



Measuring Tools

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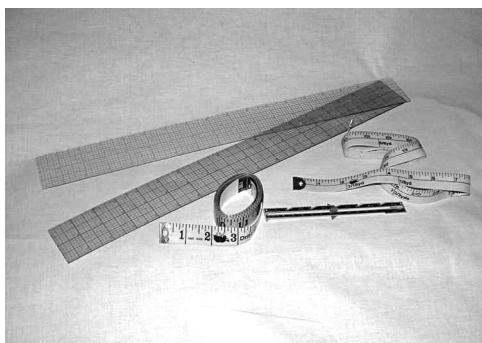
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Measure Up!

Accurate measuring is the cornerstone of successful sewing, and a few basic tools are all you need, as long as you use them often and with precision. Take time at the beginning and periodically throughout the project to measure. As the old adage goes ... measure twice; cut once.

Sewing requires a good, flexible tape measure; an 18" (45 cm), clear, plastic ruler; a sewing gauge; and either a yardstick or a hem marker. As your skills develop, more-advanced tools become invaluable.

The Essentials



The essential measuring tools: tape measure; clear, plastic ruler; seam gauge

Tape Measure: A tape measure belongs in every sewing basket—and probably in every household. It's used primarily for taking body measurements; however, it's equally useful for measuring lengths of fabric and for "quick" measurements throughout any sewing project.

Invest in a new tape measure of nonstretch fiberglass with inches marked on one side and centimeters on the other; old tapes may be stretched or frayed. Most tapes are 5/8" (1.6 cm) wide and 60" (153 cm) long; metal tips prevent the ends from fraying. Longer tape measures are available.

Use a tape measure to compare body and pattern measurements. For example, if you want to make a skirt that reaches your knee, measure from your waist to your knee

and then measure the pattern from waist to hemline. Then adjust the pattern as necessary before cutting the fabric.

Tip: Use a tape measure to draw a perfect circle. Working on a hard, protected surface, insert a pushpin in the metal eyelet at the end of the tape measure. Extend the tape, and pivot it around the pushpin, marking the desired circle radius as you go.

Sewing Gauge: A sewing gauge is a 6" (15 cm) metal or plastic ruler with a marker that slides up and down the center. One edge is marked in inches with a small notch cut every inch; the opposite is marked in centimeters. Use it when you need to measure the same short distance repeatedly, such as the seam allowance, hem depth, buttonholes, tucks and pleats. For sewing smaller seams, such as doll and baby clothes, quilt piecing and heirloom sewing, use a sewing gauge with 1/8" increments.

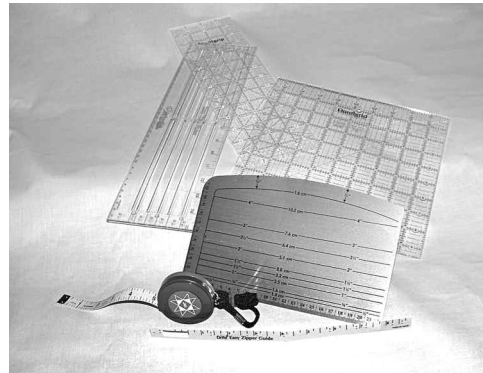
Tip: The sewing gauge has a tiny hole at one end and another hole in the sliding marker. To draw scallops, place a pin in the end hole and a pencil in the marker's hole. Pivot the ruler to mark scallops along a line.

Clear Ruler: A transparent, plastic or acrylic ruler with easy-to-read markings is helpful when measuring and drawing straight seamlines and cutting lines. Use it to lay out patterns on fabric; to mark parallel lines; for general measuring; and for quilting, crafting and scrapbooking as well. Available in a variety of sizes, a 12" or 18" ruler is good to start with.

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Quilting rulers fall in this category. In quilting, accurate cutting and measuring are imperative. Rulers with a nonslip backing and easy-to-read, contrasting measurement lines are helpful. Use rectangular rulers to cut fabric strips and square rulers to cut fabric blocks. For more advanced quilting, consider circle and triangular rulers. For more on quilting rulers, see Guidelines 9.205 and 22.240.

Tip: Use Glow-Line tape to clearly mark the line on the ruler that you want to follow. It's available in neon colors; simply finger-press it in place.



Quilting rulers, slotted ruler, hem gauge, retractable tape measure, zipper guide

Skirt-Hem Marker: Use a skirt-hem marker to mark skirt hems quickly and accurately. To use a chalk hem marker, align the slider the desired measurement from the floor (with shoes on!) and squeeze the bulb to dispense chalk in a smooth line around the skirt—just rotate and squeeze. A pin marker requires a helper. It is a yardstick-like ruler, attached to a base, with a slot at the upper end for inserting straight pins.



Chalk Hem Marker

Tip: A yardstick with both inches and centimeters clearly marked is just as accurate for measuring hems, as long as you have a helper. It's also useful for aligning grainlines when laying out patterns on fabric.

Retractable Tape Measure: This is a useful variation of a standard tape measure, particularly when you need to measure a wide span. The case secures the tape, so it can be stopped at any point and then retracts at the push of a button. It's flexible enough to measure curves, yet rigid and long enough for measuring windows.

Hem Guide: Subtly shaped and clearly marked, use a hem guide for measuring straight and curved seams

and hems. This diverse tool has three straight edges and one curved edge marked with 1/4" and 5/8" seam allowances, as well as standard hem allowances.

To use the guide, place it on the wrong side of the fabric, fold the fabric around the guide's edge to the desired hem depth; steam-press. The gauge eliminates pressing marks on the right side of the fabric. Use the right-angle corner to press square pockets. (The guide will be hot after pressing.)

Also available are sturdy cutting boards and ironing-board covers marked with grids. The grid helps when determining straight lines for folding hems, finding grainlines and measuring seam allowances. The board is coated and corrugated and usually folds up for storage. In addition to the grid, diagonal lines, circles and angles are marked.

Zipper Guide: Made of 1/2"-wide plastic with a notch for the zipper tab, this is a very handy tool for straight topstitching short, centered or lapped zippers. Insert the zipper following the pattern or zipper packaging instructions. Then place the guide over the zipper with the zipper tab in the notch, and stitch around the guide.

Adhesive-Backed Rulers: For a handy measuring guide, affix one of these to a cutting table, worktable or the front of your sewing table. 🖱️

Prym-Dritz Corporation supplied the featured measuring tools.