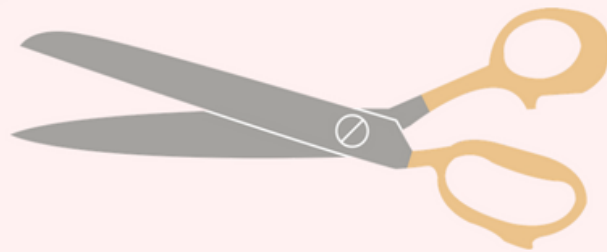


*A Guide  
To  
Sewing Clothes  
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# A Guide to Sewing Clothes Without a Pattern

Sewing clothes without a pattern can seem daunting, especially if you've never tried it before, but it's perfectly possible to do.

All you need is a plan of how you're going to go about it!

This mini guide will help you do just that. So follow these steps and you will be able to make clothes that fit well without the expense or frustration of buying a pattern.

## 1. Get a Clear Idea of the Finished Garment

First of all, you need to decide what you want to make. Once you've done that, the next step is to determine **exactly how you want the thing to look** when it's finished.

**What shape** do you want the neckline to be?

**Will the skirt** have pleats or gathers?

**Will it have set in sleeves** or raglan sleeves?

**How long** will it be?

To help you decide, you will need **plenty of pictures**. Look on Pinterest and Google Images for the kind of thing you want to make. Then look closely at the details and decide whether you will do yours in the same way or differently.

**Draw lots of pictures**. Get an idea of how it will look from different angles.

Don't worry if you're not much of an artist! The purpose of the drawings is to help you to get a clear idea in your mind of how you want the finished thing to look.



## 2. Decide On Your Fabric

The fabric you decide to use will affect the next steps, so you will need to **choose the type of fabric** now.

Things to bear in mind are:

**If the fabric is very light**, it might need lining.

**If you are planning lots of gathering**, adding a lining might make it bulkier.

**Heavier fabrics will not gather well** and very heavy fabrics are not great for pleats.

**How do you want the finished garment to feel when you're wearing it?** Drapery and flowing, crisp, formal, comfy or hardwearing?

**If you use a knit fabric**, you can probably get away without using a zip or darts as the stretch in the fabric will accommodate curves and bulges.

**How experienced are you at sewing** and how do you feel about challenging fabrics?

Remember that very stretchy and shiny fabrics can be difficult to sew.

**If you choose a large print**, you might need to pattern match, whereas you won't need to with smaller prints and plain fabric.


Take a good look at your design and choose some fabric that's suitable.

If you fall in love with something that won't suit your design, you can always change your design!

## 3. Work Out the Shapes of the Pieces

So you've decided on the details of how your garment will look. Now it's time to figure out how to make it!

If you've not tried this before, a **good place to start is your own wardrobe**. If you have clothes that you don't wear any more and if you have the time, take them apart so that you can have a good look at the shapes used in their construction.



If you've made clothes before using a pattern, you can use the knowledge you have gained there to help.

Remember, if you are adding darts, the shape will need to accommodate them.

Don't worry about getting the shapes perfect, it's just about solidifying your ideas at this point.

In a notebook, or on a sheet of paper, **make some rough sketches of how the pieces will look.** Again, this isn't an art competition, so don't worry about your drawings! The point is that the whole process is much easier if you have a clear idea of how the pieces should look.

## *4. Take Your Measurements*

To make clothes that fit, you need **accurate measurements.**

When taking measurements, I'd recommend wearing a **fitted t shirt and a pair of leggings.** Don't try measuring yourself over an enormous, bulky jumper!

**Use a plastic tape measure and don't pull it too tight!** Of course it's nicer when the numbers are smaller, but you won't be thinking about that if the thing you've made is so tight you can't breathe!

**Bits to measure include:**

Shoulder to shoulder

Back of your neck to your waist

Bust

Under boob area

Waist

Hips

Around the top of your arm



Shoulder to elbow

Shoulder to wrist

Waist to knee

Waist to floor

## 5. *Drafting the Pieces*

What you do next depends on what you are making.

**It might be best to draft a pattern piece on a large sheet of paper.** For this, you could use pattern paper, baking or greaseproof paper or newspaper. You could also use an old sheet.

**For a skirt,** you might prefer to take your measurements and draw the shapes directly onto the fabric with tailors' chalk.

When it comes to drafting pattern pieces, you have 3 options.

**Option 1** is to draw round existing clothes that you have in your wardrobe.

This works best if you take the clothes apart first, but it possible to do this by drawing around clothes that are intact. Just turn the item inside out and try to ensure that the section you are drawing around is flat on the paper.

**Option 2** is to pin large pieces of fabric to yourself or a dress form, then with a pen draw on where you need the seams will need to be and where you will need to cut.

**Option 3** is to make pattern pieces from your measurements.

I have used all 3 options at some point when making clothes without a pattern. They all work, but the important things to remember with all 3 methods are to add a generous seam allowance and to keep trying it on. Making a toile (or muslin) first is a good idea, as it allows you to check the fit and make any necessary adjustments before cutting into your fabric!



## *Other Things to Consider When Making Pattern Pieces*

**It might be necessary to add some darts.** People are often put off by the idea of sewing darts, but they're nothing to worry about!

A dart is basically a triangular shaped tuck often found tops, bodices of dresses and sometimes at the top of a skirt.

They change a flat piece of fabric into a 3d shape that allows for curves and for the fact that women's bodies are not cuboid.

The wide end of the tuck will normally start in the seam, with the point of the triangle 6 - 10 cm away.

**Don't forget to add a seam allowance** and a little bit extra for ease of wearing!

**Generally, if something's a bit too big,** it's easier to sort out than if it's too small.


**When drafting pattern pieces,** if you draw bodices, skirts and sleeves to be cut on the fold, you're more likely to get them symmetrical than if you draw the whole thing.

## *6. Cutting Out*

Remember to measure twice and cut once!

**Before cutting the pieces out you will need to establish a few things.**

**Did you include a seam allowance** when you were drafting the pattern pieces or will you need to add it while you're cutting out? If you've already added the seam allowance to your pattern pieces, it's a good idea to write it on them to save confusion later.



How many of each piece do you need?

Do you need to **cut them on the fold**?

Do you need some pieces to be **mirror images of each other**, so cut out on folded fabric?

**Which way do you need the grain to be running?** Generally it runs up and down sleeves from shoulder to wrist, up and down trouser legs waist to ankle, up and down bodices and tops, both front and back, and up and down the skirt centre front and back.

If you can't remember which way the grain is, it runs parallel with the selvedge.

If you've cut the selvedge off and you can't remember which way up the fabric goes, the fabric stretches most side to side. Even closely woven fabrics will have some give in them here. The grain runs up and down and does not stretch as much.

Once you've cut everything out, you're ready to start sewing!

## *7. Decide on an Order For Sewing It Together*

It's a good idea to **jot down an order for your steps** to avoid getting into a muddle later on.


### *Trousers and Shorts*

- 1. Join front and back seams.** If you need a zip at the front, add that in this step.
- 2. Join side seams.** If you have decided to put the zip at the side, include it in this step.  
Try them on and make any adjustments.
- 3. Sew casing** for the waist or add waistband.
- 4. Sew trouser/ short cuffs.**

### *Skirts*

- 1. Assemble skirt front and back sections** if the skirt is in more than 2 pieces.



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2. **Pin the side seams** and try it on to check fit. Make adjustments where necessary.
  3. **Sew side seams.** If you need to sew in a zip, you can do that in this step.
  4. **Attach the waistband.**
  5. **Sew the hem.** You could sew a folded hem or use bias binding.

## *Tops*

1. **Sew darts.**
2. **Sew shoulder seams,** then try it on to check that things are in the right place.
3. **Sew sleeves** to open armholes.
4. **Sew side seams** armpit to waist.
5. **Sew sleeve seam** armpit to wrist.
6. **Make button bands** if you need them and finish any closures in the top.
7. **Finish the neckline.** You could line it, use facings or bias binding.
8. **Hem the sleeves** and the bottom edge.

## *Dresses*


1. **Sew darts** in bodice.
2. **Sew shoulder seams** and try it on.
3. **Complete skirt sections** front and back.
4. **Pin skirt pieces to bodice.** Try it on to check waistline. Sew the skirt sections to the bodice.
5. **Sew sleeves** into open armholes.
6. **Pin side seams,** then try it on again to check fit. Sew the side seams. If you need to add a zip, do it now.
7. **Sew sleeve seams.**
8. **Finish neckline** and hem skirt and sleeves.

## *Tips*

Make sure you **press the seams** as you go.

Keep trying it on and **don't trim any seams** until you're sure it fits!

**To finish hems,** you could sew a folded hem or use bias binding.



**Bias binding** is also good for finishing armholes and necklines, or you could use facings.

The great thing about making your own clothes without using a pattern is that you can make whatever you like and in whatever style and fabric you choose. So don't be afraid to experiment!

This way of going about making clothes without a pattern is the way I use, but it's not the only way. It's a good place to start as any, but feel free to do things in your own way as your confidence grows!

Lastly, sometimes things go wrong. Don't worry! It's part of the learning process. Often things can be fixed, which is why I would recommend keeping an unpicker handy. And if they can't be, don't give up! Learn from what went wrong, and ruffly flowers are great for mistakes!

Happy sewing!