
How to Sew Zippers with Liesl Gibson

Chapter 1 - How to Sew Zippers

Introduction to working with zippers

- [Instructor] There are two basic kinds of zippers. There's a regular zipper and the invisible zipper which, contrary to popular opinion is not actually invisible but once it's sewn into your project the only thing that shows on an invisible zipper is the zipper pull. Let's talk about the anatomy of the zipper itself. For both an invisible zipper and a regular zipper they each have a pull which is the portion that you pull to open and close the zipper. They also have what's called a slider. The slider is the part that goes up and down on the zipper and it opens and closes the teeth of the zipper itself. And then of course we have the teeth themselves. One step that really helps with zipper insertion is to apply a narrow strip of fusible interfacing to the wrong side of the fabric where the zipper is going to be positioned. I also like to finish the seam allowances before I insert a zipper. And the last part is I like to buy zippers longer than I think I'll need and then I shorten them to the appropriate length. The first step for shortening a zipper is determining how long you want that zipper to be. And I'm making a skirt today. I want my zipper to be about eight inches long so I'm going to measure from the top edge of the zipper when the slider is all the way up. I'll measure from the top of the slider down the zipper to eight inches and then I'm going to put a little mark there with a pencil or a fabric marking pen or whatever you wanna use. Then I'm gonna take the zipper over to the sewing machine and I'm going to sew a little bar tack where that mark is. A bar tack is a zigzag stitch that stays in place. It's not moving forward or backward. You're just stitching over the teeth of the zipper probably five or six times is plenty but you're preventing the slider from going below the teeth at that portion. Once you've done that, you can cut the zipper about an inch below where you bar tacked. So leave a little bit of zipper in tact for sewing. The process of shortening the zipper can be done the same for both the regular zipper as well as an invisible zipper. Before inserting an invisible zipper it's important that you unzip the zipper and then, with a cool iron, unroll those teeth and press them as flat as you can. An invisible zipper is inserted before the seam itself is sewn. I find that the easiest way to think through the correct placement of the zipper is to start out with both the fabric and the zipper facing right side up. Then I turn the zipper over and I'll pin it into position with the zipper teeth very near the top of the skirt. I have a facing in place here. And the edge of my zipper tape will be right up against the edge of the fabric. And then one more. When I baste the zipper into place I'm also going to take the top edge of the zipper tape and just bend it out of the way, baste it here to reduce bulk and to give a nice, clean finish to the top of the zipper. Now we need to do the same thing on the other side but this is where it gets a little bit tricky. We need to think about, again, turning that right side to face the right side of the fabric. And so, when you get it pinned into position it's going to look a little funny. It will look like the zipper is twisted but it's okay. And then pin that in place the same way that you did with the other side of the zipper. Now we can hand-baste the zipper in place before we stitch it. You can put the zipper foot or the invisible zipper foot on your machine. Backstitch your lock stitch at the beginning and end of your seam. We'll start at the top on both sides. Stitch as closely to the teeth or the coils on your zipper as you can. We do this opposite side in the same manner. So now I'm going to zip the zipper just a little ways up and then I'll turn it inside out so that we can stitch the rest of the seam below the zipper. So, first we'll pin those edges together. Now we can sew the rest of the seam below the zipper. And this is where it gets a little finicky. The seam line is not going to match your zipper seam lines exactly. It will be

off approximately by an 1/8 of an inch. I'm going to go above and slightly to the left of my zipper stitching. And from here you can change to a regular foot if you want. I may just continue as long as I have the zipper foot on anyway. Continue to stitch this seam with the regular seam allowance. On my skirt it's 5/8ths of an inch. And here's the moment of truth. Let's zip up our zipper and see what it looks like. I think it's pretty good. Looks nice and smooth down at the bottom there. If you're not happy with how it's lining up just take a few stitches out of that bottom section and restitch that a little closer or a little further away depending on what you feel it needs. And then the only thing that's left to be done on our skirt is I have this facing on the top edge. I'm simply going to fold under that top edge of the facing and I will hand-stitch it to the zipper to finish this skirt really nicely. And then you're finished with your invisible zipper. With a centered zipper we base the portion of the seam ^where the zipper's going to be positioned ^and then we can stitch below the zipper placement ^with a regular seam. Once you've sewn the seam you can press the seam allowances open. Then you can turn your fabric over to the right side and with chalk or a fabric marking pen draw a line a quarter inch on either side of your basting line and this will become your top stitching line. And also draw in the bottom edge of that top stitching. Turn your fabric back over to the wrong side and center your zipper over the seam allowances. Then you can baste the zipper into position. Before we top stitch the zipper into position we're going to take out those center basting stitches and this will allow us to move the slider out of the way as we're top stitching. Now, with the zipper foot on the machine, we can top stitch along the top stitching lines that we drew. Always stitch from the top of the zipper down, pivot at the bottom edge of your stitching line and end your stitching at the seam line itself. Now change your zipper foot to the other side in order to stitch from the top down on the opposite side of the zipper. So now that we have a top-stitched zipper, the last few steps to finish this off will be we have these little thread tails here and down here. We'll pull those through to the wrong side of the fabric and knot them off so we have a nice, clean top stitching that goes all the around the zipper. Then we can take out those temporary basting stitches that were holding the zipper in place before we top stitched it and of course we'll wanna get rid of our top-stitching marking so that all we're left is the nice top stitching. And of course, when you do it, you'll want to be using a coordinating thread rather than something that's very contrasty like I did here. The last step I will just fold the edge of the facing under and then I'll hand stitch it to the inside of the zipper to give it a nice finish. And that is our centered zipper.