

Sewing Glossary

Just like other disciplines, sewing has its own jargon or language. If you are new to the area of sewing, there are lots of new terms you will be seeing and learning about. If you are an experienced sewer, you may also find some words that may be of interest. The following are some of the more common terms used in sewing and on pattern guides.

- Back Stitching** – a method of securing a line of hand or machine stitching. One or two stitches are taken just behind the last stitch. Thread ends must then be cut close to the line of stitching or hidden between layers of fabric.
- Basting** – a long hand or machine stitch used to hold fabric pieces together or to mark a location such as a crosswise thread or loop when trying to make a piece of fabric thread perfect prior to layout and cutting.
- Bias** – any diagonal area between the two edges (lengthwise and crosswise) of a piece of fabric.
- Casing** – a type of waistline treatment. It is a fabric tunnel that encloses elastic, cording, or drawstring.
- Clip** – a small cut into the fabric that is to, but not through, the line of stitching. Generally used to release fabric strain/stress. Used along inside curved areas.
- Crosswise Fold** – created by folding fabric on a crosswise yarn (woven fabric) or crosswise course (knit fabric). This will be a 90° angle from the lengthwise edge. Most fabrics coming from the factory are folded lengthwise, then wrapped/rolled onto a cardboard bolt for shipment to the fabric store.
- Crosswise Grain** – yarns (loops) running across the fabric from selvage to selvage or lengthwise edge to lengthwise edge.
- Dart** – a V-like (single dart) or double V-like marking on the pattern to help in fitting a pattern to a body curve. The dots on either side of the V are matched together, then stitched.
- Directional Cutting** – cutting out the pattern to maintain the grain. A good key to remember is to cut from wide to narrow (larger end to smaller end), inside to outside.
- Directional Stitching** – stitching to preserve the grain of the fabric. This is an important step to prevent excess stretching and raveling. When stitching with the grain, you are stitching in the direction of the threads/yarns rather than against them (smoothing down, not ruffling the yarns at cut edge).
- Ease** – compacting or “squeezing” a longer fabric edge to fit or match an adjoining edge.
- Even Plaid** – a fabric with a line design, either printed, woven or knit, in which the pattern is exactly the same on both sides of a given line (lengthwise and crosswise).
- Favoring the Right Side** – see “Grade” below. A term for removing bulk from an enclosed seam or enclosed area.
- Gathering** – a process of creating fullness. Basting threads in a fabric (machine or hand) are pulled creating gathers.
- Grain** – the direction of yarns in a fabric; i.e., lengthwise grain, crosswise grain.
- Grade** – a technique used to reduce bulk of an enclosed seam or enclosed area. Each seam or fabric layer is cut a different length creating a stair-step layering of the fabrics in the area. The edge or fabric piece closest to the outside of the garment is left the longest (the fabric closest to the outside of the garment cut the shortest).
- Guide Sheet** – one or more sheets in a commercial pattern envelope designed to “guide” the sewer in layout, cutting, and constructing the item. A guide sheet is not intended to, nor does it necessarily, provide all the techniques. For example, a guide sheet may not tell the sewer to finish the seams even though a seam finish is required for the fabric.

Layering – See “Grade” above. A term used to describe a technique for removing bulk from an enclosed seam or area.

Layout – one or more pictorial designs in the pattern guide to assist you in placing the pattern pieces on your fabric. Layout views are designed in keeping with the recommended fabrics listed on the back of the pattern envelope, and the customary width and textures (napped/one-way designs) of those fabrics. Beginners should be encouraged to use one of the layout views. Advanced sewers should review the views before revising or creating their own layout.

Lengthwise Fold – fabric folded along a lengthwise yarn (woven fabric) or rib (knit fabric). Most fabrics coming from the factory are folded lengthwise, then wrapped/rolled onto a cardboard bolt for shipment to the fabric store.

Lengthwise Grain or Rib – the warp yarns of woven fabric, wale loops of knit fabrics, that run the direction of the selvage edge (woven fabric).

Marking – various types of techniques that can be used to transfer dots and other pattern notations to the fabric. These notations are important in knowing how to put fabric pieces together properly.

Match – to put two or more pieces of fabric together aligning notches and/or other pattern notations that have been transferred to the fabric. To align a fabric design or motif across a cut edge or seamline.

Notch – a V-like protrusion, usually solid black, along the cutting edge of a pattern. These notations should be cut around (out into the fabric) as the pattern is being cut from the fabric. Notches are used as a guide to knowing how fabric pieces fit together. Accurate cutting is important.

On Grain –when the lengthwise and crosswise yarns are at perfect right angles.

Piece perfect – See “On Grain” above. Threads have been pulled (woven fabric) or a line of basting has been done across a course (knit fabric) to mark the crosswise grain line, and the fabric has been folded. The lengthwise and crosswise yarns are at perfect right angles.

Pivot – a technique performed when sewing an L-shaped formation. When you reach the point when the corner is to be turned, leave the machine needle in the fabric. Raise the presser foot, turn the corner and continue stitching.

Preshrink – prewashing (washable) or drycleaning (drycleanable) of all fabrics, notions, zippers, (etc.) used in the project before they are used during construction.

Regular Machine Stitching – the appropriate length of stitch for the type of fabric being used. Stitch will be smooth, without puckers or tight threads pulling on the fabric. It is a balanced stitch (looks the same on either side) usually consisting of 12 to 14 stitches per inch.

Raw Edge – any cut or torn edge; an area or edge without a seam finish.

Right Side – the outside of the fabric that is to be seen or used. Generally speaking, fabric is folded or sold with the right sides together to protect it from excess soil during handling. Prints and designs may be more vivid on the right side. In some situations, it is difficult to determine the intended right side of the fabric. The purchaser or user ultimately may determine which side is to be the right side of the fabric.

Selvage – firm edge along the lengthwise edge of a woven fabric.

Staystitching – done just after marking to prevent stretching during the construction process. It is regular machine stitching, through single thickness, just inside the seamline.

Stitch-in-the-Ditch – a line of regulation machine stitching very close to/in the ditch of the seam, to secure an area. The stitching does not show.

Suggested Fabrics – a listing of fabric recommendations made by the designer that are listed on the back side of the pattern envelope.

Thread Perfect – one or more methods by which a fabric piece is prepared for layout and cutting. A thread or yarn (woven fabric) is pulled across the crosswise length of the fabric. When working with a knit fabric, a course or series of consecutive loops are identified across the crosswise length of the fabric.

Trim – the cutting away of fabric from an area. This technique does not remove bulk, but shifts it from one area to another.

True Bias – the 45° diagonal angle of a fabric when the lengthwise and crosswise yarns are at right angles to one another.

Understitching – a line of regular machine stitching along the facing side of the garment approximately 1/8-inch from the seamed area through all thicknesses of fabric. Used to control bulk by rolling the facing edge toward the inside or under side of an area (collar, neckline facing, front facing, cuff, etc.).

Uneven Plaid – a fabric with a lined design, either printed, woven or knit, in which the pattern is not the same on both sides of a given line (lengthwise and crosswise).

Wrong Side – the inside of the fabric or garment.

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