

# Set-In Sleeves— Tips Beyond the Guidesheet

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Sleeves, and the way they are shaped and set in, are one of the focal points in the changes of fashion. They are in a strategic location—near the face—and thus are a noticed feature of the blouses, dresses, shirts, and jackets that you sew. A well-made sleeve is a credit to your sewing ability. Since the most common sleeve problems exist with set-in sleeves, the tips pertain to this style. The tips provide information that may not be given in the pattern guidesheet. Always depend on the guidesheet for basic instructions and information no matter what your sewing skill level is.

## Sleeve-Cap Ease

Puckers and unsightly tucks or ripples in the sleeve result when the fashion fabric is not supple enough to handle the allowed ease, or the ease allowance has not been properly controlled by the seamstress. The recommended amount of sleeve-cap ease is  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " ease for supple fabrics and 1" ease for knits, firm wovens, and real or imitation leather.

You should check the sleeve-cap ease on the paper pattern before you cut the fashion fabric. Making ease alterations on the paper pattern is easier than trying to make them on an already cut-out sleeve.

Determine the pattern ease allowance by aligning and pinning the shoulder seam of the front and back bodice pattern pieces. Placed on edge, walk a tape measure or a flexible ruler around the armhole seamline from underarm seam to underarm seam (Figure A). Make a note of this measurement.

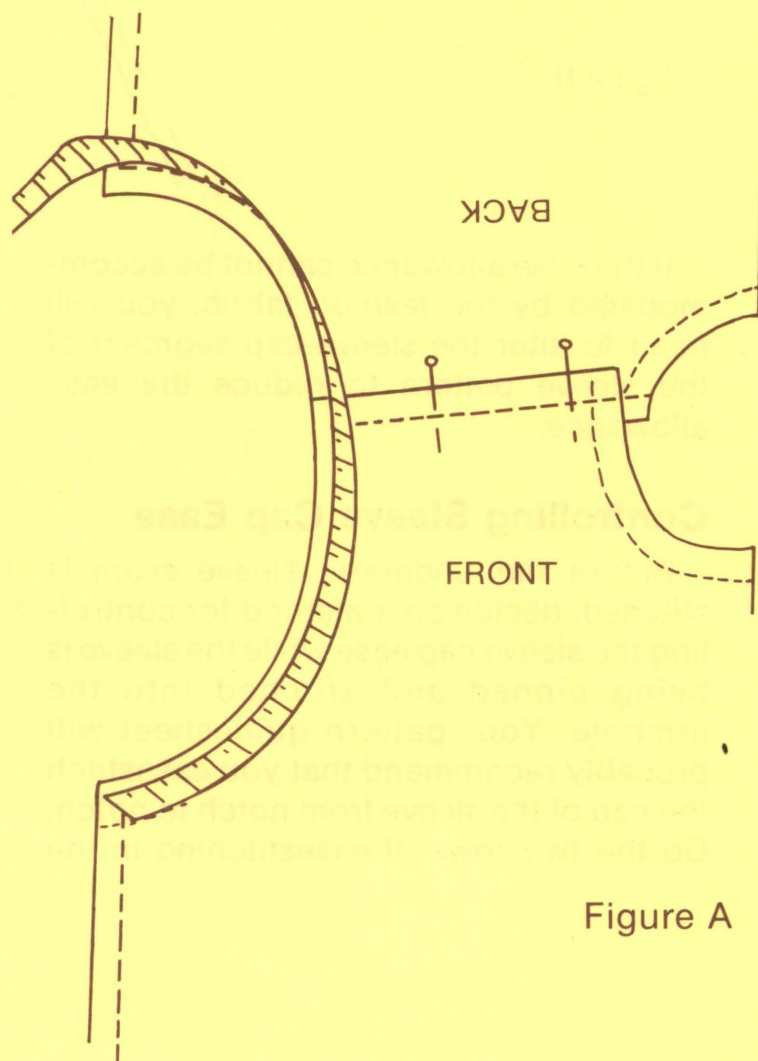


Figure A

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Next, measure around the sleeve cap seamline from underarm seam to underarm seam, with the tape or flexible ruler on edge (Figure B). The difference between the two measurements is the sleeve-cap ease.

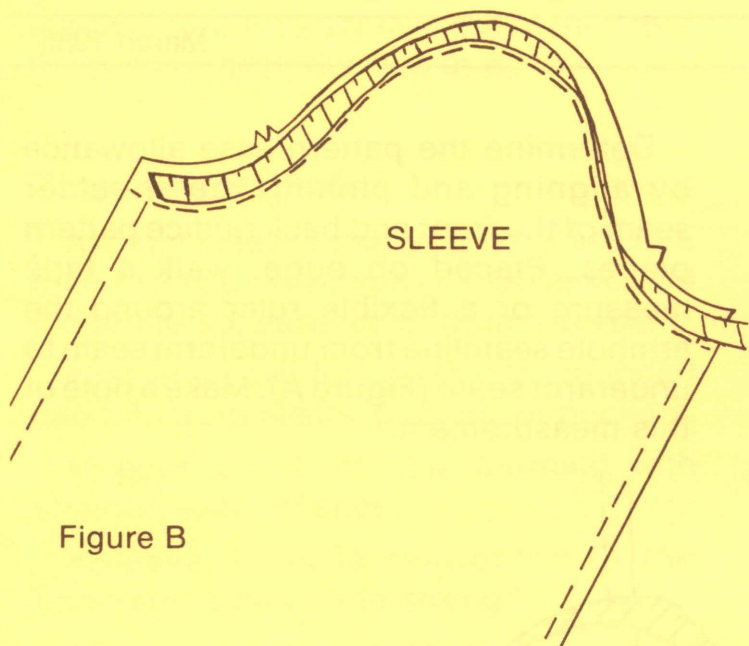


Figure B

If the ease allowance cannot be accommodated by the fashion fabric, you will need to alter the sleeve-cap segment of the sleeve pattern to reduce the ease allowance.

## Controlling Sleeve Cap Ease

Before the underarm sleeve seam is stitched, decide on a method for controlling the sleeve cap ease while the sleeve is being pinned and stitched into the armhole. Your pattern guidesheet will probably recommend that you easestitch the cap of the sleeve from notch to notch. Do the two rows of easestitching in the

seam allowance close to the seamline so it won't show after the sleeve has been stitched into the armhole. Do not use a long-basting stitch. The fabric will pleat in a long stitch. Try 8-10 (2.5mm.) stitches per inch on medium-weight fabric. Pull the bobbin threads to adjust the cap ease. If you are unfamiliar with the behavior of the fashion fabric, you may want to test easestitching on a scrap of the fabric.

Rather than sewing two rows of easestitching, try this method. Cut 1" wide true bias strips of a firmly woven fabric the length of the armhole between the matching points—dots or notches. Notches are the most often used matching points, but there are some exceptions. In some two-piece sleeve patterns, the notches are lowered because of the seam location. In this case it is advisable to use the dot markings to locate the ease. Pin the bias strip to the wrong side of the sleeve, matching raw edges together at the notches and the top of the cap (Figure C). Set the machine at a regular stitch length and stretch the bias strip to meet the raw edge of the sleeve cap and sew

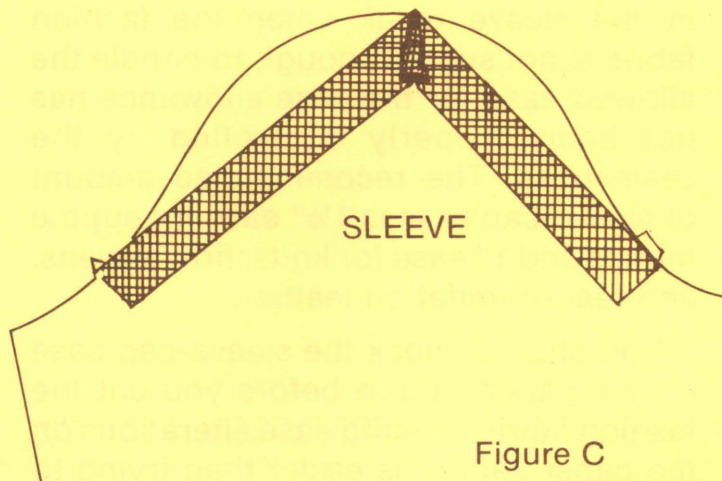


Figure C

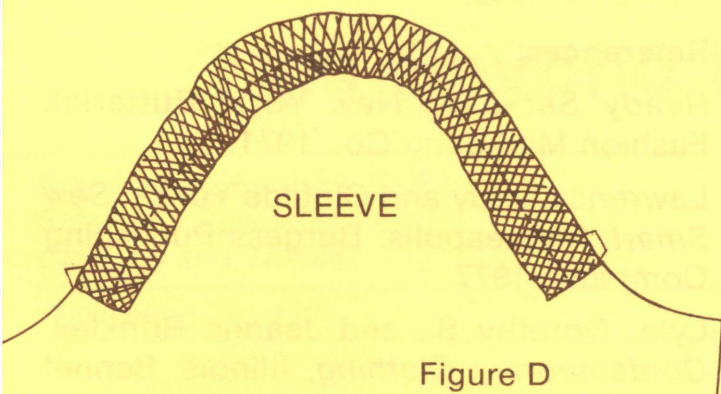


Figure D

Adjust the ease as needed and hand-baste on the seamline. Other alternatives for checking the hang of sleeves in addition to hand basting are pin basting and basting tape. Pin basting and basting tape allow for rotating the sleeves if needed, while hand basting does not.

the two layers together  $\frac{5}{8}$ " from the cut edge (Figure C). The bias strip will retract to its original size and automatically cause the sleeve cap to ease (Figure D).

After you have stitched the underarm seam(s), finished the lower edge of the sleeves, and have fitted the body of the garment to your satisfaction, you are ready to set in the sleeve. Be sure to check the pattern guidesheet for sleeve setting instructions specific to the garment you are sewing.

## Sleeve Application

Work with the garment wrong side out and the sleeve right side out. Pin the sleeve into the armhole matching markings, notches, and sometimes seams. Best results are achieved for most fabrics when pins are inserted to control the fabric at the stitching line only—so the smaller the amount of fabric caught on the seamline by the pin, the better results you will have (Figure E).

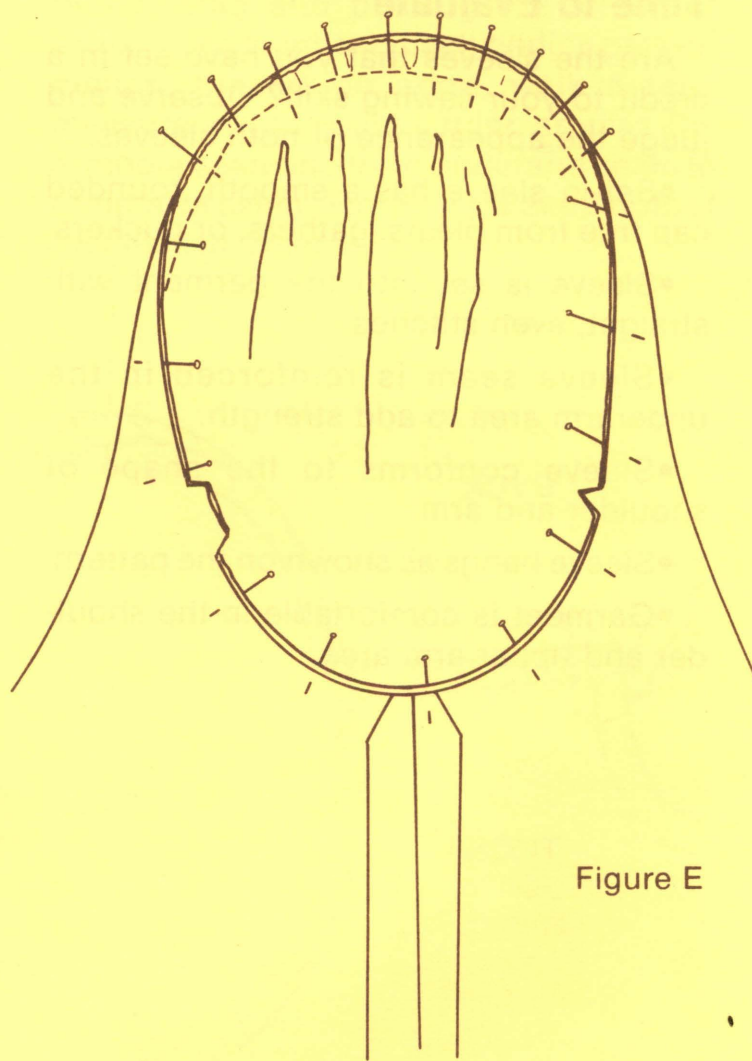


Figure E

Try on the garment; check sleeve length, fit, and comfort. Cap ease should be where *you* need it—remember that everyone's upper arm and shoulder are different in shape and curve. When your arm is down, the sleeve should hang evenly, in a smooth relaxed curve which follows that of your arm. Make the necessary changes in fit. It may mean that you cannot match pattern markings, notches, and seams. This alteration won't present a problem except when matching stripes and plaids.

With the sleeve side up, beginning at the front underarm notch, stitch around the sleeve. When you reach the starting point of the stitching, continue to sew a second line of stitching to the back underarm notch (Figure F).

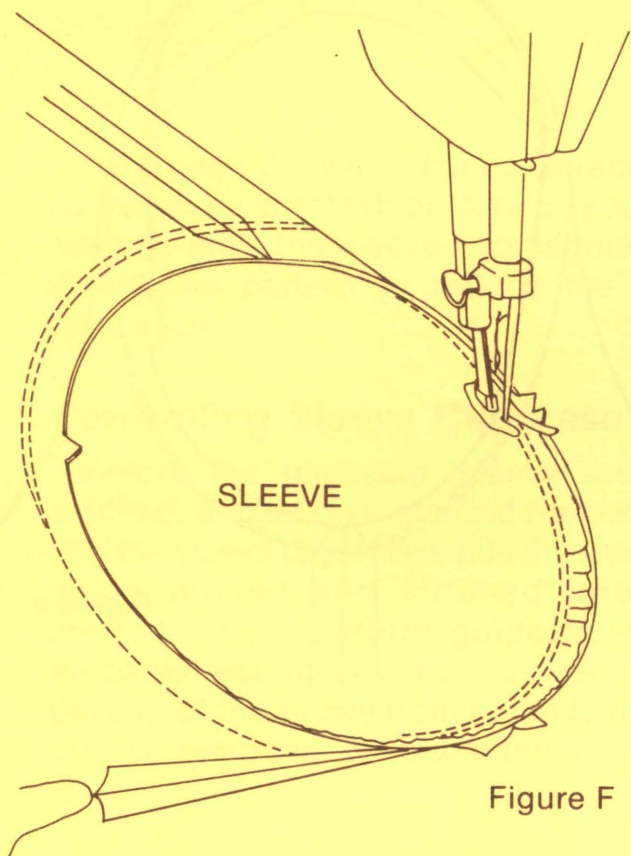


Figure F

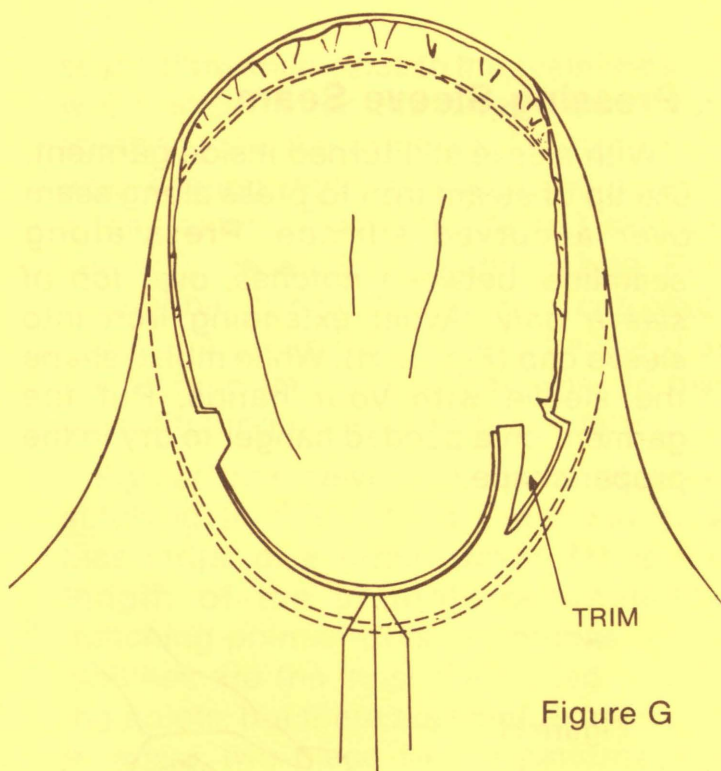


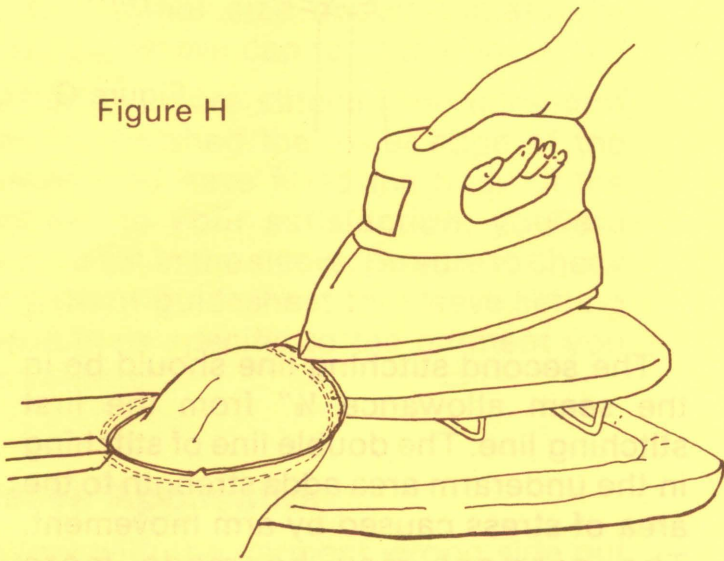
Figure G

The second stitching line should be in the seam allowance  $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the first stitching line. The double line of stitching in the underarm area adds strength to the area of stress caused by arm movement. The garment may be made more comfortable if the seam allowance in the underarm area is trimmed to  $\frac{1}{2}$ " between notches (Figure G). Do not trim sleeve cap. The seam helps support and shape the sleeve.

## Pressing Sleeve Seam

With sleeve still turned inside garment, use tip of steam iron to press along seam over a curved surface. Press along seamline, between notches, *over top of sleeve only*. Avoid extending iron into sleeve cap (Figure H). While moist, shape the sleeve with your hands. Put the garment on a padded hanger to dry in the proper shape.

Figure H



Turn seam allowance toward sleeve along cap. The underarm seam allowance will stand up under the arm, enabling the sleeve to hang close to the body.

## Sleeve Heads

Because of sloping shoulders and/or fabric drape (softness) or pattern design, sleeve cap lines may be enhanced by the addition of a sleeve head. To make a sleeve head, cut a strip of polyester fleece 1" x 8". Pin it to the wrong side of the sleeve, placing the center of the sleeve head at the top of the cap. Sew the sleeve head in place by restitching the armhole that is covered by the strip. In order to see where to stitch, you will stitch with the garment side facing you. The polyester fleece will help control and smooth the ease in the cap (Figure I).

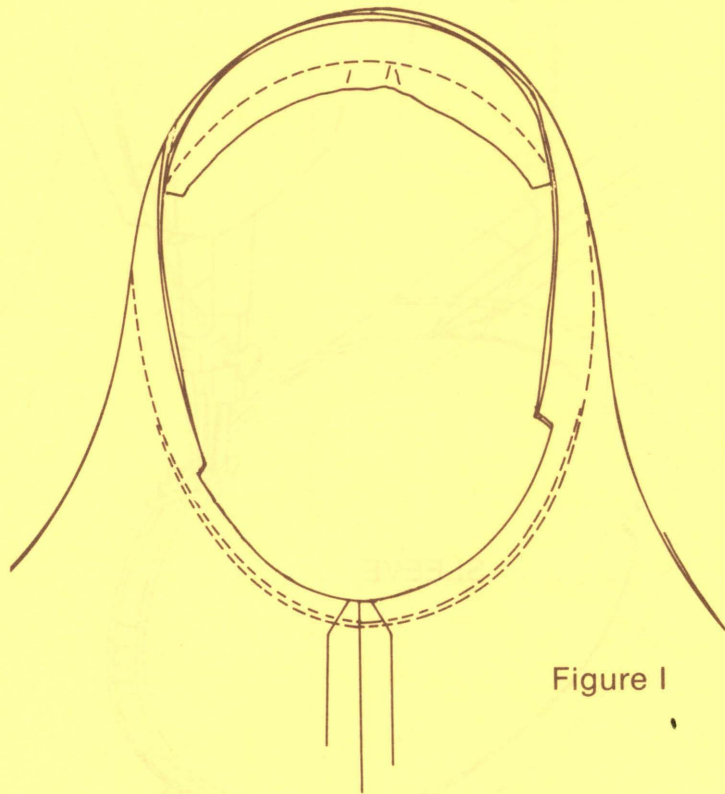


Figure I

The cap of a set-in sleeve is not always smooth and free of fullness. As fashion changes, fullness in the form of gathers, tucks, and pleats may be important design features of set-in sleeves. The pattern guidesheet instructions should be followed in order to achieve the results that the pattern designer had in mind.

## Time to Evaluate

Are the sleeves that you have set in a credit to your sewing skill? Observe and judge the appearance of both sleeves.

- Set-in sleeve has a smooth, rounded cap free from pleats, gathers, or puckers.
- Sleeve is set into the garment with straight, even stitches.
- Sleeve seam is reinforced in the underarm area to add strength.
- Sleeve conforms to the shape of shoulder and arm.
- Sleeve hangs as shown on the pattern.
- Garment is comfortable in the shoulder and upper arm area.

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