

Read a Pattern Right

Everything you need to know is on—or inside—the pattern envelope



Have you ever been seduced by the photo on the front of a pattern envelope? Those photos may not show all the details, but there are plenty of clues on the envelope to steer you toward designs that are worth your time and effort. Take a moment to read the pattern envelope—and the pattern itself—and you'll avoid all kinds of pitfalls.

A close look at the envelope helps you pick the right size, purchase the best fabric (in the right amount) for the project, and predict how the finished garment will fit. The guide sheet, of course, provides step-by-step instructions for cutting and making the garment. And the pattern tissue tells you where to cut, fold, gather, ease, sew, and much more.

If you enjoy the process of sewing as much as you do the finished product, reading the pattern and its envelope can shed new light on how to create clothes you love to make—and to wear. You just might find that patterns make good reading.

Design photos
Study the photos. Look for clues about the garments' fit, design lines, and alternative styles by mixing and matching garment parts from the different views shown.

Start on the outside

The information on the front and back of the envelope tells you everything you need to know before you sew a garment: the size you need, how the garment is supposed to fit, and how much fabric to buy.

Recommended fabrics

For the best results, follow these guidelines. With experience, you'll be able to substitute fabrics. Be especially observant of suggestions regarding stretch.

Body measurements

Pattern sizes aren't the same as ready-to-wear sizes: Your pattern size will be larger than what you wear in purchased clothing. Get out the tape measure, and determine your correct pattern size.

Yardage requirements
Find and highlight the requirements for your size in the width of your chosen fabric. Pay attention to notes about purchasing more fabric to match plaids or stripes. Don't forget to look at extras such as lining, interfacing, trims, and other notions.

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14 PIECES/PIEZAS

Métrages et instructions de couture en Français à l'intérieur de l'enveloppe.

FINISHED GARMENT MEASUREMENTS (Includes Design and Wearing EASE)

A Bust	34	35	36½	38½	40½	42½	44½	46½	48½	in
B.C.D. Bust	33½	34½	36	38	40	42	44	46	48	"
E Hip	36½	37½	39	40½	42½	44½	46½	49½	51½	"
Finished back length from base of neck:										
B Dress	54½	55	55½	55½	55½	56	56½	56½	56½	in
C Dress	38½	39	39½	39½	39½	40	40½	40½	40½	"
E Shorts Side Length	21½	21½	21½	22	22½	22½	23	23½	23½	"

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Read the directions

Pattern guide sheets are gold—even if you know how to sew, be sure to look over the instructions. You never know when a design may call for an unusual technique.

Navigate the pattern tissue

Cut each pattern piece on the appropriate line for your size. Look over each piece before you lay it on the fabric to identify the symbols that apply to the view you're making.

Pattern pieces
Use these outline drawings and the list below to identify the pieces you need for the garment.

General directions
Read through the directions to interpret symbols and terms on the guide sheet and pattern tissue.

Pattern ID
The pattern company name, pattern number, size, and the number of the pattern piece all help you keep track of the pieces you're using.

Centers front and back
These crucial landmarks are typically positioned along a fold or seamline (unless the garment is asymmetrical). Mark centers front and back on your fabric at the edges with clips or notches so you can refer to them throughout construction.

Grainline
Position the grainline parallel to the fabric selvage. If the printed grainline is short, extend it to both ends of the pattern piece. Before laying out a pattern, make sure that the selvage is perpendicular to the cross-grain.

Notches, dots, circles, squares
These symbols provide landmarks for construction steps. Mark them so they're easy to locate when you're sewing.

Layout diagrams
Follow these diagrams to cut the garment from the amount of fabric listed on the envelope. If you have less fabric than recommended, a creative layout could accommodate the pattern pieces.

Written instructions
These instructions tell you what to do with each pattern piece, e.g., "Cut here for view B," "Ease-stitch," "Shorten here," or "Cut 2 of interfacing."

Hemlines and foldlines
Note that the hemline is labeled with the expected hem allowance for the design. You can adjust that to suit your project. Vertical foldlines, such as those at a center-front opening, should be marked with clips at each end, a chalk line, or thread-tracing.

Cutting and "place on a fold" lines
Most patterns are multisize, so there are several cutting lines on each piece. Highlight your size before cutting to avoid veering off course. Be sure to lay pattern pieces marked "place on a fold" on the fabric fold.

Sewing directions
Here's the how-to. Read the directions all the way through—if several views share steps, you can easily get sidetracked. If there are any potentially confusing parts, highlight the steps you need.