

common terms

Give your vocab a boost with this must-know list of sewing lingo

APPLIQUÉ—A surface pattern made by cutting out fabric or lace designs and stitching them to another fabric.

ARMSCYE—Armhole (sewing term).

BACKSTITCH—A strong stitch that doubles back on the last stitch. There are a variety of backstitch styles.

BATISTE—A fine woven cotton fabric.

BESWAX—A wax made by bees used to smooth and strengthen thread for hand sewing.

BIAS—**True bias** is a cut made on an angle 45 degrees to the selvage. This direction allows for the most stretch.

Bias refers to any line diagonal to the crosswise and lengthwise grains. Most bias pattern pieces are laid on the true bias; the grainline arrow and the pattern's layout instructions help you align pattern pieces.

BIAS BINDING—Also called bias tape, a bias cut strip used to bind or cover edges. Slightly stretchy, it sews neatly around curves.

BIAS SEAMS—Seams cut and sewn on the bias.

BINDING—Strip of fabric used to cover or enclose raw edges.

BLANKET STITCH—Hand stitch used for finishing a fabric edge. A smaller version is a buttonhole stitch.

BLIND HEM—A hem where the stitches do not show from the right side.

BRISTLE BRUSH—A stiff-bristle paintbrush which is best for manipulating heavy paints.

CASING—A folded and stitched “tunnel” that holds elastic, cording, or boning.

CATCHSTITCH—A cross-shaped hem

stitch used to join an edge to the inside of a garment.

CHAIN STITCH—A stitch formed by making connected loop that form a chain.

CLEAN FINISH—The term used to describe a finished raw edge.

COUCHING—Hand- or machine-sewn stitches that invisibly overcast a thread, yarn, or trim to attach it to fabric.

CREWEL YARN—A two-ply, loosely twisted, fine-worsted yarn used in heavy embroidery.

CROCHET—A method of making a garment, fabric, braid, or lace with yarn and a hooked needle.

DARNING FOOT—A presser foot with a circular opening that doesn't clamp down over the fabric and is used with dropped feed dogs for free-motion stitching or mending.

EASE—1.n. Difference between body measurements and garment measurements. Also defined as the amount of space in a garment that allows comfortable movement. 2.v. Gathering stitches to fit a longer piece of fabric to a shorter piece of fabric.

EDGE STITCH—Straight stitching sewn very close to the edge of a seam, trim, or outer edge. Prevents edges from stretching or rolling, and supports the fabric.

FACING—Used to finish exposed edges as a partial lining found on center front, neckline, or armhole edges.

FADE-OUT PEN—A fabric pen with ink that disappears 12 to 24 hours after marking.

FEED DOG(S)—Located beneath the

presser foot, these “teeth” move the fabric under the presser foot. In the raised position, they “feed” the fabric. You can also drop the feed dogs so you can move the fabric freely in any direction.

FELL STITCH—Hand stitches worked from the right side to pull a seam together invisibly. Stitches travel in the fold of the fabric.

FINGER PRESS—A temporary method of flattening a seam using the heat from your fingers.

FLAT-FELLED SEAM—A machine-sewn seam where all raw edges are encased by fabric and sewn flat.

FREE-MOTION EMBROIDERY—Hand-guided stitching with dropped feed dogs on hooped fabric.

FRENCH DARTS—Front darts starting from near or at the side seam waistline and ending near the bust point.

FRENCH SEAM—A self-enclosed seam stitched from the right side, then from the wrong side.

GORE—Vertical garment sections, usually on a skirt.

GRADING—The process of converting a pattern from one size to another.

GRAINLINE—Long arrow symbol printed on a pattern that corresponds to the lengthwise grain of the fabric.

HAND-OVERCAST—A diagonal hand stitch that wraps around an edge like a spiral.

HIP CURVE—A curved ruler.

HONG KONG SEAM FINISH—A bias-bound edge seam finish, great for heavy fabrics.

HOOP—A plastic, metal, or wooden

hoop that holds fabric tight while sewing or embroidering.

HORSEHAIR BRAID—A bias-woven net strip of synthetic threads, often used to support a hem. It stretches and takes curves easily.

INSEAM—The vertical inside seam on pants.

INTERFACING—Sew-in or fusible fabric used to stabilize fashion fabrics. Can also add body, reinforce, or shape a garment.

INVISIBLE STITCH—Made at 1/16-inch or 1/8-inch intervals through the side fold of the turn-under allowance. This technique hides the stitch in the fold along the edge.

LAPEL—The joining of a coat or shirt with the collar of the garment; varieties include notched and clover leaf.

MACHINE TENSION—Controlled by disks to apply drag to the machine thread. Adjust it for thread and fabric variances.

MICROBRUSH—A paintbrush with a tiny, brush tip made for applying controlled, small amounts of paint to a surface.

MITER—When two strips cross at right angles, the line formed by connecting the inside and outside corners.

MONOFILAMENT THREAD—Often called clear or invisible thread made of nylon or polyester.

NAPPED FABRIC—A fabric with a fuzzy texture, such as velvet, that runs in a specific direction.

NOTCHES—Found on the cutting lines of patterns, these diamond- or triangle-shaped marks indicate where seams should match.

ON-GRAIN—The line parallel to the selvage on fabric. The same as grain, straight-of-grain, or warp threads.

OMBRÉ—Closely related tones of color that graduate from light to dark.

PEPLUM—An extension of a bodice below the waistline. It can be flared, pleated, cut separately from the garment, or one piece.

PICKSTITCH—A variation on the backstitch where you backtrack only slightly and only a bead of thread is visible on the right side of the garment.

PIPING—A narrow piece of bias-cut fabric folded over a cord and inserted into the seam between the edge and facing of a garment as a decorative trim.

PLACKET—A faced strip of fabric that houses either the buttons or buttonholes on a closure.

POINT PRESSER—A small tool used to get inside a tight corner or small space for ease of pressing.

PRINCESS SEAM—A vertical seam between side seams on pants, skirts, blouses, dresses, jackets, or coats.

QUILT—1.n. Coverlet or wall hanging made from small pieces of fabric sewn together in batted layers and topstitched. 2.v. The action of topstitching the quilt layers together.

RAW EDGE—The unfinished cut edge of fabric.

ROTARY CUTTER—A round cutting blade with a handle.

RUNNING STITCH—An even hand stitch in which the stitches weave in and out of the fabric from end to end in a dashed line.

SCALLOPS—A series of curves or shell-like segments forming an ornamental edge.

SELVAGE—The tightly woven factory edge of fabric that runs parallel to the lengthwise grain.

SERGE—To sew an edge or seam with a serger. A serger (also known as an overlock machine) creates an overlock stitch that extends over the edge of the cloth. Some include automated cutters that cut off the excess fabric.

SHISHA—Mirrored glass used to decorate clothing or other accessories.

SHOULDER POINT—The point of the shoulder seam where the arm and shoulder connect.

SHOULDER SLOPE—The angle between the side base of the neck and the shoulder point.

SINGLE CROCHET—The most basic crochet stitch.

SLEEVE CAP—The section of the sleeve above the biceps line.

SLIP BASTING—A temporary stitch made on the right side of the folded lapped seam; it enables exact matching of plaids and then acts like a hinge to reposition fabrics right sides together for permanent stitching.

SQUARE KNOT—A knot that forms a square. It's commonly used in macramé.

STITCH IN THE DITCH—Stitching inside the "valley" or "groove" of a seam.

STABILIZER—An underlayer used to support a fabric for machine embroidery.

STAYSTITCH—Machine stitches along a seamline that keep the fabric from stretching when the seam is sewn.

TAPESTRY NEEDLE—A needle with a blunt tip and large oval-shaped eye made for decorative stitching with bulky threads or yarns.

TUCK—A stitched pleat of any width.

UNDERLINING—A layer of lightweight fabric sewn into a garment to reinforce seams, add weight or firmness, hide construction details, and provide a layer for inner stitching.

WARP—Lengthwise thread in woven fabric that runs parallel to selvage.

WEFT—The crosswise threads in a woven fabric, traveling from selvage to selvage.

WRONG SIDE—Typically, the inside of a garment or the backside of fabric.

YOKE—A fabric panel either across the shoulders or at the waistline.

ZIGZAGGING—A stitch that has width and length and looks like connected Zs.