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HEG81-147 Seam Finishes

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Seam Finishes

Learn to recognize different types of seam finishes, their advantages, and how to sew them.

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A seam finish is a treatment applied to the raw edge of a seam allowance to prevent the fabric from fraying. It may also add a touch of beauty to the inside of an unlined garment.

Consider the following when selecting the best seam finish for a particular fabric:

- *Tendency of the fabric to ravel.* In general, woven fabrics ravel, knit fabrics do not. A tightly woven fabric, however, will have little tendency to ravel. A knit fabric that tends to curl or roll along the cut edge will need a seam finish to control the curling even though the fabric itself does not ravel. The more a fabric ravel, the more detailed a finish will be needed.

To determine if a fabric ravel, use an edge other than selvage that is cut on straight grain. Cut along the edge of the fabric at an angle, then stroke the cut. Observe how easily the fabric ravel. If the fabric is washed for preshrinking, the tendency of it to ravel can be observed at this time.

- *Ability of the finish to control raveling.* Some seam finishes control only a limited amount of raveling (such as stitch and pink). Other finishes (such as bound) control almost any raveling.
- *Bulkiness of fabric and bulkiness of seam finish.* One goal of sewing is to reduce unnecessary bulk. If the fabric is bulky, avoid using a bulky seam finish. If the fabric is lightweight, avoid a bulky finish that will affect the hand/drape of the garment. Some finishes that control excessive raveling are bulky. Use

when needed, but understand that they will add bulk.

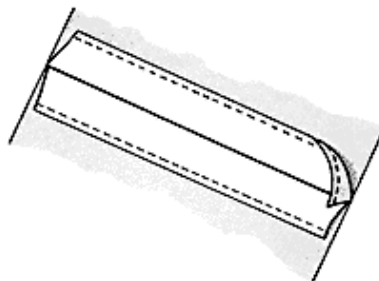
- *Finished appearance of the garment.* Choose a seam finish that will not be visible on the outside of the garment, or affect the hang or drape of the garment. When sewing an unlined jacket or coat, consider the inside appearance of the garment if it is removed. In a high-quality garment, the inside will be as neat as the outside.
- *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 wedding dress that is worn only once). Seam allowances might be finished differently in an unlined garment than in a lined one. Similarly, they may be finished differently in an unlined skirt than in an unlined jacket.
- *Care requirements of fabrics.* Fabrics machine laundered at normal agitation for a long time will have greater abrasion and tendency to ravel than those machine washed at a gentle agitation level for a short time or dry cleaned.

Seam finishes are added to each seam allowance after the seam has been stitched and pressed. Curved seams should have the seam finish applied before the seam is clipped or notched. If the seam finish will affect the width of the seam allowance, be certain that the garment fits properly before applying the finish.

Seam finishes can be divided into two groups: 1) those that do not add any bulk to the garment and 2) those that add some bulk to the garment.

Seam Finishes That Do Not Add Bulk

Edge Stitch (Figure 1.)



The edge stitch is the simplest finish to apply. Straight stitch 1/8" to 1/4" from the raw edge. An attachment (edge-stitcher) is available for many sewing machines to make this stitching easier.

Uses:

- This finish is best for firmly woven fabrics that do not ravel.
- It may also be suitable for medium to firmly woven fabrics that are lined and will be dry cleaned.

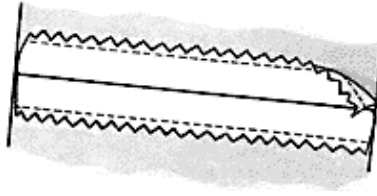
Advantages:

- Fairly easy, especially for those with limited sewing skill.
- Does not add bulk to the garment.
- No additional cost.

Disadvantages:

- Edge Stitching will not control heavy raveling.
- The thread may eventually pull away from the garment along with short, raveled yarns.
- Will not prevent or control raveling but may delay it temporarily on a firmly woven fabric.

Stitch and Pink (Figure 2.)



Straight stitch 1/4" from the cut edge of the seam allowance. Use pinking shears to trim the raw edge close to the stitching.

Uses:

- This finish is best for firmly woven fabrics that have little tendency to ravel.

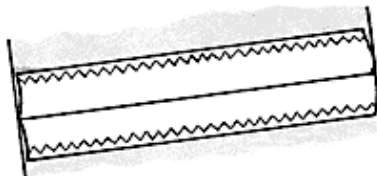
Advantages:

- This finish is easy for beginners and those with limited sewing skills.
- Does not add bulk to the garment.
- Pinking reduces the length of yarns. If it ravel, shorter yarns come out of the fabric, thus leaving a neater appearance than when fabric is not pinked.
- No additional cost.

Disadvantages:

- Does not control moderate amounts of raveling.
- Youngsters may have difficulty manipulating pinking shears on the edge of fabric.
- The row of stitching may leave an impression on outer surface if lightweight fabric is not properly pressed.

Machine Zigzag (Figure 3.)



Using a medium width zigzag and slightly shortened stitch length, stitch close to the raw edge of the seam allowance. Do not stitch over the raw edge, as this may cause the fabric to bunch up and form a ridge. Adjust pressure and tension to attain a properly balanced stitch. If necessary, trim close to the stitching.

Uses:

- This is probably the most common seam finish. It's a nice finish for medium-weight woven fabrics that ravel.

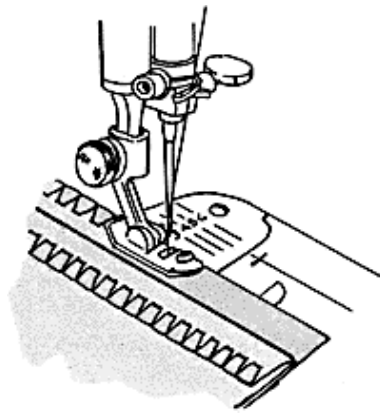
Advantages:

- Relatively easy finish to apply.
- No additional cost.
- Does not add bulk.
- Fairly effective at controlling moderate raveling.

Disadvantages:

- Sometimes difficult to avoid puckering the seam allowance.
- If not pressed properly, zigzag stitches may leave an impression on outer side of lightweight fabric.
- Yarns not secured by stitching may still ravel if garment is washed frequently.

Machine Overcast or Overedge (Figure 4.)



Follow instructions in your sewing machine manual. Select the overedge or overcast stitch. Stitch on the seam allowance, barely stitching over the raw edge.

Uses:

- Can be used on medium and heavyweight fabrics to control raveling.

Advantages:

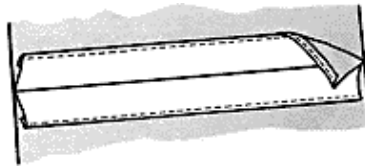
- Relatively easy to apply if machine has this stitch.
- Besides stitching over the edge, also forms a second row of stitching, about 1/8" from the raw edge, that helps prevent raveling.
- No additional cost.
- Does not add bulk.
- Fairly effective for controlling moderate raveling.

Disadvantages:

- All machines are not capable of producing this stitch.
- May cause puckering, especially if a special foot is not available.
- Pressing may leave a ridge on outside of garments made of lightweight fabric.

Seam Finishes That Add Some Bulk

Clean Finish (Figure 5.)



Press under 1/8 - 1/4" along the raw edge of the seam allowance. Machine stitch close to the folded edge.

Uses:

- Best for lightweight fabrics that ravel excessively.

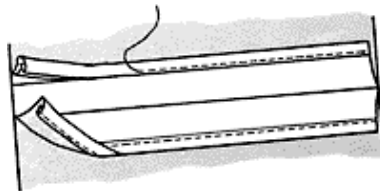
Advantages:

- Controls raveling, even after repeated launderings.
- No additional cost.
- Neater appearance to inside of garment than some finishes.

Disadvantages:

- Adds some bulk to the seam allowance.
- If not properly pressed, a ridge may form on the outside fabric where seam allowance is turned under.

Bound (Figure 6.)



Wrap binding around the raw edge of seam allowance. Binding may be one of the following:

Pre-folded lace or gauze finish; seam binding, lace hem tape or net that has been folded in half lengthwise and pressed; or double fold bias tape. Place the narrow or decorative side of the binding on top. Top stitch close to the inner edge of the binding, stitching through all thicknesses, catching underside of binding in stitching.

Uses:

- For unlined jackets and coats and fabrics that ravel excessively.

Advantages:

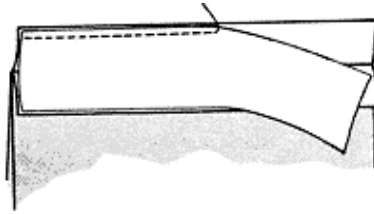
- Adequately controls raveling.
- May add only a minimum of bulk to garment, depending on product used.
- Gives a nice appearance to inside of unlined jacket.

Disadvantages:

- Adds to cost of garment.
- Lace, gauze and net add minimal bulk to garment; bias tape adds more bulk.
- Requires skill to stitch close to edge and sew through three or more thicknesses.

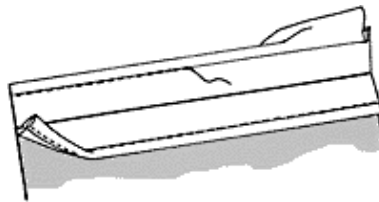
- If not properly pressed, a ridge may form on outside of garment.

Hong Kong Finish (Figure 7.)



Cut bias strips of lightweight fabric (such as batiste, broadcloth or lining fabric) 1-1/4" - 1- 1/2" wide (or press out folds in bias tape). Lay the bias strip on top of the seam allowance, right sides together. Stitch 1/8" - 1/4" from the raw edges. 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, (Figure 8). This will secure the bias on the underside. If necessary, trim the excess bias close to the stitching.

Figure 8.



Uses:

- For unlined jackets and fabrics that ravel excessively.

Advantages:

- Controls raveling.
- Gives a nice appearance to inside of jacket.

Disadvantages:

- Adds bulk to the seam allowance (but less bulk than some of the bound seams).
- Adds to the cost of the garment.
- If not properly pressed, a ridge may form on the outside of the garment.
- Takes some time.

Special Seams

Some special seams also include the function of controlling raveling. These seams include: flat felled, mock flat felled, double welt, French and mock French.

Use of Commercial Products

Several new commercial products have recently been developed to use as seam finishes. These include pre-cut fabrics and liquid seam finish products. Always test a new product to see how well it works. It should be easy to apply, control raveling, and withstand several test launderings.

Appearance of a Good Seam Finish

A good (quality) seam finish should have the following characteristics:

- Neat, even stitches.
- Seam allowance is even in width.
- Smooth, without puckers.
- Controls raveling.
- Does not add unnecessary bulk to the garment.
- Does not show obviously on the outside of the garment.
- Neatly applied to the garment.
- Appropriate to the fabric and intended use of the garment.

Remember that there is not one "right" seam finish. Many seam finishes can adequately control raveling. Select the seam finish that is more appropriate for amount of raveling, bulkiness of fabric, and desired finished appearance.

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