

Morgann McCoy Biz Column: Essential Tools for Sewing

Description



Essential tools with A Well Worn Story waist apron

In my ten years of sewing, the most common question I have been asked by fellow seamstresses is, “Which tools do you use every day?” So today, I’m tackling that question with some reflection on those ten years and a littlepeek into my workspace.

As a beginner, I remember feeling overwhelmed by the amount of product options while shopping for sewing tools. This is probably true when pursuing any sort of creative outlet. Whether a musician, a writer, an entrepreneur, a gardener, or anything in between, as a beginner you often wonder, “Which tools do I actually need to begin?” or “How much money do I really need to invest to advance my skills?”

Here are the tools I recommend for any seamstress, from beginner to professional. These are tools I picked up years ago and still use every day in the studio.

Shears
Every seamstress needs a trusty pair of shears to cut through all types of fabric. I have two pairs: one Fiskars and one Gingher. Pro tip: dedicate your shears to fabric only, using a separate pair for paper, crafting, etc. I also have a scissor sharpener from Fiskars that pairs well with their dressmaking shears.

Rotary Cutter + Mat
Another great option for cutting, especially for heavyweight materials like canvas and leather. I always use a rotary blade for cutting into large leather hides. The cutting mat is a great resource for ensuring your edges are straight and square. Pro tip: keep a couple extra blades in stock. There’s nothing worse than a dull blade.


FISKARS

Essential Tools Rotary Cutter

Wide Ruler
I personally love my clear 2 inch wide ruler for cutting leather straps and trimming fabric. Quilters might prefer the 4 inch wide version for cutting squares.

Snips
Spoiler alert: at some point in your sewing journey, you will have to rip out a seam. Or possibly 20 during one project. It's normal and part of the learning process. These snips work well for trimming threads and double as a seam ripper.

Weights / Pins
I learned how to sew in college and my professors were anti-pins, mostly because students would forget to pull the pin, sew into it, and break a needle. So, I personally use weights to trace my patterns onto the fabric, then sew without any pins. Depending on your preference, you will need weights or pins or both.

Chalk
You will need chalk to trace your patterns onto fabric. I also use it for marking pocket placements, holes for rivets, etc. It washes off by spot cleaning with a little water, but I always recommend testing it on a small piece of fabric before marking your project pieces, just to be safe.

Although I have linked to a new version of each tool on Amazon, I highly suggest looking for these at garage/estate sales, flea markets, and antique/thrift stores. Many of our grandmothers were seamstress and took great care of their tools. Two generations ago, tools (and sewing machines) were made to last. Back when I was starting college, I went to an estate sale with $50.00 and walked away with a bag full of tools and yards upon yards of high quality cotton fabrics. Bonus points for a really fun Saturday chattingwith a woman who quilted for 40+ years. Buy secondhand if you can.

Of course, these are just my personal favorites. I always love to hear which tools are working well for fellow seamstresses.

Let’s turn the comment section into a resource for everyone to use. Tell me about your favorite tools below!

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