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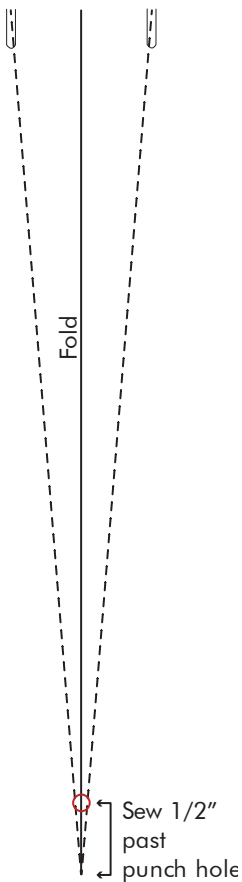
Sew It Seams - the Sewing Series

Installment 2 - Taking It In with Darts

In this article, we'll explore the basic single-point and double-point (fish-eye) darts, and how to sew them successfully.

Darts are one of a myriad of ways of "controlling fullness". Simply stated, darts help to transform an otherwise shapeless textile into a garment with contours.

Single-Point Dart



Darts have the following elements:

- Legs (the dashed sewing lines)
- Vanishing point (the point where the legs converge)

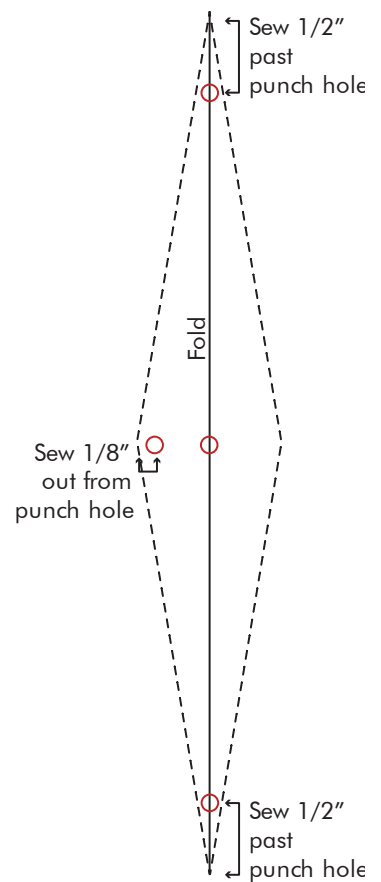
There are two basic types of darts:

- Single point (pictured to the left)
- Double point/Fish-eye (pictured at the right)

Classically, single point darts are found at and above the waist on the bodice and/or where it joins to at and below the waist on the skirt or trouser. They are always going to start at the edge of the fabric. Fish-eye darts are most often found with the "belly" – the largest part of the dart – at the waistline and radiate both up and down, helping to define the waistline. They most often are placed in a garment away from an edge. However, they can also start at the edge of the fabric.

The widest part of the dart intake is the place where the most fabric is taken in – for instance, at the waist. They usually narrow as they come toward full shapes (bust, hips, seat). Most usually, darts drop out before they reach the top of any mound.

Fish-Eye Dart



If there is a “standard” dart, it is the waist dart. But really, there is nothing standard about darts. The really cool thing is that darts can be shifted from one position to another, making them incredible design elements. (See the illustration to the left for optional dart placements on the front of a bodice. We’ll explore rotating darts to different positions in another article.)

In this article, we’ll explore the basic single-point and double-point (fish-eye) darts, and how to sew them successfully.

You may notice in the illustrations of the single and double-point darts the indication of “punch holes” (sometimes referred to as “back offs”). These are representative of a larger, standardized industrial sewing language used by the commercial world. This sewing language helps to expedite the sewing process in the factory. You will not find these punch holes (or back offs) on most patterns purchased for the home market.

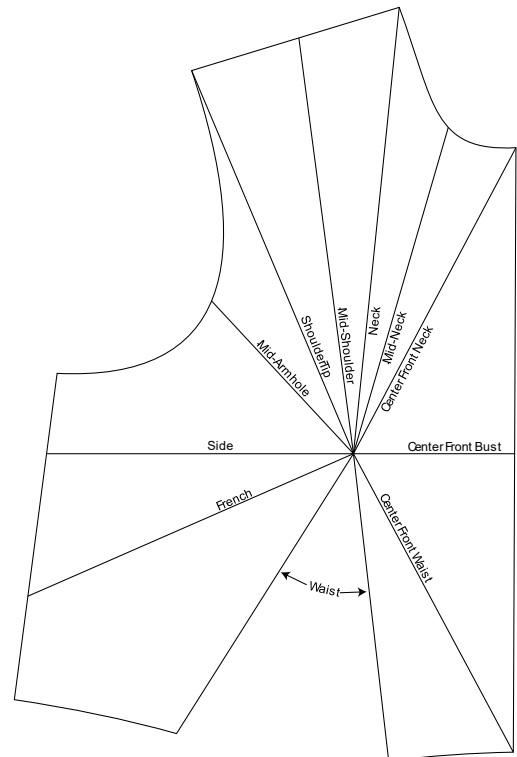
In the commercial world, fabric is laid out on long cutting tables, single-ply, and many layers deep. A “marker” (similar to patterns purchased at a fabric store with the exception that all pattern pieces are printed with the grain in the same direction as the lay of the fabric) is placed on top of these layers. A person with mad cutting skills, using the marker as a guide, cuts the pattern pieces with these incredible fabric saws (yes – many layers at a time!) Notches are cut at the same time. Punch holes follow, and are actual holes drilled into the fabric.

In combination with notches, punch holes provide information to the person sewing the garment. It’s part of a language and larger vocabulary of standardized industrial sewing construction. In most circumstances, the punch hole (the back off) is placed $\frac{1}{2}$ ” behind the vanishing point of the dart. (If the dart is very narrow, the punch hole must be placed further back so that it does not compromise the finished dart.)

On a fish-eye dart, there are additional punch holes: one that defines the depth of the dart take-up at the belly and another placed at the center of the belly. The latter correlates with the center and fold line of the dart. The former is placed $\frac{1}{8}$ ” inside of the sewing line at the widest part of the dart. In conjunction with the backoffs at the vanishing points of the dart, the person sewing the dart in factory knows:

1. to fold the legs of the dart together guided by the punch holes at the vanishing points at both ends and the one centered at the belly;
2. to begin sewing at the vanishing point at one end $\frac{1}{2}$ ” before the punch hole;
3. to sew $\frac{1}{8}$ ” outside of the punch hole at its widest point;
4. and to terminate $\frac{1}{2}$ ” after the punch hole at the vanishing point at the opposite end.

In the home market, most sewists don’t use punch holes or back offs. Often, the dart is marked on to the reverse (or wrong side) of the fabric. The legs are brought together, and the dart is sewn, starting at the edge of the fabric and terminating at the [vanishing] point of the dart.



With some basic understanding about darts, let's review some fundamentals on how to sew darts successfully.

With some exceptions, the legs of the dart are sewn in a straight line. However, this straight line is sewn at an angle to the folded edge of fabric. It doesn't seem like it would be but sewing straight lines angling from the edge of the fabric can be daunting. (Heck, sometimes sewing a straight line parallel to the edge of the fabric can be a workout!)

I'm going to share a couple of techniques with you that I find helpful.

First, I don't use backstitches. Instead, I always mark the vanishing point with a tailor tack. I thread-mark the leg notches, or I clip into the fabric. I prefer to thread-mark so as not to compromise the fabric.

To create a tailor tack:

1. Thread a needle, doubling the thread back on itself. Do not knot the thread ends.



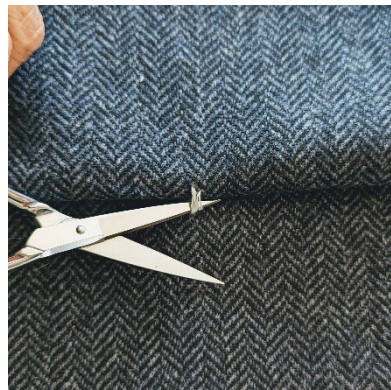
2. With fabric faces (right sides) together, at the vanishing point of the dart, catch a small bite of both layers of fabric then come right back up – no more than a few fibers away from the first bite.
3. Pass back through the first and second bites to create a small thread loop.



4. Gently pull the two layers of fabric apart until the loops on the reverse side disappear.



5. Carefully clip the threads between the face sides of the fabric.



- 6.

One of the cool things about tailor tacks is that the “whiskers” that are formed when cutting between the layers always identify the face (or right side) of the fabric. Even when I don’t have darts to sew, I will often place a tailor tack somewhere in the pattern piece when I have a fabric that doesn’t have an obvious face (or right) side.

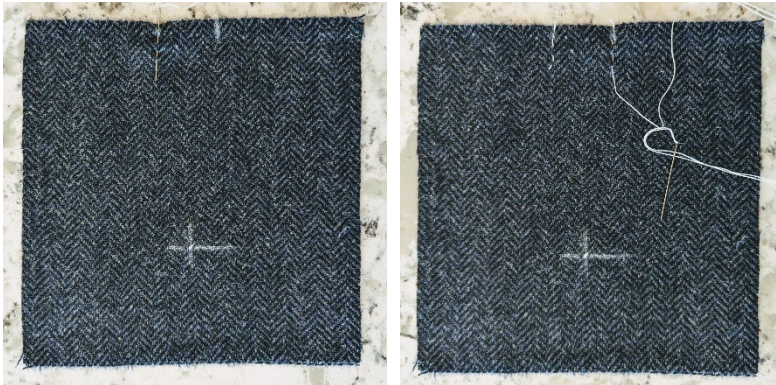


To create thread-marks to identify notches:

1. Thread a needle.
2. Mark the dart legs.



3. On each individual layer of fabric, at the notches, using one strand of thread, place 3 or 4 small running stitches perpendicular to the edge of the fabric at the middle of the notch.

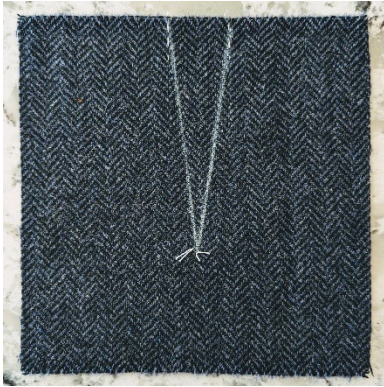


4. Clip the thread tails short to avoid pulling them out accidentally.

Here's another piece of helpful advice (learned the hard way): Use a different color of thread anytime you are placing temporary thread markings on a pattern piece. In this way, hopefully you'll avoid the same mistakes I've come across: pulling out the threads forgetting why I purposefully put them there in the first place!

Once tailor tacks and thread marks are placed, the darts are ready for sewing. However, there is another step that makes them absolutely flawless – and it's nearly magical!

1. On the face side of the fabric, mark the dart legs. Since the face side of the fabric is being marked, it is extremely important to use caution when marking. I use tailor's chalk that has no added dye or wax.



2. Thread a needle, doubling the thread back on itself. Make sure to use a length of thread allows you to complete the dart preparation. An arm's length should be sufficient.
3. On the face side of the dart, starting at the end of one dart leg, take a small running stitch – no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ " in length. Place the stitch just inside of the chalk line.



4. Pass directly across to the other dart leg, and repeat, placing the stitch just inside the chalk line.



5. Pass directly across to the first dart leg, and repeat. Repeat in this fashion until reaching the dart point.

6. Take a stitch at the dart point.



7. While holding on to the tail end and the needle end of the thread, pull on the thread ends to draw the dart legs together.



8. Once the legs are drawn up, this is what it looks like from the reverse side:



You're ready to sew!

1. For the single-point dart, I find it easiest to start at the legs and sew toward the vanishing point. Within about 1/2" of the vanishing point, instead of backstitching, shorten the stitch length. This

helps to reduce bulk. The threads can also be knotted.



2. For the double-pointed dart, start with long thread tails, holding them taught behind and underneath the presser foot. Instead of backstitching, shorten the stitch length for about the first 1/4". Repeat this procedure as you come to the vanishing point at the other end.
3. When pressing darts that run the length of the body, the dart take-up is most often pressed toward center front or center back. Since the intention of darts is to create shape in a garment, use a tailor's ham to press darts. Set the dart by pressing on the reverse side stopping short of the vanishing point.



4. Direct the dart take-up toward its finished position and press from the face side. To avoid wrinkles at the vanishing point, when pressing be careful to make sure the dart is smoothed across a section of the ham that has the same contour as the dart. The vanishing point should "vanish" into the fabric.



Until next time when we'll review dart manipulation, have a great day sewing!