

sewing basics

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The information below is for those just starting out, or those who want to refresh some of the basics. We'll keep it in every issue so it is always there for reference.

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Sewing should be fun! (details from Simplicity 4118)

Basic equipment

1. Scissors and shears

- Good shears – only to be used for dressmaking, preferably with side bent handles (keeps the blades flat against the cutting surface).
- Small embroidery scissors to cut into seam allowances, clip and snip.
- Pinking shears – ideal for quickly neatening cotton fabrics.

2. Good quality thread

Buy named brands (Cheaper threads can break and split easily). Allow two reels per garment. Match colour as close to fabric as possible. If exact shade is not available, buy slightly darker colour as when unrolled from the reel it will appear lighter.

3. Haberdashery

- Pins - preferably glass or plastic head so that they are easy to remove as you sew. Keep replacing them as pins blunt as easily as needles!
- Marking pen/pencil – preferably a disappearing one or chalk pencil that will brush off.
- Tape measure – avoid using the old one that has been kicking around for ages, it might have stretched!
- Sewing machine needles - invest in a selection so they can be changed regularly (blunt needles are the cause of MANY stitch problems. See Trouble Shooting below). Have some universal needles in different sizes for woven fabrics, some ball point or stretch needles for knit and stretchy fabric, jeans needles for denim or other heavyweight fabric and a twin needle for decorative top stitching.

Fabric choice

To start with, choose a stable woven fabric such as cotton, gabardine or flannel. Fleece is also OK, although works better if you take a wider than usual seam allowance as the layers can 'creep' when you stitch (so they don't end up the same length!). The good thing is you don't have to neat the seam allowances on fleece as it doesn't fray. Avoid slippery fabrics and stretchy fabrics until you have experience with some of the easier fabrics.

TIP: Always test stitch on a scrap of the same fabric, same number of layers with interfacings etc before starting on garment pieces. That way you can check the machine is stitching properly and that the stitch length/width is correct.

Pattern choice

- **Know your pattern size** – measure yourself accurately and honestly then choose the correct pattern to suit YOU (this is probably NOT the same as ready-to-wear). If making tops, jacket or dress, choose from BUST size; if making skirt, trousers and shorts, choose from WAIST. Except – if your bust cup size is two sizes larger than your high chest/high bust (under arms) then choose bust size by your high bust measurement and adjust for cup size. Equally, if hips are two sizes larger than waist, choose by Hip size and adjust for waist. (nb: how to alter for larger busts was covered in November 2005 issue BUSTED by Gill Arnold).
- **Measuring guidelines**
Wear underwear and take measurements, preferably with the help of partner or good friend.
High chest/high bust – underarms and above bust
Bust – around fullest part of bust
Waist – to find natural waist (if not obvious); tie string around waist area and bend from side to side. String will settle on natural waistline.
Hips – around the fullest part of bottom; usually 18- 23 cm from waist
Back length to waist – From bone in nape of neck to waist (this measurement helps determine your body type for paper pattern sizing).
- **Pick an easy pattern** - designs that have minimal number of pieces are easier to construct as are those listed as Easy, Very Easy, Fast & Easy etc. Also patterns with sewing time listed as 1,2 or 3 hours will be simpler to construct.
- **Understanding the pattern envelope** – pattern envelope backs have a huge amount of useful information that will help you achieve a great looking garment. This includes:
 - The number of pieces in the pattern (gives an indication of level of difficulty, fewer pieces, easier to make).