



PERSONAL BASIC PATTERN MAKING BLOCKS

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This e-book combines and revises sections from 4 posts :

Introduction on favourite pattern altering books	May 2013
Pattern making - the formal route	May 2011
Pattern making - easier fitting shells	June 2011
Aids to well fitting blocks	April 2012

Pattern making introduction

So, you know what style you want and where your wardrobe gaps are – how about making your own pattern ?

I keep going on about starting from well fitting basic pattern blocks. But how do you get those well fitting basic blocks in the first place.

Pattern making textbooks describe two very different processes.

1. pattern **drafting** – draw out basic pattern blocks from scratch, based on personal or standard size measurements, using nothing more than paper, pencil, simple rulers.
2. pattern **altering** – change basic/ master patterns/ blocks to make new styles (also called ‘developing’ the pattern).

You can do the second process, of pattern altering to make your own design, using any starting point pattern. You haven’t got to start by drafting your own blocks from scratch.

This e-book is about the many ways of getting basic well fitting basic blocks to use as a starting point for personal pattern making.

There are several types of method :

- Draft your own basic blocks from measurements. What's taught in pattern making textbooks. Good if you enjoy the maths and geometry involved, but not necessary. (See first section here, starting on page 3.)
- Use a commercial simplified method for getting well fitting basic blocks, such as a special ruler or multi-size pattern, or pattern making software. (See second section here, page 11.)
- Fit a muslin fitting shell pattern to your body (page 20).
- Drape or wrap various materials directly on your body (page 24).

Those are the focus of this e-book.

But it isn’t actually necessary to start your pattern making from paper patterns or basic blocks, so there are brief comments on other methods (page 25).

This e-book doesn’t give step-by-step instructions for making the blocks. It’s about the different methods available.

Pattern Drafting – the formal route

Three main groups of people use pattern making skills, and they have very different needs :

- RTW designers and pattern makers use standard body shapes and sizes, and may want the quickest way of making patterns. From designers of huge production runs for superstores to studio designers of small runs for boutiques. I put them together here because none of them need be concerned about the shape of specific individuals.

- professional dressmakers and costume makers : make one-off versions of any style for any body shape, hopefully with minimum effort. The most challenging group of needs.

- amateur dressmakers : work with one person or a small group of people. And we can choose to work fast or slow, simple or complex, good enough or perfect, depending on what we enjoy.

This e-book is for the third group. I'm commenting as a hobby dressmaker who only has to fit herself. Custom dressmakers have very different priorities.

The “draft a fitting shell, design by altering that” approach is the way fashion designers and custom dressmakers are taught the basic principles of pattern making. But underlying these, the general aims are to :

- get a good fit,

- make a garment pattern for the style you want.

And you can often achieve these more easily by other methods.

So what's done in practice may be rather different.

I'm going to talk about the ‘first principles’ methods in this section. But not to worry if you find yourself grimacing and saying “I don't want to do that”. There are easier methods, starting on page 11.

Note on terms : people use the words ‘block’ and ‘sloper’ with many different meanings. So I don't use the word ‘sloper’. I'm using these meanings :

‘fitting shell’ : a basic closely fitting pattern. Follows the shape of the person it's for, with no design features. Little movement ease, so not usable directly as a garment pattern.

‘block’ : basic starting pattern for a type of garment, with the usual ease and style elements for this. Such as a simple fitted blouse or casual jacket.

I'll also mention ‘primary’ blocks :

fitted bodice (down to waist), **sleeve**, **skirt**, **pants**.

These are the most basic blocks, from which other styles can be ‘developed’.

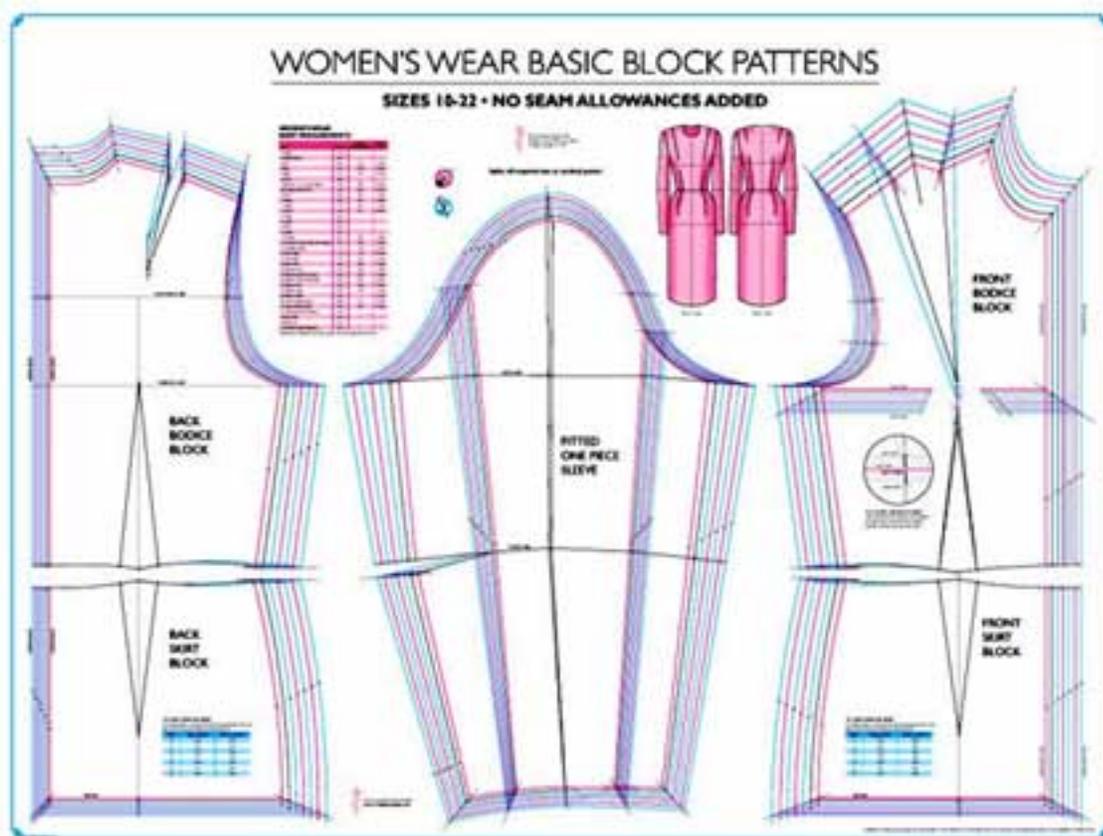
‘Secondary’ blocks are ones which can be derived from the ‘primary’ blocks, such as blocks for raglan or kimono sleeves, casual-dartless styles, sheath dresses, jackets and coats.

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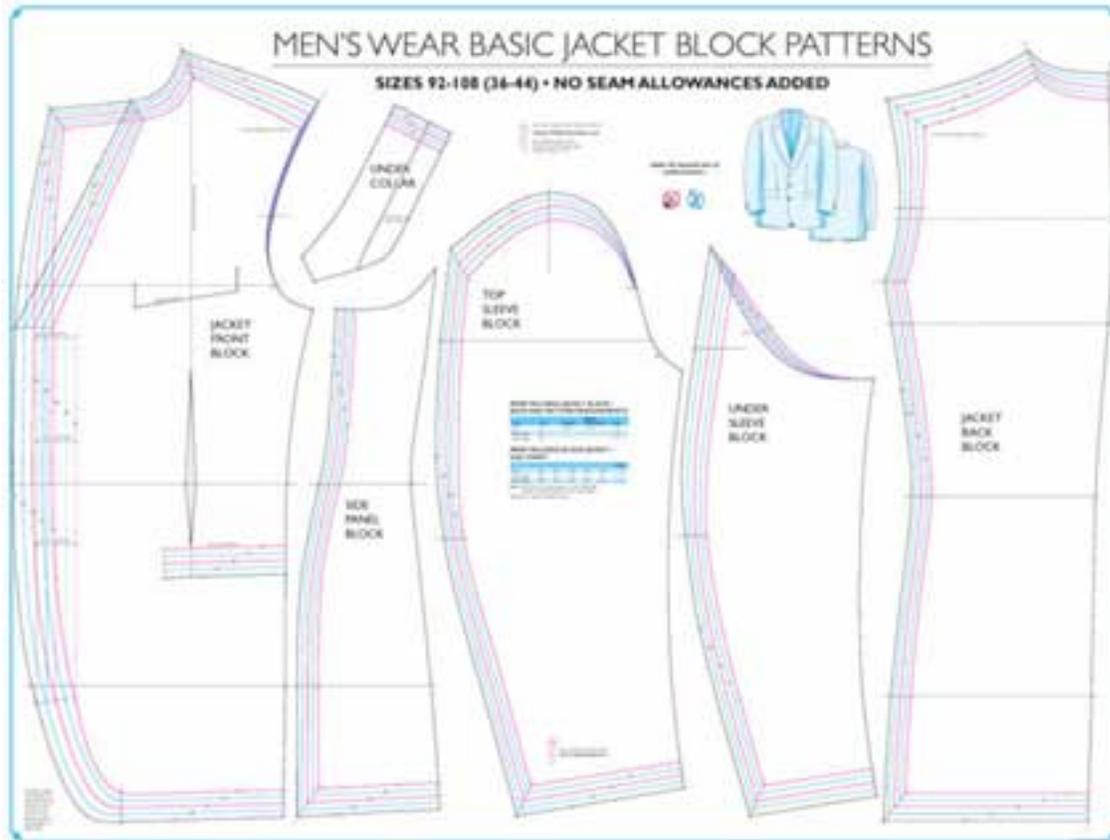
Ready To Wear standard fitting shells and blocks

RTW designers make patterns based on a generic industry/ company standard body shape. Though there isn't one industry standard. Different companies use different ones. So we find some RTW companies fit us better than others, and some use more flattering size numbers.

Shoben Fashion Media publish full size blocks for use in design schools (sources in [UK](#), [US](#)). Here's their block for a women's dress (Big4 pattern sizes 12 – 24, underarm ease about 4 inches/ 10 cm) :



And here is their men's jacket :



They also publish women's blocks for jacket, pants, casual top, stretch body.

Notice they publish blocks for a few basic garment types, with different amounts of ease and common style elements. They don't expect students to start their designs from the most basic fitting shell. Though they do expect students to devise more complex blocks for themselves, such as a 'torso block' for dress/ blouse without waist seam. I've found myself working this way too, making some basic types of garment that fit well. Then, for very simple garments, all you have to do is change style elements on the basic block.

Here's an [interesting story](#) and advice from someone who taught herself how to make patterns and now sells pdf download patterns on-line.

The big pattern companies also use slightly different basic fitting shells. oop book 'Every Sewer's Guide to the Perfect Fit' by Morris and McCann compares them. And there are designers within the large pattern companies who use their own idea of an average body shape, like Sandra Betzina and Connie Crawford. Independent pattern companies have their own body shapes too, presumably related to the shape of the designer. So if we use independent patterns, we learn which companies have patterns which fit us easily with small changes, and which ones don't.

Pattern making books

If we use the formal approach to make clothes for individuals, we need to learn both drafting a fitting shell from measurements, and then making styles from that.

There are books for professional pattern makers and designers. These are just some of the many available. It's a good idea to read the comments at Amazon and Pattern Review. None of the books get 100% approval, especially from beginners.

Winifred Aldrich : [Metric Pattern Cutting](#).

Connie Amaden-Crawford : [Patternmaking made easy, 3rd edtn.](#).

[Review](#) by Kathleen Fasanella.

Helen Armstrong : [Pattern making for fashion design](#)

Kenneth King : [e-books on CD](#) Separate CDs on each 'moulage' for bodice, sleeve, and pants, and for making other styles from them.

I haven't seen any of these, which come at college textbook prices.

All of these sources are 'bibles'. They try to cover all possible styles, which you pick and choose from to make your own design.

I prefer a 'project based' style of learning. For this there's Lori Knowles' 'Practical Guide to Pattern Making' for [women](#) and for [menswear](#). I have the one on women's styles, and find it's my main go-to book on pattern making.

There are also books for amateurs who want a relatively painless introduction. Some are listed in my post on [my favourite books on pattern drafting](#)

We all have different thinking and learning styles, so my choices won't suit everyone. There's a strand at Stitchers Guild on [learning pattern making](#), which suggests other possibilities.

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[Simple bra pattern](#)

[Developed from the bodice block, so has the same limitations.]

[Skirt](#)

[Doesn't allow for different measurements front and back.]

[Conversion to princess line dress](#)

[Loose fit casual dartless top](#)

[Trousers/ pants](#)

[Doesn't include crotch length. Or allowing for the different effects waist-to-crotch height, flat/ large butt or abdomen, deep torso, sway front/ back have on the pattern needed.]

If you like to watch video demos instead of working from written materials, another on-line source for pattern drafting is [eSewing Workshop](#) (not free).

They have several free sample videos, so you can test if you like their approach. I haven't tried their pattern making classes. Their instructions on altering the basic muslin to refine the fit are part of their sewing lessons.

All pattern drafting methods using personal measurements claim to give a well fitting personal block. But they all have limitations with what body features they fit well, depending on what measurements they include and how they use them. As do the software methods based on them. They would have to be horrifically complicated to include all 88 fitting topics in the [Liechty et al Fitting and Pattern Alteration](#) book.

These detailed personal adjustments really are made more easily using a muslin (see page 22).

As all the pattern drafting methods are different, it's likely that some drafting methods are more successful with some body shapes than others. Sadly no one has done an analysis of that !

And I've given up on the search for one that fits me well first go on the basis of measurements, and only needs small adjustments to get a good fit.

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Simplified drafting

If you'd like to start your personal pattern drafting with something simpler using fewer measurements, there are several books with very simple instructions for drafting a personal fit. They can do this because they use the modern 'casual' or 'dartless' block, which at its simplest has :

- no darts.
- front and back patterns the same except for the neck line.
- as the front and back pattern armholes are the same, the sleeve cap is symmetrical.

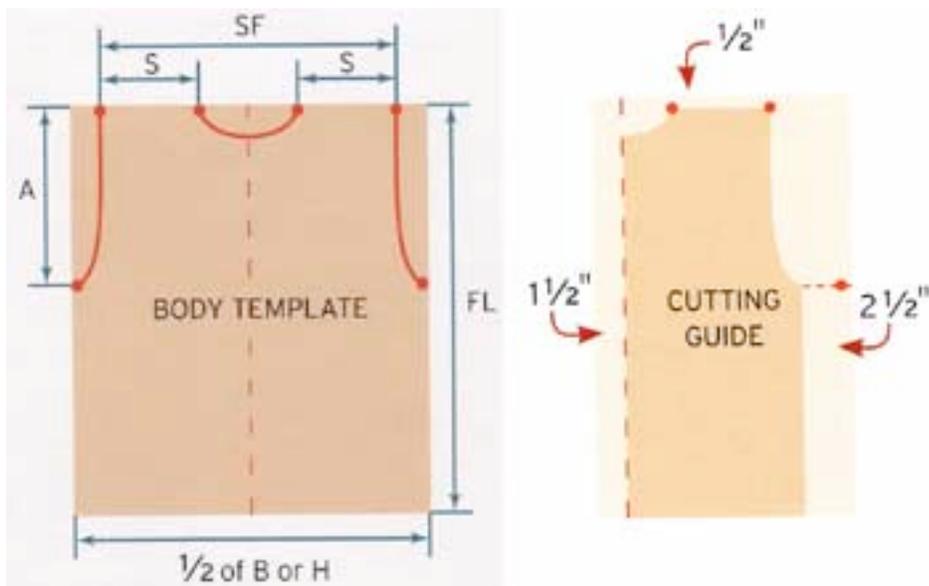
(See [my post on the casual/ dartless block.](#))

Much easier and cheaper shape to manufacture. And much easier to make a basic pattern for.

Simplest of all is '[Sew What ! – Fleece](#)' by Jessop and Sekora.

Simple patterns and simple sewing instructions for near beginners.

They use 7 measurements to draw their 'body template'. Then they add extra width to front opening, shoulders and side seams, to make tops and jackets. Easy pull-on pants from 5 measures and a similar approach. Book leads you through a sequence of projects so you learn both simple pattern making and sewing. All in fleece, so no need to neaten edges and prevent fraying.



Sew What ! Fleece pp.76-7

There's a similar book for skirts, [Sew What ! Skirts.](#)

For a less easy starting point, there's Cal Patch's [Design-it-yourself Clothes](#). This simplifies block making and pattern altering. Few darts, so not for large cup sizes. Problem : the instructions are mainly in paragraphs of words with few illustrations. Not good for a visual person. Also the focus is on pattern making. The minimal sewing instructions are not for beginners.

She uses 24 measurements in all. For a wide range of clothes : skirt, tee, shirt/ light jacket, dress, pants. Modern styles, plus instructions for pattern alterations.

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The simplest Casual Block doesn't fit me well. I now have my own 'casual block' with personal neckline and shoulder slope, back shoulder darts, and personal armholes and sleeve cap – very different front and back (post on that [here](#)). Many people with a full front look better if they add a bust dart to the casual block. Now I can apply the simple style changes which people suggest for the casual block, to my own version of it.

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Easier fitting shells

So far, this has described the stereotype of what pattern making involves.

But, as [Kathleen Fasanella](#) so passionately and frequently points out, that is just how RTW designers are taught the principles. Not what they actually do. In practice they make things easier for themselves by starting from an existing design which is similar to what they want.

I knew a commercial designer who had pictures of style elements on her studio wall. She'd say – we'll have that body, that collar, that sleeve – and the pattern maker would go off and combine them. This is also how you work if you use some types of pattern making software, such as [Pattern Master Boutique](#).

So it can be much simpler. Understanding first principles is helpful and interesting. And useful in some but not all contexts. But it just isn't always necessary.

After all, the aim of 'pattern making' is to get a well-fitting pattern for the style you want. And you don't have to go through all the drafting processes described so far to get that.

We amateurs are free to make many choices.

We haven't got to start our pattern making from the most basic blocks if we don't want to (see page 25).

And if we do want to, there are easier ways of getting the starter blocks than by drafting them from scratch from measurements (so long as our body shape is not too far from average).

So not to worry if you find the processes described so far are all much too daunting. Happily there are many other possibilities 😊.

You can :

- use simpler methods for measuring and drafting.
- take the measurements and let someone else do the drafting.
- get a fitting shell by fitting a muslin rather than drafting a paper pattern, using no more measurements than you normally take when choosing a pattern size.

All these simplifications make assumptions. Especially about the measurements needed.

Some of these methods make very simplified patterns.

All of them include some wearing ease. So they make assumptions about the clothes you want to make.

Many people, especially custom dressmakers, like to make a fitting shell which is a 'second skin'. Enough ease to breathe, but no assumptions about how loose the garments made from it should be, how much stretch there will be in the fabric used, or how easy it should be to make various movements.

If you want a 'second skin' you will have to use a drafting method with no allowance for ease. Or do draping (page 24). Not one of these easy methods.

You measure, someone else makes the shape : physical tools

I've tried several physical methods for making a basic starting point pattern from your own measurements.

These are paper-and-pencil easy 'personal fit' methods. Allow for a limited number of measurements. Some of them involve drawing around a plastic template or ruler, some involve tracing over a special multi-size pattern.

All these tools are methods for drafting a basic personal block. You then have to use the usual pattern altering methods to make other styles from the block. The tools don't help directly with that. I think the publicity for some of these physical products implies that all the pattern designing and altering is done for you automatically too, but it isn't.

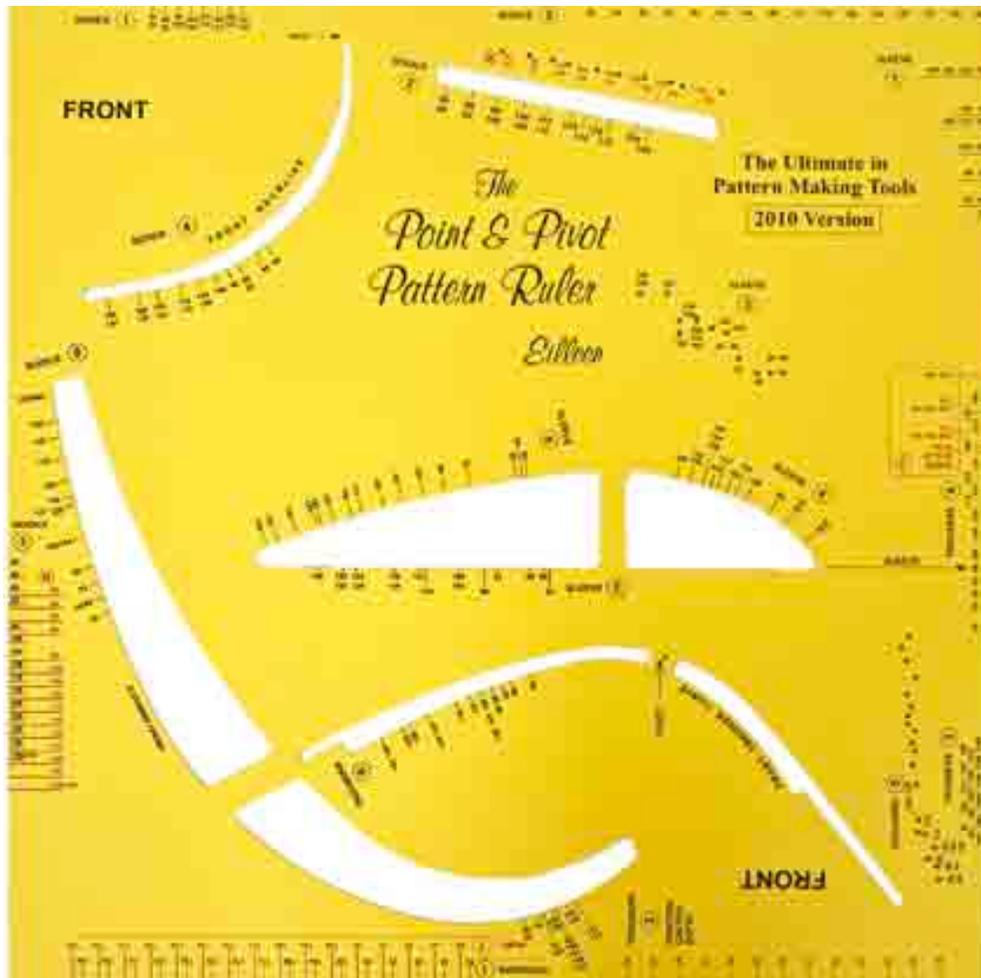
Plastic templates

[Bonfit Patterns](#) use plastic slot-together templates to get different size bodies (photos in [my review](#)). For top, skirt, pants. Probably better if you don't need an FBA. I think the Bonfit book about pattern making which is with my old kit is poor. Small dim print and few illustrations.

Special rulers

There are some block drafting rulers which look interesting. But I haven't tried them, as when I found them I already knew they don't include all the measurements I personally need for a good fit.

The [Point and Pivot Pattern Ruler](#) is from Eilleen in South Africa.



This uses personal measurements for bust, bust point and cup size, waist, hip, waist length. This video shows [how to draft a bodice](#).

There are several similar rulers from Australia :

[DKEMEL ruler](#)

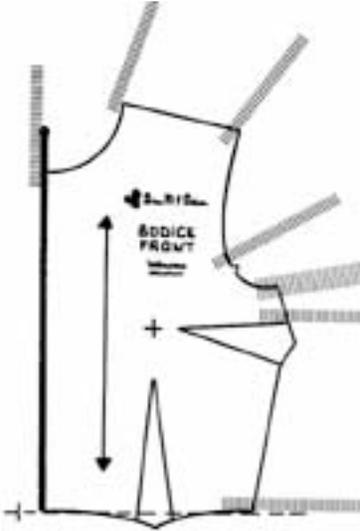
[Pattern Drafter](#)

[Sitam square](#)

Tracing multi-size patterns

The [Sure-Fit Designs system](#) is a join-the-dots tracing method. She claims it can be used for any size body.

Bodice, skirt, pants, shirt (casual dartless block).



The Sure-Fit dress kit allows for bust, cup size, bust point position, waist, waist length, shoulder and arm length, high hip and hips.

For people with a longer back crotch measure, the Sure-Fit pants don't discriminate between those who need more vertical length and more angle, to accommodate a large rear, compared to people who need more horizontal crotch extensions, to accommodate a deep torso (see my note on [pants wedges](#)).

There are many helpful videos about improving the fit, at the [SFD Learning Center](#). These apply to fitting any personal blocks, not just the SFD derived ones.

Sure-Fit calls the basic pattern your 'body blueprint'. You then use standard pattern making methods to get other styles. I think the very visual Sure-Fit booklets are good. And the Sure-Fit instructions can be used to make new styles whatever your source of basic blocks.

For me personally, the Sure-Fit bodice patterns don't get any closer to fitting me than any other source of a basic top. And the skirt and pants have so little relation to me they're not a good starting point for getting a good fit. But many people, who are closer to average in shape than I am, rave about the quality of fit they get from this system.

With the re-issue of Sure-Fit there has been a lot of interest, see [Stitchers Guild discussion thread](#).

In the [FitNice System](#) you trace very simple basic shapes for casual-block knit top and elastic waist pants. Many simple ideas for pattern alterations.

Up to finished measurement at bust level of 48-1/2 inches/ 123 cm.

The conversion for wovens doesn't work well for my body shape, as the simplest casual block isn't good on me.

The [Lutterloh System](#) only allows for bust and hip measurements. When I was trying these methods I already knew that was not enough for me.

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Sadly, none of these physical tools include all my challenges in getting forward neckline, sloping shoulders, high round back, forward armhole, etc. to fit. I need to do those fit alterations myself.

But you only have to make alterations once on the basic pattern. Then all patterns you make from your personal basic pattern will include those changes ready made.

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You measure, someone else makes the pattern : software

What if you want a basic block which allows for more of your personal measurements ?

The idea of pattern making software is that you put in your measurements, and it produces the patterns for you. All the software brands use different measurements and different ways of calculating the patterns.

There are 2 steps in using software.

You put in your measurements, and refine the fit if necessary.

Then you tell the software what style elements you want, and the software produces the pattern to your measurements.

So, unlike the physical tools, software does do all the pattern making for you.

In [Pattern Master Boutique](#) you enter your measurements and test fit a set of basic fitting shell patterns : bodice, skirt, pants, and sheath dress. If the fit isn't right, you enter slightly changed measurements, print out another pattern, try that, and so on. Once you've got the fitting shell right, then you can choose from a huge variety of style elements to make your own designs.

Express Fit - Required	Custom Fit - Optional
Chest Circumference: <input type="text" value="38"/>	Center Front Length: <input type="text" value="15"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Back Shoulder Width: <input type="text" value="15.5"/>	Front Shoulder Width: <input type="text" value="15"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Neck Circumference: <input type="text" value="15"/>	Front Shoulder Slope: <input type="text" value="18"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Natural Waist: <input type="text" value="32"/>	Center Back Length: <input type="text" value="16.5"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hip Circumference: <input type="text" value="37"/>	Back Shoulder Slope: <input type="text" value="17.75"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Crotch Length: <input type="text" value="25"/>	Bicep Circumference: <input type="text" value="11.25"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Height: <input type="text" value="66"/>	Bust Radius: <input type="text" value="4.25"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Weight: <input type="text" value="148"/>	
Bra Cup Size: <input type="text" value="C"/>	

This, and the discontinued Bernina My Label, are the only pattern making software I have personal experience with. I found this sort of fitting process is not one I enjoy at all. And after a lot of struggles I eventually discovered it wasn't possible for me to get a pattern from PMB that worked well for me.

Most pattern making software has a demo version so you can check if you like the method of working. Though you may have to pay out before you can find if it produces a good pattern for your own body shape. The software packages include guidance about improving the fit. Sadly that doesn't necessarily work, if the calculations don't allow for your particular body shape specialities.

It's a good idea to start small and find if using pattern software is a way of working you enjoy. And best to start by expecting 'better' rather than 'ideal' for the fit. It may take several tries to get the best fit you can.

And if the measurements used in particular software don't allow for some of your particular body shape features, such as armhole not half way between shoulder and waist, then you may have to make those fit changes on every pattern that is produced.

These are sources of pattern making software for amateurs :

[Dress Shop](#)

[Garment Designer](#) (link on left in menu along top)

[My Pattern Designer](#)

[Pattern Maker](#)

[Pattern Master](#)

Professional pattern making software is rather different. It doesn't need any focus on individual fit. And there is very much more design freedom. But that does make it much more difficult to learn.

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Although I love using a computer for many purposes, I'm much happier doing real-world pattern making. Rather than working in the virtual reality of pattern software. Many people are the other way round.

Companies providing personalised blocks and patterns

Here are some commercial companies that prepare specific patterns personalised to your measurements.

blocks

[Your Personal Fit](#)

pattern.stringcodes.com

are companies that do the calculating and printing out for you. Claim to send you basic personal fitting shells drafted from measurements you send them.

patterns for specific styles

[Fit Me Patterns](#) claims to do the same for specific styles. Personally fitted versions of some Simplicity and New Look designs. Conventional patterns mailed. There are some interesting pdfs in their Education section.

Wild Ginger, makers of Pattern Master Boutique software, have personalised individual style pattern downloads at e-patterns.com. Click on the shop tab.

<http://leko-mail.net/index.html>

Lekala Patterns ask for 5 circumference measures - no provision for altering neck-waist or waist-hip lengths, which are important for me.

Download patterns, and I suspect the English sewing instructions were prepared by an automated translator. . .

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I haven't tried any of these myself. I only came across them when I already knew that I had been unable to find any pattern drafting method or software that allowed for my specific combination of fitting needs.

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Which measurements do you need ?

It's not that my body is impossible to fit. It's just that none of the drafting or simplified methods include all the measurements needed to allow for all of my special body shape features. (If you don't believe me I'm that different from average without looking odd, see my post on [Getting to know my sizes](#).)

Quite apart from the question of whether it's possible to represent some fit issues by simple measurements. Any method that included enough measurements to represent all possible fitting issues would be so complicated it would be unusable.

All the drafting and simplified methods use a reduced set of measurements which the developers think describe a large majority of people. So they really shouldn't claim their method works for everyone !

As a very rough rule-of-thumb - the fewer personal measurements a method asks for, the fewer special body shape features it will give a good result for.

If it uses fewer measurements, it will be easier to understand and use, yes. But less effective. Many of the easy tools and drafting methods don't deal with different cup sizes or bust point locations. Let alone square/ sloping shoulders, high round back, unusual armholes, large arms, deep torso, large/ flat butt, etc.

Do you know what measurements need to be in a tool for it to give a good result on your body ?

I don't know of any pattern drafting method or simplified aid which includes all the measurements needed to get a good result for all possible body shapes, to cover all 88 fitting issues included in this book :

[Liechty et al Fitting and Pattern Alteration](#) - very expensive, large, and somewhat daunting. A professional tool. But it does have diagrams showing garments with faulty fit. And lists the measurements you need to compensate.

Commercial fitting shell patterns do something similar, but only mention the more common fitting issues.

If your first attempts at using drafting or easy tools aren't successful. And you don't want to be so analytic about finding a tool that will work for you. Then fit directly on your body. Fit a muslin (next page) or drape or wrap (page 24).

Fitting directly on your body - commercial fitting shells

Well, if drafting from my measurements doesn't give me a good fit. And nor does using any of the 'easy' methods. What does work for me ?

Most ways of making a personal fitting shell use many measurements. And it's difficult to take those accurately, especially on yourself. And none of the methods described so far include enough measurements to allow for all possible body shape features.

But there isn't actually any need to do detailed measuring to get a fitting shell – if your size is within the usual pattern ranges. Well, no more than the measuring needed to choose a pattern size. Plus doing the fitting work.

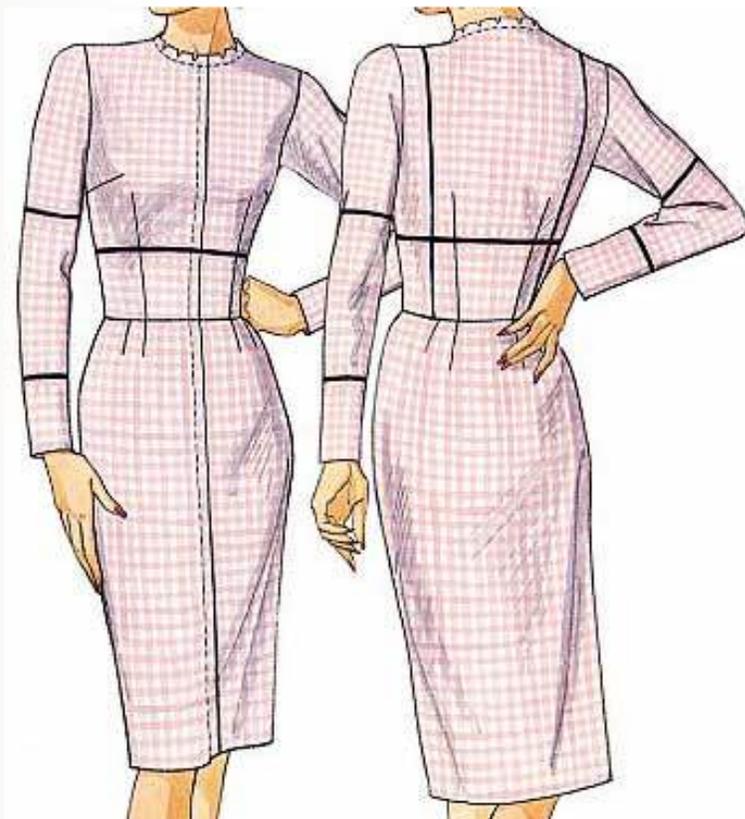
There are several bodice-skirt fitting shell patterns :

[Butterick 5627](#) for sizes 6 to 22.

[Butterick 5628](#) for sizes 16W to 32W.

(Connie Crawford's patterns are a different shape.)

[McCall's 2718](#) (below) This has bodice fronts for 5 cup sizes. Individual patterns for sizes 6 to 22.



[Vogue 1004](#) has individual patterns for sizes 6 to 22.
(Sandra Betzina's patterns are a different shape).

You may get a better fit for your shoulders if you choose the pattern size by high bust/ chest, rather than full bust measurement (see my post on the [FBA](#)).

There's also a pants fitting shell, [Vogue 1003](#), individual patterns for sizes 6 to 22. Probably best for people who don't protrude front or rear (see my post on [pant fit](#)).

You do have to do the fitting work to get a personalised version of the shell pattern. But these patterns come with a great deal of fitting advice.

The instructions in fitting shell patterns tell you how to fit by altering the pattern. But they can also be used for fitting by working directly on your body, by 'reading the wrinkles'. See next page for notes on how to fit.

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Of course, many of us use pattern drafting or the easy block making tools in the hope of avoiding having to do this fitting work!

But if we have more unusual body shape features, direct fitting is the best known option (and see page 24).

Starting from one of these commercial patterns gives you a double payoff :

- You get a personal fitting shell which you can use for your own pattern making.
- You know how your body differs from the average Big 4 pattern. So you know what changes you need to make, and how big, every time you use one of their patterns.

This is the method that works for me. Though none of the fitting shell patterns include all the guidance I need for getting a good fit, especially around the armhole and upper arms (see next page).

And now I have good fit basic personal patterns, they differ in so many ways from the commercial shapes, I find it a huge hassle to do all the changes to a commercial pattern. Easier (I think at the moment !) to start from my own basic blocks and add the style elements from patterns I like.

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Getting a muslin to fit

Brief notes, as fitting is not the focus of this e-book.

Whatever you start your pattern altering from, first get your basic starting point pattern to fit well. The idea is : if the starting point fits well and the pattern changes are made using the right methods, then the garment patterns made from it will fit well too.

Sadly the 'easy' methods of getting well fitting blocks don't give a perfect fit for everyone.

The pattern drafting methods don't work well for everyone either. Before I started trying this myself, I was naive enough to assume all pattern drafting methods are the same, and that they all really do make a perfectly fitting block without any further effort. Sadly, not so.

So to get a good basic pattern we also need to know how to fit.

Make a muslin from the pattern produced by your pattern drafting, or by your personal block making tool. And improve the fit.

There are many ways of working on fit, see my post on [How do you like to do your fitting ?](#)

After years of trying drafting and easy tools, I finally realised the only way of getting good personal blocks that worked for me was to start with a muslin for a basic block (from any source) and do a lot of alterations. Guided by this marvellous fitting book, combined with 'reading the wrinkles'.

Liechty et al. [Fitting and Pattern Alteration. 2nd edtn.](#)

The only fit book I've seen which includes all my fit issues.

Yes, 'doing it the hard way' – but

Hurrah, success at last 😊

If you're very lucky you can find a good professional dressmaker to do this for you.

Like many other aspects of styling, for many of us getting a good fit is a learning process. Not something that can be achieved in an instant. Every step can be an improvement.

For more on this, see my [Index page 2 listing posts on fit.](#)

And my post about [my favourite books on fit](#) (about half way down).

There are on-line fit classes at [Pattern Review](#) and [Craftsy](#), some with personal help.

A good close fit for all styles on all body shapes ?

I can get a good close fit using direct muslin fitting methods on basic blocks with darts, for all the 'primary' blocks : fitted bodice (down to waist), sleeve, skirt, pants. Though I do need to add shoulder darts, and more darts for high hips.

Many people find it easier to get a good fit if they add more seams, or more bust darts. Add shoulder princess seams to the bodice, princess seams down from the main waist darts of pants.

I can't get a good close fit on my body with 'secondary' blocks which have fewer seams.

A cut-on sleeve top has limits. Sewing techniques are minimal for a cut-on sleeve top, so they can be good styles for beginner sewers. But there just aren't enough places where I can adjust the fit to give a good result on my combination of high round back and wide underarms.

Similar problems with a fitted style with waist darts but no waist seam (as in sheath dresses and many fitted jackets). To get a good close fit over my waist and high hips, I either need several princess seams, or a partial waist seam. Or compromise and have a looser fit in some areas.

Other body shapes may have special difficulties too. For example, people with wider waist/ abdomen than hips may need to compromise in how much they narrow a skirt or pants below their mid-section, to get a flattering look.

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Shaping directly on your body, for 'second skin' fitting shells

Draping a fitting shell

If you drape your fitting shell fabric directly on your body, you only need measure enough to cut a fabric rectangle big enough to cover the area. And do the rest by draping.

Connie Crawford has a DVD on this, called the [Custom Bodice DVD](#). There's an interesting sample clip at the site.

There's one [review](#) at Pattern Review from someone who managed to do it on herself. From comments added to this review, it sounds as if this method is good if different parts of you are different sizes. Or if the 2 sides of your body are different shapes. I haven't tried draping myself.

The price of this DVD is above the customs limit here in the UK, so expensive. There is a similar sounding DVD available here, [The Art of Dress Modelling](#) by Lisa Silberberg from Shoben Fashion Media. But that's all I know about it.

There are written instructions and photos about draping a fitting shell in 'Patternmaking for Fashion Designers' [womenswear](#) by Lori Knowles. Looks tricky to do on yourself !

There's a video class at Craftsby – [Fashion draping](#). Not for sewing beginners.

Draping gives you a 'second skin' fitting shell. You need to add ease to most measurements to get a wearable pattern.

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Body wrapping, kitchen cling film

Have fun with a a generous supply of kitchen wrap and a helper to wind it round you.

Here's the original article describing the wrapping method, by [Kathleen Fasanella](#).

Here's a blogger [telling it for real](#) with many photos 😊

This isn't a completely simple method, as you :

- have to judge how to cut into the shell to flatten it,
- need to add movement ease to the basic body shapes, to have a wearable pattern.

There are similar methods using materials like [duct tape 1](#), [duct tape 2](#), [brown paper tape](#), fully shapeable dress forms. I haven't tried them, but I love this tale about [mishaps with a shapeable foam dress form](#).

Pattern making without starting from the most basic blocks

Actually we haven't got to use basic fitting shells at all, to get patterns for our own styles.

Professional pattern makers need to know how to 'develop' other basic garment block shapes from the most basic fitting shells.

(Though these days many professional pattern makers use software design tools, rather than the craft skills of working direct with paper and fabric.)

This e-book is mainly about the 'primary' blocks, the essential starting points from which all other blocks can be developed.

But we hobby sewers haven't got to draft them and use them to make our own styles, unless we enjoy it.

I tried to get a good fit using drafting and easier methods for several years, and I learned a lot about all the methods which aim to help you make the starter set of well fitting personal basic blocks. Those are what this e-book is about.

But there are actually many other methods of pattern making which don't depend on starting from these most basic blocks. Which I've noticed since giving up on trying to do pattern making the 'proper' way.

Method A :

For simple garments which don't require good fit – start with an existing garment and use it as a pattern. Just lay it on the fabric or paper, and draw round it.

A couple of books listed in my post on [my favourite books on pattern altering](#).

Method B :

Start from any pattern which is close to what we want, and alter it (what most professional designers do most of the time).

For example, wardrobe pattern books supply both base pattern and altering instructions. But we can apply the same pattern altering ideas with many other patterns as a starting point. Such as our Tried 'N True patterns.

Again see my post on [my favourite books on pattern altering](#).

Method C :

Get a set of personal blocks for the garment shapes you usually wear, but get them by fitting commercial patterns. Rather than by drafting the most basic 'primary' blocks/ fitting shells and then 'developing' those to make secondary shapes.

Start from a commercial pattern for one of these 'secondary' shapes, like a raglan or kimono top. Get that to fit. And then use that as the base for making other styles. Easiest to start from a pattern with few added style elements.

This is what I find myself doing in practice. I've tried many pattern drafting and easy fitting methods. And find I have to do nearly as much work on getting the result to fit as I do on a commercial pattern. So I might as well start with a commercial pattern and cut out the step of using the special aid.

See my posts on :

[fitting my own casual pullover](#)

[fitting my own raglan top](#).

I also have basic skirt and pants, developed by the same method : starting from a commercial pattern and doing a lot of fiddling with a muslin.

Here's my posts on what's involved in :

[getting a good fit in my waist-hip area](#)

[getting a good fit for my crotch curve](#).

I'm still working on a basic shirt and fitted blouse, but making progress.

I don't wear tees and knit tops, or jeans and leggings, or sheath dresses, or different shapes of skirt, but many people will want basic patterns for them too.

To get a set of good starting point patterns by this route, we don't need help with drafting the primary and secondary blocks. We need help with fit (see page 22).

I no longer feel I 'ought' to be using the 'proper' method of drafting my basic pattern making blocks. Because for me this direct approach gives a better result with less work.

Method D :

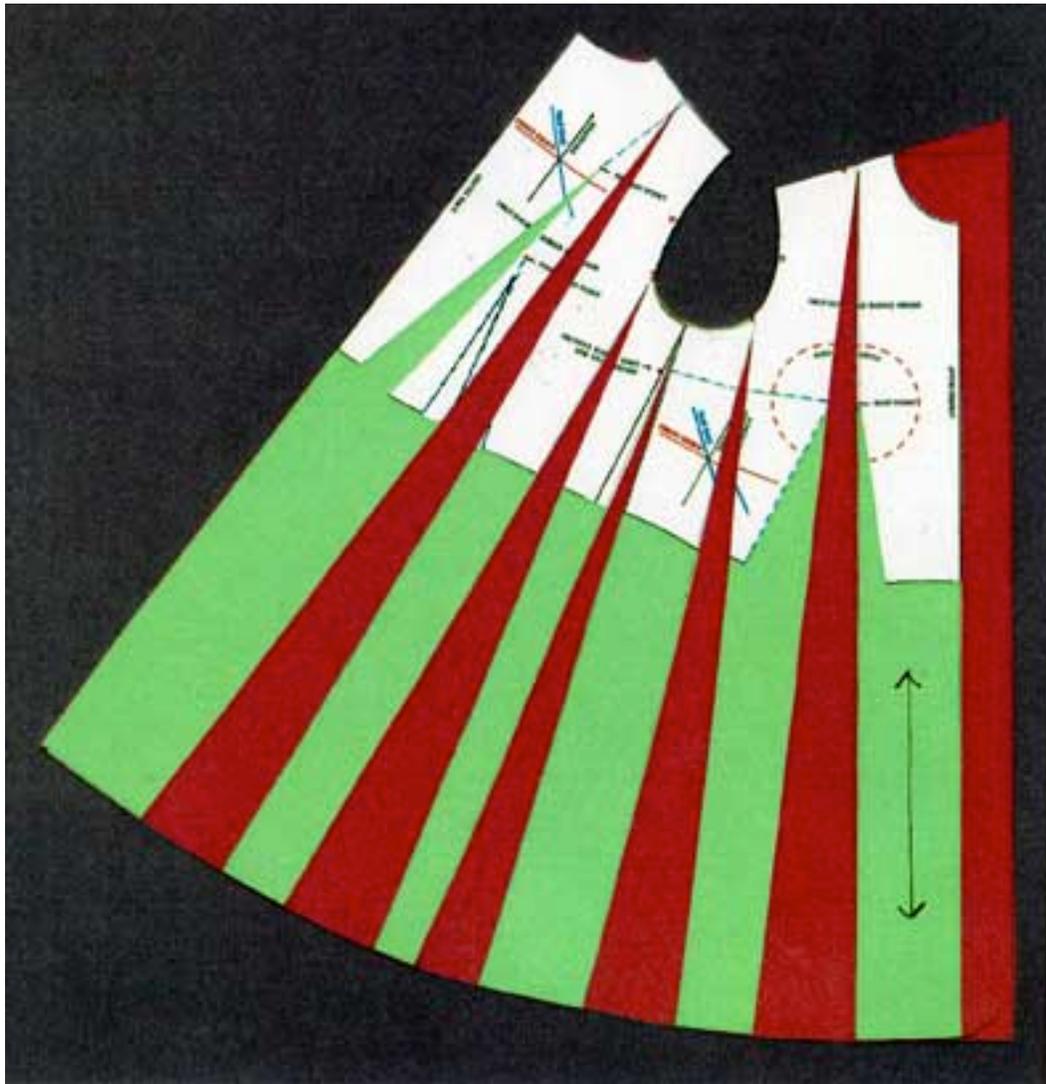
And for something completely different there's draping as a method for making patterns. Cut fabric shapes close to what you want but with big seam allowances. And play with manipulating the fabric on a dress form or person until it's what you want. (See my post on [Draping](#).) Work with fabric, pins, scissors. Rather than with paper, pencil, ruler. Some people find they're much happier and more inspired this way.

There are books on draping but I haven't tried it and don't know them.

Altering your basic well fitting starting blocks to make patterns for different styles

Just a note on this here, as this is a huge topic and the focus in this e-book is the starter blocks, not on altering them to get another style.

An example : working out how to copy a favourite flared jacket with no side seams and revers neckline.



Starting from a quarter scale fitting shell (white) : rotate out the darts in the fitting shell, add length (pale green), slash and spread (red).

I like Peggy Sagers 'Basic Pattern Making' DVD for a good intro to understanding the basics of altering a basic starting point to make patterns for different styles. Though it's very difficult to re-view as it has no menu or headings, or listing of what's covered. I've made extensive notes on what happens when. (And it is expensive, luckily I got it on special offer.)

And I definitely need to be supported by pattern altering books for reference, so I don't have to remember it all. See my post on [my favourite books on pattern altering](#).

No substitute for actually doing some, to learn how to do pattern making.

It's fun to use quarter size blocks and play with different pattern making techniques. There are often quarter size blocks in pattern making books, but I haven't found any copyright free ones.

Quarter size patterns fit 16 inch 'fashion dolls' with relatively correct adult body proportions (not like child-shape dolls or Barbie, however much fun they may be to make clothes for !). Here are a couple of on-line sources for buying these small patterns as downloads : [Don McCunn](#) and a [doll pattern site](#). (Tyler Wentworth is a 16" fashion doll.)

And then make up the design full size in 'muslin'. To be sure the pattern pieces go together properly. And to check the overall silhouette and size/ shape/ placement of style elements flatter your body shape. Good to make this trial garment in a fabric you can write and draw on, and just baste it together so you can change things easily.

Getting the right length and breadth of each pattern piece, and the best placement of each style element, to achieve the effect you want is a matter of judgement, an art not a science. So can only be refined by practice, experimenting to find out what has what effect. Which is why many of us find we prefer to adapt commercial patterns rather than trying to make our own designs.

Muslins are used in 2 ways :

- for testing the fit,
- and for testing the success of the design ideas.

Professional high-end designers and custom dressmakers don't expect to get things right first time !

They may make many muslins before they're satisfied with the result.

See my [Index page 3](#) which lists my posts on pattern making.

Some final comments

So which do you enjoy – taking accurate measurements, doing the drafting, using an easy tool, or fitting, or draping ?

And you need to decide whether you want to work towards a personal fitting shell which is a close fit ‘second skin’ with no movement ease. Or personal blocks, which can be used as patterns for simple garments. Or the Tried ‘N True equivalent. Personally I’ve tried many methods of getting well fitting basic blocks, and in practice I’ve settled on deriving my personal set of basic patterns by fitting commercial patterns.

There’s a wealth of methods for getting a well fitting starting point pattern to use as the base for making new styles. Obviously it’s something people have difficulty with. And have been inspired to think of solutions for.

I spent a long time getting upset about tools which claim to give a good result for everyone but didn’t work for me. And I didn’t know enough about body shape to understand why. I now know I have several body shape features which aren’t mentioned in most fit books. Ah well, it was one way of learning about fit. And it does mean I’ve tried many of these tools ! Now I’ve found the fitting help I need in [Liechty et al Fitting and Pattern Alteration](#), I’m quite relaxed about it all.

So, sorry, if you read this in the hope of finding the magic ingredient which removes all your fitting woes. It doesn’t work like that for everyone.

But I have rather emphasised the problems because I spent so many years trying these methods without success. Most people are close to average ! So most people will have much less difficulty with getting good personal blocks than I did.

Of course there are many people who get good results with these tools and are delighted with them. And many more people find them a great help in getting part way to a good fit.

Developing a fitting shell or basic blocks may not be something we have to do often. But if we find the right method for us, it can be something we find rewarding rather than keep putting off.

So if the easy methods produce a successful pattern block for you – then how marvellous for you, and how lucky you are. I’m jealous 😊

Best Wishes for finding your own best way of getting these precious personal pattern basics from which we can make so many new styles.