

FREE Pleated Face Mask Tutorial

ADVISORY: THESE MASKS WILL NOT PREVENT OR FILTER COVID-19 AND SHOULD NOT BE USED INSTEAD OF PPE.

So, disclaimer out the way: These masks cannot and will not filter Covid-19.

What they can do is help prevent symptomless carriers from coughing, sneezing or breathing the virus into the air around them, and they can help you not to be touching your nose and mouth whilst out in public

I make no claim to 'own' this pattern or method, I mean it's stitching some rectangles of fabric together and folding them, it's not exactly proprietary knowledge...

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Please contact enquiries@dragonflyjewellery.co.uk if you have any questions.

Please do not sell items made using this tutorial. This is a free tutorial for the purposes of helping people sew masks for themselves, their families and their community. You may distribute this tutorial to other crafters or sewists, share it on instagram, blogs or pinterest, link to it, and otherwise publicise it as long as it remains free and unedited. If you've used my tutorial to make some masks, I'd love to see them! You can @ me on pinterest, instagram and facebook [@dragonflyjewellerygb](https://www.instagram.com/dragonflyjewellerygb)

Materials you will need:

- *Tightly woven cotton fabric* – I have been recycling bed linen, shirts and other cotton clothing. It's better if you can recycle rather than buy new fabric for this project. Charity Shops or 'Goodwill' will often have bed linen or shirts available, and they are easy enough to boil wash. Since you'll be using 2 layers AND pleating, the fabric shouldn't be TOO thick as you need to breathe through it.
- *5mm / ¼" Flat Elastic* – Each mask requires 12" of elastic.
- *Thread*
- *Pins*
- *A Sewing Machine equipped with a suitable needle* – I use a 2020, 90/14 or 100/16 (Red Shank, Blue or Purple Band) as these are more suitable for cottons and the folded layers of cotton – I've had the best results with the 100/16's (purple band).
- *Scissors or a Rotary Cutter and cutting mat*
- *Robust Cardboard*
- *A 30cm / 12" or longer ruler*



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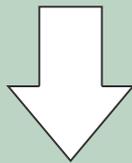


Step 1: The Template

Draw yourself a 9 inch by 7 inch rectangle on a piece of robust cardboard.

I have recycled an Amazon delivery envelope but you could use a cereal box, poster board, whatever.

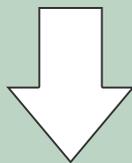
For those not working in inches, just make it 23cm x 18cm.



Step 2: Cutting Fabric

Depending on how many masks you're making or how awkwardly-shaped your fabric is, you might want to just place the template one piece at a time to cut the maximum number of rectangles.

If you're using a large quantity of fabric, you can pleat it up and cut 3 or 4 layers at a time. Whatever works best for you.



Step 3: Pinning

Once you've cut out your rectangles of fabric, you will need to pair them up and match them right-sides together.

If you can't tell which side is the 'right side', that's fine, it's just a mask. Pick whichever side looks best to be your 'right side'.

I like to pin the layers together into the corners making sure the pins are a good 2cm / 1" back from the edge.

For the purposes of this tutorial, I am using a spotty fabric as my 'outer' fabric, and some plain blue for my 'inner' fabric.

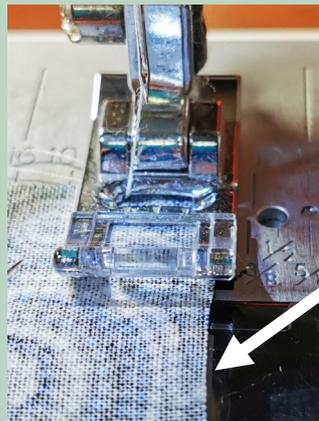


FREE Pleated Face Mask Tutorial



Step 4: Sew the long sides – leaving a gap for turning

Once your fabric is pinned, set your sewing machine to a straight stitch, with the needle in it's 'default' position – every machine is different but this is what mine says.



Position the long edge under the presser foot. We're working with a 1/4" / 5mm Seam Allowance.

Most machines or presser feet will have some sort of marking. You can just see the grey line on my bobbin-cover I'm using as a seam guide.



For the first edge, just go all the way from edge to edge.

For the second, stop about halfway along, do a little backstitch, lift your presser foot, move the fabric forward an inch, lower the presser foot, do another little backstitch, then continue to the end. This will make your turning gap.

Your piece should look like this when you're done.



Step 5: Cut the Elastic

Cut two pieces of 5mm / 1/4" wide elastic that are 6" long for your ear pieces.

If you have a large head or would prefer a looser fit, cut 2 7" pieces, or make it 5" if you're quite petite or making this for a teen.

Whatever is most comfortable: It's easier to fold and stitch a piece of elastic that is too long than it is to lengthen one that is too short.

If in doubt, go longer. Personally, I find 6" elastic strips to be adequate.

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Step 6: Pinning the Elastic

This part is difficult to explain, but it's why we sewed the long edges first.

Open one of the short edges and place the end of the elastic up against the seam, lining up the cut edge of the elastic with the outside edge of the fabric.

The other end of the elastic should be pointing inwards towards the inside of the tube you've made.



Fold the fabric back over the elastic, and pin in place.

Making sure there are no twists in the elastic, repeat on the other end of the same short edge.

The tube will buckle because the elastic will be pulling it in – that's okay.

Fold the fabric over and pin in place. You should now have something that looks like this.



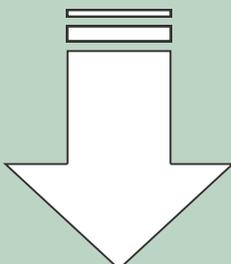
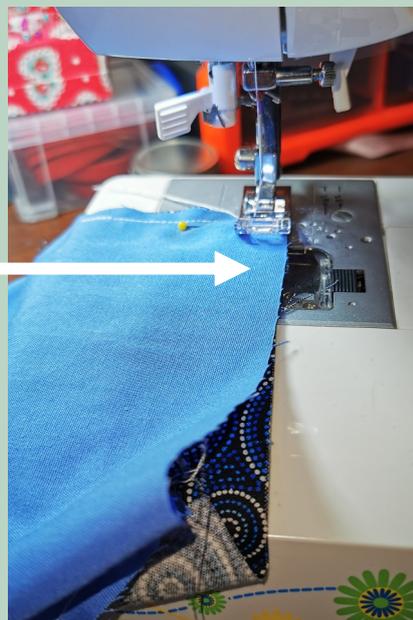
Step 7: Sewing the Elastic sides

Again, this part is also hard to explain. You'll be sewing down the short sides but as I said in Step 6, the short side is kind of buckled so for now, ignore the elastic, and just match up the fabric edges.

You'll start off with the tube kind of buckled in at the bottom but we'll sort that out as we sew the edge.

For now, position the fabric under the presser foot as you did before, leaving the elastic slack and making sure it's tucked away from the edge. Again we're using a 5mm / 1/4" seam allowance.

Step 7 continued on next page...



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Step 7 Continued...

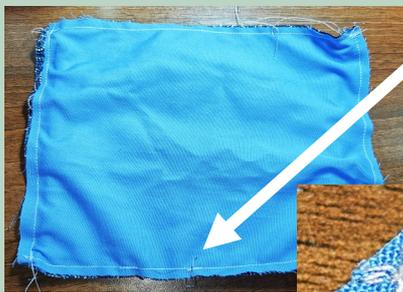
Start stitching down the edge until there is enough of the seam sticking out the back of the presser foot for you to get a hold of.

At this point you're going to apply tension to the elastic making sure to hold the back of the already-sewn fabric. My cutting was a bit wonky in this picture but since we're going to be trimming the seam allowances anyway, as long as both bits of fabric get stitched together, it's all fine.

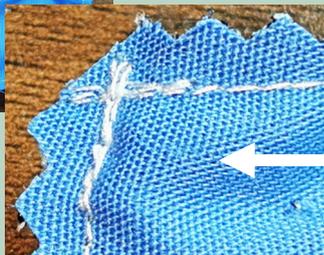
Holding the elastic at both ends of the short edge, continue stitching. I like to do a little back-stitch over the elastic ends to give them a bit more of a robust anchor, but it's up to you. Repeat for the second edge.



Step 8: Trimming and Turning



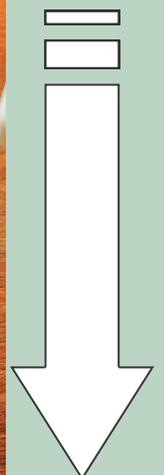
At this point, you'll have something that looks like this – an inside-out rectangle with a tiny gap on one long edge.



So now you'll trim your seam allowances and clip your corners – I use a pair of pinking shears but if you don't have any, that's fine, just trim the 5mm seam allowance down to around 2mm – again, it's not massively important to be perfectly accurate, we're just neatening things up.

I usually leave the seam allowance around the turning gap untrimmed – it makes it easier to ensure the gap gets closed during the gap stitching stage.

Using a finger, or a crochet hook, or whatever, reach into the gap in the long edge and find one of the pieces of elastic. Pull it back through and turn the piece right-sides-out.



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Step 8 Continued...

When completed, there should be no raw edges apart from the tiny bit visible in your turning gap. 



Give the item a good pressing with a hot iron – cotton typically gets ironed on a high setting, but be careful not to catch your elastic as it may melt, and you'll have to turn it inside out again, unpick the short edge and replace the elastic. No-one wants that.

Make sure to tuck and press the raw edges for the turning gap. If done correctly, this should blend in with the seam and we'll close it when we top stitch.



Step 9: The folding and Pleating

I've read a few tutorials where people say 'just eyeball a couple of pleats' or 'at roughly 1/3 of the way down, do a pleat'. This is not helpful, nor does it yield particularly elegant or consistent results, so I experimented a bit and came up with this.

9a) Fold the mask in half, with the outer fabric on the outside and press to get a good pleat line down the middle. This line will just be used to match the pleats to, so you could draw it with a fabric marker or chalk pencil if you prefer. 

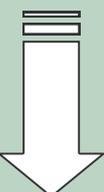


9b) Turn the mask over so the inner layer is up-permost. Take one side and fold the edge in to meet the middle line. Press again. This is the start of your first pleat.



9c) Turn the mask back over and pinch the fold you just made, then bring the folded edge down to meet the centre crease we created in step 9a. Press well. This is your first pleat.

Pin the 2 edges of the pleat down. I like to pin horizontally. Try to make sure the edges of the pleat line up neatly – if you need to tent the centre of the mask a little to match the sides, it's fine, the pleats will be unfolded on your face anyway, this is just to get the edge stitched down. 



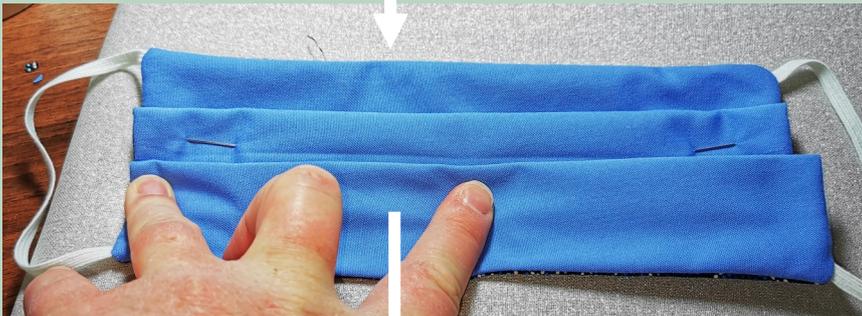
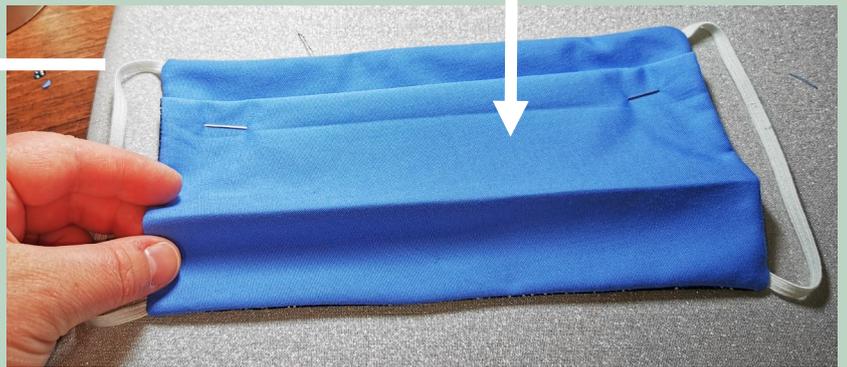
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9d) For pleat number 2, leave the mask outer-side up, and fold the un-pleated edge up to meet the centre crease/bottom of pleat 1 again. Press.



9e) Turn the mask over, and pinch the crease you just made, and then bring the creased edge up on the inner side to meet the centre line.



Press and pin, making sure that the pleat folds 'meet' but don't overlap on the centre line.

Adjust the pleats a bit if you need you – the pleats should not overlap as this will probably break a needle and it makes the mask bulkier on that side seam than it needs to be.



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Step 10: Top Stitching

This part can be difficult for beginners – it's difficult for me and I'm not a beginner – I'm terrible at it, my top stitching on these masks looks awful. It won't win you awards on Sewing Bee but it does the job.

Every sewing machine is different, but to get the best outcome, I find that if I move my machine needle to the right hand side, I can get a narrower topstitch line. This picture shows the fabric in position with the needle over on the far right above the presser foot.



I find it easier to start with one of the long edges as you won't have to contend with the folds. It's up to you whether you sew each edge as a separate line, or if you pivot at the corners.

Beginners may find it easier to sew each edge separately.

Run a line of straight stitching along the edges of the mask, and down the sides, making sure to securely stitch down your pleats.

If it's easier, leave a slightly larger gap between the stitching and the edge of the pleated sides as this will help the fabric pass under the presser foot more evenly – the narrow topstitching is only important on the long edge as this is what closes off the turning gap.

Remove any pins and give the mask one last press and you're done. The most comfortable orientation is to have the pleats pointing downwards.

