

MASTERCLASS

COUTURE CLOSURES

BY LINDA REYNOLDS

Learn the techniques used by the top fashion design houses for applying some of the more commonly used couture finishes in garment sewing.





FINAL TOUCH

The details matter when it comes to garment sewing. The techniques applied throughout construction impact the accuracy in the way the pieces come together and the quality of the fit. The techniques used during the final stages of construction as finishing touches matter even more, as they have a greater effect on the overall appearance of the finished garment. A focus on those final details can elevate any ordinary project to couture status.

HAND STITCHING

Knowing how to hand sew is an essential skill every garment sewer should master. This is especially true when applying many couture techniques. Hand sewing requires patience and precision, something not always welcomed by many of today's time-pressed sewists. While there's a seemingly endless variety of hand stitches used in garment sewing and embroidery, just a handful rise to the top of importance and should be part of every sewist's skillset. Familiarize yourself with how to baste, backstitch, prickstitch, catchstitch, blindstitch, slipstitch, and sew a buttonhole stitch, and then use the guidelines below for hand sewing success.

- Dressmaking needles are sized from 1 to 18. The higher the number, the finer and shorter

the needle. Use short needles for general sewing and when sewing short stitches, hemming and finishing stitches. Use longer needles for thread tracing and general basting.

- Use a thimble to prevent the needle from digging into the tip of the middle finger and to help execute more precisely spaced stitches.
- In most instances, a single strand of thread is all that's necessary. Use a length of thread 18" to 24" long; the longer the thread, the more it will tangle and knot.
- All-purpose polyester thread is sufficient for most hand stitching. However, silk thread will not leave an imprint in the fabric when pressed and is best when sewing fine, delicate fabrics.

- Always secure the beginning and end of the stitching with a knot. Basting stitches are the exception to this. Because they are meant to be removed, leave the ends loose or secure with a single backstitch.
- With only a few exceptions, hand stitches work from right to left. If left handed, stitch in the opposite direction.
- For stitching on buttons, snaps and hooks & eyes, always pass the thread through some beeswax before stitching, then press the thread to set the wax. This will both strengthen the thread and prevent it from twisting.
- Always use a light touch and don't stitch too tightly to prevent puckering.



HOOKS & EYES

Hooks and eyes are sold in two basic styles and come in a wide variety of sizes to suit every possible need in garment sewing. The wire version is the most common, while the die cut metal ones are designed to withstand more durable wear. These are the ones most typically found as waist-band closures on pants and skirts.

There are two ways to hand sew hooks and eyes to garments — the easy, rather straightforward way and the couture way. The primary difference is that one looks prettier, neater and more professional than the other. And, as you may have already guessed, the pretty one requires a bit more care to sew. Both, however, if sewn well, should stay secure on the garment.

To stitch hooks and eyes the couture way, whether applying the wire or metal versions, always start with a double strand of good thread that has been pulled through some beeswax and then pressed.

Knot the end of a double strand of thread.

Determine where the hook should sit and run a tiny double stitch to secure the knotted thread in place. Throughout the entire application

process, make sure the stitches do not penetrate to the garment exterior.

Place the hook over the stitch and hold the hook in place tightly with your thumb and forefinger. Sew several stitches under the hook to secure it in place.

Run the thread under the hook and in between the layers of fabric and then up into the center of the top hole.

Pull the needle through and then direct it again under the wire hole. As a loop of thread forms, direct the needle under the loop and pull the thread **(1)**. This completes the first stitch.

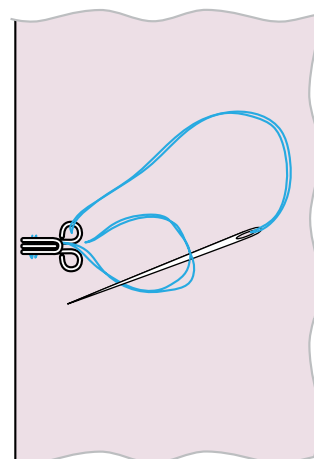
Repeat as many times as necessary to secure the ring. For a small hook, three or four stitches is plenty.

Run the needle under the fabric and into the center of the other ring. Repeat the buttonhole stitch process.

To finish, sew a locking stitch.

To apply the corresponding eye, place the eye onto the hook to determine its location. Unhook them and then tape the eye in place to keep it from moving when sewing. Then repeat the same buttonhole stitch process used for the hook to secure the eye in place.

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BUTTON LOOPS

Loop closures add an elegant and striking finish to any home-sewn garment. Loops are nothing more than very narrow fabric tubes made into button loops, spaghetti straps, decorative frogs or Chinese ball buttons. Fabric tubing can be self-filled, called Rouleau loops, or contain a cording core.

Both styles start with bias cut fabric strips. The width and length of the strips is based on the particular use and, in the case of corded tubing, the cording diameter.

Lightweight, thin fabrics work best for the neatest-looking narrow tubing. While bulky fabrics can be used, they are more challenging to complete and will produce wider tubing.

ROULEAU LOOPS

For typical Rouleau loops, start with bias cut strips that are about 1¼" wide.

Fold the fabric strip in half lengthwise with right sides together. Machine stitch a seam using a ⅜" seam allowance. A 2.2mm stitch is best for a secure seam. The result is a very narrow ¼" tube.

Stitch again very close to the first stitching line to strengthen and seal the seamline. Trim the seam allowance very close to the stitching.

Cut a double strand of thread that is at least the length of the fabric strip and run a few tight hand stitches on one end of the strip (2).

Using the eye end of the needle, feed it through the entire length of the tubing.

Once through the tubing, begin to pull the opposite end through. You may need to hand feed the end to get it started. Clip off the needle and thread when complete.

To finish, carefully place the tube on an ironing board so the seamline runs straight and pin each end to the board, giving the tube a bit of a stretch. Steam the tube, but do not press. This will set the tube and will prevent it from stretching.

CORDED LOOPS

Begin with a length of cording that's slightly more than double the length of the fabric strip.

To determine the bias strip width, take the diameter measurement of the cording and add 1" (for two ½" seam allowances) plus slightly less than ⅛" for ease.

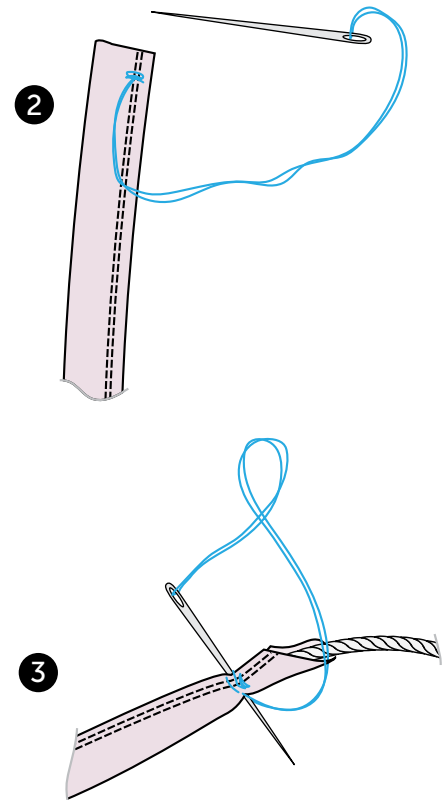
Fold the bias strip in half lengthwise over the cording with right sides together. Leave a small length of cording exposed at the starting end. Pin to hold together.

Using a zipper foot, stitch a seam close to, but not too snug against, the cording. Stitch again close to the first line for a secure seam.

With a needle and thread, sew a few strong stitches to secure the fabric to the cording at the bottom end of the strip (3).

With the covered cording to your left and the uncovered cording to your right, use your fingers to move the fabric over the uncovered cording, turning the tube so the seam is on the inside. It helps to pull the exposed cording at the beginning end.

Continue to move the fabric over the uncovered cording. When all the fabric has been turned, cut off the excess cording.



BUTTON LOOP CLOSURES

Button loops are typically sewn along a seamline that's faced. For a center-front button-loop closure, the loops are stitched to the center-front seamline.

Mark the center-front line on the right side of the garment right front. Repeat for the garment left front. If the loops should begin at the garment upper edge, place the first loop about $\frac{1}{2}$ " below the neckline seamline or edge.

To determine the each loop size, begin by pinning the first loop $\frac{1}{2}$ " below the neckline to the center-front line. Wrap the loop so the space between the inside loop and the center front is half the button diameter.

Sew a button to a piece of scrap fabric. Wrap the loop around the button so it fits as desired. Pin both ends in place. Trim the loop so each end extends $\frac{1}{2}$ " beyond the center-front line.

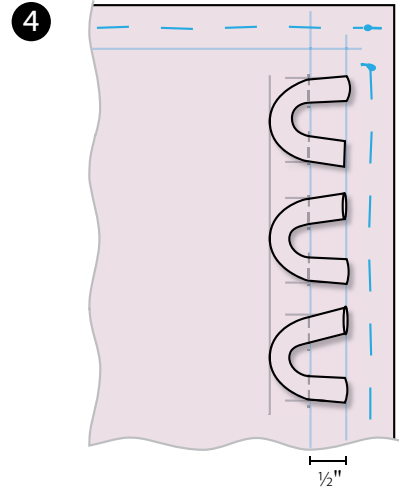
Mark the upper and lower loop placement. Unpin the loop and measure its length, then cut the remaining number of loops needed to that measurement.

Mark the placement of the button loops along the center-front line. Pin in place, and then either hand or machine baste along the center-front line (4).

Attach the facing, understitch and finish the garment as appropriate.

For the left-front piece, extend the finished edge $\frac{1}{2}$ " beyond the center-front line. Complete the left front as appropriate.

To place the buttons on the left front, align the garment center-front lines. Using the loops, mark the button placements.



PRO TIP: The buttons won't sit on the center-front line, but just to the right of it. When the garment is buttoned, the center-front lines will align.

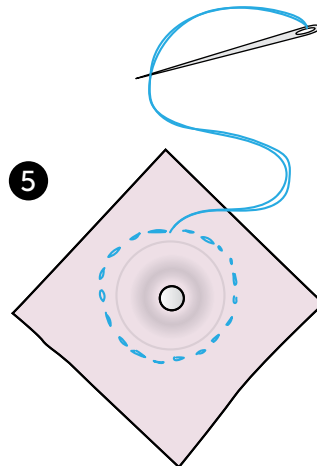
COVERED SNAPS

Snaps covered in matching or coordinating fashion fabric add a very polished and couture finish to a garment. This practice is typically done for large snaps, when they're used in outerwear closures for example, but it's also a common application in finely made suits or special occasion garments.

Cut two squares or rounds of fabric that are double the snap diameter.

Beginning with the male snap, use an awl or other sharp pointed device to make a small hole in the center of the fabric square. Insert the snap into the fabric hole. The snap should fit snugly and stay in place naturally.

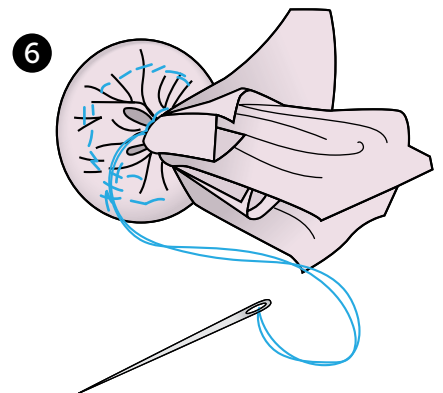
With a needle and single strand of thread, sew a running or easing stitch around the perimeter of the snap halfway between the fabric and snap edge (5).



Pull the thread so it gathers over the snap, wrap the thread several times around the fabric shank and knot to secure.

With another needle and thread, stitch around the inside perimeter using a backstitch to secure the folds together (6). When the full perimeter is stitched trim off the fabric shank.

For the female snap, place the fabric square over the male snap. Snap the two parts in place. The fabric square will be tightly sandwiched between the two components.



Continue per the male snap to cover the snap, keeping the components together throughout the process.

PRO TIP: Covering the female snap while attached to the male snap ensures the female snap is not covered too tightly, which prevents the snaps from properly connecting.

Stitch the snaps in place, passing the needle through the holes and the fabric covering them.

PRICKSTITCHED ZIPPERS

Zippers applied by hand rather than by machine add a beautiful and clean couture finish to any garment. This alternative method uses the version of the backstitch called prickstitching and works best in difficult fabrics, such as velvet, where machine application is impractical, providing an elegant way to finish a zipper in special occasion clothing. This special application is much simpler than it looks and works for either railroad style or lapped zippers. The key is to space the stitches evenly in a straight line and away from the zipper seamline.

Prepare the fabric for inserting a zipper. Interface and finish the seam edges, baste the zipper seam together and permanently stitch the remaining side or back seam. Press open the seam.

Center the zipper on the zipper seam wrong side and securely hand baste it in place.

To ensure all of the prickstitching is evenly spaced on the garment right side, use a removable fabric marker to mark the location of each prickstitch. For a railroad zipper application, do this on both sides, making sure each prickstitch lines up horizontally to its corresponding stitch (7). The prickstitching should sit approximately $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the zipper seamline, and each stitch should be between $\frac{1}{4}$ " and $\frac{1}{2}$ " apart.

Knot the end of a double strand of waxed thread, and start stitching at the base of the zipper toward the zipper top (8). Stitch slowly, carefully and not too tightly. Make sure stitches are evenly spaced and that just a few threads are captured for each stitch. Complete the stitching with a locking stitch. ⑤

