

KWIK•SEW® Sewing Educator Guide  
Glossary of Sewing Terms

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**Alteration:** A change made to a completed garment to adjust the fit.

**Back Stitch:** To stitch in reverse; usually over the beginning and end of a seam to prevent the stitches from becoming loose and fabric pulling apart.

**Bar-Tack:** A very short, tight zigzag stitch used to reinforce small areas of strain.

**Baste:** To temporarily join pieces of fabric together using long stitches that can be easily removed; done either by hand or machine.

**Batting:** A lightweight material made of polyester, or any combination of polyester, cotton, wool, or silk, used as layered filler between finished fabric pieces to give fullness or loft.

**Bias:** A diagonal cross of the lengthwise and crosswise grain of fabric. This is where there is the most stretch.

**Bias Tape or Binding:** Long strips of fabric cut on the bias, used to envelop the raw edge of a hem or seam. It can be bought prepackaged or made from fabric or scraps. Bias tape is folded on the two lengthwise edges (sometimes the edges are double-folded).

**Blind Hem:** A hand hemming technique in which small zigzag stitches are made and hidden between the hem and the garment.

**Blocking:** The process of straightening fabric before sewing by pulling it so that lengthwise and crosswise grains meet at a 90 degree angle.

**Bolt:** The common means of packaging fabric for retail sale—the manufacturer's length of fabric wrapped around a cardboard frame. A typical bolt of fabric contains 12 - 20 yards (11 - 19 meters).

**Clip:** A small cut into the seam allowance to allow fabric to bend at curves and points.

**Crosswise Grain:** The direction of fabric that runs from selvage to selvage or horizontally. Also known as weft.

**Dart:** The take up of excess fabric, of a determined amount, at the edge of the garment and converging to a diminishing point; indicated by an arrow on a pattern. This design element allows for proper draping in a garment or sewing project.

**Design Ease:** The added measurement to a garment design to allow for comfort and movement; will vary in garments depending upon the style and suggested fabric.

**Dressmakers Ham:** A shaped cushion with rounded curves used to press curved seams and darts.

**Dressmaker Shears:** Scissors that are 8" (21 cm) -10" (26 cm) in length with bent handles which are used for cutting only fabric.

**Easing (Ease):** Long loose machine stitches sewn in one or two rows to allow fabric to join evenly to another without tucks or gathers when extending threads are pulled. Used most often when sleeves are set in the armhole of a garment.

**Edge Stitch:** A line of stitching sewn extremely close to a folded edge or a seam line.

**Facing:** Fabric pieces that are mirror images of garment/project pattern pieces, commonly used to finish openings such as necklines, armholes and front shirt openings.

**Fabric Stretch Gauge:** The guide printed on the back of the pattern envelope to gauge the appropriate fabric stretch required for the garment design to fit properly.

**Fabric Width:** The measurement of the fabric from selvage to selvage. Fabrics come in varying widths, however, there are two typical fabric width classifications; 45"(115 cm) and 60" (152 cm).

**Fiber Content:** The type of natural or man made material that makes up the fabric. The fiber content allows you to know how comfortable the fabric will be, what type of garment it is suited for and what kind of care it will need.

**Fold:** The edge formed by doubling the fabric when the selvage edges meet or are parallel.

**Gathering:** Long loose machine stitches sewn in one or two rows to allow fabric to gather when extending threads are pulled. Used most often when gathering sleeve caps or sleeves to a cuff.

**Grading Seams:** Seam allowances trimmed to graded widths in order to reduce bulk in the seams.

**Grain (Grain-line):** The direction of a weave in a fabric.

**Grain Line Arrows:** These mark the direction of the grain-line on patterns to indicate where on the fabric in relation to the grain-line the pattern pieces should be placed.

**Hand Sewing Needle:** A small instrument, usually made of steel, that has an eye for thread and is used for carrying thread through fabric to make hand stitches.

**Hem (Sewing) Gauge:** A small plastic or metal ruler with a sliding indicator /guide that is used for measuring and marking hems and buttonholes.

**Hemline:** The line designated for the bottom edge of the finished hem.

**Inseam:** The inside seam on pants—runs from the hem of the pant to the point of the crotch.

**Interfacing:** A type of fabric sewn or fused between the facing and the outside of a garment (as in a collar or cuff) for stiffening and shape retention.

- **Woven** - has grain line (pattern pieces should be laid out on grain)
- **Non-woven** - has no grain (pattern pieces may be laid out in any direction)
- **Fusible** - has a glue-like heat sensitive surface on one side and is ironed on rather than sewn (can be woven or non-woven)
- **Non-fusible** - must be sewn in (can be woven or non-woven)

**Iron:** Gliding a heated iron across fabric with a sweeping motion for the purpose of removing wrinkles and/or smoothing the fabric.

**Layout:** The chart provided in the pattern instructions showing the appropriate placement of pattern pieces on the fabric for cutting.

**Lengthwise Grain:** The direction of fabric weave that runs parallel to the selvage, or vertically, and is the strongest direction of the weave. Also known as the warp.

**Lining:** A lightweight silhouette similar to a garment that is placed on the inside of the garment.

**Marking:** Transferring the various sewing construction symbols from the paper pattern pieces to the fabric.

**Marking pen:** Specifically used for marking darts, dots, pocket placements etc. on fabric—can be water soluble (washes out with water) or disappearing (fades over time).

**Mitering:** The process of sewing two seams together that are cut on the bias; often used to match plaids or stripes.

**Nap (Pile):** The distinct feature on such fabrics as velvet and corduroy that the right side of the fabric has a natural direction of the fibers—the natural direction will feel smoother and the opposite may feel a bit rough and the color may appear different when looking at it from different angles.

**Needles:** Used for both machine and hand sewing: Hand sewing needles come in sizes 1 through 10; size 1 is the heaviest, size 10 the lightest. Machine needles come in sizes 7 through 18, but the numbers work the opposite way from those of hand-sewing needles, 7 being the lightest and 18 the heaviest.

**Notch:** A protruding arrow shaped mark on a pattern piece which is used to match two pattern pieces together for precise sewing.

**Notions:** Any items other than a pattern and fabric that are used to complete sewing projects such as pins, thread, buttons, zipper, etc.

**Pattern Grading:** The technique of resizing an original pattern into various pattern sizes.

**Pins:** Used for fastening or joining.

**Pin Cushion:** A small cushion in which pins may be stuck so they are ready for use.

**Placket:** An opening or slit in a garment usually on the front of a shirt or on the sleeve above the cuff.

**Preshrinking:** The pre-washing (and drying) of washable fabric before sewing to avoid shrinkage of the finished garment.

**Pressing:** The act of using an iron to heat set fabric flat (typically at the seam allowance) by lifting it from the fabric to move it from one position to another.

**Pressing Cloth:** A cloth that goes between the garment and the iron when pressing to prevent heat damage to the garment, this can be purchased or a scrap of fabric can be substituted.

**Right Side:** The outside or top side of fabric; usually softer or smoother.

**Rotary Cutter:** A fabric cutting tool that has a sharp round blade attached to a handle; should be used with an appropriate cutting mat.

**Seam:** The joining of two pieces of fabric by sewing, usually near the edge of the fabric.

**Seam Allowance:** The portion of fabric between the seam and the raw edge.

**Seam Ripper:** A tool with a small curved blade that has a sharp point on one end and a plastic tip on the other end that is used to remove stitches.

**Selvage:** The narrow tightly woven edge portion of fabric; it runs parallel to the warp.

**Sewing Machine Needle:** A small steel instrument that has an eye for thread on one end used for carrying thread on a sewing machine; the other end is blunt and is locked or screwed into a shaft above the needle plate of the machine.

**Shears:** A cutting implement similar or identical to a pair of scissors but typically larger.

**Stay Stitching:** A straight stitch just inside the seam line that stabilizes a single layer of fabric and allows the seam allowance to be clipped to a corner.

**Stitching in the Ditch:** Stitching on the outside of the garment through all layers in the groove (ditch) of the seam, or as close as possible to the seam to secure inside waistbands, facings and bindings to the garment.

**Straight Pins:** Pins used for the temporary joining of materials such as pattern pieces to fabric preparing the layout or to join one fabric piece to another during construction. There are various lengths and widths to accommodate different types of fabrics and projects.

**Straight Stitch:** A utility stitch on a sewing machine which creates a non-stretch seam; most often used when sewing woven fabrics.

**Tailor Tacks:** Small hand sewn stitches to mark inside construction details such as darts or pocket placement.

**Tape Measure:** A pliable measuring instrument; usually made of cloth or paper for necessary flexibility.

**Thimble:** A pitted cap or cover worn on the finger to push the needle in hand-sewing.

**Thread:** A filament, a group of filaments twisted together, or a filamentous length formed by spinning and twisting short textile fibers into a continuous strand used for hand and machine sewing.

**Trim:** To cut away excess fabric.

**Top Stitching:** A line of stitching sewn on the outside of a garment close to a seam for stability or decoration.

**Tracing wheel:** An instrument with a smooth-edged, small serrated or needle-pointed wheel mounted on one end of a handle to transfer markings onto paper or fabric.

**Tracing paper/Dressmaker's Carbon Paper:** Paper which has been coated on one or both sides with white or colored wax or chalk—used in conjunction with the tracing wheel.

**Understitching:** Straight stitch sewn through seam allowances on facings or bindings close to seam to keep facings and bindings from rolling to outside of garment.

**Warp (lengthwise grain):** Lengthwise threads that run parallel to the selvage edges of the fabric.

**Weft (crosswise grain):** Crosswise threads that run perpendicular to the lengthwise grain.

**Wooden Point:** A tool used to dry-press small, hard-to-reach areas during the sewing process. Also used to push points of collar tips to the maximum.

**Wrong Side:** The inside or back side of fabric; usually rougher or less finished.

**Yoke:** A shaped panel of fabric that is topstitched onto or inserted into a garment for decoration or shaping purposes.

**Zigzag Stitch:** A machine stitch with a continuous "Z" type design that allows seams to stretch; can be used on the raw edge of fabric to prevent fraying.