

Setting Secrets...the Sleeve Master Class

The perfect set-in sleeve! The set-in sleeve is the most classic style of sleeve used in garment construction, though the process of actually sewing this sleeve style can often seem like a daunting task especially for beginner sewists. With these master instructions, you'll learn an application technique that works time and time again.

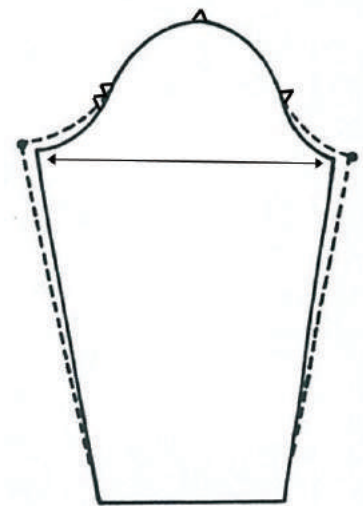
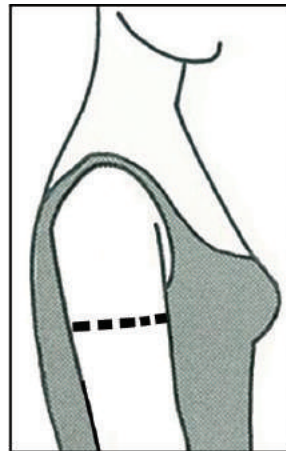
But first it's best to review the elements that will affect your success of setting the sleeve to perfection.

1. Bicep wearing ease in relation to the circumference of your upper arm
2. Sleeve cap ease in relation to the length of the front and back armscye
3. Fabric choice
4. Preparation of the sleeve cap for stitching purposes
5. The sewing process



Bicep Wearing Ease

The larger the circumference of your upper arm, the wider your sleeve needs to be to fit comfortably. Typically the minimum amount of ease for a woven set-in sleeve is 1 1/2" (3.8cm), however depending on the stability of the fabric, many women find they prefer 2" (5.1cm) wearing ease. If you need to widen the sleeve, you'll find directions in the Dress Kit Instruction Book – Page 16 #13 – Large Upper Arm Minor Tune-Up – and in this accompanying video - Large Upper Arm Alteration.



Sleeve cap ease in relation to the length of the armscye

Secret #1: The secret to the required amount of sleeve cap ease is that it simply depends! Read on...

How is this sleeve ever going to fit over your shoulder and hang nicely? To accomplish this, the sleeve cap requires ease. This means that the length of the sleeve cap (from the back underarm point to the front underarm point) must be longer than the actual armscye opening. How much sleeve cap ease should the sleeve have? The secret to sleeve cap ease is that honestly...it just depends! It depends primarily on fabric choice, garment style and silhouette of the sleeve.

If there's too much ease you can end up with unintended puckers, gathers and tucks. If there's too little ease, the bodice can often end up with a puckery seam line, plus you'll likely have drag lines toward your shoulder due to lack of appropriate ease. Many commercial patterns typically allow 1 – 1 1/2" (2.5 – 3.8cm) over all cap ease. I generally prefer to look at back cap ease and front cap ease as separate elements, where the back cap has 1/2 - 5/8" (1.3 – 1.6cm) ease and the front has 3/8 – 1/2" (1.0 – 1.3cm) ease. But again, this amount of sleeve cap ease depends so much on the fabric (woven vs. knit) and the silhouette. For more extensive details on cap ease, please see this article – Sleeve Facts: Sleeves & all their quirkiness! Found at <http://www.sfdlearningcenter.com/SleeveFacts.html>

Fabric choice



65% Cotton/35% Poly blend

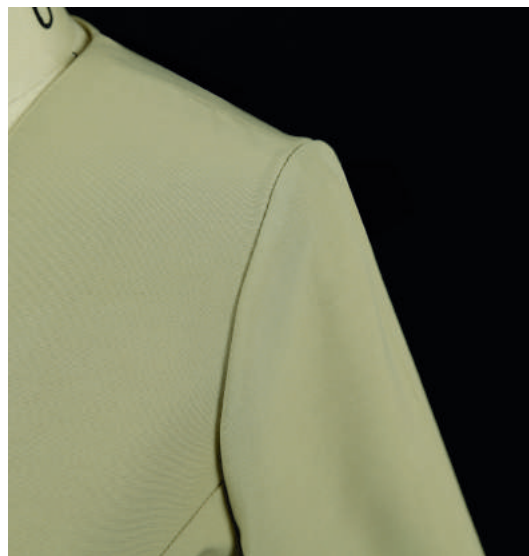


100% Polyester Knit

Very stable cotton, muslin or cotton/poly fabric (which we often use for our test garment) is usually the most difficult to set the sleeve in well. There is absolutely no give in the fabric. But because there is no give, it means that the cap will require more ease. This is where sewing technique comes in which is what I'll discuss next. And of course, you know the old saying 'Practice makes Perfect'. Nothing is closer to the truth than this statement. The more times you set a sleeve, the more confident you will become. The peach colored blouse photo is sewn from a 65/35% cotton/poly blend whereas the burgundy colored blouse was sewn from a stretch knit. Because knits stretch, you'll always find setting sleeves so much easier and consequently they require less ease. Usually $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{3}{8}$ " (6mm – 1.0cm) in the back and $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6mm) in the front is all that is required.

Sleeve Cap Preparation & Insertion

There are many different techniques for preparing and sewing the sleeve into the armhole. This happens to be my favorite.



Markings: Make sure that the single front notch, double back notch and single cap notch are marked on both the sleeve and the armhole. The shoulder seam, if it's in the standard location being the top of your shoulder, acts as the matching point for the single cap notch.

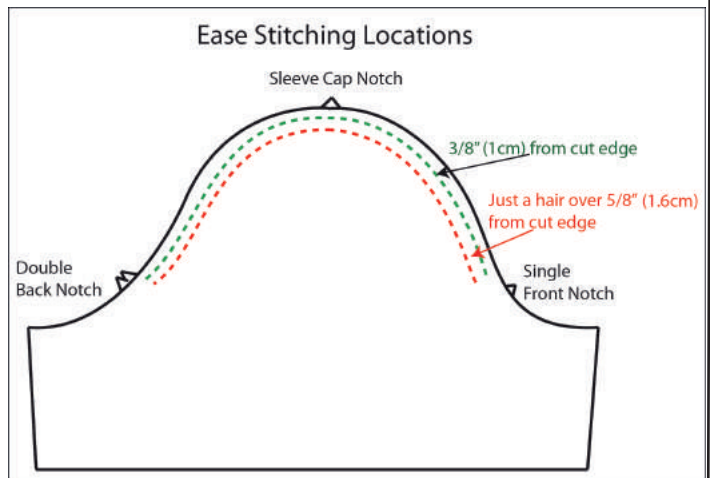
The end result:



The process:

Secret #2: E-a-s-e the sleeve cap - don't gather! Read on...

Cap Ease Stitching: Please don't think of this ease stitching as gathering stitches. Even though you'll stitch with long basting stitches, you will not be gathering but rather simply e-a-s-i-n-g the sleeve into the armhole. In my experience watching students use this process, they typically pull up the ease stitches too much creating way too many gathers. It's a light hand that gradually moves the fabric along the ease stitches to create soft capping to the top of the sleeve.

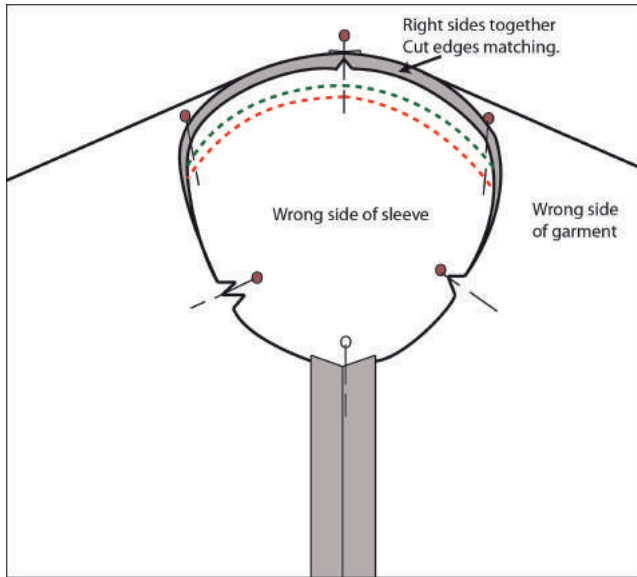


Using a contrasting thread color in the bobbin and top of the machine, stitch 2 rows of long ease stitches from the single front cap notch to the double back cap notch. Place the first row of ease stitches $\frac{3}{8}$ " (1.0cm) from the cut edge. Place the second row just a hair beyond the $\frac{5}{8}$ " (1.6cm) stitching line. This allows for easy removal plus when attaching the sleeve to the armhole you won't catch the second row of ease stitches.

With right sides together, sew the underarm seams of the sleeve together. Press seam open over a seam roll. Turn it so that the right side of the sleeve is face out.



Seam Roll



The Insertion Process: If you want to see this process, please watch the accompanying video (Sewing a Woven Fabric Set-In Sleeve) as it shows very clearly how to hold and position the sleeve to the armhole as well as the subsequent application and sewing steps.

Secret #3: Use lots of pins when joining the cap to the armhole.

1. With right sides together, place the sleeve into the armhole. Match the single front notches, double back notches, the single cap notch to the shoulder seam and the underarm seams together. Pin well and pin at right angles to the stitching line.
2. Gently pull up on the ease stitches to ease the cap to the armhole. It is so easy to over gather these ease stitches. That is NOT the intention. Only ease the cap just enough until it fits, shapes and molds to the armhole opening. Distribute the fullness evenly on the top half of the sleeve cap.

Secret #4: Sew slowly & always with the needle stopping in the 'down' position. Read on...

3. Always baste (longest stitch length) the sleeve in position the first time. My preference is to sew with the sleeve next to the machine throat plate and the sleeve face up. I do this so that I can see the fullness and manipulate it as necessary when sewing. Once completed, check to make sure there are no puckers/tucks on either the sleeve or the bodice armhole.
4. Then stitch the sleeve seam permanently.
5. Remove all ease stitches.
6. Trim the seam allowance to approximately ¼" – 3/8" (6.3mm-1.0cm). Seam finish with a double row of stitching and trimming or serge/overlock to seam finish.
7. Using a Pressing Ham, press the seam allowance toward the sleeve. You're done!! You've mastered it!



Or,

