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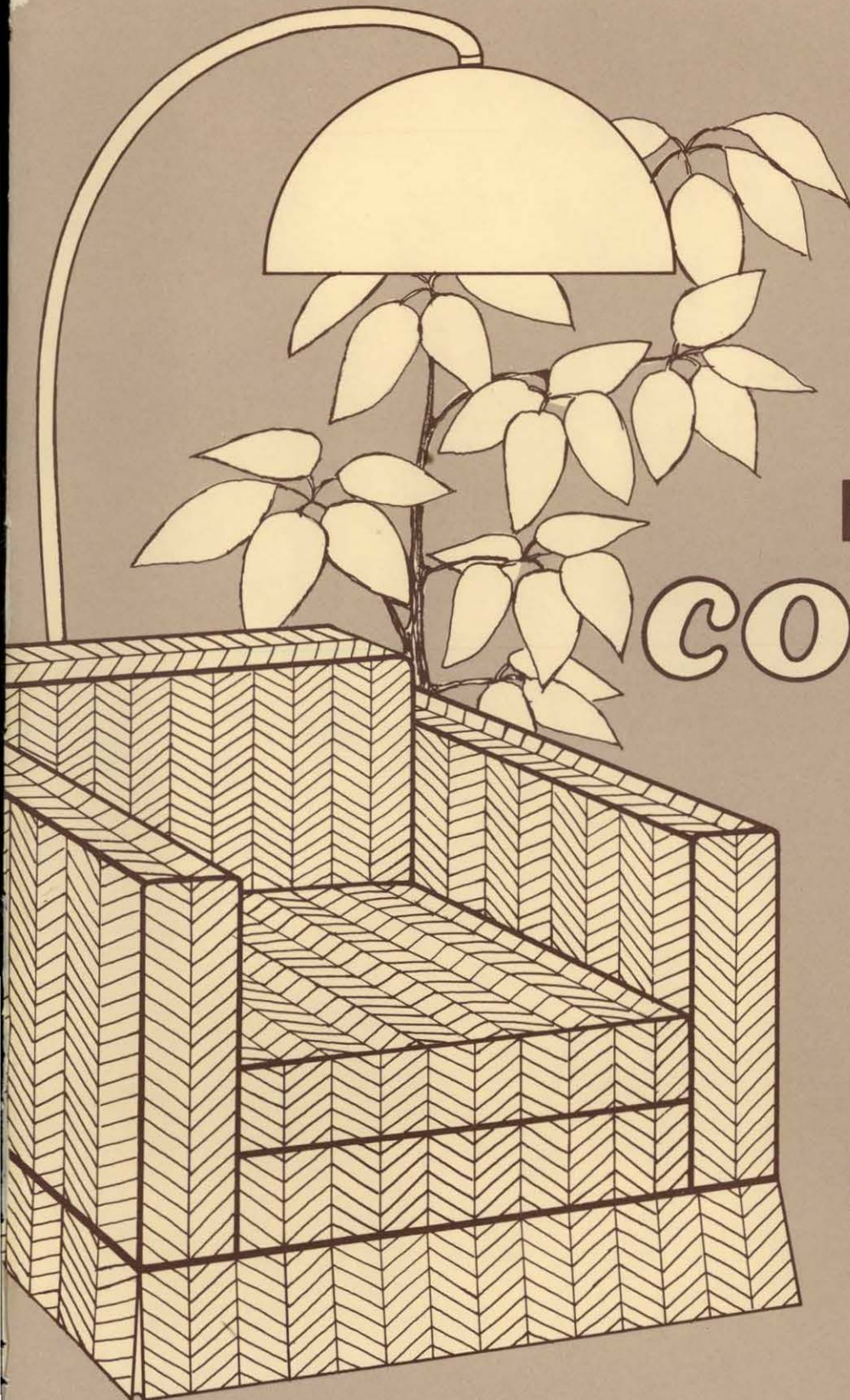
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COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE




how to make...  
**covers**  
**that**  
**fit**

**UPHOLSTERED  
FURNITURE**

Bulletin No. 539  
November 1974



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**how to make...**  
**covers**  
**that fit**  
**UPHOLSTERED**  
**FURNITURE**

New slipcovers can transform worn faded furniture, inspire fresh new color schemes, allow for seasonal changes and be bright color accents for a room. If you can make the slipcovers yourself you may find you have an inexpensive method of accomplishing some of the decorating improvements you've been wanting to make in your home.

A smooth, snugly fitting slipcover results from the "piece" method of construction given in this bulletin. You actually make the cover in separate pieces for the back, arms, seat front and cushion. The pieces are fitted and anchored to accomplish a cover which is easy to handle and stays in place.

## STARTS WITH THE CHAIR

Plans for any slipcover begin with the style of furniture to be covered. The chair with good lines is easiest to work with as the structural breaks can be used as guides for seam lines.

Completely padded furniture is most easily slipcovered. If furniture has wood trim, you usually should pad the trim before making the slipcover. The

springs and padding must be smooth and firm if the cover is to fit and look well. If new padding is needed add it before fitting the covers.

You may want to use a pleated or gathered flounce, depending on the style and finish preferred (Fig. 1). The pleated flounce adds a tailored finish—(a,b); the gathered flounce adds an informal finish (c).

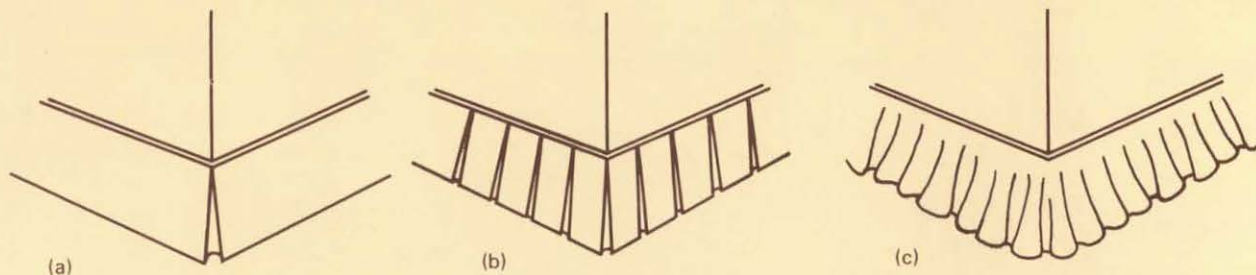


Figure 1

## HOW TO PREPARE THE CHAIR

Put your furniture in condition first:

1. Unless you wish to use the chair with original cover again, slit the cording casing and remove cording wherever possible.
2. Vacuum or brush the chair to remove all dust from upholstery and crevices.
3. Shampoo or dry clean soiled upholstery.
4. Make all repairs the furniture needs.
5. Pad hollow backs and wood trim that is to be covered. Make pads from several thicknesses of cotton batting and cover with muslin. Be sure the padding is firm and smooth.
6. Patch worn spots on upholstery. (Fig. 2).
7. Cover inside back, inside arms and cushion of mohair furniture with outing flannel (feed sack, muslin). Extend the material just to the crevices and baste in place. This will prevent the slipcover from moving on the mohair.
8. Cover leather or plastic completely by tacking outing flannel (other suitable fabric) to the framework of the chair. Leave all "work through" spaces around seat open.
9. Repair innerspring cushions if needed.

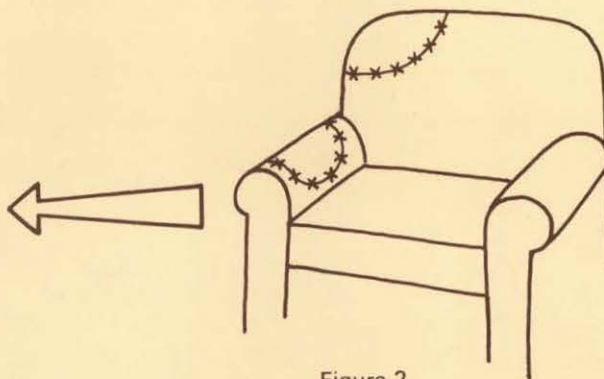
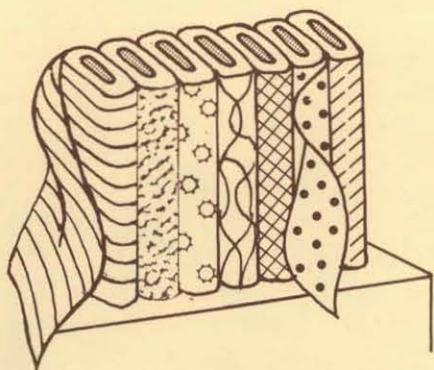


Figure 2

## CHOOSING THE FABRIC



### Which fabric is best for your chair?

Select a fabric which fits the atmosphere of your furniture, your house and your family style.

A firm, closely woven fabric will adjust and mold to the contour of the chair, fit snugly and hold the shape well. Avoid loosely woven fabrics that ravel and stretch easily. Long surface yarns catch and pull and are not as serviceable as fabrics that are closely woven. Some of the new stretch fabrics have possibilities for making neat, snug-fitted covers.

Texture is important too. Coarse, nubby, or tufted fabric is not adaptable to small scale furniture in small rooms. It is much more effective on large scale furniture. Smooth, firm fabrics give a tailored crisp effect and are especially good for the small pieces of furniture and furniture in small rooms.

### Will the color "go" with other colors in the room?

For a pleasing effect, all colors in the room must harmonize. If more than one piece of furniture is to be slipcovered, use the same color for all or choose variations of one color rather than using too many unrelated colors.

Perhaps you would like to make one piece of furniture an accent note with a contrasting or brighter color than the rest. Do consider the use of the chair when selecting the color. Dad's temperature might hit a new high if you slipcovered his favorite lounge chair in pale pink.

### Is the design the "just right" one for your chair?

Fabric with pattern should be used only against plain walls, rugs and draperies. Draperies and slipcovers of the same design or companion designs are often effective. One general rule to remember: Plain furniture (no pattern) is good against patterned background and patterned furniture must have a plain background. Too much pattern gives a feeling of unrest and lack of order in a room.

Before you buy, do a home test of the fabric you like best. Borrow a generous sample that you can drape over the chair to be covered. You can then check color, design and texture in relation to the chair and the room.

### Do Remember

The design of a large pattern must be centered or matched. When fabric with a large pattern is chosen extra yardage must be purchased.

You may also have a matching problem when using stripes, checks and plaids. Scale design in relation to chair. Plain and small all-over geometrical patterns are good selections and are easy to work with.



### Do Read Labels

Proper labeling of all fabrics to help identify fibers became mandatory with the "Textile Fiber Products Identification Act", 1973. The label must give the generic or family name and the percentage of all fibers (5 per cent or over) in order of predominance. **Look for the fiber content label.**

Wearability and ease of care will be increased if the fabric has a soil resistant finish. Finishes applied by the manufacturer are usually satisfactory. Some finishes are now available so they can be applied at home after the slipcover has been placed on the chair. **Look for a label indicating a soil retardant finish.**

Fabrics which launder easily without shrinking are desirable. If "Preshrunk" or Sanforized (other) is on the label or selvage of the fabric, the expected shrinkage will not be more than 2 per cent, which is not enough to affect fit of the cover.

If there is no indication of the extent fabric will shrink, preshrink it before you start the slipcover. Be sure to keep the grain line straight while doing the preshrinking. **Look for a label or selvage which tells you what to expect in shrinkage and request the recommended laundry method label.**

# ESTIMATE AMOUNT OF FABRIC

The amount of fabric you'll need will be influenced by:

- Style of the slipcover.
- Size of the piece of furniture to be covered.
- Width of the fabric you have selected.
- Design of the fabric.

Remember, if you choose patterned fabric you must allow for centering and matching. Allow extra fabric in proportion to size of design. Also, some fabrics such as corduroy must be used in one direction and some fabrics have continuous, not repeat, patterns that make extra fabric necessary.

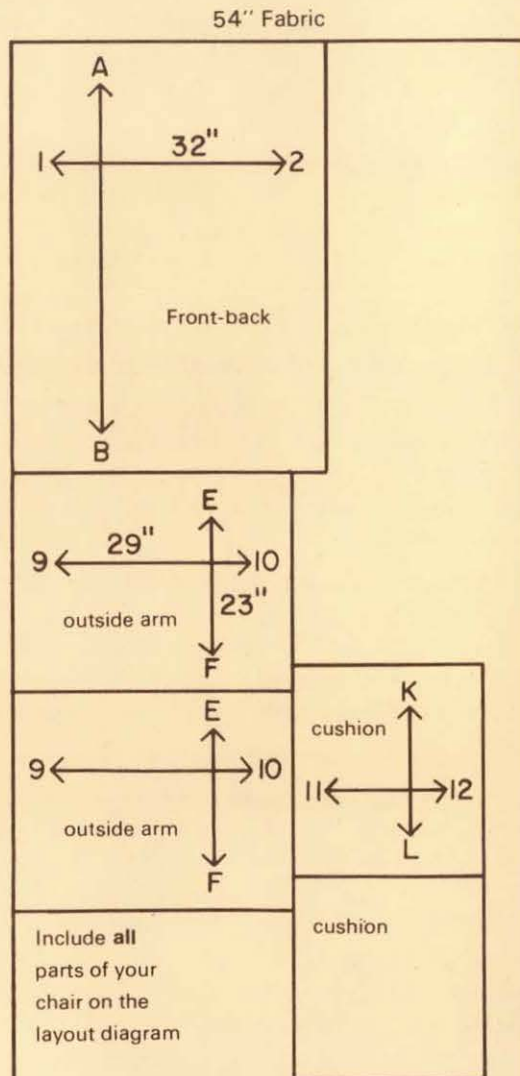
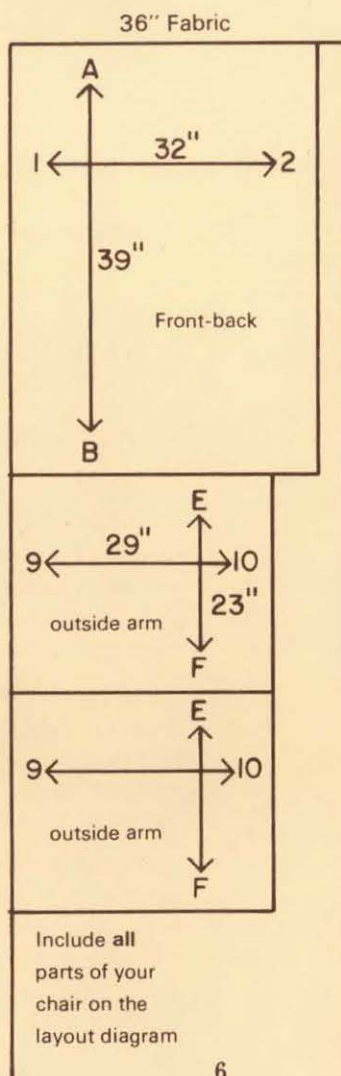
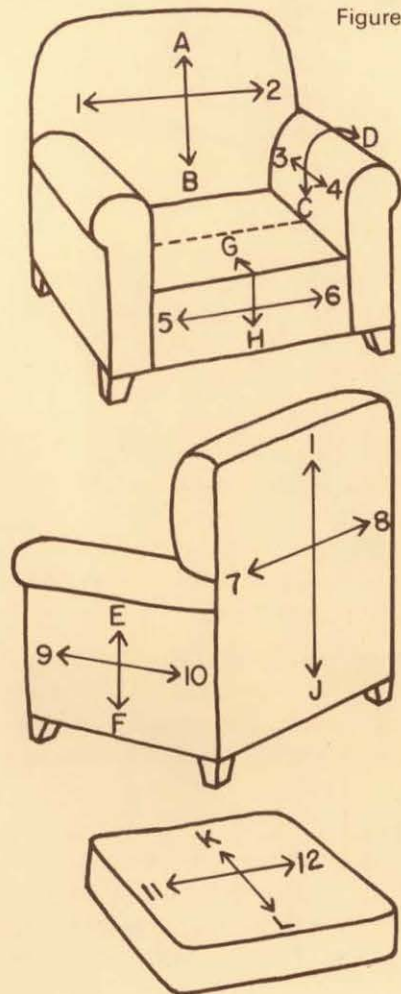
Measure your chair and block out the measurements to determine necessary yardage (Fig. 3). If you take careful, accurate measurements and write in exact sizes of each piece, this diagram can be used when you cut the fabric for the slipcover.

Measure each part at the widest and longest points. Make these allowances:

- 1 inch for all seams.
- 7 inches for tucking in at bottom of inside back and inside arms (remove cushion before measuring inside sections of chair).
- 2 inches at bottom of all outside pieces.
- 8 inches to extend onto seat for chair front piece (apron).
- 4 inches at sides of seat piece.
- 2 inches at sides of chair front (apron).
- 2 inches at back of outside arm pieces.
- 1 inch at back of inside arm piece.
- 3/4 yard at least to cover cording.
- If flounce is to be used, allow 2 times the distance around the chair for a gathered flounce and 3 times the distance for box pleats. The flounce is always cut crosswise of the fabric.

## Examples of Layout Diagram

Figure 3



# MAKING THE SLIPCOVER

The order to follow as you make the slipcover is:

Step 1 Chair back

Step 3 Chair arm

Step 5 Final fitting and attaching of the slipcover. Add flounce if one is to be used.

Step 2 Chair apron (seat front)

Step 4 Cushion



Remove cushion from chair. Find lengthwise center of inside back. Mark with chalk or with long running stitch using thread of contrasting color (Fig. 4). Also, mark a straight line parallel across the inside back at the widest point. In this same way mark the grain line and center of outside back, arms and seat front.

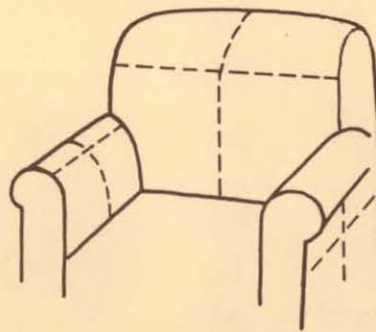
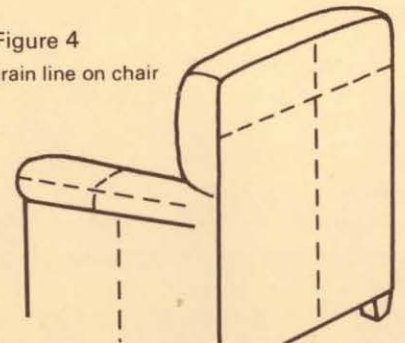


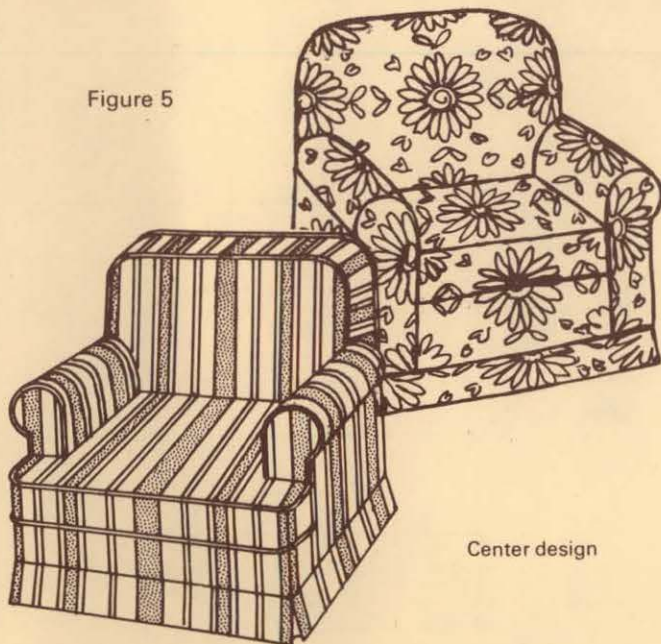
Figure 4  
Mark grain line on chair



If the fabric you have chosen has a design be sure to center the motif when cutting each section of the slipcover (Fig. 5).

Cut the slipcover pieces making sure you cut on the straight of the fabric. Each piece should be cut with straight lines and squared corners. Do not attempt cutting to match curves and variations of the chair. You will adjust the straight line, square-cornered pieces of fabric to take the shape of the chair as you proceed with the fitting and construction of the slipcover.

Figure 5

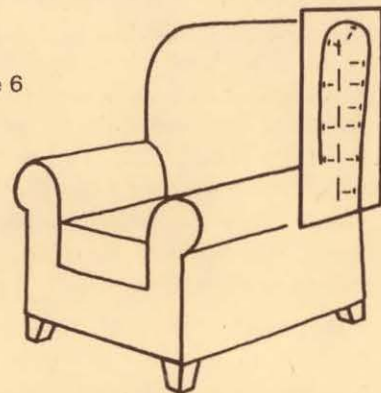


Center design

Carefully measure each part of the chair and check your layout diagram for accuracy. Did you allow 1 inch for all seams, 7 inches for tucking at bottom of inside back and inside arm, 2 inches at bottom of all outside pieces; 2 inches at back of outside arm pieces, and 8 inches on chair seat front piece?

If the back of the chair has side panels or boxing fit this first. Keeping grain line straight, fit and pin the panels or boxing snugly to the chair. Then mark along the chair edge with basting thread of contrasting color or with chalk (Fig. 6).

Figure 6



Remove the fitted and marked pieces and stitch covered cording along the marked line.

## Covered cording

You will need covered cording (Fig. 7) to help anchor some of the pieces to the chair and to edge all boxing pieces including ones for the cushion and along seams for contoured lines.

First, make continuous bias. Several yards of true bias can be cut in one continuous strip by stitching a piece of fabric into a tube. Approximately 7 yards of cording can be cut from 1/3 yard of fabric 36" wide when strips are cut 1 1/2 inches wide.

Pull threads to be sure fabric is cut on grain. Cut off selvage and lay fabric on the table wrong side up with lengthwise grain of fabric running toward you.

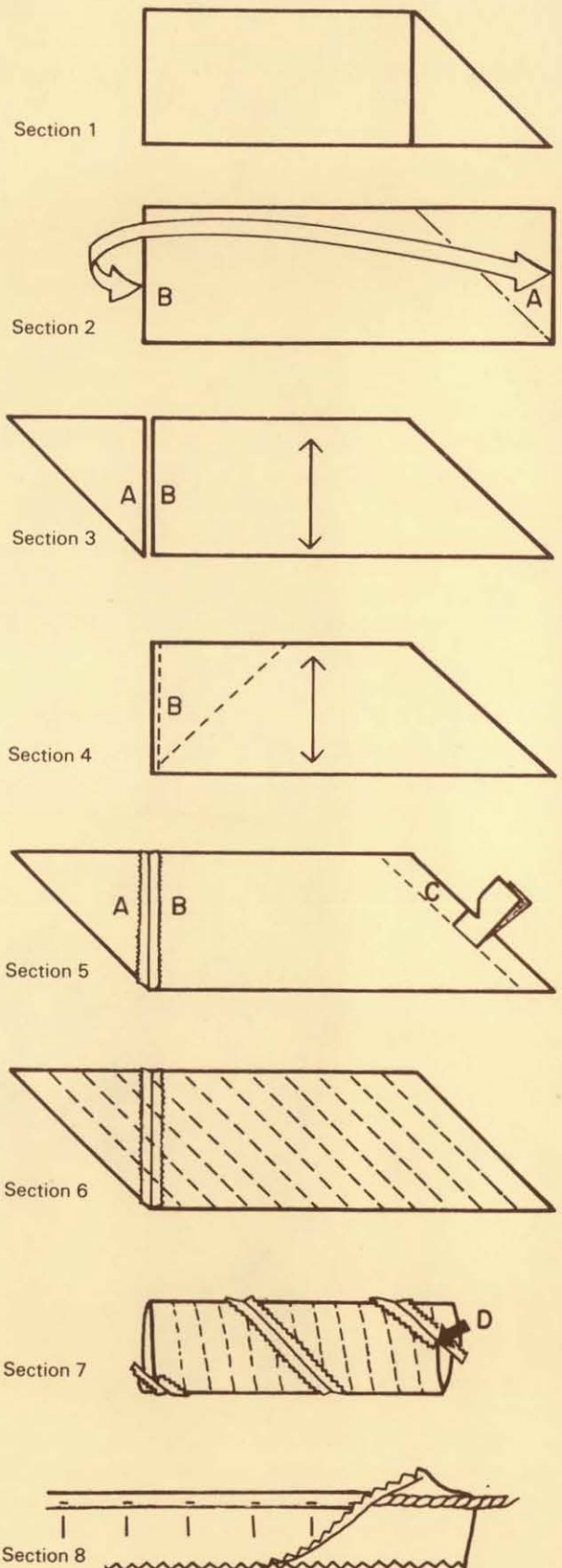
Bring upper right corner down diagonally to the lower edge so that the end of the piece (lengthwise grain) is in line with lower right edge (crosswise grain) forming a perfect point at lower right corner (Fig. 7-1). The fold forms a true bias. Cut on fold and lay piece back in the position it was before folding (Fig. 7-2). Slide smaller piece (without turning) over to left of larger piece so that A (lengthwise grain) is in line with B (lengthwise grain). Check with Fig. 7-3. Turn smaller piece back under larger piece, right sides together, so that edges A and B will form a seam. It will then look like Fig. 7-4. Pin and stitch in a plain seam. Press seam open as in 7-5.

Lay material on table wrong side up with seam at your left. Make a gauge 1 1/2 inches wide from cardboard. Lay the gauge at right end as in Fig. 7-5c. Measure by gauge and mark a line parallel to the true bias edge (Fig. 7-5). From this line mark a second line the same distance, using the gauge for accuracy. You must be accurate to get good results. Mark the entire piece in this way so that all lines are the same distance apart and parallel with the true bias edge. See Fig. 7-6.

Turn the piece over so the upper edge is next to you and the right side of material is up. The 2 edges (crosswise grain) need to be brought together and stitched into a seam. To do this, bring the straight edge of the lower right corner next to you, up to upper straight edge at the first marked line on right corner and let the bias edge cross the marked line 1/4 inch below the straight edge. Pin in place. This is to be the stitching line. The upper corner will extend the width of one strip and be free. Match the first marked line next to you with the second marked line on the opposite side, letting them cross 1/4 inch below straight edges. Pin.

Continue in this manner until all marked lines cross accurately at stitching line and are continuous. Work with the seam edges only. As they are pinned together, the piece will begin to form a tube, so that it will be impossible to work with it lying flat on the table as you would other seams.

Figure 7





When pinning is complete, you will have a long tube with the original upper right corner extending. Stitch and press seams open. Start cutting on line where the first pin was placed and the bias strip extends (arrow D, Fig. 7-7). Cut along marked line until the entire tube becomes one long true bias strip. There will be some waste at the opposite end.

When bias is cut and cord is ready to cover (preshrink cord), lay the cord in the center of the bias strip at the right end. Bring the upper edge of the strip directly over the cord to the lower edge, being careful not to stretch edges. Hold cord in place by inserting the point of a pin just below and at right angles to the cord (Fig. 7-8). Continue pinning from right to left, setting pins about 1 inch apart. Stitch with matching thread about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch away from the cord, using a cording presser foot.

Fit the inside back piece to the chair (Fig. 8). First, fold the piece of fabric lengthwise to locate center. Mark along center line with contrasting basting thread. Allowing for the 1 inch top seam, place the piece on the chair right side out with center mark matching the center mark on the chair. Pin a few places along this mark.

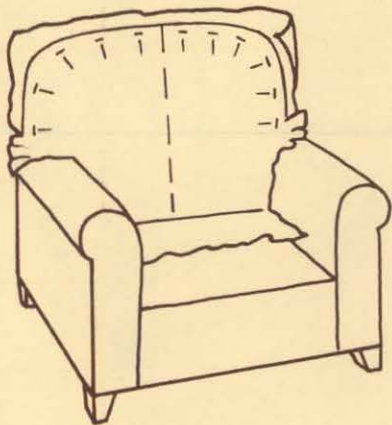


Figure 8

Smooth and adjust the fabric, keeping fabric grain in line with the marked parallel line of the chair (not specifically on the line but in line).

Pin fabric to chair adjusting it to the contours of the chair. If there is fullness at the corners pin corresponding pleats in the two sides. If necessary, cut a few notches (not too deep) around curve of arm to give a smooth fit. Mark outline of the chair on the fabric, using marking chalk or basting thread.

Using the same technique as for inside back, fit the outside back to the chair. Pin and mark the outline on the fabric (Fig. 9).

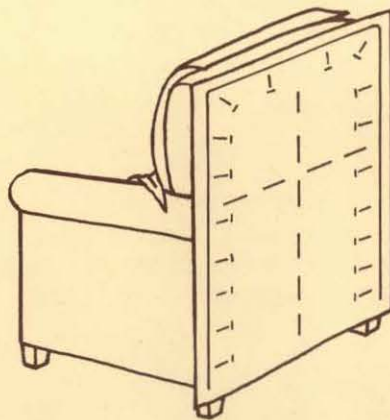


Figure 9

### Chair with Boxing

Adjust the boxing to the chair, pinning it to the inside and outside back pieces. Try not to pin into the chair. Mark corners or contour features to keep accurate matching of boxing with back and front pieces (Fig. 10).

Remove back cover. Be careful to keep the boxing and two adjoining pieces securely pinned together. Machine baste-stitch (on right side) along the cording, using cording foot on machine, to join the boxing with the inside and outside piece.

Return back cover to chair and check fit. Make adjustments, then stitch pieces together making a seam on the wrong side of the slipcover.

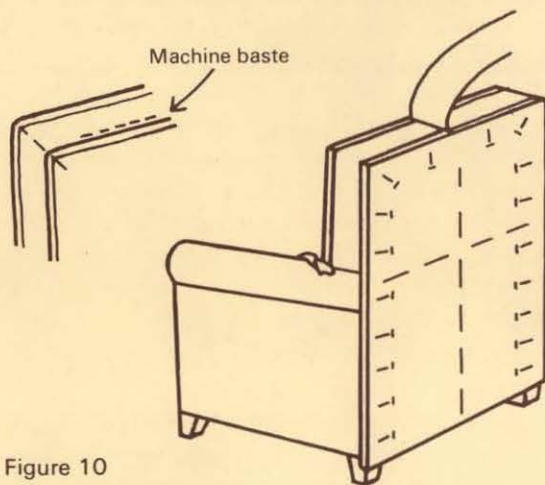


Figure 10

### Chair Without Boxing

Fit inside back to chair, marking chair edge. Sew covered cording along marking for top edge of chair, where inside back joins outside back across top of chair (Fig. 11).

Fit outside back to chair. Return inside front to chair placing top cording over top of outside back. Pin front piece along cording to back piece. Remove pinned-together pieces from chair and machine baste-stitch on right side along cording.

Check the fit again and when it is satisfactory stitch seam on wrong side.

Again, place this part of cover on chair and pin the two side panels to the cover (Fig. 11). Remove from chair and machine baste together along cording. Check fit and sew seam on wrong side.

Some chairs have neither boxing or side panels on the back section. On these, the front piece extends to the back piece at both top and sides. If your chair is like this, the outside back piece should be fitted to the chair first and marked along the chair edge at top and sides. Then stitch covered cording along the marked line.

Fit inside front to chair, adjusting it to the curve around the sides and over the top. Probably some pleating will be necessary. Place back piece on chair with cording lapping over front piece along edge of chair back. Pin front and back together. Baste stitch along cording. Do a final fitting and stitch a seam on the wrong side.

Return cover to chair. Secure a few places with pins. Push fabric of inside back into the crevice where arm joins back. Mark this curve with chalk. Be sure to place the mark well into the crevice (Fig. 12).

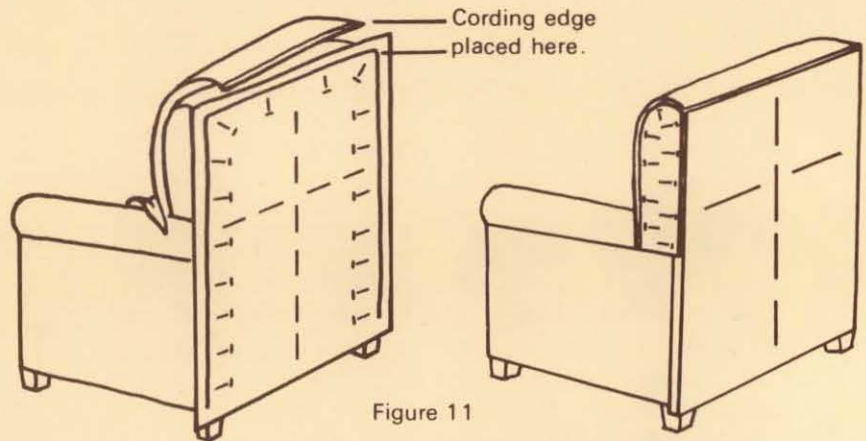
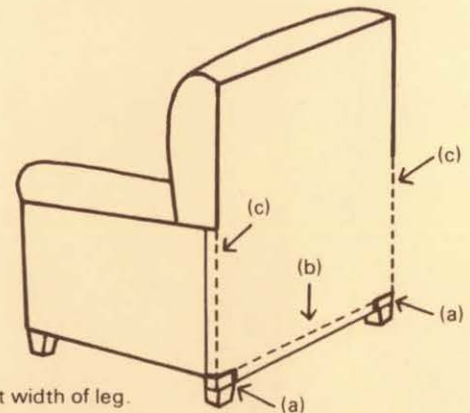


Figure 11

Mark outside back along side edge and bottom edge of chair. Also mark exact width of leg (Fig. 13). Remove cover from chair. For over-the-arm-curve use a bias strip 4 inches wide and long enough to reach from the back edge over the arm along mark extending 6 inches down inside.

Figure 13



- (a) Mark exact width of leg.
- (b) Mark chair edge at bottom
- (c) Mark chair edge at sides

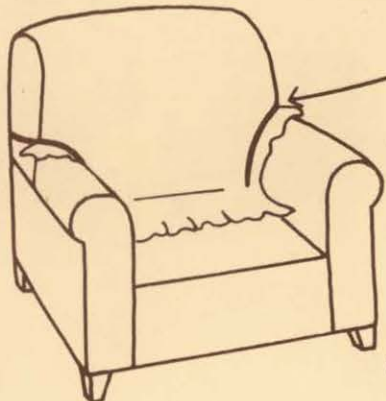
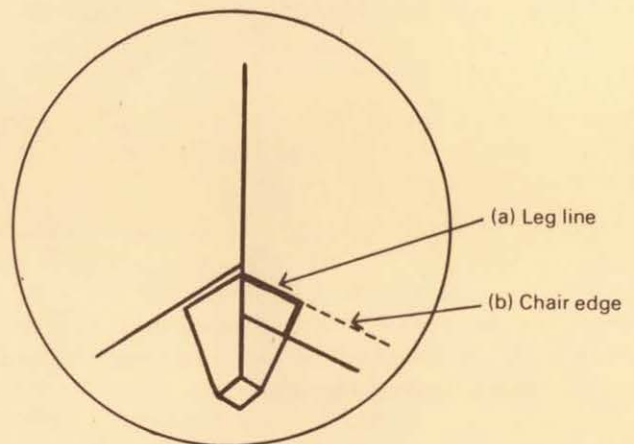
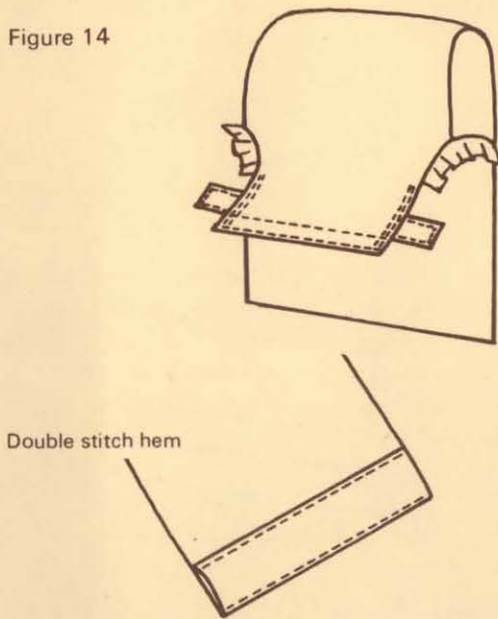


Figure 12



Fold the strip in half and sew across the ends on wrong side. Turn bias to right side and stitch to cover along over arm mark. You may want to check this on chair before trimming and clipping the seam. The bias strip should lie out flat over the arm. (Fig. 14).

Figure 14



To hem inside back below bias strip, turn fabric even with the bias seam and double-stitch. Hem bottom of inside back. Make double-stitched hem wide enough for  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch dowel, or wider (Fig. 14). Fold two 5-inch square pieces of fabric in half. Stitch  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch seams across one end and lengthwise. Turn seams to inside. Sew one tab on each side of inside back just above the bottom hem for tucking.

For back facing at leg area, cut a piece of fabric 1 inch longer than the chair leg mark and 4 inches wide. Fold facing piece in half lengthwise and mark 1 inch from fold (Fig. 15a). Place this 1-inch mark line along the chair leg mark line on right side of fabric. The facing should extend 1 inch past the end (inside) of the leg mark (Fig. 15b). Stitch along this line. Pivot at the inside end of the mark and continue stitching to facing edge.

Cut from bottom outside corner to point of stitching. Trim out extra fabric leaving  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch seam. Turn facing to wrong side, press and topstitch close to turned back edge.

To finish sides of outside back piece, first stitch fabric along raw edge. Then turn the fabric under along the side chair marks and topstitch along the fold.

Last, do the bottom hem for the outside back. Turn and press raw edge under  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch. Make the second turn half-way between fabric fold and edge-of-chair mark, bringing the first fold to the chair edge mark. Double stitch.

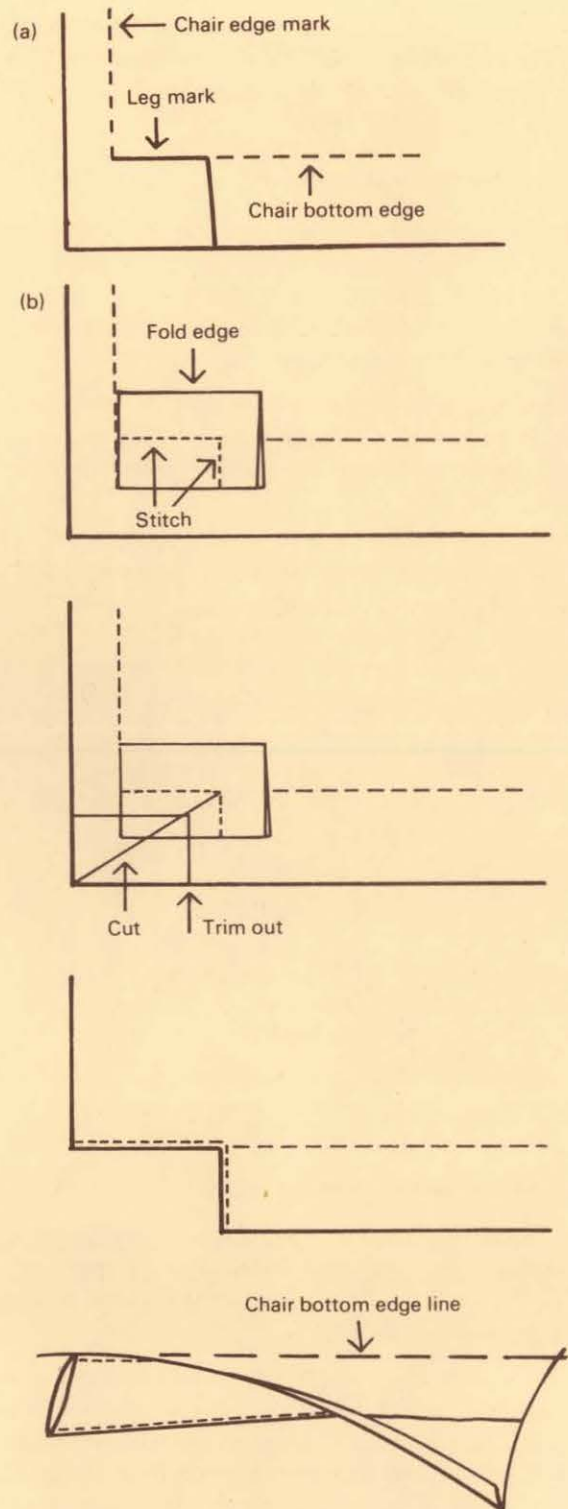
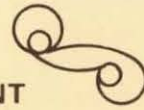


Figure 15



## CHAIR APRON - SEAT FRONT



The way to make the seat front or apron depends on original construction: Straight 1-piece apron with arm front pieces extending to bottom of chair; apron divided with cording inset and lower section extending across lower front arm, or T seat front.

### *Straight One-piece Apron*

The fabric piece for this should extend 8 inches onto seat from front edge and 4 inches on each side. (Fig. 16a). Turn under a narrow hem ( $\frac{1}{2}$  inch) at back and sides of apron fabric and double stitch. Do a 1-inch, double stitched hem on the front.

Place the fabric on the chair with back edge  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches from chair front edge. Fit the fabric to the chair seat front pinning at back and temporarily securing under chair front.

Shape snug mitered corners and baste with a slip stitch. Remove fabric from chair and either hand stitch or machine stitch the corner miter seam.

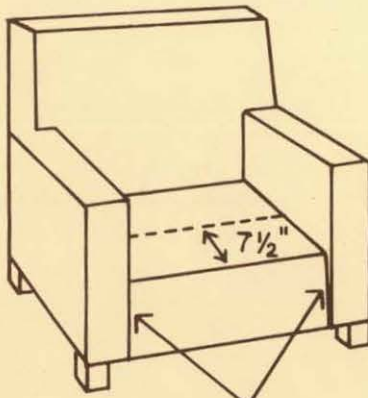
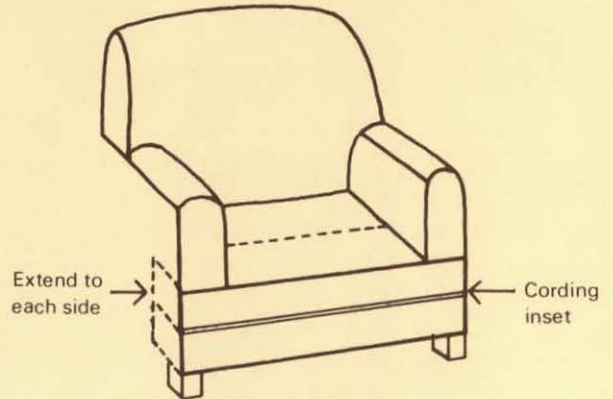


Figure 16 (a)

Miter

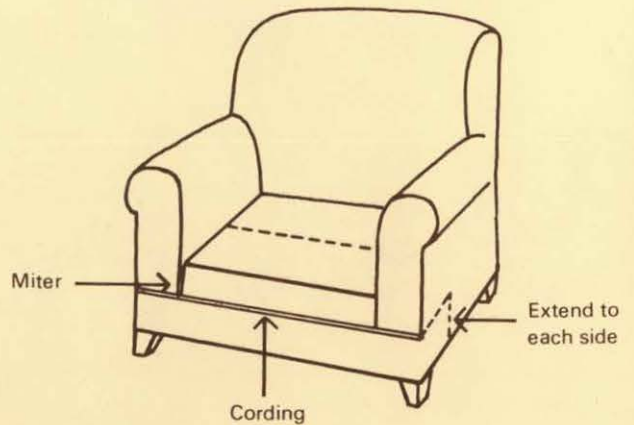
Make final fit, marking for leg, and hem at bottom, following instructions for outside back-facing for leg and bottom hem (Fig. 15).

Figure 16 (b)



Extend to each side

Cording inset



Miter

Cording

Extend to each side

### *Apron Divided with Cording Inset*

Follow instructions for the one-piece apron omitting the 1-inch hem at front. The front edge of the fabric should come to the existing break in the apron with 1-inch seam allowance (Fig. 16b).

The bottom piece of the apron should be 4 inches longer than the width of the chair front. Pin the center of this piece to the center of the seat front and mark lines where the two will be stitched together. Sew cording along this mark. Sew corded bottom piece to the seat front. Continue from both ends of the cording with a hem.

### *T Seat Front*

For a T seat, double stitch  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch hem across the back. Adjust and pin the fabric to the chair with 2-inch hem allowance extending at the front bottom edge. Mark the exact contour of the seat around front of arm extending 4 inches along inside arm (Fig. 17a).

Cut two bias strips of fabric 6 inches wide and as long as the mark around the arm. Fold strip double and face the arm area, stitching along the contour mark. Cut out excess fabric, leaving  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch seam allowance. Tuck bias strip down between arm and seat when adjusting the T

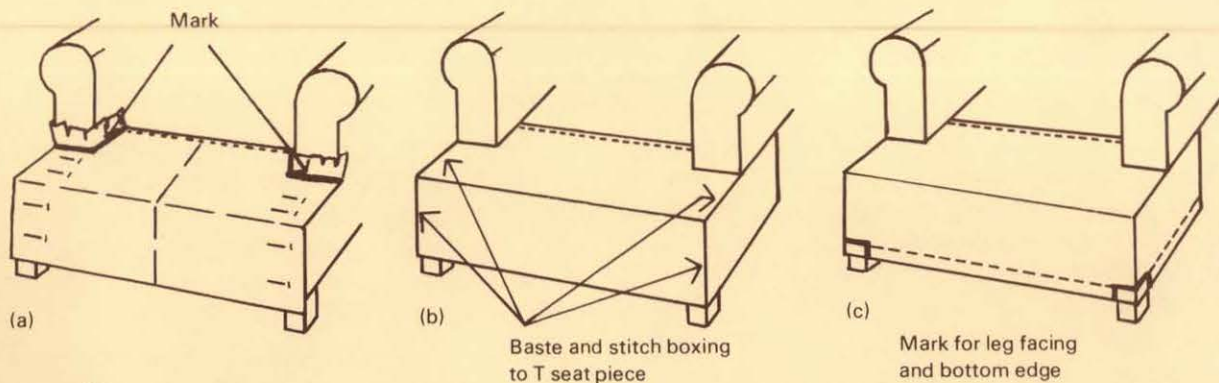


Figure 17

seat piece to chair. Make double stitched narrow hem along remaining portion of side edges of seat piece.

To box the outside corners of the seat extension use a piece of fabric that extends at least 2 inches past the arm. Fit the boxing to the chair, then pin it to the seat piece. You may need to slip stitch baste this to get a good

fit. Either machine stitch inside seam or topstitch close to edge.

Mark at front legs and face (Fig. 15).

Your chair may have variations of these three basic seat treatments. Adapt the treatment that is most like your chair.

## ARMS

Follow the same method for the arms as used for the back with two exceptions. There is special treatment for the T type chair and all chairs where the back and arm join. If the chair has a T seat with cording around the arm front, boxing should extend 2 inches below bottom of outside arm edge (Fig. 18). After the boxing is stitched to the rest of the arm piece, stitch the extended cording to the front edge of the outside arm piece. This cording when tacked to underside of chair helps hold the arm cover snugly in place.

Mark the curve line over the arms where they join the back (Fig. 19). Make this mark back in the crease. Stitch cording along curve mark before hemming bottom of inside arm pieces (see hemming instructions for inside back, Fig. 14).

Mark legs and follow instructions for finishing legs (Fig. 15).

Figure 18

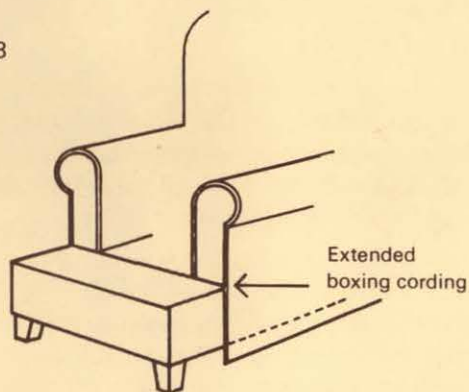
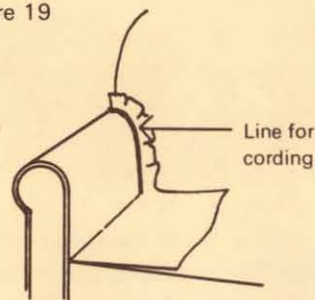


Figure 19



## CUSHIONS

Start with the boxing for the cushion (Fig. 20). An opening is necessary and should be placed in the back section of the boxing. It needs to be large enough to allow for stuffing the cushion into the cover, at least the width of the cushion. Or the opening can extend 2 to 3 inches on each side of the cushion.

Stitch a strip of fabric, placket fashion, on each side of the zipper. Using selvage will result in less bulk. Snap fasteners or velcro can be used for closing the placket or it can be hand stitched closed after the cover has been placed on the cushion.

Now, sew the zipper section to one end of the cushion boxing. Measure exact width finished boxing should be, marking seam lines on both sides. Stitch cording (on

right side) along the marked lines. Adjust boxing around cushion. Pin, then sew ends together.

To join cording ends, untwist plys of cord, cut half of plys away from one end and half from other. Twist the remaining plys of the two ends together and wrap with thread to hold securely.

Pin one cover piece to the cushion and fit the boxing around the cushion (place placket in back). Pin the two together, marking corners to keep a perfect match. Machine baste along cording.

Check fit, then fit and pin the remaining side to the boxing and machine baste-stitch. Check again and if the cover fits the cushion, sew seams on the inside.

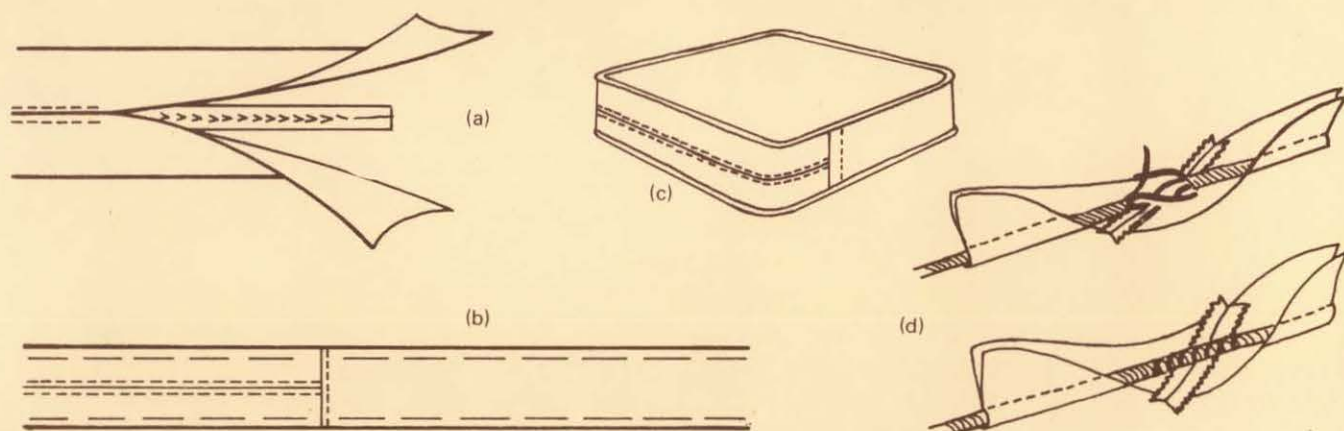


Figure 20

## THE FINAL COVER

The slipcover pieces should be pressed before they are put on the chair.

**First**—Fit the apron to the seat front. Baste-stitch the back edge to the seat.

Tack the lower edge to the underside of the chair with No. 6 size tacks. Use cardboard under the tack to make removing easier and use only the number needed to keep the apron in place.

The T apron and some aprons with cording will have extensions at the side to wrap around the corners of the chair. These should be tacked to the side of the chair.

**Second**—Adjust the back cover to the chair. Have the side bias strips laying flat over the arm curve. Put a wooden dowel in the front hem and push it firmly down between seat and back. Push the tucking tabs into the side crevices. Do not secure the outside back piece to the chair until arm pieces are in place.

**Third**—Place arm pieces on chair over the back bias strips. Cording at back of the arm piece must fit snugly in crevice where back and arm meet. Put wooden dowel in the inside arm hem. Be sure it extends through the cording at the back of the hem, as it acts as an anchor holding both back and arm pieces in place at this point. Push the dowel down firmly into the opening between seat and arm.

Place tack through cording when securing front of arm piece to underside of chair. Tack in a few places along underside. Arm and back pieces can be finished in either of 2 ways:

- (1) Bring back edge of arm piece to back of chair and tack (limit) under outside back piece.


- (2) Tack both arm and back pieces to underside of chair. Then slip stitch the two pieces together along edge of chair.

**Fourth**—Place slipcover on cushion. It completes the chair.


**Fifth (optional)**—If you are finishing your slipcover with a flounce, make it now (Fig. 1). Finish the flounce along the top with cording.

Fit flounce to the chair and pin it in place. Lift bottom of flounce and pin it up to the slipcover above so you can work on the underside. Using strips of cardboard along cording seam, tack the flounce to the chair. Or baste-stitch the flounce in place. Remove pins and let flounce drop into place.

Your chair is now ready to be used and enjoyed.



### THINGS TO REMEMBER AS YOU MAKE THE SLIPCOVER



1. Each chair has variations which must be considered. You will need to adapt the methods given in this bulletin to fit your chair.
2. Take accurate measurements, adding recommended allowances for seams, tucking and hems before buying fabric and before cutting the slipcover pieces.
3. Where instructions call for cording, covered cording is to be used.
4. During construction, machine baste-stitch first on right side along cording, then make permanent inside seams after final fitting.
5. Cording is used in several places for tightening and anchoring the slipcover.
6. Use double fabric facings for legs.
7. Use wooden dowels the width of inside back and length of arm from front to back to hold cover in place.
8. Always use cardboard under tacks.