

Hand Sewing: The Basics

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Many sewing projects require a small amount of hand stitching. Consider it aerobics for your hands and cross off that workout for the day.

The Tools

- **Needle:** For information on selecting the right hand sewing needle, read [Hand Sewing: Selecting the Right Needle for the Job](#).
- **Thread:** For information on selecting the right thread, read [Selecting the Right Thread for the Job](#).
- **Thimble:** A thimble is optional, but it's helpful with heavier fabrics or when pushing the needle through several thicknesses.

Using a Thimble

A thimble protects your finger from pain as you push the needle through layers of fabric. Choose a thimble that comfortably fits the middle finger on the hand you use when hand sewing.

- Place the thimble on your middle of your right hand if you're right handed and vice versa if you're a lefty.
- Hold your needle between your thumb and index finger.
- Insert the needle into the fabric and push it through with the side or end of the thimble.

Hand Stitch Types

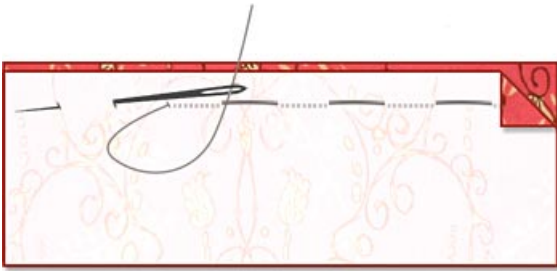
The stitches types shown below are just a few of the many stitches that can be done by hand. For anyone using a sewing machine for most of what they do, these stitches should be all you need to fill in those little hand-sew-only tasks.

To begin, thread your needle and knot the thread. To learn how to do this, read [Hand Sewing: Thread a Needle, Tie a Knot](#). Next, determine which stitch to use from the list below. When you finish hand sewing, use the securing stitch to prevent your stitches from coming undone.

Basting Stitch

A basting stitch is used to temporarily hold together pieces that may shift as you use your sewing machine. When basting, it's a good idea to use a contrasting thread so it's easier to remove the basting stitches after the permanent sewing is complete.

You can use your [sewing machine to create a basting stitch](#), but there are times when it's better done by hand, for example, when you want a stripe or plaid to match perfectly across a seam.



Weave your needle in and out of the fabric creating the look of a dashed line. Stitch about 1/4-inch stitches with equal length spaces between.

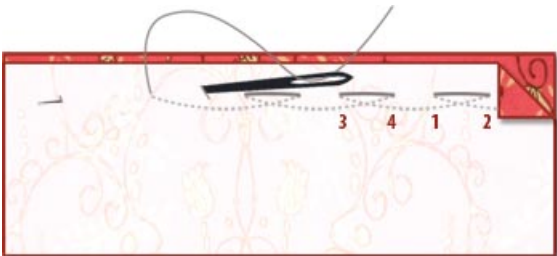
Running Stitch



The running stitch is done in the same way as the basting stitch, but with short evenly spaced 1/16-inch to 1/8-inch stitches (depending on your fabric -- smaller stitch for lighter-weight fabric). The running stitch is best done using your sewing machine, but this stitch is good for gathering or quickly mending a seam that has come apart.

Backstitch

The backstitch creates a very strong seam. It's used on heavy or dense fabrics and often to repair a seam. Begin at the right end.



- Bring your needle up through the fabric at point 1.
- Insert your needle and go down through the fabric at point 2.
- Bring the needle up through the fabric point 3.
- Insert your needle and go down through the fabric at point 4.
- Repeat until you reach the end of your seam.

Overcast Stitch

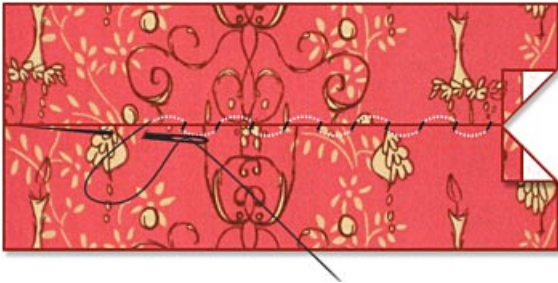
The overcast stitch is used to finish cut edges on fabrics that tend to ravel, such as linens and gabardines. Your sewing machine may have an overcasting stitch that will save you from hand sewing.



- To overcast by hand, start on one side of the edge you want to finish.
- Make a series of equal-spaced and diagonal stitches that loop around the edge of the fabric.

Slip Stitch or Ladder Stitch

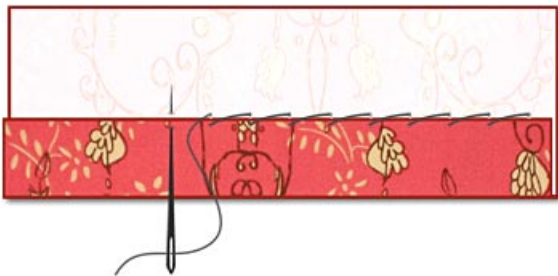
This is the hand stitch I find most useful. A slip stitch is used to create an invisible seam between two folded edges, or a folded edge and a flat edge. You can use slip stitching for bindings, to close a lining, for the final stitches on a stuffed pillow, or to apply applique invisibly.



- Iron the folds flat.
- Slip your threaded needle inside the fold to hide the knot.
- Bring the needle out through the folded edge.
- Pick up a few threads of fabric and then work through the fold again.
- Slide the needle along, come out of the fold to make the next stitch.

Blind Hem Stitch

If your sewing machine can make a blind hem stitch, you'll find it superior and faster than hemming by hand.



- Slip your threaded needle inside the fold to hide the knot.
- Bring the needle out through the folded edge.
- Using the point of your needle, pick up a few threads from the front side of your project.
- Push the needle back into the fold of the hem edge.
- Repeat for the length of the hem.

Securing Stitch

Regardless of the type of stitch you use, you will need to finish with a securing stitch to prevent your work from coming undone.

- Take one small backstitch and make a loop over the point of the needle.
- Pull the thread through the loop to create a knot at the base of the fabric.
- For a stronger secure stitch, repeat the process to create two knots.

Sewing Tips & Tricks

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