

Lesson Plan: My First Designer T-Shirt!

Materials Needed

- **Fabric:** About 1 yard of beginner-friendly knit fabric like cotton jersey. Let the student pick a color or print they love! Pre-washing and drying the fabric is recommended.
- **T-Shirt Pattern:** A simple, beginner t-shirt pattern in the student's size. (Alternatively, you can use a well-fitting existing t-shirt to trace a pattern onto paper).
- **Sewing Machine:** Threaded with a matching all-purpose thread and equipped with a ballpoint or stretch needle (important for knit fabrics).
- **Basic Sewing Kit:**
 - Fabric scissors or a rotary cutter and mat
 - Pins or sewing clips
 - Measuring tape
 - Fabric marker or chalk
- **Iron and Ironing Board:** Essential for pressing seams.
- **Optional "Creative Corner" Supplies:** Fabric paint, iron-on patches, stencils, fabric markers, or scraps for an appliqué pocket.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Safely operate a sewing machine to sew straight seams on knit fabric.
- Understand and follow the basic steps of a sewing pattern from cutting to construction.
- Correctly assemble a simple t-shirt by sewing shoulder and side seams.
- Practice the technique of folding and sewing a hem.
- Apply creative choices to personalize a handmade garment.

Lesson Activities

Part 1: The Design Studio (15 minutes)

Goal: To get excited and prepare the pattern and fabric.

1. **Become the Designer:** Start by discussing the project. This isn't just any t-shirt; it's a custom piece! Ask the student: "What makes a t-shirt cool? A fun color? A cool graphic? A comfy fit?" Have them sketch a quick drawing of their ideal t-shirt.
2. **Pattern Prep:** Lay out the pattern pieces. Identify them together: Front, Back, and Sleeves. If using an existing t-shirt to trace, guide the student to carefully trace the front, back, and one sleeve onto paper, adding a 1/2 inch seam allowance around all edges.
3. **Fabric Layout:** Lay out the fabric, making sure it's smooth. Show the student how to place the pattern pieces on the fabric, paying attention to the "stretch" of the fabric (it should stretch side-to-side on the t-shirt body). Pin the pattern pieces securely.

Part 2: The Prep Station (20 minutes)

Goal: To cut the fabric and learn the importance of precision.

1. **The First Cut:** Demonstrate how to cut fabric safely and accurately using fabric scissors or a rotary cutter. Guide the student as they cut out their Front, Back, and two Sleeve pieces. This is a great time to say, "Measure twice, cut once!"
2. **Machine Bootcamp:** Move to the sewing machine. Review the essential safety rules (e.g., fingers away from the needle, sew at a slow, steady speed). Have the student practice sewing

straight lines on a scrap piece of the t-shirt fabric. Show them how to start and end a seam by backstitching.

Part 3: The Construction Zone (45-60 minutes)

Goal: To assemble the main body of the t-shirt, step-by-step.

Teacher's Note: For each step, model it first, then have the student do it. Use the iron after every single seam—this is the secret to a professional-looking garment!

1. **Step A: Shoulder Seams:**

- Place the Front piece and Back piece together with the "right sides" (the pretty sides) of the fabric facing each other.
- Line up the shoulder seams and pin them.
- **You Do:** Guide the student to sew both shoulder seams using a straight stitch and a 1/2 inch seam allowance. Remember to backstitch!
- Press the seams open with the iron.

2. **Step B: Attaching the Sleeves:**

- Lay the t-shirt open at the shoulders. Find the center of a sleeve's top curve and match it to a shoulder seam. Pin the sleeve into the armhole, easing the curve to fit. The right sides of the fabric should still be together.
- **You Do:** This is the trickiest part. Encourage the student to sew slowly around the curve. Repeat for the other sleeve.
- Press the seams.

3. **Step C: Side Seams:**

- Fold the shirt so the front and back are aligned again, with the sleeves folded in half. The right sides are still facing inward.
- Line up the long seam that runs from the sleeve cuff all the way down to the bottom hem of the shirt. Pin it all the way down.
- **You Do:** Sew this long seam on both sides of the shirt.
- Turn the shirt right-side-out. It looks like a t-shirt now! Give a high-five!

Part 4: The Finishing Touches (30 minutes)

Goal: To complete the shirt with hems and unique personalization.

1. **Hemming:** Explain that a hem gives a clean, finished edge that won't unravel.

- On each sleeve and the bottom of the shirt, fold the raw edge under by 1/2 inch and press it with the iron. Fold it another 1/2 inch and press again. Pin in place.
- **You Do:** Carefully topstitch the hems down. Sewing in a circle can be tricky, so go slow.

2. **The Creative Corner:**

- Lay the finished t-shirt flat. Bring out the optional creative supplies.
- Ask the student: "How can you make this t-shirt uniquely yours?" Let them take the lead. They can paint a design, add an iron-on patch, create a stencil, or even sew on a contrasting pocket using a fabric scrap.
- This is a time for pure creativity and fun, with no right or wrong answers.

Wrap-Up & Assessment: The Fashion Show! (5-10 minutes)

Goal: To celebrate the finished work and reflect on the learning process.

• **Show and Tell:** Have the student model their new t-shirt! Ask them to share their experience:

- What was your favorite part of making the shirt?
- What was the most challenging part?
- What are you most proud of?
- What would you do differently or try next time?

- **Assessment:** The finished t-shirt serves as the primary summative assessment. Observe its construction (Are the seams relatively straight? Is it wearable?). The student's answers during the "Show and Tell" provide insight into their understanding of the process and their problem-solving skills.

Differentiation and Extensions

- **For Support:** Use sewing clips instead of pins, as they are easier for small hands. Use a washable glue stick to baste hems in place before sewing. Choose a slightly thicker, more stable knit fabric that doesn't curl as much.
- **For a Challenge:** Introduce a zigzag stitch to finish the inside raw seams to prevent fraying. Try color-blocking by cutting the sleeves from a different fabric. Add a ribbed neckband (a more advanced, but very satisfying, skill).