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 1/2" (13mm)
For a D cup add 3/4" (19mm)
For larger than a D cup add 1 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 Θ 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.

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

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**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 3/8" (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 3/8" (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 Θ.

**NOTE:** The dart tip will not be at the bust point. The fullness of 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 1/2" (13mm) from the bust point.
- For a C cup, end the dart 1 1/2" (2.5cm) from the bust point.
- For a D cup, end the dart 1 1/2" (3cm) from the bust point.
- Draw in the dart legs from the side seam to the dart tip.

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