

**A** dressform! What a wonderful tool to have in a sewing room. It can save time, (eliminate multiple try on), and is a huge help in fitting and altering patterns, fitting and hemming garments, and altering ready-to-wear. Plus, being able to design by draping or otherwise creating garments on a personal dressform is the "icing on the cake" for many seamstresses.

The more closely your dressform duplicates your body, the more useful it will be. Since most of your garments hang from your shoulders, the shoulder area on a form should reflect your exact shape (including your posture) as closely as possible.

## MAKE IT CLOSE TO YOUR SIZE

- Shoulders - width, slant, an extremely sloped or square shoulder shape is not unusual, try padding the area or reshaping the shoulder accordingly.
- Back neck and shoulder area - especially important for "more mature" bodies, padding the back neck area and the larger back width will help.
- Waist length - measurement should be marked exactly on the form to correspond to your figure.
- Bust - height, shape, fullness can be padded or compressed, bust points need to be marked to correspond to your figure.
- Waist - easily padded or made smaller to match your waistline.
- High hip - (includes tummy) easily padded or made smaller to match your hip line.
- Hips - shape adjust width or fullest hip area by padding dressform, mark to correspond to your hips.
- Dressform height - to be the same as yours.
- Do whatever it takes - change the dials, pad it, squish it. Mark unchangeable areas of the form that are different from your body.

## TIP

It is easy to overfit on a dressform altering patterns — tops

## ALTERING PATTERNS — TOPS

Pin darts in paper pattern to the right side. Pin front and back of bodice (jacket, blouse, dress) directly to dressform on shoulder, overlapping at the seamline and over shoulder pads, if required. Pin the side seams together with seam allowances facing out. Adjust as necessary. Often a change in the body of a garment will necessitate another change in the sleeves, collar, facings, etc.

Determine neckline placement (especially if you have shortened the waistlength). Reposition buttonholes if necessary.

## ASYMMETRICAL BODY

An asymmetrical body is a body with a considerable difference in the right and left sides of the body and requires a separate paper pattern to be made for each side. For more extreme cases, extra shoulder padding on the lower side may help the garment to drape correctly (adjustments in seamlines may also be needed) or choose pattern and/or fabric that camouflages the differences.

## ALTERING PATTERNS – SKIRTS

Pin in darts and seam allowances as mentioned above. Change the dart shape if necessary to fit the hip curve and tummy area. Be sure that the side seam is hanging perpendicular to the floor and that the hipline markings are parallel to the floor. Adjust the level of waistline, if necessary, at the waistline. Do not make adjustments at the hemline (except for the finished length).

## WORKING WITH WAISTLINES

If you are not sure where your waistline is, put a well-fitting skirt on your dressform and mark where it's waistline falls. Leave that mark on dressform permanently. (When trying to fasten close-fitting garments on your dressform, keep in mind that your own body is soft and "squishable" but your dressform probably is not. Just pin the opening together on the form.) Also, waistlines are often not parallel to the floor yours may be higher or lower in front, back, or on one side.

## FITTING GARMENT ON YOUR DRESSFORM

After fitting the pattern on your dressform, further fitting of your garment should be minimal it can be "fine-tuned" on your form.

## HEMMING

Try on your garment and turn hem up to the desired length across the front. Then place garments on your dressform and set your dressform up on your sewing table. Measure from the counter up to the marked front hemline; then mark remainder of skirt accordingly. Lay garment flat and turn up hem all around. Finish hem appropriately.

## READY-TO-WEAR

Some alterations are possible, some are not; it depends on the problem and whether the garment is too small or too big and how wide the seam allowances are. Darts are often marked with a "puncture hole" at the end and so cannot be moved or made smaller. Be sure to check out the "inside" of the garment before buying one that is going to require altering.

Typical necessary changes:

- Jackets - back of neck
- Shoulder line - shoulder pads...bigger, smaller, side-to-side differences, sleeve length.
- Skirts - Place on dressform. Check fit of waist, hips, tilt (side seam perpendicular to floor).
- Hems - redo if necessary.

## DRAPING

Begin with a design in mind or begin by "playing" with fashion fabric on the dressform. When you get an idea, then draw the design and begin working with muslin or a "cheap" fabric with draping qualities similar to your fashion fabric.

Drape both sides of the garment - not just one side as in pattern alteration.

## TIP

Be sure to allow enough wearing ease

After muslin is pinned into a design, mark seamlines, darts, tucks, pleats, cowl folds, etc., and where darts meet darts. Be sure to fit neckline well (smoothly).

Remove muslin and trace design onto pattern paper. Add 1" wide seam allowances and all other marks from the muslin.

Cut fashion fabric from the pattern and pin together on dressform. Baste then slipstitch garment together. Check for fit. Machine stitch. Hem. Add any finishing touches.

Draping takes longer and is more work than using a commercial pattern, but the satisfaction is immense when you wear your very special, personally designed garment.

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