



SEWING SKILLS HANDBOOK



Summit County



EXTENSION 
UtahStateUniversity

Introduction



PURPOSE

This handbook has been put together to help you visually define basic quality standards. This handbook is not intended to serve as an instruction manual. It is assumed that you will have a good reference book in your sewing library. **There are many right ways to do each skill but the end quality should be the same.**

REFERENCES

To help you with construction procedures, frequently used sewing books have been used to reference the skill samples:

1. Nancy Zieman, 1991. *Let's sew! A Beginner's Sewing Guide*. Nancy's Notions, Ltd., Beaver Dam, Wis., in association with the National 4-H Council. **(LS)**
2. *Reader's Digest Complete Guide to Sewing*. Revised Edition, 1995. The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., Canada. **(RD)**
3. *Sewing Essentials*. The Singer Sewing Reference Library, 1984. Cy DeCosse, Inc., Minnetonka, Minn. **(SE)**

They will be listed by the initials shown above in the reference section of each skill.

NUMBERING

The Numbering system on the bottom left corner of each skill page is set up as follows

Level: Beginning (Beg); Intermediate (Int) and Advanced (Adv). **Category:** Hand Stitches (HS); Basic Techniques (BT); Machine Stitches (MS); and Serging Stitches (SS). **Subcategory and Sample Number.**

For example, **Beg HS SA 1**, translates to: Beginning (Level), Hand Stitches (Category), Stitch Application (Subcategory), and Sample #1.

This numbering system will enable us to add new samples and skills as the need arises without disrupting the numbering of the entire handbook.

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Skill Samples

Section I

Beginning Level



Blind Hem

Hand Stitch

Hem Quality Standards

Width:

- Appropriate for weight of fabric, garment, size of individual.
- Adequate to suit style and provide weight to hang well.
- Uniform in width.

Free from bulk.

Fullness reduced or controlled by easing shrinking.

Free from tucks or pleats.

Seams pressed and graded.

Seams clipped at edge of pleats.

Flat and Smooth.

Inconspicuous: (unless designed to be decorative)

- If topstitched it is uniform.
- Hemming stitches are evenly spaced, secure, free from drawing and invisible on outside.

Pressed to avoid ridges.

Hangs evenly, uniform distance from floor.

Stitch Quality Standards

Stitches are inside between garment and hem allowance.

Stitches should be about 1/4" apart - alternating from hem to garment.

Use single strand of **matching** thread.

Hem edge should be finished, usually a flat method so as not to add bulk.

Pressing should not cause the hem allowance to indent the right side of garment.

Helpful Hints

Work right to left to form stitch.

Do not pull stitches too tightly.

References:

SE ppg 56-57, 104-107
 RD pg 143



Blind Hem

Skill Sample



Tacking (facings)

Hand Stitch

Quality Standards

- Small inconspicuous stitches.
- Stitches do not show on right side.
- Even stitches.
- Secure.
- Use single thread in **matching** color.

Helpful Hints

Tack facings at shoulder seams where there are enough fabric layers to hide stitches.

References:

RD ppg 139, 207



Tacking (facings)

Skill Sample



Button (shank)

Hand Stitch

Quality Standards

Appropriate to placement, garment design needs, closure requirements, fabric used.

Neat:

- Small even stitches.
- Stitches do not show on right side of fabric.

Reinforced on wrong side, usually with interfacing.

Location:

- Fabric lays flat.

Secure:

- Use double thread in **matching** color.

Shank:

- Threads parallel with opening edge.
- Shank aligns with buttonhole so shank does not spread hole open.

Helpful Hints

Use a shank button for closures in heavy and bulky fabrics.

If the fabric is extremely bulky, an additional thread shank may be needed below the regular shank to allow enough space for the buttonhole to fit under the button without pulling an indentation

Some metal shanks cut thread. One could use a metal eye (from a hook and eye set) in place of the thread.

References:

LS pg 61
RD pg 361
SE pg 115



Button (shank)

Skill Sample



Button with Thread Shank

Hand Stitch

Quality Standards

Appropriate to placement, garment design needs, closure requirements, fabric used.

Neat:

- Stitches do not show on right side of fabric.

Reinforced on wrong side, usually with interfacing.

Location:

- Sets aligned.
- Fabric lays flat.

Secure:

- Use double thread in **matching** colors.

Helpful Hints

No thread shank is needed when sewing the button on very thin, lightweight fabrics or using as a decorative button.

Use a thread shank when button is used as a fastener on heavy or bulky fabrics.

Shank length should equal the garment thickness plus 1/8 inch for movement.

Lay a pin or toothpick across the top of button while sewing it on to allow enough thread on back to wrap for shank.

References:

LS pg 61
RD ppg 361-362
SE pg 116



Button With Thread Shank

Skill Sample



Sewing Snaps and Hooks

Hand Stitch

Quality Standards

Appropriate to placement, garment design needs, closure requirements, fabric used.

Neat:

- Small even stitches.
- Do not show on right side of fabric.

Reinforced on wrong side, usually with interfacing.

Location:

- Sets aligned.
- Hook so fabric lays flat.

Secure:

- Use thread in **matching** color.

Helpful Hints

For a more professional look use a button-hole stitch when sewing hooks & eyes.

Snaps:

Position ball half on underside of overlap on garment; stitch through each hole.

Swing or hanging snaps may be used to hold together two edges that meet to prevent them from gapping.

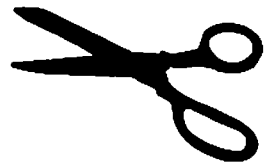
Hooks & Eyes:

Use a straight eye on lapped edges and a round eye for those that are abutted. Sew hook head down also.

On skirts and pants use a special purpose type hook & eye as it can withstand more stress and strain.

References:

- LS ppg 62-63
- RD ppg 364-368
- SE ppg 108-109, 117



Sewing Snaps and Hooks

Skill Sample



Interfacing (fusible)

Basic Techniques

Quality Standards

- Should be same or lighter weight than fashion fabric.
- When woven, cut on same grain as fashion fabric.
- Attached securely.
- Does not show on right side.

Helpful Hints

Preshrink interfacing following manufacturers directions.

Care requirements of interfacing and fabric should be similar.

Seams in interfacing should be either lapped or abutted.

Trim excess interfacing from seam allowances -- then fuse.

Pink edges of interfacing to prevent ridges

References:

LS ppg 28,40-41
RD ppg 84-85, 88, 91
SE ppg 38-39



Interfacing (fusible)

Skill Sample



Trimming and Grading

Basic Techniques

Quality Standards

- **Trimming occurs when:**
Seam allowances on enclosed seams are cut away, usually to one-half the original width.
- **Grading occurs when:**
Seam allowances on enclosed seams are trimmed to different widths to reduce bulk. The seam allowance nearest the garment side should be left the widest.
- **Finished edges lay flat with no bulky ridges.**
- Cut edges should be straight and even.
- Grading or trimming should be parallel to seamline.
- Curves should be smooth not bumpy.
- Narrowest seam allowance should be at least 1/8" wide.

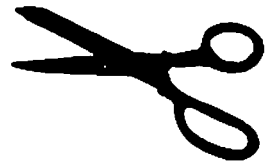
Helpful Hints

Applique scissors are very helpful when grading seam allowances.

Grade narrowest seam allowance first, then grade each level a little wider. Finish up with the widest seam allowance.

References:

LS ppg 42, 64
RD ppg 159, 226-227, 289
SE ppg 96, 99, 100



Trimming and Grading

Skill Sample



Notches and Clips

Basic Techniques

Quality Standards

- Notches are used in convex (outward) - V shaped cut.
- Clips are made in concave curves.
- Cut through seam allowance but do not cut through stitching.
- Clips and notches should be staggered in seams where they face each other such as princess seams.

Helpful Hints

Sharper curves need more and closer cuts.

Cuts should be evenly spaced to cause smooth curves.

References:

LS pg 42
RD ppg 159, 226-227, 289
SE ppg 76-77, 96, 98, 100



Notches and Clips

Skill Sample



Basting and Ease Stitching

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- One row of stitches.
- Use longer than normal stitch length.
- Fabric is eased and NOT gathered.
- No folds, tucks, or pleats.

Helpful Hints

References:

LS ppg 66-67
RD ppg 149, 166, 269
SE ppg 60, 73-75



Basting and Ease Stitching

Skill Sample



Edge Stitching

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Applied along folds or edges to maintain sharp crease.
- Done after hem is completed.
- 1/8" from folded edge.
- Regular stitch length.

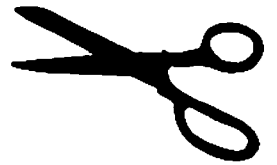
Helpful Hints

Stitch from bottom of garment to top to avoid distortion.

See also Pleats (Int MS Tech 2)

References:

RD ppg 179, 182-183
SE ppg 71-72



Edge Stitching

Skill Sample



Gathering

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Use 2 rows of stitching with a longer stitch length -- about 8-10 stitches per inch on sheers and light weight fabrics, and 6-8 stitches per inch for medium weight fabrics.
- Gathers are evenly spaced without bunches, folds and tucks.

Helpful Hints

Stitch one basting line just next to seamline and the other 1/4" away in the seam allowance.

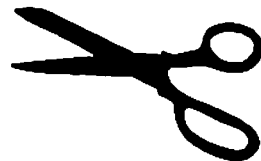
Pin and stitch seam with gathered side up.

A looser upper tension causes links to fall to bottom layer, making it easier to pull bobbin threads.

Bobbin thread is pulled to create gathers.

References:

LS ppg 51-52
RD ppg 166, 190-191
SE ppg 60, 84-85



Gathering

Skill Sample



Reinforcement Stitching

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Stitches are even, flat and straight.
- Use small stitches -- 18-20 stitches per inch.
- Use thread in **matching** color.
- Placed on seamline to strengthen the fabric at points of strain.
- Used at corners or curves that will be clipped.

Helpful Hints

Accuracy is very important. Mark corners carefully before stitching.

References:

SE pg 60



Reinforcement Stitching

Skill Sample



Stay Stitching

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Typically 1/2 inch from edge.
- Use regular length stitches.
- Stitches are even and lay flat.
- Use thread in **matching** color.

Helpful Hints

Most important seamlines to staystitch are necklines and armholes.

With loosely woven or very stretchy fabrics, staystitch all seamlines.

Stitch in the direction of the grain of the fabric.

Necklines should be staystitched in 2 stages -- from outside shoulder toward center front or back.

References:

RD pg 156
SE pg 60



Stay Stitching

Skill Sample



Top Stitching

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Longer stitch length.
- Stitched through all thicknesses.
- Stitch from bottom of garment to top to avoid distortion.

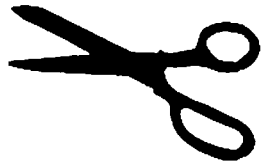
Helpful Hints

Loosen top tension for a more pronounced stitch.

Special topstitching or buttonhole twist thread can be used for a more decorative look.

References:

RD ppg 155, 164
SE ppg 61, 70-71



Top Stitching

Skill Sample



Understitching

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

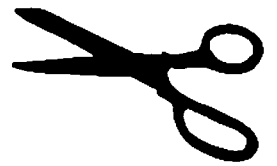
- Holds facing in place.
- Not visible on outside of garment.
- Thread blends with fabric.
- Done from right side of facing through facing and all seam allowances after seam allowances are trimmed, graded, clipped, or notched.
- Even stitches.
- No puckers or tucks.
- Stitching is even from seam line.

Helpful Hints

On heavier fabrics use the multi zig zag stitch for understitching.

References:

LS pg 42
RD ppg 155, 159
SE ppg 61, 97



Understitching

Skill Sample



Clean Finish

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Appropriate width for weight of fabric.
Heavier fabrics -- wider seam allowances.
- Stitching is straight and close to folded edge.
- Folded edge turned under evenly (1/8" or 1/4" if fabric frays easily.)

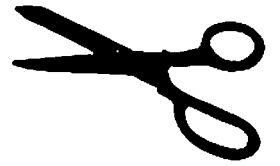
Helpful Hints

Use this type of finish on light to medium weight fabrics.

On difficult fabrics or curved edges, it may be helpful to place a row of stitching at the foldline to help turn edge under.

References:

LS pg 41
RD pg 160
SE ppg 64-65



Clean Finish

Skill Sample



Stitched & Pinked Seam Finish

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Use only with a wide seam allowance.
- Use only for firmly woven fabrics that do not ravel.

Helpful Hints

References:

RD pg 160
SE ppg 37, 64



Stitched & Pinked Seam Finish

Skill Sample



Zig Zag Seam Finish

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Stitches should be an appropriate length and width for the type of fabric - typically medium width and short length.
- Edge of fabric should not roll or pull together.
- Edges of knits are not rippled from stretching.

Helpful Hints

If fabric is lightweight and frays easily, turn seam allowance edge under after trimming and zig zag over turned edge.

Multi-stitch or 3 step zig zag can prevent edges from rolling.

To help prevent edges from curling or puckering use the overcast guide presser foot or the overedge presser foot.

References:

LS pg 37
RD pg 160
SE ppg 64-65



Zig Zag Seam Finish

Skill Sample



Basic Hem

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

Width:

- Appropriate for weight of fabric, garment, size of individual.
- Adequate to suit style.
- Provide weight to hang well.
- Uniform in width.

Free from bulk.

Fullness reduced or controlled by easing or shrinking.

Free from tucks or pleats.

Seams pressed and graded.

Seams clipped at edge of pleats.

Flat and smooth.

Inconspicuous: (unless designed to be decorative)

- Topstitching is uniform.
- Hemming stitches are evenly spaced, secure and free from drawing.

Pressed to avoid ridges.

Hangs evenly, uniform distance from floor.

Helpful Hints

To retain crisp pleats, on the wrong side of garment stitch close (1/8") to pleat edge in hem allowance.

References:

LS ppg 46-47
RD pg 306
SE ppg 104-107



Basic Hem

Skill Sample



Buttonhole (machine)

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Stitch tension correct. Top tension loosened so that stitches interlock on underside. The stitches appear round and smooth on top.
- **Matching thread.**
- No space between stitches. Solid coverage around hole.
- Length of opening the same as the button length plus button width.
- Vertical buttonholes placed on center front or center back.
- Horizontal buttonholes placed 1/8" into overlap from center front or center back.
- Stitching should lay flat.
- The parallel rows of stitching should be the same length.
- Bar tacks at each end of buttonhole should be the same width.

Helpful Hints

Most machines provide a special presser foot for buttonholes.

Place a few drops of FrayCheck between rows of stitching before cutting open buttonhole. This prevents excess fraying.

Buttonhole could be reinforced by stitching over buttonhole or using carpet thread.

References:

LS pg 60-61
RD ppg 335-356
SE ppg 110-113



Buttonhole (machine)

Skill Sample



Casing (elastic)

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Size of elastic is appropriate for casing width.
- Width of casing allows draw string or elastic to stay in place during wear.
- Flat - does not twist or curl.
- Stitching is even and secure.
- Casing is even in width.
- Skill sample demonstrates three types of casings.

Helpful Hints

Stitch elastic flat, through casing, at several locations to prevent elastic from twisting or curling.

References:

LS ppg 43-45
RD ppg 246-249
SE pg 86



Casing (elastic)

Skill Sample



Dart

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- No pucker at point of dart.
- Pressed correctly:
 - Bust - down towards bottom of garment.
 - Waist - towards center of garment.
- Stitching direction on a regular dart is from wide end to point.
- For contour darts, begin stitching at center and stitch towards each point separately.
- Fasten off point of dart by tying off threads by hand, or machine stitching a short chain and then backstitching in the dart seam allowance at least 1/2" above point.

Helpful Hints

Do not use backstitching at point of dart because fabric distortion may occur.

Some deep darts may be slashed and pressed open.

If dart stitching line is straight, a piece of tape beside the line can help sewers stitch straight.

References:

LS ppg 50-51
RD ppg 171-175
SE ppg 81-83



Dart

Skill Sample



Machine Blind Stitch Hem

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

Width:

- Appropriate for weight of fabric, garment, size of individual.
- Adequate to suit style.
- Provide weight to hang well.
- Uniform in width.

Free from bulk.

Fullness reduced or controlled by easing or shrinking.

Free from tucks or pleats.

Seams pressed and graded.

Seams clipped at edge of pleats.

Flat and Smooth.

Inconspicuous:

- If topstitched it is uniform.
- Hemming stitches are evenly spaced, secure, free from drawing and invisible on outside.

Pressed to avoid ridges.

Hangs evenly, uniform distance from floor.

Helpful Hints

Most machines provide a special presser foot for machine blind stitch hemming.

References:

RD pg 306
SE pg 107



Machine Blind Stitch Hem

Skill Sample



Pockets (curved patch)

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Curves are even and flat.
- Seam allowance fabric does not show outside the top edge of the pocket.
- Top corners are reinforced.
- Pocket is straight on the garment.
- Top stitching is even and straight.

Helpful Hints

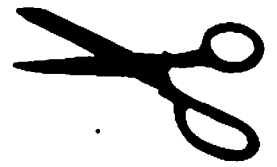
Use a curve template or ease stitch along curves to ease in fullness.

If a plaid or striped fabric is used, care should be taken to match pattern precisely or cut pocket on opposite grain or bias for contrast.

Interfacing in the pocket hem will help stabilize the top of heavily used pockets.

References:

LS ppg 64-65
RD pg 287



Pockets (curved patch)

Skill Sample



Pockets (square patch)

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Corners mitered.
- Seam allowance fabric does not peek from underneath the edge of the pocket.
- Top corners are reinforced.
- Pocket is straight on the garment.
- Top stitching is even and straight.

Helpful Hints

If a plaid or striped fabric is used, care should be taken to match pattern precisely or cut pocket on opposite grain or bias for contrast.

Interfacing in the pocket hem will help stabilize the top of heavily used pockets.

References:

LS ppg 64-65
RD pg 287



Pockets (square patch)

Skill Sample



Pointed Collar

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Lies flat.
- Left and right side points are sharp and identical in shape and size.
- Free from bulk.
- Interfaced to maintain shape.
- Understitching on under collar.
- Under collar should not show when looking at upper collar.

Helpful Hints

Trim 1/8" or less from outer edges of under collar. Pin right side of upper collar to right side of under collar with edges even. The slightly smaller under collar helps prevent the under collar from rolling to the right side.

If the collar is a two-piece rolled collar, stitch diagonally across the corner (1-2 short stitches). This helps to make a sharper corner when the collar is turned.

References:

LS pg 53
RD ppg 224-233
SE pg 99



Pointed Collar

Skill Sample



Tension (straight stitching)

Machine Stitches

Quality Standards

- Fabric does not pucker or gather.
- Top and bobbin threads link in center of fabric layer(s).
- Tension adjustments should be made with the machine threaded and the presser foot down.

Helpful Hints

To decrease tension - turn dial to a lower number.

To increase tension - turn dial to a higher number.

If top is too loose - links will fall toward bottom layer of fabric.
Increase tension on top thread.

Let the fabric feed easily through the machine. Pulling back on the fabric can cause a very small stitch to form.

References:

LS pg 14
RD pg 29
SE pg 13



Tension (straight stitching)

Skill Sample



Tension (zig zag stitching)

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Fabric does not pucker or gather.
- Top and bobbin threads link at the corner of each stitch and in center of fabric layer(s).
- Tension adjustments should be made with the machine threaded and the presser foot down.

Helpful Hints

To decrease tension - turn dial to a lower number.

To increase tension - turn dial to a higher number.

If top is too loose - links will fall toward bottom layer of fabric.
Increase tension on top thread.

References:

RD pg 31

SE pg 13



Tension (zig zag stitching)

Skill Sample



Button (machine)

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- **Matching thread.**
- Thread shank to prevent puckering for those buttons used for closure.
- Buttons placed on center front or center back in normal front or back plackets.
- Buttons should not extend past edge of garment.
- Back or inside fabric layers should be reinforced with some type of interfacing fabric.
- Button should be secure.
- Fabric should lay flat and not be pulled up into button.

Helpful Hints

Lay a toothpick between holes of button. Zig zag over toothpick while sewing on button to provide a thread shank.

When finished, place a drop of FrayCheck on top and bottom of stitching to seal thread in place.

References:

RD ppg 362
SE pg 116

Beginning Level



Button (machine)

Skill Sample



Zipper (centered)

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Zipper is centered between fabric “lips”.
- Placket seam allowance is finished.
- If there is a facing, zipper top stop should be located 1/2” below seamline.
- If there is no facing, zipper top stop should be located 1/4” below seamline.
- Even and flat, no bumps or puckers.
- Top stitching is even and correct stitch length.

Helpful Hints

Tape (1/2”) can be centered over the seamline. the edge of the tape serves as a stitching guide.

Typically used for center front or center back zippers in garments.

Work from bottom to top of placket.

For a dressier appearance the zipper could be hand stitched using the prick stitch.

References:

LS pg 54
RD ppg 329-331
SE ppg 118-119, 122-123



Zipper (centered)

Skill Sample



Zipper (lapped)

Machine Stitch

Quality Standards

- Even stitch length and tension.
- **Matching thread.**
- Lap stitching should be straight and even distance from seamline (about 1/2").
- Lap should open to right hand when looking straight at zipper.
- Zipper should be covered by lap.
- Seam allowance should be finished before zipper insertion and should be caught evenly during zipper application.
- Top edges should be even.
- Lap should remain over zipper when closed and placed under stress.

Helpful Hints

1" seam allowances are helpful and preferred.

References:

LS ppg 55-56
RD ppg 334-335
SE ppg 118-121



Zipper (lapped)

Skill Sample



Serging (3-thread seam)

Serging Stitch

Quality Standards

- Tension is correct - upper looper lies on top of fabric and lower looper lies on the bottom. Loops meet at edge of fabric.
- No gathers or puckers.
- Stitch length and width adjustments are set appropriately for fabric type.

Helpful Hints

When making adjustments, turn dials one number at a time, and then test again.

Use a longer and wider stitch on heavier fabrics, and a shorter, narrower stitch on lighter-weight fabrics.

Use a 3-thread overlock for seams in knitted fabrics, edge finishes on woven fabrics and non-stress seams in woven garments.

References:

LS pg 17
RD ppg 38-40, 163



Serging (3 thread seam)

Skill Sample



Serging (4-thread seam)

Serging Stitch

Quality Standards

- Tension is correct- loops meet at edge of fabric.
- No gathers or puckers.
- Stitch length and width adjustments are set appropriately for fabric type.

Helpful Hints

When making adjustments, turn dials one number at a time, and then test again.

Use a longer and wider stitch on heavier fabrics, and a shorter, narrower stitch on lighter-weight fabrics.

Use a 4-thread overlock for finishing fabric edges or for seams when a stronger seam is desired.

References:

LS pg 17
RD ppg 38-40, 163



Serging (4 thread seam)

Skill Sample



Overlock Finish

Serging Stitch

Quality Standards

- Tension appropriate-loops intersect at edge of fabric.
- Appropriate stitch length for type of fabric.
- Use **matching thread**.

Helpful Hints

Be very careful when using this seam finish. Watch carefully that no other parts of the garment get accidentally trimmed by the serger knife and sewn into the seam finish.

References:

LS pg 37
RD ppg 38-40, 153, 161



Overlock Finish

Skill Sample