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Basic Handsewing Skills

4-H Clothing, Skill Level 1

Some handsewing, like basting, is only temporary. Other handsewing, such as a hem or embroidery, is meant to stay. Learning to choose and use the best method of handsewing for your fabric and garment takes practice. This handout tells about four kinds of stitches. Keep it to help you choose the kind of stitches to use when you need to sew by hand. Your leader can help you learn how to make the stitches.

The equipment you will need is simple—needles, scissors, pins, and perhaps a thimble. (See your handout sheet on “Sewing Equipment.”) You will also need thread.

The thread should suit the weight and color of the fabric if you are doing permanent handsewing. If your fabric is made from cotton or wool, use cotton or polyester and cotton thread. If your fabric is made from a manufactured fiber (such as acrylic, polyester, or nylon), use a thread made from a manufactured fiber (such as polyester and cotton, polyester, or nylon).

Thread comes in different sizes. The smaller the number, the bigger the thread. Size 50 is used for most handsewing. The color of the thread should match or be slightly darker than the fabric. For fabrics with more than one color, choose thread to match or go with the main color. Cut the thread at an angle to give an end that will be easy to put through the needle. Put the cut end through the needle. Knot the same end to keep the thread smooth.

The *running stitch* is used for basting, easing, gathering, and mending where there will be no pull. Take several stitches forward, weaving the needle in and out of the fabric (Figure 1). The size of the stitch depends on the purpose of the stitching—longer stitches for basting or other temporary stitching, and shorter stitches where sewing will be permanent.

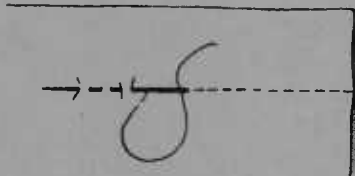


Figure 1

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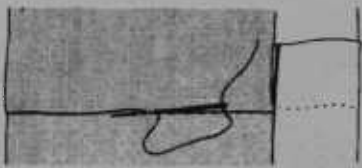


Figure 2

The *slipstitch* is used when you don't want the stitches to show. It might be used for hemming or for closing the opening of a stuffed toy. Slip the needle through the edge of the fold of the top fabric. Then pick up a thread of the under fabric. Space the stitches evenly. Be sure that the thread does not show or pull on the right side (Figure 2).

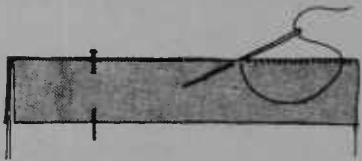


Figure 3

Both *overhand stitches* and *whipstitches* hold two folded edges together. For the overhand stitch, put the needle in at a diagonal (/) through the back and front edges so the stitch itself is straight. For the whipstitch, put the needle into the fabric square with the edge so the stitches are slanted. Either the whipstitch or the overhand can be used to attach lace or trim or to close openings of stuffed toys. The overhand stitch is less easily seen (Figure 3).

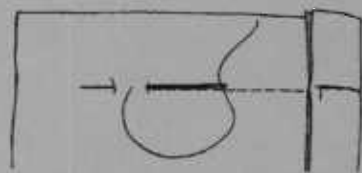


Figure 4

The *backstitch* is a strong handstitch. When the stitches are the same size as machine stitching, it looks like machine stitching. Backstitching is useful for attaching pieces firmly and for repairing seams in areas that are hard to reach. With the right sides of the fabric together, bring the needle up through the fabric layers. Put the needle about $\frac{1}{16}$ to $\frac{1}{8}$ inch in back of where it came up, and bring it out again $\frac{1}{16}$ to $\frac{1}{8}$ inch forward. For each stitch, put the needle at the end of the last stitch and bring it out ahead (Figure 4).

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