

Achieving a great fit is easy once you learn the basics. Designer and educator **Kathryn Brenne** teaches the most sought-after alteration.

Adjusting for a Full Bust

Given that most commercial patterns are drafted for a B cup, accommodating a fuller bust can be a challenge. (One exception is Vogue's Custom Fit collection, see "Cheat Sheets," page 23 for more information.) In order to get the circumference needed to accommodate a larger bust, sewers often choose their pattern size by the bust measurement. But since a larger cup size doesn't necessarily mean a fuller figure overall, choosing a pattern size in this manner can result in a garment that's too big in the neck and shoulders or with a hemline that rides up in front. Take the time to make a few fairly simple adjustments and alterations and you can eliminate these problems, ending up with a garment that fits well and flatters your figure.

SIZING UP

Before you begin any alterations, you'll need to have a good grasp of a few measurements and know your correct cup size (which may not match that of your favorite bra). Here's how to measure.

Bust: Measure around the fullest part of the breasts, keeping the tape measure straight across the back.

Chest: Measure the chest around the body under the arms, above the fullest part of the bust (this is sometimes referred to as the high bust), keeping the tape parallel to the floor.



Shoulder to Bust Point: Measure straight down from the shoulder to the apex of the bust.

Bust Point to Bust Point: Measure across the bust from apex to apex and divide this measurement in half to determine

the location of the bust point from the center front.

Once you've recorded these measurements, compare your Chest measurement to your Bust measurement. The difference between the two will give you your cup size.

If the difference is:

1" (2.5cm) or less = A cup

1 1/4" to 2" (3cm to 5cm) = B cup

2 1/4" to 3" (5.5cm to 7.5cm) = C cup

3 1/4" to 4" (8.3cm to 10cm) = D cup

If you are larger than a B cup, a bust cup alteration will allow you to use a smaller pattern than you might have chosen originally, providing a better fit in the neck and shoulder area. It will also allow for more fabric across the bust as well as extra length in the front to accommodate the fuller figure—without changing the armhole, side seam, sleeve, neck and shoulder area.

To get the best fit, choose your pattern size by your Chest measurement rather than your Bust measurement. For example, a Vogue size 12 has a bust measurement of 34" (86cm) and a chest measurement of 32" (81cm). If you have a chest measurement of 32" (81cm) and a bust measurement of 36" (92cm), purchase a size 12 pattern based on the 32" (81cm) chest measurement and alter it to fit a D cup. This will give you a better fit in the neck and shoulders, and once the pattern is altered to accommodate the bust in the front, a smoother more figure-flattering fit overall. If you use the 36" (92cm) bust measurement as a guide for choosing the size, you'd purchase a size 14 pattern. The resulting garment will be too large across the back, neck and shoulders. If you fall between sizes, consider your bone structure. If you have a small frame choose the smaller size. If you have a larger frame, choose the bigger size.

PATTERN POINTERS

Most pattern styles fall into one of the following categories: dartless, darted, princess seam from the shoulder, or princess seam from the armhole.

On all styles, you'll need to increase the width and length of the front bodice pattern piece to accommodate larger than B-cup sizes.

The following amounts will be added to the length and width as the pattern is spread (following the examples shown later in the article):

For a C cup add $\frac{1}{2}$ " (13mm)

For a D cup add $\frac{3}{4}$ " (19mm)

For larger than a D cup add $1\frac{1}{4}$ " (3cm)

The first step in making any bust alterations is to make sure that the bust point on the pattern (marked on the tissue with a \oplus symbol) matches

your personal bust point. (For most people with a full bust, the bust point is often lower and wider than the pattern.) On the tissue, measure down from the shoulder stitching line an amount equal to your shoulder-to-bust point measurement and make a mark. Then, from the center front, measure an amount equal to your bust point-to-bust point measurement divided in half. The intersection of these two lines is

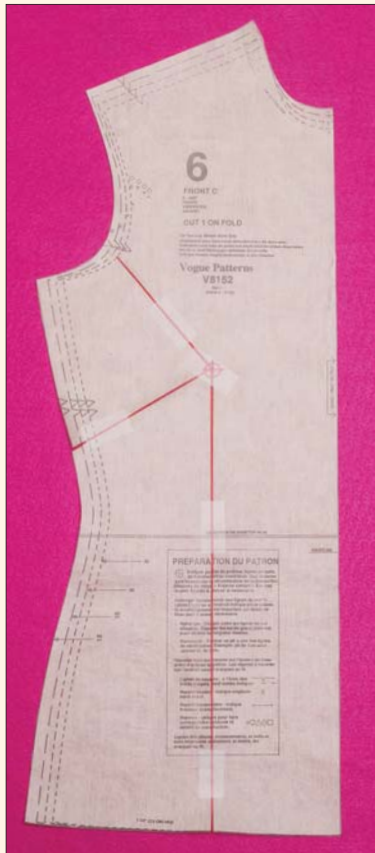
your personal bust point. Now you can begin your alterations.

TIP: Making a tracing of the pattern, rather than working from the original tissue, will make alterations easier to follow.

ADDING A DART

Full figures are better defined with a dart and it's relatively simple to add darts on styles where none exist. This simple alteration creates extra width and length to accommodate the fuller bust resulting in a more figure-flattering fit.

- Begin by marking your personal bust point on the pattern.
- Draw a line parallel to the center front up to your bust point.
- Draw a line from the bust point to the armhole. (I often use the armhole notch as a guideline for drawing this line.) Mark the armhole $\frac{5}{8}$ " (16mm) stitching line across the end of this line.
- Draw another line from the bust point to the side seam where you want the dart to lie. (This is where you become the designer and decide on the angle of the dart.) Avoid placing the dart straight across the bust.
- Cut along the marked lines leaving a hinge at the $\frac{5}{8}$ " (16mm) armhole seam allowance marking and at the tip of the bust point dart.



- Using the amounts indicated above for your cup size, spread the sections apart. Keep the front edges parallel below the bust point. The side panel will drop down and a dart will

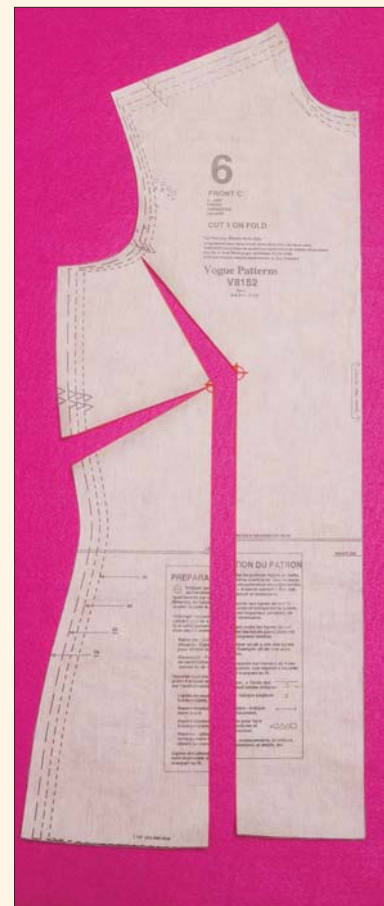
open on the side seam. Note: This alteration increases the garment width through the waist. If no extra circumference is needed here, the side seam can be reshaped below the dart to remove the extra width.

- True up the lower front hemline by extending the new side panel hem to the center front and square off the center front corner with a 90-degree angle.

- Find the center of the dart at the side seam. Draw a line from the center to the bust point.
- Mark the dart tip on the new centerline with a \oplus .

NOTE: The dart tip will not be at the bust point. The fuller the bust, the farther back the dart tip sits from the bust point. Use the following guidelines:

- For an A or B cup, end the dart $\frac{1}{2}$ " (13mm) from the bust point.
- For a C cup, end the dart 1" (2.5cm) from the bust point.
- For a D cup, end the dart $1\frac{1}{4}$ " (3cm) from the bust point.
- Draw in the dart legs from the side seam to the dart tip.

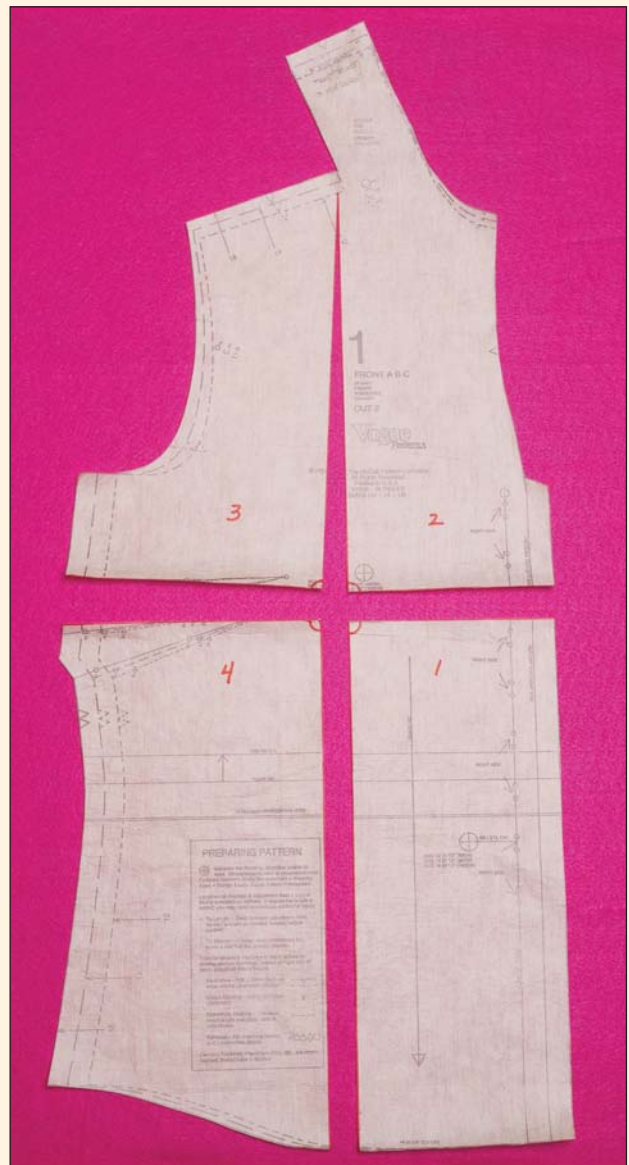


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ALTERING A GARMENT WITH DARTS

- Begin by marking your personal bust point.
- Draw a line parallel to center front that runs up through the bust point to the shoulder. Mark the $\frac{5}{8}$ " (16mm) seam allowance at the shoulder on this line.
- Draw a horizontal line from the center front through the bust point to the side seam.
- Label the resulting quadrants as :
 - Quadrant 1 (lower center front),
 - Quadrant 2 (upper center front),
 - Quadrant 3 (armhole)
 - Quadrant 4 (lower side seam).
- Cut the quadrants apart leaving a hinge at the $\frac{5}{8}$ " (16mm) shoulder seam allowance. The bust point remains in the lower corner of Quadrant 2.
- Anchor Quadrant 2 to a piece of paper and extend the center front line.

- Align Quadrant 1 on the center front line and drop it the required amount (see cup size spread amounts, previous page) below Quadrant 2.
 - Spread Quadrant 3 an equal distance away from the bust point marked on Quadrant 2.
 - Keeping Quadrant 4 aligned horizontally with Quadrant 1, spread Quadrant 1 and Quadrant 4 apart the same distance.
- NOTE:** The amount that opens up at the side seam between Quadrants 3 and 4 will be greater than the amount opened between each of the quadrants. Measure the amount of this opening and add it to the depth of the original dart at the side seam. This is the depth of the new dart. Divide this measurement in half.



- To relocate the original dart, which is probably sitting too high, draw a line from the bust point on Quadrant 2 to the side seam where the new dart is to be located. This becomes the center of the dart.

- Mark the dart tip on the new centerline.

The dart tip will not be at the bust point. The fuller the bust, the farther back the dart tip sits from the bust point.

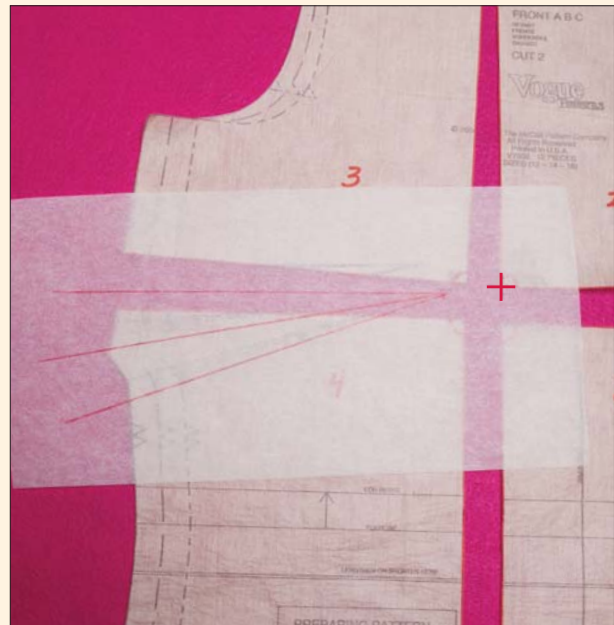
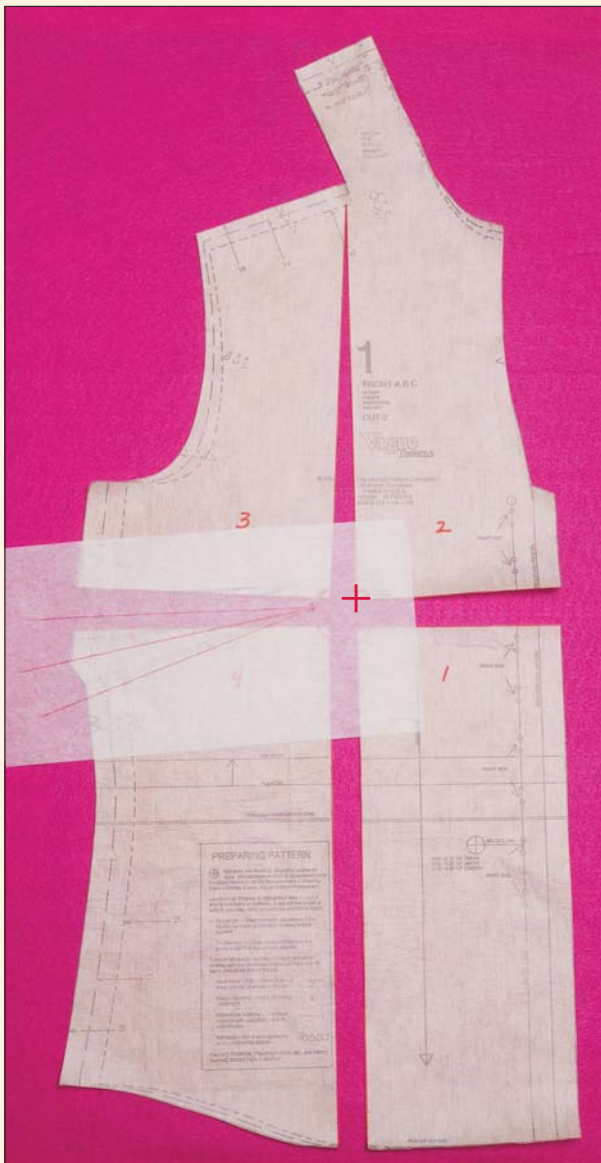
Use the following guidelines:

For an A or B cup, end the dart $\frac{1}{2}$ " (13mm) from the bust point.

For a C cup, end the dart 1" (2.5cm) from the bust point.

For a D cup, end the dart $1\frac{1}{4}$ " (3cm) from the bust point.

- Take the measurement of the new dart depth (divided in



half), and add it to each side of the dart's center line.

- Draw in the dart legs and true up the dart (See "Truing up a Dart," below).

This alteration creates extra width in the front through the waist and upper hip. If the extra circumference is not required it can be taken out with a vertical dart. Vertical darts can end 1" (2.5cm) or more away from the bust point, depending on the amount of shaping required. If the pattern originally had a vertical dart, it may need to be relocated so that it is situated below the new personal bust point. Add the amount that was spread to the original vertical dart and retrace it to the new location.

Truing up a Dart

To true up a dart, fold the pattern paper along the dart legs to the tip. Fold the dart in the direction that it will be pressed. (I have noticed on several European designer garments that the dart is pressed up reducing the drag on the bias seaming.) Using a spiked-tooth tracing wheel, trace over the closed dart along the side seam cutting line. Open up the pattern and the tracing wheel will leave small holes in the paper. This becomes the new cutting line. If the dart is quite deep with a lot of fabric folded into it, add a $\frac{5}{8}$ " (16mm) seam allowance to the dart legs and cut out the center of the dart.

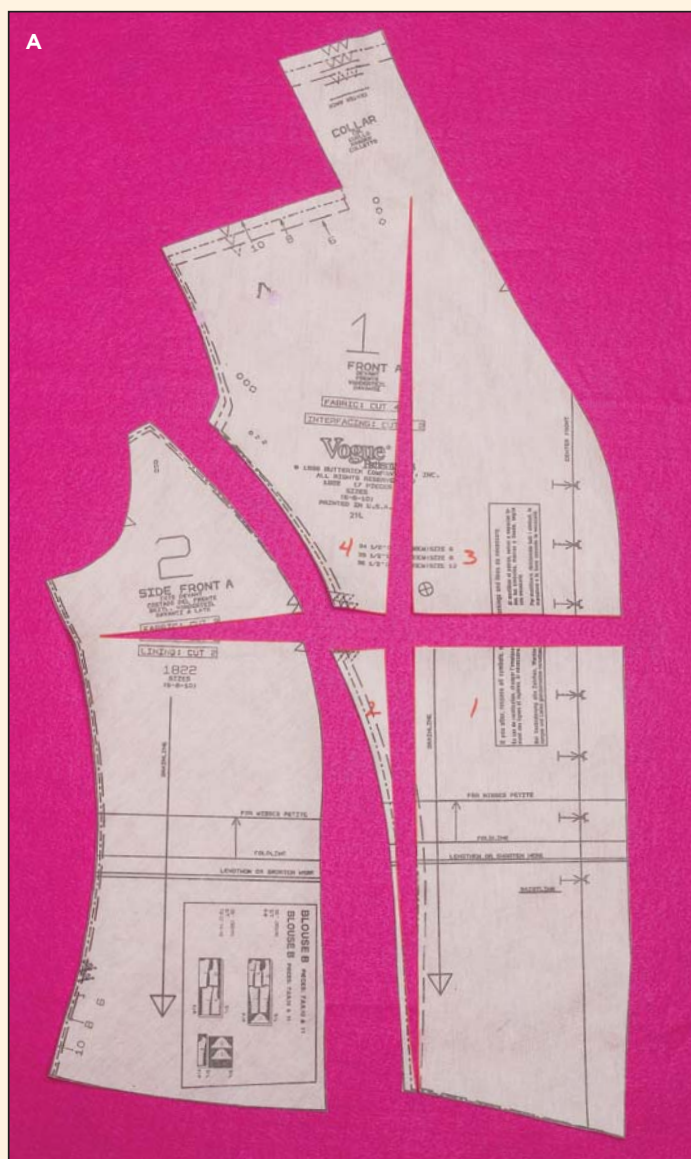
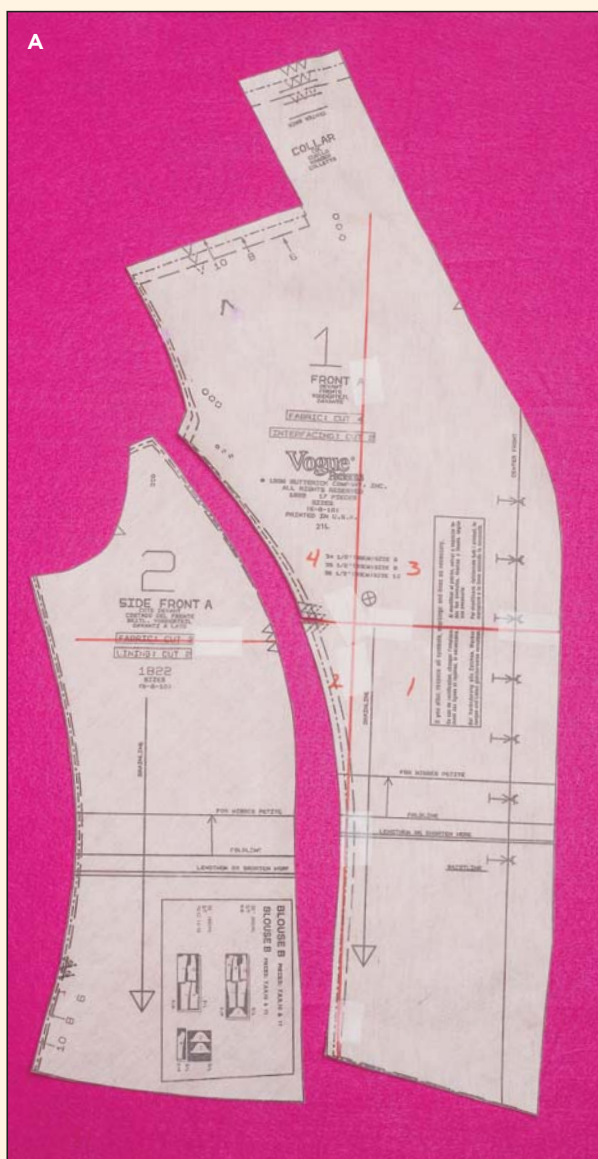
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ALTERING A GARMENT WITH PRINCESS SEAMS

There are two styles of princess seams. On one the seam comes from the shoulder (B) and on the other it comes from the armhole (A). Both styles are altered in the same manner.

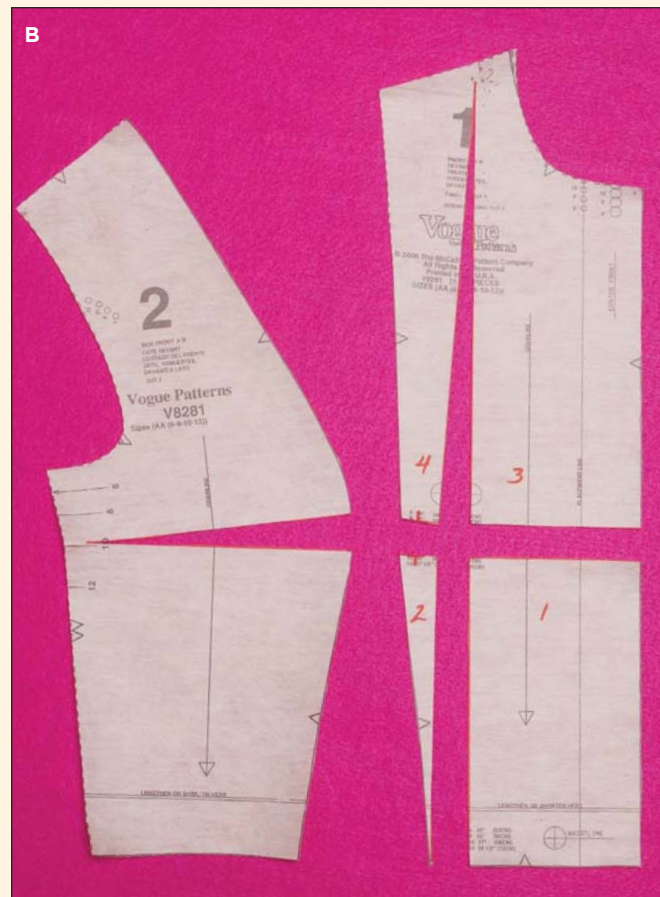
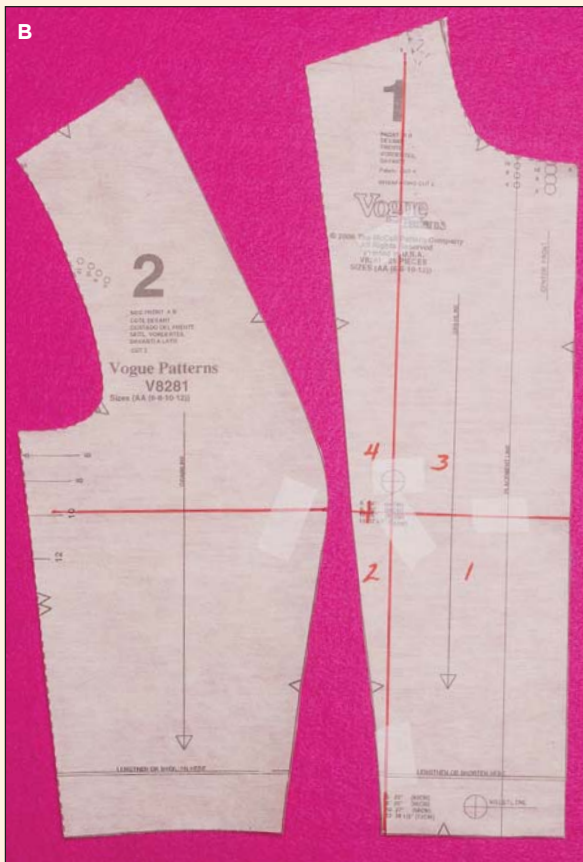
- Begin by locating your personal bust point on the bodice front. Depending on where the princess seam sits, the bust point-to-bust point measurement may not fit on the pattern piece. In this case, draw a line at the shoulder to the apex height, perpendicular to the center front.
- Draw a vertical line parallel with center front from the shoulder to the waist. If the pattern is quite narrow at the waist, you may need to move this line in towards the center front slightly, but it is important that it remains parallel and on grain.

- Label the sections as:
 Quadrant 1 (lower center front),
 Quadrant 2 (lower side front)
 Quadrant 3 (upper center front)
 Quadrant 4 (upper side front).
- Cut the quadrants apart leaving a hinge at the shoulder.
- NOTE:** My example of a princess seam-from-the-armhole has a collar attached to the front pattern piece, so I left the hinge at shoulder height.
- Anchor Quadrant 3 to a piece of paper and extend the center front line.
- Align Quadrant 1 along this extended front line, dropping it the suggested spread (see page 19) below Quadrant 3.
- Align Quadrant 2 horizontally with Quadrant 1 and spread the



same amount vertically. If no extra width is needed through the waist, the bottom of Quadrant 2 can be held in at the waist as in the princess-from-the-armhole sample.

- Spread Quadrant 4 an equal distance from Quadrant 3. The amount that opens up at the side front seam will be greater than the spread amount. Measure this amount.
- Line up the side front pattern piece to the bodice front pattern and find the point at which the horizontal line intersects.
- Draw a line perpendicular to the grain line on the side front, from this point towards the side seam. Cut along this line leaving a hinge at the side seam.



- Open the pattern an equal amount to that which opened up on the bodice front between Quadrants 2 and 4.
- True up the pattern by redrawing the seam line on the bodice front.
- If Quadrant 2 extends past Quadrant 4, add a small amount onto Quadrant 4, and take a small amount off of Quadrant 2 to maintain a smooth seam line.
- Check the side front pattern to make sure that the fullness of the curve sits at the opening and not above it. Smooth out the curve if needed. ✂

Cheat Sheets

Recognizing that women come in many shapes as well as sizes, Vogue Patterns has introduced the Custom Fit collection, a line of patterns with separate bodice pattern pieces for A, B, C and D cup sizes. No altering needed, just choose the bodice piece that matches your cup size.

Kathryn Brenne is the owner of The Academy of Fine Sewing & Design. Visit her website at www.finesewing.com for a complete list of sewing vacation workshops and tours.