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by Rae Cumbie
Fitting Basics

Taking the time to correctly fit your garments will help you create a flattering wardrobe that you'll be proud to flaunt. Discover expert fitting techniques for various garment types by following these essential step-by-step guides. Begin by learning how to properly fit a jacket in "Fitting Benefits: Part 1," and then expand your fitting skills to include pants in "Fitting Benefits: Part 2." Refine the fit of your sleeves and learn troubleshooting tricks in "Sleeve Fitting." Finally, "Make it Fit: Simple Sheath Dress" shows you how to fit a classic sheath dress. Apply your newfound fitting knowledge to your future sewing projects to create a closet full of gorgeous garments! Happy sewing!

Beth Bradley
Associate Editor, Sew News

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FITTING BENEFITS, PART 1

Before

After

Tight-fitting bustline
Sleeve length
Elbow dart
Pant length

Vogue 7947
A significant benefit for the fashion sewer is a custom fit for any body type. This month, we explore the benefits of fitting a jacket. Next month, you’ll learn the importance of fitting pants. These two segments will give you the knowledge to complete a perfectly fitted suit that will become a wardrobe staple.

The benefits of fitting are obvious in the before and after photos shown at left. The before photo shows the model wearing a size 10 cut exactly from the pattern. The after photo shows a size 10 altered to the model’s shape and measurements.

The Best Pattern Size

Consider both body shape and measurements when choosing a basic pattern size. Bust, waist and hip measurements may be misleading, especially when one area needs special attention. For instance, a full bust may suggest a size 14, when in fact a size 10 better suits your height and shape. By using a size 10, the bustline is altered by adjusting only the bodice front—not by changing the entire jacket size. Using a size 14 would lengthen the jacket, broaden the shoulders, drop the waist, lower the armhole, increase the waist and hip fullness, and create a whole different set of problems.

Compare the across-chest, across-back and across-shoulder measurements to the stitching lines on the pattern pieces. Most patterns don’t include stitching lines, but they’re generally identified with pattern markings. Stitching lines are normally ⅜” from the cutting edge. Use a clear ruler and mark these lines with a soft pencil to help make accurate comparisons. For jackets include about ¾” for ease.

Note the size that’s most consistent with your across-chest, across-back and across-shoulder measurements.

Compare the neck-to-waist measurement. (The featured model’s back neck-to-waist measurement is 15”, but the size 10 pattern measures 16”. This extra inch in the bodice length causes the jacket to blouse in the back, as shown at left. For V-necklines or necklines scooped in the back, use the sizing chart to compare neck-to-waist measurements. Adjust the length accordingly.

Compare the bust, waist and hip measurements. Jackets are designed with ample ease to wear over a blouse and drape nicely. To determine the ease amount allowed for the pattern, compare the sizing-key measurements to the pattern pieces. Some patterns print this information on the pattern pieces. In the featured pattern, the bust and hips include 3½” of ease and the waist includes 5” of ease. Retain the recommended allowances for comfort and proper drape.

The featured model’s waist and hips are closest to a size 10. This size is also a good base for future pattern selections. Her bust size will almost always present fitting challenges and require pattern alterations.

Muslin Fitting

Very few people perfectly fit any standard size. The benefits of sewing let you develop a perfectly fitted garment in any of today’s current styles in the colors and fashion fabrics you enjoy most. Make a muslin or practice sample until you’re familiar with fitting techniques. Perfect the sample and pattern before cutting the fashion fabric.

Adjust the bodice length. To adjust the bodice back length, find the shorten-or-lengthen-here markings on the back pattern piece. To shorten the bodice, fold the pattern and reduce the length by the necessary amount. Tape or pin the pattern to secure. To lengthen the bodice, cut the pattern at the shorten-or-lengthen-here markings, separate the pieces the necessary amount, and true all straight-of-grain lines. Use a clear ruler as a guideline. Place pattern-tracing cloth behind the pattern pieces and secure with tape. Repeat this process on the front pattern piece (1).
Body Measurements

Seven body measurements in yellow help determine your basic jacket pattern size:

1. **Bust**: Measure around the fullest part of the chest; don’t let the tape sag in the back.
2. **Waist**: Measure around the natural waistline.
3. **Hips**: Measure the fullest part of your hips (approximately 7” down from the waistline).
4. **Across chest**: Measure across the chest, from sleeve edge to sleeve edge.
5. **Across back**: Measure across the back, from sleeve edge to sleeve edge.
6. **Across shoulders**: Measure from the shoulder upper edge across the neck bone to the other shoulder upper edge.
7. **Back neck-to-waist**: Measure from the neck bone to the waist.

Five additional measurements in red are needed to fit the pattern:

1. **Bust depth**: Measure from the shoulder (at the neckline) to the bust point.
2. **Bust-point to bust-point**: Measure from bust-point to bust-point (generally 7” to 8” for sizes 8 to 14).
3. **Sleeve length**: With your arm bent, measure from the top of the shoulder to the elbow to the wrist.
4. **Shoulder to elbow**: With your arm slightly bent, measure from the top of the shoulder to the elbow.
5. **Bicep**: Measure around the fullest part of the upper arm.

Take all measurements wearing the undergarments and shoes you’ll wear with the jacket. Stand straight and in a natural position. Don’t pull the tape too tight; have a friend measure you.
Taking accurate measurements will actually help you look more slender and proportionate when you wear the garment.

**Adjust the bustline.** The featured model’s bust measurement is 3” larger than the size-10 pattern. To add 3” to the center front or side seams appears like a good solution, but it doesn’t account for necessary shaping around the bust. The best solution is to separate the pattern at the bust point, adding the increase specifically where it’s needed. To increase the bustline, draw a line down each dart center. Connect the dart points and cut the pattern. Since 3” are needed, each side needs to be increased by 1½”. Separate the pattern pieces 1½”. True all horizontal and vertical lines. Insert pattern-tracing cloth under each side and tape (2). Even though the darts are changed, the waist, hip and shoulder measurements remain the same.

Mark the bust point on the new pattern. Redraw the darts, using the new markings to determine placement. The point of the lower dart should begin about ¾” below the bust point; the upper dart point should be at least 2” higher than the lower dart point (3). The new darts are now very wide and will be bulky if left as is. To resolve this problem cut away the excess fabric. Use a clear ruler and mark cutting lines ⅝” outside the dart lines (4). To true the shoulder seam, fold the shoulder dart and redraw the shoulder seam using a clear ruler or straight edge. Adjust the upper dart length and/or width further during the fitting process if necessary.

**Reduce bust fullness** using the same approach. Cut the pattern along the dart lines, and then reduce the bustline fullness the desired amount by overlapping the pattern pieces. Keep the grainlines and vertical markings true, and then secure with tape. Redefine the darts as outlined above and true the shoulder seam.

tip: Decrease the hipline either at the side seam or the back darts. Don’t reduce the hip measurement on the front dart.
To increase the waistline, determine the problem area(s): front, sides or back. Add to the side seams or reduce the darts depending on your body shape. Side seams should always be reduced or increased equally on the front and back. If the shaping of one seam is changed and not the other, it produces a puckered seam and affects the jacket drape. Side seams should hang straight up and down and not pull toward the front or back. The same is true for darts. Increase or decrease them equally on each side.

Follow the same procedure to increase the hip. Add shape to the side seams or fullness to the front or back by reducing the darts.

Make a sample jacket front from muslin. Allow for seam allowances and the center-front overlap when observing the muslin fit. Pin-fit the muslin sample if it needs further adjustment. Mark along the pins, and then transfer the new markings to the adjusted pattern. When a pattern calls for shoulder pads, pin the shoulder pads to your bra straps before fitting.

Compare bicep measurements. Jacket sleeves don’t fit snugly like a T-shirt and there’s a certain amount of built-in ease. Refer again to the markings on the pattern to determine if the width, or bicep area, needs to be altered.

Compare shoulder-to-elbow measurements. If shoulder pads are used, add the shoulder pad thickness to your body measurement. Length is usually added to the upper sleeve in order to accommodate shoulder pads. Compare your measurements to the pattern; measure from the top of the sleeve to the point of the elbow dart (5). The dart point should point directly to your elbow when your arm is bent. Adjust the upper sleeve length to correct the elbow-dart placement.

Adjust the lower sleeve length. Mark the hemline on the pattern and lengthen or shorten the pattern as needed at the shorten-or-lengthen-here markings. Fold out the excess, or cut and separate the pattern pieces to add length. Don’t simply make the pattern longer by adding length to the hem edge or shorten it by trimming the pattern. This changes the sleeve contour and makes it either too full or too narrow at the wrist and/or hem.

After adjusting the main pattern pieces, consider if any of these changes will affect the lining or facing pattern pieces. If so, make similar adjustments to them.

Cutting & Construction

Cut the fabric and stitch the darts as directed on the pattern. Stitch the shoulder seams and hand baste the side seams using a long running stitch. Don’t press the seams or darts until you fit the jacket.

For each fitting, wear the undergarments and shoes you’ll wear with the outfit. Even though shoes don’t affect the jacket length, they do affect your stance and the fabric drape.

Stitch the elbow dart and baste the underarm sleeve seam. Baste the sleeve cap and ease it slightly. Pin the top of the sleeve to the jacket shoulder seam. Check that the dart is in the accurate location; determine the correct sleeve length. Make necessary adjustments before pressing the darts and stitching the underarm and side seams.

Follow the remaining pattern guidelines for construction, including interfacing, pressing and finishing edges.

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SOURCE

Hancock Fabrics, www.hancockfabrics.com, supplied the fabric and supplies for this project.

tip: When using fusible interfacing, cut out the pattern pieces about ¼” larger all the way around. Recut the pattern pieces after the interfacing is applied as ironing may cause slight fabric shrinkage.
Pants may be simple to sew, yet they’re often the hardest to fit. Adjust the pattern according to your body contours for the optimum fit.

Consider your body contours once you’ve determined your best pattern size. Body or shape deviations from the basic pattern cause the pants to pull or sag. Subtle variations and pattern adjustments make a remarkable difference in fit (1). Consider the various deviations from the pattern and identify the areas you should address. Pattern adjustments should be made where they’re needed and not just by randomly adding or subtracting inches at the waist, the hips or even the length.

If you base the pattern size on your waist measurement, the pattern should be fairly correct in that area. If you opted for a larger or smaller pattern size due to your hip measurement, refer to figure 1 to determine where the waistline should be adjusted.

If your body is narrow front to back with dramatic waist-to-hip shaping, alter the pattern at the side seams. Subtract equal amounts from the front and back side seams (2).

If your body contour is very straight at the side and your waist is larger than the pattern-sizing chart, straighten the side seams extending the front and back equally the needed amount (3). If your stomach is round but dents in at the waist, increase the front darts. Add up to ¼” on each side of the dart for a total of 1” (4). Make an additional dart if you need to reduce the waist even more.

If your hips are fullest in the back, decrease the waist up to ⅛” on each side of the back darts, and/or at the center-back seam (5).

Any reduction or increase on the pattern is doubled on the finished garment, since there’s a left and right side. The alterations need not be limited to one location, i.e., front, back or side. Small or considerable adjustments may be necessary in several locations.
Never choose a pattern size based on your ready-to-wear size. If it helps your self-esteem, ignore the numbers! You’ll feel and look better in properly fitted clothing.

1. **Body contours**

   - **Straight at sides**
   - **Dramatic waist-to-hip shaping**
   - **Stomach contour contributes to hip measurement**
   - **Basic pattern size**
   - **Extended body profile**
   - **Upper leg circumference**
   - **Basic pattern size**

2. **Narrow body contour**
   - Subtract equal amounts from front and back side seams
   - **Back**
   - **Front**

3. **Straight body contour**
   - Straighten side seams equally on front and back
   - **Back**
   - **Front**

4. **Round body contour**
   - Increase front dart
   - **Up to \( \frac{1}{4} \)"**
   - **Front**

5. **Full hip contour**
   - Increase back dart and/or center-back seam
   - **Up to \( \frac{1}{4} \)"**
   - **Back**

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*After* Vogue 7947
**Body Measurements**

Take your measurements wearing the shoes and undergarments you’ll wear with the pants. Don’t pull the tape too tight or let it sag.

Six **body measurements** determine your basic pant pattern size:

1. **Waist**: Measure around the natural waistline.
2. **Hips**: Measure the fullest part of your hips (approximately 7” down from the waistline).
3. **Crotch length**: Measure from the center-front waistline between the legs to the center-back waistline. Notice approximately where the inner leg seam will be.
4. **Crotch depth**: Sit on a hard chair, and then measure from the side waist to the chair seat.
5. **Pant length**: Measure from the side waist to the approximate hem. (This varies with different shoes.)
6. **Upper-leg circumference**: Measure around the fullest part of the upper leg.

**tip**: Patterns are drafted with a narrow crotch profile (width). It’s rare that the front-crotch length needs to be reduced. Don’t confuse this with the crotch depth.

**Compare & Contrast**

**Most patterns don’t show** the stitching line, which is generally ⅝” from the cutting line. For more accuracy, use a soft pencil and clear ruler to mark the stitching line before comparing measurements.

**Hips**: If the pattern size was based on your hip size, make no changes at this time.

**Crotch Depth**: Compare your crotch-depth measurement, plus 1” for ease, to the pattern side seam. Adjust the pattern at the shorten-or-lengthen-here markings at the hipline (6).

**Crotch length (front and back)**: Once the pattern is adjusted for crotch depth, compare your front and back crotch length measurement plus 1” for ease to the pattern. This measurement provides for the contour shaping around the stomach and seat area.

**Adjust crotch depth**
Pattern Profile

Refer to figure 1 to outline your profile. To get a feel for the pattern profile, place the pattern pieces together, aligning the inseams; secure with pins at the crotch stitching line. Note the profile width and shape (7).

If your stomach is round, make the adjustment for the crotch length at the center-front seam (at the fullest part of the stomach). Draw a line from the dart to the fullest part of the center front. Cut the pattern and separate the desired length. Slide paper under the separated pattern pieces and tape to secure. The center-front seam will be slightly curved (8).

If your seat is fuller than the basic pattern, make an adjustment at the fullest part of the center-back seam. Draw a line from the dart to the fullest point of the seat, and then horizontally to the center-back seam. Cut on the line and separate the pattern pieces the needed amount. Slide paper under the separated pieces and tape to secure (9).

For a very slim figure the crotch length may need reducing. If your body width is narrow, reduce the pattern-profile width. Draw a line from the lower-back crotch to the inseam. Fold the pattern in a dart fashion. Secure with tape (11). If necessary, address the problem area further in the pin-fitting stage.

Tip: If dramatic changes are made during a muslin fitting, consider making another sample. This saves time from further alterations.
Pant Length

Compare the pant-length measurement to the pattern’s side seam. Don’t include the waist seam allowance or the hem in this comparison. (The hem is generally marked and can be from \( \frac{1}{2} \)" to 2\( \frac{1}{2} \)" depending on the pant style.)

Shorten the pant pattern before you cut out the fashion fabric. If the leg is cut straight or only slightly tapered, shorten the pattern around the knee area.

To lengthen pants, cut the pattern at the shorten-or-lengthen-here markings. Spread the pattern pieces the needed amount. Insert paper under the pattern pieces and secure with tape. Make sure the grainlines remain true. If the leg has a bell or tapered shape, true the cutting line making gradual directional changes (12).

To shorten pants fold the pattern at the shorten-or-lengthen-here markings, reducing the length by the needed amount. If there’s a shaped hemline, shorten the pant above and below the knee. Take equal amounts from both the front and back pattern pieces as this insures a gradual taper and/or that the bell begins below the knee. Redefine the cutting lines.

Muslin Fitting

Use basting stitches to make a sample pant from muslin or sample fabric. Wear the undergarments and shoes that you’ll wear with the pants. Pin-fit any areas that still need adjusting. Transfer the changes to the pattern pieces.

Pin out any excess fabric and mark the adjustment with a fabric marker (13). Remove the stitching from the muslin and compare each piece to the pattern. Fold the pattern, reducing it the adjusted amount; tape to secure.

If the pants are too tight, mark the muslin where the fabric pulls. Cut the muslin, and then allow it to separate. Pin a muslin scrap under the clipped areas (14). Mark the new stitching lines on the center-back seam.

Take apart the pants and lay the muslin pieces over the pattern. Transfer the new stitching lines to the pattern. Extend the pattern paper by taping paper to the outside edges. It’s not necessary to cut the pattern and separate it as for the muslin pant. Re-establish the cutting lines—they should be \( \frac{3}{8} \)" from the stitching line.

This process may seem time intensive, but the result is a pattern you can use as a base to alter other pant patterns. Since the crotch and darts remain consistent, transfer the changes to any pattern. Use the grainline markings as a guide for placement, keeping them parallel.
Cutting & Construction

Cut the fashion fabric and stitch the darts as directed by the pattern guidelines. Stitch the center-front and center-back seams and baste the side seams. Don’t press the seams or darts until you fit the pants. The waistline will be slightly tighter after the waistband or facing is applied. Follow the remaining pattern guidelines for construction, including pressing, interfacing and finishing the edges.

When choosing fabric for pants consider the weight and drape. Fabrics with a small amount of stretch or give are more comfortable, especially for fitted pants. Test the fabric by pulling it slightly from side to side. Choose a fabric that drapes nicely with a close weave. Fabrics with a loose weave pull apart at stress areas on the seams.

Designer Details

• Add a double row of stitching to the side seams for a faux flat-felled seam. Use contrasting thread for interest. Roll the pant legs and add tabs and buttons for a contemporary look.

• Shorten the pant legs and taper them slightly by taking equal amounts from each side (front and back). Include a vent or buttons for an accent.

• Add purchased decorative tape or accent fabric to a turned-back cuff for trendy fashion appeal.

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Hancock Fabrics, www.hancockfabrics.com, supplied the fabric and supplies for this project.

source

tip: Reduce, increase or modify side seams equally on the front and back. If you change the shaping of one seam and not the other, you affect the drape and can produce a puckered seam. Side seams should hang straight and not pull toward the front or back.
MOST SEWERS FIT THE BODICE OF GARMENTS but often overlook the sleeves. Has this ever happened to you? You’re sewing a garment and everything’s looking fine. But when you insert the sleeves, suddenly the garment doesn’t fit as comfortably as before. To avoid that disappointment, check the fit of the sleeves before setting them into the garment.

Length

Check the sleeve pattern length. Measure your arm (or have someone else do it for you) from the bone at the end of your shoulder, around your elbow with your arm bent, down to your wrist bone (1). This measurement includes the ease required for moving your arm.

Use this measurement to check the sleeve length on set-in styles. Lengthen or shorten as necessary. If your alteration is more than 2”, alter the sleeve in two places—above the elbow and between the elbow and wrist.

To lengthen the sleeve, slash across the lengthen/shorten line(s) and spread the required amount, placing pattern-tracing cloth beneath your pattern to fill in the gap (2). To shorten the sleeve, draw a line above or below the lengthen/shorten line, cut the pattern on the line and tape it to the new line (3).

For garments with dropped sleeves, a better way to measure is from the bone at the top of the spine, over to the shoulder bone, then down the arm to the wrist with the elbow bent. To measure the pattern, pin the pattern sleeve to the back pattern piece, overlapping the seam allowances. Measure from the center back, diagonally over to the outer shoulder seam, and then down the sleeve center (4). If the sleeve has a cuff, pin it to the sleeve;
the cuff adds 2” or more to the arm length. Add 1” or more if you want the sleeve to blouse.

**Don’t skip measuring a short sleeve.** If you have short arms, elbow-length sleeves may be too long, and you’ll need to shorten the sleeve in the upper arm area. Conversely, if you have long arms, you probably need to lengthen short sleeves.

**Shorten the sleeve** in the body of the sleeve rather than at the hem. Chopping off the sleeve at the hem changes the width and you’ll lose the pattern’s hem shaping. For a long sleeve without a cuff, shape the hem so it mirrors the sleeve shape. It will be easier to stitch in place (5).

**Arm Width**

*Measure around the fullest part of your bicep* and allow 2” to 3” of ease in the garment unless you’re working with knit. Because knits stretch and provide natural ease, you may only want 1” of ease in a knit sleeve.

Instead of measuring your arm, measure the sleeve of a garment you feel comfortable in for the most accurate amount of desired ease. Lay the garment flat, measure the sleeve 2” below the underarm, and subtract your arm measurement. Measure the pattern and note the difference.

**To enlarge the sleeve** use the following method, which allows you to make a larger alteration to the sleeve circumference while maintaining the size of the sleeve cap. This method doesn’t affect the bodice seams or armseye in any way.

**Draw a vertical line** through the sleeve center and a horizontal line through the sleeve just below the underarm.
curve. Cut both lines up to, but not through, the stitching lines. Clip the tissue from the outer edge toward, but not through, the first cut. This creates hinges that allow the tissue to lay flat (6).

**Place the sleeve on pattern-tracing cloth** and trace around the original sleeve cap. Spread the pattern open to gain extra width. If the change is significant, the sleeve cap will drop down. Tape the altered sleeve in place and trace around the outer edges. Straighten the hemline. This gives you more room within the sleeve where you need it, but keeps the sleeve cap intact so it will ease into the armseye as designed.

**To make the sleeve smaller**, reverse the above procedure, overlapping the pattern instead of spreading it to make it narrower.

**Armhole Too Tight?**

Sometimes, the sleeve fits but the armhole feels tight.

**Trim away the seam allowances** in the underarm area as seam bulk restricts arm movement. If the armseye still feels tight, remove the sleeve in the underarm area and trim the underarm of the garment to about ¼”. Reinsert the sleeve and you should notice an improvement.

**If that adjustment isn’t enough** the entire armhole needs to be longer. Slash the bodice front and back through the armhole area, add length and alter the sleeve cap the same amount. This makes both the armseye and the sleeve cap longer. Make any necessary changes to your front facings and neckline since they will have changed. Don’t add more than ½” to 1” with this alteration.

**Too Much Ease**

Setting a sleeve into a garment can be difficult, but sometimes the problem is the pattern, not you. The sleeve cap should only measure about 1” to 1½” larger than the armseye. If the sleeve is larger than that, getting it to fit without puckers will be difficult.

**To reduce the sleeve-cap ease**, slash from the cap cutting line down into the head of the sleeve. Overlay the slashes equally to remove some ease (7). Reverse the procedure and add to the sleeve cap if you need to make the sleeve bigger.

**Altering Cuffs**

Cuffs don’t usually pose much of a problem, but check that there’s 1” to 2” of ease.

**Pin the cuff around your wrist**, matching the button marking with the buttonhole, and make sure you can slip a finger between your wrist and the cuff. If you’re making a short sleeve with a band, check that you have sufficient ease.

**To alter cuffs**, slash and spread them to lengthen or overlap them to shorten. Disregard the notches on cuffs; just make them fit the hem circumference.

**If you alter a cuff on a long sleeve shirt or blouse**, alter the sleeve circumference to fit. Change the pleats on a long sleeve shirt or change the angle of the underarm seam to reduce or enlarge the sleeve lower edge.

**Making a Muslin**

Although they’re advised to, very few seamstresses make muslins. Making a sleeve muslin is easy and can prevent problems. It’s especially wise to make one for a jacket sleeve. You’ll see right away how the sleeve fits, whether the cap has too much ease, if it’s hanging on grain and what length adjustments you’ll need. Be sure to put in the proper shoulder pad when fitting. A half hour spent making a muslin can save
countless hours if you spot a problem and correct it before cutting the garment fabric.

**Cut out one sleeve** in a similar fabric weight to your garment fabric. Draw the vertical and horizontal grainlines on the sleeve. Sew the garment front and back together, baste in the sleeve muslin, and check the following:

► **Is the sleeve hanging straight?** The marked grainlines will show this right away. If not, remove the basting and shift the ease in the sleeve cap. Move the sleeve cap toward the garment front or back to make the sleeve hang better.

► **Is the sleeve the right length?** Turn up and mark the hem—this is essential if you’re adding a cuff or putting in a sleeve vent.

► **Are there wrinkles in the sleeve cap?** If there are draglines near the underarm, add more height to the sleeve cap because there isn’t enough fabric for the cap to hang smoothly. Remove the basting at the sleeve cap and let the sleeve drop until the draglines disappear. The opened space is the amount you need to add to the sleeve cap.

► **Is the sleeve too tight or too loose?** Wrinkles across the cap indicate tightness; folds collapsing in the cap indicate that it’s too loose.

► **Is the cap too full?** Easing a sleeve into a jacket is a mark of a good seamstress. If the sleeve cap stitching line is more than 1½” longer than the armseye you’re inserting it into, you’ll have difficulty. Wool is the easiest fabric to set in; polyesters and microfibers are the hardest—reduce the amount of ease in sleeves made from those fibers.

### SLEEVE TYPES

Alterations vary depending on the sleeve. The four basic sleeves are set-in, dropped or extended, raglan, and dolman.

**SET-IN sleeves** have a cap shaped distinctly like a bell and are meant to sit right at the shoulder point; ¼” to ½” beyond if there’s a shoulder pad. The armhole also comes up higher underneath the arm. These sleeves give the trimmest look and give your arm more freedom of movement than the more casual dropped sleeve.

**DROPPED OR EXTENDED sleeves** have a flattened cap and are generally inserted into the garment before the underarm seam is sewn. This sleeve is good if you lose weight because you can alter the garment side seams and sleeves without removing the sleeves. Most shirts fall into this category.

Dropped sleeves can look sloppy because they’re loose fitting. To improve the fit, shorten the bodice in the sleeve area and reduce the shoulder width. This brings the sleeve and the seam higher up under the arm. Slash the bodice front and back and overlap the tissue to reduce the armseye size (A). Shorten the shoulder seam; no change is necessary to the sleeve. (Remove up to 1” with this alteration.)

**RAGLAN sleeves** are seamed diagonally to the bodice front and back. They may have a dart at the top of the shoulder or may be seamed down the sleeve center. They’re comfortable in sportswear, coats and jackets, as they provide shoulder room and allow for bulkier garments underneath. Sleeves with a center seam are easy to alter. Alter the length between the underarm and wrist. Alter the width within the tissue, as the seams joining the sleeve to the garment are often shaped and you don’t want to affect the way they fit into the armseye.

**DOLMAN sleeves** are cut as one piece with the bodice. The underarm is often cut very low, but you can raise that seam. Sew the curve deeper, starting gradually (B). Check the fit, as you need room to get the garment over your head and shoulders. The sharper the curve becomes, the more you need to trim and clip it so it lays flat.
Setting in Sleeves

A dropped, or extended, sleeve has a flattened cap and is sewn to the armseye before sewing the underarm seam. There’s little or no ease in this sleeve cap; the little there is can be eased in by sewing with the sleeve side against the feed dogs to help draw in the fabric. For blouses, press the seam allowances toward the sleeve. For shirts, press the seam allowances toward the bodice. Edgestitch and/or topstitch shirt seam allowances.

A set-in sleeve has a higher, more shaped cap and is inserted in the round (underarm seam is sewn and the sleeve is sewn as a circle into the armseye). For most blouses and dresses, you can ease the sleeve cap using a method called “ease stitch plus.”

Place the sleeve cap under the presser foot, and sew from notch to notch on the stitching line with your left forefinger held tightly against the back of the presser foot. This causes the fabric to bunch up and gathers the cap slightly. When you remove the sleeve, it already has a curved shape. If this isn’t enough gathering, repeat. Then pin the sleeve into the armseye and stitch.

For jackets, sew two lines of basting stitches on the cap: one on the stitching line and one ½” from the raw edge. Pull up the bobbin thread and adjust the gathers to match the armseye. Work the gathers so the fullness is even with no puckers. When stitching the sleeve to the garment, sew with the sleeve side on top so you can see the gathering. Pull the fabric on either side of the presser foot to flatten it and, as long as you sew right on the stitching line, the sleeve will be pucker free.

Another method for jacket sleeves involves adding a sleeve header to the cap. Remove the interfacing from an old tie. Cut a strip about 1” to 1½” wide. On the sleeve wrong side, place the tie interfacing on the stitching line. Sew from one notch around the sleeve cap to the other notch, pulling the interfacing as tightly as you can and letting the fabric feed normally. When you remove the sleeve, the interfacing returns to its normal length, gathering the sleeve cap with it. The interfacing remains in the cap. When the sleeve is sewn into the jacket the interfacing is pressed out into the sleeve cap with the seam allowances. It acts as a buffer between the sleeve and the garment, supporting the cap and giving a rounded tailored shape.

Hem Treatment

This method for hemming short sleeves is quick and gives a nice look.

When cutting out the sleeve, make sure the side seams are straight and don’t angle in. If the pattern doesn’t have a 1¼” hem, make that change on the pattern.

Cut the sleeve ¾” longer than the pattern. Sew the underarm seam. Press under 1¼” on the hem; press under 1¼” again.

On the sleeve wrong side, stitch exactly ¼” from the fold around the entire hem. Pull down the hem allowance, pushing the little tuck up toward the shoulder; press (8). The result is a tuck on the sleeve right side and a nice finish inside.

Adding a Cuff

Many jackets look good with folded-back cuffs. This also solves the problem of sleeve length—simply fold the cuff more or less depending on how long you want the sleeve.

To add a contrast cuff to a jacket, lengthen the sleeve by the depth of the cuff. Keep the sleeve straight when going down to the hem or the cuff won’t turn back smoothly.

Replace the bottom third of the lining with a contrast fabric. Add seam allowances when cutting the fabric.

Stitch the contrast fabric to the lining; line the sleeve right to the edge (9).
ACHIEVING A PERFECT FIT in a “simple” sheath dress requires a little advance preparation. The dress should skim the body curves from neckline to hem with unwrinkled ease. By making a few simple adjustments, you can create your own perfect sheath dress.

choosing a pattern

Classic sheath-dress patterns feature either darts or princess seamlines that start at the armseye. If you’re particularly curvy, the princess seams offer more options to make adjustments. For straighter bodies, darts provide the necessary shaping from the upper body through the hip curve. Your fabric selection will also dictate which design to choose. A soft, flowing fabric will work better with fewer seams, while stiffer, crisp fabrics are better controlled with more seams as found in princess garments.

If you don’t know your pattern size, have a friend take your measurements, including a high-bust or chest measurement (place the tape measure above the bust in front and above the bra line in back). Patterns from the major pattern companies are sized differently than ready-to-wear garments, so compare your measurements to the charts in the back of the pattern catalogs. Choose the bust size closest to, but not smaller than, your high-bust measurement to assure the best fit in the shoulders and armholes.

The sleeveless sheath dress first became popular during the Roaring '20s, flourished in the 1960s and returned to center stage at the turn of this century. Today, sheath dresses are a staple of spring and summer wardrobes.
If your chest and hip measurements indicate different sizes, a multisize pattern is a good solution—you can cut on the appropriate size line in each area.

**Tell-tale Measurements**

Your measurements provide information about how you’ll need to adjust your pattern.

**If Your Full Bust** measures 2½” or more than your high bust, make a full-bust adjustment.

**If Your Back-Waist Length** is shorter or longer than the pattern, adjust the pattern at the above-waist pattern adjustment line. For a shorter back length, fold out the extra amount at the adjustment line and tape. If your back-length measurement is longer than the pattern, cut along the adjustment line and spread the pattern the needed amount. Tape a strip of pattern tracing cloth in place to fill the space.

**If Your Waist and Hip Measurements** differ from those listed on the pattern, add or subtract from the pattern waist and hip, dividing the adjustment amount equally between the vertical seamlines. For example, if an extra 6” is needed at the hips and you have a princess-seam pattern, there are six adjustable seams—two side-front, two side-back and two side seams—equaling 12 seam allowances. Divide the adjustment amount (6”) by the number of seam allowances (12). The resulting ½” is the amount to add to each seam edge from the hipline to the hem. Use a French curve to smoothly redraw the seam from the waist to the hip adjustment (1).

These adjustments may need to be fine-tuned in the fabric, but they’ll give you a good start toward an excellent fit.

### Making a Mock-up

After making adjustments to the flat pattern, it’s useful to sew the pattern in fabric to fine-tune the fit. Choose muslin or a fabric similar to the fashion fabric. (Avoid dark or large-print fabrics, as the needed adjustments won’t be as obvious.)

**Cut Only the Main Garment Pieces.** If you know you need extra room at the hips, cut out the garment with extra-wide seam allowances in that area—2” is usually sufficient. Transfer all seamlines, marks and darts to the fabric, including the center-front and -back lines and the horizontal hip line. Hand or machine-baste the fabric pieces together leaving the zipper area open.

**Staystitch the curved seamlines** at the neck and armhole edges. Clip to, but not through, the stitching so the fabric will give and the garment will sit correctly at the neck and armhole. Put on the mock-up garment, and pin the zipper opening closed.

**Look for areas** that are too tight or too loose. Release and stitch narrower seams to add room where it’s needed. (Fabric drag lines will “point” to areas needing adjustment.) If an area needs even more fabric, such as across a broad back, slash the area and add additional fabric. Pin out areas where there is too much fabric. Make the same changes on the pattern for future garments.

**Darts Should Follow Body Curves,** and bust darts should end approximately ¾” from the bust apex. There should be no excess fabric or pouching at dart points.

**Princess Seamlines** should run smoothly from the armhole to just outside the bust apex and continue to the hem.

**Neck Edges and Armholes** should lie smoothly against the body with no pulls or gaps. Side seams should fall perpendicular to the floor, and horizontal lines should run parallel to the floor. Make any necessary corrections so the mock-up fits this way.

### Rounded Upper Back

For many, a rounded upper back requires a fitting adjustment. If your dress crawls up the back of your neck, or pulls across the upper back, slash the garment horizontally through the center-back seam across the curve, ending just before the armhole seam. The fabric will spread the amount needed to add to your pattern.

**Tip:** Fitting is much easier if you have someone to help make the adjustments. To find a sewing educator to help you, ask about sewing teachers at your favorite fabric store or visit www.paccprofessionals.org for their dressmaker and sewing educator referral list. Oftentimes, sewing professionals will work with you on an hourly basis.
Add a piece of fabric, and pin in place to achieve a smooth back (2). Slash the paper pattern along the same line, and tape in a wedge that corresponds exactly to the mock-up. True the center-back seam so it remains on the straight grain. Fill in the pattern with tissue to assure a straight center-back line. Add a dart in the back neck to redefine the neck contour (3).

**Bust Adjustments**

*If a princess-seam garment* pulls across the bustline, release the seams in the bust area, and repin them to fit. **For a very full bust**, slash the mock-up side-front and the center-front, adding fabric to allow for a smooth fit. Then go to your paper pattern, and make the same adjustments (4). Also see “Make It Fit” in the August ’04 Sew News for making a full-bust adjustment to a princess-seam garment. **Adjust for a smaller bust** on a darted sheath dress by pinning out a fabric tuck from the shoulder to the hem. For a princess-seam sheath dress, take in the side-front seams as needed.

**Add these adjustments** to the pattern by redrawing the princess bust curve or shortening the dart after folding and taping out the pattern excess (5).

### Neck & Armholes

Excess fabric in the neck and armhole can be pinned out with small tucks on the pattern—true the cutting line at the tuck. If the excess fullness is more than ½”, transfer the extra to an existing dart or princess seam. **Pin out the excess fabric**, and mark along the pins; remove the pins. The new marks will look like a dart, but they’ll appear in an area where you don’t want a dart for design purposes (6). The dart will be moved to a more conventional area on the garment. Start by transferring the marks to the corresponding place on the pattern. **For patterns** with bust darts, slash through the dart center and through the adjustment “dart,” extending the slashes until they almost touch, leaving a small hinge of tissue (7).

*A sheath is a great way to showcase a new fabric. Or, create an understated dress to set off a lovely jacket or scarf.*
Bring together the lines of the dart you wish to eliminate, and tape them together. This will further open the bust dart. Fill in the expanded dart with pattern tracing cloth and tape in place (8).

True the dart end by pinning the dart together, folding the dart toward its finished direction, and trimming the excess tissue (9).

For princess-seam dresses, remove excess armhole fabric at the upper edge of the side-front seam. Make a neckline adjustment similar to the dart method: Pin out the extra, mark along the pins, and transfer the marks to the pattern. Slash the new dart and the front and side-front starting at the bust apex, again leaving a hinge of tissue. Bring the dart lines together, spreading the front and side front. Fill in the spread area with tissue, and tape in place (10).

waist & hips
Use your mock-up to perfect the lower-body fit by pinning out any excess or releasing seams where needed. Transfer the adjustments to the paper pattern, adding pattern tracing cloth as needed. If seams need to be re-drawn, use a French curve to smoothly connect the areas.

If you’ve made a number of adjustments to your pattern, consider making another mock-up to test and tweak the changes for a perfect fit.

resources
Look for the following books at your local library, bookstore or fabric store.


Fantastic Fit for Every Body by Gale Grigg Hazen; Rodale Press, 1998.

Fast Fit: Easy Pattern Alterations for Every Figure by Sandra Betzina; Taunton Press, 2003.

Fit for Real People by Pati Palmer and Marta Alto; Palmer/Pletsch, 1998.

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