

Unmentionables - Chemise and Corset

By: **alasse**

<http://www.burdastyle.com/projects/unmentionables-chemise-and->



I always wanted to have a try at recreating historic fashion, simply as a challenge. Oh and because I think it would be awesome to have it on display in my room ;) For my first (because now that I started I don't want to stop!) historic project I chose a late victorian ensemble because it isn't as space consuming as something with a hoop skirt. And because I want the dress to fit in the end (even over the corset) I started with my victorian underwear: the corset and the chemise. I made the pattern for the corset myself and it actually was pretty easy. The chemise started off as two fabric squares and then I just worked out the pattern as I went along. The chemise is very thin cotton, the corset is cotton satin on the outside and a denim weave on the inside to give it stability. After all, there is a lot of pull on the panels. I used spring steel boning, because it's strong and still flexible at the same time. The front panels of my corset are hand embroidered and I made up the pattern by combining several Photoshop Brushes. Also check out my blog, where I posted this as well! My complete victorian project: Unmentionables – Chemise and Corset More underwear?! – Bustle and Petticoat Get dressed, young lady! – Victorian Day Dress and Hat A Night at the Opera – Victorian Evening Gown EDIT: I added both patterns now (chemise and corset), but I could not figure out how to make two different sets of instructions. So now step 1-6 are about the chemise and from step 7 onwards it's all about the corset.

Materials

3 kinds of white cotton: a thin linen weave, a cotton satin and a denim weave

Step 1 — Before you start



This is for the chemise pattern. I'll deal with the corset from step 7 onwards.

You'll need:

• approximately 2 metres of fabric (e.g. light cotton or anything rather thin)

• thread

• optionally: lace for the neckline and sleeves

The pattern I uploaded is the exact one I used. I usually wear a burdasize 38, but because a chemise is really wide in general, you might not have to alter it unless you wear a very different size. You can adjust the size a little at the gathered parts at the front and back.

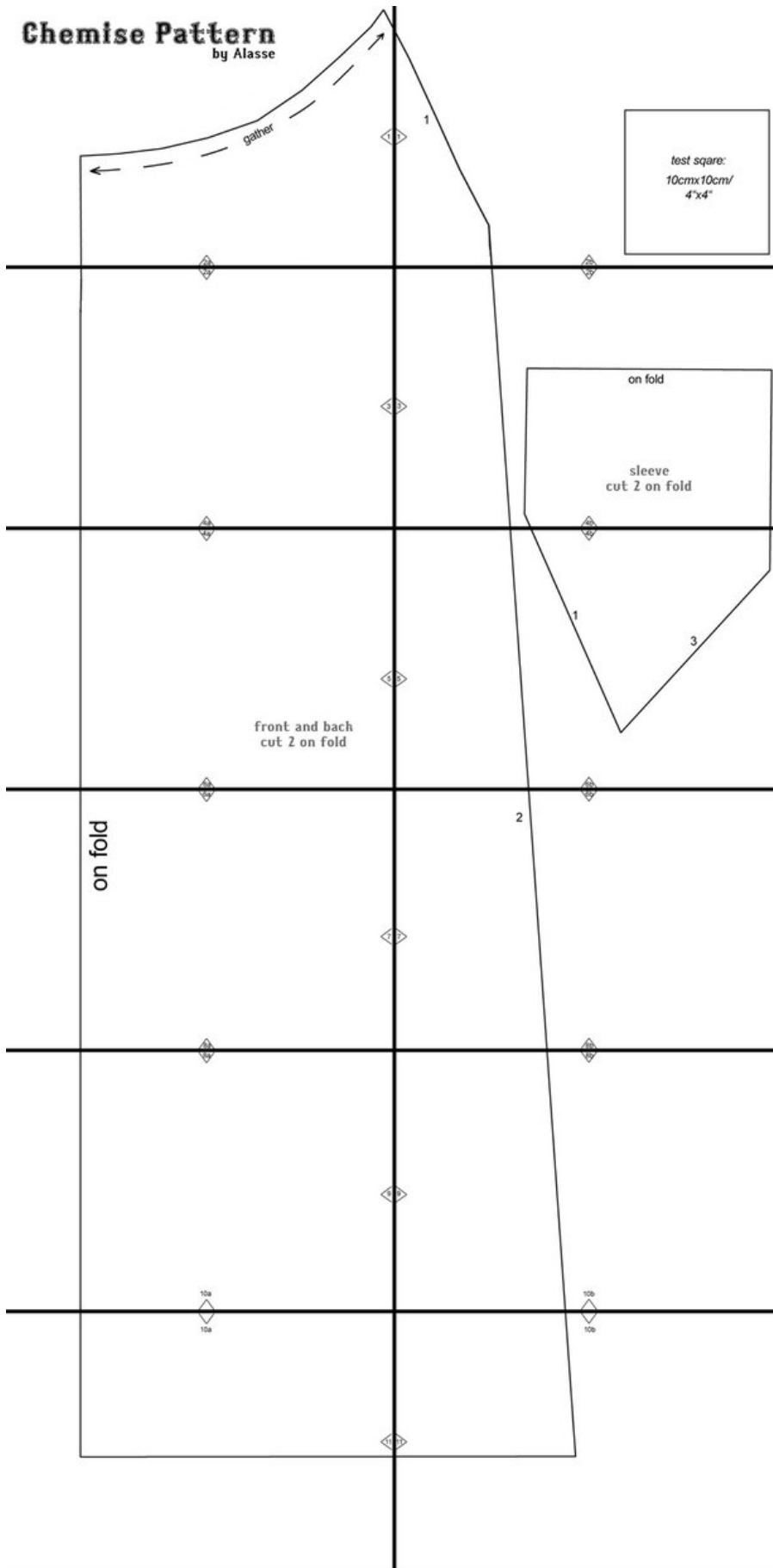
You should really check the width of the sleeves, though. My upper arm has a circumference of 27cm, please adjust the sleeve opening to your measurement.

Of course you can also quite easily change the length of the chemise and the length of the sleeves.

Step 2 — Cutting out the fabric

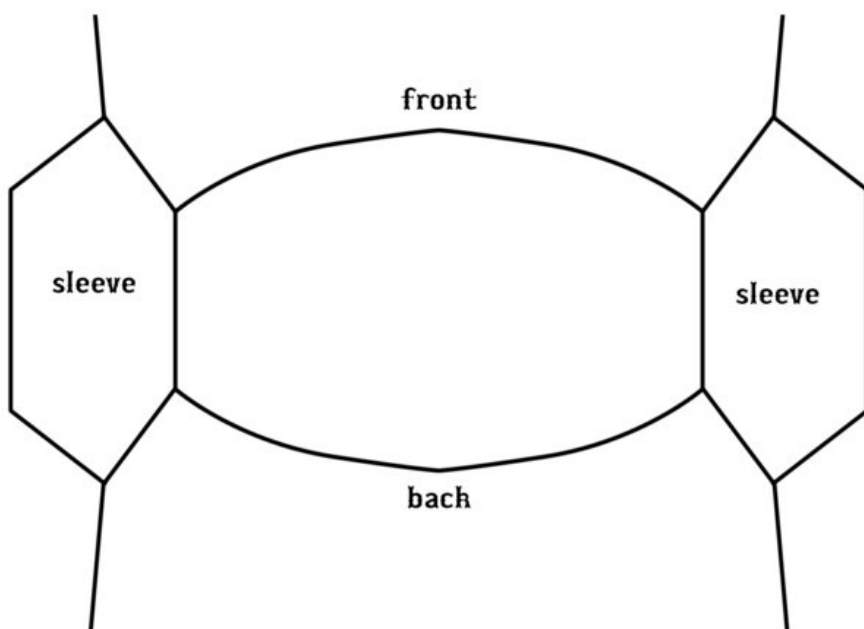
Chemise Pattern

by Alasse



Cut out both pieces twice on fold. Seam allowance is not included in the pattern, so add it now :)

Step 3 — Sew on sleeves



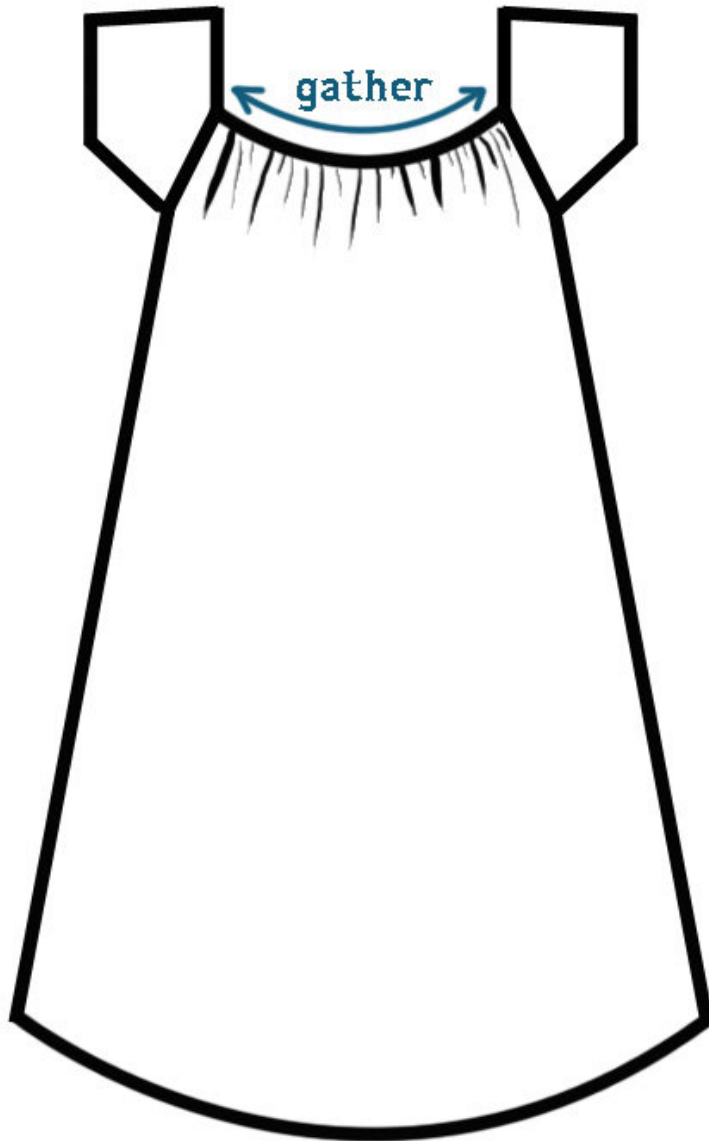
Sew on sleeves (number 1) as you can see in the drawing.

Step 4 — Sew side seems



Sew side seams and sleeve seams in one go, like indicated in the picture (numbers 2 and 3).

Step 5 — Gathering the neckline



Gather the front and back neckline as indicated in the pattern.

Now you can adjust the size of the chemise a little: Gather the neckline just as much as you need for the chemise to fit. I gathered the neckline to be 30cm both in the front and the back.

Step 6 — Finishing

Finish the bottom, sleeve and neckline hems.

Optionally you can add lace, or maybe some tucks along the bottom hem, which was also quite common in the victorian era.

And youâ’ re done :)

Step 7 — Now the corset...



Pattern Notes

The pattern I uploaded is the exact one I used for my project. I usually wear a burdasize 38, but that doesnâ€™t mean you can just use the same pattern, if youâ€™re a size 38, too. Thatâ€™s because a corset shouldnâ€™t be made in regular sizes, but from your personal measurements to achieve the perfect fit.

The ones I used for the pattern are:

- Bust: 87cm
- Underbust: 77cm
- Waist: 65cm
- Hip: 90cm

So, if you have the exact same measurements (or VERY close to them), feel free to use the pattern as it is. If you donâ€™t, however, you can still use my pattern as a guideline when drafting your own. Iâ€™ll be giving directions for the drafting part as well.

Step 8 — You'll need



• 50cm of an outer fabric (satin, jacquard, whatever you like)

• 50cm of an inner fabric (has to be rather strong, I used a denim weave)

• busk

• boning (Note: if you want a corset that will shape your silhouette, don't use plastic boning. It will lose its shape eventually. I decided on spiral steel boning because it is the most comfortable to wear in my opinion. Decide for yourself. You'll need the boning either cut to the right sizes – I used 8 ready cut pieces – or you have to cut it to the correct length yourself and then attach end caps. Also your choice.).

• eyelets

• 5m of corset lacing

• strong thread

Step 9 — Taking measurements

â'¢ For the semi-bust corset, the first measurement you will be taking is where your bust is the widest. Tighten your measuring tape around your bust and try out how tight you want your corset to be after it is laced. In my case, the measurement I got was 89cm.

â'¢ Next you need to take your underbust measurement. You canâ' t (and shouldnâ' t) narrow down your ribcage with the corset, so use this measurement as it is. My measurement was 79cm.

â'¢ When youâ' re done with that, measure the space in between your two measurements (i.e. distance between bust and underbust, 7cm in my case).

â'¢ Now measure your waist, again tightening the measuring tape as tight as you want your corset to be (in my case 67cm).

â'¢ We need the distance between underbust and waist as well, so measure that (14cm).

â'¢ Now measure around the spot where you want your corset to end, somewhere on your hips (92cm) and the distance to your waist measurement (11cm).

â'¢ Add together the bust/underbust-distance, the underbust/waist-distance and the waist/hip-distance ($7+14+11=32$ cm) and youâ' ll get the length of your corset in the front.

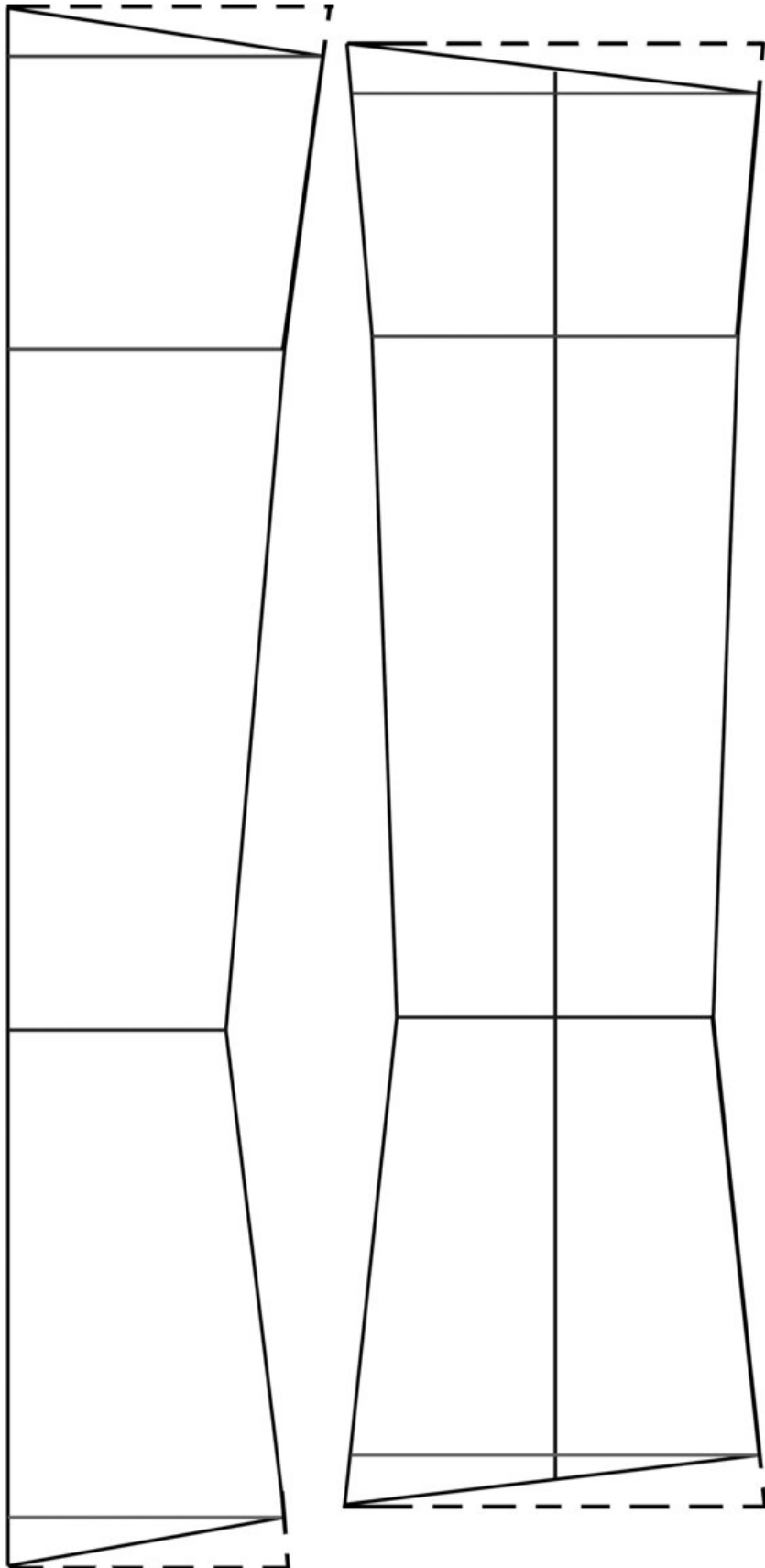
o Please note: This is also the length of the busk you will have to buy. Most of these are only available in even lengths (e.g. 30cm, 32cm, ...), so you might want to adjust the end point of your corset to get an even length.

â'¢ Now you can optionally take away a few centimeters from these measurements, if you want your corset to be open in the back. I deducted 2cm from every measurement, to get a small gap.

â'¢ Okay, one last bit of easy math ;)

Decide, how many panels you want (I used ten) and divide your measurements by the number of panels. The measurements you get are the ones you will draw your panels with.

Step 10 — Now we can start drafting...



We will start with the front panel.

Iâ€™m sorry, if this is hard to understand (itâ€™s really difficult to explain...), but please just take a look at the pattern, it should help. So even if you wonâ€™t be actually using it, at least download it to see how the pattern works.

â€¢ Draw a line with the length of the front of your corset (32cm).

â€¢ Draw lines in the correct length (original measurements divided by number of panels) to one side in a right angle to the front line. The distances between the lines are determined by the distances between measurements you took earlier.

â€¢ Connect the ends of these lines.

Now, a corset isnâ€™t as high in the back as it is in the front, so weâ€™ll make the panels smaller towards one side.

â€¢ To do this, draw a line one centimeter away from each end of the long line in right angles to the long line.

â€¢ Then connect the tip of the long line with the point where your new line meets the connection lines of the bust, underbust, waist and hip lines (I tried to make the method clear in the picture).

The next panel works just the same way, but this time, youâ€™ll use the original length of the corset minus the two centimeters we deducted to make it smaller towards one side. This new length (30cm) is the length of the second long line.

Other than the front and back panels, the panels in between also have to be axially symmetrical, so now when you draw the bust, underbust and waist lines, the long line will divide them right in the middle.

ATTENTION: For bust and hip you wonâ€™t use the measurement you calculated earlier, but youâ€™ll have to measure the length of the lines I made dashed in the sample picture. Otherwise it wonâ€™t fit.

Again, take off one centimeter to one side in the same way as you did the first time.

Do this another two times (always use the â€œdashed-line-measurement" of the panel before), so that you have 3 axially symmetrical panels (all getting smaller towards one side) and your front panel.

The back panel is drawn like the front panel, only using the new measurements you got along the way. Do not make this part smaller towards one side.

Phew, okay, I hope this is all clear somehow :)

Step 11 — Making a test piece

Of course you donâ€™t have to, but I advise you to. Youâ€™ll be very sorry if the finished corset doesnâ€™t fit, because it is frankly too much work to screw up ;)

Instead of putting in a busk in the front, just sew the front panels together. Then attach the other parts in sequence. You can make tunnels for the boning out of the seam allowances, so you donâ€™t have to put in a lining. You donâ€™t necessarily have to put the boning in the test piece, but it will make it easier to see if it fits right.

Try on the trial version and make changes to the pattern if you have to.

Step 12 — Cutting out the fabric



Cut out all pieces twice out of both fabrics, adding a generous seam allowance, especially at the back panels.

Step 13 — Start sewing



First of all, you should neaten and iron every seam, or the whole thing might end up messy. I won't mention it every single time though.

Okay, we will start with the front.

Most busks have two of their post/eye-sets closer together, that's the side that faces down, making the half with the eyes the right one and the one with the posts the left one.

â'¢ Now take the half with the eyes and place it along the frontal seamline of the right front panel. Now you can mark where the eyes will have to peek out between the two fabrics.

â'¢ Right on right, sew together the two front panels in between your markings (marked in purple in my picture).

â'¢ Put the busk in between the two layers, sliding the eyes into the spaces you left open when making the

seam.

â'¢ Now, with the busk in between the two layers, make a seam as close to the busk as you can, thus holding it firmly in place (this works best with a zipper foot which I unfortunately don't have, that's why my seam looks a little askew...)

Step 14 — Sewing on the other panels



The next step is sewing on the subsequent panel and it works the same way for every panel.

â'¢ With right sides together, sew the outer fabric version of your side front panel (number 2) to the outer front panel.

â'¢ Then do the same with the lining pieces and check if the seams meet up.

â'¢ If you didn't draw perfectly precisely when you copied the pattern to the fabric, adjust the seam on the lining piece (that's why generous seam allowance is important).

â'¢ With the seams of the outer fabric and the lining on top of each other, sew the outer fabric and the lining together left and right of the seam. This is the tunnel where your boning goes, so the distance between the two seams depends on the width of your boning (mine is 7mm, so the two seams are roughly 1cm apart).

â'¢ In the same way, attach the other panels.

Step 15 — Put in the lacing



We're at the very back of the right half of the corset, where you will have to put in the lacing. There's a lot of pull on the eyelets once you're corset is laced, so I put interfacing in between the two layers of fabric.

Depending on what kind of fabric you use, you don't need to do this.

• Cut off the back seam allowance of the lining piece.

• Fold the seam allowance of the outer fabric piece twice and then fold it around the edge of the lining piece.

• Sew together (along the dashed purple line in my picture)

• Put in the eyelets in between the edge and the seam you just made. They shouldn't be too far apart (there's only 5mm between mine and they have a diameter of 1cm, so I must have put one in every 2cm).

You're done with one half! Rejoice :)

Step 16 — Sewing the second half



The second half is done the same way except for the front panel, where you have to put in the other half of the bust.

This half has the posts, which aren't quite as easy to work with as the eyes.

Right on right, sew together the front panels (outer fabric and lining). The posts have to go through the outer fabric (consider this, if you want to add embroidery! I didn't but was very lucky mine wasn't damaged).

For marking exactly where, I used a little trick. With tailor's chalk, draw thickly onto the top of the posts.

There should be a little chalk dust on them.

Now fold open the front panels and align the busk with the front seam, then press the posts on the fabric. The chalk should have come off and made little marks where the posts have to be.

When making the holes for the posts you don't want to damage the fabric but only part the threads, so they can close again around the posts.

Take a pointy object (a sharpened pencil will do fine) and push the threads apart until you can fit the post through. Do this for every one of the posts.

To hold the busk in place, do as you did on the other half: make a seam as close to the busk as you can.

The other panels and the back work just as on the other side.

When putting in the eyelets on this side, make sure they're lined up with the eyelets on the other side!

Step 17 — Finishing up...

Now you can put the boning in the tunnels you sewed earlier.

As a last step, finish the upper and lower edges with bias tape. There are a lot of tutorials out there, explaining how to use bias tape, so I won't cover it here.

And voil, you're done! All that's left to do is lacing the corset (lots of instructions for the right way to do that all over the internet) and wearing it!

Good luck!

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