

How-to

Create a Custom Dress Form

By Judith Neukam



Many people have sewn their whole lives without a custom dress form and didn't suffer a lick. But if you're lucky enough to have one, it sure is nice. Just imagine making little style changes and fitting improvements on a 3-D version of yourself. Here's why a dress form is great and how you can make one, with a little help.

Minor pattern adjustments become easy and obvious when you're looking at the actual problem in fabric on "yourself." Of course, custom-made forms are as useful as commercial versions for all the traditional dress-form functions—draping, visualizing, shaping collars, holding garments during sleeve insertion, hemming, and so on. But none of the fitting benefits are possible if the form you're using doesn't mirror, with reasonable accuracy, your body shape and posture.

The shape of your shoulders, the position and angle of your neck and the unique distribution of your body weight are issues far more important than questions of circumference, since most clothes hang from the shoulders or the waist, and don't fit snugly. And this is precisely what a custom form provides: an accurate recreation of your posture and your shape, while keeping within an inch or so of your current circumference measurements.

The best feature of the do-it-yourself, duct tape form described here is that it's so quick to make you can have a working form ready in less than two hours. And, you can accomplish this for about \$15.

Also, check out four other dressform methods in our article, [Clone Yourself A Fitting Assistant](#).



Dress-form making is fun and fast, and will improve your fitting results like nothing else.

Gear up

If you can, recruit two helpers: One cuts the tape into suitable strip sizes; the other applies the tape. Use old scissors, as the tape adhesive gums them up, and precut 4-inch to 6-inch strips and longer strips for the waist and crossing the heart. You will need two to three 60-yard rolls of 2-inch duct tape. The brand makes a difference, because some tape shrinks over time and change the size of your dress form. Ace Hardware house brand holds up well, as does [Duck TaP-e](#).



The form doesn't have to look like a tin man. Choose colorful duct tape for the last layer.

Prepare the wrappee

Wear well-fitted undergarments. Tape a 2-inch strip cut from a file folder to your skin and over your underwear, down your center back from your hairline to below your hips. This protects you and your underwear when you cut off the dress form. Then put on a long T-shirt. This remains inside the form, so choose one you don't mind sacrificing to the project. The T-shirt needn't be too tight, because the tape pulls it in. A turtleneck T-shirt is ideal, or you can fill in around the neckline with plastic wrap before taping.

Apply the tape in layers

Start wrapping under the bust. Wrap snugly, but not so tight as to rearrange or compress the body. At the waist, wrap a little more loosely on the first layer, allowing folds to form in the tape as you follow the contour, if necessary. Proceed to a "cross-your-heart" taping that goes from one shoulder under the opposite breast then around to the back, to define the bust area. Wrap the tape horizontally at the bottom, down to mid-thigh. At the bust and underarm, cut the T-shirt sleeves, if needed, to allow the tape to follow the figure, and use shorter pieces fanned out over the bust. Protect the neck area with plastic wrap if the T-shirt doesn't cover it. Tape the edges at the neckline and armholes similar to those you'd want on a fitted bodice, giving your form a neck. When the first layer is complete, wrap twice more, first vertically, then again horizontally, further compressing the waistline to fit each layer more closely, and smoothing over any wrinkles this causes with more tape.

Cover areas that the T-shirt doesn't with plastic wrap before taping.



The form is wrapped three times, but you can change to colorful duct tape for the last layer.



We used Totally Tie-Dye from Duck Tape for the final layer to make our form festive.



Let yourself go

When finished, but before removing the form, have the "wrappee" bend slightly sideways to reveal her waistline, and mark it (and any other points you want identified) with permanent marker. Mark the final layer carefully with plumb lines at the center front and center back, around the waist, and carefully establish the proper height and posture by marking a line parallel to the floor below the hip level around the form.



Cut through the tape and T-shirt layers up to the center back, with your scissors sliding along the paper strip you taped on the body. Carefully step out of the form.

Stand and deliver

Cut along the horizontal line at hip level to establish a base line. Trace around the base of the dress form, cut a cardboard or 1/2-inch foam core base to match, and cut a hole in it if you plan to fit a stand pole. A strong wooden hanger placed inside the shell supports the shoulders. Tape the hanger to a PVC pipe or a wooden pole if you plan to make a stand, and tape it inside the form before stuffing it. Otherwise you can use the hanger on a ceiling-hung chain or hook to hang your dress form. Then start stuffing the form by supporting each breast on the inside with a taped or glued-in foam raglan shoulder pad if the bust contour needs the additional support (larger bust shapes tend to cave in over time without support). Stuff and tape over the armholes and neck, and solidly stuff the entire form to support it. Use a fiberfill intended for toys or pillows. Push the foam core base into the bottom of the dress form, and tape it in place. Compare the wrappee's measurements to the form. If necessary, you can adjust the form by cutting slits to create darts, or by squeezing or padding the form to the new dimension, and retaping.



Trace around the form to make the base.



Cut and fit the base to the form, and tape it in place.

The dress form can hang on a chain from the ceiling when you're using it and hang it your closet when you're storing it.



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