



The 5-Minute Sewing Machine Evaluation Checklist

Bring this guide, a scrap of woven cotton fabric, and a spool of thread to your meetup or dealer visit.

Section 1: The Visual Inspection

Don't plug it in yet. Look for physical red flags.

- **Cords and Pedal:** The power cord and foot pedal wires are intact, with no exposed wires or electrical tape.
- **The Skeleton:** The machine feels heavy and stable (indicating a heavy-duty interior metal skeleton), not like hollow, brittle plastic.
- **Bobbin Area:** Open the bobbin case. It is relatively clean, not packed with decades of lint or rust.
- **Needle Area:** The presser foot area is intact, and the needle sits perfectly straight, not bent.

Section 2: The Dry Run (Power Off)

Test the mechanical movement.

- **Handwheel Test:** Turn the handwheel *toward* you. It spins smoothly without grinding, clicking, or stiff resistance.
- **Feed Dogs Check:** As you turn the handwheel, the metal teeth under the needle (feed dogs) rise, move backward, and drop cleanly.

Section 3: The Power & Safety Test

Plug it in and turn it on.

- **Lighting:** The workspace lighting turns on immediately (bonus points if it's a cool-touch LED).



- [] **Speed Control:** If the machine has an adjustable speed slider, set it to the lowest speed. Press the pedal (or start button)—the machine should run at a slow, manageable "turtle" pace.
- [] **Sound Check:** The motor hums evenly. It does not whine, smoke, or smell like burning dust.

Section 4: The Stitch Test

Thread the machine, insert your woven cotton scrap, and test the tension dial.

- [] **Straight Stitch:** The machine sews a straight line without skipping stitches.
- [] **Zigzag Stitch:** Switch the dial. The needle swings left and right smoothly without hitting the presser foot.
- [] **Reverse Function:** Press the reverse lever/button. The feed dogs immediately pull the fabric backward.
- [] **Tension Check:** Look at both sides of your fabric. The stitches look identical on the top and the bottom (no messy thread nests underneath).

[Footer/Verdict Box] The Verdict: If the machine fails the Tension Check or the Handwheel Test, **walk away**. If it passes, you've found a solid machine for your young crafter!