



Seams Logical: Pick the Right Seam Finish

Here are step-by-step instructions for several different methods of finishing seam allowances. Well executed seam finishes improve the appearance of your garments and protect them from wear or fraying. Most of these methods are also demonstrated in a video featuring Rae Cumbie which can be reached from a link on the “Helpful Hints – Jacket Help” page of the Fit for Art Patterns website, www.fitforartpatterns.com.

Utilitarian Seam Finishes

The simplest seam finishes are perfect for garments where the seams are rarely seen. These machine finishes will prevent the fabric in the seam from unraveling and will provide a neat appearance. If the seam allowance will be pressed open, each side of the seam allowance can be finished separately. If the seam allowance is to be pressed to one side, both seam allowances can be finished together.

1. Zigzag

Virtually all modern sewing machines can be used to zigzag along the raw edge of a seam allowance. Set your sewing machine to a zigzag stitch with a setting wide enough and long enough to capture at least 3 or 4 threads of the fabric in the stitching. Stitch as close to the edge as you can.

2. Serge

A serger produces a slightly neater and more secure finish. For a basic serged seam allowance, set the serger for a three thread overlock stitch. If the fabric unravels particularly easily, use the widest setting.

3. Pink

Use pinking shears to trim the raw edge of each seam allowance, then straight stitch inside the seam allowance to stabilize the pinked seam.



Decorative Seam Finishes

The following seam finishes, while a little more time-consuming, will give your garment a couture appearance. They are especially useful for unlined or sheer garments in which the seam allowances may be visible.

1. French Seams

A French seam is a narrow seam encased in a slightly wider seam. French seams work best on medium to lightweight fabrics and sheers and are particularly good for fabrics that fray easily. Heavy weight fabrics are very bulky in French seams. Seams with lots of curves are difficult to execute as French seams.

- Begin by pinning the seam with wrong sides together. It will look like you are sewing the seam on the outside of the garment.
- Sew the seam at ¼" and press the seam flat.
- Trim the seam allowance down to 1/8".
- Turn the garment wrong side out and pin the seam again, right sides together, encasing the original seam.
- Stitch at 3/8" on the wrong side of the fabric and press to one side.

2. Hong Kong Finished Seams

A Hong Kong finish is a lovely and sturdy finish for seams in medium to heavy weight fabrics. This seam is most effective on seams at least 5/8" wide that will be pressed open and flat.

- Cut bias binding strips at least 1" wide from lining, lightweight cotton or silky fabric. You will need enough bias strips to finish both raw edges of each seam allowance.
- Place one raw edge of the bias strip against the raw edge of the seam allowance, right sides together.
- Stitch a ¼" seam connecting the binding strip to the edge of the seam allowance.
- Press the binding strip away from the seam allowance,
- Wrap the binding around the edge of seam allowance and press into place. (The raw edge of the bias strip should be hiding between the seam allowance and the inside of the garment.)
- Stitch in the ditch between the binding and the seam allowance to anchor the raw edge of the bias strip under the seam allowance.



3. Bound Seams

Bound seam finishes completely encase the seam allowance with clean edges and are excellent for seams that will be pressed to one side. For heavy fabrics, choose a lining or other light silky fabric to bind your seams. For medium weight fabrics, use cotton or silky fabrics. Pre-made seam binding can also be purchased.

- Cut bias strips that are at least 1¾" wide and long enough to bind the entire seam. (Piece the strips along the straight-of-grain if needed to have enough length.)
- After you have sewn the seam, trim or grade the seam allowances to the desired finished width.
- Pin the binding strip to the seam on the inside of the garment. One edge of the binding strip should extend ¼" into the seam allowance.
- Stitch along the seam line capturing the binding strip into the seam as you stitch.
- Press the binding toward the seam allowance.
- Press the remaining raw edge of the binding under ¼" and wrap the pressed edge of the binding strip to the other side of the seam allowance.
- Hand or machine stitch the binding into place, catching the turned edge.
- If you are making a reversible jacket or want a very flat seam, hand or machine stitch the loose edge of the bound seam allowance to the jacket.

4. Rolled Edge Seams

When the fabric is very lightweight and the garment has minimal structure, encase the seam in thread using a serger's rolled edge setting.

- Sew the seam and press the seam allowances to one side.
- Set the serger to the rolled edge setting. Make some samples using your extra fabric and adjust the settings if necessary.
- Fold the garment away from the seam allowance and feed the seam through the serger, trimming most of the seam allowance away as you stitch.