
The
Dressmaker's
DICTIONARY

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The Dressmaker's Dictionary

ANN LADBURY

Illustrations by Jil Shipley

Arco Publishing, Inc.
New York

Dedication

Friends have told me I should dedicate my books. So, as I hope this Dictionary will provide answers to lots of dressmakers' questions, let me dedicate this one to all the people who write to me with their queries.

'What is meant by ...?' 'What is the best way to ...?'

'How do I set about ...?' 'What exactly is ...?'

etc, etc.

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Preface

Everyone engaged in learning needs, at some time, to look things up. The reasons vary; it may be to refresh the memory, perhaps a decision between two methods has to be made; or it may be necessary to distinguish between similar terms. Whatever the reason, one can look it up in this dictionary. It contains the traditional terms of stitches, processes and equipment in common use in dressmaking as well as new ideas and new aids. It is arranged in alphabetical order for rapid reference and if there is a need for details of how to go about a process in order to be sure of good results, they will also be found here. In addition, where things have become known by two names, both are listed, with the definition appearing under the one that is most often used.

Acknowledgment

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ADJUSTABLE MARKER

A very useful piece of measuring equipment consisting of a 15 cm (6 in.) metal strip with a moveable arrow. It is more rigid than a tape measure and quicker to use, especially where a measurement has to be repeated. Set the arrow for a hem, buttonholes, width of crossway strip, etc., and quickly cut or chalk at intervals beside the arrow. It is worth having two markers for occasions when two measurements are needed and one marked can be left for any length of time. Use two markers also for marking both the length of buttonholes and the space between.



ADJUSTABLE ZIP FOOT

This is one of the most useful of the additional feet provided with a sewing machine. If not part of the standard equipment it is worth buying. The construction of the foot varies with the make of machine but the principle is that it can be adjusted so that the machine needle stitches very close beside the zip teeth. A small part is hollowed to take the needle point but as the foot can be adjusted to sew to the right or left it is best gently to check that the needle is not going to hit the foot and break, and adjust it a little more if necessary.

Most zip feet are constructed so that they clamp well to the fabric to prevent movement of fabric or zip tape. Some zip feet have a section at the back which lowers on to the zip teeth to keep them flat and prevent puckering.

The zip foot can be used for sewing in the con-

cealed type zip as well as the conventional zips with visible teeth. Some zip feet have a central channel, specially constructed for sewing in concealed zips by clamping over the zip teeth forming a bridge.

A-LINE

The original term came from Christian Dior and indicated a sharp A shape in the form of fullness below the knee. We now use the term to describe any dress or skirt which shapes out from waist to hips and where the seams continue at a slight outward angle, giving a skirt that is wider at the hem than the hips but not full enough to fall into folds.

ALTERATIONS

If alterations, such as replacing zips, have to be made to a completed garment it helps to remember the following:

Unpick only the essential area. Do not rush ahead taking out a zip or taking off a whole waistband. As you release the first stitches see if there is another layer of possibly interfacing or lining that is going to be freed. If so, stop and put in a row of tacking to hold it in place.

If possible try on the alteration before actually finishing it off. It is easy to take in too much or too little.

Do not press out all the creases until it is re-assembled. Stitching lines are a guide either to be re-used or you can stitch parallel to them.

Often it will be easier to finish off the alteration by hand stitching on the right side if the area is small or difficult to reach. Sometimes it is difficult to line up a row of machining on the inside with the remains of previous stitching so it solves this to work slip stitch or something similar on the right side to finish.

With ready-made clothes take note of the construction, as you unpick, and if any edges fray or weak areas appear, reinforce them before attempting to make the alteration.

ANCHOR MACHINE EMBROIDERY THREAD

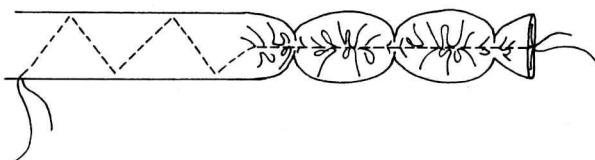
A fine mercerised thread used for all types of machine embroidery. No. 30 or 50 may be used depending on the result required and the thickness of the fabric. This thread is also best used for making machine-made buttonholes on fine fabrics, working round the buttonhole twice if necessary. Machine Embroidery Thread has not sufficient strength for seam construction in garments but it can be used effectively for light decorative embroidery work on baby clothes. It is also a good idea to use it for tacking when working on very fine silks such as chiffon.

ANORAK

Once a purely practical walking and camping jacket in drab colours but now developed into a useful warm garment for children; part of school uniform; and as a fashion garment. The main features that have been retained are the ribbed or elastic cuffs and waistband and centre front opening with open-ended zip. Collar styles vary, including the addition of hoods. Fabrics include proofed poplin, nylon ciré, all quilted and padded fabrics, woollens, knits and any suitable fashion fabrics such as combinations of cord and knitting.

APPLIED SHELL-GATHERS

A decorative strip of fabric gathered up before being applied to the right side of a garment. It works especially well in fabrics that are fine but do not crush easily. Decide on the finished width of the strip according to the position on the garment and cut a length of fabric on the cross and a little more than twice the finished width. Fold the strip right side inside and stitch near the raw edges with a slight zig-zag stitch or a stretch stitch. Turn the tube right side out, work the join to the centre and press. On the upper side work a row of running stitches to zig-zag across the tube. Pull up the thread slightly until the tube forms shells. Fasten off the thread. Place the strip on the right side of the garment and machine down the centre with a small straight or zig-zag stitch. Do not press.



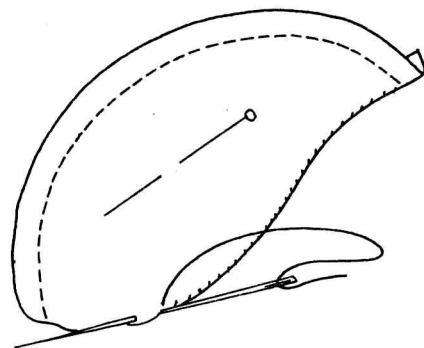
APPLIQUE

A decorative effect produced by applying additional pieces of fabric of various sizes and shapes to an existing garment or household article. The applied fabrics may be contrasting in texture as well as colour, they may be applied singly or in an overlapping sequence to form a picture. However, if the article is to be washed frequently, all fabrics should be similar in fibre content.

The stitches used to attach the motifs may be unobtrusive, such as slip hemming, or they may be planned to the design and therefore embroidery stitches and appropriate threads would be used.

Hand appliqué

Use either entirely non-fraying fabrics such as jersey, plastic, felt, Colourphelt and other non-woven materials so that the shapes may be applied by sticking in place using pieces of Bondaweb or Wundaweb, and then stitched round the edge using one of the close embroidery stitches such as loop stitch. If finer fraying fabrics are used there is a choice of two methods, depending on the type of material being used. The first is to press Bondaweb on to the wrong side of a piece of fabric, larger than the motif, or large enough to cut all motifs. Peel off the paper and cut out the motifs, marking them with pencil first or use a cardboard template if several are to be the same. Household articles are also quite useful, such as saucers, coins and match boxes. Place the motif in position, slipping a small piece of Wundaweb underneath and pressing, then stitching round the edge with an embroidery stitch.



The second method must be used with soft or fine fraying fabrics. Mark out the shape of the motif on the fabric and machine on the line. Trim away the surplus fabric leaving 3 mm ($\frac{1}{8}$ in.) outside the machining. Pin motif in position, turn under the 3 mm ($\frac{1}{8}$ in.) so that the machining just disappears and neatly slip stitch the edge using normal sewing thread. Embroidery stitches can be added afterwards if you wish.

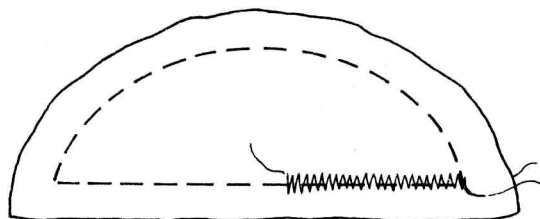
Machine appliqué

Decide on the design. Keep the outline as simple as possible, with very few additional rows of stitching which will require careful finishing of threads at the end. Most outlines, even initials, can be simplified. Trace a motif or draw your own design on soft sew-in Vilene and cut out. Pin this to the garment and adjust it until it looks right. Unpin the Vilene but mark its position on the garment with a chalk cross.

Decide on the fabric for the motif and on the thread colour. This can match either of the fabrics or you can introduce a new colour. Use Anchor Machine Embroidery no. 30 or 50, or, for a heavier result, use normal sewing thread such as Drima.

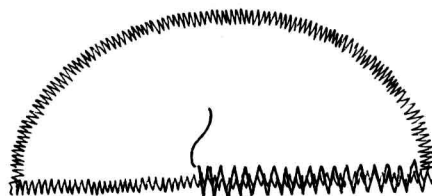
Set the machine to satin stitch. Stitch length: $\frac{3}{4}$; zig-zag: $1\frac{1}{2}$. Attach the satin stitch foot.

Pin the Vilene template to the fabric and mark round it with a dotted pencil line. Trim away some of the surplus fabric but leave at least 2 cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in.) extending beyond the pencil line. Place the fabric on the right side of the garment. Slip a piece of Wundaweb between the two and press until it adheres.



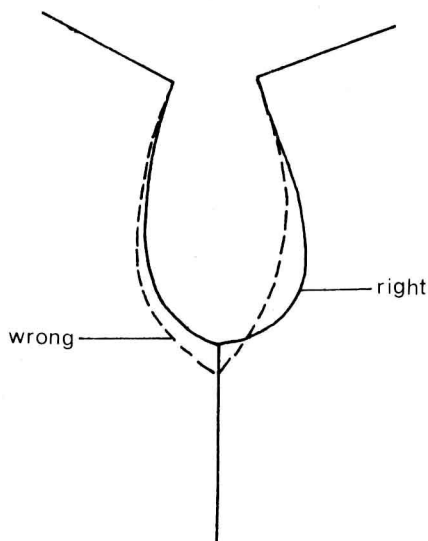
Put paper underneath the work and work satin stitch round the design following the line. Try to start and finish at a point convenient for fastening off or for moving on to the next part of the design. If the design has two sections that will partly overlap, work on the underneath one first but avoid a ridge by satin stitching only round that part that will not be covered by the upper part.

Remove the garment from the machine. Tear off the paper. Trim the thread ends and carefully trim away the excess fabric close to the satin stitch. Adjust the stitch to work a zig-zag width of 2, still keeping to a stitch length of $\frac{3}{4}$. Work round the motif again, stitching exactly over the first row. The slightly wider stitch will cover the first stitching. Remember to put a fresh piece of paper underneath.



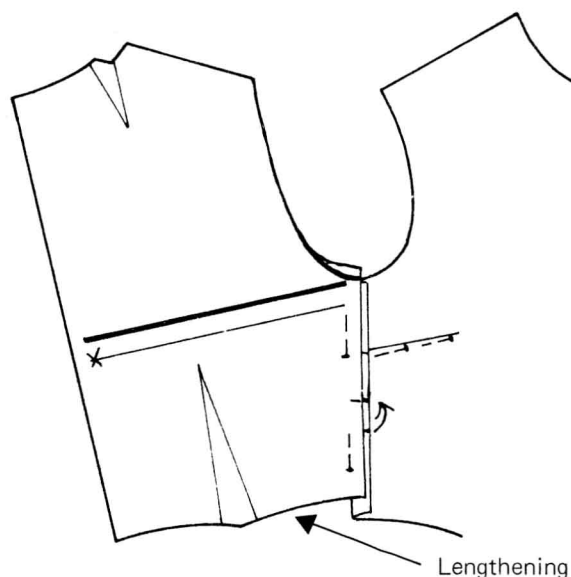
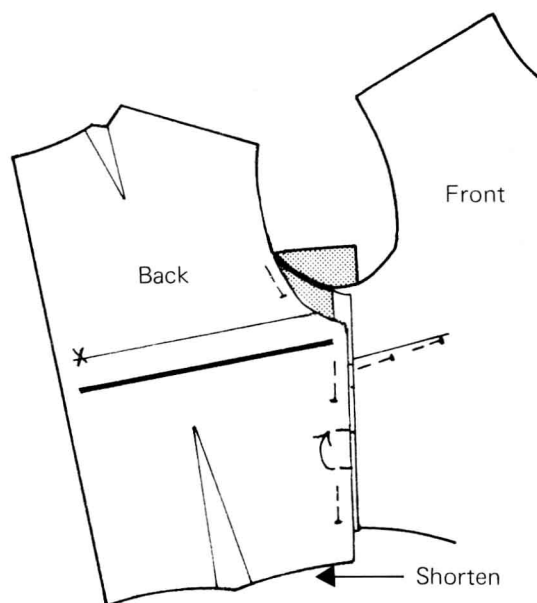
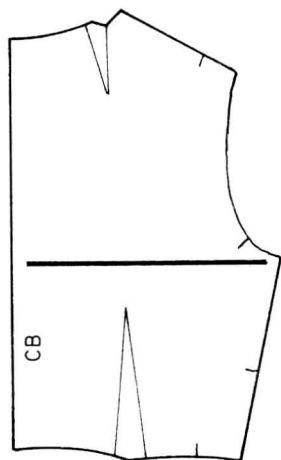
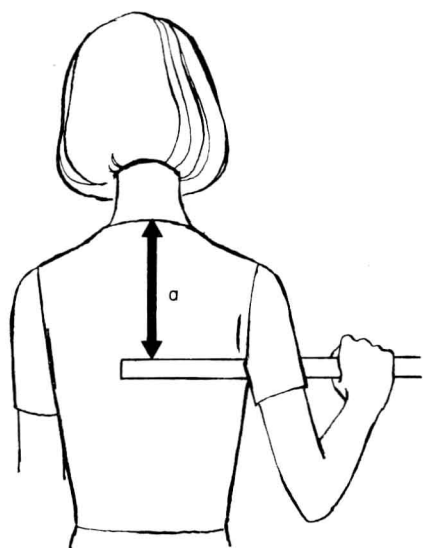
ARMHOLE

This can be one of the most difficult areas to fit partly because flesh does not accumulate uniformly but also because the armhole is affected by the slope of the shoulder and the width of the back and chest. However, it helps to understand the main principles of the shape of the armhole for a standard set-in sleeve. It is the shape of the armhole that is important, not necessarily its depth. A low armhole is not only uncomfortable but it means the whole dress lifts when you raise your arms. The underarm should follow the curve of the body with just a little ease for comfort. Study your pattern carefully; place the back and front together at the side seam. There should be a slight scoop at the back but much more at the front. Below, you can see a poor armhole with a better shape drawn in. It is worth making this small alteration; it is invariably more comfortable to wear and if it isn't right you can scoop it away again.



Check the depth of your armhole by placing a ruler under your arm and across your back. Get someone to measure from your back neck or shoulder to the ruler. Check your pattern. Most people need a shallower armhole so fill it in as shown. If you have a pad of flesh at the front of your arm and armholes cut across it uncomfortably, raise the armhole line so that the sleeve join is above the flesh — do not lower it or it will be loose and uncomfortable.

Pin the back and front patterns together at underarm and measure. If the armhole on the pattern is too deep, move the back pattern down, so shortening the distance between neck and underarm point. Fill in back armhole curve to make a good line with the front armhole. If the armhole is too shallow, move the back pattern up and cut out the back armhole curve.



Mark a new balance mark across the two patterns, at the side seam, before unpinning. Having altered the back armhole, be prepared, at the fitting stage, to raise or lower the front shoulder seam a little. It is best not to do this on the pattern because it is by no means always correct on every figure. The sleeve remains unaltered; you would only need to enlarge or reduce the sleeve head if you made a massive alteration to the depth of armhole.

(See also *Waist Fitting*, page 123.)

ARROWHEADS

A decorative triangle of thread (also known as sprats' heads), usually quite small, that can be worked at the tops of pleats and slit openings, and sometimes featured at the ends of piped pockets. It is a useful method of neatening these places and the arrowhead also strengthens and prevents seams splitting under strain.

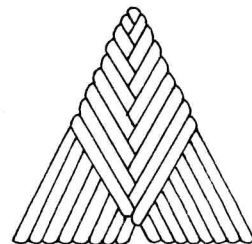
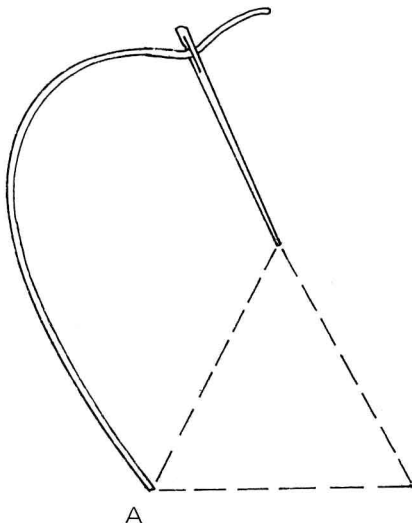
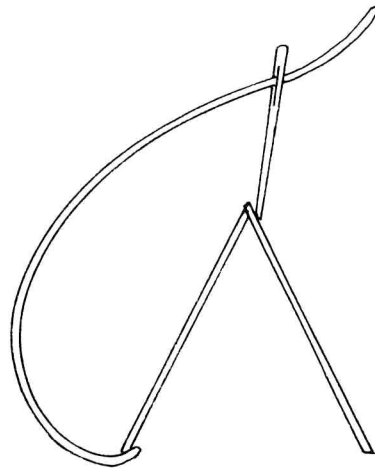
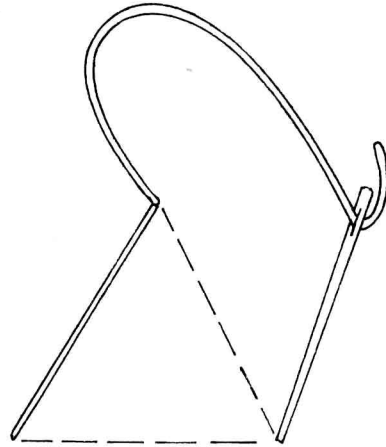
Use sharp tailor's chalk and a ruler and mark an equilateral triangle on the right side of the fabric making sure the chalk lines cross at the corners to provide a clear point for stitching.

Use a thick thread such as buttonhole twist, Drima Bold or Anchor Soft and thread a fairly long piece into a Between needle big enough to take the thread but not so thick that you have difficulty in penetrating the fabric. Use the thread singly and put a knot in the end. Use matching thread unless you are very expert in working arrowheads.

Bring the thread up at point A but do not pull the knot close to the underside of the fabric. After working a few stitches the knotted end will be held in place so you can then cut off the knot.

Follow the sequence shown in the diagrams using stab stitch and making sure the tension is even on each stitch. Do not crowd the stitches, they should be sufficiently close to allow the threads to lie comfortably side by side. When the central diamond is full fasten off on the wrong side by running the needle under and over a few threads. Press on the wrong side.

If you have to make several the same size make sure you note the size of the chalked triangle because the finished arrowhead tends to be smaller.

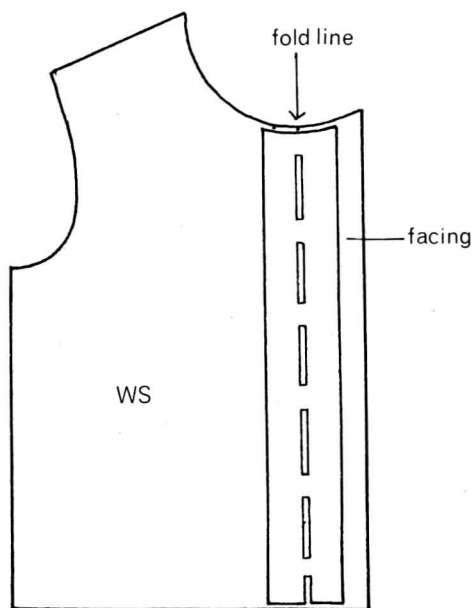


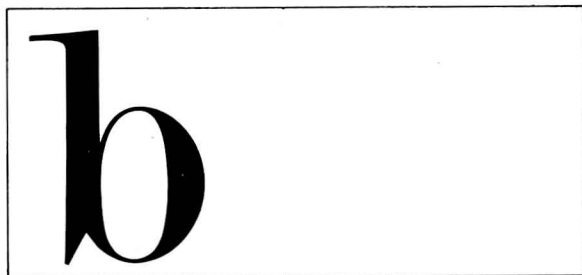
If you work arrowheads at the tops of inverted pleats stitch only through the top layers of fabric, not through to the pleat backing or the pleats will pucker.

Arrowheads can be worked very easily in an embroidery hoop provided the fabric is not too thick.

ATTACHED FACING

If a garment edge is perfectly straight and needs finishing with a facing there is no necessity for cutting an additional piece of fabric and simply re-joining it. Even if the pattern provides a separate piece it is worth pinning it to the main piece to see if it can be cut in one — there may be insufficient material for instance. The pattern may already be cut to include a facing edge to be turned back. In either case, cut out with the grain of the fabric following the grain of the main piece, mark the fold line, that is the point where the facing is to fold back, and press a length of Fold-a-Band in position with the central holes exactly over the fold line. You may need to add an additional interfacing but often the Fold-a-Band will provide the necessary support as well as an accurate and crisp edge. The illustration shows an attached facing on a blouse front.





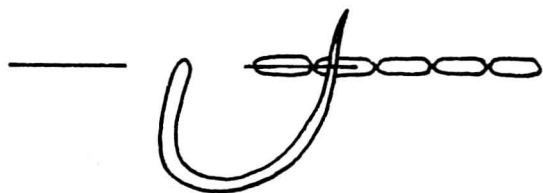
BACK STITCH

This term has two meanings. In hand sewing it is a stitch that is mainly used for repair in places where a seam has split and it is not worth getting out the machine to re-stitch. Sometimes it may be used for very short rows of stitching that may be awkward to reach by machine, although in the majority of such cases the half back stitch is probably more effective.

To replace or imitate machining, thread a small needle with a short piece of thread. Use a knot and start to overlap the machining by at least 1 cm ($\frac{3}{8}$ in.). Bring the needle out, pull the thread fairly tight, pass the needle back to the previous stitch, or into a hole made by the machine needle, pass the needle under far enough to leave room for the next backward movement and so on. Fasten off firmly. One of the disadvantages of the stitch is that it looks untidy on the wrong side, but this is not important when repairing an open seam.

Back stitch is a much used embroidery stitch especially effective on even weave linens and canvas where geometric designs are used.

(See also *Half Back Stitch*.)



In embroidery this is a flat outline stitch. Work from right to left. Take a stitch through the fabric, then a back stitch, half the length of the first stitch, to where the needle was first inserted. Take the next stitch to bring the needle in front of the first stitch so that when the next back stitch is taken it is the same length as the previous one.

BACKING

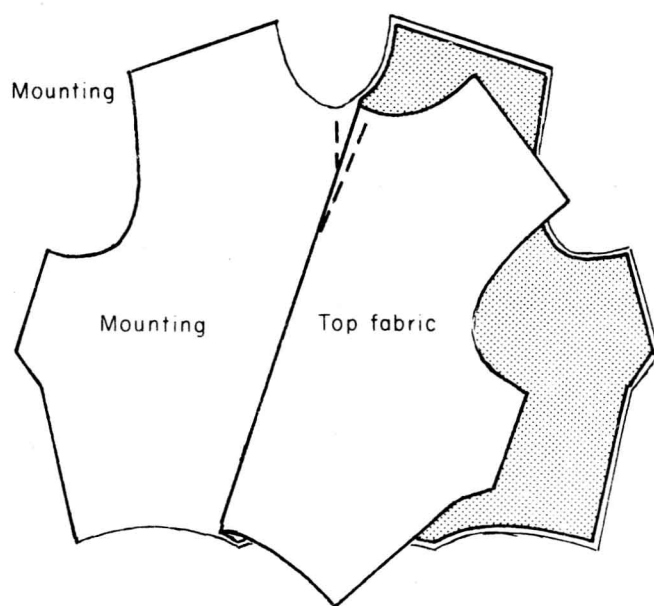
An entire section or part of a section of garment may be backed. The two main reasons for backing are to add strength, as in the case of pockets or for a repetitive process such as decoration, or to make sure the fabric cannot be seen through, as in the case of lace.

The choice of backing material depends on the task it has to perform. A piece of tape folded into two or three is a strong backing for a button on a working garment; a piece of cotton lawn or light Vilene would be adequate for a yoke; thin taffeta or even chiffon would be a suitable backing for lace. When backing a limited area so that a process can be worked make sure the backing fabric extends well beyond the area the process will occupy. Place the fabrics together and baste, or in the case of iron-on Vilene, press in position.

If an entire garment is to be backed or mounted great care must be taken with the choice of backing fabric. In general it should be lighter in weight and softer but of a similar nature. For example, mount jersey fabrics onto nylon jersey backing.

Cut out the whole garment and cut out the backing, place each piece of fabric wrong side down on to the wrong side of the mounting and with the whole piece flat on the table work basting stitches all over each piece. Begin in the centre to eliminate any movement to one side. Keep the stitches fairly loose.

Make up the garment treating all pieces as one layer. If the correct weight of backing has been used there will be no problem with excess bulk in seams and darts.



It is sometimes desirable to make up a garment that is partly backed or mounted and partly loose-lined. (See also *Lining*.)

Reasons for backing or mounting an entire garment

Providing support for the top fabric will considerably reduce creasing in wear, and in the case of fitted skirts and dresses it will also prevent seating. The heavier the person the more strain is placed on the fabric in wear, so mounting is a great advantage. A very slim person who always buys top quality very expensive material does not have to mount for reasons of strain or fabric support, but she may nevertheless like to do it because the whole silhouette is crisper and more shapely and the outfit remains looking fresh and new for much longer. Mounted fabric is much easier to sew, slippage of seams is less likely, puckering is eliminated, and pressing is easier because seam imprints are less likely. Also hems never show because the stitching is taken only through the mounting.

Mounted garments travel better because they crease less, both in the suitcase and being worn.

There are two things to consider in garments which need mounting. First, if you are using a fabric which will not perform as you want it to as a single layer, then you must mount it, whatever the garment. Secondly, if you are making a garment which by its style puts a strain on the fabric, you should mount it. Examples of this include close fitting articles such as straight dresses and skirts.

Fabrics for mounting

The success of mounting depends on the correct choice of the supporting fabric and this may be a further deciding factor. If you are unable to buy a suitable mounting, or you are not sure what to use, then it is better not to do it.

Occasionally people complain that mounted clothes are hot, which surprises me until I see the variety of underwear they are still wearing. Mounting can replace a slip and clothes stand away from the body. It is, of course, more expensive to mount, although you eliminate the cost of lining in most cases.

Suggestions for mounting fabrics are: cotton lawn, Vincel/cotton or any soft, thin cotton, voile, chiffon, viscose, polyester/cotton. Only use conventional lining fabric if you want a slippery effect.

Buy the fabric first

Buy your fabric and have it with you when you buy the mounting, placing it on top of various mountings to feel the effect. The top material should be supported, but it should not have its character eliminated by a strong or opposite mounting.

Buy the same amount of mounting material unless you are omitting some part such as sleeves, in which case buy 50 cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ yd) less for short or $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeves and 70 cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ yd) less for long sleeves.

If you locate a supply of the most used mounting

fabrics it is useful to buy a large amount for future use.

If the fabric is sheer or open, then a suitable colour of mounting must be found, but with solid fabrics white can be used for most things which is more economical than buying short lengths.

Most reasonably priced material is now pre-shrunk as part of the finishing, but if you are doubtful wash and iron the whole length before cutting out.

It helps to eliminate static electricity if the length of nylon jersey and also the length of synthetic top fabric is washed through in a fabric softener before cutting out. After making up, continue to rinse synthetic garments in one of these softeners.

BAG OUT

A term and a method of construction used mainly in the ready-to-wear industry. It is a quick way of lining by which you make the garment or part of it and make the lining. Place the two right sides together, stitch round the outside leaving a good-sized gap for turning through, turn through and press. The gap is then stitched by hand.

The disadvantages of this method of lining are that the lining is always liable to part from the garment and bag away from it because it is not fixed and also the edges of the lining will always tend to show at the edge of the garment.

The only cases where bagging out can be used successfully are where two layers of fabric are being used, for example in making straps, belts or bibs for dungarees.

(See also *Lining*.)

BALANCE

Balance refers to the hang and the proportion of a garment, and this is dependent on the posture of the person as well as the shape. Someone with a forward-tilted posture will need the front length of the garment from neck to hem considerably shorter than that provided by a pattern. Someone with a large or prominent bust will find the balance of a pattern incorrect because she will need more length in the front. There are many other instances where the balance of front and back of any garment have to be adjusted to produce a properly fitting garment and this is of course in addition to fitting.

(See also *Fitting*.)

BALANCE MARKS

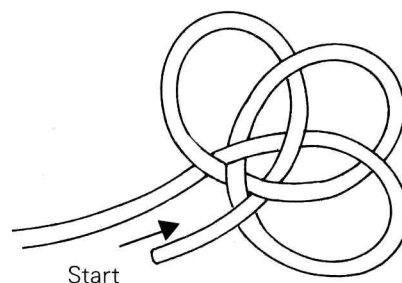
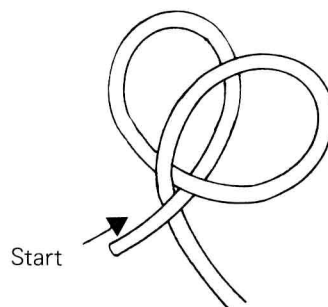
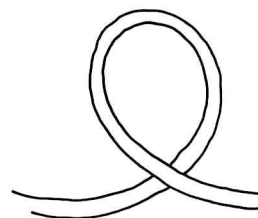
Marks on a pattern, usually triangles, to show where one piece matches another. To distinguish various similar pieces different numbers of balance marks are used, for example one on the front of a sleeve and also on the corresponding armhole, and two at the back. Sometimes balance marks are also numbered so

that for instance the balance marks on both parts of a skirt seam to be joined will bear the same number. For beginners and those who seldom sew these numbers are helpful as they ensure that the correct, and perhaps fairly similar, pieces are being joined. However, to make full use of them the pattern pieces must be kept laid out beside the fabric pieces until the whole thing is assembled.

I think experienced sewers should make very limited use of balance marks. In a few places — gathered areas, tucks, pleats, pocket positions, and other style features — they must be used, but in the construction of basic seams it is far better to observe the grain of the fabric and make a smooth seam than to force balance marks to meet. Even in more involved processes such as setting in sleeves and attaching a collar, provided the obvious points match, such as underarm or centre back and front, it is far better to manipulate the layers of fabric and ease to produce a correctly fitting result than it is to rely on balance marks. Also, of course, any slight adjustment at fitting means the balance marks no longer match anyway.

When cutting out, cut a smooth edge to every pattern piece, never cut the triangles outwards or, worse still, inwards. Then any that will be needed should be marked with tailor tacks (page 304), carbon paper and tracing wheel (page 311), or if there are only one or two and you will be doing the appropriate stitching immediately make a mark with tailor's chalk or a chalk pencil.

The balance marks that are really useful are the ones you add yourself. The occasions when you might do this include times when you have made a fitting adjustment, but you need to undo the seam and re-assemble it to the new marks; marking the position of a seam pocket, perhaps at the correct level; and also when making pattern adaptations. For this last use of a balance mark draw a style line such as a yoke on a paper pattern, then make balance marks across it before cutting the pattern to ensure correct matching when re-joining in fabric.



BALL BUTTONS

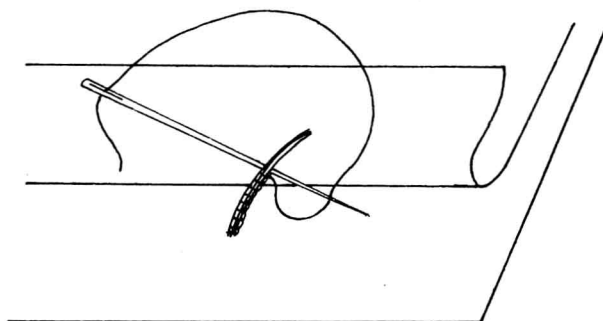
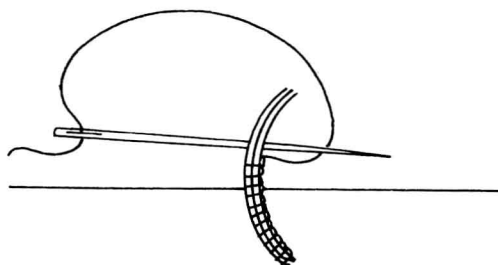
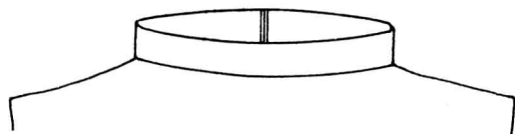
These are buttons made by knotting a cord. They are often combined with frog fastenings or rouleau loops but they are effective purely as decoration. They are not very successful if used with any of the conventional slit buttonholes because if you lengthen the shank sufficiently to allow the buttonhole to close under it, the button wobbles. Loops simply wind round the button loosely. Not a strong fastening, so it should not be used at points of strain.

Use lengths of rouleau or thin cord to make the buttons. The thicker the cord the larger the button will be, so try to keep them in proportion on the garment. Fine rouleau will make very small buttons but it can be filled with cord to produce larger ones.

Fine cord can be used double with good effect; two colours can be used. In order to tie the knot you need quite a long length of cord so buy or make plenty and cut into the number of pieces required plus a few extra ones to practise on. Allow about 15 to 25 cm (6 to 8 in.) for each button depending on thickness. It is difficult to describe in words which way to wind the cord, but if you follow the illustrations it should work correctly. Form it quite loosely and then gently ease the knot into a ball. Make sure the cord loops in the direction indicated.

BAND COLLAR

A narrow strip of fabric attached to a basic neckline. It looks better and is easier to attach if the fabric is cut on the cross but sometimes fashion dictates that it is straight and therefore stands away from the neck. The neck fastening may be at the centre front or the centre back. Always interface with medium to firm interfacing depending on the fabric. For details of attaching see *Stand Collars*, page 70.



BAR TACKS

There are two kinds of bar tacks, those that strengthen and those that loosely attach. The latter are also called French tacks.

A strengthening bar tack may be needed at the base of a zip, the end of a pocket, buttonhole, the step of a lapel, or any point where regular strain is applied. To work them by machine, set the stitch width to $3\frac{1}{2}$ or 4 and satin stitch for about four or five stitches.

To work by hand make four or five stab stitches on top of each other about 3 to 5 mm ($\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ in.) long, pulling the thread tight. The threads may then be tightened and drawn together by working close loop stitch over them. Depending on the position of the tack the loop stitches may be taken through the fabric underneath as well for extra strength, but this does make the tack more obvious.

Bar tacks may be worked on the wrong side or the right side but they must be very small and neat wherever they are.

Loose longer tacks are used to keep linings in place. Make several threads about 5 mm to 1 cm ($\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ in.) long between the lining and the garment, trying to confine the stitching to the seam allowances so that they are not visible from the right side. Work close loop stitch over the threads. Alternatively, a less strong tack can be made by working chain stitch for 1 cm ($\frac{3}{8}$ in.) between lining and garment.

The tacks may be placed at intervals round a hem or down seams but do not use too many or they restrict the hang of the garment.

BASTING

The word has come to have two meanings. First, it is the description tailors use for tacking, i.e. all tem-