

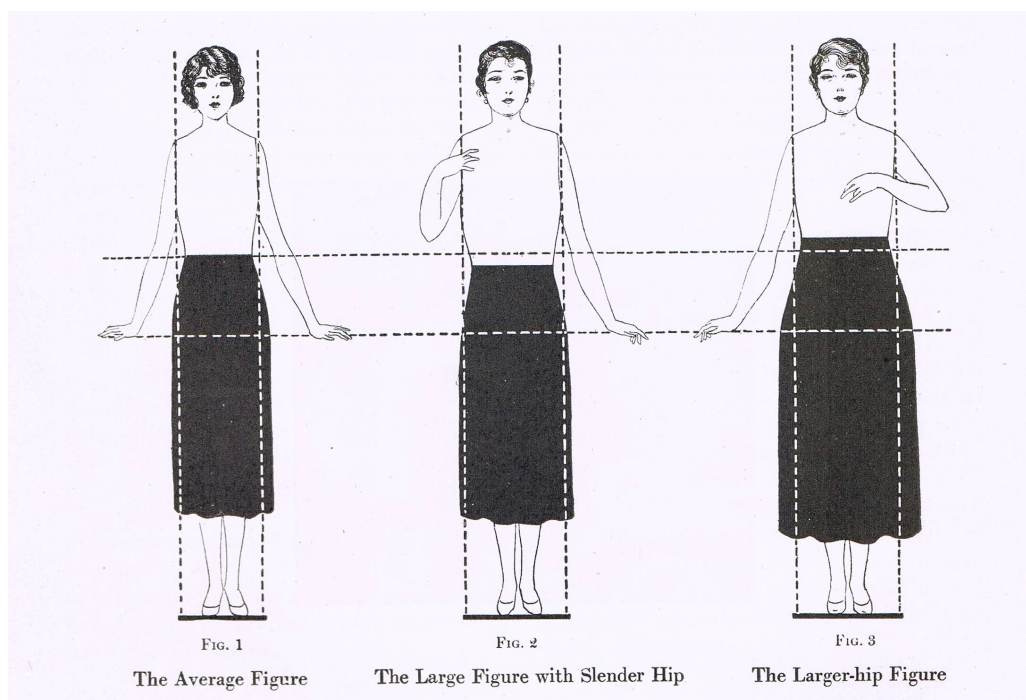
The Sizing of Model A Era Patterns

By Peggy Gill

[Authors Note: The terminology and language found in period sources is often quite different than our modern phrases and idioms. I have chosen to keep as much of this language intact—if for nothing else other than a humorous nod to the past.]

Like the brightly colored stick candy that lured a child to the candy counter in mercantile stores of bygone eras, vintage fashion patterns offer an endless source of intrigue and fascination to a seamstress who is also a Model A fashion enthusiast. These vintage patterns offer a glimpse into the past for fashion detail not often seen in modern designs. For the seamstress, her fingers may begin to tingle with the anticipation of being able to recreate these garments in an effort to bring these styles to life in our modern era.

Before you cut, please take note... Model A era patterns may *appear* to be sized differently than modern ones. It is not so much that they are sized differently, but that terminology back then may be different when compared to our modern day terms and phrases—but perhaps more significant is that the size of the “average figure” has changed. I happened upon a book that was published by The Pictorial Review Company, a pattern company popular during the Model A era. First published in the mid-twenties as a guide for the home seamstress, *The Mary Brooks Picken Method of Modern Dressmaking* author Mary Brooks Picken stresses that before you choose a dress pattern to work with it is essential that “you choose that pattern definitely designed for your type... average, slender hip, or larger-hip figure.”

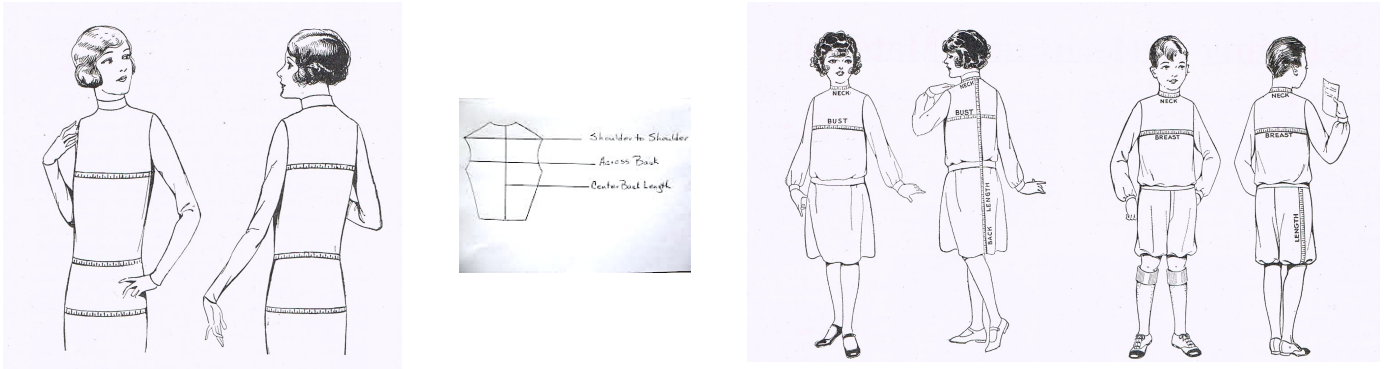


The Average Figure (Fig. 1) has a bust that is slightly smaller than the hip measurement, and the waist-line is at the natural waist. This is all figures with average proportions in hip and bust, with the bust measurement being less than 42 inches.

The Large Figure with Slender Hip (Fig. 2) shows a figure with the bust and hip measurement practically the same and with the waist-line lower than that of the average figure person. This shape is designed for large figures, that is, one with a bust of 42 inches or more.

The Larger-hip Figure (Fig. 3) has a hip measurement larger than the bust and the waist-line is higher than that of the average figure person.

It is important to take current measurements for each new pattern or project. It is a simple fact of life...our bodies change as we age. The illustrations below show the placement of the tape measure for women and children. According to *The Mary Brooks Pickin Method of Modern Dressmaking*, taking measurements correctly is paramount to a well fitting garment. “To take the bust measurement, draw the tape under the arms and straight across the back, taking the measure around the fullest part of the bust. For correct waist measure, draw the tape around the figure at the natural and normal waist-line, taking the measure snug, but not tight. To measure hip width, draw the measure around the figure, 7 inches below the natural waist-line. Have the tape easy on the hip and not too tight. When taking the measure for misses and small women, place the tape at the fullest part of the hip.”



“Juvenile patterns” refer to juniors, girls, and children. (Notice that boys are not included here.) Sizes for these patterns are according to the age of the child, “if the child is of average size for its age.” If the child is larger or smaller than “average” the bust/breast/chest measurement should be used. Misses sizes refer to young women and older teens, or women of small stature. Something to note about the misses sizes is the cut or “line” of the pattern. Although a persons measurements may fit the guidelines outlined below, the overall fit may be too small. For example, looking at an era pattern that says it is a size 18 years will show that the bust measurement is 36”. In my opinion, based on personal trial and error, patterns that are sized using the numbers 13-20 are made for younger women and older teens who have more slender arms and less, shall we say, *natural padding* in strategic places. The measurement across the back at the shoulders also tends to be narrower. One suggestion is to make a mockup of your chosen pattern in a muslin or other similar inexpensive fabric to make sure the sizing is right for you.

Like “juvenile patterns,” patterns for boys are sized according to age “as long as the boy is the average size for his age. If he is larger or smaller than average, coats, suits, and blouses would be sized by the chest measurement.” Shirt patterns used the neck measurement and trousers used the waist measurement.

Men’s shirt patterns used the neck measurement for sizing. When using a shirt that the man currently wears for this sizing, measure the neck-band from the center of the buttonhole at the left end to the center of the buttonhole at the right end. If measuring a man’s actual neck, hold the tape “easy around the bare neck where the neck-band comes...then add one-half inch to this measure.” Sleeve length was also important in men’s shirts. Measure sleeve length from the center back (where the buttonhole at the center back of the shirt would be) “over the elbow with the arm bended to the wrist.”

MEASUREMENT CHARTS

The following “Corresponding Measurement of Patterns” comes from *The Mary Brooks Pickin Method of Modern Dressmaking* and refers to **The Pictorial Review** patterns of that time (which include the Model A era). All measurements are in inches. It was suggested that if you fall between sizes, it was usually better to “select the size larger, especially if ease was desired in the garment.”

The Average Figure:

Bust	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48	50	52
Hip (7" below waist-line)	38	40	42	44	46	48	51	53	56	59
Across the Back	14	14	15	15	16	16	17	17	18	18
Waist	27	29	31	33	35	37	39	41	43	45

The Large Figure with Slender Hip:

Bust	42	44	46	48	50	52	54	56	58	60
Hip (7" below waist-line)	42	44	46	48	50	52	54	56	58	60
Across the Back	15	16	16	17	17	18	18	19	19	20
Waist	35	37	39	41	43	45	47	49	51	53

The Larger-hip Figure:

Bust	35	37	39	41	43	45	47	49	51	53
Hip (5" below natural waist-line)	37	39	41	43	45	47	49	51	53	55
Hip (7" below natural waist-line)	40	42	44	46	48	50	53	56	59	62
Across the Back	14	14	15	15	16	16	17	17	18	18
Waist	29	31	33	35	37	39	41	43	45	47

Juniors, Girls, and Little Children:

Years	½	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Breast	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35
Waist	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	25	26	26	27	27	27	28	28	28	29	29
Entire Length Shoulder to Hem	21	22	24	25	26	28	29	30	32	34	35	37	39	41	43	46	48	50

Misses:

Years	14	16	18	20
Bust	32	34	36	37
Hip (7" below natural waist-line)	35	37	39	40
Waist	26	27	28	29
Length of Dress at center front from waist-line to hem	32	35	37	38
Length of Dress (beginning with Pattern No. 2345)	30	32	33	34

Boys:

Years/Size	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16
Breast	22	23	24	26	28	30	32	34
Waist	21	22	23	24	26	27	28	29
Neck	10	10 ½	11	11 ½	12	12 ½	13	14

Men:

Breast	24	36	38	40	42	44	46	48	50
Neck	14	14 ½	15	15 ½	16	16 ½	17	17 ½	18

Pattern Counter Catalogs are also a good source for sizing/measurement information. The following information and text was taken directly from a **1929 Butterick Counter Catalog**. If you look closely, you will see some differences between these from Butterick shown below and the measurements listed above from The Pictorial Review Pattern Company.

LADIES

BUST	32	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48	50	52	Ins.
WAIST	27	28	30	32	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	Ins.
HIP MEASURE	35	37	39	41	43	45	47 ½	50	53	56	59	Ins.

ARM MEASURE

BUST	32-34	35-37	38-40	41-44	45-47	Ins.
ARM MEASURE	11	12	13	15	15	Ins.

MISSES

Young girls of the same age vary in size. In addition to the measures, the average size is given on the pattern envelope to make clear that the pattern is cut on misses' lines, but the only way to get the correct size is to buy by measures, just as one would for a woman's pattern. The measures are taken just as for women.

BUST	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	Ins.
SIZE	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
WAIST	26	27	27 ½	28	29	30	31	32	Ins.
HIP	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	Ins.
Socket Bone to Floor	50	52	53	54					Ins.

JUNIORS

Girls of the same age vary in size. In addition to the measures, the average size is given on the pattern envelope to make clear that the pattern is cut on juvenile lines, but the only way to get the correct size is to buy by measures. The bust measure only is needed for patterns of dresses, coats and underwear (except drawers). Drawers should be bought by the waist measure.

BUST or BREAST - Take measure over the bust or breast, close up under the arms and straight across back. This measure should always be taken from the back and the tape should be easy, not snug.

WAIST - Take measure at natural waistline, drawing tape snug but not tight.

Alteration in Length is explained on the Deltor, which is enclosed in every Butterick Pattern envelope.

BUST	31	32	33	34	35	Ins.
SIZE	13	14	15	16	17	
WAIST	26	27	27 ½	28	29	Ins.
HIP	34	35	36	37	38	Ins.
Socket Bone to Floor	50	52	53	54	--	Ins.

GIRLS

BREAST	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	Ins.
SIZE	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
WAIST	24	24 ½	25	25 ½	26	26	26 ½	26 ½	27	Ins.
Socket Bone to Floor	36	38	40	42	44	46	48	50	52	Ins.

CHILDREN

BREAST	21	22	23	23 ½	24	Ins.
SIZE	2	3	4	5	6	
WAIST	21	22	23	23 ½	24	Ins.
Socket Bone to Floor	28	30	32	34	36	Ins.

INFANTS

BREAST	19	20	21	22	Ins.
SIZE	½	1	2	3	
WAIST	19	20	21	22	Ins.
Socket Bone to Floor	21	24	28	30	Ins.

For additional reading about this subject you will want to read Sewing Patterns During the Model A Years, by Janet Gundlach. Janet offers general pattern history as well as practical tips and advice when working with vintage patterns. Janet is a member of the Gallop in' Gertie Model A Club and is an avid seamstress. She has also served on MAFCA's Era Fashion Committee as a member and as the Chairperson. This article can be found on the MAFCA website at: http://www.mafca.com/downloads/Fashions/Sewing_Patterns.pdf.

It is with much gratitude and thanks to Helen Christensen from the Santa Clara Valley Model A Club and her wonderful team of volunteers that these patterns have been painstakingly preserved for our use today. In addition to their pattern preservation, they have put together a fabulous catalog available for purchase through MAFCA or viewing online on the MAFCA website. It should be noted that although our Pattern Catalog has a large number of patterns available, there are not all sizes available for each pattern in this collection. For more information about the MAFCA Pattern Project, please visit the MAFCA website at: http://www.mafca.com/patterns/patterns_history.html.

Sources: 1929 Butterick Counter Catalog

The Mary Brooks Picken Method of Modern Dressmaking, The Pictorial Review Company, NY, 1925.