

# 10 Common Mistakes of New Sewers

## 1 Selecting a Complicated Project

If you don't have a lot of sewing experience, don't try to tackle a wedding dress or tailored suit jacket - or a Halloween costume with over 100 pieces! Instead, select a pattern that has features you know, plus one or two others that you'd like to learn. There are many patterns on the market that are designed especially for beginning (and/or re-entry) sewers; look for words such as "Easy," "Simple," and "Quick." Many pattern companies also have a line of "Learn-to-Sew" patterns that contain more complete instructions and explanations than regular patterns.

## 2 Using Inferior Tools and Materials

No one does their best work when using cheap and/or poorly designed tools and materials. Serious painters don't use little plastic paint brushes and tiny kid-size palettes of watercolors, nor do the best cooks use inferior kitchen tools. Always choose the best you can afford, even if it means waiting awhile before you have all the tools you'd like to have. To start, make sure your sewing machine is in the best possible condition by having it cleaned and serviced; purchase a good pair of sewing shears (they should cut fabric easily all the way to the points) and a box of fine, sharp pins. Add good quality fabrics and thread, and you'll have a much more pleasant sewing experience!

## 3 Starting with a LARGE Project

When learning a new technique or working with a new material, always start on a small scale. Make a pillowcase before you start a duvet cover, a valance before a shower curtain, and a table runner before starting a king-size quilt. While the techniques may be fairly simple, just feeding all those yards of fabric into the sewing machine can be quite a test of one's coordination and agility! Learn the necessary techniques on a project that's easy to handle, then move on to something bigger.

## 4 Selecting the Wrong Fabric

Always check the back of the pattern envelope for "Suggested Fabrics" and select a material similar to those listed. You may not be familiar with all the types listed, but you'll have a better idea of the sort of fabric for which the pattern was designed. For example: don't choose a soft, drapery, lightweight fabric for a pattern that recommends "firm, woven fabrics such as suiting, twill, denim;" on the other hand, don't use a stiff fabric when "lightweight, soft wovens such as challis, rayon, and silk" are suggested. You probably know more about fabric than you think you do - after all, you've been shopping for clothing for how many years? Select fabrics for your projects that you would expect to find when shopping for the same item, whether it be a garment, home accent, or craft project. Also, keep in mind that solid color fabrics with a smooth surface will show mistakes and stitching imperfections much easier than a textured fabric or one with a busy print.

## 5 Using the Wrong Needle

While the Universal needle size 80/12 is great for most sewing projects, it can cause problems on others, particularly when stitching with specialty threads and/or fabrics. There are many different types of sewing machine needles, each suited for a particular type of sewing - quilting, embroidery, leather, microfiber, metallic threads, and more. Needles also come in different sizes, from 60/8, a very thin needle for fine fabrics with a high thread count, to 120/20, great for stitching through heavy canvas and upholstery fabric. Always choose a needle that is suited for the technique you are stitching, that corresponds to the thread count of your fabric, and that is recommended for the type of thread that you are using.

## 6 Using Poor Quality Thread

Do you constantly have stitch problems? If the thread you're using is a "5 spools for \$1" special, the problem isn't you or your machine, it's the thread. Cheap thread is just that - cheap. Using good quality thread not only eliminates your stitching problems, but will last longer and make your projects look more professional. Poor quality thread is made from very short fibers, spun together to form a strand. The resulting thread has thick and thin places that do not flow through the sewing machine evenly; it also sheds fibers creating lots of lint. Good quality thread is made from long fiber strands, is very even (which keeps the tension even), and makes very little lint. The next time you have a problem with stitches, make sure you're using a good quality thread such as Mettler or Isacord.

## 7 Not Utilizing Machine Accessory Feet

How many of the accessory feet included with your machine have you actually used? Are they gathering dust in the corner of a drawer? Do you ever use a foot other than the standard one that came on the machine? Nearly all sewing machines come with at least four "standard" presser feet: an all-purpose or zigzag foot, a buttonhole foot, a zipper foot, and a blindhem foot. In addition to their primary functions, many other techniques can be sewn with these accessories. For instance, the guide on a blindhem foot is perfect for edgestitching and understitching, and a zipper foot is excellent for creating and inserting covered cording and piping. Read your owner's manual and other sewing books to learn more about your machine's accessory feet.

## 8 Ignoring Sewing Machine Features

Do you know everything your machine will do? Many beginning seamsters are unaware that their machines may have one or more of the following useful features:

- adjustable needle position, indispensable for topstitching, edgestitching, understitching
- ability to lower or cover the feed mechanism, allowing freemotion work (quilting, embroidery)

- blindhem stitch, useful not only for hemming but also for creating decorative edge finishes on fine fabrics and for attaching corded trims to home dec projects
- satin stitch, which is just a regular zigzag stitch with the stitch length reduced so that you get a rich, full line of stitching—great for applique

To make sure you get the most out of your sewing machine, attend your dealer's guide classes and/or work through all the stitches and techniques in the owner's manual.

## 9 Expecting Perfection in Every Project

If most stitchers never made mistakes, there would be no such tool as a seam ripper. No matter what we do, we all have to practice, practice, practice to develop new skills. Unfortunately, many of us set unrealistic standards for ourselves, and if we don't achieve them we're very disappointed and discouraged. But—don't be more critical of your own work than you are of others. Here's an exercise to help bring a little perspective to the situation: the next time you're at a quilt show or even just going through your closet, take a very close, critical look at one of your favorite quilts or garments—seams, hems, edge finishes, etc. You'll be surprised at the imperfections you can find when you're really searching for them, but that you would never notice otherwise.

## 10 Not Loving What You Sew

For most people, sewing is a hobby, not a job, and as such it should be FUN! The ability and the desire to create in some form or fashion lies within most of us. To choose fabric and thread as the medium to express that creativity makes you a member of a unique club full of talented, artistic people. Even though sewing involves a number of technical skills that take time to develop, millions of people are inspired by their passion for it. That passion usually comes not from the process but from the creation of an article they know will be beautiful, useful, and/or loved by someone they love. If you focus on working with fabrics that call your name and projects that inspire you, you will continue to learn and grow until stitching up "something new" is second nature.