

One important aspect of a good fitting coat is having a correctly balanced coat. Remember that balance is the length of the front compared to the back. As you are fitting your coat with the basted skeleton fitting, take a look at the front of the coat. Do the fronts swing away from each other? If so, temporarily remedy this by pinning the center front of the forepart until the fronts are even. Just take out an inch or maybe more as if you were putting in a dart.

Next, measure how much you had to take in to make the fronts hang evenly. If it was more than one inch, you'll have to raise the waist seam manually. For example, if you had to pinch the front seams up 2 ½", the waist must be raised 1 ½". The remaining inch will be shrunk away with ironwork in the next step. Please keep in mind that 1 ½" is just an example, and exaggerated. Hopefully you won't have to take in that much. If the amount needed to balance the fronts is one inch or less, this can be achieved by ironwork alone.

The waist seam is raised by subtracting the amount from the bottom of the forepart. The skirt length remains the same.

Removing the Basting Stitches

After you have made all necessary corrections during the fitting, make sure you have marked the new seam lines with chalk, and that they all agree with each other. For example, the waist seam in front should be raised up equally if necessary. At this point, you will remove all of the basting pieces, and press the seam allowances flat again if necessary. Be sure not to undo your careful ironwork on the forepart though.

Cutting the Canvas

Lay the forepart on your canvas, making sure the grain lines are lined up. Next, trace around the entire forepart with chalk, except for the side seam. The canvas does not extend all the way to the side seam. Instead, it extends in a concave line from a point about an inch away from the top of the side seam, to about halfway along the waist line, as shown.

Next, add a half inch allowance all the way around, except for the side seam. This is to give you some room for error when basting on the canvas later, as they rarely line up perfectly.



Fulling (shrinking) the Center Front

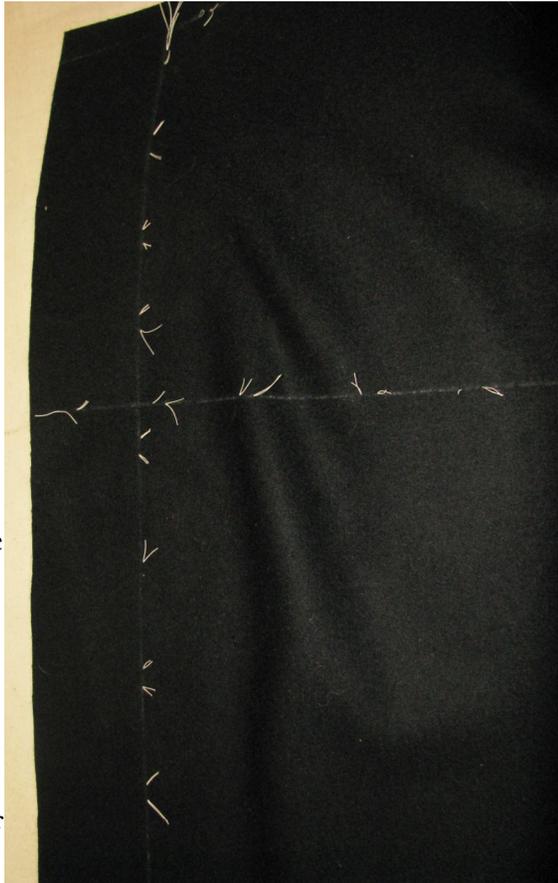
Now that you've determined and marked the amount to raise the waist seam on the forepart, it is time to complete the ironwork. Lay out the forepart, right side down, on your ironing board, with the center front facing you.

Mark the ends of the neck and waist seam, so you can determine how much fabric has been shrunk away. Next, make some small gathers or puckers along the center front, letting the ends of the center front line come towards each other.

Using your iron, gently massage the fabric along these puckers near the edge in a circular motion. Gradually work the resulting fullness towards the middle of the chest. What we are looking for is a nearly straight center front line, with a bubble of fabric near the middle.

This bubble of fabric often looks like an elongated oval, in the center of the fabric. Keep working at this until an inch in total has been shrunk away (you can tell by the chalk marks you made).

This step is very tricky, and more difficult than stretching. It would be a good idea to practice on some scraps of wool fabric first. Make a slight curve with your hip curve and just practice



shrinking the front away. I found it took me about five coats before I was satisfied with the results. This is definitely not something learned in a day.

Remember that fabric that has been shrunk has a tendency to stretch back into shape, so you must handle the forepart carefully. Also, allow the entire piece to dry and cool down before moving it.

Darts

If you are placing darts either the forepart or skirt, now is the time. First, baste each dart together, ensuring the chalk lines are lined up evenly. I recommend drawing the chalk lines on the pieces with just the tailor tacks showing, as it's slightly easier and more accurate. The basting should be about a quarter inch below the chalk lines, to keep it out of the way of your stitching.

Sew, using either a backstitch, or machine stitch, carefully following the line. Start from the top of the dart, and near the end, taper out gradually, to ensure a clean dart point.

Press the dart on both sides to set the stitches, but do not let the iron move past the tip of the dart, or you will get creases that are very difficult to remove.

If the darts are wider than one inch, trim the darts so that there is a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch seam allowance, but do not trim the points. Press this seam open over a tailor's ham, carefully opening the tip of the dart with a pencil or other object. At the tip, gently shrink out any excess to smooth out the tip of the dart.

If the darts are thinner, press them towards the back of the coat.

From the right side, press the darts again, and allow the dart to dry thoroughly before moving on to the next one.

Tail Facings

I've always considered this step as the 'first' step in constructing a coat, as all the technical and fitting issues are finally behind us. As such it's also one of my favourite steps. We are going to commence construction of the tail facings, which protect the edge of the garment from wear, and give some weight and body to the area as well.

Begin by laying both back pieces, right side up, as shown. The left side should overlap the right. Take this left piece, and set aside the right piece. It's important because each side is constructed slightly differently. The following steps all pertain to the left side.



Turn the left side of the back so that the wrong side is facing up. Trim away the inlays around the waist area and center back, if you did not need them. If you made any adjustments to this area, then trim only the excess amount.



Measure and chalk a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch line at the bottom of the center back, and across the top of the center back vent, as shown. Again, make sure you are working on the left side of the coat before you continue. Make a small cut from the corner of this area to the intersection of those two lines, as shown. The cut should be made just to the lines, not extending into it, as the chalk has a width to it, remember.



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Next, mark a vertical line extending from the top of the back skirt to the bottom. I generally make this 1 3/4" wide, because the fabric will be folded to this point to make a 7/8" facing. This is adjustable though depending on your size. Generally, the line should be made 1/4 inch away from where the center back seam line will be.



At the top, baste over the fabric 1/4 of an inch, and press carefully. Then baste the fabric along the center back over itself, so that the edge lines up with the vertical line you just drew. Baste carefully. There will be a little fullness at the top, because you don't want the facing to extend above the top of the vent. Press this fold as well, gently shrinking out the fullness.

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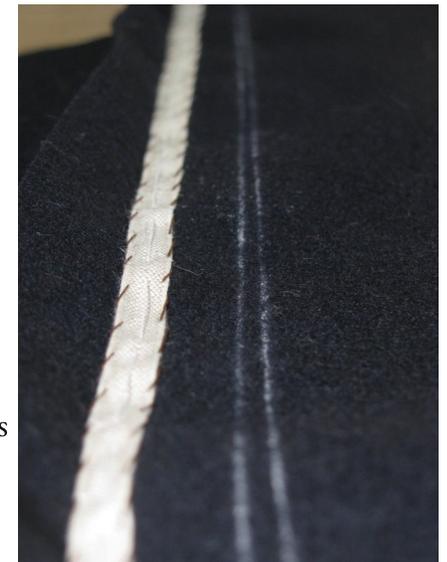
At this point, remove all basting stitches, and unfold the facing. You should have a nice crease along the edge, and top of the back vent. Use this as a guide to baste in the linen stay tape.

The tape should be placed right along this crease, starting at the top. Start with a backstitch with your basting thread to hold it in place at the top, and hold the tape where you want it as you baste.



About 8 inches from the bottom, make another backstitch in place. From this point on, hold the tape a little tight compared to the fabric until you get to the bottom. The tape should be about 1/4 inch tighter than the fabric, which is distributed equally along the 8 inches, as you baste. At the bottom, end with another backstitch in place. The stay tape should be trimmed 1/8 of an inch above the inlay at the bottom.

The stay tape is then slip stitched into place, making sure the stitches do not show through to the right side.



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Baste the top of the vent closed again, and fell it down by hand, using 8 to 10 stitches per inch. These stitches should not appear on the right side of the fabric, and should be just little pinpricks on the wrong side of the facing. Catch only a few threads in the facing as you go.



Next, baste the facing closed again, and fell this as well, as just described.

Finally, press the facing from the right side on a flat surface, to remove any wrinkles and puckering. Do not press any further than the edge of the facing, because there should be a slight fullness here from holding the stay tape tighter. This is the same principle as when shrinking the front of the forepart. The result should be a back tail piece that curves slightly inward, and helping to avoid sticking out away from the body.

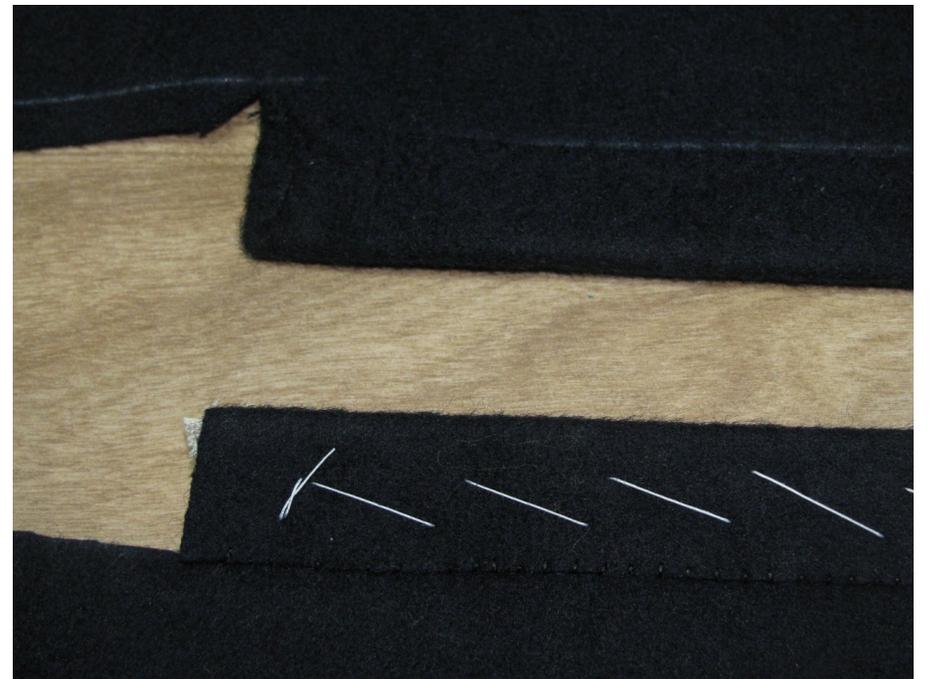


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Pick up the right back piece. This time, do not make the cut, but proceed to making the 1 ¾ inch vertical line. Baste over along just this edge, insert the stay tape, and fell just as with the left side. It's okay if the stay tape extends above the top of the vent a little.



The result should be two back pieces with facings, that are different only at the top of the back vent. This will add strength to the back vent, as we'll see in a later step.



Constructing the Body

Now that the back vent facing is complete, it is time to construct the body of the coat. This is much the same as when you made the full muslin, though we will go into slightly more detail now.

Sidepiece to Forepart

At this point, any unused inlays at the bottom of the forepart and side piece should be trimmed off. If you made any adjustments, such as lengthening the skirt, then make sure you have marked that and do not trim off that area.

Begin by basting the side piece to the forepart, lining up the edges of the side piece to the edges of the tailor tacks. You should have stretched both of these seams by about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, and they should agree in length at this point. Sew with a back stitch or machine stitch, and press both sides to set the stitches. I suggest using a seam roll to press the top two thirds of this seam, as it will add a little more shape. At the bottom third, where the pieces spring out to make room for the hips, you will need to use a tailors ham.



The Skirt

If you have not placed any darts into the skirt, it is then necessary to full some of the fabric at the hip area of the skirt. Place the skirt, right sides together, onto the forepart assembly, and make note of where the side seam is. Make a chalk mark on the skirt, one inch behind where the side seam would be, and 2 inches in front.



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Take up just the skirt. Using basting thread, start with two back stitches in place, just to the outside of the first mark. Make small, even running stitches just to the other mark, and snip the thread, leaving at least 6 inches extra.



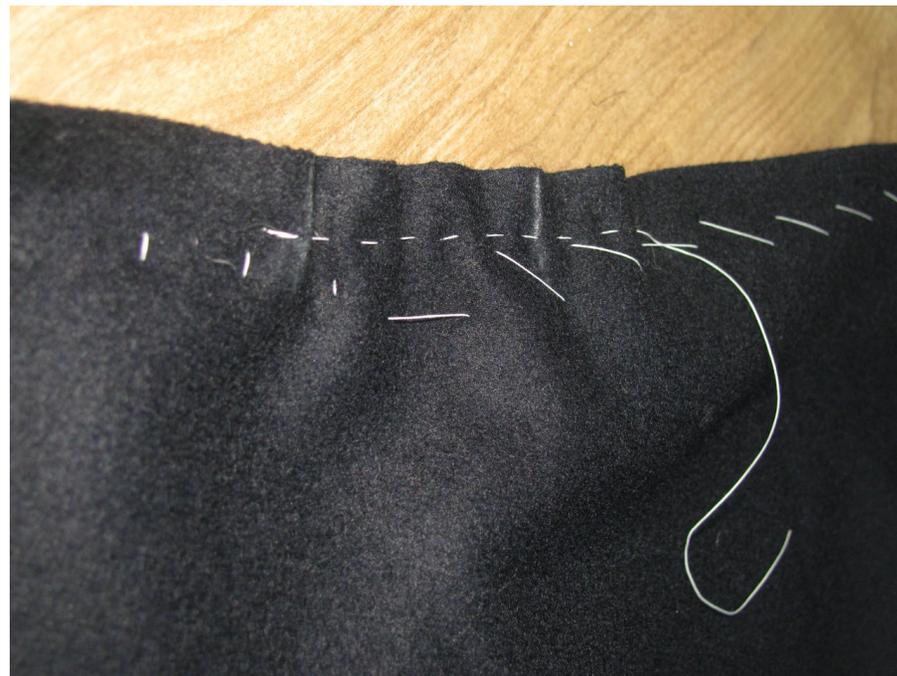
Place the skirt again on the forepart assembly. Flip it over so that the forepart is on the top. The back edge of the side seam should extend $\frac{1}{4}$ inch – the seam allowance width – into the inlay we gave to the skirt when drafting. It should not follow the spring upwards, however, but instead continue in a line with the rest of the skirt.



Baste this point in place, then turn over the whole assembly so the skirt is on top again. Baste until you get to the first chalk mark, using the padding type basting stitch for strength. When you hit

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this mark, gently pull on the thread you previously basted in, gathering in $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ an inch of fabric. Baste this down carefully so that the fullness remains evenly distributed. Feel free to use back stitches if necessary. The basting should be $\frac{3}{8}$ ” away from the edge, to stay out of the stitching line later.



Continue basting the rest of the skirt in place. You should have about 1 inch extra at the center front of the skirt, which will be used later to self-face the skirt in the front.

With the skirt side up, carefully shrink out the fullness you put in. The iron should not extend more than $\frac{1}{2}$ from the edge of the fabric, or you will shrink out all of the fullness, thus rendering all that work you did useless.

Sew the waist seam, skirt side down, from the front edge of the forepart, to the back edge of the side piece. Press to set the stitches on both sides. Open up the seam allowances on the wrong side, carefully using a tailor's ham to press the curved areas. Press the

right side.

On the back of the skirt seam allowance, carefully make a small snip in the seam allowance, $\frac{3}{8}$ in from the edge of the side piece



back. This will enable the skirt inlay to lay upright instead of being folded over in a seam allowance, thus helping to make the back pleat area thinner.

Back Piece

Trim off the inlay at the top of the side piece at the outside edge only, if you did not need it. With right sides together, line up the back piece to the skirt and forepart assembly. You can place a pin at the waist area to help hold it if you wish.



Line up the top of the side seam to the top of the back seam, making sure the side piece extends by an amount equal to the seam allowance. Baste in place $\frac{3}{8}$ inches away from the edge, gently easing the back piece into the side piece. The pieces should line up correctly if you did your fitting stages and muslins correctly. Any mistakes should have been caught by now.

Continue basting the skirt to the back skirt. At the bottom, the front skirt should meet the back skirt at the inlay marks, but if not, it's not a huge problem. It means that you stretched the skirt while making up though, so just be aware of it. Any length discrepancies will be dealt with later.

Now sew the seam with the back side down. This helps manage the fullness of the upper back area.

When you get to the waist line, determine how wide you want the pleats to be. Regulations stated no pleats, but you do need to have at least a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch pleat (also known as a false pleat), to leave room for the pockets. If you are doing the $\frac{1}{4}$ inch pleat, you'll turn in at the waist and sew just a quarter of



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an inch before turning 90 degrees to finish sewing. It's a good idea to chalk the line to ensure a straight seam. Trim off the extra fabric, leaving a 1/4 inch seam allowance.

If you wish to have the full pleats, continue sewing 1/4 from the edge, as you did in the muslin.

After sewing, clip the seam allowance of the back piece just above the point where you spring out for the pleat area. This enables you to press the upper back seam properly.



Press both sides to set the stitches. Press from the wrong side to open the seam, and press from the right side. Be sure to use a tailor's ham at all times this upper back seam, as it is very important for fit. If you press it flat, you'll shrink out all the ease that is there and end up with a ruined coat.

At the pleat area, press the pleat back. I generally press to one inch below the buttoning point, where all three pieces meet. If you've

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done everything correctly, there should be only four layers at this point. It took me a while to figure out this step. I remember having 6 or more layers here while I was learning. Hopefully the instructions have been clear enough to help you get to this point with less trouble. If not, please let me know. At this point you should have two nearly identical halves of a coat.



Pleat Pockets

Enlisted frock coats had two interior pockets attached to the back pleats. These are relatively easy to make, but precision is required, as always. If done incorrectly, they will affect the balance of the back vent, and pull on the skirt.

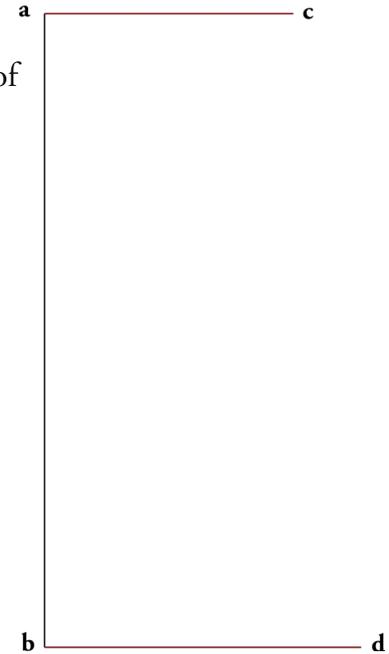
Drafting

We'll begin by drafting the pattern for these pockets. I usually draw them directly on the fabric itself, but you should get some practice and draft on paper until you are more confident in the process.

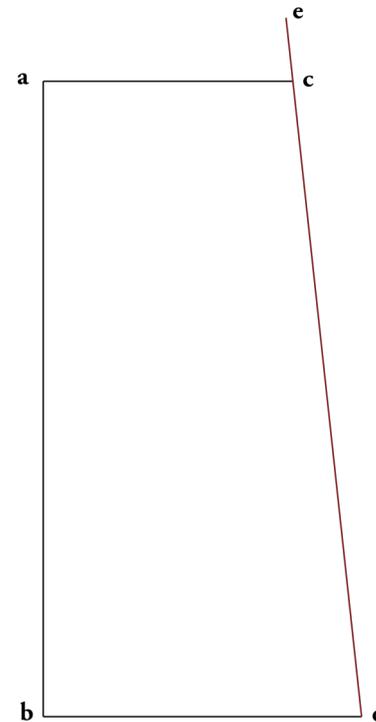
Begin by drawing a vertical construction line, marking the height of the pocket. I generally use two thirds of the height of the back of the skirt plus two graduated inches for the total. You want the pocket deep enough to hold items without fear of losing them, but not so deep that it's hard to reach them. In the illustration, I am using 14 inches as an example. Just remember this is completely variable and use your best judgment for your case.



At the top, square off a line, about 5 ½ graduated inches in length. This gives us the width of the top of the pocket. If it's too narrow, it will be difficult to reach your hand in, whereas being too wide will interfere with the coat construction.

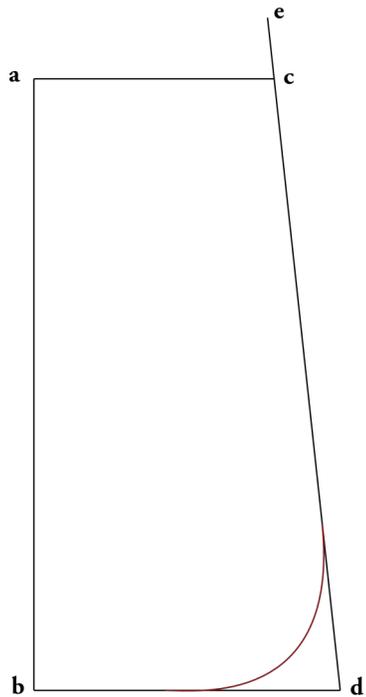


At the bottom, square off another line, marking the bottom of the pocket. This should be about 1 ½ graduated inches longer than the top line. Again, this is variable.



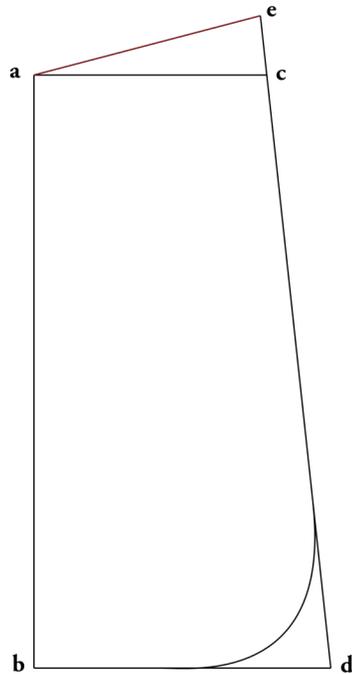
Connect the two endpoints C to D with an oblique line. At the top, extend the line about 1 ½ graduated inches. This will give you some room for error when installing the pockets later on.

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At the bottom of the pocket, use a French curve to draw a nicely shaped outer edge. This will help avoid small items from getting stuck in the corner.

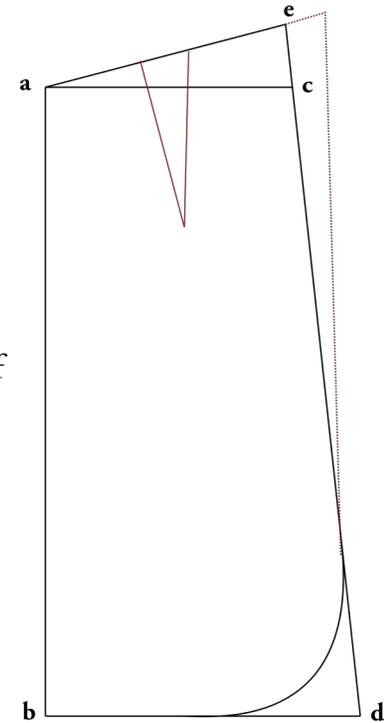
Connect the points A to E. This is the top of the pocket. This completes the pocket draft, unless you have darts in the skirt.



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If you placed a second dart in the skirt of your coat, you will have to place one in the pockets as well. These should be the same width, and perhaps a half inch longer than the skirt darts, placed roughly in the middle of the pocket.

You must also extend the side of the pocket to replace the width taken up by the dart.



Cutting the Pockets and Facings

Place your pattern on your brown polished cotton, lining up construction line A – B with the grain. I find that by rotating the pattern piece for the second pocket, you can save some space. You will need two pockets, for a total of four pieces. Keep the pocket halves together after they are cut out.



For the facings, cut out a 2 by 8 ½ inch rectangle of wool. Make sure the grain is lined up, and the nap is facing downwards.

After cutting, press each facing precisely in half, right side out. You may want to baste the halves together first to ensure accuracy and avoid movement from the iron.



Check to see which end is the bottom, by running your hand along the nap. At the bottom, using a french curve, chalk a small curve, starting at the bottom of the folded edge, running up about an inch to the cut edges. Lay both facings on top of each other, and trim along the chalk line, ensuring each piece is identical.



Pocket Construction

To begin construction, take the top halves of each pocket, and set aside the bottom halves so that you do not get them mixed up. As we go step by step, you should be doing both halves at once, the second half being a mirror image of the first.



On the wrong side, measure out a line ½ an inch from the edge, along the A – B line of the pocket.

Fold and press over the fabric so that it just meets this line.

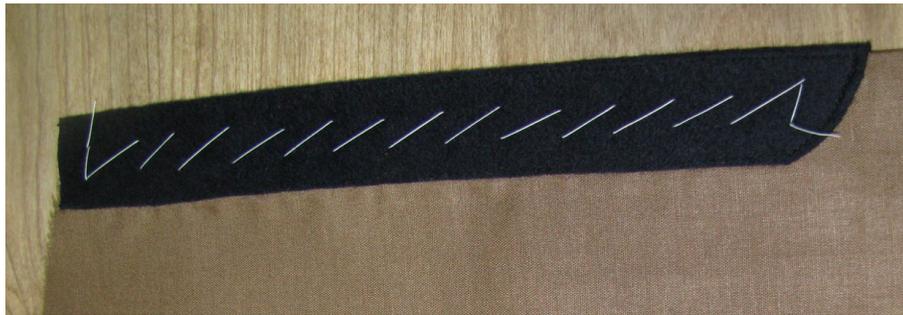


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Take a facing and insert the pocket between the folded layers. Ensure that the pocketing is snug into the fold of the facing. Baste carefully, checking as you go, that this is still the case.



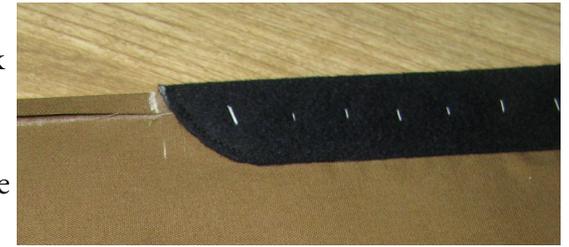
Starting at the top of the outer edge, machine sew a line of top stitching, 1/8 inch around the facing. At the bottom, I recommend turning the sewing machine wheel by hand for maximum control. If you wish, this top stitching may also be done by hand, using a side stitch.



After top stitching, press the facing well to remove any excess that may have entered into the facing while sewing. Press both sides.

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At the bottom of the facing, draw a small mark on the folded edge of the pocket fabric, directly below the facing. Snip the seam allowance to the fold, but no further, and press the bottom of the pocket open



again.

Now place the pocket backs and fronts right sides together, and baste along the outer edge. Make sure each piece lies completely flat, with no tension. Then sew a 1/4 inch seam along this edge, using brown cotton thread. Remove the basting stitches, press to set the stitches, and at the bottom curve, trim the seam allowance to 1/8”.

Turn the pockets right side out, and baste just around the outside edge. As you are basting, hold the bottom piece under by 1/16th of an inch, to keep it hidden from view. Then top stitch a



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mere 1/8 inch from the edge, using the sewing machine foot as a guide. Alternatively, use a side stitch to finish the pocket by hand. Remove the basting stitches. At this point, the pocket construction is completed.



Installing the Pleat Pockets

Lay the coat on the table right side up, and turn over the back piece so that the wrong side is up. Place the pocket, facing side down on top of the back. The top edge of the pocket should lie flush with the top of the pleat inlay.



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Starting at 1/16 inch below the facing, baste the pocket in place from that point, to the bottom of the pocket. Start with a few stitches in place to ensure that this point below the facing will not move at all.



Then just above the middle, start basting towards the top. However, you need to move the bottom facing piece out of the way of this basting, so that it does not get caught in the seam.



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Now sew the pocket down along the edge, using a $5/16$ " seam. This is just a smidge wider than normal, and will hide the seam line you created when sewing the back piece to the skirt. When you get to the middle, where the facing is close to the seam line, take care not to actually catch the facing, but come as close as you can to it. If you do accidentally catch it, you'll have to unpick the stitches and try again.



Remove the basting stitches, and press the pocket away from the body as shown. Don't forget to press the underside beneath the facing. Keep the pocket in this position for the next step.



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Now baste the facing to the body of the coat, so that it will not move. At the bottom of the facing, sew a stay stitch to secure the bottom of the pocket mouth, and give it some extra strength.



Open the coat completely now so that the wrong side is up, as pictured. Adjust the pleats so that they lie evenly. You may want to baste the pleats in place to make the next step easier. I haven't only because I've done this so often. Notice how the top of the pocket follows the curvature of the waist seam. If we had cut the pocket straight across at the top, it wouldn't have reached the seam at this step, and created a lot of tension in the coat.



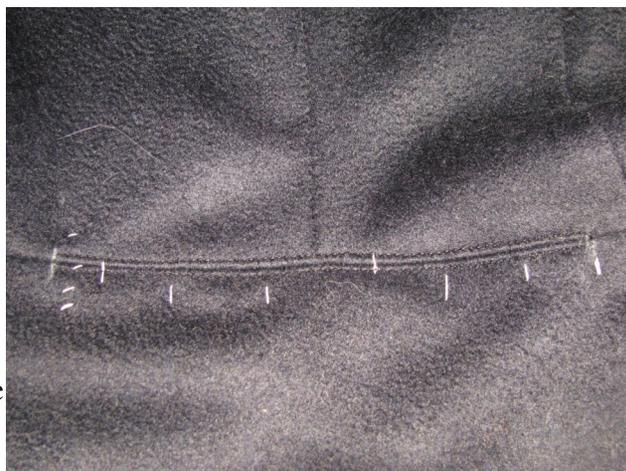
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Baste across the top of the pocket, making sure the edges are quite secure. You don't want any movement during the next step, which is very difficult under the best of circumstances.



From the outside of the coat, mark the points on the waist seam corresponding with the ends of the pocket and facing. Using the presser foot as a guide, sew a box stay, 1/8 inch from the waist seam, from chalk mark to chalk mark. When you get to the point where the waist seam meets the side seam, there is a lot of bulk.

Take your time, turning the wheel by hand. At the ends, turn at 90 degree angles and complete your rectangular box. The end with the facing is also difficult to sew. Use a size 100 needle for best results.



This is very visible on the finished coat, so make sure it comes out right. Don't be afraid to unpick the stitches and try again, however difficult. The results will be worth the extra effort. And again, you may use a side stitch by hand here, if desired.

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At this point, the pockets are completed! Remove all basting stitches, and give a good press from the wrong side before moving on to the canvas.



The Canvas

The canvas has a very large affect on the final appearance of a coat. It provides shape and support for the garment. The shape of the canvas will mimic the shape of the coat we created through ironwork, making it more permanent.



Begin by laying your canvas pieces out as shown. You may want to mark the wrong sides for future use, though it doesn't matter which side is up at this point, as long as they are mirrored.

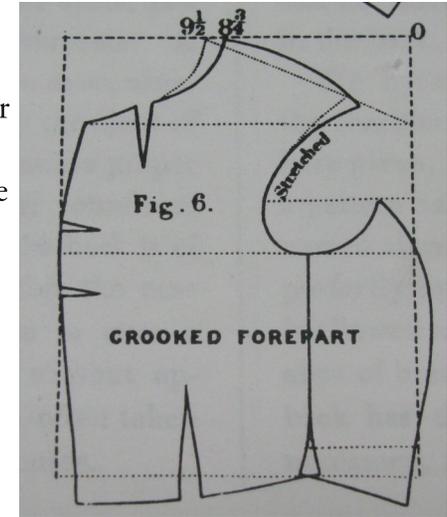
Perform ironwork on the armscye, shoulder, and neck, exactly like you did on the forepart itself. In the 1870s, this was replaced by inserting a series of gussets at these points. But to my knowledge, this is the most period appropriate way of putting shape into the canvas here.

Mark a line two inches in from the center front. This is to roughly correspond with the marking threads on the front of the coat.



Darts must be placed in front of the coat, taking out a total amount equal to that which you shrunk from the front of the forepart. Each dart must be no larger than a half inch, and the total amount taken out should be no more than one inch, as for the forepart. For example, if I shrunk away $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in the forepart, I would make two darts, each $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch wide.

In my case, I only needed to shrink out a half inch, so I will put one half inch dart in the canvas. Determine the location you want the darts, by finding the most curved section of the center front. Devere shows us his recommended locations in his 1866 manual.



Start by drawing the center construction line of the dart at a right angle to the marking line you made two inches from the edge. The line should be about three inches long. Mark half the dart width to



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each side (in my case, $\frac{1}{4}$ "), and connect, forming a triangular dart as shown. The two outer lines should extend all the way to the edge of the canvas.

What this is doing is ensuring the dart is the proper width at the center front line, instead of the very edge of the coat. If you measure the dart from the edge of the coat instead, you will find the dart is too small, and have little affect on the coat's shape.

Now place both canvas pieces together, and cut out the darts at the same time, on the inner edges of the chalk marks. You are cutting directly on the seam lines, as having a normal seam in the canvas would be too bulky.



Here is a new method I learned very recently to sew the darts together in a traditional manner. This proves that there is always something new to learn in tailoring, no matter what your experience.

Cut a strip of holland linen 1 inch wide, by about 1 inch longer than the total length of your dart. Stretch this lengthwise with your iron to prevent and unwanted stretching or shrinking later on.

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Baste one edge of the dart to the bottom half of the linen. The edge of the dart should follow the grain line, and be as close to the middle of the canvas as possible.



Baste the other edge of the dart on to the linen, butting the canvas edges closely together, but not overlapping.



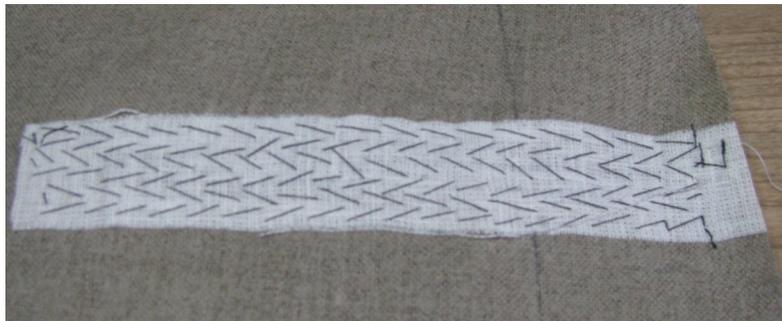
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If you end up making the darts too large, you will end up with too much shaping in the front, and have a very 'womanly' look to the coat. If this happens, you can reopen the dart and insert a piece of scrap canvas, sewing it down along the edges of the dart. This will save you from having to cut another set of canvases. Then redraw new darts and continue as before.

Using a padding stitch on the linen side, stitch up the middle of the linen, catching both edges of the dart underneath. Hold the canvas so that the dart is pointing out in front of you, and hold the needle right to left as you insert it in the canvas.

When you get to the end, don't rotate the canvas, just start sewing back towards you, the needle going the same way. The second row should be to one side of the first row, and then you will keep working until you fill up that half of the linen.

Then start on the other half of the linen in the same manner. When completed, you should have several rows of nice stitching, holding the canvas firmly in place. Repeat on the other dart if applicable.



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Prior to this method, I had been using a machine stitch to hold everything in place. And prior to that, when I first started tailoring, I would sew the darts with the same method as used for the outer wool fabric, creating a thick bulky seam. It's nice to look back on your own work to see the progress you have made.

Basting in the Canvas

We will begin basting in the canvas now, working in even more shape as we go along. You'll notice that neither the canvas nor the forepart want to lie flat on the table. The human body is not flat, so why would a coat be flat?

Keep this in mind as you're basting in the canvas. Keep one hand underneath the canvas as you go, making sure the shape is supported as you baste.

To begin, lay the canvas on the table, with the coat, right side up, on top. The canvas should extend about ½" past the edge of the wool, giving us some room for error as we baste.

Start by basting from about an inch or two away from the top of the shoulder, down the center of the coat, ending one inch above the waist.



Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

At the waist, baste toward the edge of the coat, stopping at the tailor tacks on the front of the coat. Then follow the front upwards, smoothing the fabric toward the edge as you go.



Module Eight — Pockets and Canvas

Keeping one inch away from the inlays, baste across the neck and shoulder, ending where you originally started.



Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

Baste from the bottom of the scye, down along the edge of the canvas, to one inch above the waist, cutting across to meet the other basting you put in.



Module Eight — Pockets and Canvas

Finally, baste around the armscye, about a half inch from the edge. Also baste the rest of the waist line from the tailor tacks to the center front.



Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

At this point, hold up the garment, being careful to support it fully to prevent unwanted stretching, and ensure that there are no ripples or unwanted fullness in the coat front. If there is, remove the basting and try again.

When you are satisfied, carefully trim the extra canvas from the edges of the coat along the center front, neck, shoulder, and armhole.



Module Eight — Pockets and Canvas

Turn the coat to the inside, and observe the waist seam. There should be about an inch extra inlay, which will need to be trimmed off carefully. The canvas edge needs to lay perfectly even with the waist seam.

With your scissors in the 'ditch' of the waist seam, carefully cut away this extra canvas. Cut a little bit at a time, and check between each cut that you are cutting accurately. If you cut too much away, the coat front will be pulled upwards and give an unsightly appearance. It's okay to leave about 1/16 inch extra canvas. The extra fullness in the canvas will keep the wool in shape.



Recreating a Federal Enlisted Frock Coat

Using a cross stitch, secure the canvas to the waist seam of the coat. This will hold it permanently in place. Stitch from the inner edge of the canvas, to about two inches from the center front, where the tailor tacks are. You can use the basting stitches holding the canvas in place as a guide.



At this point you should have two halves of the coat completed, with pleat pockets and canvas installed. The progress so far should look thusly:

Module Eight — Pockets and Canvas

