

The centuries-old art of needle and thread remains highly relevant today. Despite 19th-century fears surrounding the potential of the then-newfangled sewing machine to obsolete sewists, sewing skills have actually become more marketable over time. Recently, some fashion companies have taken to pretending that robotic machines make their clothing. However, the truth is that skilled people are always required for any sewing project.

Industries and Companies Driving Sewing Demand

While sewing is often associated with leisurely parlor ladies and grandma's quilting, it is also a form of skilled labor and the career of many breadwinners. To this day, sewing is ingrained in numerous industries.

Fashion and Apparel

Sewing is an integral tool in the fashion industry, where it's used to make clothing, footwear, and accessories. Professionals in this industry create both ready-to-wear and custom apparel, like one-of-a-kind bridal gowns. Revenue growth in this industry accelerates by 8% per year, aided by shrinking trend cycles, ecommerce convenience, and digital marketing. Alongside the fast-fashion craze, the industry also encompasses a growing number of designers and consumers invested in slow fashion (an approach that prioritizes fair trade and sustainability).

Sewists can access a range of apparel-related employment opportunities:

- Apparel retail companies, brands, luxury labels, and fashion houses.
- Bridal wear and tailoring companies.
- Fashion design and sewing education programs.
- Styling studios and firms.

- Fashion retailers that offer tailoring services.

Textile and Leather Manufacturing

While not common in hobbyist circles, industrial sewing is a key tool for manufacturing. There, sewing helps assemble many items, from curtains to upholstery for furniture and vehicles. It's also commonly practiced in bookbinding. Manufacturing contributes around 10% to the US national GDP, making it a sizable slice of the economy. In this niche, the main employers are wholesale and manufacturing companies.

Entertainment and Performance Arts

With Hollywood movies often shelling out millions for costumes, the entertainment industry is well known for its clothing. While some costumes are constructed using other methods, most are designed and constructed by sewists.

Entertainment employers commonly need sewing experts, including:

- Costume design organizations
- Performing arts companies such as the American Ballet Theatre (ABT)
- Video production, film, and television studios
- Sports entertainment companies like WWE Wrestling

Common Sewing Career Paths and Salaries

Sewing is a manifold art that branches into many potential career paths, each with unique responsibilities, skills, and salary averages (roles are explored in depth below). Thanks to this variety, sewists can both enjoy careers that fulfill their interests and select paths that fit their circumstances. For example, roles like Fashion Designer and Tailor often require significant experience, but thanks to the presence of roles like

Stitcher and Sewing Machine Operator, less knowledgeable sewists can begin building experience as novices.

On average, sewing-related careers earn about \$62,000 each year. However, this average only tells part of the story. In reality, just over half of sewing jobs pay less than this, while the rest earn more. Income variations are determined by location, demand for specific services, and the individual's experience. The top earners are Fashion Designers and Costume Designers living in high-demand fashion centers like New York City and Los Angeles.

Job Title	Main Responsibilities	Average Annual Salary, United States
Seamstress	No longer the gendered role it was historically, this career emphasizes sewing apparel. They often create custom clothing based on unique commissions. This position is also sometimes referred to under the monikers Seamster, Sewist, and Sewer, due to potentially uncomfortable connotations now associated with the word "Seamstress."	\$47,000-59,000 Glassdoor.com
Tailor	Tailoring involves constructing garments with more complex architecture such as ball gowns and traditional men's suits. To give garments a specific structure, Tailors use hand stitching to	\$55,000-74,000 Glassdoor.com

carefully sculpt layers of fabric, padding, and stiff supports. In addition, Tailors often alter existing garments to fit their clients.

Stitcher / Sewing Machine Operator

These entry-level positions involve assembling pre-cut fabric pieces into a finished item. While Sewing Machine Operators work with a sewing machine alone, Stitchers rely on a combination of hand sewing and machine work. These professionals often work in clothing-adjacent niches such as costume design.

\$49,000-62,000

Glassdoor.com

Fashion Designer

These creatives design and make apparel. While often hailed as avant-garde, Fashion Designers can also specialize in ordinary clothing niches such as kids' clothing, swimwear, or boho-chic.

\$75,000-

102,000

Glassdoor.com

Patternmaker

Responsible for creating the two-dimensional blueprints that sewists know as patterns, Patternmakers serve as a bridge between conceptual designs and sewn reality.

\$68,000-91,000

Glassdoor.com

Sample Maker

Working closely with designers, Sample Makers sew mock-ups of initial designs to identify problems and refine patterns before completed garments are made.

\$47,000-59,000

Glassdoor.com

Costume Designer

These creatives are the minds behind the costumes visible in films, television, and stage performances. Costume Designers use clothing to tell stories and convey character while also accounting for practical concerns like dancing and stunts. Like Tailors, they may also take charge of alterations and repairs.

\$75,000-108,000

Glassdoor.com

Embroiderer

Specializing in decorative stitches, these professionals create designs for display on fabric. They may use hand sewing, machines, or a combination. Embroiderers are also responsible for attaching beads, trim, sequins, and other decorative elements to fabric.

\$41,00-53,000

Glassdoor.com

Sewing Instructor

This rewarding career entails teaching sewing skills to students of varying ages and backgrounds. Some teachers only teach beginner lessons, while more experienced instructors offer advanced training.

\$53,000-67,000

Glassdoor.com

Top Locations to Build a Sewing Career

You can build a career in any location with a demand for sewing. In practice, this means many Seamstresses and Tailors own small businesses, with local Sewing Instructors providing lessons in their homes. That said, top-paying sewing jobs are concentrated around large metropolitan centers with strong industrial and design sectors. The top

four include New York City (NYC), Paris, London, and Milan. Additional sewing hubs located within the US include Los Angeles (LA), San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago, Las Vegas, and Miami.

New York City Sewing Careers

One of the globe's top four fashion destinations, this bustling metropolis has a massive commercial fashion market aided by over 65 million annual visitors. People also come from afar to shop for other textile goods (like furniture). The city's well-oiled network includes a balanced mix of retailers, designers, manufacturers, suppliers, and other clients, meaning that sewing professionals have their pick of the litter when it comes to opportunities.

If you ask any sewist who lives in NYC, Manhattan is the place to be. There, in the city's official Garment District, hundreds of businesses come together to supply sewing materials, design clothing, sew finished items, offer tailoring, and sell ready-to-wear clothing. Meanwhile, the intertwining Theater District eats up a steady stream of custom-made stage costumes.

Key employment options in NYC include:

- Companies that make or alter clothing. In addition to fashion brands (like Ralph Lauren and Marc Jacobs), these can include tailoring and bridalwear companies (such as Kleinfeld) and wholesale manufacturers (such as Oscar de La Renta)
- Performance arts organizations such as Broadway
- Retailers with alteration departments (like Saks Fifth Avenue and Macy's)
- Schools such as The New York Sewing Center and the Fashion Institute of Technology

Los Angeles Sewing Careers

Like NYC, Los Angeles is an epicenter for fashion and costume design, making it a top location to start a sewing career. The city is particularly famous for its denim and leather apparel and is considered the top clothes shopping destination in America. Spread across 107 blocks, the LA Fashion District includes more than 2,000 apparel retailers along with Designer showrooms and sewing spaces. As America's second most important textile and fabric manufacturer, LA also includes plenty of material suppliers and manufacturers that need talented sewists.

The local entertainment and education industries also add significant fuel to sewing jobs. Local sewing professionals will find a wealth of opportunities to develop costumes for Hollywood, theater, and other performing arts. Meanwhile, those with the right expertise can find fulfillment in a steady stream of eager sewing students.

Sewing employment opportunities in LA come from a mix of:

- Companies that make, sell, and tailor apparel. Examples include fashion brands like Guess and Lucky Brand, retailers like Forever 21, and luxury labels like Rick Owens
- Costume design companies such as Western Costume Company and Local 892
- Entertainment companies. This category encompasses film studios like Walt Disney and Warner Bros., as well as performing arts companies
- Schools such as StitchSpace LA, the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising, Otis College of Art and Design, and Sew FYI

Alexandra Malouf