

Self-Fit Your Pants

Simple steps
to a great fit
—no assistant
required

BY LINDA LEE

*You don't need a second set of hands
or a sewing buddy to fit pants with
this handy guide to measuring, pattern
alteration, and muslin evaluation.*

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We could all wish for a “sewing twin” when it comes to fitting pants. The prospect of doing it alone may seem challenging, but you can achieve a great pants fit on your own, no matter what fitting problems you encounter.

A few simple steps yield better-fitting pants, regardless of the style. It all starts with the proper measurements and selecting the best pattern size to work with.

After comparing all of your measurements to the pattern, you'll make important length and width adjustments, sew a muslin, and evaluate its fit. In this article, I'll teach you about a few of the

most common pants-fitting problems, how to recognize them on your muslin, and how to resolve them.

Even after you make the first muslin, I'll guide you through fine-tuning the fit so you can make pants that are comfortable and flattering. You can do it easily all by yourself, no fitting assistant necessary. A camera and mirror, and the guidance provided will help you resolve your pants-fitting issues.

Linda Lee teaches sewing and garment-fitting techniques. Sewing Workshop.com.

Take the right measurements on your own

Start by pinning a length of elastic around your waist. Use the width of elastic required by the pattern if you're making elastic-waist pants or the width of the finished waistband of your fitted pants. I use 1-inch-wide Stretchrite Woven Polyester Flat Non-Roll Elastic. Place the waist elastic at the level needed for the pants style you've chosen. Record all of the following measurements as you take them.

1 Measure your waist. Place one finger between the tape measure and your body, and don't hold your breath. A waistband's fit should include breathing room.



2 Measure your high-hip circumference and depth. The high hip is a few inches below your waist and may be the fullest part of the tummy. Also measure the depth or vertical distance between the high-hip level and the bottom of the waist elastic. If you own a double-sided tape measure with each side starting with 1 at opposite ends, you can take the high-hip circumference and depth at the same time, as shown.



3 Measure your full-hip circumference and depth. Place the tape at the level of greatest circumference anywhere from just below the waist to as low as the upper thighs. Whether it is higher or lower on your body, measure the distance between it and the bottom of the waist elastic.



4 Measure your stride, back to front. Place the measuring tape end at the center-back waist at the elastic's bottom edge, run it under the crotch and up to the bottom of the elastic at center front. Add at least 1 inch. If you are size 16 or larger, and/or if you have a plump seat, add 1 inch to 2 inches.



5 Measure length. Stand on the tape measure's 1-inch mark, and run it along the outside of your leg up to the elastic's bottom edge. Subtract 1 inch from the measurement.



Choose a pattern size

Find a pants pattern that rests at your waist, and choose the size to use based on just one measurement: the full-hip circumference.

Compare your full-hip measurement to the pattern's size chart, and find the closest hip measurement on the chart. If your high-hip circumference is greater than your full-hip circumference, use that measurement instead. If your measurement falls between two sizes, consider the style: If it's slim-fitting, choose the larger size; if it's loose-fitting, choose the smaller size.

The size you choose is only a starting point from which you will create a better-fitting pant pattern that is based upon all of your measurements.

45": 2 1/2 yards sizes XS-XL
 50": 3 yards sizes 1X-3X
 55": 2 1/2 yards sizes XS-M
 60": 3 yards sizes XS-M
 65": 2 1/2 yards sizes L-XXL
 70": 3 yards sizes L-XXL

SIZE MEASUREMENTS									
(XS)	(SM)	(MED)	(LG)	(XL)	(XXL)				
6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	
31	32 1/2	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	
4 1/2	25 1/2	26 1/2	27 1/2	29	31	33	35	37	
34	35	36	37	39 1/2	41 1/2	43 1/2	45 1/2	47 1/2	
H Top Back Length, Pants Inseam									
3 1/4	23 1/2	23 1/2		24	24 1/2	25			
30	30	30		30	30	30			
(1X)	(2X)	(3X)	(4X)*	(5X)*					

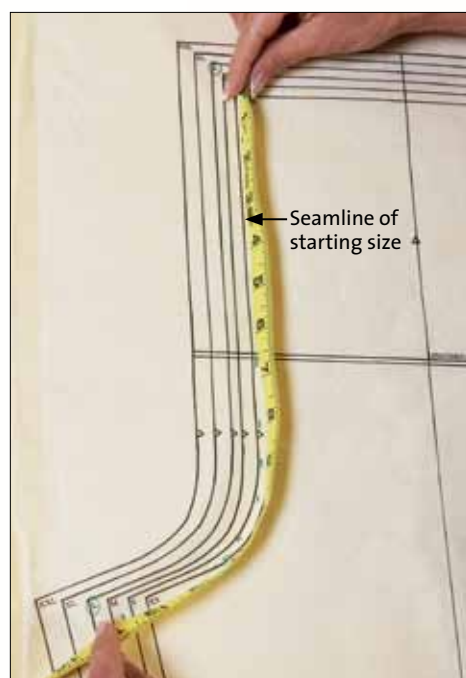
46 1/2" Full Hip

Modify the length

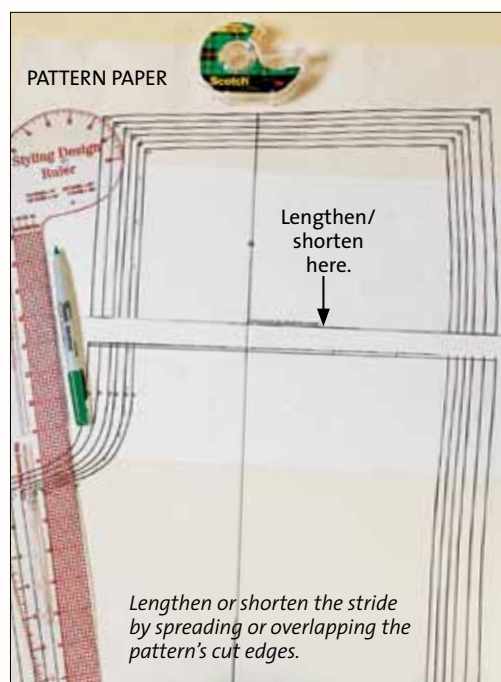
Now that you've selected the right pattern size, you need to make its finished dimensions correspond with your measurements in key areas. During each step, you'll start by measuring specific areas of the pattern and comparing it to your measurements. For accurate fit, always adjust length first so that when width adjustments are made they are at the correct level.

COMPARE AND ADJUST STRIDE

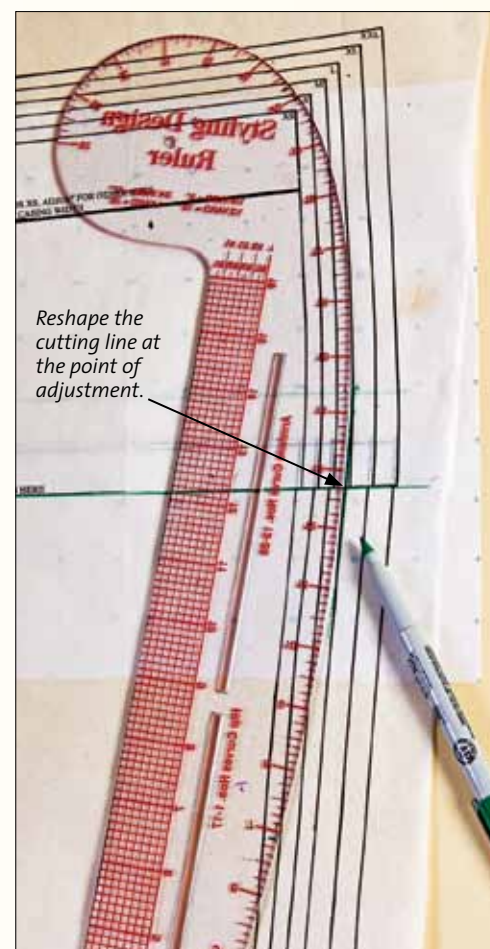
1 Hold your tape measure on its edge, and measure the pattern's front and back crotch curves along the seamlines of your size. Add the two measurements. Compare the sum to your stride measurement and record any increase or decrease needed. Divide it in half to determine the correct amount to change the front pattern and back pattern. For example, if the pattern measures 27 inches and your stride measures 29 inches, you need to add 1 inch to the front and 1 inch to the back for a total of 2 inches.



2 Lengthen or shorten the stride. If the pattern doesn't include lengthen/shorten lines, draw a line perpendicular to the grainline above the crotch curve. Cut along the line. To lengthen the stride, tape the pattern's cut edge to pattern paper. Extend the grainline onto the paper. Draw a parallel line on the paper the necessary distance from the pattern's cut line. Tape the remaining pattern piece along the marked line, matching the grainlines. To shorten the stride, overlap the cut edges to remove the necessary amount.



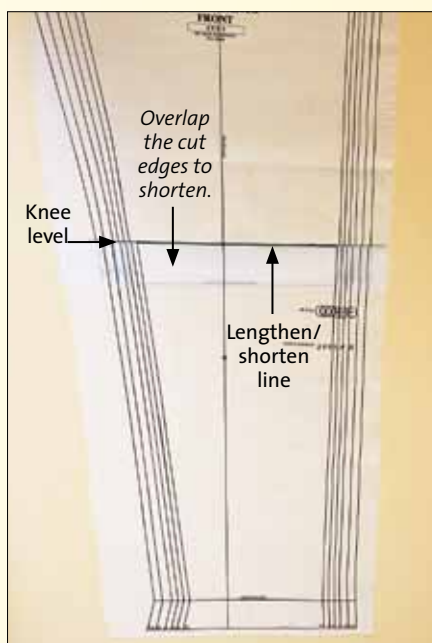
3 Use a fashion curve or a straightedge to true the lines connecting the adjoining pieces.



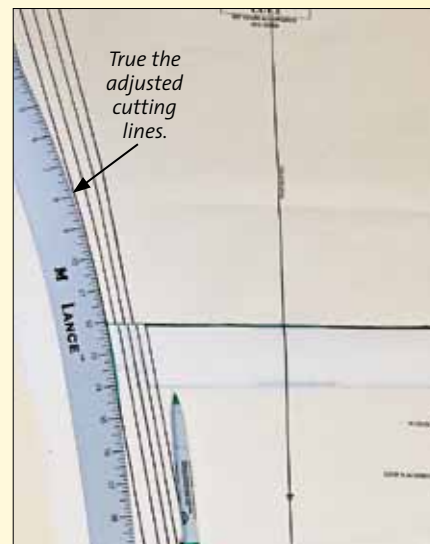
ADJUST THE TOTAL LENGTH

1 Measure the pattern's side seam length from the waist seamline to the finished hemline. Compare the length to your measurement. The difference between the two measurements indicates how much the pattern must be lengthened or shortened.

2 Lengthen or shorten the front and back pattern pieces the necessary amount. Use the pattern's printed lengthen/shorten lines or draw in your own lengthen/shorten lines perpendicular to the grainline at the knee level. If the knee isn't identified on your pattern, find the approximate knee level by folding the leg hemline to meet the crotch point notch. When altering the length more than 6 inches, divide the amount in half and lengthen or shorten by the halved amount both above and below the knee level. This retains the silhouette and makes it easier to true the seams.



3 Use a hip curve and/or a straightedge to true the side seam and inseam cutting lines.

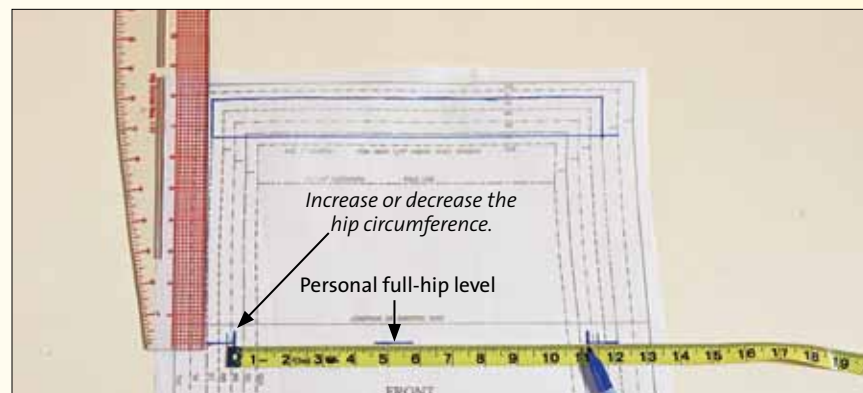


Make width adjustments

Now you need to compare and match the pattern's width (circumference) to your measurements at specific areas. You'll need to consider ease. The amount of ease built into the pattern varies depending on the style and intended fit, but you can incorporate as much or as little ease as you wish.

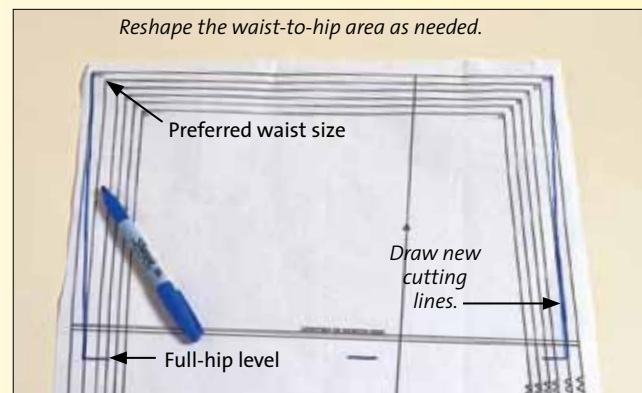
FIT THE HIP

Compare your full-hip measurement to the pattern's full-hip measurement, front and back. Measure along the pattern's side seam from its waist, and mark the level of your measured full-hip and high-hip depths on the seamline. Measure across the front and back pattern at both levels, omitting seam allowances. Multiply the front and the back measurements by 2 to get the pattern's complete full-hip and high-hip circumferences. Compare this to your measurements, and consider the amount of ease included and the ease you prefer. Mark inside or outside the pattern's side seamlines to change the width as necessary. If additional room is needed, tape pattern paper underneath the side seam edge from waist to knee. Reshaping and truing the lines will be done after the waist fit is finished.



RESHAPE THE WAIST AND HIP

Measure the pattern's finished waist circumference, minus seam allowances and darts. If your pattern has a yoke or wide, shaped band that rests below the waist, align it with the leg piece. Compare the number to your waist measurement to find the amount of ease built into the pattern for your selected size. Decide how much ease you want at the pant waist, and include that amount in any changes you make to the pattern's waist measurement. Use instructions for making changes at the hip, dividing the changes among front, back, and side seams. Your changes will reshape the overall waist-to-hip area. Add or eliminate ease, and use a hip curve to blend and true the cutting lines at waist, full hip, and high hip.



Check the fit with a muslin

Make a muslin using good-quality muslin fabric; cut only the pieces needed for a complete front and back, and omit the hem allowance. Sew any darts, machine-baste the pieces together, and leave an opening if necessary. Mark the waist seamline. The easiest way to evaluate a muslin's fit without help is with photos. Stand in

front of a full-length mirror, and take pictures from several angles so you can study every detail of the pants fit. Reading a muslin is straightforward: Wrinkles and drag lines point directly to the problem causing them. The most common fit issues are discussed below, along with ways to fix them.

POOR FIT IN THE TUMMY

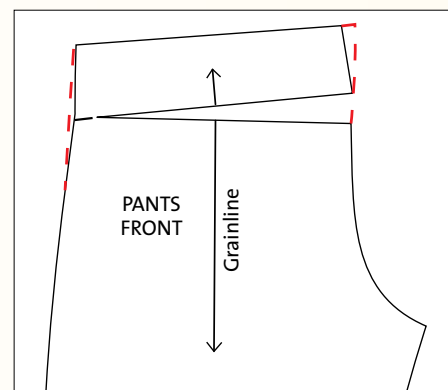
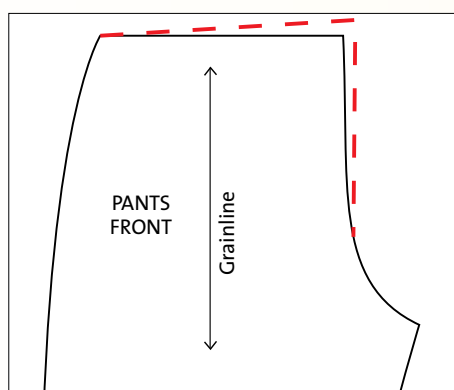
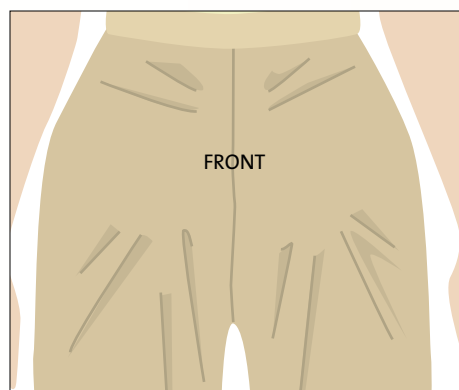
On a rounded tummy, the muslin may show vertical and/or diagonal wrinkles starting at the fullest part and ending at the top of the legs. Add length and/or width at center front to help the fabric drape more smoothly. Use the major adjustment to add more than 1/2 inch.

Minor adjustment

Redraw the crotch seam up to 1/2 inch higher at the waist and up to 1/2 inch wider at the center front.

Major adjustment

Draw a line perpendicular to the grainline at the high-hip level. Cut; leave a hinge at the side seam. Spread along the slash line the amount needed. Straighten the center-front cutting line, and true the side seam.



POOR FIT ON A FULL, PROMINENT SEAT

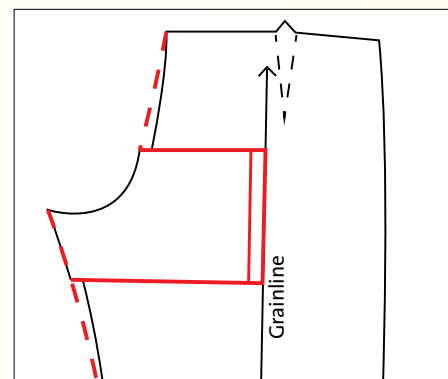
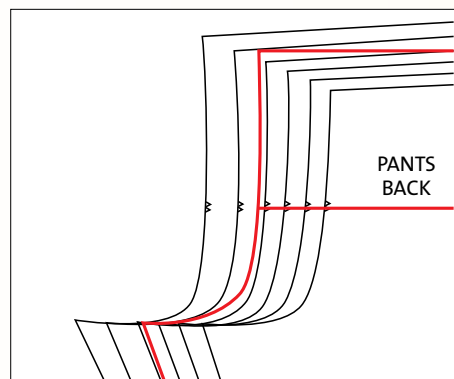
The muslin may feel tight across your seat, appear stretched at the center-back seam, show diagonal wrinkles extending into the crotch, or pull downward at the center-back waist. You need to reshape the crotch curve to add more width at the center-back seam. Add up to 1 inch to sizes 16 and under, or up to 1 1/2 inches to sizes 16 and up. If you need to add more than 1 1/2 inches, you are probably using the wrong starting size.

Minor adjustment

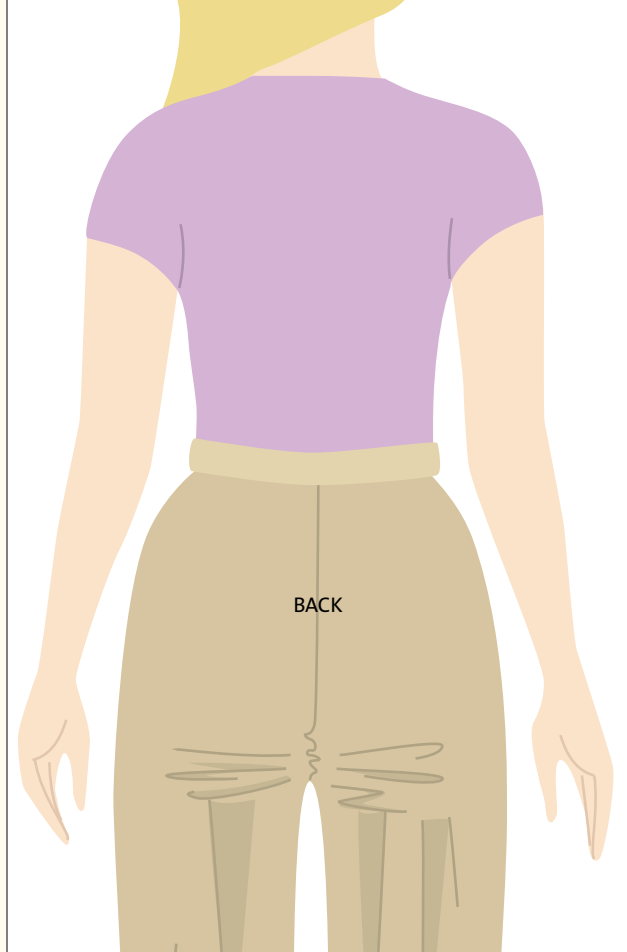
Use this method to flatten the back-crotch curve and to add width and length at the center back. Release the muslin's center-back seam and evaluate how much it spreads; add this amount to the back seam. Tape pattern paper under the center-back seam and draw a new line the necessary amount outside the original cutting line at the center back above the crotch curve. Reshape the crotch curve, flattening it to add more fabric in that area. Add height at the center-back waistline.

Major adjustment

If you need to add 1 inch or more to the crotch curve, use this method. Draw two lines perpendicular to the pattern's grainline, 4 inches above and 4 inches below the crotch point. Draw a line parallel to the grainline near the center of the pattern. Cut out the resulting section. Shift the section outward the necessary amount. Place paper under the area, and tape the pattern's cut edges in place. Use a hip curve and/or fashion curve to true the crotch and inseam cutting lines.

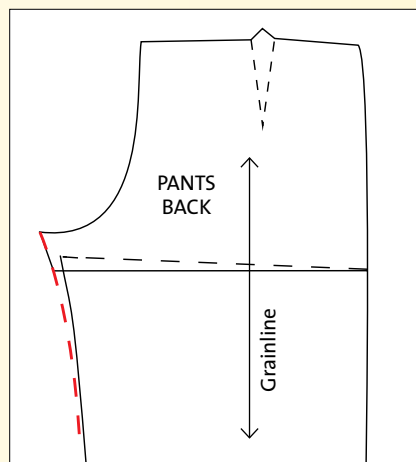


Photos: Sloan Howard. Illustrations: Michelle Penney.



WRINKLES BELOW THE SEAT

Horizontal wrinkles below the seat often indicate too much length in the back of the inner thigh/crotch area. The excess must be removed for a smooth fit. While wearing the muslin, pinch out the excess fabric, pin, and measure the amount that needs to be removed.

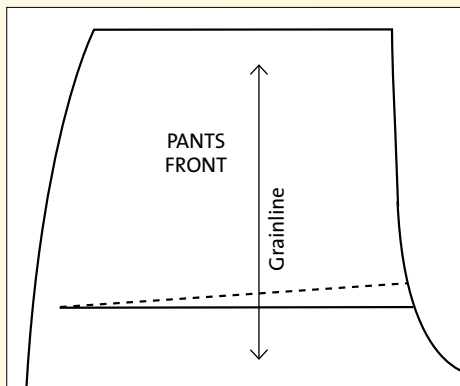
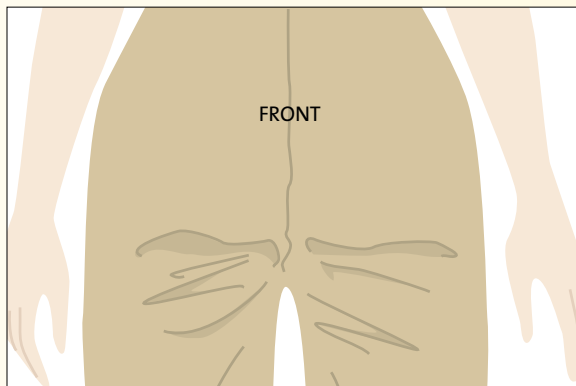


To remove the excess length from this area, draw a line on the pants back pattern $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches below the crotch point and perpendicular to the grainline. Cut on this line, leaving a hinge at the side seam. Overlap the cut edges the necessary amount and tape in place. Use a hip curve to true the inseam cutting line. When sewing the pants back to the front, stretch the back inseam to fit the front inseam.

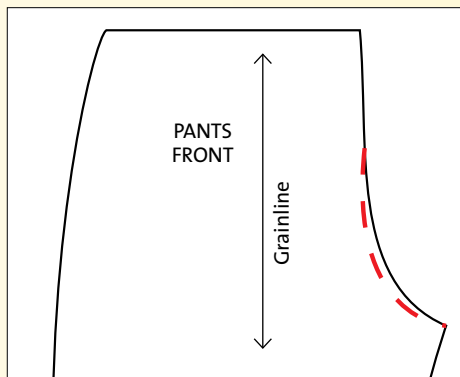
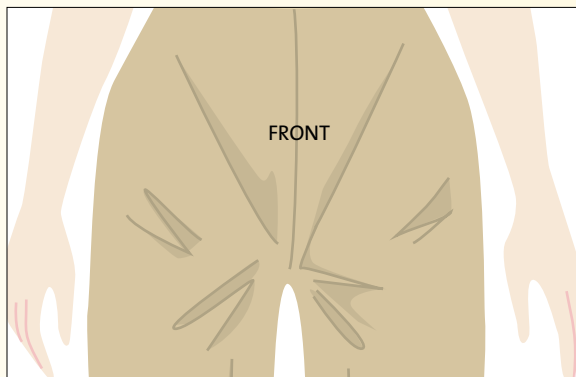
FRONT CROTCH WRINKLES

Wrinkling through the front crotch is caused by too much fabric or too little fabric.

If it is wrinkles and a loose fit, it indicates too much fabric, which is resolved by shortening the crotch. On the muslin, pinch out the excess fabric and pin. Measure the amount that needs to be changed.



To remove the excess fabric from the front crotch, draw a horizontal line on the pattern from where the front crotch curve begins straight over to the side seamline. Cut on this line, leaving a hinge at the side seamline. Overlap the cut edges the amount needed, and tape in place. True the center-front cutting line using a fashion curve.



If the crotch feels tight, it is too short; the wrinkles are caused by the fabric pulling to fit around the body. Redraw the crotch curve to make it deeper.