
Sewing a T-Shirt with Cal Patch

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Overview

(bright music) - So in this workshop, I'm going to show you how to sew a simple T shirt with a classic neck band. And we will cut from a pattern, learn to sew with knits, and test stretchy stitches, ^sew a neck band and hem. ^The idea of sewing with knits might seem intimidating, and you may think that you need a serger to do it. But you can sew a T shirt with a regular sewing machine.

Chapter 2 - Materials

Materials

- These are the supplies you'll need for making a t-shirt. A pattern, you may have drafted one in my pattern-making simplified workshop. Or you could find a commercially available t-shirt pattern. Definitely you'll need some knit fabric, with some stretch. Probably just regular jersey is fine, cotton jersey, but we'll talk a little bit more about knits coming up. Sewing shears, nice sharp scissors for cutting your fabric. You'll need pattern weights, I like to use them when I'm cutting knits, it's a little bit easier to work with. And you'll definitely need pins as you're sewing. Some all-purpose thread, probably matching your fabric, although I'm using contrast so you can see my stitches more clearly. I like to have some small scissors around for clipping threads as I work. Some quarter inch twill tape or seam tape is handy as stay-stitching on the shoulder seams, which we'll talk more about later. Always a good idea to have your seam ripper handy, and of course your trusty sewing machine. You'll also probably wanna have some extra needles on hand. People often think, or ask me, if they need a special needle for sewing knits. Traditionally a ballpoint needle is a good idea. However, I find a universal needle works for both knits and wovens, and I use them pretty much for every sewing project.

Chapter 3 - Prepping and Cutting Your Fabric

Choosing your fabric

- You may or may not be familiar with knit fabrics and there are lots of different types. So I'd just like to show you some of them and talk about what you might want to work with for your t-shirt. I would suggest if you're new to knits, just some basic jersey. Cotton is good. I'm going to be using a cotton bamboo blend jersey, but something without lycra or spandex is going to be a good first knit project. Two other similar types of knits are cotton interlock, which is very similar, but a little bit thicker than jersey. And one by one rib, which has a little more stretch. The jersey's probably better, but this will also work fine. But just so you know, there's lots of other options. Wool jerseys can be great. There are novelty stitches like this is a wool thermal, or a wool rib. You may find later that working with cotton lycra jersey could be a good idea if you want a really stretchy t-shirt. Cotton fleece, what they make sweatshirts out of is great. You might be lucky enough to find some novelty pointelle type of stitches. That's where the knit has a little bit of holes in it. This is a rib pointelle, and a thermal that's made of cotton with a print on it. The thing to remember is that every type of knit is going to react and behave very differently, so the basic pattern that we've made is really meant to fit with 100% cotton jersey, or a jersey without a lot of stretch. If you use that pattern and it works for jersey and then you try it out of some super stretchy thermal, you may find the t-shirt's too big. So really each pattern is made for a specific type of knit, and you'll want to make that decision early

on.

Cut out your fabric

- To get started, we'll need to cut our pattern out from our jersey. First, you'll want to lay out your fabric and make sure it's nice and smooth. We have it folded down the length direction, so that your selvages are together, and you have a fold on one side. It's very important when we're working with knits to pay attention to the grainline. The grain is the direction that runs parallel to the selvage and the fold. And the reason why you want to be really careful, even more so than with wovens, is that knits have a lot of stretch in the cross-direction, the cross-grain, but not so much in the length. There is still a little bit of stretch in the lengthwise grain, but you really want that stretch to be working in the horizontal direction. We have our pattern here. So, I'm going to lay it directly on the fold, because my instructions say cut one on the fold. And even though my fabric is doubled, because I lay it on the fold, it becomes one piece when I open it up. So, I place this exactly lined up. My grainline shows me that I have it placed in the right direction. And I'm going to use my weights to hold it secure. I like using the weights because they hold things flat without getting ruffled up like the pins might, but if you just have pins, that's fine, too. I'm ready to begin cutting. So, I'm just going to carefully cut around the pattern with my nice sharp fabric shears. (scissors crunch) It's important when you're cutting knits to not move everything around, because the knit will definitely shift and your pieces could get distorted. So, even though that means you may end up in some awkward angles like this, better for you to move yourself around than to start shifting everything to make it more convenient. People often ask me if they should wash their knits before working with them, and, technically, it's probably a good idea, however, I find that when I wash my knits, they get all kind of ruffled up, and it can be really hard to lay them out and get them really flat, so I actually often don't wash my knits first. Though, if shrinkage is going to be a big factor for you, you might prefer to wash. (scissors crunch) And my front piece is finished. I can take the pattern off. So, I cut two layers on the fold, and that opens up to be one complete T-shirt front. Now you can go ahead and cut out your sleeve and back pieces, and then we'll be ready to sew.

Chapter 4 - Sewing Body of T-Shirt

Stretchy seam test swatches

- When sewing with knits, it's very important that your seams will stretch, because a stretchy knit needs a stretchy stitch in order that the seam won't break when you're wearing it. So I'm going to show you that even your regular sewing machine has plenty of options for you. I do have a little bit of a fancy electronic machine with a lot of stitches, but even a basic machine, as long as you have a zigzag stitch, you'll have something to work with. One of my favorite stitches to use is the stretch straight stitch, which is actually done by moving two steps forward, one step back, two steps forward, one step back. This action creates a little bit of stretch built right into the seam. So that's a good one. Another is the zigzag stitch and just by using a narrow width and a narrow length such as 1.5 millimeters, in each direction, it'll give you a nice stretchy seam, which might surprise you, because it's so basic, but it works quite well. I also have on my machine a mock-serger stitch. This is a nice one because it combines a straight stretch stitch with a almost serger-like finishing stitch, kind of a zigzag effect. So that's a good one. It will reinforce your seams and finish the edges a little bit. I actually don't usually finish my edges on my knits because knits won't unravel. So just trimming them after you sew the seam will be sufficient. As I mentioned before, every knit has a personality of its own, so it's very important to do a few tests to see what kind of stitch works best with your knit

on your machine. I'm going to try the stretch straight stitch first, just to see how that works on my knit. You should just play around. It'll help you get to know the knit you're working with and see which type of stitch is going to work best for what you're doing. (machine whirs) This is the stretch straight stitch, and you can see how the machine is moving forward and backward. One, one, two, one. And that's your stretch straight stitch. This is actually a really cool stitch because it has a lot of stretch in it, and many people don't even realize that they have it on their machine, but look for it and see, you probably do. Now I'll show you the tiny zigzag stitch. I like to use a width of 1.5 millimeters, (beeping) and a length of 1.5 also, but you should experiment, see what works for you. Every knit is different. Every machine is different. (machine whirs) So there's what the tiny zigzag looks like. It's got a good bit of stretch. Really, you should give it good stretch and make sure it's enough for your fabric, because if you pop some stitches, you could also try a shorter stitch length or maybe a wider stitch will give you a little more action. But that looks pretty good. So I've done two test samples and they're actually both laying pretty flat, so I'm pretty happy with both of them, but I think I'm going to go with the zigzag because it's a quicker stitch, and it seems to be working quite well for this.

Sew side and shoulder seams

- We've cut out our pieces and selected a good stretchy stitch. Now we're ready to put the pieces together and begin sewing our T-shirt. In order to put the front to the back, we first need to determine which is the right and wrong side of the jersey. There are two different sides to jersey. One is the knit side, which is the front or right side, and on the back side is actually the purls. If you're a knitter, you'll recognize these when you look very close up to each stitch. They are knits and purls, just like in hand knitting, just on a very small scale. We're ready to put the front and back together, and now I can see which is the right and wrong side, and the more you work with knits, the more familiar you'll get with the different sides. It's fine if you prefer to use the purl side of the jersey too, but generally, the knit side is considered to be the right side. So I'm placing my front and back together, right sides together, lining them up along the side seams and shoulder seams. It's probably a good idea to use some pins, especially if you're new to sewing with knits. They are pretty sticky, and they'll kind of hold together but you don't want them wiggling around as you're sewing your seams. It's a good idea to be placing your pins right along the seam line since that's where you'll be sewing. That looks like enough pins. We can go to the machine. We've established that we're using the tiny zigzag stitch, so here's our first seam. With the zigzag, you can do a little back stitch to begin, and then go ahead and move forward. Always keep a close eye on the stitching and make sure that fabric is moving through the machine. Sometimes with knits, especially right at the beginning of a seam, the needle can push it down and it can get stuck, so just make sure everything's moving along nicely. I always like to take my pins out before I stitch over them. Jersey does have a tendency to curl up a little bit, so just smooth it out if necessary, and approaching the end of the seam. You're going to wanna do a little back stitch at the end, just to secure the end of the seam, and there's your first side seam. Next, you'll sew the other side seam. Pin it and sew it the same way you just did, then we can move on to the shoulder seam. The shoulder seam is going to need a little bit of a special technique because generally, you don't want the shoulder seams on a T-shirt to stretch, and the first seam was a vertical seam, which is the lengthwise grain of the knit, which doesn't have a whole lot of stretch. It has a little, but not as much as the cross grain has a lot more stretch, and we don't really want our shoulder seams growing and the sleeve creeping down your arm, so I like to use a little bit of some kind of woven, non-stretchy ribbon or tape. This

happens to be quarter inch twill tape, which is something I like to use, but there's lots of options. You probably have something around you could use. There's a rayon seam tape that works really well, or you could just use a ribbon if you have something like that laying around. It just needs to be not stretchy and pretty thin so that it won't be adding a lot of bulk to your seam. Just cut it approximately the length of your shoulder seam. It can be a little longer, and place it right on the shoulder seam line, and then you can pin everything in place. Just make sure the tape is about a half inch in so that your seam line will be somewhere within the tape. If it seems like too much trouble to pin and sew everything at once, you could also sew your shoulder seam first and then add the seam tape with a second line of stitching, but it shouldn't be too difficult. Okay, and take this to the machine. Since I'm now sewing a seam that won't stretch because of the rigid tape, I can go to my regular straight stitch, and I like to be around 2.8 millimeters. Definitely want a little back stitch because we're doing straight stitch. Doesn't matter if the stitching is in the center of the tape. In fact, it's actually better if it's off center because when the tape is gets folded back, you won't have both ends of it lying on top of each other. And back stitch the other end. And there's your nice, non-stretchy shoulder seam.

Sew sleeve

- You can go ahead and sew your other shoulder seam just like you did the first one. And then we're ready to move on to sleeves. I've gone ahead and sewn my sleeve underarm seam because it's exactly the same technique you used for your side seam. Since I used the tiny zig-zag stitch, I did the same stitch for my underarm seam. You just fold the sleeve, you just fold the sleeve in half with the right sides together and sew along that long side. Now I can go ahead and turn it right-side out so that I can place it into the armhole. And this is something that many people find really intimidating, setting in a sleeve, but it's actually not very difficult. So I have a tube basically, which is the sleeve and I'm going to be attaching it to another tube which is the armhole. I just need to line everything up and then it will be very simple to sew them together. I'm starting here with the side seam of the shirt to the underarm seam of the sleeve so those two seams are right on top of each other. I have my seam allowances opened up, and I'm gonna pin and I'm placing the pin on the inside of my tube because that's where I'm going to be sewing from. When you're sewing two circular pieces together you always want to begin at one end then go to the opposite. So I'm next moving to my notch in the shoulder of the sleeve. And lining it up with the shoulder seam. And I'll place a pin there as well, on the inside of the tube. The lower half of the armhole is actually, both your pieces are the same shape so they'll fit together really nicely. And then the upper half you'll notice the sleeve cap is a little bit rounded. And the top of the armhole of the body is very straight, but if you just use your fingers and work them together, remembering that they're only going to match up at the seam line which is 1/2 inch in from the edge. The edges might seem a little bit puckery, you can see you have some extra fabric there because the edge is little bit longer than the seam line since we're on a curve. But right at the seam line everything does actually match up. And that should be good for this side. Go ahead and do the same thing on the other side, so that I can stitch them together. To set the sleeve in, I'm going to use the same stitch settings that I've already been using for my seams. And I'm beginning down at the underarm seam and side seam connection, which is the bottom of the armhole, basically your armpit. Cause I always like to start a circular seam in the most discreet place so the overlapping stitches won't be visible at all. I'm gonna do a little backstitch to start. (machine stitching) And then move forward. (machine stitching) Even though you're sewing a tube, you just wanna make sure that the section in front of you is nice and flat and

be sure that your two edges are nice and lined up. And it should all go smoothly. (machine stitching) You may sometimes need to stretch the fabric as you're sewing. See how I have this little bubble here? Can also push it down and stretch a little bit and that should flatten out the two layers so that they join smoothly. (machine stitching) And keep checking that your layers are both there. Curling is going to be a factor. (machine stitching) It's helpful not to take your pins out until you're right up close to them. That'll keep your pieces together better. (machine stitching) Try to be aware of what's happening on the underside, I'm approaching my shoulder seam so I should make sure it's flat and I see that the two layers are kind of folded so I'll try to smooth them out. (machine stitching) And we're almost around the whole armhole. As you can see it's not such a scary thing. (machine stitching) We're on the home stretch. (machine stitching) Coming around to the beginning of the seam. (machine stitching) I like to overlap about 1/2 inch or maybe even an inch. And then do a couple backstitches. I always like to trim my beginning threads right now, so that I don't have to come back and do it later. And the complete tubular armhole seam is stitched and when you turn it right-side out, you have a beautiful set-in sleeve.

Chapter 5 - Create Neckband

Measure and cut neckband

- There are many ways to finish the neckline of a T-shirt. One is a classic, simple neckband, which is what I'm going to show you in this workshop. But I'd just like you to see for future reference a few other ways. You can try some decorative elastic. And this little swatch has part of it with the lacy, elastic sewn flap. And, another option is you can use it to gather up the neckline. There's also fold-over elastic which covers both sides, and finishes the edge of the neck. So let me show you how to go ahead with a classic neckband. It's the simplest method and what I recommend for beginners. We need to measure the neckline of our T-shirt. You'll wanna use a tape measure and stand it up so that you can bend it accurately around the curve. I've got 14 inches for the front, and then I'll continue around the back so that I'm getting the full circumference. So it looks like 22 inches is my neck circumference, and that's going to help me determine how long to cut the piece for my neckband. However, I need to cut it a little bit shorter than the 22 inches, because the band will be laying inside of that circle, which means it's a slightly smaller circle. So I like to subtract about 10%. So if it's 22 inches, 10% would be a little over two inches, so I'll cut my band about 20 inches long. And the width of it will be two times my desired finished neckband width. So for example, this neckband here is about three-eighths of an inch wide. So if I double that, I've got three-quarter inch, plus I need a half inch for seam allowance. We have a quarter inch of seam allowance on our neckline seam, and I need to double the quarter to get a half. So that was two times three-eighths is three quarters, and a half inch is two times my seam allowance. That's just an example; you can do it any width you like. And you can see how that's going to look if you need to guesstimate how wide you want your band. So let's see if this is already the right size. It's a little longer than I need. I need 20 inches, and I've got it folded, so that would be 10 inches. So I need to seam these short ends together making the band into a tube.

Sew and attach neckband

- I can use regular straight stitch, 'cause it's just a short little seam that won't really be getting stretched, and a quarter-inch seam allowance will be plenty. (machine whirs) And now I've got my band sewn into a tube. I can just trim this edge so that it's a little more even. Knits are very forgiving so, slight imperfections will all come out in the wash. And then, I need to fold this in half so that the

raw edges are together, and I'm folding the wrong sides together so that they're right-side out. Put a couple of pins around the band to hold the edges together, and then you can sew it. And I'm going to use a regular zigzag, starting at the join of the neckband, and I'm zigzagging right over the two raw edges to attach that. (machine whirs) We have a nice neckband that's going to look very lovely sewn into the neckline. So to do that I'm going to flip it, so the raw edges of the band are lined up with the raw edge of the neckline. I've got the seam of the band right on top of one of my shoulder seams. It doesn't really matter which one, and now I just need to figure out how to evenly distribute this around the entire circumference. In theory, I could find the opposite end by folding where the seam is and folding the other side and this is exactly half way along the length. However, my back neckline is shorter than the front, so I can't just go ahead and match this to the other shoulder seam, but what I usually do is find that point and then just shift, maybe an inch toward the back, and see if you lay the band around the neckline if it seems like the right proportion, and I feel like the back section of the band is still a little long and the front is a little short, so maybe I'll go another half inch or so over, line that up and now it's starting to look a little better. I think I can still go over a wee bit more, and that's looking like it's going to fit nicely. So that point I can now pin to the other shoulder seam. I've got two ends pinned, and now I wanna find the center of the band, to the center of the back neck and seam in the front. So whenever I need to find the center of something, I just fold it in half, matching up the two pins, and get the middle where the fold is and I'll find the center fold of the back neck, and then I can place the two together, and attach with a pin. Same thing for the front center of the band, center of the front neckline, and I join them together with a pin. Now my four opposite points of the circle are joined and I know things are evenly distributed, so I can go back and just fill in each section 'cause I definitely need a lot of pins here to keep everything connected as I stitch. Use as many pins as you think are necessary. You might need a few more than me if this is very new to you. Pins are your friends. They will help keep everything together as you are sewing around. Better too many than not enough. I have enough pins into the band, so I can go to the machine and attach the band to the shirt. I'm using the mock-serger stitch, which has the nice way of finishing all of the raw edges and enclosing them into the seam. If you don't have it on your machine, just go ahead and use your zigzag. (machine whirs) This stitch is like a combination of the straight stretch stitch and the zigzag, and I'm placing it so the zigzag is going right over the edge. As you're stitching around this neckband, it's going to be very important to keep making sure you can see the underneath layer which is the t-shirt, itself, because if you don't see it there, it's very likely that it could be pulling under, just a little bit and you won't actually connect the band to the shirt. So always just make sure you see your edges and even keep the shirt pulled out just a little bit so that it definitely isn't getting lost. (machine whirs) And there you have your lovely finished neckband!

Chapter 6 - Finishing and Variations

Finish raw edges and variations

- The final step in making your t-shirt is to hem all of your bottom edges, which is the bottom of the body of the t-shirt and also the cuffs of the sleeve. I've done a few test swatches with different stitches. Trying turning twice, or just turning once. I've got a sample of the straight stretch stitch, which I don't think looks great because it's a little bit bubbly. I've got a tiny zig-zag, which I think looks pretty nice from both sides. And I've only turned this edge up once, which gives you a thinner hem, which is nice. And my third swatch is the mock serger stitch that I just used to attach the neck band. And that one looks pretty good too. But I think since I've been using the zig-zag on my other

seams, I'll go ahead and be consistent and use it for the hems. So all I need to do is turn up the edge. And actually, I like to trim the bottom of the seam allowance of the side seam at an angle. Just to minimize the bulk when I fold these up. And there'll be several layers together. Open up your seam, turn it up. Maybe trim this so it's a little bit more even. I'm just going to turn it once because in my test that was the one I liked best. I'll pin this all the way around and then I can begin stitching it up. I've got the zig-zag. And this one can be a little wider. (beeping) Maybe I'll do 2.5 millimeters. Width. And 1.5 length. (machine whirring) Just play around and see what settings you like. And I'm placing the stitches so that when it comes down on the left it's wrapping over the raw edge, which will enclose that edge into the seam. Coming back around to the end of the hem, which is also the beginning. Do a few back stitches. And you've got a nicely finished hem. Which looks great from the front. I'll ahead and hem the sleeve cuffs in exactly the same way as I did the bottom. (machine whirring) And there is our finished t-shirt, looking lovely. As you can see, it's really not that difficult to sew with knits. You've just made your first t-shirt. Now there are so many fun ways you can play around. You can mix fabrics, so different edge treatments. Have fun making some cool t-shirts and sewing with knits.