

Regency Gown Pattern Instructions

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Notes:

I created this pattern after viewing three extant gowns belonging to museum collections in Virginia, D.C. and Denmark. I chose gowns that really had a more “modern” look to them so that the resulting pattern design would be more wearable and less “costume-y.” The gowns I studied all had very high empire waistlines (right below the bustline) and relatively slim skirts, pointing to the mid-Regency period (1810s). This pattern is perfectly suited for early 1800s impressions if you create the extra full skirt back and for late 18-teens impressions if you just add the extra trimmings seen in that time period (ruffles at the wrist, tucks in the skirt, ruffles at the hem, cording, etc.). If you don’t need a costume or would just like to make a dress that works in a modern setting, I recommend making the gown skirt plainer by substituting the skirt back lining piece for the skirt back piece. This will create an A-line skirt without any gathers in the back. If you add about two inches to the length of the bodice all the way around, you’ll also give it a more modern empire waistline. There are many, many ways you can alter this pattern slightly for different looks. For dozens of photographs and tips, be sure to visit <http://sensibility.com/tips/>!

This pattern may be used for either a day dress or a ballgown, depending on the fabric and sleeve type you select. Long sleeves are for day dresses and come down to the knuckles when hemmed. The short sleeves may also be used for day dresses. Women often wore detachable undersleeves to keep from catching a chill. You may use the long sleeve pattern to create an undersleeve. (See sleeve instructions.)

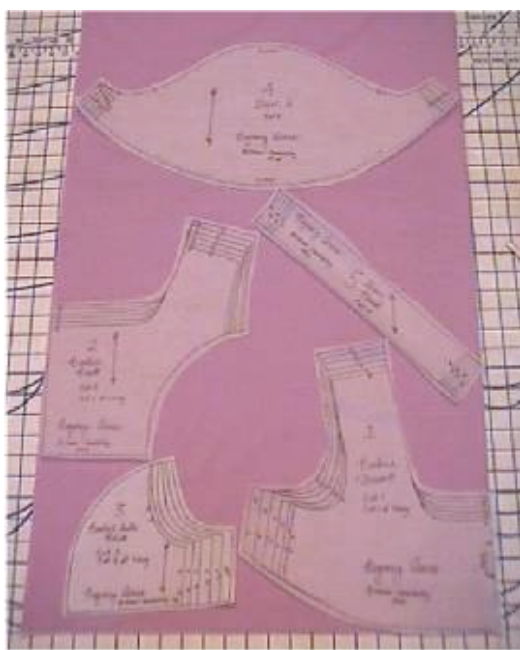
For day dresses, cotton, muslin, voile, Irish linen and lightweight wool are a few good choices. If you are not striving for a more period-correct gown, you may wish to use challis, crepe or another type of rayon blend. These fabrics hang very nicely. For ballgowns, silk, silk taffeta, voile, organdy and Irish linen all work well. Ballgowns can be trimmed as much or as little as you wish. Regency gowns were often lavishly trimmed with braided cords, ribbon, embroidery, tassels, ruffles or a combination of all of these. The most common places to trim are the neckline, cuffs, waistline and hem of the gown. Fabric piping also looks wonderful at the neckline and waistline. Do note that an authentic gown would be sewn entirely by hand with interior seams neatly finished to prevent fraying (using flat-felled or French seams). However, you can also use a sewing machine for all interior seams and use hand stitching for hems and buttonholes.

As always, I recommend making a mock-up of the bodice out of inexpensive material prior to cutting into your fashion material. This will allow you to check the fit and make any adjustments before you make your gown. Please see <http://sensibility.com/pattern/whynot.htm> for fitting tips. No two women are alike, and it’s a rare lady who is totally “standard” in size! Fitting a toile may seem like an unnecessary extra step, but you’ll be so glad you invested the time to get a perfect fit.

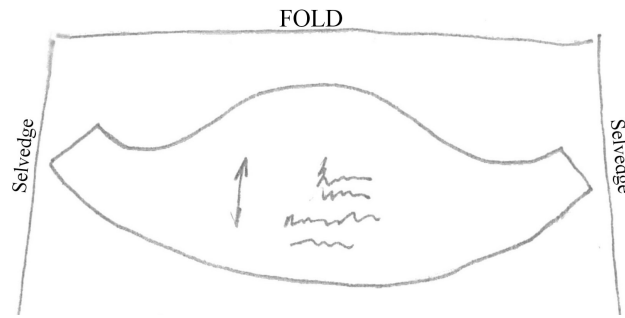
Miss Petites, please see Appendix C for fitting help!

5/8” seam allowed unless otherwise indicated on pattern piece.

Pattern layout:



**Here is the suggested layout for the ballgown on 45” wide material.
For a day dress, the long sleeve can be placed where the short sleeve is in the illustration.**

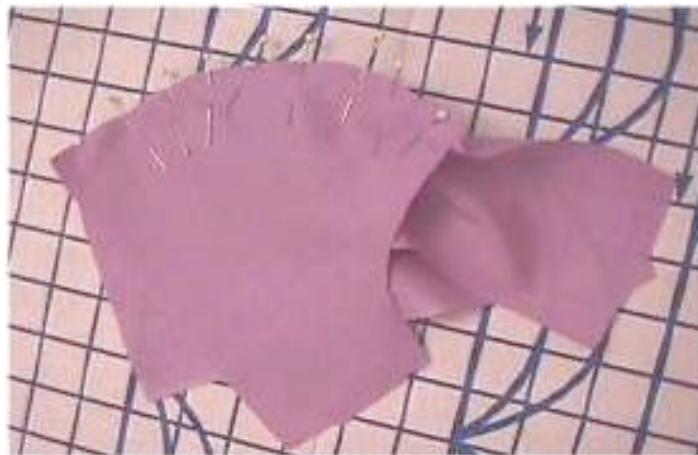


For patterns over size 14, you will need to lay out the short sleeve as shown above.

Assembly Instructions:

1. **Bodice** (Note: In these photos, the lilac fabric is the bodice lining. It is used to illustrate steps, as it is easier to see than the white voile used for the bodice material.)

A. Pin the bodice back and side back pieces together, easing curve as necessary and matching at the lower back edge. Stitch.



B. Clip curves and press seam toward the side.



C. Run gathering stitches in bodice front, following lines indicated on the pattern.



D. Pin bodice front and back pieces together at shoulder and side seams. Stitch. Press seams open. [Important Note! The “shoulder” seams on this gown are that in name only. They do not hit the top of the shoulder at all, rather, they drop behind the shoulder of the wearer about an inch and a half. This is period correct for the Regency era and later. The dropped seam wasn’t obvious enough on my earlier version of this pattern, which led to some confusion, so I’ve dropped it further.]



E. Repeat all of these instructions for the bodice lining.

F. Pin bodice to lining, right sides together. Stitch from back opening all the way around the neckline to back opening, leaving 5/8” free at the bottom of each back opening.



Lining pinned.



Bodice stitched to lining, leaving 5/8" free at bottom of back closure.



Above: Detail of where stitching stops.

G. Grade seam allowances and clip curves.



H. Turn bodice right side out and understitch lining as far around as possible and down the back closure.
(For a video demonstration of understitching, please click [HERE](#).)



Detail of understitching.

I. Press bodice and set aside.



2. **Sleeves** (Note: Short sleeves are shown. Instructions for long sleeves and optional undersleeves are given below.

A. Run gathering stitches on tops and bottoms of sleeves, following lines indicated on the pattern. Pin sleeve band to sleeve, pulling gathering stitches to fit. Stitch.



B. Sew sleeve seams together and press open. Press under $\frac{1}{4}$ " of the sleeve band.



C. Pin sleeves to armholes, right sides together, matching underarm seams to side seams.



D. Pull gathers to fit. Stitch. Clip curves, turn sleeve inside out and press. Set aside.



Bodice with sleeves.

Long Sleeves: Assembly is the same, but you will press under the cuff only when you have determined the hem width after trying on your dress.

Optional Undersleeves for Short Sleeved Dress: If you plan to make detachable undersleeves, you will be finishing your short sleeve sleevebands now, so you can ignore the sleeve finishing instructions found below. Zigzag or narrowly hem the raw edge of your short sleeve sleevebands. Turn the sleeve band to the inside so that it covers the sleeveband seam allowance completely. Press. Now fold the sleeveband back out and mark four to six evenly spaced horizontal buttonholes on the part of the sleeveband that will be folded inside. (In other words, you will be placing buttonholes beneath the fold line made when you pressed the band.) Make the buttonholes, cut them open, then fold the sleeveband inside and whipstitch it in place over the seam allowance inside. You will now have four to six buttonholes *inside* the each sleeve around the sleeveband. Cut out two undersleeves, using long sleeve pattern but omitting the cap of the sleeve. Stitch sleeve seams. Turn under a narrow hem along the top edge of each undersleeve and stitch. Using the buttonholes you made in the sleeveband as a guide, mark where you will place four to six buttons around the outside top of each undersleeve. Sew buttons in place. Now your undersleeve will button into the sleevebands and will not slip down (as undersleeves with drawstrings are prone to do). Go ahead and try on your bodice with the undersleeves buttoned into the sleevebands. Undersleeves should come to the knuckles, but they can be hemmed shorter if you prefer. Mark and hem each undersleeve to the appropriate length. Remove undersleeves and complete the rest of the gown.

3. Skirt

A. Cut skirt lining opening for back closure as indicated on the pattern. Sew skirt lining front to skirt lining back at side seams. Press seams open. [Note: The skirt lining is fitted exactly to the bodice once the bodice front is gathered. If you wish to add a waistband to your dress, cut it as long as the skirt lining is wide at the top.] Repeat these instructions for the skirt. (The skirt back pieces are wider than the lining, allowing for extra fullness to be pleated or gathered.) [Note: **The skirt lining is optional. If you are using a non-opaque material and do not wish to have the extra layer, you can omit the skirt lining entirely.**]



Clipping skirt back opening at center back.

Optional Skirt Back Additions for Extra Fullness: If you wish your skirt to be even fuller across the back (appropriate for 1790s to early 1800s), first you must cut the center back of the skirt open all the way to the bottom, since the edges will become the side back seams. Next, cut an additional back panel. Simply lay your skirt back piece on the skirt fabric (to determine proper length), and cut a rectangular panel on the fold to the width desired (no more than twelve inches from fold, or it becomes difficult to gather.) Now cut an opening in the center back fold, following the marks indicated on the center back pattern piece. Sew this new panel to the skirt back pieces at the side seams. Run gathering stitches as indicated on the pattern, leaving 1" for the placket closure. The rest of the pattern directions are the same.

- B. Pin skirt lining to skirt, wrong side of skirt to right side of lining, matching seams and back closure. There will be extra skirt fabric, which you may ignore for now.



Skirt and lining pinned. You can see the “extra” white skirt fabric, which has not yet been gathered to fit the lining.

- C. To make a placket for the center back skirt opening, cut a piece of fabric on the bias twice as long as the back opening and two inches wide.

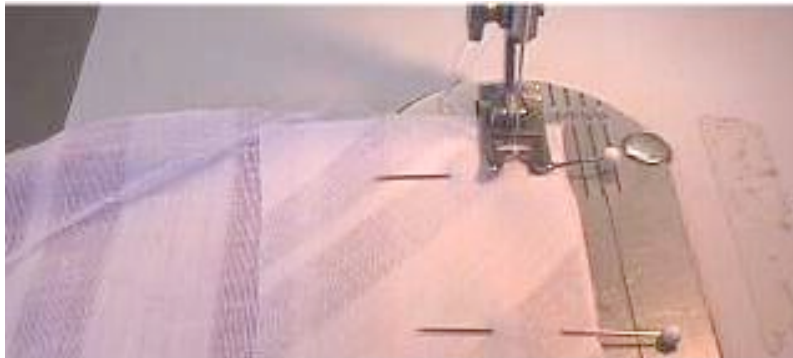


Placket piece cut on the bias.

- D. Pin placket to right side of skirt back opening, catching the lining as well (if skirt is lined). [**Note:** Because the placket is cut on the bias, it may stretch a little when pinned in place. Just trim away any excess material after sewing the placket to the skirt.]



- E. Stitch placket to skirt and lining, starting with a 3/8" seam allowance and gradually bringing the presser foot to the edge of the fabric at the center of the placket. When you reach the center, leave the needle in the center, lift the presser foot and pivot the fabric to head back up the other side of the placket. Gradually come back to a 3/8" seam allowance as you finish the seam.



- F. Press under 1/4" of the free edge of the placket or finish with a zig-zag stitch. If you are making an unlined skirt, press the placket as illustrated so the left side overlaps the right and makes an even closure.



**The left side of placket is pressed completely under so nothing shows outside.
The right side of the placket is turned under just enough to whipstitch over seam on the inside.**

G. If you are making a lined skirt, hem the edges of the placket by narrowly turning under twice and hemming, then turn under *both* sides of the placket to the inside of the dress and press neatly. (You will not have the placket overlap like you do with a button closure):



4. Attaching Bodice

A. Pin bodice to skirt and lining, matching center fronts, side seams and back closures and leaving bodice lining free. Pull gathering stitches in bodice to fit. For skirt back, you may either gather or pleat the remaining fabric to fit between the side back seam and the skirt closure.



Back skirt fullness pinned (inside view). Bodice lining is kept free.



This shows how the fullness is gathered between the side back seam and the back closure.

B. Stitch bodice to skirt, keeping bodice lining free as shown below. Press seam allowance up toward bodice.



5. Finishing the Dress

A. Turn under the bottom of the bodice lining fabric and pin in place above the waist seamline. Whipstitch the lining in place.



B. Turn under the pressed edge of the sleeveband and whipstitch in place. (See photos below.)



- C. Mark buttonholes horizontally and 1.5" apart on the overlapping back flap of the bodice. Four or five 5/8" buttons will usually fill the space, depending on the size of your gown. Clip buttonholes open, then pin the bodice closed and mark where the buttons should be sewn. Sew buttons in place. If desired, also sew a snap or hook and eye closure in the placket.
- D. To hem the dress, try it on and have someone mark the hem for you. Some clipping of the fabric may be necessary to even out the bottom edge. Turn up and hand stitch the hem in place. Press. Lining should be hemmed to almost the exact same length, save 1/4" inch. This hem may be machine stitched if you wish, since it will not show. You may also choose to put tucks in the skirt lining and/or edge it with lace to make it resemble a petticoat. In order to leave enough room for tucks, you'll need to cut your skirt lining pieces longer to begin with.



Enjoy your new creation!

Appendix A: Additional Suggestions for Gown Embellishments

Overskirts: Adding an overskirt is an easy way to enhance the elegance of your gown. You can use sheer materials, such as voile, organdy or lace, over a colored lining for a more dramatic effect, or you could experiment with an underskirt (lining) in one color and an overdress (sleeves, bodice and overskirt) in another. The dresses illustrated below were drawn by retired paper doll artist Kim Brecklein* from my gowns and demonstrate how an overskirt can be added for a completely different look. I have made several ballgowns with sheer sleeves and the same sheer material over a colored bodice and skirt. The effect is charming.



Trim: Besides sewing a flat ribbon trim around the hem, sleeves or neckline of your gown, you can attach narrow crocheted lace to the inside of the neckline and sleevebands, whipstitching or straight-stitching it in place. Two-the three-inch-wide crocheted lace also looks wonderful sewn around the outside of the neckline and beneath the sleevebands. For those who enjoy heirloom sewing, entredeux is beautiful around the hemline of a gown and in the sleevebands. A ribbon bow at the center front of the bodice (see illustration above left) adds a lovely touch. Once you have finished your basic gown, it is fun to experiment with embellishments. Each type of trim can add a new dimension to your gown!

Further Fun:

Be sure to visit my Sewing Tips section (<http://sensibility.com/sewingtips.htm>), where you will find photo instructions that demonstrate adding a train to the gown, making the gown button in front, making a drop-front (“apron”) bodice and more!

* While Kim is no longer creating paper dolls, I do offer Kim’s beautiful “Penelope” Regency doll printed on cardstock and as an instant download. See <http://sensibility.com/doll> for more information.

Appendix B: What About Underpinnings?

If you are aiming for the total Regency look, you will need to create the proper undergarments before you begin on your gown. I have available a Regency Underthings Pattern that will give you a chemise and short stays to go under your gown. I also have available a page of instructions for making the Regency Gown pattern into a bodiced petticoat if you prefer that instead of stays. See www.sensibility.com/pattern/petticoat.htm for directions with photographs (note that you can also use these instructions to create a full petticoat to go over your chemise and stays as well--you'd simply omit the darts and boning in the petticoat).

If you are over a "D" cup, I would not recommend my short stays, since they will not provide you the needed support. Instead, I highly recommend the Regency Stays pattern by the Mantua Maker. This pattern is available directly from www.mantuumaker.com, which also offers the needed busk for the center front. The pattern does tend to run a little on the small size, so I strongly recommend that you make up a muslin toile for a try-on (as instructed in the directions) and that you begin by cutting the pieces out a couple of sizes larger than your measurements indicate.



Do note that you *can* wear the Regency Gown over a conventional bra, but you'll find that the overall fit is nicer and looks better with proper underpinnings. And it is really fun to have your Regency wardrobe correct from the skin out!

Aprons, anyone?

I've been asked many times about patterns for Regency aprons, but you really do not need a pattern to create a simple apron for this time period. All you need to do is to cut a rectangle of material large enough to cover the front of the bodice (with slight gathers if you wish and enough room for a hem all the way around the top and sides or room for a seam allowance if you prefer to line it). Next, cut a rectangle the same width and as long as you wish for the apron skirt front (plus room for seam allowances at top and sides and the hem at the bottom). Cut straps wide enough to turn under (or to fold in half, sew, and turn right-side out) and long enough to go from the front bib of the apron down to the empire waist in the back. Cut a waistband that will go around your empire waist and either tie or overlap in back. Finally, cut two rectangles for the skirt back that match the skirt front in length and that will just meet when the apron is tied or hooked closed in the back. Sew the straps to the front bib, then sew the front bib to the waistband (matching center fronts). Sew the skirt pieces together at the side seams, then sew the skirt to the waistband, matching center fronts again. Sew the shoulder straps into the back waistband. Finish all the edges nicely (lining the waistband to enclose all the raw seams), and that's all there is to it!

Have fun with all your Regency sewing adventures!

Appendix C: Help for Miss Petite!

If you are usually a size 0 or 2 in off-the-rack sizes and have a petite frame (particularly if you are narrow through the shoulders with a measurement of less than 15" from shoulder to shoulder), you will need to make some adjustments to the bodice pattern pieces to obtain a perfect fit. If you go by your bustline measurement when choosing a size, you are likely to end up with a gown that either gapes badly in the front neckline or that slips off one shoulder. This section is here to help you alter the pattern to give you a beautiful fit every time.

Making a Toile

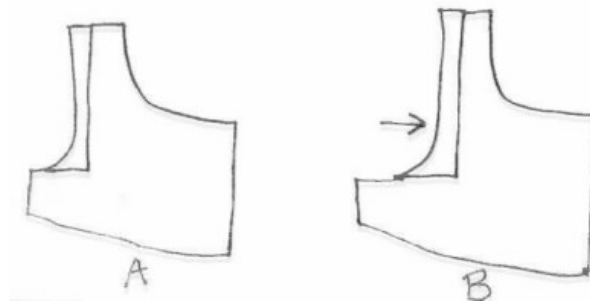
I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of making a toile for a try-on before you cut out your fashion fabric. A toile is simply a garment or partial garment constructed from muslin or another inexpensive material. In this case, you'll need to make a bodice for your fitting—no need to add sleeves or anything else. Baste together the pieces, then enlist the aid of a helper to pin the bodice closed in back (the overlap should be 1 ¼" to allow for the seam allowance and overlap on the final gown). Do note that it is vital that you try on your toile over the undergarments you intend to wear beneath your gown!

But What About My Size?

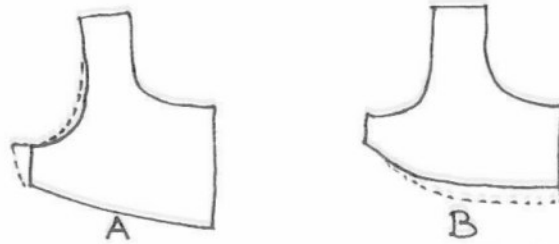
My general rule of thumb for Miss Petite is this: If your bustline measurement indicates that you need a size 10, you should make your toile in a size 8. Just go a size down from whatever your bustline measurement indicates and create your toile from that size. Then you can proceed to the step-by-step instructions for fitting your toile. This will help you circumvent many narrow shoulder fitting issues from the get-go.

Fitting and Making Adjustments

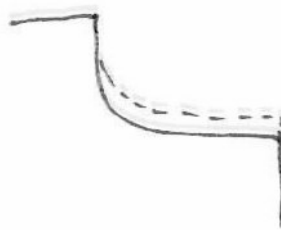
1. Once your toile is basted together, put it on over your undergarments and have a helper pin it closed in back as explained above. Standing in front of a mirror, check to make sure the side seams of the bodice come directly below the underarm (if you are wearing a set of stays or a petticoat beneath, you can actually pin the side seam of the toile to the side seam of the undergarment to anchor it). Also check to make sure the armholes are comfortable (keeping in mind they'll be larger once the sleeves are sewn in). Going down a size may mean you need to trim out a wee bit at the bottom of your armhole. If you do cut down the armholes, be sure to use a sleeve in the next size *up*.
2. Now take a good look at the shoulders of the bodice. The outside edge should extend past your shoulders by 5/8" (the seam allowance for the sleeve). If the shoulders are drooping or falling down, you'll need to adjust them by bringing them in closer to the neckline. For now, just write down how far toward your neck the shoulders need to move. When you are ready to make the change to your master pattern, you will create an "L"-shaped slash like the one shown in "A" below, then move the entire armhole area in toward the neckline to take up the amount you've noted ("B"). Repeat this step for the bodice back piece. (Making these changes will also take up any slack in the neckline if you have gaping issues there.)



- Before you check the fit of the bustline, it is best to go ahead and make a new toile with the changed shoulder area. If you didn't have to make any changes to the shoulder, then just continue on. Pull up the basting stitches below the bustline on each side to take in the fullness that will be gathered into the skirt front when you make your gown. Now check to make sure there is room enough in the bodice to accommodate your bosom. Essentially, there should be no pulling horizontally across the bust, and the bodice should be long enough so that the bottom hits you below the bustline, leaving enough room for your seam allowance and a comfortable fit. If there is any pulling or binding horizontally, you will add to your side seam as shown in "A" below. If the bodice seems too short, note down how much length you need to add to it (this is also true for ladies with a low bust point, by the way). Change your master pattern as shown in "B" below.



- Finally, take a good look at your neckline to make sure you like where it is hitting you. Do keep in mind that you will "lose" 5/8" all the way around the neckline of your gown when it is sewn to the lining. You can make changes to the neckline of your master pattern by simply following the curve line indicated, marking it either higher or lower, depending on your own needs:



- Once you've got your master pattern marked and adjusted, go ahead and cut out the lining of your gown and sew it together. Use this as your final toile to check the fit one last time. If you're happy with what you see, congratulations! You're ready to start on your gown. If you find you're still running into some fitting concerns, be sure to visit <http://sensibility.com/pattern/whynot.htm> for additional fitting helps for ladies of all shapes and sizes. No one has a "standard" body, so fitting a toile to create a master pattern is a big accomplishment that will guarantee success in all your sewing endeavors!

Enjoy Your Regency Creations!