PART III—DRESSMAKING

CHAPTER IV

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS

In making a costume there are many factors to be considered each one of which plays its relative part in making the completed garment a success. Some of these—they might be called preliminary—such as the selection of material for color and wearing quality and the choice of design from an aesthetic and economic standpoint, are discussed in other parts of this volume. They are referred to here only as showing their relative position in the whole problem. The matters discussed in detail in this chapter are the various factors which determine good technique, such as accuracy and sequence, the use of good tools, the preparation of material, a few general rules for cutting, marking, fitting, and the taking of accurate measures.

I. CHOICE OF MATERIAL AND DESIGN

When a dress is to be made there are two initial steps to be taken: choosing the material and choosing the design. The material may be purchased first and a suitable design made, or the design may be selected and the material suited to it. To result in a satisfactory combination the two must be chosen with reference to each other and not as individual units. If the fabric is chosen first, the immediate consideration should be suitability to purpose, and at once the interdependence of all parts of the problem is evident. For on this question of the use of the costume depends also the choice of design, of color, and often of the wearing quality of one textile against the beauty of another.

In the fashion world it is the textile which determines the
design. The manufacturer produces new fabrics, and designs which seem best suited to these are worked out by the dressmakers. Many hours are spent by the dress-designers in the perusal of past fashions for suggestions and in modelling and draping in the materials themselves on living models. For this reason, as new fabrics appear on the shop-counters fashions simultaneously appear to which they seem well suited. Aside from these fabrics, some of which may be called novelties, there are also the many standard materials always on sale which change little from year to year. These are not definitely related to the passing fashions and easily lend themselves to a variety of designs.

II. Technique

When the preliminary choice of material and design has been made, the actual execution of the technical part of the problem may be approached. Good technique has certain essentials which cannot be overemphasized, such as accuracy, system or sequence, simplicity of construction, and the use of good tools. A knowledge of "dressmaking-sewing" might be included in the list; this differs from the others, however, in that it requires skill and is the result of experience; while, on the other hand, accuracy and system are necessary in acquiring proper skill and experience. It is too often thought that a careful or good sewer must be also a good dressmaker. The terms are by no means synonymous. A knowledge of dressmaking-sewing appears to consist chiefly in appreciating where to "slight" and where to sew carefully; in regular sewing there is no slighting; there is a fixed standard of excellence.

Accuracy in following directions, in cutting, in fitting, in finishing—in fact, accuracy in all details, no matter how trifling—is indispensable.

The temptation is great to attempt saving time and labor by short cuts, by omitting certain steps which at the time seem scarcely necessary. Only a careful observance of sequence—of the required order—however, really saves time and labor and gives a satisfactory result.
Simplicity of construction is necessary for the comfort of the wearer. In making a design the openings for a garment are often not indicated. It is then the task of the dressmaker to work out a scheme of construction which will place all openings and fastenings so that they do not detract from the symmetry and charm of the design and at the same time are convenient and easy for the wearer to manage. Simplicity in design—good taste shown in simple decoration—is discussed elsewhere in this volume (*Designing, Part III*).

III. Tools

Good tools are absolutely necessary for good work. By tools are meant such things as sewing-boxes, sewing-machines, thimbles, scissors, pins, needles, emeries, tape-measures, pincushions, tracing-wheels, tailor's chalk, white and colored cottons, sewing-silk, and a skirt-rule or square, or both.

It will save time and thought if, while sewing, all the tools which are used frequently are conveniently placed on the table near the worker and always kept in the same relative position.

1. Sewing-Boxes.—A rather shallow sewing-box is very useful; all the smaller tools may be kept in it in fairly good order. A convenient size is 9'' long, 6'' wide, 2½'' high. At present, in red cloth, these cost from $9 to $12 per hundred.

2. Sewing-Machines.—While the elaborate dresses intended for afternoon and evening wear require little machine stitching except for the linings, there is a larger class of garments of all materials which is dependent for finish, and often for decoration, upon good machine work. Many of these, even though well cut, well fitted, and in good taste, are not successful because of poor stitching. This may be the fault of the worker or of the machine used. Of the two general kinds of machines manufactured—the automatic, or single-thread, and the double, or two-thread—only one kind is suitable for dressmaking; that is, the two-thread machine. As far as possible it is wise to buy machines of
standard make which have a recognized quality tested by years of constant use. This is particularly true of machines for school use, which are obviously subjected to rather severe treatment. There are a few well-known machines, used the world over, which are simple in construction, can readily be understood and managed, and are not easily put out of order. They have an established standard of quality to maintain and are found much more satisfactory than the machine of unknown or only locally known make. While the initial price of the latter machine may be small it frequently proves expensive in the end. To make its cost correspondingly small it must necessarily be made of materials which are not of the best quality and do not stand wear.

3. Thimbles.—Celluloid is a good material and not expensive. Many inexpensive thimbles and also many of those which have had much wear are rough. They should be discarded because they will catch and pull the threads of the material and often ruin its appearance.

4. Scissors.—It is convenient to have both scissors and shears but not absolutely necessary. If only scissors are used, however, they should have fairly long blades in order to cut an even, straight edge. The blades should be kept sharp and without any catches in their edges. If the blade has one small place which will not cut, the threads of the material will be pulled each way several inches and much damage will be done.

5. Pins.—Fine pins, about one inch in length, with sharp points, are best for general use. If the pins are large they make holes in the material; if too short they are difficult to manage. Steel dressmaking pins are excellent, but they must not be left in the work, as they rust easily and quickly.

6. Needles.—Two kinds of needles, one for sewing and one for basting, are a convenience. The size for sewing depends, of course, on the material, but for ordinary use the papers of sevens to nines are best. For basting, milliner’s needles, sevens to nines, are satisfactory.

7. Emery.—Needles require frequent smoothing, which necessitates an emery in every sewing equipment.
8. **Tape-Measures.**—Since tape-measures vary greatly in quality and occasionally in length of inch, they should be selected with care. Double measures, numbered on each side, are a necessity. The numbers should begin at opposite ends on the two sides; then either end may be used. The brass clips at the ends are not desirable even in good measures; they soon drop off, the unprotected ends fray, and the first inch is shortened. If there is no brass clip the end is made strong enough to stand wear.

9. **Pincushions.**—Pincushions are made in various styles. Small ones with a tape for attaching to the belt or waist are good. They should be filled with curled hair and covered with material through which the pins slip easily. Wool material, like broadcloth or serge, is excellent. A convenient pincushion is one made in the shape of a crescent, with its points connected by a band long enough to allow the cushion to slip over the hand. When this cushion is worn on the back of the left hand it is always within easy reach. It is especially useful in fitting. If cushions are not used the worker quickly acquires the very bad habit of holding pins in the mouth.

10. **Tracing-Wheels.**—Tracing-wheels must be selected with great care. Even the best cannot be used with all materials; poor ones should always be discarded and no attempt made to use them even by experienced workers. A tracing-wheel is intended merely to mark the surface of the material; yet in many cases, because it is poor or because too much pressure is used, it cuts the threads enough to weaken the material so that when worn it soon breaks or tears.

11. **Tailor’s Chalk.**—Tailor’s chalk is used in making corrections after fittings and particularly in indicating the line of turning for skirt hems. In many instances it takes the place of the tracing-wheel, where the wheel is not safe or will not show.

12. **Basting-Cotton.**—Regular cotton, white, the size depending on the weight of the material, is best for basting. Basting-cotton, as it is at present made, should not be used; it is generally coarse and uneven and leaves a mark when
pulled out, even if care is taken in cutting the stitches and removing short lengths at a time. Alterations after fitting are marked with colored cotton to distinguish them from the original basting-lines. Red should not be used, as it does not hold its color and light materials are marked by it. Light blue, yellow, and tan are generally safe.

Many materials, such as soft silks and velvets, should be basted with fine sewing-silk and greater care than usual taken when the bastings are removed. Taffeta silks, even a good quality, frequently present as difficult a problem as these others, because not only do they show marks of basting but all pinholes as well. Fine needles for pinning and fine needles and sewing-silk or No. 120 cotton for basting give the best results.

13. **Skirt-Rules and Squares.**—In drafting, a square is indispensable, as it is difficult to strike a true angle with a skirt-rule. All squares are not true, however, and should be tested. If true at first they easily get out of order unless stayed at the corner with a metal brace. This should be remembered when purchasing.

Skirt-rules sixty inches in length are often a great convenience but are not a necessity. They are more expensive and not always so easy to get as the regular yard-sticks.

**IV. Preparation of Materials**

Most materials need some preparation before being made into wearing-apparel. In general, all wash materials, cottons and linens, need shrinking; all wool materials need sponging.

1. **Shrinking.**—Shrinking includes soaking in water, drying, and usually pressing. With few exceptions all cotton and linen materials should be subjected to this process to remove the sizing which is usually added in the finishing. Practically no linen or cotton materials are sold which have not had some sizing applied; it may be very little, merely to aid in finishing, or it may be a large quantity to conceal a loose weave and poor fibres. In shrinking, the water softens or dissolves the sizing. The threads
of the material, freed from the stiffening which was applied while they were under tension, close up, particularly the filling threads, and the material shrinks. The shrinkage is usually much greater in length than in width.

The shrinking of a material requires a little time and care but is very simple. If the material is placed in the water, folded together in yard lengths as when purchased, it is much easier to manage and wrinkles less. The water should be lukewarm at first; warmer water should be added later and then be allowed to cool. If the material is not wrung in any way, but hung, still in its folds, it will dry without wrinkling and require little or no pressing. The drying may be done in the open air or in a warm room. The more care taken in hanging the material evenly the better condition it will be in and the less pressing it will require. If there are wrinkles, however, they should be pressed out. In doing this the iron should always follow the threads of the material straight across or up and down with the selvage. If, in pressing or hanging, the material has been stretched out of shape, it is almost impossible to place a pattern on it and have the straight or grain of the material run as it should. This straight of material is most important in dressmaking, for if the threads do not run correctly the garment will not fit properly and cannot be laundered satisfactorily.

2. Sponging.—Practically all wool fabrics are sponged to prevent water-spotting. They usually shrink slightly in the process. This is an advantage when the material is to be made into garments requiring frequent pressing; less shrinkage then occurs when the pressing is done. Sponging is not difficult to do at home unless there is a great quantity of material. If possible, a table should be used, as the ordinary ironing-board is not large enough to be convenient. The table should be covered with enough material to give a fairly soft, though firm, surface. For the outside cover heavy unbleached muslin is excellent; it is strong and has no lint on its surface. The coverings must be fastened so that they will keep perfectly smooth, as the wrinkles will mar the surface of the material.
In working, the material is placed face down on the ironing-table, a wet cloth is laid over it, and a fairly hot iron used. After enough pressing has been done to make the cloth nearly dry it should be removed and the material itself should be pressed. Throughout the pressing care must be taken not to rub the iron along the material in any direction, but in moving to lift it slightly, otherwise the material will follow it and wrinkle. If the material has a nap the pressing must go with the nap. Only a small section of the material should be dampened and ironed at one time, as otherwise sections of it may dry before they can be pressed. If double-width material is to be used it can be left folded, with the right side inside. The wet cloth placed on one side is usually sufficient to steam through both thicknesses of the material unless it is very heavy. Both sides should have a final pressing, however, in order to have the full width of the material thoroughly dry and smooth. Many fabrics are said to be sponged before they are put on sale, but unless this fact can be verified it is wise either to have them sponged at the store or to do it at home. There are few tailors and dressmakers who do not sponge all the materials they use.

3. Pressing.—Much of the pressing which is required in the finishing of garments is done in practically the same way as the pressing for sponging.

When possible, all material should be pressed on the wrong side. Frequently the heat and weight of the iron is not sufficient to press the seams and hems in heavy fabrics as flat as is desired. A damp cloth should then be placed over the material while it is pressed. The steam from the cloth moistens the material slightly, and when the cloth is removed and the material pressed dry it will be perfectly flat.

As in sponging, an iron must never be pushed or dragged over material. In many cases the material will follow the iron and become so wrinkled that it is practically impossible to make it smooth even by much subsequent pressing. The iron should be lifted from place to place until the surface to be pressed has been covered.
If, in the process of making any garment, some of the pressing must be done on the right side, the material should be carefully covered so that the iron will not touch it, as it usually leaves a slight polish. Heat will occasionally change the color of a material, more especially silk; for that reason it is wise to test the effect first on a small sample. Generally in this case the use of a cool iron will obviate the difficulty and press the material satisfactorily.

Silk should be pressed as little as possible, as heat takes the life from it; it requires no preliminary sponging or shrinking. To press the necessary seams and hems in silk they should be drawn with as much tension as possible over the surface of a not-too-hot iron. For pressing velvet—except panne and mirror velvet—a special kind of board is used, the surface of which is covered with small, flexible wire points. The pile of the velvet is pressed into these points by the use of an ordinary iron, the wrinkles are removed, and the velvet is made to look like new. Mirror velvet may be made from ordinary velvet by pressing. A damp cloth should be used on the right side of the velvet and the iron should follow the nap.

V. Cutting

There are several general rules to be observed in cutting. Most materials with a nap must be cut so as to have the nap run down. Ordinary velvet and corduroy are, however, generally exceptions to this rule. If the richest effect possible is desired, the velvet can be made with the pile running up. The objection to this is that as the pile is standing up it catches the dust easily and is difficult to keep clean. Panne velvet should have its pile running down. Many materials which have no nap, such as henrietta and cashmere, show a difference in color if the pattern is not laid on so that the material all runs in one direction. A test for difference in color can easily be made by putting the two cut ends of the material together and holding them up. In that way the top and the bottom of the material
are side by side, and it is easy to determine whether they catch and reflect the light in the same way.

For the inexperienced it is always a good plan to cut all patterns first in inexpensive material, such as cambric, unbleached muslin, or calico, and have them tested and fitted.

In cutting, the two corresponding pieces or sides of any garment should be cut together; that is, two fronts of a shirt-waist or two sleeves, for otherwise two pieces may be cut for the same side. There are occasional exceptions to this, as, for instance, when the amount of material is limited and by cutting the pieces singly they may be more economically placed and material saved, or when the material has a decided up and down, because of nap or pattern, and must be cut separately to look and wear well. It is, in general, more economical if, in placing a pattern for cutting, its wider sections are placed at the cut end of the material. For instance, with a shirt-waist pattern the fronts are usually placed first, with the bottom of the pattern at the cut end of the material. This gives opportunity, if there is no up and down, to slide the second piece of the pattern by the first and so save material. A similar plan may be adopted satisfactorily in cutting skirts.

VI. MARKING

In cutting a garment from any pattern the garment should be carefully marked, wherever necessary, with a tracing-wheel, tailor's chalk, or tailor basting. The lines to be marked depend, of course, on the kind of garment. Seam-lines should always be indicated as a guide in basting for fitting, and such lines as the neck, armseye, waist, hip, and hem, which are needed not only for a guide in basting but for the actual making.

(i) The Tracing-Wheel will mark two thicknesses at once and is, for that reason, especially convenient. It cannot, however, be used on all materials. For instance, in soft fabrics and those with fancy surfaces the markings will not show.
(2) *Tailor's chalk* marks only one surface at a time, and there is always danger of its being erased during the bast- ing, etc.

(3) *Tailor basting* is in general a most satisfactory method of marking. It may be done through two thicknesses; it stays in place as long as it is needed and does not injure any material. It requires, however, more time than either of the two other ways. When the cutting is done the seam-lines are frequently marked with tailor's chalk, which serves as a guide for the tailor basting. In making this basting a long double thread is needed. The sewing is done through both thicknesses, using first a short, then a long stitch. The thread is not pulled through tightly, as in the regular basting, but each long stitch is loose enough to form a loop. After the basting is finished the two pieces of material are carefully pulled apart as far as the loops will allow, and the stitches which hold them together are cut between the two layers of material. If this is correctly done there will be stitches enough on each piece of material to indicate the line perfectly.

**VII. FITTING**

Generally only one side—the right—is fitted, either for waist or skirt, and the other side is altered to correspond. There are exceptions to this as to every rule. If, for in- stance, the right shoulder or hip differs greatly from the left it may be necessary to fit the entire garment. The alterations should not be so great, however, as to accentuate the differences in the two sides.

**VIII. TAKING MEASURES**

The taking of measures is a very important preliminary to dressmaking—for drafting, for modelling, or for the use of commercial patterns. Individual measures are neces- sary in constructing the drafts and in modelling. They are also necessary in testing the commercial patterns, which are all made to regulation measures and may need slight adjusting. Measures must be accurate, otherwise all the
patterns will be wrong, and, as they are rather difficult to take because of the varying outline of the figure, it is necessary to prove them by repetition. Much subsequent time and labor are saved in the testing and fitting of patterns if this is done. Measures should always be taken over the dress. Before taking the measures a band or tape should be closely pinned about the waist at the normal waist line. The tape should be a very little lower in front than in the back to give a good line. All the lengthwise waist measures are taken to the lower edge of this tape, which is resting on the waist line.

In taking measures a regular order should be maintained and a record of the measures kept in a book. It is usual to take (a) the waist measure first, then (b) the sleeve and (c) the skirt. In measuring, as in fitting, all the work should be done on the right side.

I. Waist Measures

(A) Length Measures

(1) Length of Back.—This is taken from the little bone at the base of the neck straight down to the lower edge of the waistband.

(2) Length of Front.—This is taken from the centre of the hollow at the base of the neck straight down to the lower edge of the waistband—an easy—that is, fairly loose—measure.

(3) Depth of Dart.—This measure is required in all the fitted garments but is not used in the shirt-waist. It is taken from the base of the neck at the centre front in a slanting line down to the point of the bust. It averages 8 to 9 inches.

(4) Length of Underarm.—It is very easy to have this measure too long or too short. One simple way of preventing this is to fold the tape-measure over a fairly long lead-pencil, which is then placed under the arm. The number of inches from the top of the pencil to the lower edge of the waistband in a straight line will give the correct measure. In taking this measure the shoulder must be kept in a natural position and the arm held down close to the figure. The tendency is to raise both shoulder and arm. In the normal figure the height of underarm equals one-half the length of back. In shirt-waist drafting this measure—one-half the length of back—may be used with safety, as the armseye is always made large,
Taking measures
(B) Width Measures

(1) Width of Back.—This is taken one-quarter of the distance down, between the neck and waist, across the back from armseye to armseye. It is an important measure, especially in the drafting, as other measures are based on it. It must be neither too wide nor too narrow. On its correctness depends the fit of the entire waist. It is difficult to take, as the armseye line is rather intangible. No dependence can be placed on that line in the waist worn when the measure is taken, as armseyes vary greatly in shape and size. A tape placed around the armseye may assist in determining it accurately. This should extend in a fairly straight line from the top of the shoulder down and under the arm. Another method of determining the armseye is to place the thumb close up under the arm and let the fingers extend upward and mark the armseye line.

(2) Width of Front.—This is taken 1½" or 2" below the hollow at the base of the neck, across the widest part of the chest, from armseye to armseye. This measure should not be too wide; it may also be guided by the tape around the armseye.

(3) Bust.—In taking this measure it is necessary to stand behind the person who is being measured. It should be an easy measure over the fullest part of the bust, rather high under the arms and straight across the back. For a very thin person it is often wise to add an extra inch.

(4) Waist.—This measure may be taken along practically the same line as that used for guiding the length measures. It should, however, be a perfectly straight line, without any drop at the front, and a close measure. It will do for both waist and skirt.

(C) Neck or Collar Measures

Five measures should be taken:

(1) Base of Neck.—This should be a close measure, as it is used both for the neck of the waist and for the bottom line of the collar. If there is too large an opening at the neck of a waist it is almost impossible to adjust a good collar. If the neck is small it can easily be cut out.

(2) Top of Neck.—This should be a close measure.

(3) Height at Back.—This is taken from above the bone at the base of the neck to the height required.

(4) Height at Front.—This is taken from the hollow at the base of the neck to the height required.
(5) **Height at Side.**—This is taken just back of the ear. It is measured from the base of the neck to the height required. It should not be more than \( \frac{1}{4} \)" or \( \frac{3}{8} \)" higher than the back.

(D) **Armseye**

This is taken at the joining of the arm and body, under the arm and up over the shoulder-bone, making a good curve in front and an almost straight line at the back. This also should be a fairly close measure.

**II. Sleeve Measures**

Four measures should be taken:

(1) **Length Inside.**—This is taken along the inside of the arm, from the little muscle where the arm joins the body to the bend of the elbow, and to the wrist at the base of the thumb.

(2) **Length Outside.**—Shoulder to elbow; elbow to wrist. This is taken along the outside of the arm from the place where the width-of-back measure ended to the point of the elbow (with the elbow bent so that the hand will rest on the chest); from that same point to the wrist ending just beyond the bone at the wrist.

(3) **Size at Elbow.**—The tape-measure is placed in the bend of the elbow; the elbow is then bent and the measure taken rather closely over the point.

(4) **Size at Hand.**—This measure is taken very closely over the knuckles with the thumb held in to the palm and should be the smallest through which the hand can be passed.

**III. Skirt Measures**

(1) **Waist.**—This measure has already been taken.

(2) **Hip.**—Two hip measures are necessary; the first is taken over the fullest part of the hip, usually about 6" below the waist; the other is taken over the fullest part of the thigh, about 10" below the waist. These two should be parallel. The second measure is chiefly used in testing the patterns and is usually from 4" to 6" larger than that taken at the 6" point. The tape-measure should be placed about the hips and the thigh in a perfectly straight line, parallel to the floor, and free measures taken.

(3) **First Depth of Dart.**—This is taken from the waist line to the first hip line, directly over the hip.

(4) **Second Depth of Dart.**—This is taken from the waist line to the second hip line, directly over the hip.
(5) Length of Front.—This is taken from the waist line to the floor, exactly at the centre front.

(6) Length of Side.—This is taken from the waist line to the floor over the hip.

(7) Length of Back.—This is taken from the waist line to the floor, exactly at the centre back.

It is most important to take the last three measures to the floor, no matter what the desired finished length of the skirt may be, and to have the tape-measure fall in a perfectly straight line.

In order to simplify the work in dressmaking, which is given in the succeeding chapters, a definite division has been made between the making of patterns and the making of garments.

In Chapters V, VI, and VII all the effort is directed toward securing satisfactory patterns—satisfactory not only from the point of view of fit but, as far as possible, from that of design as well. The work deals not only with the various methods of making the patterns but also with their perfecting by fitting, testing, and altering. It includes directions for the drafting of patterns to individual measures and their fitting, the testing and altering of commercial patterns, and, based on experience in these first two methods and aided by a knowledge of design, the making of more elaborate patterns in paper and on the dress-form.

In Chapters VIII, IX, and X all the work is directed toward the making of the dress itself. Because of the limitless variety of design and finish possible in the making of a garment and the constant change demanded by fashion, it is possible to give in this section only general rules, which must be adapted by the worker to the requirements of specific problems as they present themselves from time to time. The work deals with the various steps involved in the method of procedure: that is, the cutting, which includes the correct placing of the pattern on the material and the various methods of tracing and marking the material; the basting; the fitting, which includes altering and rebasting; and the general finishings, which include the foundation embroidery stitches.

As has already been said, in making any garment time
and effort should be saved as far as possible. To do this, before beginning work all required materials and tools should be collected and conveniently placed and a general method of procedure decided upon. In order to secure satisfactory results the work must be carefully planned and the plan followed step by step, with no details omitted. "Short cuts" should be avoided by all except the experienced.