



How to Sew Thick Layers

Janome America



SEWING THICK LAYERS

BEST FEET – BEST PRACTICES

Plus how to hem jeans

DIY sewing projects are rarely just two layers of quilting weight cotton floating through your machine with ease. In garment construction, pattern pieces can come together from all angles, overlapping layers and seams. With three dimensional projects, like bags, fabric baskets or heavy cushions with piping; bulk and thickness are everywhere! Keeping seams straight, needles from breaking, and fabric moving evenly under the needle is challenging (*read: can make you want to throw it all out the window*). But with the right presser feet and accessories, an understanding of seam grading, and the patience to go slowly and carefully, you can sew like a pro through thick and thin.

SEWING THICK LAYERS



It's important to understand that although using a quality sewing machine, like a Janome makes everything more frustration-free, you don't have to use the most expensive model in order to accomplish your tasks with ease and precision. It's more important to *understand* your machine model (yep, that manual comes with it for a reason), to review the uses of all the available presser feet, and to choose the right needle, thread, and stitch for your project.

For our samples we worked with three Janome machines: the top-of-the-line [Janome Horizon Quilt Maker Memory Craft 15000](#), the mid-range [Janome Horizon Memory Craft 8900](#), and the entry-level [Janome 760 Jem Platinum](#).

Our examples detail some very common techniques you're likely to come across – especially in garment sewing, but of course the solutions outlined are applicable to a range of circumstances.



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If we could boil it down to the *top three machine things to remember*, they would be:

1. Keep your presser foot flat
2. Make sure your needle is sharp
3. Slightly lengthen the stitch

However, the **machine operator** (that would be you) is just as crucial. Don't forget to:

1. Go slowly and carefully
2. Let the machine do the majority of the work – don't aggressively push or pull the fabric
3. Practice on layers of scraps first to confirm stitch settings are correct for the situation

Hemming Jeans

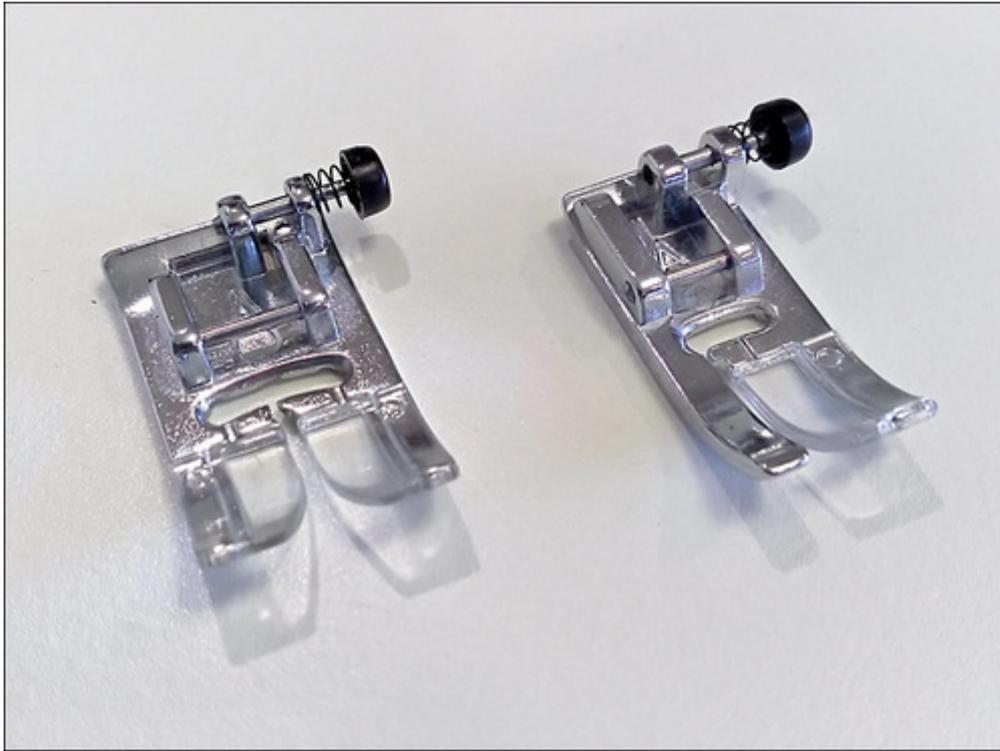


That hefty flat felled seam along the side of your jeans is the king of thick layers! The key is to keep the foot parallel to the bed of the machine as the foot is lowered. When the needle penetrates the fabric, it enters at a 90° angle to the foot. If the foot is parallel to the bed of the machine, the needle enters the fabric straight down. If the foot is at an angle, tipping forward or backward, the needle enters at an angle, which can cause the needle to break or skip stitches. We have two favorite solutions: the Janome Little Black Button and a Hump Jumper.

Thread the machine with all purpose thread and insert a jeans/denim needle. The needle size for our sample was a 90/14 jeans needle. Slightly lengthen the stitch. We used 3.0mm. The presser foot is standard.

The Janome Little Black Button

Janome machines come with a standard presser foot (the A foot) that has a 'little black button' on the side. This easily overlooked feature is designed to keep the foot level at the start of a bulky seam. To use the button, place your layers of fabric under the foot. Push and hold the little black button and lower the foot. This action locks the foot parallel to the bed of the machine as the foot is lowered. Once stitching is started, the button will pop out again. The image below shows the standard foot in both a 9mm and 5.5mm width.



For our jeans hemming example, we used a $\frac{1}{2}$ " double-fold hem. To do this, simply press back the raw edge $\frac{1}{2}$ ", then press back an additional $\frac{1}{2}$ " to encase the raw edges within the double fold.

There are two seams to stitch across when sewing a jeans hem. One is a serged or overlocked seam, and the second one is the bulky welt seam. Start at the serged seam to use the little black button.

Place the folded hem under the foot. The foot should be just behind the seam so the needle drops in before the bulk of the seam (don't try to start right on top of the seam). Press and hold the black button to level the foot.



Still holding the button, lower the foot. The button will hold the foot in position parallel to the bed of

the machine.

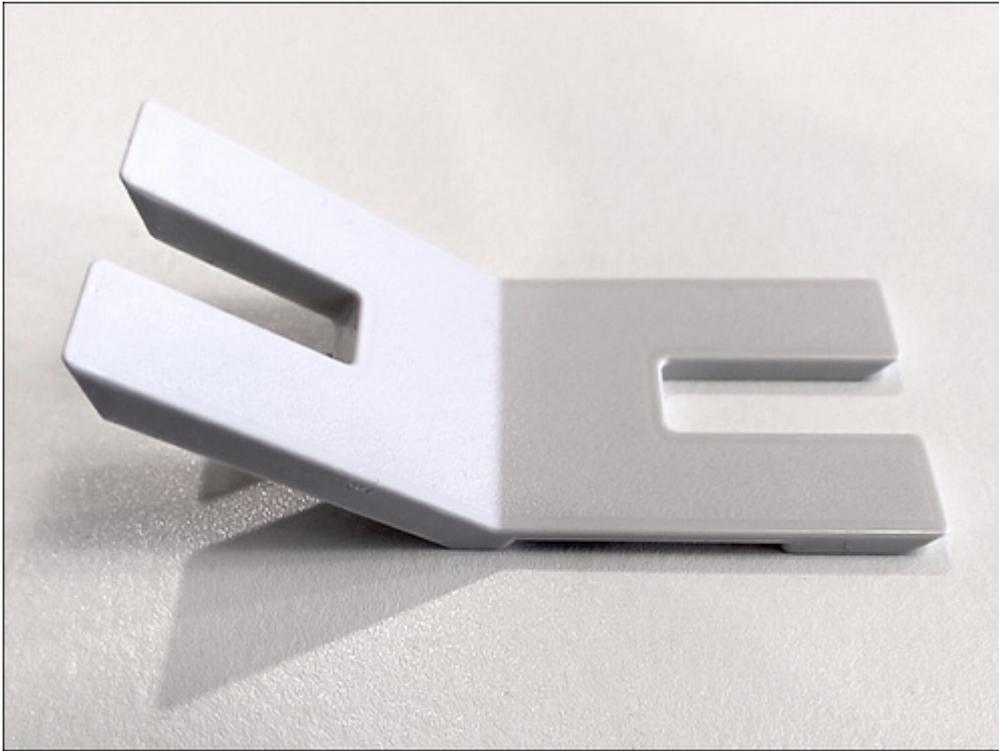


Start stitching. As the machine moves forward, the button will release. You will glide up and over this first thick seam.

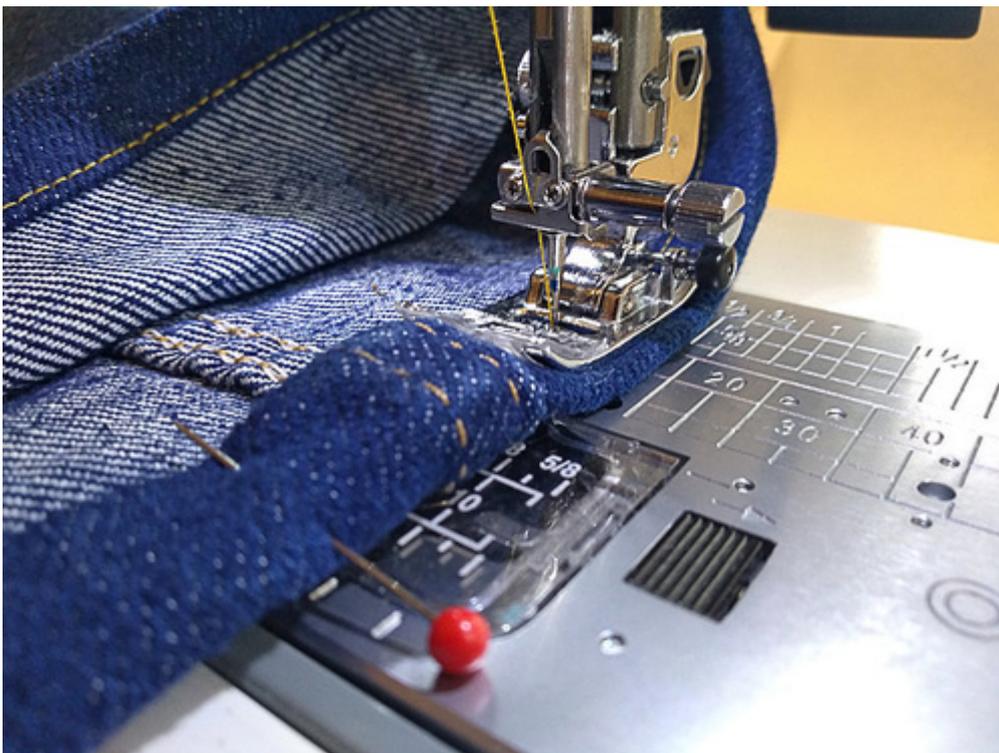


The Hump Jumper

Sometimes you need even more leveling help. For this, a hump jumper is your friend. This handy plastic foot accessory looks like the letter "L." *L is for level!* It has a slot for the needle in the center and a choice of two thicknesses to level the foot.



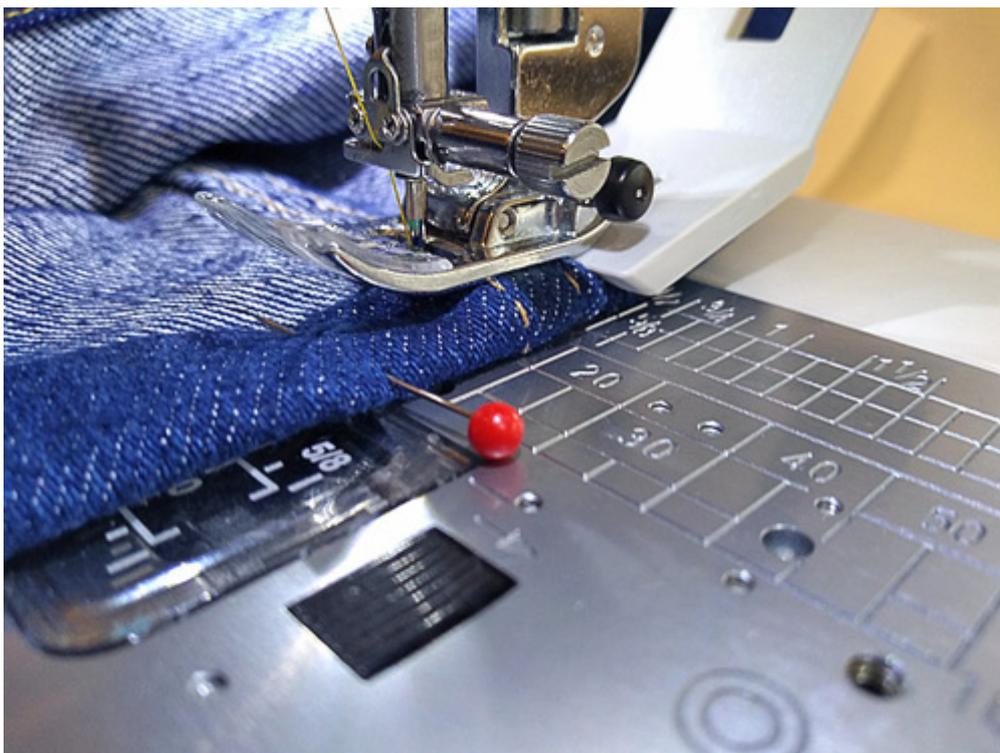
Continue sewing from that first seam you successfully conquered until you are close to the scary welt seam.



Stop with the needle in the down position and lift the presser foot. Place the hump jumper under the foot at the rear of the foot. Because this is a super thick seam, we inserted the thicker side of the hump jumper. With the hump jumper in place, notice that the foot is now level and parallel to the bed of the machine.



Continue stitching until you reach the other side of the welt seam.



Stop, and with the needle down, raise the foot. Remove the hump jumper from the rear of the foot and re-position it under the front of the foot. Lower the foot. The foot should again be level and parallel to the bed of the machine.



Continue sewing until the foot is completely past the bulk of the seam.



Stop and remove the hump jumper, then continue sewing to complete the hem.



Success!



Seams and Topstitching with Multiple Layers

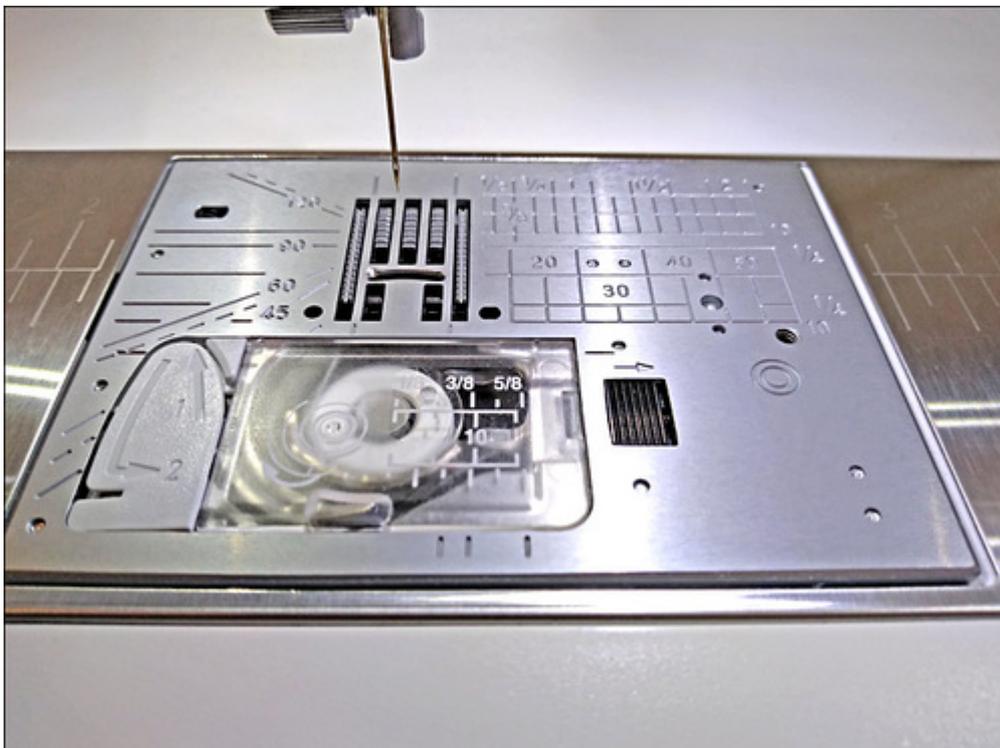
This technique again uses a garment sewing example, but as mentioned above, thick layers and overlapping seams occur on many, many projects. You might encounter them around the top of a fabric basket that combines a heavy exterior fabric with a lightweight lining. Bags and totes have side seams, box bottom seams, and overlaid pockets where layers can stack up like cord wood. And if you love cushions with accent piping, you can easily encounter up to six layers when thicker interfacing comes into play. The list goes on, but there's no scarcity of multiple layers that require seaming and

topstitching.



We're working with a jacket front that has four separate pieces plus a front button band. All these sections must carefully match up so they are even at both the top and bottom edges. How on earth do you keep all those layers from shifting as they're sewn? Double up on your feed dogs!

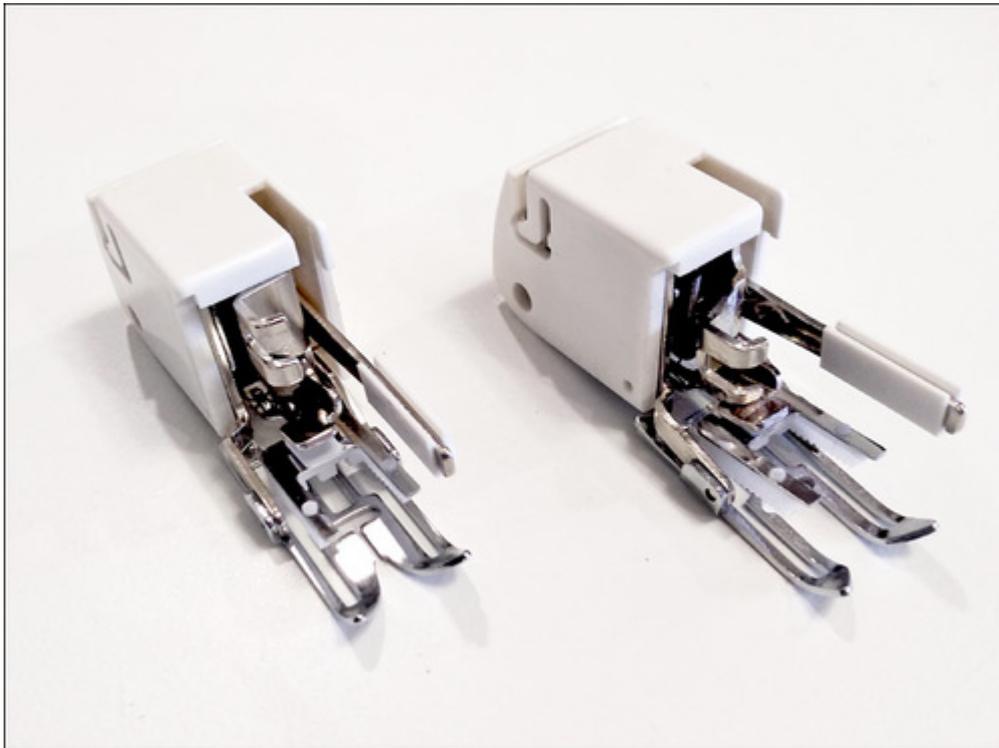
Your machine already has lower feed dogs under the presser foot - those little teeth right in the center of the needle plate.



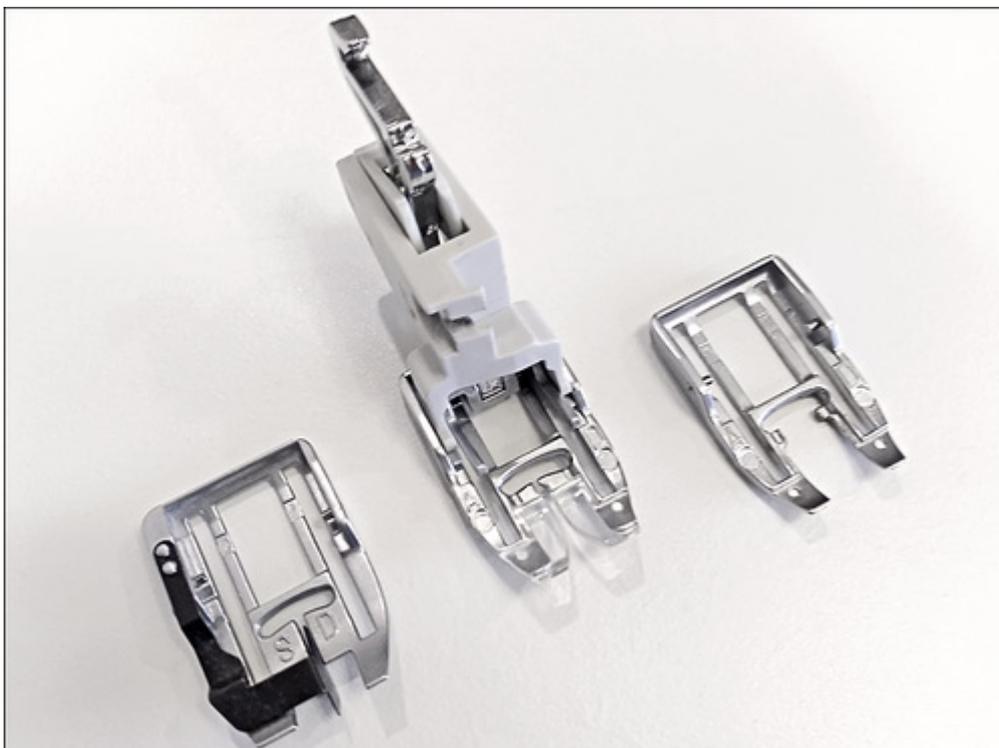
An [Even Feed foot](#) (also called a Walking foot) or a built-in fabric feeding system (we use the [AcuFeed™ Flex fabric feeding system](#) built-in to many of our Janome studio models) incorporates

upper feed dogs into the mix so both the top and bottom layers of fabric are moved through the machine in unison, keeping seams straight and edges even.

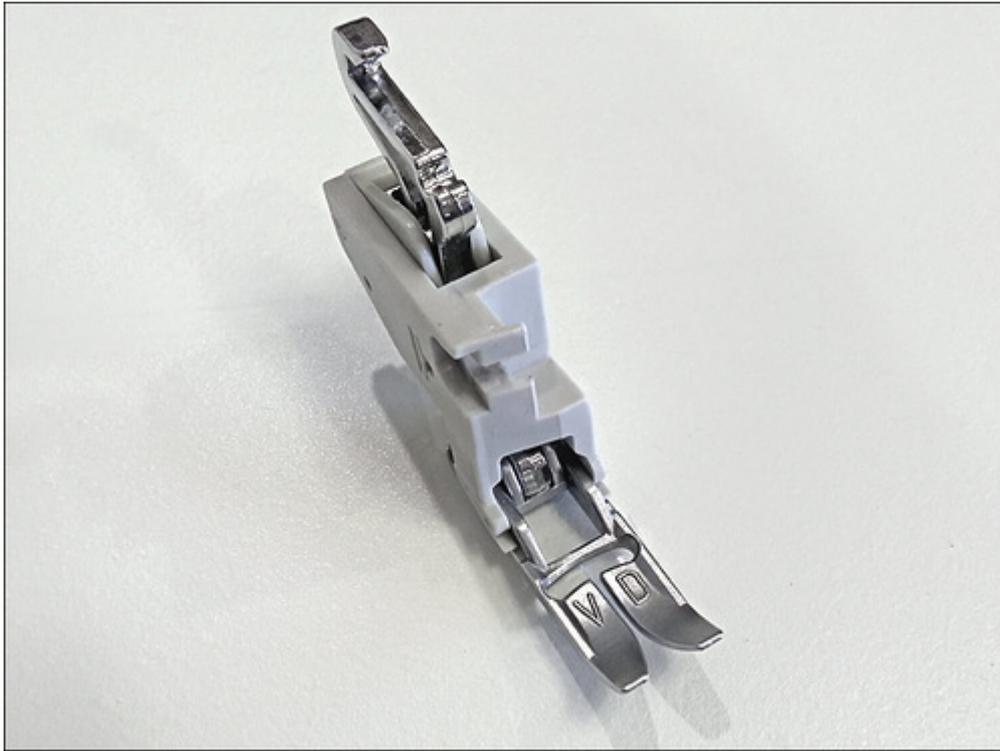
Below is a [Janome Even Feed/Walking foot](#) in two sizes: Standard Walking Foot, high shank (left) and Open Toe Walking Foot, low shank (right).



In this photo you see the standard components of the [AcuFeed™ Flex system](#).

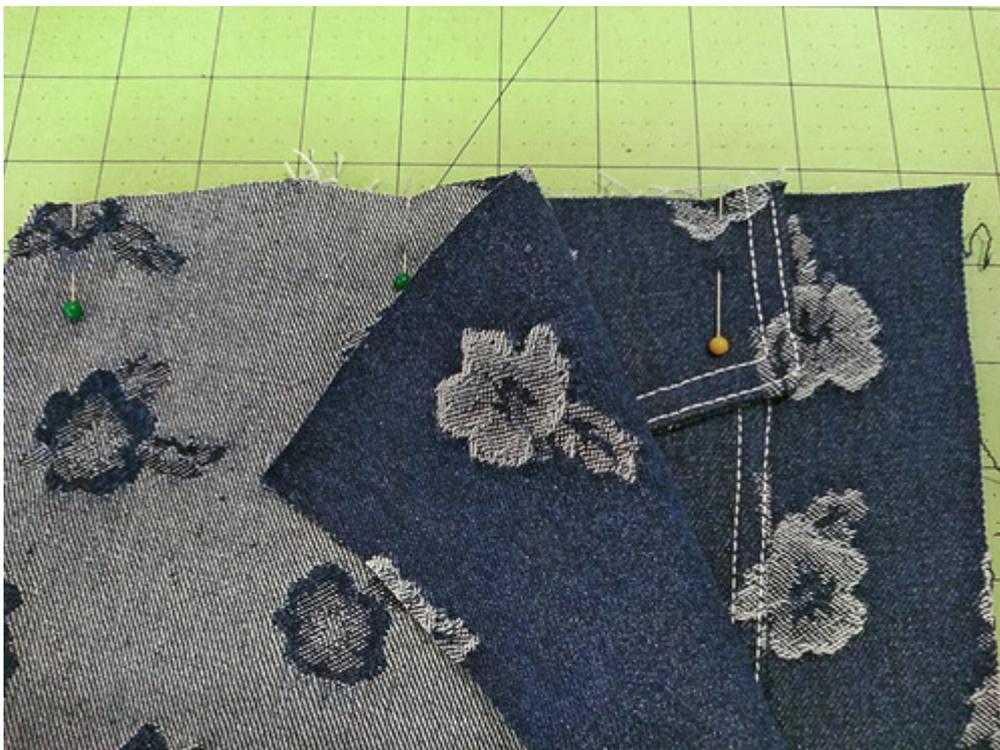


We used the optional Narrow AcuFeed™ Flex foot in our sample on the [Janome Memory Craft 8900](#).



Since we are again working with denim, we threaded the machine with all purpose thread in the top and bobbin, used a 90/14 jeans needle, and lengthened the stitch to 3.0 mm.

Pin together the sections of the jacket, matching the upper edges.



Even feeding from the bottom and top top allows you to easily stitch the seam through all the layers.



For topstitching, we used the same foot but changed to a topstitching thread in the needle. The fabric continues to feed evenly, making the topstitching more accurate and less subject to individual stitch wobbles.



Success!

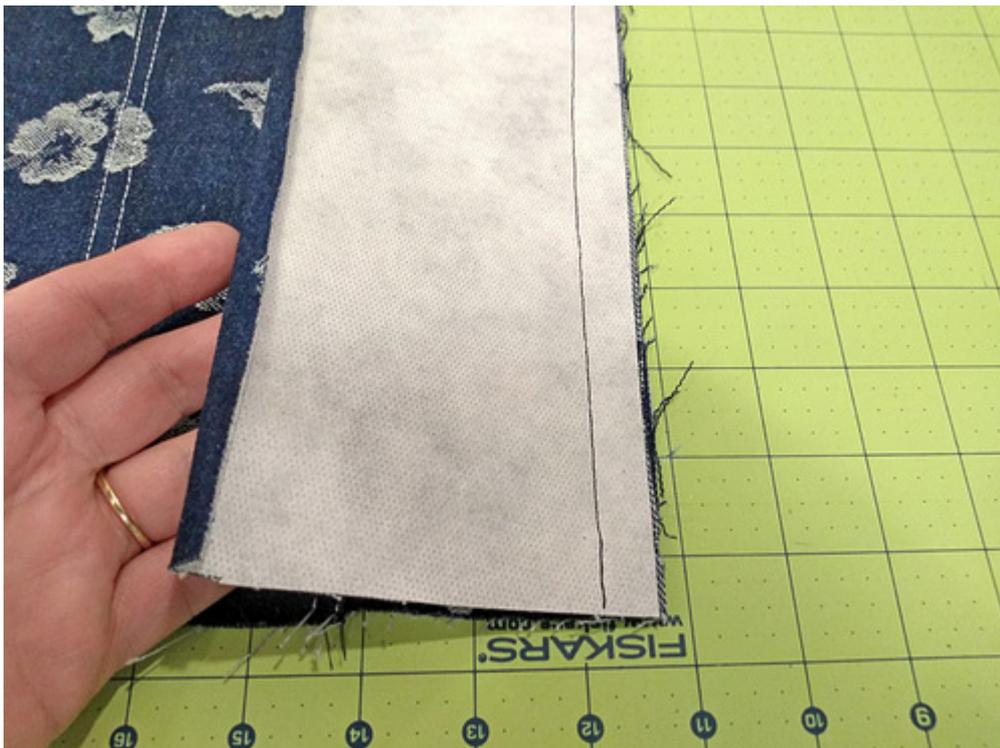


Grading a Seam to Reduce Bulk

With an enclosed seam, such as the seam attaching a placket to a jacket front, we have the perfect sample for grading seam allowances. The purpose of grading a seam is to reduce bulk, which in turn allows the seam to lay smoothly when pressed.

The placket on our sample jacket is interfaced, adding to the bulk of the seam.

Once the placket is sewn to the jacket front, it is time to grade the seam allowance.



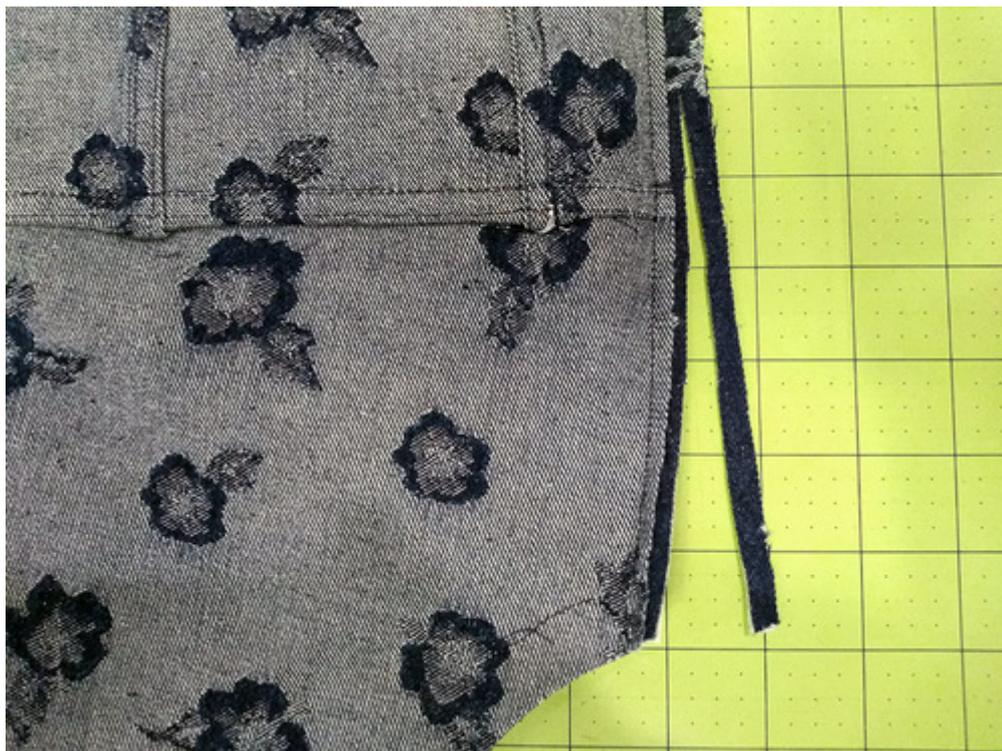
Place the jacket face down. The general rule in grading a seam is that the layer closest to the body when *wearing* the garment is the top layer and will be the shortest. The bottom layer, the one farthest away your body when wearing your garment, will be the longest layer. If your seam has more than two layers, the layers should still be graded so the layer closest to the body when worn is the shortest and the layer furthest from the body is the widest; the layers in between are then stair-stepped in size. As an example, for four layers, trim the layers from shortest to widest to $\frac{1}{8}$ " , $\frac{1}{4}$ " , $\frac{3}{8}$ " and $\frac{1}{2}$ ". In non-garment projects, it's the outermost layer facing right side out that should be the longest and the innermost/lining layer that should be the shortest.



In our sample, the inner layer will be next to our body. It's trimmed to $\frac{1}{8}$ ".



This means the exterior layer is the lower layer and should be trimmed to $\frac{1}{4}$ ".



Press the trimmed seam allowance toward the placket. Fold the placket in half, covering the seam, baste or pin in place, and press. On our sample, the placket is finished with topstitching. The extra work grading the seam allowance provides a smooth, bulk-free seam and the topstitching is straight and parallel with the seam.



Graded seams are traditionally recommended for attaching cuffs, collars, plackets, and waistbands where the seam allowance is pressed to one side, creating bulk. But it is also a very useful technique for seam allowances that are pressed open and flat. An example would be interfaced and interlined garments where the many layers are treated as one at the seams. For this type of seam, the

interfacing or interlining would be trimmed to $\frac{1}{4}$ " and the fashion fabric would be trimmed to $\frac{1}{2}$ ". When pressed open, the resulting seam will lay flat and smooth.

Success!



For more information on grading seams, [take a look at our full step-by-step tutorial](#).

Quilting Multiple Layers

When quilting is mentioned, most of us think of the fun of creating quilt blocks, but we may panic at the thought of actually quilting the many layers. As above, an [Even Feed/Walking foot](#) makes all the difference, evenly feeding the upper and lower layers of fabric plus the center batting.



For our mini sample, the machine is set up with an Open Toe Walking foot and a Quilt Guide Bar. The sewing machine is threaded with all purpose thread. We used an 80/12 universal needle and lengthened the stitch to 2.8mm.

Layer the batting between the two layers of cotton and pin.



Using an appropriate fabric pen or pencil, mark a straight line for the first line of quilting.

Adjust the Quilt Bar to your desired distance between the lines; we spaced our parallel lines at $\frac{3}{4}$ " from the needle.

Sew along the first drawn line of stitching.

When the first line is done, remove the quilt sandwich from the machine, move it to the right and place the quilt bar directly on top of the first line of stitching. Sew the second line of stitching, running the guide bar along the previous line from top to bottom. Continue quilting, stitching in the same direction for each line.



When one side is complete, turn the quilt sandwich 180° and quilt the remaining side.



To create a grid, turn the quilt sandwich 90°, mark and stitch your first line of quilting. Move the quilt sandwich to the right and add more lines of quilting, repeat from the center out to the left until the

piece is completely quilted.



The key here is to use an [Even Feed/Walking foot](#) or to engage your built-in fabric feeding system to keep the multiple layers from shifting. We are focusing on straight line quilting, something we use quite a bit on smaller home dec projects, like hot pads. We have [a complete tutorial on straight line quilting with additional details](#).



Free-motion quilting is another animal altogether that we aren't covering here. It involves dropping the feed dogs entirely so *you* are controlling the fabric's movement.

Stitch in the Ditch Quilting

As shown above, an [Even Feed/Walking foot](#) is excellent for helping feed all layers evenly. But there are additional specialty feet that can make things even easier.

A favorite quilting technique is to ‘stitch in the ditch,’ carefully following the seam between borders and blocks. The [Janome AcuFeed™ Flex system](#) has interchangeable feet, one of which is a Ditch Stitch foot with a center guide for following a seam, ensuring an accurate line without an accidental wobble away from the line.

Place the quilt was under the foot. Lower the needle at the corner between borders. Use the needle up/down feature to bring the bobbin thread to the surface. Hold the thread tails to the back of the machine as you start sewing, then guide the foot along the seam line. A perfect stitch in the ditch!



If you're interested in finding out more about many of the standard and optional presser feet available for Janome sewing machines, [take a look at our article on the Janome Presser Foot Workbook Series](#). A must-have for all Janome owners.

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