

# Sewing BASICS

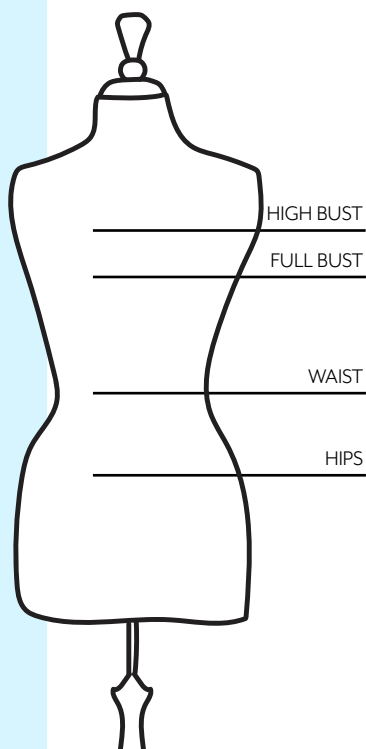
## The Perfect Fit

The key to successful fitting is taking accurate body measurements to ensure you get the right size. Pattern sizes aren't the same as high street clothing sizes, so don't be tempted to skip this stage. Once you've taken your measurements, compare them to those on the pattern envelope or Size It Up panel opposite, then you can make any necessary alterations. Cut out the paper according to the size closest to the measurements you have selected, choosing the best fit (for dresses, blouses and jackets) in the bust and shoulder, as this area is harder to adjust. If your waist or hip measurements are out of proportion according to the standard pattern size, then simply graduate in or out to reach the relevant waist or hip lines to your size.

- ✿ Measure yourself in your underwear, preferably in a well-fitting bra you will be wearing often.
- ✿ Use a new tape measure as they can distort out of shape over time.
- ✿ Ask a friend to help you, especially with tricky measurements such as your back-neck to waist and height.
- ✿ Be honest with your measurements and remember that pattern sizes are totally different to ready-to-wear high street sizing.
- ✿ Use your measurements to help you adjust the pattern to fit your shape, not forgetting to take the required amount of ease into account.

## Taking Your Measurements

Measure while in the underwear you will be wearing and hold the tape measure comfortably snug, but avoid pulling tight.



**Height** Standing against a flat wall without wearing shoes, measure from the floor to the top of your head.

**High bust** Measure directly under the arms, straight across the back and above the bust.

**Full Bust** Take the tape measure around the fullest part of your bust and straight across the back.

**Waist** Tie a length of narrow elastic around the waist and let it settle naturally at your waistline, then measure over it. Keep the elastic handy for future garments.

**Hips** Measure around the body at the fullest part. This is usually 18-23cm below the waist.



## Reading a Pattern

The basic markings you will find on commercial dressmaking patterns are important to familiarise yourself with. These marks indicate various techniques or steps and are best transferred onto your fabric pieces once you've cut them.

### MULTIPLE SIZE CUTTING LINES

These lines indicate dress sizes. Highlighting yours can help with cutting.



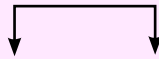
### GRAINLINE

Align this mark with the grain of the fabric i.e. parallel to the warp (see below).



### FOLD LINE

This mark indicates that the pattern piece should be positioned along the fold of the fabric, creating a larger 'mirrored' piece.



### BUST/HIP INDICATORS

Located at the bust and hip points on the pattern – make any necessary adjustments if yours don't fall there.



### LENGTHEN/SHORTEN HERE

This is an opportunity to customise the pattern to your preferences.



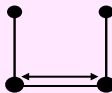
### MISCELLANEOUS MARKINGS

These come in a range of sizes and are used as points of reference on a pattern to indicate where pieces should be placed.



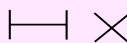
### TUCKS AND GATHERS

Bring these lines together before stitching.



### BUTTON / BUTTONHOLE PLACEMENTS

These indicate where buttonholes should be made on a garment.



### NOTCHES

Match two pieces of fabric together at these points.



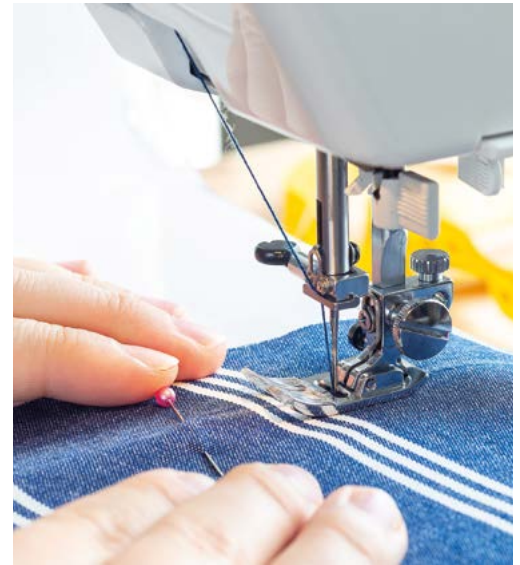
## Size it up

Once you have your body measurements, choose the closest size from the chart below. Remember, there will be variations depending on which fabric and pattern you choose, so always make a toile first.

	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24
Bust cm	78	83	88	93	98	103	108	113	118
Waist cm	59	64	69	74	79	84	89	94	99
Hip cm	85	88	93	98	103	108	113	118	123
Back neck to waist	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47

## How to care for your machine

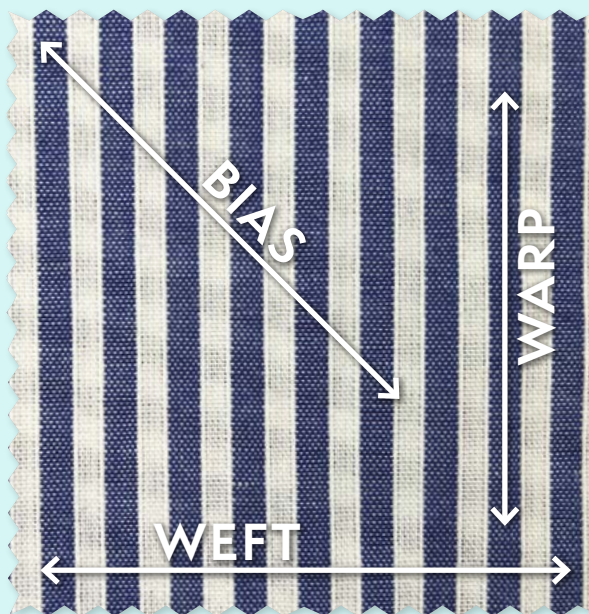
- Always keep your machine under cover when not in use to prevent dust gathering in any moving parts.
- Clean your machine regularly, making sure to unplug it first. Many experts advise against using compressed air – a lint brush or dry cloth should do.
- Always use good quality machine thread to prevent lint build up. Avoid those with waxed or glazed coatings as they are bad for the machine.
- Brush out the bobbin case every time you change the bobbin to help you keep on top of any lint build up.
- Change the needle regularly as dull, blunt ones will affect the stitching quality. Aim to replace it after 8-10 hours of active stitching or once you've finished a big project.
- After every use, make sure to check the needle, bobbin and thread tension so any problems can be addressed before you start another project.



- Oil your machine regularly if you have a mechanical model, referring to the instruction manual. Only use a recommended oil – you'll need just a couple of drops each time.

## Understand your fabric

Getting to grips with your fabric is a fundamental part of sewing. Before you start, familiarise yourself with:

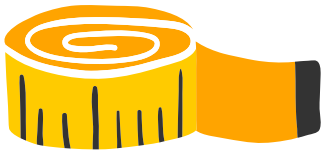


**WARP** These are the yarns that run the length of the fabric. They are stronger than weft yarns and less likely to stretch.

**WEFT** These run over and under the warp threads across the fabric from selvedge to selvedge.

**BIAS** The bias grain runs 45° to the warp and weft of the fabric. Cutting garments on the bias creates a finished piece that will follow the contours of the body.

**SELVEDGE** The non-fraying, woven edges that run parallel to the warp grain is the selvedge.



### Advice for fabric prep

1 It is advisable to launder the fabric, as you would the completed item, before you start cutting. This ensures that you will know how the fabric reacts and reduces the possibility of shrinkage in the completed garment.

2 Press the fabric with an iron on a suitable setting, and lay out in a large space ready for pinning the pattern pieces to it.

3 Fabric is usually folded selvedge to selvedge. With the material folded, the pattern is pinned to the top. Once cut, the opened fabric will be twice the size of the paper pattern piece. If your fabric is patterned, it is advisable to place the design outermost so that you can lay out the pieces in a pleasing manner to suit the printed motif.

### Pattern tips

1 Most commercial patterns are printed on dressmaker's tissue paper and have cutting marks for more than one size. Each size is identified by a different style of marking for the cutting line. When only one line is visible this indicates that this is a common cut line for all sizes.

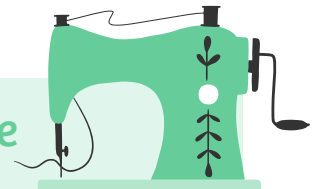
2 Many patterns are available with a series of variations on a garment, which allows you to select different elements to suit your style. These are indicated on the pattern, with alteration lines for different lengths.

### Pattern preparation

1 In addition to starting with your fabrics laundered and pressed, it is also advisable to press out your paper pattern pieces. You can either choose to do this before you cut the individual pieces required and iron the entire sheet as a whole, or after they have been cut.

2 Unfold the tissue paper and with an iron on its coolest setting – taking care not to burn the paper – gently smooth out the creases, so that all the folds are pressed flat.

## Choosing the right machine needle



- Your machine will likely come with universal point needles, which have a slightly rounded point. They can be used for sewing most woven or knit fabrics.
- Sharp point (regular) needles are great for woven fabrics like cotton and linen, as they make even stitches and will minimise puckering.
- Ballpoint needles have rounded points and are designed especially to sew knit and stretch fabrics.
- Embroidery needles have a larger needle eye for thicker embroidery threads, and are designed to prevent threads from breaking.
- Quilting needles have a tapered point that can stitch through several layers of fabric without damaging them.
- Topstitching needles have an extra large eye and a deeper groove for heavier topstitching and doubled threads.
- Wedge point needles are for sewing leather and vinyl as they easily pierce the fabrics and create a hole that will close back up afterwards.

3 By ironing them you will ensure that the pieces lie flush with the fabrics when pinned and will result in cleaner, sharper lines when cutting. The thin tissue can be ironed on a cool to medium setting – if in doubt, press a blank section of the paper first.

### Placing pattern pieces

1 Place the pattern on the fabric with the printed tissue side uppermost. Some pieces will need to be placed on the fold, this is indicated on each specific part. The tissue paper used for dressmaking patterns means that you can see through to the design of the fabrics. This is essential when working with patterned materials, allowing you to adjust the placement of the pieces to ensure continuity in the motif can be achieved over joins in the garment pieces.

2 The 'to fold' symbol means that the piece should be placed to the folded edge of the fabric for pinning. This will create both sides when the cut piece is opened, for example two sides of a top will be cut at once.

3 The other pieces should be placed on the fabric with the grain arrow running parallel to the selvedge. Measure the distance from one end of the arrow to the parallel selvedge, repeat at the other end and move the piece slightly until both the measurements are the same. Once you are happy with the finalised placement, pin carefully in place using as many pins as is necessary to secure.

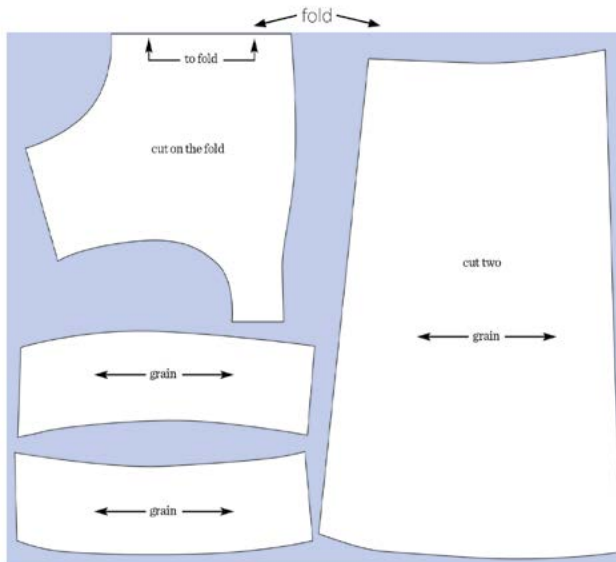
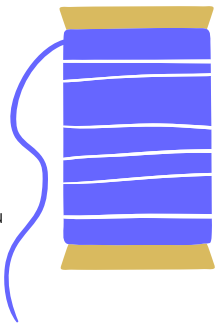
4 Most patterns offer a layout guide for the placement of the

pieces onto the fabric (see below). This ensures that you lay out the pieces in the most efficient manner.

5 Transfer any notches and markings onto your fabric, these are important for lining up your pattern pieces and positioning darts, zips and buttons. Use either a tailor's tack, or a heat-erasable pen to mark.

### Thread facts

- You should select a thread that meets your specific sewing needs. Your fabric will have an influence on the type of thread you select. As a rule the fibre content of your thread should be the same or similar to the fabric.
- Heavyweight fabrics require a thicker thread and lightweight versions require a finer thread. Very lightweight or sheer fabrics are best sewn with a very fine needle and an extra fine thread.
- Using the correct thread thickness may help reduce puckering, a problem frequently encountered when sewing with lightweight fabrics.
- Don't forget to consider the care requirements of your thread choice. They should be compatible with the fabric care recommendations.



## SEW HQ

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### Cutting tricks

- Keep patterns pinned to the fabric pieces until it's time to sew them together. This will help to identify the sections of the garment.
- Use a rotary cutter to achieve neat, straight cuts. If using scissors, use the full blade for the long, straight edges and work with smaller cuts around the curves.
- Invest in a cutting mat and keep it clean and flat when not in use.
- Keep your fabric scissors sharp and use them for just fabric.
- Store template pieces together in a project bag to use again.

# Stitch terms



**APPLIQUÉ:** Decorative technique with pieces of fabric stitched on top of another

**BACK STITCH:** A hand stitch made by inserting the needle at the mid-point of a preceding stitch so that stitches overlap by half lengths. Strong stitch used for outlining and seams

**BACK TACK:** Set the machine to reverse and work back over a couple of stitches to secure

**BIAS BINDING:** Narrow strips of fabric used to create neat finishes to hems and edgings

**BOBBIN:** Removable spool underneath the needle plate on a sewing machine where the lower thread is wound

**GRAIN:** The lengthways and crossways directions of the threads in the fabric

**INTERFACING:** Fabric placed between the main materials to give item structure, available in a range of weights

**PRESSER FOOT:** Part of the sewing machine that is lowered over the fabric to hold in place while stitching

**RAW EDGE:** The cut edge of fabric. This can be finished with zig-zag machine stitch to prevent fraying

**REVERSE STITCH:** A sewing machine setting that allows you to work back over a row of stitches to secure

**RIGHT SIDE:** This is the side of the fabric that will be on show when the project is completed. When given the instruction 'right sides facing', place the fabric right sides together

**SEAM ALLOWANCE:** Amount of fabric allowed for turning to make a seam

**SELF LINED FABRIC:** Using the same material as a lining

**SELVEDGE:** The finished edges of woven fabrics

**STAY STITCH:** Straight machine stitch worked just inside a seam allowance to strengthen it and prevent breaking

**TACKING STITCH:** A hand sewn temporary stitch used to hold fabrics together, or as a guide before stitching

**TOP STITCH:** A machine straight stitch used on the right side of an item, often in contrasting colour for decorative effect

**WARP:** The lengthways threads on woven fabrics, the edges of which form the selvedge

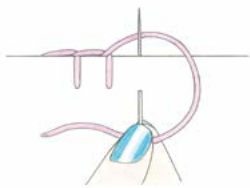
**WEFT:** The widthways threads that run across the warp on a woven fabric

**WRONG SIDE:** The reverse side of the fabric, which will be the inside the completed garment

**ZIG-ZAG STITCH:** A machine stitch used to secure raw edges of fabric and for decoration, used in a variety of sizes

## Blanket stitch

Also known as buttonhole stitch, used for reinforcing the edge of thick materials



1 Secure the thread and working along the edge, bring the needle to the surface of the fabric.

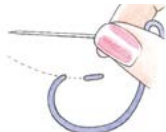
2 Take the needle through from the back of the fabric to the surface on the stitch line. Loop the end of the thread under the needle and pull through to adjust so that the stitch lies along the edge of the fabric.



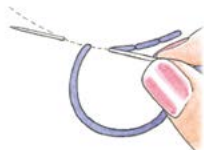
3 Repeat to create evenly spaced stitches along the fabric edge, maintain an even tension to avoid distorting the fabric.

## Back stitch

Strong hand stitches with a neat finish



1 Secure the thread on the wrong side of the fabric and bring the needle through to the surface to start the first stitch. Move a stitch length backwards along the sewing line, take the needle back through the fabric and then bring it to the surface at the end position of this stitch.



2 Moving back along the stitching line, take the needle down through the same hole as the previous thread. Bring it to the surface for the end position of the stitch. Keep repeating along the sewing

## Chain stitch



1 Bring the needle to the surface at the start of the sewing line. Take it back down very close to where it came up, then return it to the surface at the end position of the first stitch.



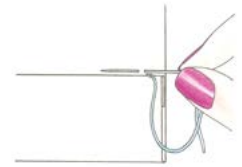
2 Take the needle back down, close to where it came up through the loop and bring it back up at the end position of the next stitch.



3 Continue working along the stitching line, repeating the steps to create a chain of links. Finish by catching the final loop with a small stitch to secure.

## Slip stitch

Small stitches used for hemming or sewing up projects after stuffing



1 Work on the fold in the fabric, secure the thread with a double stitch. Pick up two threads of the fabric with the needle tip, then slip the needle through the fold of the hem.



2 Bring the needle out 0.5cm along, then pick up two more threads of fabric before returning through the fold of the hem.



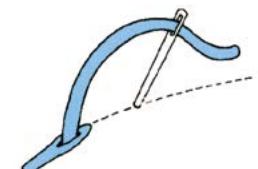
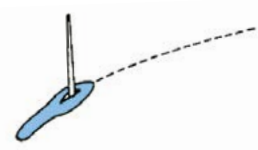
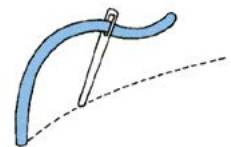
3 Pull the thread lightly as you work to tighten the stitches, being careful not to distort the fabric which makes the stitches visible.

## Split stitch

1 Split stitch will resemble a chain when done correctly. Draw a guideline to follow and work with the fabric stretched in a hoop.

2 Working from left to right, bring the needle up at the start of the design line, then down a stitch length to the right. Pull the thread through to form the first stitch, then bring the needle up through the centre of the stitch, piercing the thread.

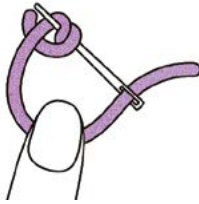
3 Repeat along the length of the line. To use split stitch for filling, simply work lines of split stitch close together, following the contours of the shape to be filled.



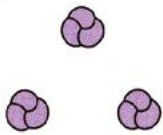
### French knot



1 Bring the needle through to the right side of the fabric where you want to position the knot. Wrap the thread two or three times around the needle.

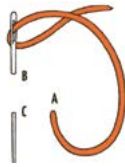


2 Hold the thread close to the surface of the fabric, then pull it tight and re-insert the needle into the fabric close to where it emerged.

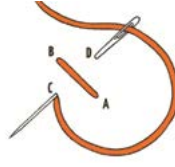


3 Keeping the tension on the wrapped thread, pull the needle through to the back of the work; the knot formed should sit on the surface of the fabric.

### Cross stitch



1 Bring the needle out at A and make a diagonal stitch to B, an equal distance up and to the left of A. Bring the needle out at C, directly below B and level with A.



2 Make a second diagonal stitch to D, immediately above B and level with B. To work a second adjoining cross, bring the needle out at C again.



3 Work cross stitches in the same way across the row. Complete all the A to B stitches first and then go back along the row doing C to D for a neater finish

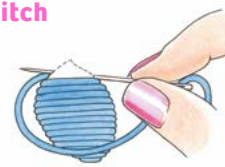
### Tracing templates

With some fabrics, it may not be possible to trace your motif directly from the template. Instead, tape the template to a light box or window pane. Position the fabric right side up on top, taping the edges to prevent it moving, then trace the design on to the fabric using a vanishing pen or pencil. Otherwise you can transfer it using carbon paper or use the 'prick and pounce' method, where you make a series of pin pricks all along the lines of your paper template, place it on the fabric and use chalk to go over the lines. The chalk goes through the holes and on to the fabric below. The lines can then be reinforced by going over them with a chalk pencil or a vanishing pen.

### Satin stitch

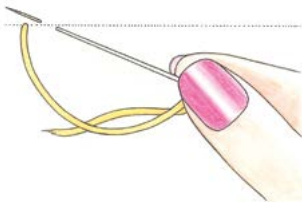


1 Starting on the wrong side of your work, pull the needle through to the base of the outline to be filled and push through the opposite side, forming a long, straight stitch.

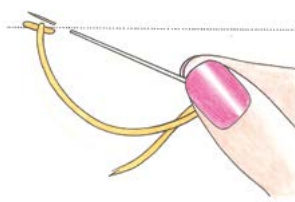


2 Underneath the work, move the needle down to the spot next to the first stitch and make a parallel line of thread. Repeat until the design is filled.

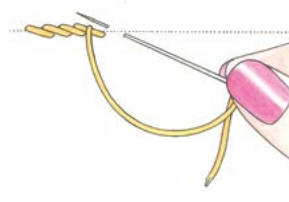
### Stem stitch



1 Working from left to right, bring the needle up through the start of your line, then move a stitch width to the right. Then pull it up halfway back along the previous stitch.



2 Make another stitch to the right of the first, bringing the needle back up halfway through and slightly above the stitch as before – the stitches should look slightly slanted.



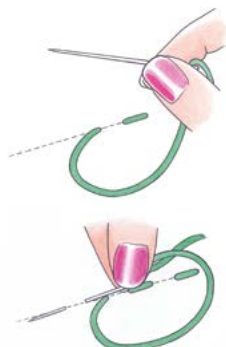
3 Keep stitching a length to the right, then back up through the halfway point of the previous stitch keeping the thread coming out on the same side to form a line of even stitches.

### Running stitch

A simple row of stitches that creates a dotted line of thread

1 Secure the thread on the wrong side of the fabric, then bring the needle through to the surface to start the first stitch.

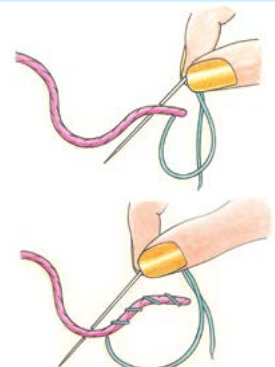
2 Moving forward, take the needle back down through the fabric and then bring up again. Keep the distance between the gaps and the stitches the same size and continue along the stitching line.



### Couching

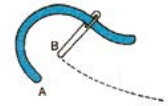
1 Thread cord onto a large-eyed needle and bring up at the start of the design line. Hold in position. Bring a regular needle of sewing thread up very close and to the left of the cord, then take it down through the fabric on the other side, making a stitch.

2 Continue along the cord in this way. When finished couching, take both needles back through to the reverse of the fabric and secure.

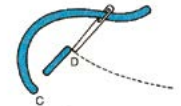


### Long and short stitch

This variation of satin stitch can be used to cover larger shapes. It can also be worked in several colours or different shades of the same colour. As with satin stitch, stitches should be close together, with no gaps between them, to create a solid area. Keep even the longer stitches quite short so they do not snag or pull. Draw an outline of the shape to be filled and take the needle in and out of the fabric just outside the outline, so it ends up covered by the stitches.



1 Bring the needle out at A and insert it at B, on the edge of design.



2 Bring the needle out at C and insert it at D, making a longer stitch that butts up tightly against the first stitch.



3 Repeat these two stitches to the end of the row.



4 On subsequent rows, bring the needle up through the stitch in the previous row. Work stitches that are the same length, but stagger the starting point, as shown. Long and short stitches can be worked so that they fan out to fill a shape; this is particularly appropriate for petal and leaf shapes.