Are you ready? Let's go sew!

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SERGER BASICS Part One

What makes a serger different from a Sewing Machine?

Although they share some similarities, sergers are a different "animal". Think of your sewing machine as your "stove", and your serger as your "microwave oven." There is generally less visibility and maneuverability with a serger. Curves and corners have to be handled more carefully. Sewing machines are ideal for precision sewing, while sergers give you the ultimate in speed. Not only do they sew fast, they sew the seam, overcast the edges, and cut away excess seam allowance all in one step. A serger and a sewing machine make great companions, complimenting one another. Always start with a good sewing machine suited for your needs and then add a serger for tasks that the sewing machine can't perform. Keep in mind the fact that sewing machines have "serger like" stitches but nothing on the sewing machine can imitate the ready to wear look that a serger provides for seam finishes and rolled hem edges.

Here are some ways they are the same:

- They both sew.
- They both can be used for construction and decorative applications.

Here are some ways they are different:

- Sergers sew approximately twice as fast as a sewing machine.
- The presser foot and feed dogs on a serger are much longer and many sergers have a feature called differential feed.
  Notes about Differential Feed:
  If a serger has differential feed, there are two separate sets of feed dogs on the machine. One in the front and one in the back. This feature allows you to control the feeding of the fabric layers in a very unique way. Simply put, when differential feed is set at 1.0, both sets of feed dogs move at the same speed. With this setting the feed dogs are basically in neutral.

Anytime the setting is turned toward the positive end, with the number higher than 1.0, the front feed dogs move faster than the back. This causes the fabric to be eased in or possibly even gathered. It's common to use differential feed on knits to keep them from stretching out.

On the opposite end, when the serger is set in the negative range, below 1.0, the front feed dogs move slower, effectively stretching the fabric or smoothing it out. This end of the differential feed dial is not as commonly used but it can be very helpful for smoothing out seams on tightly woven fabric and fabric that is silky and puckers easily.

- Unless the blades are disengaged, sergers cut before they sew.

- Sergers use needles and loopers rather than a needle and a bobbin.

- Sergers form an interlocked stitch with loops that interlock and virtually seal the raw edge of the fabric. A sewing machine uses forward, backward, and side motion and a series of knots to form a stitch.

Follow these steps to become familiar with your machine:

- Read your manual cover to cover. It may seem like a foreign language at first, as there are many new terms that are exclusive to sergers. Learn each machine part and its proper name.
- Remove and replace the needles until you are comfortable with the process. Needles must be inserted so that they are facing in the proper direction and are inserted up as far as they will go. Leave the screw slightly loose when you remove a needle to avoid creating a burr or rough spot within the needle bar.
- To get familiar with your machine, thread your machine according to the color code, using good quality serger cone thread that matches each color-coded guide. This will help you see which thread forms each part of the serger stitch.
- Thread your machine "from scratch" following the diagrams in your manual step-by-step. Needles are always threaded last. If either of your looper threads break and need to be re-threaded, you MUST re-thread the needles last so they are on the surface of the machine when you resume stitching.
- It is **VERY IMPORTANT** to keep your machine very clean and well oiled. Oil machine after 8-10 hours of sewing time, following machine manual for specific oiling points. In particular, oiling the upper looper mechanism is essential for maintaining a smooth serger operation. Failure to do this may result in a machine that freezes up and quits working. If your serger has not been used for a few weeks or more always oil before you use it. **Note**: There may be a few models where oiling is not recommended. However, most sergers do in fact need oiling of a few essential parts. If your machine manual tells you oiling is not advised, please follow you manual and disregard information above.
- When sewing with standard serger stiches, never sew beyond the edge of the throat plate with the cutting blade disengaged! There are times when you will want to disengage the cutting blade but, in these instances, you'll need to make sure the fabric does not enter the area where the cutting action normally takes place.