

Education

The Virtues of Darts
by Sheri McKillop



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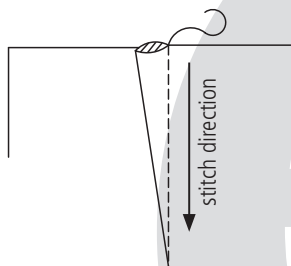
Darts are a necessary part of a well-fitting garment. If we were all shaped like cartoon characters after they are run over by a steamroller we wouldn't need darts but we are shapely with many curves.

Sewers often tell me how much they hate darts. At this point I step up on my soapbox and start extolling the virtues of darts. A garment can't be fitted without them and for many women a garment won't fit without them.

On your custom-fit pattern you may notice darts added even if the original pattern doesn't have them. The purpose of the dart is to allow a two-dimensional piece of fabric to fit around a three-dimensional form. If you see a dart on your pattern it has been placed there to enhance the fit around a curved area of your body. The reason many people don't like darts is they are often in the wrong location or aren't stitched correctly therefore looking "homemade". It is important to stitch and press darts accurately, especially bust and waist darts.

Check the location of your darts. Bust darts should point to the bust point and end at least 1/2" (1.25 cm) and up to 2" (5 cm) away from the bust point. Darts on skirts and pants should be located at the fullest part of your tummy or seat and should never extend beyond the fullest part. Remember a different bra or panties from the ones you are measured in can have a dramatic effect. If the darts are in the wrong position simply cut the dart from the paper pattern and slide it up or down, right or left until it points to the correct location. Tape the pattern back together with the dart in its new location.

Darts are always stitched from the widest end to the narrowest end. Contour darts are like double-ended darts and are often found in the waist area of jackets and dresses. They will point towards the bust and towards the hip



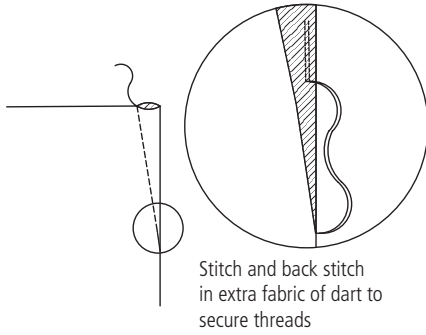
area. They should be treated as two darts. Begin stitching in the middle of the contour dart where it is widest and stitch to the point. Then begin again at the widest section and stitch to the other point.

Stitch length should be between 10 and 12 stitches per inch or 2.5 mm. When you begin stitching at the wide end you may back stitch to reinforce the end. Follow the line of the dart towards the point. As you approach the point, shorten your stitch length a little to give you more control. As you reach the very end of the point, taper off the edge of the fabric very gradually. I try to aim for taking three stitches at the very end of the dart that are just barely catching one thread of the fabric and then the fourth stitch is off the end. Never backstitch at the point of a dart. This will cause an unflattering bump in the dart from the bulk of the stitches.

There are a couple of alternative ways to secure your threads. Hand tie them in a small knot so the stitches will not come out. This manner is time consuming. Take a couple of stitches on nothing hoping that the threads knot. This method is quick but unreliable. My favourite way is to stitch off the end of the dart, lift the presser foot, pull the fabric away from the needle slightly and then replace it under the presser foot with the bulk of the dart under the needle. Stitch and backstitch in the extra fabric of the dart. A little thread loop will form from the point of the dart to where you back stitch but it is small and inconspicuous. This method is fast and reliable.

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Once you have stitched the dart your work is not yet complete. You have stitched a three-dimensional shape into your fabric and you don't want to take it to the ironing board and press it flat and two-dimensional. Begin by pressing the dart as you



just sewed it so the fold line of the dart is pressed. Do not press past the point of the dart. Place the dart over a tailors ham or rolled up towel moulding the dart to where it fits best. For vertical darts the bulk of the dart should be pressed

towards the center of the garment. For example, skirt darts are pressed toward center front or center back. For horizontal darts like bust darts the bulk should be pressed towards the floor. Carefully press the dart from the wrong side then flip it and give it a finish press from the right side using a press cloth.

If the end of the dart is a little too pointy, place it flat on the ironing board and press just the tip flat to avoid a poke at the end of the dart.

Sewers have often avoided darts because they can make items look homemade, but a dart well-stitched and pressed is a great fitting aid that will enhance the look and feel of your garment. ◆