



# BASIC SEWING

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JOANN'S FIELD GUIDE

NAME

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# Introduction

Hi there! Welcome to JOANN's Field Guide to Basic Sewing.

If you picked this up, you must be interested in learning how to sew apparel or home decor. Lucky for you, we've got lots of tips!

For specific projects and inspiration, make sure to visit [joann.com/projects](https://www.joann.com/projects). But if you need some basic information to get started, you've got the right guide in your hands. After reading through this information, you'll know more about how to select the right tools and supplies as well as the terminology you'll need to read a pattern. We also cover sewing basics to arm you with the confidence to get started.

For more information, be sure to check out our sewing classes at [joann.com/classes](https://www.joann.com/classes), as well as our Field Guides to Sewing Machine and Apparel.

As always, we can hardly wait to see what you make. Share with us! [#handmadewithjoann](https://twitter.com/handmadewithjoann)

## Words to Know

**Backstitch** -- Secures a line of stitches. Backstitching is overlapping stitches at both the beginning and end of a stitching line.

**Baste** -- Basting stitches are long stitches done by hand or machine that temporarily hold fabric in place before sewing. They are removed once the final seam is in place.

**Bias** -- Refers to any line diagonal to the crosswise and lengthwise grains. True bias is a cut made on a 45 degree angle to the selvage. This direction allows for the most stretch.

**Clip** -- Helps flatten a curved seam. Snip at even intervals along the inner curve being careful not to cut into the stitch line.

**Crossgrain** -- Runs perpendicular to the selvage.

**Edgestitch** -- A second row of stitches very close to the seam line on the right side of the fabric. This is usually sewn to keep pressed seams in place.

**Finish seams** -- There are several ways to finish a seam or raw edge to get a neat look and prevent fraying. For sturdy fabrics, just trim seams with pinking shears. For lighter fabrics, use a zigzag stitch along the seam. Other methods of finishing include turned-under seams, bound edges and serged edges.

**Gather** -- Gathering stitches are used to sew a longer edge to a shorter edge, resulting in significant fullness.

**Grade seam** -- Seams need to be graded to reduce bulk when pressing the seam allowance in a single direction. After the seam is sewn, trim the seam allowance in half. Then, identify which side of the seam allowance will be laying against the body once it is pressed, and trim that side of the seam allowance in half.

**Grainline** -- The grainline runs parallel to the selvage. The long arrow symbol printed on a pattern corresponds to the location of the fabric's grainline when laying out patterns.

**Notch** -- The notches on a pattern help align the pattern pieces when you sew them together.

**Raw edge** -- The raw edge is the unfinished, cut edge of the fabric.

**Right side & wrong side** -- The right side of the fabric will show on a finished garment; the wrong side will be on the inside. Here's a quick tip: the raw edges of knits fabrics tend to roll toward the right side.

**Staystitch** -- Staystitching is a straight stitch sewn through one layer of fabric. It's most often used around a curve to prevent distortion.

**Seam Allowance** -- The seam allowance is the distance between the stitching line and the raw edge of a piece of fabric. Most commercial patterns have a 5/8 inch seam allowance.

**Selvage** -- The self-finished edge of fabric. The selvages are located on either finished edge of fabric and are made while the fabric is being manufactured, usually on a loom.

**Stitch length** -- The stitch length is determined by the movement of the feed dogs. It can be set so that the stitches are longer or shorter depending on the project.

**Topstitch** -- The stitching on the outside of a garment that is parallel to and usually 1/4 inch from the seam.

**Understitching** -- The stitching that helps seams lay flat and prevents facings and linings from rolling to the outside of the garment.

## Buying a Sewing Machine

*courtesy of Dritz*

This isn't something you do on a daily basis, so it can be overwhelming. Think about what types of items you want to make and how frequently you will use the machine. Don't invest in a machine with features you don't think you will use.

A good beginner machine should be able to do a straight stitch and a zigzag stitch. Look for machines that will allow you to adjust the stitch length and width as well as the tension. A machine that comes with a zipper foot, buttonhole foot and reverse stitch function would be the perfect way to start.

Read the manual that comes with the machine and familiarize yourself with its many parts and what they do. Soon, you will have the knowledge and confidence you need to start sewing.

Need more information? Check out our Field Guide to Sewing Machines.

# Basic Tools & Supplies

*courtesy of Dritz*

There are many tools and supplies out there that can help make sewing easier. Having the correct basic supplies will make it easy for you to learn to sew correctly.

## NEEDLES & PINS

As a general rule, select the needle size and type to accommodate the thread and material you will use for your project. Replace needles after about 8 hours of sewing. A dull or bent needle could tear or damage your fabric and ruin your project.

### ANATOMY OF A PIN

**Head** -- Straight pins have one of the following types of heads: metal, plastic/nylon, no-melt plastic or glass.

**Shaft** -- Select the pin shaft diameter for the weight and thickness of the fabric: .5 millimeters (mm) for fine, lightweight fabrics and sheers; .6 mm for medium-weight fabrics; and .7 mm - 8 mm for medium-weight to heavyweight fabrics.

**Point** -- Pins should easily slide into the fabric without snagging or creating large holes. A sharp point is suitable for most woven fabrics. A ball point with a rounded tip slides between loops of knit fabric without snagging or pulling the yarns.

**Length** -- Choose the pin length that provides the best ease of handling for the specific project.

- Short 1/2 - 7/8 inch length allows for detailed handwork and close pinning.
- Medium 11/16 - 15/16 inch is a multipurpose length suitable for various sewing projects
- Long 1.5 - 2 inch is required for working with multiple layers of fabric.

## **SELECTING THE PROPER STRAIGHT PIN**

Select pins according to the type of pin, length of pin, type of pin head, type of metal from which it is made and the project for which it will be used.

**Applique** -- Short length helps position and hold appliques during hand sewing.

**Ball Point** -- Rounded tip is specially designed for knit and lingerie fabrics.

**Long Ball Point** -- Long pin for use on medium-weight knit fabrics.

**Beading** -- Large head is ideal for lace, open-weave fabrics and beading crafts.

**Bridal and Lace** -- Extra-fine pin for use on delicate or lightweight fabrics and lace.

**Color Ball** -- General purpose sewing pin for medium-weight fabrics.

**Extra Long Color Ball** -- Extra-long pin for lofty fabrics, quilt basting and home decor sewing.

**Craft** -- Extra-long pin for heavyweight fabrics, home decor projects and crafts.

**Dressmaker** -- General purpose sewing pin suitable for medium-weight fabrics.

**Glass Head** -- A general purpose pin with a heat-resistant glass head used for medium-weight fabrics.

**Extra Fine Glass Head** -- Fine .5 millimeter shaft with a heat-resistant head used for delicate fabrics and machine piecing.

**Metallic** -- Silver or gold plastic head pin used for general sewing, crafts and decorative projects.

**Pearlized** -- Colorful, pearlized head used for general sewing, floral, crafts and decorative projects.

**Pleating** -- Fine, sharp pin for pinning pleats and for delicate, lightweight fabrics.

**Quilting** -- Used for basting quilt layers and pinning multiple layers of fabric. Long length is also ideal for loose weaves, synthetic furs, plush velvets, bulky fabrics and heavy trims.

**Satin** -- Used for satin and medium-weight fabrics.

**Extra Long Satin** -- Extra-long pin with a tapered point for light- to medium-weight fabrics.

**Sequin** -- Extra-short, fine pin used for pinning sequins and thin trims, hand applique and crafts.

**Silk** -- Rustproof pin used on silk and synthetic fabrics.

**Super-Fine Sharp** -- .5 millimeter fine pin specially designed for microfibers and delicate fabrics.

## **CUTTING TOOLS**

### **SCISSORS**

Sharp scissors are a must for sewing. Never use your fabric scissors to cut paper. It will dull your blades and ruin your scissors for cutting fabric. There are many different types of scissors. Knowing what to use when can be extremely helpful. Here is a handy guide to give you some direction:

**Dressmaker shears** - heavy-duty scissors designed for a seamstress. These shears cut efficiently and smoothly through a variety of material.



**Pinking Shears** - have saw-toothed blades instead of straight ones. They are used to add a ravel-resistant (zigzag) finish to fabric or a decorative finish on fabrics that don't ravel.

**Appliqué Scissors** - specially designed for close trimming around edges and aligned seams without damaging the fabric.

**Embroidery scissors and thread snips or clippers** - ideal for clipping and notching, trimming fabric, and snipping thread tails.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

- Scissors with shorter blades (3-5 inches) are made for cutting in tight spaces and clipping intricate designs.
- Scissor with longer blades (8-10 inches) are made for long clean cuts.
- Use Teflon-coated scissors for cutting through adhesives to keep the blades from gumming up.

### **ROTARY CUTTERS**

Rotary cutters and a large rotary mat are excellent for slippery fabrics, fine shears, fleece, felt and synthetic suedes.

## **THREAD TYPES & TIPS**

There are several types of thread. Your project will typically dictate the type of thread you will need, as will your machine. When picking your thread, make sure to check your instruction manual because using the wrong kind could damage your machine. In most cases, though, you'll need to use an all-purpose thread. JOANN carries 3 major brands of thread: Coats & Clark, Gutermann and Sulky®.

Sulky® is used for machine embroidery. Its decorative thread is made from rayon and is not for basic sewing. Both Coats & Clark and Gutermann offer all-purpose sewing thread along with machine embroidery thread and several other specialty threads.

**All-Purpose** - polyester or cotton wrapped polyester; strong with a bit of give; suitable for most machine and hand sewing projects

**Cotton** - strong with no give and a silky finish; suitable for basic machine or hand sewing projects; not suggested for sewing knits

**Hand Quilting** - 100% natural mercerized cotton; strong with a silk-like luster for HAND quilting; coated so it slides easily through layers of fabric

**Machine Quilting** - 100% cotton thread; strong with a silk-like luster suitable for machine sewing; especially good for long arm machine quilting

**Silk** - fine and often used for embroidery; ideal for sewing silk, wool and basting all fabrics; does not leave holes and is very flexible

**Heavy Duty / Upholstery / Strong Outdoor** - 100% polyester; perfect for sewing upholstery, vinyl, leather and heavyweight fabrics; strong outdoor thread is UV resistant.

**Jeans or Topstitch** - heavy-duty polyester or cotton covered polyester; used for decorative seams and ornamental stitches; change to a topstitching needle and larger needle size to accommodate the thicker thread.

**Button and Carpet** - strong and heavy hand sewing thread; coated to prevent tangling

**Machine Embroidery** - either rayon or polyester, for decorative uses; good sheen and very smooth; Should not be used for garment construction

**Invisible / Transparent** - either nylon or polyester; strong but nylon thread is not heat resistant (a hot iron could melt it); can become brittle from laundering and exposure over time; can be a little difficult to work with

**Metallic** - decorative stitching or embroidery; can be used for hand or machine sewing; breaks easily; try using Dritz Sewers Aid when sewing with metallic thread

**Elastic** - thread with fine elastic within it; used for smocking or shirring

### THREAD TIPS

- When sewing a stretchy fabric such as a knit or Spandex, use polyester thread as it has some give to it.
- Cotton thread is not as strong as polyester but works well for patchwork or quilting, lighter-weight cotton fabrics and woven natural fiber fabrics.
- For sturdy fabrics that take a lot of wear, polyester would work well, as it is strong.
- When selecting thread color for your fabric, select a shade darker as the thread looks lighter when sewn.
- Do not use hand sewing thread in the machine; it is for hand sewing only.
- Rayon embroidery thread is designed for decorative stitches and machine embroidery where a sheen is desired. It is not strong enough to use for construction.
- For bold topstitching, as on jeans, heavy-duty thread gives a nice finish. Change to a topstitching needle and larger needle size to accommodate the thicker thread.
- Invisible thread is generally clear nylon or polyester that does not show much when sewn.
- Serger thread is a thin polyester thread on a cone for use on sergers when three or more threads are used together in a seam.
- In most cases, the same thread should also be used in the bobbin. For machine embroidery, there is special bobbin thread that comes in black and white. When using topstitching thread, all-purpose thread is often used in the bobbin. When sewing heavy duty items, such as canvas and upholstery, the heavier thread should be used for both the needle and the bobbin.

## OTHER SEWING SUPPLIES

**Pin Cushion** - a small stuffed cushion to store sewing pins or needles with sharp points down.

**Tape Measure** - a non-stretch, flexible tape measure is used to take body measurements to correctly size patterns or quickly measure an object or space.

**Marking Tools** - marking pencils or chalk are nonpermanent ways to mark fabric for basic sewing.

**Seam Ripper** - used to remove unwanted stitches or to open buttonholes. They have a pointed tip that slips easily under stitches and a cutting blade in the curve that slices through those unwanted stitches.

**Elastic Threaders** - a device to easily insert elastic into casings.

**Thimbles** -- A thimble aids in repetitive hand sewing tasks by protecting the fingertip from abrasion and accidental piercing. It also helps to push the needle through difficult or multiple layers of fabric.

**Beeswax** -- To prevent tangles and knots in the thread when hand sewing, pull thread through beeswax to coat the thread.

**Needle Pullers** -- Lightweight, flexible needle pullers are essential to hand sewing, especially when stitching through heavy fabrics such as denim and leather or multiple fabric layers.

**Steam Iron** -- used to press seams before sewing.

# Sewing 101

## PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

*courtesy of Dritz*

Before you begin a project, practice stitching with your machine. There's no need to thread your machine. You can draw straight lines and curvy lines on a piece of plain paper and sew on the lines. The needle will perforate the paper and leave a trail of small holes, letting you check your accuracy. Once you feel comfortable, try threading your machine and practice stitching on a scrap piece of fabric. It's that easy!

## STITCHING A SEAM

- Pin two pieces of fabric, right sides together, near the edge. Make sure the pins are placed perpendicular to the edge of the fabric.
- Place your fabric piece under the needle. A common seam allowance is 5/8 inch, so make sure the fabric edge is lined up on the correct line of your sewing gauge or throat plate, the flat metal piece that the needle goes through.
- Lower the presser foot, which will keep pressure on the fabric and help move it through the machine at a steady pace.
- Lower the needle slowly. Try moving the hand wheel to lower the needle, making sure to hold on to the thread tails until a couple of stitches are made.
- Press the foot pedal and begin sewing the seam. Continue sewing, removing pins as you come to them so you don't accidentally hit one.

**TIP:** Always start with your needle in the highest position.

## SEWING A SHARP CORNER

- When you want to turn the corner, lower the needle all the way into the fabric. You can use the hand wheel to do this.

- Raise the presser foot but leave the needle down in the fabric.
- Rotate the fabric ¼ inch turn, leaving the needle in the down position.
- Lower the presser foot with the fabric in the new position and continue stitching.

Once you are comfortable with the basics, you can try your first project. Look for an easy pattern. Pillows, pillowcases and aprons are all good beginner projects. As your confidence builds, you can try a pair of shorts or a skirt. When you're ready, check out our Field Guides to Apparel and Home Decor for more advanced sewing projects.

## **PRESSING**

A good steam iron is essential to the sewing process as ironing is an important step in the construction process.

- Use a press cloth when ironing to prevent shine on ironed fabric. Always use the press cloth when applying fusible interfacing.
- If fabrics have shiny metallic threads, set iron to low temperature.
- Use a seam roll cushion to press seams open without leaving imprints.
- Before pressing a synthetic fabric, test on a sample of the fabric and adjust temperature as needed.

# Patterns

## PICKING A PATTERN

*courtesy of Simplicity*

Patterns are grouped together by type in pattern catalogs in the store. Navigate to the section that has the type of pattern you're looking for (e.g. dresses, shorts, costumes, pillows), then take note of the following information.

**Pattern Number** -- use this number to find the corresponding pattern in the pattern drawers

**Pattern Views** -- these drawings show what other views, or versions, are included in the pattern. For instance, with one dress pattern, you may be able to version it with short or long-sleeves, or with different skirt lengths.

**Pattern Size & Body Measurement Chart** -- use the body measurement chart in the catalog to help you determine which size pattern to pull from the pattern drawer. Sizes are specific to pattern brands and are different from what you might wear from clothing stores.

Once you've selected a pattern from the drawer, use the back of the pattern envelope as a shopping list for the fabric and notions you'll need to complete your project. You'll find suggested types of fabric for best results, a list of notions needed for each view of the pattern (you may not need them all) and a yardage chart. The yardage chart tells you how much fabric you'll need for the size and pattern view you're sewing. Fabrics typically come in 45 and 60 inch widths, so yardage amounts are listed for each.

## USING A PATTERN

To use a sewing pattern, follow these simple steps:

- Lay the pattern pieces on the fabric according to the pattern's cutting layout.
- Use a marking pencil to trace the pattern onto your fabric. Be sure to transfer all of the markings and cutting notches. Every pattern uses a series of symbols to indicate design elements, such as buttonholes, gathers and cutting notches.
- Cut all of the fabric pieces out using a good pair of sewing shears.
- Cut out each of the pattern pieces using the cutting guide lines for the size you're making.
- Sew the pieces together according to the step-by-step instructions on the pattern.

## Tips & Tricks

- Never leave pins in fabric for long periods of time, as the metal could leave marks.
- Old thread on wooden or Styrofoam spools breaks easily and should not be used. Save the wooden spools for your antique collection, and purchase new thread for sewing.
- Wrap spools of thread and filled bobbins with narrow strips of vinyl to store neatly.
- An alternative to a pin cushion is to glue magnets to the bottom of a small plate or bowl to keep your pins in place.
- Do not sew over pins. Remove them as they get near the sewing foot, or use binding clips designed to be sewn over.



- Use long pins for loose weave, thick or bulky fabrics or synthetic furs. Short pins get lost in the fabric.
- Use a lint roller to pick up stray threads on the ironing board and sewing area.
- Use a magnet to pick up pins that fall on the floor or in the carpet.
- Stick pins in a bar of soap before working with heavyweight fabrics. The soap helps the pins slide more easily through the fabric.
- Always mark your pattern on the wrong side of the fabric.
- Trouble with thread twisting creating a knot while hand sewing? Run thread through beeswax.
- Don't have heavy thread for topstitching? Use two spools of thread, and thread them through your machine as one thread and use a larger sewing needle.
- Trouble with vinyl, leather, pleather or plastic dragging while sewing or topstitching? Use a Teflon-coated foot or place Magic Scotch Tape on the bottom of foot. It works like magic!
- Draw the pattern line and the seam allowance at the same time by rubber-banding two pencils together, magically giving you the right amount of space between each line.
- Don't have a needle threader handy? Spray the end of the thread with a little hairspray to make it stiffer and easier to poke through the eye of the needle.
- Keep losing your scissors? Thread them on a long ribbon and wear them around your neck so you always know where they are when it's time to snip.

- Patterns tear easily. Get more use out of them by ironing interfacing on the back of them, making them sturdier for storing and reusing.
- A steam iron is an essential tool when sewing, but it doesn't reach between buttons very well. Try a hair straightener for tight spaces!
- If you have a craft table, adhere a measuring tape to the edge for easy measuring and cutting.

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