

Machine Buttonholes Made Easy

Cooperative Extension Service
College of Agriculture and
Home Economics



Guide C-231

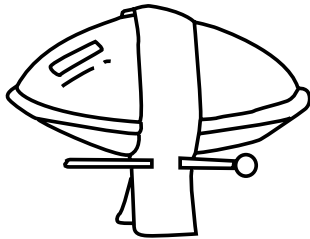
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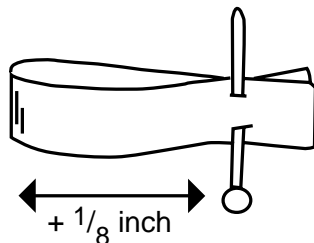
DETERMINING BUTTONHOLE SIZE

The buttonhole markings on the pattern tissue indicate the placement—not the size—of the buttonhole. Buttons are sized according to their diameter. However, it's a button's circumference (the diameter plus the height) that determines how large the buttonhole needs to be. For example, a flat $\frac{5}{8}$ inch button probably will require a smaller buttonhole than a domed button of the same size.

- To determine the circumference, wrap a piece of narrow ribbon, seam binding, or twill tape around the widest part of the button and pin the ends together.

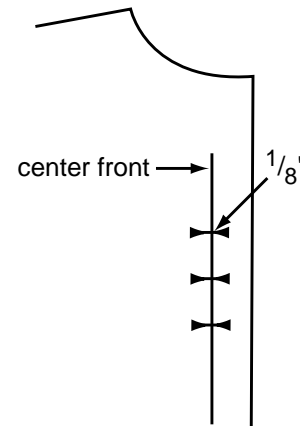


- The length of your test buttonhole should be equal to half the circumference + $\frac{1}{8}$ inch. If your button is very thick, you may need to increase the size a little more. Test the size before making any buttonholes on your garment.



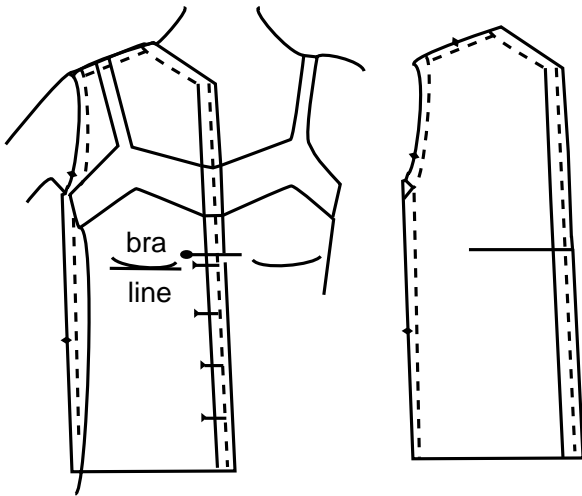
PLACEMENT

Horizontal buttonholes should extend $\frac{1}{8}$ inch over the center front or back toward the garment edge. These buttonholes are best for closely fitted garments and styles without a placket.



Vertical buttonholes should be sewn on the center front or back lines and are best for garments with a banded opening.

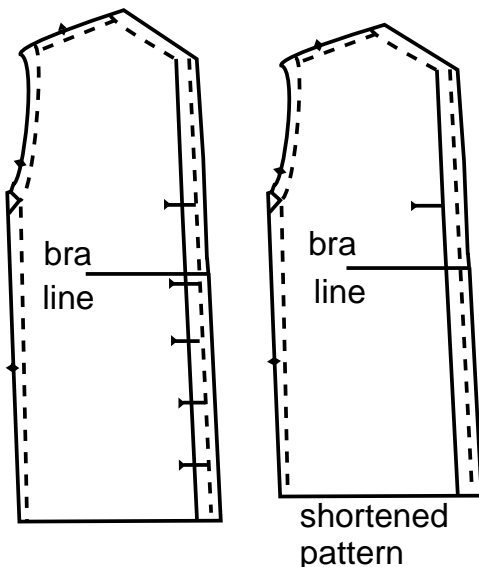
If the pattern was lengthened or shortened, the buttonhole placement must be altered.



- Pin the front and back pattern pieces together at the shoulder stitching line. Place the pattern on your figure with the center front of the pattern to your center front.
- Mark the “bra line” on your pattern. A button and buttonhole are needed at the bra line to prevent “gapisis,” or gaping at the bust.

Reposition the buttonholes if a buttonhole is not marked at the bra line. Keep these spacing guidelines in mind:

- If the pattern was lengthened, mark the same number of buttonholes below your waistline as indicated on the pattern.



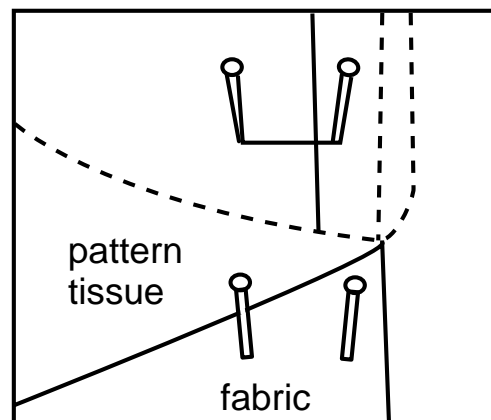
- If the pattern was shortened, you may need to eliminate a buttonhole so the spacing is not too close together.
- Place a buttonhole at the bra line.
- Standard buttonhole placement is 2 to 3½ inches apart.
- Use a seam gauge to accurately space the buttonholes.

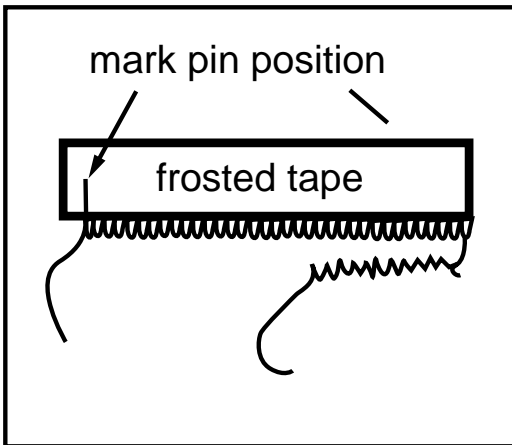
TRANSFERRING THE MARKINGS

Mark the buttonhole placement on the right side of the fabric. You can do this during the cutting and marking stage when you transfer all the other markings or you can wait until just before you are ready to make the buttonholes.

Even if you marked the placement lines when you cut out the garment, it’s a good idea to check them when you’re ready to make the buttonholes. Here’s how:

- Place the pattern tissue on top of the garment, aligning the pattern seamline with the garment opening edge.
- Stick pins straight through the tissue and the fabric at both ends of each buttonhole marking; then carefully remove the pattern without disturbing the pins.



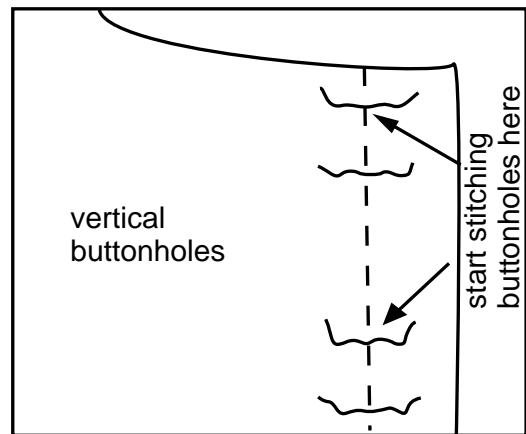
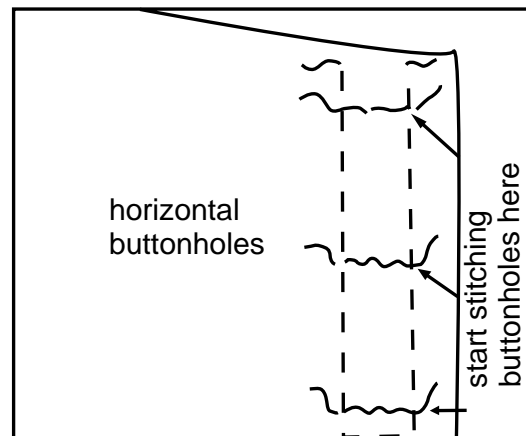


- If appropriate for the fabric, mark between the pins with a water-soluble or evaporating marking pen. If marking pens are not suitable, place a strip of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide transparent tape or masking tape alongside, but a scant $\frac{1}{8}$ inch away from the pins. Mark the position of each pin on the tape. When you make the buttonhole, stitch next to the tape, being careful not to stitch through it. Caution: Test tape on a scrap of the fabric. Some fabrics are marred by tape.

SOME BUTTON AND BUTTONHOLE BASICS

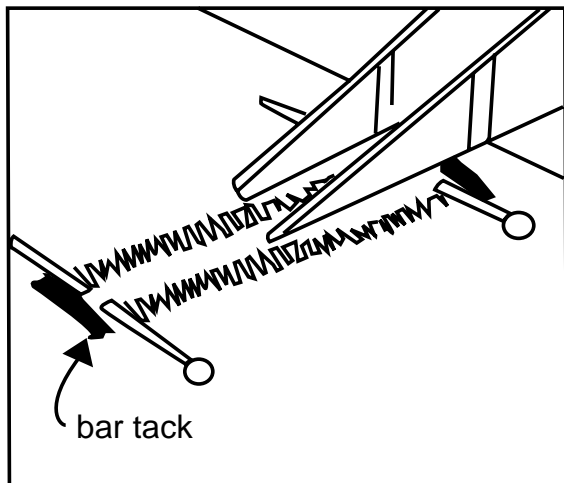
- Whenever possible, stick to the size button recommended on the pattern envelope.
- If you can't find a button you like in the right size, don't select a button that is more than $\frac{1}{8}$ inch larger or smaller. Otherwise, the buttons will either look out of proportion on the garment or the buttonholes must be respaced.

- To make sure buttonholes are accurately placed, begin stitching horizontal buttonholes at the marking closest to the garment edge; begin stitching vertical buttonholes at the marking closest to the upper edge of the garment.
- Always make a test buttonhole first on a scrap of fabric. Use the same number of layers (fashion fabric, interfacing, facing, etc.) as the garment will have.



TIP

If your fabric doesn't feed evenly through the machine, try using a piece of non-woven stabilizer or tissue paper underneath. If your fabric is very sheer or very fragile, try putting the tissue paper underneath and on top. It's easy to tear it away once the buttonholes are completed.

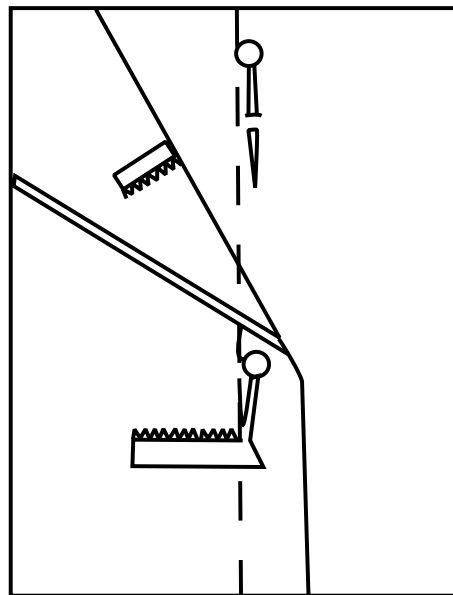
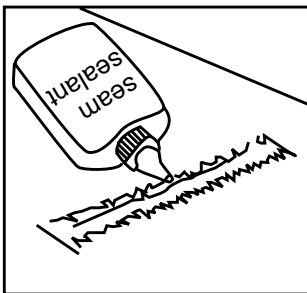


Cutting the Buttonhole Open

Once all the buttonholes are stitched, cut them open using a razor blade; a buttonhole cutter; or a pair of small, sharp scissors. Start at the center and cut toward each end. To prevent cutting too far, put straight pins at each end of the buttonhole opening—place pins inside the end bar tacks.

Tip

If, despite all your good intentions, you cut into the stitches, repair the damage with a dot of seam sealant.



To Locate the Button Position:

- After making the buttonholes and cutting them open, lap the garment edges, matching center, so it looks like it's buttoned.
- For a horizontal buttonhole, stick a pin through at the center front or back marking, $\frac{1}{8}$ inch in from the end of the buttonhole.
- For a vertical buttonhole, insert the pin $\frac{1}{8}$ inch below the top of the buttonhole.

REFERENCES

Simply the Best Sewing Book, Simplicity Pattern Co., Inc. 200 Madison Ave., NY. 1988. p 143-45.

“Successful Sewing Basics,” Transcript #106. Nancy’s Notions, Ltd. Beaver Dam, WI, 1987.