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Understanding Fit

Hope this helps all of you understand fit a little better.

Fit... I hear it often said, "I have given up on fit!" The purpose of this article is to help you understand why you don't get fit and help you understand it better. I hear women say, "I've been sewing for 40 years, I should know how to fit" To me that's like saying "I've been driving a car for 40 years, I should know how to clean a carburetor." If you then proceeded to clean the carburetor and did not do very well, you would not be surprised. Because we sew, it doesn't entitle us to know patterns. Most of us have never been taught and that has led to our fitting struggles. With sales of our products, we have an 800-help line and often I hear, "it doesn't fit!" My common response is "that doesn't really tell me anything except that your unhappy" but if we break "fit" down into simpler terms, I think we can all solve our own problems by answering a series of questions.

Let's define fit as 1. Circumference, 2. Length, and 3. Depth of a garment. These three things are necessary for a garment to fit and do not change over time. They are classic elements. The rest of the garment can be described as style, and this changes greatly over time. But fit is classic and is very costly when purchased in ready to wear.

When these three elements on the garment are the same as the body, the garment fits. Most of us don't understand these basic elements and so we struggle. But as we explain each of these elements, you'll begin to see how easy fit becomes. We will not deal with style elements in this article, just fit.

So, let's put the garment on and analyze fit:

#1 Circumference. Most of us understand circumference. Does the garment go around our bodies? Do we need more or less fabric, and most of us realize how to add or subtract fabric. The side seams are the easiest places to add or subtract but not always the best, as sometimes they throw off other relationships.



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Ease in our garment is included in our circumference. Ease in the top half of our body is mobility, ease in the bottom half of our body is how much sitting room we need. I have often heard 2" is standard. Let me say it clear, there is no standard. Ease in the top half of the body is mobility and mostly based on individual personalities. Some women don't mind barely being able to raise their arms, others don't want the fabric to even touch them.

Ease in the bottom half of the body is based on body fat, the more fat, the more ease is needed. Bones and muscles don't spread when we sit, fat does. Two women can both be size 12's, one may be 5'10" and very little body fat, one may be 5'2" and have greater body fat. The 5'2" woman needs more than 2" to sit. The 5'10" woman needs less. To find out how much ease you need in the bottom half of your body, wrap the tape measure around the widest part of your hips and while holding the tape measure, sit on a chair. Allow the tape measure to slip through your hand while it enlarges and read the circumference at full sitting. The difference between this sitting hip measurement and your standing hip measurement is your ease. You actually don't need your ease to get a garment to have correct circumference, more importantly you need your sitting hip measurement. All garments should be made to equal that number.

When needing to add a lot of circumference, it is best done by adding seams. If I need 14 extra inches at my hips, if I only have 2 side seams, then each part of the pattern must accommodate 3 ½". But if I have a side panel on the front and back then I have 14 places to put 1" and must only add 1" to each pattern. So it is easy to add vertical seams, adding nothing but a seam allowance at the top and more at the bottom or vice versa. (PICTURE)

So, to sum it up, do we have a circumference problem? Can we solve it through side seams or would we be better off to add a seam to give us more flexibility and allow a more graceful change from the top to the bottom of our body.

#2 Lengths.

There are 3 lengths that need to be correct on the garment and they need to match our body. They are 1. Base of the neck to bust, 2. Bust to waist, and 3. Waist to hip. These are easy to correct if wrong and can be changed by a shorten or lengthen line. Where we get confused is a lot of our patterns do not have enough lengthen or shorten lines to accommodate these three areas. Patterns are not gold, you



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can change them and should change them to accommodate you. A great place to change the length from base of the neck to bust is below the armhole and above the bust point. No other area has to be changed when this area is used.

Then the waist must be in the right place and we can shorten or lengthen the garment anywhere in between the bust and the waist, and do the same for the hipline area. (picture) Sometimes lengths of our body are different in the center than at the sides of our body, and we will cover this using the next section, which ties into depth.

#3 Depth.

Depth of the garment is achieved through darting. This is probably the most misunderstood fitting area. As the body has bulges, so should a well fit garment. Darts that match our bulges allow for greater mobility. The bulges of our body are the bust, shoulder blade, tummy, rear, and elbow. Every place there is a bulge, there is a change and the dart allows for that change of either length or circumference.

Example:

If I measure from the base of the neck to the bust and the bust to waist, my measurement is longer than if I measure from the edge of my shoulder to the waist. The reason that it is longer is because of my bust bulge and if I have a garment with no darting, then it is the same length in the center as it is on the side. When I wear a garment like this, the excess fabric on the side creates a gap, which is usually undesirable. To eliminate this excess fabric, we stitch a dart, the dart is equal to the difference between the longer length of the center of the body and the shorter length of the side of the body. The only other tool we have to accommodate this difference is the angle of the shoulder seam. So the angle of the shoulder seam and the angle of the bust dart are tools to help us get the center length and the side lengths of the garment to match our body.

As the bust gets larger, the center measurement gets longer and so the difference between the center of the body and the side of the body becomes greater, there fore the dart increases. This is the B cup, C



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cup, and D cup, as we know it. The same principle applies to the back of the body where the shoulder blade is, but because the bulge is smaller, the difference is less. As women get more rounded through their back, the darts must be increased to accommodate for this greater difference. We should recognize that without darts, we couldn't obtain great fit. If we look at a lot of the garments we wear, there is no darting. Not because it looks good on our bodies, but because by using circumference only when fitting, it is much easier to fit the masses. The garment does not really fit it just merely goes around the body. It is using only one of the fitting principles.

When there is no depth, we can take the garment off, place it on a table and it will lay flat. A flat garment on a UN flat body, such as we women is not flattering. Flat garments gap. Once depth is sewn into a garment, it is always there and the garment does not lay flat. Most of the time as depth is removed from our garments, so is length. You can tell when length is removed because it doesn't matter where the bust is in the garment or where the waist is. A great many of our garments today fit by using only circumference and not length or depth. When this happens, a curvy body is usually not happy and while they are quick to sew, they do not produce a satisfactory result.

So from now on, look at the pattern you select. Ask yourself, how many of the three ingredients of fit does this garment contain? Does it have all three, or does it merely go around the body? Then after each garment is made up, if you are not happy, analyze if fit is the problem. Except don't ask, does it fit? Ask: is the circumference ok? Do I need to add or would I like it if I took some fabric away? Do the lengths of the garment match the lengths of my body? Do I need to shorten or lengthen a particular section? And then, do I have gaps? Gaps are usually dart related. Sometimes I have a gap and a dart and that's an indicator that the dart is not large enough.

The reason many women struggle with pant fitting is because you must have correct length, depth and circumference. All three must come together just right for the pants to fit.

If these three areas we've discussed are correct and I have good fit, then maybe I don't like the garment because of style, but let's tackle one problem at a time. Let's for now learn to analyze fit.

If you have any questions please contact us!