



Bound and Hong Kong Seam Finishes

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A binding or Hong Kong seam finish could be a matter of necessity, when a seam allowance is so loosely woven that zigzag or serger stitches pull right off the edge. Or, a wrapped seam finish may be used for purely aesthetic reasons.

What's the Difference?

The difference between a bound and Hong Kong seam finish is that the edges of a binding strip are turned under both front and back; the underside strip edges of a Hong Kong finish are left raw to reduce bulk. Both treatments require two lines of stitching to complete.

A Hong Kong finish is the preferred method for seams that will be pressed open; bound seams may be pressed to one side or open. There are occasions when both methods may be used in the same project. For instance, finish a straight jacket seam with a Hong Kong finish; and then bind the sleeve seam (1). A Hong Kong finish isn't just for seams—it's also great on hem or facing edges. Substitute a bound seam on sheer fabric wherever a French seam is impractical, such as when setting a sleeve. Binding seam allowances together as one can even make a garment reversible.



1

Fabric Selection

It's well worth cutting your own binding. Packaged bias tape has its place in the sewing room, but it's not the best choice for finishing garment interiors.

Select a thin, lightweight fabric that will hold a crisp fold. Tightly-woven natural fabrics such as china silk or 100% cotton batiste work well. To tame a slippery or unstable fabrics, press with spray starch before cutting. If the seam is inside a skirt or a lined jacket, choose a color that blends with the fashion fabric. For unlined jackets, where the seam finish will show, choose a contrasting color and/or print just for fun, but make sure it won't shadow through to the garment right side.

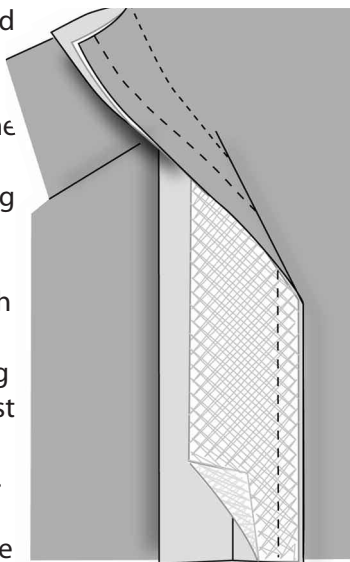
Cut fabric strips on the true bias (a 45° angle to the selvage) for either a binding or Hong Kong finish. Handle bias strips gently; they'll permanently lose width if overstretched. The ideal width depends on the weight and stability of the binding fabric, the thickness of the fashion fabric; and in the case of a binding, the number of seam allowance layers to be bound together. Test out several widths before deciding on one—a few millimeters in width can make all the difference between an agreeable—or exasperating—experience.

As a starting point for testing a Hong Kong finish, cut a strip 1" wide. For binding, try a cut width of 1 1/2". Test the width on the same seam allowance conditions as the garment. When combining binding and a Hong Kong finish in the same project, you'll probably need to cut different strip widths for each.

Hong Kong Finish

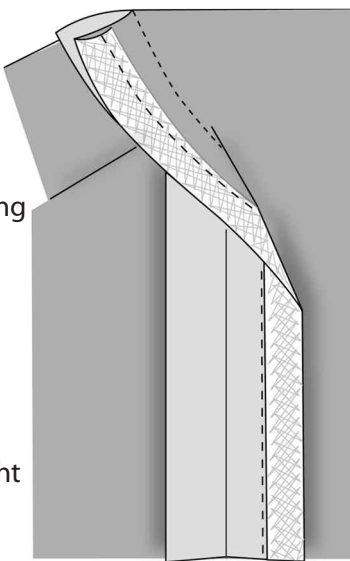
Because a Hong Kong treatment obscures the fabric edge a bit, be sure to sew any seam requiring precise matching or fitting adjustments before finishing the seam allowances. Treat the edge of a facing before installing it; and treat a hem allowance as soon as practical after joining the garment sections.

Right sides together, pin and stitch the bias strip to the seam allowance using a scant 1/4" seam (2). Press the bias strip away from the garment seamline, wrapping the raw edge to the back. From the right side, pin the strip in place and then stitch in the ditch, catching the strip underside (3). Situating the second stitching line just off the bias strip helps maintain fluidity and drape. The underside raw edge won't fray and it's not visible when the seam allowances are pressed open.



2

A shortage of fabric in the final step suggests that first line of stitching is too wide, or the cut strip width is too narrow. If an excess of bias fabric interferes with pressing the seam open, cut strips slightly narrower or simply trim the raw edge close to the stitching line.

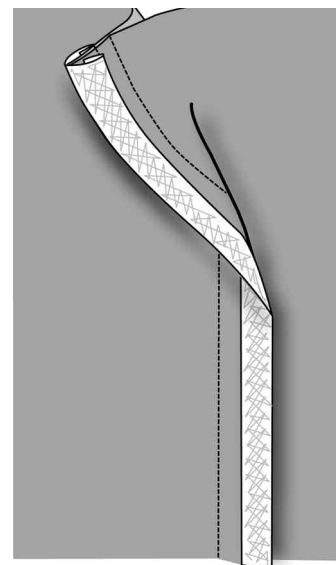


3

To avoid a line of demarcation from pressing through to the garment right side, first flatten each Hong Kong wrapping with a firm pressing. Press the garment seam open over a seam stick (a half-round dowel) or cut strips from a brown paper bag and slip them between the seam allowance and the garment as a buffer.

Bound Seam

A binding is applied in a similar manner as a Hong Kong treatment. Sew the garment seam, and then trim and/or grade the seam allowances as desired. Holding the seam allowances together, pin the right side of a bias strip against either seam allowance. Stitch through all layers using a 1/4" seam. Press and wrap the strip as described for a Hong Kong treatment. Turn the work over. Fold under the remaining raw edge to extend just beyond the first stitching line. Pin; and then either secure by machine or slip-stitch by hand (4). To join binding ends around a sleeve seam, overlap them slightly, turning under the ends of the upper layer 1/4".



4

When applying a binding to closely-trimmed seam allowances it may be necessary for the first stitching line to be very close to, if not actually on top of, the construction seamline. If so, there's nothing wrong with having the second stitching line falling on top of the binding.

Bias Sewing Tips

Bias strips are naturally stretchy; and cutting them from a slippery fabric only increases the likelihood that the bias will creep ahead of the fashion fabric as you sew. If the bias strip begins to bubble in front of the presser foot, sink the needle, raise the presser foot, and gently ease the strip toward the needle. Re-set the presser foot and continue sewing. ■