Hemming Skills

Level 2 & 3

Oregon 4-H Clothing Construction Fact Sheets: Basic Skills—Levels 2 and 3

4-H 320-32 • October 2014

A hem finishes the bottom edge of a garment such as a shirt, blouse, pants, or skirt. It is usually the last construction step. There are many ways to hem a garment. You will need to think about the garment, the fabric, and the skills you have when you choose hemming method.

After a garment is hemmed, it should hang as smoothly as possible. The hem should be level with the floor. It should not show through to the right side of the garment unless it is meant to be decorative. On the inside, a hem should be even in width and smooth without lumps or tucks. You may need to make a test hem on a scrap of your fabric to help you decide which way to hem your garment.

Marking the hemline

If you are making a new garment, it must be fitted and completely finished before you mark the hemline fold. Hang the garment on a hanger for one whole day before you mark the hem. If you are working with an old garment, remove the old hem and press out the crease as much as possible.

The best way to mark the hemline fold is to have someone else mark it for you while you are wearing the garment. If you are marking the hemline of a skirt, dress, or pants, wear the same shoes and undergarments that you will wear with the garment. If you will wear the garment with a belt, wear the belt while the hem is being marked.

Stand straight with your arms hanging down naturally and your weight distributed on both feet. Ask your helper to go around you with a skirt marker or yardstick, placing pins about 3 inches apart along the fold line of the hem. The hemline fold should be level with the floor (figure 1).

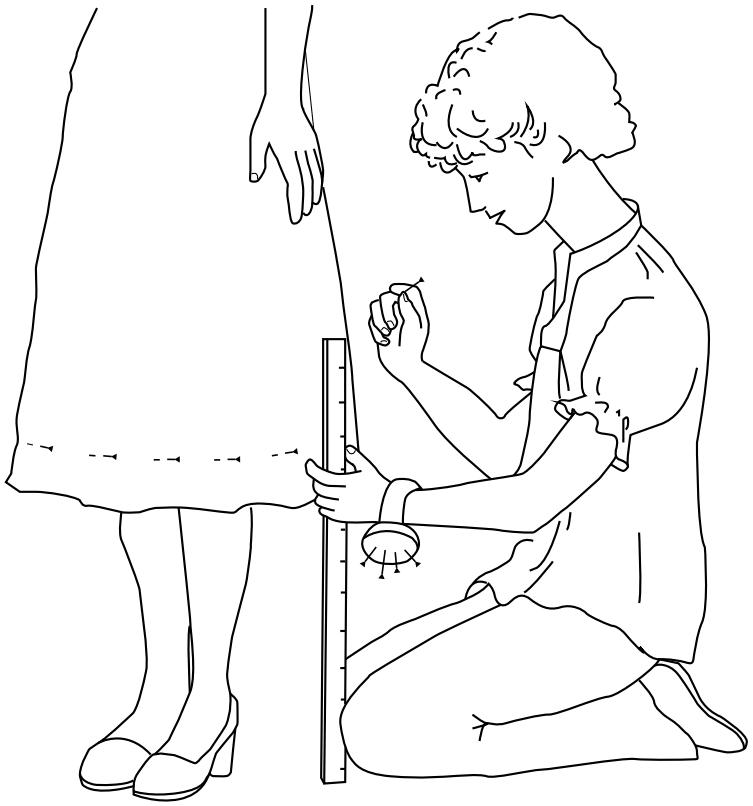

Figure 1. Mark the hemline.

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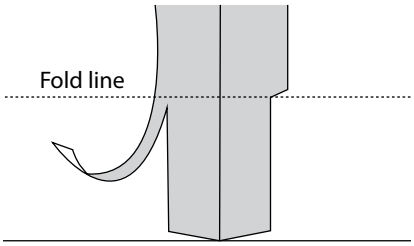

Figure 2. Trim seam allowances within the hem.

Preparing the hem

Turn the garment inside out, and place it over the ironing board with the wrong side facing you. Trim the side seam allowances within the hem slightly to prevent a ridge within the hem (figure 2). Fold up the hem on the marked pin line by placing additional pins across the edge about every 2 to 3 inches (5 to 8 cm).

Hand-baste close to the fold to hold it in place (figure 3).

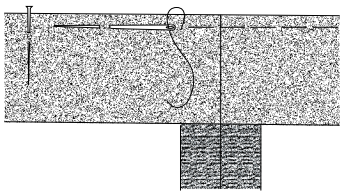

Figure 3. Hand-baste close to the fold.

Try on the garment to check that the length is correct and that the hemline is level with the floor all around the garment. If necessary, clip the basting stitches, re-pin the hem, and adjust the fold line.

Determine the correct width for the hem based on the type of garment, how circular the hem edge is, and the weight of the fabric. In general, skirts, dresses, and coats have a 2- to 3-inch (5- to 8-cm) hem. Jackets, pants, and blouses have a 1- to 2-inch (2.5- to 5-cm) hem. Garments with straight hem edges may have wider hems than those with flared or circular hem edges. Flared or circular hems may be as narrow as ¼ inch (6 mm), rolled and hand- or machine-stitched.

Make the hem an even width all around by measuring with a seam gauge or ruler and marking the width with tailor's chalk, a marking tool, or pins (figure 4). Trim away the extra fabric so the hem is even all around. Be sure to open the hem away from the garment so you don't accidentally cut the garment!

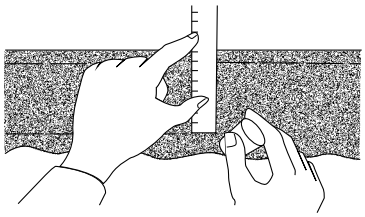

Figure 4. Measure and mark the hem.

If the hem doesn't lie flat against the garment, use a stitch length that is slightly longer than the normal stitch for seams, and make a line of ease stitching ¼ inch (6 mm) from the cut edge. Pull on the bobbin thread with a pin every few inches to tighten and flatten any extra fullness (figure 5). Be careful not to remove so much fullness that the ease stitching pulls the hem tighter than the matching garment area.

Press and flatten the eased area by pressing lightly with an iron. Use a piece of heavy paper between the hem and the garment to prevent forming a ridge on the right side (figure 6). It is acceptable to have small wrinkles caused by extra fullness, but it is not acceptable to have tucks or overlaps. You may need to make the hem width narrower.

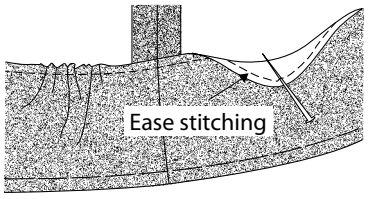

Figure 5. Ease stitching.

Finishing the hem edge

The way you finish the cut edge of a hem depends on the type of fabric, type of garment, and wear and care the garment will receive. Your skills and equipment will also help determine the type of hem finish you use. In general, lightweight, simple finishes are preferred because they do not show through the finished garment. The hem finish should prevent raveling but should not add bulk or cause a ridge to show on the right side of the garment.

If your fabric ravels easily and you are skilled at handling ease, you may wish to enclose the hem edge with seam binding, stretch lace, or bias tape. These finishes add fabric to the hem edge, so they may cause a ridge to show on light- to medium-weight fabrics.

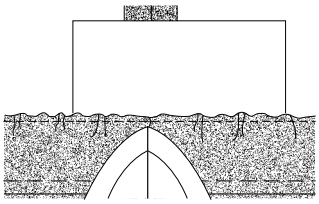

Figure 6. Press the eased area.

Simple hem-edge finishes

Stitched and pinked is good for knits and fabrics that don't ravel, and for garments that won't receive hard wear. Machine-stitch ¼ inch (6 mm) from the edge with regular-length stitching or ease-length stitching. Trim the edge with pinking shears, being careful to avoid cutting the stitches (figure 7).

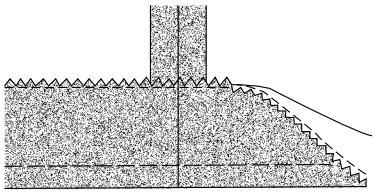

Figure 7. Simple hem-edge finish—stitched and pinked.

Turned and stitched (clean finished) is a good finish for lightweight fabrics and durable, washable, medium-weight fabrics. Turn ¼ inch (6 mm) of the raw edge to the underside and press. Topstitch ⅛ inch (3 mm) from the fold (figure 8).

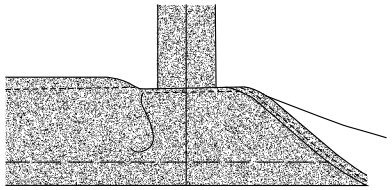

Figure 8. Simple hem-edge finish—turned and stitched (clean finished).

Zigzag finish can be used for most fabrics that ravel. The multi-stitch zigzag found on some machines is good for knits, such as sweater knits that require stretch. Put the zigzag stitching line ¼ inch (6 mm) from the edge. Adjust the zigzag from medium-width and medium-length stitches as needed for your fabric, taking care not to stretch the edge or add bulk. You may need to add ease stitching just below the zigzag. Trim any excess fabric to the zigzag stitching (figure 9).

If you have a serger, you may use a two- or three-thread **serged** edge. This finish is good for fabrics that ravel easily. A three-thread serged edge is also good for knits when you want to keep the stretchy quality of the fabric. After marking the hem an even width all around, serge to both trim and finish the edge (figure 10).

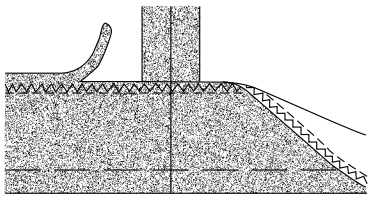

Figure 9. Simple hem-edge finish—zigzag.

Enclosed hem-edge finishes

Seam binding with woven edges is used for straight-edge hems that ravel. **Stretch lace** is used for curved hems and stretchy fabrics that ravel.

Complete the ease stitching before applying the seam binding or stretch lace. Place the seam binding or stretch lace on the right side of the hem, lapping it ¼ inch (6 mm) over the edge, just over the ease stitching. Pin the seam binding or stretch lace in place. Be sure the hem lies flat without being pulled or stretched by the seam binding or stretch lace. It should be able to stretch later if the fabric stretches.

Sew the seam binding in place along the lower edge using a straight stitch. Sew the stretch lace in place along the lower edge using a zigzag stitch to allow for stretch (figure 11).

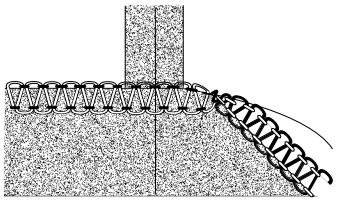

Figure 10. Simple hem-edge finish—serged.

Bias tape is a good edge finish for flared or circular skirts because it is flexible and shapes to the curve of the hem. Commercial bias tape is available in a variety of colors.

Open one fold of the tape. Place the fold line just below the ease stitching on the right side of the hem. To make the beginning and ending meet, fold back the beginning about ⅜ inch (1 cm), and then overlap the end about ¼ inch (6 mm). Machine-stitch on the fold line. Press the tape up so the stitching is hidden (figure 12).

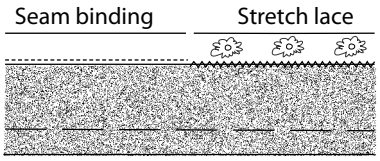

Figure 11. Enclosed hem-edge finish—seam binding and stretch lace.

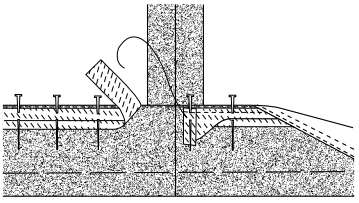

Figure 12. Enclosed hem-edge finish—bias tape.

Attaching the hem

You may attach the hem to the garment by hand-stitching, machine-stitching, or fusing.

Hand-stitching is the traditional way of attaching a hem and is still the best way for many hems.

Machine-stitching for hems can be done by using straight stitching for narrow, rolled hems or by using the blind-hemming stitch that's available on some machines. Machine-stitched, narrow, rolled hems are appropriate for blouses and shirts where the hem will not be seen and for some household items where a sturdy hem is needed. Machine-stitched blind-hemming is appropriate for children's clothing, household items, and sportswear when the fabric is sufficiently bulky to hide the stitches.

Fusible web can be used for some hems. It is a quick way to attach the hem, but it is not as durable as other methods.

Hand-stitching

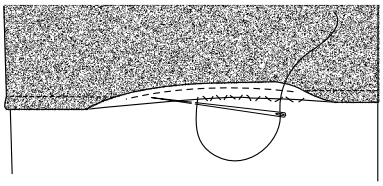

Figure 13. Blind-stitch hemming.

There are two places to do hand-stitching for hems: inside the hem between the hem and garment, and over the edge of the hem. Stitching between the hem and garment is called inside hemming. To do this, fold the garment back, and take stitches between the garment and the hem, leaving about ⅛ inch (3 mm) of the top edge of the hem free. Sewing the finished edge of the hem to the garment is called over-the-edge hemming.

Generally, inside hemming is preferred because there is less chance of a ridge showing on the right side of the garment. Your hemming method choice also depends on how much your fabric ravels and the edge finish you used. If you used a stitched-and-pinked or zigzag finish, attach the hem with inside hemming. If you turned and stitched the hem edge, use the vertical or slanted hemming stitch.

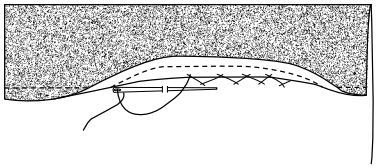

Figure 14a. Catch-stitch hemming, inside.

For either type of hemming, always start at a seam and hide the thread knot inside the hem. Take tiny stitches in the garment, picking up only one or two threads or a part of a heavy thread. Stitches should be about ¼ to ⅜ inch (6 mm to 1 cm) apart. Never pull the thread tight. It is good practice to lock hand-hemming stitches about every 12 inches or so by making a couple of stitches on top of each other. Do not cut the thread off too short.

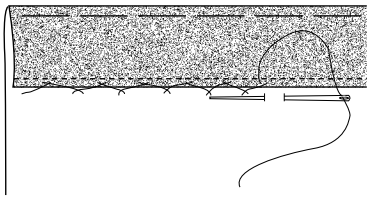

Figure 14b. Catch-stitch hemming, over the edge.

Blind-stitch hemming is an inside hemming stitch that doesn't show from either the right side of the garment or the hem side. First, finish the cut edge of the hem with an appropriate edge finish. Then make small stitches between the garment and the hem, about ⅛ to ¼ inch (3 to 6 mm) from the hem edge. Leave about ¼ to ½ inch (6 mm to 1.3 cm) between stitches. Do not pull the stitches too tight. The stitches should not show from the right side (figure 13).

Catch-stitch hemming can be done as inside hemming (figure 14a) or over-the-edge hemming (figure 14b). To make a catch stitch, work from left to right, but put the needle into the fabric from right to left so each stitch makes an X as it enters and leaves the fabric. Catch a few threads of the hem, then a few threads of the garment. Move diagonally to the next stitch. Alternate stitching in this zigzag fashion. Keep the stitches loose to retain flexibility of the hem edge.

The **vertical hemming stitch** is used with the turned-and-stitched hem finish and the enclosed-edge finishes. Take a one- or two-thread stitch in the garment, and then bring the needle through the edge at a slant. Now take the next stitch directly below where the needle came through the edge. The stitches will pass over the edge squarely and be straight up and down. This is a durable stitch (figure 15).

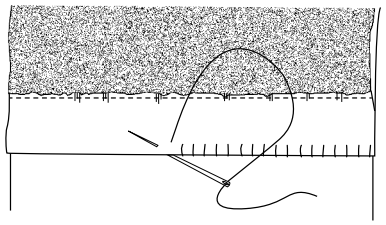

Figure 15. Vertical hemming stitch.

The **slanted hemming stitch** is a less-difficult variation of the vertical hemming stitch. The slanted hemming stitch is also used with the turned-and-stitched hem finish and the enclosed-edge finishes. Take a one- or two-thread stitch in the garment, and then bring the needle straight through the edge. Now take the next stitch in the garment ahead of where the needle came through the edge. The stitches will pass over the edge at a slant. This is a less durable stitch than the vertical hemming stitch, but it is faster to do (figure 16).

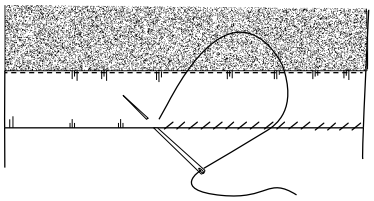

Figure 16. Slanted hemming stitch.

Machine-stitching

A **narrow, rolled, machine-stitched hem** is used on tuck-in blouses and shirts where the hem will not be seen, on garments for which durability of the hem is important, or when the look of a stitched hem is most appropriate. After marking the hem, trim the hem allowance to ½ inch (1.3 cm). Staystitch any curved edges ¼ inch (6 mm) from the edge. Press a ¼-inch (6-mm) fold. Fold again another ¼ inch (6 mm) and press. Now machine-stitch along the inner folded hem edge. Practice this hem first on a sample of your fabric (figure 17).

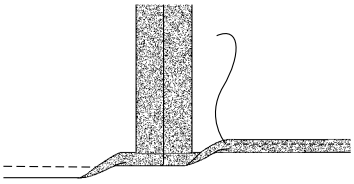

Figure 17. Narrow, rolled, machine-stitched hem.

Blind-hemming by machine can be done on some sewing machines. If your machine will do this kind of hemming, follow the instructions in the owner's manual. Set the stitch width as narrow as possible to catch only a thread of the garment. Practice the stitch so you can do it without the stitches showing on the right side (figure 18).

A **serged blind hem** can be done if your serger has an attachment for hemming. The finishing and blind hemming are done in the same step. Set the serger on a long stitch length, and then follow the instructions in the owner's manual. This type of finishing requires skill in using your serger and testing with your fabric. A serged hem is best for medium-weight or textured fabrics, so the stitches do not show (figure 19).

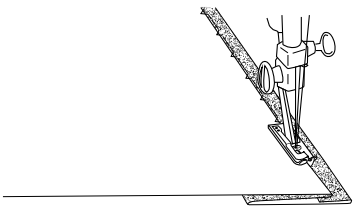

Figure 18. Blind-hemming by machine.

Fusible web

Using fusible web is a fast way to attach a hem. However, it is not as long lasting and durable as other finishes for wash-and-wear garments. Fusible web is an adhesive that holds two layers of fabric together when heat is applied. It is available in precut strips, on rolls, or in large sheets from which you can cut strips.

Because some fabrics melt when too much heat is applied, you need to follow the manufacturer's instructions and test the fusible web with a sample of your fabric before using it on your garment. Check the appearance of the sample. The fusible web should not make the fabric look any different than it did before fusing.

Prepare the hem carefully, and make any adjustments in the hem before applying the fusible web. It is very difficult to change the hem after it is attached. Put the fusible web back from the cut edge of the hem at least ¼ inch (6 mm) prevent a ridge from forming on the outside and to prevent the fusible web from sticking to the iron. On light- to medium-weight fabric, use a strip of fusible web ¾ to 1 inch (1.0 to 2.5 cm) wide. With heavier fabrics, use a 2-inch (5-cm) strip of fusible web.

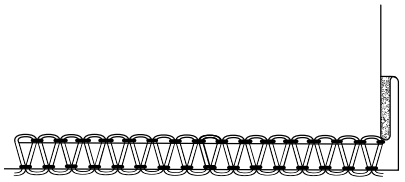

Figure 19. Serged blind hem.

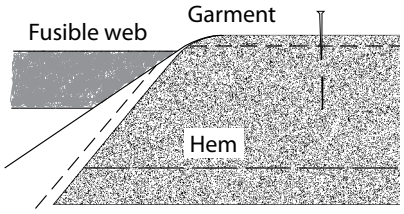

Figure 20. Place and pin fusible web.

Place the fusible web between the garment and the hem. Pin to prevent the web from slipping (figure 20). Heat-baste the fusible web by steaming lightly between the pins (figure 21).

Remove the pins before completing the fusing. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for fusing, just as you did when testing. Continue to fuse a small section at a time (figure 22). Allow the fused section to dry and cool before handling.

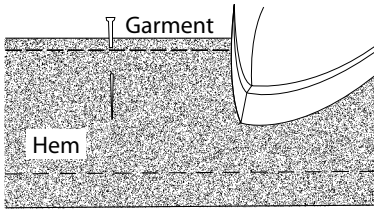

Figure 21. Heat-baste fusible web.

Pressing the hem

After attaching the hem to the garment, remove the basting along the fold. Give the hem a final pressing with a steam iron along the fold. Press lightly on the hem edge to prevent a ridge from showing on the right side of the garment.

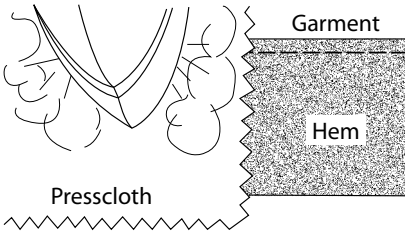

Figure 22. Fuse sections at a time.

By Pamela Rose, 4-H Youth Development specialist, family and consumer science and expressive arts, Oregon State University.

This publication is based on and replaces OSU Extension publication 4-H 92125, *Hemming Skills: 4-H Clothing, Skill Level 2*, by Ardis W. Koester, Extension textiles and clothing specialist emeritus; and Barbara J. Sawer, Extension specialist emeritus, 4-H Youth Development; both of Oregon State University.

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