

Easing and Gathering

Level
2 & 3

Oregon 4-H Clothing Construction Fact Sheets: Basic Skills—Levels 2 and 3

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Easing and gathering are ways of controlling extra fabric to join two cut edges that are not the same length. Easing controls a little extra length, while gathering controls a large amount.

Easing

The purpose of easing is to give a small amount of shaping. Garment areas that might use easing include back shoulder seams, set-in sleeve caps, waistbands, and hems. The eased area should be smooth and unpuckered when complete. Fabrics with permanent-press finishes, non-woven fabrics, woven fabrics with close yarns, and some stable (non-stretchy) knit fabrics are more difficult to ease than other fabrics.

Pattern symbols that indicate ease are usually dots, circles, or notches that show you where to begin and end the area to be eased. Transfer these symbols from the pattern to the fabric when you do the marking.

Small amounts of ease may be handled by pin-basting the long edge to the short edge. Working with the longer side facing you, pin the seam at the beginning and end of the area to be eased. Bend the seam slightly away from you to smooth out the ease (figure 1).

Distribute the fullness evenly, and place pins up and down across the edge to hold the ease in place and keep it from bunching. Machine-stitch with the eased side down so the feed dogs continually pull and work in the ease (figure 2).

If bending the seam away from you does not smooth out the ease, you have a moderate amount of ease that needs additional steps to control. First, make a row of machine-stitching just a thread's width inside the seamline on the seam allowance. This stitch should be slightly longer than the stitch used for regular seams but not as large as a basting stitch. For fabrics that are hard to handle, make a second row of stitching in the seam allowance, $\frac{1}{8}$ inch (3 mm) from the seamline (figure 3).

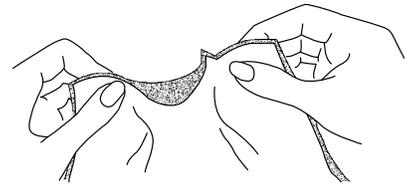


Figure 1. Bend seam to smooth out ease.

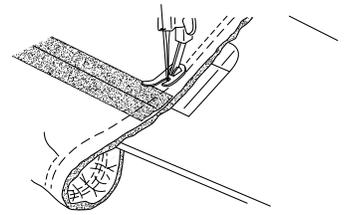


Figure 2. Machine-stitch with eased side down.

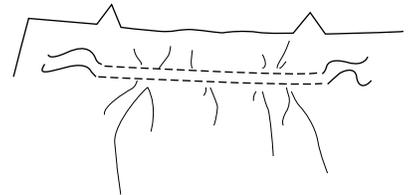


Figure 3. Make a second row of stitching in the seam allowance.



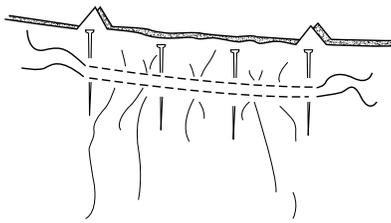


Figure 4. Pin eased area before stitching.

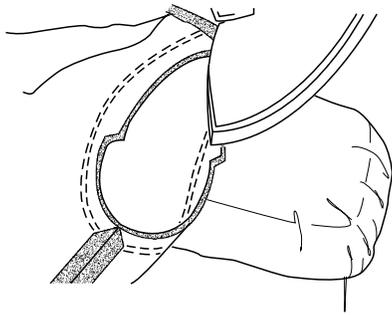


Figure 5. Press the eased seam.

To join the long edge to the short edge and form a seam, pin the seam at the beginning and end of the area to be eased. Pull on one end of the easing threads until both edges match. With your finger, stroke the fullness smoothly and evenly across the area to be eased. Pin the eased area of the seam to hold the fullness and keep it from slipping (figure 4). Hand-baste to hold it in place, if needed.

Then you can machine-stitch the seam with the eased side either up or down. Consider the amount of ease. If you think the feed dogs can stroke the ease into place, stitch with the eased side down. If you feel more comfortable watching and adjusting the ease as you stitch, stitch with the eased side up. You can use a long needle or seam ripper to guide the eased area under the presser foot when the eased side is up. Either way, remove the pins as you come to them when you stitch.

Begin pressing a seam that has been eased by using the edge of a steam iron and stroking lightly. Stroke from the line of stitching outward onto the seam allowance, and from the stitching inward over the garment. Lift and lower the iron, applying light pressure until the ease has disappeared and the area is smooth. If the area being eased is shaped, such as the cap of a sleeve, working over a pressing ham or sleeve board will make shaping easier (figure 5).

Press both seam allowances open or in one direction. Shoulder seam allowances are usually pressed open. Press waistband seam allowances toward the waistband. Do not press open armhole seams; turn these toward the sleeve by hand after pressing the seam allowance.

Gathering

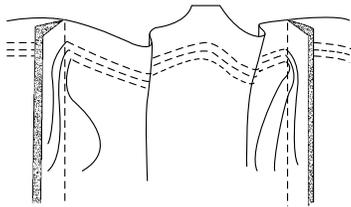


Figure 6. Gathering stitching.

The purpose of gathering is to control a large amount of fullness that is part of the garment design. Areas that might use gathering are waistlines, cuffs, yokes, and ruffles. Gathers should be evenly distributed without gaps or folds.

Gathers are indicated on patterns with seamlines labeled “gathering line.” Dots or circles show the beginning and end of the area to be gathered. Transfer these symbols from the pattern to the fabric when you do the marking.

Before gathering, be sure to stitch, edge-finish, and press open any seams that will be crossed by the gathering. The gathering stitch should be slightly longer than the normal stitch used for seams. Test to see which stitch length is suitable for your fabric and the amount to be gathered.

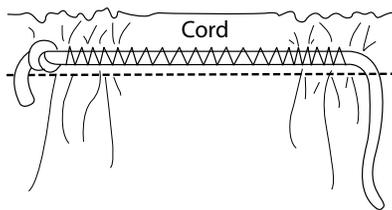


Figure 7. Zigzag stitching over a cord.

Stitch two parallel rows of gathering stitching in the seam allowance. Put the first row of gathering on the seamline, and the second row in the seam allowance, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (6 mm) from the first. If your fabric does not show needle holes after the stitching is removed, you can better control gathers by stitching three rows of gathering $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (6 mm), $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (1.3 cm), and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (1.9 cm) from the cut edge (figure 6). You will sew the seam on the $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch (1.5-cm) stitching line, and then remove the $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch (1.9-cm) line of gathering.

Another way to stitch the gathering is to use zigzag stitching over a thin, strong cord. Set the machine for a stitch of medium width and length. Place the cord $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (6 mm) above the seamline, and stitch over the cord to hold it in place. If needed, adjust the stitch width to avoid stitching into the cord. To draw up the gathering, slide the zigzag stitches along the cord (figure 7). This method is good for gathering long areas because gathering threads break easily.

To attach a gathered edge to a straight edge, pin the right sides of the fabric together at any points of matching, such as notches or center front and center back seams. Temporarily fasten the bobbin threads at one end by winding them in a figure 8 around a pin. Pull the bobbin threads at the opposite end by sliding the fabric along the bobbin thread until the edges match in length (figure 8). Secure the threads around a pin in a figure 8, and repeat from each end until the edges match and the gathers are evenly distributed. Pin crosswise to the cut edge as needed to hold the gathers in place and keep them from slipping or bunching (figure 9).

Readjust the sewing machine to the correct length of stitch for seams before stitching the gathered and straight edges into a seam. Stitch on the seamline with the gathered side up. Watch to be sure the gathers are evenly distributed. You can use a long needle or seam ripper to guide the gathered area under the presser foot when the eased side is up.

Press the seam allowance flat as it was stitched, using the tip of the iron. Finish the gathered seam edge. Open the garment flat with the straight edge folded back. This leaves the gathers so you can press them. Again, press the seam allowance with the tip of the iron, being careful not to press folds in the gathered section (figure 10). When you press the gathered area, direct the point of the iron into the gathers (figure 11).

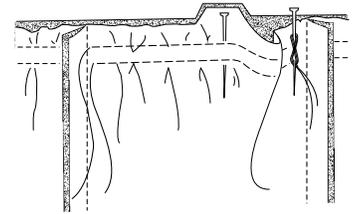


Figure 8. Fasten and pull bobbin threads to evenly distribute gathers.

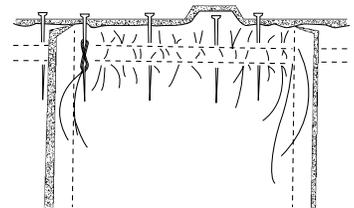


Figure 9. Pin to hold gathers before stitching.

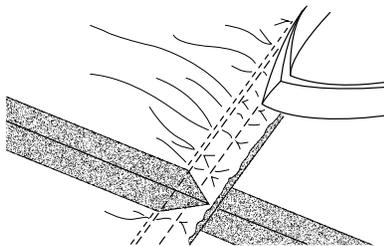


Figure 10. Press seam allowance with point of iron.

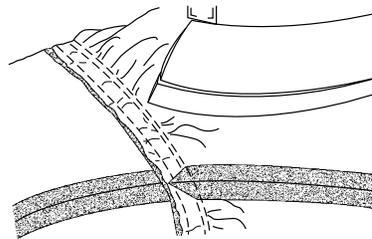


Figure 11. Press gathered area, directing point of iron into gathers

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This publication is based on and replaces OSU Extension publication 4-H 92133, *Easing and Gathering: 4-H Clothing, Skill Level 3*, by Ardis W. Koester, Extension textiles and clothing specialist emeritus; and Barbara J. Sawyer, Extension specialist emeritus, 4-H Youth Development; both of Oregon State University.

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