

Step-By-Step Instructions on How to Hem Pants

Stephanie Graceffo

Introduction

Knowing how to hem pants is an essential skill to have. You may have an old pair of pants that are too short or find yourself in the dressing room of your favorite store trying on a new pair of pants that are too long. Rather than tossing those old pants or forgetting about buying the new ones, you can easily hem the pants to the perfect fit. Whether you need to adjust new clothes or adapt hand-me-downs, when it comes to pants, fit is important, and length should never stand in the way of you and a pair of pants.

Materials

- Pants to hem
- Shoes that will be worn with the pants
- Full-length mirror
- Seam ripper
- Scissors
- Chalk
- Measuring tape
- Sewing kit or sewing machine
- Iron and ironing board
- Damp towel



Image adapted from: diyfashion.about.com

Steps

The following section provides step-by-step instructions on how to hem your pants.

Step 1: Prepare the Pants

Use a seam ripper to remove the hem that is already in place.

A seam ripper (seen in the figure to the right) is a hand-held tool with a pointed tip that is small enough to slip under single stitches. To rip the stitches of the seam, slide the seam ripper through the line of stitching. The small, sharp hook of the seam ripper will slice through the thread. A seam ripper works much better and faster than scissors for removing the stitching.

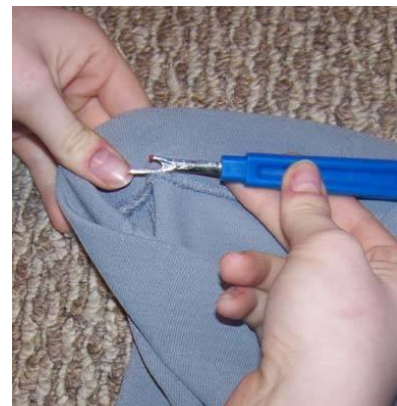


Image adapted from: diyfashion.about.com

Note: When ripping the seam, be careful not to rip or cut the fabric itself.

Note: Along the edge of the hem there may be a zigzagged or looped stitch. This stitch is in place to keep the end of the fabric from unraveling. Leave this stitching intact if possible.

Unfold the hem so that it hangs loose. You are now ready to iron.

Step 2: Iron your Pants

Plug in the iron and let it heat up.

Warning: Some fabrics are not heat safe and will melt the fabric where the iron is applied. Check the tag for information. If the tag does not say whether or not the fabric is iron-safe, test a small area first to see if your pants can be ironed.

Lay a damp towel between your iron and the fabric. Iron the end of each pant leg where you just removed the stitching. This will remove any creases from the previous hem.

If your pants cannot be ironed but still have a strong crease from the hem, put the pants in the dryer with a moistened sock or washcloth. Set the dryer on fluff or medium for about 15 minutes.

With the preparation complete, you can now determine how long you want your hem.



Image adapted from: diyfashion.about.com

Step 3: Find your length

Put on the pants you want to hem and the pair of shoes that you plan on wearing with the pants. Hemming the pants without the shoes will result in an incorrect hem length.

Note: For tips on finding the correct length for various types of shoes see Appendix A.

You will not need to do this step for both pant legs so pick whichever pant leg (right pant leg or left pant leg) is easier for you to work on.

Working from the side of the foot, fold the hem of your pant leg up and under the inside of the pants. Using a full-length mirror, adjust the hem as needed until you achieve your desired length.



Image adapted from: diyfashion.about.com

Insert one pin along the top of your hem. Then, insert a second pin along the bottom of your hem.

Note: Make sure the fabric is straight before you insert the second pin

Next, you will mark your measurements and pin the pant legs.

Step 4: Measure and Pin

Take off the pants. Carefully turn them inside out without disturbing the pins. With the measuring tape, find the length from the bottom fold to the top edge of the fabric that you folded up and inside the leg. Mark this measurement with your chalk. Use this measurement to fold and pin the rest of the hem. Measure, mark, and pin all the way around the pant leg to make sure your hem will be straight.

Warning: Do not use pen, pencil or markers to mark your measurements. They can stain or run after washing.

Measure, fold and pin the other pant leg the same way.



Image adapted from: diyfashion.about.com

Step 5: Iron the hem

Ironing will put your new hem in place. You will create a new crease along the bottom of the pants.

Iron all the way around the bottom edge, removing your pins as you go. This new crease will keep your hem folded and in place as you sew. Repeat with the other pant leg.

Try on the pants again and take a look in the full-length mirror to make sure the pants are at the correct length. The hem can always be re-measured and ironed before you sew.

Once you have ironed your hem in place, you are ready to sew.

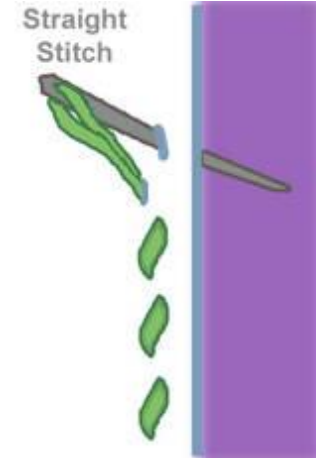


Image adapted from: diyfashion.about.com

Step 6: Sew the Pants

There are two methods for sewing: hand sewing and machine sewing.

If hand sewing, select a color of thread that matches or closely matches the original thread used on the pants. Cut approximately three feet of thread. Do not cut the string too long or it will be difficult to manage. If you run out of thread, you can always re-thread. Thread a medium-sized needle and begin stitching a straight stitch 1/8 inch from the top of the hem and go all the way around the pant leg. Do not sew around the bottom of the hem. Cut off your thread and knot it. Be sure to tie off all thread ends on the inside of the pants.



Note: For instructions on how to do a straight stitch, see Appendix B.

Repeat for the other pant leg.

Image adapted from: diyfashion.about.com

If machine sewing, load your bobbin and top spool with a color thread that matches or closely matches the original thread used on the pants. Set your machine for a small to medium straight stitch. Begin stitching 1/8 inch from the top of the hem and go all the way around. Do not sew around the bottom of the hem. Be sure to tie off all thread ends on the inside of the pants.

Note: Because sewing machines vary, if you need instructions on setting up your sewing machine for the straight stitch, refer to your sewing machine's instruction manual.

For a quick and easy hem, that does not require sewing, you can use fusion tape. Fusion tape, also known as hem tape, is a fusible material that has an adhesive coating which will bond the fabric together without sewing. This tape comes precut in strips and ready to apply to pants. It acts like double stick tape but is activated with heat.

Follow all directions that come with your hem tape. Try a little bit at a time to test what kind of pressure and heat you need to apply with the iron for the best bond.

Conclusion

Congratulations, now your pants are hemmed. Try them on again with your shoes and see the difference hemming can make. Now those old pants, hand-me-downs, or brand-new pants you just had to have from the store fit perfectly, regardless of their previous length.

The great thing about hemming is now that you can hem pants, you can hem just about anything: shorts, skirts, dresses, or even tops, it's the same concept.

Hemming is relatively simple and is a great skill to have. You now know how to adjust the length of any garments to make them fit perfectly.



Image adapted from: diyfashion.about.com

Appendix A: Shoes and Pant Hems



Image adapted from sewing.about.com

As you can see from the figure above, not all shoes are the same. Depending on the type of shoe that is worn, the same hemline will land on a different part of the foot. With a heel, the pant leg has more room to hang freely and will not crinkle. With a flat shoe or sneaker, pant legs do not have the same amount of space and are more likely to crinkle. A flat shoe will follow the normal foot hemline. Though sneakers are relatively flat, the padding on the top of the sneaker will affect how the hem hangs.

A straight hem is one that is evenly horizontal to the floor. Wherever you measure the hem it should be an even distance from the floor. If necessary, you may need someone else to help you pin the hem of your pants.

When finding the length of your pants and pinning your hem, stand up straight. Your posture will affect the length of your pants. Bending over will not allow you to get a straight hem at the correct length.

Make sure to work from the side of the foot. Working from the front or back of the shoe prevents you from seeing the other side of the foot. This obstruction will result in an uneven hem.



Image adapted from sewing.about.com

Appendix B: Straight Stitch

A straight stitch is the most common stitch in sewing. It is well used for simple hems, sewing two pieces of fabric together, and gathering fabric. The tighter the stitch, the more secure the connection of the fabric.

1. Knot your thread on one end by making a slip knot. A slip knot is made by running the thread through a small section of fabric and slipping and thread through fabric until the knot catches the back of the fabric. Pull the needle and thread until the knot catches the back of the fabric

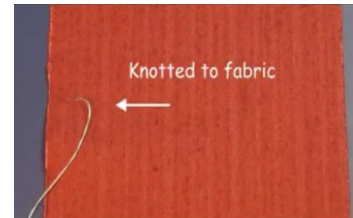


Image adapted from: cyberseams.com

2. Hold the fabric tightly and press the needle in and out of the fabric in a rocking motion. The smaller the stitches, the more secure the seam will be. You can do one stitch at a time or make several stitches at once, whichever you prefer.



Image adapted from: cyberseams.com

3. After each set of stitches, pull the thread tight before continuing. For a more secure seam, try to make all of your stitches the same size in length.



Image adapted from: cyberseams.com

4. Continue this process until you have threaded all the way across the fabric.



Image adapted from: cyberseams.com

5. Knot the thread at the end to make sure the stitches stay in place. Tie off your ends where they will not be seen (i.e., on the inside of your pants when hemming)