

BASIC SKILLS

DARTS 101

Learn basic techniques for stitching three common dart types. Plus, discover tips for moving and manipulating darts to create fashions that best flatter your figure.



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A dart is a stitched-down fold in fabric ending in a point that molds fabric to the shape of the body. Darts smoothly taper out excess fabric created as the body curves from fuller to smaller areas. Adding darts is an invaluable way to shape a piece of flat fabric to the body's contours.

Darts are commonly found radiating from the hip to the waist, from the bust to the waist or from the bust to the side seam. Darts are also used to shape the shoulder area in the front and back, the small of the back, the sleeve at the shoulder and the bend of the arm.

There are three basic types of darts: single-pointed, double-pointed and curved. Each type has a different shape in order to achieve different results. As a rule, the more curved the dart, the closer it fits to the body.

DART PLACEMENT

Darts point in the direction of a full area of the body where there's no seam to give shaping. They usually begin with a point $\frac{1}{2}$ " to 1" from the area of fullness and expand in width as they move away. For instance, on a skirt front, the dart begins just above the tummy fullness and grows into the smaller waistline.

Darts appear on commercial patterns as triangles, diamonds or football shapes, depending on their type. Before cutting a darted garment, ensure that each dart points toward the fullest part or parts of the body. Redraw the dart to make it longer or shorter, if necessary, to achieve the desired amount of fullness.

Transfer all dart markings to the fabric wrong side before removing the pattern. Mark delicate or lofty fabric with tailor's tacks for accuracy and to prevent damage. For more stable fabrics, use tracing paper and a wheel or pins and chalk to transfer the markings.

SINGLE-POINTED STRAIGHT DART

This is the most common dart. On a pattern it looks like a triangle with a line through the center (1).

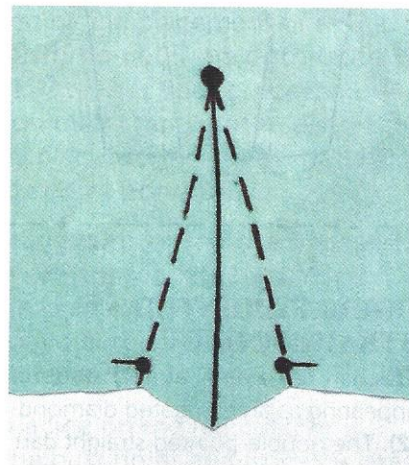
To sew a single-pointed straight dart, mark the dart lines and any matching points (usually indicated on the pattern with small darts) on the fabric wrong side.

With right sides together, fold the dart on the centerline. Make sure the outer lines and matching points align; pin at right angles to the stitching line, placing one pin at the dart point.

Stitch from the wide end to the point, making the last two or three stitches as close to the foldline as possible; don't backstitch. Remove the fabric from the machine, leaving 4" long thread tails.

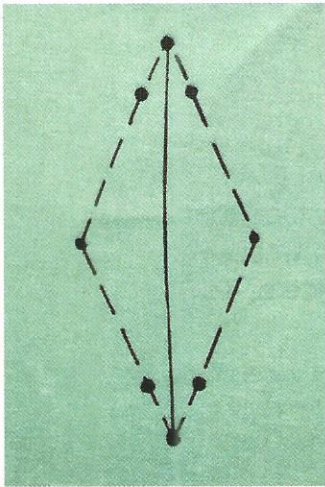
With the thread ends together, tie a knot as close to the dart point as possible.

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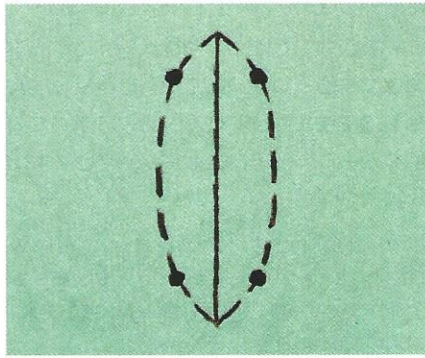


TIP: If you prefer not to tie off threads, decrease the stitch length to 20 stitches per inch as you approach the dart point and stitch off the fold; leave $\frac{1}{4}$ "-long thread tails.

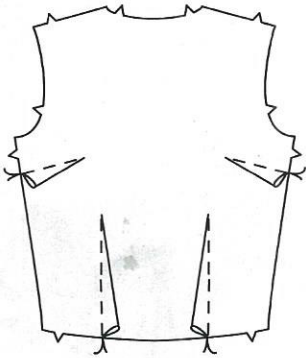
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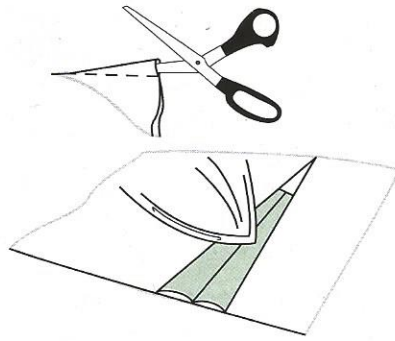
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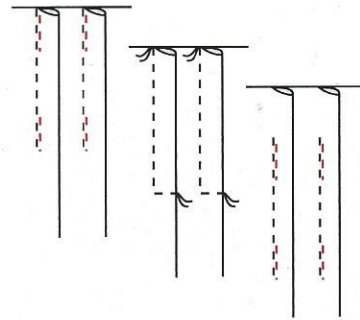
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DOUBLE-POINTED STRAIGHT DART

This dart has a point at each end, appearing as an elongated diamond (2). The double-pointed straight dart can take the place of two single-pointed darts when placed at the waistline. The widest part sits at the waist, with the points toward the bust and hip.

For accuracy, stitch double-pointed darts in two separate steps and directions. Mark the dart lines and all matching points on the garment wrong side.

With the right sides together, fold the dart on the centerline. Match and pin the dart outer lines together, pinning first at the waist point and then at the end points. Add additional pins as needed.

Beginning at the center dot, stitch toward one end point, making the last two or three stitches as close to the foldline as possible; don't backstitch. Remove the fabric from the machine, leaving 4" long thread tails.

Stitch in the opposite direction. Start again from the dart center and work toward the remaining point, overlapping two or three stitches of the previous stitch line. Leave 4" thread tails. Tie the thread tails into knots at each dart end.

Clip into the dart fold at the waistline, ending $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the stitching; press toward the garment center. Clipping the dart alleviates strain at the waistline by eliminating bulk and allows the dart to lie smooth.

CURVED DART

Curved darts are stitched very much like straight ones, but because of their shape, curved darts fit closer to the body. On a pattern, a curved dart looks similar to a straight dart, except the stitching lines are curved rather than straight (3).

Mark the dart lines and all matching points on the garment wrong side.

With right sides together, fold the dart through the center so the outer stitch lines and matching points align; pin in place.

Stitch the dart and secure the thread tails, following the instructions above.

Clip the fold edge perpendicular to the stitching in several places along the curve to prevent puckering.

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PRESSING DARTS

Begin by pressing the dart flat as stitched. Lay the dart over a tailor's ham and press to one side. For horizontal darts, press the fold down; for vertical darts, press the fold toward the garment center (4).

If the dart is wide or the fabric is heavy, slash the dart to within 1" of the point and trim the seam allowance to 1/2" from the stitching line. Press the slashed seam allowance open and press the point flat (5).


DART TUCKS

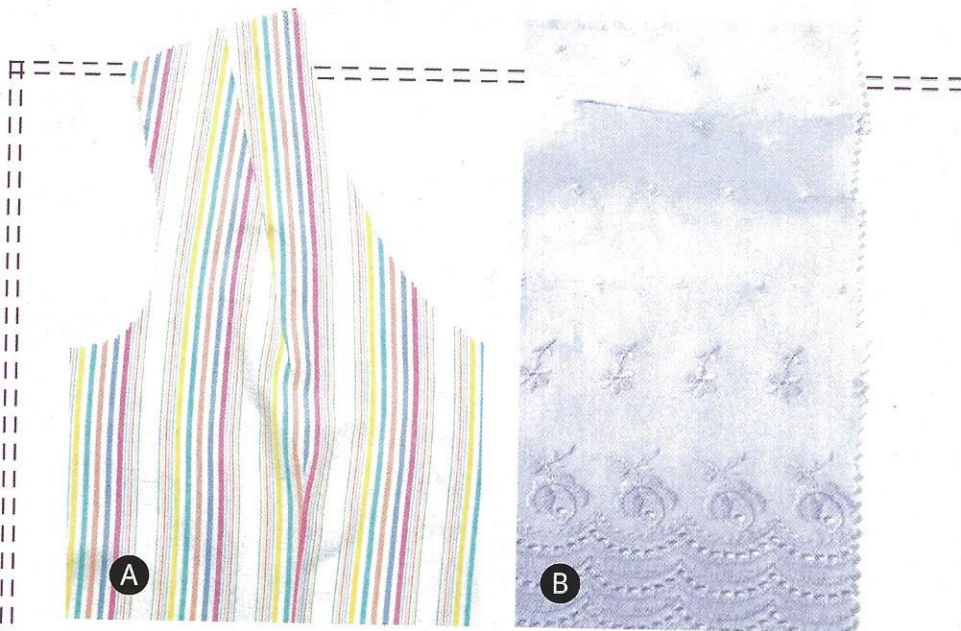
Also known as release tucks, these folds are used to take in fabric at a specific area and release it at another point. This method is most often used to control fullness at the bust and hips. Unlike darts, the tuck portion can be on the inside or outside of a garment. Only part of the fold is stitched, releasing the fabric's full width where the stitching ends. The tuck may be secured across the top or bottom, or with a short line of stitching through the center (6). The upper or lower portion of the tuck is often enclosed in a seamline, eliminating the need for any additional stitching.

Tucks are usually marked on patterns as broken lines. Tuck lines are usually straight, but can be curved to create a small amount of shaping.

To make a released tuck, mark the tuck lines on the garment piece. For tucks on the garment outside, mark the lines on the fabric right side; for tucks on the garment inside, mark the wrong side.

Bring the marked lines together; pin in place. Stitch as indicated in the pattern guidesheet. Secure by backstitching at the beginning and end of the stitching line or by knotting the thread ends.

Press the folds in the direction indicated in the pattern guidesheet. 



MANIPULATING DARTS

Move darts to better suit the fabric or the desired look. Consider the fabric design when deciding where to place darts. Stripes are significantly distorted by the placement of a dart, so decide where to place the distortion or if the distortion can serve as a design element (A). Likewise, if you're incorporating a border or decorative edge, you might not want to distort the design, so move the dart. Likely places to move bust darts are into the armhole, shoulder and center front (B).

To add an additional dart for fitting purposes, move the excess fabric that's pinched out to a more appropriate location, if desired. Manipulate the fabric into an existing dart. If the dart becomes quite large because of your curves, consider dividing it into two smaller parallel darts.

To manipulate bust darts, draw a line on the flat pattern through each existing dart to the bust point and from the area where you want to move the dart into the bust point. Cut each line to just shy of the bust point so there's a hinge in the paper.

Close the darts you want to eliminate by aligning the matching points and taping them closed. This will cause the new spaces in the pattern to spread where you want to send the darts.

Fill in the new spaces with pattern paper; tape in place. Draw in the new darts, remembering to end the dart just shy of the bust point. Use a curved ruler to draw in curved darts.

True the dart legs of the new or adjusted dart by pinching it together, folding it in the pressing direction and trimming off the excess paper.