

*Pattern Design Guides by Don McCunn***The Sheath Dress**

These instructions show how to create a Sheath Dress from the basic fitted sloper with minimal changes to the pattern. They have been prepared for Don McCunn's online class "How to Make an Upper Torso (aka Bodice) Sloper."

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The Sheath Dress

by Don McCunn

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The idea for the Sheath Dress came when my model Alex and I visited the Yves St. Laurent exhibit at the de Young museum in San Francisco.

I was looking for a simple example of a sleeveless style dress to illustrate how to convert the Bodice Sloper to a wearable garment. Alex was drawn to a sheath dress that had gold sleeves but said she would prefer it without the sleeves. This style seemed to suit my requirements for an easy to sew style.

The YSL Sheath has a simple neckline slightly enlarged from the fitted neckline of the sloper, a side dart angled from the waist to the bust, and an interesting opening on the left shoulder. The fitted gold sleeves must have been a separate garment underneath. I saw no additional opening or shaping for this garment which means it needs to be pulled on over the head. I had some black silk charmeuse I thought might be good for this style as black was YSL's favorite color.

In the photo to the left you can see the initial fitting with the left shoulder opening pinned closed. No attempt was made to establish the hem length.

In the photo to the right we adjusted the hem by pulling the skirt to create a drape at mid-thigh level and accessorized with a wide black belt and a chain necklace.



Step I. Required Measurements

To create this design you need the measurements below. The first two are described in my book *How to Make Sewing Patterns* on the pages indicate. The third measurement verifies that the garment can be pulled on over the head. The fourth measurement is a discretionary design choice.

- #15 Hips (p18) _____
- #35 Waist-to-Hips (p20) _____
- Pull Over Circumference _____
- Waist to Hem _____



The circumference of this garment needs to be wide enough so that it can be pulled over the head.

The Sheath Dress, cont'd

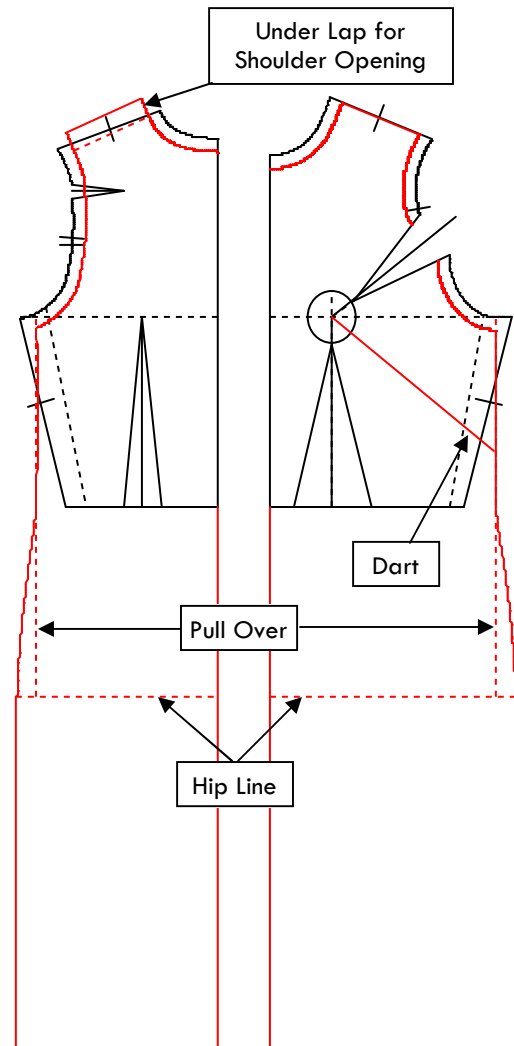
Step II. The Design Lines

These steps add design lines to a copy of the Bodice Sloper. The design lines you choose for making a sheath dress may be different than the ones that follow. These steps are just provided as a guideline.

If you have a Skirt Sloper, use that to verify that the waist to hem leaves adequate room for the lower torso. I recommend a minimum of 3" of total ease at the hip level unless you need more for the Pull Over measurement.

1. Extend the Center Front and Center Back lines by the Waist to Hem Length.
2. Measure down the Waist to Hip length (#15) and draw the Hip line.
3. Add 3" (8cm) to the Hip measurement (#35) then divide by 4. This is the minimum Hip Width.
4. On the Hip line measure out from Center Front the Hip Width and draw the Side Seam parallel to the Center Front line.
5. On the Hip line measure out from Center Back the Hip Width and draw the Side Seam parallel to the Center Back line.
6. Divide the Pull Over measurement by 4. This is the Minimum Fabric Width.
7. On the Hip line measure out from Center Front the Minimum Fabric Width and draw a dotted line parallel to the Center Front line up to the Bust line.
8. On the Hip line measure out from Center Back the Minimum Fabric Width and draw a dotted line parallel to the Center Back line up to the Bust line.
9. Curve the front and back Side Seams from the Armscye down to the Hip line using the Pull Over line as a reference. The Side Seam does not have to go to the full bust width because this is a sleeveless style. The bust width for the Sloper is for garments that include sleeves.
10. The Neck and Armscye curves are discretionary design lines. In the example shown these lines are 1/2" (12mm) in from the curves on the Sloper.
11. The angle of the back Shoulder Seam has been altered (the dotted line) to remove the width of the upper back dart. This can be done because the dress weight fabric will conform to the contour of the body. (For very rounded backs, an alternate would be to pivot the dart to the shoulder seam.)
12. Add a 3/4" (18mm) Under Lap extension to the Back Shoulder Seam.
13. Draw in the desired side dart line.

The next step for the pattern is to alter the location of the above Bust dart.

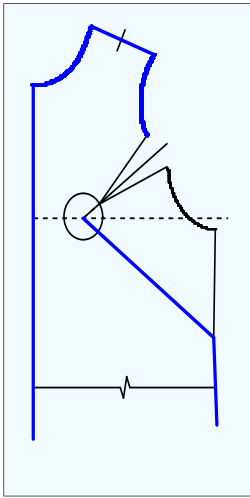


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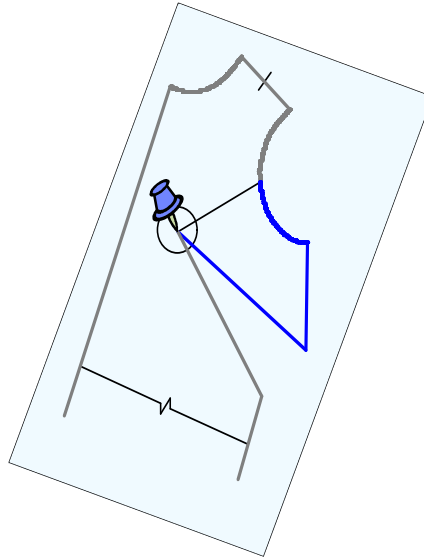
Step III. Alter the Dart

The steps below show how to alter the location of the dart. To save space only the top of the dress is shown.

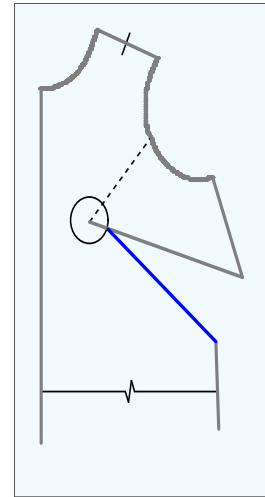
The new dart should be drawn by placing a fresh sheet of pattern paper on top of the sloper pattern then tracing the design lines from the fitted slopers. For the illustrations that follow, this fresh sheet of paper for the design is shown with a light blue background.



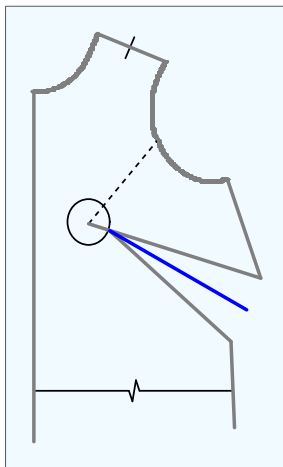
1. On the fresh sheet of pattern paper trace around the entire pattern from the top of the old dart to the line for the new dart, the blue lines.



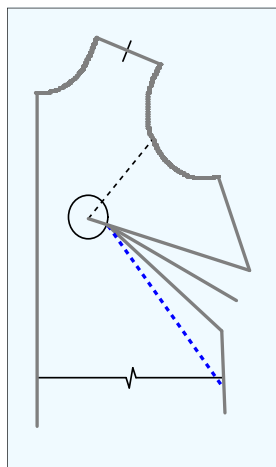
2. Place a pin in the apex of the Bust and pivot the new pattern paper until the Above Bust dart is closed.
3. Trace from the closed Above Bust dart to the new Dart line, the blue lines.



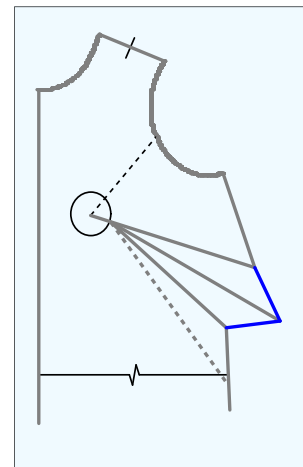
4. Change the bottom leg of the new dart line to the edge of the Bust Circle.



5. Draw a line that divides the new dart in half.



6. Measure down 1/2 the dart width and draw a dotted line from the Dart Point to the Side Seam.



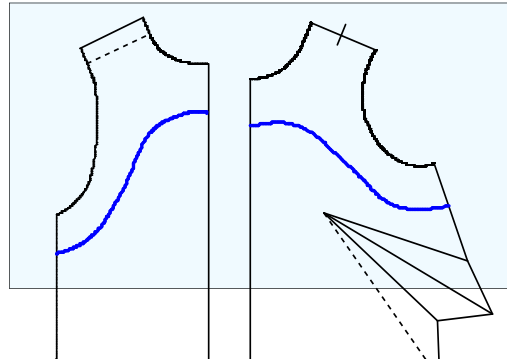
7. Measure the length of the dotted line and make the dart center line that length.
8. Draw in the point of the dart, the blue lines.

The Sheath Dress, cont'd

Step IV. Create a Facing Pattern

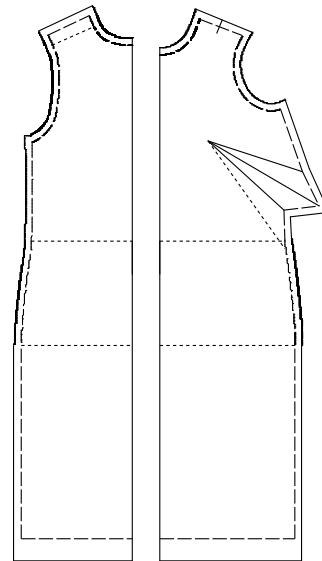
For this design finish the edges of the neck and armscye using a facing.

1. On the Sheath Dress pattern draw a facing from the side seam to center front and center back to side seam as shown by the blue lines.
2. On a fresh sheet of paper, trace from the top of the patterns down to the facing.
3. Add seam allowances to the facing pattern.



Step V. Add Seam Allowances.

For seam allowances for this pattern I recommend a standard seam allowance around the shoulder seam, armscye, and side seam. I use 1/2" (12mm). I would suggest a 2" (5cm) hem allowance. Center Front and Center Back are cut on the fold.



Step VI. Sewing Sequence.

1. Sew then press the darts.
2. Zigzag all seam allowance edges.
3. Sew the Side Seams of the dress.
4. Sew the Side Seams of the facing.
5. Pin the facing to the dress, right sides together.
6. Sew around the armscye, shoulder seam, and neck line.
7. Trim then turn the facing and press.
8. Pin the right shoulder of the front of the dress on top of the back shoulder so they overlap by 3/4" (18mm).
9. Sew hook and eyes to the left shoulder so the front of the dress overlaps the back by 3/4" (18mm). I recommend the 3/4" waistband hook and eyes.
10. Hem the bottom of the dress.