

MASTERCLASS

THE ART OF *Hemming*

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Whether finishing a home-sewn garment or altering a store-bought one, knowing how to hem is a life skill and, if done well, an art. Learn tips and techniques to take your hemming skills to the next level.

HEMLINE

The first and most important task is to figure out where the hemline should fall on the garment. Personal preference is the guiding principle here. If determining this on oneself, the best method is to try on the garment and have someone else fold up the fabric to find the right hemline. Teach your child, friend, husband or significant other to help you, and you're set for life when it comes to hemming.

If that isn't an option, replicate the hem length of a similar garment in your closet. Measure the inseam

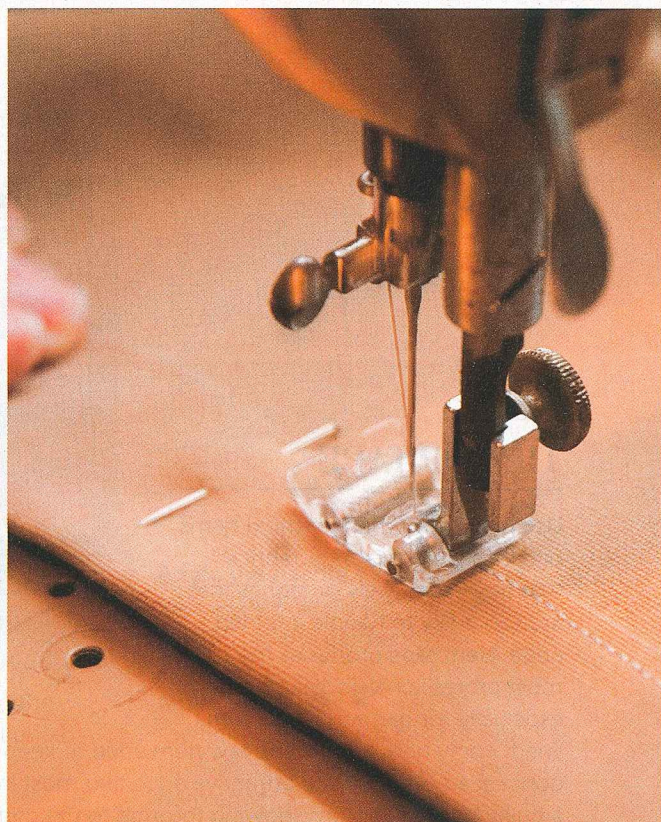
of a favorite pair of pants, the underarm sleeve length of a well-fitting sleeve or the waist-to-hem measurement of a comfortable skirt, and use those measurements to determine the new hemline.

Another method is the trial-and-error approach. Pin up the hem to an estimated length and then try on the garment. Repeat until the desired hemline location is achieved. While not easy to do on oneself and a bit time-consuming, one or two attempts will result in a desired hemline length.

START SIMPLE

The most complicated part of any hemming task is all the extra design elements, such as linings, kick pleats and cuffs. These elements often require a bit more knowledge and a few additional sewing techniques. Before undertaking more complicated hems, it's vital to master the simple or plain hem that has no such interruptions.

In a plain hem, the lower edge is simply turned to the wrong side and stitched in place around the circumference of the garment. While simple, there are still some important considerations to make when stitching this hem type. Aside from figuring out where to stitch the hemline, it's necessary to finish the cut or hem allowance raw edge to produce a clean appearance on the garment wrong side and contain any possible fraying, as well as ensure there is no bleed or bump on the garment right side. The fabric type and, in some cases, the garment type, determines how to finish the edge.



HEM PREP

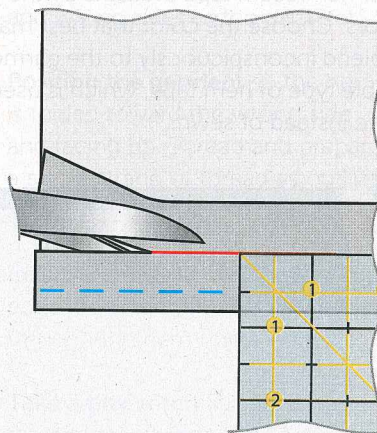
Once the location of the hemline is determined, mark the hem allowance and cut away any excess fabric length. The hem allowance, also referred to as the hem depth, is the distance from the hemline to the cut edge. It's this amount that's folded to the garment wrong side and stitched in place.

Fold the excess fabric and pin it in place around the entire garment circumference. Try on the garment. Confirm the hemline is in the desired location and is an equal distance from the floor at all points. There are exceptions for women's dress pants or any hem that's intended to be at different lengths from the floor. Some women prefer the back to be a bit longer to accommodate wearing high heels. If that's the case, adjust accordingly.

Hand-baste the hem, stitching $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the fold. This secures the hem and allows for easy pin removal while completing the hemming process. Hand basting also provides a rounded, rather than crisp, hem edge. For more casual or simple cotton projects, press the hem in place instead of hand basting so a pressed crease is visible.

Mark the desired hem allowance around the entire circumference. This determines where to cut away any excess length. A $1\frac{1}{4}$ " to $1\frac{1}{2}$ " hem allowance is typical for pants, while dress or skirt hems are around $1\frac{1}{2}$ " to 2". Whichever hem width is chosen, trim away the excess fabric (1).

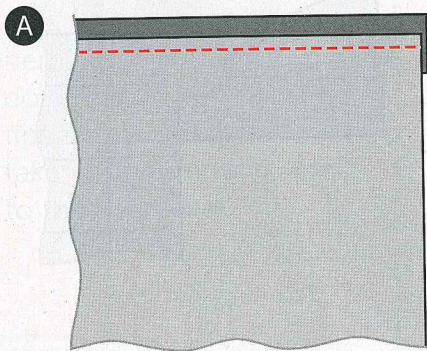
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TIP TOP TAPE

Use **hem tape** when finishing hems on heavyweight fabrics, fabrics that fray excessively or fabrics that are too bulky to handle a folded edge. Hem tape produces the most professional-looking hems, especially for garments that aren't lined. Apply hem tape to the raw hem edge to keep fabric from fraying, conceal an otherwise unattractive edge and most importantly, prevent a bulky hem edge from showing through to the garment right side.

Hem tape is available in three types. One is a lace tape that has some stretch to it so it conforms well to both curved and straight edges while producing a decorative finish to the hem edge. Another is a 1/2"-wide polyester tape that is also used to finish seams or to stay seams. As an added bonus, the tape features easy sewing guidelines to make attaching the tape fast and even. These types come in packaged form in select colors sold in three-yard lengths. Fine fabric shops may also offer hem/seam tape available by the yard in a broader selection of colors. Choose the color that best matches the fabric, as it's intended to blend inconspicuously to the garment wrong side. There is also a fusible type of hem tape, which is used the same way, but is fused in place instead of sewn.



To apply hem tape, machine stitch or fuse the tape to the hem allowance edge, making sure the tape upper edge sits 1/8" to 1/4" above the hem allowance edge (A). This allows the hem edge to transition smoothly onto the garment fabric, preventing any bump or bleed to the right side. Use either a straight or small zigzag stitch to sew the tape in place.



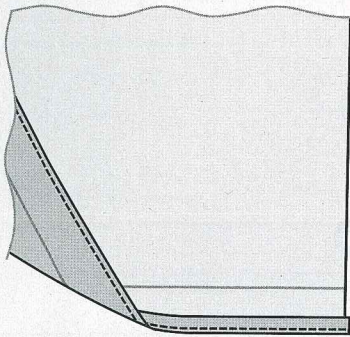
EDGE FINISHES

All garments should look as clean and finished on the wrong side as they do on the right side, so some careful finishing of the hem edge is necessary. There are essentially three ways to finish a plain hem. The type of fabric and style of garment determines the appropriate approach. The objective is to secure a hem so it's as close to invisible from the garment right side and no visible bleed or bump from the hem edge shows through.

Serge the edge to produce a clean finish when working with almost any type of fabric. The overlock stitching prevents raw edges from fraying and provides a medium from which the final hem stitching takes place. Serging is by far the easiest and fastest way to finish a hem edge for both knit and woven fabrics. For a lined garment, serging the fashion fabric hem produces a clean finish that is then covered and concealed by the lining.

A turned and stitched hem edge looks especially clean and finished on lightweight to mediumweight fabrics. Make certain the double layer of fabric at the turned edge isn't so bulky that it bleeds or is visible from the garment right side when pressed.

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Create a turned edge by folding the upper hem $\frac{1}{4}$ " toward the wrong side; press. Stitch approximately $\frac{1}{6}$ " to $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the fold, and then fold the hem allowance toward the wrong side before hand stitching to the garment (2).

Machine stitch the folded hem

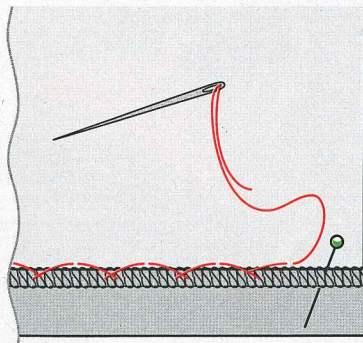
to secure, as an alternative. After folding the upper hem edge $\frac{1}{4}$ ", fold the remaining hem allowance and machine stitch $\frac{1}{6}$ " to $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the first fold. Attach an edgestitch/joining presser foot or a zipper foot for better accuracy, or use a steady hand with a universal foot.

For very sheer fabrics, a double-fold hem is best. This type of hem ensures the raw edge won't show through sheer fabric and adds just enough weight so the hem hangs firmly in place. Fold half the hem allowance toward the wrong side; press. Fold the remaining half toward the wrong side; press. Hand or machine stitch the hem in place.

STITCH OPTIONS

Stitching hems by hand or with a sewing machine. Both ways offer options that are nearly invisible on the right side. Hand stitching the hem achieves a more refined finish and produces nearly invisible

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stitching to both the garment wrong and right side. The key to hand hemming is learning to take the smallest stitch, literally just one thread when possible, with the needle and to exercise patience and precision.

There are variety of hand-stitching options to use for any hemming project. The choice depends on the fabric, the project and personal preference.

CATCHSTITCH

The catchstitch is a complex hand stitch that incorporates flexibility and stretch into the stitching and is therefore a good option for hemming knit fabrics. Serge the hem edge first, and then catchstitch the hem in place, working left to right.

Position the garment so the hem is folded toward the wrong side and facing up. Thread a needle with a 20" length of thread. To strengthen it and prevent it from knotting up, run the thread through some beeswax and then iron it. Knot one end of a single thread.

Draw the thread through the hem edge at the starting point.

Angle the needle to the right and take a tiny right-to-left horizontal stitch from the garment.

Move the needle $\frac{3}{8}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " to the right and take a small right-to-left horizontal stitch through the hem edge.

Repeat to complete the hem (3).

SLIPSTITCH

The slipstitch is one of the most frequently used hand stitches for hemming, and with good reason. The stitch, when done carefully, is virtually invisible from both the right and wrong sides of the garment.

Position the garment so the hem is folded toward the wrong side and facing up. Thread and prepare a single strand of thread as outlined at left.

Insert the needle into the hem upper edge, beginning from the wrong side through the hem upper edge.

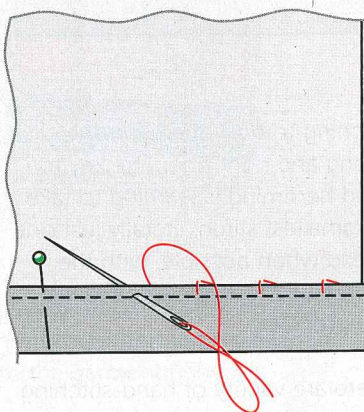
Take a tiny stitch (ideally a single thread) directly above and into the garment. The resulting stitch should be quite small and perfectly vertical.



TWO IN ONE

For knit fabrics, a coverstitch hem is the optimal choice. This stitch produces an edge that's totally concealed by a double row of stitching on the garment right side and an overcast stitch on the underside. The prime advantage of this stitch is it stretches with the fabric. In addition, it's a two-in-one technique that secures and finishes the hem edge in one step. The drawback is it requires a separate coverstitch sewing machine or a serger with a coverstitch stitch option. This technique can't be accomplished with a standard sewing machine. As an alternative, use a twin needle to produce the same effect, but be aware that this method doesn't stretch with the fabric as much.

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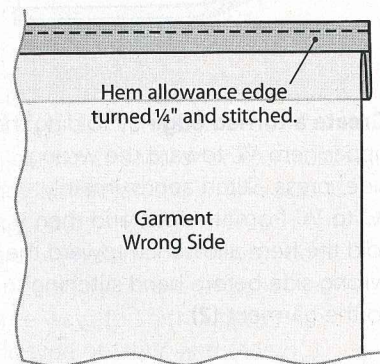
Insert the needle into the hem edge, front to back, and angle it up and to the left $\frac{3}{8}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ ".

Repeat until the hem is fully stitched, making sure only a thread or two of the garment fabric is captured with each stitch. Keep the spacing between each stitch consistent and even. On the garment right side, only small, evenly spaced pick stitches should be visible. If applying on lofty or dense fabrics, the stitches may not be visible at all (4).

BLIND HEM

Stitch a blind hem either by hand or sewing machine. If using a machine, install a blind-hem presser foot and

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select a blind-hem stitch. Some machines offer two blind hem options: one for woven fabrics and another for knit fabric that allows for stretch. Whether stitched by machine or hand, when done right, just a row of small pick-like stitches will be visible on the garment right side.

To blind hem by hand, serge, trim with pinking shears or fold the hem edge. If the edge is folded, be sure the fold is at least $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide so the raw edge is contained and concealed by the blind hemming.

Secure the hem in place with pins or a good pressing.



Working from the wrong side, turn the hem allowance down, exposing just slightly less than $\frac{1}{4}$ " of the hem allowance. This creates a folded edge on the fabric wrong side. Pin the fold to secure (5).

Thread a needle with a single strand of thread and knot the end. Working from either right to left or left to right, start by securing the thread to the exposed hem allowance.

Move $\frac{3}{8}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " to the side and pick a tiny, one-thread vertical stitch from the fold. The smaller the stitch, the less visible the stitching will appear on the garment's right side.

Move another $\frac{3}{8}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " and take a small stitch from the hem allowance edge.

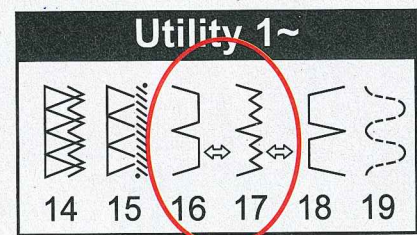
Repeat to complete the blind hem. The finished result is a hem that's almost invisible from both the garment's right and wrong side.

To blind hem by machine, finish the hem edge as desired and fold the hem per the instructions for hand hemming.

Set the sewing machine to the blind-hem stitch option, either woven or knit, and attach the blind-hem presser foot (6).

Test-stitch on a scrap to determine the correct stitch width and length. The stitch width option adjusts the amount of the fold that's captured so the pick stitch can be made smaller and less conspicuous.

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Position the hem under the presser foot so the fold rests against the foot blade.

Machine stitch the hem.

When complete, press open the folded portion. 5