



## Online Sewing Classes – Sample Lesson

### **SEWING CURVED SEAMS**

When most people learn to sew, emphasis is usually put on acquiring the skills to sew a straight seam. And by all means, it's important to be able to sew a consistent and even straight seam. But most sewing projects and garments also have curved seams. And sewing a curved seam is different.

This was brought home to me when a student complained that she was having trouble setting in a sleeve on a pattern that I had developed for her. I had carefully walked (measured) the pattern pieces and knew that the sleeve cap was only  $\frac{3}{4}$ " longer than armhole opening - an amount that should be simple to ease in.

So I asked my student to pin and stitch the other sleeve as I watched. I immediately saw what was causing the problem for her. When she came to the curved portions of the seam, her instinct was to move the fabric that was about to be sewn so that it was in a straight line in front of the needle. In effect, she was sewing a curved seam in a straight line.

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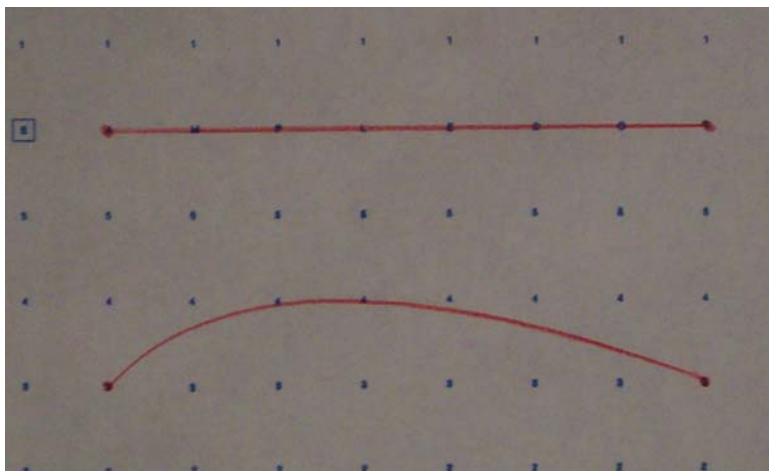


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I showed her my technique - which I will describe in detail for you - and with just 5 minutes of practice, she was sewing beautiful curved seams.

### **A CURVE IS LONGER THAN A STRAIGHT LINE**

If you think about it, it's obvious that a curved line between two points is longer than a straight line drawn between the same two points:



The straight line measures 7".

The curved line measures 7-1/2".

Now, with this in mind, think about sewing a curved seam. If you move the fabric like my

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student did when she was trying to set in her sleeve, you're actually shortening the length of the seam (because you are sewing a straight line instead of a curved one). On a sleeve, this can be a critical problem - if the length of the armhole opening is reduced, then there is less distance in which to ease the sleeve cap.

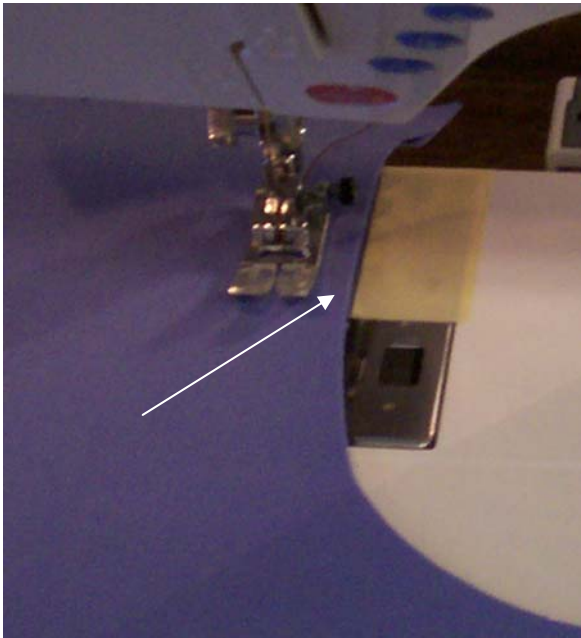
### **VISUALIZING THE SHAPE OF THE SEAM**

When I am about to sew a curve, it helps me to visualize the shape first. Ask most sports coaches and they will tell you how much it helps an athlete to visualize what he or she is about to do, whether it's a gymnast about to vault or a baseball player getting ready to swing the bat. Visualizing the seam first puts an imprint of the shape in your mind - and it will also remind you that you're about to sew a curve, not a straight line.

### **DIRECTING YOUR FOCUS CAN HELP A LOT**

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I get the best results if I focus about here when I'm stitching and guiding the fabric.

If you have cut your project out with a consistent seam allowance, direct your gaze just in front of the presser foot and at the edge of the fabric; note that the distance between the edge of the fabric and the needle should be equal to the specified seam allowance. On many machines there's an etched line for the common seam allowance widths directly on the throat plate of the machine, so you can line up the edge of the fabric along the proper etched line.

Not all machines have etched lines, and on some machines, the etched lines are



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difficult to see. If this is the case, place a piece of masking tape so that the distance between the edge of the masking tape and the sewing machine needle is equal to the seam allowance you need. (In the photo above, you can see that the masking tape makes it obvious where to line up the fabric.)

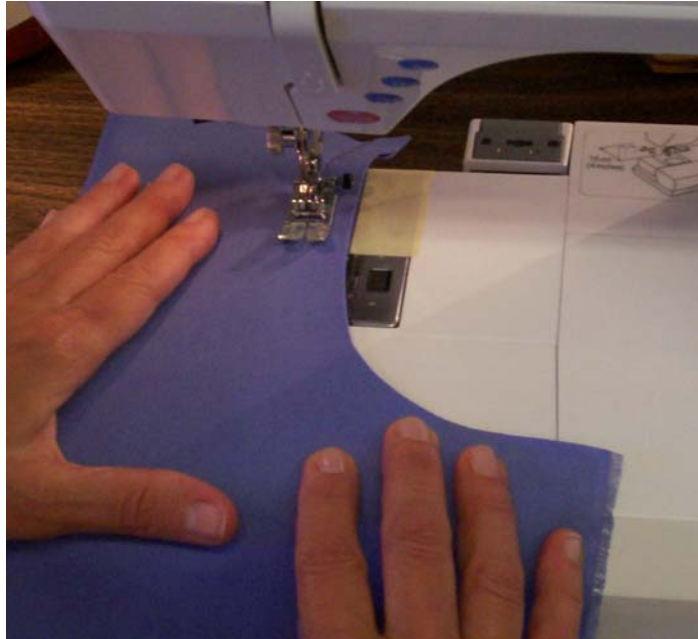
If you cut your projects with irregular seam allowances and trace your stitching lines onto the fabric, try directing your focus on the traced seam line about  $\frac{1}{2}$ " in front of the presser foot and right along the traced seam.

In either case, you don't need to look at the needle - it's going to go up and down whether you look at it or not!

### **STITCHING THE CURVE**

When you are ready to start sewing, lay the fabric flat:

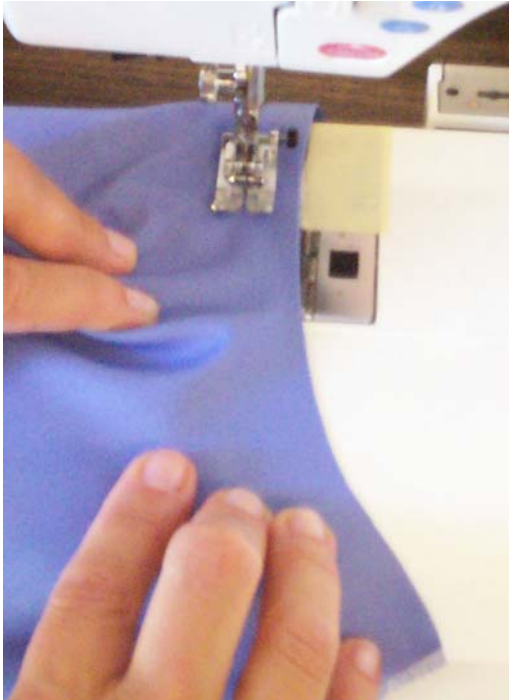
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As you sew, guide the fabric, maintaining the curve of the fabric and keeping the fabric flat. Stitching slowly will help a lot, since you'll need to guide the fabric in an arc. The only portion of the fabric that needs to be "straight" is the  $\frac{1}{2}$ " or so that's directly in front of the presser foot. I like to think of this process as sewing a long, smooth curve.



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As you sew, *don't* straighten out the fabric like this – remember, this will shorten the seam.

With a little practice, you'll be able to sew beautiful curved seams!

### ***About the author:***

*Sarah Veblen started sewing as a teenager and has not looked back since. For more than 20 years, she has specialized in innovative pattern development, perfection of fit and sophisticated fabric usage. She launched her own Intensive Study Program in Fashion Design in 2001. Sarah teaches online classes on PatternReview.com and her classes have gotten excellent feedback from participants!*

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