

# Careers

## Apparel Production

IN THE POCKET OF A GARMENT, have you ever found a small sticker that read "Inspected by 79"? What does that mean? Actually, number "79" is probably one of a small army of apparel production workers who take a garment from an idea to something wearable.

In the most modern apparel production environments today, overhead conveyors and other automated systems carry partially assembled garments between workstations. Computer-operated robots pick finished garments off the assembly line and arrange them for packing and shipping. Telecommunication systems, such as bar code tracking, allow clothing manufacturers to quickly produce the garments most in demand.

With modular apparel manufacturing, machine operators work in groups, or modules. They specialize in one task but learn to run other machines as well. A good understanding of the production process allows workers to create efficient schedules and meet quality goals. For higher productivity, they earn higher pay.

While technology and new methods are taking hold, manual work and assembly lines are still common in apparel production, especially with small manufacturers. Computerization and teamwork, however, are gaining importance as effective ways to lower production costs and improve quality.

In apparel production many workers handle the same task at the same time. They may specialize in one operation but learn others as well.

### IS THIS FIELD FOR YOU?

What type of person is suited for work in apparel production? The statements below profile a successful worker.

- I pay attention to detail.
- I appreciate the way parts of a process fit together.
- I take pride in doing quality work.
- I'm confident about giving my input on a project.
- I enjoy learning new skills.
- I believe that even small tasks are important.
- I have a talent for helping people work well as a group.

### THE SKILLS YOU NEED

With changes in the production workplace, interpersonal skills are becoming as important as manual skills. A combination of skills, which includes the following, is most helpful:

- Hand-eye coordination
- Mental concentration
- Communication
- Teamwork
- Flexibility
- Computer

### Education and Training

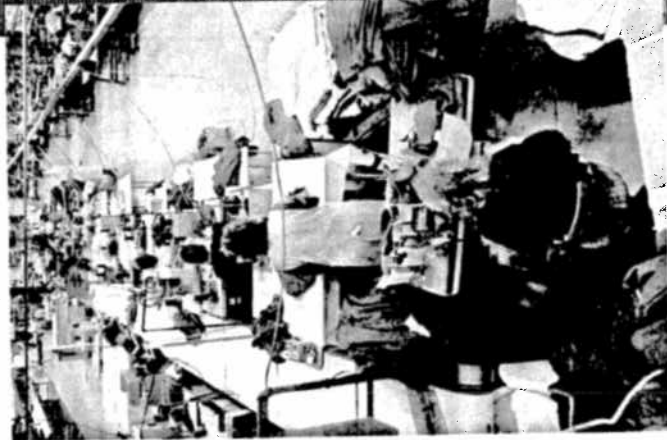
Careers in apparel production have traditionally started with on-the-job training after high school. With further education from a community college or technical school, however, workers can advance more quickly. Since the industry uses computerized machinery, basic computer skills in data entry and word processing help workers stay current. Courses in communication, management, and even psychology are well used by workers where apparel production is modular.

Specialized training is an advantage. Particularly useful is a two-year, associate-of-science degree in apparel production. Studies include fabric behavior and construction, the workings of mass production equipment, and the basics of design. Certificates of proficiency in such areas as electronic grading and marking are also available.

### Possible Career Paths

Combined with higher education, apparel production careers can be a starting point for other careers. By studying design, a patternmaker might become an assistant designer and eventually head designer. Courses in management and production principles can lead a line worker to a supervisory position. A supervisor, in turn, might advance to production manager. A hand sewer could combine work experience with courses in small business operation to start a custom tailoring service. Retailers and dry cleaners also need experienced, knowledgeable people to alter or mend clothing.

The sewing machines used on the floor of a garment-making facility are state of the art. They quickly adjust stitch type and stitch length for any change in fabric.



## Choosing an Apparel Production Career

**INSPECTOR**   **MACHINE MANUFACTURER REPRESENTATIVE**   **PATTERNMAKER**  
**SAMPLE MAKER**   **SENIOR MILL ASSISTANT**   **SEWING MACHINE OPERATOR**  
**SHIPPING AND RECEIVING CLERK**   **SUPERVISOR**   **PRODUCTION MANAGER**

### Patternmaker

Whether you buy or make a shirt, it starts in the same way—with a pattern. A patternmaker translates the approved sample garment into a paper pattern. Patternmakers may work in the sample room of a fashion house or in a clothing manufacturer's product engineering department.

With a process called grading, the patternmaker increases and decreases the size of all pattern pieces to correspond to garment sizes. Each garment manufacturer has its own standard measurements for different sizes. Formerly done by hand, grading has been simplified by using a computer and digitizer tablet, a device that electronically records dimensions in a graphics program.

### Sewing Machine Operator

Professional sewing machine operators account for almost half of all workers in apparel production. Mass-producing a garment takes operations that can't be done on one machine. Instead, each operator uses a customized machine, programmed to perform a specific function. One embroiders, another attaches collars, and a third finishes buttonholes.

Operators are expected to take full advantage of a machine's capabilities—in other words, they have to keep up. Because of the trend toward work modules, sewers often learn to use multiple machines. In teams, they take an active role in problem solving.

### Inspector

The job of inspector, or quality controller, is vital today. While automation has taken over some inspection duties, in the garment trade the trained human eye is highly valued.

The inspector whose number you find on a piece of clothing checks finished garments for secure stitching, correct colors, and correct sizes. An ear-aiding the cutter to avoid that spot. Another inspector may correct an error in a partly completed article or return it to a worker for repairs. Inspector-worker teams get more involved in preventing and spotting errors on assembly lines.

As part of apparel production, a sample cutter cuts fabric to make a prototype of the garment that will be produced.



When sewing a garment, you need to press seams and iron the completed garment. Certain workers in industrial apparel production also have these responsibilities.

### Supervisor

Any issue affecting smooth production during apparel assembly is probably a supervisor's concern. Are the machines working safely? If not, have repairs been arranged? Are employees satisfied with schedules? Are excellent workers rewarded and less productive ones advised on better work habits? With responsibilities like these, supervisors often put in more than 40 hours a week. They may work rotating shifts to get to know all workers.

As workers' roles have changed, so has the supervisor's job. Supervisors today are less likely to tell workers to increase production to meet management demands. They are more likely to ask for suggestions on improving a module's productivity, help carry out changes, and evaluate results.

### Shipping and Receiving Clerks

Shipping clerks assemble and pack orders for shipping. Some drive forklifts that take packages to the shipping dock. Using computerized shipping or manifest systems, clerks create labels and paperwork for routing merchandise. They make sure records are forwarded to other departments.

Receiving clerks perform similar duties. They compare an order against the invoice and check contents for damage. After notifying other departments of receipts, they route the goods to appropriate areas. They may also schedule deliveries and deal with lost or damaged shipments.

In a small company clerks may perform both shipping and receiving tasks. Hand-held scanners and computers are used for record keeping.



### CAREER APPLICATIONS

1. **Career Preparation.** Choose an apparel production job that sounds interesting. Review the job duties and recommended training and education. Then list three actions you could take now to help prepare for this job.
2. **FCCLA.** With a few classmates, plan an Interpersonal Communications Project. Research and present the qualities needed for successful teamwork. Include a skit that demonstrates problems apparel production employees could have as they work together in a module and how they might solve the problems. A possible problem would be an uncooperative team member who slows the module down.
3. **Professionalism.** Locate definitions of the word professionalism. Consult individuals, dictionaries, and industry groups, which often post a code of ethics on Web sites. Based on your investigations, explain in writing how workers in production jobs can practice professionalism, regardless of their job title.