

## Step 1

### Measure yourself in preparation for choosing the right size pattern and fabric

Before you head to the shops or look online for dressmaking patterns you can measure and note down your basic dimensions, so you'll know which pattern size range and fabric to buy – High Bust, Waist, Hip – plus knowing your height and inside leg is useful



**n.b** – we measure the high bust as well as of the bust as the high bust is your **TORSO** size – you'll look for the bust measure on the packet that's closest to your high bust in order to choose the correct pattern for your torso BUT then you'll use the BUST measure to know how much fabric to buy – more about this later! It will all make sense...

**Let's all measure ourselves and note it down so you can go buy some patterns!**

## Step 2

### Choose a Pattern

- **Browse through the pattern designs**, choosing one that says it's suitable for your level – go for VERY EASY if you are new to dressmaking as these will still be pretty complicated for newbies!

- **Paper or PDF?** Online you can buy paper patterns or pdf/digital patterns. When printing the latter yourself at home, make sure there is a 'test square' – first print just the sheet with the test square and measure your print to check it's the right size – you will need to adjust printer settings if it's not

- **Women's Pattern Types** – these are sometimes stated on the envelope & may be helpful, but you can adjust your pattern whatever length and size it starts off as...

**Misses** This pattern style has been designed for women of average proportions between the height between 5ft 5" and 5ft 6" (without shoes)

**Women** This is designed for women who are between 5ft 5" to 5ft 6" tall (without shoes) with larger bust and hips than Misses.

**Petite** These patterns are designed for women with a shorter back-waist length, and a height of between 5ft 2" and 5ft 4" tall (without shoes).

- **Sales** – join the mailing list for [sewessential.com](http://sewessential.com) or [weaverdee.com](http://weaverdee.com) to be alerted of pattern sales - also John Lewis have the same pattern sales and you can click and collect pattern purchases from your local Waitrose, so this could be quicker than waiting for the postman!

## Step 3

### Use the Body Measurements Size Guide to buy the correct pattern

**A note about dressmaking pattern sizes!!** Did you know that the high street does vanity sizing? This means that the sizes on patterns are what we used to buy in the shops in the 60's/70's, so if you are a size 12 in the shops now you may need a size 16 pattern etc – don't be upset, it's the high street that lowered the sizing!

**Once you find a pattern you like:**

1. **Ask for the envelope** before getting it stamped for purchase (in Fabric Land once they stamp the pattern you can't return it)
2. **Find the Body Measurements Size Guide** on the back of the envelope (if it's Burda you'll need to look inside on the tissue) - this is the pattern company's recommendation for which size you should make, they taken account of 'wearing ease', so it should fit in the way the pattern designer intended i.e. as shown on front of envelope on the illustration.  
**If you're buying online**, patterns should have an image of the back that you can zoom in on – if they don't google that pattern number and brand and click on images and find an image of the back elsewhere to use .
3. **Now we need buy the correct size pattern range** as there could be there are 2 envelopes available to buy, e.g. size 8-14 in one and 14-22 in the other. If all sizes are in one pattern that's simple and you can just buy it. To work out which envelope to buy if there are 2, you'll be looking for your nearest pattern size on the **Body Measurements Size Guide** for the following:

- **For tops and Dresses:** buy the pattern size where the BUST size is closest to your HIGH BUST

- **For skirts that have a straight waistband and flare or gather out from there (so are not fitted on the hip):** buy the pattern size that's closest to your WAIST

- **For all trousers and also for skirts that are fitted on the hips:** Buy the pattern size where the HIP is closest to your hip

## Step 4

### Choose the 'view' you want to make

**Look at the illustrations or colour photos of models wearing the garment 'views'** (the different styles that can be made from the set of pattern pieces inside the envelope – you can choose which one you want to make) are usually on the front. And usually there are line drawings of the back and front of the garment on the envelope – I use these line drawings to look at the detail, which isn't always apparent in the colour image e.g.:

- if it has lots of seams or is quite plain (seams are going to take way longer to sew!),
- if it has princess seams or darts,
- whether it has pockets
- the shape of the waistband etc

**Find – 2 patterns that look the same in colour image but you can see are in fact constructed differently when you look at the line drawings**

## Step 5a

### Choose your fabric and trims (notions)

**You'll usually see a list of suitable fabrics for this pattern on the back of the envelope.** The main thing I look for is whether it recommends a jersey (stretch) or non stretch, then I next look at whether it recommends heavier or lighter weight fabrics, but a look at the images on the front usually gives an indication of this.

TIPS – find out about good pattern and fabric:

Follow Fabric Godmother 'stories' on Instagram ([instagram.com/fabricgodmother](https://www.instagram.com/fabricgodmother)) - she recommends fabric and pattern combos, Join Dragonfly Fabrics mailing list ([dragonflyfabrics.co.uk](https://www.dragonflyfabrics.co.uk)) – their email newsletters recommend fabric & pattern combos

**For a glossary of fabric types head to:**

- [simplicitynewlook.com/getting-started/fabric-glossary](https://simplicitynewlook.com/getting-started/fabric-glossary)
- Ditto Fabrics on Kensington Gardens, Brighton as they know a lot about fabrics and will help you choose a suitable one for your pattern – they also have some of the nicest fabrics in Brighton (end of line designer stock).
- You will find fabric bargains at Fabric Land (but not always the best fabric suitability advice we've found)!
- C&H Fabrics (now called Closs & Hamblin) on Western Rd may be good to advise you if you get the right assistant and have some beautiful quality fabrics including Liberty and a fabulous range of notions and trims and some good quality fabrics (grab a 10% discount flyer for them from us in class)
- Check out our directory of fabric and notion shops at [www.sewinbrighton.co.uk/fabricbuying.html](https://www.sewinbrighton.co.uk/fabricbuying.html)

**You'll also see a list of notions needed such as:**

- sewing thread,
- buttons or zip (note what type of zip\*)
- binding,
- poppers or hooks & eyes
- zip

\*zips – there are ordinary closed end zips, invisible zips and open ended zips – get the right one

## Step 5b

### Buy your fabric and notions

**Have another look at the Body Measurements Size Guide** – this time you'll want to see which of your relevant body measures for this pattern are largest (by relevant measures I mean: a shirt may have bust waist and hips in the Body Measurements section, trousers just waist and hips, a shorter top just bust and waist etc). If your hips are size 18 and your bust size 14, buy enough fabric and trims for size 18.

**Exercise: Work out the amount of fabric you would need to buy for your size on your pattern (same pattern we all have for this workshop)**

**On the envelope there will be a chart saying fabric amounts** needed per size and style – check if there are also sections for your chosen 'view' for interfacing and lining. For Simplicity, Burda, McCalls, New Look etc patterns the left is in English but US sizing ie inches body measures and yards of fabric. On the right is usually French or Spanish in cm body measures and metres for fabric lengths – this can be handy as we tend to buy fabric by the metre in the UK!

**Why you might need to buy EXTRA FABRIC:**

- **Nap:** Also should say if amounts are for fabrics *with* or *without* nap (ie fabrics with a pile direction like velvet, brushed cotton, corduroy or fur, or one way prints need to have all pieces cut in same direction so would need a pattern where the amounts of fabric are calculated for laying out pattern pieces on a fabric 'with nap')
- pattern matching – if you have a repeat pattern that you want to match on the sides or CB/CF, buy extra

- Are you taller than 5'6"? Patterns are designed for up to 5'6" so buy extra if you are taller. There may be some *finished garment measurements* which can be useful as they often give the overall length of the garment
- Do you want the garment longer than shown on the envelope – buy more fabric for this

Cont'd on next page

## Step 6

On the other handout I've explained this whole process that you'll need to do next:

- a) Cut out your pattern
- b) tissue fit it & mark changes back to pattern
- c) cut out fabric & pin fabric pieces together as full garment and try on
- d) adjust it - mark fabric and mark changes back to pattern
- e) sew it following the making instructions, trying on as you go

But first let's explore what's in your envelope...

## In the envelope

1. **The pattern** – in a range of sizes – you will cut out on the correct line for your size - see my handout 'Preparing Your Pattern' for more info on sizing and fitting
  2. **The making instructions sheets or booklet, which usually includes:**
    - **What Seam Allowance (SA) is used** throughout the pattern (usually 1.5cm, but do check) i.e. this amount is included in the pattern – you don't need to add anything extra. When sewing read the making instructions carefully as you go along as some sections may use a smaller seam allowance e.g. on collars – it will say this if it deviates from the standard though
    - **Clear front and back line drawings** of each 'view' (design option) in this packet – helps you see exactly what's going on this garment
    - List and illustrations of which pattern pieces are in the envelope
    - **General directions inc**
      - explanations of symbols and how to mark these on the fabric,
      - seam allowance used throughout pattern (seam allowance is almost always included in the patterns so you don't need to add it – check though),
      - how to lengthen or shorten your pattern etc.
      - Some sewing techniques instructions needed for this project
      - Additional info such as if the garment sits 1" below the natural waist when worn
      - Also see 'nap' above and the short glossary below
    - **Some patterns include fitting tips** e.g. Palmer Pletsch for McCall's & Simplicity Amazing Fit patterns – it would be much better if they all did, but most don't!
    - **Layout of patterns on fabric, lining and interfacing** for cutting each style, fabric width and size. They have worked out the most economical way to use the length of fabric you bought
      - Note the guide that shows which way up the pattern pieces and fabric are when pinning to cut out – shaded or not shaded
    - **The making/sewing instructions** follow these for making the entire garment – often includes how to fuse interfacing. My advice is don't look too many steps ahead, just do each step and the next step will make more sense! Look at the illustration and refer back to your pattern all the time if you don't understand something, it usually helps.
      - Note the guide that shows which way up the pieces of fabric are shown in the illustration eg shaded = outside of fabric, hash lines = interfaced sections. This is very helpful when 'reading' the illustrations along with reading the words for that step
    - **Interfacing and facings information. See glossary below.** The facings are narrow pieces that are the shape of the edges of the garment eg waist or neck or armhole, that are fused with 'fusible interfacing' and sewn to the edges of the garment and flipped inside – they neaten and stabilize the edges of your garment
- Look at - fusible interfacing and an example garments of where it's used**

## Kat's GLOSSARY and helpful notes

- **The fabric**
    - **Selvedge (S)** – the manufactured edges
    - **Nap/pile** – see above
- Look at - some velvet or cord and a one way print to explain nap**

- **On the pattern and cut pieces**
  - **Centre Front or Centre Back - CF, CB** – centre front of pattern sits on YOUR centre front or centre back
  - **Interfacing and facings.** The facings are narrow pieces that are the shape of the edges of the garment e.g. waist or neck or armhole, that are fused with 'fusible interfacing' and sewn to the edges of the garment and flipped inside – they neaten and stabilize the edges of your garment
  - **Cut on the fold (FOLD) (F)** – you are only given half a pattern piece for symmetrical pieces, so you fold the fabric, usually on the SG, and place pattern edge (eg the CF) where it says FOLD on the folded edge, then only cut the 3 remaining sides  
**Dots, circles, triangles** – similar to notches – just mark them with chalk or tailor tacks and then follow the instructions and they will be mentioned – refer back to pattern to see where they are/were if not sure once sewing  
**Practise cutting notches and marking dots: - make a couple of notches and a triangle and a dot and a dart on an A4 sheet, pin and cut out and mark dots, notches and darts**
  - **Notches** – makes your garment pieces like a jigsaw puzzle so you know which pieces match which
  - **Right sides together or not for cutting out?** I don't worry too much about this – if it says do one or the other in the instructions just follow it!
  - **Lengthen and shorten lines** – use these when tissue fitting if the key points eg waist or bust are not in the right position for you
  - **Grain line, Straight grain (SG)** – often shown as an arrow, runs parallel to the Selvage. Important so garment hangs correctly
  - **Size lines** – will be usually a different colour per size or different pattern – don't get confused with the sizes written next to the dots – look at a part of the pattern where there are no dots, or find a size 'key' on the pattern somewhere
- **Sewing**
  - **Stay Stitching – stops edges stretching.** Your pattern instructions usually say to do this on a couple of cut edges (eg waist or neckline) to stop them stretching.  
**Why Stay Stitch?:** if you will be trying on the garment without it's waistband (to check fit) you'll need Stay Stitching to stabilize the edge to stop it stretching out of shape OR if you will be applying bias binding to the neck or armhole etc instead of a facing\* (binding is cut on bias and not very stable, it's stretchy, so the edge it's sewn to needs to be stabilized first) so sew with ordinary stitch, just inside seam allowance eg at 1.3 if SA is 1.5, to stop fabric stretching when sewn in next stage eg binding applied to neck
  - **Understitching** – keeps the lining or facing on the inside of the garment  
**Look at - an example of understitching**
  - **Basting/tacking/machine-basting** – temporary/not final stitch for holding pieces together before final sewing occurs
  - **Trimming vs snipping** – follow guide on the pattern – I often do both on curves, plus you can trim one SA shorter than the other to 'layer' it to reduce bulk

## What shops and pattern designers say about patterns

*Lisa Falconer – creator of the Avid Seamstress pattern range:*

I started teaching sewing before my sewing pattern range and was teaching other sewing pattern brands. Whilst teaching I noticed how many people were struggling with the way the instructions were set up, or how the sewing brands were explaining the steps - especially with the big 4. They would often give you a few instructions in one paragraph and it was difficult to break down what they were actually asking you to do. It was during this period that I started working on my sewing range with the instructions having a huge focus. We often get comments on how easy it was to follow our instructions and what a pleasure that made sewing the garment.

*Dorte from Dragonfly Fabrics – sells fabrics and patterns:*

My favourite sewing pattern brands are Tilly and the Buttons, Grainline Studio and The Avid Seamstress for their accurate instructions and fab style, also with great pattern related blog posts and technique details write ups, and also Closet Case Files and Sew House Seven for stylish modern garments.

I used to buy Burda patterns but never really liked the big companies because of the thin paper patterns, I find it really fiddly and also there are so many similar styles, it's difficult to choose one