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Finish That Seam

—But first be sure the finish is the proper one for your material. Here are the recent findings of two textiles and clothing graduate students.

by Barbara Short
Technical Journalism Junior

WHEN your mother was a little girl, often seamstresses stayed in the house for a week to outfit the family each year. Then the inside of a dress was just as finished as the outside. Those seamstresses took pains to finish each seam so that they could be sure it wouldn't ravel. Recent graduate research at Iowa State has taken guesswork out of seam finishing. Findings will mean no more unnecessary sewing or hopelessly raveled seams for the modern dressmaker.

Helen Marian Thomson Hiltbold and Eddye Ruth McCarty performed tests to find out just what kinds of seam finishes one should use on various grain seams in different fabrics. Both women were textile and clothing graduate students, and were doing their research for M.S. theses. Mrs. Hiltbold tested cotton, linen and nylon fabrics, and Miss McCarty worked with rayon.

If you're sewing a garment now or plan to do so, keep your fabric in mind as you read, and make mental notes of seam finishes you can use most successfully. For along with the new unit method of sewing come facts about seam finishing to change sewing methods.

Pinked Edges

Most students use pinked edges for cotton fabrics. Mrs. Hiltbold discovered from a survey both women conducted in clothing construction classes, Miss McCarty found that the pinked edge finish ranked second for rayon fabrics, and that most rayon seam edges were finished by overcasting. Contrary to popular belief, research revealed that in most fabrics tested, pinked seams ravel more than any other.

Straight grain seams raveled least in a majority of seams in her fabric group. She reports that garment bias ravel more than true or straight grain. From these facts, you can see that different grain seams in a garment need different finishes.

As to seam finishes for cotton, nylon and linen, the turned and stitched edge did not ravel at all. Mrs. Hiltbold points out that the ridge produced when the edge is turned shows on certain fabrics. An overcast seam finish ranked second except when used on lightweight loosely woven fabrics. Here they caught and pulled during washing and caused seams to pucker. Mrs. Hiltbold recommends enclosed seams for voile, batiste, dimity, lawn, organdy, and dotted swiss since they take less time, look neater and prevent ravel. Pinked and lapped, and raw edges double stitched both ravel more than raw edges in most cases.

Turning and Stitched Edges

Turned and stitched edges showed no raveling, but Miss McCarty also spoke of the possibility of a ridge showing on the right side of the material. Overcast seams were second best, and proved satisfactory on all grains, although true bias raveled the most. However, overcasting in bemberg sheer caught and pulled during agitation of washing.

Lapped and pinked seams were also satisfactory, and there was little change between ravel in the three grains. Cut edge double stitched finished seams were all right on straight grain edges of rayon fabrics. These seams raveled beyond the safety point on garment bias and true grain.

All seam finishes, even pinked edges, did not change enough to matter in most cases when rayon was dry cleaned. Exceptions are garment bias seam edges for crepe back satin and alpaca. Unfinished, pinked and cut double stitched edges do not give enough protection. Turned and stitched edges are best for these fabrics. Rayon print, shantung, crease resistant suiting, tropical suiting and satin ravel least when dry cleaned.