

PART 1: BEGINNING DRAPING

Introduction

Learning to drape is a crucial skill for a designer; it is the primary tool for developing a signature style and flair. For the beginning designer, however, it can be daunting and in Part 1 of this book the emphasis is on engaging students in the draping process, making it seem accessible, easy, and creative.

Although fine draping is a couturiere's art, draping is also something people have done for themselves for centuries – creating beautiful, practical shapes from simple lengths of woven cloth. In section 1.1: Draping the Woven Panel the aim is to show students how easily two-dimensional fabric can be turned into a three-dimensional garment. In section 1.2: Dresses the essential basics of darting and seaming are introduced with exercises that are challenging, but which will prepare students for the Audrey Hepburn sheath dress project. Section 1.3: Corsets involves draping very close to the mannequin, something students appear to do naturally. This section is actually easier than the previous one, as simply moulding the muslin/calico to the mannequin only needs to be done smoothly with attention to how to remove pulls and wrinkles. Students' manual dexterity will improve with the intensive pinning, clipping, and fitting.

While it is essential for students to master the technical skills introduced in these first three sections before moving on to more complex techniques, it is just as vital that they learn the subjective skill of observation. Being able to recognize specific grainlines, see good composition as it relates to proportion and silhouette, and identify the mood and tone of a design are all important.

1.1: Draping the Woven Panel

Objectives: The main goal of the draping projects in this section is to introduce students to basic techniques, to teach sensitivity and dexterity in handling fabric, and to provide valuable exercises for developing an eye for proportion and balance.

General Guidance:

- The photographs for the exercises and draping project are intended to be a proportion guide for your students' drapes. Often students see these proportions slightly differently and, even when attempting to follow these set examples, tend to come up with different results. While this is a healthy indication that they are beginning to develop their own personal style, it is important to point out how their look varies from that of the example.
- After a group finishes their drapes, it is useful to do a review or critique and let the students observe each other's work. Pointing out subtle differences in the drapes will help them hone their observational skills.

Student Pitfalls:

- It is important while draping to be constantly aware of grainline directions. Students will often confuse the length and horizontal grains so it is a good idea to suggest that they use a small arrow to indicate the lengthgrain when marking the muslin initially (pages 20-22). When draping, the drape may sometimes not look quite right; the muslin piece may have been turned 90 degrees and will need correcting.
- Beginning to work with gathering can be awkward and often results in fabric that is bunching and uneven. Demonstrate the technique of pulling the fabric on both sides of the elastic so that students can observe close-up how this evens out the gathers.
- A common mistake is pinning in the wrong direction. Remind students that the pin enters the fabric at the folded edge, and that the pins should be perpendicular to the seamlines. Pinning properly will help to reduce puckering and improve the appearance of the drape.

Teaching Hints:

- Make sure each student's fabric is perfectly on-grain and well pressed; this will teach the important skill of recognizing grainlines. Encourage students to spend time

manipulating the fabric, experimenting with how it moves and drapes.

- Demonstrate an awkward proportion so that students can see how much better the drape looks when a good proportion is achieved.
- Observe the accuracy with which students are marking their grainlines, the neatness of their pinning, and smoothness of their cutting. Steer them towards time-efficient and concise methods of working.
- Look at the tools your students are using. It is important that their scissors are a comfortable fit and that they have the right pins and wrist cushion so that they can focus on the draping rather than struggle with equipment.

Exercises/projects:

An additional project for this section is available in the Tutor's Resource Guide.

Videos:

1. Tearing the Muslin (Calico)
2. Blocking the Muslin (Calico)
3. Pressing the Muslin (Calico)
4. Marking the Grainlines – Pencil
5. Marking the Grainlines – Thread Tracing
6. Draping the Three Grains
7. Aligning the Grainlines
8. Pinning Two Pieces of Muslin (Calico) Together
9. Turning Up and Pinning the Hem
10. Pinning, Marking, and Turning Seams

Key Terms:

Crossgrain: The weft thread direction.

Grainlines: These refer to the direction of the threads. Woven fabrics consist of two threads – warp and weft – interlaced at right angles.

Horizontal grain: The weft thread direction.

Straight grain: The warp thread direction, sometimes called the length grain.

Selvedge edge: The bound edges on either side of the fabric.

Thread trace: A hand-sewn straight stitch line used to mark seams or edges during draping or the marking and truing-up process.

Warp thread: This is the vertical thread which runs parallel to the selvedge.

Weft thread: This is the horizontal thread which runs crosswise.

1.2: Dresses

Objectives: This section provides a natural progression from working with the geometric woven panel. The main goal here is for students to learn how to handle the fit of bust fullness, waist and hip curves.

General Guidance:

- The exercises and draping project in this section teach students to use different types of darting and seaming to make bodices and dresses that fit the female figure. It is useful to relate what was learned in the previous section to these new techniques by pointing out that they are still working with a woven panel but trying to control more carefully the way it drapes on the body.

- When dresses are complete, put them on forms and encourage students to study the differences in the way they look. This will help train their eyes to see subtleties in line and silhouette.

Student Pitfalls:

- Students will often make the bodices fit too tightly as it is easier to drape very close to the mannequin. However,

the garments are not intended to be molded to the form, but should have the same kind of ease that slim-fitting clothes do when worn (pages 44-47).

- A common error is for students to make the darts too deep, which results in a very pointed bust look. Darts should be as shallow as possible while still achieving the fit required. Students also often need reminding that the dart should stop an inch or so before the bust point.

Teaching Hints:

- Stress precision with locating and marking grainlines, as the bodices need the strong grainline down the center front. The darts will be difficult to execute well if the fabric is off-grain.
- Move through the darting exercises fairly quickly (page 43). They will be challenging for students to execute and it is better to do more of them rather than focus on perfection. Folding darts and matching up seams will improve through repetition.
- The Audrey Hepburn sheath dress should be done more slowly and carefully to allow students the time to really finesse the darts and the shape (pages 50-57).
- Draping princess seams can be time-consuming and difficult to learn. Make sure that your students follow the draping order: first pinning the seams wrong sides together, then checking the fit and curves of the lines, then trimming (page 45), clipping (page 61), and turning the seams to the inside. They will not be able to see what line they are creating until they do this last step, often one they will try to leave out (page 33).

Exercises/projects:

An additional project for this section is available in the Tutor's Resource Guide.

Videos:

10. Pinning, Marking, and Turning Seams
11. Trimming and Clipping
12. Side Bust Dart
13. Turning Front Over Back
14. French Dart
15. Long Vertical Darts, Front and Back
16. Taping the Stylelines
17. Marking
18. Truing
19. Fitting the Dress
20. Transferring the Muslin to a Paper Pattern

Key Terms:

Bust point: The fullest part of the bust.

Ease: The extra fabric allowed in the fit of a garment.

Hipline: The fullest part of the hip, usually considered to be 7 inches (18 cm) down from the waist.

Princess line: The vertical line that divides the torso in half from center front to side seam. Usually it begins at the center of the shoulder, but it can also curve out from the armhole.

Truing: The process of correcting and equalizing any discrepancies in sew lines created during draping.

Waistline: The narrowest part of the waist area on the form.

1.3: Corsets

Objectives: Studying the complex shapes of the female figure is an important aspect of all garment construction. The main goal of the exercises in this section is to help students learn how to drape closely to the mannequin, thus providing a valuable understanding of how to fit the female form for all subsequent sections.

General Guidance:

- The exercises are meant to be done fairly quickly, with the pinning and clipping process providing valuable practise in smoothing out curves, working out a crossmark system, and aligning top and lower edges of all the pieces. Re-pinning the half muslin to see the result of the draping will show students where they may have made errors.
- The Lacroix corset, the section project, should be done more slowly with accuracy being stressed. It is good visual training to make sure the stylelines are placed correctly and the proportions matched.
- After a group finishes their drapes, it is useful to do a review or critique and let the students observe each other's work. Pointing out subtle differences in the drapes will help them hone their observational skills.

Student Pitfalls:

- Students naturally seem to pin very tightly to the mannequin. With the corsets this is fine, as long as the fit is even. If the seams are straining and making pulls, then students need to remove the pins individually and figure out where to ease the fit a little (page 53, Step 7, pull corrections).
- It is important while draping to be constantly aware of grainline direction. With so many pieces lined up together, one of the pieces can easily begin to shift off-grain as the pins are tightened up. It will be easy to see if one is slightly tilted – a common error that needs correcting.

- Another common mistake is using either too few or too many pins. Encourage your students to check the photographs and to notice that more pins are required when the fabric needs to be supported. Using too many pins will make the seamlines appear wrinkled and puckered.

- Pinning in the wrong direction is also a common error. Remind students that the pin enters the fabric at the folded edge, and that the pins should be perpendicular to the seamlines. Pinning properly will help to reduce puckering and improve the appearance of the drape.

Teaching Hints:

- Grainline direction is crucial to the drapes in these exercises. If the muslin sections are not prepared properly, or if the grainlines are not angled correctly while draping, the balance of the corset will be compromised. Make sure each student's fabric sections are perfectly on-grain.
- Placing pins closer together is necessary on very fitted garments. However, since students will sometimes need to correct and re-angle their muslin pieces during draping, it is better to get all the pieces set on the mannequin, and then for students to go back and refine the fit, placing more pins in between existing ones as required.
- Encourage your students to stand back occasionally to check their stylelines. It is easy for them to become too focused on the details and not see the bigger picture. Having a mirror close by is useful in checking the drape from a distance.
- It is also helpful to use tape to see how the lines look from a distance (page 82, Steps 8 and 9) and if they are off, correct them.
- It is important to give special attention to the front underarm area. Most mannequins are larger and harder at that area and if the corset is to fit a real model it needs to be draped very tightly there, or draped with the shoulders of the form pushed in.

- It is also important to point out that the front underarm top edge needs to be draped high as this is not a particularly attractive part of a woman's body to show. Draping it high will also give more bust support (page 77, Step 9).
- Coordinating the details of the Lacroix corset toile is a good exercise in working with proportion (pages 78-85). Often a drape must be shown to a superior for approval, and the closer the look of the toile to the finished product, the more time will be saved later. The volume of the flowers, spacing of the closure, and proportion of the quilted areas, all need to be visually balanced.

Exercises/projects:

An additional project for this section is available in the Tutor's Resource Guide.

Videos:

21. Marking the Grainlines – Pulling a Thread
22. Adding Sections of Fabric
23. Turning the Seams of a Fitted Garment

Key Terms:

Boning: A flexible yet firm strip of metal or plastic used to support and maintain shape.

Crossmarks: Lines designating the intersections of fit seams, stylelines, or darts.

Georgian silhouette: A flattening construction usually with a top edge that is straight across.

On-grain: Means that the straight grains or horizontal grains are in balance and properly placed.

Off-grain: Means that the straight grains or horizontal grains are tilted too much or not in balance.

Petersham ribbon: Ribbed ribbon used in hats, corsets, and waistbands designed for reinforcement.

Styleline: A seamline that runs from one point of a garment to another, used specifically for style rather than to help with the fit of a garment.

Victorian silhouette: An hourglass, more voluptuous silhouette than the Georgian one.