



# Couching

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If you can sew a zigzag, you can couch! Couching is a simple embellishment technique accomplished by zigzagging one or more colorful yarns or trims to a fabric surface.

## Creative Couching

The welcomed addition of texture and color via couching materials enlivens an otherwise dull fabric. Couching can also be used to create a unique coordinating fabric, hide a fabric faux-pas or add a dash of color and texture—all with the use of a variety of colorful yarns, embroidery floss, ribbons or fabric scraps sewn to the fabric's surface.

Couching can be applied to small and large areas alike. Apply decorative ribbons, threads or yarns to smaller areas such as pockets, collars, or cuffs. Accent accessories like hat crowns or brims, glove edges and scarves. Don't forget home décor projects like pillows and valances.

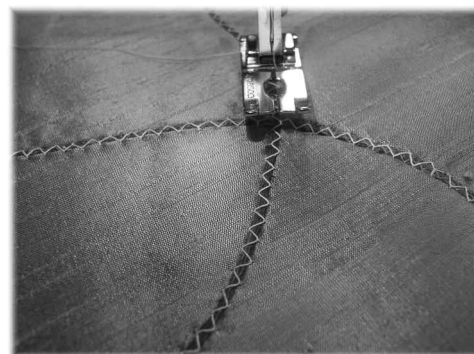
For larger statements, yokes, plackets and garment fronts or backs readily welcome the added texture and color that couching offers. Even throws and bedspreads can be couched. Where there is open space, there's a couching opportunity!

## Material Pleasures

When it comes to selecting materials suitable for couching, the choices range from basic yarns to the exotic. Solid colored threads, yarns or cords, in single or multiples, offer one option. Novelty or variegated yarns provide a colorful and textured look. Embroidery threads in rayon or metallic add luster. Ribbons or fabric cut in thin strips offer additional options. For elegant touches, add strands of sequins or feather trims. Consider the overall desired look and take the time to test several combinations. It's part of the fun!

## Tools of the Trade

With couching, something interesting is always afoot—so opt for specialty presser feet to assist the couching process. Proper foot selection is based on the design



patterning and the number and size of threads to be sewn.

A single, smooth or novelty thread or yarn can be couched with a zigzag or open-toe presser foot. This presser foot is well-suited for a zigzag stitch and an uncomplicated couching pattern. For more complex designs, opt for a cording or braiding foot (1). This foot type is used for guiding and controlling the yarn(s) in tighter spaces. Unlike the open-toe foot, a braiding foot holds the yarn up allowing for a more precise application.

For most embroidery sewing, including couching, the best needle choices are either a size 70/10 or 80/12. Finer fabrics, generally teamed with lighter couching materials, will require a ballpoint (for knits) or smaller needle size 65/9. Heavier fabrics require a larger needle to penetrate the fabric's surface and securely stitch the yarn(s) in place.

When selecting the sewing machine thread, consider if the stitches should be invisible or decorative. Using a matching or monofilament thread through the machine needle permits the sewing thread to blend in, allowing the couching to "float" on the surface. If a more detailed and textured look is desired, choose an embroidery thread in a metallic or in a contrast color.

This thread choice will add more color and texture to the overall design and the stitches become an integral part of the overall couching design, especially if an open decorative stitch is used.

An appropriate bobbin thread for successful couching is an embroidery bobbin weight (size 60 to 80), available spooled or on pre-wound bobbins. Select a color that most closely blends with the sewing machine thread.

## Under It All

Stabilizers are an important component for smooth, pucker-free couching. Lighter weight fabrics such as cottons, silks, polyester blends and lightweight knits are strengthened by fusing a light knit interfacing on the fabric wrong side. Some fabrics need additional stabilization with a tear-away stabilizer.

For fabrics with more body, like wools and denim, opt for only a tear-away stabilizer. Cut a piece slightly larger than the couched area and apply to fabric's wrong side, following the manufacturer's instructions. Once the sewing is complete, tear away the excess. In all cases, be sure to test your yarn, stabilizer and fabric selections together before starting the project.

## On Your Mark

Couching can be accomplished two different ways:

The first by sewing along a pre-determined placement line. Draw a pre-determined design or a free-hand line with chalk on the fabric's surface. This technique offers greater control of the couching process and uses a specialized presser foot.

The second method is applying trims in a random fashion. Using your hands and a braiding or cording presser foot, simply guide the yarns into place as they are sewn. Moving the yarns in a gentle or dramatic fashion will determine the mood.

## Couching Cues

- Cut the couching base fabric at least 1/2" larger than the pattern indicates. This ease allows for any take-up that occurs as the threads are sewn to the fabric surface. When couching is complete, compare the piece to the original pattern and trim if needed.
- Choose a wide, medium-width zigzag stitch for most couching. Adjust the stitch width to just cover the

threads. For a more ornate look, select a decorative machine stitch to hold the couched threads in place.

- Sew slowly and let the foot guide the trims either along the marked line or in freehand patterning.

- When turning or pivoting, leave the needle down in the fabric to lock the stitch location, lift the foot and continue sewing.

- Extend the trim ends into seams for the easiest finishing. If they end within the project, leave thread ends long enough to thread into a hand needle and pull them to the underside to secure.

- Looking sparse? Fill in the area with additional couching material.
- When couching is complete, lay the fabric flat, wrong side up on a towel and lightly press to set the trims; avoid flattening the couching.
- Add beads, charms and other embellishments to couched threads for more pizzazz. 🖱️

