

Ombre Vest

The sun is out, summer is in full swing... and your wardrobe is looking a little tired. Blast. Yes, you have plenty of tank tops, but they all start looking the same after a while, don't they? Well, with a little knit fabric and a lot of dye, you can make a light and airy and oh-so-flattering drape vest! If that's not enough, we'll give it the ombre treatment and a little embroidery to really make your wardrobe pop. Never made a vest from scratch before? Rest easy. If you can trace and cut things out, I swear this thing is a piece of cake. To make your vest, you'll need:

- Light knit fabric (about 2 yards, more if you want a longer drape)
- Your favorite fitted tee
- Scissors and pins



Lets start with your tee. You'll want one that fits you well, and is a little bit fitted. We'll use this as a template for your vest. Much easier than measuring things, don't you think? Being an art student, I tend to avoid measuring things when possible. It's not that I'm lazy. It's just that the numbers seem to rearrange themselves when I'm not looking.



First of all, this is a vest, so we won't be needing the sleeves. Unless "vest" has a new definition I'm not familiar with. Fold your sleeves inside your shirt, and if you like, pin in place to keep them out of the way, Make sure you pin and fold along the curved seam of the sleeves, so you can see the shape clearly.

Lay your shirt on top of your knit, with the back side facing up. This will make the shape easier to trace. Carefully mark, or if you like, simply cut out around your tee, adding about a 1/2 inch for seam allowance. I like to give a lot of seam when working with stretchy fabrics. They can be so darn sneaky sometimes.





Here's your back piece all cut out. Easy as pie!

Mmmm ... pie.

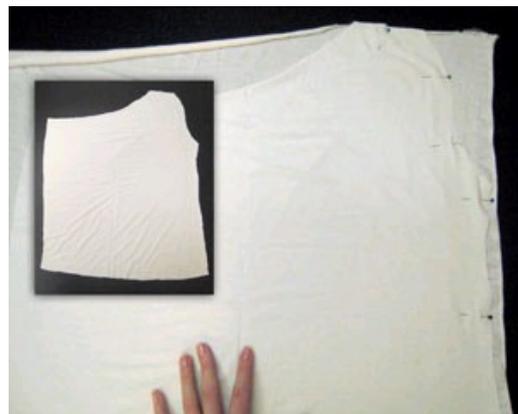
Focus, people! Stop daydreaming about pie. Pie is what got me into the predicament of liking drapey flattering clothing in the first place. Stupid pie...

OK, so now we're going to make the front pieces. Though when draped it looks like it might be a complicated shape, we're actually just taking the T-shirt shape and extending it straight out to the side in a rectangle, like so. Place your tee, right side up this time, on top of your knit. Pin in place along the edge you'll be tracing, and then mark out how far you'd like your drape to go. The farther out it goes, the longer the drape.



Mark this shape with some pins (or just a pin, for general reference) and cut out your front vest shape. You'll notice from the rectangle's edge it has a nice easy slope up to the edge of the neckline.

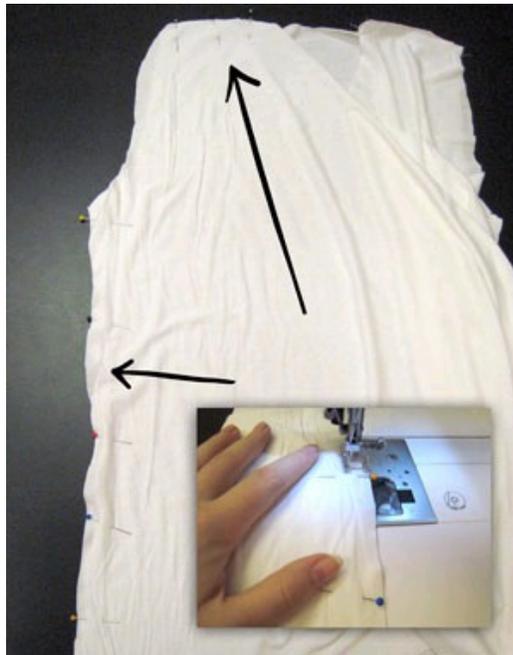
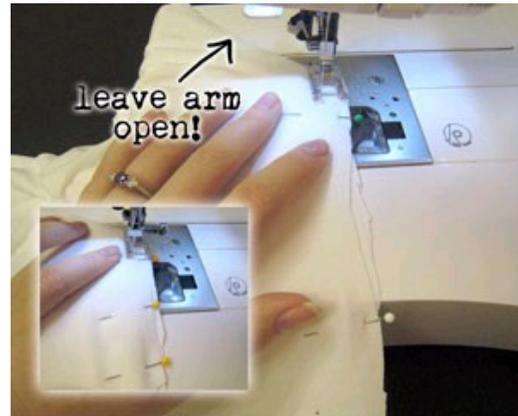
Once you've cut your piece out, flip it over and use it to cut out the other side of your vest. That's it! We have all our vest pieces. I wish all things were this easy.





Place your back piece right side up, and the front vest piece right side down, and align the edges, like shown. Since there's a lot of drape to get in the way, I decided to do each side one at a time. I don't need any extra help with screwing up these things, thank you. Pin along that edge, but make sure you make a mental note not to pin or sew the armhole.

Sew a seam along the top shoulder edge, and along the side. Leave the armhole open! Yeesh people, don't you listen? Otherwise all you have is a weird looking blanket or perhaps a strange scarf. You could try wearing it on your head and start a new hot trend... or maybe you can just not sew it shut. Your choice.



Pin and repeat this on the other side.

Aaand you have a vest! OK, a totally unfinished vest, but you can try it on now and see how it drapes and feels. Technically, if you are making it out of a non-fraying knit, you could leave the edges raw (and you guys know what a fan I am of raw edges) but in this case let's go the whole nine yards. Or two yards. Or whatever you bought. I'm thinking nine yards would be a bit much. Who buys nine yards for a vest?

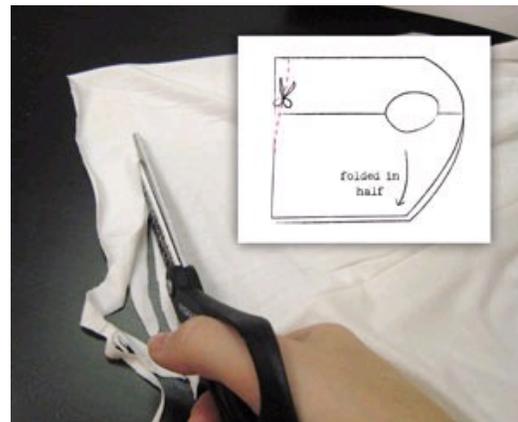
I'll stop now.



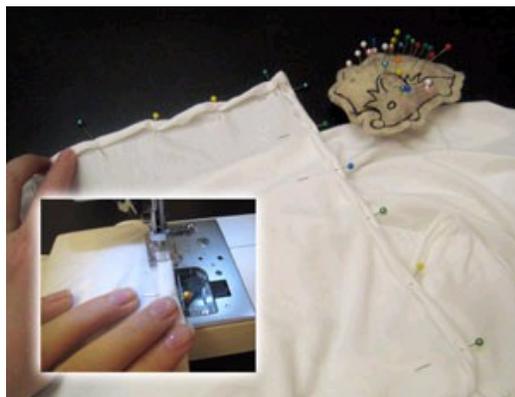
So! Since I am a big fan of cheating, erm, efficiency, I thought I could simply do a single pressed seam for the sleeves, since no one is going to see the inside of the vest. I hope. If they do see the inside armholes of my vest all I can say is, I don't know what they were doing in there, and it's not my fault.

Carefully pin all the way around each sleeve and sew a seam. Ta da! Sleeves done!

...a quiet little side note here, before we move on to finishing all the edges. I think the vest has a nicer drape when it kind of curves up at the back, and down at the front. To accentuate this curve, you can fold your tee in half, and snip a slight curve along the back. Nothing too drastic! Just to add a little bit of finesse. This part is totally optional. But awesome. We do love awesome around here.



OK! Back to our regularly scheduled programming. So, this next part, well I'm not going to lie... it involves a lot of pinning. It's not hard, it's just a little tedious. So buck up.



Since the drape of this vest means you're likely to see both sides of this seam, we really do want it to look pretty, so we're going to fold it under, and then fold it under again. Do this all the way around the raw edge of your vest, pinning as you go. You could try ironing, but to be honest, this stuff seems to be best persuaded when sharp objects are involved. I suppose that could be said of most things...

Once you have it all pinned, sew a neat seam all the way around.

Your vest!

Yes, I suppose it could be done now, but we have a plan to make it so much more awesomer. Awesomest? So awesome you'll start inventing words. See? We do love awesome around here.



That's right, we're taking it all the way to ombre! It's a little messy but a lot of fun, and it's so worth it for the effects. To ombre dye your top, you'll need:

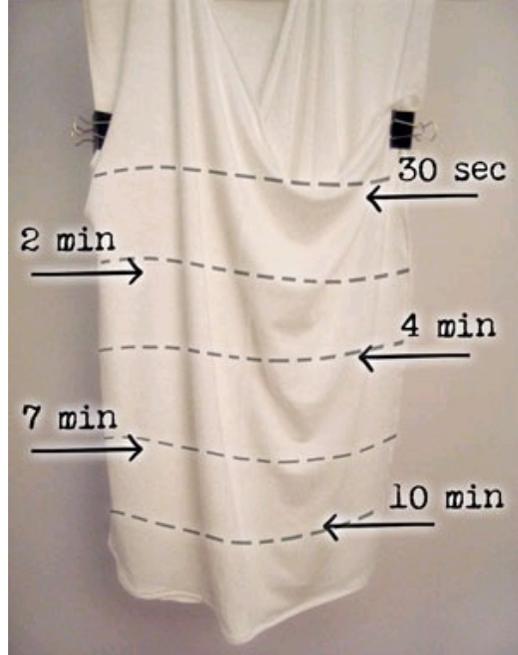


- A big ol' plastic bucket or something to put all your dye in. Something not too precious. And don't leave it lying in your basement where giant centipedes can take up shop and you freak out and you're already late for work and you have to go to Target to get a new one because centipedes are scary. What?
- Dye. Duh.
- Salt (depending on your fabric, read your dye directions)
- Something to heat up water
- Clips or clothespins
- Gloves, if you're smarter than me and like your hands. Smarty pants.
- An extra bucket or nearby sink with water

I'll say right now, read your dye directions for exact specifications on what it might require. These are the most common, but not all dyes are the same.

This is a personal choice, but to make dyeing easier, I'd clip up those draped edges so they hang about equal with the rest of the shirt. It makes things a lot simpler, trust me.





Now, the next part is not really an exact science. Every shirt is different, and it especially matters if you're dyeing white to dark like me, or maybe just a color to a similar dark color. If you're really unsure about things, you can always test dye a swatch of fabric. In fact, I recommend it, because as I found out, the dye doesn't always behave like you think it will...

So! Here's how I did it. I do it backwards from some -- I start by dipping in the bottom and working my way up. True, its harder to see how your dye is coming (you need to pull it up now and then) but I like it because it allows you to dilute the dye with more water as you get closer to the top, letting it blend easier. I'll talk you through it...

First, though, you have to make your dye according to your bottle's directions. Mine involved dye, salt, and a lot of very hot water.



Wait! Before you begin, you might notice something wrong with this picture. If you do, well you're more observant than me, because obviously I suck at following directions. You're supposed to thoroughly soak your shirt first, and then wring out the excess water. This will allow your shirt to dip into the dye easier, and will also help the dye bleed up into your fabric for a smoother gradient. Don't be a dork like me. Follow directions. And do what I say, not what I appear to be doing.



So, start by dipping the bottom segment of your shirt in the dye. Hold for at least 10 min. This may seem like a long time, but especially on synthetic fabrics, it always comes out lighter than you think.

After ten minutes, drop your shirt down to the next segment. Hold for 7 minutes. Yes, your arms will get tired. Try asking someone to hold this for a second and then walk away for a coffee break. It works.



Continue moving down. At the four minute mark, if you're going from a very dark dye to a very light fabric, you might want to add some extra water to start diluting the dye. It's your call, but I find it helps. Make sure the water stays warm though. At the two minute mark, add even more water.

For the very last dunk, add as much water as you will, and then quickly dunk the fabric. Don't hold for longer than 30 seconds! Your gradient will be too harsh. You can see mine already is, but that's partially because my fabric was dry. Bad Niamh.





Once your dyeing is done, dunk your fabric into some cold water to start rinsing it out. I dunked mine into some water and then carried it to the sink.

Take it under the sink and give it a good rinsing. I mean a really good rinsing. Try to wash the dye downwards as much as possible, especially if you have a light fabric, to keep the dye from bleeding upwards.

Despite my best efforts, the light pink spread to the rest of my vest while I was rinsing it out, so take care if you don't want that to happen.



You can see in this pic how much lighter it is already. The deep purply brown fades up, and then starts into a light pink. Keep rinsing and rinsing and rinse some more until your water runs clear, then rinse it again in hot water. Set your shirt out to air dry.

A word of caution about dyes and light fabrics! One, dyes may not always be the color you think. I thought I bought brown. The package said brown. But upon dyeing, I discovered it lies. Brown was actually neapolitan, because out from my brown bled a nice, soft ice cream pink. Huh. Not bad, really, just unexpected.



Pssstt... want a little secret tip from me to you? This only works if you're going from color to white like I am, but if you find your dye bled upwards a little more than you wanted, you can fix it with bleach. Fill a plastic container with a water bleach solution, and while your shirt is still wet, soak just the top. Kinda like ombre dyeing in reverse. Don't bleach for too long though! It can weaken your fabric. Once you've bleached out enough color, rinse it thoroughly and hang it out to dry.

Are we done yet? Not hardly! What kind of website do you think this is? We add embroidery to everything. If you don't know that by now, well, you must be new here.



So, how, you might ask, are we going to embroider on something so thin and light? With our favorite ever designs, [scribbles](#), and a little help from some special stabilizer! To make this work, you'll want heavy-weight water-soluble stabilizer, the kind usually used to make freestanding lace. We're using a water-soluble because let's face it, there's no cutaway stabilizer you can use that you wouldn't see through this top. You'll also want a really, really, light design. I mean really light, like a small scribble. I would also keep it 4x4 or so, since larger designs are going to interfere with your drape.

Could we possibly have designs like that? Of course we do! Not only that, we have ombre designs like that! Yup, we have ombre embroidery! This little [henna hand](#) is a perfect example of a simple transition between scribbles. Pick the right colors, and you have an ombre effect!

This is also a great reason to do the embroidery last... you never know quite what color you'll get from your dye, it's best to wait and see so you can match it! You ready? Carefully hoop up your vest (I'm hooping up the back) with the stabilizer underneath, without stretching or distorting the fabric. Set your machine to stitching, and watch the ombre magic happen!



Once you're done, flip your design over and veeerry carefully trim away as much excess stabilizer as possible, and then soak your stabilizer according to the package directions. Allow to dry.

Ombre embroidery meets...



Ombre top!

Slip on your oh-so comfy lightweight vest, and marvel! Light and airy, with beautiful gradient colors, and matching custom embroidery. DIY is a dream!

Make a bunch at different lengths, add sleeves, dye some, or just embroider others. Add a belt or try some dangly jewelry for a different look.

Looking good this summer is, if you'll excuse the pun, a breeze.





You'd never find a vest like this in a store without a price tag to melt your brain. And it's totally, completely, and utterly custom and handmade.

And it hides all that extra pie.

Looking for more ways to spice up your wardrobe this summer? [How Joyful](#) shows how to upcycle a plain old T-shirt into a breezy vest, complete with perfectly placed ties and lace accents. [At Second Street](#) shares a tutorial to make a drapery cardigan, perfect for wearing during the summer and into the fall. And [Ruffles & Roses](#) makes a pretty Grecian-inspired top using some knit fabric and a few measurements from your body.
