Chapter Five

PROFESSIONAL DETAILS OF MILLINERY

Cutting materials for hats differs from cutting materials for clothes. Here you will be using materials almost always on the bias. It is easy enough to establish a bias when you can see the selvage. It is harder when you are working with scraps or small pieces of material. Look at the weave. After you recognize the straight of the goods, you will be able to find your bias.

When material is cut on bias grain it is the most pliable. A bias strip of fabric will stretch in width as well as length. It is this elastic quality that makes bias so desirable to use in millinery work. When covering a frame, bias is easier to smooth on; in making a crown, bias will stretch to fit the headsize without giving the hat a tight and uncomfortable feeling.

To cut material on the “bias,” fold the straight cut end (or crosswise thread) to lie parallel with the selvage (or lengthwise thread). Mark the fold (running diagonally at a 45° angle) with pins or chalk or press a light crease. It is important to do this because it can mean the difference between a “homemade hat” and a “hand-made creation.” Don’t try to cover a frame unless you know what “bias” means!

When you are draping a bias cut, you are “working with the material,” and will therefore get a clean, professional effect.

Bias bands and tubings may be shaped by steam-pressing.

One of the few exceptions to “cutting on the bias” is the basic 6-section crown. You can cut this on the straight of the goods because the curved upper half of the pattern will automatically run on the bias.
You may also cover your wire with a circled banding of felt or straw; or you may want to turn back the edge of the brim, giving in effect a hem. In this case your wire would not be sewed on the edge, but would be sewed on the underside, as far back from the edge as the width you want for your hem. Sew the wire first, catching your stitch only on the underside of the brim, then turn back the straw or felt over the wire and sew, shaping as you sew. Steam-press the edge to finish.

HOW TO MAKE A LINING

Make linings for all frame hats. Taffeta is the ideal material, and it doesn’t have to be new taffeta—you can utilize old taffeta slips, dresses, blouses. Any other material falls down inside your crown; taffeta has the necessary body to keep it standing up.

Because your head is round and because your head fits up into your hat, your lining should either be blocked round or cut, sewed and blocked to shape.

Six-Section Crown Lining: Use the 6-section crown pattern (Foundation Crown Pattern No. 1) for hat linings when the crown is deep.

After cutting out and sewing the 6 sections together, put lining on the block, seam sides up. Now stretch the material over the block, pinning the seams open. Steam-press each seam separately; take out pins and repin, stretching material a little more while it is damp. The material will conform to the block, and the result is truly professional.

An "outside" 6-section crown is blocked in this same way.

When the lining dries, take it off the block and fit it into the hat.

Pin it all around at the juncture of crown and brim. Cut off excess lining just inside the edge and sew. You do not turn the edge under, as headsize ribbon goes over the raw edge to finish it. The stitch that holds the lining can be rather large.

This lining will fit in almost any hat, but if your hat is very shallow, you can make an easier lining.

Lining for Shallow Hat: Cut your lining after Foundation Crown No. 2, pin (use lots of pins!) and stretch this piece of material to your block. Steam-press and let dry. Again, the secret is to stretch while damp!

Fit the lining into the hat, then trim away any excess material. To finish, cover the raw edge with grosgrain.

Blocked linings may be purchased at any millinery supply house. If you find you don't like to make linings, you might lay in a supply of these, even though they are not as nice as the ones you can make.

HOW TO SEW IN A HEADSIZE RIBBON

(A) In flexible felts or straws, sew your headsize ribbon into your hat with a running stitch, using a large stitch under, and a very small stitch on top of the ribbon. The small one is almost no stitch at all
and can be hidden in the grain of the ribbon. This is called a hidden stitch.

The circled ribbon is placed in the crown at the juncture of brim and crown, and the stitch runs along this juncture. Ribbon is not sewed on both edges. Be careful not to let the stitch show on the top side of your hat.

Handle your felt or straw carefully while sewing in the headsize. As you sew, you will have to bend parts of the hat, but do it so gently that the line of the hat will not be broken or lost.

(B) For Frame Hats: In making a frame hat, you will need to make and sew in a lining before putting in your headsize. Because the crown is stiff, it is a little harder to sew in the headsize.

crowns out of materials. The term “blocked hats,” however, applies primarily to felts and straws.

Blocking will either shrink or stretch, and you use a block the same size as your head so that your hat will be your size when it is completed. A nonheadsize blocked hat is usually made on a 22-inch block. This will fit average headsizes.

A good preliminary for blocking felts is this: Sprinkle water all over your hood or body — just as you would dampen a blouse that is to be ironed. Roll it up and leave it wrapped up for a few hours. This allows the moisture to penetrate the fibres of the hat and softens the sizing.

Note: Do not cut the crown from the brim until after the crown is blocked.

![Frame hat finished with lining and headsize ribbon.](image)

After sewing and trimming your lining, cover the raw edge with the circled headsize. Use a diagonal or zigzag stitch. On a stiff crown, you will find this easier than the plain running stitch.

**HOW TO BLOCK A HAT**

(A) Blocking Processes Are Used Extensively in Millinery. We have pointed out various instances where blocking is much superior to pressing when making

Work with the whole hat.

(B) Blocking the Crown: Stretch the hat over the block. If you wear a large-sized hat, you will find that the dampened felt will now stretch over your large block.

Steam-press it. Never let the hot iron touch the unprotected felt!

When your crown dries, you will find it to be the exact size and shape of your block, and furthermore, it will stay that way — unless you choose to reblock it.
Blocking the crown of a felt hat. Use hot iron, wet cloth s-te-a-m.

Now suppose you wear a small-sized hat. You may find that the dampened crown is loose on your block. In this case, you will need to steam-press and pull down gently to shrink. Gradually you will find that the felt is shrinking to the size of your block.

As you pull and steam-press, get the feeling of molding with your fingers, just as a sculptor would do. Have your towel wet and keep it that way. Do not iron — but keep the steam going through the fabric by moving the iron over the wet cloth.

Don't be afraid of hurting your felt (or straw) — it was especially processed so that it can be steamed and pulled into shape.

On the other hand, don't pull too hard at any one point. You can pull a hole in it, especially some of the softer felts and the finer straws.

Work gently and unhurriedly. You will learn to let the steam do most of the work.

After you understand the principle of steaming the felt all over evenly, you need not sprinkle your hat beforehand. You can start to work immediately. Keep your towel very wet.

After your crown is blocked, be sure to let it dry thoroughly before taking the hat off the block.

(C) Working with Fancy Blocks: You follow this same procedure when you are working with fancy blocks. A "fancy" is a wooden block that has some style feature carved into the wood itself. For instance, it might have an indented crown or a peaked crown, or a squared-off crown. There are hundreds of different style ideas.

Steam-press your hat over a fancy block, and it will retain the exact size and shape of the block.

These are harder to block than round crowns, but they vary and add style interest to your hat.

Don't stop blocking until every wrinkle is out — they will come out!

If you do not have a fancy block, it is possible to make a substitute, using your wooden round block as a base.

Making Fancy Tips for Hat Blocks: There are lots of ingenious ideas — here are two that my students have used.

Take the corner end of a small stiff box. It should measure about 3½ inches across. Stuff it with tissue and thumbtack it upside down to the front of your block.

Another idea is to take an old electric cord from a discarded iron and coil it
Home made fancy tips and resultant blocked felt crowns. (a) Small box (b) electric cord.

round and round. Fasten it to your block and block your hat over that.

We have experimented with the lids of coffeepots, small paint buckets turned upside down, the inner cardboard core of a roll of toilet paper stuffed with tissue and cut until the length is about 3½ inches, wooden spools, bottoms of cups or sauce dishes turned upside down over the block, empty powder boxes, baking-powder tins, etc., etc. The variety of small objects that can be used is endless; the problem is to find things that can be attached to the block. If you use anything metal or china, it is hard to keep it in place — under control — while you block. Cardboard gadgets are much better because they can be thumbtacked to the block.

Making Fancy Tips Out of Material: If you are really ambitious, you can make fancy tips out of buckram or cardboard; many professional milliners do this.

Here is a suggestion for making a fancy crown tip out of buckram:

Cut a 3½-inch circle to use as a pattern; lay the pattern on buckram and cut out. Wire the edge of the buckram circle. Take a strip of buckram 2 inches wide and as long as the circumference of the circle (allow for ½-inch lap in back).

Sew this strip to the same wire used in wiring the top section. Use the overcast stitch. After sewing the lap in the back of the "box," wire the bottom edge.

To make buckram stiffer, cover with several coats of shellac. After it is dry,

(a) Cut and wire 3½" circle of buckram. (b) Sew 2" strip of buckram to same wire. (c) Wire bottom of tip after ends are joined.
Ideas for home made fancy tips, made out of buckram and wire and stuffed with tissue paper.

and very stiff, stuff the tip tightly with tissue. You now have a tip which can be tacked to the block and which is strong enough to withstand reasonable pressure of the iron in the blocking process.

This is the simplest kind of tip (a "square" tip can be made just as easily and in the same way). After you have made one of these, work out something a little more intricate. You will get lots of ideas just from looking at hats on the street or in the stores. Pick out the blocked crowns and try to visualize just what kind of an object or shape made that particular kind of style interest. Remember that tips are set on top of the block; therefore they should not be made too large.

Down Brim Block: A "down" brim block can easily be made with cardboard. Determine the size brim you want — make a paper pattern and cut out the head opening. Cut the pattern at the center back and lap the outer edge of the ends.

Take the excess lap out of the pattern and using the pattern, cut 6 or 8 layers of cardboard. Use cardboard about the weight of the kind that comes in laundered shirts.

Sew the ends of each cardboard layer together and then "nest" the layers, one on top of another. Sew the combined layers together, using heavy thread and a strong needle. This will give you a fairly strong surface upon which you can block a felt or straw brim.

Brim Block (a) Cut brim pattern. Take out back section as indicated and sew seam. (b) Make 6 or 8 cardboard layers like pattern. (c) Nest cardboard layers and sew together.
Blocking the Brim: The brims of felts and straws are also blocked. There are many kinds of wooden brim blocks, but they are cumbersome and expensive. Their purchase is not justified unless you are going to make a great many hats all with the same style of brim.

A good substitute is your padded bread board. Of course, you will not be able to block a Breton or a bumper brim on this flat surface, but there are lots of other styles that you will be able to make.

After blocking your crown and letting it dry, you are ready to cut the brim from the crown. Where to cut depends upon whether you want a shallow or a deep crown and whether you want a hat that sits back on your head or one that tilts forward.

Measure your own head, top front to back and from one side to the other, and then transfer these measurements to your crown with a chalked line. Add ½ inch below this line to give yourself a little lee way. Add more if you intend to turn under the edges of the hat in finishing.

Sometimes it is wise to take your crown measurement from an old hat that you have on hand.

I want to stress one point here that holds true throughout your hat making: Block your crown on your block as you will wear the hat! If it goes on the back of the head (this applies also to linings) put your material on the back of the block. If it will be worn forward, block it toward the front of the block.

After your brim is cut from the crown, pin it to your padded bread board. The widest part of your brim should be the front of your brim.

(left) Cutting eyeline for forward crown. (right) Cutting guide for off-the-face crown.

If you are using a pattern, you will lay your brim on the flat board and steam-press, pin and pull until it is approximately the right size. Cut after the pattern, and let dry.

If you are not using a pattern, you can play around with it and possibly make up
Padded Bread Board — Be sure pins are placed at an angle so you can steam-press between them.

Your own style. In this case, pin the brim to the board just as it fell from the crown. Pin all around the edge of brim and also in the center. Stick your pins in at an angle that will allow you to steam-press between them.

The brim should lie flat, more or less round in shape, at the outer edge. The inside edge (where you cut away the crown) should also lie flat and without wrinkles. It should be oval in shape and as large as your crown in size. If it is irregular and smaller than headsize, it can always be trimmed out. If the felt tends to bunch along this inside edge, you will have to stretch, steam-press, and pin until the excess felt has been worked out.

Stretch the felt (when it is soft from the steam) toward the center. Be sure that the outer edge is pinned down securely all around.

Wrinkles at center can be worked out but you will have to steam, stretch, and pin — and then perhaps repeat the process several times.

If this stretching makes the inside oval smaller than your crown, trim it out to fit after the brim has dried on the board.

If you are making a casual hat you will have to establish the eye-line on your crown. (See Eye-line, Chapter I.)

— Don’t lose sight of your center front in either crown or brim.

The brim goes over the crown. Pin the center fronts together and put a couple of tentative pins (you may want to change) on each side.

Seat yourself in front of your mirror and try holding the rest of your brim in different ways. It may be turned up in back or cut away entirely in the rear. Turn one side up and the other down. Try twisting

(a) After crown is blocked, cut eyeline. (b) Brim goes OVER the Crown. Pin in place. (c) Try hat on to check and then sew brim in place. (Over-cast stitch.)
or rolling one end and pin close to the crown. Add a pleat or a tuck to one side or the other. Put in a few pins to hold your "idea" in place.

Get a hand mirror and look at your hat from all angles. It is possible to have a good line in the front and at the same time have a bad side silhouette; or vice versa. If you can't seem to get rid of a bad line — but all the rest of it suits you — perhaps you can cover the bad line with a trim. After you find the placement that you like, pin carefully and then try on again to double-check.

You are now ready to sew. (Trim away any rough or ragged spots in your felt brim at the inner edge.) Use a small, tight overcast stitch, hiding it in the edge of the felt. Stitch firmly, because when you wear the hat, you will probably pull it on by the brim.

If your stitches are small and uniform and if they hardly show, they will form a hand-made detail and need not be covered. But if you feel that your first effort should be shielded from public view, use circled grosgrain ribbon, wide or narrow in width, a piece of narrow felt cut from edge of brim, or a piece of material tubing.

If the crown is too deep, after you have found brim placement (and after brim is sewed in place) trim away excess felt.

The final inside crown edge should be about ¼ inch below the sewing line which connects brim to crown.

SPECIAL TREATMENT FOR OFF-THE-FACE BRIM

Brim can be made larger or smaller than the diagram calls for. If you wish a large brim, enlarge your pattern along the dotted line as suggested. This pattern can be laid on a felt brim (after it is cut from the crown) or it can be used with buckram and then covered with material. (See directions, Chapter XI, for making brims and crowns.) In either case, whether you are working with felt or material, the brim is sewed to the crown in a different way than when you make a "forward" hat.

You will not need an eye-line in your crown. On the contrary, your crown should be symmetrical — cut just alike on both sides — and should be blocked on the back of the block. The crown should sit back of your hairline, letting your hair frame your face. Completed crown measurements for 22-inch headsize should be approximately 11 inches from front to back and 12 inches from side to side.

After you have blocked a felt crown this size and blocked and cut the brim according to the pattern, you are ready to sew the brim to the crown. In the case of material, you would first block and make the 6-section crown out of buckram; then cover it with a blocked 6-section crown made out of material. Your brim would be cut out of buckram (using pattern), wired, and covered with material. It should then be stitched in many rows to make the material conform to the brim. When each piece is completed, you are ready to attach the brim to the crown.
Pin brim across front of hat until slashes at each side are reached.

Working from back of hat, turn brim and pin to crown.

After sewing brim to crown, cover joining with trim.

Bring trim through side slashes, tie bow center back. Tack trim in place.

Off-the-face brim with appliqué trim.

Make a notch at the center front of the brim and make ½-inch slashes on each side, 5 inches from the center front.

This brim goes over your crown (just as the "forward" brim did) but instead of pinning on the top side of the brim, you pin on the underside of the brim, and the brim is set about 1 inch above the edge of the crown. (Of course you match center front of brim to center front of crown.)

Pin the brim 10 inches across the front (until you reach the slash on either side). The brim was pinned 1 inch above the crown edge at the center front; but as you work toward the slash, the brim gets closer to the edge of the crown; at the slash it should be about ½ inch above the edge of the brim.

Now turn the hat around and work on the back of the hat. Bring the brim ends around toward the center back. Reverse the inner edge of the brim at the slash and all the way across the back of the hat. This means that you will be pin-
ning the inner edge of the brim to the edge of the crown — from the top side of the brim.

This is a trick hard to describe (and it takes much longer to tell about it than to do it); but if you succeed, your brim will stand up very nicely in the proper off-the-face manner.

After the brim is pinned, it should be sewed in place, front and back. Use a back-stitch, so that it will hold securely. Leave a ½-inch space unsewed on each side at the slash. Your trim will run through the slash at this point.

To cover the joining of crown and brim you may use a narrow strip of felt, grosgrain ribbon, or a piece of material tubing. The length of this piece of trim should be long enough to go around the head, plus an allowance (if you are going to tie and cross the ends — or if you make a looped bow at the joining). Width of trim should be 3/8 to 5/8 inch.

Match the middle of the trim to the center front of the brim and pin it across the raw edge of the brim. At the slashes on each side, draw the ribbon through to the other side of the brim. Twist the trim as you bring it through the opening so that it covers the raw edge of the brim.

Make a join at the center back; tie the ends or make a bow.

The trim should then be tacked in place and the pins removed.

Note: If you start the ribbon at the center back, you can finish with the bow at the center front.

This hat with its headsize crown and large brim needs very little in the way of trim — the band and bow are sufficient. However, if you want to be a little spectacular and make the hat part of a costume, you can add an appliqué trim.

Make cutouts of colored felt and sew these across the front of the brim as suggested in the illustration on page 38.

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(a) To enlarge pattern, draw a rectangle 7" x 13". Rule off rectangle in one-inch squares. Draw outline, following the lines of this pattern, which are set in one-half inch squares. (b) Lay completed pattern on another large piece of paper, folded. Lay line marked "fold" on the fold of this second piece of paper. (c) This gives you a complete brim pattern. Mark around pattern on buckram and cut. Wire "dotted edge" of buckram.

ONE-HALF OFF-THE-FACE Brim Pattern (to be enlarged)