
How to Sew a Bias Facing with Liesl Gibson

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Overview

(upbeat music) - One of my favorite ways to finish an edge, like an neckline or an armhole, is to use a bias facing. I'll show you what bias is, why it's useful, how to make it, and how to apply it to finish an edge.

Chapter 2 - Make and Attach Bias

Cut bias strips

- I'm making a little T-shirt out of a wool challis. This is a very lightweight wool, and because it's such a fine weight, I don't want to add a lot of extra bulk to the neckline. So I'm going to add this little bias facing out of an equally lightweight, very sheer cotton. And it's important to remember, with a bias facing, that if you're using something very sheer, like my shirt is, the bias facing could potentially show through the fabric. It won't show on the outside edge, but if the fabric is sheer enough, you could potentially see the facing through it. So keep that in mind, especially if you're sewing something that's white and sheer. It may show through. Just keep that in mind when you're selecting your fabrics. Another thing to think about is that you probably don't want to use something heavier than your garment when you're making your bias facing. One of the advantages of a bias facing is that if, for example, this was a very heavyweight or a very thick fabric, I could use something very lightweight and not add any extra bulk to the neckline, but on the other hand, if this was lightweight and I added something very heavy to it, it might be a little odd and be a bit bulky at the top. So, always go either the same weight as your body fabric or lighter. And I think that's a good guideline to follow. This is the fabric for my bias facing. Bias runs at a 45 degree angle to the threads in my fabric. This is the selvage edge of my fabric. It's the tightly woven side of the fabric when it runs off of the bolt or off of the roll. The bolt will be running this way. This is one of the two edges that are naturally built into the fabric. The threads of the fabric will run parallel to that selvage edge. This is the warp thread, or the length thread. You'll also have another thread that's woven up and down in between the warp threads. This is the weft thread, or the cross grain thread. In order to find a bias, let me just show you. The cross grain will be moderately stretchy. The length grain will have almost no stretch at all. But if I go at a 45 degree angle to both of those threads, and I pull like this, you can see I have a tremendous amount of stretch. That's called the bias, and the 45 degree angle itself is really considered to be true bias. It will give you the most stretch, and another advantage of it, is that it will contour really nicely to a curve, like to my neckline. So I'm going to cut my strips of bias that I'm going to apply to the neckline, and in order to do that, I'm going to start, I've torn or pulled a thread at the cross grains, so that I know that the fabric is running on grain along this edge, and of course it's on grain along this edge, because I've got that selvage. I'll position it on my cutting mat or on the table, just like this, and there's a nice grid on my cutting mat. If I can see through it, you can actually cut right along from corner to corner, and that will be your bias. If you don't have that, it's also easy enough with a ruler. Let's say I measure in about 10 inches and make a mark. I'm measuring 10 inches from the selvage edge. I'll do the same thing from the cross grain edge, right there. And where those two 10-inch measurements intersect, that tells me that it's a 45 degree angle to the corner of my fabric. So if I line up the ruler from the corner of the fabric through that tic mark that I've made, I can use a rotary cutter, or a scissors. You could always

draw a line with your chalk or use the rotary cutter to simply cut that angle, and I'll continue that all the way up to the edge of the fabric. I'm working with about a half yard of fabric here, and that's more than enough, but it's nice to have a long enough section of fabric that I don't need to seam pieces together to get all the way around my neckline. So there's my bias edge. I've got a nice 45 degree angle. Now, I'm going to cut my bias strip to be one inch wide. So I'll position the ruler again one inch from my cut edge, and then I'm going to cut it a second time to make a one inch wide strip. And now we have the bias strip that we're going to use for the facing. Let me just set that aside for a moment. Since we're going to be applying the bias to the neckline of the shirt, we want to be sure that the neckline will have a quarter inch seam allowance. If you have a pattern that has a larger, a wider seam allowance, just trim it down 'til it's a quarter inch. If you don't have any seam allowance at all, then you'll want to add it on to your seam line, just one quarter inch. And also be sure to stay stitch your neckline, because you don't want this to stretch. All of this fabric is cut on bias, because it's curved, and this is very susceptible to stretching. And since the bias is going to be stretching, we want to be sure that this doesn't stretch and distort. So we'll do a quarter inch seam allowance all the way around, and the stay stitching will just hold it in place and prevent it from getting any bigger or stretchy. We also want to be sure that the bias is long enough to get around this neckline. If your bias isn't long enough, you can always sew two pieces of bias together to get the long enough strip, but otherwise it's really nice if you can get in in one piece, so there's only one seam, making it into a loop. So keep that in mind when you're cutting your bias. I'm now going to take the bias over to the iron, and I'm going to get this ready to stitch in place.

Attach bias tape

- To prepare the bias strip and get it ready to attach to the neck, I want to fold both of the edges in and get a really nice finish on it. And in order to do that, I generally like to fold the strip in half and press it to get a really nice crease right down the center. And while you're doing this, really try not to stretch it. You want to keep this is at the same width that you cut it as much as possible. Just gently folding and pressing right down the center. Once you have a crease down the center, you can open it back up, and that crease will serve as a folding guide so that you can fold and press each of the edges in to meet at that crease. And that way, they meet at the center of the bias. So here I'm folding one edge and pressing it. Watch your fingers here. And then I'll go back. Whoops! Messed that up a little bit. That's okay, we'll have extra there, so we'll just leave that. Then I'll fold the other edge in to meet it at the center. Whoo! There goes a finger. You can always turn down your steam setting on your iron, too, just to prevent any scalding from happening. I also have this little contraption that will prevent all kinds of burned fingers. To use this, this is a 1/2-inch bias tape maker, and you can take your bias strip. It's helpful if it's cut at an angle like this one. You feed it in through the wider end. There's a little slot here that it goes into. And it always takes a little bit of finagling to get it through here, but if you've got a pin, you can kinda push it through the groove to get it down towards the tip. There it goes. And you can see that this nifty little contraption folds both ends of the bias and gets them all set for you to press. So usually what I like to do is put a pin somewhere over there on the end just to kind of hold it in place. And then it's still your job to keep the fabric centered. Watch your fingers when you're getting it started. But as you move along, move your iron right along with it, and you'll be pressing both edges into the center. So you're keeping your fingers away from the iron a little bit and you are skipping that center crease because it's automatically folding the two edges in. This will save you time and burned fingers. Pin it again to hold it in place, and you can continue to fold and crease. The idea here is by folding both of the

edges in, we're getting a crease that we can sew through in order to attach the bias to the neckline, and we're also getting a nice folded edge on the opposite side that will give us a clean finish on the inside of the garment and will us to finish that bias. Once you've finished pressing the strip like this, we can take it over to a sewing machine and we can start attaching it to the neckline. Here's my neckline and here's my bias. And before I get started, the first thing I wanna do is just trim one end of the bias so that it's at a 90-degree angle. I don't need that angled bit anymore. Then I'm going to open it up, and I think I'll start sewing it someplace near the shoulder. I think it will just be a little bit less visible up there. So preferably not center front. Somewhere in the back would be okay, too, but I think I'll start at the shoulder because I have a seam there already. What I'm going to do is unfold one edge of the bias and I'm going to be attaching the bias right along that crease. That's my 1/4-inch seam. So I'll be sewing it to the neckline with the right side of the bias to right side of the fabric, right along the creased edge of the bias. Before I do that, I'm also going to fold that end over, and that will give me a nice finish when I come back around, and you'll see that shortly. I'm just going to put a pin in there to hold it, and then I'm gonna take it over to the sewing machine and I'm going to start to sew the bias all the way around the neckline right in that crease. As I'm stitching this, I think I'll actually use a slightly wider than 1/4-inch seam allowance here, simply because I wanna be sure to cover that stay stitching. So I'm stitching in the crease, or maybe just to the left edge of the crease, and that's making sure that my stay stitching doesn't show on the finished garment. As I line up the bias and get it ready to sew, I might stretch it just a little bit, because I do want it to be a little bit narrower than the neckline. Don't stretch it very much. You don't want this to be really cinching up the neck itself. But just a tiny bit will be okay. I'll stitch right over that folded edge at the very beginning, and then just carefully line up the edge of the bias with the neckline, and again, keep an eye on that seam line and keep it right at a 1/4 inch or a little bit beyond a 1/4 inch. Closer to 3/8 of an inch, just slightly wider. And you can use that crease in the bias as a guide again. I'm going to go all the way around the neck like this. Take this section really slowly. Just continue aligning the two fabrics together. Keep watching your seam line and your seam allowance. Make sure that you're stitching it about 1/4 inch or right in that crease. And stop frequently to get yourself set up for the next little section. If you want to pin, you can, but I sometimes find it's a little bit easier not to pin, only because the bias is a bit stretchy and it will tend to get longer as you're sewing along, as the sewing machine pushes it. If you do pin it, you might find yourself adjusting it periodically, which is not a problem, but I sometimes find that it's easier just to keep going. I'm reaching my starting point here, and I want the bias to overlap at this point, so I'm going to cut it to be slightly longer than my starting point. Maybe 1/2 inch or so. And then I'll stitch right back over the starting point in order to finish that edge. I'm stitching through all the layers of the bias at that point. I've gone all the way around the neckline now. The next step will be to take this to the iron, and I'm going to press the bias away from the shirt, toward the neck, and once I've pressed everything up away from the neck like that, then I will press it around to the wrong side and we'll edge stitch that inside folded edge, and that will finish the facing. The bias will already sort of want to come up away because it's already creased there. We're just going to help coax it along. Try to keep that second fold in place. Don't open that up. You're just pressing the bias itself and the seam allowances up away from the shirt. Here's the join. I'll just press them both going up. And just to neaten that up a little bit, I think I'll also shorten the fold so that they match. There, and then repress that section. There, that will look better when we sew that down. I'll just continue around like this. I'm using the end of my ironing board here because I can sort of get the neckline over that. If you have a ham, you can use the ham for this step too. That'll allow you to press the curve easily without

flattening the entire shirt. And once we've gotten all the way around like that, then we just turn it over... And press the seam, roll it ever so slightly to the wrong side of the shirt so that the seam won't show and you won't get those little glimpses of pink when you're wearing it. We'll press it again. Think I might actually turn it inside out for this. 'Cause then I can slip it right into the neckline. That'll make it easy. While I'm at the iron, I like to make sure that that facing is laying really flat up against the neckline before I go back to the sewing machine. And one thing that can really help is to turn it inside out and press it down and then pin it in place so that it's not moving around at all while you're sewing it. So I'm just gonna put a few more pins in here, and then I'll be ready to go over to the sewing machine. And you can see it's really laying nicely along here. Once it's nice and flat all the way around the neckline and I've got it pinned into position, then I can it back to the sewing machine and I will stitch right along that outside edge, as close as I can, to finish it. Here we go. I'll start up near that shoulder where the two ends meet. If you have a free arm on your machine, it can be nice to take advantage of that. You can really get the neckline over the machine that way, and you have better control over your stitching, I think. I'm using thread that matches the fabric of my shirt so that it will show just as little as possible. I'm stitching as close to the edge as I can. Take your time with this. And again, this is just really finishing that neckline. It's giving the bias an almost invisible finish. Really should only be showing from the inside of the garment because I picked this hot pink for my bias. The alternatives to a bias facing would be a lined garment or a full facing, but a full facing adds quite a bit more bulk and it can be a little floppy and just not as neat a finish as a bias facing, I think. Plus it's just kind of fun to have that nice little pop of color on the inside. You can also do a bias facing on the edge of a hem, say a sleeve hem or an arm hole, if you have a sleeveless garment. So think about this as an option when you're doing your sewing and when you're picking your finishes for whatever project you're working on. And as I come back to where I began, and I'm reaching the point where these two ends of bias meet each other, we can kind of fiddle a little bit with the folds and get them tucked under as much as possible. If you want, you can also hand stitch this to finish it, but I often find that you don't need to if you're being nice and neat in tucking them under. You'll have a pretty good result. And then I'm just going to finish stitching that and come right back to meet my starting point. I'll backstitch a couple stitches, and we have a bias facing. Let me just turn this right side out. Here's our bias facing. This is a great way to finish a neckline, an arm hole, a sleeve, even a hem. And it's also a great way to add a little pop of color on the inside. So think of that as a design detail when you're thinking about how to finish your garments.