

# How to Draft and Design Original Doll Garments to Fit the Doll of Your Choice

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How many times has it happened that you design a doll from the beginning, or use someone else's pattern with the intent of making an entirely different character than the one you only to find that you now have the arduous task of designing clothing to actually *fit* the doll?

I have flipped through children's books on occasion, for example, and decided that I would make such-and-such a doll. "I like that costume... I have my doll...*Now what?*" is a typical scenario. Sound familiar? You go and purchase the perfect fabric from the store with trim and embellishments to die for. You get home and when no one's looking, you wrap it all on top of the doll and wrap it up ten times. You imagine and you play around for an hour or so. Put the doll back and go make dinner or something. How many times have you done this? Later you go looking through all your patterns for the kind of clothes to dress this doll in, but none of them seem to fit right. Even look through your own and Butterick patterns (that's IF you are still making "real people clothes" now that you are addicted to dolls!) No luck, but you're not giving up. You spent 5 hours on trying to find something free. "Nah, that's not what I wanted. Ok, I'll do it myself." Out come the paper and scissors, and.... Oh Brother! Look on the bright side, you will never know the difference!

Sound familiar? How much "hard-earned fabric" have you wasted this way? The doll might, that doll clothing ends up looking like something out-of-this-world (really!) and the doll goes into a black-hole of a storage bin, along with that unfinished quilt and cozy and apron I wanted to make last autumn, and all the other mishaps and haphazard things. Oh, quit! My point is, we've all been there, done that. Sometimes making a doll can be a snap compared to dressing it with no pattern on hand, no matter what you've got floating around in your head at 150 miles per hour. That's the hard part. How much fabric have you wasted on mistakes? A great doll has a great outfit. The

doubt about it, and unless you are making a 'wild art doll' and gluing pieces together make some makeshift clothing, a good doll designer must know how to design good. Believe it or not, this is often more difficult than designing real clothes for real (don't worry, this is NOT your imagination!)

Here is a method that I developed to help make the task more straightforward. It involves a little patience, and is based on draping, pattern grafting and garment construction principles. With a little practice, it is much easier than it sounds! I recommend keeping a good book on garment draping in your library, the kind that is used as a textbook for fashion design students. You don't need to learn how to drape like a professional, just look at the drawings and flip around in the book now and then until you feel comfortable with this subject. Imagine the drawings are your dolls. It works subliminally, trust me! This really is not mandatory, but it has been very helpful and has given me confidence. Sometimes I leave the book out on my table in my room when I know people are coming to visit, so I look more sophisticated than I am!

If your garment is very loose and flowing, like a historical robe sort of thing, or has many pleats or other complicated details, then you will need to know more about garment design. Also, let's assume that you have experience making clothing - *that is*- and feel comfortable working with regular patterns. These things considered, I will construct a tunic and robe, which will serve as is the basic underlying principle of the method. You can adjust the pattern to be a dress, a jacket, whatever your heart desires.

I'll supply you with a super easy doll body pattern that you can stuff and shape however you like. It can be a man or woman. The arms and legs are already attached to the body, just like a gingerbread cookie, to make life more simple. Only the head is separate. *Let's get started!*

**IMPORTANT:** As a general rule, I do not attach the head of my dolls until they are dressed. It makes it easier to put the clothes on in case I don't feel like making the head removable.

This also assists me to design the clothes after the new doll is ready.. I can get in the way.

***Materials:***

**Doll**

**Paper**

**Tape**

**Writing utensil**

**Scissors**

**Latte (just kidding)**

**Before we begin, take your doll in hand and lay it down aside the original pattern.**

**Does the doll have the same sort of shape as what you see on paper?**

**Whether**

**the answer is yes or no, this question is an important key point to understand and consider when you are designing a doll garment. Why?**

**Well, think about it. Instinctively, many people make the mistake of attempting to graft a pattern as a take-off of the original doll pattern. It makes perfect sense, because you are dressing that doll. Logically, by adding a large seam allowance, it should be possible to make a good garment pattern just for that doll. But it won't always work, and in many cases, the results will be disastrous. WHY?**

- 1. What if I have used a very stretchy fabric, and the doll stretches after it is stuffed?**
- 2. What if I sculpt muscles or breasts, or even make my doll fat?**
- 3. Or better yet, what if I have a complicated torso pattern with more than a front and a back? (it might have sides, which add a special third dimension that I would not necessarily envision on paper)**
- 4. How do I know how tall the doll really is or the length from shoulder to**

fingertip, until the doll is already assembled?

5. Sometimes stuffing a doll gives it a character you may not see in the pattern. When this happens, I don't mind.... I let the doll create itself and go from there! Here is what our board-flat pattern looks like when it is made with stretchy fabric and sculpted with stuffing.... Incredible, isn't it? Look at that body! Those muscles! They were not in the pattern! How d'ya like that!



Okay, back to business. How are we going to dress this guy? The clothes make the man...

- 1) Lay the finished doll out on a piece of paper.  
The paper must be larger than the doll.
- 2) Loosely trace the doll's torso, and draw  
arrow markers where the arms and neck are.

**IMPORTANT:** Sometimes arms have wire in them and are positioned in a specific way. I like to design my clothing to accommodate these positions, and once in a while I make a sleeve slightly different than the other to help accent the position of the arm. Whether I choose to do this depends on what kind of dress she is wearing, what she is "doing," etc. When tracing, do not make it exact, according to the seam, the body, etc. Just make a general outline.

- 3) Make a mark where you expect the hem to be.
- 4) Cut out your clothing "pattern" with paper towels- cut out a front and a back,  
just like you normally would if it were fabric
- 5) Add darts if applicable
- 6) Hold it up to the doll- does it seem like it will fit?
- 7) "sew" it and try it on the doll.
- 8) When you are satisfied, then make a muslin, and if completely satisfied with that, then make your garment.
- 9) Enjoy!

**I hope this gives you some ideas to work with !**

