

## Sewing “Myth Busters” *by Janet Pray*



### 1. “Setting the Stitches”

The first time I heard this term I was curious and then as it was explained to me, I was baffled! For those of you who have never heard of “setting the stitches”, here is what they tell me: You sew the seam then press flat before pressing open (on all types of fabrics). This is to “meld” the stitches with the fabric. WHAT? How is that even possible? If it is possible, why isn’t it more difficult to pull the stitches out when needed? I have asked every expert I know and not one subscribes to or believes in this operation. My considered conclusion: this is an extra step that has no real purpose and will not make any difference in the quality of your project, however it will make your project take a little longer.



### 2. How to Best Pre-shrink Fusible Interfacings

The short answer is: DON'T.

If you are going through the laborious task of washing and/or rinsing fusible interfacing and then carefully hanging to dry, I am here to save you some time! Quality fusible interfacing will never need pre-shrinking.

If you have trouble with bubbling or the orange peel affect here are the three reasons that can happen:

- Poor quality interfacing. (Avoid prepackaged inexpensive interfacing often sold in chain stores).
- The fabric the interfacing is glued to was not pre-shrunk.
- Interfacing did not cool before being moved from the ironing board and this is the most common mistake.

When adhering fusible interfacing first do a test piece using the fashion fabric. Follow the manufacturer's directions for heat, steam, pressure and time. Leave the piece where it lies on the ironing board to let the hot glue completely cool before moving or sewing on it. You may also want to test stitching on the sample and perhaps wash and dry it, to be assured it has the proper body for the project.



### 3. Don't Touch My Sewing Scissors!

What I am about to tell you must be kept a secret from all non-sewers. Cutting plain paper with your beautiful sewing scissors will not dull them! That's right, but if you have every member of your family afraid for their lives if they should use your sewing scissors, by all means keep it that way! I for one do not want to hunt the entire house to find my scissors when I want to use them. So in other words my sewing scissors can be used to cut paper but only by me. 😊 Remember, this is our secret.



## 4. Directional Sewing

I have had many questions from students who ask about directional sewing. This simply means to sew a seam in a certain direction like pant legs for instance. The “myth” is you must sew both pant legs in the same direction like, top to bottom or sometimes one top to bottom and the other bottom to top. This is simply not necessary, as it has NO purpose, but it won’t disturb the quality of the project.

However, a second version of this “myth” is fundamentally **WRONG!** When attaching a collar or facing, the sewer is told to start in the middle of the neckline and stitch to one end then turn it over starting the middle again, sew to the other end of the seam. This is so wrong it makes me a little crazy every time I hear it!!

As you know, if you have ever taken an **Islander Sewing course**, the feed dogs are very important in the easing, so the neckline should **ALWAYS** be against the feed dogs. Remember the Islander rule that makes for happy and successful sewers – The pattern piece that is most slippery, most bias, longest, loosest or most difficult to handle always goes against the feed dogs.



## 5. How many efficient & easy ways are there to put in a basic zipper?

The answer is: One

If you are among the many sewers who go to great lengths to avoid putting in zippers I have good news for you.

Let’s start with what not to do:

- Don’t pin
- Don’t glue
- Don’t tape
- Don’t baste the seam or the zipper

### ***Here are the tools you need:***

1. A very narrow zipper foot. If the one that came with your machine will not fit within the zipper tape between the teeth and the edge of the tape you can purchase a generic zipper foot. Try sewing catalogs like Nancy’s Notions or go to Amazon.com. They are usually around \$5. That’s right only about \$5.

2. Sewing machine in good working order.

3. Two hands, one to hold the zipper and fabric, the other to guide it through the machine.

If you have taken an Islander sewing course you know how to hold the fabric and zipper with your right hand as you guide it with your left. If you have not taken an Islander Sewing Systems course then you will need a little instruction. How to insert the slot zipper and the lap zipper are covered in **Islander Sewing Systems I** (book or DVD). The DVD **Easy Zippers** covers the slot, lap, invisible, fly and mock fly.



## 6. Portable Machines Make Sewing Easier

Today most home sewers sew on a portable sewing machine, the kind with a handle on top so you can store it in a closet and pull it out anytime you need. For those who do not have a specified room for sewing this is a good thing, right? Well, maybe not.

Hands-down, the perfect sewing scenario is to have a sewing cabinet that the machine sinks down in. The table surface around the machine should be “flush” with the bed of the sewing machine and it should be large enough to allow your sewing projects to lay completely flat as you sew them. Some tables even have an extension leaf that can be used for large projects like coats, capes, full length gowns and quilts.

If the space or finances for a cabinet are not available, another option is a portable table that provides the same benefits. Although these tables are a bit narrow in depth you can always butt them up to another table.

If a portable table does not fit your situation then an extension table is a “MUST”! An extension table is usually clear Plexiglas and can be purchased for any make or model of sewing machine.

Here are just a couple of reasons you should only sew with an extended surface. When you sew on a machine that sits on top of a table there is precious little room for you to control the garment while trying to sew straight seams. You may not even realize how much extra work you are doing and how detrimental it is to accomplishing the best results. Let’s talk about a large project, maybe a coat or a gown. As the garment proceeds through the machine it falls off the back and side, then the weight of the project begins to pull and cause stress as you work harder to keep the seams straight and the project under control. Now think about your arms and shoulders and how much less stress it will be to have everything on a flat surface. The side benefit here is you can sew longer without fatigue.

Even without using Islander Sewing techniques having a flat surface makes your sewing easier and better. Using Islander Sewing Systems (no pins) the extended surface is one of the keys to faster and better sewing! You can purchase an extension table for absolutely any sewing machine at: **Islander Sewing.com**



## 7. Sewing Curved Seams

When you use commercial sewing patterns one of the first things you learn is, “all seam allowances are 5/8” unless otherwise noted”. The fact that all seam allowances are the same width would at first seem to be a terrific idea, keeping it simple to remember. When it comes to curved seams like necklines the 5/8” seam allowance is not necessary especially when the next step in the directions is to cut it down to 1/4”. The simple remedy to this is when cutting out the pattern pieces just trim the neckline and facing seam allowances to 1/4”. This is also true for armseyes on sleeveless garments.

Clipping this seam brings up more Myths! Some home-sewers will clip so many times and so close together the seam is nearly shredded, while others have decided clipping little V shaped notches from the seam is a good idea. Clipping about 1/4” apart is sufficient and V shaped notches are NEVER a good idea as it will leave empty spaces in the seam that will show on the right side of the garment when pressed. Always clip as close to the stitching as possible.

### ***Don’t skip this step!!!***

The final step, understitching, is one most home-sewers either don’t know about or just skip. This technique is done to keep the facing or lining from showing on the right side of the garment and to create a beautiful sculpted curve. Simply press the seam allowance toward the facing and then, from the right side, topstitch the seam allowance to the facing, a needle-width away (very close) from the seam.



## 8. Quilter's Cotton for Clothing?

Yes, we have all seen the cute little girl's dresses and simple shift style dresses and tunic tops for adults made from "quilter's cotton". They look really cute on the pattern covers or on the mannequin in the store but is that fabric really suitable for garments?

Well, let's first define "quilter's cotton". It doesn't really have an official definition, rather it is a term that has been organically derived by the popularity of quilt makers and quilt shops alike. Quilter's that are at the top of their craft know that a firmly woven strong quality cotton fabric makes a very nice and long lasting quilt. Sounds like a great fabric to use for almost anything if firmly woven and strong were the only two criteria. When making a garment, one must consider the "drape" of the fabric and here is where it can all go wrong.

Let's take a short sleeve shirt, like a resort style you might see in Hawaii. At first glance in the quilt shop you see dozens and dozens of prints that would be beautiful made into an island resort style shirt. When the quality quilter's cotton is applied the shirt has a life of its own and not in a good way. After being stitched into a shirt the fabric will stand out from the body, and is stiff with sleeves that want to stick straight out from the shoulders instead of draping down following the lines of the body. A shirt like this is not comfortable and only looks good on the hanger.

When the same quilter's cotton is applied to a child's ruffled dress or play suit it has the same attributes as the shirt but one additional problem will arise. All those ruffles will wrinkle when washed and sometimes even curl inward causing an unpleasant and very messy look. Now try to iron all those little tiny ruffles..., you get the picture.

Just because it's found in a quilt shop does not mean its quilter's cotton. Many quilt shops will carry garment suitable fabrics like, Pima or Lawn. These are softer and have a nice drape that not only makes them garment friendly fabric but they are far more comfortable to wear and easier to maintain.

## #9 Dual Duty Thread



*Question from online student:* I noticed that one of your thread choices was a "Dual Duty" thread. I was told in a sewing class to never use that or a "spun" thread because it was 2 different materials - usually cotton wrapped around polyester because it creates lots of fuzz and burrs - which can lead to problems in sewing machines. What are your thoughts?

*My response:* In my experience the sewing class information is incorrect. Along with other sewers and garment factories around the world, I used Coats Dual Duty thread for over 30 years, 20 of those were producing my own line of coats and capes. I never had a single problem with my machines or the thread. Chances are the clothes you have purchased, the sports equipment your kids use and countless other everyday items have all been constructed with Coats thread.

Several years ago Coats discontinued that Dual Duty thread that was wrapped with cotton. The new thread is Dual Duty XP which is 100% Polyester and also an excellent product.

To make sure you have a successful sewing experience Coats has created a thread advisor that can be found at: <http://www.makeitcoats.com/en-us/learn/care-repair/coats-thread-advisor>. On the Coats website you will find lots of helpful information to answer any questions pertaining to which thread to use along with which size needle will be best.



## #10 Download PDF patterns take too much time and money

Often I hear long time sewers say they don't want to print out all those pieces of paper, and tape all those pieces of paper together and they don't want the cost of all that paper and printing.

I have downloaded and taped together several brands of patterns and some are better than others. However, in general I have concluded they are worth the savings and here is why.

If I have to travel to a store to purchase the pattern it's no less than a 1½ hour trip and that's only if I don't get distracted in the fabric store, ha ha ha. For the cost of the gas to and from the store I can print out the pattern (paper, ink and tape). Now the time to tape the pattern together is far less than the 1½ hr., OK, who am I kidding, 2½ hr. trip to the fabric store.

Time is money and I just saved time and money. Add to that, the purchase price of a download pattern is considerably cheaper so I saved again! For example, Islander Sewing Systems MotorCity Express pattern retails for \$23.95 plus shipping and you will wait up to a week to receive it. The download version is only \$15 and you can start sewing the same day you purchase.

One last benefit to downloaded patterns is the nice heavy paper instead of the flimsy tissue. I particularly like the heavy paper for cutting around with the rotary cutter. The blade can rest against the paper as your guide so you are not likely to get off track. **You be the judge but by all means, try one first!**



## #11 Free-Arm Sewing Machines - Fabulous or Not?

When I was a teenager my mother bought a Singer Touch & Sew. The salesman told us how fabulous the "free-arm option" was, especially when putting in a sleeve. I was so excited! Wow, great new technology and it's going to make sewing easier!!

Then I tried it ... well that was a bust. It was awkward and not the least bit efficient. First you remove part of the machine bed, then shove the garment down into the well of the machine cabinet and pull the armhole around the free arm. This is not a respectful way to handle most fabrics and bound to stretch out the armhole as it is twisted around and around while you sew. What a mess! I never used it again.

Years later when I learned industry sewing techniques, I was taught to always sew inside the circle of any part of the garment or project. When sewing a waistband, a hem or a cuff position the garment so you are sewing inside the circle. For example, on a hem that will be stitched on the wrong side, turn it right side out. Now you can sew on the wrong side and you will be inside the circle. It only took one attempt for me to realize how efficient and easy it was to sew inside the circle. I didn't have to take my machine apart, shove my beautiful dress down into the machine cabinet or pull and tug the entire garment around the Not so-fabulous free-arm.





## #12 Make Your Own Dress Form for the Best Fit?

Several years ago the dress form body-double became a real popular activity (fad). There were several different methods, all of which included wrapping your body with some type of tape, even duct tape was used. Some tapes were pinable resulting in a more useful dress form than those that were not. Hours of work went into these forms with a modicum of discomfort for the one who is being wrapped in tape or some other materials. The several hour process produced an unsightly, lumpy version of the would-be dress maker. Now she would need to fill the hollow body-double with something to hold its shape and then build a stand that is sturdy. After many hours of labor the end result was an ugly, lumpy version, similar to the maker's body. Although somewhat useable it was still not very user-friendly and so horrible on the eyes you would never leave it out where others could see it. Personally, I would rather be seen naked than have someone see that body-double dress form!

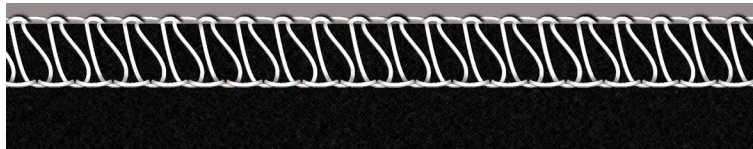
### A Better Option:

Using a dress form is the easiest and best way to fit yourself. But, I recommend you buy a dress form that is close to your measurements but slightly smaller. To make it reflect your exact measurements, use foam or batting to pad where necessary. When your shape or size changes you can alter the padding. If you need to make a garment for someone else the padding can be rearranged easily. You can even add a custom covering, usually made of knit. Now the dress form isn't something you need to hide from guests.

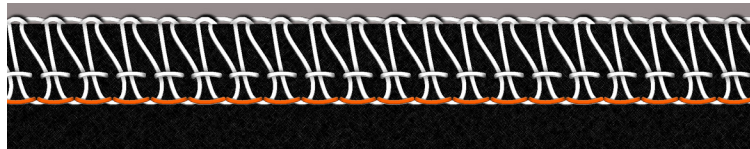


### Buying a Dress Form:

Dress forms for home sewing can be purchased new for as little as \$200. These are not likely to be pinable but they are size adjustable. Pinable may not be as important to those who are not draping or creating original designs. Pinable, professional dress forms start at about \$400 and go much higher when collapsible shoulders and/or arms and legs features are included.



3 Thread Serging Stitches



4 Thread Serging Stitches



## #13 Serging always requires trimming the seam allowance.

In one of my popular classes based on the pattern, Jacket Express, the majority of the seam allowances are 3/8" and for a very good reason. The seams are meant to be pressed to one side and double topstitched. The first row of topstitching is very close to the seam and the second row is 1/4" from the seam. If the seam allowance is any narrower than 3/8" the second row of topstitching will not go through the same thickness of fabric layers and therefore will not look nearly as nice as the first row. Some students have remarked that after serging the seam it was now too narrow for the second row of topstitching. After many comments like this I could only conclude that some of my students may not be aware of three possible solutions: 1. the width of the serging can be adjusted, 2. the blade can be disengaged (lowered) so it does not trim the seam allowance, 3. it is not necessary to trim the seam as you serge. You may have been told that trimming as you serge gives the best results. Although it does give great results as the serging wraps closely around the edge for a quality finish. The same results can be had without trimming. Simply keep the raw edge of the seam allowance just grazing the blade without being cut and you will find that same close clean finish.

### Why use 4 thread serging?

In this same class as above I've received many questions about why to use 3 thread vs 4 thread serging. The short answer is, 3 thread serging merely finishes the edge and keeps the fabric from raveling. 4 thread serging not only finishes the edge but delivers a straight stitch that creates the seam (shown above with oranges stitches). In other words, with 4 threads you can stitch the seam at the same time you finish the raw edges. With 3 threads you do not have a straight stitch so it will not create a quality seam because the stitches are too far apart.



## #14 Un-threading your machine improperly or Never re-thread your machine again.

Here is something I read on the internet:

*"Did you know that the proper way to un-thread your machine is to clip the thread at the spool and then pull the cut thread from the needle end instead of just pulling it all through the machine when you take the spool off? Doing it the wrong way can mess up your tension disks on your machine."*

### This is misguided on two levels in my opinion.

1. If the foot is up when pulling thread out of the machine the tension discs are not engaged so it is very unlikely you could do any harm at all. If the foot is down the thread should not be pulled up or down!
2. It's not necessary to pull the thread out in either direction. When ready to change thread: start with the foot up, simply clip the thread near the spool and replace the spool with the new thread. Now tie the new thread to the old thread with a square knot. With the foot still in the up position pull the old thread from behind the needle until the knot goes through the eye of the needle. Sometimes you may need to lift the thread up level with the eye (front and back) to encourage it through but usually it slides through easily.

Note: If you are using a needle size 10/70 or smaller the knot may not clear the eye. In this case you just pull the thread until the knot is near the needle, clip the knot and re-thread the needle with the new thread.

I know today's sewing details can be mystifying. There are so many choices and way too many well-meaning opinions and of course some of those are MYTHS. If you have a question you would like demystified ask Janet at [islandersewing@comcast.net](mailto:islandersewing@comcast.net).

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