

1940s "Swing" Dress Pattern Instructions



Important: If you are using the pre-2008 version of this pattern, you'll need to click [HERE](#) for steps to modify your pattern to work with the instructions below. The modification is very simple and easy and will make a world of difference!

Notes:

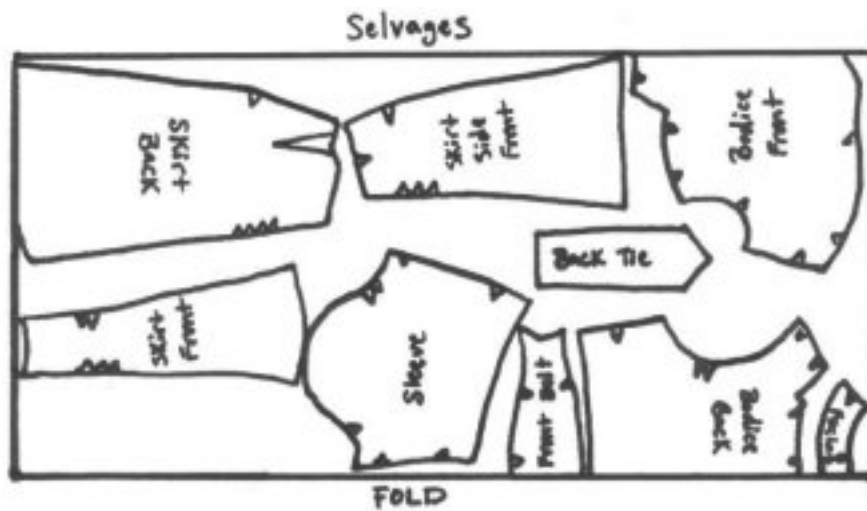
Inspired by a Hollywood fashion of 1943, this pattern features the tailored lines so typical of the WWII era. Following the fabric ration guidelines of the time, women made their dresses with narrower skirts, fitted sleeves, and fewer fabric embellishments like ruffles or flounces. This “swing” dress features a wide front waistband and back ties to give a nice fit. The skirt is slightly gored for a bit of flare at the bottom when you twirl. It is even possible to take this pattern from day to evening by lengthening the skirt to the floor and using the “bracelet-length” sleeve pattern! Please take careful note of the lines on the pattern pieces for lengthening or shortening. The bodice is designed to accommodate long-waisted ladies -- those with a nape-to-waist measurement 17” to 18”. If your nape-to-waist measurement is less than this, you will most definitely need to shorten the bodice pieces. If you do not, you will end up with a lot of extra material hanging out over the waistband, which is not flattering. I strongly advise making a muslin mock-up of the bodice to check its fit before you slice into your beautiful fashion material!

Suggested fabrics include crepe, rayon, and polyester blends. Extremely lightweight fabrics are not recommended, since they do not create as nice a drape. A small brooch or fancy button can be used to secure the bodice at the front neckline.

Do note that I always recommend tracing a master pattern from your original onto interfacing or medium-weight tracing paper. This preserves the original pattern

sheets intact and gives you a sturdy master to use over and over again. It's also very important to read all instructions prior to cutting into your material.

Pattern layout:



Here is the suggested layout for the pattern pieces on 54" wide material.
(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

Assembly Instructions:

(**Note:** There is a 1/2" seam allowance on all seams except where noted.)

1. Dart bodice back at neck by creasing at center back and stitching 1/8" from crease at the top, tapering to nothing at the dot marking the bottom of the dart.



Stitching the back dart.
(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

2. Pin back facing to bodice back, matching notches and centers. Stitch, stopping at the dot marked on the bodice back neckline.



Attaching the back facing.
(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

3. Match back facing to front facing (this is the tall area at the top of the bodice front), right sides together. Stitch, taking up a 5/8" seam. (Note that this seam will meet the dot where you stopped stitching the back facing to the bodice back.)
4. Gather bodice front at shoulder between notches. Turn under and press seam allowance at bodice back neckline (where the back facing ends) and the seam allowance at the bottom of the shoulder overlap (when both areas are turned under and pressed, you have an "L" shape). Pin bodice back over bodice front, matching notches and adjusting gathers to fit. Topstitch bodice back in place across the lower edge and up the side of the "L" until you reach the seam between front and back facings.



Gathers between notches.



Pressing under seam allowance at shoulder.



The rest of the allowance (neckline) pressed under.



*Gathers pulled and pinned.
(Shown from underside.)*



*Bodice back pinned
in place.*



*Topstitching.
(All topstitching thread
is white to help
you see it.)*

(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

5. Turn under and stitch edges of facings to finish them. Clip neckline curves. Turn back facing inside on seam line and front facing in on fold line.



*Hemming facing
edges.*



*Clipping curves on
back facing.*



*Facing turned inside and
pressed.*

(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

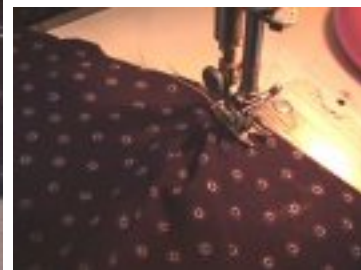
6. Lap right front over left, matching centers (no photo). Baste lower edges together. Pleat bodice back at lower edge by bringing small dots to meet large dots. Baste.



Back pleat marked.



Pleat pinned.



Basting pleat.

(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

7. Dart skirt back pieces and sew together along center back seam, matching notches.

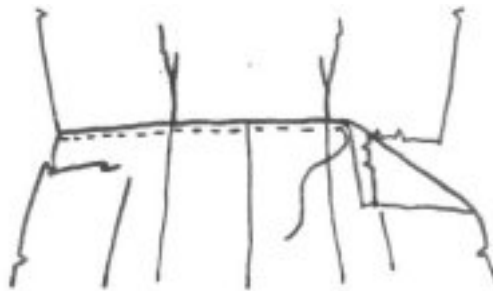


Sewing the skirt back dart.

(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

Note: There is no photo for stitching the center back seam, since that is just a straight seam.)

8. Turn under seam allowance on skirt back and stitch over bodice back, matching centers and notches.



(Click for larger image. No photo for this step, because it is just another topstitching step and looks the same as the first one!)

9. Gather bodice front at lower edge between notches. Turn under seam allowance on front midsection belt and pin over bodice front, matching centers and notches and adjusting gathers. Topstitch in place.



(Click for larger image. Again, no photo. The illustration is much clearer than any of my pictures turned out. ;-)

10. Sew skirt front pieces together, matching notches.
11. Sew skirt front to skirt side front, matching notches.
12. Turn under seam allowance on front midsection belt and pin over skirt, matching centers and notches. Topstitch in place.



Pressing under belt seam allowance. Belt pinned over skirt front.

(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

13. Fold back ties in half and stitch, leaving straight ends open. Turn and press. Baste ties to midsection at side seams.



Back tie sewn together.



Back tie corners clipped.



Back tie turned and pressed.



Basting in the back tie.

14. Pin dress together at sides, matching notches and leaving left side open between notches. Stitch, taking care that you don't accidentally catch the ends of your back ties into your side seams. (No photo, since this is just straight seam stitching.)

Sleeves:

1. For 3/4-length sleeves, dart sleeve at elbow and stitch seam together, matching notches. Finish lower edge with a narrow bias facing, or face with ribbon seam binding. Turn under and hem in place by hand. (I'm currently working on a 3/4-length sleeve dress and will post photos when they are ready.)



(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

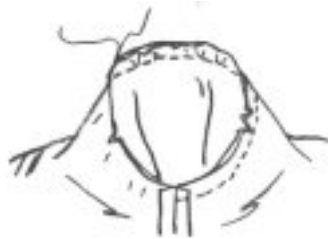
2. For short sleeves, stitch seam together, matching notches. Turn up lower edge on hemline. Turn under and stitch edge of hem, then hem to sleeve by hand or

machine. (No photos, since this is very straightforward, and photos don't look any clearer than the illustrations.)



(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

3. Pin sleeve into armhole, matching notches at front and back and the dot at the shoulder. Hold sleeve toward you and baste in place, adjusting ease so that the sleeve fits perfectly into the armhole. Stitch.



(Click thumbnail for larger image. Yet again, a photo just can't show this as clearly as a line drawing.)

Shoulder Pads:

1. Tack pad to shoulder and armhole seams so center of folded edge is about 1" forward of shoulder seam and extends beyond armhole about 3/4" at shoulder. (Note, if you are using larger, modern shoulder pads, you will actually tack the pad into the dress closer to the inside of the neckline, as shown in the photograph below. Shoulder pad is shown resting on mannequin as it will sit on the wearer. It would be turned upside-down to be tacked onto the dress, since the dress is shown wrongside out.)



(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

Finishing:

1. Following the instructions included with your invisible zipper foot, sew the invisible zipper into the opening at the left side seam.



Invisible zipper open. Invisible zipper closed.

(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

2. Try on your dress and mark where the bodice front overlaps at the neckline. This is where you will place your brooch or sew a button to keep the "V" surplice closed. Use a hem marker or have someone else mark your skirt hem for you. Hem allowance is one inch. You may need to trim a bit to have it even all the way around if you are larger in the hips or derriere. Hem the skirt by machine or by hand.



Brooch pinned to hold surplice closed.

(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

Dress completed! Happy dancing!



Dress from front. Side view. Back view.



Bodice close-up.

(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

Enjoy your new creation!

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