

First of all, let me take a moment to explain a few things. This is an introduction to sewing a couple of Japanese garments.

When we think of the word "shirt" in reference to mundane clothes many terms come to mind: blouse, polo, Henley, tube top, camisole, tee-shirt, dress shirt and more. Much in the same way the Japanese had numerous garments with all sorts of names. For example, if I were teaching a basic class on tops of the early 21st century we might just learn how to sew a tee-shirt or a button-down oxford dress shirt because it is a fairly generic garment worn by both sexes but as we know there are many kinds of shirts that we have even in our own time. What I will be teaching is just one method to make a Japanese shirt and dress which can be used with most outfits.

I highly recommend looking at examples of clothing from the time period that you are interested in and attempting to reproduce those to the best of your ability. Try to find where the seams are in the photographs and figure out proportionately how large these pieces should be for you.

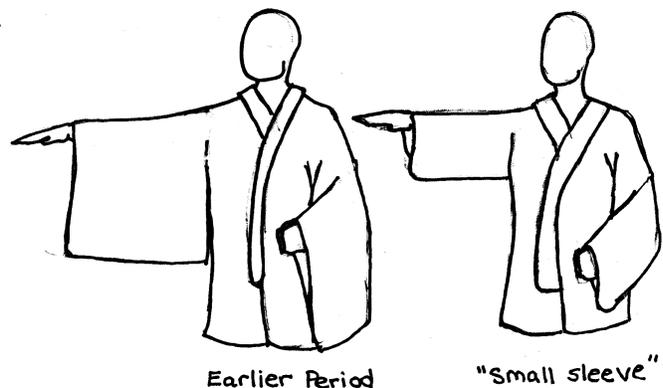
The nice thing about Japanese clothing is that the majority of it is made of rectangles that are sewn together in different ways. As you will learn, there are very few curves that you will have to cut. This is also frequently the hardest thing for European garb sewers to understand at first. Having a late French persona I was used to making darts and pleats and cutting all sorts of odd shapes to get my garb to fit me so I understand that a

"brain shift" may be involved in understanding Japanese garments.

Why is the word "Kimono" in quotes?

The word "Kimono" is actually not a term that was used in period. It came around at a much later time in order to distinguish Japanese garments from Western clothing. I chose to use the word "Kimono", however, because it gives most people an instant picture of what garment I am referring to. If I said it was an introductory class to *juni-hitoe* and *haori* most people would probably have no idea what I was referring to.

The term "Kosode" (koh-soh-day) is a bit more correct for the garments that we'll be learning in this class. "Kosode" means "small sleeve". In the latter half of what is the time frame for the SCA the Japanese sleeves on their garments got a lot smaller than in the earlier half.



In order to distinguish between "tops" and "dresses" I will be referring to them as "Kosode" and "Kimono" respectively. We could refer to them both as *kosode* but I will use the two different terms to try to keep things clear and simple to get you started with making your first Japanese clothes.

The Japanese had looms that were only 13-14 inches wide in period. They made very efficient use of their fabric and most of the sewing will be based on the width of the fabric. Start by figuring out what size your width of fabric (or standard panel) should be.

I usually use a 12" panel for a Small to Medium sized modern Western woman, 13" for Medium to Large women, 14" for Large to Extra Large, 15" for X-Large to 2 X-Large and 16" for 3-4 X-Large women. Men I will use 14" for Medium and 15" for Large to X-Large, etc. This is sort of a rough idea. It may take a little while to find what is right for you, but this Japanese garment is very forgiving and there is some room to play. These measurements also apply to other Japanese garments that you may try to sew such as *hakama*.

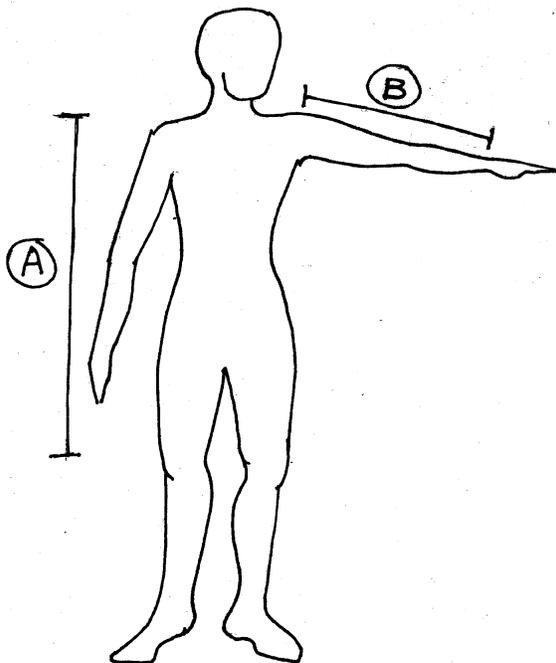
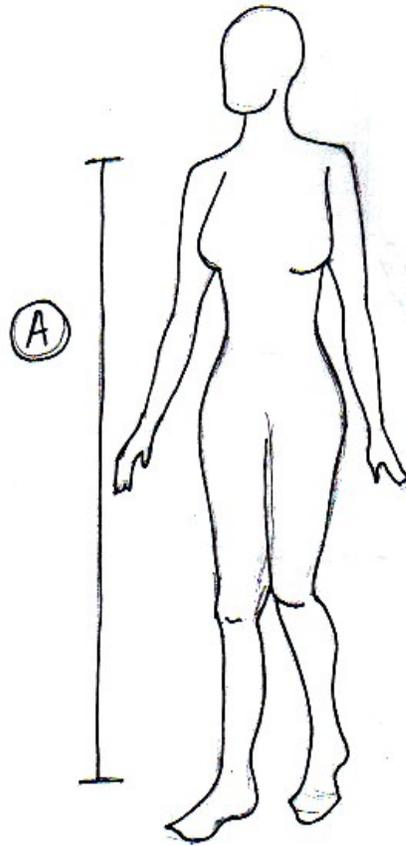
Since the Japanese had a selvage edge on their garments they didn't have to finish their edges, but if you are using any fabric that is wider than your panel you will have to finish your edges and seams. If you are new to sewing and do not know how to do this, please feel free to ask me after class or come over to Clan Yama

Kaminari for a visit. You are always welcome!

Now that you have a rough idea as to what size panel you will be cutting out let's cover a few terms in reference to measurements that you will need.

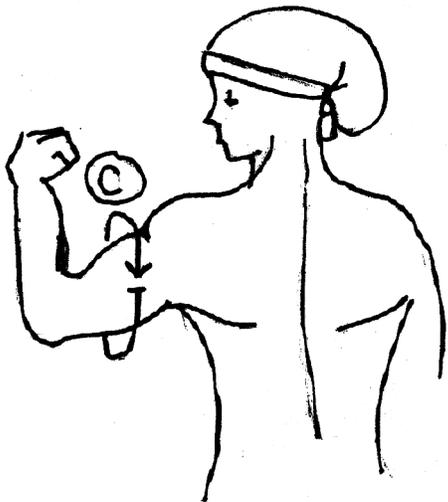
Length of the garment (A)- This is measured from the shoulders to the bottom of where the garment should be. In period, Kosode went to about mid-thigh (I have made many that were too short thinking of them as being "tops" similar to what modern people wear). The mid-thigh length also helps to cover under the gaps of hakama. *Kimono* were very long for more formal occasions, but some of the lower class also had kimono that were about mid-calf. For Pennsic I like to make them a little above the ankle to reduce the amount of mud and dirt that winds up on them and to help with mobility. Kosode and *Kimono* are constructed in the same way, but *Kimono* are longer.

Add 1-2" to the length of the garment to allow for hemming.



Length of the sleeve (B)- Measure from the shoulder to the wrist for full length sleeves. The Japanese did have some tops and *kimono* that had $\frac{3}{4}$ length sleeves as well but I have yet to find any that stop above the elbow. The instructions for this packet will be assuming that you are making full length sleeves.

Circumference of the sleeve (C)- Again, this measurement can vary depending on how long you would like the sleeves to be. Earlier period and more formal garments had wider sleeves. More casual and later period had narrower sleeves. If you are putting together an outfit with multiple layers you may want to make the under layers with narrower sleeves than the outer layers to avoid stuffing excess sleeve fabric into the outer sleeves. These should be loose and comfortable. They should not look like modern tube sleeves. Just as a rough idea, I usually make sleeves anywhere between 22" and 30" in circumference.



How much fabric will I need?

Again, this will all depend on the size of the person that you are making the garment for and the style that you want. For a *kosode* you will need anywhere between 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ yd- 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ yd of 42"-45" wide fabric. *Kimono* can be done with 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ -5 yd of 42"-45" wide fabric. I would recommend drawing the layout of the pieces that you will be cutting before going ahead and cutting them out.

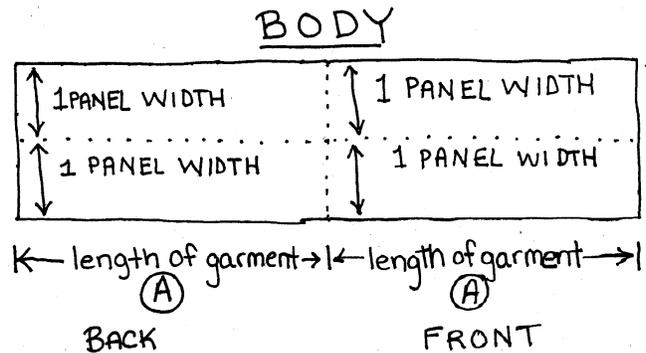
Most Japanese period garments were made of silk, but hemp and cotton were also used, although cotton was very expensive at the time.

Cutting out the Pieces

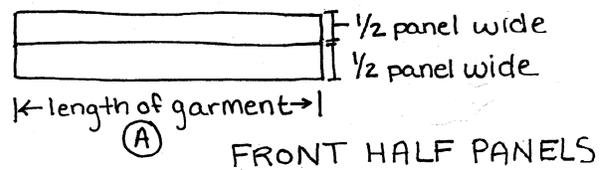
Due to the fact that Japanese looms were significantly smaller than our modern industrial looms we will have to cut our pieces to the width that the looms were (or the size that you chose earlier as being your standard panel size) in order to have the seams be correct on the finished *Kosode* or *kimono*. Please pay close attention to the direction of the grain and pattern of your fabric.

What pieces you will need

One body piece: This is one long piece that is two panels wide and twice the length of measurement A. For example, if your panel width is 14" and you want to make the garment 25" long then the piece that you will cut out is 28" wide by 50" long. *

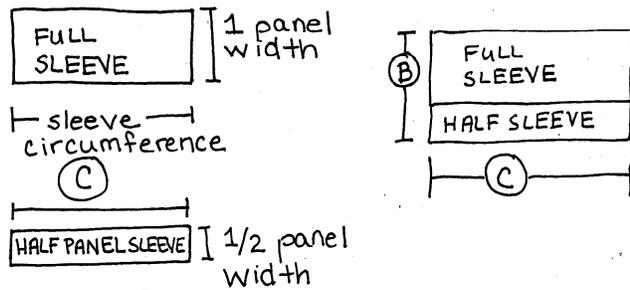


Two Half panel front pieces: Cut two pieces that are a half panel wide and the length of measurement A. For the same example above this would be 7" wide (half of 14") and 25" long.



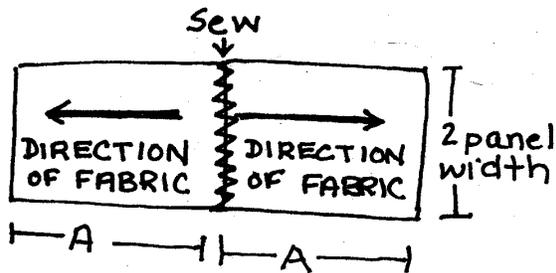
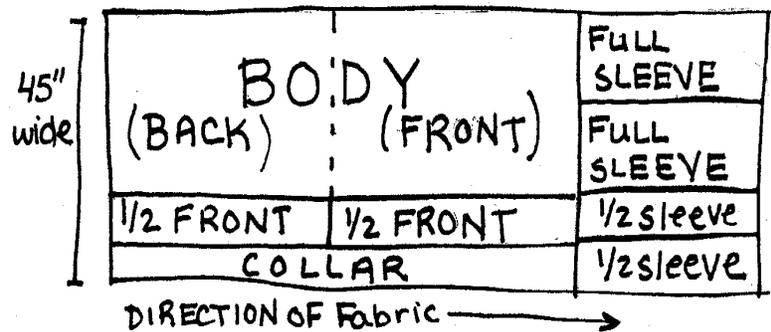
Two Full panel sleeve pieces: Cut out two pieces that are one full panel wide and the length of measurement C (the circumference of the sleeve). For the example above these would be 14" wide by 22-30" long depending on how full you want the sleeves to be.

Two Half panel sleeve pieces: Cut out two pieces that are a half panel wide and the length of measurement C. The example would be 7" wide by 22-30".



Here is an example of how you could go about cutting out the garment depending on the width of fabric and the width of the panels that you need.

*If you would like the direction of the fabric of the body to go in the same direction for both the front and the back then cut two pieces that are 2 panels wide by the length of measurement A and then sew them together.



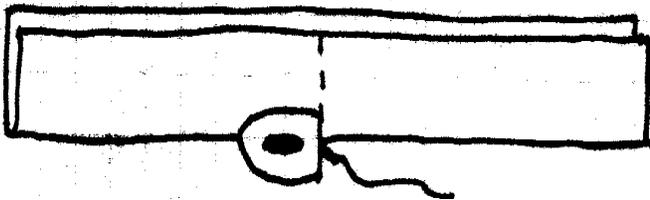
So far, everything is just rectangles. That isn't so hard, is it?

Collar pieces: These usually work well if I make them 5-8" wide (more formal women's kimono had very wide collars) and the length of the body (measurement A). If you need to piece it together that's fine. Just cut multiple pieces that are 5-8" wide depending on the look that you want.

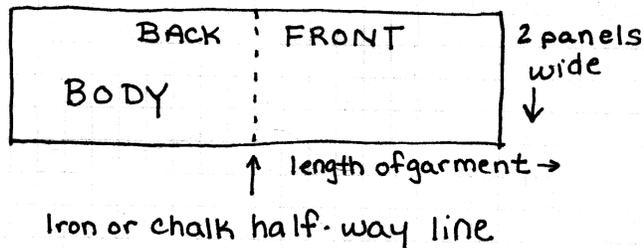
Assembly

Body

To begin we're going to need to make a couple of cuts in the body piece. Start by folding the body in half lengthwise. Iron or mark this line with chalk.

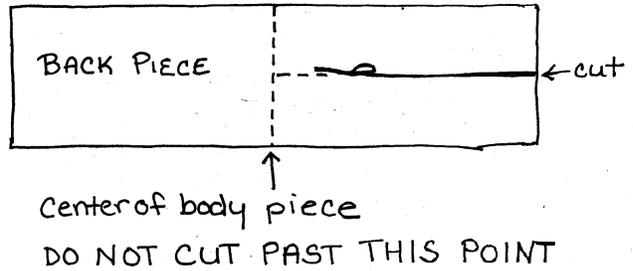


Then fold the body in half widthwise and iron or mark with chalk.

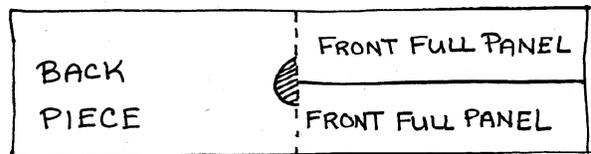


Open the piece fully.

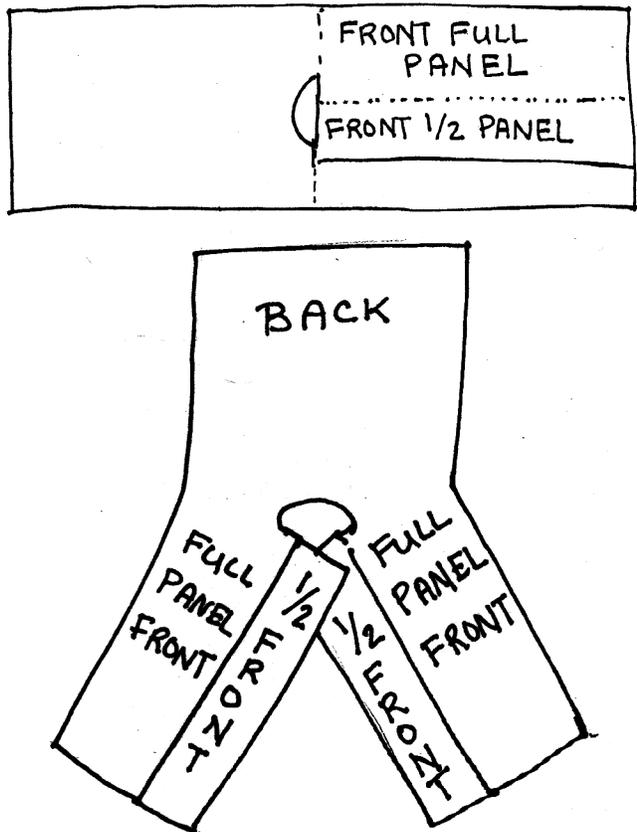
Cut the fabric in the center front and only cut as far as the center line between the front and back portions of the body. This will create two front full panels.



Next you will need to cut a small area out of the back which will create a sort of neck hole. This should be no deeper than 3 inches or wider than 8 inches. It will look like a half of an oval. There is a piece included in the back of this instruction packet that you can use as a guide to get you started.



Now that the front has been cut in half lengthwise and the neck hole is cut, you can attach the front pieces that are a half panel wide. These pieces will be added to the centerline of the front on each side. This will create overlapping pieces. It may look a little strange for a while, but that's okay.

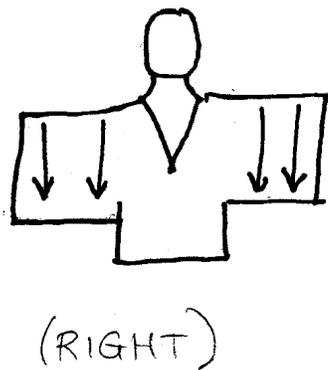
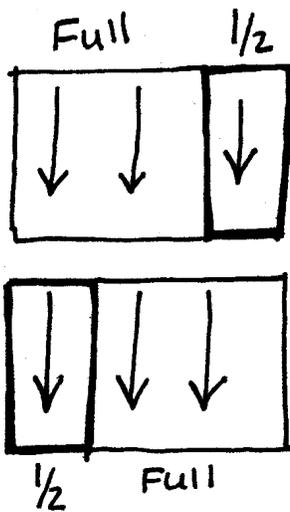


Sleeves

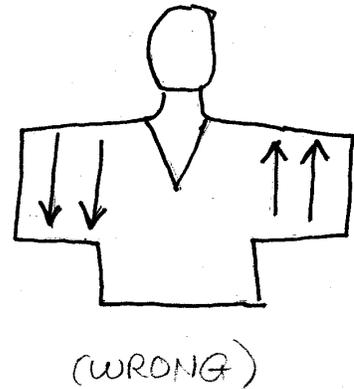
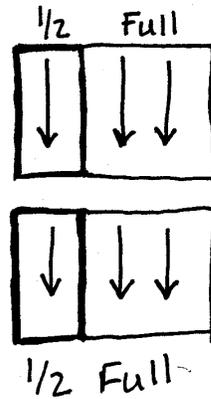
Next we will need to assemble the sleeves. Set your body piece aside for now. Take one half panel sleeve and one full panel sleeve and sew them together along the line that is the sleeve circumference. Do the same for the other sleeve.

I recommend laying out the two full panel pieces, with the pattern going in the same direction and then adding one half panel on the left side of one piece and one half panel on the right side of the other piece if you have fabric with a pattern that you want to keep in the same direction.

If you attach them on the same sides of the full panels you will have one sleeve with the pattern going in one direction and one sleeve with the pattern going in the other direction.



(RIGHT)



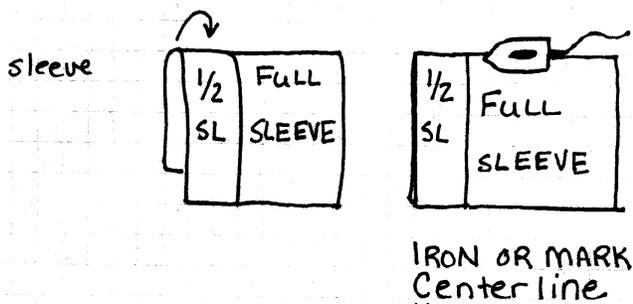
(WRONG)

Attaching the sleeves to the body

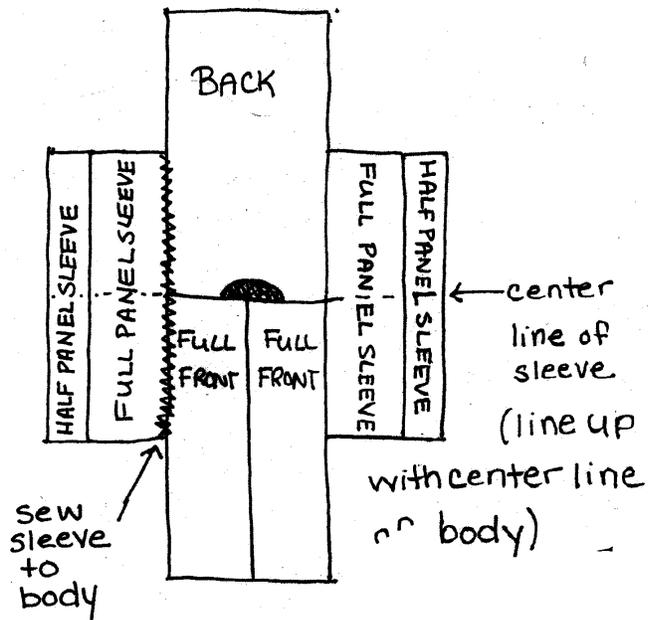
If you think of the half panels of the sleeves as being "cuffs" this will help you to orient the pieces in the correct manner so the seams wind up in the correct places.

The following instructions are for a garment with closed armpits. Most of the people that I have sewn for seem to have a preference for the closed armpit, but an open armpit is also correct, just another style. If you would like tips on creating an open armpit we can discuss it at the end of class, or come and visit me at Clan Yama Kaminari. I would love to offer any assistance that you may need.

Fold the sleeves in half and iron or mark with chalk where the center is.

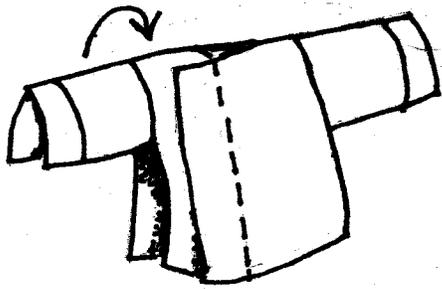


Line the center of the sleeve full panel up with the center line of the body that runs between the front and back portions. Sew down the width of the sleeve, attaching it to the body.

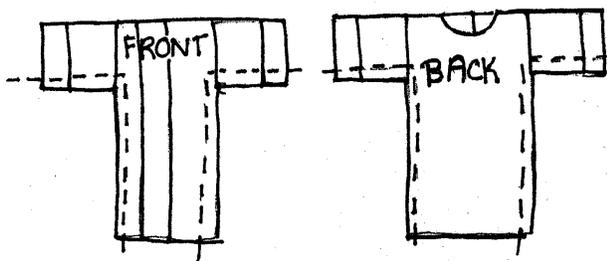


Putting it all together

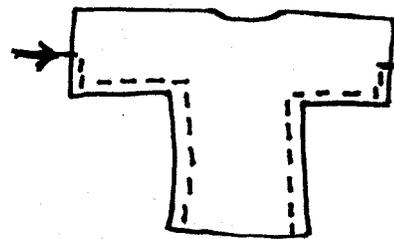
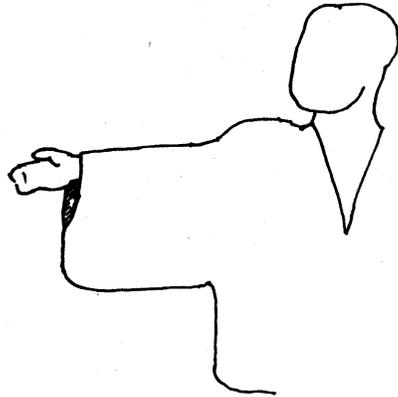
At this point you need to fold the entire body and sleeves in half along the center line. Fold this inside out so your seam allowance winds up on the inside. The shape will change from a very long cross to an upper case "T".



I recommend pinning the bottom of the sleeves and the sides of the body together just so they don't shift while you are sewing. You can make one seam from the bottom of the sleeve and down the side of the body.



If you would like partially open sleeves, just sew the cuff together on the bottom 1/3-1/2. Make sure that the person who is receiving the garment can get their hands and arms in and out of the arm opening.

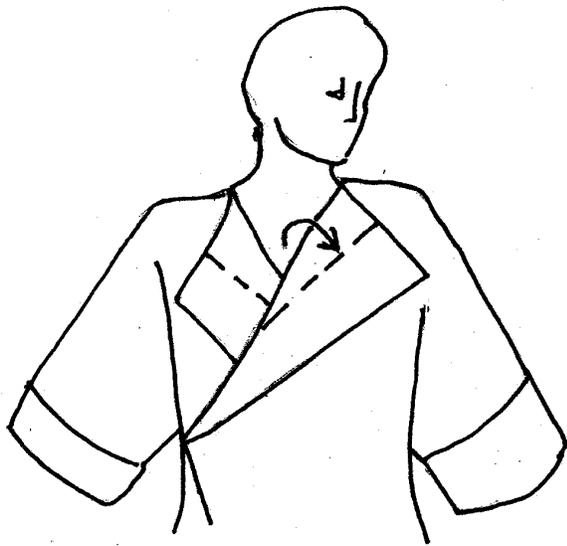


Make sure to finish the raw edge of the cuff.

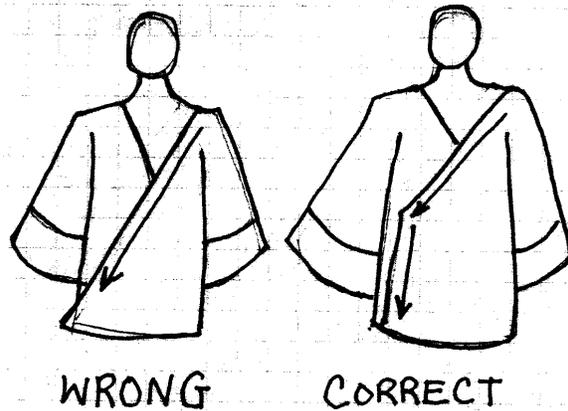
It's starting to resemble a *kimono* or *kosode* now, isn't it?

Cutting the front angle of the body

Usually this works best if you can place the *kosode* or *kimono* on the person or yourself. An angle needs to be drawn from the center line of the body at the outer edge of the neck hold down to a couple of inches above the waist. You can take the inner corner and fold it down to figure out your angle.



I recommend pinning this angle and ironing it before cutting it. Do not cut an angle that goes from the neck hole straight down to the hem. It won't look right.



Tip After cutting the angle on one side, keep the excess triangle piece, flip it over, and use it as a guide for cutting the other side so they are symmetrical.

Remember, the collar still needs to be attached which will change the look of the front a little.

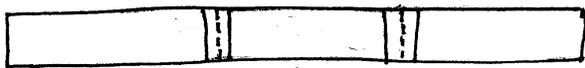
The collar

Congratulations! You are mostly done with your new *kosode* or *kimono*! Take a moment to admire what you have accomplished thus far.

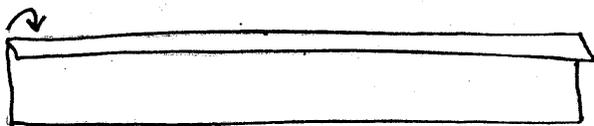
To make the collar I usually attach two strips end to end that are 5"-8" wide by the length of the garment (measurement A). If you need to you can piece together multiple strips that are the same width.

This part works best with an iron, trust me.

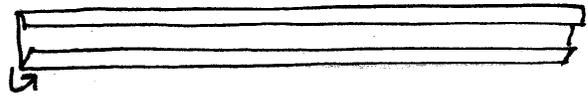
After sewing your strips together to make one very long strip iron your seam allowance flat.



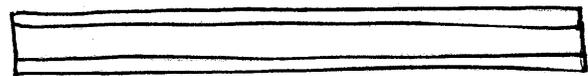
Take the long side of the strip and fold it over about 1/2" and iron it along the entire length of the strip.



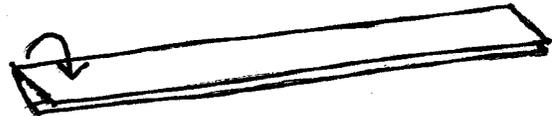
Do the same on the other side.



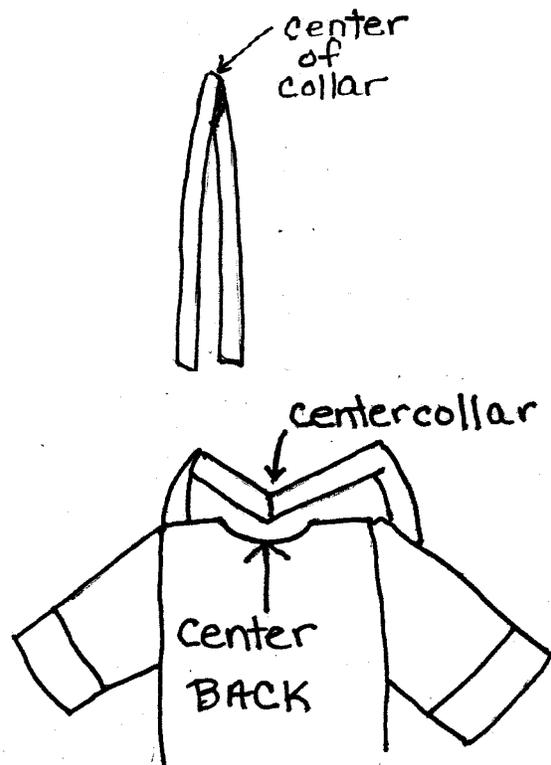
Fold the entire collar in half lengthwise by lining up the edges so that all of the rough edges are on the inside.



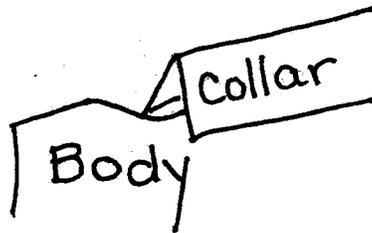
Fold the entire collar in half and iron or chalk where the center of the collar is.



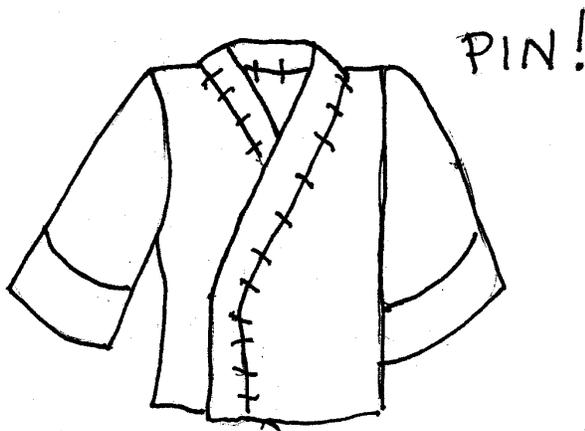
Line up the center of the collar with the center of the back portion of the body.



You will be sandwiching the body fabric between the two folded edges of the collar piece. Have them overlap about ½" to avoid having the body piece pull out of the collar with wear and tear.

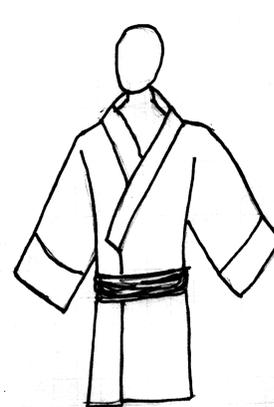


I highly recommend pinning the collar and body together, otherwise you may face unnecessary hours of frustration.

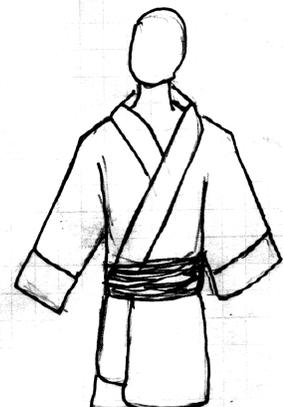


Getting around the curves of the neck hole can be a little tricky and you may have to go deeper or shallower with your collar overlap to adjust. Take your time. This is often the most frustrating part for most sewers. If you feel like you need to take a break and come back to it please do so. You'll be happier in the long run.

Make sure that the collar is at least long enough to go below the waist. If not then it will not tuck into *hakama* or an *obi* and you'll have a floppy collar that just doesn't look right and will make you frustrated every time you wear it.



WRONG - COLLAR NOT LONG ENOUGH



RIGHT

For most of the garments that I have seen the collar does not completely reach the bottom. Figure out the length that you want the collar to wind up at, then cut about ½" below. Fold over the edges of the half fronts that will be exposed if they are a raw edge. If they are a selvage edge you don't need to do anything. Tuck in the bottom ½" of the collar and pin.

Technically you can machine sew the collar to the body but it often creates small wrinkles and additional frustration. The Japanese sewed their collars in a manner where you couldn't really see the seams. I usually hand sew the collars on using a running hem stitch that barely shows. Make sure that you are attaching both the bottom and top layers of the collar. I like to start from the center of the neck hole and work my way down each side. Again, take your time with this. For an idea, you can assemble most of the garment and pin on the collar, then bring your garment to an event and sit and hand sew the collar on while you socialize with other lovely SCAdians.

Hem the bottom of your *kosode* or *kimono* and YOU ARE DONE!

Additional Tips

For curvy women

A way to "cheat" a bit for women who may be more curvy is to cut an extra large half panel for the front. If your panels are 14" wide, then cut your half front panels 9" or 10" wide instead of 7". You will still be making the same angular cut on the top but you'll have a little extra fabric around the hips and thighs which will give a little more coverage and less "gappage" in the center front which is always a good thing.

Sleeves

If you find that the sleeves aren't the length that you like you can try using just a single panel width (just use the full sleeve panels and don't bother with the half sleeve panels) or just make the panels proportionally 2/3 full panel and 1/3 half panel. For example, if they need to be around 18" long make your full panels 12" and your half panels 6".

Again, just like there are many different kinds of modern shirts with different sleeves there are also many different kinds of Japanese shirts with different sleeves.

Feel free to play around with the style you like. I highly recommend looking at pictures of actual garments from the period and basing your garb off of those.

This packet is simply a way to get you started with making Japanese clothes.

Please take your time when doing this the first few times. I would recommend reading the entire packet before you lay out your fabric and start measuring and cutting.

This packet will also be available on the Clan Yama Kaminari website as well as my step by step instructions for sewing *hakama*. Visit www.yamakaminari.com. It should be on the front page under the heading "Japanese Garb". It is in a pdf format that is easy to print should you want additional copies.

As my research and experience improves, so will these instructions, but for the moment this is the easiest way that I can explain how to get you started on your Japanese wardrobe without bogging you down with too many details. I hope that you find this to be instructional and helpful and I wish you luck!