

Cutting Skills



Oregon 4-H Clothing Construction Fact Sheets: Basic Skills—Level 1

4-H 320-12 • October 2014

Cutting during garment or item construction requires accuracy and care. If you do not cut carefully, the size and fit of a garment can change, seams won't match, facings and edges will be bulky, and shaped areas won't lie flat. Whatever kind of cutting you are doing, do it carefully with the correct equipment. Be sure your scissors or shears are sharp so they will cut without you needing to use extra pressure.

Preparation for cutting

When you use a commercial pattern, read the pattern envelope to determine all of the pattern pieces you will need to cut out for the garment or item you are making. If your pattern is a multi-sized pattern (more than one size on the pattern pieces), you will need to identify the correct cutting line for the size chosen. You may want to use a highlighter to trace the desired cutting line.

Follow the layout diagram on the pattern instruction sheet. Place any pattern pieces to be cut on the fold. Then lay out the other pattern pieces, measuring to be sure each end of the grainline arrow is the same distance from the selvage. Pin pattern pieces in place, placing pins perpendicular to the cut edge but not over it. The distance between pins will depend on the shape of the cut edge. For more information, see the *Pattern Skills* fact sheet (4-H 320-18).

Cutting out the pattern and fabric

Use shears with bent handles to cut out the pattern and fabric (figure 1). The bent-handled shears help keep the fabric flat as you cut. Never use pinking or scalloping shears to cut out a pattern and fabric because they don't make a smooth edge for guiding your stitching.

Cut exactly in the center of the cutting line. Cut with the pattern to your left so you can see exactly where the blades are cutting. On a loosely woven or stretchy fabric, cut in the direction of the lengthwise yarn to keep raveling or stretching to a minimum.

Slide the shears along the cutting surface to move forward for the next stroke. Use long, firm, smooth strokes that cut with all but the tips of the blades. Hold the shears upright, without letting them tilt to one side. This is especially important when you are cutting two layers of fabric because it will keep both layers exactly the same size.



Figure 1. Using bent-handled shears.
Photo: Mary Stewart, © Oregon State Univ.



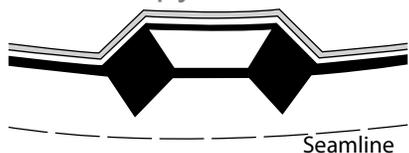


Figure 2. Cut pattern notches outward.

Cut all pattern notches outward so the seam won't be weakened and the notches will be visible for matching (figure 2). Cut double and triple notches with a continuous outer edge. If you do not cut out notches, be sure to mark notches before removing pattern pieces from the fabric.

Save the fabric scraps that are left after cutting. Scraps are useful for testing machine tension, stitch length, iron temperatures, and pressing techniques. Some commercial patterns do not include patterns for bound buttonholes, belt carriers, sleeve plackets, and other small pieces that need to be cut from scraps.

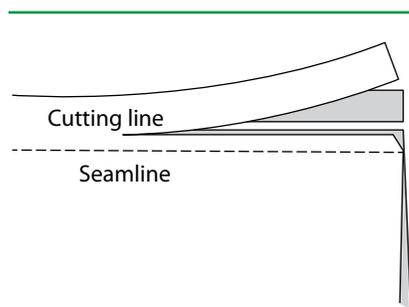


Figure 3. Grading (layering).

Cutting to remove fabric bulk

Grading or layering is a special way to remove fabric bulk when a seam isn't going to be pressed open. It also helps prevent ridges on the right side of the garment after you press. It is used where two or more seam allowances lie together in an enclosed seam such as a facing, pocket, or cuff.

To grade, cut each layer of a seam allowance a different width. Each layer should be narrower than the one before (figure 3). The widest layer should be toward the outer surface of the garment, and the narrowest layer should be closest to the body. The final width of each layer will depend on fabric weight, number of layers, and how much the fabric ravel.

Very bulky fabrics can be graded by trimming the several layers at once, if your scissors are very sharp. Hold the scissors at a flat angle against the shortest edge. Grading should be done before notching or clipping seam allowances.

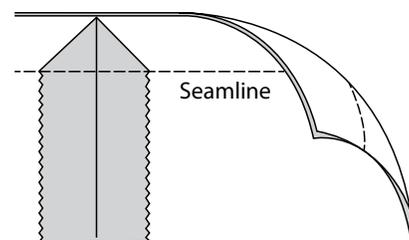


Figure 4. Grade at seam intersections to reduce bulk.

Grading seam intersections where two seams meet (figure 4) may be required to reduce bulk if you are using medium-weight or heavyweight fabrics. Seam intersections that may need grading include a dress waistline seam before applying a zipper and a shoulder or side seam before applying a neckline or an armhole facing.

If the fabric requires a seam finish, do the finish on the first two seams before joining them with the third. Trim away the seam allowance of the first two seams where they will be joined by the third seam to reduce bulk.

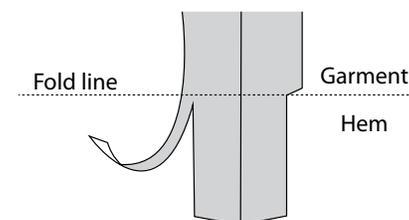


Figure 5. Grade vertical seam allowances within the hem.

Grading vertical seam allowances within the hem prevents bulk and ridges. Trim the seam allowance below the fold of the hem narrower than the vertical seam allowance above the fold (figure 5). Begin the trimming about $\frac{1}{16}$ inch (1.5 mm) above the fold line of the hem to prevent bulk at the fold. Be careful not to trim away so much that the hem can't be made longer.

Cutting shaped seams

Clipping means snipping into a seam allowance within a seam that curves in (figure 6).

Clip inward curved seams to relieve strain on fabric edges and prevent the seam allowance from folding back within an enclosed seam. Facings for necklines and armholes are examples of inward curved seams.

When there are two or more layers of fabric, clip each layer separately and alternate clips so they do not leave a sharp double edge (figure 6). Clip only where needed to relieve strain or pull. On gentle curves, few clips will be needed. On sharp curves, more clips are necessary. Clip to within $\frac{1}{16}$ inch (1.5 mm) of the staystitching. Do not cut through the staystitching.

Staystitching is a row of regular-length machine stitching placed just inside the seamline. It is done immediately after the garment has been cut out and marked and the pattern pieces are removed from the fabric pieces.

Stitch through a single layer of fabric. Stitch with the yarn direction and change the direction of the stitching as necessary to keep going in the yarn direction.

When seaming together an inward curve and an outward curve, as in a princess seam, you may need to do a little clipping before stitching the seam to fit the two curves together and additional clipping after stitching the seam to prevent the seamline from stretching out of shape during handling or garment construction.

Notching means cutting a small triangle of fabric from a seam that curves out (figure 7).

Notch an outward curved seam by cutting out a small, triangular wedge of fabric from the seam allowance to reduce bulk. Rounded collars and round-cornered patch pockets are examples of outward curves.

When there are two or more layers of fabric, notch each layer separately and alternate notches so they do not leave a sharp double edge (figure 7). Notch only as needed to reduce bulk. On gentle curves, few notches will be needed. On sharp curves, more notches are necessary. Notch to within $\frac{1}{16}$ inch (1.5 mm) of the staystitching. Do not cut through the staystitching.

If an inward curve requiring clipping and an outward curve requiring notching are combined into a curved seam, such as a princess seam, alternate the clips and notches (figure 8). If a clip and a notch line up, the seam may not form a smooth curve.

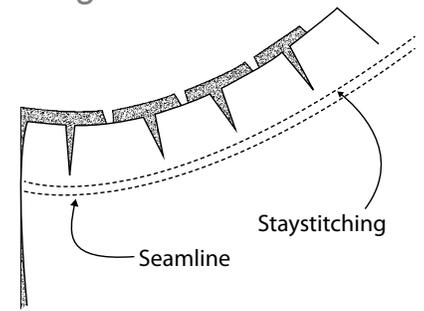


Figure 6. Clip an inward curved seam.

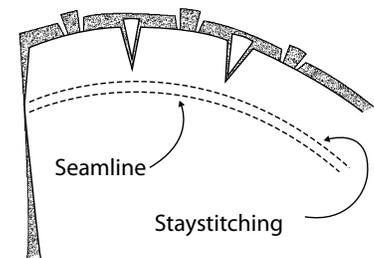


Figure 7. Notch an outward curved seam.

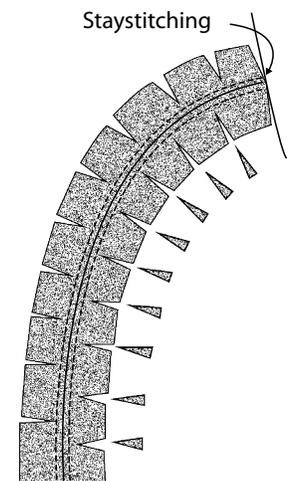


Figure 8. Curved seam, shown pressed open, with notches on outer curve and clips on inward curve.

References

Zieman, N. (1991). *Let's Sew! A Beginner's Sewing Guide*. Beaver Dam, WI: Nancy's Notions.

Reader's Digest. (2005). *Complete Guide to Sewing*. (2005). Pleasantville, NY: The Reader's Digest Association.

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