



Glossary of Sewing Terms

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Fashion designers and seamstresses seem to have a vocabulary all their own. The following list is a collection of the more common terms used to describe the silhouettes, styles, and details of clothing design, as well as fabric qualities, notions, and construction procedures. Having a working knowledge of these terms will increase your confidence when discussing and constructing garments.

- A-line –** Dress or skirt resembling the shape of an A.
- Alter –** To change the pattern or garment so that it fits the body and represents body measurements and proportions.
- Applique –** A cut-out decoration, design or motif applied to base fabric.
- Armscye –** Armhole; opening for a sleeve.
- Asymmetrical –** One-sided, not geometrically balanced.
- Baste –** Stitches made by hand or machine to hold fabric pieces together temporarily.
- Bias –** Diagonal direction of fabric. True bias is at a 45-degree angle to the grain line.
- Binding –** Strip to encase edges as a finish or trim.
- Blind hem –** Sewing a hem invisibly with hand or machine stitches.

Blouson –	Bloused effect of fullness gathered in at and falling over a seam, typically the bodice over a skirt.	Dart –	A tuck in the fabric that helps in fitting the garment over the body curve.
Bodice –	Portion of garment above the waist.	Dolman –	Sleeve set into a deep armhole so as to resemble a kimono sleeve.
Bolt –	Unit in which fabric is packaged and sold by the manufacturer. Usually contains 12 to 20 yards.	Double-breasted –	Front closing that overlaps enough to allow two rows of buttons.
Boning –	Flexible strips used to stiffen seams or edges.	Drum lining –	Lining not sewn into garment seams.
Casing –	A folded-over edge of garment or area through which elastic or ribbon is threaded.	Ease –	The even distribution of slight fullness when one section of a seam is joined to a slightly shorter section without forming gathers or tucks. Used to shape set-in sleeves, princess seams, etc.
Chevron –	V-shaped stripes.	Edge stitching –	Stitching placed 1/16 inch from the edge; may be stitching detail, such as topstitching or stitching done to finish the outer edge of a seam or facing edge.
Clean finish –	A method for finishing the raw edges of pockets, hems or seams.	Empire –	High waistline bodice with a loose, straight skirt.
Clip –	A cut in fabric to allow ease on curves or corners. Also used to indicate notches in pattern.	Enclosed seam –	A seam allowance along a faced edge that is stitched and turned to form an enclosed seam between two layers of fabric.
Closure –	That which opens or closes a garment (buttons, snaps, etc., or the area on which they are placed).	Eyelet –	Small, round, finished hole in a garment or fabric.
Colorfast –	Fabric that will not fade or run during cleaning or laundering.	Fabric hand –	The way a fabric feels and drapes; its flexibility, smoothness and softness.
Contrasting –	Opposing; showing off differences of color, fabric, shading, etc.		
Crease –	A line made by folding the fabric and pressing the fold on this specified line.		

Facing –	To finish an edge by applying a fitted piece of fabric, binding, etc. Also the right side of the fabric.	Grade –	To reduce the bulk of enclosed seams by trimming the individual seam allowances different widths, clipping inward curves and corners, notching convex curves, and trimming away excess fabric at outward corners.
Fell stitch –	Neat, tiny, vertical stitches used in tailoring.	Grosgrain –	Silk fabric or ribbon having heavy crosswise ribs.
Finger press –	Pressing a small area by creasing with the fingers.	Gusset –	A fabric piece inserted at the underarm to give ease in the sleeve area.
Finish –	Any means of completing a raw garment edge to keep it from raveling, rolling or fraying.	Hem –	The finished portion on skirts, jackets and sleeves held in place with a hemming stitch.
Flap –	Shaped garment piece attached by only one edge, such as a flap pocket.	Interfacing –	A carefully selected fabric placed between the garment and the facing fabric for added body, to give support, and to maintain shape.
Flare –	Portion of garment that spreads out or widens.	Join –	A term used in pattern directions that usually means to stitch together the pieces referred to using normal seam allowances and regular stitches.
Fly –	Fabric used as lap to conceal an opening in a garment.	Keyhole –	Rounded neckline with an inverted, wedge-shaped opening at front or back.
Fold line –	The line where fabric is folded, usually vertically, when cutting out a garment. It is common for the center front of a garment to be placed on a fold line.	Lap –	To fold or extend a garment piece over another.
Fusible web –	A web-like adhesive that melts when you apply heat and moisture.	Lapels –	Part of a garment that turns back, especially the front neckline fold of a jacket.
Gather –	To draw up fabric fullness on a line of stitching.	Layout –	Cutting chart on instruction guide sheet showing the placement of pattern pieces.
Give –	The amount of stretch on fabric that yields to pressure without tearing or breaking.		
Gore –	Tapered section of a garment; wider at the lower edge.		

Line –	Style, outline or effect given by the cut and construction of a garment.	Pin basting –	Pinning seams before stitching.
Marking –	Transfer of construction symbols from paper pattern to fabric.	Pinking –	Cutting raw edges with pinking or scalloping shears to prevent raveling.
Match –	To bring notches or other construction markings on two pieces together.	Pintuck –	A narrow channel of fabric stitched together to form tuck design detail, used in french hand sewing.
Miter –	To form a diagonal seam at a square corner.	Pivot –	Stitching around a corner by leaving the needle in the fabric, raising the presser foot, and turning the fabric in a new direction.
Motif –	Unit of design; used as decoration or pattern.	Placket –	Garment opening fastened with zipper, snaps or buttons. Finish applied to sleeve opening with cuff.
Nap –	Soft surface with fibers that lie smoothly in one direction.	Pre-shrink –	Washing/dry-cleaning fabric to allow for shrinkage of fabric before construction.
Notch –	Cutting wedges from seam allowances of an outward curve. Also a pattern symbol transferred to fabric to indicate seaming.	Princess line –	Garment fitted with seams instead of darts.
Notions –	Items other than fabric or a pattern required to complete a garment, such as buttons, thread, zipper, etc.	Ravel –	To fray.
Pattern markings –	The symbols for construction printed on the pattern, such as for darts, buttonholes, notches, dots or tucks. They are transferred from the pattern to the fabric by means of tailor's tacks, notches, chalk, basting or temporary fabric markers.	Raw edge –	Unfinished edge of fabric.
Peplum –	Small flounce or extension of garment around the hips, usually from the bodice.	Right side –	Finished side of fabric, outside of garment.
		Rip –	To remove stitches improperly placed; also tearing fabric along the straight grain.
		Roll –	Desired curve and fold (commonly on a collar); shaping established by pressing, pad stitching, etc.

Seam –	Two or more edges of fabric held together by sewing. Seam should be well constructed and appropriate for the fabric, type of garment, and the location on the garment.	Silhouette –	Outline or contour of a figure or garment.
Seam allowance –	Width of fabric beyond the seam line, not including the garment area.	Single-breasted –	Center front closing with enough flap to allow one row of buttons.
Seam binding –	Ribbon-like tape used to finish edges.	Slash –	Cut taken in fabric to facilitate construction or turning of fabric at a point or corner.
Secure –	Fasten permanently by means of a knot, backstitching, etc.	Slip stitch –	A hand stitch used to join two layers of fabric from the right side.
Self fabric –	Of the same material as the rest of the garment.	Stay –	Means of maintaining the shape of a garment area, by using a small piece of fabric or tape that is sewn to an area of the garment to reinforce and secure a position.
Selvage –	Lengthwise finished edges on all woven fabrics. Running parallel to the lengthwise grain.	Stitching in the ditch –	The technique of sewing a straight stitch inconspicuously in the seam well on the correct side of a previously stitched seam. Used to complete waistbands, cuffs, collars, and french bias binding.
Semi-fitted –	Fitting to conform partly, but not too closely, to the shape of the figure.	Tack –	Joining two garment layers with small, loose, hand stitches or thread loops.
Serger –	A machine that overcasts and trims an edge simultaneously.	Tailoring –	Construction technique requiring special hand sewing and pressing to mold fabric into a finished garment.
Shank –	Link between button and fabric to allow for the thickness of overlapping fabric.	Taper –	Cutting or stitching at a slight diagonal, generally to make gradually smaller.
Sheath –	Close-fitting dress with a straight skirt.	Template –	A shape made of a stiff substance, such as freezer paper, usually the size of the finished design. (i.e., pocket, applique shape or quilt pattern)
Shirtwaist –	Dress with bodice details similar to a shirt.		
Shrinking –	Constricting fabric with steam or water to eliminate excess in a specific area. Also done to fabric before cutting out a garment to prevent further fabric shrinkage.		

Tension –	Amount of pull on thread or fabric during construction. Also the relationship of the needle and bobbin thread and how they interlock to form the sewing machine stitch, creating a balanced, looser or tighter stitch.	Underlining –	Lining joined in garment seams that is used to give shape or support.
Thread count –	Number of threads in 1 square inch of fabric.	Understitching –	Folding the entire seam allowance to the facing side or underside and then stitching on the correct side of the facing close to the seam edge. This allows the seam to lie flat and keeps the seam edge from showing on the correct side of the garment.
Topstitching –	Line of machine stitching parallel to a seam or edge, done from the right side of a garment.	Vent –	Faced or lined slash in a garment for ease.
Trim –	To cut away excess fabric.	Welt –	Strip of material stitched to a seam, border or edge.
Trimming –	Feature added to a garment for ornamentation, such as braid or self fabric.	Wrap-around –	Garment or part of a garment wrapped around a person, such as a skirt.
Turnover –	A garment section, usually a collar or cuff, that folds back upon itself.	Wrong side –	The inside of a garment or back side of fabric.
Twill tape –	Firmly woven tape used for tailoring to reinforce and prevent stretching.	Yoke –	Fitted portion of garment, usually at shoulders or hips, designed to support the rest of the garment hanging from it.

This publication was adapted from "Garment Construction Terms" by Cynthia Klumpp, Master Clothing Volunteer Coordinator, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas.

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