

# Easing, Gathering & Shirring

11.215

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## SEW-lutions Guidelines

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If one piece of a project is too large to fit its adjacent piece, then something must be done! Common places where this occurs are when a sleeve is set into an armhole, a cuff is added to a sleeve, there's a full skirt joining a fitted bodice or a host of other similar situations. And in the home decorating world, gathers are used to create flounces, dust ruffles, curtain and valance trims, and cover-ups of all sorts.

### Coming to terms

Although the three terms—easing, gathering and shirring—all refer to managing fullness one way or the other, they are different.

Easing means gently pushing fullness into a smaller area, but without resulting in visible gathers or pleats. Most commonly used to fit sleeves into armholes, easing should result in flat seaming with just a hint of fullness on one side.

Gathering is drawing up fullness into a predetermined size smaller area. The fullness is meant to show, unlike easing where it shouldn't be overly visible.

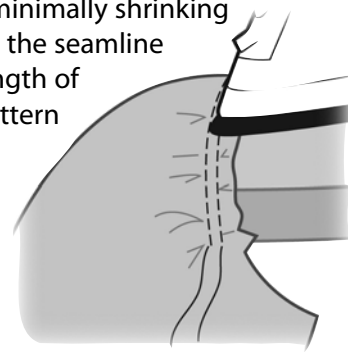
Shirring is formed by multiple rows of gathers and is a way to create controlled fullness, like at a waistline, cuffs or a bodice yoke. It's often accented with decorative stitching or smocking and stabilized so the multiple thread rows aren't stressed.

### Easing

Easing works well in fabrics that are easily shaped by steam pressing, like wool and wool blends. The combination of stitching and pressing makes the process successful, whereas easing synthetic fabrics is much more difficult.

To ease, stitch a line of basting length stitches just inside and outside the seamline. Pull both bobbin threads together to eliminate the excess fabric length at the seamline. Steam-press the seamline over a shaped surface like a

pressing ham, minimally shrinking in the excess so the seamline matches the length of the adjacent pattern section but the area on either side isn't flattened (1).

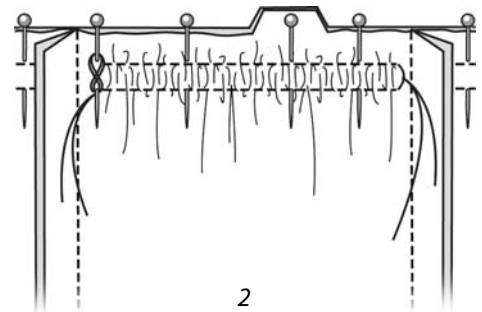


### Gathering

Pulling up fullness with

gathering can be accomplished several ways. The most common is to sew a line of basting length stitches just above and below the seamline, just like for easing. Instead of stitching over perpendicular seamlines, the gathering lines should be broken at those points, and begun again just on the other side of the seam. If the pattern offers notches to be matched, use those to join the corresponding piece to the gathered section. If there aren't any notches, quarter the distance of both pieces and match the quarters.

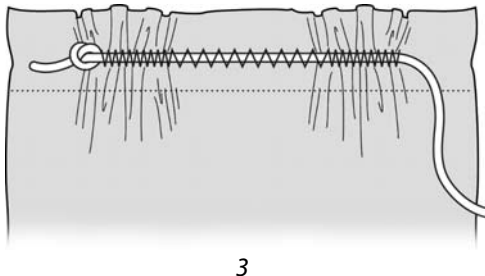
If you've stitched the gathering lines from the project right side, pull the bobbin threads when it's time to gather. Gently pull the fabric fullness along the thread length, and tie off threads at one end to prevent pulling them out. At the opposite end, wrap the thread ends around a pin to secure the gathered length. Distribute the gathers evenly between the match points (2).



To join gathered sections to a flat section, set the machine to normal seaming length, then be sure the gathering folds are perpendicular to the seamline. Stitch along

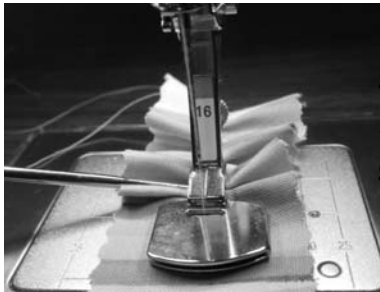
the seam, between the gathering thread rows. Remove any visible gathering threads once the seam is sewn. Lightly press the upper gathers to set, but avoid pressing them flat.

Another method for gathering is to zigzag over a heavy cord, like buttonhole twist or pearl cotton, using a wide stitch. Place the cord 1/4" above the seamline and stitch carefully so as not to catch the cord. Knot one end of the cord to keep the stitches in place, then pull on the cord and adjust the fullness to fit (3). This method works especially well on long expanses of fabric (like dust ruffles), and on bulkier fabrics where normal gathering thread lines may break more easily.



3

A third method of gathering, though with less control, is to use a gathering foot. This machine attachment pushes fabric under the foot as it stitches it in place.



4

Photo courtesy of Bernina of America

This method is not recommended for many items where a precise amount of gathering is needed, but it works well for ruffles and places where gathers can be less controlled (4).

Another method of gathering is with the serger. Set the differential feed on the serger to a lower number so it pushes more fabric under the foot as you sew. This method allows you to finish the edge of a piece with serging, while gathering it at the same time (5). Again, it's difficult to figure the amount of gathering that will result, but test-serging on a sample allows you a close guess. If you start with a



5

12" long sample, measure how long it is after gathering and extrapolate to your project needs.

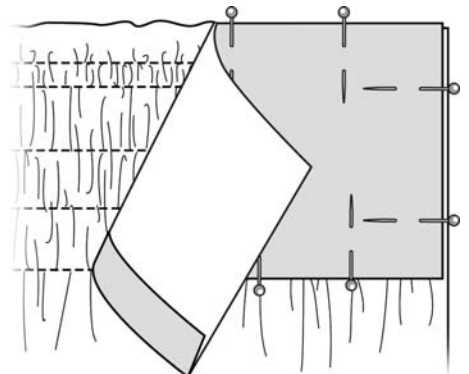
Gathering normally has at least a two to one ratio of fullness, but for nicer looking gathers, use three to one. As an example, a 36" length would gather to 12" for best appearance.

## Shirring

Shirring is done exactly like gathering, except there are multiple parallel rows of stitching. All threads need to be pulled up to size at one time for the best appearance. It's important to tie off threads securely so that no rows come loose.

Once shirring is complete, the underside can be stabilized with a flat fabric for maximum security keeping the shirring purely decorative. To do so, place a piece of woven

fabric under the shirred rows that's the size needed for the pattern piece. Hand tack it to the lowest row of shirring, include it in the vertical seaming and in the upper seamline to secure (6).



6

Shirring can also be done by stitching over rows of cord as described above for a gathering option.

Stable shirring is often embellished with decorative machine stitches over the gathered area, to simulate smocking.

A frequently used method to create shirring is to sew multiple rows with elastic thread in the bobbin and regular thread through the needle. This gives the shirring some flexibility, as in the case of a cuff treatment where the hand has to go through it, or a garment waistline with breathability. ■

For more information, see Guidelines 11.232 Ruffles and 12.295 Set-in Sleeves.