

## Seam Finishes

by Rebecca Kemp Brent for Coats & Clark

Finishing the exposed raw edges on a project is important for both appearance and durability. Edges left unfinished will fray over time, creating a stringy mess at best and, at worst, undermining the project seams.

Whatever edge finish you choose, remember to sew the seams first, before finishing the raw edges, to ensure an accurate fit. Choose a fine thread such as Dual Duty XP Fine or a serger thread like SureLock to avoid adding bulk to the seam allowances.

A few fabrics such as boiled wool, felt, and fleece don't require edge finishes, because their constructions lock the yarns into place, making the edges stable even when cut. For other fabrics, here are some seam-finishing suggestions.

1. Pink the edges with pinking shears. You can also sew a line of straight stitches 1/4" from the raw edge before pinking for extra security.
2. Use a liquid seam sealant such as Fray Check to keep the fabric from fraying. Apply a small amount of the seam sealant along the edges only. For a softer finish, cover the treated fabric with a press cloth and press the sealant until dry. Unlike other seam finishes, this one can be applied before the seam is sewn.
3. Sew a line of straight or narrow-zigzag stitches 1/4" from the fabric edge on knit fabrics. No other finishing is required for many knits.
4. Fold 1/4" of the raw edge to the wrong side and press. Stitch the folded edge in place. This is called a clean-finished edge. Be aware of the bulk it adds, which can be a problem in all but the lightest-weight fabrics.
5. Overcast the edges. The seam allowances can be overcast separately and pressed open, or overcast as one and pressed to one side. Pressing to one side creates bulk, so use it cautiously. When the seam allowances are finished together, you'll get a neater finish if you trim the seam allowances to 1/4" before overcasting. Overcasting stitches can be sewn by hand or machine; see which overcasting stitches are available on your machine or use a simple zigzag.
6. A serger can be used in place of an overcasting stitch to finish each raw edge individually; a serger can also be used to stitch, trim, and overcast a seam in one operation, finishing both raw edges together. This is an excellent choice for many projects, especially simply shaped knit garments. Knits that are serged can't roll at the edges, so the seam allowances will be flatter and less bulky if serged. Keep in mind, though, that once a seam is trimmed with a serger, alterations to make the garment bigger are virtually impossible. If you plan to serge, baste the seams and test the fit first.
7. A Hong-Kong finish or bound edge is a beautiful finish that can be made in matching, blending, or contrasting fabric. It's excellent for the seams of an unlined jacket or along a skirt or jacket vent.

- a. Begin by cutting true-bias strips of a lightweight fabric, 1" – 1 1/4" wide. Piece the strips as necessary for long seamlines or hems.
- b. Place a bias strip on one seam allowance, right sides together and raw edges matched. Stitch 1/4" from the raw edges.
- c. Press the bias strip away from the seam. Fold the free edge to the wrong side of the seam allowance, covering the raw edge.
- d. Stitch in the ditch to secure the binding on the wrong side. If desired, trim the excess binding fabric 1/8" from the seam on the wrong side of the seam allowance.

You can also use a packaged seam-binding tape to cover the raw edges of your fabric. Seams Great is a lightweight tape made just for the purpose.

8. French seams are known for their narrow width and near invisibility on fine fabrics, but can also be used to make strong, reinforced, wider seams on heavier fabrics.
  - a. Place the fabrics to be joined with **wrong sides together** and raw edges matched. Sew, using a seam allowance 1/8" less than the total seam allowance; for example, if the seam allowance is 5/8", sew this first seam 1/2" from the raw edges.
  - b. Trim the excess seam allowance a scant 1/8" from the seam. Lightly press the seam open; it's not necessary to open the seam allowances.
  - c. Fold the fabric along the first seam, this time with **right sides together**. The trimmed seam allowances will lie between the fabric layers.
  - d. Stitch the seam a second time, 1/8" from the fold/first seam line, enclosing the raw edges. Adjust the seam width, if necessary, to cover the raw edges completely.

Sew a practice seam with your fabric to determine exactly how wide the seam in step a should be, and how narrowly you can trim the seam allowances in step b. The narrower the trim, the narrower the final seam can be without showing "pokies," or edge threads from the trimmed fabric; however, trimming too closely can allow the fabric to slip out of the first seam, resulting in an unfinished narrow seam that is unsightly and not secure.

To use a French seam on a heavier fabric, trim the seam allowances up to 1/4" from the first seam and make the second seam just wide enough to cover the raw edges. You may also want to research felled seams for sturdy joins on heavy fabrics.

There are a couple of don'ts for seam finishes, too:

- Don't trim or finish the raw edges before sewing the seam. Pre-finishing the seam edges may seem easier, but it results in inaccurate seam widths and can affect fit.
- No matter how tempting, don't use a selvage edge as a seam finish. Selvages shrink more than the fabric between selvages, so your seams will pucker when the project is washed.

Products seen on the show:

- Dual Duty XP Fine thread and SureLock serger thread from [Coats & Clark](#)
- Seams Great and Fray Check from [Dritz](#)
- Sashiko machine embroidery designs from Rowena Charlton Designs