

5 TIPS TO GETTING A BETTER FIT

WHEN USING SEWING PATTERNS



SEW MUCH MORE FUN

WHY DOESN'T IT FIT?



If you've started making your own clothes from sewing patterns only to find that they don't fit then you are not alone.

When I first started making my own clothes I had the same experience. I'd pick a pattern, cut out the size I thought I'd need, cut out my lovely fabric, follow the instructions as best I could, only to find when I put it on, it didn't fit properly!

If that's happened to you too then I've got some tips to share to help you avoid that frustration and get a better fit when using sewing patterns.

Since making those early ill-fitting garments I now have many more years of experience.

I use these 5 tips every time I make a garment.

I now have a wardrobe of handmade clothes that fit so much better than anything I could buy in the shops. They look good and feel great to wear. I am excited to try new patterns because I know that these tips work.

So let's dive in!

TIP 1: CHOOSE GOOD PATTERNS

Two key factors that influence the fit are the standard measurements the pattern is based on and the quality of the pattern design.

Each pattern brand uses it's own set of standard measurements from which it creates the pattern pieces for each size.

If you find a pattern brand that uses measurements similar to your body measurements then you stand a good chance of getting a better initial fit.

If not, you are more likely to need to make some adjustments.

In terms of the quality of the pattern, not all pattern brands are created equal.

Drafting sewing patterns that result in comfortable garments for an array of body shapes and sizes requires a lot of skill and the quality of patterns can vary greatly.

In terms of design quality, testing plays an important part.

Many brands now have groups of pattern testers of all different shapes and sizes to help give feedback on construction and fit.

If you find a pattern brand and designer that fits you well it can be worth utilising more of their patterns.

It might sound tough to know how to pick good patterns but don't worry, I've got some tips for you, starting with some brands I love:

- [33 Sewing Pattern Brands that I love](#)

*Today's progress
is determined by
yesterday's
choices*

SparkPeople





TIPS FOR CHOOSING GOOD PATTERNS

Here are a few more tips to help you:

1 Google it!

You'll be amazed what you can find when you Google the name of a pattern. So many people now helpfully post photos and reviews of the patterns they have made.

Click on the 'Images' option in Google and look at

- how many people have made it - usually more is a good sign
- what it looks like on different body shapes - are there images of people with a similar body shape to you wearing it and does it look good
- are there any common fitting issues (wrinkles, bulges or gaping) - if so, that might be one to avoid
- are there fabrics that it seems to work better with - if so, are they the types of fabrics you like

2 Read the reviews

Many of the images will be linked to blog posts. Click through to read what people thought of the pattern and any fitting adjustments they had to make.

3 Check the pattern photo

Does the garment on the pattern photo fit properly? You'll be surprised how many show wrinkles and pulls! If it doesn't look great on the model then it's probably one to avoid.

TIP 2: TAKE YOUR MEASUREMENTS

Because pattern brands use their own standard measurements they are often not the same sizing as clothes you'd buy on the high street.

To get the best chance of a good fit you need to select the right pattern size. To do this you need to take your body measurements.

All good sewing patterns will have a table showing the body measurements they have used to create each pattern size.

Many sewing patterns cover multiple sizes. The beauty of this is that you can mix and match between sizes even in the same garment.

For example in the Itch to Stitch range I use

- a size 6 at the bust blended to
- a size 8 at the waist
- and 8 or 10 at the hip depending on the style of the garment.

To find out more about using multi-size patterns take a look at this blog post and video:

- [Getting the most from multi-size patterns](#)

Bust cup size

Unless otherwise stated, sewing patterns are usually designed for a B cup bust.

If you wear a bra with a larger cup size many fitting resources recommend using the high bust measurement to pick the bust size.

Combining this with a manual full bust adjustment will often give a better fit on the shoulders and upper body. This article is a great reference:

- [High bust measurements](#)

For details on how to make a bust adjustment take a look at this blog post and video:

- [Small and Full Bust Adjustment](#)

It's not about the size you wear, but the way you wear your size





TIPS TO TAKE YOUR MEASUREMENTS

Here are a few tips to take your measurements

1 Wear the underwear you'll wear under the finished garment

Take your measurements wearing the same underwear that you plan to wear with the outfit you are making

2 Stand relaxed and breath out

Unless you want to only be able to wear the garment when holding your breath take the measurements while you are standing in a relaxed position

3 Don't allow extra ease when measuring

Make sure to take your actual measurements with no extra room required. The pattern already includes for ease (i.e. extra room to move) so at this stage we want your real body measurements.

It helps to wear something close fitting like leggings and a vest or just your underwear.

4 Don't get attached to the numbers

If we take measurements and see numbers that we aren't expecting it can trigger emotions. Remember the only reason we need these numbers is to choose the best pattern pieces to give the best fit.

They don't mean anything other than that.

5 Use a piece of elastic to find your true waist

Tying a bit of elastic around your waist and wriggling until it settles will help you find your natural waist (which is often higher than where you wear your waistbands).

MEASUREMENT TRACKER

Picking your pattern size

You can use the table below to track your measurements and pick the nearest pattern size.

If your measurement falls between sizes I'd recommend picking the larger size as it's easier to take a garment in than to try to let it out.

In the example I've shown my measurements. With this pattern brand I'd initially choose size 6 for the bust, blended to 8 at the waist and 10 at the hip.

Units of measurement

Centimetres / Inches *

* delete as appropriate

Date of measurement

My bust cup size

	My body measurement	Closest pattern size measurement	Closest pattern size
High bust measurement			
Full bust measurement			
Waist measurement			
Hip measurement			

Example

Cup size = D

High Bust = 34 in

Bust = 36 in *

Waist = 31 1/2 in

Hip = 41 in

BODY MEASUREMENTS

(in)	00	0	2	4	6	8	10
Bust	31 1/8	32 1/2	33 7/8	35 1/8	36 1/2	37 7/8	39 1/4
Waist	25 3/8	26 3/4	28 1/8	29 1/2	30 7/8	32 1/4	33 5/8
Hip	33 1/4	34 5/8	35 7/8	37 1/4	38 5/8	40	41 1/4

* I prefer to use my full bust measurement so I chose my size based on that

TIP 3: GET TO KNOW YOUR BODY

To be able to make clothes that will fit and flatter our bodies it helps to get to know what our bodies look like.

That might sound obvious but in the past few years I realised I was making clothes for the body image I had in my mind and not my real body.

When I started to really look at how I stand and take photos of how I look from different view points I learnt a lot more about the types of fitting adjustment that would make a real impact.

As I have got older my body shape has evolved with me. Being more aware of that helps me choose styles and make adjustments that help show it off to it's best advantage.

This body had carried me through a hard life. It looked exactly the way it was supposed to.

Veronica Roth

1 Use a full length mirror

The easiest step is to stand in front of a full length mirror and relax. Look at your posture, look at your proportions, close your eyes then when you open them, what is your eye initially drawn to.

Try to observe without judgement. If that's hard, imagine it's your best friend standing in front of you and how you might describe their body.

2 Take photos

Unlike a mirror, photos can provide some separation and allow us to be more objective as it is just capturing a moment in time.

If you have a friend or partner that can help get them to take photos from the side and the back.

The greatest revelation I had was when I saw myself pictured from the back the first time, realising how the rounding of my shoulders affected my posture and what I was wearing.

From that alone I was able to start making adjustments that stopped my clothes bunching up at the waist or tipping back off my shoulders.

If you don't have a friend who can help, check out the tips in this blog post for setting up your phone to take selfies:

- [Tips to turn frightful photos into sexy selfies](#)

TIP 4: MAKE A MOCK-UP



*Photo:
Christian Dior exhibition at the V&A*

This tip alone was responsible for the biggest change in the fit of my hand made garments.

When I started to make clothes, I would cut out the pattern and then put that straight onto my fashion fabric to cut out my garment. I didn't know any different.

Then I did a pattern drafting course at night school and the first thing our wonderful teacher taught us was to make a mock up or toile from a cheaper fabric e.g. calico. It rocked my world.

I know that many dressmakers still don't make mock-ups as they think it's too time consuming. If your measurements are very close to the standard pattern measurements then that may work for you.

But if you do really want to fit your garments to your body variations then this would be my top tip. I've tried other methods such as tissue fitting from the pattern but as I am often trying to work out fitting adjustments on my own I have found this to be the easiest method and I always now make a toile.

It has also saved me loads of money not making pattern styles that actually don't suit me because I can tell from the toile how it's going to look.

For more information check out this blog post:

- [What is a toile and why do I need one?](#)

If it's good enough for Christian Dior, it's good enough for me!



TIP 5: TEST THE FIT AS YOU GO

My final tip is one that I have introduced more recently as I have been experimenting more with fitting.

That is to check the fit as you go. By that I mean sew as few seams as possible or parts of seams so that you can try the mock up on.

For example sew the shoulder seam and just the first inch of the side seam under the arm, then try it on.

Many garments hang from the shoulders when worn. If the fit around the shoulder is not right it can affect the fit of the whole garment.

I used to be impatient and want to see what the mock-up was going to look like, so I would sew up all the seams and then try it on.

Then I would spend ages trying to work out which fitting adjustment I needed because it didn't sit right.

Now I sew the fewest seams possible and try it on. I can then check

- if the shoulder seam is in the right place
- if the length markers for the bust and waist are in the right place
- if the side seam looks like it is hanging straight down or pulling to the front or back
- I can pin the remainder of the side seam to see if I need to add any width (which I usually need to do across the back hip).

...all before spending a lot of time sewing up seams that I will ultimately need to unpick.

So if you want to make checking fit simpler then by testing the fit at each stage you can check and adjust as you go, focusing on each area one at a time.

For tips on making shoulder adjustments take a look at this article:

- [Shoulder adjustments](#)

NEXT STEPS

Thank you so much for reading this guide. I hope that you are able to put these tips into action. I'd love to know how it goes when you do, so please email me - hello@sewmuchmorefun.co.uk - with the juicy details.

If you've found these tips useful and want to learn more please subscribe to our YouTube channel and Sew Mindful podcast for more free sewing and fitting tips and techniques.



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