

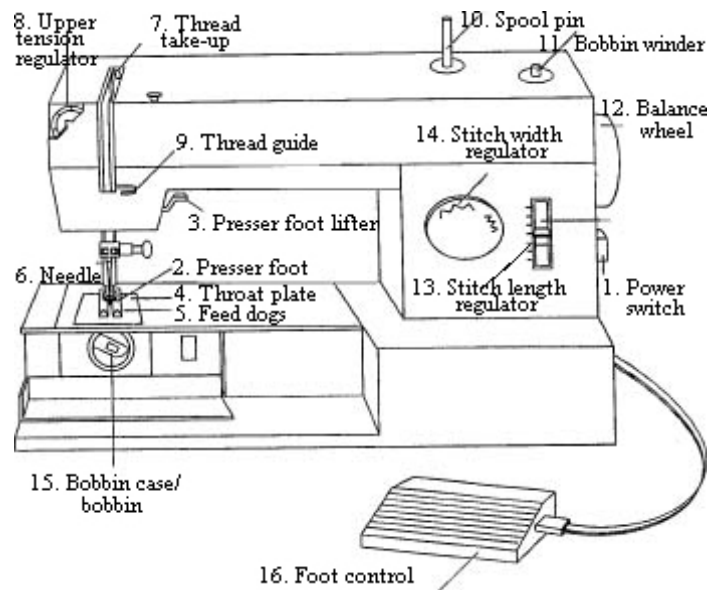
# Sewing Machine Basics

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*Though they can sometimes seem intimidating, sewing machines are valuable tools.  
Remember these basics to help get you started.*

## Parts of a Sewing Machine<sup>1</sup>



1. The **power switch** turns the sewing machine on and off.
2. The **presser foot** holds the fabric in place during sewing. Some presser feet are specialized for certain tasks such as hemming or sewing zippers.
3. The presser foot is raised and lowered by using the **presser foot lifter**.
4. The **throat plate** is the metal part of the sewing machine between the needle and the bobbin. The needle passes through a hole in the throat plate during sewing.
5. The **feed dogs** move the fabric through the machine during sewing. On some machines, the feed dogs can be lowered to allow sewing in curves and other designs, or to ensure that many layers of fabric move through the machine together.
6. Use different types of **needles** for different types of fabric and thread.
7. The **thread take-up** helps to feed the thread through the machine.
8. The **upper tension regulator** allows adjustment of the thread tension.
9. The **thread guide** helps prevent thread tangling.
10. The **spool pin** holds the spool of thread during sewing.
11. The **bobbin winder** prepares bobbins for sewing.
12. The **balance wheel** is part of the sewing mechanism. Turning the balance wheel raises and lowers the needle.
13. Stitch lengths are selected using the **stitch length regulator**.
14. Stitch widths are selected using the **stitch width regulator**.
15. The **bobbin case** holds the **bobbin**, which holds the second thread used in machine sewing.

<sup>1</sup> Diagram from <http://msucare.com/pubs/images/p1302-16.htm>

16. The machine is operated using a **foot control** pedal. The farther down the pedal is pressed, the faster the machine sews.

## Sewing Machine Feet

There are dozens of different kinds of presser feet that you can purchase to make various sewing tasks easier. A few of them are described below.

- The **zigzag foot** most often is the “default” foot that comes with your machine. It has a wide opening for the needle to pass through, to accommodate the way the needle moves from side to side while sewing a zigzag stitch.
- A **zipper foot**, sometimes called a piping or cording foot, allows you to sew very close to the teeth of a zipper or the edge of decorative piping or cording. Some zipper feet may be adjusted to make it easier to position the seam.
- A **walking foot** has a feed mechanism that compliments the feed dogs. Walking feet are useful when you are sewing fabric that feeds unevenly or many layers of fabric.
- A **ruffler** automatically sews ruffles and gathers, gathering the fabric and sewing the gathers down in one step.

Different presser feet will fit different types of machine, so if you are shopping for feet it's a good idea to bring one of your current feet with you. The staff in the sewing machine shop will be able to tell what type of foot you need by looking at the one you already have.

## Sewing Machine Needles

There are many different kinds of needles, but for the majority of sewing you will be using one of several main types:

- **Ball-point needles** are used for sewing knits and meshes. The rounded tip of this needle passes between the fibers of the fabric.
- **Sharp-point needles** are used for sewing fine woven fabrics. The pointed, sharp tip pierces the fibers of the fabric.
- **Universal point needles** can be used for sewing both knits and wovens. It is an excellent needle for general sewing use.
- **Denim needles** are used for sewing heavy, dense fabrics such as denim. I use denim needles for all my corset work (or anything that uses many layers of dense fabric.)
- **Leather needles** have a wedge-shaped tip for punching through leather, heavy vinyl, and similar fabrics. Be careful when sewing with these needles as they will leave large holes if the stitches are removed.

Needles' sizes are given in two numbers, such as 60\8 and 120\19. Larger numbers are larger sizes. Small needles should be used for fine fabrics, and vice versa.