



July 2004



Choose the Right Pattern For You

Do you spend some time reading a pattern envelope before purchasing? Do you think ahead, imagining the finished product? Do you know how to choose good patterns? Thinking ahead, asking questions, and knowing our preferences will work to our advantage when using sewing patterns. Here are some personal guidelines which I use when choosing a pattern:

1. The sample garment shown should be clearly photographed, or there should be clear, cleanly rendered line drawings of the garment given. I want to see details. If the darts or style lines fall at what will be an awkward position on my body, I will pass on that pattern. If the overall shape of the garment does not agree with my body shape, I will pass on that pattern.
2. The description of the garment will give you clues about the pattern. A description of “very loose-fitting” with a drawing of a boxy jacket tells me that there is a great deal of ease. Perhaps this is not what I am seeking in a garment. A “closely-fitted” jacket with shaped design lines might be more to my liking.
3. If the pattern is a designer pattern, I try to educate myself about the designer’s style. In other words, I look at the current offerings by that designer to see if I like them. Does the designer usually present shaped garments? Are the designer’s work primarily geometric or architectural? What types of fabrics does the designer use? Do I like that combination? If I like the general shape and style of a particular designer, I am more likely to enjoy the garment I make from their licensed pattern.
4. If the pattern is an independent designer, is the designer available for answers to my questions? What is the overall design philosophy of the independent designer? Is their line known for particular fit? Is their line known for creativity? I try to attend trunk shows and sewing shows in which independent designers participate. By doing so, I am able to see finished garments in real fabric, which helps me make my decisions regarding pattern.
5. Finally, do I LIKE the pattern? If I have reservations about a pattern, I probably will not purchase it. If I know, for instance, that a drape or button at the full hip is not flattering to me, and that is a primary focus of the design, I will not buy the pattern. However, I have been known to purchase some patterns just for the instructions (Claire Shaeffer’s Vogue Couture pattern line is a good example.)

All of these considerations take place before you ever open the pattern envelope. There are still things to do after you take the pattern home; check the pattern for accuracy, adjust the fit, and make a muslin. These topics will be discussed in future issues.

Take some time with patterns you already own. Use the above guidelines, if you like. Mark those patterns with which you have had success, and see what they have in common. You'll be making much better pattern purchases as a result.

A Classic, Versatile Trim (Part Two)

Take a look at current luxury ready to wear clothing, and I am sure you notice the use of trim. Many times, designers have trim made to order for their own clothing lines. More often, the trim is made of the same fabric as the base garment.

One of the most versatile self-fabric trims is the bias tube. This very simple trim can be manipulated into a variety of effects. In this issue, we will look at three innovative ways to use bias fabric tubes as trim for a garment, home décor, or to make a custom fabric. The next issue will show two additional ideas for using tubes.

In issue 2, we discussed a reliable method for making bias fabric tubes. Here is a brief review of the process:

1. Cut the fabric on the true bias, twice the finished width plus seam allowances.
2. Fold in half lengthwise, stitch using a zigzag stitch for stretch.
3. Trim off excess seam allowance.
4. Turn tube right side out, using tube-turning tools.
5. Press finished tube, moistening, stretching, and steaming, to make thin tubes.



Before we look at the five ways to use the tubing, let's discuss how to finish the raw ends. I use one of the following two methods:

Method One: Hem the Ends Together

Hold the end of the bias tube in the left hand. Insert a threaded needle into the seam allowance of the tube at approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the end, as shown. Secure with a backstitch.



Roll the raw ends of the fabric to the inside of the tube as shown.



Stitch with a whipstitch to hold the ends in place.



This method is good for when subtle, perfectly invisible ends are needed. I must confess, however, that the second method is my preferred method. I think it has that extra “something” that gives the project a little punch. See if you agree.

Method Two: The Wrapped End

Hold the end of the tube in the left hand, as shown. Thread your needle with a double length of thread, and knot the ends together. You will want about 18 inches of working doubled thread for the wrapping.



Fold the raw edge of the tube to one side approximately ½-¾” from the end. Insert the thread into the seam allowance. Do not worry about hiding the thread tail. It will be hidden during the wrapping.



Take a few stitches across the tube to secure the raw end. Again, perfection is not necessary at this point. You are merely doing this stitching for security.



Wrap the thread several times around the end of the tube as shown, covering the knotted thread end and the raw edges of the fabric in the wrapping.

When finished to your liking, run the needle back and forth through the wrapping several times to secure the thread. Cut the thread.

Three Ways to Use Bias Tubes

One: Closures

We're probably most familiar with this use for bias tubing. Closures made of tubes are sometimes inserted into the seam of the garment, sometimes applied to the top. You can even make ties to use as shoelaces! You have probably seen closures made of tubes that were simple ties, with one end of each tie inserted into the seam allowances of opposing sides of a garment. Perhaps you have seen the tubes used as loops to surround a button. My favorite closure to make from tubes is the "ball button and frog" which we see so often on Asian-inspired clothing. Ball buttons look difficult to make, but are truly quite simple.

Begin with a 12 inch or so length of tubing.



Make a double loop with the tube as shown.



Take the end of the tube that is on the bottom of the double loop and bring it to the top.



Weave this end through the holes in the loop.



Tighten the loop bit by bit until you have a ball.



After making the button, you will want to make the “frog” to use as the button closure. This can be inserted into the seam, but I think it is much more interesting and creative to do an applied frog closure. Here is a very simple frog to make:

Use a six to ten inch length of tubing. Finish both ends, using your preferred method. Fold it in half as shown, turning the side with the seam allowance to the inside.

Pin this to your fabric. I am using a piece of paper for clarity. You will also use matching thread for your project.

Determine the size of the opening you will need for your finished button. Mark this loop end with a pin as shown. From this marking pin, measure one inch, and place another pin.



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Either by hand or machine, stitch the inside edges of the tubing together between the two pins. Use a secure backstitch or bar tack at each end.



The ends remaining are for you to play with. Try coiling the ends as shown, stitching them in place on your background fabric to hold the shape in place.



Or, run the tube through a large bead and let the ends dangle.



This simple frog lends itself to a lot of creative variations.

Two: Applied Flat

The application of a straight piece of bias tubing seems pretty boring, doesn't it? However, if you look at some of the beautiful pieces being worn today, you'll see an elegant simplicity in this classic design. To my eye, there are two keys to making a simple trim like this appealing. The first, of course, is the expert application of the trim. The second is to use the straight application in multiples. One line of tubing across the calf line of a pair of pants looks like a mistake. Three lines, evenly spaced, look like a design!

Because we are dealing with bias, and bias stretches, care must be taken when attempting to appliqué it in a straight line. Let's use the example of three rows of evenly spaced tubing on the pants described above. What would be the best method for applying the bias?

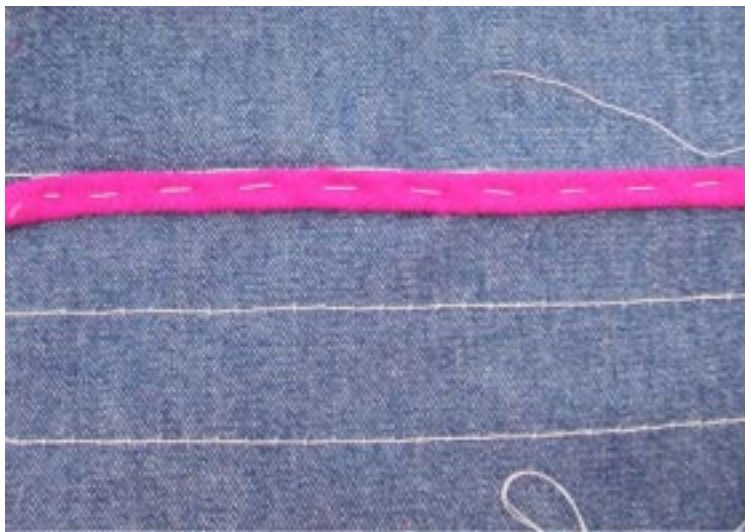
First, stitch the outseam of the pant leg, but leave the inseam open.



Mark the lines for application of the trim carefully. Use a ruler and mark a chalk line for each row of trim. I find that stitching over the chalk marking with a machine basting stitching will give you a very consistent guideline for application of the trim. Use a thread to match your base fabric for this basting.



Hand baste the trim in place, using your machine marking as a guide. Try to position the seam allowance of each row of the tubing in the same direction; for instance, if you have the seam allowance side on the top, keep it on the top of each of the three rows. After hand basting the tube in place, remove the machine basted markings.



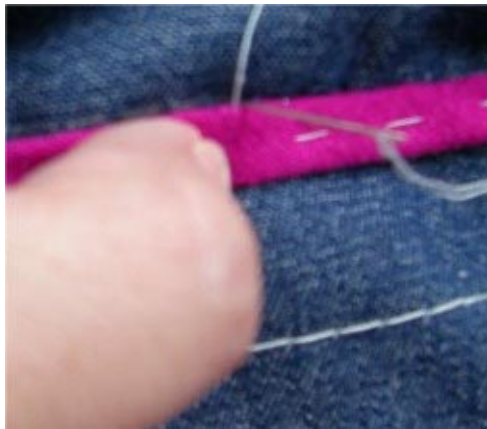
You can then permanently stitch the tubing in place by hand or by machine. For hand application, use an appliqué stitch. Thread your needle with a single length of thread. For appliqué work, I prefer to wax and iron the thread. Please don't roll your eyes; it really does help with the "kinking" nature of the thread! Insert the needle through the wrong side of the fabric, bringing it up next to, but not through, the tube.



Insert the needle horizontally through the fold of the fabric of the tube, bringing the needle out 1/8 to 1/4 inch away. The exact distance is not critical, but be consistent!



Next, insert the needle through the base fabric, running it horizontally behind the fabric for 1/8 to 1/4 inch. Repeat these steps across the piece.



You may choose to apply the tubes by machine. You could simply appliqué the tubes by straight stitching down each side. I prefer using a blind hem stitch, as this will be less likely to stretch the bias. Position the needle to the right of the tube. I use a topstitching or edgestitch machine foot for this type of application. You will stitch on the backing fabric for the straight stitches of the blind hem stitch, then catch the tube with the zigzag stitch. The first row in the photo below is done in contrasting thread for clarity. The second row is done in matching thread.



By adjusting the widths of the stitch and the widths of your tube, you can make interesting variations of this application like the one shown below. The tube was set next to the hem of the garment, and is attached to the hem only with the zigzag part of the stitch.

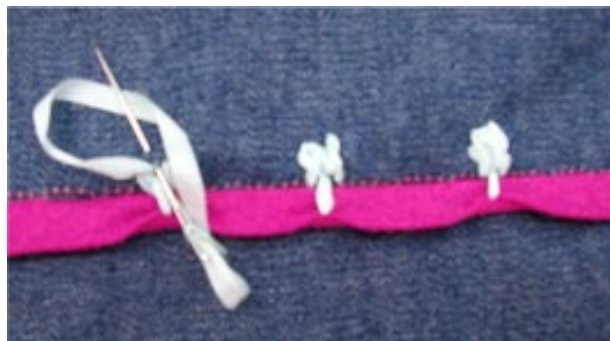


Here are a couple of variations on this straight applied design. Run several rows of tubing evenly spaced, with decorative machine stitching between them.



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Make wide tubing (1/2" or wider). After stitching in place on one long side, mark evenly spaced intervals on the opposite side. Pull the edge at the marking up to the opposing side, securing with a hand stitch. Embellish with beads, embroidery, whatever you choose.



Three: Free-form Appliqué

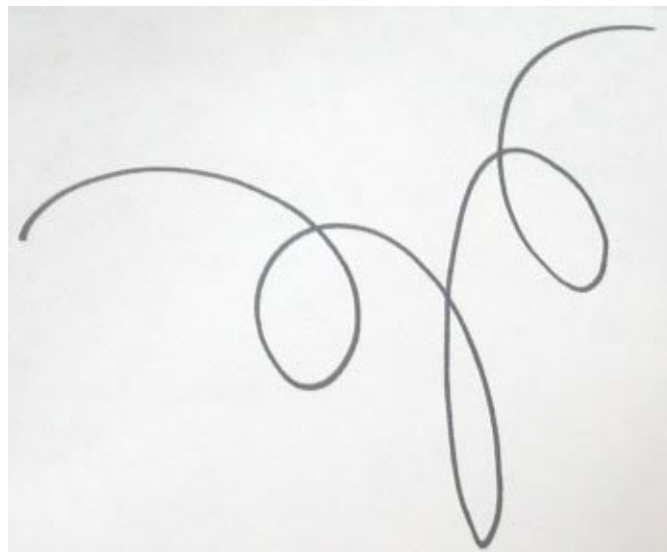
Do you have a garment that needs a little “punch”? This might be the solution. I made an olive green jacket a few years ago, very classic in design, with a beautiful cut. It was, to be frank, boring. This free-form appliqué gave the jacket a unique style.



A simpler design is being used for the example. Feel free to make yours as simple or as elaborate as you like. This technique works best with finished tubing of less than ½” in width.

You will need a long piece of tubing with the ends finished, an assortment of beads, a square of freezer paper, several heat-proof straight pins, and an iron, in addition to your regular sewing supplies.

Draw a free-form design on the matte side of the freezer paper. If you are doing two sides of a garment, trace the design onto a second piece of freezer paper, making sure to reverse the design for symmetry (lay the two pieces shiny sides together when tracing to do this).



Lay the paper shiny side up on the ironing board. Begin following the design with your finished tubing, pinning it into place. If you have a very curved piece, like this one, I find that pinning on the outside of the curve first, then coming back to pin the inside of the curve gives the best results.



If you run out of tubing, attach a second piece by tucking the raw ends underneath an overlapping bit of tubing.

When finished, press with an iron, using a lot of steam. Allow the piece to cool completely. Since you have the piece against the waxy side of the freezer paper, the wax will cause the tubing to stay in place until cool.

Gently remove the pins, and press again to remove pin marks.

Pick up the paper and tubing together and move to the base fabric. Holding the appliqué in place with your flattened hand, gently slide the paper out of the way with the opposite hand as shown.



Correct any places that have “moved”, then stitch in place by hand (using the hand appliqué stitch) or by machine (using the blind hem stitch).



Accent with beads, embroidery, buttons. Use the bias as a part of a larger composition, which might include appliqué, silk ribbon, or machine embroidery.

Interfacing Tricks

Fusible interfacing is one of those products we wonder how we ever lived without. For most of us it is the first choice when interfacing appropriate areas on a garment. It holds the fabric in the position in which it is fused, keeping the fabric in the right condition for the job.

Have you considered using this property of interfacing to your advantage? There are two applications of fusible interfacing which qualify very nearly for magical status. The first is the use of interfacing to shape fabric; the second is the use of interfacing to RE-shape the fabric. We know about shaping all or part of a garment by using interfacing. Using interfacing to beef up a collar or cuffs is pretty simple to do. Let's take the shaping of the garment a step beyond the basic, and use the stiffness of the interfacing against the softness of the fabric to make the pattern piece do what we want.

First, let's review the steps for proper fusing: pre-shrink, pressure, and steam.

PRE-SHRINK the interfacing by dipping it in warm water and hanging it to dry. This is a simple step that will save you a lot of aggravation later. Use **PRESSURE** with your iron when applying the interfacing. Press down with the iron, then lift it up, moving to the next fabric segment to be fused. Do not move the iron from side to side. This will cause puckers and folds. You will be unhappy.

Use **STEAM** when fusing. I prefer to use a spray of water from a spritz bottle before pressing the fusible, rather than using the steam from the iron. My personal iron leaves steam hole markings if I use the iron steam; test your own iron to see if this is the case with yours.



For the first interfacing trick, let's use a French cuff as an example. We want a French cuff on a blouse to have beautiful shape: crisp, sharp and held in place with an elegant line. Normally, I would block fuse this small piece (fusing a length of interfacing to the entire section of fabric, then cutting out the pattern piece after fusing). However, we want the fold of the cuff to be soft. Fusing the entire cuff will often give a folded edge that is much too crisp for a pretty cuff. Here is the solution: Cut the interfacing by the same pattern as for the cuff as shown, but at the fold line, cut the interfacing in half. When fusing, allow a thread's distance between the two halves of the interfacing.



This thread's distance will give the softness needed for the cuff to roll beautifully into position, maintaining the crispness of the rest of the cuff.



Now, where can you use this? Shape a jacket lapel by splitting the interfacing along the roll line. Shape a shirt collar by splitting the interfacing along the fold of the collar. Shape a hem by splitting the interfacing at the exact hemline. Any part of a garment that needs to fold, and needs to have shaping near the fold, can benefit from this technique.

The second interfacing trick is a fabric manipulation trick from years ago, with a few new variations. I had seen a demonstration of fabric tucked and scrunched and wrinkled, then held in place permanently with a backing of fusible interfacing. This particular technique was interesting to me. What were some different shapes and tools I could develop by using fusible interfacing? Could I re-create some of the designer fabrics in this way?

Grab some scraps of fabric, some interfacing scraps, and an iron. You'll also want some oddball items like dryer hose, a cookie drying rack, a paper towel tube....use your imagination and gather anything that is heatproof and of an interesting shape. For an example, let's start with the dryer hose. Extend the hose until the surface is flat. Wrap a scrap of fabric around the hose. Use old bobbin thread to wrap the fabric in place until secure. Scrunch the hose until it is compressed to its original shape. Lay a piece of fusible interfacing face down on the fabric. Mist with water, then press in place with the iron until it is secure. Allow the fabric to cool, then remove it from the hose. You have just created a designer fabric, using interfacing! This technique is particularly successful when using sheer fabric.

Experiment with other findings to make textured fabric: poke the fabric through the holes of the gridded cookie drying rack. Poke the fabric in the end of the towel tube and stuff it with balls of yarn. Wrap it with a rubber band, fuse to the interfacing, then cut the rubber band. Have some fun!

These pieces of fabric are wonderful for accents in garments. I'm sure you can already picture one for a collar or a cuff, but why not use them for the button band on a shirt? Or the flap of a pocket? Or as a wide binding on the edge of a top? Or bias binding on a coat?



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Thanks again and happy sewing!