

Sewing/Quilting Tools

I taught a class yesterday at Sew With Vision on “Basic Alterations” – taking clothing in at the waist, under the arms; shortening pant/jeans legs, adjusting straps, etc. I wanted the two gals to understand there’s not a lot you can do to make a RTW (ready to wear) garment bigger; however, you can make adjustments to make something smaller.

For example, my high-belly measurement is much larger than it was ten years ago (related to my age and the meds I take). Not much I can do about dropping the weight from that location. So when I was buying a vest for fall wear, I bought 1XL to fit my belly, which meant it was too big around the hips, and the armholes needed adjusting. I could have done some complex taking apart, but instead, I just took darts in the shoulder seams (and hand stitched the dart to the lining so it laid flat); I did the same at the hips – a dart in the side seam from waist to hem by machine, then hand stitched the dart down. Now the vest fits decently and looks fine.

The one enlargement adjustment I do to make something bigger is to add elastic gussets to the waist of pants when the waist just gets too tight (my hips and thighs have stayed the same size for more than 20 years!). [I’ve previously described how I add elastic gussets to pants: <https://jmncreativeendeavours.ca/2018/04/02/elastic-inserts/>]

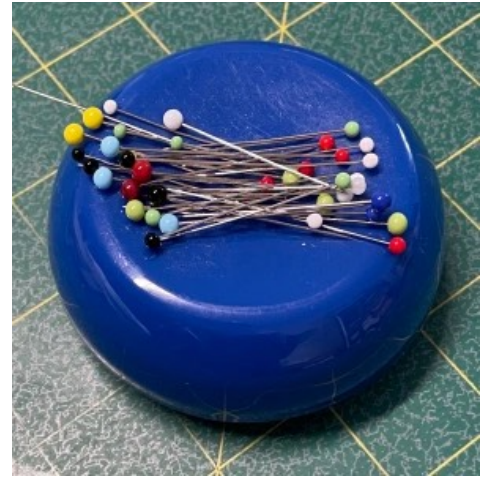
Back to the class – while the gals were working on small adjustments to garments for themselves and their children, it became obvious they had a few tools. Because I wasn’t expecting to do any sewing myself, I’d neglected to bring my sewing kit with me (<https://jmncreativeendeavours.ca/2017/12/12/sewing-tools-organizer-finished/>). We had to hunt through the shop’s tool collection (of dull very well used tools) to find what we needed. I told the gals I’d make them up a list of necessary sewing tools.

I’ve previously described five essential quilting tools I have at each sewing machine (<https://jmncreativeendeavours.ca/2019/01/30/my-5-essential-quilting-tools/>).

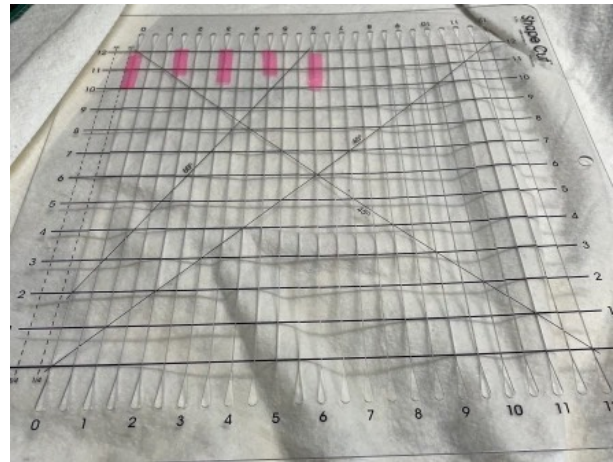


5 Essential Sewing/Quilting Tools

- 8" shears – for cutting out garment patterns (I use a rotary cutter for cutting out patterns but there are curves that sometimes call out for shears)
- 4 1/2" embroidery scissors – I use these for snipping and cutting small pieces
- 3 1/2" precision embroidery scissors for removing stitches and close cutting
- A sharp seam ripper (I change them as soon as they feel dull; I buy them in quantity to have plenty on hand and within easy reach)
- A Seam Ripper Clipper (in photo above)
- Glass Head straight pins (I like 1 1/16" length – I find shorter ones harder to handle). You want glass heads because the iron won't melt them! You want bead heads because they're much easier to pick up
- A magnetic straight pin holder
- A 45mm rotary cutter with a supply of spare blades always on hand (I order in bulk online)
- A Self-healing Cutting Mat – I recommend starting with a 24" x 36" mat (I have a 3' x 6' mat that covers my entire cutting table – expensive but useful)
- Rotary Cutting Rulers and Templates – start with a 6" x 24" ruler
- A Shape Cut Template/Ruler – this makes cutting strips of fabric very easy



Magnetic Pin Holder



A Shape Cut Template/Ruler

▪ **Marking Tools**

- Heat Erasable marking pens (Frixion are the most common, but I've bought acceptable ones in sets online)
- Clover Chaco Liner – makes a fine chalk line (can purchase refills)
- Chakoner – a heart-shaped chalk line drawing tool
- A Fons and Porter or Bohin mechanical pencil with white lead (I have other colours, too, but I use the Frixion pens for marking on light fabrics and the chalk liners or pencil for marking on dark)
- Post it notes, small and larger – I use them to identify cut fabric for both sewing and quilting
- Masking Tape – I mark fronts and backs of garment pieces, for example, so I know what is what
- Fine Sharpie Permanent Marker – another tool I keep at each sewing machine

- A .7mm lead mechanical pencil (with .7mm HB lead) – perfect for pattern drafting on paper
- Medical Exam Table Paper 18" x 125' ideal for tracing garment pattern pieces
- **Bobbins and Bobbin Holder**
 - A supply of empty bobbins for each different sewing machine – each colour thread needs its own bobbin! You always want an empty bobbin around and each machine may take a different size bobbin (even from the same company)
 - A bobbin holder or box to keep bobbins in order and easily accessible and storable
- **Thread**

There's no point in sewing with cheap thread! Your machine won't like it and the garment or quilt won't like it either! I suggest

 - Aurifil 50wt cotton thread (variegated in two shades of grey for quilt piecing) – this is a lovely, strong, low lint thread, although expensive
 - Wonderful 50 weight cotton thread – a bit heavier than Aurifil but I use it for quilting a lot
 - Gutterman polyester thread (50wt)
 - Mettler polyester thread (50wt)
 - Coats and Clark polyester thread (50wt) – this is my least favourite but do use it to match with fabric when I have to
- **Other Useful Tools**
 - A brush for cleaning lint from the sewing machine
 - A "HumpJumper/Seam Jumper" multi-purpose tool (the tool I have for lifting the presser foot for thick fabric also has a small hole for inserting a new machine needle – handy)
 - A fine crochet hook for pulling threads hidden beneath quilt top or bringing pulled threads to the back of a knit garment
 - A Snag Repair Tool (Snag Nab-it) to bring pulled thread to back of knit fabric
 - A Large Safety Pin – for pulling elastic or ribbon through channels in garment or other sewing construction
 - A roller of sticky tape – great for picking up threads on your ironing board or fabric
 - Fray Check fabric glue
 - 1" Curved Safety Pins for holding a quilt sandwich together (these small pins are a good size – the larger ones are awkward to sew around when quilting)
 - Washers – the largest you can find in the hardware store – great for holding paper patterns on fabric – much better than pinning – you need at least 6 (8 is better to have on hand; they're inexpensive)
 - In addition to the feet that come with your machine, you will want extra feet for different jobs – you can find sets online that come with both a low-shank and high-shank adaptors (the set I have from Love/Sew works on both my old Singer Featherweight and my Brother Quilter)
 - NEEDLES – you need lots of spare needles – you need a fresh needle every time you start a new project (when I'm quilting, I change needles every 30,000-40,000 stitches – in other words, I change my needle two to three times during the quilting process). I buy needles in bulk – in boxes of 100 – for the needles I use most: Universal 80, Embroidery 75, Quilting 75. I also use Top-

Stitching 90, and various Stretch/Ballpoint needles, Twin Needle 75 4mm & 6mm, also it's useful to have Denim /Jeans needles 90 for working with denim. Schmetz and Inspira (as well as Klasse) are all sturdy needles which come in many sizes and for all fabric types [<https://www.schmetzneedles.com/pages/sewing-machine-needle-chart?srltid=AfmBOopLOpsA-oGFmbcXGBIIcANTjbRxzSivBejuXQKSoBgcuF11qDSv>]

Just remember: dull needles can ruin your project, and there's nothing worse than breaking a needle and not having a new needle on hand

- A pin holder with a magnetic mouth used for storing discarded needles and bent pins – you can also use a large pill container with a lid, even a mason jar – something to collect used sharps
- A magnetic pin holder



Sewing Machine Needles

- Ironing Board and Iron – if possible keep your ironing board always set up – makes it much easier to just get a project going. You want a good pad and cover – I have a felted wool padding and I use a heavy twill unbleached cotton to make my table cover – I make a new cover every two years or so
- A sewing table at the right height for your body (I had mine made for me – lower than a standard table height because I'm short and my upper arm measurement is somewhat long) – a dedicated sewing table means you can keep your machine set up and ready to go.
- An adjustable stool – I have what's called a Saddle Seat that I can adjust to the perfect height to keep my shoulders down and relaxed when I'm sewing (I actually have two of them which I move around as I need them). Even though they don't have a back support, the seat forces you to sit with your knees below your hips which puts the lower back in a good position for extended working (although if you're quilting or making a garment from scratch, you're pressing as you go which gets you standing and moving to and from the ironing board a lot).

- A Cutting Table at a comfortable working height – I created mine from a teak dining room table on a double set of wood bed lifts – makes it the perfect height for me
- Shelves and drawers and containers for storing fabric, notions, zippers, thread, patterns, tools
- Trash cans – one at each sewing station
- Good lighting



My Sewing Studio