

Gussets for Fit

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Gussets come and go with changing fashions, but they are a wonderful technique for your sewing toolbox. Garments with closely fitted armholes or constricting sleeve styling (dolman or batwing sleeves, for example) may need gussets to provide ease for comfortable movement, and they're also a great way to add fabric while fitting upcycled garments.

Traditionally, gussets are made in a diamond or kite shape that tapers to nothing at each end. You might also use a rectangle topped with a tapering triangle in a garment where the additional fabric falls all the way to a hemmed edge, or round the gusset points to create an oval shape that eliminates sharply angled seam intersections.

Here's an overview of the gusset-making process.

1. Draft a pattern.

Try on or measure the garment to determine how much additional fabric you'll need. The sample from the show adds 3" to the armhole seam. (The pajama top adds a full 8" for a loose fit!)

Also decide how far into the garment you want to taper the extra fabric. This might be determined by intersecting seams (as on the cosplay gown from the show) or factors such as keeping the gusset hidden while wearing.

Use the measurements to draw a pair of intersecting lines at right angles, with the additional width (the short line on our sample) centered on the perpendicular line. Connect the endpoints of the crossed lines to create a diamond or other shape.

Add seam allowance as determined by the garment you're altering.

SEE ILLUSTRATION A

2. Choose the gusset fabric.

Ideally, you may have scraps of the garment fabric to use. If not, look for a lightweight fabric that matches or blends into the garment fabric. Gussets are usually added at an inconspicuous area on the garment, so an exact match may not be as necessary as you expect.

3. Cut the gussets from the fabric.

4. Prepare the garment.

Measure and mark the gusset length on the wrong side of the garment seam. Mark both sides of the seam (e.g., the garment front and back pieces) so that the marks are always visible after the garment pieces are separated.

Remove the seam in the gusset area, removing at least 1" of stitches past the marked endpoints.

Sometimes it is necessary to open an intersecting seam as well; for example, if the underarm and side seams were sewn independently before the sleeve was inserted. If that's the case, open just a little of the intersecting seam. Restitch the intersecting seam on each side of the opened gusset seam before you insert the gusset, backstitching to secure the new seams.

5. Pin one half of the gusset to the garment, matching the widest point of the gusset to the intersecting seam (or any mark you may have made for the widest addition, if there's not a seam there). Stitch the gusset in place from one dot to the other as shown, backstitching at each end. Follow the seamline on the garment rather than keeping a set seam allowance width. Pivot with the needle down at the intermediate gusset corner.

SEE ILLUSTRATION B

6. Pin the second half of the gusset to the garment, matching the marks on the garment as originally sewn. Sew the gusset to the garment as before. Stitch past the ends of the gusset to close the garment seam completely.

7. Use a serger or overcasting stitch to finish the raw edges of the new seams. Press the gusset carefully.