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Serger Construction Methods

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Women of today are involved in a multitude of careers — wife, mother, professional. Many women act as heads of households. Time is not available to today's homemaker for clothing construction as we have known it in the past. Sewing with a serger is one of the most time efficient ways to construct family clothing and stretch the family clothing dollar.

The construction methods described in this publication have been adapted from the ready-to-wear industry. Although quality in affordable ready-to-wear is at times marginal, methods are fast. The speed sewing methods used in home serging allow the home sewer to incorporate the desired quality in minimum time. Each individual has a set of quality standards in clothing construction. Many of the construction methods used in the past are suitable for serging, and quality need not be compromised.

When shopping for fabric, take time to browse in the ready-to-wear department for style and construction ideas. Many fabric manufacturers for ready-to-wear are now selling yardage on the bolt. It is possible with a serger to construct clothing nearly identical to ready-to-wear at a fraction of the cost.

Serging will save about one third of clothing construction time. Although a conventional machine is still necessary, the serger will do about 90 percent of the construction of most garments. Buttonholes, top stitching and zipper application are the exceptions.

Three methods for using the serger in clothing construction are as follows:

1. **Serging alone** — No straight stitching on a conventional machine is

necessary. The serger sews the seam, finishes the edges and cuts away the seam allowance in one step. This method is best suited for knit fabrics but can also be used on wovens in some instances.

2. **Serging as a seam finish only** — In some garments, it is desirable to maintain the $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch seam allowance. Slacks, blazers or any garment that may need fitting during the sewing process or that may require altering at a later time should be constructed by using this method. After cutting the garment, serge all edges that will require a seam finish. Once all seams have been serged, construct the garment by conventional methods. Waistlines and necklines need not be serged as they will be encased by facings or waistbands. Sleeve caps and armhole seams can be serged together after the sleeve is set in.

3. **Straight stitch/serge combo** — Loosely woven fabrics or garments that will receive hard wear should be constructed using this method. Construct the garment using conventional methods. After stitching each seam, press and serge the two seam allowances together, leaving a $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch or $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch seam allowance. To make this method faster, thread the serger and conventional machine with matching thread. Sew several seams before stopping to press and serge.

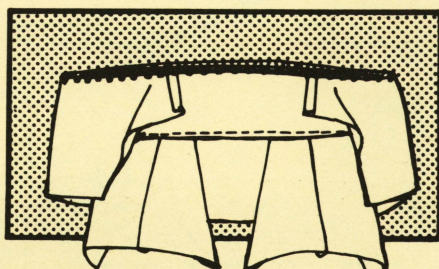
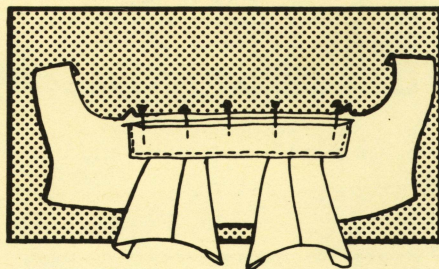
The "clothesline" method of clothing construction can be used readily in serging. Because you do not need to lift the presser foot when beginning or ending a seam, several seams may be stitched

without cutting threads between the pieces or seams.

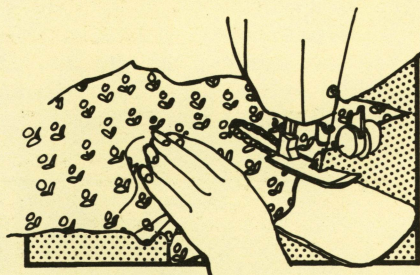
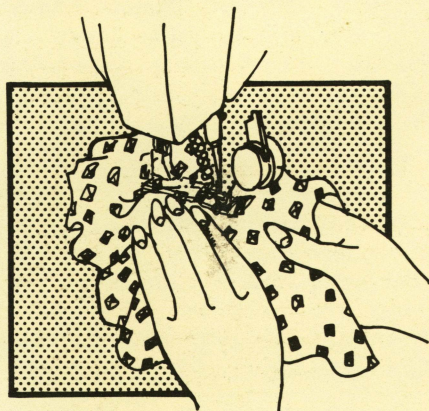
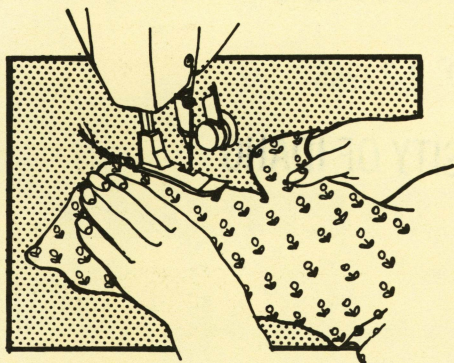
Serging does not eliminate the need for pressing. Press seams flat to relax threads, then press seam to one side then to the other. You may need to press from the right side as a finishing touch.

Collars can be attached to garments using a plain serge seam. Construct the collar as you would normally. Place collar on neck edge of bodice, folding the front facing back over the collar. Stitch across the neck edge through all thicknesses (facing, collar and bodice). Turn and press.

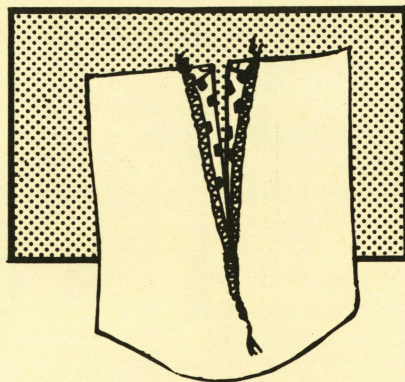
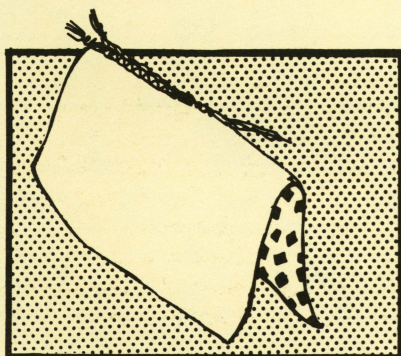
The back neck edge will be finished with an overlock stitch. It may be necessary to straight stitch the seam to the bodice from shoulder seam to shoulder seam to hold it in place. The collar will cover this stitching when worn.



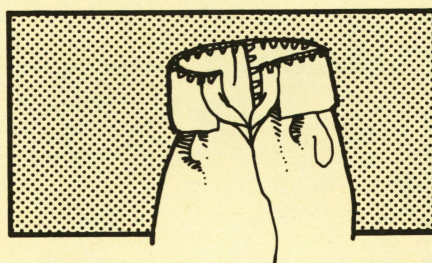
Cuffs — Cut slit in sleeve where sleeve placket is to be located. Stitch up to the point where the knife would cut (if it were down) the fabric to the right of the corner. Fold this fabric back to prevent cutting. Stitch slowly, feeding the fabric under the presser foot. Small pleats will be forming on the left but should not be stitched in place. When stitching is completed, fabric should lie flat.



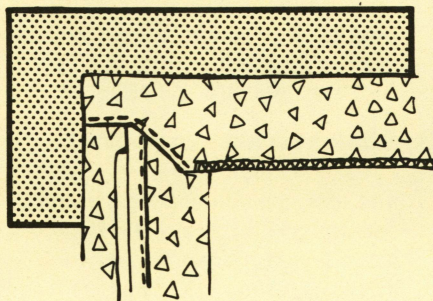
Serge a small dart at the end of the placket.



Construct cuff. Turn and press. Pin cuff to sleeve folding about $\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch of the placket back over the cuff. Stitch through all thicknesses. Turn and press.



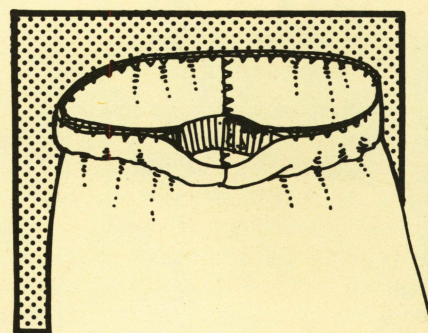
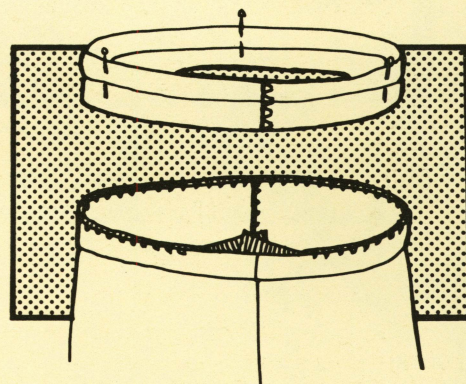
Waistbands — Sergers provide several alternatives for waistband applications. When applying a conventional waistband, cut the band $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch narrower than usual. Serge the long edge that is usually turned under. After you have applied the band, fold and stitch in the ditch. Serging the inside edge rather than turning it under cuts down on the amount of bulk around the waist.



Several applications for elastic waistbands exist as follows:

1. Cut the waistband the appropriate length and $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch wider than elastic. Sew waistband into a circle, and divide into quarters. Fold in half. Pin to garment matching quarter marks to seams or appropriate marks. Place elastic inside folded waistband. Serge both layers of the waistband to garment being careful not to stitch through elastic. Leave an open-

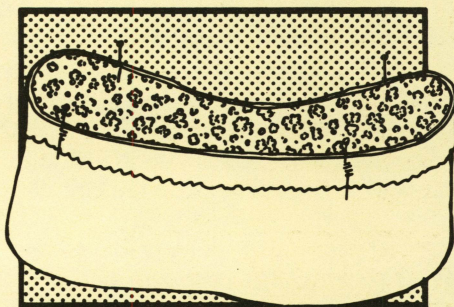
ing of about 2 inches. Pull elastic to desired size, and stitch ends together. Serge opening.



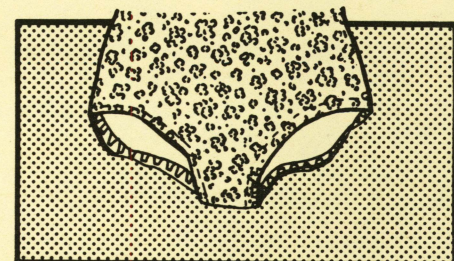
2. Fold over elastic casing. Divide and mark the top of the casing and elastic. Serge elastic to the top edge of the garment stretching elastic while stitching. Fold fabric over elastic to form casing, and straight stitch with the conventional machine.

This method may also be used to apply $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch elastic to legs of swim suits or leotards (see figures).

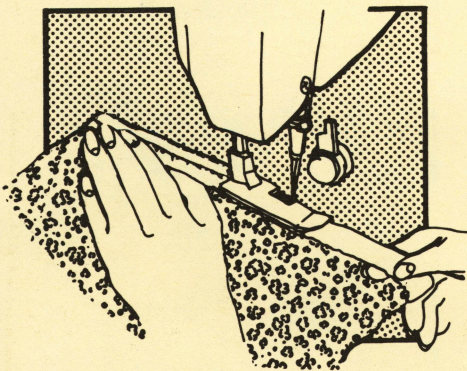
Three-thread application (a)



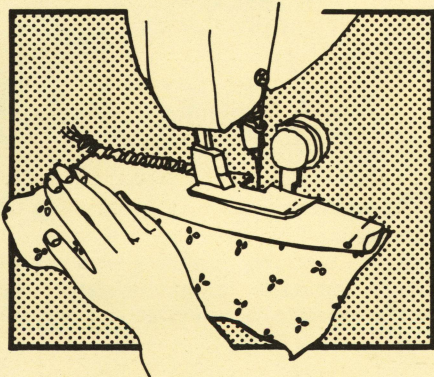
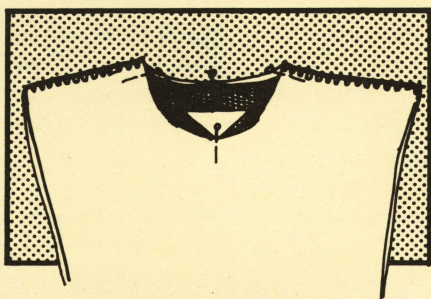
Three-thread application (b)



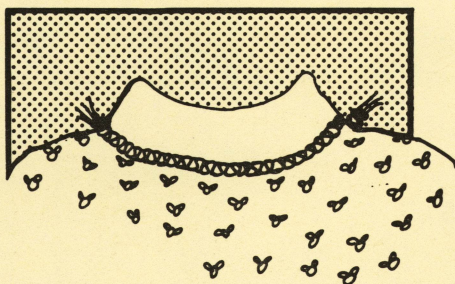
Three-thread application (c)



Ribbing — The method of applying ribbing with a serger is the same as with a conventional machine. Use plain serge seam. Stitch width should be set at 1/4-inch. Stitch with ribbing on the top, stretching the ribbing as necessary. Serging allows great flexibility for ribbing.

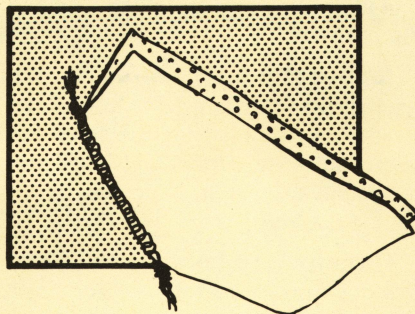


Sewing wrong sides together using a two-thread flat lock stitch places a decorative stitch on the right side of the garment.

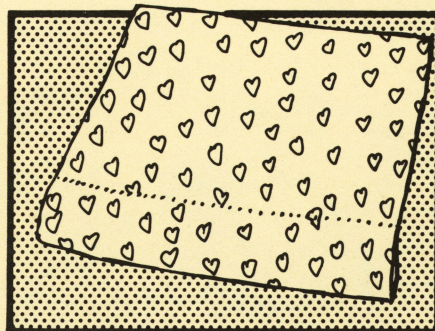
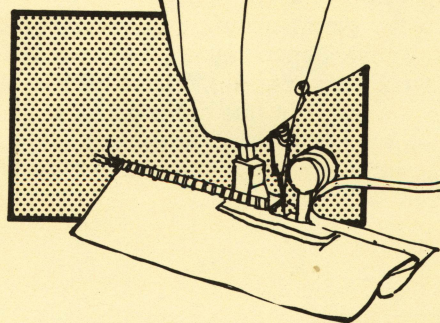
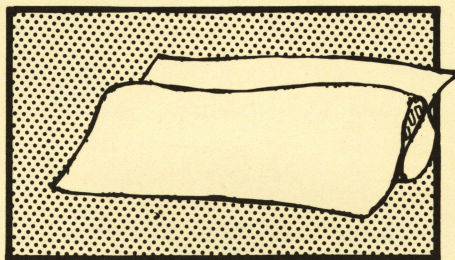


Darts — You can sew single point darts with a serger. The cutting action will eliminate the need to split and press wide

darts open. Sew darts with regular serge seaming or with the flatlock stitch. Serging is NOT appropriate for stitching double pointed darts.



Ladder hemming is done by using the flatlock stitch.* Fold the hem up as when using the blind hem attachment on a conventional machine. Stitch with the needle running just on top of the fold. The overlocking will create a finish on the edge while the needle is stitching the hem. Flatten stitches and press. The smaller the needle bites, the less the stitches will show.



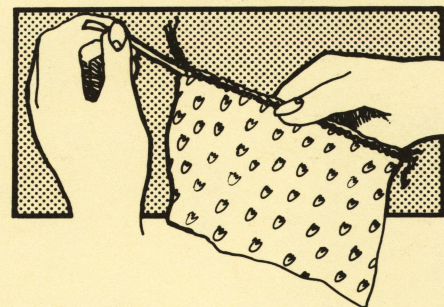
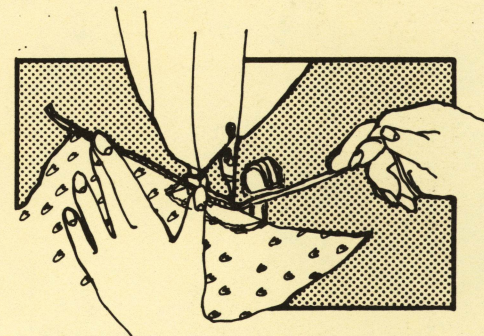
*Flatlocking is described in University of Idaho Current Information Series No. 764, *Serger Principles*.

For a decorative hem, fold fabric up twice. Serge along the second fold using a two-thread flatlock stitch. Flatten stitches. Overlock stitch will be visible on right side of the garment.

Gathering is accomplished using a three-thread serge seam. After stitching, pull gently on the needle thread to form gathers.

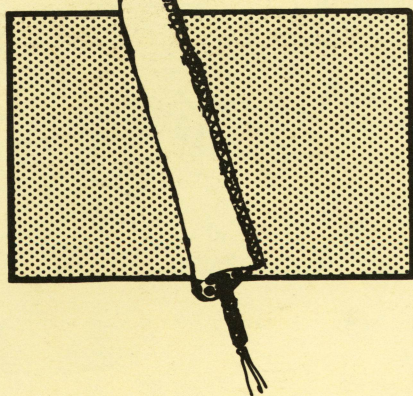
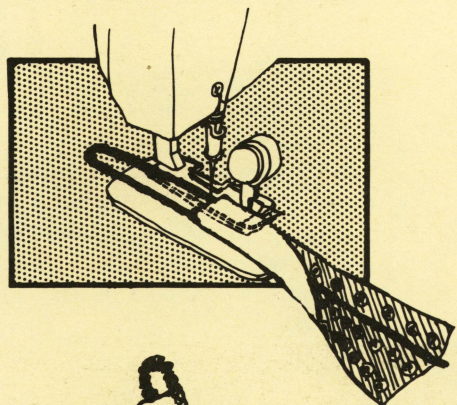
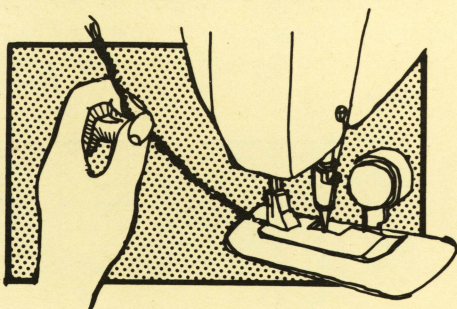


Gathering over a cord is accomplished by placing a small cord under the back of the presser foot. Hold cord against the knife, and serge over the cord, being careful not to stitch cording. Pull cording to form gathers.



Spaghetti — Spaghetti straps can be made easily on a serger. Run out a long string of stitches. Pull the looper threads off the end. Fold fabric around the string of stitches. Place under the presser foot, and stitch a seam in the fabric. The long string of threads is now encased in the fabric. Pull on the string to turn.

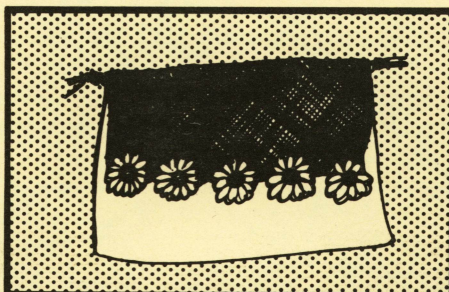
Serge stitches can also act as stuffing for spaghetti if you prefer a round spaghetti. Remember to cut woven spaghetti strips on the bias and knits with the stretch of the fabric. They are easier to turn and wear better.



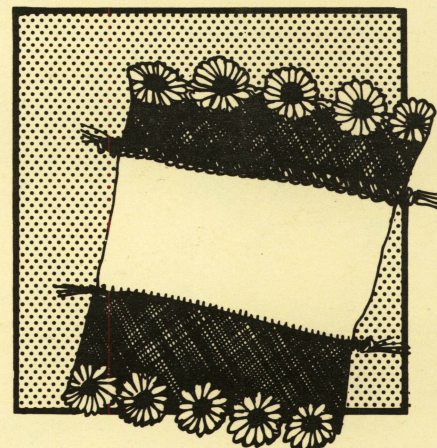
Belt loops — Thread belt loops can be made by running stitches out of the machine using a short stitch length. Sew into the side seam of your garment, or thread onto a large needle and sew onto the garment.

Taping shoulder seams — When sewing shoulder seams in a knit garment, a piece of twill tape can be sewn in the seam to prevent stretching. Lay tape on seam line and stitch. Tape may be trimmed if desired.

Three-thread lace application — Using a three-thread plain serge seam in a narrow width, serge lace to fabric right sides together. Press.

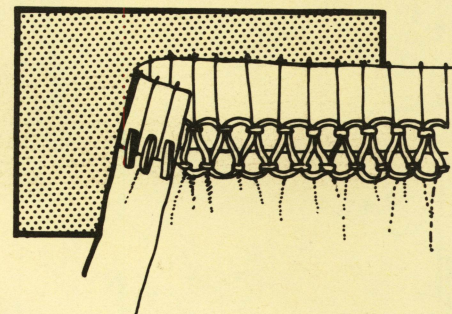


Two-thread lace application — Lace can be applied to garment by using the two-thread flat lock stitch. Serge lace to the garment right and wrong sides together, depending on the desired effect. Flatten stitching. A ladder stitch will be on the right side of the garment; the serge stitch will be on the inside. This is an excellent stitch for lingerie as it lies flat and does not add bulk.



Ribbon can be inserted above lace in the same stitching as the lace is applied. Use a two-thread flatlock stitch. Place ribbon under the back of the presser foot. Hold ribbon up against the knife while stitches are formed over the ribbon.

Elastic and lace elastic can be applied using the two-thread flatlock stitch. Divide and mark elastic and garment. Serge wrong sides together. Flatten stitches.



About the Authors — Barbara A. Morales is an Extension home economist in Jerome County, and Ernestine Porter is an Extension clothing and textiles specialist stationed in the University of Idaho School of Home Economics at Moscow.