

# Hosting a Sewing Day

Authentic pioneer techniques can be used for every level of trek clothing, from the basic Flavor of History, all the way to fully-authentic clothing. Hosting a sewing day leads to good fellowship, support, and personal accomplishments. Plan for a two-hour session; this is long enough to complete a sunbonnet, or an apron, or a petticoat. To do all three in one day, plan for a Saturday, midmorning to mid-afternoon.

## Budgets

None of the projects presented in the Pioneer Pack are costly (sunbonnets can be made for about \$5, aprons for around \$7 and petticoats for under \$10, for instance).

Consider asking in the ward for donations of all-cotton yardage in “old fashioned” prints, plaids, and stripes of 45” lengths or more. You aren’t going to get donations of historically accurate prints, necessarily, but “old fashioned” is fine for the flavor of history! It is vital that all fabrics be 100% natural fibers—no rayon, polyester, etc.

One of the best ways to save even more is for individuals on to sign up for coupon mailers from a chain fabric store (such as Joann’s). When a coupon for “40% Off One Item” arrives, use it to purchase an entire unopened bolt of 36” or 45” white muslin in the quilting section. Bolts have between 25 and 50 yards each. Divide the bolt into 4 yard lengths (a generous amount for a petticoat), and each teen or adult can make their petticoat for about \$10 in fabric. (Encourage individual families, or groups of friends, to do this, and save!)

## Sign-ups and Commitments

It’s important to know how many people will attend, so you can arrange an appropriate number of machines, irons, mentors, and social distancing as appropriate. Sign-up sheets with a deadline, a materials list, and perhaps a materials purchase contribution (such as for a petticoat, above) will help participants commit to attending.

## Set-up

Bring out long banquet tables and chairs; you can fit about three machines at each table. Since the projects include steps for machine, steps for hand, and steps to press, you can plan for at least two sewists to share each machine. Machines need not be complex: a straight stitch is the only function you’ll be using.

Sergers are not needed for any project, and won’t speed up any step of construction. Extension cords with multi-plug ends will be very useful!

Plan for a pressing station (ironing board, iron, pitcher of water, and a small “landing zone” table) for each sewing table. Basic handsewing supplies (#10 sharps or #10 crewel needles, thimbles, and beeswax) are also helpful. Two to three sewists and one mentor can work at each table.

Each sewing machine should be set up with:

- 100% white cotton sewing thread, one spool, and
- at least three wound bobbins
- New pack of #14/90 sharp machine needles
- One pair sewing scissors, sharp
- One seam ripper, sharp (reverse sewing is a part of every project!)

## Skills

Mentors should be comfortable demonstrating and assisting with these basic sewing skills:

- Straight stitch seams by machine
- Running stitch by hand
- Pressing seams
- Folding and pressing hems
- Drawing up gathers

The projects here on the Trek page and elsewhere on the Sewing Academy site teach historic methods where they are easier than modern machine sewing methods. Some hand sewing techniques (such as for gathering) are less frustrating for novice sewists, and yield a far superior result in the finished garment. Mentors who are mainly familiar with modern machine techniques will want to practice the handwork, to better demonstrate it. Clothing need not be perfect to be highly functional.

## Your Sewing Session

**Start with a prayer.** This really does make a difference! The added patience, perseverance, and clarity of mind for each person dramatically enhances the experience.

**Divide** your sewists into groups with mentors, or into “skill stations.” Each project needs to be completed in the order described in the pattern. With larger groups, it may be helpful to work on more than one project, to stagger the instruction. Many skills will be used at more than one step, or in multiple projects; once a skill is learned, mentors help reinforce and enhance confidence of individual sewists. Learning to correct mistakes is part of sewing! Mentors must be comfortable teaching “reverse sewing”, and maintaining a positive, patient attitude toward mistakes.

**Background music** can also help keep everyone on task and concentrating, but watch the volume level; normal conversational tones are important to prevent the sewing day becoming painful. If you are working with a small group in someone’s home, turn on a church history movie once everyone is involved in construction, or turn on pioneer-era music and use the time for “internal” trek prep.

## Clean-up

Don’t forget this step! Have everyone share the load to put up tables and chairs, sweep and vacuum the work areas, and police the floors for stray pins. As in pioneer days, many hands make light work. Enjoy your sewing projects!

