

How to Make a Cotton Mask with a Pocket for a Removable Filter

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I started mask-making by watching this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCJcE-r7kcg&fbclid=IwAR36RsCTTp0HX55X40HI18UITHHzNji4yTFJ2BGtZEKYfHvgWlzVa1mSNuE&app=desktop>

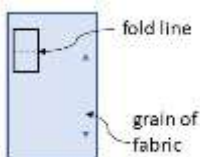
Then I wrote these step-by-step instructions, partly so I'd have something to refer to while sewing. I also wanted to pin down some details that aren't mentioned in the video. If you find any of my directions confusing though, you may want to watch the video.

Special notes at the end of this document:

- Fussy cutting to position a design on the front of the mask.
- Making the back from a different fabric from the front.
- Daisy chaining for multiple masks.
- Making masks for children.

Step 1 (Prepare your fabric and other materials):

We are making masks that will be able to be washed and dried. So, before you start, wash your fabric and dry it in the dryer.



- For the body of the mask: Cut a piece of fabric, 15" x 7.5". Generally, you'll want the long side of the rectangle to be parallel to the selvage of the fabric, as shown on the left.



If the fabric has a design and you care about the placement of the design on the mask, see special notes below.

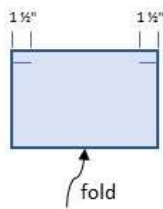
- For the nose wire: A pair of gardener's twist ties works well. (But don't use the paper ones from the grocery store.) Cut two pieces, each, 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ " long. No longer. You do not want to catch them in the binding on the sides of the mask. They might need to be replaced.
- For the side binding strips: Cut two pieces, 6" long and 2 $\frac{1}{8}$ " wide. You can use the same fabric or a complementary one. You'll notice that in the example shown here, I've used the same fabric but cut it across the grain, so the stripes will be horizontal.
- For the elastic straps: Cut two pieces of elastic, about 10" each. You can make these a little bit shorter or a little bit longer for comfort. Alternatively, you can skip the elastic and make ties. To do this, cut two 36" pieces of ribbon or bias tape, instead of the short binding strips described above.

Step 2 (the body of the mask):



- Place the fabric, right side up, on the table with the design right side up, as shown. (If there is no design where up matters, lay it either way.)

Serge or zigzag the bottom edge so that it won't ravel. It will be open to the back of the mask when completed. (The zigzag is shown in the white oval here.)



- Fold the fabric in half, *right sides* together. We want to leave a fairly big opening in the seam we are about to sew so that a filter can later be inserted if desired. So mark $1\frac{1}{2}$ " in from each side. (This measurement doesn't have to be exact, though.) Using a $\frac{1}{2}$ " seam allowance, sew those two short seams, from the edge of the fabric to your marks, making sure to backtrack for strength. You've now got a tube (with a partly open side) of fabric.

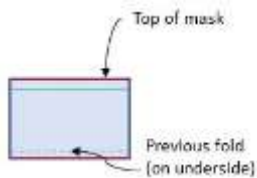


- Fold the tube so that the (partial) seam you've just sewn is facing you. Open up the seam and press it open.

- Place the tube as shown here with the side that has been zigzagged or serged on the right.
- Topstitch the right edge, about $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Keep the seam allowance pressed open as you sew. This is a bit tricky as the fabric may bunch up. Be careful not to catch any of it. Turn the tube right side out.

Here's what it will look like when you've done this.

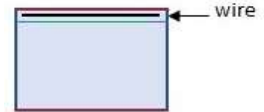




- Lay the tube flat again. But don't fold on the original fold line. Fold $\frac{1}{2}$ " away from it (so the seam/opening is now $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the top on what will be the back of the mask.) In the drawing, the red lines are the new folds; the green line is the partial seam that you sewed in the last step. In the picture, you can see the seam/opening in the white oval.) If your design has a right-side up, note that the opening you see here is on the back of the mask and your design will be upside down. Press.



Step 3 (The nose wire and stitching around the mask): A wire at the top of the mask can be used to crimp the mask so that it goes over the wearer's nose. In this step, you make the channel for it and also topstitch around the edges of the mask.



- Place the mask, front side down, on the machine as shown on the left here. Topstitch exactly $\frac{1}{8}$ " away from the top of the channel.

- Lift the needle and turn the fabric 180°. You are now going to sew around the bottom of the channel and then around both sides and the bottom of the mask, except for the sides of the nose wire channel. So move the fabric a bit to avoid that $\frac{1}{2}$ " of the side seam, as shown on the right here. Topstitch exactly $\frac{1}{8}$ " along the bottom of the nose wire channel. When you get about $\frac{1}{4}$ " away from the side, lift the presser foot, turn the fabric 90°, and sew down the side of the mask. When $\frac{1}{4}$ " away from the bottom, lift the presser foot and turn the fabric another 90°.



Sew along the bottom of the mask. When you get about $\frac{1}{4}$ " away from the side, lift the presser foot and turn the fabric another 90°. Sew up the other side until you are about an inch away from the top.



This last step sews from the back of the mask (so the bobbin thread is on the front). If you don't have quite the right thread in a bobbin, you can do it from the front. You just have to be very careful when you sewing the bottom of the nose wire channel.

On the front, the mask will now look as shown on the left here. (Don't worry about the two rough edges. They will be covered by the side binding strips.)

- Insert the wire(s) at the top of the mask, through one side of the channel. Be careful to position them in the middle of the mask. You do not want to catch them in the side seams since they may need to be replaced. Particularly if you are using a light color fabric, insert the wires so that two layers of fabric are in front of them. That way the green won't show through.



Step 4 (the pleats):

- Place your mask on the table, with the opening on the underside. What you're now looking at will be the outside of the mask when it is worn. Position the mask so the wire is on the top.

- Make a template like the one shown here. Each large square in the background is 1" x 1". Each small square of the template plastic is $\frac{1}{4}$ " x $\frac{1}{4}$ ".



- Using the template, mark the lines for the pleats. Clipping them is an easy way to do that.

- Make the pleats by folding along each purple line and bringing the fold down to the closest green line. Fold in the direction of the blue arrows. *Note that you are making the pleats so that they face downward on the outside of the mask.* Pin the pleats in place on both sides. Check that both sides are now 4" high. Adjust the pleats as necessary. Pin the pleats in the middle of the mask.



- Sew down the pleats by running a $\frac{3}{8}$ " seam along both sides of the mask. Leave the pins in the middle in until you've added the side bindings.

Step 5a (the side bindings and elastic if you are going to make elastic loops for holding the mask on):

- Place one strip of binding along a short edge of the mask, right sides together, with about $\frac{1}{2}$ " of binding sticking out past the bottom of the mask. Sew a $\frac{1}{2}$ " seam. Cut the other end of the binding so it also sticks out $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Check that you have not caught the ends of the nose wires.



- Fold the binding open and press flat (finger pressing should work).



- Turn the mask over so that you are looking at the back. Fold up the seam allowance on each end of the binding as shown here. Notice that it's not folded straight. It angles up a bit so that it will be completely hidden when the binding is folded over.

- Fold in the two short ends of the binding so that they align with the top and bottom of the mask. Again, angle inward a bit, as shown in the picture, so that they won't show on the outside of the mask. Finger press and pin.



- The next step is to sew down the two short edges of the binding. (This will keep the elastic from getting stuck when you feed it through the channel you are making.) If you don't want this stitching to be visible on the front of the mask, you can sew only the part that will be folded to the back of the mask. An easy thing to do is to sew as shown in white here. Start at position A and end at position B. You don't need the stitching on the long edge, but it's faster to do this than to stop and start. You also don't need to sew the two short edges twice, but if you do it this way, the ends of the threads will be on the part of the binding that is going to be tucked under.

- Fold the long raw edge of the binding over about $\frac{3}{8}$ ". Then fold again. Pin in place. You want the second folded edge to just cover the seam, so the amount of each fold will depend on the exact size of the seam and on how thick the fabric is (since folds actually take fabric). The photo is of the back of the mask at this point.
- Sew down the long edge. I sew by hand. But you can sew by machine if you want. Whether you sew by hand or machine, two things are important: You are making a channel through which the elastic will go. So do not sew along the bottom or top of the binding. And make sure to reinforce both ends since the elastic may pull. Do the second side the same way.



- Attach a safety pin to one end of a piece of elastic (cut to 10" or your chosen length). Use the safety pin to push the elastic through the channel. Remove the pin.

- Overlap the two ends of the elastic, being careful not to twist it. Sew the two ends together. The best way to do this is using a zigzag stitch. I use the stitch shown here (on a Babylock Accord). Much of the elastic that is available now tends to ravel, so it is good to zigzag over both ends of it.



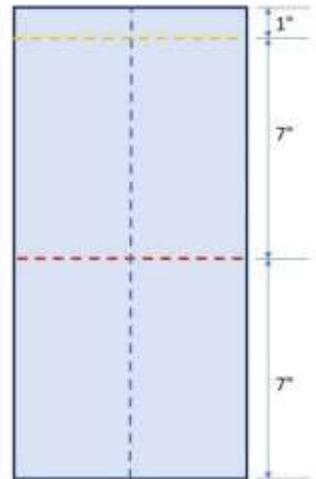
- Pull the elastic through the channel so that the seam is hidden.

Step 5b (the side bindings if you are going to make ties for holding the mask on): Some people like ties because they will adjust perfectly and not stretch out of shape.

- If you want to use ties, follow the instructions for Step 5a until the last three bullet items (that mention elastic).
- Make ties. You can use ready made seam tape or ribbon. Or you can cut two pieces of fabric and sew them into a tube.
- Thread the ties through the sides of the bindings, using a safety pin, as described above for elastic.
- Tack the ends together.

Special Notes

- **Fussy cutting to show off a design.** If the fabric has a design and you care about the placement of the design on the mask, make a tissue paper pattern, as shown here. On the pattern, the yellow line marks what will be at the top of the mask. The red line marks what will be the bottom. So you can decide what parts of the design will show there. The blue line on the pattern marks the middle, horizontally. If you have a geometric design, you may want to center it on the mask.



- **Using a different fabric for the back of the mask.** I generally cut the entire mask from a single piece of fabric. But you might want to make the back from a different fabric. I have done this once, when the fabric I was using was so tightly woven that I feared that two layers of it would effectively prevent breathing. To do this, cut the piece for the front 8.5" high and the piece for the back 7.5" high. This allows for a ½" seam at the bottom of the mask.

- **Daisy chaining.** If you are making two or more masks that use the same color thread, you can speed up the mask-making process by sewing them in parallel. Sew a seam on the first mask (the striped one shown here). Lift the presser foot and put the second one in place to sew. Lower the foot and sew. When done, clip the threads that connect the masks.



- **Children's masks.** Recall that the adult masks described here have a finished (after pleating) size of $7\frac{1}{2}$ " x 4". To make them, we cut a piece of mask fabric $7\frac{1}{2}$ " x 15", and we had a mask size, before pleating, of $7\frac{1}{2}$ " x 7". I have made two sizes of smaller masks for children.

- For a 7-year old, I made a mask whose finished size was $5\frac{1}{2}$ " x 3". To do this, cut the mask fabric $5\frac{1}{2}$ " x 12". Follow the standard directions for steps 1-3. The height of your mask will then be $5\frac{1}{2}$ " (yes, the same as the width, but that just happens to be so). Now, because the height is different from an adult mask, you will need a different template for marking the pleats. Use the one shown here. To make the pleats, fold along each purple line and bring the fold down to the next green line.
- For a 9-year old, I made a mask whose finished size was $6\frac{1}{2}$ " x 4". To do this, cut the mask fabric $6\frac{1}{2}$ " x 15". Since the height is the same as for the adult mask, you can use the standard pleating template.

