

# T is for T-Shirts

## Guide C-210

Cooperative Extension Service  
College of Agriculture and  
Home Economics



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Making a T-shirt is a simple matter. The fabric used is usually a lightweight, single or double knit selected from a wide variety of colors and fabric designs. Before using, preshrink the fabric by laundering it as you plan to launder the finished garment.

Single knit fabrics tend to curl, so avoid unnecessary stretching. To reduce curling during preshrinking, machine or hand baste the cut edges and selvages together. After the fabric has been washed and dried, the basting can be removed.

### Selecting a Pattern

Select a T-shirt pattern in the size you normally use. Patterns “for stretch knits only” are sized accordingly. T-shirts usually have no darts—the stretch of the fabric takes care of fitting body curves. If you normally alter the pattern in length, bust, or shoulder width, do so on the T-shirt pattern.

Check the pattern to determine the size of the seam allowances. They may vary from 1/8 to 5/8 inches, depending on the kind of pattern used. If the pattern has 5/8 inch seams, you may want to trim them to 1/4 or 3/8 inch—especially the neckline, sleeves and arm holes. The smaller seam allowances will make sewing these seams much easier.

### Stitching

Sew seams with straight, zigzag, stretch, or overlock stitching. When a straight stitch is used, loosen the machine tension and shorten the stitch length to achieve some “stretch” in the stitching. Two rows of straight stitches on each seam will prevent seamlines from breaking easily. If a zigzag, stretch, or overlock stitch is used, adjust the length and tension as needed to achieve a smooth stitch.

### Stabilizing

Twill tape, seam binding, or a piece of woven selvage should be sewn into shoulder seams to help sta-

bilize them. Seams forming decorative yokes or mid-riffs may be stabilized too. Center the tape over the seamline and sew through it as the seam is sewn.

### Finishing Edges

After seams are sewn, trim close to the line of stitching. Side seams can be pressed to the front or to the back. Press sleeve seams toward the sleeve. The shoulder seams usually are pressed toward the back. Serging with an overlock stitch is an excellent way to finish seams.

Neckline edges and hems often are finished by turning them under 1/2 inch and top-stitching. Or, the pattern may call for binding edges with self-fabric or contrasting trim. Ribbed trimming can also be used to finish the neckline and hem edges.

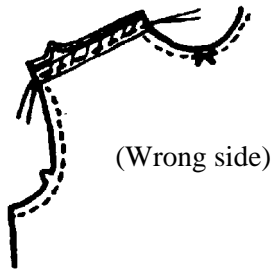
If you want to bind the edges or use ribbed trimming and the pattern does not call for it, a slight alteration is necessary. Cut off seam allowances of the areas to be bound. Where ribbing is to be used, cut from each edge an amount equal to the width of the trimming that will be added.

If there is no pattern for the binding, cut a piece of self-fabric 1 1/2 inches wide and the length of the neckline minus 1 inch. Cut this piece on the cross-wise grain of fabric.

For ribbed trimming on a crew style neckline, cut a piece of ribbing long enough to pull over your head easily. For a lowered neckline, cut as for selfbinding minus 2 to 3 inches. The width should be twice the finished width plus two seam allowances. The finished ribbing for a crew neckline will be about 1 inch wide. For a lowered neckline, plan for a ribbed trimming to be no wider than 3/4 to 1/2 inch.

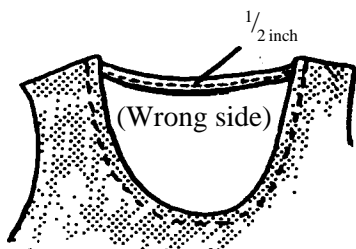
## Sewing the T-Shirt

1. **Sew shoulder seams.** Be sure to stabilize the seam with twill tape, seam binding or a piece of woven selvage. Cut two pieces of tape the exact length of the shoulder seam. Pin the tape to each front shoulder, centering it over the seam. Pin front and back of T-shirt together. Sew seam through the center of the tape, then trim the seam allowances even with the top edge of the tape. Press seams toward the T-shirt back.



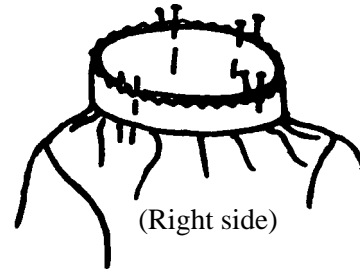
2. The pattern guide sheet may give specific instructions for finishing the neckline. Or, select one of the following methods.

**Turn and Stitch Finish.** Sew a line of baste stitching on the seam line. Press the seam allowance under along the row of stitching. Top-stitch in place 1/2 inch from fold. A second row of top-stitching can be sewn close to the first or along the folded edge to add a decorative touch. (Go to Step 3 to complete T-shirt.)

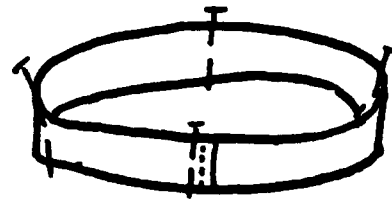


**Ribbed Trimming.** Sew ends of trimming together to form a circle. Trim seam allowance to 1/4 inch. Fold ribbing in half, matching raw edges together. Using chalk or pins, mark circle in fourths with one marking at the seamline. Use pins or chalk to mark the T-shirt neckline in fourths with a mark at center front and center back. Pin ribbing to neckline. Be sure to put the seam of the ribbing at center back. Sew together, stretching the ribbing to fit the neck-

line. Trim seam allowance to 1/4 inch if necessary. (Go to Step 3 to complete T-shirt.)

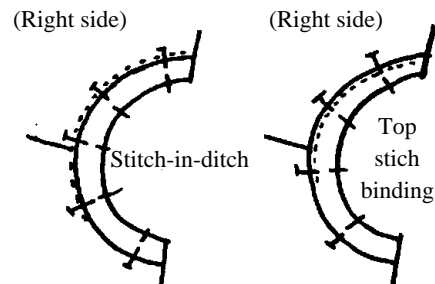


**Binding.** For self-fabric binding, sew ends of binding together to form a circle and trim seam allowance to 1/4 inch. Using pins or chalk, mark circle in fourths with one marking at seamline. Mark the T-shirt neckline in fourths with a mark at center front and center back. Use pins or chalk to mark neckline. With right side of binding to right side of neckline, match the marks on the binding to marks on the neckline and pin together. Be sure to put the seam of the binding at center back. Stitch on seam line and trim seam allowance to 1/4 inch if necessary.

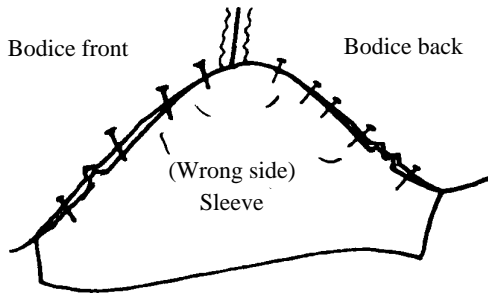


Divide in fourths and mark with pins or chalk.

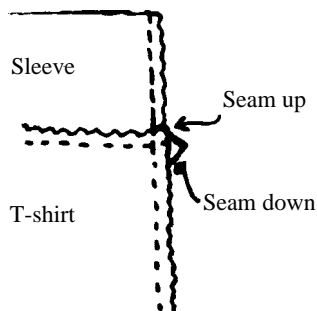
Fold the binding over the seam allowance to the inside and pin in place. Press lightly. Finish sewing the binding to the neckline by top-stitching along the inside edge of the binding or stitch-in-the-ditch. This stitching should be done from the garment's right side. Trim off excess binding on the inside of the neckline close to the stitching.



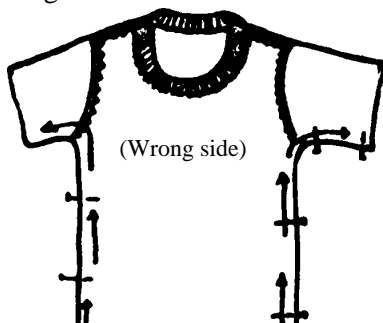
- Trim seam allowances of sleeve and armhole to 1/4 inch if necessary. Pin the sleeve to the armhole with right sides together. Match underarm seam edges, the notches, and the top of the sleeve to the shoulder seam. Pin as needed to hold edges together.



- Stitch the sleeve to the garment, *stretching the armhole* to fit the sleeve.
- Press the seam allowance toward the sleeve and trim close to the stitching. Serging the armhole seams is an excellent way to finish and set-in the sleeve at the same time.
- Pin the side seams together, matching at the underarm seams. Turn one seam up and one seam down on each armhole to reduce bulk.



- Sew side seam from lower hemline to hem edge of sleeve. Trim the seam allowances close to the stitching and press. An overlook stitch formed by a serger is an excellent way to sew the seam, trim away excess fabric and finish the seam edge.



- Finish the hems of sleeves and lower edge as desired and press. The hem edges can be finished by ribbing, serging, or hemming by machine or by hand.

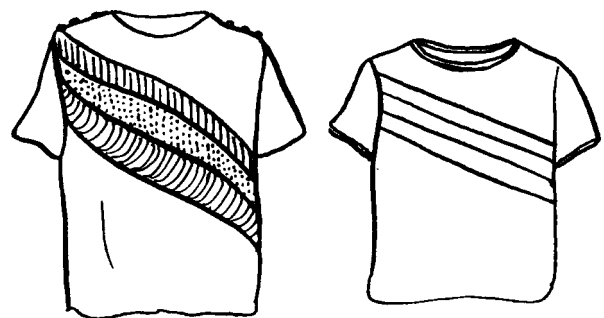
### Some Creative Ideas

After you have mastered the basic skills, be creative. Here are a few ideas:

**Rainbow T-shirt.** Piece fabric for T-shirt front to make a rainbow.

- Make a copy of the pattern front and sketch the rainbow shape desired. Mark the gainline on all design pieces.
- Cut the pattern apart on design lines.
- Allow for seams and cut out pieces in selected colors.
- Sew/serge pieces together to make the shirt front.
- Finish the T-shirt as usual.

This same technique can be used to create other designs.



**Add a Lace Medallion.** Sew a pretty lace applique to the bodice front, back, and/or sleeves and cut away knit for a “see-through” look.

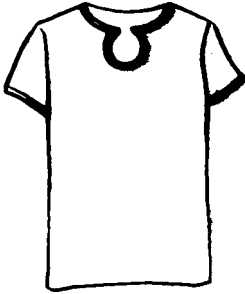
- Select medium to heavy lace applique and determine where you want it.
- Pin or baste medallion in place and zigzag stitch around outer edges.
- Trim away knit from wrong side.

Use lace on neckline or sleeve edge in place of hem or binding, if appropriate.



**Make a “Keyhole” Neckline.** Cut out a “keyhole” and bind with self fabric.

1. Cut neckline in desired shape.
  2. Determine length and cut appropriate width of binding.
  3. Join binding ends to form circle and divide into fourths.
  4. Divide neckline shape into fourths and apply binding as usual.
- Matching binding can be added to sleeve edges also.



**Try a T-Shirt Collage.** Use leftovers from other T-shirts to make a colorful collage.

1. Cut T-shirt parts from a variety of fabrics. Example—front of a floral fabric, back of stripes, right sleeve of a geometric and left sleeve of solid. Or, you can piece together a patchwork design for front, back and sleeves.
2. Finish T-shirt as usual.
3. Finish neckline with a turn and stitch finish, ribbed trimming or binding of a color that coordinates with all the parts.



**Make a “String-tie.”** Bind neckline, allowing an extension for ties at center front, center back, or wherever you prefer.

1. Determine where you want the tie and cut a slash or a special shape into the neckline.
2. Determine length of binding needed for neckline, allowing extra for tying.
3. Finish slashed edge by turning under or with a facing or binding.
4. Bind neck edge as usual allowing tie ends to extend.
5. Fold in raw edges of tie extension and stitch together.
6. Finish tie ends with a knot, add a bead or leave the raw edge.



**Create a Scene.** Select a flower, farm scene, sunset, or a favorite animal to applique.

1. Sketch your design.
2. Cut fabric pieces of appropriate fabrics.
3. Arrange fabric design on T-shirt section to be trimmed
4. Fuse pieces in place.
5. Zigzag around edges to finish design.
6. Finish T-shirt as usual.

