



Pattern
Alteration

Bodice Back Width

AgriLIFE EXTENSION
Texas A&M System

Extension Family Development
and Resource Management Specialists

Before attempting this alteration, read Extension publications E-372, *Principles of Pattern Alteration*, and E-373, *Personal Measurement Chart*, for instructions on basic alterations.

Often the back bodice of a garment is too tight or too loose because the wearer has a wide or narrow back (Fig. 1). These fitting problems can be corrected by altering the bodice back width on the pattern.



Bodice back too tight



Bodice back too loose

Figure 1

If the back bodice is too tight, the sleeve seams will tear out at the back or horizontal wrinkles will form across the back. To alter a tight bodice, increase the width of the pattern. If the back bodice is too loose, vertical folds or wrinkles will form or the back will hang loosely away from the body. To alter a loose bodice, decrease the pattern width.

To determine the amount of alteration needed, compare the wearer's personal measurements with the pattern measurements. As a guide, use the back shoulder width measured 4 inches (10 cm) below the base of the neck. (Refer to line 9 on the *Personal Measurement Chart*.)

To help determine where the alteration is needed, check the fit of an unaltered garment. Find the point below the base of the neck where back width differs most from the pattern width, and alter the pattern there. Most often, alteration is needed across the shoulder blades.

Do not confuse a wide back with a round back. A round back may need both the length and the width altered in certain areas, and darts may need to be added to fit the body. For specific instructions on altering for a round back, see Extension publication E-379, *Round Back and Dowager's Hump*.

Basic fitted bodice, princess-style bodice and shirt

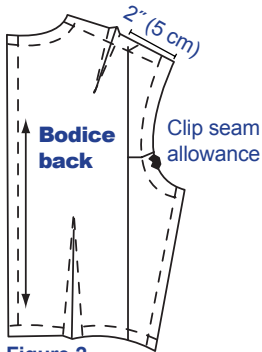


Figure 2

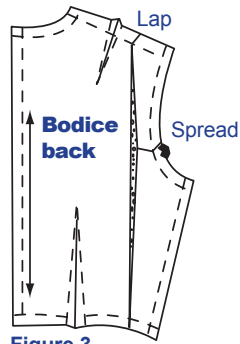


Figure 3

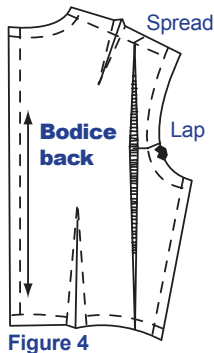


Figure 4

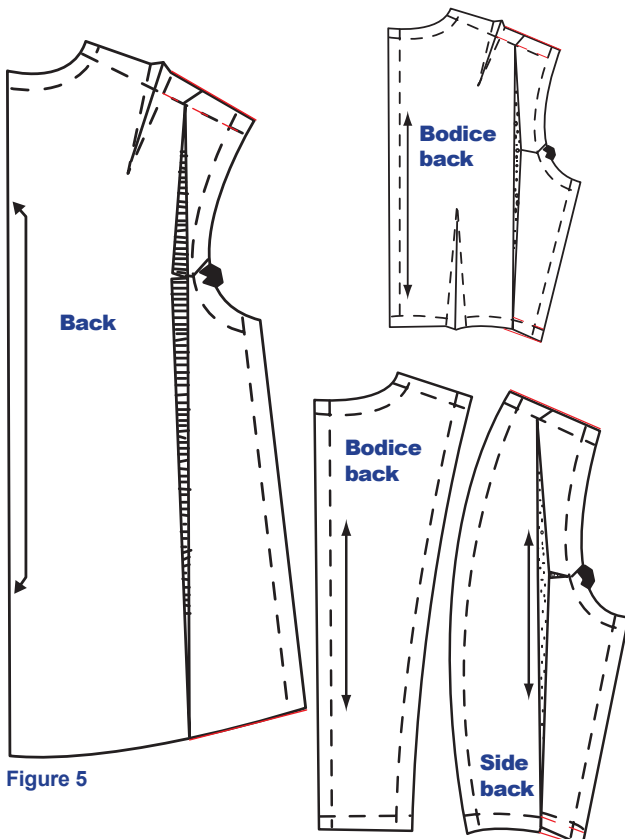


Figure 5

Here are the steps for altering a basic bodice, a princess-style bodice or a shirt:

1. Along the shoulder seam line, measure 2 inches (5 cm) from the armhole seam line and mark it. Draw a vertical line from this point to the lower edge of the pattern, parallel to the lengthwise grainline or the center back (Fig. 2).
2. From the vertical line, draw a horizontal line to the armhole seam line at the notch or at the point where the alteration is needed as shown in Figure 2.
3. Cut along the vertical line from the waistline or lower edge *to, but not through*, the shoulder seam line. Cut along the horizontal line *to, but not through*, the armhole seam line. Clip the shoulder and armhole seam allowances to the seam lines at the slashes (Fig. 2).

To increase the bodice back width:

4. Place tissue paper under the pattern. Spread the vertical slash where it intersects the horizontal slash one-half the total width needed. Keep the pattern flat. Then taper the slash so the pattern sections touch but do not lap near the waistline and lower edge. The horizontal slash at the armhole will lap. The clipped seam allowances will lap or spread as needed. Tape the pattern in place (Fig. 3).

To decrease the bodice back width:

4. Lap the pattern along the vertical slash where it intersects the horizontal slash one-half the total decrease needed. Keep the pattern flat. Taper the lap so the pattern sections touch but do not lap near the waistline and lower edge. The horizontal slash at the armhole will spread. If needed, place tissue paper under the spread area. The clipped seam allowances will spread or lap as needed. Tape the pattern in place (Fig. 4).

To complete either alteration:

5. Redraw the lower edge and/or waist seam line to maintain a smooth line. Redraw the shoulder seam and cutting lines as straight lines (Fig. 5).

Modified princess-style bodice

To alter a modified princess-style bodice, follow these steps:

1. Pin the back bodice pieces together from the armhole and along the princess seam line as far as seam lines will match with the pattern flat. Alter the pattern in the same way as a true princess-style bodice (Fig. 6).
2. Separate the pattern pieces and add more tissue paper if needed. Tape the pattern in place. Redraw all of the altered seam lines and cutting lines (Fig. 7).

Vests, tunics and dress without a waistline

These are the steps for altering vests, tunics and dresses without waistlines:

1. Measure in 2 inches (5 cm) from the armhole seam line along the shoulder seam line, and mark it. Draw a vertical line from this point to the lower edge, parallel to the lengthwise grainline or center back (Fig. 8).
2. From the vertical line, draw a horizontal line to the armhole seam line at the notch or at the point where the alteration is needed, as shown in Figure 8.
3. At the waistline, draw a horizontal line from the side seam line to the vertical line.
4. Cut along the vertical line from the lower edge to, but not through, the shoulder seam line. Cut along horizontal lines to, but not through, the armhole and side seam lines. Clip the shoulder, armhole and side seam allowances to the seam line at the slashes (Fig. 8).

To increase the bodice back width:

5. Place tissue under the pattern and spread along the vertical slash where it intersects the upper horizontal slash for one-half the amount needed. Keep the pattern flat. Taper the spread so the pattern sections touch but do not lap near the waistline. Realign the vertical slash edges below the waistline so that the pattern sections touch but do not lap. The horizontal slash at the armhole will lap and the slash at the waistline will spread. The clipped seam allowances will lap or spread as needed. Tape pattern in place (Fig. 9).

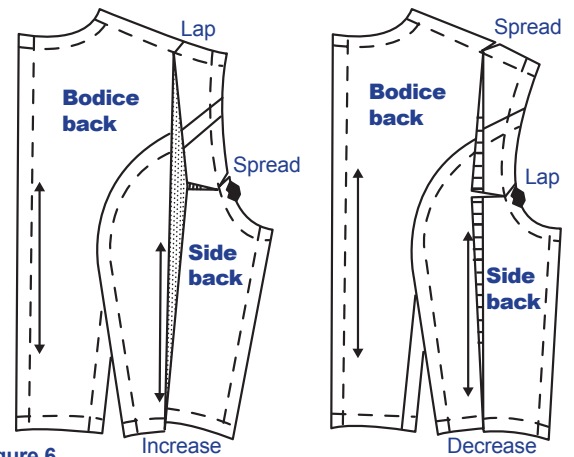


Figure 6

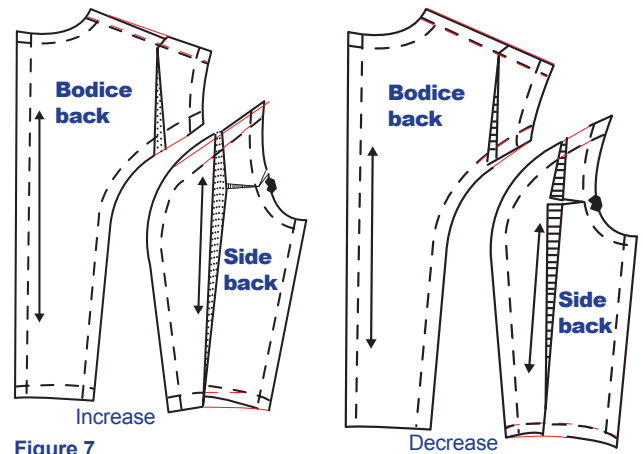


Figure 7

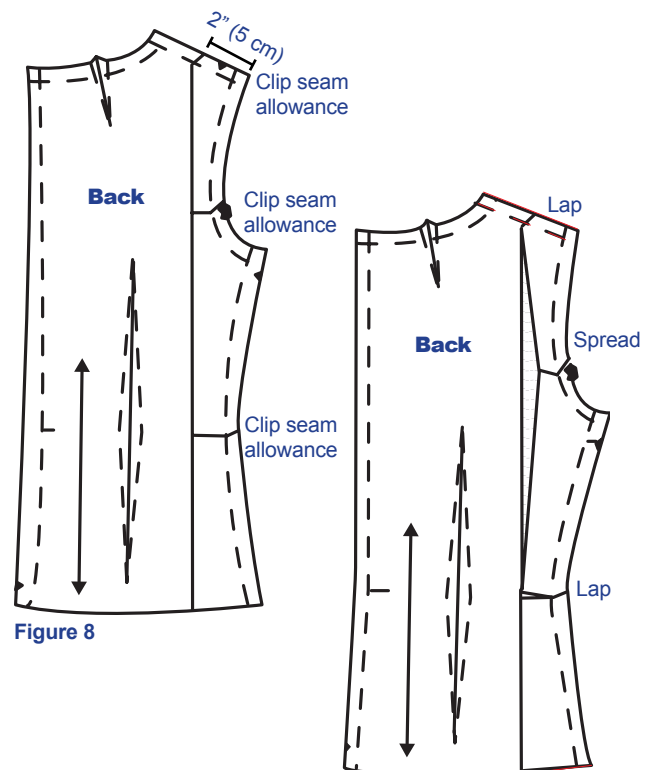


Figure 8

Figure 9

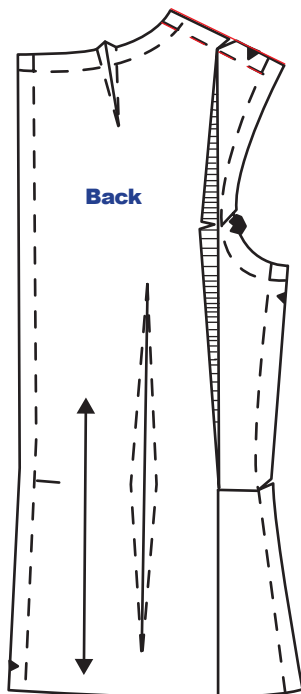


Figure 10

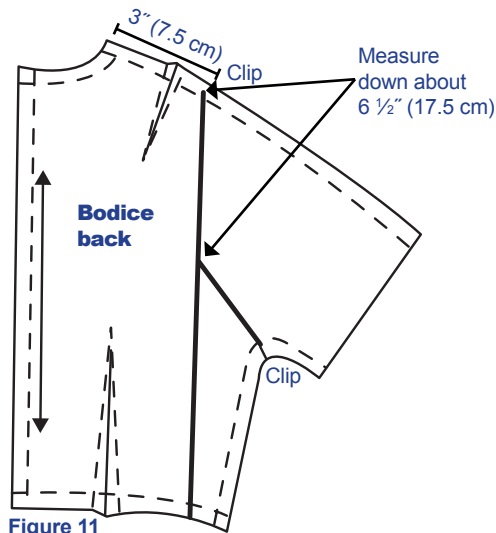


Figure 11

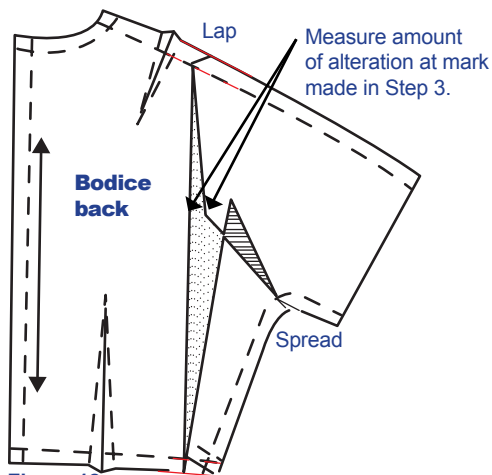


Figure 12

To decrease the bodice back width:

- Lap the pattern along the vertical slash where it intersects the upper horizontal slash one-half the decrease needed. Keep the pattern flat. Taper the slash so the pattern sections touch but do not lap near the waistline. Realign the vertical slash edges below the waistline so the pattern sections touch but do not lap. The horizontal slash at the armhole will spread and the horizontal slash at the waistline will lap. The clipped seam allowances will spread or lap as needed. Tape the pattern in place (Fig. 10).

To complete either alteration:

- Redraw the shoulder seam and cutting lines to straight lines. Redraw the lower edge to a smooth cutting line (Figs. 9 and 10).

Kimono or dolman sleeve bodice

To alter a kimono or dolman sleeve bodice:

- Fold in the shoulder dart, if any. Measure 3 inches (7.5 cm) from the normal neck seam along the shoulder seam line, and mark it. Release the dart (Fig. 11).
- Draw a vertical line from the marked point to the waistline, parallel to the lengthwise grainline or center back.
- Measure down the vertical line about 6½ inches (17.5 cm), or to the point where the alteration is needed. Mark the location.
- Draw a line from the mark to the underarm curve seam line.
- Cut along the vertical line from the waist to, but not through, the underarm seam line. Clip the shoulder and underarm seam allowances to the seam lines at the slashes (Fig. 11).

To increase the bodice back width:

- Place tissue paper under the pattern and spread the vertical slash one-half the total amount needed where it intersects the diagonal slash. Use the spread of the upper pattern section to measure the amount altered. Keeping the pattern flat, be sure that the pattern sections still touch near the waistline. The diagonal slash will lap or spread as needed. Tape the pattern in place (Fig. 12).

To decrease the bodice back width:

- Lap the pattern one-half the decrease needed along the vertical slash where it intersects the diagonal slash. Use the lap of the upper pattern section to measure the amount altered. Keeping the pattern flat, be sure the pattern sections do not lap near the waistline. The diagonal slash will spread. If needed, place tissue paper under it. The clipped seam allowances will spread or lap as needed. Tape the pattern in place (Fig. 13).

To complete either alteration:

- Redraw the waist seam and cutting lines to form a smooth curve without changing the length of the bodice. Fold in a dart, if necessary, to redraw a smooth shoulder seam and cutting lines (Figs. 12 and 13).

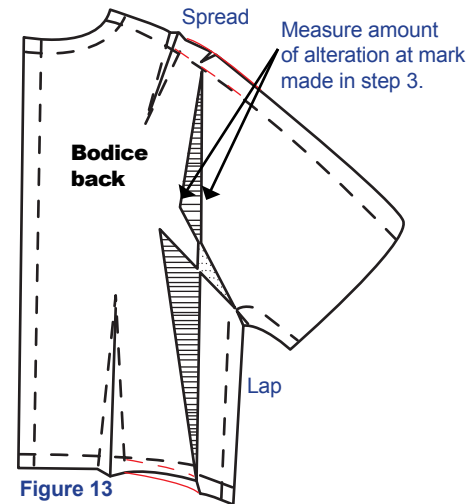


Figure 13

Ann Vanderpoorten wrote the original manuscript for this publication.

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