
Wardrobe Basics: Sewing Tunic No. 1 with Sonya Philip

Chapter 1 - Sewing Tunic No. 1

Overview

- Hi my name is Sonya Philip. I'm an artist, designer, maker. I also started 100 Acts of Sewing which has become a pattern line of simple clothes for people to make. And today I'm here for the latest installment of the Wardrobe Basics series and this time I'm going to show you how to make tunic number one. A very versatile drop shoulder garment which you can make in two lengths, a cropped shirt version and a tunic version which I'm wearing right now. I'll walk you through all the steps to make the basic tunic and I'm really excited to show you all the different modifications you can make with this basic pattern including tie backs and an empire waist, as well as a jacket modification. This garment comes together quickly and easily and can be worn by so many different body types.

Materials

- To make this tunic, you'll need the following materials. Your pattern printed and put together. Your main material. Check the instructions for the yardage. A half yard or fat quarter of contrasting material for bias tape. Pattern weights, washi tape, tailor's chalk, pins, matching thread, 3/4 of an inch bias tape maker, a large safety pin, scissors, pinking shears, a rotary cutter, sewing gauge, pencil, large ruler, and tracing paper. You'll also need a cutting mat to use with your rotary cutter as well as an iron, ironing surface, and sewing machine.

Basic tunic

Cutting the basic tunic

- Print out your pattern. Once its assembled, I recommend using tracing paper to preserve your pattern as a master so you can use it in different sizes for later on. I get my tracing paper from an art store. It's sometimes sold as sketching paper, and it comes in different widths. This is a 24-inch width. You can just put that over your pattern. You'll see here we have the tunic body, and it has two different lengths, a cropped version and a long version. There's the lowered neck and the back. You'll be tracing one front and then one back. And there's also the sleeve, the pocket, and for the jacket modification later. Line up the edge of your tracing paper with the edge of the pattern, and then with a pencil, choose your size and trace out. After you finish tracing, you can cut out your pattern piece, as I've done here. Just make sure to mark which size you've made, and whether it's the back or the front, as well as your fold lines. Do the same for the pocket and the sleeve. Next, grab your fabric. Make sure that it's pre-washed, and fold it in half, selvages together. Selvage is the straightedge that runs along the long side, and this is the cut edge up here. Lay it out and smooth out any wrinkles. Place the back pattern piece on the fold. Weight it down with your pattern weights. And pattern weights can really be anything, these are washers covered with fabric, you can use cans, rocks. And take your tailor's chalk, and trace around the pattern. It's important to use a contrasting color, so you can see the lines. And cut that piece out. Repeat for the front piece, and now, I'll trace the sleeve. If you have enough room, you can get both of them just by scooting them down on this fold, or you can get a little more out of your fabric with some of the smaller sizes by refolding, just making sure you have enough for the width there. Once you've cut everything out,

you'll have a back, a front, two sleeves, and a pocket. For this tunic, I'm using just one pocket, but feel free to cut two.

Assembling the basic tunic

- Now we're ready to start pinning. Take your front and back piece, and line them up at the shoulder. They'll be right sides together. Pin at the shoulder, I like to place my pins perpendicular. And you just need two or three pins just to keep everything from shifting, and you're ready to sew. Make sure your machine is in the straight stitch, and the stitch length is between the two and the three. And the seam allowance used is a 1/2 inch, and this is the measurement from the needle to the edge of the fabric. And you can double-check to see what that is, and if you have markings on your plate here, you can use that. I like to put a piece of washi tape down between the 3/8 and 5/8 measurement, that's a 1/2 inch. And that will just act as a guide. Make sure to backstitch at the front and back, reverse. After you've sewn your seam, you'll need to finish the edges. You can use pinking shears or a zigzag along the edge, or use a serger. I've sewn the second shoulder, and finished both edges. And now I'm gonna iron those edges to the back. To attach the sleeves, lay the tunic right-side up. Take your sleeve piece, and the short straight part is the cuff, and this wider curved part is the shoulder where we'll be pinning to the body. Take the fold and pinch press it to mark it. Lay your sleeve on top with right sides together. The sleeve goes on top of the body, that folded midpoint, match that to the shoulder seam, and pin. Then ease in and match the curves, pin the sleeves to the tunic body, and then pin the other side. And sew sleeve, again, using 1/2 inch seam allowance. When you're sewing, make sure that the shoulder seam as you get to it stays to the back. Repeat on the second side, and finish the seam with whichever way you want to, zigzag, pinking shears, or a serger. After you're done with that, then press the seam towards the cuff. Fold the tunic, right sides together. Match the seams where the sleeve attaches. Make sure that both of the edges are facing towards the cuff, and place a pin right there. Then start pinning from the cuff, and pin the body down to the edge. We'll sew the sleeve and side seams, and there's a little trick for how to do that. I'm gonna show you using a contrast thread just to really highlight how it's done and what's going on. Start sewing at the cuff. Sew down the sleeve. As you get to the edge of the sleeve seam, slow down, and you're gonna stop, move the needle into the down position, and lift the presser foot. Pivot the tunic, put the presser foot back down, sew for 1/2 an inch until you reach the sleeve seam. Again, put the needle in the down position, lift the presser foot up, and then shift the tunic again. Presser foot down, continue sewing down the body. Be sure to backstitch. You'll see that this little segment of sewing interrupts the angle just giving a little more room. If you have a thicker fabric, you can ahead and clip the edges just to give a little more room. But be careful to just do it, and not go too close to the line of stitching. Go ahead and finish the edges in whatever method you were using, either zigzag, pinking shears, or a serger, and repeat for the second side.

Making bias tape and finishing tunic

- Now it's time to finish the neckline with bias tape. You can of course use purchased bias tape that's already made in the store. I prefer to make my own, and I'm gonna show you how. You'll need a fat quarter, or a half yard, and you're going to find the bias, and how you do that is you take the cut edge and you fold it up to the selvedge, the side. And that 45 degree is the bias. And the reason we use bias tape rather than just a strip of fabric is because it's cut on the bias, it has a lot more stretch and give, and it's able to lay flat along the curve of the neckline, and not buckle. So once you've folded it and found that nice curve, make what I call a little sacrificial cut, where I cut the

edge off here, the fold. Just with your rotary cutter, cut all the way along. And the width of the bias tape that you'll need is an inch and 1/4, and I measure that out with a ruler, inch and 1/4. I do it with the side of the ruler. Trim the edges to make them square. Lay them on top of each other at a right angle, right sides facing. Place a pin. Sew from one corner to the other at a 45 degree angle to make a continuous strip of bias tape and join the two pieces. Trim the corner, leaving 1/4 inch. Press that open. This is where you'll use your bias tape maker. Feed the bias tape with the right side down through the larger opening. Sometimes they have a little channel that you can scoot it through. These two edges don't have to touch, but you don't want them to be wildly different, you want them to stay consistent. You need to iron and move the bias tape maker. The bias tape maker folds the edges in, and you follow along with the iron. And you'll need about 30 inches, which is about a yard, for your neckline. Fold over one edge of the bias tape and fold the raw edge in and press, just with your fingers. I like to start pinning at the right shoulder. You'll have your tunic right side out, and you're going to be attaching the bias tape to the right side. Open it up. Make sure that edge is still facing to the back. And you're gonna match the edge of the bias tape to the edge of the neckline, and just ever so slightly give a little bit of tension to the bias tape. And just make it flush. Pin around the neckline. When you get to the second shoulder, also, keep that seam folded to the back. And put a pin in it. When you get to the end, just remove that pin, overlap, and then make sure that it overlaps completely, and cut the excess. Now you're going to sew along that fold line. Unlike the rest of our seams, this is sewn with a 1/4 inch seam allowance. You can use the fold line or sew to the edge of your foot as a guide. Press the bias tape to the inside of the tunic. Here's the overlap part. You can either fold this on top, or fold it over, either way. Make sure that the edges stay to the back. I like to make sure that a little bit of the main tunic body is showing. It's almost like the very barest, I don't know, 1/16 of an inch. Just that way, it doesn't show on the wrong side. Continue pressing all the way around the whole neckline. You can pin as you go, or pin afterwards. After you've finished pinning, it'll look just like this, and now you're ready to sew, and we'll take it to the machine. You want to sew close to the edge, but not so close that you run the risk of running off the bias tape and into the body. But nor do you want to be too close to the middle, because otherwise you won't catch this last fold of the bias tape. You wanna be careful where you place your needle, and just go slowly. Now, let's hem this tunic. We're going to do that with a double-fold hem. First, fold it over 1/4 inch. Trusty little seam guide here. You can either eyeball it or just make sure you cut 1/4 inch. And just press it all the way around, 1/4 inch. Next we're gonna fold over 1/2 inch. Like so. And again, all the way around. We've pressed, we've pinned, and now we sew. There isn't a set seam allowance, just make sure that you catch the fold, sew close to the edge. And here we go! Do the same thing for the sleeves, another double-fold hem, 1/4 inch and 1/2 inch, pin and sew. Take your pocket, and you're going to do another double-fold hem at the top. Usual suspect of 1/4 inch and then 1/2 inch. Sew across the top, and after you're done with that, you'll finish all the way around the edge of the pocket in whatever method you've used this far, either pinking shears, zigzag stitch, or serger. Your pocket will now look like this. I've zigzagged all the way around. Press the raw edge to the wrong side, 1/4 inch all the way around. It can be difficult around these curves, and one trick is to use a basting stitch, which is setting the sewing machine stitch to the longest stitch length, and just sewing around this U here. Don't back-tack, and you can then pull on either side, and then that just forms a little cup in the curves, and you can help use that, the tension of the stitches, to just help press and get a nice curve. You don't wanna pull it all the way across, because you don't want this to cinch across here, you just want it in the curves. Carry on at the other side. And then just fix it. And it's super hot. (laughs) Now it's time to position the pocket on your tunic. I

have these two pockets, one is cut with the grain, with the orientation, and this one is cut cross-grain. So it's really up to you whether you want to have a pocket that stands out, or a pocket that is more camouflaged, and you can make it blend in seamlessly with the tunic. I'm gonna go for this one, a little hidden pocket. You can position it wherever you want, and I like to, once I've figured out where I want it, slip a magazine in between the two pieces, just so then when I'm pinning, I'm not at risk of pinning through two layers. Pin the pocket on the tunic. And you'll topstitch all the way around that. Opening it up, making sure that you're only sewing through the front. You're sewing close to the edge here, your needle is going to be about 1/4 inch away. Or less than 1/4 inch. I like to go back and forth on the top of the pocket. Backstitch, and snip your threads. Now you're done with your very own tunic. Look at that!

Tunic modifications

Cutting the jacket modification

- For the jacket modification, you'll need to come back to your pattern. You will need to trace the jacket modification and you'll also need to trace just one back, in your size, as well as the sleeve. Now, take your back pattern piece. We'll modify it to make it a little bigger. First, draw a line starting at the neck in the middle and draw it straight down. Draw a second line starting at the midpoint of the shoulder. You should have something that looks like this with two lines that run parallel from the midpoint of the shoulder and the center of the neck. Next, you're going to cut along those lines. Cut two strips out of your tracing paper that are at least one inch wide and as long as your back piece. Separate out the pattern piece a half-inch and lay the strips down. It might be helpful at this point if you have a surface to tape the pattern pieces down so they don't shift so much as you're doing it. I'm just using washi tape here. Lay the paper strips on top and tape them down. Repeat for the second one. Tape that down. You can see that this one's all wonky but that's okay, it still works. I'm gonna tape that down. And if you have any excess, just cut. Neaten any edges. Now you have your enlarged pattern piece. You can retrace this, if you want, to have a cleaner copy for your back. You will need to retrace it to modify it for the front. So, at least retrace it once, twice if you want a nice, clean copy without all these extra fiddly bits. Here's your newly traced piece. We'll modify this for the front by drawing a line from the inner shoulder all the way down to that edge there, it will be a diagonal, and this will become the jacket front. So, once you've drawn it, cut it. Mark that this is the front. You can use the sleeve pattern as is but if you want to make it a little longer as I have, here's how you can do that. Trace out the pattern piece all the way around, except for the cuff, and then shift it forward however many inches. I'm going to shift mine forward about four inches. Trace down the cuff. And I'm just going to freehand draw that line up, following the curve. And I now have a lengthened sleeve piece that I'll cut out and use. Lay out your fabric, fold it, selvages together, and smooth out any wrinkles. Lay the back piece on the fold, trace it, and cut one. You'll also lay your sleeve on the fold and cut two of those. The jacket modification piece is cut on the fold as well. You can cut it cross grain, so the stripes go horizontally or you could fold the fabric and cut it, so whatever pattern direction goes up and down. It's really up to you, your design choice. Now, the front pattern piece is not cut on the fold and you will have to also not line it up with this straight piece because remember, it is going to come out with that V. So, you're going to edge it out from the fold of the fabric, weight it down and trace it, and you'll end up with two front pieces. Once you've cut out your pieces, you'll have two sleeves, two jacket modifications,

which will be the collar, your back, and two fronts. Next, you will put your fronts on your jacket back, right sides together. You'll match the shoulders of the front to the back, right sides facing. You'll pin, and then we'll be ready to start sewing.

Sewing the jacket

- You'll sew the jacket just like you did the basic tunic. You'll have the shoulders sewn and then the sleeves and the sides. Also, finish those edges with whatever method. Here I did zigzag stitch, you can use pinking shears or a Serger. And you'll turn the jacket rightside out. The next step is just sew together the two jacket modification pieces to make the collar of the jacket. You'll just take the two short ends and pin them together. And sew across that using a 1/2 inch seam allowance. (sewing machine whirs) Press that seam open. Fold it down the middle lengthwise in half. And now, you're ready to attach it to the jacket. Find the center back. You can do this by taking the shoulder seams matching them up. Place a pin. Then take your folded collar piece and find the center seam where you just sewed up the jacket collar. Match those two pieces and pin. And you're just going to continue pinning from the middle the two layers of the jacket collar to the jacket, right sides together. Make sure when you get to the shoulder that the shoulder seam stays to the back as you're pinning. And continue matching the edges and pinning all the way down. And if it's a little too long, don't worry. You can trim that. Now you'll sew the collar to the jacket using a 1/2 inch seam allowance. (sewing machine whirs) Finish that edge with whatever method. I zigzagged and press the edges towards the inside of the jacket. Then go ahead and top-stitch along the inside of the jacket body. (sewing machine whirs) Next, hem both the bottom and the cuffs with a double foldover hem just like you did in a main tunic. This time using a 1/2 inch and another 1/2 inch. You can see. Finish the hems here, and you have your wonderful jacket which you can throw on top and just head out the door. Easy transition piece. Very simple to wear.

Cutting the gathered skirt and tie-back variation

- This modification features a gathered waist and a tieback. And I'll show you now how to modify the pattern for that. Trace out the size you need, and also trace out a sleeve. Measure up 12 inches from the bottom, and draw a line across. Then cut the pattern in 1/2. This top part of the piece, the bodice, will remain the same, and you can make the front, just lower the neckline for the front, and that will be your front and back piece. And now I'll show you how to modify the bottom piece to enlarge it for the gathered skirt. Take a fresh piece of paper, and put your bottom skirt on top that you cut. Measure two inches from the edge, and weight that down with whatever you have handy. Trace the top and the side, and then go ahead and shift that pattern piece down six inches. Keep it lined up with the outside edge. Go ahead and trace the bottom, and then carry it onto the gap there. You can use a straightedge, or ruler, or just eyeball it to the edge. Mark your pattern piece, then cut it out. Next, you'll make the pattern piece for the tieback. Measure out 17 1/2 inches on a piece of paper. Draw your line, then measure down 3 1/2 inches on both sides. Connect that down on the bottom, mark one end as the fold line, and label your pattern. Cut that out. After you've made the modifications, you will have a tunic front, a back piece, your skirt, a sleeve, and a tieback piece. Lay out your fabric, place your pattern pieces on the fold, trace them, cut them out, then we're ready to sew.

Sewing the gathered and tie-back variation

- To create the gathers on the skirt, you'll set your machine stitch length to the longest setting,

usually a four or five, and you'll make two lines of stitches. Remember, not to backstitch, and leave long tails. Separate the tails out and grab two of them and pull gently, gathering along. I like to start on one side, and then go to the other side, and work towards the middle. Work back and forth. Just try and evenly gather across. And it's really just a slight gathering. A lot less gathering than you would think. Take your bodice piece and lay it on top of the skirt, right sides together. Start pinning on either side. Place a pin in the middle. Pin the remaining. Careful not to pull or squish the gathers too much. Now you're ready to sew. Make sure that you switch your stitch length back down to between two and three, out of basting stitch. Sew using a half inch seam allowance. This time, remember, you are backstitching. Sew from the bodice side so you don't have to deal with the ripples of the gathers. Finish the edges. I'm going to zigzag while I'm here at the machine. You can go ahead and pull, or use a seam ripper to pick out those gathering stitches, and then press the seam edge down to the hem. Repeat for the back, basting and gathering the back skirt and attaching it to the back bodice piece. Next, we're ready to sew the tie backs. Take one of your tie back pieces, and fold it in half, lengthwise, with the right sides together, and then you can go ahead and just iron that. And you'll sew all along the raw edge there. Go ahead and sew using a quarter inch seam allowance. Turn your tie back right side out. I like to do this using a large safety pin. Pin the safety pin, one on one end of the tie back, and then feed it through. And then ahh! The emerging! It's like a cresting whale. Whoa! Look at that. You can go ahead and press it to make those edges nice and crisp. On one end of the tie back, tuck in the edges to the inside. That's about a quarter inch folded in. And then iron. Sew across to close and finish that end. Repeat the whole process for the second tie back. And now you're ready to sew the whole thing together. Put your back and front pieces together, and sew at the shoulders, just like we did with the main tunic. Finish the edges. Go ahead and attach the sleeves, just like again, the main tunic. And now you're ready to put the tie backs in. Take the unfinished edge of your tie back and position it right at the point where you've joined the skirt to the bodice. You'll sandwich it in with the sewn side down, right at the edge. And you're creating a little sandwich there in between the front and back. Pin those three pieces together. When you're pinning, match the seams where the skirt is joined, and make sure that the edges are facing down. Start pinning just like you did with the main body, pinning at the sleeve join, matching the seams. Grab the second tie back and do the same thing, positioning it in the same place, in between the skirt and the bodice. After you've pinned, you're all ready to sew down the sleeve and the sides, just like you did with the main tunic. After you've finished sewing the sides, attach the bias tape just like in the main tunic. And then hem the sleeves and the bottom of the skirt using a quarter and a half inch double fold hem. And then, you're all done. And there you have your tunic with the tie backs to create a more fitted look, and the kicky skirt. This would look super cute in a light lon, or in a cozier flannel for your autumn wear. Here is our basic tunic with pocket. Here's the jacket, with the collar. And here is cropped version, which we didn't show sewing, but it's made exactly the same as the main tunic, just using the shorter, cropped cutting lines. And there you have all the tunics. You can mix and match the modifications, adding pockets, or tie backs to any of them. You have endless variation, which is anything but basic. Make tunics and enjoy them.