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Sewing Stretch Terry, Velour, and Chenille

Cooperative Extension South Dakota State University

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Stretchy fabrics are softer and stretchier than many other knits. Use patterns designed for stretchy knits. Follow the pattern's instructions to be sure the amount of stretch in your fabric is right for the pattern.

Preshrink the fabric using the method and detergent you will use to care for the clothes.

For best results use "with nap" pattern layouts. Knits generally have subtle shading differences—especially terry loops and velour pile. When laying out the pattern, keep the fabric flat to avoid stretching. Don't let it hang over the edge of the table.

Seams

Use polyester or polyester core thread, about 10-12 stitches per inch, and a loosely balanced tension. If loops of the terry cloth catch on the presser foot, wrap a piece of transparent tape over the two toes of the presser foot to make one guiding surface.

Some of these fabrics are heavy enough that they do not curl.

You can sew a plain seam using a narrow zigzag stitch or a straight stitch, stretching as you sew. To avoid bulk, leave seams 5/8 inch wide and press open.

The following kinds of seams are recommended for velour and terry. These stitches are strong, stretchy, and they control curling of seam allowances.

• Two rows of straight stitching ¼ inch apart. Stretch the fabric slightly as you stitch. Trim close to stitching.

• Overedge stitch or other stretch stitch. Turn to ¼ inch.

Avoid special stretch stitches which are so close together and use so much thread that the seam is stiff.

Press seam allowances toward the back of the garment.

To keep shoulder seams or other seams from stretching, sew seam tape or narrow twill tape into the seam.

Topstitching

Topstitching is decorative and keeps undercollars and facings from rolling to the outside. To make the stitching more obvious, use two strands of regular thread or special topstitching thread. Use about six to eight stitches to the inch.

Understitching

If topstitching isn't used, understitch the undercollars and facings to keep them from rolling. Press the seam allowances toward the undercollar or facing. Layer the seam allowances so that the wider seam allowance is against the outside of the garment. Clip or notch curves. Stitch the seam allowances to the undercollar or facing close to the seam line. Use a zigzag stitch to help flatten seams.

Interfacing

Interfacing collars, cuffs, or necklines is usually optional, but it helps prevent rolling of undercollars and facings.
For tailored styles, light to medium weight woven or non-woven interfacing is usually needed. Interfacing helps stabilize and strengthen buttonhole and button areas and stabilize and smooth zipper openings. Select lightweight woven or non-woven interfacings. Fusibles may not be the best choice since the fabrics are so stretchy and textured.

Finishing necklines

One quick method to finish a neckline without facings is to turn under the seam allowance. Topstitch close to the fold and again ¼ inch away. Trim the seam allowance close to the stitching.

Or trim the neckline with self-fabric or purchased ribbing. To make your own trim, cut the fabric crosswise, twice the width of the finished trim plus two seam allowances. The length depends on the amount of stretch. The trim should be shorter than the neckline, but long enough to get over the head. Stitch the ends of the trim together.

Fold the trim in half the long way.

Divide the neckline and trim into four sections. Mark with pins. Pin the trim to the neckline, matching the marking pins.

Stitch, stretching the trim to fit the neckline. Use an overedge stitch or two rows of straight or zigzag stitches. Trim close to the second row.

Follow the same technique to trim sleeves and hems.

Hems

Machine topstitching is sturdy and decorative. It is suitable for sporty clothes as well as other clothes with decorative stitching.

A hand hem is a traditional finish for everyday and evening wear. Use a loose hand stitch between the hem allowance and garment.

A machine blind hem is sturdier than a hand hem. Do not turn under the raw edges before hemming.

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