

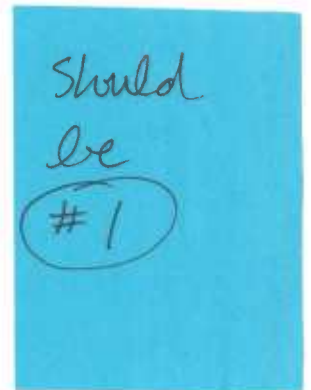
## SHIFTS, CHEMISES & PARTLETS

A shift or chemise was a woman's basic garment, no matter what class she belonged to. It was the first thing she put on in the morning, and the last thing she took off at night, assuming that she took it off at all. Lower class women had the habit of keeping their shifts on day and night, for the sake of warmth and convenience. The upper classes, with their warmer rooms, often slept in their skins, or in a kind of night-gown, called a "bed-gown".

A shift could be designed with a low or high neckline, be made of coarse linen or fine silk, be plain or embroidered, collarless, or made with a collar that had a built-in ruff. The low necked shift was worn by lower class and lower middle class women only, and could usually be pulled higher on the neck by tightening the drawstring (if it was designed with one). The high necked shift (also called at this time, a chemise) with or without a collar and cuffs, would have been worn by men of any class, as well as the women described. This section will show you how to make both types.



*Shifts in three lengths*



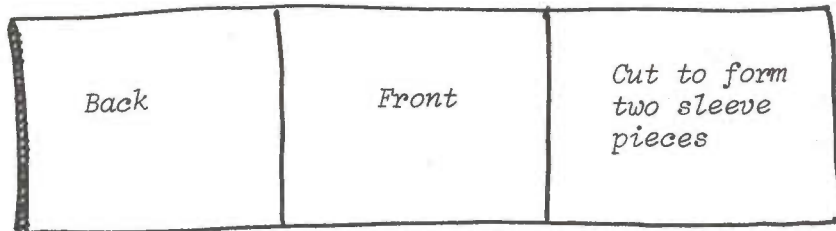
For comfort's sake, we suggest that you make your shift out of 100% cotton or other natural fiber that breathes. Polyester and poly-blend fabrics look wonderful and are easy to care for, but if your body is in the habit of sweating when you are hot, as most people's bodies are, you will be much more comfortable with a natural fabric next to your skin.

The easiest way to make a peasant type shift is to find a commercial pattern that will give you a blouse that looks like a picture of the peasant blouse in the pattern section, and follow the pattern instructions. This sometimes comes in a long and short sleeved version. Use the long sleeved type only. The shift can be anywhere in length from hip to floor length. If you have no pattern, you can use the following instructions to make a shift from scratch.

If you are using a 100% cotton fabric, such as cotton muslin, remember to wash it in hot water before you cut into it, because it will shrink a little, the first time it is washed.

First, take the following measurements. Measure from the base of your neck to your hip for blouse length, or to the floor for floor length, and add 6" for casing and hem allowance. This body length measurement, we will call measurement #1. Measure from your shoulder to your wrist bone and add at least 10". This extra length will allow for fullness in the sleeve as well as the turnings for the casings. This sleeve length measurement, we will call measurement #2.

Now, using measurement #1, cut two pieces of your fabric for the front and back body pieces. Using measurement #2, cut two pieces of the fabric for your sleeve pieces. Do use the entire width of the fabric for the shift pieces, unless you are unusually small. The shift will look and feel better, as well as preventing waste of your fabric.

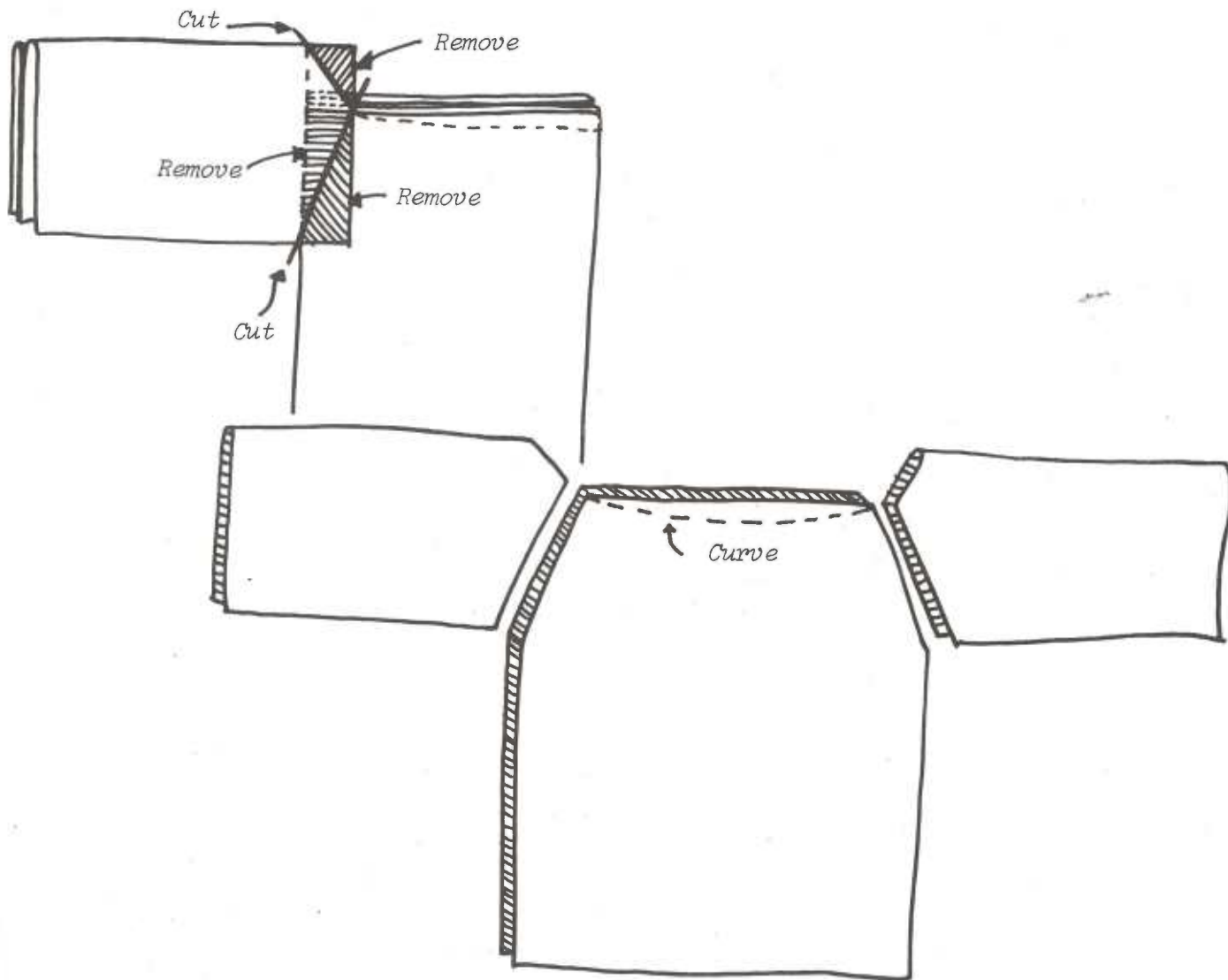


1. Fold each of the body and sleeve pieces in half length, then lay the body pieces, one on top of the other out on a large flat surface, such as the floor. Stack the folded sleeve pieces one on top of the other, and lay them down on the body pieces, overlapping the pieces, as illustrated. There should be a 3" overlap both in and at the top.

Now, on the sleeve piece, draw a diagonal line between the point where the sleeve overlaps the body, and a point 3" in from the edge. This should give you a triangle with two 3" sides. Draw

another line from the first point, down to where the sleeve overlaps the body again. This should be 3" in from the edge, at the bottom of the sleeve piece.

2. Cut through all the layers, including the body pieces, along the lines you drew. You may want to pin it all together before cutting, so that all eight layers of fabric won't shift around. The short cut between the 3" marks should just go through the sleeve pieces. It will help to make the scoop neck. If you wish, you may now cut a shallow curve in the top edge of the body piece after unfolding them. This will help to make the scoop neck as well.



Opening the body and sleeve pieces out flat, pin them together so that they make the shape of a cross and sew them together. Then, folding the whole thing in half so that it takes the shape of a 'T', sew the long seams from the cuff end to the armpit and down to the hem. Do the same for the other side.

Work two buttonholes on either side of the center front from  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " down from the edge to 2" down and clip them open. These are

for the drawstring later, and should show on the outside when the shift is finished.

Turn under all the raw edges (cuffs, neckline, and hem)  $\frac{1}{4}$ " and press. Then turn under all the edges 1" more and press. Sew all of the turned under parts, leaving small openings in the stitching at the cuffs to insert elastic. This will not be necessary for the neck or hem.

Using a safety pin, thread  $\frac{1}{2}$ " elastic through the cuff casing and pull it together until it feels comfortably snug on your wrist. Sew the ends of the elastic together and stitch the small opening closed. Repeat for the other cuff.

