Seam allowance chart

Last checked 2026-11-17

US commercial patterns use 5/8 in, quilting uses 1/4 in. Always use the allowance printed on your pattern.

Use	Seam allowance	Note
US commercial patterns	5/8 in (1.6 cm)	North American standard for Simplicity, McCall's, Butterick and Vogue-type patterns.
Quilting	1/4 in (0.6 cm)	Often sewn scant so the finished seam measures true.
Home decor and curtains	3/4 to 1 in (1.9 cm)	Wider than typical garment seams.
Serger / overlock (stitch position)	1/4 in (0.6 cm)	The stitches sit about 1/4 in from the fabric edge to the left needle. On light fabric the knife trims about 1/8 in of the seam allowance; on medium and heavy fabric, serge without extra trimming. Set by the machine, so follow your pattern's allowance and test on scrap.
French seam	5/8 in (1.6 cm)	Two passes: 1/4 then 3/8 in (or 3/8 then 1/4); trim between.
Curved seams and necklines	1/4 to 3/8 in (0.6 cm)	Narrower than straight seams; clip or notch curves.
Hems: skirts, dresses, coats	1 1/2 to 3 in (3.8 cm)	NMSU says 2 to 3 in; BellaOnline says 1 1/2 to 2 in for most skirts and dresses.
Hems: jackets, pants, blouses	1 to 2 in (2.5 cm)	NMSU Extension only; BellaOnline gives no figure for these.
Hems: flared or circular edges	1/2 to 1 in (1.3 cm)	Narrower on curves so the hem lies flat.

Use	Seam allowance	Note
Zipper insertion	5/8 in (1.6 cm)	Add 5/8 in to zipper length when marking the opening.

Metric equivalents are computed from the first figure.

Computed or quoted from the sources below; check your pattern or manual before you cut.

Sources

Ageberry: seam allowances in sewing patterns: https://www.ageberry.com/seam-allowances-in-sewing-patterns/
SewGuide: seam allowance: https://sewguide.com/seam-allowance/
WeAllSew: Serging 101: https://weallsew.com/serging-101-understanding-you-serger/
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Sewing Parts Online: how to sew a French seam: https://www.sewingpartsonline.com/blog/french-seam
Wikipedia: seam allowance: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seam_allowance
NMSU Extension: Making Perfect Garment Hems: https://pubs.nmsu.edu/_c/C314/
BellaOnline: basics of hemming: https://www.bellaonline.com/article.asp?id=65420
NMSU Extension: Zippers Made Easy: https://pubs.nmsu.edu/_c/C221/index.html