

HANDLING/WORKING WITH BULK

Working with bulk is one of the most challenging activities you will have in garment construction. Whenever two or more fabric pieces come together for any reason, you are likely to face decisions related to bulk. More layers and the heavier fabric weight greatly increase the challenge. Even with sheers, we must learn how to manipulate to make a nice outside appearance as well as comfortable wearing conditions on the inside. If incorrect decisions are made or no decision is made at all, disaster frequently occurs. What starts as a beautifully handcrafted garment turns into a "homemade" mess!

The following terms and techniques are used to help with handling fabric/garment bulk. Notice the term "handling." We can never eliminate bulk if we continue to have several layers of fabric or have/use bulky fabrics. However, we can and *must* learn to "handle" bulk.

It is very important as a skilled sewer, that you learn when and where to use each of these techniques listed below. Sometimes it becomes necessary to "modify" a technique because of the fabric used, the specific circumstance/location in the garment, or for another reason. Understand that the pattern guide sheet will not always give the best method. On the other hand, it is important to teach beginners to use and rely on the pattern guide sheet since they are *learning* to sew.

For those who have been sewing for many years and are into or beyond the intermediate stage, we know that the pattern guide sheet cannot take into account the fabric we are sewing, and thus cannot always give the "best" technique.

It is necessary to experiment with various ways of handling fabrics. Always keep in mind that fabrics are like people; each has its own individual personality. Just as we treat individuals differently, we must also treat and handle fabrics differently.

The information given below will serve as a guide to understanding and working with bulk in garment construction. Many of these techniques are used together and work in team fashion. Keep this in mind as you examine the illustrations.

Grading — (beveling, favoring the right side, layering) Grading is used when seam allowances fall or rest one on top of the other as in hems and enclosed seams (i.e. facings, collars, and waistbands). In most cases, the seam allowance that is closest to the outermost layer of fabric is kept the longest. The seam allowance closest to the body is cut the shortest. Each seam allowance segment must be cut a different width, thus staggering the seam allowances and distributing the bulk. Grading is the first step to take in reducing bulk on most enclosed seams.

Grading seam allowance within the hem:

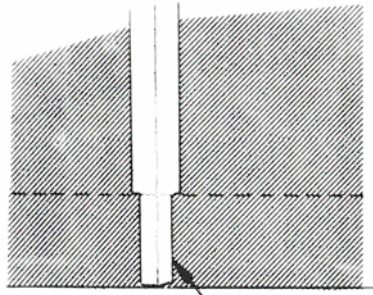


Figure 1

Grading at skirt pleat or coat facing area:

a. **Stitch and grade**

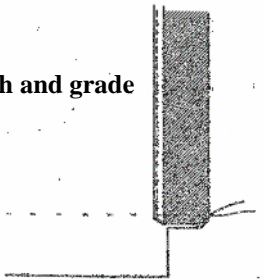


Figure 2

b. **Inside garment, completed look**

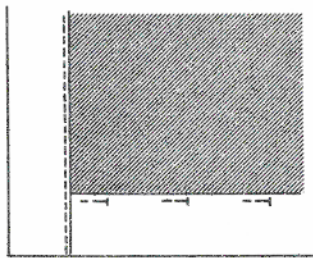


Figure 3

Stitch and grade at facing

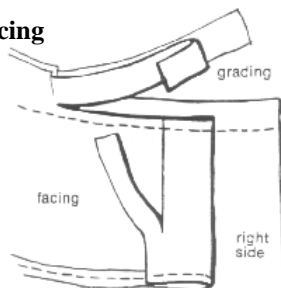


Figure 4

Grading seam allowances of facings:

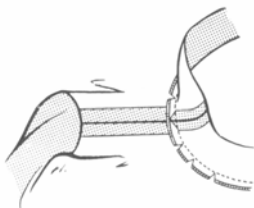


Figure 5

← **Trim facing seam allowance to 1/4-inch**

There are a number of places where grading may be necessary other than the places illustrated above. If there are several layers of fabric or the area "feels" or appears bulky, chances are some type of grading may be helpful in managing the area. Experiment; and learn to apply these and other techniques to make your sewing "top-notch"!

Trimming — cutting to remove a small amount of fabric/thread, etc., from an area. In the case of an enclosed seam, both seam allowances are cut back an equal distance. This technique does not "distribute" or stagger the bulk but "shifts" it from one area to the other. This technique can be used on the enclosed seam of a lightweight sheer or see-through fabric instead of grading. A seam allowance in a curved area (collar, neckline, etc.) must be trimmed reasonably close (1/8-inch) to permit the seam to turn and not pull or pucker. When using it on a sheer, *always* try the technique on a test sample before using it on the garment.



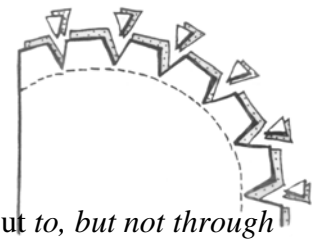
a. **Trimmed seam**

Figure 6

Notching — using the tips of a sharp pair of scissors, remove small V-shaped cuts from the seam allowances on an outside curved area. (Figure 7)

Figure 7

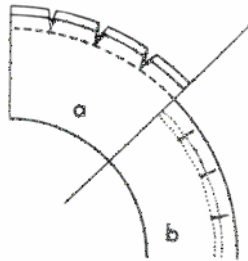
Notches should be cut *to, but not through* the line of stitching. Cut notches *only*



where needed. To prevent unsightly gaps created by over notching; remove only enough V-shape cuts to permit fabric to lie smoothly without bulges or ridges once the seam is turned to the inside. (Notched edges of the seam allowance should meet.) (Figure 8) Over cutting will cause gaps that can become unsightly from the right side of the garment. This technique is the second step to reducing bulk on an outside curved seam allowance.

Figure 8

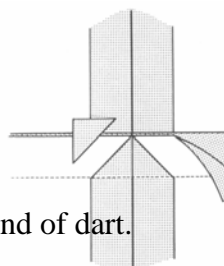
a. inside collar



b. inside when the collar is turned right-side out

The ends of seam allowances are also **notched**, or cut into a point, to reduce bulk when seams are joined and crossed by another seam. When the last seam (Figure 9) is pressed open, the seam turned back will be different layers.

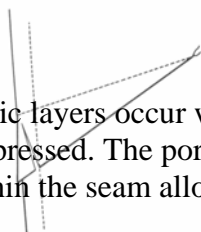
Figure 9



Notch, wedge, end of dart.

Figure 10

Multiple fabric layers occur when darts are stitched and pressed. The portion of the dart that falls within the seam allowance should



be cut off diagonally. (Figure 10)

Collar points need to be notched to remove excess fabric to allow the tips to turn and lie smooth and flat. (Figure 11)

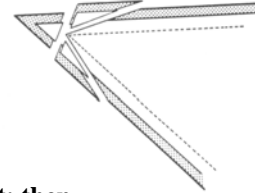


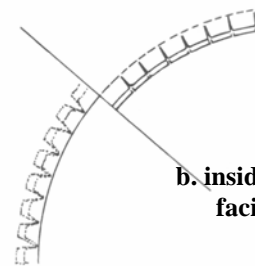
Figure 11

Cut across point; then trim each side to but not through the stitching.

Clipping — using the tips of a sharp pair of scissors, take small cuts into the seam allowance. (Figure 12a) Take care to cut up to but not through the line of stitching. This technique is the second step to reducing bulk on inside curved seam allowances such as neckline curves, to permit the fabric to spread sufficiently and turn smoothly. (Figure 12b)

Figure 12

a. inside garment before turning.



b. inside garment after facing is turned

Figure 13



Many sewing experts recommend cuts be made to the single seam allowances rather than cutting through both layers at the same time (Figure 13). This method is especially important when fabric is loosely

woven, sheer or receives a great deal of stress and strain in the area (armseye or crotch).

Clipping is also used when joining two different curved edges together. Seam allowances should be stay stitched and then clipped to the stay stitching line before seaming the two together. (Figure 14)

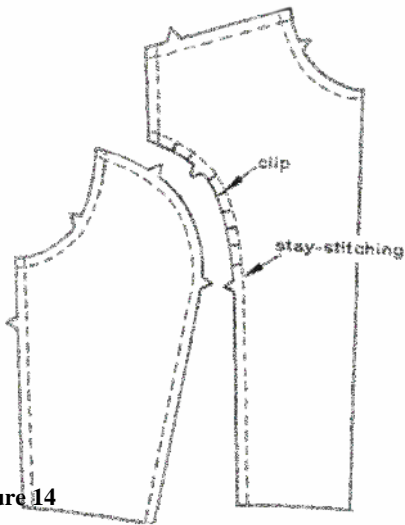


Figure 14

Understitching—used on enclosed seams. It is a row of regulation machine stitching $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch from the seam ditch. Once the enclosed seam has been graded and clipped/notched, understitching is the last

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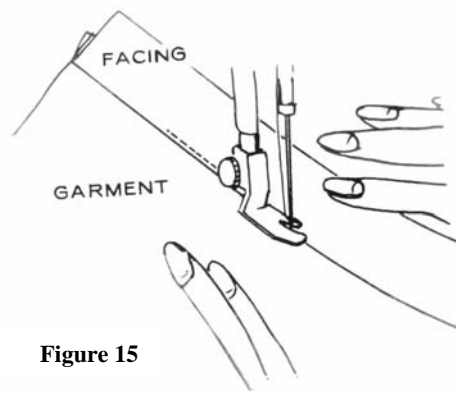


Figure 15

step in handling bulk on an enclosed seam. The stitching is done from the right side of the facing through all seam allowances by pulling the seam allowances and facing away from the garment. (Figure 15)

Understitching may also be done on the undercollar along the lower edge of the collar seam to prevent undercollar from rolling out.

Understitching does not show on the right side of the garment.

It is used for the following:

- to hold the seam allowance in place
- to prevent the seam from rolling to the right side
- to simplify and assist with turning the seamed area
- to make pressing easier
- to make the finished edge of the garment look smoother by helping to control the bulk.