

This class will teach you how to construct a basic garment. These tips and instructions will work for any type of garment you want to sew and can be used with machine sewing and hand sewing techniques.

#### Materials Needed:

Fabric	Thread	Tailor's Chalk
Fabric Scissors (do not use paper scissors)	Measuring Tape	Yardstick or straight edge
Sewing Machine (mechanical or human)	Straight Pins	

#### Fabric

If making garments for SCA activities, you should limit your fabric choices to natural fibers. Man-made fibers are more difficult to sew with and were not available during SCA period.

**Linen** is your best choice if you can find it. Linen fabric breathes and wicks moisture away from your body, making it the best choice for hot weather. Online retailer fabric-store.com is a great choice. 5oz is the weight for most garments and 3oz is a good choice for under clothes. Many linens found in brick and mortar fabric stores will actually be a rayon/tencel blend or rayon/linen blend. Try to find 100% linen if possible.

**Wool** is also documentable to SCA time periods and is good for cold weather as it is designed to keep you warm. Just like linen, what is sold in fabric stores is often a man-made substitute for wool and will not have the same properties. Wool fabric comes in many different weights and weaves. Flannel or suiting are good words to find in relation to regular clothing weight fabric. Melton describes coat fabric. Tropical wool is very lightweight and can be good for hot weather. Wool can even be see-through.

**Cotton** will be the most readily available find at the fabric store that is suitable for your needs. It is a natural fiber but was not available to most of Europe before the 17th century. Cotton is better than polyester in hot weather but it is not as good as linen. Cotton will cling to sweaty skin when linen would wick the sweat away. But cotton is cheap, easy to find, and easy to sew with. It is a good alternative to anything that is a man-made fiber.

#### **WASH FABRIC BEFORE CUTTING**

Any fabric you buy should be washed prior to cutting. Some fabrics may shrink with washing and you want that to happen before your garment is sewn rather than after. Unroll your fabric and place it carefully in the washer. Like sheets, it can easily get twisted up and tangled in the drum. Loosely piling the fabric on top of itself, not around the spindle, will help avoid this. Add your regular soap and wash as harshly as you might ever wash your finished garment. I do not recommend washing wool on hot but some swear by this. However you wash your fabric, please make sure to at least wash it. You may never plan to launder your finished garment yourself, but that doesn't prevent a stray spill or rainstorm from having its way with you.

A note on other types of fabric: Silk is a natural fiber and was available in the SCA time period. However I would not choose silk for your first project. Get your hands dirty with some cheap cotton and work your way up to the expensive stuff.

Once your fabric is washed, iron it. Use whatever heat setting is appropriate for the fabric you have. If you do not own an iron or an ironing board, get one. It is a more worthwhile investment than even your sewing machine. I wouldn't even do handsewing without an iron.

**TL;DR:** Use linen. Wash it. Iron it.

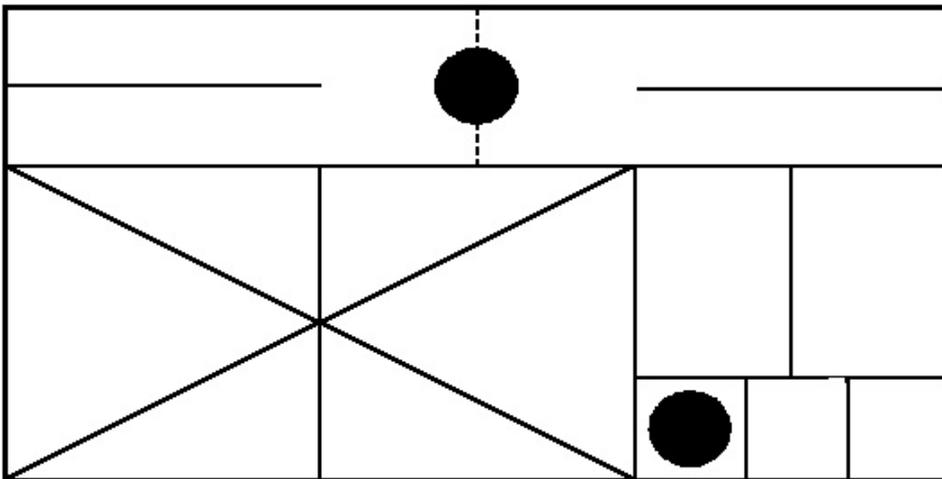
#### Pattern

A pattern is the basic shape that you will create in order to achieve your garment. The pattern will differ for every kind of finished garment but the basics in how to cut it out and the tips to help you are the same. Patterning is its own class and years can be spent trying to perfect it. But simple, loosely fitted garments can be achieved with a basic understanding of measurements. Many websites and books provide instructions on how to create garments using measurements. I always suggest making a mockup of any new pattern before cutting into your good fabric. Try measuring and cutting your pattern out of a very cheap fabric (old sheets, muslin, bargain quilting fabric) before putting the same pattern on your good fabric.

Many store-bought patterns will work for SCA clothing. Please do your research and make sure you are happy with your choices before putting hours worth of work into a garment. There are also many talented tailors who will happily help you create a custom pattern. Unlike modern clothing, historic clothing was not mass manufactured but made for specific individuals and based on their measurements. Store-bought patterns are trying to find a happy medium between these. They may never look as accurate as a pattern made just for you. You can modify store bought patterns to your own measurements, but at that point you'd save yourself time by simply drafting your own pattern. If someone has made a pattern for you, you can treat the pattern pieces in the same manner as store-bought ones.

### **PATTERN LAYOUT - Conservation of fabric**

Once you have a pattern, look at all your pattern pieces and try to lay them out on your fabric all at the same time. If your pattern includes seam allowance, something the package or your tailor friend will tell you, often abbreviated as SA, you can let the pattern pieces touch each other. If your pattern does not include seam allowance, you will need to leave enough room around each piece to account for that. A good rule of thumb when starting out is an inch of seam allowance. Leave one inch around every pattern piece in every direction. Be aware of the direction of the fabric and pattern. If you are using a solid colored linen, it will not matter if your pattern pieces are flipped or upside-down. But if you have a design or shine to your fabric, you should try to cut your pieces so the fabric is all going in the same direction. Here is a possible lay-out of a geometric tunic. Images from: <http://forest.gen.nz/Medieval/articles/Tunics/TUNICS.HTML>



This sort of layout is only possible if there is no direction or design to the fabric. Try to place your pattern pieces with the most economic use of your fabric in mind. This will be more difficult with a design or directionality to the fabric. Be especially careful of velveteens and other fabrics with a pile. They don't seem as if direction is important, but when held to the light, pieces will look very different if flipped upside-down from each other.

### **CUTTING THE FABRIC**

Once all your pattern pieces are laid out with the most economical use of your fabric, pin the pattern pieces to the fabric or use weights to hold them securely. Draw around each pattern piece with tailor's chalk. Remove the pattern pieces once all pieces are traced. You can even label them for tracking purposes later (front, sleeve, etc). If your pattern includes seam allowance, cut the fabric right along the edge of the chalk line. It is then a good idea to mark into your cut pattern piece the distance of your seam allowance. For example, if your seam allowance is  $\frac{5}{8}$ ", mark a line  $\frac{5}{8}$ " in from the edge of each piece to show your actual pattern line. If your

pattern does not include seam allowance, measure 1" away from the pattern chalk line and make a new dotted line. Then cut along that dotted line. You do not have to draw this extra line, but it will help as you are starting out.

**TL;DR:** Trace pattern pieces in chalk. Use consistent seam allowance. Measure a lot.

### **Construction**

Once you have all your pieces cut out, you are ready to sew them together. Most patterns will have instructions on what steps to start with and what steps to finish with. Generally shoulder seams or putting two pieces together to treat as one are done first and hems, cuffs, collars, and seam finishing are done last. Decide how you will finish your seams before you begin construction. Some methods and tips are below:

**SEAM FINISHING** - image from [http://www.geocities.jp/igarashi\\_lab/seamAllowance/index-e.html](http://www.geocities.jp/igarashi_lab/seamAllowance/index-e.html)

Seam finishing is the method ones uses to bind or finish seams. Most fabrics unravel to one extent or another if left unfinished. Finishing your seams extends the life of your garment and usually makes it machine washable. Washing machines and dryers will hasten the fraying of any fabric because of the agitation and friction.

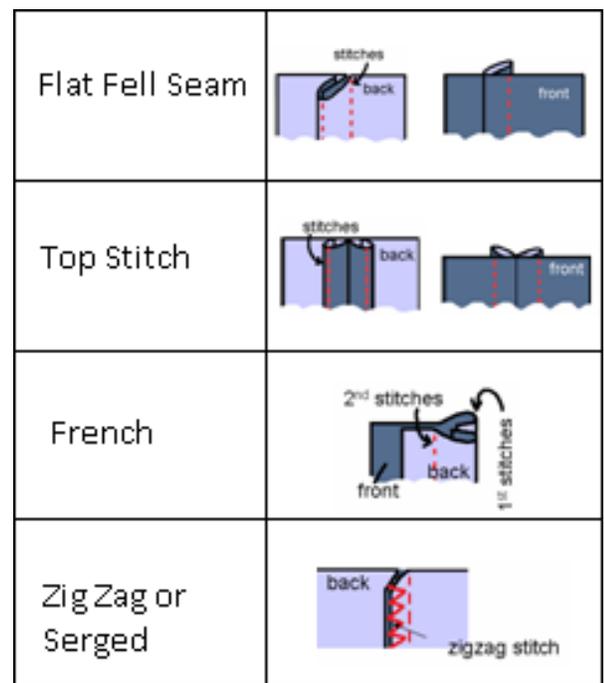
**Flat Fell** - This method seems to be the most popular historical seam finishing technique. Also sometimes called a run and fell. Fold one seam allowance over the other to encase it and stitch down next to your original sewing line with either a running stitch or a hem stitch. This method is sometimes made easier by staggering your pattern pieces by 1/4" before sewing construction seams. Otherwise, you will need to trim one seam allowance down by half before completing each seam.

**Top-Stitch Seam** - Press open seam and turn under a small amount of your seam allowance and top stitch down. You can also use this method and use a hem-stitch to hide the finishing.

**French Seam** - First sew items wrong side to wrong side, then flip and sew right side to right side. This encases the raw edge inside the seam.

**Serging or Zig Zag** - This method is not historically accurate but it can make your finishing much faster when using a machine. After sewing your seams, simply sew over the raw edge of both seam allowances with zig zag stitch or a serger.

**Bias bound** - (not pictured) If your fabrics are particularly bulky or turning the seam allowance is not advisable, you can also use bias strips to bind the seam. This is most easily done by pressing open the seams and pinning down the bias tape wrong sides together along the open seam. Make sure the bias tape covers all raw edges. Then as with the top stitch seam, sew down the bias tape either with a straight stitch or a hem stitch.



**SEWING MACHINES** - If you are planning to hand-sew your garment, you can skip this section.

All sewing machines have the same basic parts. But it is important to know your machine's particularities. Use the instruction guide to thread the spool and bobbin in the machine. Place some scrap fabric (that is left-over from cutting out your pattern) under the needle and lower the presser foot. Sew about 5" and stop. Lift the presser foot, remove the fabric, and cut the threads leaving a few inches still attached to the machine. Look at the test seam and make sure the machine is working well. If there are tension problems, or problems with the

threading of the machine, you will see excess thread, pulling of the fabric, or other problems. Try again with the scrap fabric until the seam looks smooth and does not pull the fabric at all. Now you are ready to sew!

## SEWING

Now that we've completed all the preparation, it's actually time to do some sewing! Please take note that it took three full pages of preparation before a sewing class got to the sewing part. This is important. Preparation and attention to detail will prevent angry, crumpled garments thrown to the corner of your sewing room. Every garment construction is different but the basics to get you there are the same.

- Pin pattern pieces together. Use straight pins to attach the pattern pieces together. If you place the pin perpendicular to your intended seam, many sewing machines will sew directly over the pin without the need to remove it. You can also place pins in the same direction as your intended seam. You will just need to remove them as you sew.
- Place your pinned pieces in the machine, lower the presser foot, and insert the needle into the fabric on your sewing line. Then sew your seam. Make sure to do a few back stitches at the beginning and end of every seam.  
**OR** Hand sew your seam.
- Trim your threads and press the seam with your iron.
- Press the seam open so the pieces are flat again before attaching the next piece.
- Continue sewing seams until your garment is complete.

Curves should be handled slowly and carefully. Points can be difficult with a machine and are sometimes easier to do by hand.

## HEMS/EDGES

The simplest hem on any garment is to turn the fabric to the inside twice and sew a straight seam to keep it in place. A rolled hem can also be used if there is a small amount of fabric left. And you can use a blind stitch or a hem stitch to hide the line of sewing at the bottom of the garment. This same treatment can be used for necklines and cuffs. Iron the turns before pinning and sewing to make your life easier.

**TL;DR:** Use pins. Sew straight. Sew slowly. Press your seams. Finish your seams.

## Final Notes

Sewing your own garments can be rewarding and cost saving. In most cases, there is no reason to reinvent the wheel; ask for help if you need it.

I can be reached at [ariel.sarah@gmail.com](mailto:ariel.sarah@gmail.com). Happy Sewing!