Good Measure for Success

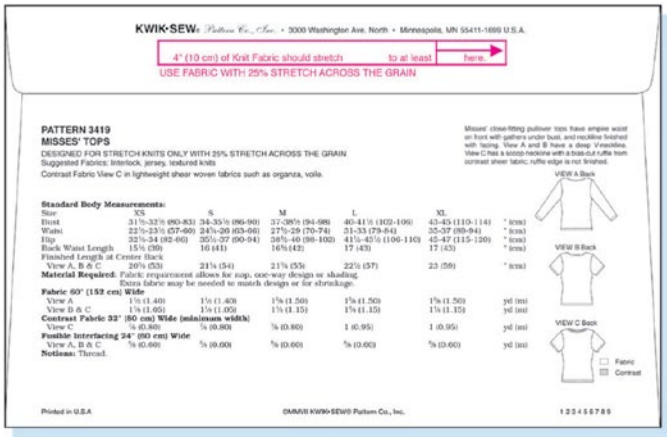
By Martyn Smith

The secret to success in making garments for yourself or others is taking precise measurements and applying them to the pattern. Martyn discuss his tips for successful measuring.

Taking your own measurements is very hard, so having someone else to take them for you is a bonus. Once accurate measurements have been obtained you are then able to choose the correct size pattern for the garment. Choosing the right size pattern is very similar to choosing the right size garment at the clothing store. Every company has its own idea of what a size 10 or a small should measure, but it's hard to establish what exact measurement they are using. Some brands try to gain customer loyalty by down-sizing their garments so a size 12 is selling as a size 8 etc., and this is supposed to appeal to one's vanity and create customer loyalty to the label. Contract pattern makers who work for a series of different companies often work from a different size chart for each brand rather than the traditional 'standard size chart' that seems to have been left behind a few decades ago. This also makes it very difficult for people returning to sewing garments, as garment sizing has completely changed over time and can be very confusing.

The back of a pattern envelope gives the purchaser a lot of information in regard to actual sizing and measurements, suggested fabrics to be used and amount of fabric and notions for each size. The suggested fabric list on the envelope also gives the purchaser a hint of the fabric weight and this will also give an indication on the season (winter or summer) and the amount of ease that has been allowed in the garment. See photos 1 and 2.

Ease is a mystery to most people and yet it is the most important issue when making up a garment or creating a pattern. When taking measurements there is often no consideration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4" (10 cm) of Knit Fabric should stretch to at least here.

USE FABRIC WITH 25% STRETCH ACROSS THE GRAIN

PATTERN 3419
MISSES' TOPS

DESIGNED FOR STRETCH KNITS ONLY WITH 25% STRETCH ACROSS THE GRAIN
Suggested Fabrics: Interlock, jersey, textured knits
Contrast Fabric View C in lightweight sheer woven fabrics such as organza, voile.

Misses' close-fitting pullover tops have empire waist on front with gathers under bust, and neckline finished with facing. View A and B have a deep V-neckline. View C has a scoop neckline with a bias-cut ruffle from contrast sheer fabric; ruffle edge is not finished.

VIEW A Back
VIEW B Back
VIEW C Back
Fabric
Contrast

Standard Body Measurements:

Size	XS	S	M	L	XL	
Bust	31½–32½ (80–83)	34–35½ (86–90)	37–38½ (94–98)	40–41½ (102–106)	43–45 (110–114)	" (cm)
Waist	23½–24½ (57–60)	26½–28 (63–66)	27½–29 (70–74)	31–33 (79–84)	35–37 (90–94)	" (cm)
Hip	32½–34 (82–66)	35½–37 (90–94)	38½–40 (98–102)	41½–43½ (106–110)	45–47 (115–120)	" (cm)
Back Waist Length	15½ (39)	16 (41)	16½ (42)	17 (43)	17 (43)	" (cm)
Finished Length at Center Back						
View A, B & C	20⅞ (53)	21⅜ (54)	21⅞ (55)	22½ (57)	23 (58)	" (cm)

Material Required: Fabric requirement allows for nap, one-way design or shading. Extra fabric may be needed to match design or for shrinkage.

Fabric 60" (153 cm) Wide						
View A	1⅜ (1.40)	1½ (1.40)	1⅝ (1.50)	1⅝ (1.50)	1⅝ (1.50)	yd (m)
View B & C	1⅛ (1.05)	1⅛ (1.00)	1⅛ (1.15)	1⅛ (1.15)	1⅛ (1.15)	yd (m)
Contrast Fabric 32" (80 cm) Wide (minimum width)						
View C	⅛ (0.80)	⅞ (0.80)	⅞ (0.80)	1 (0.95)	1 (0.95)	yd (m)
Fusible Interfacing 24" (60 cm) Wide						
View A, B & C	⅝ (0.60)	⅝ (0.60)	⅝ (0.60)	⅝ (0.60)	⅝ (0.60)	yd (m)

Notions: Thread.

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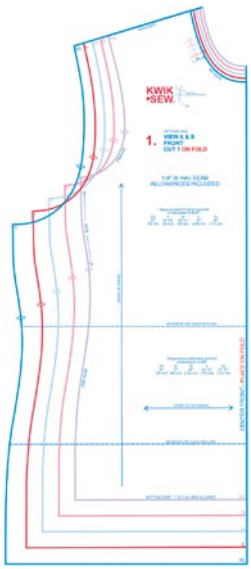
as to what might be worn under a garment (this is especially so when dealing with winter-weight garments). A thick layer under a blouse or top has a physical value in measurement. This can be tested by measuring an undergarment (a spencer, woollen undervest or even a camisole/petticoat) by wringing it out as if it were wet and then wrapping a tape measure around the bulk. See photo 3 (over page). This bulk quite often measures more than one thinks no matter how tight or 'non-bulky' the undergarment is. So this layer must be included in the calculation of ease on top of the body measurement.



The ease chart, see diagram 1, is a guide of how much extra has been added to a pattern and should be added to your body measurement to get an idea of the finished garment width. Another way of checking this is to measure an existing garment that fits well and use these same measurements to apply to the pattern before cutting out the garment. Sometimes sewers are very surprised at what size pattern they end up cutting out, or sometimes disappointed in the finished result after not checking the measurements on the pattern and just using the size guide on the back of the envelope. There has to be some ownership of checking the pattern measurement by the sewer, as the end result is very important to the wearer. Sewers often say "I love sewing but hate cutting out"! This statement often indicates that the first steps of checking measurements to pattern have been missed out and deemed unnecessary. When a pattern is made by a commercial pattern maker they often make many toiles or muslins of the pattern during the process; this is to check for design details, ease/sizing allowances and fit. A quick test of the pattern in a cheap fabric first will eliminate any disappointment in the finished garment in the expensive fabric!

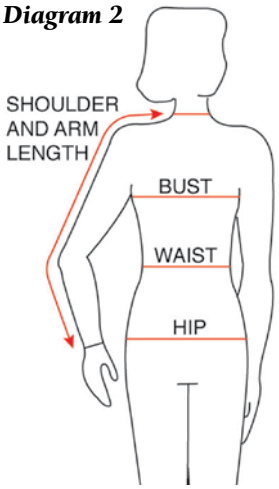
Diagram 1 – Ease Chart

Degree of Ease	Fitted	Regular	Loose
Type of Garment	Formal Bodice, Evening Gown, Snug Tailoring Stretch Wovens etc.,	Dress, Shirt, Classic Tailored Jacket etc.,	Baggy Shirt, Casual Outerwear, Coat or Anorak etc.,
Bust	4 – 5 cm (1½ – 2in)	8 – 12 cm (3⅛ – 4¾in)	10 – 16 cm (4 – 6¼in)
Waist	2 – 3 cm (¾ – 1¼in)	4 – 6 cm (1½ – 2¼in)	6 – 12 cm (2¼ – 4¾in)
Hip/Seat	3 – 6 cm (1¼ – 2¼in)	3 – 6 cm (1¼ – 2¼in)	6 – 12 cm (2¼ – 4¾in)

Taking successful measurements See diagrams 2, 3, 4 & 5. One big mistake when measuring is allowing the person being measured to be in front of a mirror. This is particularly important when measuring a man as he never sees his figure the way others do. Sucking in his stomach and puffing out his chest is inevitable, as is standing taller than he actually is. This can happen with women but not often. A low court shoe (for women, normal street shoe for men) is advised when measuring, as stockinged feet will add extra to the hip/seat measurement due to the displacement of the weight from the ball of the foot to the heel. This is why swimwear models wear stilettos when on a catwalk, as it trims, tightens and turns the thigh and buttock muscles and gives a firmer line. Taking a hip measurement in stockinged feet will often require the garment to be taken in through this area during a fitting.

The bust should be measured over the fullest part (apex) of the breast and over the shoulder blades. The tape measure should be as level with the floor as possible. The waist measurement is really dependant on where the actual garment is going to sit on the body. The true waistline on the body is at pivot-point level and this can be found by prodding the spine at the back-waist area with one finger and trying to tip the person off-balance as their resistance to the pressure will be nil if the right place has been found. This is called the 'true back-waist' point. For a man, this point will be lower, hence this is why men like to wear their trousers lower than women, as ideally a belt will cover or protect this vulnerable

Diagram 2



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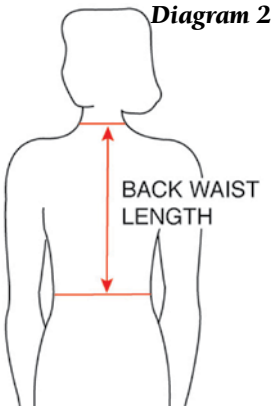


Diagram 4

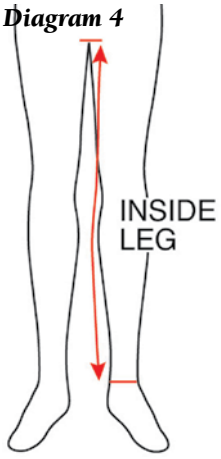
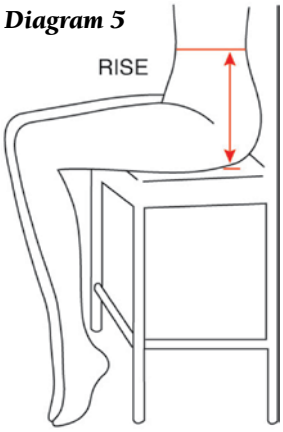


Diagram 5



pivot point. The hip is to be measured at the fullest point. A suggested point down from the waist is 20cm (8in) but this is rarely ever correct. Take a note of how much further down the fullest part of the hip is and check this against the pattern if it is severely lower.

All these measurements should be taken firmly and for newcomers to sewing, perhaps a couple of times to make sure that the measurements are consistent.

Length measurements are very subversive as everyone is different in their beliefs. A true back measurement is taken by finding the nape bone at the back of the neck (place the chin onto the chest and a bone will appear at the back of the neck) to the back waist pivot point. Make sure the person being measured is relaxed and standing in a normal, comfortable way. The waist-to-knee measurement should always be taken at the front of the body as buttocks or hips will give extra length and this measurement is generally measured to the middle of the knee cap. A 'top length' can also be a good measurement to take, as it is measured from the nape bone to the mid buttock, and this is usually a good way of checking that an upper garment is going to cover the bits that don't want to be seen (in some cases).

Measuring for trousers is the hardest. Measuring a man is easy as he most probably will be wearing trousers that will be a guide. For women, measuring over tights is the best and make sure the person is not in stockinged feet. The inside leg is the most accurate way of checking the rise of a trouser. Sitting on a chair and measuring the distance between the seat and the waist is really only for modesty and the application of this method to a pattern is ridiculous. This method was derived from yesteryear when male tailors had to take this measure on female clients and it was seen as being socially unacceptable to do it any other way. Today we are a little more forgiving and can get a more accurate and cleaner measurement by taking an outer leg measurement (from the waist to the floor at the side of the body) and an inner leg measurement (from the crotch to the floor with the legs only slightly astride). The difference will give the 'rise' measurement which is the true waist-to-crotch depth required to check against a pattern for good fit. See diagram 6. To use the outer leg and inner leg measurement on a pattern, remove about 5cm (2 in) from this measurement as a guide to a finished hem length (this is only a guide as the width of the trouser length will dictate the real finished length as will the height of the heel of the shoes the wearer will be wearing).

One of the other difficult points to apply to a pattern is the sleeve length. Depending on the style and design lines on the pattern, it is hard to determine where the shoulder sleeve seam is supposed to go and there are different suggested ways of applying this measurement on a series of different styles. See diagrams 7, 8, 9 and 10. Overlapping the seam allowances used on the pattern will give a better end measurement than doing them individually.

All in all, if it is at all possible to take 'some' measurements off existing garments this will be a great help. Measuring an existing garment that is being worn for shoulder width and sleeve lengths is the best way, especially when making a tailored jacket or closely fitted garment. The tape measure doesn't lie but it's very hard to make people comfortable around one. One of the most disconcerting things about either sewing for you or sewing for others is the ability to accurately monitor the physical measurement change as we get older. The memory of what we use to measure and what we measure today is a big reason why sewers stop sewing.

NOTE: There are many books that have been published to help people fit patterns and make alterations. The best I've found over the years is called *The Perfect Fit* put out by the Singer Sewing Reference Library.

Diagram 7

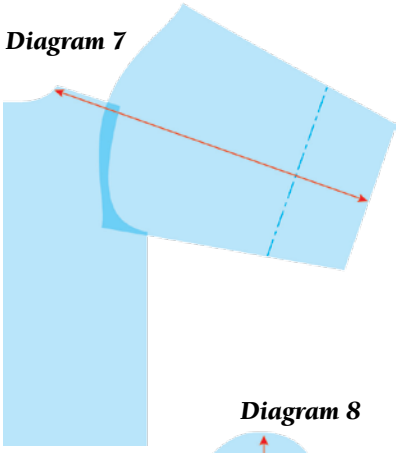


Diagram 6

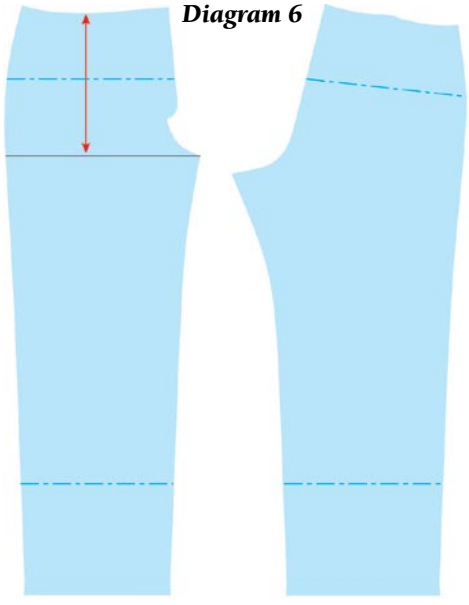


Diagram 8

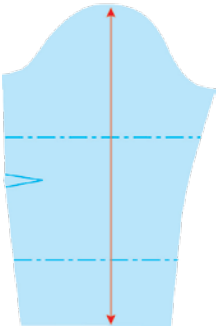


Diagram 9

Diagram 10