Make Trousers (beginners)

This tutorial will help you to make your first pair of trousers. If you have already made some in the past and are just looking for a recap, you probably want the refresher tutorial. Note trousers are not gender specific so one pattern for all.

You will need:

Approx 1.5m fabric (you will not use all of this, but you will probably need this much to fit the pattern on)
Needle
Thread
Tape measure
Pencil/chalk
Pins
Sewing machine (if you want to cheat)
Cord (to hold your trousers up)

Measurements:

You will need to note down 6 measurements before you can start marking out.

Outer leg length – from waist to ankle down the outside of the leg (that's over your hip, not down the front of your leg). Once you have this, add 2 inches for the waist-band.

Inner leg length – from groin to ankle

Hip width – circumference of widest point (either around hips or bum, depending on your shape. Choose the bigger of these measurements). Once you have your measurement, quarter it.

Thigh width – circumference of widest point of thigh. half this measurement and add 1 inch for comfort you don't want this bit to be too tight)

Ankle width – circumference of ankle (make sure you can get your foot through!) then half it.

Underside length – imagine the line of your waist. You need to measure from front to back, between your legs to your waist line. Once you have this measurement, half it and add 2 inches.

**IMPORTANT – Once you have these, add 1/2 inch (1.5cm) to all to allow for seams.**

Marking out:

Lay out your fabric and fold over about 1/3. Make sure your outer leg length is at least as long as the fold. If it isn't, fold the fabric the other way. Measure and mark out your outer leg length onto the fold. At one end, mark your ankle width at right angles to the fold. At the other end mark your hip width in the same way.
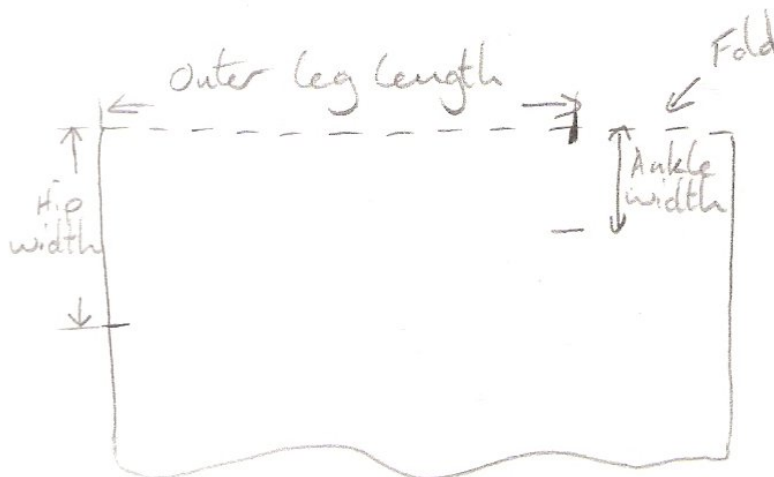
Now the interesting bit. You will probably need an extra pair of hands (and eyes) and may find it easier first time with two tape measures. You need to make a triangle to find the crotch of your trouser leg. From the point of your ankle width mark (the end furthest from the fold) measure your inner leg length on one tape measure. Maybe get your friend to hold this in place whilst you do the next bit. From the hip width mark, measure the underside length on a second tape measure. Now find the point where these two distances meet (pointing away from the fold). Make a mark.
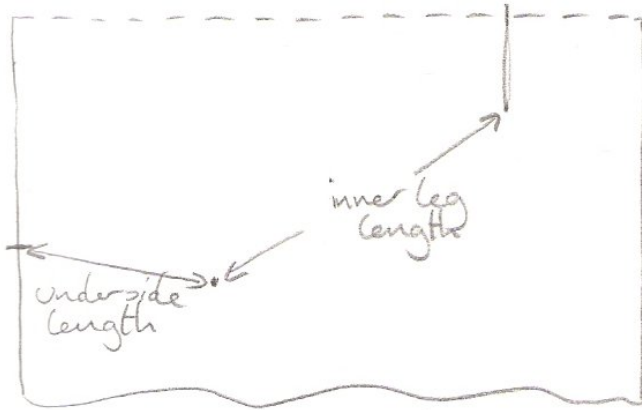
Now check that your leg will fit by checking that the distance between the point of your triangle and the fold is at least as long as your thigh width. If the thigh width is longer, then extend the point of the triangle out so that the thigh width fits comfortably inside. From this new point, draw lines to the hip width line and the ankle width line. If your thigh width is less than the original point, then leave it as is, and just join up the point to the ankle width and hip width marks. You should now have a roughly triangular shape with blunt ends. See image below for clarity.
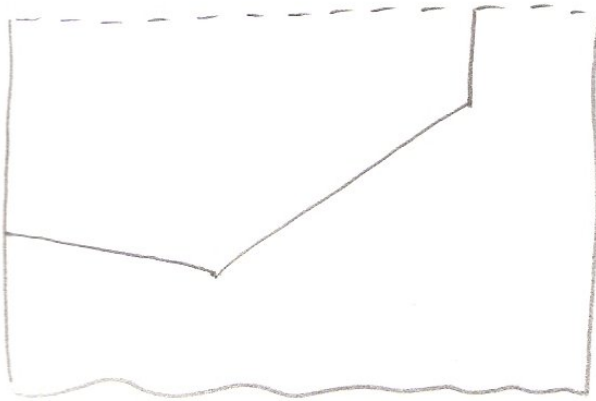
Trousers are the most variable item of kit. Your pattern might look quite different from this depending on your shape. Longer or narrower legs make for more elongated patterns with the groin closer to the hip end. Rounder frames result in patterns that have wider legs and the groin closer to the middle of the length. Whatever shape your pattern is, don't worry. If you have measured the right parts of you and put those measurements into the right places on the pattern, your trousers will fit.

When you are happy with your marking out, pin near the lines and cut out your shape. You now have one trouser leg in your hands. There's no need to measure out the second as you now have a template for the other leg. Simply refold your fabric and lay your template on (still folded lengthways). You will get more efficient use of fabric if you turn your pattern the other way round so the ankles point the other direction to previously. Also make sure that you fold over enough width to allow for the point of the groin (check that you have enough fabric on top and underneath) otherwise you will end up with a draft. Pin your template to your fabric, and cut out your second leg.

You should now be in possession of two trouser legs. You also face the decision between sewing by hand or using a sewing machine. Some things to consider:

-Using a sewing machine does not mean no sewing by hand. You still have to finish the edges by hand.

-You cannot start one way then change your mind. Choose a direction and stick to it as the method of hemming is very different and does not combine.

-Using a sewing machine means doing every seam twice. This leads to thick seams which are especially problematic with trousers as you end up with a lump at the crotch where the seams meet.

-Sewing by hand means hemming each piece first then sewing it together once. It means no hemming at the end though as you have already done it.

Once you have chosen your means of sewing, follow the appropriate colour text. Green for information specific to hand sewing, red for information specific to machine sewing.

If sewing by hand, you first need to hem both your legs. If you need help with this see the sewing and stitches tutorial. It helps to pin the edges once you have folded them over as a lot of the edges are diagonal and therefore inclined to stretch and warp. When you have finished, skip down to the black generic instructions below.

If you are using a sewing machine, you do not need to hem your fabric first. Unfold your legs (if you haven't already) and lay them one on top of the other (so the hemming faces outwards). Line them up, then pin along the two shorter sides that stretch from waist to the groin points. Sew along these seams. If you are using a sewing machine, you now need to turn your trousers the other way out and sew that seam again. To do this, turn them, then pinch the seam (you may need to wriggle it a bit to get it to fold flat). Pin close to the edge and sew approx 1cm from the seam. This will create a tube-shaped 'pocket' to hide the fluffy edges of the fabric as well as add extra strength. If you are unsure, see the sewing and stitches tutorial. When you have sewn the seams this second time, turn the garment back the other way out and trim off any fluffy bits that stick out from the seam.

You now need to sew up the inside of the trouser legs. Lay out your trousers so that the legs fold in half (as you would lay out normal trousers). Pin and sew the long seam starting at one ankle and finishing at the other. Do not stop at the groin or else you will end up with a hole. The sewing machine may run into difficulty at the crotch as it is trying to sew through so many layers of fabric. If you find the needle moving but the fabric not pulling through (so it sews on the spot) then lift the foot slightly (not all the way) and gently nudge the fabric through. Be careful doing this as you can easily loose your line. Press lightly on the peddle to stop it whizzing off when it gets to the other side of the problem. When you are through, let the foot down and continue as normal.
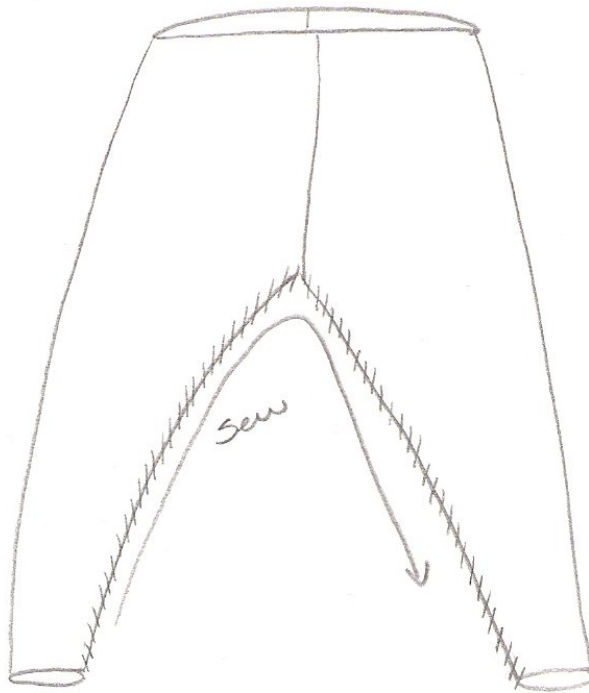
Once you have completed the seam, you need to sew it again from the other side. Turn your trouser the other way out, lay them flat and get pinning. Again you need to sew about 1cm from the seam. You should end up with all the tubing on the same side. If you have one seam on one side and the other on the opposite, you have done something wrong and need to unpick one set of seams (twice). If this happens and you are unsure which way out to start on:

Lay your fabric so the existing seams have their tubes on the inside. That way when you turn it to do the second run all the tubes will be on the same side.

If you have been using a sewing machine up to this point, you can go no further by this method. Time to pick up that needle and thread. Hem the ankles and around the waist. See the sewing and stitches tutorial if you are unsure how to do this.

You now have an almost complete pair of trousers. However you will probably have noticed that they are very large around the waist, as well as very high (they are designed to be very loose at the top to allow for movement). This is because they will have a draw string. So find yourself a piece of string or thonging.

First, fold about 1 inch of your waistband inwards and crease or mark it. Unfold it so that you can see the fold line. You will need two holes for your draw string to protrude from, so snip two slits at the front on either side of the seam in the folded section. Be careful not to cut any stitches. Grab needle and thread and sew many stitches over each other across the ends of these slits. This will help stop the fabric fraying (see image).
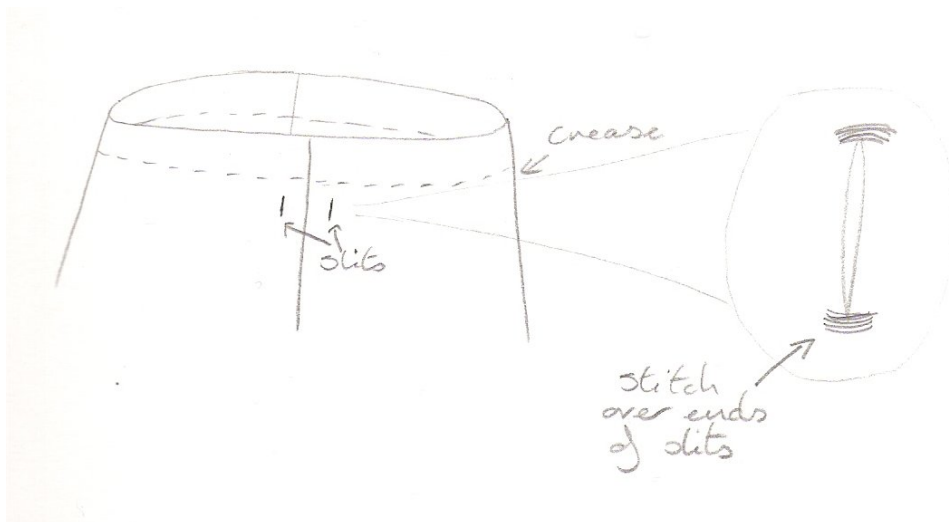
Fold the waistband back over. Take your drawstring and put into the fold. Pull the ends out through the slits you just made. Prod the string right up into the fold and pin it in place so that you don't accidentally stitch it in. Tie large knots in the ends of your cord to stop it vanishing into the trousers later. Pin along the lower edge of the folded section and sew it to the body of the trousers using the same stitch as for hemming.
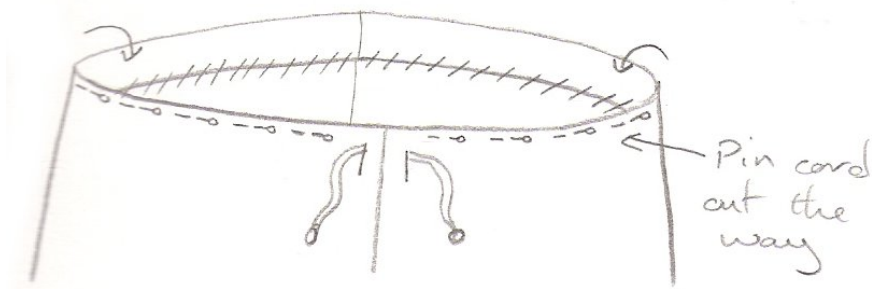
When you are done, remove the pins and you now have an authentic pair of trousers. Snazzy.