

Ladies' Classic 1950s Wardrobe Pattern Instructions

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Notes:

My love affair with the 1950s has been a long one, stretching back to my childhood and photographs of my glamorous grandmother, Jeanie (known to me as “Mimi”)—an Air Force wife who believed in dressing the part as she represented her husband and nation at various functions through the years. She was an experienced self-taught seamstress, using a Singer Featherweight to make stunning ensembles for herself, but, every now and again, my grandfather splurged and bought her an outfit from a Paris or New York designer. She kept those in perfect repair, and I can’t ever recall seeing her with a frayed pocket or a missing button. Her natural grasp of dignified feminine charm has always inspired me and motivated me to treat dress as an art form and leave as memorable an impression behind me as she did.

When I began work on this pattern in 2011, I originally intended to make a simple shirt dress with a couple of sleeve options. I had purchased a deadstock 1950s shirt dress in 2010 and loved its curved collar, nipped waist, and full, pleated skirt. It was also incredibly comfortable to wear. I decided to use it as inspiration for a new pattern and got right to work. But, through a series of events, including an overseas move and an overflowing coffee pot, my original pattern work was destroyed, and this design languished for five years (I’ve put the entire saga on my blog if you’d like the back story!). I feel a special sense of satisfaction that this pattern has finally made it back from the UFO (unfinished object) heap and ended up with a lot more options than I ever dreamed up originally.

One thing I admire so much about the ladies of the 1950s was their ability to “curate” a wardrobe. Clothing was more expensive then and represented a real investment—either of money if purchased outright or of serious time and skill if made by the wearer herself. Children of the Great Depression and careful consumers during WWII’s rationing, these ladies had learned first-hand how to make the most of what they had, to repurpose fabrics for other projects, and to remake last year’s clothes to fit current styles with little financial outlay. As a result, they didn’t have wardrobes bulging with cheap, factory-produced garments that wore out easily and could be tossed into the bin and replaced at a whim. Instead, they had a collection of artistically made, well-fitted clothing that was kept in good repair and accessorized to give it a new look from time to time. Even on a limited budget, women knew how to make themselves look charming, and you can see this in candid street photos from the time period—not just on magazine covers. Women dressed with a wonderful eye for style and form and even a touch of glamour as simple as a brooch, a scarf, or a flowered hairpin. The result was a dignified femininity that I’m frankly sorry we’ve lost in our culture of pajamas worn outside the house. I’m thrilled to see a lot of modern women bringing back the flair of earlier eras and learning to be curators of their own artistic wardrobes. Little by little, they are adding the special touches and thoughtful

approaches to color and drape that make dressing a bit like creating a work of art. It never fails to bring a smile to my face when I see it, and I have also been stopped more times than I can count when I’m “dressed up” and told how lovely I look and what happy memories my clothes evoke. I hope you’ll take this pattern and make many, many happy memories with it as you become the curator of your own artistic 1950s-inspired wardrobe! [If you are interested in how our foremothers learned the skill of curating a wardrobe, I recommend *The Lost Art of Dress* by Linda Przybyszewski.]

You can create a variety of looks by mixing and matching the pieces in this pattern. The original shirt dress had a full skirt with pleats going in one direction all the way around, plus self-cuffed short sleeves. I’ve also created a tailored 3/4-length sleeve with darts at the elbow and an optional fold-back cuff, which can be made of contrasting material and sewn on or made detachable for even greater versatility. The full-skirted shirt dress closes in front with a button placket that ends in a hidden opening in the skirt’s front seam. Side seam pockets are also available for the full skirt. Note that there is a maternity option for the full-skirted dress (see special cutting line). The pencil skirt option is fitted exactly to the bodice so the darts and pleats match in front and back, and it uses an in-seam zipper on the left side for closure (pockets not recommended). A folded kick pleat in the skirt’s center back provides room for movement. The detachable peplum (Appendix A) and removable collar dickie (Appendix B) provide the final touches that give the dress the look of the quintessential 1950s hourglass suit. You can also stitch up the pencil skirt and add a waistband, then make the bodice pieces into a separate blouse with a peplum that can be tucked in or left untucked for charming separates (see Appendix B). Be sure to see Appendix C for instructions to make a petticoat to wear beneath the full skirt for that perfect shape. It’s important to have the petticoat first, as you need to hem the full-skirted dress so that it hits no more than one inch below the petticoat’s length, otherwise you get an awkward drape at the lower edge of the skirt.



My father and grandmother, visiting Washington, D.C. “Mimi” made her outfit, from the silk blouse with collar and cuffed sleeves to the wool circle skirt and ruffled petticoat beneath.



Mimi and “Pop” in 1959. Note her pencil skirt and tailored blouse.

One final, very important note on fit: This pattern is not designed for a full-busted figure (that pattern will be published separately for sizes 16-26C-DD). If the difference in your full bust measurement and your high bust measurement is greater than 3” and you still want to use this pattern, you will need to do a full-bust adjustment (FBA) to prevent gaping at the front button closure. There are a *lot* resources online that show you how to do an FBA step by step, so I’m not including that info in the toile fitting section below.

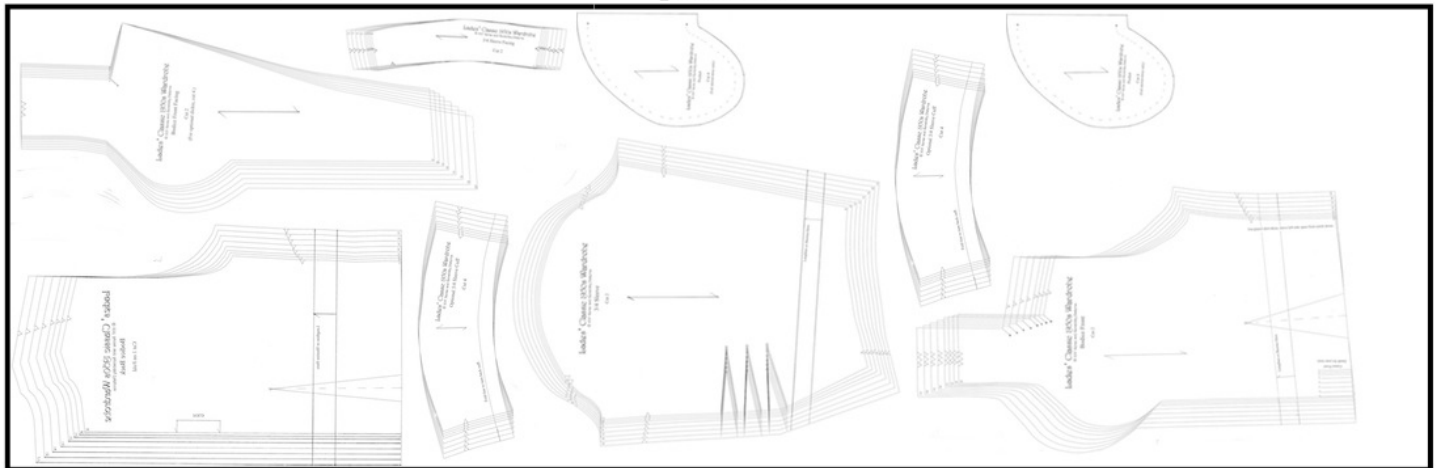
Fabric suggestions: For either dress option, I recommend cottons, shirting, and medium weight gingham for that crisp 1950s look. Linen-cotton blends and medium-weight rayon also work nicely if you want more drape. If you plan to make something a bit more formal, silk taffeta, dupioni silk, and lightweight wools work beautifully, especially for the pencil skirt dress option, which looks like a tailored suit when it is made from such fabrics. If you opt to make a separate blouse, I recommend soft Pima cotton, Oxford shirting, polished cotton and lightweight silk. Note that the original dress did not include interfacing, but if you want more substance to the collar, then you’ll need to purchase fusible (iron-on) interfacing for the front facing to provide that stiffness. If you’re using a lightweight wool or rayon for the “wiggle dress,” those will definitely need interfacing to provide the needed body in the collar and cuffs for a more structured suit look.

Please read these instructions through in their entirety before cutting into your fashion material. 5/8” seam allowances are used everywhere except on the bodice darts, which have stitching lines provided--but see the instructions for fitting your bodice toile first! Have fun sewing!

Pattern layouts:

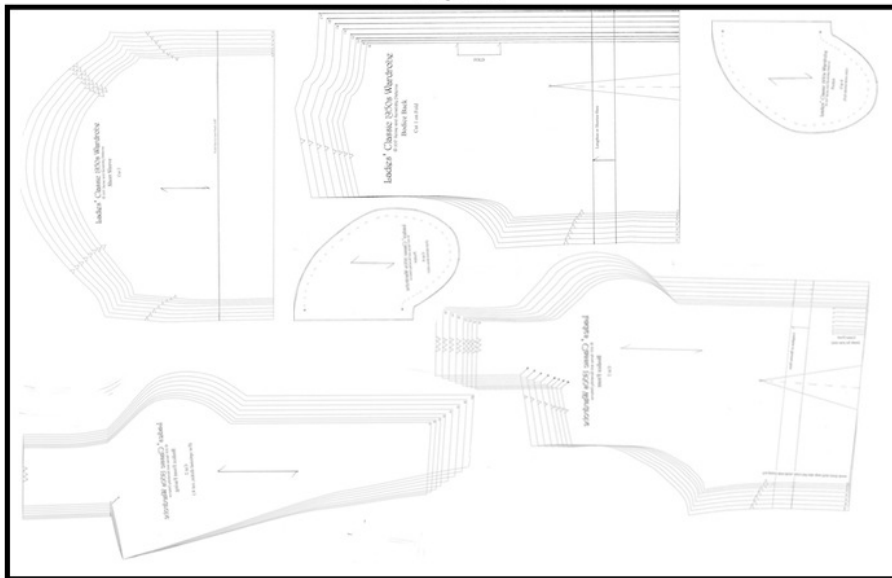
Layout for bodice, sleeves, cuffs, sleeve facing, and pockets on 45"-wide fabric (all sizes). For short sleeve, omit cuffs and facing and place sleeve in the same position.

Selvages



FOLD

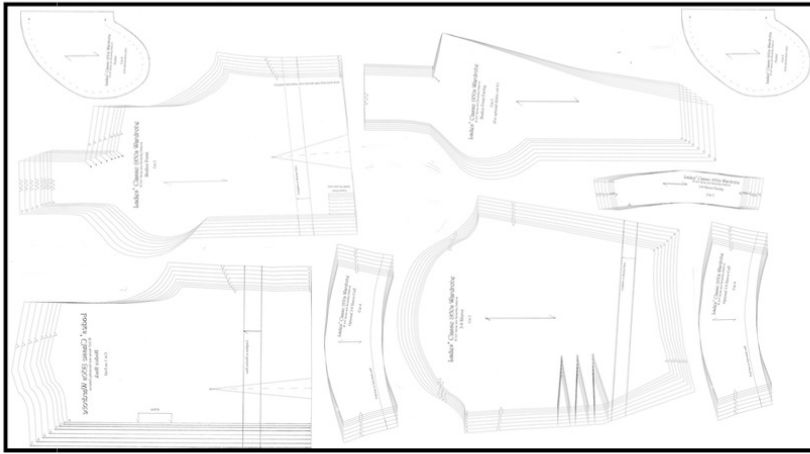
FOLD



Selvages

Layout for bodice, short sleeves, and pockets on 60"-wide fabric (all sizes).

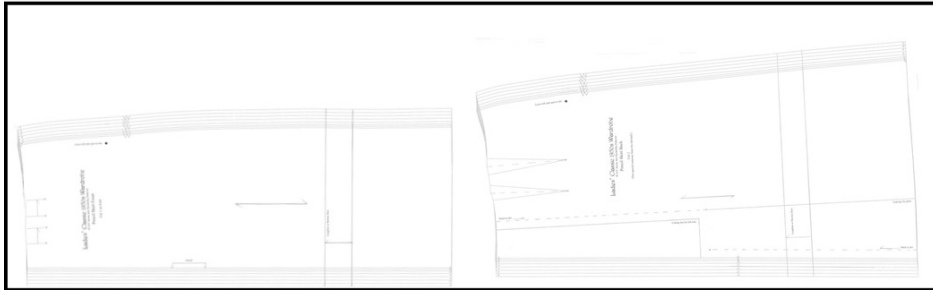
Selvages



Layout for bodice, 3/4 sleeves, cuffs, sleeve facing, and pockets on 60"-wide fabric (all sizes).

FOLD

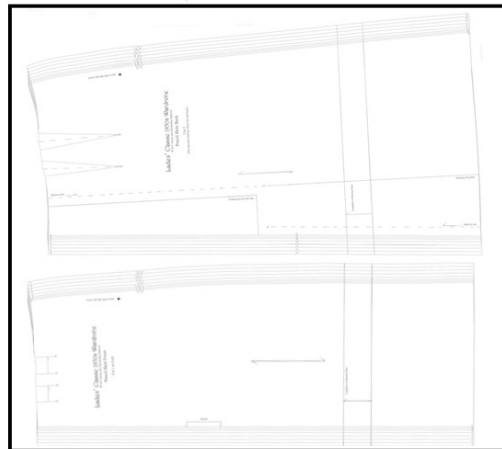
Selvages



Pencil skirt layout for all sizes on 45"-wide material and for sizes 18-20 on 60".

FOLD

Selvages



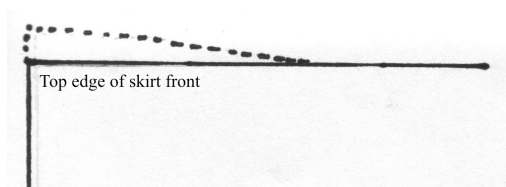
Pencil skirt layout on 60"-wide material for sizes 6-16

VERY IMPORTANT:

The cut-away line for the left side of the skirt back is lined up with the size 6 center back on the pattern piece, but you need to match it to the center back edge of your own size and mark before cutting! See instructions under section 6 below.

FOLD

Full Skirt Cutting Instructions: The skirt front and back are just simple rectangles cut to measure. All sizes are 30" long to allow for a deep hem to the knee or narrower hem to mid-calf. For skirt back, cut on fold; for skirt front, cut on selvages. Here are the widths for each size (measuring from fold or selvage, so the final result is double this amount): 4 (19"), 6 (19.5"), 8 (20"), 10 (20.5"), 12 (21"), 14 (21.5"), 16 (22"), 18 (22.5"). Remember that it's perfectly fine to cut to the full width of your material for all sizes if you want a fuller skirt (or even add a fourth panel if you want maximum twirl—simply add another 30" to your yardage requirement for the extra panel, then see special instructions in the full skirt section below). **Maternity Version:** If you're using the special bodice cutting line to allow for a baby bump, you will also need to modify the skirt front to allow for the rise over the belly. Take the same cutting line I've given for the maternity bodice, but align the dotted lower edge with what will be the top edge of your skirt front (PRIOR to cutting!). Add the additional curve at the top of your skirt as you cut, providing the needed room for the skirt to fit over the belly without shortening your hem:



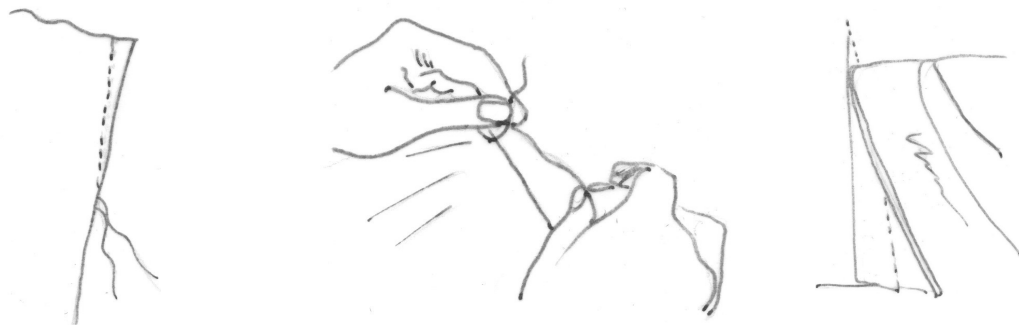
Assembly Instructions:

ALL OPTIONS:

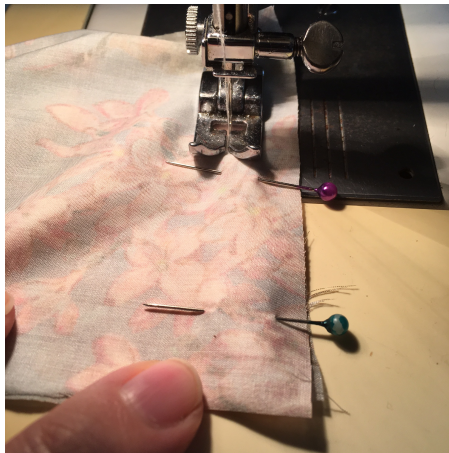
1. Making the Toile

Note: It is *essential* to make a bodice toile before you cut into your fashion fabric. Don't skip this step! Before you start, make sure you are wearing the underthings you intend to wear with your dress. If you're a fan of 1950s bras and girdles and plan to go for the whole look, put those items on when you fit your toile. **Please note that the measurements given on the chart are for your shape *while you are wearing your undergarments*, so be sure to take your measurements with your underthings on.** A modern bra is also perfectly fine. If you are pregnant, make sure to use the cutting line on the bodice for that option. *It is very, very important to note that a stretchy muslin is going to behave differently during fitting than a stiffer fabric like shirting or silk taffeta, so try to use fabric for your toile that is similar in weight and "stretchability" to your fashion material.* [Note, you will stitch the toile with wrong sides together so that the darts and seams show on the outside when you try it on. This allows you to fit to your unique shape correctly. Sewing right sides together would mean trying the bodice on wrong-side out and would result in incorrect fitting on the final dress.]

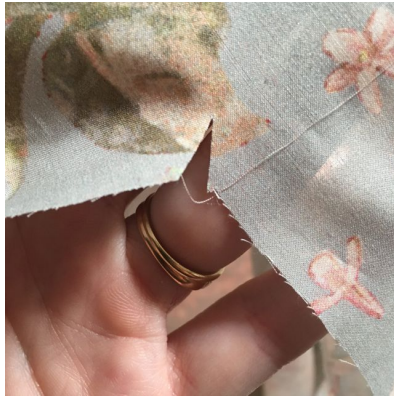
- A. Baste up darts in bodice back and front *on the right side of your toile fabric*, following stitching lines indicated. Start at the bottom of the dart and run the needle off the fabric at the top dot to leave thread ends to tie off, making a smoother dart (and avoiding "points"), the press dartstoward side seams:



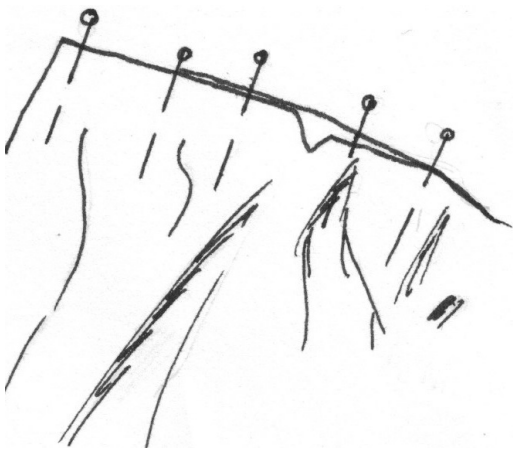
- B. Pin the collar extension at the center, wrong sides together, then stitch and press seam open:



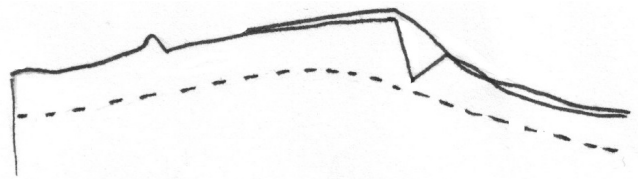
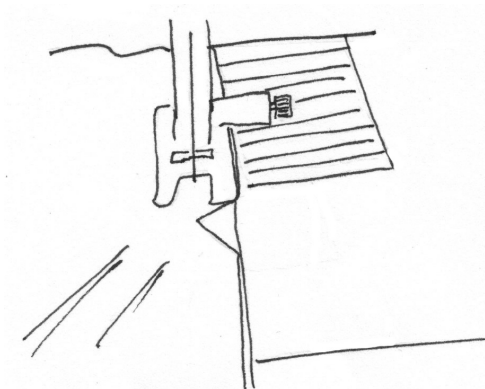
- C. Where indicated on the pattern piece, snip each corner at the junction of the collar extension and the shoulder to the dot. This provides the necessary ease to fit the collar to the neckline without puckering:



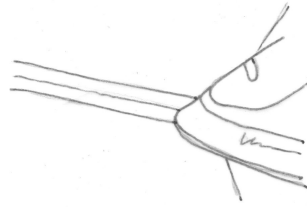
- D. Pin bodice front and back together at shoulder seams with *wrong sides together*, matching notches. Continue pinning the collar to the neckline, matching the extension's seam with the center back of the neckline:



- E. Stitch, beginning at one shoulder edge and going across to the other, taking care as you navigate below the snip. The seam is going to be slightly rounded, but that's correct:



F. Press shoulder seams open.

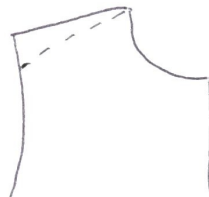


[Note: At this point, you aren't going to add sleeves, because I want you to be able to see exactly how the armhole sits when you try on the bodice.]

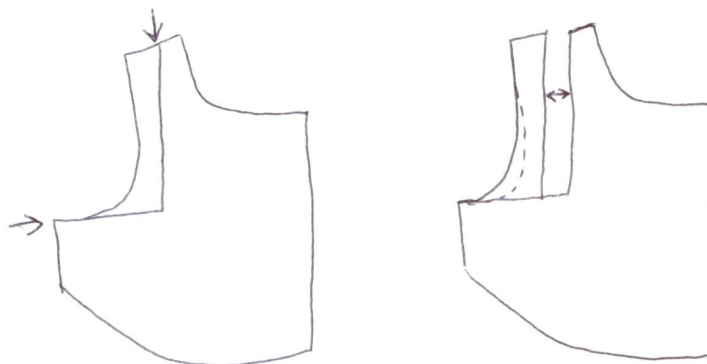
2. Fitting the Toile

Now that you have your bodice toile ready, try it on right side out over your undergarments to analyze the fit, pinning the front closed so that the center front lines (marked on the pattern piece) overlap. Because you sewed the bodice with wrong sides together, you will have easy access to the seams on the outside to make adjustments, and you will be adjusting for the correct side of your body. If you do not have a partner to help you check the following key areas, use a mirror in a well-lighted area:

- Look at the bodice front. Do the darts hit below the center of the bust correctly on each side? Does the point of the dart end smoothly to create a nice hourglass shape, or does it come too high and create an unsightly “point?” Make a note of any needed changes to the darts, marking your toile appropriately. If needed, remove your basting stitches and re sew the darts to test them again. This is the most crucial area to fit, and no two ladies have identical bustlines, so it's important to check your bust point (length from shoulder to mid-bust) and make sure you have an attractive fit that doesn't draw attention to the wrong areas.
- Have a look at the back of the bodice to make sure the darts give a smooth, close fit there. If you have a bit of a “sway back,” you can take up more fabric in those darts for a closer fit. The side seams should come just under the arm and leave you enough wiggle room to reach forward, hug yourself, and move comfortably. Mark any needed changes or unpick and re-baste until you are satisfied with the overall fit of the bodice.
- Check the waistline of the bodice all the way around. It should hit exactly on your natural waist or just slightly above for the most flattering fit. Remember that 5/8” will be taken up with the skirt seam, so don't get trim-happy if the waistline hits 5/8” below your natural waist!
- Check the fit of the bodice through the shoulders. First, make sure the seam sits at the top of your shoulder without a lot of room beneath. You should be able to slip a pinkie finger under the shoulder seam, but if you have more room than that, you need to take up the shoulder seam for a closer fit (note that these are “generic” illustrations not drawn from this pattern's bodice!):



- The armhole edge should not hang down over the edge of your shoulders more than 5/8" (the amount that will be taken up when the sleeve is set into the armhole). If there's more than 5/8" hanging down, it's perfectly fine to simply trim away the excess, making sure you have marked the 5/8" allowance first. If the shoulders feel too snug across the back, then you will need to add to the width so that you aren't squeezed once the sleeves are in place. In that case, you need to add width to the armhole edges front and back. You don't have to slash and spread the pattern as I've shown below—eyeballing it is fine as you add to your final pattern pieces.



- Once the armholes are right, you can test-fit the sleeve of your choice. This is mainly to check that you have enough room in the bicep, particularly for the 3/4-length sleeve. Follow sleeve instructions from section 3 on page 10, first unpicking the side seams of the bodice to insert sleeves flat as shown. Put on the bodice and flex to make a muscle and check the bicep fit (most important on the closer-fitting 3/4-length sleeve). If the sleeve is too snug, it's fine to go up to the next size, but trim the top curve of the sleeve to match the same size as your bodice to prevent puckers when the sleeve is inserted in the armhole.
- Fold the collar down in back and outward at the front to make sure you get a nice, smooth fold line without puckers where the collar meets the neckline. You will be able to choose whether you want the bodice to button up higher (to just under the curve of the collar seen on the left) or lower, creating a lapel look (seen at right):



Do keep in mind that the collar is short in back and will just meet the seam that joins collar to bodice when finished and folded back. The toile has a 5/8" seam allowance that will be taken up when the facing is sewn on, so don't worry if your collar is longer in the back at this point. Optionally, the collar can be worn standing in the back, which is also perfectly kosher for this time period and gives yet another look.

- Once everything is pinned and marked, remove the fitting toile, undo the basting stitches, and use the pieces to make your final master pattern, transferring any special notes or markings. If you had a perfect fit the first time, congrats! If you need to make significant changes, cut a new set of bodice pieces from your toile fabric and have another go at fitting to make sure everything works, then make your master pattern.

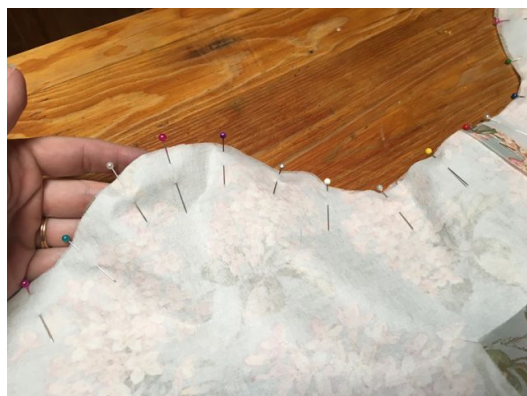
3. BODICE AND SLEEVES FOR ALL VIEWS

- A. Follow steps A-F above to create your bodice of fashion material (but with right sides together this time!). Press neatly. If you opt to use fusible interfacing, iron it to the wrong side of your bodice facing, making sure you give it time to adhere:



- B. As you did in the original Step C above, pin and sew the facing together at the center of the collar extension, then press the seam open. Also snip to the dot at the inside corners.

- C. Pin the facing to the bodice, right sides together, following the curve of the collar and matching the center seam of the extension:



- D. Stitch facing to bodice, beginning at the lower edge of the front opening and continuing around to the opposite edge:



E. Grade seam allowance and clip curves:



F. Lay bodice out flat, then understitch the facing to the seam you just made, starting at the lower edge of the bodice front and stopping where you want the collar to fold out. (This step creates a much nicer finish at the button closure. If you're new to understitching, I have a video tutorial on my website in the Tips section.)



G. Turn facing to the inside and iron the whole thing neatly, making sure your collar curve is fully turned out all the way around and looks neat:



H. To finish the inside of the neckline, you will fold under 5/8" of the raw edge of the collar facing and iron. Also iron under 5/8" at the shoulders. Pin in place over neckline and shoulder seams:



I. Whipstitch the facing to the seams, creating a neat finish:



J. Now it's time to sew the sleeve in place. You will do this before stitching up the side seams, as the curve of the sleeve head will ease nicely into the armhole when there is more room to work. Instructions follow for both the short sleeve and the 3/4-length sleeve.

i. **The Short Sleeve:** Pin sleeve to armhole, matching notches front and back. If needed, run basting stitches around the curve of the sleeve head to help you ease it into the armhole without puckering (usually only needed on stiffer materials without a lot of give).



Stitch sleeve in place:



Iron sleeve seam away from the bodice toward the sleeve, then pin the sleeve and the bodice side seam together, matching underarm seam and notches. If you are making the “wiggle” dress, make sure you leave the left side seam open from the notch down to accommodate the zipper. Stitch:



Iron sleeve and side seams open, then turn the bodice right side out and iron all neatly.

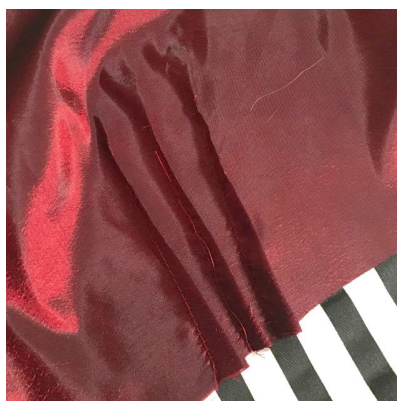
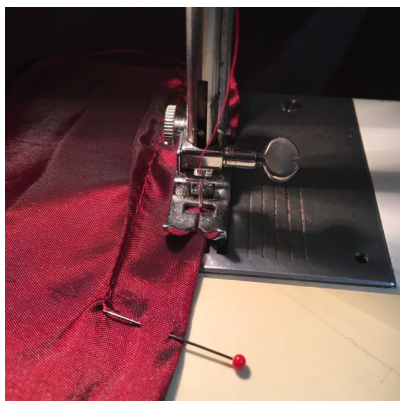
To finish the sleeves with a self cuff, you will turn the sleeve ends inside along the fold line and iron. Because turning up a hem at the very end of the sleeve causes a line to show on the outside of the sleeve, I recommend finishing the sleeve ends with pinking shears instead. This prevents unraveling but doesn't leave an obvious line on the outside of the sleeve. Stitch the turned-up sleeve in place below the pinked edge:



Now turn the back the cuff to the outside of the sleeve, matching the folded end to the stitching line you just made. Iron neatly in place. Voilà!



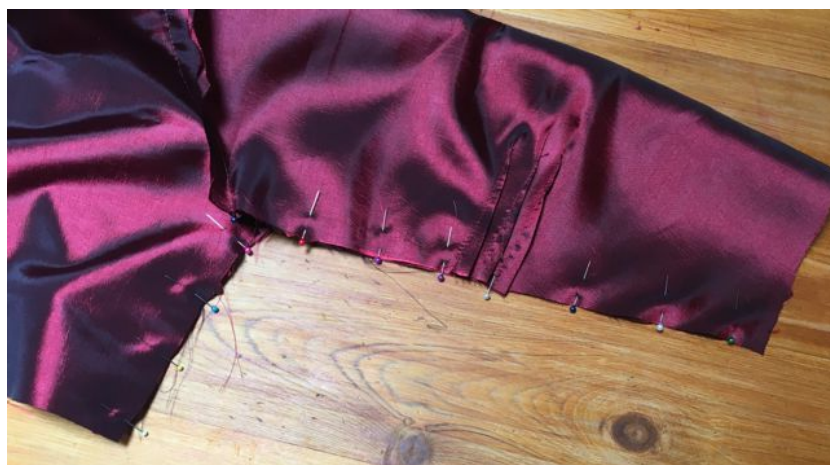
ii. **The 3/4-length Sleeve:** Stitch up the three darts in each sleeve's elbow, stitching off the end of the material and tying off as you did with the bodice darts. When all three darts are in place, press them toward the end of the sleeve:



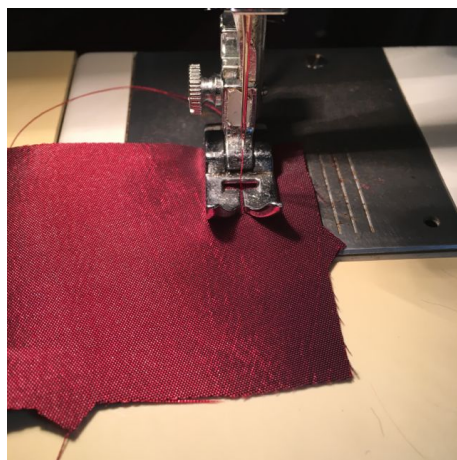
As instructed above for the short sleeves, pin the sleeves into each armhole curve, matching notches for front and back and easing as needed for a smooth fit. Stitch in place and press seam toward sleeve head.



Pin sleeve seam and underarm seam, matching notches and stitch. If you are making the pencil skirt dress, make sure you leave the bodice's left side seam open from the notch down to accommodate the zipper.



Now you have three ways to finish the ends of this sleeve: a simple facing, a sewn-on cuff that turns back, or a detachable cuff (if you use white fabric, it gives the look of a shirt worn beneath a suit jacket). The facing is used for all three options, so go ahead and stitch the short end, right sides together:



Press seam open. If you do not plan to use the cuff (or plan to use the detachable one), you will pin the facing to the end of the sleeve, right sides together, matching seam and notches. Stitch in place, then turn to the inside and iron neatly.



To finish, you'll turn under the raw edge inside, then blind stitch the facing invisibly in place. That's all you need to do for a plain sleeve with no cuff or a detachable cuff.

For both cuff options, take the four cuff pieces and pair them to make two cuffs, pinning with right sides together, matching notches on the short ends. [If you are using a floppier fabric, then iron fusible interfacing onto two of the cuff pieces first. If you are using a very thick, heavy material like wool, I recommend using lighter lining material to back your cuffs rather than a double layer of wool.] Stitch up the short edge, around the curved upper edge, then down the other short edge:



Clip corners and grade seam allowance:



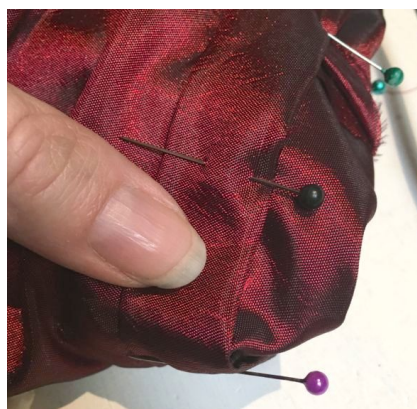
Turn cuffs right side out and iron, taking care that the corners are nice and sharp:



If you plan to make the turned-back cuffs permanent, then pin them to the outside of the sleeve ends, matching notches. Note that the cuff ends do not overlap. Pin the sleeve facing over the cuffs, right sides together and matching notches. Stitch, securing cuff and facing to sleeve.



Turn facing down along seam line and fold it into the sleeve end, leaving cuff on outside of sleeve. Turn under $5/8$ " of the raw edge of the facing and pin in place to inside of sleeve, then blind stitch to the sleeve end (not into the turned back cuff):

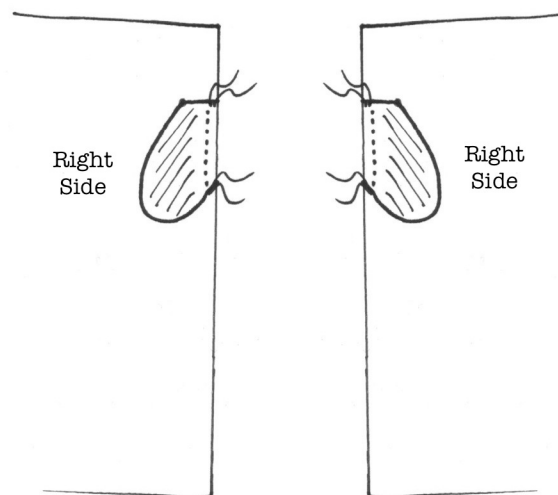


For a detachable cuff, follow the steps for facing the end of the sleeve, then make the cuffs as shown and turn the raw edges 1/4" to the inside so they meet, then topstitch or slipstitch closed to finish. Iron under along the fold line. To attach the cuffs, you will sew female snaps (press studs) every two inches along the inside of the sleeve end, taking care the stitches only go through the facing. Sew corresponding male snaps to the cuff ends, inside the folded edge. When you want to wear the cuffs, simply snap them into the sleeve ends for a whole new look!

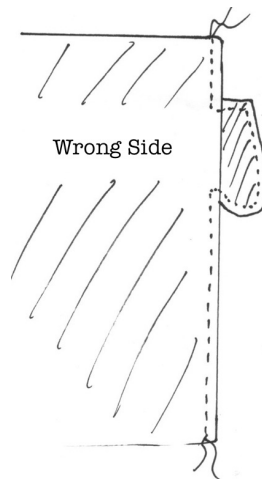
4. THE FULL SKIRT

Follow my instructions at the end of the cutting layouts to cut out your skirt front and back pieces. Be sure to cut the skirt front edge along the selvages, as this will create a finished edge to the front opening (which doesn't need a conventional placket). If you opt to add a fourth panel, it will be cut on the fold like another skirt back. You will stitch the two skirt back pieces together, then stitch each to the two skirt front pieces, as shown below. When you reach the bodice-to-skirt steps, match the seam between the two skirt back pieces to the center of the bodice back, but position the side seams three inches forward of the bodice's side seams. Your pockets will still be easily reachable and comfortable set further into the bodice front, and your skirt will be super twirly!

A. **POCKETS:** I absolutely love pockets in my skirts and dresses, so I've included them for the full skirt option. If you do not want to use them, skip this step. Place each pocket three inches down from the top of the skirt fronts and back at the side seams, lining up the edge of the pocket with the edge of each skirt piece, right sides together. Stitch in place:



B. Iron pockets away from each skirt edge, then match skirt front side seams and pockets to skirt back side seams and pockets, right sides together. Stitch down from the top edge of each skirt side seam and around each pocket as shown before returning to the side seam and continuing down to the lower edge:



C. Continue through the rest of the skirt steps below. If you've added pockets, your side seams are already stitched together. If not, match right sides together and stitch, then press seams open.

D. Repeat for skirt front seam, stopping six inches from the top of the skirt (this will create an opening beneath the bodice's button closure).

E. **Pleating the Skirt:** While you *can* just gather the skirt to the bodice, I recommend pleats like the ones on the original inspiration dress. They give a beautiful, crisp finish to the dress and also cover the front opening neatly and invisibly. [The exception is if you're making the extra-full skirt with a fourth panel. In that case, gathering is easiest, and see Appendix C for a fantastic gathering trick!] Pleating is really done best by eye or with a pleating gauge. You'll be making unidirectional pleats all the way around the skirt (like large knife pleats). On my original dress, the pleats look like they are spaced 1.5" apart, but when you slip a finger inside the actual pleat, it's only 5/8" deep. So you'll be making 5/8" pleats spaced about 1.5 inches apart (depending on the size dress you are making, this will vary slightly, so use your eye and your own judgment). Because you cut the skirt front on the selvedge, you can simply iron the seam allowance of the top opening inside. Now you'll start your first pleat over this turned-under edge to hide the opening. At left below you see the depth of the skirt pleat at the front opening. At right, the skirt has been pinned to the right front of the bodice, which will overlap the left.



F. Continue pleating around the skirt, making all the pleats face the same direction until you reach the other side of the bodice, pinning as you go:



G. Stitch skirt to bodice, following the direction of the pleats so you don't accidentally turn one back on itself with the presser foot:



H. Finish the raw waistline seam with a zigzag or overlock stitch to prevent unraveling, then iron waistline seam up toward bodice. Turn the skirt right side out and iron:



5. FINISHING THE FULL-SKIRTED DRESS

A. Try on the dress and mark the center front overlap, pinning bodice closed for now. Use a skirt marker or have a helper mark the skirt's hem for you. A deep hem has been allowed if you want a knee-length skirt. If you prefer tea-length, you can turn under a short hem. It's really about personal preference. I like a deep hem myself and turn under two inches twice before whipstitching the hem in place (though machine stitching is also fine):



B. The bodice buttons closed with either three or four 5/8" buttons. If you prefer the higher neckline closure (just below the curve of the collar), then you'll need four buttons. If you like a slightly deeper V with the lapels showing, then you'll need three. Space buttonholes evenly, using a buttonhole gauge or measuring tape (my three-button dress has three inches between each buttonhole). Mark button placement through buttonholes and sew buttons in place.



Voilà! You've finished the full-skirted shirt dress, a 1950s classic that has never gone out of style. I hope you find this particular design as comfortable and flattering as I have. I can just about guarantee you'll

be stopped and complimented wherever you go! (Below you see me in the maternity version of this dress.)

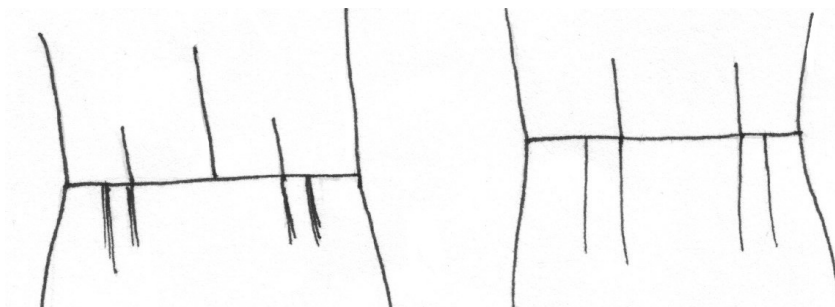


If you'd like that iconic "pouff" to the skirt, then you definitely want to wear a fluffy petticoat under this dress. If you'd like to make one, head on over to Appendix C. If you'd like to buy one, I *highly* recommend the extremely soft and comfortable petticoats from Banned Apparel (available from amazon.com), Malco Modes (malcomodes.biz), or Doris Designs (dorisdesigns.co.uk). These are made from chiffon rather than scratchy netting and are heavenly to wear.

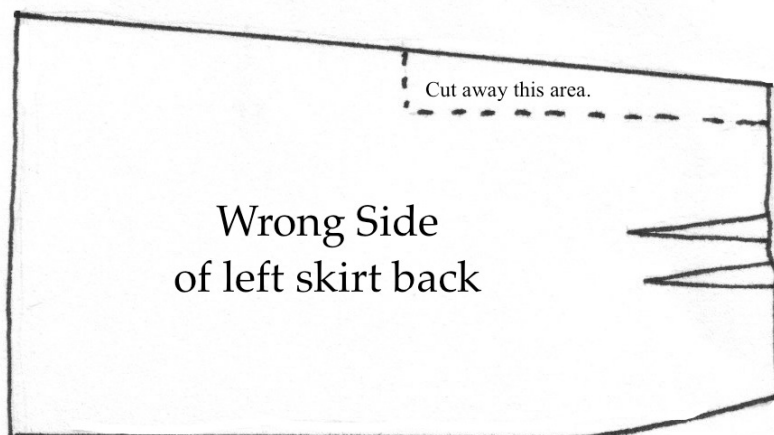
6. PENCIL SKIRT OPTION (the "Wiggle Dress")

This dress option makes for a very tailored look, so it's important to get it right so that your bodice and skirt match up perfectly. If you made significant changes to your bodice darts or side seams, you will also need to make corresponding changes to your pencil skirt front and back, as the bodice darts line up with the inner set of darts on the skirt back and the inner set of pleats on the skirt front. The side seams need to match exactly, since a zipper goes into the left side seam from bodice into skirt. The bodice still has functional buttons, but the dress will not go on without the side seam zipper opening.

Before cutting out the pencil skirt pieces, check them against your fitted toile or final pattern pieces to make sure the pleats and darts will line up as shown below:



A. Cutting Out the Skirt Pieces: While the skirt front is very straightforward and cut on the fold, the back pieces are cut with a slight difference between right and left. This is to create the deep pleat in back that allows for easy movement when walking. In order to keep that pleat stable (particularly for heavier fabrics), the right side of the skirt back above the pleat isn't cut away as with conventional kick pleats. The left side is cut away to reduce bulk at the waistline, but it is anchored to the fabric of the right side so that the weight of that deep, folded pleat is distributed into the waistline seam. This may sound puzzling at first, but it will make sense as you go along. Place the skirt back piece on your doubled material and cut out both back pieces at once. Now use tailor's chalk or a fabric pen to mark the area that will be cut away on the left back piece. You can use a measuring tape to copy the cut-away lines from the pattern piece, making sure you match to your own size's center back line (the cut-away area is lined up with the size 6 on the piece, as there was no other way to make it work without a bunch of confusing overlapping lines). Do make sure you are marking the correct skirt back half if you are using fabric with a right and wrong side! Cut away that area from your left skirt back piece:



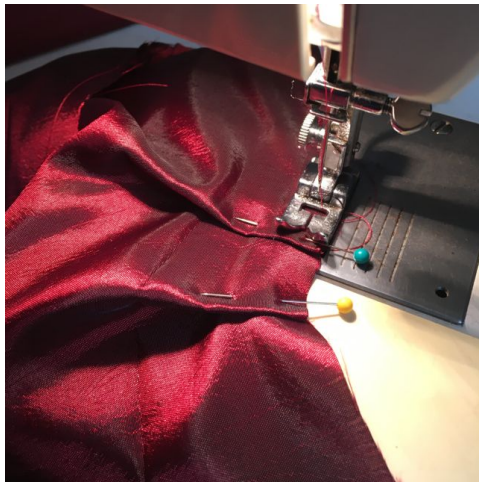
B. Neaten the raw edges of the center back pieces by overlocking or zigzagging each one top to bottom (following the “L” shape on the left side).

C. Make two darts on each skirt back piece, following the stitch lines and ending with the needle running off the fabric at the end so you can tie each pleat to finish neatly without a pucker:



D. Press pleats toward side seams, then set aside skirt back.

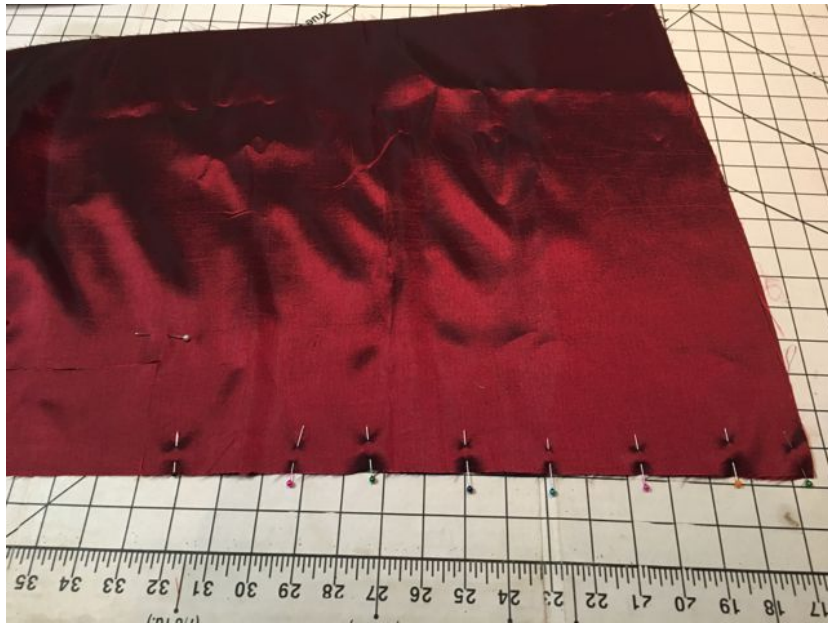
E. Pin the pleats on the skirt front on each side, with the pleat pointing toward the side seam, then baste pleats in place:



F. Iron pleats.

G. Pin skirt back pieces, right sides together, making sure the cutout area of the left side lies neatly over the right side:





The lower portion of the skirt back is pinned where it will be stitched up to the dot.

H. First, stitch from the bottom of the skirt up to the dot marked just below the cutout area. Stop at the dot and leave the needle in the fabric, then pivot 90 degrees and stitch across the short end of the cutout to the next dot, leaving the needle in the fabric again:



I. Continue stitching up from the second dot to the top of the skirt, 5/8" away from the cutout edge:



J. Iron skirt back neatly, pressing the pleat along its fold line (so that the fabric of the pleat is beneath the *left* side of the skirt back):

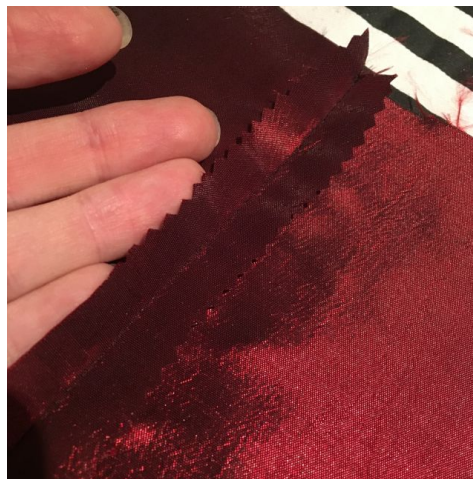


Above you see the depth of the pleat after it has been pressed neatly.

K. Pin skirt front to skirt back along side seams, matching notches and remembering that you will leave the left side open to the dot for the zipper closure:



L. Stitch side seams and press open. I like to finish 1950s-style seams with pinking shears:

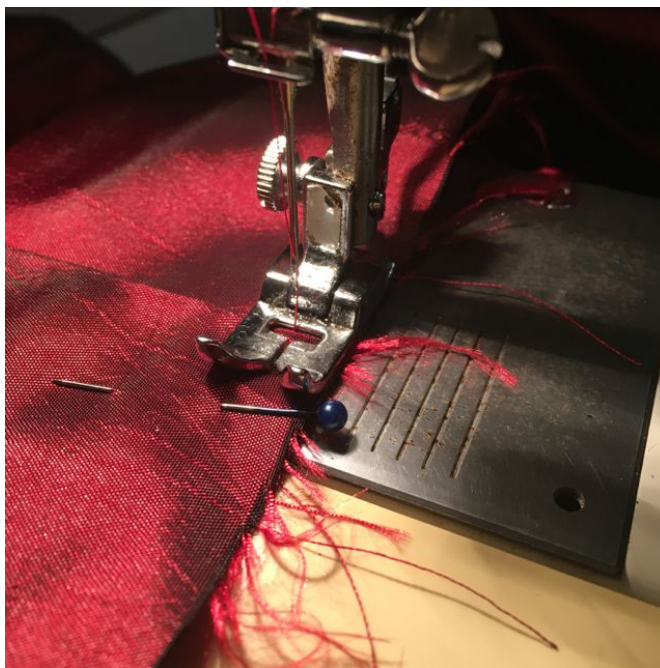


M. Now it's time to stitch the bodice to the skirt. First, using the "c.f" line marked on the bodied front pattern piece, overlap the center front and pin in place:



N. Pin skirt to bodice, matching center fronts, center backs, side seams, and darts/pleats. The open left side seam of the bodice will correspond with the open left side seam of the skirt.

O. Stitch bodice to skirt, starting at the open side seam and ending when you reach it again:



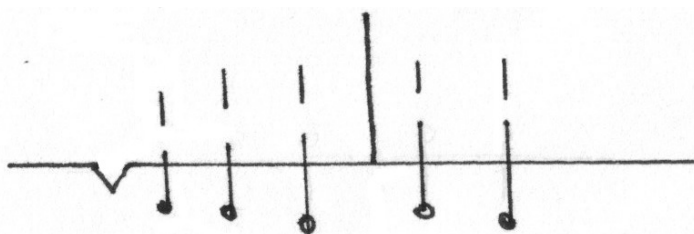
P. Neaten waistline seam with a zigzag or overlock stitch, then iron it up toward the bodice. [Please note, if you are using thick fabric that creates bulk in this seam, you need to grade the seam allowance so you don't have difficulty later making the lowest buttonhole.]

7. INSERTING THE SIDE SEAM ZIPPER IN THE PENCIL SKIRT

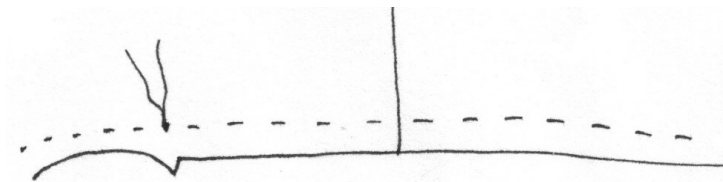
You have a couple of options here. I prefer invisible zippers, but they can be tricky if you've never tried them, so I'll show you the conventional zipper option first. If you are really new to sewing and terribly nervous about messing up, I recommend doing a practice run on leftover fabric ends with a cheap zipper. Practice makes perfect! There are also hundreds of video and photo tutorials online that walk you through zipper insertion. Just enter "zipper tutorial" on your favorite search engine.

A. Conventional Zipper Instructions

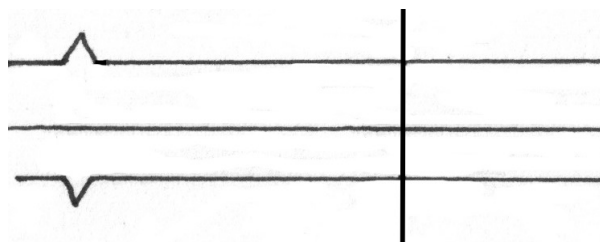
1. First, pin the left side seam of your dress, right sides together, matching from the notch down to the dot at the hip. You want to check to make sure that the waistline seam matches perfectly so you don't end up with a skewed closure:



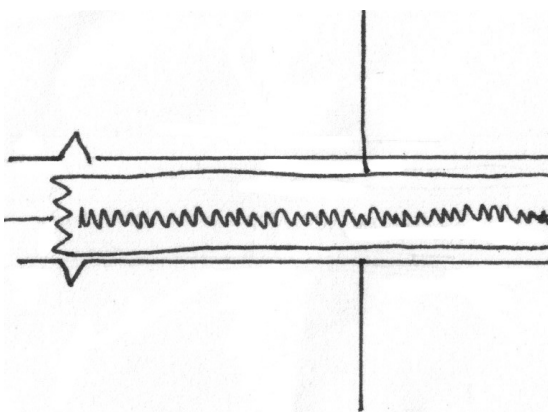
- Next, baste from the notch down to the dot marked on the skirt and stop:



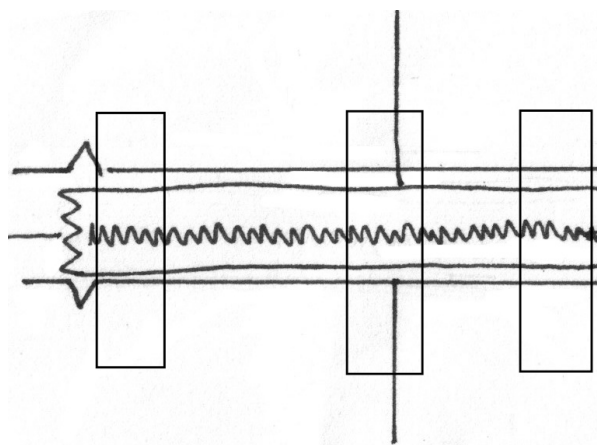
- Now press this basted seam open, double-checking that your waistline seams match on either side:



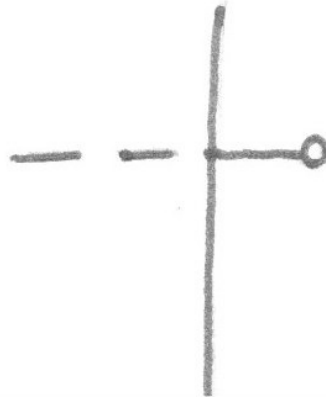
- Take your zipper and run the slider up and down a few times to make sure the zipper is in good working order. Pull the slider to the top so your zipper is closed, then place the zipper face-down on the wrong side of the seam you've pressed open, lining up the top of the zipper with the notch inside the side seam:



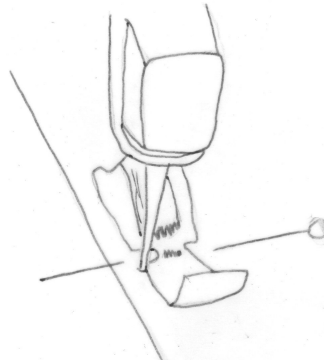
- Use a few pieces of invisible tape to secure the zipper to the pressed seam, making sure the zipper's teeth line up with the center of the seam:



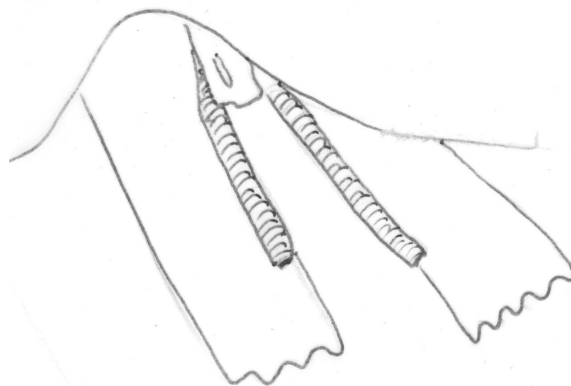
- Carefully flip over the dress so you are looking at the right side. Take one pin and use it to mark the end of the zipper (just above its stop). Do the same to mark the bottom of the zipper on the outside at the dot:



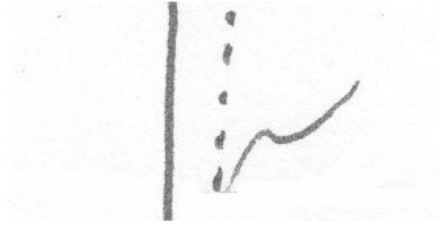
- Now place your zipper foot so the needle is on its left side, and put the needle into the fabric at the bottom of the zipper (above the pin) and to the right of the zipper's teeth (you can feel them through the material). Take care that you aren't so close to the zipper that you end up sewing over the teeth-- $\frac{3}{8}$ " is a good spacing from the center seam:



- Backstitch a couple of times to secure your thread, then stitch up the side, keeping your spacing even all the way. When you're within two inches of the top of the zipper, raise your presser foot, keeping the needle in the fabric/zipper. Unzip the zipper beneath about two inches so that the pull is out of the way of the foot for the remaining stitches but making sure the teeth remain lined up with the seam above them:

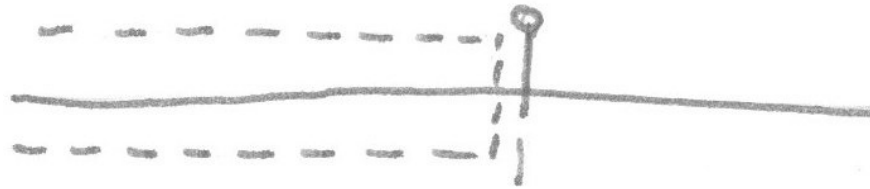


9. Lower the presser foot and finish stitching up to the top of the side seam opening:

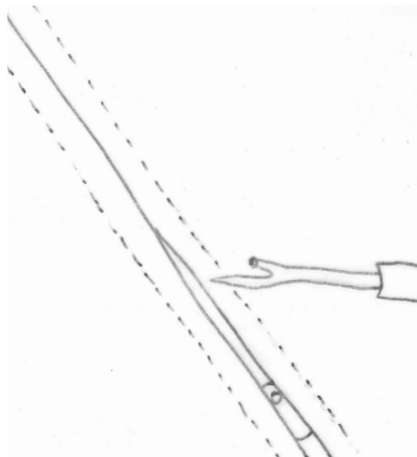


10. Zip the zipper closed again and return to the pin marking the stop at the bottom of the zipper. Switch the needle so it is on the right side of the zipper foot and stitch up from the bottom as before, keeping your spacing $\frac{3}{8}$ " to avoid the zipper's teeth. As you did on the first side, stop two inches from the top and unzip the zipper to allow you to stitch past the pull without difficulty.

11. Now return to the pin marking the stop and stitch across the bottom of the zipper, joining the two lines of stitching used to place the zipper:



12. Using a seam ripper, carefully cut through the basting stitches over the zipper's teeth:



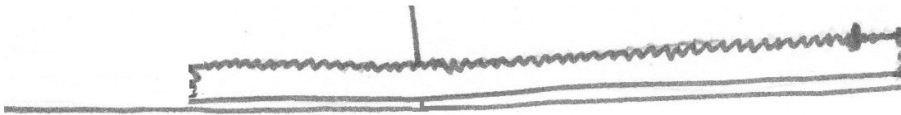
13. Remove the tape from the inside of the bodice and use its sticky side to pull out any remaining basting threads from your zipper closure.

B. Invisible Zipper Instructions

Invisible zippers mean no stitches show on the outside of your closure, which I think makes a much nicer finish that is well worth the extra effort. You will need a special invisible zipper foot, and if your machine doesn't have one, you can pick one up inexpensively at your local fabric store. Follow the instructions on the package to install the correct shank for the foot to fit your machine. **Please note that you will NOT stitch the side seam closed below the notch before inserting the zipper.**

i. Prior to sewing the zipper in place, use your iron to press under each side of the 5/8 seam allowance at the side opening of your dress. When you finish, fold them out again. The creases you've made will help you line up the teeth of the invisible zipper when you sew it in place. Now unzip the zipper and iron the "curl" out of it with your iron on a low setting to avoid melting the teeth (you can also "finger press" it to help straighten it out prior to sewing).

ii. Open the invisible zipper and pin the right half of the zipper to the right side (as you are looking at it) of the side opening, matching right sides together. The teeth of the zipper should line up with the crease you made when you ironed, and the top of the zipper tape should meet the notch at the top of the side seam:



iii. With the invisible zipper foot in place on your machine, center the needle so it is directly over the hole in the middle of the foot. Place the foot at the bottom of the zipper, just above the stop. Now lower the foot so that the right-hand groove beneath goes over the ridge of the zipper teeth (so the teeth travel safely through the "tunnel" as you sew):



2. Stitch up the length of the zipper, keeping the teeth in the "tunnel" and lined up with the crease you made in the material. Stop when you reach the top of the zipper, then backstitch and clip threads.

3. The most important thing to match up when inserting an invisible zipper is the seam line between bodice and skirt on either side of the opening. You don't want to end up with a mismatched seam, so the best "ounce of prevention" is to close the zipper after you've sewn one side and mark with a pin where the seam line meets the zipper tape:



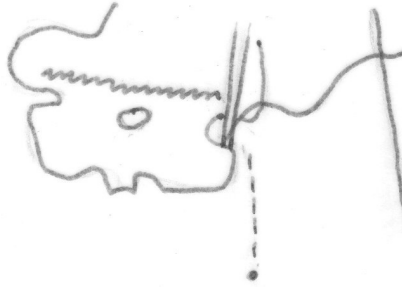
4. Now unzip the zipper once again and line up the free side to the opposite side of the opening, matching the pin to the waistline seam. **IMPORTANT:** Make sure you do not twist the second half of the zipper too many times when you match it up to the opposite side of the side seam opening. You will match the other side of the zipper to the dress's front half, right sides together and lining up the teeth along the crease. This can be a little confusing the first few times, as it looks like you're placing the zipper in backwards. Just remember that, when zipped, the waistline seam will match beautifully in the middle, and the zipper will be turned back to the inside of the dress. Stitch the other half of the zipper in place the same way, from bottom to top:



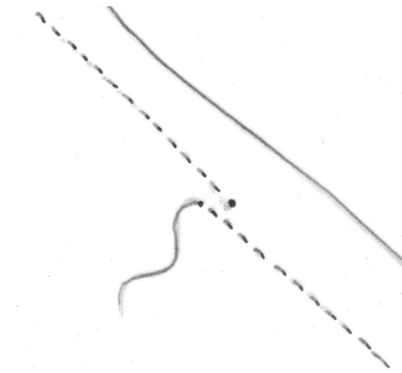
5. To zip the dress up, you'll need to flip the bottom of the zipper under itself first so the stop is on the inside. Zip up to the top, and you'll see that the zipper is completely inside the dress with no stitching lines visible:



6. To finish the side seam, turn the dress wrong side out and pin the rest of the skirt's side seam together below the zipper, making sure there are no puckers at the zipper's end. Place the foot to the left of the zipper, giving you slightly more than a 5/8" seam from the edge:



7. Backstitch, then stitch down from this point all the way to the hem, following a 5/8" seam allowance as soon as you've gotten past the zipper's stop:



8. FINISHING THE "WIGGLE" DRESS

1. Try the dress on and mark the hem with a skirt marker or a helper. The hemline of most pencil skirts of this era hits at mid-calf or just below. Turn up the needed amount and hand stitch or blind stitch the hem in place. Iron neatly.
2. Refer to section 5B above to place buttonholes and buttons in the bodice front. If you have used a thicker material and interfacing, you will need to use buttons with a shank rather than flat buttons to go through your buttonholes without difficulty.
3. If you're interested in the wardrobe-expanding detachable peplum or the collar dickie that gives this dress the look of a tailored suit, continue on to the appendices!

Enjoy your new creation!