

# BASIC HANDSEWING STITCHES



Basic handsewing stitches may be temporary, such as basting, or permanent, such as hemming and decorative stitching. Learning to coordinate the right equipment and techniques with your fabric requires both understanding and experience. When you can coordinate equipment, techniques, and fabric to do handsewing well, the garments you construct will have a final look of quality. The equipment needed for handsewing is simple. Basically, it includes needles, thread, scissors, and perhaps pins, thimble, and beeswax.

## NEEDLES

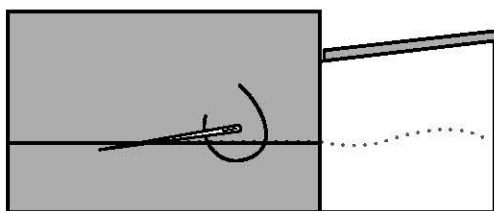
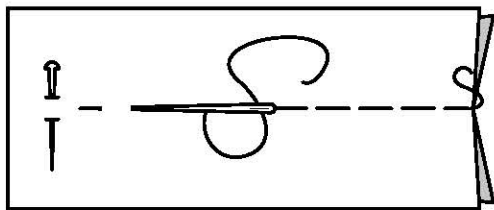
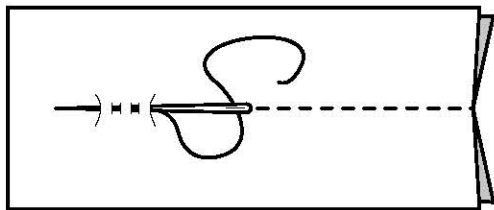
Select the needle and thread suitable for your fabric and the type of handsewing you are going to do. The needle should be small enough so that it slips through the fabric easily and does not leave holes unfilled by the thread. Sharps and embroidery needles are basic to most handsewing. For basting, the longer milliner's needles permit more stitches to be collected on the needle at one time. For the short stitches required in hand tailoring, betweens are best.

## THREAD

The thread should be compatible with your fabric weight, purpose, and color if you are doing permanent handsewing. If your fabric is made from cotton or wool, use cotton or polyester/cotton thread. If your fabric is made from a man-made fiber such as acrylic, polyester, or nylon, use polyester/cotton, polyester, or nylon thread. For silk fabric, use silk thread for handsewing. Silk thread should be used for basting when pressing will be necessary since it does not leave indentations or press marks. Thread is available in different sizes ranging from 100 which is an extremely fine thread, through size 70, 60, and 50 which are the most used medium sizes, to size 8 or heavy duty cord and buttonhole twist. The color of the thread should match or be slightly darker than the fabric. For print and plaid fabrics select thread to match or harmonize with the predominant color.

## PREPARATION

Cut the thread at an angle to give an end which will be easy to insert in the needle. Pass the freshly cut end through the needle and knot that same end. This will maintain the twist and keep the thread smooth. Pulling the thread through beeswax will add strength and slipperiness. Beeswax should not be used if the fabric is sensitive to oil stains.

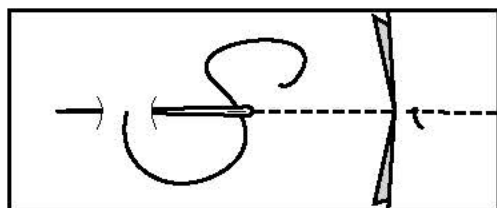


## STITCHES

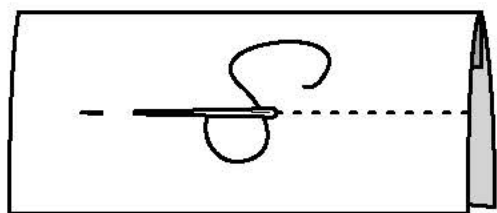
**RUNNING STITCH** is a basic stitch used for basting, easing, gathering, mending, and seams where there will be no strain. Take several stitches forward, weaving the needle in and out of the fabric. The size of the stitch will be determined by the purpose of the stitching.

**UNEVEN BASTING** differs from even basting in the length of the stitches. The top side has long stitches and the back side has short stitches. It is used for marking when other forms such as chalk or tracing wheel are unsuitable.

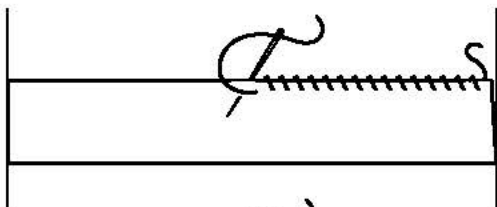
**SLIPSTITCH** is used for invisible finishing when there is a folded or turned edge. Slip the needle through the edge of the fold then pick up a yarn of the under fabric. Space the stitches evenly, being sure that the thread does not show or cause an indentation on the right side. Slipbasting is a variation of the slipstitch used to match stripes, plaids, or curved seams: the needle slips through the fold and equally through the underfabric.



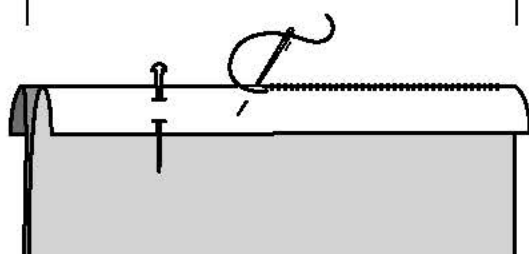
**BACKSTITCHING** is a basic stitch with several variations. It is a strong handstitch useful for repairing seams and hard-to-reach areas. With the right sides of the fabric together, bring the needle up through the fabric layers. Insert the needle about 1/16" to 1/8" in back of where it came up, and bring it out again 1/16" to 1/8" forward. For each stitch, insert the needle at the end of the last stitch and bring it out ahead.



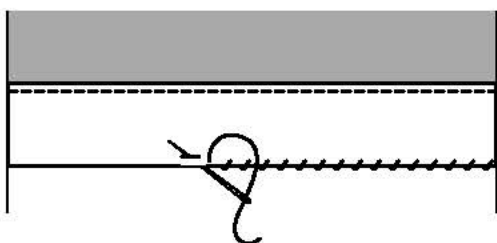
**PICKSTITCH** and prickstitch are backstitches with the thread on the right side carried back only one or two fabric yarns before being inserted into the fabric. The pickstitch is sewn through only the top layer of fabric to give a decorative, beadlike effect on the surface. The prickstitch is used for applying zippers from the right side of a garment. It passes through all fabric layers.



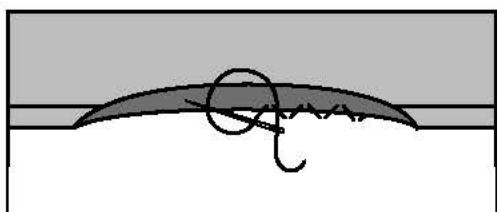
**OVERCASTING** is used to finish raw edges of delicate fabrics to prevent them from raveling. It was used for all ravelly fabrics before zigzag machines were available to the home sewer. Take diagonal stitches over the edge at a uniform space and depth.



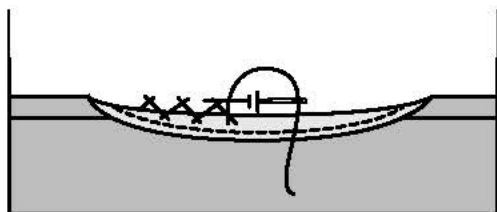
**OVERHAND AND WHIPSTITCH** are closer, tighter variations of overcasting. Both hold two finished edges together. The overhand stitch tends to be less conspicuous. For the overhand stitch, insert the needle at a diagonal through the back and front edges so the stitch itself is straight. For the whipstitch, insert the needle at a right angle so the stitches are slanted. Both the whipstitch, and the overhand may be used to attach lace or trim to a garment or to close openings of stuffed toys.



**HEMMING STITCH** is used when the hem is finished with a seam binding. Take a one or two-yarn stitch in the garment, then bring the needle through the edge of the seam binding. The stitches which pass over the seam binding edge to the garment may be slanted (quick, but less durable) or vertical (more durable and stable). The stitch should be inconspicuous from the right side and not drawn or pulled too tightly.



**BLINDSTITCH** hemming is inconspicuous from both the right side and the hem side of a garment. First, finish the raw edge of the hem or facing without folding it. Then, 1/8" to 1/4" from the hem edge, alternate small, horizontal stitches in between the garment and the hem leaving about 1/4" to 1/2" between stitches. Do not pull the stitches tightly. Stitches or indentations should not be visible from the right side. This stitch permits pressing without forcing the hem edge to cause a ridge visible from the right side. The blindstitch is used with a non-stretchy, non-ravelly fabric.



**CATCHSTITCH** is used like the blindstitch except it is flexible and suitable for use with non-ravelly, stretchy fabrics. It also permits pressing without forcing the hem edge to cause a ridge visible from the right side. The stitch itself is taken in the opposite direction to the line of needle movement. Working in a left to right direction, in between the hem and the garment, 1/8" to 1/4" from the hem edge, take a small stitch in the hem. Then move diagonally to the right to take the next stitch in the garment. Alternate stitching in this zigzag fashion. Keep the stitches loose to retain flexibility of hem edge.