

Six Sewing Exercises for Absolute Beginners

In the [Learn How to Sew Series](#) on MadamSew.com, we looked at all the things a beginner might need to know and get to be able to start his or her sewing journey confidently. After you've gathered all the basic sewing materials you can start practicing with a sewing machine. I made a compact list of some interesting exercises for absolute beginners. When you master these techniques, I believe you can put your mind to a real sewing project. It is important to feel in control of your sewing machine in order to make professional looking things. The more you practice, the better you will get at this, but you don't need to stay in the practicing phase for too long. Finishing an actual project is very rewarding.

Sewing with a machine can take some practice. It takes time to learn how to coordinate your hands with the pedal. You need to learn how to master the speed control and guide the fabric under the machine to get an accurate stitch.

I believe if you practice the below five things, you will be able to comfortably start your first sewing project. In just a bit, we will share six exercises for you to practice sewing with a sewing machine.

- Sewing on a marked line, straight and curvy
- Sewing a seam
- Sewing a hem
- Backstitching
- Taking a 45 degree turn

If you want more information on [how to set up your sewing machine](#), read this blog post and learn what the different parts of a sewing machine are, how a stitch is made, and how to thread and/or troubleshoot your sewing machine.



Six Sewing Machine Exercises for Beginners

Start by threading your sewing machine with top thread and bobbin thread and install a regular sewing machine needle. If I'm talking in riddles here, read the article I referred to above, first. If you have an electronic sewing machine, just go with the standard settings. If not, set your stitch to a stitch length or 2.5, which is the standard stitch length.

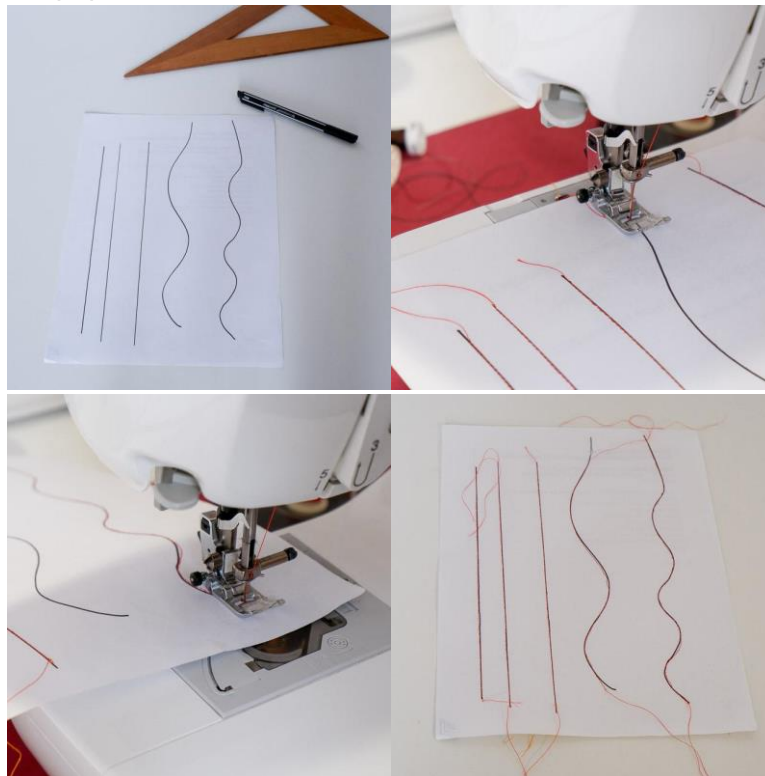
1. Sew on Paper

Forget fabrics for a moment for this step and grab a piece of paper. Paper is much easier than fabrics to maneuver. Yes, you can sew on paper! This could even be a separate craft project. I [made stitched Christmas cards](#) a couple of years ago.



Back to practicing. Follow these steps:

- Draw some lines on a sheet, some straight, some curvy
- Put the sheet under your presser foot, start at the far end of the paper and have the paper in front of you, partly on the sewing machine, partly in front of the machine
- Lower the presser foot
- Push the pedal carefully and make stitches through the paper, following the lines and guiding the paper under the presser foot until you reach the end of the paper
- Push the pedal a little harder to speed up if you feel confident
- Stop pushing the pedal when you want to stop, lift the needle from the paper, pull the paper out from under the needle and cut the two threads



Always go slow at first. Get to know the speed of your machine and the way to handle the “gas”. Play a bit with the stitch length and maybe another type of stitches like a zigzag stitch.

2. Sew Curved and Straight Lines on Fabric

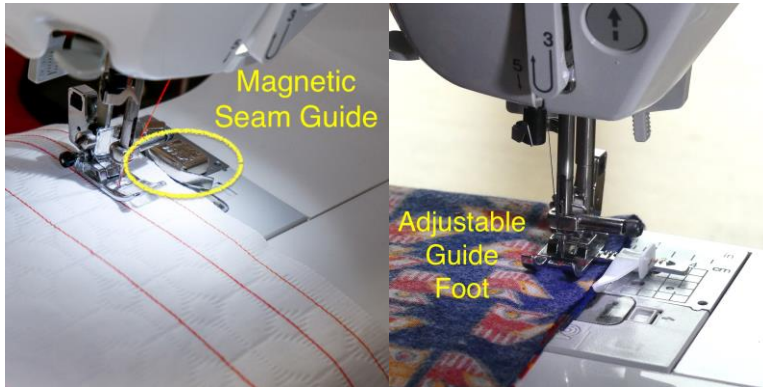
When you are in control with sewing on paper, grab a piece of cotton fabric. Quilt fabric is perfect, or a piece of white muslin. Don't use stretchy fabrics. These are too difficult for a novice sewist. Don't start sewing with knits until you are confident sewing with woven fabrics like cotton or canvas, or you will just end up with a lot of frustration.

Iron the fabric first, then mark some lines with a [temporary fabric marker](#) on the fabric piece and try sewing on the marks. I used [a heat erasable fabric marker](#). The marks disappear with the pass of a hot iron.

You can also freestyle and sew without marks of course, but you'll learn more if you try to follow a mark on the fabric or the guide lines on your sewing machine. Align the fabric edge with one of those guides and try to stay at the same distance with your stitches.



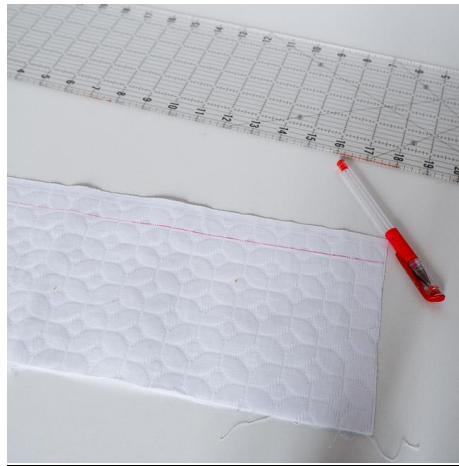
If a guideline does not help enough to keep that set distance, there are some tools on the market to help you. The [magnetic seam guide](#) can be positioned on any metal needle plate and makes sure the fabric stays aligned when sewing. The [adjustable guide presser foot](#) does the same thing, which comes in handy for those without a metal needle plate to attach the magnet to. You can also use a removable tape, also referred to as washi tape.



3. Stitch Long Folds

Sewing on a long fold is actually 'hemming'. In order to learn how to hem accurately, you are going to mark, iron, pin and sew in this exercise.

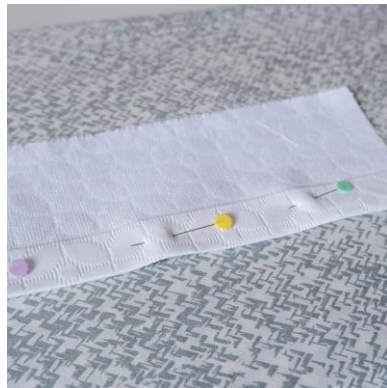
1. Draw a help line with a temporary fabric marker 1 inch from the edge of your fabric. Use a [chalk marker](#), a soap sliver or a [heat erasable fabric marker](#).



2. Fold the fabric on this marked line and iron the fold. The fold should be 1 inch from the edge of the fabric. This is a single folded hem if you would stitch it down as it is now. But, we are making a double folded hem. This way the raw edges of the fabric will be completely hidden.



3. Fold the fabric over again 1 inch from the edge. The raw edge is now hidden. Iron this double folded hem flat. Add some sewing [pins](#) to hold the hem in place.



4. Move over to the sewing machine. Sew a line close to the fold from top to bottom, removing the pins one by one as they get closer to the sewing machine. You can mark this line or use the seam allowance marks on the needle plate of your sewing machine as a guide. Align the edge of the fabric with one of the guidelines on your machine plate and keep the edge on that line when sewing. When you are sure that your fold is straight you can also use that line as a guide together with your presser foot.



A nice tool to make ironing hems easier is the [hot hem ruler](#). It makes marking unnecessary. This ironing ruler speeds up the process of hemming while keeping it accurate.



4. Sew Seams

To construct things with a needle, fabric and thread you will be sewing a lot of seams. When you sew a seam you are attaching two pieces of fabric. A seam is the line where two pieces of fabric are bonded together, in this case using thread and stitches and a sewing machine.

Where do you sew the seams? This is where seam allowance comes in. Seam allowance is the distance between the stitching line and the fabric's edge. This fabric edge will be hidden on the inside of your project. Most sewing machines have seam allowance guides on the needle plate to follow to keep a straight line. Depending on the project you are making, you can use a different seam allowance. Common seam allowances range between $\frac{1}{4}$ inch and 1 inch. A larger seam allowance is easier because you have more margin of error.

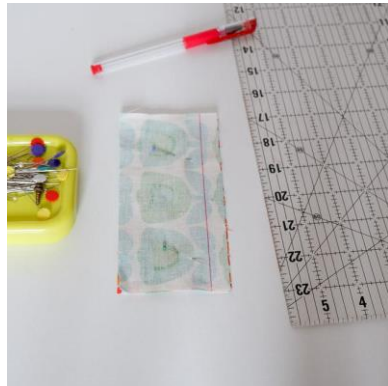
Sewing through two layers of fabric is not so hard, you just have to make sure they stay together and don't shift to get an accurate seam.

How to sew a seam with ½ inch seam allowance...

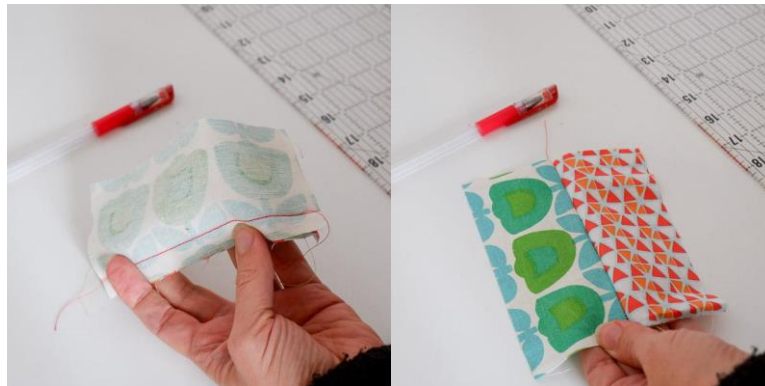
- Position two pieces of fabric on top of each other, right sides together



- Use pins to hold the two fabric layers in place.



- Sew a line at a ½ inch distance from the fabric's edge. Use the seam allowance guide of your sewing machine to keep a straight line.



- Iron the seam open



There are different tools on the market to help you keep a straight line. The [magnetic seam guide](#) is one of the classics. It is a little magnet that you can attach on the needle plate of your sewing machine. You guide your fabric along that guide to keep your stitches consistent.



5. Backstitching

Most projects require that the thread doesn't come undone at the start and the end of a row of stitches. If you sew a seam, you want this seam to be strong, right? For backstitching, you use the reverse sewing direction of your sewing machine. You sew a couple of stitches in the opposite direction you're sewing in, on top of the stitches you've just sewn. This way your stitches will get locked-in.

Check your sewing machine's manual to find out where the backstitch button or handle is located on your sewing machine.

Practice sewing 'backwards' with your sewing machine on a scrap... Back and forth..

Back and forth... 😊



6. Do a 45 degree angle turn

When you make a 45 degree turn with a sewing machine, you need to lower your needle in the fabric at the turning point, stop, lift the presser foot, turn the fabric so you can start sewing the other row comfortably. That's it.

It is important to have the needle in the fabric. If not, your fabric will move when you lift the presser foot and you'll have to reposition your fabric with the risk of creating a loop with your thread. Some sewing machines have a setting to have the needle in the fabric when you stop sewing (= let go of the pedal). If you don't have that, you can use the hand crank at the side and manually lower the needle by turning the wheel toward you.



Start with an Easy Sewing Project

When you have tried all of the above, choose an easy project to start with so you will have this great feeling of success when you finish it. On the Madam Sew Sewing Blog we have published many beginner proof sewing project tutorials over the years. Scroll through our blog or pick one from the little list below and have fun!

- [How to make a drawstring bag](#)
- [How to make reusable make up wipes](#)
- [How to make a flag garland](#)



It is essential you feel comfortable sewing on your machine to make good looking clothing, accessories or home decor items. Think of your machine as a car, you have to feel in control to feel fully secure using it. Becoming proficient at sewing is really a matter of time spent at the sewing machine. Practice makes perfect is definitely true!

Questions or extra tips for novice sewists, leave a comment below or send me an email an@madamsew.com

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