Sewing 101
A Step by Step Guide to Sewing Basics

By: Mavis Cox
FOREWARD

Hello and welcome to ‘Sewing 101 A Step by Step Guide to Sewing Basics’. First of all I would like to say thank you very much for purchasing this book, as it is the culmination of a lifetime spent doing all kinds in handicraft throughout my long life!

As a young girl who learnt to sew from my mother, and embroider from my grandmother, so my sewing knowledge extends over more decades than I truly care to think about. And throughout these many years I’ve seen how general interest in sewing has changed as well.

When I was a young girl, it was very common for the women and young girls in the family to learn and use sewing around the home. It was passed on from one generation to the next. However, I’ve also seen in my latter years how working families have not had the time needed to learn sewing the way I did, and how convenience has led them to purchase over the shop counter. And during that time sewing machines have also been modernized from the treadle-style machines that I used for many, many years.

For a long time now I’ve had friends and family suggest that I should write down some of my experience for the sake of the many people that have missed the hands-on education that I received as a young girl. Now, after all these years, I’ve finally done just that!
Perhaps you are just starting out on that journey that I did all those years ago. Let me tell you, no matter what age you are, you are never too old to learn something new. So even if you are half my age or more, and think it’s too late, then think again!

In ‘Sewing 101 A Step by Step Guide to Sewing Basics’, I've given you much of the basics that you will need to get started in no time at all. Like anything, you just need to take things one-at-a-time, and build upon the simple successes before you attempt to get too far ahead of yourself.

I've explained what I think you need to know, plus given you a bit of background history about sewing in parts as well. Be sure to read every word in order to make the most out of this book.

I would also want you to know that you will be entitled to free updates to the book as they occur. Please use this information to sew the seeds of your new future, so that you too can be making the latest quality garments to your exact requirements.

Imagine how you will feel when people compliment you on what you are wearing or how you’ve furnished your home? That’s what happened to me, and I ended up making garments for others after they saw what I had done for myself and my family.

As I keep saying, I've had so much enjoyment from sewing that I hope that my book can do the same for you in return.

Best wishes,

Mavis Cox
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## SEWING MACHINES

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## BUYING A SEWING MACHINE

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INTRODUCTION

Sewing has been around as long as life. Cave people would sharpen bones to stitch leather and fur and from there, the world of sewing has exploded. The great thing about sewing is that anyone can do it, regardless of age or gender. With a little instruction and practice, you can make clothing, textiles, gifts, or whatever you like. In truth, when it comes to sewing, the possibilities are endless.

In this book, I will cover some of the basics to help beginners get started while also providing some tips and techniques that would benefit even the best of the best. This book covers interesting facts about sewing, some information on history, information as to the best type of needle to use for various fabrics, which sewing machine is best for a specific use, and so on.

Sewing is a great pastime, something people can do to relax, a type of therapy if you will. For other people, they sew as an excellent way of saving money. Today’s cost of raising families is high but by learning to sew, you can find great fabrics for pennies on the dollar and make the most up-to-date fashions. Another benefit to sewing is making your own shower curtains, table runners, tablecloths, and other home accessories.

Sewing is also a great way to make beautiful gifts, something perfect for Christmas, birthdays, anniversaries, or just because. Finally, sewing for some people can become a profitable career. The costumes worn in stage productions, Las Vegas shows, weddings, etc, are sown by experts in the industry. As you can see, when it comes to sewing, there are multiple options from simple pleasure to an income-making career.

Thank you for buying my book and I am confident you will feel much more confident in your sewing abilities after reading it! Here’s to your first and next sewing project!
NOTIONS, NOTIONS, AND MORE NOTIONS

Whether sewing by hand or with a sewing machine, you need needles, thread, thimbles, and scissors - all things known as “notions.” In this chapter, I will break down the notions used for people who sew by hand and those who prefer a machine.

SEWING BY HAND

The notions listed below are used when hand sewing. Choosing the right needle and the right thread may sound like nothing important but in fact, sewing with the right notions will make a huge difference in not just how the project goes but how the projects looks when finished.

Needles

One of the most important decisions is choosing the right needle. If the wrong needle is used on certain fabrics, it will tear, leave holes, or simply make the finished project look sloppy. Obviously, you would not be able to use a small needle on denim fabric just as you would not use a large needle on gentle fabric such as silk.

When buying needles, you always want to buy quality. Even if you pay a little more, this will ensure the tip is perfect and sharp and the needle made well to avoid breakage. As you shop, remember that needles will come in sizes from 1 to 10 and vary from fine to thick. Remember, the smaller the number the longer and thicker it will be.
If you have trouble threading a needle, you can always purchase a needle threader, which makes the process a breeze.

- **Ballpoint** – Considered an all-purpose choice, great for hand sewing or hemming knit material. The tip is rounded so it goes between thread and not through.

- **Beading** – Used for attaching small pearls or beads to fabric. The design is long, fine, and has a small round eye.

- **Between** – The Between is an in-between with a shorter style that works well for fine stitching on heavier type fabric.

- **Calyx-Eyed Sharp** – The design is open at the top with two eyes, which makes it easy to thread. Also known as “Self Threading”, this needle is perfect for people with poor eyesight or those who simply have difficulty threading a regular needle.

- **Chenille** – Designed for ribbon or heavy embroidery. The needle design is short and thick, and has a large eye with an extra sharp tip.

- **Darning** – Typically used for mending holes in woven fabrics. The Darning needle is large in diameter and generally longer than a standard type needle.

- **Doll** – Used for working on soft sculpture dolls and for creating facial features. The Doll needle is sold in sizes up to six inches long.

- **Embroidery** – Also known as “Crewel”, this needle is very much like Sharps but with a longer eye to make threading easier. The Embroidery needle is easy to use for a number of projects.
- Leather – The Leather needle is also called “glover” and used for piercing leather, vinyl, and suede. The needle is long with a strong, wedge tip.

- Milliners – Used primarily for millinery and basting, the design is longer than most needles.

- Sharps – Medium length and used for general type sewing projects.

- Tapestry – Designed for loosely woven fabric. The design is short with a blunt tip.

- Upholstery – Used on thick, tightly woven upholstery fabrics and for quilting projects. The Upholstery needle comes in a curved or straight design.

The key with choosing the right needle is to make sure the needle is small enough so it can penetrate the fabric without causing any stretching. In addition, you want the needle to be large enough so the needle works well with the chosen thread.

To ensure you buy the right size, check the package for the type and size. Once you know the type of needle needed, you can buy multi-packs that will save you money overall. Finally, when hand sewing, to keep from being pricked with the needle you can wear a thimble to protect your fingers.
**Thread**

Just as you choose the right needle for your sewing project, it is important you also choose the right thread. Different types and weights of fabric will require a specific type of thread.

This section will provide you the various options so you know exactly the type of thread to use for your project. Keep in mind that while one brand of thread is not necessarily better than another, there are differences. However, you probably want to avoid the cheap polyester type threads in that they are lower quality and difficult to use.

In addition to your standard threads, as you will see below, you can also purchase a wide range of specialty threads that are used for embellishment. The most important thing to remember when sewing is that you want the finished look of your seam to look clean and crisp. The wrong needle will make your seams pucker, snag, or pull, giving them a poor finished appearance.

Finally, the threads listed are the same for hand sewing or machine use. Therefore, this particular section will cover both.

- **Beading** – Used to apply bead work or other adornment by hand. Beading thread is a fine filament that is beautiful, elegant, yet strong.

- **Boucle** – Popular for couching and knitting, Boucle is a textured yarn that is sold in both cotton and rayon.
- Braid – Used for cross-stitch, knitting, needlepoint, or surface embellishment, this thread is flat or round.

- Buttonhole Twist – Great for fine detail and machine top-stitching.

- Chenille – Ideal for decorative edging. The strands are velvet-like and come in both cotton and rayon.

- Cording – Great for decorative edging, top-stitching, crochet, knitting, and weaving.

- Cotton – Cotton thread comes in a number of types with Egyptian being the best as far as smoothness and strength. Cotton is used for everyday projects by hand or on the machine and is available in a multitude of colors.

- Embroidery Floss – Used primarily for hand stitching of embroidery, smocking, tapestry, cross-stitch, and hardanger. The Embroidery Floss is also commonly used for machine couching decoration. This type of thread is available in cotton, rayon, and silk.

- Lingerie – This type of thread is supple and braided, designed to stretch with fine fabrics often used for lingerie.

- Metallic – Usually used for appliqué, cross-stitch, couching, decorative serger projects, and quilting. The sparkling colors of Metallic thread add character to designs.

- Nylon – With Nylon thread, you want good quality and the softest, thinnest you can find. The best choice is one listed as “.004 – 100% polyester monofilament.” This thread is very pliable and nice for knits.
- **Polyester** – Choose a well-spun polyester thread to make threading and sewing easier. The downfall to polyester thread is that as cotton fabric ages, it can become abrasive, causing breakage. Even so, polyester is considered pliable and a good, all-purpose thread.

- **Rayon** – Commonly used for machine embroidery, monogramming, or decorative serger edging and by hand, for cross-stitch or embroidery.

- **Silk** – Nice for delicately woven fabrics. Silk thread has more give than cotton so if you want a nice, lightweight thread for delicate fabrics that give, choose silk thread.

- **Upholstery** – Used on thick, tightly woven upholstery fabrics and for quilting projects. The Upholstery needle comes in a curved or straight design.

When choosing your thread, just keep in mind that you want the thread to be similar in fiber content to the chosen fabric. While you can try a number of thread types, the most common include cotton, polyester, and a cotton/polyester blend.

In addition to fiber content, you want thread that matches the dominant color of your fabric. If you have a color that is difficult to match, then choose thread that is one to two shades darker than the dominant color since lighter shades would stick out like a sore thumb.

If your fabric is light to medium weight with little to no stretch, then a cotton thread would be your best choice. However, if the fabric has stretch, you will find that the cotton thread breaks. Instead, for fabrics with stretch, the
polyester thread is best. The one thing to remember is that polyester thread will leave a somewhat waxy or shiny finished look.

For most sewing projects, whether by hand or on a sewing machine, the best thread is labeled as “all-purpose”. Typically, this is a cotton thread wrapped with polyester thread, meaning it works well on just about every fabric type. All-purpose thread is found in every color imaginable so matching fabrics is never a problem.

Now, if you are working with delicately woven or thin fabrics, then a silk or cotton thread would be your best choice. On the other hand, if you have a sewing project that needs strength and durability in the stitch, you want “heavy duty” thread. This would include fabrics such as upholstery, denim, and even some heavier linen.

When buying patterns, you can look on the back of the package to see what type of fabric and thread the manufacturer recommends. Generally following this guideline will be the best decision. Always remember that most of the all-purpose threads have a 50 weight, which is considered medium weight. The higher the number goes the finer the thread will be.
SEWING BY MACHINE

While some of the more experienced sewers enjoy creating beautiful designs by hand, the majority of people who take up or already sew will use a sewing machine or at least a combination of both. Further in the book, I will discuss the best type of sewing machine to buy based on the type of sewing projects you plan to do.

Needles

When it comes to needles for your sewing machine, the most important thing is to check your machine’s manual to determine the type of needle recommended by the manufacturer. While you will find some needles are considered universal, meaning they will work well with just about any type of sewing machine, some machines need very specific brands and types.

The right needle size is determined by the weight of the fabric you will be using for your project. Needles for sewing machines are numbered, which can vary depending on the brand and whether the needle is the U.S. or European system. Again, check the pattern packaging to determine the correct size and be sure to change your needle based on the type of fabric being used.

- Ball-Point – The design has a rounded point that works well on knit fabrics. With this needle, it actually pushes the yarn aside rather than piercing through it, which can be damaging.
• Sharp-Pointed – The needle is tapered and designed specifically for knits and woven fabrics.

• Twin and Triple – The twin needles are two needles joined while the triple needles are three needles joined, both with a common shank or body. Typically, this needle style is used for decorative or straight stitches.

• Universal Ball-Point – Made for knits and woven fabrics, the needle has a special taper design.

• Wedge – The point is wedge shaped and designed for leather or leatherette fabric.

**Thread**

Thread used in sewing machines is no different from thread used for hand sewing projects. Therefore, refer to the list provided above.

**MISCELLANEOUS NOTIONS**

To make your job easier when sewing, there are other miscellaneous notions to consider. While not all of these are mandatory, they can help you through the various processes of sewing.

**Beeswax**

Beeswax is often used for sewing on buttons.

**Buttonhole Scissors**
If you plan to create buttonholes, then a good pair of buttonhole scissors would be desired. These scissors are designed with a set screw that does not allow the scissor blade from cutting beyond the desired length.

**Bodkin**

This small tool resembles a pair of tongs that are used for threading cording, elastic, or ribbon through a fabric casing.

**Buttonhole Chisel**

This sharp blade is sold with a small block of wood. The wood sits beneath the buttonhole while cutting, providing an easy and fast way to cut out straight, clean buttonhole openings.

**Dress Form**

If you are a serious sewer, a dress form can be very beneficial. With this, you want one that can be sized or adjusted.

**Electric Scissors**

Fairly new on the market, a good pair of electric scissors makes the job of cutting out patterns much faster while producing clean lines.
Embroidery/Sewing Scissors

This type of scissor is great for precision work such as clipping threads, cutting buttonholes, and so on. Embroidery and sewing scissors are designed with two sharp points and are best in a four to five-inch length.

Emery Bag

This is used to remove rust and sharpen needles. Just remember that you should never store needles in emery since it can damage the finish.

Fabric Glue

Fabric glue is an excellent solution for basting or pinning fabric. Although you could use a glue stick for temporary holding, fabric glue is specially designed to provide a permanent type stitching, ideal for fabrics such as felt, leather, vinyl, and even trim.

Fasteners

This would include things such as zippers, elastic, buttons, snaps, hooks, etc.

Flexible Ruler

This see-through ruler has markings for eighth of an inch grid. With this, you can place the ruler over the edge so you can see what you are marking on the fabric.
French Curve

To help re-draw curved lines after adjusting your pattern, this tool is excellent. You can also use a French Curve as a guide when you transfer curved lines with a tracing wheel and paper.

Hem Maker

For some people, making a clean hem seems impossible. With a hem maker, you get an accurate line every time. You will find a number of different options such as chalk and bulb but the one that uses pins tends to be the favorite and most accurate.

Loop Tuner

A loop tuner is used for turning bias binding and inserting cord into the casing or tubing.

Magnetic Seam Guide

With this, you can be sure you have an even seam line while stitching.
Pincushion

A pincushion comes in several styles. You can choose one that simply sits on the sewing table or one that can be worn around the wrist. Regardless of the type chosen, they are used to hold your pins.

Pinking/Scalloping Shears

To finish your seams, a 7 1/2-inch pinking or scalloping shears work best.

Point Press

A point press is used to press seams open in the points of lapels and collars.

Press Cloth

Since the majority of fabric types become shiny when ironed, a dampened press cloth will provide more steam. With this, you avoid getting the shiny look and just nice, crisp edges.

Iron

During the process of setting up your pattern and just before stitching, there will be many times when you need to press. A good dry/steam iron should always be on hand.

Replacement Needles
Because needles, especially those used for hand sewing, become dull in time, it is important to keep replacement needles handle. This will make the stitching process so much easier while keeping the thread from fraying and the material from snagging.

**Rotary Cutter**

This sewing tool is used to cut fabric. The rotary cutter resembles a pizza cutter, consisting of a handle and thin, round, sharp blade. Be sure to use your rotary cutter only on a cutting mat to help extend the life of the blade. You can buy this tool in small, medium, and large.

**Scissors**

Just as with shears, every person who sews needs a good pair of tailor point and/or five-inch embroidery scissors. These scissors are great for hand sewing and perfect for snipping and trimming.

**Seam Ripper**

Everyone needs a sharp seam ripper. You can use this small tool for ripping out seams, hems, or cutting machine created buttonholes.

**Shears**

Every person who sews should have at least one good pair of shears. Used for sewing projects, shears help keep the fabric flat during
cutting. While you can choose the length that fits best in your hand, most people go with a seven or eight-inch length. The key with shears is that you need to keep them sharp.

**Short Ruler**

A short ruler is ideal for marking your buttonholes and hems.

**Sleeve Board**

A sleeve board helps in pressing the seams for sleeves and other places on the garment difficult to reach. Just be sure you choose a board that is well padded.

**Straight Pins**

These pins are used for pinning on patterns, hemming up a garment, marking darts, and so on. Be sure you choose a good brand that is rustproof. Most often, a number 17 is used and you can choose from plain or plastic heads. In addition, straight pins come in magnetic wire, extra thin, and extra long.

**Tailor’s Chalk**

Tailor’s chalk has been used for years and is a clay chalk that helps with transferring pattern markings to your fabric.

**Tape Measure**
When sewing, you need a good tape measure that can be placed on fabric to ensure accuracy.

**Thimble**

Typically used for hand sewing, a thimble fits snugly on the middle finger. When it comes to thimbles, there are many different styles. For example, the metal thimble is available in both open and closed end, which works great for long fingernails.

Leather thimbles are usually made from soft, sturdy leather with a metal pad inside for pushing needles through. This type of thimble is primarily used by quilters.

**Thimble Pads**

Thimble pads are made from plastic or leather and have an adhesive back to protect fingers. Some people do not like the feel of an actual thimble but find thimble pads to be very comfortable and easy to work with.

**Third Hand**

This is also known as a clamp or bird and used for holding things while sewing. The tool has a spring-closed clip that can easily be attached to a sewing table. With the clip, you can fasten fabric while working the sewing machine with your other “two hands.”
Thread Clippers

These small scissors are sharp with blades that can be held open with a spring mechanism. The benefit to thread clippers is that because of their small size, they can easily be held while still sewing.

Threader

Again, needle threaders are inexpensive and can save a person tons of frustration. Whether using a hand needle or machine needle, you can find several different types of threaders. In addition, if you have a snag on the wrong side of your fabric, a needle threader can help pull it through!

Tracing Paper/Wheel

To transfer patterns onto fabric, you can use tracing paper and a tracing wheel. The paper is available in a number of colors and the wheel is designed with teeth so marking is visible.

Trimmers

Trimmers are usually six to seven inches in length and great for clipping loose threads, trimming seams, and all-purpose use.
Yardstick

A yardstick is an excellent tool for measuring. People who sew have been using a yardstick for generations, finding it helps when measuring from the floor to a hemline or whenever a grain line needs to be extended.
ORGANIZATION

Any person who has sewn will tell you that good organization makes the project far more enjoyable. As you lay fabric, the pattern, scissors, pins, and so on down, you will find they become lost very quickly. A few simple steps can help keep you organized so you do not spend wasted time trying to find things.

**Baskets**

Baskets of all shapes and sizes make great sewing organizers. You can store patterns, thimbles, needles, ruler, scissors, whatever you like.

**Bookcases**

If you have an unused bookcase around the house, you can place your storage containers or baskets on the shelves. Left open or a curtain attached to a spring rod would be ideal for hiding your goodies.

**Floss Boxes**

Most people who sew agree that organizing buttons is one of the bigger challenges. One of the best options is to purchase plastic floss boxes. These have small compartments for separation and can be purchased at most home, notion, or fabric stores.
**Peg Board**

A peg board can be installed on the wall and used for keeping sewing tools organized. You can purchase clip on hangers that will store your rotary cutters, tape measures, lint rollers, scissors, and so on.

**Stackable Boxes**

Another excellent option for storage is clear, stackable boxes such as those used for shoes. These are great for fabric remnants, notions, patterns, etc.

**Thread Organizer**

Keeping the types and color of thread organized in drawers or containers is a huge help. Just be sure the storage is covered to eliminate the build-up of dust.

**Stackable Boxes**

Another excellent option for storage is clear, stackable boxes such as those used for shoes or decorative boxes as shown in the photograph. These are great for fabric remnants, notions, patterns, etc. and best of all, they are very affordable.
ALL ABOUT PATTERNS

Walking into a fabric shop and looking at patterns is downright fun. However, because the pictures are so alluring, many beginners will simply grab something they like and not give much consideration to the level of difficulty. In this chapter, I will provide you with some good rules and tips to follow when it comes to choosing sewing patterns. Remember, patterns are the same whether sewn by hand or with a sewing machine.

CHOOSING YOUR PATTERN

On the pattern package you will find both picture and written description of the design. This information will include all the details needed when making your decision.

Level of Difficulty

In most cases, the front of the pattern will tell you if the pattern is “easy” or “more advanced.” Pay close attention to this! If you are just starting out, you definitely want the easy pattern. Keep in mind that just because a pattern is labeled “easy” that does not mean you are giving up on quality, fashion, or even a little challenge.

Generally, an “easy” pattern simply means fewer pieces and that the design is a little more straightforward. As you advance in your sewing skills and have tackled a few easy projects with success, you can then turn your sights on a little more difficult pattern.
Some people who have been sewing for 20 years will continue choosing the easy patterns simply because they enjoy them so do not shy away just because of the word “easy.” Instead, focus on the garment design itself and whether it works with the type of fabric you had in mind.

**Size**

On the front of the pattern will be listed the size or sizes the pattern will fit. For example, if you were looking to make a woman’s shirt, the size might say “10-12” or “Large.” Then on the back side of the pattern would be a specific breakdown for bust, length, etc.

When choosing a pattern based on size, it is essential that you have accurate measurements. When taking measurements, be sure they are taken wearing good-fitting undergarments. You want the tape measure to be snug but not overly tight. One mistake that many beginners make is adding inches to create a looser fit. Instead, choose a larger pattern or one that is labeled “loose fit.”

It is also important that you carefully read the size chart since patterns do not follow the same standards for size as what you would get with ready-to-wear items. Therefore, read the measurement chart for each pattern since that too can vary even within the same brand. Finally, make sure you compare sizes if you are buying a European pattern in that the sizes between the U.S. and Europe are different.
Fabric

On the back of the pattern will be the recommended fabric. Be sure to think about the fabric's characteristics specific to that pattern so you will have a good idea of how the finished garment will drape or fit.

In addition to the suggested fabrics, patterns will usually have a list of fabrics that would definitely not work well for that pattern. If you have your heart set on a particular type of fabric, you may need to choose a different pattern.

Design

Many patterns will include the same basic garment design with several variations. For instance, if you were looking at a woman’s skirt pattern, you might see the same skirt in varying lengths or for a blouse, a pattern that included the same blouse design but with short sleeves, long sleeves, a collar or no collar, and so on. The benefit here is that you get many different patterns all in one.

Price

The price of patterns has not changed much over the years. Today, you can still pick up a brand name pattern for less than $3. If you really want a bargain, check out eBay and perform a search for “patterns.” Generally, you can find several in one auction for $1. In addition, most fabric and sewing centers have regular sales so keep your eyes open.
Line Drawings

Most pattern packages have illustrations. While the picture on the front of the package is very helpful, the line drawings will make it easier to see the details of the pattern. Many times, the outside picture looks easy but then after scanning the line drawings, you begin to see the true level of difficulty.

Hand Drafting

For the more advanced sewer, you can try your hand at this type of pattern. Most often you would need to take a course at your local community college or you can purchase books on the process. With this, you learn how to create your own patterns. One woman became so good that she would simply use brown grocery bags or newspapers and create amazing designs.

Silhouette Key

Today, most patterns have a row of symbols that would include circle, rectangle, triangle, etc. on the back side of the package. These keys are used to distinguish the body type that particular pattern will work best for.
Brand

You will find a number of excellent pattern brands, companies that have been in business for a very long time. The interesting thing is that different brands make different style and body type patterns. Therefore, if you try a Simplicity pattern but find that McCall’s works best, then stick with what you like.

With patterns, there are few things you can do to ensure you pick the best for what you need. First, have some type of idea on the type of garment you want to sew, the way you want it to fit, the type of fabric you prefer, and the level of difficulty. With this, you can then spend a little time scouring through the different patterns to find one that matches your idea.

You also want to visualize both fit and style. Most people know the style of clothing that looks best them. Therefore, while you might be drawn into the latest trend, if that trend is not something that complements your body type and size, why bother. Instead, focus on what you know is your best and choose patterns accordingly.

Another important thing is to understand fabrics. With so many choices on the market today, it is easy to get confused. However, start by having a good idea of the type of fabric you want and then choose the pattern to match. Although the expensive designer fabric may be beautiful, is it something you will actually work with and wear. Buy wisely and remember that fabrics such as knits can be a real bear to handle.

Probably the most important aspect of choosing your pattern is to not get in over your head. People often buy a difficult level pattern, convinced that if they take their time and follow the directions, it will be fine. Unfortunately, they begin laying
out the pattern and after cutting a few pieces, are totally lost. Just as with learning to drive a car, start out slow, gain experience, and then advance.

**LAYING OUT YOUR PATTERN**

Most fabrics should be washed prior to lying out and cutting the pattern. This will eliminate any problems with shrinkage. Once washed, take a few minutes to press the fabric so it is crisp and easier to work with. Next, you will need to refer to the instructions on your pattern to determine the exact pieces you will need. Remember, most patterns come in a number of styles so you need to choose the right pieces for the clothing item you want to make.

Separate these pieces out and then cut them on the appropriate line. Keep in mind that each pattern piece will have sizes so when cutting, follow the line that matches the desired size. In addition, there will be triangle or half triangle shapes, which are notches. With these, you need to cut them outward so you have a notch that goes out from the line. This will be used for matching pieces of fabric up.

You now need to determine how the pieces will be laid out. Fold your fabric so the right sides are together, along a single lengthwise or crosswise thread as shown in the layout diagram. The purpose of this is so any markings can be made on the wrong side of the fabric. In other words, if you need to use a fabric pen or chalk, rather than marking the front side, you would only be marking the underside that no one will see.
For the next step, place the fabric on a flat surface, making sure the edges line up evenly. Again, it is important you pay close attention to any special symbols on the layout diagraph, which will be discussed in the pattern instructions. As an example, you might see a note that one of the pieces should be laid out face down instead of face up.

The next step involves laying the pattern out on the fabric and pinning the larger pieces together first. Follow this by pinning the smaller pieces. Try to place all of the pieces as close as you can on the fabric without overlapping them. This way, you can get all of the pieces cut out and not come up short on material. Look for the grain line arrow found on pattern pieces, showing that this pieces it not to be placed on the fold of the fabric.

Now, position the pattern piece so the arrow goes parallel to the selvage line “finished edge” of the fabric. Pin that piece or pieces to the fabric along the fold first. Then, place pins going perpendicular to the pattern’s edge, keeping them about 6 inches apart. You now want to pin any remaining pieces of your pattern, making sure you keep the pins inside the cutting line and at the same time, perpendicular to the cutting edge.

A few tips while laying out and cutting your pattern would include:

- If any of your pattern pieces are crimped or wrinkled, you can use a warm, dry iron to flatten them, which will make cutting more precise.

- To help you keep focused on the right pattern instructions, highlight them with a yellow highlighter

- If the fabric being used has a nap, which would include velvet or something with a one-way design, you want to use distinct layout distinct diagram.
Therefore, pay close attention to the pattern pieces so you have the appropriate ones.

- Always take a moment to measure the distance from each arrow (triangle) point on the grain line arrow to the selvage.

- If your pattern requires lining or interfacing, then you can pin and cut these at the same time you lay and cut the fabric. Simply make it two layers and then follow the same instructions as if cutting only the fabric. This will also ensure the two pieces match precisely.

- Before you pin the remainder of your pattern pieces, pin the grain line arrow to the fabric to help keep the grain line arrow aligned properly.

- After you have created your beautiful piece, you want to preserve your pattern for future use. Go ahead and cut out the pattern pieces you did not use and then keep all the pieces of the same size together. Place them in an envelope, labeled, and clipped together.
WORKING WITH FABRIC

Probably one of the most fun aspects of sewing is going out to shop for fabric. As with many other items you will need, always watch for sales at your local fabric store or check out online companies and eBay. Generally, the online prices are much more affordable when looking at higher-end fabric. However, when you buy online, be sure to take into account the cost of shipping.

In addition to providing you with information on the various types of fabrics, I will also provide you with some excellent and recommended online fabric companies. First, let us talk about the history of fabric just briefly. The outline below shows you some of the general timeline for both natural and manmade fibers.

NATURAL FIBERS

Flax

Of all textile fiber, flax is considered among the oldest. In fact, fine linen made from flax was used for burial shrouds and the deceased Egyptian pharaohs. This particular fiber dates back to somewhere around 5000 BC and over the years, has been produced primarily by Poland, Germany, Belgium, France, and the Soviet States with Belgium and Northern Ireland being the two largest exporters.

Cotton

Dating back to around 3000 BC, cotton was commonly worn by Egyptians. Then in 1793, Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin whereby cotton could
easily be processed. Then in 1884, the power loom was developed, which led to significant advances in cotton fabrics.

Today, I see cotton produced primarily in the United States, China, India, and the Soviet States. However, Brazil, Mexico, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and Sudan also produce cotton but on a lesser scale.

**Wool**

Also dated to around 3000 BC, wool has long been an important part of the fiber world. Used first by people in the Late Stone Age for warmth, its value was carried down through time. With more than 40 different species of sheep, today you can find over 200 types of wool, each of different quality. Wool is produced largely in New Zealand, China, Australia, Argentina, South Africa, and the Soviet States.

**Silk**

History tells us that more than likely silk was first discovered by a Chinese princess. For silk fiber to be made, two continuous filaments must be cemented together, which is then used by the silkworm to create the cocoon. The silk culture dates back to around 1725 BC at which time Chinese emperor’s wife supported the movement.

The interesting fact about silk is that its cultivation and manufacturing process were carefully guarded by the Chinese people for approximately 3,000 years. Again, while it cannot be confirmed, legend tells us that two monks were able to smuggle silkworm eggs and the seeds of a mulberry tree from China, carried out in their walking sticks.
Then, when a Chinese princess married an Indian prince, the silk culture was blown wide open. Today, the major producer and exporter of silk is the country of Japan.

**MANMADE FIBERS**

**Rayon**

Rayon was actually the first manmade fiber appearing in 1910, being produced in the United States by the American Viscose Company. For this fiber to be created, two different chemicals and unique manufacturing techniques are used. The result is two specific types of rayon, which include Cuprammonium Rayon and Viscose Rayon. The only producer of rayon is the United States.

**Acetate**

Acetate was also produced in the United States in 1924 by the Celanese Corporation.

**Nylon**

First produced in the United States in 1939 by E.I DuPont de Nemours & Company, today this is the second most widely used fiber in the nation, followed second to polyester.

**Acrylic**

This manmade fiber was also produced in the United States in 1950 by E.I DuPont de Nemours & Company.
**Polyester**

Polyester was first produced in 1953, again in the United States and again by E.I DuPont de Nemours & Company. Of all manmade fibers, polyester is the most widely used in this country.

**Triacetate**

In 1954, the Celanese Corporation produced this fiber but the production was stopped in 1985.

**Spandex**

Spandex is another manmade fiber produced in the United States by E.I DuPont de Nemours & Company. This fiber is called elastomeric, which means it can stretch out a minimum of 100% and then snap back to its original size and shape. This particular fiber is used in filament form.

**Polypropylene/Polyolefin**

Called both Polypropylene and Polyolefin, this fiber was first produced in the United States by Hercules Incorporated. The fascinating thing about this fiber is that in 1966, it became not only the world’s first, but also the world’s only Nobel Prize winning fiber.

**Microdenier/Micro Fibers**

Known as both Microdenier and Micro Fibers, this was produced in the United States in 1989 by E.I DuPont de Nemours & Company. Interesting, micro fibers are now produced as many different types of synthetic fibers to include acrylic, nylon, and polyester.
For a fiber to be deemed a micro fiber, it must consist of less than one denier per filament. Of all manmade fibers, micro fiber is the finest and thinnest, even more so than silk. To give you an idea just how fine this fiber is, a strand of human hair is 100 times larger than most micro fibers.

**Lyocell**

This was produced in the United States by Courtaulds Fibers in 1993. The benefit of Lyocell is that it is considered environmentally-friendly and produced from the pulp of trees grown specifically to make Lyocell. The processing of this manmade fiber is just as unique, involving a solvent spinning technique.

**TYPES OF NATURAL FABRIC**

As you will see from the list below, there are two types of fabric – natural and manmade. Both have good qualities but when sewing, the important thing is to choose the best fabric for the project.

**Angora**

This natural fiber is available in two distinct types. First, there is the Angora known as Mohair, which is from the hair of an Angora goat. The second is Angora from rabbit hair. The fibers are very fine and lightweight and offer tremendous warmth. Many times, you will find Angora blended with wool to help lower the price while still keeping its unique characteristics.
While Angora can be used for a number of purposes, you generally see it for clothing items such as sweaters, shawls, coats, suits, socks, and accessories. In addition, Angora is popular for blankets and throws. Keep in mind that the law requires Angora rabbit apparel and textiles to display a label reading, “Angora rabbit hair.”

**Camel**

Under the Camel fiber is also Alpaca, Llama, and Vicuna. This fiber is very lustrous, strong, and provides good insulation. Camel is generally used for sweaters, shawls, coats, suits, socks, and accessories along with blankets and throws.

Of all fibers in the world, Vicuna is considered the most valuable. Because of this, anything containing Vicuna will be costly. For camel fibers, you usually see these used only in apparel and textiles that have neutral or natural colors since they are highly resistant to dye. To maintain camel fibers, it is important that the item only be dry cleaned.

**Cashmere**

Cashmere is another natural fiber that comes from the fleece of the Kashmir goat. These fibers are very soft and luxurious. Cashmere provides a nice draping, perfect for apparel. In addition, if the fibers are short, they tend to pile.

Generally, Cashmere is chosen for sweaters, shawls, coats, suits, socks, and accessories along with home textiles to
include blankets and throws. You can buy Cashmere in lengths of 1 1/4-inch to 3 1/2-inches. Because it takes four goats to make one garment, Cashmere is expensive. Therefore, you always want to have any cashmere items dry cleaned.

**Cotton**

Cotton is a natural fiber that is extremely comfortable, lightweight, soft, strong, absorbent, machine washable, and available in a wide array of colors and patterns. Because cotton is so easy to handle when sewing, it is a popular choice.

With such versatility, cotton is used for a number of apparel items such as blouses, skirts, dresses, jackets, and so on. Cotton is also a popular choice for curtains, bedspreads, sheets, tablecloths, and other home fashions.

**Hemp**

Hemp is a natural fiber that is actually three times stronger than cotton is. This fiber is durable, offers excellent abrasion resistance, dyes easily, is naturally resistant to mold and mildew, is antimicrobial and UV resistant, it breathes easily, and can be machine washed. Best of all, hemp becomes softer after every wash. The only downfall is that hemp fibers wrinkle easily and does not work well for draping effect.
However, hemp is often the fabric of choice for various types of apparel such as dresses, blouses, pants, jackets, children wear, and so on. Hemp is also used commonly for curtains, bedspreads, dishtowels, sheets, and other home items.

When buying hemp, you want to look for the best quality, which comes from the Cannabis Sativa plant. Another, lower quality hemp known as Abaca is actually Manila hemp or Sisal hemp. On its own, hemp can be a little rough, which is why you generally find it blended with other softer fibers to include cotton, polyester, silk, and wool.

**Linen**

This natural fiber is made from Flax. Linen is a very comfortable fiber that is two times stronger than cotton. Linen also has a nice crispness, is highly absorbent, can be dyed easily, comes in weights from light to heavy, does not pile or become static, tailors well, and can be washed by hand.

Typically, you see linen used in apparel that needs a starched, crisp appearance such as dressed, blouses, suits, and jackets. However, linen is also great for home fashions when used as table linens, sheets, dishtowels, upholstery, curtains and drapes, and so on.
**Ramie**

This natural fiber is also known as China Grass. Ramie is highly absorbent, dries quickly, is resistant to mold and mildew, is strong, and offers a smooth, lustrous appearance. Ramie is somewhat like linen but not quite to the same level of quality. The fibers of Ramie are brittle, causing it to wrinkle easily.

In most cases, you would see ramie used in dresses, skirts, jackets, pants, blouses, and children's wear, along with home fashions to include things like curtains, bedspreads, table linens, dishtowels, sheets, and upholstery. Although ramie can be used by itself, it is best when blended with softer fibers such as polyester or even cotton.

**Silk**

As mentioned, silk is created naturally by the silkworm. These fibers are elegant and soft. Silk drapes beautifully and is the thinnest of all fibers. Silk can be dyed well, is hand washable, and has no problems with piling and little with static. The only real downfalls to silk are that it has poor resistance to sunlight and can be costly.

Even so, items made with always luxurious. You will often find dresses, blouses, pants, scarves, ties, skirts, and jackets made from silk. Even home textiles can be made from silk to include curtains, drapes, upholstery, and pillows.
**Wool**

Made from the fleece of sheep, wool is a very comfortable, luxurious, lightweight, and versatile type fiber. Wool is an excellent insulator, is easy to dye, and is both washable and wrinkle resistant. Wool is typically used for coats, sweaters, and jackets although it can be made for loungewear, blouses, shirts, scarves, curtains, blankets, and upholstery.

**Miscellaneous Natural Fibers**

- Banana – Similar to linen, lightweight, elegant, washable, and often blended with polyester and silk. Great for clothing and home fashions.

- Pineapple – Similar to linen, lightweight, elegant, washable, and often blended with polyester and silk. Great for clothing and home fashions.

**TYPES OF MANMADE FABRIC**

**Acetate**

This manufactured fiber is made from cotton linters or wood pulp. The appearance is crisp yet soft, luxurious, and can be dyed easily. Acetate is also an excellent fiber for draping, is moth, mildew, and shrink resistant, does not have problems with piling, little static problem, dries fairly fast, and in most cases, needs to be dry cleaned.
You would use acetate for a number of garments to include dresses, blouses, and clothing worn for special occasion. As far as home fashion, acetate is great for curtains and drapes, bedspreads, and upholstery. Today, you can buy pure acetate or fabric that is a blend with other types of fibers. Because of this, you now see acetate used in many designer clothing lines.

**Acrylic**

This manufacturer fiber is soft, lightweight, but also warm. Acrylic can be died well, is machine washable, retains its shape well (perfect for pleating), wrinkles very little, does not fade in sunlight, and is moth, chemical, and oil resistant. The one downfall to this fiber is that it can pile and static can be a problem.

You would use acrylic for sweaters, fleece, circular knit apparel, children wear, sportswear, blankets and throws, upholstery, and even outdoor furniture, rugs, and awnings. The nice thing about using acrylic is that it resembles wool, being very warm without the heaviness. This fiber can be machine washed or dry cleaned.

**Lyocell**

This manufacturer fiber is cellulosic bases. It provides outstanding strength, is washable, has excellent draping, is soft, absorbent, and dyes well. When used for apparel, Lyocell is great for making pants, jackets, dresses, skirts, suits, and sportswear. You can also use this fiber for curtains,
upholstery, bedspreads, table linens, dishtowels, bath towels, and sheets. The appearance of Lyocell is much like rayon although Lyocell is more durable and when wet, possesses better strength.

**Nylon**

Considered one of the favorite manufactured fibers, nylon is lightweight, strong, drapes well, is abrasion resistant, easy to wash, resists shrinking and wrinkling, holds pleats well, is resistant to many chemicals and oils, and dries fast. In addition, nylon can be pre-colored or dyed quite well. The downside to nylon is that both piling and static can be an issue and when exposed to constant sunlight, this fiber has poor resistance.

Nylon is used for a number of sewing projects to include intimate apparel, hosiery, blouses, dresses, jackets, pants, skirts, raincoats, ski and snow apparel, windbreakers, children wear, swimwear, and active wear. For the home, nylon is used commonly for curtains and drapes, upholstery, rugs and carpets, and bedspreads.

You will also find nylon used for a wide array of things such as backpacks, tents, sleeping bags, life vests, luggage, umbrellas and so on. The primary benefit to nylon is its strength but when exposed for long period to sun, it does not do well.
**PLA Fiber**

Also called NatureWorks PLA, this manufactured fiber is a corn-based polymer. The appearance is similar to cotton. In addition, this fiber is great for most sewing projects, is flammable resistant, biodegradable, UV resistant, drapes well, and is great when blended with polyester, cotton, or simply used on its own.

While people who sew are still experimenting with this fabric, currently it is used for active sportswear, men’s shirts, lingerie, outerwear, and performance wear. The results with these sewing applications have proven very successful and it is expected that more and more options will become available.

**Polyester**

Polyester is a widely used manufactured fiber that is strong, crisp, does not stretch, or shrink, and can be machine washed or dry cleaned. You will also find that polyester dries quickly, and is resistant to wrinkling, chemicals, and abrasion. Although this fiber is wonderful for sewing projects it does have a negative side. First, once stained, polyester can be difficult to clean simply because it has a low absorbency level. Second, polyester often has problems with both piling and static.

You would use polyester for all types of clothing such as blouses, jackets, sportswear, suits, pants, shirts, lingerie, rainwear, children wear, dresses,
and so on. You will also find polyester used for curtains and drapes, fiber fill, floor covering, bedding, and upholstery.

Because polyester is so great at wash and wear, it is by far the most used of all manufactured fibers. The problem is that with an over use of polyester some 25 to 30 years ago this fiber often has a negative image. However, polyester is beginning to enter a new market of designer clothing as it is now being blended with many dry clean fibers to include rayon, acetate, and wool. The result is a beautiful, durable fabric that is quite versatile.

**Polyolefin**

This manufactured fiber is also known as Polypropylene and Olefin. This fiber is amazingly lightweight, strong, it is resistant to sunlight, abrasion, static, stain, mildew, chemicals, rot, weather, and odor, dries fast, and color fast, and is non-allergic. However, Polyolefin has some problems with piling and static, and must be washed, dried, and ironed at low temperatures.

Typically, you see Polyolefin used for several different apparel items such as underwear, socks, sportswear, active wear, jeans, and even lining for other fabrics. In addition, Polyolefin is used for both indoor and outdoor carpeting, carpet backing, wall covering, upholstery, bedding, and furniture.

This particular fiber was developed more than 35 years ago and is definitely a high-performance fiber. While it was originally used for home furnishing, today you see it used for active wear associated with canoeing,
backpacking, mounting climbing, and other favorite outdoor activities. Interestingly, this fiber was used with a blend of Lycra as the Japanese Olympic swim team’s official swimsuit! The reason – less absorbent and the only fiber that is capable of floating.

**Rayon**

Rayon is another manufactured fiber that is made from wood pulp. This fiber is very soft, highly absorbent, drapes well, and dyes well. In addition, with rayon you do not have to worry about pilling or static. The one concern is that rayon will shrink if not dry cleaned.

Rayon is used for making blouses, jackets, dresses, lingerie, millinery, slacks, sport shirts, sportswear, suits, ties, and work clothes, as well as home fashions to include blankets, curtains and drapes, bedspreads, slipcovers, tablecloths, and upholstery.

**Spandex**

Spandex is another manufactured fabric that is very lightweight, is stretchable to 500% without breaking, is abrasion resistant, very durable, soft and supple, resistant to perspiration, detergents, and lotions, and does not have problem with piling or static.

Generally, you would use Spandex for athletic apparel, swimsuits, ski pants, slacks, foundation garments, and other items that require snugness
and stretch. While there are several brands of Spandex, the one most commonly used is called Lycra made by DuPont.

**Triacetate**

This manufactured fiber is very lustrous, drapes well, is highly resilient, retains pleats, can be machine washed, and does not pile. Then the only downfall is that Triacetate can have problems with static.

This fiber is generally used for dresses, skirts, robes, sportswear, and anything that needs to have a permanent pleat. Although not commonly used for household fashion, it is used on occasion in upholstery. Interestingly, Triacetate is the only manufactured fiber still in production today not manufactured in the United States.
**FABRIC TIPS**

I have compiled some extra insider tips for buying fabric. These tips will make the process of buying fabric more enjoyable and less expensive.

- Although not all cities have them, some of the larger cities have a special garment district. Included are a number of wonderful fabric stores where you can buy amazing fabrics at unbelievable prices. The key here is to know your fabrics and have a good idea of current market value so you can barter.

- Discount fabric stores and online auctions such as eBay are great places to find wonderful fabric for a fraction of the original cost. Therefore, always look in sales bins and take time shopping around online.

- Always check the label or fabric information. Typically, this will be located on the end of the fabric bolt, providing you with the content of the fabric, width, care instructions, and so on.

- If you plan to use interfacing for your garment, be sure you perform a test fuse to a small piece of fabric. Since the bonding process is permanent, you want to make sure the fabric for your project and interfacing work well together before you bond the entire fabric.

- When buying the interfacing, the type you choose will depend large on how you want the finished garment to look and feel. For instance, if you want a crisp, tailored look, then you want woven interfacing for durability and strength. However, if you want something draping and soft, then a knit interfacing would be far softer. In addition, remember that non-woven interfaces usually shrink!
• Be sure you check the grain line of the fabric since some will be “off grain” when on the bolt and cannot be transformed back to a straight grain. For this reason, always check the fabric to see how straight it is before you buy. Do not be afraid to unroll a yard, lay it out to match the selvages, and then make your decision.

• Just as you need to pre-wash your fabric, it is a good idea to preshrink your interfacing. This will help eliminate the possibility of puckering or distortion. Instructions are generally posted on the package. If the interfacing is dry clean only, you can use a steam iron and then allow it to dry prior to using.

• Make sure you check the fabric weight so it will drape the way you expect. Remember, the fabric should be chosen for the pattern.

• When choosing the color of your fabric, keep in mind that the lighting in fabric stores is generally poor. If you need to match fabric, take it to the front window or door so you can see it in natural sunlight.

• When creating a project from different types of fabric, pay attention to the care instructions. You certainly would not want a garment made from one fabric that needs to be dry cleaned and another that must be hand washed.

• For the width, fabric is sold in 44 to 46 and 54 to 60 inches. The pattern will usually have options for both but on occasion a pattern will be very specific to the width. Therefore, be sure you choose accordingly.

• Finally, if you buy printed fabric, remember that the print or pattern will repeat so to match your garment where the sleeves match, the pockets match, the collar matches, and so on, you need to purchase the appropriate amount. If you are unsure how much, the salesperson should be able to guide you.
LEARNING THE STITCHES

One of the most important and useful things you will learn for sewing is the various stitches. Obviously, you have stitches for both hand sewing as well as machine sewing, each with very distinct purposes. Some stitches need to be tight, some loose, some decorative, and so on. In this chapter, I will provide a description along with diagram of the various stitches to help you along.

HAND STITCHES

The following are the most commonly used stitches. As mentioned, each is unique and used for a specific purpose. Depending on the sewing machine you purchase, some will have a multitude of stitches built in. With this, you simply choose what you need and the machine does all the work for you. However, even so it is important that you understand the various stitches and how they work so as you begin your next project, you will know which stitch is needed for which fabric and type of project.

Backstitch

The backstitch\(^1\) is considered the strongest of all hand stitches. Generally, this stitch results in a tight, straight line, much what a sewing machine would do. To create a backstitch, you would work from the right to left, starting with a few stitches worked at the same spot.

\(^1\) www.stitchguide.com
Then, you would make a stitch and move over a small space. Next, take the needle back to the last space, bringing it out the same direction but in front of the thread. This stitch would be continued until you reach the end of your seam. Once you reach the end, simply create a few more stitches in the same spot to hold the end.

**Buttonhole Stitch**

This stitch is also referred to as a Blanket Stitch. With this, you would work from your left to right. Start by bringing the needle up at your starting point and then making a few small stitches in the same spot to fasten your thread. Then place the needle straight up and down over and back of the line.

Now, hold the thread in the form of a loop with your thumb on the left hand and bring the needle out through the loop at the same spot under the bottom row of the outline stitches. Continue your stitches until you have a perfect straight line on both the center and top. Make sure your stitches are evenly spaced and with a consistent depth. This stitch is used to create a neat edge of a buttonhole, vest edge, blanket, or other similar seam line.

**Catch Stitch**

The catch stitch is typically used for hemming fabric that is bulky or working with curved areas of the pattern. With this stitch, you will work from the right to left. Start by fastening the thread to the edge of the folded fabric using a
couple of backstitches. Then, make a diagonal stitch, again from right to left.

Now, with the needle pointing to the left, make a small stitch in the fabric from right to left. Bring the needle out of the fabric, making a diagonal stitch, again right to left. Be sure when making the catch stitch that you do not pull the fabric too tightly.

**Chain Stitch**

This stitch\(^2\) is the same as a Closed Loop or Closed Link stitch. In most cases, the Chain Stitch is used for putting in hems, adding padding embroidery scallops, and other multi-purpose projects when a regular stitch would not work. The nice thing about the chain stitch is that it works well and is very decorative.

Start by fastening the thread on the backside of the fabric and then on the top of the piece, working downward. Next, draw the thread through to the right side and hold the thread down with the thumb of your left hand. You now want to place the needle exactly where you brought it through the fabric, again taking a short stitch downward. Just be sure you do not draw the thread too tight.

Now, place the needle inside of the loop, holding the thread down with the thumb of your left hand. Bring the thread out just below the previous loop, which will now form your next loop. Continue in this manner until you have completed the project. Remember, for the chain stitch, the needle

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\(^2\) www.embroiderersguild.com
must always be straight up and down and then just inside the previous loop.

**Chevron Stitch**

Although a little more difficult to master, this is a nice stitch that can be learned with a little time and practice. Work the stitch from the left to right, along two parallel lines. The goal is to keep the lines an equal distance from the seam line. Now, come up at the starting point along one of the baselines.

Create a backstitch to about half-way from the original point with the needle coming up through the center of the straight stitch. Make a straight stitch in a diagonal direction to the next baseline, inserting the needle. Next, come up a little to the left of this insertion point, making yet another backstitch like the previous one. Finally, work down to the original baseline using the same stitching manner.

**Couching Stitch**

The couching stitch has several variations. Typically used to outline a design or create accent, this stitch is actually quite easy to learn. Simply bring the laid thread up from the back of the fabric to the front, holding it in place with your thumb. Then, work the thread to secure to the fabric. Now, take the laid thread to the back of the fabric, secure, and continue working the stitch.
Cretan Stitch

The Cretan stitch\(^3\) is another that requires a little time and practice. However, when used with beads and pearls, it is magnificent. Work the stitch from the left to right, along two parallel lines. Be sure to keep the lines an equal distance from the seam. Come up at your starting point along one baseline. Insert the needle at the next baseline, just to the right of the original point. Now, take a small stitch straight down. Then, insert the needle at the lower baseline just to the right of the stitch, making a small stitch up the same length as the previous one.

Cross-Stitch

While you might think of a cross-stitch as something used only for crafts, this particular stitch is actually quite common for a number of sewing projects. In many cases, a cross-stitch would be used for decorative purposes, great for children wear, vests, and so on.

Typically, Aida cloth is used, which has a grid for creating the stitch. However, with a loosely woven fabric, you can easily create your own cross-stitch design. Start by bringing your needle up through the back side of the fabric, making sure you leave a short end on the back. Work this over in the same spot a couple of times to fasten the thread.

For a single row, always cross the thread over in the same direction, taking care not to join separate areas of the same color thread with long runs of thread on the back of the fabric.

\(^3\) www.prettyimpressivestuff.com
For creating a row of stitches, you want to work across the fabric as shown in the diagraph and then come back to complete the cross design. Be sure you always cross in the same direction to make the process quicker and the stitches neater.

**Eyelet Stitch**

The eyelet stitch[^4] is decorative and great for filling. The amount of tension used will determine how open the center of the eye will be. Start working from the outside in, bringing the needle to the center eye. Pull the thread firmly but gently. Continue working clockwise until you have all the points completed.

**Feather Stitch**

The feather stitch[^5] is a nice ornamental stitch that takes a little practice. With this stitch, you can work the needle straight up and down or slanted. The key with this and all ornamental stitches is keeping a straight line. If needed, you can create a row of bastings (temporary stitches) along the side where you want your feather stitch and then when done, remove the bastings.

Start by fastening the thread on the backside of the fabric and at the top. Now, let the thread fall downward into the form of a loop. Hold the loop down with the

[^4]: www.jeanfarish.com
[^5]: www.classicstitches.com
thumb on your left hand. Just below where the thread came through, carry it across to the opposite side.

Now, bring the thread upward to form a loop, again holding it down with your thumb. Make a straight stitch inside the loop, carrying the thread across to the opposite side. Continue this stitch until done. The feather stitch is created with the needle going straight up and down while the Briar Stitch is created with a slanted needle.

**Fly Stitch**

This stitch is a single, detached stitch somewhat like the feather stitch. With this, you would bring the needle from the back of your fabric to the front, inserting it at the desired point to create a second point of stitch. Then, exit from the back to the front between and just over to the left or right of the first part of the stitch. Secure the loop with a small stitch.

**Herringbone Stitch**

This easy stitch is a variation of the cross-stitch. With this, you want to work from left to right, moving the needle and thread along two lines parallel to the seam. Then, you will bring the needle up at the baseline, taking a long, diagonal stitch to the right.

Next, insert the needle in the upper baseline. Then, take a small backstitch to the left of the baseline, followed by a long right diagonal
stitch down to the lower baseline. You will continue working the stitch until you finish the seam.

**Outline Stitch**

This particular stitch can be done to produce two different looks. The first gives the appearance of a broken line while the second appears as an unbroken line. The key to a good outline stitch is keeping the needle in a perfect line for the design to be outlined and to keep the thread on the same side of the needle.

For this stitch, you will start at the bottom of your project, creating a few running stitches to fasten the thread. Then, put the thread to either the left or right-hand side of the needle and point the needle with the point toward you through the back of the fabric. Taking a short stitch, you want to draw the thread, being careful not to pull too tight.

Next, again be sure the thread is on the left or right as you had it with the first stitch. Take another stitch toward you, continuing in the same way until you have completed your sewing project. The result is a nice, clean outline that finishes off the project beautifully. The appearance of a broken and unbroken line depends on how far apart you space your stitches.
Running Stitch

Of all stitches, the running stitch\(^6\) is by far the easiest and most basic to work. This stitch consists of a single stitch between two points, ideal for fine detail and outlining. To create a running stitch, pass the needle over and under the fabric. Usually, the upper stitches are worked with an equal thread length while in an even manner.

Satin Stitch

To create a great looking satin stitch, you need to work the stitches closely together. Be sure the edges are kept even, taking the stitches to the outside of the line for the best appearance. To make a satin stitch, simply make a straight parallel stitch along the raw edge of your appliqué.

Then, bring the needle up through the appliqué and down through the fabric. Be sure the stitches are kept very close. Repeat this process all along the edge until the entire appliqué is secure.

Seed Stitch

This stitch is created by taking small half or even quarter back stitches to cover petal or leaf designs on a monogram. To make the seed stitch look its best, you want to use rows of evenly spaced stitches, making sure the stitches in each row fall midway

\(^6\) www.embroiderersguild.com
between the stitches of the previous row so each is staggered.

**Smyrna Stitch**

This particular stitch\(^7\) is much like the double cross-stitch. For this, you would bring the needle from the back of the fabric to the front at odd numbers. Then, enter the fabric at even numbers, as shown in the diagram.

**Stem Stitch**

The stem stitch is worked from left to right. With this, you will take regular, small stitches along the line of your design. Be sure the thread always comes out of the fabric on the left side of the previous stitch. Generally, you would use a stem stitch for flower stems on designs but it can also be used for outlines.

**Straight Stitch**

This standard stitch is used for all types of projects and fabrics. The key is to keep the stitches flat on the surface so no loose threads exist or that the thread is not pulled to tight. To create a straight stitch, simply bring the needle up through the back of the fabric at your starting point and then down to the insertion point (you choose the length).

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\(^7\) www.2busystitching.com
MACHINE STITCHES

Again, the hand stitches above are generally the same that you will find on many of today’s sewing machines. In addition, the following are the most commonly used stitches used primarily on a sewing machine.

Basting Stitch

This is the longest stitch the sewing machine can make. Generally, this stitch is up to 1-inch long or more. Speed basting makes stitching seams go quickly but keep in mind that some sewing machines tend to produce empty stitches between long ones. When this happens, you might see a line of needle holes or have bulked up thread on the underside of the fabric. To eliminate this problem, hold the fabric firmly in both front and back.

Ease Stitching

This particular stitch is also known as “Gathering”, which is a line of stitching used to draw the fabric up, giving it a nice fullness. You will often see ease stitching used on the top portion of curtains, waist bands of skirts or workout pants. Although not difficult, this stitch does take a little practice to get good at.
Stay Stitching

With stay stitching, you end up with a directional line, which is used prior to the garment constructions to help stabilize the edges. This particular stitch is generally not done on tightly knitted or woven fabric but for loosely woven fabrics and knits, and bias edges, it works great for adding control. In addition, stay stitching can be used on curved edges and then clipped to clean up the appearance.

Stitching in the Ditch

This stitch involves stitching on the right side of fabric, in a pressed, open seam, as a means of fastening another piece of fabric to the underside. With this stitch, you would use matching thread and a regular length of stitch. The result will be that the outside stitch becomes invisible, as it disappears in the “ditch”, thus the name.

Understitching

With understitching, you get a line of stitches that is done on the underside portion of a collar or facing. The purpose of this particular stitch is to help close the edge so seams do not roll. The result is a nice, clean look.

8 www.learnhowtoquilt.com
As you can see, there are multiple stitches to consider for sewing. Again, most of the sewing machines sold today have built-in stitches that mimic these hand stitches. Therefore, you would simply choose the stitch needed for your specific project.
Because the world of sewing machines has grown and advanced so substantially, I wanted to provide a chapter dedicated specifically for this subject. Choosing the best sewing machine for your sewing needs can be overwhelming. As you begin your search, you will discover a whole array of choices. Some sewing machines are still simple while most have new and exciting features.

**HISTORY**

Sewing machines have quite the history. The most fascinating aspect is that sewing machines have been in use for around 20,000 years! While they were not the sophisticated machines of today, they were none the less, machines. The earliest machine was from the Celtic Hill Fort in Germany, dating back to around the third century BC.

Then, another sewing machine was discovered in a tomb from the Chinese, Han Dynasty that dates between 200 BC and 220 AD. Although very crude, this sewing machine actually had a thimble. Then in 1790, the first “real” sewing machine was invented by Thomas Saint, a British inventor. This particular sewing machine was designed to sew canvas and leather for shoes and boots. In addition, rather than using a regular sewing machine needle, an awl was used to puncture the heavy material.

By 1830, Barthelemy Thimonnier, a French tailor, was actually responsible for patenting the first sewing machine. This machine was designed with a hook tipped needle that resembles the embroidery needles used today. The stitch created was the chain stitch, also still in use. Just 11 years later, 80 of
Thimonnier’s sewing machines were in operation by the French army in the making of uniforms. When the factory was destroyed in fighting, the machines were destroyed and Thimonnier died a bankrupt man in England.

Walter Hunt was noted for creating the first double-thread sewing machine in 1834 in New York. Hunt was also responsible for inventing another device used daily – the safety pin. This machine was designed with an eye-pointed needle and worked with a shuttle system, which carried the second needle to make an interlocking stitch. However, concerned that his new machine would put innocent seamstresses out of work, he abandoned his work.

Then in 1846, another man by the name of Elias Howe of the state of Massachusetts developed his own sewing machine. This one had a grooved eye-pointed needle and shuttle system. The result was a lock stitch that was great for sewing straight lines but nothing more. People in the United States were unimpressed so Howe took his idea to Europe for the making of corsets. Sadly, Howe also died a man without money and never lived to see his impending patent come to fruition. Even so, in 1856, his sewing machine was successful in obtaining a patent, placing him as one of the world’s first.

Isaac M. Singer then patented the first rigid-arm sewing machine in 1851. This was a new concept in that the machine included a table that could help support the fabric and the vertical presser foot held the fabric in place while sewing. In addition, his new invention featured a vertical needle-holding bar that stayed in position over the table. Gone was the hand crank and in came the foot treadle – a major breakthrough!

The fascinating thing about this is that Singer took some of his sewing machine ideas from Howe, which resulted in a lawsuit. The result was that Singer had to pay Howe a nice royalty. Even with this, Singer’s company went on to become the world’s largest manufacturing company.
Spending literally millions of dollars to advertise his new machine, the Singer sewing machine took off. The only problem was that in 1850, a $75 price tag meant only the affluent could afford one. Because of that, an installment plan was created (the very first in the United States); giving a greater number of people the opportunity to own their machine.

**TYPES OF SEWING MACHINES**

From that time forward, sewing machines have exploded the marketplace. Today, you will find machines with computers where you simply put in the appliqué design you want, set the fabric, and the machine does all the work. While you can still choose a simple model, the more advanced models are amazingly affordable and super fun to use. The following are some options that you might consider when shopping for a new sewing machine:

**Brother**

In 1908, Yasui Sewing Machine Company was established and then 20 years later, the Brother brand was founded. Just four years from then, the domestic sewing machine began to be produced in mass numbers. From that day forward, Brother has been considered a leader in the sewing machine industry, also manufacturing the Babylock model.

Today, Brother sells, sewing machines, electronic machines, and sergers. Just to give you a few ideas of what Brother sells, I have provided a few options.
• Brother PC6500 Best Buy 5x7” Embroidery & Sewing Machine (retails for around $1,000) – This sewing machine features the following (not inclusive):
  - 5.1 x 7.1-inch embroidery sewing area
  - Up to 5.1 x 11.8-inch multi-hooping capability
  - #1 alphabet card
  - #2 floral card
  - 99 built-in stitches
  - Drop feed control
  - Automatic thread tension and reinforcement stitch
  - F.A.S.T. bobbin winding system
  - Programmed thread cutter…and more

• Brother XR65T Sewing & Quilting Machine (retails for around $125) - This sewing machine features the following (not inclusive):
  - 27 built-in stitches
  - 67 stitch functions
  - Drop-in bobbin
  - 1-step automatic buttonholer
  - Built-in needle threader
  - Quilting features (spring-action quilting foot, quilting guide, and oversized table)…and more

**Singer**

As discussed in history, Singer has been around for a long time, having proven to be a leader in the sewing machine industry. Singer currently offers sewing machines, basic and quantum machine, embroidery machines, sergers, industrial sewing machines, and presses. The following are just a few examples of what you will find:
• Singer Quantum XL5000 6x10-inch Embroidery & Sewing Machine (retails for around $2,500) - This sewing machine features the following (not inclusive):
  o Automatic tension and threading
  o Conversion Software, Video, and Workbook
  o Automatic self-winding bobbin…and more

• Singer 132 Featherweight (retails for around $175) - This sewing machine features the following (not inclusive):
  o 20 built-in stitches
  o Front load class 15 plastic bobbins
  o 3/4 size head
  o Lightweight and compact (just 14 pounds)
  o 5-step buttonholer…and more

**Janome**

This company is one of the newer ones on the market but it brings new technology and excitement to sewing. First established in the 1970s, these machines are excellent for both sewing and embroider.

• Janome Memory Craft MC4400 (retails for around $1,300) - This sewing machine features the following (not inclusive):
  o 200 built-in stitches
  o Quilt heirloom capabilities
  o Drop-in bobbin
  o Backlight LCD
  o 10 languages for instructions
- Easy push buttons
- Fully adjustable stitch width and length…and more

- Janome L344 (retails for around $250) - This sewing machine features the following (not inclusive):
  - 14 built-in stitches
  - Free arm feature
  - Buttonhole capabilities
  - Built-in carrying handle…and more

**Simplicity**

Simplicity is another longstanding company that offers a wide range of sewing machines, embroidery machines, sergers, and presses. The following are a few of the many options Simplicity offers:

- Simplicity SE3 (retails for around $800) - This sewing machine features the following (not inclusive):
  - 119 built-in stitches
  - 4 built-in alphabet font styles
  - 120 frame designs
  - 3 hoops without grids and video
  - LCD touch screen…and more

- Simplicity SE3 Embroidery Machine (retails for around $1,000) - This sewing machine features the following (not inclusive):
  - Box II card converter
  - 18 spool Madeira embroidery thread starter kit
  - Pantograms 4000 design CD…and more
Miscellaneous Sewing Machines

In addition to the top brands already mentioned, you have a choice of many other top sewing machines. Other names you might research include:

- Alphasew Sewing Machines (made in China)
- Barbie Sewing Machine (upgrade from White Sew Cute and designed specifically for children)
- Bernina Sewing Machines
- Craft Master Sewing Machines (computers and sergers to include Kenmore and Elna)
- EuroPro Sewing Machines (computers and sergers)
- Johnson Sewing Machines (all-metal and portable)
- Juki Sewing Machines (makes Singer XL and Bernina sergers)
- Omega Sewing Machines (made by Janome)
- Necchi Sewing Machines (made by Janome)
- New Home Sewing Machines (made by Janome)
- Pfaff Sewing Machines (home and industrial)
- PowerPro Sewing Machines (walking foot)
- Refrey Sewing Machines
- Reliable Sewing Machines (made in Canada)
- Renaissance Sewing Machines (sergers – industrial as well)
- Rex Sewing Machines (made in China – primarily industrial)
- Riccar Sewing Machines (very affordable)
- Sailrite Sewing Machines (portable and colorful)
- Seammaster Sewing Machines (very affordable)
- SewPro Sewing Machines (portable)
- Tacsew Sewing Machines (industrial only)
• Thompson Sewing Machines
• Toyota Sewing Machines (sergers)
• Viking Husqvarna Sewing Machines
• White Sewing Machines (sewing, embroidery, sergers)
• Yamata Sewing Machines (made in China)

**BUYING A SEWING MACHINE**

Remember, a sewing machine is a major investment so even if you buy second, you want to make sure the machine you buy first, meets your sewing needs and second, meets certain criteria. The machine needs to function well so sewing is a pleasant experience and not a constant hassle.

Some people like portable sewing machines, which fit easily in a cabinet or closet when not in use while other people want a sewing machine that can be left out all time. Regardless, the following checklist will ensure you buy the best machine for YOU.

• Can the sewing machine handle various weights of fabric
• Does the knee or foot control function properly and smoothly
• If buying a zigzag sewing machine, is it capable of sewing a smooth, straight line
• If the sewing machine has a buttonhole option, does it work properly
• Does the sewing machine vibrate while running at all speeds
• Is the sewing machine too loud
• Does the sewing machine light function and provide adequate lighting for the working area

• Can you get to the bobbin easily and is it easy to thread

• Are any removable parts easy to assess

• Is the sewing machine easy to clean

• Can you adjust both upper and lower tension

• Does the sewing machine come with a manual/video/CD

• Does the sewing machine come with a guarantee and if so, what is covered

• Does the price of the sewing machine include lessons on how to use and maintain the machine

• Do you have the option of buying additional or replacement items such as bobbins, zipper foot, etc

• What tools/supplies come with the sewing machine (zipper foot, bobbin, miniature screwdriver, etc)
SEWING TERMINOLOGY

I hope you have gained invaluable insight into the world of sewing. For most people who try sewing, they find this to be a very enjoyable, relaxing, and rewarding hobby or career. To close out the book, I have listed some of the common sewing terminology that you can use as a reference when needed.

I sincerely thank you for buying “Sewing 101: A Step By Step Guide To Sewing Basics.” and hope you enjoy your next sewing project!

- Back Tack – Few stitches done in reverse for the purpose of securing a line of stitches
- Bar Tack – Short thread reinforcement used for points of stress
- Baste Marking – Marking with a machine or hand basting
- Bias – Diagonal line across fabric
- Bias Binding – Strips of fabric cut on the bias
- Binding – Method for cleaning up raw edges using a separate length of fabric
- Bound Edge – Method for cleaning up a raw edge using bias binding
- Casing – Stitched channel between two pieces of fabric used for rope, ribbon, or cording
- Clean Finishing – Edge of fabric turned once and stitched
• Construction Stitching – Stitching for darts and seams to shape and hold a garment together

• Crocking – Color that rubs off

• Directional Stitching – Stitching with the grain in woven fabrics

• Ease – Allowance added to a body measurement so a garment can be wearable

• Ease, to – Attach fabric edge to a slightly shorter edge

• Fashion Fabric – Outer fabric in a garment

• Finger Pressing – Opening seam allowance with the thumbnail

• Give – Degree of elasticity in thread or fabric

• Grading – Trimming seam allowance to a different width for the purpose of reducing bulk while avoiding ridge

• Hand – Drape and feel of fabric

• Interlining – Layer of fabric added for lining, usually for warmth

• Miter – Diagonal fold made that the corner in an edge finish

• Nap – Raised, downy, or hairy surface on certain fabrics such as flannel

• Non-Woven Fabric – Fabric not knitted or woven from yarn or thread
• Notches – Markings found on patterns that are used for matching once attached to fabric

• Pivoting – Moving fabric around with the sewing machine needle still down and the press foot up

• Pre-Shrinking – Shrinkage prior to fabric being cut

• Self Fabric – Fabric from which a garment is created

• Sizing – Starch-like substance that is added by the manufacturer

• Stability – Degree fabric resists pulling out of shape

• Stay – Tape added to a garment to help keep it in shape

• Stay Stitching – Stitch done on the inside allowance prior to construction used for stabilizing

• Stitching in the Ditch – Stitching on the right-hand side through a seam as a means of fastening something on the underside

• Test Seam – Seam performed on a scrap piece of fabric to determine the correct stitch

• Topstitching – Machine or hand stitch that can be decorative or function – once done, the stitching shows on the outside of the fabric

• Understitching – Line of stitching on the edge of the facing or under collar to eliminate rolling