

Easy FLY-FRONT Zipper

A straightforward method yields flat, neat results

BY PAMELA LEGGETT

I've been teaching pants fitting and sewing since the 1980s. My techniques and skills have changed and improved over the years, but this fly-front zipper technique has remained the same for me because it works. It's a classic technique I learned way back when, and I've enjoyed carrying it forward into new decades. My students feel proud of their zippers when they use this method—it satisfies the sewing geek in all of us.

This method is adaptable for any pattern with a center-front seam, as you can draft your own extension or modify an existing one. Each step has easy preparation

to get the elements in proper alignment for stress-free sewing. Along the way, there are opportunities to catch any mistakes before you proceed to the next step. And it relies on some basic physical guides, like clear tape, the zipper tape, and carefully placed pins, to guide your topstitching. The finished result only appears to have been painstaking.

If you've never tried sewing a fly-front zipper before, I am certain you can follow this tutorial. You'll be amazed at how simple it is. If you sew them all the time, maybe this easy method will offer a refreshing, relaxed take on a traditional closure.

Pamela Leggett, the owner/designer of Pamela's Patterns, teaches fitting and sewing classes at her studio in Vernon, Connecticut, in the Philadelphia area, and for sewing groups, stores, and shows nationwide. PamelasPatterns.com

Plan or modify an extension

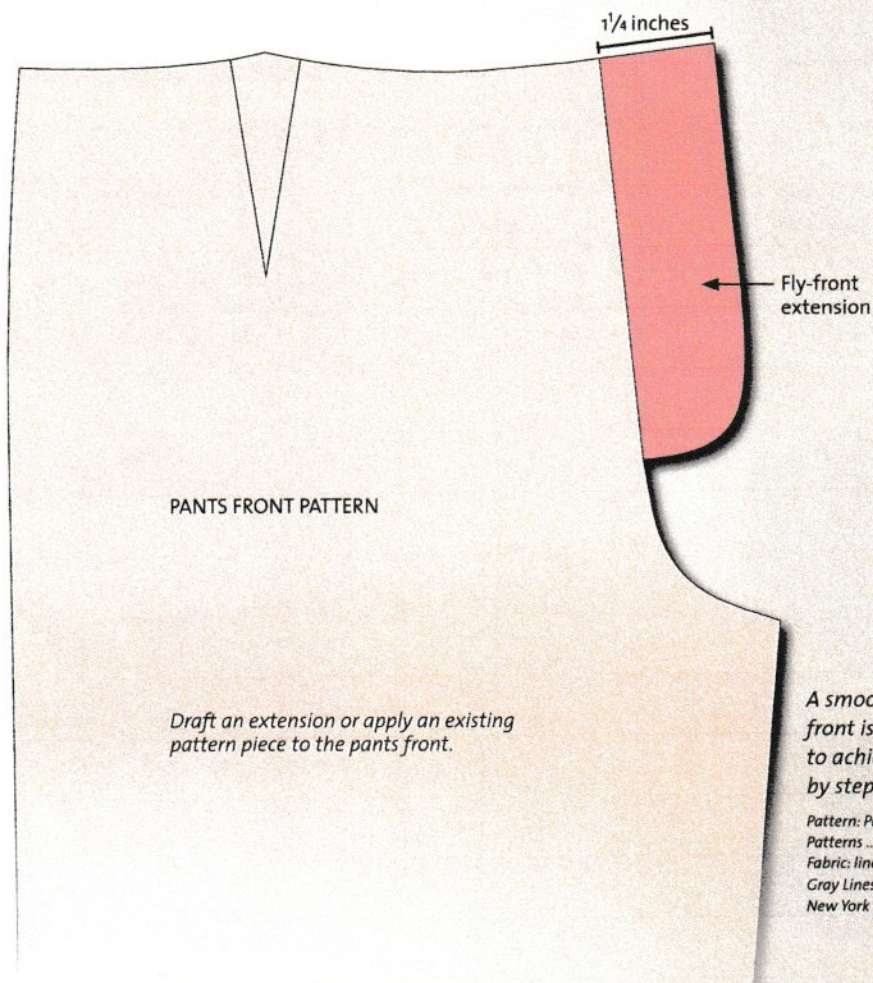
Some patterns come with a fly-front extension drafted onto the pattern, while others have a separate piece that gets sewn to the center front. Regardless of how your pattern looks, here are several tips.

Fit the pattern first. Use your preferred fitting method, or work with a pattern or sloper you've already modified for fit. Assess the proper rise, and determine how you want the pants to sit on your body. Rise styles change and, right now, we are seeing a higher rise in fashion. When the rise is low, the zipper is short. When the rise is high, the zipper is long.

Combine pattern pieces. If you have one of the aforementioned patterns with a separate extension piece, tape the fly-front extension to the pants front pattern, aligning the seamlines, to create a single pattern. This eliminates seam bulk in the finished pants.

Position the extension. No matter what the rise is, I believe it's flattering and convenient to position the fly-front extension as low as possible on the center front, right above the crotch curve. This enables you to put in a longer zipper.

Draft your own. Follow the illustration to add a custom extension to your fitted pattern. A good width for the extension is $\frac{1}{4}$ inches, and the bottom end can be rounded or square. It is easy to adapt any pants pattern to a fly-front zipper by adding the extension. If you decide to use the same pattern for a side or back zipper closure, just fold back the extension.



A smooth fly front is simple to achieve, step by step.

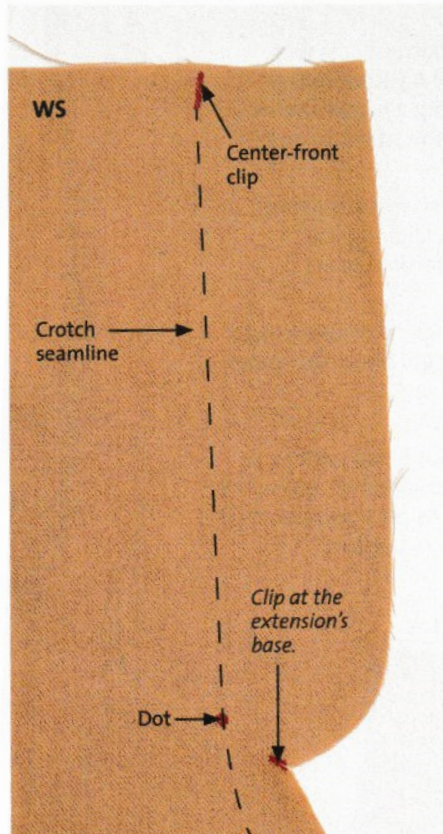
*Pattern: Pamela's Patterns ... Pants Perfected.
Fabric: linen blend,
Gray Lines Linen,
New York City.*



Prepare the pants fronts

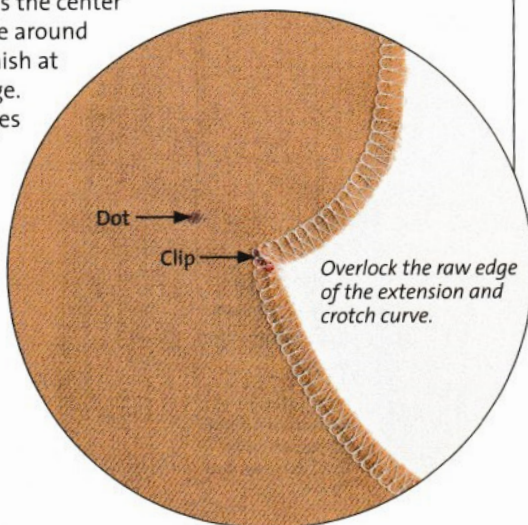
Complete some prep work before constructing the fly-front zipper to ensure a smoother sewing process. Finish the raw edges on the extensions and along the front crotch curve. Stabilize the extensions if desired, and clip where necessary to facilitate adding the zipper. Finally, before sewing in the zipper, baste the pant fronts together along the center front.

1 Clip the center front at the waistline to mark the center-front seam. Also mark a dot on the wrong side along the crotch seamline, $\frac{5}{8}$ inch above the fly extension's bottom edge.

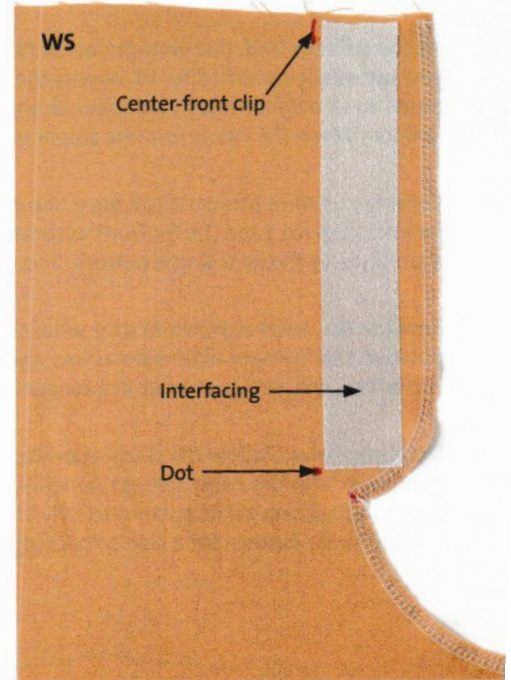


2 Prepare for serging the opposing curves. Clip $\frac{1}{4}$ inch into the fabric at a 45-degree angle, just below the extension.

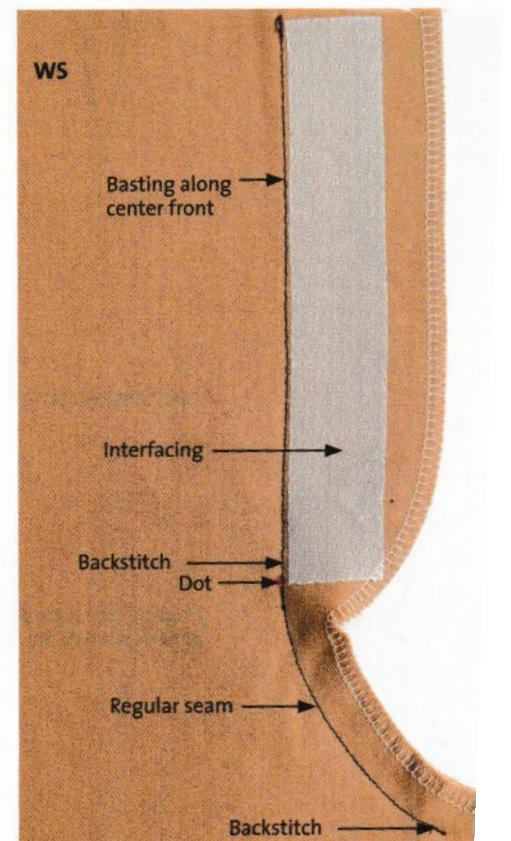
3 Apply a three- or four-thread overlock to clean-finish the entire front crotch seam. Starting at the inseam end of the crotch, straighten the inside curves as you reach them, an inch or two at a time. At the clip, straighten the area where the extension meets the center front. Then continue around the extension to finish at the pants waist edge. Skim the fabric edges with the serger blade, and don't take off any of the seam allowance. Don't worry if the overlock stitches near the clip look loose or messy, as the zipper construction hides them.



4 Add a strip of lightweight interfacing to the fly extensions. Interfacing the fly front renders a result that is smoother and more polished. I recommend Perfect Fuse Light by Palmer Pletsch or $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch Knit Stay Tape Interfacing by SewKeysE.



5 With right sides together, machine-baste the center front. Stitch from the waist to the dot, and pause with the needle lowered in the fabric.

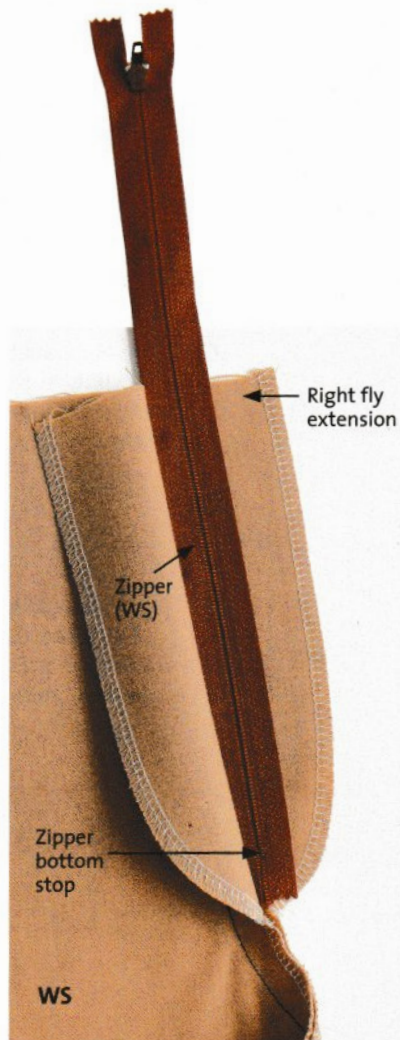


6 Change to a construction stitch length. Backstitch at the dot, then stitch to within 1 inch to 2 inches of the inseam and backstitch. Press the extensions open from the waist to the dot.

Insert the zipper

Install a zipper foot on your sewing machine, and work with a standard zipper that is longer than the finished fly front. The zipper top will be trimmed to fit the pants. The beauty of this technique is that the zipper is stitched to the fly extensions first, then the fly extensions are topstitched to the pants. This sequence ensures a result without bunching or ripples.

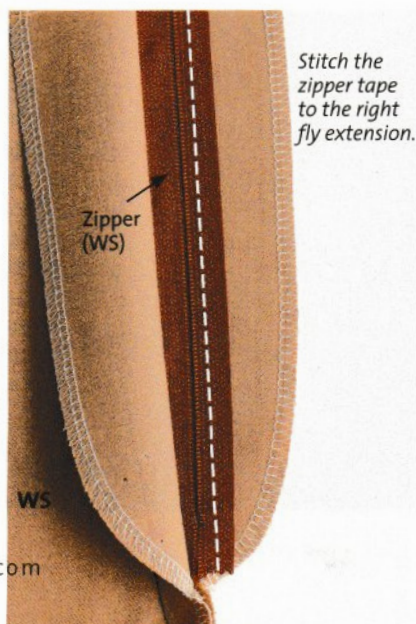
1 Position the pant fronts wrong side up, with the fly extensions pressed open. Hold onto the right fly extension and move the right front under the left front. Find the dot at the bottom of the extension and mark it with a pin so it is visible on the extension.



2 Place the zipper right side down on the right fly extension. Align the zipper tape's left side to the center-front seam. The zipper's bottom stop should be $\frac{1}{4}$ inch or less above the dot. Pin the zipper tape to the right fly extension, making sure the pants are still moved out of the way to the left.



3 Adjust the zipper foot and needle position to stitch on the zipper tape. Sew about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the zipper teeth, where pinned. Start stitching at the waist and finish at the end of the zipper tape. Remove the work from the machine and double-check that the zipper is stitched only to the extension, not to the pants.



5 Stitch about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the zipper teeth, where pinned. You may flip the work to stitch from the crotch to the waist, or reposition the zipper foot to stitch from the waist, as with the right fly extension. Make sure you stitch the zipper tape only to the extension, not to the pants.

4 Refold the pants to sew the other side of the zipper. Place the pants wrong side up, hold onto the left extension, and move the left front under the right front. Slip your fingers under the zipper on the right fly extension up to the stitching, and gently push the zipper onto the left fly extension. Push the zipper as far leftward as it will go, until the right extension has no more give. This is a key to getting the zipper in the correct position. Press flat, then pin the left side of the zipper tape to the left extension.

tip

Wait to trim the zipper. Don't cut the extra zipper length off until the waistband is sewn in, and be sure to stitch over the teeth a couple times before cutting. You don't want to trim the zipper and then accidentally zip off the slider.

Apply topstitching

Visible stitching on the fly front is not solely decorative. It keeps the folded extension and the zipper neatly in place. Switch back to a regular zigzag presser foot. Take care to press, place, and pin the fly in position before topstitching, and the process will proceed without a hitch.

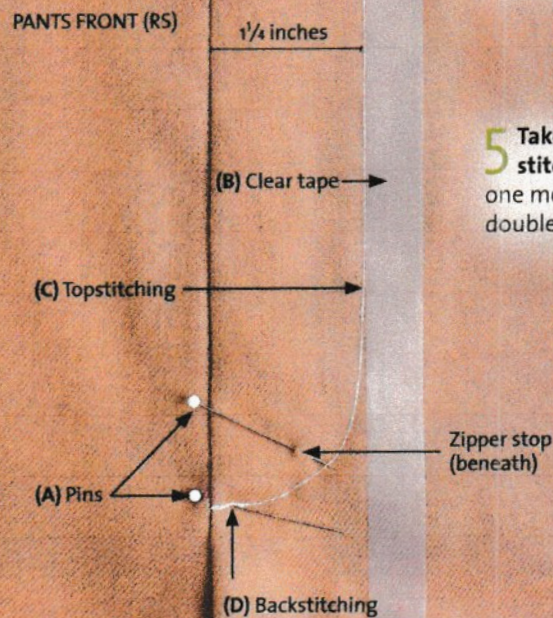
1 Place the pants right side up on the pressing surface. The zipper naturally lies to the right (when the pants are on, this is the left side). Press the zipper using a doubled press cloth to avoid pressing in any shine.

2 Mark two places on the front with pins placed diagonally (A). First mark where the basting and the regular stitching meet at the dot on the center-front seam, and second, at the zipper stop.

3 Measure from the center-front seam approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ inches to place the topstitching. Apply clear tape (B) where the topstitching will be, instead of using a fabric marker or chalk on the pants front. Since you attached the zipper to the extensions, it does not matter if the topstitching catches the zipper tape.

4 Set your machine to a longer stitch length. Use 3.0 mm to 4.0 mm, to topstitch the extension to the pants (C). Be sure to stay clear of the pin marking the zipper stop. Stop stitching at the dot where the basting and stitching meet, or just slightly below the dot. Backstitch at the end (D).

5 Take out the center-front basting stitches. Give the zipper area one more press, covering it with the doubled press cloth.



tip

Guide the topstitching. You may find it easier to follow a guide or mark for the straight stitching, then sew the curve freehand. If this seems daunting, draw in the curve or make a curved template first.

Add an optional shield

A zipper shield is a folded fabric piece, sewn in place behind the zipper to buffer it from the body. Women's dress pants generally do not have a zipper shield, while casual pants, such as jeans, often do. This option is up to you. If you choose to have a shield, it's an easy process to make and add one.

1 Cut a shield piece from fashion fabric. Make it 3 inches wide and the same length as the zipper opening.

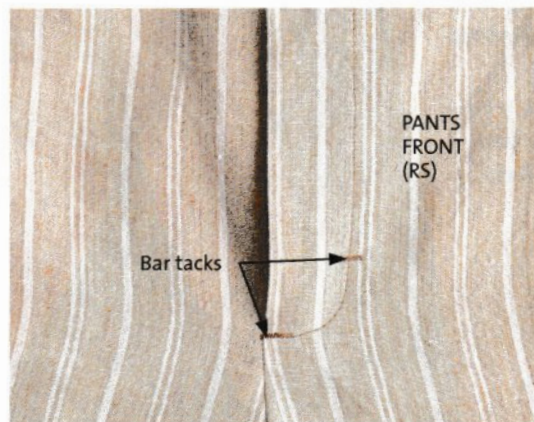
2 Fold the shield in half lengthwise, wrong sides together. Overlock the cut edges and one short end.



3 Place the pants right side up and open the zipper. Lay the shield under the zipper on the underlap side. Align the serged edge to the zipper tape. Topstitch close to the zipper to hold the shield in place. You won't be able to stitch to the zipper bottom. Stitch as far down as you can.



4 Stitch bar tacks to secure the shield to the pants. Use a narrow zigzag and a short stitch length for the bar tacks. Stitch across the bottom of the zipper topstitching, across the seam, and again over the topstitching 1 inch to 2 inches up.



A zipper shield is a quick addition to ensure comfort with a fly-front zipper.