



Cutting Methods

Introduction

Cutting out a project accurately is important. The precision on your initial fabric pieces will have an effect how the final project looks. We recommend using a rotary cutting system. If you prefer, you can cut out your own paper pattern pieces using a preprinted cardboard mat as a guide. Or, you can cut pattern pieces out of pattern-making paper.



Cutting & Pattern Making Supplies

Rotary Cutting System

To cut out the pieces for our projects, we highly recommend that you use this rotary cutting system. All of the items of this system are available in various sizes.

- Rotary cutter*
- Self-healing cutting mat*
- Omnigrid ruler - 6" x 24"

Cardboard Mat

If you prefer to make your own pattern pieces, a cardboard cutting board can be helpful. A 1" grid printed on the board helps you measure the pieces.

- Cardboard Mat*
- Rolled Paper or Tissue Paper
- Pencil
- Ruler
- Paper Cutting Shears*

Pattern-Making Paper

Fabric stores sell interfacing preprinted with a 1" grid. Using this paper is one of the easiest ways to make rectangular and square patterns.

- Pattern-making paper*
- Ruler
- Dressmaker shears*

* See Sewing Suppliers List at end of document.



The Basics of Rotary Cutting

A rotary cutting system provides a fast, precise way to measure and cut fabric pieces for a multitude of sewing and quilting purposes.

Rotary Cutter

The cutter itself is shaped something like a pizza cutter and has a blade that is round. The whole circular edge is a razor blade that is very sharp. Safety is a very important consideration when using this cutter.

There are different kinds and sizes of cutters. Larger blades are nice for fabric like fleece with a thick nap. The smaller blades are used for cutting curved pieces. We recommend a medium-sized blade with a lock that can be locked open or closed.

The Cutting Mat

There are different kinds and sizes of mats. The large ones are very nice to cut out large projects. The basic one that most people start with is 18" x 24".

Grid Rulers

Grid rulers come in many different sizes and styles. The standard size is 6" x 24". It is very nice to have the 24" length when cutting larger pieces like the pillowcase fabric. If you are going to get just one ruler, that size is the one to get.

The 12" x 6" and the 1" x 6" are also very handy for a great variety of projects and purposes.

Rotary Cutter Safety Rules

Rotary blades are razor sharp. You do not want to cut your finger with it. If you follow these few, simple rules, you can safely use your cutter.

- *Place your small finger just off the edge opposite where you are cutting.*

When holding down the grid ruler, make it a habit to place your pinky finger against the opposite edge from where you are cutting. It should touch both the fabric (or mat) and the ruler. This keeps your hand away from the cutting edge and prevents cuts. It also prevents the ruler from swiveling around as you cut.

- *Bear down on the ruler, holding your ruler perfectly still while you are cutting.*

You will have to put some pressure on the ruler to hold it steady.

- *Cut away from yourself.*

Always start cutting near to yourself and cut away. Try to not place your hands or your fabric in an awkward cutting position that is hard to reach. Your mat can be moved or adjusted at any time.

- *Every time you set your cutter down, make sure the blade is closed.*

Otherwise, you could draw your hand across it from the side. If it fell on the floor open it could likewise slice.



The selvage edges always run parallel to the lengthwise grain.

Cut on the Fabric Grain

All fabric has **grain** lines. When the fabric is being woven, the threads that are secured on the loom and run the length of the fabric are the **warp**. The threads that run from side to side across the loom are the **weft**. The side edges of fabric are called the **selvages**. In a printed fabric, they are usually white and the printed pattern does not extend onto them.

When a pattern piece calls for **lengthwise grain**, orient the pattern so the grain runs parallel to the selvage edges. The **crosswise grain** runs in the other direction, or along the width of the fabric.

The diagonal direction of fabric is the **bias**. If you pull on it, you will notice that it stretches easily. Most of the time you want to avoid cutting on the bias. Use caution when sewing on the bias, as the fabric can stretch out of shape.

Most of your projects will be made from fabric rectangles and squares. When you cut your fabric, you want to cut with the grain lines.



To cut, align the 2 selvage edges together along the base grid



Fold the fabric with the grain to prevent twists at the fold.

Cutting Your Fabric

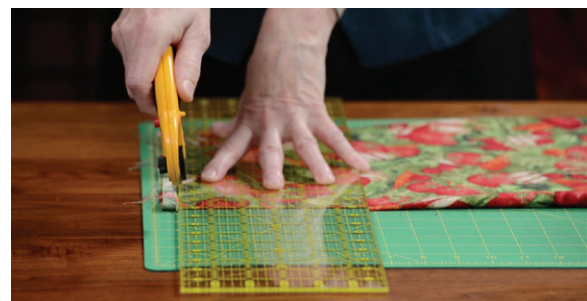
Fold the Fabric with the Grain Lines

To make cuts from larger pieces of fabric, you can fold the fabric and cut it folded. The blade is able to cut through several layers at once.

- Fold your selvage edges together, parallel with each other. Smooth the fabric at the fold line. *Make sure there is no twist in the fold.*
- Bring the fold toward you and fold the doubled fabric. Lay the folded edge parallel to the selvage edges.

Cut Off the Edge to Square the Fabric

- Line the grid ruler up with the folded edge. If you folded your fabric straight, the cut will be with the grain.
- Place the cutter *perpendicular* against the edge of the ruler. Cut away from you, holding the cutter blade upright. Don't lean it over either direction as you cut. When finished, lay the cutter on the table with the blade closed.



As you cut, keep cutter blade perpendicular to the ruler..



Place the 2 1/2" mark of the ruler at the squared fabric edge.

Cutting By Ruler Measurement

When cutting strips of fabric of a determined width, use a ruler measurement to show you where to cut.

- Look at the ruler and find the mark at the correct measurement. Line that mark up with the vertical, squared edge of your fabric.
- If you folded the fabric on the grain, the fold should line up with horizontal ruler grid.

Cutting by Mat Measurement

To cut a smaller piece of fabric to a specific dimension, for instance 10" x 12", you can use the mat dimension lines for your cutting lines.



Cut at the fabric at the mat measurement of 13"

- Lay your fabric squarely on the board. Align the selvage edge with one of the grid lines. Trim off the selvage with the cutter.
- Align the cut edge next to 1" line. Place your ruler across the mat at the 13" line.

Note: Aligning your fabric with the 1" line rather than the 0 line will enable you to see the mat markings more clearly. Just be sure that you add that inch to your measurement before you cut.

- Cut the 10" side.

The straight vertical edge is on the 0 line, so you can cut on the 10" mat line. Now you have a perfectly cut 10" x 12" rectangle.

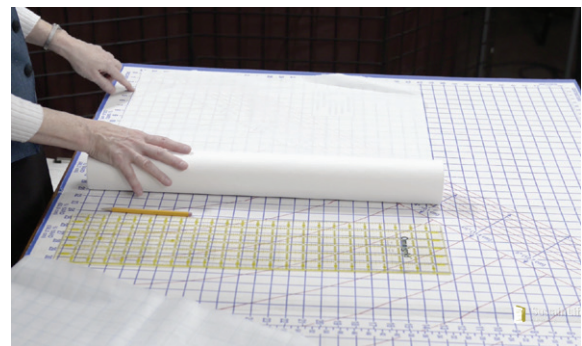
Alternative Methods of Cutting

If you choose not to cut out your projects with the rotary cutting system, there are other options. Rectangular patterns are very easy to make.

Cardboard Cutting Board

Large, cardboard cutting boards printed with a 1" grid are very nice to use when cutting fabric, especially for garments.

To make the pattern pieces, you can use rolled paper or tissue paper. If you will be using the pattern often and you want it more sturdy, use interfacing or muslin. You will be able see through to the grid marks on the cutting board.



- Using the cutting board, lay the straight edge of your paper right against the base mark of the cutting board grid. Allow the paper to hang slightly over the left base line.

- Using a pencil and a ruler long enough to span your pattern piece, make a mark along the 12" grid line.
- Line your ruler up with the grid line that is 10" up from the baseline.
Note: The grid on some mats is numbered from top to bottom. If the bottom line is 36", align the ruler to the mark at 26".
- Now align the ruler vertically with the 0 line, and draw a line up the outside edge.
- Cut along your lines with paper-cutting scissors. Cut the edges straight.
- Now you have a 10" x 12" rectangle. Pin it on your fabric. Use fabric scissors to cut it out to make your project pattern piece.

Pattern-Making Paper

One other simple way to make a pattern is to use pattern-making paper. This material is more like interfacing than paper, and makes a durable pattern piece. It comes preprinted in a one inch grid and can be purchased at any fabric store.

For a rectangular pattern, all you have to do is count the number of squares you need on the 2 sides and cut out the rectangle. For instance, for an 8" x 10" rectangle, cut a piece that is 8 squares by 10 squares.

Review this video: [Cutting Methods](#)

Watch the next video: [Foundational Sampler](#)

Questions about Sewing?

Submit any questions for Cindy in the Q&A section on the course homepage or post it to our blog at www.sustainlife.org/blog/category/sewing/

Sewing Suppliers

Simply Fabrics

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Additional Videos

Beginning Sewing

- Introduction to Sewing
- Introducing the Projects
- Notions & Fabrics
- Sewing Machine
- Foundational Practice Sampler

Project Videos

- 1 Lined Tissue Holder
- 2 Shoe Bag
- 3 Gift Bag
- 4 Double Drawstring Bag
- 5 Bag Caddie
- 6 Bread Cloth
- 7 Basic Pillowcase
- 8 Lined Drawstring Bag
- 9 Pillowcase with Contrasting Band
- 10 Flange Pillow
- 11 Tote Bag
- 12 Lined Apron