

## SEAMS & HEMS

The most basic sewing skills – seaming and hemming – involve joining two pieces of fabric together and neatening the raw edges. Once you have learnt how to do these neatly and accurately, you should be able to make up any of the projects in this book.

### SEAMS

Careful preparation always ensures professional-looking results, so take time to pin and tack each seam before you sew. Follow the instructions carefully, as they tell you how to prepare your fabric and will give details of the individual seam allowances. It's a good idea to reinforce both ends of the seam with a few stitches worked in the opposite direction, to prevent the two threads from unravelling. Check your sewing machine manual to find the reverse lever, or to see if it has a function that will do this automatically.

### **SEAM ALLOWANCE**

This is the distance between the edge of the fabric and the stitch line, and it varies depending on the scale of the project and the type of fabric you are using. You'll find a series of parallel lines engraved on the needle plate of your sewing machine: pick the one marked with the measurement you need and keep the edge of the fabric aligned to this as you stitch.

### **PINNING AND TACKING**

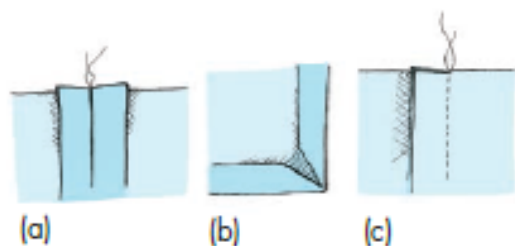
Place the two pieces of fabric together, with the right sides facing inwards. Match up the corners and pin the raw edges together. Insert the pins at right angles, at intervals of 5 to 15cm, depending on the length of the seam. Tack just inside the seam line, then take out the pins.

### **STRAIGHT SEAM**

Lift up the machine's presser foot and slide the top end of the fabric underneath. Line up the right-hand raw edge with the correct guideline on the needle plate and lower the foot. Lower the needle and sew to the end of the seam. Raise the needle and the presser foot and lift out the fabric. Trim the threads.

### **PRESSING**

Every seam has to be pressed flat. The step instructions tell you when to do this and whether the allowance should be pressed open (a), inwards (b) or to one side (c). Right-angled or curved seams need to be trimmed before the piece is turned right side out: see opposite.



### **CORNER SEAM**

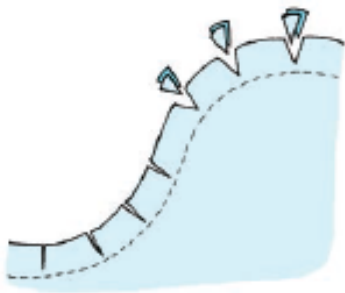
Stitch along the first edge and stop when you reach the end of the seam allowance. With the needle still down, lift the presser foot and turn the fabric through 90 degrees. Lower the foot and sew along the second edge. Trim two small triangles from the seam allowance, to reduce the bulk. Turn the fabric right side out, carefully ease out the corner with a knitting needle, then press.

### **T-JUNCTION SEAM**

This smart seam gives depth to a bag. Join the side and bottom seams, leaving the cut out corners unstitched. Press the seams open. Refold the corners, lining up the seams, and pin them together. Machine stitch along the given seam allowance, then trim the seam and neaten with a zig-zag or binding.

### **CURVED SEAM**

Pin, tack and machine stitch as above, taking care to keep the seam allowance regular as you guide the fabric under the presser foot. You will need to cut into this surplus fabric before turning right side out to reduce the bulk and to give a smooth line. For an inside curve (left), make a series of small snips at right angles to the seam line, so that the seam allowance will stretch out. Cut to within 2mm of the stitches. On an outward curve (right), snip regularly spaced triangular notches, so that the seam allowance will fit comfortably within the curve.



### **SEWING A CIRCLE TO A CYLINDER**

This three-dimensional seam is used when you need to sew a round base onto a tube of fabric. To make sure it all fits together neatly, fold the circle in half, then quarters and then eighths and mark each of the eight equal divisions with a pin. Cut a round of 6mm snips into the seam allowance of the cylinder, spacing them about 2cm apart. Fold into eight divisions and mark them with pins. With right sides facing, pin the two pieces together with the marker pins aligned. Tack just inside the seam allowance, then machine stitch with the cylinder uppermost. You may then need to clip into the seam allowance on the circle for a neat finish, depending on the thickness of the fabric.

### **TOPSTITCHED SEAM**

Topstitching is used to give extra strength and a decorative finish to a seam. Press the seam allowance to one side. With the right side uppermost, sew through all three layers of fabric, keeping closely parallel to the seam line.

## HEMS

There are two ways to finish off a raw edge. You can fold it over to the back of the fabric and stitch it down to make a flat hem, but a more decorative method is to bind it with a narrow strip of fabric or with ready-made bias binding. There are two types of hem – single and double. A single hem has just one turning or the Sewing Machine Cover where the back of the fabric will be hidden from view. A double hem is folded over twice to give a firm, reversible edge. The depth of the turnings is always specified in the instructions.

### SINGLE HEM

Zig-zag or overlock the edge of the fabric, then with the right side facing downwards, fold it back to the required depth. Use a tape measure or ruler to make sure that the turning is consistent all the way along, then press, tack or pin it in place, as instructed. Machine stitch down, using the guidelines on the needle plate to keep the line straight.

### DOUBLE HEM

Fold and press the first turning as for the single hem, then turn it back a second time to the given depth. Tack through all the layers, then machine stitch 3mm from the inner fold.

### BINDING

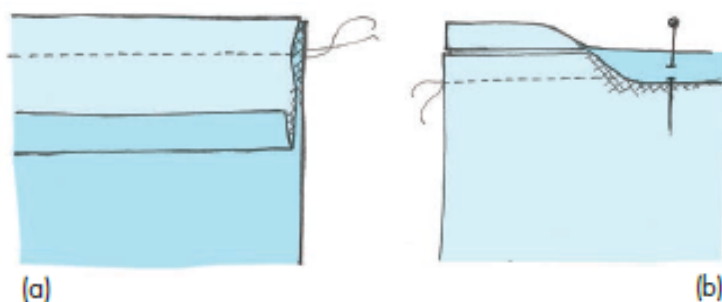
A bound edge always gives a 'finished' look to a project, and using a contrasting colour gives definition to the outline and any pockets. Binding can also be used to neaten bulky inside seams, unobtrusively, with matching bias binding or decoratively.

### BINDING A STRAIGHT EDGE

If you are using bias binding, start by opening out the fold along one edge. With right sides together, pin and tack this edge to the edge of the fabric or along the seam allowance.

Machine stitch along the first fold (a). If you are binding with a straight-grain fabric strip simply press a 1cm turning along one long edge and match the raw edge to the edge of the fabric. Stitch 1cm from this edge.

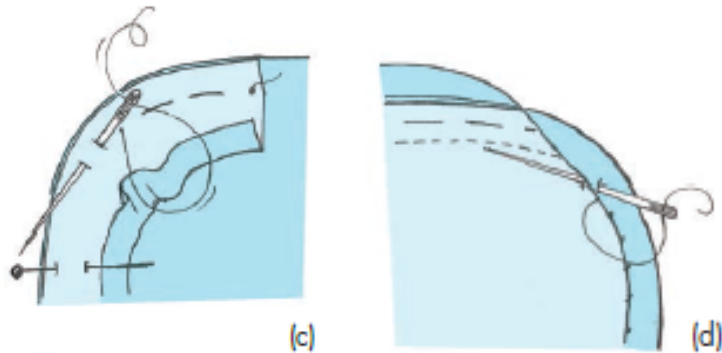
Turn the fabric over and fold the neaten edge of the binding to the right side so that the raw edges are enclosed (b). Tack it down and machine stitch close to the fold. You may prefer to slipstitch the folded edge by hand for a less obtrusive finish.



### BOUND CURVES

As above, open out the binding and, with right sides together, tack it to the edge of the fabric (c). You will need to stretch out the raw edges slightly and ease in the centre fold as you go round the curve, so that the binding will fit comfortably over the edge of the fabric without pulling it inwards.

Turn the binding to the wrong side of the fabric. Ease out and slip stitch down to the folded edge (d). Gently steam pressing the binding in place will help you achieve a neat curve.



### BOUND RIGHT-ANGLED CORNERS

Tack the binding down as above, until the distance from the corner is the same as the depth of the first turning – usually about 5mm. Make a 45 degree fold, so that the raw edge now lies alongside the next edge, and continue tacking. Machine stitch along the fold.

Finish off by turning the binding to the back and refold the creases. Tuck under the surplus binding on both sides to make a neatly mitred corner.

### BOUND INSIDE CORNERS

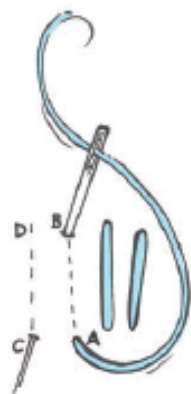
Tack the open edge of the binding along the first curve, easing the outside edge to fit, and ending directly below the inside angle. Pleat the binding so that the raw edge lies along the next curve. Continue to the end and machine stitch along the fold line, taking care not to catch the binding. Turn the folded edge over to the back and tack it in place, once again pleating the surplus fabric at the inside corners. Use the point of your embroidery scissors to push the pleat under the binding for neat angles. Sew down by hand or machine.

### EMBROIDERY & HAND STITCHES

There are literally hundreds of different embroidery stitches that you can use to embellish your fabric creations.

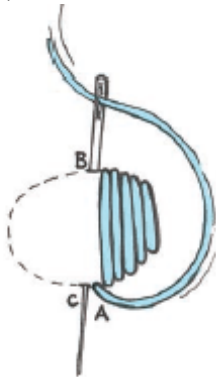
### STRAIGHT STITCH

Use this as a decorative edging around appliqué shapes and for small highlights of colour and short lines. Simply bring the needle up at A and take it down again at the top of the line, at B. Make the next stitch from C up to D.



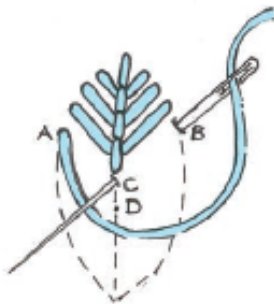
### SATIN STITCH

This stitch has a smooth, silky appearance. It consists of a row of straight stitches, worked closely together within a given outline. Make a stitch from A to B, then bring the needle out at C, a thread's width to the left, ready for the next straight stitch.



### FLY STITCH

The ideal stitch for leaves. Start with a short straight stitch at the top, then fill in the outline with closely spaced 'Y' shaped stitches. Bring the needle up at A and down at B. Pull it through over the thread at C and take it back down at D to make an anchor stitch.



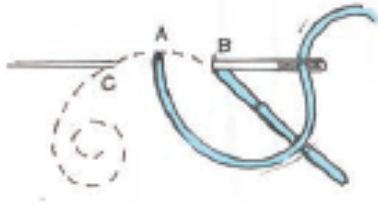
### CHAIN STITCH

These interlinked looped stitches are ideal for stitching intricate shapes and lettering. Take the needle down at A and loop the thread from left to right. Bring the needle back up at B and draw it through over the thread. Carefully pull up the thread to make a small loop, then continue along the marked line, starting the next loop at B.



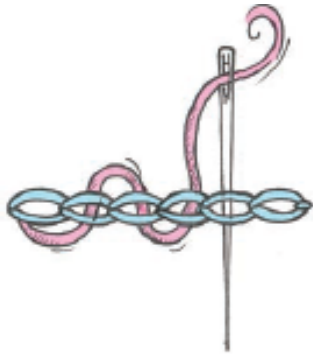
### BACKSTITCH

This stitch can be used for hand seaming and for 'drawing' fine lines within an embroidered design. Come up at A and make a backwards stitch to B. Bring the needle out again at C, a stitch length from A, then continue to the end of the line. If you are stitching along a tight curve, you will need to make smaller stitches.



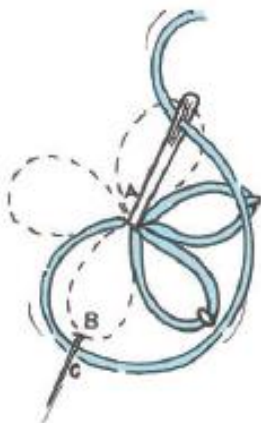
### INTERLACED CHAIN STITCH

A composite stitch worked in two colours. Start with a row of chain stitches, then thread a blunt needle with a contrasting cotton. Bring it up by the first stitch and slide up upwards, under the second stitch. Slide it down under the third, then continue weaving behind the chain stitches to make a wavy line.



### LAZY DAISY STITCH

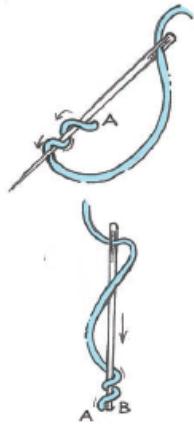
This is the obvious choice for embroidering flowers and petals. It is made up of individual chain stitches that all start at the same centre point. Chain stitch from A to B, as above, then take the needle through at C, making a short straight stitch to anchor the loop. Sew more 'petals' to complete the flower.



### FRENCH KNOTS

These tiny round knots are used for highlights of colour and for flower centres. They take a little bit of practice. Bring the needle up at A and wind the thread twice around the tip in an anti-clockwise direction. Maintaining tension on the thread with your other hand so that the

loops don't slip off, take the needle through close to A, at B, and draw it gently through the loops.

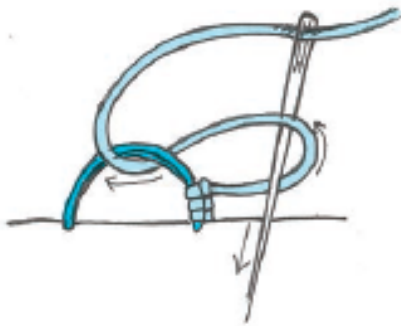


### **FASTENINGS**

Fastenings need to be functional and secure, but they can also be decorative. Look out for neon zips, pretty vintage buttons and bakelite buckles to use alongside more practical magnetic bag fasteners, spring clips and drawstring cords.

### **BUTTONHOLE LOOP**

Make a foundation bar of two loose stitches and cover it with a row of tailor's buttonhole stitch, starting at the bottom right. For each stitch, pass the needle from right to left under the bar and then down through the loop of thread on the right, making sure that the top part of the loop lies above the needle, as shown. Gently draw up the thread so that it forms a small purl that lies parallel to the bar. Repeat this to the end of the bar to form a semi-circular loop.



### **ZIPS**

Adding a zip to a pencil case, laptop cover or bag isn't nearly as complicated as inserting one into a garment, where it may need to be concealed with a flap or set invisibly into a seam. I like to use zips as a way to add stripes of bright colour to a project. Zips are made of two tapes, each edged with a line of metal or plastic teeth, which open up or interlock when the pull is moved. Tack the edge of your fabric securely to the tape before stitching and always fit the correct narrow zipper foot to your machine. This enables you to stitch close to the teeth, so you will also need to check that the needle is in the correct position before you start to sew. You can find out how to do this in your machine handbook. Use a thread to match the fabric and reinforce both ends of each seam with a few reverse stitches.

When you are sewing, keep the needle a constant distance from the teeth. Just before you reach the zip pull, raise the presser foot, keeping the needle in the down position. Gently

slide the pull backwards, behind the needle. Lower the foot again and continue stitching to the end. Take care not to stitch into the tabs that join the two sides of the zip.

### **TOUCH-AND-CLOSE TAPE**

This is a quick and practical fastening. Touch-and-close tape can be bought by length or as small round dots, sometimes called 'coins'. One side is covered with dense loops and the other with small hooks: when they meet, they form a strong bond. Separate out the two sides. Sew the looped side to the bottom layer and the hooked side to the top layer of your project. Stitch carefully around the outside edge with thread to match the main fabric.

### **STRAPS & HANDLES**

A well-chosen handle is the finishing touch for any bag. Depending on the style, I like to use cotton webbing, which comes in a range of colours, thicknesses and different weaves, or fabric handles made in either matching or contrasting material.

### **FLAT HANDLE**

To make a flat handle for a bag, cut a strip 2cm wider than the finished width and 2cm longer than the required length. Press under a 1cm turning along each long edge, then press in half lengthways. Unfold and press a 1cm turning at both short ends. Refold, then tack the folded edges together and topstitch all the way around the outside edge, using matching thread.

### **REINFORCING STITCHES**

When you sew a handle onto a bag, you need to 'box stitch' – that is, sew a square of reinforced stitches at the end, so that the main bag won't tear. First, tack the end of the handle securely in position. Then, starting at the top right corner, stitch an open square through the bag and handle, sewing over the existing stitch lines on the handle. Sew diagonally across to the bottom left corner, along the bottom edge, then diagonally up to the top left corner. Finish off with a second line of stitches along the top edge. You may find it helpful to draw the square and lines on first. Using the reverse lever to sew backwards will save you having to move the fabric about under the presser foot.

### **NARROW STRAP**

Fold the fabric strip in half, right sides facing, and pin the raw edges together. Machine stitch along the long edge, about 5–10mm from the edge, depending on the thickness of the fabric. Slant the end of the seam out to the corner. Trim back the seam allowance to 3mm. Thread a tapestry needle with a short length of strong thread, fasten it to the corner and tie the ends together. Pass the needle slowly through the tube: the fabric will gradually turn right side out as it is turned through. You can also use a safety pin for turning through wider tubes and serious stitchers may have a rouleaux turner, a special long thin tool with a latchet hook at one end.