

A basic shift pattern - all periods



Fine white lawn or poplin is best for our scale - although patterned fabrics were sometimes used, most shifts were plain linen or cotton or woollen. Decoration was embroidered or lace added to edges. Throughout all periods up to the later Victorian, no special attention or detailing was added to underwear, except where it might show; e.g. neckline or cuffs.

You will need:

- normal sewing supplies (pins, needle, thread, scissors etc)
- copier paper or similar for tracing the pattern.
- fabric at least 6" long (15cm) by 12" wide (30cm)
- Optional: a 12" (30cm) piece of silk ribbon.

1. Trace the pattern, **along the heavy lines**. (The seam allowances are omitted from pattern, they are only shown for guidance.). Cut out the paper pattern, including the neck hole.
2. Place pattern on the fabric, with the grain aligned and pin in place. Cut out the fabric about 1/4" – 3/8" (about 1cm) outside the pattern, which gives you your seam and hem allowances. Cut out the hole for the neck, 1/4" – 3/8" in from the edge.
3. Press the side/arm seam and hem allowances over the paper. If you are not adding lace to the cuff, fold it back as well. This gives a much straighter and more accurate line on such a small scale.
4. Snip the curved neck edge about 3/4 the way into the allowance (not right into the pattern). Snip the curved underarm seams allowances as well, as shown on the master pattern.

5. Fold the allowances over the paper all round, starting with the side seams, then sleeves and hems and lastly the neck edge. You may like to tack the allowances before pressing, both to ensure accuracy and prevent you burning your fingers.
6. Remove the paper (and tacking if used). Fold the garment in half across the shoulders with right side inside. With a tiny running stitches sew the side/underarm seams along the crease line.
7. Finish the sleeve and hem lines. You can tack them up with a tacking stitch, taking the minimum amount in each stitch so it barely shows on the outside. Or you could add lace, in which case you can eliminate bulk by cutting off the relevant allowances and covering the edge with the lace.
8. Run a neat gathering thread (doubled) around the neck edge. This will show a little bit, so neat and small is best. Fit over the dolls head, and pull up the thread until you are satisfied with how it looks, and making sure that it can still fit over the doll's head to get it off. Remember that a lot of dresses will have low necklines - some Georgian and Regency dresses were designed to show the necklines of underclothes, but you may not want that! This neckline fits well just along the top edge of the doll's "bust". Tie off the thread and snip.
9. If you intend to dress and undress the doll a lot, and are worried the neck edge will fray, then you could reinforce it:
10. Working from the wrong side, starting from what will be the centre back, sew on the silk ribbon to make a neck facing, and to hold both the raw edges of the vees inside and the gathering firmly in place. Tiny, tiny stitches - try not to let the stitches show on the front. Ease the ribbon round the curves, so it sits flat to the fabric. Fold under the last little bit to make a neater finish, butt joining to the other end.
11. You can leave the neck at that, or add a lace edging if desired.
12. Turn right side out and press.

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