

Ripple-free Piping

When you get down to it, piping is just a fabric-covered cord. It should be easy enough to produce, right? Well, the answer is yes... and no. This wonderful design detail that adds structure to and defines garment seams and edges can definitely be tackled by sewers of all levels. All piping is made with bias strips of fabric cut on a 45-degree angle, which are then wrapped around a filler cord, and applied to a garment.

But the very nature of stretchy bias fabric requires careful handling within the framework of those few simple steps: You'll need to choose your fabric and filler cord wisely, be exacting when you measure and cut, hand-baste as well as machine-stitch to form the piping, and then hand-baste and machine-sew again to attach it to your garment. But, believe me, these fine points are key to controlling bias stretch and are well worth the extra time they require. Your piping will be tight, even, smooth, and frustration-free—you'll never again have to rip out stitches to fix a pesky snag, fold, or ripple.

Forgo too-thick or too-thin fabrics

Before you start taming bias strips, let's talk a little about fabric choices, because not all yardage is piping-worthy. Stiff, heavy fabrics like corduroy or denim are difficult to manipulate around a filler cord, and the seam allowances become very thick, very fast. And sheer fabrics may allow the texture of the cord to show.

Your garment and piping fabrics also need to be compatible in terms of weight, drape, and texture. A nubby wool piping and a fine silk garment fabric, for instance, aren't a great pair—the wool piping would look out of place and weigh down the silk. To avoid a piping mismatch, it's always a good idea to test out fabrics in a little piped sample before you commit to using them in an entire garment.

Let the feet do the walking

As you'll see in the step-by-step instructions that follow, after you hand-baste, you can then sew the piping by machine. For this, you have a

To outsmart a shifty bias strip, carefully cut, fold, and pin it around a cord. Then hand-baste the pair in place



few presser feet choices: a piping foot, which works well but isn't standard for most machines, a zipper foot, or a regular foot. I use a regular foot whenever I can, as I've found that a zipper foot doesn't always exert the right amount of pressure on the fabric, which can effect the tension and create loose stitches. On my last pass of stitching, however, I switch to a zipper foot so I can sew as close as I can to the cord.

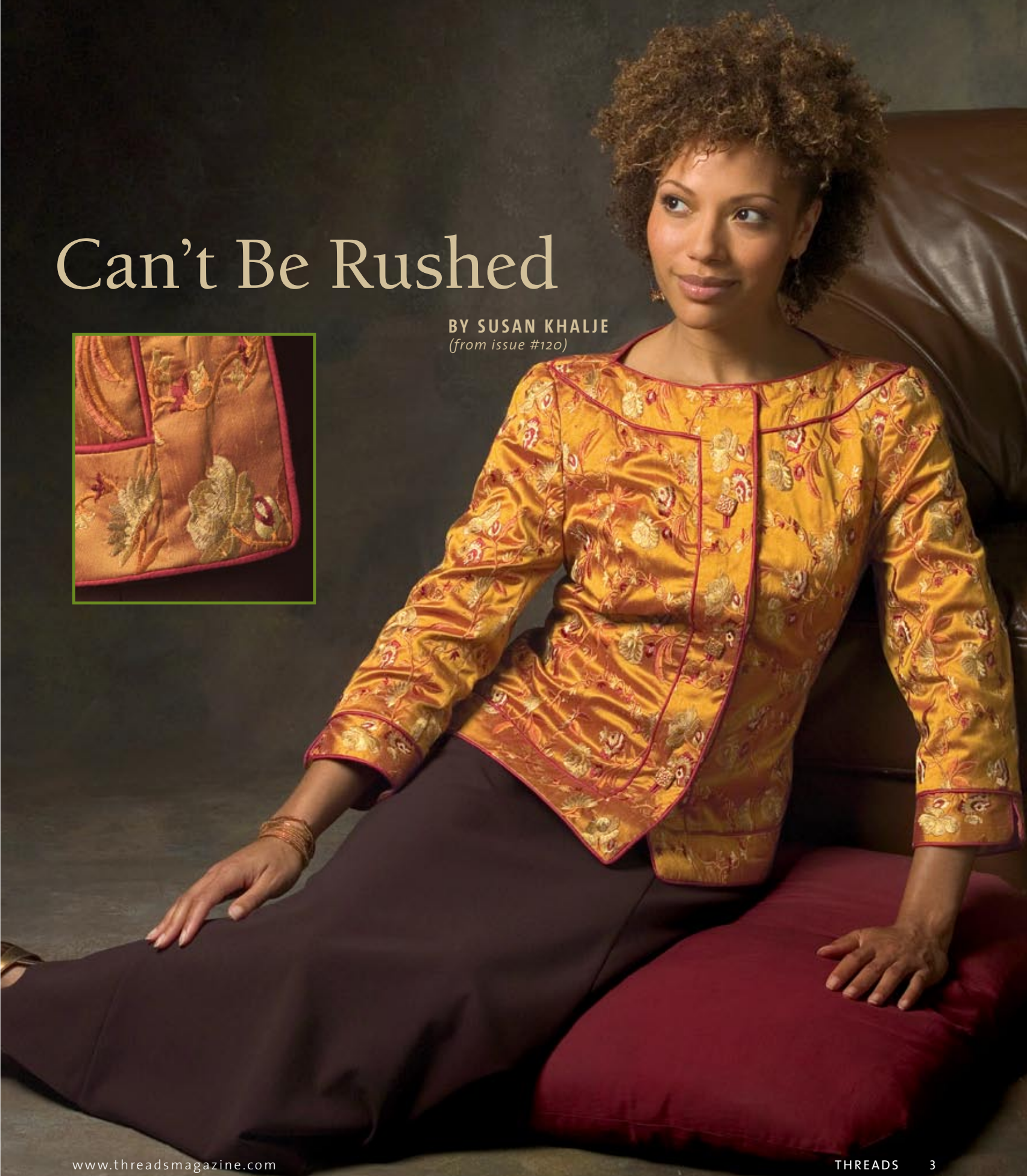
No pressing needed

After all your hard work basting, the piping will do all the work for you in creating a fine edge. Piping is meant to be gently rounded, so pressing really isn't necessary. Applying heat, pressure, and steam to a piped edge may create a not-so-gentle ridge, and the seam allowances may show through the fabric. In this rare moment of sewing construction, your hard-working iron can kick back on its heels for a well-deserved breather.

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Can't Be Rushed

BY SUSAN KHALJE
(from issue #120)



Filler choices Compare thickness and texture

Although filler cord is completely covered by the piping fabric, its thickness and surface does affect the final result. All of these options are fairly inexpensive, which is a good thing—you'll be using a lot of cord in your garment.

TWISTED CORDING

This white or off-white cording is sold at home-decorating centers and larger fabric stores and is available in a range of diameters. It was created for heavier home-decorating fabrics, so the diagonal cording lines might be visible through lightweight garment fabrics.

YARN

Readily available at sewing and craft stores. Choose a synthetic twist that won't shrink when washed, and isn't too furry—stray fibers can get caught in your stitching.

RATTAIL (AND ITS THINNER COUSIN, MOUSETAIL)

This narrow, shiny rayon cord is firm, smooth, and consistently thick so it never gets caught in machine stitching. Fabric also slides beautifully over it, which makes ruching (see p. 7) a cinch.

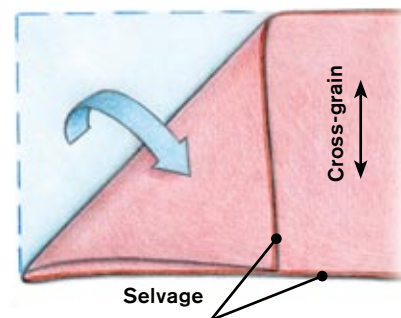
First Step

Measure and cut the bias strips

Experiment a little to see how wide to make your strips. As a general rule, cut them double the diameter of the filler cord, plus 1½ to 2 inches for seam allowances. Remember, bias strips narrow a little once they're cut, so it's better to cut them wide—you'll have better control with generous seam allowances. And you can always trim later.

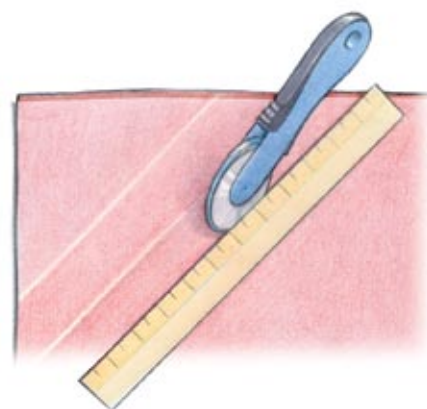
Find the true bias.

To make sure the horizontal and vertical grains are at right angles, line up the fabric in a table corner. To find the true bias—45-degree angle—pick up a fabric corner and fold it so the selvage—tightly woven edge—is aligned along the cross-grain. Press.

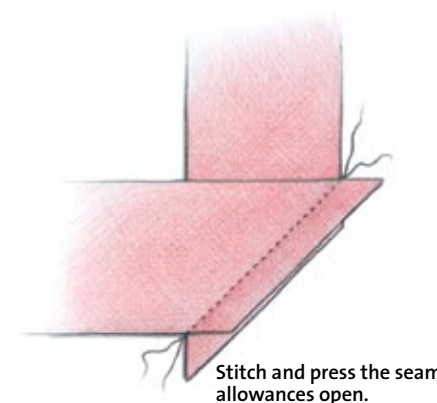


Cut with a ruler and rotary cutter.

Open the fabric, then trace the foldline with chalk and a ruler. Measure your desired width; continue until you create enough strips for your project. A rotary cutter and mat ensure that the fabric lays flat. Use the edge of the ruler as your cutting guide.



Join strips to get the length you need. To join bias strips, sew them along the straight grain, which in a bias strip is along the diagonal. The joins will be unobtrusive.



Second Step

Cover the cord

To ensure that the filler cord doesn't slip inside the bias strip as you are sewing, first tie a knot on either end.

Fold the strip over the cord.

On a flat surface, place the strip right-side down. Lay the cord down the center, then fold the fabric over it. To avoid shifting the bias, first secure with a pin in the center of the strip (don't lift the fabric off the table), then one at each end. Pin again halfway between the pins, then halfway between those, and so on.



Hand-baste the edges together, then machine-stitch.

Lifting the strip could shift the bias, so keep it where it is. Hand-baste with a running stitch about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch from the cord; remove the pins. Machine-stitch just inside the basting, leaving room for a final and closer pass of machine stitching. If this initial stitching is too close, then the second row will be even closer, and the piping will become stiff.



Pipe an edge or a seam. A colorful covered cord defines a neck edge and highlights an otherwise invisible seam.



Third Step

Apply the piping to the garment

In the following steps, piping is applied to the right side of one fabric layer. To sandwich piping between two layers, follow the same steps, then simply place the second layer on top (the layers will be right-sides together), and stitch alongside the last line of machine stitching.

Staystitch the garment edge. Mark the seamline on the wrong side of the fabric with chalk. Then, to prevent the edge from distorting as you apply the piping, and to give you a clear stitching path, staystitch along the line.

Hand-baste in place, then machine-stitch inside the first line. Pin the piping on the right side of the fabric, placing your pins just inside the initial row of machine stitching. Your goal is to match the pins to the garment staystitching. Then, hand-baste (yellow stitches) just the tiniest bit inside the staystitching and the line you've just pinned. Remove the pins, machine-stitch on top of the basting (not shown), then remove both basting lines.



(continued on the following page)

Special Details

For curves, snip seam allowances

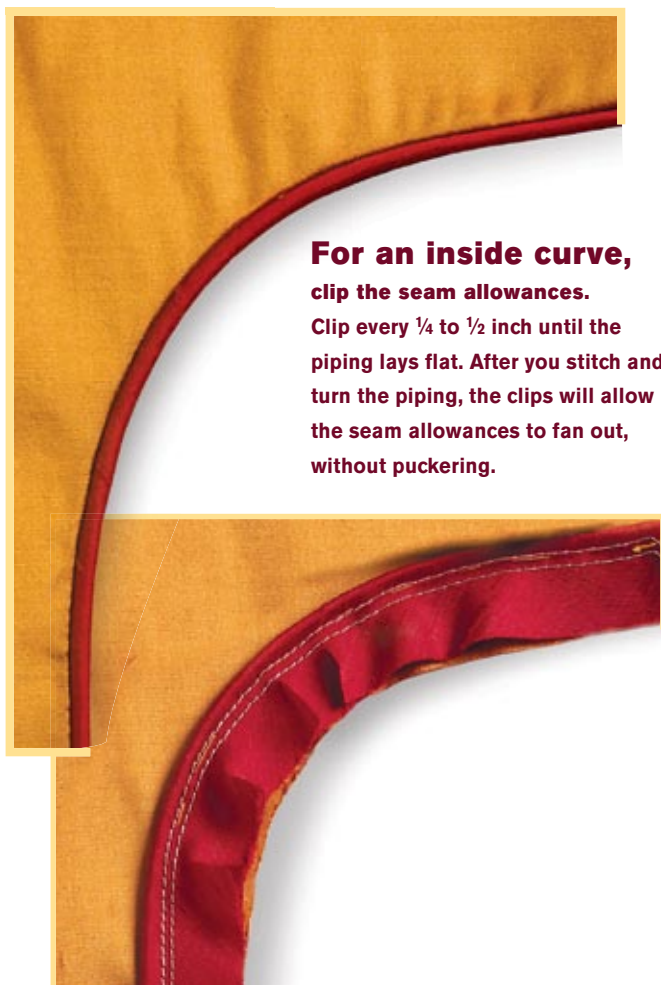
To sew piping along anything but the straight-and-narrow, you need to snip the seam allowances *before* you sew on the piping. To get the allowances to lay flat, don't be afraid to snip right up to the stitching line.

For an inside curve, clip the seam allowances.

Clip every $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch until the piping lays flat. After you stitch and turn the piping, the clips will allow the seam allowances to fan out, without puckering.

For an outside curve or corner, notch the seam allowances.

Notch out a triangle every $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. After you stitch and turn the piping, the notches will allow the seam allowances to nestle without bulk.



Get creative

Piping lends itself to a number of striking variations. Here are some of my favorites:



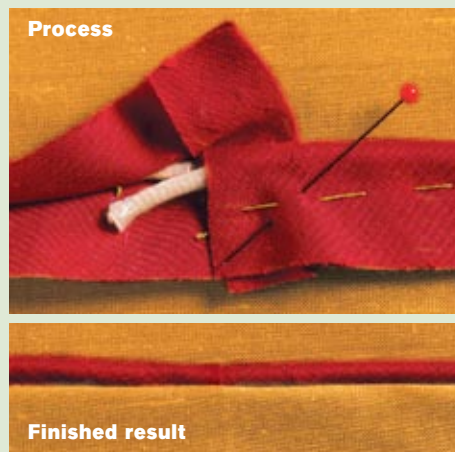
Overlap at an inside corner. While piping can be eased around an outside corner or curve without any trouble, it's not so happy in a sharp inside corner. The extra fabric tends to fold over on itself. I prefer to overlap two pieces of piping for a clean, sharp corner.



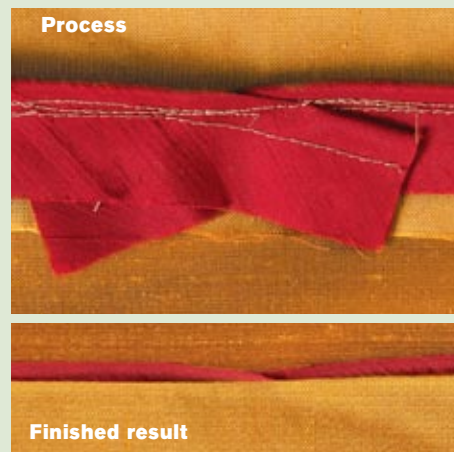
Pipe a buttonhole. For this fancy finish, first fuse interfacing to the fabric's wrong side (this will stabilize the fabric and prevent the piping ends from showing through). Then fashion two small pieces of piping and apply as you would a bound buttonhole.

Options for joining the ends

In some applications, such as around a sleeve hem or neckline, piping ends need to be joined. You have a few methods to choose from, but in all, the cord ends need to be cut so they butt up against each other. If they overlap even a little you'll get an unsightly bump.

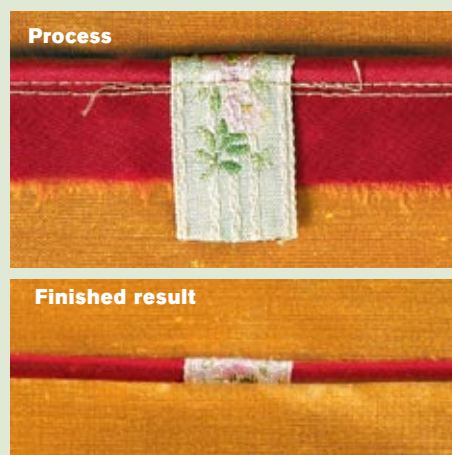
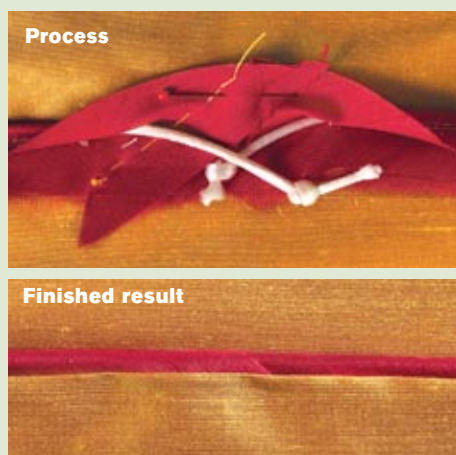


Slip one end inside the other. Press the raw edges of one end under, then slip the other end inside. Tighten the top layer of fabric to reduce bulk.

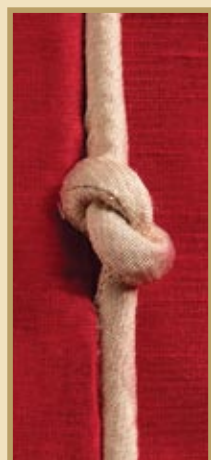


Angle and overlap the ends. You'll just need to experiment to see how you want to slope the ends.

Seam the ends. Seaming piping to the perfect length requires fiddling, as the bias strips can stretch. Loosely baste the seam until you sew right up to it, adjust as necessary, then machine-stitch.



Cover the join with ribbon. For a pretty, unusual patch, straddle the two ends with a piece of grosgrain or velvet ribbon. Tack the two ends together first so they don't wiggle loose under the ribbon.



Incorporate a knot. Tying a knot is a technique I borrowed from the home-décor industry. It's seldom seen in garments, so its presence can be very striking.



Ruch for texture. Experiment with how much extra dimension you prefer by scrunching the bias strip up on the cord; even layer strips for maximum texture. Then, to eliminate bulk, press the seam allowances flat. This also keeps the gathers in place until they're machine-stitched.



Make it a double. Simply layer one row upon another. Just remember that this does create thickness, and therefore less flexibility. Grade the seam allowances to reduce bulk.