

Savvy Needle Tutorial

Selecting a Pattern

Keys to picking out a pattern:

- * Go to fabric store
- * Look through pattern books
- * Look at back of book to see shapes, measurements
- * Tabs on side of book tells you which section you're searching in
- * Find a design you like
- * Find a flattering design for your shape
- * Find a design for your sewing level
- * Measure yourself
- * Pick out the right size pattern – NOT the same as ready-to-wear!

You want to sew. You have an idea of what you want to make – maybe a skirt, perhaps a dress. Where do you begin?

To start out, you'll need to get a sewing pattern.

Sewing patterns are made by many different companies. Some of the most well-known are Vogue, Butterick, McCall's, Simplicity, and Burda. There are other smaller pattern companies as well, who offer a wide range of sewing options.

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by Kelli Nottingham

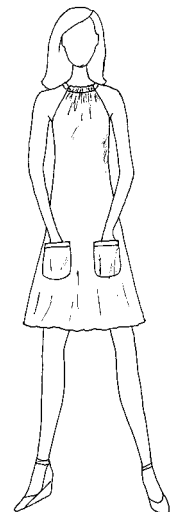
Before you head to your local fabric shop to buy your pattern, be sure to measure yourself. Please see the [Savvy Needle Tutorial on Measurements](#) for further details on getting the best measurements you can. *This is critical, because you buy patterns based on your measurements. If you don't have good measurements, your garment will not fit!*

Once you have your measurements written down, head to your local sewing and fabric shop. They will have large books full of a variety of patterns. Have a seat and look through books from several different companies. You'll notice that most of these books have color-coded tabs on the side of the page. These tabs tell you what category of patterns you are in: women's, men's, children's, crafts, costumes, etc.

As a beginning sewer, you will want to look for patterns that have simple lines and few pattern pieces. Here are some sample sketches of good beginning sewing projects:



Note that these two dresses do not have many seam lines. They also don't have many details, such as collars or pleats. This means that these should be simpler to sew.



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Some pattern companies have a separate line of patterns aimed at providing easy but stylish garments. These often have a name that denotes this, such as Very Easy Vogue patterns, and Simplicity It's So Easy. These patterns sometimes have their own color-coded tab in the pattern book.

While it may be tempting to purchase a more complicated design, remember that the most important thing at this point is to choose designs with which you can succeed. To help you figure out which may be a bit complicated for beginning sewers, take a look at the following, and notice how many seams and design lines you see on the garments. The more seams, the more pieces there are in the pattern. And the more pieces in the pattern, generally the more complicated it is. For example, look at the details and seams on these outfits:



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Look through these sections of the book for patterns that will be flattering to your figure. Remember that the models for these garments are posed carefully and generally look great in just about anything. It's very important to choose fashions for your figure wisely. You don't want to expend the time creating a garment, just to find that it doesn't flatter you. For more information about finding flattering styles for your shape, please check out the [Savvy Needle Tutorial on Styles for Your Figure](#).

Helpful Tip: If you aren't sure a garment will look good on you, try going to a clothing store to find a similar style. You can try it on and determine if it will look good on you before you spend time and money to create something similar.

Once you find a pattern you like, write down the pattern number and go to the filing cabinet for that company. The patterns are stored in these filing cabinets by number, from lowest to highest.

Once you locate the pattern you want, it's time to decide which size to purchase! Most patterns come with multiple sizes in one envelope. This is a great feature for those of us who may be one size on top and another on the bottom.

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IMPORTANT NOTE:

Pattern companies do not use the same standard sizing measurements as the ready-to-wear industry. What does this mean for you? It means that you **WILL NOT** wear the same size in sewing patterns that you do in ready-to-wear (store-bought) clothing. Generally, sewing patterns are smaller than ready-to-wear. This means that you must do four critical things:

1. Measure yourself carefully! The easiest way to guarantee failure in your sewing is to make the garment in a size that's too big or too small.
2. Forget your ready-to-wear size. It is **NOT** the same size in sewing patterns!
3. Take a deep breath. Remember: no one will know what size your handmade garment is, unless you tell them.
4. Purchase the correct size, no matter if it is bigger than you normally wear or not.

To give a personal example, I wear a size 12 in ready-to-wear. However, in sewing patterns, I generally make my clothing at a size 18. This doesn't bother me. Why? First, no one knows what size I sew for myself. (Ok, you know **NOW**, but that's ok. I trust you!) Second, as long as the garment fits properly, the size number doesn't really matter.

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You can determine which size you need by looking at the back of the sewing pattern. There is a chart on the back of the envelope that shows the measurements for the various sizes in that pattern. The pattern book also often has charts in the back, showing the standard measurements they use for various sizes.

Buy dress and shirt patterns by your bust measurement.

Buy skirt and pant patterns by your waist measurement.

If your hips and bust vary significantly in size (you have a large or small bust, for example) you will want to buy dress patterns by the larger measurement. Let's say you have a bust that is 38 inches, and your hips are 46 inches. In this case, buy the dress pattern for 46 inch hips. It's easier to size a pattern down than to try to make a smaller pattern work for a larger size.

Once you determine your size, be sure to buy the corresponding pattern from the pattern drawer. Also check to be sure that the pattern tissue paper and the instructions (usually printed on thicker paper) are both in the envelope. You don't want to get home to realize there are no instructions with the pattern!

Next, we'll look at picking out fabric to make your new garment! Please see the [Savvy Needle Tutorial on Choosing the Right Fabric](#).