Alteration and Tailoring Tools and Equipment

ALTHOUGH ALTERATIONS ARE EXPENSIVE, purchasing trendy new clothes can be more costly than altering or tailoring existing clothing in your wardrobe. Fashion trends change constantly. Yet highly disposable clothing, known as "fast fashion," should cause you to consider making room in your budget for alterations. If you have the essential sewing tools and equipment as well as some "tricks of the trade," you can alter your existing wardrobe to meet your specific measurements and shift an outdated garment to a stylish look while saving money.

Objective:

Describe alteration and tailoring and the basic tools and equipment.

Key Terms:

- alteration
- awl
- beeswax
- bespoke tailoring
- custom tailoring
- emery bag
- French chalk
- French curve template
- hem gauge
- hip curve template
- iron
- ironing
- ironing board
- made-to-measure tailoring
- needle
- needle board
- pincushion
- pinking shears
- pins
- point turner
- pressing
- pressing cloth
- rotary cutter
- scissors
- seam ripper
- seam roll or sleeve roll
- sewing gauge or seam gauge
- sewing machine
- shears
- sleeve board
- spray bottle
- steam presser
- tailor
- tailor's bench
- tailor's board
- tailor's clapper
- tailor's ham
- tailor's scissors
- tailor's square
- tailor's tack
- tailoring
- tape measure
- tape measure with handle
- thimble
- thread
- tracing wheel

Understanding Alterations and Tailoring Tools and Equipment

Alteration is the process of adjusting an existing garment for a better fit: hemming or increasing or decreasing the width or length of the overall garment or of garment features. Garments can be altered for a more flattering fit, such as lengthening or shortening a pair of pants, adjusting the width of the waistline, adding shoulder pads and elastic, etc. Exact measurements, often between 10 and 15, must be accurately taken to successfully alter a garment for a customer. Alteration changes are less extensive than those conducted by a tailor.

TAILORING

Tailoring is the art of designing, cutting, fitting, and finishing custom garments for a customer. Tailors construct, repair, or alter clothing (e.g., suits, coats, dress shirts, and trousers) to a customer's specific body measurements. Tailoring a custom garment is more expensive than altering an "off-the-rack" garment.

Tailor

A **tailor** is a person who makes one-of-a-kind garments but also repairs and/or makes alterations to an existing garment. He or she must excel in hand sewing and machine skills and visualize a design. In addition, a tailor needs good pattern making, cutting, and measuring skills. The word "tailor" is from the French "*tailleur*," which means to cut.

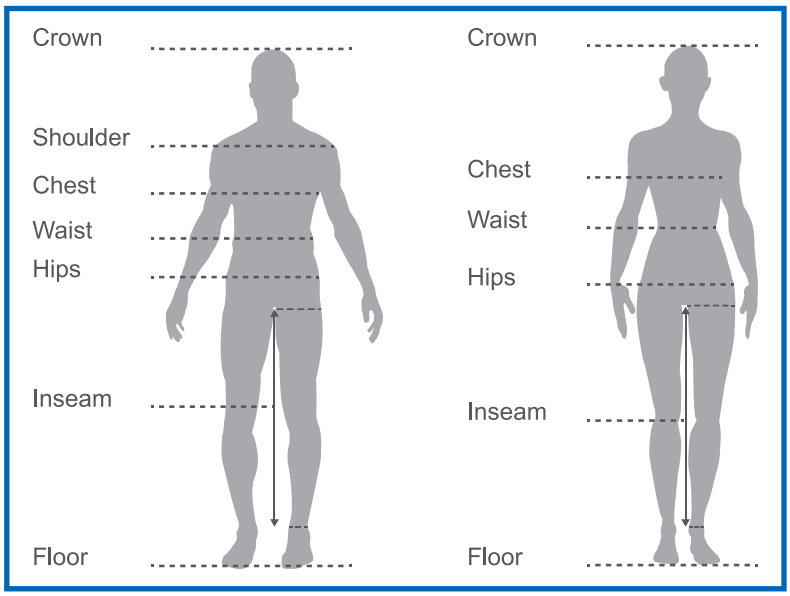

FIGURE 1. Alteration is the process of adjusting an existing garment for a better fit: hemming or increasing or decreasing width of the overall garment or of garment features. Tailoring is the art of designing, cutting, fitting, and finishing custom garments for a customer. Both alterations and tailoring require taking accurate body measurements.

Custom Tailoring

Custom tailoring is designing and detailing a one-of-a-kind pattern based on customer measurements. Tailors take 20 to 30 different measurements to ensure the precise fit of a custom tailored garment. The customer has many design options: cuffs, collars, lapels, buttons, pockets, and fabric. Second and third fittings may be required.

Made-to-Measure Tailoring

Made-to-measure tailoring is a standard pattern fitted to the measurements of the person ordering the garment. This type of garment tailoring often requires a second fitting to fine-tune the measurements.

Bespoke Tailoring

Bespoke tailoring is the total control of garment fabric, fit, and feature shapes (e.g., lapels, collars, cuffs, buttons, and pockets) by the customer with most, if not all, tailoring work done by hand. The garment is fit precisely to the customer's measurements. Bespoke tailoring is the "gold standard" of tailoring and is typically conducted by a master tailor. The cost for a bespoke garment is higher than for other types of tailor-made garments because there is no standard pattern to be adjusted; each pattern is created for one specific customer.

Evolution

Tailoring has evolved from men's clothing to women's clothing. Many women who wear petit clothing prefer to have the jacket or trousers patterned in the appropriate measurements. Wool, linen, and silk fabrics are the most commonly tailored. To alter clothing to a client's specific measurements, a tailor needs several tools to complete the job. Selection of the correct tool for each alteration or tailored option is critical to creating a beautifully fitted garment. Alteration and tailoring tool categories include measuring, marking, cutting, sewing, pressing, and other miscellaneous tools.

ALTERATION AND TAILORING TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

While some tools and equipment have been used for hundreds of years, new and improved tools and equipment are now common.

Measuring tools

Measuring tools vary greatly and are specific to the needs of the tailor.

French Curve Template

A **French curve template** is a drafting and patternmaking tool used to connect points in a smooth curve for common fitting and for pattern alterations or adjustments to necklines, armholes, darts, and other curved lines.

Hip Curve Template

A **hip curve template** is a tool used in patternmaking to create long, slight curves for hips, thighs, elbows, and lapels. It is also used to make side seam adjustments. One side of the hip curve measures in inches, but the other side measures in centimeters.

Tailor's Square

A **tailor's square** is a two-armed, L-shaped ruler used in patternmaking to draft or to scale down an existing pattern. It is often referred to as an L-square in which the long arm measures 24 inches and the short arm measures 14 inches.

Tape Measure

A **tape measure** is a flexible cloth, plastic, or fiberglass ruler with markings in centimeters on one side and English standard inches on the other side. Tape measures allow tailors and alterations specialists to measure around curves or corners precisely.

Tape Measure with Handle

A **tape measure with handle** is a tool that gauges the inseam of the pants so taking that measurement is more comfortable for the client and the tailor.

Yardstick

A yardstick is a ruler used to measure fabric and hem lengths as well as to check the grain line.

FIGURE 2. Alteration and tailoring professionals use many measuring tools. Which tools are pictured here?

Hem Gauge

A **hem gauge** is a short metal rule, approximately 8 inches wide by 4 inches tall, with a flat bottom edge used to measure and create hemline folds. It is used in conjunction with an iron and board to create crisp and accurately creased hemlines.

Sewing Gauge or Seam Gauge

A **sewing gauge or seam gauge** is a 6-inch ruler with a movable marker used to mark a desired measurement (e.g., the width of a seam allowance or a hem).

Marking Tools

Fabric marking tools consist of tailor's chalk, wax and chalk pencils, and fabric pens. All of these marking tools are removable by brushing, rinsing with water, or using a special substance that dissolves in the air after a few minutes or when pressed with an iron. You must use the correct form of removal to ensure the markings do not become permanent. Some markings become permanent if applied with water or heat.

French Chalk

French chalk (tailor's chalk) is a temporary mark used to locate fabric positions that require cutting, trimming, and/or other alteration. French chalk is easily brushed off fabric once the tailor has completed use of the marks.

FIGURE 3. Tailor's chalk is an essential tool for marking fabric for alteration and tailoring tasks.

Tracing Wheel

A **tracing wheel** is a blunted saw-tooth or smooth-edge wheel attached to a handle that transfers pattern markings to fabric by use of a special carbon paper. Markings include pleats, darts, buttonholes, pockets, and appliqués. It is also used to trace lines from a draped-muslin or from a ready-made garment.

Tailor's Tack

A **tailor's tack** is a method of marking two or more pieces of fabric by creating a loop stitch with a double-threaded needle to which the fabric is slightly pulled up and snipped. This method creates a marking with the cut threads left in the fabric. The advantage of a tailor's tack is that no chalk or carbon marking needs to be removed.

Cutting Tools

Cutting tools vary in size and shape based on purpose and fabric type.

Seam Ripper

A **seam ripper** is a tool with a sharp point and a blade used to unpick or remove stitches or seam stitches.

Pinking Shears

Pinking shears are hand-operated cutting instruments with saw-toothed blades that leave a zigzag pattern on fabric to prevent the fabric from fraying. Pinking shears can be used to finish hem edges and seams. Some pinking shears are bent-handled, making it easy to cut fabric laying flat on a cutting surface.

Scissors

Scissors are hand-operated cutting tools with two short 6-inch blades and ring-shaped handles used to trim and clip seams and facings and other excess fabric. **Shears** are hand-operated cutting tools, similar to scissors, but with longer 8-inch offset blades that make it easy

to snip or cut fabric in one motion. Shears also have specific thumb and finger holes. Some shears are bent-handled, making it easy to cut fabric laying flat on a cutting surface.

Tailor's Scissors

Tailor's scissors (trimming scissors) are small hand-operated cutting tools with 6-inch or shorter blades used to clip threads, make small slits, or open buttonholes. They are used to clip and trim seam allowances.

FIGURE 4. Various cutting tools are pictured. Identify each.

Rotary Cutter

A **rotary cutter** is a hand-operated or electric cutting tool with a sharp circular blade used to cut fabric in clean, quick, and precise cuts. A rotary cutter is best at making straight and wide or gradual curves. It also makes cutting through multiple layers of fabric easier (a depth of about one-half the diameter of the blade). However, detailed cuts are trickier to maneuver. Therefore, most tailors prefer shears. Most rotary cutters are used in conjunction with a cutting mat.

Sewing Tools and Equipment

Sewing tools and equipment may vary quite a bit for companies and personal equipment in a home based on cost.

Awl

An **awl** is a hand-sewing tool that has a large handle with a long needle protruding from the top. The thread, which is thick and coated in wax, is wound on a small spool in the base of the handle. The thread is lead through the top of the handle and along a groove in the needle, which is then threaded through the eye of the needle. It can be used for piercing through and stitching two or more layers of thick fabric in place (e.g., leather) as a machine has trouble completing this action.

Sewing Machine

A **sewing machine** is a device that stitches together fabric by looping a top or needle thread and bottom or bobbin thread together to create a stitch. Although most tailors prefer hand stitching, a machine comes in handy for portions of the construction process.

Thread

Thread is a long strand of numerous fibers twisted together and used to sew fabrics together. It comes in many varieties, colors, and tensile strengths. The most common thread types are polyester, cotton, and silk. When tailoring, silk thread is preferred because it is strong, especially in conjunction with beeswax. Silk thread is good for hand sewing, basting, tacking, hemming buttonholes (silk buttonhole twist thread is preferred), and other tailoring techniques.

Needle

A **needle** is a long slender implement with a sharp, pointed tip and an eye through which thread is passed for sewing. Needles come in different shapes and sizes and are used for hand sewing and machine sewing to baste, attach buttons, sew fabric, and other alteration, tailoring, and mending operations.

- Ballpoint needles have a small rounded tip for use with knit and lingerie fabric projects.
- Betweens needles are short with a small rounded eye to produce short, fine stitches for tailoring and hand projects.
- Curved needles are coarse, semicircular tools with a large oval eye and tapered for use with piping and other curved surfaces.
- Sharps needles have a small rounded eye and are typically called "all-purpose" based on their size. Sizes 1 to 5 are for heavyweight fabrics; sizes 6 to 8 are for medium-weight fabrics; sizes 9 to 10 for fine and lightweight fabrics; and sizes 11 and 12 are for sheer fabrics.

Pressing and Ironing Tools and Equipment

Pressing is the act of placing a hot iron, usually a steam iron, on fabric and then lifting it repeatedly to complete a sewing detail (e.g., opening a seam, making a crisp corner, creasing, or gently flattening a buttonhole). Tailors, seamsters, and seamstresses follow the practice of "press as you go" to create professionally crafted garments.

Ironing is placing a hot iron on fabric and then sliding it over the fabric to remove wrinkles. An **iron** is a piece of equipment, usually electric, used to complete sewing details and to remove wrinkles from fabric. Irons are used both to press (lift and repeat) fabric pieces during construction to create a permanent finish detail (e.g., a cuff) and to iron (slide from side to side) to remove wrinkles from fabric.

Ironing Board

An **ironing board** is a foldable, adjustable-height table, with a heat-resistant surface and an iron rest used to press and iron fabric or garments.

Pressing Cloth

A **pressing cloth** is an oblong or square piece of muslin, cotton, linen, wool, or silk organza fabric based on the fabric being pressed or placed between an iron and the fabric or a

garment being pressed to prevent damage—marking, shining, scorching, or burning. A pressing cloth protects the iron as well as the fabric or garment being pressed, especially when applying fusible interfacing. A pressing cloth ensures that the adhesive will not "ooze out" onto the fabric or onto the iron plate.

Spray Bottle

A **spray bottle** is a hand tool used to spritz water onto pressing surfaces to encourage steam penetration through fabric or onto a press cloth. Creating steam typically results in a garment that appears more finished.

Steam Presser

A **steam presser** is an electric hand-held or floor-mounted tool with a water tank that emits hot steam to remove wrinkles from fabric without scorching or damaging the fibers or the garment. The handle allows the tailor to steam garments on a model form or on a hangar. It is also used on pile or napped fabrics when pressing or ironing would crush or flatten the fabric surface.

Point Turner

A **point turner** is a plastic or bamboo hand tool used to push out corners and turn collar, lapel, cuff, and other garment points. It can be used for pressing pointed and curved seams.

Seam Roll or Sleeve Roll

A **seam roll or sleeve roll** is a cylindrical-shaped cushion covered with tightly woven fabric used to press open straight seams in sleeves and other garment areas. These rolls prevent the impression of a seam ridge from appearing on the right side of the garment when seams are pressed. Seam rolls and a tailor's ham typically have a plain cotton fabric side and a plaid wool side. They are stuffed with sawdust to maintain firmness. A **tailor's ham** is a ham-shaped cushion used as a mold for pressing and shaping curves such as pleats, darts, sleeves, lapels, hips, and collars.

Sleeve Board

A **sleeve board** is a small wooden pressing tool with rounded ends used to open seams and details of small or narrow garment areas (e.g., sleeves, pant legs, and necklines). It resembles two small ironing boards attached atop each other. A sleeve board rests on top of an ironing board or other protected table surface.

FIGURE 5. Which pressing tools are used in this illustration?

Tailor's Clapper

A **tailor's clapper** is a wooden pressing tool rounded at one end and grooved along the sides to provide a handhold and is used to open seams in corners and points, pound creases into heavy fabric after steaming, or gently flatten and create sharp hem lines, cuffs, collars, pleats, and lapels. It is used to press fabrics or garments after steam has been applied.

Tailor's Board

A **tailor's board** is a wooden pressing tool with flat, curved, and angled surfaces and a pointed edge to open seams, shape curves (armholes and collars), and shape and sharpen pointed collars, lapels, and pockets.

Needle Board

A **needle board** is a rigid, flat length of stiff fabric topped by short, blunt, upright wires embedded in the base. A needle board is used to avoid crushing the pile or nap fabrics—velvet, velveteen, corduroy, fleece, Ultrasuede—and to prevent those fabrics from matting or flattening. It prevents the seam ridge from appearing on the right side of the garment when pressed.

Miscellaneous Alteration and Tailoring Tools

Alteration and tailoring tools are an essential part of the process.

Tailor's Bench

A **tailor's bench** is a workspace with storage for fabrics and tools as well as a large work surface for patternmaking as well as fabric cutting and sewing.

FIGURE 6. A tailor's bench is a workspace used for measuring, marking, cutting, pinning, sewing, and pressing.

Beeswax

Beeswax is a natural thread lubricant used to make the thread stronger and to make threading a needle easier. It also makes thread less likely to knot when hand stitching. It is used mainly in hand sewing and for attaching buttons.

Pins

Pins (straight pins) are usually short, straight, stiff, thin pieces of wire with a pointed and a blunt end used to fasten pieces of cloth together. However, sewing and tailoring pins come in many shapes, lengths, and thicknesses (e.g., all-purpose, pleating, lace, applique, and other spe-

cialized types). The type of pin a tailor prefers depends on the weight of the fabric being used. A tailor has several uses for pins, including to fit fabric close to the body, to temporarily baste fabric together while cutting or sewing, and to mark fabric.

Pincushion

A **pincushion** is a cotton-stuffed cloth or cushion found in different shapes and sizes that stores pins or needles for easy access. Pincushions are designed to be worn on the wrist or are placed on tabletops.

Emery Bag

An **emery bag** is a pincushion that sharpens needles and pins by inserting their tips in and out of the bag. This pincushion is filled with a mineral called "emery" that resembles fine metal shavings. Emery is used on boards to file a person's nails and for other industrial applica-

FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Made to Measure vs. Bespoke Tailoring

Many differences exist between made-to-measure and bespoke-tailored garments. Made-to-measure is a pattern adjusted to fit several people of similar stature. Bespoke tailors create a completely new pattern based on individual measurements. It is a "one-of-a-kind" pattern. Also, made-to-measure garments usually require few or no fittings, whereas, bespoke-tailored garments require several fittings.

Made-to-measure garments usually have a limited selection of fabric choices, whereas, bespoke-tailored garments have many fabric choices and range from expensive one-of-a-kind fabrics to imported, specially dyed, custom-made, special order, or domestic fabrics. The choices in bespoke tailoring are almost limitless because they are custom-made to the client's specifications. The type and number of pleats, cuff styles, pocket styles, buttons, or other closures are limitless in bespoke tailoring, whereas made-to-measure garments have limited or no options. Garments at a tailor shop are going to be much more expensive than made-to-measure garments at local retail shops.

If a person is striving to be unique and can afford the hefty price tag, bespoke tailoring may be a top priority.

To learn more about tailoring, access "What Is the Difference Between Made to Measure And Bespoke?" at:

https://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2013/01/16/what-is-the-difference-between-made-to-measure-and-bespoke/#7d301b3e5352

tions. [NOTE: The small strawberry attached to the traditional "tomato pincushion" is the emery pincushion.]

Thimble

A **thimble** is a pitted, metal shield, cap, or cup that protects fingers from puncture while pushing a needle through cloth.

WORKING ENVIRONMENTS AND CONDITIONS

Across the globe, working environments and conditions are not always favorable to a perfect finished product.

Environment

Trusting relationships with clients, job motivation, job satisfaction, flexibility, and good communication between tailor/alterations specialist and client play important roles in a good work environment. These professionals depend on good customer service and satisfaction to build clientele and satisfy clients.

Working Conditions

Good working conditions are essential to a tailor, a seamster, and a seamstress. These professionals work 40 hours per week or more—perhaps many more hours if they operate their own shops. Spring and fall are their busiest seasons, and they often work more hours during those fashion-specific seasons. Some tailors choose to work in a factory or small shop in a store, while others prefer to work out of their home. Several items to consider when constructing a suitable workspace and environment include lighting, equipment,

Lighting

A variety of lighting types are beneficial for specific tasks: natural, artificial, and task lighting. Natural lighting is best for meeting clients because it is warmer and more inviting to the customer. So it is important to have windows near work surfaces to reduce the eyestrain of the tailor, seamster, and seamstress.

Artificial or general overhead lighting helps avoid dark spots in the working studio and at the tailor's workbench. This type of lighting is especially beneficial when working into the late evening or on gloomy, dark days when natural lighting is limited. In contrast, task lighting provides direct light to illuminate a workspace, and magnifiers enhance the ease of any hand-sewing tasks or other detail work.

Equipment

Factory or store equipment can be noisy, and this type of loss of concentration can add stress to the task. If someone chooses to work from home, that stress can be reduced or eliminated. However, some commercial equipment is beneficial, such as:

- Industrial sewing machines reduce work and work time versus hand stitching an entire garment.
- Ergonomic lifts and/or platforms ease a sewing job when measuring, making alterations, or finishing a garment. These devices place less strain on the alterations or tailoring professional by lifting a client from the floor, which reduces repetitive kneeling and/or squatting to take measurements or to pin alterations.

Layout and Décor

Layout and décor can be a large influencer.

- Bright and bold items create energy and can help define a space.
- Neutral items create a calm atmosphere that can lead to a less stressful environment.
- Partitioned or separate work and fitting rooms are beneficial for different construction tasks. However, an open space can be inviting and creative.

Summary:

Alteration is the process of adjusting an existing garment for a better fit—hemming or increasing or decreasing width of the overall garment or of garment features. Garments can be altered for a more flattering fit, such as lengthening or shortening a pair of pants, adjusting the width of the waistline, or adding shoulder pads and elastic. Exact measurements, often between 10 and 15, must be accurately taken to successfully alter a garment.

Tailoring is the art of designing, cutting, fitting, and finishing custom garments for a customer. Tailoring a custom garment is more expensive than altering an "off-the-rack" garment. Tailors take 20 to 30 different measurements to ensure precise fit of a custom tailored garment.

Alteration and tailoring professionals use measuring, marking, cutting, sewing, pressing, and numerous specialty miscellaneous tools and equipment in their daily work. They must consider their working environment's equipment, lighting, layout, and décor. And it is crucial for alteration and tailoring professionals to build positive relationships with their clients.

Checking Your Knowledge:

1. Describe the differences between alterations and tailoring.
2. Describe the difference between pressing and ironing.
3. Select five essential alteration and tailoring tools and equipment, and explain the uses of each.
4. Explain what a tailor's bench is and how it is used.
5. Explain the benefits of task lighting for alteration and tailoring tasks.

Expanding Your Knowledge:

Are custom-made suits the future of menswear? Is bespoke tailoring a dying art? Are online tailors focusing more on "custom-made" garments, or are they still focused on "made-to-measure" garments? Read the articles at http://articlesofstyle.com/47285/is-creative-custom-the-future-of-menswear/. Then watch the short clip about a tailor designing a custom-made bulletproof suits on the Garrison website at http://garrisonbespoke.com/custom-suits/. Discuss these two pieces of information with the class.

Web Links:

The Power of Alterations
http://debbieroes.com/power-of-alterations/

Wardrobe from Scratch: Alterations and Tailoring
http://www.puttingmetogether.com/2013/02/wardrobe-from-scratch-part-3b.html

Which Are the Easy Alterations?
https://insideoutstyleblog.com/2013/08/which-are-the-easy-alterations.html