

I have a love/hate relationship with my tape measure. I am a visual person and when I actually have to measure something I do it begrudgingly. From the beginning I have fought the notion that I need to know exact measurements. When learning proper pattern making in school I was always eyeing my lines with my ruler while others were busily measuring. Granted there are times when exact measurements are necessary but I avoid those times! Yet, another reason I love LYCRA so much.

The problem with measuring is that it becomes a crutch. You stop trusting what you see and depend on the tape, right or wrong. In one sewing class I took away everyone's tape measures and saw terror in their eyes! I actually had to fight to get a few of the girls to give them

up! After cutting out and pressing the pattern pieces we laid them out on the fabric and used our eyes to measure from selvedge to grain line. After they were all laid out we checked them with our tapes. I wasn't surprised but most of the gals were, for the most part they had all laid them straight. This is the first step to visualizing. The next step was to take away the pins. Again, those faces! I gave everyone a new piece of white school chalk and they were asked to chalk around the pattern pieces. Afterwards I took away the tissue and we looked at the chalked shapes. Then we looked in the mirror at our bodies. Did the pattern pieces "look" right? Did the shaping look like it was in the right place for our curves? Simply, did the length look right? The width of the sleeve hem? These are question usually left up to your tape measure. When you use your eyes for answers before using your tape measure you will see that what the tape says is only a guide to what your eye already knows.

Start with a little test.

Guess what your measurements are:

Bust: \_\_\_\_\_

Pant Side Seam: \_\_\_\_\_

Waist: \_\_\_\_\_

Back waist: \_\_\_\_\_

Hips: \_\_\_\_\_

Shoulder: \_\_\_\_\_

Sleeve Length: \_\_\_\_\_

Crotch: \_\_\_\_\_

Inseam: \_\_\_\_\_

Upper Arm: \_\_\_\_\_

After training your eye to understand your shape you will be able to lay out a piece of fabric without a pattern and chalk out a top or skirt. How fun would that be?! Knowing which type of sleeve cap fits into what style armhole, or knowing right off the bat that a sleeve would be too narrow across your upper arm. These are not things only professional seamstresses can understand. If you are doing any sewing for yourself you can trust that your garments will improve if you put down that tape measure.

The reason I like to chalk my pattern pieces is so I can make alterations easily without changing my pattern. I prefer to make note of what I did to refer to next time because I may be using a different fabric that would require other changes.

Working with the chalk to add a little here or take away a little there or to lengthen a curve or drop an armhole continues that important hand to eye coordination. As you use your hands to change shapes on the pattern with your chalk you are unconsciously thinking of your bodies shape and the kind of look and fit you see in your mind's eye. It continues when you are cutting the pattern out following the lines. Use long smooth scissors strokes to continue that visual flow. Sometimes even at the point of cutting you instinctively cut at the outside of your

chalk line knowing you may need a bit more room.

Whether you are sewing or serging your project you continue to visualize and sew quickly and smoothly thinking of what area of your shape you are sewing together and making small adjustments instinctively being independent of that 5/8" seam allowance.

From the time you choose your pattern until you finish the hems you should visualize the finished garment on your body.

