

2001

# Sewing With Serger Basics

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## Recommended Citation

Memmott, Margie P., "Sewing With Serger Basics" (2001). *All Archived Publications*. Paper 456.  
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# SEWING WITH SERGER

## BASICS

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February 2001

FL-501

A serger is an overlock machine that trims, stitches and overcasts all at once to save time and produce professional finishes. The serger is used in conjunction with a conventional sewing machine to create a wide variety of products. Here are some basic guidelines and helpful hints when sewing with a serger.

### NEEDLES

- Change needle when stitches skip, or when needle is dull, bent or burred.
- When properly inserted, needle heights are not the same (this is normal).
- Use the same size needles at the same time.
- Size 80 needles are recommended for most serger sewing (70, 90 are fine, but don't use 100).
- Needles to use:
  - Sharp** for wovens
  - Ballpoint** for knits and interlocks
  - Universal** only when sewing a woven to a knit
  - Stretch** for spandex, super stretchy knits and fleece
  - Leather** for upholstery and leather

### THREAD

- Use a long staple thread to help prevent frequent thread breaks or knot formation in front of the needle.
- For sergers, choose thread with as little lint build-up and slubbing as possible.

### THREADING THE SERGER

- Needle threads are always threaded last.
- When a looper thread breaks, pull the thread out of the eyes of the needles, re-thread the loopers, and then re-thread the needles.
- After serger is threaded, use a double layer of fabric and sew a trial run to check for proper stitch formation and tension.
- Decorative or heavier thread can only be used in the loopers and NOT in the needles.
- Use nets on looper thread cones of slippery decorative thread.
- To change thread, either:
  1. Cut the old thread just above the spool and tie to the new thread with a small knot. Pull thread through until the knot comes to the eye of the needle. Cut the knot off and thread new color through needle. Do for both needles.
  - Or 2. Tie small knot to join old and new thread, turn all tension discs to 0 (zero tension = loose) and pull threads through, then return all tension discs to proper settings. Knots in thread will usually NOT go through eyes of needles.

### TENSION

- For proper stitch formation, check and make sure threads are engaged in tension discs.
- Turn discs to the left for less tension and to the right for more tension (Right = tight, Left = loose).
- When all else fails, re-thread the serger.

## STABILIZING SEAMS

- Use twill tape especially in shoulder seams.
- Use clear elastic (1/4" or 1/2") for stretch knits such as tricot. The tape or elastic should be cut the same length as the original seam.

## BEGINNING SEAMS

- Sew two stitches onto fabric. With needles down, lift pressure foot and pull gently on tail of thread to clear stitch finger. Pull thread chain in front of needles, lower foot, oversew chain 1", and pull chain tail in front of blade and cut.
- Or tie a knot in end of chain.
- Or thread chain ends through eye of a tapestry needle, then tunnel the needle and thread back along the seam allowance between the fabric and the stitches.

## ENDING SEAMS

- Sew one or two stitches off end of seam. Lift pressure foot, gently pull fabric back to pull stitches off stitch finger. Turn fabric over and oversew last 1" or 2" (do not cut previous stitches).
- Or tie knot in end of chain.
- Or thread chain ends through eye of tapestry needle, then tunnel back along the seam allowance between the fabric and the stitches.

## OUTSIDE CORNERS

- Sew one or two stitches off the edge of fabric. With needles and pressure foot up, gently pull fabric straight back off stitch finger. Turn fabric in order that needles will enter at edge of fabric. Gently pull on needle threads above tension guides to pick up any extra slack. Lower pressure foot and sew.

## INSIDE CORNERS

- Sew until blade touches the corner, tuck the fabric on the left close to the needles in order that second edge is straight and alongside the blade. Sew the second edge. If corners pucker, use scissors to clip the inside corner to the seam allowance.
- Remember to clip fabric first to sew into corners or on inside curves, as needed.

## ROLLED HEMS

- Follow serger manual directions for rolled hem preparation.
- Do not use a rolled hem on fabrics that are thick, loosely woven, dotted swiss or fabrics with paint.
- If threads of fabric tend to poke out, increase the knife cutting width to reduce the amount of fabric cut from the edge.
- To change bottom knife position, turn hand wheel until needles are in the upper position and move upper blade out of the way.

## HELPFUL HINTS

- Use thumb to slightly raise the front of pressure foot to insert fabric.
- To use conventional spool of thread, place it on the spool pin with the notched edge down and use a spool cap so thread will not get caught in thread spool notch.
- To pin fabric, place pins parallel to the edge of the fabric and into the garment about 3" from the edge to avoid damage to cutting knives.
- NEVER SERGE OVER PINS! Knives may break and serger's timing may be impaired.
- To remove serged seams, run seam ripper along top edge of fabric, under looper threads, and cut them the desired distance. To remove the chain part of stitch, work from the underneath side of the serged stitches, locate the looper thread, pull it and the chain will come right out.
- Remove serger lint with a paint brush, canned air, air compressor, etc.
- Have fun and do not be afraid to experiment!

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice-President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. (EP/DF/02-2000)

