

Felice's guide to drafting a basic toile for a 16th century bodice

Introduction:

This is a guide to drafting a toile (pronounced twahl). I have developed my technique through trial and error, looking at what others do and seeing how they fitted patterns in the 16th century. I am not a tailor or seamstress – I am self-taught, so if I can do it, so can you!

Please note – this is just a guide. It is my way of patterning which works for me. Lots of people who pattern use their own methods - it is a very personal thing. If you don't relate to my method, find what works for you and use that.

Do's and Do Nots

Do Not:

- Say "I can't do it"!!!
- Be afraid to stuff it up first time – you have to have a go to learn anything
- Make a costume for a particular date or event – you will always run out of time and take short cuts and be unhappy with it (no 1 rule that I keep breaking...)
- Trust mass production patterns for authenticity accuracy – use them as a guide only.
- Make a piece of garb, then try to document it.

Do:

- Forget modern concepts of how clothing is worn and construction – some things are similar, but lots are not
- Make your toile (pronounced "twahl") or fabric pattern with fabric first
- Measure twice and cut once.
- Fit, re-cut pattern if needed then fit again – that's what a toile is for – when you know your toile is right, you won't stuff up the garb.
- Pin close together when fitting
- Measure over any undergarments such as a corset, farthingale and bumroll

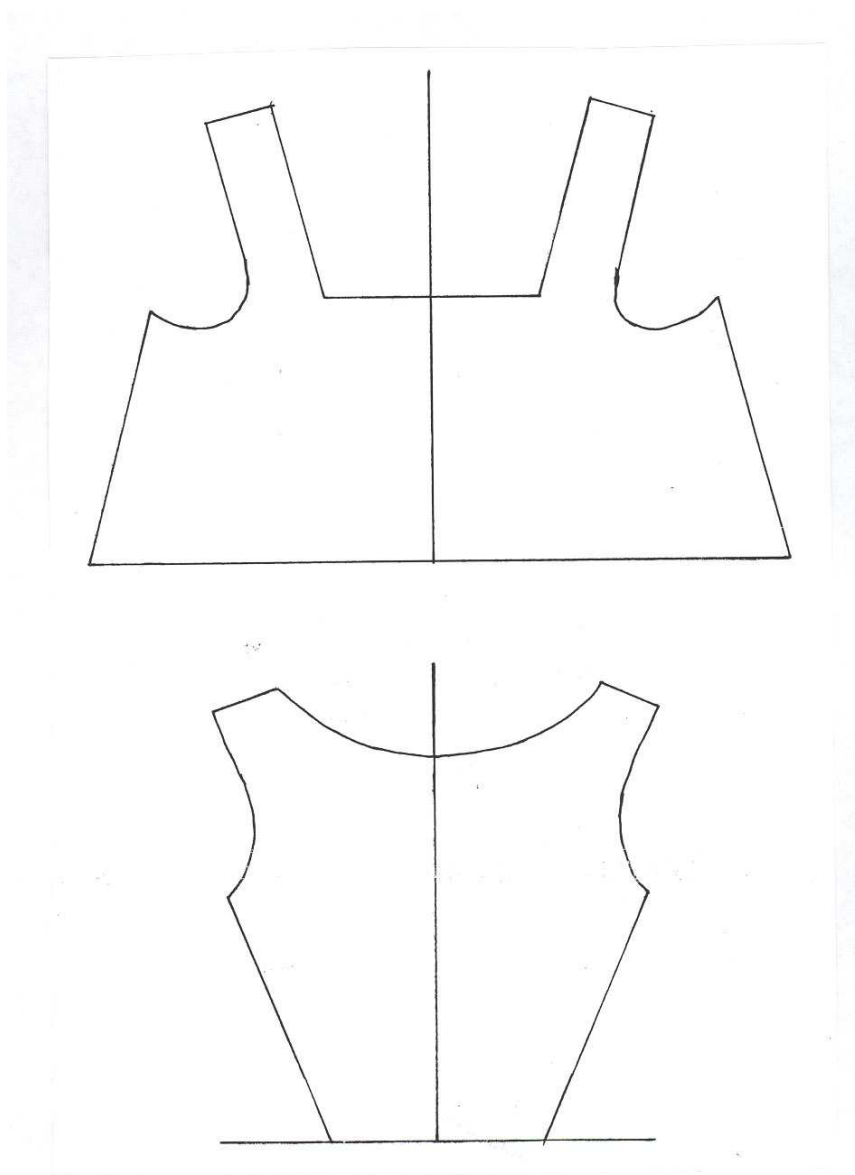
Patterning Tips

- Drafting a pattern for a 16th century female bodice is easy as there are no curved seams involved.
- If you are working from a pre-made pattern, copy it to fabric and make a toile so you can check its fit before cutting – they usually are not the best for accuracy of construction, but they are a good place to start if you are just learning.
- If you are adapting from a pattern made for someone else, make your own toile from it to check the fit before cutting out.
- Make your kirtle or corset and farthingale and wear it when measuring for the outer gown pattern.

I have included a couple of links to some pattern drafting advice. Remember, everyone does this differently and has different ways of learning how to do it. I have no tailoring or seamstressing background. I taught myself by experimenting with cheap fabric and playing with the shapes I was drafting. Being able to draft your own pattern means you can make whatever style you want plus you can easily make another pattern when you change shape.

Pattern Shape for 1500 – 1550s Italian bodice.

This is what you will be drawing up from these instructions. This is a basic generic Italian bodice from which you can develop other pattern styles.



1. Taking Measurements

Measure so that the tape is fitted but not tight around the body.

NOTE – Final bust levels are usually raised above the natural position to roughly the level of just under the armpits as the bodice is designed to flatten, raise and support the bust.

Measurements that I use:

A	Bust	
B	Waist (TRUE waist between hips and ribs, not where your hipster jeans sit. Generally will be about an inch above the belly button. Always check where it will sit on the hips and around the back and make sure you measure to a level waist – don't drop it in front.)	
C	Front neckline to waist (the spot where the finished bodice neckline will sit – get the person to flatten their bust up and in to get the right level. As a reference point, also check how far the neckline will sit below the clavicle bones which are just below the throat.)	
D	Front neckline to point/drop of bodice (if needed)	
E	Front shoulder to waist (approximately where the bra strap sits and straight down over the bust)	
F	Front shoulder to neckline (use the same neckline reference point as in C)	
G	Back shoulder to waist	
H	Back neckline (drop 5-8cm below cervical vertebrae – large vertebrae at base of neck – depending on how curved you want the neckline)	
I	Waist to armhole (better to take this up closer to the armpit as you can always trim away the armhole when fitting)	
J	Shoulder to armhole base (Imagine a horizontal line at the base of the armpit and measure from the shoulder down to that)	

K	Front neckline width (for this Italian pattern, usually no wider than the nipples. Will be much wider for other styles)	
L	Front shoulder point to shoulder point (bony point of clavicle bone – measure straight across the base of the neck/clavicles))	
M	Back shoulder point to shoulder point (generally will be larger than L depending on the curve of the back)	
N	Front strap to strap (Look at the shoulder point and imagine where you think the strap will sit - most straps will sit over the shoulder points as generic Italians have wide necklines usually.)	
O	Back strap to strap	
P	Strap width (depends on the style of pattern you are drafting – I find around 4 – 6cm is generally good)	
Q	Back panel bust level width (with the person's arms down, measure across the shoulder blades at the point where the arm joins the back)	
R	Back panel waist level width (each side of the spine are strips of muscle - measure from the outside edge of one to the other)	
S	Back panel side seam (the point in Q down to the point in R)	
T	Back armhole to armhole (use as a guide – measure across the shoulder blades to where the armhole edges will be. As most Italian styles don't have set in sleeves, the armhole does not have to be as close fitting)	
U	A (Bust) – Q =	
V	B (Waist) – R =	

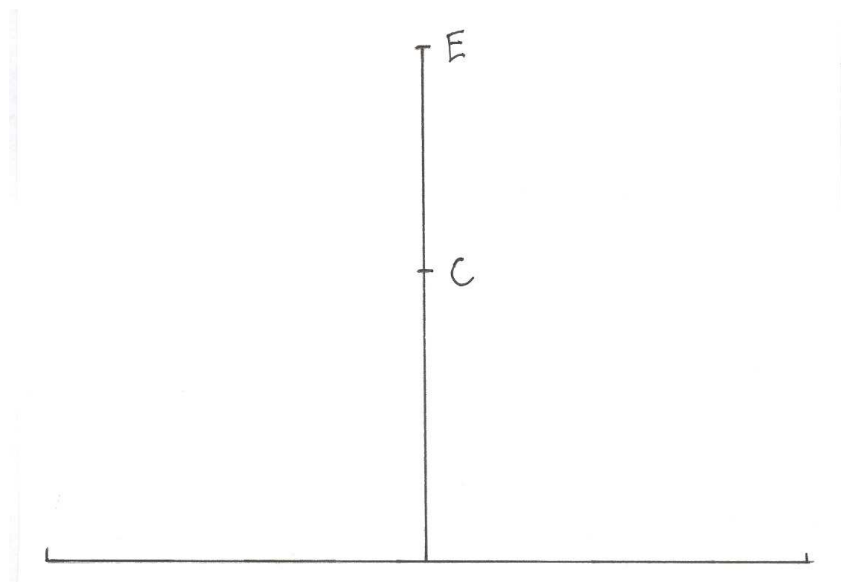
2. Drawing up the toile from the measurements

Front panel:

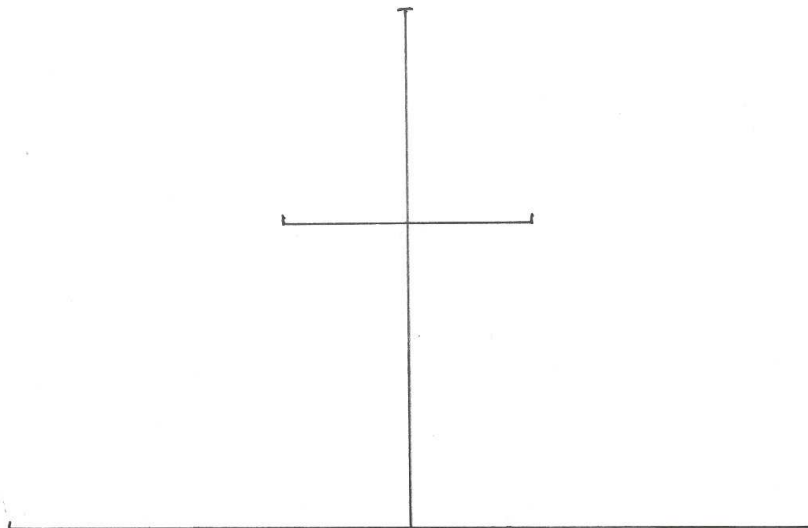
1. Ensure your fabric is not too creased and is lying square, not on a diagonal or the bias.
2. Leave enough space at the bottom of the fabric to allow for 1 cm seamage plus some fudge factor. (If you were drafting a bodice with a dropped front, eg Elizabethan, remember to allow enough fabric space below the waistline for the drop.)
3. Draw a horizontal line and mark the centre point. This will be half the widest part of the pattern, which will either be measurement U or V depending on the measurements.



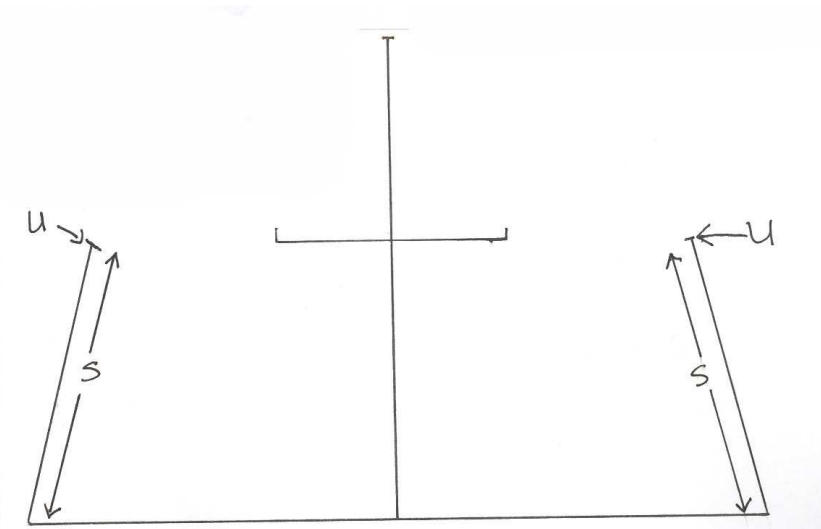
4. Draw a vertical line on the centre mark. Make sure it is at right angles. Make sure it is longer than measurement E – Front shoulder to waist. On the central line mark E.
5. On the vertical centre line, measure up measurement C – Front neckline to waist. Place a mark there. This is the level of the neckline.



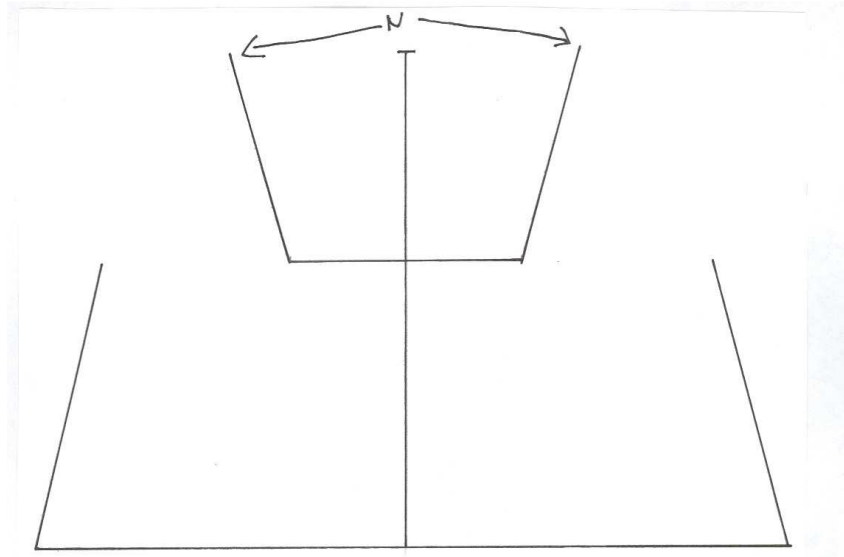
6. On the mark for the neckline, draw a horizontal line the width of the neckline. (Remember to halve the measurement and centre it on the centre line.)
7. If you are not working on a grid, measure from the waistline to the neckline at each end of the neckline to ensure that the line is straight.



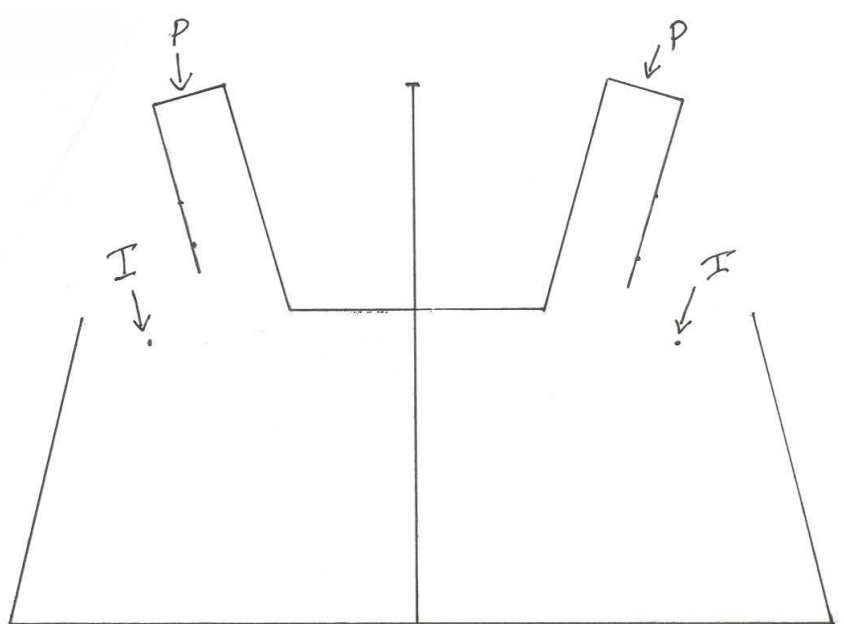
8. On the level of the neckline, measure the bust measurement (U) horizontally from the central line. Remember to halve it and centre it on the line. Mark the measurement, don't draw a line.
9. Join the points that you just marked with the waistline marks. These are the side seams for the front panel.
10. Use measurement S (Back panel side seam) to check the length of the side seam, from the waist level up. Mark the measurement.



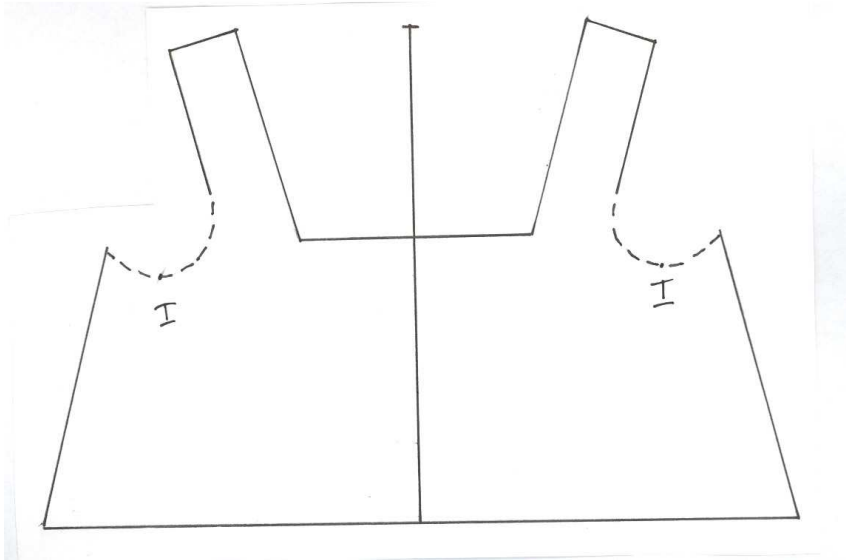
11. At the top mark on the centre line (the shoulder height), horizontally measure N (front strap to strap), remembering to centre it on the line. Mark those points in, but don't draw a line.
12. Draw a line from each point you just marked down to the edges of the neckline line. You now have the neckline shape drawn in.



13. At the shoulder level of the neckline, measure P (strap width) at a right angle from the shoulder strap line and mark the point. Do the same again about half way down the strap.
14. Connect the dots you just drew to give the armhole edge of the shoulder strap.



15. In from the side seams about 5cm, mark in measurement I (waist to armhole).
16. Using that mark, the line of the shoulder strap and the side seam, draw in the armhole curve. This curve may take practice to see that it looks right. Remember, if in doubt, make it too small, as it's easier to trim fabric off the toile, but not add it on.



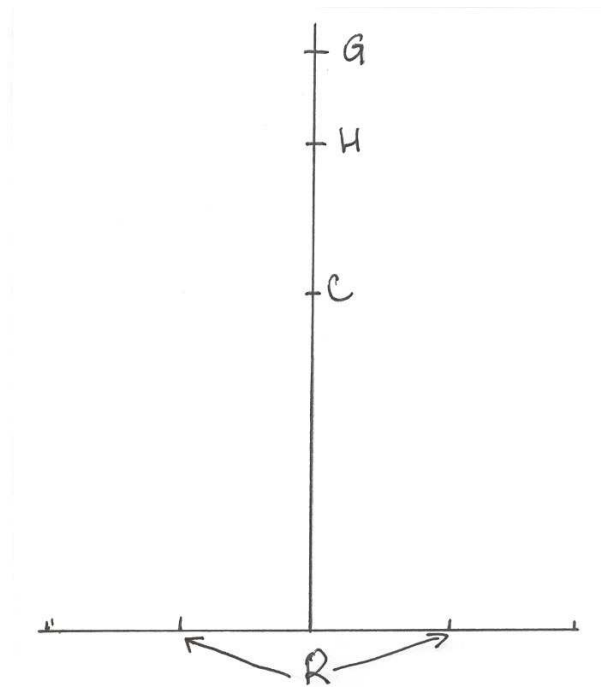
17. You should now have a front panel toile pattern.
18. Mark 1cm seams around the pattern, but make the side seams and the tops of the straps 2cm seams. The extra seamage I call fudge factor. I like to add extra on the side seams because it makes it easier to hold the fabric while pinning it when fitting. But also, if you are just a bit unsure that the pattern will fit, have a bit extra fabric will help.

Back panel:

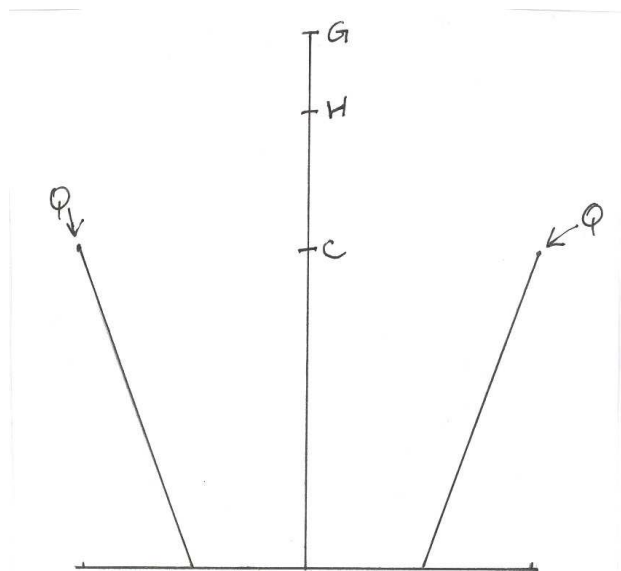
1. Ensure your fabric is not too creased and is lying square, not on a diagonal or the bias.
2. Leave enough space at the bottom of the fabric to allow for 1 cm seam allowance plus some fudge factor. Don't place this panel too close to the front panel as you still have to add in seam allowance and fudge factor when you cut it out.
3. Draw a horizontal line and mark the centre point. This will be half the widest part of the pattern which will either be measurement Q (Back panel bust level width) or M (back shoulder point to shoulder point) depending on the measurements.



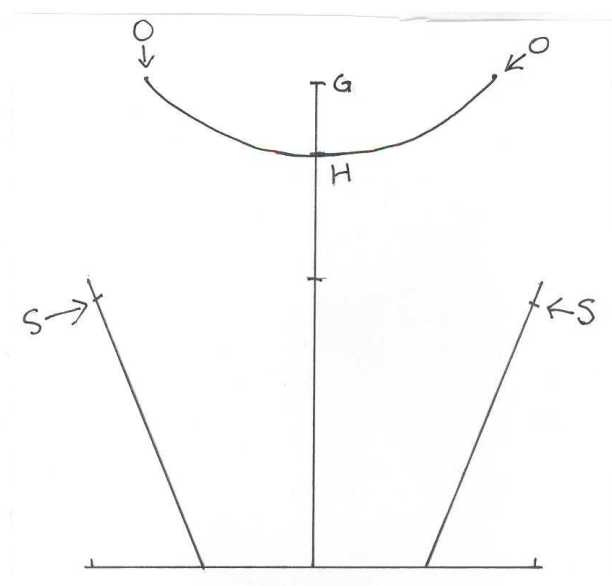
4. Draw a vertical line on the centre mark. Make sure it is at right angles. Make sure it is longer than measurement G (Back shoulder to waist). On the central line mark G.
5. Mark H (Back neckline) on the central line.
6. Mark C (Front neckline to waist) on the central line.



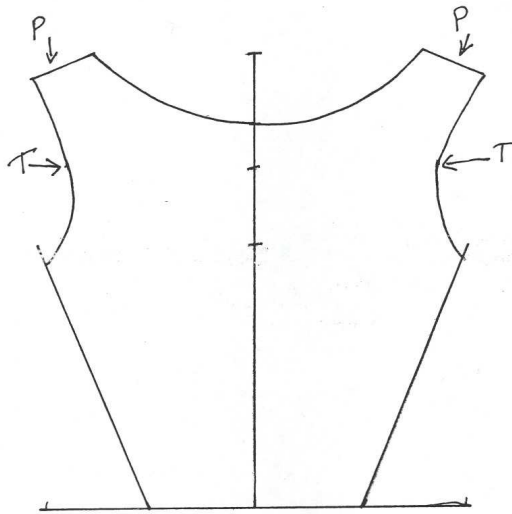
7. On the waist line, mark R (Back panel waist level width), half on either side of the central line.
8. At level C, mark Q (Back panel bust level width), half on either side of the central line.
9. Connect the two marks on each side. These are the side seams.



10. Use measurement S (Back panel side seam) to check the length of the side seam, from the waist level up. Mark the measurement.
11. At level G, mark O (back strap to strap) half on either side of the central line.
12. Draw in the back neckline, connecting the mark at H to each of the shoulder strap marks you just drew.



13. At the shoulder level of the neckline, measure P (strap width) at the same angle as the front neckline and mark the point and draw in the line.
14. Halfway between H and C, mark in how far to draw in the armholes by using measurement T (Back armhole to armhole).
15. Use the 3 points at the top of the strap, the armhole distance and the top of the side seam to draw in the armhole curve.



16. You should now have a back panel.
17. Mark 1cm seams around the pattern, but make the side seams and the tops of the straps 2cm seams.

Fitting the Toile

1. Pin the shoulders together and one of the side seams.
PIN CLOSE TOGETHER. If you use too few pins, you will not get it fitting correctly. Make sure the edges of the pattern are lined up and not skewing as you pin. Keep the fabric smooth as you pin, so you don't get tucks or wrinkles.
2. Once you have pinned the toile and it is sitting smoothly and firmly enough, draw the stitching lines over the pins. Make sure you mark both sides of all the seams.
3. Take the pins out, lay the toile out flat and draw the stitching lines. You may have to straighten a few crooked marks.
4. Mark 1cm seam allowance from the stitching lines you have just drawn and cut off any excess fabric.
5. Write the date, the name of the wearer and the style eg Italian 1520 so that when you use it in the future you know what it is.

Fitting Tips

- When fitting a bodice, if you have saggy wrinkles, it means that there is too much fabric. Taut wrinkles means there is not enough fabric
- Wrinkling or gaping at the armhole usually means that the angle of the shoulder strap (and therefore the curve of the armhole) is too straight for the curve of the bust.
- Wrinkles or buckling at the waistline – your pattern is too long for the wearer's true waist. Everyone is different, but a general guide is that the waist is ½ to 1 inch above the belly button. Don't think about modern waistlines – which have dropped down to the hips these days.

Construction Tips

- If the pattern has a 1 cm seam allowance, then make sure you sew at that measurement. If you don't, your garb will be too tight or too loose. This is not a good look and it can also be quite uncomfortable.
- My preference is to cut the canvas interlining with no seam allowance as it ends up too bulky in the seams. Sew the interlining to your lining fabric before anything else – sew about 2-3 cm from the edge of the interlining so that you can tuck your seams under the interlining to keep the outer fabric smooth.
- Grade your seams – this means trim 1 layer of your seam fabric in close by about 5mm to the sewing (only do this with the stronger close woven fabrics – usually the lining). The next layer of fabric in the seam – probably interlining – cut about half way along the seam allowance. Leave the third layer. This is to reduce bulk in the seam areas.
- When the seams are graded and clipped for curves, tuck them under the interlining. Run a row of stitching on the edge of the interlining to secure it to the lining and stop the seams from popping out. This will ensure your interlining doesn't slip and makes the outer fabric smooth and bumpless.
- Be friends with your iron!! Iron sections as you sew them.

