Finishing Wearables—Dealing with the Demons: seams, facings, and hems
with Eleanor Best

Contents

e term *Fashion Fabric* will be referred to in this booklet as any handwoven fabric or textile used for outer garment construction.

Underlining?

Underlining is fabric that is used to "strengthen" a fashion fabric when a sculptured look is desired. Without underlining, the appearance may be sloppy, wrinkled, puckered, stitching may show through, the original shaping may not hold up with wear or cleaning, and without the "backing" protection, the fashion fabric may be subject to abrasion that will shorten the lifespan of the garment.

e type of fabric that may be used for underlining may be chosen from a selection of commercially prepared underlinings or may be any fabric that will be compatible with the fashion fabric. Compatibility would include such features as: draping, weight, woven, knit or non-woven, fusible or separate fabric, machine or hand washable, dry cleanable, shrink resistance, and color.

e underlining is cut using the same pattern pieces as the fashion fabric. It may be used for markings needed to identify sewing areas such as darts, seam joinings, pleats, etc. so that marking directly on the fashion fabric does not have to be done. is may be an advantage when it is hard to see or make markings on the fashion fabric itself.

e underlining and the fashion fabric are

Fashion Fabric

Separate underlining

Fused underlining

then attached to each other to produce one single piece. is may be done by basting or fusing.

Another advantage of underlining is that facings, hems and interfacings may be stitched only to the underlining so that ridges and stitching do not show on the right side of the fashion fabric. To accomplish this, the underlining should be lighter in weight and as soft or softer than the fashion fabric so that the outer fabric retains the appearance for which it was designed. Choose a fabric for underlining that is firmly woven so that the garment will retain its shape and prevent stretching.

Often di erent e ects may be desired in one garment. In this case it will be necessary to choose the appropriate underlining for the purpose. For example, a softly draped yoke may need a softer underlining than would the skirt which may need a sti er underlining to retain the shape of an A-line. Generally underlinings fall into two categories—soft and crisp. e softer ones generally are used with lighter weight fashion fabrics while the crisper ones are used for the heavier weight. Care must be taken when using the fusible type or when fusing an underlining fabric to the fashion fabric. Make sure that the e ect is not *too stiff* or that the fusing process does not produce an uneven e ect on the outside fashion fabric. Test it first.

Remember it is not always necessary or even desirable to use underlining when constructing your garments.

Interfacing

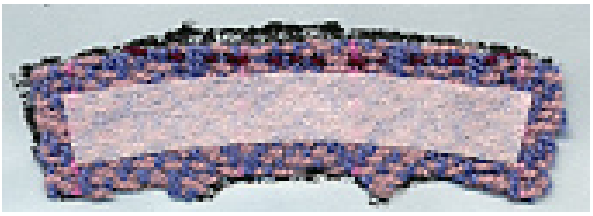
Interfacing is used to maintain strength and stability in *specific* areas of the garment.

ese areas usually are the collars, cu s, buttonholes, opening edges and lapels of the garment. As with the underlining, the interfacing also prevents stretching and puckering, while adding shape and crispness to the fashion fabric. If interfacing is not used, there may be ridges or bumps that will give a *homemade* look to the garment.

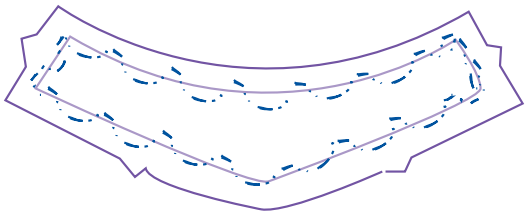
Several weights of interfacing may have to be used to achieve desired e ects. For example, buttonholes should be of a medium weight to avoid tearing when in use, while an area that only requires a slight shaping would only require a lightweight interfacing. Collars may be sti or draped and soft as in the case of a mandarin versus a cowl collar. Pockets and facings may require a heavier weight to retain their stability. Usually the same rule applies to the weight of the interfacing—choose a lighter weight than that of the fashion fabric.

In some cases it may be necessary to interface large portions of the garment. Printed commercial patterns will identify these sections usually by providing separate pattern pieces. Be sure to select the interfacing that will provide the proper drape when placed under the fashion fabric. Test by placing the fashion fabric, with the interfacing under it, draped over the hand. Make sure that the finished fabric will be pliable enough to be wearable.

ere are two methods of fastening the interfacing to the fashion fabric. Usually the interfacing is cut (or trimmed away) so that the seam allowances remain free, then the interfacing is catch stitched with alternating stitches in the interfacing then in the seam allowance of the fashion fabric or it may be fused to the wrong side of the fashion fabric again leaving the seam allowance free.

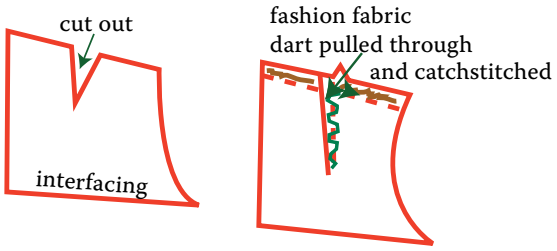


Collar with fused interfacing



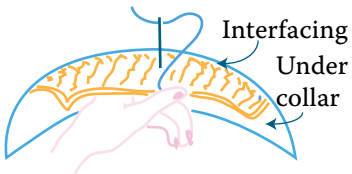
Yoke with interfacing “catch stitched” to fashion fabric seam allowance

e area where a dart comes may be treated by cutting out the dart from the interfacing and pulling the dart of the fashion fabric through the cut out area and then catch stitching the dart to the interfacing.



Dart area cut out Interfacing applied to fashion fabric

A special technique called “padding” is used for rolling the area around the neck of a collar. It is done on the under collar fabric only. is is a catch stitch much like a herringbone but the fashion fabric is caught by only a thread so it will not show on the right side. e catch stitching is then done while the interfacing and fashion fabric are molded around the finger to produce the roll shape in the collar.



Method of forming the roll and padding undercollar.

Another method may be used but it may not be as reliable. Cut the interfacing slightly smaller than the pattern ($^1/_8$"), then stretch it slightly whether fusing or stitching so that it produces a slight “roll” in the fashion fabric. This will produce a concave roll which should make the collar lie naturally around the neck. If there is a chance that future washings or dry cleanings may dislodge a fusible fabric, it would be advisable to catch stitch the fusible type of interfacing also. When working around the armhole area some bubbling may occur, making it necessary to add a lambswool padding or other material to fill in the slack areas.

There are three main types of interfacing fabric—woven, non-woven or knitted. The woven and non-woven types are found in various weights and a limited selection of colors. Care must be taken to cut with the grain of the fabric if the woven type is used. The non-woven comes in stretchable as well as non-stretchable, so the finished effect must be determined in choosing which type is needed. Compatibility with the use of the fabric and its cleaning qualities should be taken into consideration as well. The handweaver might give thought to the use of a fusible interfacing to give stability to an otherwise unstable fabric. If using fusible interfacing in areas other than belts or patch pockets, iron on the interfacing to the *facing fabric rather than the fashion fabric to avoid a “too rigid look.”*

Test your choice of interfacing before constructing the whole garment. Make sure that you are producing the effect that you want. It may be necessary to use a pressing cloth if the fabric is too delicate. Check too, to make sure that the iron-on adhesive does not show through. Remember that it has taken a long time to weave the fashion fabric so it is worth the time to finish it properly.

The professional handweaver may wish to purchase an **Ultra Press** (or similar make) machine if using the fusible type of interfacing to any extent as it produces an excellent

source of dry or steam heat over a larger flat surface, thus giving a better bonding.

Linings

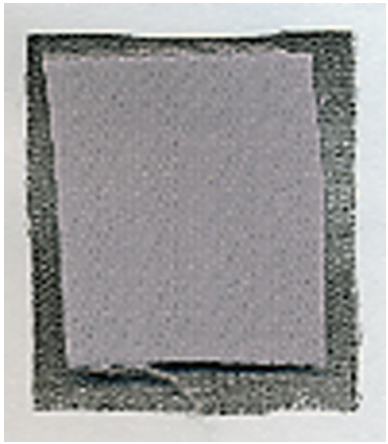
Lining may be made from any durable fabric to give body and a comfortable feel while weaving the garment. Choice of a suitable color, weight and pattern (if desired) can give the garment a luxurious couturier finish—the professional look that can add dollars to its value and enhance the value of the custom made handwoven fashion fabric. From the utilitarian point of view, the life of the garment will be lengthened by protecting the fashion fabric as well as protection for the seams which would otherwise be exposed.

As with the advantages of using underlining and/or interfacing, wrinkles may be reduced, a crisper look will result, shape will be retained and an unstable fabric may be stabilized.

Again the lining fabric choice should be softer and lighter weight than the fashion fabric—*a happy medium* of just enough weight to give stability but not allow sewing construction to show through and heavy enough to maintain the original structure intended for the garment. Unlike the underlinings and interfacings, the lining will show and it will come in contact with the body, so the choice should be such that it will maintain an attractive appearance (wrinkle-free, etc.) Do not forget fiber compatibility (washable or dry cleanable) and comfort in wearing—a lining suitable for outdoors may be quite unsuitable for shopping indoors or may not allow breathing in damp weather. Above all, do not skimp on the quality. Many store-bought garments, especially coats, have inferior quality linings that become threadbare long before the outer fabric is worn out—and who wants to take the time to carefully pick out a lining and replace it with a new one!

Interlining

Do not overlook the possibility of adding warmth to a coat by adding a fourth layer—a layer which will be treated as if it were the lining and subsequently sewn together with the lining and put into the coat as if they were one piece.



The interlining should be chosen for the purpose of the garment—light weight but warm heavier for winter wear if that is not compromised by the weight of the garment.

Facings

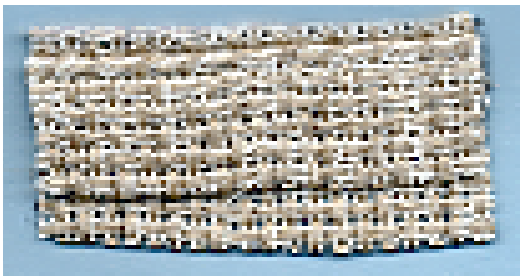
Some garments require only a partial lining or even a binding which will finish a seam or edge. Some areas where this type of finishing is done would be a neck, armhole or casual jacket where reinforcement is only needed across the back and down the front openings. A facing may also be used as an extender for too short sleeves or a hem that needs to be lengthened.

There are many ways that a facing may be applied and many fabrics that could be used to do this. If a facing is to be used as a partial lining, it will be necessary to finish all raw exposed edges in some manner, whether it is a plain hem, a zig zag top stitching or other choice. In the case where a narrow binding or facing is being used, the facing will probably be sewn down on the inside.

Facing a hem, armhole or neck with narrow binding

Making a neatly turned facing

As there are sometimes several layers of fabric seamed together before a neckline or armhole is to be turned so the facing is inside, this leads to a rolling effect which will not allow the turned seam to lie flat. To minimize this problem, it is a good idea to stitch approximately $^1/_8$" away from the seam line through all of the **facing** layers only. The fashion fabric remains free of visible stitching. This type of stitching is sometimes called "stitch in the ditch", but this is a confusing term unless one is familiar with the technique. After the stitching has been completed, it is easy to fold back the facing so that it lies flat and no longer has the tendency to roll back onto the fashion fabric seam or even worse show unevenly around the neckline or armhole edges.



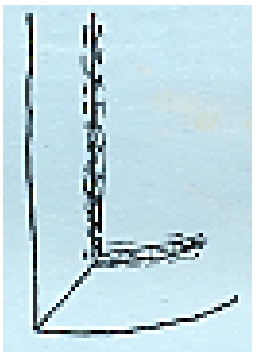
"Stitch in the ditch" seam

Another problem that arises with a facing is how to fasten it on the inside. If there is no underlining or interfacing, the facing must be stitched to the wrong side of the fashion fabric. As small stitches will probably show through to the right side and the probability of puckering taking place as well, it may only be possible to tack the facing to the inner seam lines. Sometimes the facing may be fused to the wrong side of the fashion fabric, but extreme care must be taken to insure that the fusing line does not show. This problem is easily prevented if the facing can be hemmed to the interfacing or underlining.

Several other methods of binding an edge are available. Among these are binding with a self fabric cut on the bias in strips, prefinished bias bindings which do not need to be folded under, and using a stretchy binding which will conform to the curves of the seam.

Facings which are cut to follow the seam lines of both neck and armhole edges and are cut out so that they conform to the pattern of the fashion fabric should be edge finished and tacked or sewn to the main part of the garment. In the same way a facing may be cut so that it is an extension of the neck and front or back edge of the garment. The same finishing process for this type of facing is followed.

A major point of concern is the method of joining or turning a corner with a facing. It may be necessary to "miter" the edge of a corner to achieve a neat turn. The following method is explained by the diagram.



A mitered corner

Usually a bias binding will turn nicely without too much effort. Then there is the problem of turning under the excess fabric when the facing has been applied. It may be necessary to trim off excess bulk in order to have the finished edge lie flat. To do this, trim the facing or binding to about ¼" extending from the edge and turn under this excess and slipstitch the open side.

Seams

Handwoven fabrics have a tendency to fray more easily than commercial fabrics, so the seams must be handled in such a way that this problem is minimized. A well finished handwoven fabric should not fray any easier than a commercial one, but the problem is probably augmented by the fact that the handweaver considers 30 ends per inch a fairly close set whereas the average commercially woven fabric may be at least 130 ends per inch. In addition, a slippery fiber will obviously fray to a greater extent than one with a rough texture. One of the best solutions that I have found recently is the use of the serger (overlock) machine. I place my pattern piece on the right side of the fashion fabric and trace around it with a fabric marker. At least three types of fabric markers are now available—the marks made by one must be removed by a damp cloth, the marks of another disappear after 24 hours and the third must be removed by using a solvent found at the other end of the marker. My personal preference is for the first one.

After marking, I follow the lines made by the fabric marker, and with the blade of the overlock machine down, cut and sew at the same time. This process is followed by sewing the seams. Another short cut used by the makers of commercial garments is to make only one seam with the serger so that there is no seam allowance left to be pressed open. This method is fine if the pattern is guaranteed to fit and there is no desire to alter the garment after it is finished. For the production weaver, this method would be faster and probably adequate as there is little time to bother with custom fitting. An examination of some extremely high priced couturier garments revealed that **all** of those examined showed that the seams had been constructed using an overlock machine. Traditional seam finishes include the plain stitched seam which is used for most functional seams in a garment—the long ones such as side seams, underarm and sleeve. Usually the seams are pinned at intervals along the seam line so that the stitching may be made along a line that does not include bumps or bulges and above all matches up with the corresponding pattern piece. Most patterns include notches on the pattern piece to assist in matching these pieces. The seam may then be pressed open. Care at this point must be taken to ensure an even, non bumpy appearance on the right side of the fashion fabric The seam allowance should not show through after pressing. To avoid this, a strip of cardboard or some sort of separator may be inserted between the back side of the fashion fabric

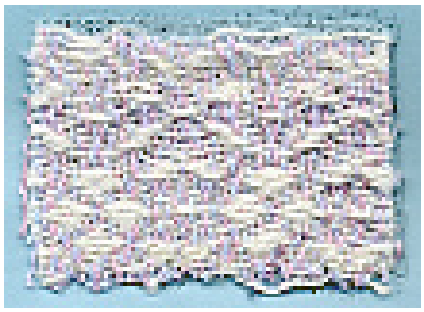
Wool coat fabric using overlock binding

and the seam allowance **or** the fashion fabric may be pressed with a press cloth face side up with the wrong side placed on a terry cloth towel. Even if the fabric has been interfaced or underlined, this procedure may be necessary.

Another method of finishing seams is with pinking shears. I do not recommend this method if working with handwoven fabrics as they are generally not woven close enough to hold and will fray very easily. An easy method of finishing a seam is to stitch a three-step zig zag all around the edge of the seam allowance.

Top stitching may be used, but the traditional handwoven garment should **not** have any machine stitches showing. A carefully executed hand sewn backstitch may be done as a method of top stitching, but this method can be done only by the weaver who has time to spend making a truly custom made garment and who also has the skill to handstitch in a precision manner.

A seam edge may be bound with tape but sometimes this may prove too bulky. A good answer to this problem is the use of a sheer fabric that molds beautifully around the seam edge. This fabric is available on the market under the commercial name of



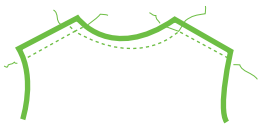
Top edge bound with nylon net—bottom edge with three step zig zag

Seams Great, but an alternative that proves to be much less expensive is sheer nylon tricot which may be purchased by the yard. This fabric comes in a very wide width and only a fraction of a yard is needed for use time and again. The advantage of buying it this way is that it may be cut in strips as wide as is needed and this fact is important if a weaver is working with a bulky winter coat fabric, for example. The binding is put on using a zig zag stitch through all three thicknesses or a straight stitch seam, but this method requires an additional stitching to bind it down. Another method using this type of binding is the use of nylon net. This produces a slightly stiffer binding but is almost invisible.

The fabric may be turned under and stitched, but care must be taken that the result is not too bulky—probably not a good idea for handwoven garments. Another treatment of seams which fall along an outer edge of a garment is to catchstitch a twill tape for reinforcement along the seam line and even along the roll of a lapel. This is a tailoring technique which should be used after consulting a tailoring manual. If this is not possible, a good *Vogue* pattern usually includes most of the fine details needed for construction.

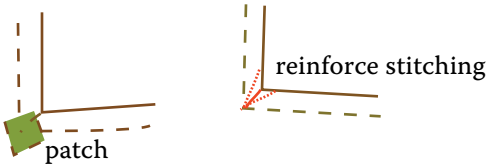
Some special stitching should be done in areas where there may be stretching or extra strain. A neck edge could easily stretch out of shape as it is pulled on and off the head, or any area where the fabric has a bias edge may tend to become distorted in relation to the original paper pattern before it is constructed. The answer to this problem is to **stay-stitch**—sew a line of stitching (stitches long enough to adjust if the fabric stretches beyond the original pattern piece size—(10-12 sts. per inch?) approximately $^1/_8$" to ½" from the original seam line in the seam allowance and through each individual pattern piece. Use matching thread as this stitching will not be removed and may be seen from the inside of the garment and make sure that the fabric is not gathered by the stitch so that

it ends up smaller than the original paper pattern piece. Each seam should be stay-stitched separately—not done in one continuous seam. When finished stay-stitching, test the fashion fabric pattern piece on the paper pattern piece to make sure that it is exact.



Separate stay-stitching seams

Some seams may need to be strengthened at points where there may be undue strain or where raveling may occur. Place a small square of fabric over the stress point and stitch as previously indicated. An alternative to this method would be to stitch to the stress point and back in a triangular shape but this method is not as effective as the patch method.



patching or reinforcing stress areas

Several special techniques work better for certain situations when seaming. For example, instead of adding bulk when a dart is needed in interfacing, the dart is cut through the center to the point and overlapped and stitched flat. **Or**, the dart may be trimmed close to the seam line to eliminate bulk. The seam around a collar frequently has several thicknesses of fabric due to the interfacing, so it is advisable to trim the interfacing closely ($^1/_8$", trim the next layer of fashion fabric to slightly under ¼" and the remaining fashion fabric layer slightly more than ¼". this method is called "layering" and may be done in any area where bulk needs to be diminished. After layering has been completed, it may be necessary to trim to about $^1/$ " from the point where the collar point will be turned. The angles of a neat trim will equal the angle formed by the original stitched angle.

Matching the pattern

Extreme care must be taken to stitch both layers evenly. Usually pinning will be sufficient to ensure that this happens, but occasionally the fabrics may have to be basted together. Special feet are now available to allow the foot to slide on top but hold back the fabric on the bottom layer. This problem is especially apparent when seaming tartan or striped fabrics which **must line up**. Test the seam first. It may even be necessary to offset the pattern in the fabric slightly and then baste it to compensate for this problem.

Matching the pattern

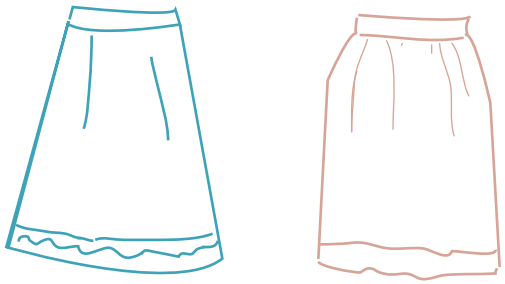
Hems

The treatment of hems is directly related to the type of fabric and style of the garment. A narrow rolled hem which is probably not going to be used by a handweaver is associated with very fine or sheer fabric. A heavier weight dress fabric will need a hem that is suitable to the pattern style. A straight skirt will require a plain turned up hem while a flared skirt will require a method of getting rid of the excess bulk of the flare when it is turned up.

A plain hem should be turned up all around so that the same distance from the floor is established. It may be necessary to trim parts of the hem so that it is the same

depth all around. In addition the seam areas may need to be trimmed away to avoid excess bulk depending upon the thickness of the fabric. An edge finish should be given to the raw edge of the hem. This method may vary with the desired finish and may include blind stitching, overcast, the hem turned under or a hem binding applied. *Many hems today are uneven or "shredded" which will be fairly difficult to do with handwoven fabrics.*

There are two types of hems that require a method of easing in the fullness when they are turned up. These are found on A-line and circular skirts. Stitch a basting-length stitch, by decreasing the tension on top, approximately ¼" from the raw edge. The areas that need to be eased may then be "gathered" or drawn up slightly, pressed as flat as possible to shrink out the excess fabric and then stitched in one of the methods suggested above.

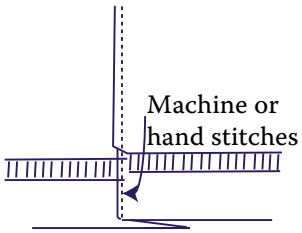


Gathered edging on flare skirt and plain edging on straight or gathered skirt

Decrease the depth of the hem on a circular skirt to about 1" so that excess bulk is taken out, let the skirt hang over night or longer, then proceed with the hemming.

If the fabric is fine enough, the raw edge may be turned back and then hemmed directly to the fashion fabric but finishing hems may be done in several other ways as mentioned above. If using a seam binding which is a natural for handwoven garments, preshrink to make sure that the seam binding will not shrink at a different rate from the fashion fabric. A straight binding may be used if there are no curves, but in the case of the A-line skirt or the circular skirt it will be necessary to use a stretchy or bias binding (or gather the top edge of the binding.) Other methods include a three step zig zag or a straight stitch covering about ¼" area from the raw edge, then a turn back, pinked, or overcast stitched edge. These methods are not as successful with handwoven garments. An extension of the depth of a hem may be done by facing the hem line with fabric cut on the bias, sheer nylon binding or wide purchased bias tape.

Corners may be treated in several ways. Directions given in the pattern will probably be the best to follow, but it may be necessary to modify the method if the fabric is overly bulky. Consult a manual on tailoring for a variety of corner finishings, with and without a lining attached. Special applications are necessary if pleats are involved with the hem. The seam allowance that will fall within the boundary of the hem is trimmed to eliminate bulk and the pleat seam allowance is cut at right angles to the edge. The hem is then sewn in place as usual and the folded inside edge is stitched close to the edge to maintain a sharp pleat. The seam allowances above the hem area are pressed in one direction which also produces a sharper pleat.



Hemming with a pleat

A method that would be advantageous with unlined handwoven garments is double stitching a hem. This simply means that the depth of the hem is marked half way and catch stitched to the wrong side of the fashion fabric all along this marking. Then

another row of catch stitching is done along the edge of the hem. This method ensures that the weight of the hem does not pull the garment out of shape. Another method of controlling the outward appearance of the fashion fabric is to cut a bias strip of interfacing the depth of the hem. The strip may have to be sewn together to make it long enough. Do this by overlapping the interfacing and stitching it flat. Trim to eliminate bulk. The strip is then placed on the hem line with about 5/ " extending over the hem line and the top of the bias strip slightly below the turned up hem. Catch stitch the bias strip to the wrong side of the fashion fabric. Then catch stitch the hem to the interfacing strip. This same application may be done with sleeve hems.

You be the judge

Is the pattern and fabric right for the wearer? Are the trims including pockets, buttons, belts properly positioned for the wearer?

Does the garment have styling and shape without wrinkles or sagging? Is the fashion fabric too "boardy" as a result of improper set, finishing of the handwoven fabric, incorrect yarn for its use or improper choice of underlining, interfacing or lining?

If the garment has a collar, does it lie softly with the proper roll and no seams showing at the edges? Are there any seams showing where the facing has been joined? Is the garment pressed with soft or crisp edges as the pattern dictates?

Are the hems invisible and not overly presssed? Does the lining pull the garment out of shape in any area?

Some General Hints for Success

Always preshrink all fabrics to be used in construction of the garment. This will ensure that the finished product will survive the repeated steamings during construction as well as remain a useful article when subjected to most cleaning processes. Note that preshrinking does not always mean that "hot, soapy water" must be used, it means that the fabrics should be subjected to the same treatment that they would eventually receive upon completion of the garment and that through this treatment a surprise ending will not result from having one fabric change shape more than another.

Refer to a pattern fitting manual if you are not sure of the fit or size of your pattern. When in doubt make the seams larger by about 3/ " as they can always be cut back if needed.

Cover buttons to match the fashion fabric for a custom made look. It is also possible to dye buttons to match or blend with the fashion fabric.

Reference Books

The Vogue Sewing Book
Bane, Allyne: *Tailoring*
Betzina, Sandra: *Sew with Flair*
Betzina, Sandra: *Power Sewing*
Carr, Roberta C.: *Interfacing*
Erickson, Lois: *Design and Sew It Yourself*
Grigg, Gale: *Sew Sane*
Kastama, Kathryn: *Instant Design*
Johnson, Leonora: *The Successful Serging Handbook*
Sew News
Singer Sewing Reference Library
Threads Magazine