

*Real Thread*

# Custom T-Shirt Buyer's Guide

**UNISEX PRODUCTS**



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***We know that ordering custom t-shirts for the first time can be overwhelming.***

If you're not well versed in t-shirt brands, printing styles, or fabric types, it's hard to not get lost in all of the print-world jargon and default to ordering solely based on price-point. But that's exactly how you end up with boxy, ill-fitting t-shirts that get buried in the bottom of drawers, never to see the light of day.

This guide will serve as your go-to reference for all things t-shirt related. We'll cover everything from ink and fabric types to garment recommendations to money-saving tips and more — all so that you're fully equipped to design and order your dream custom t-shirts. Let's get into it!



02.

# Choosing a Print Style

## ***WATER-BASED INKS***

At Real Thread, we're known for printing with water-based and discharge inks, as opposed to industry-standard plastisol inks — which are bad for the environment and also prone to cracking and peeling. Without getting too technical, you can think of water-based inks as inks that soak directly into the fabric of the garment — leaving behind an incredibly soft, breathable print that doesn't crack or peel over time.

Real Thread has two water-based ink print styles for you to choose from: SuperSoft and Bold. Next, we'll look at the differences between the two to help you decide which is best for your t-shirt.

## SUPERSOFT INK

We're pretty proud of our SuperSoft ink, a water-based ink that dyes the fabric of your t-shirt instead of sitting on top of it. SuperSoft contains an agent called "discharge" that essentially bleaches the fabric, removing the base color of the garment and replacing it with the color of the ink. Discharge only removes the color in cotton fibers, though — which means that 100% cotton t-shirts will have brighter prints, while cotton-blends will have a more vintage print look.

### IS IT RIGHT FOR ME?

SuperSoft is the right choice for you when you want a print that is incredibly soft and breathable. The print lasts a long time and is extremely comfortable.

- ✓ No feel
- ✓ Approximate Pantone match
- ✓ Fabric type may influence vibrancy of design





## **BOLD INK**

Our Bold ink is a high-opacity water-based ink that creates a slightly thicker print than SuperSoft. It has a bit of a feel to it, but results in an exceptionally vibrant print across all colors and fabric types.

### **IS IT RIGHT FOR ME?**

Bold ink is the best option when you want incredibly vibrant colors that seem to jump off the shirt. It's a bit heavier in feel than SuperSoft, but still a far cry from the cracky/sticky feel of plastisol. Bold works on absolutely any shirt fabric — meaning your results will always be consistent, right down the Pantone you've selected for your design.

- ✓ Slight feel
- ✓ Exact Pantone match
- ✓ Bright prints across fabric types

# 03.

# Fabric Types 101

The fabric makeup of the t-shirt you choose is going to have a major effect on both the look and feel of your t-shirt. When printing with water-based inks, each ink reacts differently with each fabric type, so it's helpful to understand how and why.

When thinking of fabrics, there are three major categories:

1. 100% cotton
2. Cotton / polyester blends
3. Tri-blends

We can spend a lot of time digging into the details of each fabric type, but for right now, let's focus on the two most important factors: how each fabric type feels, and how it looks.

# How They Feel

*In terms of feel, you can generally think of fabric types in this order:*



This isn't to say there aren't exceptions, though — the brand you decide to use for your garment will play a big role in softness and quality as well (more on that to come). But, generally, this order holds true.

*\*these examples were all printed with our SuperSoft ink*

# How They Look

Like we mentioned earlier, when printing with our Bold Ink, you'll always get the same print result, regardless of fabric type. When printing with our SuperSoft ink, though, the print result can vary widely based on which fabric type you choose.

As you can see, the vibrancy of the ink varies widely across fabric types — showing up at it's brightest on 100% cotton, and yielding a more vintage and heathered look on tri-blends.

***Note: At Real Thread, we'll always show you a hi-res mockup of your order before we print, so you'll know exactly what kind of print result to expect.***

*SuperSoft ink on 100% cotton*

*SuperSoft ink on poly/cotton blend*

*SuperSoft ink on a dark tri-blend*

*SuperSoft ink on a light tri-blend*

# Alternative Fabric Types



## 01. **HEMP**

Hemp t-shirts are widely regarded as one of the most eco-friendly t-shirts out there. Not only is hemp insanely comfortable to wear, but it's also actively saving the planet by absorbing carbon dioxide. Hemp is also super durable — so expect to keep your hemp t-shirt for a long time.



## 02. **BAMBOO**

Bamboo is becoming more popular as a material for t-shirts because of its anti-bacterial and moisture-wicking qualities. These t-shirts are a great choice for a workout gear of sleepwear — they can keep the temperature down and make a hot summer day a little easier to bear.

## 03. **VISCOSE**

Viscose is a type of rayon, so it's produced from wood pulp. It has some of the same qualities as standard rayon, but it's also similar to bamboo in being great for a workout because of its natural moisture-wicking qualities.



*Recyclable material*

04.

# Unisex Product Recommendations



# Next Level 3600



Soft



Affordable



Lightning-ready

## OVERVIEW

This 100% cotton t-shirt from Next Level is a great introduction to premium t-shirts. Its slim fit and affordable price have made it one of the most popular garments we print on. If you're new to the world of t-shirts and looking for a standard unisex tee to customize, we highly recommend it.

## FEATURES

- Fashion fit
- 100% cotton
- Tearaway tags
- 4.3 oz

# Bella+Canvas 3001



Soft



Affordable



60+ Color Options

## OVERVIEW

This 100% cotton crewneck from Bella+Canvas is a t-shirt staple. Featuring a slim fit, a huge variety of color options, Bella+Canvas' signature ring-spun cotton, this is certainly a t-shirt worth considering. The Canvas 3001 is very comparable to the Next Level 3600, but it has a bit slimmer of a fit and is offered in over 60 color options.

## FEATURES

- Fashion fit
- 100% ring-spun cotton
- Tearaway tags
- 4.2 oz

# Next Level 6210



Softer



Affordable



Lightning-ready

## OVERVIEW

This Next Level crewneck — made with their premium CVC cotton/polyester blend — is a super-soft crowd favorite. With a great fit, soft feel, and low price point, the Next Level 6210 is a great option for those who value a soft feel over everything.

## FEATURES

- Fashion fit
- Polyester-cotton blend
- Tearaway tags
- 4.3 oz

# American Apparel BB401



Soft



Made in the USA



Lightweight

## **OVERVIEW**

The American Apparel BB401 is the original premium custom t-shirt. Yielding exceptionally vibrant prints across print styles, this garment is almost guaranteed to catch eyes — a crowd-pleaser across use cases and platforms.

## **FEATURES**

- Fashion fit
- 100% ring spun cotton
- Tearaway tags
- 4.2 oz

# Bella+Canvas 3413



Soft



Lightweight



50+ Color Options

## OVERVIEW

When it comes to softness, this tri-blend from Bella+Canvas is the creme de la creme. Trust us, once you put this t-shirt on, you will not want to take it off. With a modern, slim fit, crew neck, and a signature tri-blend material — choosing to print on this shirt is one of the best choices you can make.

## FEATURES

- Slim fit
- Tri-blend
- 3.8 oz

# Alternative Apparel 6005



Soft



Eco-friendly



WRAP certified factory

## OVERVIEW

Alternative Apparel is known for exceptionally high-quality t-shirts — and this crewneck tee is no exception. Made with 100% organic cotton, this shirt is a perfect everyday tee for the eco-conscious. Bonus: side-stitching gives this shirt a nice, slim, retail-quality fit.

## FEATURES

- Slim fit
- 100% organic cotton
- 3.5 oz

# Royal Apparel 64051



Softer



Eco-friendly



Made in the USA

## OVERVIEW

This t-shirt from Royal Apparel is particularly unique in that it is stitched together with 60% hemp and 40% organic cotton. If you're looking to go eco-friendly, this is a solid garment that makes good use of both components to create a shirt that is as soft as it is sustainable.

## FEATURES

- Slim fit
- 60% hemp, 40% organic cotton
- 4.3 oz

05.

# T-Shirt Add-On Options



Our retail-ready add-on services have the ability to elevate your brand in a serious way. Adding custom features to your t-shirts is a small but impactful way to show attention to detail and give your brand an extra touchpoint. Here's the rundown on three popular add-on services you may want to consider before closing out your custom t-shirt project.

***TAG PRINTING***

***HEM TAGS***

***FOIL PRINTING***

# Custom Printed Tags



**Custom printed inside tags are a great way to give your brand an extra touchpoint in a stylish, memorable way.**

## DETAILS

Turnaround time: +3 days for printing tags, +3 days for tag removal

Tag image size: up to 3" wide x 3" tall

## NOTE

Head to [realthread.com/templates](https://realthread.com/templates) to download an editable set of tag templates. Each template contains all of the info you'll need to include in your tags.

Quantity	QUANTITY 20-49	QUANTITY 50-199	QUANTITY 200-999	QUANTITY 1000+
Printing	+ \$2.00	+ \$0.75	+ \$0.60	+ \$0.45
Removal	+ \$2.00	+ \$0.60	+ \$0.55	+ \$0.50

# Hem Tags



***Hem tags are a stylish way to give your t-shirts an extra level of customization. You can either provide us with hem tags, or order them through us.***

## **DETAILS**

Turnaround time: +3 days for sewing,  
+2 weeks for manufacturing

Minimum order for manufacturing: 50 tags

## **PRO-TIP**

If you know you'll use hem tags on future orders, order extras. We'll keep them here at Real Thread and save them for your next order, saving time and getting you a better price break.

Quantity	QUANTITY 20-49	QUANTITY 50-199	QUANTITY 200-999	QUANTITY 1000+
Sewing	+ \$2.00	+ \$0.60	+ \$0.55	+ \$0.50
Creation	—	+ \$3.90	+ \$0.97	+ \$0.34

# Foil Printing



***Foil printing is a great way to give your t-shirts an extra element of texture and shine. The foil adheres to your t-shirts with a special glue that's printed on (similarly to any standard screen printed design), with the foil pressed on top after.***

## **DETAILS**

Turnaround time: +3 days

Color options: Gold, silver, black, red, blue, copper, green

Quantity

QUANTITY  
20-49

QUANTITY  
50-199

QUANTITY  
200-999

QUANTITY  
1000+

Printing

+ \$4.00

+ \$2.00

+ \$1.75

+ \$1.50

# 06.

# Money Saving Tips

No matter what, t-shirts are going to be an investment, particularly if you're looking for a t-shirt that your customers, prospects, or coworkers will actually enjoy wearing. That being said, there are a handful of money-saving tips that first-time t-shirt buyers might not be aware of.



**01.**  
**PICK A VALUE T-SHIRT**

There are loads of different t-shirt manufacturers and garments out there — some coming with heftier pricetags than others. If you're not picky about a few key specifications (organic fabrics, speciality blends/brands, Made-in-the-USA, etc.), you can likely find a comparable garment that will save you a bit of cash.

Brands like **Bella+Canvas** and **Next Level** are great options for an affordable t-shirt that feels high-end.



**02.**  
**KEEP COLOR COUNT LOW & PRINT LOCATIONS**

In screen printing, a new screen is created for each additional color or print location in a design — which requires additional materials and labor, increasing the price of your shirts. Keeping your color count and print locations lower can end up saving you a good bit of money.

**03.**  
**USE PRICE BREAKS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE**

When buying t-shirts in bulk, you always want to be aware of the different price breaks. Say your company has 45 employees. You could just go ahead and order 45 shirts... But if you were to add on five more, you'd hit a 50 piece price break, which would actually end up making your order less expensive overall — and you'd have five extra shirts to have on hand for when the team grows.

**Our standard price breaks are at:** 20, 36, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000, and 5000+ units.



**04.**  
**AVOID RUSH FEES**

Having your ducks in a row early can save you a substantial amount. Avoiding rush charges by staying ahead of the game is probably the easiest way to ensure you don't pay a premium for your t-shirts.

At Real Thread, our standard turnaround time is 10 business days plus transit time. And of course, when you are in a bind, we have a variety of rush options to make sure you get your t-shirts when you need them.

NOTE: We know mistakes happen and sometimes you're caught in a bind— which is why we have a special 2-day turnaround service (known as Lightning) for specific garments. Reach out to [team@realthread.com](mailto:team@realthread.com) if you want more information or need to get an order in, stat.

# Getting Started

***Getting a t-shirt order started at Real Thread is incredibly easy!***

Our online order tool makes it easy to upload your artwork and order online. Or, if you need a hand, our customer success team seriously cannot wait to work with you.

Head to [realthread.com](https://realthread.com) or reach out to [team@realthread.com](mailto:team@realthread.com) to get started.

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