

Patterning for movement

The self-gusseted sleeve

BY LAURIE KURUTZ



IN PRODUCING COMEDIES OR musicals such as *You Can't Take It With You* or *Guys and Dolls*, costumers often face the challenge of building costumes that look historically accurate, but in which actors can execute action and movement. In musicals, dancers must move in ways that accurate period costumes may not allow. In comedies, actors might need to perform pratfalls or other actions that can put costumes in jeopardy. One of the best solutions to these costuming challenges is the self-gusseted sleeve.

A gusset adds length to the sleeve cap where an actor needs extra room for movement. Typically, an actor will need more room in the back and the armpit of the sleeve. A costumer will often sew an extra piece of fabric—a gusset—into a garment, but doing so adds seam allowances that create excess bulk at the armpit. The solution discussed below adds a gusset to the sleeve pattern *before* the garment is cut and sewn. This method eliminates bulky seam allowances and streamlines the construction process while allowing the actor ease of movement.

Illustrating the challenge

Photo 1 on the next page shows the standard sleeve pattern cut out of muslin and sewn into a mockup of the basic bodice. When the actor moves her arm, the standard sleeve pattern will not have enough length in the sleeve cap at the back or the armpit to allow for movement without causing drag lines in the torso of the garment. The too-tight sleeve pulls up the bodice, resulting in a restriction of movement and a messy costume fit.

Self-gusseted sleeves allow actors extra room for movement in Southern Oregon University's 2011 production of *You Can't Take It With You*.

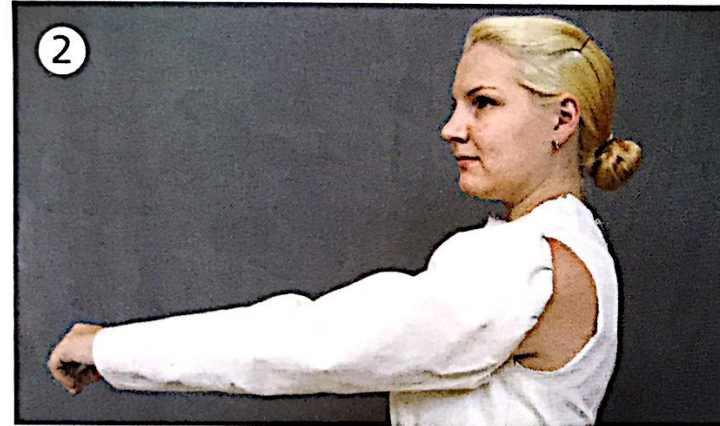
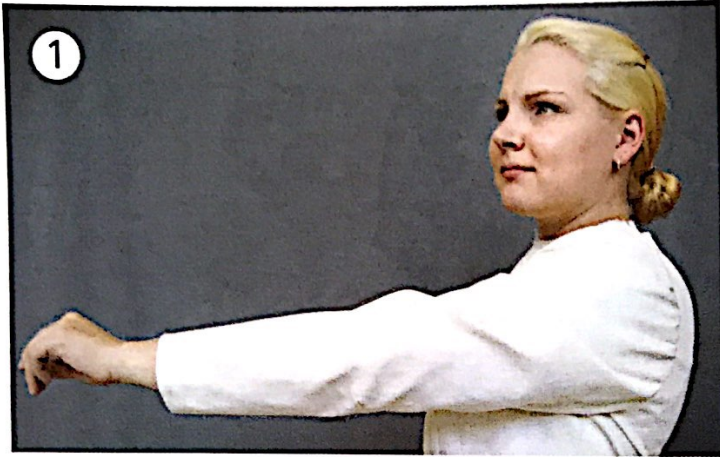


Photo 2 shows the standard sleeve seam ripped from the basic bodice at the back and armpit. When the actor moves her arm, a gap appears indicating the amount of additional length needed in the sleeve cap. We will add this gusset amount to the paper sleeve pattern.

Photo 3 shows the new self-gusseted sleeve that we have cut and sewn into the basic bodice. This self-gusseted sleeve will allow the actor movement.

Assemble your materials

A basic sleeve pattern from a basic commercial pattern

Two pieces of craft paper approximately 30"x20"

Paper scissors

Clear tape

Push pins

A cloth or plastic flexible measuring tape

A ruler

Create the pattern

Remember, the objective in patterning the self-gusseted sleeve is to retain the original measurement of the sleeve cap cir-

cumference while adding in the fullness of the self-gusset—ensuring sufficient freedom of movement for the actor without changing the look of the garment.

Step 1

Start with the standard sleeve pattern with elbow darts (you can buy a commercial pattern at any fabric store). To preserve the original thin tissue-paper pattern, make a copy of it on craft paper. Transfer all notches, notations, and grain lines. Set aside the original commercial tissue pattern and work with the new craft-paper copy. Measure the length of the sleeve-cap line and write it on the pattern (Photo A).

On the copied sleeve pattern, draw a horizontal line two inches below the sleeve-cap line. Draw a vertical line centered on the sleeve cap and upper arm area. That second line will intersect with the first horizontal line in the center of the sleeve pattern.

Step 2

First, cut the pattern along the vertical line, from the top of the sleeve cap

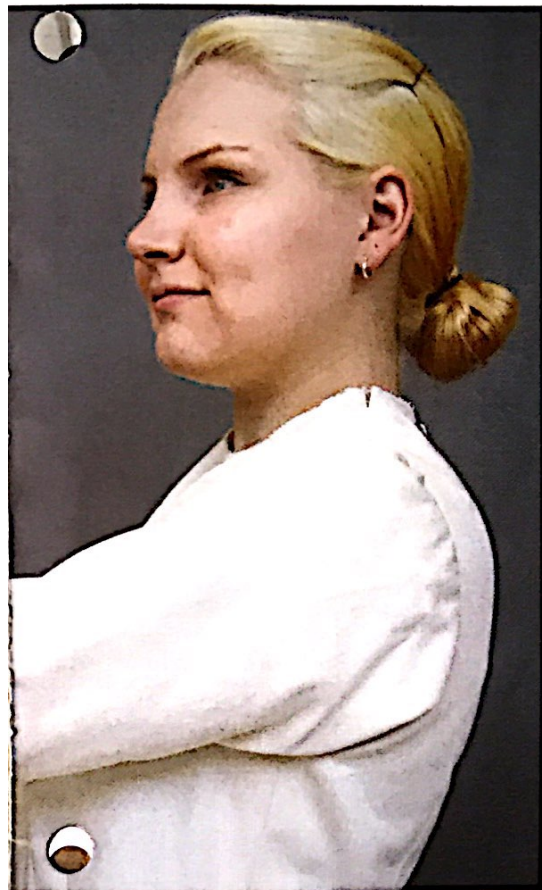
down to the horizontal line. Next, leaving an eighth of an inch of paper uncut at each edge of the pattern, cut from the lower end of the vertical line to the right and left edges of the pattern. That eighth-inch of uncut paper will act as a hinge when we pivot the sleeve open in the next step.

Step 3

Place the sleeve pattern on top of a new piece of craft paper. Use push pins to hold the lower section of the sleeve pattern in place. Pivot open the sleeve cap approximately one and one half inches at the sleeve cap line and push pin the pattern in place to hold the upper section of the pattern in the newly expanded position (Photo B).

Step 4

At each side of the pattern, extend the side seam line up approximately five inches or more, depending on how much of a gusset the actor needs. Draw a line from the original shoulder notch position to the extended side seam line, which will outline



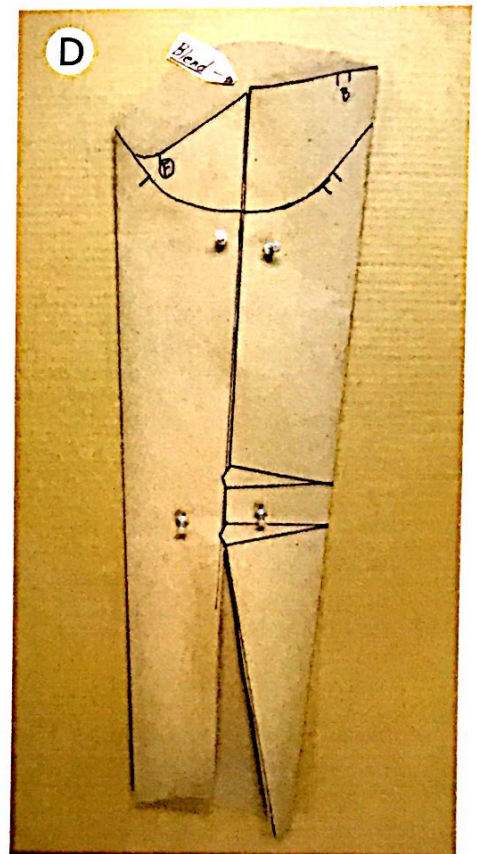
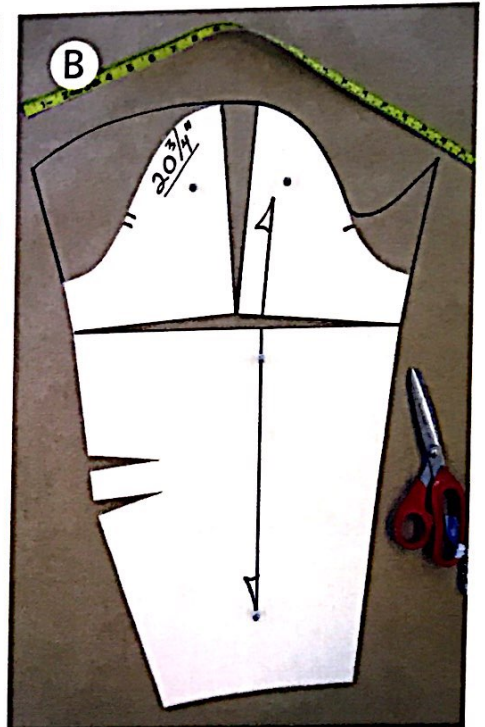
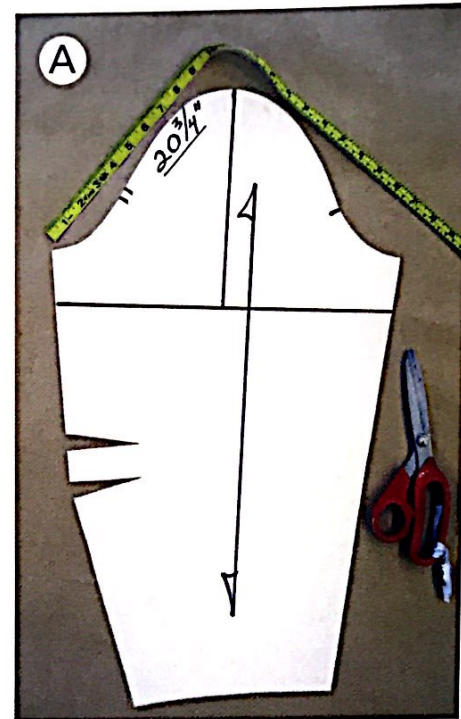
the back part of the self-gusset. Next, draw a steeply curved line from the original front single notch on the sleeve cap up to the extended side seam line. This line defines the other part of the self-gusset. With a measuring tape, measure the sleeve-cap line to make sure it is the same length as the original sleeve-cap measurement (Photo B). If the sleeve-cap line is too long or short to fit into the armhole of the garment body, lengthen or shorten the sleeve cap by moving the side seam lines in or out equally until the sleeve-cap line has the correct measurement.

Step 5

Trace around the rest of the sleeve pattern, transferring all notches, notations, darts, etc. Remove the original sleeve pattern and set it aside (Photo C).

Step 6

Cut out the new self-gusseted sleeve pattern. To make sure the sleeve cap line is a smooth, blended line, fold the sleeve pattern so that the two side



PHOTOS BY LAURIE KURUTZ

seams are touching and lined up at the original under-arm lines (Photo D). If there is a corner or a divot in the sleeve cap line on the gusset, draw a smooth line to blend the two sides of the gusset. You now have a new sleeve pattern with a built-in self gusset that will ensure free movement for actors and dancers. This self gusset can be introduced into sleeve patterns of any style or period.

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