

Getting Started in Dressmaking (T005-1)

Your 10-step guide to getting started in dressmaking - why not print it out and take it with you on your first pattern-buying trip?

1. Use a Proper Pattern

If you have never made your own clothes before, please start by using a commercial paper pattern. Copying one of your favourite pieces out of the wardrobe is not as easy as it seems and paper patterns can be used again and again and customised to your own tastes.

2. Take Your Measurements

Make sure you take your (honest) measurements before you go shopping, don't just assume you are a 12 or a 14. Patterns are often sold in multi-sizes these days – choose the one that includes your measurements and make sure you check the finished measurements, of the style you choose, on the back of the pattern envelope. Finished pattern sizes vary widely between manufacturers.

3. Go to a Reputable Pattern Stockist

There aren't as many as there used to be but they're still around. Don't be tempted to buy patterns from charity shops or car boot sales. There are frequently bits missing or, if the pattern has been used before, vital bits may have been cut off.

4. Get Advice

Get advice from someone who knows what they're talking about. If your local fabric shop is staffed by people who aren't dressmakers themselves, ask a friend to help.

5. Choose a Simple Pattern

Just because your choice isn't full of zips, complicated shaping and fancy buttonholes, it doesn't mean it won't be stylish. It is far better for your confidence to make something simple, properly, than to relegate something complicated to the back of the cupboard before you're halfway through the instructions.

6. Choose a Pattern with Options Included

There are many simple 'complete wardrobe' patterns available now where you are supplied with enough pieces to make a simple top, trousers or skirt, and even a simple jacket. When you have completed your first garment, it will be an easy step onto the next and you don't even have to stop and think what you'll wear it with.

7. Choose Your Fabric

Make sure the fabric you like is listed as suitable on the back of your pattern envelope. A remnant from the local curtain warehouse will not work and buying cheap fabric is usually a false economy. If you're going to invest a lot of time and effort in your project you want it to look good. Of course, you don't want to spend



a fortune on your first practice piece – but if it's good quality you're much more likely to take extra care with it.

8. Buy Enough Fabric

Don't try and skimp on fabric. There is nothing worse than finding you can't fit all your pattern pieces onto the fabric you did buy and the shop is waiting for more stock to come in.

9. Buy a Good Quality Thread

Your sewing machine will run much better and you'll get less fluff build-up around the bobbin and needle-plate. Your seams will be stronger and lie flatter. Don't be tempted by the thread bargain box – there's a reason they're cheap. Good quality polyester will suit most of your sewing needs. If the colour you need is not available, try a neutral shade close to that colour – but not black or white, unless your garment is that colour – as they will show!

10. Buy a Zip of the Right Length and Colour

If your project does need a zip, make sure it's as close a colour and size match as possible. Putting in a zip takes a bit of practice and if it's not perfect on your first try, no-one will notice if a little of the tape is showing.