Glossary of Clothing Design

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Do You Know the Difference Between a Bell Sleeve and a Bishop Sleeve?

And why on Earth would you need to?

Well, they are two very different looks. When designing a garment, you need to know the names of the pieces you are incorporating into your design – if only so that you can research how to achieve the look you want, and learn how to actually make a bell sleeve or a bishop’s sleeve.

If you don’t know what it’s called, it’s much harder to find instructions!

Secondly, by studying the terms in this glossary (illustrated with sketches), you’ll get ideas for your designs. Maybe you’ve never seen a trumpet skirt before, but become intrigued enough to use the shape in your next design.

That’s my hope, anyway. I hope that you not only learn some of the terms that describe the design elements of clothing, but that you see and learn about a few that are unfamiliar – and that you begin to use them in your own creations!

This glossary isn’t just a reference tool – have fun with it! Happy sketching!
A –

**Accordion pleats** — Similar to **knife pleats**, but more narrow. Accordion pleats are generally about ½” deep, and all folds follow the same direction on the body. These pleats are designed for movement.

![Accordion Pleats](image)

**A-Line** — A skirt with a slightly flared shape, wider at the hem than at the waist.

![A-Line Skirt](image)

**Assymetric hem** —
A hem shape that is deliberately uneven, for aesthetic purposes. One side is different (in this case, higher) than the other.

![Assymetric Hem](image)
**B –**

**Barrel cuff** – A simple round cuff used on a gathered sleeve, usually with a button closure. Not a tailored look, the sleeve may have a bound vent or opening.

**Bellows pocket** – A pocket with a gusset around the pocket bag that expands for extra room. Often used on cargo pants or safari-style shirts.

**Bell Sleeve** – A flared sleeve without a cuff. Bell sleeves may have a modest or a large flare, depending on the designer’s intent.
Bertha collar – An oversized round collar that follows the shape of the neckline. The collar does not have a stand, and lays flat against the body. The width of the collar generally matches the shoulder width, and may be longer in the back.

Bias – The diagonal of the fabric, crossing both the lengthwise and crosswise grain. Woven fabric cut on the bias has more stretch than a fabric cut on a straight grain, and a garment cut on the bias drapes and hugs the body beautifully. True bias is cut at a 45 degree angle.
Bishop Sleeve – A moderately full sleeve with fullness at the wrist gathered into a cuff. A true Bishop sleeve is also cut a bit longer on the back side of the arm for more drape and movement.

Binding – A method of finishing the raw edge of a garment by wrapping a bias-cut strip over the edge and stitching in place. A relatively simple finish, it can also be used to add contrast color to a garment.
**Block** – Also called a pattern block, basic block, or sloper, the block is a very basic pattern devoid of any styling details. It is used to establish fit, and then used in designing patterns that maintain correct fit. It is the “blank slate” upon which style is added.

**Blouse** – Usually refers to a woman’s shirt or loose garment that extends from the neck to the waist or a little below. A women’s blouse may include more feminine details than a woman’s tailored shirt, and may or may not include a collar or sleeves. Blouses usually button or fasten in the front, but openings vary greatly.
**Blousing** – Adding length to a bodice to allow extra fullness at the waist and ease of movement. The look is reminiscent of a blouse tucked into a skirt.

**Boat neck** – A wide, shallow neckline. The front neck drop is relatively high, making the neckline look almost straight from shoulder to shoulder. Also called a “bateau” neckline.

**Bodice** – The upper part of a dress, covering the upper torso (above the waist). The bodice does not include the sleeve or collar.
**Button tab closure** – A closure consisting of tabs (short, narrow straps) closed with buttons and buttonholes. Often decorative, the button tab can also be used to cinch in a sleeve cuff, waistline, or close a pocket.

**Box Pleat** – A pleat formed by folding the fabric in alternate directions. A box pleat has folded edges facing each other on the inside of the garment; an **inverted box pleat** has folded edges facing each other on the outside of the garment.
C –

**Cap sleeve** – A very short, shaped sleeve that covers little more than the shoulders. Cap sleeves may be set-in (as illustrated), or cut as an extended shoulder.

**Cargo pocket** – A patch pocket that is square on the bottom, with a scooped shape at the opening, resembling a pork chop. Also called a porkchop pocket.

**Collar band** – Also known as a **collar stand**, the collar band is used with a shirt collar. It is a separate piece, relatively straight, set to the shirt with the collar set to the top of the band.
Contrast – A color or fabric that is different than the body fabric. Contrasting color in fabric, trim or thread is used as an accent.

D –

Dolman sleeve – A sleeve that is incorporated into the bodice of the garment, without an armhole. Unlike the kimono sleeve, the dolman has a very deep underarm and tapers to the wrist. If the dolman has a very deep underarm area (almost a straight line from waist to wrist), it is known as a batwing.

Dress – A garment consisting of a bodice (top) and skirt. The two pieces may be joined with a waist seam, or the dress may hang from the shoulders without a waist seam.
Drop waist — A dress with a waist seam set below the natural waist. A dropped waist may sit high on the hip, or well below the hip, as illustrated.

Empire waist — A waistline in a dress, blouse or top that sits higher on the body than the natural waist, just under the bust. The proportion between the shorter bodice and longer skirt gives an illusion of height. Named for the empire of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Exposed Zipper — A zipper set with the zipper teeth uncovered and visible. A concealed zipper, which is the norm, is set with the teeth covered by the fabric.
Facing – A method of clean finishing the raw edge of a garment by sewing a separate piece of fabric (with a shape that matches the edge) and folding it to the inside of the garment. The facing encloses the seams and is the neatest, cleanest method of finishing an edge.

Fashion – Not easily defined, “fashion” may refer to styles that are currently popular, or an acceptable manner of dress that exists only for a short period of time. Fashion is always changing; many ethic or historical styles of dress were more static and were acceptable over a period of centuries. These are not “fashion”, although they may inspire fashion.
**Fit and flare** – A dress silhouette that fits closely to the body on the top (bodice), but is full below the waist. Christian Dior’s “New Look” of the 1950’s was classic fit and flare.

**Fitted cuff** – A high sleeve cuff, usually with buttons, that is shaped and fitted to the arm (more narrow at the wrist and wider at the top). Unlike the barrel cuff, which is a straight piece of fabric and not fitted to the shape of the arm.

**Frog closure** – A decorative closure consisting of braided trim arranged in a series of loops. One side of the frog ends with a braided knot that serves as a button, the other ends with a loop that secures the button.
G –

**Gather** – or “gathering” is the process of drawing fabric together to control fullness. A full skirt is gathered to fit a waistband or fitted bodice; a full sleeve is gathered to fit a cuff. This can be done by hand or by machine. Also known as **shirring**.

![Gored skirt](image)

**Godet** – A triangular inset that creates fullness and movement, typically in the seam of a skirt. A “softer” look than a tailored pleat.

**Gored skirt** – A skirt with panels that are wider at the hem than at the waist, allowing fullness at the hem without waist darts. The number of gores and fullness of the skirt varies.
**Handkerchief hem** – An uneven hem created by making the bottom of the skirt flat rather than curved, following the body. A flat hemline results in points at the corners when on the body, creating the uneven hemline.

**High waist** – A waistline that sits higher than the natural waist. The high waist can be used on a blouse, top or dress – even a pant, with a very wide waistband. An **Empire waist** is an example of a high waist.
J –

**J-shape** – Used to describe an armhole in a sweater (as opposed to a straight armhole), or the shape of a scoop pocket. It can also describe the shape of a topstitched fly front or the partial placket on a polo shirt.

![J-shape](image)

**Jabot** – A series of ruffles or lace worn at the neck of a blouse. The ruffles are usually attached to a neck band, worn around the neck or under a collar.

![Jabot](image)

**Jacket** – As outerwear, a short coat worn over clothing for warmth. A jacket may also be a lightweight garment, also worn over clothing, but intended to be worn indoors (ie, part of a suit).

![Jacket](image)

**Jeans** – Pants or trousers made of denim fabric (a durable twill, usually using indigo-dyed yarns woven with white yarns). Jeans can be workwear or fashion, and usually have multiple pockets with copper rivets.
**K –**

**Kangaroo pocket** – A shaped patch pocket applied to the center front of a garment, usually with 2 openings. The pocket may be split by a center front zipper.

**Keyhole opening** – A small, bound vent at a neckline or sleeve cuff, allowing easy on/off without a long placket or full opening. Usually closed with a button and loop.

**Kick pleat** – An opening at the center back seam of a slim skirt to allow ease of movement. The opening (or vent) is clean finished and overlaps the other side of the skirt.
**Kimono sleeve** – A sleeve that is incorporated into the bodice, without an armhole. They often use a gusset at the underarm for increased movement. Kimono sleeves became popular in the 1940’s, due to the increasing Asian influence in design. See also *dolman sleeve*.

**Knife pleats** – Pressed folds of fabric, each facing the same direction.
Lace-up closure – A vent with a series of small holes (embroidered or metal eyelets) on each side. A thin tie, or “lace”, is threaded through the holes and tied to close. Used at a neckline, sleeve or pant hem.

Lapel – Generally a part of a collar which folds back to create a larger opening at the front of a shirt or jacket. The lapel ends at the top button or closure.

Leggings – Close-fitting pants of stretch fabric, with an elastic waist. Often worn under a tunic or, sometimes, a dress.
N –

Nap – A directional finish on a fabric, usually a pile fabric such as velvet or terrycloth. The nap is smoother in one direction than the other. All pieces cut from a napped fabric must be laid in the same direction on the fabric. “Nap” can also apply to a directional print.

Natural waist – A waistline seam that sits on the body’s waist.

O –

On-seam pocket – A pocket with the opening at the side seam (or other seam) of a garment. The pocket “bag” is stitched into the seam and is not visible on the outside of the garment.
P –

**Pants** – A garment covering the lower half of the body, with each leg covered separately. The legs are joined through the lower torso (hips and waist). Also known as trousers, although that term usually refers to a tailored pant.

**Patch pocket** – A pocket applied to the outside of a garment and topstitched in place. The pocket may be a simple square or any shape desired. It is stitched on all sides except one, to allow access to the pocket.
**Peplum** – A short extension of a blouse or jacket waist that may be flared, gathered, or pleated. It may be seamed to the bodice, as shown, or built into the shape of the bodice. A peplum can also be set to the waistline of a skirt.

**Pencil Skirt** – A slim-fitting skirt with a hemline no wider than the hips, and often more narrow than the hips. There would be a kick pleat at the back hem for movement.

**Peter Pan collar** – A collar that sits flat against the neckline of a blouse. The curve of the collar matches the curve of the neckline, and does not roll or sit above the shoulder line. Usually a round collar.
**Picot** – A decorative trim applied to the edge of a garment consisting of a series of small loops.

**Pile** – A series of loops, tufts, or cut loops that create a raised surface on a fabric. Pile fabrics, such as velvet, often has a **nap**, and has a slightly different appearance depending upon the direction of the light hitting the surface.

**Piping** - A decorative trim applied to the edge or inserted into a seam of a garment. Piping consists of a folded piece of fabric which may or may not be filled with a narrow cord. Piping can be used to emphasize a seam line and add color to a garment.

**Plaid** – Woven or printed pattern of alternating colors in the warp and weft (lengthwise and crosswise grain) of the fabric.
Princess seam — A shaped seam made by joining shoulder and waist darts in a bodice, allowing the bodice to conform to the shape of the body without the use of obvious darts. The seam can be continued into the skirt for a princess seam dress.

Puff sleeve — A short, full sleeve, usually with a narrow cuff that sits just above the elbow or at the bicep. The sleeve has fullness at the cap and at the cuff.
R –

**Raglan sleeve** – A sleeve that incorporates the shoulder area into the sleeve. Often used with color-blocking for emphasis. Also called a **saddle shoulder** sleeve.

![Raglan sleeve diagram](image)

**Ruching** – A gathered or pleated strip of fabric used to decorate a garment.

**Ruffle** - A separate piece of fabric sewn to a garment for decorative purposes, which is either gathered for fullness (as shown) or shaped to be wider at the edge than at the seam. A ruffle adds fullness and may be firm (standing away from the garment) or softly draping.

![Ruffle diagram](image)
S –

**Sailor collar** – A large, wide collar with a squared back collar. The back collar is larger than the front, and the front is ordinarily a V-neck. Similar to a middy collar worn by navel personnel.

![Sailor Collar](image)

**Sailor front** – An opening in a pant modeled after trousers worn by sailors, with multiple buttons on a large, center front flap. There is no zipper.

![Sailor Front](image)
**Scoop pocket** – A pocket with a rounded opening and pocket bag that is set inside the garment.

**Set-in Sleeve** – A separate sleeve sewn into an armhole. A set-in sleeve offers the most natural fit, as the sleeve and armhole operate much the same as the arm and shoulder socket.

**Shawl collar** – A set-on collar on a blouse or jacket that does not have a notched lapel. The collar rolls without a stand, and is set to a V-shaped neck opening.
Sheath – A form-fitting dress, with or without a waistline, utilizing darts to shape to the bust, waist and hips. The skirt is narrow at the hem.

Shift (dress) – An easy-fitting dress without a waist seam. The shift fits somewhat closely through the shoulders and bust, but flares into a wider hem than the sheath, with no fitting darts at the waist. Popular in the 1960’s, a more extreme example would be the tent dress, with a wider flare than that shown.
**Shirt cuff** – A more tailored version of the **barrel cuff**, a shirt cuff is a straight piece set to the end of the sleeve, with a tailored placket.

**Slash/Slant pocket** – A pocket set into a garment with a straight, angled opening and the pocket bag set inside the garment.

**Smocking** – A decorative technique that controls fullness through gathers or fine pleats, stitched in a pattern of contrasting threads.
Three-quarter length sleeve – A sleeve that ends between the elbow and the wrist, covering $\frac{3}{4}$ of the arm.

Trumpet flare - An extreme flared shape, used at the hem of a skirt or a sleeve. Unlike the godet, there are no inserts in a trumpet flare. The skirt or sleeve consists of panels (or gores, in a skirt), which are much more narrow at the top than at the bottom. Each panel is flared to an extreme degree, resulting in a full hem on a fittet skirt or sleeve.
Topstitching – Single or multiple rows of stitching, through all plies of fabric, and visible on the face of the fabric. Often decorative, using either matching or contrast thread.

Trapunto – A decorative technique similar to quilting, but the backing fabric is slashed in some areas, and those areas are stuffed with batting (the slash is then stitched closed). This results in a dimensional surface, with precise placement.
V -

V-neck – A shaped neckline ending in a point at center front.

Vent – An opening on the edge of a garment to allow movement. The edges of the vent may meet, or may overlap, as in a kick pleat, or may be cut in a “V” shape.
Welt pocket – A pocket made by cutting a slit in the fabric, attaching a pocket bag, and finishing the slit with one or two strips of fabric. Often used as rear pants pockets, or suitjacket pockets set at waist level.

Wrap skirt – A skirt with a full-length opening, which overlaps and is secured, typically, with buttons. The wrap may also be closed with a tie at the waist, or, in the case of a pleated, kilt-style wrap, with a decorative pin.
Yoke – The upper area of a garment, usually the shoulder of a bodice or the hip/waist area of a skirt or pant, that fits the body closely. The lower portion of the garment hangs from the yoke and is often larger and more full than the yoke area. The yoke then controls the fullness and the shape of the garment. The yoke also serves the purpose of re-directing darts, for fit.