

# Princess Seams

11.310

Page 1



## SEW-lutions Guidelines

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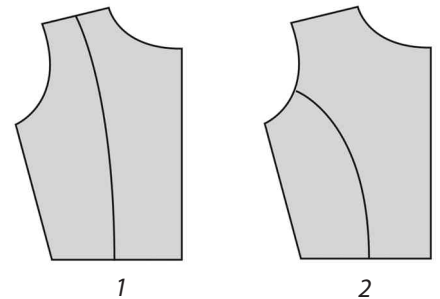
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Princess seams are a variation of darts, allowing the creation of a fitted garment through the use of shaped seams. They start at the waist and travel toward the most prominent part of the body in that quadrant of the garment. For example, on a bodice front they travel over or near (within 1 1/2") the bust point, while on the bodice back they travel over or near the shoulder blades. Though less common, skirt or pants princess seams start at the waist and travel over or near the fullest part of the abdomen and/or near the fullest part of the buttocks.

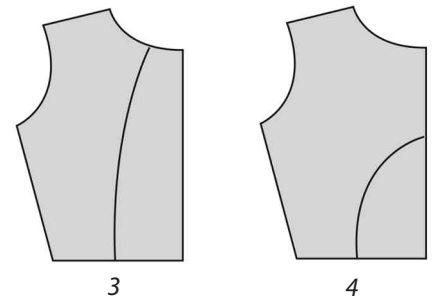
### Style Options

Because the seam always starts at the waist, names of princess seam styles refer to the ending point. Two classic styles of princess seams are shoulder (1) and armhole (2). A princess seam can end almost anywhere—in the neckline (3) or in the center front (4), depending on the garment design.



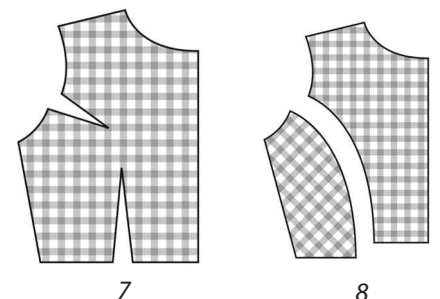
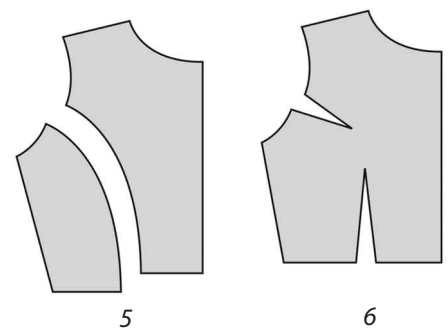
### Different From Darts

To see how a princess seam is related to darts, place the front and side front pattern pieces of an armhole princess-seamed bodice (5) side by side with a bodice front containing a waist and an armhole bust dart (6). A princess seam is actually the combined waist and bust darts, with the curved lined smoothed between and seam allowances added to the new edges on each pattern piece.



### Great Grains

Many sewers find curved seams easier to sew and fit than curved bust darts. Princess-seamed bodices allow for a more precise use of the garment fabric grain than darted bodices, because each pattern piece has its own grainline. This creates more or less distortion of the patterns/stripes/figures on the garment fabric for styling purposes. For example, all of a darted bodice front is cut on the same grain line (7), causing pattern distortion as the darts are sewn. The front of an armhole princess seamed jacket might be cut on the lengthwise grain, while the side front can be cut on the true bias (8) as a design feature.



## Sewing Curved Seams

The traditional way to sew a princess seam is to start by staystitching the most convex curved piece 1/8" inside the seamline with a small stitch length. Then place the garment pieces right sides together keeping the piece with the convex curved edge next to the feed dogs during sewing. (If you cup your hand, the back of your hand creates a "convex" curve and the inside creates a "concave" curve.) When sewing an armhole princess-seamed garment side front to the front, the side front is placed against the feed dogs with the front piece on top of it.

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*The fabric against the feed dogs travels faster than the upper fabric layer, easily easing the rounder curve to the flatter curve. Curves stitch easier and look better when sewn with smaller length stitches.*

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Match the stitching lines of the two pieces when you sew them together, not the fabric edges. Don't tug the curves to get them to fit, as this will distort the fabric and the garment's fit. The seamlines on the adjacent pieces should be comparable in length, usually within about 1/2", easily eased by the feed dogs.

When sewing princess seams this way, it is easy to stretch the fabric resulting in distortion. To get the seam allowances to lie flat requires clipping into the seam allowance and this also weakens the seams.

## Quadrant

When referring to the body or clothing, a "quadrant" is one quarter—the left front is one quadrant of the human body and the right back is another.

A more contemporary approach to sewing princess seams is to re-draw the seam allowances to 1/4" before cutting out the garment and sewing the seams right sides together with the convex curve against the feed dogs. The smaller seam allowance width makes the seams easier to sew without the risk of stretching the fabric edges and the narrower seams don't require clipping to lie flat, so the seam allowances are stronger.

## Seam Allowance Savvy

Since princess seam allowances are curved and primarily on the bias grain, minimal finishing is needed. The seam allowances can be left alone or finished with pinking shears. For ravelly fabrics, a line of three-step zigzagging next to the seam allowance edges will suffice. Serging the seam allowances may add bulk to the area, so test before choosing this option. 📌