CHEAT SHEET

Seam *Finish* Guide

Eight ways to finish a seam allowance, how to sew each one, and the fabrics each suits best.

01 Zigzag / overcast

Stitch each allowance edge with zigzag or overcast, outer points just off or at the raw edge. Try about 3 mm wide × 2 mm long, then test.

Best for: Suits many fabrics. Go wider on fraying linens.

EASY · NO SERGER

02 Serged (overlocked)

Trims and wraps the edge in one pass. On knits it can sew the seam too. No serger? Some machines have an overlock-look stitch.

Best for: Fast and neat on most fabrics.

FAST · KNITS & WOVENS

03 Stitch & pink

Straight-stitch ⅛–¼" from the raw edge (farther if it frays more), then trim with pinking shears. Use a thin thread.

Best for: Firm, lightweight wovens: cotton broadcloth, silk charmeuse.

FLAT · LOW BULK

04 Pinked only

Trim each allowance along its very edge with pinking shears or a pinking rotary blade. No thread, so no ridge.

Best for: Stable, tightly woven fabrics such as taffeta.

QUICKEST · WOVENS

05 French seam

Sew wrong sides together at ⅜", trim to ⅛–¼", press, fold right sides together and sew again ¼" in. Totals ⅝" and hides every raw edge.

Best for: Sheer and lightweight fabrics. Aim for ¼" finished.

ENCLOSED · LIGHT FABRICS

06 Flat-felled

Trim one allowance to ⅛", fold the other over it and edgestitch flat, close to the fold and close to the seam.

Best for: Strong finish for light to medium weights: shirts, sportswear, kids' clothes.

STRONG · ENCLOSED

07 Hong Kong

Wrap each allowance in a 1¼" bias strip of lining, stitch in the ditch, press open.

Best for: Fabrics that fray, and unlined jackets where the inside shows.

COUTURE · UNLINED

08 Turned & stitched

Press open, turn each allowance edge under ¼" and edgestitch close to the fold, through the allowance only.

Best for: Light to mid wovens when you want a clean inside without binding.

CLEAN · NO TOOLS

Knits usually don't need one. Knit fabric doesn't unravel like a woven, so many sewists leave the allowances raw. For a tidier inside, zigzag both allowances together close to the stitching and trim, or serge them.

Test first. Sew a sample seam on a scrap of your real fabric before you commit. It saves time, especially on silks and anything slippery.

Sources, checked Nov 2026. Threads magazine: "Four Ways to Finish Seams" and "Four More Ways to Finish Seams" (Sandra Miller), "Keep Pinking and Zigzag Stitching Among Your Basic Seam Finish Options," "Seam finishes for silks" (Threads #139); Sew by the Yard, How to Sew Knits Without a Serger.

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