

A woman with blonde, wavy hair is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is wearing a maroon blazer with a notched lapel and three buttons. Underneath, she wears a patterned top and a matching patterned skirt. She is also wearing large hoop earrings and a necklace. The background is a solid grey.

*Placed between the lining
and fashion fabric, a canvas
coat front supports the
jacket's shape.*

The Canvas Coat Front

Build lasting structure into jackets with a classic tailoring method

BY PAMELA POWELL

A canvas coat front foundation supports a beautiful, sculptured jacket silhouette. If the shoulder pad outlines show through a jacket's right side, the front is wrinkled and pulls up at the bustline, or the pockets sag, these are all signs that a garment lacks core structure, and a canvas coat front is the perfect solution.

A canvas coat front is a familiar concept to tailors. It is a carefully cut and shaped canvas piece, shaped with a felt chest section and pad stitching. It sculpts a garment from shoulder to chest and into the lapels. It is this canvas framework that ensures a menswear coat holds its shape for life. It restrains the fabric, preventing it from stretching and wrinkling, and supports the garment, so that it keeps its shape even without a body inside.

Here, I'll show you how to plan, cut, and sew a canvas coat front for a ladies jacket. Tailoring is about cut, fit, and construction. It takes figure variations into account, along with personal taste and, of course, fashion trends. A custom-made canvas coat front provides an accurate fit and lasting style.

Canvas comes in many weights, but for a jacket front, I use

hair canvas or Hymo (see "Sources," page 60). Lightweight canvas is used in women's tailoring as it works harmoniously with the female figure. A toile or muslin is important to make, whether drafting a pattern or working from a commercial pattern. It counts as the first fitting.

The pattern I created for the sample jacket shown was inspired by a 1949 design and can be purchased at PamelaPowell.com. It elegantly follows body lines, and rounds into the waist. The two-panel front gives the jacket a more form-fitting and slimming silhouette. The jacket also has details you can reshape, resize, or embellish. It has rounded front hems and lapels, and hipline pockets finished with piping and flaps.

Quality never goes out of style. Invest the time to understand the canvas front, and discover how to create a foundation to support a fit that lasts.

Pamela Powell's fashion background extends to Europe, Australia, and America. She has worked in couture for celebrity clients and designs bridal, special occasion, and eveningwear.

Map out the foundation

The canvas front is made with two interfacings inside the jacket shell. The padded canvas interfacing ensures that the garment holds its shape. You'll cut and shape the canvas front as the garment is cut, sewn, and tailored. This sample jacket has a two-panel front.

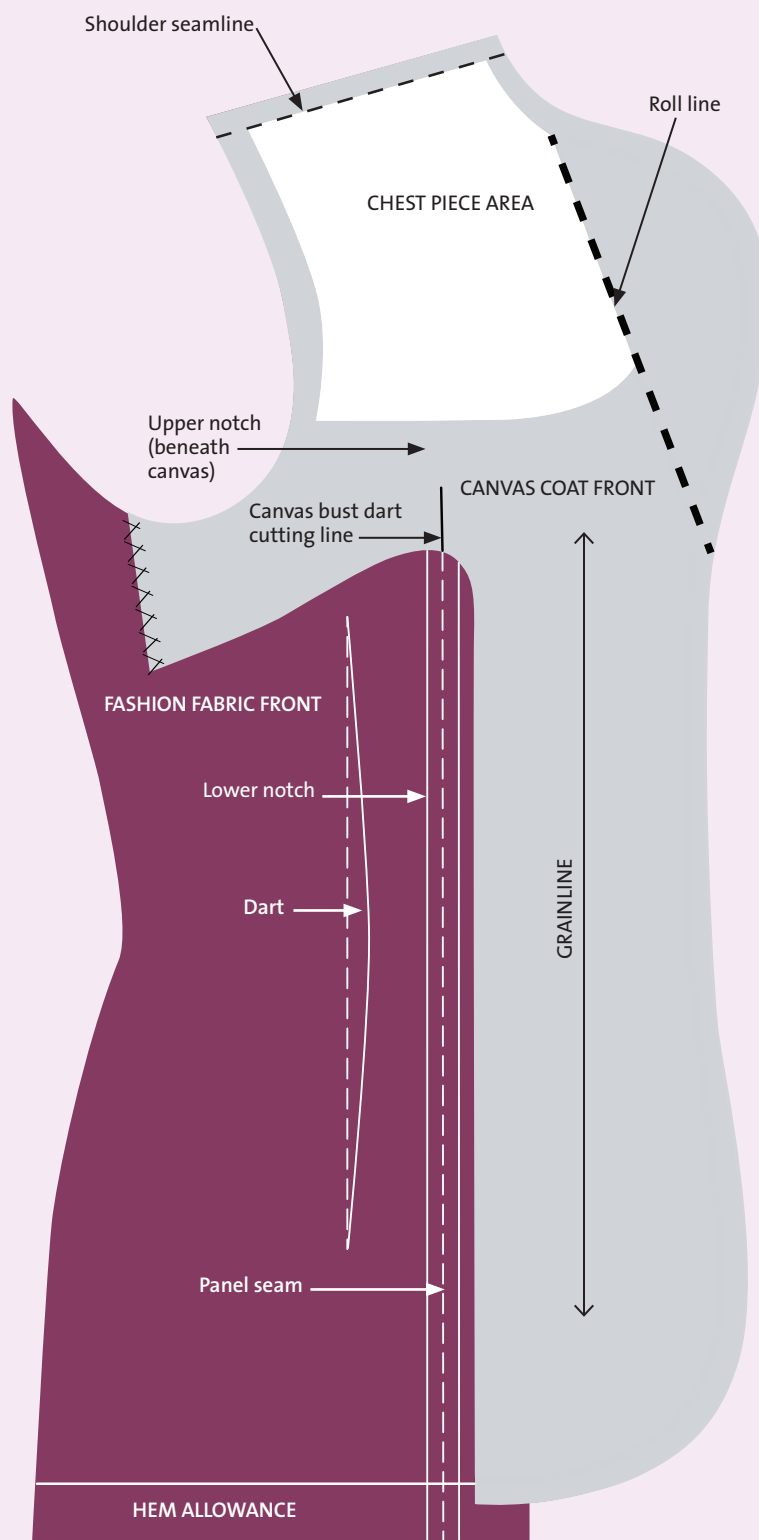
1 Cut the jacket pattern pieces in fashion fabric.

Press the fabric with the iron. Layer the front panels, and steam to shrink the ease in the seam allowance from the lower-notch point to the upper-notch point at the bustline curve, so the side panel's seam allowance matches the front panel's seam allowance. Next, shrink and stretch the seam allowances at the waistline to avoid clipping them at the curves. Sew the panels together, and press the seam flat and open. Press and gently stretch the fabric in the bust area over a ham to create a more rounded bust shape.

2 Cut the canvas. Fold the canvas in half lengthwise. Place it on your cutting surface and lightly brush to flatten. Use the fashion fabric as a guide to cut the canvas interfacing. Place the coat front onto the double-layered canvas. It is not important to match the straight of grain, as canvas can be cut slightly off grain. Pin or hold the coat front in place with weights. Draw around the coat front edge with chalk or pencil. Mark the seamline that joins the two panels, and mark the lapel roll line.

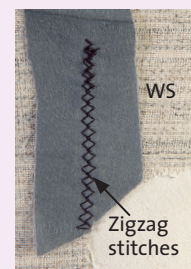
Tip

SHAPE WOOL. To shrink an area, use steam and lift and lower the iron over the target. To stretch wool, slide the iron back and forth with less steam.



3 Remove the fashion fabric from the canvas. Cut the canvas front along the chalk line. Measure and draw a line approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long on the canvas at the panel seamline. Mark and cut along this line. Overlap the cut's edges $\frac{1}{4}$ inch to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch to create a lapped dart in the canvas to shape it at the bustline. Match the shape to the jacket front and baste the dart. Place a scrap of muslin or pocketing under the lapped canvas, and zigzag the canvas layers and fabric together.

Back the lapped dart in the canvas front with a fabric scrap.



Sew a lapped dart with zigzag stitches in the canvas front at the bustline.

4 Cut the felt chest piece.

This layer rounds out the coat from the shoulder to the bustline. It lives between the canvas and the lining. Use the canvas as the cutting guide. Place the felt edge to the roll line. Draw around the armhole, across the shoulder and neckline. Measure up approximately $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches to 3 inches from the bust point and draw across from the armhole to the roll line to mark the felt chest piece's bottom edge.

5 Remove the chest pieces' armhole and shoulder line seam allowances. Position the chest piece on the corresponding canvas fronts. Use hand pad stitching to attach the chest pieces to the canvas fronts.



6 Make the pockets before attaching the canvas fronts. Stabilize the pocket placement on the fashion fabric's wrong side with silesia pocketing or fusible interfacing. Attach and complete your pockets of choice. Now you are ready to join the canvas fronts to the jacket shell.

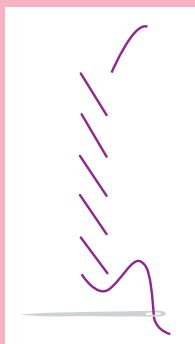


A canvas front prevents the jacket fabric from wrinkling or stretching.

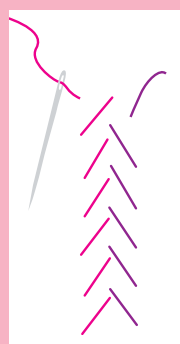
JOIN LAYERS WITH PAD STITCHING

The pad stitch is a diagonal stitch worked in parallel but staggered rows. It is used to join one or more layers of fabric. The lapels and undercollar are pad-stitched to retain their curvature. Pad stitching also adds firmness, and that is why it is used to attach the chest piece to the canvas front. Traditionally, silk thread is used to make these stitches that match in color to the fashion fabric so that the stitches don't show on the finished garment.

1 The stitch length is approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, changing to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch where a firmer material is required. Pick up a good $\frac{1}{8}$ inch to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of fabric with the needle, but don't fuss over the precise stitch length.



2 Stitch parallel to the roll line on the felt chest piece and from the roll line to the lapel's edge. Reduce the pad stitch size in the undercollar stand to reinforce the fabric from the roll line to the neck edge.



3 While you're stitching, hold the fabric layers draped over your opposite hand so the pad stitching will hold the curvature you want in the lapel or chest front you're stitching.



Join the layers

The jacket shell and the canvas fronts are now stitched together and treated as one. Some tailors work on a dress form to pad-stitch, but I was taught to work on the table and this is the technique I still use.

1 Place a canvas front on the table with the chest piece down. Now place the corresponding jacket front over the canvas, right side up. Baste the canvas front to the jacket front, working from the hem up the front to the lapel roll line, at the side-seam waistline, and around the armhole up to the shoulder.

2 Turn the jacket front over, and catch-stitch the canvas at the underarm. Cut the canvas back so that it sits under the pocket bag, if needed, and catch-stitch across the pocket top and down the pocket bag's front to the canvas. If your coat front is darted, cut the canvas along the dart stitching line and pull the dart value though the cut to the jacket interior. This will serve as a padding under the dart.



3 Pad-stitch the lapel. With an even tension (no thread pulling), work staggered pad stitches on the canvas from the roll line to the outer edge, but not into the seam allowance. The stitch size should change from approximately 1/2 inch long to 1/4 inch long at the lapel's edge.

4 Stabilize the lapel and front edge seam. Use linen or cotton 1/4-inch-wide stay tape. Start where the collar meets the lapel, and pin the tape within the stitching line to about 2 inches above the break point. Pull the tape to add tension over the break point. Continue to pin the tape down the coat front, adding tension again around the hem curve. Slipstitch both tape edges. Trim the canvas back to the tape.



Trim the canvas from the seam allowance to the stay tape.

SOURCES

Tailoring supplies and kits, patterns, and information:

BBlackAndSons.com

MacCulloch-Wallis.co.uk

Pamela-Powell.com

WilliamGee.co.uk

Finish the facings

It's important to get the correct cut and shape for the coat front facing so it rolls freely over the lapel. The facing's outer edge is cut on the straight of grain.

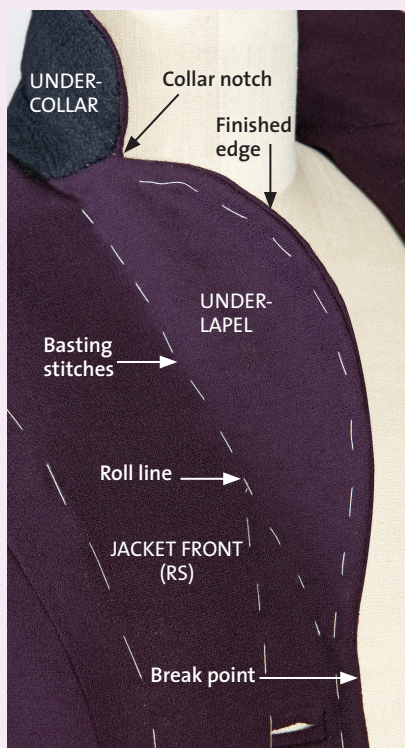
1 Make a paper pattern of the lapel edge. Pin the pattern onto the ironing table. With the fabric's right side down, place the lapel over the paper pattern. Work in small arcs to steam-press the fabric into the pattern's curve. This creates ripples of ease on the opposite side, which are easily steam-pressed out.

2 Place the facing's right side to the coat front's right side. Pin it in place and machine-stitch from the collar notch to the facing's bottom, using the taped edge as a guide. At the lapel tip, bring the facing's seam allowance down onto the tape. Tack it in place, and repeat with the other seam allowance side. Check that your stitches don't show through to the right side, then press. Repeat at the rounded hem. Press the rest of the seam allowances open.



3 Stabilize the hem allowance with 2-inch-wide hem facing. Then baste the hem up.

4 Turn the facing to the right side. Working with the front flat, begin at the collar notch and baste along the edge to the hem. Baste along the roll line, past the break point. Baste parallel to the edge, just past the buttonhole edges.



Baste around the lapel edge and along the roll line before adding the lining.

Hand-basting keeps the fitted canvas front and the fashion fabric together as you set the sleeves and add the lining.



5 Complete the jacket construction. Attach the side back panels to the coat front. Tack the shoulders together for a second fitting. Once alterations are made, baste the assembled lining to the coat front. Work and shape the undercollar before slipstitching it on. Set the sleeves before a third fitting. After any final alterations, finish the jacket.