

# Easing and Gathering

4-H Clothing, Skill Level 3

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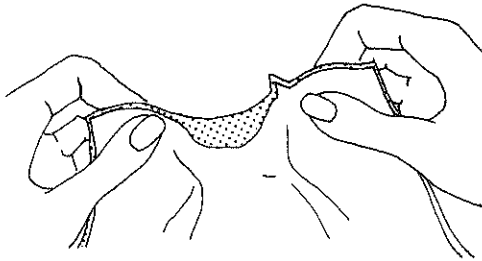


figure 1

Easing and gathering are ways of controlling extra fabric in order to join two cut edges that are not the same length. Easing controls a little extra length, while gathering controls a large amount.

## Easing

The purpose of easing is to give a small amount of shaping. Garment areas that might use easing include back shoulder seams, set-in sleeve caps, waistbands, and hems. The eased area should be smooth and unpuckered when it is completed. Fabrics with permanent press finishes, nonwoven fabrics, woven fabrics with close yarns, and some stable (nonstretchy) knit fabrics are more difficult to ease than other fabrics.

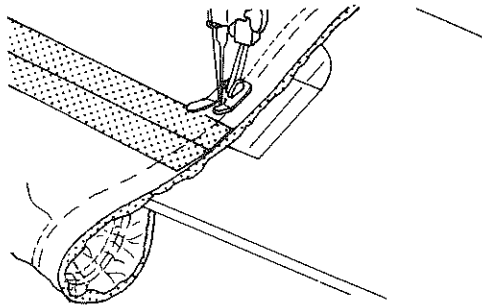


figure 2

Pattern symbols usually used to indicate "ease" are dots, circles, or notches that show you where to begin and end the area to be eased. These symbols should be transferred from the pattern to the fabric when you do the marking.

Small amounts of ease may be handled by pin-basting the long edge to the short edge. Working with the longer side facing you, pin the seam at the beginning and at the end of the area to be eased. Bend the seam slightly away from you to smooth out the ease (Figure 1). Distribute the fullness evenly and place pins up and down across the edge to hold the ease in place and keep it from bunching. Machine-stitch with the eased side down so that the feed dogs continually pull and work in the ease (Figure 2).

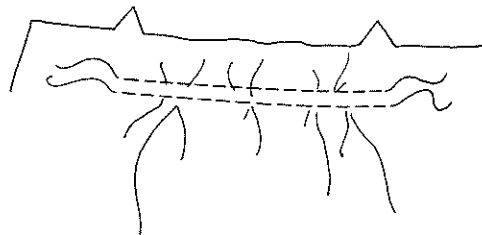


figure 3

If bending the seam away from you does not smooth out the ease, you have a moderate amount of ease that needs additional steps to control. The first step in controlling a moderate amount of ease is to make a row of machine-stitching just a thread's width inside the seamline on the seam allowance. The size of the stitch should be slightly larger than the stitch used for regular seams, but not as large as a basting stitch. For fabrics that are hard to handle, make a second row of stitching also in the seam allowance,  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch (3 mm) from the seam line (Figure 3).



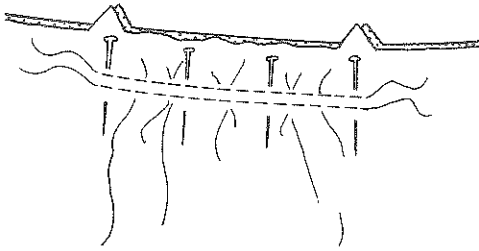


figure 4

To join the long edge to the short edge and form a seam, pin the seam at the beginning and ending of the area to be eased. Pull on one end of the easing threads until both edges match. With your finger, stroke the fullness smoothly and evenly across the area to be eased. Pin the eased area of the seam to hold the fullness and keep it from slipping (Figure 4). Hand-baste to hold it more securely if you wish.

The seam can then be machine-stitched with the eased side either up or down. Consider the amount of ease. If you think the feed dogs can stroke the ease into place, stitch with the eased side down. If you feel more comfortable watching and adjusting the ease as you stitch, stitch with the eased side up. A long needle or seam ripper may be used to guide the eased area under the presser foot when the eased side is up. Either way, remove the pins as you come to them when you stitch.

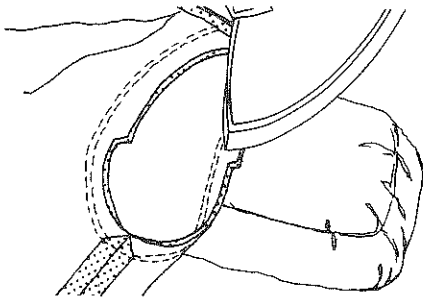


figure 5

Begin pressing a seam that has been eased by using the edge of a steam iron and stroking lightly. Stroke from the line of stitching outward onto the seam allowance and from the stitching inward over the garment. Lift and lower the iron, applying light pressure until the ease has disappeared and the area is smooth. If the area being eased is shaped, such as the cap of a sleeve, work over a pressing ham or sleeve board so it can be shaped the way it should be (Figure 5).

Press both seam allowances open or in one direction. Seam allowances such as shoulder seams are usually pressed open. Waistband seam allowances are pressed toward the waistband. Armhole seams are not pressed open, but are turned toward the sleeve by hand after the seam allowance has been pressed as stitched.

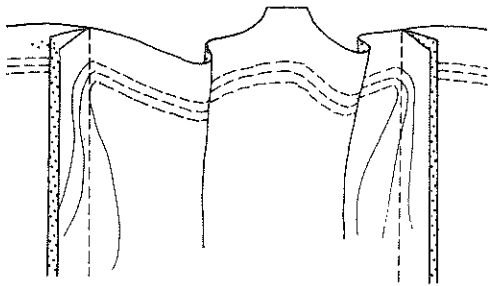


figure 6

## Gathering

The purpose of gathering is to control a large amount of fullness that is part of the garment design. Areas that might use gathering are waistlines, cuffs, yokes, and ruffles. Gathers should be evenly distributed without gaps or folds.

Gathers are indicated on patterns by seam lines labeled "gathering line." Dots or circles show the beginning and ending of the area to be gathered. These symbols should be transferred from the pattern to the fabric when you do the marking.

Before gathering, be sure to stitch, edge-finish, and press open any seams that will be crossed by the gathering. The gathering stitch should be slightly longer than the normal stitch used for seams. Test to see which stitch length is suitable for your fabric and the amount to be gathered.

Stitch two parallel rows of gathering stitching in the seam allowance. Put the first row of gathering on the seam line and the second row within the seam allowance,  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (6 mm) from the first (Figure 6). If your fabric does not show needle holes after the stitching

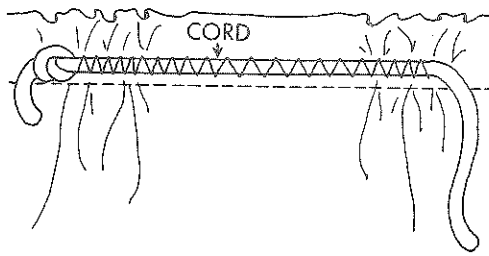


figure 7

has been removed, gathers can be better controlled by stitching three rows of gathering  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (6 mm),  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch (1.3 cm), and  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch (1.9 cm) from the cut edge. The seam is sewn on the  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch (1.5 cm) stitching line, then the  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch (1.9 cm) line of gathering is removed.

Another way of stitching the gathering is to use zigzag stitching over a thin, strong cord. Set the machine for a stitch of medium width and length. Place the cord  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (6 mm) above the seam line and stitch over the cord to hold it in place. If needed, adjust the stitch width in order to avoid stitching into the cord. To draw up the gathering, slide the zigzag stitches along the cord. This method is especially good for long areas that are to be gathered since gathering threads break easily (Figure 7).

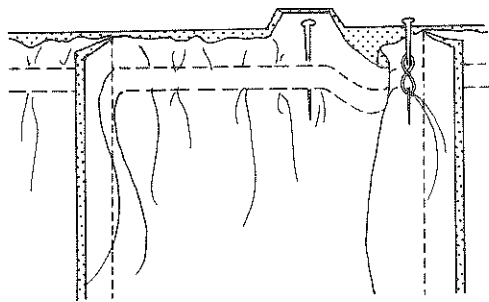


figure 8

To attach a gathered edge to a straight edge, pin the right sides of the fabric together at any points of matching, such as notches or center front and center back seams. Temporarily fasten the bobbin threads at one end by winding them in a figure 8 around a pin. Pull the bobbin threads at the opposite end by sliding the fabric along the bobbin thread until the edges match in length (Figure 8). Secure the threads around a pin in a figure 8 and repeat from each end until the edges match and the gathers are evenly distributed. Pin crosswise to the cut edge as needed to hold the gathers in place and keep them from slipping or bunching (Figure 9).

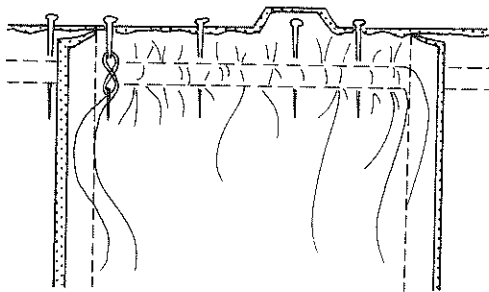


figure 9

Readjust the sewing machine to the correct length of stitch for seams before stitching the gathered and straight edges into a seam. Stitch on the seam line with the gathered side up. Watch to see that the gathers are evenly distributed. A long needle or a seam ripper may be used to guide the gathered area under the presser foot when the eased side is up.

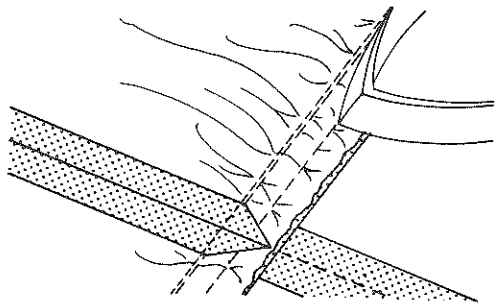


figure 10

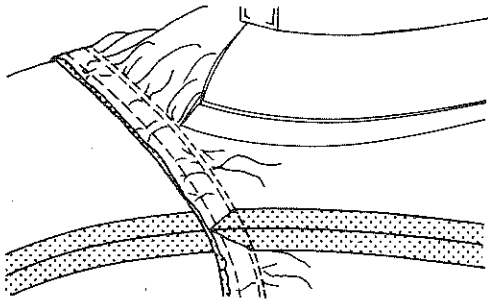


figure 11

Press the seam allowance flat as it was stitched, using the tip of the iron. Finish the gathered seam edge. Open the garment flat with the straight edge folded back. This leaves the gathers so you can press them. Again, press the seam allowance with the tip of the iron, being careful not to press folds in the gathered section (Figure 10). When you press the gathered area, work by directing the point of the iron into the gathers (Figure 11).

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