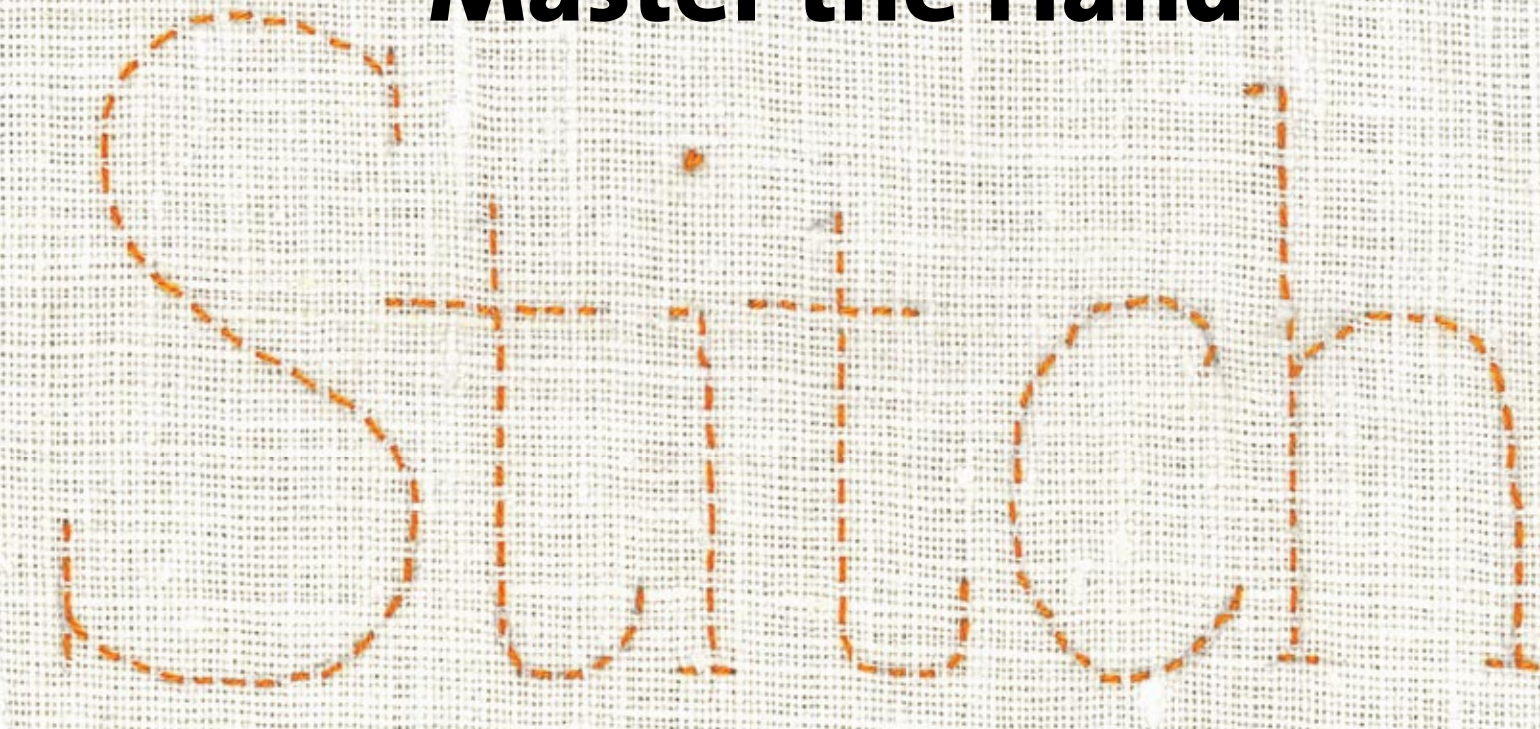


Master the Hand



Learn the fine, invisible stitches that are the hallmarks of couture sewing

Hand stitches are crucial in good finishing; when sewn properly, they are as strong as machine-sewn stitches, and you can do them almost as quickly. But many people avoid them and try to always use machines.

Here, I'll show you the stitches used most often in my work. They aren't all of the hand-sewing stitches used in couture sewing, but they are the most useful to a broad audience—the catchstitch, the blanket stitch, the pickstitch, the slipstitch, and the fell stitch.

For clarity, I used buttonhole-twist thread, so you can see the stitches in the photos.

A few words on thread before I begin: Any thread longer than the distance from your hand to your elbow will tangle when you work and slow you down. I've actually clocked this; it's faster to re-thread than to fight a long length of thread.

Before they sew, some sewers wax their thread to strengthen it and make it easier to work with. I don't, but I do iron it to take out any extra twists.

When you're buying thread, beware of bargains. Those spools you get ten for a dollar aren't for fine sewing. I typically use Gutermann polyester or Mettler silk-finish cotton. Good-quality thread allows you to work faster, and it's more durable.

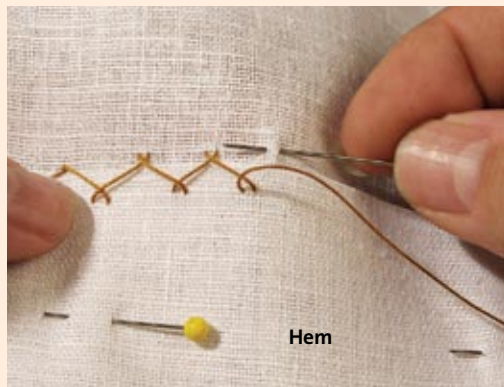
You should also always keep a good supply of sharp, high-quality needles. Preferences in lengths and diameters vary; my favorite is a no. 10 milliner's needle because it's slightly longer than a regular hand-sewing needle; it feels better in my hand (probably because I'm used to long beading needles). Experiment and find the needle that suits you best. With good thread and your favorite needle, you're ready to master these hand stitches. In the next issue, I'll show you a few more tricks of the trade with needle and thread.

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Catchstitch

This stitch keeps layers of fabric flat against one another, whether it be a hem or seam allowances. Use it on lined garments because the lining protects the surface threads,

which tend to catch on things. You can vary the stitch length according to taste. I recommend that you make stitches $\frac{3}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch apart.



CLASSIC VERSION:

In the classic version, the direction of travel is left to right, but the needle points to the left. As you can see in the photos, it is a back-and-forth stitch; you first catch one layer and then the other.



MY VERSION:

This version uses less thread and is faster to sew than the classic catchstitch. I like to interline garments (see “You Say Underlining, I Say Interlining” on p. 40). Catchstitches allow me to tack seam allowances down flat to the interlining without the stitches showing from the right side. To stitch my version, take two “bites” on one stitch—one on the seam allowance and one off. The needle travels at 45 degrees to the seam, as shown above.

Blanket stitch

The blanket stitch is used decoratively as an edge stitch—an overcast stitch for a beautiful seam finish—or an appliqué stitch to apply one layer flat against another. You can vary the

stitch depth and length according your taste and the thickness of thread used. This stitch can be worked edge-side up (demonstrated here) or with the edge-side down.



Secure the thread at the edge of the fabric. Bring your needle one stitch length to the left, insert it through the fabric, and hook the thread behind the needle point.



Pull the needle directly up (or down), to close the stitch. The thread should lie right on the edge of the work.



Bring your needle over one stitch length, insert it through the fabric as you did before. Hook the thread behind the needle, and pull the thread to close the stitch. Repeat to the end of your work.

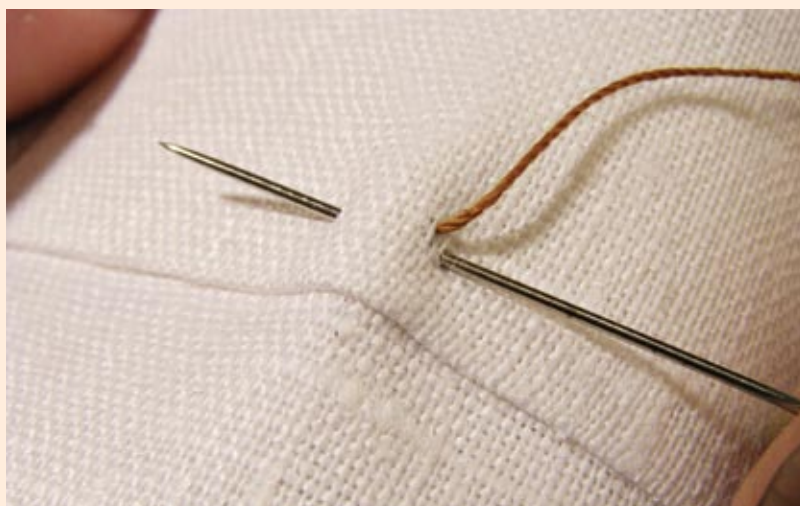
Pickstitch

In sewing circles, the proper name for this stitch has been hotly contested, but I prefer “pickstitch” to “prickstitch.”

The pickstitch is a strong, decorative stitch used for topstitching and installing zippers in difficult fabrics such as velvet. It is also a good way to understitch seam allowances on facings when a machine stitching isn’t possible.

When I sew pickstitches as a decorative detail, I use buttonhole twist in a single or double strand, depending on how visible I want the stitches. For understitching facings, I use Mettler silk-finish, cotton, single thread. For hand-picked zippers, a doubled buttonhole twist is the proper strength.

Make the stitches $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch apart, depending on how far away from the edge you are sewing. The pickstitch is a backstitch but a very tiny one. The direction of travel is right to left. Begin by bringing the needle up through the fabric.

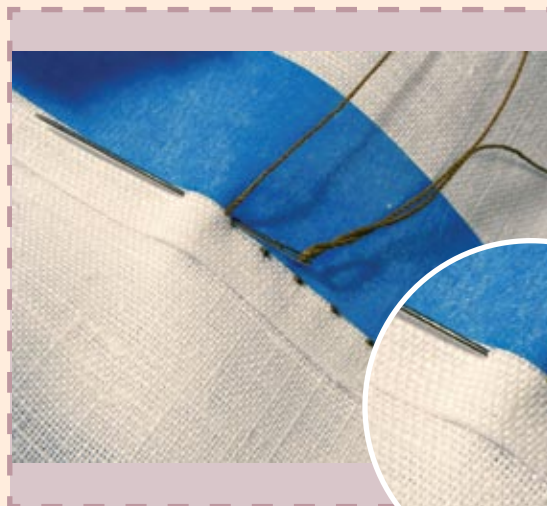


Insert the needle about 1mm behind (to the right of) the point where the thread emerges. In the same action, bring the point of the needle up through the fabric for the next stitch. The stitches should be about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch apart.

Pull the stitch closed. The

tension here should be snug but not tight. You want the stitch to show and not sink into the fabric.

Repeat the process along the seam.



Tip: To sew a row of pickstitches exactly parallel to a seam, use low-tack masking tape to guide your line.

Test the tape on a scrap before you use it; you don’t want to mar the surface of the fabric.

Slipstitch

This is an excellent hemming and finishing stitch because the thread is hidden inside a fold when it's sewn properly. The needle "tunnels" between the layers of the folded edge—hence the word "slip." Use it for hemming and sewing linings in or garment sections

together. To keep the stitches flat and hidden, tunnel the needle about 1mm below the fold. In hemming and finishing applications, keep the thread tension snug but not tight; otherwise, you'll get a ripple where the stitching is.



BLIND ON BOTH SIDES:

When you hem, emerge from behind the fold on the hem allowance. Next, take up one yarn of the body fabric. Pull the thread. Then, about 1mm below the hem edge fold and slightly behind it, tunnel the needle for about ¼ inch, before it emerges for the next stitch. Pull the thread. That was one-stitch cycle; repeat.



BLIND ON ONE SIDE:

Emerge from behind the fold. Take a ¼-inch-long stitch through the opposite side and re-emerge. (This stitch shows on the wrong side.) Then tunnel the needle for about ¼ inch through the fold for the next stitch. Pull up the thread. Use this stitch for sewing linings to facings or when you need invisible stitches on one side only.

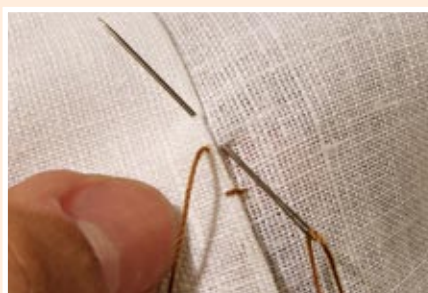
Fell stitch

Also called an "appliqué stitch," a fell (or "felling") stitch is used to appliqué one layer of fabric (generally a folded or selvage edge) to another. It's quick, strong, and flexible—the piece sewn on with a fell stitch can move somewhat like a hinge, and that makes it good for installing linings. It

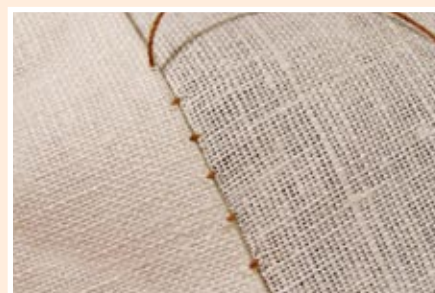
is also used to sew lace—either as appliqués or appliqué seams. The fell stitch is seen in millinery work as well as clothing; it is used to attach hat bodies to brims and to attach hatbands to hats. The stitches themselves typically sit 90 degrees to the edge, or they can be angled slightly.



Emerge on the folded edge. The stitch should be about 1mm away from the fold.



Insert the needle directly into the fabric next to the fold. Run it diagonally so that it emerges beyond the first stitch.



Pull the stitch closed. See how the stitch sits 90 degrees to the fold? Sew the stitches between ⅛ to ¼ inch apart.