Simplified Sewing: Hems

Cooperative Extension South Dakota State University

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Email: sdsu.extension@sdstate.edu

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Simplified Sewing: Hems
THE HEM of your dress can have the "professional look" or the "homemade look." In general, the best hem is the least conspicuous, and every step in making a hem is planned with this in mind.

The professional touch is recognized by the following characteristics:
- Inconspicuous from the right side
- Even distance from the floor
- Wide enough for good proportion and to give enough weight to hang well
- Even in width
- Flat and smooth
- Neat on the wrong side

Which hem—where
Each season the fashion world sets a new hem level. There is always the question, "Do I shorten or do I lengthen?" Remember that high fashion merely indicates a trend. Within certain limits of this fashion level, the exact position of your hemline should be determined by the length which is becoming to you as an individual.

The weight of fabric and the amount of circular flare in a skirt determine the hem width. Straight and moderately flared skirts of medium-weight fabric usually look best with 2-inch to 3-inch hems. Sheer fabrics in the same type skirts may need hems of 3 or more inches.

The greater the circular flare in a skirt, the narrower the hem. Width may vary from 1/8 inch to 2 inches depending on the amount of fullness that can be removed by shrinking or easing.

Steps common to all hems
1. Mark the hemline accurately

Before marking, check the following:
- A new garment should be finished (except for hem) and pressed.
- For an alteration, the old hem should be ripped open and pressed.
- A bias-cut skirt should be left on a hanger over night (or longer) to allow for stretching.
- The foundation garment and shoes to be worn with the dress or skirt should be worn when the hem is being marked.

2. Turn hem evenly

Spread skirt on a flat surface to make sure that the hemline is even and straight.

Turn to wrong side, fold hem back along the marked line, and pin at right angles near the turning line.

Match center front, center back, and seams of hem to those of garment.

Baste about 1/8 inch from the turning line. You can press, rather than baste, the turning line on some fabrics such as firm cottons or linen.

Press lightly on fold.

3. Mark depth of hem

Measure desired depth from fold and trim off excess fabric. (Fig. 2) For less bulk at the seams, trim seam allowance from hemline to raw edge. (Fig. 3)

4. Reduce hem fullness in circular skirts

Make a line of machine stitching (with slightly loosened tension) about 1/4 inch below the cut edge of hem. Begin and end at each seam line, treating skirt sections separately.

Illustrations courtesy Educational Bureau, Coats & Clark, Inc.
Pin upper edge of hem to the garment at seam lines and center of each gore.

Ease the fullness between these points by pulling the bobbin thread until upper edge of hem nearly equals the width of the skirt.

On wool fabric this excess fullness may be shrunk out smoothly with steam. Follow directions for pressing wool. Steam also helps to smooth out fullness on cotton.

The garment is now ready for a hem finish.

**Finishing the hem**

Fabric and pattern determine the hem finish.

*Turned and stitched hem* is used for light-weight and medium-weight fabric on straight or narrow-gored garments. Use it on fabrics that are slippery or tend to ravel. Consider it for hems that have some fullness to be eased in and on hems that will receive hard wear or that may be let down.

Machine stitch a line ¼ inch from the cut edge. Turn edge under on the stitching line, press, and topstitch. (Fig. 4)

Pin or baste hem to garment, being sure to match seams. Press lightly, always into the hem with point of iron. (Figure 5)

Fasten hem to garment with one of the hemming stitches. (Page 9)

*Tailor's hem* is used on firm, nonfraying fabrics of heavy and medium weight. It is durable and inconspicuous because thread is protected.

Stitch ¼ inch from cut edge. The edge may be pinked if preferred.

Match seams and pin or baste the hem to garment slightly below stitching line. (Fig. 6)

*Seam binding hem* is used with medium-weight and heavy-weight fabrics. It is especially desirable for fabrics that ravel easily.

Shrink seam binding before using.

After edge of hem is ready, topstitch binding to right side of fabric about ¼ inch from cut edge overlapping the ends of tape. (Figs. 7 and 8)

For a circular skirt, shape seam binding by steam pressing to follow curve of hem. (Fig. 9)
Machine-finished hem (without hemming attachment) is a quick, durable hem for straight skirts of medium-weight cotton, such as housedresses, dirndles, and aprons. Practice and patience are needed to achieve the “professional look” with this finish.

Turn raw edge of hem ½ inch and press.
Pin hem in place. (Fig. 10)
Fold hem back against right side of hem edge extending about 1/16 inch beyond the fold. (Fig. 11)

Set machine for 10 to 12 stitches to the inch. Stitch on extended edge of hem for 5 stitches. (Figure 12)
With machine needle up, pivot the fabric and put needle into body part of garment once, then bring needle up, pivot fabric again so that needle enters extended edge and repeat . . . (5 stitches in edge of hem and 1 stitch in body of garment.)

Hem for a coat or jacket is marked in regular manner. Trim off interfacing at the hemline. Turn hem, mark and trim to desired width.

If fabric is bulky and you do not plan to lengthen the garment trim excess fabric from facing hem as shown in Figure 13,

Press facings in place. If top stitching is not used on front edge of garment slip-stitch facing hem to garment hem ½ inch from front edge. (Fig. 14)

On a short coat or jacket, slip-stitch the bottom edge of facing to coat (Fig. 15). On long coat, a chain tack about ½ inch long will hold facing in place. (Fig. 16)

Special problems

Pleats with a seam may be hemmed this way:

Press the seam to one side. Then mark the depth of the hem. At this point clip both seam allowances and press seam in hem area open. Trim seam allowances from hemline to raw edge. (Fig. 17) Turn hem and complete. (Fig. 18)

Faced hems—Either a self-made facing, ready-made facing, or horschair braid may be used. A hem is usually faced when the garment is too short, fabric is extremely bulky, or the facing is used for decorative purposes.
Hemming stitches

The hemming stitch used depends on the fabric, and the use of garment, and personal choice.

Use a fine needle and single thread. Begin at a side seam with knot hidden inside seam. Stitches taken on a garment side must be very small (pick up one or two threads) and about 1/2” apart. Do not pull thread tight. Finish on hem or seam (never on garment side) with a few over-and-over stitches, ending with a loop or two. Clip thread, not too close.

For inside hemming, the hem is folded back and stitches are taken inside, between hem and garment, leaving hem edge free.

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For flat hemming, edge of hem is sewn flat to garment. All the stitches shown below can be used for either method, except blind-hemming stitch, which is used for flat hemming only.

Slip stitch

For inside hemming. On garment side, pick up one thread in fold, then take a stitch through edge of hem as directed for specific hem.

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Blanket stitch

For inside hemming. On garment side, pick up one thread in fold, then take a stitch through edge of hem as directed in specific hem, passing needle over looped sewing thread as shown.

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Blanket stitch

For flat hemming. On garment side, pick up one thread next to edge of hem, then take a stitch through edge of hem, passing needle over looped sewing thread as shown.

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Catch stitch

For flat hemming. On garment side, pick up one thread next to edge of hem, then take a stitch in hem as shown.

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Blanket stitch

For flat hemming. On garment side, pick up one thread next to edge of hem, then take a stitch in hem as shown.

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Blind hemming

For flat hemming. On garment side, pick up one thread next to edge of hem, then take a stitch through edge of hem as directed for specific hem.
For flat hemming. On garment side, pick up one thread next to edge of hem, then pass needle through edge of hem as shown.

Double Hemming

Turn hem the desired width. Stitch ¼-inch from cut edge and finish raw edge as needed. Baste hem in place at fold and along center hem. Fold hem back along basting line and blind catch stitch, taking ¼-inch stitches above basting line. This line of stitching is for support. Do not pull tight.

Pressing

Select the pressing procedure to match the fabric.

Proper pressing is essential for the professional touch.

Use a strip of brown paper between hem and garment to avoid a ridge on right side of garment.

Press, don't iron. Pressing usually is done with steam.

Press up from fold with point of iron toward top of hem. Press with the grain.