Smooth Sleeves are Smart

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Recommended Citation
South Dakota State University, Cooperative Extension, "Smooth Sleeves are Smart" (1979). SDSU Extension Fact Sheets. 520.
https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/extension_fact/520

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Smooth Sleeves are Smart
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Fashions in sleeves come and go. But whatever the style, the set of the sleeve is extremely important to the overall good appearance of any garment. Sleeves influence the silhouette and are a focal point of any fashion.

The basic sleeve types are set-in, raglan and kimono. Each type may be varied by changing the width of the shoulder, depth of the armhole, length, fullness, and shaping at the wrist or elbow.

A set-in-sleeve is cut separately and sewed into an armhole. The cap may be smooth, gathered or darted. Set-in sleeves may be one or two pieces.

A raglan sleeve is cut separately, but continues over the shoulder to the neckline. The seam attaching it to the body of the garment becomes a modified armhole. Raglan sleeves may be cut in two sections or one section with a dart.

A kimono sleeve is cut in one with the body of the garment. It may be wide or narrow. If narrow, a gusset underarm may be needed.

Set-In Sleeves

The cap of a set-in sleeve is always larger than the armhole into which it's fitted. The excess is called ease. The method for controlling ease is detailed below.

1. Before stitching the underarm seam, make a row of ease stitching (6-10 stitches per inch) between the notches on the seamline of the sleeve cap. Stitch a second row within the seam allowance 1/8 to 1/4 inch from the first row. Leave thread ends dangling. (See figure 1)


3. Finish lower edge of sleeve with hem, cuff or facing.

4. Place sleeve in armhole, right sides together. Pin edges together matching:
   - underarm seam
   - top of sleeve and shoulder seam or shoulder marking

5. Draw up the bobbin basting thread between pins on either side of dots.

6. Distribute ease evenly and pin at half-inch intervals or baste.

If the fabric can be shaped by steaming, fasten the ease threads securely by wrapping them around pins. Carefully remove sleeve from armhole. Place cap over end of sleeve board or pressing ham. Gently apply tip of iron to the top of the sleeve to shrink out the fullness. Do not press beyond the stitching lines. (See figure 3)

Return sleeve to armhole. Pin or baste, matching the points listed above. Stitch, starting at underarm seam, with sleeve side up. Stitch again 1/8 inch from the first row of stitching. Trim underarm seam allowance to 3/8 inch. (See figure 4). Press seam as sewn (sandwich pressing). Turn seam allowance toward sleeve. Finger press only.

Note:
- These instructions may be in conflict with methods used on some knits.
For very sheer fabric, a false French seam makes a good finish. Trim seam allowance to ½ inch. Turn in both seam edges. Hand sew with whip or running stitch.

Puff sleeves, featuring many gathers, are treated in the same way, except there are continuous gathers over the sleeve cap.

Raglan Sleeves

Raglan sleeves are cut in two sections or in one section shaped by a large dart.

Stay stitch sleeve and bodice edges that meet. The dart or shaped shoulder seam is very important, because it shapes the shoulder area and enhances the fit of the garment.

The individual who generally decreases the shoulder width of the bodice pattern will need to decrease the length of the raglan sleeve in the shoulder area by folding out the excess in the pattern piece. A similar adjustment is made in the bodice back and front to make the seams correspond in length.

The dart or the shaped shoulder seam is stitched first. Press open. (Slash dart) Stitch underarm seam. Press open.

Finish lower edge of sleeve before fitting it into the body of the garment.

When joining, stitch from neck edge to neck edge.

Stitch again 1/8 inch from first row in underarm area only between notches. Trim to 3/8 inch in under arm only. Overcast if necessary. (See figure 5)

Kimono Sleeve

Kimono sleeves require some reinforcement under the arm to relieve strain on the seamline. Patterns usually include a gusset or instructions for reinforcement.


Lay a 3 or 4-inch piece of twill tape over seam. Stitch on right side 1/8 inch on either side of seamline. (See figure 6)

Include twill tape in underarm seam as it is being sewn. Clip seam allowance on garment and press seam open. (See figure 7)

General Characteristics of a Well-Made Sleeve

1. Crosswise grain is parallel with floor.
2. Lengthwise grain is at right angles to floor.
3. Underarm seams match.
4. Straight, even stitching around armhole.
5. Double stitching in appropriate areas for added strength.
6. Seam finish is appropriate for fabric.
7. Kimono sleeve is reinforced on curved underarm seam.

Other Extension publications available on clothing construction include:

FS 245 Equipment for pressing
FS 246 When You Press
FS 247 When You Sew
FS 401 Sewing Modern Fabrics
FS 518 Simplified Sewing Hems
FS 520 Preparing Fabric for Cutting
FS 597 Pressing Fabrics
FS 678 Selecting and Altering Patterns
FS 720 Design Details: Collars, Facings, Pockets
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