

METHODS TO MASTER:

Five Patternmaking Skills

{ by Sarah Veblen }

Learn five key skills for adjusting and correcting your garment patterns. Employ these techniques to streamline the fitting process and create more flattering, comfortable garments.



Pattern Precision

In garment sewing, the pattern plays a key role: It allows you to repeatedly achieve consistent and predictable results. A well-executed pattern makes it easier to sew the garment because all of the puzzle pieces fit together perfectly. In addition, subtle pattern changes, such as slightly adjusting the hip curve to fit you more precisely, make the finished garment look more flattering.

Incorporating just a few skills into your patternmaking arsenal gives you more control. For example, if you notice that two side seams are not the same length, rather than wondering what you did incorrectly, you'll know how to check—and more importantly, correct—the pattern. Having this knowledge puts you in charge of the pattern, rather than the pattern being in charge of you.

There's no need to be intimidated by pattern adjustments and alterations. Everyone can learn basic patternmaking skills and achieve more successful results. Taking a little time to practice the following five techniques will give you a solid foundation on which to build. Develop clean and precise patternmaking habits to make tackling more difficult problems down the road much easier. By taking control of the pattern, you'll be amazed at how much more relaxed and confident you are when sewing your next garment.

Ruling Rulers

Set yourself up for success when making pattern alterations by having the right rulers on hand (1).

A transparent 1"x6" ruler marked with an $\frac{1}{8}$ " grid comes in handy when working and maneuvering in smaller pattern areas.

A transparent 2"x18" plastic ruler marked with an $\frac{1}{8}$ " grid allows you to see the pattern markings through the ruler as you work. The $\frac{1}{8}$ " interval works well for patternmaking because garment seam allowances are usually $\frac{1}{4}$ ", $\frac{3}{8}$ ", $\frac{1}{2}$ " or $\frac{5}{8}$ ".

A transparent curved fashion ruler, sometimes called a Styling Design Ruler, aids in measuring and drawing curves.

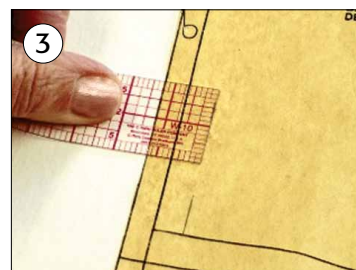
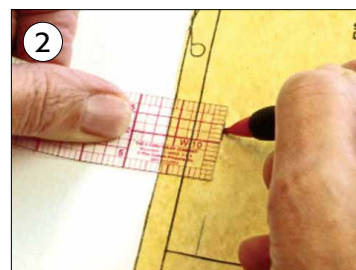
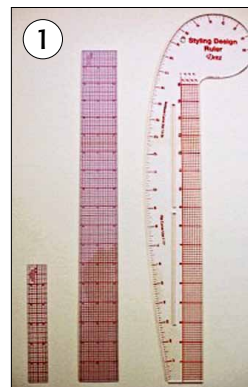
#1: Focusing on Seamlines

When making pattern alterations, concentrate on the seamlines (stitching lines) and ignore the cutting lines. Many patterns, especially multi-sized patterns, don't have any seamlines marked on the pattern. So the first step is to accurately draw the seamlines on the pattern for your reference.

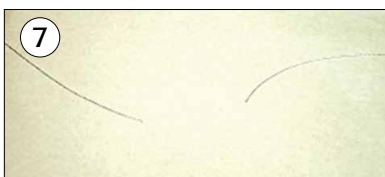
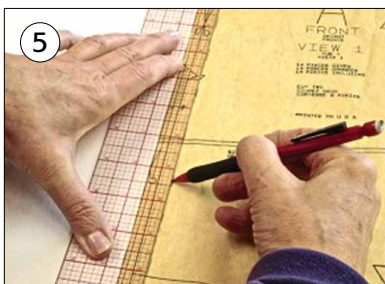
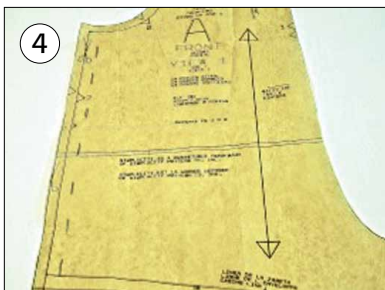
Use a clear ruler and pencil to draw the seamlines according to the pattern seam allowance listed on the guidesheet. If making very complicated pattern alterations, cut off the seam allowances entirely so there's no possibility of confusion. After the pattern work is complete, add the seam allowances back to the corrected pattern.

#2: Using Rulers

Use a straight-edge ruler to draw straight lines and a fashion ruler to draw any curved lines. With practice, the rulers will become an extension of your hands. As you gain experience, you'll find that you don't need to hunt for the optimal ruler position, but rather that you instinctively place the ruler close to the correct position for the effect you want to achieve.



If your pattern only has cut lines, use a ruler and pencil to draw in the seamlines. For accuracy when drawing the seamline, place the ruler mark exactly along the printed cut-line outer edge to account for the thickness of the printed line (2). Don't align the ruler mark directly over the printed cut line (3). Press the ruler securely to avoid shifting it while tracing the edge. Direct the pencil point into the ruler edge.



Draw a series of tick-marks to indicate the seamline along each pattern edge (4). To achieve a straight edge, connect the marks using a long straight ruler (5). For a curved edge, use a fashion ruler to connect the tick marks (6).

For accuracy when blending or connecting curved lines, position the ruler so that as much of the ruler as possible is touching the marks that need to be connected or blended. Draw the curves that will be connected (7). Carefully align the fashion ruler as completely as possible with the curves, and then trace to connect them (8), rather than aligning the ruler only with the area that needs to be connected (9).

By using a fashion ruler, you have the ability to create subtle but important differences to fit the curves of your body. For example, flatten or add to the bust curve as needed (10.) Or add more fullness to the hip curve as needed (11).

#3 Walking & Truing Seams

The length of two adjoining seams should always be exactly the same length, unless one garment component intentionally has ease in comparison to the other. It's easy to check if adjoining seams are the same length by "walking" the seams.

Mark the seamlines along both adjoining seam edges (12).

Position the pattern pieces with right sides together. Match the seamlines at the lower edge (13).

Carefully move the upper pattern as needed to align the seamlines in successive sections. Place a pin through both seamlines to match them exactly (14). Continue matching and pinning along the entire seam length (15).

When you reach a notch, mark on the upper pattern (16). Match and mark the first dart leg (17) if applicable, and then mark the second dart leg (18). Match the seam to the upper edge (19).

If the seam length between two notches is greater on one pattern piece than the other when comparing adjoining pieces, this is often due to intentional ease being incorporated. When truing pattern pieces, control where that ease occurs with notch placement.

When walking and truing a pattern, concentrate on the seamlines. It doesn't matter if the cutting lines that are parallel to the seamlines are the same length, because it's the seamlines that will be stitched together.

As with any pattern work, working cleanly and accurately is important. If desired, walk a seam more than once to ensure that the pattern is accurate. Aiming for accuracy within a 1/16" tolerance is a reasonable goal.

#4 Truing Dart Legs

When altering a pattern with a dart that intersects a seam, it's necessary to true the dart legs. This is a quick and simple technique, because the dart extension (the paper that's usually triangularly shaped and extends beyond the seam-line) automatically becomes the correct shape during the truing process. And having trued dart legs makes it easy to accurately fold the dart when making the garment.

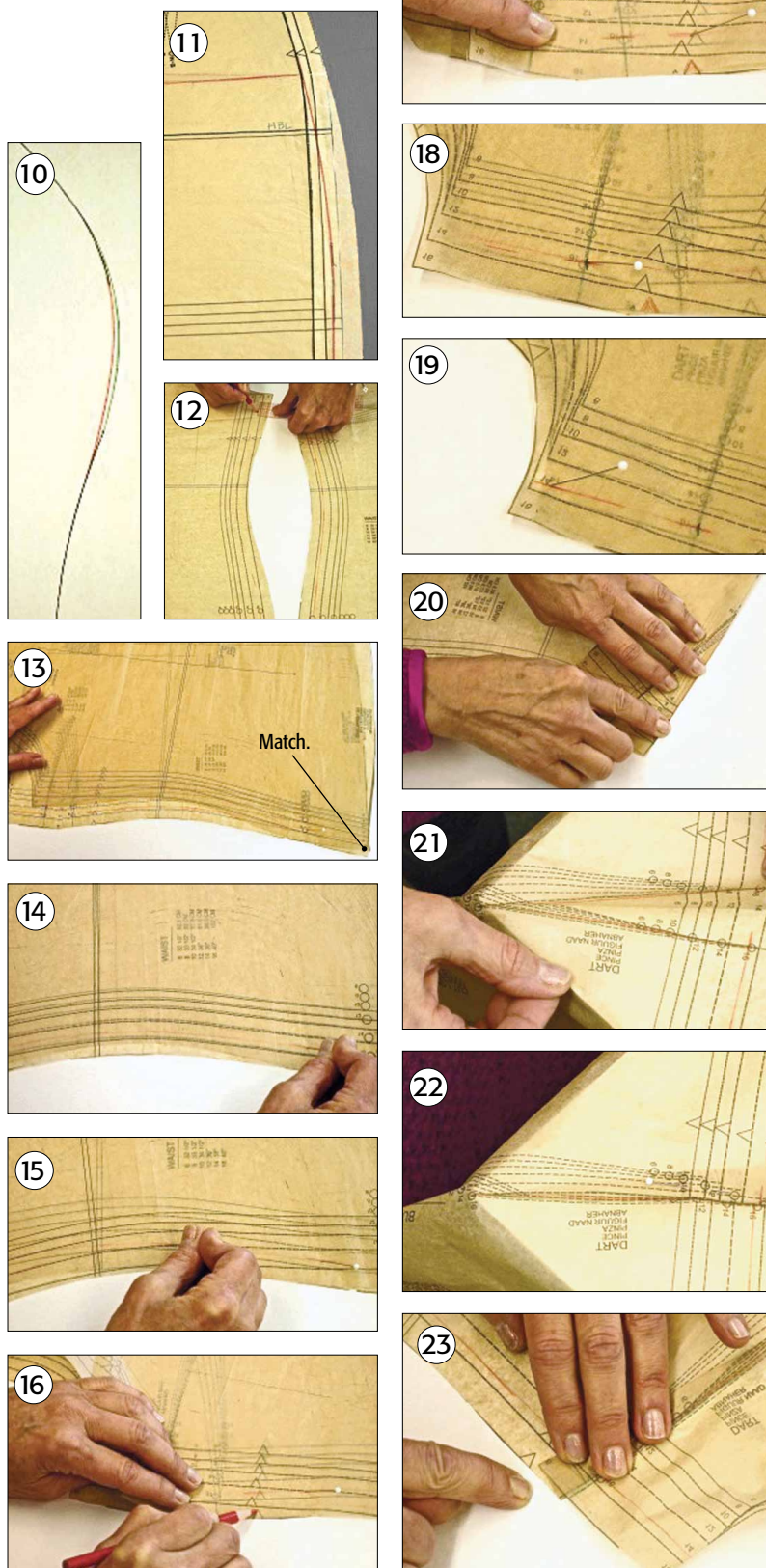
If working with shaped (curved) dart legs, redraw the dart legs using a straight edge ruler, connecting the dart point and each dart leg where it intersects the seam. Perform the pattern work using these straight dart legs; but sew shaped dart legs during construction.

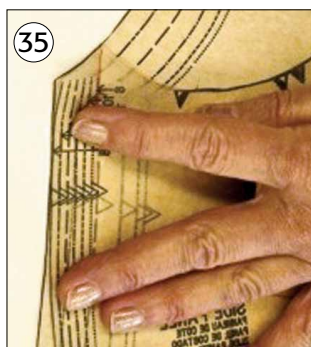
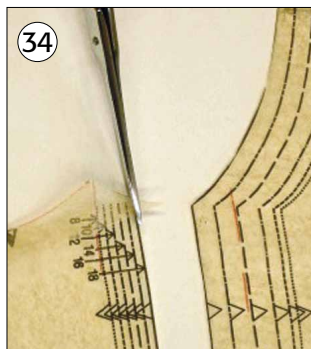
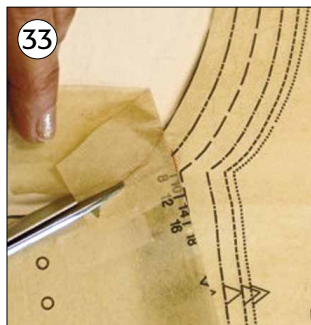
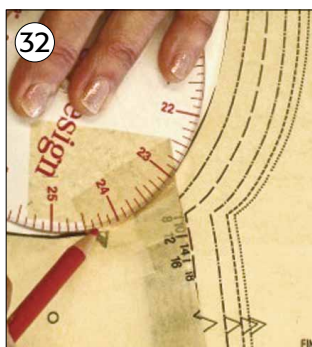
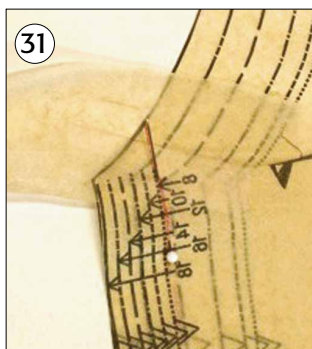
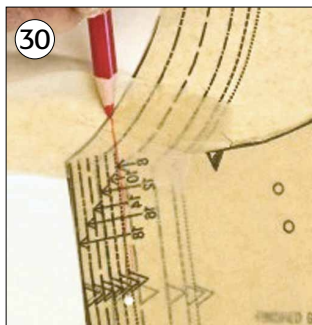
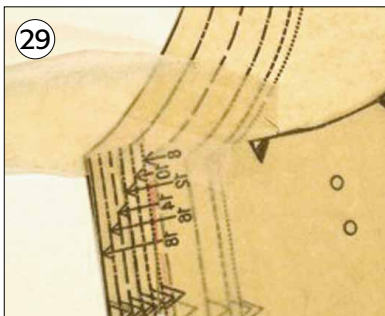
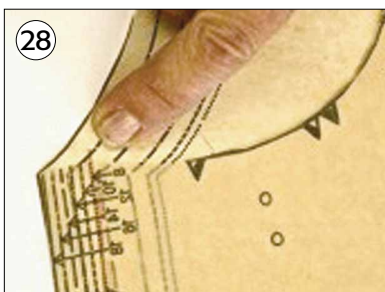
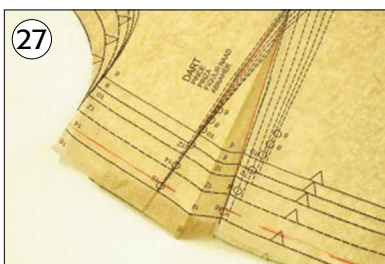
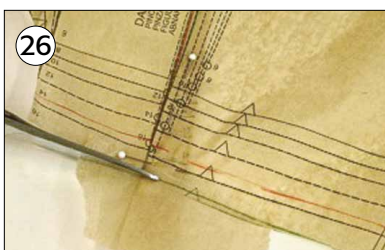
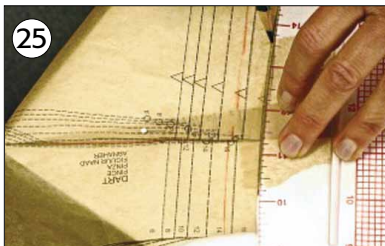
To true the dart, fold and pin the dart in place on the pattern. To create the correct dart extension, fold the dart in the direction it will be pressed. Horizontal darts are usually folded down; vertical darts are usually folded toward the garment center. Refer to the dart leg that's closest to the direction the dart will be folded as the "leading dart leg." For a horizontal dart, the lower dart leg is the leading dart leg; for a vertical dart, the dart leg closest to the garment center is the leading dart leg.

Fold the leading dart leg (20).

Fold the remaining dart leg, placing the dart point along a table corner to aid in folding the point crisply (21). Pin the dart (22).

Note the discrepancy along the seamline (23).





Unfold the dart, and then tape additional paper along the dart edge (24). Refold and pin the dart, and then trace the cutting line onto the pattern using a fashion ruler (25).

While the dart is folded, cut along the drawn cutting line (26). Unfold and unpin the pattern for a perfectly trued edge (27).

#5: Truing Difficult Seams

Some seams are not as simple to true as others. And pattern companies don't always true their patterns so it's easy to see where adjoining seams align at an intersecting seam and cut line. Two examples of difficult seams are armcye princess seams and tailored-jacket sleeve back-of-the-arm seams. Use the follow-

ing method to true difficult seams. This example is for the seam where a jacket front and side panel are joined (similar to an armcye princess seam).

Align the adjoining patterns with right sides together. Note the area where the seams aren't true (28). Tape additional paper along the cut edge (29).

Extend the seamline onto the additional paper (30). Pin the seamline as it will be sewn (31).

Fold the upper pattern away from the seamline, and then redraw the edge as needed to match the seamlines (32).

Cut along the drawn line while the pattern is folded (33). Unpin the patterns and cut away the excess paper (34). Align the patterns to see that the seams are now trued (35). ✂