

How to measure for curtains

This guide is intended to help you decide how and where to measure for new curtains, whether you are making them yourself, or having them made to measure. Obviously, there are certain things that are specific to the type, style and mounting, but I will try to cover as many eventualities as possible. When measuring for curtains, there are several things to be taken into account - the desired length, commonly called the 'drop', the width, the amount of gather required, the width of the fabric, whether or not linings are to be attached or unattached. These are just some of them. Lets just start with the basics.

The window aperture:



Is it short and wide, or long and thin? Is it a bay window? Does the curtain go around the bay, or across it? If the curtain goes across the bay, then you will probably need long AND wide curtains. Lets take the first one - short and wide. Measure the length of the curtain pole or track if there is one already. Otherwise, measure the actual width across the aperture from left to right. Don't get distracted by the width of the window frame - you need to know how much width of fabric you need. If someone else is making the curtains, this is the width measurement they need for the window. They will also need to know how much gather you want in your curtains, but they may assume that variable. If you say you want pencil pleat headers, for instance, they can work out how much fabric width to add to get average gather on pencil pleat tape. But if you like lots of gather, or not very much gather when the curtains are closed, you need to have that conversation with the maker.

If you are making your own curtains, you now need to work out for yourself how many widths of fabric you need. Divide the measurement you just got by 2 (you need 2 curtains, right?). If the answer is equal to or less than the usable width of the fabric (i.e. minus the selvedges) then there is enough in one width of fabric for each curtain if you like them flat when closed. However, if you like a bit of gather, you will need either 1.5 widths per curtain, or 2. If the answer is much more than the usable width of the fabric, you may need 3 widths per curtain! (My bay windows do, because the track goes right round the inside of the bay, and I like lots of gather in my curtains when they're closed).

Lets work out an example. You measure a short wide window aperture, and it measures 150cms (59") across. Divide this by 2 = 75cms (29.5"). This is the flat width of curtain you will need - the minimum. Most soft furnishing fabrics come 140cms (55") wide, here in the UK, at least, but DO CHECK. If your fabric is narrower, you will need more. If it's wider, it affects the amount of gather. And the USABLE width will be slightly less - usually around 137cms (54").

So, in this example, one width of standard fabric at 137cms (54") wide, will be enough to make one curtain with average gather when they're closed. Even if you're adding joined on linings, and you need a seam allowance. **YOU NEED 2 CURTAINS - DON'T FORGET!**

Lets do a bigger one:

You measure a window aperture, and it measures 250cms (98.5"). Divide by 2 = 125ms (49.25"). If your fabric is standard width (137cms (54") wide), then there will be no gather in these curtains at 1 width, so you will need 1.5 or 2 widths to give the amount of gather you would like. I have found that 2 widths of fabric gives between little and average gather on this size of window. **YOU NEED 2 CURTAINS - DON'T FORGET!**

Now we've worked out how many widths for each curtain, we need to know the length.

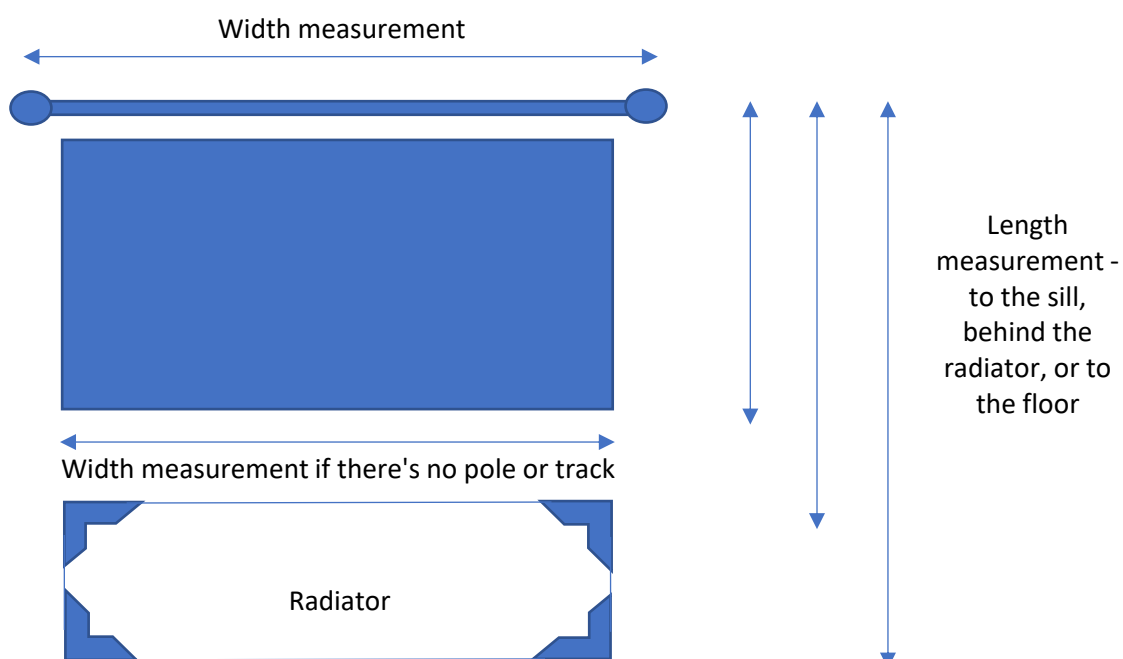
Each track and pole will be different, but if you're using a header tape, there are general rules.

Measure from the centre of the track, or the holes that the hooks go through, or the eyelet screws (which the hooks go through) on the rings if it's a pole.

Measure to where you want your curtains to come to (the 'drop'). This could be the floor, the window sill, or just behind the radiator. This is the finished curtain measurement, and will be what the curtain maker needs to know.

If you are making your own curtains, you need to add seam allowances. Generally, I add 2.5cms (1") at the top and 20cms (8") at the bottom for seam allowances. I then turn my bottom hems 10cms (4") and then again 10cms (4"), so they have a double fold hem for weight and substance. Whatever you want your seam allowances to be, you need to add to your curtain length.

In the short, wide example above, where one width of curtain was sufficient, if the length measurement you took was 120cms (47.25"), then you would need $120 + 20 + 2.5$ for each curtain = 142.5cms (56") fabric. So for 2 curtains I would buy around 3 metres (142.5cms x 2) depending on the pattern repeat. If there is no pattern repeat, then 3m of fabric will be fine, but if there is a pattern repeat and you want your left and right curtains to match, then you will need to add the length of the pattern repeat to your fabric order.



If the window is a bay window, and the track goes around the bay, you will need to measure the length of the track, just as before, but you will have to measure around the corners which is a little more tricky. The easy way is to cut a length of string against it, the same length as the track, and then measure the string in a straight line with your tape measure! Make sure you don't stretch it though.

When I make curtains for my customers, I offer a free measuring service, because I insist on measuring for curtains I am making, so I know exactly where I've measured. Of course, that only works if I remember to write down whether I've noted with or without seam allowances! ;) It also helps me to be able to advise on different headers etc to suit the room, when I've actually seen it for myself.