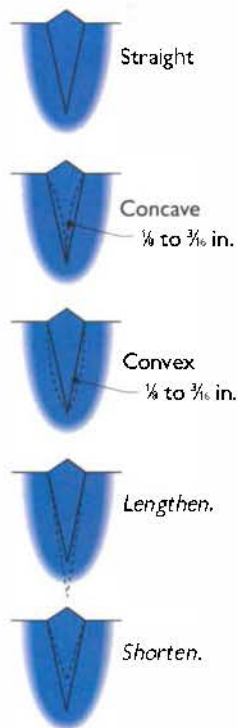


Basics

We've set aside this space to explain sewing techniques and terms that may not be familiar to everyone. If you've ever been stumped by a casual instruction to "clean-finish the edge" or "find the true bias," this column should be a handy reference.

ALTERING A DART'S SHAPE

You can alter a dart's shape and length to better fit an individual body. To add room in the dart area, curve the dart legs inward to make a concave dart and/or shorten the dart. To remove excess fullness, make the dart convex and/or lengthen it.



DARTS BUILD SHAPE INTO A GARMENT

by Shirley Smith

A dart is a long tuck that narrows to a point at one or both ends to build shape into a flat piece of fabric. Seemingly a simple matter, darts are extremely important for fit and style. It's easy to achieve perfect darts that shape the bust, hips, waist, and back of a garment, provided you remember to mark accurately, stitch carefully, and press gently. I'll discuss the basics of sewing beautiful darts in a minute, but first let's look briefly at how darts should fit.

Well-fitting darts should point to, and end slightly before, the fullest part of the body. To check for placement and fit, pin-fit the pattern before cutting your fabric by pinning it along the darts and seamlines. Then "try it on" to check the position, length, and shape of the darts. (For more on pin-fitting, see *Threads* No. 65, pp. 16-18.)

Darts can be straight, concave in shape (with legs that curve inward), or convex (with outward-curving legs). If you need to add room in the dart area of your garment, a concave dart takes up less fabric and adds needed fullness; conversely, a convex dart removes excess fullness for a closer fit. Making a dart slightly longer or shorter may also be necessary to match your body's shape (see the drawings at left).

Transfer darts accurately from pattern to fabric

Mark darts with tracing paper, marking pencil, or tailor's tacks



Tailor's tacks made with pins transfer darts accurately and quickly, without leaving permanent marks: Insert a small-headed pin through the pattern and fabric layers at each dot on the dart; flip to the other side and insert a pin at each pinned point. Gently pull the fabric layers apart, pin the end of the dart on each layer at a right angle to the fabric's fold, and finish separating the layers.



made with thread or pins. Fast and easy to work with, tracing paper and marking pencils should be used on the fabric's wrong side only, and avoided on sheer fabrics since they can leave permanent marks on the right side. When using a tracing wheel, use a ruler as a guide to trace the lines of a straight dart, and a French curve as a guide for curved darts.

If you use a marking pencil, cut the garment piece and, before removing the pattern tissue, stick a pin through the pattern and both layers of fabric at each dot along the dart. Lift the pattern piece and place a small mark on the wrong side of each layer of fabric at the point where the pin comes through.

For tailor's tacks, the procedure is similar, but marks are made with thread stitches or pins (use a thread color that's visible and that won't bleed) rather than with a pencil. For thread tacks, take two $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. stitches on each dot of the dart using a long, doubled strand

of thread (see the lower drawing on p. 20). Leave a 1-in. loop between stitches and long threads on either end. Snip the loop, remove the pattern piece, and separate the fabric layers, snipping the threads between layers.

Pin tacks require a little practice, but they're accurate and fast and won't leave permanent marks on your fabric. To learn how to make pin tacks, see the photos above.

Stitch perfect darts

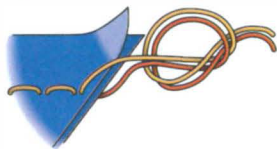
Use $\frac{1}{8}$ -in.-wide masking tape as a guide to stitch curved or straight darts that are well tapered at the point (see the photo at left on p. 20). Be sure to remove the tape as soon as the dart is completed so that the adhesive doesn't remain on the fabric.

When stitching an open-ended dart at a seam or edge, begin at the wide end, backstitching at the seamline, then stitch to the point and off the fold. Don't backstitch at the point; rather, leave long thread ends and tie them together in a tai-

Basics (continued)

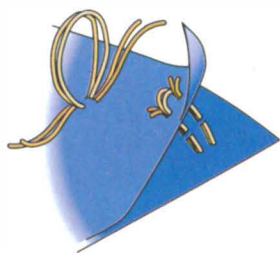
Tailor's knot

A tailor's knot neatly secures threads at the point of a dart.



Tailor's tack

Use thread tailor's tacks on delicate fabrics and other fabrics that are difficult to mark with pencil or tracing paper.



lor's knot (see the top drawing at left) at the dart's end. To stitch a double-ended dart, sew from the middle of the dart to one point. Then flip the garment to the other side so you can again sew from mid-dart to the other end, overlapping the stitches in the middle, leaving long thread ends, and knotting at each point.

If you're sewing darts in sheer fabrics, or when darts are sewn on the right side of a garment for a design detail, you can eliminate the thread knot at the dart end by stitching with one continuous thread. To do this, pull your bobbin thread up through the needle plate and thread it through the needle from back to front (the reverse of normal threading). Then continue to thread the machine in reverse to the thread spool and wind enough of the bobbin thread around the spool to stitch the dart. Then stitch the dart *from the point to the wide area*.



Use ¼-in. masking tape to guide stitching the dart from its wide end to and through the point. After removing the tape, press the stitched dart over a tailor's ham, inserting heavy paper into the dart to prevent show-through.

Pressing is critical

Press stitched darts first on each side, just to the end of the dart, so you don't crease your fabric beyond the dart point. Then press to one side (as indicated in your pattern) over a tailor's ham to retain the curved shape (see the photo at right, above). To prevent the dart's outline from showing on the right side, insert a piece of heavy paper between the dart and the garment while pressing. Turn the garment to

the right side and press again, checking to make sure the point blends smoothly into the rest of the garment. Use a press cloth, if your fabric requires it, when pressing from the right side. Follow these steps and you'll have the beautiful, smooth darts that are so important to the fit and look of your garment.

Shirley Smith sews beautiful darts in White Salmon, WA.