

Button, Button ...

6.105

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Buttons date back to the Bronze Age when cavemen carved them from bone and horn, and they were considered a status symbol. Only later did they become a functional closure, wrapped with sinew and leather loops.

Greeks and Romans used buttons as toga fasteners and later used them with slashes forming the first known buttonholes.

Today, buttons are made from every kind of material imaginable—metal, plastic, porcelain, wood, bone, glass, fabric, leather, shell and jewels—and they're used functionally as garment closures when coupled with loops, buttonholes or ties. Many buttons are used as a purely decorative embellishment with, perhaps, an operational closure underneath, such as snaps or hook-and-loop fasteners.



Versatility

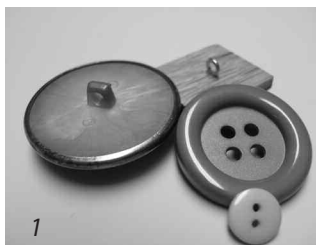
Buttons come in a number of shapes. Round is the most common shape, but square, oval, triangular, cylindrical and assorted novelty offerings fill the racks as well.

In addition, button covering kits are available for a perfect match to a garment fabric.

Buttons come in assorted colors, from basic black and white, to more exotic hues like magenta and lime. Metallic buttons commonly come in silver and gold finishes, but copper, brass and pewter can also be found, especially in handcrafted buttons.

Selecting Buttons

There are two main types of buttons: sew-through and shank (1).



A sew-through button has visible holes that go all the way through the button. The most common have either two or four holes; though occasionally artisans create three-hole versions.

A shank button has a loop on the back, and

the button is attached with stitches that go through the loop. The shank holds the button above the garment surface to allow for a thicker layer (or layers) of fabric at the garment closure. Shank buttons are, therefore, typically used on jackets, coats or other bulky garments. Shank heights vary and can be extended by the way the button is sewn to the garment.

Buttons may be tone-on-tone with the garment, for a subtle look, or a bold contrast for emphasis.

Placement

Buttons are generally positioned on the garment center-front or center-back line, as noted on the sewing pattern. Spacing varies depending on the size of the button and the garment, but it should also be noted on the garment pattern.

Although most buttons are equally spaced, artistic groupings of buttons can add more interest.

Sizes

Functional buttons range from 1/8" diameter to 1" or 1 1/2" diameter. Purely decorative and craft buttons can be larger but generally no more than 2 1/2" across. Anything larger strains the fabric it's meant to embellish.

Most patterns designate a button size suitable for use with the project, but don't hesitate to vary the size slightly to get a button you like. Remember to adjust the buttonhole size accordingly.

Location, Location, Location

Buttons are sewn under buttonholes after the buttonholes have been completely stitched and cut open. For horizontal buttonholes, the button center is generally located 1/8" from the buttonhole end closest to the garment opening. For vertical buttonholes, the button is positioned about 1/8" from the top of the buttonhole. Mark the button location by lapping the garment layers with the center fronts aligned (as if the garment were buttoned shut) and with the buttonhole layer placed on top. Push a straight pin straight through each buttonhole to the lower fabric layer to mark placement for the buttons.

Sew on one button at a time. Stop and button the garment before sewing on the next button, to ensure the buttons are properly spaced.

Remember: Buttons are meant to be fun. Keep that in mind as you select them for a closure!

For specifics on how to attach buttons, see Guideline 12.105. 📖

Directional Differences

Men's and women's garments button in different directions. Women's garments traditionally button right over left, and men's left over right. Though some garment designers opt for right over left even for women's garments. For instance, women's jeans almost always button right over left.

Historians speculate the reason for the directional differences could be twofold. Traditionally, a man needed his right hand free to access weaponry in time of battle. Swords were often hidden under outer garments, and were more easily accessible with a left-over-right closure.

Others theorize that maids and servants tended to dress high-society women, and the right-over-left configuration made dressing easier for the servant when facing the woman.