

1972

## EC72-427 Altering Women's Ready Made Dresses

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# ALTERING

## WOMEN'S READY-MADE DRESSES



Extension Service, University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Agriculture Cooperating with the  
U. S. Department of Agriculture and the College of Home Economics  
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# ALTERING

## Women's Ready-made Dresses

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Your personal appearance and comfort will be enhanced by a smart-looking, becoming and well fitted dress. If fitted too closely, a garment tends to emphasize figure irregularities and may cause a dress to "ride up." A careless or bedraggled appearance results if the dress is fitted too loosely. Either extreme will detract from your personal appearance and comfort.

In recent years consumers have found more choices of sizes and styles. Many women, however, find that individual posture and figure irregularities mean some alterations. The extent of alteration can be lessened by choosing the best fitting size and design.

If a dress needs alteration, several factors should be considered before the dress is bought or the alteration attempted. Extensive alterations are not always worth the effort or time spent in doing them. If in doubt, don't buy.

☐ **The Design** - Occasionally the original design of a dress is changed by alterations. This may or may not be desirable. This is more likely to happen if several alterations are to be made on the same dress or the design is complicated.

☐ **The Fabric** - The fabric of the dress may show stitch marks and creases when seams are ripped. Sometimes these marks are difficult or impossible to remove. If the fabric frays or ravel easily, narrow seams will slip or tear out quickly under strain. If the dress fabric is a plaid or stripe, alterations can easily result in mismatched designs.

☐ **Seam Allowances** - Modern garments often have trimmed or notched seams, making it impossible to let out the seams. Modern fabrics often retain the original marks of the stitching line, which show when the seams are let out. If the fabric frays or ravel easily, narrower seams may tear out quickly. The garment could be taken in, however

☐ **Hems** - The hem allowance may be too narrow to let down satisfactorily even if it is faced.

Occasionally the folded edge cannot be pressed out and shows where it is let down.

☐ **Grain** - If parts of the garment have been cut off grain, alteration rarely can correct this failing.

☐ **Darts** - If darts are slashed open, they cannot be moved if this is the alteration needed.

☐ **How Extensive are the Alterations?** - If the garment is too big, or too small all over, altering rarely achieves fit. If too many alterations are required, the look of the garment and how you feel about it may be changed.

☐ **Who Will Do the Alterations?** - Minor alterations such as seams, darts, skirt lengths and some sleeve lengths can easily be made by the homemaker and in most cases results are satisfactory. Extensive alterations are time consuming and often too complicated for the average homemaker. If done by a professional, these extensive alterations will be costly and the finished jobs are not always satisfactory.

### FREQUENTLY NEEDED ALTERATIONS

Some frequently needed alterations which are easy to do are:

1. Skirt length.
2. Skirt side-seam adjustments to increase or decrease ease through the hips.
3. Bodice length.
4. Waistline.
5. Underarm seam adjustments to increase or decrease ease through the bust.
6. Shortening the shoulder seams.
7. Sleeve length.
8. Back neckline too wide

More difficult alterations might include:

1. Recutting the armhole if the sleeve seams fall down on the arm.



2. Cutting down a neckline that is too high.
3. Recutting collars.
4. Length adjustments on cuffed sleeves.

## GENERAL TIPS

Remember that altering a dress will improve fit, appearance and comfort only if it is done properly and neatly.

Alterations at or below the waistline are generally the easiest. Alterations at the armhole, neckline and shoulder areas require more skill.

Occasionally, alterations will require ripping and restitching a placket or other closure.

When altering a dress, rip carefully only as much as is absolutely necessary. Try not to stretch or mar the fabric in any way. Stay-stitch curved edges if you feel it is necessary. Remember to maintain the proper grainline of the dress. Try for pleasing proportion, balance, and good design in your altered garment. Fit the dress right side out.

After the necessary ripping has been done, steam press the seams to remove old crease lines and stitching marks. Press as you sew new seams and do a final pressing after alterations have been completed.

## Hem Adjustments

### Skirt Length

To adjust the hem on a straight or slightly flared skirt, rip the original hem and press out the crease. Mark the correct length, turn and baste near the lower edge and press. If necessary, trim the hem to a uniform width. The seam binding need not be removed unless the hem is uneven, is over three inches wide, of bulky fabric or needs facing.

If the skirt is to be lengthened and sufficient hem is not available, remove the seam binding and face the lower edge of the skirt. Bias skirt facings can be bought at a notions counter, or cut from a piece of yard goods. Select for the facing a fabric of matching color and one which has similar wear and care qualities.

The hem width in very full circular skirts is kept narrow. In ready-mades these hems are sometimes stitched with several rows of machine stitching. If the dress is to be shortened, the old hem may be cut off instead of ripping it. The hem then may be put in by hand or by machine.

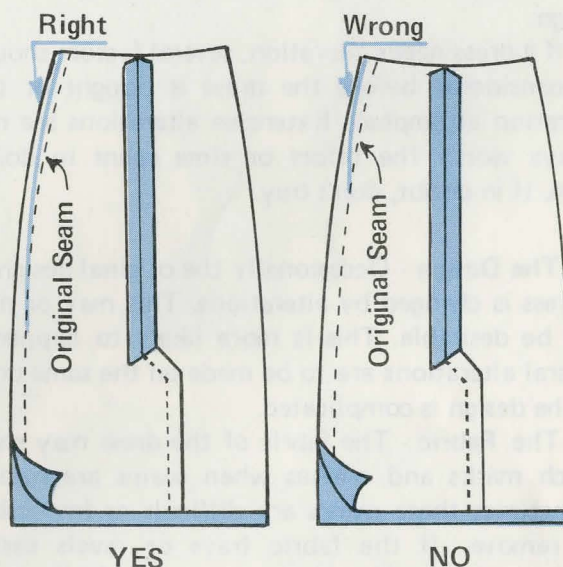
It is best to shorten skirts of some styles from the waistline. Examples of such garments are those

made of border prints, those with permanent pleats or kick pleats.

Remove the skirt from the bodice at the waistline. The placket or other type of closure at the waistline will have to be ripped and refitted. Lift the skirt the required amount. The side seams and waistline of the skirt might require refitting. Baste the skirt to the bodice. Fit the dress to be sure the hem is the proper length and hangs evenly. Finish the waistline seam and restitch the placket or waistline closure.

## Skirt Too Large or Too Small Through the Hips

Fullness at the hipline can be taken in or let out at side seams, at gore seams or at center front and back seams if no pleats are involved. Occasionally this type of alteration will require refitting the side placket. To make the alteration, remove the original stitching at the most appropriate seams. Refit, stitch and press the new seams open. If seams have been let out, be sure the remaining seam allowances are wide enough and strong enough to withstand the normal strain of wearing. Remember to keep side seams straight from the hipline to the hem.



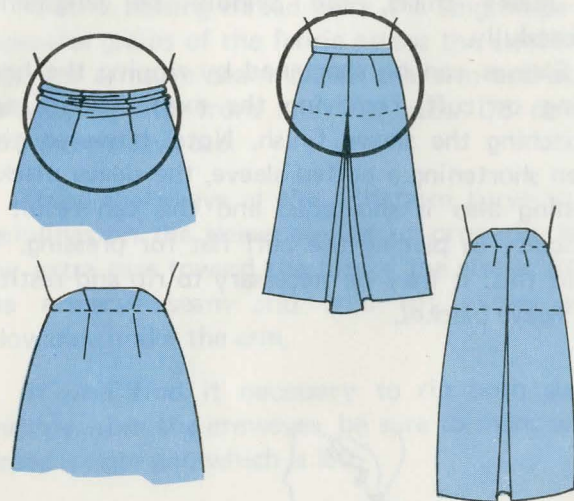
Occasionally, ease through the hips can be gained by lifting the skirt at the waistline. This might involve refitting the placket and the darts at the waistline. An adjustment in skirt length might also become necessary.

## Crosswise Wrinkles in Skirt Just Below Waist

A slightly swayback posture will cause crosswise wrinkles in the skirt directly below the waistline in



the back. To correct this, rip the back waistline seam and raise the skirt back, tapering the amount from center back to side seams to remove the wrinkles. Fit and restitch the waistline seam. This alteration also can prevent a skirt back from "cupping-in" and a back pleat from hanging open. The one-piece, or princess style dress should be avoided by a swaybacked person. Wrinkles will form at the back waistline and there is no seam in which to fit out the excess fullness.



### Waistline Too Loose or Too Tight

Minor adjustments in the size of the waistline can be made without ripping the placket. Make the adjustments at darts, tucks or seams other than the placket seam. If an adjustment is more than two inches, the placket will have to be ripped and restitched to keep the proper balance of the dress on the figure.

Rip the waistline seam. Refit the waistline of the bodice by making necessary adjustments in the darts, tucks, gathers or seams. Refit the waistline of the skirt. Restitch the waistline seam and press the dress. If the placket is in the center back, alterations may be made at the side seams without ripping the entire waistline.

### Bodice Too Long or Too Short at the Waist

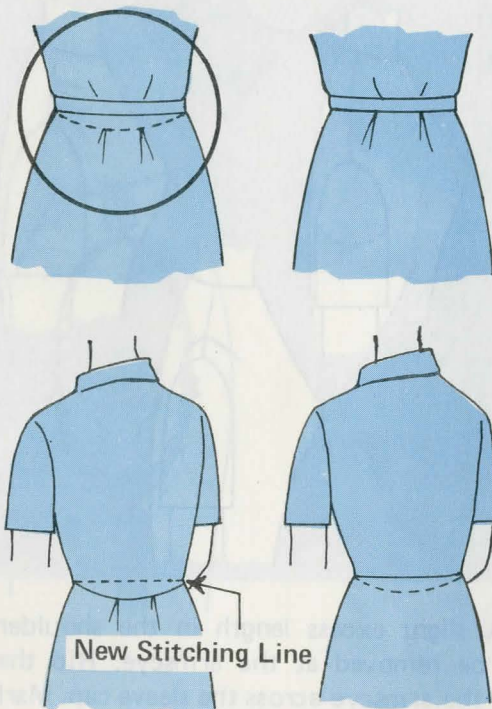
The belt should cover the waistline seam. If the seam shows below the belt, the bodice of the dress is probably too long at the waist. This happens most often at the back of the dress.

If, when trying a ready-made dress for fit, it seems to be too short in the bodice, it would be best to avoid purchasing the dress. This can seldom be altered successfully.

To make this alteration the waistline seam must

be ripped from the skirt at the points where the bodice is too long. Fit the bodice and mark a new stitching line at the waistline position for the individual figure being fitted. Raise the skirt and stitch it to the bodice at the new stitching line.

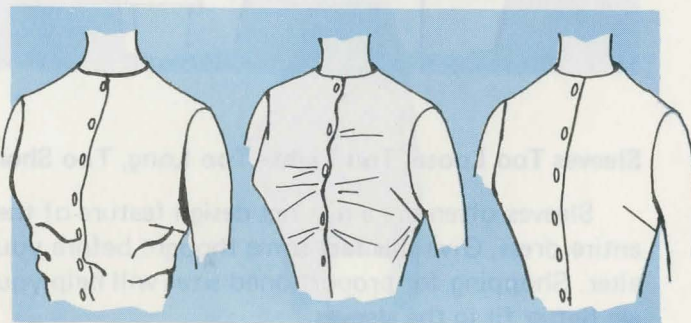
A stay tape at the waistline seam will help maintain proper fit in this area. If the ready-made dress does not have a stay tape, one can easily be stitched to the waistline seam allowance.



### Bodice Too Large or Too Small Through the Bust

These alterations can usually be made by letting out or taking in the underarm seams of the bodice.

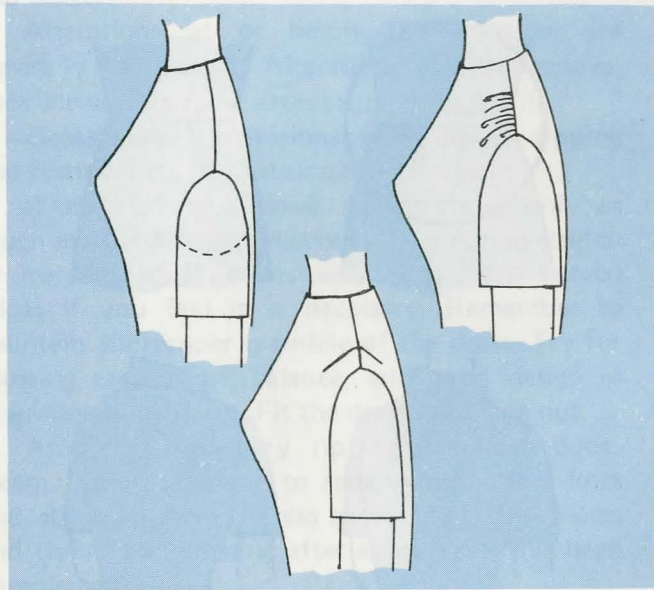
Underarm bustline darts and waistline darts in the front bodice are sometimes not the proper length or are not in the proper position for the bust of the individual figure. These darts should point toward the fullest part of the bust and end about one and one half inches from the fullest part of the bust. These alterations are simple to make and will improve fit and appearance considerably.



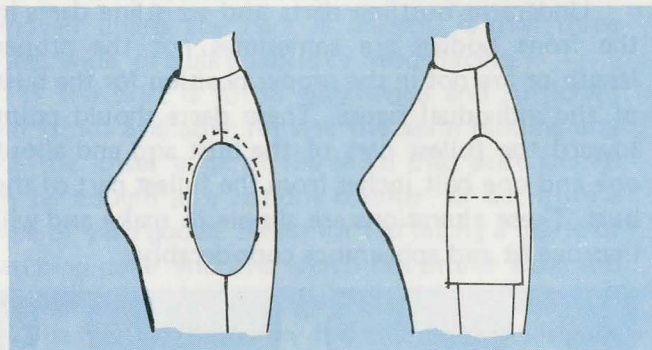


## Shoulder Seams Too Long

If the front of the dress has tucks, darts or shirring at the shoulder, the seam may be ripped and the excess length can be added to the darts, tucks or gathers. The excess length of the back shoulder seam can be stitched into a back shoulder dart.



A slight excess length in the shoulder seams may be removed at the armhole. Rip the sleeve from the armhole across the sleeve cap. Mark a new armhole seam on the dress bodice. Baste the sleeve into the armhole and fit. Restitch the sleeve into the armhole using the original stitching line on the sleeve and the stitching line across the shoulder seam. Trim excess from armhole seam allowance.



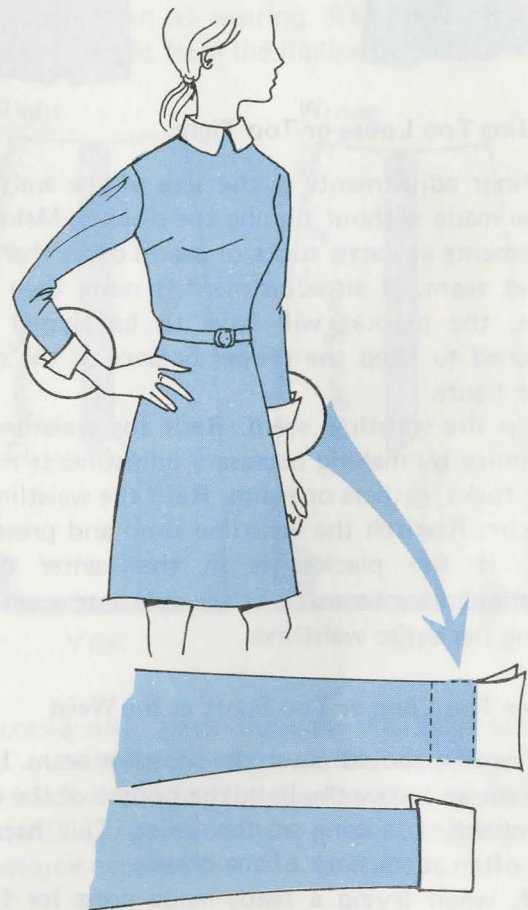
## Sleeves Too Loose, Too Tight—Too Long, Too Short

Sleeves often are a distinct design feature of the entire dress. Give this fact some thought before you alter. Shopping for proportioned sizes will help you get better fit in the sleeves.

To alter the fullness of a long or three quarter length sleeve, make the adjustment at the underarm sleeve seam. Elbow ease or darts may also need some altering.

Long and three-quarter-length sleeves can be lengthened if the sleeves are hemmed and the depth of the hem allows the alteration. Sometimes a cuff can be removed and a piece stitched to the sleeve to lengthen it. The cuff is then restitched and folded to cover the inset. Sleeves with cuff bands, as those on men's shirts, can seldom be lengthened successfully.

Sleeves can be shortened by ripping the hem, facing or cuff, removing the excess length and restitching the sleeve finish. Note, however, that when shortening a cuffed sleeve, the sleeve placket opening also is shortened and this can result in difficulty in placing the cuff flat for pressing. To avoid this, it may be necessary to rip and restitch the sleeve placket.





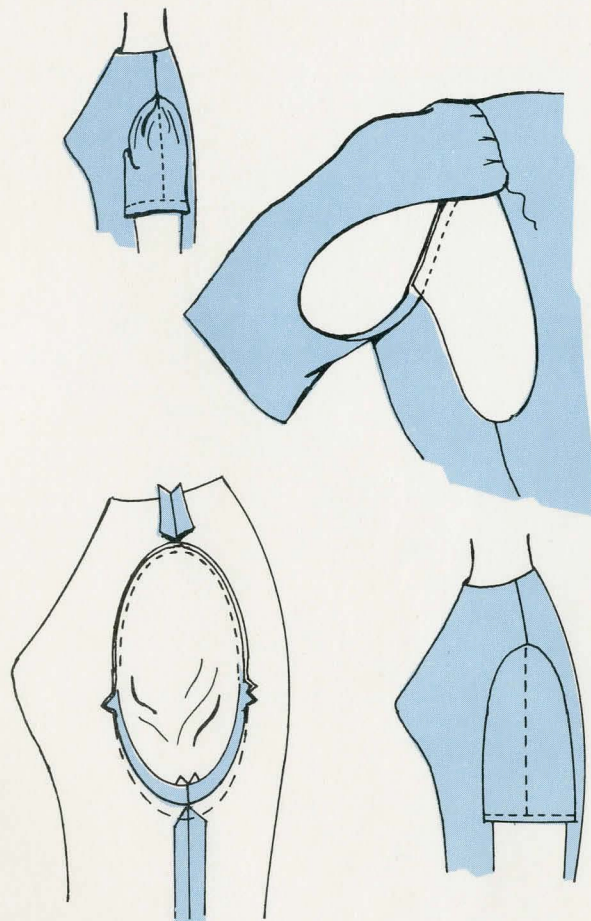
### Wrinkles in the Sleeve Cap

Diagonal wrinkles at the top of the sleeve result from a sleeve cap which is too short. The seam allowance at the sleeve cap is seldom wide enough to be released and add the needed length to the sleeve cap.

With a basting thread mark the lengthwise and crosswise grains of the fabric across the sleeve cap. Rip the armscye seam under the arm and about halfway up the front and the back. Do not rip across the sleeve cap.

Raise the sleeve at the underarm curve so the grainlines on the sleeve are set up properly. Work any extra ease toward the top of the sleeve. Stitch the armscye seam and trim off excess seam allowance under the arm.

If you find it necessary to rip both sleeves entirely from the armscyees, be sure to mark which sleeve is right and which is left.



### Back Neckline Too Wide

Sometimes the back neckline of a dress is too wide and stands away from the neck. Rip off the facing or the collar. Place small darts at the back neckline to remove excess width. These darts will tend to draw the shoulder seams toward the neck and perhaps improve shoulder fit. The collar or neck facing will need to be refitted to the altered neckling.

