



*Ginger Snaps Designs*

Answers to All Your Questions About

# Tucks

By Nancy Coburn

Pintucks .... Folded Tucks .... Construction Tips .... Placement Guidelines

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

*Philippians 4: 13*

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**[www.gingersnapsdesigns.com](http://www.gingersnapsdesigns.com)**

*The text which follows is from the now out-of-print book,  
“Answers to All Your Questions About Tucks.”*

*The pull-out pattern for four baby pillow sham covers  
which were included in the original book,  
along with the detailed instructions  
for construction of the pillow shams,  
and embroidery and shadow work designs,  
is available online as “Aidan’s Pillow Sham.”*

*These patterns make great baby gifts  
and are a good project for your left-over trims  
and fabric remnants.*



# Answers to All Your Questions About Tucks

By Nancy Coburn

## INTRODUCTION

Tucks have been used through the ages to embellish clothing. In heirloom sewing, released tucks provide fullness where ease of movement is needed. Tucks are also used to add detail to a variety of garments and other heirloom sewing projects. They may be used with lace insertion and embroidery in a variety of ways to create garments and linens as unique as the designer's creativity.

Tucks are simply fabric that is folded and stitched, or, in the case of machine-made pintucks, it is fabric that is drawn in slightly between twin needles to create the appearance of a narrow tuck. Folded tucks may vary in width from a narrow 1/8" to 1" or so when used as a skirt embellishment.

Tucks may all be the same length, meaning that they end at the same point.



Tucks may be graduated, meaning that they are released at varying points.



Tucks may be sewn into another seam.



Tucks may be released at the bottom.

Tucks may be used in heirloom sewing in a variety of ways. Tuck size and spacing may vary according to your particular project and personal preference. They may all be pressed in the same direction or they may be pressed *away* from a center point, such as a trim, lace band, or embroidery. Blind tucks may be sewn so closely together that the stitching line is not visible because it is hidden by the fold line of the adjacent tuck. Detailed instructions for sewing tucks, as well as instructions for cutting out your garment and for determining tuck placement, follow. These comprehensive instructions will help you with all your sewing patterns. The questions and answers below, completed with detailed photographs and illustrations, should answer all your questions about using tucks to embellish anything you want to sew.

## QUICK REFERENCE LIST OF QUESTIONS

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*Determining the position of tucks, page 6*

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## SOURCE FOR ILLUSTRATED PATTERNS

All illustrations of garments used in the instructions are available from Ginger Snaps Designs. Information may be found on our website, [www.gingersnapsdesigns.com](http://www.gingersnapsdesigns.com)

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

**Note:** For best results, please **read** all instructions *before* you begin a project.

**WHAT ARE SOME WAYS IN WHICH TUCKS CAN BE USED TO EMBELLISH HEIRLOOM SEWING?**

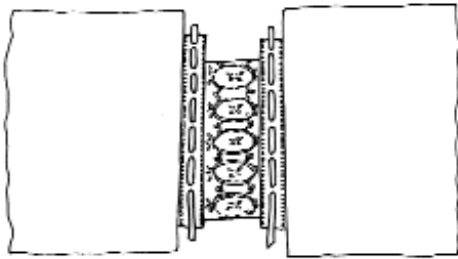
Tucks may be used as an embellishment on any part of any heirloom garment — yokes, bodices, sleeves, and skirts. They may be used alone or with lace bands. They may be used as complete panels, such as a tucked yoke or bodice. They may also be used as part of a shaped panel with lace insertion and embroidery. The opportunities to use tucks in heirloom garments are endless.

I generally complete my lace work and *determine* the *number* of tucks and *spacing* based on the total garment size and design and the embellishment choices I have made. This is often a decision I make as I work. I continue making tucks until I think my garment looks balanced and complete.

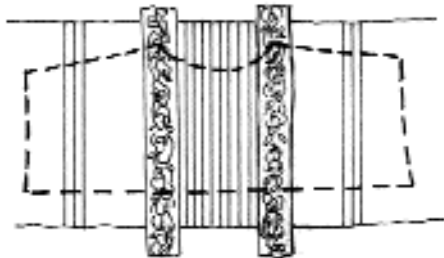
**• Yokes or bodices**

If you are using tucks in a yoke or bodice along with a lace band, cut out a block of fabric larger than the pattern piece you are using, sew the tucks, and then cut out the yoke or bodice by the pattern.

Prepared fabric:

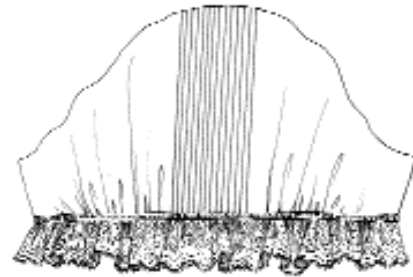
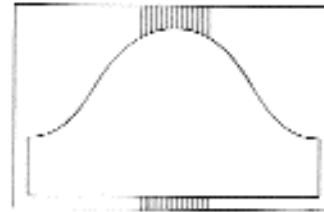


Sew the tucks parallel to the lace band or lace insertion and then cut it out.



**• Sleeves**

Tucks may be used in sleeves with or without lace insertion or embroidery. To do this, cut out a block of fabric larger than the sleeve pattern, complete the design work, and then cut the sleeve out by the pattern.



**• Skirts**

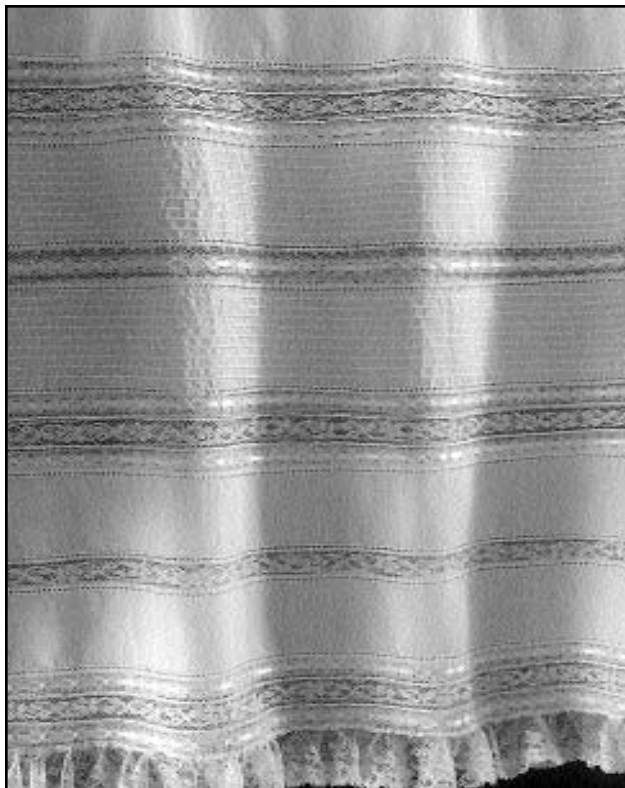
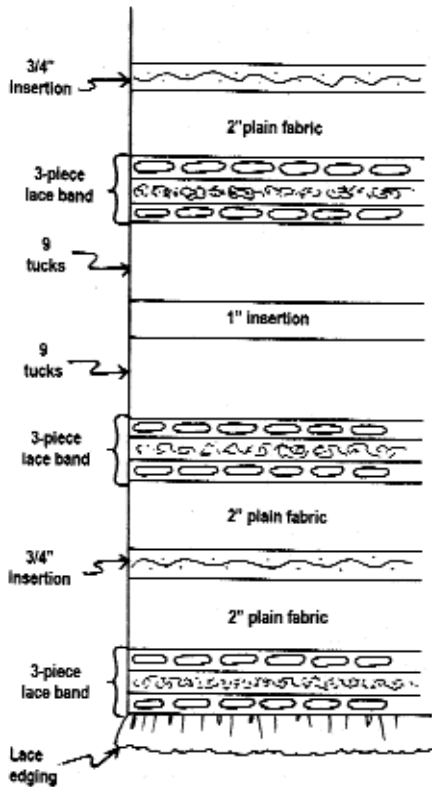
The basic guidelines to remember when embellishing the skirt are (1) to **allow** *extra fabric* at the top of the skirt so you have the option of changing your mind about design details, and (2) **begin** your design work from the *hemline* and work up toward the top of the skirt, making adjustments in design features and spacing as you work. Complete the hemline last so you will have the option of changing design details and length, if necessary.

Fabric between strips or bands of lace insertion may be left plain or it may be embellished with embroidery or tucks.

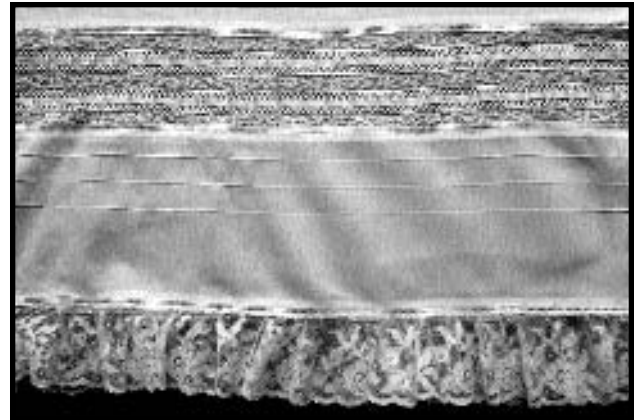
When using a group of tucks in a skirt, if possible, use an uneven number. If you use tucks above and below a lace band in the skirt, complete the lace band first. Then sew the tucks parallel to the lace band. When I use pintucks in a skirt, I use *seven* to *fifteen* tucks, spaced 1/4" apart, both above and below the lace band. Occasionally, I use three tucks both above and below the lace band and I space them 3/4" apart. This is a matter of personal preference. I usually do not decide until I have nearly completed the skirt.

Begin with a plan and make adjustments along as you work. You will eventually reach that moment when your heirloom design will look perfect to you.

Sample illustration to assist you in designing your skirt embellishment:



Occasionally in skirts with lace bands, I space the tucks 3/4" apart.



I complete my lace work and begin sewing tucks, making adjustments in the number of tucks as I work. As a general rule, use an uneven number of tucks. When using pin-tucks which are spaced 1/4" apart, I generally use more tucks. When using tucks to compliment a lace band in a skirt, I will space three tucks, 3/4" apart, above and below the lace band.

• *Shaped-tucked panel technique*



In areas where you want the detail of tucked fabric, without the added fullness below the tucks, use the "Shaped-Tucked Panel Technique."

An example of how this technique may be used to embellish a garment is shown in the bodice of the toddler dress below:



Make tucks in a block of fabric larger than the area to be covered and then cut it out. Then attach it to the flat fabric and cover the seam with lace insertion. Follow the instructions below. This technique may be used in many areas where you want tucked panels.

### Instructions:

**1. Make** tucks in a block of fabric larger than the area you have chosen for your tucked panels.

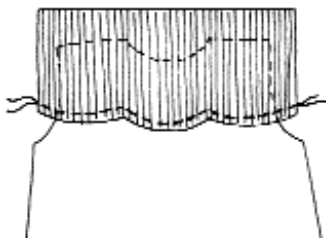
I allow at least 2" excess fabric both *above* and *below* the pattern piece to allow room to shift the piece around so I can cut my tucked panel where the tucks are the prettiest. I allow approximately 1/4" extra width for each tuck. If you are unsure exactly how much extra fabric you need, overestimate because you certainly do not want to end up short when you've invested time in making tucks.

**2. After** sewing your tucks, **cut out** your tucked panel along the edge where it joins flat fabric. Do not cut out the outer edge until you have basted the tucked panel to the fabric.

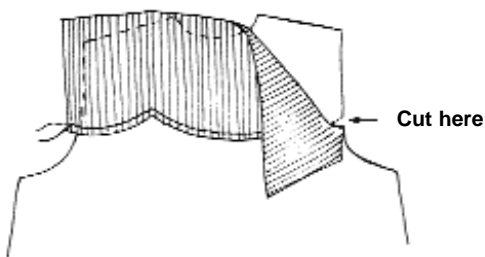
It may be easier to draw the tucked panel area on to the tucked fabric and then cut it out. Be sure to consider the placement of your lace insertion when you cut out the tucked panel.



**3. Lay** the cut tucked panel on top of the garment. **Pin** it in place along the edge and **baste**. Using a #2 pencil, **draw** the outer edge on to the tucked panel.

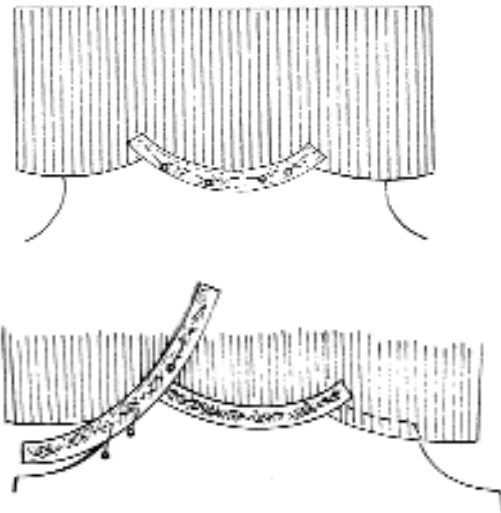


**4. Cut** away the fabric behind the tucked panel leaving approximately a 1/4" overlap.



**5. Center** lace insertion over the edge of the tucked panel and extend to other areas indicated by your chosen design.

**Pin** in place. **Baste** and **press**.

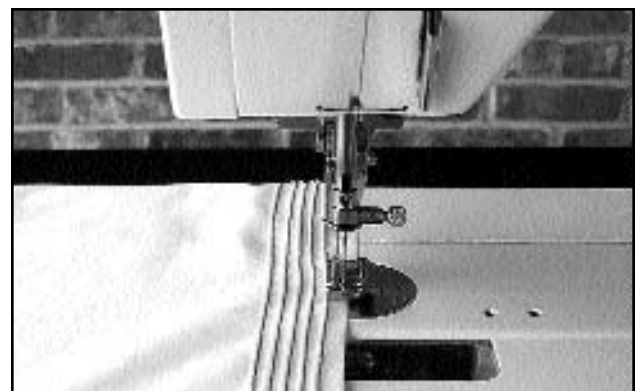
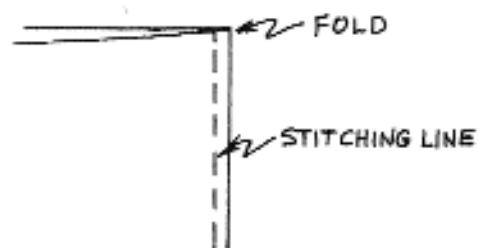


**6. Attach** the lace insertion to the fabric using a machine zigzag stitch or hemstitching.

**7. Cut out** the prepared fabric exactly by the pattern piece. This applies to areas where you have chosen to leave excess fabric along the outer edge.

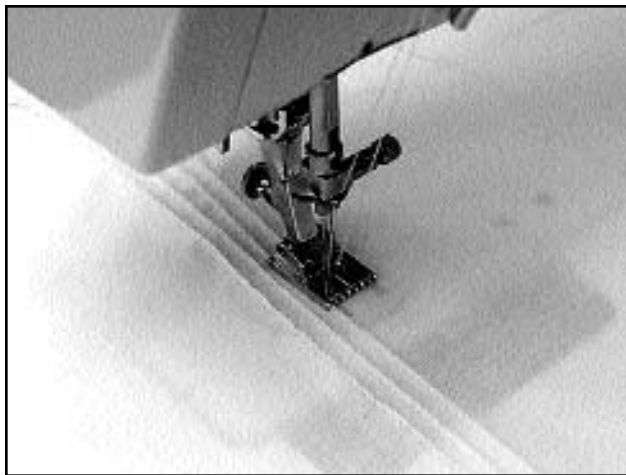
### WHAT IS A FOLDED TUCK?

A folded tuck is fabric that is folded and stitched along the fold. Tuck width and spacing between tucks may vary according to your personal preference.



### WHAT IS A PINTUCK?

A pintuck is sewn on the top side of the fabric using a machine pintucking foot. **Note:** The fabric is *not* folded.

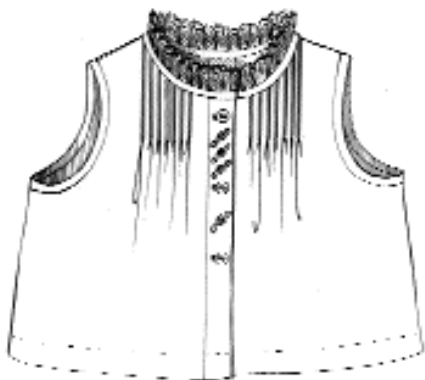


The appearance of a narrow tuck is created when fabric is compacted between the stitching lines of the twin needles in the pintucking foot.



### WHAT IS A RELEASED TUCK?

A released tuck is a tuck which is not sewn into another seam at both ends. Fullness is released at the base of a released tuck.



### HOW DO I DECIDE ON THE SPACE THE TUCKS WILL OCCUPY IN MY GARMENT IN WIDTH AND DEPTH?

If a pattern specifies exact placement of the tucks, follow the pattern instructions. The instructions in this leaflet will help you complete the tucks successfully. Even though exact placement may be marked on a pattern piece, I recommend using the blocking method of sewing tucks to complete your garment. I find it impossible to sew completely uniform, perfectly parallel tucks and I find it impossible to make the beginning of my tucks neat and uniform. I *always* allow extra fabric at the top of the fabric I plan to tuck. I press creases to determine my tuck placement, sew the tucks, and then cut out the pattern piece exactly by the pattern. Detailed instructions may be found in the question, "How do I block a pattern piece when sewing tucks?"

In spacing your design, any tucks across the shoulder should be placed so that the fullness from the release of the tucks will allow ease across the chest, at the point of arm movement.

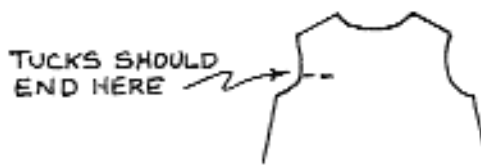
Shoulder tucks should be placed along this area:

#### TUCK PLACEMENT



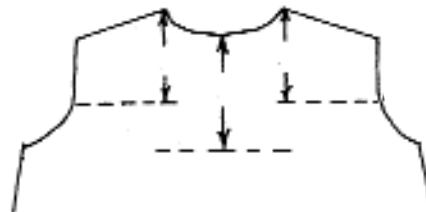
For the same reason, tucks near the shoulder and armhole curve should end *above* the armhole curve.

#### TUCKS SHOULD END HERE

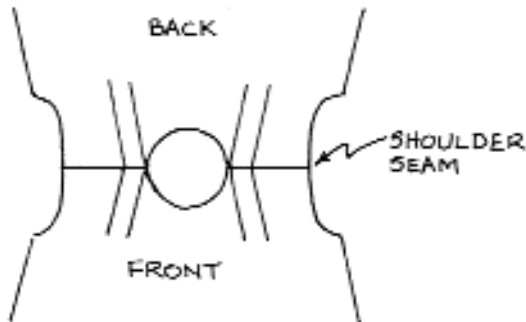


The *center* of a design is always deeper, whether it is embroidery, tucks, or lace insertion.

Tucks at the center front area will not affect the arm movement as much and may be deeper.



If tucks are used on the back of the garment at the shoulder line, place them so that they match the tucks on the front of the garment, if possible. However, this is optional.



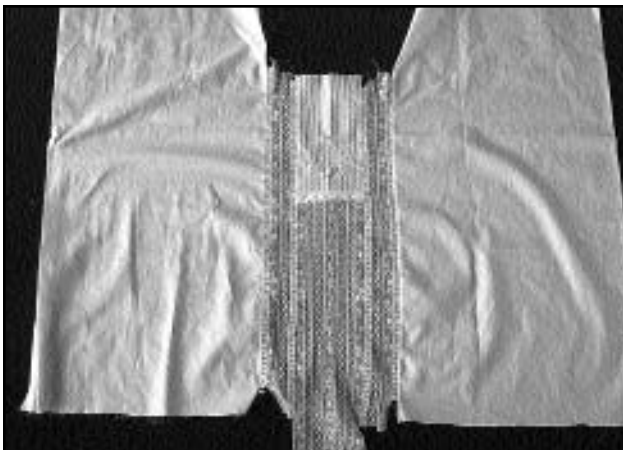
### **HOW MANY TUCKS SHOULD I USE?**

In a yoke or bodice, use an *uneven* number of tucks (3, 5, 7, 9) on each side of the center front. If you are using 10 or more tucks on each side of the center front, or if you are tucking a complete yoke or bodice or shaped-panel, this will not matter.

### **HOW MUCH FABRIC DO I ALLOW FOR TUCKS WHEN I AM CUTTING OUT MY PATTERN?**

When you are cutting out a garment or project and you are determining the size of the fabric panel to be tucked, allow 1/8" for each twin needle pintuck and 1/4" for each folded tuck. I always allow more fabric than this as a margin for error.

**Note:** I always roughly block the pattern, allowing a couple of extra inches above and below the pattern. Tucks are rarely neat and uniform at the beginning or end and this allows you fabric to cut off so that you have a neat tucked panel for your garment. The photograph below shows a bodice which has been prepared for sewing tucks parallel to the lace band at the center front.

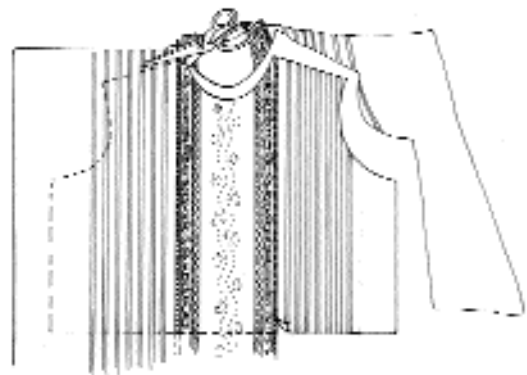
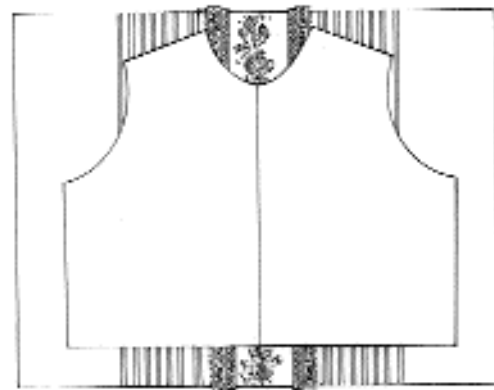


### **HOW DO I CUT OUT A PATTERN PIECE WHEN I WANT TO ADD TUCK EMBELLISHMENT?**

When cutting out a garment and determining the size of a skirt, bodice, or sleeve which will have tucks, allow 1/8" for each twin needle pintuck and 1/4" for each folded tuck. I always allow more fabric than this as a margin for error.

When using tucks in a yoke, bodice, or sleeve, cut a block of fabric larger than the pattern piece, plus fabric allowances for the tucks, complete the embellishment, and then cut out the pattern piece.

Tucks are generally uneven at the ends and it is good to have room to maneuver the pattern an inch or two.



### **HOW DO I MAKE BASIC FOLDED TUCKS?**

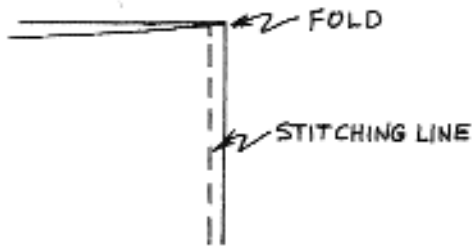
Measure and mark the placement of the first tuck.

After determining the width, decide on the method you are going to use to keep your tuck width and spacing uniform and parallel as you sew.

Fold the fabric. Press a crease, if desired.

Stitch the tuck.

Detailed instructions for completing these steps may be found in the answers to the following questions.



**WHAT STITCH LENGTH SHOULD I USE WHEN SEWING TUCKS?**

General guideline: approximately 10 stitches per inch

This is a general guideline and may vary with your personal preference, considering your particular machine, the fabric you are using, and your desired effect.

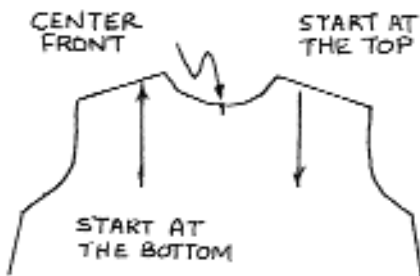
**HOW WIDE SHOULD MY TUCKS BE?**

Again, this is a matter of personal preference. Tucks may be as narrow as 1/8" or as wide as an inch or so. Width will be determined by the location of the tucks on the garment and the space between the tucks. I generally sew folded tucks approximately 1/8" wide. The key to sewing uniform, neatly-spaced tucks would be to use your presser foot and perhaps a seam gauge as a guide as you sew. Your tuck width may vary with the needle position or placement of your seam gauge. Sometimes I use 1/4" folded tucks on boy shirts.

The width of pintucks would automatically be determined by your particular pintucking foot.

**HOW CAN I ASSURE THAT THE TOP-STITCHING OF FOLDED TUCKS WILL APPEAR UNIFORM WHEN I AM USING TUCKS ON EITHER SIDE OF A CENTER POINT?**

To assure that your tucks will appear uniform, the *bobbin thread* should *not* show on the top side of the tuck. To accomplish this, the tucks on one side of the center point will be sewn from the top and the opposite side will be sewn from the bottom.



Tucks will be pressed *away* from the center.

**HOW CAN I ASSURE UNIFORM, PARALLEL PLACEMENT OF TUCKS ON EITHER SIDE OF A CENTER POINT, SUCH AS IN A DRESS, DAYGOWN, OR DIAPER SHIRT?**

To do this, simply determine the placement of the first tucks on either side of the center point, fold over, and press a light crease. This crease will be the exact placement for the first tucks on either side.

The "blocking" method of sewing tucks is explained below. Although the example used is a daygown, this method may be helpful in determining tuck placement on a variety of garments.

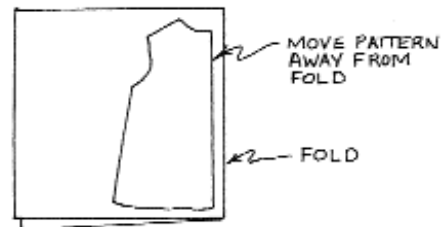
**HOW DO I BLOCK A PATTERN PIECE WHEN SEWING TUCKS?**

Do *not* cut out your pattern when you will be using tucks. **Block** it out. "Blocking" the pattern serves two purposes. It eliminates the beginning stitches at the top edge of the tucks, where the beginning of each tuck may not be uniform and neat. "Blocking" also insures a better fit because the size of the finished garment will not vary if the tucks are not perfectly uniform in size. If tucks are sewn after the garment pattern has been cut out, the garment may be either too wide or too narrow due to lack of exactness in sewing the tucks.

An example of how to "block" a pattern is shown below, using a daygown.

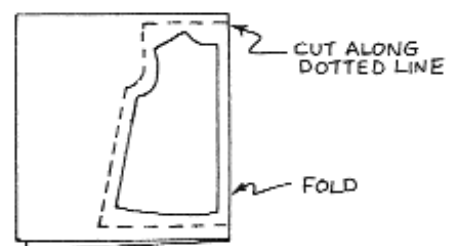
**Lay** the pattern piece on the folded fabric. To allow fullness for the tucks, move the center front of the pattern *away* from the fold. Allow approximately 1/4" for each tuck. For example, if you are using 3 tucks on each side of the center front, you will move the pattern 3/4" away from the fabric fold.

**Roughly cut out** the side seam and armhole 1" or so from

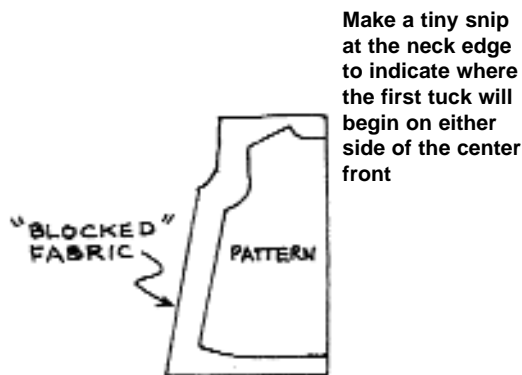


the edge of the pattern. Do not cut out the shoulder or neck edge. Cut horizontally across the top of them, as shown below.

**Move** the center front of the pattern back to the fold.

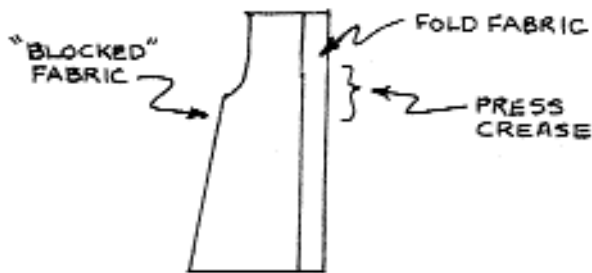


Determine the placement of the first tuck on either side of the center front, and make a tiny snip at this point. Also make a tiny snip to mark the center front. This will be used as a guide for the first tuck on each side of the center front.



To insure parallel tucks on each side of the center front, fold the fabric on the snip for the first tucks, and press a light crease about 3" deep, as shown below.

The garment will be cut out exactly by the pattern after the tucks have been sewn.



Your goal is to sew uniform *narrow* tucks. The width can vary. The purpose of the "blocking" technique is to insure a good fit after the tucks have been made. By cutting out the gown after sewing the tucks, you can develop your own gauge and method for making the tucks and you can sew faster because the need to be exact in tuck width has been eliminated.

To **re-cut** the daygown: When you have completed the tucks, fold the fabric at the center front. Be sure the *first* tucks on each side of the center front are *parallel*. Lay the pattern on the folded fabric, matching the center fronts. Carefully fold in the fullness from the release of the tucks to match the *grainline* of the tucks. This will prevent the fabric from flaring out at the side seam when the pattern is re-cut. Re-cut the tucked fabric exactly by the pattern.

**HOW CAN I DETERMINE THE PLACEMENT OF**

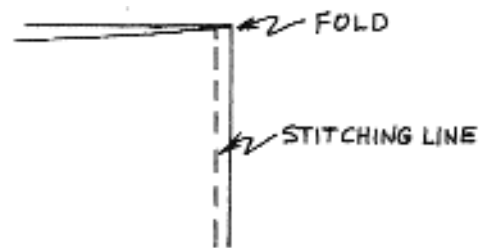
**THE FIRST TUCK THAT I SEW SO THAT THE TUCK IS STRAIGHT AND ON THE STRAIGHT OF THE GRAIN?**

There are three ways you can do this:

- **Determine** the tuck placement, **fold** the fabric, and **press** a light crease to determine the tuck placement.



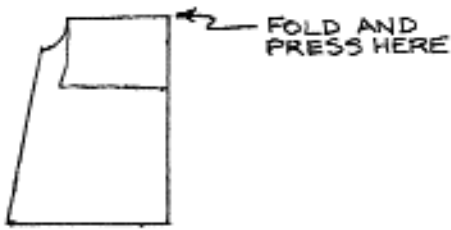
- **Mark your** tuck spacing with a pencil and ruler. Cut a rectangular piece of fabric a little larger than necessary. Use a ruler to space tucks evenly and make a vertical line for the fold line of each tuck. Tucks should be parallel to the grainline of the fabric. Fold the fabric on the line, press a crease, and stitch along the folded edge. Press the tucks. Cut out the pattern after the tucks have been completed by matching the center fronts.



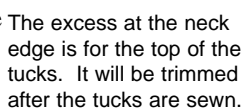
- To mark tuck placement, make a snip in the edge of the fabric and **pull a thread**. If the tucks will be released, pull the thread slightly. Do not pull it out completely. This technique is helpful when using 100% cotton batiste.

**HOW CAN I ASSURE THAT RELEASED TUCKS WILL END AT THE SAME PLACE?**

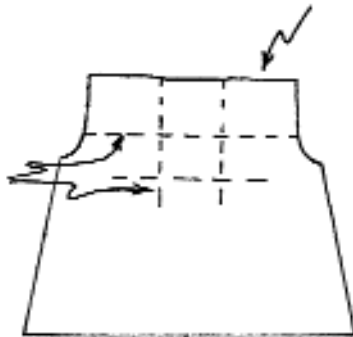
**Press** a light crease by folding over the top of the garment at the point where the tucks should end. This crease will be used as a gauge so that all tucks will end at the same exact point, *on the crease*.



You may press another light crease if deeper tucks will be used at the center front.

The **open** garment will look like  The excess at the neck edge is for the top of the tucks. It will be trimmed after the tucks are sewn.

Crease lines are used for determining tuck depth and parallel center front placement.

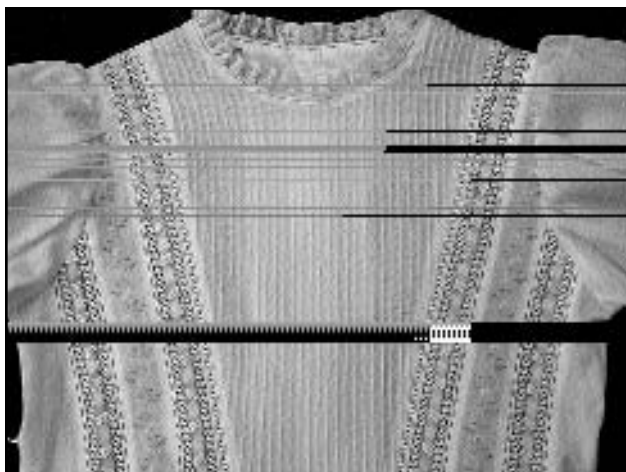


this:

**HOW DO I SEW TUCKS USING MY MACHINE PINTUCKING FOOT?**

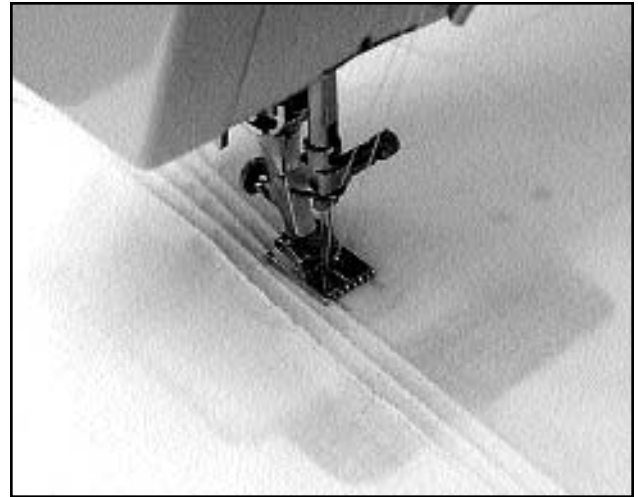
If your machine has a *pintucking foot*, follow your machine instructions for making tucks.

Tucks made with a machine pintucking foot generally work well with sheer fabrics. I spray starch the fabric before making tucks to help get more fabric into the pintuck. I also slightly increase my tension. After I sew the pintucks, I spray starch the fabric again and, using the point of my iron, I press across the tucks and create as much of a fold in each tuck as I can. Sometimes this works better than at other times. Sometimes it is impossible to get the appearance of



a folded tuck and, although the tucks are not as pretty, this is acceptable.

After I sew the first tuck, I place that first tuck under the



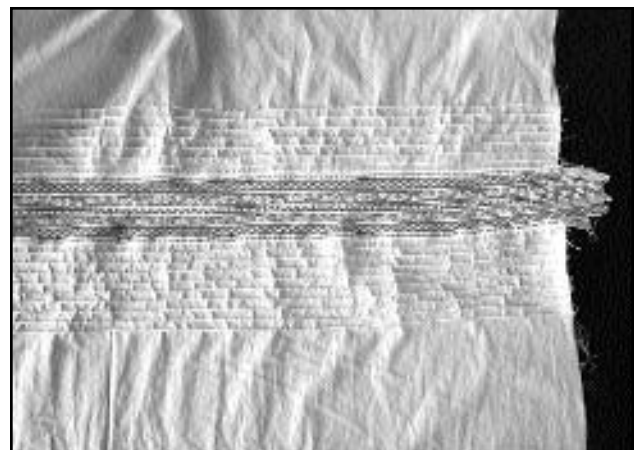
next groove in the presser foot and use it to space the tucks evenly.

Occasionally in skirts and with lace bands, I space the tucks



3/4" apart. To do so, I use the quilting bar as a seam gauge to sew uniform and evenly-spaced pintucks.

Sample skirt which has been pintucked parallel to a lace



band, before it has been pressed:

### **HOW CAN I SEW TUCKS IF I DO NOT HAVE A MACHINE PINTUCKING FOOT?**

**To determine placement for the first tuck,** fold the fabric on the grainline of the fabric, press a crease, and stitch 1/8" from the folded edge. Adjust the tuck width as desired. Tucks should be parallel to the grainline of the fabric.



You may find it helpful to press a crease for *each* tuck just before sewing it.

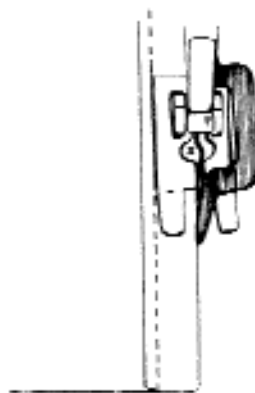
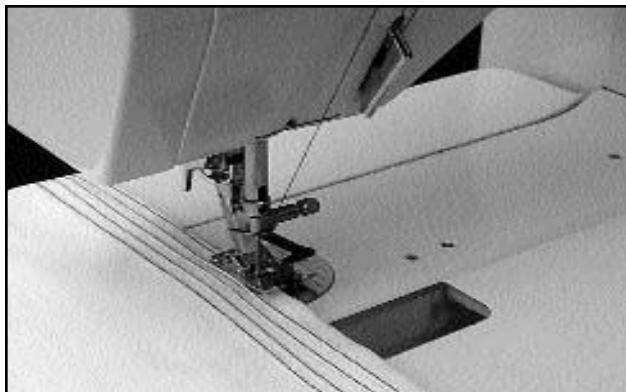
**Note:** I often tell students that sewing tucks is like cleaning out a closet. If you are not in the mood to do it, wait until another day. On days when things are really clicking and my tucks are turning out great, I tuck as much as I possibly can on current projects.

#### **Method 1:**

Use your *blind hemmer* foot attachment or your edger presser foot.

Set the needle in the *left* position.

Fold the fabric on the "tuck" line with the wrong sides together. As you sew, keep the edge of the fabric even with the edge of the hemmer foot. As you feed the fabric under



the presser foot, *keep your eye on the edge of the fabric, not on the needle.*

#### **Method 2:**

If your machine does not have a blind hemmer foot attachment or an edger foot, use your *general purpose* or *zigzag* foot.

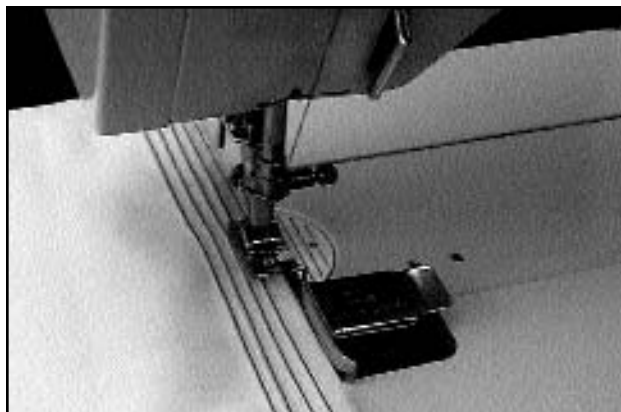
To use the general purpose or zigzag foot, select a point on the presser foot and watch the fold along the point. Do not watch the needle.

After sewing the first tuck, align the remaining tucks by keeping the edge of your presser foot parallel to a tuck



which has already been sewn. Tucks will be uniformly spaced according to the width of your presser foot.

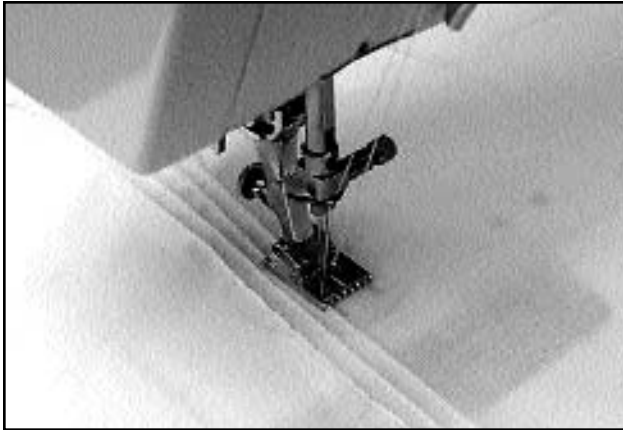
It may be a little easier to stitch a uniform tuck if you use your seam gauge much like a blind hemmer foot attachment, as shown below. Set the needle position at the *left* position and place the seam gauge at the center position of



the needle. Adjust this placement as desired to determine tuck width.

### **HOW CAN I ACHIEVE UNIFORM SPACING BETWEEN PINTUCKS?**

To achieve uniform spacing when sewing tucks using a machine pintucking foot, sew the first tuck. Then place the



first tuck under the next groove in the pintucking foot and use it to space the tucks evenly.

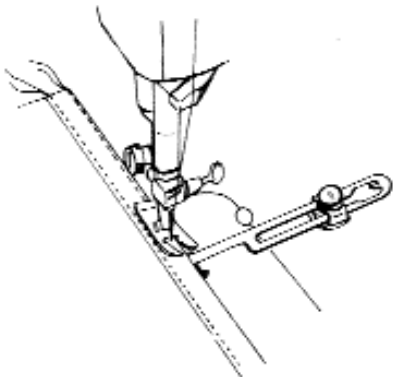
Occasionally in skirts with lace bands, I space the tucks 3/4"



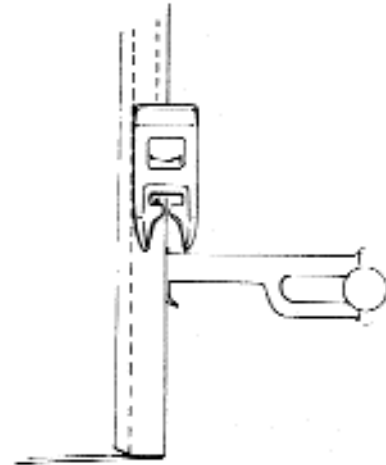
apart. To do so I use the quilting bar as a seam gauge to sew uniform and evenly-spaced pintucks.

### **HOW CAN I ACHIEVE UNIFORM SPACING BETWEEN FOLDED TUCKS?**

After sewing the first tuck, align the remaining tucks by keeping the edge of your presser foot parallel to a tuck which



has already been sewn. Tucks will be uniformly spaced according to the width of your presser foot.



As you sew tucks, keep your eye on the folded edge and a selected gauge, *not* on the needle.

You may find it helpful to press a crease for each tuck just before sewing it.

You may adjust the width of your tuck by moving the needle to the left position.

### **HOW CAN I ANCHOR THE BASE OF RELEASED FOLDED TUCKS SO THAT THEY WILL NOT UNRAVEL AFTER REPEATED LAUNDERINGS?**

Options:

(1) Backstitch 3 - 4 stitches from the base of the tucks to anchor your threads. After you clip the machine threads, pull both threads to the bobbin side so that no ravel can be seen from the top side. If desired, you may tie the threads in a knot and/or use a dot of Fray-Chek.

(2) Stitch to the base of the tuck, pull the machine threads to the bobbin side, and tie a knot. Use Fray-Chek, if desired.

**Note:** If the threads are hard to see, use a straight pin or needle to pull the threads to the wrong side.

### **HOW CAN I ANCHOR THE BASE OF A RELEASED PINTUCK SO THAT IT WILL NOT UNRAVEL?**

Pull all machine threads to the bobbin side. You will have three threads. Tie these threads in a secure knot on the under side.





