

SEMPER HOPKINS

Introduction to Upholstery

Your practical guide to tools, materials and techniques. Learn the skills. Build your confidence. Create independently.



A Welcome from Emma

Welcome to Introduction to Upholstery!

For me, learning upholstery is all about being curious, asking questions and having the confidence to give something new a go. It's about understanding how things are made, exploring different materials and techniques, and discovering what you can achieve with your own hands.

Learning a new skill takes time and practice. Things won't always go to plan, and that's absolutely fine. Be kind to yourself, ask questions and don't worry about getting everything perfect first time.

Most importantly, enjoy the process. Take your time, experiment and have fun along the way. I hope this is just the beginning of your upholstery journey, and that you'll leave feeling inspired and confident to tackle more projects of your own.

Emma x

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1.Understand Upholstery

Before picking up the tools, let's explore how upholstered furniture is made, modern versus traditional upholstery and how furniture is constructed

What Is Upholstery?

Upholstery is the craft of making furniture comfortable and functional using materials such as webbing, springs, padding and fabric. It's also a wonderful way to breathe new life into existing furniture.

Upholstery has evolved over hundreds of years, with different materials and techniques introduced as furniture design and manufacturing have changed.

Traditional upholstery is associated with older furniture and uses materials such as coil springs, hessian, horsehair and natural fillings. These techniques are still used today, particularly when restoring antique furniture.

Modern upholstery developed with the introduction of newer materials, particularly during the 20th century. It commonly uses foam, webbing and polyester wadding to create comfort and shape.

Both approaches have their place, and some furniture combines traditional and modern techniques. During this workshop, we'll focus on modern upholstery, giving you practical skills and a foundation to build on.

Understanding Furniture Construction

Every piece of furniture is different, and understanding how it's constructed is an important part of learning upholstery.

Some pieces, such as chairs, sofas and footstools, have a frame that supports the upholstery. Others, such as ottoman tops, bench seats, headboards and some dining chairs, have a solid wooden base.

From there, different layers of materials are added to provide support, comfort, shape and the final finish. The materials and techniques used will depend on the furniture's design, age and purpose.

Emma's Tip: Get curious! Look underneath, turn furniture over and notice how it's been put together. What materials have been used? How are they attached? What purpose do they serve? The more you observe and ask questions, the more you'll begin to understand how furniture is made.



Tools, Materials & Fabric

Getting to know your tools, materials and fabrics is an important part of learning upholstery.

In this section, we'll explore what they're used for, how to choose the right materials and what to consider when selecting fabric for your projects.

Upholstery Tools: Staple Gun

Having the right tools makes upholstery easier, safer and much more enjoyable. You don't need to invest in lots of expensive equipment to get started. Think about the projects you'd like to make and how often you're likely to use your tools.

Choosing Your Staple Gun

A staple gun is one of the most frequently used tools in modern upholstery, so it's worth choosing one that suits your needs.

Battery-powered staple gun: A portable option that doesn't require an air compressor. A good choice for occasional upholstery projects at home.



E.g. Tacwise 4v or 12v
Cordless Stapler / 53 Series 12mm Staples

Pneumatic staple gun: Powered by compressed air and commonly used in professional upholstery workshops. Ideal for regular use and larger projects, although you'll also need an air compressor and hose. This equipment is an investment, but good-quality tools can last for many years.



E.g. Senco Xtreme Pro Series
71 Series Stapler / 71 Series 3mm-12mm Galv Staples





Compressor and Air Hose

Emma's Tip: You can spend a little or a lot on upholstery equipment, so speak to a specialist supplier to find what's right for you. We recommend MyToolKit online, although there are plenty of other suppliers available.

Other Essential Upholstery Tools

Alongside your staple gun, there are a few other tools you'll use regularly. Getting familiar with them will make preparing, upholstering and finishing your projects much easier.



Tack Hammer: A lightweight hammer used for securing upholstery tacks and small nails.



Tack Lifter: Used to lift and loosen upholstery tacks when stripping furniture.



Staple Remover: Helps remove staples from wooden frames when stripping upholstery or correcting mistakes.



Pincers: Used to grip and pull out stubborn staples, tacks and small nails.



Upholstery Scissors: Used for cutting fabric and upholstery materials. I recommend having two pairs: one specifically for fabric and another for materials such as hessian and wadding.



Double-Ended Upholstery Needle (**10" or 12"**) - A long needle used for shallow buttoning, allowing you to pass through the upholstery layers to attach and secure buttons.

Other Essential Upholstery Tools

Measuring, Marking & Positioning Tools- Accurate measuring and marking make a real difference when upholstering furniture. These simple tools will help you prepare, cut and position your fabric and materials.



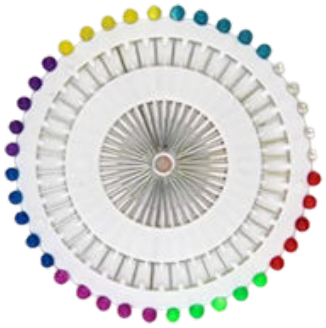
Metal Ruler: A 1-metre ruler is ideal, with a smaller 20-inch ruler useful for detailed work.



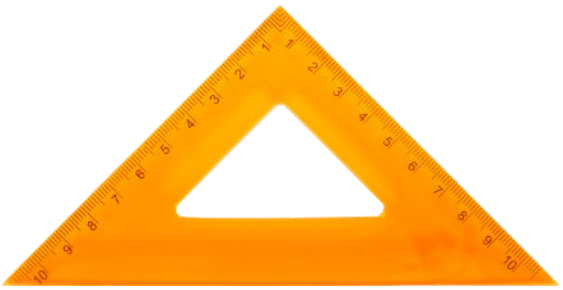
Fabric Tape Measure: A flexible tape measure for measuring furniture, fabric and curved or shaped surfaces



Tailor's Chalk or Chalk Pencil
For marking fabric before cutting. I use Koh-I-Noor chalk pencils.



Pins: Used to hold fabric in position before securing.



Set Square: For checking right angles and marking accurate cutting lines.



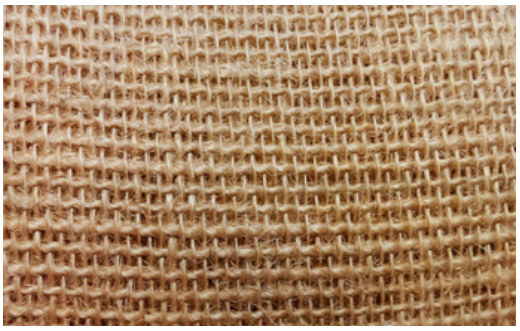
Marker Pen: For marking wooden frames, foam and other materials.

Upholstery Materials

Different materials are used to provide support, comfort, shape and finishing details. Here are the materials we'll be working with during the workshop.



Seat Webbing: Used to create a strong, supportive foundation for your upholstered furniture.



Hessian (10-12 oz):A strong woven fabric used to cover the webbing and provide a foundation for the padding.



Polyester Wadding (Dacron) - 2 oz, 4 oz or 6 oz: A soft layer placed over foam to smooth edges, soften the shape and create an even finish.



Spray Adhesive: Used to attach foam and wadding to suitable surfaces.



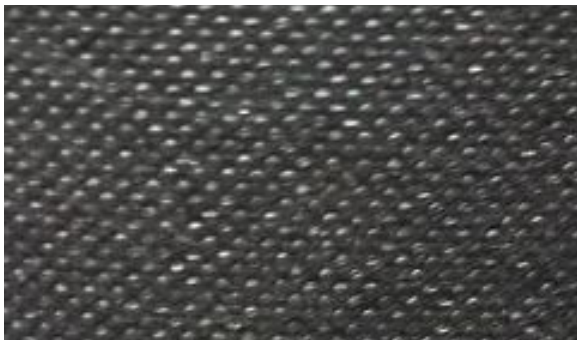
Alloy Button Shells & Wire Backs - Size No. 30 - Used to make fabric-covered upholstery buttons.



Nylon Buttoning Twine: Strong twine used to secure upholstered buttons.

Upholstery Materials

Different materials are used to provide support, comfort, shape and finishing details. Here are the materials we'll be working with during the workshop



Black Dipryl (Backing Fabric) - A lightweight, non-woven fabric used to cover the underside of upholstered furniture.



Furniture Legs with M8 Fixings - Available in different styles and finishes to personalise your furniture.



Washers for Furniture Legs - Used with suitable fixings when attaching furniture legs.

Choosing the Right Upholstery Foam

Foam is used in modern upholstery to provide comfort, support and shape. Different furniture requires different types of foam, depending on how it will be used.

A dining chair, footstool, bench or sofa cushion may all need different levels of firmness, thickness and durability.

Understanding Your Foam

- Density – The weight of foam per cubic metre. Higher-density foam is generally more durable, but isn't necessarily firmer.
- Firmness – How soft or firm the foam feels when compressed.
- Thickness – The depth of foam needed to provide the right comfort, support and shape for your furniture.

Choosing More Sustainable Materials

Most conventional upholstery foam is made from polyurethane, a petroleum-based material with limited recycling options.

In our workshops, we use recycled polyester cushioning materials made from recycled PET plastic bottles, helping to give existing materials a new purpose. These alternatives aren't yet as widely available as conventional upholstery foam, but more sustainable options are gradually entering the market.

Working with a Specialist Supplier

We recommend speaking to a specialist upholstery foam supplier when choosing materials for your own projects. They can advise on the right grade, firmness and thickness for your furniture. Many also offer professional cutting services, helping you get the correct size and shape.

Emma's Tip: If you'd like to use similar materials to those we use in our workshops, ask your supplier for recycled PET polyester cushioning or padding made from recycled plastic bottles. Explain your project so they can recommend the most suitable product.

Understanding Foam Grades

Upholstery foam is available in different grades depending on its density, firmness and intended use.

Suppliers often use a combination of numbers and descriptions to identify different grades. These specifications help you understand which foam is suitable for seating, backs, cushions or padding.

You don't need to memorise the grades. Speak to a specialist upholstery supplier, explain what you're making and ask them to recommend the most suitable option.

Grade	Colour	Typical Applications
6lb recon	Orange	Bar seating, vehicle seats, arm rails, gym mats, and general support
8lb recon	Pink	Gym mats, soft play equipment, martial arts pads, arm rails and very firm bench seats
10lb recon	Blue	Gym mats, soft play equipment, martial arts.
30/110 Soft	Lilac	Memory foam, ideal for mattress toppers or comfort layer over firmer foam
50/230 Hard	White	Very firm quality foam used in auditoria, vehicle and very high use seating applications
50/135 Soft	Pink	Luxury medium soft seating for top quality seat cushions and toppers

Understanding Foam Grades

Grade	Colour	Typical Applications
24/130 Firm	Yellow / White	Firm, low density grade suitable for arm wraps, back foam, wings and padding
24/065 Super soft	White	Super soft foam ideal for soft back cushions and wraps
28/150 Firm	Grey	Firm foam suitable for fixed backs, deep buttoning and arm wraps
30/110 Soft	Lilac	Soft foam ideal for soft fixed backs, arm foam or soft wraps
33/160 Firm	White	Medium - firm foam suitable for seating. Widely used in caravan and motorhome upholstery, firm fixed backs, deep buttoning and arm wraps.
33/190 Hard	Blue	Firm seat foam. widely used in contract upholstery for backs and seat toppers. Ideal for a firm seat cushion or wrap, dining chair pads and office furniture
36/110 Super soft	White	Super soft seating foam, ideal for replacing fibre or feather seat cushions or a topper over firmer foam
36/125 Medium	Beige	Medium feel foam. ideal for caravan cushions, medium feel seat cushiosn, arm and seat wraps
39/120 Soft	Orange	Quality soft medium foam, ideal for seat cushions, and softer toppers over firmer foam
39 /200 Hard	Blue	Quality firm foam, ideal for firm seat cushions and seat toppers
40/150 Medium	Grey	Quality Medium feel foam., ideal for most seat cushions.

Choosing Upholstery Fabric

Choosing fabric is one of the most enjoyable parts of upholstery, but there's more to consider than colour and pattern.

Before falling in love with a fabric, think about how your furniture will be used and whether the fabric is suitable for the job.

What Should You Consider?

Purpose & Durability

Who will use the furniture, and how often? A frequently used dining chair or sofa needs a more durable fabric than an occasional decorative piece.

Fabric Composition

Consider what the fabric is made from, such as wool, cotton, linen or synthetic fibres. Different materials have different properties, textures and care requirements.

Care & Maintenance

Check the manufacturer's cleaning instructions. Some fabrics are easier to maintain than others, particularly in busy households.

Colour, Pattern & Texture

Think about whether you want your furniture to blend into the room or make a statement. Consider how patterns, textures and the direction of the fabric will work on your piece.

Budget

Upholstery fabrics vary considerably in price. Set a realistic budget and consider how much fabric you'll need.

Choosing Upholstery Fabric

Understanding Fabric Specifications

Before purchasing, check the supplier's fabric specifications.

Martindale Rub Test

Measures a fabric's resistance to abrasion. As a general guide:

- 15,000–25,000 rubs: Light domestic use.
- 40,000+ rubs: Heavier domestic use.
- 70,000+ rubs: High-traffic and commercial environments.

Colour Fastness to Light

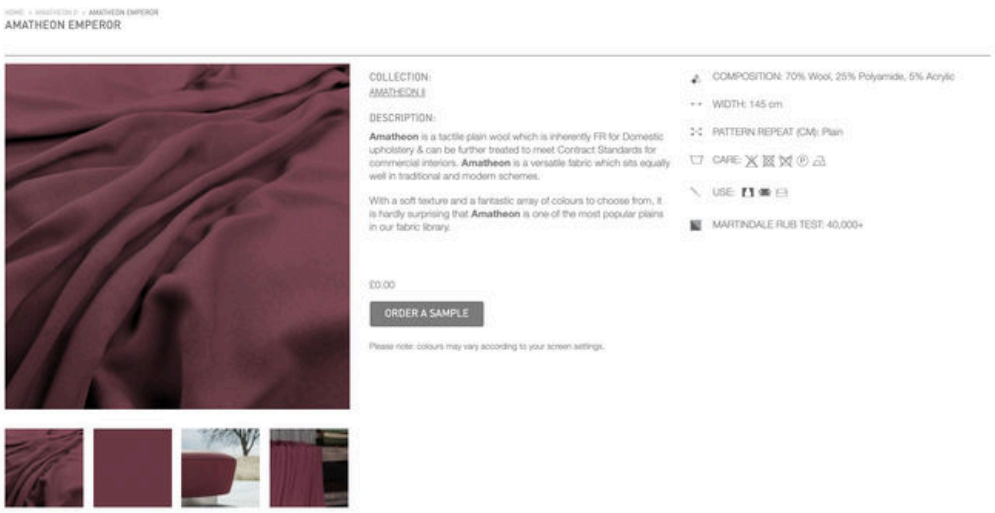
Indicates how resistant the fabric is to fading when exposed to light.

Fabric Width & Pattern Repeat

Important when calculating quantities, particularly for patterned fabrics.

Fire Safety

Check that the fabric and upholstery materials meet the relevant UK fire safety requirements for your furniture and intended use. Ask your supplier if you're unsure.



Emma's Tip: Always request a fabric sample before buying. Check the colour, texture and feel in your own space, and make sure the fabric is suitable for upholstery, not just curtains or cushions.



3.Core Upholstery Techniques

Now it's time to put everything into practice!
In this section, we'll work through the techniques you'll use to create your own upholstered piece of furniture, from preparing the foundations to adding the finishing touches.

Take your time, ask questions and enjoy learning something new.
Remember, practice is all part of the process.

Attaching Seat Webbing

Webbing creates a strong, supportive foundation for your upholstered seat.

Tools & Materials You'll Need: Elasticated seat webbing, staple gun and scissors.

The Technique

1. Space each strip approximately 1 inch (2.5 cm) apart, or around two to three finger widths. Aim for even spacing across the frame.
2. Fold over approximately ½ inch (a finger width) of webbing to create a double layer.
3. Staple the folded end securely to the furniture frame.
4. Stretch the webbing firmly across to the opposite side.
5. Staple the webbing in place while keeping it under tension.
6. Fold the webbing back over itself and staple again, creating a double-strength fixing.
7. Cut away the excess webbing.
8. Repeat the process, spacing each strip evenly until you've completed the webbing in one direction.
9. Turn your frame and repeat the process in the opposite direction, this time weaving the webbing over and under the existing strips before stretching and stapling it into place.
10. For the second strip, reverse the pattern, weaving under first, then over. Continue alternating the weave with each new strip until your seat base is complete.



Watch the demonstration video here

Emma's Tip: Don't cut your webbing to length before attaching it. Keeping it on the roll allows you to stretch it properly and secure both ends before trimming.

Attaching Hessian

Hessian creates a strong, protective layer over your webbing, helping to support the upholstery materials above and provide an even foundation.

Tools & Materials You'll Need: Hessian (10–12 oz), staple gun and scissors

The Technique

1. Lay the hessian over your webbed frame, allowing enough material to fold underneath the edges.
2. Starting in the centre of one side, staple the hessian to the frame, working towards each end.
3. Space your staples approximately 1 inch (2.5 cm) apart, stopping around 2 inches (5 cm) from each corner.
4. Turn your frame around, pull the hessian firmly across and repeat on the opposite side.
5. Repeat the process on the remaining two sides, keeping the hessian smooth and evenly tensioned.
6. At each corner, fold the excess hessian neatly underneath and staple securely into place.



Watch the demonstration video here

Emma's Tip: Keep the hessian smooth and taut without pulling it so tightly that you distort the webbing underneath. Take your time folding the corners for a neat, secure finish.

Attaching Foam

Spray adhesive is used to secure the foam to the hessian, creating a stable foundation for the next stage of upholstery.

Tools & Materials You'll Need: Foam, spray adhesive and a dust sheet.

Preparing Your Workspace

Cover your workbench with a dust sheet to protect it from spray adhesive. Make sure you're working in a well-ventilated area and follow the adhesive manufacturer's safety instructions.

The Technique

1. Cover your workbench with a dust sheet to protect it from spray adhesive. Work in a well-ventilated area and follow the manufacturer's safety instructions.
2. Position your foam on top of the hessian, making sure it's correctly aligned.
3. Carefully fold back half of the foam, keeping the other half in position.
4. Spray a generous, even layer of adhesive onto the exposed hessian.
5. Gently lower the foam back into position, keeping the edges aligned.
6. Fold back the other half of the foam and repeat the process.
7. Gently press the foam into place to ensure it's securely attached.



Watch the demonstration video here

Emma's Tip: Spray adhesive typically becomes tacky within 30-40 seconds, so work carefully and confidently. Attaching the foam in two halves gives you greater control, particularly on larger projects such as benches and headboards.

Attaching Dacron

Dacron creates a soft, protective layer over the foam, helping to smooth the edges and prepare your furniture for the top fabric.

Tools & Materials You'll Need: Wooden frame, Dacron (large enough to cover the foam and frame), staple gun and scissors.

The Technique

1. Measure and cut a piece of Dacron large enough to cover the foam and wrap around the frame.
2. Position the Dacron evenly over the foam.
3. Staple the Dacron into place around the frame, spacing staples approximately 4–5 inches (10–12 cm) apart.
4. Secure the Dacron neatly around the corners.
5. Cut away the excess Dacron from the corners to reduce bulk.





Watch the demonstration video here

Emma's Tip: You don't need lots of staples when attaching Dacron. You're simply tacking it into place. For curved furniture, pull the Dacron taut, gather and staple it neatly around the curves, then trim away any excess to reduce bulk and create a smooth finish.

Measuring for Your Top Fabric

Before cutting your upholstery fabric, it's important to measure your furniture accurately, allowing enough fabric to cover the top, sides and underneath the frame for stapling.

Tools & Materials You'll Need: Completed wooden frame, flexible tape measure, pen and paper.

The Technique

1. Place your completed frame on a stable work surface.
2. Using a flexible tape measure, measure across the top of the frame, continuing down both sides to include the foam and frame.
3. Add an extra 5 cm allowance on each side to give you enough fabric to pull and staple underneath.
4. Repeat the process in the opposite direction to calculate the length of fabric required.
5. Write down both measurements before cutting your fabric.



Emma's Tip: Always have a pen and paper handy to record your measurements. Measure twice before cutting your fabric — it's much easier to double-check now than discover you've cut it too short!

Watch the demonstration video here

Marking and Cutting Your Top Fabric

Accurate marking and cutting will help ensure your fabric fits your furniture correctly and is ready for upholstering.

Tools & Materials You'll Need: Upholstery fabric, tailor's chalk or Koh-I-Noor chalk pencil, metre ruler, set square and fabric scissors.

The Technique

1. Roll out your fabric on a clean, flat surface and check for any flaws or imperfections before cutting.
2. Using your ruler and set square, check that the bottom and side edges you're measuring from are straight and at right angles to each other.
3. Measure and mark the width of your fabric using the measurements you've recorded.
4. Measure and mark the length, then join your markings to create a square or rectangle.
5. Double-check all your measurements before cutting.
6. Mark the centre point on all four sides of your fabric.
7. Cut small notches at each centre point so you can easily identify them when positioning your fabric.
8. Carefully cut out your fabric along the marked lines.





Emma's Tip: Always check that your starting edges are straight and square before measuring. If they're not, your fabric could end up wonky, even if your measurements are correct!

Watch the demonstration video here

Stapling Your Top Fabric to the Frame

Correctly positioning and tensioning your fabric is important for achieving a smooth, professional finish.

Tools & Materials You'll Need: Cut upholstery fabric, furniture frame, staple gun and staples, black marker pen, ruler, staple remover and tack lifter.

The Technique

1. Using a ruler and black marker, measure and mark the centre points on all four sides of your wooden frame.
2. Lay your fabric flat on your work surface, with the underside facing upwards.
3. Position your frame onto the fabric, aligning the centre marks on the frame with the notches you've cut into the fabric.
4. Starting at the centre of one side, pull the fabric over the frame and secure it with a staple.
5. Repeat on the opposite side, pulling the fabric firmly to establish your tension. Repeat on the remaining two sides, checking that your fabric is centred, smooth and evenly tensioned.
6. Working from the centre outwards, staple approximately 2 inches (5 cm) of fabric at a time, placing the staples closely together with no gaps.
7. Turn the frame and repeat on the opposite side, continuing to work a couple of inches at a time around the frame to maintain even tension.
8. Continue until you reach approximately 3 inches (7.5 cm) from each corner, leaving enough fabric to create your corner folds.



Watch the demonstration video here

Emma's Tip: Take your time setting the tension before adding more staples. Check all four sides to make sure the fabric is smooth and evenly stretched. It's much easier to adjust a few staples now than remove lots later!

How to finish your furniture with double pleats

Double pleats create a neat, decorative finish to the corners of your upholstered furniture. This technique is taught in four practical steps, helping you build your confidence with each fold.

Tools & Materials You'll Need: Furniture frame, staple gun, staples, scissors, staple remover and tack lifter.

The Technique

During the workshop, watch Emma demonstrate each step before having a go yourself. We'll work through the three stages together, giving you time to practise and ask questions along the way. When you're ready to tackle your next project at home, you can revisit the video demonstrations below to refresh your memory.

Watch the Video Demonstrations

1. Step 1 – Click here to watch the step-by-step demonstration
2. Step 2 – Click here to watch the step-by-step demonstration
3. Step 3 – Click here to watch the step-by-step demonstration
4. Step 4 – Finishing off. Click here to watch the step-by-step demonstration





Emma's Tip: Always check that your starting edges are straight and square before measuring. If they're not, your fabric could end up wonky, even if your measurements are correct!

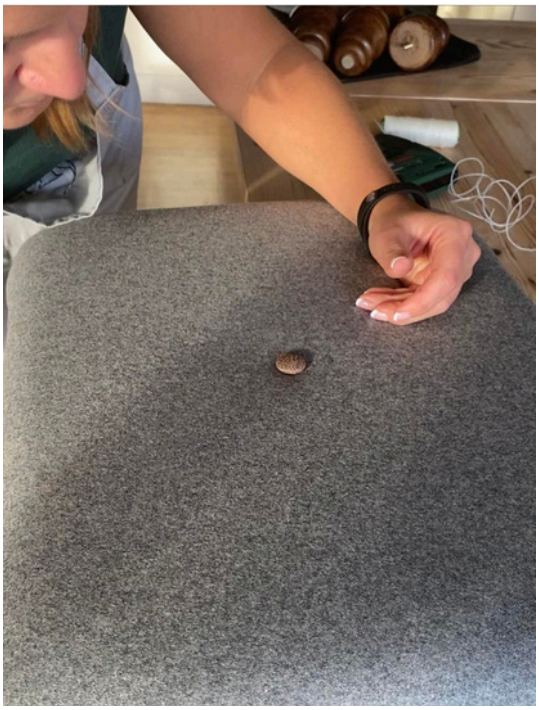
Creating Shallow Buttons

Shallow buttoning is a decorative upholstery technique that creates gentle indentations in the fabric, adding detail and shape to your finished furniture.

Tools & Materials You'll Need: Furniture frame, needle, butttons, buttoning twine, scrap fabric.

The Technique

1. Turn your furniture over and use a ruler to find the centre point of the frame from underneath. Mark this position with a pin.
2. From underneath, push your buttoning needle through the marked point, eye first, to identify the central button position.
3. Measure and mark the remaining button positions using a ruler and pins, checking that they're evenly spaced and suit the size of your furniture.
4. Starting with the centre button, use your buttoning needle and nylon twine to pull the button into position. Repeat for the remaining buttons.
5. Secure the twine underneath the frame using a slip knot, placing a small piece of fabric beneath the knot to prevent it pulling through. Finish with a double knot and trim off any excess twine.



Step 1 - Click here to watch the step-by-step demonstration

Step 2 - Click here to watch the step-by-step demonstration

Emma's Tip: If you're buttoning into a solid wooden base rather than hessian and webbing, remember to drill the buttoning holes before you start upholstering. Otherwise, you won't be able to pass your buttoning needle through the frame.

Attaching Your Bottom Cloth

Bottom cloth, sometimes called Black Dipryl, is used to cover the underside of your upholstered furniture. It conceals the webbing, staples and frame, giving your finished piece a neat, professional appearance.

Tools & Materials You'll Need: Upholstered furniture frame, Black Dipryl bottom cloth, staple gun, staples and fabric scissors.

The Technique

1. Turn your upholstered furniture upside down on a clean, protected work surface.
2. Measure and cut your bottom cloth to fit the underside of the frame, allowing enough fabric to fold the edges neatly underneath.
3. Position the bottom cloth centrally over the underside of your frame.
4. Starting in the centre of one side, fold the edge under and staple into position. Repeat on the opposite side, keeping the cloth smooth.
5. Continue stapling around the frame, folding the corners neatly and ensuring the cloth lies flat.
6. Trim away any excess fabric for a tidy finish.



Emma's Tip: Keep the bottom cloth smooth and neatly folded at the edges. Although it's underneath your furniture, a tidy finish makes all the difference.

Watch the demonstration video here

Attaching Your Furniture Feet

Attaching the feet is the final stage of your upholstery project, bringing everything together and transforming your upholstered frame into a finished piece of furniture.

Tools & Materials You'll Need: Upholstered furniture frame, furniture feet, plastic washers and any tools required for your chosen feet.

The Technique

1. Turn your furniture upside down on a clean, protected work surface.
2. Identify the fixing points on the underside of your frame.
3. Position the plastic washers and attach your furniture feet using the M8 fixings.
4. Screw each foot into position until it's secure, taking care not to overtighten. Overtightening can damage the fixing or cause the foot to come away from its threaded fitting.
5. Carefully turn your furniture upright and check that it stands evenly and feels stable.



Emma's Tip: Different furniture feet may require different fixings. Always check the manufacturer's instructions before attaching them to your frame.

Step 1 - Click here to watch the step-by-step demonstration for attaching feet

Step 2 - Click here to watch the step-by-step demonstration for attaching legs



4.Create Independently

From learning the techniques to creating your own upholstery projects. Now it's time to put your new skills into practice.

In this section, we'll help you choose a suitable project, assess your furniture, calculate the materials you'll need and plan your next steps.

It's all about building the confidence to tackle your own projects and enjoy the process of creating something yourself.

Choosing Your Independent Project

One of the best ways to develop your upholstery skills is to get stuck in and have a go! Every piece of furniture is different, and you'll learn something new with each project. The important thing is to take your time, understand how it's constructed and build your skills as you go.

I wouldn't necessarily recommend jumping straight from making a footstool to reupholstering a sofa! Instead, you might progress to a dining chair, headboard or bench, gradually introducing new techniques, more challenging fabrics and different furniture shapes. With each project, you'll build your knowledge, confidence and practical skills, preparing you to tackle more complicated pieces in the future.

What to Look For

When choosing a piece of furniture to transform, consider:

- The frame: Is it sturdy and in good condition, or will it need repairing?
- The construction: How has the furniture been upholstered? Can you identify the different layers and how they're attached?
- The materials: What might need replacing, and what could be reused?
- The design and techniques: Do you want to recreate the original look or change the design? Think about the upholstery techniques you'll need. Have you already learnt these skills, or are they something you feel confident having a go at and learning along the way?

Learning Through Deconstruction

One of the most valuable things you can do is carefully strip back the existing upholstery.
As you remove each layer, you'll begin to understand how the furniture was originally constructed and how you might rebuild it.

Emma's Tip: Take plenty of photographs as you remove each layer, particularly around corners, folds and fixings. Keep the original fabric pieces where possible, as these can be useful templates when cutting your new fabric.

Deconstructing Your Furniture

Before you start reupholstering a piece of furniture, you need to understand how it was originally constructed.

Carefully removing the existing upholstery is one of the best ways to learn. It allows you to see how the different materials, layers and techniques work together.

Tools You'll Need: Staple remover, tack lifter, pincers and scissors.

The Process

1. Photograph your furniture before you begin, taking pictures from different angles and capturing any details you may need to recreate.
2. Work backwards, carefully removing the upholstery in the reverse order to which it was originally attached.
3. Take photographs as you go, particularly of corners, pleats, folds and how the fabric has been secured.
4. Keep the original fabric pieces intact wherever possible. Label them so you know where they came from, as they may be useful templates for cutting your new fabric.
5. Examine each layer as you remove it, paying attention to the materials used and how they're attached to the frame.
6. Assess the frame and materials once the upholstery has been removed. Check what can be reused, what needs replacing and whether any repairs are required.

Emma's Tip: Don't rush to strip everything off! Take your time and pay attention to how the furniture has been put together. The photographs and notes you take now will be invaluable when you come to rebuild it.

Always remove staples and tacks carefully and dispose of them safely as you work.

Assessing Your Furniture & Materials

As you carefully remove each layer of upholstery, take time to assess its condition and decide what can be reused, what can be repaired and what needs replacing.

Not everything needs replacing. Understanding the condition of the materials will help you plan your project and make informed decisions.

What to Look For

1. Fabric: Check its condition and keep the original pieces intact wherever possible. These can be useful templates when cutting your new fabric.
2. Dacron, foam and other fillings: Check for wear, compression, crumbling or loss of shape. Consider whether the existing padding can be reused or needs replacing.
3. Hessian: Look for tears, damage or deterioration. Check that it's strong enough to support the upholstery layers.
4. Webbing and springs (if fitted): Check for sagging, stretching, broken springs or loss of support. Consider whether repairs or replacements are needed.
5. The frame: Once exposed, check for loose joints, cracks or damaged wood. Complete any necessary repairs before rebuilding your upholstery.

Making Your Decisions

Think about the finished piece you want to create. Are you restoring the original design or making changes?

You may decide to reuse some materials, replace others or introduce different upholstery techniques to achieve your desired finish.

Emma's Tip: Assess every layer as you remove it. If you're unsure whether a material has enough life left in it, I'd recommend replacing it. You've already invested the time and effort into reupholstering your furniture, so it's worth doing it properly rather than having to take it apart again later.

Planning Your Upholstery Project

Now that you've assessed your furniture, it's time to plan how you'll bring it back to life. Taking time to prepare will help you understand what's involved, organise your materials and avoid unnecessary interruptions once you get started.

Things to Consider

1. Your finished design: Are you recreating the original look or changing the fabric, padding, shape or decorative details?
2. The techniques: What upholstery skills will you need? Are there any new techniques you'd like to learn or practise?
3. Materials & budget: Make a list of everything you'll need, including webbing, hessian, foam, Dacron and top fabric. Calculate the quantities and costs so you know what your project will involve.
4. The tools: Check that you have all the tools and equipment you'll need before starting.
5. The order of work: Use the photographs and notes from deconstructing your furniture to plan how you'll rebuild it, following the original construction process in reverse.
6. Your time: Allow yourself plenty of time for each stage. Upholstery can take longer than you expect, particularly when learning new techniques. Don't rush or work when you're tired, as that's when mistakes can happen.

Emma's Tip: Make sure you've ordered and received all your materials before starting your project. There's nothing more frustrating than setting aside time to work on your furniture, only to discover you're missing something you need!

Measuring & Calculating Your Materials

Every piece of furniture is different, so the materials you'll need will depend on its construction and the design you want to achieve.

Use the photographs, notes and measurements from deconstructing your furniture to identify each layer and work out what you'll need to rebuild it.

What to Consider

1. Identify your materials: Make a list of every material needed for your particular piece, including any springs, webbing, fillings, padding, fabric and specialist components.
2. Measure each section: Record the length, width and depth where appropriate, allowing extra material for wrapping, folding, stapling and securing.
3. Consider your finished design: If you're changing the shape, padding or upholstery details, think about how this will affect your material requirements.
4. Calculate your fabric: Measure each upholstered section separately, considering fabric width, pattern repeats, direction, seams and matching.
5. Check quantities and sizes: Find out how your materials are supplied and calculate how much you'll need to order, allowing for cutting and wastage.

Before You Order

Double-check your measurements against your furniture and make sure you've included everything needed for each stage of construction.

Emma's Tip: Keep your original fabric pieces wherever possible. They can be useful templates when calculating and cutting your new fabric, particularly for furniture with unusual shapes or multiple sections.



Now It's Your Turn!

Congratulations on completing your Introduction to Upholstery course!

You've learnt the tools, materials and techniques to get started, but this is just the beginning.

The best way to build your skills and confidence is to keep practising. Every project will teach you something new.

I'd love to see what you create next, so please keep in touch and share your projects with us. Happy upholstering!

Emma x

Upholstery Tools, Materials & Suppliers

You can buy upholstery tools, materials, foam and fabrics from specialist shops and independent suppliers, many of which also sell online.

Here are some useful suppliers to help you source materials for your future projects.

Upholstery Tools & Materials
https://www.jamiltonupholstery.co.uk/
https://www.upholsteryshop.co.uk/
https://www.heico-direct.co.uk/shop/upholstery-supplies
https://www.mytoolkit.co.uk/
https://www.ajtupholsterysupplies.co.uk/

Foam Suppliers
These suppliers offer foam in different grades and thicknesses, including cut-to-size options.
https://www.gbfoamdirect.co.uk/
https://www.efoam.co.uk/
https://www.directfoam.com/foam-price-calculator/

Foam Made from Recycled Content
At our workshops, we use an alternative to conventional foam made from 80% recycled polyester. It's supplied in full sheets, which we cut to size for our projects. As availability to non-trade customers can be limited, we'd recommend contacting independent upholstery suppliers to ask whether they can source Ultraflex or another suitable recycled-content cushioning material for your project.

Upholstery Fabric Brands
https://www.moons.co.uk/
https://warwick.co.uk/
https://www.linwoodfabric.com/
https://martonmills.com/

Continue Your Upholstery Journey

Now you've learnt the basics, there are lots of ways to continue developing your upholstery skills and putting them into practice.

Upholstery Frame Kits

Fancy making another footstool, stool or bench at home? Our upholstery frame kits give you a starting point for your next project, allowing you to put your new skills into practice.

Continue Learning With Us

Whether you'd like to learn more advanced techniques or work on your own furniture, we'd love to welcome you back.

- Upholstery Skills Workshops – develop your techniques, including deep buttoning, square buttoning, piping, pleats and shallow buttoning.
- Open Studio Days – bring your own project and use our professional workspace and equipment independently.
- Other Creative Workshops – explore new skills, from upholstery to interior design.

Enjoyed Your Workshop?

We'd love to hear what you thought!

Your feedback helps us improve our workshops and encourages others to come along and have a go.

If you've enjoyed your experience, we'd really appreciate you taking a moment to leave us a Google review.