TECHNOLOGY

Kenmore Model 158 Sewing Machine Instructions How To

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Introduction: Why the Kenmore Model 158 Still Matters

If you have inherited, thrifted, or rescued a Kenmore Model 158 sewing machine, you have a piece of sewing history that can still deliver beautiful results today. These vintage workhorses, produced from the 1950s through the 1970s, were built with metal gears and a robust motor, making them far more durable than many modern plastic models. However, finding clear **Kenmore Model 158 sewing machine instructions** can feel like a treasure hunt. Many original manuals are lost, and online resources are often scattered. This guide provides **how to**operate, thread, and troubleshoot your Kenmore 158, turning that intimidating vintage machine into your go-to sewing companion. Whether you want to hem jeans or piece a quilt, mastering these instructions will give you years of reliable service.

Getting to Know Your Kenmore Model 158 Sewing Machine

Before diving into operations, take a moment to identify your specific variant. The Model 158 encompasses a wide range of sub-models (158.130, 158.170, 158.175, etc.), but the core controls are largely similar. Your machine likely features a side-loading oscillating hook, drop feed dogs, and a front-facing stitch length dial. Familiarize yourself with the key parts: the handwheel, the stitch length knob, the stitch width lever (for zigzag models), and the presser foot lifter. A quick wipe-down and a drop of sewing machine oil in the recommended points will prepare it for action. Always check the electrical cord for fraying before plugging it in—vintage wiring may need replacement.

Locating the Model Number

Your Kenmore 158 manual number depends on the exact sub-model. Look for a silver or white plate on the right side of the machine, near the handwheel. The number will read something like **158.1302** or **158.17590**. This code helps you find specific **Kenmore Model 158 sewing machine instructions**online if you need diagrams. For general operation, the steps that follow apply to the vast majority of 158 machines.

How to Thread the Kenmore Model 158

Threading a vintage machine is different from a modern computerised model. Your Kenmore 158 likely uses a standard top threading path with a tension disc system. Follow these steps carefully. Incorrect threading is the most common cause of stitching problems.

1. Raise the presser foot. This opens the tension discs. If you thread with the foot down, the thread will not seat properly.
2. Place the spool on the spool pin. Use the spool cap to hold it in place. For cross-wound thread, use the vertical pin; for straight-wound, use the horizontal pin if available.

3. Lead the thread through the top guide. This is the first wire loop at the top left of the machine.
4. Bring the thread down and around the tension disc. You should feel a slight resistance as the thread passes between the two discs. On many 158 models, there is a spring-loaded wire above the disc—make sure the thread hooks under this wire.
5. Pull the thread up through the take-up lever. This is the metal arm with a hole that moves up and down. Ensure the thread enters from the right side and exits towards the left.
6. Guide the thread down through the remaining thread guides. These are small metal loops above the needle clamp.
7. Thread the needle. Thread from front to back unless your machine specifies otherwise (some older models prefer left to right). Draw about 10 cm of thread through the needle eye.
8. Test the threading. Turn the handwheel toward you one full rotation. The thread should move smoothly without snapping. If it feels tight, check that the presser foot is up.

Pro tip: If your thread keeps breaking, lower the presser foot and tug the thread—it should feel firm but not impossible to pull. Adjust the tension dial only after confirming the threading path is correct.

Winding and Inserting the Bobbin

The Kenmore 158 uses a class 15 bobbin, which is still widely available. The bobbin winder is typically located on the front right of the machine, near the handwheel.

Steps to Wind the Bobbin

- Place the empty bobbin on the winder spindle. Push it to the right until it clicks into place.
- Place a thread spool on the spool pin. Bring the thread to the bobbin winder tension disc (a small disc on top of the machine).
- Wrap the thread around the bobbin a few times manually. Then push the winder mechanism into contact with the handwheel.
- Start the machine slowly. The bobbin will wind automatically. Stop when it is full (not overstuffed).
- Disengage the winder and trim the thread.

Inserting the Bobbin into the Case

The drop-in bobbin system is specific to some 158 models, but most use a side-loading bobbin case. Hold the bobbin so the thread unwinds clockwise. Place it in the case, pull the thread through the tension slot, and ensure it catches under the spring. Leave a 10 cm tail. Insert the case into the machine hook, pushing until it clicks. The bobbin case finger should point upward.

Selecting Stitch Length and Width

The stitch length knob on the Kenmore 158 is usually a large dial on the front of the arm. Numbers range from 0 to 4 or 0 to 5. The higher the number, the longer the stitch. For regular sewing, a setting of **2.5 to 3**works well on medium-weight fabrics.

- 0 = Lock stitch (no fabric feed). Used for button sewing or darning.
- 1 to 2 = Short stitches for lightweight fabrics or fine detail work.
- 3 to 4 = Medium stitches for most cotton, linen, and twill.
- 4 to 5 = Long basting stitches for gathering or temporary seams.

The stitch width lever (on zigzag models) adjusts the sideways movement of the needle. Set it to 0 for straight stitch only. For zigzag, choose a width between 1 and 5. A width of 3 is typical for overcasting edges.

Understanding the Stitch Pattern Selector

Many Kenmore 158 machines have a dial or a set of cams for decorative patterns. **How to**select patterns is

straightforward. Turn the pattern selector knob to the desired number. Common patterns include:

- Straight stitch (usually position 1 or A): For basic seams.
- Zigzag (often position 2 or B): For finishing raw edges, appliqué, or stretch seams.
- Blind hem: For invisible hems on trousers or curtains.
- Buttonhole: Some 158 models have a four-step buttonhole function. Consult your sub-model's specific chart.

To engage reverse, simply push the reverse lever (usually located under the stitch length dial) while sewing. Release it to go forward. This is used to lock stitches at the beginning and end of a seam.

How to Adjust Tension for Perfect Stitches

Balanced tension is the hallmark of a well-maintained Kenmore 158. The top tension dial is numbered from 0 to 9, with 4 or 5 being the default for medium fabrics. Bobbin tension is adjusted via a small screw on the bobbin case.

Checking Upper Thread Tension

If the needle thread appears as a straight line on the bottom of the fabric, the top tension is too tight. Turn the dial to a lower number. If the bobbin thread shows loops on top, the top tension is too loose. Increase the number.

Adjusting Bobbin Tension

Only tweak bobbin tension if adjusting the top dial does not fix the problem. Hold the bobbin case by the thread tail and give a gentle tug. It should drop about 2–3 cm when you bounce it. To tighten, turn the small screw clockwise in tiny increments (quarter turn). Test on a scrap of fabric after each adjustment.

Basic Sewing Techniques on the Kenmore 158

Starting a seam on this machine requires a steady hand. Always lower the presser foot before sewing. Use the handwheel to manually insert the needle into the fabric at the seam start. Then press the foot pedal gently. The machine will feed the fabric automatically. Do not push or pull the fabric—let the feed dogs do the work. **How to** maintain even speed: practice using the pedal pressure. A light touch gives you control for corners and curves. For turning a corner, stop the machine with the needle in the fabric, raise the presser foot, pivot the fabric, lower the foot, and continue.

Common Issues and Troubleshooting

Even with proper **Kenmore Model 158 sewing machine instructions**, problems can arise. Here are typical fixes.

Skipped Stitches

- Cause: Bent or dull needle. Replace the needle with a new one (size 80/12 for medium fabric).
- Cause: Needle inserted incorrectly. Ensure the flat side faces to the right (or left, depending on your model).

Thread Jamming or Nesting Under Fabric

- Cause: Machine threaded with presser foot down. Re-thread with the foot up.
- Cause: Bobbin case not fully inserted. Remove and reinsert, listening for the click.

Machine Not Feeding Fabric

- Cause: Feed dogs are lowered. Look for a switch or lever near the needle plate and raise them.
- Cause: Fabric is too thick or sticky. Try using a walking foot or a Teflon presser foot.

Maintenance Tips for Longevity

Your Kenmore 158 is a mechanical marvel that needs regular care. **How to**keep it running smoothly for decades: clean lint from the bobbin area after every project. Use a small brush (the one that came with the machine is ideal) to remove dust. Oil the machine every 8–10 hours of sewing time. Apply one drop of sewing machine oil to the hook race, the upper arm mechanism (under the top cover), and the shuttle area. Wipe off any excess. Never use WD-40 or cooking oil—they will gum up the works. Store the machine covered, away from humidity and dust.

Conclusion: Mastering Your Kenmore 158

Following these **Kenmore Model 158 sewing machine instructions how to**guides will transform you from a novice to a confident operator.

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