The Quality Look in Clothing Construction

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The Quality Look in Clothing Construction

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Quality is determined by the appearance of a finished garment as well as the effect of methods and techniques used. These pages tell you what to look for, not how to do it. For methods, please refer to other sources. Fabric and design often influence methods used.

To get the quality look, you will need to make your own decisions. Your pattern will give you suggestions for fabric and sewing techniques.

Sew no more than necessary to give you good appearance, durability, and fit (of parts together).

**Cutting**
Fabric is pre-shrunk and straightened before cutting.
Pattern is placed accurately on grainline and/or design motif.
Cutting is carefully done.

**Staystitching**
First step after cutting and marking.
Stitched with grain for shape retention ½ inch from outer edge on seamline in curved, bias, or angular seams.
Neckline is staystitched on seamline.

**Stitching**
Tension is balanced.
Thread color and size match fabric.
Stitch length corresponds to fabric.
Short stitches add strength and make curves and corners smooth.
Double stitching reinforces points and/or areas of strain.
Topstitching is shorter than normal except for decorative effect.

**Interfacing**
Reinforces, adds body, provides crispness, and preserves shape.
Weight should be the same as, or slightly lighter than, that of garment fabric.
Color is inconspicuous.
Care methods are the same as garment’s.
“Gives” slightly with body movements.
Placed next to garment unless it shows.
Used under buttons and buttonholes.

**Darts**
The point is stitched as close to fold as possible to insure smoothness.
Finished dart is pressed toward center of body unless it is slashed and pressed open.
Wide end of dart is trimmed diagonally within seam allowance to reduce bulk after seam is sewn.

**Seams**
Plain seams are satisfactory for most garments.
Even in width.
Raw edges in fabrics that fray are finished by pinking, stitching and pinking, edge stitching, zigzagging, overcasting, clean finishing, or binding.
Welt or flat felled seams add durability, comfort, and smoothness. (Sportswear, shirts, pajamas, etc.)
French seams on sheer fabrics conceal raw edges.
Enclosed seams are trimmed and graded or layered to eliminate bulk. (Collars, cuffs, etc.)
Seam allowance is notched on inside curves.
Seam allowance is clipped on outside curves.
All seams are pressed as sewn and finished with care. (See FS 597, Pressing Fabrics.)

**Collars**
Collars are smooth and flat and lie down or stand up as intended.
Edge seams should roll to the underside. (Understitch.)
Seams are graded or layered with the wider allowance left on the top collar.
Corners, points, and curves are sharp or rounded and smooth.
Seam allowance is notched on curved edges for smooth effect.
Collar is attached to garment with shaped or bias facing, or no facing at all with all edges turned under at the neck edge. (Shirt type.)

**Facings**
May be shaped or fitted, bias, or extended (cut in one piece with garment).
Flat surfaces are smooth with sharp edges and corners. (Understitch.)
Outer edge is finished same as plain seams.
Enclosed edges are graded and usually understitched.
Inside curves are notched. Outside curves are clipped.
Inside corners are reinforced and clipped.
Outside corners are reinforced and as much of the seam allowance as possible is removed.
Free edge is hand-tacked at seams and darts or machine-stitched “in the ditch” at seamlines.

**Belts**
Cut on lengthwise grain.
Belt backing, if used, is concealed.
Eyelets, if used, are metal or handworked with buttonhole stitch, depending on style of garment.
Three eyelets—no more, no less.
Belt loops are necessary. They may be thread or fabric strips.
Waistband
Cut on lengthwise grain.
Reinforced with self-fabric, interfacing, grosgrain ribbon, stiffener, or elastic.
Width is suitable to garment design.
Band ends lap right over left on front or side closures, lap left over right on back closures.
Overlapping end is usually even with opening edge; underlap extends slightly, up to 1½ inch.
Flat button and buttonhole, or hooks and eyes are used. Wide flat hooks are acceptable on skirts and pants.

Plackets
Any opening with finished edges, usually in a seam, but sometimes a slash in the fabric.
May be closed with zippers, button, snaps, hooks, etc.
May be finished with two strips, continuous lap strip, or a cut-on facing.
Smooth, flat.

Zippers
All zippers, regardless of type, when inserted in a seam should be completely hidden when closed.
This applies to lapped or centered applications and invisible zippers.
Exposed zipper applications are found in a slash or as a decoration.
Zipper opening equals zipper length plus one inch.
Top machine-stitching is straight, from ¼ to ⅛ inch from the seamline or edge of zipper lap.
Stitch line may taper slightly at the top to allow for the slider.
Top stitching may be done by hand for "better" appearance.
Neckline facing may be applied before or after the zipper is in place.
It covers the upper end of the zipper tape.
Opening extends only slightly beyond the top of the slider (⅛ inch or less) in a finished zipper application if it ends in a facing such as a neckline.
A hook or snap may be used at the top, inconspicuously, to prevent spreading.
Zipper meets the waistband in skirts and pants with waistband and zippered closings.
Follow the directions enclosed with your zipper for best results.

Buttonholes
Buttonholes may be bound, hand or machine made, as suited to garment and fabric.
Buttonholes on grain, exactly the same size if in rows, and evenly spaced.
Buttonhole length equals the diameter plus thickness of button.
Firm, not frayed.
Bound buttonholes have square corners and lips are even in width; tightly closed, but not overlapping.
Machine-worked buttonholes have stitches close together, forming a satin stitch. Stitches are even in depth and lips just one thread apart to prevent fraying.
Handworked buttonholes may have a rounded end near the garment edge and a bar tack at the other, or the same finish on both ends.

Buttons
Placed at points of strain and evenly spaced to prevent gaping.
Flat buttons require a thread shank for ease in fastening.
Size, shape, color, and weight of button complements garment.

Gathers
Distributed evenly and lie exactly crosswise to the seamline.
Gathered and flat pieces are joined by a plain or lapped seam, with both seam allowances usually pressed to the flat fabric. (Sleeves are the exception.)
Gathered areas are never pressed flat; only the point of the iron is worked into the gathers.

Sleeves
Sleeves are a focal point of a garment.
A well-curved armhole line results from even stitching, uniform seam allowance, and well-matched seamlines, whatever the sleeve style.
Crosswise grainline is parallel with the floor in all types of sleeves unless it is cut on true bias for design effect.
Underarm or armhole is reinforced with two rows of stitching. (Notch to notch.)
Seam finish should correspond to that used on other structural seams.
The sleeve is sewn into the bodice, except in some shirt-type patterns in which the sleeve seam and bodice side seam are treated as one.
The lower edge of any sleeve is finished last.
A conventional set-in sleeve is smooth over the top, with fullness eased gradually in the notched area.
Armhole seam is lightly pressed into the sleeve.

Hems
Inconspicuous on top side of garment.
Even in width, smooth, and flat.
Width ranges from 1½ inches to 3 inches, depending on style of garment and weight of fabric.
Flared or circular hems are narrower than straight ones.
Sheer fabrics may have very wide or very narrow hems.
Stitches are loose enough to prevent dimpling.
Stitches are on grain, passing under only one or two threads.
Stitches are evenly spaced, ⅛ inch to ½ inch apart.
Stitches are concealed on the wrong side of garment.
Hem is finished appropriately for garment and fabric. (See FS 518, Simplified Sewing—Hems.)
When a facing extends through a hem, usually the hem is made first, and the facing is folded back over the hem.
If there is not enough fabric for a suitable hem or the fabric is too bulky for a regular hem, a facing is recommended.
Pockets
May be functional, decorative or both.
Patch, insert, or set-in pockets vary in shape and size.
They may be lined or unlined.
Pocket placement flatters the wearer.
Curved edges are smooth; corners are sharp.
Interfacing on the open edge of a pocket prevents stretching.
Seam allowances on curved edges of patch pockets are notched to eliminate bulk.
Square corners are mitered and trimmed to eliminate bulk.
Patch pockets may be applied by hand or machine.
If applied by machine the stitching may be visible or invisible.
Top corners are reinforced with a triangular line of stitches or backstitched about ½ inch.
Set-in pockets are constructed in the same manner as bound buttonholes; they may be plain, or finished with a Welt or a flap.
Follow pattern directions for all pockets.

Lining
Lining provides a smooth inside finish and improves appearance of jackets, coats, capes, etc.
Made separately.
Placed inside garment, wrong sides together and attached by hand or machine along the edges.
Coat linings hemmed separately and held in place with long thread tacks.

REFERENCES
Fact Sheets:
FS 247 When You Sew
FS 518 Simplified Sewing—Hems
FS 520 Preparing Fabric for Cutting
FS 597 Pressing Fabrics

Underlining
Underlining is a backing for the garment fabric.
Its purpose is to add body, preserve shape, and increase durability.
Underlining is lighter in weight than garment fabric and is suited to garment in durability, weight, color, drapability, and care requirements.
Cut from same pattern pieces as corresponding garment sections.
Two layers are handled as one.