1960

Facts about Fitting

Agricultural Extension Service

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Recommended Citation

http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/extension_circ/618
FACTS ABOUT FITTING

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, BROOKINGS
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FACTS ABOUT
F I T T I N G

A garment that fits well looks as if it “belongs” to the wearer. Such a garment adapts itself to the standing, sitting, and moving positions of the person wearing it. It is neither too loose nor too tight and it feels and looks comfortable. It brings out the good points in the individual’s figure and skillfully hides poor ones.

Insuring a good fit may depend on fitting after the basic fitting dress is cut and basted or after the ready-made dress is bought. This circular deals with that type of fitting, not with special pattern alterations.

Whether the garment is to be made at home with adjustments on a basic fitting pattern or whether the changes are to be made in a ready-to-wear garment, you need to be able to recognize signs of good and poor fit.

Fabric Grain and Seams Earmark Good Fit

A good fit is indicated by the direction of grain of the fabric. The crosswise yarns should be parallel to the floor at the center front and back bust line and hip line. The lengthwise yarns on the sleeve cap should lie in the direction of the arm when it hangs straight at the side. Crosswise yarns on the sleeve cap are generally parallel to the floor (figure 1).

Seam line is a second indicator of good fit. Seams that lie and hang straight keep the dress in line. The shoulder seam should rest on the top of the shoulder so that it is not seen from the front or back. Armhole seams should make a curve under the arm and over the top of the shoulder. They should be straight in front and back except when special style features such as extended shoulders call for a change. The waistline seam should appear to be straight around the figure, although it does dip slightly in the front, following the natural curve of the waist. The under-arm waist seams and skirt side seams should hang straight down with no swinging to the front or back.

Look At Your Figure

The first step on the road to good fit is to know your own figure. Study it standing before a full-length mirror. Each person’s weight distribution and bone structure may differ from the model used in making the pattern. These individual differences cause fitting problems. Some of the more common figure variations are square shoulders, wide shoulders, narrow sloping shoulders, rounded shoulders in the back, prominent back hips or side hips, sway back (exaggerated hollow at the waistline), large upper arm, very thin arms, short or long arms, short or long waist.

Begin With the Pattern

It is important then, if you are going to make a garment at home, to begin by taking accurate measurements. Bust, waist, and hip measurements are generally listed on the pattern envelope. You will need help in taking these measurements accurately. Most patterns are sold by bust measure. If you have few figure irregularities, a pattern in the right bust size should fit fairly well. Study the scale of measurements given in the pattern book to see which size pattern is nearest to your own measurements. Follow measuring directions carefully. Remember that pattern companies allow tolerance in the pattern to take care of fullness.

A Basic Fitting Pattern which is available now from most pattern companies would furnish a permanent guide for you when it is adjusted to your figure. Following the directions in this circular to remedy fitting problems, you will be able to make the necessary changes in the muslin cut from the basic fitting pattern; later, transfer the changes from muslin to the pattern tissue, then to the style pattern you choose. The device of the basic fitting pattern is a great time saver and is perhaps the most efficient way to get a good fit in the garment you are making.

Altering Ready-to-Wear

For garments purchased ready-to-wear, the altering must be done on the garment. The smart shopper will always try on the ready-made garment before buying, in order to see and feel how it fits. Here, too, it is necessary to recognize good and poor fit when you see it. If the alterations necessary would be too hard to make, it would be wise not to buy the garment. It is also wise to remember when you are fitting an article of clothing, either one that you are making or one you are buying, always to wear the shoes and foundation garments you intend to wear with it.

Problem, Cause, and Remedy

With this brief background for recognizing the signs of good fit and the necessity for accurate body measurement, we can discuss now the most common fitting problems, what causes them, and how they may be remedied.

PROBLEM 1:

In this problem the armhole line falls too far down on the arm and sometimes pulls the neckline away from the side of the neck. It is probably caused by shoulders being too narrow in proportion to the bust.
If a garment cut from a basic fitting pattern is used, fold and pin a diagonal tuck into the muslin the amount needed for the correct shoulder width and then alter the basic tissue pattern accordingly. This can later be transferred to any style pattern where the same adjustment is called for. The directions in the instruction sheet which comes with the basic fitting pattern are good and easily understood. Many people prefer to make all of the changes needed in the muslin cut from the basic fitting pattern.

In a ready made garment it is possible to shorten the shoulder seam without changing the armhole or sleeve fit. To do this remove the sleeve, fold out and pin in the necessary amount in the blouse front and back to make the shoulder seam the right length (figure 2). Now cut a paper pattern of the garment with the tuck still pinned in, armhole and all. Unpin the tuck in the blouse. Pin the pattern to the garment and cut, giving the blouse a new shoulder line but retaining the original armhole so the sleeve will fit. Be sure not to take out too much ease in the blouse itself.

**PROBLEM 2:**

The blouse is too tight and draws through the bust, thus causing diagonal wrinkles down around the armhole, the crosswise grain drops under the arms and the blouse pokes out at the lower center front. The under arm seam swings to the front (figure 3A).

This is caused by a fuller bust than the pattern. It is evident that the blouse needs more width and length in the front. A garment needing this alteration should never be purchased unless there is enough extra length in the front of the blouse and a very good seam allow-
ance throughout. When there is sufficient length, rip open the underarm and shoulder seams. Let down the center front of the waist by tapering the seam allowance on the front shoulder to one-fourth inch at the neck edge. Then lift the lower waist front with one or more small darts at the underarm (figure 3B). In addition, more fullness in gathers or darts may be needed under the bust. Let out the front side of the underarm seam. This gives width across the bust and allows additional fullness under the bust. The allowance on the back is left unchanged.

**PROBLEM 3:**

The neck bulges and there are wrinkles across the chest (figure 4A). Coats and suits sag at the bottom. The cause of this problem is a very flat chest. The garment is too long between the shoulder and bust and the darts in the blouse are too deep for the small bust. The remedy for this is to raise the fabric at the neckline, and take deeper shoulder seams at the neck end pushing the extra amount to the armhole seam to be trimmed out. The front neckline will need to be reshaped (figure 4B).

If the blouse has an underarm dart, rip the side seam and the dart, pin in a narrow dart just wide enough to straighten the grain over the bustline. The extra cloth will then need to be trimmed off at the front waistline.

**PROBLEM 4:**

The blouse pokes out in back at the lower edge and at the neckline. Diagonal wrinkles form from the shoulder blades downward under the armhole (figure 5A).

This is caused by round shoulders or protruding shoulder blades or a roll of fat just below the neck.
The remedy for this in a readymade garment (if shoulders are only slightly rounded) is to take a few darts at the back neckline. If shoulders are very much rounded, raise the back shoulder seams at the armhole above the front, and then trim the armhole out to the same size (figure 5B). Darts or gathers may also be used and fullness may be needed at the waistline in back.

**PROBLEM 5:**

Diagonal wrinkles form from the neck to the lower armhole both back and front; the seam fits closely at the neck (figure 6A).

This is caused by sloping shoulders. The remedy for this problem is to take a deeper seam at the armhole end of the shoulder seam in the front only, if there are no wrinkles in the back. If there are wrinkles both front and back, lift both seams. Then hollow out the armhole the amount you have raised the seam so the sleeve will fit (figure 6B).

**PROBLEM 6:**

Crosswise wrinkles appear in the back above the shoulders and diagonal wrinkles toward the center front. The garment is loose at the neck (figure 7A).

This is the opposite of Problem 5, and is caused by square shoulders or prominent shoulder bones.

To remedy this, raise the shoulder seam at the neckline end, slanting to the regular armhole. If the neckline is raised too high, the neckline will need to be recut to the normal. If this is a ready-to-wear garment with a collar, rip the collar loose and recut the neckline (figure 7B).

**PROBLEM 7:**

The blouse is too long at the waistline in back so the blouse and skirt wrinkles crosswise at the waistline (figure 8A).

This is caused by a sway back. To remedy this in a dress with a waistline seam rip the side seam and take off the extra length at the lower waistline also deepen the shoulder seams to take up part of the length (figure 8B). The skirt often needs to be hollowed out until it is smooth at the waistline (figure 8C). In one piece dresses a crosswise dart will have to be folded in at the waistline. In ready-to-wear this could be concealed under a belt. However, one piece dresses are not good for people with sway back.

**PROBLEM 8:**

Neck and shoulder seam slides back. This is caused by a back armhole which is short in proportion to the front or because the blouse back is too narrow (figure 9A).

To remedy this, open the underarm seam. Raise the back and recut the back armhole (figure 9B).

This problem is hard to correct in ready-to-wear if it is caused by the back being too narrow. If there are wide seams the back can be made a little wider by letting out the seams.

**PROBLEM 9:**

Armhole problems:
(a) Blouse puckers and sags at the underarm seam. The cause may be a stretched armhole. In woolen fabrics this may be shrunk back into place. In other fabrics raise the shoulder seam at the armhole end and trim out the lower edge of the armhole (figure 10).
(b) Sleeve draws around the arm. This is caused because the armhole is too tight. The remedy is to clip where it is tight until it seems comfortable and mark a new armhole line and recut (figure 11).

(c) Sleeve sags under the arm and wrinkles downward. The sleeve draws when the arm is raised. This is because the armhole is too large. To remedy this take a deeper shoulder seam on the armhole and a deeper underarm seam. Recut the under part of the armhole to shape (figure 12).

PROBLEM 10:

Sleeve problems:
(a) Sleeve wrinkles from the under armhole to the elbow. This is caused by the sleeve being set too high in the armhole. To remedy this trim out the under side of the armhole slightly, and reset the sleeve.

(b) The sleeve cap puffs up. This is caused by the fullness not being distributed evenly. The sleeve cap may be too long. To remedy this case the fullness more evenly, leaving about 1 inch at the top without any ease; or take a deeper seam in the top sleeve cap.

(c) Sleeve draws across the back and the seams pull out. This is because the back is too narrow or the cap of the sleeve is too narrow (figure 13A). If the seams are large enough they may be let out (figure 13B). If the sleeve cap is too narrow and the sleeve is long enough, the sleeve may be raised and the cap recut giving more width (figure 13C).

(d) The sleeve binds and draws across the arm. This is because the sleeve is too small through the upper arm. Rip the sleeve from the armhole and piece it underneath and recut giving more width in the cap. Let out the seams if possible.

(f) The sleeve wrinkles diagonally both front and back from the shoulder to the armhole. Crosswise grain drops front and back (figure 14A). A short sleeve stretches out at lower edge this is because the sleeve cap is too short (figure 14C).

To straighten the grain (figure 14B & D), let the seam out if possible or fit the sleeve by raising the sleeve in the armhole at the lower part until the grain is straight then ease in the extra fullness toward the top of the sleeve. Work the sleeve up in the armhole. Trim off the amount of sleeve raised above the armhole (figure 14E).

PROBLEM 11:

Collar problems:
(a) If a rolled or notched collar stands away from the neck it is caused by the collar being set too far on the back of the neck or the collar being cut too straight. Correct this by raising the neck seam if possible, stretch the collar at the lower edge taking off the extra at the ends. If possible recut the collar to give a greater downward curve at the back neck edge of the collar.

(b) If the rolled or notched collar rolls too high and too close to the neck the neck edge of the collar may be hollowed out slightly until it fits. Attached collars rolling too high need more curve at the neck edge.

(c) Attached collars which ripple at the edge, or are too flat need a straighter neck edge. Recut the collar if possible.

PROBLEM 12:

Skirt problems:
(a) The skirt pokes out in front and cups in at the back (figure 15A).

This is caused by a prominent abdomen. To remedy this open the seams and raise the side front seams at the waist until the grain line is straight cut off the amount raised and let out the seam if necessary. The back will need to be raised a little at the center back (figure 15B). A one piece dress will need a deep bust dart and maybe one at the waistline in front.

(b) The skirt swings up at the lower back and draws in at the front just below the waistline.

This is just the reverse of (a) and is caused by a prominent back hip. The remedy is to let out the side seams, raise until the grain is straight and the skirt hangs evenly. If the seams are too small, raise the skirt
at the waistline from the back and on around to the front. Hollow out the top of the skirt if the figure is also sway back. The hem will probably need facing to make the skirt long enough.

(c) Pleats in the skirt spread and sag.

There are a number of reasons for this. The pleat insets may be poorly caught. To remedy this tack the pleat better. The waistline may be too loose allowing the skirt to sag in the front. To correct this raise the front waistline of the skirt and refit. A third cause may be that the skirt is too tight; if this is the case, this garment is not for you.

(d) The skirt cups in at the back or the side seams swing to the front.

The cause is that the back of the skirt may be too long between the waist and hips and too tight across the hips. To remedy this raise the skirt in the back until the hip grain is straight across the back and the seams hang straight. *Fit the hip first and then the waist.*

**PROBLEM 13:**

Other fitting problems:

(a) Skirt draws and binds around hips

Cause—Skirt too small

Remedy—Let seams out if possible and raise at the waistline and let out hem.

(b) Seam lines are off plumb, and skirt sags and wrinkles on one side. The hem is uneven.

Cause—one hip larger or higher than the other.

Remedy—Fit each side of the skirt separately, being sure the grain lines run true.

(c) Garment draws at the seams and has a tendency to slide up.

Cause—garment is too tight.

Remedy—Let out seams. If this is not enough the garment may have to be remodeled.

Sometimes the blouse will draw at the bust line because the waistline gathers are in the wrong place or the underarm darts are not slanted right. *Don't be afraid to change the position, length or slant of darts to fit your bust line.*

**Some General Fitting Rules**

Diagonal wrinkles in the garment to be fitted offer a clue to the adjustment needed. If there is a group of wrinkles they will generally point in the direction of the seam to be let out. A line drawn at right angles from the center of a diagonal wrinkle will point to the seam to be taken in.

**Darts are Controlled Wrinkles**

Darts have been called controlled wrinkles. They are useful fitting aids. They can be used to take up fullness and to shape and direct fullness where it is needed to straighten the grain. Tucks and gathers do the same things in softer fabrics. Try different locations for the darts until you get a smooth becoming line for you. In fitting, seldom take up as much as 1½ inches in one dart. Two or more darts are usually better than one larger one.

The dart should point in the direction of the body bulge but should not be stitched out to the point of the bulge, as in the bust line.

**Front shoulder** darts remove wrinkles from the shoulder down to the bust. Direct the shoulder dart toward the bust bulge—seldom over it.

**Back shoulder** darts give ease across the back of the blouse. They improve the fit on a round-shouldered person.

**Neckline darts,** tucks, or gathers at the back make dress fit snugly at the neck and yet allow for fullness over the back. Such darts may be straight or diagonal.

**Underarm darts** give ease and can be used to adjust the crosswise grain of the fabric below the bust. Usually one or more darts from the underarm seam are placed below but pointing toward the bust line. Generally this dart should be not more than three-eighths inch wide or more than 3 inches long.

**Waistline darts** are often placed in a blouse at points directly below the bust or shoulder blade in the back to give needed ease.

**Elbow darts,** correctly located, give elbow room and hold fullness in the right place. When locating such darts, bend the elbow and place the darts or gathers at the bend.

**Using the Fitting Facts**

After studying the fitting problems outlined in this circular, you will become more aware of your individual fitting problems. This will be helpful when selecting ready-to-wear garments which fit without too much alteration as well as furnishing information which you can use in making the changes a garment may need.

Through careful selections and good fitting your clothes will have that smart-custome-made look which comes when clothes have been styled, cut and fitted to your figure.