

Making the Mary Dress In Detail:

1. Prepare the material.

WASH and DRY the material, using whatever laundry method you will commonly use with the garment. (The facing material, too) This is very important, because excessive shrinkage might ruin the effect of the dress, custom-made to the figure of the wearer.

2. Measure and cut the Dress Length

Unfold the fabric, and lay it out on a flat surface. From one cut edge, measure the Dress Length measurement in several places across the width of the fabric. (See Designing the Dress in Inches for this measurement.) Remember that the Dress Length is both front and back of the dress added together (in other words, the dress has no shoulder seams.) To decide how long the dress should be, it is helpful to either lay the fabric on the floor and lie down on top of it, or drape it over your shoulder.

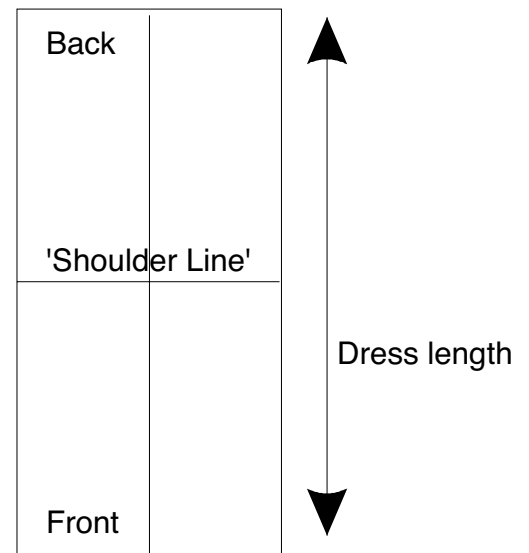
Add 4" for hem allowance. (This is generous. If you are short on fabric, you may add significantly less. For a lighter fabric like silk or chiffon, you probably will want less). Mark this line with pins or chalk and cut along it. Lay the rest of the fabric to one side.

3. Mark the center point for the neck.

Fold the Dress Length you have just cut in half, with the selvages running down the sides. Where the fold is will be the shoulder 'line' of the dress. Make sure the two cut edges (the front and back hems of your dress) are lined up. Mark the folded edge with chalk or pins.

Now, fold the Dress Length the other way, to get a very long narrow rectangle. Mark the fold line again with chalk, crossing the first chalk line so that there is a large chalk cross in the middle of the fabric. This is the center point of the fabric and will help make an even neckline.

As a preliminary step, hem the selvage sides of the dress 1/2". Leave the bottom un-hemmed. This will save time sewing several shorter hems later. You may have to redo the hemming of the sleeves, but this step will gain you more than you will lose.

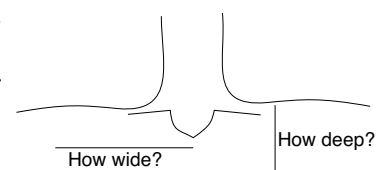


4. Construct and insert the neckline

Designing the Neckline:

If you are not used to cutting necklines, the best thing is to find a dress or shirt with the neckline that you like. Or find a pattern with the neckline you want and use this. When cutting necklines, it is far better to cut too small than too large, which is almost impossible to fix.

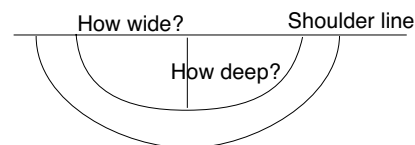
To make your own neckline pattern, decide what shape you want - a round neck? A V-neck, or square? All work well with this dress. To determine how wide the neckline will be, measure from the center of your neck (that little hollow in the middle of your throat) out to one shoulder as far as you want. Write this down.



Next to determine how deep the neckline will be, measure from your shoulder down your chest as far as you want. Write this measurement down.

Take some graph paper, draw a straight line across it for the shoulder line, and mark the middle. Mark on each side how wide (from this center point) you have decided to make the neckline, and measure down from this center point to mark how deep you want your neckline to be.

Now draw the curve, V or square you have decided on. Use the squares on the graph paper to make sure that the curves and all measurements are the same on both sides of the neckline.



When you have a line you like, draw another line the same shape two inches further out. You will have a shape that looks

like a big 'smile' Add a seam allowance of $\frac{5}{8}$ " all around this shape and cut it out. This is the front neckline pattern piece. Hold it up to yourself to check the fit and shape.

Redo this step as often as necessary to get a neckline you are happy with.

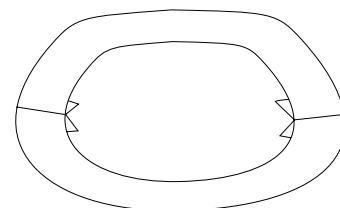
For the back neckline, use another sheet of graph paper. Draw a straight line again and mark again how wide you've decided to make your neckline. Measure from your shoulder how far down your back you want the neckline (at least as far as that little bump on the back of your neck) and mark this down on the graph paper. Draw a smooth curve, add the $2\frac{5}{8}$ " and $\frac{5}{8}$ " as with the front neckline and cut it out.

Pin the two together at the shoulders and try it on. Is it big enough to fit over your head? If not, remember that it's a bit small because of the seam allowance. Is it still too small?

Creating a Facing

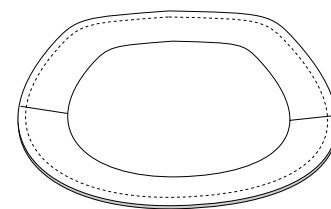
I like to make my necklines with a facing and interfacing, since this part of the dress encounters a lot of stress.

To make the neckline interfacing, pin and cut out one set of the neckline pattern (front and back) on the cotton facing (you can use professional interfacing if you like, but cotton facing is just as nice. It won't be seen in the dress, so don't be afraid to use ugly scrap material, so long as it's sturdy. Make sure that the 'up-and-down' on the facing (from the shoulder edge to the bottom) is in the same direction as the up-and-down on the fabric (parallel to the selvages)



Sew the front and back neck interfacings together at the shoulders with $\frac{5}{8}$ " seams. Press seams open. Try on the neckline facing to see if it's adequate. The neckline should be a little smaller than you like, since when the seam allowances around the neck are sewn, it will become $\frac{5}{8}$ " wider. Make all the adjustments you want (start over if you need to) at this stage.

Now use your paper patterns again to pin and cut out a front and back facing from the Finishing Material you set aside. Use one end of this length of material, not the middle!



Stitch the front and back facings together at the shoulder seams. Press seams open. Stay-stitch the facings and interfacings together, wrong sides together. The interfacing is now the wrong side of the neckline piece. Fold the facing in half, to bring the shoulder seams together. Mark the center of the back and front with chalk or a pin.

Inserting the Neckline into the Dress

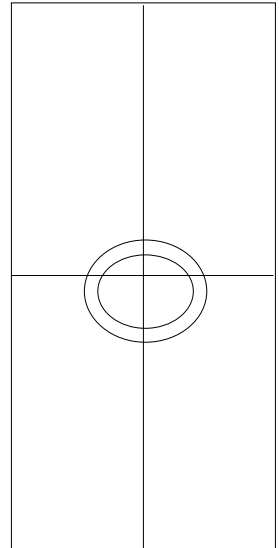
Now unfold the material for the dress to insert the neckline into it.

Center the facings on the dress, RIGHT sides together, using the chalked cross as a guide. Make sure the front and back center lines of the facing match the centerline on the dress on both front and back. Make sure the shoulder seams of the facing line up with the shoulder chalk lines on the fabric. Make sure there is an equal amount of material on both shoulder lines.

When adjustments have been made, pin the facings to the neckline around the inside, the RIGHT side of the facing to the RIGHT side of the dress. (Note: This method will produce a finished facing on the INSIDE of the dress. For a facing on the OUTSIDE of the dress, which gives an attractive 'bound' look to the neckline, pin the facing to the dress with the WRONG sides matching.)

Carefully cut out the neckline hole, using the facings as a guide. When in doubt cut smaller rather than larger. Carefully (it's full of pins!) try the dress on at this point to check the neckline and adjust as necessary.

Stitch the neck facing to the dress neckline. Trim seams and cut corners and curves. Turn the facing to the WRONG (IN) side and press down, so that the seam allowances are hidden between the dress and facing. Topstitch the neckline. (For facings on the outside, press facing to the RIGHT (OUT) side. Then hem the unfinished edge of the facing and topstitch it to the dress). Try it on again to make sure it's perfect. At this point, make a note of how far down your arm the sides come.



5. Draw and baste the arm and side seams

Fold the dress in half again with the completed neckline in the middle, so that the front and back sides are equal in length to each other. Lay it flat on the floor (a table is probably not wide enough).

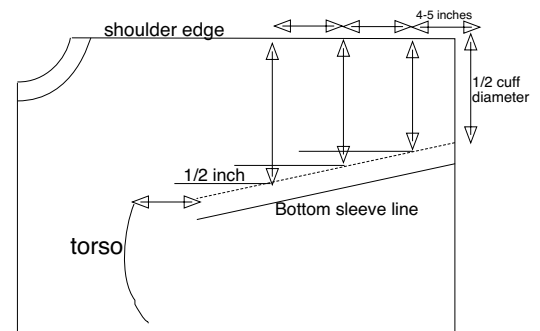
The Arm Seams

Use 'Designing the Dress in Inches' to decide how wide you want the sleeves to be. The basic sleeve will be tapered at the arm (depending on the width of the material, the sleeves will be either 3/4 length or elbow-length before hemming) and will widen out as it goes towards the torso. You may prefer a sharply angled sleeve or a more narrowly angled sleeve.

NOTE: It will be impossible to make a tightly fitted sleeve, which requires a separate sleeve piece cut with the sides parallel to the selvages of the material. The Mary Dress is intended to be more loose than fitted.

Going down from the folded shoulder line, measure HALF of the cuff diameter at the edge of the fabric. (Because the material is folded, it will be the full cuff diameter when you cut it out.) Mark this point with a pin or chalk.

Measure in 4 or 5" along the fold from the sleeve edge and then down from that point, adding 1/2" to the original measurement at the end (cuff) of the sleeve. Mark this point with a pin or chalk.



Measure in 4 or 5" along the fold from the sleeve edge and then down from that point, adding 1/2" to the original measurement at the end (cuff) of the sleeve. Mark this point with a pin of chalk. Measure another 4 or 5" and repeat, adding another 1/2 inch.

Connect the points with a chalk line, using the straight edge. End the line a generous 6" from your torso. Add on a 5/8" seam allowance to the line. I will call this the "bottom sleeve line."

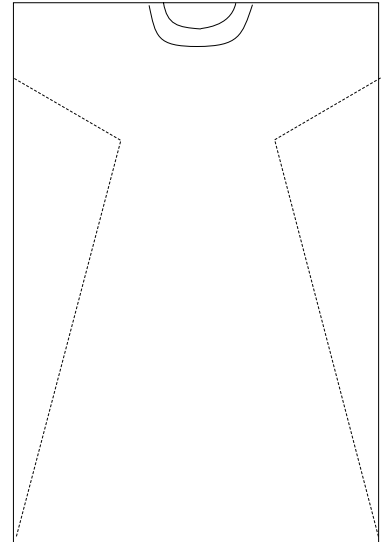
Using the same method, mark the bottom sleeve line on the other side of the dress.

Pin along both lines.

The Side Seams

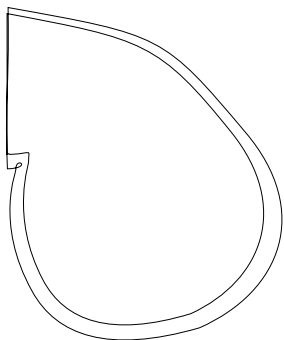
Starting from the bottom corner of one side of the dress, use the yardstick to draw a straight line with chalk to the end of the bottom sleeve line. This will be the "skirt line" of the skirt. Repeat on the other side of the dress.

Using pins stuck perpendicular to the chalked lines, pin the two sides of the skirt together. Baste one continuous seam along the bottom sleeve line and the chalked skirt line of both the right and the left side.



6. Construct and insert the pockets.

Pockets on a Mary dress are not necessary, but they are convenient. Because they are hidden in the folds of the "wings," they are unobtrusive.



Cut out four pockets from your extra material or from contrasting material (don't mix knits with non-knits for this step). Starting the seam about 5/8" from the long straight edge of the pocket, sew the backs and the fronts together with a 1/2" seam, leaving an opening wide enough for your hand to slip inside easily. Save yourself mending time by reinforcing the pocket with another line of stitching 1/4" outside the first.

Press the open ends of the pocket out. Clip and notch the curves. Turn the pockets inside out, so the seams are on the inside.

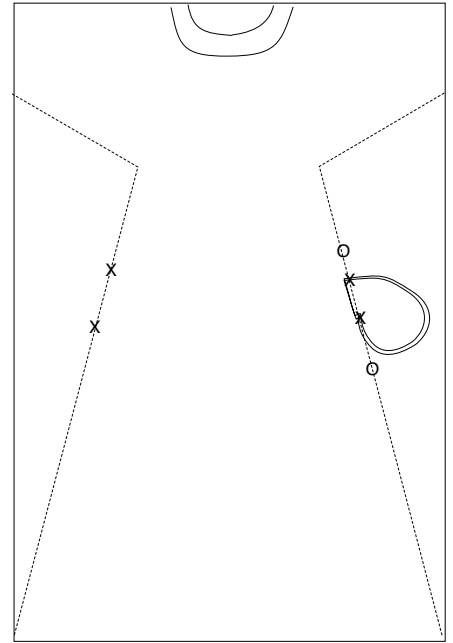
Decide the most comfortable position for the pockets. Measure down from your shoulder to the top of where you want the pocket to be. Typically I place mine about 3" below my navel line so that when my arms are down, I can rest my hands in my pockets comfortably. Mark this spot on the dress with chalk or a pin. Open the basted skirt line about 3 inches above and below these points.

Slip the pocket into this opening, so that the body of the pocket is 'outside' the dress (and in between the wings) and the straight edges go through the skirt line. Line up the seam allowance of the pocket with the skirt line and pin the pocket in place.

From the 'inside' of the dress, sew the pockets into the dress. This can be a tricky and sometimes frustrating step. Try pinning and sewing the front edge of the pocket first, then removing the pins and pinning and sewing the back edge. Since the top of the pocket will be a stress point, reinforce the seams.

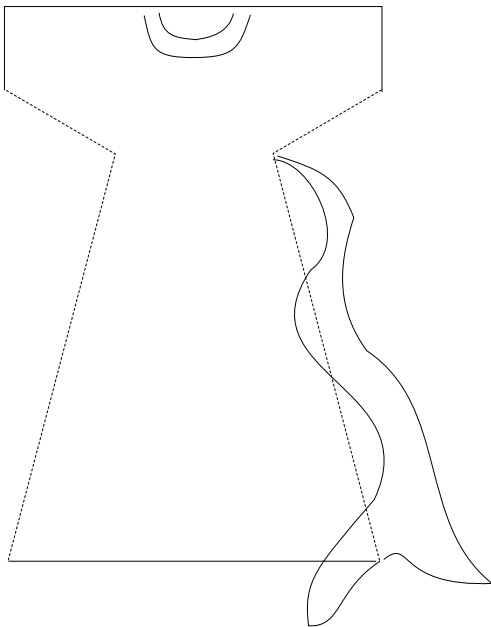
Push the pocket through the opening to the inside of the dress. Now the pocket seams are all on the outside of the pocket away from your hands when you put them into the pockets.

Try on the dress to make sure the pockets are positioned comfortably and unobtrusively. When satisfied, reinforce the opening edges by stitching one or two rows at the top and bottom of the pocket.



7. Sew the arm and side seams

The most stress put on the Mary Dress is the seam under the arm where the sleeve seam meets the skirt seam, particularly where it joins the pocket. To eliminate this stress, a 'gusset' can be placed where the sleeve seam meets the skirt seam. A gusset is a diamond shaped piece of fabric, 4 to 5 inches top to bottom and 3 to 4 inches back to front. Placing the gusset will involve opening the sleeve and skirt seam after you've sewn it.



Sew a seam along both bottom sleeve lines, ending at the top of the pocket opening. From the bottom of the pocket opening, run a finished seam down the skirt line of both the right and the left side.

Finally, cut along the bottom sleeve line to 'release' the wings, leaving a generous seam allowance.

With the dress inside out, open the stitching at the armpit and sides and insert the gusset, right side to right side. Sew around all four sides of the gusset, being careful to 'turn the corner' (leave the needle in the fabric, lift the pressor foot, turn the fabric, replace the pressor foot) as close to the corner of the gusset, and as close to on top of the seam line as you can. Turn the dress right side out, and cut the sleeve seam allowance to let the gusset lie flat.

8. Finishing:

Finish off the tops of the "wings" (the skirt edges hanging down from where you cut them off the bottom sleeve line) with a 1/2" hem. Where the two wings run together under the arm, I fold the front layer over the back layer and reinforce it a few times with stitching.

Starting from under the arm, (where you ended the wing hems) you will simultaneously finish off and reinforce the raw edges of the bottom sleeve line with a flat-felled seam (the kind found on the side seams of dungarees).

To do this, press both seam allowances to one side. Trim the back seam allowances to 1/4. Fold and press the front seam allowance over it to hide it, tucking in the raw edge. Press. Run a seam 1/8" from this folded edge to encase the back seam allowance snugly under the front seam allowance. No raw edges should be seen on either the inside or the outside of the garment.

Finish off the ends of the sleeves as you wish, or simply leave the hem you did in step 5 at the beginning of the dress instructions. Some options include adding a cuff of fabric, folding over the end of the sleeve, sewing a 'tunnel' and running elastic through it. Large cuffs folded over and hand-stitched in place can look very attractive.

The bottom hem of the dress as it stands is uneven, since the wings will fall more deeply to the floor on either side of the dress. You have two choices at this point.

For a more formal dress, I have left this uneven hem, which can give a pleasingly dramatic effect. Some women like the dress this way. I would advise trimming them so that the edges don't drag on the floor (a tripping hazard, plus they get dirty). In this case, give the dress a machine hem of 1/2" or more (the hem tends to "roll up" on some fabrics so you may want a wider hem to prevent this happening).

The other choice is to even out the wings so that the hem of the dress is even all the way around, as in a standard skirt. I have chosen to do this with my work dresses, to minimize the wings catching on sharp edges as I do my chores.

To even out the hem, put on the dress. You will need a helper. Stand on a level surface a few feet from the ground. As you turn slowly, have your helper mark where you want the hem to be.

If you are lacking a helper at this point (husbands sometimes don't understand how to mark hems) put the dress on a hanger. Cut the dress 1/2 or more below your marked line and hem as you chose. I usually open out the "wings" and tuck the bottom tips over the hem, running a seam down the middle of the wing to keep it there.

The Sash

To make a sash with your extra strip, simply hem the strip of material on all sides and use. Edge with silk or cotton tassels if you chose. I've gotten away with not hemming my knit sashes, as the edges sometimes "roll up" and hide the raw edge.

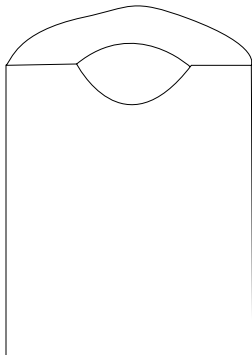
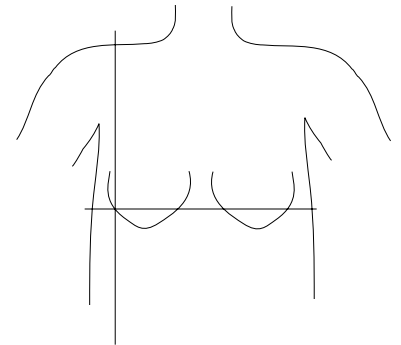
Note: Never stretch out knit material while you are hemming it.

The Mary Dress with a Nursing Panel

Nursing dresses are best with a knit material or one that has some "give." But linens and other non-stretchable materials can be used to good effect as well, provided your panel and nursing opening are generously sized. Your nursing panel will be, in effect, your front neckline facing. The back neckline facing is constructed as before. Lining the nursing panel with a narrow facing will give a more finished look to the neckline. As was suggested as an option in the directions for the Mary dress this nursing panel and back neckline facing end up on the OUTSIDE of the dress.

1. Making the Nursing Panel:

Measure across your chest, starting about 1/2 way down on the outside of one breast and ending about 1/2 way down on the outside of the opposite breast. This will give you the width of your panel. I make my panels long enough to reach 6" or so below my navel. Be generous. You can always cut it out longer and wider and trim it to the size you need in the final steps.



Make the neckline of the panel, the back facing, and the interfacing as directed in the directions for a simple Mary Dress. Sew the nursing panel and the back facing together at the seams and press seams open. Stay-stitch the interfacing (or interfacings) to the facings.

Hem the sides of the nursing panel. Hem the raw edge of the back facing. The sides of the back facing and the sides of the nursing panel should match, by the way. Make a wider back facing if you have to.

2. Inserting the Nursing Panel:

Pin the nursing panel and facing to the dress and mark and cut out the neckline as directed in the simple Mary Dress.

Pin and stitch neckline of the facings to the dress, RIGHT side of the panel to the WRONG side of the dress. (The back facing will be on the outside too.) Trim seams and notch curves and corners. Turn the back facing and nursing panel to the outside and press. If you like, topstitch around the neckline.

Continue to make the dress according the directions for a simple Mary Dress.

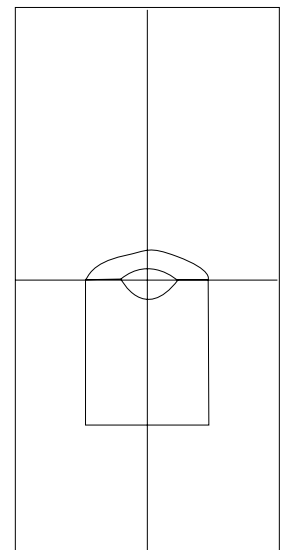
3. Adjusting and Attaching the Nursing Panel:

When the pockets, side seams, wings and sleeves are finished, it is time to adjust and sew down the nursing panel. Try on the dress.

Adjust the panel so that it hangs straight down, the material flush and smooth with the material of the dress. Carefully pin along all edges.

Pin the back facing down as well.

Take off the dress and lay it flat. Adjust the pins so that the material of both panel and dress is flat and not puckered. Try the dress on again to check for ease of movement.



The panel should not be pulling on the dress in any way. This may take several adjustments to perfect.

When the arranging and fitting is done, mark the place where the nursing panel seam passes the bottom of your breast on each side. Measure about 2" down and mark and pin. Measure the nursing panel about 6" down from the shoulders on each side and mark. You will sew the panel to the dress at these points. You can always make the opening smaller if you like.

Remove the pins between these two marks and try on the dress again. You should be able to pull the side of the panel over your breast on each side to completely expose the breast easily. If this is not easy to do, move the pins further apart to allow some more give. If the give is far too much, move the pins towards each other.

At this point, also decide how long the nursing panel will hang down. I find it is better to have a long panel that can be "sashed in" along with the dress. In this case, end the panel about 2-3" below the sash. If you are not planning on sashing the dress, you can have the nursing panel end wherever you are comfortable. Sometimes it is attractive to finish the nursing panel in a gradual point as opposed to a square, which gives a slimming effect.

Find the middle of the panel to do this and mark the sides of the nursing panel at about navel height. Sketch a line joining the middle with the side marks in a triangle (straight or curved into a heart-point-shape).

Fold the panel in half while cutting to make sure both sides are even. Be generous in making seam allowances in case the finished panel falls "in a funny place" and must be moved.

Sewing the Nursing Panel:

Carefully sew down the nursing panel and back facing along the edges, the bottom and sides, leaving a gap for the breasts. You may want to baste the nursing panel down first and give a final fitting before you sew. A well-sewn nursing panel is crucial to an attractive dress. To minimise ripping at the stress points, you may want to run an additional seam 1/4" from the original seam along the sides.

Cutting the nursing opening.

Turn the dress inside out. Measure and cut out the nursing opening in the actual dress material.

For a knit material, a simple vertical slit starting 4" below the neckline and ending 6" below the breasts is adequate. You can always make it bigger. For non-knit material, you may wish to make a narrow oval. Knitted materials need no other finishing (zigzag the edges if you like) but a material like linen may need a narrow handkerchief hem along the seams to prevent fraying.

The top and bottom of the slits are the stress points, and you may want to reinforce those points with stay stitching. If you are ambitious for a really professional look and are using sturdy fraying material, make oval-shaped facing. Be careful of giving the opening a bulky hem if your material is very thin (like silk) as the slit edges might show through the nursing panel (fully line the panel if you are worried about this).

WHEN CUTTING THE NURSING OPENING, BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO CUT THE NURSING PANEL AS WELL! Hours of work gone to waste instantly if that happens.

