

Working with S-T-R-E-T-C-H

Q: Why are so many of the clothes we buy made from stretchy fabrics?

A: Because they are comfortable, easy care, they drape well, and they fit lots of different shaped bodies!

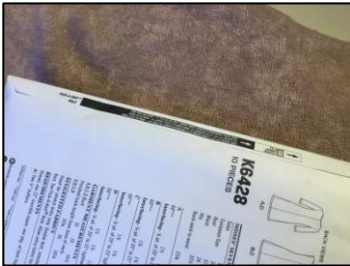
So, although when we start sewing we tend to work with woven fabrics because they are more stable and therefore easier to work with it's important that we master working with stretch fabrics so that we can create our own gorgeous stretchy outfits. I've put together my TOP TEN TIPS to help you master working with S-T-R-E-T-C-H.

1: Know your STRETCH



Different knitted structures will stretch in different ways and by differing amounts. A TWO-WAY stretch will stretch in just one direction – either vertically or horizontally across the fabric. A FOUR-WAY stretch however will stretch both vertically and horizontally. Gently pull your fabric to work out where it stretches. The GREATEST stretch must go around the body.

2. Get the right PATTERN



You will need to use a pattern which has been designed for knitted/ stretch fabrics. On the back of the envelope you will find a gauge which will help you measure the stretch of your fabric and ensure that it is suitable for the pattern.

3. Needles, Pins & Wonder Clips



The last thing you want to do with a knitted fabric is cause any damage to the structure as this may lead to holes and ladders in the fabric. BALLPOINT needles and pins have a slightly rounded end and allow the point to slip between rather than through the knitted structure, avoiding any damage. Choose a ballpoint needle or one designed for stretch fabrics. Wonder

clips are great for holding layers of fabric together and cause no damage they can however be heavy on the edge of the fabric but are a useful addition to your tool box.



4. Thread

You will want a thread which has some stretch to avoid snapping and breakages in your seaming. I always use a POLYESTER thread to ensure your stitching has the strength and stretch required for knitted fabrics. You may also consider, particularly if you have an overlocker, wooly nylon thread as this will give you great coverage

and great stretch.



5. Stabilisers

Even though we are working with stretch fabrics and want to, in the most part, retain the stretch there will be area of your garment where stretch need to be controlled. Specialist interfacing is available with will stretch with you fabric. I tend to use a light weight fusible interfacing so that the fabric has the

support required but does not lose its drape. Shoulder seams and sometimes waistbands often need support to avoid too much stretch in these areas; specialist SEAM TAPE for stretch fabrics can be used although I sometimes use tape, ribbon or bias binding if I want very limited stretch.



6. Foot Pressure

It's really important that your stretch fabric is not squashed, pushed or pulled while stitching as this will distort the fabric and lead to wavy seams. By reducing the amount of pressure placed upon the fabric while you are stitching you can reduce

the amount of stretch. You will need to refer to your sewing machine manual to find out how you do this but, it is usually a dial situated on the top left hand side of your machine.

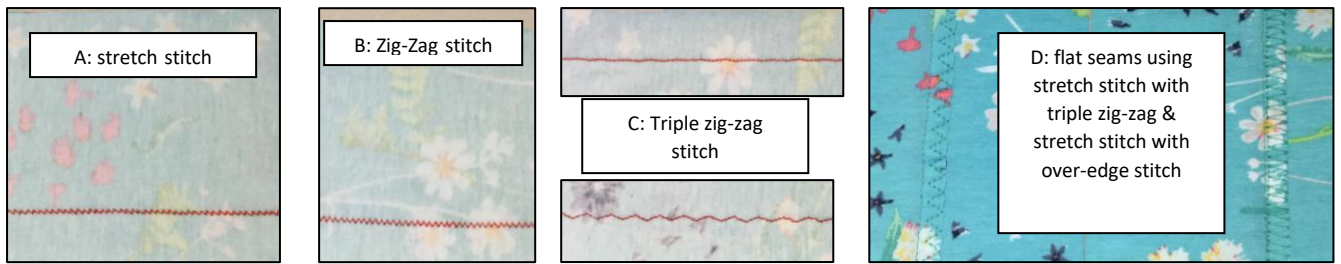


7. Walking & Sliding

Enabling your fabric to travel through the machine easily will also reduce unnecessary pressure and stretch to occur. A WALKING FOOT is a great addition to your tool box if you intend to work with stretch fabrics on a regular basis. They add

a second feed dog while you are stitching so while the sewing machine's feed dog is moving the bottom layer of fabric the feed dog in the walking foot is moving the top layer of fabric at the same time, hence an even seam and no stretching.

An alternative is to add a layer of tissue paper or Stitch & Tear between the fabric and the presser foot to act as a slippery surface for your presser foot to glide along and thus reducing the friction and stretching.



8. Stitches & Seams

You will need to TEST your stitch type, width and length to determine the optimum stitch for your project. You are looking to achieve a stitch which works well with your fabric and has some stretch which works with the 'give' in your fabric. Here are some of the options.

A: Stretch stitch. I've put this one first because it's my go to stitch for stretch fabrics. It does what it says on the tin. It offers good stretch and it's nice and narrow so can be used on open seams (I usually reduce the stitch width to 0.5mm)

B: Zig-zag stitch. This is a simple stitch and available on most machines. It's great for offering a little stretch and maybe neatening edges but is really only suitable for closed seams because the width of the zig-zags will not allow the fabric to open and lie flat.

C: Triple zig-zag stitch. This stitch offers most stretch than the basic zig-zag and is great for re-enforcement and decorative finishes.

D: Flat seaming. By combining stretch stitch with either the triple zig-zag or over-edge stitch options it is possible to create flat seams with a good amount of stretch.



E: Overlockers. You may be lucky enough to own an overlocker. They come into their own when working with stretch fabrics. I tend to use a four thread safety seam for main seam stitch solely with the overlocker or, for neatening edges I use a three thread stitch using the right needle to give a narrow stitch pattern. By adjusting your cutting blades and tensions very professional flat seams can be achieved. I love them!



9. Hems

Hems can be an issue on stretch fabrics as, by definition, you are stitching along the greatest area of stretch! I have found one of the most effective ways to finish a hem is to use a twin needle. Your hem will look professional as you will have two lines of parallel stitching on the right side and your cut edge will be neatened at the same time by the bobbin thread crossing from one line of stitching to the other. NOTE: you will need to stitch from the RIGHT side and use a ballpoint or stretch twin needle.

Again, overlockers are great for create edge finishes on knits. The rolled hem feature can be used to create fluted or lettuce leaf edging



which is a great way of adding a professional but o-so-simple decorative edge.



10. STEAM don't press

Just as with your presser foot, placing pressure on your fabric will cause it to stretch. Therefore, take care when using your iron. Hold the iron just above the surface of your fabric and use steam rather than pressure. Always test of a scrap beforehand.