Garment Sewing with Knits: An Introduction with Amanda Todaro

Chapter 1 - Garment Sewing with Knits: An Introduction

Overview

(gentle music) - I'm Amanda Todaro, and I am a sewing educator with Ditto Patterns. Knit fabrics have become so popular in fashion and in our closets. Stretch fabrics are more comfortable to wear, and fitting them is really simple. (gentle music)

Understanding the stretch of fabrics

- Sewing knit fabrics is slightly different than sewing woven fabrics, but once you know the difference, you'll wanna sew with knits more and more. The first step to sewing knits is knowing the difference between woven and knit fabrics and how they're made. Woven fabrics have their threads running vertically and horizontally cross. They are woven in that way. Knit fabrics are looped threads. That's what gives them their stretch. The next step is understanding if your knit is a two-way or four-way stretch. A two-way stretch will stretch one way, but not the other. A four-way stretch stretches in all directions. Once you know if your knit is a two-way or four-way, you can then start to understand how stretchy your knit is. A lot of patterns will request that you use a low, medium, or high-stretch knit. You can figure this out by cutting a piece of fabric that is four inches by four inches. This is a stretch ruler. Hold your fabric on the stretch ruler and pull. Wherever that fabric lands is the percentage of stretch. So, this one is a high-stretch knit. I encourage you to test this at home, and test what fabrics you have to see how stretchy they are. Here is a medium rib knit. Some fabrics stretch a lot and recover a lot. Some fabrics stretch very little, but are still considered a knit. Before starting any knit project, look at the pattern, and find out if you need to use two-way or four-way stretch, and how stretchy your fabric should be, whether it's a low-stretch, medium, or high-stretch knit.

Sewing knits on a sewing machine

- The simplest way to sew knits is on your sewing machine. With the right thread, needle and settings, you'll be sewing a T-shirt or dress in no time. The first step to sewing knits is to use the correct needle. You'll wanna get a ballpoint needle or a stretch needle for your machine. You'll also wanna use an all-purpose polyester thread. Polyester actually has a little bit of a stretch. The last step is to have the proper settings on your machine. You don't wanna sew with a regular straight stitch. The reason being, as this gets stretched, your stitches can break, leaving holes in your knit garments. There are two stitches I wanna show you today that are common on most sewing machines. The first is a simple zigzag. You'll want to take the width down, somewhere between 1.5 and two. You'll want to raise your width. I like to set it at three to start. Once you have the proper settings, you can start sewing. (machine humming) I encourage you to play around with the width and length of your stitches. Depending on the density of your knit, you'll get a different look depending on which stitch you use. (machine humming) With a zigzag stitch, my fabric now stretches. Your seam will look like a regular stitch from the outside. Another stitch you can try on your machine is a stretch stitch. It's common on most machines. It looks like a lightning bolt. (machine humming) This takes a bit more time, but gives you a very secure, stretchy seam. I encourage you to check out your manual to see what stitches your machine may have. All machines have a zigzag, but a lot also have a stretch stitch.

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Sewing knits on a serger
- The quickest and most effective way to sew knits is with a serger or overlock machine. This machine will give you the most professional results. I have my machine set to a four-thread overlock stitch. Check your manual to see which stitch is best for your fabric. Once you're ready to sew, set your fabric underneath the foot. Here is your knife. This will cut off any fabric that you have over this edge. When sewing with a serger or overlock, don't push or pull the fabric through the foot. The machine will guide the fabric for you. (machine whirring) If your pattern has 1/4 of an inch seam allowance, you're going to sew with the raw edge of your fabric against the edge of this plate right underneath the foot. This means the knife won't cut off much fabric and not much of your seam allowance. When you get through your pattern piece, continue sewing to create this long tail. Then you can cut off the thread. If your seam allowance is 5/8 of an inch, you're gonna wanna cut off some of your seam allowance as you sew. I'm lining up the raw edge of my fabric with this 5/8 mark. As you can see, as I'm sewing, my excess seam allowance is being cut off. (machine whirring) Here is my completed four-thread overlock stitch. This is a beautiful seam and stretches really well with the fabric.

Setting in a sleeve
- When making a garment like a T-shirt, we're gonna set in the sleeve a little different than when we set in our woven sleeve. We're gonna set in the sleeve before sewing the side seams. I'm going to do this on my serger, but you can use your sewing machine set to a zigzag or a stretch stitch. I already have the shoulder seams sewn of my T-shirt. I'm then going to set the cap of the sleeve onto the T-shirt, matching up this notch with the shoulder seam. I'm using clips with my knit T-shirt. You can also use pins, but I find clips are way easier to secure your knit fabric. Once you have this notch set, you can match up the raw edges of the underarm. With these three points matched up, we can then begin matching up these curves with our clips. Your sleeve should have a back notch and a front notch that you can use to match up as well. (clips rattling) Just like our woven shirt, the cap of the sleeve is going to be slightly bigger than the arm's eye of the T-shirt. Pull gently as you get these raw edges together. Now that our sleeve is clipped or pinned into place, we can take it to the serger or sewing machine. This pattern has 5/8 seam allowance, so I'm going to line up the raw edges of my fabric as I send it through the serger. (serger whirring) Remove your clips as you go. Use your fingers to manipulate the fabric to make sure you don't get any gathers underneath the sleeve. (serger whirring) As I get to this cap, I am going to pull gently so that everything lays smoothly. (serger whirring) Doing this gentle pull replaces the need for those ease stitches that we did with the woven shirt. (serger whirring) Our sleeve is now set in. Repeat this process on the other sleeve. Pin or clip your side seams. Match up your underarm seams right here. (serger whirring) Repeat on the other side. The base of your T-shirt is now done with the set-in sleeves and side seams. Next step is to finish the neckline and hems.

Sew a mock cover stitch with twin needles
- Hemming knit fabrics is different than hemming woven fabrics. You need to use a stitch that's going to stretch with your knit garment. This is a cover stitch. You find this stitch commonly in your store-bought clothing. These two rows of stitches gives the hem the ability to stretch with the garment. You can achieve this hem on your sewing machine. To start, hem up your fabric the amount listed on your pattern. For me, I'm using a 5/8 seam allowance. You'll need a set of twin needles, as well as two spools of polyester thread that you want your hem to be. I have my bobbin

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already set in threaded the normal way. Remove your needle and set in the twin needle. Place one spool of thread on the spool holder. Place the other spool of thread on your second spool post. Take both threads and begin threading your machine. Once you get your threads to the needle, one will go in the left, the other in the right. I'm gonna start adding this hem to my sleeve. Raise your length slightly to a 3.0 or 3.5. When hemming a sleeve, pull the drawer of your machine out of the way. When sewing this hem, you want to sew with the right side of your fabric up. I like to start at a seam. Because my seam allowance is 5/8 of an inch, I'm going to sew with the fold lining up to the half inch mark on my sewing machine. Here's what your mock cover stitch looks like from the front and the back. If you have a serger, you can take an additional step before setting in your mock cover stitch to finish the edge of your fabric. This just adds a nice professional finish. However, knit fabrics don't generally fray, so it's optional. Once you finish the hem of your sleeve, you can move on to the other sleeve and the bottom of your T-shirt.

Add a neck band
- Adding a neckband to your T-shirt is a great way to finish the neckline. You can use the fabric itself, a rib knit or a contrasting fabric. The pattern you choose may provide you with a neckband pattern, but if it doesn't, you can measure and cut your own. You'll just need a few measurements. I cut the width at an inch of 3/4, but you could go up to two inches. Next, you'll need to measure the neckline. My neckline is measuring at 24 inches. You'll cut your neck band to a length that's 70 to 90% of that measurement. 70% is great for high stretch knits. 90% is great for low stretch knits. This isn't an exact science, so once you cut a length of a neckband, you can test it around the neckline. After making a few T-shirts, you'll gain more confidence in what length you should cut your neck bands. When cutting your neckband, you wanna make sure the greatest amount of stretch goes the length of the neckband. The next step to sewing your neckband is to sew the short edges together. We will now iron our neckband in half. Fold your neckband and match up the raw edges. You will need to add markings to your neckband for placement. We wanna have four equal marks. Fold your neckband in half. This will be your center front. Fold it in a half again, matching up those notches. We now need to add the same notches to our neckline. We already have one in the center front and center back. To get the side marks, fold your neckline in half like this. Fold again, we can then put marks right in here. Now we have points that we can match up our neckband to our neckline. I like to put the seam of my neckband at the center back. Use your clips to hold your neckband in place. Next, match up the center front. Then match up the side notches. Your neck band is gonna be slightly smaller than the neck line. That's because we cut it at a lesser percentage. Once sewn, it'll pull in gently like this. You can sew the neckband with a serger or sewing machine. I'm going to use my serger. I like to start at the center back, line up the raw edges with the edge of the knife. The seam allowance of this neck line and band is a quarter of an inch. Gently pull your neck line and neckband as you sew. As you get back to your starting point, sew past that point and then veer off. The final step is to give your neckline a good press with an iron. Your neckband is complete. If you wanna add a little something extra to your neckband, you can do a mock cover stitch. This will hold down your seam allowance and keep the neck band really flat when wearing. A T-shirt is a wonderful project for beginners, but you can use these techniques on many different knit garments.

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