

common terms

Give your vocab a boost with this must-know list of sewing lingo

ARMSCYE—Armhole (sewing term).

AWL—A pointed instrument used for piercing small holes in leather, wood, etc.

BACKSTITCH—A strong stitch that doubles back on the last stitch. There are a variety of backstitch styles.

BASTE—Temporary long running stitches created by hand or machine to hold fabric in place before the final stitching.

BESWAX—A wax made by bees used to smooth and strengthen thread for hand sewing.

BIAS—**True bias** is a cut made on an angle 45 degrees to the selvage. This direction allows for the most stretch.

Bias refers to any line diagonal to the crosswise and lengthwise grains. Most bias pattern pieces are laid on the true bias; the grainline arrow and the pattern's layout instructions help you align pattern pieces.

BIAS BINDING—Sometimes called bias tape, a bias cut strip used to bind or cover edges. Slightly stretchy, it sews neatly around curves.

BINDING—Strip of fabric used to cover or enclose raw edges.

BOX PLEAT—Two pleats that face each other on one side and away from each other on the opposite side.

BROCADE—Fabric woven with an elaborate design or raised overall pattern.

BUMP CLOTH—Thicker than usual underlining, often used for silk drapery panels.

CASING—A folded and stitched “tunnel” that holds elastic, cording, or boning.

CATCHSTITCH—A cross-shaped hem stitch used to join an edge to the inside of a garment.

CENTER BACK—(CB) the vertical center line on the back of a garment.

CENTER FRONT—(CF) the vertical center line on the front of a garment.

CHARMEUSE—A soft, lightweight drapable fabric of silk or synthetic fibers, having a semilustrous satin face and a crepe-like back.

CLEAN FINISH—The term used to describe a finished raw edge.

DART—Folded and stitched wedges of fabric that shape a garment over curves. The dart point is marked by a dot. Dart legs are the lines that start at the point and stop at the seam.

DOUBLE-FACED—A material with two “right” sides.

D-RING—A D-shaped, usually metal, ring of various sizes used in a closure, as a means of securing straps or objects, or as a decoration.

EASE—1.n. Difference between body measurements and garment measurements. Also defined as the amount of space in a garment that allows comfortable movement. 2.v. Gathering stitches to fit a longer piece of fabric to a shorter piece of fabric.

EDGE STITCH—Straight stitching sewn very close to the edge of a seam, trim, or outer edge. Prevents edges from stretching or rolling, and supports the fabric.

FACING—Used to finish exposed edges as a partial lining found on center front, neckline, or armhole edges.

FEED DOG(S)—Located beneath the presser foot, these “teeth” move the fabric under the presser foot. In

the raised position, they “feed” the fabric. You can also drop the feed dogs so you can move the fabric manually in any direction.

FELL STITCH—Hand stitches worked from the right side to pull a seam together invisibly. Stitches travel in the fold of the fabric.

FLAT-FELLED SEAM—A machine-sewn seam where all raw edges are encased by fabric and sewn flat.

FRENCH DARTS—Front darts starting from near or at the side seam waistline and ending near the bust point.

FRENCH SEAM—A self-enclosed seam stitched from the right side, then from the wrong side.

GORE—Vertical garment sections, usually on a skirt or dress.

GRADING—The process of converting a pattern from one size to another.

GRAINLINE—Long arrow symbol printed on a pattern that corresponds to the lengthwise grain of the fabric.

GUSSET—A small, triangular piece of material inserted into a garment to improve the fit or for reinforcement.

HAND-TACK—Sewing a stitch two or three times by hand in the same place to hold a seam or trim in place.

HEM ALLOWANCE—the distance between the cutting line and the hemline. Also called the hem depth.

HEM BAND—A band inserted into a hem for stability.

HOOK AND EYE—A two-piece clothes fastener, usually made of metal, consisting of a hook that catches onto a loop or bar.

HORSEHAIR BRAID—A bias-woven net strip of nylon threads, often used to support a hem. It stretches and takes curves easily.

INSEAM—The vertical seam inside the leg on pants.

INTERFACING—Sew-in or fusible fabric used to stabilize fashion fabrics. Can also add body, reinforce, or shape a garment.

INVISIBLE STITCH—Made 1/16-inch or 1/8-inch apart through the fold of a turn-under allowance. This technique hides the stitch in the fold along the edge.

JEWELRY FINDINGS—Materials used in jewelry making such as headpins, clasps, bails, etc.

LOOP BUTTONHOLE—A buttonhole closure made of corded loops.

MACHINE BASTE—A very long machine stitch.

MACHINE TENSION—Controlled by disks to apply drag to the machine thread. Adjust it for thread and fabric variances.

MÖBIUS—A one-sided strip with a nonorientable surface made by taking a single strip and twisting one end, then attaching the two ends.

MUSLIN—1. Unbleached cotton fabric. 2. A term used by designers to describe a test garment that checks fit and style.

NAPPED FABRIC—A fabric with a fuzzy texture, such as velvet, that runs in a specific direction.

NOTCHES—Found on the cutting lines of patterns, these diamond- or triangle-shaped marks indicate the points where seams should meet.

ON-GRAIN—The line parallel to the selvage on fabric. The same as grain, straight-of-grain, or warp threads.

ORGANZA—A sheer polyester, nylon, or silk fabric constructed in a plain weave and with a crisp finish.

PICKSTITCH—A variation on the backstitch where you backtrack only slightly and only a bead of thread is visible on the right side of the garment.

PIPING—A narrow piece of bias-cut

fabric that is folded over a cord and then inserted as a decorative trim into the seam between the edge and facing of a garment.

POLYMER CLAY—A heat hardening polymer compound used for veneer, jewelry, or small sculpture.

POINT PRESSER—A small tool used to get inside a tight corner or small space for ease of pressing.

QUILT—1.n. Coverlet or wall hanging made from small pieces of fabric sewn together in batted layers and topstitched. 2.v. The action of topstitching the quilt layers together.

RATTAIL—A silk tubular braid used for trimming or as a cord.

RAW EDGE—The unfinished cut edge of fabric.

ROTARY CUTTER—A round cutting blade with a handle.

RUNNING STITCH—An even hand stitch in which the stitches weave in and out in a dashed line.

SEAM ALLOWANCE—(S.A.) The distance between the cutting line and the seam line. This allowance is usually hidden inside the garment when sewn.

SELVAGE—The tightly woven factory edge of fabric that runs parallel to the lengthwise grain.

SERGE—To sew an edge or seam with a serger. A serger (which is also known as an overlock machine) creates an overlock stitch that wraps over the edge of the cloth. The machine trims the edge right before it sews it.

SHOULDER POINT—The point on the shoulder seam where the arm and shoulder connect.

SLEEVE CAP—The section of the sleeve above the biceps line.

SLIP STITCH—Used to join two folded edges or one folded edge to a flat surface, for an almost invisible stitch.

SQUARE KNOT—A knot that forms a square. It's commonly used in macramé.

STITCH IN THE DITCH—Stitching inside the “valley” or “groove” of a seam.

STABILIZER—An underlayer used to support a fabric for machine embroidery.

STAYSTITCH—Machine stitches along a seamline that keep the fabric from stretching when the seam is sewn.

STRAIGHT SKIRT—A skirt with seams perpendicular to the floor and hemline parallel to the floor.

TOPSTITCH—A decorative row of stitches sewn on the right side of a garment.

TUCK—A stitched pleat of any width.

UNDERLINING—A layer of lightweight fabric sewn into a garment to reinforce seams, add weight or firmness, and provide a layer for inner stitching.

VENT—An opening serving as an outlet for air, and, in a garment, to allow for movement.

WAISTBAND—A band of material encircling and fitting the waist of a garment, such as trousers or a skirt.

WARP—Lengthwise thread in woven fabric that runs parallel to selvage.

WEBBING—A strong, woven material of hemp, cotton, or jute in bands of various widths used for belts, carrying straps, etc.

WEFT—The crosswise threads in a woven fabric, traveling from selvage to selvage.

WHIPSTITCH—To sew by hand with overcast stitches; used to finish a fabric edge or to bind two pieces of fabric together.

WOOL BOUCLÉ—Woolen yarn with loops producing a rough appearance on woven or knitted fabrics.

WRONG SIDE—(WS) Typically, the inside of a garment or the backside of fabric.

ZIGZAG STITCH—A stitch that has width and length and looks like connected Zs.



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