

Sewing Repairs & Alterations — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a bench-side practice log. Each section matches a module and walks you through real repairs on your own garments, with worksheets to record measurements, machine settings, and outcomes. Work through the items with actual clothes in hand, and use the templates to track your repair queue and the settings that worked.

Your Repair Kit and the Machine

Assemble your kit, dial in your machine, and build a tested reference of needle and tension settings for the fabrics you sew most.

Checklist: Core Kit Audit

- Sharps hand needles in sizes 5 to 10 are in the kit
- A thimble that fits my middle finger snugly
- Fabric-only shears, labelled and kept away from paper
- Seam ripper with a sharp point and small thread snips
- Polyester all-purpose thread in black, white, navy, grey, and beige
- Glass-head pins, fabric chalk or chalk liner, and a tape measure
- A working iron, press cloth, and a tailor's ham or rolled towel

Worksheet: Machine Tension Test Log

Sew a test seam on a doubled scrap of each fabric you use. Record the dial setting that produces a balanced stitch (top and bottom identical). Leave the result column blank until you have inspected the stitch. Fabric (e.g. cotton poplin, denim, jersey)

Needle type and size used

Stitch type and length (mm)

Top tension dial setting tested

Balanced? top and bottom match (yes/no)

Notes / final setting kept

Exercise: Threading From Memory

Unthread the machine completely, then rethread the top and bobbin without looking at the manual. Sew a 10 cm test seam and inspect both sides. Repeat until you can do it cleanly twice in a row.

- Where in the path did you hesitate or make a mistake?
 - What did the underside of the seam look like, and what did it tell you about tension?
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- List the three reset steps you will always try first when a stitch goes wrong.

Hand-Stitch Fundamentals

Build muscle memory in the four core hand stitches, reliable knots, and clean button and snap replacement.

Exercise: Four-Stitch Practice Sampler

On a 20 cm scrap, sew a labelled row of each stitch: running, backstitch, slip, and blind-hem catch stitch. Aim for even 2 to 3 mm stitches. Keep this sampler as a reference.

- Which stitch felt least consistent, and what helped you even it out?
- Tug each row firmly. Which held best, and does that match what the course said about strength?
- How many stitches did you fit per 2.5 cm on your backstitch row?

Worksheet: Button and Closure Replacement Record

Fill one row per closure you replace. Record the shank length you built and whether you added a backing button. Leave the durability check blank until after the next wash.

Garment and closure type (button, snap, hook)

Number of stitch passes through holes

Thread shank length built (mm)

Backing button added? (yes/no)

Survived first wash and wear? (yes/no)

Checklist: Finishing Every Repair

- Started with a quilter's knot or doubled knotted thread
- Kept stitch tension snug but not puckering the fabric
- Ended with two backstitches in place, not a single loose knot
- Buried the thread tail inside the layers before snipping
- Tugged the finished repair in the direction of stress to test it

Hems and Length Alterations

Measure, mark, and execute hems on real garments, including the original-hem method for jeans.

Worksheet: Hem Measurement Sheet

Complete one row per garment hemmed. Measure the finished length on the body, then record the hem allowance you folded. Leave the final length column blank until you measure the completed hem.

Garment (trouser, skirt, sleeve)

Finished length target measured on body (cm)

Hem allowance folded (cm)

Hem method used (double-fold, blind, original jeans)

Front-back length difference set for break (cm)

Final measured length after sewing (cm)

Exercise: Blind Hem Practice

Practise a machine blind hem on a folded scrap of medium-weight fabric using the blind-hem foot and matching thread. Adjust the zigzag swing until the surface stitch is a faint dot. Then sew one hand catch-stitch hem for comparison.

- How many threads of the face fabric did each bite catch, and was it visible from the right side?
 - Which method gave a cleaner invisible result on your fabric, machine or hand?
 - What did you change about the zigzag swing to make the surface stitch disappear?
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Checklist: Original Jeans Hem Steps

- Calculated tuck depth as half the total length removed
- Folded so the factory hem stops just short of the new length
- Confirmed both legs match before sewing
- Stitched a new line tight against the original hem stitches
- Used a 100/16 jeans needle and a hump-jumper at side seams
- Trimmed the tuck to about 6 mm and finished the raw edge
- Pressed the allowance up so the original hem hangs naturally

Seams, Zippers, and Denim Repairs

Adjust fit at the seams, replace a zipper cleanly, and reinforce denim with patches, sashiko, and bartacks.

Worksheet: Take-In Alteration Planner

Plan a side-seam take-in. Record the total excess you pinched out, then split it across the seams. Leave the per-side and final columns blank for you to calculate and confirm at the second fitting.
Garment and location of excess

Total excess pinched out (cm)

Number of seams sharing the change

Amount per seam (cm)

Taper blended over distance (cm)

Fit confirmed at second fitting before trimming? (yes/no)

Exercise: Zipper Replacement Run-Through

Replace one broken or sacrificial zipper using either a centred or lapped installation. Baste it first, then sew both sides top to bottom with the zipper foot. Inspect for waves.

- Did you sew both sides in the same direction, and how flat did the result lie?

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- Centred or lapped, and why did you choose it for this garment?
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- What distance from the teeth did you stitch, and would you adjust it next time?
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Exercise: Denim Patch and Sashiko Repair

Repair a worn or torn area of denim with a backing patch cut at least 3 cm larger than the damage on every side, then quilt across it with parallel rows or sashiko running stitches.

- How much larger than the damage was your backing patch on each side?
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- Did you stitch across the whole patch face or only the edges, and why does it matter?
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- Where else on the garment did you add a bartack to prevent the next failure?
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Checklist: Stress-Point Reinforcement Sweep

- Belt loops bartacked at top and bottom
- Pocket corners reinforced before they tear
- Base of the fly or zipper opening bartacked
- Thinning knees backed and quilted while fabric is still strong
- Thread matched for invisible repair or contrasted on purpose

Your Action Plan

1. Assemble and label your core repair kit, keeping fabric shears separate from paper scissors
2. Sew tension and needle tests on your three most-used fabrics and record the winning settings in the reference template
3. Practise the four core hand stitches and two anchor knots on a labelled sampler until they are even
4. Replace any loose or missing buttons and snaps across your wardrobe, building a proper thread shank on each
5. Hem one pair of trousers with a blind hem and one pair of jeans with the original-hem method
6. Take in one loose garment at the side seams, fitting twice before you trim anything
7. Replace one broken zipper using a lapped installation, sewing both sides top to bottom
8. Reinforce one worn denim garment with a backing patch and sashiko, and bartack its stress points
9. Log every repair with its settings and outcome so your next job starts from proven numbers

