

# Beginner's Guide to Sewing **Professional-Quality Seams**

Created exclusively for Craftsy by Christine Haynes



# This guide is just the beginning!

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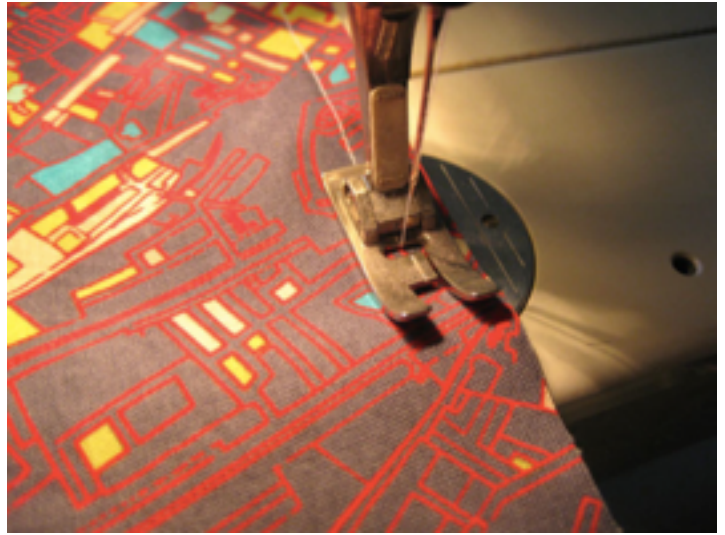
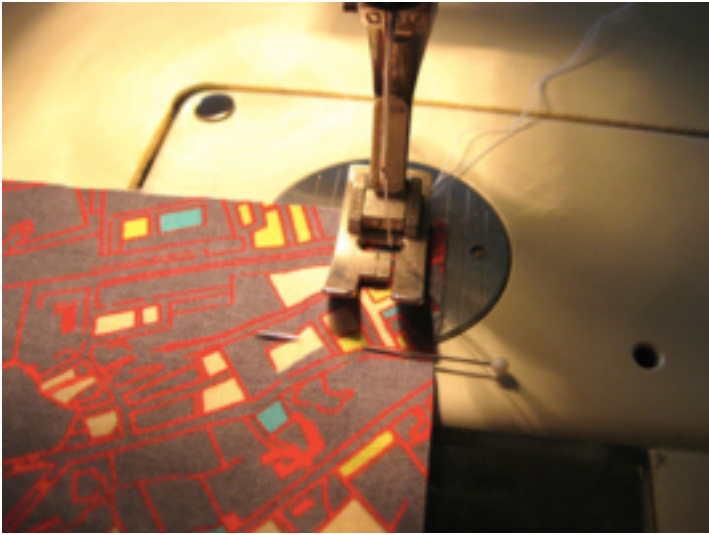
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# The French Seam

French seams are perfect for lightweight and sheer fabrics, and are among the most popular of seam finishing techniques, as all the raw edges of the fabric are hidden in an elegant finished seam. It is also a great finish for seams that will be exposed, like an unlined jacket. French seams get a bad rap for being hard, but honestly they are incredibly easy.

The biggest hurdle is getting over the idea of sewing wrong sides together instead of right sides together at the beginning. It feels all backwards. Follow these easy steps and try French seams on your next project. You'll soon be saying, "Oooo! La la!"





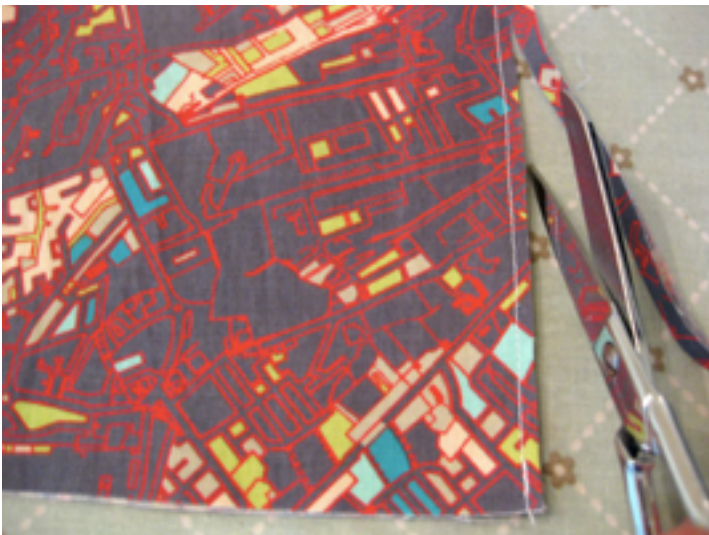
## How to sew a French seam

### STEP 1:

Pin wrong sides together and place in the machine at  $\frac{3}{8}$ " seam allowance.

### STEP 2:

Sew the entire seam at the  $\frac{3}{8}$ " seam allowance.



### STEP 3:

Trim the seam allowance down to  $\frac{1}{8}$ ".

### STEP 4:

Open the seam, right side of the fabric facing up.



**STEP 5:**

Press your fabric: press the seam allowance to one side, on the right side of the fabric. Be sure to have your iron set to the correct heat for your fabric type.

**STEP 6:**

Press on the wrong side to ensure the seam is flat.



**STEP 7:**

Fold the fabric on the seam, right sides together. Press the seam flat with the stitching on the edge of the fold.

**STEP 8:**

Pin the layers together along the pressed edge.



**STEP 9:**

Insert the seam into your sewing machine. Sew the quantity to equal the project's seam allowance based on what you used in step 1. If you sewed at  $\frac{3}{8}$ " and the seam allowance is  $\frac{5}{8}$ " that means you should sew this step at  $\frac{2}{8}$ " or  $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

**STEP 10:**

Continue sewing the entire seam, trapping the original seam and allowance in the fold.

**STEP 11:**

Press on the wrong side of the seam, pressing the entire French seam to one side.



**STEP 12:**

Press on the right side of the seam for a final pressing.



Enjoy your new skills and give a French seam a try on your next project!

# The Self-Bound Seam

A self-bound seam looks like a tiny French seam, but it's sewn completely different. The seam allowance is used to bind all the raw edges so that the inside of the garment is all tidy and clean. Perfect for thin cottons and other wovens for a really elegant interior.







## How to sew a self-bound seam

### STEP 1:

Pin the fabrics together, right sides facing.

### STEP 2:

Insert the fabric on the project's seam allowance. I've sewn this sample at 5/8".



### STEP 3:

Press the stitching to set it after sewing in Step 2.

### STEP 4:

Trim the top layer of the seam allowance down to 1/8". Be sure not to trim the other side.



**STEP 5:**

Fold the untrimmed seam allowance toward the trimmed side, lining up the raw edges.

**STEP 6:**

Fold the untrimmed side of the seam allowance a second time, lining up the first fold with the original stitch line of the seam.



**STEP 7:**

Insert the seam into the machine, lining up the needle just inside the fold of the seam allowance.

**STEP 8:**

Stitch along the fold, keeping the stitching near the edge and sewing through all the layers of the seam allowance. This traps all the raw edges inside.



**STEP 9:**

Give the whole seam a final press to set the stitches.

And you're done! The outside is a simple seam, while the inside is clean and tidy with all the raw edges hidden, keeping the fabric from fraying. Give it a try!

# The Flat Fell Seam

Take a look at your jeans or at a men's dress shirt, and you'll spot flat fell seams. On the outside of the garment there is a pair of stitch lines, and on the inside of the garment, it's all clean and tidy without raw seam edges. Ever wonder how they did that? We'll show you!





## How to sew a flat seam

### STEP 1:

Pin the fabric of the seam together, wrong sides facing.

### STEP 2:

Sew the seam with the wrong sides facing at the project's allotted seam allowance. This example is being sewn at 5/8".

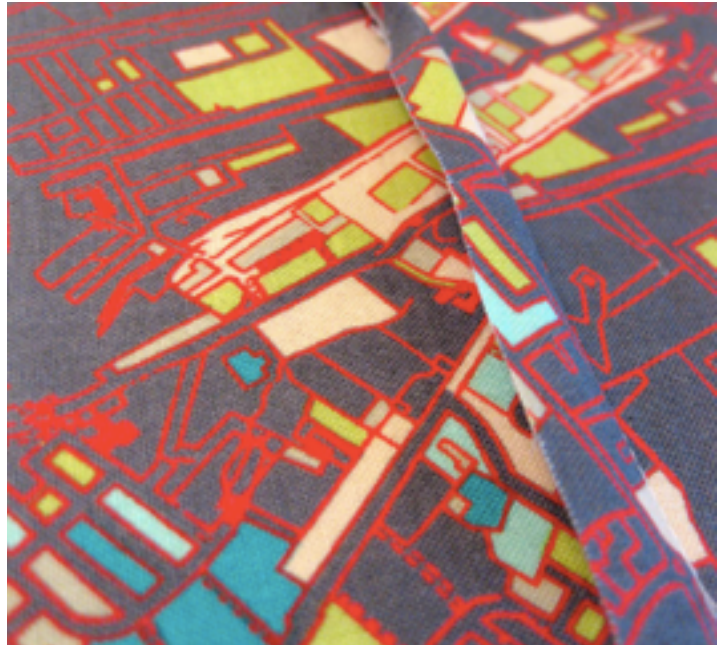
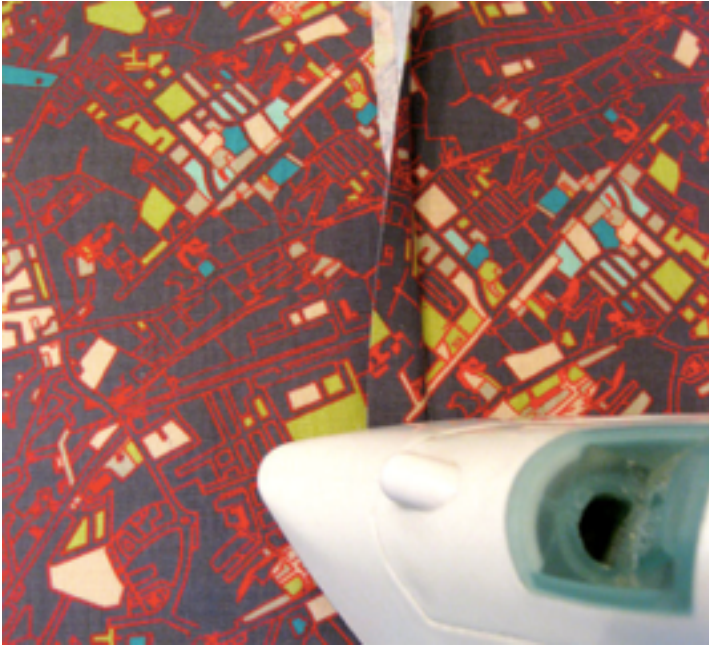


### STEP 3:

Press the seam open on both sides of the fabric. Be sure to set your iron for the type of fabric being used.

### STEP 4:

Trim one side of the seam allowance down to 1/4". Do not trim the other side.



**STEP 5:**

Press the untrimmed seam allowance over the seam and on top of the trimmed side.

**STEP 6:**

Fold the pressed side under, tucking the raw edge into the fold.



**STEP 7:**

Press the fold, making sure that the raw edge is fully tucked under and that the flap left is the same width along the seam.

**STEP 8:**

Line up your fabric in your machine so the stitching is close to the fold.

**STEP 9:**

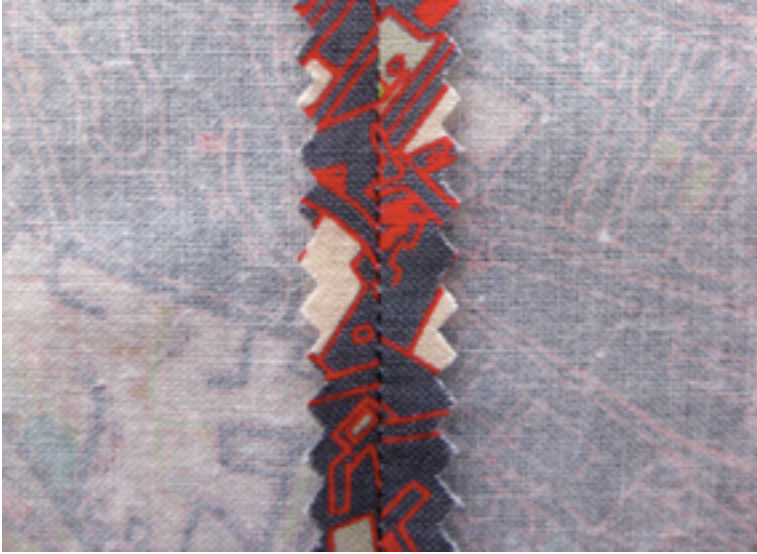
Stitch along the edge of the fold, trapping all the raw edges inside.

# Serger and Pinking Seam Finishing

Finishing the inside of your garments isn't purely for looks, it's also serves a function, as finishing the raw edges of the fabric keeps your woven fabrics from fraying and falling apart. If the fabric falls apart and works its way to the seam, it will weaken and break open. You don't want your seam to burst open do you? No, I didn't think so! There are dozens of ways to finish a seam, some far fancier than others. In this section we're going to learn about two options: finishing with a serger and finishing with pinking shears. In the next section we'll look at zigzag and 3-step zigzag finishing.

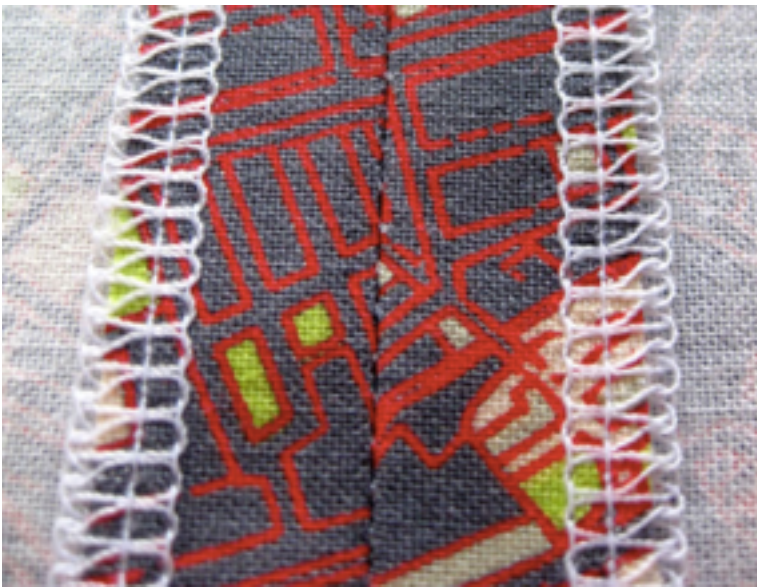


Pinking shears look like regular scissors, but instead of flat blades, there are little triangle "teeth" on the blades that make zigzag points in the fabric. Most woven fabrics are well suited for being cut with pinking shears, but some synthetic blends, silks, and thinner fabrics can sometimes bunch up and not give you a clean cut. If you've ever bought vintage clothes, you likely have come across a garment with pinked insides!



To do a pinking edge on a seam, sew the seam as written, then afterward simply trim the seam down with the pinking shears. Easy!

A serger finish in the traditional way, can only be done on a serger, or overlock, sewing machine. Some straight stitch machines have serger-like stitches, but a true serger stitch is done on that specific machine. Sergers have anywhere from 3 to 5 cone threads and a knife inside the machine. The knife cuts off the seam allowance while the threads stitch two straight stitches, a regular and a safety stitch, plus additional threads wrap around the now cut edge of the seam allowance, finishing it off at the same time.



There are three main ways to use a serger for finishing a seam. First, pictured to the left, is much like the pinking shears option, where the seam is sewn and then the raw edges are finished individually by sewing along the edge with the serger machine.

A second choice, pictured to the left, is to sew the seam first, but then instead of finishing the seams individually, you can sew the seam allowances together, trimming off as much of the seam allowance as you desire with the knife of the serger machine.

Lastly, a serger will do a regular stitch, as explained above, so if you'd prefer to forgo the straight stitch machine, the serger can do everything all at once, from sewing the stitch to finishing it off.





# Zigzag and 3-Step Zigzag Seam Finishing

One of the easiest ways to finish the edges of the seam allowance inside your project is with the humble zigzag stitch. It is like a serger stitch in that you can "wrap" the threads around the edge of the fabric, keeping them locked in place and preventing them from fraying. It's not exactly a couture move, but it is efficient and effective!

In addition to a regular zigzag stitch, many machines come with a 3-step zigzag, or multi-step zigzag. Unlike a regular zigzag stitch, which is one stitch from point to point, a 3-step zigzag is three stitches from point to point. Sometimes on thinner fabrics, a regular zigzag can bunch up the fabric, but a 3-step zigzag stitch is flatter since it's like a straight stitch from point to point, and keeps the fabric from bunching up.

Each of these stitches can be done in two main ways for the purpose of finishing the seam. Let's learn what they are!





First, both regular zigzag and 3-step zigzag stitches can be used for finishing the raw edges of the fabric individually. For the regular zigzag, pictured above, it is simply done by stitching on the seam allowance, on either side of the seam line, and trimming off the excess fabric on the seam allowance up to the stitching. The stitching can be done anywhere on the seam allowance you like.

For the 3-step zigzag, pictured below, this is usually done on the actual edge of the seam allowance. Simply insert the seam allowance into the machine at the 1/8" seam allowance mark on the machine. Set the width to 5 or 5.5 and the length to about 1.5 for a stitch like mine below. The threads will lock in the edges of the fabric, keeping them in place during washing and wearing.

Another way to handle the 3-step and zigzag finishing is to sew the seam allowances together. With either stitch type, sew the layers of the fabric at any point you desire on the seam allowance, then trim off the excess afterwards. Below is the 3-step zigzag with the seam allowances sewn together.



To do this method with a regular zigzag stitch, pictured above, treat it the same as with the 3-step zigzag, and simply sew all the layers of the fabric together. I find this to be a great finish on sleeves, where there isn't much room for fancy finishing and where trimming the seam down is desirable.

These are the most common seam finishing choices for the home sewist, so odds are good you've tried one or maybe two of these. I find that many of my students have never tried the 3-step or multi-step zigzag stitch, so give that a go on your next project!

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## Meet the Author

### CHRISTINE HAYNES

Christine Haynes is the owner of her eponymous line of sewing patterns, Christine Haynes Patterns and writes her blog, [City Stitching with Christine Haynes](#). She has been sewing for over 30 years and has a BFA in studio art from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Christine's first book, *Chic & Simple Sewing*, was published in 2009 by Potter Craft. Her writing has also been featured in the book *One Yard Wonders*, as well as Sew News Magazine, Threads Magazine, Sew Stylish Magazine, Craft Zine and Craft Stylish Magazine. In addition to patternmaking and writing, Christine is the instructor of the Craftsy class [The Sassy Librarian Blouse](#). Her work has been featured in The New York Times, The New York Post, The Los Angeles Times, Martha Stewart's Radio Channel, People.com, LA Weekly, Daily Candy, and NBC's Today Show, among others.