Sandra Betzina’s
PANTS PRIMER
Everything you need to know to select, custom-fit, and finish a pants pattern you’ll love!
START WITH A GOOD PATTERN

Over the many years I’ve been teaching women’s pants-fitting workshops, two features have proven themselves keys to success when choosing patterns, no matter what the style. You need a pattern with a properly shaped crotch curve and you need that pattern to be available in a wide enough size range to easily accommodate realistic hip and tummy measurements, without the legs becoming too wide. It’s a big help if the pattern is multi-sized too, for easy blending between sizes. For years, the only patterns I knew of with a crotch curve consistently appropriate for the female figure were those produced by Burda; and to this day, all Burda pants patterns include this curve compared to standard U.S. patterns. Recently I joined forces with Vogue Patterns to create Today’s Fit patterns, which include pants patterns in all of the styles shown here, with hip measurements from 34 ½ in. to 57 in., extra room at the tummy, a multi-sized range from A through J and an excellent crotch curve. You can, of course, achieve similar results by altering existing patterns, if you have the time and patience.
MEASURING FOR PANTS

**Circumferences:** Wearing only underwear, measure waist, high hip, full hip, and upper leg around its fullest part (shown at right).

**Crotch Lengths:** Place narrow belt or elastic around your waist. Tie small weight (key ring works well) in center of 30-in-long piece of string. Place string between legs and slide ends under belt or elastic at center front and center back. Adjust ends so that weight is at center of body between legs, but shifted about $\frac{1}{2}$ in toward front of body; and pull down on weight to position it about $\frac{1}{2}$ in away from body. Mark where string intersects with belt elastic at each end, then measure front and back crotch lengths from mark to weight.

**Length:** Today’s fit pant has a straight hem covering the heel of the shoe and folding or “breaking” in front. Measure down side of your favorite pants from waistline seam to finished length. Or, standing in bare feet, fold up muslin pant hem evenly around bottom of pants so that hem crease touches floor in back. (This is a general guideline and you may prefer a slightly shorter length).
PRELIMINARIES

Choose multi-sized pattern, using the larger of your full-hip or high-hip measurements, and outline your size, making smooth transitions between sizes, as shown left below. If your waist is smaller than given sizes, use smallest available and adjust further.

**Crotch Length Overall:** Measure front and back crotch curves along seamline, between waistline and inseam. If you’re longer or shorter overall than pattern, lengthen or shorten on adjustment lines between crotch and waist by that amount. Asymmetrical front/back adjustments, described at right below.

**Finished Length:** Add or subtract amount altered for length above to finished length given on pattern back. To match your desired finished length, fold out excess or spread pattern both above and below knee to maintain hem width and proportions.

**Hem Width:** Inner and outer leg seams must be reduced or enlarged by same amount to prevent leg from twisting. Taper to crotch or knee or inseam and to fullest point of hip or high hip at outseam.
**Full Thighs:** (You see wrinkles across front of leg right under crotch when standing and wrinkles that pull under seat in back). Measure from side seam to inseam across front and back pattern pieces around body, both at crotch level, to find ease. Minimum ease for narrow pull-on style is 2 in., but tailored pants look better with 4 in. Add ¼ in. to ½ in. to front inner leg, tapering back to original seamline within 7 in., by mid-calf if knees are also full, or to bottom of pants if calves are also full.

**A BASIC GUIDE TO PANTS-ALTERING**

**Make A Muslin!** Yes, you should make a test pair of pants, especially if you are doing a lot of alterations or are trying a new pants pattern. Test in sale-table fabric similar to what you’ll use for pants. Use 1-in. seams except at crotch curve, which should be 5/8 in. Skip pockets and fold up hem allowance. Machine-baste pants together with twill tape supporting waistline seam allowance. Try on pants wearing shoes. Transfer all adjustments to your pattern.

**Flat Seat:** (Your pants have fullness wrinkles under seat in back.) You need less depth on back crotch curve. On multi-sized pattern, cut one size smaller on back inner leg, tapering back to original cutting line before knee. On single-size or smallest size pattern, cut away ¼ to ½ in. from back inseam, tapering to original cutting line before knee. Note: If your calves protrude farther than your seat when you lock your knees, your pants won’t be able to hang straight down, and this can’t be corrected.

**Small Waist:** (Your waist is small in comparison to your hip.) As with full thighs, reshaping side seams emphasizes disparity. Instead, increase
width of all existing darts and pleats a little on each side, or add others. If your seat protrudes and your center back is quite curved, you can also increase size of center-back seam. Also, try easing pants to waistband; you can ease in 1/8 in. for every inch of waistline fabric. Add twill tape to hold eased waistline before you try on pant.

**Full Seat:** (Your pants wrinkle into crotch and waistline dips down in back.) You need more length at back crotch. Add ½ in. to 2 in. to back inseam, tapering back to original line by 7 in., or to hemline if calves or knees are full. You may also need to add ½ in. to 2 in. at center back at top of waistline, tapering to zero by side seam.
Full Hip/Thigh: (Your pants are too tight in this area.) Add to both front and back side seams without tapering back to original seamline at waist or hem, which would emphasize the problem. At waist, reduce added amount by no more than ½ in. and take out the rest with darts and pleats for more flattering effect.

Full High Hip: (Your high hip and full hip measurements are close to same size, or full hip is smaller than high hip.) Don’t fit to mimic exact curve of hip. To suggest a more balanced figure, don’t taper fabric at both high hip and full hip to give illusion that full hip is not as small as high hip. Add at side seam for high hip if necessary and add half of that amount to full hip, even though you don’t need it (below left). Ease waistline if you don’t need extra room at waist (below left), and curve back dart to accommodate fullness in back (below right). Curved front darts will only accentuate a protruding tummy.
**Back-Waist Problems:** (Your side seams swing forward and are not perpendicular to the floor.) In front of mirror, lift pants at center back to make side seams hang straight. You will probably need to lift between ½ to ¾ in. If more, you may have to scoop out lower back-crotch curve, too. Cut off at center back along waistline, tapering back to original at side seam. If you have wrinkles at center back under waistband, use same solution as above.

**Large Tummy:** (Your pants pull down at center front.) You need more length over tummy area: usually ½ to 1 in. Add this amount to waistline at center front, tapering back to original cutting line at side (left image). You may be more comfortable wearing your waistline lower if your tummy is large and you roll down waistband in front of pants to eliminate excess fullness when sitting. Cut off 1 in or so from center front, tapering back to original cutting at side seam (right image).
**Full Waist:** (Your waist is similar size to your hips.) Reduce or eliminate darts and reduce pleats (keep them if possible to preserve style), in addition to adding side seams, to accommodate both waist and high hip.

**Flat Hip:** (Your high-hip measurement is larger than full hip.) On muslin or fashion pants, have helper pin out excess side seam. You may need to redraw pocket curve so pocket opening doesn’t get too small.
CONSTRUCTION TIPS

Because every fabric drapes and works up differently, baste side seams so you can take in or let out to suit fabric before sewing permanently. Trim your lower crotch curve seam allowances front and back to ¼ in.

**Underline** pants when fabric is either not stable or not heavy enough for pants.

- **Use** Silk organza for crisp look, pima cotton or cotton voile for soft support, or fusible tricot to reduce wrinkling.

- **Cut** underlining same as pant itself without hem allowance. Hand-baste to pants and to center of darts and pleats. Sew underlining and pant as one layer; pattern markings are only necessary on underlining.

**Half Lining** adds comfort and helps reduce baggage at knee.

- **Use** Lining or underlining fabric, or scarf you no longer wear.

- **Cut** same as pant front only, stopping 3 in below knee.

- **Serge** bottom edge or position selvedge there. Make darts and pleats in pants lining separately. With wrong sides together, hand-baste lining to pant front; then treat both layers as one.
**Full Lining** looks great, feels good, and reduces wrinkling.

- **Use** Rayon Ambiance or China Silk because they breathe.

- **Cut** lining same as pant pattern without hem allowance. Because lining fabric has no give, sew all darts and pleats three-quarters of their marked size. Construct pant lining same as pants using ½ in seam allowances and with zipper opening unfinished. Hem with double ½ in turns. Ease lining waistline to fit pants waist and trim lower crotch curve seam allowance to ¼ in. Before attaching pants waistband or facing, slide lining inside pants with wrong sides together. Fold under lining seam allowance at zipper opening and pin to zipper tape. With pins on pant side pin lining and pant together at waist. Machine-baste waistlines together with lining against feed dogs, to ease lining to fashion fabric. Continue with finishing waist.

**Hemming:** Attach hem to interfacing for a truly invisible hem. Cut bias strips of fusible or sew-in interfacing 1 in. wider than hem allowance and position above hem crease. Secure sew-in with catchstitches at top and bottom. On lined pants, secure lining hem to top of hem allowance at inner and outer leg seams with crochet stitch to keep lining in place without pulling fashion fabric.
**PICK YOUR STYLE**

1. **Classic Trouser**
   One or two pleats in front, back darts or elasticized back, slanted or on-seam side pockets, fly front, tailored waistband.

   **Suitable fabrics:** Sueded microfiber, wool crepe, wool flannel, wool gabardine, three or four-ply silk crepe de chine, pre-washed, medium-weight linen; drapey, woven Lycra blends.

   **Worn with:** Tuck-in top or medium-loose overshirt, classic style sweater, hip length or longer blazer or collarless jacket.

   **Example:** Vogue 7027

2. **Narrow Pull-On Pant**
   Elasticized waist, medium-narrow legs; no styling details but in-seam pockets a bonus.

   **Suitable fabrics:** Wool double-knit, heavy silk/Lycra, stretch velour, stretch gabardine, stretch cotton/Lycra, stretch linen, avoid single knits and other fabrics that will stretch out at knee and seat.

   **Worn with:** Any size overshirt; long sweater and oversized jacket; tuck-in top if figure allows.

   **Example:** Vogue 7263
3. **Multi-Seamed Princess Pant**
Seams at front and back of leg and side seams allow close, easily altered fitting without wrinkles, especially under seat; in-seam pockets; tapered leg; no waistband – waist finished with facing or petersham.

**Suitable fabrics:** Most versatile style-knit or woven, drapey or crisp fabrics; silk dupionni; sueded microfiber; wool flannel; crepe or gabardine; linen; velveteen; brocade; stretch wovens.

**Worn with:** Anything.

**Example:** Vogue 7179

4. **Full Pull-On Pant**
Elasticized waist; loose waist and high hip; straight or tapered leg (flattering for shorter legs); in-seam pockets if pattern includes side seam, otherwise no pockets.

**Suitable fabrics:** Drapey rayons; Slinky Knit; two or three-ply silk crepe de chine; silk chiffon or georgette; wool jersey; stretch velour; rayon and Lycra knits; Tencel; medium-weight microfibers.

**Worn with:** Close-fitting, tuck-in top; wrap top; short sweater.

**Example:** Vogue 7281
5. **Flat-Front Pant**
   No pleats; front and back darts; faced waist; straight or slightly flared bottom leg (boot cut); side-seam pockets.

**Suitable fabrics:** Lycra blends; linen; wool gabardine; wool/Lycra knits.

**Worn with:** Small or boxy sweater; T-Shirt; slightly fitted blouse; short, fitted jacket; hip-or-crotch length vest.

**Example:** Burda 3098