



# Basic Sewing Techniques Pt. 1

By Haley Hopkins | June 21, 2024 | Sewing Techniques



## Introduction

Sewing may seem really complicated and like there is so much to learn. There is no way you can learn everything. That's not true. It is really a lot easier than it seems. Once you know the basics, you can usually piece the rest together with a little bit of trial and error. As long as you have the basics, and don't give up, you will be able to make anything.

This is the first blog post in the basics series. In this post, we'll be going over all the techniques required to make the last three blogs I did: the corset, the hoopskirt, and the ball gown.

The techniques covered today are: the basic stitch, the backstitch, the pivot stitch, the topstitching, and also pressing, trimming, and gathering. These are the beginner-level basics. Don't worry they are pretty easy.

## Using the Sewing Machine

### Using the sewing machine

One thing that might be helpful to know is how to use your sewing machine. That is not included in this blog. Things like how to thread it, how to set the stitch length, how to set the tension, and how to set the stitch width, plus where the back stick button is, should be in your machine's user manual. I know it seems annoying and pointless, but reading that actually can help a lot. Once you are familiar with your machine, everything else becomes easier. I am going to let the manual teach you the machine basics and run right into the basic techniques.



## Basic Stitch

The basic stitch is the most common and easiest part of sewing. In fact, it is what you think of when you hear “sewing”. It is used to sew two pieces of fabric together. It is one of the first things you should master in sewing.

No special presser foot needed

The stitch setup requires a length of 2.2

- a. Place the two pieces of fabric with the right-sides together. The raw edge should be mostly even. Pin in place.
- b. Place the fabric in the machine, with the edge lining up to the 5/8” line. (Most patterns are set with a 5/8” seam allowance. That is the standard. If yours is different you will have to adjust. My calculations and patterns usually have 1/2” seam allowance. Sorry to make things confusing.)
- c. Lower the pressure foot, so it’s at the top of the fabric.
- d. Press your foot on the pedal.
- e. Stitch forward, keeping the edge of the fabric at the 5/8” line.
- f. Once you reach the bottom of your fabric, raise the pressure foot and needle. Remove the fabric, clipping the thread tails.

Good job. This technique will get you through most of your sewing needs. Honestly, this is the first thing you need. Once you add the backstitch as well, you are ready to start sewing! Easy, right? You got this!

## Back Stitch

The backstitch is vital for the beginning and ends of your seams and stitches. It secures the stitches and makes sure your seams don’t come undone. This should be one of the first things you perfect in your sewing journey. This technique could be used for most stitches and occasions, for simplicity purposes I will be writing the instruction as if you are doing a back stitch at the beginning and end of a basic stitch.

No special foot is needed.

The stitch setup will be at the length of 2.2



- a. Start  $\frac{1}{2}$ " down from the top edge of the fabric. Seam allowance is the same as for the basic stitch.
- b. Hold down the button on your machine that makes it sew backward.
- c. Press on the pedal gently.
- d. Sew backwards to the top edge.
- e. Do not go past the edge, that will cause the end to gather and pucker. Stop a stitch or two before the very end.
- f. Let go of the button.
- g. Press on the foot again, this time sewing forward. Retrace your seam, sewing directly over your backstitches.
- h. Sew until you reach a stitch away from the bottom edge.
- i. Hold the button down again.
- j. Sew back over your stitches for 4-5 stitches and then stop.
- k. I like sewing forward to the end again, but this isn't necessary.
- l. Lift your needle and presser foot. Remove fabric and clip the thread tails.

You have completed the Back stitch! Congratulations! Those stitches aren't going anywhere.

## Pivot Stitch

Pivot Stitches are used for corners, and well, pivots. It is when you want to change direction abruptly. You can change direction smoothly and make a curve, but if you need a quick change in direction, then the pivot stitch is what you need. This technique works best with a basic stitch. So, that is what I will be writing the instructions for.

No special presser foot needed.

Stitch set-up requires a length of 2.2

- a. Start with a backstitch and start your basic stitch as per the instructions above.
- b. Sew straight until you reach where you need to pivot.
- c. Stop stitching with the needle down, in the fabric.
- d. Raise the pressure foot, but not the needle.
- e. Turn the fabric so the foot is now facing the desired new direction.



- f. Lower the pressure foot and continue the basic stitch as normal until you reach the end.
- g. Back stitch to secure the stitches. Raise the needle and presser foot. Remove the fabric and clip the thread tails.

You should now have a beautiful corner in your stitching. Good job!

## Pressing

Pressing the seams and seam allowances is one of the things that they say sets an amateur and a master sewer apart. It's not hard though. You can start pressing at the very beginning and skip right ahead. This will be used on both the basic stitch and on the seam allowance.

Securing stitches.

Pressing the stitches you just sewed will meld the stitches into the fabric. The heat helps the thread integrate itself with the fabric and become one with it. It is called pressing because of the motion you are making with the iron. Just sliding the iron around can pull at the stitches, so you will want to press on the stitches, then raise it and press on the next part. Some people don't think pressing the stitches is really necessary and skip the step, others find it vital. I will let you decide which you are and just teach you how to do it.

No sewing machine required, you do need an iron.

Knowledge about the natural or synthetic nature of the fabric is helpful.

- a. Heat up your iron. If you know the heat needed for the fabric, heat it to that. If you are unsure, I would start lower and work your way up, testing on a scrap of the fabric.
- b. Once your iron is ready, take your stitched piece. Arrange it flat on the iron board. Press the iron on the stitches.
- c. Lift slightly and move the iron to the next part of the stitch. Press the iron on the stitches.
- d. Repeat this process, till you have pressed the whole seam.
- e. Turn off your iron, and let it cool before you move, or handle it.

Good job! What do you think? Helpful?



## Pressing seam allowance

Next you want to press the seam allowance open. This helps control the bulk and reduce seam allowance confusion. It helps the whole seam flow as it should.

- a. Heat your iron, same as previously done.
- b. Once your iron is ready, take your sewn seam. Open up the seam allowance. So they are going back to their side. You should be able to see the stitching slightly.
- c. Press your iron down on the open seam.
- d. Heat until the seam lays open and flat.
- e. Move the iron to the next part until the whole seam is pressed open.
- f. Turn off your iron, and let it cool before you move, or handle it.

Now your seam is open, and won't interrupt the flow of the fabric. Good job!

## Trimming

Trimming is used to reduce the bulk of the seam. This can be especially important in corners where the seam allowance will bulk up and become awkward. It also helps with armholes, where the seam allowance may mess with the fit and feel of the fit. This can be used to trim the seam allowance after most seams. Whether you did a basic seam, zigzag seam, or even a zigzag finish. These instructions will be for a basic seam.

No machine required, but you will need fabric scissors.

If you are pressing the seam open, be sure to do that before trimming. It makes the pressing so much easier.

- a. Take your sewn seam.
- b. Cut the seam allowance down to about half the previous size.

## Trimming corners

- a. When trimming a corner you can trim like normal, but then cut off the little corner of the seam allowance so that the allowance is smallest at the corner.



Now you have smaller seams that will not interfere with the fit of the fabric.

## Topstitch

This technique really helps a lot in making your projects look professional. It ensures that the linings don't show and that nothing will slide out of place. I love the look it gives and would recommend learning this sooner rather than later. This technique is done after a seam is finished.

No special foot needed

The stitch setup is flexible with the length. A length of 3-4 is usually recommended. I often just keep it the same as my basic stitch though.

- a. After you finish the seam and press the seam open, you will press the seam closed with the wrong sides together.
- b. Roll the seam slightly to the wrong side before pressing.
- c. You will stitch on the right side of the fabric  $\frac{1}{8}$ "- $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the edge, back stitch at the front and end to secure the stitching.
- d. Make sure to clip your thread tails afterward.

Congrats! Now your edge looks tailor-done. I am often impressed by how such easy things make a huge difference in how professional a piece looks.

## Gathering

The last thing we'll go over today will be gathering. This is the hardest technique so far. It is used to make those cute gathered skirts, puffed sleeves, and ruffles. It can be really cute. Even though I said it was the hardest so far, don't worry it's still relatively easy! I know you can do it. I will walk you through every step of the process, don't worry.

No special presser foot is needed.

Stitch set-up requires a stitch length of 4

- a. You will start with the single piece that you want to gather. The piece it will attach to will be off to the side for now.



- b. With the stitch length set to 4, sew a straight stitch  $\frac{5}{8}$ " from the raw edge. Do not backstitch on either side.
- c. When you remove the fabric from the machine, make sure to leave longer thread tails.
- d. Sew another straight seam at a stitch length of 4,  $\frac{1}{4}$ " away above the other in the seam allowance. Do not backstitch on either side of this one either. And leave plenty of thread tails.
- e. Now you should have two lines of stitching.
- f. Take both the bobbin thread tails on one side in your hand. Pull gently at them, sliding the fabric back as you pull. If you pull too hard or fast, you could break the thread, so don't rush it.
- g. Gather till satisfied.
- h. Pin it to the other flat piece of fabric. With the right-sides together.
- i. Change the stitching length back to 2.2
- j. Sew them together using a basic stitch, and backstitches on both ends to secure it.

Your gathering is now secure and attached. I find this one of the more satisfying techniques to look at. I can stare at a good gathering for a while. It's so pretty and cute!

## Conclusion

Now that you have those basics down, a whole world of possibilities opens up for you. I am so excited for you. Similar to learning the notes of singing, once you know the basics, you can sew most anything.

With all those techniques under your belt, you should be able to complete a lot of patterns, including the blogs I have published previously. The only skill you are missing for the dress would be darts.

Darts aren't that hard and are summed up in one social media post on my Instagram and Facebook. Check those out, or sign up for the email list to see when the next blog in the series. Darts will be included in that one.

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