

# Learn How to Sew

Do you want to embark on a creative journey into the world of sewing? Learning how to sew is a rewarding and enjoyable hobby, allowing you to create beautiful objects like clothing, accessories, home decor, and more. If you have never touched a sewing machine, you are probably wondering... Where do I start?

In this guide, we'll outline the first steps you can take, what you should learn first, and the essential tools and supplies you'll require to begin your sewing adventure.

You will get a lot of links to other resources and Madam Sew articles that explain the different parts of a successful sewing journey more in-depth or give you inspiration to continue and learn more about sewing. There is so much to learn and that is the interesting part about sewing, there is always something new to try and get better at!

This is a long blog but worth the read! If you want to keep it for future reference, you can also download and print the PDF. The link is at the end of this article.

## First Steps

### 1. Set Your Sewing Goals

Determine what you want to achieve with sewing. Are you interested in making clothing, home decor items, costumes, bags, or something else? Setting clear goals will help you focus your learning and make informed decisions about the types of projects and skills you want to develop. Grab a little notebook and write down what you would like to learn and accomplish.

### 2. Sewing Time and Space

You need time and a bit of space in your house to start sewing. You need a couple of hours to sew or practice sewing. Setting up your sewing stuff if you don't have a dedicated space, takes some time. If you only have half an hour before going to bed, I can tell you that it will be hard to make any progress. It is better to book 2-3 hours in your calendar or one afternoon every week, instead of one hour, three nights in a row. But, if you can set up a little sewing corner in your house, that will certainly help you to get going and allow you to practice for shorter periods of time.

Creating a dedicated sewing workspace with a sturdy table, good lighting, and ample storage for your tools and materials is great but certainly not necessary when you are just starting. You can simply sew on the kitchen table or a desk.

### 3. Learn by Doing

You don't need to start reading books about sewing or spend nights surfing the internet before you start your first project. But along the way, you will need to use Google or another search engine or a beginner-friendly sewing guide to provide you with valuable insights so you can keep on learning. Sewing can be easy and straightforward but can also become very complex, depending on what you want to do. There is so much valuable information online that you can learn to sew by yourself.

And please know that sewing is an ongoing learning process. I've been sewing for 14 years now and there is still so much growth possible. That is what is one of the things that is so great about this hobby!

If you know you are not the type of person to discover everything on your own, try to find a sewing class near you to learn the basics.

## What to Learn First

Getting the right tools and gear and knowing how to use them all is very important and saves you from frustrations along the way.

1. A **sewing machine** is the most important tool you'll use as a beginner and the most complex.
2. But even when you have a machine, there will always be some **hand sewing** involved.
3. You cannot sew without **fabric**
4. and some **basic sewing tools, notions**
5. and **sewing techniques**

### 1. Sewing Machine Basics

If you're using a sewing machine, invest in a reliable one that is suitable for beginners. Make sure it comes with a user manual for reference. If you still need to buy a sewing machine, this article about [how to choose a beginner sewing machine](#) gives you some insightful criteria and tips and can help you on the way to choosing the right machine for your budget.



## Know your Sewing Machine

You first need to learn how to operate your sewing machine. Understand the different parts of your sewing machine, how to thread it, and how to adjust settings like stitch length and tension. In this Madam Sew blog post on [how a sewing machine works](#) you'll learn about:

- The different sewing machine **types** that are available
- The **different parts** of a sewing machine
- How a **stitch** is made on a sewing machine
- How you **set up** and thread a sewing machine



## Sewing Machine Needles

The needle is an important part of a sewing machine. You can use different types of needles on a sewing machine. Depending on what fabric you are sewing with, you can attach a needle that works best for the thickness, material and stretch of that fabric. I would recommend buying a little set of 'universal' sewing needles, the regular needles that have a couple of different sizes in a pack. These needles can be used for medium weight woven cotton fabrics. A needle won't last forever so, you can buy other needles that fit your projects and fabrics. In my [blog on sewing machine needles](#), you can find everything you need to know about the different types, sizes of needles and when to change a needle.



## Sewing Machine Thread

Sewing machine thread comes in many different qualities, colors and materials. Threads come on spools and cones. Cones hold much more thread but usually don't fit on the spool holders of a household sewing machine.

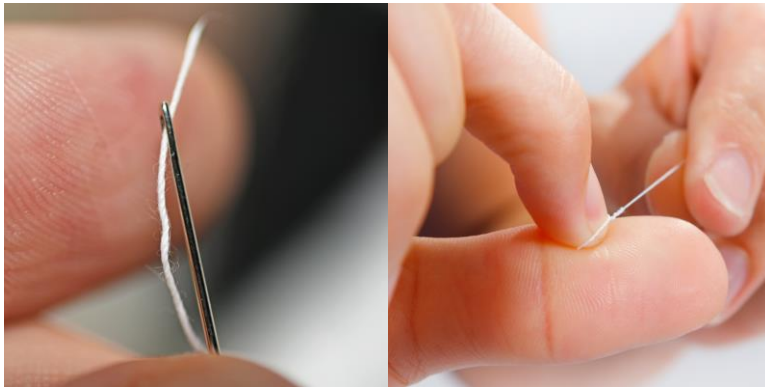
Quilters often like to use 100% cotton threads, whereas sewists rely more on polyester threads. Polyester makes a strong durable thread suitable for all types of sewing. It doesn't shrink or fade easily when washed. And polyester thread doesn't produce a lot of lint, which helps to keep your sewing machine clean. Make sure you buy all-purpose sewing machine thread. Know that hand sewing threads and [embroidery threads](#) are different and often coated, even if they are also 100% polyester. The standard weight of sewing machine thread is 40 or 50. The higher the

thread weight number, the thinner the thread. When you see 40/2 on a spool, this means the weight is 40 and the ply two, 50/3 is a thread with a weight of 50 and three-ply. This [article about quilting thread](#) also gives more information about threads in general.

## 2. Basic Hand Sewing Techniques

Even if you primarily use a sewing machine to sew, knowing basic hand sewing techniques is essential. Learn how to sew on buttons, make simple repairs, and perform basic hand stitches like running stitch, backstitch, and whipstitch.

On the [Madam Sew Sewing Blog](#) we have a little series about hand sewing basics. Threading a hand needle involves [getting the thread through the eye](#) of the needle and [knotting the thread](#). We have blogs that explore both of these subjects in depth.



When hand sewing, you can use a single or double thread when threading your needle. Double threads are good when you need the extra hold. But if you don't want the thread to show or are temporarily basting a seam, you will use a single thread. In Cathy's mini blog she explains in detail [when to use a double or a single thread](#).



When you start or finish hand stitching, you don't want the knot nor the thread ends to show. Find out all about [how to neatly hide your knot and thread end in this tutorial](#).



In my own sewing projects, I try to use my sewing machine as much as possible. The only hand stitches I use are **basting stitches** and **ladder stitches**. [Basting stitches](#) are temporary stitches to hold something together that is difficult to attach with sewing pins or clips or you want to try on and fit comfortably before sewing the final stitch. [Invisible ladder stitches](#) are used to sew a hole closed in a seam. Why would you have a hole in a seam? To turn a project inside out. You always sew seams on the inside of a project, which means you have to turn it 'right side' out when almost done. And you will have to close this "turning hole" neatly.



### 3. Fabrics

A basic introduction on fabrics is very helpful. Learning about different types of fabrics and their characteristics, can help you make appropriate choices. Understanding fabric properties will help you pick the right material for your specific project, ensuring it turns out as expected. When you start to sew, you will most likely rely on tutorials or clothing patterns that come with fabric recommendations. It is best to stick to these recommendations in the beginning. After a while you will get to know different fabrics and how they react and drape.

Also keep in mind that some fabrics are harder to work with than others. A woven cotton fabric or a muslin is a good one for a first project. Quilt fabrics are mostly woven cottons. Don't choose knit fabrics or very stretchy fabrics when you haven't sewn before. It is not easy to handle fabrics with stretch. Keeping a straight line and guiding them under your sewing machine is more of a challenge with these than with a woven non-stretchy fabric. Gradually explore more diverse fabric types as your skills improve.



When you are a complete beginner, I advise you to go to a **physical fabric store** where you can touch the fabric, test its drape, and see the colors in sunlight. This way you can really decide if this is the fabric you had in mind for your project and you can also ask the shop assistant for help. When you just want to play around with the sewing machine, you don't have to buy new fabrics. Use old bedsheets or men's shirts to do a test run or go to a thrift store and buy fabric leftovers or clothing that you can reuse.



#### 4. Your Sewing Kit

Besides a sewing machine, needles, threads and fabrics, there are a couple of basic sewing tools you can't start without.

You will be...

1. Cutting fabric end threads
2. Measuring people, things, fabrics and pattern pieces
3. Marking patterns, notches, helplines,... on fabric
4. Ironing fabrics, seams and hems
5. Pinning fabric pieces together
6. Making mistakes and having to rip seams open to start over

## A. Tools for Cutting

Buy [good quality fabric scissors](#). You can basically cut everything in the sewing process with a good pair of tailor's shears. But be careful to never use your fabric scissors for anything else but threads and fabrics. Paper cutting will make shears dull very fast. The most important thing is that your fabric scissors are sharp, have long blades, and are comfortable to hold.



Little scissors like [thread snips](#) or the [classic stork scissors](#) to cut threads or little detailed pieces are nice to have but not necessary during the first months.



If you are quilting or cutting a lot of straight little pieces to make accessories, you might want to consider buying [a rotary cutter](#), [cutting mat](#) and [cutting ruler](#). Did you know that [pinking shears](#) are used to finish edges in sewing. The zigzag cuts prevent the fabric from fraying too quickly.



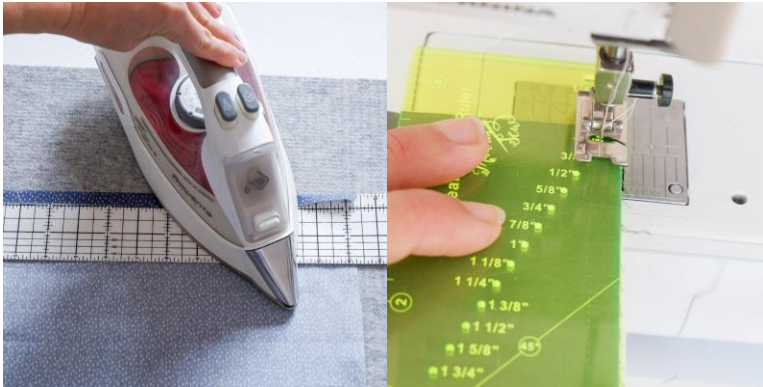
## B. Tools for Measuring

To cut and sew accurately, you need to measure. Measuring happens in a lot of different stages during the sewing process. Use a flexible [measuring tape](#) or a [body self measuring tape](#) to take the measurements of your model. Use [a seam gauge](#) to set the distance of a hem or add seam allowance when you copy a pattern on your fabric.



I believe a little seam gauge for small measurements and a measuring tape are the most important rulers you need when you start to sew. Other more specific rulers like the [hot hem ruler](#) or the [seam guide ruler](#), are worth looking into as well if you need help ironing accurate hems or want to accurately position your needle, but are more of a nice to have than an absolute must.





### C. Tools for Marking

You will need a temporary fabric marker for fabrics. Drawing help lines on fabrics is an essential step in sewing. Lines and symbols like buttons, darts, gathering points are transferred from patterns to the fabric. Seam allowances are also marked on the fabric. It is important to use a marker that won't stain the fabrics permanently. All marks need to be removed when your project is finished. Always test on scraps of your project fabric first!

There are a lot of different fabric markers on the market. I have been testing a lot of different ones over the years. I prefer [chalk marker pens](#) because they are easiest to use, they mark most consistently across different fabrics and stay on the fabric for an appropriate amount of time. If you don't want to spend money on this, you can also use soap slivers. These wash out easily and slide smoothly over most fabrics. You just need to have some thin pieces of soap available.



Read the linked [article about different types of making tools](#) for more information.



## D. Ironing and Sewing

You might not have realized when you started sewing that ironing is an important part of the sewing process. If you want fine results, you need to iron a lot. When you are setting up your sewing machine, you need to get out your iron and ironing board as well. But, if you don't have the space to set up an ironing board near your sewing machine, you can use [a wool pressing mat](#). Quilters love these wool ironing mats. The wool makes the seams or hems you iron extra crisp and the fabric super flat in no time because of the wool. And you can take this mat to a class or use it on your kitchen table.



In this blog Carole talks about [pressing principles](#) for quilting and Ana also shared her [tips and tricks for pressing](#). The tips and information from these articles are written for quilters but are also interesting for sewists.



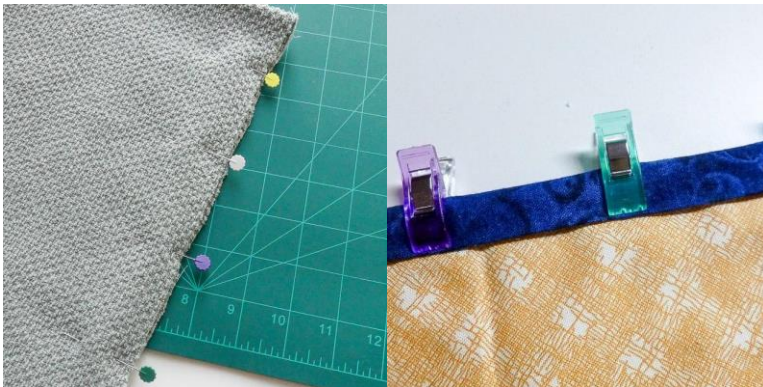
## E. Pinning

In order to sew two pieces of fabric together accurately or sew a professional looking hem, the fabrics need to be held together correctly before the stitches are put in place.

This is where pins come in. Good pinning determines where the fabric ends up in the final project. Pins are also used to secure pattern pieces on the fabrics so you can copy and cut them accurately.

There are two main methods you can use to pin fabric, horizontal to the seam or vertically (perpendicular). There are many different kinds of pins on the market. I would opt for [glass head pins](#). These are basic pins with a glass head. They are easy to grab and you can iron over them, if you need a quick extra press. When working with thicker layers, these pins might be too short, then you can add [long flower pins](#) to your sewing kit.

Little pin pricks are very common when you sew. If you want to avoid those, you can opt for [sewing clips](#). They are also great for holding thick layers. I use all three types, glass head pins, flower pins and clips.



In this article you will get some tips to nudge you in the right direction on [how to use sewing pins](#). One tip I want to share with you right now: throw away bent pins! 😊



## F. Making-Mistakes Tools

Troubleshooting is also a part of the sewing process, a less interesting part and a to-be-avoided-part, but necessary. Your sewing machine will not always react the way you want. In the construction phase, you can easily join the wrong seams, yes, that happens to every sewist. When you want to remove a row of stitches, you need a good quality [seam ripper](#) to pick out those tiny stitches. You can find basic seam rippers in your local

sewing supplies store, if you want one with [a comfort handle](#) or [a lighted seam ripper](#) to see the stitches better, check out the [MadamSew Webshop](#)



Another problem that might occur is thread bunching on your sewing machine. Your threads are all tangled up under your fabric and your fabric is now attached to the machine. This is a problem that all sewists face. To free your project, I use the [bird nest toolkit](#) that has a sharp knife and long hook in it. This is not a beginners must-have but I thought it was nice to mention this trouble shooting kit.



## 5. Beginner Sewing Practice Exercises

You have to feel in control of your sewing machine in order to make professional looking things. My one piece of advice: practice, practice, practice! 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 manage the speed control and guide the fabric under the machine to get an accurate stitch.

What should you practice to be able to comfortably start your first sewing project? Read this [blog with six useful exercises](#) that a novice sewer can try to get some sewing machine confidence. In the blog, I'll explain the following exercises in detail:

[Add link to new blog + thumbnail image](#)

- Practice sewing on paper
- Sew curved and straight lines on fabric
- Stitch a long fold
- Sew a seam
- Backstitching
- Do a 45 degree angle turn

## Start Your First Sewing Project

Now that you have an overview of - the first steps to take; what to practice initially; the essential tools and supplies - you can embark on your first sewing project with confidence. Choose your first project wisely. Simple projects like making a basic pillowcase or a drawstring bag, will help you build confidence and learn basic sewing skills.

Some beginner-friendly sewing projects:

[Make a Drawstring Bag](#)

[Make a Baby Bib](#)



For clothing and more complex projects, you will need a sewing pattern. Patterns provide detailed instructions and templates to follow. Having an insight on how something is constructed is more difficult than you think. You will certainly learn a lot by doing and by using patterns. You can also make a pattern from an existing piece of clothing, like I did in this [‘construct a t-shirt pattern yourself’ blog](#). If you need a hand, in our [how to work with a PDF pattern](#) blog, Jackie guides you step-by-step in using a free sweater dress pattern.



There's so much to learn when you sew, and it takes a lot of energy to filter all the information. That is what I tried to do with this article, to be that filter. Sometimes you get stuck trying to find the best way to do things or the best tools to use—and then you don't make time to actually sew.

For more sewing inspiration, you can check out [these blogs](#) that list [different beginner projects](#). Remember that sewing is a skill that takes time and practice to master, so be patient with yourself and enjoy the creative process. As you progress, you can delve into more advanced techniques and tackle intricate sewing projects. Happy sewing!



If you have any questions about this extensive 'learn how to sew' blog, don't hesitate to get in touch [an@madamsew.com](mailto:an@madamsew.com) or leave a comment.

Happy Sewing!

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