

UNDERSTANDING AND USING A

sewing machine



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Frontispiece: Fig. 1 Sewing projects, designs and printed fabric by the author.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Kitty, my lovely Mum, who has inspired a love of printed textiles and has patiently taught me to sew, whilst making clothes, bags and quilts for myself and my four fantastic children, Danny, Harry, Ellie and Molly. Thanks, too, to my Nan Mollie, whose machine I now have. She let me watch her sew, made a trousseau of clothes for my favourite doll and worked in a fabric shop. Finally thanks to everyone who gave advice, help and support in the making of this book.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHOOSING A SEWING MACHINE AND ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SEWING MACHINE

SETTING UP, THREADING AND USING YOUR MACHINE

STITCHES

STARTING TO SEW AND JOINING FABRICS

HOW TO MEASURE AND PLAN PROJECTS WITH ACCURACY

LOVELY LAVENDER HEARTS

HOW TO NEATLY LINE AND MAKE A BAG WITH HANDLES

INSERT A ZIP AND CUSHIONS WITH ZIPS

LINED CURTAIN CREATIONS

INDEX

INTRODUCTION

Hand sewing traditions date back thousands of years, with earliest evidence being bone needles found at the sites of primitive cave dwellings. Use of mechanical sewing machines is, however, a much later invention dating from around the middle of the eighteenth century.



Fig 2. 'Paisleyland' fabric panels designed by the author.

My own personal love of sewing goes back to childhood and a Mum, Kitty, who sewed everything from clothes to home furnishings. My Irish grandmother Mollie was also a keen needlewoman, sewing every day, at a 1930s black and gold Singer treadle machine. This machine is still a prized family possession. I started sewing clothes in my early teens, under expert guidance, being encouraged to make even the most challenging projects. Fairly ambitious initial creations included dungarees, long panelled and tiered skirts and fitted

summer dresses. All of these were made using paper patterns, which are a great way of learning new skills and techniques and visualizing and making complete projects.

An early love of fabric and print design preceded art school training as a surface pattern designer and a long career as a textile designer.

As a teacher of beginners' and more advanced sewing classes I've found that many people learn to sew informally at home, although increasingly some pick up sewing techniques through internet tutorials. Others are returning needlewomen refreshing rusty sewing skills. There is currently renewed interest in craft and sewing skills and beginners may approach these classes with justifiably high expectations and ambitions. In a few hours, students are able to learn to use a machine and move quickly from making very simple envelope cushions to more complex projects such as lined bags, accessories, home furnishings and fashion.

This book will be a written version of the sewing classes that I teach and aims to be fun and creative, taking the reader on a sewing and imaginative journey that teaches and builds upon basic skills, tackling gradually more challenging projects throughout. By learning to use a sewing machine and some basic simple techniques, you will be able to embark confidently on a lifetime of creative sewing for home, fashion and accessories.

Your initial motivation for learning to sew may be practical and economic, possibly after realizing how expensive it is to buy new curtains, cushions or simple clothes.

Some beginners have inherited cherished sewing machines from family members, maybe with a cupboard or boxes full of inspirational fabrics, threads and sewing notions. Sometimes these come with a growing realization that knowledge of sewing has not been passed on.

Reasons and incentives for learning may include wanting to create original clothes, memory patchwork quilts, home furnishings, bags and accessories, or to alter items.

What all of these projects have in common is that they entail the use of the same practical sewing skills, processes, planning and

creativity. Inspiration for sewing will come from anywhere and everywhere! Fabric shops, markets and vintage fabrics can all prove the stimulus for new projects. A simple pin board, folder or notebook of magazine cuttings and projects will inspire and provide much future encouragement. It is a good idea and fun to begin to collect fabrics, buttons, braids and anything that inspires you to sew.

This book will aim to inspire creativity, incorporating and encouraging imaginative and original design elements to complement, embellish and personalize your own projects.

The sewing journey will begin with choosing your machine or getting to know the one you may already have. The first steps will embrace understanding your sewing machine, including winding the bobbin, threading the machine up correctly and adjusting the settings. You will become increasingly familiar with all of its functions, settings and parts as you begin to sew with developing skills and assurance. Understanding and threading the machine is very simple, and you will very quickly begin to plan, design and sew some simple items.

With every project completed you will gain new practical design and making talents that can be built upon for future projects. There are not many definitive rules; it's going to be fun and creative and you will swiftly learn to realize the importance of measuring, cutting, pinning, tacking and understanding fabrics and sewing.



Fig. 3 Mollie's machine.

Simple projects such as making an envelope cushion will encourage the development of sewing machine confidence and familiarization. This project will enable you to become proficient with straight stitching, including using the machine needle plate measuring guide to ensure a regular 1.5cm seam allowance. You will begin to sew with accuracy and care, including tackling corners. The pattern selection stitch dial will be introduced to demonstrate the sewing machine's range of stitches, including zigzag stitching, as you finish off your cushion's raw edges. You will learn to adjust the stitch length and width dials to create exactly the right stitch size. Each chapter will guide the sewing expedition, enabling you to build

skills and techniques and learn to creatively develop your own projects and expertise. The importance of measuring, planning and using the machine to sew accurately will again be demonstrated and reinforced in the lined bunting and 'lavender hearts' projects.

By the end of the book you will be taught how to utilize the machine to put in a zip, take up a hem and create simple decorative appliqué designs. All of the chapters teach techniques and skills that can be applied to future projects, so that the whole time you are building up a wealth of sewing experience and building upon your talents. The final project teaches you how to create a tab top curtain and simple curtains. With all the experience you have gained you will find that these are really quite simple. You may want to tackle the creative appliqué and border details or even design and make your own.

Throughout the book there will be plenty of simple sewing, troubleshooting and creative tips to guide you along the way.

Have fun and happy sewing!

CHOOSING A SEWING MACHINE AND ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

Sewing machines

It is a good idea to research and choose your sewing machine from a reputable sewing machine supplier who can give you guidance, a demonstration and possibly a free trial and some instruction.



Fig. 4 Sewing at home.

Starting out, you need a good basic electric machine with a range of stitch functions. Many come with between sixteen and twenty-four stitches, including a choice of buttonholes. You should look for a model with a fairly sturdy machine casing as this will ensure that the machine remains stable when you are sewing. Most will come ready fitted with a zigzag foot that is suitable for both zigzag and straight stitching. All new machines will be equipped with some supplies,

which will include a range of sewing machine presser feet and a dedicated manual.

Portability may be important, enabling you to sew in different places and possibly take your machine to classes. Most new machines will have a handle on the top for carrying. Some will come with hard cases, which fit neatly over the handle. Otherwise a simple canvas or plastic slip cover should be provided.

Machines with a removable extendable free arm are a very good option as these enable you to easily handle fabric, moving it around and aiding the stitching of smaller, more tricky sewing areas such as trouser legs and sleeves.

Many sewing schools use Janome machines, which are very durable, simple to use, reliable and portable. Brother produce good, reasonably priced sewing machines suitable for all projects. Singer are a long established sewing machine manufacturer producing a range of economically priced machines, including an inexpensive beginner's model incorporating a few stitch options. John Lewis sell their own range, including a robust budget sewing machine.

Bernina produce excellent sewing machines. These are more costly than entry-level machines. They inspire dedicated devotees amongst many keen sewing enthusiasts and are often investment pieces.

If you acquire an older machine with no instructions, you will find that manuals and directions for most makes are available online. There are also many internet sites with useful feedback and tips.

Many modern machines will incorporate computerized functions with automatic settings for stitch length and width. Some advanced versions will have memory functions, which can be linked to computers. These are not necessary for initial sewing projects and beginners. If you have inherited or acquired a vintage machine, for example an old Singer, you will have no decorative stitch functions but will still be able to sew and make almost anything. Indeed, some keen sewers prefer working with old machines.

Essential equipment for sewing

A sewing box

You will need a place to keep all of your sewing equipment and notions. A portable tiered tool box with a handle works brilliantly. These have plenty of small divisions useful for storing reels of thread and other haberdashery items and a main larger section which can be used for stowing items such as sewing scissors. You can find tool boxes such as these in DIY shops.



Fig. 5 Sewing box.

Transportable wooden cantilevered and hinged boxes, with handles and layered sections, are a good option and, like the tool boxes, have plenty of partitions for organizing materials.

Vintage and antique boxes, sewing boxes on legs or boxed tables can be found online or in charity shops and will serve as decorative sewing room organizers. These are normally wooden or wicker.

There are many pretty fabric-covered, padded sewing boxes available, sometimes with wicker features and handles. These will often have pockets and inside padded areas, which can be used for storing pins and needles. They are cheap and especially good for children who are beginning to sew.

Scissors

Sharp sewing scissors reserved solely for sewing and a small pair of little scissors for snipping detailed areas are essential. You will also need paper scissors for cutting out paper patterns.

Needles and a needle case

You will need a packet of mixed hand sewing needles and a larger darning needle for threading through thicker threads, ribbon or elastic. A needle case is really useful and also a great sewing project. An essential item is a packet of mixed-size, universal sewing machine needles to suit your sewing machine.



Fig. 6 Kitty's needle case.

Pins

A box of dressmaker's pins will be required and if possible a pin cushion. You may want to make the cushion, though. The lavender heart project in this book makes a great pin cushion.



Fig. 7 Lavender heart pin cushions.

Measuring

A tape measure and short ruler are essential. A long metre rule is also very useful for bigger projects like curtains.

Threads

You will need a range of good quality machine sewing threads to match your fabrics. A reel of tacking thread will also be needed.



Fig. 8 Threads.

Stitch unpicker or seam ripper

This will be used for unpicking areas of machine and hand stitching and pulling out and neatening off threads.

Markers

Tailor's chalk, water soluble pens and pencils. An ordinary pencil can work fine for marking small areas but with all of these it is best to do a sample and to try to only mark areas which are not going to show, for example inside the seam allowances.

Buttons

You can start saving old buttons and often pick them up in charity shops or markets. A jar or tin of vintage buttons will look good in your sewing room and add decorative finishing touches to many projects.



Fig. 9 Button box.

Iron and ironing board

You will need an iron to press all the items which you make and during the various stages of a project. It is a good idea to make sure it is clean before ironing your sewing.

Fabrics and haberdashery materials

Collect and source inspirational new and vintage fabrics and notions to inspire your sewing and projects. Good local fabric shops, online sellers, markets and charity shops are all good resources. Old favourite clothes, curtains and linens are all good sources for recycling projects.

Fabric facts

Fabric will come in a number of widths, including 90cm, 115cm and 150cm. These must be considered when buying fabric as they will help determine how much you will need. All commercial patterns will give guidelines on buying appropriate fabric widths, length and weights. Obviously this will not apply when recycling old fabrics, clothes, curtains and household linens. Different weight fabrics will be more suited to some projects than others. Medium- and heavier-weight fabrics are better for furnishing projects such as cushions and also for bags as these will need to be more durable. A good fabric shop is always a great place to ask for advice on the suitability and quantity of fabrics needed for different projects.



Fig. 10 Cushion made with vintage embroidered fabric and linen.

Storing fabrics

Fabrics can be stored according to colours, types and sizes. For example, you could categorize small-scale printed cottons together, and larger patterns, cream or white, plain and semi-plain and richer velvets in separate areas. Classifying them works well as it makes it easier to find things. They can be folded and kept in places such as an old wooden chest of drawers, see-through plastic storage drawer towers and lidded boxes. It is good to separate larger pieces and keep precious small vintage scraps, laces and embroideries in a separate drawer or box. Fabrics will fade with the light so it is always better to store them rather than have them out or on display shelves.



Fig. 11 Storing fabrics.

Notebooks/sketchbooks, pin boards and inspiration

Gather inspirational ideas from magazines, photos, cuttings, objects, your holidays and anything that motivates you to create pin mood boards, sketch books, folders and notebooks. These will encourage future ideas and projects.



Fig. 12 Sketch book pages.

Strong paper for making patterns

Brown parcel paper and dressmaker's squared or spot and cross paper are ideal. The pre-prepared papers have the advantage of some measured markings but these are not essential. Newspaper sheets can also be used. For smaller projects, open sheets from glossy magazines work very well. The paper should be reasonably strong so that you can reuse it again if needed. You can iron most

homemade paper pattern pieces and commercial patterns if necessary to make them lie flatter. This may serve a dual purpose with regard to newspaper patterns, as the heat would also fix the ink and stop the possibility of any of it rubbing off onto the fabric.

A sewing place

If possible it is ideal to have a designated sewing place where you can leave your sewing machine out permanently and ready to sew. It should be kept covered when not in use to avoid it becoming dusty. You may even want to make your own fabric cover. All you need to work on is a sturdy table with access to a plug socket and a good light source so that you can sew at any time. For laying out and cutting fabrics, a big table is ideal. For larger projects like curtains you could plan and cut out on a clean floor or even a double bed.



Fig. 13 A sewing place.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SEWING MACHINE

In order to learn to use your sewing machine you must become familiar with all the functions and parts. Each new sewing machine will come with at least a basic manual or handbook. The first pages will show diagrams naming all the machine parts and their functions pretty much like the one shown in [Figure 14](#). For older machines lacking their own instructions, these are fairly generic and will apply to most machines. They are useful resources and sources of reference.

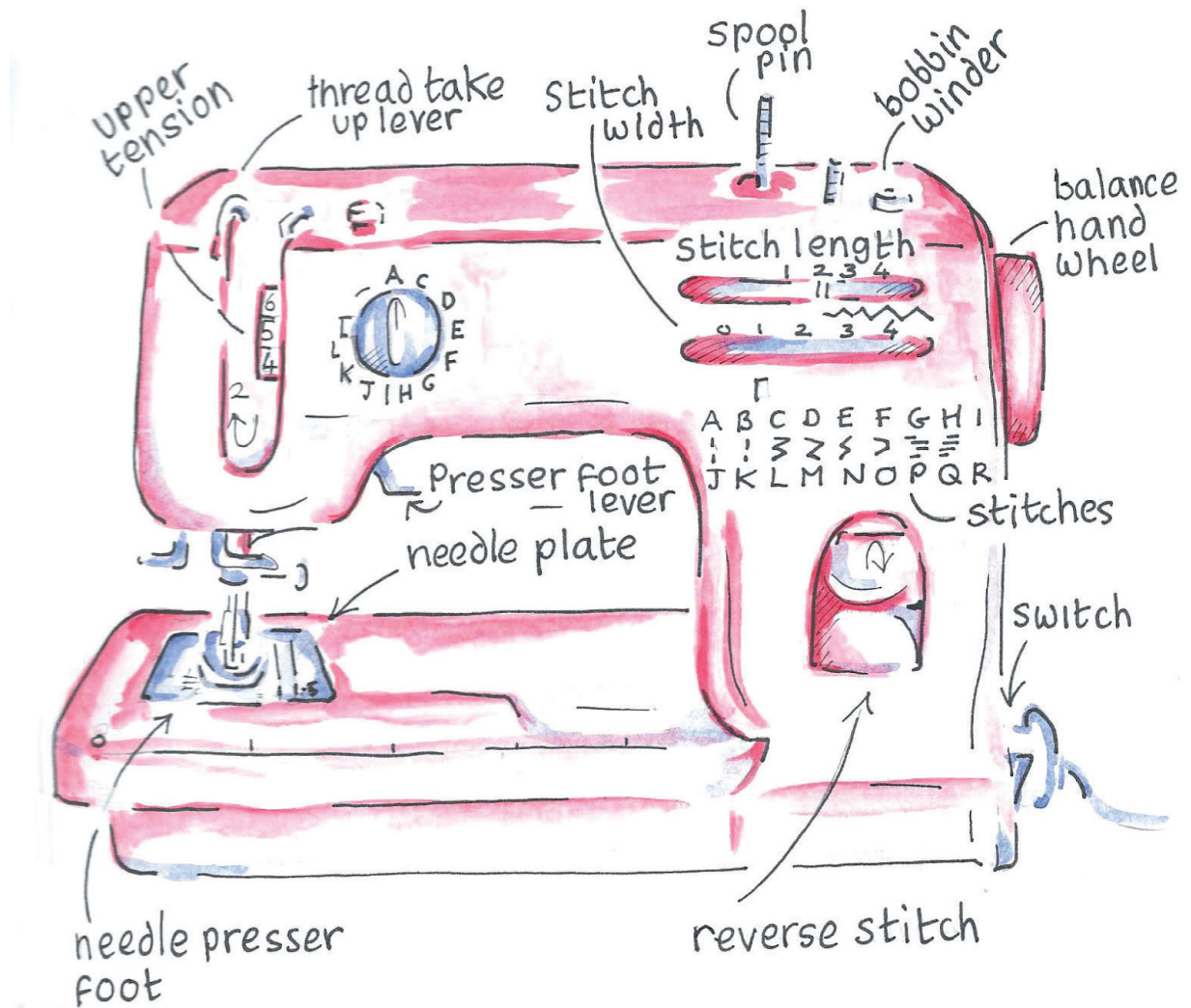


Fig. 14 Understanding your sewing machine.

The most important elements of sewing with a machine are threading the top thread and the bobbin. The machine takes threads from the upper and lower threads to make the stitching. When straight stitching, these should appear as neat regular stitching. If the stitches are irregular or threads keep breaking or snagging, it is often a result of mis-threading or winding the lower bobbin incorrectly. It can also be an issue with tension. This all takes practice.

On/off switch

This is normally over towards the right side at the bottom of the machine. It should be switched off when not in use.

Threading upper thread

Many machines will have numbered markings and little printed diagrams just near the thread spool pin to help guide the threading of the machine. Each machine threads up differently but it always involves a sequence of taking thread from the reel through a succession of hooks and essentially a thread take-up lever. Finally the needle needs to be threaded; normally this is from front to back. After you have threaded it up a few times it will seem very simple.



Fig. 15 Threading the machine using numbered markings.

Bobbin

This is the small spool onto which you will wind the lower threads.

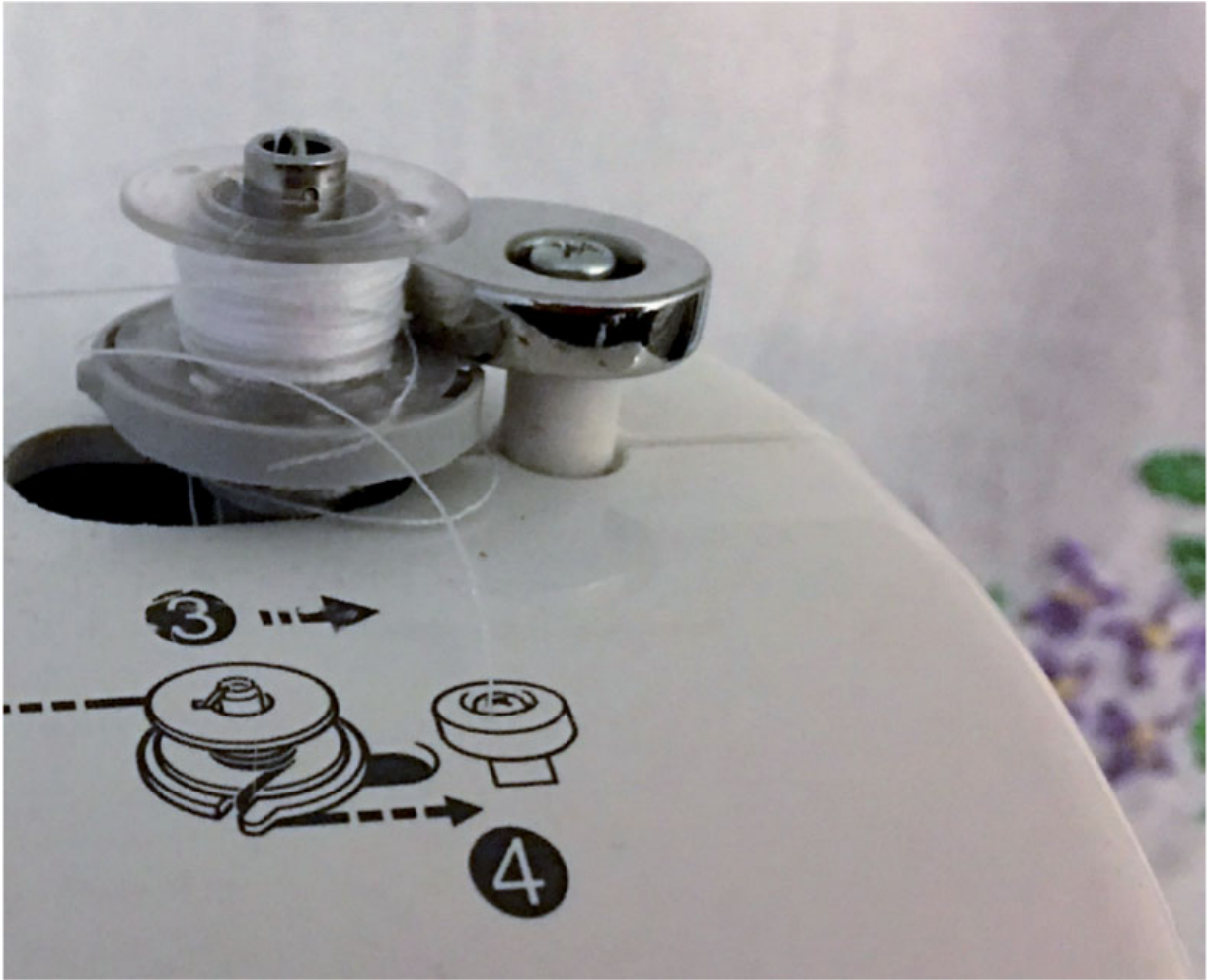


Fig. 16 Bobbin.

Bobbin winder

The lower bobbin is wound by placing an empty bobbin onto a bobbin winder spindle. The thread is wound onto the bobbin using the foot pedal control or the operation control button. The bobbin winds until it is almost full and should stop automatically.

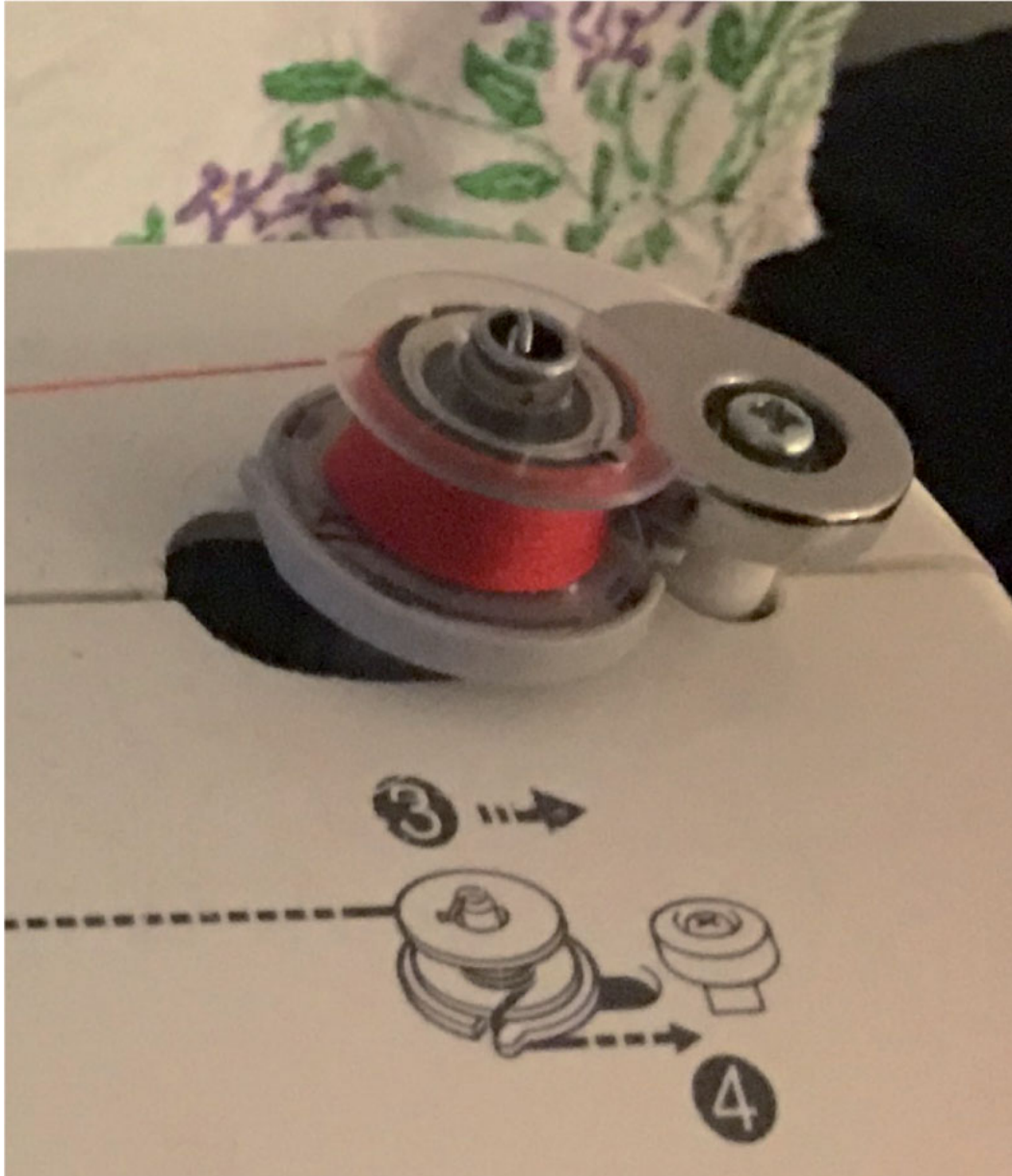


Fig. 17 Bobbin engaged with bobbin winder.

Bobbin cover for top-loading machines

This will vary on different machines. It should appear as a plastic cover at the top and just in front of the needle plate. This slides out to reveal the space into which you slot your bobbin. On front-loading machines bobbins need to be placed into a metal bobbin case and loaded from the front of the machine.

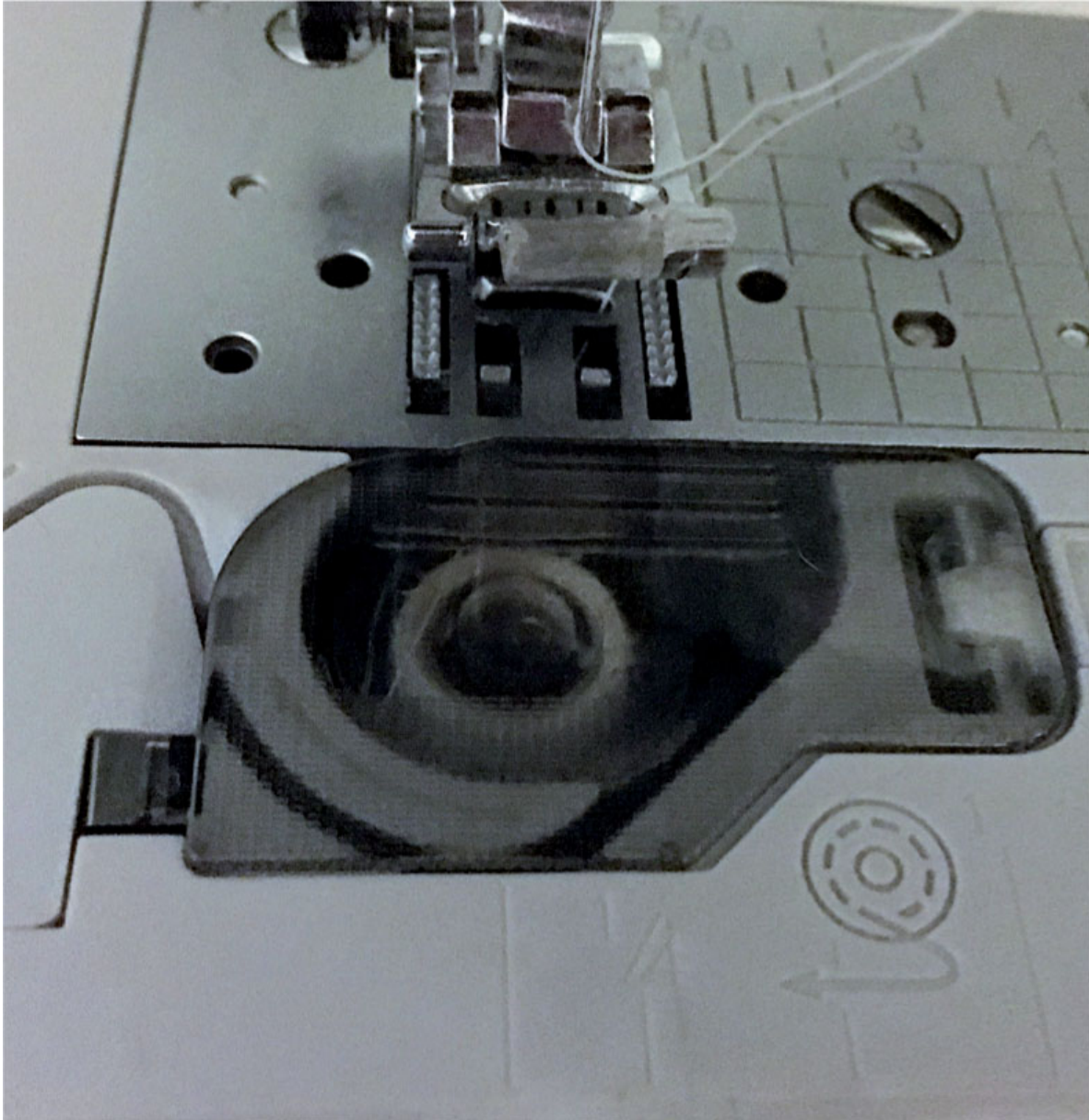


Fig. 18 Bobbin cover.

Metal bobbin case

Front loaders have a separate metal bobbin case into which you will need to fit the threaded bobbin. Together these are then placed into the bobbin driver, which is accommodated under the needle plate zone.



Fig. 19 Bobbin case.

Bobbin driver

This small space is accessed through a tiny door at the bottom front of the front-loading machine. The loaded metal bobbin case is inserted into this area ready for sewing.

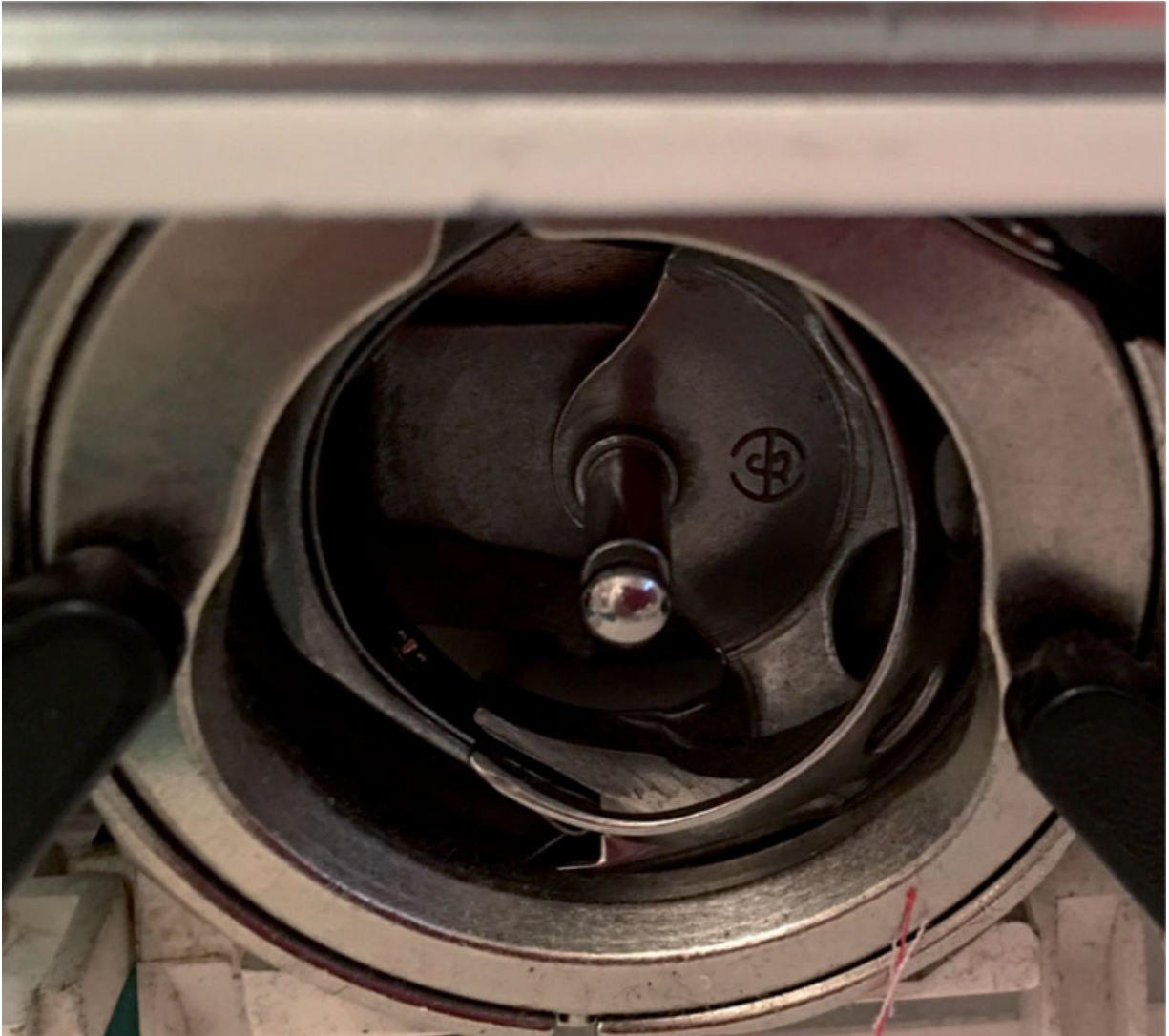


Fig. 20 Bobbin driver.

Thread tension dial

The thread tension dial will generally appear as a small numbered dial. For many projects it will work to leave this dial on a medium setting of about 3 out of 6 options. To loosen it take it to a higher number, to tighten it take it to a lower number. Computerized machines can adjust the tension automatically and some also allow you to manually override this. An essential element to sewing is getting the tension right. Both upper and lower threads have to be adjusted to work together to create good stitching. If this is not happening the stitching may come out too tight or too loose. The

stitches should cross over at the centre and through the fabric. Nearly all tension adjustment takes place on the upper threads. Tension may need to be adjusted when you sew different fabrics and projects. It is always essential to sew a small sample with any new fabric to check the stitch and sewing quality.

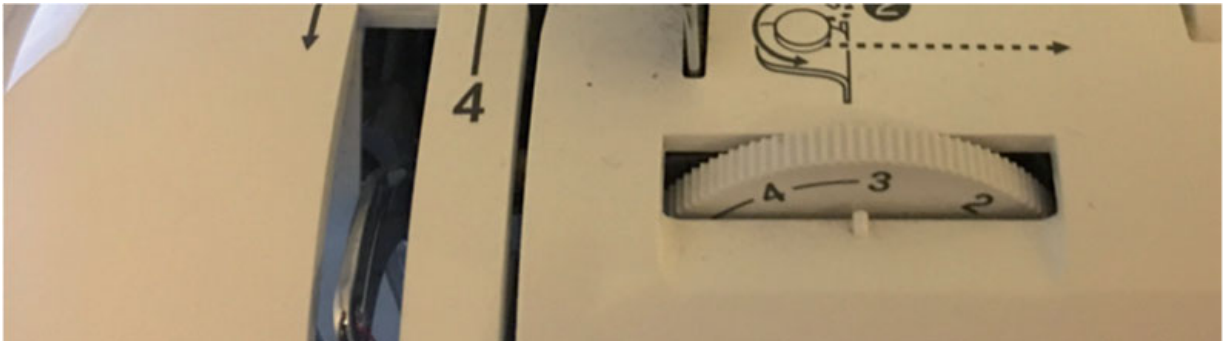


Fig. 21 Thread tension dial.

Thread cutter

There is a thread cutter attached to most machines. This should be on the left side, above and behind the presser foot lever. You simply hook the thread through to cut it.

Foot pedal

The foot pedal or the operation control button will determine when you start to sew and how fast you go. The foot pedal will plug in to the right side of the machine and sit below your table on the floor once you are stitching. It will regulate sewing speed.

Start/stop operation control button

This will appear as a small button, just above and to the right of the presser foot area. Some machines operate by using this button and no foot pedal. When this is pressed your machine will first begin to sew slowly. There may also be the option of using a foot controller too. When plugged in, this will override the start/stop button.

Speed control lever

Machines with an operation button will have a speed control lever, which can direct stitching speed. It will slide to the right to go faster.

Reverse stitching

You will normally use the reverse stitch function at the beginning and end of sewing to secure the stitches firmly in place. On some machines a small amount of reverse reinforcement may happen automatically at the start of stitching. The control functions for reverse stitching will appear as a small button or a push-down lever.

Needle threader

Some machines will have an automatic needle threader to help thread the needle. This will be located just to the left and slightly behind the presser foot holder. It pulls downwards to help with threading. You cannot use this with twin needles.

Needles

The needle needs to be inserted into a machine clamp to attach it to the sewing machine. A small screw holds the clamp in place and this must be loosened to change a needle. There are flat and rounded sides to the top of the needle, which must be placed with the flat side at the back of the clamp and pushed upwards. Needles must be changed if they become bent. Machines are generally threaded front to back, although some machines may thread from side to side. The thread must not be twisted but should be passed evenly through the upper thread system and then through the needle.

You must use the correct type of needle for different fabric weights. You will need a sturdier needle for heavy fabrics such as denim and a finer one for lighter fabrics such as a fine cotton. Always use good quality needles that are compatible with your machine, although many are largely universal.

Inserting and changing the needle

To insert a new needle you will need to hold the old needle and unscrew the needle clamp screw to open up the clamp. Needles have both a flat and a rounded side at the top. The flat part must be placed against the back of the clamp and pushed upwards until it is in place. When changing a needle, make sure that the needle is raised by using the hand wheel or the needle position button if there is one.

Needle position button

Some computerized machines will have an option to raise and lower the needle with a button.

Twin needle

These can sew two parallel lines of stitching coming off two spool pins of thread. They must be used with a zipper foot as they need a wider hole in which to stitch through.

Presser foot holder

A screw holds this in place and this in turn holds the presser foot. Machines will come with a small screwdriver for adjusting the screw. This must be properly fitted but should rarely need adjusting.

Needle presser foot

This sits below the needle and the needle passes through it as it stitches. Sewing machines come with a range of feet and will normally come fitted with a zigzag foot that is also used for straight stitching. You can use this for many projects. You need to use a presser foot that is designed for the type of stitching that you are doing. For example, if you selected a wide zigzag stitch and did not use a zigzag foot, the needle would hit the metal sides of the foot as the hole would be too narrow. Choose the new foot and insert it by lining it up with a notch in the holder. Lower the presser foot lever and click the foot into place. You should also be able to push it in.



Fig. 22 Presser foot.

A new machine will come with at least a selection of feet including: a buttonhole foot, normally two zigzag feet, a zipper foot which can be used on either side of the needle, an overcasting foot, a blind stitch foot and button fitting feet. You can get more attachments and feet from your machine supplier. More specialist options include: appliqué, quilting, free motion stitch, edgestitch, piping and walking feet. Domestic sewing machines will generally take universal high shank feet. You can obtain a foot that will suit almost any task.

Presser foot lever

This raises and lowers the needle foot at the start and end of stitching. It is situated just up and to the right of the presser foot.

Presser foot release button

Make sure that the needle is up before adjusting the feet. At the back of the pressure foot holder a small button releases the foot when you want to change it. When you touch this it should disengage and drop the foot.

Needle plate

Below the needle foot sits the needle plate, which the needle will pass through as it begins to sew. This will normally have calibrations marking useful measured amounts like a 1.5cm seam allowance. These are really helpful as straight line guides once you start to sew.



Fig. 23 Needle plate.

Feed dogs

These enable the fabric to move through the sewing machine as you sew. The speed at which they do this is normally determined by the foot pedal. On machines that can work without a pedal the speed control lever will govern how fast they work.

Balance or hand wheel

At the top right side of the machine is the balance wheel. This is used to raise and lower the needle and guide the needle down into the fabric. It is also useful when you need to pivot and turn on corners whilst keeping the needle in the fabric to create an even line of unbroken stitching.



Fig. 24 Balance or hand wheel.

Stitch length regulator

This may be shown as a numbered sliding scale alongside stitch markings printed onto the machine or panel. On computerized machines there may also be an operation panel with markings from 0 to 5. Such machines may automatically select the stitch length although you can override and change this.



Fig. 25 Stitch length regulator.

Stitch options

Many new machines come with sixteen to twenty-four stitch options, including a choice of buttonholes. These appear printed on the machine. They will include straight stitch, zigzag stitches, blind hem stitch, buttonholes, stretch stitch for sewing stretchy fabrics, overcasting, appliqué and decorative stitches.

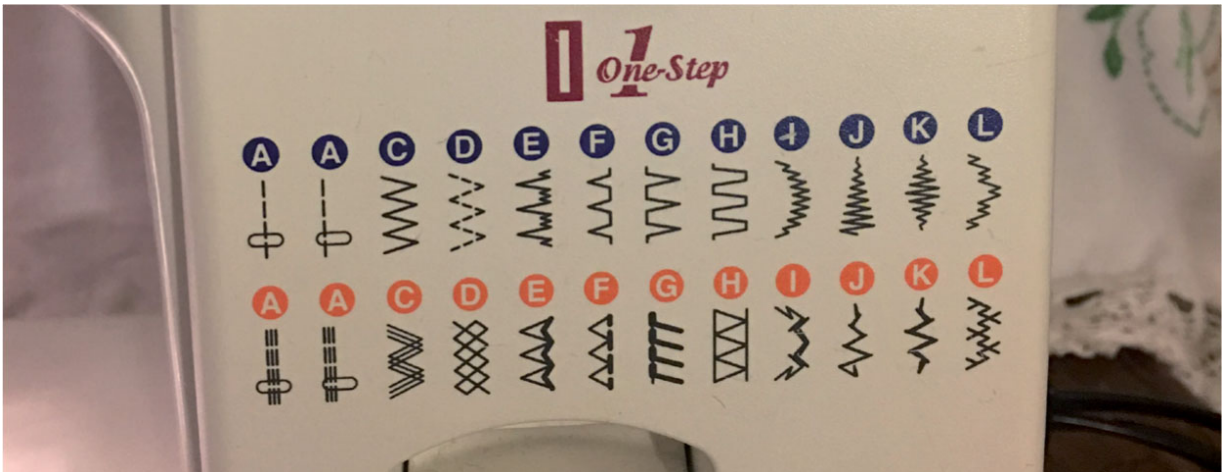


Fig. 26 Stitch options.

Buttonhole lever

This will be over to the left above the presser foot. It pulls down and sits to the left between brackets on the buttonhole foot.

Equipment accessory box

There will be an integral storage box underneath and to the front of the needle plate area. This is for keeping all your spare bobbins, feet, needles, spare spool pins and the machine screwdriver. Always replace and keep the accessories in here so that you don't lose them. Sometimes the box is separate from the machine.



Fig. 27 Equipment box.

SETTING UP, THREADING AND USING YOUR MACHINE

You will need to set up the machine on a sturdy table, near to a power supply and with plenty of light so that you can see what you are doing. Select a reel of thread to match or contrast with your fabric or fabric sample piece. This thread will be used to wind the lower bobbin and thread up the top of the machine. They should always be threaded with matching threads. These two areas work in unison, bringing upper and lower threads together to form stitches. Plug in your machine or combination machine and foot pedal controller. Next turn on your machine. Always turn it off when not in use.



Fig. 28 Setting up your machine.

Wind the bobbin

Select an empty bobbin and push this onto the little bobbin winder spool pin at the front. Next, note the larger spool pin behind and remove that spool cap. The cap appears as a disc with a hole in the centre. Place your reel of thread onto the larger spool pin behind and replace the spool cap. This will hold the thread in place and stop it spinning off the machine when you are winding the bobbin and

sewing. Take the thread and pass it through the bobbin winder guide and pre-tension disc and then wind it once or twice around the bobbin. On new machines there will often be numbered markings printed onto the machine to remind you how to thread up the bobbin winder. This bobbin then needs to be pushed and clicked into place to engage the winder. To wind the thread onto the bobbin press the foot pedal control or operation control button if you are not using a foot pedal. The bobbin thread winds until it is almost full and should stop automatically. Cut the thread and remove the bobbin from the winding spool.

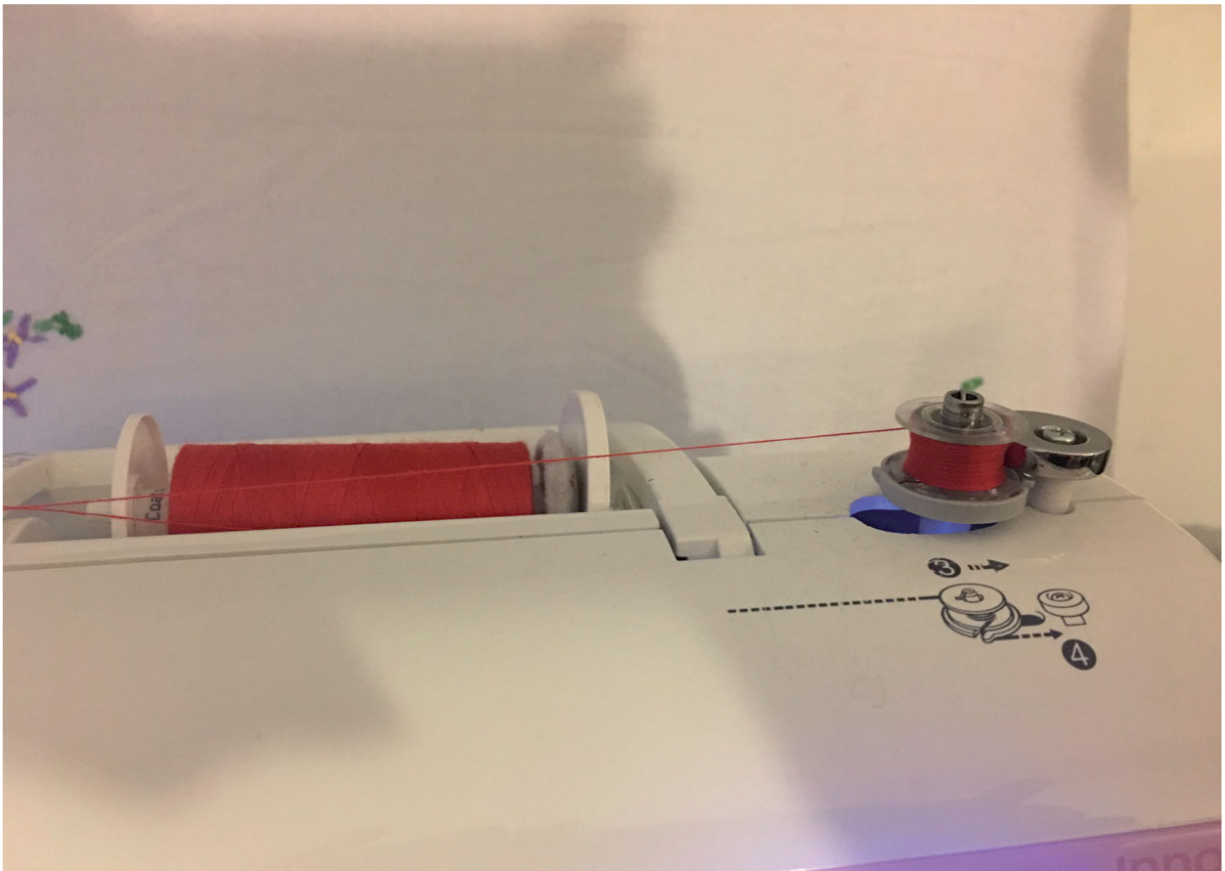


Fig. 29 Wind the bobbin.

Placing the bobbin into a separate metal bobbin case

Front-loading machines have separate bobbin cases into which you will need to fit the bobbin. To do this you will hold the bobbin case in one hand whilst holding the bobbin in the other and push the bobbin into the case. Take the loose thread and pass it through the downwards slit into the case. Keeping the thread tight against the case, slide it between the main body and a small attached flap that clips tightly onto the outer case. The thread will follow through and emerge at the small open rectangle in the case side. Pull out about 10cm of thread. The bobbin case is then ready to be inserted into the machine.



Fig. 30 Putting the bobbin into the bobbin case.

Inserting the metal case and bobbin into the bobbin driver

The bobbin driver is housed in the small space under the needle plate at the front of the machine. There will be a tiny door at the front which opens up to do this. Note that the bobbin has a metal arm. Holding the arm pointing upwards and the metal case towards you, insert the bobbin into the bobbin driver. When it is positioned correctly gently click it into place. Tuck in the threads and close the door.

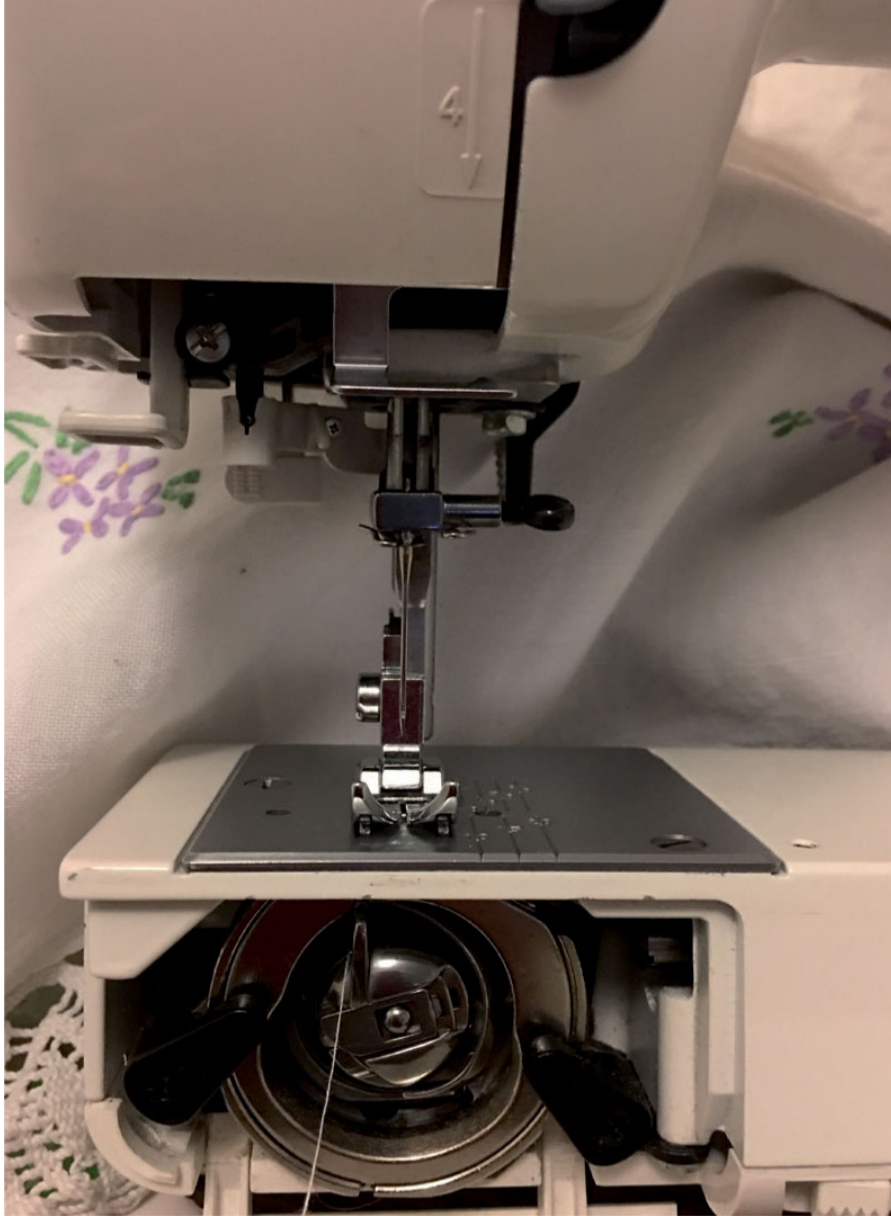


Fig. 31 Inserting the bobbin case into the bobbin driver.

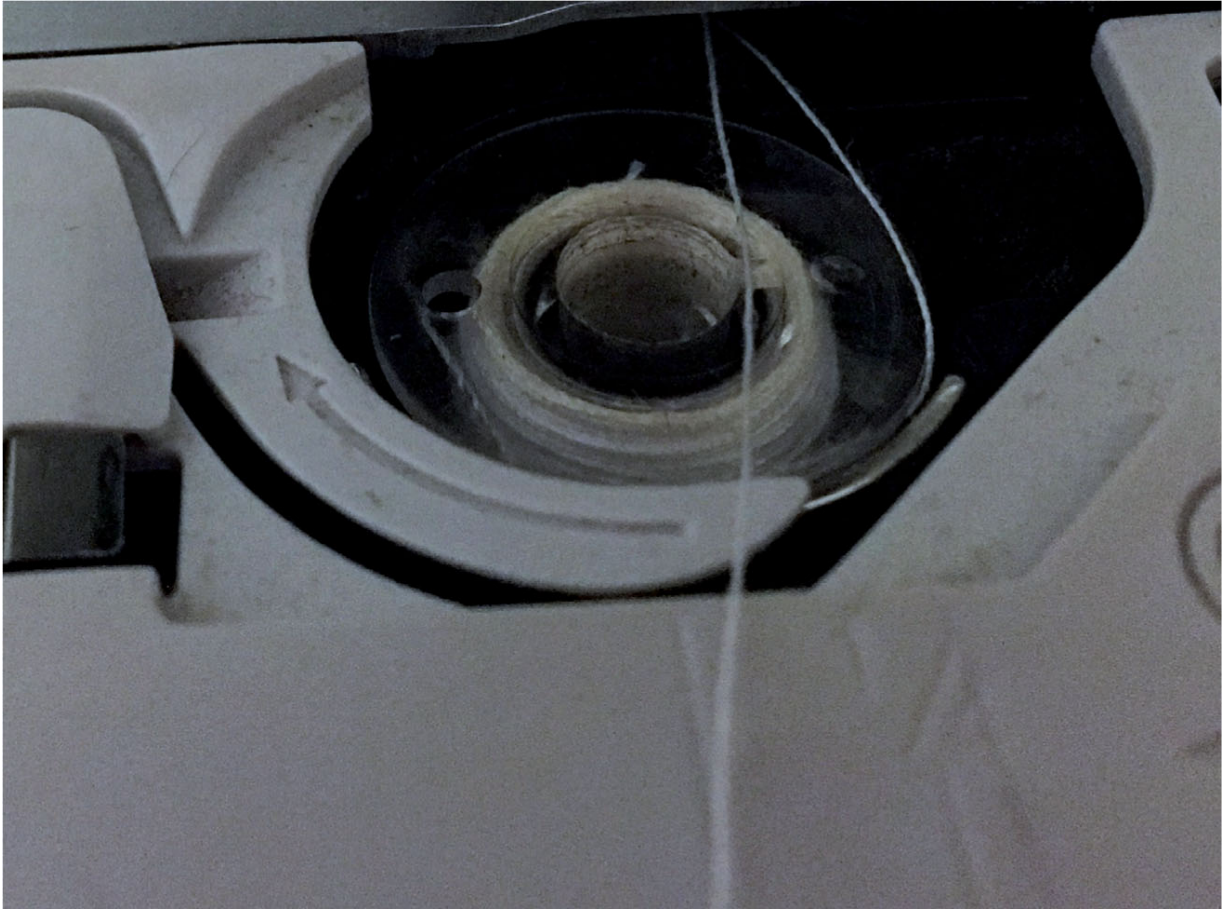


Fig. 32 Inserting the bobbin into a top-loading machine.

Putting the bobbin directly into the machine

On top-loading machines there is no bobbin case and the bobbin is inserted directly into the machine just in front of the needle plate. There is often a small plastic cover which slides to the left to reveal the space into which to put the bobbin. The bobbin should be inserted with the thread to the left. Thread will then be passed through a marked groove in the machine on the left. Pull out a few centimetres of thread towards the left side. Replace the cover once the bobbin is in place.

Threading up the upper thread of the machine

The correct threading of the machine is essential. Most machines will have printed or raised numbered indicators showing how to thread up the machine. Many will also have diagrams marked onto the machine. Every model will thread up slightly differently. If the machine is not threaded correctly it will not stitch properly and the threads will snag and break.



Fig. 33 Threaded machine.

Step 1: Raise the presser foot lever

The presser foot must be raised to thread up the machine.

Step 2: Raise the needle

Raise the needle by turning the hand wheel slightly towards the back of the machine. If there is a needle position button, press this as required to raise the needle.

Step 3: Place the reel of thread onto the spool pin

Remove the spool cap, place the thread onto the main spool pin and replace the cap.

Step 4: Take thread through the thread guide

Pull thread from the reel and pass this through the first thread guide hook from right to left. This hook will sit just to the left of the reel of thread.

Step 5: Pass the thread through the thread guide cover

A second hook will sit to the left of the first. Pass the thread through this next guide from right to left and down the channel below this. There will be two channel paths; take it down the right side.

Step 6: Pass the thread through the take-up lever

Raise the take-up lever by turning the hand wheel towards the back. Take the thread upwards through the left side channel to reach the take-up lever. Pass it through the raised hook on this lever, hooking through from right to left.

Step 7: Take the thread down to the needle bar hook

Pass the thread back downwards from the take-up lever through the left side channel. Hook it under the thin metal hook at the top of the needle.

Step 8: Thread the needle

The needle is normally threaded from the front to the back, although some may thread from side to side. Thread the needle and pass the

thread under the presser foot to the left and towards the back. Cut thread, leaving about 10cm.

Pull up the lower thread ready for sewing

Hold the end of the top thread coming from the threaded needle. Turn the hand wheel forwards until the threaded needle dips down into the hole in the needle plate and catches the lower thread. Take hold of the two thread ends and pull gently to the left until the lower thread comes up completely. Place these ends to the left behind the needle foot and towards the back. There should always be about 10cm of each thread; if there is too little the machine will come unthreaded as you sew.

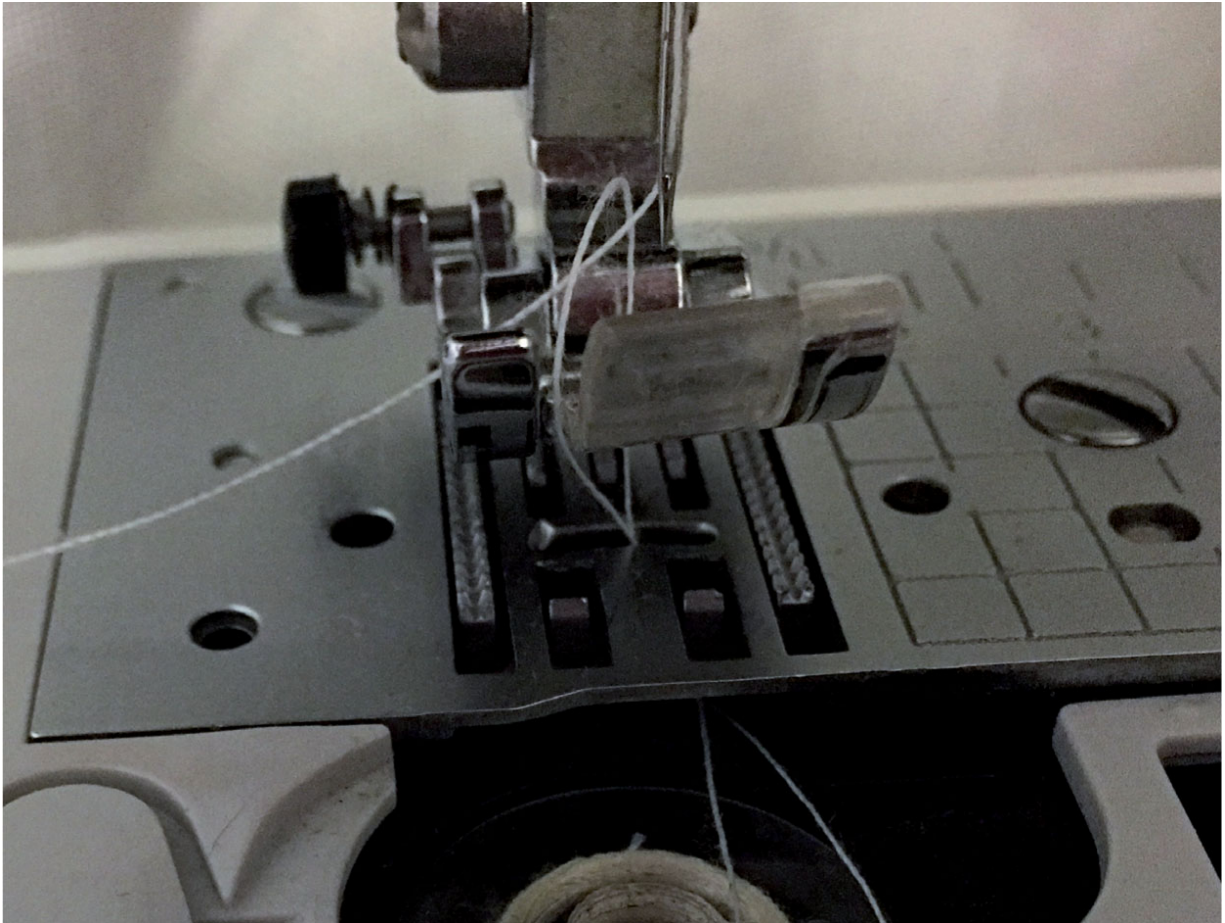


Fig. 34 Pulling up the lower thread.

Sewing a sample

The machine is now ready to sew. Select a straight stitch function and a medium-length stitch, roughly 2 out of 4 options. The width will be selected as '0' as the stitch is running in a long straight line. Computerized machines may select the options when you chose the straight stitch function. Leave the tension on the middle setting at about 3 of 6. Raise the presser foot lever, take a scrap of fabric and place this under the presser foot with the raw cut edge to the right up against the 2cm marker on the needle plate. Lower the lever and sew forwards to get the feel of the machine and check the stitching. Press the reverse lever or button to finish off at the end. Raise the presser foot lever and the needle. Remove the fabric by pulling the

fabric away from the machine at the left, leaving about 10cm of thread. Cut off the thread and remove the fabric from the machine.

STITCHES

Once you have set up and threaded your machine, you are ready to start sewing and using your machine for many exciting projects. Models vary, but most will have a range of stitch functions. Many machines will have pictures of the stitch options printed on the machine with corresponding numbers to help select the stitches. Straight stitch and zigzag will probably be the most common stitches used for early sewing projects. These will use a standard zipper foot, which will serve as the foot for both; it should be the foot that a new machine comes fitted with. Every fabric will sew slightly differently, so it is always a good idea to do a sample piece prior to sewing your actual project. This enables you to get a feel of the sewing.



Fig. 35 'Love' cushion project.



Fig. 36 Stitch sampler.

Hand 'tacking' or 'basting'

This is the hand stitch process that holds your fabric together prior to machine stitching. You will need to use a needle threaded with double thread measuring roughly from the length of the needle to your elbow and knotted securely at the end. The actual stitches are a series of hand running stitches. All these stitches will be removed once you have machine stitched your project. When putting in a zip

you may initially use tacking to stay-stitch roughly across the two sides to keep the fabric and zip centralized.



Fig. 37 Hand tacking.

Straight stitch

This stitch will be used for most machine sewing as well as inserting zips, gathers, some appliqué and small details. First, select the straight stitch option. This will be denoted by indicators showing a straight stitch broken line and possibly a letter which might correspond to letters and stitch indicators printed onto the machine. You will also need to select the stitch length option with a sliding lever or a button. The length will often be set at a medium setting in the middle of the range at about 2 of 4. Computerized machines will automatically select a medium length when you select straight stitch, although you can change it. Because the stitch is linear the width will be '0'.

Zigzag stitch

Zigzag stitches are great for finishing off raw rough edges on seams and for decorative appliqué and details. Options for the zigzag function will indicate that a higher number selected will create a wider stitch. Zigzag stitches can often be both medium width and length at a setting of 2 out of 4 length and about 2.5 of 5 for width.

Reverse stitching

This enables the machine to stitch backwards and ensures that the sewing is secure and not going to come unstitched. Functions will vary but it normally consist of a button or small lever which you hold down just whilst reverse stitching. Some machines will automatically stitch a few reverse stitches before you start sewing forwards.

Appliqué stitch

This is used for appliqué and for finishing off edges. The symbol for this appears a little bit like a blanket hand stitch.

Stretch stitch

This is a slanted zigzag used for stretchy fabrics. There may also be an option for a zigzag to be used for attaching elastic.

Overcasting stitches

These stitches are used to finish off raw seam edges. Your machine may have different overcasting options for thin-, medium- and thickweight fabrics.

Blind hem stitch

This stitch is useful for hemming and finishing off, when you don't want the stitches to show. You have to use a blind hem foot for this stitch. The machine will do most stitching on the wrong side, just catching occasional stitches on the right side so that hardly any stitches are showing at the front.

Buttonhole stitches

Most machines will come with automatic buttonhole functions. Some will have a choice of settings which can be used with fabrics of different weights ranging from light to heavier and double thickness. You will need to use a buttonhole foot to create these stitches. Consult the specific instructions that come with your machine. Buttonhole options automatically sew the whole sequence of stitches. This consists of a row of stitches at each end and smaller ones tightly down each side.

Many new machines will come equipped with a buttonhole foot guide with a measured scale of markings. This clips onto the presser foot lever in the same manner as other feet. Some machines will have a buttonhole lever on the left which you lower to engage with the foot. The selected button fits into the sliding scale so that you can measure it. If it doesn't fit in, you will need to calculate the measurement by adding the button length and the width together.

You will then select your chosen buttonhole stitch depending on the fabric weight and thickness of layers.



Fig. 38 Stitch sampler family tablecloth, circa 1970.



Fig. 39 Stitch functions on a machine.

If you do not have a buttonhole function, you could try using a zigzag stitch with a short stitch length and invent your own bespoke buttonholes.

Other decorative stitch functions

Most new machines will come with a range of decorative embroidery stitches that can be used to embellish your projects. Some highend models may include hundreds. Embroidery stitches will not sew in a straight line as they are creating an irregular patterned sequence of stitches. You will need to follow a needle plate numbered line calibration or draw a faint line to guide your stitching. A zigzag or satin stitch foot will work for most embroidery stitches. You might need to adjust the upper tension depending on the stitch. It is a good idea to try out all the stitches to get the feel of them. Play with the length and width to find out what works best. Maybe use them to decorate an item such as a plain tablecloth as you sew with them. Many of the wider embroidery stitches will work well for edging most of the appliqué projects in this book.

Free-motion embroidery

For beginners, it is best to do this with a darning foot. More experienced sewers may do it without any foot but this is very skilled. You can create very creative pictorial drawn lines and even writing. To sew in this manner you will need to drop the feed dogs which hold the fabric in place and feed it through the machine. Models vary so check with the manual, but some have a feed dog button to do this. It could be round the back of the machine; for other machines you may have to adjust a screw. You can use a wooden embroidery hoop to prepare fabric for this type of stitching as it will help keep the fabric firmly in place.

Free-motion quilting

This will require a free-motion quilting foot. To attach this you will need to remove the whole presser foot holder. The quilting foot attaches to the screw on the presser foot holder. The metal pin needs to sit over the screw on the needle clamp. You will need to hold the foot firmly in place with one hand as the presser foot screw is tightened with the other. Use the screwdriver that comes with your

sewing machine. Feed dogs will have to be lowered, as before. As you sew and move the fabric around, you must hold it firmly with both hands.

Hand slip stitch

This hand stitch can be used for finishing off projects like the stuffed lavender hearts or hand hemming. The threaded needle goes from the front of the fabric along one stitch length inside the top of a seam before catching the back fabric, carrying along the seam and catching and stitching the front.



Fig. 40 Hand slip stitch.

Hand back stitch

This requires you to first stitch forward with one stitch and down into the fabric. Go up through the fabric after about a stitch length and stitch backwards into the space. Go round the back of that stitch and come up again at the end of it. Carry on in the same manner. It creates a line of continuous stitching. You could use it for embroidering lavender heart fronts with messages.



Fig. 41 'Home sweet home' lavender heart with back stitch.

STARTING TO SEW AND JOINING FABRICS

In this chapter you will learn how to use your sewing machine to join fabric right side to right side and make a very simple envelope cushion cover using two matching or complementary pieces of fabric. This is a great first project. You will also learn to make a simple cushion paper pattern and to pin and cut out fabric using paper patterns, use hand ‘tacking’ or ‘basting’ to keep fabric pieces in place, and how to use the straight and zigzag functions on your sewing machine to sew the cushion. If your machine is an older one you may, however, only have a straight stitch option.



Fig. 42 A memory cushion made from summer dresses.

The techniques and processes that you are about to learn will teach you the basics of understanding and using your sewing machine effectively. You will also learn new and useful sewing skills.

Pinning the paper pattern securely in place ensures that the template does not move on the fabric and helps guarantee accuracy and straight cutting. It is easiest to pin in a straight line around the paper pattern, just inside the outer edge. Pinning is often also used to mark measured seam allowances and denote stitching lines. In

future projects as you grow in confidence and experience you may decide to machine sew without first using hand tacking stitches. When using this latter technique you will need to progress with great care, stopping and removing pins as you sew.

After cutting fabric pieces to size, guided by the paper pattern templates, you will need to join the cut fabrics right sides together so that the project is effectively made inside out. Most sewing ventures begin like this. All straight stitching along seam allowances and zigzag or straight stitch finishing off will eventually end up on the wrong side or inside of the cushion cover.

Most of the envelope cushion task will be sewn using the straight stitch function on your machine set on a medium stitch length roughly in the centre of the operation panel, so at about 2 if there are options up to 4. Leave the tension dial in the middle at about 3 of 6. You will then use a zigzag stitch for finishing off the edges.



Fig. 43 Paisleyland print envelope cushion.



Fig. 44 Paisleyland envelope cushion back.

Project: Joining fabric to make a simple envelope cushion

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Strong paper for making pattern templates

- Matching or complementary fabric, medium-weight dress fabric or furnishing fabric
- If buying new fabric, select one 50cm drop length x 115cm width. For matching front and back you can cut both pieces from the same length piece
 - For contrasting cushion front and back, buy two 50cm drop lengths as the excess can be used for other projects
 - Matching or contrasting threads
 - Measuring tape
 - Pencil and ruler
 - Fabric and paper scissors
 - A 40cm square cushion pad to stuff your finished cushion cover



Fig. 45 Pin the cushion paper pattern.

Step 1: Choose fabric, make the paper pattern, and pin it out

First, choose the fabric for the main front and the back of the cushion cover. If selecting a printed fabric, look for a print with reasonably even all-over coverage. For example, this could be a small-scale (ditsy) floral design, a medium-sized trailing floral, an all-over contemporary abstract pattern or a stripe or dotty print. You could use the same fabric for front and back pieces or they can be made of contrasting fabric colours and patterns.

On a large piece of reasonably strong paper draw out the main cushion body square shape of exactly 38cm square. Next draw out a rectangle sized 38cm x 48cm for the cushion back. Cut out these two paper patterns. When making your own paper patterns, brown parcel paper works well or you can choose from a range of readily available pattern papers such as dressmaker's squared or spot and cross paper. You can also use newspapers.

Place the fabric for the front cushion panel with the right side upwards. Using your paper pattern templates, carefully place the main square paper pattern front piece aligned parallel with the selvedge or finished edge of the fabric and up near to the cut or top 'raw' fabric edge. In this way you ensure that the pattern is aligned with the straight grain of the fabric. If using a directional print, for example a floral or animal print in which there is an obvious right or wrong way up, make sure that you take note of this. Begin to pin the paper to the fabric carefully along the pattern paper edges, using approximately three pins on each side. Next, take the large rectangle pattern back piece and again place this parallel with the selvedge (finished edge) and near to the cut or 'raw' edge. Again, pin carefully around the edges using approximately three to four pins on each side.



Fig. 46 Cut cushion fabric.

Step 2: Cut the fabric

Using your sharp fabric scissors, place the flatter side on the table with the slanted side upwards and cut the fabric carefully around the paper pattern pieces. It is easier to cut in a straight line if you keep the scissors in the fabric as you cut continuously. When you have finished cutting, remove the pins and put the pattern pieces to one side.

Taking the longer back piece of fabric, fold this neatly in half down the middle. Iron it to get a neat fold. Next, cut carefully along this fold so that you now have two back pieces.



Fig 47 Pin and tack cushion back seams.

Step 3: Prepare the cushion back seams

On just one long side of each of these two rectangle back cushion pieces, measure 0.5cm from the 'raw' cut edge and fold, pin and tack the fabric under from the right side to the wrong side. Repeat this process by measuring a further 1cm and turning the folded edge back again towards the wrong side of the cushion before pinning and tacking ready for machine sewing. For many simple sewing projects you will keep the stitch length dial or lever on a medium length of

about 2 of 4. Select the straight stitch function and you are ready to sew! Take a scrap sample piece of fabric to do some practice stitching.



Fig. 48 Sew cushion back seams.

Step 4: Sew the cushion back seam edges

Using the presser foot lever or lift to pull up the needle foot, place the folded fabric side upwards and to the right under the needle foot. Although you have measured, pinned and tacked your cushion you can now also use the measured markings on the needle plate to keep your sewing straight by carefully aligning the folded edge to the 1cm marker. Lower the presser foot lever or lift so that the machine needle foot rests on the folded fabric. Begin by first using the reverse stitch function to sew a few stitches and then start to sew slowly and carefully forwards by pressing the foot pedal or control button. Stitch all the way along one long side of each of the two cushion back pieces.

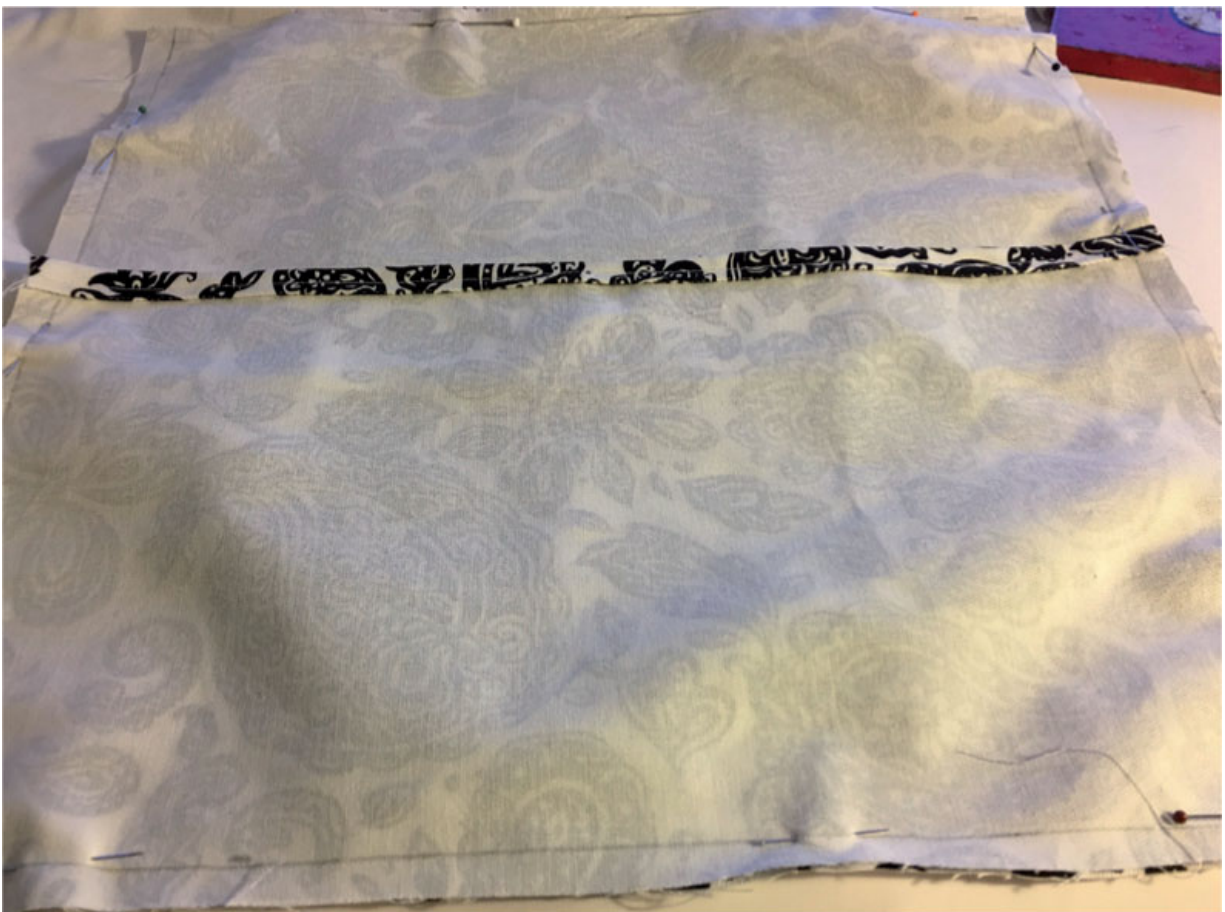


Fig. 49 Sew front and back cushion sections.

Step 5: Join and sew the front and back cushion sections, and finish off

You are now ready to sew the front and back cushion sections together. Place the front fabric piece right side up so that this side is facing towards you. If it is a directional fabric also place it the right way up. The wrong side of the fabric will be flat against the table. Next, place the two rectangular back pieces side by side and whilst matching the raw edge corners overlap each of the two sewn finished seams along the centre back of the cushion cover. Measure, pin and tack all around using a 1.5cm seam allowance measured from the outer cut edge. This is a standard seam allowance used in most commercial patterns and many projects. Take out the pins and begin to machine stitch one cushion side along the line of tacking, remembering to do a little reverse stitching at the beginning. When you have sewn along one side and reached the corner, keep the needle in the fabric or turn the hand wheel to lower the needle into the fabric. Raise the presser foot lever and turn or swivel the fabric on the corner, pivoting to change sewing direction and then sew down the next side of the cushion. Repeat this until you have sewn all the sides. Do a few reverse stitches at the end.

Finish off the cushion by first selecting the zigzag function. Stitch all the way around the seams just outside the outer line of the straight stitching. Reverse stitch at the beginning and end to ensure that the stitching is secure. Carefully trim cut the excess fabric outside the outer edge of the zigzag stitching. Use an unpicker and scissors to trim off all loose threads and tacking. If you do not have a zigzag function you can finish your seams by using straight stitching. If using straight stitching turn each raw edge under from front to back by 0.5cm. Pin, tack and machine along these edges, then iron these seams open.

Cut diagonally across the corners of the cushion seams. This ensures that it is not too bulky inside the cushion corners when turned. Turn the cushion the right way out, gently poke out the corners from the inside with something rounded and blunt-ended like

a chopstick or a pencil end. Carefully iron the cushion, stuff with a 40cm cushion pad and admire your handiwork!



Fig. 50 Cottage cushion.

Making an appliqué cushion

You could add appliqué detail to the cushion front square after cutting the fabric at Step 2. To do this, fold the cushion into two to ascertain the centre point. Iron along this crease. Use motifs such as hearts and letters cut from templates and pin, tack and stitch these centrally onto the cushion. Use straight or zigzag stitching to stitch all around these motifs. You can use the same templates as you use for the bunting and lavender hearts projects (see pages [56](#) and [62](#)) or design your own. Other ideas include cutting shapes from existing

print designs like large flowers and applying these, or inventing new patterns by mixing pattern prints from different places. You must always apply the appliqué before sewing up the main seams. It must not sit too near the raw edges as it could end up disappearing into the seams when the cushion is sewn up.



Fig. 51 Heart appliqué cushion.

Project: Design and make a cushion with a heart appliqué

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Cut main fabric cushion pieces (Step 2 of 'Simple envelope cushion' project)
- Scrap fabric with ditsy floral patterns, dots, gingham or plains
- Heart template
- Matching/contrasting threads, as desired
- Scissors and unpicker



Fig. 52 Pin and cut heart appliqué.

Step 1: Use the instructions for making a heart template, and pin it out

See 'Make lavender hearts with initial and ribbon detail', Step 1: Make a paper pattern, page [62](#). Cut out this paper heart.

Pin the template onto the fabric, taking note of any directional pattern. Make sure that the heart shape is sitting the right way up on the fabric.



Fig. 53 Sew heart appliqué.

Step 2: Cut fabric, find the centre of cushion front, tack and sew appliqué

Cut out the heart shape by carefully cutting all around the heart template. Take particular care cutting around the tricky bits like the point and the top. You may need to use both large and small scissors. The large ones will cut out the long sides and the smaller ones will cut out the detailed trickier bits.

Take the front cushion square and ascertain the centre point. You can do this by ironing a crease down the centre and also by measuring. Position the heart in the centre of the cushion square. Line up the point and dip at the heart top with the crease. Take a ruler and double check that it is centred. Pin in place.

Hand tack stitch the heart in place so that it does not move when you start to machine sew.

Practise sewing around a heart shape. Draw a heart outline shape onto some scrap fabric. Sew along this line using a straight stitch function and medium settings. Once you have practised, sew the actual project.

Sew the heart motif onto the cushion front. Position the needle starting at the heart point by raising the presser foot lever and putting the raw heart edge to the right under the presser foot and aligning it with a marker. Lower the presser foot. Sew a few reverse stitches. Stitch forward just inside the raw edge by about 1cm. Continue carefully machine stitching all around the outside of the heart. As it is a curved shape you will need to turn the fabric slightly as you go. Do this by leaving the needle in, taking up the presser foot lever and swivelling and moving the fabric as you sew. When you get to the dip at the top make sure that you leave the needle in, turn and swivel to go down the other side. Finish off with a few reverse stitches.



Fig. 54 Trim and press heart appliqué.

Step 3: Trim and press heart appliqué

Take out the tacking using the unpicker, cut off all the loose ends, carefully trim the heart and press the appliquéd cushion front.



Fig. 55 Join cushion pieces.

Step 4: Make the appliqué front piece into a cushion

Follow Steps 3, 4 and 5 of 'Joining fabric to make a simple envelope cushion', see pages [41–43](#), to make up the complete cushion.



Fig. 56 Sew cushion sections and stitch across back pieces.



Fig. 57 Swivelling and turning at the corner.



Fig. 58 Back centre seam.



Fig. 59 Upcycled cushion using vintage embroidery and memorable fabrics.



Fig. 60 Velcro fastening with vintage button, reverse of the 'E' upcycled cushion.

Optional finishing touches: You could use a small square of Velcro fastening to attach both sides of the back of your envelope cushion. These will need to be tacked then attached using a straight stitch. Remove the tacking. Once you have machine sewn these in place you could stitch a large button over the stitching on the top edge. This will pull the cushion together, securing the back, and create a lovely smart finish.

HOW TO MEASURE AND PLAN PROJECTS WITH ACCURACY

In this chapter you will learn how to design, measure, plan and calculate fabric quantities with accuracy. You will build upon techniques and skills learnt in the previous chapter to gain increasing confidence in approaching new and original sewing projects. These instructions will offer guidance in designing and making your own bespoke beautifully lined bunting flags and calculating exactly how much header tape is required for future projects.



Fig. 61 Bunting with three flags.

Using Paper Patterns

You will often want to use paper patterns. Pinning the flag, heart and motif paper pattern pieces onto the fabric is essential to guide and guarantee precision and straight cutting. Pinning carefully all around the main pattern pieces, a short distance in from the outer edge of the paper, will ensure that the fabric does not move or slip during cutting. The smaller initial letter pieces require a few pins placed along the centre of the templates to hold them securely in place. Tips for using and adapting pattern templates for future projects and building upon your sewing experience will also be given.



Fig. 62 'HAPPY' bunting.

Sewing Machine Control

Sewing machine control is absolutely key to the success of a project, especially when making smaller items. These projects will develop sewing machine control, accuracy and confidence as you sew appliqué pieces in place, using the straight stitch function on a medium setting, and stitch measured seam allowances, sewing the main front and back pieces together around the fabric bunting. In the case of the triangular bunting flags, you will use the straight stitch function on the machine to sew down the first long side prior to swivelling the needle at the point to change direction along the second side. The header tape may be sewn using either the straight stitch or zigzag functions on the machine. For all machine sewing in this chapter use the standard 'zipper foot', which allows for both straight stitching and the wider zigzag sewing.

Project: Design and make simple lined bunting with four flags

The processes for the appliquéd bunting and lavender hearts projects both necessitate applying decorative elements onto main front fabric pieces prior to joining two shaped elements together to make each flag and heart.

It is worth thinking about the place where you might want to hang your finished bunting string and scale the flags and longer bunting string accordingly. Larger flags might work for a child's name bunting whereas smaller-scale flags could look good hanging across the top of a small window, a bookcase or a double door.

Calculate the drop fabric upwards to allow more fabric for longer names.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Paper for making pattern templates
- Assorted floral, striped, dotty, checked or illustrative printed fabric. Choose as desired for flag front pieces. You will need fabric approximately 30cm drop x 115cm width. This is enough to make four medium-sized flags
- Plain or semi-plain fabric approximately 30cm drop x 115cm width for the four flag backs
- Matching or contrasting sewing threads
- Header tape: natural cotton herringbone/cross-grain tape about 2.5cm deep by about 150cm long

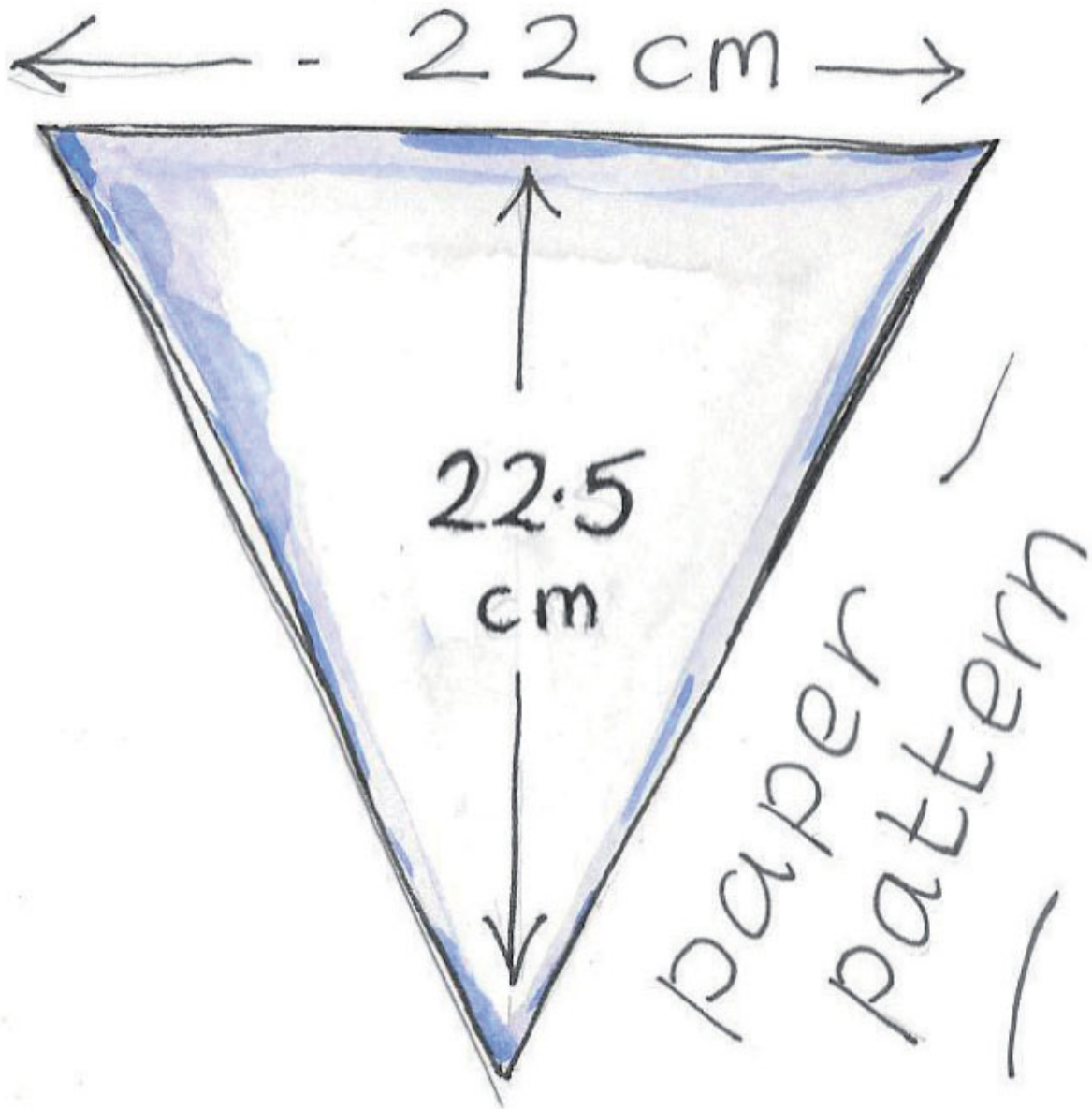


Fig. 63 Make a bunting paper pattern template

Step 1: Choose fabric and make the paper pattern

You will first need to choose the fabric for the front and back of the flags. If making the flags from patterned and scrap fabric you will need to consider which fabrics sit well together, looking at contrasting and complementary colours, pattern scale and prints.

On a large piece of strong paper roughly plot out the size of your flag, plus 1.5cm seam allowances all around the flags. A good medium-sized finished sewn flag is approximately 19cm width by

21cm drop. To make this sized flag you would need to make your paper pattern bigger and to include seam allowances on both long sides. It should be 22cm width at the top with a drop of 22.5cm to include these allowances. You will reuse this pattern template a number of times to make repeating flags so it must be fairly durable. Measure the desired top width of the fabric and draw a line with a ruler from one end of the line to the other. Find the mid-point of this line and mark it. Measure the required length or drop of the flag from this mid-point downwards and draw a line from the top to the bottom. Fold the paper along this line and then open it up. Draw a line from the bottom of the line to each top flag corner to make a long triangle shape. Cut out this bunting flag shape.

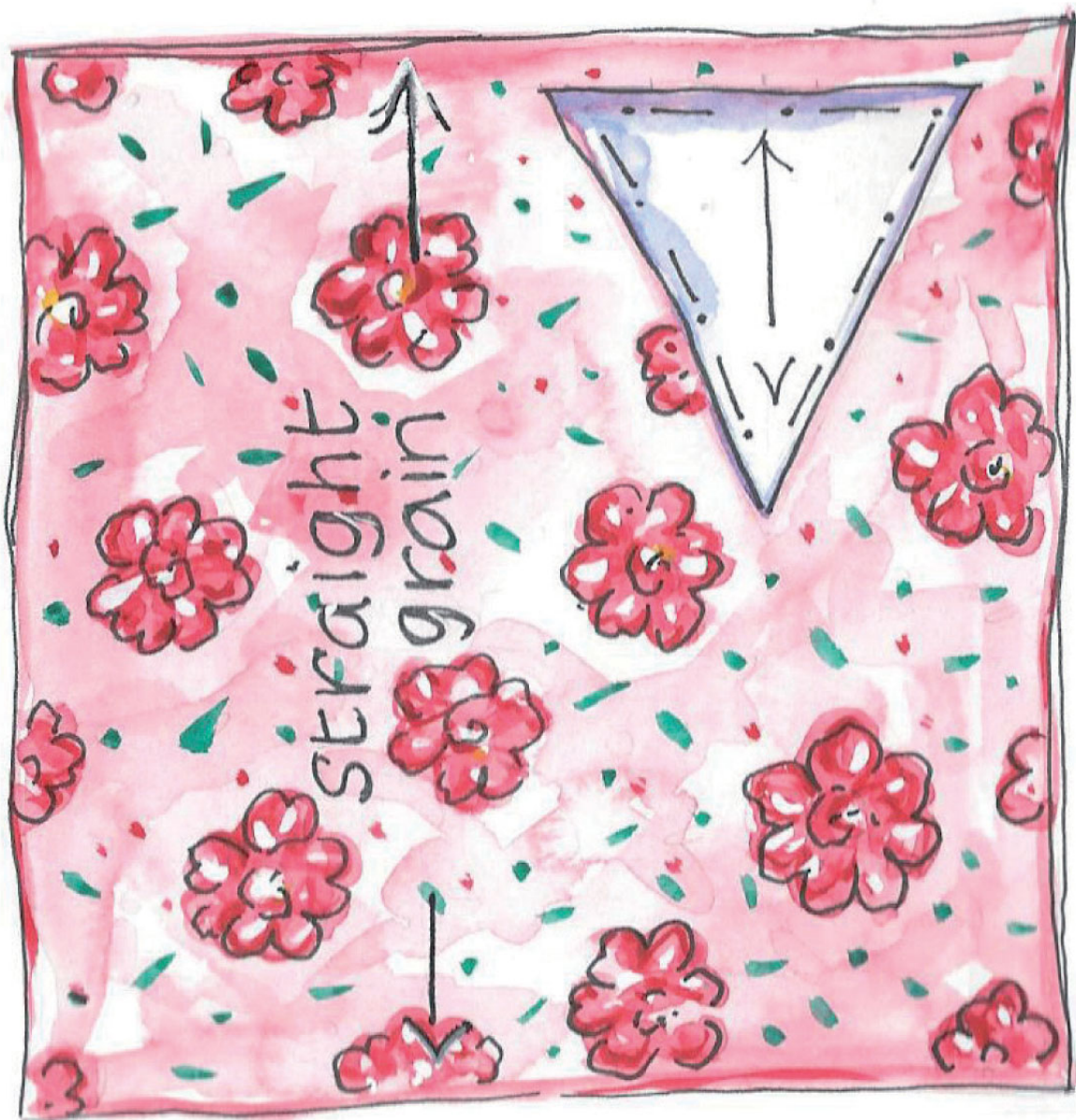


Fig. 64 Pin pattern template onto fabric.

Step 2: Pin out the bunting paper pattern

Place the paper pattern aligned so that the centre point line runs straight down the straight grain of the fabric. If you position one side of the flat flag top edge against the selvedge finished edge, this should help you to place it correctly. If your front flag fabric has any defined pattern like a stripe or a check this can also be used as a positioning guide. If you are using a directional print with a distinct right and wrong way up, make sure that you take note of this. For

example, a floral design with stems or trails or a representational illustrative print with animals or characters has an obvious direction. Pin the paper pattern onto the fabric using the pins lengthwise, with approximately two pins along the top and two pins down each long side. You will need to repeat this pinning process four times for the front of the bunting flags and four times for the back of the flags, therefore pinning then cutting eight flag pieces altogether. These will ultimately form the four finished bunting flags.



Fig. 65 Cut front and back flag pieces.

Step 3: Cut the fabric bunting flags

Using your sharp fabric scissors, cut carefully around each front flag piece. Unpin the paper pattern, repeat the pinning process as above and carefully cut out the other three front flags so that you have cut four flags for the front of the bunting. Repeat the procedure, pinning then cutting four flags for the back of the bunting.

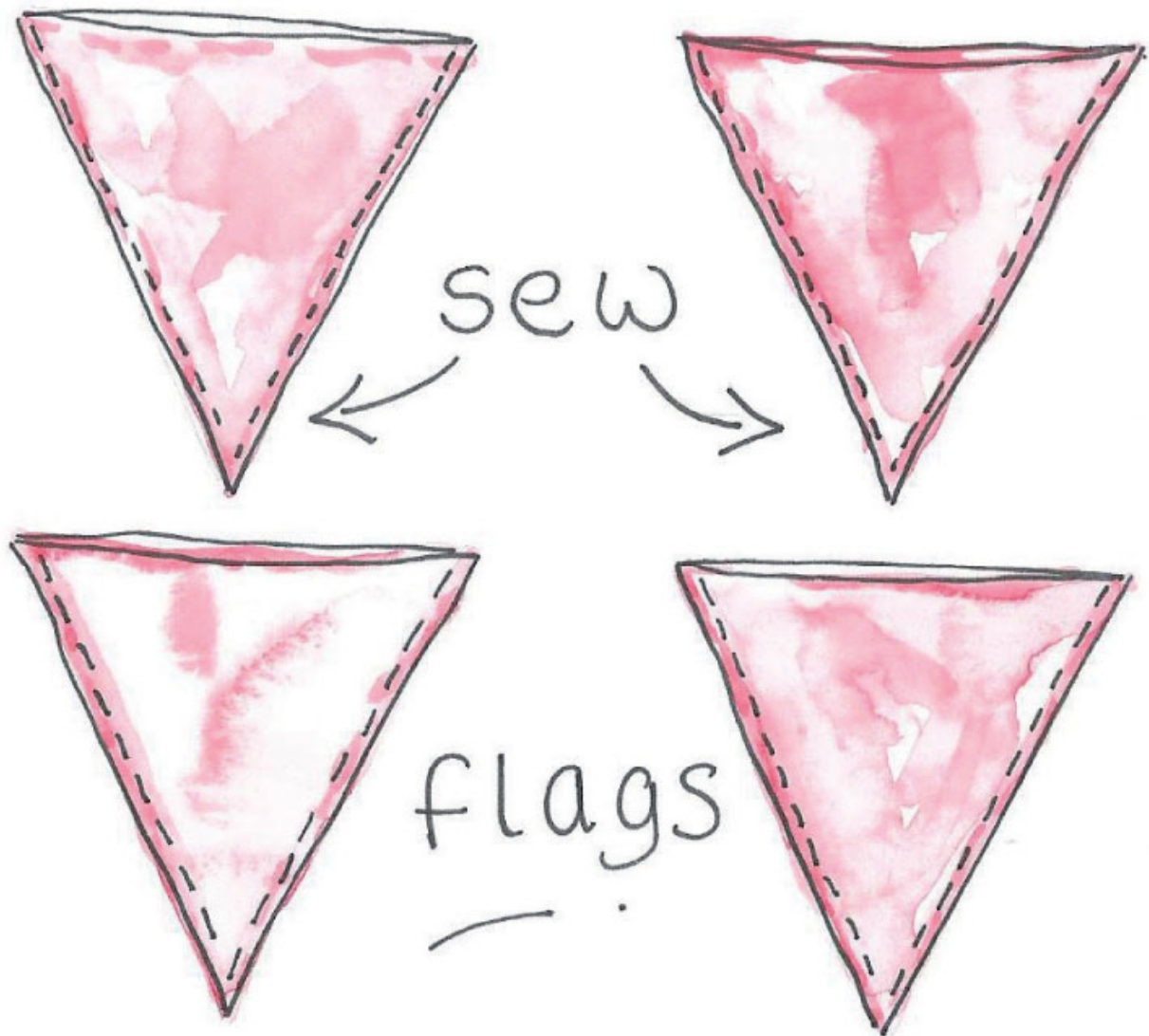


Fig. 66 Sew flags together.

Step 4: Pin, tack and sew the cut flags together

Place one front flag piece on your table so that the printed or right side of the fabric is uppermost. The wrong side of the fabric will be flat against the table. Place one cut back flag piece face down on top of the other so that the two fabric flags are joined right side to right side. Measure 1.5cm from the selvedge edge on the two long sides and pin along this line. Draw with a marker and ruler, before pinning along the marked lines. This enables you to clearly see and check that you are allowing the correct measured seam allowance. You can choose which method of marking to select depending on the colour

of your fabric and what is going to show up easily. Pin and tack two fabric flag pieces together on the two long sides only. Repeat this process three more times, pinning and tacking each of the other three front flag pieces to each of the three back pieces so that you have four tacked flags. Make sure to leave the tops open for turning.

Select sewing thread to match your fabric flags. Wind the bobbin, and thread up the machine upper thread and the needle. Select a medium stitch length and the straight stitch function. Sew a sample piece with scrap fabric to check how your machine is stitching. Although you have measured, pinned and tacked your flags, you can now also use the measured markings on the needle plate to keep your sewing straight by carefully aligning the two joined tacked edges to the right against the 1.5cm marker. Lower the presser foot lever or lift so that the machine needle foot rests on the two tacked pieces of fabric. Use the reverse stitch function to sew a few stitches. Stitch forward all the way along one long side of a bunting flag, making sure that you leave the shorter untacked top opening unsewn. When you reach the pointed end, leave the needle in the fabric and raise the presser foot lever or lift. Turn the fabric gently on the needle point and then sew forwards in the other direction along the second long side. At the end do a few reverse stitches. Remove the flag from the machine, trim threads and set aside. Repeat this process with the other three flags.

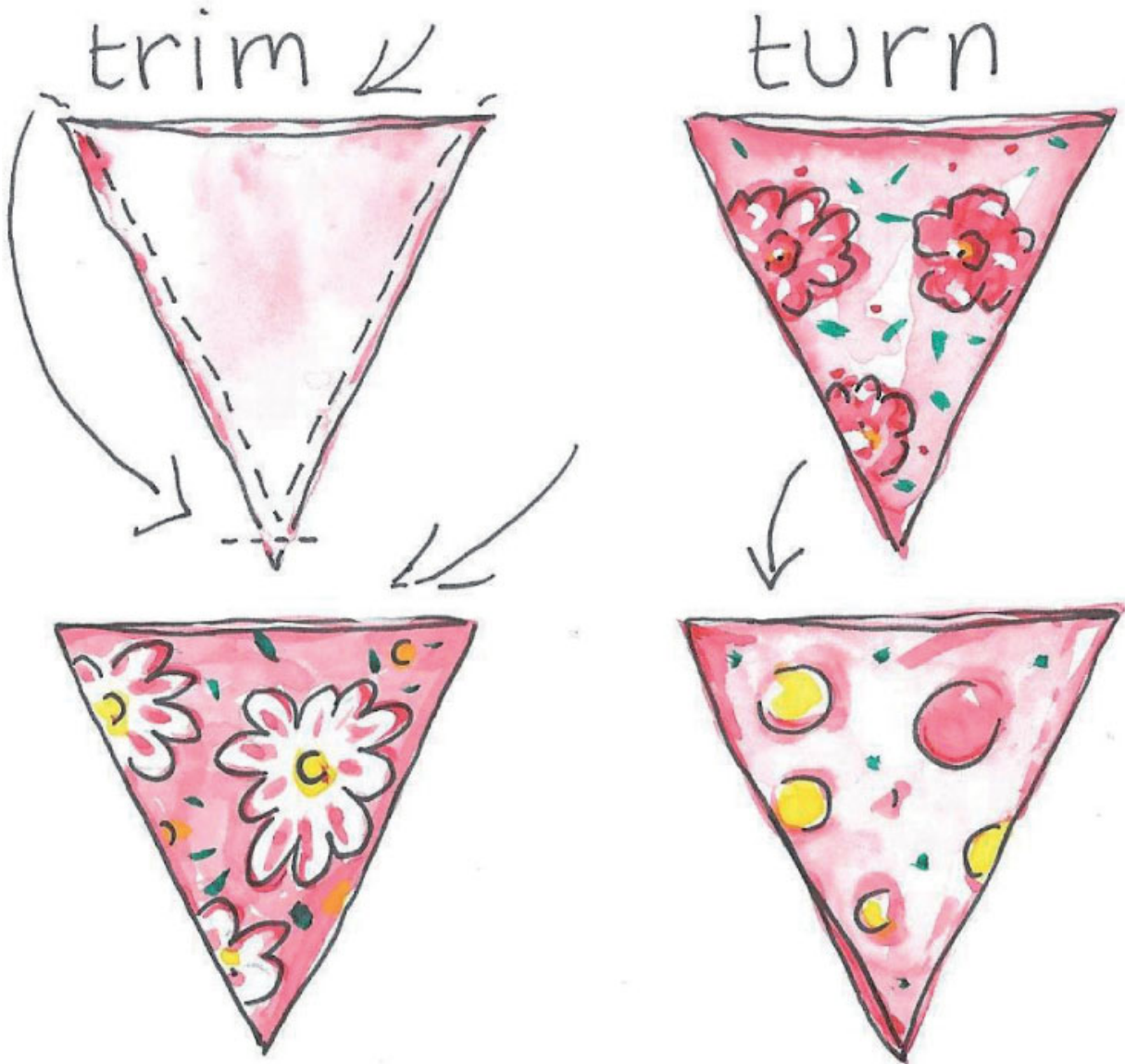


Fig. 67 Trim and turn the flags.

Step 5: Trim and turn the flags

Using sharp scissors, carefully trim all the raw edges beyond the line of stitching. At the pointed end also cautiously cut a little bit of the fabric straight across the rough raw edge point beyond the line of stitching. This ensures that the finished flags are not too bulky and can poke out with pointed flag ends when turned. Turn the flags the right way out and push out the pointed ends using something rounded or blunt-ended like the wrong end of a pencil or a chopstick.

You can also carefully pull the point out a little more by cautiously picking it out with a pin. Finally carefully press the sewn flags.



plot flags onto tape ~

Fig. 68 Plot flags onto tape.

Step 6: Lay out the flags onto the tape

Lay out the cross-grain header tape and mark with a pin 30cm from the left end; this marks and leaves enough tape to tie up the bunting string. Begin plotting out the finished flags in a straight line along the central mid-line running along the header tape, with the raw edged open tops upwards. Lay them out so that they sit side by side with the top points on either side of the flags just touching. Finally also leave 30cm tie at the right-side end.



Fig. 69 Pin and tack flags onto tape.

Step 7: Pin and tack tape

Carefully fold the tape over and pin everything in place all the way along the top, ensuring that you capture both sides of the flags, front and back. Tuck in and pin the ends of the tape. Tack all the way along the tape using a knotted double-threaded needle.



Fig. 70 Machine stitch flags onto tape.



Fig. 71 Bunting with floral and gingham flags.

Step 8: Sew the flags onto the bunting tape

Begin to machine stitch the bunting tape at one end. Start sewing about 1cm in from the end of the tape, reverse stitch and then carry on forwards. Select a medium stitch length of about 2.5 out of 5 and a straight stitch function. Sew around the end of the tape and then down along the entire top line of the bunting over the top of the enclosed open tops of the bunting flags. Keep the flags to the left with the folded part of the tape to the right. Align the folded edge of the tape with the right edge of the needle foot in order to keep the

sewing straight. Continue sewing all the way along until you reach the other end of the tape and sew a few reverse stitches at the end. You could also sew this part with a contrasting thread, using zigzag stitch to create a decorative finish.



Fig. 72 'Name' bunting.

Step 9: Hang up your bunting and admire your handiwork!

Project: Make lined appliqué letter, name of word bunting

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Paper for pattern templates

- Assorted floral, striped, dotty, checked or illustrative printed
- fabric. Choose as desired for flag front pieces. You will need approximately 30cm drop x 115cm width fabric to make four medium-sized flags
 - Plain or semi-plain fabric approximately 30cm drop x 115cm width for the four flag backs
 - Calculate fabric drop upwards to provide more fabric according to the length of the word to be featured
 - Scrap fabrics with small-scale, all-over ditsy fabrics, plains and semi-plains; these are for the appliqué letters
 - Matching or contrasting sewing threads
 - Header tape: natural cotton herringbone/cross-grain tape about 2.5cm deep by 150cm long
 - Big, sharp fabric scissors and smaller embroidery scissors

To make bunting which features letters, names and words follow the previous stages right up to and including cutting the fabric bunting flags using the flag pattern. First select your chosen name or greeting for the flags. Cut one flag to correspond with and feature each letter of a name. Cut out the same amount of flag pieces for the reverse of the flags in plain or patterned fabrics.

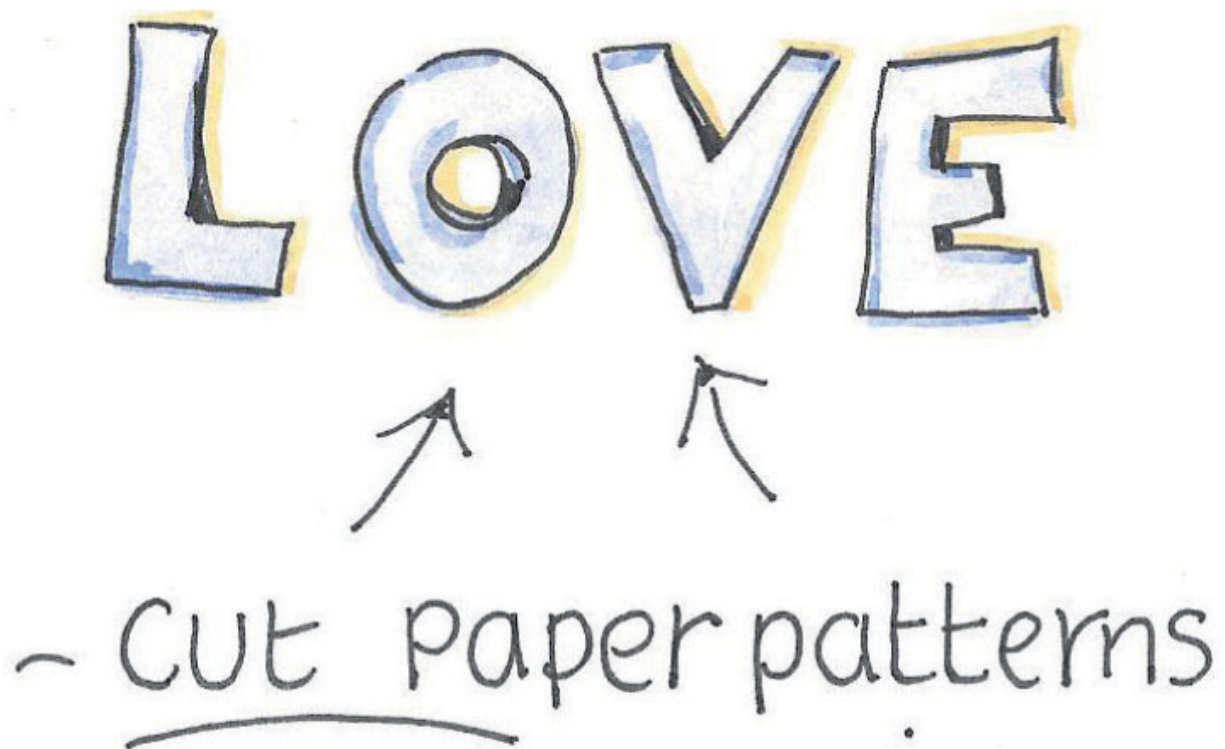


Fig. 73 Cut LOVE paper pattern templates.

Step 1: Create the paper pattern letters for the appliqué

Roughly sketch out the size of the letters required. These need to be large enough to stand out but must sit in the centre of the flags and leave plenty of room for seam allowances around the flags. Next draw out these letters onto strong paper to make letter templates. You can also download letter shapes and enlarge them to your chosen size before printing. The templates should be strong enough to be reusable. You may want to stick them onto strong card. It is not necessary to include seam allowances for the letters.



Fig. 74 Pin the LOVE paper patterns onto fabric.

Step 2: Pin out the letter templates

Carefully select fabrics for the letters that will contrast with and stand out on the bunting flags. Pin out the paper letters onto the patterned or plain fabric, carefully taking note of any directional features in the fabric so that patterns appear the right way up once the letters are cut.



Fig. 75 LOVE letters.

Step 3: Cut the fabric and create borders to letters

Using your sharp fabric scissors, carefully cut around the paper templates to make the letters. You may also need to use small sharp embroidery scissors to cautiously cut around the finer details of the letters and to cut out any tiny pieces inside the letters.

Pin and tack the letters onto contrasting fabric to create borders. Cut carefully about 1cm just outside and all around the first letters to create the border depth.

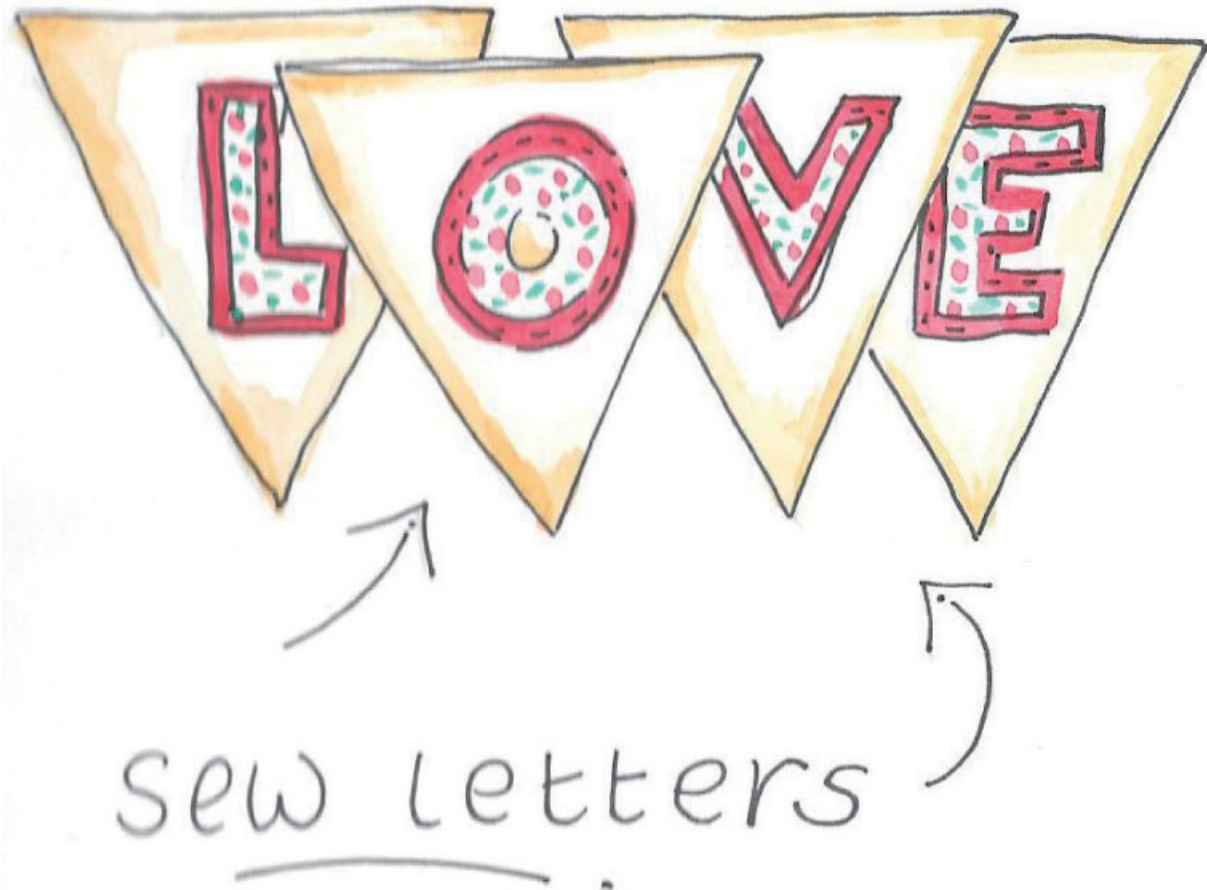


Fig. 76 Sew letters onto flag fronts.

Step 4: Pin, tack and sew the letters onto the flag fronts

Pin the letters centrally onto each flag, leaving plenty of space all around so that they don't get caught up in the seam allowances of 1.5cm. Make sure that they are straight and tack them into place.

I think that because you are sewing a more detailed and intricate project it is a good idea to sew a sample practice piece before you embark on your appliquéd flags. Select scrap fabrics similar to those you have selected for your decorative flags and tack one piece on top of another. Roughly draw out a few letter shapes and practise sewing straight stitch around those shapes, slowly turning the fabric and pivoting the needle by raising and lowering the presser foot lever to sew more angular shapes. You will have already practised and perfected this technique when making the envelope cushion project.

Use the presser foot lever to pull up the needle foot, place the tacked letter fabric shape facing upwards with a raw cut edge to the right and most of the letter shape to the left, under the needle foot. Lower the presser foot lever and do a few reverse stitches. Sew forwards using straight stitch all around the edges of the letter shape but about 1cm in from the raw edge. Alternatively you could use the zigzag function to sew around the letter shape and stitch all the way around the letter. Do this by sewing over and covering the outer raw edge with stitching. You may adjust the density of the zigzag stitching with short length stitches so that you create zigzags that are closer together or even a satin stitch with stitches sitting tightly together. For the purposes of this project, however, a straight stitch or looser zigzag stitch works really well and creates a fabulous vintage look that will complement your bunting creation.

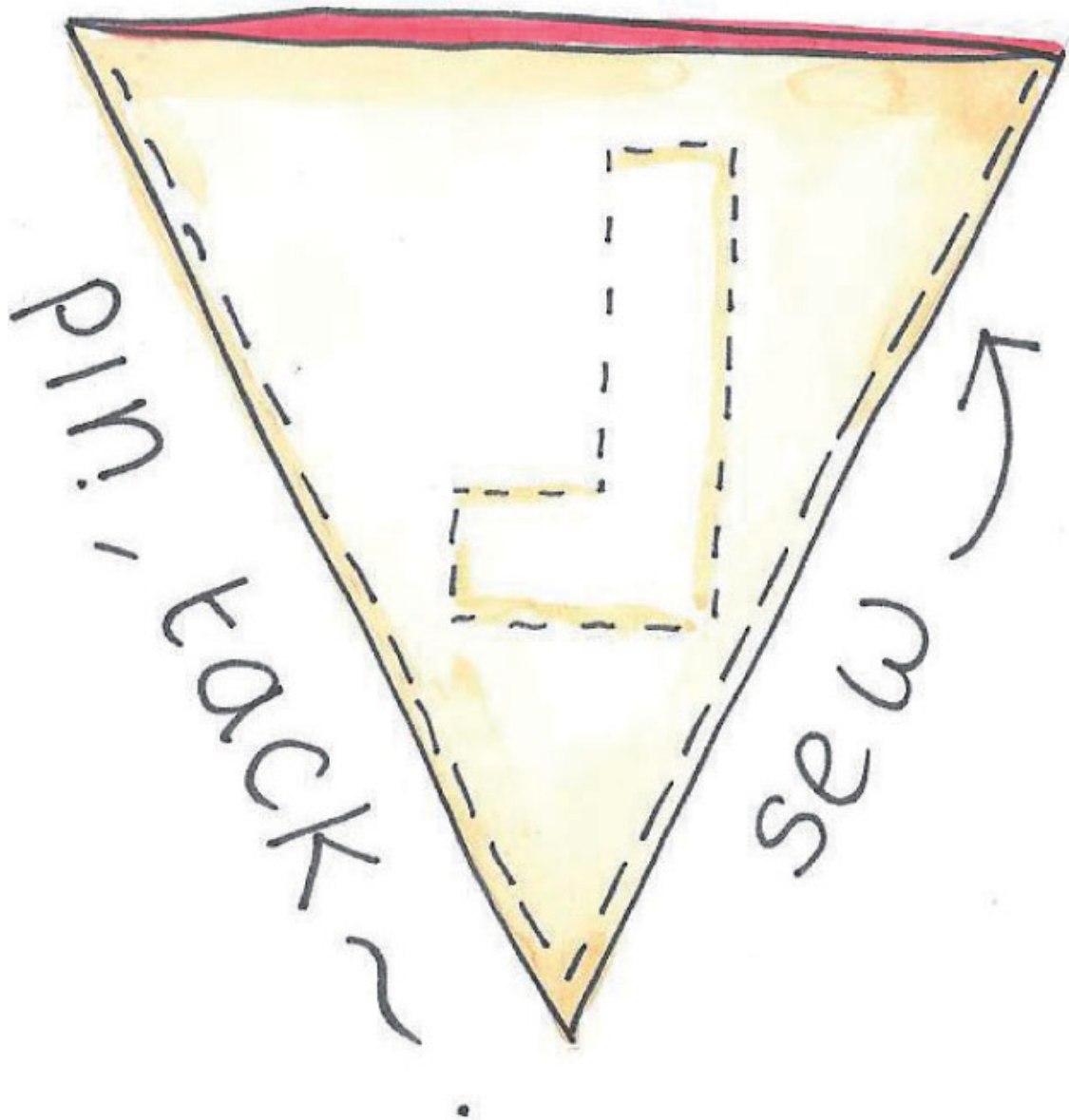


Fig. 77 Pin, tack and sew flags together.

Step 5: Pin, tack and sew the fabric flags together

Follow all the instructions used for making simple lined bunting with four flags. Pin and tack the appliquéd front flag right side to right side with the back of the bunting flag. Leave a seam allowance of 1.5cm and the straight stitch function and carefully machine sew the flags together along the two long sides, leaving the top open.



Fig. 78 'LOVE' bunting.

Step 6: Press flags, lay out onto the bunting tape, pin, tack and sew

As before, follow all the stages of the simple bunting project and trim the raw edges and especially the inside point of the flag before turning the flag the right way out and carefully ironing it flat.

Lay out the flags onto the header tape and pin, tack and sew. Use instructions as for: 'Design and make simple lined bunting with four flags', following Steps 6, 7 and 8 (see pages [53–54](#)).

Hang up your amazing appliquéd bunting creation and admire your handiwork!

More bunting ideas

You could also make memory bunting (using memorable fabrics), Happy Birthday, Noël, Christmas, or appliquéd motif bunting to coordinate with a room scheme. It can work well to alternate prints and plains for the main flags. In order to alternate the flags you will need to make bunting with an odd number of flags to create

matching ends. You could include motifs such as appliquéd hearts and flowers as word spacers. If you position darker fabrics and stronger bolder prints as the end flags this will help to create definition and frame the bunting design. You could even make reversible bunting to suit different occasions. Sewing tiny beads at the points of bunting can create a lovely decorative finish.



Fig. 79 'NOEL' bunting.



Fig. 80 Flower bunting.



Fig. 81 Love bunting with ditsy florals and kitty's patchwork quilt.

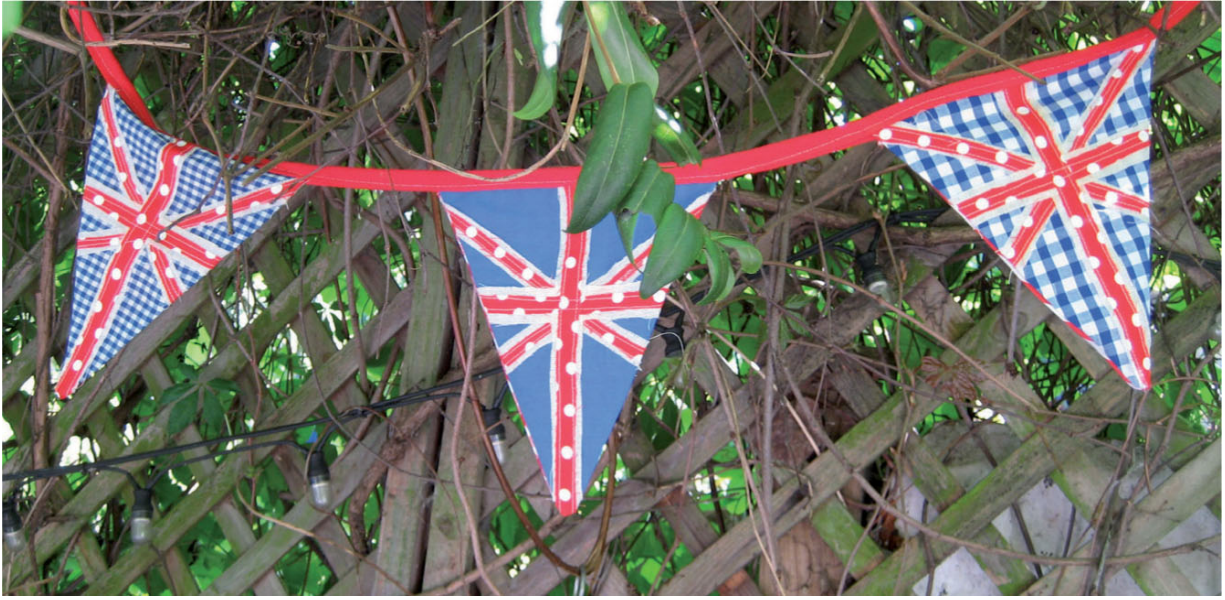


Fig. 82 Patch bunting.

LOVELY LAVENDER HEARTS

This chapter will include hand finishing and decorative techniques. You will build upon skills learnt in the bunting projects to use your sewing machine to produce smaller-scale items including beautiful hanging hearts, sewing curved fabric edges with accuracy. Hearts will later be stuffed with wadding or scrap fabric and some dried lavender.



Fig. 83 Hearts with vintage buttons.

Sewing Skills for Smaller Shapes

You will use your machine sewing skills to accurately sew detailed appliqué letters and small curved heart shapes together right side to right side. Hearts will be finished with hand sewn and decorative techniques. Both straight and zigzag stitches can be used to stitch these items, although you will use straight stitch to close up all the main seams. You will need to sew slowly and carefully around the

rounded and detailed shapes, lifting the presser foot up as the needle remains in the fabric, swivelling it slightly and lowering it again, turning the fabric in small stages as you go. As these are small-scale projects, if you use zigzag on the appliqué it will work well to use a small or medium stitch setting for width and length.



Fig. 84 Lavender heart with vintage fabric.

Fabulous Fabrics

You will first need to choose complementary fabrics for the contrasting front, back and smaller centre of the hearts and appliqué letters as required. You must consider the balance of how the colours, patterns and prints sit together. For example, a darker colour like a bright deep red works well for the main front heart with a contrasting paler plain or darker patterned fabric for the smaller centre heart. Any print or plain medium-weight fabric will work well for the back of the heart. Do not select thinner fabrics as the stuffing may show through. These hearts make great pin cushions to use for all your needlework projects. They are a very popular project in sewing classes and initial hearts have been created for many gift purposes, including two monogrammed hearts tied together with ribbon as wedding presents, or to give to loved ones of every age, from newborns to centenarians.

Project: Make lavender hearts with initials and ribbon detail

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Sturdy paper for making pattern templates
- Assorted ditsy, floral, striped, dotty, checked, plain or illustrative printed fabric; choose as desired for heart front and back and decorative appliqué details
- Matching and/or contrasting sewing threads
- A short length of ribbon or cross-grain tape approximately 8cm long
- Buttons and beads
- Large and small scissors



Fig. 85 Pin templates.

Step 1: Make a paper pattern and pin out templates

On a piece of paper roughly sketch out the heart size and shape that you require. A heart template of approximately 14cm depth by 17cm width will work well. Fold a piece of paper down the centre of the sketched heart measurements and mark a point at the top of the fold. Measure 14cm down and mark a second point to create the heart depth including the seam allowance. Next, draw a swoop of a squished semi-circle from the top point to create half a fat heart

shape. Remember that you are including a seam allowance, in this case 1cm all around, so that the paper heart template will be bigger than the finished object. Cut the paper whilst still folded and open out to reveal a paper heart template. Repeat the process to create a smaller heart that fits neatly within the bigger one, leaving a border around it. To do this, measure about 8cm depth by 9cm width for the smaller heart. Adjust sizes to suit your requirements.

Carefully select fabrics for the heart fronts, centres, backs and letters. Remember to consider how to use contrasting and complementary fabrics and try out fabric combinations together. Pin the templates for the two main and one small heart pieces, carefully aligning the templates so that they sit on the straight grain of the fabric and making sure that any directional fabrics sit the right way up. If electing to apply an appliqué letter, choose a ditsy small-scale print or fabric that contrasts well with the smaller centre heart and take note of any directional features in the fabric so that patterns are the right way up once the letters are cut.



Fig. 86 Cut fabric heart pieces.

Step 2: Cut fabric

Using your sharp fabric scissors, carefully cut around the paper templates to make three fabric hearts. Also cut out the initial letters if desired. You may need to use small sharp embroidery scissors to cut around the finer details of the letters and to cut out any pieces inside the letters. To cut tricky inside sections try first folding the letter shapes and snipping a small incision in exactly the right place to start the cutting.



Fig. 87 Sew hearts.

Step 3: Pin, tack and sew the hearts and letters onto the heart fronts

Pin the cut smaller heart accurately in the centre of the larger front heart so that each sit right side upwards and the right way up. If using letter appliqué pin the cut letter centrally onto the small heart. Make sure it is the right way up and straight, then tack in place.

Select scrap fabrics similar to those you have chosen for your cut hearts and place one piece on top of another. Sew a sample practice

piece on the machine using straight stitch and zigzag functions as required. Choose sewing thread to match or contrast with your cut heart pieces. Wind the bobbin and upper thread with matching thread. Select straight stitch with a medium stitch length. Lift the presser foot lever or lift to raise the needle and place the front heart upwards with the point downwards, and the line of tacking in the heart centre directly below the needle. Although you tacked your hearts you can now also use the measured markings on the needle plate to keep your sewing straight by carefully aligning the raw edges to the right against the markers. Lower the presser foot lever so that the machine needle foot rests on the two tacked pieces of fabric. Use the reverse stitch function to sew a few stitches. Sew forwards all around the edges of the small heart shape about 1cm in from the raw edge. You will need to pivot the needle at the heart point, keeping the needle in the fabric and raising the pressure foot lever as you turn before lowering it to sew the second half of the heart. Alternatively you could use the zigzag function, if you have one, to sew around the centre heart shape. Do this by stitching over and enclosing the cut edge.



Fig. 88 Apply appliqué letter.

Step 4: Apply letter motifs

If you are adding a fabric letter motif to your heart you will now need to machine stitch around this shape. This is best done using the straight stitch function, following all the instructions above. As this is a small detailed shape you will need to sew slowly and with great care. On most and more angular letter shapes you will need to use the pivoting technique to turn the fabric and sew the letter accurately.



Fig. 89 Pin and tack hearts together.

Step 5: Pin and tack the main heart pieces together

Place the front appliquéd heart and the back heart piece right side to right side, matching all points and the heart shape. Measure and pin a 1cm seam allowance and tack along this line, leaving a top opening of a few centimetres for the stuffing and lavender.



Fig. 90 Sew together using straight stitch.

Step 6: Sew the main heart pieces together using straight stitch

Use the straight stitch function to sew around the heart, starting at the top with a reverse stitch before continuing forwards, pivoting on the heart point and continuing up the second side. Although you have measured and marked a 1cm line, also use the machine markings on the needle plate to sew accurately. Make sure that you leave enough room at the top to turn the heart the right way out.



Fig. 91 Trim heart.

Step 7: Trim, turn and press the heart

Trim the raw edges of the heart, especially at the pointed end. Trim across the point just outside the line of stitching so that it is not too bulky. Turn it out the right way and push out the heart point using a blunt pencil or a chopstick. Press gently with an iron if needed, although when they are stuffed the creases tend to disappear!



Fig. 92 Stuff the heart.

Step 8: Stuff the heart

Stuff the heart with half of the wadding or cut up soft scrap fabric, pushing it carefully down into the pointed part of the heart. Carefully put two small scoops of lavender into the centre of the heart. Stuff the heart with the rest of the wadding or scraps to create a pleasingly plump and rounded heart.



Fig. 93 Fully stuffed heart.



Fig. 94 Finish with a ribbon.

Step 9: Finish with ribbon or cross-grain tape

Take the length of ribbon or tape, doubled up in a loop. Place the cut ends inside the open top of the heart. Tuck in the raw edges. Secure the ribbon in place by stitching two hand-sewn running stitches on the front of the heart. Push the needle back through the top of the heart, pulling the thread tightly before stitching two running stitches on the reverse side of the heart top.



Fig. 95 Close the heart back.

Step 10: Close the heart opening completely by hand slip stitching the top open edges

To slip stitch, start as if sewing running stitch. Take the threaded needle from the front of the heart and push it back through and stitch along one stitch length inside the top fold of the heart back. Bring the needle to the front heart and then repeat the process until the heart is completely closed. Finish with two neat stitches close together and

then cut the thread very close to the stuffed heart and push it inside the seam.

Step 11: Finish with a button

Sew one button onto the front centre top where the ribbon meets the heart. This finishes off your lavender heart and hides any messy hand stitching. To sew on a button sew three running stitches into the fabric with the knotted thread. Place the button over these stitches. Push the threaded needle from the back of the button through one of the buttonholes to the front. Push it back through the second hole and through the fabric. Repeat this three times. Finish off with three neat stitches under the button and cut the thread close to the stitches. Sew the second button to the reverse of the heart at the top in exactly the same way. You can also decorate the hearts by sewing on upcycled or memorable buttons and beads from old necklaces.



Fig. 96 Buttoned-up heart.



Fig. 97 Finished 'J' lavender heart.

Step 12: Hang up your hanging heart and admire!

Message hearts

A variation of this project is to hand stitch words and messages onto the front of the hearts within the smaller hearts. Words can also be incorporated onto the back of the hearts, carefully stitching and marking dates to commemorate special occasions such as birthdays

and weddings. The embroidery stage will need to be completed before the front and back main hearts are pinned, tacked and sewn together at Steps 5 and 6. It is a good idea to first try out sketching the layout and spacing of letters and words onto paper before lightly replicating this onto the front heart fabric with a pencil. When stitching messages you will need to use plainer, lighter coloured fabrics for the smaller central heart placement so that the words show up. It works best to stitch the letters using a back stitch.



Fig. 98 Message hearts



Fig. 99 Babushkas stuffed with fabric scraps and some lavender.



Fig. 100 'LOVE' heart string.

Project: Make a lavender heart string

MATERIALS NEEDED

- All the same materials required for each lavender hanging heart (see [above](#))
- Cross-grain tape or strong ribbon to thread and hang the hearts, approximately 1.5cm width by 100 to 150cm in length for a four-heart string

You will need to make a group of hearts using all the instructions and techniques above. You must consider how the hearts will sit together so that the colours and patterns balance and complement each other well. All the hanging ribbons will need to be exactly the same length so that they hang at the same length and level.

Once you have made all the hearts required you will need to prepare the hanging tape or ribbon on which to thread the hearts. Fold and pin the ribbon lengthways along the middle. Tuck the ribbon ends in and under and pin. Tack the pinning in place.

Machine sew the cross-grain ribbon or tape all the way along using a straight stitch or zigzag, remembering to use reverse machine stitching at the beginning and the end of the tape. Use a medium stitch length.

Thread the hearts onto the sewn tape in the right order and hang up your lovely lavender heart string.



Fig. 101 'NOEL' heart string.

More ideas for heart strings

These make great 'NAME' strings or use words such as 'LOVE', 'NOËL' or 'HOME'. They will work best for shorter words as the hearts may weigh down the heart string if the word is longer and there are many hearts.

HOW TO NEATLY LINE AND MAKE A BAG WITH HANDLES

In this chapter you will learn how to design and make beautiful bags with handles, including a simple lined magazine bag and a lined tote bag with an inside pocket and boxy squared corners. You will also build upon these techniques to make smaller items, learning how to create a lined phone or glasses case.



Fig. 102 Black and white tote bag.

Processes and Planning

The methods for the two bag projects both necessitate careful measuring and planning. Handles are made inside out as long tubes, which are then pushed through to the right side. Positioning these at a measured distance from the raw edges and machine stitching to attach them is of particular importance for both bags.

Boxy Bottomed Tote Bag

You may find the processes involved in making the squared off bottom of the boxy tote bag slightly mystifying. Once you have made one following these instructions it is actually very simple and it is an extremely satisfying project to complete. The results are well worth the effort and it builds upon everything you have learnt about sewing and your sewing machine whilst completing other projects in this book. The addition of a simple patch pocket to the inside lining is an extra detail which builds upon machining and sewing skills. Line to ensure that your handles are even and smartly sewn. Lined phone and glasses cases also require good and careful sewing machine control as you are dealing with smaller pieces of fabric and sewing smaller scale items. For all projects you will use techniques like pivoting the needle on the corners to attain smart square angles to your bags and the smaller projects.

Using Paper Patterns

It is essential to make paper patterns for both bag projects to ensure accuracy and so that you can make them again. The tote bag has an irregular shaped bottom, which requires a bit of measuring and planning when plotting it out onto the pattern paper. Take extra care if using a directional fabric for the outer and lining parts of the bag, making sure the fabric sits the right way up.

Sewing Machine Control

Sewing machine control is particularly important for the more tricky detailed parts of these projects, such as the handles. Measured and tacked seams must be adhered to as you machine sew in a beautifully straight



Fig. 103 Magazine bag with vintage 1970s fabric.

Project: Make a simple, neatly lined magazine bag

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Sturdy pattern paper for making pattern templates

- Medium-/heavy-weight patterned or plain cotton for the outside of the bag and handles (you could also use good quality oilskin fabric for the outer bag): 70cm drop by 90cm wide
- Lighter weight patterned or plain cotton for the bag lining and pocket: 70cm x 90cm
- Matching threads
- Scissors

The processes for the two lined bags both require similar procedures for attaching the lining fabric and the handles, which are inset into the top seams. This bag is slightly simpler and has two short handles, one on either side of the open top. The bag shown is made from vintage 1970s fabric from upcycled curtains.

Step 1: Make the paper patterns and pin them out

Using a tape measure or ruler measure, draw and cut out a square of approximately 37cm. This will be used as the pattern for the outer and lining parts of the bag. This includes the 1.5cm seam allowance. Measure and mark a distance of 5cm in from both top corners on one short side of the pattern template. Mark with a tiny triangular notch, cut slightly into the pattern. These indicate where the handles will go.

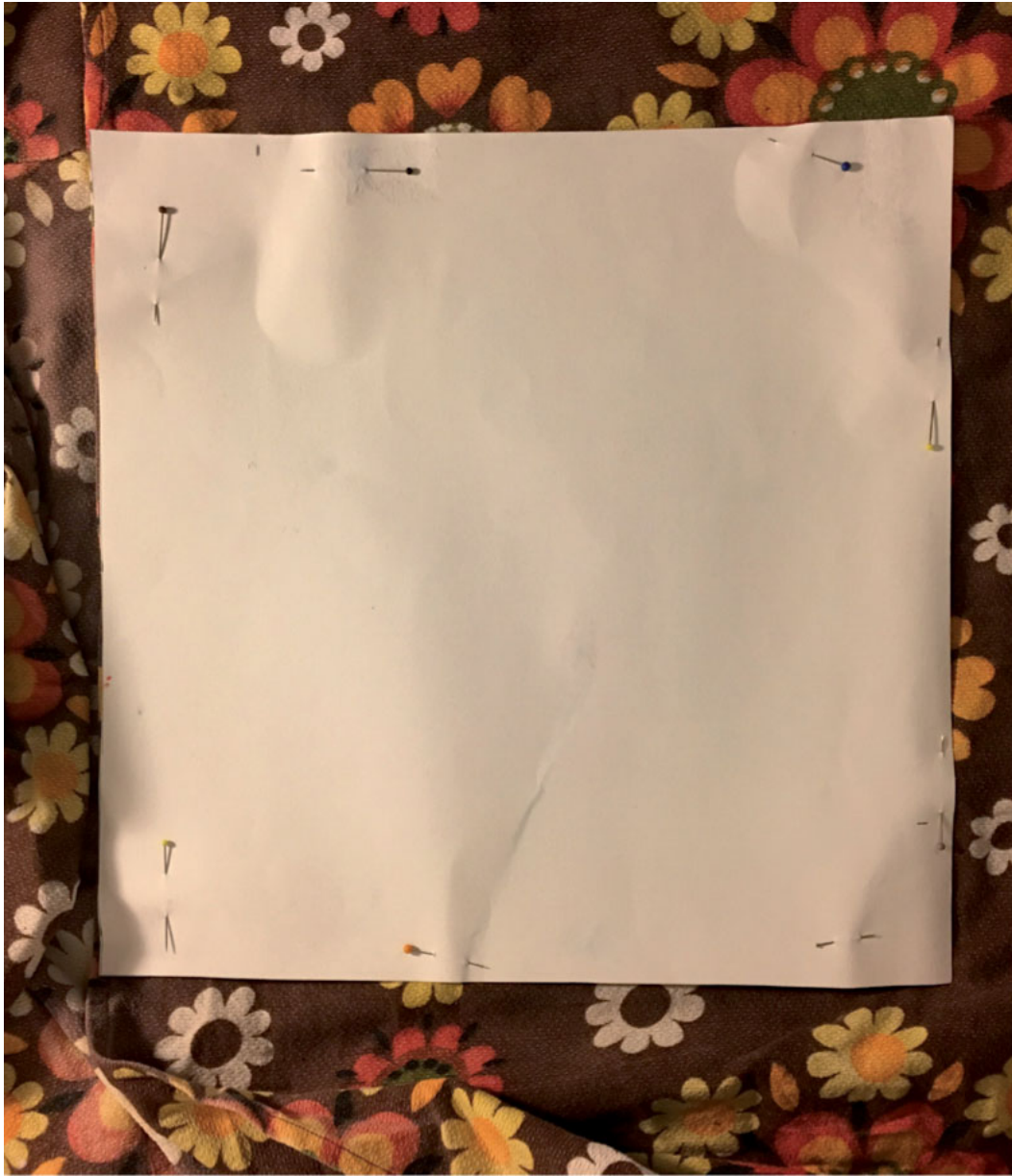


Fig. 104 Pin out pattern template onto the main bag fabric.

Measure, draw and cut out a long rectangle on the paper. This will be the paper pattern for the handle straps and should measure 8cm wide by 23cm long. This includes seam allowances of 1.0 cm along the long sides and seam allowances of 3cm for the ends. The length of the strap paper pattern is approximately half that of the finished strap plus seam allowances. It is going to be pinned onto the folded fabric edge and opened out into the full handle length of 46cm when

cut. Cutting on folds is a very common procedure in sewing and when using patterns.

Align the straight edges of the paper pattern with the selvedge edge and straight grain of the outer bag fabric and pin it in place along the edges of the paper pattern. You can then cut the two main bag outer pieces separately, repeating the pinning process twice. Alternatively you could fold the fabric and pin the pattern onto and through both layers of fabric before cutting. The handles will need to be cut separately by placing the strap end on the fold of the fabric and pinning through two fabric layers. Cut two of these. Check for any restrictions of directional fabrics and adjust your pinning out accordingly.



Fig. 105 Pieces cut.

Step 2: Cut the bag and lining pieces

You will need to repeat this pinning process to pin the pattern onto the lining so that you end up with two main outer fabric squares and two lining fabric squares and two outer fabric handles. Use your scissors to carefully cut around all the paper pattern templates so that you have the right amount of cut fabric bag pieces.



Fig. 106 Pin and tack handles right side to right side.

Step 3: Pin and tack the handle pieces, and sew each strap together

Place the handle pieces on your table with the right side upwards and fold the fabric lengthways right side to right side so that it is doubled over. Measure 1.0cm in from the two raw edges and pin all along this line. You could mark this with a ruler and pencil or tailor's chalk and pin along this line whilst leaving both ends open. To tack the straps, thread a hand-sewing needle with double thread, knotted at one end, and sew along the pinned seams. Repeat this with both straps.

Select thread to match your fabrics and set the machine on a medium straight stitch length. Sew a sample piece with some of the scrap fabric to check the stitching. Begin sewing the straps together by sewing down one long side just on or inside the tacking, with the raw edge aligned with the 1cm needle plate marker to check and guide the stitching. Reverse stitch at the beginning and end.



Fig. 107 Turn straps.

Step 4: Turn the straps the right way out

Use a large safety pin or kilt pin to turn the straps the right way out. It works best to pin them at one open end side and push the pin through the tube, gently easing the attached strap fabric through until it appears the right way out, pulled through at the other end. Fold and press the strap so that the seam is in the middle if using cotton fabric. If you have chosen to use oilskin you cannot iron flat the straps.



Fig. 108 Straps turned and seams pressed centrally.



Fig. 109 Attach straps onto the bag.

Step 5: Position and attach straps

Note the marked notched distance of 5cm in from both top corners of the bags. Place the end of the strap right against and inside the main outer fabric with the folded edge up against and inside the 5cm marker and the pressed seam facing upwards and the strap front against the bag outer fabric. Taking care not to twist the strap, place the other end up against the other 5cm marker. Pin these in place. Measure down 1.5 cm from the top edge where the straps are attached and pin and tack all the way along this edge. Using a straight medium stitch function, machine sew along this tacked edge. Repeat this process with the other bag side.



Fig. 110 Bag front and lining pieces with handles sewn into the seam.

Step 6: Attach stitched outer and lining bag sections together

Place one piece of outer fabric right side together with a corresponding lining piece. Measure and pin 2cm down from the raw edge on the attached handle side. The reason for a slightly bigger seam allowance is to ensure that the strap is stitched and set firmly into the bag seam. Tack and then machine straight stitch along this pinned line. Sew again just outside this stitched edge towards the raw edge to reinforce the stitching. Next, use a zigzag stitch to finish

off the raw edges and secure the stitching more firmly. Flatten out the stitched fabrics and press (unless using oilskin fabric, in which case do not iron it). Repeat this process with the other bag side. This attaches both front bag pieces with the lining and sets the handle into the seam. Make sure that the straps are hanging down into the bag sections and do not get caught up in the seams.



Fig. 111 Attach two sewn bag sections together.



Fig. 112 Snip corners so that they are not too bulky.

Step 7: Attach two sections of bag and lining together

Lay out one stitched bag and lining section with the right side uppermost. Place the other stitched section on top, matching the front bag fabric sections together right side to right side and the corresponding lining pieces also matched with each other. Align all the raw edges and match the corners. Make sure the straps are tucked in so that they do not end up stitched into the wrong seams.

Measure and mark at a distance of 1.5cm all the way around the outside edges of the joined bags. Tack all the way around except a section of about 6cm at the bottom of the lining part, which will be left unstitched for now in order to turn the bag. Machine straight stitch around nearly the whole perimeter, using straight stitch as before. Zigzag outside this line of straight stitching to finish the seams. Trim raw edges and across the corners at a diagonal so that they are not too bulky.



Fig. 113 Using the finished bag.

Step 8: Turn the bag

Turn the bag so that it is the right way out. Fold under the unstitched lining section, pin, tack and machine stitch along this part so that the opening is closed. Push the lining into the bag and press the fabric bag flat. If using oilskin fabric you cannot iron it. Enjoy your bag!

Project: Make a neatly lined tote bag with an inside pocket

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Strong paper for making pattern templates
- Medium-/heavy-weight patterned or plain cotton for the outside of the bag and handles (you could also use good quality oilskin fabric for the outer bag): 75cm drop by 90cm wide
- Lighter-weight patterned or plain cotton for the bag lining and pocket: 75cm x 90cm
- Matching threads
- Scissors
- Pins and a needle

This bag is slightly more complicated than the magazine bag and uses a different technique for making and assembling it. It is also bigger and has the added feature of a patch lining pocket and a useful square box shape at the bottom of the bag. Like the magazine bag it has two short handles, inset on either side of the bag top.



Fig. 114 All the cut pieces for the tote bag.

Step 1: Make paper patterns for the bag, lining, handle and pocket, pin out and cut

Using a tape measure or ruler, measure and draw out a rectangle shape 46cm x 25cm on your pattern paper. In one corner draw a square shape of 9cm x 9cm. Cut out and remove this square shape so that you are left with a rectangle with one corner missing at the bottom. At the uncut top of the rectangle, measure along and mark 8cm and then 3cm from the long edge. Cut little notches at these

points to act as markers for the handles. When cut out, this pattern piece will be the paper template for both your main bag outer fabric and lining. It includes 1.5cm seam allowances.

Make a handle pattern measuring 8cm wide by 37cm long, including seam allowances of 1cm along the strap sides and seam allowances of 3cm for the ends. The length of the strap paper pattern is half that of the finished strap, plus seam allowances, as you are going to cut it lengthways on a fold.

For the pocket pattern, measure and cut out a square of 14cm square onto your pattern paper.

Fold your outer bag fabric and place the long edge of the bag pattern against the folded fabric edge, aligning straight edges of the paper pattern with the selvedge edge and straight grain of the outer bag fabric. Always make sure that the paper pattern is pinned with the cut-out square away from the fold and at the bottom. If you are using a directional print this is particularly important as that part will form the bottom of the bag. Pin it in place along the edges of the paper pattern. Cut this out and repeat the process so that you have cut out two outer bag pieces. Cut out two lining pieces in exactly the same way. All these pieces will open out and be twice the size of the paper pattern templates when unfolded.

The handle will need to be cut as two long pieces by placing the strap template end on the fold and then pinning through two fabric layers. Pin and cut out two of these separately and unfold to open out. Check for any restrictions of directional fabrics and adjust your pinning out accordingly.

Pin out the pocket on either the lining fabric or on the outer body fabric if you want it to contrast with the lining.

Remember to repeat the pinning process, so that you will end up with two main bag outer fabric pieces, two bag lining fabric pieces and two long outer fabric handles. You will also have one pocket. Use your scissors to carefully cut around all the paper pattern pieces. Make sure that you cut all the notches in the bag tops as these ensure that handles are positioned in exactly the right place.



Fig. 115 Handle pieces sewn with straight stitch.

Step 2: Pin, tack and sew the handle pieces

Pin and tack the handle pieces as for the magazine bag, placing them with the right sides together and folded lengthways. Pin 1cm in from the raw edges and tack this seam, leaving both ends open at top and bottom. Repeat this with both straps.

Choose thread to match your fabrics. Select a medium length straight stitch length and sew a sample piece with scrap fabric to check the stitching. Stitch each strap by sewing down one long side

just on or inside the tacking, with the raw edge aligned with the 1cm needle plate marker to check and guide the stitching. Take out the tacking after sewing.

Use a large safety pin or kilt pin to turn the straps the right way out and press the straps so that the seam is in the middle.



Fig. 116 Pocket back.



Fig. 117 Pocket front.

Step 3: Make the pocket

Use a zigzag stitch to neaten all the pocket edges. Turn, pin and tack the top edge of the pocket down 1.5cm from the right to wrong side so that the zigzag stitching is on the inside. Machine stitch this using a straight stitch. Turn and pin under all the other edges so that all the zigzagging is now on the inside. Press these folded edges under and take out the pins. Position the pocket right side upwards, with the stitched line uppermost on one side of the lining centrally

and about 10cm down from the top. Pin and tack in place, leaving a 1cm seam allowance. Machine straight sew the pocket on three sides, leaving the top part open. Reinforce the beginning and end of the stitching with reverse stitches.



Fig. 118 Put sewn outer and lining bags together.

Step 4: Make up the outer fabric and lining pieces

With right sides together pin and tack 1.5cm seam allowances along the bottom and sides of the bags. Make sure that you leave the top part and cut-out square shapes open. Machine straight stitch along these marked seams. Repeat this process for the lining. Press all the seams. Use a zigzag function to finish off all the raw edges.

Step 5: Make the box corners for the outer bag

With right sides together open up the corners of the outer bag and refold them so that the seams align. Pin and tack 1.5cm from the edges to form the boxy bottom of the bag.

Repeat this process for the lining but make sure to leave one corner open as this is how you will turn your bag the right way out at the end. Machine stitch along all these seams using a straight stitch. Finish off the edges with a zigzag stitch.



Fig. 119 Boxy bottom corners.



Fig. 120 Attach straps.

Step 6: Position and attach straps

Take the outer main bag and make sure that it is the right way out. Place the end of one strap against the main outer fabric between the two cut notches, with the pressed seam facing upwards and the strap front against the right side of the outer bag fabric. Taking care not to twist the strap, place the other end between the remaining

notches. Pin in place, repeating this on both sides. Tack in place and take out the pins.



Fig. 121 Join the bag pieces.

Step 7: Join bag pieces

Turn the lining inside out and put the outer bag inside the lining with right sides together. Match the side seams and notches and pin the

two bags together 3cm down from the top edge. Tack this in place and remove all the pins. Machine stitch along this tacked line using a medium stitch. Machine sew again just outside this stitched edge to reinforce the stitching. Finally zigzag stitch to finish the raw edges off and secure the stitching more firmly. Trim the edges and remove the tacking.



Fig. 122 Bag inside showing contrasting pocket and lining.



Fig. 123 Front of lined phone or glasses case.

Step 8: Finish the bag

Pull the whole bag through the unstitched corner part in the lining. To close that corner, fold the seams inwards and machine straight stitch over the opening. Press the bag, especially the top and handles. Take a break and admire your bag!

Project: Make a lined phone or glasses case

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Sturdy pattern paper for making a template
- Medium-weight patterned or plain cotton for the outer case: 25cm x 40cm
- Lighter weight fabric for the lining: 25cm x 40cm
- Pins and a needle
- Matching threads and ribbon for a loop fastening

The instructions for both the lined phone and glasses cases are exactly the same. You will use contrasting fabrics for the outside and lining to create an added touch. The lining will just show and create a border of patterned fabric at the very top of the cases. These small bags are also reversible as they are fully lined and neatly finished off. There is an option of adding appliqué detail onto the case fronts and a button loop fastening. Designs could include initial letters, hearts, flowers, boats, butterflies and babushkas. You could also cut around patterns from prints you particularly like and apply these.



Fig. 124 Cut pieces for the front, back and lining of the case.

Step 1: Make the paper pattern for the bag and lining, pin and cut out the pieces

Using a tape measure or ruler measure, draw out a rectangle shape 11.5cm x 19cm on your pattern paper. Cut this out to make the pattern for all the cases. This includes seam allowances of 1cm.

Fold the outer case fabric in half and pin the pattern onto and through both layers, aligning it with selvedge. You will need to repeat this pinning process to pin the pattern onto the lining so that you end up with four small fabric rectangles after cutting out. If the fabric has a strong directional pattern like a stripe or check, make sure that you align the pattern template with this.



Fig. 125 Machine sew 'D' appliqué onto the case.

Step 2: Optional appliqué

If you are going to apply appliqué onto the case you need to do it at this stage. Pin, tack and machine stitch any appliqué motifs onto the front centre of the case. Use a straight or zigzag stitch or even an appliqué stitch. Make sure to leave plenty of room for the 1cm seam allowances.



Fig. 126 Attach back of case to a lining section.

Step 3: Attach the front fabric to the lining

Place one piece of the front fabric right sides together with one piece of lining, matching the corners. Measure, pin and tack 1cm in from the raw edge on one short end. Repeat this with the other two sections. Machine straight stitch along this seam using a medium setting.



Fig. 127 Lining and back section and lining and front section stitched together.

Step 4: Attach the two joined parts of the case together

Place the front fabric pieces right side together and the lining pieces right side together. Pin and tack all around except for a section of about 5cm at the bottom end of the lining pieces. You will leave this for turning. Machine straight stitch all the way around except for the 5cm opening, aligning the raw edges with the 1cm marker on the needle plate to check your stitching.



Fig. 128 Stitch the open lined section.

Step 5: Turn the case and finish off

Pull the case through the opening. Fold under the open part, pin, tack and machine stitch along this line carefully. Press the case and put in your glasses or phone.



Fig. 129 Back of case.

Optional loop fastening

Cut a piece of ribbon approximately 10cm long. Before stitching together one side of lining and back fabric piece (Step 3), insert the folded ribbon into the seam in the back centre. Pin, tack and stitch the ribbon and seam together. When the case is assembled and turned, you will then have a loop fastening on the reverse side at the

top. Stitch a large button on the front side so that the loop buttons up and closes the case.

INSERT A ZIP AND CUSHIONS WITH ZIPS

In this section you will first learn how sew a zip into two fabric squares to make a cushion cover. This is a very simple way of inserting a zip. Methods used when you are inserting the zip into a stitched seam are slightly different. For putting a zip into any project you will use a zipper foot so that the machine stitches slightly to the side of the zip.



Fig. 130 Butterfly birthday cushion, an upcycling project made with memorable fabrics.

If you want to design and create a decorative appliqué front to your cushion, refer to the instructions at the end of this chapter and instructions for creating a butterfly heart cushion (see pages [91–93](#)).

Project: How to insert a zip into a square cushion using two squares of fabric

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Medium-weight dress fabric or furnishing fabric: 50cm drop length x 90cm width. For contrasting front and back, select two 50cm drop lengths as excess can be used for other projects
- Matching or contrasting threads
- 38cm square cushion paper pattern template (see [Chapter 8](#))
- Measuring tape
- Marker and ruler
- Scissors
- 40cm cushion pad to stuff your cushion cover
- Matching 35cm zip



Fig. 131 Stitch one cushion edge on each square.

Step 1: Pin out the pieces, cut the fabric, then pin, tack and sew one cushion edge on each square

Place the cushion fabric with the right side upwards. For matching the cushion front and back, fold the fabric into two down the middle and pin the paper pattern in place, aligning with the selvedge and straight grain. You would then cut through the two layers. For contrasting front and back you will need to pin the paper pattern onto

the two fabrics and cut separately. Use about three pins on each side of the paper pattern.

Using your sharp fabric scissors, cut the fabric carefully around the paper pattern pieces.

Your zipper will sit at the bottom of the cushion. If you have a directional fabric, mark the bottom with a pin so that the cushion sits the right way up. Measure and pin 0.5cm along one bottom edge of each cushion square, turning fabric from the right to the wrong side. Tack these edges in place. These ends are going to sit on the zip side of the finished cushion.

Finish off the two tacked edges using a straight stitch. Sew with the folded edge to the right and the rest of the cut cushion piece to the left. You will stitch just one edge on each cushion. Stitch a few reverse stitches at the beginning and end of the line of stitching. Press these folded stitched edges.



Fig. 132 Tack and stay-stitch the zip.

Step 2: Pin, tack and stay-stitch the zip

Measure and turn under 1cm. Pin and tack in place. Press this edge.

Place the zip uppermost and the right way up on the table. Take the first square with sewn edge and position this so the folded sewn edge sits centrally down the zip. Position it so that the top zip pull sits about 1.5cm below the top raw edge. Do the same with the second sewn edge. Make sure that the long teeth of the zip are central. Measure and mark 0.75cm in from the folded pressed edge

on each side. Pin both sides in place along this marker, using about three pins lengthways along each sewn side. Do not twist the zip or fabric pieces. The zip must be straight and the folded sewn edges must sit centrally. This is so that when the zip is machine sewn it will pull up in a straight line.

Tack all the way down both sides of the pinned edges about 0.75cm in from the folded edge.

Roughly stay-stitch/tack the two sewn edges in place, stitching across the two folded edges so that they meet and sit flawlessly in the zip centre. Stop short 5cm from the top of the zip. This method is useful for ensuring a zip is put in straight.



Fig. 133 Machine stitch the zip sides.

Step 3: Select zipper foot, fit zipper foot, stitch the tacked zip sides

The zipper foot has two little half-moon notch shapes on either side so that it can work as you stitch close on either side of the zip. The needle drops down at the side of the foot. It also has two bars for attaching it to either side of the presser foot holder.

Fit the needle foot so that the machine will stitch on the left of the foot for the first cushion zip side. Following instructions in [Chapter 2](#),

see [page 23](#), raise the needle and use the pressure foot release button to remove the existing foot. Put the zipper foot aligned below the notch in the pressure foot holder, so that the foot is fitted towards the left. The bar on the foot will click into place on this side when you drop the pressure foot lever onto it. Check it is in place. Reverse this process to fit the foot on the right side.

Set the functions on a straight stitch with a medium length. Make sure that your machine is set with a normal central needle position so that the needle does not hit the presser foot. You can check this by gently rolling the hand wheel forwards and checking that the needle is going to fall in the correct position.

Start the machine stitching from the bottom of the zip. The edge of the zipper foot should be just about aligned to the folded edge running down the centre of the zip. Do a few reverse stitches then sew carefully in a very straight line, stopping about 5cm before you reach the top of the zip. This is because you will need to ease the stitching around the bulkier zipper pull in order to stitch in a straight line. Raise up the foot lever. Pull down and open up the zip a little. Carry on stitching about 1cm from the folded edge and do a few reverse stitches at the end. Change the zipper foot so that it is fitted on the right side and repeat this process stitching down the other side of the zip. Both sides are now stitched onto the zip.



Fig. 134 Finished cushion, showing zip.

Step 4: Attach two squares together, stitch all the main seams, turn and press cushion

Use the unpicker to remove all the preparatory tacking stitches.

Place the two squares right side to right side so that corners align and the zip sits on one end side. Press in place. Measure, mark and pin 1.5cm in from all the raw edges. Ease the zip down about 5cm so that when you stitch the cushion together it will be easier to turn it.

Change the presser foot back to the zipper/straight stitch foot that is generally fitted on the machine. Select the straight stitch function and a medium stitch length. Place the zipped side at the top with the zipper pull to the right. Raise the presser foot lever and the needle. Position the first tacked side underneath the needle foot with the raw edge to the right. Do a few reverse stitches then machine sew forward nearly all the way to the end of that side, stopping short about 1.5cm before the end. At the corner, keep the needle in, raise the presser foot lever and swivel on the needle, turning the sewing and changing direction to sew down a second side. Do the same for the third side, finishing with a few reverse stitches at the end. Raise the presser foot lever and needle. Pull the sewing project away from the needle towards the left and cut the threads, leaving about 10cm of thread coming from the needle.

Select a zigzag function and a medium length stitch. Sew zigzag stitch to finish off all the raw edges outside the sewn seams. Keep the straight stitching to the left and raw edges to the right and sew the zigzag just outside the straight stitched line towards the raw edge. Progress in the same way as for the main seams, stitching and swivelling the needle at corners to stitch the next side. Do a few reverse stitches at the end.

Trim off all loose thread ends and the seams. Snip across the corners of the cushion so that it is easier to turn, poke out and create squared corners.

Unzip the cover completely and turn it the right way out. Make sure that all the corners are fully pulled out. Press the cover and stuff with the cushion pad. Zip it up and plump up your cushion. Admire your handiwork!



Fig. 135 Projects on sewing table.

Project: Set a zip into a sewn seam on a cushion

To set a centred zip into a seam you follow a slightly different process to setting a zip into a long seam. This procedure can be used to put a shorter zip into a cushion and when making clothes, for example putting a seam into the back of a dress, skirt or top.

Follow all the instructions for materials in 'How to insert a zip into a square cushion using two squares of fabric', above, except use a shorter 20cm zip for this cushion project. Follow the processes for 'Insert a zip' as before, up to the end of Step 1.



Fig. 136 Sewn seam with pressed seam allowance.

Step 1: Pin and tack seam, machine stitch, press

Place the two squares right side to right side with the two zigzagged edges together and match the corners. The zip will be inserted into the sides with zigzag stitching. Pin once in the centre to hold fabrics. Measure up 15cm from the bottom raw edge on the sewn sides and mark with a pin. Measure in 1cm from the folded sewn edges and draw a line all the way up. Pin and tack along this line just up until the 15cm marker pin.

Set the straight stitch function and a medium length stitch. Machine stitch the tacked seam from the raw edge until the 15cm

marker. Reverse stitch at the beginning and end.

Carefully press the seam and unsewn 1cm folded allowance open. The allowance is 1cm on this seam because you have already turned under 0.5cm with the zigzag stitching, totalling the normal seam allowance of 1.5cm.



Fig. 137 Set and pin the zip into the seam.

Step 2: Set and pin the zip into the seam

Place the fabric right side down. Place the zip direction. Stitch carefully along the face down on the wrong side of the fabric with the bottom of the zip to sit just below the top of the sewn seam. Position it so that the zip sits centrally between both the folded sewn edges, and the top zip pull sits about 1.5cm below the top raw edge. Make sure that the long teeth of the zip are central. Measure and mark about 0.75cm in from each of the folded edges. Pin both sides in place along this marker, using about three pins lengthways along each side. Do not twist the zip or fabric pieces. The zip must be straight and the folded sewn edges must sit centrally. This is so that when the zip is eventually sewn in, it pulls down straight. Turn it over to check that it is sitting centrally. Adjust as needed.



Fig. 138 Stay-stitch and tack the zip.

Step 3: Tack and stay-stitch in the zip

Tack the zip in place along both sides and along the bottom. Loosely stay-stitch across the folded seams to make sure that they sit perfectly together.



Fig. 139 Make a butterfly appliqué cushion front using heart templates.

Step 4: Select and fit the zipper foot, stitch the tacked zip sides, finish

Set the foot so that it clips onto the needle plate holder on the left. Set the functions on a straight stitch with a medium length.

Pull the zipper down so that it is open by a few centimetres. Start the machine stitching from the top of the zip. The edge of the zipper foot should be just about aligned to the folded edge running down the centre of the zip. Do a few reverse stitches then sew carefully in

a very straight line, just stopping level with the top of the sewn seam and bottom of the zip. Keep the needle in the fabric and raise the take-up lever. Swivel the needle and move the fabric to change direction. Stitch carefully along the bottom of the zip across both seams until you meet the line of tacking on the other side. Swivel the needle again and change direction to face up the other side of the zip. Repeat this process, stitching the other side of the zip. Both sides are now stitched onto the zip.

Follow Step 4 of 'How to insert a zip into a square cushion using two squares of fabric', see pages [87–88](#). You could also use overcasting stitch to finish off the raw edges. Some machines will have different options for thin-, medium- and heavier weight fabrics relating to this stitch.

Project: Make a Butterfly Appliqué Cushion Front Using Heart Templates

You could add appliqué detail to the cushion front square after cutting it out. To do this, fold the cushion into two to ascertain the centre point. Iron along this crease. You could use motifs such as letters or hearts cut from templates and pin, tack and stitch these centrally onto the cushion. Use straight, zigzag or appliqué stitching to stitch them in place. You can utilize the same templates as for the bunting and lavender hearts or design your own. Other ideas include cutting shapes from existing print designs and applying these or inventing new patterns by mixing pattern prints from different fabrics. You can design some wonderful effects by building up simple templates. Use a heart paper pattern to create butterfly motifs, using each heart for wings. Similarly you could create flowers from cut heart motifs.

The heart butterfly is a simple but very effective project for which you could use an appliqué function if your machine has one. Otherwise zigzag or straight stitch options will also work fine. This heart filled butterfly design can be used for any cushion projects.



MATERIALS NEEDED

- All materials required for zipped cushion projects, including two main cut-out cushion squares (see page [40](#))
- A selection of small-patterned contrasting scrap fabrics for appliqué (small-scale ditsy, dotty and plain fabrics)



Fig. 140 Fold fabric to make cut heart wings.

Step 1: Draw and cut out symmetrical heart-shaped paper patterns, fold fabric

Use the instructions for the lavender hearts project to create a heart template (see page [62](#)).

Fold fabric into two and pin the heart template in place through both layers. Choose a lighter colour for the tops of the wings.



Fig. 141 Cut top wings.

Step 2: Cut top wings

Cut out the two hearts for top wings and set aside.



Fig. 142 Cut wings, body shape and antennae.

Step 3: Pin and cut out lower wings, cut a body shape and antennae

Use the heart template to pin and cut out two more wings.

Fold a scrap of the upper wing fabric into two and cut on fold to create a long rounded body shape. Cut two strips of about 4cm for the antennae.



Fig. 143 Arrange pieces as a butterfly along the centre line.

Step 4: Arrange heart templates as a butterfly along the centre line

Iron centre crease in the cushion front. Measure and mark the mid centre point of this line with a pin. Arrange the hearts in a butterfly shape centrally onto the fabric and pin in place. Place the body shape on top and arrange the antennae.



Fig. 144 Machine stitch appliqué.

Step 5: Tack appliqué, machine stitch around the appliqué edges

Tack all the appliqué in place.

Use matching thread. Select either the zigzag or appliqué stitch functions. You will need to use a zigzag foot and stitch right on the edge of the appliqué shapes. The appliquéing needle will fall outside the appliqué edge. The zigzag stitch needle will stitch over both edges. Manoeuvre carefully around the rounded shapes. Pivot needle at points and turns by raising the presser foot lever and

turning the fabric to change direction. If you only have a straight stitch function, sew just inside the raw edge of the appliqué shapes.



Fig. 145 Cushion front with buttons.



Fig 146 Button and bead tin.

Step 6: Trim edges, add finishing touches, finish

Trim off all ends and remove tacking. Add button/bead detail if required.

To finish, follow the cushion instructions for constructing cushions from two pieces of fabric, see [Chapter 5](#) and this chapter. The front appliquéd cushion piece will work with both zipped cushion projects and the envelope cushion project.

LINED CURTAIN CREATIONS

In this chapter you will be shown how to make and manage larger scale sewing machine projects. You will learn to measure windows and calculate fabric to make tab top curtains, simple lined curtains and individualized projects. You will consider fabric print direction and the straight grain, and may need to match prints side to side to create larger window treatments. You will use your sewing machine to join fabric right side to right side to make all the curtains.



Fig. 147 Sewing on a border.

You will understand how to accurately calculate the length, quantity and spacing of tab tubes or straps for the tab top curtains. These may include a border. Skills learnt making these could also be used to design and create room dividers, pictures, wall hangings and decorative features.

Making simple lined curtains will equip you with the ability to make more advanced and intricate window creations and build upon sewing expertise and techniques that you have learnt throughout this

book. Pinning and hand tacking will be used to accurately position measured curtain header tape and the tabs prior to careful machine sewing. Hand finishing skills will be included.



Fig. 148 Upcycled linen patch curtain.

Curtains can be made out of old and preloved fabrics and larger cut-down curtains. Photos of an 'upcycled linen patch curtain' project

are included in this chapter, inspired by a donated box of wonderful cream linen, embroidered fabrics and lace. This is a more advanced creative sewing project, which may inspire many additional upcycling projects. It is made in much the same way as the curtain project except that the irregular-shaped patches are first stitched irregularly onto the main cream linen curtain pieces.

These techniques and processes will teach you the basics of understanding and using your sewing machine effectively to make many home furnishing creations. All the tasks in this chapter will require some planning and a bit of space to lay out the larger projects. You will build upon all the machine sewing skills, talents and experience that you have accumulated so far.

Project: Tab top curtains

To make tab top curtains you will need to measure the drop from the top curtain rail to the sill, or longer if you want them longer. For this purpose a distance of 15cm from the rail to the frame will be assumed. Add 30cm to the drop measurements when buying fabric to allow for all the tabs and drop seam allowances and 3cm to the total side width for those seam allowances. Next measure from the edges of the window frame from side to side. The tab top curtain will be approximately one window width wide. To make it a bit fuller add an extra half a width so that it is 1.5 window widths. Note down all these measurements and sketch a very simple drawing of what measures what and what sits where.



Fig. 149 Finished tab top curtain.



Fig. 150 Cut tab pieces.

To Make One Panel Tab Top Curtain

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Sufficient measured medium-weight fabric to fit your window and make one curtain (cotton or linen)

- Lining fabric measuring the same as the main front fabric (plain, lighter weight cottons or lining fabric)
- Contrasting or coordinating fabric for the appliqué motif patterned border as required, approximately 20–30cm deep x the required curtain width. The project shown uses the border from an old tablecloth and accentuates the embroidery work
- Small and large sharp scissors
- Metre rule and tape measure
- Fabric markers
- Velcro tape
- Pencil and paper
- Pins and a needle

Step 1: Cut curtain fabric pieces and lining, cut tab pieces

Using window measurements and seam allowances, plan out the exact size of your required curtain using a tape measure or metre rule. Add 3cm to the total side width and 4.5cm to the total depth for the seam allowances. Mark the edges and size with pins and draw the shape with a metre rule and tailor's chalk or pencil. Cut out the main tab top curtain front piece. Cut the lining to exactly the same amount. For a finished one metre square curtain you would need a piece of fabric 103cm wide by 104.5cm drop to allow for seams.

Calculate the amount of tab top pieces you will need based on spacing them about 10cm apart. Cut each tab piece as a length of 20 x 12cm from the curtain front fabric. For a small curtain of one metre square you will cut six tabs.



Fig. 151 Cut appliqué border.

Step 2: Cut appliqué border

You can choose any depth for your border but a border of approximately 20–30cm will work well. To start this project cut the main border piece as one section of about 20–30cm deep to match the width of the main curtain front piece, then adjust and engineer the pattern to suit the design. If you are cutting it from a patterned printed design, think about cutting around shapes, for example irregular-shaped flowers, to create interest. If cutting it from

something lacy or embroidered, as illustrated, use the pattern to guide you.



Fig. 152 Trim border appliqué.

Step 3: Pin, tack and sew the border onto the curtain front

Matching bottom corners, pin and tack the border along the curtain bottom. If using a directional patterned fabric, ensure all fabric

decoration is the right way up and sits straight.

Set the stitch length dial or lever to a medium setting and select the straight stitch function. Take a scrap sample piece of fabric to do some practice stitching. Raise the presser foot lever and place the raw top edge of the border fabric aligned with the right of the needle foot. Begin by first using the reverse stitch function to sew a few stitches and then start to sew carefully forward. The project illustrated was stitched about 1cm from the lace edge and then the excess was trimmed afterwards. For a patterned fabric the same principle could also be applied. The needle foot and calibrations should also be used as guides. If you elect to stitch a straight border, sew in a straight line all the way along and straight across just about 1cm below the raw edge. Sew along the top border edge and do a few reverse stitches at the end. Raise the presser foot lever and remove your sewn piece from the machine by pulling it to the left and cutting threads. Trim off all loose ends and trim the raw border edges if necessary.



Fig. 153 Fold and sew the tabs.

Step 4: Fold and sew the curtain tabs

Fold the tab strips lengthways with right sides together. Measure a seam allowance of 1.5cm in from the outer raw edge and use a marker to draw a line. Pin lengthways in about three places along each long side. Tack along the pinned line. Make sure that you leave the ends open for turning.



Fig. 154 Machine stitch the tabs.

Step 5: Machine stitch the tab tubes

Keeping the straight stitch function at a medium setting, place the first tab under the needle foot by raising the presser foot lever to bring up the foot. Position the presser foot aligned with the open tab end and the needle about 1cm from this end. Keep the raw edge to the right aligned with the 1.5cm marker on the needle plate. Although you have carefully measured and marked the 1.5cm seam allowance, this serves as an extra check and helps to ensure that

you sew in a straight line. You will want all the tubes to be equal width and match each other. Lower the lever, do a few reverse stitches backwards and then carefully machine stitch all the way along the tab piece. Repeat this process for each tab. Trim the raw border edges so that they are not too bulky for turning.



Fig. 155 Turn the tabs the right way out.

Step 6: Turn tabs the right way out and press

Using a large safety pin at the top of the sewn tab, begin to push this into the centre of the tube until it comes all the way through and the tab is the right way out. You can also use a long blunt object like a chopstick or the end of a pencil to push the tab through. Making tabs like this is a very useful technique, which can be used for many other projects like the handles on a bag or shoulder straps on a garment. Arrange the tabs so that the seam sits centrally and then carefully press them flat.

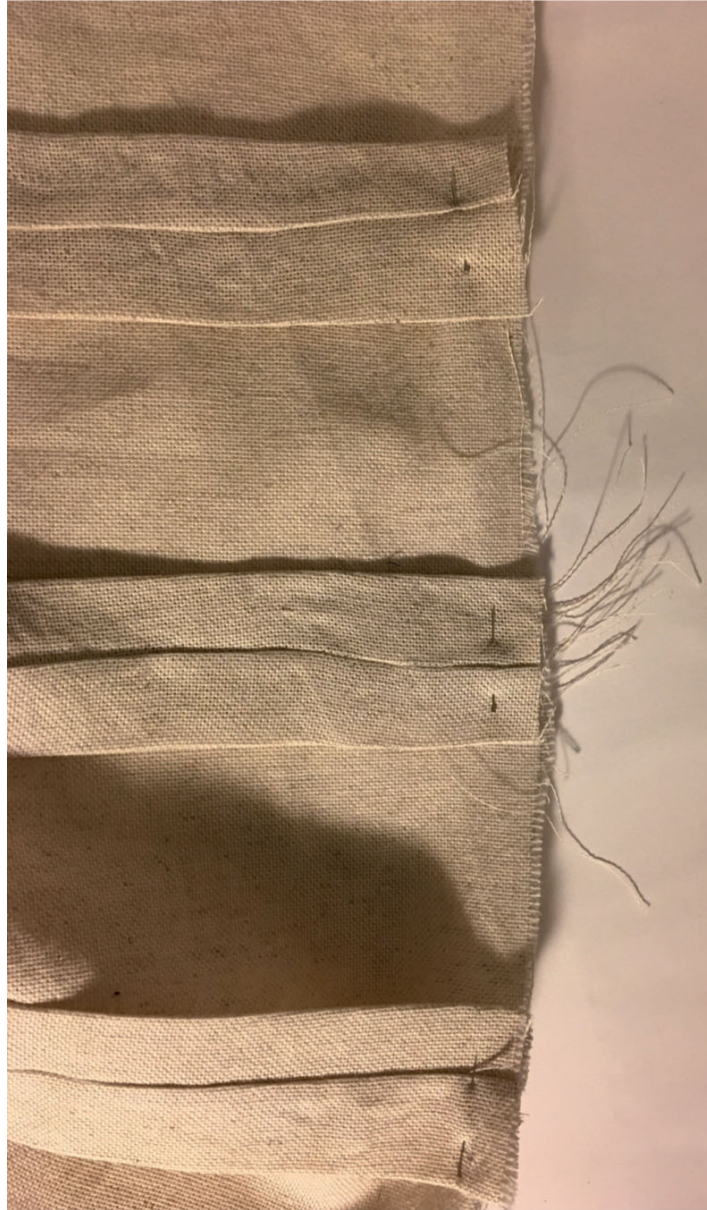


Fig. 156 Attach the tabs to the curtain.

Step 7: Attach tabs to the curtain front top and machine stitch

Find and mark the top centre point of the main front curtain piece with a pin. Measure in 3cm from the outer top edge and mark with a pin. Take the first tab, folded into two with the seam inside, and place it centrally onto the central marker, facing downwards with raw edges together. Measure and pin this 3cm from the top edge. Place the second tab at about 7–10cm markers on each side, again folded in two with the seam inside and facing downwards. Continue to space

the other tabs out evenly as required. Measure, plan and plot this out with pencil markers and pins so that they are exactly and evenly spaced. Pin the remaining tabs in place, folded into two with the seam inside and all placed facing downwards. Tack all the tabs onto the curtain front piece. Make sure that they all face downwards and that all the seams are inside the folded fabric tabs.

Keep the straight medium stitch options. Place the main fabric front piece under the needle foot aligned with the first tab and flat against the needle plate with the raw edge to the right, aligned with the 3cm marker on the plate to ensure that you sew in a straight line and tabs are sewn on and positioned correctly. Carefully machine stitch all the way along the tops of the tab pieces and the main seam. Take out tacking and trim the threads.

Step 8: Join the front piece to the back lining piece, machine stitch the two main pieces together

Place the main front piece right side upwards with tabs folded in two downwards on the fabric and away from the raw edge. Place the back piece on top, right side to right side aligning and matching all corners and edges. Mark in from the outer edges all around the piece. Use a seam allowance of 1.5cm on the two long sides and along the bottom 3cm at the top. Use pins, markers and a metre rule to help. Place pins evenly along these line markers. Double check all the tabs are inside and facing downwards and then tack all around the marked seam allowance, except for an open section of approximately 10cm over to one side at the curtain bottom. This unsewn area will be used to turn the curtain the right way out once it has been machine stitched.

Keeping your machine on the same straight stitch and medium options, stitch both main curtain pieces together. Place both fabric pieces under the needle foot, starting by aligning the bottom left corner on the long side with the 1.5cm marker on the needle plate. This will help to guide straight, even and measured sewing. Raise your presser foot lever to bring up the foot and position the presser foot aligned with the corner and the needle about 1cm from this end

corner. Lower the lever, do a few reverse stitches backwards and then carefully machine stitch all the way along to the top of the curtain. Raise the lever, keeping the needle in to swivel on the corner and turn direction. Repeat this process until you have sewn all around the curtain, making sure that you leave a section open at the bottom. Trim and neaten the raw border edges and trim diagonally across the corners, as you want them to be sharp and not too bulky when turned.



Fig. 157 Machine stitch the two main curtain pieces together.



Fig. 158 Slip stitch.

Step 9: Turn the curtain the right way out, and pin, tack and hand slip stitch the open section

Gently turn the curtain the right way out by pulling it through the open section. Once it is all through, poke out all the corners with a chopstick or blunt pencil. Tuck in the open section, ensuring all raw edges are inside and it matches the sewn part. Pin and tack it all in place.

Thread up a needle with matching thread, knotted at one end. Starting from one open end push the thread through so that the knot is on the inside front of the curtain and push the needle and thread

inside and along the folded unsewn edge. Push it through from the front to catch the back curtain section with a small stitch and then again along the folded unsewn edge. The objective is to create tiny almost invisible stitches. This technique is useful for finishing off many projects. Continue stitching like this until you have sewn up the whole section. Finish off with a couple of stitches at the end part and trim all the threads.

Carefully press the whole tab top curtain, and admire and hang up your appliqué tab top curtain creation!

Tab Top Curtains with Adjustable, Removable Velcro Tabs

For fixed rails you can create removable tabs. Follow all the instructions including 'Materials Needed' up until Step 6, then continue to:



Fig. 159 Attach velcro to tabs.

Step 1: Top stitch one end on each tab, attach the tabs, attach Velcro to the tabs

Turn under one end on each tab by tucking it in neatly by about 1cm. Pin, tack and straight machine top stitch along this seam.

Place tabs along the front curtain piece with pressed seamed parts uppermost. Match and attach the ends with the raw edges to the curtain top raw edge. Follow instructions for measuring, plotting and stitching the tabs as in Step 7 for the first tab top curtain project (see

page [101](#)). Make sure that you keep the sewn tab ends free and unstitched from the main curtain front.

Cut squares of Velcro and attach one half of the squares to the inside seamed part of each tab at the sewn hem end. Pin, tack and machine stitch in place. Sew a small square area around each Velcro piece.



Fig. 160 Attach velcro to tabs and curtain back.

Step 2: Make up the curtains, attach Velcro to curtain back

Follow Steps 7–9 of the main project.

Attach the other part of each Velcro piece to correspond to the position of the tab on the back part of the lining. Make sure that they are all in the right place and the same distance from the curtain top. Pin, tack and machine stitch in place.

Hang up your adjustable curtains and appreciate your handiwork!

Project: Very simple lined curtains

It is a good idea to fit a curtain pole before measuring for your curtains. This enables you to correctly gauge how long they need to be. For the purposes of this project it will be assumed that the pole will sit about 15cm above the window. It will also be wider than the window frame by about this much on either side. The instructions are for extremely simple curtains. There are lots of variations on these directions and also masses of advice online.

Measuring the drop

To measure your window, measure the drop distance from the top of the pole to the bottom of the window frame. If you want the curtains to go below a window sill or to the floor, you will have to add this measured distance to the drop. Also add about 25cm extra to the drop to allow enough for all your hems.

Secondly, measure the width distance by measuring from one outside edge of the window frame to the next. Now double this width measurement, as you will be creating two curtains and this will ensure ample fabric to cover the window.

Calculate the fabric needed

Fabric comes in a number of width sizes and this needs to be considered when computing the amount needed. The quantity

required for the width will be roughly the width window measurement (as above) multiplied by two. It might be a good idea to employ the expert help of a good fabric shop retailer to assist with this! This amount is then multiplied by the drop to give you the exact amount that you need. Remember to add about 25cm on the drop to all of this to make sure that you have enough fabric for hemming. For extra-full curtains, you can multiply the window width fabric by two and a half.



Fig. 161 Finished header-tape curtains.

Wide windows

If you need to add fabric widths together to make your curtain fabric wide enough, do this by sewing fabric together down along the straight grain with very straight seams and neatly pressing these open. Match all patterns as best you can. Make sure that all part-cut-through widths end up on the outside parts of curtains as this will look neater.

Patterned fabric with a repeat

You may need to allow for an obvious repeating pattern when calculating your fabric. This can vary according to the type of fabric design repeat, for example if it is side to side straight match or a half drop. You can again enlist an expert fabric retailer to help with this, and there are some online calculators that can help work it out. Basically you need a bit more fabric if you want to match a complex and noticeable pattern. This is more complicated than making up a plain or multi-directional fabric pattern design with even coverage.

Small windows

On very tiny windows you may want to just create one little curtain that pulls over to the side.



Fig. 162 Chair seat cushion to match the curtains.

Project: Super-simple lined curtain creations with header tape

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Enough fabric for each main curtain front, as measured and required
- Lining fabric for the back, as required
- Curtain header tape for the curtain top, roughly the same as the measured main fabric width
- Matching sewing threads
- Metre rule and tape measure
- Fabric markers
- Pins and a needle

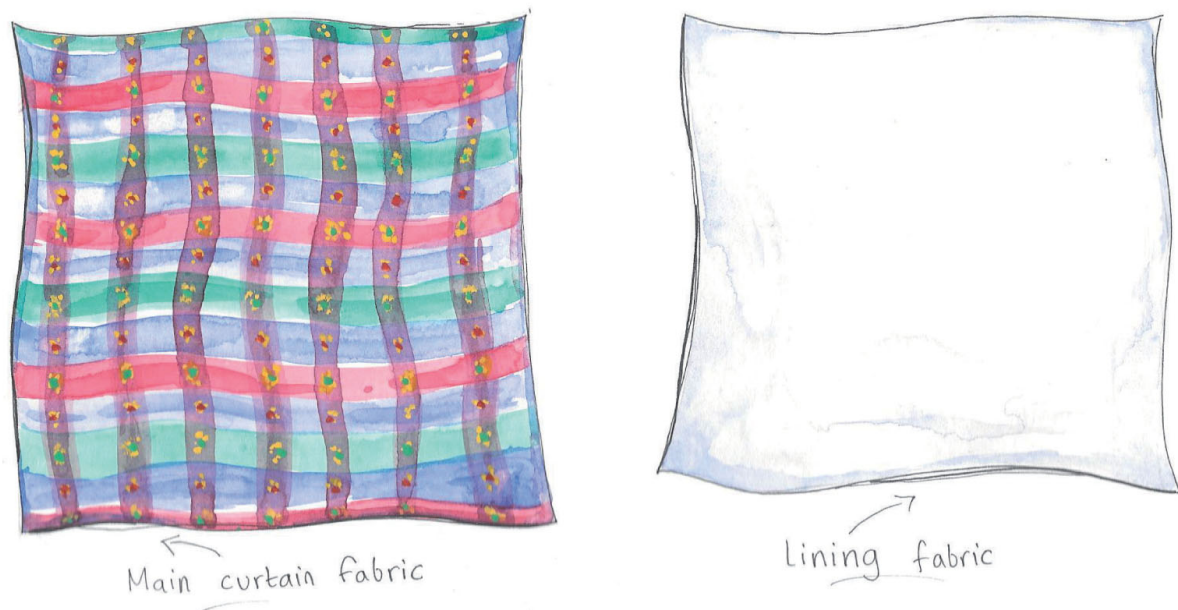


Fig. 163 Cut curtain fabric pieces.

Step 1: Measure for main curtain front fabric and lining fabric and cut

Measure the window from the top pole to the desired finished length with a measuring tape. Measure the frame width. Follow all the specific previous instructions. Make sure that you allow 12cm extra for both the top and bottom hems on the drop or length. Make a written note of all the measurements. It is a good idea to draw a

small rough sketch indicating where all the specific measurements sit.

Plot out and measure the exact amount needed for the main curtain fabric, including the extra bit for hems. Use fabric markers and a metre rule to guide you and lightly draw out the curtain size onto the fabric. Make sure that you measure along the straight grain of the fabric parallel with the selvedge edge and at a right angle to this to create your squared curtain shape.

Make the drawn lining fabric piece slightly smaller than the front fabric piece. This should be about 9cm less on the width and about 4cm shorter on the drop.

Cut out all the fabric and lining pieces with sharp scissors.



Right side to right side

Fig. 164 Join front curtain fabric and lining.

Step 2: Join front fabric to lining

Place the front fabric piece right side up and place the lining right side down on top. Match the curtain pieces at the top corners. Measure, mark and pin a distance of 1.5cm all the way down both curtain side seams. Pin carefully all the way along these lines. Tack this in place. The front fabric will of course be slightly bigger. This is so that when it is made up it will fold a little bit around the back, creating hems on either side.



Fig. 165 Tack curtain sides before sewing.



Fig. 166 Seams on curtain front and back.

Step 3: Sew side seams, trim and press, turn the curtain the right way out

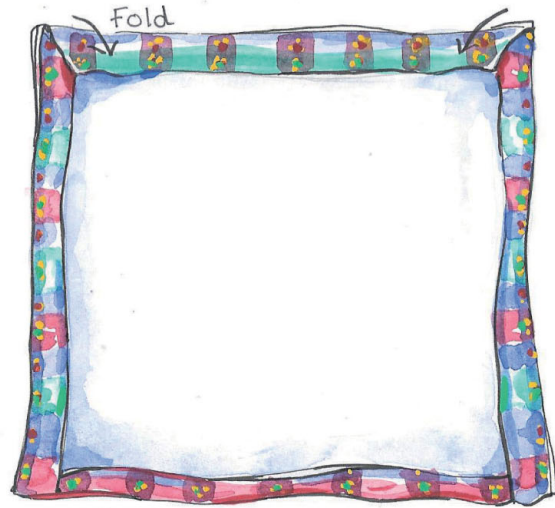
Stitch seams of 1.5cm down both sides. Using straight stitch and a medium length, sew all the way down both these side seams with matching thread.

Trim all loose threads and side seams. Take out the tacking with an unpicker. Press.

Turn the sewn curtain pieces the right way out. Arrange them so that roughly 4.5cm of the front fabric is turned over to the back neatly on each side of the lining side. Place a few pins along the turned part and neatly press it all the way down.



Fold top two corners in –



Fold mitred corners and top –

Fig. 167 Fold and mitre top two corners towards the curtain back.

Step 4: Turn over the curtain top

Measure a line of about 6cm down from the two raw edges at the curtain top. Turn down the curtain top towards the lining. Mitre each side corner folded neatly under in a triangular shape on both sides. Pin and loosely tack in place.



Pin, tack and sew header tape

Fig. 168 Pin, tack and sew header tape onto curtain.

Step 5: Pin, tack and machine stitch the header tape

Measure and cut the header tape to fit all the way along the top of the curtains at the inside top on the lining side. The tape should be very slightly shorter than the sewn curtain and turned under a small amount, about 1cm at either end to hide the raw cut edges of the header tape. Pin and tack in place in a line just about 1–2cm down from the folded-down top. Make sure that you position it with the

right side uppermost so that the hooks can pass through the loops when the curtain is finished.

Stitch the tape in place using a straight stitch with a medium setting. Start stitching on one of the long sides of the tape with some reverse stitches to secure the stitching. Sew all the way along, raise the presser foot lever, leaving the needle in, and swivel at the corner to change direction. Sew down a short end side, then the other long side and finally the last short end. Finish with some reverse stitches. It's important to make sure the stitching is secure. You will end up with a long thin rectangular shape sewn at the top of the curtain, securing the tape.



Fig. 169 Finished curtains on a rail.

Step 6: Turn up and stitch the bottom hem, hang up curtains

Measure, mark and turn up the bottom hem once by 1cm, folding the fabric from front to back. Turn it up a further 5cm that so it covers the lining.

Mitre both bottom inside corner hem edges, folding them under like little triangular envelope corners on each side to create a neat finish. Pin these in place.

It is best to slip stitch the hem by hand to create a neat finish. Use matching thread so that stitches do not show on the curtain front. You can also machine along the bottom hem using a straight stitch or try the hemming stitch function. See all the instructions and notes in the 'Stitches' chapter, see pages [33–34](#), and any specific guidelines relating to hemming stitch in your machine's instructions.

Adjust the cords on the header tape to create exactly the right gathered look. Knot them at the ends so that they don't pull through. Attach curtain hooks to your tape and hang up your super-simple lined curtain creations!



Fig. 170 The author at work at her heirloom Singer machine.

INDEX

accessories 7
antennae 92
applique 36, 43, 44, 49, 56, 57, 61, 82, 91, 93, 96, 98, 103
applique border 98
applique cushion 43
applique letters 56, 57
applique stitch 34
appliqued 50, 58, 59
appliqued flags 57
appliqued flowers 59
appliqued hearts 59, 64
attach tabs 101

babushkas 68, 81
back stitch 37
bag pieces 80
bags 7, 71, 73, 76, 80, 81
bags with handles 71
balance hand wheel 18
balance or hand wheel 18, 24
basting 33, 39
beads 62, 93
Bernina 11
blind hem stitch 34
boats 81
bobbin 20
bobbin case 20, 21
bobbin cover 20
bobbin driver 20, 21, 28
bobbin winder 18, 20

bobbin winder spindle [20](#)
bobbin winder spool [27](#)
body shape [92](#)
border [95](#), [96](#), [98](#)
borders to letters [57](#)
bottom hem (curtains) [109](#)
box corners [79](#)
boxy bottomed tote bag [71](#), [79](#)
Brother [11](#)
bunting [49](#), [54](#), [58](#), [59](#)
bunting flags [49](#)
bunting paper pattern [51](#)
bunting tape [54](#), [58](#)
butterflies [81](#), [92](#), [93](#)
butterfly applique [90](#), [91](#)
butterfly birthday cushion [85](#)
butterfly motif [91](#)
buttonhole lever [25](#)
buttonhole stitches [34](#)
buttons [8](#), [15](#), [62](#), [66](#), [93](#)

calculate fabric [95](#), [104](#)
centre seam [47](#)
chair seat cushions [105](#)
Christmas bunting [59](#)
clothes [7](#)
complementary fabrics [61](#)
computerised [11](#), [22](#)
corners [42](#), [46](#), [75](#)
cross grain tape or ribbon [62](#), [66](#), [69](#)
curtain pieces [102](#), [106](#)
curtain rail [96](#)
curtain sides [107](#)
curtains [7](#), [87](#), [95](#), [96](#), [98](#), [101](#), [102](#), [103](#), [104](#), [105](#), [106](#), [107](#), [108](#),
[109](#), [110](#)
cushion back seams [41](#)

cushion front [91](#)
cushions [7](#), [85](#), [87](#), [88](#), [93](#)
cut fabric [63](#)
cut the fabric [41](#)
cutting [39](#)

decorative flags [57](#)
decorative stitch [36](#)
design [50](#)
directional fabric [42](#), [51](#), [63](#)
ditsy small-scale prints [63](#)
dividers [95](#)
dried lavender [61](#)

embroidered [98](#)
embroidery stitches [36](#), [67](#)
embroidery work [96](#)
envelope cushion [9](#), [39](#), [40](#), [57](#)
equipment accessory box [25](#)
extendable free arm [11](#)

fabric facts [16](#)
fabric scraps [68](#)
fabulous fabrics [61](#)
feed dogs [24](#), [36](#)
feet [25](#)
flag fronts [57](#)
flags [50](#), [52](#), [53](#), [56](#), [57](#), [58](#)
flower bunting [59](#)
flowers [81](#), [91](#)
foot pedal [20](#), [21](#)
free-motion embroidery [36](#)
free-motion quilting [37](#)
front-loading machine [28](#)

glasses case [71](#), [72](#), [80](#), [81](#)

haberdashery [15](#)
hand sewing [7](#)
hand sewing needles [13](#)
hand tacking [33](#)
handbook [19](#)
handle pieces [73](#)
handles [72](#), [75](#), [76](#), [77](#)
hang up curtains [109](#)
happy birthday bunting [59](#)
header tape [50](#), [53](#), [105](#), [106](#), [109](#)
header-tape curtains [105](#)
heart applique [43](#), [44](#), [46](#)
heart butterfly [91](#)
heart fronts [63](#)
heart motif [44](#)
heart templates [43](#), [44](#), [90](#), [91](#), [92](#)
hearts [62](#), [64](#), [67](#), [69](#), [81](#)
hearts with initials [62](#)
hemming stitch functions [110](#)
home furnishings [7](#)
home heart strings [69](#)

initials [62](#)
insert a zip [85](#)
inserting and changing the needle [22](#)
inside pocket [76](#)
invisible stitches [103](#)
iron and ironing board [15](#)

Janome [11](#)
John Lewis [11](#)
joining fabric [40](#)

lavender babushkas [68](#)
lavender hanging heart [69](#)
lavender heart string [69](#)

lavender hearts [9](#), [37](#), [61](#), [62](#), [67](#)
letter motifs [64](#)
lined applique letter bunting [56](#)
lined bunting [9](#), [50](#)
lined curtains [95](#), [104](#), [106](#)
lined magazine bag [72](#)
lined phone (cases) [71](#), [72](#), [80](#), [81](#)
lining [73](#), [75](#), [76](#), [79](#), [81](#), [82](#), [83](#), [96](#), [97](#), [106](#), [107](#)
loop fastening [83](#)
love bunting [57](#), [59](#)
love cushion project [33](#)
love heart string [68](#), [69](#)
love hearts [50](#)
love letters [57](#)
love paper patterns [56](#)
lower thread [31](#)

machine stitch [89](#)
magazine bag [71](#), [72](#), [76](#)
manual [19](#)
markers [15](#)
measuring [14](#)
measuring the drop [96](#), [104](#)
memorable fabrics [47](#), [59](#), [85](#)
memory cushion [39](#)
memory patchwork [7](#)
message heart [67](#)
metal bobbin case [28](#)
metre rule [96](#)
mis-threading [19](#)
mitre [108](#), [109](#), [110](#)
monogrammed hearts [62](#)

name bunting [55](#), [56](#)
name heart strings [69](#)
needle bar hook [30](#)

needle case [13](#)
needle plate [18](#), [20](#), [23](#), [24](#)
needle position button [22](#)
needle threader [22](#)
needles [13](#), [22](#)
noel bunting [59](#)
noel heart strings [69](#)
notched [74](#)
notches [72](#), [77](#), [80](#)

on/off switch [19](#)
operation control button [22](#)
outer and lining bag [75](#)
overcasting stitches [34](#)

panel tab top curtain [96](#)
paper patterns [40](#), [49](#), [50](#), [51](#), [56](#), [71](#), [72](#), [76](#), [81](#), [91](#)
paper template [50](#), [51](#), [56](#)
patch bunting [59](#)
patchwork quilt [59](#)
pattern [41](#)
pattern templates [40](#), [56](#), [62](#), [63](#), [72](#), [76](#)
patterned fabric with a repeat [105](#)
patterns [17](#)
pencils [15](#)
pictures [95](#)
pin [40](#), [86](#), [98](#)
pin board [8](#), [17](#)
pin cushions [14](#)
pinning [39](#), [49](#), [51](#), [77](#)
pins [14](#)
pivot [93](#)
pivoting [64](#), [65](#), [72](#)
planning [71](#)
plot flags [53](#)
pocket [76](#), [77](#), [78](#), [80](#)

presser foot [18](#), [23](#), [45](#)
presser foot holder [23](#)
presser foot lever [18](#), [23](#), [29](#), [44](#), [53](#), [57](#), [93](#), [99](#)
presser foot release button [23](#)
processes [71](#)

raise the needle [29](#)
raw edge [41](#), [57](#), [64](#), [75](#)
recycling [15](#)
reverse stitch [18](#), [22](#)
reverse stitch function [53](#)
reverse stitches [45](#), [53](#), [57](#)
reverse stitching [34](#)
ribbons [62](#), [66](#), [69](#)
right side [39](#)
ruler measure [83](#)

safety pin [78](#), [100](#)
sample [31](#)
sample piece [98](#)
satin stitch [36](#), [57](#)
scissors [13](#)
scrap fabric [53](#), [61](#), [65](#)
seam allowance [9](#), [56](#)
seam ripper [15](#)
selvedge (finished edge) [41](#), [51](#)
setting up your machine [27](#)
sewing box [12](#)
sewing classes [62](#)
sewing machine control [49](#), [71](#)
sewing machines [11](#), [19](#)
sewing place [17](#)
sewing skills [61](#)
sewing table [88](#)
simple curtains [9](#)
Singer [7](#), [12](#), [110](#)

sketchbooks [17](#)
slip stitch [36](#), [37](#), [66](#), [102](#), [110](#)
small windows [105](#)
smaller shapes [61](#)
snagging [19](#)
speed control lever [22](#)
spool cap [27](#), [28](#)
spool pin [18](#), [28](#), [30](#)
stay-stitch [33](#), [86](#), [90](#)
stitch functions and options [25](#), [35](#)
stitch length regulator [24](#)
stitch unpicker [15](#)
stitch width [18](#)
storing fabrics [16](#)
straight stitch [33](#), [58](#), [64](#), [69](#), [91](#)
straps [73](#), [74](#), [79](#), [80](#)
stretch stitch [34](#)
stuff [65](#)
stuffing [62](#), [64](#)
switch [18](#)
swivel [90](#), [109](#)
swivelling (and turning at the corner) [46](#), [61](#), [88](#)

tab top curtain [9](#), [95](#), [96](#), [103](#), [104](#)
tab top pieces [97](#)
tab tubes [99](#)
tabs [100](#), [101](#)
tack [64](#), [86](#), [89](#), [90](#), [98](#)
tack hearts [64](#)
tacked zip sides [86](#), [90](#)
tacking [39](#), [91](#)
tailors chalk [15](#)
tape measure [14](#), [81](#)
templates [43](#), [44](#), [62](#), [63](#), [81](#)
tension [19](#), [21](#)
thread cutter [21](#)

thread guide [30](#)
thread guide cover [30](#)
thread take-up lever [18](#), [19](#), [30](#)
thread tension dial [21](#)
thread the needle [31](#)
threading upper thread [19](#)
threads [14](#)
threads keep breaking [19](#)
tool box [12](#)
top-loading machine [29](#)
tote bag [71](#), [76](#), [77](#)
trim [52](#), [65](#)
twin needle [23](#)

universal sewing machine needles [13](#)
upcycled [66](#), [72](#), [95](#)
upcycled cushion [47](#)
upcycled linen patch curtain [95](#)
upcycling [95](#)
upcycling project [85](#)
upper tension [18](#)
upper thread [29](#)

Velcro [47](#), [103](#), [104](#)
Vintage [12](#), [16](#), [58](#), [61](#), [72](#)
vintage embroidery [47](#)
vintage fabrics [7](#), [15](#), [61](#)

wadding [61](#), [65](#)
wall-hangings [95](#)
widths [16](#)
wind the bobbin [27](#)
window treatments [95](#)
wings [92](#)
word bunting [56](#)

zigzag [11](#), [33](#), [34](#), [36](#), [43](#), [54](#), [57](#), [58](#), [61](#), [64](#), [69](#), [78](#), [79](#), [80](#), [88](#), [91](#),
[93](#)

zigzag foot [11](#), [93](#)

zigzag functions [50](#), [57](#)

zigzag stitch [43](#), [57](#), [58](#), [61](#)

zigzagging [78](#)

zip [33](#), [86](#), [87](#), [88](#), [89](#), [90](#), [91](#)

zipper foot [33](#), [50](#), [86](#), [90](#)