

Guide to a Bespoke Suit

Introduction to
Tailoring

Proof 1.1

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What is bespoke tailoring and what I am doing

Welcome to my guide to a bespoke suit. This is a progressive documentation from practicing your first stitch, and building on that that leads to making handsewn trousers, jackets and waistcoats. Further building on those with alternative features, methods and styles. Importantly calling it handsewn does not mean it's entirely made by hand. Sewing machines are heavily involved. However I am still having trouble coming up with an accurate way to distinguish this level of garment making from production sewing methods that involves more machine sewing and as little as no hand sewing. Some call it the bespoke method, but I don't necessarily find that to be accurate.

I am a training tailor intent on making guides to as many parts of bespoke tailoring as I can for others to learn as well.

Even for those who can sew already the bespoke tailoring trade is very different and using this early context clarifies a lot of differences later. In sewing terms and techniques that I will use that are different based on sewing background and where you're from. This structure relies a lot on the context I've laid out.

It might be difficult to just watch the video, or read the guide on making the jacket and make a jacket. Each garment guide relies at least a bit on the foundation of information I've laid before-hand. However; if you can sew already then you are likely to find it easier to take methods from the garment making guides and apply them yourself. As well the methods you use don't even have to be the ones I lay out. When I make the jacket you can use your own method of making pockets, or adding the zip to trousers, ETC.

Some initial parts are less relevant to future things. For example, if you only want to learn trousers, then sampling jacket features won't be as helpful.

What I want to share are contemporary, practical methods. It's subjective as many might say that the amount of hand sewing involved makes it thoroughly impractical.

There are many different methods of doing any given thing and then more techniques for each step. I define the method as what is being done, the cutting and the order, whereas the technique is how that is done (for example what stitch is used, or what finish on an edge is used)

As of now I am making video guides as well as written companion guides with illustrations and written measures. Content should be near enough identical, just different formats.

I am also here documenting everything I learn so that I can look back at it easily. I want to learn as much as I can about this level of sewing and the more time I spend learning the more time I also spend forgetting.

If you want to start practising you can literally start with some stationary, cheap cloth, basically any pair of scissors, a needle, some thread and a sewing machine.

There's no real getting around the sewing machine. If no one you know has one and never uses it; then you can get one on the cheap I'm sure, or bite the bullet to invest in an ok one.

I list more in my tools video, but this is the practical minimum you can use to start sampling.

I have the hand stitches that I actually use going forwards, including guides on handsewn buttonholes. Then there are samples of features like all of the pockets and zip that can be made that will also be used in the garment making.

Following from that I cover pattern cutting, however you do not have to draft your own pattern, but you do need to understand the difference in how it's used. As I lay out later, a pattern in tailoring is not the same as a commercial or production pattern.

I talk about the materials and trimmings and cutting out then making the garment all the way through. I take less time to go into detail of the things that I've sampled, but I don't skip over where each step is in the making of the garments.

Bespoke tailoring is generally accepted to mean a garment (Usually of the suiting kind) made from measurements taken specifically from a client. Furthermore any specific requirements from the client are used to inform the cut and make of the garment.

Synonymous with bespoke tailoring is the idea of being handsewn and handstitched. Something being handsewn may not make it bespoke, but bespoke is typically handsewn. Discussions can be had over what really qualifies as bespoke tailoring.

Bespoke these days may have origins in the tailoring trade, but now it does mean 'custom'. Tailored essentially meaning made and sewn to fit. Often tailored suits are so similar to one another that they could scarcely be much more than made to measure.

"Handmade" or "Handsewn" is a technical term that simply indicates that an individual or a small group of people sewed that garment. Whether they used sewing machines or not. It indicates a more personal touch and states it was not made on an assembly line. If something was made on an assembly line I think that it would be referred to as "production". An individual can still learn the 'production method' to make clothes, which would then be "handmade" or even "couture" technically. It would usually be much faster, featuring more machine stitches than hand stitching.

"Hand stitched" indicates that something was sewn with a needle and thread; by hand. In bespoke an entire garment won't be totally hand stitched, but there are different methods that

can be completely or partially hand stitched more than other common bespoke methods.

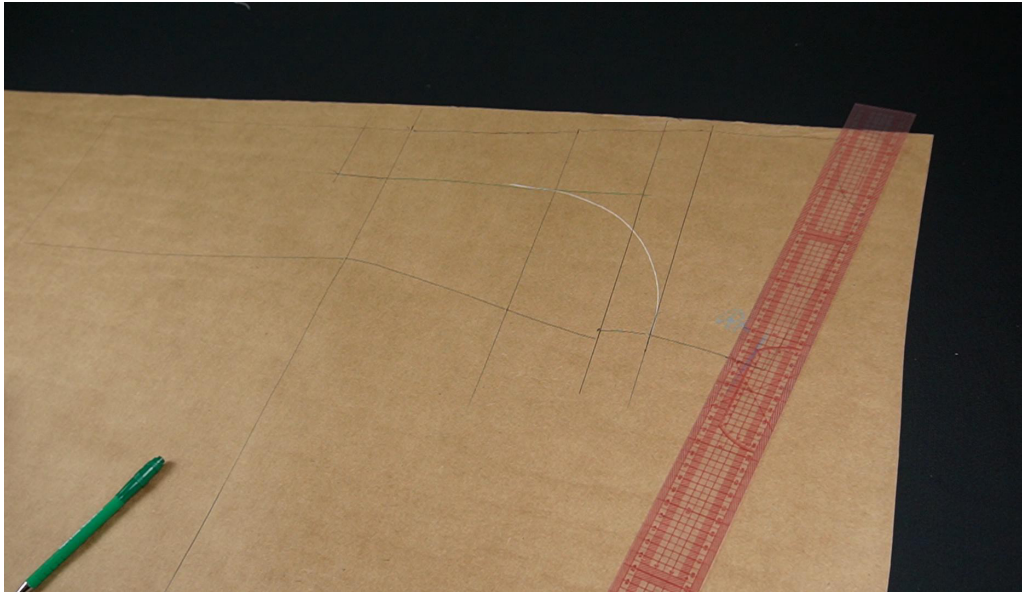
If you come from a production sewing background; bespoke and production have very different rules and principles. I've seen that people who "can sew" struggle with learning bespoke, because it's like they have to learn everything again in a different way.

I wouldn't say forget everything you know (I find that very unhelpful advice); only be ready to re-learn everything you think you know.

There can't really be a "bespoke method" but there is an oft-used structure to making jackets and trousers, with varying techniques and methods. A totally "bespoke method" could mean a method informed by the client's needs. As I go forward I will use the term "bespoke method" even though it can be argued that it's not wholly accurate.

I want to create a guide to learning how to sew bespoke-level clothing. For myself to serve as an aid-memoir and for others to help get started. Making small concise guides that gradually get more advanced and subsequent guides for variations in design, method and technique.

Intro to Tailoring



Job roles

Knowing the structure of the bespoke trade is helpful. Especially if you want to enter it. When beginning to ask around tailor shops and introducing yourself and perhaps sharing your work, you need to understand who it is you're talking to and what their specific role is. Also what jobs they may have to offer you. If someone says they're a maker, or that there's an opening for an undercutter you need to know what that means and what that job is.

The first thing to note is that the shop or the brand is often referred to as a house, or shop.

How the tailoring industry works is in three main jobs. Cutting, making and finishing.

A person can be a cutter, maker or finisher.

The cutter meets with the client, takes their measurements and sources materials. The cutter will draft, or cut, the pattern for the client and they'll buy and cut out the fabric.

The maker will put together the pieces. They are usually specialised. They make jackets, or they make trousers, or waistcoats, etc. Often there's some overlap, so a coat maker or trouser maker might also make waistcoats. Overcoats will often be made by coat makers. The relationship between cutter and maker might be that they both work for the same house and get work passed between them. The cutter and maker might both work independently and the maker is commissioned by the cutter.

Finishers can be in-house working directly for the maker, or outsourced. I expect most if not all makers can finish, but outsourcing is more time and cost-efficient.

It is often best to specialise. You will always make more money if you can practically act as part of a production line. The Cutter can cut more because they aren't making.

The Maker can make more because they aren't finishing. The finisher is also the best and fastest

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at hand-finishing and hand-sewn buttonholes. Generally speaking anyway, there are exceptions.

I'm told if you want to be a cutter it is best to first train as a maker, a jacket maker specifically, so that you have an understanding of how the maker works which can make their lives easier.

There are also undercutters and trimmers. Both work for cutters. An undercutter's entire job is striking and cutting cloth from patterns that the cutter has made and will later fit.

The trimmer is the one who adds the trimmings, so the lining, canvas, pocketing, holland linen, buttons and suchlike to the bundle of cloth; before it gets sent to the maker.

Both jobs could be described as the menial labour that the cutter can delegate. There are things that can be learnt from both and they are a good way to get your foot in the door with a cutter. They can lead to apprenticeships, but, personally, they aren't desirable jobs.

Lastly are pressers. Again it's a job that is done more efficiently by a dedicated presser. Ironing a garment at the end before delivery is called the top press. All other ironing before the finish is referred to as underpressing. I'm aware some houses have inhouse pressers, others use the valet in piccadilly arcade, but a maker should always be able to confidently press their own work. Some do and take pride in it, others underpress to a sufficient degree that it barely requires the top press.



There are old jobs that don't necessarily exist anymore because it became more cost efficient to combine or completely outsource, like trotters. Transporting garments between makers and cutters and such, but that's usually the interns job these days.

That is a brief introduction to how the tailoring trade is organised for those interested in the sewing side of the business.

I initially forgot to mention alterations tailors. Generally speaking alterations is a job nearly outside of tailoring that either requires thorough knowledge of a lot of garment making or being taught how to do specific alterations. That said I've seen in a few cases makers either starting with alterations or at some point a lot of alterations come in and they can take on that work.

I think that doing alterations of handmade tailored garments is an important step in the journey of being a tailor. It can give you insights into how others make garments and show you why something is cut or made in a certain way, or give you ideas to improve cutting and making. For example what you should or should not cut down or when you should leave extra material.

I see a lot that the alterations tailor is an outsourced job these days. This tailor can have multiple bespoke tailoring houses as clients and individual clients. Just because I've not noticed whether houses have in house alterations tailors doesn't mean I might not be wrong. I'll ask around and see.

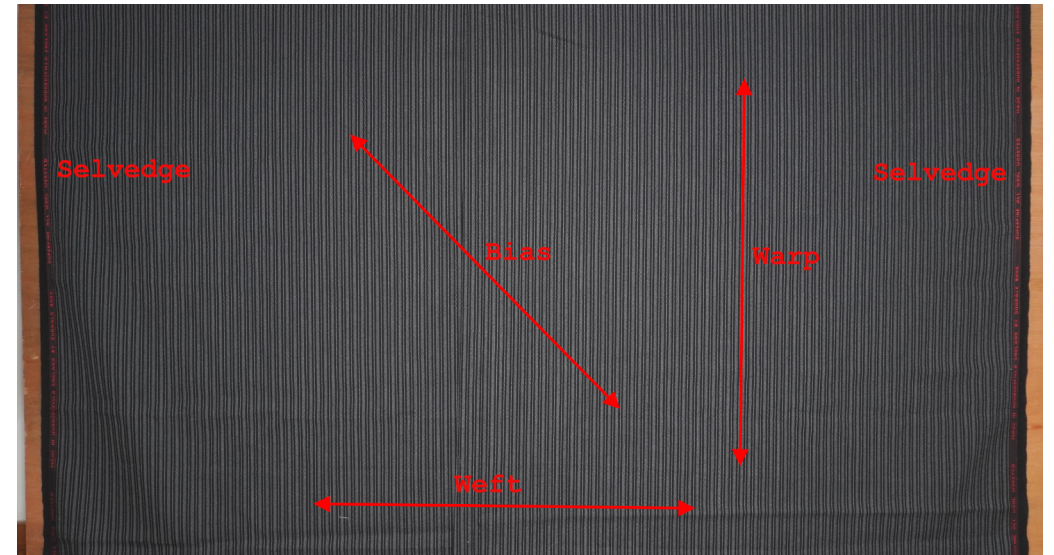
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As an aside I've read that a codger is what alterations tailors were referred to. I think now an old codger is just a grumpy old man, but that's where it comes from. I noticed occasionally tailors graduate from making clothes to becoming alterations tailors.

I wonder whether to include master tailor, because it isn't a job rather an informal qualification of somebody who can cut and make the main facets of tailoring to the same standard of each individual maker. As you'd expect it takes almost the same time to become a master as each of the others put together. As I alluded to earlier it's not something that's necessarily profitable unless you monetise it in another way, like being a head cutter (the highest rank of cutter in a tailoring house, essentially being in charge in the cutting room) or in educating others with courses such as ARTS, or one to one tuition beside apprenticeships. I say it isn't *profitable* to be a master and work by yourself, but to clarify you can make a living cutting and making for your own clients. They are limited by the work that they can complete, whereas being able to outsource work is much more scalable as a tailoring business. Also a head cutter doesn't have to be a master tailor, but being a master *can* make somebody better suited to the role.

I'm not sure whether it's worth noting or whether it's too much of a generalisation that a lot of master tailors are total Prima Donnas. Be consious if you meet one.

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A word about cloth

A word about fabric and grain, weave, warp, weft, bias and selvage. I make references to this information during cutting and making, so it should be known.

The weave is the individual horizontal and vertical yarns that make up the grains of the fabric. As cloth is woven it has the warp yarns lined up next to each other and the weft yarn is used to bind them together.

Cloth used in tailoring usually is up to about 150 cm (56") wide. The weft goes across this width and the warp is the long yarns going the length of the cloth.

The selvage runs both sides of the warp. This is on both edges of the cloth when it's woven before it's folded in half and folded onto a board. Sometimes you won't receive cloth folded like that though. It's just folded up and you then need to re-fold it, so that it can be used properly. Opening it fully and folding it in half along the warp.

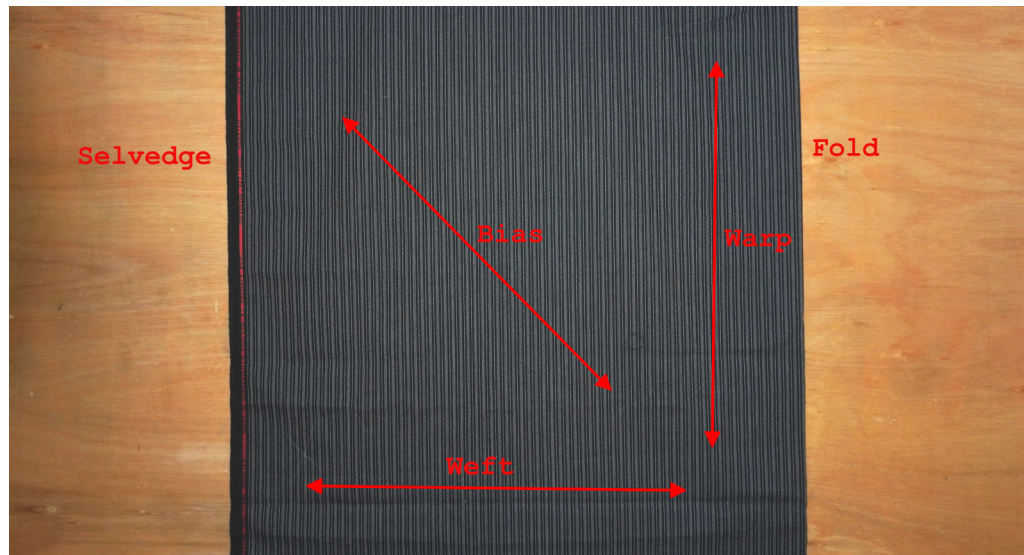
This creates the fabric as it's used with a selvage side and fold side.

The selvage stops the cloth from fraying down the edges. In lining we'll often use the selvage along the bottom of trouser lining because it's the least bulky most efficient way of preventing it from fraying away over time.

Along the selvage you'll sometimes find details about the company and quality of cloth.



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Generally the right side of the cloth, the side that gets folded on the inside has the readable selvedge. That is a good rule of thumb if you don't know which way around to fold the cloth.

A helpful way of remembering is warp / walk, walking down the length. A normal striped cloth like a cashmere stripe and other pin stripes; the stripe goes along the warp. When I say the straight grain I'm talking about the warp.

Weft is the width, by process of elimination.

The bias is at a 45° Angle to the two of them. As you come off of the warp or weft there is a greater amount of flexibility in the fabric and the most on the 45° bias, or referred to just as the bias. This all applies to almost all fabrics, suiting or otherwise that doesn't have an artificial stretch from elastane or anything.

We need to know this because a lot of the seams that we cut aren't on the warp or weft. Hence there's a certain amount of stretch on all the edges. We need to be careful sometimes when ironing and sewing seams because they might stretch and pull, thereby changing the pattern.

In other cases pieces like pocket welts need to be cut on the grain, either the warp or the weft.

Something important to note, that can be easy to get confused by; is when tailors will say the rightside, wrongside or correct side of fabric.

All fabric will have a side we are working with, and the side we aren't. The side that we want showing on the outside of our project and the inside.

Tailors cut the cloth doubled up so that cut two of each piece. The side that we want to show on our finished product is always on the inside, so that it is protected in storage and not marked on as much. This is what we are talking about almost literally every single time we say: Right side. The right side of the cloth. Not the side on the right. Not the right-hand-side, or



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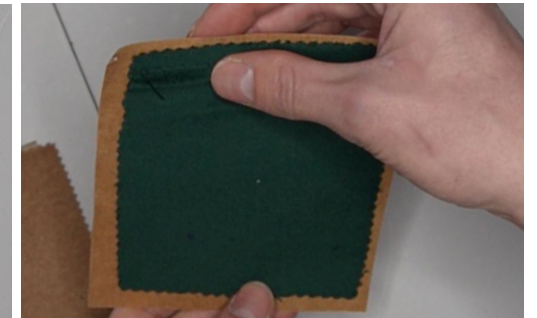
correct piece.

The other that won't usually be seen at all on the finished product will often be referred to as the wrong side, or inside.

I leave this in because I don't want anyone to get confused about whether I'm talking about the right side of the cloth, or the right-hand-side piece of a garment. I just need you to be aware, but I will be clear and always say right-hand-side and left-hand-side.

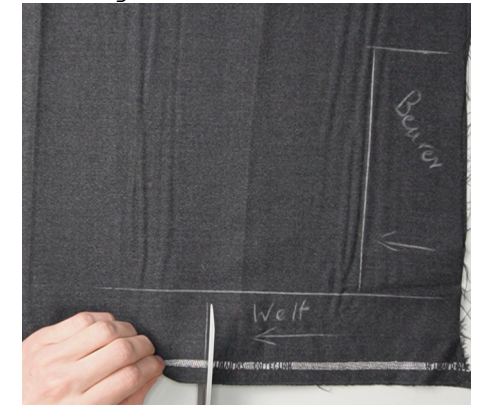
We mostly chalk on the wrong side. We often mark the wrong side onto the fabric with a chalk strike or an X so that we don't get confused and accidentally make two identical pieces instead of two mirror images. Also marking the grain of cut cloth that may have a specific direction of the grain. An arrow makes sure we match the cloth correctly.

The direction of the grain is most important when there is a pile in the cloth. You can find a pile in carded cloth IE flannels sometimes. Cashmere or other quite fuzzy overcoating cloth. Most notably with velvet or corduroy. This is important to think about when laying a pattern onto cloth. If the cloth has a pile you use a one-way lay, where the grain of the pattern pieces all go in the same direction. This is really easy to illustrate, because if I flip the corduroy upside down it looks completely different in the light.



You can cut it to show light or show dark, but know this so that you don't cut it with a two way lay by accident, flipping the certain pieces upside down to fit them onto the cloth better.

It's also pertinent when cutting it out to mark the arrows on the leftover pieces so that the grain and by extension the pile can be matched properly as it's being made without having to spend extra time working out which way the grain actually goes.





Fabric file

What could be helpful is beginning a fabric file. A personal index of cloth. Not just cloth you have, or have used, any cloth you find.

Keep a sample of the cloth and write down what it is and any characteristics. Characteristics such as composition and weight. Worsted/wollen/ flannel. The type of weave. Other things like fibre width/length, ply, pic count if you can figure them out.

Keeping these in a file or notebook of sorts will help create an internal identification of cloth as well. Over time you could better approximate attributes of cloth by just feel.

Essentially making flash cards of any cloth you can get your hands on.

Cloth characteristics require its own section and I think it's worthwhile knowing, but I can't cover it here. Start as early as you can. You might be able to find old swatch books and those will tell you a lot about the cloth that you add to your fabric file.

As you can see I have varied cloth, some from old swatch books, some from cloth I've bought, samples of the denim from my jeans are here, cloth I've been given and used some I haven't used yet. Cottons, velvet linen a few different super statuses. And my tartan. When I find new samples I keep and note them quite uniformly as you see.



Stock and pattern book

Having a way to keep track of the cloth you have is very helpful, specifically for working tailors. Cut lengths and stock cloth always requires keeping track of. How that is traditionally done is with the stock book and the pattern book. Far as I know the stock book contains the lengths and stock at the start of every year. Updated annually to keep everything in a simple order and give each cloth a designation. The pattern book is continually updated and added to as new cloth is ordered and used with a swatch of the cloth for reference. I've seen stock and pattern books more than 100 years old that are still used because they haven't even been filled yet.

For me at least the pattern book is very useful to keep track of the limited stock that I have. On a personal note I don't do well with ornate notebooks, because I always feel that I'm wasting each page I use. In this case I find it a worthwhile endeavour to keep track of the cloth I have. No page is wasted even after I use the cloth because it's kept nonetheless as a record.

It's great to have on hand the cloth I have and how much of it is left, so I know what I might be able to do with it.

The stock book is distinct from the fabric file, but it doesn't have to be. The file contains all different kinds of cloth, any small swatch that you can get a hold of to familiarise yourself with different cloths, and the stock book tells you what you have that you can sew something with. The sooner you start a stock book the easier it will be to keep track of. Even if you're not selling I still find it a fun thing to keep on my shelf. Should you start selling it will give you the impression of having a history.

If nothing else it's a fun addition to being a fabric collector too.

Previously I had pinked off a piece at the selvedge, or if there was an apparent piece of excess, no more than 2.5x2.5 cm (1"x1"). Use glue or fabric glue to stick it into the designated spot. Among the length, I also note the mill or merchant, any selvedge IDs, composition and weight, similar to the fabric file. When I use a cloth from the book I note the date, exactly how much I used and how much is remaining (if I didn't use all of it) and the order number of the commission.

Right" and "wrong" methods

Something I feel is important to touch on is right, wrong and different methods in tailoring.

Basically there are no wrong ways to do something if the result is the same or comparable. There are probably certain principles that remain true. I'm sure there are objectively wrong, or worse things to do, but it can be difficult to definitively state that something can be wrong.

One tailor may do something that others don't. This doesn't mean they are wrong to do it.

Another tailor may skip something that everybody else does. They aren't necessarily wrong for skipping it if their finished product is the same.

It's important to know that there are many different methods for everything and you can't just say it's wrong. Keep an open mind to alternative methods.

Though almost contradictory one piece of advice I had been given is to focus on one method. For example there are probably scores of ways to put on a collar. Learn that one method until it's second nature before trying varied ways of putting on a collar. I think that is where the prestige of bespoke tailoring comes from; the practice and mastery.

This is more of a universal suggestion, but given the variety of method and technique (and elitism) in bespoke it's worth saying.

There are so many different methods that evolve from other methods or are done very differently.

Always listen to feedback, but you don't have to act on it.

If you get any feedback whether it's positive or negative there might be something that you can learn from it. It can be needlessly insulting, but again you don't have to act on it.

Metric vs Imperial

English tailoring is all in imperial measurements. I'm vaguely aware that Scottish tailors use both, and other tailors in the world use metric, except some Americans, I think. Every British tailor on Savile Row works in inches, as well as most off of the row.

Why this is important to note is that in education there is a blanket rule that we must be taught in metric in the UK. So I have learned mostly in metric and I present my technical guides in metric. Although sometimes it's easier to say a centimetre instead of 3/8ths and an inch instead of 2.5 cm.

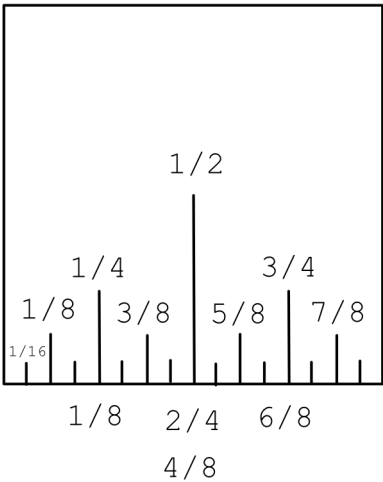
How specific can you really go? It is just too precise to measure to the millimeter. From what I've seen of Italian tailors they measure to the quarter of a cm, which is only a little bit less than 1/8".

I prefer to draft in centimetres and use a calculator instead of a tailors L-square (which is very important drafting in inches) Using the L square is faster than a calculator, because every fraction between 12 and 24 inches (for chest and seat measures between 24 and 48 inches) is calculated already. There are metric L-squares as well and it's the same idea; the measure on the ruler is theoretically more accurate than the calculation with 4 decimals that gets rounded.

For people unfamiliar with imperial though, there are a couple of things that you should know if you want to use it. You might find better instructions elsewhere but this is my take.

This is just to explain the fractions of an inch. It's basic fractions and the increments that are used. Since I have had to explain this to people in the past it might be worth some people's time to see.

In tailoring and in general an inch is split into eighths. Therefore there is half, quarter and eighth of an inch. On rulers the inch increments are the only ones marked and each extra increment is often a line that gets smaller for each fraction.



The half is halfway between each one inch increment. It's denoted by a line shorter than the inches.

The quarter is halfway between the inch increments and half increment. Then the eighth is halfway between each of those.

The rulers we use usually only go as small as the eighth instead of the 16th.

Each increment is a fraction of an inch and when they are described they should always be reduced to the simplest form. Therefore the increments go 1/8", 1/4", 3/8", 1/2", 5/8", 3/4", 7/8" and then it's the next inch.

No one wants to hear 2/8", 4/8", 2/4" or 6/8".

Using these you'll recognise the recurring amounts that are actually used, as well as the use of good and bare, so a good and bare amount just indicates slightly more or slightly less than the given amount, like good 1/8" or bare 3/4". That indicates an amount slightly more than an 1/8" or slightly less than 3/4".

These imperial increments can become easier to approximate by eye. Also included is a table of conversion for each inch increment with the exact conversion and the functional conversion that I typically use. What I use are not conversions, just equivalences.

1/8	0.3175 cm	0.25 cm
1/4	0.635 cm	0.5 cm
3/8	0.9525 cm	1 cm
1/2	1.27 cm	1.2 cm
5/8	1.5875 cm	1.5 cm
3/4	1.905 cm	2 cm
7/8	2.22 cm	2.2 cm
1	2.54 cm	2.5 cm

Common terms I'll use

This isn't a glossary of 101 terms tailors use. This is to get you started with the absolute minimal effort, but so that you can follow along.

Baste

There are two uses of this, to baste (verb) is to make a temporary stitch between two or more things before machining or hand sewing them permanently. This is usually, but not always, done with basting thread which is a weak loosely woven cotton thread. Using a wide stitch one a sewing machine is also a way of basting a seam before sewing it, because the wide non-back tacked stitch will be easy to remove later.

A baste (noun), also referred to as a fitting, is when a garment is put together to be fitted to a client. You can make a baste to make adjustments very easily. Rather than finishing a garment and realising the fit is wrong. Basting for a fitting gives us the opportunity to truly fit the cloth to a person. This is a lot of what makes it Bespoke.

Seam allowance

(noun) This is how much larger the fabric is than the finished product. The amount of fabric that we have that we use to sew the fabric. Most often, using metric and in the patterns I'm using the seam allowance is 1cm. That means I am usually stitching 1 cm from the raw edge of the fabric. As stated that means you could otherwise use a 3/8" seam allowance. A 1/4" seam allowance is traditional, so you might occasionally find that patterns are drafted with that instead. The 1 cm, ie the 3/8" SA is a European change because the quarter seam allowance doesn't neatly convert into metric unlike the 1 cm to 3/8" conversion.

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Inlay

Inlay(noun) is what allows us to have fittings, ensure a correct fit, and increase the size as well as reduce the size of a garment. Inlay is extra fabric that we leave beyond the seam allowance, or sew line, so that we can move the seams if we need to to get a better fit. Then later we can adjust the size of a garment.

It's also why we are stuck mark stitching. Inlay is put in strategically to allow for the maximum amount of alteration in a fitting and left in the finished garment to allow it to be altered later on.

When inlay is added while cutting out patterns, that is extra cloth left past specific edges as the pattern was originally drafted. I've noticed the inverse done; where what I would refer to as inlays are added to the pattern and then the sew-on-chalk lines, or fold-on-chalk lines are added on the cloth.

Draft

To draft (Verb) or a draft (noun) typically refers to the cutter's job of using measures to create the jacket or trouser shape for a client on paper. Creating the pattern. The probably comes from 'draft' meaning the first form of something that may have changes made later. Drawing out a pattern can also be referred to as 'cutting a pattern'.

Verb "Today I need to draft a pattern for [client]"

Noun "The draft has been fitted and needs alterations."

Pattern

It's worth defining pattern, because in production clothes making a pattern (as far as I know) is a block with seam allowances included. In bespoke the pattern is the shape of a garment made from client measurements. It has a mixture of seam allowances included and not included because of how construction is done in bespoke. The reasoning is due to the construction and the addition of inlays in certain places. The inclusion or exclusion of seams is not universal in tailored patterns. When you learn one by heart it's easy to understand the differences.

Pattern also still refers to the design on cloth, like checks and stripes. Both versions can often be used in the same sentence "use so-and-so pattern to cut from the blue check patterned cloth." "the pattern has to be laid in a specific way on the stripe pattern".

You have to interpret the context to know which one is being talked about, because that's just another glitch in the English language. That being said I don't think it's ever caused anyone confusion since they both exist outside of this trade of sewing too, but me seeing it written down so often talking about cutting patterned cloth makes me want to clarify.

Block

Again in production there is a different definition, but in bespoke it means a pattern that is

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drafted to standard measurements, rather than client measures. Standard measures can come from a table of measures based on the chest or seat size. There are many tables of measure that contain different measures and have different proportions.

Personally I've put together my own table of measures combining a few sources and a few changes to make them more contemporary.

Trimmings

Trimmings, trims, or trim (noun and/or verb) means all the hardware and materials besides the cloth that goes into garments. Outside of bespoke it sometimes doesn't have the same meaning. It's the bits like buttons, buckles and zips, lining, canvas, shoulder pads, twist, fusing, linen all those extra things that are required to make a garment.

I go into detail about the trimmings required to make each garment as well as sourcing them. For sewing samples I will outline the specific trimmings needed at that moment. As I've learned though, sourcing can be a fluid market and my suggestions can quickly become outdated.

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Length and shortness

Relative length

This is a brief explanation of relative length and shortness. When sewing with multiple layers and specific to bespoke tailoring with hand-sewn canvases the relative lengths are important to making cloth smooth and ensuring fits come out as patterned. Understanding the relative lengths helps to learn and understand, because when I or a tailor might describe something to you as long or short we might not be talking about what you think.

The easiest and most visual way of describing it is with some paper. I have two pieces and I cut one to be slightly shorter.

First thing I want to say is that it can be described in either way. It can be said that this piece is short against that piece and that piece is long against this piece. They both mean the same thing. It just depends which way around you want to describe it. It depends which material you want to talk about.

For example the lining should be long against the cloth, or the forepart is short against the canvas.

It means the same thing as the cloth should be short against the lining, or the canvas is long against the forepart.

It also serves as a way of receiving feedback, so you might be told that the canvas is too long, or the lining is too short. Or the canvas is too short, or the lining is too long. If you're in a position to get feedback, relative length in this way was never explained to me, so I sense they often assume you know what they're talking about and make you get up to speed in your own time.

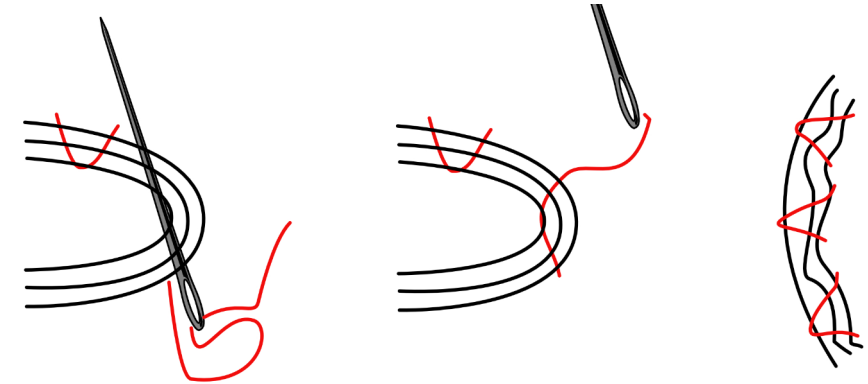
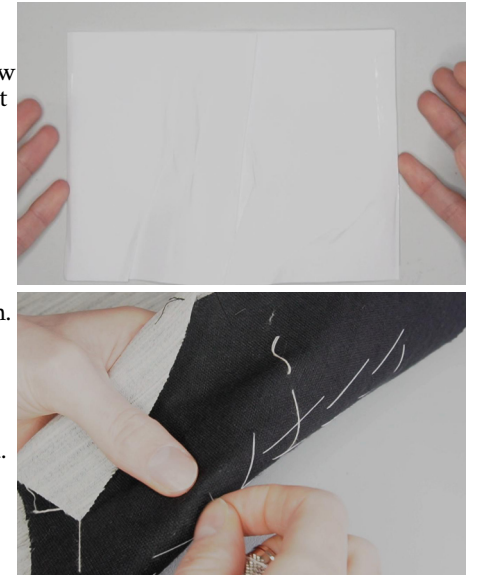


Length and shortness

Ease

The use of ease, excess and fullness comes up in a few places. It means when something is long against what it's being sewn to it can be shrunk to fit the shorter seam. The cloth I'm generally working with, wool suiting materials, a long seam can be eased into a smaller seam such as the shoulder or the armhole. The back shoulder is long against the front shoulder, so when it's sewn it needs to be eased, so that the start and end of the seams match. It is effectively closing a dart but in an invisible way across the seam. The opposite comes up as well, stretching a short seam to a longer seam.

I might be pointing out the obvious, I join the edges of the paper together. The two layers are now joined. It's more difficult to tell, with something thin like paper but when two materials are bent into a curve the one on the inside will have to be, or become shorter in order to fit inside of the outer one. The



radius of the inner curve is smaller than the one on the outside.

Therefore in cases where the inside and the outside needs to be smooth like a shirt collar or nero style of collar then the inside needs to be shorter. Alternatively the inside could be eased in like a lined flap where the lining is cut on the bias, so that when it is long on the inside it can be pressed and eased in to hide the length.



With some materials this will have the effect of not fully shrinking the material and leaving it crimped.

If I try to make the two layers of paper lay flat against each other the piece that is long against the short piece; it cracks and crinkles, but it is still long against the other piece.

This brings me to canvassing. The long piece is sitting against the shorter piece. If they were attached together with glue or if they were pad stitched together they are practically one piece now.

Length and shortness

The tension of the long piece is forcing the short piece to stay very flat. Even when the layers are bent so the short piece is the outer curve. If a dart is put into it, the layers can easily stay curved this way around.

In canvases the body canvas is folded on the inside and the other layers are all on the outside. When it's curved over your hand as your padding the body canvas is becoming short and the layers of chest canvas and domette are longer.

Afterwards when the canvas is pressed to try and shrink the extra length or the ease of the long canvas the tension is still there forcing the body canvas to remain smooth and flat.

Very similar to canvassing the foreparts. The forepart has to be short over the canvas. It's clear when being told how to canvas, as you pull the cloth tightly over the canvas. In some cases the cloth is pulled and positioned over the canvas in specific ways as well, but that is above and beyond what is at least necessary. This isn't the start and end of how canvassing works, this is just to fill in the initial context I had long lacked.

Back to the paper, if the canvas is short against the forepart then the cloth droops over it. It is also why it's important that if the canvases may shrink that they are preshrunk. If the canvas is just long enough and then it shrinks; then the forepart becomes long. This causes it to become droopy and almost bubbly, but in a very different way that fused canvases do. Potentially that is one reason that some tailors will force a lot more excess into canvases than others.

Shrinking canvases can involve thoroughly steam ironing it, but an easier thing to do is putting it in a bucket of water for about 10 minutes and leaving it to dry. And then ironing it to make it smooth to use.

Pad stitching undercollars and lapels are then the opposite. The inside is padded so that it's shorter and the outside is long. This is to make the lapels roll. The inside being short pulls the long-side under tension and forces it into a 3D shape. The undercollar is similar, but it sits more flat and it relies a little more on ironwork to shape it. The padding is also there to join the two layers of the undercollar together. Though it too folds in the way that it's padded.

Admittedly some tailors don't bother with curving layers together to pad, meanwhile other tailors go even further and create extra shortness/length. If you are learning from somebody you have to follow their lead. If you are learning from here initially you can experiment.

- Folding curves

One last thing that the paper helps to show is folding cloth along curves. This closely relates to shrinking and lengths, but also introducing stretching. Stretching cloth is used in places to manipulate cloth by expert tailors, but it is also used in common seams. Seams with just a seam allowance on both sides are simple, because the seam isn't usually stretching that much.

For example if I create a concave curve that the cloth will be folded along the edge is shorter than the actual curve. Therefore it will have to stretch when inlay is added on top of that. Paper can't stretch so in order to simulate the stretching of the cloth the seam that's folded needs to be cut into in order to allow the edge to be longer and then it can sit flat. Hopefully you can see the cuts in the paper opening up to lay flat against the rest of the paper.

If I create a similar convex curve and the cloth is folded over the seam. This time though the edge is too long to sit flat. This means that the cloth has to shrink, paper doesn't work like that though, so it's crinkled and folded over itself to let the seam lay flat.

Length and shortness

Something else worth noting, but probably becomes apparent anyway, is that a concave line can be referred to as a *hollow*, *clear* or *scooped* line. That refers to making changes to a line as well, it can be *hollowed*, *cleared* or *scooped* to make it more concave. The opposite also applied where it can be filled to make it less concave.

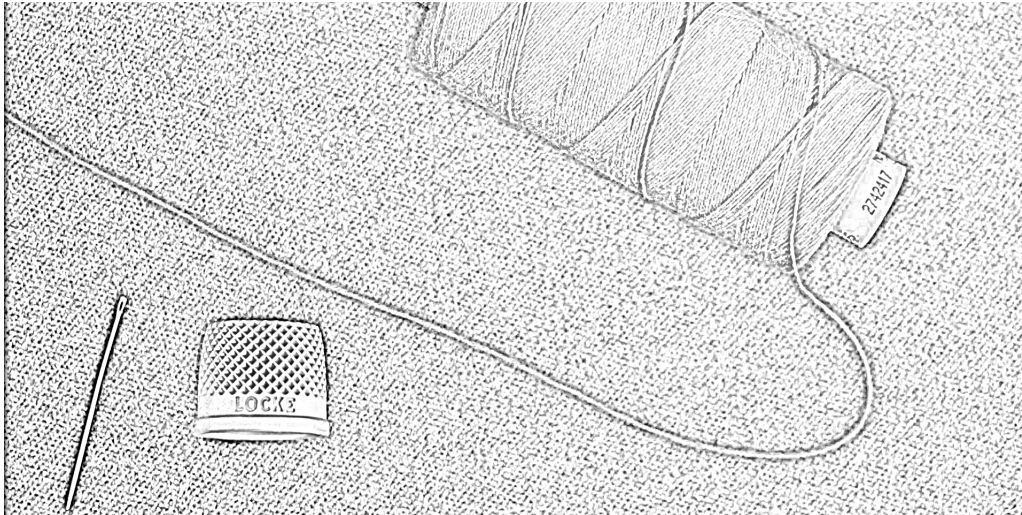
A *full* seam/edge can refer to a relatively straight concave seam, or a convex seam. A convex seam could be called full or round.

When doing the same thing with cloth, this is an seam for demonstrating and not representative of anything that will likely be sewn in the future. Pressing the seam allowances open and using steam and water automatically stretches and shrinks either side as appropriate. It could use a little more work to make it more flat, but you get the idea.



This clarifies a lot of techniques for the future and better defines terms I use to describe what I'm doing and exactly why we're doing it.

Hand Stitches



Using a needle

Tailors use needles in a specific way. If you've never picked up a needle before, or even if you have, these are the techniques and you should practice and sewing habits that you ought to learn. In some ways the needle doesn't matter, in other ways it does. For my expanded thoughts you can see the equipment section. In short I am using needles that are a bit shorter than typical home sewing needles. They are John James sharps size 5.

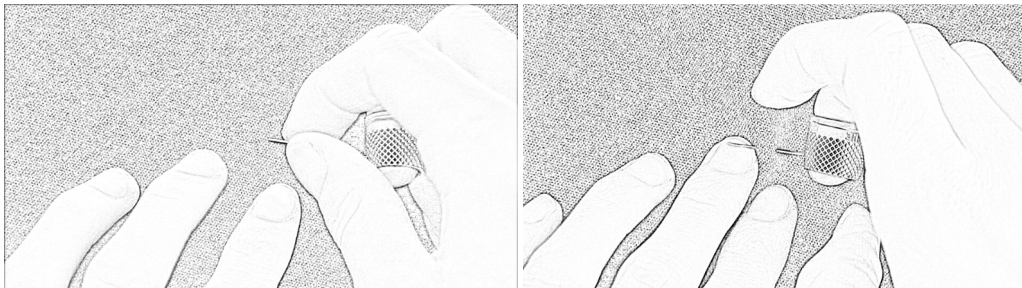
Complimenting the needle is the thimble. The tailors open-top thimble is important as it maintains comfort for hours of hand stitching that this kind of making involves. The technique and short needle makes each stitch as fast as it can be even before you get practice and skill.

On your preferred hand the thimble goes on your middle finger.

With your thumb and forefinger of the same hand grip the needle about halfway along the length with the eye towards the middle finger and the point facing away from your hand.

The technique is to use your thumb and forefinger to point the needle into the cloth.

Use the grooves of the thimble to grip the dull end of the needle and then push the needle through the cloth with your middle finger. Position the needle and the cloth together so that



Hand Stitches

the needle will come out from the same side of the cloth when it's pushed through.

Release the shaft of the needle continuing to push it through and when the needle comes up from the cloth again use the same grip with your thumb and forefinger to pull the needle through and away from the cloth.

The position and shape of your hand to do this requires practice to do it properly. If it's your first time trying this technique then it may feel very uncomfortable, but you will have to get used to it in order to make the most of hand stitching.

You can take a piece of cloth, or clothing and just continuously practice making the stitch. This technique is why the thimble is so important. Even though it's the dull end of the needle, and when you start sewing through more layers and different cloths it hurts and it will cause more damage over time.

Using your middle finger to push the needle through rather than just your thumb and forefinger to push and pull it is more efficient because when it's done well each stitch can be done in nearly one motion.

Starting a stitch - threading the needle

For demonstration purposes I have a very red mara 30 thread. This is thick and bright. Due to the thickness I need to use a larger needle to fit it through. The general rule is to use the smallest needle for the thread. It goes through fabric more easily and the shorter it is the faster the stitch can be.

To thread the needle it's easiest when the thread is fine and tightly spun. Therefore you'll see people snipping off the very end of the thread if it's been cut for a while before they put it through the needle. It can be cut straight, but if you're having trouble threading the needle then you could try cutting it at an angle. Cutting it at an angle creates a slimmer point of the thread that can be used to guide it through the eye of the needle.

Another option you'll see often is wetting the thread with saliva and one I don't see often is drawing the thread over beeswax to stiffen the point and hold the yarns together.

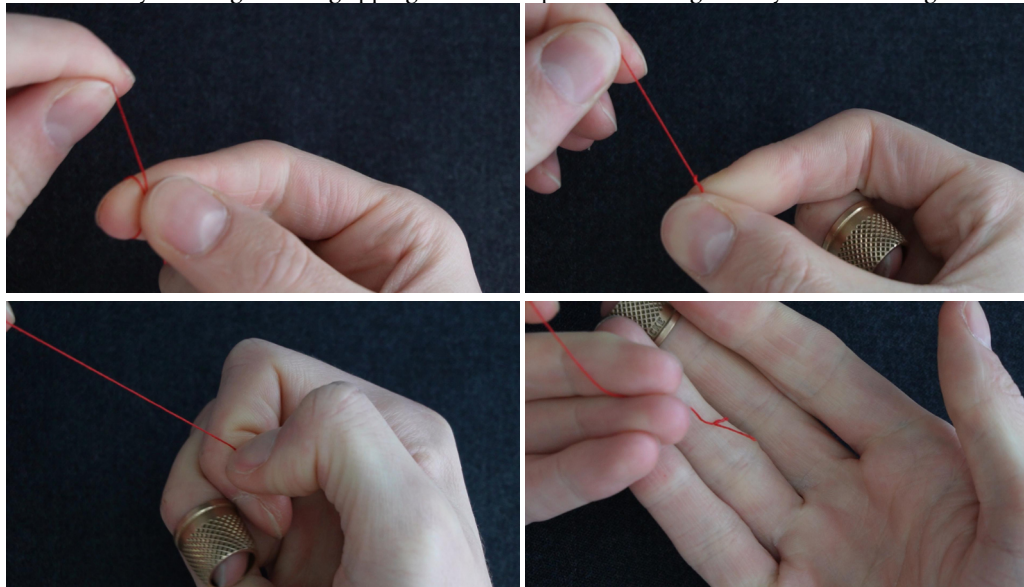
Come back for this one later, it only works with basting thread, but when you tear a piece of the cotton thread it'll have a tapering trail of yarns that will make it difficult to guide through a needle. This could also be cut off and threaded like normal, but to save having to pick up your scissors you can moisten the end, hold the very top of the full gauge of thread and place your needle horizontally across it. Fold the trailing yarns over the needle, take the needle out from the loop and spin the thread between your fingers. Do this right and you will have a firm enough point that can be placed through the eye of the needle. Like I say this only works with cotton basting thread and saves barely seconds, but I was intrigued when I saw it so I had to share it somewhere.

Hand Stitches

Starting a stitch - Tacking and knotting

The important thing about stitching in tailoring is that most of the time we use a single strand of thread. This means that we have a length of thread that has gone through the eye of the needle. One end of the thread is fastened at the start of the stitch and then the two strands are pulled all the way through each stitch leaving a single strand in the cloth.

The two main ways to begin a stitch are by knotting or tacking. As with many things there are a few ways to knot the thread, but what I like is holding one strand of the thread in my thumb and forefinger, wrapping the thread once around the forefinger and using my thumb to roll the coil off of my forefinger. Still gripping the thread pull the coil tight away from the length of



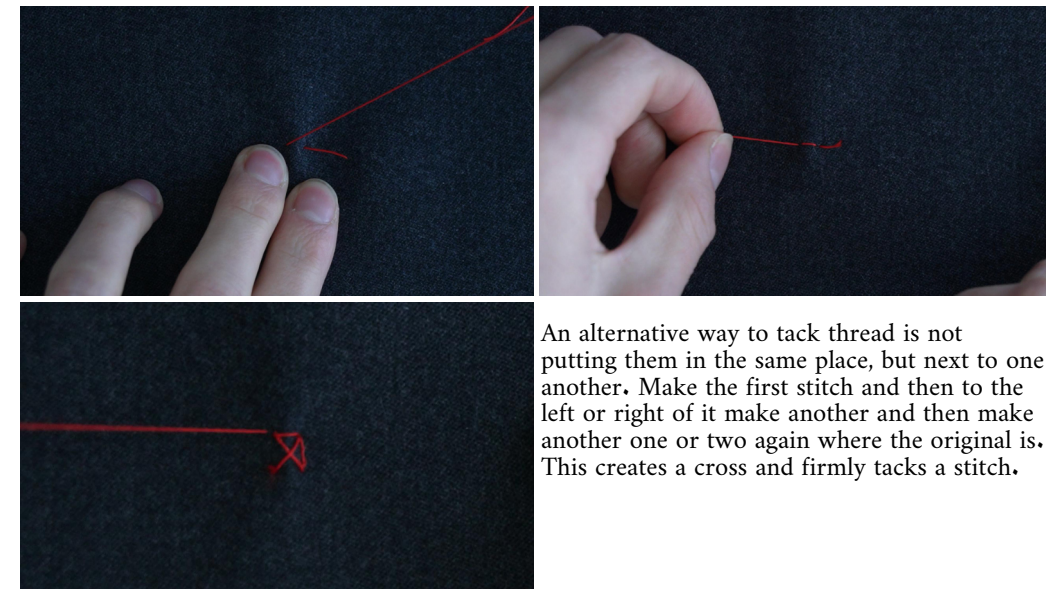
Hand Stitches

thread and that should create a knot. As with the stitching technique this can require practice to get right, but I think this method is worthwhile learning, because it is faster than the other two I'm aware of and it only requires one hand, so long as the thread is held tight somewhere.

The knot is one method to make sure the stitch that you want to sew doesn't pull though the cloth as you're trying to sew something.

Tacking the thread is like back tacking on the sewing machine. It can be used with a knot or it can be used by itself and both can be better suited to certain sewing situations.

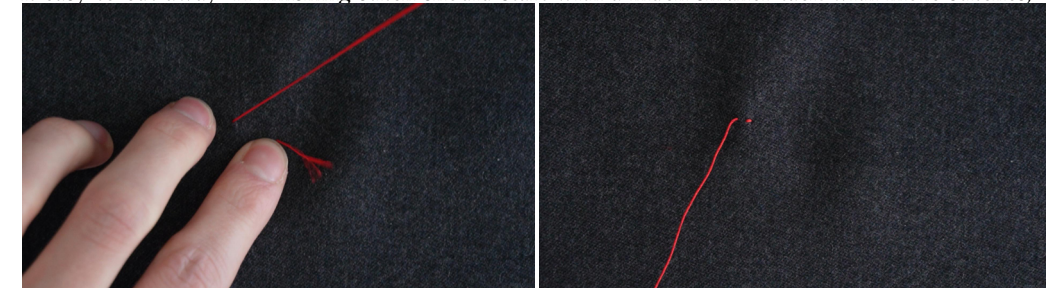
To tack the thread, here I leave it with no knot. Make sure one side of the thread is longer than the other. Make a stitch through the cloth wherever you want to start. Then make an identical stitch on top of it. This is tacked in place. However unlike the knot it can be pulled through quite easily. In most cases you should make two or three stitches in place to properly tack the thread.



An alternative way to tack thread is not putting them in the same place, but next to one another. Make the first stitch and then to the left or right of it make another and then make another one or two again where the original is. This creates a cross and firmly tacks a stitch.

The alternatives to this is beginning the stitch and hiding the tail of the thread between the two layers of cloth. Poke the needle between the layers of cloth such that the needle come out where you want to start the stitch. Then you can make a few stitches in place. Tacking this way can also be started with a knot which would then be cut away after the stitch has been sewn.

The size of the tack depends on how easily you want to remove the stitch afterwards. If it's a basting stitch then you likely want to remove it more easily, so the tack should be larger making it easy to cut away. A finishing stitch should start with a much smaller tack with more stitches,



so that it won't come undone as easily.

Running stitch

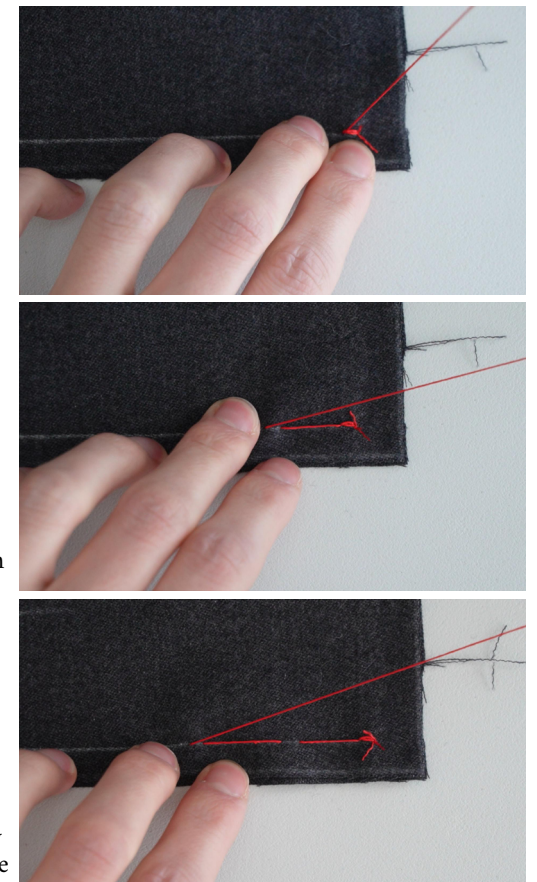
The first stitch to know is the running stitch. Nearly universally called the running stitch. It is the simplest and the best start to learn hand stitching. Knot or tack the thread and decide what you'll sew through. I have two layers of cloth here, and I will sew 1 cm ($\frac{3}{8}$ ") from the edge to stitch a seam. You can chalk the sew-line on if you like.

Knot or tack the thread on the same side that you use the needle. I use the needle in my right hand, so I start on the right-hand-side.

Make the first stitch through the cloth to get the knot or the tack into position. To start make the first stitch through the cloth about 0.5cm ($\frac{1}{4}$ ") long. With the thread pulled through and fastened in place make sure that the other side of the thread is still shorter than the first so that the stitching doesn't get doubled up.

The next stitch through the cloth can be made any distance, but in this case I will make it 2 cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ ") from where the thread has come out of the cloth.

With the needle motion from earlier the stitch is made in one movement again approximately 0.5 cm ($\frac{1}{4}$ ") from where it went through the



Hand Stitches

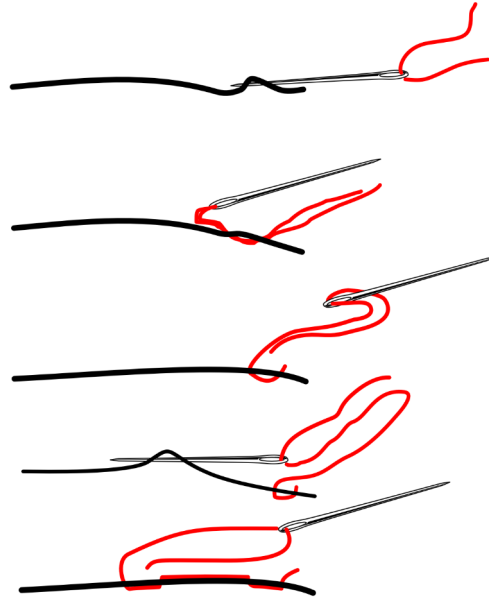
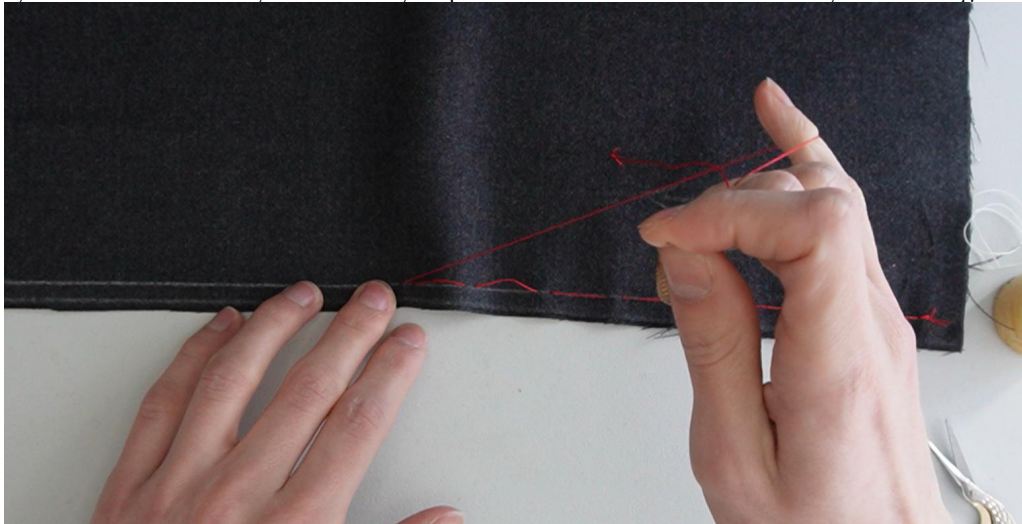
cloth. Repeat that again going right to left (for right handed sewing - Go left to right for left handed sewing) The size and distance between each stitch can be different depending on what the stitch is there for.

When pulling the thread through it's important that the thread isn't being pulled through too tightly or too loosely. It can't be so tight that the stitch is drawing the seam in and shortening it, and it can't be too loose that the stitching isn't held firmly or there is slack between each stitch. This is what the last part of the stitching technique is for. When the needle is pulled through the cloth and the thread is being pulled; loop your little finger of the sewing hand underneath it and when the thread is fully pulled through. Your little finger then acts as a kind of tension spring. It can take time and experience to get the tension right anyway, because it's still possible to pull it too tightly or leave it too loose. While doing this still holding the cloth that is being sewn down so that it isn't being pulled around and only the thread is being pulled through the cloth.

Again make sure the free end of the thread doesn't get stuck inside of the stitching causing you to start sewing with doubled up thread. Most of the time we sew with one strand to keep the stitch fine and to allow us to use the whole length of the thread.

This can become second nature as you begin to sew so long as you think about it. When pulling the stitch tight you'll instinctually release a small amount of the other end through the eye.

Importantly for two reasons don't sew with a small amount of thread on the loose side of the eye of the needle. Firstly it's then easy to pull the thread out of the needle as you're sewing.



Hand Stitches

don't need to move your arm as far away to pull the stitch through. If you have a 1m or 1yrd piece of thread and only 10 cm is threaded through the eye of the needle you have to pull nearly 90 cm or 28" through the cloth for the first few stitches. Whereas if the thread is nearly equal to the start of the cloth you only have to pull less than 50 cm or 16" through.

In fairness this is just to improve your own efficiency. You don't have to think about these things. For me it was second nature, but I've had to watch people sew taking twice as long to do something and I'm sure people look at me the same way. I just want to put it out there. Having these simple things down can make it easier for people to evaluate how you sew if you plan to find someone to teach you.

You don't have to pull every stitch through as you're sewing. As earlier the less arm movement you can do the quicker the stitch will be done. Every other stitch I only pull enough thread through to make the subsequent stitch and then pull the excess through both at once. This makes the follow up stitch faster and halves the number of times you have to pull the whole length of thread through.

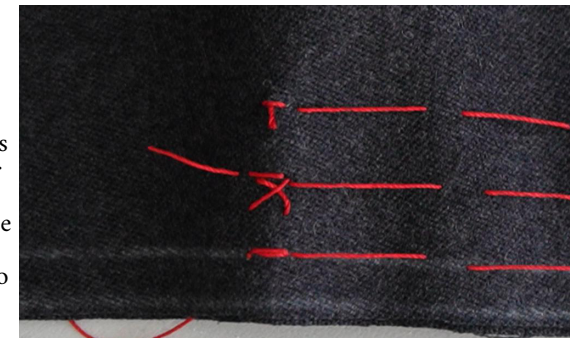
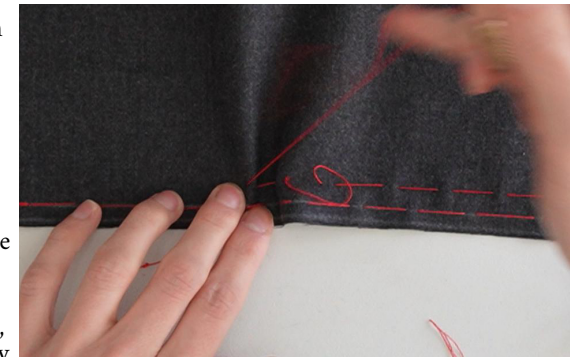
This can only be applied to certain stitches, but I'll mention which. Though you'll likely notice as you gain more experience hand sewing.

Finishing a stitch again a few ways and it can depend exactly what the stitch is for. Firstly it can be tacked the same way it was started. A few stitches in the same place or a few stitches beside each other. The trailing stitch could be cut off or it could be hidden between the layers of the cloth. Again it depends on how easily you need to remove it.

For the bastes that need to be secure at the time and need to be easy to cut off they can be tacked with the X pattern in the same way as it can be started.

The stitch can also be knotted in a similar way to the tacking. Make a few small stitches in the same place and with the second one thread the needle through the first loop and pull it tight to make a knot. Again the trailing thread can be cut off or it can be hidden between the cloth.

That concludes the very basics of hand stitching techniques in bespoke tailoring. This leads to the different hand stitches that I will use going forwards.



Hand stitches

This section is the start of going through the hand stitches that I use going forwards. What is important to note about hand stitches is that there aren't universal names for them. A few stitches have a definitive name, some have a couple of recognised names and some names are used for different stitches, depending on who you're talking to.

Therefore if you know stitches and all of them in my list are familiar, it may be worth double checking that we're talking about the same technique before I saw one thing and do another later on. The name is not so important as the action associated with it.

In tailoring there is a near universal technique to using a needle and thimble that I went into depth in the previous section as well as starting and ending stitches, using the running stitch as an example. Therefore from here I am going to refer to the techniques to go over the different kinds of stitches that I will use in sampling and making.

I want to mention thread first, for demonstration purposes I have a red mara 30. When you are sewing it depends what you are trying to do which decides what thread you should use. The two main kinds that you'll use for hand stitching is cotton basting thread and handsilk. I go more in depth about those in the guide/section on sewing equipment.

Alternatives to basting thread you could just use polyester machine thread. For basting at least, but it's not a good alternative for mark stitching. Alternative to handsilk you could also use machine cotton or polyester. What I suggest is taking a bunch of lengths of the thread from the spool or cone, cutting them into strands of about 1m (or a yard or so) about your arms length, and steam them under a hot iron. This then functions similarly to a handsilk skein and it will tangle less as you're sewing with it. You could wax the lengths too, but I find that ironing and steaming is what actually makes a difference.



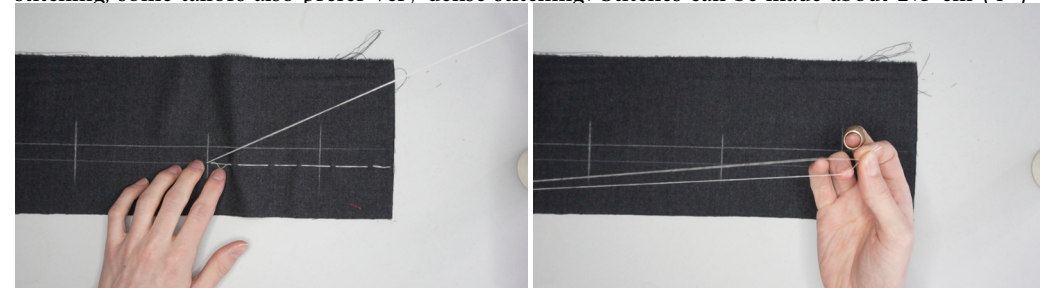
Mark stitch

The mark stitches are one of the first couple of questions that people who are unfamiliar with tailoring ask. As stated earlier the cloth is cut on the double, so to demonstrate mark stitching I have two layers of cloth. I make some chalk lines onto the cloth as lines to be copied onto both sides of both pieces.

I make two parallel lines and then some short balance points, just some marks perpendicular to create some variety to practice mark stitching.

To demonstrate I will use basting thread, the undyed loosely woven cotton thread. I take a piece that is twice as long as the first line that I want to mark stitch. Put the thread through the needle and unlike what I said in the previous section make the ends of the thread equal. The mark stitch is most often sewn with doubled up thread, but don't knot the thread.

The mark stitch is then just a running stitch. Don't tack the thread either. The density of stitching is very subjective. Usually when people are just starting they make more dense stitching, some tailors also prefer very dense stitching. Stitches can be made about 2.5 cm (1")



Hand Stitches

apart, making the stitch between both layers of the cloth. Pull the stitch all the way through, but not too much so that the stitch so far pulls through the cloth since it isn't tacked in place.

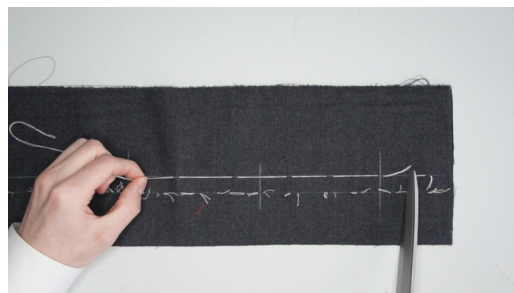
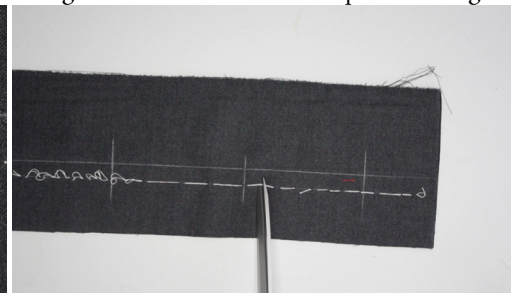
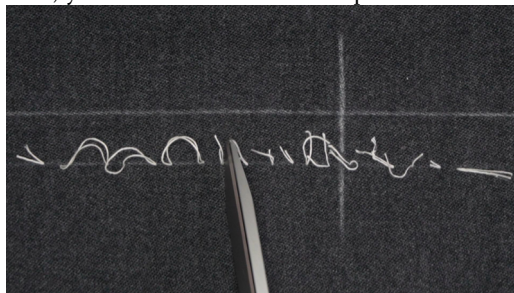
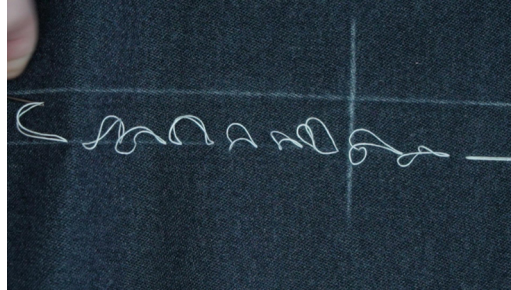
Much more dense stitches can be made that are about 0.5 cm (1/4") between each stitch. What is important when doing that is to leave extra thread between each stitch so that the cloth can be pulled apart and the stitching cut without pulling the stitches out of one of the pieces of cloth.

When you run out of thread just cut the thread from the needle and re-thread and restart like normal. It also can't be tacked to finish.

How densely you make mark stitches depends on what you're stitching and what you think that you need. I have specific ways of mark stitching each piece of a garment and each detail that is the most efficient for me.

You obviously need a lot more thread to make the really dense stitching and it takes longer the more stitches you want to make. I am only doing this to demonstrate what you could do if you'd like to. This isn't the only way of making mark stitches.

If you aren't making the very dense mark stitches you don't have to make just one stitch at a time, you could make a few and pull the thread through all at once. This is an optional thing



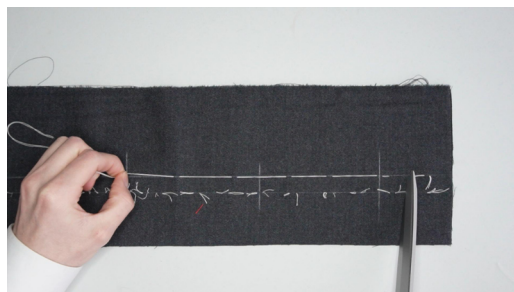
you can do in situations that just makes it more efficient to do as mentioned earlier.

Out of habit, after every seam that I mark stitch I cut the thread between each stitch.

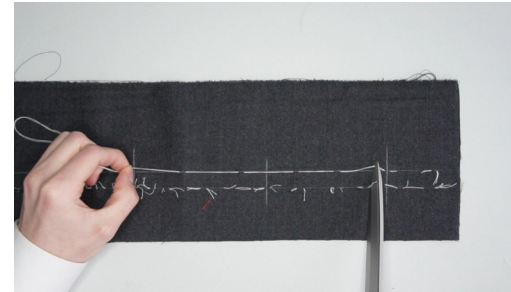
For the second line I mark stitch a bit more typically to how I do it. I leave a larger distance between each stitch. How large this is still depends a little on what the seam is and how straight the line is.

Just so you can see, I will cut this length here instead of using the whole length of thread or stitching the whole length.

When I stitch with a larger distance I pull the excess thread through the following stitch before cutting it. This way I don't have to waste all the excess basting thread between

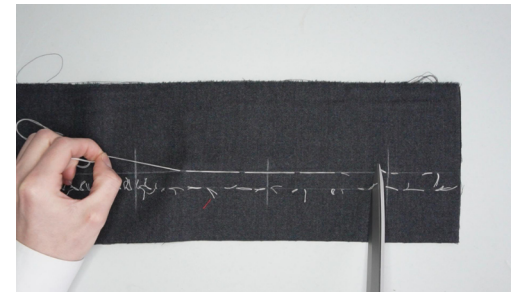


Hand Stitches

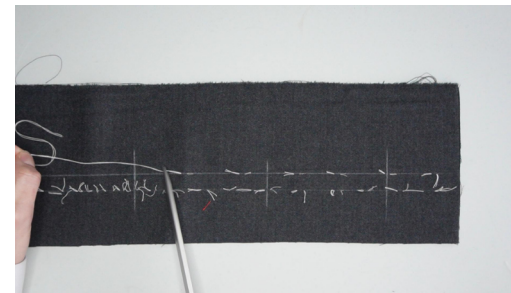


each stitch. You can leave however much thread you feel comfortable to leave in order to cut when the cloth is separated. This way I still have plenty of thread to keep mark stitching without having to get a new thread so often.

It also makes it less messy. I've seen tailors make the long stitches and then just cut from both sides of each stitch in the end leaving small lengths of basting thread scattered around completely wasted.



Another thing I've seen is holding snips in the same hand holding the needle and cutting each stitch after it's been made before making the next one. There's also a basting stitch reminiscent of the lock stitch, so this is not the definitive guide to mark stitching, just enough to get you started and to answer what mark stitching is.



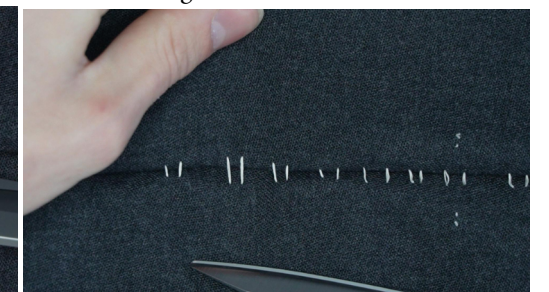
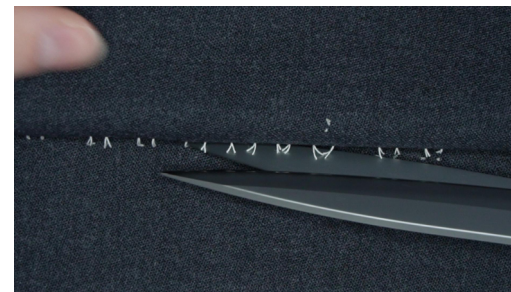
Also to practice I made the vertical lines intersecting with the first two. Making some mark stitches in similar ways to help demonstrate things like notches and other intersecting lines.

Cutting the mark stitches is pulling the layers of the cloth apart and slipping the scissors or snips between to cut the two threads. It can be important to cut them both at once because if only one is cut the other could be easily pulled out of the cloth. Leaving more thread between each stitch makes this easier, because you can pull the layers of cloth further apart without so easily pulling stitches out.



The notches here are a good exercise for cutting more difficult to reach places, so you can skip them initially. I pull the cloth apart, conscious of the mark stitching nearby.

Cutting the lines are easier then. The cloth can be folded over itself and the stitching can be pulled open slightly. Like I say this can be easier with longer threads left between each



Hand Stitches

stitch, but with experience less thread can be used and still comfortably cut. It can even be cut barely parting the cloth at all which leaves the thread more like dots on the right sides of the cloth instead of loose thread.

For the first line I pull the entire run of stitching apart and cut it all at once just to demonstrate. They can be cut as previous. I am aware of the other vertical stitches that are currently unseen, so I don't place the scissors too far into the cloth such that I might accidentally cut them or pull them out.

I've seen people be a lot less gentle than this and just shucks the scissors between the two layers scissoring all the way to cut the mark stitches. Maybe I simply do not trust myself to cut so brazenly without pulling out stitches or snipping into the cloth.

I make the snips then position the scissors into between cloth to cut the vertical stitches again to cut the second line of stitching again this is more representative of what I actually do. I pull the thread apart at each stitch and cut it instead of pulling the whole length apart and then cutting the whole length. I pull and cut one or two stitches at a time.

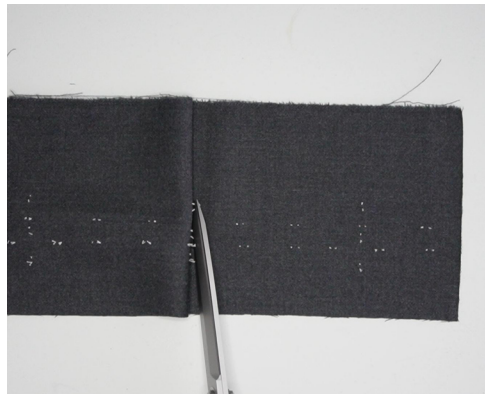
For the last set of vertical stitches because these are the last stitches I don't have to gently pull the cloth apart at each one; rather I can fold the whole cloth over the stitch and cut it more similarly to the one I just did.

It's quite easy to distinguish the right sides and wrong sides of the cloth just based on the mark stitching, especially if you do it nicely, but I will mark the wrong side anyway.

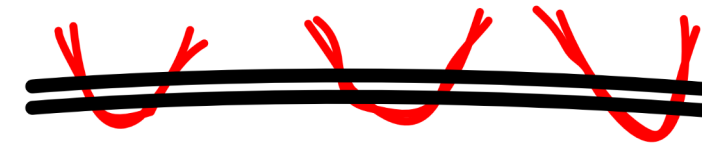
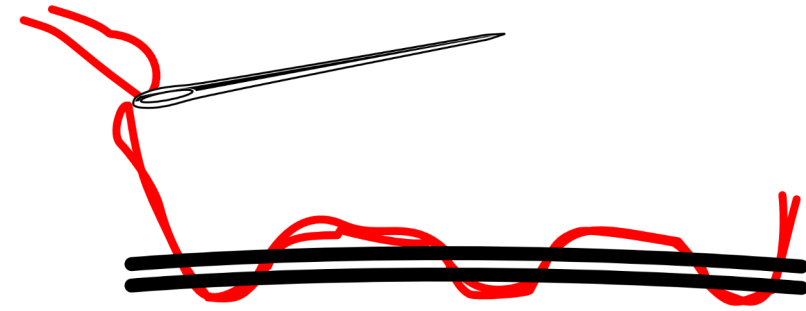
I usually markstitch the whole pattern piece and then cut all of the stitches to separate the two pieces of cloth before moving onto the next. It's then ready for the next thing I need it for.

That concludes the introduction of how to mark stitch and hopefully it partially illustrates the advantages. The information that was just on the wrong side of one of the layers of cloth is now accurately copied onto both sides of both pieces and the right sides of the cloth hasn't been marked with any kind of pen, wax or chalk and I wouldn't have to get the pattern out to mark it twice.

To practice some of the following stitches I am using this piece and cutting a section off to re-use with the mark stitching.



Hand Stitches



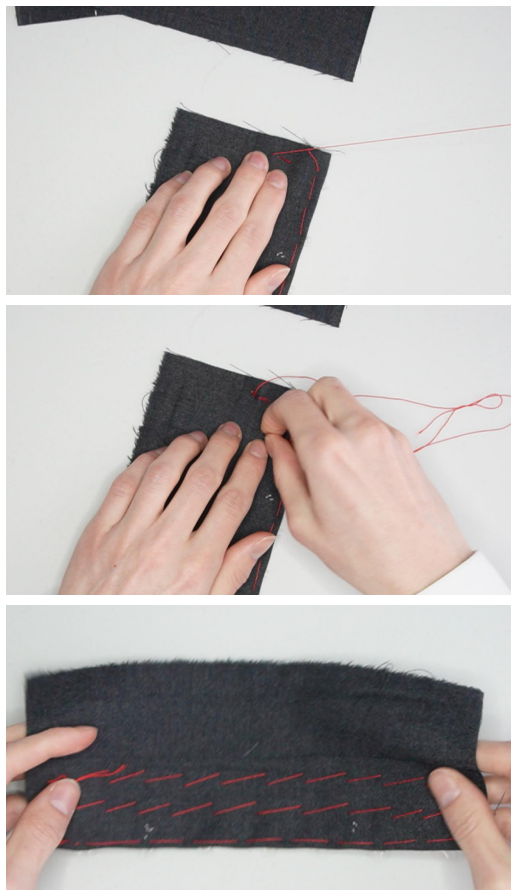
Slip stitch/pad stitch

The slip stitch I interpret as a stitch that in essence very similar to the running stitch, just the stitch is made perpendicular to the direction that the stitch is going. It can be a finishing stitch or a baste and predominantly for handmade jackets it's used to pad canvases, as it's called. To practice this one I start by folding some cloth over and basting along the edge with the running stitch as the previous section.

I am using the raw edge as my direction of stitching and I make the stitch perpendicular to the direction that the stitch is going, so I'm making each stitch perpendicular to the raw edge. The stitch can be tacked, or knotted and instead of moving across; moving up or down along the cloth to make the next stitch.

A slip stitch can more securely hold a seam in place than a running stitch, but be as easy to remove as the running stitch. Also simply being sewn in a different direction it can be more comfortable to sew a slip stitch than a running stitch. I sew it like a running stitch here to hold the raw edge to the cloth.

I make another for additional practice and to illustrate that this is another stitch that can be sewn in pairs. The size of the stitching is



subjective as well. A baste usually doesn't need to be any denser than a similar running stitch, but it depends on the situation a finishing stitch should be much smaller around 1 cm ($3/8''$) between each stitch.

The pad-stitch is the same stitching motion, but often on a curve. To practice I have a piece of canvas and cloth with the wrong-side of the cloth against the canvas. I make the grains here inline, but it's not always like that. I make a diagonal line down the corner as though it's the breakline of the lapel. I make a baste along that to join the two layers of cloth.

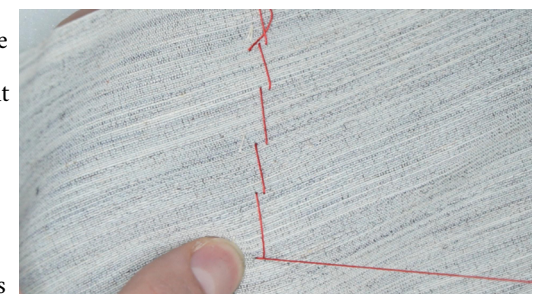
To begin this stitch it can be knotted, but I don't like knotting a pad stitch. I tack it through only the canvas. Each stitch is sewn through the canvas and barely sewing through the cloth. As you can see the needle is making a much smaller stitch through the cloth after the thread is tacked to the canvas. To demonstrate I am stitching flat to begin with. Following the baste I made for the direction of the stitching.

Making the next stitch a little over a cm ($1/2''$) from the first. Since I started at the top I stitch downwards, but it could be started at the bottom to stitch upwards. Each subsequent stitch is made through the canvas and sewing through as little of the cloth as possible. This is easier the smaller the stitch you make through the canvas.

When you look from the right-side of the cloth there should be very subtle stitches. In the best case the thread won't actually be visible and there will just be a dimple in the cloth where the stitch is holding the cloth to the canvas. It's easier or more difficult depending on the cloth. In this case I'm trying and usually you're either using handsilk or machine cotton in a matching colour to pad lapels. The thick bright thread helps to illustrate the stitch. That said; I've seen worse padding with finer, matching thread.

Changing directions back up making the next line just next to the first. Often you'll see the stitches being made halfway along the previous line of stitching making a staggered pattern.

To illustrate the alternative I'll make this line of stitching level with the previous. This doesn't have a huge functional effect. From the rightside it looks like straight lines of stitching instead of a slightly more checkered effect, as you'll see when it's been done.



Hand Stitches

The stitches shouldn't be pulled tight between each other at this stage, but it cannot be slack otherwise the cloth won't be held tightly enough to the canvas.

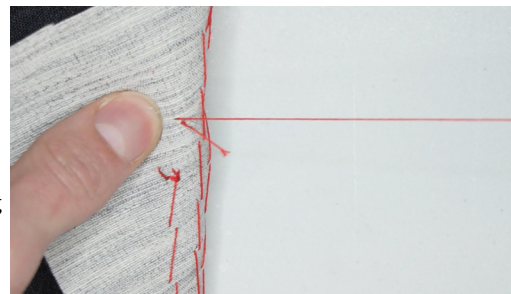
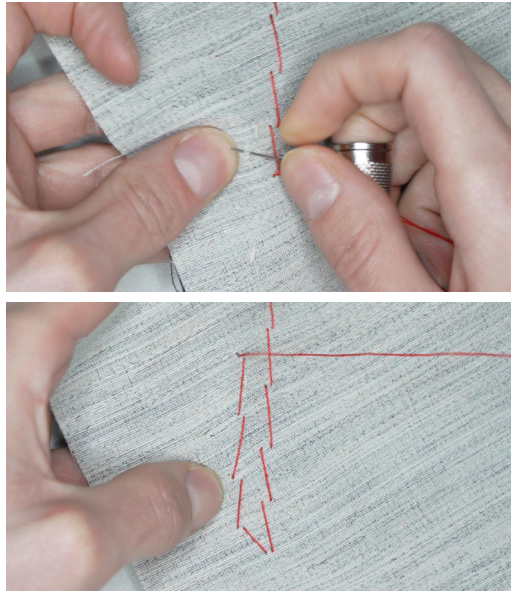
Going back to sewing staggered stitches I curve the sew-line over my hand to begin sewing stitches. Make sure that the two cloths are still against one another, so there isn't any gaping between the two layers. Also you don't want to pull the canvas over the cloth when padding lapels because the idea is that there is extra length. Pulling and stretching the canvas over the cloth is the opposite of what you want here, as is apparent when you see me talking about relative length.

To sew through just a very small amount of the cloth as you're making the stitch you first sew through just the canvas. Then dig into the cloth and then come up out of the cloth and the canvas to pull the stitch through. There's no real technique to only sewing through one of the two layers that are next to each other. I just have to feel through the needle what it has and hasn't sewn through yet.

You'll see padding stitches of different densities, sometimes stitches are very small and close together, other times it'll be more like this, larger and more spaced out. I've experimented and not really found a difference, making two almost identical jackets and the only change being how dense and tight the padding was, there was no discernable difference in the roll of the lapel. In the future I'll probably try a similar experiment again and come to a different conclusion. Tailors more experienced than me will say there's no difference and others will swear by their way, being either softer or better structured. Opinion is personal experience and experimentation. That's mine and it may yet change.

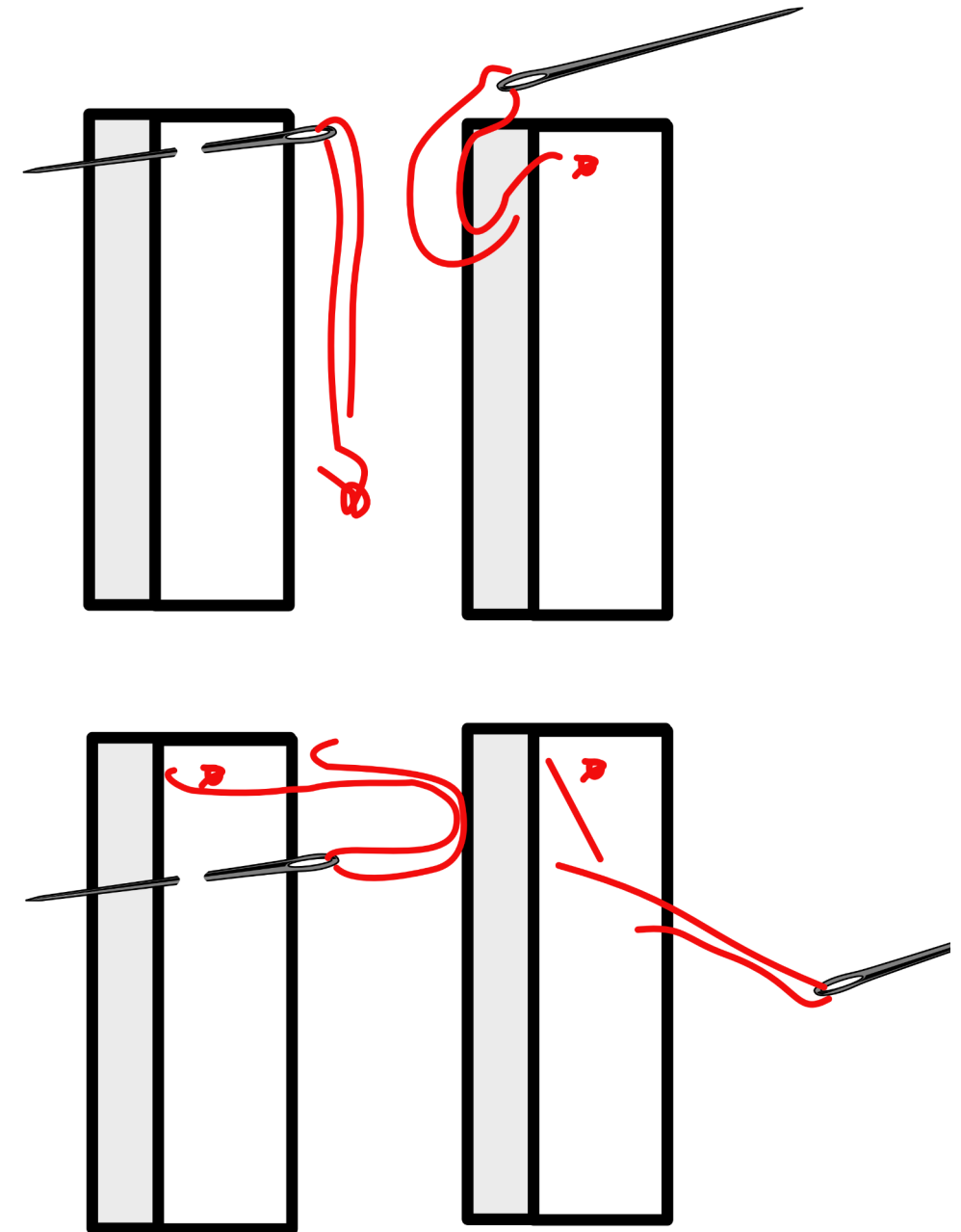
When padding you'll need to finish and restart stitches. When the thread starts running out tack the thread through just the canvas again after the last stitch.

With a new length of thread you can start it in any way again. For demonstration purposes I've knotted this one to start which is done, I just think it's bad because the padding on lapels and collars have just one layer of cloth covering them. I find it's less subtle than tacking and doesn't require any different amount of effort. There's no trade-off.



Hand Stitches

As compared to the second and third row which was sewn with the stitches next to one another creating a straight line between them the rest is a kind-of checkered pattern of stitches.

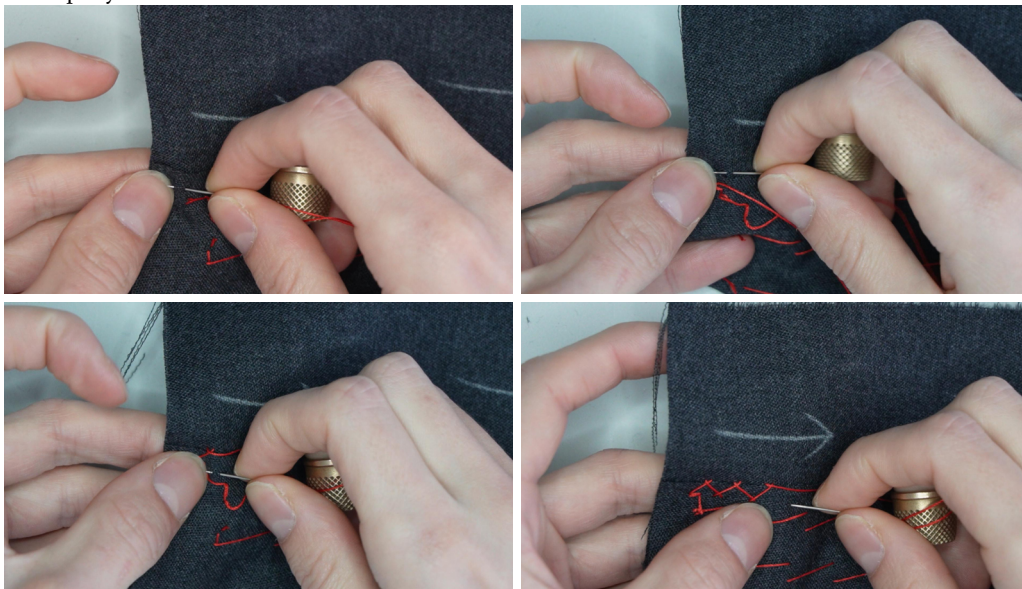


Hand Stitches

Cross stitch

The cross stitch is universally called the cross stitch and one where the direction of stitching is opposite to the direction of sewing. It can be used in a few places, but I'll demonstrate with the raw edge folded up against the cloth on the previous piece I used.

Starting on the left of where you want to sew. For this one I am just sewing it, but I tack the thread on the cloth on top a bare 1/4" or about 0.5 cm from the raw edge. It could be knotted instead or as well. I only stitch through the top layer. To begin sewing the cross stitch the next stitch is to the right and through the other layer of cloth which I make just past the raw edge of the top layer of cloth.



Hand Stitches

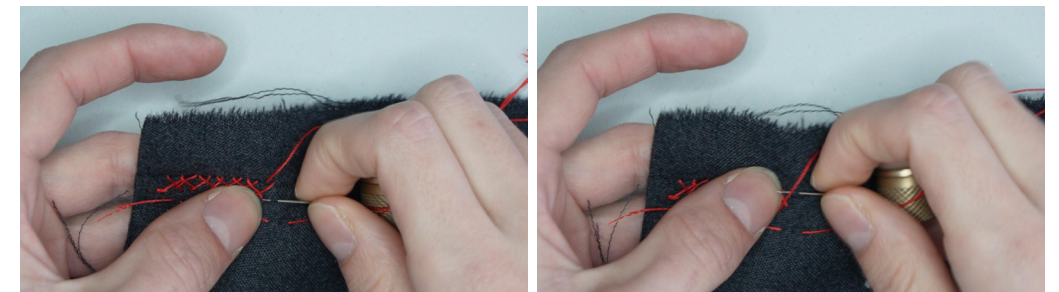
Then the next stitch is made to the right again and back down on the other piece of cloth.

If you do a similar layout of stitching going in the direction of the needle then you get more of a running stitch and lose the function of the cross stitch. The thread tightens and nearly locks up when the thread or the cloth is pulled or put under pressure due to the friction of the thread going in opposing directions after it's sewn through the cloth.



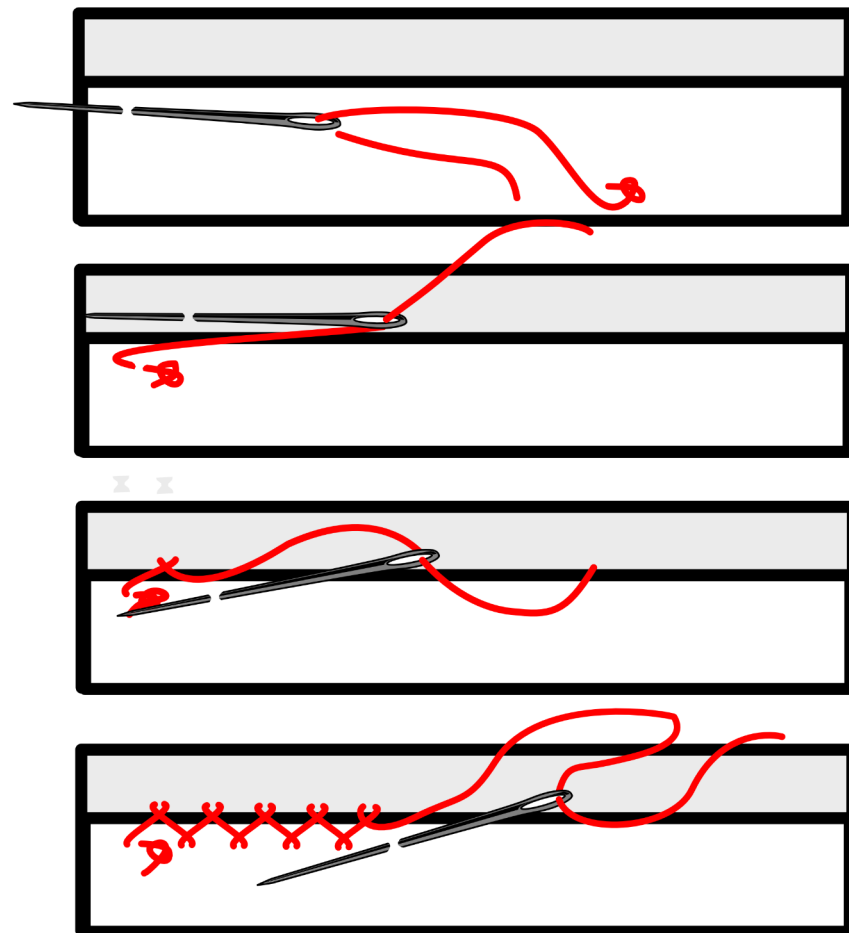
It serves a lot as an aesthetic stitch that covers raw edges in garments or as an exposed stitch joining two edges. Often it's placed subtly on the inside where any other finish would have other drawbacks such as introducing bulkiness. It can also be used for its locking function in internal places where something needs to be held tightly to something else. You also see it used in trouser hems.

What I've done so far is a stitch that is visible on the rightside of the cloth. In certain cases you need to make the stitch very subtly in the cloth that it's being sewn to so that it can't be seen from the rightside of the cloth. When making the stitch in the back layer of cloth make it very carefully and only pick up a few of the yarns. This is easier or harder depending on the cloth and how fine the yarns are. In this case even with thick red thread you can't tell it's been stitched at all from the outside which is what you generally try to do in certain contexts. This variation can't be very strong though, because the yarns you've stitched through can pull out of the weave or break very easily. Therefore the stitch should be a bit more dense to compensate.



At the end of the stitch, especially for the subtle version it should be tacked on the inside layer of the cloth.

Again a key use of the cross stitch can be to aesthetically cover raw edges inside of garments. This is an example of the higher density and size that you want to use in that context. Each stitch that is made is a bit longer and the needle comes out of the cloth about where the previous stitch at that level went through the cloth. This kind of visible aesthetic stitching you want to use a thicker thread such as buttonhole twist instead of the finer handsilk. That's just my opinion though I don't know whether anyone else thinks about it that much. This isn't usually made in a place that the stitch needs to be too subtle on the other side of what's being sewn, but don't sew through every layer behind it, just the two that are being sewn together.



Fell stitch

The felling stitch is used to sew a folded edge onto a flat edge. The fell stitch can refer to a few different kinds of stitches, but I call what I'm doing here a fell stitch.

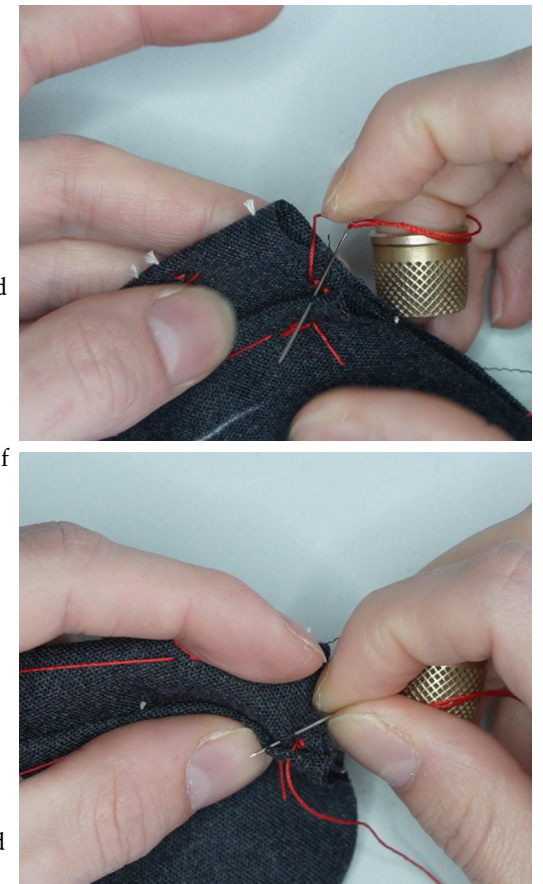
I place one of the folded edges that I have against some cloth and baste it there so that it can be held in my left hand as I'm felling them. Fastening the thread at the start and end of the basting stitch.

The fell is sewn right to left with the folded edge pointing away from myself.

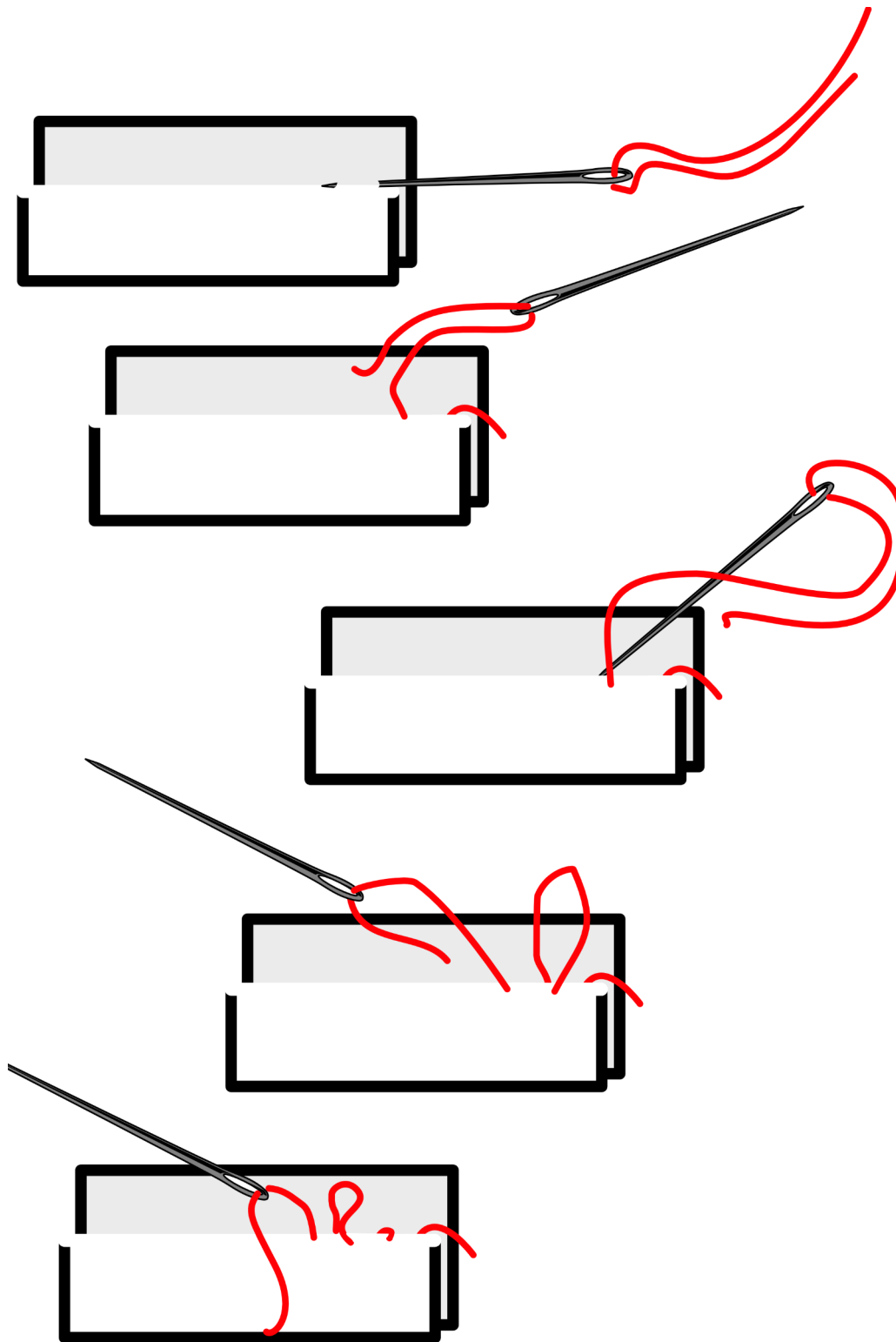
To begin I usually move the folded cloth out of the way and tack on the cloth that the folded edge is being sewn to, so that the tack is hidden from view.

With the final stitch of the tack, or when it's knotted, the needle needs to come out of the cloth in line with where the cloth on top is folded and the stitch is then sewn through the fold just glancing through the fold of the cloth as subtly as possible.

The follow-up stitch is sewn through where the needle initially came out of the cloth underneath, without catching the fold a second time. Make the stitch in line with the folded



Hand Stitches



Hand Stitches

edge and come out of the cloth again sewing through the fold again directly above. The length of the stitch should be around or less than 0.5 cm or 1/4". Pull the thread through to finish the previous stitch.

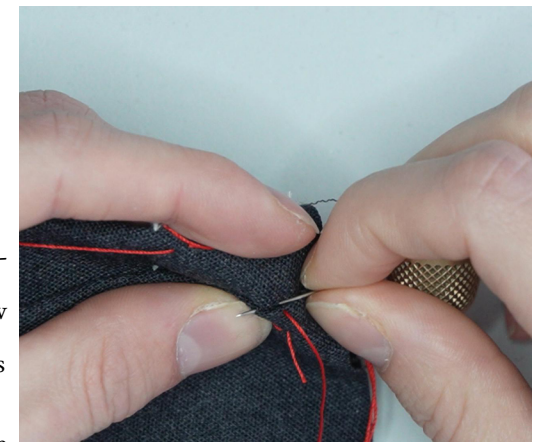
Again make the following stitch back through the position underneath, stitch across and exiting the cloth sewing through the edge of the fold, which should be done in one stitching motion.

It's not totally imperative to stitch through the exact same location down to the yarn, but as close as you can comfortably get will improve how fine and subtle the stitch will be.

Note as well that the stitch is only being sewn through one layer of the cloth underneath. Depending on the context this becomes more or less important.

This now is what making the stitch should look like as it's being sewn. The fell stitch is one of the more used finishing stitches, depending on the methods used for both hand-sewn jackets, trousers and waistcoats. It can depend exactly where the stitching is used how important it is that you need to only sew through the single layer of cloth. In most cases where it's used you don't want the stitching to show all the way through to the otherside of what you're sewing. Therefore try and practice only sewing through a single layer of cloth.

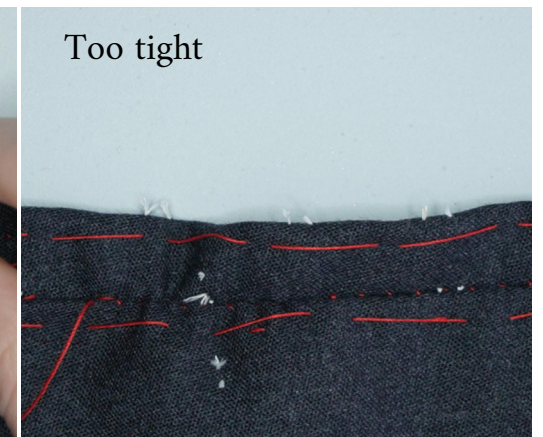
A couple of things to keep aware of as usual is not pulling the thread too tightly or leaving it too loose. If the stitches are left too loose they become more visible and the cloth isn't held down very well. If you've only done a few stitches they can be pulled through more tightly, but if a whole run of stitching has been done then it needs to be removed and redone. Stitching too loosely is in my case overcompensating for stitching too tightly.



Too loose



Too tight



Hand Stitches

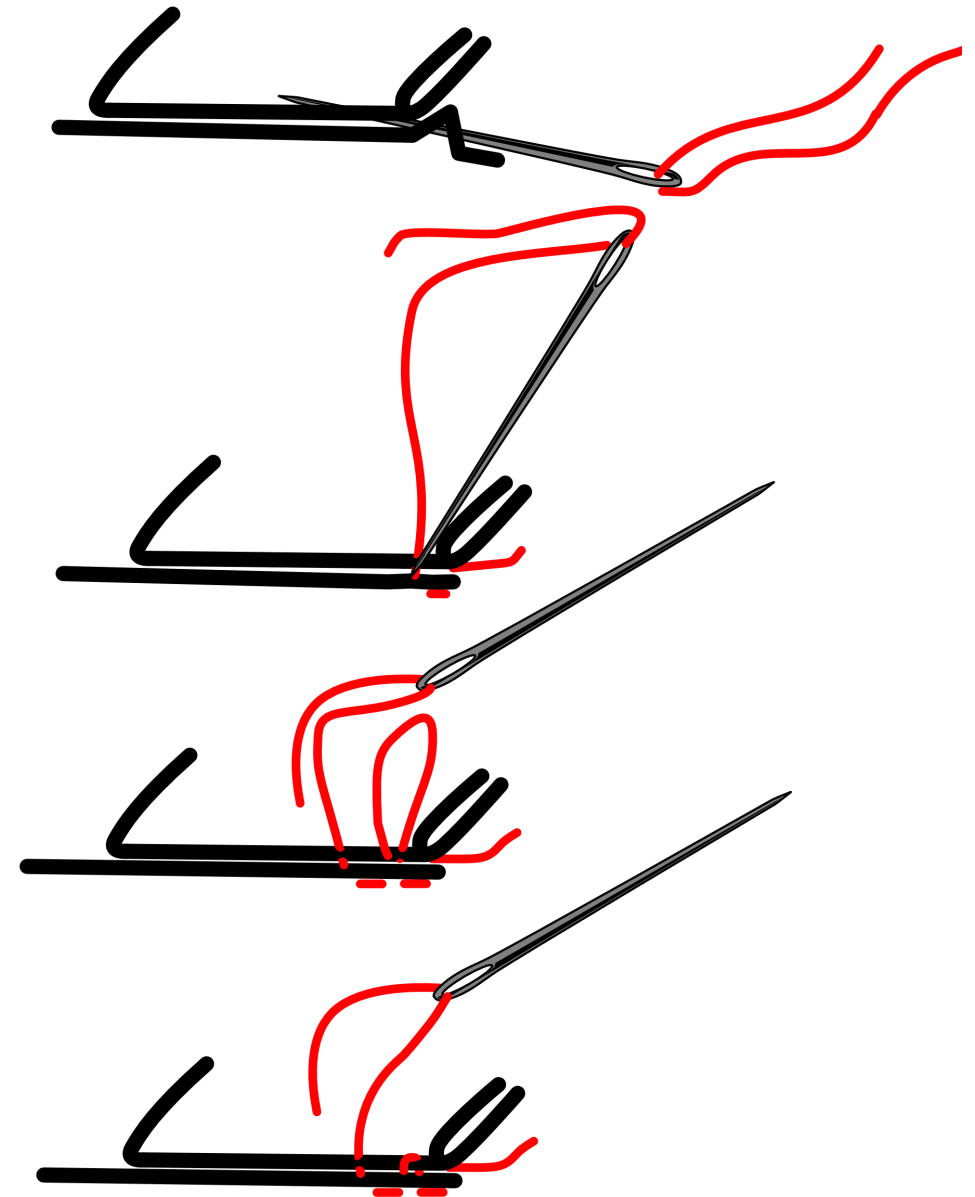
When the stitches are pulled too tightly it is very easy for it to draw the seam in and cause it to become tight and disfiguring the seam.

Same thing, if you notice a few stitches are too tight then some stitches can be pulled out, otherwise the whole seam needs to be unpicked.

Finishing the stitch I tack it as subtly as possible. I try to just tack it into the cloth underneath in order to keep the fold of the seam quite clean. Then I hide the thread between the layers of cloth.

A final note is that when sewing materials of different colours together I've found it's best to match the thread to the cloth that is being sewn down instead of the cloth that it's being sewn to. A tonal match is generally fine because the thread will be thin and the stitch is subtle.

Hand Stitches



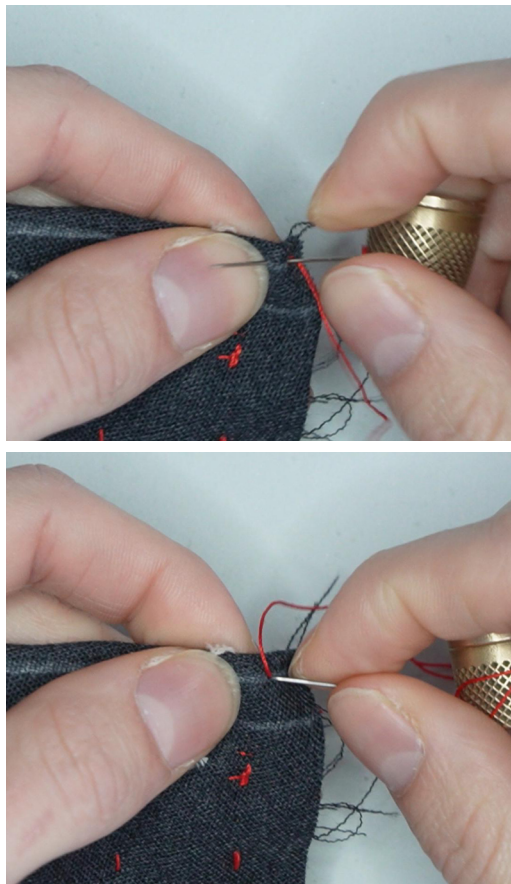
Prick stitch

Along a folded edge now I am going to sew a prick stitch. I chalk a couple of lines to sew along like a prick stitched edge just along the fold and a swelled edge 1 cm (3/8") from the edge. Generally the prick stitch will only be sewn with handsilk thread, unless it's there for specific decoration in which case it's whatever decorative thread you want to use. If you don't sew a prick stitch I think that is called a bluff edge.

This stitch can have a few different names, but I like prick stitch the best, likely because it's the first one I was told. It's used for finishing seams and edges so that they don't move or roll, so that seams remain flat and in some cases reinforce areas.

To begin this stitch I hide the tail of the thread between the layers of cloth and come out where I want to begin the stitch. I make a very small tack, sending the needle up and down through the cloth a few times in the same place to fasten it.

The first stitch I make from the same place that it comes out of the cloth and stitch through the layers of cloth coming back up a few mms along the seam, pulling the stitch through.

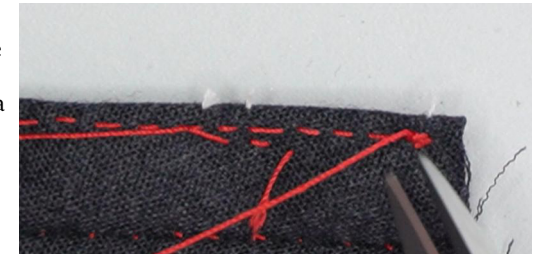


What is important when making every subsequent stitch is that the needle needs to go through the cloth behind where the thread comes out of the cloth from. It might be tricky since the stitch needs to be made almost in the same place as the thread came out of the cloth to make a neat prick stitch. In most cases you are aiming for the exact same place and it can be very easy with fine thread to make it neat.

There are wider decorative variations where the next stitch is sewn further from where the thread comes out, but that's not what I'm doing right now.

The prick stitch is one of those that can't be done two at a time where you make two stitches and then pull the thread through both at once. Each stitch creates a large amount of friction in the cloth, because the stitches are each made behind the last unlike something like a running stitch; each one is like a tack in the cloth that holds the rest of the stitch in place.

One thing you should note is that whenever I'm holding something up to hand stitch it the main body of the piece I'm sewing is towards me and my hands are positioned on the outer edge to sew. For example here the folded edge that I'm sewing is pointing away from me, not towards me. If I weren't posing for the camera it would be much closer to me, but the principle still applies.



To finish the stitch I tack it in place, but instead of sewing through both layers of cloth I send the needle to the reverse of the seam and then tack it in on top of the stitches already in the cloth, through just one layer of the cloth and hide the tail of thread. I could also tie a knot and cut it away or some combination.

The off-side of the prick stitch can look like a machined seam, or tiny running stitch when done specifically neatly. In other cases it can also look like a prick stitch as well. What is generally important is that the stitch does show through the other side of what is being sewn because otherwise it might not function properly as the stitch. It is often a functional stitch and it needs to be sewn through the appropriate layers to function properly.

Like I demonstrated with the fell stitch and have said and constantly brought up the stitch can't be too loose that each prick stitch is loose and leaving excess cloth on the right-side of the seam or too tight drawing in the edge making it shorter. I feel like I'm really hitting on this because appropriate hand sewing tension is important and I can't necessarily say anything other than try to get it right.

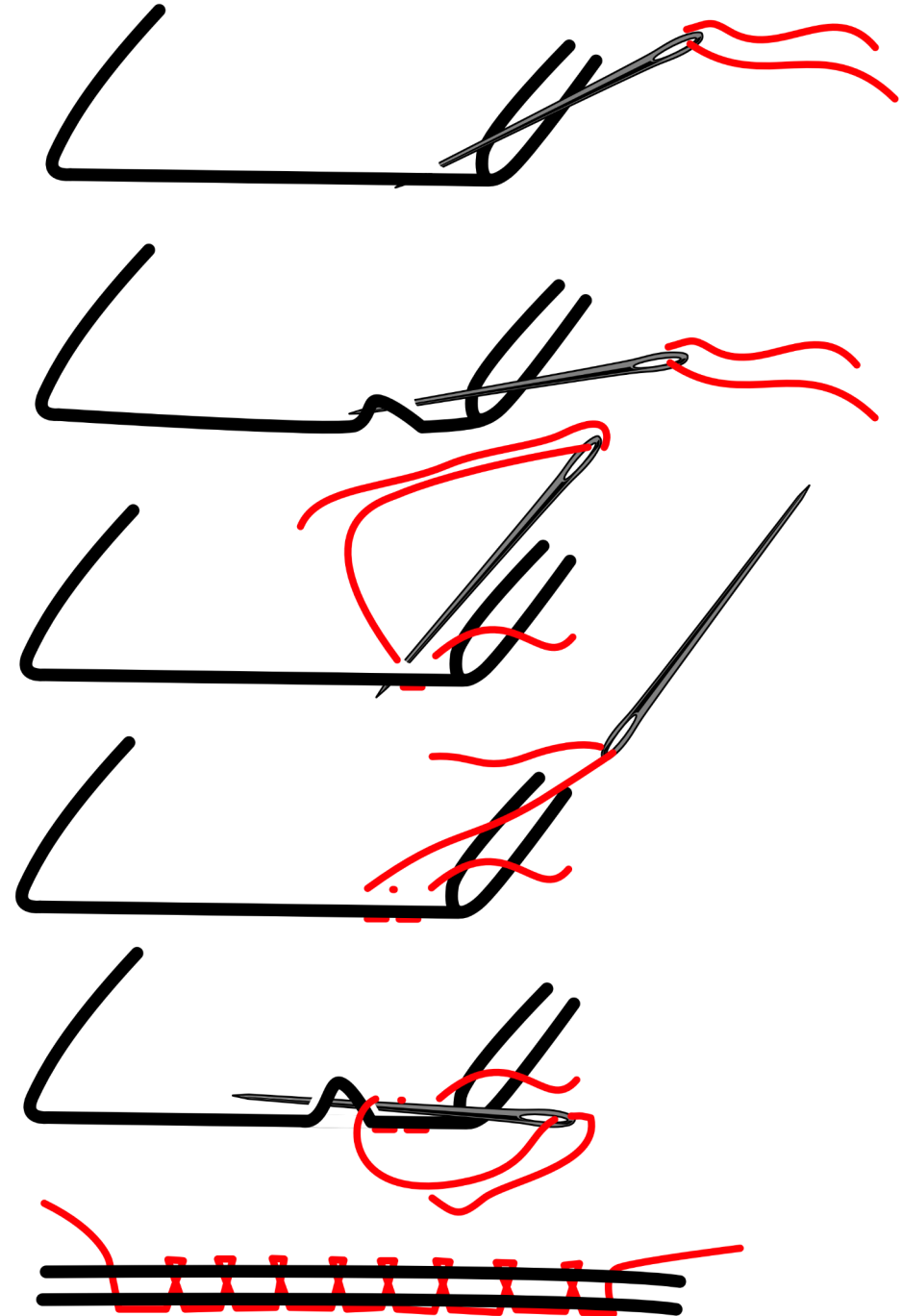


Hand Stitches

I made a second stitch here for to demonstrate the stitch could be started similar to how I just finished the previous one, I.E tacked on the wrong side without showing on the side on top. There are many variations and combinations and I don't want to go through all of the ones that I know, but this can get you started and you can find what you like and experiment and learn others. Find your preference.

There's nowhere to really say this but I think that I should present what I say with more certainty and confidence than it should actually have, but that doesn't have to mean what I say is the one right thing. If I frame everything I say with uncertainty and ambiguity then that doesn't inspire any confidence at all. There are so many possible techniques and methods that I don't want to shut off from you or myself. Sometimes I write with certainty and finality, but that doesn't mean that it is the one and only correct thing.

Hand Stitches



Back stitch

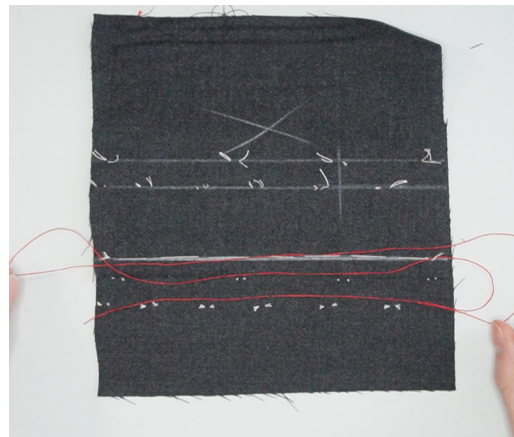
The back stitch is not a common one to use in bespoke, but it has a few very specific uses in tailoring as selling points for jackets. Namely the shoulder and sleeve seams. Whether this has a huge effect is probably up for debate and it isn't a must. It can also be used in the seat seam of trousers and the patrol seams of bodycoats. The back stitch is like a machine stitch in function. It strongly joins two seams together. One thing about back stitching is the greater amount of control you have over the stitch than sewing in a machine.

There's more to be said, but I take a markstitched piece of cloth and line up a raw edge to it. Baste it down, I use basting thread to help create the contrast. You'll typically only sew a back stitch with handsilk, but for clarity I still use the red mara 30.

The back stitch is used when a seam needs to be more flexible, like the seat seam or when there's ease in the seam like the aforementioned shoulder and armhole.

I chalk a sew-line to follow a seam from the raw edge. This stitch is sewn in the direction of the needle, so right to left for me. Maybe worth noting is that the back stitch requires 3 times as much thread as the length of the seam.

With my needle threaded once through I tack the thread at the start. The stitch I make to tack is a little more than 1/4" or 3-4mm in length. Once tacked I make one final stitch through the cloth, but instead of coming out again in the same place I stitch one stitch length further than the current one.



Pull that through and the next stitch is where the previous stitch ends, as close to the same hole as possible. Making the stitch, again, one stitch length further than where the current thread is.

That is how the stitch is sewn. There is a length on the underside of the cloth twice as long as the stitches on the topside. The stitches underneath overlap each other which is why this stitch takes up so much more thread.

It's not too hard to make a straight line without the guide, or follow a seam when sewing this stitch. It's important that each stitch is pulled firmly so that the cloth is held in place. As always though it can't be so tight that it's drawing the cloth together.

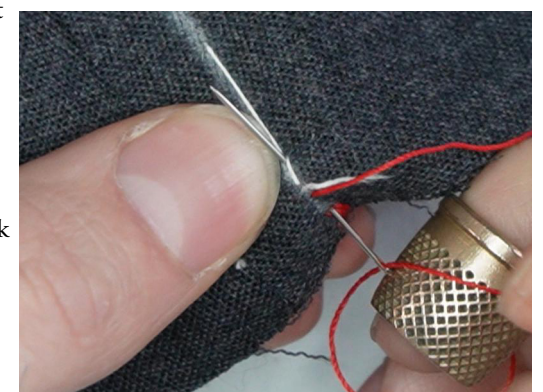
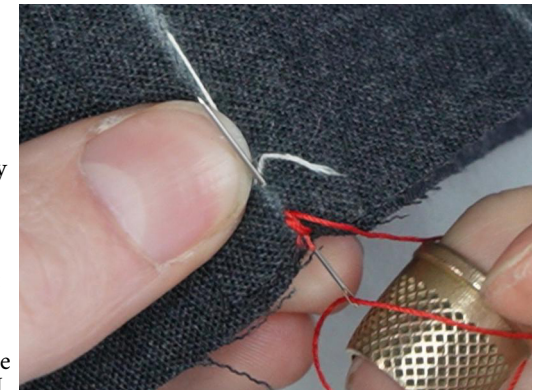
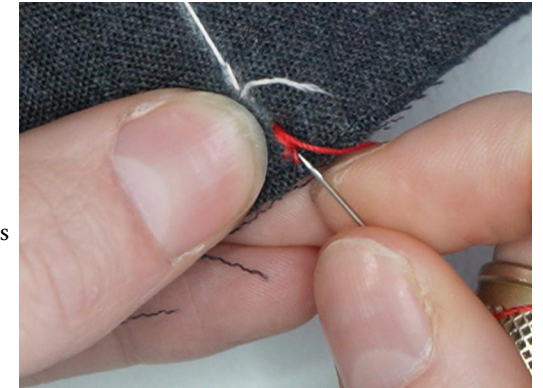
As stated this is often used when ease is involved, but I found that I had so much to say about it that I just made its own video/section on length and shortness.

I'm doing this quite slowly in order to make it easiest to follow. I also find that tacking is the best start and end to this stitch because the tack appears basically part of the stitch, like the back tack of a machine stitch. In cases where I need to start another back stitch because I run out of thread I won't tack to end it, I'll leave the thread and then overlap the end of the first run of stitching by a few CMs to finish the first and start the second. As necessary when sewing armholes.

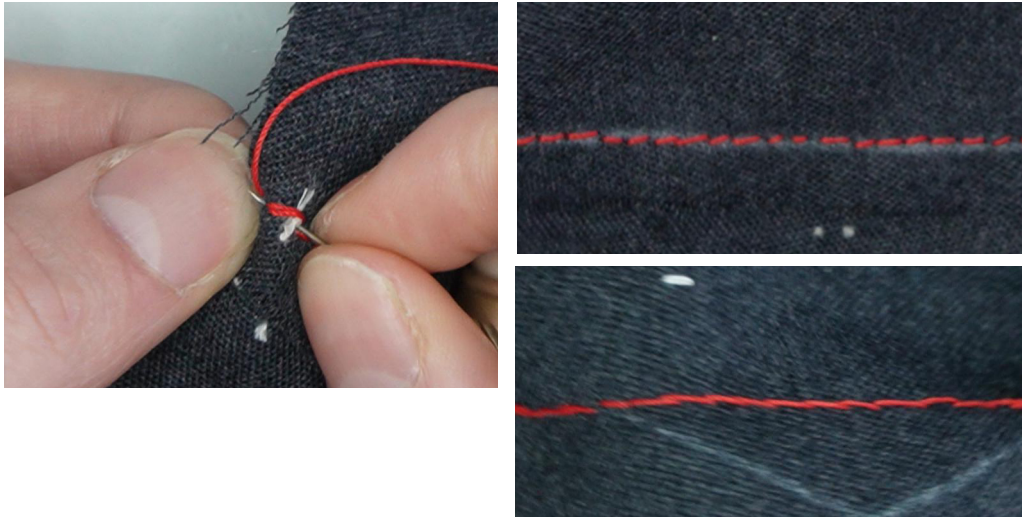
Basting a seam before stitching it is important because when hand stitching in this way you'll be holding it in your hands not against a table. Normal hand sewing techniques apply.

As stated, ending a back stitch is just tacking it in place. You can see how distinct the back of the stitch looks as compared to the front.

Pulling apart the two pieces of cloth you can see that I might have sewn this a bit loosely. Likely accounting for how infrequently it's a stitch I use. Hopefully this also illustrates that you can tell whether a machine stitch or a back stitch was used because the individual stitches you can see are at a slight angle whereas a machine stitch is perfectly horizontal across the seam.



Hand Stitches



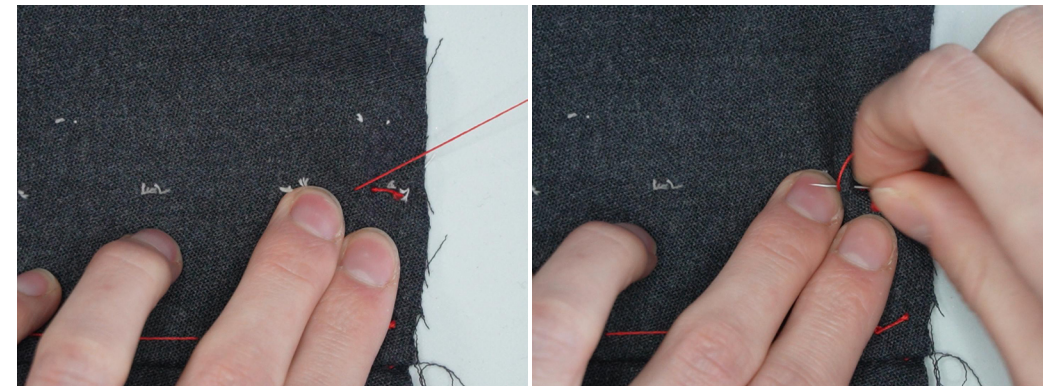
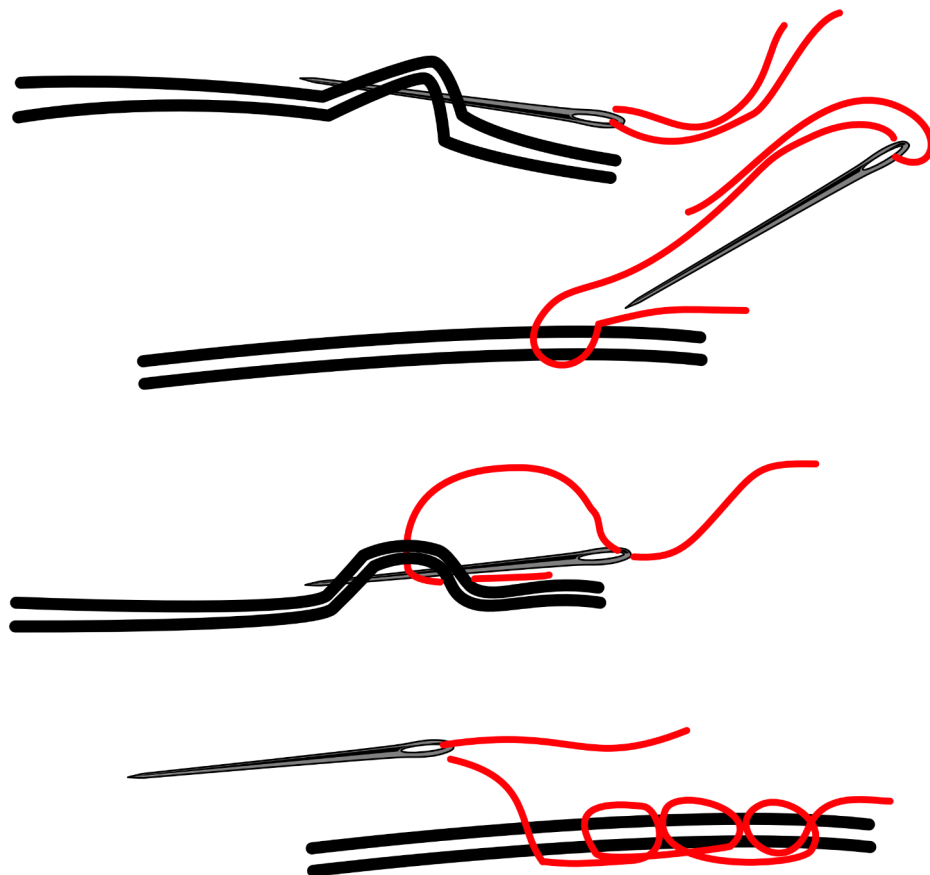
Hand Stitches

Lock stitch

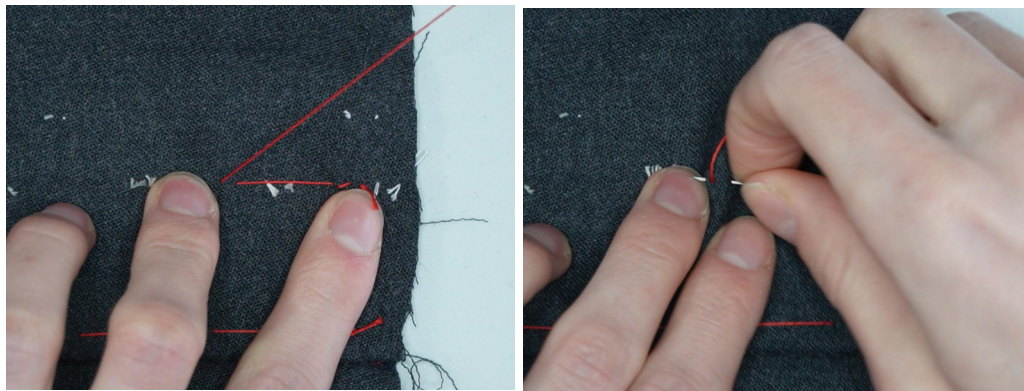
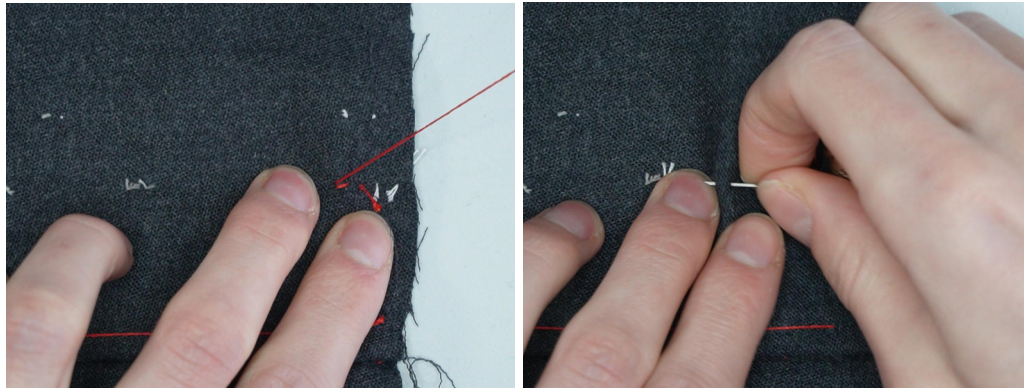
Using the same piece of cloth I will fold one of the layers over the stitch onto cloth on the other side. I baste it down next to the seam, but that's to not have to press it and keep it flat anyway.

The lock stitch (as I think it is called, or can be called) is like a running stitch except every stitch gets tacked. I got confused when I first used this and referred to it as a 'running-prick stitch'. Which it is almost just a combination of the two. In a way it then doesn't need to be explained, but I felt compelled to do so.

I start this one with a knot, do the first stitch and then I make a small tack as well. Making another stitch an arbitrary distance from the first and then I tack the stitch again. So-on and so forth. The lock stitch can be made with basting thread or finishing thread and is just used when something needs to be held in place either temporarily or permanently more strongly than usual. One place it can be used is when basting the fly of trousers, an area that can be under too much stress for a running stitch. I've seen it used in canvassing and on edge tape. It's subjective, you could use it wherever you think that the extra strength is necessary.



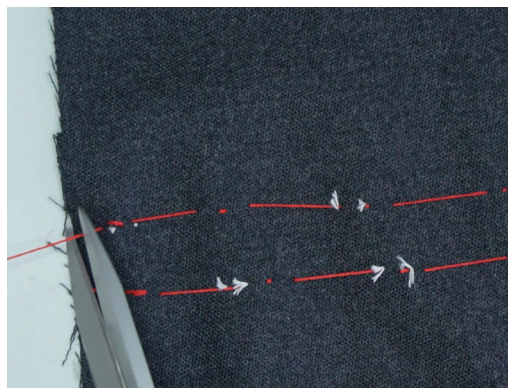
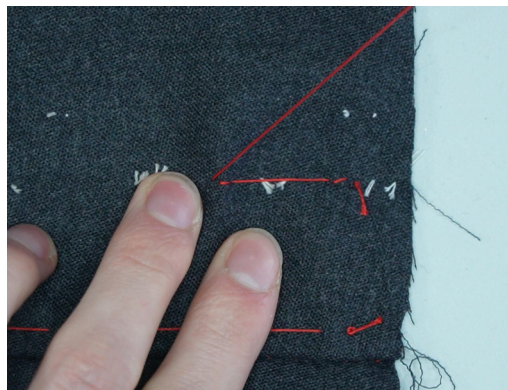
Hand Stitches



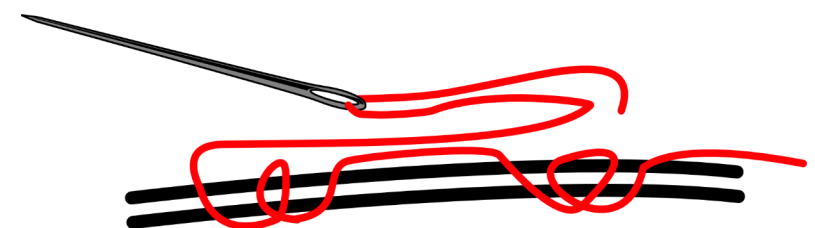
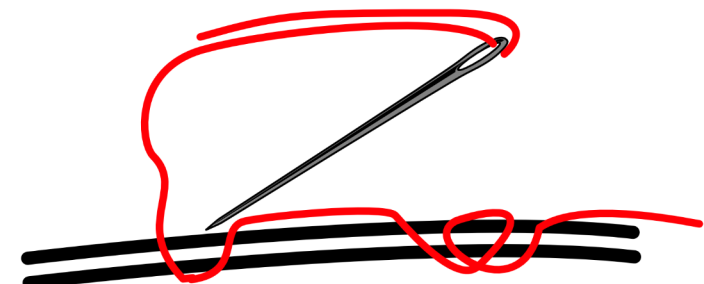
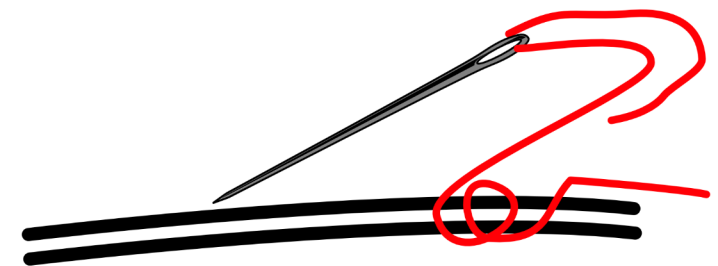
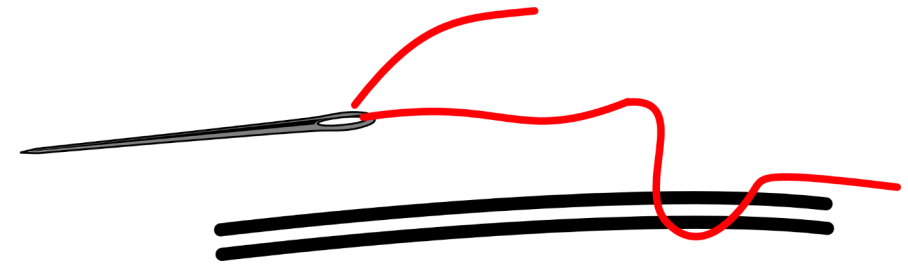
The size of the tack can vary, to a stitch as small as a prick stitch to a large tack. You recognise it almost anywhere that there is one long stitch and one small stitch alternating along a seam.

The 'lock stitch' is also not to be confused with the 'lock stitch' that a sewing machine sews. This is a lock stitch in that between every stitch it is locked in place.

It can be tacked at the end however you feel like it. This is a stitch where you can pull through two lengths at once, but it's important that it's the tack and the following stitch that is being pulled through. It gets stuck when you try to pull the stitch and the tack though at the same time. The stitch can follow any line, there's no reason that I followed the mark stitches.



Hand Stitches



Hand Stitches

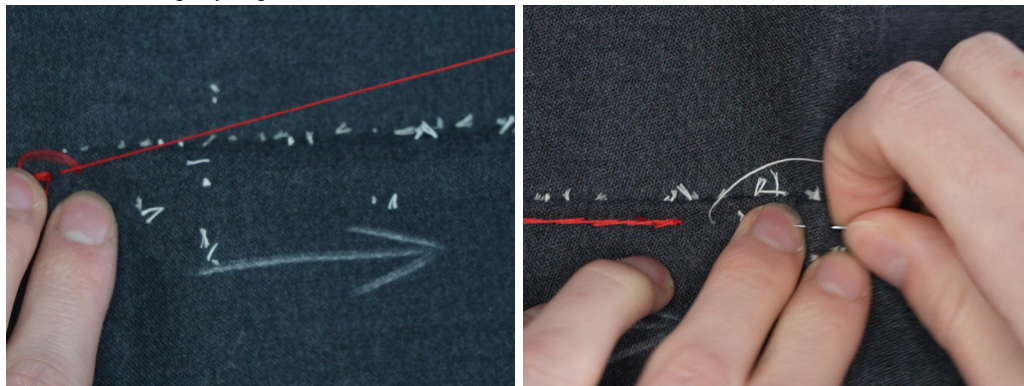
Blind stitch

I take another piece of fabric for the back stitch. I fold over one edge and place it against the other piece of cloth. This is only for demonstration so there's no need to place it specifically at all, but I have folded over one edge on purpose.

The blind stitch (Whether that's its preferred name or not I don't know) is like the cross stitch in that it's sewn backwards, or left to right for right-handed sewing.

Secure it in any way on to the leftmost place that needs to be stitched. I tack this one a few times. To sew the blind stitch I go one stitch length away from where I started and make a stitch back towards it. Coming out from the fabric as close to where the previous stitch went into the fabric.

There are a few uses of this stitch and it can be done with basting thread or finishing thread. One use is that it's a strong stitch. What you might notice is that its front looks a bit like the back stitches back. Therefore pull the stitch firmly in order to make sure the two pieces of cloth are held tightly together.



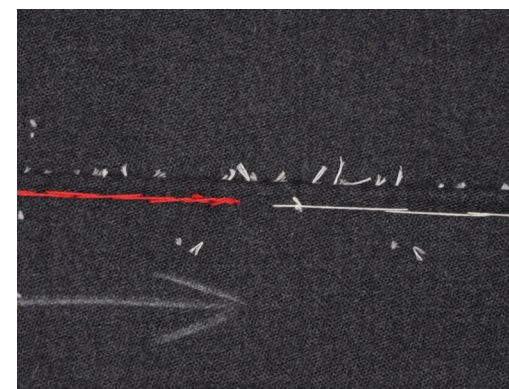
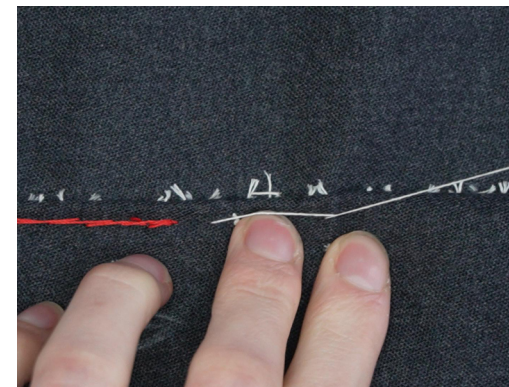
Hand Stitches

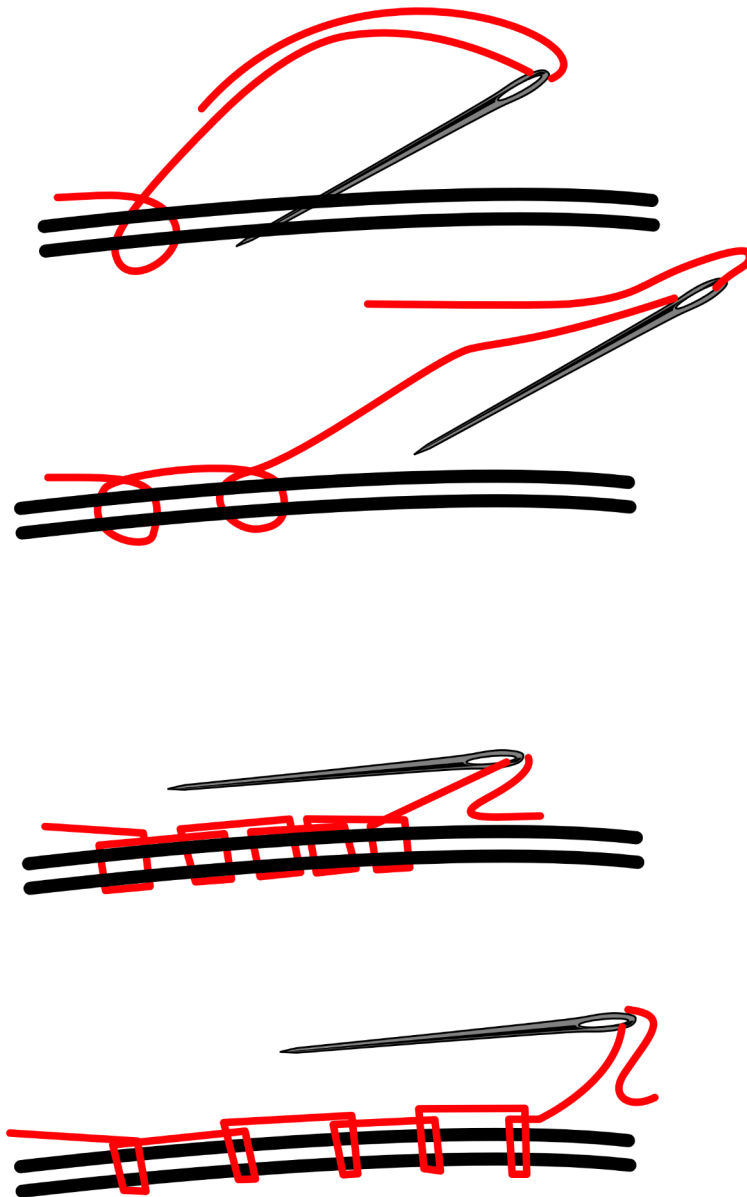
It can also be used when you can't sew from the other side and need a strong but clean stitch on the opposite side of the seam that you *can* sew from. The size of the stitch can vary as always, a finishing stitch should be made so that the stitch length is smaller and that the thread doesn't show as much on the other side.

A baste can be sewn where the stitch length is wider, so each stitch I make is further away from each other and the stitch itself is like a medium to large tack size.

Finishing this stitch is no different to normal.

The blind stitch can also just be used when the direction of stitching is just easier to do left to right instead of right to left. It's not that much more difficult to remove a large basted blind stitch than a basted running stitch.





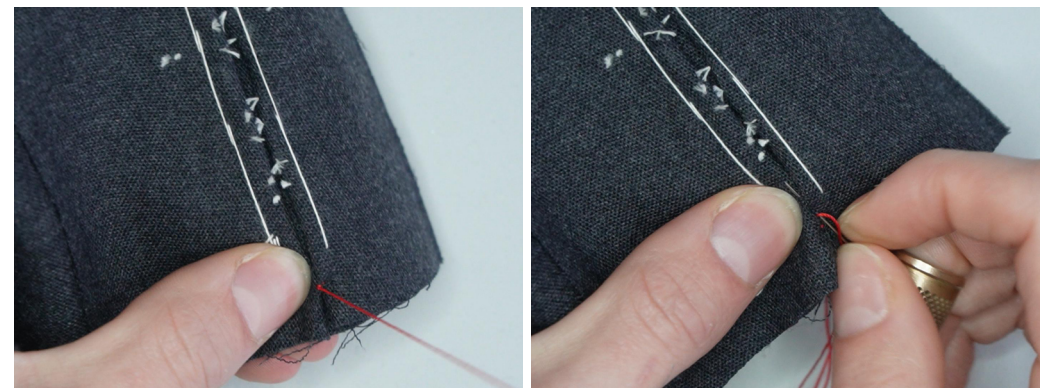
Ladder stitch

This ladder stitch (As I think it's quite universally referred to) requires a specific layout of cloth to practice. The ladder stitch is used in one whole place in the jacket and sometimes not even at all. For the top collar method I use I do use the ladder stitch, so it's important to practice.

I make a fold on one piece of cloth and lay the fold onto the cloth. To baste it down I blind stitch it because the gorge line is one of the places it's recommended to baste it securely over the normal running stitch.

The other piece of cloth is folded and gets blind stitched just next to it. The edges should be just touching.

It was a mistake to fold along the mark stitches though, they just get in the way.



Hand Stitches

To begin I send the needle between the layers of cloth on the right-hand-side of the folded and come out about on the fold of the first piece. I then make some tiny stitches to tack the thread in place and across the two folds, not sewing though anything else. The start doesn't have to be as clean as this since the start is generally covered by lining.

I make one short stitch into the left-hand-side fold as you look at it from where it's tacked and then exit the fold a few mms along the edge.

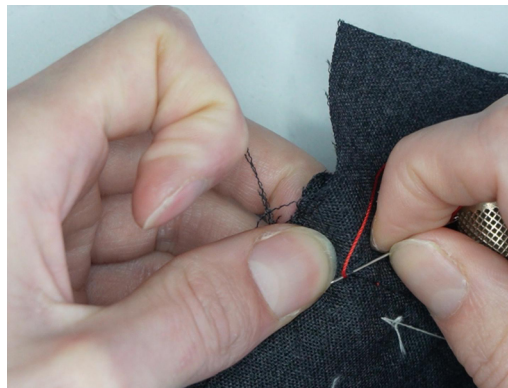
On the opposite fold I stitch into that one level with where I just exited the left-hand-side.

I then do every stitch in pairs. I send the needle a few mms along the fold exit the cloth and immediately end the other side as level as possible with the exit. This is then pushed along the fold a little bit, exiting the left-hand-side folded edge again. It then continues that way all along the seam. Make sure each stitch is given an appropriate amount of time to be sewn so that it's done well.

If it's done nicely the thread should not be visible at all, and as you can't see I am sewing with a bright red gutermann mara 30. It is usually sewn with handsilk.

Pulling the two seams apart it can become clear why this is called the ladder stitch.

I simple choose to start each pair of stitches sewing into the right and then the left, but they could be done singularly or other way around. Be consistent with your practice though.

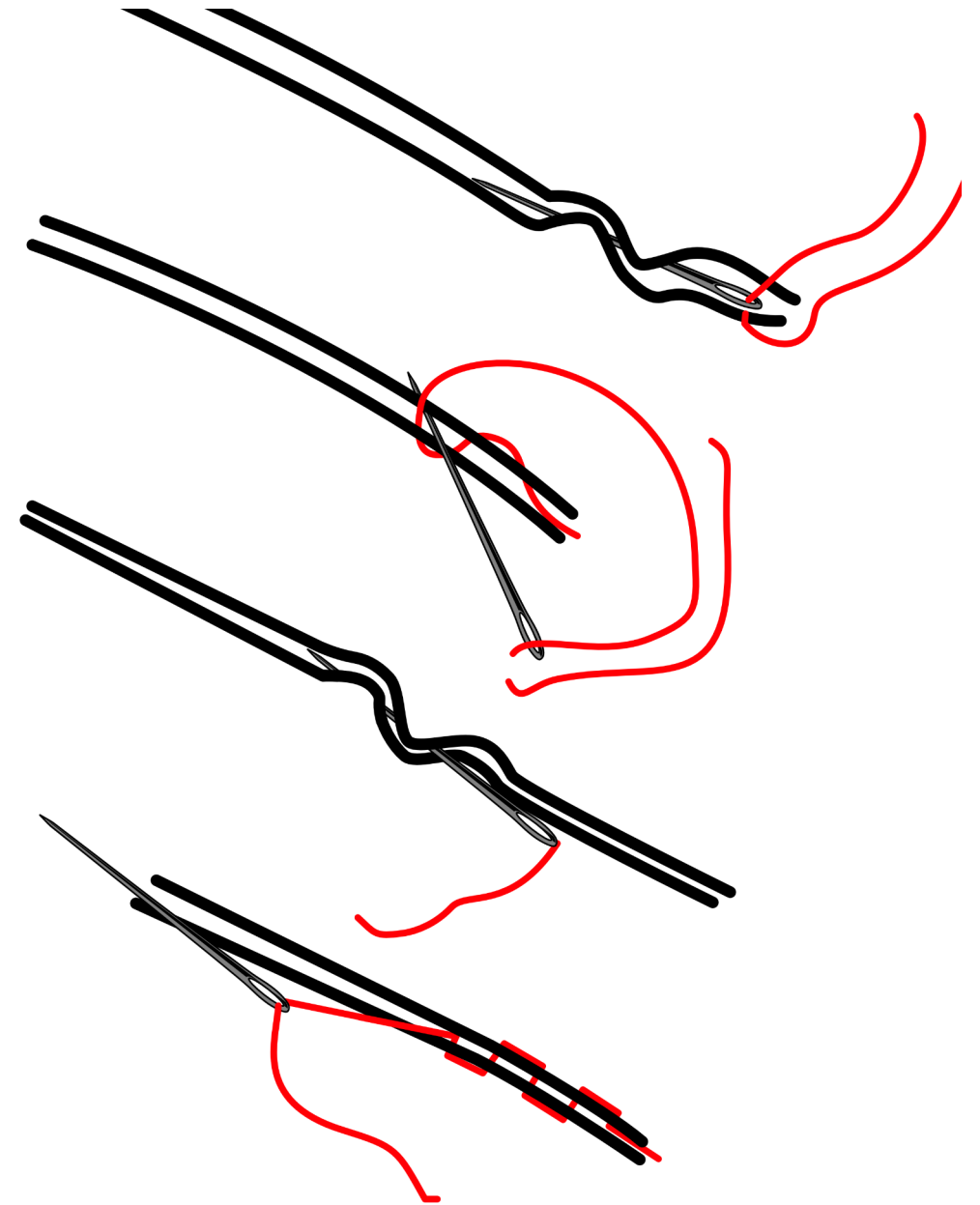


Hand Stitches

Under no circumstances should the ladder stitch be used to sew up a seam. It's practically a running stitch on its side, it's not a strong stitch, which is why it needs to be quite dense.

As started one method of the top collar doesn't even require this stitch and sometimes it's not used at all, rather a miniscule slip stitch or something to sew the gorge line up, but this what I am going to use later on.

I finish the stitch quite similarly to how I start, tacking it in place, but then I send the needle to the other side of the cloth and tack it further proceeding to hide the tail of the thread.



Chain stitch

With another scrap I mark a sew-line 1 cm from the edge to follow. This is another stitch that requires 3 times the thread as the length of the stitch. Sometimes you'll see tailors just pull the thread through the cloth once before tacking a stitch. Have you seen that before? That's not anything other than underestimating how long the thread was and accidentally pulling it all the way through.

Tack the stitch. Hold the thread across the seam and make the next stitch by sending the needle through the cloth from about the same place as it just came out of the cloth. With the point of the needle coming out above the thread across the sew-line.

Pull the thread through towards the sew line which will draw the loop closed and it'll stop when it hits the point that the needle just came out of the cloth.

Now again hold the thread just ahead of the stitch that was just sewn. Send the needle through the cloth again from inside of the loop that was just closed to make another small stitch.

This might be the one stitch that is sewn in a



perhaps different way to the rest because of how the stitch needs to be pulled along the sew line and how the loop is created.

This is not a chain stitch like you get from a machine. Unfortunately it would take incredible care to make a stitch that can all be popped out. This stitch is used for drawing in seams or for adding a flexible strength to an edge. It's often used in place of twill tape along armholes to stop it from over stretching or to shorten the seam itself.



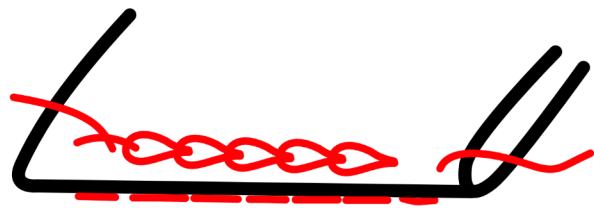
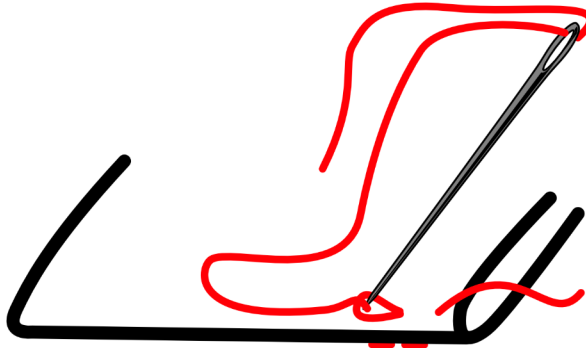
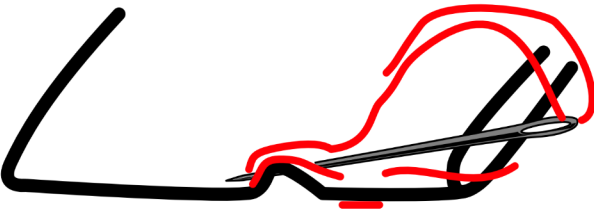
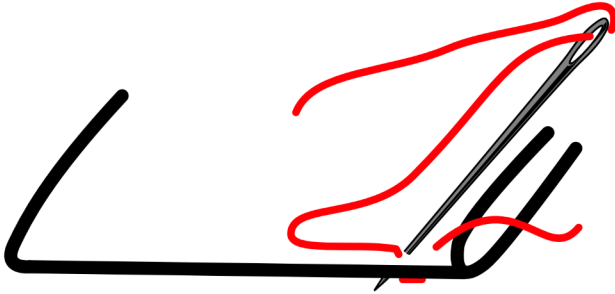
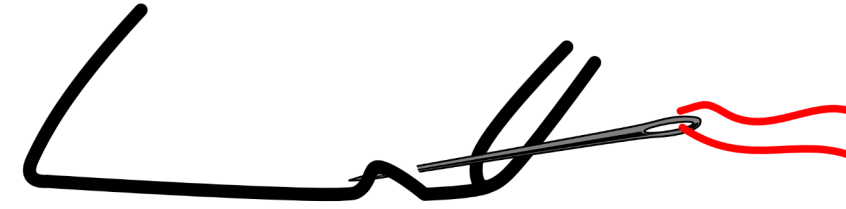
If you're looking to draw in a seam then with every stitch pull more tightly to shorten the seam and tiny amount between each stitch. When doing this it's important to hold the loop very tightly while making the followup stitch because it will pull back through and loosen again if it's under tension.

This is another one of those that are scarcely used and some use it more in different places than others.

Finishing this you make the last looped stitch and then tack the thread outside of the last loop to keep it held tight down. If you try to tack it starting from inside the loop won't be held and it will come loose.

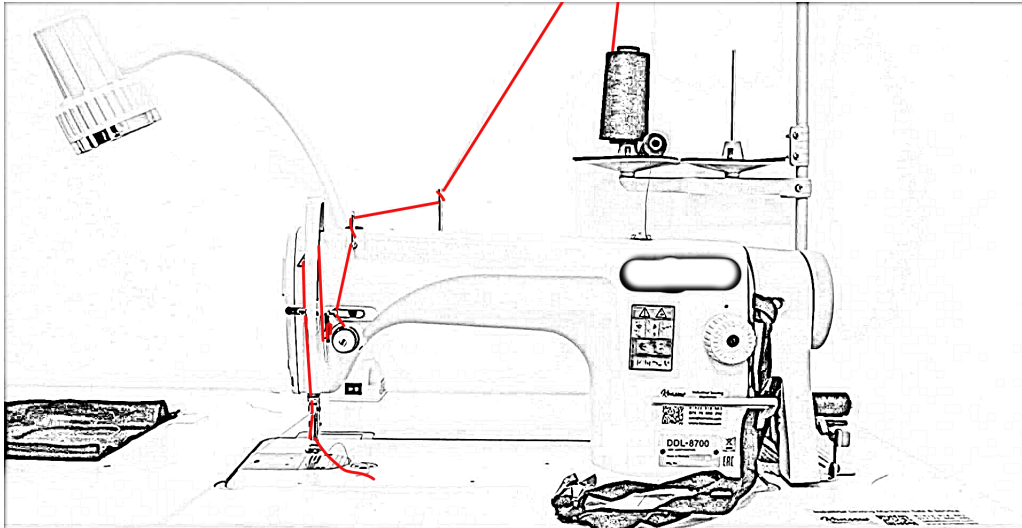


Hand Stitches



Hand Stitches

Sewing Machines



A sewing machine

If you know how to use a sewing machine you don't need to be here. I don't go into much additional detail than you need. This is just to serve to help those just getting started, or if you need a reminder how to thread an industrial machine. With some tips at the end.

Nothing I'll share should be new, I just want to share to cover all the basics. What I have is an older machine that has a bobbin case. New machines don't seem to have a bobbin case. The bobbin goes straight into the machine under the needle plate. I won't talk at all about those because they are much more user friendly.

I am going to show you how to thread sewing machines and how if you can thread one machine you can essentially thread any other make or model. The structure of threading them is practically the same between domestic and commercial, it's just about recognising which part is which. I'll add some tips at the end.

I don't understand overlocking machines as well as I know sewing machines, so I can't really speak to the technicalities. Overlockers know they're complicated, so even industrial ones come with guides showing how to thread them when they come undone.

As a complete aside I have a habit of always turning the machine off when I leave it, or if I'm re-threading, or changing the bobbin I don't leave it on. This is a habit out of university, that isn't a common practice elsewhere from what I have seen. Analogue machines I've noticed with a kinda clutch mechanism they wind down after they've been turned off, so the pedal can still be engaged and it will still make a few stitches until all of the energy has dissipated and the motor stops.

Also some house keeping, appropriate footwear; tie up long hair; don't wear loose clothing that can get pulled into the machine.

Sewing Machines

Spool pins

A domestic will have one or two spool pins for a spool or cop of thread. A domestic is not made to be used with a cone. You can get a cone stand that allows you to stand and use a cone in a domestic machine. My machine is quite well thought out and it has two pull out spool pins



except one of them is actually the first thread guide, since it has a hole through it.

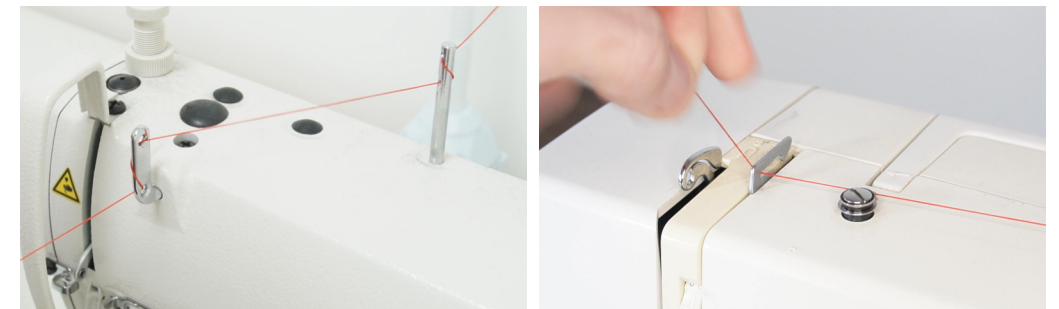
Industrial machines have a separate cone stand to the machine attached to the table. It can be used with spools or cops as well as cones. It's first thread guide is directly above the pins that allows it to use each kind of thread receptical.

In both cases that's where the thread starts.

Thread guides

A domestic may have one or two thread guides. There should be one in the area above the needle and a second would be closer to the spool pin. My machine has two, importantly the second is through what appears to be a second spool pin, but it has a hole so it is actually a thread guide.

Industrial machines will have more thread guides. The first will be above the cone stand that



leads it above the machine. The second will be around the middle of the top of the machine and the last above the needle area.

Through at least one of the holes the thread winds around the thread guide mechanism. The thread shouldn't ever be wrapped around itself. Instead of going through from the direction that the thread comes from it goes back towards the thread through the hole and then changes direction again towards the rest of the mechanism.

Sewing Machines

Tension wheel

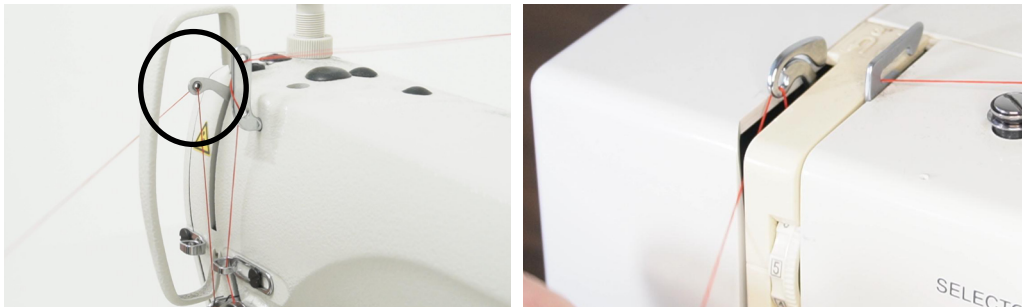
Domestic machines always have arrows to remind you how to thread the machine. Telling the order and direction the thread needs to go. From the thread guide the thread goes directly down into the gap and then is pulled back up. The thread is automatically positioned through a kind of torsion spring that dampens the pressure between the take-up-lever to the tension wheel.



In industrial machines the tension wheel is usually outside the machine and in line with it instead of hidden and perpendicular. The thread goes under the wheel from the side the thread comes from, around and up over the torsion spring, then down again over the spring, through another thread guide and back up towards the take-up lever. With the industrial it's important that the thread is placed between the two discs that create the tension wheel, because that holds the thread while the take-up lever pulls the thread up away from the bobbin.

Thread take-up lever

Domestic machines will usually have a hidden lever inside of the machine, like the tension wheel. This makes it much more safe for consumers to use. Therefore the thread take-up lever needs to be moved to the highest position with the hand wheel that allows the user to manually operate the mechanism to exact positions. The thread take-up lever, which mine I always thought looked like a brontosaurus head, will have a hook shape and the thread can be put into it from right to left and then threaded down towards the needle again.



Industrials and machines like vintage singers, have their levers on the outside with a hole in the top instead of a hook. The thread goes through, right to left and down. The lever is exposed, but it has a narrow cage kind-of cover to prevent anything getting hit from the front as it's on its way up or down.

Sewing Machines



More thread guides

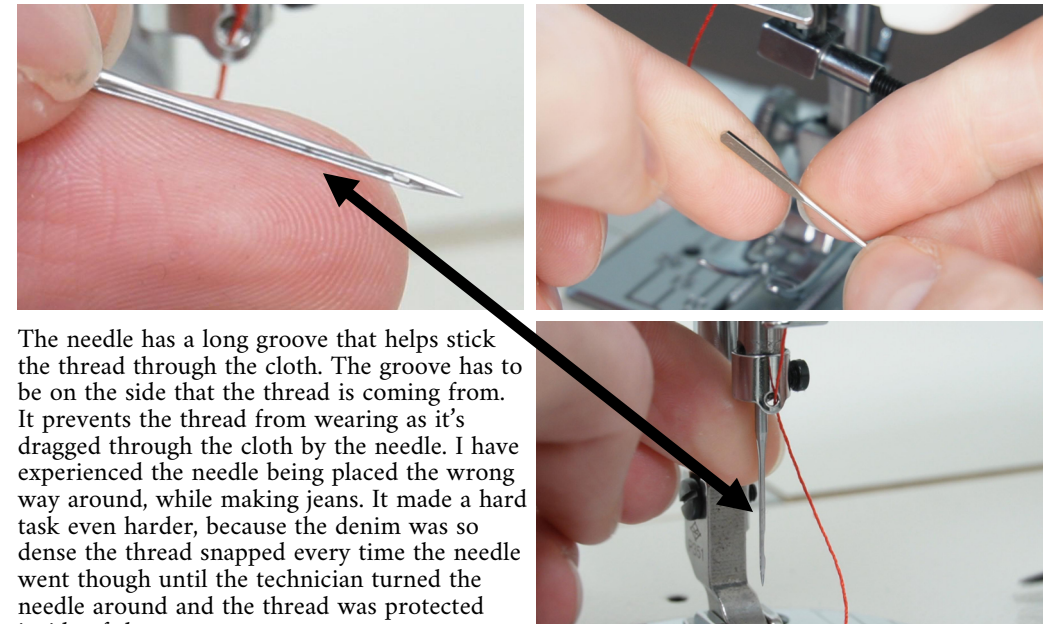
Down towards the needle there will be two to three thread guides before the needle. The thread just should be put through them.

Needle - **Brown clip colour mark**

Industrial machines almost always thread through the needle from the left to the right. From the outside and the loose thread is then on the inside. In domestic machines it can be the same, but sometimes it threads through the front of the needle to the back.

Some machines will have automatic needle threaders. Mine don't; so I can't speak to those.

Important to note about the needles though is that they are placed in the machine in the correct direction. Sometimes the needle can only fit into the needle clamp in one direction which makes it easy as on domestic machines. With industrial needles the shank is round, so it can be spun around. Therefore it's important that you know how to position the needle in the machine.



The needle has a long groove that helps stick the thread through the cloth. The groove has to be on the side that the thread is coming from. It prevents the thread from wearing as it's dragged through the cloth by the needle. I have experienced the needle being placed the wrong way around, while making jeans. It made a hard task even harder, because the denim was so dense the thread snapped every time the needle went through until the technician turned the needle around and the thread was protected inside of the groove.

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Sometimes the needle is held in place with a butterfly screw or similar that can be tightened and loosened by hand and others you need the screwdriver. Just finger-tight is enough. You want to be able to take out out to replace it when necessary.

Almost as an aside. I guess it works with both kinds, when changing thread instead of removing the entire thread from the machine and re-threading it with a new one; cut the thread near the spool or cone, place the new thread on there and tie the ends together.

Take the thread out of the needle and pull the thread though until you get the new thread through the last thread guide, cut the knot off and thread the needle again. Sometimes if the thread is fine enough and the eye of the needle is big enough the knot can be pulled through the needle, no need to re-thread. That's kind of a tip and I've noticed that not everyone knows about doing that, but I'll leave it here. In the same vein I've heard that thread should only be pulled through the machine in the same direction, so it's best to not pull thread out of the machine back in the direction of the spool pins. Unverified, but I've heard it can mess with the tension disks.

A couple of notable differences with domestic and industrial is that a domestic usually has another wheel next to the stitch length that changes the type of stitch. An industrial machine won't generally have that. It will do one thing and do it quickly and it will do it better. This means you might need other machines for other purposes, but for tailoring you really only need forwards and back. Some machines also won't have a reverse stitch function either. There are ways around not having that function, but that is usually quite a specialised machine for heavy duty work.

Industrial machines also won't have needle position dials that can move the needle to the left or the right. Some domestic machines also don't have that, or it will be part of the stitch type dial. In my case the stitch length and stitch type are both selected from the one dial. Industrial machines do have the stitch length dial.



Industrial machines have two ways of lifting the presser foot. Notably the lever under the table that's operated by your knee to keep your hands on the cloth and the lever behind the mechanism to keep it held up. The domestic only has the hand lever. **Colour group blue**

The tension wheels are also different as a domestic is sometimes numbered and you need to figure out which number/position is correct, whereas in the industrial generally you have to screw or unscrew it until it's correct.



Sewing Machines

Another thing I'll point out is that when the presser foot of the industrial is lifted sometimes the tension wheel loosens the grip it has on the thread making it easier to pull thread through the machine.

Sewing Machines

Charging a bobbin **Blue clip colour mark**

Here I talk about and prepare the bobbins. Bobbins are little spools that have to be wound with thread and they go inside of sewing machines to allow it to create a stitch. Sewing machines have built in mechanisms to fill, load or charge bobbins with the desired thread. A few bobbins will come with the machine and bobbin case. The bobbin case is what the bobbin goes into to be inserted into the machine. There are specific bobbins and cases for domestic machines and for industrial machine. Both can be bought separately and separate bobbin winders are also available. You really need enough bobbins to go with each thread that you use. Do not wind multiple threads onto one bobbin at the same time. It really annoys people if you are all sharing them in a studio, namely me, and is inefficient. Un-thread the bobbin and throw away the thread if you're that desperate.

Spool pins

With domestic machines they can't generally fill a bobbin while the machine is threaded. Partially because it only has one spool pin, so it needs to be used for one or the other.



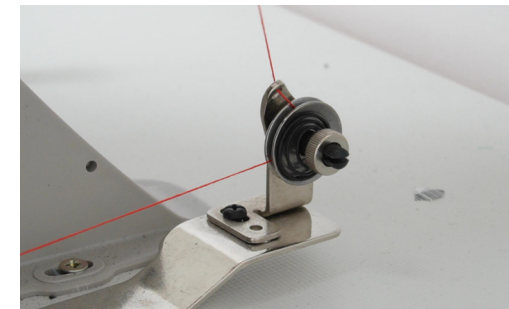
Sewing Machines

Industrial machines will have separate pins and thread guides towards the bobbin winder mechanism.

Bobbin winder tension disk

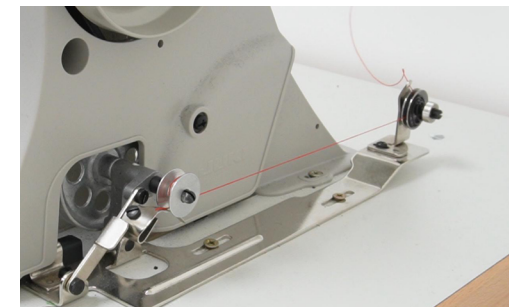
Both kinds will have a specific tension disk for the bobbin. When threading up a domestic machine it's important you don't thread it through the smaller tension disk, only through the normal tension wheel. To fill a bobbin it needs to go around the smaller tension wheel and back to the bobbin winder, which needs a bobbin added to it.

Same thing with industrial machines, except the tension wheel is often the same size, but it has its own thread guides that it needs to go through when winding around the wheel. The wheel can usually be adjusted as well, but it's not typically necessary in most cases I've found.



Bobbin winder pin

Domestic bobbins can be easy because they generally have a hole in both sides, or they're the kind with a perforated circumference. Put the thread through one of the holes and pull it



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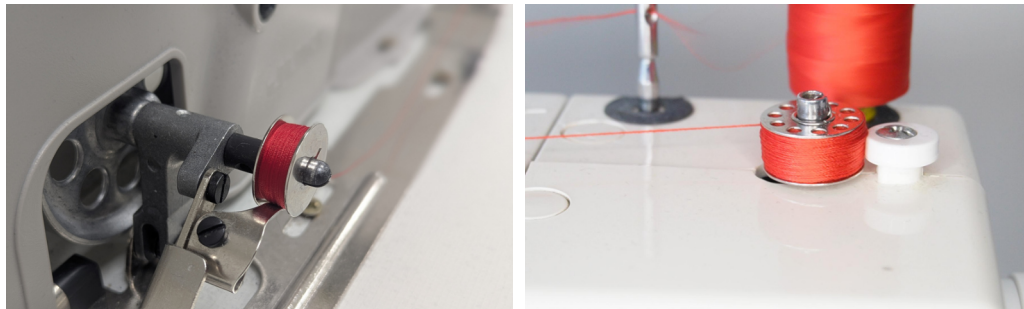
through at least a little bit and keep a hole of it. After the bobbin is put onto the pin, the pin is then clicked into position to engage it with the motor. Still holding the thread press the pedal to begin winding. Once it's wound a few times and you don't need to hold the thread anymore, cut the thread as close as possible to the bobbin and get it out of the way. The bobbin will then continue to wind up as the motor runs.

Industrial bobbins can be a little different in that they might not have holes. If they do then same thing, if not then you need to wind the bobbin by hand with about 30 cm(12") of thread so that the thread can begin to be wound. Place it into the winder pin, click it into position and press the pedal to start the winder pin. In some cases the end of the thread will come undone slightly. Once the thread has started winding, cut off the end to prevent it from getting tangled up.

Bobbin winder stop

In both cases the bobbin winder stop should stop the bobbin from winding by pushing the winder pin out of position again. In the case of domestics it's been my experience that the pressure of the thread against the stop can't force the winder pin out of position. Therefore you need to manually decide to stop it about when the thread starts touching the stopper.

In the case of industrials they are typically reliable, so you can sew with the machine while a bobbin is winding and not have to check whether it's becoming overfilled.



Notable differences between industrial machines and domestic machines Industrial machines it's easy to wind a bobbin with one spool and sew with another, whereas domestic you should do only one or the other at a time.

Often I've seen industrial machines with the bobbin winding parts quite separate, only joining around the motor. Domestic machines typically charge bobbins across the top of the machine. There are industrial machines that have a similar mechanism, but you can still sew and charge at the same time since they have separate thread guides.

Bobbin case - Cyan clip colour mark

I'm only talking about machines with bobbin cases, as I said I don't use a caseless machine and I'm pretty sure there is no caseless industrial sewing machine, which I don't care to reasearch. Two important things to take care of.

Removing the bobbin from the machine you need to pull on the lever to unclip it from the machine. You can see that with front loading domestic machines, but with an industrial table

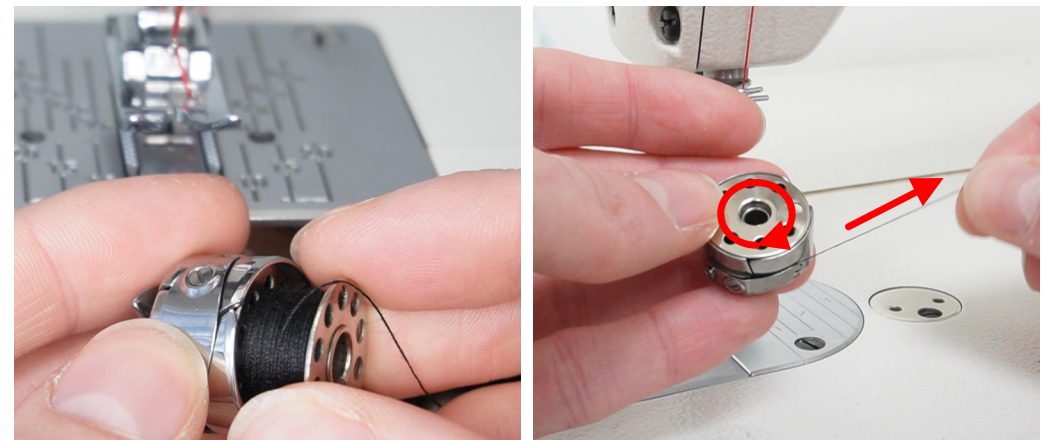
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machine you have to feel for it.

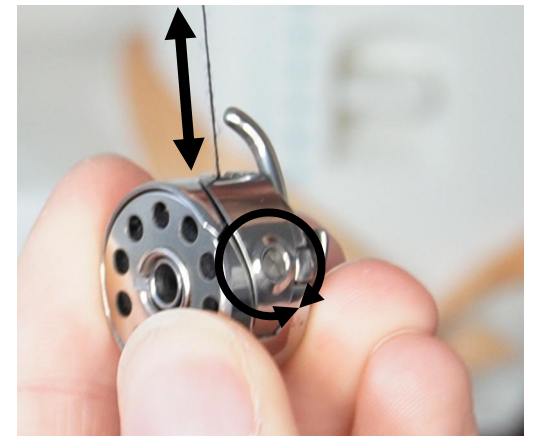
First is when the bobbin goes into the case. It should be a certain way around. The case has a gap that the thread slips through and under a flap-like piece of metal and comes out through a window in the case. This is the same for both industrial and domestic cases. It seems domestic cases are quite universal as well. Domestics have a small arm that points to the top where the thread comes out of the case.

With the bobbin on the left and pulling the thread through from the right the bobbin needs to be spinning clockwise. Often I put the bobbin in backwards to no effect, but it is good practice and if you get your machine serviced they might tell you that too. It may cause a problem that has no solution other than threading it properly.



Second important thing is that the tension of the bobbin is correct. Once the bobbin tension is correct then the tension of the machine can be calibrated to match. There is a small screw that can be twisted clockwise to tighten and anti clockwise to loosen, same as lefty loosey, righty tighty. You can vaguely gauge that the tension of the bobbin is correct by just holding it up by the thread. If the case falls and unwinds then it's too loose.

What you need is to gently rock the case up and down by the thread and the case should unwind just a little bit each motion.



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If it doesn't unwind at all with the up and down motion then it's too tight.

Make ready - Wine clip colour mark

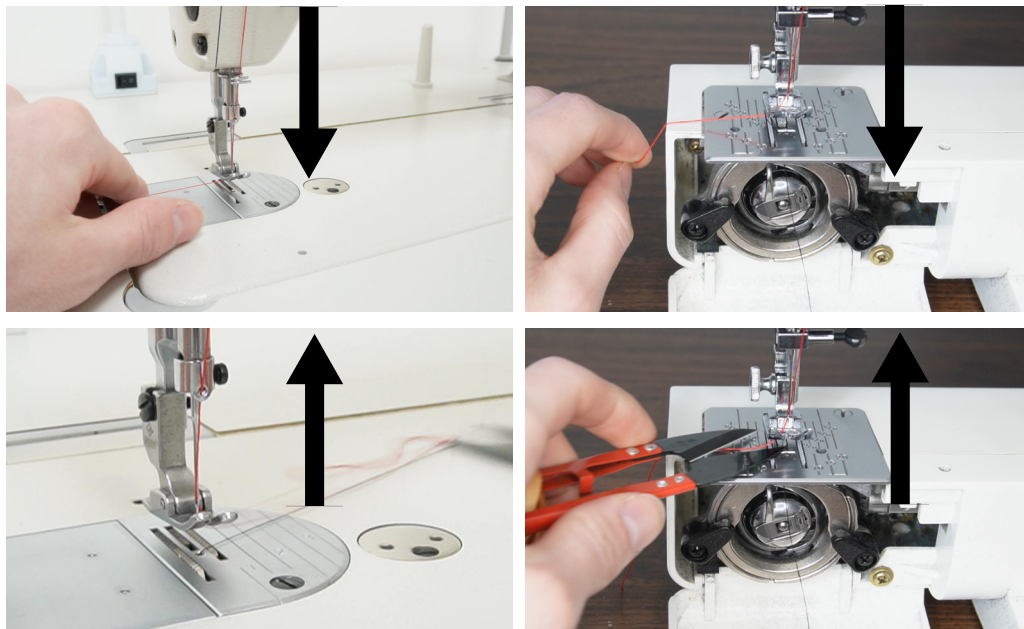
Putting a bobbin into the machine it will only ever fit in one way. Generally it will go in with the thread coming out roughly on top towards the needle. There's a large opening on the top of industrial bobbins and domestics have a bar that points about to the top that slips into a gap in the mechanism. It should click into position and then it should not come out without releasing it with the lever as before.

I never realised until I was told that pulling out the lever grips the bobbin in the case so that it won't fall out when the lever is pulled open. If you hold the lever open as you're putting it into the machine then it won't click, just push it in until there's resistance and release the lever. It should then be in position.

With the bobbin inside and the machine and needle threaded hold the thread that goes through the needle and use the hand-wheel to make a stitch motion, so the needle goes into and then out of the presser plate once. Pull the thread from the needle taut and that should pull the looped thread from the bobbin up through the hole. Use something to pull the end of the thread through the machine. I never grab it with my fingers, even though I've probably turned the machine off and my foot may or may not be on the pedal. Again also only pull the hand wheel towards you, or counter-clockwise.

The mechanism doesn't need to be open to allow the bobbin thread to be pulled through the plate, I just left it over to demonstrate. Just ensure that the thread isn't stuck anywhere inside and it'll work.

Not to sound cliché, but I know someone who has sewn through their finger and is quite picky about turning switches off. I'll use snips, a ruler, unpicker, my scissors, the screwdriver, pen sometimes, to pull the thread out. That is the machine ready to start sewing. Turn on and it's ready to go.



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One last thing on industrial machines, if you have one it's likely not being used at max speed a lot if ever. Occasionally you should run the machine very quickly as that's the way it's designed. The speedy motion pulls oil through the mechanism. They are made to move very quickly and the type of sewing that I do mostly involves stitching carefully and intentionally.

You could warm up the machine in the morning before you start, or you could un-thread and wind a bobbin running the machine near max speed to pull some oil through. If you're winding a bobbin by itself make sure the presser foot is in the up position otherwise it grinds against the needle plate annoying everyone in the vicinity. You'll notice that they have small transparent window-domes and you're looking for the oil to be splashing into it. If you've bought an industrial hopefully you've generally been instructed on its oil instructions and upkeep.



To oil a domestic I take of the presser foot plate, remove the top cover and take out the bobbin mechanism. I slightly oil a cloth and wipe the moving metal on metal parts to lightly oil the parts. I'm not saying this is necessarily the exact right thing, but don't overuse the oil. Maybe it's just my machine, but I hadn't properly oiled for the first few years at all and somehow it survived. I don't oil it a lot. If you're experienced in other trades sewing then that might sound non-ideal, but using my machine is heavily interspersed with hand-stitching, possibly more than you.

Sewing Machines

Tips

I think this was originally a tips and tricks list of things that I like to keep in mind and other common practices. That I had conceptualised in 2023, but then I wanted to talk about threading sewing machines too.

1. This was a tip about having a bobbin winding while you're sewing to avoid having to stop for long when the current one runs out. That can only apply to industrial sewing machines and is not a totally helpful tip anyway. Instead I'll remind you to keep a spare bobbin in the colour you're already using. Breaking the flow of sewing on the machine and having to stop to refill the bobbin can really annoy us. Especially if I'm about to do a lot of sewing and I know I'll be using a lot of thread then I might fill an extra bobbin giving me two, plus the one I'm using. I'm beginning to think that a separate bobbin winder will be great.

2. Another tip is that I don't like having a light directly shining onto the presser foot where I'm sewing. I find that it casts a shadow that makes what I'm looking at even more difficult to see without the light. I prefer to have soft boxes either side of me to create good all around light that nearly prevents any shadow, with essentially a key light and fill light. I think this comes from when I first turned on my first sewing machine, the light came on and immediately bust. So for a few years I sewed without the light inside because I didn't know how to change it. This is a very personal preference, that I've been called crazy for. Amazingly, both my lightboxes are broken right now. I got a good few years out of them, but I can't really take a picture of a well lit studio.

3. Attach snips to the machine. The overlocker too. Domestic machines often have a thread cutter. Some industrial and some specifically smart domestics have built in thread cutters when ending a stitch. I just noticed that my machine has two, it has a knife and a groove in the back of presser foot piston that has a very sharp edge.

Sewing Machines

Generally on industrials there's nothing, or the built in automatic thread cutter. Often you'll see tailors just snapping the thread, but I think that tying a ribbon or something to some snips and keeping them near the machine is better. This stops us from snipping the thread and then wandering off with the snips and putting them down absentmindedly forgetting about them until we need to next snip threads after sewing a stitch on the machine. One note is to make sure that the ribbon or whatever is long enough to snip the threads from where ever it's tied to.



4. Something that I do since I have used multiple gauges of thread in the past is keep different bobbin cases already adjusted to the tension for that thickness of thread. It means that the tension in the bobbin is always correct and saves having to change it whenever I use a different thread.

4. One tip I was once given, that I don't use, is sticking a notebook to the machine so that you could keep track of when needles were changed and what needle is in it now, when it was cleaned or when it was last oiled.

5. A tip for industrial machines as tailors it requires precise machining. Something that I've found is that you can just turn the hand wheel on the side, but in some cases it is stiff. Particularly on older analogue machines. If you can gently engage the pedal to the point just before it starts sewing; the wheel can then be moved with a much more gentle touch. It doesn't work on digital machines because the pedal is more like a switch. This *can* just save that slight extra exertion I've had when using some industrial machines.

6. **Grey clip colour group** My last one is about the thread take-up lever. This is something I expect everyone to know, but I'll share it just in case. You know sometimes in the machine the first stitch pulls the thread out of the needle and then you have to re-thread, re-position and go again? This is why and the only reason that it happens. The thread take-up lever. That lever pulls the thread up from around the bobbin to pull the stitch tight.



Sewing Machines

If the lever is in the lower position when the stitch is started the first thing it does is pull the thread up through the needle before the needle is sent down into the cloth.

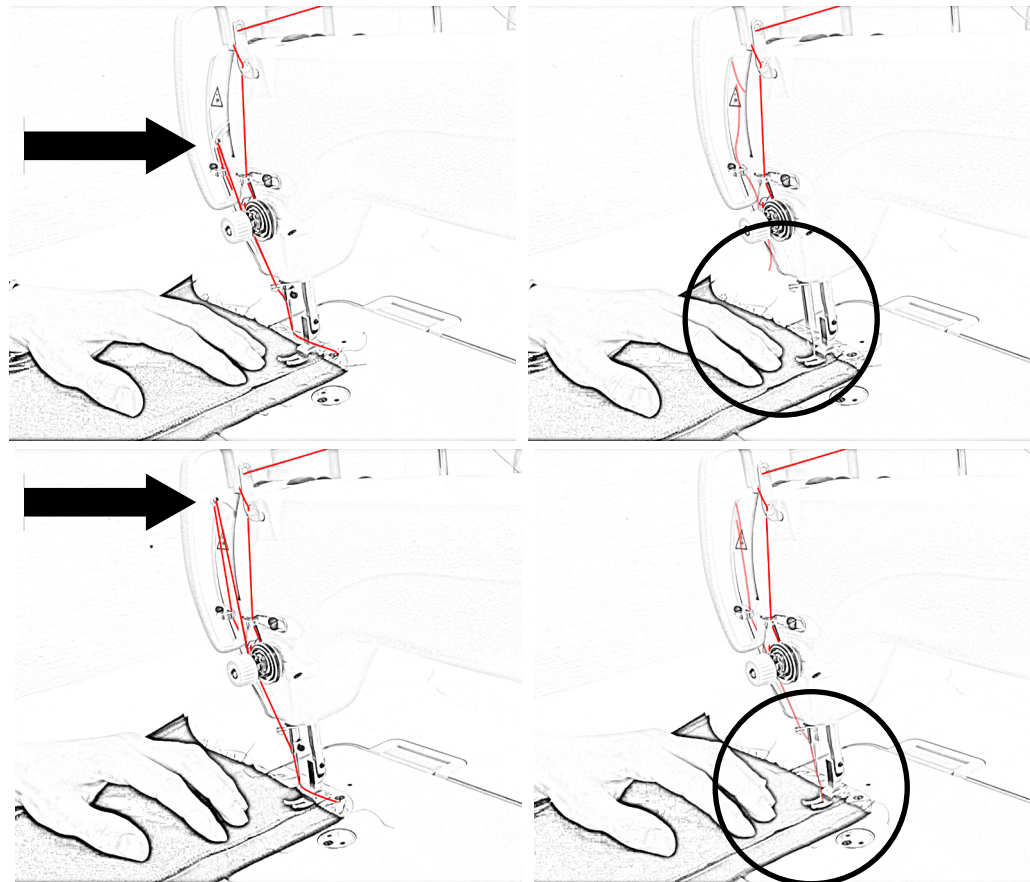
Therefore you want the take-up lever in its highest position before starting a new stitch.

To be clear, the lever in the top position is not the only way to prevent this, you can pull extra thread through and hold the thread down tightly. One time, I think someone tried to tell me it's a tension issue.

The take-up lever is the cause. At the end of a stitch I'll make sure the lever is in the top position. Before I start a new stitch I also glance at the lever to make sure it's in the correct position.

Showing the thread being pulled out was annoying, because then it wouldn't pull out. I had to actually force the circumstances to make it pull out in order to show it happening.

To illustrate my point I've lined up the same circumstances with almost less thread, but the lever is in the high position and the stitch starts just fine. Smart digital machines often will keep the take-up lever in the top position and that is why. It is still good practice to hold the thread before beginning a stitch.

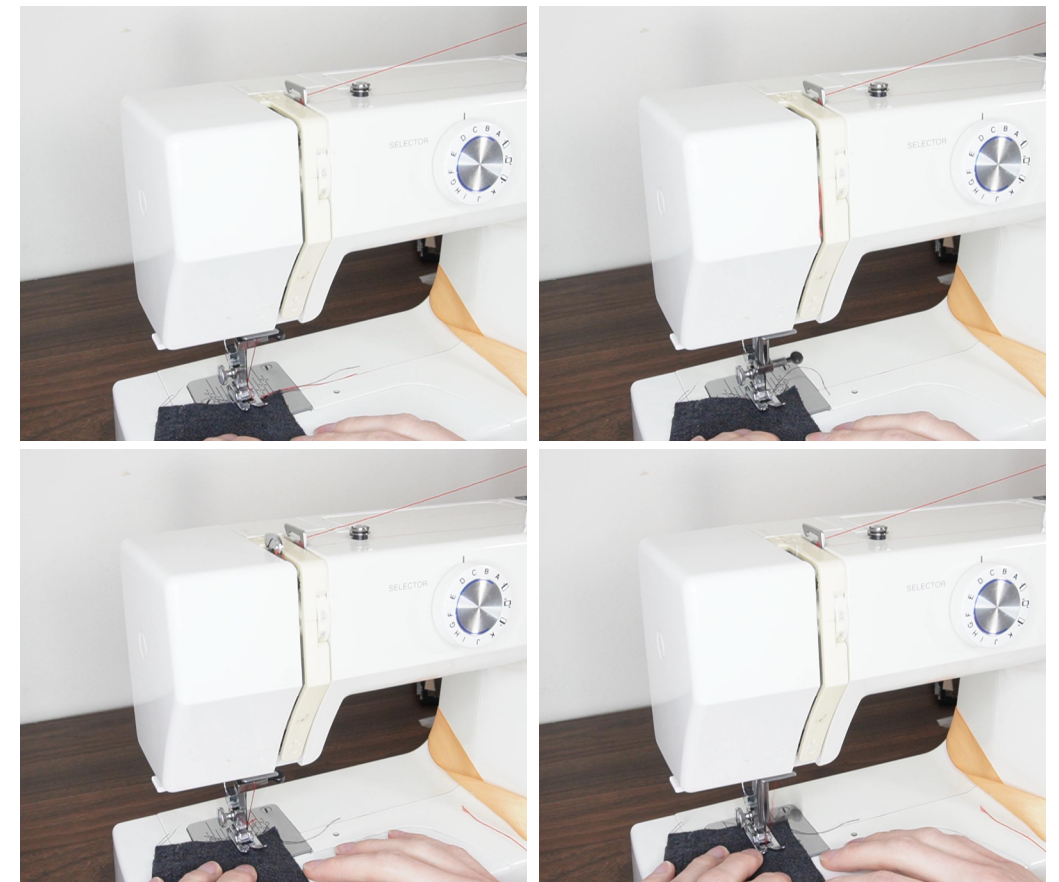


Sewing Machines

On the domestic it's the same thing. Thread take-up lever in the topmost position. To demonstrate I left a more normal amount of thread with the take-up lever down and it pulls out. In fairness the first take of this shot trying to show the thread pulling out it didn't, because I left about 15 cm (6") of thread out and it pulled it to almost nothing, but the stitch successfully started.

Again though to make my point; with the thread-take-up lever in the top position I cut the thread to about 2 cm (3/4") past the eye of the needle and you'll note that the stitch starts fine.

This does tell me that the thread doesn't pull out as easily on industrial machines, but again; a glance and spinning the wheel a half turn where necessary is little extra effort for a lot less frustration while sewing on the machine.



The thread you ideally want is called buttonhole twist. It's a silk yarn that has been twisted and then usually three yarns are spun together that creates buttonhole twist.

Interestingly you can still find vintage twist, but the current kinds in production are generally Gutterman, cucirini tre stella and Fugix. German, Italian, Japanese. There's also an Indian one and probably more Asian ones I don't know about. Gutermann 10m reels were discontinued, and now they have 30m reels, the Italian are 10m reels, the Fugix come in 20m bobbins. The Italian is the thinnest and least tightly twisted and I think the Indian is similar. Gutermann is thicker and more tightly twisted and the Japanese is the thickest and a little more tightly twisted.

Generally you choose whatever you can get. The fineness of the thread means that you need more stitches to best sew the buttonhole, because they need to be closer together. The more spun the yarns are the better it is to sew with because the thread doesn't strip and fray as you sew the buttonhole.

Twist can also be used to sew the buttonholes on and the thicker the thread the stronger the button will be held in place.

With the twist it's highly recommended that you treat it with beeswax and with that you need a cloth to iron the wax into the thread and remove the excess.

Lastly buttonhole gimp is a thick sturdy thread that generally has a core of yarns and then has another thread tightly coiled around it. It's used to create depth and stiffness to the buttonhole by sewing the stitches over the gimp it raises the stitches away from the cloth and stiffens the hole. Gimp can be expensive and difficult to find, so at the end I share how to make a soft gimp from the twist.

Generally gimp is only used in jackets and waistcoats, it's too stiff to use in trousers.

Why?

An important question to ask is; why hand-sewn buttonholes? It can be very easy to commission buttonholes sewn in by machine, or doing it in our domestic machines. Some machines can even make really good buttonholes. As of now I don't really have an answer to that. Hopefully I will have a good answer sometime, because when people ask I want to be able to tell them something.

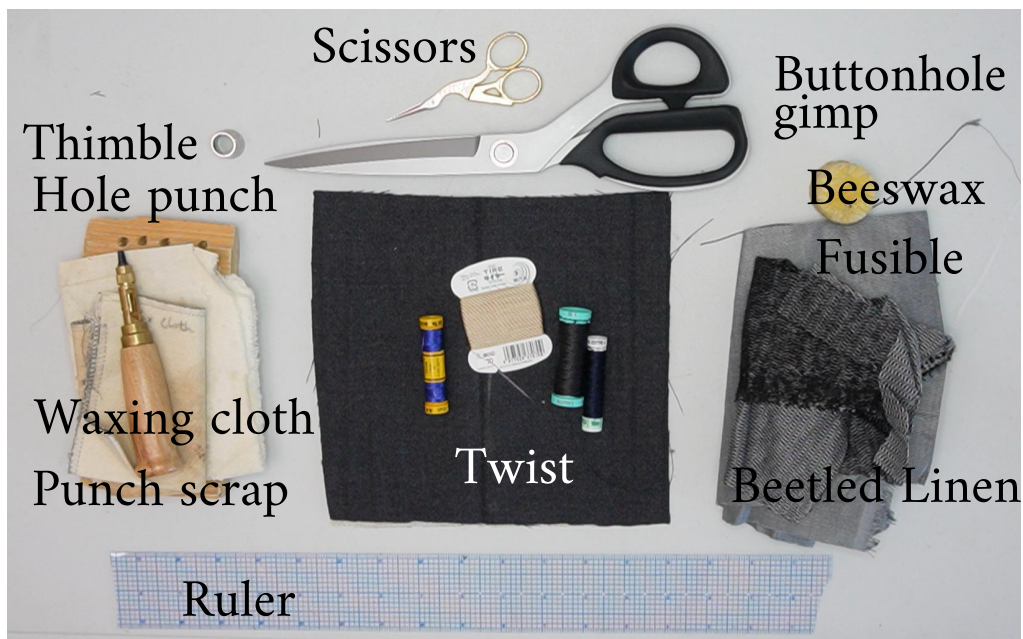
At this stage there is no other option I would entertain in handmade garments, but if somebody doesn't see it; I don't care to try and convince them otherwise.

Come to think of it and little ironic and contrary I am all for machine buttonholes in shirts which is most weird because the shirts I've made have handsewn buttonholes.

How to make hand-sewn buttonholes

In this section I cover all of the basic information that will get you started and able to practice your first 100 buttonholes. This is a much more streamlined guide than I've done previously and this is the written companion guide if you prefer to read or need a quick refresher on sewing buttonholes when I've forgotten how. It will later have a part two where I expand on methods and techniques. Here I lay a foundation to learn the fundamental technique to hand-sewn buttonholes, the necessary knowledge as well as advice that might help to make it easier as you're beginning to practice. I use all light and contrasting threads to make it easiest to see and follow.

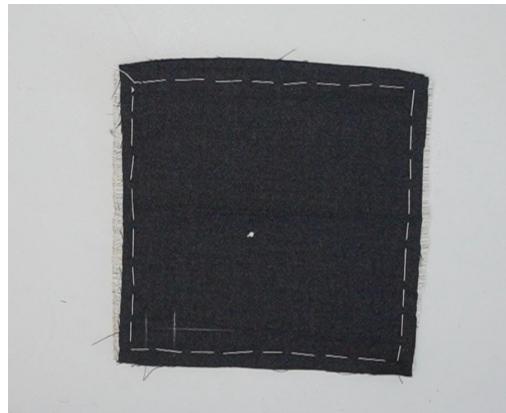
To begin with you need a few things, all slightly expanded upon in my non-definitive list of tailoring equipment, I wouldn't mention a thimble (except I just did). You need scissors, needle, ruler, some cloth marker like chalk and you ought to get some form of hole punch. Mostly you see people using a revolving hole punch. I like a screw hole-punch but it's just preference. With that you need a scrap of cloth to put behind the cloth and in my case I need a block or mat to press the punch into. The size of the hole is generally 3-3.5 mm, or about an eighth of an inch or so.



Preparing

Buttonholes get sewn through a variety of materials. What I will do is prepare a large piece of cloth to practice sewing buttonholes into. Whenever a buttonhole gets sewn into a garment we know where the buttonholes are going to be, so we can prepare the area inside by potentially adding a layer of another material to reinforce the area. Such as beetled linen or fuse the cloth that can help prevent fraying. Tailors do different things in different places to prepare the buttonhole area and it partially depends on preference and what would be reasonable and what is functionally useful.

In this case for practice I put some body canvas between two layers of cloth. The body canvas stiffens the area and I think makes it a little easier to sew than just through two pieces of cloth. These can be sewn around the edge to keep the practice sheet together for now. You could fuse the top layer of cloth to make it easier, or use any other kind of interfacing rather than just a light non-fusible canvas.



For the choice of cloth; a cloth where you can easily see the weave can make practice easier and a loose weave that makes it more difficult to sew-well and can force you to become better than you would with an easy cloth to sew into.

Thread

I'll prepare the thread and then the hole. Buttonhole twist needs to be waxed and ironed. You can unspool the number of lengths that you need for whatever you're sewing. I suggest measuring out a length sewing a hole with it and deciding whether you need more or less thread for that length. For a 2 cm or 3/4" buttonhole I find that I need about 70 cm or 30" of thread to have a comfortable amount. The amount can vary depending on factors like thread thickness, stitch density whether you're using gimp or not, size of the keyhole and width of the stitch and tension you're pulling.

Multiple threads can be measured, cut and waxed at once. The more threads make sure you pull more tightly over the wax to get enough wax into each thread. Wax the whole length of thread, by pulling it from one end of the thread through the wax and then pulling from the

other side to wax all the way to both ends.

When taking multiple lengths at once you can measure the first length and then use that to gauge the length for the rest and then cut them separately once you have the required number.

Place the threads between a cloth and put a hot iron over it. Make sure the heat is getting into the threads and melting the wax as you pull the thread through the cloth. With multiple threads you know it's been done well when the threads all automatically come apart from each other after being stuck together when drawing them over the wax. The thread should come out a little more stiff when the wax solidifies again within the fibres of the yarns. Iron the wax all the way to both ends. If you make a lot of lengths then it's best to then hang them somewhere instead of coiling them up again. After they've been ironed the thread won't as readily coil up around itself as it often does when it's come off the reel.

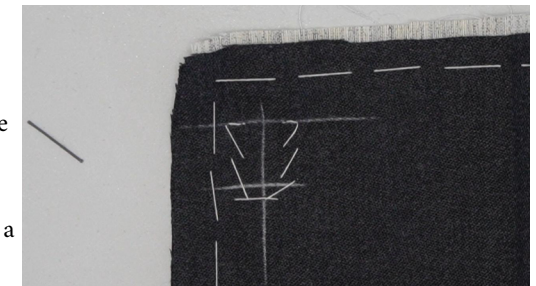
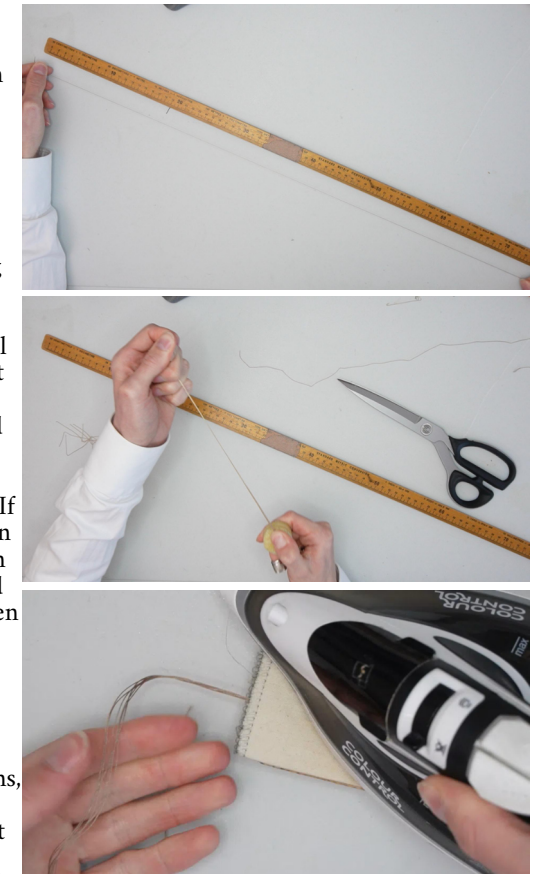
I've seen at least a couple of ways to wax thread, that's not really important though. I don't know whether anyone feels strongly about waxing single lengths vs multiple lengths, but I have never noticed a difference. When you're pressing the thread it is very important that you have a scrap wax cloth. The cloth prevents wax getting onto the iron and into the ironing board. It can also prevent burning the ironing board which is definitely possible considering how burnt the cloth is.

Like I've mentioned in the introduction to hand stitches sections; ironing the thread is what straightens it out and stops it from springing, coiling and tangling while sewing with it. I can't necessarily say what the wax does aside from helping the thread go through the cloth more smoothly. They say it strengthens the thread, but I can't see how.

Similar for the gimp. It's usually springy until it's pressed and it becomes straight. Don't wax the gimp though.

Hole

To prepare the buttonhole it's generally already marked stitched into the cloth, or we decide where to put it. For practice I just mark a line that the hole will be along and the top of the buttonhole. Measure the length of the buttonhole and mark the bottom. You're best marking a hole in line with the grain of the cloth. That way if you are using one with a loose weave or visible yarn you can use it to



Hand-sewn buttonhole

gauge the position of the stitches. It also makes the cloth the most stable and simplest to practice on.

Usually the top of the hole is a given and nearest the edge of the cloth. For practice the top could be anywhere, but the point closer to the edge of the cloth is simplest.

Baste around the hole in order to keep the layers together when they're being machined and after it's cut it's then less likely that the layers can shift causing the holes in each layer to be misaligned.

I just sew a slip stitch either side through everything. One thing I do specifically is not tie a knot in the basting thread to start the stitch. I tack the thread once to start and on the other side I tack it once to finish. After so many buttonholes I want it easy to take out afterwards. Also don't leave any thread trailing from the start or the end otherwise it can get tangled while sewing.

It's generally recommended that you make a very fine machine stitch down either side of the hole and across the bottom. As in with a very narrow stitch length. Don't back tack it at all. Start from the top and sew down next to the line showing the hole. At the bottom turn and sew 2-4 stitches depending on the stitch length, so that it's not much wider than 3 mm or an eighth of an inch. Turn and sew up the other side. It should go without saying that outside of practice this would be a matching thread.

Trimming the thread away the hole can be punched. The hole needs to be across the middle of the length of the hole and the top of the hole needs to be just touching the top of the buttonhole as drawn, not placed with its centre at the intersection of the length and height. This way the finished size of the hole will be correct as marked.

I put my block down and the hole-punch scrap on top of it then the buttonhole and then punch it. Like I say the size should generally be 3-3.5mm. With the keyhole cut it's easy to get a pair of sharp pointed scissors in there to cut down the length of the hole to the machine stitching across.

I'll try and remember to double check the length from the top of the keyhole to the base of where the cut is marked, so that I don't make it too long or short. It can look odd when a buttonhole is too long but when it's too small then it's useless and has to be started again, or in one case they needed help to do up the buttons each time.

From here you could start the buttonhole, but there's a few things that can be done to help prepare the hole further.

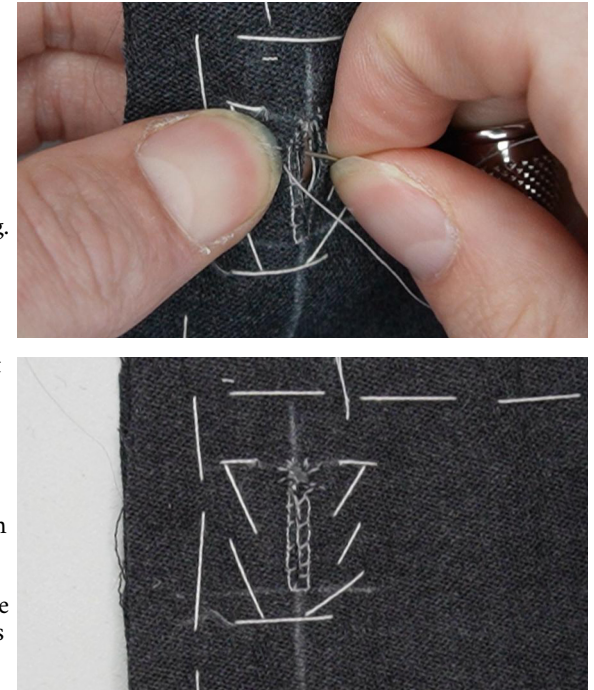


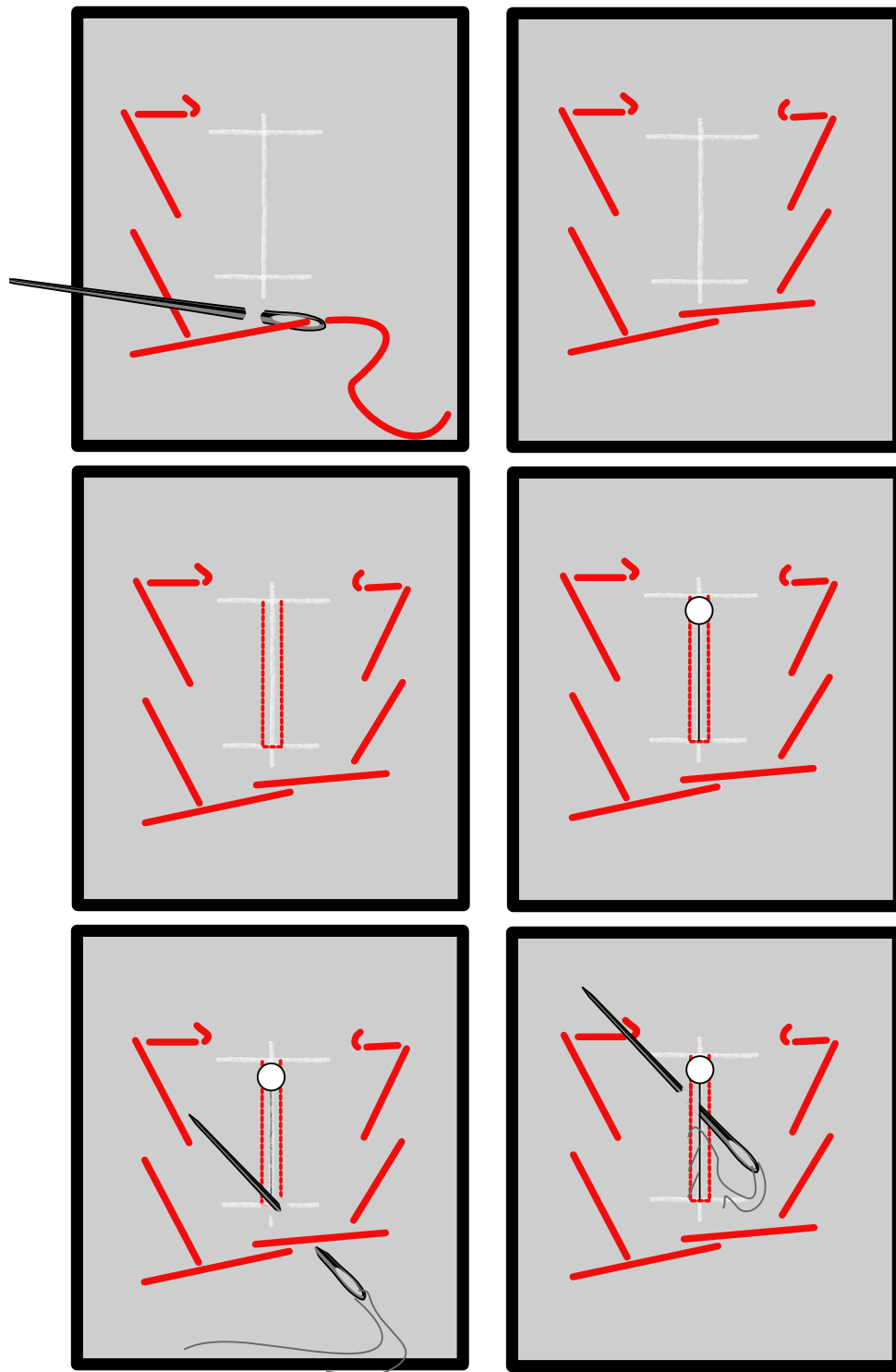
Hand-sewn buttonhole

One thing is to use the twist or a finer thread to firstly bind around the edges of the cloth. To start, I sew between the layers of cloth to the base of the hole and make sure the tail of the thread is hidden before I tack the thread and sending the needle through the hole to come up a very small distance from the cut edges, but past the machine stitching. Pull the thread through and then along the hole do the same again.

This keeps yarns in place that may otherwise come loose and fall out or get stuck in the stitching. The better prepared a buttonhole the easier it can be to sew and should the buttonhole stitching have to come out the hole will remain intact and a new hole can be sewn on top of it. This can be done with varying densities and around the keyhole do a few stitches to round the hole to work down the other side. At the end I send the needle between the layers of cloth again and cut the thread off to hide it again.

With a fine thread you could do a spaced out buttonhole stitch to prepare. You can also use a fray-check or fabric glue to reinforce the yarns and as previously stated the cloth could have been fused in advance. In some cases a fray check could seep into the cloth and cause discolouration in the area around the hole, so some tailors avoid using it, but others do use it, but I can't personally say one way or the other.





Starting the buttonhole

There are a lot of ways to begin the buttonhole, so I will just share the method I use now. It's quite specific but all that you need to do is make sure the thread comes out at the left-hand-side of the base of the cut to start the buttonhole.

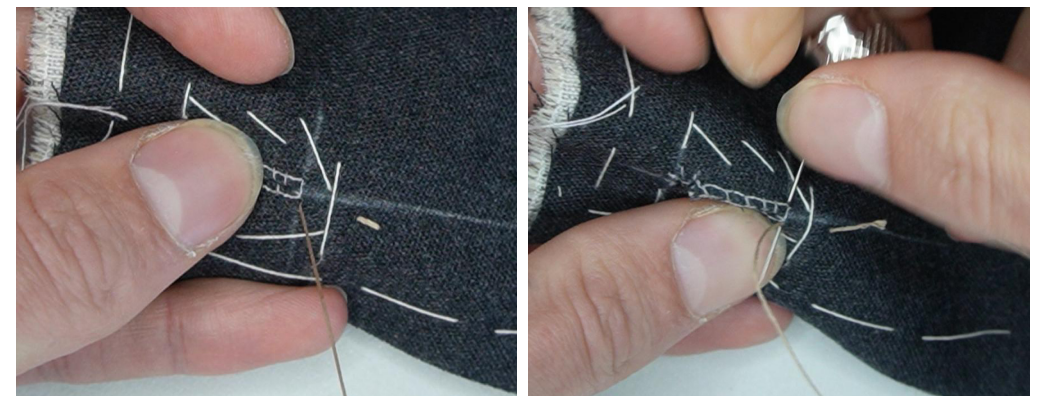
With the prepared thread I send the needle between the layers of cloth and come out of the cloth to the left-hand-side of the base of the cut, no wider than the finished buttonhole will be. I pull the thread through until the tail is hidden between the layers of cloth, but it could also be knotted or left on the outside and cut off later.

Then I make a stitch from the right-hand-side at the base of the buttonhole and come out where the first stitch came out on the left-hand-side. Pull this through and potentially do another of the same stitch to tack it more firmly in place.

Position the cloth so that the buttonhole is pointing away from you because the needle is sewn perpendicular to the hole and we push it from the right to the left.

I take the gimp and place it just about against the edge of the left-hand-side where the stitch will be started. I use a pin to hold it in place past the top of the hole so that it won't fall away before I start stitching it down. Only place enough gimp past the base so that you don't waste much. Fold the gimp in half, placing the turn at the keyhole and make sure there isn't too much past one end to avoid wastage.

Send the point of the needle through the hole underneath the cloth. Right at the base of the hole make the first stitch through the cloth. Try to sew through the cloth at as steep an angle



Hand-sewn buttonhole

as possible so that the most amount of cloth gets sewn through while the stitch remains as narrow as possible. You need to be able to gauge how far from the cut to send the needle through the cloth and that comes a lot with practice, but you can also very finely mark how far from the cut to sew, or use the machine stitch if it's a good distance. Leave the needle halfway through the cloth and place the gimp, if you're using it, between where the needle comes out and the raw edge.

Take hold of the threads from the eye of the needle and then wrap them over the gimp and then around the point of the needle clockwise, or from the bottom to the top around, or in the direction of the buttonhole however you think about it pull it into the needle and then pull the needle through the cloth pulling the thread through and tightening the knot. Pull the thread up at about a 45 degree angle away from the cloth. Don't pull it too tight but tight enough that the thread is snug around the cloth. It might not hold itself down too tightly yet until a few more stitches are sewn though.

To sew the next stitch again it takes practice to see exactly how far along the next stitch should be and can depend on the kind of stitch you're sewing as well as the thread you're using. Otherwise it's the same thing. Try to sew as perpendicular up through the cloth as possible. You can take the time and make small re-adjustments to where the needle is coming out of the cloth to make sure it's the ideal distance from the previous stitch and a consistent distance from the cut. It's the same once you decide on the position and send the needle halfway through the cloth. Take the thread from the eye of the needle and wrap them over in the same direction as previous clockwise around the point of the needle, then pull the needle through and tighten the knot. Pulling the thread away from the cloth at an angle again to position the knot slightly out of the hole so that the knots later touch without pushing the cloth open.

This is the first difficult thing about sewing buttonholes. Sewing the stitches consistently.

It can't be too wide otherwise it can look ugly (this apparently referred to as a crushed beetle), but too narrow and the stitches might pull out the weave of the cloth. If the stitches are too far from each other it can look bad and if it's too dense then it can also cause rippling in the cloth. Worst though is



Hand-sewn buttonhole

inconsistent stitching. There's a relatively broad degree of widths and densities that can be good so long as it's consistent all the way around. I think this is also the easiest thing to get good at when practicing hand sewn buttonholes. I recommend that especially when you start to sew 2 cm or 3/4" holes instead of shorter ones so that you get more practice with straight lines. Plus the bigger holes help to hone your patience and you'll be better at sitting there sewing them. A buttonhole taking 15 minutes doesn't seem like a big deal to me anymore.

Another real hurdle of sewing buttonholes is actually creating each buttonhole stitch. It's really easy to just send the needle through the cloth and forget to loop the thread over the needle to make the knot. I did that a lot and I've seen tailors still doing it and I also do it occasionally. It can be corrected, but you could just leave it and try to remember for next time.

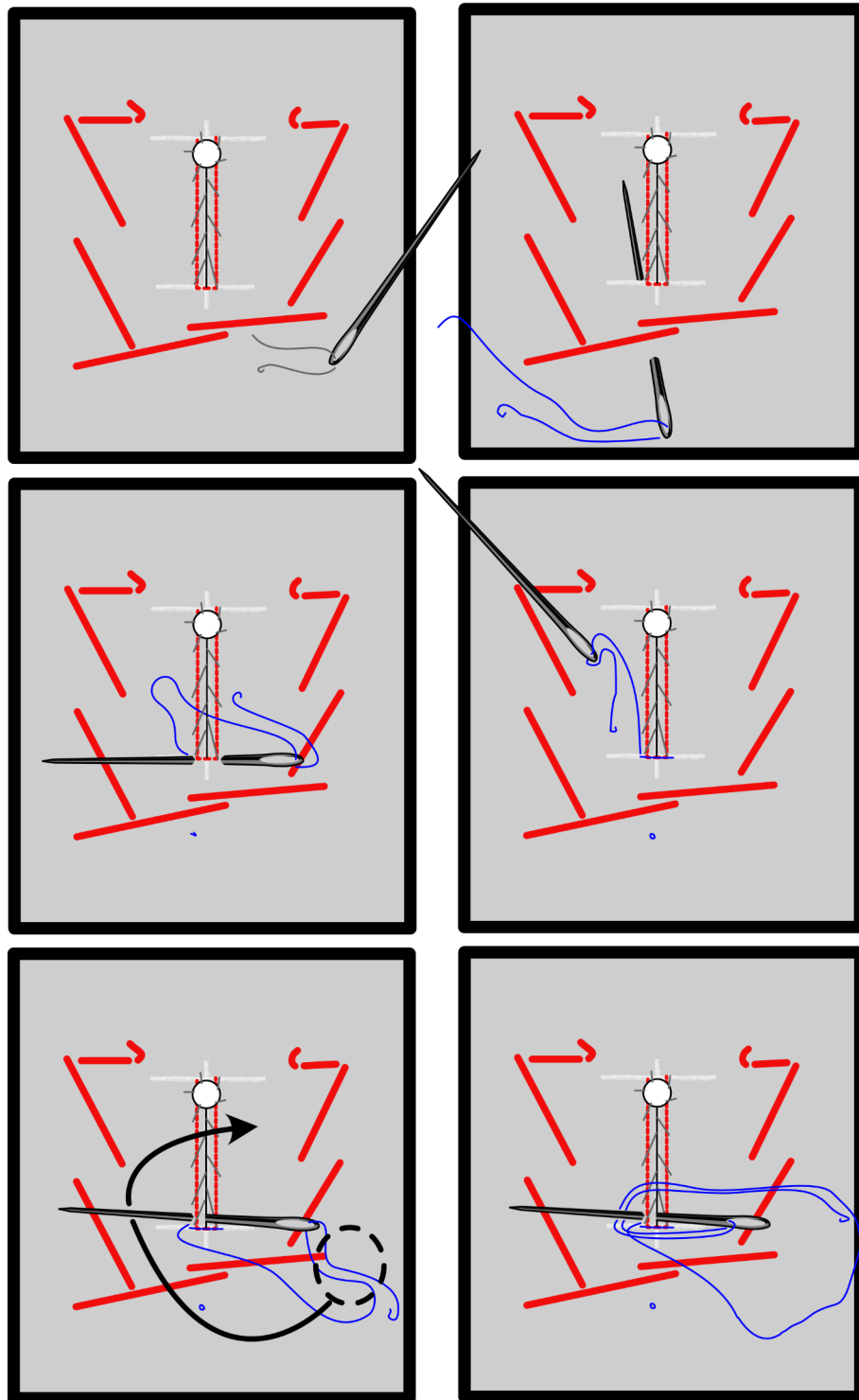
Keeping the tension of each stitch similar is more difficult to describe than anything else. Often when you see people sewing they will pull on the thread a little bit after the stitch is sewn in order to pull it taut and keep the stitch neat without any excess. All you really need to do it not pull it too tight that it's compressing the cloth inside of the stitch. I also don't pull so tight that the knot is being drawn towards the previous knot. You see whenever I am pulling the thread after sewing the stitch, I am pulling the knot into position. Sometimes away from the previous knot and making sure it's inline with the rest of the stitch. This keeps the knots appearing perpendicular to the raw edge of the cloth. Don't leave it too loose either, but again keeping it consistent is the most important thing to do.

Also the buttonhole twist is not doubled up to sew the stitches. Make sure that the tail of the thread doesn't get stuck in a stitch and you end up sewing it doubled up. It shouldn't need to be said considering I've brought it up before. One time when I'd forgotten how to sew buttonholes I did sew one with a doubled up thread before I realised that it looks quite wrong and bulky. When I started I was using doubled up machine sewing thread to practice. I wasn't using gimp of any sort and I didn't have a hole punch. It's easy to start practicing.

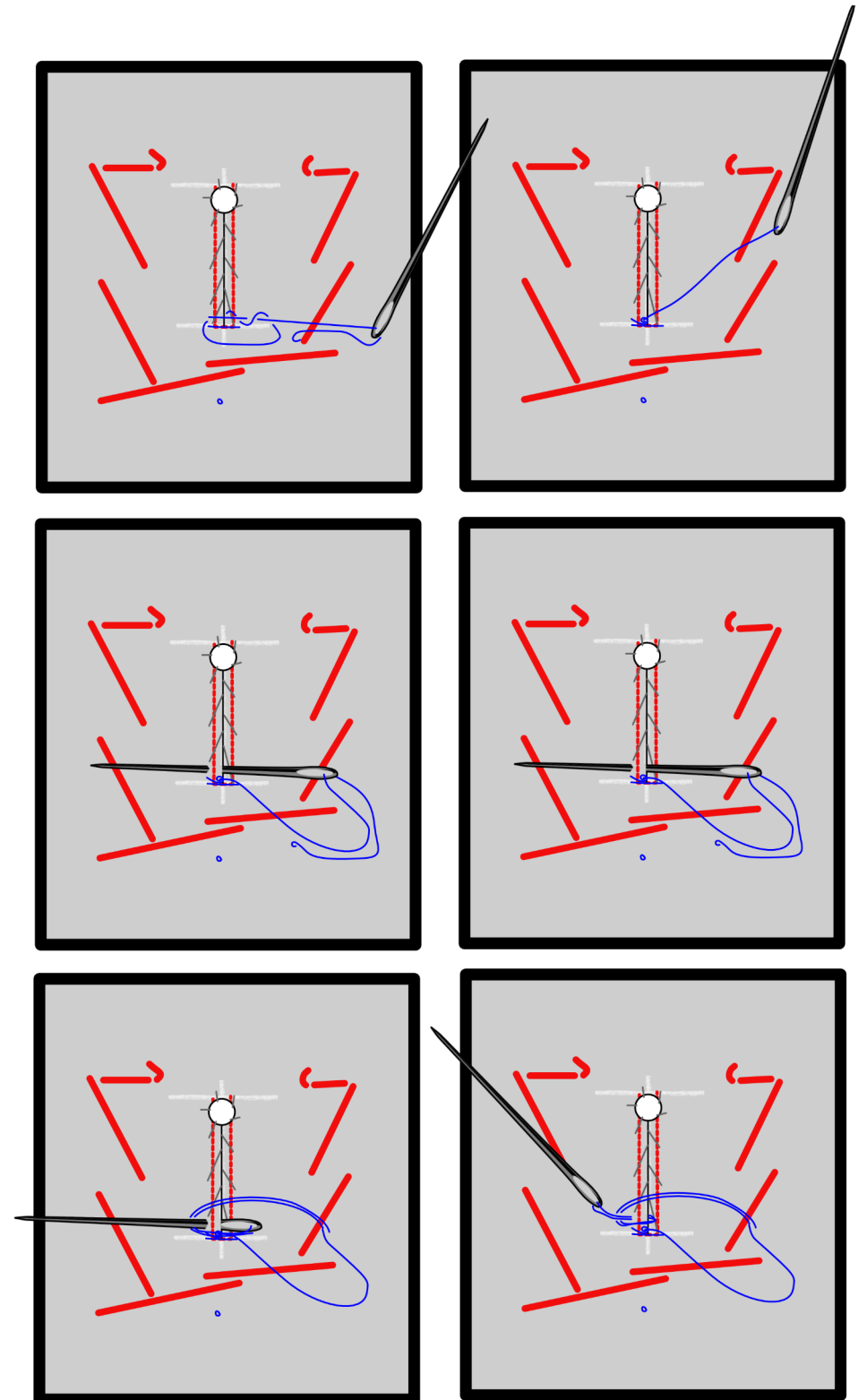
The buttonhole stitch can be sewn in a few ways. There are a few techniques to get the same result and there are also different things you can do that result in different looking buttonholes. Here I am going over what I think is the best one to learn to begin with and what I see as the common one. In the future I'll go over everything I know about buttonholes. When you can sew a buttonhole already it is very easy to pick up and change methods to test something new.



Hand-sewn buttonhole



Hand-sewn buttonhole



Hand-sewn buttonhole

Keyhole

Aside, I don't know what most people refer to this portion of the buttonhole as, I'm not sure if I made up calling it the keyhole.

Towards the top of the hole as you get to the keyhole you can sew all the way to the top of the straight cut and the last stitch can remain the same all the way to just below where the keyhole is cut.

In the circle of the keyhole I make the first stitch at an angle pointing nearly back towards the start of the buttonhole. All the same ideas apply. I still want to maintain the same distance from the cut, but the distance from the previous stitch is more difficult to gauge because if it's the same then the distance around the outside of the stitching around the circle might be too spread out.

I also make a point to pull the gimp around the curve as I'm sewing it down keeping it above the edge of the cloth and it can help to see how far from the cut I need to sew.

I can make another stitch at an angle but slightly more in line with the previous stitches, and then another stitch at the leftmost point of the keyhole parallel with the original stitches. The number of stitches is just a suggestion though there could be more than just two between left-point of the hole and the straight stitches.

I continue around the keyhole keeping everything already stated in mind. At this point I don't think much of sewing around the hole, so I'm doing my best to remember how I had thought of it. In the past to practice I've guessed how many stitches I might be about to do around the hole and marked where each one should be and used that as a guide to sew the stitches. I have also been told that it's the same, just sew on a curve. I know some people find that helpful so I'll share it.

I rotate the cloth around and position the gimp as I go. When the buttonhole is turned all the way around and I've done the last stitch in the circle; I can do a stitch right on the start of the straight edge again. Then continue down the second side of the hole. It's more important around the keyhole that the knot is pulled more towards the top of the stitching than down into it, because if all of the knots down in the hole they'll be more dense and bunched up becoming unsightly.

What takes practice is the transition from the straight to the curve. You'll often see it look quite gradual and I think that comes from sewing stitches slightly further from the raw edges in the last few stitches towards the leftmost point of the keyhole and just pulling them more tightly under more tension to compress the cloth inside and make the stitch the same size all the way along.



Hand-sewn buttonhole

Towards the end of this guide I include a short section about something I did to help me practice sewing the keyhole nicely.

Second side

Down the other end it's the same as the first side. Keep all the same things in mind.

The keyhole is important for the buttonholes because it allows the button shank to sit in the buttonhole without forcing a gap in the cloth causing it to warp. It's also why the button needs to have a shank. It's very copacetic, they need to work together.

You don't necessarily need to get a hole punch immediately. You could cut the hole open and then try to cut a keyhole in the top which is what I did a few times. Or you could leave it straight and just sew a few stitches around the top to change directions. That's only if you can't or don't want to immediately get a hole punch, but in any case it may require practice before you are good at it.

I originally heard that sewing a good buttonhole requires practicing it 100 times, and for me that was certainly true. I kept track and literally at around 98 I thought yeah this is looking good, and from then I was sewing them quite well. I have also been told it takes 200 to be good and most recently I was told it takes 1000. The person who told me it takes 1000, by their own admission, doesn't sew good buttonholes. I've stopped counting but I must be in the 300-500 range now, not including shirt buttonholes.

Important when sewing the stitches and sticking the needle into the underside of the cloth is that you are actually sewing through the cloth. Like I say, try to sew as perpendicular to the cloth underneath as possible and come straight up through. It is very easy though to sew it quite diagonally and because the needle should come out quite close to the edge it is possible that you actually sewed through little to none of the cloth underneath. This is more common the thicker the cloth and the more layers there are. When you miss the cloth underneath it makes the buttonhole more likely to pull out of the cloth, it leaves a hole open and can result in fraying and further damage. When you finish a hole and you check the other side of it make sure you check that the cloth underneath is sewn down and if it isn't make sure you keep it in mind for next time as something you need to be conscious of.

Again there are a lot of different ways to finish off the buttonhole. I'll do something quite simple and effective.

Sew the last stitch parallel to the first and the gimp will be sticking out from them both. Firmly pull on the ends of the gimp to pull a little bit extra out of the stitches causing the buttonhole to become a little bit tighter. As close to the first and last stitches as possible cut the gimp off. Try to pull the buttonhole back into shape to relax it a little bit and draw the gimp back into the stitching. You can put something blunt like a narrow knitting needle into the keyhole to help pull it.



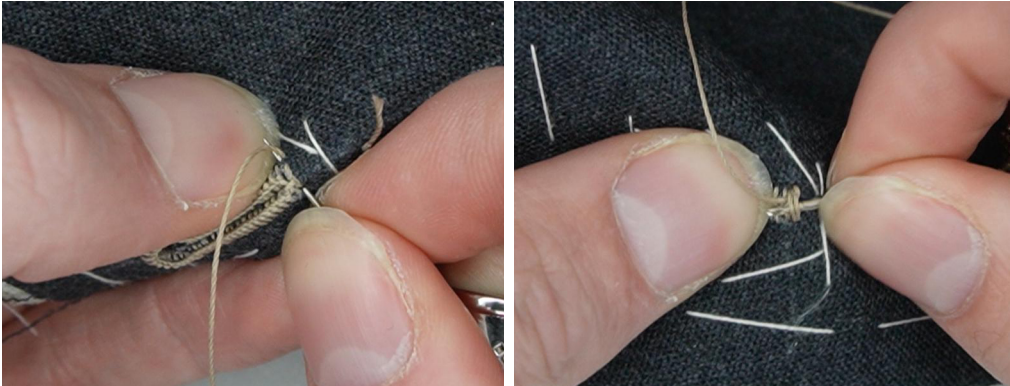
Hand-sewn buttonhole

With the needle now make a stitch sewing through the original buttonhole stitch from the outside towards the inside of the hole. Pull the stitch tight and that will pull the base of the buttonhole together to help keep it parallel and neat. Then at the base of the middle of the buttonhole I sew through the cloth towards the outside of the last stitch coming out just next to it. From here creating the bartack across the bottom. Sewing just next to the outside of the



first stitch and sending the needle all the way to the other side of the cloth and coming back up through the cloth where the stitch had just come out previously.

Sew across the base of the buttonhole two more times to create 3 stitches across the base to create the bar. This can then be wrapped with thread to make it neater and to protect the bars of thread themselves from wear. You can wrap it quite densely or with as few as three times to make it quite subtle, or make tiny buttonhole stitches across it to make it stand out a bit more.



At the other side when done I send the needle to the opposite side of the cloth through the same hole again and pull it all the way through.

I think this bar tack is quite important to sew through all the layers of cloth because the cloth is otherwise cut or snipped into at that point and there isn't much holding it closed. There isn't much leverage on that position, but nonetheless I think that reinforcing that point will help prevent the cloth from splitting. The bar can also be used to cover any exposed gimp that there may be.

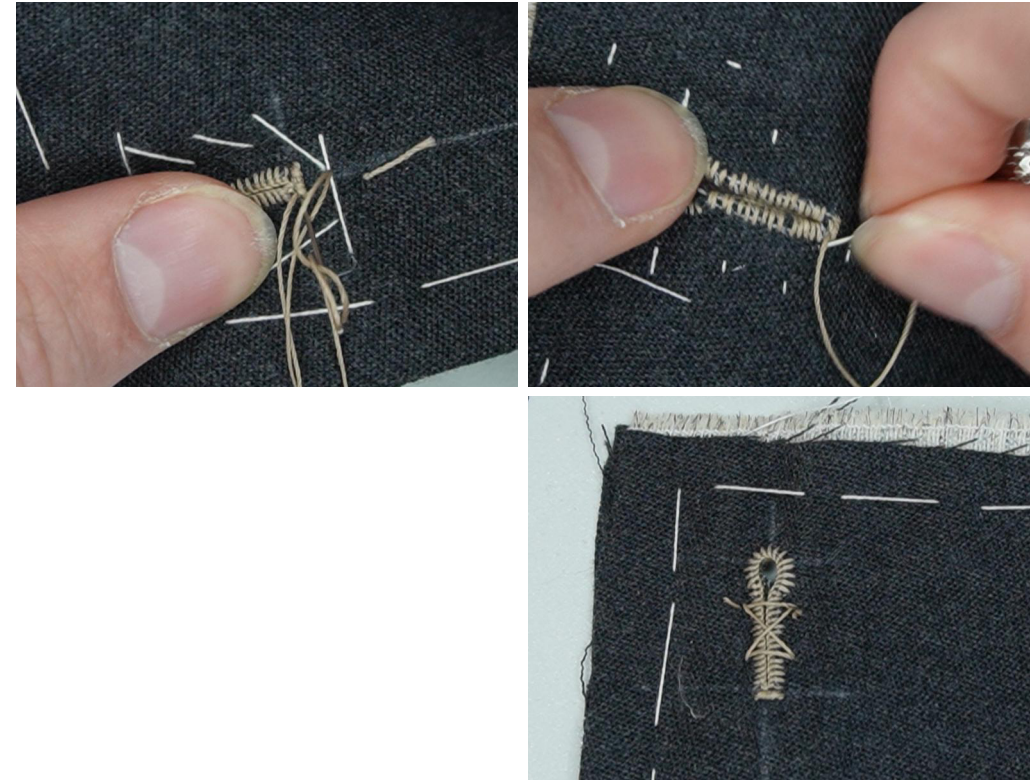
I wrap the thread over the bar tack on this side too, only up to three times to get to the opposite side and with the final loop I put the needle through it and pull it tight to tie it off, then hide the thread between the layers of cloth. I cut it off to hide it and that's the buttonhole itself sewn.

You can look at the hole from the front and position it closed and you have a chance to push all the knots into alignment if they aren't already.

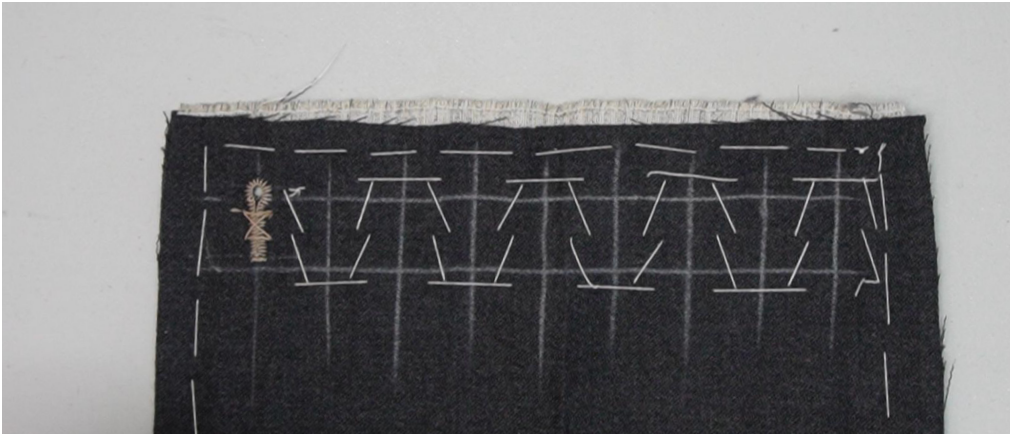
Hand-sewn buttonhole

If you knotted the thread to begin the stitch it can be cut away now too. Generally when a buttonhole is sewn it is then basted closed with the leftover thread for the garment to be pressed before the buttons are added. I imagine the idea is that it maintains the shape of the cloth and doesn't allow the buttonhole to be pulled open while the garment is being moved around.

The reason for my method of the original baste, each tack comes out easily and then the thread can be pulled out easily too. That would be the end of sewing a buttonhole into a garment. I have a few more points to make about practice though.



Hand-sewn buttonhole



Taking a whatever sized piece of cloth and preparing a number of buttonholes at a time can make it easier to choose to practice. It certainly did me. Like I said I had a piece of cloth and I could sew 50 buttonholes into it, and when I filled that up I made another to get up to my first 100.

You could overlock or pinking shear the edge to make it a bit neater. If you keep some threads prepared too you can take it with you wherever you are and practice sewing anywhere. I found it difficult to practice on the bus though. Towards the end I made a point to practice three buttonholes a day and quickly that is when I started getting better. I was never very patient and it took a lot to sit and sew them, but now there were 50-something buttonholes in just my final project at university and I don't really think twice about sewing them anymore. Well I do a little, but it's not that bad.

A practice method for the keyhole

Something that I found helpful when practicing sewing around the keyhole is marking each stitch that I will do around it before I start sewing. After the hole is cut I clearly mark the top point in line with the hole and then I mark across the diameter of the hole horizontally.

I then divide the sections further approximating where I can sew some more stitches. So in the lower sections I think I can sew 2 stitches and in the top sections I think I can sew 3 stitches between the vertical and horizontal lines. This can be refined as you practice, for example I think I could have sewn an extra stitch in the top sections.

With the positions equally marked though I can start sewing the buttonhole. As I get to the top I think about it the same way as previously mentioned, but I use the marks and make stitches along those as I sew around the keyhole. You could use sharp chalk, or a pen if you have a light coloured cloth.



Hand-sewn buttonhole

All the way around the hole can be finished just the same again. I did this one without preparing it fully or gimp just because I only wanted to show the star. This is a method that should only be used in practice. You can remove the chalk marks from a garment, but it shouldn't be a crutch to use when sewing buttonholes, I only ever did it to get used to sewing around the keyhole.

Different parts of sewing a buttonhole can come more easily to some than others and you can get advice as helpful as "get good". Between this and other things I've mentioned, something might be able to help if you're struggling with any given part.

Beyond that; depending on what you are sewing or other experience you have can influence how easily sewing buttonholes may come to you. I don't think there's an arbitrary number of times you can practice it before you're good, but if you're not good then you can keep at it and try to improve with each one. See what might be wrong and try to fix it next time.



Soft Gimp

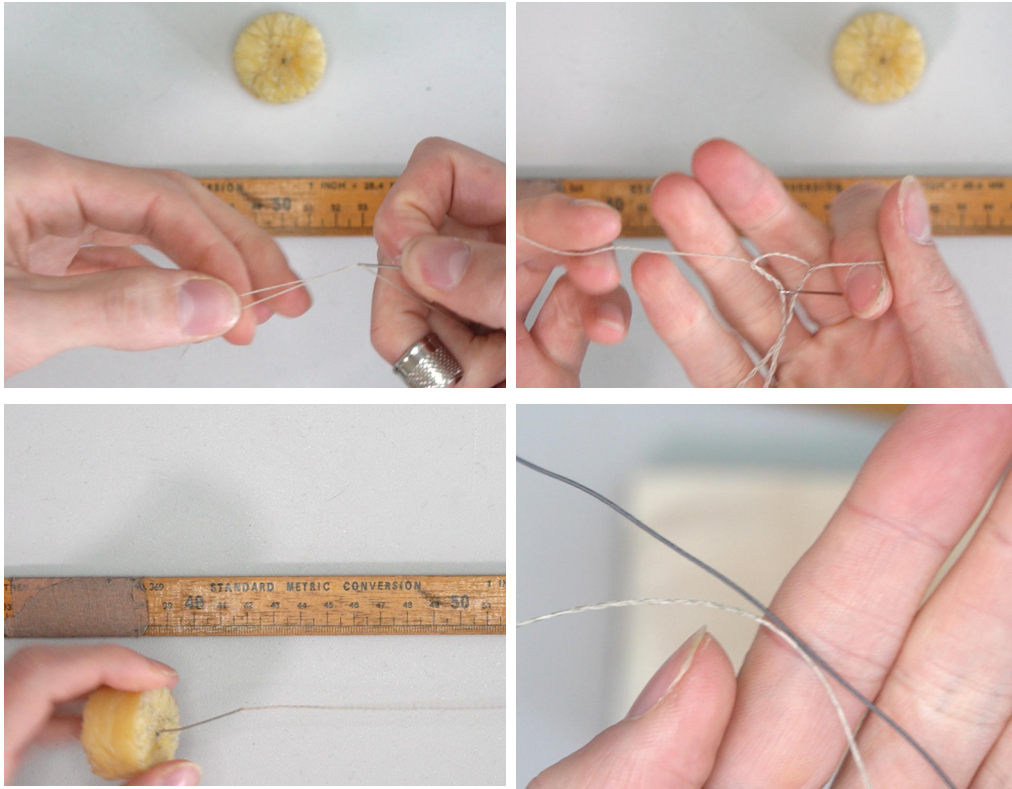
To make a substitute gimp you need to take about four times as much twist as the length of gimp you want.

Wax the whole length, but don't press it. Fold it in half and put it through a needle and place the needle halfway along the two lengths. Hold one end and start twirling the other. Twisting the two strands together. Eventually the whole length will be twisted and if you allow the two ends to get close to one another the thread will then begin to coil itself quite randomly. Essentially to control that, take the needle that should still be halfway through the thread and stick it into the wax or into a spool or cop of thread. Nothing too heavy that the needle can't hold it up, but not too light either.

Holding the ends of the thread pick up whatever the needle is stuck to and put the ends of the thread together. The thread will start spinning together, spinning the needle and the wax or whatever.

Let it keep spinning and you might want to give it a push to speed it up a bit, but once it stops the thread itself should be quite stable and I suggest at this point pressing it like any other waxed thread. Then you have a soft gimp that you can use, plus it's already threaded on a needle, but note that it really cannot be used to sew milanese buttonholes. It's only good for creating the dimensionality of a buttonhole.

Hand-sewn buttonhole



Hand-sewn buttonhole