

Seam Finishes

LOOK AT THE SHIRT you are currently wearing. Pay attention to the seams. Then look at your neighbor's shirt. Are the seams the same or different? Various seams can be used. It is important to understand the seam types before you begin a sewing project.

Objectives:



1. Demonstrate basic seam construction techniques.
2. Construct common seam finishes.

Key Terms:



backstitching
basic seam
clean finish
flat-felled seam
French seam

pinked seam finish
pinking shears
seam allowance
seam finish
seamline

topstitching
trim
zigzag seam finish

Basic Seam Construction Techniques

A basic seam is the most common seam. Most articles of clothing are created by using this seam. Specific steps are needed to complete this task.

STEPS TO CONSTRUCT A BASIC SEAM

A **basic seam** is a line formed by stitching two or more layers of fabric together. The line of stitching that joins two or more layers of fabric together is often called the **seamline**.

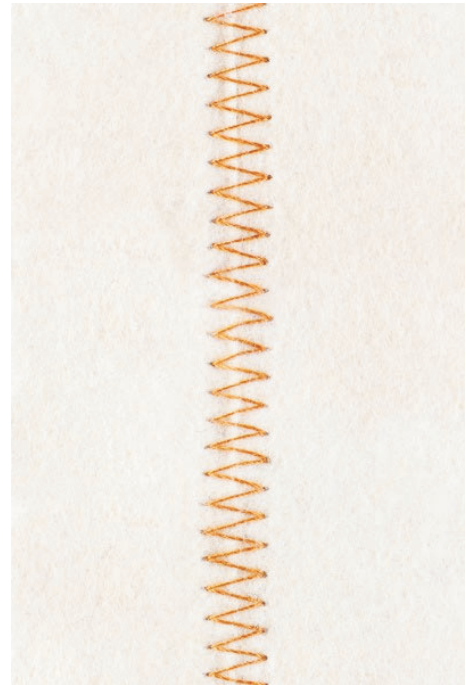


FIGURE 1. This image is an example of a seamline—where the main part of the jacket and the sleeve meet.

Seam Allowance

The **seam allowance** is the distance between the seamline and the cut edge of fabric. A standard seam allowance is $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch wide. However, the pattern direction sheet and/or the individual tissue pattern piece should be consulted to determine the correct seam allowance for each seam of the garment.

When constructing a seam for a knit fabric, it is a rule of thumb to stretch the fabric slightly as the seam is sewn. From the needle to the outside edge of the presser foot is approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, which helps you estimate the seam allowance. Place the right sides of fabric together, making the cut edges even and matching any notches or symbols. Start stitching at the cut side of the seam line, and follow the pattern directions for seam width. Backstitch $\frac{1}{4}$ inch to anchor the stitching at the beginning of the seam.

Backstitching is inserting a few “reverse stitches” (causing the sewing machine to go backwards) to create a type of knot or lock to prevent the stitching from pulling out. Complete the seam by stitching to the end of the piece and by backstitching to secure it.

Press the completed seam open and flat on the wrong side of the fabric.

A **seam finish** is an edge applied to the seam’s raw edges to prevent fraying and to maintain the integrity and stability of the seam through normal wear and laundering. Seam finishes make the garment neat and clean. In addition, seam finishes add longevity to the garment. The type of seam finish chosen depends on the fabric, garment type, strength required, whether or not the garment will be lined, and the general visual appearance desired.



FIGURE 2. The seam allowance is the distance between the seamline and the cut edge of the fabric.

Construct Common Seam Finishes

Various types of seam finishes exist. Some examples are flat-felled seam, French seam, clean finish, zigzag seam finish, and pinked seam finish.

COMMON SEAM FINISHES

A **flat-felled seam** is a strong seam produced by overlapping one seam allowance with the other and then topstitching onto the outside or top of a garment with two parallel rows of stitches. **Topstitching** is a row of stitching close to the seam or edge of a garment on the outside or top; it is used to add strength and detailing. Flat-felled seams are frequently used on

sportswear, reversible garments, and blue jeans. With wrong sides (or right sides, depending on where you want the fell to be) of the fabric together, stitch a basic seam. Press the seam open. Then press the seam to one side.

The next step is to **trim** (cut away some of the seam allowance, according to the directions given in the pattern, to eliminate bulk) the under seam allowance to $\frac{1}{8}$ inch. Turn under the raw edge of the top seam allowance, and pin it into place over the trimmed edge of the other seam allowance. With the seam allowance lying flat, topstitch close to the fold, stitching through all fabric layers.

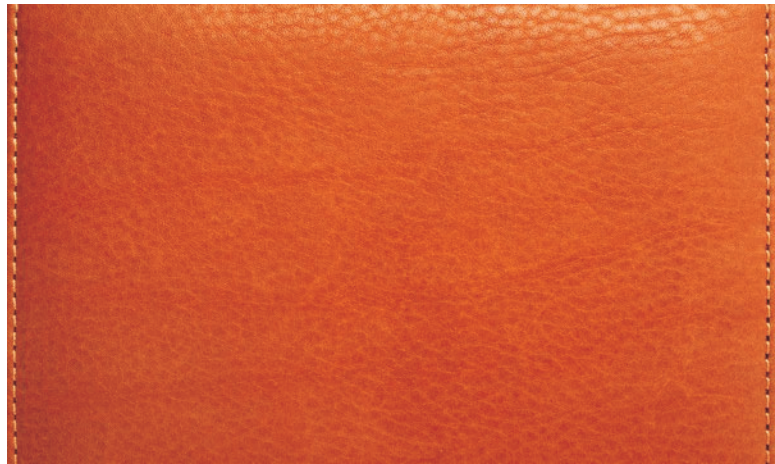


FIGURE 3. Topstitching is a row of stitching close to the seam or edge of a garment on the outside or top.

French Seam

A **French seam** is a completely enclosed seam allowance produced by sewing the seam first on the right side of the fabric and then on the wrong side. It is usually used for lightweight and sheer fabrics. Follow these steps: With the wrong sides of the fabric together, stitch $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{8}$ inch from the seamline. Then press the seam allowances to one side. Trim the seam allowances to a scant $\frac{1}{8}$ inch. Turn the right sides together. Fold and press on the stitching line. Finally, stitch on the seamline to enclose the raw edges.

Clean Finish

A **clean finish** is a seam turned under $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of the raw edge of the fabric and then stitched close to the folded edge. It is a neat finish for the seam allowance. Also, it is great for unlined garments, as long as the fabric is light to medium weight. In addition, it is a good choice for fabrics that tend to ravel easily. Steps to produce a clean finish include stitching a basic seam, pressing the seam allowance open and flat, and turning under the raw edge of each seam allowance edge at $\frac{1}{8}$ inch. Next, turn under $\frac{1}{4}$ inch if the fabric tends to ravel. Stitch close to the folded edge on each side of the seam allowance using a straight stitch.

Zigzag Seam Finish

A **zigzag seam finish** (overedge) is a series of short, sharply angled stitches applied close to the raw edge of the seam allowance as a seam finish to prevent fraying and raveling. The zigzag stitch is usually applied to the seam allowance edges with a sewing machine and is suitable for most fabrics. Use a smaller width stitch on lightweight fabrics and a larger width stitch for heavyweight fabrics.



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Matching the Purpose and Type of Seam

When beginning a sewing project, determine the purpose so you can decide what type of seam to use. The Craftsby blog explains the different types of seams that can be used for various projects. What additional seams are explained in this blog? Click here to read:

<http://www.craftsy.com/blog/2014/01/sewing-seam-types/>

The first step to produce a zigzag finish is to set the sewing machine to a medium-width zigzag stitch and test the stitch on a scrap piece of the fabric to get the correct width for the fabric used. Then reset the stitch width based on the test. Apply the zigzag stitch to the edges of the seam allowance, only pushing the rest of the fabric to the side. Sew the stitch to the right side of the raw edges, and ensure that the stitch barely travels off the edge of the seam allowance. This encloses fabric threads that could fray or ravel.

Pinked Seam Finish

A **pinked seam finish** is a finish produced with special shears. It is a quick method for finishing a seam allowance but should be used just on fabric that does not ravel easily. **Pinking shears** (scissors with a sharp saw-tooth edge) are used to create a pinked seam allowance. The first step to produce a pinked seam finish is to sew a basic seam. Then press it open and flat. Work with one side of the seam allowance at a time, and straight stitch $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the raw edge of the seam allowance. Then trim close to the stitching on each side with pinking shears to create a zigzag pattern. Other seam finishes are bound, piped, welt, corded, slot, Mock-French, double-and triple-stitched, and lapped.



FIGURE 4. This image is an example of a pinked seam finish.

Summary:



The basic seam has at least three parts: the raw edge (cut edge), the seamline, and the seam allowance. A flat-felled seam is a strong seam produced by overlapping

one seam allowance with the other and then topstitching onto the outside or top of a garment with two parallel rows of stitches. In contrast, topstitching is a row of stitching close to the seam or edge of a garment on the outside or top; it is used to add strength and detailing.

A French seam is a completely enclosed seam allowance produced by sewing the seam first on the right side of the fabric and then on the wrong side. A clean finish is a seam turned under $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of the raw edge of the fabric and then stitched close to the folded edge. A zigzag seam finish (overedge) is a series of short, sharply angled stitches applied close to the raw edge of the seam allowance as a seam finish to prevent fraying and raveling. A pinked seam finish is a finish produced with special shears.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What is a seam allowance?
2. Describe the pinked seam finish.
3. How do you produce a zigzag seam finish?
4. How do you produce a clean finish?
5. How do you produce a French seam?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Go to a local store that sells fabric. Locate a book, or talk to a worker about the type of seams. What additional seams exist that were not discussed? Report your findings.

Web Links:



ZigZag Seam Finish

<http://sewing.about.com/od/techniques/p/zigzagseamfinis.htm>

French Seams

<http://www.sewneau.com/how.to/french.seam.html>

Pinked Seam Finish

<http://www.sewingsupport.com/sewing-how-to/sewingsupport-articles/seam-finishes/pinked.html>