

Sheer Sew-How: Sewing Tips & Techniques for Sheer Fabric



Have you ever fallen in love with a beautiful sheer fabric that keeps saying ‘Buy Me!’.

Then only to think, ‘How do I treat this when sewing?’ and ‘What will I make out of it?’

I had eyed this bolt of fabric a number of times. No doubt the print and the colors were calling to me.

So one day, I bought about 2 ½ yards. What to design and sew that will look good stitched out of this print? And, how best to tackle sewing with a sheer?



This article will focus on a few tips and techniques that should be considered when sewing with a sheer fabric. I chose Style #3, the Asymmetrical Wrap Blouse, from [Sew Sensational Shirts](#) for the design.

Sheers can come in a crisp ‘hand’, like voile and organdy, or in a soft, drapable ‘hand’, like chiffon, georgette, organza or batiste. Crisp sheers will add fullness when pleated or gathered, whereas soft sheers will generally drape well or add graceful fullness when pleated or gathered. But softer sheers are often more delicate, wobbly and often cantankerous to sew with.

For your pattern choice, avoid complicated, multi-piece patterns and very fitted styles. Neither are suitable for this fabric choice.

Remember, sheers can show all, so when choosing your pattern design be prepared to show off what’s underneath, or if you have a few extra pounds that you want hidden, choose a style that will look good with sheer sleeves, but underline the bodice front and back.

Underlining, Lining and Interfacing Sew-Hows

Underlining:



Think ‘extra attention’ when sewing with sheers. Underlinings may be necessary for certain parts of the garment as they provide support and shield the see-through aspect.

When choosing the underlining, it should be of similar nature in fiber type and care and perhaps even a little lighter in weight so that it doesn’t affect the hand and final

appearance of the garment. Test various colors of underlinings as each color will

significantly change the final visual effect. In this example, the sheer is backed with beige, brown and black fabric. Notice the final effect created by changing the color of the underlining.



Underlining simply means that lining is cut from the same pattern pieces as the garment fabric. Then the underlining and fashion fabric are basted together which will then act as one layer during construction. Underlining adds stability, body and durability during construction with a sheer. It also stabilizes the seams and makes the entire sheer garment easier to sew together. But it does diminish the effect and see-through quality of the sheer.



If the garment requires fitting darts, sew the underlining and garment fabric as one unit when stitching the dart.



Interfacing:

Eliminate interfacings if possible, but if you absolutely must have interfacing, realize it is going to show through. Perhaps a silk organza might be considered. Some lightweight fusibles may work, but test first.

Lining:

Lining fabric should be soft, drapable and compliment the fashion fabric. Lighter weight and compliant is the best choice. Or in this situation where the front collar drapes and folds back on itself, the lining is cut from the fashion fabric insuring suitability.

Lining and fabric hems should be sewn independent of one another. In my example, the sleeve is lined with the black poly. Both are hemmed independently, but the sleeve cap was treated as one unit and stitched into the armscye of the bodice as explained in [Sew Sensational Shirts](#).

Layout and Cutting Sew-How:

- Is the fabric squared and on grain? Pull a crosswise thread fiber. Match the selvages. Make sure the cross grain is at right angles to the selvege particularly if the fabric is a stripe or checked design.
- Carefully prepare the layout. Consider cutting each piece, including self-fabric lining, separately. Make sure to flip the pattern over to result in opposite sides (R & L).
- If the fabric has an obvious pattern repeat, make sure the repeat happens at the same juncture so that side seams or other dominant seams will line up. If the fabric has a nap, sheen or pattern, use a 'with nap' style of layout.
- Sharp Shears or Rotary Cutter Blade. The sharper the better.
- If working with a particularly slippery, delicate sheer, you may want to pin the fabric and pattern pieces into a padded grain board, rather than using a cutting mat.

Fabric Sew-How:

- Depending on the color and design on the fabric, you might use a tracing wheel and tracing carbon – only if the marks are removable. However, be careful, as marks will generally be visible from both sides and the tracing wheel could permanently damage the fabric. **TEST FIRST!**
- Removable chalk, marking pens or pencils may be suitable
- Tailor's tacks are always an option.
- To distinguish between the Right and Wrong Sides, a pinned on tag works well.



Sewing Sew-How:



- Sharp sewing machine needles e.g. Microtex Sharp (size 9 or 11)
- Sharp, fine straight pins, silk or ball-point pins
- Lightweight, yet strong thread designed for sewing delicate fabrics – e.g. Coats & Clark Extra Fine or Metler Fine Embroidery thread
- Test a sample seam. If puckering occurs, shorten the stitch length.
- If fabric gets pulled down into the throat plate, switch to a single hole throat plate.
- When beginning the seam, hold the threads at

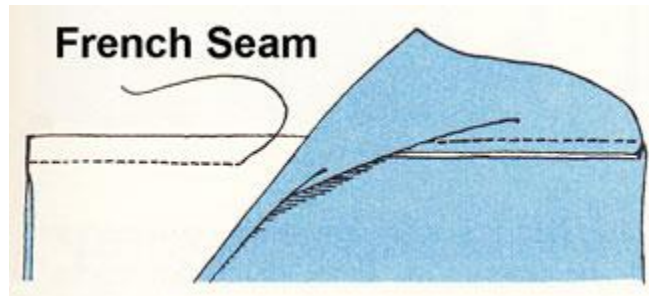
the back of the needle.

- Alternatively, to avoid mangled and puckered fabric, place a piece of tissue or tracing vellum between the fabric and the feed dog.
- Gently hold the fabric taut front and back when stitching, but do not pull the fabric through.
- Don't back stitch. This will inevitably pull the fabric down into the throat plate. Rather, shorten the stitch length to 1.5 mm to begin and end each seam.

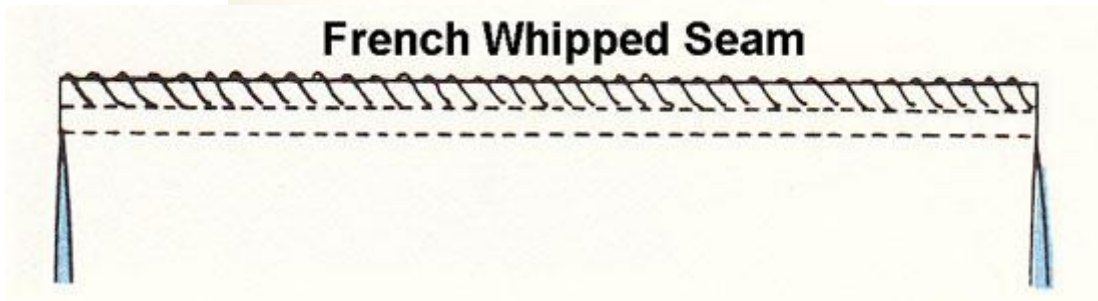
Seaming Suggestions:

Most appropriate seams finishes are:

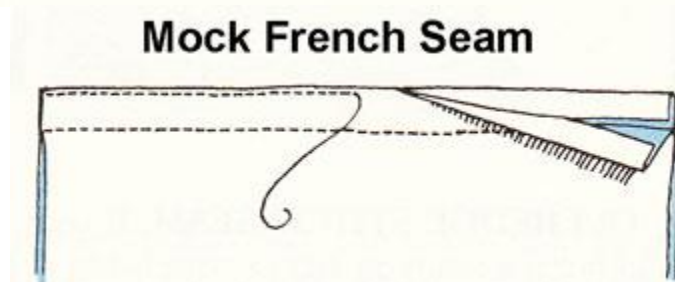
- French seam
- French whipped seam with overcast or zigzag finish
- Mock French seam
- Self-bound seam



French Whipped Seam



Mock French Seam



(Illustrations: Vogue Sewing Book – 1982 – Butterick Fashion Marketing Illus from Vogue on a French seam)

Pressing Sew-How:

- Press with caution.
- Test heat, pressure and steam and the resulting effect on the fashion fabric.
- Enclosed seams should be pressed over a ham, seam roll or thick towel so no lumps or bumps show through.
- Use a press cloth...use light pressure...use your fingers to finger-press.

Hemming Sew-How:



For the see-through sheer, consider the final effect. Turn $\frac{1}{4}$ ', then turn up again. Slip-stitch or machine stitch realizing it will show through.

- Soft sheers are best hemmed with a hand-rolled hem.
 - Crisp sheers lend themselves to deep, folded hems making it part of the final effect.
- When lining is used, hem as 2 separate layers if possible.

My final garment...



Since I'm modest and always cold, I chose to underline and line the entire garment. The sleeves are lined only with the black poly. I realize this takes away from the sheer quality of being a 'sheer', but the black emphasized the animal print.



The other end of the spectrum...

Here's Margaret in a sheer blouse which isn't underlined or lined. Everything shows through. To create different effects, she changes the color of her tank top. It's summery, cool and refreshing looking. PS – I'd be cold all the time in this, but Margaret looks perfectly comfortable in her hot climate environment. It's a very effective 'sheer' presentation.

(With permission from [Joyful Expressions](#) and Margaret)