

# INDUSTRY GUIDE TO SEWING ORDER

## Your Go-To List For Garment Assembly

by *Connie Crawford*

Have you ever sat down to sew a garment and were not sure where to begin? Which comes first—the zipper or the side seams; the darts or the pockets? And does it even matter? Years in the fashion industry have taught me many “tricks of the trade,” but one of the most important lessons I’ve learned in creating garments professionally, is to know the correct sewing order for the best results.

Fashion industry pros do not use direction sheets. Instead, they follow a very logical sewing order. Also referred to as the “Unit Method of Construction,” this systemic approach to sewing enables the garment’s complete front and back to lie flat as long as possible. All darts, tucks, pleats, and style lines are sewn first and the side seams or shoulder seams are not sewn until absolutely necessary. This makes the garment easier to manipulate in the machine and simplifies the sewing process.

The garment sections are handled less often, preventing wear or distortion. Each piece is easier to press, and the overall construction process takes less time.

When using this method, it is important to follow the steps in consecutive order and not skip around. If the design does not have a particular step, simply proceed to the next step. As you practice sewing this way, you’ll gain a greater understanding of how any garment—dress, blouse, skirt, vest, pant, or jacket—is constructed, enabling you to sew more effectively. Though this order is complete, it’s wise to use the pattern direction sheet, if available, for specific sewing methods and techniques.



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## Step-By-Step Construction Method

Follow this list for efficiency in constructing any garment. If your project doesn’t include a certain step, simply skip to the next one.

- 1 ATTACH INTERFACING**  
Regardless of where interfacing is placed on the garment, it should be attached before any sewing is done. Most blouses are interfaced on the collars, cuffs, necklines, and facings. Most skirts or pants require it for the waistband.
- 2 SEW DARTS, TUCKS, AND PLEATS**  
Check each pattern piece for darts, tucks, or pleats. Regardless of where these items are on the garment, sew them before any seams. However, for skirts pleated all around, you may wait until after the side seams are sewn.
- 3 SEW STYLE LINES**  
A style line is any seamline other than shoulder-, armhole-, or side seams. It usually runs from a seam or garment edge to another seam or edge. For example, a yoke runs from side seam to side seam, and a shoulder princess seam runs from the shoulder seam to the hem. If you are sewing any specialty seams within these style lines, such as welt seams, faggoted seams or slot seams, sew them at this time.  
  
In addition, sew the center-front and center-back seams, and crotch seams on the front and back pants up to the zipper opening. Topstitch as desired. Note: At this point, the garment’s back and front sections are complete but are not attached to each other.
- 4 ATTACH POCKETS**  
Pockets are among the most obvious details on a garment: the time spent on their construction is evidence of the level of workmanship, so take your time sewing, and be sure pocket pairs are balanced.
- 5 INSTALL ZIPPERS**  
Sew zippers now while the garment is still flat. However, wait until step 15 to install a zipper into a dress with waist seams.
- 6 SEW SHOULDER SEAMS**  
Most dresses or blouses have shoulder seams in the garment body and in the facings. All shoulder seams should be sewn at this time, generally, with a plain seam. However, there are exceptions, such as a man’s shirt, that may require a welt seam.

## 7 SEW T-SHIRT-STYLE SLEEVES

Most tailored or fitted garments require a set-in sleeve, which is not sewn until step 13. However, if your garment requires a flat construction method, sew the sleeve armhole now, before the side seam.

## 8 SEW SIDE SEAMS AND INSEAMS

It is time to give the garment shape. Using an appropriate seam for the garment design and fabric, sew all the side seams on blouses, bodices, skirts, and pants. Sew all pant inseams. If the dress design has an attached skirt, sew the skirt and bodice side seams separately, but do not attach the skirt to the bodice yet.

## 9 ATTACH WAISTBANDS AND/OR FACINGS FOR SKIRTS OR PANTS

Attach waistbands, waist facings, center-front skirt facings, and elastic waists. If the garment requires a lining, follow the same previous steps and then attach it to the garment, wrong sides together, aligning the waistlines. Finish the waistband.

## 10 PREPARE AND ATTACH THE COLLAR

Sew the collar pieces as normal, trim and clip the seam allowances as needed, and press the seams. Attach any required neckline or center-front facings. Attach the collar. A neckline bias binding or facing without a collar is done in step 13.

## 11 PREPARE THE SLEEVES

Attach all detailing, such as plackets, cuffs, flounces, gathers, and elastic to the sleeve. It is easier to maneuver the bodice and the sleeve by completing these details before inserting the sleeve into the armhole. If the garment design is sleeveless, skip this step. However, a bias binding, facing, or hem is necessary to finish the armhole; skip to step 13.

## 12 SEW SET-IN SLEEVES

The garment is now ready for you to set the finished sleeve into the armhole. If the garment is sleeveless proceed to the next step to finish with a facing or binding.

## 13 SEW BODICE FACINGS (WITHOUT COLLARS AND/OR SLEEVES)

Sew the armhole or neckline facings. If the garment does not have sleeves and/ or a collar, it is necessary to cleanly finish the raw edges with a facing or bias binding. Note: Bodice center-front facings were already attached in step 10 when the collar was attached.

## 14 SEW THE WAIST SEAM ON DRESSES

If you are sewing a dress with a waist seam, sew the bodice and skirt together at the waistline.

## 15 SEW ZIPPERS IN DRESSES WITH WAISTLINE SEAMS

If the dress has a waistline- or an empire seam and a zipper closure, sew the zipper to the garment at this time. The pattern suggests the appropriate type and size for the garment. However, an 18-inch to 22-inch zipper is common for centerback dress seams. If the design requires buttons and buttonholes, skip this step.

## 16 SEW HEMS AND HEM FINISHES

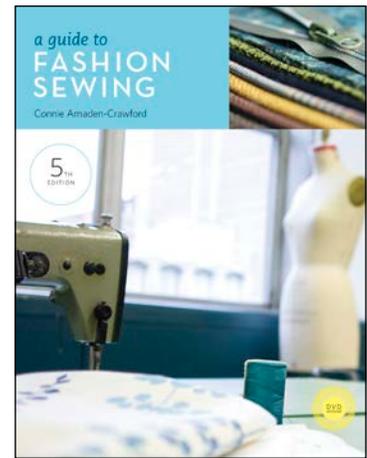
Select a hem suitable to the garment and fabric. A hem should be inconspicuous, unless it is intentionally decorative.

## 17 APPLY CLOSURES

Sew buttons and buttonholes at this time. Consider the buttonhole placement; buttons and buttonholes are generally placed on the center-front line, not on the edge of the garment. A button should be placed at the bust and waistline. Hooks and eyes, frog closures, and other closure types are also sewn at this time.

## 18 ADD THE FINISHING TOUCHES

Put the finishing touches on your garment. Make self-fabric belts, sew and attach bows, and add any additional embellishments.



For more detailed instructions, including step-by-step illustrations, please refer to chapter five in Connie's textbook: *A Guide To Fashion Sewing*.

## A QUICK GUIDE TO Sewing Order

Follow these steps in succession, and skip the steps that do not apply to your garment. Copy, laminate, and keep this list near your sewing machine for easy reference.

- |    |   |  |  |
|----|---|--|--|
| 1  | Interfacing                                   |  |  |
| 2  | Darts, tucks, and pleats                      |  |  |
| 3  | Style lines                                   |  |  |
| 4  | Pockets                                       |  |  |
| 5  | Zippers                                       |  |  |
| 6  | Shoulder seams                                |  |  |
| 7  | T-shirt-style sleeves                         |  |  |
| 8  | Side seams and inseams                        |  |  |
| 9  | Waistbands and/or facings for skirts or pants |  |  |
| 10 | Collar  |  |  |
| 11 | Sleeve preparation                            |  |  |
| 12 | Set-in sleeves                                |  |  |
| 13 | Bodice facings                                |  |  |
| 14 | Dress waistline seams                         |  |  |
| 15 | Zippers in dresses with waistline seams       |  |  |
| 16 | Hems and hem finishes                         |  |  |
| 17 | Closures                                      |  |  |
| 18 | Finishing touches                             |  |  |