Sewing with Knits

Creating the Trio T-Shirt

by Linda Lee
Know Your Knits

All knits have some things in common:

- They are created by a single fiber that is looped, not woven.
- They will not ravel when cut.
- They are best cut with one-way nap layouts. Why? Some knits have a different shine depending on the direction and you may not notice it until the garment is sewn. Best to be safe.....

Knits come in a wide variety of wonderful colors and patterns.
Know Your Knits

Different types of knits have different characteristics.

- **JERSEY/SINGLE KNIT** — Lengthwise ribs on the face and horizontal purl loops on the reverse. All cut edges curl.

- **DOUBLE KNIT** — Lengthwise ribs on both sides look the same. Heavier than jersey knits. Edges do *not* curl.

- **INTERLOCK** — Fine ribs on both sides like a double knit. Slightly heavier and has less stretch than jersey knits. Edges do *not* curl.

- **RIB KNIT** — Prominent ribs on both sides. Used mostly for finishing garment edges at hems, necks, and wrists.
Pretreating Knits Before Cutting

Like all fabric, knit fabrics do need pretreating.

- If your knit is made of cotton, silk, linen, rayon/viscose, or polyester, you can either pre-shrink on the gentle cycle in the washer and dryer, or hand wash with a gentle laundry soap. Your choice will depend on the fabric and also how you plan to launder your garment.

- Wool knits will need to be either dry cleaned or steamed—unless you purposely would like to felt your knit. Felted knit can be lovely. Be sure to experiment with a test sample so you are not unpleasantly surprised at the results!
Successful Sewing with Knits

Before we get started sewing, let’s talk about notions. Using the right tools and notions is invaluable in achieving success. The supplies on the next few pages are Linda’s favorites and are staples in her toolbox.

As you go through this tutorial, details about specific notions are designated by the following symbol:

Know Your Notions

Always purchase the best notions you can afford. They really do make a difference in your results and the enjoyment of your craft.
Helpful Notions to Have on Hand

In addition to your regular notions, these will helpful for this project. Details about these notions will be given when you’ll be using them.

- **Trimming scissors**
- **Appliqué scissors**
- **Tailor’s ham**
- **Hip curve ruler**
- **Quilt and Sew ruler**
- **IBC Glass Head Pins**
- **Chakoner**
- **Fusi-Web & Fusible Hem Tape**
The Best Thread for Knits

Buy good quality polyester thread that is cross-wound on the spool. You can tell if a thread is cross-wound if you can see the thread forming diagonal patterns on the spool. Cross-wound thread comes off the spool smoothly and will allow the stitches to made more easily. Don’t EVER be tempted to buy bargain thread! It will only bring you grief.

Buy 4 spools when you buy your fabric—1 for your sewing machine, 3 for your serger.

Why polyester? Polyester thread has a slight give that keeps it from breaking when the knit stretches.

Excellent brands to choose from include Mettler Metrosene Plus and Isacord.
What Needle Should I Use?

It would be wonderful to be able to tell you exactly which needle to use—but your perfect needle will depend on your particular knit fabric. Test on some fabrics from the knit that you are using. Start with the Universal. If you experiencing skipped stitches, try a Stretch needle or a Jersey. The right needle will give you smooth, even stitching.

- Universal
- Ball Point/Jersey
- Stretch

Always start a new project with a new needle.
Your sewing machine may have come with some of these specialty feet. If not, they are worth looking into if you plan to do much sewing with knits—you will notice the difference in the quality of your stitches and the ease of precise topstitching.

Clear Presser Foot  Edgestitch Foot  Walking Foot  Single Hole Throat Plate

We’ll cover the benefits of each of these accessories when their use shows up in the construction process. This gives you an overview of supplies that will help you be successful with knits.
Trio T-Shirt

We’ll be sewing the T-Shirt from The Sewing Workshop’s Trio Collection. This T-Shirt combines good fit and classic styling. By using this garment, you’ll have the opportunity to learn all the basic techniques in sewing with knits—perfect seams, smooth hems, and clean finishing.

In addition to the T-Shirt, the Trio Collection also includes a drop-sleeve top and flat front cargo pants.
Trio T-Shirt

The Trio T-Shirt is a semi-fitted t-shirt with raglan sleeves. Designed as a wardrobe basic, this T-shirt looks great in either a solid or a print. The fabric **must** be a two-way stretch knit.

**STYLE NOTE:** People who think they can’t wear raglan sleeves love this design because of the seam that runs across the shoulder and down the sleeve—shaped so that everyone can get a great fit.
Trio T-Shirt with Trio Top

Here the Trio Top has been layered over the T-Shirt. Are you starting to see the possibilities? The back of the Trio Top has some subtle yoke detailing to give it a distinctive, yet classic look.
How to Measure for your Best Fit

These seven measurements will give you the basis for determining which size to choose from the pattern choices. With multi-size patterns, you can achieve a better fit even if your measurements fall into different sizes.

1. High bust circumference
2. Full bust circumference
3. Waist circumference
4. High hip circumference (over the tummy)
5. Full hip circumference
6. Upper arm circumference
7. Sleeve length
How to Measure for your Best Fit

For the Trio T-Shirt, choose your basic size from your full bust circumference unless your full bust circumference is more than 2" greater than your high bust circumference. If this is the case, choose your pattern size by your high bust measurement.

Why?

It is easier to add to the bust area than to alter the shoulder and neck area.

Make all pattern adjustments before cutting out your fabric.
Working with Multi-Size Patterns

Use the multi-size lines on the pattern to blend from one size to another. In this case, the pattern starts at a medium at the bust and increases to between a Large and an X-Large in the hips.

The hip curve will help you make a smooth adjustment between the sizes.

Linda likes using a Prismacolor Col-Erase 20045 Carmine Red Pencil with an eraser to draw lines on pattern pieces.
Helpful Ruler

Quilt and Sew’s graph-ruled 2" x 18" **Clear Ruler** is Linda’s favorite for measuring, marking, and cutting. This ruler is lightweight, flexible, and very readable. Garment sewists have found many uses for this traditional quilting ruler—from helping with alterations, making accurate chalk marks, and as a guide for a rotary cutter.

This **Hip Curve** is a plastic version of the more expensive professional metal curves. Even though it is called a HIP curve, it is the most universal tool for blending the curve between different sizes on pattern pieces.
Layout & Cutting

Simple guidelines for success:

- Use the “with nap” layout so that you will get uniform color shading.
- Lay out so the greatest stretch goes around the body
- Do not allow fabric to hang over the edge of the cutting surface
- Use pattern weights or IBC pins. (*Larger pins may leave holes in delicate knits.*)
- Cut with either scissors or rotary cutter.
- If fabric torques or is twisted after washing, cut a single layer at a time.
Pins and Marking Chalk

IBC Glass Head Pins. Razor sharp pins will glide like butter through fabric. Plus, the glass heads won’t melt when near the iron.

Chakoner. Soft, white powdered chalk for drawing a fine line every time. Chalk dispenses from a rotating serrated wheel located at the bottom of the heart. Remove the plastic eraser to refill it. The heart shape is ergonomically friendly. Use white or yellow chalk only. Other colors may not disappear, especially pink or red.
Making a Pressing Template

Start with a manila file folder or a piece of tagboard. Using a rotary cutter and a straight edge, carefully cut a 1" strip.

This template will be your guide for pressing up even hems.

Linda’s loves the Quilt and Sew which is 2" x 18" and has a see-thru grid for so many sewing tasks.
Creating a Memory Crease

Press to create a memory crease which you’ll need later in the construction. It is easier to make this the first step after the pieces have been cut (instead of waiting until the garment seams are sewn).

Place template on the wrong side of the fabric. Press the fabric up and over the template, aligning the cut edge of the hem with the top edge of the template. Press through all layers.

_TIP:_ Press from right to left if you are right-handed, or left to right if you are left-handed.

Press all hems: front, back, and sleeves using the 1" manila template.
Choose Your Hem Tape

You have two options for stabilizing the knit and preparing it for a smooth hem.

If you have a thin or very stretchy knit, use **Fusible Hem Tape**—available in white, natural, or black. Since the tape is not visible once the hem is in place, just choose the color closest to your fashion fabric.

• OR •

If your knit is more stable and has less stretch, use **Fusi-Web** as your stabilizer. Fusi-Web is an adhesive mesh that is invisible once pressed.

[Image of Fusible Hem Tape and Fusi-Web]

**Tips!**

**Know Your Notions**

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How to Use Fusible Tapes

**Fusible Hem Tape.** If you want to stitch a successful hem in knit fabric, Fusible Hem Tape will be your best friend! It holds the hem in place until you are ready to topstitch, and also adds a touch of stability that will keep the knit from stretching out of shape as you stitch.

**Fusi-Web.** Fusi-Web is a very thin adhesive mesh used as a temporary bond. Using medium heat, press the paper-covered Fusi-Web to the wrong side of the fabric for 3–5 seconds. Carefully peel off the paper covering. Place the corresponding fabric over the exposed fusible and press again. This will temporarily adhere the fabric in place until your stitching is completed.
Apply Fusible Hem Tape

Machine stitch or serge Fusible Hem Tape to the wrong side of each hem edge with the fusible side up. The fusible side has a slightly gritty feeling. Hem Tape prevents rippling when stitching hems on the crosswise grain.

Use the serged method for the best stretch.

Apply Fusible Hem Tape to the front, back, and sleeve hems.
OR Apply Fusi-Web

Press strips of Fusi-Web to the inside raw edges. Press over the paper covering—the paper will be removed later. A slow and steady press will yield your best results. Fusi-Web is generally used for stable knits with less stretch.

Apply Fusi-Web to the front, back, and sleeve hems.
Seam Stitch Options

1. Straight stitch *(not shown)*

2. Narrow zigzag  2.5mm L x .5mm W

3. Two rows of zigzag
   - First row narrow — 2.5mm L x .5mm W
   - Second row wide — 3mm L x 4mm W
   Trim close to wide zigzag

4. 3- or 4-thread serger *(shown on next page)*

*Leave the seam allowances untrimmed and press the seams open unless the fabric tends to curl. Then trim close to the stitching as shown.*
Seam Stitch Options—Serging

If you have access to a serger, this stretchy, overcast seam is a natural for sewing with knits.

Use a 3-thread stitch for delicate knits.

Use the 4-thread option when the knit is bulkier and the garment will be worn or laundered often.

As always, it’s a good idea to test the different options on some scrap pieces from the knit you are using.
How Do I Decide Which Stitch to Use?

1. Straight stitch
   Use a straight stitch when the garment is fairly loose and not extremely fitted. Loose garments do not put a lot of strain on the seams, so popped stitches are less of a problem.

2. Single narrow zigzag
   Use a narrow zigzag [2.5mm L x .5mm W] when the garment is fitted and needs to stretch when it is put on or during wear.

3. Two rows of zigzag
   Use double zigzag [Narrow: 2.5mm L x .5mm W — Wide: 3mm L x 4mm W] when the fabric is especially curly or more reinforcement is needed.

4. Serger
   3- and 4-thread serger seams are always an option for a ready-to-wear finished look.
Sewing & Pressing Raglan Seams

With right sides together, stitch:

- the front sleeves to the front body
- the back sleeves to the back body

Working from the *right side* of the garment, press the raglan seams *toward* the garment body. Right side pressing creates a crisp, flat seam without an unwanted tunnel along the stitching line.

Use a Tailor’s Ham to preserve the shape.
Tailor’s Ham

Tailor’s Hams are covered in wool (usually a plaid, but colors can vary). The other side is a tightly woven cotton. After pressing, allow your garment to cool slightly before moving it—this helps the seam hold its shape.

A Tailor’s Ham is a tightly stuffed pillow which is used as a curved surface when pressing—especially sleeve caps, curved seams, and darts. Pressing on the Tailor’s Ham allows the garment to more permanently assume the shape of any seam that has a curve.

If you’ve never pressed with a ham before, you’ll be pleased at how easy it is, and how it adds to the professional look it gives your finished garment.
Topstitch Seams

Topstitch ¼" from the seam line. Use a walking foot (also called an even-feed foot) to prevent the wrinkling that may occur while topstitching knits.

Visually line up a spot on the inside indentation of the toe of the presser foot to sew an even distance from the seam.

Slow and steady, please!

Line up the seam line with the indentation on the presser foot to keep your topstitching even.
Why Use a Walking Foot?

Why? Take a look! Viva lá difference!

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What Else Can I Do to Get Smooth Topstitching?

Loosening the pressure on the foot can also help keep the fabric from twisting. Many pressure knobs are on the left side of the machine—check your manual for your machine. Start with the lightest pressure possible and increase the pressure a click at a time as you test on your fabric.

You’ll soon find the right pressure for your fabric on your machine.

Look for this type of symbol.
Trim Seams for a Professional Look

Use appliqué scissors to trim the excess seam allowances.

Work over the tailor’s ham so the paddle-shaped duck bill of the scissors lies flat to the seam but away from the garment.

If you do not have an appliqué scissors, use a small trim scissors and extra caution!

The duck bill prevents cutting into the garment by accident.
Sew Shoulder Seam & Staystitch Neckline

Stitch the front to the back along the shoulder seams.

Press the seam toward the front and topstitch using the same techniques as for the raglan seams.

Now, staystitch the neck edge $\frac{3}{8}$" from the raw edge.
Specialty Scissors

Appliqué Scissors have a paddle-shaped blade that protects the bottom layer of fabric to allow for a controlled cut close to the stitching. Offset handles let the user maintain a comfortable hand position while cutting.

Trimming Scissors. A good pair of trimming scissors is a must. This 6" pair by Homestar from Japan is Linda’s favorite for precise trimming. Ultra-sharp—especially at the tip. Rarely need sharpening and worth the money!
Prepare the Neck Binding

To stitch the short seam of the neck binding, hold the thread tails when starting to stitch and place a piece of paper under the work while stitching. Use a walking foot for sewing.

To create an even line when you open the seam, offset the triangular ends when you start to sew. Use a ¼" seam.

When sewing with knits, using a walking foot makes a substantial difference in the quality of your seams and your topstitching.

Offset the little triangle at the start of the seam. When you open the seam, the neck band will be even!
Look What Happens

1. Not so good... The fabric resists feeding properly and threads stick in the throat plate.

2. Single-hole throat plate helps keep your seams smooth. Keep in mind the limitations with zigzag stitching.

3. Using a paper underlay is an easy alternate.

1. Sewn with no special tools

2. Sewn with a single hole throat plate and walking foot

3. Sewn with paper underlay and walking foot

A single-hole throat plate prevents the fabric from getting caught in a wide opening of a standard throat plate.
Overview of Alternate Neck Bindings

There are two techniques for applying neck bindings.

**PATTERN INSTRUCTION METHOD** uses a single layer of binding applied to the right side of the neckline and is wrapped to the wrong side to encase the raw neckline edges. This method is in the Trio pattern instructions and is the classic method of finishing necklines.

**READY-TO-WEAR METHOD** starts with a pre-folded binding sewn to the right side of the neck edge, and then is flipped so the seam allowances are on the inside of the garment. It is easier to achieve an even width of binding with this method and is the standard in today’s ready-to-wear.
PATTERN INSTRUCTION METHOD

Neck Binding

*Quarter Mark Binding*

To divide the binding into quarters, first lay the binding on a flat surface. Pin mark the two folds.

Then refold the binding, placing the first pins on top of one another. Pin mark the two end folds.

1. First put pins at the two folds.
2. Match these pins in the center.
3. Then put pins on the new end folds.
Neck Binding

Quarter Mark Neck Edge

Place your garment on a flat surface. Stack the shoulder seams on top of each other. Pin mark the end folds to mark the center front and center back.

Then refold the garment, placing the first pins on top of one another. Pin mark the folds at the shoulders.

Note: The shoulder seams will be slightly behind the pins for the quarter marks.
Neck Binding

Pin Binding to Neck Edge

With right sides together, match the pins from the binding to the pins at the neck edge.

Pin together only at these quarter markings.

Note: The binding is slightly smaller than the neck edge.

Pin the binding to the neck edge only at the four pin markings.
PATTERN INSTRUCTION METHOD

Neck Binding

Sew Binding to Neck Edge

With the walking foot and using the free arm on your machine, place the neckline in the machine with the binding underneath. Anchor the needle in the fabric at the pin marking at the center back.

Hold and gently stretch the fabric at the next quarter pin mark, stretching the binding until it matches the garment. Stitch just to the left of the original staystitch. As you stitch, make sure the binding remains flat and does not roll.

Sew on the garment side with the neck binding on the bottom. Stitch just to the left of the staystitching.
Neck Binding

*Trim Seam*

Place the neck opening over a sleeve board and carefully trim the seam allowance so that both layers are even. Do not trim off the seam allowances—this trimming is to make all three edges even.

Use fine trimming scissors with very sharp points for best results.

*Draping your garment over a sleeve board keeps the seam separated from the garment, preventing cutting into the wrong layer of fabric.*
Neck Binding

Wrap and Pin Binding

Working over a tailor’s ham, wrap the binding around the seam. Pin frequently in the ditch of the seam.

This is when you’ll be happy to have the very sharp, very fine IBC pins.

The tailor’s ham allows you to shape the neckline as you pin.
Neck Binding

Stitch the Neck Binding

Using the free arm of your machine, attach the binding by stitching in the ditch of the seam. Using the edgestitch foot with the metal flange in the ditch will allow you to stitch perfectly. Keep the needle in the center position.

Remove the pins as you come to them. Do not stitch on or over any pins.
Neck Binding

Trim the Seam Edge

Working over a tailor’s ham and with appliqué scissors, trim the excess binding off right next to the stitching. Keep the duck bill of the scissors next to the garment to avoid accidentally cutting into the main part of the garment.
Neck Binding

Steam & Press the Binding

Place the neck opening over the tailor’s ham and smooth it in sections. Allow it to contour to the shape of the ham.

Lightly steam the binding and then gently press it with your fingers. Try not to flatten it too much with the iron. Keep the binding slightly rounded on the edge.

The tailor’s ham will give the neckline a rounded shape.
READY-TO-WEAR METHOD

Neck Binding

Mark the Stitching Line

Fold the neck binding in half. Use a clear ruler to accurately mark a line ⅜" from the folded edge. Do not be tempted to follow the cut edge—it may be slightly uneven. The part of the binding that will show at the neckline is from the fold to the chalk line.

Mark ⅜" from the fold. Use a Quilt and Sew Clear Ruler and Chakoner for accurate and easy marking.
READY-TO-WEAR METHOD
Neck Binding

*Divide the Binding into Quarters*

Lay the binding on a flat surface. Place a pin at the seam and the opposite fold. Reposition the binding by stacking these pins on top of each other and place pins on the new folds.

*Prepare the Neck Edge on the Garment Body*

Pin front and center back of neck opening. Place these pins on top of each other and place pins on the outer folds at the shoulders. You’ll now have four pins in the binding and four pins on the garment neck. *(Shown in Pattern Instruction Method.)*
Neck Binding

Sew the Binding to the Neck

Pin the binding to the right side of the garment by matching the pins.

Holding the garment at the pins, stretch gently until binding matches neckline. Stitch on the chalk line—from one set of pins to the next. Keep an eye on the left side of the presser foot. Make sure it is always an even distance from the folded edge.

Or align the left side of the presser foot with the folded edge and move the needle position to the right.
READY-TO-WEAR METHOD

Neck Binding

*Edgestitch*

Move the needle position to the left of the center position. You will be stitching next to the well of the seam through the garment and the seam allowance.

It is extremely important to keep checking to make sure the seam allowance is *away* from the binding and *towards* the garment.

The fabric often tries to creep ahead of the presser foot. Occasionally lifting the presser foot and re-positioning the fabric helps to avoid this.

*Stitch just to the left of the seam ditch.*
READY-TO-WEAR METHOD

Neck Binding

Serge the Raw Edges

Use a 3-thread stitch to serge the raw edges of the binding and garment. This is delicate work! *Work slowly and carefully!* Check frequently to be sure that the garment will not get caught by the serger knife.

If you do not have access to a serger, trim the raw edges neatly.

*It is imperative to keep checking to make sure the serger is not catching the garment!!!*
READY-TO-WEAR METHOD

Neck Binding

Steam the Neck Binding

Place the neck opening over the tailor's ham. Lightly steam and finger press only. Shape the binding to a smooth neck curve.

Don’t move the garment until it is dry.

Combine the steam of the iron and the pressure from your fingers to create a smooth, professional neckline.
Side Seam Stitch Options

Once the neck binding is complete, sew the side seams. Use the same seam option as the previous seams, or use a serged seam.

1. Straight stitch *(not shown)*

2. Narrow zigzag 2.5mm L x .5mm W

3. Two rows of zigzag
   - First row narrow — 2.5mm L x .5mm W
   - Second row wide — 3mm L x 4mm W
   Trim close to wide zigzag

4. 3- or 4-thread serger *(shown on next page)*

Leave the seam allowances untrimmed unless the fabric tends to curl. Then trim close to the stitching as shown.
Side Seams—Serger

If you have access to a serger, this stretchy, overcast seam is a natural for sewing with knits.

Use a 3-thread stitch for delicate knits.

Use the 4-thread option when the knit is bulkier and the garment will be worn or laundered often.

As always, it’s a good idea to test the different options on some scrap pieces from the knit you are using.
Pressing the Hems

As one of the first steps, you prepared your hem with either Fusible Hem Tape or Fusi-Web. Now that the side seams are stitched, you can take advantage of that prep!

Press up the hem, using the memory crease as your guide. The **Fusible Hem Tape** will hold the hem in place through the topstitching process. Use light steam and steady pressure with your iron, rather than a back and forth motion.

Remove the paper covering of the **Fusi-Web** to expose a strip of adhesive. Press the hem in place using light steam and steady pressure, rather than a back and forth motion.
Stitch the Bottom Hem

Using the walking foot, topstitch the hem $\frac{7}{8}$" from the edge.

Use a line on the throat plate as a guide.

Having the hem pressed and stabilized with either Fusible Hem Tape or Fusi-Web makes it possible to get a smooth, professional hem every time.
Press & Stitch Sleeve Hems

Using a sleeve board, press the sleeve hem in place.

Use the free arm on your sewing machine when stitching the sleeve hem. As with the bottom hem, follow a guide line on the throat plate for even stitching.
Hem Stitch Options

**SEWING MACHINE**

Use a *straight stitch* when the garment is loose fitting and won’t need to stretch much.

Use a *double needle* when the garment will need to stretch more when putting on and taking off.

Wide-set double needles [3.5mm–4.0mm] will look more like a commercial cover stitch, but tend to tunnel (create a ridge). Narrow-set double needles are usually more trouble-free.

*Experiment on a scrap to find the stitch that works for your particular knit fabric.*

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Hem Stitch Options

**COVER STITCH MACHINE**

The cover stitch most emulates a ready-to-wear look. Not only does it look professional, but it is a sturdy hem finish and stretches nicely. It can also be used as a decorative finish.

Some machines are dedicated and create only that stitch. Some high-end sergers include a cover stitch option.

Stitch through one layer of fabric and leave the edge unfinished. Use either side as the face of the garment.

Cover stitch on folded hem.
Hem Stitch Options

**SERGER**

Many sergers have a blind hem foot as an extra accessory. The regular setting barely catches the fabric to create an invisible hem. As you adjust the setting, the needles pick up more fabric to create the look of an added band.

Follow the instructions for your particular serger brand.

*Invisible blind hem*

*With adjusted setting to create a faux band*
Enjoy!

Give your new T-shirt a light steam pressing—and then you are done!

Remember, different knit fabrics and sewing techniques will give you a rich variety of both basics and “wow” pieces for your wardrobe—all from the same pattern!

I hope these instructions have given you the confidence to continue your sewing journey with knit fabric.

To purchase notions or patterns referenced in this instructional presentation, visit www.sewingworkshop.com