

Basics

Step-by-step to perfect machine-made buttonholes

by Connie Long

If you do your math and mark correctly, your buttonholes will be neat and secure

No matter how carefully a garment is constructed, if it sports sloppy buttonholes, it can never claim professional status. Machine buttonholes should be discreet, uniform in length, an equal distance from the garment edge and each other, and, of course, perfectly stitched. Here's how to sew them.

Provide necessary support

Buttonholes always look better, and are easier to sew, when the fashion fabric is properly supported with interfacing. In most cases, the fusible or sew-in in-

terfacing required for the garment facings will adequately support the buttonholes. With some lightweight or loosely woven fabrics, however, you may need to add another strip of thin interfacing or organza in the buttonhole area. Because sewing buttonholes falls at the tail end of the construction process, you must remember to plan your interfacing needs in advance.

Test, practice, and test some more

The best way to figure out your interfacing requirements is to sew a test buttonhole (layer two

Button-to-buttonhole math

Here are three formulas to help you calculate the correct buttonhole size for buttons of different proportions.

Sew-through button less than 1/8-in. thick

Measure the diameter.



$$\frac{\text{diameter} + \frac{1}{8} \text{ in.}}{\text{buttonhole length}}$$

buttonhole length

Sew-through button more than 1/8-in. thick

Measure the diameter and thickness.

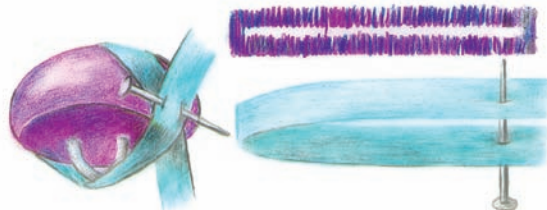


$$\frac{\text{diameter} + \text{thickness} + \frac{1}{8} \text{ in.}}{\text{buttonhole length}}$$

buttonhole length

Ball or shank button

Wrap twill tape around the button and pin where the tape ends overlap.



$$\frac{\text{distance from fold to pin} + \frac{1}{8} \text{ in.}}{\text{buttonhole length}}$$

buttonhole length



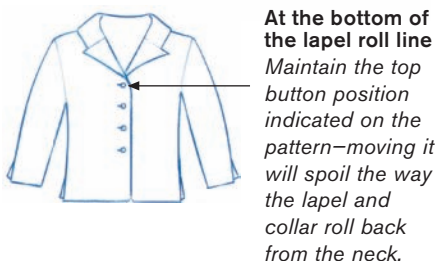
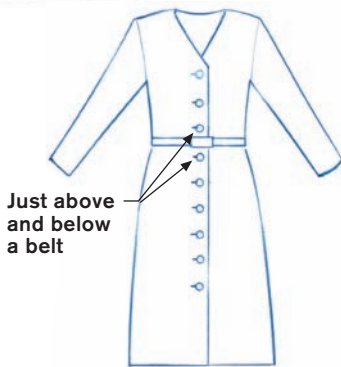
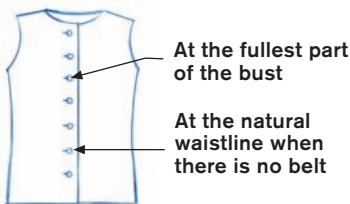
Mark, sew, and cut your way to a buttonhole that's a perfect fit for your button.

ONLINE EXTRA

Visit www.threads magazine.com for “Bungled Buttonholes,” problem-solving tips for common mistakes, excerpted from *Sewing 911* by Barbara Deckert (The Taunton Press, 2001).

Fasten at five crucial points to prevent gaping

There are five garment areas that always require a button and buttonhole.



fabric scraps with interfacing to simulate the faced garment front) and scrutinize the results. If the hole stretches out of shape even slightly, you'll need to add an extra strip of interfacing.

Also test the length of the buttonhole. Determine the length using one of the formulas on p. 20, sew a buttonhole according to those specifications, then slip the button through it to make sure it's snug enough to be secure, but loose enough for the button to pass through easily. Test the alignment (hori-

zontal, vertical, or diagonal) of the hole (see p. 24 for details) and also experiment with the stitch length and tension to find the combination that produces smooth, consistent stitching.

Space buttonholes precisely, then sew them

When you're pleased with your test buttonholes, you're ready to sew them on your garment. Fully construct and interface the garment, then make sure the buttonhole area is perfectly pressed and smooth; be sure to pin the

facing to the garment if it isn't secured. Now you're ready to decide how far apart the buttons should be and mark the placement of the buttonholes to match (see below). You'll find that sewing the buttonholes (see p. 24, at top left) and then using them to position the corresponding buttons (see p. 24, at top right) is the easy part.

Connie Long teaches beginner sewing classes at G Street Fabrics in Rockville, Md.

(Continued on p. 24)

Space the buttons, and mark the buttonholes

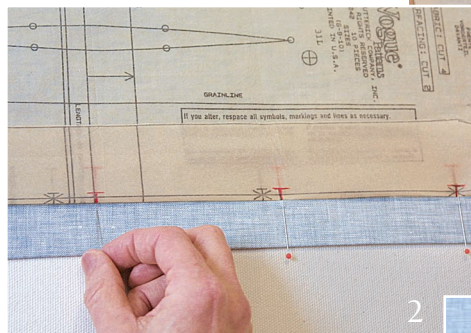
The button/buttonhole placement is printed on the pattern piece or on a separate guide. Adjust the button/buttonhole spacing if you alter the pattern, use a button size not recommended for the pattern, or choose a different button arrangement.

1. Check the spacing.

Hold the pattern up to your body to make sure the buttons are positioned in the key areas as explained at left. Place a pin at all relevant key areas.

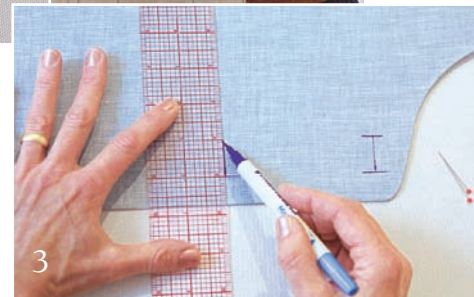
2. Respace the buttons, then pin-mark on the garment.

Set the pattern on a flat surface and space the additional buttons at even intervals from the pins, along the center front. Place the revised pattern on the right side of the garment, folding it back as shown, and place a pin through the fabric at each mark. Remove the pattern.



3. Draw in the buttonholes.

Using an easy-to-remove fabric marker, make a small dot on the center front line at each pin mark on the right side of the fabric. See “Horizontal, vertical, or diagonal buttonholes” (on p. 24) for different ways to position the holes. Use a ruler to draw a line in your chosen orientation at each dot; draw a short perpendicular line at each end.



Sew each buttonhole

Depending on the make and model of your sewing machine, you'll be able to sew each buttonhole automatically (in one step) or in four steps.

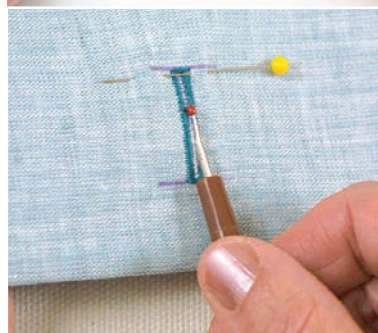
Machine-sew using a special buttonhole foot.

Center the foot over each marked position on your fabric and stitch the buttonhole as described in your owner's manual.



Slice open each buttonhole.

Protect the stitches at the buttonhole end with a pin. Cut the fabric inside the buttonhole, using a fine, sharp seam ripper, single-edge razor blade, buttonhole chisel, or small, sharp scissors.



Align each button with its hole

Mark each button position only after you stitch and slice open all the buttonholes. First line up the closure edges, placing the facings together and aligning the neckline and hem; pin if necessary. Place the buttonhole side face up on a flat surface.

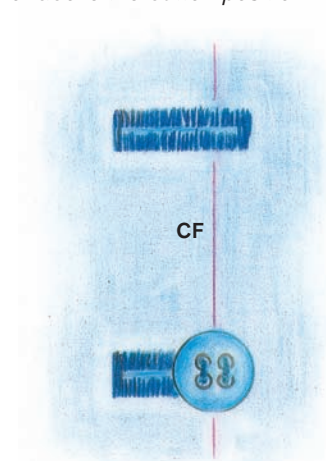
Insert a pin through the buttonhole.

Align the pin $\frac{1}{8}$ inch from the buttonhole end closest to the garment edge for a horizontal or diagonal buttonhole, or $\frac{1}{8}$ inch below the upper end for a vertical buttonhole. Mark a dot where the pin emerges on the bottom layer with a fabric marker.

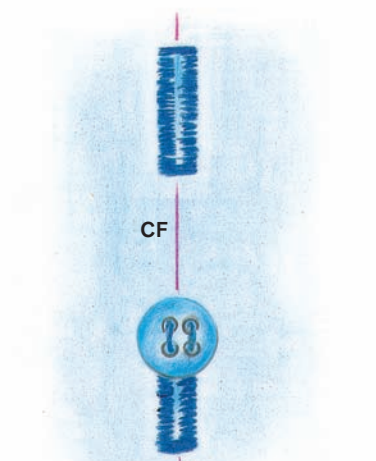


Horizontal, vertical, or diagonal buttonholes

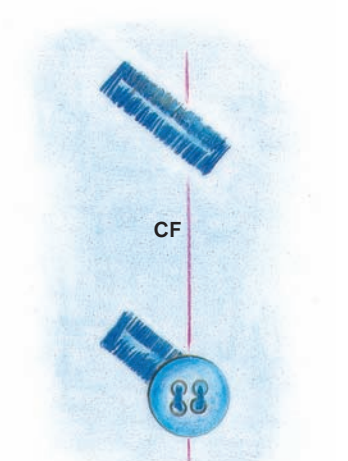
Before you decide how to align a buttonhole, consider that when worn, horizontal stress will put pressure at the buttonhole end, or side, that is closest to the garment edge. For vertical or diagonal buttonholes, gravity exerts a small pull as well. Always place the stress-bearing end of the buttonhole $\frac{1}{8}$ inch beyond or above the button position.



Horizontal buttonholes provide a secure closure, staying closed even when they are large (in order to accommodate a large button). Place them perpendicular to and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch beyond the center front.



Vertical buttonholes provide a secure closure as long as they are not too large. Position them on the center front; when spacing, measure the desired interval between buttons—not buttonholes—and use it to mark the top of each buttonhole.



Diagonal buttonholes provide a whimsical touch. Place them at an angle to and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch beyond the center front. Add extra interfacing to inhibit stretch along the bias.