

Girls' Regency Dress Pattern Instructions



Notes:

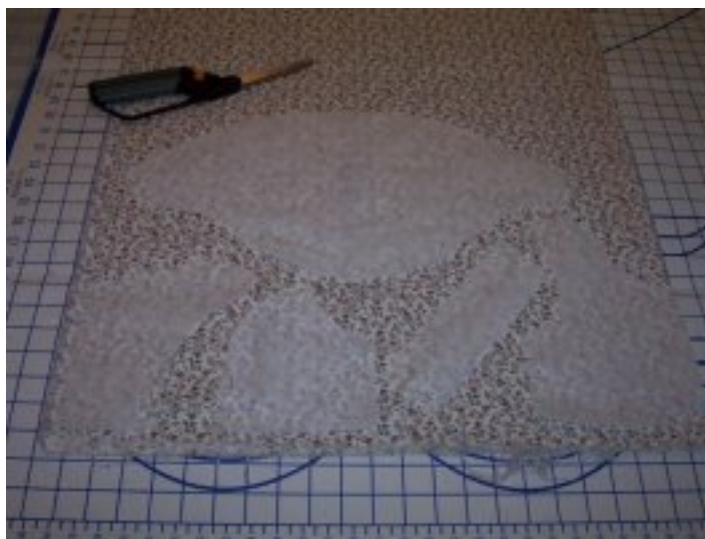
This is the little girl version of my adult Regency Gown Pattern. I didn't just shrink the adult pattern pieces for the smaller version, however. Girls' dresses during this time did not have the deeper necklines, and gathered bodices do not seem to have been as common as plain ones. Accordingly, this pattern features a bodice that is straight across the front and has a higher, smaller neckline. The skirt gathers all the way around (front and back), since that seems to have been more common for little girls than skirts gathered across the back only. However, if you prefer to keep the skirt fullness in the back, you can do so by not matching the skirt side seams to the bodice side seams, keeping the skirt front straight and distributing the gathers from one underarm seam to the next, across the back. There are two sleeve types, the puffed short sleeve and a slightly puffed long sleeve.

When you are ready to start, trace all of your pattern pieces onto interfacing or pattern paper. This keeps your original pattern intact, so you can use other sizes later if you wish. It is absolutely essential that you measure the child for whom you will be making the dress. Do not look at the size on the chart and assume that a "6" in patterns corresponds with a "6x" off-the-rack. It does not! Pattern measurements are very different from retail clothing measurements. Go by the measurements, not by the "size." Skirt hem length is also going to vary quite a bit, depending upon the child. Some six-year-olds are tall, while others are short. The hem lengths shown on the skirt piece are just suggestions. I recommend that you measure the child from empire waistline to desired hem length prior to cutting out the skirt. The same is true for the sleeves. No "standard" pattern size is going to be perfect for a variety of girls. Again, a taller girl will have longer arms. Even if she is a perfect 6 in the

chest, she might need a size 10 sleeve. Just measure from shoulder to knuckles to determine the proper length (long sleeves are meant to hit at the knuckles). You may also use the long sleeve pattern to create an undersleeve. (See sleeve instructions.) Long and short sleeves are both appropriate for day wear for little girls. Just make your choice based upon the season in which the dress will be worn.

For day dresses, cotton, muslin, voile, linen, and lightweight wool are a few good fabric choices. If you are not striving for a more period-correct gown, you may wish to use challis, crepe, or another type of rayon blend. These fabrics hang very nicely. Even though little girls did not attend balls, I know how girls love fancy ballgowns! For those, silk, silk taffeta, voile, organdy, and Irish linen all work well. Ballgowns can be trimmed as much or as little as you wish. Regency gowns were often lavishly trimmed with braided cords, ribbon, embroidery, tassels, ruffles or a combination of all of these. The most common places to trim are the neckline, cuffs, waistline and hem of the gown. Fabric piping also looks wonderful at the neckline and waistline.

Pattern Layout:



Here is the suggested layout for the bodice and sleeve pieces on 45" wide material. (The fabric fold is on the right.)

The remaining fabric will be used for the skirt pieces.

The long sleeve can be placed where the short sleeve is in the illustration.
(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

Assembly Instructions:

1. **Bodice** (Note: In the photos, the white fabric is the dress lining.)

A. Pin the bodice back and side back pieces together, easing curve as necessary and matching at the lower back edge. Stitch.



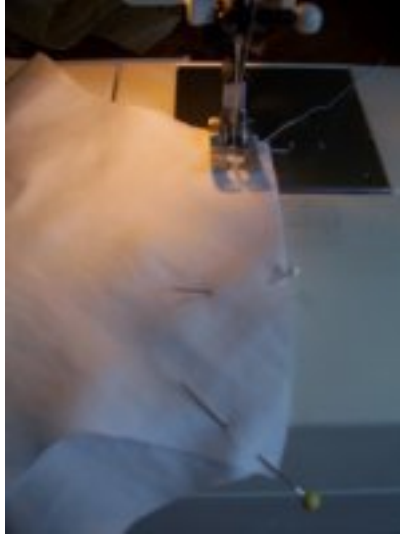
(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

B. Clip curves and press seam toward the side.



(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

C. Pin bodice front and back pieces together at shoulder and side seams. Stitch. Press seams open. **[Important Note! The “shoulder” seams on this gown are that in name only. They do not hit the top of the shoulder at all, rather, they drop behind the shoulder of the wearer about an inch and a half. This is period correct for the Regency era and later.]**



Sewing the shoulder seam.
(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

D. Repeat all of these instructions for the bodice lining.

E. Pin bodice to lining, right sides together. Stitch from back opening all the way around the neckline to back opening, leaving 5/8" free at the bottom of each back opening.

F. Grade seam allowances and clip curves.



Left: Clipping the corner of the seam allowance at the center back neckline.

Right: Seam allowance clipped around the curved neckline.
(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

G. Turn bodice right side out and understitch lining as far around as possible and down the back closure. [To watch a video clip demonstrating understitching, click [HERE](#).]



(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

H. Press bodice and set aside.



2. **Sleeves** (Note: Short sleeves are shown. Instructions for long sleeves and optional undersleeves are given below).

A. Run gathering stitches on tops and bottoms of sleeves, following lines indicated on the pattern. Pin sleeve band to sleeve, pulling gathering stitches to fit. Stitch.

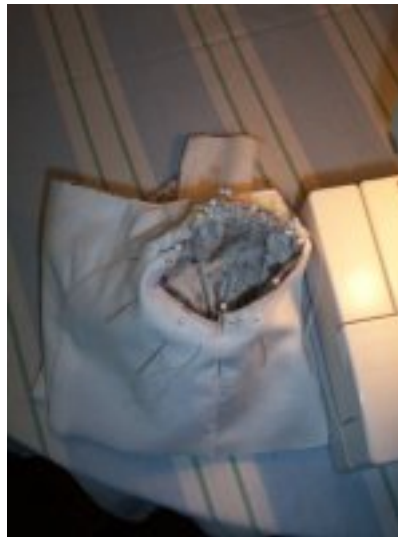


Left: Sleeve pinned to the sleeve band. Right: Sleeve sewn to sleeveband, seam being trimmed to reduce bulk.

(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

B. Sew sleeve seams together and press open. Press under $\frac{1}{4}$ " of the sleeve band.

C. Pin sleeves to armholes, right sides together, matching underarm seams to side seams.



Sleeve pinned into armhole.
(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

D. Pull gathers to fit. Stitch. Clip curves, turn sleeve inside out and press. Set aside.

Long Sleeves: Assembly is the same, but you will press under the cuff only when you have determined the hem width after trying the dress on the child.

Optional Undersleeves for Short Sleeved Dress: If you plan to make detachable undersleeves, you will be finishing the short sleeve sleevebands now, so you can ignore the sleeve finishing instructions found below. Zigzag or narrowly hem the raw edge of the short sleeve sleevebands. Turn the sleeve band to the inside so that it covers the sleeveband seam allowance completely. Press. Now fold the sleeveband back out and mark four to six evenly spaced horizontal buttonholes on the part of the sleeveband that will be folded inside. (In other words, you will be placing buttonholes beneath the fold line made when you pressed the band.) Make the buttonholes, cut them open, then fold the sleeveband inside and whipstitch it in place over the seam allowance inside. You will now have four to six buttonholes inside the each sleeve around the sleeveband. Cut out two undersleeves, using long sleeve pattern but omitting the cap of the sleeve (as per cutting line). Stitch sleeve seams. Turn under a narrow hem along the top edge

of each undersleeve and stitch. Using the buttonholes you made in the sleeveband as a guide, mark where you will place four to six buttons around the outside top of each undersleeve. Sew buttons in place. Now the undersleeve will button into the sleevebands and will not slip down (as undersleeves with drawstrings are prone to do). Go ahead and try the bodice on the child with the undersleeves buttoned into the sleevebands. Undersleeves should come to the knuckles, but they can be hemmed shorter if you prefer. Mark and hem each undersleeve to the appropriate length. Remove undersleeves and complete the rest of the gown.

3. Skirt

A. Cut skirt lining opening for back closure as indicated on the pattern. Sew skirt lining front to skirt lining back at side seams. Press seams open. Repeat these instructions for the skirt. [**Note: The skirt lining is optional. If you are using a non-opaque material and do not wish to have the extra layer, you can omit the skirt lining entirely.**]

B. Pin skirt lining to skirt, wrong side of skirt to right side of lining, matching side seams and back closure. Run gathering stitches around the top of the skirt (catching the lining if you're using one), breaking the gathering stitches at the side seams.

C. To make a placket for the center back skirt opening, cut a piece of fabric on the bias twice as long as the back opening and two inches wide.



Placket piece cut on the bias.
(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

D. Pin placket to right side of skirt back opening, catching the lining as well (if skirt is lined).

E. Stitch placket to skirt and lining, starting with a 3/8" seam allowance and gradually bringing the presser foot to the edge of the fabric at the center of the placket. When you reach the center, leave the needle in the center, lift the presser foot and pivot the fabric to head back up the other side of the placket. Gradually come back to a 3/8" seam allowance as you finish the seam.

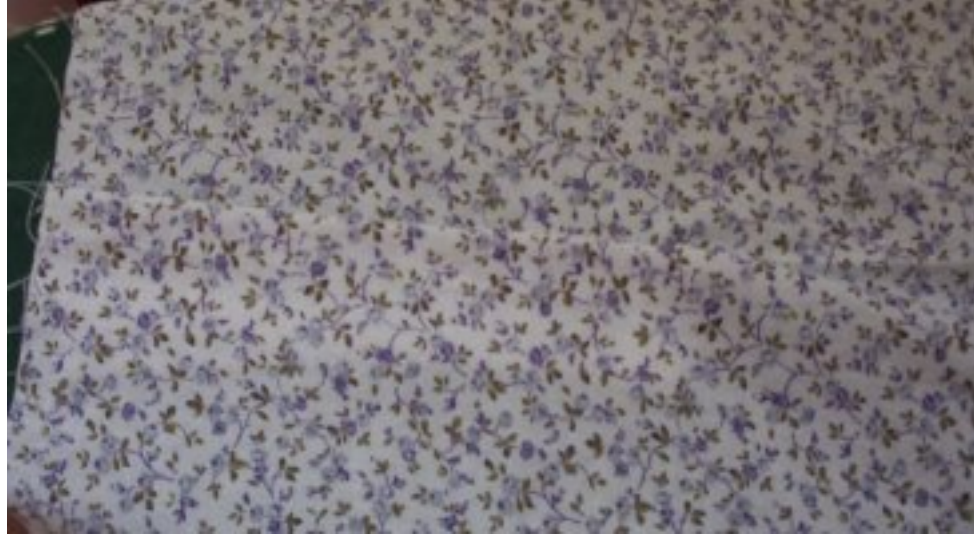


The placket sewn to the skirt.
(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

Press under 1/4" of the free edge of the placket or finish with a zigzag stitch.

Press the placket as illustrated so the left side overlaps the right and makes an even closure.





The left side of placket is pressed completely under so nothing shows outside.

The right side of the placket is turned under just enough to whipstitch over seam on the inside.

(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

4. Attaching Bodice

A. Pin bodice to skirt and lining, matching center fronts, side seams, and back closures and leaving bodice lining free. Pull gathering stitches in skirt to fit. [Note: You can also pleat instead of gathering if you prefer. If you wish to make the skirt front flat (no gathers or pleats), ignore matching the side seams with the bodice side seams. Instead, match center fronts, smooth the skirt to the side seams, then gather remaining skirt fabric from one side of the back to the other.]

B. Stitch bodice to skirt. Press seam allowance up toward bodice.



(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

5. Finishing the Dress

A. Turn under the bottom of the bodice lining fabric and pin in place over the waist seamline. Whipstitch the lining in place.



Bodice lining turned under and pinned.
(Click thumbnail for larger image.)

B. Turn under the pressed edge of the sleeveband and whipstitch in place.

C. Mark buttonholes horizontally on the overlapping back flap of the bodice. You can space them an inch to an inch and a half apart. Four or five 3/8" buttons will usually fill the space. Clip buttonholes open, then pin the bodice closed and mark where the buttons should be sewn. Sew buttons in place. If desired, also sew a snap or hook and eye closure in the placket.

D. To hem the dress, try it on the child and mark the hem. Turn up and hand stitch or machine stitch the hem in place. Press. Lining (if used) should be hemmed to almost the exact same length, save 1/4" inch. You may also choose to put tucks in the skirt lining and/or edge it with lace to make it resemble a petticoat. In order to leave enough room for tucks, you'll need to cut the skirt lining pieces longer to begin with, of course.





Finished dress, with a detail of the bodice.
(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

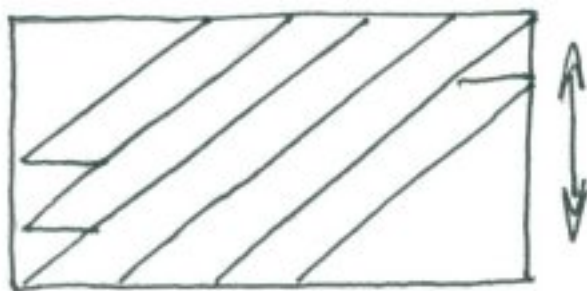
Appendix: Creating a "Drawstring" Gathered Dress



Many Regency dresses closed with drawstrings instead of buttons. Buttons appear on a few early Regency gowns, but they seem to be more common after the 1810s. There are hundreds of examples of period gowns that simply tie in the back at the top of the neckline and at the waistline—especially girls' gowns. Today, because of the danger of strangulation from ties or ribbons in a dress, you will use elastic to create the drawstring look without the strings! **The only extra item you'll need for this option is a package of 3/8" elastic.** [Note: I do not have photos for these steps yet but will post them as soon as I do!]

Bodice:

1. To create a fuller bodice front, place the center front of the pattern piece two inches away from the fold of your material, adding four inches to the bodice front width. For the center back bodice, simply cut it out on the fold instead of cutting along the center back line. (Because the bodice back already includes room for seam allowance and overlap, you'll have all the extra room you need without adding width.) **Do not cut out lining pieces; those are omitted for this option.**
2. Sew the bodice pieces together, just as shown in the pattern instructions. Press seams and set aside.
3. Using your leftover fabric scraps, cut out bias strips 1 ½" wide. Cut enough strips to go around the neckline of the bodice you've just created.



4. Sew strips together along the angled ends until all strips are connected. To get

a perfect seam, your stitches should run between the “>” and the “<” shown in the illustration at left below. These “notches” are created when you overlap the strips (right sides together, of course!). [Your seam allowance will be 1/8” to 1/4” only. A larger seam will make a crooked bias strip with odd angles, so stay between the notches and make a small seam.] When you’ve finished sewing, press the strip neatly.



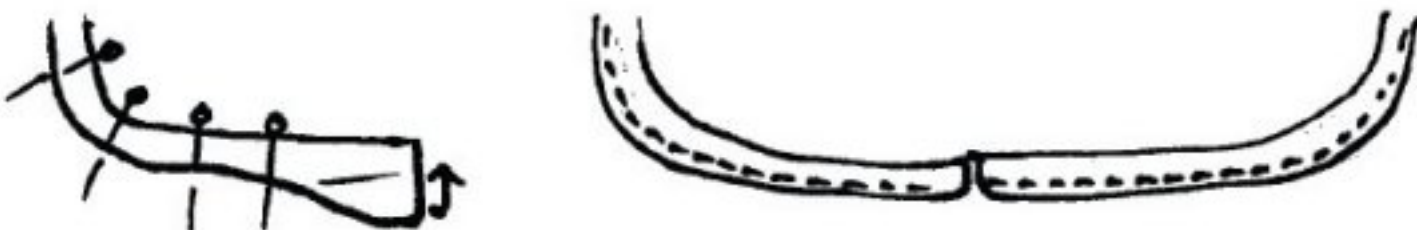
5. Pin binding around the bodice neckline (right sides together), beginning and ending at the center back and folding under the edges as shown:



6. Stitch in place all the way around the neckline. Trim seam allowance down to 1/4” and clip curves.



7. Fold under the raw edge of the binding and fold the binding to the inside of the neckline to create the elastic casing. Press neatly and pin in place. Stitch, making small running stitches all the way around the neckline and making sure outside stitches are tiny, even, and neat (you do not have to do this step by hand if you prefer to use your machine.).



8. To determine the proper length of the elastic you will use, measure around the original bodice front and back pieces, then subtract 1.5". This omits the back seam allowances and overlap but gives you enough room to tie off or stitch together the elastic ends. So, for instance, if the original neckline measures 16", your elastic should be cut to 14.5". Set aside the elastic for now, as you'll run it through the casing after attaching the sleeves and skirt to the bodice. Refer to the original instructions for sleeves, then come back here for the skirt and finishing.

Skirt:

1. Cut out the skirt according to the pattern pieces and instructions. **Do not cut an opening for a placket; none is needed.**
2. Sew the skirt together, then run basting stitches along the top for gathers as shown in the instructions.
3. Pin skirt to bodice, matching center fronts, side seams, and center backs. Pull up basting stitches and pin gathers in place. Because the bodice is wider, the skirt will not gather quite as much right now – it will once you've run your elastic through the waistline, though!
4. After sewing the skirt to the bodice, zig-zag or Serger-stitch the raw edge of the seam allowance to finish it off, then iron the seam allowance up toward the bodice. Turn the dress wrong-side out and find the center back of the bodice. Beginning there, sew the seam allowance to the bodice close to the edge of the seam allowance, creating a casing for the waistline elastic. Stop your stitching half an inch from where you started to leave an opening through which to feed the elastic.

Finishing:

Now you're ready to run your elastic through each casing.

1. Use a safety pin to run the elastic through the neckline casing. When you've gone all the way around, you can either tie your ends together in a tight knot or overlap the ends and zig-zag stitch them to secure them. The finished opening in the neckline binding allows you to change out the elastic later if you need to.
2. Measure around the child's empire waistline (have her try on the dress if you aren't sure where that will hit). Add half an inch for the overlap, and cut the elastic to that length. If the child's empire waistline measured 24", you'd cut the elastic to 24.5".
3. Use a safety pin to run the waistline elastic through its casing. Tie it off or overlap and zig-zag to secure the elastic in place.
4. Hem the dress to the appropriate length for the child and iron neatly. There you go! You've got a beautiful, drawstring-look option that makes for a nice variation on a theme. Best of all, this is an easy-on, easy-off option that makes it possible for a young child to dress herself!



Photos by B. Norris
(Click thumbnails for larger images.)



Left photo by J. Norris; right by B. Norris
(Click thumbnails for larger images.)

Enjoy your new creation!

Special thanks to Emma S. for formatting the instructions into HTML!

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