



Sewing & Pattern-Making Materials and Equipment

A practical guide to the essential tools of the trade — from pins and needles to pressing equipment — and how to select, use, and care for them properly.

SEWING FUNDAMENTALS

Five Essential Categories

All sewing and pattern-making tools can be grouped into five functional categories. Understanding these categories helps you select the right tool for every task – and ensures your work is precise, efficient, and professional.

Pins & Needles

For joining, hand-stitching, and basting fabric layers together securely.

Cutting Equipment

For cleanly cutting fabric, pattern paper, and seam allowances.

Marking Tools

For transferring pattern markings accurately onto fabric.

Measuring Tools

For taking body measurements and drafting patterns with precision.

Pressing Equipment

For shaping, finishing, and setting seams with heat and steam.

Pins & Needles

Pins and needles are among the most frequently used tools in sewing and pattern-making. Choosing the correct type for your fabric and task is essential for achieving neat, damage-free results.

Choosing the Right Pin

- Match pin length and thickness to fabric weight
- Use fine, sharp pins for delicate fabrics like silk or chiffon
- Use glass-head or pearl-head pins for visibility and heat resistance
- Use T-pins for blocking knitted or lace work on boards
- Use fork pins to hold tucks and pleats in place

Choosing the Right Needle

- **Sharps:** General hand-sewing on woven fabrics
- **Embroidery/Crewel:** Long eye for threading multiple strands
- **Beading:** Very fine and long for threading beads
- **Leather:** Wedge-shaped point for piercing leather cleanly
- **Cross-stitch:** Blunt tip to avoid splitting canvas threads
- **Curved:** Ideal for upholstery and mattress-making

Cutting Equipment

Clean, accurate cutting is the foundation of well-made garments. Using the right cutting tool for each task prevents fraying, distortion, and inaccuracy. Always keep cutting tools sharp, and never use fabric scissors on paper, as this dulls the blade rapidly.



Fabric Scissors / Dressmaker's Shears

The primary cutting tool. Long blades allow smooth, continuous cuts along the fabric grain. Hold the lower blade flat against the cutting surface. **Never** use on paper.



Pinking Shears

Feature a zigzag blade that cuts a decorative serrated edge, simultaneously reducing fraying on seam allowances. Ideal for woven fabrics that ravel easily.



Rotary Cutter

A circular, razor-sharp blade ideal for cutting multiple layers, curved lines, and quilting patchwork. Always use with a self-healing cutting mat to protect both blade and work surface.



Small / Embroidery Scissors

Short, fine-pointed blades for trimming threads, clipping curves, and cutting into tight corners with precision. An indispensable finishing tool.

Precautions When Using Fabric Scissors

Fabric scissors are a significant investment and must be handled with great care. Following these precautions will protect both the tool and the user, and extend the scissors' working life considerably.

Use Exclusively on Fabric

Never cut paper, cardboard, tape, or any non-fabric material with fabric scissors. Even a single cut through paper dulls the blade noticeably and affects cutting quality.

Keep Blades Sharp

Have scissors sharpened regularly by a professional. Test sharpness by cutting a single layer of cotton — clean, effortless cuts indicate a sharp blade.

Handle Safely

Always pass scissors handle-first to another person. When not in use, keep scissors closed and store in a protective case or sheath.

Clean and Oil Regularly

Wipe blades clean after each use. Apply a small drop of sewing machine oil to the pivot screw periodically to keep the action smooth and prevent rust.

Marking Tools

Marking tools are used to transfer pattern symbols, seam lines, darts, and construction details from pattern paper onto fabric. Accuracy here directly affects the fit and finish of the finished garment.

01

Tailor's Chalk

Available in triangle or pencil form. Marks are temporary and brush away cleanly. Ideal for marking directly on fabric. Choose a colour that contrasts with the fabric.

02

Marking Pencil / Water-Soluble Pen

Used for fine, precise lines on pattern paper and some fabrics. Water-soluble marks disappear with a damp cloth. Test on a fabric scrap before use.

03

Tracing Wheel & Carbon Paper

Place dressmaker's carbon paper between pattern and fabric (carbon side down), then run the tracing wheel along the pattern lines. Transfers markings quickly and accurately. Note: carbon paper is consumable.

Measuring Tapes & Rulers

Precision measurement is non-negotiable in garment construction. A reliable measuring tape and a set of rulers — including curved rulers — form the backbone of accurate pattern drafting and fitting.

Properties of a Good Measuring Tape

- Made from non-stretch material (fibreglass or reinforced plastic)
- Clearly printed markings on both sides (metric and imperial)
- Minimum length of 150 cm (60 inches)
- Firm yet flexible enough to follow body curves
- Metal-tipped ends to prevent fraying and ensure accurate zero point

Essential Rulers for Pattern Drafting

- **Straight ruler:** For drawing grain lines, seam allowances, and straight pattern edges
- **L-square / Set square:** For creating perfect right angles at shoulder and hem lines
- **French curve:** For drawing smooth necklines, armholes, and sleeve caps
- **Multi-purpose curved ruler (Parrot-wing):** Combines multiple curve types in a single tool — highly convenient for drafting diverse pattern curves without switching instruments

Pressing Equipment

Pressing at every stage of construction — not just at the end — is what separates a homemade garment from a professionally made one. Heat and steam set seams flat, shape curved areas, and give the finished piece its polished appearance.



Dry & Steam Iron

The most commonly used pressing tool. A **dry iron** uses heat alone, whilst a **steam iron** releases steam to relax fabric fibres. Steam irons are preferred for most woven fabrics. Always check the fabric's heat tolerance before pressing.



Tailor's Ham & Sleeve Roll

Shaped pressing cushions that support curved and three-dimensional areas of a garment — such as darts, sleeve heads, collars, and princess seams — whilst pressing, maintaining the intended shape.



Vertical / Handheld Steamer

Releases continuous steam without direct contact with the fabric. Ideal for pressing garments on a hanger, delicate fabrics that cannot tolerate direct iron contact, and **curtains attached to rails** where a flat iron cannot reach.



Ironing Board & Press Cloth

A stable, padded ironing board provides the pressing surface. A **press cloth** (muslin or fine cotton) placed between the iron and fabric prevents shine, scorching, and iron marks on delicate or dark fabrics.

Care, Storage & Sustainable Use

Proper care and storage of sewing tools protects your investment, ensures consistent quality, and promotes responsible, sustainable practice in the workroom.

Reusable Tools — Care & Storage

- Clean tools after every use — remove chalk dust, lint, and moisture
- Oil scissors at the pivot point and machine needles periodically
- Store pins and needles in a sealed pincushion or tin to prevent rust
- Keep rulers and measuring tapes flat or rolled — never folded sharply
- Store irons upright and allow to cool completely before storing
- Ensure all tools are in good working condition before each use

Consumable Materials — Use Wisely

Some materials are used up through normal use and cannot be restored:

- Pattern paper and tracing paper
- Marking pencils and tailor's chalk
- Dressmaker's carbon paper

Use these materials **economically and without waste**. Reuse pattern paper where possible — trace onto fresh paper rather than cutting original patterns. Any item that can be reused *should* be reused.

Review Questions

Use these questions to consolidate your understanding of sewing and pattern-making materials and equipment. Refer back to the content covered in this unit for your answers.

1	Categories How many categories can materials and equipment used in sewing and pattern-making be divided into based on their use? What are they?
2	Cutting Equipment Give three examples of cutting equipment and explain how to use them.
3	Pins What factors should be considered when choosing the appropriate type of pin? Explain.
4	Hand-Sewing Needles What factors should be considered when choosing the appropriate type of needle for hand sewing? Explain.
5	Curved Needles Curved needles are suitable for which type of sewing? Briefly explain.
6	Scissors Safety Briefly explain the precautions to take when using fabric scissors.
1	Measuring Tape What properties should a good measuring tape have?
2	Marking Materials Give three examples of materials and equipment for marking on pattern paper and briefly explain how to use them.
3	Pressing Marks What materials and equipment are used for pressing marks onto fabric? Briefly explain how to use them.
4	Curved Ruler What is the convenience of a multi-purpose curved ruler or parrot-wing curved ruler?
5	Types of Iron How many types of basic irons are there? What are they? Briefly explain how to use each type.
6	Ironing Curtains If you need to iron curtains attached to a rail, what type of iron should you choose? Why?