

Circular flounces

Hi I'm Ellen Miller, author of *Creating Couture Embellishment*. I'm going to talk about Circular Flounces. First let me explain the difference between a ruffle and a flounce. A ruffle is made with a gathered piece of fabric. Here are the gathers and here are the frills. A flounce is made from a flat piece of fabric. Here is the flat edge of the flounce and here are the frills.

Circular flounces are made from ring-shaped pieces of fabric. They can be a little tricky because they can be dramatically affected by small changes in the size of the fabric pieces and the placement of the straight grain line.

Pattern and cutting

To start I'm going to draw a big circle on this piece of muslin. Mark a center point for the pivot point of the circle. You can use a string with a pen tied at the right length, but this method requires that you keep the string taut as you go around. I prefer to use a stick or a ruler with the pivot point in it and a pen at the end. This ruler has holes along the centerline through which the push pin can anchor the pivot point. Keep the pen at the end of the ruler while turning the ruler around the pivot point. Here the pen is 9in, from the pivot point. The circle has a 9in radius. This outer line, the circumference, will be the hem edge.

Using the same pivot point I need to draw a smaller, inner circle, which will be the seam line, where the flounce sews to your garment. This is a repeat of the previous circle drawing technique, but smaller. Here the pen is 3in from the pivot point.

Then you cut along the circles' lines to start your flounce.

This circle has been cut from striped fabric. The straight grain, here and here, follows the pattern of the fabric. Note that I cut through this circle

here, on the straight grain. We'll come back to this in a few minutes. The cross grain goes across the stripes, here and here, and the bias grain is here and here, here and here.

The inner circle, which I stay stitched, will be the seam line. The outer circle, here, will be the hem edge.

When the inner circle, or the seam line, is pulled straight, the portions of the circle on the straight grain, at the ends and the center of the flounce, here and here, lie flat on the table, and they will lie flat against the body.

The cross-grain sections of the flounce, where the stripes are nearly horizontal, here and here, flare away from the table, just as they will flare away from the body. The bias grain sections also flare away from the body, as you can see here and here.

If I need to change the amount of frill in my flounce I have several options.

One option is to clip into the seam allowance almost to the stay stitching. This helps the seam allowance to be flatter and makes the flare in the cross-grain area is slightly reduced, while bias areas are ripple a little more.

Another option is to change the size of the circles. This is set of 3 circles were all cut with same outside circumferences or hem length but with different inner circumferences, or seam line lengths. These circles all have a radius of 9in, just as all the other circles have had.

As you change the size of the inner circle you also change the length of the seam line, the depth of the flounce and the amount of frill. Here the circle has an inner circle with a radius of 7in. As the inner edge of the circle is straightened along the seam line, note the frill of the flounce, which is small, and length of the seam line, which is long. This circle

also has a radius of 9in but the radius of the inner circle is 5in. The frill of the flounce is fuller than the first sample, but the seam line is shorter. Finally this last circle has the most frill, but the shortest seam line. The radius of this inner circle is 3in. If I were to use this flounce I would need to join several flounces together to make the seam line long enough.

Remember when I cut through the circle on the straight grain earlier? If I always cut through all the circles on the straight grain, then I will be joining my circles together on the straight grain, making the seaming easy and keeping the frills in similar grain sequence so from one flounce to next. It will look like I have one long piece of fabric, rather than a bunch of circles joined together.

Sewing circular flounces

I like to hem the flounce should be done before it is sewn into the garment- just because the flounce alone is less fabric to manipulate on the sewing machine than the flounce and the garment. Frankly, I finding hemming these flounces is tricky, as you are constantly shifting from straight grain to bias, to cross grain and so on. My go to strategy is to line the flounce. Just be sure to cut the lining on the same grain as the fashion fabric. If the lining fabric is cut on a different grain, the two layers will fight each other and negate any frill.

To line a flounce cut the two circles out of fashion fabric and cut the radius along the straight grain. With right sides together, stitch together the outer circumferences of the two circles. Press the seam, as you sewed it, to embed the stitches.

Turn the circles so you have right sides facing out. Open out the circles to expose a small portion of the seam. Working across the seam, on the wrong side of the fabric, press the seam, pushing the tip of the iron just beyond the seam allowance. This will push out the seam line. Carefully work your way around the inside of the circle, pressing the seam without

introducing any unwanted creases. When you have finished pressing the inside of the circle, it will look like an inflated pita bread.

Press the circles flat together, with the seam line at the edge or rolled slightly to the wrong side. You can under stitch the seam or not.

Sew the seam allowances of the smaller, center circle together, wrong sides together.

Open out the inner ring and sew it to the base fabric. If you are sandwiching the flounce between two layers of fabric, sew the flounce to the bottom layer first, so you can see how the flounce drapes as you stitch and not get any little tucks or puckers in the seam line. Then sew the top layer. Press the seam.

Circular flounces can be sewn onto a garment horizontally or vertically, with quite different results and can be added anywhere you want to add a little drama: a neckline, a cuff or a sleeve. A touch of elegance is always good.