

How to Use a Seam Ripper

What is a seam ripper and how is it used? A seam ripper is a hand-held tool with a smooth point and cutting blade on one end, and a handle on the other. It is designed to remove unwanted stitches. There are many seam ripper styles – small, large, ergonomic, and some with other tool combinations. Fine or heavy-duty blades are available. Handle styles vary from short to long, round or flat, to curved ergonomically. Regardless of style, this little tool is a must-have for any sewing room.

Stitch removal steps are applicable to all rippers. Illustrations show only a couple of our available styles. Keep in mind that reference to small (fine) or large (heavy-duty) rippers refers to the blade size, not the handle size. Fine and heavy-duty blades are available in many handle styles.

See our tutorial “How to Choose a Seam Ripper” for descriptions of ripper styles and special features.

- You will need:**
- Ripper of your choice
 - Your project



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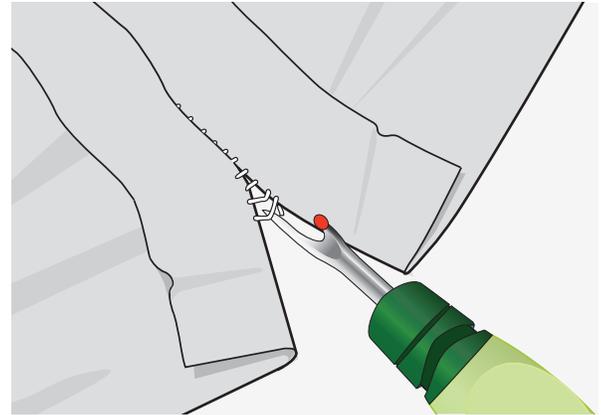
Rip Out Unwanted Stitching

Machine stitching is applied to fabric in many ways. There is the traditional seam, where seam allowance is pressed open and stitches are somewhat hidden. There is topstitching on a seam or fabric edge, where stitches are visible and easily accessible. Then there is the serged edge, where stitches can be a confusing tangle. We all make mistakes. You may wish to correct a seam, or refashion a garment, both requiring stitch removal. Any size ripper will work to remove stitches, using either technique.

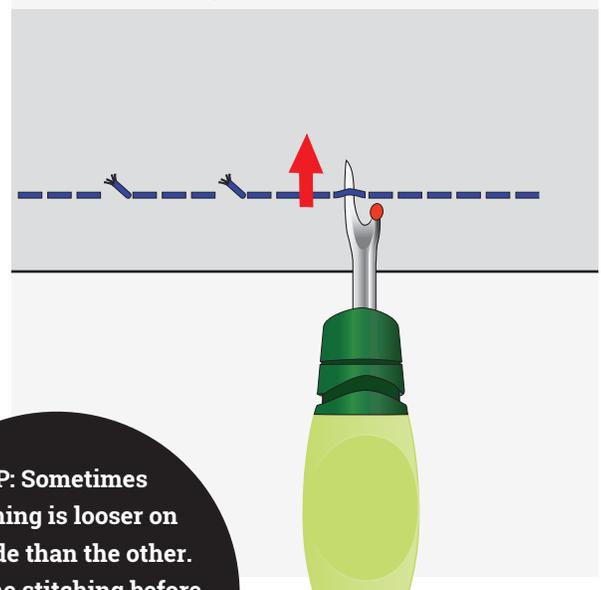
Removal of seams that are pressed open: Pull stitched seam apart gently until you can see the stitches. Use the point of the ripper to lift an individual stitch. Once you have released one, the next will be easier to pull loose. Use the inner curved edge of the blade to cut the thread.

Removal of top stitching or seams that are pressed to the side: Stitches are usually visible. Use the point to lift the stitch slightly; then slide the ripper further into the stitch to cut the thread. Always push the point away from your body.

For seams pressed open flat:



For topstitching or seams pressed to the side:



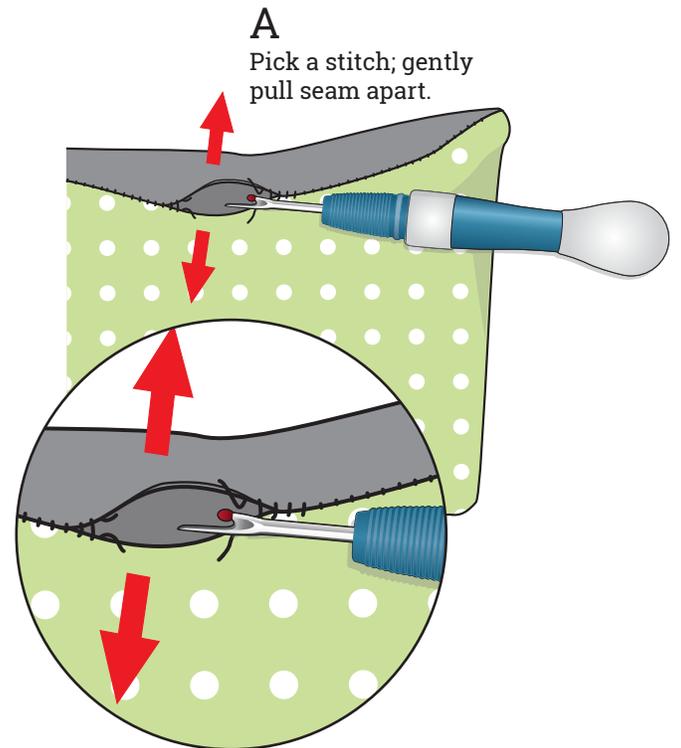
TIP: Sometimes stitching is looser on one side than the other. Examine stitching before ripping. Work on the side with the loosest stitches.



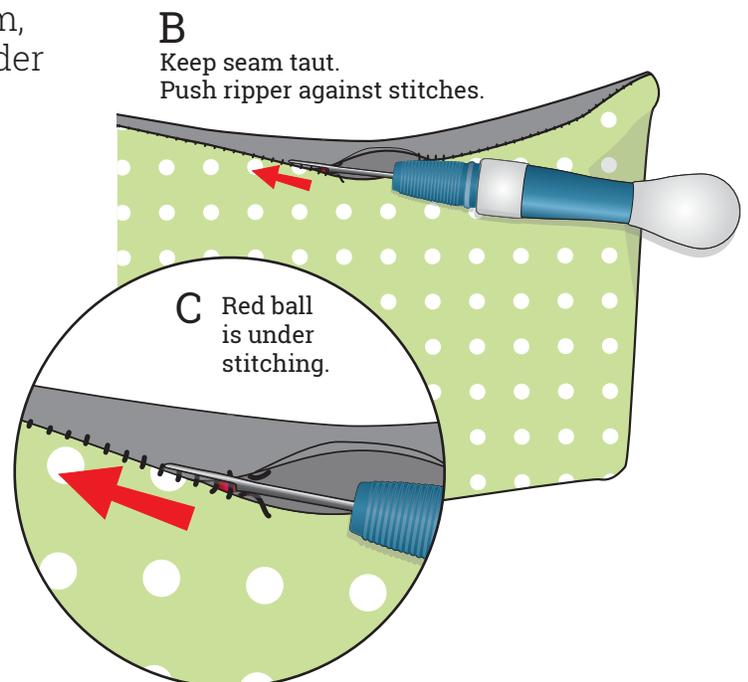
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Difficult-to-reach seams that may be hidden inside a project: The little red ball next to the cutting edge actually has a purpose! It helps keep fabric away from the blade. This is good for projects where the seam allowance is hidden inside, such as a pouch or pillow cover. After you pick your first stitch, gently pull seam apart until there is about a 1/2" opening (**A**).



Once you have a small opening in the seam, turn the ripper so the ball side is down, under the stitching and slide it into the opening. Keep the fabric and stitched seam taut (**B**). Push the ripper away from you to cut the stitches (**C**).



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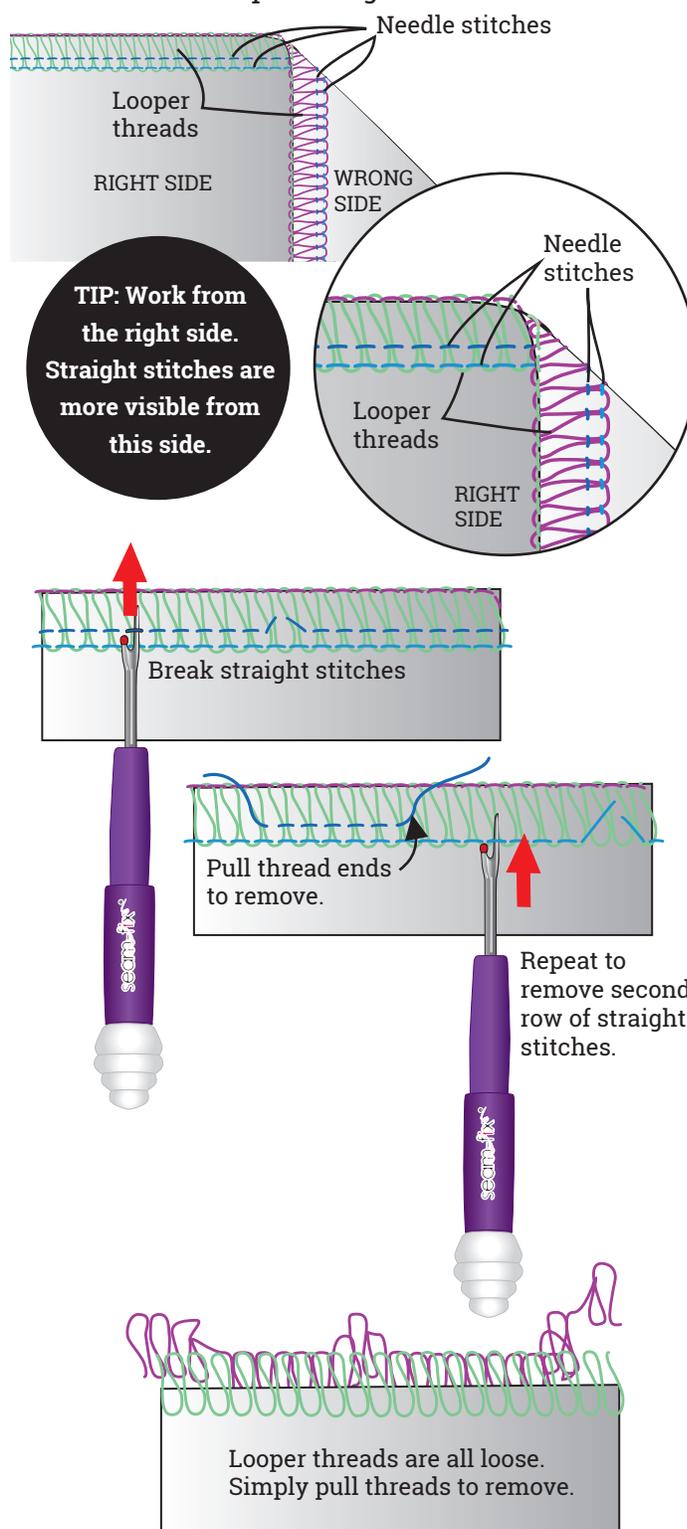
Removal of Serger Stitching:

Overlocked or serged seams, whether custom created, or store-bought have several threads that interlock. Removal of serger stitching can be done two ways.

METHOD ONE:

Unpick the stitches. This works best on three- or four-thread sergers. Four-thread sergers have two needles and two loopers; three-thread sergers have 1 needle and 2 loopers. The needles create straight stitching to connect the looper threads, which wrap over the fabric edge. Slide tip of ripper under one row of straight stitching to break the thread. Repeat to break the thread every few inches. Pull thread ends to remove stitching. Repeat with the second row of straight stitching for a four-thread serger. Looper threads are now released and will easily pull free from fabric.

METHOD ONE: Unpick serger stitches:



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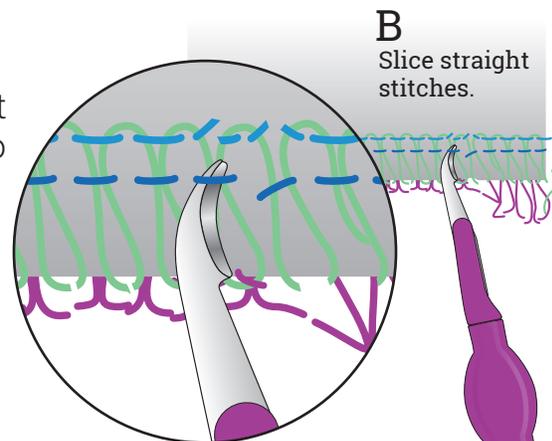
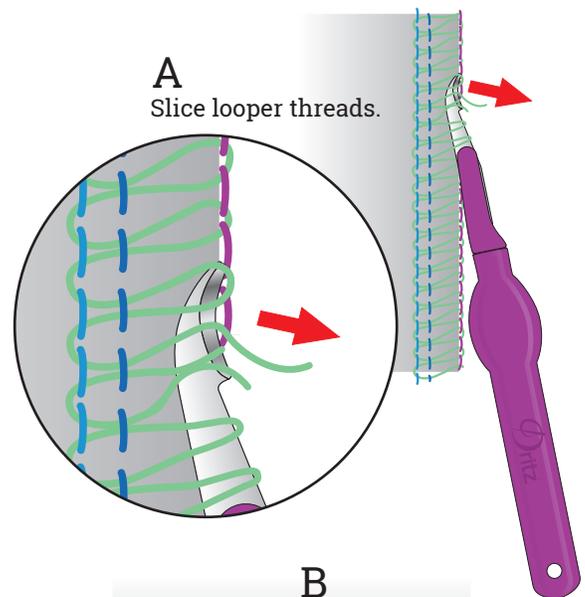
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METHOD TWO:

Use a curved ripper to slice serger stitching. Slip the cutting blade under looper threads. Move ripper away from the edge of fabric so the blade slices through the looper threads only (A).

Slide the cutting end of the ripper under the straight serger stitches. Cut every second or third stitch (B). This method is easy, but a bit messy as you will have many thread ends to clean up. Consider using the Seam-Fix® seam ripper with eraser to sweep up all the loose ends! See the Seam-Fix tutorial for Items #664, 665, 949 and 953 for detailed information.

METHOD TWO: Slice serger stitches:



TIP: This method creates lots of thread scraps. Use the Stitch-Fix® ripper to erase the mess!



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Buttonholes:

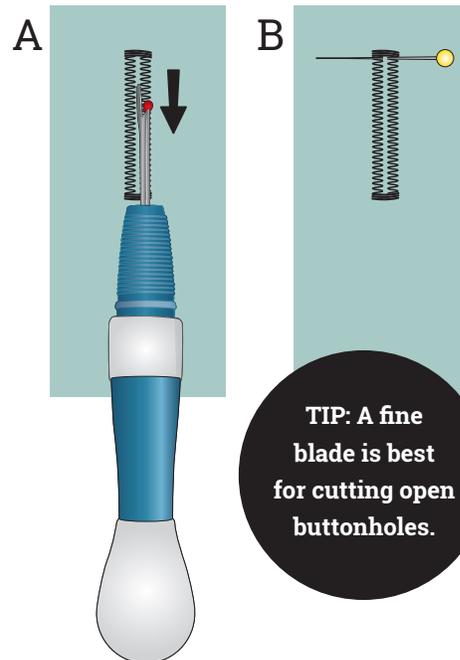
Using a ripper is an easy way to open a buttonhole, but use caution to not cut through the ends or to accidentally clip stitching.

To Help Prevent Clipped Stitches: Turn the ripper so long end is down and red ball faces up. Draw the ripper toward you starting at the far end of the buttonhole inside the bar tack (A). Do not pierce the fabric. This is meant to simply score the area between the stitches to help separate them.

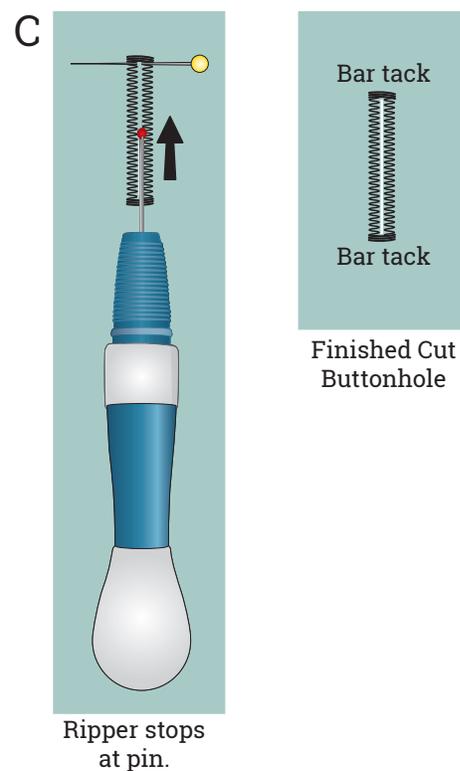
Place a straight pin at the far end of the buttonhole, flush against the inside of the bar tack (B). This will prevent accidentally cutting through the bar tack at the end.

To Cut the Buttonhole: Insert the point of the ripper into fabric between rows of stitching in the end closest to you. Firmly, but gently, push the ripper away from you (C). The blade of the ripper will stop at the pin.

Open a buttonhole



TIP: A fine blade is best for cutting open buttonholes.



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To Distress Jeans:

A ripper is the easiest way to create distressed jeans.

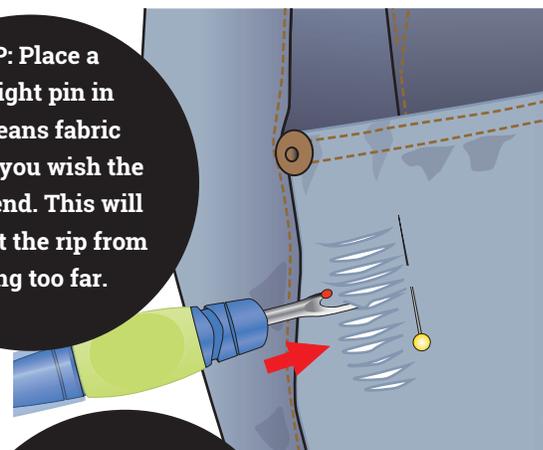
Decide where you want a rough hole. Insert ripper into fabric. Push the ripper along the grain of the fabric for even raveling. Push it diagonally for ragged cuts.

IMPORTANT: Always push the ripper away from you when cutting.

Distress jeans

TIP: Place a straight pin in the jeans fabric where you wish the rip to end. This will prevent the rip from going too far.

TIP: Further distress your denim by folding it along the grain. Rub an emery board roughly across the fold repeatedly for instant aging!



Unusual uses for a seam ripper:

- The tip and blade are very efficient for removing satin-stitched embroidery, or for cutting the short slits required for magnetic snap prongs. To prevent accidental rips, keep fabric taut and don't push too hard. A straight pin at the far end of the planned cut will help prevent unintended rips.

- Use the tip like a stiletto to help turn under seam allowances or guide fabric through your sewing machine.

- Don't forget the household needs – slice through hair or thread that is wrapped around your vacuum cleaner roller.

Cut slits for magnetic snap prongs

