

Tailoring 101

There's more than one way to tailor a coat

There was a time when most home sewing consisted of making frocks, and sewers like my mother thought tailoring was “difficult.” So when I learned to tailor, she thought I was a genius. But tailoring is really just a collection of construction techniques that add quality to certain types of garments.

WHAT IS TAILORING?

Tailoring implies several things: how shape is built into the garment; the use of high-quality fashion fabrics, interfacing, and findings; precision techniques with machine and hand stitching; and good pressing. A tailored garment keeps its shape through wear and cleaning, whether it's on the hanger or on the body. In an untailored garment, shoulder pads are often the sole providers of shape.

Tailoring techniques build shape by using malleable natural fibers with interfacing, pad stitching, and pressing techniques to control the fabric.

Many tailoring elements start with the pattern. For example, a bias undercollar makes the collar roll, and a two-piece sleeve allows the sleeve to follow the natural bend of the arm. Other tailoring elements involve taming the fabric, such as taping the roll line to “snug in” the lapel area and keep it close to the chest. Taping also prevents the bias area of a lapel from stretching and encourages the lapel to roll. Attention is given to turn-of-cloth to ensure that enclosed seams turn under; the “public” side (the side that's seen when the garment is worn) is cut slightly larger than the “non-public” side.

Here I discuss three types of tailoring: traditional, contemporary, and Japanese. They all have their pros and cons; but when you understand what each offers, you can choose

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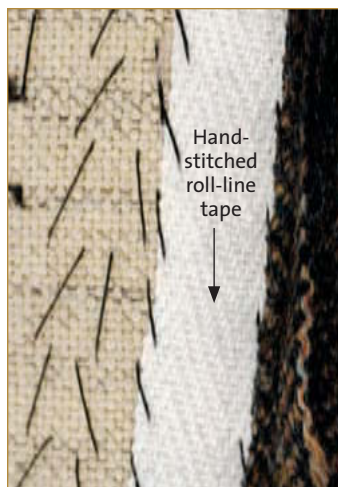


Learn the difference between traditional, contemporary, and Japanese tailoring; then choose the one that suits your style.



Pad stitching

Pad stitching is used to build in shape, and interfacing does not extend into seam allowances so edges are sharp and thin.



A hand-stitched roll-line tape holds the lapel close to the body.

Hand-stitched roll-line tape

the methods that will work best for you and your project.

TRADITIONAL TAILORING

Traditional tailoring is highly structured. Goat's hair hymo interfacing and pad stitching are used to build in shape and to add durability. Interfacing doesn't extend into the seam allowances so garment edges are kept sharp and thin. The roll-line tape, which holds the lapel close to the body, is stitched by hand, and the turn-of-cloth is ensured by establishing stitching lines as the garment is constructed.

Time-consuming, traditional tailoring requires a lot of hand stitching and takes a high-level of skill to master the techniques. The fine, high-level tailors and teachers retired years ago, so today it's difficult to find a place to learn. It's also difficult to practice and develop these skills without a tutor.

CONTEMPORARY TAILORING

Sometimes, called "soft" tailoring, contemporary tailoring employs fusible

interfacing, which may or may not extend into seam allowances. The roll-line tape is stitched by machine or eliminated, and there's minimal hand stitching overall. It's far easier to learn and to develop soft



Fusible interfacing extends into the seam allowance

Facing is supported with a fusible interfacing that extends into the seam allowance in contemporary tailoring.

tailoring skills, but they don't produce results of the quality that traditional tailoring does.

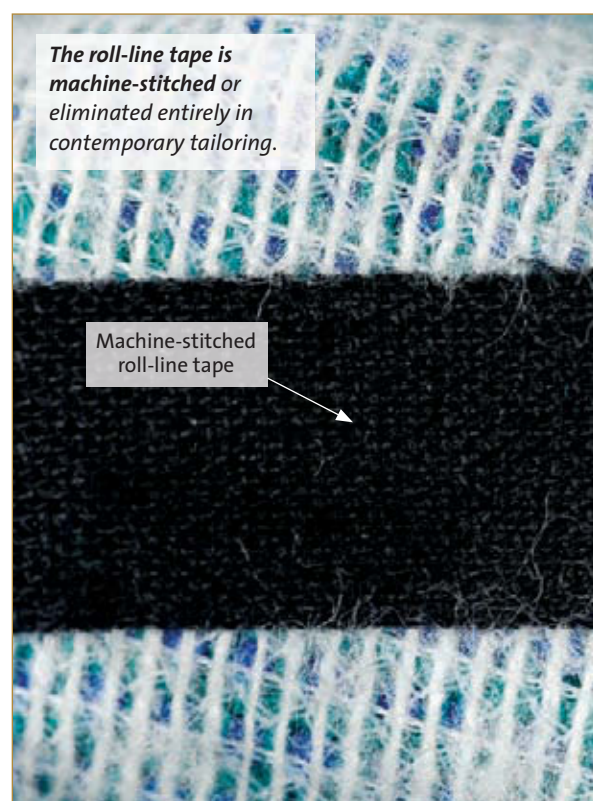
JAPANESE TAILORING

Japanese tailoring combines the fine detailing of traditional tailoring with the



Lapel

Fabric is shaped by hand in traditional tailoring. Hand pad stitching shapes and molds collars and lapels. Goat hair support is trimmed from seam allowances, and lapel roll lines are supported with hand-sewn tape and secured with basting until the final pressing.



The roll-line tape is machine-stitched or eliminated entirely in contemporary tailoring.

Machine-stitched roll-line tape

speed and ease of contemporary tailoring to produce quality results.

Distinctive characteristics of Japanese tailoring include adjusting the seam allowances on the pattern to guarantee the turn-of-cloth. This type of tailoring uses fusible tape from Japan for the roll-line tape, fusible interfacing, and careful pressing. Japanese tailoring techniques save time, are easy to do, and, best of all, they don't sacrifice quality.

TO TAILOR OR NOT?

Jackets, coats, pants, and sometimes dresses lend themselves to tailoring. After choosing the garment, pattern, and fabric, the question is—to tailor or not?

To determine the type of tailoring you should apply, ask yourself the following questions: Do you have the skills for traditional tailoring? What level of quality do you want to achieve? How much time do you want to spend on construction?

Then, ask yourself: Does the fabric you want to use adapt to tailoring? (That is, can you mold and shape it by pressing?) Synthetic fabrics won't adapt, and some

natural fabrics are woven so tightly that you can't discipline them with an iron. You can use the same pattern as for a tailored garment, but you just can't expect the garment to keep its shape.

Even though the pattern does not dictate which construction system to use, the guide sheets may. If you are a beginner, follow the pattern guide sheets. As you develop skills, you can adapt your own construction techniques.

Finally, does the pattern adapt to tailoring? If it doesn't have a bias undercollar, you can make one. If it doesn't have a two-piece sleeve, you can use the armhole and sleeve from a pattern that does. Tailoring makes a handsome long-wearing garment, and acquiring the skills is a rewarding journey. Using these techniques may add a little time to your construction process, but the results are worth it.

Judy Barlup (UniqueTechniques.com) recently retired after many years of teaching tailoring.

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TAILORING TERMS

There are a few items and terms often used in tailoring that you need to know.

Pad stitch: a diagonal stitch that is staggered from one row to the next and used to join two or more layers of fabric.

Goat-hair hymo: a woven wool/goat hair blend canvas interfacing.

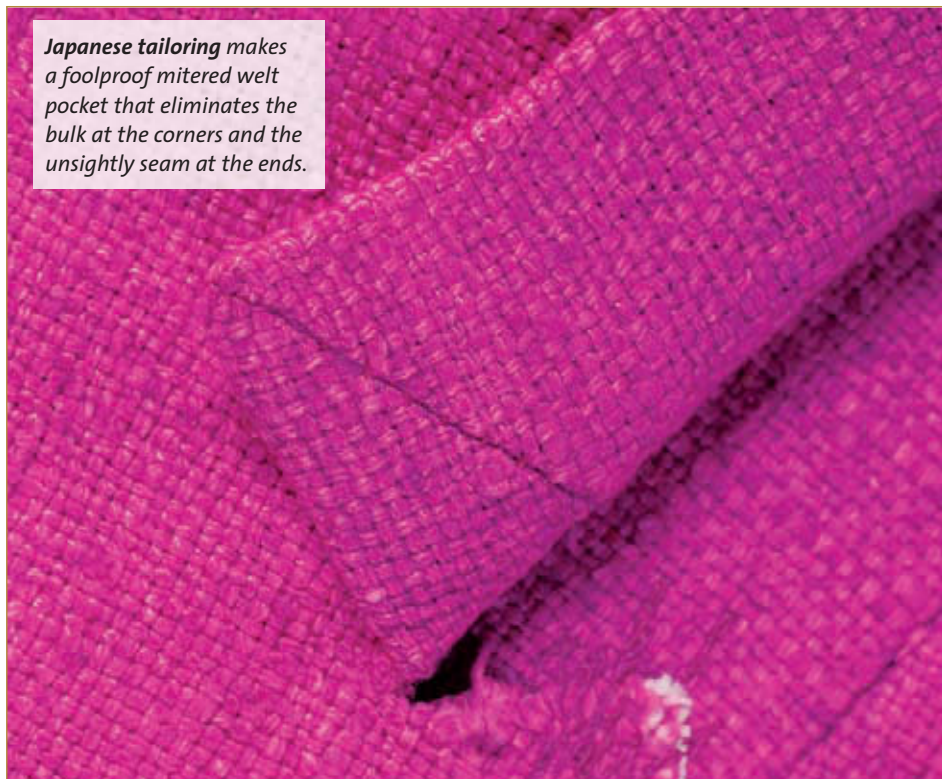
Roll-line tape: a non-stretchable twill tape used to support the lapel roll line.

Turn-of-cloth: the amount of fabric taken up when the under layer extends further than the top layer.



In Japanese tailoring, cutting lines are adjusted to keep edges sharp and make enclosed seams roll under.

Japanese tailoring makes a foolproof mitered welt pocket that eliminates the bulk at the corners and the unsightly seam at the ends.



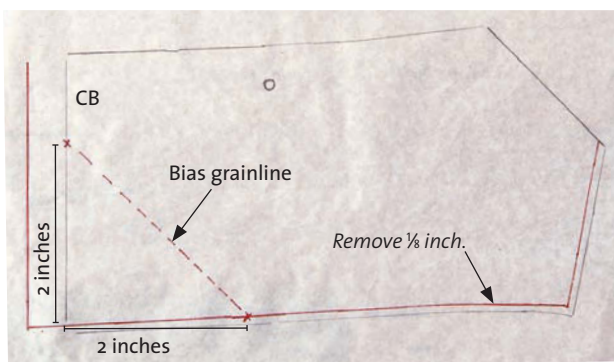
Make your pattern “tailorable”

The undercollar of a tailored garment is cut on the bias to preserve the collar's roll. A two-piece undercollar keeps the front edges on the same grainline. If your pattern doesn't have a separate undercollar pattern, make one: Just trace the upper collar. (If the pattern piece is for the full collar, trace only half of it to the center back.)

ADD A TWO-PIECE UNDERCOLLAR



1 Trace the original pattern. Add a $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch seam allowance (or whatever you prefer) to the center back. Make all of your changes on the traced copy.



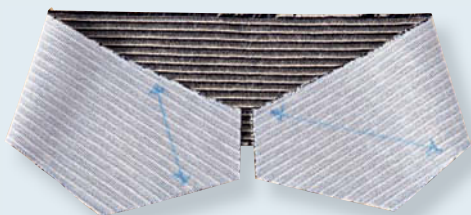
2 To draw the bias grainline, place a mark 2 or 3 inches from the neck edge on the center back (CB). Place a mark the same distance from the center back on the neck edge. Join these two points. Since the undercollar needs to be smaller than the upper collar (to ensure the seams roll under), take $\frac{1}{8}$ inch off the outside edges of the undercollar. If you are working with heavy fabric, reduce the undercollar even more.

3 Cut the undercollar. Apply the interfacing, and stitch the center-back seam. When you press the bias collar, it often stretches, especially when fusible interfacing is applied. To correct the problem, place the undercollar pattern on the collar, and trim away any excess before sewing.



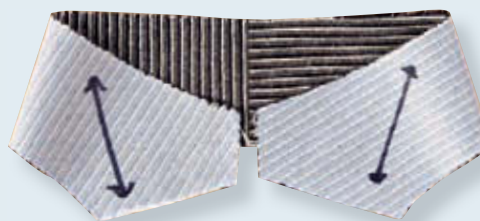
AN EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

ONE-PIECE UNDERCOLLAR



The fabric here is a diagonal stripe. The stripes match, but see how the bias grainlines on each side of a one-piece sample go in different directions. This can distort the front of the collar slightly.

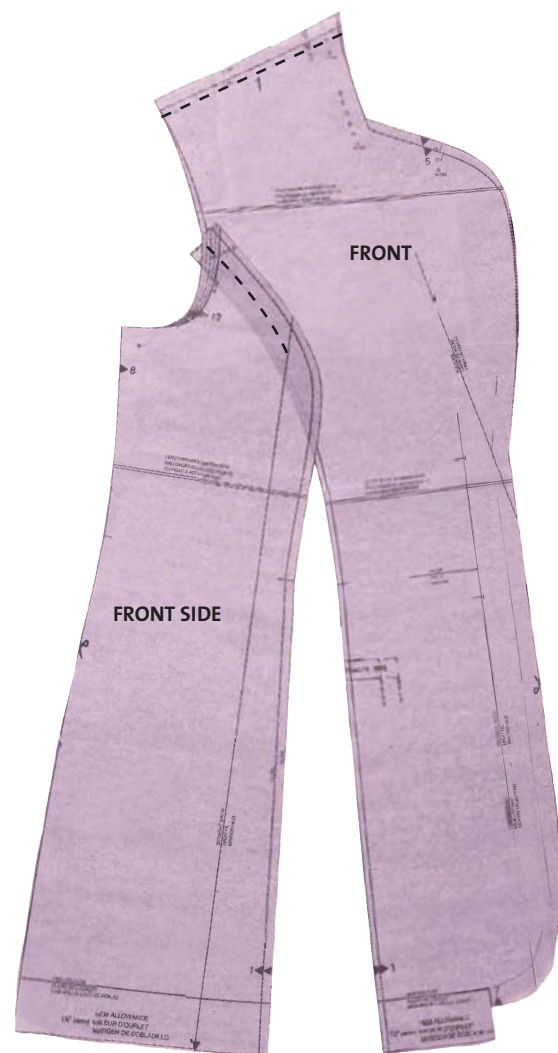
TWO-PIECE UNDERCOLLAR



The stripes don't match here, but the fabric grain does. Note that when you are working with a diagonal stripe or twill, the underside of the collar is less attractive on the two-piece undercollar. If you wear your collar up, you may prefer the look of the one-piece undercollar.

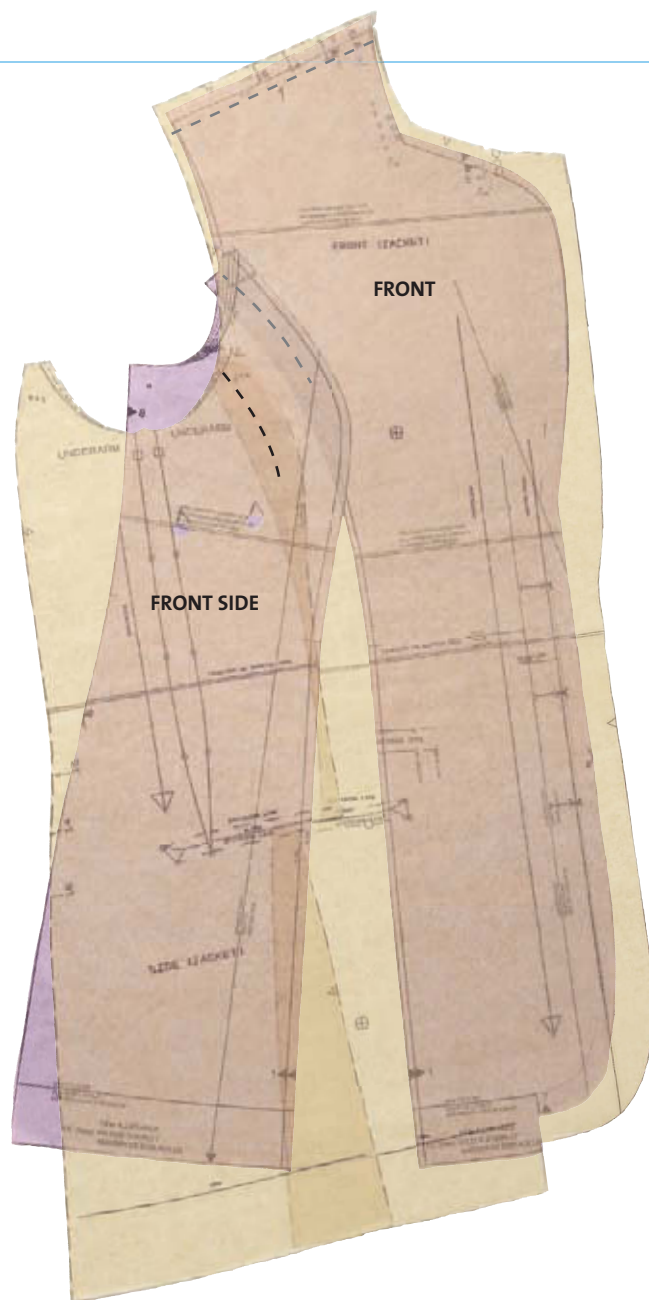
ADD A TWO-PIECE SLEEVE

1 On both the old and new patterns, draw the stitching lines (if they don't exist) on the shoulder and armhole. For princess seam patterns, draw the stitching lines that extend into the shoulders and armhole for 2 to 3 inches. Mark the intersection of the neckline and shoulder seams.



2 Start with the sleeves and shoulder pattern you want to use. Work with the front and back patterns separately. Pin your favorite front shoulder to a piece of foam core. If the pattern is a princess line, pin the front pieces together following the marked lines.

Tip **USE A PINNABLE SURFACE.** Foam-core board and push pins are handy tools for patternwork.



3 Match and pin together the stitching lines for the new pattern. Position the new pattern over the old pattern, matching the center-front lines and the intersection of the neck and shoulder lines. It might not be possible to match the shoulder points exactly, but they should be at the same level horizontally. **Note:** The new pattern doesn't have a side seam. Use the underarm dart to help guide your placement. Then when you repeat these steps with the back pattern pieces you'll fill in the finished armhole.

4 Trace the cutting line of the shoulder and armhole from the old pattern onto the new pattern. Be sure to use the old pattern at the neck edge. It may be necessary to adjust the side seam on the new pattern to match the old pattern. There will be no changes to the sleeve. The original two-piece sleeve pattern now fits into the adapted armhole.