

# Before You Buy a Pattern to Sew, Analyze Your Body

by Pati Palmer,  
Palmer/Pletsch

Getting a pattern that fits is more than buying the right size. You must also learn about your shape and body proportions. So “get honest.” For an unbiased look at your body, place a paper bag over your head and stand in front of a full-length mirror. DO cut eye holes in the bag!

Speaking of full-length mirrors, do you own one?  
\_\_\_ If yes, you get 5 points.  
\_\_\_ If it is in your sewing area, you get 10 points.

## Is There Such a Thing as a Perfect Body?

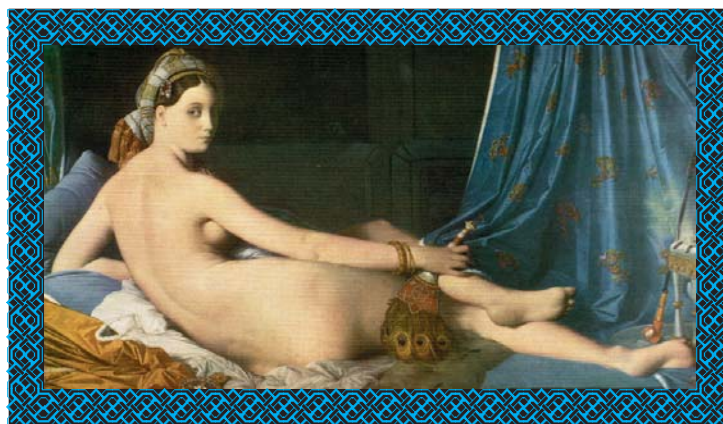
If there is, she doesn't come to our Palmer/Pletsch classes. Marta Alto and I have been fitting for over 25 years and have yet to see someone make no adjustments. People are uniquely different from the so-called “standard.”

In the past the ideal shape was more pear-shaped than today's ideal. This painting of *Odalisque* showed the ideal female figure. She was never slim-hipped. If you were, you weren't beautiful—you were too poor to have much to eat.

*Odalisque*  
Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres



Today, we all dream of being tall and slim. Edith Head, designer for many beautiful movie stars, once said that women are too hard on themselves and should play up the positives and stop worrying about what they consider their flaws.

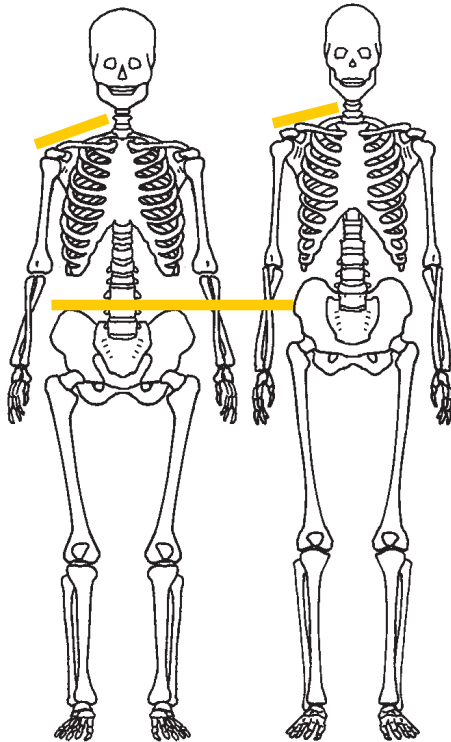


# Why Are People's Bodies So Different?

## Genetics

You are born with a certain skeleton. It has its own shape and proportions. Your bones may be large, medium, or small. Your shoulder bones may be more square or sloping than "average." You may be longer or shorter in the waist than "average." When you fit a pattern, you are fitting your skeleton plus your "fluff."

*Note the differences in two skeletons of the same height. For example, look at the differences in the shape of the rib cage, the slope of the shoulders and the shape and width of the pelvis.*



## Maturity

With maturity things just seem to fall. Blame it on gravity! We started fitting in our 20s and saw how people changed as they matured. It was a rude awakening. In spite of all of this, we have determined that **40 isn't fatal**. Nor is 50, 60, 70, etc. If you think your body has gone downhill, remember, it is balanced by your intelligence, insight and compassion, all of which have gone uphill.

Young    Mature



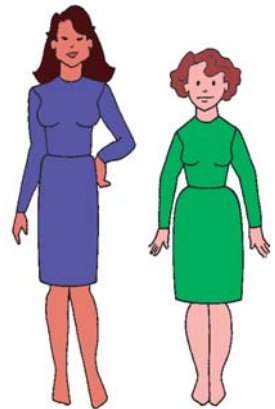
## Posture Affects Fit

Encourage your children to stand up straight and to pull their shoulders back. We are seeing more 13-year-olds with rounded backs and forward shoulders than ever before. They are the computer generation and posture is reflecting it. Poor posture becomes permanent. It causes hems that sag or hike up, jackets that won't stay on the shoulders, and collars that stick out at the back neck. Stand up straight, put weight evenly on both feet, don't cross your legs, and don't carry book bags or grocery bags or heavy purses on one shoulder, or babies on one hip. You'll look smarter, younger and thinner and have a healthier back!

## Weight Distribution and Shape

You will differ from the hourglass figure if you carry more or less weight in any area. Causes can include genetics and age, but shape is also affected by how physically active you are and what type of exercises you do. Also, for many, shape changes after pregnancy.

*Two people who weigh the same can be shaped differently.*



## Body Proportions

Proportion is the length of the different body sections in relationship to each other. Three people standing in a row may all be the same size and height, but vary in waist and leg length.

Proportioned patterns are not necessarily the answer for a tall or short person. **Find out where you are tall or short**

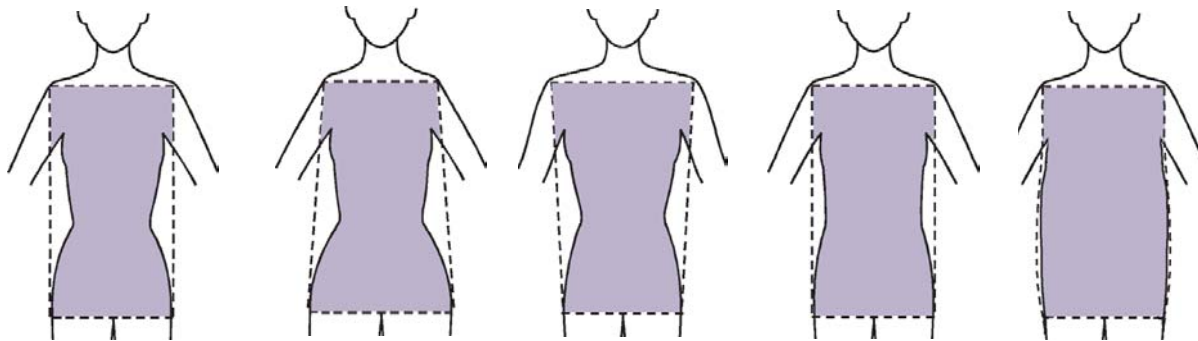
and learn how to lengthen or shorten a regular pattern in the right places. Most short people have average waist length and crotch length. Their shortness is in their legs.



"But we're all 5'4" and wear a size 12!"



There are five common categories of shape. Most people are one of the following:



**Hourglass**

Shoulders and hips are the same width. Waist is about 10" smaller.



**Triangle**

Shoulders are narrower than hips.



**Inverted Triangle**

Upper body (shoulders or bust) are wider than hips.



**Rectangle**

Waist has little or no indentation.



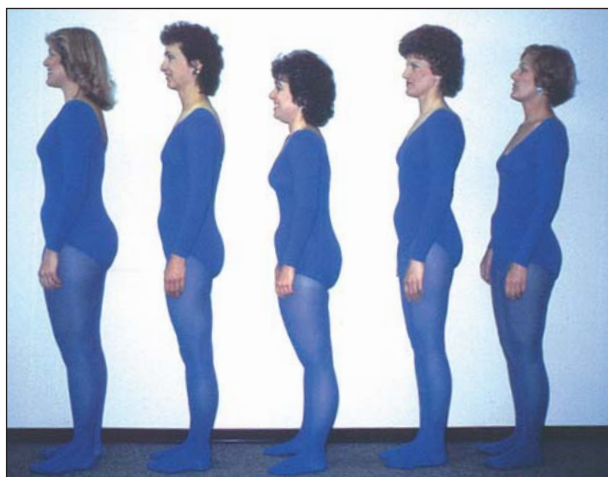
**"O"**

Waist is larger than bust or hips



**The Pattern Company Nightmare**

All of the women below sew with a size 10... in the shoulders. Look at the differences in bustline, height, waist length, shoulder slope, posture and silhouette or shape. Imagine the nightmare of pattern companies trying to design patterns to fit all of these figures.



It would be IMPOSSIBLE to come up with a **perfect pattern** to fit each of these shapes, let alone the myriad other body shapes in the sewing population. Therefore, pattern companies stick to a standard. Once you know your standard alterations, you can sew any design from any company.

**Make a Body Graph**

A "body graph" is a quick, fun and simple way to identify your shape and proportions regardless of your height. If you are short, where are you short? Did you know your shoulders or hips are uneven? What is your shape? We have tested and fine-tuned the steps of making a body graph with students in our workshops. You can find instructions for making one in our book *Fit for Real People*. Once you have your graph, you can compare it to "Perfect" proportions and then make alterations to your pattern tissue. A little extra work can ensure that you'll make a good looking garment that makes YOU look good.



Excerpted from *Fit for Real People*, available at [www.palmerpletsch.com](http://www.palmerpletsch.com). Look for this book and our other Real People books and DVDs