

## Full or Small Bust Adjustments Tutorial

*More than you probably want to know!*



### When is a bust pattern adjustment a good idea?

Traditionally, patterns are drafted to accommodate a B-cup bra size. If you vary from that, you may want to consider making a bust adjustment. Whether it is advisable or necessary will depend on the style of the garment (fitted, slim, or oversized; woven or knit) and the amount that you vary from a B cup.

Many of the “big four” pattern companies are now including a small selection of garments that include pattern pieces for B, C & D cups, which could be an option if you are averse to making a bust adjustment but need a FBA. Independent pattern companies will vary on what they offer. There are several independents that also have B-D cup sizing. Other independent companies may have a certain type of customer that they strive to serve - be that curvy figures, petite figures, pear shapes, apple shapes or full busted. There may be less standardization among independents, and it is wise to know the customer base that patterns are drafted for before selecting a pattern. Some independent companies’ drafting guidelines are listed on this chart

<http://www.freenotion.com/blog/2015/6/16/theres-a-designer-for-that>

### How can I tell if a bust adjustment is needed?

If the clothes you make (or buy) show these characteristics, you may want to consider a full bust adjustment (FBA):

- Fabric in the bust area strains, buttons gap or there are strain lines between breasts.
- There is excessive fullness between the armhole and the bust or armhole gapping
- Diagonal drag lines from the bust toward the side seam
- When a pattern is selected to accommodate the bust circumference, the rest of the upper bodice (neckline, shoulders, or upper chest) is too large or sloppy looking.
- Side seams pull toward the front at bust level
- Hemlines in the front are shorter than in the back

*Fitting is both an art  
and a science!*

This tutorial evolved from research for a presentation to my local ASG chapter.

I have no formal education on pattern design...but I have relatively narrow shoulders/upper chest and have worn a DD or larger bra cup since 7<sup>th</sup> grade!!!

The techniques included here are what I have found to work best *for me* over the years as I have learned better how to fit “the girls” from *many* books, online resources and other sewers. In sewing there is almost always more than one way to get a similar result. Find what works for you!

--Diane

If the clothes you make (or buy) show these characteristics, you may want to consider a small bust adjustment (SBA):

- An excess of fabric width in the bust area that “overwhelms” the wearer
- There are wrinkles at bust level and/or vertical folds in the bodice front
- When a pattern is selected to accommodate the bust circumference, the upper bodice is too small or appears skimpy.
- Hemlines in the front are longer than in the back

Of, course, the most surefire way to determine if a bust adjustment is needed on a particular pattern is to make a muslin (but we all know that doesn't always happen!)

### **Why add or change a dart?**

Because the bust protrudes outward from the body, a dart is designed to add depth to the front of the garment to accommodate that “bump.” Often, a darted garment provides a sleeker and more flattering fit. If you are full-busted, it helps pull the bottom of the garment closer to the body, eliminating that “maternity top” look when fabric falls straight from the bust point.

When you do a FBA or a SBA or add a dart to a garment that lacks one, it does several important things:

1. Adds or deletes circumference of the garment at bust height
2. Adds or deletes the length of fabric that goes over the bust
3. Corrects the depth added to the garment to be more commensurate with your bust size.

### **Selecting a pattern size**

If you are doing a FBA or adding a dart to an undarted pattern, choose your pattern according to your high bust measurement. You will be adding fullness to the bust, and a smaller size will likely be more attuned to your shoulder/neck size. Take the high bust measurement around your back, snug under arms and *above* the bust.

If you are doing a SBA, I would suggest selecting a pattern by full bust size. Though most fitting resources address FBA, few address SBA. However, in nearly all situations, doing the opposite of a FBA should work (instead of spreading, simply overlap the tissue.) Admittedly, I have little experience in SBA, but the few resources I found led me to believe this is true!

## How to do a basic bust adjustment OR Add a dart to an existing pattern that lacks one

*The illustrations show adjusting a darted pattern, but the exact same steps will add a dart to a pattern that does not include a dart. Similarly, the illustrations show a FBA where the tissue is spread. For a SBA, the tissue would overlap instead.*

### Determine your bust point.

Many patterns mark the bust point. But if it is not marked or you know from experience your bust point may not be where the pattern indicates, you can simply hold the pattern up to your body and mark a new bust point. But if you routinely do a bust adjustment, it is handy to know your specific measurements. The bust point will be the point of the breast that protrudes the farthest (wearing a good bra) and may or may not correspond to the position of your nipple.

1. Measure from shoulder point below your ear lobe to bust point and note that distance on chart to right.



2. Measure between bust points and note that distance on chart to right.



3. Transfer your bust point to your pattern and mark with a



#### Where's my bust point?

Shoulder point to bust

\_\_\_\_\_

Bust point to bust point

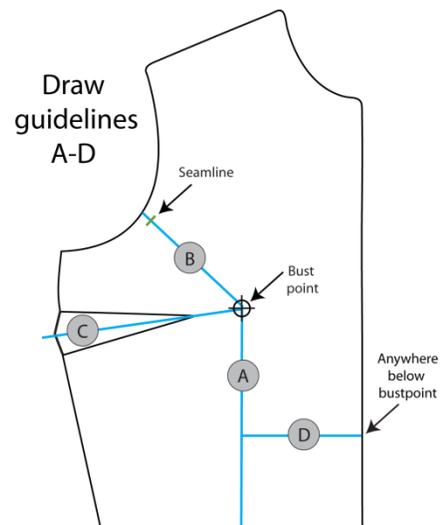
\_\_\_\_\_

Divide by 2 to get  
measurement from center  
front of pattern to bust  
point

\_\_\_\_\_

### Draw reference guidelines

1. Draw a line from the bust point to the bottom of the pattern piece parallel to the grain line (A).
2. Draw a line from the bust point to approximately one-third the way up the armhole, usually the notch (B). Mark the seamline at the underarm on this guideline.



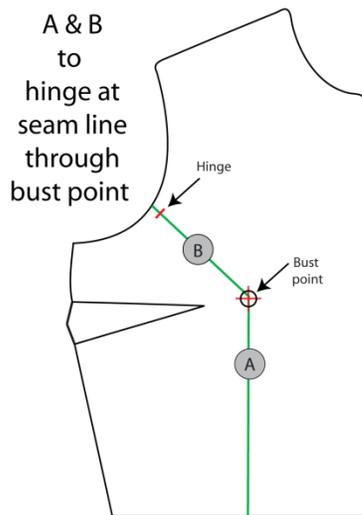
3. Draw a line through the center of the dart to the bust point (C). If you are adding a dart to a pattern that lacks one, estimate the center of the dart you want to add,

4. Draw a horizontal line from the vertical line to the center front (D). This line can be anywhere below the bust point.

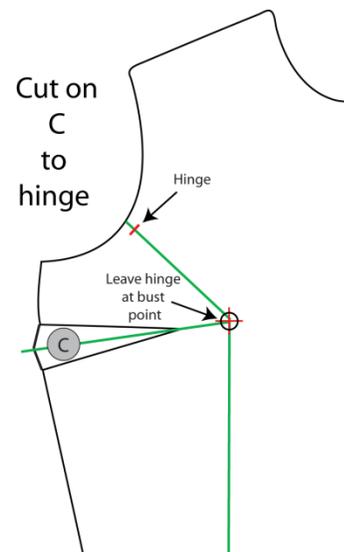
## Slash pattern

Place the pattern on a pinnable board or have weights available to hold the pattern in place as it is cut.

1. Cut from the bottom of the garment to the bust point (A). Continue cutting through the bust point to **but not through** the armhole seamline (B) leaving a hinge of tissue. Snip from the cutting line to the seamline at the armhole to allow the hinge to spread at the seamline.



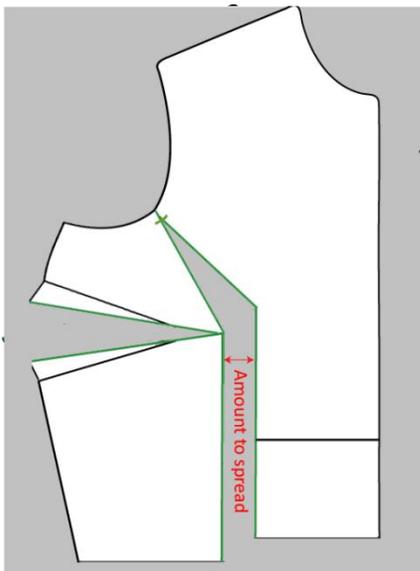
2. Cut from the edge of the pattern to **but not through** the bust point (C), leaving a hinge of tissue at the bust point.



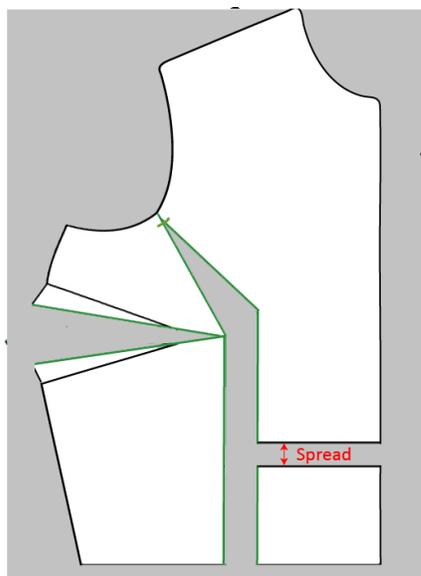
3. Leave line D uncut for now.

## Spread (FBA) or overlap (SBA) the pattern.

1. Anchor with pins or weight the neckline portion of the pattern above the slashes.
2. Spread or overlap the pattern the required amount (see box for guidance), keeping the vertical slash edges parallel. The bust dart will open or diminish as the pattern is spread or overlapped. Anchor the pieces, fill any gaps with tissue and tape in place.



3. **Now** cut along horizontal line (D) and align with the newly adjusted hemline. Fill any gap and tape in place, being careful to keep the center front edge aligned.



### *How much do I spread or overlap?*

The amount you will spread for FBA will be half the difference between your high bust and full bust measurement.

Full bust Measurement \_\_\_\_\_

*minus*

High bust measurement \_\_\_\_\_

Difference \_\_\_\_\_

*Divide by 2*

Amount to spread \_\_\_\_\_

**OR**, use these *general* guidelines:

A - 3/8"

C +1/2"

D +3/4"

larger than D +1-1/4" or more

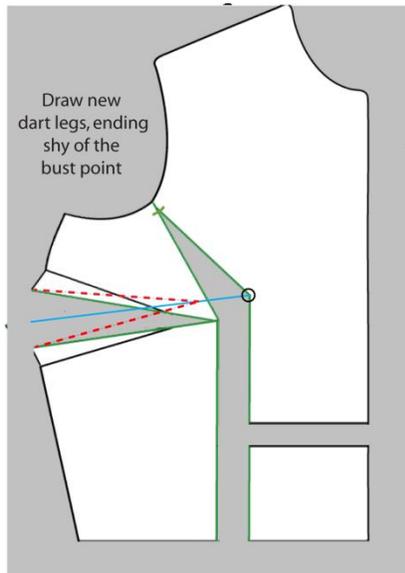
Alternately, if you made a muslin, measure the gap or overlap at the bust line level at center front and spread half of that amount.

Some judgment can be used based on the style, type of the garment or fabric choice. For example, you may want a slightly lesser amount on a knit tee and the full amount on a fitted, woven bodice.

## Draw in new dart stitching lines

The sewn point of the dart ends shy of the bust point and does NOT extend to the bust point.

1. Draw in new dart stitching lines from the side seam pointing to the bust point, ending short of the bust point the recommended amount or your individual preference. You can fine tune where the dart ends during fitting, if need be.

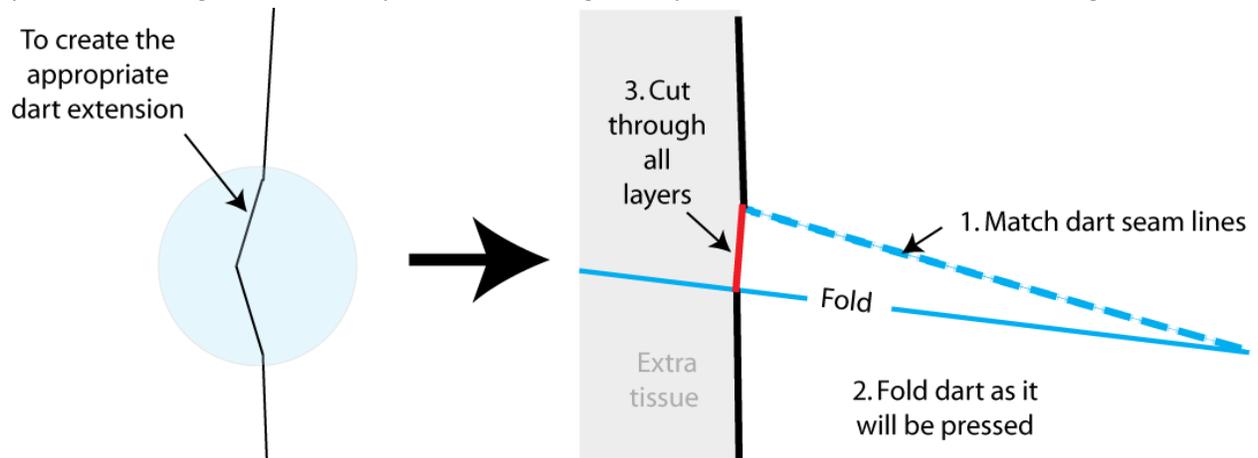


### General Guidelines for end of bust dart legs

A-C cup	1" from bust point
D cup	1 ½" from bust point
DD cup	2" from bust point
larger than D	2" or more

## Create dart extension, true seams and SEW!

1. Create the appropriate dart extension for your pattern. Fold out the newly created dart as it will be pressed. Holding folded dart in place, trim through all layers to form the correct dart cutting line.



2. Extend cutting lines at any gaps.

3. Analyze if the changes you have made will affect any adjoining pattern pieces. "Walk" or measure adjoining seamlines and adjust as needed.

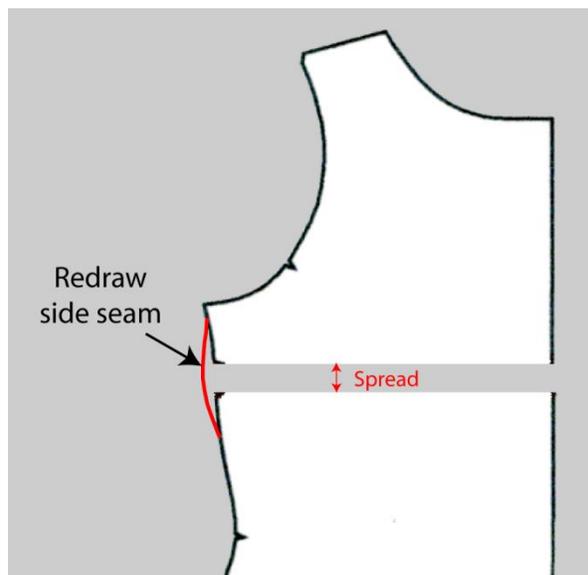
**4. During construction, mark and pin out dart. Try on. Make any needed adjustments in the depth and position of the dart. Transfer any changes to the pattern. Sew the dart.**

5. Press the dart over a tailor's ham or folded towel to maintain shaping. Though we have all been taught to press bust darts down, if you have a larger bust, try pressing the dart up instead. This tends to "fill" any hollow above the bust and not add additional fabric bulk to the fuller bust.

## A Knit Alternative

There is nothing that says a knit garment can't have a dart! But, if you don't have a large adjustment to make or really don't want a dart for a FBA, here's an alternative to try.

1. Slice the pattern horizontally at the bust point level.
2. Spread the pattern and add approximately 1" in length.
3. At the bust point level, measure out approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Draw a gentle curve from that point to blend with the side seams. This will be your new cutting line.
4. Pin the seams as normal above the "bubble" you have made in the seam. When sewing, gently stretch the back to ease in the excess fabric at the front. Most knits will easily stretch enough so that there are no or few puckers at the seam, but this gives you a little more room at the bust line.



## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: My dart ended up too high or too low? How do I alter the pattern?**

**A:** Draw a box around the dart, cut out the box and simply move that piece up or down the needed amount. Fill the gap with tissue and blend the new side seams. Minor adjustments can often be changed during fitting, but you will want to make the change or note that change on the pattern for future use.

**Q: A bust adjustment adds or subtracts circumference throughout the pattern piece. What if I don't have a waistline seam and I don't need that change in the waist and hips?**

**A:** Before doing the bust adjustment, cut the pattern horizontally midway between the bust point and the waistline. Do the bust adjustment as described. When done, tape the bottom and top back together matching center front. Blend the side seam. **OR**, make the adjustment on the full pattern piece and remove any additional circumference when fitting

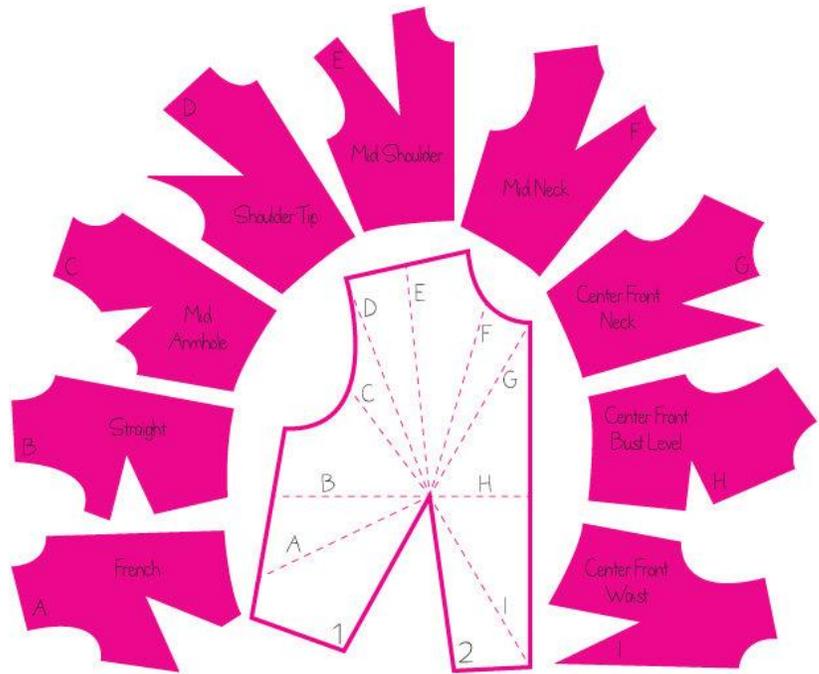
**Q: What if I don't want a "regular" "horizontal bust dart?"**

**A:** Once you have a "regular" bust dart, it is easy to move it! Make the bust adjustment as described.

You can change the location by rotating the dart to a new position as shown in the diagram. A dart can be rotated from the bust point to *any* pattern piece edge.

**Quick how-to:**

- Make dart adjustment
- Slash pattern to new position of dart to **but not through** dart point
- Close the "regular" bust dart to open up a new dart
- Redraw dart legs, ending shy of the bust point



Melly Sews tutorial & video on dart rotation:

<https://mellysews.com/2017/05/rotate-darts-sewing-patterns.html>

Diagram from burdastyle.com

**Q: What if I need the bust adjustment, but do not want to add a dart?**

**A:** A dart doesn't need to be a dart! The fullness of the dart can be converted to a pleat or pleats, gathers, or pin tucks! In this case, you can rotate the dart from the side seam to shoulder gathers or add a yoke and incorporate fullness below the yoke. Or, rotate to small pleats at the neckline of a T shirt or gathers at the center front of a blouse. This is where you can get creative.

There are also multiple ways to adjust a pattern without adding a dart. If making a larger adjustment, I would suggest **not** picking an adjustment that adds only circumference without adding length for the best results. I like Louise Cutting's method for a no dart FBA (*warning*: you need to be a Threads Insider member (a paid online subscription) to view this link.)

<https://www.threadsmagazine.com/2012/07/03/pattern-adjustment-for-a-full-bust-without-darts>

**Q: I have a large FBA, which makes a very deep dart. Are there alternatives?**

**A:** If you have a very large FBA (more than 2-1/2" or 3"), you might consider rotating part of the dart to another location (for example, a shoulder dart in addition to a regular dart) or split the fullness into two side by side darts (just be sure that both dart legs end within 2" or so of the bust point.) Or, use a Y-dart FBA, which adds an additional slash over which to spread fullness. See the Curvy Sewing Collective's

tutorial on *Large FBA adjustment: The Y-dart FBA* at  
<http://curvysewingcollective.com/large-fba-solution-the-y-dart-fba/>

**Q: How do you do a bust adjustment on an extended shoulder or dolman sleeve?**

**A:** Estimate where the shoulder seam would be and lop off the extension or sleeve at that point with a straight line and set aside. Continue with the bust adjustment as described, estimating the position of the armhole slash. Line up the extension or sleeve at the top and bottom of the adjusted bodice and tape in place. You will likely have a small gap between the body and the sleeve – just fill that in with tissue.

**Q: My pattern has a front yoke or multiple pieces that make up the front. How do I do a full bust adjustment, then?**

**A:** Temporarily tape the pattern pieces together and follow the instructions for a bust adjustment, making the appropriate changes to *each* pattern piece. If the pattern pieces don't quite fit together throughout (i.e. curved seams that you can't match precisely), just make sure that they match at the location of the slashes and do the best you can. Carefully check seam lengths of adjoining seams ("walk" the seams or measure) and make any adjustments as needed.

**Q: I have a pattern with unusual style lines and I can't quite figure out how to do a FBA or a SBA?**

**A:** This may take some serious thinking, but is usually doable... The key points to remember are

- the bust dart legs (or pleat, gathers or pin tucks) must end at the seam line of a pattern piece
- the dart legs should end no farther than 1 ½" – 2" of the bust point
- Always true and walk seams to ensure they still match after making adjustments and modify as needed.

If you are lucky enough to have a seam line that is within *about 3"* of the bust point, the fullness can be built in there. You may have to do some brainstorming and may need to do a little more slicing and dicing of the pattern, but there is usually a way.... often using dart rotation to move the fullness to an existing seam or another location where a sewn dart will not interfere with the style lines. This can be a real "head-scratcher" but also a way for a creative solution.

**Q: I have a darted pattern, but would really like a princess seam. Can I convert it?**

**A:** .Make any bust adjustments *before* you convert it to a princess seam.  
Jenny Rushmore did a good segment on "it's Sew Easy" on how make a darted pattern into an armscye princess seam: [https://youtu.be/l\\_jfv6ldvHE](https://youtu.be/l_jfv6ldvHE)

This longer video covers both princess seams and armscye seams: [https://youtu.be/bz7\\_mYxgO1U](https://youtu.be/bz7_mYxgO1U)

**Q: How do I do a FBA or SBA on a princess seam?**

**A:** There are multiple ways to do this. Many resources suggest "free hand" drawing additional width to the center front piece and lengthening the side piece to match. Personally, I have had better luck adding

a dart and rotating that dart to the curved seam. As with most FBA, the opposite would apply for a SBA, with overlaps instead of spreads.

Jenny Rushmore, from Cashmerette patterns (designed for curvy figures) has a great BluPrint (formerly Craftsy) class on FBAs, including princess seams. This tutorial shows you how:

<https://shop.mybluprint.com/sewing/article/how-to-make-a-full-bust-adjustment/>

The Curvy Pattern Collective also has a good tutorial on this:

<http://curvysewingcollective.com/princess-seams-an-fba-for-large-busts/>

## Resources

- Google & You Tube are your best friends! But as with anything on the internet, there can be **BAD** info. Search for info from a respected sewing instructor or a pattern designer for best results.
- Nearly any basic reliable fitting book will show how to do a full bust adjustment. The depth and level of detail however can vary (i.e. does it cover princess seams adjustments, etc.)

**These are available in the Central Iowa ASG library & can be checked out by members:**

*Fit for Real People*, Palmer & Pletsch

*Perfect Fit*, Singer Sewing Library

*Full Busted? Sew Clothes That Fit* - An excellent video featuring Marta Alto from Palmer & Pletsch

Likely there are others within our library that cover these adjustments, but I know that these are both relatively comprehensive.

## Confused or questions?

**Central Iowa ASG Chapter members:** I would be happy to answer any questions, if I **have** an answer!

[E-mail me](#)

**Other internet users who stumble upon this tutorial:**

- Please don't e-mail me with questions. Do your own research ... there is lots of info out there!
- Do [e-mail](#) for permission to share this info with your guild chapter or elsewhere.