

Hem finishes

You should always strive to duplicate the original hem finish unless the client asks specifically for something else. Finishes include a “shirt-tail hem,” topstitched hem, blind hem by machine, blind hem by hand, serged edge and cover stitch. The blind hem, serged hem and coverstitch all require specialized machines. Some sergers can be adjusted to create cover stitches. Experience will tell you which machines you need. I consider both sergers and blind hemmers necessary for an alterations business.

Military hem

Once you have pinned the hem, it is now time to actually sew. Let's start with the most common type of hem, the “military hem” shown in the photo at right. The first step is to “true” or even the hem from the center front pin to the center back. The hem should be a straight line from center front to center back. (With most slacks, the front will be slightly shorter than the back.) I always press the correctly measured hem using a pressing cloth. Then I turn the pants inside out and mark the amount that needs to be cut. The new hem should resemble the original hem as closely as possible—whether it was serged, taped or otherwise finished.

In hems that “break” over the instep (“military style”) and slant from front to back, the fabric cannot turn up evenly all the way around. If the slant is less than ½ inch you can let out the side seams slightly to allow the hem to go in evenly. Usually, the angle is greater than that and there is a “gap” in the center front of the turned up hem. The only solution is to snip the fabric in the center front hem enough to allow the hem to lie properly. Before I start to sew, I slip a paper towel or scrap of fabric under that slit and edge it with an anti fray solution such as FrayCheck® and allow it to dry before continuing. Usually when I hem pants I start at the side seams and work around, but with the military hem, you need to pin the hem from side seam to side seam round the back and leave the slit open. Start hemming at the slit and proceed around the hem to the other side of the slit.



Above: Snip the fabric in the center front to allow the hem to lie properly. Use an anti fray solution to stabilize the area.

Below: Hem from the edge of the slit around the hem to the other side.



Note: I use a silk organza pressing cloth that I make myself, but you may use any of a number of commercial or home made versions.