the hem an even distance from the floor. Mark with pins or chalk. If possible, have someone else measure (Figure 1).



2. Turn up the hem at the marked hemline. Pin, baste or lightly press to hold the line (Figure 2).

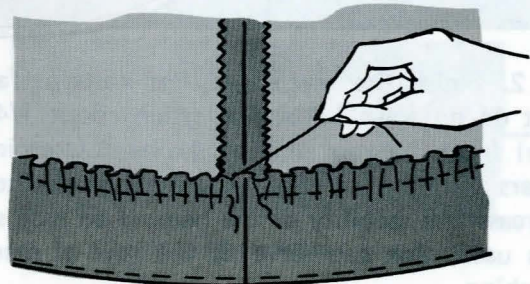


3. Decide width of hem. Use a gauge to measure the width. Mark with pins or chalk. Trim off extra fabric (Figure 3).



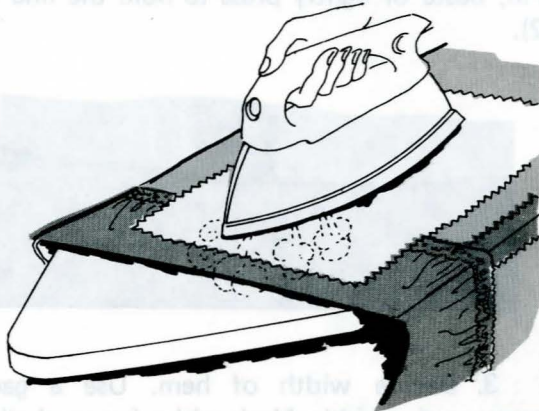
4. Draw up fullness with an ease stitch. Many hems when turned are slightly too full to fit smoothly against the underside of the garment. A line of ease stitching is used to allow the fullness to be eased in.

To ease—Place a hand or machine basting stitch 1/4 inch (6 mm) from the cut edge. Draw the thread to ease in extra fullness so the hem lies flat and smooth when seams in the hem and skirt are matched (Figure 4).





5. Press the hem. You may be more satisfied with the appearance of the hem if you turn the hem and baste it close to the fold and raw edge before you press it (Figure 5). This procedure helps to keep the ease distributed correctly. Steam press, using a press cloth to protect the fabric. Gently press the hem with the iron at right angles to the hem (Figure 5). If a softer hem edge is desired, press up to, but not over, the hem fold.

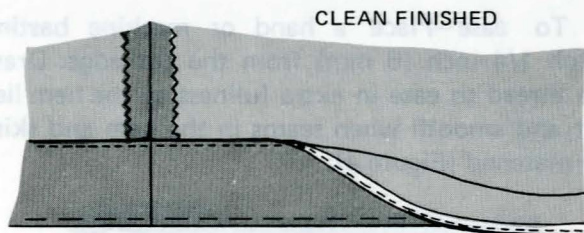


6. Finish the cut edge. Match hem seams to garment seams. Fasten with fusing materials or desired hem stitch.

### Finishing the Raw Edge

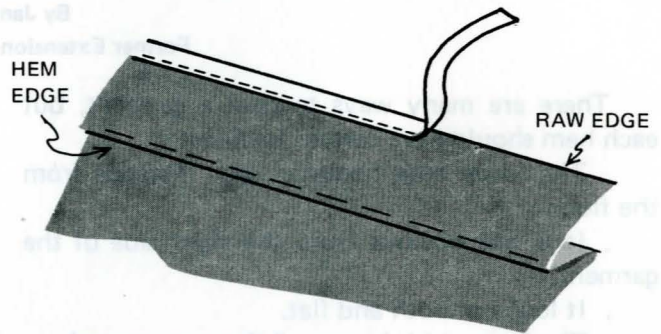
The kind of finish you choose will depend upon 1) the kind of fabric you are using, 2) the style of the garment, 3) the kind of wear and planned use of the garment, and 4) the amount of time you want to spend on finishing touches.

**1. Clean Finished.** (For lightweight to medium weight fabrics.) Turn under the raw edge of the hem about 1/4" (6 mm) and stitch along the fold. If an ease stitch was used, turn the hem edge under along this stitching line (Figure 6).



**2. Finish the raw edge.** (For knits or fabrics that do not ravel.) Machine stitch about 1/4" (6 mm) from the raw edge of the hem. Use pinking shears on the raw edge or use a zigzag stitch to increase the stability of the hem. If an ease stitch was used, this can serve as the row of machine stitching.

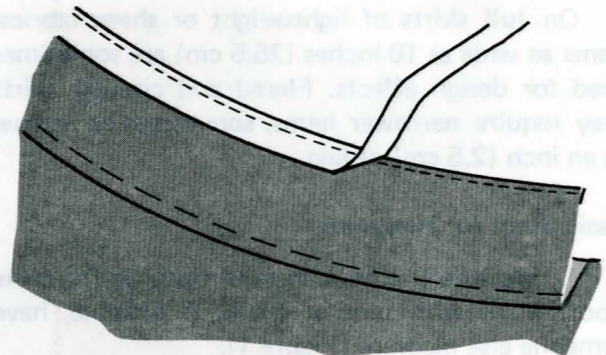
**3. Hem tape.** (For bulky fabrics or for those that ravel.) Place seam tape, hem tape or stretch lace on the right side of the fabric so that it covers the raw edge (Figure 7). Stitch close to the lower edge of the tape. Use a straight stitch or a narrow



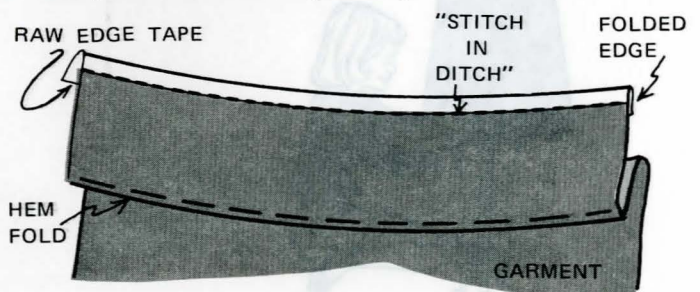
zigzag. Stretch lace is especially suited to knits because it will move with the fabric. It is not necessary to use stretch lace with knits, but it gives an attractive custom touch.

**4. Bound hem.** (For bulky fabrics, for those that ravel or for decorative purposes.) A bias tape or a 1 inch (2.5 cm) lightweight, smooth bias strip is used.

If bias seam tape is used, unfold one edge of the tape and place it right side down against the right side of the hem, matching the edges. Machine stitch along the fold of the tape, being careful not to stretch the bias tape (Figure 8a). Then fold the tape over the edge of the hem. "Stitch in the



ditch" on the right side along the groove where the bias joins the hem (Figure 8b).





If a bias strip is used, placed right sides of bias strip and hem together. Match raw edges and stitch 1/4 inch (6 mm) from the edge. Turn the bias over the raw edge. On the other side, stitch close to the folded bias on the hem.

**5. Zigzag stitching.** (For knits, particularly sweater knits, where stretch in hem is important to correspond to stretch in the garment.) Use a narrow zigzag stitch 1/4 inch (6 mm) from the edge for the ease stitch. This will allow for greater stretch. Use wide close-together zigzag stitches or multiple zigzag stitches to finish the edge (Figure 9).



## Putting in the Hem

**Hand Hemming**—The hem can be placed flat on the garment with the stitches run across the top of the hem. This is called flat hemming. This method works best with woven, textured fabrics. Sometimes the garment is folded back and the stitches are taken between the two layers of fabric. This is called inside hemming. The latter method has less tendency to show stitches on the right side.

Be careful that stitches are not pulled too tightly. Lock the hem stitch with an extra stitch about every 12 inches (30 cm) so the hem will be secure. Use only a single thread of about 12 to 15 inches (30 to 40 cm) long.

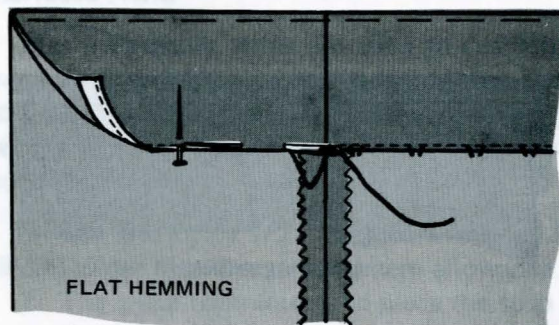
Take three or four tiny stitches in a seam or the hem to begin your hemming. Repeat this every time you end or begin a new thread, because knots have a tendency to show. Take these stitches in the hem portion rather than the garment so the stitches will not show on the right side.

Pick up only one or two threads, or parts of threads, in the garment as you put in the hem. A slightly longer stitch can be taken in the hem portion.

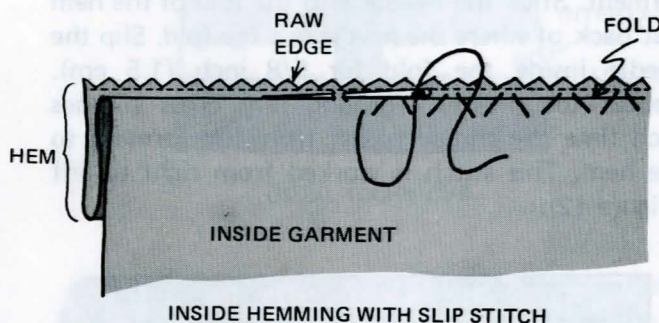
### 1. Slip stitch

Pin or baste the hem in place. Anchor end of thread.

**Flat hemming.** Take a tiny stitch in the garment at the edge of the hem. Then slip the needle inside the hem fold for about 5/8 inch (1.5 cm). Long stitches are hidden in the fold (Figure 10a).



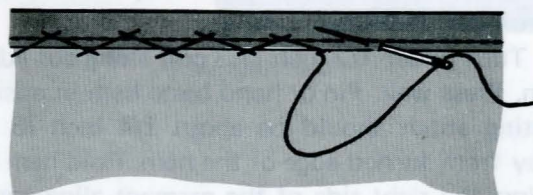
**Inside hemming.** Fold garment back. Take a tiny stitch in the garment at the fold. Then take a stitch through the hem. Repeat at 1/4 inch (6 mm) intervals (Figure 10b).



### 2. Catch stitch or Tailor's hem.

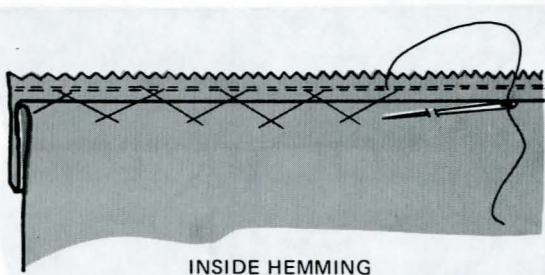
Pin or baste hem in place. Anchor end of thread.

**Flat hemming.** Working from left to right on the hem, take a short stitch in the fold of the hem, then a short stitch in garment. Stitches should be about 5/8 inch to 3/4 inch (1.5 to 2 cm) apart. Distance may be determined by heaviness of fabric. Stitches will cross each other so that a loose cross stitch seems to form (Figure 11a).





**Inside hemming.** Fold hem back and then work from left to right. Take a short stitch in the stitching line along the edge of the hem, then take a short stitch in the garment. Stitches should be about 5/8 inch to 3/4 inch (1.5 to 2 cm) apart (Figure 11b).

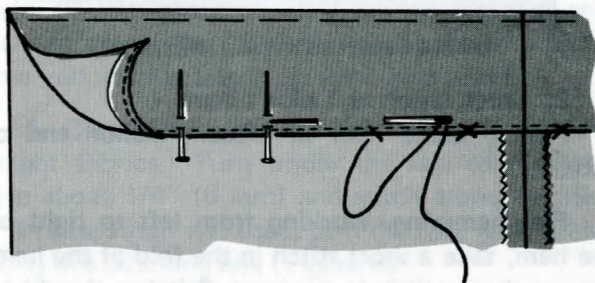


INSIDE HEMMING

### 3. Lock stitch.

This stitch is best used for heavily textured or bulky woven fabrics. It is a sturdy stitch with little give and is used only with flat hemming.

Anchor thread, then take a tiny stitch in the garment. Stick the needle into the fold of the hem just back of where the needle left the fold. Slip the needle inside the fold for 5/8 inch (1.5 cm). Repeat the process, forming tiny cross stitches each time the thread passes from the garment to the hem. This stitch is worked from right to left (Figure 12).



## Machine-Stitched Hems

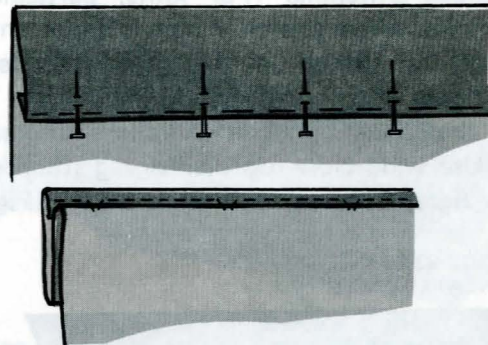
### 1. Blind hem stitch.

Consult your sewing machine manual for the correct machine setting. The following directions are given for machines that may not have this feature.

Turn under 1/2 inch (1.3 cm) along cut edge of hem. Press well. Pin or hand baste hem in position. Basting stitch should be about 1/4 inch (6 mm) away from turned edge of the hem. Fold hem back against the right side of the garment allowing hem to extend about 1/8 inch (3 mm) beyond the fold. Machine stitch on the extended hem edge 5 to 6

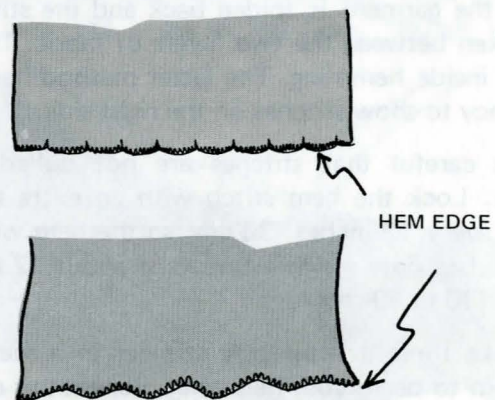
stitches, then swing the material under the needle so one stitch will be taken in one thread in the fold of the garment. The length of the stitch will depend upon the weight of the fabric. Repeat the process until the hem is completed (Figure 13).

HEMLINE FOLD



### 2. Edge finishes.

Many machines have decorative stitches which may be used as finishes along the raw edge of the hem or along a turned-under portion of about 1/4 inch (6 mm). In this case the hem will be cut off at the desired length and the turned-under portion eliminated. Try some samples to see which stitches would be most satisfactory to use (Figure 14). This finish is usually found in lightweight knits or other fabrics that drape easily.

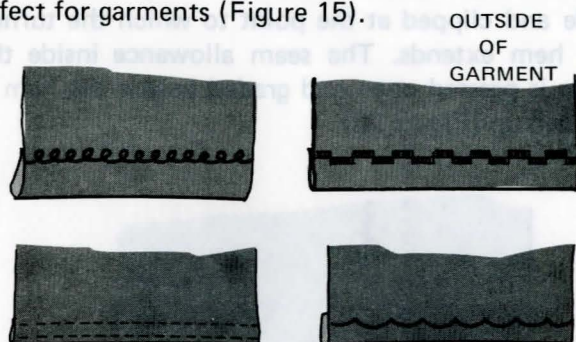


### 3. Top stitching.

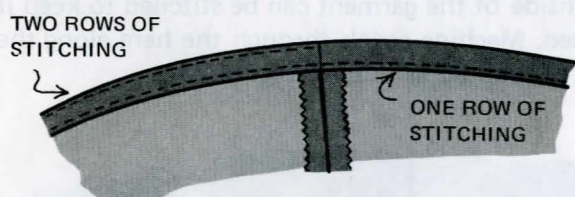
A straight stitch can be used to hold the hem, or the decorative stitches found on many machines can be utilized. Two or more rows of straight stitching can also be decorative as well as functional. Finish the edge of the hem and turn it under. Pin or baste in place. Stitch on the outside of the garment. Repeat the same stitch elsewhere on the garment to carry out the decorative theme. This top stitching can be used to advantage in sports-



wear, children's clothes, ethnic wear or as a special effect for garments (Figure 15).



**Narrow hems** (For bias or circular cut skirts) The depth of the hem will usually be less than an inch (2.5 cm). The hem may be turned under twice and machine stitched. Two or more rows of stitching may be desired to give the hem a detailed finish (Figure 16).

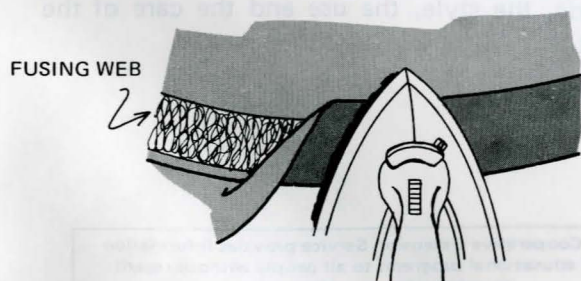


### Fused Hems

The fusing webs can be used to advantage with many hems. Be sure to test it with a sample of your fabric first. If it is a heavily textured fabric, the fusing may not be satisfactory. In some cases the web may give too stiff an appearance to a sheer fabric. In other cases where steam or a hot iron is necessary, the fabric or fiber may not react well to the steam or heat.

Read and follow the directions that come with the fusing webs.

To apply the web, cut a strip slightly narrower than the hem. Slip it into place about 1/8 inch (3 mm) below the upper hem edge. The strip should avoid the folded hem edge by about the same measurement (Figure 17).

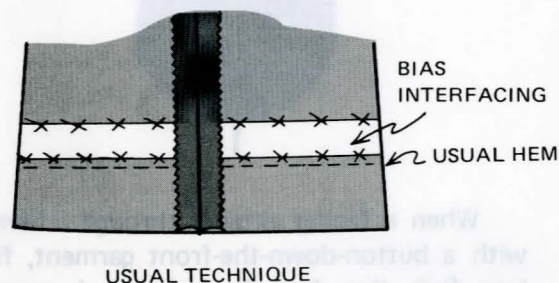


Baste with the iron by touching the point of the iron around hem at intervals. Then follow the fusing directions for the final hem fusing. The fused hem may occasionally have to be touched up to renew the bond.

### Interfaced Hems

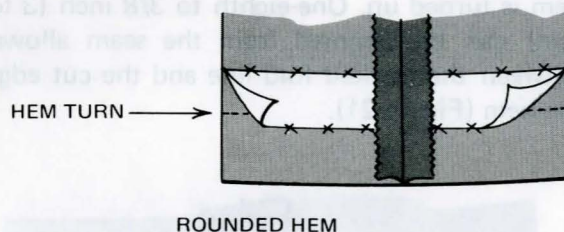
Bias interfacing strips are used to cushion the hems for some fabrics, particularly heavy-weight fabrics. This keeps the hem width from showing on the right side. These strips may be pieced if necessary.

1. Cut the strips 1/2 inch to one inch (1.3 to 2.5 cm) wider than the garment hem allowance.
2. The usual technique is to place the strip just above the hem fold in the garment so it is not caught in the fold (Figure 18a).



Occasionally a rounded hem is desired, however. In this case the interfacing strip needs to be at least one inch (2.5 cm) wider than the hem. It is placed to extend below the fold (Figure 18b).

3. Pin or baste the strip to the garment, then catch stitch.
4. Catch stitch the raw edge of the garment to the interfacing strip.



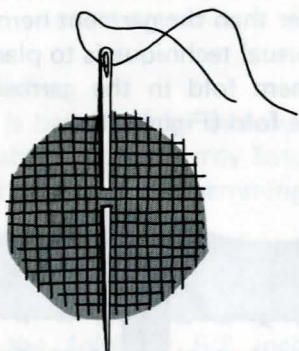


## Final Pressing

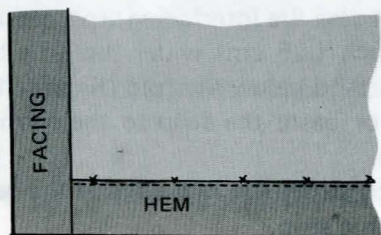
After the hem is stitched a final pressing is necessary. Use a well padded ironing board and lightly press the hem on the wrong side. If touch-up pressing from the right side is necessary, use a press cloth to protect the fabric.

## Hints for Better-Looking Hems

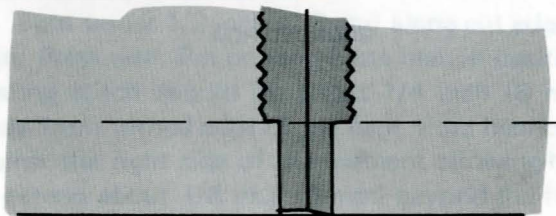
Stitches in the garment should be taken in the direction of the fabric guidelines—not diagonally on the bias (Figure 19). Keep stitches fairly loose. Pulling them too tight will cause a puckered hem.



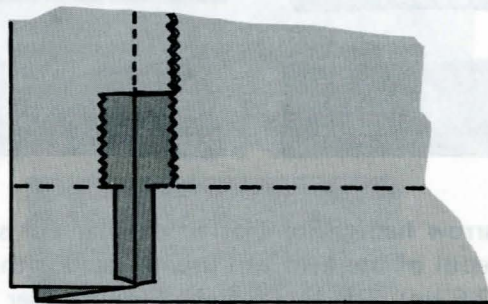
When a facing extends through a hem such as with a button-down-the-front garment, finish the hem first, then fold the facing back over the hem (Figure 20).



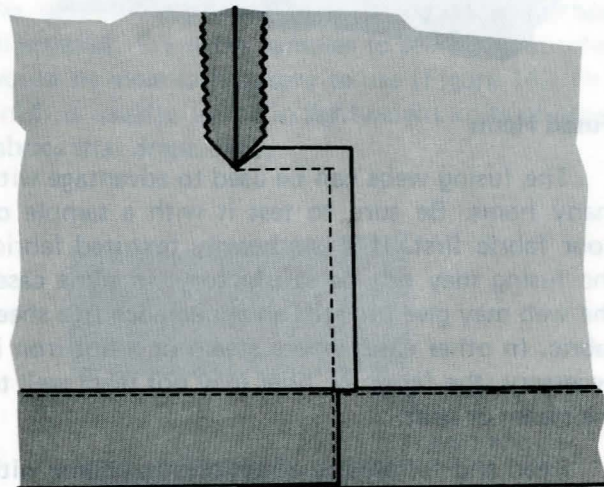
Seam allowances should be graded before the hem is turned up. One-eighth to 3/8 inch (3 to 10 mm) can be trimmed from the seam allowance between the marked fold line and the cut edge of the hem (Figure 21).



The seam allowance of a pleat is pressed to one side and clipped at the point to which the turned up hem extends. The seam allowance inside the hem is pressed open and graded before the hem is turned up (Figure 22).



After a pleat is hemmed, the fold which falls to the inside of the garment can be stitched to keep it creased. Machine stitch through the hem along the edge of the fold as shown (Figure 23).



As you try various hem edge finishes and hem finishes, you will find that the techniques suggested in this circular can be combined or portions can be interchanged. The important point to remember is that the hem and its finish should be suitable for the fabric, the style, the use and the care of the garment.

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