

THE COLETTE GUIDE TO
SEWING HEMS

YOUR QUICK REFERENCE FOR HEMMING
SKIRTS, DRESSES, & TOPS



Colette
PATTERNS



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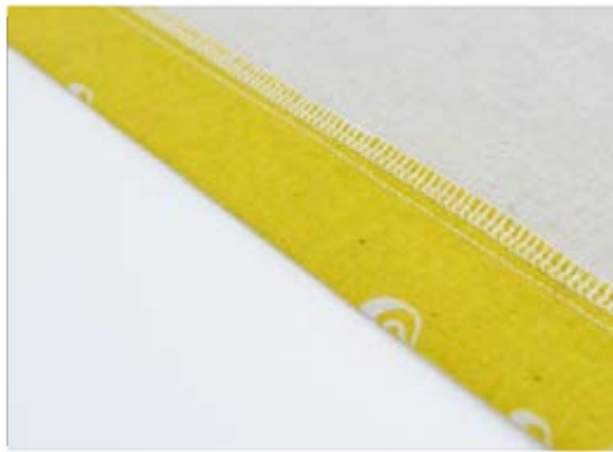
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• WELCOME •

to The Colette Guide to Sewing Hems

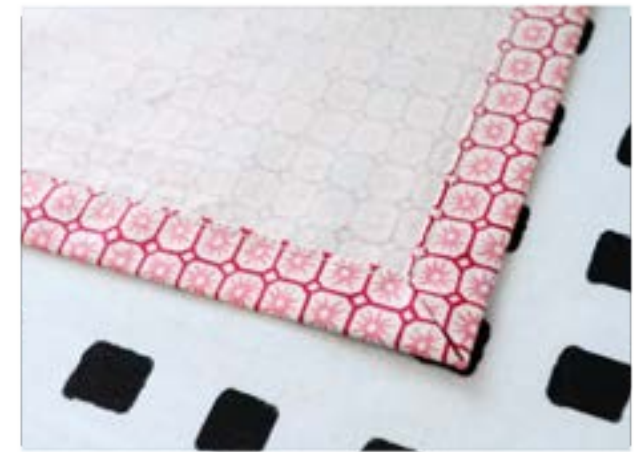
INTRODUCTION



Learn a variety of ways to finish the raw edge before you hem.



How to stitch your hem, either by hand or by machine.



Special techniques cover sewing hems in knits and sewing mitered corners.

YOUR COMPLETE REFERENCE GUIDE





Colette Guide to Sewing Hems



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Text by Sarai Mitnick and Devon Iott.

Photography by Sarai Mitnick and Devon Iott.



EVERY HEM IS DIFFERENT

When I first learned to sew, I didn't give hems much thought. I'd learned to do a simple turned hem on my first dress, and didn't really look back. Hems are a piece of cake, I thought.

That is, until I tried to sew my first circle skirt. The deep curve of the hem - literally a circle - made it almost impossible to make my trusty turned hem look good.

There were puckers and waves and unevenness everywhere. I was lost.

As I progressed into more advanced projects and specialty fabrics, like sheer silks or heavy wools, I realized

that I needed a lot more in my toolkit than one basic turned hem.

The truth is, different garments call for different hems, and choosing and executing the right way is a bit of an art. It's also one of the many true design decisions you get to make when sewing your own clothes.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

In September of 2014, I teamed up with Devon Iott, the blogger and sewing teacher who runs [our world-class sewalongs](#), for an event we called Sept-HEM-ber. All month, we covered various techniques for sewing hems on the [Colette Patterns blog](#).

When the month finished, I put together all of that information and more to create this free guide to sewing hems. I hope you find it helpful as you go through your next sewing project.

One of our tenets at [Colette Patterns](#) is to find ways to be as useful as possible for you, our readers and customers. Even if you've never bought a pattern or book from us, I hope you'll thoroughly enjoy learning from the free stuff we put out into the world, and maybe even tell your friends about it. That's the biggest compliment we could get.

-Sarai



WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- ◆ How to make sure your hem is even.
- ◆ Everything you need to know about stabilizing hems.
- ◆ Several options to finish the raw edge of your hem.
- ◆ How to stitch a hem by hand.
- ◆ How to sew basic turned hem by machines, and a few different options for doing it.
- ◆ How to sew a machine rolled hem.
- ◆ How to sew a faced or shaped hem.
- ◆ How to sew a baby hem.
- ◆ How to sew a mitered corner.
- ◆ & more!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



DEVON IOTT

Raised on a farm in Ohio, [Devon](#) moved to Los Angeles for college and worked in the film industry for several years. She has taught sewing at various shops throughout Southern California and at the Craftcation Conference in Ventura. She now resides and teaches in Nashville. When not obsessively sewing she can be found knitting, baking, and drinking wine with her cat.



SARAI MITNICK

Sarai is the founder of beloved indie sewing publisher [Colette Patterns](#) and blogger behind [The Coletterie](#). She is the bestselling author of [The Colette Sewing Handbook](#) and editor of [The Colette Guide to Sewing Knits](#). She has been featured in *Threads*, *Sew News*, *Elle Belgium*, *Bust* magazine, *Portland Monthly*, and more.



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FIRST STEP:

PREPARATION

CHAPTER I



BEFORE YOU SEW

Getting your hem just right starts before needle and thread touch fabric. A little forethought and a few extra steps will help you get that professional finish.

[MORE](#)



Choose your hem

SECTION I



THE RIGHT HEM FOR THE JOB

Several factors go into choosing just the right hem for your project.

Hems are often the last thing we think about when making a piece of clothing. You probably already have your favorite hemming methods, techniques you turn to again and again because they're familiar and easy.

But choosing the right hem is a bit of an art, and a great way to exercise a little creativity with even the most basic garment. No matter what you're making, you can elevate the level of your final creation by choosing the hem that suits it best.

Here are five important questions to ask in order to choose the right hem:

1. **How formal is the garment?** Casual everyday garments often have simple machine-stitched hem finishes, while fancier garments might use blind hems, rolled hems, or hand-stitched hems to get a more subtle and sophisticated look.
2. **What is the shape of the garment?** If you're sewing a skirt, the fuller it is the narrower you will want your hem to be.
3. **Will the hem be visible?** If you are using a sheer fabric, you should account for the visibility of the hem through the fabric. You might choose a narrow rolled or baby hem for sheer fabrics.
4. **What is the weight and drape of the fabric?** Some hems require certain types of fabric. For example, it is difficult (or sometimes impossible) to execute a tiny rolled hem with thick or stiff fabric.
5. **How much time do I want to spend hemming?** Stitching hems by hand is time consuming. Think about the worth of the hem in relation to the total time spent on the garment. If you've spent weeks on a tailored jacket, it's surely worth it to get a perfect hand-stitched hem, even if it adds a couple hours.

Hems should be chosen based on the final look you want for your garment; but even more important, they should be chosen based on the type of fabric you are using. For that reason, the instructions that come with your sewing pattern may guide you but they don't have all the answers. If you want a slightly different look, or if you're using a fabric with special considerations, you should feel free to change things up.

See [the chart on page II](#) for some suggestions on hems that are appropriate for different fabric types and situations.

FACTORS IN CHOOSING YOUR HEM

- ◆ *Level of formality*
- ◆ *Fullness and curve of hem*
- ◆ *Visibility of hem*
- ◆ *Weight and drape of fabric*
- ◆ *Time it takes*

ADJUSTING THE HEM ALLOWANCE

The hem allowance is the bit of fabric that is folded under to create the hem. In other words, it's the distance between the finished edge of the fabric and the fold of the hem. If you take a look at a variety of garments in your closet right now, you'll probably notice that some of them have deep (meaning wide) hem allowances of 2 inches or more, and others have narrow hem allowances of 1/4 inch or less.

Different hem allowances are suited to certain styles of garments. Full skirts usually work best with a fairly narrow hem, so that there isn't much bulk added. Straight skirts can have wider hem allowances. Generally, the more full the hem, the more narrow you can go.

The chart [on the next page](#) shows suggested hem allowances for different types and shapes of garments, along with the hems that work well. If your pattern uses a wider or narrower hem than you'd like, feel free to add or subtract fabric from the hemline to get the right allowance for your specific garment.



CHOOSE YOUR HEM

This chart shows the traditional choices for various garment types, though you may choose to deviate in order to obtain a specific look. The rule of thumb is that the more flared the hem, the narrower the hem allowance should be.

GARMENT	HEM ALLOWANCE	HAND: CATCH, BLIND, SLIP, OR FELL	*HAND: ROLLED HEM	MACHINE: TURNED HEM	MACHINE: BLIND HEM	MACHINE: ROLLED HEM	MACHINE: BABY HEM	MACHINE: FACED HEM	MACHINE: FRINGED HEM	TWIN NEEDLE HEM	SERGER ROLLED HEM	BANDED HEM
skirt, straight or dirndl	1 1/2 in	✓			✓			✓	✓			
skirt, a-line	1 - 1 1/2 in	✓			✓			✓				
skirt, flared	1 in	✓		✓	✓			✓				
skirt, very flared	1/4 - 1/2 in		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				
pants, straight	1 1/2 in	✓			✓			✓				
pants, flared	1 in	✓			✓			✓				
pants, very flared	1 in	✓			✓			✓				
blouse, straight	1 in				✓			✓				
blouse, a-line	1/2 - 1 in			✓	✓			✓				
blouse, flared	1/4 - 1/2 in		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				
outerwear, straight	1 1/2 - 2 in	✓			✓			✓				
outerwear, a-line	1 1/2 in	✓			✓			✓				
outerwear, flared	1 1/2 in	✓			✓			✓				
outerwear, very flared	1 in	✓			✓			✓				
knitwear										✓	✓	✓

* For light or sheer fabrics



Level the hem

SECTION 2



PREVENT A DROOPING HEM

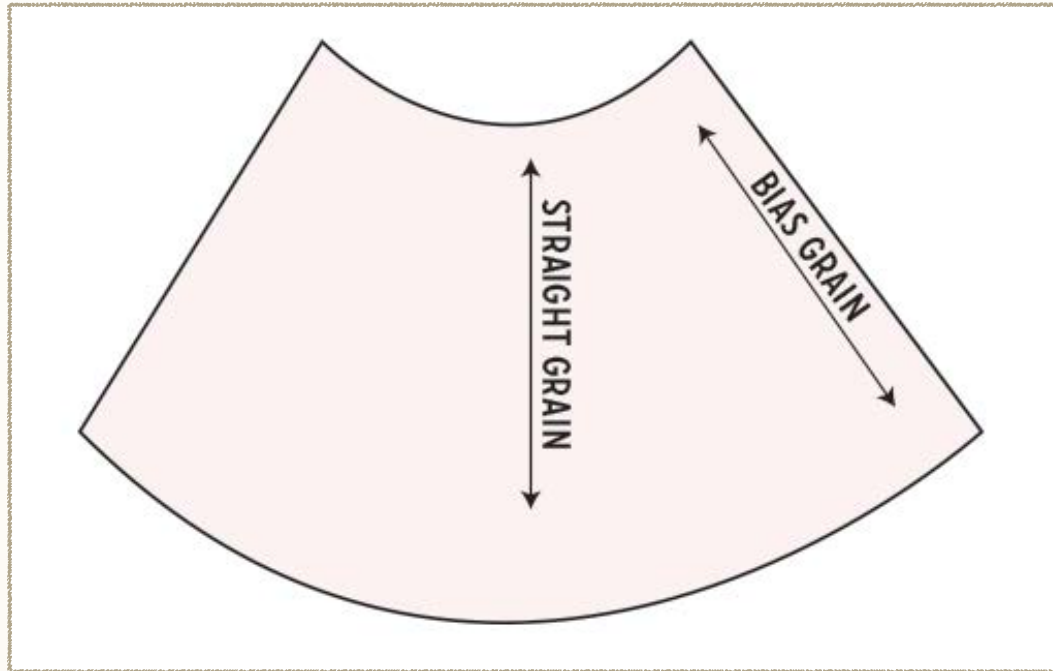
Without proper adjustments, you'll notice that hems sometimes droop at the sides or ride up at the front or back. Leveling the hem before you start sewing will get you an even result every time.

Have you ever put together a garment - whether it's a dress, a skirt, pants, or a blouse - only to notice afterwards that the hem seems to be drooping in certain areas? Or perhaps you find that hems always tend to ride up at the back for you?

It's not necessarily the fault of the pattern. There are a few reasons you might experience this kind of unevenness, but it's an easy issue to fix if you just follow a few simple steps every time in order to level the hem hem. Let's take a look at the basic process.

WHY HEMS DROOP

You'll notice that hems often seem to hang lower at the sides, or ride higher beneath curvy areas like the back of a skirt. There are two main reasons for droopy hems, and both can be corrected.



REASON 1: GRAINLINES

Unless you're making a skirt out of a rectangle, chances are that your hem falls on different grainlines. The center front might be cut on the lengthwise grain, but the side seam is on the bias (that is, a diagonal grain).

As you might know, fabric tends to stretch along the bias. As the skirt hangs, this seam stretches a bit and starts getting longer and longer. Full skirts tend to exhibit this issue more than straight skirts, because the angle of the bias seam is more severe.



REASON 2: BODY CURVES

Another reason you might see an uneven hem simply has to do with the curves of the body.

The fabric must form around the curves before reaching the hem. If, for example, the person wearing the garment has a bit of a booty, more fabric is required to cover that curve. Otherwise, you wind up with a hem that rides up in back.

HOW TO LEVEL A HEM

You should level your hem every time you make a garment, before actually doing any hemming. Here's how.



1) HANG THE GARMENT

Hang the garment up for at least 24 hours.

This gives your fabric a chance to relax and stretch. The bias grain will stretch out overnight and you'll have a better sense of what the fabric will look like when it's worn.

This step is much more important if you are sewing a full hem. As I explained earlier, full hems will have more area cut on the bias while straight, narrow hems will be cut closer to the straight grain and are less prone to stretching.



2) PUT THE GARMENT ON

If you have a dress form that you use, put the garment on that. If not, put the garment on yourself and try to get a friend to help out.

Be sure to wear the type of shoes you plan to wear with it, so you have a better sense of the appearance of the hemline. If you are using a dress form, adjust it to the height you are with these shoes.

If you'd like, you can put the dress form on something high, like a table, to avoid crawling around on the floor.



3) MARK THE LENGTH



Mark your desired length with a pin. I like to do this along a side seam, but you can also do it at the center front or anywhere else that makes sense.

If you have a skirt length that you know is flattering on you, use it! Measure that length from the natural waist and mark it on the skirt. You could get this measurement from a similar garment you have that you already like the look of. Or, put on the garment and adjust the hem to your preference.



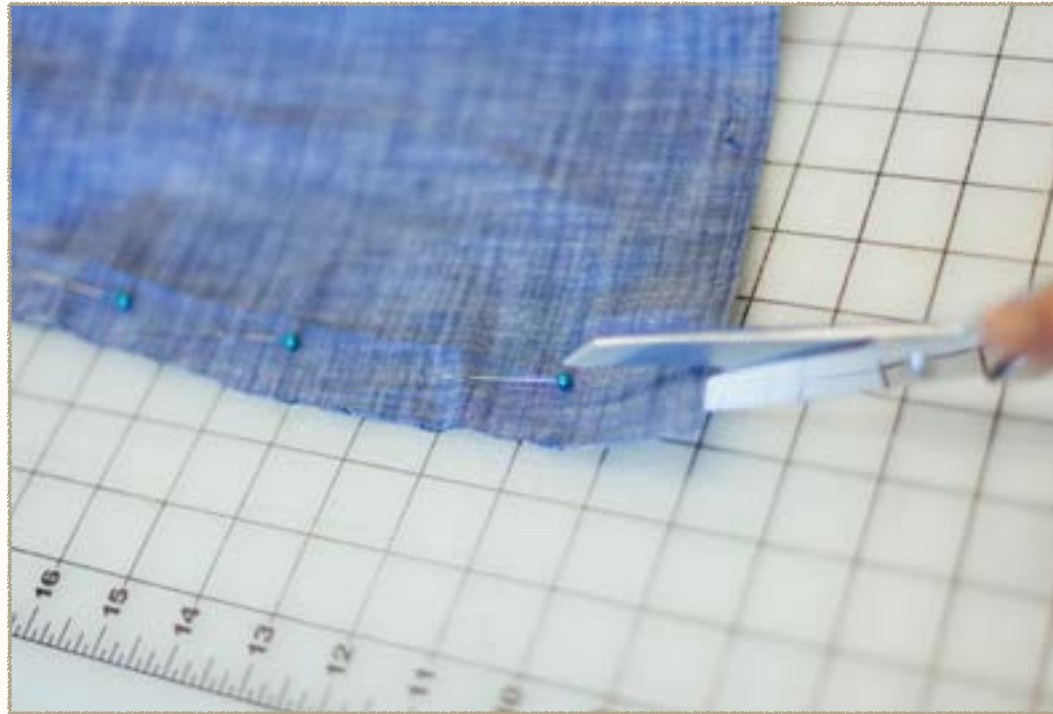
4) MEASURE FROM THE FLOOR



Measure the distance from the floor to your pin.

I like to use a yardstick to measure this distance. You can also use a tape measure, but a yardstick makes it easier to measure at 90 degrees to the floor.

Measure this same distance all the way around the hem and mark, either with pins or chalk.



5) TRIM



Now you are ready to trim off any excess fabric. Use the pins as a guideline to cut around the hem.

You are now ready to finish that raw edge and move on to the next step of hemming.





Reduce bulk

SECTION 3



PREVENT THE LAYERED LOOK

Use just two simple techniques that take seconds to do, and get rid of bumpy, bulky hemlines.

Have you ever hemmed a skirt or blouse and noticed unsightly bumps around the seams? This is because turning and folding a hem results in seam allowances that are doubled up. When you fold the fabric back on itself to create a hem, the

seam areas around the seam might have four, six, even eight or more layers of fabric. Depending on your fabric type, this can create excess bulk around certain points in the hem and prevent you from getting the smooth, crisp look you want.

TRIM OR CLIP SEAM ALLOWANCES

Use one of these two simple techniques to keep the seams around your hemline smooth and lovely. Once the hem is turned, you'll have fewer layers in any one area.



TRIM PRESSED OPEN SEAMS

To prevent bulk on seams that are pressed open, try this. Before turning up your hem, trim down the seam allowance beneath the fold line of the hem. Taper your trimming to just above the fold.

The trimmed portion will be concealed once the hem is folded, but you'll notice considerably less bulk around your seams.



CLIP SEAMS THAT ARE PRESSED TO THE SIDE

If your hem isn't pressed open like this, another way to reduce bulk is to clip the seam allowance at the fold. Then press the seam allowance beneath the fold line in the opposite direction from the seam allowance above.



GET A CRISP HEM

Stabilizers aren't always necessary. If you want a soft, flowing, or drapey look, you can definitely skip them. But if your garment is tailored and crisp or you just want to add sharpness or volume, try incorporating them.



Stabilizers

SECTION 4



Hem stabilizers are one of those things many of us might have heard of, but are never quite sure when to use. Like other forms of stabilizers (namely interfacing), there are a wide variety of choices for different applications.

Unlike interfacing, it's not likely that your sewing pattern instructions will let you know if you need one (unless you are making a tailored jacket, perhaps). The need for stabilizer, and the choice of which to use, mainly depends on your fabric.

At the end of this section, you will understand:

- ◆ Why you might use a hem stabilizer.
- ◆ What the main types of stabilizers are.
- ◆ How to choose the right hem stabilizer for your project.

TYPES OF HEM STABILIZER

Stabilizers come in many forms, including interfacing, tapes, elastics, braids, and more. Experiment to see which one gives you the look and ease of use you need for your fabric.



FUSIBLE INTERFACING

Fusible interfacing is available in several forms, including woven, non-woven, and knit.

You can find fusible interfacing at any fabric store. It's intended to be bonded to fabric with the heat of an iron.

Fusible interfacing provides a quick and simple way to add stability to a hem. Cut your interfacing in long strips and bond them to the hem before sewing.

WHY USE STABILIZER?

There are two main reasons to use a stabilizer:

- 1. To improve the appearance of your hem. A stabilizer can add crispness, structure, or volume to the hem of your garment. This is why they are almost always used in tailored jackets and coats, where a crisp look is so prized.*
- 2. To make your hem easier to sew. Some stabilizers are used not to change the drape of the hem so much as to allow you to execute the hem without problems. For example, when sewing a knit hem, a stabilizer keeps the hem from stretching out and becoming wavy.*



SEW-IN INTERFACING

Sew-in interfacing can really be any type of fabric that's used to add an additional layer of stability.

You can buy fabric that is specifically made to be used as a sew-in interfacing, or choose a fabric that works well with your main fabric.

A few good choices are:

1. **Canvas.** Commonly used in jacket and coat hems, and usually cut on the bias to make it more pliable.
2. **Silk organza.** A great choice for light fabrics, because it adds crispness while remaining extremely light.
3. **Netting.** Like organza, netting adds stiffness without much extra weight.
4. **Self-fabric.** Sometimes self-fabric can be used to give just a bit of extra structure to a hem. Reserve this for crisp fabrics that won't add much bulk.



ELASTICS AND TAPES

Clear elastic is often used to stabilize knits, and other elastics can be used for the same purpose. In addition, there are several adhesive tapes on the market that are specifically made for adding stability to hems and seams.



BRAIDS

Horsehair braid is commonly used to add extra volume at the hem, especially in full skirts. Other forms of braid can also be used for the same purpose. They are well worth experimenting with, because they hold their shape well and are easy to mold around curves.

TEMPORARY STABILIZERS

If you simply need a stabilizer to make sewing easier, but don't necessarily want the extra structure or bulk they might add, try using a wash-away stabilizer.

These can be adhered to your fabric, sewn over, and then removed with a single wash. This is a great option for delicate fabrics that tend to stretch or shift when they're sewn, such as knits or light silks.

HOW TO CHOOSE A STABILIZER

If you think your hem might benefit from a little more stability, choosing the right stabilizer is your next step. This is a bit more art than science, and you'll probably want to experiment and try sampling some ideas on scrap fabric.

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- ◆ **What is the goal of this stabilizer?** Do you want to add crispness and structure? Do you want to make a full hem more voluminous? Or do you simply want to make a flimsy hem a little easier to stitch?
- ◆ **How will it affect the texture?** Choose a stabilizer that won't be visible from the outside. If it will change the outer texture of your fabric, don't use it. For example, if your fabric won't stand up to heat, a fusible won't be the right choice.
- ◆ **Will it add too much weight?** The last thing you want is for your hem to be weighed down by a heavy stabilizer. Match the stabilizer to your fabric weight.
- ◆ **Will it add bulk?** If your fabric is light, thick and sturdy stabilizers can make your hem appear bulky. For light fabrics, think about light stabilizers, like netting or organza.

COMMON USES FOR STABILIZER

Hem stabilizers can be used in almost any garment, depending on the look you're going for. Think of this as a design choice that you can make when you're sewing. It's all about the final look that you want to achieve, so try not to think of it in terms of “right” and “wrong” choices.

Here are a few common scenarios for using a hem stabilizer:

- ◆ Stabilizing a coat or jacket hem (often with canvas, cut on the bias).
- ◆ Stabilizing knit hems with fusible tape or knit interfacing to avoid wavy lines.
- ◆ Stabilizing silk hems with organza for added crispness.
- ◆ Stabilizing full skirt hems with horsehair braid for more volume.

It's up to you how and where you use them, but they really can open up possibilities and make hem sewing a little easier (and more creative).



===== SECOND STEP: =====

EDGE FINISH

CHAPTER 2



**MAKE IT
CLEAN**

Once you've prepped your hem, it's time to make sure it looks as good on the inside as it will on the outside. It's time to finish the raw edge.

MORE



Why finish the edge?

SECTION I



CLEAN AND TIDY

Finishing the raw edge before you hem gives your garment a clean look that's more durable over time.

Finishing the raw edge of your hem not only makes it look cleaner and more professional, it also adds durability and helps give your hem a longer life. These techniques are options for finishing the raw edge, and they can be

combined with the actual hemming methods in the next chapter. In this chapter, we'll cover six different methods you can use to make the *edge* of your hems strong and tidy before getting down to the business of turning and hemming.



Serged edge

SECTION 2



USE THE OVERLOCK

Use your serger (also known as an overlock) to finish the raw edge before you hem.

Sergering is a quick, easy, and neat way to finish a raw edge before you begin hemming. The serger finishes the edge with a row of stitches, trimming the excess fabric from the edge at the same time. The benefits are that it's quick, efficient, and

highly durable. It also does not add much excess bulk to your hem, making it a good choice for thicker fabrics. However, you will need to own a serger to use this finish. Use it only with opaque fabrics, as the stitches will show through to the right side otherwise.



1. Serge along the raw edge of the hem, aligning the cut edge with your serger blade. Try to shave off a few threads as you serge, as this will create a much neater and clean-looking edge than not trimming anything off.

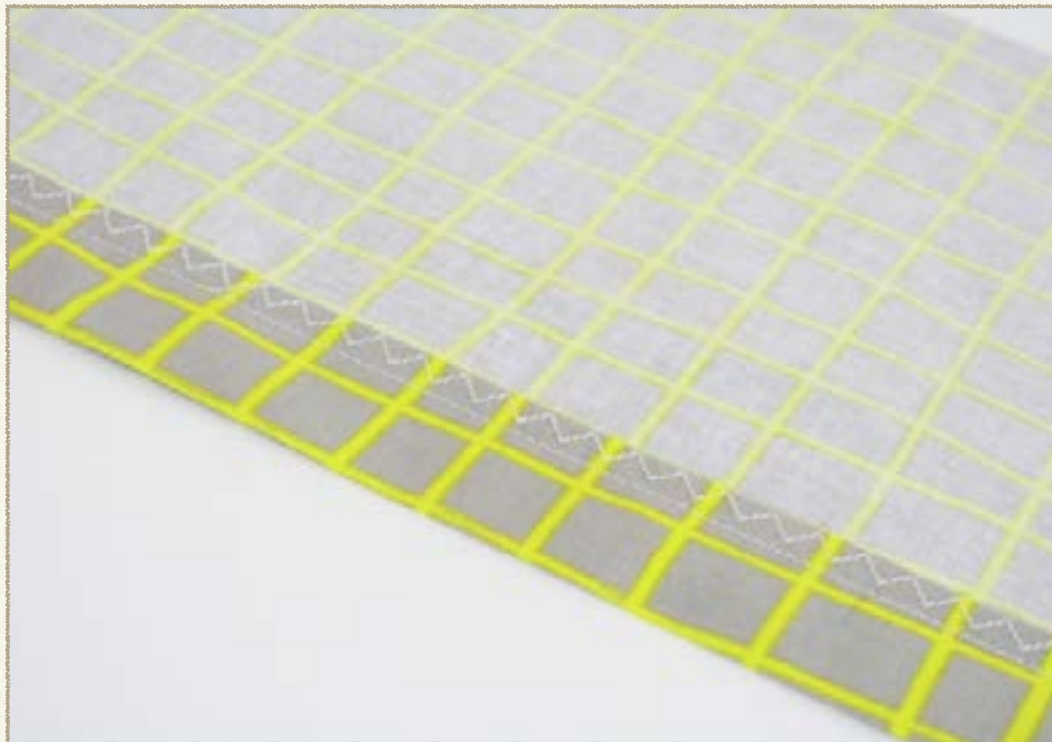


2. Turn up your hem allowance, pin and press, and then stitch as desired. See [Chapter 3](#) for hems you may choose.



Zigzag or mock overlock

SECTION 3



A STITCHED FINISH WITHOUT THE SERGER

Get the benefits of stitching the edge with a serger, even if you don't own one. The zigzag or mock overlock finish has many of the same advantages, but you can do it on your standard home sewing machine.

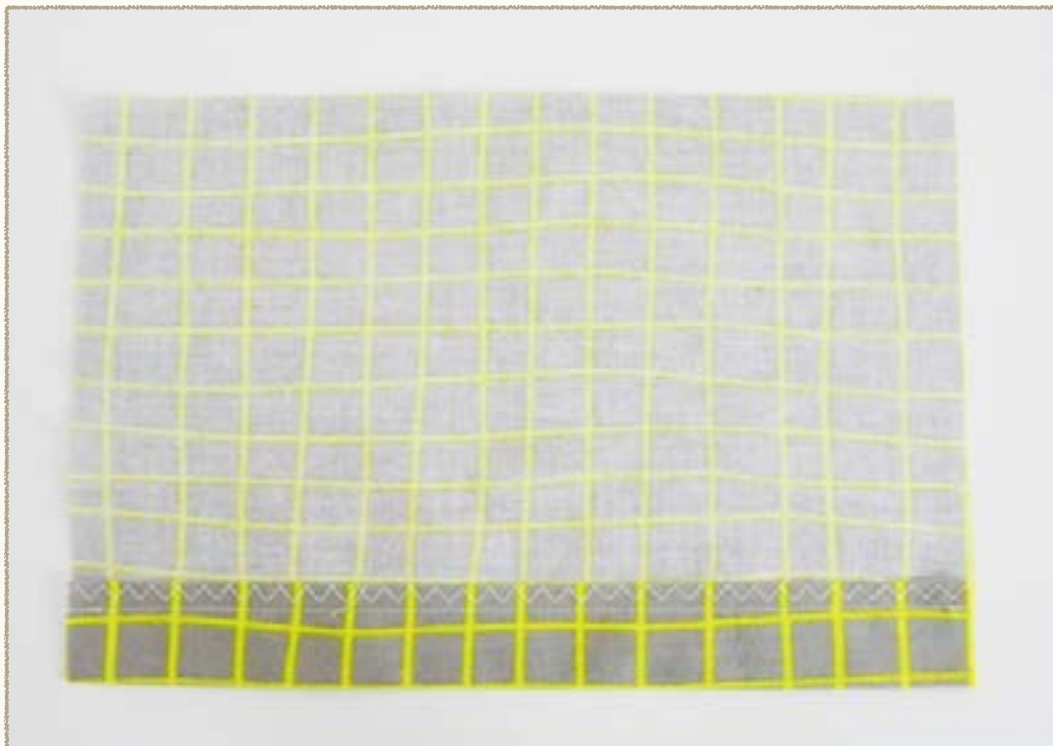
While the serged finish is durable, neat, and non-bulky, it's possible to get a similar result without the use of a specialized machine. Take a look for the mock overlock stitch on

your standard home sewing machine, which mimics the look and use of the serger. If your machine does not have one, a zigzag stitch can also be used to get a simple, easy, and fairly durable finish to your raw edge.



1. Use a zigzag or mock overlock stitch to sew along the raw edge of your hem. A good zigzag option for a single layer of fabric is the three step zigzag. Instead of sewing one stitch with each zig and zag, it sews three little ones. This helps prevent the zigzag from making a ridge in the fabric.

If you find that your machine is mangling the edge of your fabric, sew $\frac{1}{4}$ " in from the edge and trim the excess when you're done. Just remember to then deduct $\frac{1}{4}$ " from your hem allowance when you fold and press your hem.



2. Turn up your hem allowance, pin and press, and then stitch as desired. See [Chapter 3](#) for hem ideas.



Turned under

SECTION 4



A CLASSIC TURN

Perhaps one of the most common ways to finish a raw edge before hemming is simply to turn the hem under. This finish is appropriate for many types of fabric, hem depths, and styles.

Turning under the raw edge is a good choice when you want a neat and clean looking finish. Because the raw edge of the fabric is tucked under the hem, no edge is left exposed, while the stitches keep the fabric from fraying. This type of edge finish can be used with

both narrow hems and wide hems, and it also a great choice for blind hems stitched either by hand or by machine. It's also fast and easy to do. The one drawback is that a turned under edge can add a little more bulk than the two previous stitched edge finishes.



1. Turn up your hem allowance, pin and press.

Now tuck 1/4" of the raw edge down into the hem. An easy way to do this is to measure 1/4" less than your hem allowance with a seam gauge or ruler as you pin.

Alternately, you may first measure 1/4" from the raw edge and press into place before completing the hem.



2. Press and then stitch as desired. See [Chapter 3](#) for hem ideas.



Bias tape

SECTION 5



ADD COLOR WITH BIAS TAPE

Use either premade bias tape in a bold contrasting color, or make your own with fun prints like stripes, dots, or small florals. It's a great way to use up beautiful fabric scraps, and you can incorporate fabrics you love into even the most basic garments.

Using bias binding is useful for hems with a slight curve. The stretch of the bias tape allows it to form easily around these areas, without gapes or puckers. It's also a good choice when you're using bulky fabric and want to avoid the thickness of multiple folds. But the best

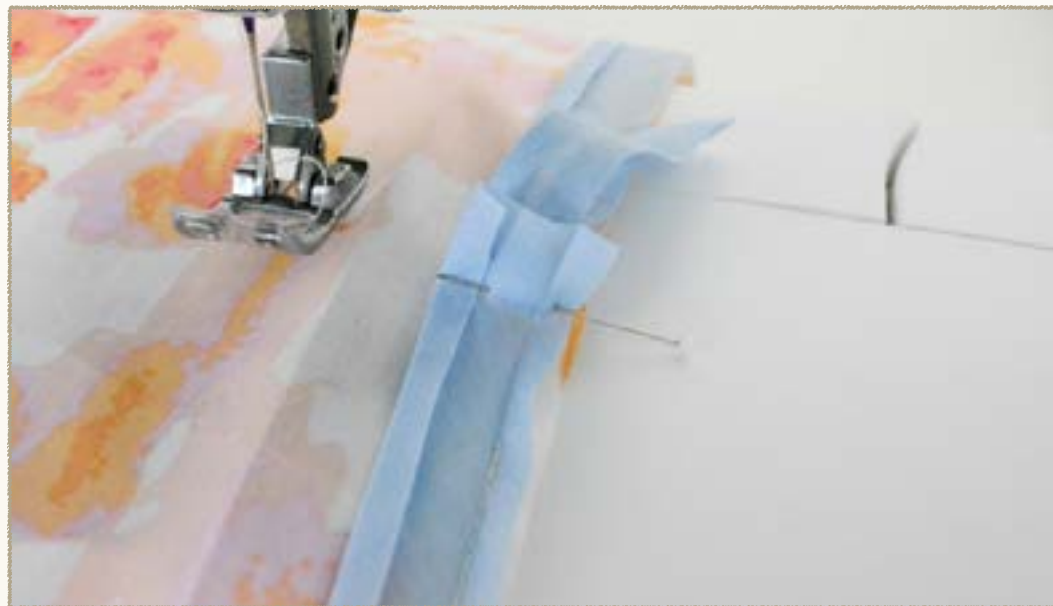
thing about bias tape as an edge finish is how great it can look on the inside of your garment. Use premade single fold bias tape, or make your own out of a fun print. The little dash of color or pattern on the inside of the hem will make you happy each time you see it.



1. Press up hem allowance. Open one side of bias tape and align raw edge of bias tape with raw edge of hem allowance, right sides together. Leaving a loose tail of tape at the beginning, backstitch and stitch tape to hem edge along crease in tape.



2. When you get all the way around, backstitch a few inches from where your stitching started.



3. Bring the bias tape tails together and pin them where they should meet, flush with the fabric.



4. With bias tape completely unfolded, sew together at pin.



5. Trim tails, press open and attach loose section of bias tape to hem between backstitches.



6. Fold hem allowance up and stitch around free edge of bias tape to secure. See [Chapter 3](#) for hem ideas.



7. If you'd like to avoid losing length of the garment to the hem - or if you're trying to squeeze something out of less fabric - skip the initial pressing of a hem allowance and stitch the bias binding to the raw edge of the fabric as described. Fold it to the inside to create a facing and stitch free edge as desired.



Hem tape

SECTION 6



TAPE IT UP

It's hard to beat hem tape for a pretty, simple finish. Hem tape works well with both machine stitched and hand stitched hems.

Hem tape is a quick but professional looking hemming option. It's a good choice when you have bulky fabric and want avoid the thickness of multiple folds. Hem tape has even less bulk than bias tape, since it is sewn completely flat and is

designed to be thin and pliable. It also provides a smooth, comfortable edge for more textured or irritating fabrics. It comes in a ton of colors, so you can match your fabric or go with a fun contrasting pop of color.



1. Overlap hem tape along hem so that the raw edge of the fabric is running down the middle of the hem tape. Edgestitch along tape to secure to fabric.
2. When you get all the way around your hem, fold under end of hem tape and pivot to stitch down.



3. Fold hem allowance up and press.
4. Stitch along free edge of hem tape as desired. See [Chapter 3](#) for hem ideas.



Lace hem tape

SECTION 7



LACE DOES TRIPLE DUTY

Lace looks great inside a hem, adds almost no extra weight, and helps to disguise stitches that might otherwise be highly visible.

Lace hem tape is a pretty hem finish that is great for lightweight fabrics and particularly for hand stitched hems. The lace adds virtually no extra weight to your hems, and also gives them a flexible finish.

Not only does lace look pretty on the inside of your garment, the texture of lace is perfect for hiding stitches. This makes lace an ideal choice for hand stitched hems, where the larger stitches can blend seamlessly into the tape and look far less conspicuous.



1. Overlap lace along right side of hem so that the raw edge of the fabric is running down the middle of the lace. Edgestitch along lace to secure to fabric.



2. Fold hem allowance up. Stitch along free edge of lace as desired. See [Chapter 3](#) for hem ideas.



THIRD STEP:

HEM STITCHES

CHAPTER 3



STITCH IT DOWN

Now that you've prepared your hem and finished the raw edge, you have your choice of stitches for completing your hem. You can [sew](#) your hem by hand or by machine.

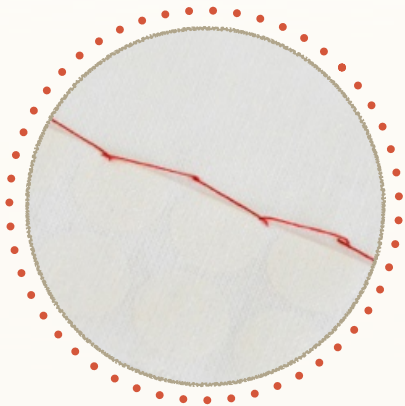
MORE



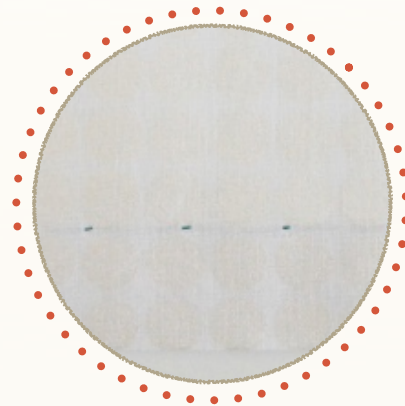
HAND STITCHES



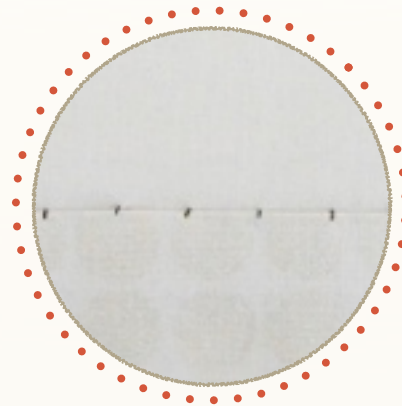
5 WAYS TO COMPLETE YOUR HEM BY HAND



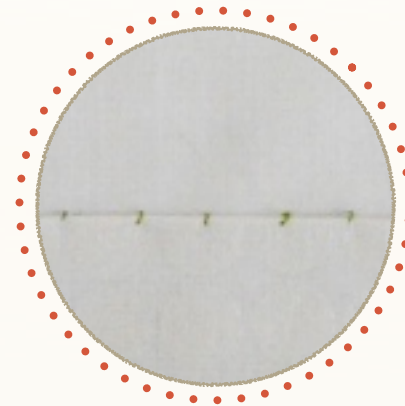
CATCH
STITCH



BLIND
STITCH



SLIP
STITCH



FELL
STITCH



HAND
ROLLED

While machine sewing a hem is fast and easy, hand sewing can give you a nearly invisible finish. Hand stitching also allows you a great degree of control, making it particularly useful for tricky situations like full, curved hems, or tiny little hems in sheer fabric.

While hand stitching certainly takes longer, it can often yield gorgeous results with less frustration. We'll cover five different options for hand stitching your hems, each of which you might find useful in different situations, plus some general techniques for hand stitching.



Hand stitching techniques

SECTION I



STARTING AND FINISHING

Learn how to begin and end your hand stitching before you choose which stitch to use.

Before we begin reviewing the individual methods of hand stitching you can choose from, we'll go over a few basic techniques that will be the same for all kinds of hand stitching.

In order to stitch a hem by hand, you'll need to know

how to begin and end your stitching. To start, you'll use a technique called anchoring. When you're done, you'll use a technique called tying off. You can use these techniques for hems, or for any other type of hand stitching you might need to do.

ANCHORING THE THREAD

When you begin hand stitching your hem, you'll need to anchor the thread to keep it secure. This is our favorite method.



1. Work with an arm length of thread, and anchor/tie off in the hem. To begin sewing, stitch twice in the same place, but do not pull thread all the way through. Pass the needle through the loop twice.



2. Pull to tighten knot down to fabric.

TYING OFF

When you've finished stitching your hem, it's time to tie off before cutting your thread.



1. When you reach the end of your thread or hem, tie a knot in the same way. To hide the tail, pass the needle through the fabric layers without going all the way through. Bring the needle out a couple inches from the knot.



2. Cut the thread flush with the fabric. The tail will disappear and be hidden between the layers.



A TRICK FOR EVEN STITCHES

If you find it difficult to maintain even stitches when handstitching, a quick mark with a disappearing fabric pen can be helpful.



Catch stitch

SECTION 2



AN ELASTIC STITCH

The catch stitch is a great choice when you need some elasticity and strength, making it less likely that your thread will break. This stitch is worked left to right (right to left if you are left handed)

The following pages will cover 5 different techniques you can use to hand stitch a hem.

In the photos, contrasting thread is being used to make it easier to see, but you will want to use thread that matches your fabric.

Any right handed directives are in the main text, and left handed directives are in italics and parentheses.

We'll start with the catch stitch. A catch stitch has a bit of elasticity, and the criss-crossing of the thread adds strength.



1. Anchor thread. With needle pointing to the left (*right*), take up a very small bit of the garment fabric just above the fold of the hem. Try to make your stitch very small as it will be visible from the right side.



2. Pull up thread. Move the needle a bit to the right (*left*) – about 1/4" to 1/2". Take up a small amount of the hem fabric with the needle still facing to the left (*right*).



3. Continue to complete hem.

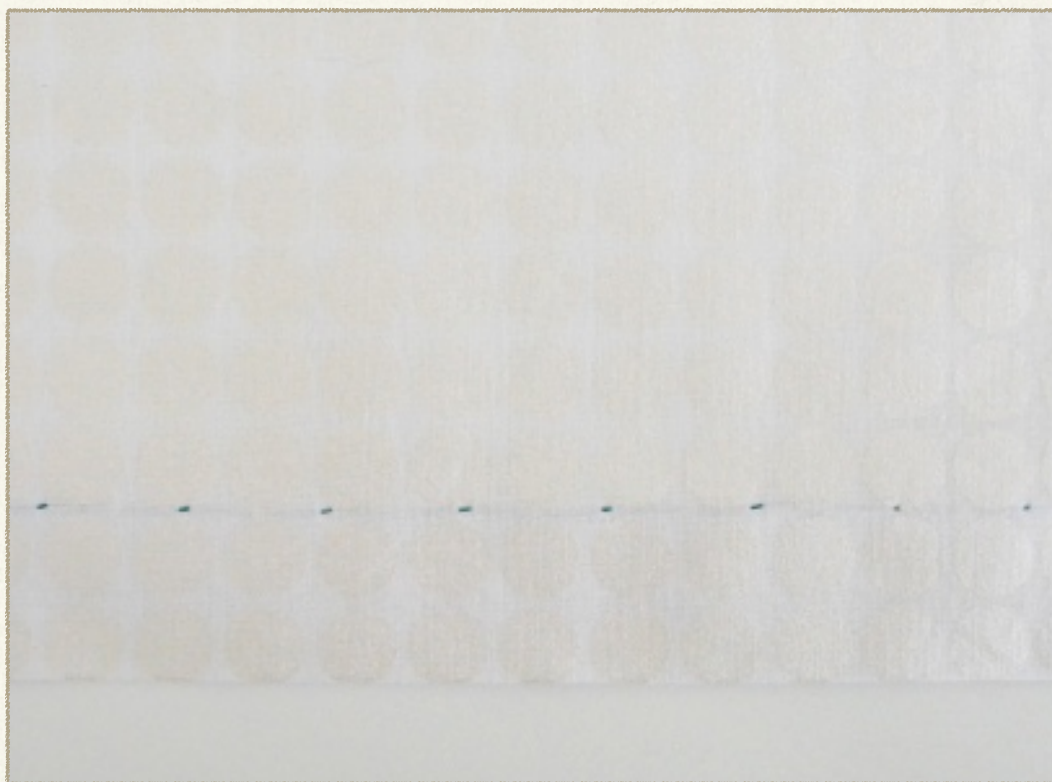


4. Your stitching will look like little x's.



Blind stitch

SECTION 3

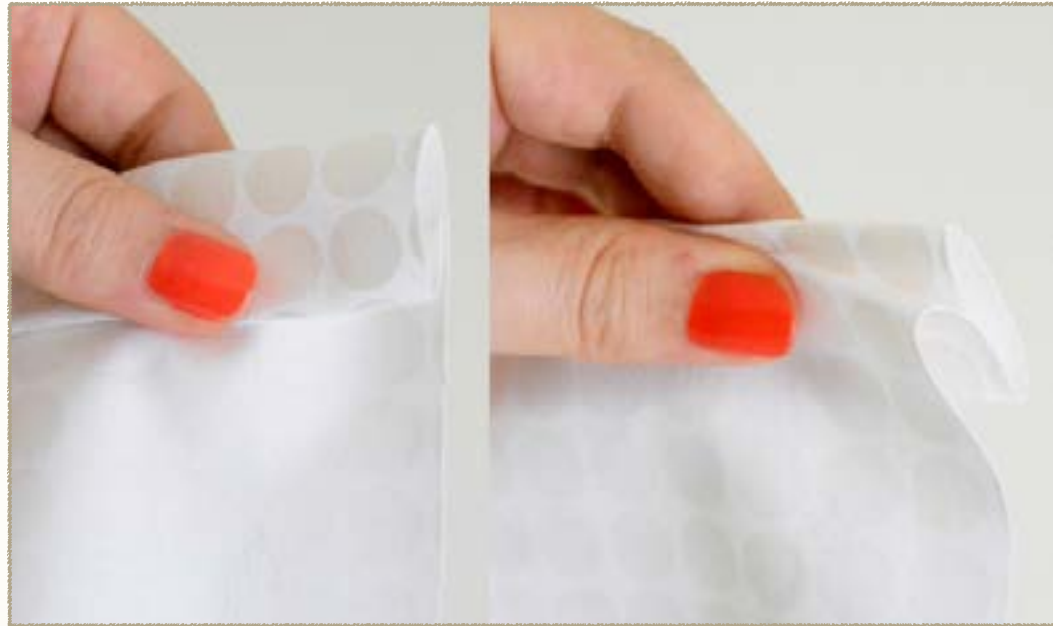


AN INVISIBLE LOOK

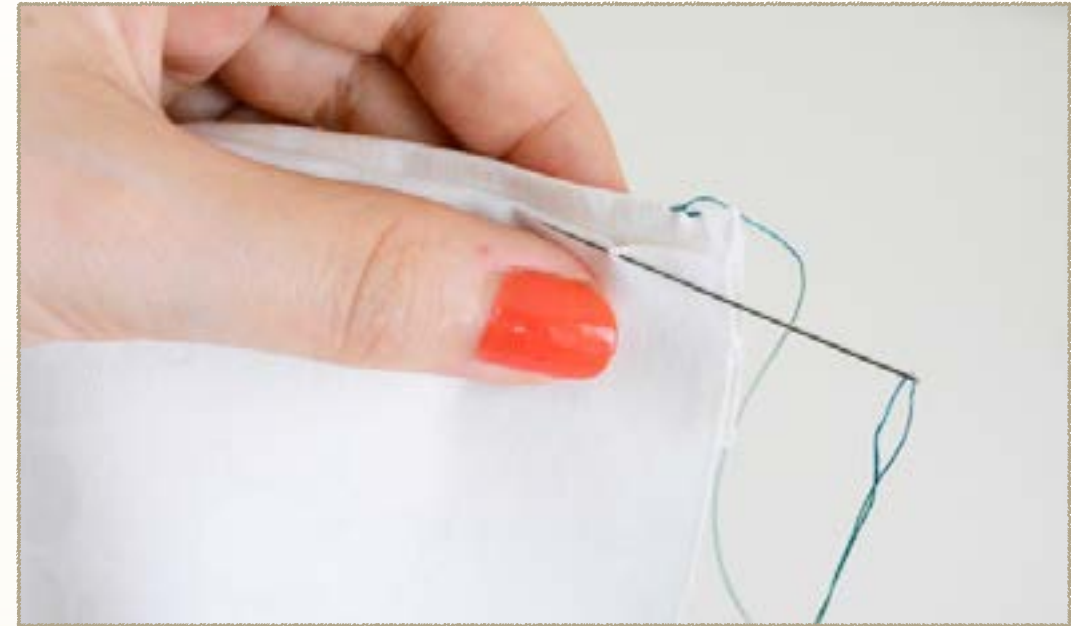
The blind stitch sewn by hand is a non-bulky, invisible way to complete your hem. For a variation, use the same technique, but sew a catch stitch to create a blind catch stitch. This will be slightly stronger.

A blind stitch is barely visible from either side. While you can also stitch a blind stitch by machine, doing it by hand means that your stitches will truly be hard to detect. Though invisible, it is not quite as strong as the catch stitch.

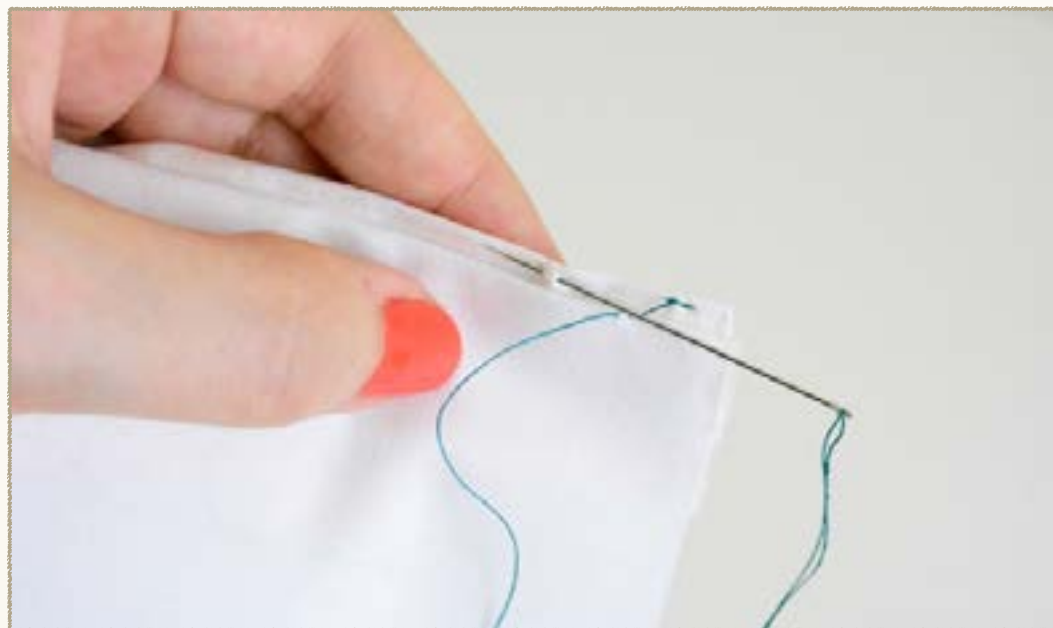
Because the blind stitch does not require a double folded hem, it's a good choice if you are concerned about having too much bulk at the hem line. Finish your raw edge with serging, zigzag, or mock overlock for the least amount of bulk before stitching this hem.



1. Press hem allowance into a double fold hem. Fold hem towards right side of garment so that finished edge sticks out by about 1/8".



2. Anchor thread. Working right to left (*left to right*), pick up a very small bit of fabric in the folded edge of the garment fabric. Sew only through one layer, and make your stitch as small as possible.



3. Move about 1/2" to the left (*right*) and pick up a bit of fabric in the hem.

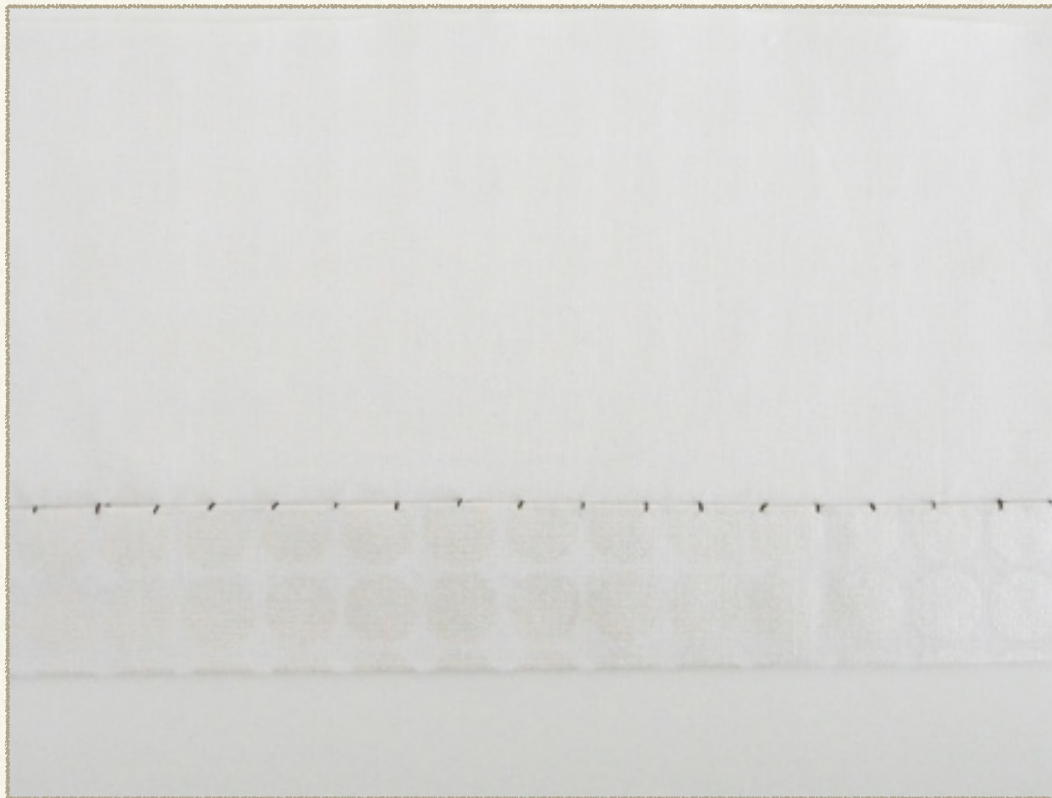


4. Continue working this way until the end of the hem. Fold hem down and press.



Slip stitch

SECTION 4



HIDDEN FLEXIBILITY

The slip stitch is simple, flexible, and creates a nearly invisible finish. It's great for hemming, as well as a multitude of other sewing purposes. Use it any time you need to sew a fold to another piece of fabric.

This stitch works great with a double fold hem, as most of the stitching is hidden within the upper fold of the hem allowance. Like the blind stitch, the slip stitch is useful when your hem needs to look good from both sides.

It can be a little easier to sew than the blind stitch. It's also a useful stitch to know for non-hemming purposes. It's quite flexible, due to the tiny stitches, and suits many different sewing tasks.



1. Work right to left (*left to right*) with the needle pointing left (*right*). With wrong side of garment facing, sew a stitch in the upper fold of the hem $\frac{1}{4}$ "- $\frac{1}{2}$ " long. Be sure to not pierce all the way through to the right side of the garment. Think of your needle as just skimming through the fabric.
2. When you bring the needle out of the fold, pick up a very tiny bit of fabric on the garment.



3. Pull thread through. Enter back into the fold of the hem directly even where the previous stitch ended.

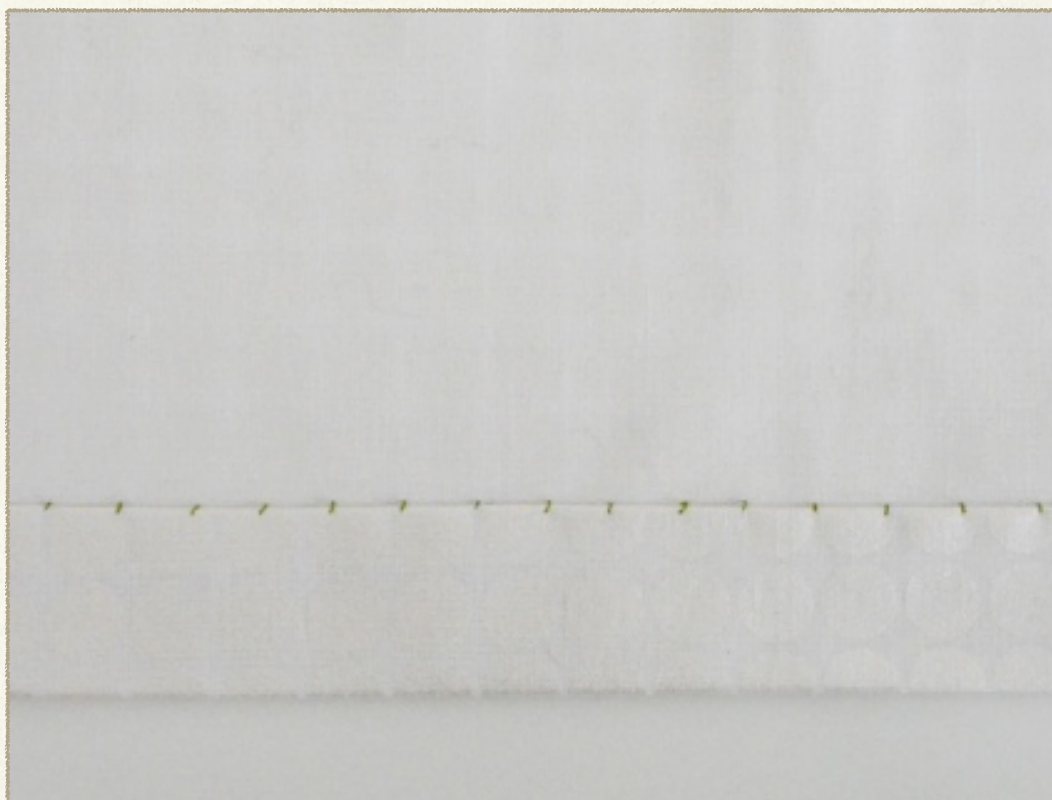


4. Stitch forward another $\frac{1}{4}$ "- $\frac{1}{2}$ " and repeat process to complete hem.



Fell stitch

SECTION 5



ULTIMATE FLEXIBILITY

The fell stitch is discreet and flexible, allowing fabric to pivot instead of being held completely flat. It is not quite as invisible as the preceding stitches, but still inconspicuous.

The fell stitch is stronger than a slip stitch, but it is visible from the underside of the work if a thinner single layer of fabric is used. For bulkier fabrics, the thread can be hidden by passing through only a portion of the fabric's thickness. With linings it

can be completely hidden by stitching only through the lining and hem.

The fell stitch is even more flexible than the slip stitch. The vertical stitches act as a tiny hinge, allowing fabric to easily pivot and move around.



1. Anchor thread. Working from the wrong side and right to left (*left to right*), pass needle through garment fabric to make a stitch approximately 1/4"-1/2" long. (For a lined garment, stitch only through the lining.) Bring the needle out through the very top edge of the folded hem.



2. Enter back into the garment directly behind end of previous stitch to make another stitch.



3. Repeat to end. On the underside of the work, there will be a line of slightly diagonal stitches.



Hand rolled hem

SECTION 6



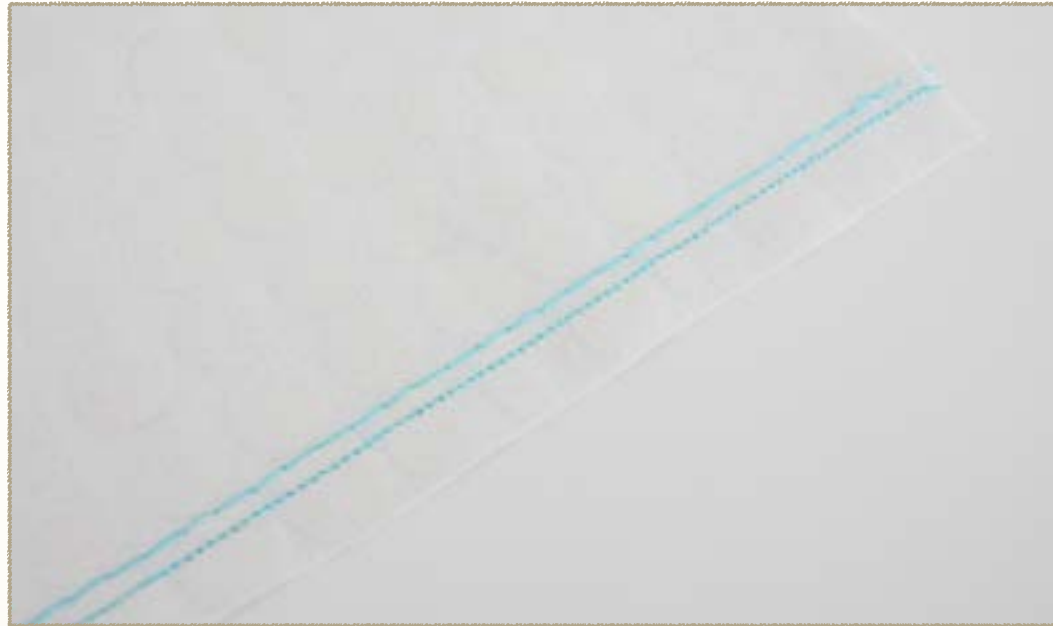
AN ELEGANT SOFTNESS

The hand rolled hem has a soft, unstructured look that compliments flowing, light fabrics.

This is a nice hem for lightweight and sheer fabrics. It does not work well on thick or embellished fabrics.

The roll of the hem is intended to be soft and have a definite curve to it,

rather than pressed flat. You will often find this type of hem on fine silk scarves and men's pocket squares. While time consuming, it gives an elegant touch to fine silks, cottons, and other very light fabrics.



1. Trim any vertical seams in the hem allowance down to 1/8". On your machine, baste around the hem at the hemline. Then shorten your stitch length to 1.5 and stitch 1/8" below the hemline. This will keep the edge of the fabric from fraying. For a slightly wider, but easier to roll hem, stitch 1/4" below the basting line.



2. Trim about 6-8" of the excess fabric close to the stitching line. Attach the end of the fabric to something stable to act as a third hand. You can safety pin it to a couch, put a weight onto it, or put it under the presser foot of your machine.



3. Roll the trimmed edge of the fabric towards the wrong side, stopping at the basting stitches. The other stitching line should be enclosed by the roll of the fabric. (Licking your fingers will really help. It's ok, no one's watching.)



4. Use slip stitches to sew down the roll. Roll and stitch a little bit at a time. When you get close to your trimmed edge, trim a bit more. Trimming as you go prevents stray threads from fraying as you work with the fabric.



5. Continue to finish the hem.

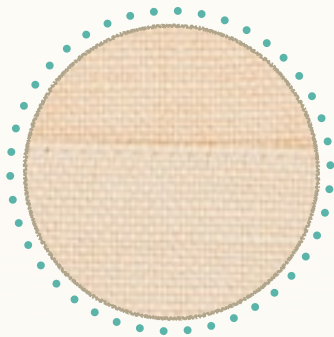
6. Remove basting stitches.



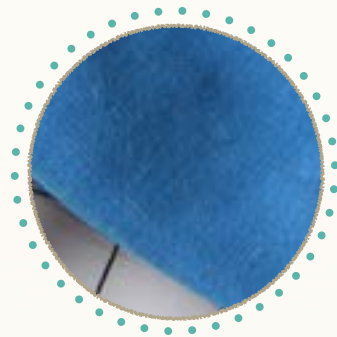
MACHINE HEMS



6 WAYS TO COMPLETE YOUR HEM BY MACHINE



TURNED HEM



BLIND HEM



ROLLED HEM



BABY HEM



FACED HEM



FRINGE HEM

Your sewing machine offers a range of quick and easy options for finishing a hem. You might be surprised at some of the results you can achieve with your sewing machine, given the right tools and the right techniques. We'll go over several of these, beginning with the most

basic type of hem, the turned hem. We'll then cover several special hems you can choose depending on your project, from the nearly invisible blind hem to the fun detail of a fringed hem. If you have a single go-to hem, try mixing it up with a new technique.



Turned hem

SECTION 7



A CASUAL HEM

Because the stitching from a turned hem shows on the outside of your garment, turned hems tend to have a casual look. I like to use them on casual dresses, shirts and blouses, and everyday pants and shorts, like jeans.

There's no doubt that the easiest way to sew a hem is to do a simple turned hem on your sewing machine. With no hand stitching required, this hem is fast, easy, and efficient.

There are several ways you can create a turned hem,

and we're going to cover each of them. The hem you choose depends on the shape of your garment and the type of fabric you're using. Take a look at the following techniques before you decide which might be best for you.



METHOD 1: THE FOLDED EDGE HEM

This is the simplest turned hem, and one you're probably used to sewing. It involves turning your hem a small amount, then turning again and edgestitching in place.



WHEN TO USE IT

- ◆ **Fairly straight hems.** This hem works best if there isn't a huge amount of flare in your garment. It's fine for most pants and shorts, works well for most blouses, and can be used on skirts with a straight or a-line shape without difficulty.
- ◆ **With fabric that won't show bulk.** If your fabric is thick, make sure it won't show a lot of bulk. Denim works well with this hem because it's so stiff that bulky seams and hems aren't noticeable.
- ◆ **With opaque fabric.** If your fabric is sheer, the edge may show through with this hem. For sheer fabrics, you're better off with the twice-turned hem (see below) or a rolled hem.

HOW TO SEW A FOLDED EDGE HEM



1. Determine your hem allowance. Decide how wide you want your finished hem to be. If your hem is very flared, use a more narrow hem allowance. If it's straight, you may use a hem allowance of 1 inch or more. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ " to this amount for the total hem allowance and adjust your pattern if needed. For example, if you want a finished 1" hem, you should cut a hem allowance that is $1 \frac{1}{4}$ ".
2. Turn the raw edge of the hem under $\frac{1}{4}$ " and press.



3. Turn the rest of the hem allowance again and press in place.



4. Pin the hem in place all the way around. Use a tape measure or seam gauge to make sure the hem is even all the way around. Press.



5. From the wrong side, edgestitch the folded edge in place. An edgestitch foot is recommended. Start and end the stitching at a side seam, backstitching to secure.

6. Give the hem a final press.



METHOD 2: THE CURVED TURNED HEM

If you are sewing a skirt with more of a flare at the hem, you can sew a variation on the folded edge hem. This method helps ease any extra fullness into the hem.



WHEN TO USE IT

- ◆ **Flared hems.** You can use this technique when you want the easy, casual look of a turned hem but your skirt has a bit too much flare to make that easy.
- ◆ **With fabric that won't show bulk.** You especially don't want to use this technique if it will make your hem look bulky, because the extra fabric from the curve will add a little more bulk than usual. Avoid using it with synthetic fabrics that don't press well.
- ◆ **With opaque fabric.** Again, sheer fabric will show the edge beneath, so stick with this technique when there's no danger of show-through.

HOW TO SEW A CURVED TURNED HEM



1. Stitch a line of basting 1/4 inch from the raw edge, all the way around your hem. I used a red thread so you can see the basting clearly. Increase your thread tension slightly before you stitch.

BASTING BEFORE YOU TURN

The basting does three things:

- ◆ *It measures and marks a precise 1/4 inch for you, so you don't have to do a lot of tedious measuring and marking by hand.*
- ◆ *It forms an almost perforated line, making the hem easier to fold.*
- ◆ *It very slightly eases the edge in, making it a little tighter and easier to fold under twice. Increasing the thread tension just a bit helps with this.*



2. On the wrong side, turn along the basting and press. Holding it a little taut along the basting will help you fold the edge as you press. Use plenty of steam.



3. Once your hem is pressed, turn again and press. The raw edge should be up against the bottom fold, within the hem.



4. Now edgestitch along the fold on the inside of your skirt to form a perfect hem. If you have an edgestitching foot, I recommend using that.



5. Give your hem a final press.



METHOD 3: THE TWICE-TURNED HEM

A twice-turned hem is basically doubled up. The hem is turned once, then turned again by almost the same amount. This gives the hem added structure and hides shading if your fabric isn't completely opaque.



WHEN TO USE IT

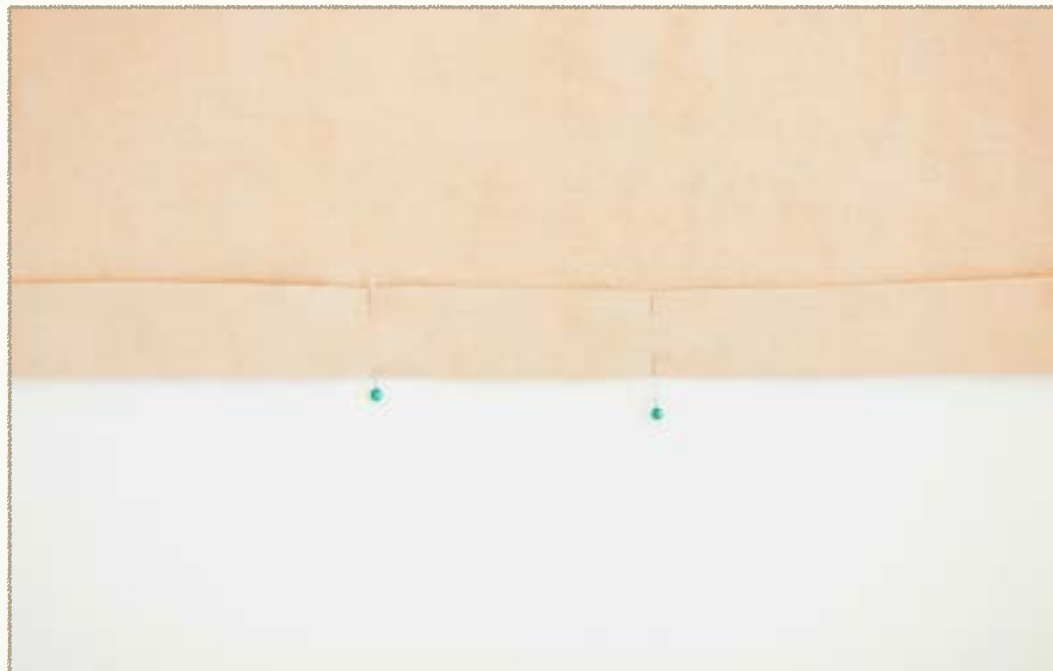
- ◆ **When you want crispness.** The doubled-up hem can add a little extra structure, so it's a good choice for crisp fabrics like shirting.
- ◆ **With fabric that won't show bulk.** This is another one that should be avoided if you're worried about excess bulk. It's often used on denim because bulk is easy to hide with such a sturdy fabric. Try sampling this hem with your fabric before you commit to make sure it will look right.
- ◆ **With somewhat sheer fabric.** If your fabric has a bit of sheerness, like a white shirting or a cotton lawn, the twice-turned hem helps to hide any of the show-through you might get with a folded edge hem.

HOW TO SEW A TWICE-TURNED HEM



1. Determine your hem allowance. Decide how wide you want your finished hem to be. If your hem is very flared, use a more narrow hem allowance. If it's straight, you may use a hem allowance of 1 inch or more. Double this amount and add $1/8$ " to this amount to account for turn of cloth. Adjust your pattern if needed. For example, if you want a finished 1" hem, you should cut a hem allowance that is 2 $1/8$ ".

2. Turn the raw edge of the hem under by the finished hem amount. In our example above, that would be 1". Use a tape measure or seam gauge to make sure the hem is even all the way around. Press.



3. Turn the rest of the hem allowance again and press in place. In our example, that is another 1". The extra $1/8$ " will be taken up by the turn of cloth. Pin the hem in place all the way around.



4. From the wrong side, edgestitch the folded edge in place. An edgestitch foot is recommended. Start and end the stitching at a side seam, backstitching to secure.



5. Give the hem a final press.



METHOD 4: THE SERGED AND TURNED HEM

This method is ideal for curved hems or hems that might be in danger of showing a lot of bulk. The raw edge is finished with serging (or another finishing stitch if you don't have a serger) and eased into place to help control the excess fabric from a curve.



WHEN TO USE IT

- ◆ **With a flared shape.** This finish is ideal when you want an easy machine-stitched hem for the most flared skirts, like circle skirts, full gathered or pleated skirts, or semi-circles.
- ◆ **With bulky fabric.** This is also a good choice if your fabric shows bulk, because there's no turned edge to add extra thickness. Of course, it works with non-bulky fabrics too.
- ◆ **With opaque fabric.** Because the edge is finished with serging, this isn't a good choice for sheer fabrics. For a sheer fabric with a curved hem, try a narrow twice-folded hem, a rolled hem, or a baby hem instead.

HOW TO SEW A SERGED AND TURNED HEM



1. Determine your hem allowance. Decide how wide you want your finished hem to be. For flared skirts, a hem of 1 inch or less is ideal.

2. Finish the raw edge with a serger. If you don't have a serger, you can also use the mock overlock stitch or a zigzag stitch on your sewing machine.



3. Sew a row of ease stitches all the way around, close to the serging. Use a stitch length of 4mm and leave long thread tails.



4. Turn the hem allowance up and pin in place. Adjust the ease stitches by pulling on the bobbin thread tail and adjust the easing until the hem lays flat. Use a tape measure or seam gauge to make sure the hem is even all the way around. Press in place.



5. From the wrong side, stitch the folded edge in place. Start and end the stitching at a side seam, backstitching to secure.

6. Give the hem a final press.



Blind hem

SECTION 8

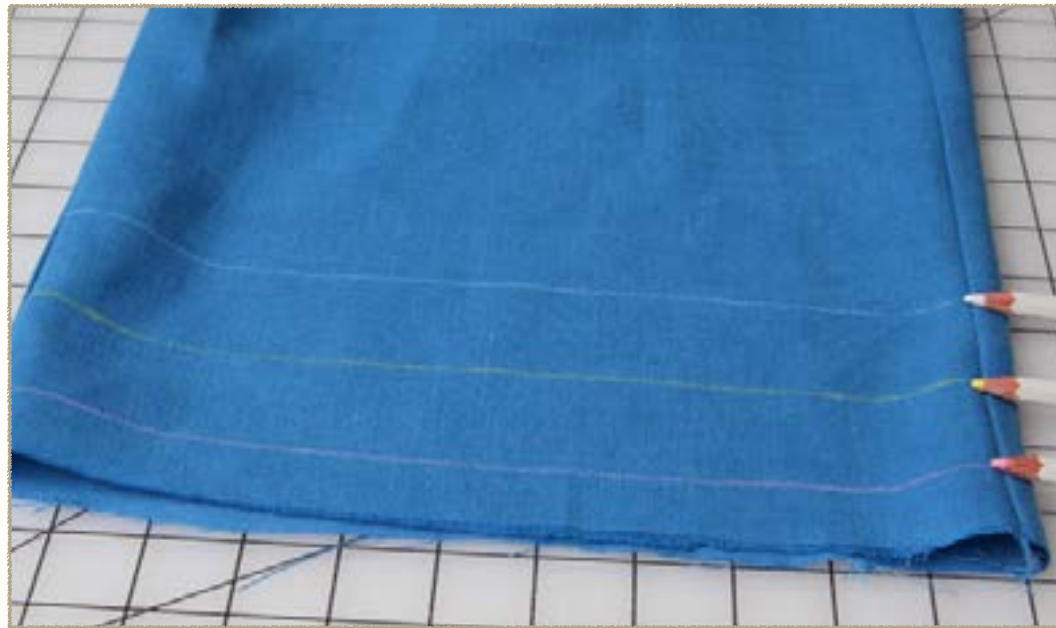


AN INVISIBLE HEM BY MACHINE

It's easy to create beautiful inconspicuous hems with your sewing machine. I used to find them to be a bit of a pain, but honestly my Bernina and its wonderful blind hem presser foot have banished all my frustrations. If you have trouble with your hems, you might consider trying another foot, if your machine accepts them. It could make all the difference.

Blind hems are fantastic. Using an ingenious method of folding and stitching, you can create a machine stitched hem that is nearly invisible from the outside. It's a fantastic way to create a deep hem on a skirt, unlined jacket, or pants.

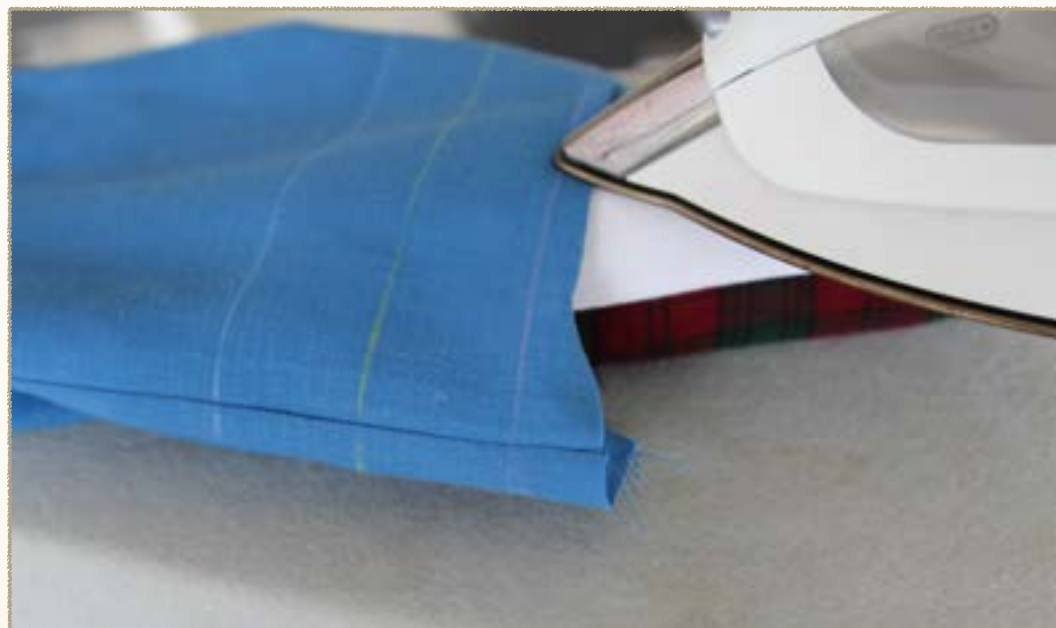
Make sure you have enough seam allowance for a fairly deep hem. I like to make mine at least 1 1/2 to 2 inches. Add an extra inch to that. So if you had a skirt that you wanted to be 25" long with a 2 inch hem, you'd make sure the skirt was at least 28" long before hemming.



1. First, figure out exactly where you want your hem to fall and mark that line in water soluble pen, pencil, or chalk on the right side of the garment. That would be the middle line here, shown in yellow.

2. Mark two more lines, one above and below your hem line. They should be of equal distance to the hemline, however deep you want your hem to be. So for a 2" hem, you'd draw a line 2 inches above (the white line) and a line 2 inches below (the pink line).

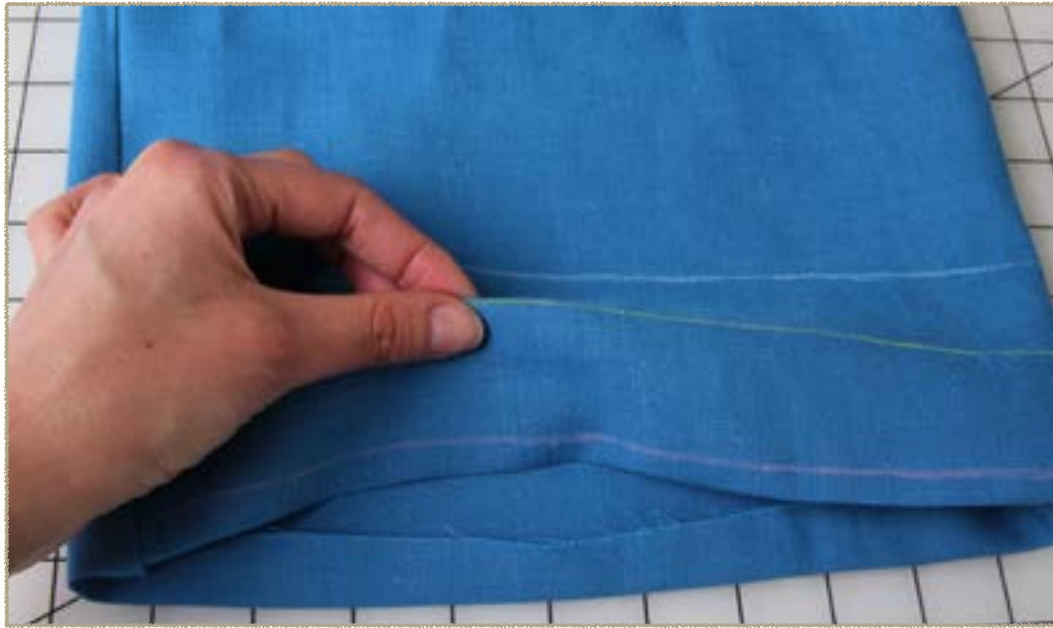
3. If necessary, trim the raw edge of the hem so it is only about 1 inch below the bottom (pink) line.



4. Turn the raw edge under and press. The fold should be 1/2 inch from the bottom (pink) line. Basically, you're folding it in half so that the raw edge on the inside hits right at the pink line.



Here's how it will look after you press it.



5. Pinch along the middle (yellow) line to fold.



6. Fold along this line, matching up the top (white) line with the bottom (pink) line as you fold.



7. Pin the fold in place. Here you can see that the middle (yellow) line is now at the bottom of the hem.



8. Fold again. Fold upward along the top (white) line this time.



9. Pin in place again. You can just remove the existing pins and repin at this point.



Here's how it will look on the inside.



10. Lightly press the folds. Once you've pressed them in place, you can remove the pins if you like.



Again, here's how it will look once pressed.



11. Put the blind hem presser foot on your sewing machine. This is what the foot looks like.



12. Set your machine to the blind hem stitch. You can see what it looks like here. You can set the stitch width wider or shorter depending on how wide you want it, but mine was set to 3.5mm here.



13. With the wrong side up, lower the presser foot onto the hem. The vertical plate should sit right along the fold. As the machine stitches, it will stitch across that plate every few stitches, taking a tiny bite out of the fold. Stitch slowly, making sure to keep the fold right up against the plate.



14. Look at the stitches carefully at this point. Occasionally, your machine may have missed the fold while stitching. You may need to go back and restitch over parts if this happens. This is the part that used to frustrate me, but with a higher quality foot, this never seems to happen anymore.



15. Remove the pins if you haven't already and let the hem come down.



16. Finally, give the hem a press. You'll often get a little crease where the hem was previously pressed. Use a little spray of water to help remove the crease as you press. If it's still there after pressing, don't worry too much. It will probably come out with washing.



Machine rolled hem

SECTION 9



A TINY HEM

The rolled hem foot can get you a soft, tiny machine rolled hem.

I consider this hem to be a little on the advanced side, because it requires careful handling of the garment while you sew. If you're new to the technique, I recommend practicing a bit first, and sewing very slowly to start.

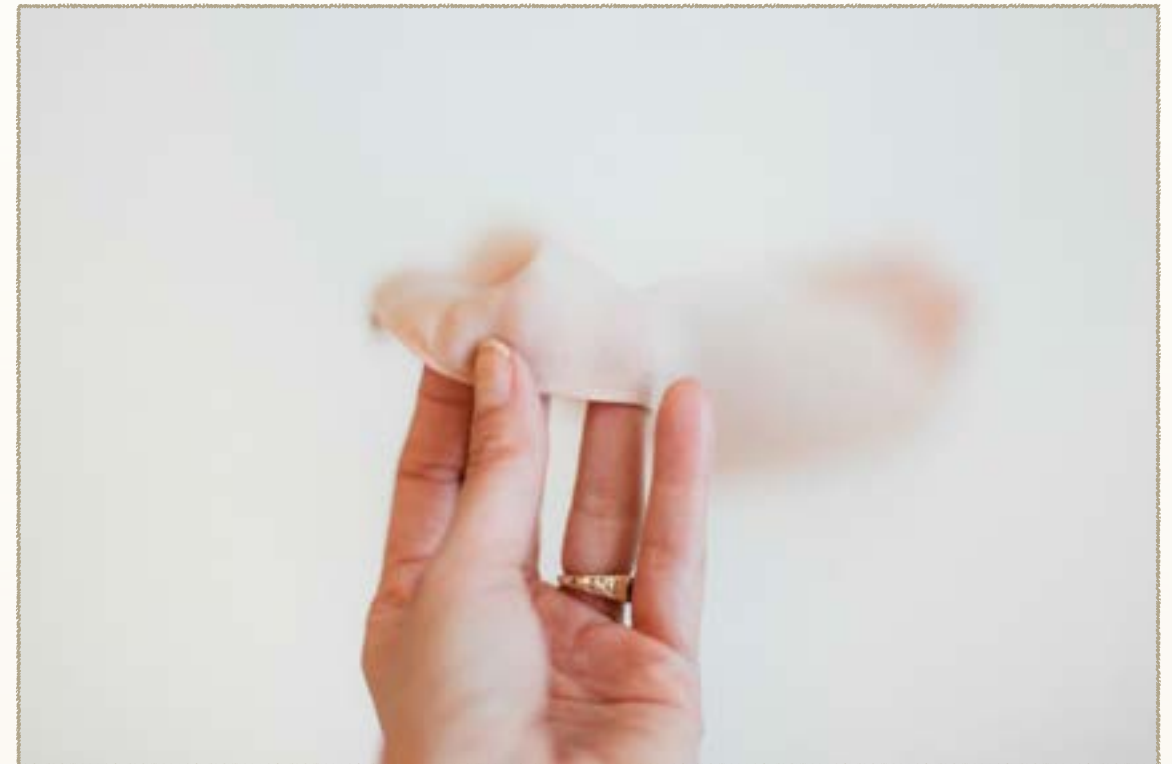
We'll be sewing this hem using a rolled hem foot. There are many rolled hem feet out there. For my machine (a Bernina), there are several. I am using one that creates a 4mm finished hem (the #69).



Be sure to use the correct needle when sewing this hem. Using a heavy needle with lightweight fabric and sewing close to the edge like this is a recipe for disaster. A heavy needle will push the fabric into the machine and cause it to be "eaten". Believe me, I know.

WHEN TO USE IT

- ◆ This hem is a great choice for **lightweight fabrics**. You can use it on slips, skirts, and pretty silk blouses.
- ◆ It is often seen on **blouses and shirts**.
- ◆ It's a great choice for **sheer fabrics**, because the hem is less noticeable than a wider one would be.
- ◆ The rolled hem is perfect for **curved hems** like circle skirts because there is so little bulk. Remember the rule of thumb, the curvier the hem, the narrower it should be.





1. Place the fabric under the presser foot, with the edge of the fabric aligned with the edge of the foot.



2. Stitch a few stitches.



3. Raise the presser foot. Without cutting the threads, lift the fabric and pull the thread to get some slack. Move the threads to the back.



4. Lower the presser foot again. Hold onto the excess thread. This will give you something to grasp as you position the fabric. Position the fabric around the curve of the foot. This curve turns the fabric edge under twice and holds it in place as you stitch. If you have trouble getting it in, try using the tip of your seam ripper to help guide the fabric into the crevice.



5. Stitch slowly. As you stitch, make sure the edge of the fabric remains turned under the curve of the foot. This can be tricky and requires some practice. Hold the fabric slightly taut, and position it slightly to the left so that it continues to curl under as you stitch.



Baby hem

SECTION 10



TINY HEMS WITHOUT ROLLING

Like the rolled hem, the baby hem is perfect for sheer and lightweight fabrics.

A baby hem is essentially a very small rolled hem done on the machine without a rolled hem foot. It's a pretty and delicate hemming option that is perfect for lightweight and sheer fabrics that have a bit more crispness, such as

cottons. A baby hem isn't really suitable for thicker fabrics, as they would be too bulky to create the small folds.

Use this when you want the look of a rolled hem, but are working with a fabric that has some stiffness.



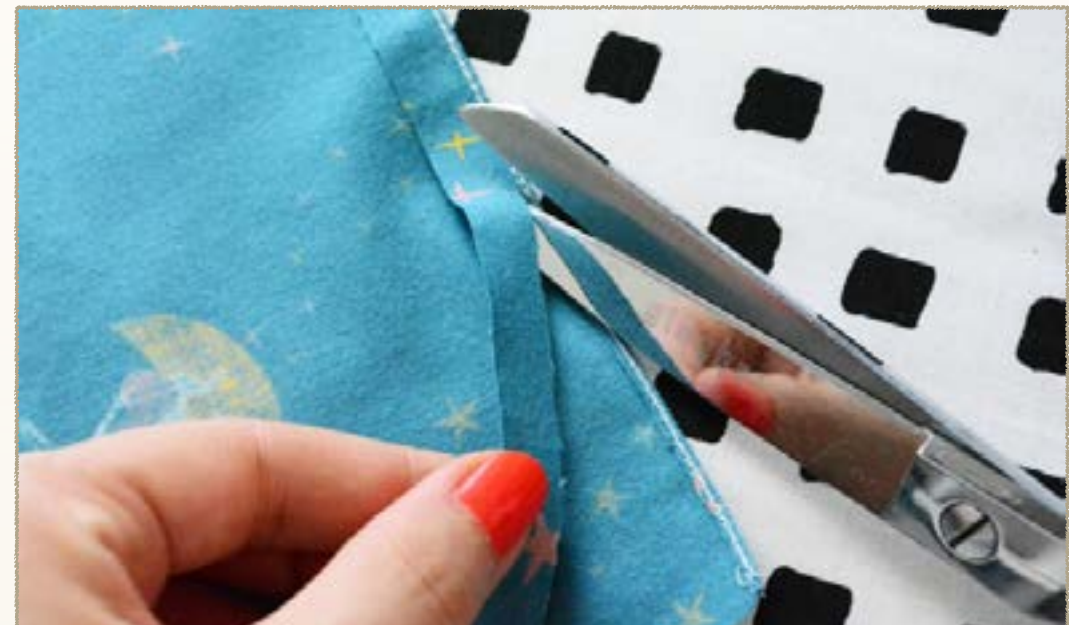
1. Stitch $\frac{1}{8}$ " below your hem allowance all the way around the edge to be hemmed (e.g., if your hem allowance is $\frac{5}{8}$ ", stitch at $\frac{1}{2}$ ".)



2. Press fabric to wrong side along stitching line.



3. Stitch a scant $\frac{1}{8}$ " in from the bottom folded edge all the way around.



4. Using small scissors, carefully trim the excess fabric as close to your stitching line as you can. As you trim, hold the fabric taut with your non-cutting hand.



5. Roll the bottom edge towards the wrong side of the fabric to create a tiny fold. Press.



6. Stitch down the center of the fold all the way around.



You will see one line of stitching on the outside...



...and two lines on the inside.



Faced Hem

SECTION II



A HEM WITH SHAPE

Facing a hem allows you to create all kinds of fancy shapes, like scallops, points, and more.

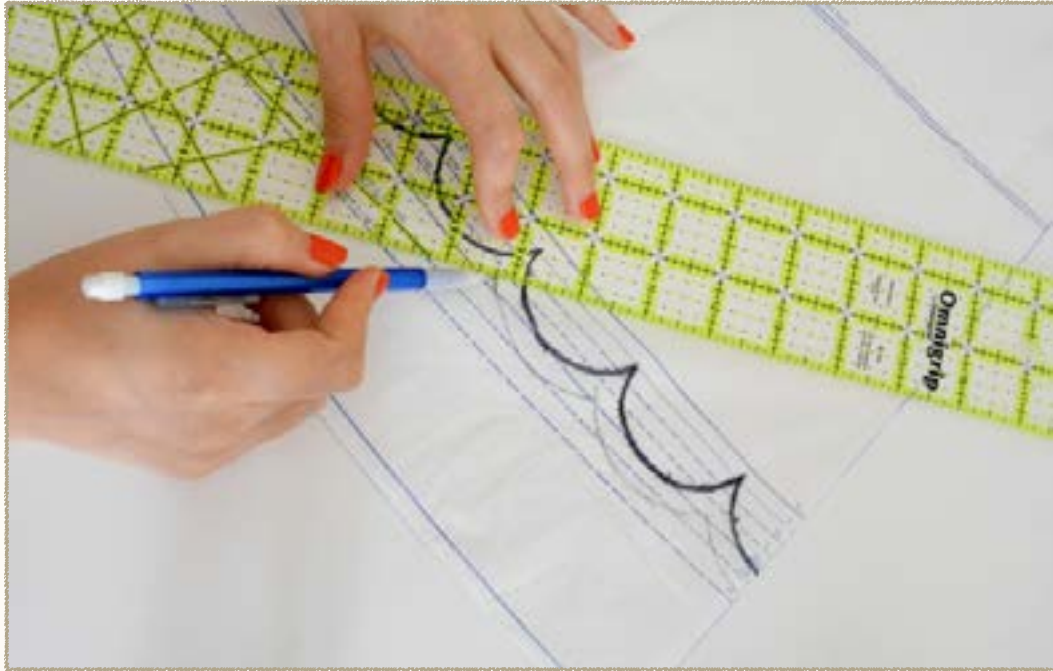
Using a facing for a hem is a fun way to customize an edge. Add scallops, zigzags, or whatever else you can dream up with a faced hem! The facing allows you to create complicated shapes without difficulty, since the

facing piece exactly mirrors the shape of the hem.

You can add a shaped hem such as this one to any regular pattern. Trace a copy of your piece and draw in the shape you'd like along the hemline before moving on to the next step - drafting a facing.

DRAFTING THE FACING

Before we can sew, we'll need to draft a pattern piece for our facing.



1. On your skirt piece (or whichever piece has your hem), draw the finished hem edge at the length you'd like. Use a ruler to add a seam allowance.



2. Trace off the bottom and side edges onto new paper.



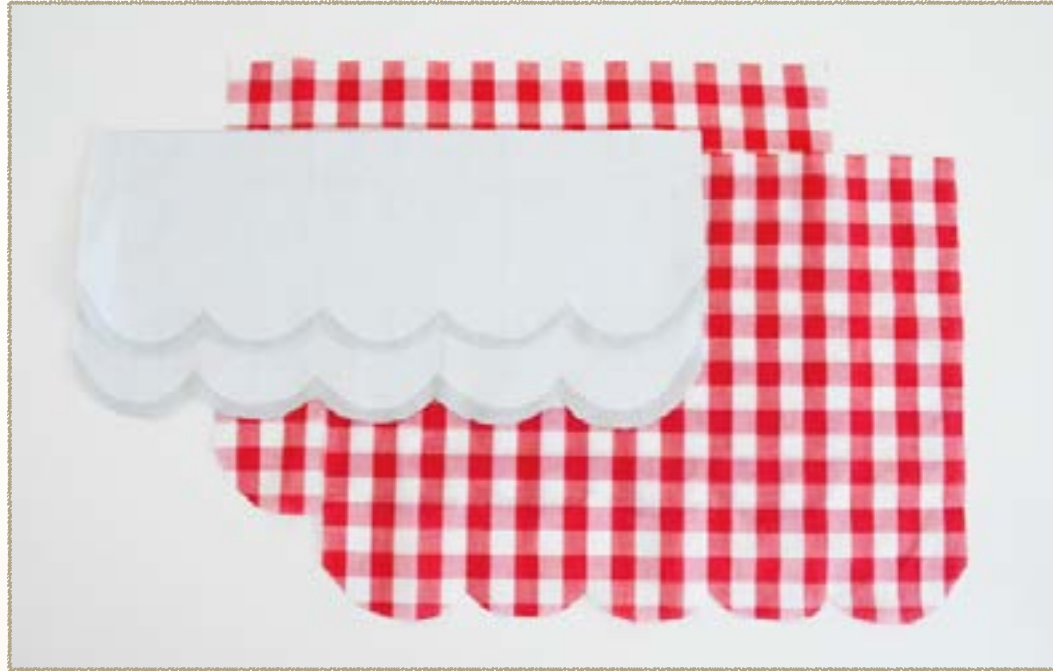
3. On the sides, measure up from the bottom the width you would like your facing to be, plus seam allowances. Use a ruler to connect the marks. If your pattern piece is curved, mark several points up from the bottom and use a ruler to connect them.



4. Mark any grainlines, folds, labels etc. Repeat for any pieces involved in your hem (ex. skirt front and back).

STITCHING THE FACING

Now that the facing has been drafted, it's time to attach it to the hem of your skirt, dress, or blouse.



1. Cut out your paper and fabric pieces. Apply interfacing to the facings. Before you fuse, trim the seam allowance off the bottom edge of the interfacing to get an extra clean edge when you turn it.



2. Sew side seams of skirt and facings and finish. Grade facing seam allowances. Press all seams open.

3. Finish top edge of facing.

ADDING CONTRAST

To switch it up a bit, make your facing out of a contrast fabric and attach it with its right side to the wrong side of the garment. Turn it to the outside, tuck in the raw edge and topstitch around the top.



4. Pin facing to outside of garment, right sides together, aligning bottom edges.



5. Stitch all the way around the bottom edge. Notch any outer curves and clip any inner curves and corners.



6. Turn facing to inside. Use a point turner or chopstick to push out corners and edges. Press.



7. Stitch along top edge of facing to secure using desired method.



THE BIAS FACED HEM

A variation on the faced hem is the bias faced hem. This hem is finished with single fold bias tape that is turned to the inside to form a facing.

This type of faced hem is appropriate for hems that are deeply curved, since the bias tape molds easily around curved areas. If you use bias tape made from your self fabric, the end result looks much like a turned hem, but it is much neater and easier to execute on a deep curve. It is not appropriate for complicated shapes such as scallops. See [Chapter 2, section 4](#) for more on installing bias tape.



Fringed hem

SECTION 12



A SIMPLE FRINGE

You can create adorable napkins, scarves, belts, and more with a fringe hem.

Leaving hems raw may seem unfinished, but when you use that raw edge to create fringe, the effect is striking. I've seen this look both in modern ready-to-wear and as an accent on vintage garments from the 1960s.

This technique only works when the hem is cut on-grain, so use it when you sew dirndl skirts from a rectangle of fabric, create self-fabric trims, or at the ends of tie belts. It works well for any loosely woven fabric, particularly plain woven cotton or linen.



1. Begin by stitching 5/8" from the raw edge using a zigzag stitch. This will keep the fabric from completely unraveling when you wash it.



2. Use a seam ripper to pull threads out one by one, using your fingers to completely remove them from the rest of the garment. Continue until you get close to the stitching.



SPECIAL

TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER 4



A FEW TRICKS

Need a special technique for sewing with knits? How about mitered corners? In this chapter, we'll cover these bonus techniques that work for particular fabrics and situations.

MORE



Twin needle

SECTION I



A SIMPLE HEM FOR KNITS

If you don't own a coverstitch machine, never fear. There are plenty of ways to finish hems on knit fabrics without much special equipment. Whether you have a serger or just a standard home sewing machine, the twin needle hem lets you get a stretchy, neat finish without a lot of fuss.

Looking for an easy way to hem knits? In the world of ready-to-wear, a coverstitch machine is usually used for creating neat hems with stretch. But you can still create that same look and functionality without a coverstitch, and even without a serger!

All you need is a twin needle, a type of forked sewing machine needle that lets you sew two rows of stitching at once. Twin needles come in multiple widths. The wide width (1/4") will closely mimic the look of a coverstitch.



1. To start, finish the raw edge of your hem. You can use a serger to overlock the edge, or use your sewing machine's mock overlock stitch or a zigzag stitch to finish. While this step is not 100% necessary, it helps to create a cleaner and more durable edge.



2. Turn the finished hem under and press into place. If possible, stabilize your hem with a product such as [Wonder Tape](#) (see sidebar on the next page). Lower the bobbin tension to prevent the rows of stitches from forming a raised channel.



3. Insert the twin needle and follow your sewing machine's manual for threading it with two spools of thread. Stitch the hem in place with a straight stitch, catching and securing the raw edge beneath, just like a coverstitch. The underside of the stitch will have a zigzag, allowing the stitches to stretch.

GET RID OF THE WAVES

Sometimes hems on knits can get a little wavy when they're sewn using the twin needle technique. This is usually because the fabric is being stretched a bit as it's sewn. To help get a crisp hem, try using a wash-away stabilizing tape, such as [Wonder Tape](#). Wonder Tape is adhesive on both sides, so it even holds your hem in place while you sew!





Serger rolled hem

SECTION 2



AN EASY NARROW HEM FOR KNITS

The rolled hem created on a serger is also sometimes called a marrow edge or lettuce edge.

We've covered how to create a rolled hem by hand, and how to create a rolled hem on your standard home sewing machine. But there's an even easier type of rolled hem and it's created with a serger.

Be aware that the look of a serger rolled hem is different from the first two we mentioned. The rolled hem is encased by thread; while it is narrow, it is far more visible. This is a good choice for knits when a narrow look is desired, or if you don't want to create bulk.



1. To set up your serger, remove the left-hand needle. Remove or disengage the stitch finger on your serger. Lower the stitch width and the stitch length (many sergers have a length and width labeled "R" for rolled hems). Raise your lower looper tension a little and sew test pieces, continuing to adjust the lower looper tension until your stitching is perfect.

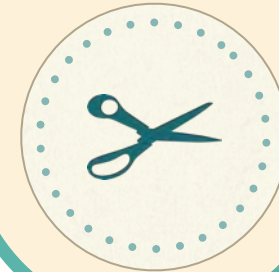


2. Stitch the hem of the fabric to create a standard rolled hem. With the shorter width, length, and only one needle, you will have a very neat encased hem.



THE LETTUCE HEM

For a rippled lettuce edge, stretch your fabric as you sew the rolled hem on your serger. This works best if the area you are sewing is on the crossgrain. Remember to always test sew first to get an idea of how much stretch you need to get the effect you want.



Banded hem

SECTION 3



A HEM THAT ADDS COLOR

The banded hem is easy to sew on knit garments, whether you have a serger or not. It acts almost like a cuff, giving a clean finish with plenty of stretch.

Bands are often used in sewing knitwear to finish off openings, such as necklines and, armholes, or other curved areas. But they can easily be added to sleeves, tops, and skirts as hem finishes as well. This is a great finish for including pattern, color, or just a neat

finish without a serger. You can either use your self fabric, or try adding a contrasting fabric. If your fabric has stripes, try cutting the band on the crossgrain for a fun effect. Bands can be subtle and narrow or dramatic and wide.



1. Measure the hem and draft band pieces of the same length. Determine how wide you would like the band to be. Add seam allowance to this number. Double this number to get the width of your band. For example, for a finished band of 2" with a $\frac{3}{8}$ " seam allowance, the band piece should be $4\frac{3}{4}$ ". With right sides together, stitch band pieces at the side seams.



2. With wrong sides together, fold band in half lengthwise. With right sides together, line up raw edge with the raw edge of the garment. Stitch in a continuous circle, using the four-thread overlock, mock overlock, single-step zigzag, or three-step zigzag.



3. Turn seam allowance to the inside.



4. If necessary, steam the garment to finish. This finish can also be perfect for sleeve cuffs and hems, and even works on curved hems.



Mitered corners

SECTION 4



PERFECT CORNERS

Mitered corners look impressive, but the methods are simple. Use a mitered corner any time you're hemming something that meets at a right angle.

When hemming two edges that meet in a corner, the multiple folds along each edge pile up on top of each other and create an excess of fabric at the corner. Mitered corners reduce the bulk, allow the edges to meet evenly, and

look oh-so-satisfyingly neat and tidy.

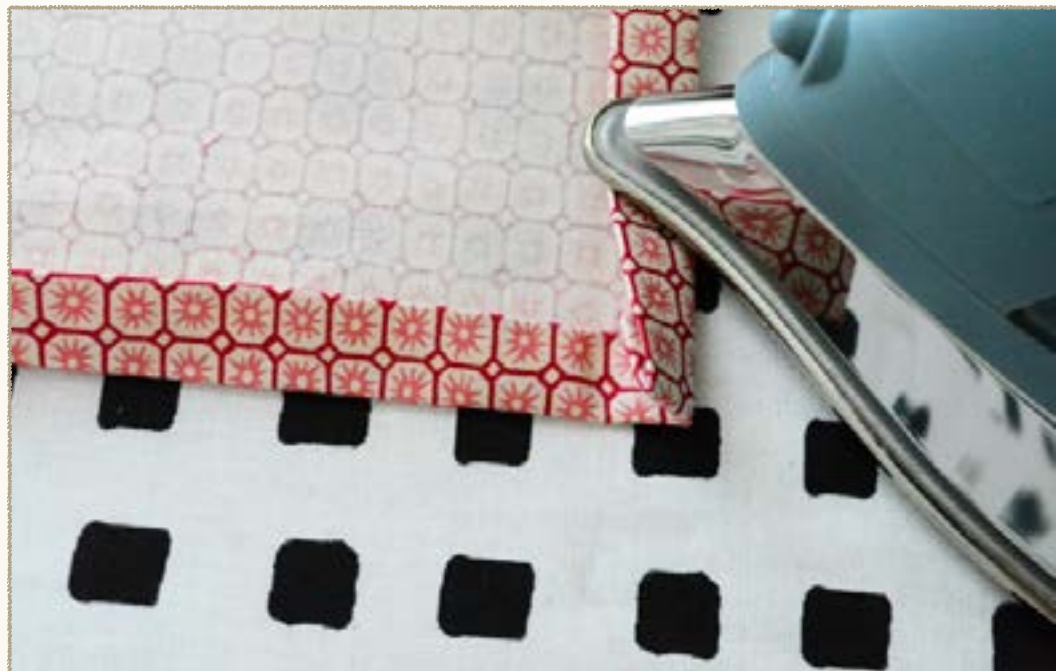
In this section, we'll cover two different methods for making mitered corners. The first is the topstitched mitered corner, and the second is the sewn and topstitched mitered corner.

METHOD I: TOPSTITCHED MITERED CORNER

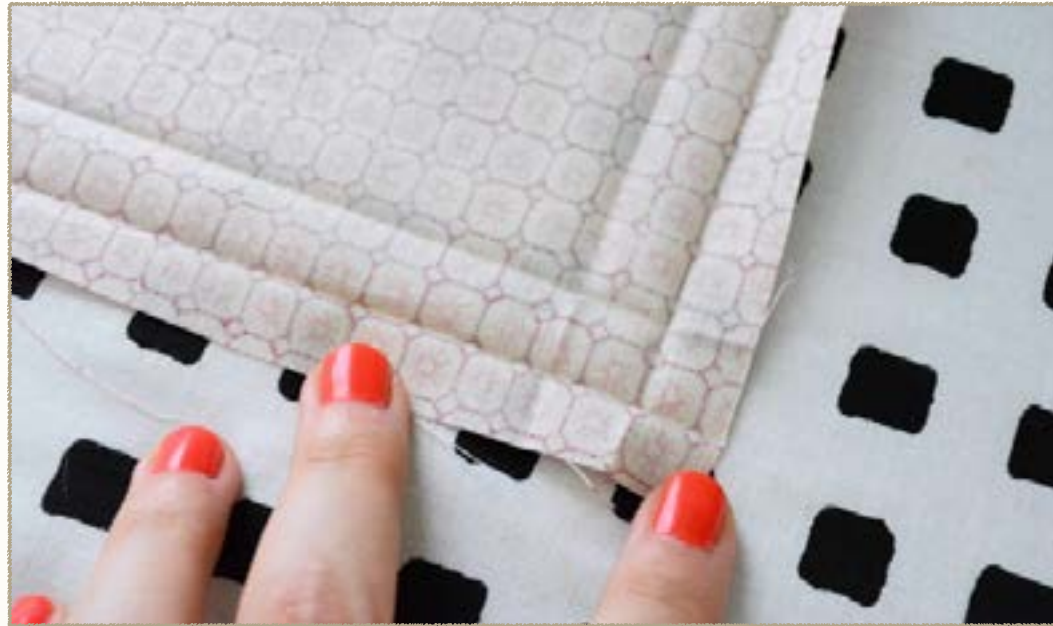
This mitered corner looks great and is fastest to sew.



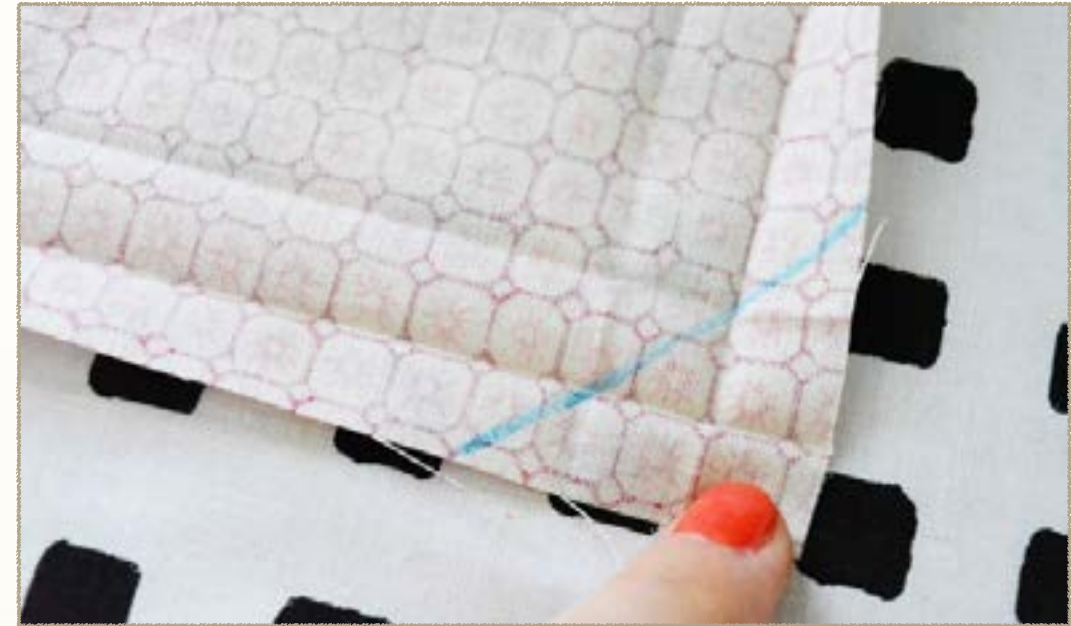
1. On all edges, press half your hem allowance to the wrong side.



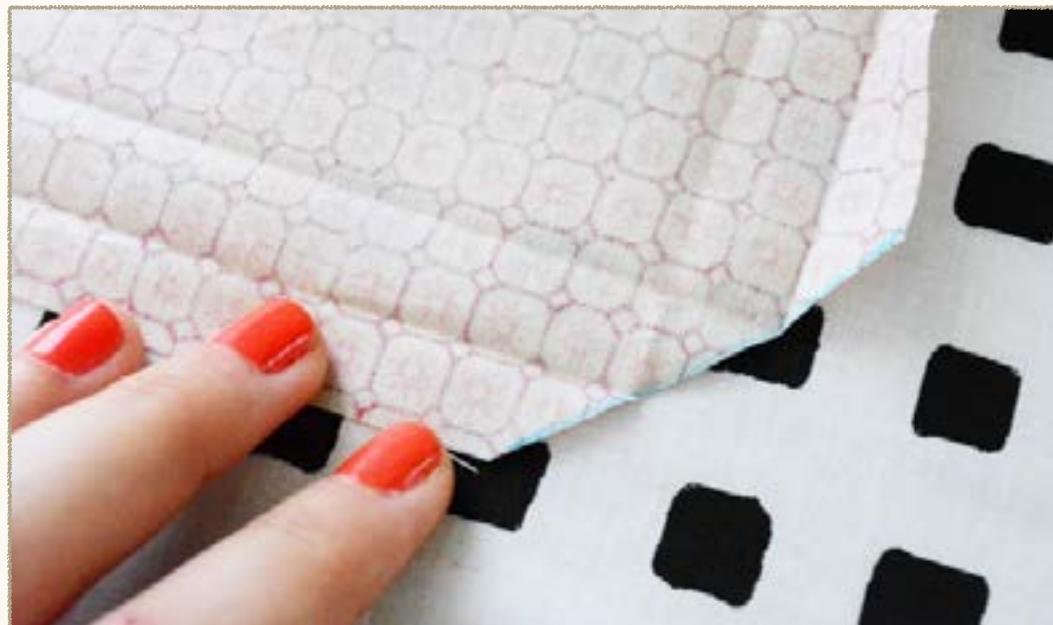
2. Press the same amount again. At the corners, make sure you fold and press evenly. It will be bulky.



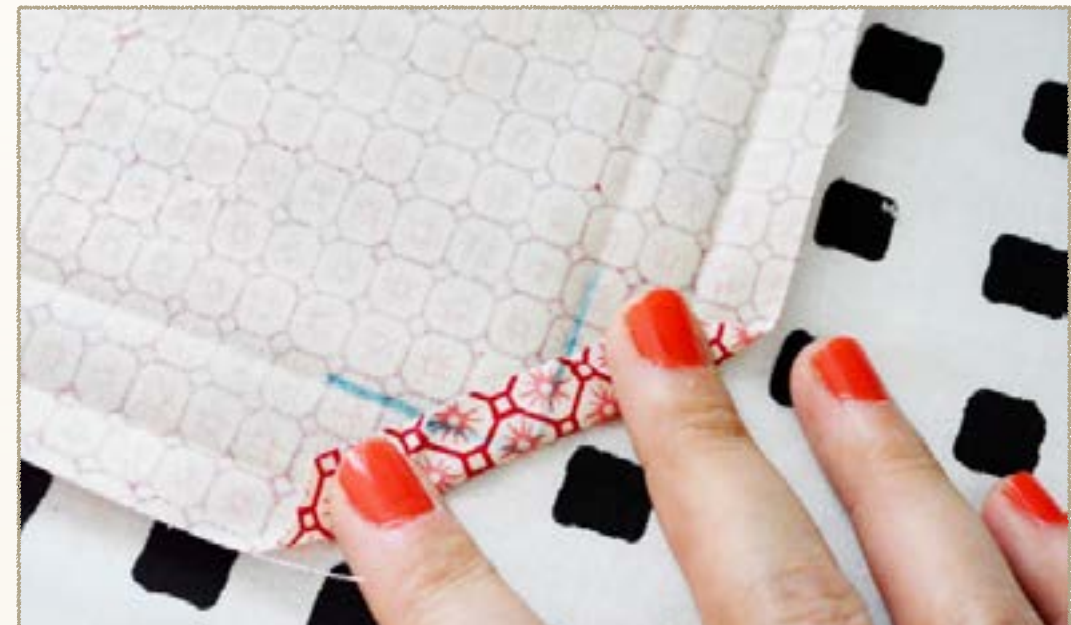
3. Unfold everything.



4. Find the middle square formed by the folds. Mark a line through its corners all the way across as shown.



5. Trim along line.



6. Fold angled edge in so that the creases line up. The creases you should align are marked in blue. Press lightly, taking care not to press out your other folds.



7. Refold along first fold and press.



8. Refold along second line and press.



9. Pin corner and sew around inner fold, pivoting in mitered corner directly between folds.

METHOD 2: SEWN AND TOPSTITCHED MITERED CORNER

This form of mitered corner is stronger and will stand up to more wear and tear.



1. First, divide your hem allowance in two parts. You can divide it evenly, or, for a wider finished hem, divide it into a smaller and bigger portion. (For example, if my hem allowance is 1", I can either divide it into 1/2" and 1/2", or 1/4" and 3/4".)

2. Press half your hem allowance towards the wrong side along both edges. If you divided your hem unevenly, press the smaller portion.



3. Press half your hem allowance towards the wrong side again. If you divided your hem unevenly, this time press the larger portion.



4. Unfold the second fold only. Fold the corner in towards the wrong side as shown so that the creases line up with those from the second fold. The creases we are aligning are traced in blue.



5. Press to crease and unfold.



6. Now fold the corner right sides together, aligning the outer edges. You should be folding so that the most recent crease - the one diagonally across the corner - is lined up with itself through the layers. This crease is marked in blue. Pin.



7. Stitch along crease, backstitching at beginning and end. Cut off excess and clip top corner.



8. Turn corner right side out and use point turner or chopstick to push it out.



9. Press, then topstitch around free inner fold, pivoting at the corner.



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Thanks!
Sarai & Devon