How to Make a Buttonhole on Your Sewing Machine

Editor: Liz Johnson
Friday, 08 August 2014 1:00

Most of us understand how to sew on a button. If not, we have tutorials on sewing them or by hand as well as by machine. Pretty darn easy either way, and not scary at all. But buttonholes are a whole different matter. At the end of your project, after you've put in so much work, it's time to put in the buttonholes. You should be happy you're almost done. But for many of us, beads of sweat start to form across our brows and we wonder, "Am I about to ruin everything by botching the buttonholes?"

Well, you can stop sweating, because it's really not that hard once you break it down into individual steps.

We've put together complete instructions on how to put in a buttonhole for both automatic and basic sewing machines. From marking where it goes, to hiding that final thread tail, we've got you covered. Stop sweating and start reading.

As Janome is the exclusive sewing machine sponsor here at Sew4Home, we are using their machines (the top-of-the-line Horizon Memory Craft 15000 and the entry level MyStyle 100 mechanical) for our buttonhole demonstrations.

What you'll need to sew a buttonhole

- Sewing machine
- Buttonhole foot
- Practice fabric or a project that needs a buttonhole
- Button of choice
- Fabric marking pen
- Thread in color to match or contrast with fabric
- Small, sharp scissors or seam ripper
- Straight pins
Know Your Basic Buttonholes

Before you start, you should be familiar with the most commonly used buttonholes and what they're designed to do.

Below is a Square buttonhole, which is widely used on medium to heavy weight fabrics. It's a standard buttonhole for garments, and the one you would be most likely to use in home décor projects. You can also make this style of buttonhole on even the most of basic sewing machines.

Buttonhole number two is rounded at one end and is used on fine to medium weight fabrics, especially for blouses or children's clothes.

A buttonhole rounded at both ends is best on fine, delicate fabrics, such as silk.
The keyhole buttonhole is widely used on medium to heavy weight fabrics. It's also suitable for larger and thicker buttons because the keyhole at one end allows a bit of an extra opening to push in a thicker button.

The open-effect buttonhole shown below is a stretch buttonhole, which can be used on stretch fabrics or on standard fabrics for a decorative effect.
A second option for knits is called, appropriately enough, a knit buttonhole. As with the stretch buttonhole above, this style could also be used on regular fabrics to create a decorative touch.

One additional, extra-fancy option: Corded Buttonholes

You can also make a buttonhole with cording embedded in the sides. This technique makes the buttonhole sturdier and can also be used for a subtle decorative effect.
Turning any of the buttonhole styles into a corded version is easy. You simply run your decorative cord (or thick thread or floss) through the guides on your buttonhole foot and secure the ends with a knot. Then simply sew your buttonhole as normal. The machine will automatically encase the cording in the stitches.

When finished, pull on one of the thread tails until the loop of cording disappears. Then use a thick needle to pull your other thread tails from the front to the back. Knot the tails at the back to secure.

**How to sew an automatic buttonhole**

One of the reasons we love the *Horizon Memory Craft 15000 from Janome* is how easily it does buttonholes (13 styles are included). It's as automatic as they come and the results are always beautiful.

Always test sew your buttonhole before sewing it on your project. And be sure you’re testing under exactly the same conditions. That means on a scrap of the same fabric with the same stabilizer and using the same thread.

1. Stabilize your fabric behind where the buttonhole will be stitched. For this example, we used a medium-weight fusible stabilizer.
2. Using a fabric pen and ruler, mark the near end of the buttonhole (the end closest to the edge of your project) and where the opening slit will be. There's no need to mark the far end, since the machine will determine that automatically.

3. Insert your button into the back of the automatic buttonhole foot. The buttonhole foot has a sensor that will make a buttonhole appropriate to your button.

4. Attach the foot to the machine and pull down the buttonhole lever.

5. Choose your desired buttonhole. On our MC15000, this is done on the touch screen. For our demo, we chose a basic square buttonhole.

6. Place your stabilized fabric under the foot. Position it so the needle will pierce at the intersection of the two marked lines.
Your marked lines look like the letter, “T” – drop the point of the needle at the exact meeting point of the vertical line with the horizontal line. Hand crank the needle until it goes into the fabric.

7. Align your fabric as needed so the buttonhole will be sewn straight. We used the measuring guides on the MC15000 sewing bed.

8. Start sewing. You can use a foot controller or a Start/Stop button. With either method, our MC15000 sews all four sides of the buttonhole automatically and then stops.

9. If you want to sew additional buttonholes of the same size, just lift the presser foot, align the fabric on your next set of marks, and stitch the next buttonhole.

10. Remove your fabric from the machine and trim the thread tails.
How to open the buttonhole

When all the buttonholes are complete, you’ll need to open the center slit to accept a button. There are two methods for doing this.

Whichever method you choose, it’s a good idea to pin the ends of your buttonhole. The pins act as a stop so you don’t accidentally cut through the stitching.

Option 1

1. Use a good seam ripper. If you use a cheap one, it can be like trying to cut steak with a butter knife.
2. Starting at one end of your buttonhole and working toward the middle, pierce the fabric with the point and cut half the slit. Be sure to stay exactly in the center so you cut only the fabric. Insert the seam ripper at the opposite end and work toward the middle until the slit is fully open.
Option 2

1. Use a buttonhole cutter set. This two piece set, consisting of a chisel and a small wooden block, gives you the cleanest possible cut.

2. Set the buttonhole on the block. Starting near one end, place the chisel where you want the slit created. Push down and gently rock until the chisel cuts through the fabric. Move down and repeat until the buttonhole slit is fully open.

3. Make sure your button fits. When cutting, always err on the side of a bit too small. You can always open the slit a bit
more, but closing it down requires attempting to hand stitch the buttonhole to close-up either end. This never looks super professional. If it is just not the right fit, adjust your marks. Make sure the button is seated correctly in the buttonhole foot, and test again.

### How to sew a basic 4-step buttonhole

The most basic sewing machines use a four-step process to sew a buttonhole. It requires a little extra measuring on your part. And when you’re sewing, you’ll need to manually stop at the appropriate buttonhole length.

This demo was done on a [Janome MyStyle 100](http://example.com) mechanical machine.

1. Stabilize your fabric where the buttonhole will be stitched. As above, for this example we again used a medium-weight fusible stabilizer.
2. Mark your buttonhole on your fabric with a ruler and fabric pen, making it ¼” larger than your button. Mark both ends and the buttonhole slit.
3. Attach the buttonhole foot to your machine. Align your fabric under the foot so the needle will pierce the intersection of the “T” markings at the back of the buttonhole. (Some machine models start the 4-step at the front, so be sure to check your manual.) Hand crank the machine until the needle pierces the fabric.
4. On your machine, set the stitch selector to buttonhole Step 1.
5. Start sewing. Slow down as you near the front of your buttonhole. Stop exactly at the end point.

7. Select buttonhole Step 3.

8. Start sewing. Slow down as you near the back of your buttonhole. Stop exactly at the end point (just like you did above for the opposite side).

9. Select buttonhole Step 4. Sew about six stitches (just like you did at the front of the buttonhole). Remove your fabric from under the foot. Leave long tails when you snip your threads.

10. Using a hand needle, pull your thread tails to the back and knot them to secure.
11. To cut open your buttonhole, follow the instructions above.

After you've done it a few times, you'll see that making a 4-step buttonhole isn't any more difficult than doing any other stitch. You just need to think ahead and sew carefully.

We'd like to thank the helpful staff at Paramount Sewing & Vacuum in Eugene, Oregon for their technical advice on this article. They are one of the best places on the West Coast to buy a Janome.

Tags:

- Janome
- Sewing Tips & Tricks

Soft Cross Body Bag with Decorative Stitch Strap: Janome Skyline S7
Modern Two-Tone, Fold-Over Clutch in Faux Leather: Janome Skyline S7
Hanging Sewing Caddy with Clear-View Vinyl Pockets: Janome Skyline S7
Accessories We Love: Janome Flower Stitch Attachment
How to Turn a Corner with a Decorative Stitch
Mountain Sunrise Embroidered Pillow: Janome America
Accessories We Love: Janome Free Motion Couching Foot Set
Accessories We Love: Janome Ultimate Ruffler
Decorative Stitch Piping Frames Appliqué Pillow: Janome America
Zippered Clutch with Cross Stitch Embroidery: Janome America
Embroidered Patchwork Pillow: Janome America