



Jane Harbison
Design.



The Funny
A-Z Of Sewing
Terms

BY SAFETY SARES



Note from Safety Sares

When Jane of Jane Harbison Design asked me to put together an A to Z of Sewing Terms, it was Jane's hope, that I, as someone whose most impressive sewing accomplishment to date is a poncho for her Barbie doll would be able to describe sewing terms in such a way that the beginner sewer could understand.

For those advanced sewers, you'll be wondering where Jane found me, but I hope you get a laugh. You may even learn something new.

*If you'd like some other terms defined,
please contact Jane directly.*

So here we go – the A to Z Of Sewing Terms.

*Cheers
Safety Sares*

*p.s. Do you like the stitch border around the page?
I thought that was pretty clever of me.*



The Funny A-Z Of Sewing Terms

*For People Who Don't Take Sewing Too Seriously
And Choose to Have Fun With It.*

A.

APPLIQUÉ

There is nothing like a French word to get the A to Z of Sewing going. It's a sewing technique where you cut fabric into small shapes (if you are clever maybe you'd do a champagne glass with a champagne bottle in a bucket with some cheese) and then you sew them on a larger piece of fabric. And then you'd have something lovely to sit on whilst sipping your champagne. Get busy appliqueing.

ARMHOLE OR THE FANCY ARMSCYE

I've never ever seen any pattern say Step 4: Sew the sleeve into the armscye but just in case you come across it one day, you'll know exactly where to put your sleeve. Tip for young players: make sure you sew the right end of the sleeve into the armscye. My friend Jo made me this great jumper last year and when I put it on, I struggled to get one arm in one of the sleeves. Turns out she parked the wrong end of the sleeve into the armscye. Love that word - armscye. Never going to use armhole again.

B.

BOBBIN

Robin Bobbin is what my Mum use to call her bobbin. Named after her big brother Robin. The bobbin is an essential piece of kit for your sewing machine. You won't make one stitch without it. It's that round plastic or metal round thingo that you wind the thread around and around and around. It's the thingo that spits out the thread to form the bottom part of the stitch. It's also pretty cool to see how fast you can thread your bobbin. My Mum use to say 'steady as she goes on Robin Bobbin. You aren't trying to win the Grand Prix of Sewing.' 'Oh yes I damn well was!'

BIAS BINDING

This is when you get your scissors snipping away and cut strips of fabric at a diagonal angle across the weave of the fabric. You'll use bias binding to finish off edges like necklines or seams instead of overlocking. This is because overlocking machines look frightfully complicated and you are scared of using one however if you are an overlocker machine master, give us your phone number and we can send our stuff for you to overlock.

BUTTONHOLE

Honestly if you don't know what a buttonhole is then I think you should find another hobby. It is that hole that the button goes through. Not always easy to make. Some machines are set and go whilst others need a little bit of a helping hand.

BUTTONS

Buttons come in all shapes, sizes and colours. I find button selection is one of the most exciting events associated with the sewing game. I get annoyed when the pattern says 5 x 5mm buttons. I find the best and most prettiest button is 20mm so the pattern is no go for me. And making the buttonhole larger just isn't an option. I buy the button anyway.

C

CLIP / NOTCH

Clipping and notching despite what it sounds like is not a sheep shearing technique. A clip is a snip towards the stitching and a notch is a v-shaped (wedge) cut out towards the stitching. Clipping and notching will apparently give you a much better result in convex (scalloped hem) and concave (neckline) curves. To get the best result, cut close to the stitch line but not through. Got that – close but not through otherwise you'll probably have to start again. Ring Jane she'll know what to do.

CUTTING

Cutting is what you do with your scissors. See S for Scissors. Cutting in a straight line is not always easy. Cutting a curve is harder. Remember to go slow. Concentrate – don't take your eye off the line. And invest in a good pair of scissors I say. Makes cutting easier if you are not using a rusty old pair of school scissors.

D

DART

A dart is when you get bored with sewing, and you dart off to get a Tim Tam or it's that thing that you put in a shirt that helps to define your bosom/boobies/bust or in a skirt or trousers to define your waist. And heaven help us most of us need a bit of waist defining. So get busy and put some darts in to shape your garments. You need lots of pins and just follow the pattern instructions. It's so easy to make a dart or...maybe not. Remember to dart away for a Tim Tam if required.

DRAPE

Drape is the term used to describe the way a fabric hangs under its own weight. Fabric drapability is an important factor from an aesthetic point of view. We all like our garments to drape just right otherwise it looks bad. Choosing the right fabric to get the right drape is important.

THE DRESSMAKER

A great Australian comedy-drama film starring Kate Winslet and hunky Liam Hemsworth. Kate plays a couturier-trainer dressmaker – a really fancy dressmaker but just remember we are all dressmakers when we get behind our Janome or Singer even if we are only sewing a dress for our Barbie Doll or repairing a rip in a hankie. We don't need to be making designer ball gowns although it would be good fun.

E

EYELET

Eyelet is Piglet's first cousin. But in the sewing world it is a very small hole with finely stitched edges.

EDGESTITCH

Do we really need a definition of this one. It's pretty self-explanatory but I am going to tell you anyway. It's a line of stitches close to the edge of a seam, hem, or pocket opening. It helps to hold the edge of your project flat – not round like the earth. Typically used when two layers of fabric have been seamed together and then turned right side out, with the seam being on the outside of edge of the project. I think I now confused myself about what an edgestitch is.

F

FABRIC

This stuff is so important. Without it, you literally can't sew anything. There are so many different fabrics – light weight, heavy weight, cotton, linen, silk, crepe, denim, lace, satin. Go to your nearest fabric store and just wander amongst the fabric. It's a delightful experience or can be a little stressful if you don't know what to choose. Or just go to Jane's store Jane Harbison Designs and buy some fabric.

FROGGING

Frogging is the art of unpicking and it all makes sense as the name is attributed to the croaking sounds of frogs croaking i.e. rip-it, rip-it.

G

GATHER

I love to gather with my friends but also gather fabric to create fullness or ruffles. Gathering is an act of bundling up a portion of fabric to fit onto a smaller, pre-measured length of fabric which then creates a fullness.

GRAIN

Fabric grain refers to the direction of the warp and weft threads used in the weaving of the fabric. Weft and warp (www.weftandwarp.com.au) is also the name of a fabric shop in Canberra – what a cool name.

H

HAPPY

Happy is what you are when your project is completed and looks exactly like the pattern picture.

HEM

A hem is that bottom edge of a shirt, skirt, pants, jacket etc. and is often folded up towards the inside of the garment. Today it is quite trendy not to hem your garments so if you couldn't be bothered hemming something and it makes you happy. Go for it, I say.

INTERFACING

A term for a textile used on the unseen (wrong) side of fabrics. They support and stabilise the fashion fabric of the garment.

J

JEWELLER'S KNOT

This is when a jeweller gets involved in your sewing and creates a simple knot tied on a strand of thread which is then pulled down on a pin or needle on the base of the thread.

K

KNOT

A knot is created when things go wrong. Sometimes it is easy to undo the knot – a tangled mess of thread or sometimes it is just easier to cut the knot away and start again.

L

LINING

No one, no one wants to see your knickers. So lining is important. It's that piece of material used to finish the inside of a garment. Linings can hide the seam and apparently make your masterpieces easier to wear.

LOCK STITCH

The lock stitch is apparently the most usual and common type of stitching performed by sewing machines. Who knew that? A lock stitch is defined as being a stitch where two threads, one from the bobbin and one from the main thread are kept on their own side of the material, but literally 'locked' together each time the needle enters the fabric.

M

MANNEQUIN

We all know what a mannequin is and only about 0.001% of sewers have one. Yes it's the tailors dummy or a synthetic human body that you can use to create patterns on by draping fabric onto it rather than cutting a pattern first. To use a dummy you probably needed to be an advanced sewer. Cause other than Jane, I don't know anyone who can just create an outfit from draping material over a dummy. If only it were that easy.

MATERIAL

Material is cloth from which clothes, curtains, or similar items can be created. Quite simply, without material you won't be sewing anything, nothing. **Important tip:** If you sew your own bathing suit/togs/swimmers, it's important to make sure the material you use doesn't turn transparent when it gets wet.

N

NAP

A nap happens when you get tired during your sewing project. It's okay to take a nap as you'll be refreshed and ready to go again. It is also the term for a fabric texture that runs in a particular direction and requires all other pattern pieces to be cut facing the same orientation. But remember to nap often.

O

OVERLAY

This refers to the top layer of fabric when there is a different one underneath.

OVERLOCKER

This is an amazing sewing machine that trims and neatens the edge of fabric. Overlocked edges really make it look like you can sew.

P

PATTERN

These are the great templates that Jane has been whipping up for everyone, that give us all the pieces of the garment that we then cut out and assemble to create the final piece. Remember to cut the pattern out carefully. If you cut one piece in a different size, it will impact how it all goes together.

PINS

Pins are fun but dangerous. They come in all colours. I like the ones with the coloured ends. Pins have the important job of holding your pieces of fabric together.

PLEAT

A type of fold in the fabric created by doubling the material back on itself and securing it in place. When ironed, they create a sharp crease.

PRESSER FOOT

The presser foot is a very crucial but small piece of metal near the needle on the sewing machine. The presser foot keeps your fabric in place while you sew.

PRINCESS SEAM

Who doesn't love a princess seam? It's that vertical seam line which gives shape to a garment in place of darts and therefore gives you shape. A princess seam is usually found on bodices, dresses, jackets, and blouses.

Q

QUICK UNPICK

A small tool that has a sharp pointed end, that when slid between stitches, will cut and unpick them. Makes for speedy work for when you stuff things up. It's also known as a sewer's best friend.

R

RAW EDGE

The edge of the piece of fabric after it is cut but before it is hemmed. If left raw, the fabric might fray and we don't want that.

RIGHT SIDE

The right side is just that the right side of the fabric. That is the front, or face of the fabric. This is the side of the fabric designed to be on the outside of the garment. See Wrong side.

RUCHING

Also known as gathering. Sections can be gathered into seams.

RUNNING STITCH

A hand-sewn stitch that weaves in and out of the material. This creates a dashed line effect.

S

SCISSORS

The main cutting tool for cutting out your fabric. There are lots of different types of scissors. You only need to go to Spotlight or your nearest fabric store to be bamboozled by the sheer number of scissors. There are even special scissors for left-handed people like me.

SEWING MACHINE

A sewing machine is a very important piece of sewing equipment. It is that fancy piece of equipment that helps you sew your garments together. It has mechanically driven needle for sewing or stitching so that you don't need to sew by hand like they did in the olden days.

SEAM

The line where 2 pieces of fabric are held magically together by the thread.

SEAM ALLOWANCE

This is the width of the fabric beyond the seam line. The standard seam allowance is normally 1.5cm.

STRAIGHT STITCH

A simple, straight stitched line. It's not always easy to go in a straight line but go slow and steady, and probably best not to drink and stitch at the same time.

T

TACKING

These are those really big stitches used to hold two pieces of cloth together to make it easier to sew. There are just temporary stitches which are removed once a permanent seam is completed. This is where you can use your Quick Unpick.

TAILOR'S CHALK

Just like teacher's chalk (sort of). Tailor's chalk is a piece of chalk used to mark fabric.

TERMINATION POINT

The place where 2 seamlines end. Similar to a train line ending. Everything stops at the termination point.

THIMBLE

Safety Sares is all about safety, so a thimble is a very important piece of safety equipment. It is a protective implement worn on the finger or thumb when sewing.

TOP STITCH

A line of stitching parallel to a seam or edge, sewn from the right side. These can be decorative or can be used to add strength to an item.

TUCK

A stitched fold of fabric. This can be used for decorative purposes or to add shape to a garment.

U

UNDERLAY

The layer of fabric underneath another layer of fabric.

UNDERSTITCH

When the seam allowances are stitched to the facing along an edge.

V

VERTICAL BOBBIN

When the bobbin moves back and forth to pick up the thread. I think there is also a cocktail called the Vertical Bobbin.

W

WALKING FOOT

A presser foot that steps across the fabric, as opposed to sliding.

WINE

A wine is what you have when you complete your sewing project. Or you may like to have one whilst sewing. Remember to drink Water as well to keep hydrated. A dehydrated sewer can lead to sewing mishaps.

WRONG SIDE

You'd think you wouldn't need a definition of the wrong side but how often do you ask yourself 'is this the right or wrong side' with the wrong side being the inside or back of the fabric. The side that isn't on show. See Right side.

Y

YARN

A continuous length of interlocked fibres. A yarn can be made from natural or synthetic fibres. Or a yarn is when you ring up one of your girlfriends to yarn about your sewing project.

YOKE

A panel across the shoulders or the waistline.

Z

ZIGZAG STITCH

A zigzag stitch is a literal stitch made with a zigzag pattern. Often used to sew along raw edges to prevent them from fraying.

ZIPPER

The Zipper is a fun and refreshing cocktail made from raspberry liqueur and a punch of vodka but it can also be a fastening or unfastening device that is used to open or close parts of clothing or other articles. It consists of a slider with a tab, facilitating the opening or closing of two interlocking teeth or coil connected to a fabric tape strip.

ZIPPER FOOT

To install your zipper, you will need a zipper foot. This is an attachment for a sewing machine that is designed for installing zippers.

Interspersed with a number of somewhat interesting sewing facts, many you take for granted that everyone knows, Sarah has made funny observations. I hope you have enjoyed this fun A-Z Of Sewing.

*Have a lovely day.
Jane Harbison*

WHAT NEXT

Beginner Sewer: [Start Here with step by step instructions](#)

Intermediate to Long Time Sewer: [Start Here](#)

Have Questions

Contact Jane via email: jane@janeharbison.com