BASIC SEWING EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUES

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BASIC SEWING EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUES

INTRODUCTION

This is a free introductory sewing guide produced by SimplyFurnishings.com available via our web site. We hope that you will find this guide useful and that it will inspire you to return to the site to find out more about making your own soft furnishings, with a little help from our TEACHYourself SOFT FURNISHINGS® guides. We have produced a range of step-by-step guides to aid those people who have a basic knowledge of sewing skills, but who would like to learn how to make a range of beautiful soft furnishings for their home with a truly professional finish.

The guides are all presented in the same format for ease of use and reference. The information is clearly laid out in step by step format with illustrations and diagrams as appropriate and colour pictures showing finished articles in a real setting.

This guide follows the same format in terms of presentation and quality, although the complete guides are of course available in hard copy and are published and bound professionally. This introductory guide is sub-divided as follows:

Section 1 - Basic Sewing Equipment and Materials

This section I have divided into two sections, the first part deals with basic sewing equipment and contains information on the sewing equipment that you will need to get started. It is presented in alphabetical order with diagrams for extra clarification. Some of this equipment I am sure you will have to hand already, but I have found that there are a few extra items that prove invaluable. They guarantee a better finished article, save a great deal of time in the long run and are clearly well worth the financial investment.

The second part deals with details of some of the soft furnishing ancillary materials that I use on a daily basis and that you may well feel is worth buying ‘in bulk’ if you are going to do a lot of sewing. It is much more expensive to have to buy ancillary materials by the metre or in small amounts. You may well feel the extra convenience of having all you need readily to hand is worth the
extra initial outlay. Again the items are listed alphabetically with illustrations for extra clarification when necessary.

Section 2 - Glossary of Terms

The guides have been written clearly and concisely for ease of use but do contain some technical terms that you will need to understand before progressing. These terms are frequently used in the world of interior design and the making of soft furnishings. Our glossary should help you to understand these words which we use frequently and to help you to become conversant with them.

Section 3 - Stitch and Seam Library

The Stitch and Seam Library is set out in two sections each in alphabetical order.
The first will explain with clear diagrams the types of seams that are used in the Teach Yourself Guides.
The second will introduce you to stitches that are used in the making of soft furnishings along with some basic sewing stitches which you are probably already conversant with. Description of their uses and illustrations will enable you to master these few easy stitches, and give you the confidence you need.

Section 4 - Top Tips

This is to give you a taster of some of the ‘tricks of the trade’ I have found invaluable over the years in making soft furnishings both for my clients, my friends and family and for my own home. Many more are included in the guides, but here are a few of my top favourites!
1. SECTION 1 – BASIC SEWING EQUIPMENT AND ANCILLARY MATERIALS

1.1. Basic Sewing Equipment

The following alphabetical list contains some items of sewing equipment that I am sure you will already have to hand, others are more specific to the making of soft furnishings and are well worth investing in – they make each job a whole lot easier!

Clamps I have 6 metal Cloth Clamps. They are large ‘bull dog’ type clamps used for clamping fabric to my worktable prior to cutting out or during the making-up process. Next to my metal L Square, they are my most indispensable pieces of equipment! When dealing with large expanses of fabric, it is essential it should be anchored to the table or held under tension. If you are not fortunate enough to have a worktable, you can still use these clamps, but you will obviously need to protect your tabletop. See Top Tips for ideas on a worktable design

Curved Needles I have a selection of different sizes and gauges that I use for different jobs. I could not make a stiff pelmet or tieback without a curved needle. I suggest you buy a mixed pack that can give you the variety you will need. You will probably have a favourite that you use for most things.

Iron I have a cordless steam iron that I could not manage without. I very rarely use the steam facility as so many modern furnishing fabrics seem to react adversely to the application of steam, but it is invaluable for attaching interlining to buckram. The fact that it is cordless means that I do not have to worry about getting caught up in a long flex and can use the iron on soft furnishings ‘in situ’ if necessary.
‘L’ Square  I have found this to be the most useful piece of equipment in my workroom! It is made of metal and was intended for use in a drawing office. It has measurements of 60cms along one arm and 40cms along the other shorter arm, but I am sure different sizes can be purchased. It enables me to cut fabric at a perfect right angle; invaluable when making cushions or cutting out strips of fabric for mitred corners. When used in conjunction with my metal metre rule, I can guarantee I always cut across widths of fabric at a perfect 90º to the selvage.

Metre rule  It is invaluable to have a metre rule preferably made of metal with a non-slip strip along the reverse side. Wooden metre rules have a tendency to warp over time and will not enable you to draw a straight line on your fabric. It is particularly helpful if the rule has clearly marked measurements, metric or imperial but not a mixture of both!

Needles – hand sewing  Stock up on a good variety with eyes that you can easily thread and will take various thicknesses of sewing thread. I recently purchased several packs of ‘long darners’. Although long they have a fairly narrow gauge with large eyes. I now use them for most jobs. I find the extra length means I do not prick my fingers anywhere near as much. Particularly good for stitching in the pleats on hand stitched headed curtains.

Needles – sewing machine  Make sure you have a good supply of sewing machine needles of different gauges.

Pins  Glass headed pins are the only types I use. I purchase 2 sizes, the 30mm x 0.6mm and the 50mm x 0.8mm. I never use dressmakers’ pins as they can so easily be left inside a finished article unnoticed. The coloured glass heads are much more prominent.
Quilting
Pens

These are available in two types that I am aware of – a water soluble marker that vanishes when the article is washed and a marker that produces a line that eventually disappears when it is exposed to the light for any length of time. Invaluable for quilting fabric or for use in appliqué techniques.

Retractable
Metal tape

Always use a metal/steel tape when measuring long lengths of fabric, never a fabric tape which is used in dress making. Fabric tapes are not accurate enough and can shrink over time. The metal tape is rigid and therefore much more accurate.

Scissors

Buy at least 3 pairs of scissors if you can. One should be retained for cutting paper, buckram and any other thick items that will blunt your best cutting out scissors. An 8” pair or dress makers scissors with metal handles is ideal for these ‘work horses’. The second pair, I would suggest 10” tailor’s shears, should only be used on fabrics and linings, be well maintained and regularly sharpened. The third pair should be much smaller and be very sharp for intricate work like snipping into fabric around curves and into corners. Embroidery scissors are ideal for these jobs.

Sewing Machine

This really is your most valuable piece of equipment and should be regularly serviced and cleaned. I have an industrial sewing machine, but one that only does a straight stitch. I have a ‘back up’ domestic with lots of gadgets and a zigzag and embroidery stitch facility which I find useful, particularly in cushion making. When purchasing a sewing machine it really is a case of ‘getting what you pay for’. If you are going to expect your sewing machine to make heavy curtains and valances with buckram headings, a good quality machine is essential. You will certainly need to have a piping and zipper foot attachment right from the start. If you intend making a lot of soft furnishings, a second-hand industrial machine might well be worth considering.
Sewing thread

I suggest you have the following 3 varieties to hand:-

- 100% cotton thread in both cream and white for use on cotton sateen lining.
- A supply of assorted colours of both 100% cotton threads and polyester/cotton mixes which come in useful. However, I always purchase the right colour thread for the job – a bad match will spoil any article. Buy the correct weight as well as colour.
- Top stitching thread, either white or cream. I find this invaluable for all sorts of jobs that require extra strength, particularly when making up buckram stiff pelmets, in the lacing up process.

Short metal ruler

A small metal ruler I also find useful for measuring smaller pieces of fabric or other ancillary materials.

Spring clip washing pegs

Used for dressing curtains. See Top Tips.

Staple gun

I have 2 types of staple gun – a manual and a pneumatic. The latter is invaluable when making headboards or other upholstered articles that require the insertion of a large number of staples. The manual still comes in handy when I need to work more slowly on more intricate articles. My manual takes 6-mm staples, invaluable for making up Lambrequins made of 6 mm MDF.

Tailors chalk

Useful for marking out intricate shapes on fabric.
1.2. **Soft furnishing ancillary materials**

The following alphabetical list deals with ancillary materials that are used in the making of soft furnishings. It is by no means exhaustive but I have tried to pick out those items which I use frequently and which you should be conversant with.

**Adhesives**  
Clear Bostik or UHU are ideal for upholstery work and in the making up of lambrequin and stiff pelmets. I also buy a spray adhesive, a non-chlorinated variety if possible.

**Buckram**  
*Curtain heading buckram* is a coarse, white cotton fabric that has been stiffened with size. It comes in various widths – 10 cm, 13 cm, 15 cm and 30 cm being the most widely used. Two types are available, the ‘sew in’ variety which I use on fabric with a pile i.e. velvet and ‘fusible’ which has been impregnated with glue and which bonds to the fabric when pressed with a warm iron.

*Pelmet buckram* is very coarse and made of stiffened jute or hessian. It has been treated with a water-activated adhesive for bonding to the face fabric and interlining. It is available in 3 widths, 30 cm, 46 cm, and 92 cms.

**Bump/Domette**  
I have put these two items together as they serve the same purpose although they come in different weights. They are both used for interlining curtains, valances and pelmets and other soft furnishing items that require more body. They are both made of cotton, which has been either brushed or woven to give a soft surface texture. Bump is the heavier weight of the two. I also use a ‘stitch bonded’ synthetic interlining that comes in a light/medium weight and is much more stable in that it does not stretch or distort as much as the domette or bump and is therefore much easier to work with.

**Cleat**  
A metal or plastic hook with 2 arms used for holding cords on fabric blinds. Always use the metal variety on heavy blinds.
Continuous Zip  
I always purchase continuous chain lightweight zips for use in cushion making. The initial purchase is rather expensive but I always have zips to hand and the method of installation I use means that it is not necessary to have zips of the same colour as the face fabric. Continuous chain zips come in 200 metre and 50 metre reels in either beige or white. The autolock sliders are purchased separately.

Cord Braided polyester cord used in the making of fabric blinds. I use a 1.50mm thickness cord on a 250g cop.

Cord Weight Usually made of brass and used for holding blind cords together neatly. A more up market version of the wooden acorn!

Curtain heading tape There are so many different types to choose from, pencil pleat, pinch pleat, box pleat, gathered, goblet, smocked etc. it is well worth familiarising yourself with them all. However, I find two types I use very frequently and would certainly recommend these to you to buy in bulk if making lots of curtains:-

**Rufflette Regis Woven Pocket Tapes** in two depths, 75mm and 84mm. Both give a really professional finish and although a little more expensive are easy to work with. They do not stretch and I have never had any of the cords break when pulling up – a nightmare scenario if it ever happens!

**Valance tape** – I buy a 75mm pencil pleat tape with a velour backing stitched to one side which bonds to ‘hook’ velcro. This tape is only for use with static curtains or valances which are to be fastened to a pelmet board.
Curtain tape hooks

Lots of different types available both in plastic and metal. Do take time to visit your local store to check out all the different types, but take note of the following:-

**Rufflette Regis plastic hooks** I always use on pencil pleat taped headings. They have a small plastic disc that keeps the hook firmly anchored in the tape making the hanging of curtains so much easier. They are also much stronger than the average plastic curtain hook.

**Brass hook used for taped headings** – for heavier curtains where a plastic hook would be inappropriate.

**Brass or brass plated ‘sew on’ hooks** for use on hand stitched headings when pin hooks are not appropriate and when extra strength is required.

**Rufflette zinc plated pin hooks** for use on hand stitched buckram headings, do not rust or bend easily.

*Leadweights*

It is possible to buy either round or square leadweights for inserting into the hems of curtains. I find 1” round weights are sufficient for everything other than excessively heavy curtains.
Piping cord
I always buy bleached, pre-shrunk cotton piping cord as it is washable, however further shrinkage can occur so take care! Piping cords come in all different thicknesses, so choose the appropriate one for the job.

Rings
Small rings both metal and plastic used for sewing to blinds as cord guides. Brass rings can rust over time particularly if exposed to moisture, so I opt for plastic rings unless extra strength is required. Brass plated ‘D’ rings I use for sewing to tie backs as they give a really neat finish.

Polyester wadding
I carry a supply of 2oz polyester wadding which I double up to make a layer of 4 oz should the job require it. It is invaluable for quilting, padding lambrequins and pelmets, making plaied tie backs and for stuffing goblet pleats. It comes on 50 m roles but can obviously be purchased by the metre from your local supplier.

Sateen Lining
100% cotton sateen lining used for lining curtains, valances, pelmets, blinds etc. Linings come in two widths 122cm and 137 cm and in white, ivory, cream and beige. It is possible to buy coloured sateen lining fabric to co-ordinate with the face fabric if desired.

Screw Eyes
Brass plated or metal and coming in various sizes. They are used for holding the cords on fabric blinds. The screw eyes with very long shanks I use on pelmet boards for holding the curtain returns in place.

Velcro
Hook and loop velcro is available in different widths and colours. The standard velcro comes in hook form which has a stiff plastic backing and is ideal for attaching to the front edge of pelmet boards. The standard loop velcro is much softer and can be stitched either by machine or hand to the reverse side of valances.
pelmets or blinds. Self-adhesive velcro is self-bonding, but I personally prefer to use the standard variety in a 20mm width, colour white.

Wooden acorn A wooden weight used for holding blind cords together neatly.

2. SECTION 2 - GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following list should be used for cross-reference when using the Simply Furnishings Teach Yourself Guides.

**Architrave** A wooden border surrounding a window (usually found in older properties) or a doorway.

**Austrian blind** A soft fabric blind that is gathered or pleated along the top and which draws up in soft pleats.

**Applique** Pieces of fabric or felt applied to a background fabric.

**Basting** See Stitch Library

**Batten** A narrow piece of timber that slots into the hem or casing pockets of a roman blind.

**Bias/crossways strip** A strip of fabric cut on the diagonal across the warp and weft of the fabric.

**Binding/lipping** A strip of contrasting fabric applied to the edges of curtains, valances or tiebacks etc. This decorative edging can be cut to varying widths depending on the nature of the article being edged.

**Blackout lining** A thick fabric used to line curtains where light exclusion is required. Available in 2 varieties – 2 pass in which the lining is coated white or ecru on one side only or – 3 pass in which both sides are coated. Because of its rubberised feel, it makes it more difficult to dress the curtains satisfactorily.

**Box pleats** Flat symmetrical pleats that are formed by folding the fabric back on itself either side of the pleat.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brocade</td>
<td>A rich fabric with an intricate pattern created within the weave, traditionally embossed in gold or silver. This term is now applied to any flowered fabric with a raised pattern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckram</td>
<td>A coarse fabric of cotton or linen used for stiffening pelmets, curtain headings and tie backs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bump</td>
<td>A soft, thick material used for interlining curtains, pelmets etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café Rod</td>
<td>A narrow rod usually made of brass used for curtains with a cased or scalloped heading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calico</td>
<td>A cheap, coarse textured plain weave cotton, similar to muslin other than in its thickness. Available in different weights - can be fire retardant treated for upholstery work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chintz</td>
<td>A printed cotton fabric usually with a glazed finish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornice or coving</td>
<td>A decorative moulding positioned at the top of a wall where it meets the ceiling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut drop</td>
<td>The cut length of a piece of fabric before any hems, headings or turnings have been stitched in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dacron</td>
<td>A synthetic fibre used for filling and padding articles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damask</td>
<td>Traditionally a silk, cotton or linen fabric with a textured pattern woven into it. Cheaper substitutes are now available made of synthetic fibres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dormer</td>
<td>Term applied to a window set within a roof.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dupion</td>
<td>A plain, shiny fabric similar to silk in appearance. It is a fairly difficult fabric to work with as it frays very easily once cut.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face Fix</td>
<td>A term usually relating to the installation of a curtain track fitting or the positioning of a blind fixing. The fixing is screwed into the face of the wall above the window recess or into the front of the window frame itself if the window dressing is to be inset into the window recess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fascia board</strong></td>
<td>A narrow strip of board covered with fabric that is used to cover a curtain track.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Festoon blind</strong></td>
<td>A very decorative blind that is ruched all along its length as well as across the heading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finial</strong></td>
<td>A shaped attachment that slots onto the ends of a curtain pole. It helps secure the rings onto the pole but its primary function is decorative. Vast choice available in terms of shape and colour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finished drop</strong></td>
<td>The final length of fabric after the hems, headings or turnings have been stitched in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>French/triple pleat</strong></td>
<td>A decorative curtain or valance heading in which the fabric is gathered into groups of 3 pleats. The heading is usually stiffened with buckram.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>French Seam</strong></td>
<td>See Stitch Library.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gimp</strong></td>
<td>A narrow braid used as a decorative trimming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goblet pleat</strong></td>
<td>A decorative curtain heading in which the fabric is stitched into narrow tubes that are then stuffed with wadding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heading</strong></td>
<td>The top edge of a curtain or valance finished either with a tape or a curtain buckram.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hem</strong></td>
<td>The bottom edge of a curtain or valance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Holland</strong></td>
<td>A plain linen cloth commonly used in the making of roller blinds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interlining</strong></td>
<td>A soft material sewn in between the face fabric of a curtain and its lining. It gives the curtains a very luxurious appearance and provides extra insulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Italian stringing</strong></td>
<td>Curtains with Italian stringing are joined together permanently in the centre and are as such ‘dress curtains’. The stringing is set on the diagonal near the top of each curtain thus pulling the curtains back at this point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacing</td>
<td>A very long stitch used to attach a face fabric to a buckram pelmet or tie back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladder Stitch</td>
<td>See Stitch Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambrequin</td>
<td>A stiff shaped surround to a window, similar to a stiff pelmet, but with much longer sides that can go as far down as the window sill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading edge</td>
<td>The edge of the curtain that faces the centre of the window.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lining</td>
<td>A closely woven cotton fabric with a shiny surface used for lining curtains etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitre</td>
<td>A particular method of folding a corner enabling the fabric to lie flat. See Soft Furnishing Sewing Techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moiré</td>
<td>A watered silk or a cheaper synthetic substitute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslin</td>
<td>A very fine cotton, very like a modern sheer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notch</td>
<td>A ‘V’ shaped cut in a seam allowance, helps to reduce ‘bulk’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside edge</td>
<td>The edge of the curtain that faces the outside edge of the window.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlap seam</td>
<td>See Stitch Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattern repeat</td>
<td>The length of the pattern on a piece of fabric before it repeats itself. When joining lengths of fabric with a pattern, regard must always be paid to the pattern repeat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelmet</td>
<td>A stiff pelmet is a fabric covered window dressing usually installed on top of curtains creating a decorative finish. It is flat not gathered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pencil pleats</td>
<td>The most commonly used taped curtain heading. When pulled up, the fabric forms a row of parallel vertical pleats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinch pleats</td>
<td>See French and triple pleats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pintuck</td>
<td>A very narrow decorative seam that stands proud on the right side of the face fabric. These are usually arranged in a series of parallel lines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piping</td>
<td>Made by covering a cord with fabric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilting</td>
<td>A technique for padding a fabric - the most common method uses a layer of wadding and a backing cloth as well as the face fabric. The layers are then anchored together using decorative stitching techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repp</td>
<td>A coarse fabric with a ribbed appearance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return</td>
<td>The flat side of a lambrequin, pelmet or valance that buts up to the wall. This term also applies to the outside edge of a curtain that covers the space created between the track and the wall at the sides. It cuts out the light that would otherwise filter into the room down the sides of the curtain, creating a very tailored or ‘boxed’ effect to the window dressing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reveal</td>
<td>The side of a window recess, i.e. the wall adjacent to the window frame and at right angles to the surface wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roller blind</td>
<td>A blind made of a stiffened fabric that is mounted on a spring mechanism. The blind can be raised or lowered to a specific height.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman blind</td>
<td>A roman blind is a flat, ungathered blind with no fullness. It offers a smart clean-cut finish to a window, with its pleats forming a soft layered pelmet when the blind is raised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scalloped edge</td>
<td>A decorative edging made up of a series of symmetrical curves. A scalloped edge on a curtain heading has deep cut-outs with slots into which is inserted a rod or pole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selvedge</td>
<td>The bound edge running along the side of a length of fabric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidelay</td>
<td>The turning on the side of a curtain, both on the leading and on the outside edge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Silk A beautiful fabric made from the fibres produced by the silkworm. Care needs to be taken when using silk as the fibres eventually rot when subjected to direct sunlight.

Skewer A long thick pin that is used to hold fabric in place during the making up process.

Slip Stitch See Stitch Library

Slip hem See Stitch Library

Slot heading A curtain heading with a simple hemmed top into which is inserted a rod, pole or wire. The curtain is then bunched together to form gathers.

Smocked heading A decorative curtain heading in which a series of pencil pleats are stitched together at regular intervals to form a honeycomb design.

Squab A loose cushion with ties attached to the back edge for anchoring to a stool or chair seat.

Swag A soft swathe of fabric usually coupled with tails to form a highly decorative window dressing.

Tacking See Stitch Library.

Taffeta A shiny fabric initially made of woven silk but now available in synthetic substitutes

Tails A pleated and shaped piece of fabric installed on the outside edge of a curtain - usually coupled with swags to form an overall window dressing.

Tapestry A thick heavy fabric woven from a number of different coloured fibres. Ideal for upholstery and for drapes in period properties. Due to its bulk, care should be taken when estimating.

Template A pattern used as a guide when cutting out.

Ticking A stiffened, striped, woven fabric, traditionally in black and white and used for making mattresses. Modern
derivatives are not as stiff and come in a wide range of colours. Currently enjoying a revival in its popularity, it is an ideal fabric for a more informal setting.

**Toile de Jouy**
A printed cotton originally from France, usually bearing pastoral scenes. This fabric is undergoing renewed popularity, with its pastel designs on a white or cream background.

**Top Fix**
A term usually relating to the installation of a curtain track fitting or the positioning of a blind fixing. The fixing is screwed directly into the ceiling above the window rather than into the wall above the window if there is any. If the window dressing is to be inset into the window recess, then the fixings are screwed into the top of the recess above the window frame rather than into the window frame itself. This type of fixing, particularly for blinds, is becoming more popular with the installation of UPVC windows. These windows often have quite large vents at the top and there has to be sufficient room for these to be opened without being obstructed by the blind. Window manufacturers will often advise very strongly not to drill into the frame itself and will even go so far as to say it will affect the guarantee on the window if this advise is not heeded.

**Turnings**
A seam allowance.

**Valance**
A pleated or gathered piece of fabric usually installed over the top of curtains. This term is also used to describe the decorative skirt used to hide a divan base.

**Velvet**
A good old favourite, velvet is a pile fabric made of cotton or synthetic mixes available in a vast range of colours and different decorative finishes. It will always be at home in a traditional setting.

**Voile**
A very finely woven cloth usually made of cotton or silk.

**Wadded edge**
A bulky, rolled edge used on the leading edges of curtains, around the edges of a bed cover or cushion.

**Warp**
The lengthways thread in a woven fabric.
Wadding  A batting or filling.

Weft  The crossways thread in a woven fabric.

Zipper foot  A sewing machine attachment – a half foot that enables you to stitch very closely to a zipper or piping.
3. SECTION 3 – STITCH AND SEAM LIBRARY

The following alphabetical list of stitches and types of seams with accompanying illustrations covers all the stitch and seam techniques used in the Teach Yourself Guides. Spend some time making sure you are acquainted with the techniques and for those of you who feel a little unsure, it is best to pin and tack the fabric before permanently hand or machine stitching the seams. Practise on some scraps of material first until you feel confident enough to move onto a specific article.

3.1. Seams

- **Plain open seam**

  This is the most widely used seam in the making of soft furnishings, as widths of fabric are joined together with a seam that is virtually invisible from the right side. The average seam allowance is 1.5 cms. Work through the following steps:–

  1. Place 2 pieces of fabric together with right sides facing and with raw edges or selvages level. Pin on the seam line, with the pins placed at right angles to the seam line. Tack along the seam line and remove the pins. See **Diagram 1**.

  2. Machine along the seam line using a straight stitch.
3. Press the seam open with a cool iron. See Diagram 2.

4. The raw edges may need to be neatened by zig-zagging if the seam is not to be covered by a lining fabric.

- **Flat fell seam**
  This is a very neat strong flat seam that I use for joining fabric lined.

  1. Follow instructions as in 1 – 2 above.
  2. Press the seam allowance to one side and trim one side of the seam allowance to within 3 mm of the row of machine stitching. Turn under the raw edge of the other seam allowance and tack in place over the previously trimmed edge. Top stitch close to the fold. Alternatively, sliphem in place for an invisible row of stitching. See Diagram 3.
**French seam**

I use this seam on lighter weight fabrics where a strong narrow seam is required.

1. Place the two pieces of fabric together, wrong sides facing and stitch along 6 mm in from the final seam line.

2. Trim back the fabric to within 3 mm of this line of stitching.

3. Turn the fabric right sides together and press lightly along the seam line.

4. Run another row of stitching along the final seam line enclosing the row edges within this bound seam. See Diagram 4.

**Overlap seam**

Always use this seam when joining width of interlining together as a plain open seam would be too bulky. Place the two pieces of interlining together (there is no right and wrong side on interlining) so that the edges overlap by 2 cms. Pin and tack before stitching on the machine as interlining stretches easily. Run a single line of machine stitching down the centre of the overlapped seam, or 2 parallel lines of zig-zag stitch. See Diagram 5. Do not press.
3.2. Stitches

- **Basting/tacking**
  A temporary stitch used to hold layers of fabric together, tacking removed after final stitching.

- **Herringbone**
  A strong stitch that is used to hold a single or double layer of fabric in place over another layer of fabric.

- **Ladderstitch/slipstitch**
  An invaluable stitch used to hold two folded edges together or a folded edge to a flat edge. It is virtually invisible if executed correctly. Often stitched with a curved needle on an upholstery item.
**Lockstitch**
Akin to a loose blanket stitch, lockstitch is used to hold linings or interlinings to the reverse of a curtain face fabric.

**Serging**
Not a stitch I use often but worth mentioning as some curtain makers use this stitch to hold a single layer of fabric in place down the side edge of a curtain. Be careful to only pick up a few threads from the reverse of the face fabric so that the stitches are not visible on the right side.
- **Sliphem**
  *Used on the hems of lined and unlined curtains and on the sidelays of unlined curtains.*

![Sliphem Diagram]

- **Stabstitch**
  *A very small stitch used to attach trimming to a face fabric.*

![Stabstitch Diagram]
4. **SECTION 4 - TOP TIPS**

- **A work-table**

The large quantities of fabric involved in making up soft furnishings means that it is essential you work on a table rather than on your lap! If you are fortunate enough to have the space, it is sheer luxury to have a purpose built work table. You can then use cloth clamps to anchor your fabric to the table without doing any damage to the tabletop. The design of mine means that it can be taken up and down relatively easily when I need the space. My local carpenter constructed the table to my own design over 15 years ago and it is still going strong!

I have 2 trestles made of pine which open out to a specific width, determined by two strong pieces of rope which are attached to bottom cross members. The tabletop is in two pieces, both 245 cms long x 75 cms wide built as box frames - a plywood top is screwed to a pine surround. Slots were cut into the sides of the box frame for fixing into the top of the trestles. The table is assembled by opening out the trestles, lifting up the two top pieces and placing them on top of the trestles making sure they are firmly inserted into the slots.

The 2 top sections I have covered in a thick layer of interlining on top of which I have stapled a covering of heavy duty calico. The staples were inserted into the bottom of the boxwood frame thus ensuring the top is perfectly smooth. The padded covering enables me to use an iron on my fabrics without the surface of the table ‘weeping’ into the fibres or the rough surface of the wood snagging the fabric.

The finished table that is 245 cms long by 150 cms wide is very stable and is set at a height that enables me to sit down and work. I have colleagues with similar tables who had trestles made somewhat higher than mine as they prefer to stand and sew. The choice is yours.

In later years I had a 2’ extension section built which I clamp onto the end original table when I am working on very long curtains.

It takes sometime to get used to sewing on a table particularly if you have spent years doing embroidery or other types of ‘craft’ sewing on your lap. It is worth persevering however, as the only other alternative is to work on the floor which is no good for the back or knees! Good luck!
Cord pockets

If you have made or hung curtains in the past and have used plastic cord tidies you will know how tiresome they are. The cords get tangled and they get covered in dust and work loose over time. A far better technique I have found is to make a small cord ‘pocket’ out of the same cotton sateen lining that has been used to line the curtains. This pocket is then stitched under the lower edge of the tape on the outside edge of the curtain where the cords are left loose ready for pulling up.

Make up the cord pocket as follows:-

- Cut out a narrow strip of lining 8 cms wide x 40 cms long and fold in half across the width, wrong sides facing. You will now have a double thickness strip, 8 cms x 20 cms.
- Turn up the folded end to within 2 cms of the top.
- Run a narrow seam of 5 mm wide up each side from top to bottom anchoring both ends securely.
- Turn inside out so that the raw seams are inside the bag and the 2 cms flap is left at the top. The bag is then ready to be stitched under the curtain heading tape.

- When curtains are hung, the cords are merely fastened with a bow, wound together fairly loosely into a hank and placed into the cord pocket.
**Spring Clip Washing Pegs**

You may well be asking what are these for! Just as I have favourite pieces of equipment in my workroom, these are the most important when hanging curtains. With taped headed curtains, I ‘peg’ the pleats into position all the way down the length of the curtains at intervals of about every 50 cms. I continue to do this all the ways across the width of the curtain therefore guaranteeing that all the pleats are the same width and are the same distance apart. With a patterned, striped or checked fabric you get an amazing result as the pattern falls in exactly the same place on each pleat all the way down the length of curtain. The pleats fall in perfect pencils and look stunning. I remove the pegs just before ‘strapping up’ the curtains.

**SUMMARY**

I hope that you have found this introductory guide useful and that you will now be encouraged to start making some of your own soft furnishings, don’t be afraid to have a go!

Once you have mastered the basics then return to our web site and check out the Teach Yourself Guides web page where you will find all the information you need about our current publications. If you are a complete beginner, then I would recommend that you start slowly with the Teach Yourself Cushions Part 1 Guide, progressing on to more advanced soft furnishings such as Curtains and Blinds as your confidence grows.

If you have any problems we of course have our Discussion Forum web page where you can ask Simply Furnishings and other visitors to the site for help and advice. We shall be visiting the forum ourselves regularly and will do our best to respond quickly and deal with any queries that are posted there!

If you have any other questions relating to our company, products and services, please feel free to contact us by email at: customerservices@simplyfurnishings.com

Thank you for taking the time to visit our web site, we hope that you will become one of our regular visitors.

Good Luck!
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