# THE SILHOUETTE CHALLENGE:

# *2016* BLOGGER RUN-DOWN & F.A.Q.

Revamped February 22nd, 2016 by The Support Team

## The Silhouette Challenge: What's it all about?

The Silhouette Challenge is a **now quarterly event** open to all bloggers in The Silhouette Challenge Facebook Group. Each quarter, we have a theme (i.e. Fabric & Apparel Crafts for March!), and the Challenge is to use your Silhouette machine to create something that relates to that theme.

Our event is essentially a "blog hop," which typically takes place on a **Monday** (exact dates below) and starts at **8 a.m. eastern.** You'll share your new creation in a blog post and then include a clickable collage at the end of your post, linking to the projects of your fellow blogger participants. The best part is hopping around from blog to blog to see the wealth of inspiration from your comrades.

In 2016, we are also rolling out a new element to our Challenges and that is going to be an **optional giveaway**! The exact specifications of those giveaways will be laid out in a Google doc. that you'll receive at least 3 weeks before the post goes live. Sometimes the giveaway will require a $10 buy-in for participants and other times, if we've been able to secure a donated prize, your entry will be FREE of payment. Pretty cool, huh? We're aiming for two buy-in giveaways and two donated giveaways in 2016. And if you happen to have a contact with a brand we might want to partner with in order to offer a prize valued at $100 or more, do reach out to The Support Team to let us know! We hope you join us for our next event.

## What is the next Challenge event?

We're so glad you asked! Save the dates:



the silhouette challenge

BECAUSE CRAFTING IS BETTER WITH FRIENDS

2016 challenge themes

March 14th: **fabric & apparel crafts**

May 9th: **summer projects**

September 12th: **fall projects**

December 12th: **holiday projects**

## How can I sign up to participate?

Harrah!  Here's the full run-down that we hope will answer all of your questions.

# BLOGGER RUN-DOWN

**READ ME:**  In an effort to streamline this process to better serve both our participants and the Support Team members who work hard behind the scenes to coordinate our quarterly challenges, we have made some changes to how the event runs, which we will detail below.  This includes creating a brand new website from scratch to help organize all the entries.  We also wanted to highlight some important reminders, as well.

To make sure everyone is on the same page, we are now **requiring** all bloggers to carefully read this run-down and F.A.Q., and then initial and sign a contract verifying your understanding of how things roll prior to participating in your next challenge event.  (You'll find the website link to access this contract later in this document.)  You can find our commitments to you in the [Support Team Commitments document](#).

We trust that the time you put in to fully understanding this process will save you and all of us time troubleshooting errors in the end.

Thanks for your cooperation and all that you do to make our quarterly challenge events so much fun!

-[The Support Team](#)

## Step 1.  RSVP

At least three weeks prior to our quarterly challenge, a member of the Support Team will send an email blast and create an event on Facebook to which you can RSVP in order to stay in the loop on future updates and reminders.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** The Support Team will not send out email reminders prior to deadlines, so it's really important to mark the dates on your own calendar, so you don't miss out!

## Step 2.  Mark Your Calendar

Mark your calendar with that month's deadlines and reminders!  We cannot stress this enough.  There are even free services out there like Google Calendar where you can have appointment alerts sent to you via email and/or text.

And the two big deadlines to be aware of are:

1. Thursday prior to the event.  By the end of the day, your entry needs to be completed and double-checked.
2. Challenge Day, 8 a.m. eastern: posts go live!

A full run-down of all the important dates and deadlines can be found at the end of this document, so stay tuned!

**Why should you mark your calendar?**
We cannot accept any submissions after Thursday, so please, for the love of all things craftastic, write these dates down now!  In fact, if you plan to participate for the rest of the year, go ahead and jot down ALL the deadlines. Impress yourself with how proactive you are!

## NEW Step 3.  Sign-Up on the Google Spreadsheet.

- After you have read the full run-down for the quarterly Challenge you are interested in participating in (either in the event on FB or through the Google Doc. sent out via email), hope over to our nifty Sign-Up Spreadsheet.  This is where you can let us know if you are participating in our optional giveaway and also secure your order in the Rafflecopter widget (first come, first serve).  If there is a buy-in for the giveaway, it will be set in order of payment received by coordinator. https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1k13t5HcEHi5X1LiA45s4_uNAf1ax4F1rvbTIgW3HUis/edit?usp=sharing

## Step 4.  Submit Your Info & Photo on the Website!

- As of January 2015, we have a new website to organize all the Challenge information for us.  Our very own [Support Team member](#) Kristy GD built this entirely from scratch and serves as our tech support, so please be patient if you find any errors.  If you have any problems with the website itself, please contact Kristy GD at [kgdcraftermath@gmail.com](mailto:kgdcraftermath@gmail.com) who will help you as best she can.
- The website can be found at [http://challenge.thinkingcloset.com](http://challenge.thinkingcloset.com).  The first time you go, you'll need to create a password.  Since you're already part of the Facebook group, it already knows everything about you that we do.  (Want to know what that is?  Check out our Privacy Policy [here](#)!)
- After you create a password and sign in, you'll be presented with the updated contract the first time.  Just read it, sign it, and you'll be on your way.
- To join a Challenge, make sure that you've selected "Monthly Challenge"  on the left.  **(Soon to be updated to read "Quarterly Challenge.")**  If there's an open Challenge,  you'll see a form that looks like the form below.  Just fill it out, hit submit, and you're ready to go!

JANUARY 2015 CHALLENGE

ORGANIZATION. BONUS: VINYL

Isn't it everyone's New Year's resolution to get more organized? Well, hopefully you can think of a project somewhat related to this theme that will give you a good excuse to whip out your Silhouette machine and create something fun. Whether it's making labels or notebook covers or door signs or decorating your new recipe box...if it's helping you get more organized, it applies! This month's optional bonus challenge is... VINYL So, if you can find a creative way to incorporate vinyl into your organization project, well then hat's off to you!

Your Coordinator: Lauren, thethinkingcloset@gmail.com
Submission Deadline: 2015-01-15

Name: Kristy

Email**:

Blog Name: Please Excuse My Crafte

Title of your blog post
(*If you change your title, make sure to triple check your URL*):

Post Shortlink or URL (must start with http://):

Provide a brief explanation of how your project applies to the theme:

Please upload your square image here (.jpeg or .png files only, if you've already uploaded a file you do not need to re-upload it):
Choose File   No file chosen

Your current image:

You do not currently have a photo uploaded
Submit

**If you would like to change your email, please change your [settings](#).

- You can edit your Challenge entry up until 11:59PM eastern the Thursday before the Challenge. You'll see the deadline right on the page.
- Rather than emailing your photo to your Coordinator, you can now upload your image directly to the site! Please make sure that it is square-cropped and follows the guidelines below.
- A few things to note:
  - The site will recognize you as a Silhouette Challenge member and pre-fill in your first name and blog name. If you want to change these, you can edit them for the current Challenge here or go to "Change Your Settings" and change them for all Challenges there.
  - You cannot edit your email on this page. Please go to "Change Your Settings" if you want to update your email.
  - Please upload your square-cropped images right into the form.
  - The ability to edit the form closes at 11:59pm eastern time on the date of the deadline. This is a **firm** deadline. After that time, you will not be able to edit your entry. Please keep this in mind and check that all your information is in order before then.
  - Please pay attention to the brief explanation text box! We read these to make sure everything fits the theme. If your explanation is *too* brief, we may email you for clarification or remove your entry.
  - You must have all the text fields filled out to join the Challenge, but you can edit your text and upload your image up until the deadline.
- After you've filled out the form, you'll see all your information displayed to confirm that you've joined the challenge.

JANUARY 2015 CHALLENGE

ORGANIZATION. BONUS: VINYL!

Isn't it everyone's New Year's resolution to get more organized? Well, hopefully you can think of a project somewhat related to this theme that will give you a good excuse to whip out your Silhouette machine and create something fun. Whether it's making labels or notebook covers or door signs or decorating your new recipe box...if it's helping you get more organized, it applies! This month's optional bonus challenge is... VINYL So, if you can find a creative way to incorporate vinyl into your organization project, well then hat's off to you!

**Your Coordinator:** Lauren, thethinkingcloset@gmail.com
**Submission Deadline:** 2015-01-15

You've joined this month's challenge! Below, you can find the information you've provided us.

**Name:** Kristy
**Email:** kgdcraftermath@gmail.com
**Blog Name:** Please Excuse My Craftermath...
**Title of your blog post (***If you change your title, make sure to triple check your URL***):** Organizing With Icons
**Post Shortlink or URL:** http://wp.me/p3QQ9v-Vm
**Provide a brief explanation of how your project applies to the theme:** I used my silhouette to cut out vinyl icons for my craft drawers.
**Your Image:**



[Edit Challenge Entry]
[Delete Challenge Entry]
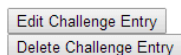
**Some Reminders:**
- Unlike how we will determine giveaway entry order, the clickable collage will still be randomly generated each Challenge and unrelated to sign-up order. So, you can sign up last, but possibly have your picture be randomly selected as first in the collage.
- Prior to signing up on the website, you must initial and sign the contract verifying that you read this run-down and understand the terms. That way, we know everyone is on the same page.
- **While we invite you to fill out the spreadsheet a.s.a.p., do not fill out the website until you have all of your project information ready to input.** Your project title, project url, project description...all need to be completed at one time. In fact, you can't sign up without this information! The form will give you an alert that not everything is filled out. The only exception is that you can upload the photo at a later date as long as it is before the Thursday deadline. If there are any errors on the form, a Support Team member will attempt to reach out to you, though may need to remove your information if the deadline has passed.

# Let's talk about links, baby....

This is the part where your due diligence can save us from running into snags with broken links come Monday morning.  It is extremely important that when completing the form, you grab the correct link from your blog draft in its full and that the link does not change between Thursday evening and Monday morning.

**Wordpress Users:**
You can find your short-link when you are in "Edit Post" mode after you have saved a draft at least one time.  You will see, under your post's title, a permalink.  Next to the permalink there are two buttons.  One says "edit" and one says "Get Short Link."  If you click on the "Get Short Link button," a URL will pop up.  That's the one you grab!  The permalink changes every time you edit your post title, while the short link does not.

**Blogger & Other Users, READ CAREFULLY:**
Once you've set a title, look in the column on the right side.  Click on "Permalink," and you will see the link to your post that will show up once it's completed and published.  You can copy and paste from there.

> **IMPORTANT:** Do not be deceived by its name; your "permalink" is not really permanent.  **Do NOT change the title of your post** or the link will change.  The link will also change if you generate it in a different month than you publish your post in.  For example, if you generate your permalink in January and your post is not scheduled to publish until February, your link will change.
>
> To avoid this common problem, you can either
> > A) wait to generate your permalink until the month changes to February or
> > b) change the end of your link from /2015/**01**/title.html to /2015/**02**/title.html when you add it to your submission.  The 01 and 02 representing the number of the month.
>
> **NOTE:** using a link shortener like like bitly will **not** fix this issue.

# Step 4 .  Submit a Photograph of Your Project

We will continue to include a clickable collage at the end of our posts with photos of our comrade's creations.   So, your project photo is going to be what entices new readers to your site.  It's not about who is first, rather it's about sharing our creativity and inspiration; so we encourage you to capture a photo that really showcases your creation in such a way that it will stand out in the collection of images.

Remember that the photo is now uploaded to the website.  Be sure to submit your project photo by the Thursday before posts go live!

**Photo Requirements:**
- The photo must be your own and should represent your finished creation.
- Be sure to take your photo in a well lit area (we recommend natural light when possible) and preferably with a simple background.  With collages like this, less is more.
- The subject must be in focus (not blurry).
- Square-cropped (you can use free online editors like picmonkey to crop your photo).
- No title text (subtle watermarks in the corner are fine).  However, if your post is something like Top Ten Tips for Newbie Silhouette Users, in that case, text would be appropriate.

**Your Coordinator will contact you for a new photo if:**
- the subject is blurry or unclear.
- the image is too dark.

- the image is not cropped square.
- there is title text atop the image.
- the image does not clearly present a finished creation.

We want your creation to get the traffic it deserves, so we encourage you to take the extra time to capture a photo that does your project justice!  For an awesome list of tips on how to take quality photos by our very own Meredith LeRoy, click HERE.

## Step 5.  Double-Check Your Information

Sometime during the week before our posts go live and before the Thursday night deadline, we ask that everyone take the time to double-check the information you inputted into the website to verify its accuracy and fix any typos.

Pay special attention to the accuracy of your post link, using the guidelines laid out in the section above, "Let's Talk About Links, Baby…."

## Step 6.  Add the Clickable Collage to Your Post

The Saturday before our posts go live, you can anticipate an email from your Challenge coordinator that will contain information for adding the clickable collage at the end of your post as well as the giveway widget and info for those participating in that element of the Challenge.

In order to make the collage clickable, it has to be added using code.  Your Challenge coordinator will provide this to you in the form of a .txt file.  You will need to open the text file, copy the code, and paste it into your blog's html editor as is at the end of your post.

**IMPORTANT:**  It is essential that you understand how to use the html editor in draft mode so you can properly add the code to your blog post.

Click HERE to learn how to add html in a Wordpress post.
Click HERE to learn how to add html in a Blogger post (scroll down to the section on editing posts).
Other users, if you have any questions, please contact the Support Team.

**NOTE:**  In addition to the clickable collage, the code you receive will include a string of clickable links to everyone's blog posts.  This is not redundant, but rather a way to ensure that we all continue to reap the SEO benefits of linking to one another in our posts.

## Step 7.  Schedule Your Post to Auto-Publish on Monday at 8am eastern

Now, you may be asking yourself…

> **"Do I *have* to post at exactly 8 a.m. eastern time on Monday?  I can probably just post a little bit earlier or later, right?"**

Wrong!
**You must** schedule your post to go live at **exactly 8am eastern**.  If you post before the group, none of our links will work in the clickable collage.  Anyone who clicks on those images will be met with a "404 Error: Page Not Found" message, which is just, well, embarrassing.

If you wait to post until after 8am eastern, then *your* link won't work in *our* collages until you click publish, and that error message will pop up on *your* link.  Also, embarrassing.

The clickable collage will only work in full once every single participant publishes, so we've selected one particular time as the official start of our event.

We highly recommend auto-scheduling your post, so you don't need to remember to manually publish it. For instructions on how to do this, check out this post, which explains the process for both Wordpress and Blogger.

To help those of you in other time zones, here's a list of some equivalent times. **8 a.m. eastern time =**
- 7 a.m. central time
- 6 a.m. mountain time
- 5 a.m. pacific time

For those of you in unlisted time zones, please refer to this time zone calculator, plugging in USA - Florida - Orlando as an example city with a time of 8 a.m. eastern.

## Step 8. Monday morning, check that your post went live at 8am as planned!

If you have internet access and are awake at 8 a.m. eastern, quickly check your blog to see that your post has gone live. Auto-schedulers are known to "miss schedule." Bloggers are known to accidentally schedule posts to go live at the wrong time. It will be a huge help to the Support Team if you can make the extra effort to verify that your post is up and that the link in our clickable collage sends readers to the proper place.

If for some reason it doesn't link properly or you are having problems publishing, just email your coordinator or the Support Team, and we will help troubleshoot!

If there are any link changes, you can expect one email at the end of the day with new code so you can (hopefully) just make one update. But we'll shoot for the moon and hope no changes are necessary.

## Step 9. Show Your Support!

One of our favorite aspects of our Challenge events is the opportunity to show our support for one another through comment love! With our ever-growing group, we realize you may not have the time to comment on every single project like we used to; however, we encourage you to at least offer some constructive feedback to the project before and after you in the collage. Trust us, you will give them the warm fuzzies and also help promote our group mantra:

# *Because crafting is better with friends….*

# BLOGGER F.A.Q.

We're almost at the finish line, we promise! Just a few frequently asked questions that you may be asking yourself!

**Q: Okay, so can I see an example of a past Silhouette Challenge post?**
Sure! Click here for Meredith LeRoy's February 2014 Silhouette Challenge post. You'll notice that it reads like a regular ole post, until you get to the very bottom. Then, you'll see where we link to everyone else participating in the challenge using the clickable collage and text links.

**Q: Does it have to be a brand new project I share or can I share an older one?**
We ask that the project be new to blogland -- not a project that you've posted before.  That way, it keeps thing fresh and exciting!

**Q: How closely does my project need to fit the theme?**
We don't want you to stress this...so really, it's your call!  Obviously, if it's a "Fabric" challenge, we want your project to include fabric in *some* way (even if you just included a fabric embellishment on a card), but we don't want you to second guess yourself too much either.  If you're inspired, go for it!

**Q: Okay, so I have my project completed, but what if my post itself isn't completed by Thursday?  Can I still participate?**
Yes!  Well, sorta.  Your projects need to be completed in time to take a photo by Thursday, but your posts don't *actually* need to be completed by then.  Theoretically, you could finish the post itself early Monday morning before we all click publish (but that would be really stressful, so for the love of your own sanity, don't).  Just add all your upload all of your post info and your photo to the site before 11:59p Thursday, and you can finish writing it over the weekend.  No problem!  ***Just whatever you do, don't change that blog post title if you're on Blogger.***

**Q: How can I share a free cut file if I want to?**
If you'd like to share a free cut file along with your post, we recommend using a file-sharing site like box.com, dropbox.com, or Google drive.  They're all free to use (up to a certain upload and bandwidth limit).  Then, you can add it to our SILHOUETTE FILES doc., found under the FILES tab if you would like to share it with the group.  Click here for an example of a post that shares a free cut file.

**Q: Can I link to the New Member Request Form in my post?**
Due to the high volume of new member requests we receive on a daily basis, we decided to stop linking to the New Member Request Form in our Challenge posts.  We're just growing faster than we can process new members right now!  However, if any of your readers ask for info on how to join or if you think of a friend who could really benefit from the group, please, don't hesitate to share the form link with them!  We are not exclusive...just short-staffed! {Smile.}

**Q: How can I download a copy of the Silhouette Challenge logo to add to my post?**
Download jpg files of our Silhouette Challenge logo (in multiple sizes) and 2016 theme list from box.com HERE. Thanks to our very own Tori Grant for designing them.

**Q: Do we have an official hashtag?**
We have declared #silhouettechallenge as our group hashtag so feel free to use it when you share your project on social media!  You can then click on the hashtag and see all other posts tagged with the same one!  Another great way for us to connect.

# At-A-Glance Instructions

- Starting now, work on your project according to the next quarter's theme.
- **Three weeks before posts go live:** the coordinator will create an event on Facebook to which you can RSVP.  You can then sign up on our SPREADSHEET.  The order in which you sign up for the giveaway or submit your buy-in payment will determine your entry spot in the widget.
- Bloggers, once you have all your project information ready to go, input it all into the WEBSITE.  Remember, the order does not matter here as the collage will be randomized!

- **Thursday before posts go live:** deadline for bloggers to input their project info on the WEBSITE, as well as upload their square-cropped photo.  Double (or even triple) check your URL link in your entry at this time.
- **Saturday before posts go live:** blogger participants will receive all of the code to add to the bottom of your posts.  Auto-schedule posts to go live Monday morning.
- **Challenge Monday at 8 a.m. EST:** posts go live!  Hop around to everyone's links, comment, and soak up the Silhouette inspiration.

# QUESTIONS?

Email your Challenge Coordinator or any member of the Support Team with your questions!

- Dee: fromwinetowhine@gmail.com
- Shannon: Laughinglunadesigns@gmail.com
- Tori: Tori@lilmrstori.com
- Jessica: cutesycrafts@hotmail.com
- Kristy: kgdcraftermath@gmail.com
- Meredith: meredith@unoriginalmom.com
- Lauren: thethinkingcloset@gmail.com

# BLOGGERS, NOW YOU'RE READY TO SIGN THE CONTRACT!

After carefully reading through this revamped run-down and F.A.Q., please head to the WEBSITE to sign the contract, so you can participate in our next Challenge event!