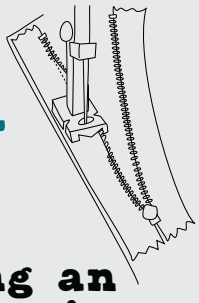
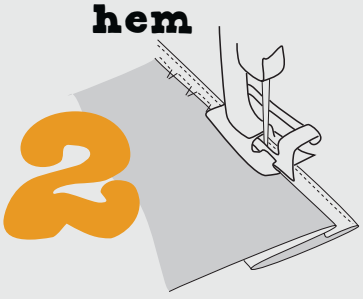
sewdaily

Top 10 sewing TECHNIQUES AND SEWING NOTIONS FROM SEW DAILY:

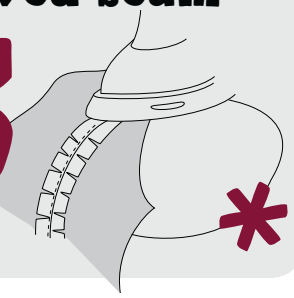
1* installing an invisible zipper



*2 machine stitching a blind hem

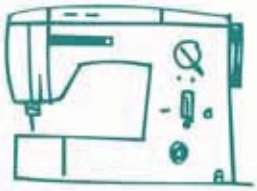


3 sewing + pressing a curved seam*



Sewer's Guide to Sewing Zippers, Sewing Buttons, Sewing Seams, and more!

sewing made modern.

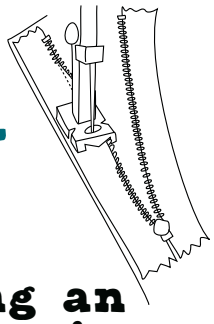


sewdaily
sewing made modern.

Top 10 sewing

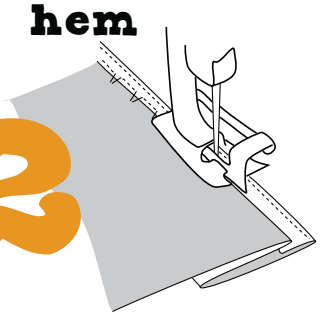
TECHNIQUES AND SEWING NOTIONS FROM SEW DAILY: Sewer's Guide to Sewing Zippers, Sewing Buttons, Sewing Seams, and more!

1* installing an invisible zipper



*machine stitching a blind hem

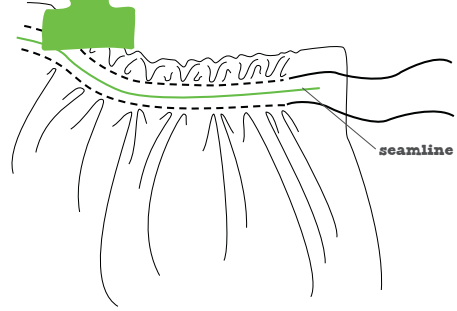
2

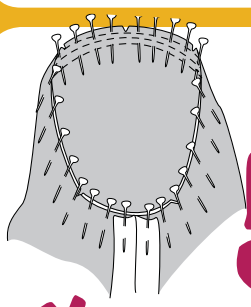


sewing + pressing a curved seam

3*

4* creating even gathers

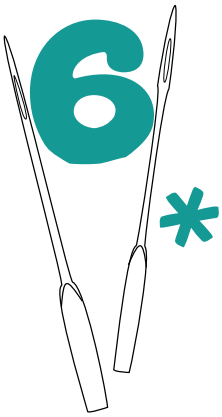




5* setting in a sleeve

choosing the right needle

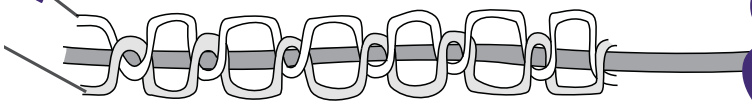
6*



*choosing the right thread

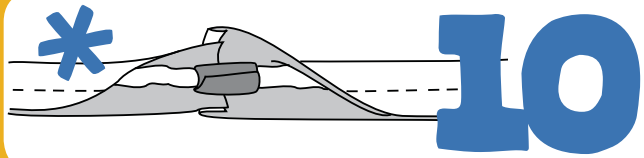
7

*adjusting thread tension



8

9* sewing buttonholes



10 making + inserting piping

+ top 10 notions*

+ top 10* sewing resolutions

MASTERING SOLID SEWING TECHNIQUES is crucial to successfully making professional-looking projects. And whether you are a beginner or have been sewing for years, it is important to have a few key techniques in your skill repertoire to give you the sewing confidence to meet pattern requirements head on from garments to quilts. So we've assembled the Top 10 sewing techniques that can be a bit tricky, but are core skills everyone should have. We'll give you all the foolproof step-by-step information you need to master these tricky techniques. All it takes is a little practice and patience and you'll be sewing like a pro in no time!

Here are just a few of the techniques you will learn:

- **Install an invisible zipper—**sewing zippers frustrates many sewists but we give you our tried-and-true techniques for putting in the perfect zipper every time
- **Sewing and pressing curved seams—**these tricky seams look difficult but they are really easy if you follow our simple instructions
- **Setting in a sleeve—**we show you how easy it is to master this garment sewing technique so that you have a smooth cap every time
- **Making and inserting piping—**this fun embellishment technique adds a professional finish to any project
- **And much more!**

We've also included our Top 10 favorite notions—tools and sewing supplies that can make sewing easier and faster. And to give you some motivation, we have our Top 10 sewing resolutions, created to give you and your sewing a jump start.

Happy Sewing,
tricia waddell
Editor in chief, *Stitch* magazine

sewdaily

EDITOR Tricia Waddell
GRAPHIC DESIGNER Charlene Tiedemann
ILLUSTRATION Ann Sabin Swanson
WRITERS
Linda Turner Griepentrog,
Katrina Loving

David Letterman does it, *People* magazine does it, even the FBI does it, and now we're doing it—a Top 10 listing! This is our list of the top 10 sewing challenges and how to meet them head-on with confidence.

top 10

by linda turner griepentrog

1 installing an invisible zipper

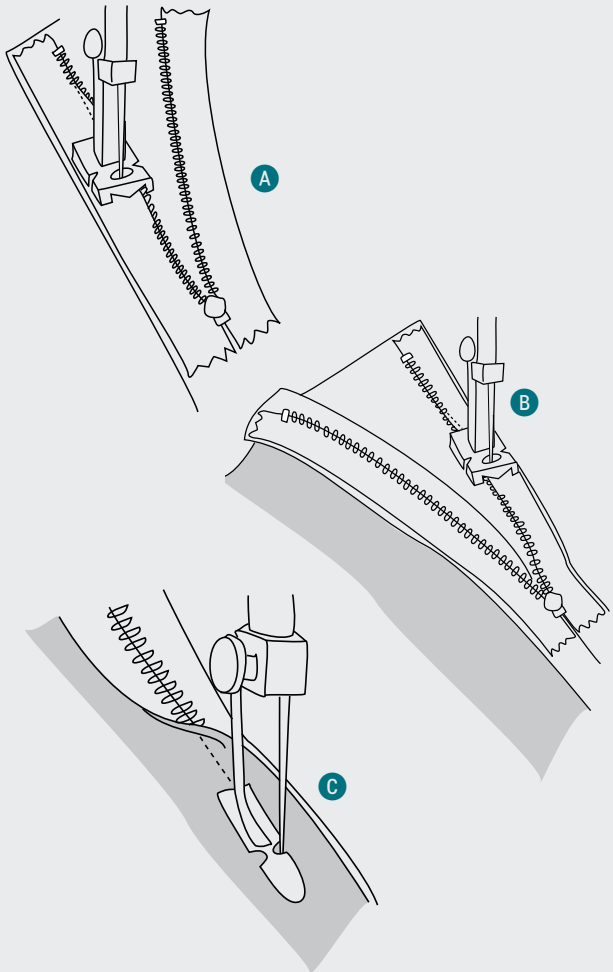
Now you see it, now you don't—or at least you're not supposed to. An invisible zipper closure should look just like a seam, with only the small pull indicating its presence—no puckers or pleats at the bottom!

Unlike a traditional zipper, an invisible one is inserted with the seam open. You need a special grooved invisible zipper foot to allow the needle to stitch as close as possible to the rolled-out teeth.

Unzip the zipper and pin it face down on the seamline right side with the top stop at the upper seamline. Roll the teeth into the right groove under the foot and stitch to about 1" (2.5 cm) above the zipper pull A. Stitch as close to the teeth as possible, but not through them, or it won't zip!

Repeat the process for the opposite side, using the left foot groove and without twisting the zipper B.

To finish the bottom, zip the zipper to get the pull out of the way, and hang on to the zipper tails. Using a regular zipper foot with the needle at the right, begin stitching slightly to the left of where you stopped on the sides and sew up the seam below the zipper C. Catch the lower zipper tape to the seam allowances if you want to.



machine stitching a blind hem

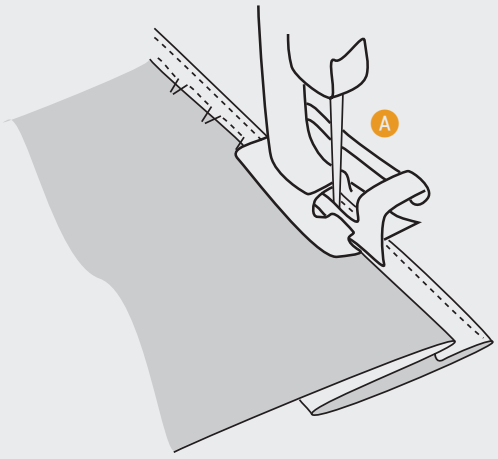
2

Yes, you can create a blind hem on the machine, but not everything works with this option. Garments that are straight (not flared) work best, and textured fabrics help hide the stitches.

Mark the hem length and trim the hem width evenly. Finish the hem upper edge by turning it under, serging, or applying hem tape.

Fold and pin the readied hem back to the garment side, leaving only the hem edge finishing (about ¼" [6 mm]) exposed. Attach a blind hem presser foot to your machine and adjust the guide so that it rides along the garment's folded edge A.

It's really important that you test-sew to get a feel for where the stitch should be because a blind hem stitch sews several straight stitches and then takes a zigzag stitch that catches into the garment right side. The "bite" of the zigzag determines how much shows on the right side, so you need to catch as little as possible. Once you've got that figured out, hem the garment, turn the hem down, and press to set the stitches.



3

sewing + pressing a curved seam

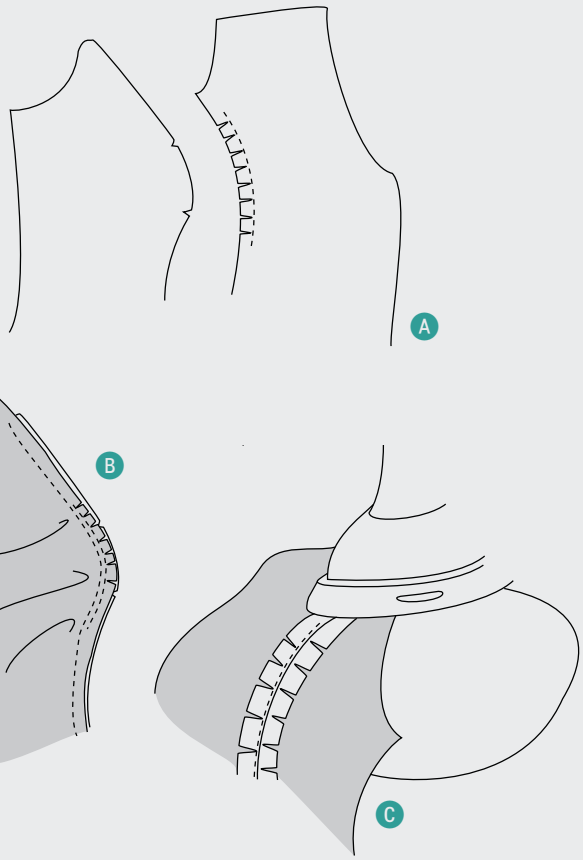
When you first look at two opposing curves (such as on a princess seam), you may think that there's no way they can fit together, but—surprise, surprise—they do. Joining a concave and convex curve takes a little know-how for a smooth seam.

Sew a line of stitching just inside the seamline on the concave curve and clip into the seam allowance every ⅜" (1 cm), stopping short of the stitching A. (Use the pattern notches as a guide for the curved section and stitch between them.)

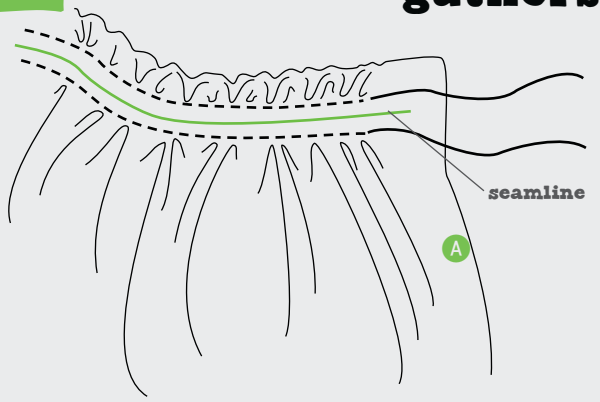
Spread the curve apart and pin it right sides together with the convex section, matching the notches. Stitch the seam with the clipped side facing up, sewing just beyond the reinforcement stitching B.

Press the seam open over a pressing ham (a stuffed ham-like shape) to avoid flattening the curve you just made. If needed, clip out some fullness on the convex side to make the seam lie flat C.

TIP Don't remember your high school geometry? Concave is a hollow inward curve (think of a cave); convex is an outer curve.



4 creating even gathers



Making even gathers isn't easy—there are always those pesky little pleats and tucks that find their way into the mix. To ensure nice, tight, even gathers, sew a line of basting stitches (longest machine stitch and slightly loosened tension) ⅛" (3 mm) on either side of the seamline. On tough-to-gather fabrics, add a third basting line right on the seamline. Leave long thread tails on both ends; when you're ready to gather, grab all the bobbin threads on one end and pull gently, easing the gathers to the center. Repeat from the other end A. When you have the exact gathered length needed, tie off both ends. As you join the gathered piece to an adjacent section, stitch with the gathered side up, make sure the fullness stays at a right angle to the stitching line, and don't let the gathers scoot along the thread length.

5 setting in a sleeve

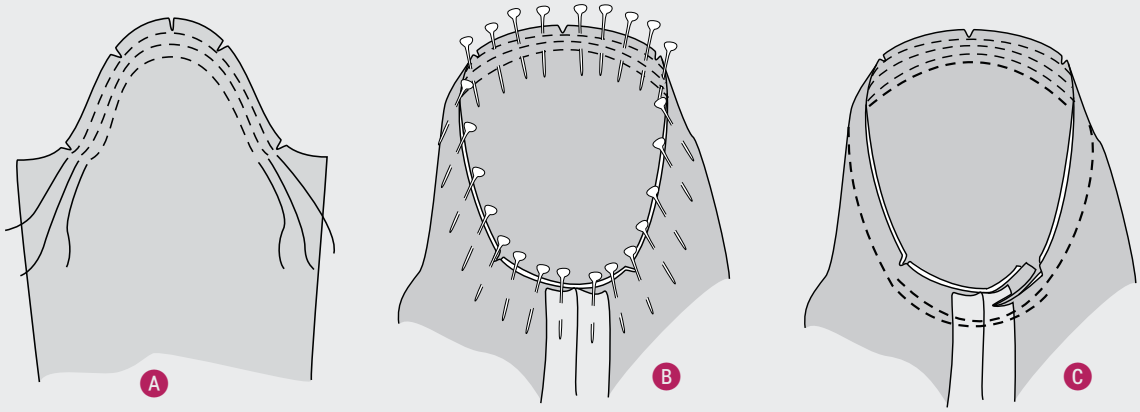
This is another of those "who thought this up?" sewing challenges—the idea that a seemingly much larger curved piece (the sleeve) has to fit into what appears to be a much smaller hole (the armhole). A set-in sleeve should have a smooth cap without any wrinkles or tucks. To accomplish this, you need to "ease" the cap fullness to fit. Similar to gathering, easing evenly distributes fullness without any gathers.

Stitch three rows of basting between the sleeve notches, one on the seamline and the others ¼" (6 mm) on each side A; leave thread tails long enough to pull.

Pin the sleeve into the armhole, right sides together matching the notches, dots (if applicable), and underarm seams. Pin at the underarm seam, center cap notch, and the front (single) and back (double) notches. Gently pull on the ease-stitching bobbin threads to pull up the excess fullness to fit the armhole, making sure that the fullness is eased evenly within each segment (between the initial pins) and then pin the rest of the sleeve in place, leaving no tucks or pleats along the seamline B. On natural fibers, use the tip of the iron to help steam out any excess, but don't press the sleeve area flat.

With the sleeve side up, begin stitching at one notch, continuing down through the underarm area and around the sleeve cap, carefully manipulating the upper sleeve fullness with your fingers as you stitch to avoid puckers. Just go slowly and be vigilant to keep the extra sleeve fullness evenly distributed between the notches as you sew.

As you come back to where you began sewing, shift the stitching to the inside seam allowance ⅛" (3 mm) and stitch back to the other notch. Trim the lower armhole area close to the second line of stitching C. Don't trim the upper sleeve seams because the seam allowances help the sleeve cap fit properly. On ravel-prone fabrics, zigzag or serge the seam allowance edges together.



6

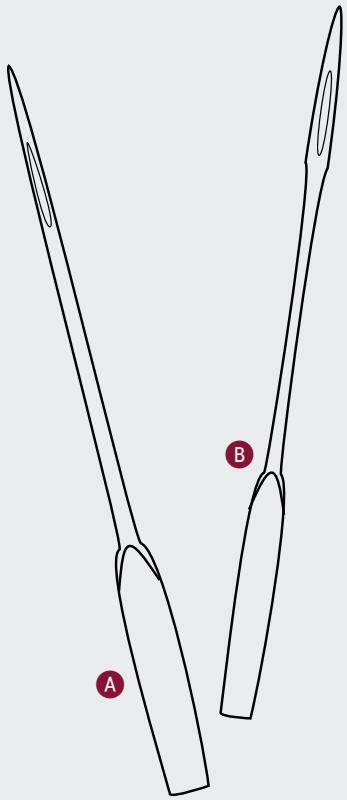
choosing the right needle

One of sewing's greatest mysteries is sewing machine needle selection, and it's important to match the right needle to the fabric and thread for successful stitching. Needles are sized according to the diameter of the shaft, and that choice is related primarily to the fabric thickness. Sizes range from 65/8 to 110/18—the first number is metric sizing and the second is American sizing; the larger the number pair, the bigger the needle. Lightweight fabrics require a smaller needle; heavier fabrics, a larger one.

There are a host of specialty needles, but the two most common types for general sewing are universal A and stretch/ballpoint B. A universal point works well for sewing most woven fabrics, and a ballpoint is needed for knits and other stretch fabrics.

Some tasks, such as using a heavier thread for topstitching, require a larger or specialty needle. A bigger eye and specially shaped shaft help topstitching-weight thread avoid that annoying shredding thing!

Special-function needles include topstitching, embroidery, jeans/denim, leather, metallic, sharp/microtex, quilting, hemstitching, twin, triple, and easy-thread. For complete information on these specialty needles, see schmetzneedles.com.



7

choosing the right thread

Matching the correct thread type to the needle and fabric being used will allow you to avoid many frustrating hours ripping out stitches. Although choosing from the plethora of different types, weights, and fibers available can be confusing, you can simplify the process by keeping a few things in mind.

Choose an appropriate thread weight for the weight of the fabric. Keep in mind that the larger the number, the finer the thread. For example, a 50 or 60 wt. is a medium-weight thread, an 80 wt. thread is fine, and a 30 wt. thread is heavier weight. You may also see threads labeled with two numbers, for example, 50/2. The first number refers to the thread weight, while the second number refers to the number of plies that are twisted together to create the thread. The larger the second number, the more plys there are, which will create a thicker and sturdier thread.

Choose a thread that is made from the same or a similar fiber as the fabric. That being said, there are properties of each type of thread that make them appropriate for sewing a range of fabrics.

SILK THREAD is a good choice for sewing both silk and wool fabrics, sheers, and other delicate fabrics. It's also great for sewing on knits or stretch fabrics as silk thread has inherent stretch. Fine silk thread is great for handsewing on delicate fabrics and for appliqué.

POLYESTER THREAD (often labeled "all-purpose") is appropriate for sewing synthetic fabrics and many general sewing projects/medium-weight fabrics. It's also a good choice for sewing on knits or stretch fabrics, and is often the most economical thread option for general sewing.

COTTON THREAD is appropriate for sewing on cotton and for handstitching, but it may break more easily than other threads and it is not appropriate for fabrics with stretch. Most cotton thread available today is mercerized, which improves strength and produces a smoother thread than cotton that has not been mercerized.

COTTON-WRAPPED POLYESTER (often labeled "all-purpose") is appropriate for sewing most medium-weight, general sewing projects.

SPECIALTY THREADS such as quilting thread, heavy-duty or upholstery thread, and topstitching thread are all examples of specific-use threads that are available. There are lots of threads to choose from, so be sure to read labels, test different threads, and choose a thread that is appropriate for your project type.

8

adjusting thread tension

If your mother repeatedly warned you not to touch the tension, free yourself of that admonition and know that it's really okay to dial up or down. If it doesn't make the stitch look like what you want, then you can simply (and safely) put it back to where you began.

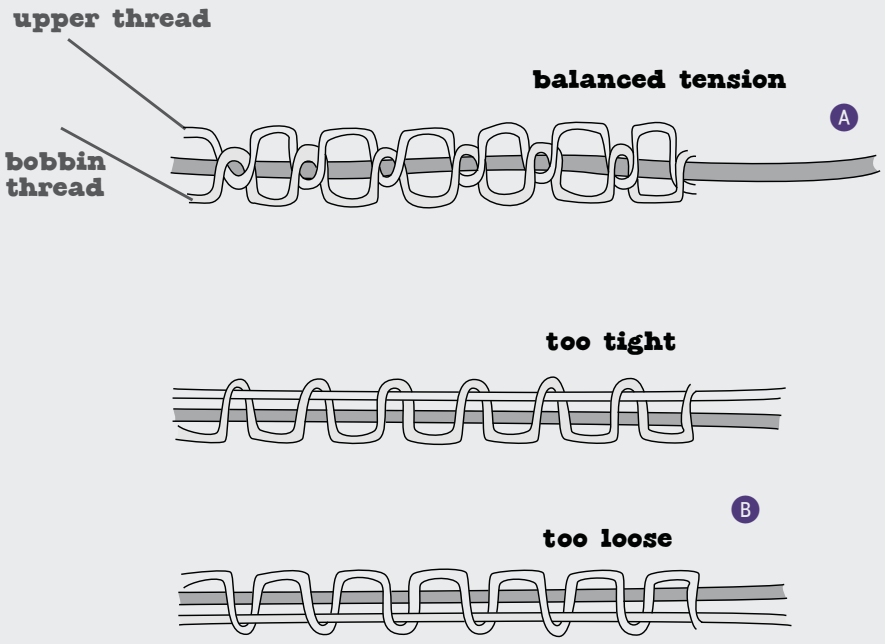
Tension is like a tug-of-war between the bobbin thread and the top thread—ideally, both should be of equal strength. If you could cut through a seam vertically (okay, just imagine it), the bobbin and top threads would be interlocking in the middle A. If the top thread is too tight, the bobbin thread will be visible on the upper side; if the top thread is too loose, the top thread will show on the underside B.

It's easier to adjust top tension than bobbin tension simply because the upper adjustment has numbers; the bobbin tension is adjusted with a mysterious screw and no numbering system. When adjusting either, remember that "righter is tighter, and lefter is looser."

Some machines adjust tension automatically based on fabric and thread information you provide; others require manual adjustment when you change thread types, sew on heavy fabrics, or use a decorative stitch.

Poor tension will affect not only the look of your stitched seam but also the durability—loose tension can cause the seam to pull out; tight tension can cause it to pucker. So, make adjustments in small increments if needed until stitching looks balanced.

Always test-stitch and fine-tune when you think there might be a tension adjustment needed. Keep a notebook of samples with tension settings written on the swatches.



9 * sewing buttonholes

Nobody wants buttonholes that shout "homemade," and the best way to stitch perfect ones depends on your machine. Some machines "read" the size of the button and make the hole the proper size automatically; others require more marking and some form of user involvement in the stitching process.

Transfer the buttonhole placement lines from the pattern to your garment fabric using a removable marking method—chalk, pen, pencil, or thread tracing. Buttonholes can be vertical or horizontal; vertical ones are aligned with the center line (front or back); horizontal ones extend ⅛" (3 mm) beyond the center line (A).

To determine buttonhole sizing, measure the button diameter and thickness, and add ⅛" (3 mm). Always stitch a test sample to make sure your button fits the hole comfortably.

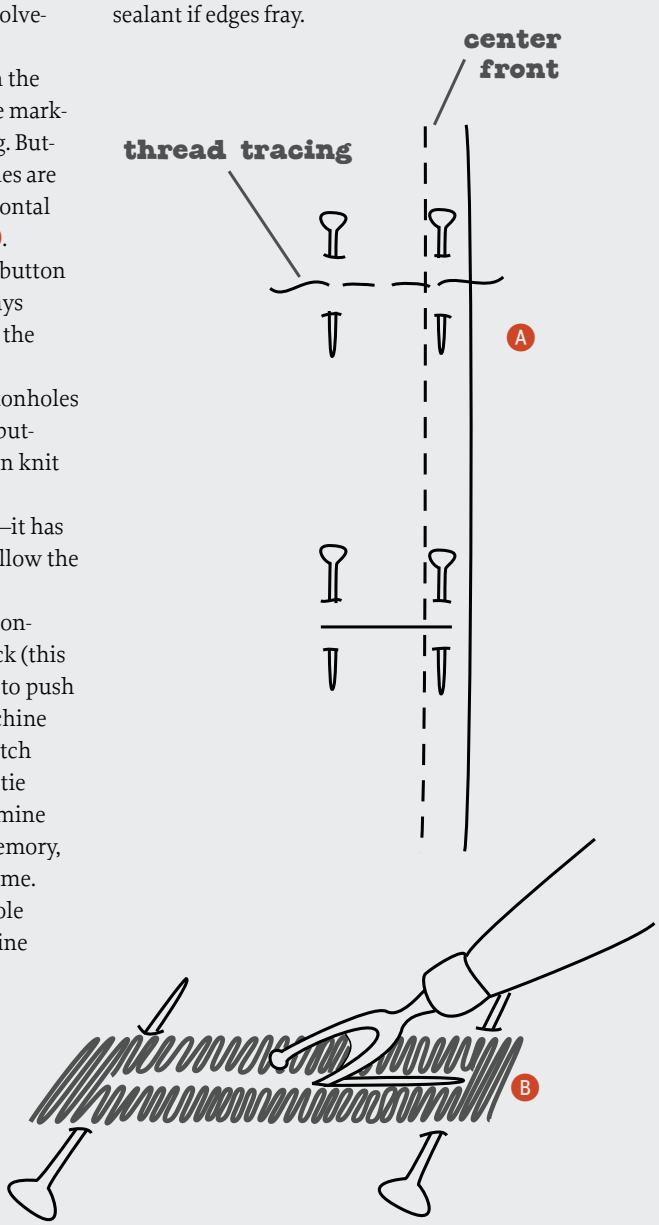
It's important to interface the area where buttonholes will be stitched; otherwise, you get "fish mouth" buttonholes with gaping openings—especially bad in knit fabrics.

Install your buttonhole foot on the machine—it has a recessed opening (or two) on the underside to allow the dense stitching to pass through without stalling.

Depending on how your machine makes buttonholes, the general plan is to stitch one side, bartack (this may be an automated function, or you may need to push a button or turn a knob; refer to your sewing machine manual) at the end of buttonhole length, then stitch the opposite side and bartack at the original end; tie off thread ends. You may need to manually determine the length each time, or if your machine has a memory, stitch one and store it to repeat accurately each time.

On knits, add a small cord inside the buttonhole stitching for stability; consult your sewing machine manual for instructions.

To cut open the buttonhole, place a pin at each end to the inside of the bartacks, to avoid cutting through them accidentally and use a seam ripper to slice neatly between the stitching rows (B). Apply a thin line of seam sealant if edges fray.



10

making + inserting piping

Whether you're sewing a pillow or a garment seam, piping adds a professional finish, and it's super easy to do. Measure the circumference of the piping and add 1¼" (3.2 cm) for seams, then cut and piece bias strips to the length needed.

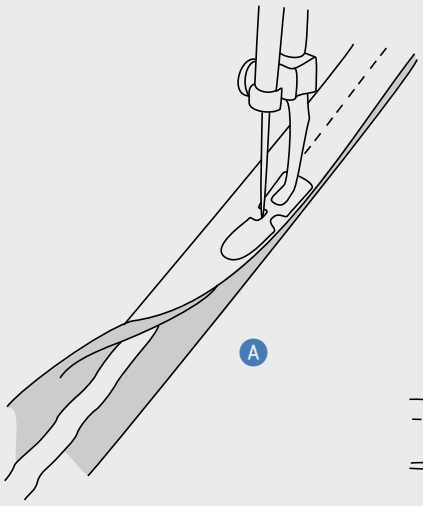
Center the cord on the bias wrong side, fold the excess fabric over the cord, and match the cut edges. Using a zipper foot, stitch close to the cord A.

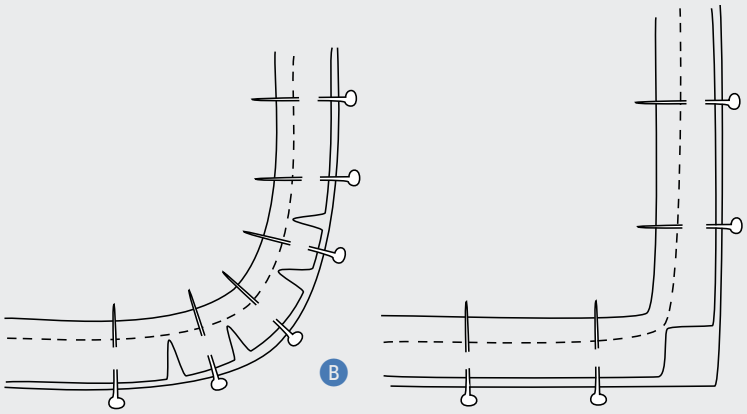
To insert into a seam, starting about 1" (2.5 cm) from the first end, baste the cording seam allowances to one side of the seam, with the cording facing inward. If the piping needs to go around a sharp corner, clip into the seamline and spread apart; if it's going around a curve, clip repeatedly so it lies flat B.

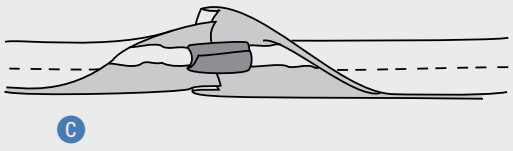
Depending on the project, piping ends can be enclosed in a seam, or to join continuously, turn under the second edge fabric covering ¼" (6 mm), clip the cord end, and abut to the opposite one. Tape the cord ends together, then overlap the fabric covering and continue stitching C.

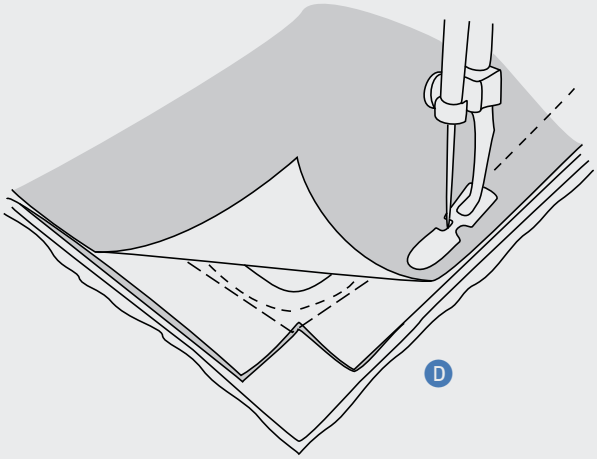
To encase the piping, place the adjacent project piece on top of the basted piping. With the basting line up and using a zipper foot, stitch just inside the previous stitching line, snugging up to the piping as close as possible D.

If your machine has a piping foot, use it instead of a zipper foot to allow the piping to feed through the underside groove; adjust the needle position to stitch just inside the basting.









top 10 notions

What if you have the basic sewing tools and supplies and you're ready to go to the next level? Check out our list of the top 10 notions that will have you sewing like a pro. **by katrina loving**

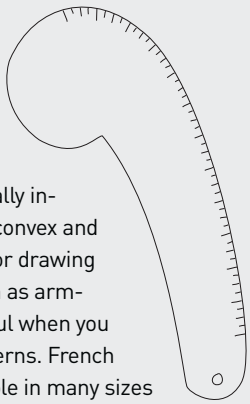
bobbin winder

Have you ever found yourself frustrated that you have to unthread and then re-thread your machine to wind more thread onto your bobbin? A separate bobbin winder is the perfect solution, letting you wind bobbins to your heart's content without touching your sewing machine.

chalk wheel /chalk pen

These tools use powdered chalk for marking fine lines and pattern markings, with the added bonus that the chalk can be easily wiped away when you're finished.

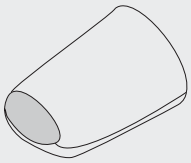
french curve



This special ruler has a varied curved edge (usually incorporating both convex and concave curves) for drawing curved lines (such as armholes) and is useful when you draft or alter patterns. French curves are available in many sizes and shapes; you'll want to get a selection to fit all your pattern needs.

leather thimble

Traditional metal thimbles are sometimes difficult to use if you have long fingernails, small or large fingers, or have trouble keeping the needle from slipping around on the surface. That's where a leather thimble comes in handy.



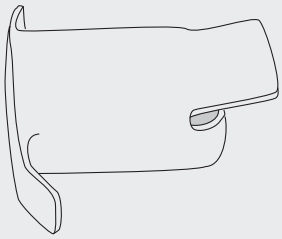
The leather is soft, which allows it to mold more easily to your finger, while the surface allows for a more secure grip on the needle as you push it through fabric. Plus, many leather thimbles feature a gap at the top for fingernails to poke through, making this thimble a comfortable option.

loop turner

A loop turner is a simple, economical little tool that's indispensible for turning narrow fabric tubes such as spaghetti straps, button loops, or drawstrings. Simply insert the loop turner into the tube and push it out the other end. Then, grab the fabric with the loop turner's small hook and pull the tool back through the tube, bringing the fabric with it. Easy!

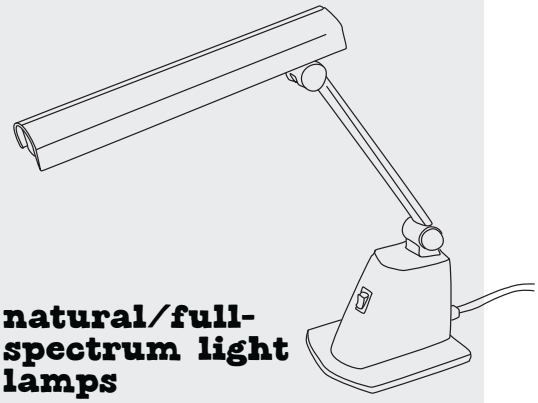
magnetic seam guide

A magnetic seam guide is an easy way to ensure even seam allowances or mark a seam allowance on your machine's metal throat plate. Simply place the seam guide at the appropriate distance from the needle and run the edge of the fabric against the guide as you sew. One caution: magnetic seam guides aren't recommended for computerized machines, so check with your dealer or sewing machine manufacturer to be safe.



mini iron

Miniature irons are perfect for small detail work. The iron can easily be used in tight spaces where a standard iron won't fit, and it gives you fine-tuned control.



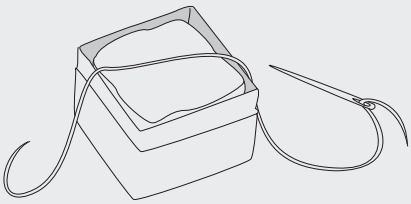
natural/full-spectrum light lamps

A lamp that mimics natural sunlight, such as an OttLite, lets you see colors true to their actual hues, which makes color-matching and design decisions so much easier and more accurate! And the lamps also use energy-efficient, long-lasting bulbs.

top 10 notions continued...

tailor's ham

A tailor's ham is a firm pressing guide named for its recognizable shape—it looks like a ham! This tightly stuffed fabric form is used to press curved seams, such as bust darts, princess seams, or armholes; it lets you press curves without flattening them or creating folds.



thread conditioner

Thread conditioner (such as Thread Heaven or beeswax) is used to condition and protect thread. Conditioning your thread cuts down on fraying, breaking, and tangling; it also adds strength and reduces drag.

LINDA TURNER GRIEPENTROG
is the owner of G Wiz Services. She loves sewing, quilting, and all things fabric. In addition to writing, she leads fabric-shopping tours to Hong Kong for the American Sewing Guild.

top 10 sewing resolutions

As we begin a new sewing season, there are some things that as sewers we simply need to commit to for our own mental health. Take this pledge—**I hereby resolve to:**

1. ***Frequently clean my sewing machine***—you're not making felt here! Fabric and thread fibers build up under the feed dogs and the resulting mass can cause stitching problems.
2. ***Close the guard on the rotary cutter no matter how soon I'll be using it again.*** It's easy for kids or pets to knock it off and potentially hurt themselves or damage the blade.
3. ***Save scraps in an organized manner***—by color or size (cut up for quilting), but not in a big heap.
4. ***Teach someone to sew.*** Everyone should know how to do it!
5. ***Sew something for charity.*** An Internet search will bring up lots of options.
6. ***Regularly read sewing and quilting magazines*** to keep up on what's new and exciting.
7. ***Spend some time sewing at least every day or every other day.*** Even if you have only 20 minutes to spare, you can get a lot done with dedicated time.
8. ***Look first in my fabric stash for what I need, before I head to the store.*** Using something you have creates space for new purchases of the latest fabrics.
9. ***Get together with other sewers.*** Whether it's through a sewing guild, a quilt guild, or just a group of sewing friends, being with others who share your passion is inspiring. Don't know anyone? Join an online community.
10. ***Take a class and learn something new.*** If you don't have a store near you, sign up for an online class!