

Sew a Straight Seam

The Start-to-Finish Checklist

Most crooked seams come from an untested machine, not shaky hands. Work through these four checks in order, every time, and the wobble usually disappears.

1. Check Your Machine First

Re-thread the top and the bobbin from scratch, even if you think it's fine. Threading errors cause a large share of stitch problems.

Sew a test line on a scrap of your actual project fabric, not a random scrap. Fabric weight changes how the stitch looks.

Check the test line for even stitches on both sides before you start the real seam. Default stitch length: about 2.5mm for most fabrics.

2. Set Up a Seam Guide

A seam guide is any straight edge next to your presser foot that marks your seam allowance. Pick one tier and use it every time.

Tier	Tool	Cost
Budget	Stack of sticky notes, about 1/4 inch tall	\$0
Low-cost	Painter's tape strip along the seam line	\$2 to \$5
Upgrade	Magnetic snap-on seam guide	\$8 to \$15

3. Guide the Fabric, Don't Steer It

Rest your hands lightly near the presser foot. Let the machine feed the fabric on its own; don't pull or push it forward.

Slow your pedal speed down until you can watch the guide the whole time instead of watching the needle.

4. Respect the Fabric's Grain

Check the fabric's grainline before pinning. Pin along the grain, not by eye, especially on woven fabric like cotton lawn or linen.

Press every seam flat before you sew anything across it. This is a construction step, not a finishing step, and it cannot be skipped.

5. Practice Before the Real Seam

Draw a line on paper and sew it with no thread loaded, just to feel out pedal speed and guiding the fabric. Move to scrap fabric at the same weight as your project. Once you can hold a straight line on scrap, the real seam is a formality.

Quick Troubleshooting

Symptom	Likely Cause	Fix
Seam drifts off the line	No seam guide, or fabric being pulled	Add a guide; let the machine feed the fabric
Seam puckers	Top tension too tight	Loosen tension slightly; test on a scrap first
Stitches uneven top vs. bottom	Threading error	Re-thread top and bobbin from scratch
Straight seam looks slightly zigzag	Normal stitch formation on thin fabric	Test on a thicker scrap to confirm; often not a defect

Ruth's rule: run the same four checks every time something looks off. Machine, guide, grain, press. The order matters more than the speed.

Ruth Delgado didn't touch a sewing machine until she was 40. She taught herself one wobbly seam at a time, and she writes the beginner guides she wishes she'd had. © Sewing.com. For personal use.