

From the Skin Out: Dressing the “Brueghel” Peasant Man

Master Richard Wymarc



Detail from: *The Peasant's Dance*. Pieter Bruegel, The Elder, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, ca 1568.

Notes

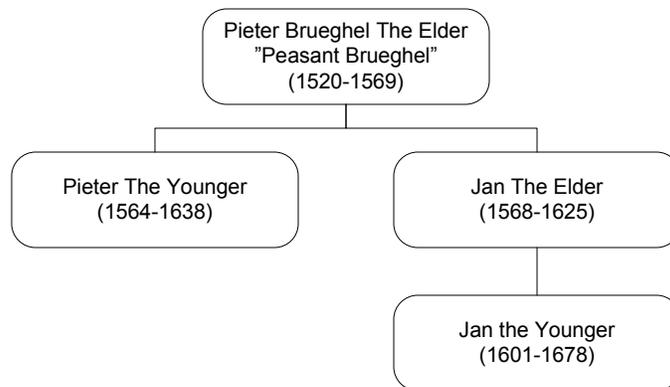
Period: Middle to late 16th century (Mid to late 1500's)

Location: North-western Europe, Netherlands

Class: Peasant to merchant / middle class

Artist: Pieter Brueghel (1520-1569)

Note: There is more than one Brueghel who is known as an artist.
- Pieter Brueghel spelled his name both with and without the "H" (Brueghel/Bruegel)
- Pieter Brueghel founded a family of painters:



- All three of the other Brueghels painted copies of the Elder Pieter's work, and created work in his style. This can cause confusion when researching these works. Always check the artist's full name and the date of the painting.

Timeline:

Late 1520's Pieter Brueghel born.

1556-1559 The Seven Vices, The Seven Virtues.

1559 The Battle Between Carnival and Lent.

1560 Children's Games.

1566 The Numbering at Bethlehem.

1567 The Peasant Wedding.

1568 The Parable of the Blind.

1569 Dies in Brussels.

The Skin and the Undergarments - Notes

When looking at the works of Pieter Brueghel, you are soon struck with the feeling that the peasants he is depicting all look very well fed, and more than a little tipsy. This is an example of what I call “Fat Happy Peasant Syndrome”.

For the most part the people in his paintings, especially the ones depicting peasant life, show people who are plump and having a very good time. Clothing is often tight, with the wearer bulging out of it, and various fastenings are undone.

Fun as these images are, I doubt that they are a good example of everyday life. Please keep this in mind when fitting your garments.

Of course, the general sloppiness of the dress gives us a good look at construction and fastenings, that we might not otherwise have.

Underwear:

A exhaustive examination of the paintings and woodcuts of Brueghel shows no example of a garment equivalent to boxers or y-fronts (or thongs). Indeed there are several examples where the hose are shown partially removed and there is no evidence of anything but the wearer under them.



1. Detail from: *Flemish Proverbs*. Pieter Brueghel, The Elder, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, 1559

2. Detail from: *Peddler Pillaged by Apes*. Pieter Brueghel, The Elder, Frankfurt am Main, Historisches Museum, 1562



The Shirt - Notes

The most common garment depicted in the works of Brueghel is the shirt. It is also the most constant in cut and construction. There are only very few variations from the basic design I will describe below.

Material: White linen. I can find no example of the use of any other color. There are examples of worn, dirty or stained shirts, but the original color is identifiable as white.

Construction: The length of the shirts depicted varies. If you look at the examples in Fig. 3 (left - The right figure is wearing an apron) and Fig. 4 you see the hems at the knee or below. In contrast look at the examples in Fig. 2: Here the hems are just below the hip. It is worth noting that with the exception of the figures in Fig. 2 I have found no examples of short hems shown untucked from the hosen. In any case, tucking such long hems into hose would make for noticeable bulk about the hips and would serve no purpose.

The neck holes are of varying sizes, but all share the same round/oval shape (see Figs. 1, 3, 4)

The sleeve length is a generous wrist-length, at times shown rolled up out of the way. The opening is loose, and there is no separate cuff or closure. Examination leads me to believe that the sleeves are tapered from the body to the cuff, as the cuffs are not large enough to be comfortable as armholes.

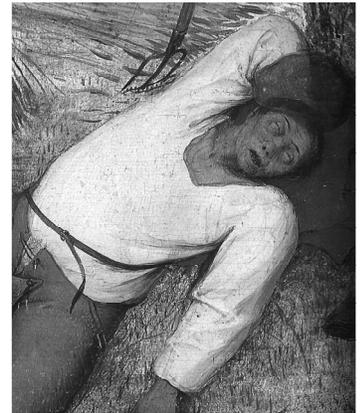
While no underarm gussets are depicted, they are a standard part of extant shirts from this period; and so I'm assuming their usage here. Note that none of the other shirt seams are depicted either.



4. Detail from: *The Blind Leading The Blind*. Pieter Brueghel, The Elder, Naples, Museo e Gallerie nazionali di Capodimonte, 1568



1: Details from *The Harvest*. Pieter Brueghel, The Elder, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1565



2. Details from: *The Wedding Feast*. Pieter Brueghel, The Elder, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, ca1568



3. Details from: *Flemish Proverbs*. Pieter Brueghel, The Elder, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, 1559



The Shirt - Construction

Measurements:

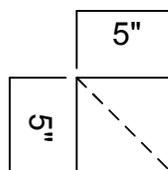
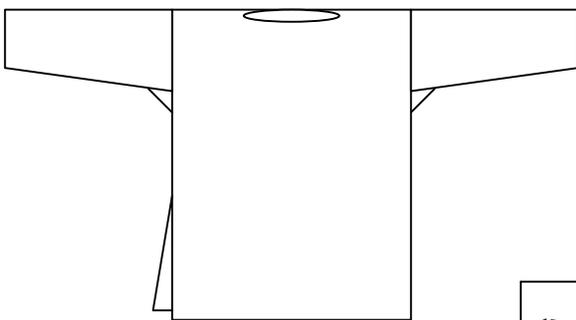
(includes seam allowance)

- A: Measure Chest, Waist, Hips and take the largest measurement. Add 5-6 inches to this and divide by 2.
- B: Measure from top of shoulder to where you want the hem to land. Add 1 inch and Multiple by 2.
- C: With arm at your side and elbow bent: Measure from the center of the nape of the neck, over the shoulder, down the arm over the elbow to the heel of the thumb. Add 1 inch and then subtract one half of Measurement A.

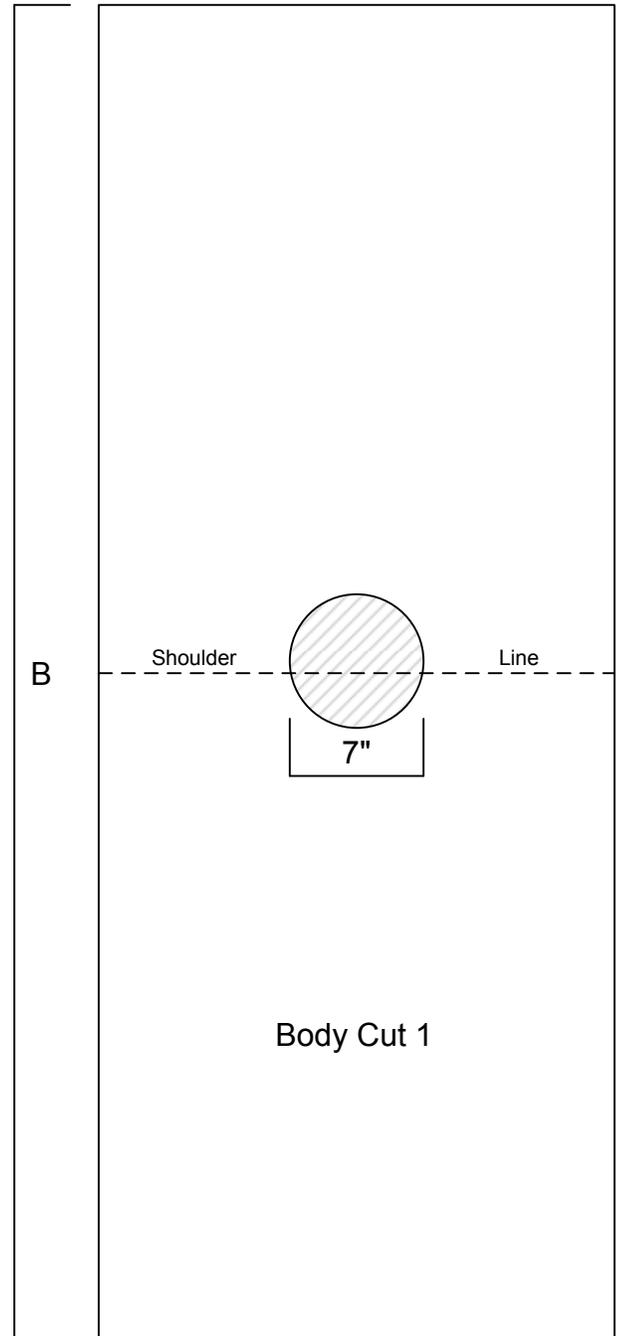
Note: The size of the sleeve will depend on the size of your arm. I'm of medium build, and the dimensions show below work well for me. If your arms are bulky or skinny you might want to adjust the width of the arm.



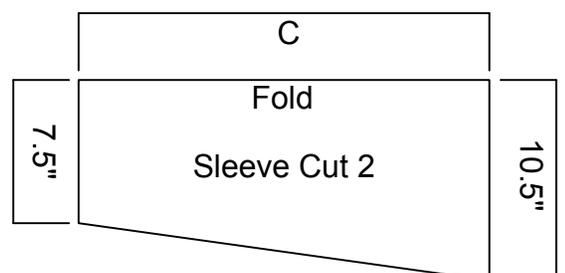
- Mark the fabric as shown and cut out the pieces.
 - Mark shoulder line on body as shown and cut out 7" dia. circle for neck hole. (center neck on shoulder line and offset 1 inch forward).
 - Finish neck by rolling and whip-stitching.
 - Finish raw edges of all pieces.
 - Attach sleeves to body, lining up the fold of the sleeve with the shoulder line.
 - Sew in underarm gores and sew up sleeves.
- Try on shirt and mark where you want the side slits to start. Remove shirt and sew sides from underarm gore to your mark.
- Hem and finish shirt



Gore
Cut 2



Body Cut 1



Sleeve Cut 2

The Hose - Notes 1

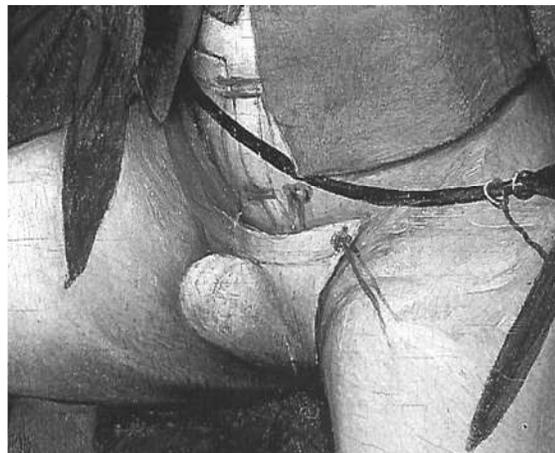
Material: Probably wool, possibly linen; almost certainly bias-cut. Colors vary from white through the spectrum.

Construction: Most of the hose depicted in Brughel's paintings are long and footed. The top of the torso section seems to be high by modern standards, coming to just above the navel (see Figs. 1, 2).

Fig. 1 shows detail of the codpiece and points that close the front of the garment. Note that the top of the codpiece does not cover the whole opening, but sits with its attaching points just above the point where the thigh meets the torso. The codpiece shown is typical in size and design.

In most of the examples where the tops of the hose are shown, the points are either partially or fully undone (see Fig. 2). Add to this the fact that they seem to stay up well on their own and it suggests to me that the torso section of the hose are lined with a relatively un-giving fabric. If you look closely at the closure ties in Figs. 1 and 2, you will see the artist has not depicted any pull lines or puckering caused by the points; but he has pulls and wrinkles further down where the thigh joins the torso.

Supporting this idea is the example shown in Fig. 3. This is a detail from one of the artist's engravings, and shows a pair of hose sitting empty on the ground. As you can see, the torso section is standing much stiffer than the legs of the garment.



1: Details from *The Wedding Dance*. Pieter Brueghel, The Elder, Detroit, Institute of Arts, 1566



2: Detail from: *The Peasants' Dance*. Pieter Brueghel, The Elder, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, ca 1568.



3. Detail from: *Charity*. Pieter Brueghel, The Elder, Rotterdam, Boymans Museum, ca1559

The Hose - Notes 2

In addition to the more familiar full-length hose, the artist depicts several examples of a shorter variation.

Material: Wool or linen; and some examples look like they might be made from leather (see Fig. 3) and one example looks like a brocaded fabric (Fig. 1).

Construction: The construction appears to be the same as the full length hose. The bottom of the short hose stops at mid-thigh and fits around it tightly.

Under this garment the wearer might have any variation of: bare legs (Fig. 2); longer under-hose covering to just below the knee (Fig. 1, 3); and socks.



2. Detail from: *Summer*. Pieter Bruegel, The Elder, Hamburg, Kunsthalle, 1568



1: Detail from: *The Peasants' Dance*. Pieter Bruegel, The Elder, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, ca 1568.

3. Detail from: *The Blind Leading The Blind*. Pieter Bruegel, The Elder, Naples, Museo e Gallerie nazionali di Capodimonte, 1568



The Vest - Notes 1

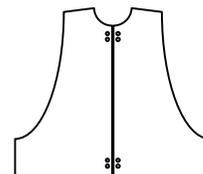
One problem I have come across is how to label some of these garments. The term “doublet” does not convey the rich variation of garments that were worn by the subjects of these paintings and woodcuts. To simplify matters I will break it down as follows: If it does not have sleeves it is a *vest*, if it does it is a *doublet*, and if it is obviously designed as an over-garment it is a *coat* (There will still be exceptions and confusion; trust me...)

Vests are a common feature of the clothing depicted by Brueghel. The three main variations are illustrated to the right. The short, plain vest, seen with, or without point eyelets around the base. A similar version with a short skirt-let or pelos attached to the bottom. And a longer, knee-length version.

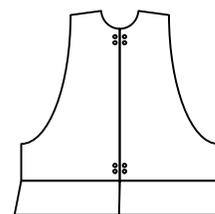
Material: Possible materials are linen, wool and in some depictions, leather.

Construction Details: The cut of the vest varies from example to example. There are slight differences in the size of the armholes, and the cut of the neck. The length is variable as well. If you examine Figure 1 you will see a long, knee-length version worn under a much shorter version of the same basic garment.

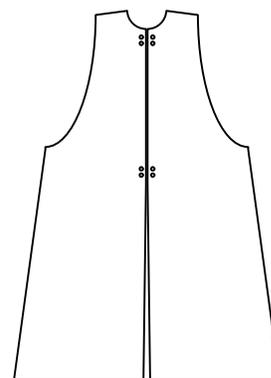
Variations:



Plain



Short Skirt



Long

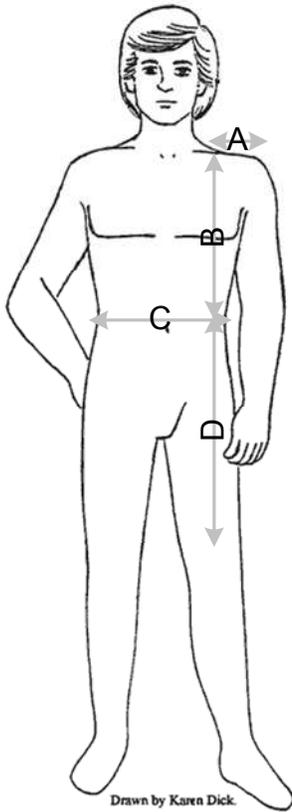


1. Detail from: *The Blind Leading The Blind*. Pieter Brueghel, The Elder, Naples, Museo e Gallerie nazionali di Capodimonte, 1568



2. Detail from: *Summer*. Pieter Brueghel, The Elder, Hamburg, Kunsthalle, 1568

The Vest - Patterning



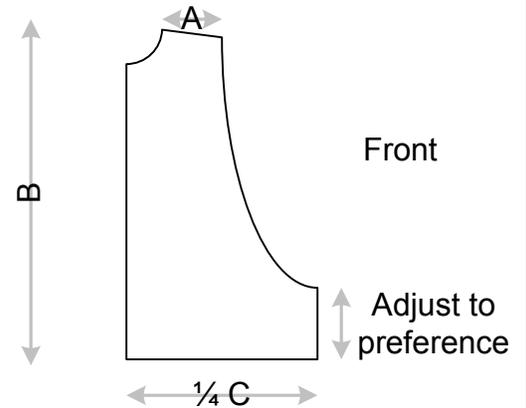
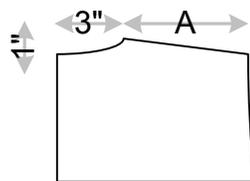
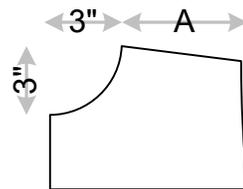
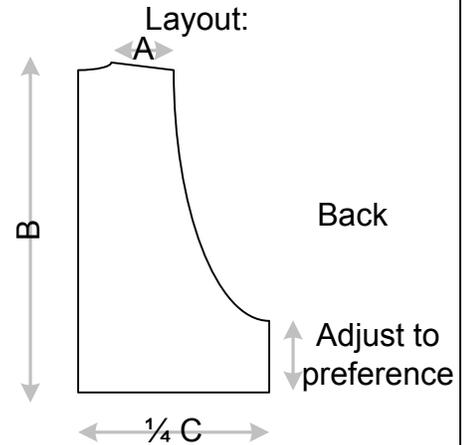
Measurements:

A: Neck to point of Shoulder = _____

B: Top of shoulder to waist = _____

C: Waist plus 1 Inch = _____

D: Waist to hem = _____



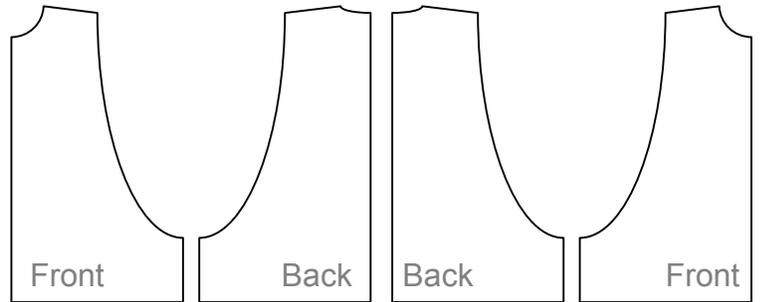
Making the pattern:

1. Take measurements as shown and draw onto butcher paper or similar.
2. Mark the neck as shown. Adjust measurements to suit your neck size. Also, adjust the shoulder slope as needed to sit properly on your shoulders.
3. Add 1/2 inch seam allowance around the pattern. Note: If you do not want a back seam, do not add seam allowance to back center line, instead mark it as "FOLD"
4. Cut out the pattern pieces.
5. If you want a long version of the vest, adjust lower hem as desired.

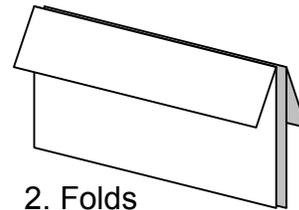
The Vest - Construction

Assembling the vest:

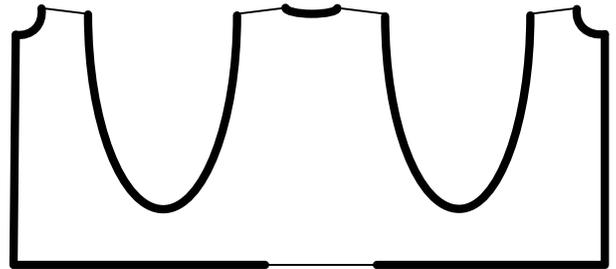
1. Lay out the pieces as shown (Figure 1) and sew up the back seam (if there is one) and side seams. Do the same for the lining.
2. Iron the seams open. Then pin the vest and lining together wrong sides out.
3. At the four shoulder points, fold the fabric and lining back on themselves the width of your seam allowance (Figure 2), and pin.
4. Sew the vest and lining together as shown (thick lines). Leave the shoulders and 8 inches at the bottom un-sewn (Figure 3).
5. Clip the corners and curves and turn the vest right-side out through the bottom opening. Straighten and iron.
6. Sew up the bottom opening and sew the shoulders together, whip-stitching the exterior fabric first, then the lining.
7. Add button-holes for points as needed: At neck and waist for closure, and around hem if needed to support hose.



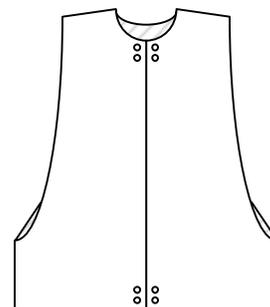
1. Layout



2. Folds



3. Sew



4. Finished

The Coat

As many of Brueghel's works depict action out of doors and/or in the winter, there are many examples of over garments.

Material: Most likely wool, lined in wool or possibly linen

Construction Details: The design of these coats shows the same wide variation as does the vests; with no two being the same. There are variations in closure, collars, sleeves, length and cuffs.



1: Detail from: Pieter Brueghel, The Elder: The Numbering at Bethlehem, 1566, Brussels, Musees Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique



2: Detail from: Pieter Brueghel, The Elder: The Peasant Dance, 1568, Brussels, Musees Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique



3: Detail from: Pieter Brueghel, The Elder: The Fall of Icarus, 1555-60, Brussels, Musees Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique

The Coat - Notes 1

The coat can be broken down and discussed as major parts:

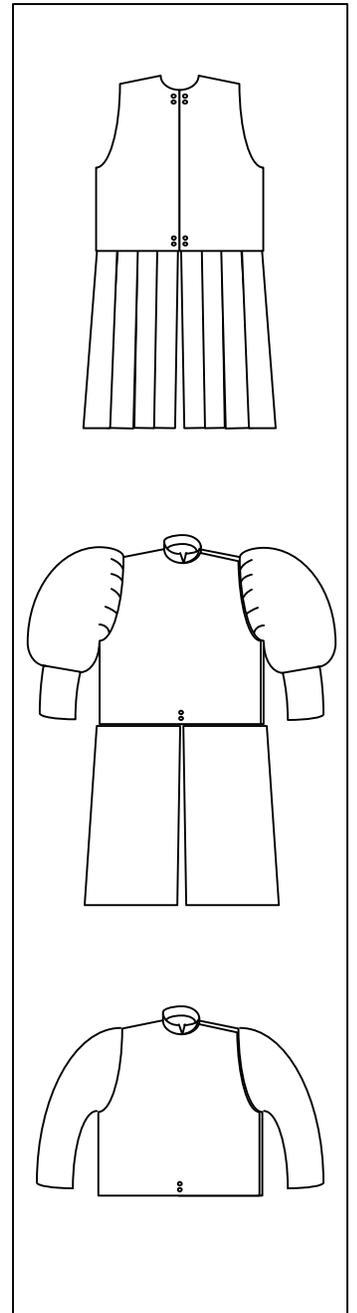
The Torso: The main body of the coat has a similar cut to that of the vest or doublet. The fit would be a bit looser and the arm holes would be of a different size, depending on the type of sleeve.

The Skirt: Depending on the example, the coat might have no skirt; a moderately smooth skirt, possibly pleated in back or slightly gathered for fullness; or a pleated skirt. The skirt might also be slit in the back as well as opening in the front.

The Sleeves: Depending on the depiction, the coat might have no sleeves; full, puffed sleeves or relatively fitted sleeves.

The Closure: I have seen two variations on the front closure. In some cases the coat's front butts together like the vest or doublet. More often, the front of the coat is double-breasted with a flap fastening at the shoulder and under the arm.

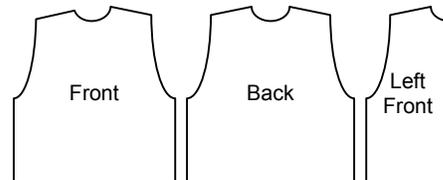
The Collar: As with everything else, the collar is optional. Sometimes there is no collar depicted, sometimes it is obviously a separate piece that has been attached, and sometimes it is obviously a continuation of the body of the garment.



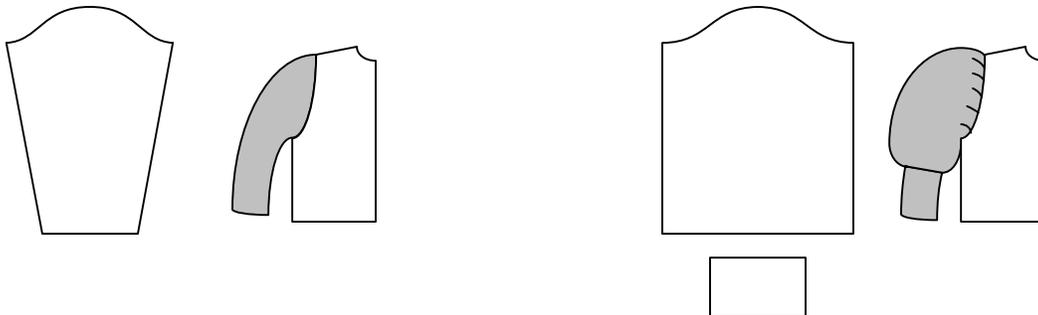
The Coat - Patterning

Making the pattern:

1. Follow the instructions for patterning the vest. If you already have a vest pattern, you can modify it quickly to serve here. Keep in mind that you will want the coat pattern to be fuller, think of how your mundane coat fits as opposed to your mundane shirt.
2. the major points to pay attention to are: The neck hole, which should fit the same as the vest one. The arm holes, which should be sized for the sleeves you want. And finally the length, which should be about the same as the length of the vest, fullness should be added side-to-side, not up and down.
3. If the coat is not double breasted the pattern of the coat is similar in front to that of the vest. If the coat is double breasted, you will need to make full front piece as well as a half front piece.



4. Once the pattern for the main body of the coat is done you can pattern the sleeves if you are going to use them. There is a wide variety of sleeve design in the works of Brueghel. From fairly tight to puffed.

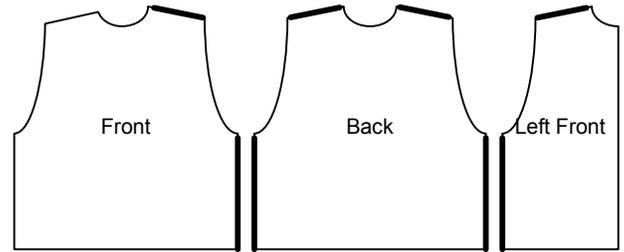


5. The collar and the skirt, if any will be measured from the completed main part of the coat.

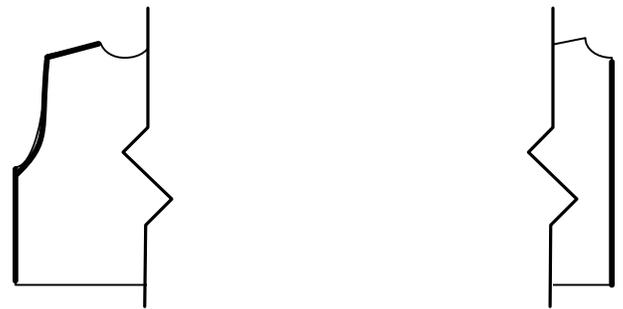
The Coat - Assembly

Assembling the coat:

1. Lay out the pieces as shown (Figure 1) and sew up the back seam (if there is one), side seams and shoulders as marked. Remember that if you are making the double breasted version one shoulder of the front will not be sewn. **MAKE SURE** you have the pieces laid out right. The flap should fasten on the left side when completed. Do the same for the lining.
2. Sew in the sleeves. Repeat for the lining.
3. Pin lining to coat with correct sides together.
4. Sew from neck opening to waist on both ends of the coat (Figure 2).
5. Finish sleeve cuffs.



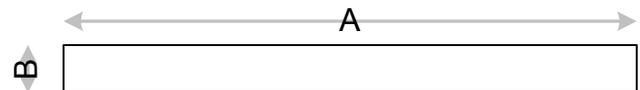
1. Layout - Sew together on bold lines



2. Attaching lining - Sew on bold lines

Collar:

1. Measure length of coat neck opening and add one inch for seam allowance (A).
2. Lay out collar as shown (Figure 3). The width should be the desired height of the collar plus one inch for seam allowance (B). Cut 2: one of coat material and one of lining.
3. Pin collar pieces together wrong side out and mark the location of the front notch, if any.
4. Sew sides and top, clip and turn. (Figure 4)
5. Pin collar into neck of coat and sew.



3. Collar pattern

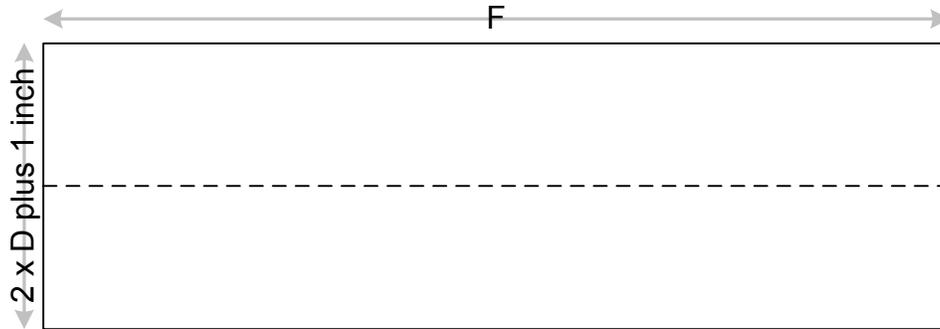


4. Finished collar

The Coat - Assembly 2

Skirt:

1. Measure from where the bottom of the main part of the coat will land on you body, down to where you want the hem to be. Call this "D". Multiply this by 2 and add an inch for seam allowance. That gives you the height of the skirt piece.
2. Next go back to the coat and measure the length of the unfinished lower hem. Call this "E".
3. There are several variations of skirts associated with this coat: Fully pleated, partially pleated and gathered. Decide which one you want.
 - For a fully pleated skirt multiply E by 3.
 - For a gathered or partially pleated skirt decide how much fullness to add and add that to E.
 - Finally, add 1 inch to the total for seam allowance and call it "F". This is the length of your skirt.
4. Cut out the fabric for the skirt in using these measurements.



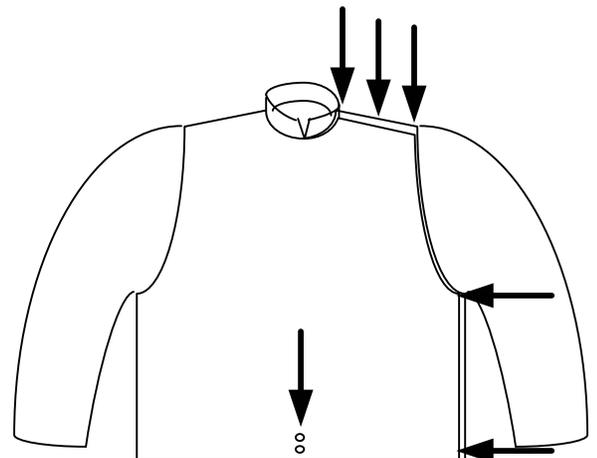
5. Fold the fabric length-wise wrong side out and sew the ends as shown. Then turn the skirt right side out and iron.



6. Pleat or gather the skirt into the bottom of the coat and sew in place.

Finishing:

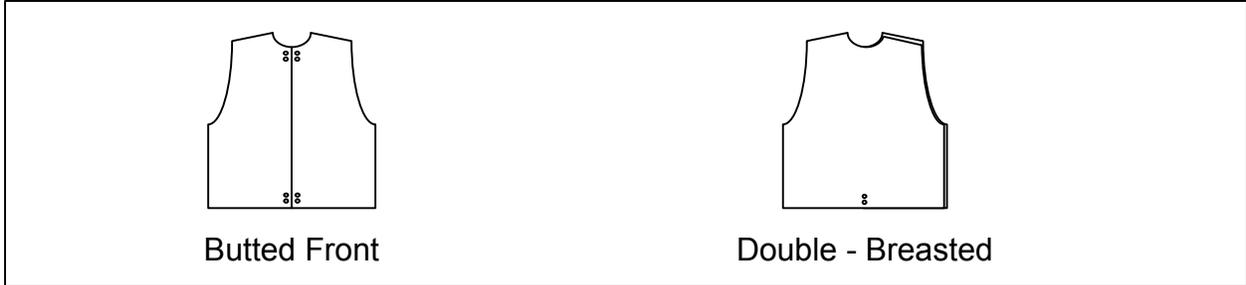
1. Sew hook and eye pairs into the seam at the shoulder as indicated, and under the arm (conjectural). Add eyelets at waist for a point to tie the coat closed in front.



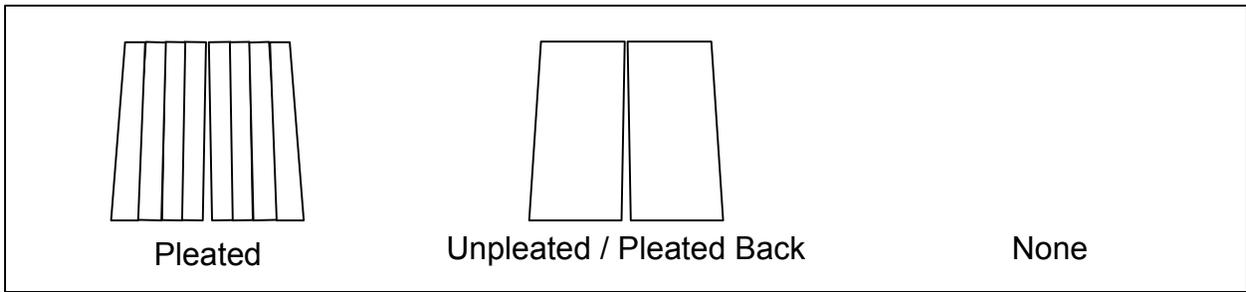
The Coat - Mix and Match

The coats depicted in the works of Brueghel have many variations of cut and style. The following breaks down the possible combinations.

Closures:

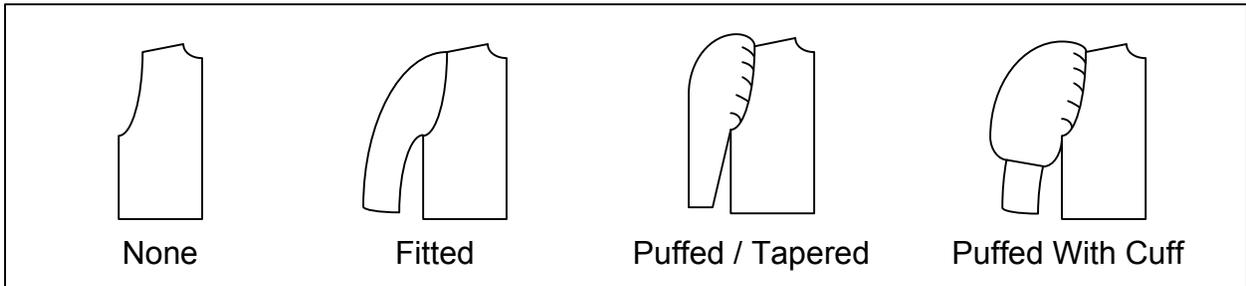


Skirts:

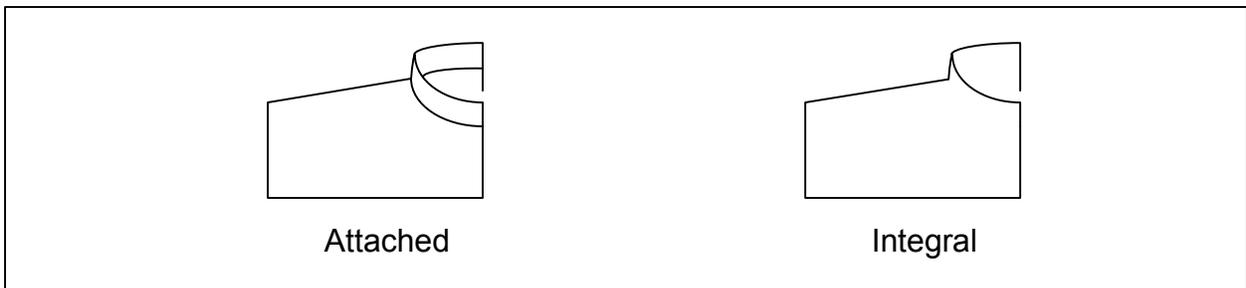


Note: Skirts can be optionally slit in back.

Sleeves:



Collars:



Accessories

1. Coif

- Men's coif has distinctive shape

2. Hats

- Wide Variety
- Often worn over coif

3. Belts

- Narrow leather, with buckle
- Not used to support clothing

4. Shoes

- Low, dark-colored.

5. Pouches

- Drawstring, hung from belts, sometimes under clothing
- Large belt pouch
- Pouches with sub-pouches

6. Weapons

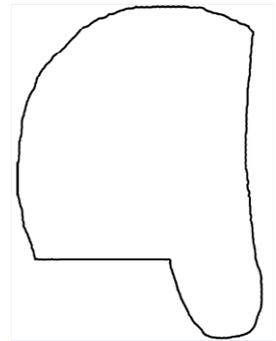
- No real swords, but examples of fighting knives / short swords

7. Knives

- small knives hung from belt with a loop.



Detail from: Pieter Bruegel, The Elder: Peasants Dancing, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 1568



References

Books:

Craft, Ruth. Pieter Brueghel's The Fair. Collins, 1975. ISBN 978-0001837195 *

Hughes, Penelope. Great Masters: Bruegel. Chartwell Books, 2003, ISBN 0-7858-1636-4

Klein, H. Arthur. Graphic works of Peter Bruegel the Elder. Dover, 1963, ISBN 0-486-21132-0

Roberts-Jones, Philippe. Pieter Bruegel. Harry N. Abrams, 2002. ISBN 978-0810935310

On the Web:

The works of Brueghel are readily available on the web. I recommend Google Image Search: <http://images.google.com/>. Use a variety of spellings (Brueghel, Bruegel, etc) and pay attention to the date and which of the three Bruegel's actually painted the piece.

* The fair was painted by Pieter Brueghel the younger; from his father's notes and sketches.