



BASIC PATTERN MAKING

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- 6 **Get down off the rack and be creative**
- 9 **A few useful materials and tools**
- 12 **Taking measurements**
- 20 **Darts – A shaping element in pattern making**
- 24 **Modeling – The real design begins with the basic cut**
- 32 **Practical dressmaking tips**
- 44 **Basic pattern for a straight skirt**
- 50 **A-line skirt with yoke and side pocket variation**
- 62 **Basic pattern for tops and dresses**
- 70 **Basic sleeve pattern**
- 78 **Tank top with wide pleats**
- 88 **Close-fitting dress with trimmed sleeves, waist yoke and visible zipper**
- 102 **Superimposed collars**
- 104 **Lapel collar**
- 116 **Glossary**

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Lucia Mors de Castro

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Get down off the rack and be creative

When we look at the history of fashion, we realize the significance of the “cut”, which marks the beginning of pattern making in the history of clothing development. From simply wrapping up in a piece of cloth, which was used to cover part or all of the body, the method of tailoring and sewing the fabric has gradually developed to make the garment fit the shape of the body. In many non-Western cultures basic rectangular shapes (whose width is generally determined by the width of the loom) are still very much the norm. Nevertheless, a customized fit is only achieved by wrapping the fabric around the body. Wraps have many practical advantages. They provide protection against heat and cold and can thus easily be made to suit individual needs. Through the use of belts and clasps it is possible to make an infinite number of different styles, with tiny objects being carried in the folds. Even babies can be transported in a simple, convenient manner. The bolts of cloth themselves are easy to store and transport, either folded or in rolls, which is particularly important in nomadic cultures. They fulfill a great many functions and last but by no means least, one size fits all.

However, in the culture of Western Europe, fashion dictates otherwise. Back in the Middle Ages, garments that were cut and sewn soon replaced the large rectangles and semicircles. Cleverly cut and stitched materials supplant the simple geometric shapes, fitting snug against the body or reshaping it, offering the wearer the task or opportunity of selecting something new to wear each day.

Cutting out soon leads to tailoring or dressmaking. With curved cuts, shaped seams, and the insertion of darts and godets, it is possible to create artistic, three-dimensional garments from the fabric. Contemporary fashion designers are using the experience gleaned from the past 800 years to experiment and are constantly coming up with ever newer and more amazing ideas, by playing around with different combinations of mathematical pattern construction, draping and tailoring.

This book gives an insight into the processes that contributes towards the creation of custom-made clothing. First we start with the sketch and the fabric samples, before moving on to taking measurements, shaping the material to the pattern, then tailoring and stitching, and last of all, the finished garment. The book focuses on introducing the reader to the technique of creating dressmaking patterns by hand, along with all the intermediate stages that teach us how to

transfer the pattern to paper, from the mere idea to its artistic representation on cloth. It is particularly designed with motivated beginners in mind, who want to make their own tailor-made clothing and see their boundless imagination recreated in fabric. With a little perseverance, the reader will learn to understand and follow the procedure by firstly transferring the two-dimensional basic design to paper and subsequently to the three-dimensional shape of the body. Once on paper, this design will provide the fundamental basis for all future shapes and pattern alterations.

The reader is led right from the opening pages of the book into the craft of working with paper and fabric. A graphic overview is presented of the materials and tools required, along with the instructions for taking and calculating the measurements needed for the technical aspects of pattern making.

The chapter devoted to shaping darts explains the basic technique of drafting the model lines and shows how the basic pattern can be altered without compromising the perfect fit.

The explanation provided for constructing the basic cut on a mannequin gives an idea of how to go about “tackling” the three-dimensional body. The exercise of working directly with curves, inserting darts and taking in flat seams should lead to a deeper understanding of how the actual shape of the basic pattern is arrived at.

The criteria for choosing the cloth, how it is cut and tailored, the procedure for the seam allowances, explanations for tracing the lining, performing a correct fitting, along with various hand and machine stitches, are all helpful learning tips that will enable the reader to create their own design.

Step-by-step instructions offer very clear explanations about how to tailor the cut for the skirt, top and sleeves, and how to move on to develop techniques to use these basic cuts to create our own designs. Brief explanations are also provided offering details of the sewing process, such as the steps to follow to insert a dart, sew in a zipper, or how to add a facing to a top. The final chapter also provides a basic knowledge of collar design and offers further useful tips concerning the virtually unlimited number of variations available for basic patterns.



A few useful materials and tools

Working with paper and fabric is only productive when it can be done easily by hand. So materials and tools have a very important part to play, and thus it is worth investing in them. The selection discussed below only cover the basic equipment and can be extended virtually ad infinitum. However, it is up to each designer to find out the method and means that give the best results for their specific patterns.

For sketching the pattern

Initially, packing paper is probably sufficient if large quantities are not required. However, for more complex work, it is worth investing in large rolls of paper such as those used for plotters. The paper should be tear-resistant and easy to cut. Some pattern designers prefer to use paper that is almost transparent because it is better for tracing the lines.

A propelling pencil is recommended for drawing and a color marker for labeling. For the accurate construction of a pattern, it is important to have rulers and tailor's squares, particularly a large T-square with a 60-centimeter-long blade, which will greatly facilitate large-scale work.

The procedure for using French curves with various contours needs a certain amount of practice. The rulers should be placed on the paper in such a way that the required curve can be drawn. Sometimes it is necessary to interrupt the drawing of a line to move the ruler to a new position. To draw two identical curves, we recommend making small markings on the ruler or else tracing the line in question.

Weights are needed to hold the paper down. To assemble the parts it is best to use pins without plastic heads, since these al-

low the paper and fabric to lie flat. Using a magnetic or wrist pin cushion means that they are always close at hand.

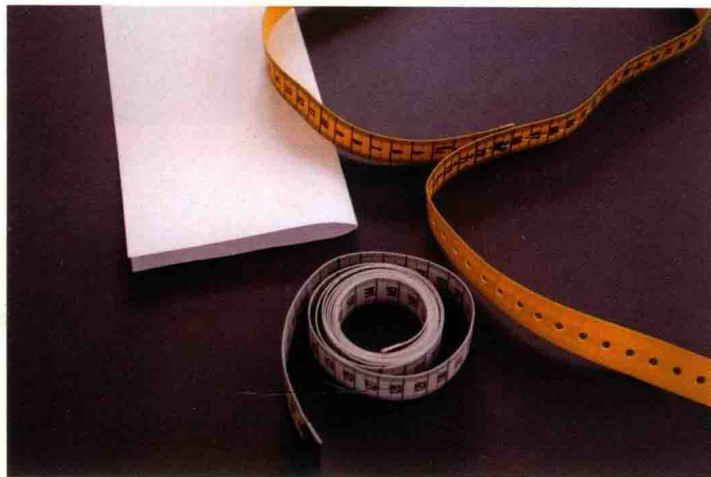
Likewise, another handy feature is removable adhesive tape or masking tape, which can be used to stick points together temporarily and then unstick them again without doing any damage. For permanent joins, instead of tape, it is better to use a pritt stick since this means the pattern can still be ironed.

Sharp paper scissors can be used to cut the pattern out accurately while protecting hands and joins. For the cross markings lines, i.e. the markings at the edges of the pattern, there is a tool that works like a small notcher. The ends can of course also be trimmed with scissors. When shifting points a small tool with a metal tip is required. This makes a tiny hole in the paper. When shifting lines, these are traced or perforated with a small tracing wheel. A pocket calculator and a pair of compasses might be helpful.

During the modeling process we recommend making several exact copies of the pattern. Quasi-transparent paper or a sheet of glass lit from below will facilitate the process, since it is often necessary to make cuts or stick additions, and once cut, it is usually very difficult to return to a previous stage, whether to make an adjustment or when the pattern is to serve as the basis for a new garment.

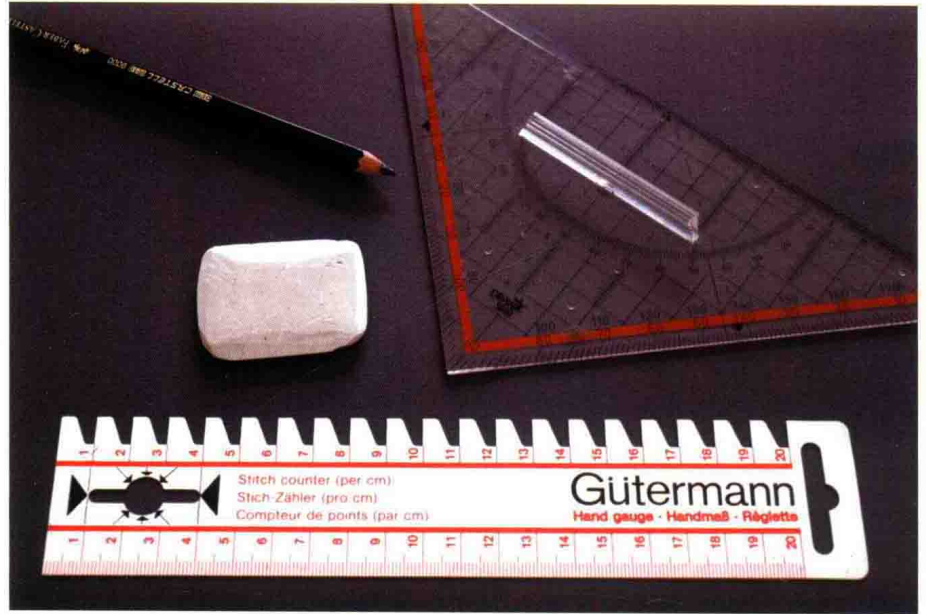
For measuring purposes:

To measure a person, a waist binding can be helpful. This is a measuring tape with a little hook on one end and approximately 60 holes on the other to enable it to be closed. It is placed on the natural waist line and used as a reference point for other measurements. Using another flexible measuring tape, it is possible to take the other measurements. A strip of paper can be used to help measure the back height. To avoid cutting below the arm we recommend folding the paper twice and place it under the arm with the fold face upwards. Detailed instructions on how to take measurements are given on page 12.



Marking the fabric

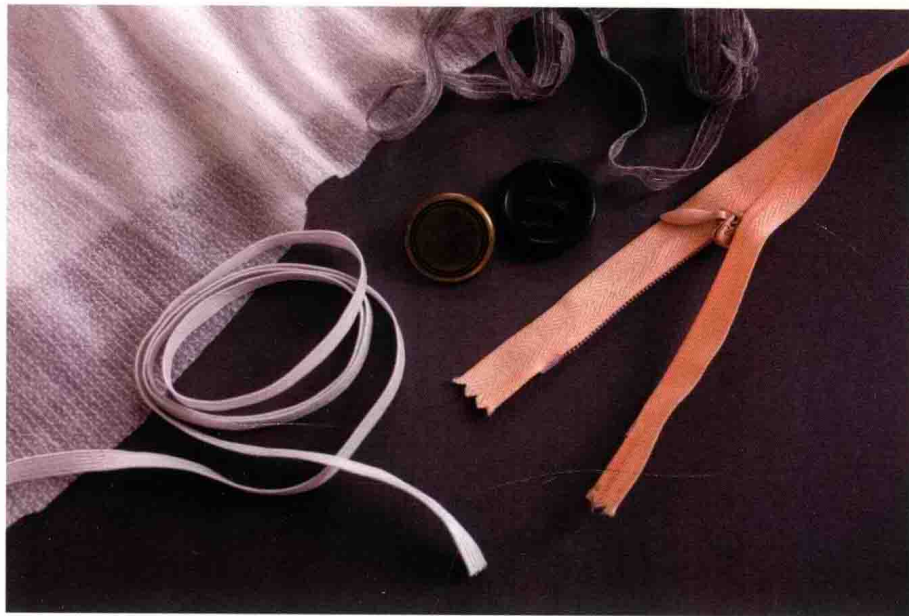
In order to transfer the cut plus seam allowances to the fabric in an orderly way, use a tailor's square or ruler and mark the material on the wrong side of the fabric with tailor's chalk or a pencil. For markings on the right side of the fabric, there are chalks that can be erased by ironing.



For cutting out the fabric

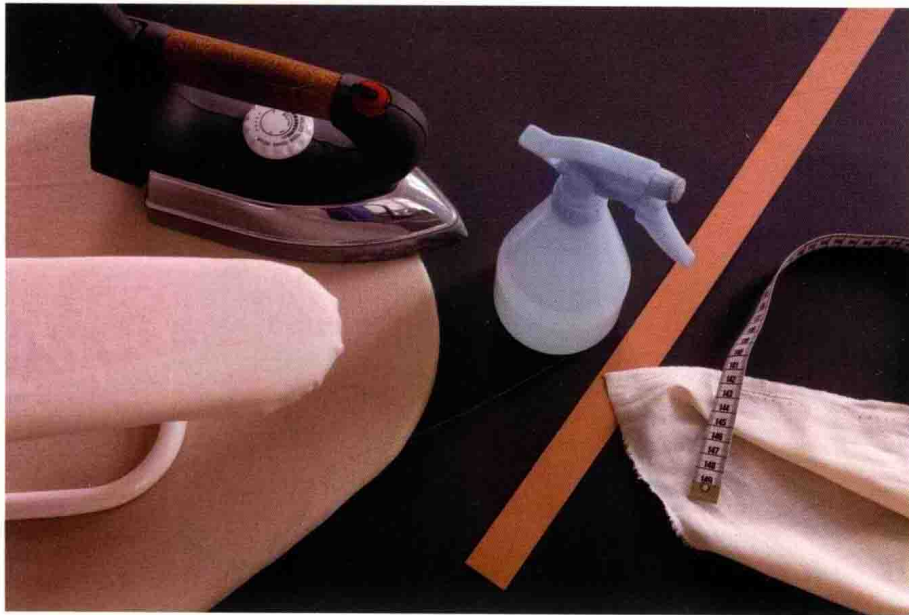
Once the seam allowances have been marked, we can proceed to cut out the fabric. To do this we need some long sharp scissors for cutting out fabric, which must be comfortable to hold. For making notches on the edge of the fabric small scissors or a pincer are used. Markings on the cloth such as darts, or the position of pockets or buttons are made with pins or thread on all layers of the fabric.





Sewing accessories

A large range of helpful and essential tools and notions exist for preparing the fabric. Among others, these include interfacing, which can be ironed into place, seam binding, buttons, zippers and elastic. Finding out about all the resources available before you start sewing, and investing in them, is usually rewarded by a more successful outcome.



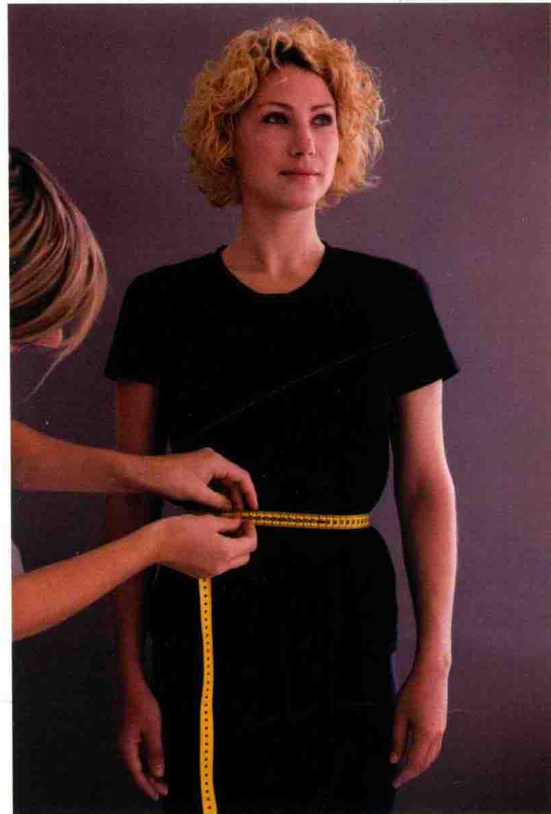
Ironing

One essential stage in the sewing process is ironing. Even this can be simplified considerably by using certain utensils. The basic equipment consists of a good steam iron with a Teflon soleplate and a clean, firmly padded ironing board. A sleeve ironing board makes it easier to press the seams on narrow items of clothing. A water spray and an ironing cloth are other items that are useful for fixing interfacing in place. Cardboard templates can help when ironing fabric edges. A tape measure should always be kept handy to ensure the work is accurate.

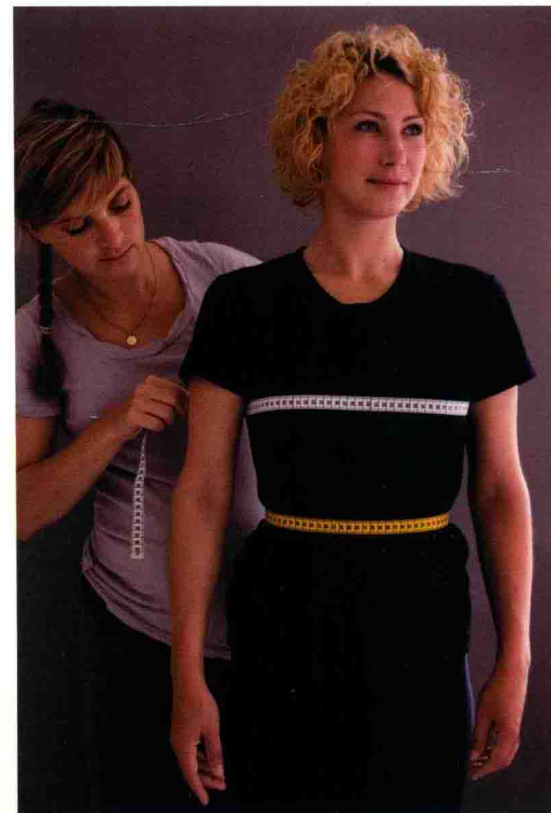
Taking measurements

During the early stages of tailoring the individual pattern, detailed measurements are taken of the body. The pattern designer should pay close attention to the body that is to wear the garment, looking at it from all angles and noting the proportions and any individual peculiarities. In addition to the measurements taken using professional methods, sketches of the person's silhouette are often used as helpful reminders to capture the contours or the distribution of the measurements on the three-dimensional body. Two people will always be needed to take measurements, since the person being measured should adopt a natural stance in an upright position. The measurements are taken with the tape measure flush against the body or on a thin layer of cloth.

First of all a waist binding should be placed around the body. This is a measuring tape with a little hook on one end and approximately 60 holes on the other so that it can be closed. The hook can thus be hooked up at the right spot to obtain the waist circumference (WAC). The waist binding should remain at the narrowest part of the torso (the natural waist line) while the measurements are being taken, since this line is often taken as a reference point for calculating other body measurements.



Next we measure the bust circumference (BC). To do this, the tape measure is placed over the highest part of the bust at the front, and then passed around the body underneath the arms, raising it slightly in the area of the shoulder blades at the back.

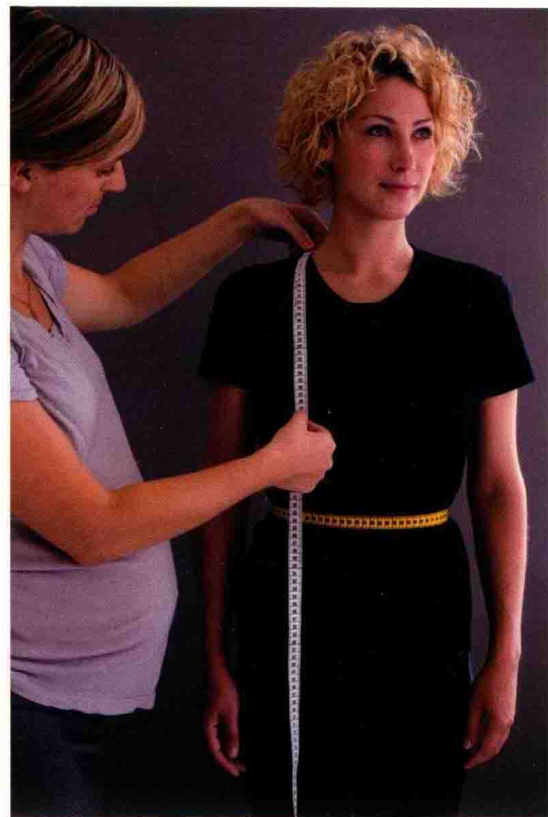




The hip circumference (HC) is the horizontal circumference of the body measured in the area of the most pronounced part of the bottom and the broadest part of the pelvis. The position of the tape measure should be carefully checked in all places, since both the bottom and the thighs and lateral contours of the hips are crucial for determining the size.



The distance between the hip circumference (HC) and the waistline gives us the individual hip depth (HD), which is usually about 19 – 22 cm measured from the waist down.



The tape measure is then placed on the front down from the first vertebra. The bust depth (BD) is measured directly on the tip of the bust.