



Sewing SKILL STANDARDS

Sewing is a creative skill. It can be an art with time, skill perfection, and the ability to make wise decisions. The following list of standards is designed to help evaluate and determine suitable sewing techniques. There is rarely only one method of doing something. Many times, however, there is a best way. The "best" sewing technique/method should *always* be determined by the *fabric being used* and the *specific garment situation*.

FABRIC COORDINATION & SELECTION

Fabric(s) selected for garment construction should:

- * be suited to the pattern design (read pattern envelope for information concerning one-way designs, napped fabrics, knits, etc.; inexperienced individuals should follow recommended fabrics listed on the pattern envelope)
- * have the same care characteristics (fabrics, trims and supportive fabrics should all be consistent in terms of care technique) or an easy method of removal at time of laundering/dry-cleaning
- * be flattering to the personal characteristics of the individual
- * coordinate with one another in terms of design, color, weight, and texture
- * appear to have balanced grain (woven fabrics--lengthwise and crosswise threads will be at right angles)

FABRIC PREPARATION

Fabrics properly prepared for garment construction should be:

- * Preshrunk (laundered or dry-cleaned) and/or prewashed according to recommended method of care.
- * Thread perfect--lengthwise and crosswise threads at right angles to one another; pull thread on woven fabrics and cut along line formed or cut along a wale or course of knit fabric.
- * Made "piece perfect"--lengthwise and crosswise ends at right angles if at all possible.

STITCHING

By HAND: A well-made hand stitch will:

- * Be composed of a thread type, weight/thickness and color suitable and appropriate to the situation for which it is used. Silk thread is the easiest to use and is especially good for basting as it does not leave indentations when pressed. Cotton, cotton/polyester, polyester and rayon sewing machine thread is acceptable. Buttonhole twist is used for hand-worked buttonholes. Heavier threads, such as embroidery, can be used for decorative stitching (saddle-stitching, etc.).



- Use white or light-colored thread when basting as dark colors can leave permanent marks.
 - Use same color, or as close as possible in color, when permanent stitching.
- * Have stitch formation which is appropriate to the fabric and garment situation for which it is used--see handout **Hand Stitches** for specific information.
 - * Have thread ends appropriately secured at the beginning and ending of the stitching. If a knot is used: in permanent stitching it should be out of sight against an inside layer of fabric; in basting, the knot can be visible. If backstitching is used: thread should be secure with thread ends hidden between layers of fabric. Area where backstitching is done should be neat.
 - * Use single or double thread appropriate to the situation--see handout **Hand Stitches** for specific information. Generally speaking, a double thread is used when hand stitching except when basting.
 - * Be neat and well formed, appropriately spaced and secured with no thread-ends showing or unsightly thread "mess" visible.

By MACHINE: A well-made machine stitch will:

- * Have thread type, needle size and type appropriate to the fabric and situation for which it is used. Generally speaking, the finer the fabric, the finer the needle and thread. Thread expands to, or takes up the entire area created by the needle; there are no excessive holes created by the needle.
- * Be a controlled, consistent length appropriate to the fabric and situation for which it is used. As a general rule, the heavier the fabric, the longer the stitch; the lighter weight the fabric, the shorter the stitch. Within this rule adjustments are made according to fabric texture and structure.
- * Have top and bottom threads equally balanced--look the same on both sides of the fabric--appropriate thread tension. Stitching is not puckered on either side.
- * Have stitching is even in length and appropriate to the fabric and stitching situation.
- * Be the type of stitching (regular sewing machine or overcast/serger) or stitch pattern (standard or decorative) appropriate to the fabric and situation for which it is used.
- * Be appropriately secured at the beginning and end of the line of stitching (backstitched, threads tied and clipped).
- * Be spaced an appropriate distance from the edge of the fabric according to the function of the stitching.
- * Be neat, straight and fits the purpose for which it was done (functional or decorative).

PRESSING

Evidence of good pressing:

- * The original texture of the fabric is maintained.
- * No shine or press marks show on right side of fabric.
- * No wrinkles or crinkle areas appear on smooth-surfaced fabric.

- * Seams and darts pressed smoothly on the stitching line. Fabric does not fold over the stitching line or stitching line or look bubbled. Edges of seam allowances and fold edges of darts do not form ridges on the right side of the garment.
- * No water-spot or steam marks are visible.
- * Helps to create and maintain the proper shape and curve to the garment as well as the various garment segments (collar, sleeve, etc.).
- * Provides a nice, neat finish to the inside and outside of the garment.

SEAMS

A well-constructed seam should be:

- * Smooth and even in appearance on inside and outside of garment. Machine tension, stitch length and presser foot pressure is properly adjusted to suit the fabric and thread.
- * Even in width throughout.
- * Pressed open or according to type of seam and/or how it will be used in garment construction.
- * Stitched with thread appropriate to fabric type, fiber content, and color. (Thread color should match or be slightly darker than fabric.)

SEAM FINISHES

A well-constructed seam finish/edge finish should:

- * Be neat and smooth in appearance; does not add bulk.
- * Be appropriate to the fabric.
- * Protect area and/or prevents edge from raveling/stretching.
- * Not be visible from the right side of the garment.

DARTS, EASE, GATHERS, PLEATS, SHIRRING, TUCKS

A well-constructed fitting dart should:

- * Be directed toward the body curve.
- * Usually end 1/2 to 1-inch from the fullest part of the body curve.
- * Be tapered so it is smooth and free of puckers.
- * Be even and smooth in appearance.
- * Be pressed before being crossed by another line of stitching, and after the garment has been fitted. Uncut horizontal darts are pressed down; uncut vertical darts so that the fold is toward the center front or center back.
- * Have threads secured at both ends by tying a knot, lock stitching or backstitching (use only on medium to heavy fabric or in seamline).

Well-constructed gathers, pleats and tucks should:

- * Be evenly distributed and/or in accordance with pattern directions.

- * Be even and smooth in appearance.
- * Pleats have ease for comfort but appear as a straight silhouette.
- * Tucks provide relaxed but defined fullness. They may be used in place of gathers or fitting darts.

INTERFACING

A suitable, well-applied interfacing:

- * Is appropriate to the fashion fabric in terms fiber content/care, construction type (knit, woven, non-woven) and manner applied (sew-in vs. fusible). Interfacing fabrics can range from commercially designed interfacing fabric to self-fabric.
- * Should be, or have, the same "grain" or "give" as the fashion fabric with which it is used.
- * Should coordinate in color as closely as possible. Use light color with light-colored fashion fabrics, dark with dark.
- * Provides the appropriate support or reinforcement needed to improve shape of garment or area. Interfacing is used in the appropriate locations in a garment.
- * Does not alter color or hand of fashion fabric. If an appropriate weight cannot be found, it is best to go lighter than heavier.
- * Appears flat and smooth; no bubbles, wrinkles, or folds.
- * Should not be visible or noticeable from the outside/right side of the garment.
- * May vary in type and weight within the same garment. Multiple types and weights of interfacing should be used depending on the area and function.

FACINGS

A well-constructed fitted facing should:

- * Fit smoothly. Neither the neckline seam nor the facing should show from the outside of the finished garment (unless it is designed to be stitched to the outside as a decorative as well as functional piece).
- * Be the same shape and grain as the edge to be faced. (It is usually 2 1/2 to 3-inches wide and even in width throughout.)
- * Be flat and smooth; free from bulk.
- * Have the outside edges appropriately finished (according to fabric type/weight) to prevent raveling.
- * Be securely held in place by understitching and tacking at seams or by top stitching. A professional looking facing will **never** be hand stitched all the way around.
- * Be interfaced to prevent stretching and sagging, to cushion the enclosed seam, reinforce area, support the facing and garment, and to provide shape.

COLLARS

A well-applied collar should:

- * Be smooth and free from wrinkles. The outer edge seam should not be visible from the right side.
- * Have smooth curves or sharp points depending on the type and style of the collar. Bulk has been properly distributed through grading/layering, notching, clipping and/or trimming.
- * Fit neckline area without unsightly gaps or wrinkles.
- * Be interfaced properly to maintain shape.
- * Understitched on outer seam edge if needed.
- * Be well pressed.

BUTTONS & BUTTONHOLES**Well-constructed buttons and buttonholes should:**

- * Be neat in appearance on the right and wrong side of the garment.

Buttons should:

- * Fit the purpose to which they are intended--functional or decorative.
- * Be securely fastened with double thread and neat stitches.
- * Have a shank (thread or as part of button) to accommodate the thickness of the fabric layers.
- * Be reinforced, according to use (heavy-duty vs. moderate) and fabric type, with interfacing and/or another button.
- * Be spaced in good proportion between top and bottom opening and in relation to the other buttons.
- * Be placed in relation to the buttonhole on the center line or lap line. Placket should be smooth and flat; no gaping or pulling when buttons are secured in buttonholes.
- * Be the appropriate size and style for garment design and fabric.

Buttonholes should be:

- * Made with the grain of the fabric, unless a bias cut garment or unusual design dictates otherwise.
- * An equal distance apart, unless spaced for special design effects.
- * An even distance from the garment edge and in conjunction with center line or lap line.
- * Sized in relation to the button size and thickness.
- * Applied to an area which has been properly interfaced.
- * The same length and width when the same size/shape button has been used.
- * Spaced according to the size of the button and garment design/function. Buttons and buttonholes should hold garment securely closed without strain or stress.
- * Positioned so that the button can be secured and will ride slightly toward the garment edge in a horizontal buttonhole and toward the top in a vertical buttonhole.
- * Neatly slashed and unsightly threads removed (a small amount of liquid seam retardant can be used on the machine-worked lips to prevent additional threads from coming out).
- * Securely fastened with threads hidden in between the layers of fabric.

HOOKS, EYES & SNAP FASTENERS

Well-constructed, well-applied fasteners should be:

- * Appropriate for the garment design and fabric being used.
- * Applied to an area which has been reinforced with interfacing.
- * Sewn in place with a single thread and buttonhole stitch, (double thread may be used when fastener is large. Stitches should be small and even for the greatest durability and neatness.
- * Secured so that stitches do not show on the right side of the garment/fabric.
- * Neat in appearance and secure.

ZIPPERS & ZIPPER PLACKETS

A well-constructed zipper placket and well-applied zipper should:

- * Be flat when closed and neat in appearance. Zipper lies smoothly with not stretching or puckering of fabric.
- * Have smooth even stitches, evenly spaced from placket edge.
- * Have stitching across the bottom of the placket, or across both ends of a dress side opening 1/8-inch beyond zipper stop.
- * Have thread ends secured and hidden in folds of fabric so they will not be caught in the zipper teeth.

Zipper placket should be:

- * Properly prepared and pressed prior to zipper insertion.
- * Sized to the zipper length. (Skirt plackets with a waistband begin just above the bar tack at the top of the zipper plus a seam allowance and end 1/8-inch below zipper teeth. Neckline plackets should be the length of the zipper, plus 1/2 inch; if the neckline is unfinished, add a seam allowance.)

Zipper should be:

- * Suited in terms of weight, size and length to the garment design, fabric being used and the opening location on the garment. Color should match or coordinate with fabric color.
- * Concealed beneath the edge of placket overlap from top to bottom.
- * Positioned to fit the placket opening. Placket opens to the end of the zipper teeth and closes at the top of the zipper. (There should not be a hole above a skirt/pant zipper placement.)

SLEEVES

A well-constructed and correctly fitted set-in sleeve should:

- * Have a smooth, rounded cap with no pleats or gathers unless they are a garment design feature.
- * Be applied so that there is ease in the underarm area as well as in the sleeve cap area.
- * Have a good armhole line resulting from straight, even stitching, and well-matched seam lines.

- * Have crosswise grain parallel to the floor, lengthwise grain perpendicular to the floor, and no diagonal wrinkles.
- * Have a seam finish appropriate to the fabric.

WAISTBAND & WAISTLINE STAY/TREATMENT

A well-constructed waistband should:

- * Be smooth, flat and free from bulk and wrinkles.
- * Be even or consistent in width according to garment style.
- * Be on grain and reinforced or interfaced to maintain shape.
- * Have under lap under the band and extending beyond placket unless pattern dictates differently; overlap even with placket, unless pattern dictates differently.
- * Have skirt or pants eased slightly onto waistband.
- * Have square corners at ends of waistband.
- * Be securely stitched with smooth, even stitching.
- * Have appropriate fasteners which are properly located and secured in place.

A well-applied waistline stay should be:

- * Used to reinforce and stabilize the seam that joins the skirt to the bodice or to a yoke/facing.
- * From firmly woven material (a narrow, grain-true strip of lightweight fabric) which has been shrunk before using.
- * Secured over and caught in the seamline, on the wrong side of the garment.
- * Securely stitched with even stitches.

CASING (a tunnel-like area made to house or enclose a drawstring or elastic)

A well-constructed casing:

- * Should be at least 1/4-inch wider than the drawstring or the elastic to be inserted.
- * Type (applied or fold down) should be appropriate for the type of and/or location on the garment.
- * Width should be even throughout.
- * Should have smooth even stitching that is neatly secured at the beginning and end. Thread ends are appropriately hidden.
- * If elastic is used, ends are neatly and securely attached.
- * Has sufficient elastic or drawstring to fit the body area comfortably and neatly.
- * May have/use a heading. Heading should be even and well stitched throughout.

An applied casing should:

- * Be made of lightweight lining fabric (self-fabric if lightweight) or ready-made bias in order to reduce excess bulk.
- * Have neat, even, turned-under ends to allow for easy insertion of elastic or drawstring.
- * Have seam edges graded (layered, beveled) to reduce bulk.

A fold down casing should:

- * Be neatly finished. Opening used for elastic insertion should be closed with appropriate stitching to match and meet other stitching used to create casing.
- * Have neat opening when a drawstring is used. A machine or handmade buttonhole is generally the opening of choice. Refer to **Buttonhole** for general information.

POCKETS**A well-applied pocket:**

- * Is neat in appearance inside and out. No loose threads.
- * Is appropriately placed for garment as well as personal body appearance and/or functional purposes.
- * May or may not be lined depending on function and type.
- * Has even and neat topstitching if appropriate.
- * Has rounded edges, square corners and/or be consistent in size, shape and design.
- * Has smooth, even and neat machine and/or hand stitching when and where appropriate.

A well-constructed pocket:

- * Has interfacing where appropriate to hold shape and/or to reinforce for functional purposes.
- * Is graded, notched, clipped, and/or trimmed to reduce bulk along enclosed areas and when multiple layers of fabric are involved.
- * Has reinforced stitching and/or interfacing at areas of stress.

HEMS**A well-made hem should:**

- * Be inconspicuous on the right side except when it is a decorative part of the garment design.
- * Be an appropriate distance from the floor.
- * Be even in width and an appropriate depth for fabric and garment design.
- * Be free from bulk by seams which fall within hem area.
- * Have fullness eased in and evenly distributed for a smooth, flat appearance.
- * Have edge appropriately finished for the type and weight of fabric and hem stitch to be used.
- * Be firmly secured with a hem stitch appropriate for the fabric and the hem edge finish.

LINING

A suitable and well-made/applied lining:

- * Fabric is compatible with garment fabric in terms of care and fiber content. It can be cleaned in the same manner as the garment.
- * Fabric can be of either woven or knit construction, yet is compatible with the garment fashion fabric. The lining fabric permits and accommodates the necessary "give" and recovery needed for body movement.
- * Fabric is firm, yet not bulky; colorfast to perspiration and body oils; absorbent or "breathable"; opaque so as not to see the inside construction of the garment.
- * Fabric color matches or coordinates with the garment fashion fabric.
- * Fabric's surface texture is smooth to permit the garment to be taken on and off the body with ease.
- * Is pre-shrunk (pre-washed or dry-cleaned prior to cutting).
- * Is completely or partially attached to the fashion garment depending on garment styling and function.
- * Pieces are cut with the same grainline as the fashion garment, or appropriate grainline, so as to maintain the shape, fit and style of the fashion garment.
- * Is cut sufficiently larger than fashion garment to provide length and width fitting ease (generally at center back, armhole, hem edge, elbow, sleeve hem, shoulder).
- * Is attached or secured to fashion garment with an inconspicuous, secure stitch--by machine and/or by hand.
- * Is smooth and neat in appearance and free from unsightly wrinkles.
- * Conceals all, or a portion of the fashion garment's inner construction.
- * Cannot be seen from the outside of the garment.

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