

Patterning by Draping

Mistress Mairghead de Chesholme

There are many ways to develop a pattern for constructing clothing. The most commonly taught way of patterning is flat patterning, but an alternate patterning method is called draping. Flat patterning uses measurements and math to convert a three dimensional object into shapes on paper that can be sewn together to make a garment. This is a highly effective, low cost, and low waste system of patterning when the technician possesses the appropriate skills. These are desired qualities when drafting patterns on a large scale. For the hobbyist, it is often much less frustrating to utilize the method of draping. The pattern maker simply constructs a pattern by pinning and manipulating fabric onto an appropriately sized model. This often requires more material and time than flat patterning, but can be far less frustrating. It affords the patternmaker the luxury of putting a piece on and examining how it looks and hangs before finalizing the piece. This is a simplified method of draping that will allow for a much lower stress method of reproducing period gowns for many people.

Materials Needed:

Straight pins

Scrap fabric (dollar fabric works or discarded sheets from hotels)

Sharpie marker

Scissors

Large envelope

Model or Dress Makers Dummy

Paper (optional)

Process:

Begin by finding a picture of the garment you would like to reproduce. Illuminations are a wonderful resource for this. The more examples you can find the easier this process will be. Keep an eye out for paintings or drawings that indicate seam lines. These will help you determine placement of seams on the body. Try to find the answers to the following questions:

1. Where are the pieces of the garment joined together?
2. How many layers are being shown in the picture?
3. Are there undergarments affecting the shape of the body?
4. Are there undergarments artificially supporting the garment such as a hoop skirt?
5. What type of texture does the fabric appear to have? Is it thick or thin? Is it coarse or silky?
6. Are there illustrations showing modifications to the wearing of the garment for purposes like accomplishing chores?

Once you have gathered the information you need, form a picture in your mind of how you want the garment to look.

Set up your dress mannequin to the appropriate height and adjust if possible for fit. Many mannequins have dials to adjust the bust, waist, and hips. If you have a solid mannequin, you can often cut out and pin or sew pieces of thick wool to it to modify it to the appropriate shape. Sometimes it will take many layers to pad out your mannequin. If you are using a live model, have them wear a thin layer of clothing like a tank top and leggings. Put the appropriate undergarments on the mannequin or model to provide the necessary support and shape for the garment. You are now ready to begin. Be very careful not to hurt your live models!

Before you pin your first piece on, look at the way the fabric is lying in the picture to determine the direction that the fabric's bias is going. Bias can completely change how the pieces are shaped and hang. Any seams cut on the bias have the ability to stretch. Woven fabrics have a natural

tendency to stretch on the bias in either direction. Different weaves will have more or less of this stretchiness.

Start on the back of the bodice. Find a piece of scrap fabric large enough to cover the back and draw a line down the middle with a Sharpie marker. Carefully place the line down the middle of the back and pin in place. Smooth out the piece and mark where any seam-lines will be. Cut along the seam leaving $\frac{1}{2}$ inch seam allowance. Take another piece of scrap fabric for the next piece ensuring it is large enough for the whole piece. Place it on the mannequin and adjust it until it looks appropriate. Pin it to the first piece and trim the seam to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Draw in additional potential seam lines and continue as before. Sometimes it is worthwhile to remove a piece and try a different shape. This is an inexact and very fluid way to develop a pattern. Take your time and remember that sometimes it is good to put a piece on and look at it while you do other chores for a few hours and decide if you like it. I have had pieces on for days trying to decide if it has the appropriate look.

If you are using a mannequin, take the garment off the mannequin and sew the pieces together when you are satisfied with your pattern. This will give you an instant mock up that you can try on the person the garment is intended for. Additional modifications can be made using pins, scissors and the marker on the person.

Take the completed pattern and carefully trim the seams so that they are even. Mark each piece with it's location in the pattern so you can reconstruct it later. Then, remove the stitching and iron the pieces if necessary. Each side of the garment should be fairly symmetrical. Take corresponding pieces and lay them on top of each other on top of a new piece of scrap fabric. Carefully trace around the pieces averaging out the two different pieces to match them. Label the new piece and set it to the side saving the original pieces. When you have completed all the pieces you have your pattern!

If you are still uncertain and want to verify fit, make a new mockup from the averaged out pattern pieces. If that works, I often trace each piece onto paper for a final copy of the pattern and store it in a large envelope. Paper patterns produce a much more consistent product than cloth. The cloth has the ability to distort it's shape each time you lay it down and will not always produce the same results.

Remember that research is a key element to this process. This will simplify pattern making for those people who do not desire to do a lot of math and plotting. This does not replace an understanding of the end result. A little background information will go a long way towards making this process much easier.