

Making a Body-Matching Dress Form

Part one:

Materials: There is a separate list for part two,

- Duct tape – 3 rolls is recommended; the original silver kind is best (and cheapest)
- Scissors
- Some paper towels or box of tissues – to add to neck lin
- Sharpie marker
- Stuffing
- Measuring tape, construction type rather than dress makers type, yard stick is even better.
- A tight-fitting T-shirt – it **WILL** be destroyed in the process of making the dress form, you want it fitting well around your armpits and chest and waist, not baggy.
- Tight fitting, thin shorts – leggings type, or have the T-shirt very long, below your crotch, the shorts *might* also be destroyed in the process of making this.
- Wear the undergarments you would normally wear for the type of dress form you are making. For example, if you are making a dress form for an Italian Ren gown, you should wear a corset that compresses your bust, just as you would use under the actual gown. You will want different dress forms for different styles clothing, depending on the undergarments used.
- Wear the same shoes (or type of shoes) you expect to use with the finished style dress, or something as close as possible – epically regarding heel height.
- Heavy cardboard or thin plywood about a 3” square
- Some **cold water bottles** – it gets pretty hot under all the duct tape as the process goes along.
- **Bring a good friend! This is a two-person project; you will need a tapee (person getting the dress form) and the taper (person doing the taping). You will get up close and personal during this project, so choose wisely. It is the taper who will do most of the work, and the tapee who will suffer from the heat and from standing still for so long.**

Procedures:

1. Wearing the undergarments and shoes of your choice, as well as a tight fitting long T-shirt and possibly shorts, you will stand still while your partner covers you with tape. You get the job of handing him/her strips of cut tape, as long as you are able to – lucky you!

Note - If this is to be used for a specific style dress, Italian Ren., for example, you will need a corset under the dress. You should make the corset first and wear it while making this dress form. That way you can fit the dress properly to your corseted figure. Different time periods and arras used a variety of different corset styles, so you might need several dress forms if you make a variety of dress styles.

2. Your partner will put the tape on you in strips about 18"-24" long to start with, keeping the tape snug to your body. *These short sections of tape will reduce the chance of wrinkles and will form to your body's shape better than a long piece.* Circle the body just under the bust, two of three slightly overlapping layers.

3. Make an "X" between the breasts – up over the shoulders and down the back in another "X", as seen in figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1



Figure 2

4. A few more strips will be added to the top to define the bust (figure 3), then the waist to the lower edge is done in mostly horizontal strips, the lower edge should be below the crotch. There should be about four – five layers of tape.



Figure 3

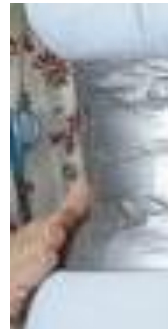


Figure 4

Don't make it to tight (like in figure 4) or the dress form will not work well for you. The "bulges" will make a distorted dress form.

Drink some water about now, as Morwenna would say, you will be sure to be hot wrapped up in all this tape by this point!

The reason we do the lower half of the body first is to try and keep you as cool as possible for as long as possible, you will get hot faster as the top is done.

4. Next fill in around and over the back and chest, again doing about 4 layers of tape. These will be mostly diagonal in direction. Pay special attention around the neck and arms. Figures 5-7



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

Try to have the tape edges match the actual edges of the arm seam on your t-shirt.

5. When you are getting near the arm area, move your arms away from your body a bit, so tape can be placed under your arm near the arm pit. Put the tape to just under the armpit; do not put it too low, if the T-shirt fits well, use the T-shirt seam as a guide where to put the tape. It (the T-shirt) can be cut to fit better if needed. **Use short sections of tape here 2"-4" long. Sometimes only an inch or so is needed to get the correct curve see Figures 8.**



Figure 8

Figure 10 shows how to hold the arms away from the body a bit, and how the tape should fit under the arm area. **On the top side of the shoulders, make sure you don't pull too tightly down; it will cause an artificially sloped shoulder line.**

Probably time for some more water – keep Morwenna happy.

6. Wrap short bits of tape around the upper arm, making a short sleeve that is separate from the rest of the dress form you just made (3-4 thickness of tape); put the tape just up to the seam line of the t-shirt which should also be just up to the body of the dress form. *Once that is done*, join the sleeve to the rest of the form using small strips of tape. In the under arm area you will need bits of tape no longer than an inch or so.

I fold those bits of tape in half with the sticky part up and then apply them to join the two pieces. It will take a lot of these bits, and you will need to go over this “joining area” 3-4 times, each time with little bits of tape. See figures 9 and 10.



Figure 9



Figure 10

It seems like a lot of fuss, but these small pieces will conform to the correct shape far better than bigger strips. If the dress form does not fit it isn't much use.

Figure 9 shows the angle the arm should be at for the finished dress form, about 45 degrees from the body. You will have to lift it a bit (figure 10) to get the bits of tape under there, but when finished it should hold the position of figure 9.

Probably time for some more water – keep Morwenna happy.

7. At the neck, use paper towels or tissues to fill in above the t-shirt up to the chin, (figure 10); tape the paper down to the body first, then form it around the neck with your hands (*avoid the temptation to throttle the person who is now very hot and tired and probably complaining*). Finally apply the tape to produce a “turtle neck” style neck line (figure 11). Use 3-4 inch strips of tape on the neck – the curvier it is, the shorter the tape needs to be.



Figure 11



Figure 12

8. Once four-five layers of tape are on the body and neck, it's time to make some markings.

Water? again? I know you are hot! And I'm sure Morwenna is watching.

9. Carefully outline the arm holes with a sharpie- try to get these lines where the T-shirt seam was, where you will have an actual seam in your dress making (figure 13). It is easiest to mark it accurately while you are wearing the form. This will make sewing a lot easier later on, no need to guess where the shoulder and arm seams should be.



Figure 13

10. Mark where the clavicle bones are (collar bones), then make a curved line to connect them, and bring that line to the t-shirt collar line at the sides and back. This will be a “standard” neckline marking. You can either make it higher or lower depending on the garb you are making, but this line will serve as a starting or reference point for you.

11. Lean to the left, as if doing a “side bend”. Mark a mark on the dress form where the fold occurs in the tape, Do the same on the right. Lean to the front as if touching your toes (not that far) and mark that spot, if possible do the back as well. Connect these marks with a sharpie (figure 14 and 15) to mark your natural waist line.



Figure 14



Figure 15

12. Last mark – ****** Make sure you are wearing your shoes when doing these next marks- I know you kicked them off at some point in this process! You should have the shoes on that you would normally wear with the type garb you plan to make using this dress form, that way the dress form will hang properly when you are using it.******

About three or so inches above the lower of the dress form, in the center of the front, make a mark with the sharpie. Measure from that mark to the floor, and write that number of inches you get on the dress form above that mark. Make a series of marks all around the dress form at that same place, i.e., **at the same distance from the floor** (figure 16). Connect these marks to make a line that goes all around the dress form, at the same height from the floor. Trust me, doing this well will save you tons of time later in your dress sewing.



Figure 16

Now let's get that hot thing off you! You might want to do this part in a private area.

13. Carefully cut up the back of the dress from the lowest edge all the way to the neck. Cut through the T-shirt (and shorts – if using shorts) BUT do not cut the underclothing – that could be embarrassing!

IF you can slide your arms out, do that. If not, make a horizontal cut from the center of the back, where you just cut, along the back of the arm to the end of the sleeve. Do the same for the other side and take the dress form off. Be careful not to let it get crunched. (You can get dressed now).



Figure 17

14. Carefully bring the cut edges together, just till they meet. Do not overlap them. Tape the cuts edges together with **just enough tape** to hold them; we will add more tape during part two. Soft stuff it now to help it keep its shape until part two – it will be removed then, so don't over do it. Don't let it get crushed or fold up. It will be impossible to get the correct shape if you do.

15. Even up the sleeve and neck edges, then even up the bottom edge, but don't cut close to the line you marked. After you trim the edges, reinforce them with some extra tape.

16. Plicae the dress form onto a bit of heavy cardboard or plywood and trace the shape at the bottom of it. It will not be a perfect oval, but that is OK. It must be exactly the shape it wants to be since that is YOUR shape. Cut this shape out and insert it carefully into the bottom of the dress form. Figures 18 and 19. Tape it a bit to hold. You will take it apart later. The dot in the center of figure shows about where the pole will go later.



Figure 18

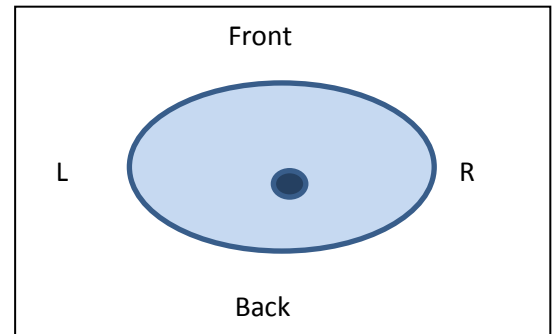


Figure 19

Part Two: Stuffing and mounting the dress form

1. Materials: Duct tape – partial roll is enough
2. Scissors, regular size
3. Measuring tape
4. Stuffing for the dress form – do NOT use paper – it will wilt and mold, and over times compresses too much. Not bubble wrap either, it pops and becomes too small for the space. Best thing is a lot of quilt batting – but that is expensive; I have used several cheap pillows from Walmart. Just pull the stuffing out of the cover. You need a lot of stuffing because you want the dress form to be as rock solid as you can get it so it holds its shape. NOTE - NOT A FEATHER PILLOW! *Squish up the pillow and see how small it gets, then figure out how many you need. **DON't use spray foam** – it expands too much and will deform the dress form.*

plastic sheet insulation like you get at a Home Depo type store. It should be firm, not break, and have a bit of flexibility. You will need enough to cover the arm holes, neck hole and the hole at the bottom of the dress form.

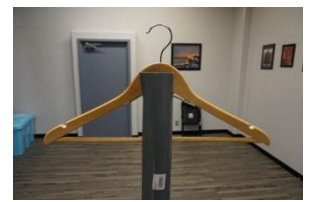
5. Exacto knife or box cutter to cut the cardboard or other material you choose.
6. Some PVC pipe 3" – 4" diameter or something similar. It should be long enough to go from the ground to your chin – whatever that measurement is.
7. A stand for the PVS pipe. A cheap Christmas tree stand is ideal, but any stand will work.
8. A sturdy wooden coat hanger NOT a wire one.
9. A hack saw or jig saw (with extension cord, IF there is electricity near by)
10. A carpenter's level

This is also best done with a friend, it's hard to hold things in place and tape them at the same time.

Procedures:

1. Make a slit in the top of the pipe, about 1/3 of the way back and about 3-4 inches deep, or as deep as needed. It should be just wide enough accommodate the thickness of the wooden hanger. Test to be sure the hanger will fit into the slot and stay upright. You will need the jig saw or hack saw for this.

An alternative method is to make the slot only about 1.5-2 inches deep. Remove the bar at the bottom of the hanger (it can be done). Drill two holes for the bar. Insert it through the holes and reattach to the hanger; this is how it has been done in the photographs. You can remove the hanger for now, but it



is not necessary. *This can be done before your come to class to make things move a long a bit faster if you want, it can be a bit fiddly.*

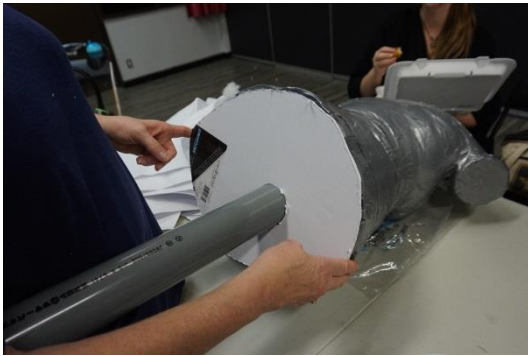
2. Take the cardboard off the bottom of the dress form. Be sure to mark the front and back left and right side so it can go back on correctly. Now you will need to make a hole, to match the same size and shape as the pole you are using. This hole should be centered between the left and right sides, BUT it should be off center, towards the back a bit. About 1/3 the distance between the back and the front. Set this aside for now. See figure 19 in part one.
3. Take the stuffing out for a minute, then slide the pipe into the dress form, with the hanger attached. Have it go all the way up so the shoulders are hanging from the hanger in a natural position. Now put the stuffing back in, around the pipe. Not too tight at this time, keep it loose. Your aim is to partially fill up the cavity, but leave enough room so you can position the pipe.



4. Put the pipe (with dress form attached) into the stand and use the level to get it as straight as you can, then tighten it so it stands on its own. Once it is standing upright, stuff the body from the bottom tightly, so the pipe is held in place by the stuffing and the dress form appears to be in the correct position on the pipe. You will fine tune this later, but get it a good as you can. Stuff some at the top, but not too tightly yet, fill the arms with stuffing too.
5. Now cut out two circles from the cardboard to correspond to the arm holes. It is easiest to cut out a square that is a bit larger than the arm hole, then hold the square to the arm hole and trace around it. Do each arm individually because often one arm is a bit larger than the other. Inset the cardboard into the arm hole about 1/2 inch and tape in place. After both arm holes are covered securely finish stuffing the arms tightly, then fill in the rest of the top up to the neck. ****** You want it firm so it holds it shape when you apply a bit of pressure, otherwise it will cave in when you try and use it. BUT not so tight you distort the shape.******



6. While one person holds the dress form upside down, or on its side, and the other person should make sure it is well stuffed, (paying attention to the bust area). Slide the cut cardboard over the protruding pipe, and then insert this into the bottom of the dress form a bit, making sure the front and back and sides all match up, using the labels you wrote on the cardboard. Make the dress form fits the cardboard, do not change the cardboard to fit the dress form. You might have to stretch and pry a bit, but it will go on. Fold the edges of the duct tape over the cardboard edges and tape them down.



7. Finish off by making sure the neck is stuffed. You can use another piece of cardboard here, or tape over it to seal it off. Make sure the hanger is securely taped to the dress form as well. Set the dress form back into the stand.
8. Measure from the bottom line that you marked earlier on the dress form to the floor. Now go around the dress form and tip it so it is even everywhere from the floor to the line. To achieve this, you will move the shoulders of the dress form back and forth or left and right) over the hanger or by moving the pole in the stand, until all is all even. You will need to do that each time you set the dress form and pipe into the stand.

When using the dress form you should be able to find the neck line and armholes placement easily. One of the nicest features of setting up the stand this way is when you mark a hem. Since you know it is even, and you know the distance to the floor from the marked line, you can easily mark hems for your own dress while it is on the form and not have to wear it while someone else pins it for you.

Just a reminder – if you will use a farthingale or big petty coat with your dress, make them first, and put them onto the dress form before you make the dress, that way the dress will fit over the under layers correctly. The same goes with hemming. Have the dress over the under layers on the dress form before you pin up the hem.

Guys – if you will wear any padded under layers, or a shirt under a doublet, put those layers on the form before you fit the outer layer – that will make sure you get enough room for the outer garment to fit over the under garment.

Special thanks to Lady Maelona Tegmaen for being my model, and to Lord Joshua McCorkle and Lord Otto Spilman, OP for their assistance with all the photographs.