

Sewing Vocabulary

- **Backstitch**

A secure, strong stitch that doubles back on the last stitch.

To backstitch using a sewing machine, reverse the direction of the stitch on the machine and stitch backward 4 or 5 stitches over the stitching you just began. Then continue the sewing forward.

- **Bias**

See Grain

- **Bobbin**

A small metal or plastic spool that holds thread, usually in a case in your sewing machine under the throat plate. Select the correct size for your machine.

The thread wound around the bobbin feeds up through the plate and becomes the bottom stitching line as you sew. You will need one bobbin for each color of thread you will be using. Start with 1 or 2 dozen.

- **Bodkin**

A long, flat, needle-like tool used to thread elastic, ribbon or cording through a casing

Substitute: Large Safety Pin

This tool has a clasp that enables you to secure elastic or ribbon on one end and easily slip it through a casing.

- **Casing**

A folded over, stitched tunnel of fabric that holds elastic, ribbon or cording

- **Chain Sewing**

Lining up precut pieces of fabric and sewing the seams one right after the other without cutting the thread between.

Chain sewing pieces of fabric saves time and saves thread. Instead of cutting the thread after you have sewn a seam, don't lift the pressure foot or remove the fabric, but continue to sew 1/2" to 1" on nothing (this will form a thread "chain"). Then feed in the next fabric piece

to sew another seam. Clip the thread "chains" apart when you have all your seams sewn.

- **Crosswise Grain**

See Grain

- **Cutting Board**

A cardboard mat for cutting out patterns using scissors

These boards fold up. It is optional but helpful, especially if you want to protect your table or if you must cut on carpet.

- **Cutting Mat**

See Rotary Cutting System

- **Directional Design Fabric**

Printed fabric that has a pattern with a one-way orientation such as swimming fish or animals in a forest.

When purchasing directional fabric, buy extra in order that you will have ample fabric for each piece to fit to the pattern and still be oriented upright when your project is complete.

Likewise, when you lay out your pattern pieces on directional fabric, orient the width and height correctly to allow the design details to be upright rather than sideways!

- **Dressmaker's Shears**

Shears with a 7-inch or 8-inch sharp blade

Straight-edged scissors with cutlery quality blades for precision fabric cutting and trimming.

- **Finger Press**

Use your finger or thumb to press open a seam.

To gently open or press a seam to one side, lay your garment on a firm surface and run your fingernail along the seam, pressing downward with an even pressure.

- **Fray**

Loose threads on the edge of cut fabric.

Zigzag stitching the edge of the seams helps prevent fraying.

- **Free Arm**

The free arm is used to sew small, enclosed areas such as a cuff or sleeve.

On some sewing machines, you will need to remove the table to use the free arm.

- **French Seam**

This seam is a very fine edge finish which encases the raw edges of the seam allowance.

Use it for projects like pillow cases to form a nice, finished seam.

- **Grain**

The woven threads of a fabric form the fabric grain.

All fabric has grain lines. The threads that run the length of the fabric are called lengthwise grain. The threads that run from selvage to selvage across the fabric are called the crosswise grain.

The *lengthwise grain* is very stable and will not stretch. When a pattern piece calls for lengthwise grain, orient the pattern so the grain runs parallel to the selvage edges.

The *crosswise grain* runs in the other direction, (across the width of the fabric) from selvage to selvage and has a small amount of stretch to it.

Bias – Any diagonal direction of fabric that is not on the grain is called the bias. The true bias runs at a 45° angle from the selvage.

If you pull on the bias, you will notice that it stretches easily. Most of the time you want to avoid cutting on the bias; you will normally want to cut with the grain of the fabric. Use caution when sewing on the bias, as the fabric can easily stretch out of shape.

- **Hem**

Finished bottom edge of a garment, or the open edge on a project such as a pillowcase.

- **Iron Cleaner**

A commercial product used to keep the plate of your iron clean.

You can use this product whenever your iron begins to drag.

- **Lengthwise Grain**

See Grain

- **Marking Pencils and Wheels**

*Choose the marking pencil that is appropriate for your fabric. **Always test first** on a scrap of fabric to make sure the mark will come out.*

- White, silver, yellow or chalk pencils or chalk wheels to mark on dark fabrics.

- Blue or purple disappearing ink quilt markers can be used to mark on light-colored fabrics. There are many kinds, and it's nice to have several to try out and see what works best on different fabrics. Do not iron over the disappearing ink markers or you will set the mark.

- Light mechanical pencils can also be used for marking light colored fabrics if you can mark on the wrong side.

- **Needles for Sewing Machine**

Choose needles for your sewing machine brand.

Sizes 12-14 are for general use. Use Jeans/ Denim needles for denim and heavier weight fabrics. Ball point needles are used for knits. If you prefer a needle with a larger eye, choose one with a higher number.

- **Notions**

Any supplies used to complete a sewing project such as thread, ribbon, elastic, inner facing, pins, buttons and so on that you will use in constructing a garment or project.

Each pattern contains a list of notions you will need to complete your project in addition to the length and type of fabric needed.

- **Pincushion**

Anything that holds straight pins securely will do.

Many people prefer magnetic pin holders.

- **Pivot the Corner**

When sewing a seam around a corner, you will need to pivot your fabric in order to make a clean, square corner.

Sew down one side of your project. At the corner, leave the needle in the down position in the center of your pre-marked 'x', then lift the pressure foot and pivot the fabric 90°, lower the presser foot and continue sewing the seam.

- **Point Turner**

Can be a crochet hook or something else pointed, but not so sharp that it pokes through the fabric. Do not use scissors – they can easily slice through the fabric.

- **Pressing**

Pressing accurately is as important as sewing straight.

Use the steam setting on your iron to achieve a smooth, flat finish, but avoid stretching your fabric.

- **Raw Edge**

Unfinished, cut edge of fabric

- **Rotary Cutting System**

Optional, but highly recommended for accuracy and speed if cutting out quantities of projects

- Rotary cutter – 45 mm
- Rotary cutting mat
- Rotary cutting rulers – 6" x 24" and 1' x 6"

The *rotary cutter* contains a round, razor-sharp cutting blade that is replaceable. It will cut more than one layer of fabric at a time. The mats and rulers are marked with an accurate measuring grid that enables you to align and straight-cut fabric squarely and precisely.

The *rotary cutting mat* is used in combination with the rotary cutter and rulers to make precision cuts without cutting through the mat itself or damaging the rotary blade.

The clear, accurate *rulers* come in various sizes. They help you cut and measure precisely, enabling you to cut your fabric in precise straight or diagonal lines. Look for rulers with 1/4" and 3/8" markings.

- **Seam**

Two pieces of fabric sewn together near the edge.

The standard seam allowance for our projects is 3/8". Standard garment seams are 5/8".

- **Seam Allowance**

The fabric width of a seam measured between the stitching line and the cut edge.

The seam allowance is usually inside a sewn garment or project.

- **Seam Guide**

A small ruler, generally made of metal, that has a sliding measurement marker.

This tool is handy for marking hems and folds.

- **Seam Ripper**

A small tool with a curved blade and pointed end for ripping out seams.

Any seam ripper will suffice. Those with oval handles will not roll away.

- **Selvage**

The tightly woven finished edges of fabric that runs parallel to the lengthwise grain.

The selvages often wash and shrink differently than the rest of the fabric. Trim them off of the fabric before you cut out your project.

- **Setting the Seam**

Long seams can bow as you press them. Lay the seam out straight on the ironing board on its side and iron the seam flat. This sets the seam.

Ironing seams sinks the stitches into the fabric, which helps keep the seams straight. Press over it a few times, then open it on the front side. Lay the seam straight, then iron the it on the right side.

- **Sewing Machine**

Your sewing machine should always be in good working order.

See the video *The Sewing Machine*.

- **Sewing Machine Bobbins**

See Bobbin

- **Sewing Machine Oil**

Oiling your machine periodically makes it run smoother and helps your machine last longer. Always use good quality sewing machine oil.

Oil the places shown in your manual, using only one drop of oil in each place.

- **Sewing Scissors**

Sharp scissors with a 4-inch blade.

These small, straight-bladed scissors can be used to snip of the ends of threads as you sew. The fine, sharp points are great for snipping tight threads or for use in intricate sewing, embroidery and needlework.

- **Sleeve Board**

A small padded board used when ironing cylindrical projects and sleeves.

Substitute: A rolled up towel or a sleeve roll.

- **Steam Iron & Ironing Board**

Use a steam iron for pressing your projects.

A mid-grade steam iron that is working well is ample for pressing most projects. If you use distilled water in your iron, it usually lasts longer. Use a sturdy ironing board with a padded cover.

- **Straight Pins**

Straight steel pins with a head.

Any straight pins will work. Extra long, large headed straight pins work well for most sewing projects. Glass headed pins are nice for sewing clothing. They have a fine, long shaft and the glass heads will not melt if they accidentally come in contact with an iron.

- **Tension**

The tautness of the thread as it feeds through the thread track and through the bobbin case. A perfect stitch interlocks the top and bottom threads evenly in the middle of the fabric layer.

Often tension problems can be solved by turning the tension control knob, which increases or decreases the pressure as the thread passes through 2 spring loaded disks on the sewing machine. The lighter the pressure on the dial the lighter the upper tension is in the fabric. See Trouble Shooting or refer to your sewing machine guide for more tips.

- **Topstitch**

A row of long, finishing stitches sewn on the right side of a garment

Topstitching is normally sewn near the edge of a finished garment or along the folded edge of a seam to secure the seam and/or decorate the project.

- **Walking the Needle**

Rotate the hand wheel towards you to slowly sew just a few stitches.

At times you will want to sew a few stitches very slowly. Leaving your foot off the foot pedal, rotate the hand wheel towards you and 'walk' the wheel, slowly make the stitches by hand.

- **Warp**

Threads that run the length of the fabric are the warp threads. Warp threads are the lengthwise grain of fabric.

When the fabric is being woven, warp threads are secured at the front and back of the loom and run the entire length of the fabric. The warp weave is very stable and does not stretch.

- **Weft**

Threads that run across the fabric from selvage to selvage are the weft threads. Weft threads are the crosswise grain of fabric.

When the fabric is being woven on a loom, the threads that run back and forth across the loom are the weft threads. The weft weave is fairly stable, but there is some give to it if you stretch it.

- **Zigzag**

A Z-shaped machine stitch commonly used to finish raw edges, keeping them from continuing to fray.

Most sewing machines have an adjustable zigzag stitch. See the *Foundational Sewing Practice* video for tips on adjusting the stitch length and width.