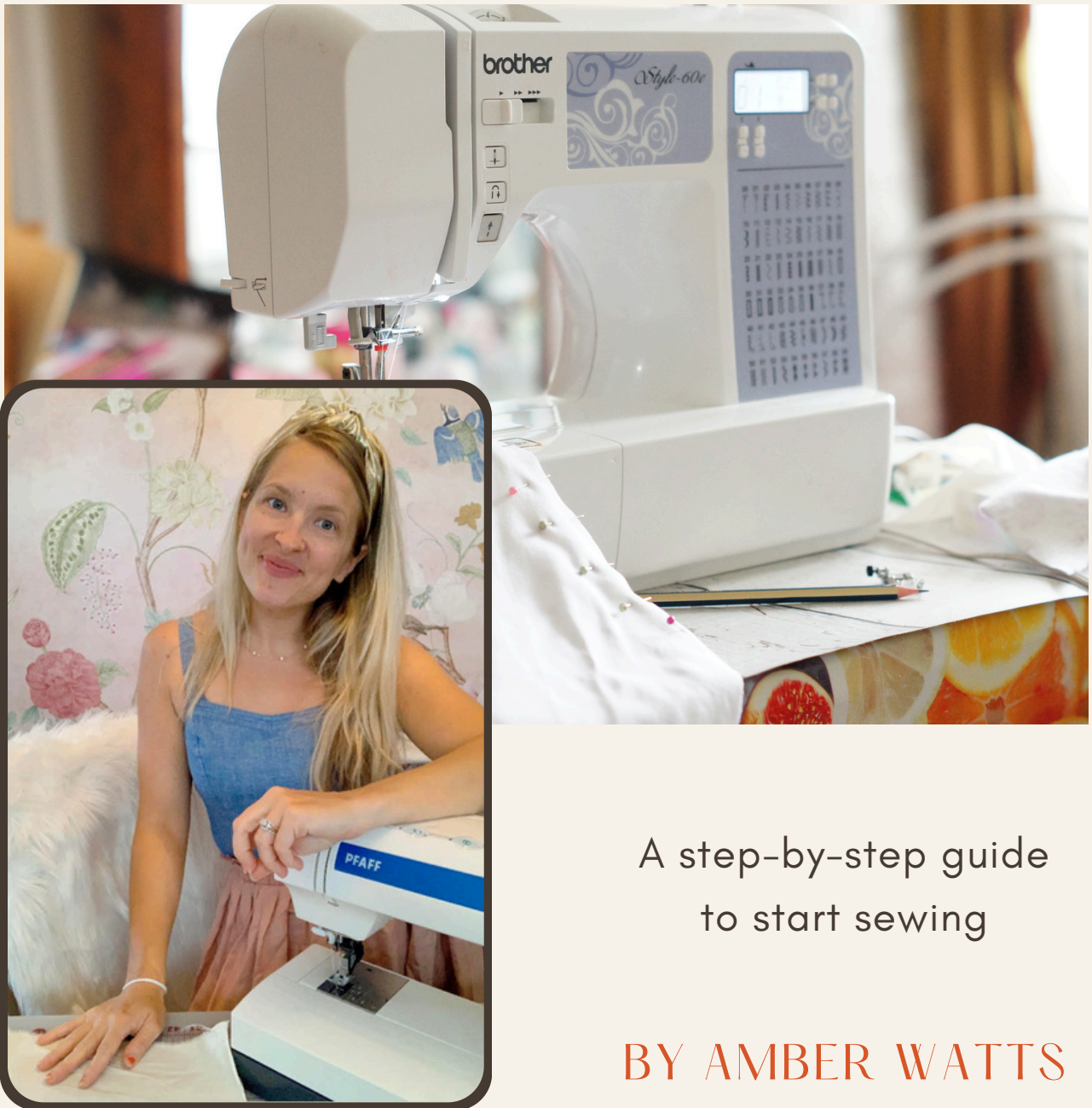


Mama Sew Tired

SEW CONFIDENT: A BEGINNER'S
QUICK-START

MINI GUIDE



A step-by-step guide
to start sewing

BY AMBER WATTS

1. Understanding the Basics of Sewing

What You Need to Start Sewing

Before you begin, gather the basic tools and materials. You don't need to break the bank, but having the right equipment will make the process much easier.



Essential Tools

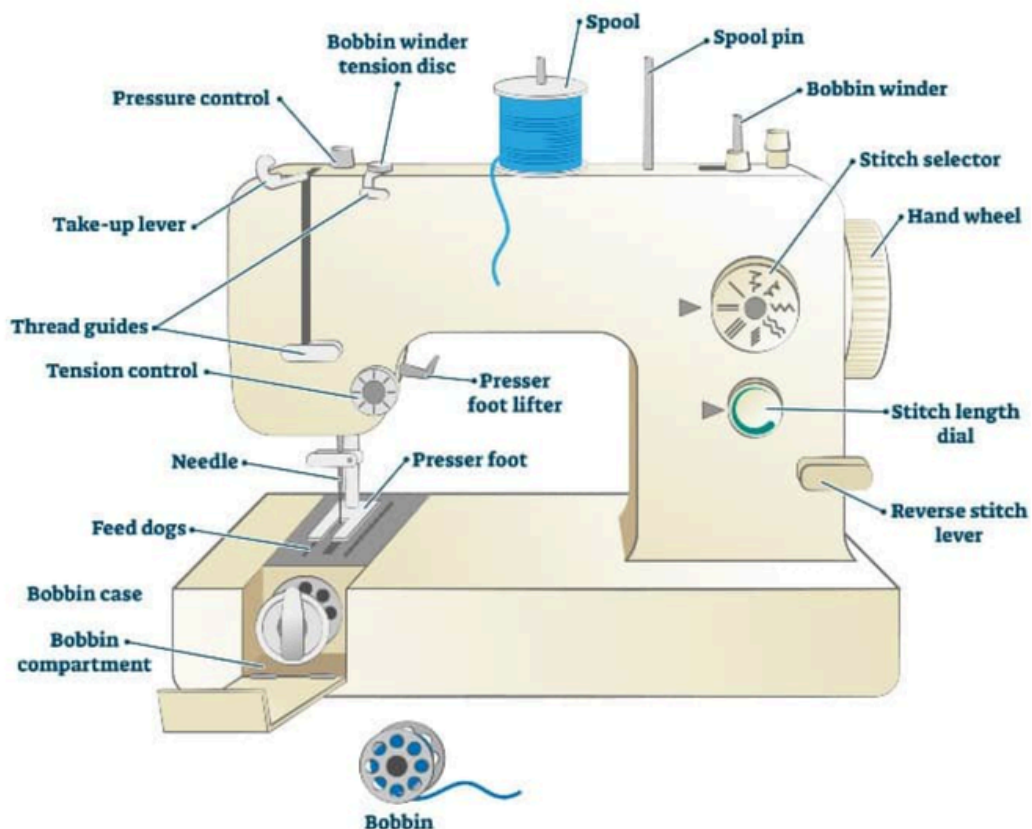
- **Sewing Machine:** You can start with a basic machine. Most machines come with a few built-in stitch options and a manual to help you set it up.
- **Fabric:** Choose a simple cotton or polyester fabric to begin with. These fabrics are forgiving and easy to work with.- Woven NOT stretch to start. NOTE * If you can't stretch the fabric it's a woven fabric.
- **Thread:** Choose thread that matches the fabric color. A general-100% all purpose polyester thread works for most fabrics. But the recommendation would be to match you quality of fabric to the same quality of thread- example cotton = cotton thread. NOTE* Poly thread is stronger then cotton
- **Needles:** Universal sewing machine needles (size 80/12) work well for beginners. Most machines will come with this
- **Pins:** These hold fabric pieces together while you sew.
- **Fabric clips:** Great for holder heaving fanrics together
- **Scissors:** Fabric shears + thread snips
- **Measuring Tape:** This helps you measure fabric and pattern pieces accurately.
- **Seam Ripper:** Mistakes happen—this tool is used to carefully remove stitches.
- **Iron & Ironing Board:** Pressing your fabric and seams is essential for neat work.

2. Setting Up Your Sewing Machine

Before you start sewing, it's essential to understand the basic parts of your sewing machine and how to use it. _ PLEASE keep your sewing machine manual on hand at all times.

Key Parts of a Sewing Machine:

- **Needle:** The part that holds the thread and stitches the fabric.
- **Bobbin:** A small spool of thread located under the needle plate, providing the second thread needed for stitches.
- **Presser Foot:** Holds the fabric in place while sewing.
- **Feed Dogs:** These feed the fabric through the machine as you sew.
- **Stitch Selector:** A dial or button that lets you choose different types of stitches (e.g., straight stitch, zigzag stitch).
- **Tension Dial:** Controls the tightness or looseness of the stitches.
- **Speed Control:** Allows you to sew at different speeds.





Steps for Setup:

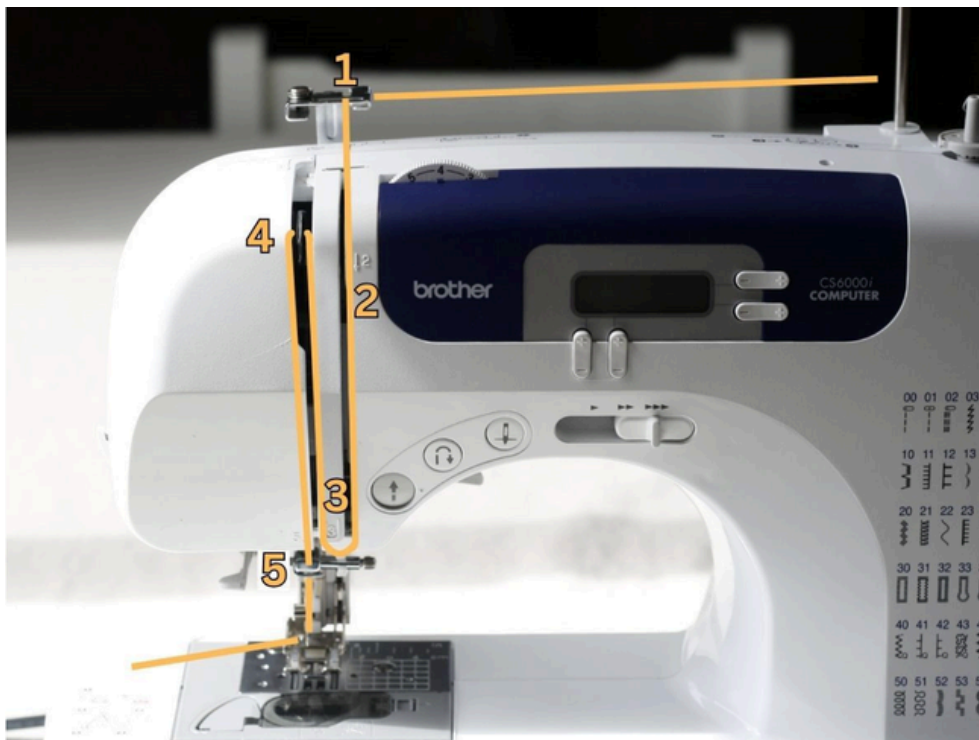
1. Thread the Machine: Follow the instructions in your sewing machine manual for threading the top thread and winding and inserting the bobbin.
2. Insert the Needle: Make sure it's inserted correctly, with the flat side facing the back of the machine.
3. Set the Stitch: Start with a basic straight stitch (usually denoted by a line with small dashes).
4. Test the Stitch: Run a test stitch on a scrap piece of fabric to make sure everything is working smoothly.

“A JOURNEY STARTS WITH ONE STEP”

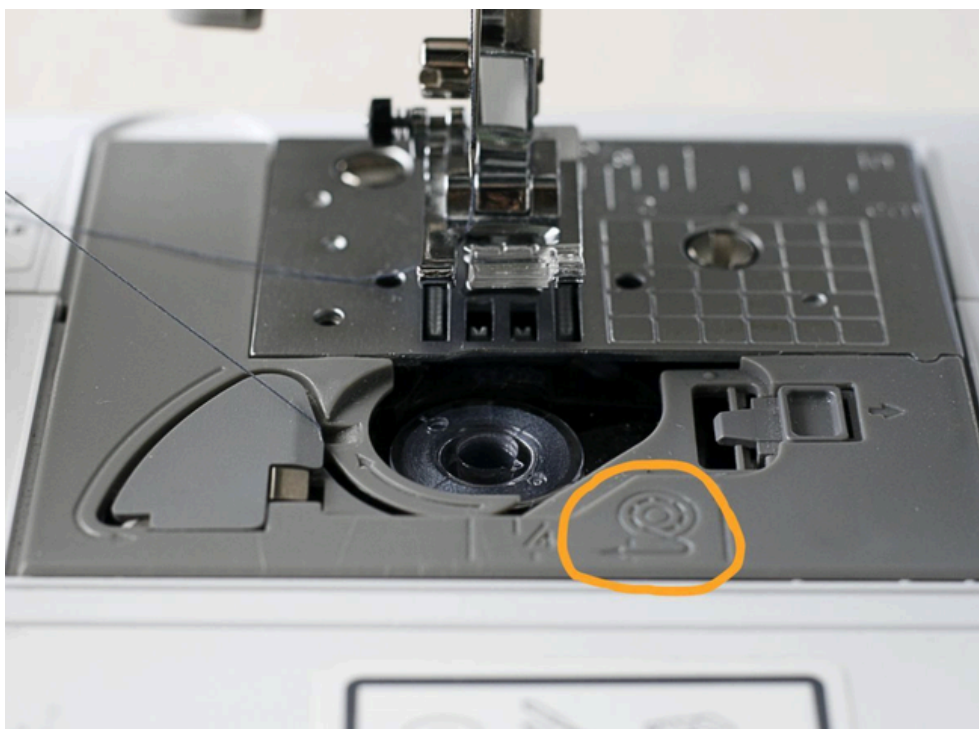
The more you rush the more you will have to re-do.

Threading your machine

All home sewing machines thread in similar ways. Please check your sewing machine manual to make sure you are following yours correctly. Below is an example of a beginner brother machine being threaded.



inserting the threaded bobbin below



Threading your machine

Step– By Step:

How to Thread a Sewing Machine (Top Thread)

1. Turn your machine OFF

Always start with the power off for safety.

2. Raise the presser foot

This opens the tension discs so the thread can seat properly (this step is important!).

3. Lift the needle to its highest position

Turn the hand wheel toward you until the needle is all the way up.

4. Place your thread spool on the spool pin

Secure it with the spool cap if your machine has one.

5. Follow the thread guide path

Pull the thread and:

- Guide it through the top thread guide
- Bring it down the first channel
- Loop it around the bottom
- Bring it back up the second channel

(Your machine usually has arrows printed on it to show this path.)

6. Thread the take-up lever

Hook the thread through the small metal arm at the top (this moves up and down when you sew).

7. Bring thread back down toward the needle

Guide it through any small hooks near the needle area.

8. Thread the needle

Pass the thread through the eye of the needle – usually front to back.

9. Pull extra thread through

Pull about 4–6 inches of thread behind the needle.

Threading your bobbin

Step– By Step:

Don't Forget the Bobbin!

If your machine isn't already loaded:

- Wind the bobbin.
- Insert it into the bobbin case (make sure thread pulls in the correct direction).
- Hold the top thread and turn the hand wheel toward you once to catch the bobbin thread.
- Pull both threads toward the back of the machine.

Quick Troubleshooting Tip:

If your stitches are loose or looping underneath, re-thread the top thread with the presser foot UP – 90% of tension issues come from this step being skipped.



Machine Basics to Understand— Stitches

1. Stitch Selector

This chooses the type of stitch your machine makes.

- Straight stitch → everyday seams
- Zigzag stitch → stretch fabrics + finishing edges
- Decorative stitches → design/detail

Think of this as “what kind of stitch do I want?”

2. Stitch Length

This controls how long or short each stitch is (front to back).

- Lower number = shorter, tighter stitches
- Higher number = longer, looser stitches

-- Standard: 2.5 (most sewing)

-- Short: 1-2: strong seams, curves (good for light weight fabrics)

-- Long 4-5: basting or gathering

Think: “how close together are my stitches?”

3. Stitch Width

This controls how wide the stitch goes side to side.

- 0 = straight line
- Higher number = wider zigzag or decorative stitch

Think: “does my needle move side to side?”

4. Tension

This controls how tight the threads pull together.

- Balanced tension = smooth stitches
- Too tight = fabric puckers
- Too loose = loops/loose threads

--Start around 4-5 (standard)

--Adjust based on fabric

Think: “are my stitches pulling evenly?”

Super Simple Way to Remember

- Stitch selector = type
- Length = distance
- Width = side-to-side
- Tension = tightness

Sewing Machine Recommendations

These are my favorite machines to teach beginners on

1.



SINGER Heavy Duty 4423

fast, sturdy, beginner-friendly mechanical machine

Pros- Comes with 23 built-in stitches

-needle threader

-Top-drop bobbin

-Adjustable presser foot pressure

GOOD for:

garments, home decor, quilting, and repairs

<https://amzn.to/3M6dHP6>

2.



Brother XR9550 Computerized Sewing and Quilting Machine

fast, sturdy, beginner-friendly mechanical machine

Pros- XL wide table gives support for wider projects

-needle threader

-3 speed control

-Top-drop bobbin

-8 quick-change presser feet (e.g., buttonhole, zipper, blind stitch, monogramming, quilting)

-lifetime technical support

GOOD for:

both clothesmaking and quilting very well

<https://amzn.to/3MoZuNc>

Sewing Machine Recommendations

These are my favorite machines to
teach beginners on

Best Overall to grow with

3.



PFAFF Select 4.2 Sewing Machine

it's about quality and control over quantity

Pros– Integrated Dual Feed (IDT™) System

–Integrated needle threader

–40 built–in stitches

–Sew slow control

GOOD for:

garments, home decor, quilting, and repairs

<https://shorturl.at/teQTZ>

ALL BLUE LINKS ARE MY AFFLIATE LINKS



3) Basic Sewing Techniques for Beginners

1-Straight Stitch

This is the most basic and commonly used stitch in sewing. It's perfect for sewing seams, hemming, and topstitching.

How to Sew a Straight Stitch:

- Place the fabric under the presser foot and lower the foot to hold the fabric in place. Lower the needle by the hand wheel (turning towards you) into the fabric.
- Start sewing by gently pressing the foot pedal (or using the hand wheel for slow, controlled stitching).
- Guide the fabric through the machine while keeping your hands steady on either side.- DO NOT push or pull the fabric into the machine.
- Keep your stitch length even and straight.
- At the end of the stitch, raise the needle with your hand wheel then raise the presser foot, and gently pull the fabric out of the machine.

1st PRACTICE :

Start with basic flat cotton and set your stitch length to 2.5, width to 0, and keep your needle in the center with the basic presser foot (sometimes- the one your machine comes with already on)



2-Backstitching

Backstitching secures your stitches at the beginning and end of a seam, preventing it from unraveling.

How to Backstitch:

- Start sewing a straight stitch, then press the reverse lever or button on your machine to sew a few stitches backward.
- After you've sewn in reverse, switch back to forward stitches to continue sewing.
- Backstitch at both the start and end of seams to lock them in place.



3-Pressing Seams

Proper pressing is crucial for professional-looking results. After sewing a seam, press it flat with an iron.

How to Press Seams:

- Open up the fabric and place it on the ironing board.
 - Press the seam flat with the iron (don't slide it back and forth).
 - Pressing helps set the stitches and gives your fabric a crisp, clean finish.
 - Make sure the setting matches your fabric
-



"Simplicity is the keynote
of all true elegance"

-COCO CHANEL

4-Hemming

Hemming is the process of finishing the edges of fabric to prevent fraying. It's especially useful when making clothing or home decor items.

How to Hem:

- Fold the fabric edge over twice (about 1/4 inch and then another 1/4 inch) to encase the raw edge.- or whatever measurement you prefer.
- Pin the hem in place, then sew along the folded edge using a straight stitch.
- Press the hem to set it in place.



4) Understanding Patterns & Measurements

Patterns are pre-made templates for cutting out fabric pieces for clothing, bags, or accessories. They can be purchased, or you can find free patterns online.



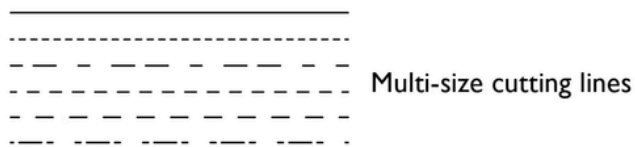
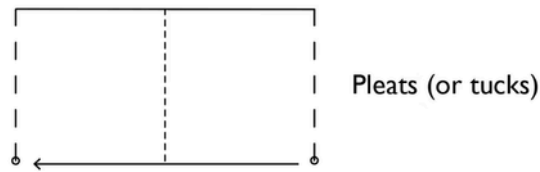
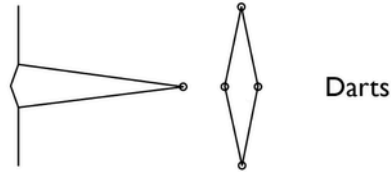
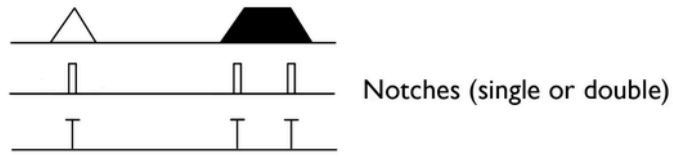
How to Read a Pattern:

- **Pattern Pieces:** Each piece will be labeled with instructions on how to cut them out and which fabric pieces they correspond to.
- **Seam Allowance:** This is the extra space beyond the edge of the fabric that you sew. It's usually 1/4 inch or 5/8 inch, but it should be specified in the pattern.
- **Grainline:** This indicates how the fabric should be aligned. It's important for ensuring the fabric stretches or hangs in the correct direction. 3 grainlines- Crossgrain (across the fabric edges), straight grain (straight with the edges of fabric), bias (45 degree across fabric). The selvages are the "edges of the fabric"
- **Cutting Instructions:** Follow the markings for how many pieces to cut and where the fabric folds (if necessary).

Taking Measurements:

- Always measure yourself or your project before cutting fabric. Common measurements for garments include bust, waist, hip, inseam, and neck circumference.

Common Pattern Marks



Step by Steps to Using a Pattern

Step 1: Look at the Pattern Envelope (Front)

The front usually shows:

- A drawing/photo of the finished garment
- Different views (A, B, C – small design variations)
- Basic info like skill level

Pick the view (version) you want to make.

Step 2: Check the Size Chart (Back of Envelope)

Do NOT pick your usual store size.

1. Measure yourself:

- Bust
- Waist
- Hips

2. Compare your measurements to the pattern size chart.

3. Choose the size that matches your measurements.

Tip: If you're between sizes, choose the larger one – you can adjust later.

Step 3: Check Fabric & Supplies

The back tells you:

- Fabric type (cotton, knit, linen, etc.)
- How much fabric you need
- Notions (zipper, buttons, elastic, etc.)

Make sure your fabric matches what the pattern recommends.

Step 4: Read the Instruction Sheet First

Before cutting anything:

- Read ALL instructions once.
- Look at the "Glossary" section.
- Notice symbols and sewing terms.

Step by Steps to Using a Pattern

Common terms:

- RST = Right Sides Together
- SA (Seam allowance) = Extra fabric for sewing
- Notches = Small marks to match pieces

Step 5: Understand the Pattern Pieces

Each piece has:

- A number
- A name (e.g., Front Bodice)
- Cutting instructions (Cut 1 on fold, Cut 2, etc.)
- Arrows (grainline – very important!)

Grainline arrow = Place parallel to fabric's edge (selvage).

Step 6: Follow the Cutting Layout

The instructions show how to place pieces on fabric.

1. Fold fabric correctly.
2. Place pieces following the layout diagram.
3. Pin and cut carefully.
4. Transfer markings (notches, darts, etc.).

Step 7: Follow Sewing Steps in Order

Patterns go in a logical order, usually:

1. Sew small pieces first (darts, pockets)
2. Join main pieces
3. Add sleeves/collar
4. Finish edges and hem

Work step by step – don't skip ahead.

5. Simple Sewing Projects for Beginners



- 1. Pillowcase**

A great introduction to sewing, it requires basic straight stitching and hemming.

 - Materials: Fabric, thread, scissors, pins.
 - Instructions: Cut the fabric into a rectangle, fold the edges to create a hem, then sew around the edges.

- 2. Tote Bag**

Tote bags are simple to make and only require straight stitching, making them perfect for beginners.

 - Materials: Fabric, sewing machine, thread, pins.
 - Instructions: Cut two rectangles for the bag body and two strips for handles. Sew the sides and bottom, then attach the handles.



This bag is one of the projects that I teach in step by step in videos in my MST beginner sewing course

5. Simple Sewing Projects for Beginners



3. Simple Skirt

A beginner skirt is a great way to learn about gathering fabric and using elastic.

- Materials: Fabric, elastic waistband, sewing machine, thread, pins.
- Instructions: Cut the fabric to your waist and length measurements, sew the side seams, and create a simple casing for the elastic waistband. Make sure to add width to waist measurement so it creates fullness


2. Pencil Case or Pouch

Start with a small, functional project like a zippered pouch or a simple make up bag. These can teach you basic construction and finishing techniques.

- Materials: Fabric- cotton. I like heavier weight for this project, thread and basic zipper
- Instructions: Cut one rectangle, open and sew zipper to each short side of rectangle (can use a regular presser foot or an invisible presser foot). Sew up long sides and your done!



This bag is one of the projects that I teach in step by step in videos in my MST beginner sewing course



“ Walt Disney: "All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them"

6. Tips for Success

- **Take It Slow:** Sewing can be a bit tricky at first. Take your time to learn the steps and don't rush.
- **Practice on Scraps:** Always practice on scrap fabric before starting your main project to get a feel for the machine.
- **Keep Your Machine Clean:** Regularly clean your machine to ensure it works properly and to avoid skipped stitches.- You can use pipe cleaners to dust/ clean inside.
- **Don't Be Afraid to Make Mistakes:** Mistakes are part of the learning process. Use a seam ripper to fix errors and try again.
- **Watch Video Tutorials:** I actually made a full beginner sewing course dedicated to this!

If you learn best by seeing it done, I guide you step-by-step on video from setup to finished projects, sewing right alongside you. Includes both machine + hand sewing projects so you can start creating right away!

Check it out :

<https://www.mamasewtired.com/beginnerssewingcourse>

Sewing Machine Needle & Stitch length chart

Fabric Type	Needle Type	Needle Size (US / Metric)	Recommended Stitch Length
Chiffon / Organza	Microtex (Sharp)	60/8 – 70/10	1.5 – 2.0
Silk	Microtex or Universal	60/8 – 70/10	2.0
Cotton (lightweight)	Universal	70/10 – 80/12	2.0 – 2.5
Cotton (medium)	Universal	80/12	2.5
Cotton (heavy)	Universal	90/14	2.5 – 3.0
Linen	Universal or Sharp	80/12 – 90/14	2.5 – 3.0
Denim / Jeans	Denim	90/14 – 100/16	3.0
Canvas / Duck	Denim	100/16 – 110/18	3.0 – 3.5
Wool (light–medium)	Universal	80/12 – 90/14	2.5 – 3.0
Knits (Jersey)	Ballpoint or Stretch	75/11 – 90/14	2.5 (use stretch stitch if possible)
Sweatshirt / French Terry	Ballpoint	90/14	2.5 – 3.0
Spandex / Lycra	Stretch	75/11 – 90/14	2.0 – 2.5
Fleece	Ballpoint	90/14	3.0
Leather (thin)	Leather	80/12 – 90/14	3.0
Leather (thick)	Leather	100/16	3.5 – 4.0
Vinyl	Leather	90/14 – 100/16	3.0 – 3.5
Upholstery Fabric	Heavy Duty	100/16 – 110/18	3.0 – 4.0
Tulle / Netting	Universal or Microtex	70/10	2.0

Quick Rules of Thumb

- Fine fabric → small needle + short stitch
- Thick fabric → large needle + longer stitch
- Knits → ballpoint or stretch needle (never sharp!)
- Leather & vinyl → longer stitches only (holes are permanent)

7. Ready For More?

Check out my step-by-step digital sewing course with easy-to-follow video lessons—perfect for visual learners and anyone who wants gentle, hands-on guidance.

It's the same course I teach my in-person students, with 4 patterns and projects included,

<https://www.mamasewtired.com/beginnerssewingcourse>



Follow me on my social pages:

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amber@mamasewtired.com

Thank you!

HAPPY SEWING!

I'd absolutely love to see what you create!

Tag me on social media or send me an email so I can celebrate your beautiful work with you.
