Exploring Sewing: Pillowcases
Project Guide

Name: ____________________________  Age: __________

4-H Club: ________________________________________________________

Advisor: _______________________________________________________

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
Planning Your Project
Information and Requirements

NOTE: This project guide is designed as a very beginning level experience for members new to sewing. The emphasis of this project is learning, exploring, and trying something new, not competition. Members are still encouraged to complete their project experience at 4-H Pre-Fair Judging in July.

This is a county only project and is therefore not eligible for Ohio State Fair competition.

About “Exploring Sewing: Pillowcases”
- Designed as a first time sewing experience for members of any age.
- Requires access to a sewing machine
- May require the help of a project helper with basic sewing experience.
- This project can be taken for one year. Consider trying “Sew Fun” if you are interested in exploring more sewing basics.

Project Requirements :
1. Complete Project Guide Learning Activities
2. Sew one pillowcase (pillowcase - pattern included or choose your own)
3. Complete the project review page.

Judging Requirements
1. Your completed Project Guide Book
2. One sewn pillowcase.
3. Feel free to bring any other items you wish to share with the judge

Fair Exhibit
1. Your sewn item.
## Planning Your Project

### Step 2 - Learning Activities

**Learning Activities:**

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<thead>
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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date Completed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify Major Parts of Sewing Machine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where Does the Thread Go</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning to Thread Your Machine</td>
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<td>Plan and Make Your Own Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others (optional)</td>
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<td><em>Examples: Watch a sewing video online or attend a class</em></td>
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### Step 3 - Service Activities

**Sample Service Activities: ***(Optional)***

- Help another member with their project
- Teach a friend or neighbor something you have learned
- Give an item you’ve sewn to someone in need

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Exploring Parts of the Sewing Machine

Every sewing machine looks just a little different. Some have many electronic controls and buttons, while others use manual switches and knobs. However, all sewing machines work in a similar way and have the same basic parts.

Find the parts form the diagram above on the machine you are using. You may need the help of your sewing machine user’s manual or project helper.
Where Does the Thread Go?

Every sewing machine has a defined path for the thread to wind off of the spool, through a tensioning system, and into the needle.

If your machine is already threaded (you can see thread running into the machine from the spool), follow the thread and see where it goes. You may need to open some doors to follow it’s path.

Find the machine’s bobbin case and see how the bobbin is threaded into the machine, too. The bobbin is usually located under the needle, or in the side of the machine.

Learning to Thread Your Machine

Review your user’s manual or ask your project helper to show you how to thread the machine. Practice several times until you are comfortable with the steps.

Repeat this process with the bobbin thread, which will require different steps.

Don’t’ Have a User’s Manual?
You can find user’s manuals for many sewing machines online if you know the brand and model of your machine. Others may be available to order. The model information is often located on the back or the bottom of the sewing machine. Sometimes, you may need to open drawers and doors to locate the manufacturer’s information.
Test Drive
Sewing on Scraps to Practice

Practice Time

Supplies:
- A sewing machine
- A project helper who knows how to use the machine
- Several large pieces of scrap (unneeded) material
  Each piece should be the same type of fabric
  (cotton works well and it easy to sew)
  Trim any stray threads along the fabric edges (frayed edges)
- Thread
  All-purpose or machine sewing thread is best
  Do not use coated hand-sewing thread in a machine.

1. Have your project helper demonstrate how to sew two pieces of fabric together. Watch how they:
   - Feed the fabric into the machine
   - Knot the thread by sewing forward and backward over the same spot at the beginning and end
   - Control the machine’s speed.
   - Cut the threads when they are done.
   - For this project, you will only need to sew straight lines.
   - It is helpful to trim any extra threads off the edges of the fabric.

2. Find two pieces of fabric and try it yourself.
   - Practice several times until you start to feel comfortable with the machine and can control the direction of the fabric and the speed.
   - For this project you only need to be able to sew straight lines, but you can experiment with steering by sewing small curves or angles.

Helpful Hints
- Adjust your seat and get comfortable before you start. It is most comfortable to sew with your feet flat on the floor. Use a large, flat box under your feet if needed.
- Go slow at first. It is easier to control your fabric at slower speeds.
- You can also practice “on paper” by removing the thread and allowing the needle to punch holes as you “sew” but be aware that it may dull your needle.
- Have fun!
Test Drive
Sewing Machine Adjustments

Adjusting Your Sewing Machine

There are several adjustments you can make on a sewing machine, including the thread tension, stitch type, stitch width, and stitch length.

**Thread Tension**
The thread tension allows you to set a balance between how hard the upper thread (from the spool) pulls against the lower thread (from the bobbin).

If your tension is well-balanced the two threads will meet in the middle. You will see only upper thread on the top of your fabric, and only lower thread on the bottom. The fabric will not appear stretched or gathered at the stitches.

If the upper thread tension is too tight, you will be able to see the lower thread pulling through both layers of fabric.

If the upper tension is too loose, the bobbin thread will pull it through both layers of fabric and you will be able to see the upper thread on the bottom piece of fabric.

*Note: Thread tension is almost always adjusted by changing the tension of the upper thread. Bobbin tension can be adjusted on most machines, however it is a more difficult process. Never adjust the bobbin tension on someone else’s machine without their permission and assistance.*

**Helpful Hints**
- Check your machine’s tension by examining your practice pieces before you begin to sew your project.
- It is easiest to adjust your tension if you use two colors of thread. Use one color on the spool and a different color on the bobbin, so you can easily see the two different threads.
Adjusting Your Sewing Machine

**Stitch Selection**
Most sewing machines are capable of creating not only a standard running stitch, but also many other decorative or useful stitches. Check your machine's users manual or stitch selection area to see the options you have on your machine.

Some stitches have specific purposes, while others are for decorative use. Your user’s manual will describe the stitch options on your machine.

For the pillowcase project you will only need a regular, straight stitch (A in the diagram above) for sewing the seams, and a simple zig zag stitch (B in the diagram above) for finishing the seam edges.

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**Helpful Hints**
- Overlock stitches (G in diagram above) can often be used to both sew and finish a seam at the same time if your machine as this option.
- When adjusting your stitch type, you may find you also need to adjust the length and width (see next page).
Test Drive
Sewing Machine Adjustments

Adjusting Your Sewing Machine

**Stitch Length and Width**
You can adjust both the length and width of most stitch types.

[Diagram of zig zag stitch with labels for length and width]

Samples of how adjustments affect a zig zag stitch (5 stitches shown)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wider Stitch (big number)</th>
<th>More Narrow Stitch (small number)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Longer Length (large number)</td>
<td>Shorter Length (small number)</td>
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Helpful Hints
- **Straight Stitch:**
  - You can only adjust the length of the straight stitch (average length is 2 - 2.5). The width is typically set at “0” although changing that setting will not affect your stitch.
- **Zig Sag Stitch: T**
  - The average length is 2 - 2.5 just like to straight stich. The average width is 3 - 4.
Plan and Make Your Project
You Choose!

Project Options

For this project, you only need to sew ONE item. “Exploring Sewing” projects are designed to be something you can complete in one to two sittings.

A set of instructions for sewing a standard-sized pillowcase are included. There are also instructions online and at craft stores which may create larger pillowcases or those with extra trim.

If you or your project helper would like to use a different pattern or set of instructions for your pillowcase, feel free to use that plan instead. However, be careful to select an easy project suitable for a first time sewing experience. See the tips below for help.

Tips for Choosing a First Sewing Project

- Consider projects with only a few pieces of fabric as opposed to designs which include many different pieces. “Patchwork” pillowcases are not good beginner projects.
- Look for instructions involving only straight seams. Curves can be hard and it’s best to try those after you have mastered straight seams.
- Easy projects use a few large pieces of fabric. Those which use many or small pieces may frustrate young sewers.
These instructions are for a simple pillowcase, made from two different fabrics. This results in your pillowcase having a decorative band of different fabric along the edge.

**Gather Supplies:**
1 Yard of “Fabric A” (the body of your pillowcase)
1/3 Yard of “Fabric B” (the decorative band of trim)
Coordinating thread
Pins
Sewing machine
Iron and Ironing Board or Mat
Project Helper

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**Fabric B**  (trim)  
**Fabric A**  (body)

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**Choosing Fabric**

- **Type of Fabric**
  - 100% cotton is a great fabric for pillowcases.
  - This pattern works well with 44-45 inch wide fabric.
  - Flannel can sometimes be difficult to work with and is not a great choice for first time sewers.

- **Patterns and Prints**
  - Random patterns and solids are easiest to work with
  - Patterns with checks and stripes will show mistakes more easily (crooked cuts or seams)
  - Choose fabrics which go well together. Consider one novelty fabric and one solid or small print.
Pre-Washing Your Fabric

When pre-washing fabric, choose the same washer and dryer settings you would for your finished product. Because pillowcases are bedding which are often washed in hot water and dried in a tumble dryer, this is also how you should pre-wash your fabric.

After washing and drying, use an iron to press the fabric and remove any wrinkles. Please be sure to have an adult help you with the iron.

Cutting Fabric

Fabric can be cut to size using scissors or a rotary cutter and mat. If you are using a rotary cutter, be sure to have an adult help you. These tools are very sharp and can be dangerous.

Cut each of fabric to get the correct size. Fabric cut off the bolt at the store is not cut perfectly. You will need to trim your pieces to size and remove the salvage edge (a tightly woven band of fabric along the edge).

Fabric A (Body): 45 inches x 31 inches
Fabric B (Trim): 45 inches x 9 inches

Why Pre-Wash?

Pre-washing your fabric will cause it to shrink before you sew your project, instead of after. If your pillowcase shrinks after you have sewn it, your pillow may not longer fit.

Pre-washing will also wash out any extra dye in the fabric which will prevent your colors from running into one another on the finished project.
Pin You Pieces Together

Pinning your pieces together helps to keep the fabric aligned while sewing.

1. Lay out Fabric B (trim fabric) with the right side of the fabric facing down.
2. Fold the fabric in half length-wise, being sure that the edges and corners of the top and bottom layer are lined up. Now you should see the right side of the fabric.

3. Use the iron to press the folded edge. Starting in the middle and working your way out to each edge helps prevent wrinkles and folds. Be sure to get adult help with this step and use an ironing board or mat underneath.

Right vs. Wrong Sides of Fabric

Every fabric has a “right” and a “wrong” side.

The right side is the one which will show on your finished product. It is usually the brightest colored, or the side which best shows the printed pattern. The wrong side will be hidden inside your pillowcase, and is actually the back of the fabric.
3. Carefully set aside your folded trim piece.
4. Lay out your Fabric A (pillowcase body) wrong side up, with the 45 inch edge along the top.

5. Lay the folded trim fabric along the top, with the cut edges lined up with the body fabric, and the folded edge towards the bottom.

6. Use pins to secure the top edge. Pin all three fabric layers together every 3-4 inches. Be careful to keep the cut edges lined up.
Sewing the Trim to the Body

You are ready to begin sewing.

1. Load your bobbin with your colored thread and install it into your machine. See your owner's manual or ask your project helper for assistance.
2. Place your colored thread on the thread holder of your machine and thread the end through your machine.
3. Sew through all three layers, leaving a 1/2 inch seam allowance. The seam allowance is the fabric between the edge and the needle.
4. Don’t forget to sew in place or sew in reverse back over your first few stitches and your last few stitches to knot your thread in place at both ends.
5. Remove pins as you get near them. Sewing over them can cause you to break a needle.

Sew along this line

Leave 1/2 inch of fabric as a seam allowance
Sewing the Trim to the Body

5. To prevent the fabric from fraying, you need to finish the seam, by sewing closer to the edge with a zig zag stitch. You will want to sew as close to the edge as possible without going off the edge.

Finishing Seams
There are many ways to finish a seam. Using a zig zag stitch like described is one easy way. You can research other ways online if you would like.

You may also use a special sewing machine called a serger which sews over the edge of the fabric and trims off the extra at the same time.
Pressing the Seam

After sewing, you need to press the seam to one side. Pressing it helps it to lay more flat in the finished product.

1. Use the hot iron the press the seam flat in the same positon you sewed it. (Do not open the fabric yet) Be sure to get adult help with this step and use an ironing board or mat underneath.
2. Decide which way to press the seam. You usually press towards the darker fabric. In the example below we are pressing towards the green trim fabric.
3. If you are pressing towards the trim fabric (like this example), be sure your trim fabric is on top. If you are pressing towards the body, flip the entire thing over so that the body fabric is on top.
4. Fold the top fabric up. Now you should be able to see the seam where the two fabrics meet.
5. Using the iron, gently press the bottom fabric first near the seam.
6. Then move the iron gently over the seam towards the top fabric and press firmly. Hold the iron for 1-2 seconds to press the seam tightly.
7. Continue along the entire length of your seam.
8. Be careful not to stretch your fabric.
**Sewing the Pillowcase Edges**

1. Place your fabric in front of you with the right side facing up.
2. Fold it vertically, aligning the top corners of the trim fabric with one another, and the bottom corners of the body fabric with one another. Carefully smooth the fabric to remove any wrinkles or bunches.

3. Prepare the pillowcase for sewing by pinning along the edges you will sew like you did when sewing the trim to the body.
4. Sew along the pinned edges, using a 1/2 inch seam allowance.
5. Don’t forget to sew in place or sew in reverse back over your first few stitches and your last few stitches to knot your thread in place at both ends.

When you get to the corner, you need to pivot your fabric
- Sew slowly as you approach the corner so you have more control.
- Stop sewing 1/2 inch before the edge, leaving your needle in the fabric.
- Lift the presser foot
- Carefully turn the fabric 90 degrees
- Continue sewing along the second edge.

6. Finish this seam with a zig zag stitch or other method.
Finishing Your Pillowcase

1. Turn your pillowcase right side out.
2. Reach into the pillowcase and carefully smooth out the seam inside, so that the pillowcase lays flat and the corner is square.

3. Use your iron to press the entire pillowcase, starting with the seamed edges, helping them to lay as flat as possible.
4. Congratulations! You are done with your pillowcase!

Want to Explore More?
Practice your skills by making a pillowcase gift for a friend (optional)
Consider taking another sewing project next year!