Costume Design Techniques for Theatre
Contents

1. Hour 3
   By Tracey Lyons
   From Sewing Techniques for Theatre

2. Getting Started
   By Graham Cottenden
   From Men’s Tailoring

3. Altering Women’s Dresses
   By Tan Huaixiang
   From Costume Craftwork on a Budget

4. The Roaring Twenties
   By Allison Lowery
   From Historical Wig Styling
Chapters 2 and 3 contain instructions for the 11 sewing samples worked on the 15 rectangles of woven fabric. In application to the samples, Chapter 2 reviews the overlock machine and expands the topic of fabric. There are sections on irons and sewing notions too. Each sewing sample is broken down into several steps with accompanying pictures. Save your work for placement in your portfolio (introduced in Chapter 1 and detailed in Chapter 5).

**NECESSARY SUPPLIES FOR CHAPTER 2***

- Thread
- Hand sewing needle
- Flat button – four holes
- Shank button
- Snap (two parts)
- Skirt hook and bar
- Seam gauge
- Pins
- Iron

*Plus previously introduced supplies
OVERLOCK MACHINE

It is time to return to the mechanics of the overlock machine. Prepare the 15 rectangles for use by overlocking all edges on each piece (see Figure 2.2).

1. Power on the overlock machine
2. Locate the foot pedal
3. Lower the presser foot
4. Align the fabric at the front of the presser foot and near the upper knife
5. Check the placement of your hands to ensure their safety from the knife
6. Push down the foot pedal. Speed is regulated by the pressure from your foot
7. As the fabric advances, note the amount trimmed by the upper knife
   a. Optimally, only the fray is trimmed off of the fabric
8. Sew past the end of the fabric to leave a thread chain
9. Trim the thread near the garment and leave the chain on the machine
10. Trim the thread from the beginning of the overlock stitching

Overlock each edge from start to finish. Remove and shift the fabric to begin overlocking the next edge. Rounding the edges diminishes the accuracy of the cutting. Finish the edges on all 15 rectangles.

FIGURE 2.2 The pictures detail steps 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, and 9
SEWING NOTIONS

The term *notions* means 'stuff for sewing.' There is an inference that notions are small, but that is not a defining characteristic. The long list of things that are notions would include, but not be limited to, thread, needles, buttons, snaps, measuring tapes, chalk, pins, and ribbon. Fabric, machines, scissors, irons, and patterns are not considered notions and yet very much 'stuff for sewing.' Sewing Sample #1 and Sample #2 attach notions to the rectangles in a way that simulates their use on a costume.

*Thread*

Any sewing topic could ignite several chapters of information and discussion. Such is the case with thread. I’m going to skip past most of the debate and simply recommend that new stitchers use a basic spool (not cone) of all-propose thread available from fabric retailers. As your skill set increases, so will your experience with thread. In no time, you may be demanding pre-waxed and pre-cut boutique-brand sewing thread. For the purposes of the following assignments, lengths of thread are about 36”.

*Needles*

This book will discuss both sewing *machine needles* and *hand sewing needles*. Hand sewing needles have a point at one end and the eye (hole) at the opposite. Machine needles have the point and eye at the same end, and the other end inserts into the machine. In either case, thin needles create less resistance when drawn through fabric yet risk breaking if too strained. Specific to hand sewing, start these projects with a size 7, 8, or 9 needle. Try different sizes to learn your own preferences.

**THREADING THE NEEDLE**

In preparation for the upcoming hand sewing projects, these steps demonstrate the process of threading a needle and tying a knot. The first introduction of a new skill is very detailed. Later, the abbreviated description defers to a new set of skills. Feel free to return to previous sections for review.
Threading the needle (see Figure 2.3):
1. Cut 36” of thread
2. Insert one end into the eye of the needle
   a. A fresh cut on the thread or a cut at an angle can improve the chances of hitting your mark
3. Bring the ends of the thread together

FIGURE 2.3 Steps 1, 2, 3
Tie the knot at the ends of the thread using these steps (see Figure 2.4):

4. Loop the thread, crossing the ends with the middle of the thread
5. Wrap the ends through the loop a couple of times
   a. More wraps mean bigger knots that hold well, even in a loosely woven fabric, but can be lumpy. Find the right balance for your project
6. Pull the ends of the thread to close up the loop
   a. It takes a little practice to place the knot near the ends of the thread
7. If the thread following the knot is long or uneven, trim to about $\frac{1}{3}$"
**PRO TIP**

It may help to consider the dominate hand as the controller for the needle and thread. The recessive hand controls the fabric.

**Buttons**

Buttons have decorated garments for thousands of years. Because of their history, they are a critical part of costume construction.

**Shank Button**

The first of the two types of buttons discussed in this book is the shank.

Opposite the button’s face, on the underside, is a loop or lump called a shank. The shank lifts the button away from the garment allowing room for the buttonhole layer to fit comfortably under the button.

*Sewing Sample #1. Part 1 of 2 – Shank Button*

Follow this process to attach the shank button to the rectangle of fabric (see Figures 2.5–2.7):
1. Fold an 8” x 10” rectangle of fabric in half on the length
   a. This creates a double layer of fabric for the button applications
   b. Both the flat and shank buttons will be sewn onto this square
2. Draw two dots (in our shop, we often use chalk for marking fabric, but for this assignment, anything will work) several inches apart on the same side of the rectangle to use as guides for sewing the flat and the shank buttons
3. With a threaded needle, start from the back of the fabric and penetrate the fabric behind the chalk mark with the needle only
   a. Back out the needle if it didn’t strike close to the mark indicating the button placement
4. When confident of the accuracy, draw the needle and thread through the fabric until stopped by the knot at the end of the thread
5. Bring the needle through the shank of the button
6. Stitch back through the fabric near but not exactly on the previous stitch
7. Pull until snug but not tight
   a. Tight stitches can pucker and pull fabric out of shape
8. Repeat the process of stitching from the back of the fabric, through the shank, and return through the fabric to the back at least three times
   a. Mind the button to avoid spinning
9. Finish with the needle drawn to the back of the fabric opposite the button
   The shank button and all the hand stitching in this book finishes with a knot and then a stitch to ‘bury the knot.’ Follow the next steps for the process:
10. Knot the thread by bringing the needle through to the back of the fabric (still on the opposite side of the fabric from the button)
11. Start a stitch that grabs a few threads and keeps the needle to the back of the fabric
12. Pull the needle free of the fabric but do not tighten the thread, leaving a loop
13. Bring the needle through that thread loop a couple of times
   a. This wrapping of the needle with thread creates the knot
14. Pull the needle, bringing the wrapped section against the fabric.

15. As an added measure of security, ‘bury the knot’

   a. To bury the knot, take one last stitch through a tiny bit of fabric near the knot, keeping to the back of the fabric.

   b. This stitch secures the top of your previous knot and locks it to the garment.

16. Trim your thread close to the fabric, but not too close (about \( \frac{3}{16} \)th of an inch).

**Figure 2.7** Steps 14, 15
**MARKING FABRIC WITH CHALK OR WAX?**

In my college program, the costume shop had black wax available to mark garments. I loved its vivid and easy flow. Even after repeated scolding, I would use nothing else. Sure, it didn’t come off of the garment easily (or ever) but my love was deep. Some things are a preference: chalk or wax, other things in a costume shop conform strictly to industry standards. Learn your preferences by trying new things. Develop your skills so that you can conscientiously break the rules.

---

**FLAT BUTTON**

A flat button has two or four holes. They lay much closer to the garment. The following stitching technique lifts the button to accommodate the buttonhole layer.

*Sewing Sample #1. Part 2 of 2 — Flat Button*

Attach the flat button to the second button placement mark located on the folded fabric rectangle previously used for the shank button (see Figures 2.8 and 2.9).
1. Begin the process with a straight pin embedded into the fabric directly above the button placement mark
   a. From the top of the fabric (on the side where you will sew the button) pin in and out of the fabric preceding the mark. Travel over the mark and pin in and out of the fabric on the opposite side of the mark
2. Using a threaded needle, start from the back of the fabric
3. Draw the needle and thread up next to the straight pin until stopped by the knot
4. Bring the needle through one of the drilled holes on the button
5. Place the button over the pin with the holes (either one pair or two) straddling the straight pin
6. Draw the needle back down through the hole and fabric on the opposite side of the pin
da. Making two parallel rows of stitches is stronger and less bulky than a stitch pattern that makes an X
7. Sew from back to front, front to back through this pair of drilled holes three times
8. Switch to the remaining pair of drilled holes
9. Sew from back to front, front to back, three times through these holes too
10. Make a stitch that brings the needle and thread between the button and the fabric. Create a thread shank by following these steps (see Figure 2.10).
11. Remove the straight pin
   a. Notice the long stitches between the fabric and the button

12. With the thread on your needle, wrap around the long stitches in the gap between the button and fabric
   a. Circle the long threads three times

13. Draw the needle through to the back of the fabric, opposite the button

14. Knot the thread

15. Bury the knot

16. Trim the threads
IRONS

Burns are the most frequent injury in my costume shop, and they are preventable. As with all things, safety should be your priority. Never operate this or any machinery that has damage. Know the correct and safe heat settings. Mind the steam, which is hotter than the iron.

Use the iron within the manufacturers’ recommendations. Power off the irons when the shop is not in use.

At this point in the book, the projects will require frequent ironing. Ironing or ‘pressing’ improves the quality and finished look of a garment. It is labor intensive and very transformative. Try ironing the remaining 14 rectangles. The flattened fabric is easier to manage.

Hook and Bar

Hook-and-bar fasteners create an invisible closure on costumes. This book describes the steps to sew a skirt hook and bar. The sewing skills for the skirt style are applicable to other hook-and-bar closures that you will encounter while working in a costume shop.

Sewing Sample #2. Part 1 of 4 – Bar

The hook and bar will be attached to the same pair of rectangles as the snap (directions for the snap will follow).
Follow this process to attach the bar (see Figures 2.12–2.14):

1. Iron two rectangles lengthwise
   a. The folded edges will overlap when the hook and bar combine

2. Designate one rectangle “lower layer” and the other “upper layer”

3. On the lower layer, set the bar back from the fold of the fabric – about an inch is normal on a garment
   a. With your recessive hand, hold the bar to the fabric. The dominate manages the threaded needle

4. Place the bar with the drilled holes smooth to the fabric and the center of the bar arching away from the fabric
   a. With your recessive hand, hold the bar to the fabric. The dominate manages the threaded needle

5. Begin from the back and stitch through the fabric and through one of the drilled holes at the end of the bar

6. Pull until stopped by the knot

7. Stitch back down through the fabric, outside of the bar; near the drilled hole, not the adjacent drilled hole
8. Snug up the stitch
9. Repeat the in and out a minimum of three times
10. Switch to the adjacent drilled hole, stitching up through the fabric and the hole
11. Stitch down through the fabric near this hole
12. Repeat the in and out a minimum of three times
13. Travel from this pair of holes to the ones on the other end of the bar.
   a. Stitch into ONE layer of fabric and bring the needle out of the fabric near the unsewn end of the bar
   b. This is a big, yet discreet, stitch
   c. Sew the bar this way to prevent thread hooking and tearing, thus undoing your stitches and leaving the garment without a means to close

**Figure 2.13** Steps 9, 12, 13
14. Stitch the other pair of drilled holes (similar to steps 5–12)
   a. Each pair of drilled holes should have at least three sets of stitches
15. Make your knot on the backside, opposite the bar
16. Bury the knot; trim threads
The following steps guide in the attachment of the skirt hook (see Figures 2.15 and 2.16):

1. On the underside of the rectangle designated ‘upper layer,’ place the back of the hook parallel and close to the folded edge of fabric
   a. Imagine a pair of slacks where the bar has been sewn to one side of the fly, the hook is on the underside of the opposite side
   b. The flat side of the hook is against the fabric

2. The first stitch starts on the same side of the hook and next to the center hole
   a. The needle penetrates both layers of fabric and returns inside of the large center hole of the hook
   b. The stitches used to attach a hook are visible from the outside of the garment and need to look tidy

3. Repeat in and out of the fabric at the center hole three times
   a. Make consecutive stitches small and close together
4. To travel from the center of the hook to a pair of drilled holes at the top, stitch between the layers of fabric (or stitch on the same side as the hook but NOT on the opposite side because a long stitch on that side will show on the finished garment)

5. Stitch the drilled holes at the top of the hook in the same manner as the pair of holes in the bar

6. Make a discreet stitch to switch to the opposite pair of drilled holes on the hook

7. Stitch each of the two remaining drilled holes three times each

8. Make your knot on the same side as the hook

9. Bury the knot

10. Trim the thread close, but not too close
**Snap**

Snaps come in all sizes and in a couple of different shapes. A snap has two parts: the ‘stud’ and the ‘socket’ (see Figure 2.17). In a practical application, the costume’s weight and the strain on the snap should determine the size needed (bigger snaps create a stronger hold). Test the snap parts prior to stitching to ensure that you have a match before stitching. Unsnap and attach each half separately using the following directions.

![FIGURE 2.17 Left to right: stud, socket](image)
Sewing Sample #2. Part 3 of 4 – Socket

Use the same pair of fabric rectangles as the skirt hook and bar (see Figures 2.18–2.19).

1. On the lower layer (the one with the bar attached), begin with the socket against fabric
   a. Note that when placed upside down, the socket half of the snap can look very similar to the stud half of the snap
   b. The snap will not click shut unless corresponding faces touch

2. Hold the snap half to the fabric with your recessive hand

3. With a threaded needle, stitch from the back of the fabric
   a. Pull the needle through the fabric and into a drilled hole from back to front

4. Stitch down through the fabric outside of the snap from front to back

5. Repeat at least three times
6. Move to the next drilled hole
   a. Threads that ‘travel’ from one hole to the next can be made on either side of the fabric
7. Each drilled hole is sewn a minimum of three times
8. Knot the thread on the backside
9. Bury knot
10. Trim threads

**FIGURE 2.19** Step 6a with travel threads on the snap side, and step 6a with travel threads on the underside of the snap
Sewing Sample #2. Part 4 of 4 – Stud

Before sewing the stud half to the top layer, test and check for correct placement. Once again, the fabric side of this attachment will show to the audience. Stitches on the right side (opposite the stud) should be small and tidy.
The following steps detail attaching the stud to the fabric (see Figures 2.20 and 2.21):

1. Begin with the fabric and snap held by the recessive hand
2. Near a drilled hole, stitch from the snap side through both layers of fabric
3. Neatly return the needle to the snap side, landing inside of a drilled hole
4. Repeat this step at least three times per drilled hole
5. Place stitches that ‘travel’ from one hole to the next on the snap side or hide the stitch between the two layers of fabric

**FIGURE 2.20 Steps 1, 3, 5**
6. Knot on the snap side
7. Bury knot
8. Trim threads
HOUR FIVE

RIGHT AND WRONG SIDE OF FABRIC

So far, this book has discussed measuring, dividing, overlocking, and manufacturing fabric. Now take a closer look at a single piece of fabric. Most fabrics (but not all) have one side designed to be the finished or outer side. For example, quilting fabric is often a cotton with a printed side intended to be the exterior (see Figure 2.23). This ‘designed’ side is the right side and the other the wrong side. For the purposes of the following exercises, we will use the right side of the fabric for the outside of the sewing samples.

Set aside this and all of the sewing samples for placement into your portfolio.
FIGURE 2.23 The right side of the fabric has a vivid print.

PRO TIP

The difference between the right and wrong sides of fabric can be subtle. When cutting this type of fabric for the purposes of making a costume, I will place pieces of masking tape on the right side of each piece. The tape helps to keep the right sides identified and removes quickly from the finished garment.

Fabrics without any difference between right or wrong sides can be tricky. First, the right and wrong sides may appear identical in one light but in another, such as stage lighting, the right and wrong sides may look noticeably different. Another pitfall of this fabric lies with the construction. Without the ability to identify the right sides, you could be building some parts with wrong sides together and some with right sides together. There is even the chance that you could build two left sides of a garment instead of the intended right and left.

There are exceptions to using the right side of the fabric on the
outside of the garment. Once, while creating a costume that needed to look old, I used the wrong side of the fabric for the outside, as it was duller in color and looked worn out.

HEMMING STITCHES

Hems are the finished edges on the garment’s sleeve, pant leg, skirt, and other places. This bit of fabric turned to the inside requires specific stitches to hold it in place. Sewing Sample #3 (Figure 2.27) and Sample #4 (Figure 2.31) detail two types of frequently used hemming stitches. As with most of this book, understanding these basics build a foundation needed for more advanced projects.

Whip Stitch

Fast and secure, the whip stitch is a costume shop ‘go-to’ for hemming and repairs. Although beautiful and tidy on the outside of a garment, the inside shows a great deal of thread from the stitches. Whip stitches shouldn’t be used if the garment will be seen inside out or taken off while on stage.
Sewing Sample #3. Whip Stitch

The following steps detail the whip stitch (see Figures 2.24–2.26):

1. On one rectangle, fold up 2” of the 10” length toward the wrong side of the fabric
   a. The amount past the fold of the hem is the hem allowance
   b. A seam gauge is a small metal ruler used to measure the depth of the fold

2. Make another narrow fold that tucks the overlocked edge into the hem allowance
   a. Pin through all layers if desired

3. The first stitch with a threaded needle places the knot on the folded edge of the hem allowance

**FIGURE 2.24 Steps 1, 2, 3**
4. With the needle, grab a few threads of the garment AND a few threads from the top of the hem allowance’s fold
   a. Experiment with the hold you use on the fabric and needle. I place the hem on my left, perpendicular to my body and I hold the needle at a 90° angle to the hem.

5. Draw the needle and thread through the stitch

6. Advance about ¼”

7. Repeat steps 4–6 for each stitch, working across the folded edge of the hem allowance
8. Running out of thread is very likely. Use this process when the thread on the needle is getting short:
   a. Knot your thread when you have about 4” remaining past the needle
   b. Less thread will increase the difficulty of creating the knot
   c. Always bury the knot and trim the threads closely
   d. Begin with the next threaded needle and back up a stitch or two so that the beginning of this thread overlaps with the last set of stitches
   e. Continue hemming using the steps 4–6

9. Finish the hemming with a buried knot

**FIGURE 2.26** Steps 8d, 8e
**Slip Stitch**

Hemming with a slip stitch creates a beautiful finish on the garment, inside and outside. It is not, however, fast. This is a two-stroke stitch, and some of the stitching is by feel, not sight.

**Sewing Sample #4. Slip Stitch**

Figure 2.28 is an enlarged view of the stitching pattern for this hem. The darker lines indicate stitches hidden in the fold. The light-gray lines represent small stitches through the garment layer.
The following steps describe the mechanics of the slip stitch (see Figures 2.29 and 2.30):

1. Simulate a hem to slip stitch by taking one rectangle and folding it up 2” on the 10” length toward the wrong side of the fabric. Just like the whip stitch, this sample has a 2” hem allowance.
2. Create another fold that tucks in the overlocked edge of the hem allowance.
3. Stitch with the threaded needle facing your recessive hand.
4. Place the first stitch on the hem allowance to anchor the knot.
5. Take a tiny stitch through the garment layer just above where the hem allowance hits the garment (working from the inside of the fabric).
6. At the same place where that tiny stitch ended, stitch into the fold.
7. Travel ¼” in the fold and pop out the needle from the fold.
8. Take a tiny stitch through the garment layer just above the location of the stitch that exited the fold
9. Repeat this two-stroke stitch combination until the hemming is finished
10. Running out of thread is very likely. The sub-directions on step 8 of the whip stitch describe the switch to a newly threaded needle
11. Finish the hemming with a buried knot tied on the hem allowance

FIGURE 2.30 Steps 8, 9, 10
Set aside Sewing Samples #3 and #4 for placement into your portfolio.

**FIGURE 2.31** Sewing Sample #4 finished

**REVIEW**

- Describe the orientation of a skirt hook to the finished edge of the garment.
- Name the two parts of a snap.
- What are some of the factors to consider when selecting the correct size snap?
- Which hemming stitch is nearly invisible from the right and wrong side of the fabric?
- When is it best to use the whip stitch to hem a costume?
GETTING STARTED
GETTING STARTED

This chapter covers the basics of getting started in tailoring, what equipment is needed, some basic tailoring rules to be followed, what measurements are needed and how to take them.

It shows you how to use a tailor’s square in the drafting process and discusses the working relationship you might have with a costume designer or supervisor.

Lastly, it considers the importance of understanding period styles and detail.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

If you work in theatre/performance wardrobe then you are likely to find most of this equipment already there.

You will need to have the following equipment before you start.

For the drafting of the patterns:

Pencil (HB or H) – needs to be kept sharp throughout
Ruler
Metre stick
Tailor’s square/L square
Eraser
Plain pattern paper
Paper scissors
Masking tape

For the construction of the garments:

Tape measure
Small pointed embroidery scissors
Cutting shears
White chalk (preferably not the pencil type)
Needles (sharps or betweens)
Basting/tacking thread (white or cream)
Open-ended thimble
Pins (not with large round heads on them)
Sewing machine
Iron (with good steam facility)
Ironing board
Sleeve board
Tailor’s ham
Lapel point presser with clapper (used in conjunction with the iron to achieve crisp seams and edges and to reduce bulky seams)

**SOME BASIC TAILORING RULES**

Tailoring has its own language and you will need to know at least some of the terminology in order to fully understand the tradition and processes, particularly if you want to research many of the past books written on tailoring. In theatrical costume making there are a number of abbreviations used and I am therefore including a list of the most common ones along with the traditional tailoring terminology. I will use both in this book. Normally a glossary appears at the end of a book, but I am including it here at the beginning as I think it is more useful in order for you to understand the basic rules of tailoring.

**GLOSSARY OF TAILORING TERMINOLOGY AND ABBREVIATIONS**

**Terminology**

- **Arm scye** – the curve of the armhole.
- **Basting stitch** – the means by which a tailor holds different layers of material together using a zigzag hand stitch of single white thread.
- **Break line** – the line on which the lapel and collar fold. Also known as the ‘Bridle’ or ‘Roll line’.
- **Cross (X) stitch** – a stitch that creates a cross over of the thread top and bottom and used for securing edges.
- **Felling** – a small over stitch used to finish seams.
- **Finished nett (1)** – finishing a seam or setting in without any visible tucks or gathers.
- **Finished nett (2)** – the edge of the cloth or material without any allowances on it.
- **Fish tail back** – the two points at the centre back of period trousers without a separate waistband.
- **Keyhole** – a type of buttonhole in the shape of a keyhole.
- **Inbreast** – refers to the pocket on the inside of a jacket or coat at chest level.
- **Inlay** – the ¾”/2.0cm added to patterns to allow for alterations. Added at the front side seam and shoulder seam on jackets, coats and waistcoats. Sometimes added to the back side seam instead of the front on waistcoats. Added to the back outside and inside leg seams on trousers. Added to the hind arm seam of either the top or underarm piece of the sleeve.
- **Jigger button** – the inside button on a double-breasted jacket that supports the jacket front.
- **Left hand side** – the wearer’s left hand side of the garment when worn.
- **Making up allowance (MUA)** – the ¾”/1.0cm included in the drafting block and around the pattern pieces. Often referred to as a ¼”/0.6cm stitch as well.
- **Mark stitching** – the means by which a tailor marks all sides of the cloth with one set of hand stitching using double white thread.
- **Outbreast** – refers to the pocket on the outside of a jacket or coat at chest level.
- **Placement line** – the tacked line ¾”/2.0cm in from the edge of the fabric at the inlay that is then used to place up against it the edge of the fabric of the seam with only the making up allowance.
- **Pocket mouth** – the opening of the pocket.
- **Right hand side** – the wearer’s right hand side of the garment when worn.
- **Right side** – the side of the material that is normally on the outside and is showing.
- **Selvedge** – finished edge of the cloth or material.
Getting started

Slip stitch – a stitch that is virtually invisible to secure edges of cloth or material.

Stoating – the bringing together of the folded edge of two pieces of cloth such as the lapel and collar.

Straight of grain (S of G) – the vertical line used to place a paper pattern on the grain line of the fabric.

Suppression – normally used to describe the amount taken out at the waist through seams and darts to give shape, style and fit to the garment.

Tacking stitch – the means by which a tailor holds different layers of material together or seams using a straight running hand stitch, single or double basting thread.

Top tacking – once a seam has been tacked together, a running hand stitch in single basting thread is used along seams and applied from the outside to give double strength when preparing for a fitting.

Uprights – the ends of the welt or jetted pockets.

Vent – an opening at the centre back or side seams of jackets and coats.

Weft – the threads of material going across horizontally from selvedge to selvedge edge of fabric.

Warp – the threads going vertically in fabric.

Wrong side – the side of the material that is normally on the inside of a garment.

Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CB</td>
<td>Centre back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>Centimetres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMS</td>
<td>Millimetres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>Single breasted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DB</td>
<td>Double breasted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHS</td>
<td>Right hand side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHS</td>
<td>Left hand side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Top</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>Bottom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUO</td>
<td>Making up allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF</td>
<td>Centre front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Side seam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OL</td>
<td>Outside leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td>Inside leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AH</td>
<td>Armhole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BH</td>
<td>Buttonhole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NF</td>
<td>Non functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TU</td>
<td>Turned under (collar edge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TO</td>
<td>Turned over (collar edge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA</td>
<td>Under arm (dart placement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OB</td>
<td>Outbreast pocket (jacket pocket)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>Inbreast pocket (jacket pocket)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Side entry (trouser pocket)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL</td>
<td>Sloping (trouser pocket)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S of G</td>
<td>Straight of grain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R/S or W/S</td>
<td>Right Side/Wrong Side</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some tailoring terminology differences from British English to American English

Arm scye – Armseye.

Basting stitch – Diagonal basting or tacking.

Calico – Muslin.

Checked – Plaid.

Cross stitch – Catch stitch.
Getting started

**Domett** – Baby flannel.
**Dress coat** – Tailcoat.
**Jetted pocket** – Double welted pocket.
**Felling** – Whip stitch or Overcast.
**Finished nett** – Clean finish.
**Fish tail back** – Fork back or ‘extra helping’ notch.
**Making up allowance** – Seam allowance.
**Mark stitching** – Tailor’s tacks.
**Mounting fabric** – Flat lining.
**Nape** – Neck.
**Outside leg** – Outseam.
**Pattern block** – Sloper.
**Inside leg** – Inseam.
**Selvedge** – Selvage.
**Stoating** – Invisible mending stitch.
**Tack or machine** – Stitch.
**Tacking stitch** – Basting.
**Toile** – Mock up.
**Top tacking** – Flat basting.
**Trousers** – Pants.
**Waistcoat** – Vest.

**A list of some basic tailoring rules, we will discuss some in more detail later on**

- Always use white chalk to mark lines, do not use coloured chalk. White chalk is easy to remove; coloured chalk will nearly always remain.
- Always use white or cream basting thread for basting, tacking and mark stitching. Coloured thread can leave a stain.
- Do not knot your tacking or basting thread.
- Basting is done in single thread.
- Mark stitching and tacking together pattern pieces is done in double thread.
- The iron is used constantly but also lightly. The materials such as cloth, canvas and linings are pressed flat continuously or pressed over a tailor’s ham if the seams or jacket have been shaped.
- Pressing is permanent, so therefore tacking takes the place of pressing in the first stages when preparing for a fitting. Seams can also be top tacked for extra strength for the fitting.
- In the final process of making up, most edges are created by tacking first and then pressing.
- Final pressing of seams and edges etc. is left for the final making up.
- You do not mark-stitch any of the sewing lines.
- Almost all seam allowances (making up allowances) are ¾”/1.0cm.
- Inlays are always ¾”/2.0cm.
- All the raw edges of the seams on a jacket and waistcoat are enclosed so no edges need finishing off.
- All the raw edges of the seams on the trousers are finished using a zigzag stitch even if you are half lining them.
- A tailor does not use an over-locking machine. Many of the allowances are too small and would be cut away or become thick with the thread and distort the lay of the cloth.
- A tailor always uses an open-ended thimble.
- Many tailors do not use pins. However, you can use them by all means but do not use the pins with the very large round heads. These will distort the lay of the cloth and are too large for this intricate work.
- Tailors work in a very organised way, methodical in their approach, precise in their sewing and careful in the way they gently handle the cloth.
- The majority of the work is best done by standing up so you are standing over the work with the garment piece laying on the workroom table.
**MEASUREMENTS**

**Some measuring rules**

- It is important to take accurate measurements and you should ideally take the measurements yourself so that you know they are reliable.
- At the same time as taking the measurements you can take stock of the person you are making for and note down any observations as to how they stand and their overall body shape. This will be very important as you prepare your patterns. In theatre one often takes a photograph of the actor; but remember to ask their permission first.
- You will always find it useful to take a whole set of measurements, however, you will find that most tailoring blocks only require a few of those measurements, for instance there are only three – chest, waist and nape to waist – needed for the waistcoat block.
- Think about what the person is going to be wearing. If the jacket is to go over a waistcoat then it will need to be slightly larger than if it is to just go over a shirt.
- When measuring, you should ask the person to remove any bulky items of clothing such as pullovers and belts and ask them to remove their shoes.
- When taking the chest waist and seat measurement, it is a good idea to place two fingers between the tape measure and the body as you take the measurements, this will add a little more ease to the measures and allow for the clothing being worn more comfortably. Be careful that the tape measure remains horizontal round the body as you measure and does not fall at the back.
- Finding the true waist can be difficult and you may find it useful to tie a tape around the waist so that you are aware of where the waist is as you take all the measures. Do not assume that the waistband of any trousers being worn is where the waist actually is.
- One of the most important measures to take is the nape to waist. The nape is the bone at the back of the neck. Not getting the correct measurement here will lead to your waistcoat or jacket being too long or too short, so it is vital that you know exactly where the waist is.
- Use a tape measure with a metal end to take the inside leg measurement.
- The arm measurements are taken with arm bent but keeping the arm horizontal as you take them. Often, these measurements are taken as a continuation from the half narrow back, starting from the centre back to the crease of the arm and then continuing to the elbow and then to the wrist. See the measurement chart and Diagrams 1.3 and 1.4.3.
- It can be a good idea to write your measurements onto the pattern pieces for future reference along with the date and who/what the garment was for.

**Standard measurements**

Where I have felt it appropriate, I have rounded up or down the conversion of inches to centimetres. This is to make the measurement more practical to use. These can be used in the absence of actual measurements but will not be as accurate of course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>86</th>
<th>92</th>
<th>97</th>
<th>102</th>
<th>107</th>
<th>112</th>
<th>117</th>
<th>122</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chest</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waist</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seat</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nape to Waist</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow Back</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### DIAGRAM 1.2 Standard measurements in inches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>34</th>
<th>36</th>
<th>38</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>42</th>
<th>44</th>
<th>46</th>
<th>48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waist</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seat</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nape to Waist</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17½</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18½</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19½</td>
<td>19¾</td>
<td>19¾</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½</td>
<td>7¼</td>
<td>7½</td>
<td>7¾</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8¼</td>
<td>8½</td>
<td>8¾</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Measurement charts

The traditional method of taking and writing down the measures was often done in the following sequence:

**Jacket:**
- Natural waist length or nape to waist
- Full length of jacket
- Half or across back
- To elbow
- To wrist
- Chest
- Waist
- Seat

**Waistcoat:**
- Waistcoat opening
- Waistcoat length

**Trousers:**
- Side seam or outside leg
- Leg seam or inside leg
- Waist
- Seat
- Knee
- Bottom (hem) width

Only the measurement was written down, but because it was always done in the same sequence the tailor knew which was which.
### DIAGRAM 1.3 A typical theatre wardrobe male measurement chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist:</th>
<th>Production:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>Character:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>NAPE ACROSS CHEST to WAIST FRONT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest</td>
<td>NAPE to JACKET LENGTH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waist</td>
<td>OUTSIDE LEG to KNEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seat</td>
<td>OUTSIDE LEG to GROUND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPE to Waist</td>
<td>INSIDE LEG to KNEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPE to Ground</td>
<td>INSIDE LEG to GROUND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half Narrow Back</td>
<td>SMALL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to Elbow (with arm bent)</td>
<td>RISE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to Wrist (with arm bent)</td>
<td>HEAD CIRCUMFERENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrist</td>
<td>EAR to EAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Across Chest</td>
<td>FOREHEAD to NAPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes on the diagram 1.4.1:

- The ‘rise’ measurement is the difference between the inside and outside leg measurement.
- The ‘small’ measurement is a tight measure taken directly below the knee around the leg.
Notes on the diagram 1.4.2:

- A = Across chest.
- B = Back nape, across chest to waist front.

![Diagram 1.4.2 Front of body](image)

Notes on the diagram 1.4.3:

- C = Half across back to armhole crease.
- D = Armhole crease to elbow.
- E = Elbow to wrist.
- The across back measure is generally taken as a half measure starting at the centre back (nape to waist line) to the armhole crease.
- You then continue the measure down the back of the arm to the elbow and then to the wrist.

![Diagram 1.4.3 Back of body](image)
Where and how to take the measurements

Height measurement:
– the measurement of a person taken from the top of head to the floor without shoes being worn.

Chest measurement:
– the measurement taken around the chest – level with the underarm.

Waist measurement:
– the measurement taken around the waistline.

Seat measurement:
– the measurement taken around the seat at the widest point.

Nape to waist measurement:
– the measurement taken from the protruding bone at the back of the neck to the waistline.

Nape to ground measurement:
– the measurement taken from the protruding bone at the back of the neck to the floor.

Nape to jacket length measurement:
– the measurement taken from the protruding bone at the back of the neck to the desired length of a jacket. Normally this will be in line with the knuckle bone of the thumb with arms placed flat against the side of the body.

Across chest measurement:
– the measurement taken across the upper chest from the crease of the arm to the crease of the arm.

Across back measurement:
– the measurement taken across the back from the crease of the arm to the crease of the arm at the narrowest point.
Shoulder to elbow measurement:
- the measurement taken from the top of the arm to the back of the elbow with the arm bent.

Elbow to wrist measurement:
- the measurement taken from the back of the elbow to the wrist with the arm bent.

Wrist measurement:
- the measurement taken around the wrist.

Waist to knee measurement:
- the measurement taken from the waistline to the knee down the outside of the leg.

Waist to ground measurement:
- the measurement taken from the waistline to the floor down the outside of the leg.

Inside leg to knee measurement:
- the measurement taken from the top of the inside of the leg to the knee – down the inside of the leg.

Inside leg to ground measurement:
- the measurement taken from the top of the inside of the leg to the ground – down the inside of the leg.

Small measurement:
- a tight measurement taken around the leg directly below the knee.

Rise measurement:
- a measurement found by deducting the inside leg to ground measurement from the outside leg to ground measurement.
You will need to understand the tailor’s square or L square. This is used to keep the block vertical and horizontal but more importantly it helps you to work out the fractions needed in the drafting of the blocks. Many of the traditional tools and techniques in tailoring are designed for speed and quickness and the square is one of these. Once you understand how to use it, it will speed up the process of drafting the blocks.

The square has a short and long arm. On one side are the centimetres or inches, on the other side it is divided into the fractions.

On the short arm of the square are found the fractions: \(16\text{ths}, 8\text{ths}, 4\text{ths}\) and halves.

On the long arm of the square are found the fractions: \(24\text{ths}, 12\text{ths}, 6\text{ths}, 3\text{ths}\) and \(\frac{2}{3}\text{ths}\).

Each fraction is divided into sections that are numbered from 12–24 in inches and 30–60 in centimetres on their respective squares.

Any measurement taken from the square, starts from the outside corner of the square (where the arms join).
A drafting power is used in the construction of most tailoring blocks. It is a number that is applied when using the tailor’s square. When you use the square you will always be using the drafting power number and that amount will either be half the chest measurement, half the waist measurement or half the seat measurement depending on which part of the garment is being drafted. You will need to find your drafting power number within the section of the fraction you are using.

Remember, each section of fractions is divided up from 12–24 inches or 30–60 centimetres.

Your measurement is then taken from the outside corner of the square to your drafting power number within any section.

The block instructions will tell you when you need to use the square and drafting power.

**For example:**

If your chest measurement is 35½”/90.0cm then your drafting power will be 17¾”/45.0cm – half the chest measurement.

If, for example, the directions read: ‘3 from 1 is ⅓rd chest on square’ then look for 17¾”/45.0cm (your drafting power) on the 1/3 section of the square.

From the corner of the square (where the arms join) apply this amount from point 1 to point 3 on your block.

**Another example:**

If the waist measurement is 27½”/70.0cm then the drafting power is 13¾”/35.0cm – half the waist measurement.

If, for example, the directions read: ‘8 from 2 is ⅓ waist on square’, **minus 3/16”/0.5cm**.

Then look for 13¾”/35.0cm on the ½ section of the square, and from the corner of the square (where the arms join) apply this amount from point 2 to point 8 on your block, and then take away 3/16”/0.5cm.

**The rule is:**

**The drafting power equals half of the width of the chest, waist or seat measurement.**

When you see the words ‘**ON SQUARE**’ in the instructions you know you have to use the tailor’s square.
### Diagram 1.8 Working scales for tailoring blocks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHEST</th>
<th>34.0</th>
<th>36.0</th>
<th>38.0</th>
<th>40.0</th>
<th>42.0</th>
<th>44.0</th>
<th>46.0</th>
<th>48.0</th>
<th>Inches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SIZE</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>102.0</td>
<td>107.0</td>
<td>112.0</td>
<td>117.0</td>
<td>122.0</td>
<td>cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest and working scale</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½</td>
<td>8½</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9½</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10½</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>11½</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>Inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scale</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>24.25</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>26.75</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⅛ rd</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>7 7/16</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scale</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¼</td>
<td>4½</td>
<td>4½</td>
<td>4½</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5½</td>
<td>5½</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scale</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⅛ th</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3½</td>
<td>3¼</td>
<td>3½</td>
<td>3½</td>
<td>3¾</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scale</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¼ th</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>2¼</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>2¼</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>2¼</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scale</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ 12 th</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>1 1/16</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>1 7/8</td>
<td>1 7/8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scale</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>cm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WORKING WITH A COSTUME DESIGNER AND/OR SUPERVISOR

Working in a performance environment, whether it is theatre, film or television will invariably mean you are working as part of a team. Even a freelance cutter or maker does not work in isolation. It can be important to build a good working relationship with the designer and the rest of the team so that you are able to give them the best interpretation of their design. Hopefully, you will find that designers will come back to use you again if you can know and understand each other well.

It’s important for you, where possible, to have some background working knowledge of the production and the characters. That way, you are able to ask the right questions when you first meet the designer to discuss the work. If the designer is busy, your initial discussion may well be with an assistant or supervisor. The supervisor or design assistant will have a good working knowledge of the concept and context production as they are dealing with all the costumes. It will be useful for you to ask about the context of the piece, perhaps how it is being interpreted by the designer/director; before going carefully through the design asking any questions where the answer does not seem clear. You need to be clear about what it is you are making as the design may contain a number of different garments.

Occasionally, you may be asked to give an estimate of how much fabric or cloth is needed. Often, a supervisor will have done this already.

You may find that sometimes the amount of fabric you are expected to work with is very tight, especially if the budget is also tight. This is where you need to be skilful in laying out the pattern and it is a time when having the allowances included in the pattern can really help.

Always ascertain which side of the fabric is being used; don’t assume it’s always the right side. If you are not sure of the right side, always ask.

Ask about any trimmings or decorations that might be on the design. Be prepared to do samples to take to the fitting to show the designer.

Discuss the actor with the supervisor; look at the measurements, do question any that do not seem to make sense. Ideally, you will have done your own measuring and seen the actor so as to assess their body shape. But, you may have no idea who measured the person and if the actor has measured themselves, you will not know how they did it – don’t just assume it was a tape measure that was used!

Ask about the fitting, when and where will it take place and how many fittings are scheduled?

I don’t think I ever took a calico toile to a fitting. I would suggest that by all means do one for yourself as part of your pattern exploration if you need to, but always take the garment in cloth to the fitting. Having chosen the fabric, the designer will expect to see it, and of course, in tailoring you can really do little else. Be prepared to only have one fitting and it is very rare to be given a lot of time to make everything.

It is quite normal that your conversation at the fitting will be mainly with the designer/supervisor and you should let the designer have any conversation with the actor. But don’t forget to ask both if they are happy with everything before the fitting ends.
PERIOD STYLES AND DETAIL

If you are working in costume for performance then it is likely that you will be expected to have a working knowledge of costume history but that is not to assume that everything will be done authentically or historically correct. A costume designer is there to ‘design’ and therefore a costume maker can expect to produce a whole range of costume from the unusual to semi or fully historically correct costume. If you are in doubt about anything it is always wise to ask.

Having a working knowledge of period styles and detail is essential when working with different periods of costume. In tailoring there is what is known as ‘style’ areas. This is where the garment is likely to change for different periods and the tailor allows for this when cutting out and leaving allowances.

The lapel, collar, pockets and front hem shape are all ‘style’ areas. So knowing the style or shape in a given period is clearly important. For instance, a lapel of 1905 is, of course, very different to one in the 1930s and there can also be differences within a given decade, which are not so clearly obvious.

Having that good working knowledge allows you to have a better conversation with the designer as to what they want. Sometimes, design features will not always be clear on a design and this is where you ask or use your knowledge. As an example, the depth of the welt on a welt pocket was often wider in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is only more recently that they have become very narrow. This can seem like a minor detail at first but it can be all too easy to mistakenly use modern ideas that will then look out of place on a period garment. Of course, research is the key here and you must do some of your own and not just rely on the designer to give you all the information you need.

Students who are starting out to learn this craft cannot expect to have all the knowledge needed immediately. You will want to build your knowledge base as you work on different productions and understand that you will continue to learn through your entire career.

In Chapter 10 I have included some ideas and techniques used in the finishing of historical tailoring. In Chapter 11 you will find some original patterns, photographs and measurement research charts that may help to give you an indication of what the styles and sizes were within certain periods.

It is worth remembering though, that for performance you are mostly working to a design to realise a costume for a performance. You are only using historical research to support the outcome of a realised costume.
ALTERING WOMEN’S DRESSES
Changing Cheap Clothing Into Elegant Garments

Altering an Old-Fashioned Dress to a 1920s–30s Wedding Dress

This dress, first modified for Crazy for You (Figure 22-1), was used again and again for different productions. It was purchased from a secondhand store; then the sleeves were removed, and extra fabric was added to lengthen the dress.

Procedure for Altering a Modern Dress to a Period Wedding Dress

Materials Required

- Secondhand dress (can be pulled from stock)
- Fabric (to add length to the garment)
- Scarves
- Sewing machine
- Seam ripper
- Scissors

Step One: Removing the Sleeves

- Pull from stock or purchase a dress (Figure 22-2), and analyze the style. (The dress used in this example was a beaded dress.)
- Detach the sleeves from the dress (Figure 22-3a) and undo the sleeve seams from the armpit down to the beginning of the beads cuff (Figure 22-3b).
- Remove some beads around the armholes and recut the armholes to narrow the width of the shoulders.
- Hem the armholes with uneven slip stitches or slanted hem stitches.

Figure 22-1  Costume design for Crazy for You.

Figure 22-2  Dress before alteration.
Step Two: Reconstructing the Dress

• Attach the two beaded sleeves that you removed to the dress’s front and back hipline to expand and continue the beautiful beaded pattern. To do this, join one beaded sleeve to the front beaded pattern at the dress’s front hipline and join the other sleeve to the back beaded pattern at the dress’s hipline for an asymmetrical balance; attach only the top sleeve-cap seam line to the dress and let the rest of the sleeve body dangle loose (Figure 22-3c).

• To achieve a 1920s flapper look, attach a few fabric kerchiefs onto the skirt lining of the dress to lengthen the dress (Figure 22-3d). To achieve the 1930s flair-out look, add two circles of the fabric to the skirt lining to lengthen the dress (Figure 22-3d).

• Finally, attach two hanging scarves to one side of the shoulder (Figure 22-3d) to add elegance and complete the dress.

The completed dress is shown in Figure 22-4.
Changing Cheap Clothing Into Elegant Garments

Altering a Used Dress to a 1920s–30s Evening Dress

This dress was altered for the character Mrs. Bradman in *Blithe Spirit* (Figure 22-5). It was also purchased from a secondhand store. The silhouette of this dress was excellent for the 1920s and early 1930s look that was needed. The major change was to make the long sleeves into short sleeves to add elegance to the evening dress.

Figure 22-5  Costume design for *Blithe Spirit*.

Procedure for Altering a Modern Dress to a Period Evening Dress

Materials Required
- Secondhand dress (can be pulled from stock)
- Fabric (for sash)
- Sewing machine
- Marker
- Seam ripper
- Scissors

Step One: Shortening the Sleeves
- Pull from stock or purchase a dress.
- Detach the sleeves from the dress (Figure 22-6a), and undo the sleeve seams. Lay the sleeves on the cutting table, pin the two sleeves together on top of each other, and draw a new sleeve style on the two original ones (Figure 22-6b). The new sleeve style in this example has rounded corners.
- Cut the sleeves following the new sleeve outline. Finish the freshly cut edges.

Step Two: Reconstructing the Dress
- Attach the new sleeves to the dress. Instead of sewing each sleeve into a tube, sew only a portion of the sleeve to the upper part of the dress armhole (Figure 22-7). The new sleeves now possess volume and flow, draping down to achieve the women's dress fashion of the 1920s and 1930s.

The completed dress is shown in Figures 22-7 to 22-8a–c.

Figure 22-6 (a) Sketch of the original dress with one sleeve detached. (b) Draw the new sleeve design on the original sleeve pieces.
Figure 22-7  Attach the new sleeve style only to the upper part of the dress armhole.

Figure 22-8  (a) Production photo showing the dress in Blithe Spirit. From left to right: Charles played by Donte Bonner. Dr. Bradman played by Michael Swickard. Mrs. Bradman played by Ayla Harrison. (b) Production photo showing the dress in Blithe Spirit. From left to right: Charles played by Donte Bonner. Dr. Bradman played by Michael Swickard. Mrs. Bradman played by Ayla Harrison. Ruth played by Patrice Bell. Edith played by Ashiey Barnette. Madame Arcati played by Charita Coleman. (c) Production photo showing the dress in Blithe Spirit. From left to right: Mrs. Bradman played by Ayla Harrison. Dr. Bradman played by Michael Swickard. Madame Arcati played by Charita Coleman. Ruth played by Patrice Bell. Charles played by Donte Bonner. Directed by Jim Helsinger. Scenic design by Bert Scott. Lighting design by Jim Hart. Costume design by Tan Huaixiang. University of Central Florida Conservatory Theatre presentation.
Altering and Dyeing a Modern Dress to a Renaissance Gown

This dress was created for Juliet in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (Figure 22-9). In the production, Juliet's family wore warm-toned costumes; Juliet's dress was a maroon–brick red color.

The original dress pulled from stock was a high-waisted, floor-length dress with no train and light yellow-green brocades (Figure 22-10a). It was dyed to suit her family's colors. Extra fabric with contrasting color and texture was added to the dress to achieve Renaissance period fashion.

**Procedure for Altering a Modern Dress to a Renaissance Gown**

**Materials Required**
- Floor-length dress pulled from stock (or purchased)
- Decorative contrasting fabric to add to dress
- Rit dye and dye pot/vat
- Sewing machine
- Scissors

**Step One: Dyeing the Dress and Fabric**
Rit dye was used to separately dye both the dress and the added fabric. Because there was no dye vat available in the shop, the dress was dyed in the washing machine.
- Pull a dress from stock or purchase one.
- Preheat and mix the proper amount of dye and water and pour it into the washer.
- Wet the dress and prewash it if needed before putting it in the dye water. (Dry fabric creates uneven dyeing.)
- Dye the fabric in the same way. (The dress had a shiny, smooth texture. For better contrast, a piece of fabric with velvet floral patterns was chosen for altering the dress. The fabric had a bright color.)
yellow background made of synthetic fibers with velvet orange floral patterns made of natural fibers. The two different fibers were an advantage. After they were dyed, the fabric turned out perfectly: The velvet floral pattern turned a deep wine color and contrasted with the bright yellow background, which did not change much in the dye. The sharp contrast to the velvet floral pattern worked very well for decorating Juliet’s dress.)

Step Two: Modifying the Sleeves

- Slash the dress sleeves open to make a place for the decorative fabric (Figure 22-10b).

Step Three: Reconstructing the Dress

- Use the dyed decorative fabric to square trim the stomach and use it to decorate the front and bottom, expand the length, and create a back train of the dress (Figure 22-10b).
- Insert decorative fabric into each sleeve seam and sew it in. Attach pairs of ties along the seam lines; space them out about 3” to 5” apart from shoulder cap down to the cuff; and tie each pair of the tie to a bow knot to create Italian-style slashes on the sleeve (Figure 22-11).
- Add lining to the layer added to the bottom of the skirt.

The completed dress is shown in Figures 22-11 to 22-12.
Changing Cheap Clothing Into Elegant Garments

Figure 22-12  Production photos showing the dress in *Romeo and Juliet*. Juliet played by Sara Hill. Romeo played by Keith Edie. Directed by Brenda Hubbard. Scenic design by Tim Stapleton. Lighting design by Mark C. Zetterberg. Costume design by Tan Huaxiang. Central Washington University Department of Theatre Arts presentation.
THE ROARING TWENTIES
(1920–1929)
The Roaring Twenties (1920–1929)

Figure 7.1  Renee Adoree (colorized), Goldwyn Pictures, circa 1922, Bain News Service; Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.
1920s’ Women

Fashion changed dramatically for women in the 1920s. After hundreds of years of being confined in corsets and having long hair put up into elaborate hairstyles, women gained new freedom from their clothes and heavy hair. Beginning in World War I, nearly all women who drove ambulances had their hair cut for reasons of sanitation and ease. In popular culture, a ballroom dancer by the name of Irene Castle cut off her long hair for reasons of convenience. The trend spread rapidly, and women everywhere began bobbing their hair.

In May of 1920, the *Saturday Evening Post* published F. Scott Fitzgerald’s short story “Bernice Bobs Her Hair.” This story of a small-town girl who is tricked by her cousin into chopping off her hair and subsequently becomes a femme fatale further served to give this haircut a special place in history. Fashion was also undergoing a revolution—women’s clothes were less confining, and more masculine shapes and clean lines were very much in vogue. The close fitting cloche hats of the era also required short simple haircuts to fit underneath.

There were many variations of the bob haircut. The Shingle involved cutting the hair close to the scalp at the nape of the neck and leaving the hair gradually longer as the barber went higher, without showing a definite line. This haircut was very easy to style in a number of ways. The Eton Crop was a very short haircut, named after the

---

**Important Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Prohibition of alcohol begins in the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>The Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote, is ratified in the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>The tomb of King Tut is discovered in Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td><em>The Jazz Singer</em>, the first feature length movie with recorded dialogue, debuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Mickey Mouse debuts in the animated short <em>Steamboat Willie</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Several gangsters are shot and killed in the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>The stock market crashes, beginning the Great Depression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Important Artists/Designers**

- Coco Chanel
- Erté
- Max Factor
- Salvatore Ferragamo
- Jeanne Lanvin
- Tamara de Lempicka
- Maxfield Parrish
- Jean Patou
- Man Ray
- Elsa Schiaparelli

**Important People/Style Icons**

- Josephine Baker
- Theda Bara
- John Barrymore
- Clara Bow
- Louise Brooks
- Al Capone
- Charlie Chaplin
- F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald
- Ernest Hemingway
- Al Jolson
- Buster Keaton
- Charles Lindbergh
- Gloria Swanson
- Rudolph Valentino

---

*Figure 7.2*  Ilona Aczel, Gizi Bajor, and Vilma Gomory, Hungarian National Theatre, 1927. These women model typical bobbed haircuts of the 1920s.
English boy’s prep school, that left both the ears and neck exposed. This haircut was made popular by Josephine Baker (Figure 7.4), the famous African American entertainer who rose to fame performing in France.

The Dutch Boy Bob was made famous by movie stars Louise Brooks and Colleen Moore (Figure 7.5). This haircut was usually worn straight to just above the jaw line, with blunt cut bangs helping to frame the face.

Another film star who set trends in the 1920s was Clara Bow. Her tousled curls, sad, down turned eyes, and well defined Cupid’s bow lip earned her the name of the “It Girl.”

In the earlier part of the 1920s, hair was often shorter, smoother, and sleeker, such as we see in Figures 7.2 and 7.5. This texture was often achieved by water waving or finger waving, a method of hair dressing that involved wetting the hair with curling lotion, combing it into waves with your fingers, and letting it dry.

Later in the decade, hairstyles had more texture—either like the messy curls of Clara Bow, or the more rigidly defined waves seen in Figure 7.7. The more rigid styles were likely created with a Marcel curling iron, an iron that created a three dimensional wave when pressed into the hair (Figure 7.8).

Despite the prevalence of the bob, some women refused to believe the trend would last. They feared cutting their hair, only to literally come up short when long hair came back into fashion. Many of these
women secured their hair in a tight low bun that mimicked the close fitting silhouette of the bob. Other women chose to wear a romantic style of hair with long ringlets, made popular by silent actress Mary Pickford, who was famous for playing plucky young ingénues. Whether women’s hair was long or bobbed, the silhouette was very close to the head, and the hair was usually dressed low on the forehead.

Figure 7.6  Clara Bow, Photoplay, 1932. Bow’s curls are an example of a 1920s’ hairstyle with a lot of texture.

Figure 7.7  American actress Clara Kimball Young on the cover of Photoplay, reproduced as an ad on page 3809 of the May 1, 1920 Motion Picture News, by Rolf Armstrong, May 1920. A short, waved hairstyle, typical of the early part of the 1920s.

Figure 7.8  Japanese woman curling her hair, photographer unknown, 1920s. This woman is using a waving iron to achieve perfect waves in her hair.

Figure 7.9  American actress Mary Pickford on the cover of the Photoplay, by Nelson Evans, October 1921.
1920s’ Men

Men in the 1920s often had haircuts where the hair was longer on the top and sides, but quite short and neatly trimmed in the back. Like the women of the period, men also had Marcel waves in their hair. Movie stars like Rudolph Valentino helped set the fashion of heavily slicked back hair.

Men following this fashion were often referred to as "sheiks"—this term came from the characters in all the Arabian/Middle Eastern film settings popular at the time. To achieve the desired slicked back, cleanly parted looks, men used hair products like brilliantine, an oily grooming liquid for hair that gave a highly glossy finish. Brylcreem also made its debut in this decade—it was invented as a pomade in England in 1928. Marcel waves were as popular for men as they were for ladies. However, not all men adopted the slicked back look. Some men wore their hair in a looser, more adventurous looking textured hairstyle, such as the look worn by Babe Ruth in Figure 7.11.

Stylish mustaches were very fashionable in the 1920s. Because women were enjoying freedoms through short boyish haircuts and more masculine clothing, men would grow mustaches to assert their masculinity. Popular styles of mustache included the very thin pencil mustache and the short toothbrush mustache popularized by Charlie Chaplin.

Figure 7.10  Actor Rudolph Valentino on page 15 of the September 1922 Photoplay, by Donald Biddle Keys. Valentino’s slicked back hair and heavily made up face were a popular look in the 1920s.

Figure 7.11  Babe Ruth, by Paul Thompson NY, circa 1920, Heritage Auction Gallery.

Figure 7.12  Lew Cody, star of Photoplay, 1924. Notice Cody’s very neatly groomed mustache.
1920s’ Flapper Styling—Step by Step

This hairstyle was inspired by Figure 7.2, with a little more curl added for visual definition.

Figure 7.13  Step 1. Begin with a wig that is cut quite short in the back, with longer hair (at least four inches long) on the top, front, and sides. (This wig could actually be used without any additional styling as a simpler kind of boyish 1920s’ look.) I used a fully ventilated lace front human hair wig for this styling project.

Figure 7.14  Step 2. Make a clean part in the wig. Comb setting lotion through the wig.

Figure 7.15  Step 3. Use a rattail comb to section out an area of hair that is approximately one inch by one inch square.

Figure 7.16  Step 4. Use a dowel rod to roll the section of hair into a pin curl.
Step 5. This curl is rolled clockwise towards the face, coming forward of the hairline.

Step 6. Continue rolling pin curls in a horizontal row around the head. All the curls in this row should be rolled clockwise.

Step 7. As you come around the part, continue rolling the curls in a clockwise direction.

Step 8. The last pin curl in this row should also come forward of the hairline. Setting your curls in front of the hairline is especially helpful if you are styling a hard front wig—this will help the waves conceal the edge of the wig once the hair is styled.
Step 9. The next row of pin curls should be rolled in a counterclockwise direction. Also make a tiny pin curl in front of the ear.

Step 10. Continue rolling the pin curls counterclockwise in a horizontal row.

Step 11. Finish this row of pin curls with a curl that comes past the hairline onto the face. Make another small pin curl in front of the ear. If there is enough length in the hair, make small pin curl behind the ear.

Step 12. The rest of the hair in this wig is too short to pin curl. (If the hair in your wig is long enough, continue pin curling the wig all the way down to the nape of the neck in alternating rows.) Instead, we are going to finger wave the back. Begin by combing all the hair to the right. You may need to add more setting lotion and water if the wig has become too dry.
The Roaring Twenties (1920–1929)

Figure 7.25  Step 13. Secure the hair in this direction by pinning a piece of blocking tape over it.

Figure 7.26  Step 14. Drop down and comb the hair back to the left. Secure it in place with the blocking tape.

Figure 7.27  Step 15. Finish off the set by combing the ends of the hair back towards the right and securing them with the tape.
Once you have finished setting the wig, steam it if the wig is made of synthetic hair. If the wig is made of human hair (as this one is) spray it liberally with water. Put the wig in a wig dryer to dry for 75 minutes.

Figures 7.28–7.31  The finished 1920s’ Flapper style set.
To style:

Figure 7.32 Step 16. Remove the blocking tape from the back of the wig and undo all the pin curls, removing the endpapers.

Figure 7.33 Step 17. Use a wide toothed comb to comb through all the pin curls.

Figure 7.34 Step 18. The wig after it has been completely combed through.

Figure 7.35 Step 19. Use a rattail comb to comb through the wig even more finely.
The Roaring Twenties (1920–1929)

Figure 7.36  Step 20. Use the end of the rattail comb to section out the hair next to the part.

Figure 7.37  Step 21. Use a teasing/smoothing brush to lightly tease the underside of the hair in the section.

Figure 7.38  Step 22. After teasing the hair, use the brush to smooth the hair back down. Next, use the brush to brush the curls at the ends of the hair around your fingers to make them neat.

Figure 7.39  Step 23. After you have formed the curls around your finger, gently pull them apart and arrange them in an attractive way. Continue smoothing and arranging the curls, working your way around the entire head.
The Roaring Twenties (1920–1929)

Step 24. Once you have finished the curls, use a piece of blocking tape to hold the waves in place.

Step 25. Use the tape to pull the wave onto the forehead.

Step 26. Continue pinning the waves and curls in place with the blocking tape.

Step 27. You can also arrange the curls where you want them by holding them in place with pins. Once you have finished taping and pinning the hair, mist the wig with hairspray and let it set overnight. When you are ready to use the wig, carefully unpin and remove the blocking tape and pins.
Figure 7.45–7.48  The completed 1920s’ Flapper style. Photography: Tim Babiak. Model: Ivy Negron.
1920s’ Finger Wave Styling—Step by Step

Figure 7.49  Step 1. Begin with a wig that mostly one length and hits just past the chin. I used a fully ventilated human hair wig for this style.

Figure 7.50  Step 2. Make a deep side part in the wig. Thoroughly saturate the wig with setting lotion. Comb the hair to the left of the part back off the face.

Figure 7.51  Step 3. Use a blocking tape and pins to hold this first section of the wave in place.

Figure 7.52  Step 4. Continue combing the wave around the end of the part. As you move around the end, you will now be combing the hair on the right side of the part towards the face.
Step 5. Continue using the blocking tape and pins to secure the wave. Notice how the wave comes down in front of the front hairline.

Step 6. Once the tape is secured, begin combing the hair back in the opposite direction. Pin as you go. If you slightly push up on the blocking tape, you can create a ridge in the wave.

Step 7. Continue working your way around the entire head, alternating directions.

Step 8. You can also add ridges to the waves by pinching them with your fingers.
Step 9. Wave down the entire wig until you reach the edge of the wig base.

Step 10. Use a dowel rod to set the remaining length of hair into pin curls.

Step 11. Use pins to secure the pin curl in place.
Once you have finished setting the wig, steam it if the wig is made of synthetic hair. If the wig is made of human hair (as this one is) spray it liberally with water. Put the wig in a wig dryer to dry for 75 minutes.

Figures 7.60–7.63 The finished 1920s’ Finger Wave style set.
To style:

**Figure 7.64** Step 12. To style, begin by removing the blocking tape. Begin the removal in the same place you started the set, at the front hairline (working from the bottom may pull the waves out of place). Also remove the pins in the pin curls.

**Figure 7.65** Step 13. Comb through the pin curls at the bottom. For a softer style, you could comb through the entire wig, but for this example, we will leave the majority of the wig slicked.

**Figure 7.66** Step 14. Use a dowel rod to neatly roll the pin curls and bobby pin them at the nape.

**Figure 7.67** Step 15. To finish the styling, direct the pin curls flat to the side using pins. Mist with hairspray and allow to dry.
Figure 7.68–7.71  The completed 1920s’ Finger Wave style. Model: Antonia Taylor.
Variations

1920s’ looks were usually dark, dramatic, and exotic. You can vary the looks by mixing in a range of dark colors, from jet black to deep auburn. You can purchase Dutch Boy Bob wigs that are ready to go straight out of the box. You can also purchase short boyish straight wigs and short waved wigs that do not require much styling that are appropriate to this period.

1920s’ Makeup

In addition to the freedom to have shorter hair and dresses, women now felt confident to openly wear cosmetics. Max Factor realized that many women desired to look like their favorite film star, and he was one of several who began marketing the cosmetics he used as a film makeup artist. It Girls and Vamps had a variety of products at their disposal to use. Pancake makeup, which gave a smooth matte look to the skin, was very popular. Eyebrows were thin, and penciled in a shape that extended down to the outside corner of the eye (see Figures 7.6 and 7.73 for examples). The eyebrows also often had a slight lift in the center by the nose, which gave the wearer a perpetually sad or vulnerable look. Eyes were accented with kohl and glossy shadows. Mascara came in cake form and was applied with a small comb to both top and bottom lashes, giving the lashes a clumpy, doll like look. Rouge was bright and was placed in circles in the center of the cheeks. Lips were drawn slightly inside the natural lip to give them a small shapely appearance. Special attention was paid to the upper lip and making it well defined. The Cupid’s Bow shape with its very defined peaks was particularly coveted. Lip colors were usually quite dark red in this era. In fact, much of the makeup was a bit exaggerated in color and intensity, influenced by film looks and the need to exaggerate them so faces were clear through the grainy film quality of the time.