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EC461 Fitting the Dress

Helen Rocke

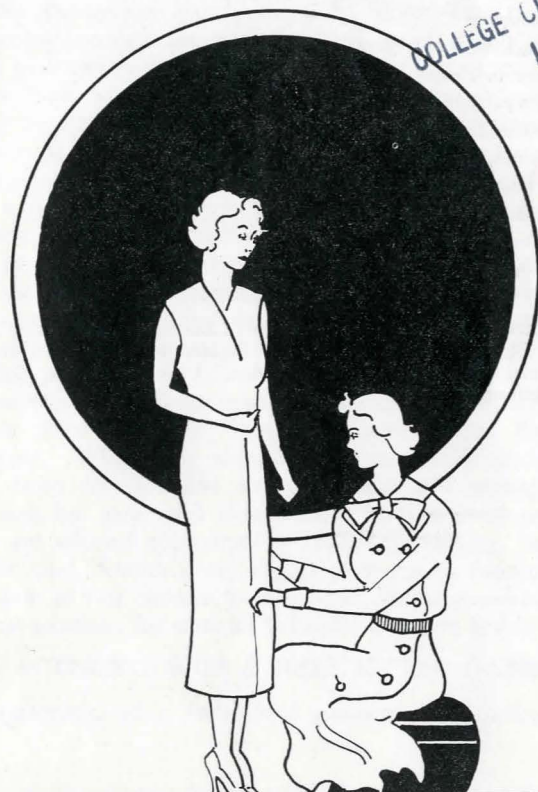
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FITTING THE DRESS



THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE
EXTENSION SERVICE AND UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING
W. H. BROKAW, DIRECTOR, LINCOLN

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Fitting The Dress

Helen Rocke

FITTING is an important element in all clothing whether it be in a dress being made by the home sewer or the professional dress maker, or one being purchased in a ready-to-wear department. A dress must fit well or it will not have that element of style or smartness which every woman desires in her clothing. Furthermore, the dress that fits well is comfortable and gives satisfaction to the wearer. It falls into correct lines without continual adjustment and allows for freedom and grace of movement, two factors which contribute greatly to one's poise and self-confidence.

In general, fitting a dress varies with the style trend of the season and with the type of dress, the material, and the individual figure. For example house dresses are usually made on looser lines than afternoon dresses. Evening dresses are perhaps fitted more closely than others. Then dresses with closely fitted sleeves cannot be fitted as snugly as sleeveless dresses or those having loose sleeves. A dress made of firm or heavy material may be fitted more closely than one made of sheer fabric. A woman of normal proportions can fit her dresses closely but the woman whose figure is not in proportion needs to make certain adjustments. The figure with a hollow chest needs to provide more fullness through the bust and chest than the normal figure of the same bust size. If the abdomen is prominent, fit the hips more loosely than the normal figure in order to make the prominence of the abdomen less noticeable. The position of a heavy bust is lifted in the corseted figure when seated, and so the stout woman needs to test the fitting of her dress in a standing and also in a sitting position.

Fitting troubles of the home sewer too are due to the fact that manufacturers have used so called "ideal" measurements as their basis in cutting patterns. When new measurements are established for figures which vary from the so-called average, there will perhaps be fewer fitting problems, but some will always occur because every person's build and posture are affected somewhat by habits of walking, standing, and sitting, by the kind of work done, and more or less by fashion in dress.

It is the aim of this circular to give some simple standards for fitting and to suggest solutions for some of the more common fitting problems.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A WELL FITTED GARMENT

The characteristics of a well fitted garment have been outlined as follows:

Body:

1. The garment should be comfortable without excess fullness.
2. The filling yarns should run straight around the figure at chest, bust, and hips, and parallel to the floor (except in bias-cut garments).

3. The warp yarns should run parallel to the center front and center back and perpendicular to the floor.

4. The under-arm seam should fall directly from the center of the armpit and perpendicularly to the floor on the normal figure; otherwise it follows the lines of the figure.

5. All structural lines of the garment should be definitely related to the lines of the figure.

6. The length of the dress should conform to fashion but vary to suit or be most becoming to the proportion of the individual.

Sleeves:

1. Neither the body of the blouse nor the sleeve should feel tight or draw at any point when the arm is bent forward or the hand lifted to the head.

2. The filling yarns should run parallel to the floor at the largest part of the upper arm.

3. The warp yarns should drop perpendicularly to the floor, from the highest point of the shoulder to the elbow.

4. The center of fullness at the elbow should come at the point of the elbow when bent.

5. The dart or opening from wrist to elbow (if any) should be in line with the little finger when the palm of the hand is turned toward the floor.

6. The inner seam should be in line with the base of the thumb when the palm of the hand is turned toward the floor.

7. There should be no fullness in the lower half of the sleeve at the armseye, except for the very fleshy upper arm.

GUIDES IN FITTING

Preparation for Fitting

If there are darts in the pattern, baste these carefully before any of the seams are made. Pins placed at intervals of 4 to 6 inches at right angles to the seam line will help to keep one side of a long seam from stretching more than another. Holding the bias side next to the worker when basting a seam will also help to prevent stretching. In basting the shoulder seam, the back of the waist should be held toward the worker. Because a person's right and left sides are seldom exactly alike, a garment should not be fitted wrong side out, for when reversed it may not fit.

Having in mind the appearance of a well fitted garment when putting on the dress to be fitted, one needs to take note of all wrinkles, bulges, strained and stretched areas, places where the material is off grain, structural lines which are not as intended and proportions which need changing. Recognition of the problem is the first step in successful fitting.

Rules for Placing Structural Lines

1. **Shoulder seam.**—A properly placed shoulder seam acts as an anchor to a well fitted garment. Therefore, it must be located carefully and the shoulders be the first part of the garment fitted. As a result the material should be smooth over the chest and shoulder blades, with no wrinkles or bulges in the front or the back and with no appearance of tightness.

The normal shoulder seam is a straight line from the highest point at the neck to $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch back of the highest point on the tip of the shoulder. This seam line should not be visible from either the front or the back when the garment is worn. In the kimono type, it continues over the tip of the shoulder and straight down the arm as it hangs naturally at the side (Fig. 1).

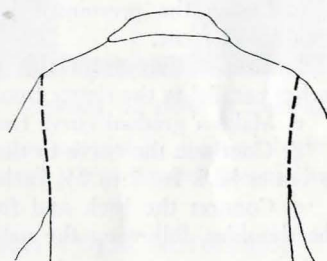
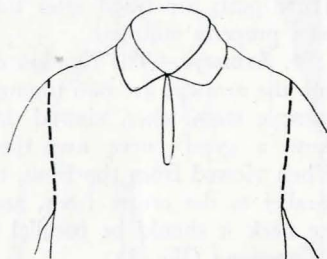


FIG. 1.—Location of shoulder and neck line.

If a person is round shouldered, the line needs to be placed slightly back of the shoulder line and not be visible from either front or back. This will give a more erect appearance to the figure. Placing it on top or to the front will emphasize round shoulders. When fitting the shoulders begin at the neck and work toward the armholes keeping in mind that the lengthwise threads of the cloth must be parallel to the center front and back of the figure, and the cross-wise threads parallel to the floor.

2. **Neck line.**—After fitting the shoulders, the next part to be adjusted is the neck line. It should form a good curve from the prominent bone at the base of the neck in the back to just above the collar bone in the center front. The line is high rather than low in the back and on the sides. A cord may be placed about the neck to help find the correct position. This line in the neck of a dress should fit snugly, but not tightly, and be sufficiently high that when the neckband or collar is pinned to it, there will be no strain anywhere. A garment with a close-fitting collar needs to have the neck line kept comparatively high at the back and sides in order that a tailored effect may be obtained.

For the person who is plump and rounded at the back of the neck, the shoulder line needs to be kept slightly back of its normal position and the neck line high in the back. A slight fullness at the center back of the garment will make it fit better.

3. **Under-arm seam.**—The under-arm seam falls directly under the high point of the shoulder and appears to be a continuation of the shoulder seam. Its position may be determined by beginning at the center of the armpit (directly below the end of the shoulder seam) and dropping a perpendicular line to the floor.

The under-arm seam is the place to make most changes which are necessary on account of irregularities of bust, hips, back, and abdomen. These parts are fitted after the shoulder seams and the neck line have been properly adjusted.

4. **Armseye.**—The location of the armseye and the fitting of the sleeve into the armseye are two important steps in the fitting of a garment. The armseye seam when viewed from the side should show a good curve over the top of the shoulder. When viewed from the front, the armseye should lie parallel to the center front, and when viewed from the neck it should be parallel to the center back of the garment (Fig. 2).

This line may be determined as follows:

- a. Locate the prominent joint at upper part of shoulder at front.
- b. Drop a line from this point from 2 to $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches parallel to the center front, to the large muscle at lower front of arm.
- c. Make a gradual curve from this point under arm.
- d. Continue the curve to the back of the arm, making the line parallel to center back for 2 to $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
- e. Connect the back and front with a gradual curve over the top of the shoulder, following the natural line of the body.

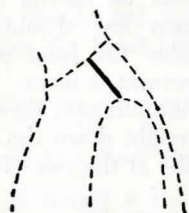


FIG. 2.—Correct armseye line.

Setting in the Sleeve

The fit of sleeves depends first of all on having the correct armseye line. It is also determined by the accuracy with which the sleeves were cut from the pattern, by the method used in attaching them to the armseye, and by the cut and style of the sleeve used. There is seldom any gathering over the upper half, although the sleeve edge should always measure an inch or more longer than the edge of the armseye. This is eased in when the sleeve is set in and prevents an unattractive and uncomfortable strain across the arm.

After all other parts of the garment have been fitted and the sleeve has been made, baste it into the armseye as follows:

- a. Locate the highest and lowest points on the arm-hole line of the sleeve. These are the only points on the sleeve edge where it is not bias, if the sleeve has been cut correctly.
- b. Locate the quarter points of the armseye by folding from the high point of the shoulder to the opposite or lowest point of the armseye, and mark these points with pins. Place the highest and lowest points together and thus locate the quarter points.

The notches found on commercial patterns to indicate the position for placing the sleeve may be right if no alterations have been made but a sleeve does not always fit well if the original pattern markings are used. Therefore it is well to locate and connect the highest and lowest points on both armscye and sleeve. This method is more satisfactory for the inexperienced, and especially when working alone.

c. Pin the highest and lowest points of sleeve and armscye together, and pin the sleeve to the quarter points of the armscye so that there is only slight fullness in the lower half of the sleeve. Place the pins at right angles to the armscye edges and pointing toward the cuff of the sleeve (Fig. 3).

Hold the sleeve side of the seam toward the worker when connecting these points and when basting the sleeve in position. Hold the edges in place with the left hand. With the thumb on the sleeve side, ease in the extra length of the sleeve by pushing the material in place with the thumb while basting. Be careful not to stretch the rounded top of the sleeve edge at any time.

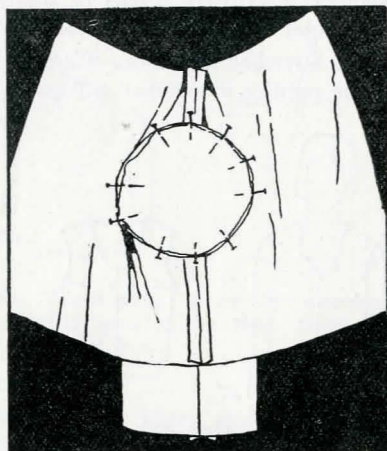


FIG. 3.—Pinning the sleeve in position.

COMMON FITTING PROBLEMS AND THEIR SOLUTION

Neck, Shoulder, Bust, Hips

1. **Too much fullness at the neck line.**—Figure 4A shows the problem. This may be due to the figure not being as full, or high across the chest, as the standard figure for which the pattern was measured, or the person may be slightly round-shouldered or hollow-chested (Fig. 4C).

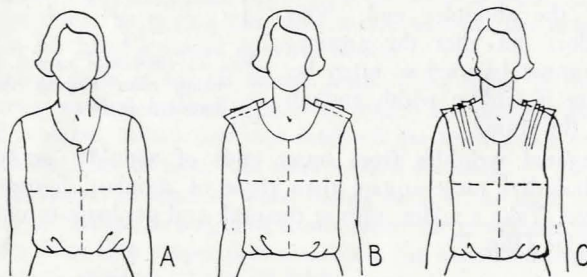


FIG. 4.—Too much fullness at the neck line.

Two possible solutions are as follows: (1) Open right shoulder seam and smooth one-half of excess fullness to the right. Do the same for the left side, then repin shoulder seam and mark new armscye (Fig. 4B). (2) Open the shoulder seams from the neck to about an inch from the shoulder and make a dart or several small darts of the extra material at the center of the shoulder seams (Fig. 4C).

2. Stretched neck line.—Careless handling while trying a garment on or while putting it together will cause stretching of the neck line. This can

be solved as follows: If collar, binding, or facing has been put on the garment it will need to be removed (Fig. 5A). Place the garment on the ironing board and press the fabric back into its original shape by pressing carefully a little way along the filling yarns, gradually reaching the stretched edge and restoring it to its original shape. Then to prevent stretching again make a row of machine stitching just outside the seam allowance before the facing is put on or stitch a

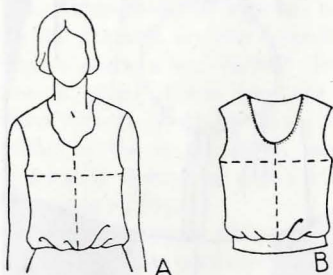


FIG. 5.—Stretched neck line.

very narrow strip of selvage on top of the facing (Fig. 5B).

3. Diagonal wrinkles from neck toward lower part of armscye.—If shoulders are more sloping than those of standard figure, (1) Take a deeper seam at the top of the shoulder to bring crosswise grain of material into right positions, then graduate seam to normal width toward the neck. This makes the armscyes higher under the arms so they may need to be clipped a little to make them comfortable (Fig. 6). (2) If the seam is wide enough, it can be narrowed at the neck and graduated to the normal width at the shoulder end. This method does not alter the armscye line but cannot be used so often because there is seldom width enough to let out the seam.

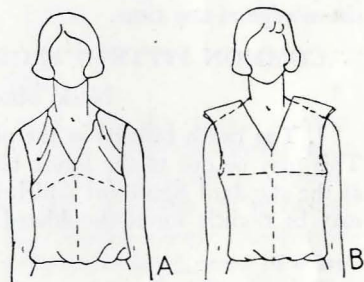


FIG. 6.—Wrinkles caused by shoulders being more sloping than those of standard figure.

4. Diagonal wrinkles from outer ends of shoulder seam to center front.—Shoulders more square than those of standard figure will cause this trouble. Take a wider seam at the neck and graduate to normal width at outer edge (Fig. 7).

5. **Shoulder seam drawn backward and dress pulls off at the side of the neck.**—The causes may be one or all of the following: (a) the sleeve is too tight through the elbow; (b) the sleeve is too tight through the lower arm girth; (c) the sleeve is too short. If the sleeve is too short it pulls the dress backward when it is pulled down to the wrist. This in turn pulls the neck sidewise. If the sleeve is too small at the elbow or lower arm girth, it binds the arm when the muscle is enlarged, pulls down the back of the dress at the end of the shoulder, and then the dress is pulled away from the neck, making the garment decidedly uncomfortable. Sometimes the right sleeve presents this problem because the right arm is frequently larger than the left.

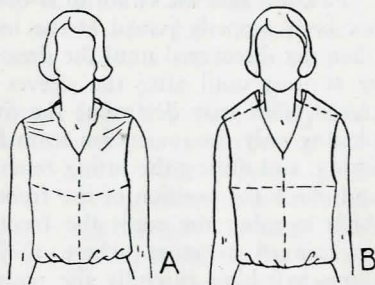


FIG. 7.—Wrinkles caused by shoulders being more square than those of standard figure.

Solutions are:

(a) If the sleeve is large enough through the lower girth when the arm is bent but is too short, a cuff may be added, or deepened if there is already one on the sleeve.

(b) Sometimes needed length may be secured by making the armseye seam on the sleeve less deep at the top back of the armseye. In some cases this may make too much fullness at the top of the sleeve to look well.

(c) If the sleeve is too tight around the lower portion of the arm the sleeve seam may be let out or a piece added if necessary.

(d) Moving the fullness at the elbow higher or lower in order to be in line with the point of the elbow when the arm is bent and raised forward in line with the chest may help.

One needs to decide which remedy will help and then to test the fitting by putting the tips of the fingers on the shoulder of the same side of the body. If one can do this without pulling the shoulder seam backward, the sleeve is not likely to pull it backward when the dress is worn. The wrist line should be tested by raising the hand to see whether the wrist line is as good when the hand is raised as when down.

6. **Under-arm seam is too far to the front.**—The figure is not of the same proportion as the standard figure for which the pattern was made. To solve the problem, take a narrower seam off the front and a wider one from the back in order to move the seam toward the back.

7. **Neck and shoulder seam of waist sliding back.**—The back of the figure is short in proportion to length of front. Open the under-arm seam and bring shoulder seam into proper position. Raise the back at the under-arm seam and cut new armseye. Trim off lower front or piece out lower back. A dart to the bust may be needed in front.

8. **Front draws across bust.**—Bust is full in proportion to standard figure and dart to the bust not deep enough. Open the under-arm seam and make it smaller. Raise the crosswise grain by a deeper or by an additional dart. Piece out lower front or cut off lower back.

9. **Dress falls backward or is out of balance.**—The front and back have not been properly joined at the under-arm seam (Fig. 8). This fault is often not discovered until the dress is finished or at least until after the sleeves have been placed. One may determine the fit earlier by pinning only the under-arm seam for the first fitting, and during the fitting remove the pins and check the position of the front and back. After opening the seam the front and back are pinned together where they naturally come, watching carefully the position of the grain in the front and back. The ends of the seam should not be forced to meet at the armseye. If the back needs to be raised or the front, this is the time it should be done because if they are brought evenly together at the armseye, then when the dress is worn the back will gradually work into the position that it would normally assume and pull the front with it. If necessary to raise the back or the front, the lower part of the armseye will need to be recut.

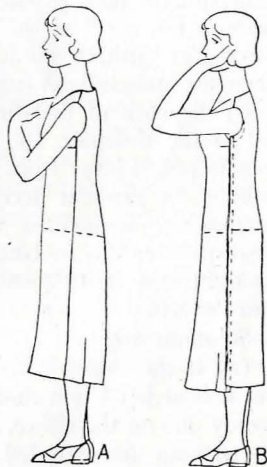


FIG. 8.—Dress out of balance and falls backward.

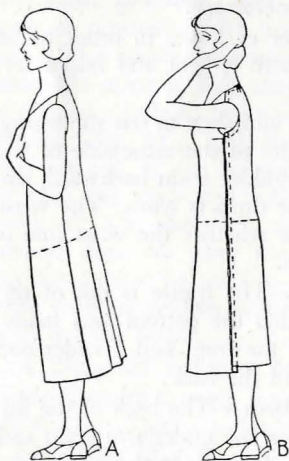


FIG. 9.—Side seams of dress swing backward.

When this condition exists in a dress that is finished, remove the stitching around the lower half of the armseye in the back, or around more than half of the armseye if necessary in order to have the replaced sleeve look well. Open the under-arm seam and put the dress on, and pin the front and back at the under-arm seam just where they seem to want to come, keeping the grain of the front and back in correct position. The seam is then ready for stitching and the skirt to be rehung and hemmed. Then reset the sleeves and finish the armseyes.

10. **Side seams swing backward and dress stands out at bottom in back.**—The crosswise grain of the material sags at the sides. This often occurs if there are protruding shoulder blades (Fig. 9). Open the side seam and repin it at the hip so the crosswise threads are par-

allel with the floor. Continue pinning toward the armscye, keeping the grain in correct position. Observe carefully where the excess fullness which has been moved up can best be placed. Usually it can be taken care of by opening the shoulder seam and moving the fullness between the shoulder and neck. If there is too much to be eased in the seam, some of it may be kept in the seam and the rest moved toward the center back making several small darts from the fullness. Then recut lower part of the back armscye.

11. Skirt stands out at the bottom of lower front, cups in at back, side seams stand to front.—Prominent abdomen or bust, or poor posture will cause this difficulty (Fig. 10A). In a one-piece dress, rip the side seam and take a deeper dart at the bust or a deeper horizontal dart at the waistline. Cut off the lower back (Fig. 10B).

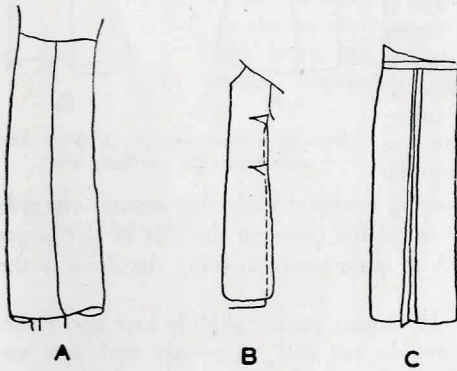


FIG. 10.—Skirt cups in at back and side seams swing forward.

For a separate skirt two methods may be used: (1) Raise the back gore and side seam of the front gore above the belt line and cut off (Fig. 10C). (2) Rip the side seam and raise the front above the back and repin. Trim the front so

the waist line is less hollow. Cut off the lower back of the skirt. If the side seam still slants, make the seam less gored, especially in the back.

12. Side seam swings to the front. Lower hem line and crosswise threads of material curve up in back.—

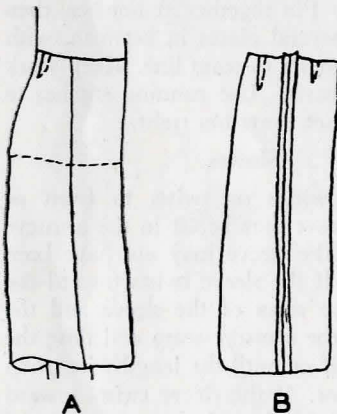


FIG. 11.—Skirt curves up in back.

The trouble here is that the hips in the back are prominent in proportion to the waist line and the front of the figure (Fig. 11A). Let out the dart in the back of the hip and let out the side seams over the hips. Take up a small vertical dart on each side of the front in order to pull the side seam at the waist line toward the front. Replace the dart in the back, keeping it vertical and tapering gradually (Fig. 11B). Fit the side seam loosely at the waist line to balance the wide hips. The side seam may be made more gored or bias, especially in the back.

13. Skirt sticks out in front at hem line and side seam slopes to the back.—A large abdomen and sway back cause this. Open the side seam and raise the front above back for ease in length and width. Let out the side seams of the front and the dart or gore in the front, if there is either one. Take a deeper dart and seam on the back gore (Fig. 12).

14. Dress swings to one side and it seems impossible to keep the center front and center back in position at the same time.—The usual cause is that one hip is larger than the other. Determine how much larger the one hip is than the other by placing the tape at the center front and measuring to center back, first around one side and then the other. Open the seam of the dress on the side of the larger hip and let out the seam as much as is necessary to bring the dress in the correct position (Fig. 13).

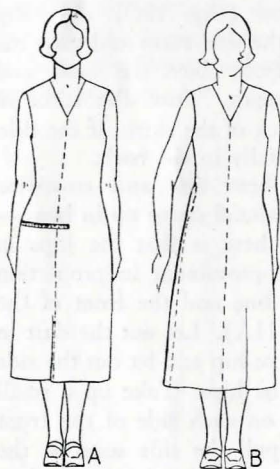


FIG. 13.—Dress swings to one side because of irregularity in size of hips.

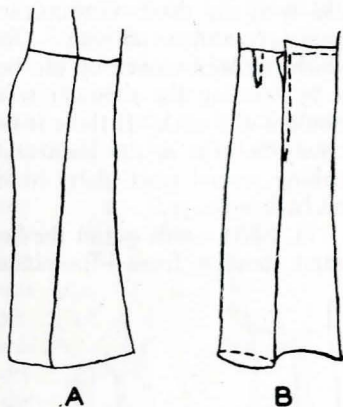


FIG. 12.—Skirt swings to front and side seams do not hang well.

15. Seams pucker slightly here and there. Gores do not end off evenly with one another at lower edge. Some seem longer than others although cut the same length.—Careless pinning and basting are the causes. Remove the bastings. Smooth one gore flat on the table and place adjoining section on it, matching notches. Smooth carefully, keeping grain straight. Pin together at notches, then at ends, and several places in between, with pins at right angles to seam line. Keep work on table to baste. Use running stitches to baste and do not draw too tight.

Sleeves

1. Sleeve swings or twists to front or back.—The sleeve may be set in the armhole incorrectly or the sleeve may not have been cut correctly. If the sleeve twists toward the front, open the seam of the sleeve and the lower half of the armhole seam and raise the back of the sleeve on the front about one-half or until the lengthwise grain of the material is at right angles to the floor. If the sleeve twists toward the back, raise the front in the same way. If the sleeve has not been placed

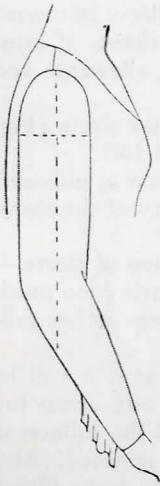


FIG. 14.—A correctly placed sleeve.

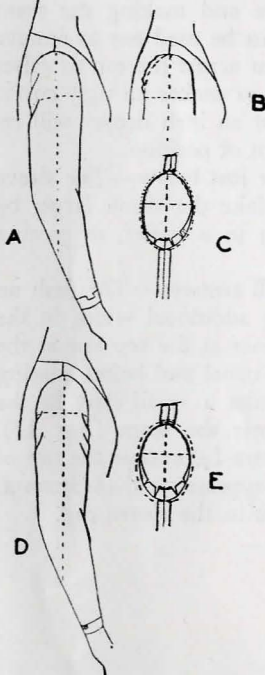


FIG. 16.—Sleeve with diagonal wrinkles at the back.

on the material correctly when cutting, recutting it and piecing the edges, or recutting a sleeve from new material may be the only remedy.

2. **Sleeve wrinkles from top downward toward the front or back or both.**—The crosswise threads of the material drop in front or back of the upper part of the sleeve or in both front and back. There may be too slight a curve on the top of the sleeve or too short a cap in the sleeve pattern for the figure.

Open the seam around the lower armseye and well up on the front if the wrinkles are in the front, or well up the back if the sleeve wrinkles in the back, or rip both front and back if there are wrinkles in both places. Replace the sleeve in the armseye so that the

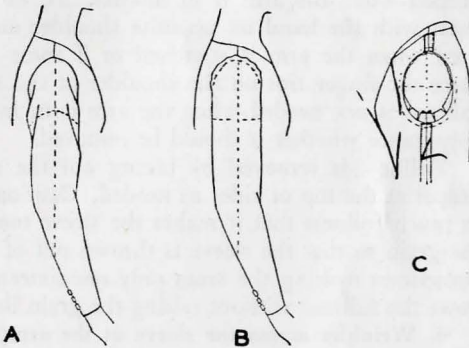


FIG. 15.—Sleeve which wrinkles from the top toward the front or back.

crosswise threads in the upper part of the sleeve are parallel to the floor. The illustration in Figure 15A shows a sleeve with diagonal wrinkles and Figure 15B shows the same sleeve pinned so that the position of the grain is corrected and the diagonal wrinkles removed. Figure 15C shows the alteration necessary in the lower armseye. This under armseye line is determined by laying the dress carefully over the smoothed sleeve and pinning the sleeve on the dress just where the two edges meet. The edge of the sleeve should not be forced down to the edge of the armseye. If the two edges naturally meet they may be basted along the seam allowance line, but if the sleeve is higher than the armseye, baste it along the

seam allowance of the lower armscye edge. Then slip the sleeve in toward this line and try the dress on to check the fitting of the sleeve. If satisfactory, trim out the surplus material to the normal seam allowance and stitch and finish the armscye.

If the sleeve has diagonal wrinkles only in the back of the sleeve (Fig. 16A) the correction is made as indicated in Figure 16B and 16C.

If the sleeve shows diagonal wrinkles in only the lower part as indicated in Figure 16D, it may be remedied by raising the lower part of the sleeve into the armscye as shown in Figure 16E.

3. Sleeves puff out at back or front of armscye or at top of sleeve.—The sleeve seam may not have been made deep enough, leaving too much width or length at the top of the sleeve or the arm may require less fullness than allowed in the pattern.

First test to see if the fullness is really excess fullness or if it will be needed when the arm is in motion. To do this fold the arm across the chest with the hand on opposite shoulder and notice if all the fullness is used when the arm is stretched or if some can safely be removed. Also place the finger tips on the shoulder of the same side of the body. Front fullness is not needed when the arm is in motion so one can decide from appearance whether it should be removed.

Fullness is removed by taking out the sleeve and making the seam deeper at the top or sides as needed. Caution must be used not to remove so much fullness that it makes the sleeve too tight across the top or raises the grain so that the sleeve is thrown out of line or makes an ugly curve. Sometimes making the seam only one-sixteenth of an inch deeper will remove the fullness without raising the grain line out of position.

4. Wrinkles across the sleeve at the armpit or just below.—The sleeve is too small for the arm. Make the sleeve larger by letting out the seam, setting in a gusset, or piecing along the seam line.

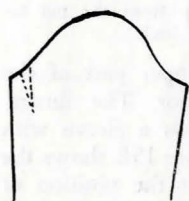


FIG. 17.—Fitting sleeve for large arm with small armscye.

5. Large arm with a small armscye.—The flesh on the arm is low and requires additional width in the sleeve above the elbow, but not at the top nor at the armscye. Fit the armscye as usual and before placing the sleeve in the armscye take a small dart in the under edge of the sleeve near the seam (Fig. 17). This will take care of the extra fullness at the top of the sleeve and give a better appearance than attempting to ease the extra fullness in the sleeve cap.

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