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Coats and Suits : Extension Circular 4-22-63

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Coats and Suits
Coats and Suits

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Project Requirements:

1. Make a suit or coat.

2. Select accessories to make a coordinated costume.

3. Maintain good grooming habits.

4. Assume responsibility for the care of your own clothes.

5. Complete your record book.

Do your clothes speak well of you? You can control what they say. It depends on how wisely you plan and coordinate what you have and how you take care of your clothes and yourself.

PLAN, THEN BUY

If you plan, you can:

1. Have the right clothes for everything you do.

2. Have clothes that belong together - not a collection of miscellaneous items.

3. Keep within your family budget or spending plan.

A satisfying wardrobe is built gradually. It is based on how it suits the occasion, on fashion, on aesthetic features. When you shop consider the clothes you have. Be sure that your new suit or coat will fit into your general wardrobe plan.

Choosing Your Color

Select one or two basic colors that are becoming to you. With carefully selected colors you can combine a few items into several attractive outfits. If your present wardrobe is made up of a variety of colors, decide which garments and colors you like best and begin to build around them. If starting a new plan choose a color you will enjoy for several years.

Choose the color for your coat first because it will probably cost more and you will expect to wear it longer. Suits and dresses are then chosen to coordinate with your coat and make a "go-together" wardrobe.

Remember that light colors and warm colors make the figure appear larger. Dark colors and cool colors are more slenderizing.
Choosing the Design or Pattern for your Coat or Suit

Choose a design suitable for the places you go, the things you do and the people you are with. A simple but good design can be worn for a number of years.

A softly tailored garment or dressmaker type will go with either dressy or sports clothes and accessories. A very tailored sports-type coat will be out of place over an afternoon dress. A very dressy coat or suit will not do for everyday wear.

A short coat makes a person seem shorter. If you make a short coat consider the color and line of the skirts you will be wearing. Skirt and coat should combine to form a good silhouette. If a coat or jacket seems to cut the figure in half the proportion is poor.

If you are choosing a coat for warmth, choose a full-length coat that is either fitted or has a straight silhouette. A neck-hugging collar and sleeves shaped close to the wrist add to warmth.

A pattern with simple construction lines and few details will be easiest to make.

Choosing the Fabric

Choose a becoming fabric. Nubby, heavy fabrics create an illusion of figure fullness or bulk. Flat, smooth fabrics create a more slender effect.

Choose the best quality you can afford. Fabrics of wool and wool blends are most satisfactory for tailoring. A high-grade wool feels resilient and alive. Read the label to learn more about it. The "Wool Labeling Act" requires that the label contain the percentage of new, reprocessed, and reused wool as well as the percent of other fibers used (except when less than 5 percent by weight).

1. Virgin - fiber that has not previously been made into yarn. It is new wool.
2. Reprocessed - fiber that has been made into yarn or fabric but has not been used. It is converted into fiber and then made into cloth.
3. Reused - fiber made from worn or used products that are cleaned and shredded into fibers again.
4. Worsted - yarns made of long fibers that are combed and twisted. They are smooth, hard, even and compact. They are used in fabrics such as serges or gabardines. Worsted fabrics hold their shape and wear well.
5. Woolen - yarns made of short fibers with a low or soft twist giving the fabric a soft fuzzy appearance. Examples are tweed and flannel.

6. Blends - a combination of wool with other natural or synthetic yarns.

Fabrics that tailor well are medium in thickness, spongy, have an unfinished or "nappy" surface and are of simple construction. Unfinished fabrics, such as tweeds, are easy to work with because they shape easily and irregular stitching in seams isn't apparent. A soft yarn molds well but care must be taken that it is not so soft that the finished garment will fail to hold a press and become baggy.

A fabric that is too loosely woven will fray and stretch.

Firm, hard finished yarns and very firm weaves can be shrunk little so are difficult to mold. Shine and seam edges are apt to show after pressing.

Plaids, stripes and checks require extra care in planning and matching.

Read fabric labels to learn about special finishes such as:

1. Shrinkage treatment - this may be treatment to prevent shrinkage while steam pressing, or when washing in a machine. Terms such as these may be found on wool fabrics: sponged; ready for the needle; London shrunk; machine washable.

2. Moth proofing - used on wool fabrics. It may need to be renewed after cleaning.

3. Water repellent treatment - used on coat fabrics. May also need to be renewed after cleaning.

Interfacings

An interfacing adds to the appearance and wearing quality of a coat or jacket. Its purpose is to:

Support roll of lapels and collar.

Add body to details of styling such as the hip section of some jackets.

Soften turn of sleeve and coat hems.

Give better shape and firmness to certain parts of garment.

Give good wearing qualities in some areas such as pockets.

When choosing interfacing consider the fabric weight and texture in relation to the pattern design. It should be lighter in weight than the garment fabric but should be firm enough in weave to give body without stiffness. The interfacing should be resilient and crease resistant. Use fabrics that have similar cleaning qualities.

Some suggested kinds of interfacing are:

1. Muslin, for reinforcing back shoulder area (wash to shrink and remove sizing) and in some collars and facings.

2. Wigan, a fabric especially made for reinforcing back shoulder sections of tailored garments. (Preshrink unless label indicates it is not necessary.)
3. Hair canvas comes in several weights and is one of the best types of interfacing for suits and coats. It dry cleans but doesn't wash well.

4. Tailor's linen is used in collars only. It is not desirable for lightweight fabrics.

5. Non-woven interfacing may be used where shaping is needed. It doesn't mold as well as the woven interfacing.

**Lining**

A lining will protect the outer fabric, cover up construction and raw edges, and make the garment easier to slip on. The lining should be attractive and serviceable. Some suitable lining fabrics are:

1. Crepes of rayon, acetate, silk or blends are soft and shape well to the jacket fabric.
2. Satin slides off and on easily and resists soil because of its slippery surface.
3. Twill, if a good quality, is firmly woven and wears well.
4. Taffeta gives body to a garment, slides off and on easily and generally wears well for the cost. It may make a rustling noise when the person moves, which some people do not like.

Extra warmth may be obtained through the use of interlinings or special types of fabric such as:

1. Interlinings of flannel, lightweight or quilted wool.
3. Crepe or satin insulated with a metallic backing.
5. Rayon or acetate fabric with a urethane foam laminated to it.
6. Fur and fur fabric (very warm and attractive but may be bulky).

**Additional Supplies You May Need**

1. Matching thread, either heavy duty mercerized or silk. Contrasting thread for basting. Marks from silk basting thread show less after being pressed.
2. 3/8 inch tape of linen or cotton (plain woven may substitute for the twill) to prevent stretch.
3. Buttons that are both attractive and useful. They may be decorative or they may be self-covered. They should be in scale with the size of the person and add a fashion note to the garment.
4. Hooks and eyes.
5. Weights of metal are used in the hems of some jackets or coats to make them hang nicely.
6. Shoulder pads may be necessary for some designs.
SET YOUR STAGE FOR SEWING

Arrange sewing machine, small equipment and pressing equipment within easy reach. A U-shaped arrangement is convenient. Be sure you have comfortable cutting, pressing and sewing heights. Use a good light that comes over your left shoulder.

Construction Hints

1. Pattern size is usually the same for a suit or coat as for a dress. If the coat is a "roomy" type one size smaller might be better. If the figure is irregular choose a size that will best fit the neckline and shoulder area. If you have a figure that is hard to fit make a test coat or jacket out of muslin.

2. Prepare fabric by straightening and shrinking if it hasn't been treated.

3. A 1 inch seam allowance on side seams allows some fitting adjustment.

4. Observe grainline carefully when laying pattern and cutting.

5. Mark with tailor's tacks or wax marking chalk. (Use wax on wool only as it may leave an oily spot on synthetics and cottons.)

6. Interfacing is usually cut on same grain as that part of the garment to which it is attached. Front interfacing should include the buttonhole area, lapel, shoulder and armseye. It should curve from the bottom of the buttonhole area to the side seam about 3 inches below underarm. Under collars and reinforcement for the sleeve and coat hems are cut on the bias.

7. Lining back should have a center pleat about 1 inch in width. If pleat is not included in the pattern, lay center back 1 inch from fold when cutting or if there is a seam, 1 inch beyond seamline.

8. Use back pattern to cut reinforcement of muslin or wigan. The length varies from 4 to 10 inches at center back and extends to 3 inches under the armseye.

9. Stay stitch all curved or bias edges to prevent stretching.

10. Grade or stagger all enclosed seams. Clip or notch curved areas. The seam allowance that is nearest the outside of the garment is left the widest.

11. Remember to press as you sew.
Interfacing and Taping Your Coat and Jacket

Skillful handling of interfacing will add greatly to the general appearance of your garment.

To make the shoulder darts in the interfacing, cut down the center of the dart between stitching lines to the point. Lap one edge over the other, matching the stitching lines. Cover with a strip of wigan. Pin and stitch in place.

Taping front edges and breakline (crease line) prevents the garment from getting out of shape.

If a hair canvas is used, the seam allowance may be trimmed away and the stay tape (should be shrunk) stitched to the canvas. Then the tape, and not the interfacing, is stitched into the seam. This eliminates the hair canvas from the seam line, holds the interfacing securely, and makes possible sharp, thin, front edges.

Taping is also desirable on shoulder and lower part of armseycse seams.

If wigan or muslin is used for interfacing on the front, it may be stitched into the seam instead of using tape.

The same effect as front taping may be obtained by using muslin.

Cut a strip of muslin 1 1/4 inches wide on the identical grain to fit the front edge of the interfacing where the facing will be attached. Match outer edge of the muslin strip with the outer edge of the hair canvas. Place muslin strip on opposite side of hair canvas from center front and buttonhole markings. With interfacing side up, stitch muslin to hair canvas 7/8 inch from the edge; stitch again toward inside edge of muslin strip for reinforcement. Press if necessary. Trim away hair canvas to first row of stitching 7/8 inch from edge.

Place interfacing to underside of coat front, muslin strip facing the coat. Stay stitch interfacing to the coat just inside the seam line at shoulder and armpit. On front edges, stay stitch on seam line. Muslin will then be stitched into the seam, but hair canvas will not.
The coat back may be interfaced with wigan or muslin (that has been shrunk). To attach interfacing to the back, baste along center back line so that lengthwise grainline or interfacing is directly underneath the lengthwise grainline of coat. The edge of the coat and interfacing should coincide exactly. Ease the interfacing toward the center so that it is slightly looser than the fabric. Baste at the neck, shoulder and underarm seams. Stitch into the regular seam except at underarm. Here the front interfacing is lapped over the wigan and catch stitched in place after the underarm seam of the coat is stitched, pressed and taped.

Collars and cuffs will also need interfacing. If there are no cuffs, stay the lower edge of the sleeve to give more body at the wrist. To do this, cut a bias strip of canvas muslin 1 1/2 to 2 inches wide. Pin or baste the lower edge against the hemline of the sleeve. Catch stitch both edges lightly to the sleeve. Turn the sleeve hem up over the bias piece, baste and catch stitch to the bias.

This same type of stay may also be used in the hem of a coat.

Collars

Follow the instructions given in the pattern. The following suggestions may help you have a sharper, smoother collar:

The upper collar is usually cut with center back on lengthwise grain of fabric. The collar should be cut with the fabric folded so that the grain on the two sides is the same.

The under collar is usually cut on the bias with a seam at center back.

If the pattern for the under collar is not smaller than the upper collar, trim 1/16 to 1/8 inch off the outer edge. This will make the upper collar roll under so the under collar will not show when it is finished.

The interfacing is cut like the under collar. Lap one edge of the seam over the other, matching stitching lines. Stitch.

Baste interfacing loosely to under collar.
If the collar pattern doesn't contain markings for a roll line, it will be necessary to define one. To do this, pin and baste the under collar to the neckline of the coat. Put the coat on and shape the collar on the neck as it will be worn. Pin a roll line between the stand and fall areas. Remove the collar from the coat. Baste and then stitch the roll line. The depth of the fall is greater than the depth of the stand at center back to prevent the seam line at the neck from showing underneath the collar.

Rows of machine stitches about 1/4 inch apart may be used to fill in the stand. A more perfect collar can be made if pad stitches (made by hand) are used. Pad stitching is also used to fasten interfacing to the lapels. To make the stitches:

Insert needle horizontally to the left, making stitches 1/2 inch to 3/4 inch in length. Continue in up and down rows. Do not turn fabric as the stitching is reversed. On the inside of the garment the stitches are vertical rows of diagonal stitches and on the other side they are faint pricks that can hardly be seen.

When pad stitching, the collar is held with the outer edge in the hand so the canvas can be eased onto the collar with the thumb. Follow the breakline to insure accurate rolling. Continue pad stitching the entire collar, shaping by hand as you work.

Steam the under collar, shaping it on a tailor's pad or rolled up turkish towel, so it will fit the neck when finished. Allow to dry thoroughly.

To eliminate seam thickness at outside collar edge, trim interfacing back to the stitching line and snip off about 1/4 inch at collar points. Ease the upper collar onto the under collar along outer edge and ends, being sure to match center backs. Pin and baste. Stitch two collar thicknesses together just at the edge of the interfacing. If the collar has a point, take one or two stitches diagonally across it. This will make a neater point when the collar is turned. Grade the seams and trim off surplus fabric at the corners.

Turn collar and baste along the outside edge, rolling under the seam edge to prevent under collar from showing. Press. Remove bastings, then sharp stitch edge (under stitch) if desired.

Shape the collar by hand by making several rows of diagonal basting parallel to the collar length to hold collar to correct shape. (Diagonal basting is shown on page 10.) Steam collar to correct shape. Remove bastings and re-steam to remove basting imprints. When collar is dry, rebaste to hold shape before attaching to neck edge. Follow pattern instructions for attaching collar.
Stitches Used in Tailoring

1. Tailor's tacks are used to transfer markings from the pattern to the material.

2. Tailor's basting (diagonal) is used to hold interfacing in place on the fabric, pockets in position, etc. A short stitch appears on the underside and a long slanting stitch on the top.

3. Swing (French) tack is used to hold two edges together loosely as coat lining to coat hem. To make a swing tack sew 3 or 4 stitches with buttonhole twist (or 6 or 8 strands of heavy duty) attaching the lining and garment hem opposite each other, leaving the thread 3/4 to 1 inch in length. Buttonhole (or blanket stitch) around these threads for the entire length keeping stitches close together.

4. Catch stitch may be used in attaching interfacing, hemming, putting tucks in lining, etc.

Pressing Techniques and Equipment

A tailored garment is never pressed flat. Each part is pressed and shaped as the garment is constructed. Remember to press each seam before you cross it with another. If you do this you will have little pressing to do when the garment is finished. Avoid using too much moisture and over pressing. Do not press wool until it is completely dry.

Special equipment will help do a more effective job of pressing.

1. Press cloth of wool may be purchased or you can make one. A piece of light wool that has no woven pattern, but is quite smooth, may be used. Baste a heavy cotton cloth such as drill or muslin (which has been washed) on top of the wool. When using this press cloth, a wet cloth is laid on top of the cotton or it is sponged with water to form steam. A steam iron might also be used.

2. Pressing mitt or tailor's ham may be used for curved seams, darts and for shrinking fullness out of a sleeve cap.

3. Seam roll is used for pressing seams open without pressing the edges flat against the garment. You can make one by rolling a magazine and slipping it into a tube made of heavy cotton or wool fabric. A rolling pin cut in half lengthwise might also be used.
4. Point presser (seam board) is used for hard to reach seams such as collar and lapel points.

5. Tailor's beater (sometimes called a clapper or spanker) is used for flattening edges on lapels, collars, fronts and hems made of heavy fabrics. The pounding is done while steam is in the fabric immediately after pressing.

6. Sleeve board is an aid in pressing sleeve seams, shrinking fullness in sleeve cap and pressing small pieces.

7. Padded coat hanger for jackets and coats helps to retain their original shape.

Easing Fullness in Sleeves

"Set-in" sleeves need skillful pressing to give a smooth effect. Make two rows of machine stitching (6 to 8 stitches per inch) over the sleeve cap from notch to notch. The first row should be just outside the seam line and the other 1/16 to 1/8 inch from this line and closer to the cut edge. Pin sleeve into armscye at seams and notches. Adjust ease by pulling under thread from both rows of stitching until sleeve fits the arm-scye. Remove sleeve and shrink out the fullness in the sleeve cap by placing it over a pressing mitt or a tailor's ham. Press out the fullness with the tip of the steam iron.

Keep pressing and shrinking the fullness until sleeve cap is shaped and smooth. Easing stitches should not be visible on right side after sleeve is stitched into armscye.
Fitting Your Coat or Suit

A good fit will give comfort, a neat appearance and good service. Fit a suit jacket with the skirt on. Wear a sweater or blouse and also the type of foundation garment you will be wearing with the costume as you fit it.

A coat should also be fitted over the costume you will be wearing with it.

If shoulder pads are to be used, they should be in place when a coat or jacket is fitted. The size and shape of pad will be determined by current fashion and your figure type.

Try the coat on right side out. Pin two center front lines together with coat edges even at the bottom.

It will generally be best to fit the right hand side of coat and then alter the left side to correspond.

When fitting ask yourself these questions:

Is grainline of fabric straight at center front and back?

Is crosswise grain at chest and across back parallel to the floor?

Does the lengthwise grain of the sleeves hang perpendicular to the floor from the highest point of the shoulder?

Is the crosswise grain at the base of the sleeve cap parallel to the floor?

Do the side seams of jacket, skirt or coat hang "plumb" and not swing to back or front?

Is the shoulder seam straight from neck to top of shoulder?

Does the neckline lie flat and smooth?

Are front darts directed toward the crown of the bust and back shoulder blade darts toward shoulder blade bones?

Is the general appearance in keeping with the present fashion?

Are the buttons and pockets well spaced?

Is there enough ease in the coat for it to fit over any garment you might wish to wear with it?

Are the armholes large enough to be comfortable?

Is the sleeve dart located at the elbow? If there are two darts, the elbow point is between them. If there are three darts the middle one should be at the elbow.
Buttons and Buttonholes

In a heavy coat where strain on the garment is great, use a small backing button on the facing side of the garment. Sew the thread through the eyes of both the top and the backing button.

Well-made tailored buttonholes add to the attractiveness of suits and coats. Make a sample buttonhole before you work on your garment. There may be some instances where a machine buttonhole will be more effective.

Instructions for making buttonholes may be found in your pattern guide or construction books. An extension circular on buttonholes is also available from your County Extension Agent.

Lining Your Jacket or Coat

Linings attached by machine give a durable finish. Hand sewing gives a custom finish.

The coat should be completely finished and well pressed before attaching the lining. Suggestions for making a lining follow:

Machine stitch all lengthwise seams (including sleeves) in the lining and press them open. If raglan sleeves are used, they may be stitched into the lining.

Allow fabric for a pleat in the center back of the lining.

To make the pleat, fold over the material right side up on the center back line, baste along the fold and press. Cross-stitch or catch stitch for about 3 inches downward from the neck. It is also necessary to cross-stitch this pleat near the waistline.

Place the coat right side down on the table. Place lining on garment with wrong sides together and the underarm seams matching those of the coat. Pin lining in place along center back, across back, chest and on side seams. Tack lining to coat at side seams to within 6 or 7 inches of hem edge.

A coat and its lining are usually hemmed separately. The lining should be about 1 inch shorter than the coat. The two hems may be joined in several places by means of swing tacks (French).
Turn under the seam allowance down the front and pin and baste along the inside seam line of the front facing. Slip stitch. Smooth the front shoulder up over the coat, pin and baste over the shoulder seam line. Then turn under the neck and shoulder seam allowance of the back and slip stitch in place over the front lining. Baste around the armholes.

Gather the top of the sleeve lining by machine and steam press to shape the sleeve cap. Turn under sleeve seam allowance and pin over the armbhole seam line of the coat and slip stitch or blind stitch in place.

Turn the lining at sleeve bottom under so that it is about 3/4 inch above the hem edge of coat sleeve and pin and baste it in place. Try on the coat, bending the arm to see whether the lining of the sleeves seems comfortable. Adjust lining if necessary. Press crease in lower edge of lining. Slip stitch lining to coat sleeve 1/4 to 1/2 inch underneath the crease at lower edge.

When lining a jacket, baste the lining to the jacket 2 or 3 inches above cut edge of jacket hem line. Place jacket on a table with lining side toward you and turn raw edges of lining under so that folded edge lies at least 1/2 inch above creased edge of hem. Pin, baste, and press a crease in the lower edge of lining. Slip stitch the lining to the jacket hem in the same manner as it was slip stitched to the sleeves.

YOUR COMPLETE COSTUME

Your complete costume can be a beautiful composition like a picture painted by an artist: You, yourself are a part of this picture. Ask yourself these questions as you look in a mirror and make your choice of accessories.

1. Do the accessories harmonize with the suit in idea? For example: If you have a sports type suit are your accessories also of the more tailored sports variety?

2. Do the colors enhance your coloring (especially those placed near the face) and compliment your personality?

3. Are colors, textures and decorative effects distributed to emphasize your good points and minimize your less desirable ones?

4. Is your color scheme definitely warm or cool with accents of the other?

5. Is one main color used with lesser amounts of one or more other colors?

6. Have you gained variety through the use of light and dark or bright and subdued colors, or a harmonious combination of textures and pattern?

7. Have you used a color (although possibly changed somewhat) in more than one place?
Do all the colors used in your color scheme seem to belong together and to enhance each other?

Wear your costume proudly!

CARE AND STORAGE SUGGESTIONS

Garments that are well cared for and stored effectively retain their original fresh appearance. Some care suggestions are listed here:

1. Rounded or padded hangers help clothes keep their shape.

2. Allow sufficient hanging space so clothes are not crowded together.

3. Air and brush clothes frequently. Use a brush with fine, soft bristles. Check for and make needed repairs (in garments).

4. To refresh a wool garment hang it in the bathroom. Fill the bath tub 1/4 full of hot water to create some steam in the air.

5. Store garments clean in sealed boxes or bags. Wool needs protection from moths unless it has been moth proofed. Moth crystals can be purchased and used as a moth preventive. The storage place should be cool and dry.

The care you give your wardrobe is your least expensive clothing cost.
LOOKING AHEAD

In 4-H

Would you like to explore the possibilities in another type of clothing project? Let me suggest that you enroll in the new project "Plan Your Own." In this project you may work on the topic that interests you most. Would you like to: (1) make some clothes for children; (2) remodel a garment and save some money; (3) learn to knit; (4) plan a college wardrobe; (5) investigate career possibilities.

In Careers

Now is the time to be thinking of what you would like to do when you finish high school. Without further training you might:

1. Sell ready-to-wear clothing or yardage in a store.
2. Sew for others (this will depend on your skill).
3. Do alterations on ready-to-wear garments.

If you have additional training such as the School of Home Economics at the University of Nebraska offers, you will have greater opportunities. Then you might:

1. Be a buyer for clothing and yardage departments.
2. Be a fashion coordinator or bridal consultant.
3. Do comparison shopping for a store.

Are you interested in writing? Then you might:

1. Serve as a fashion editor for a newspaper.
2. Serve as editor for fashion magazines.

Would you like to work in the field of education? Then you might:

1. Teach in high school or college.
2. Work as a home agent or a clothing specialist.
3. Serve as educational assistant or director for pattern companies, sewing machine companies and other related commercial companies.

Do you have unusual creative ability? You might:

1. Design clothing, patterns or textiles.
2. Be a colorist.

Would you like to do research? You might:

1. Work as a laboratory assistant, a fabric tester or a textile chemist.

Think about your talents and your interests. Then investigate the specific kind of work you think you would like best to choose as a career.