

Fitted Dress Construction

A Primer

Lesson 2: Assembly and Lining

Maistresse Mathilde Bourette
Charlotte Johnson
charlotte.r.johnson@gmail.com
<http://www.mathildegirlgenius.com>

Introduction

This is one of a series of instructions for turning your four-panel fitted dress mockup into something that you can wear.

This tutorial was written with beginner to intermediate-level sewers in mind. If something in these documents is unclear, please contact me and I will try to clarify or correct the instructions. There are often many ways to skin a cat. I am presenting techniques which work for me and for those who I've helped construct a gown.

I have provided a bibliography of main sources at the end, but quite a bit of this tutorial is the result of knowledge accumulated throughout years. These instructions are not heavily footnoted, as they're more of user's guide than formal documentation. Many of the references can be found in other papers located at my website. If you need your own documentation I'd suggest checking out the books in my bibliography. They're excellent sources, and are good foundation books for anybody interested in knowing more about the period.

Overview of Lining Styles

Before you start sewing your dress together, you should decide if, and how, you want to line it. Some extant garments found were unlined. Others, for example, the Uppsala gown¹, were lined in linen. With only a handful of examples, there's mostly speculation as to common lining techniques.

Two of the most common techniques are known as "bag lining" and "interlining", or "flat lining". How you decide to line your dress depends on the strength needed in the seams, and how you want the inside of the dress to look.

¹ See <http://www.personal.utulsa.edu/~marc-carlson/cloth/uppsala.html> for more information about the Uppsala gown. On the same website, Marc Carlson has a nice overview of known extant medieval garments. I highly recommend reading through this source.

When I line a dress, I always use linen. Linen is sturdy and won't stretch much over the course of the day. It breathes, and doesn't usually add to the warmth of the dress. Linen is available in a variety of weights. For smaller figures, lining in lightweight linen is fine. For more ample figures, you can move up to medium and heavy weight linen for more support. I usually use white or natural linen, though some extant finds have linings of colored linen.

You should also decide how much of your dress you want to line. If you're only lining for support, you can line to the hips, or to the waist if your dress has a waist seam. If you want the lining to help the drape of the fabric, you might want to line the entire dress. You can also choose to leave your sleeves unlined.

Bag Lining – No Waist Seam

Bag lining is simple, hides all of your internal seams, but doesn't lend strength to individual seams. In a bag-lined dress, the lining is attached to the main fabric at the neck and all of the openings. Some people attach the lining at the floor, and others leave the hems separate. You can also choose to line the dress all the way to the hem, or just to the hips. I don't recommend lining only to the waist, as the lining has a tendency to ride up. If the lining extends below the point where the dress is fitted, eg. to below the hips, you can usually avoid this problem.

To bag line your dress, sew together the four main body panels and gores, and sew together your four lining panels and gores, leaving the front open. I will approach bag lining the skirt of a dress with a waist-seam below.

TIP: If you set your sewing machine at just the slightest zig zag, the seams will look a little more period from the outside. You're not going to fool an expert, but you might fool somebody.

The order of assembly is largely a matter of preference, but I will list the steps that I go through. I usually use two half gores in the back, two halves in the front, and a full gore in each side. For more explanation of the gores, see *Lesson 1: Patterning the Skirt and Cutting the Dress*:

1. Sew a half gore to each of the back panels, the bias of the gore against the straight edge of the center back.

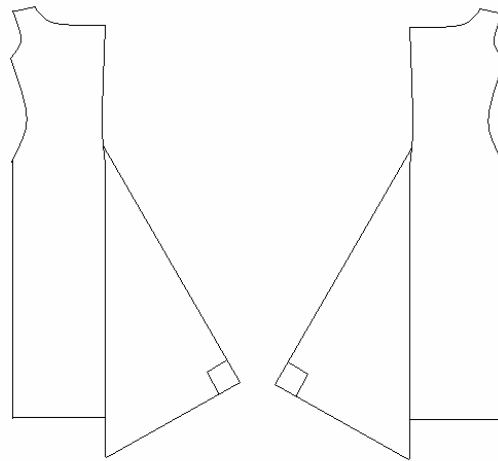


Figure 1: The half gores attached to the back.

2. Sew the two back panels together, treating each panel and half gore as one piece.

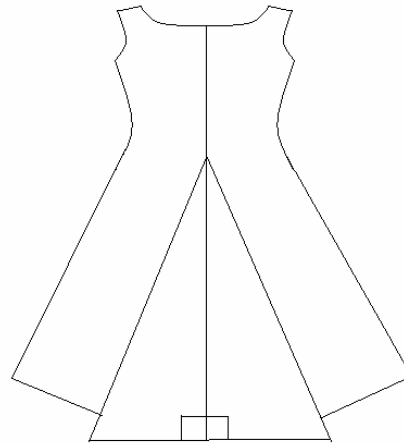


Figure 2: The completed back section.

3. Sew the full side gores to each of the back panels.

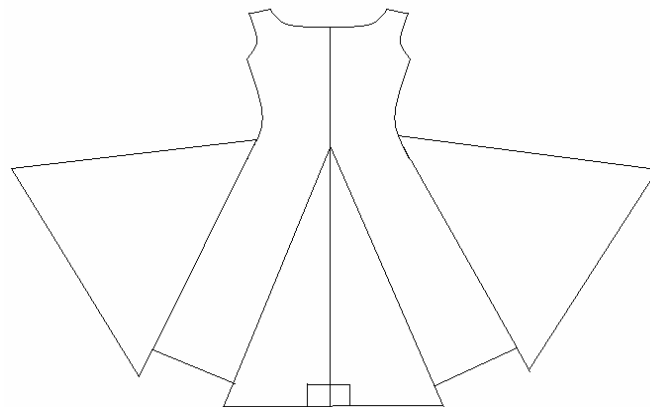


Figure 3: The side gores added.

4. Sew a half gore to each of the front panels, the bias of the gore against the straight edge of the center front.

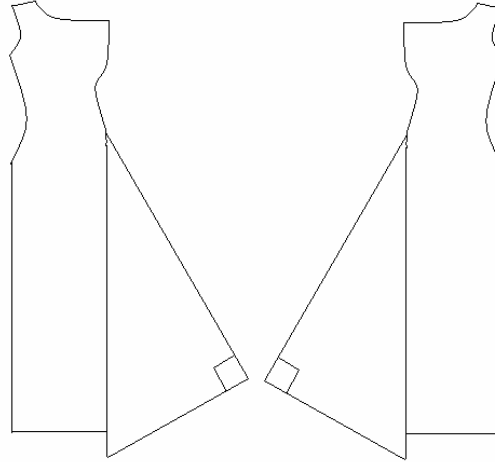


Figure 4: The half gores attached to the front.

5. Sew each front panel to the back section, at the sides.
6. Sew the shoulder seams.
7. Sew the front up to the desired height, leaving the top part open for lacing (this can also be done later)

You can sew your center front seam together right now, but I like to leave it open until I put in the eyelets. Sew together the lining in the same way. Zig-zag, serge, or otherwise finish your seams right now.

At this point, you have two pieces, the dress, and the lining. Place the dress and lining together, right sides together. Pin along the neckline and down the front opening. If you've already sewn the front part way, be careful of where all of the seam allowances are. Sew the dress and lining together, around the neckline, and down each side of the front. I usually sew around the entire neckline, down the front of one side, and then go down the front of the other side. If you start at the bottom of the sides, the fabric is likely to shift. Clip the curves, zig zag or serge the edges for strength, and turn the dress right side out. Press.

For now, leave the sleeves unattached.

If you haven't sewn your front seam closed before lining, you can do that now (or after you put in the eyelets). I usually close the dress someplace below the waist. Consider if you want the opening to fit over the hips, or if you want to always take it off over your head. Remember, the larger the opening, the more eyelet holes you have to make.

Go up between the dress and lining layers, and pin the front center seams to each other, right sides together, starting at the bottom of the bodice opening. Sew this seam just barely on the dress fabric, not on the lining, but as close to the center seam as possible. Go over the top few stitches several times for strength. This sounds much more complicated than it really is. In reality, I often sew this seam last, after I have finished all of the eyelets (then again, I usually only line to the hips and I use an interlining). It's simply a matter of preference.

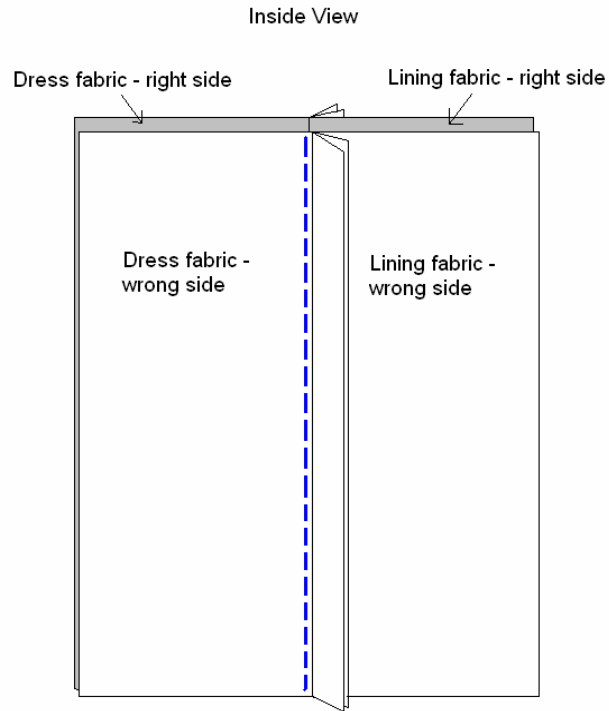


Figure 5: Sewing the front seam of a fully bag-lined skirt

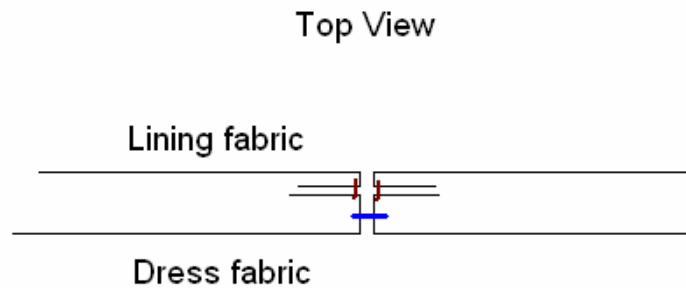


Figure 6: Cutaway view of front seam after sewing together.

Bag Lining – Dress with Waist Seam

To bag line a dress with a waist seam, sew together your four bodice panels, and sew together your four lining panels, leaving the front open on each. Place the lining and the dress together, right sides together, and pin along the neck and the front opening. Sew along the neck and front opening. Clip your seams, and turn the bodice right side out. Press.

Sew all of your skirt pieces together, and sew your skirt lining pieces to each other, leaving the front center open. When sewing the skirt pieces together, remember the bias to straight rule. On a trapezoidal panel skirt, you do need to have bias to bias on the very back seam. The very front seam will be straight to straight. This allows the skirt to drape evenly on both sides. I usually start in the back with the bias to bias seam. Add skirt panels equally to each side, until you reach the front. Leave the front seam open at this time.

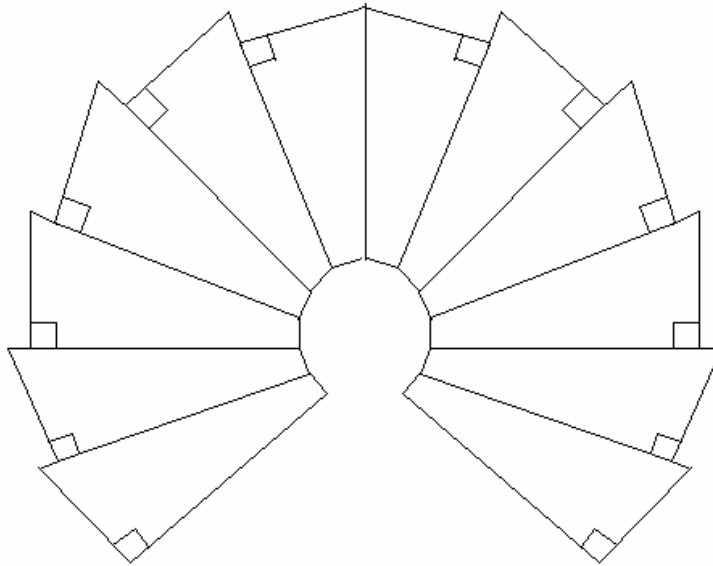
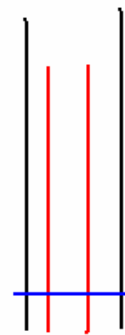


Figure 7: A twelve-panel skirt will look similar to this.

You now have three pieces – a lined bodice, the skirt, and the skirt lining.

Sandwich the right side out bodice between the skirt portions. Make sure that the right side of the skirt is facing the right side of the bodice, and that the right side of the skirt lining is facing the right side of the bodice lining.

Start by matching up the edges of the front opening, paying attention to the seam allowance on the skirt and skirt lining, and work your way evenly towards the back. If there is additional fabric on the skirt, that is fine. Pleat or gather the back of the skirt onto the back of the bodice. Sew the skirt pieces to the bodice, and turn right side out. Press.



skirt, bodice, bodice lining, skirt lining

Figure 8: Sandwich the bodice pieces between the skirt pieces.

To sew the skirt closed all the way up to the waist, go up between the skirt fabric and the skirt lining. Starting at the top for both seams, place right sides together, and sew down the center front, and the center of the lining.

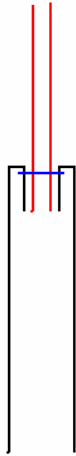


Figure 9: The skirt attached to the bodice, turned down and right side out.

For a dress with a waist seam, I often don't line the skirt. In that case, sew the skirt to the main fabric of the bodice.



Figure 10: Sew together the skirt and main bodice fabric, right sides together. Leave bodice lining free.

Fold the seam allowance up between the main fabric and the lining, and use a whip stitch² to tack the lining down, hiding all of the raw seams in the process.

² Throughout this document, I'll refer to a running stitch and a whip stitch. A running stitch is interchangeable with a back stitch and a half-back stitch, depending on the strength that you want in the seam. Frequently, I'll put four or five running stitches on the needle for each pass, then add in a back stitch when I start the next pass. This is very fast, and adds in just a little bit of additional strength. There are plenty of internet sites with pictures and even video to show you these stitches.

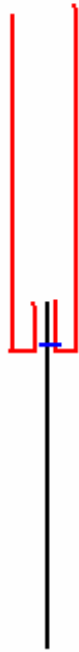


Figure 11: Open up the skirt and bodice, folding the seam allowance up between the bodice and bodice lining.

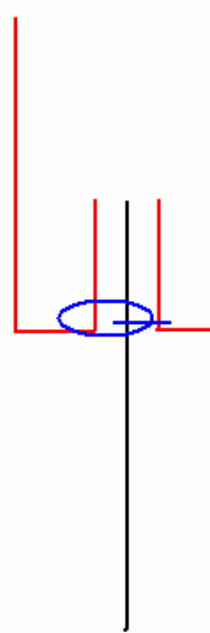


Figure 12: Whipstitch down the bodice lining.

Bag Lining – Attaching the Sleeves

Directions for making a sleeve pattern are available in a handout that I published a couple of years ago, called “Farm Boy, Fetch Me that Pitcher, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Reach My Own Damned Pottery”³. I make my sleeves after I’ve sewn together the dress.

I often don’t line my sleeves, but that is a matter of preference. If you do line your sleeves, match up the sleeve and the lining, right sides together. That usually means that the sleeve is right-side out, and the lining fabric is inside out on the outside. Sew around the cuff, and up the forearm opening, if applicable. Clip your seams, turn right side out, and press.

Pin the sleeve, fabric and lining, to the main fabric of the gown, right sides together. Leave the bodice lining free. Frequently, no matter how well fitted the sleeve, it doesn’t fit perfectly. This is normal, as both the sleeve head and the sleeve opening have quite a

³ Available at <http://www.mathildegirlgenius.com/Documentation/SleeveClass.pdf>

bit of bias stretch, and variances can happen during the attachment. This is why you pin it well during this step. Sew the sleeve, lining and main fabric, to the bodice.

At this point, a little hand sewing is necessary in order to hide all seam allowances. Fold in the seam allowance of the dress lining, and pin it over the seam allowances of the sleeves and main dress fabric. All seam allowances will be contained between the bodice fabric and the bodice lining. Whipstitch the dress lining fabric to tack it down. These stitches don't have to be tiny, even a third to half inch may be sufficient. If you're careful to stitch it to the lining or seam allowances, you won't see the stitching on the outside of the dress.

If you don't line your sleeves, attaching them to the dress is essentially the same. Hem the sleeves and/or attach buttons as necessary. Sew the sleeve to the main dress fabric. Fold the lining over the seam allowance, and whipstitch to tack down.

Interlining (or flat lining)

Interlining creates strong seams, but doesn't hide the seam allowances from view on the inside of the dress. If you want the dress to look finished both inside and out, you need to do a little more work to finish the edges. When creating a supportive dress, especially for a more ample figure, I almost always interline for strength.

To interline a dress, cut your lining pieces to the exact size of the dress pieces. I like to cut them both at once, if at all possible. Sandwich each lining and dress piece together, wrong sides together, and from here on out, treat them as one piece. Some people find that it helps to stitch the pieces together at the very edge. If you do this with a serger or zig-zag stitch, you can have machine-finished seams once you sew the dress together, without having to go back and do it again.

When you interline the dress, you will end up with raw edges around the neck and front opening. You can either fold this over twice and stitch down to hide the raw edge, or use a facing. I will discuss facings in the next lesson, *Hand Finishing*.

I usually leave the skirt bottom unattached, because invariably the dress fabric and the lining fabric will stretch differently. If you line only to the hips, you avoid this problem altogether.

Continue to *Lesson 3: Hand Finishing*

© 2008 Charlotte Johnson (Charlotte Wurtzel). The author of this work retains full copyright for this material. Permission is granted to make and distribute verbatim copies of this document for non-commercial private research purposes provided the author's name, the copyright notice, and this permission notice are preserved on all copies.