Sewing Shortcuts

Guide C-104

Reviewed by Wendy Hamilton[1]

Cooperative Extension Service • College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

INTRODUCTION

Sewing shortcuts help the home sewer save time while making attractive fashions. Using shortcuts is an important reason more people enjoy sewing at home.

The clothing industry uses many shortcuts in mass production of fashions. Pattern companies feature shortcut ideas in instruction sheets. You might have shortcuts you have developed through trial and error, or perhaps friends have shared shortcut ideas with you.

Whatever the source of shortcuts, the result is the same: attractive fashions with less time invested. Consider the following suggestions as you begin your sewing project.

1. Get Organized

Organize your sewing. Have a special place for sewing—a special room or just the corner of a table in the dining room. Plan to sew when there will be the fewest possible interruptions. Keep sewing equipment in a box or drawer so you can find it when it is needed. Think through the project; read the instruction sheet before beginning and follow the guide sheet—unless you know some useful shortcuts!

2. Select Carefully

Select your pattern and fabric carefully. Many patterns on the market feature sewing shortcuts. And remember, the fewer pieces a pattern has, the less time is needed to cut and sew.

Some fabrics, especially knits, are easier to sew than others. For shortcut sewing, select fabrics that require little or no special finishing on seams and hem edges.

3. Preshrink Fabrics

Always preshrink fabric using a wash cycle suitable for the finished garment. Instead of doing a special load just for preshrinking, put it in with the regular laundry. This will save time, water, and energy. After it is dry, fold the fabric and put it away until ready to begin the project.

4. Pre-Cut Projects

Cut out several sewing projects at one time. Then, when you have a few minutes to work, there will be something ready for you to sew.

5. Save Time and Energy

As you work, sew as much as you can before stopping to press. For example, sew all darts and all seams that don't cross a dart or seam, then press them. This will save time and energy since you won't have to heat the iron as often.

6. Use Your Sewing Machine Wisely

Sewing machines offer a variety of shortcut opportunities. Use zig-zag or serge stitching as often as possible to sew and finish seams in one action. Learn to use special feet that are available to cut down on sewing time, such as the blind hem foot, gathering foot, rolled hem foot, and others. Also, consider using specialty needles to complete projects. Double needles are great for top-stitching hems.

7. Use Shortcuts

Don't limit your use of shortcuts to knitted fabrics. Most shortcuts will also be useful on woven fabrics.

The following sewing techniques are some new and some "tried and true" shortcuts to use on your next sewing project.

IDEA 1. COLLAR QUICKIE

1. Fold front facing in place and pin.

2. Sew undercollar to neckline, including front facing.

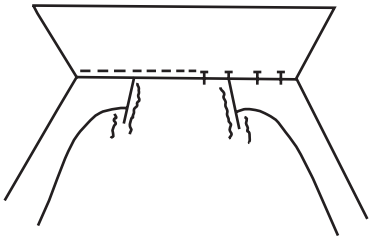
3. Grade seam allowance and clip seam, if necessary.

4. Turn seam allowance of upper collar under 5/8 in.

---

[1]Professor and CES Grants and Contracts Development Specialist, Media Productions Department, New Mexico State University.

5. Pin upper collar to neckline with folded edge extending slightly over stitching of undercollar. Stitch along folded edge.



IDEA 2. WAISTBAND QUICKIE

1. Trim underband seam allowance to 1/4 in. Finish raw edge (if necessary) with zigzag or serge stitching.

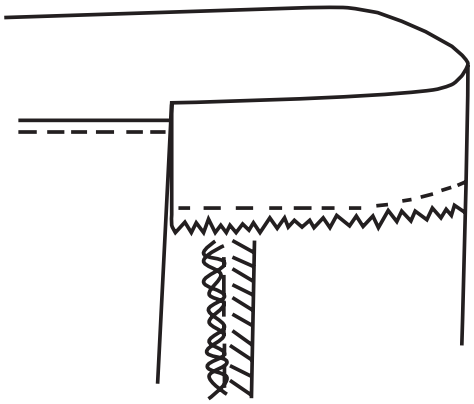
2. Sew upper band to waistline, right side to right side. Press seam allowance toward band.

3. Fold band right side to right side with underband extending 1/4 in. below upperband. Sew overlap end together. Grade seam and turn band right side out.

4. Pin underband in place, matching stitching line of band to seamline of waist.

5. Top stitch or stitch-in-ditch to finish band.

6. To complete underlap, zig-zag on the stitching line to close end. Trim off seam allowance.

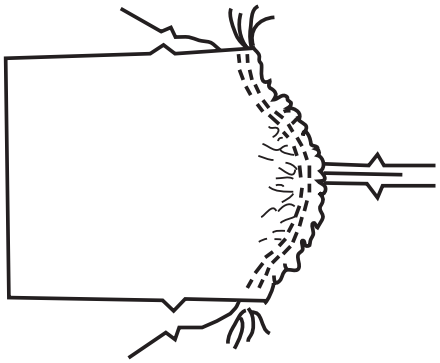


IDEA 3. SHIRT-STYLE SLEEVE

Shirt-style sleeves can be applied faster because the sleeve is sewn in the garment before joining the underarm seam.

1. Stitch shoulder seams of garment.

2. Ease-stitch the sleeve cap according to pattern instructions.



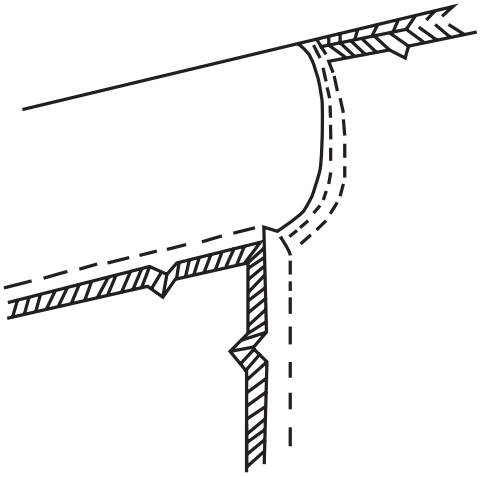
3. Pin sleeve to armhole edge and distribute ease.

4. Stitch on seam allowance with sleeve side up.

5. Stitch again 1/8 in. from first row of stitching.

6. Trim close to stitching. Press seam toward sleeve.

7. Sew garment side seam and sleeve seam in one continuous stitching line. Press open.



8. Finish bottom of sleeve as instructed or desired.

Note: You may want to double stitch the underarm seam for strength.

IDEA 4. QUICK CUFF

Eliminate the need to finish a slash, make buttonholes, or sew buttons on cuffs from knit fabrics.

1. Cut cuff on cross grain of fabric for greater give. The length should be large enough to fit comfortably

around the wrist and stretch over the hand plus 1 1/4 in. for seam allowances; the width should be double the desired width plus 1 1/4 in. for seam allowances.

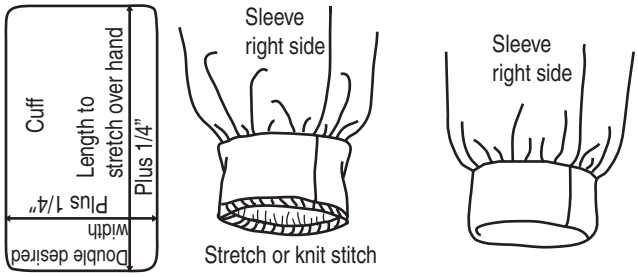
2. Seam cuff ends together; fold in half right side out.

3. Make a row of machine gathering stitches 1/2 in. from raw edge of sleeve.

4. Pin cuff to right side of sleeve, raw edges even, matching seams; ease gathering stitches to fit.

5. Stitch around cuff with narrow zig-zag stitch and trim seam allowance close to stitching or serge the seam.

6. If using zig-zag, stitch again with a wide zig-zag to overcast cut edge. Fold cuff down.



IDEA 5. ZIG-ZAG OVER THREAD

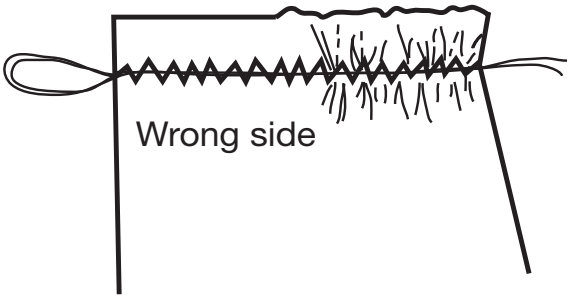
For secure gathering that won't break, zig-zag stitch over a length of the same thread. Use especially for long areas that are gathered or ruffled.

1. Set machine for a medium stitch width and a medium stitch length. With the machine threaded, pull a length of upper and bobbin thread toward you until it covers the distance to be gathered. Do not cut thread.

2. Bring thread back under the presser foot and hold a loop of this thread behind foot. Lay thread over wrong side of fabric to be gathered, within the 5/8-in. seam allowance.

3. Zig-zag stitch over thread, being careful not to catch the thread in the stitching.

4. Pull threads to gather fabric.

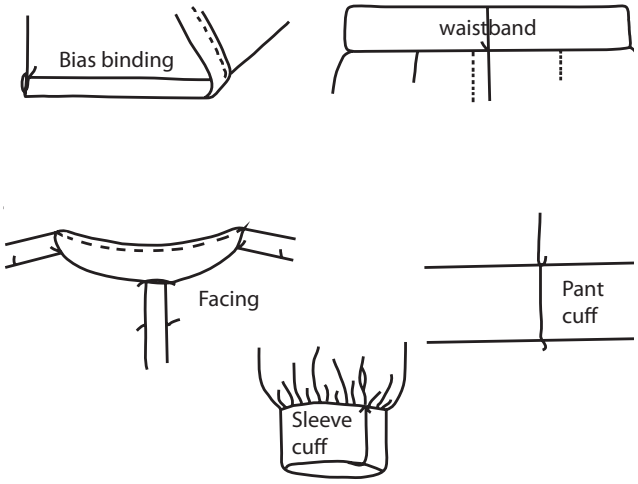


IDEA 6. STITCH-IN-DITCH

To anchor facings in place, stitch in the ditch by machine.

1. Using either the regular presser foot or zipper foot, machine stitch on right side of garment through seam or previous stitching for 1 in. or more.

2. Pull thread to wrong side and tie.



Note: Use this technique to finish bias and Hong Kong bindings, rolled collars, ribbings, and finished bound buttonholes. Stitch-in-ditch can also be used to finish waistbands, sleeve cuffs, and lined yokes. For a finished edge, either cut edge of underside on the selvage, or zig-zag or serge the raw edge.

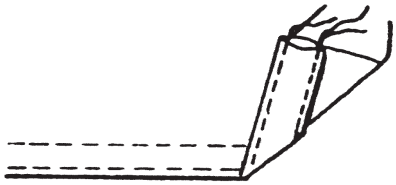
IDEA 7. NARROW DOUBLE TOPSTITCHED HEM

For Wovens:

1. Press hem to inside on marked hemline. Trim to 5/8 in. width.

2. Fold raw edge under 1/8 in. and press.

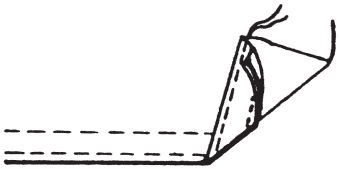
3. On right side, machine topstitch close to the fold of hem. Stitch again, catching upper edge of hem. Rows of stitching should be parallel.



For Knits:

1. Press hem to inside on marked hemline. Trim to 1/2 in. width.

2. Omit 1/8-in. turn-under, and stitch as directed in "wovens."

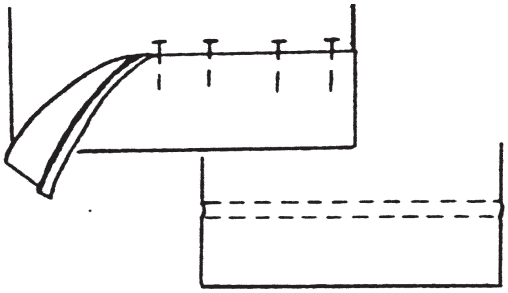


Note: Use on knits and light- to medium-weight wovens. It may be used on knits to finish necklines and armholes. When topstitching, use a stitch length slightly longer than regular stitching.

IDEA 8. TOPSTITCHED HEM

1. Press hem on marked hemline. Trim to 1 1/4-in. width.

2. Fold raw edge under 1/4 in., then press.



3. Machine stitch one row of topstitching close to upper edge of hem.

4. Stitch a second row of topstitching 1/4 in. below the first.

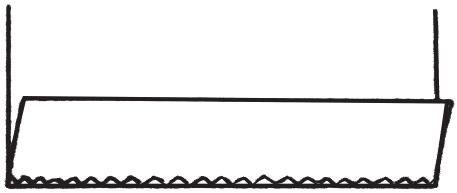
Note: Use on light- to medium-weight wovens and knits. This hem has a quilted or trapunto look because the raw edge is not caught in the second row of stitching.

IDEA 9. SATIN-EDGE HEM

1. Press hem to inside on hemline marking.

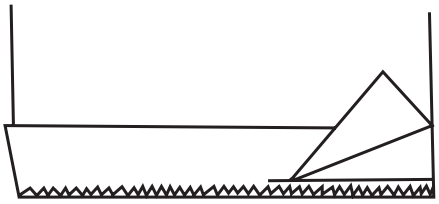
2. Set zig-zag machine for a wide, close zig-zag or set serge stitch for a rolled hem stitch. Stitch a row of stitches along folded edge of the hem.

3. If zig-zagging, stitch a second row of stitches over the first row.



4. Press with a damp pressing cloth to remove ripples.

5. Trim away hem allowance on wrong side of fabric. Cut close to—but not through—stitching.



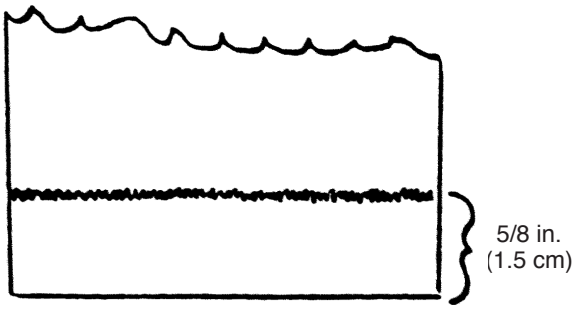
Note: Suitable for double knits, medium-weight wovens, and some single knits. Make a test sample on fabric before using on garment.

IDEA 10. ZIG-ZAG OR SERGE HEM

1. Mark hem. Trim hem allowance to 5/8 in. Fold and press along hemline. Stabilize hem by sewing a line of stitches along hem fold line.

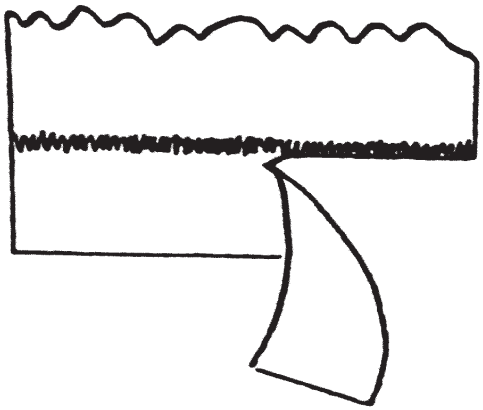
2. Set zig-zag stitch about 1/8 in. wide and close together. Set serge stitch for a wide, close stitch.

3. Stitch on fold line of hem (5/8 in. away from raw edge) around the hem of the garment.



4. Press with a damp pressing cloth to remove ripples.

5. If zig-zagged, trim away hem allowance as close to the stitches as possible. Do not cut stitches.



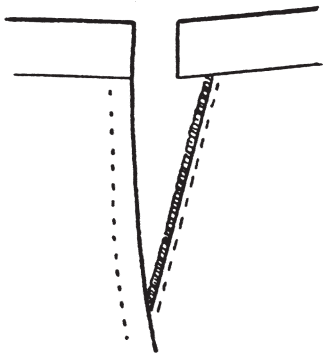
Note: Use on stretchable knits, such as jersey and double knits.

IDEA 11. MACHINE "HAND-PICKED" ZIPPER

1. Finish zipper as for a lapped application, but do not topstitch on the overlap side.

2. From the wrong side, fold the zipper tape and seam allowance under as you would do when blind hemming by machine.

3. Use the blind hem stitch or simply stitch 4 or 5 stitches along edge, then pivot to stitch into the fold. Stitch from bottom of zipper to top.



Note: Can be used when the look of a hand-picked zipper is desired, but avoid using in a garment that fits snugly.

IDEA 12. CENTER-LAPPED ZIPPER

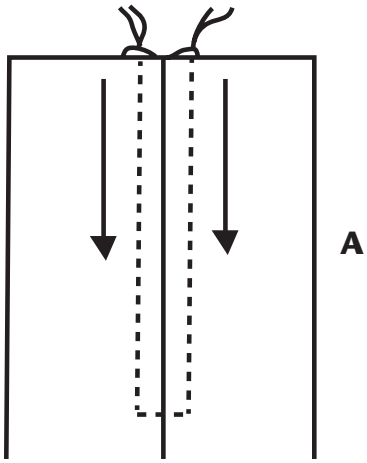
1. Prepare the opening by machine-basting (longest stitch) on seamline as directed on pattern or zipper instructions. Make another row of machine basting about 1/16 in. or less (just a "hair") on the garment side of the first row of stitching.

2. Press seam open.

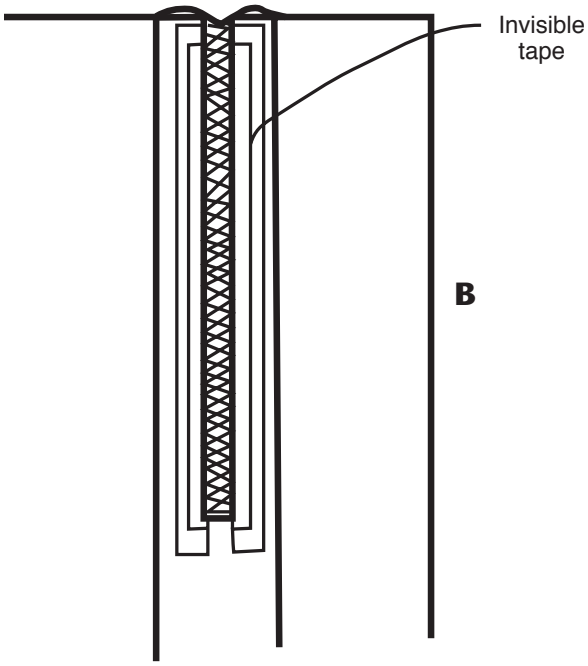
3. Cut a piece of 1/2-in. wide cellophane or sewing tape the length of the zipper opening.

4. On the right side of the garment, center the tape over the basted zipper opening. Be sure it is centered so 1/4 in. is allowed on each side of the seam and the bottom of the tape comes to the bottom of the opening.

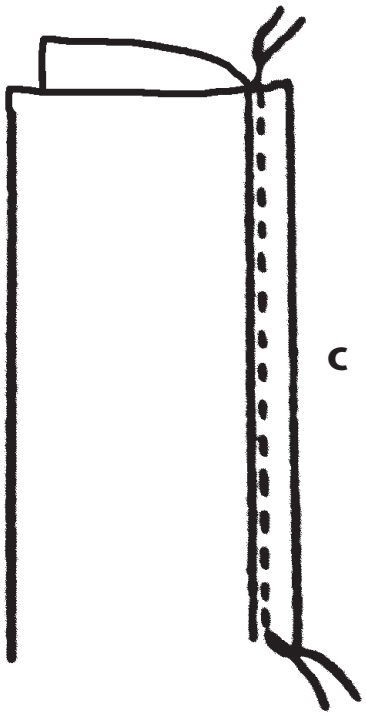
5. Topstitch zipper opening by machine-stitching close to edge of tape. Start at the top of one side, pivot and stitch across bottom of tape. Then, stitch from the top of the other side to the bottom, pivot and stitch across. Remove tape and press (A).



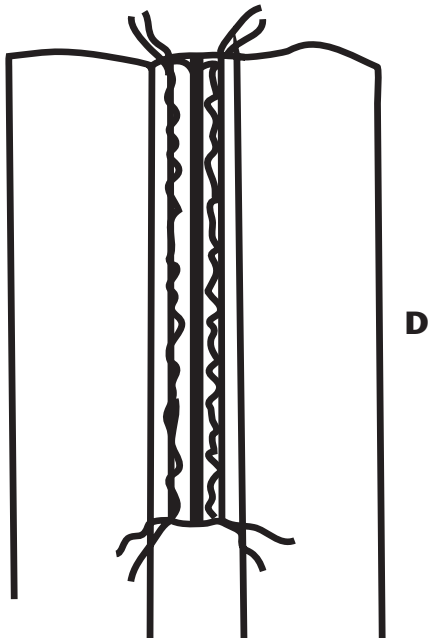
6. On wrong side, center zipper on seam allowance. Tape in place using zipper basting tape or invisible cellophane tape (B).



7. Fold back the garment side. Using a zipper foot, stitch one side of zipper tape to seam allowance as close to the topstitching line as possible (C). Stitch from bottom to top. Change position of zipper foot and stitch other side of zipper tape to seam allowance.



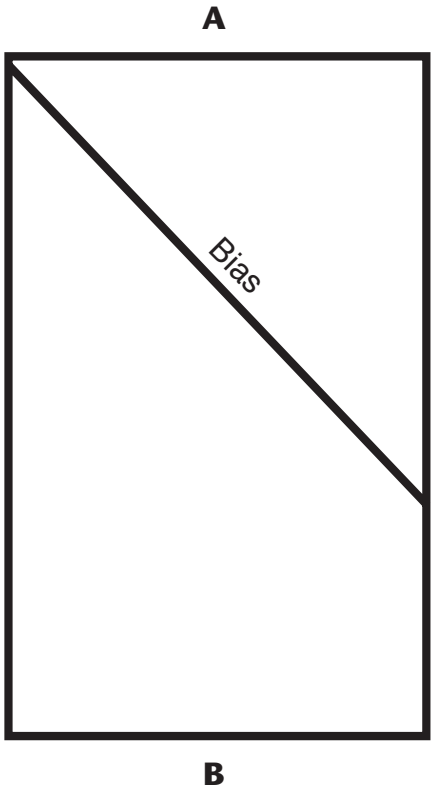
8. Press. Remove tape and basting stitches (D).



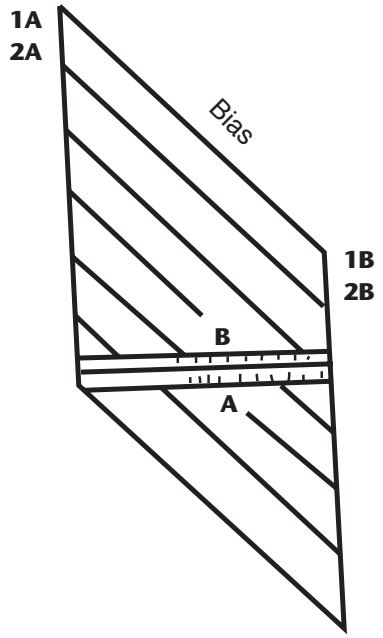
Note: Use for neckline, center back skirt, or pants zippers.

IDEA 13. CONTINUOUS BIAS

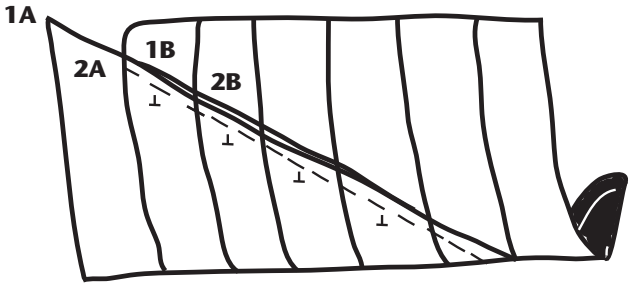
1. On a square or rectangle of fabric, mark the bias as shown. Cut line.



2. With right sides together, join straight edges A and B with narrow seam. Press seam open and mark bias as shown indicating how wide the bias is to be.



3. Seam as shown to form a tube. Match 1B to 2A so that one width of bias extends at each end of tube.



4. Cut a continuous strip, using lines marked as guide.

5. Apply bias as design of project requires.

IDEA 14. LINING POCKETS

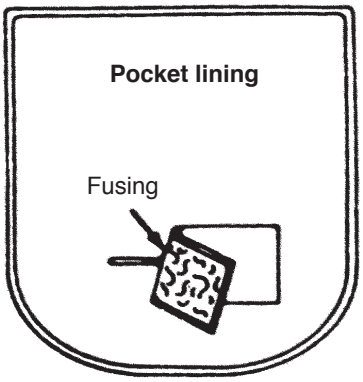
For pockets lined to the edge.

1. Cut out pocket and lining. Trim lining 1/16 in. smaller on all edges (seam will then roll to the wrong side).

2. With right sides together, pin lining to pocket, all edges even. Stitch completely around pocket.

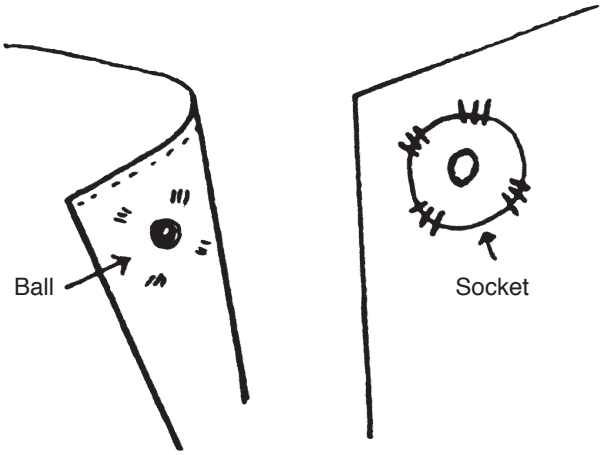
3. Cut a slit in lining near bottom. Turn pocket right side out and press.

4. Cut a patch of lining fabric slightly longer than slit; cut fusing material the same size. Fuse patch over slit. If pocket is decorative and lining does not ravel, there is no need to patch the slit.

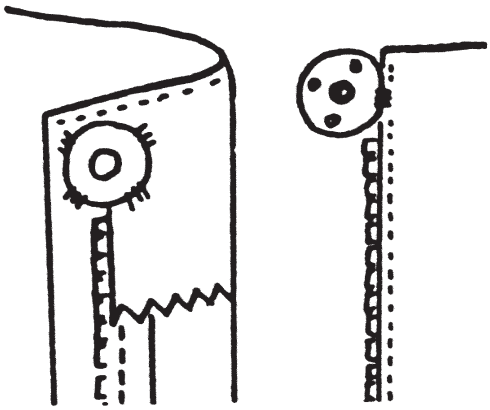


IDEA 15. FASTENER TRICKS

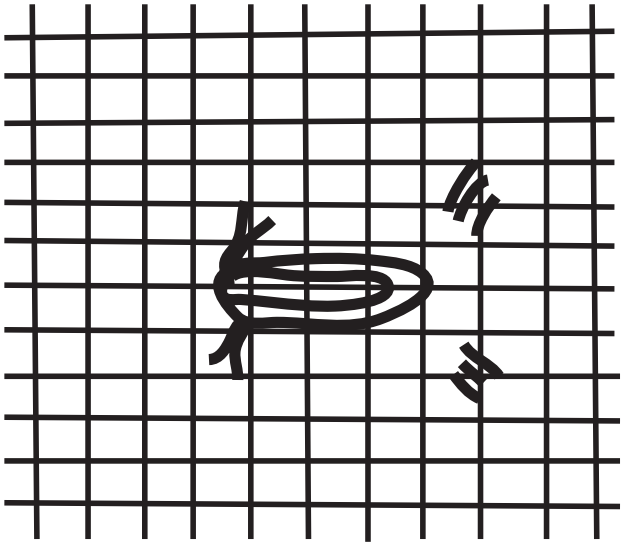
1. **Sunken Snap**: Instead of covering the ball half of the snap with fabric, it can be placed under the facing. The snap head is forced through the fabric and stitched in place. The socket half of the snap can be covered or left uncovered.



2. **Hanging Snap:** A hanging snap can be used instead of a hook and eye, but only in a place that doesn't receive a great deal of strain (necklines primarily). The socket half is attached to the overlap of the opening in the same way a regular snap is attached. The ball half is attached to the underlap of the opening through one hole only.

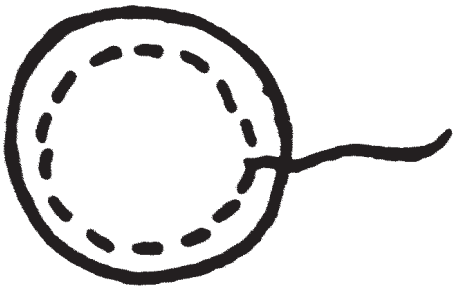


3. **Hidden Hook**: The position of the hook is determined and marked. The hook is forced through the fabric from the wrong side of the facing. If the fabric is very tightly woven, one or two threads can be clipped to make a small hole for the hook. After it is in position, it is stitched in place at the loop ends and at the bill end where it comes through the fabric. Use a thread loop with a "hidden hook" for an inconspicuous fastener.

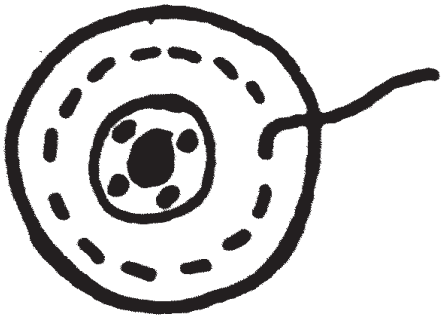


4. **Covered Snap**: Use lightweight, firmly woven fabric, such as batiste, sheath lining, acetate sheath lining, or lining fabric that matches the fashion fabric.

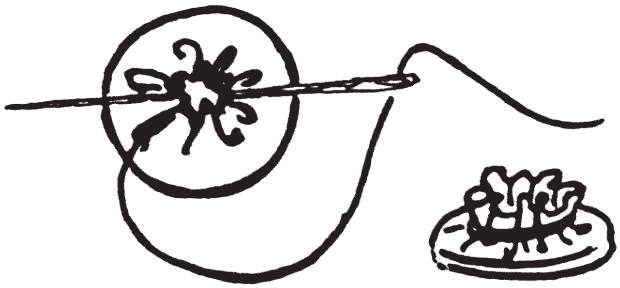
   a) Cut two circles of fabric (for each half snap) 1/4 to 1/2 in. larger than the size of the snap.



   b) Using two thicknesses of fabric, place small hand-basting stitches 1/8 to 1/4 in. from raw edge, leaving one end of thread free.



   c) Place half of snap face down on fabric.



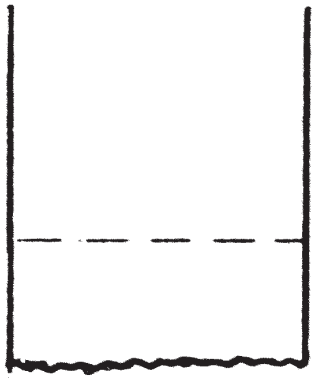
   d) Pull basting thread tightly around each circle and secure with several stitches.

   e) Sew snap to garment through the holes in snap.

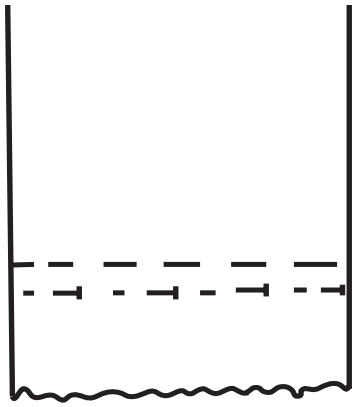
   f) Snapping the snap together will bring the knob of snap through fabric.

IDEA 16. MOCK CUFF

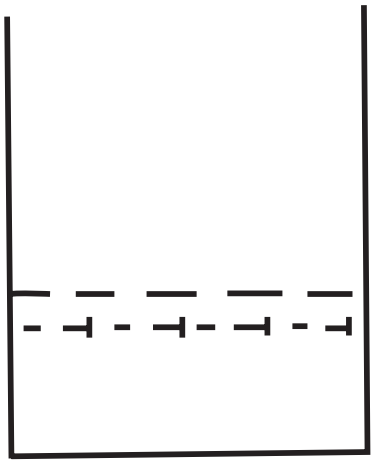
1. Mark hem at desired length.



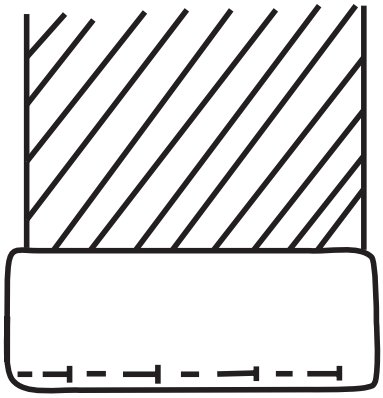
2. Measure 1 in. below hem marking and mark with pins.



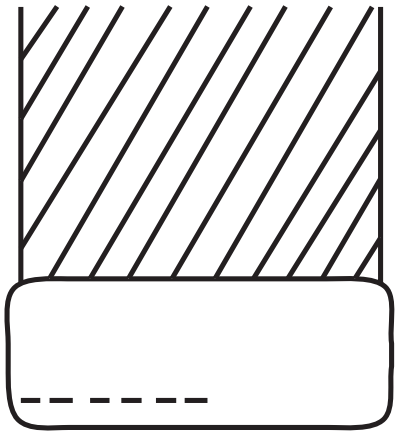
3. Measure hem allowance from row of pins and trim off excess. The hem allowance should be the width planned for the cuff.



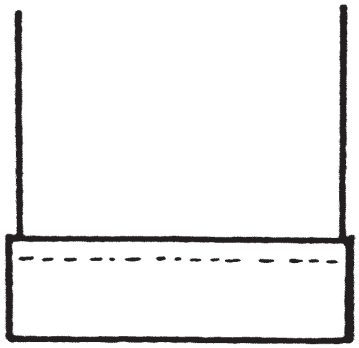
4. Turn hem allowance up along row of pins and baste to sleeve or pant leg at top of hem.



5. Turn hem to wrong side of fabric so that top of hem is in the fold and stitch around sleeve or leg 1/2 in. from fold to form a tuck.

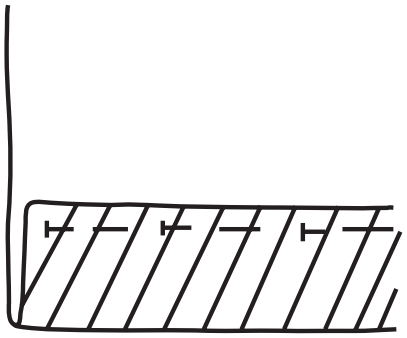


6. Turn hem down and press so tuck turns up.

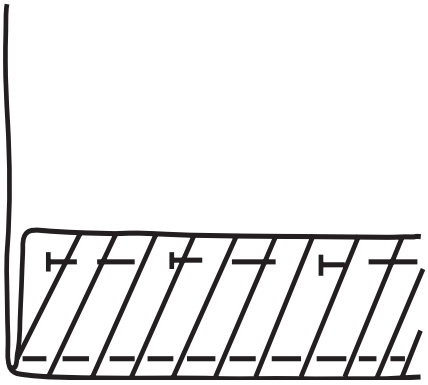


IDEA 17. MOCK EDGE TRIM HEM

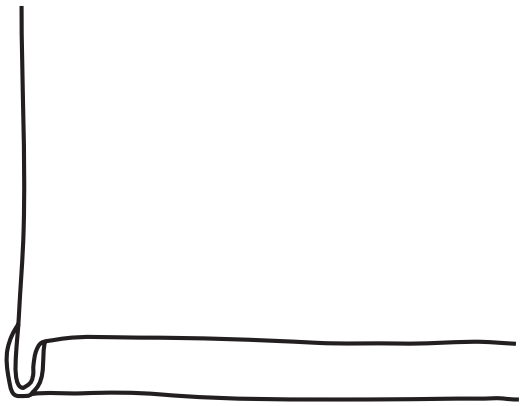
1. Fold the hem allowance up against the right side of the fabric and pin in place.



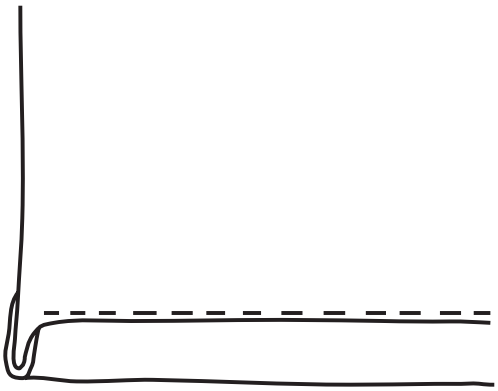
2. Sew a line of stitching 1/2 in. from the fold to form a tuck.



3. Unpin the hem allowance and fold the hem down over the tuck and to the wrong side of the fabric. Press hem in place.



4. Stitch the hem in place from the right side of the fabric by "stitching in the ditch."



5. Trim any excess hem allowance close to the stitching line on the inside.

Note: This finish looks like separate trim, but is made using the hem allowance. It works very nicely on hems that do not have much flare. Allow a 2-in. hem allowance for this finish.

FOR OTHER IDEAS

More "quickie" sewing ideas can be found in other NMSU Extension clothing publications. You may obtain copies from your local Cooperative Extension office (http://aces.nmsu.edu/county/) or online at http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_c/.

Original author: *Susan Wright, Extension Consumer Education and Health Specialist.*

Wendy Hamilton *is an Extension Grants and Contracts Development Specialist at NMSU, providing expertise and guidance in writing program grants and project contracts for the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. She has worked at four land-grant universities, and has a diverse background in textiles and clothing, adult education, 4-H youth-at-risk, horticulture, evaluation, and grant writing.*

Contents of publications may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. All other rights reserved. For permission to use publications for other purposes, contact pubs@nmsu.edu or the authors listed on the publication.

New Mexico State University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and educator. NMSU and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

Revised February 2015 **Las Cruces, NM**