

# Using Vintage Patterns

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<http://www.burdastyle.com/techniques/using-vintage-patterns>

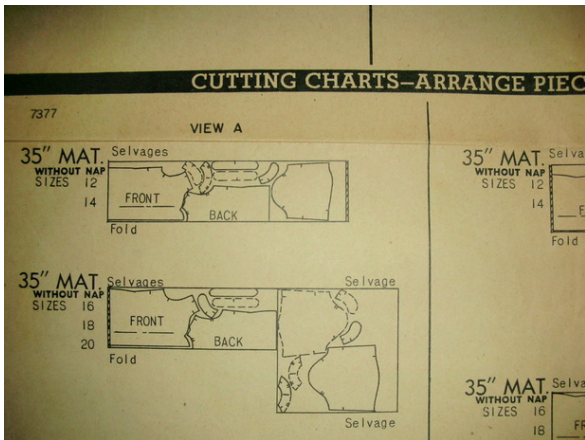
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I'm encouraged these days by the interest so many sewists have shown in collecting and using vintage patterns! If you'll notice, some of the pattern envelopes will bear the words "printed pattern." That means the pattern tissue has information printed in ink on all the pieces: the pattern company's name, the style number, the size, identifying information about every pattern piece (front, back, sleeve, etc.), cutting lines, stitching lines, notches, and more. Why the mention about the "printed pattern"? Because earlier home sewing patterns were not published this way. The pattern pieces were not printed with ink on large pieces of tissue, as they are today. The pattern pieces came already separated and the information upon them was indicated by perforations in the tissue. If you own a vintage pattern like this, there are a few things to do before you get down to stitching.

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## Step 1 — Identify the Pieces



First, gently remove the pattern pieces and instructions from the envelope and unfold them. Compare your pieces to the layout and cutting guide (also called a pattern marker) printed on the instruction sheet. Look for identifying information -- "front," "back," and so on -- on each piece.

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## Step 2 — The Blouse Front



Looked like this when I took it from the envelope. This pattern was in good condition for being over 50 years old!

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## Step 3 — Identifying Information



Step 1 — Identify the Pieces

Here is the only information identifying the pattern piece.

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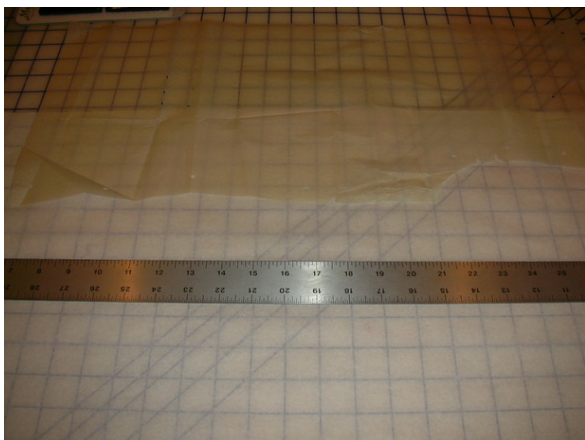
## Step 4 — Prepare the Pieces



Using my dry iron, I carefully iron out the folds as flat as I possibly can. Pattern tissue is pretty tough, but it will tear if you're not gentle with it.

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## Step 5 — Trace the Pieces



I didn't want to lay out the original tissue on my fabric, mostly because I knew I was also making pattern alterations (to help the garment fit me better) and I didn't want to destroy my original. So, I traced off a copy on some other paper. (I use the paper on a roll available from Nancy's Notions, but use whatever you can get your hands on.) Begin your tracing by marking a grainline on the paper with a yardstick, and align the pattern's grainline along the mark.

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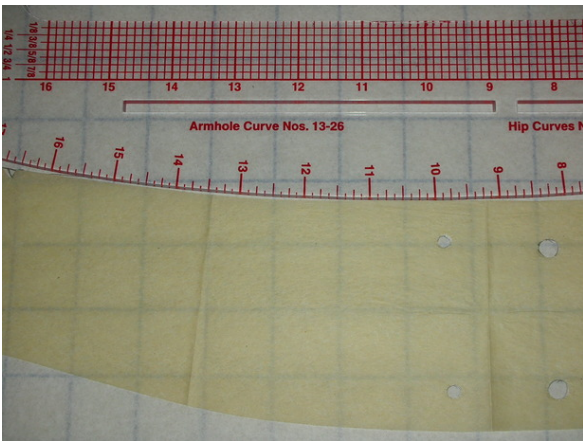
## Step 7 — Find the Pattern Markings



You'll have to really study the pattern pieces closely, because you'll be confronted with pattern markings that look like this: A lot of dots, some small triangles, some squares, and notches. What does it all mean? Well, we know what notches are for -- they are a guide for joining one piece to another. The small dots indicate things like stitching lines, gathers, darts, and grainlines. The triangles indicate the fold line for my front facing. The squares show button and buttonhole placement. There's no guide or key for these markings on the pattern sheet, however. I only figured these marks out by reading, and re-reading, the pattern instructions. One big advantage to these punctures in the pattern tissue (as opposed to printed markings)? It's really easy to transfer them to another piece of paper. Your pencil lead just fits into them.

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## Step 6 — Don't Freehand If You Can Help It



I also find that using other patternmaking tools as I trace around pattern pieces, such as design curves, is really helpful.

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