

Sewing With Knits

4.215

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SEW-lutions Guidelines

Your Guide
to
Successful
Sewing

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Knits take on a variety of personas—from soft and slinky lingerie fabrics to more stable activewear options. Familiar knits include tricot, single-knit T-shirting, interlock, jersey, double knits and fleeces. Knits may be solid color, printed or have a design knitted into them. All knits have common sewing characteristics.

Selecting Knits

Most knits are at least 60" wide, making them a very practical choice for most garment styles. They offer differing degrees of stretch, which should be taken into account when selecting a pattern. Where styling is dependent of the elasticity of the knit for fit, the pattern envelope will often include a stretch guide showing the amount of flexibility needed.

Knits generally have more stretch crosswise than lengthwise, adding to their comfort and fitting ease.

Like all other fabrics, knits vary by fiber content. Cotton knits are especially popular for sportswear, while wool knits are often used in high-fashion suits, dresses and coats. The end of the bolt should offer care instructions, so it's best to preshrink natural fiber knits (cotton, silk and wool) according to those directions before cutting and sewing your project. Man-made fiber knits may be pre-shrunk if desired.

Cutting

Knit garments should be cut with the greatest amount of stretch going around the body. Fabrics should have a visible lengthwise rib considered to be the grainline for pattern placement.

Fold the fabric along one or more lengthwise ribs, depending on the pattern cutting layout. Sometimes both the garment front and back are cut on the fold, so refolding the fabric is necessary.

Use a with-nap cutting layout, so the upper edges of all the pattern pieces go in a single direction. This avoids any shading in the finished garment.

Ballpoint pins help prevent snagging on delicate knits, and sharp, serrated-edge shears will make a clean cut.

Because of its inherent stretch, it's important that the fabric lies flat for cutting to avoid distortion. If the entire length doesn't fit on the cutting table, fold the excess and unfold as needed, but don't let it hang over the edge as the weight may distort the knit.

Some patterns designed for knits have only 1/4" seams, as opposed to the traditional 5/8" seam, so check your measurements against the pattern for fit before cutting.

Sewing

Test-stitch a seam on fabric scraps to determine the optimum stitch length, tension settings and needle type. A universal needle may work on sturdier knits, but lighter weights require a ballpoint or stretch needle for the best stitch formation and to avoid damaging the fibers.

Knit fabrics don't ravel, so in most instances, no seam finishing is needed. However, a serger can be used for seaming to encase the edge and stitch the seam in one operation.

It's important to build some stretch into the seam, particularly in activewear. Sew seams with a narrow zigzag, stretch stitch or a serger stitch.

To avoid puckered seams, hold the fabric taut when sewing—not stretched, but taut in front of and behind the needle.

Edges on single knits and other lightweights tend to curl during the seaming process. To help with this, pin

carefully or use a light misting of temporary spray adhesive to hold the edges together for stitching.

For garments with a 5/8" seam allowance, trim to 1/4" after sewing to reduce bulk, then press in one direction. Wider seam allowances may be pressed open and topstitched if a sportier look is desired, but stretch the seam slightly during topstitching to avoid puckering.

Pressing

Generally speaking, less pressing is needed for knit fabrics than for wovens, but do pay attention to the fabric's fiber content and adjust pressing temperatures/steam settings accordingly.

Press lightly to avoid damage to surface embellished knits, and use a press cloth where needed for protection. Some knits can easily be over-pressed and damage may be irreversible.

Finishing

Knit edges are often finished with ribbing, decorative elastic, binding or a self-fabric finish instead of facings. If the neckline opening is pulled over the head, it's important that the edge finish has built-in stretch as well.

Buttonholes made in knit fabrics may stretch out if not properly stabilized. If the garment doesn't have interfacing under the buttonhole area, add it, and/or add stabilizer. Another option is to stitch buttonholes over clear elastic to give them flexibility, but also resiliency.

Hems on knit garments require built-in stretch as do the seams. Topstitching a hem with a double needle builds in stretch due to the single bobbin zigzag spanning the two upper stitching lines. A stretch blindhem stitch can also be used, as can a serger blindhem or coverstitch. 🖱️

For more information on knit sewing, see Guidelines 2.220 Serger Stitches and 4.230 Sewing with Minkee-like Fabrics.