

Converting a Muslin Drape into a Paper Pattern

Converting a Muslin Drape into a Paper Pattern

There are two main types of patterns you can make when you disassemble a draped-to-fit muslin in order to convert its parts into paper patterns.

The first type is a **basic pattern**, without details. Other terms for this pattern type include “sloper” and “block”, setting aside varying definitions for and usages of these terms you might find in the garment-manufacturing industry, or argued about online. By basic, I simply mean a pattern that captures only the core fitting information from the muslin, for easy tracing and repeated use, with no attempt made yet to translate this info into a specific fashion garment. It’s essentially another pattern tool from which the second type can be more easily made.

The second type is, of course, a **fashion pattern**, complete with specific seam allowances and pattern pieces for all the details required for a specific garment, made with specific techniques. I’ll cover both types here.

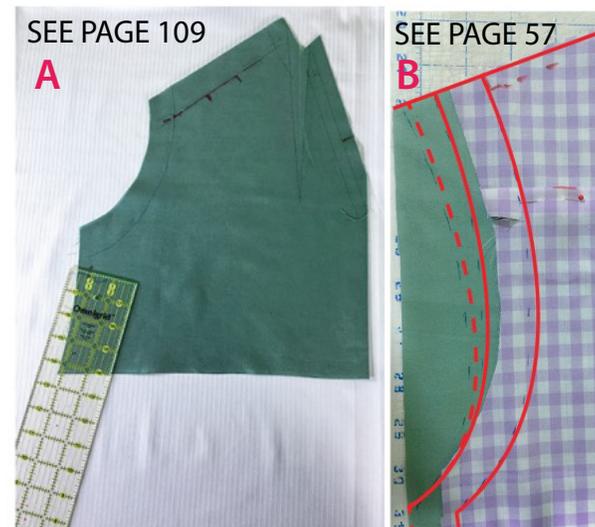
Basic patterns are easily made from traced muslins; in fact, fitting muslins are a basic patterns already, just not yet in paper. Fashion patterns on the other hand require a lot of additional information beyond what a muslin fitting will provide.

The exact form and features each pattern type needs to have depends on how you’ll use each, so you may eventually want to make various pattern sub-types, some durable and some for occasional or single use.

For example, a basic pattern that you’ll trace repeatedly onto pattern paper—using its outlines as the basis for many different specific projects that will all share the fit of the basic but will have different details and be made from a variety of fabrics—will be most useful if made from a stiff card-stock and cut **without seam allowances**, so you can trace it without wear and tear, and add different allowances as required by each new project.

And if you develop a fashion pattern for a garment you’ll often want to remake, such as a shirt for work that you’ll want in different fabrics but with mostly the same details, seam allowances, and fit each time, cutting a pattern in card stock **including allowances** would also make sense, along with similar patterns for details that will frequently be used unchanged, such as sleeve plackets.

Please note that it’s not necessary to convert muslin parts to paper for them to be useful tools for cutting fashion garments or for further refinement as muslins. As you can see me doing at A, muslin pattern pieces can be used directly as cutting and marking guides when laid smoothly on top of fashion fabrics, just as I’ve often directly traced earlier muslin tests onto other muslin fabrics when preparing additional tests, as at B. The main advantages of paper over fabric at any stage of pattern or muslin work are how smoothly fabrics laid on top of it for tracing can be shifted around without catching or distorting it, how easily paper can be stored, and how easily it can be written and drawn on with pencils and fine-tip pens.



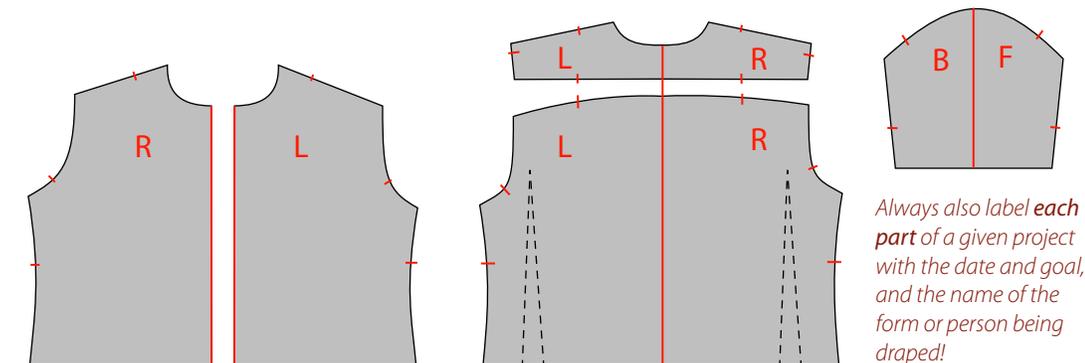
BASIC PATTERNS

All the draping methods I’m covering in the book prior to the project chapters are about creating and perfecting basic-fitting shirt muslins, with varying degrees of ease below the armholes.

As such, they’re all without any details like closures, plackets, bands, pockets, collars, hems, or cuffs, none of which have anything to do with the fit of the body or shoulders. The only pieces involved, even if internally split for more customization, are a yoke, a front and back, and sleeves. You’ll notice that all these drapes are only as long below the armholes or bust as needed to reach elbows, and to reflect body shape changes on the specific form being draped that would be likely to affect a typical shirt-like garment, so they are rarely long enough to reach the hips. Any darts in the muslin are marked and copied, but uniform tucks, such as across the back of the example below, are not; they remain pinned or basted when the muslin is removed so the reshaping they provide is captured during the tracing.

So, to convert these muslin drapes to paper basic patterns, nothing more is needed than to completely copy the un-basted muslin pieces and trace off all the marked seam and dart lines as is, including the as-cut hems and any other marks, using the tracing wheel techniques described on page 26. I typically use all poly or poly-blend fabrics for muslins so I don’t need to press them before tracing, avoiding any risk of distortion from the iron.

I always mark the on-form muslin along apparent centers—judged visually in relation to the neck, not measured—in front and on the back and yoke, as well as adding a few mid-seam alignment marks across all seams, and clear labels for right and left, and front and back.



Off the form, I always trace both sides of the front and back, and both sleeves if I’ve draped two sleeves, which I usually don’t on loose-fit muslins, but often do for snugger basics.

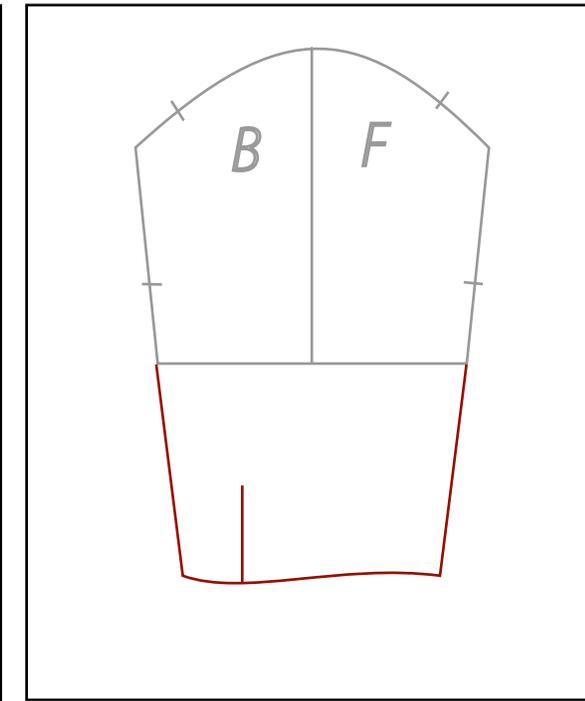
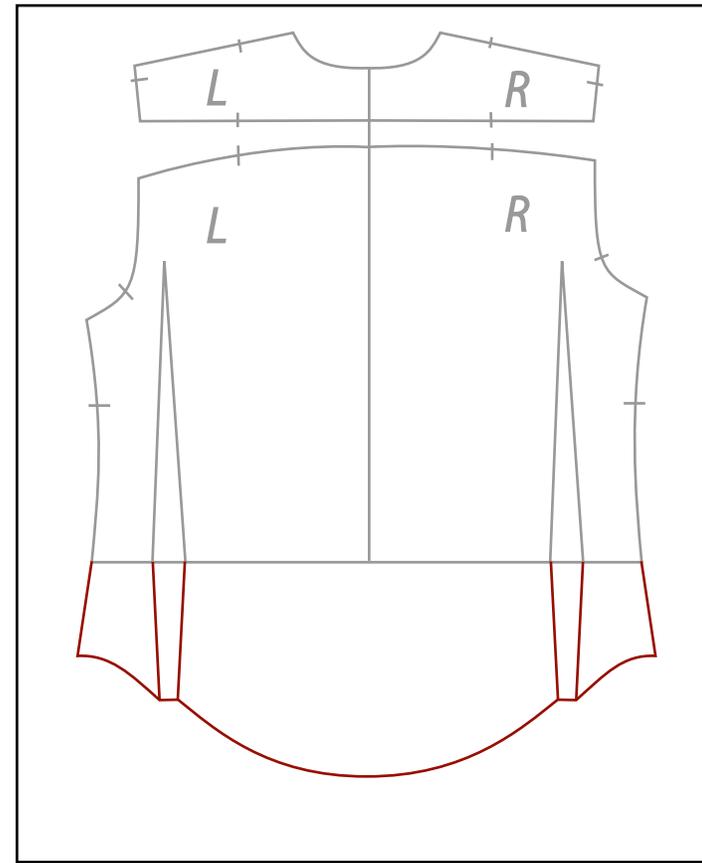
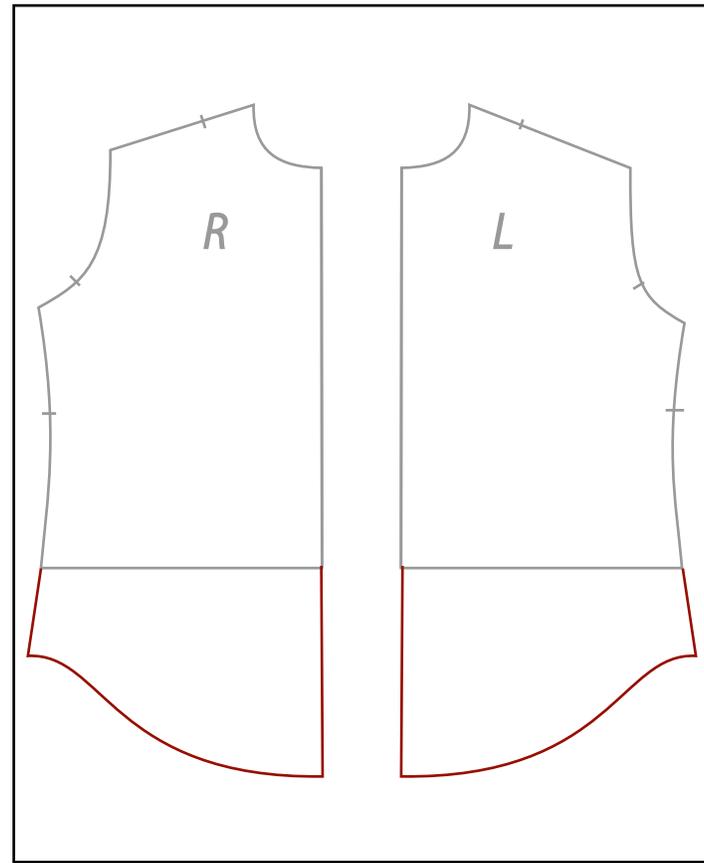
But I also always compare the R and L sides, and the sleeves if different. If any differences are within about 1/4” or 0.5cm, I also trace the larger side with the center on a folded paper, so I’ve also got a symmetrical version to try out. See page 30 for more on this.



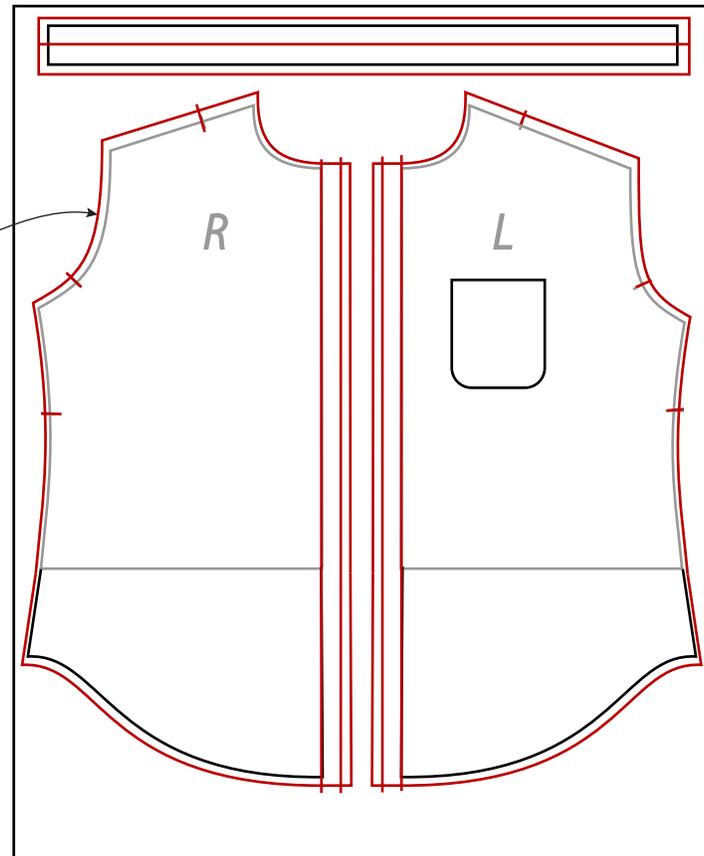
Even when I’m just developing a basic, I usually throw a paper strip over the neck to establish a basic neckline for a collar stand at this stage, just to get a jump on collars with this most common and minimal of shapes.

FASHION PATTERNS

Since the whole point of draping a shirt muslin is to adjust the pieces until they fit just as you want your shirt to fit, the simplest way to create a fashion pattern from a basic draped muslin is to use it *as is* as far as it goes, extending the lengths of the traced body and sleeve shapes as at right.

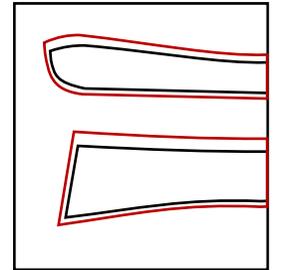
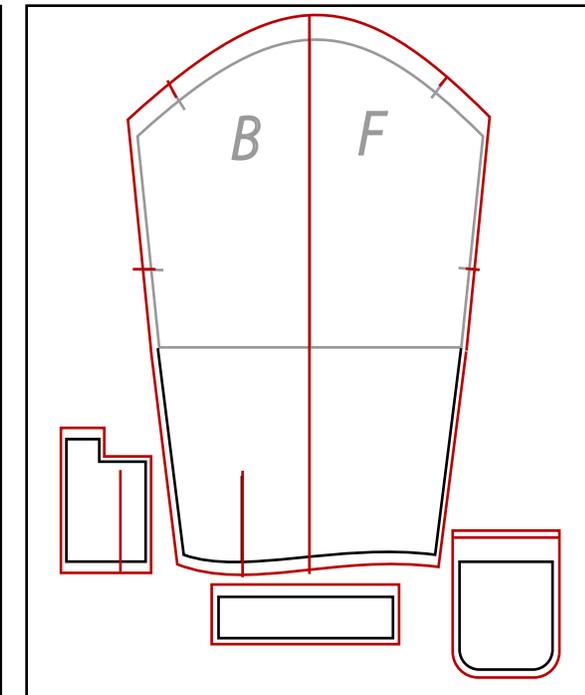
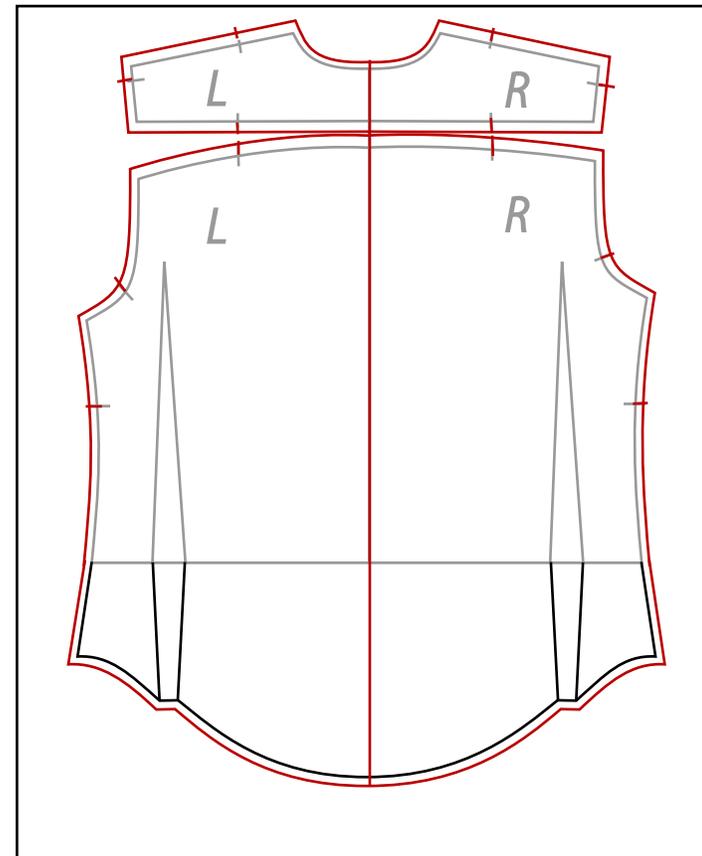


You then add in the details you need from wherever you can find them, to create patterns for the collar, cuffs, pockets, plackets, center-front closure overlaps, and hem shapes, as at right.



And finally you add on whatever seam allowances you'll need for everything.

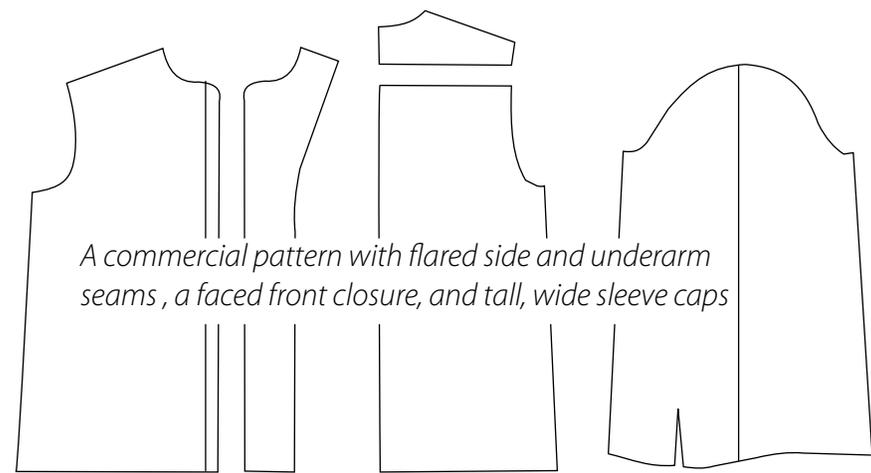
Sources for the extra pattern pieces include detail tracings from shirts you own, commercial patterns, my other shirtmaking books, your imagination...



FASHION PATTERNS

To adapt a specific existing fashion pattern to fit the way a basic does, there are a few ways to proceed, and lots of options (choices) to consider. Ideally, you'll have a multi-sized commercial pattern to work with so you can easily find the seam outlines that are most similar in scale to your basic (and don't forget that your basic has no seam allowances!).

The first step is overlay the basic shapes and the corresponding new pattern shapes as well as you can, using the center front and back verticals and the armholes horizontally to align every thing (as I've done with the blue lines below), and sometimes the necklines assuming similar shaping. This is the best

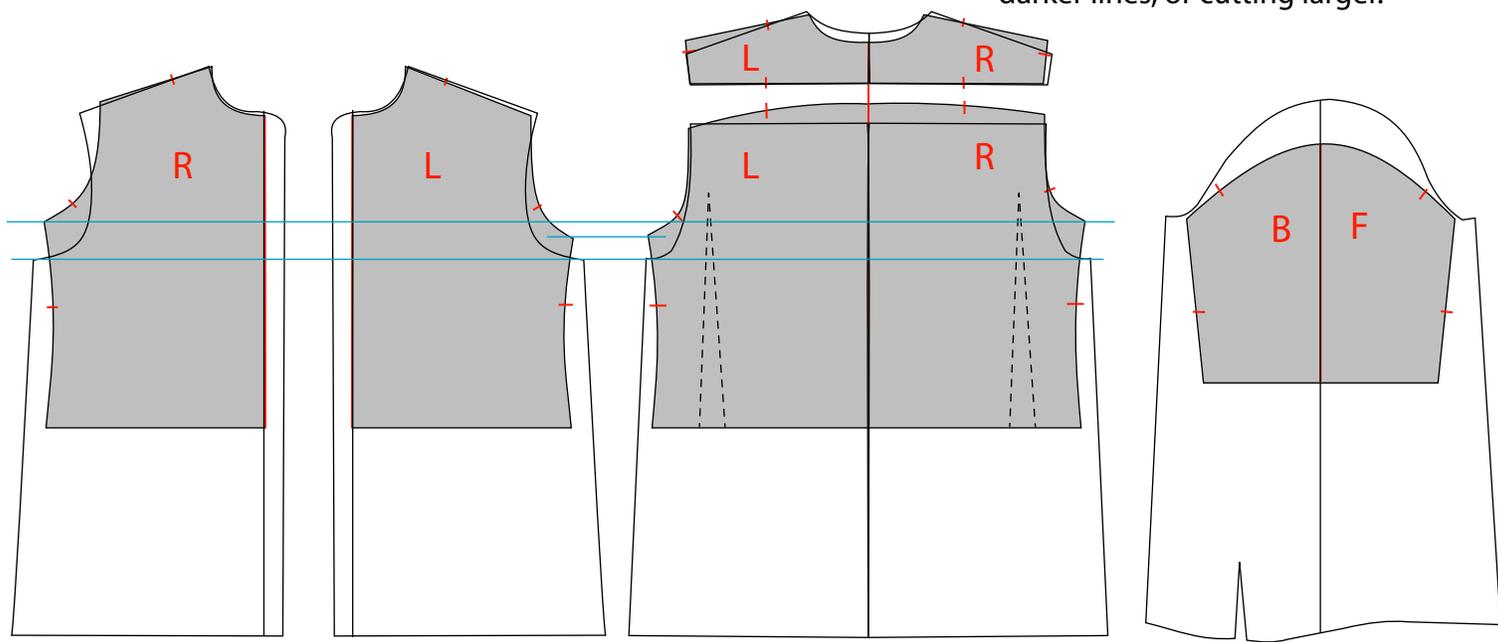


way to tell by exactly how much the pattern differs from your basic and to start sorting out your options.

The simplest thing is to borrow isolated features of the pattern to tack onto the otherwise unchanged basic, such as you can see could be easily done with the overlap at center-fronts below, ignoring the overall shapes of the rest of the pattern. This is the best way to deal with patterns that aren't scaled closely to your basic.

For patterns that are scaled well, as below, you can simply replace the pattern's yoke shapes and the front and back seams going into the yoke ("to-yoke"), as well as the armholes and sleeve cap with those from the basic, blending from these to the remaining shapes of the new pattern.

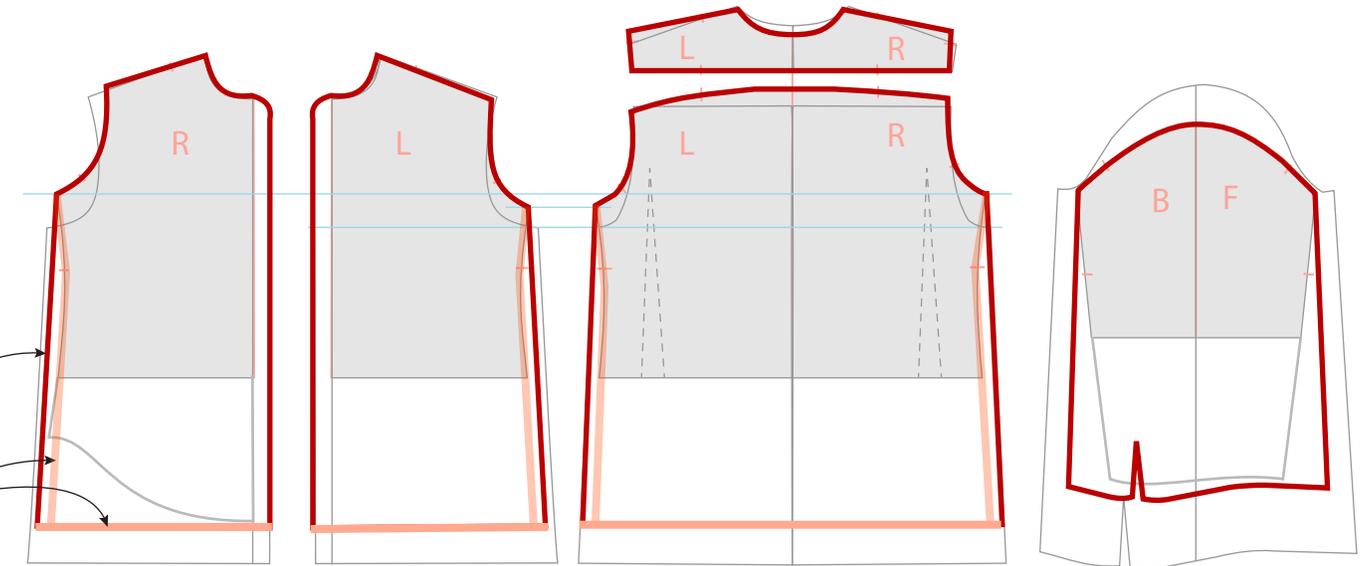
This is what I've done at top right, outlining the final composite pattern with a dark red outline. The paler lines indicate seam shapes that I'd consider exploring with further draping-to-fit adjustments, probably after cutting out the fashion fabric following the darker lines, or cutting larger.



Note that I've included the body and sleeve lengths from the previous fashion-pattern conversion, to clarify some of the many optional choices, but have marked the hems with a pale line indicating further testing needed there.

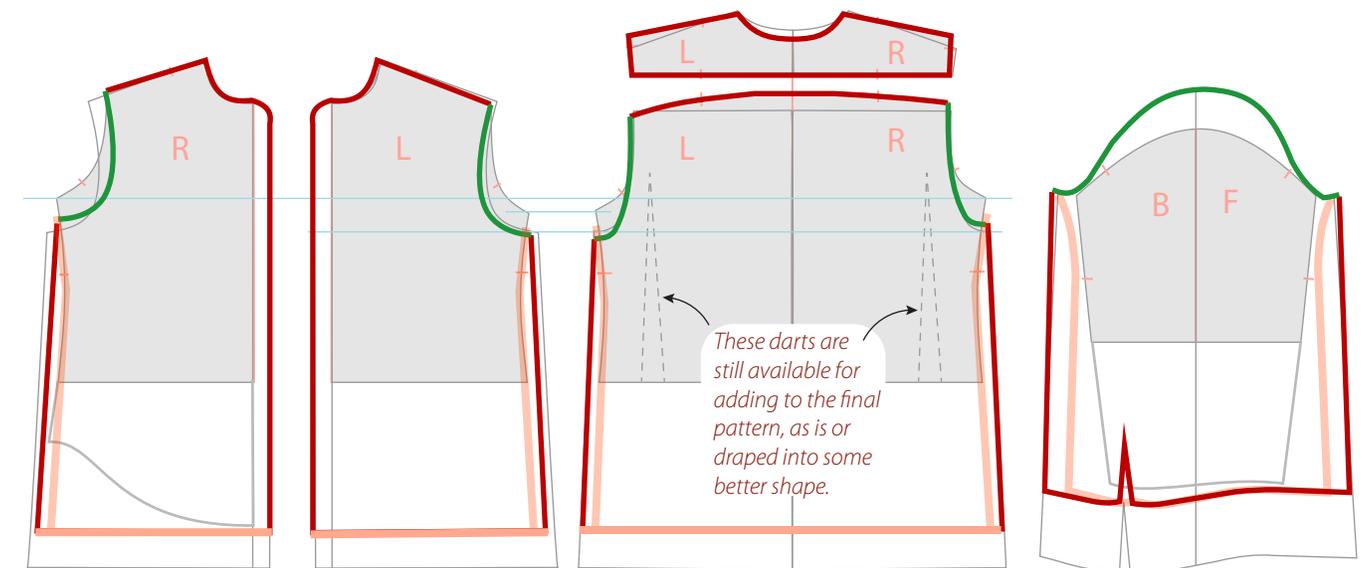
The main thing the basic—and any fashion patterns you've already worked out from

it—offers is already well tested results, while a new pattern offers unknown qualities you want to test. So, all the edges involving new shapes are good places to cut with extra allowances and to further explore by draping. In this case, I'd consider the ideal hem length relatively unknown until I'm surer of the degree or width of flare I'm going to eventually discover I want.



Below I've chosen to merge the basic's shoulders and yoke (in red) with the pattern's armholes and sleeve cap, indicated with the green lines. These shapes are straight from the pattern, angled and shifted to meet the not-symmetrical, to-yoke seam

shapes from the basic. But because the basic yoke is longer at the ends than the pattern's yoke, I've also increased the cap length and expect to have to finalize all these edges with a little further draping, so these will have extra allowances, too.



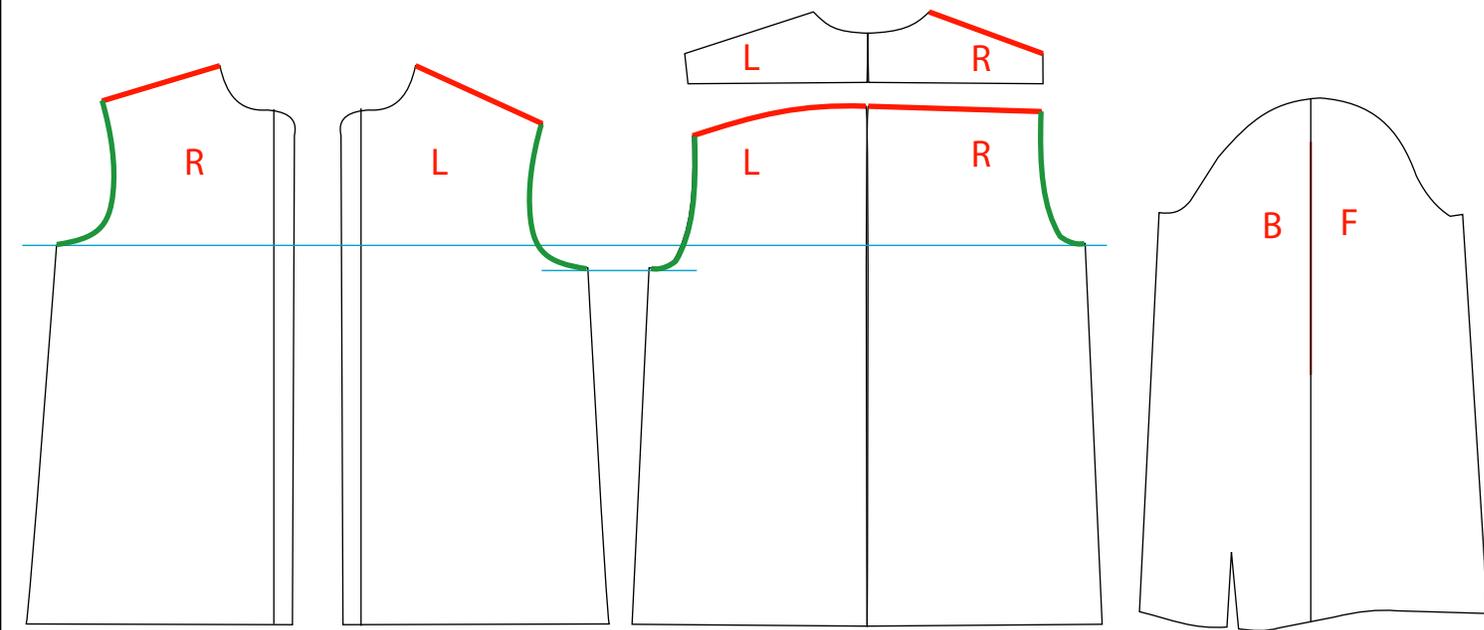
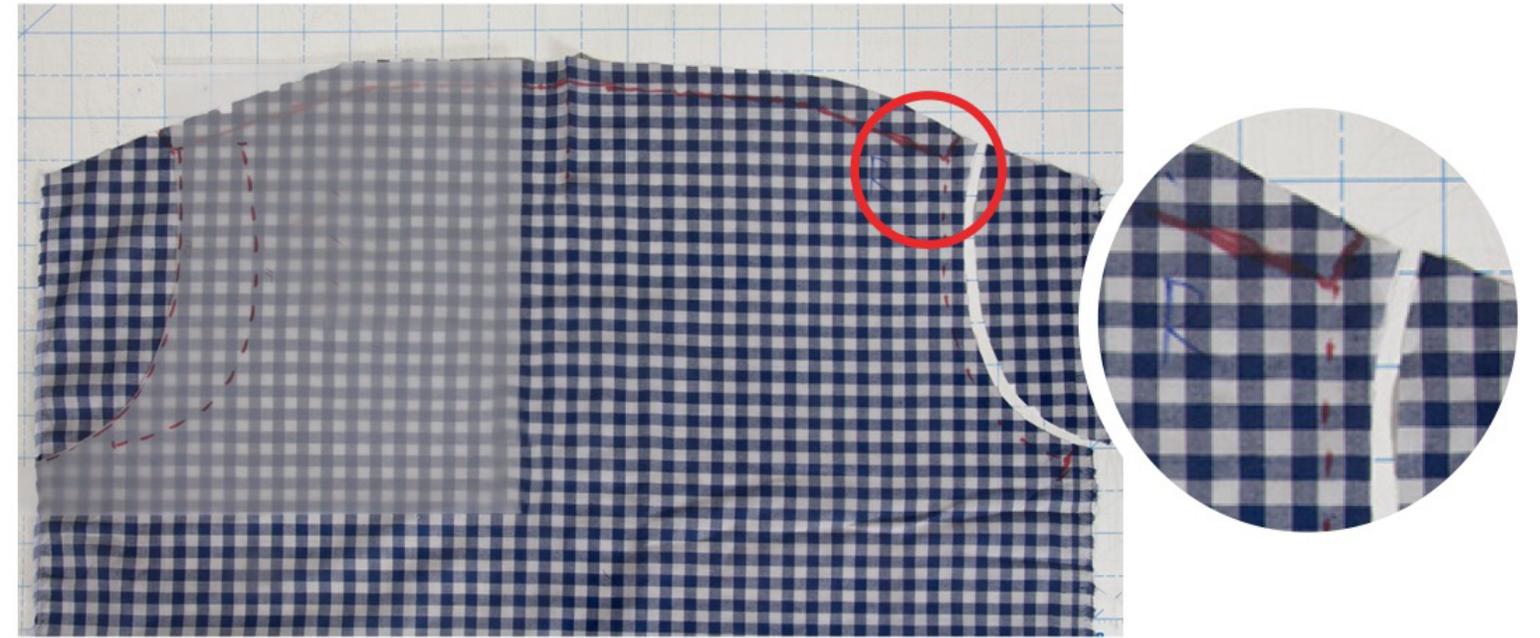
FASHION PATTERNS

Because I'm very comfortable with draping and have a form I trust, I'd regard any pattern with non-typical or very specific *fitting* shapes that I wanted to preserve or at least explore (as opposed to style-only, *non-fitting* shapes), such as this last one's flared side and underarm seams and very tall and wide sleeve cap, as actually easier to drape-to-fit from scratch compared to altering it from a previously draped basic.

As described on page 16 and shown at right, I'd use the draping variation (also labelled **A** on page 20), in which the body rectangles are first draped on a yoke from a specific pattern. After the front and back to-yoke seam-line curves are found, the same pattern's armholes—and side seams, too, if

wanted—then get traced exactly onto the gingham rectangles at the ends of the yoke curves. These are not further altered in any subsequent steps, in order to make sure the also not-altered sleeve cap they're already drafted to fit, will still work as intended when the muslin is basted together and then traced, in this case not into a basic, but into a customized version of the fashion pattern it started as from the beginning.

So, compared to the last row of diagrams on the previous page, the original pattern itself is draped, but only its to-yoke seams (red below) are actually reshaped by the process, which are then used to reposition the armhole curves, as indicated with heavy green lines below.



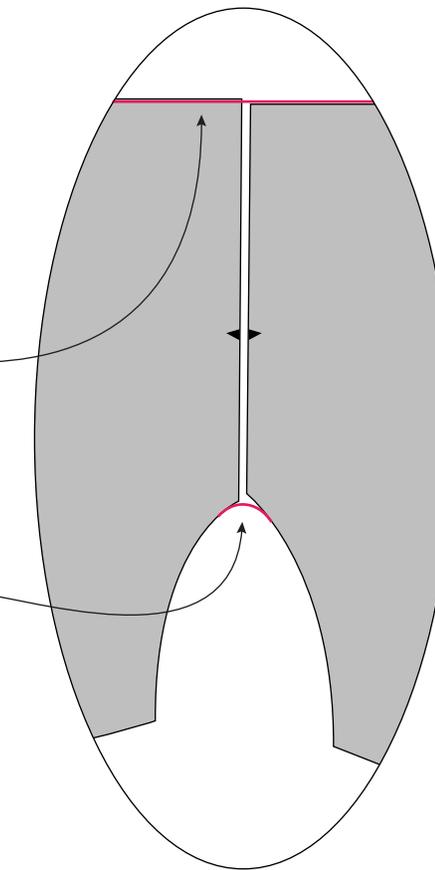
PATTERN TRUING

The final stage of preparing any pattern to be accurately cut from with no problems when sewing is called "truing".

This means carefully checking every seam line and seam allowance to ensure that these match seam lines they'll join in length and location of markings.

Seam lines that will meet end to end also need to be angled and curved so that the transition from one to the next is as smooth—or not—as intended.

Googling "pattern truing" will bring up many excellent summaries and tutorials on the topic, such as this one: <http://www.inthefolds.com/blog/2016/6/14/how-to-check-patterns>



The main thing to be aware of when truing draped and traced patterns is not to confuse truing with over-zealous curve-matching, "typical-izing", or making symmetrical of lines that the draping process itself has created to be not-matched, non-"typical" and not symmetrical. (Read page 30.)

Truing is just housekeeping, making the slightest-necessary corrections to the ends of seam lines so they fall as traced or drawn when sewn. Hand-drawn pattern lines often do need to be smoothed out and de-"wobbled" with rulers and curves, but as far as I'm concerned, truing is nothing more than making sure *the ends* of such lines are exactly where they should be. The placement and shape of the lines themselves shouldn't be altered by any smoothing they may need.