

Perfect the Wrap Dress

Learn how to make it fit
and flatter your figure

BY CHRISTINE JONSON



*Wrap dresses offer
comfort, flexibility, and
easy sophistication.*

Pattern: Vogue 8784; Fabric:
polyester crepe, Fabric.com
(no longer available).

The wrap dress is synonymous with chic, easy-wearing, go-anywhere fashion. Its nearly universal ability to flatter a woman's figure is well-known, and it has become a fashion icon in its own right.

The way fabric drapes, hugs, and folds across the body directs the eye, camouflaging and enhancing the figure—and this is precisely why so many women love a wrap dress. Wrap dresses perfectly combine style, fit, and function.

Interesting versions abound and make it possible for you to create a wardrobe of chic and dependable dresses for any occasion. The wrap dress just may be the ideal dress for every woman, and once you identify your most flattering and comfortable style, you can whip up a wrap dress for every day of the week.

In this article, I will discuss the advantages and challenges of essential wrap dress styles, explain how key variations affect the overall result, and share simple tips and techniques to solve common fit and construction problems.

PICK FLATTERING STYLE DETAILS

A wrap dress can take many forms, depending on its cut, details, and silhouette. Determining your ideal wrap dress may take some experimentation, but the results are well worth the effort.

To help you determine the style that works best for your figure, consider a wrap dress's primary elements—neckline shape and detail and skirt length and fullness—individually before evaluating how they work together. Careful thought and planning, along with the following suggestions, will help you determine the best neckline and skirt variation for creating a dress with a balanced silhouette that flatters you.

Neckline shape and detail

A wrap dress's overlapping bodice sections, which cross diagonally over center front, naturally create a V neckline. It's the most common neckline found on

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Classic Front Wrap

This is the most essential of wrap styles. It flatters the wearer based on good fit alone—no extra design details are necessary. A classic front wrap is simple to sew, and many patterns are available.

- Key elements are a streamlined silhouette, front V neckline, fitted bodice, and unfussy aesthetic.

- May be fitted with darts, princess seams, or other shaping details.

- May have a waistline seam, or bodice and skirt cut as one.

- May have a slim skirt or an A-line skirt, which can be narrow or full.

Fitting and construction tips:

- For a stretch knit fabric, choose a pattern without darts, facings, or a lining and with straight seamlines and close-fitting armholes.
- For a nonstretch woven, choose a pattern with bust and waistline darts, and a neckline that crosses the bust high at center front.



Pattern: Vogue 8784;
Fabric: silk/cotton blend
Radiance, Fabric.com.

Fashion Detail Wrap

Showier design elements can take the aesthetic in a modern, romantic, or avant-garde direction. Common details include draping, dramatic asymmetrical elements, flounces, or ruching. The biggest challenge is maintaining a balance between interesting design and a flattering silhouette.

- The bodice may be fitted or more relaxed, with or without eye-catching elements.
- Slim wrap ties can be used like a belt to further define the waist.
- Details like dramatic asymmetry, cascades or draping, ruching, flounces, or origami folds can highlight or camouflage certain figure areas.

Pattern: Butterick 5898;
Fabric: silk jersey knit,
MoodFabrics.com.

Fitting and construction tips:

- Choose patterns with details designed to camouflage or enhance the figure.
- Carefully evaluate patterns with lots of design ease and draping; they may create too much volume.
- Avoid excessive volume at the waist or at the chest, if you're busty.
- Neckline may need stabilizing to maintain proper fit.

Retro Back Wrap

Dresses that wrap to the back instead of the front were popular in the 1950s and '60s. The front bodice fits securely and can be made with any neckline shape, while the back V neckline crosses diagonally over an area of the body that requires very little fitting. There are few new pattern designs for back-wrap dresses, but many vintage patterns, available.



- Back V beautifully highlights the nape of the neck and upper back.

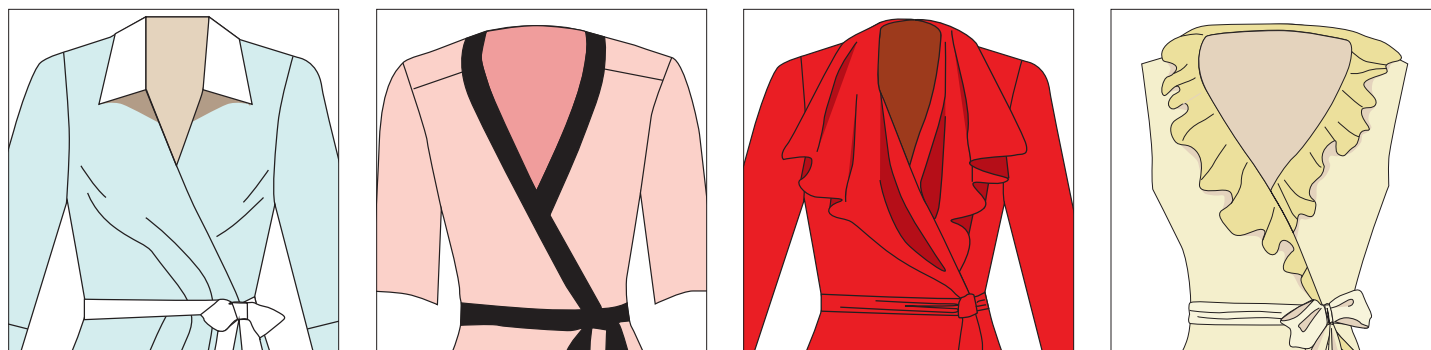


- The front bodice fits securely and can be made with any neckline shape you wish.
- Bodices are fitted, with the waistline positioned at the natural waist.
- Details may include a wide waistline sash or button closures.
- Skirts are typically full and gathered or a full A-line.

Pattern: Colette
Creme; Fabric: cotton
eyelet, Fabric.com.

Fitting and construction tips:

- Achieving proper fit in the front neckline is no different from fitting any other pattern's bodice.
- Stable woven fabrics are best.
- Always make a muslin to assess fit.



A basic V neckline can be enhanced substantially by a variety of details, such as a banded edge, shirt collar, waterfall drape, or a flounce.

wrap dresses, and it flatters many figures and face shapes. For those it does not flatter, I suggest ameliorating the shape with additional details or trying a back-wrapped style, which enables you to use different neckline shapes.

I don't recommend attempting to dramatically change a front-wrap dress's neckline shape, because it can introduce too many problems. The tension placed on the neckline by wrapping and tying the dress helps keep it in place, and other shapes may stretch, sag, or gape.

But you don't have to settle for a plain V neck. You can apply a variety of details to the neckline and front-bodice edges to better suit you. For example, adding a simple shirt-style or shawl collar gives a classic wrap dress a polished appearance and draws attention to the face. Adding a narrow ruffle softens the look, while a simple band creates a more substantial finish. A scalloped-edge band is whimsical, and it adds an element of roundness to the neckline. Draping that creates folds or a waterfall effect at the neckline and shoulder also softens the look.

Skirt length and shape

The key to a balanced silhouette lies in choosing the right skirt length and fullness to complement the dress's neckline shape

and detail, as well as your figure. Most wrap dresses are designed with either a straight skirt or an A-line skirt, although some—particularly vintage styles—may have full, gathered skirts.

Consider waistline definition and how to best flatter your curves when choosing a skirt shape. The A-line shape is most common; it balances most bodice designs, and it can vary from narrow to full. A wrap bodice with draping or folds is best paired with a straight skirt—with or without its own draping—to balance the volume. To determine the ideal skirt length for your figure, consider the wrap dress's bodice and neckline style and its skirt fullness, and the length that creates the best balance between the dress's top and bottom and your own proportions.

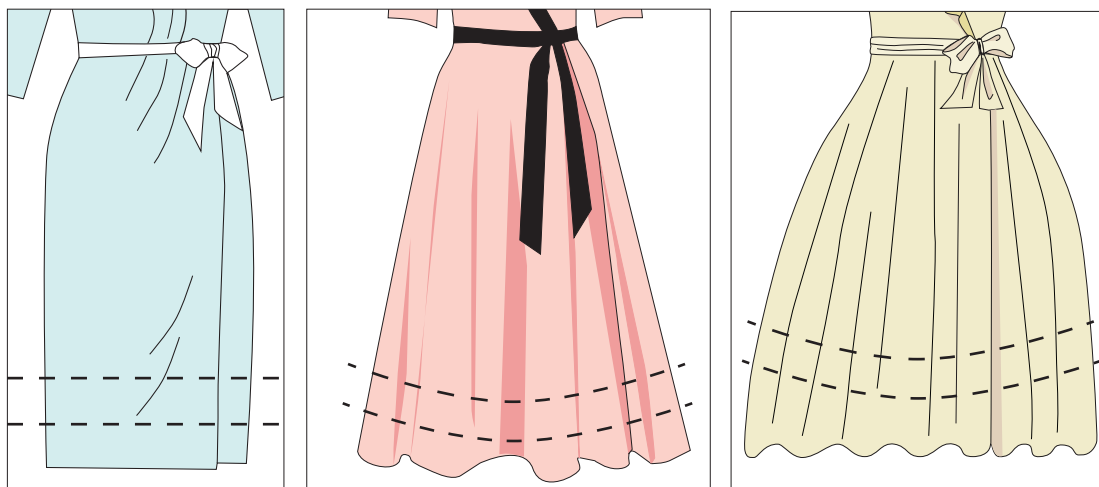
FINESSE THE NECKLINE FIT

You can overcome a wrap dress's fitting challenges by focusing on the front neckline's height, and its fit over the bust. When this area fits well, everything else falls gracefully into place.

Sculpt the neckline

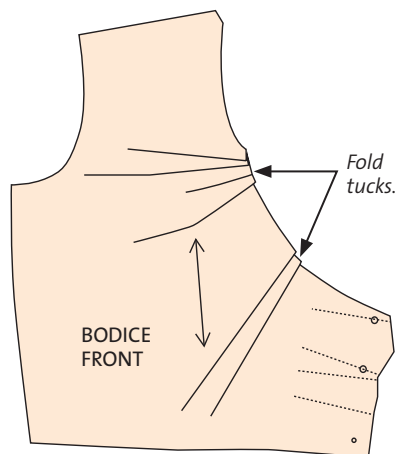
The most important qualities for a wrap dress neckline are that it flatters your bust and fits securely. The topography of a woman's torso is a series of convex and concave curves, but a wrap dress's diagonal neckline edge typically has no shaping. I suggest reshaping the edge above and below the bust to reduce the neckline ease and hug the body's curves at this crucial area.

As shown on page 42, pinch a series of small tucks along the neckline edge



A wrap dress's skirt fullness and length should balance and complement its bodice's style and details, as well as flatter your figure. You can adjust any pattern's skirt—in length and fullness—to better suit your figure.

Sculpt the neckline



Create a securely fitting wrap neckline by taking small tucks in the neckline edge above and below the bustline.

on a test muslin to shape a slight curve between shoulder and bust and another between bust and waist. Transfer the tucks to the pattern, and true the edge.

For a knit, the bodice's diagonal front edge should measure at least 1 inch shorter than your corresponding body measurement. Immediately after cutting the bodice sections from a knit or woven

fabric, stabilize the curved edge with fusible stay tape or twill tape.

Create full coverage

If you want to raise the V-neck's point so that it rests higher over your décolletage, first determine how much additional fabric is necessary to achieve the desired coverage. One-half inch to 1 inch is usually sufficient; adding a little at the wrap's neckline level and more at the waistline level creates additional coverage without adding excess fabric at the neck. Tape the front and back bodice pattern pieces to a piece of tissue paper. Then, as shown below left, draw lines to extend both shoulder lines the necessary length from the neckline level. Raise the center-back bodice's neckline seam the same amount. Redraw the front and back necklines. Either taper the front diagonal edge to nothing at the waistline level, or add height at that point as desired.

Ease a gaping neckline

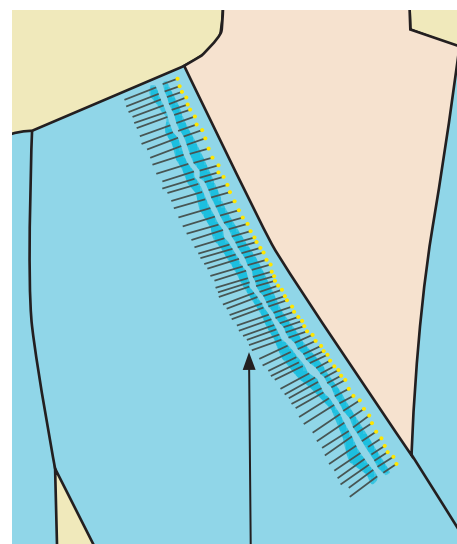
Gaping at the front neckline can be caused by a combination of factors. A tight fit across the full bust can cause the front neckline to warp and pull away from the body; the solution is adding a dart at the side seam or waist, or altering for a full bust. But the most common reason for gaping at the front neckline is that this bias-cut edge stretches out of shape as it is handled. To prevent stretching, stabilize the neckline the moment it is cut, and handle it as little as possible.

You can correct an already-stretched neckline by easing it. Pin a strip of 1/8-inch-wide twill tape (cut to the pattern's

WEBextra

For tips on repositioning a wrap dress waistline for a better fit, visit ThreadsMagazine.com.

Ease a gaping neckline

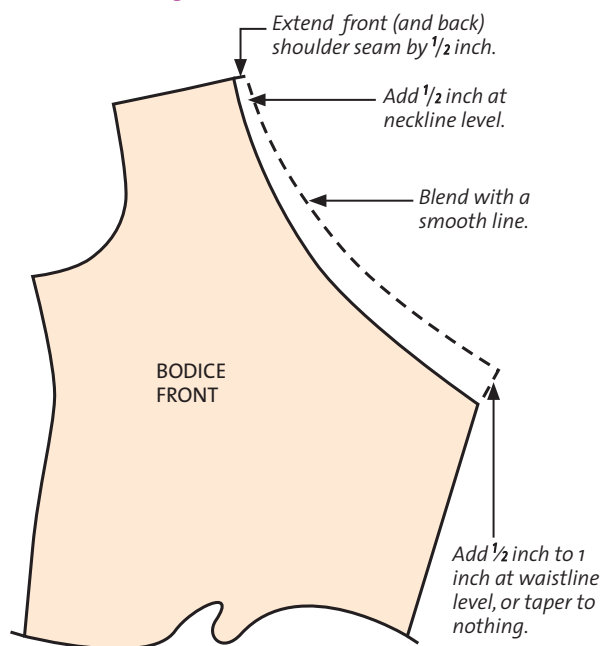


To correct a slightly gaping neckline, evenly distribute the neckline's excess length by pinning it to twill tape on its wrong side.

correct measurement) on the neckline's wrong side. Pin the fabric to the tape at close intervals, distributing the excess neckline length evenly along the tape, as shown above. Secure the easing with tiny hand stitches. This can also be done after the garment is finished. Simply ease the bodice's neckline using matching seam tape and thread. The stitches should be invisible from the right side.

Christine Jonson is the designer, pattern-maker, and owner of Christine Jonson patterns. CJPatterns.com.

Create full coverage





A wrap dress is always chic and flattering. Every wardrobe should include a few versions of this tried-and-true, easy-wearing style.