Sewing Glossary

**Alteration:** A change made to a completed garment to adjust the fit.

**Appliqué:** A cutout decoration fastened to a larger piece of material.

**Backstitch:** To stitch in reverse; usually over the beginning and end of a seam to prevent the stitches from becoming loose and fabric pulling apart.

**Bar-Tack:** A reinforcement tack used at points of strain. Bar tacks can be made by hand or machine.

**Baste:** To sew with long loose stitches in order to hold something in place temporarily during construction and fitting.

**Batting:** A lightweight material used as layered filler between finished fabric pieces to give fullness or loft.

**Bias:** A line diagonal to the grain of a fabric; a line at a 45 degree angle to the selvage often utilized in the cutting of garments for smoother fit.

**Bias Tape or Binding:** Long strips of fabric cut on the bias, used to envelop the raw edge of a hem or seam. It can be bought prepackaged or made from fabric scraps. Bias tape is folded on the two lengthwise edges (sometimes edges are double folded).

**Blind Hem:** A stitching technique used for joining fabric together so that the seam is invisible from the right side of the fabric.

**Clipping:** A technique that involves cutting slits into the seam allowance of outward curves to permit the edges of the seam to spread and lie smooth. Take great care not to cut into the seam stitching.
Crosswise Grain: Grain usually running horizontally, perpendicular to the selvage and has more give.

Dart: A triangular shape sewn onto a flat piece of fabric, allowing the fabric to conform to the contours of the body.

Dressform: A dressmaker’s dummy or adjustable mannequin.

Facing: A piece of fabric that is used to finish the un-hemmed or unfinished edges of a garment.

Fabric Stretch Gauge: The guide printed on the back of the pattern envelope to gauge the appropriate fabric stretch required for the garment design to fit properly.

Fabric Width: The measurement of the fabric from selvage to selvage. Fabrics come in varying widths, however, there are two typical fabric width classifications: 45” (115cm) and 60” (152cm).

Fold: The edge formed by doubling the fabric when the selvage edges meet or are parallel.

Gathering: A long running stitch that is used to pull fabric together to create a smaller surface area of fabric. Applications of the gathering stitch can be found at the waistline, cuffs, yoke, and in the construction of ruffles.

Grading: A technique that involves cutting seam allowances to different widths. Usually seams are graded when they form an edge or are enclosed.

Grain (Grain-line): Indicates the direction of the yarn in fabric. Lengthwise grain usually runs vertically from shoulder to hem and parallels the selvage. Crosswise grain usually runs horizontally on garment, perpendicular to selvage and has more give.

Grain Line Arrows: These mark the direction of the grain-line on patterns to indicate where on the fabric in relation to the grain-line the pattern piece should be placed.

Gusset: A small piece of fabric, often diamond or triangular shaped, that is inserted into a slashed opening to provide ease and comfortable fit. They are often used in Kimono sleeves.

Hem: A border of a cloth article doubled back and stitched down

Inseam: The seam on the inside of the leg of a garment.

Interfacing: A layer of fabric that supports, shapes, and stabilizes many areas and edges of a garment; especially collars, cuffs, waistbands, plackets and flaps.

  Woven: Interfacing that has a grain line (pattern piece should be laid on grain)
  Non-woven: Interfacing that has no grain line (pattern piece may be laid out in any direction)
  Fusible: Contains a glue-like, heat sensitive surface on one side and is ironed on rather than sewn (can be woven or non-woven)
  Non-fusible: Sewn into finished product (can be woven or non-woven)
**Layout:** The chart provided in the pattern instruction showing the appropriate placement of pattern pieces on the fabric for cutting.

**Lengthwise Grain:** Grain usually running vertically from shoulder to hem and parallels the selvage.

**Lining:** A layer of fabric, sewn inside coats, jackets, dresses, skirts and pants. Most often made from a relatively slippery fabric, it covers construction details and makes garments easier to put on and take off.

**Marking:** Transferring the various sewing construction symbols from the paper pattern pieces to the fabric.

**Marking Pen:** Specifically used for marking darts, dots, pockets placements, etc. on fabric; can be water soluble (washes out with water) or disappearing (fades over time).

**Mitering:** The diagonal joining of two edges at a corner, used to finish corners at garment edges. The join may be stitched or simply folded in place.

**Needles:** Depending on the sewing project and technique used, various sizes of sewing needles are used. Needles vary in thickness, point shape, length, and size of the needle eye. A numbering system is used to designate the size and function of the needle. There are two systems for sewing machine needles: American and European. The American system ranges from seven to 18, and the European system ranges from 60 to 110. For sewing machines, the lower the number the finer the needle; the higher the number the heavier the needle. For hand sewing, the numbers range from one to ten (classified as embroidery needles). The smaller the number, the heavier the needle.

**Notching:** A technique that involves cutting wedges from the seam allowance of the inward curve. The space opened up by the removal of the fabric wedges lets the edge of the seam draw in.

**Notions:** Any items other than a pattern and fabric that are used to complete sewing projects such as pins, thread, buttons, zippers, etc.

**Outlet:** Extra fabric allowance in pants, which is usually added to the center back seam and the top front inseam.

**Overtacking:** Three or four hand stitches in the same spot, used to hold two pieces of fabric together (can be permanent or temporary).

**Piping:** Made out of bias strips that are folded and stitched. The strips can be of any type of material, from light fabric to leather. Piping is flat, while cording is filled with a length of cable cord and therefore rounded. Both are used to decorate garments, especially the edges of pockets and for buttonholes.

**Pinking Shears:** Shears with a saw-toothed inner edge on the blades for making a zigzag cut.

**Preshrinking:** The pre-washing (and drying) of washable fabric before sewing to avoid shrinkage of the finished garment.
**Pressing:** The act of using an iron to heat set fabric flat (typically at the seam allowance).

**Pressing Cloth:** A cloth that goes between the garment and the iron when pressing to prevent heat damage to the garment. Pressing cloths can be purchased or a scrap of fabric can be substituted (100% cotton preferred).

**Right Side:** The outside or topside of fabric; it is usually softer or smoother.

**Rotary Cutter:** A fabric-cutting tool that has a sharp round blade attached to a handle; should be used with an appropriate cutting mat. This tool can be used to cut out pattern pieces from fabric, or with a straight edge ruler to ensure a straight and even cut.

**Ruffle:** A strip of fabric cut or handled in such a way as to create fullness.

** Seam:** The joining of two pieces of fabric by sewing.

**Seam Allowance:** The amount of fabric between the stitching or seam line and the fabric edge.

**Seam Ripper:** A tool with a small curved blade that has a sharp point on one end and a plastic tip on the other end that is used to remove stitches.

**Selvedge:** A firmly woven strip formed along each lengthwise edge of finished fabric. It is intended to be cut off and discarded.

**Shirring:** Multiple rows of gathering, used as a decorative way of controlling fullness in fabric over a comparatively wide span.

**Smocking:** Fabric folds decoratively stitched together at regular intervals to create a patterned effect.

**Straightening Fabric Ends:** The first step taken with every fabric so that it can be folded evenly and also checked for grain alignment. It is done either by tearing, drawing a thread, or cutting the fabric on a prominent line. The method chosen depends on the type of fabric being straightened.

**Tension (Stitch):** Each sewing machine has a top thread tension control; some have a bobbin tension control. Both controls increase or decrease the overall pressure given to top and bottom threads. If there is too much tension (pressure) in the thread, the result is not enough thread and vice versa. When there is not enough thread for the seam, a puckering effect occurs. A weak seam results from too little tension (pressure).

**Topstitch:** Machine stitches done from the right side of a garment for either a decorative effect or for functional reasons, or sometimes for both at the same time. Topstitching gives a garment a more tailored look.

**Tracing:** Transferring pattern notations onto the fabric before it is cut, using dressmaker’s tracing paper and a tracing wheel.

**Trimming:** A technique that involves cutting away some of the seam allowances when the full width of the seam allowances interfere with the fit or with further garment construction.
Understitching: A line of straight stitching, either by hand or machine, applied along certain seam lines such as neckline facing seams. Its purpose is to keep the facing and seam allowances laying flat in a particular direction.

Warp: The lengthwise yarns on a loom also known as the lengthwise grain.

Weft: The crosswise yarns on a loom also known as the crosswise grain.

Wrong Side: The inside or back side of fabric; usually rougher or less finished.

Yoke: A shaped panel of fabric that is topstitched onto or inserted into a garment for decoration or shaping purposes.

References


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