

Four Fast Flat Fell Seams

Construct a neat solution to conceal raw edges

By learning simple techniques you can create a garment that is as clean on the inside as on the outside. Put on your designer cap and focus on all details of a jacket or blouse, including the inside. Rather than hiding your craftsmanship and fully lining a garment, use flat fell seams to clean finish them. These specific seams wrap around themselves, encasing and hiding the raw edge. Flat fells differ from standing fells which look more like French seams. The highlight of this article is learning the four fastest fells (wrapped, stitched then folded, folded then stitched, and double folded), how to make them, and the best suited fabrics for each fell. You may know the standard fell seam well, but in case you don't I'll show you that and the fake fell so you can compare. These will surely speed up your sewing process.

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Tip

DO THE MATH. Make sure to adjust your seam allowances on the pattern before you cut your fabric when you've changed the seam allowance depth.



1

Wrap it

2

Stitch then fold it



3

Fold then stitch it



4

Double fold it

Further your fell knowledge

The standard and fake fell are quite prominent in the industry so let's have a refresher on page 63.



Industry standard

Standardize it



Industry fake

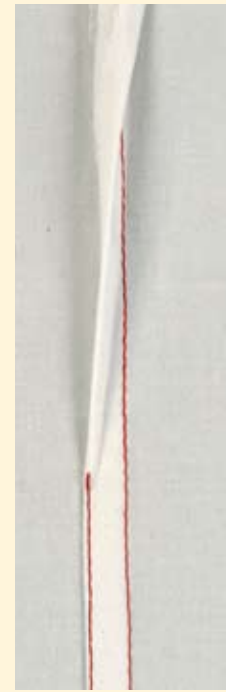
Fake it

The Wrapped Fell

Use shirtings and other light weight fabrics for the wrapped fell method.



Start with the right sides together and stitch a 5/8 seam allowance. Open the garment flat. Fold the seam allowances in one direction together tucking under the raw edges into itself.



Fold again in the same direction, press and edgestitch the folded edge.

The Stitched then Folded Fell

Less stable fabrics such as corduroy and velvet are ideal for the stitched then folded method.



Place your fabric pieces together so the under layer extends 1/2 inch. Make your stitch 7/8 inch from the raw edge of the under layer.



Wrong side up, open the sections flat. Fold both layers together until the exposed raw edge hits the stitch line and edgestitch the loose fold.

10 Topstitching Tips

Use these ten tips to keep your seams perfect.

1 Make sure you have a new needle and full bobbin and spool before starting.

2 Use topstitching needles matched to the weight of the fabric and the thread. Use size 18 needles for heavy fabric, 14 for midweights, and 12 for lightweights.

The Folded then Stitched Fell

Use the folded then stitched method on an unlined jacket made of stable fabric.



Place your fabric pieces together so the under layer seam allowance extends 1/2 inch beyond the top layer. Sew close to the raw edge. Wrong side up, open the sections flat.



Fold the seam to the left so the seam is flat against the garment and press before you edge stitch the loose fold.

“*My favorite of all these seams is the folded then stitched. It works on the widest variety of fabrics and gives me consistent, controllable results.*”

—Sharon Blair

The Double folded fell

Use this method on thick fabrics such as heavy denim and waxed cotton.

Mark the top and bottom ends of your two fabric pieces 3/4 inch from the seam edge.

Press the seam edge 1/4 inch to the wrong side on one piece, 1/4 inch to the right side on the other. Overlap the fabrics. Align notch marks at each pressed fold notch. Edgestitch the pressed edges, sewing the straight stitch in the same direction on each side.



3

If you want the two lines of stitching to show on the outside, start with the wrong sides of the fabric together. If you want one line of stitching to show, start with the right sides together.

4

Do not clip the seam allowances, such as for notches. You may be cutting into the fabric you need to make the fell.

5

When sewing, focus your eyes on a guideline, not the needle.

6

Use a presser foot with a 1/4 inch guideline. Or choose a 1/4 inch-wide presser foot. Or move your needle position to get your 1/4 inch line of stitching. Test stitch. If bobbin thread looks loose, tighten the tension.

The Standard Flat Fell

Although the standard fell has more passes through the machine, is harder to press on long seams and more difficult to sew on curves, it remains the industry standard, hence its name. Here's how you can make one at home.



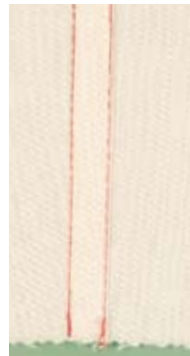
Sew a traditional 5/8 inch seam allowance, pressing the seam allowance open.



Trim one of the seam allowance sides to 1/8 inch wide.



Fold the uncut seam allowance over the newly cut side and tuck it under by 1/4 inch.



Press down and sew close to the newly folded edge to achieve your fell.

MAKING FLAT FELL SEAMS IN MASS PRODUCTION

Factories attach folders and binders to their straight stitch machines. These industrial machines wrap the fabric pieces automatically and sew each seam in one pass. Many denim garments contain flat fell seams and are created by operators joining seam allowances with a 5-thread safety stitch on an overlock machine.

Using a double needle, double bobbin machine, the topstitching is quickly stitched on the garments. These tasks take seconds with skilled operators handling 6,500-stitch-per-minute machines. In fact, from first cut to final button, an overseas factory uses less than 14 minutes to create a pair of jeans.

The Fake Flat Fell

If you look at the inseam of your jeans you are likely to see the fake flat fell. Because of speed, the fake flat fell is the most common seam used for outerwear and unlined jackets in mass production. Here's how you make one.



Join your seams with a straight stitch and finish the edges with a zigzag or your serger. Press the seam toward the front of the garment and turn the garment right side out. Edgestitch 1/8 inch from the fold and then topstitch in the same direction 3/8 inch from the fold.



If you have a 4.0 mm twin needle, you can edge and topstitch at the same time. Don't be deterred when the twin needle looks like a zig zag stitch from the bobbin thread. It will blend in nicely with your serger stitches.

7

Use a stitch length of 3.5 or 4 on jackets. Test stitch. If bobbin thread looks loose, tighten the tension.

8

Sew on right side of the fabric as much as possible and stitch slowly at even speed.

9

Sew both your first and second stitch lines in the same direction. This keeps the seam from twisting.

10

Use a shim when crossing thick seams. This will keep your stitches an even length. As you approach the seam, insert the shim under the heel of the presser foot. As you stitch off the seam, place it under the toes.