Senior Creative Project
"Tailoring a Man's Double Knit Suit"

Submitted for partial completion of the requirements of the Honors Program of Ball State University

by Beverly Ann Martin

Under the supervision of Mrs. Shirley Adams
Until recent years, the construction of men's garments has been avoided by most home sewers because the required tailoring has been considered to be too time consuming and often too difficult to be worthwhile. Today, however, more and more home sewers are starting to sew for husbands, brothers, and other men. One possible reason for this could be the high cost of men's garments, especially custom fitted suits. For example, most men cannot afford to have suits professionally tailored to fit perfectly, so they have had to resort to purchasing garments of standard sizing, with only minor alterations to aid the fit. However, a home sewer, who does not include sewing time in the cost of constructing a suit, can usually create a suit that costs much less than a professionally tailored one—provided she has the knowledge and skills necessary in fitting and constructing the garment.

Another factor that may encourage home sewing of men's garments is the availability of commercially made units—such as shoulder pads, waistband facings, front interfacings with padding attached, and special fabric for under collars. These save time and often help to simplify construction.

In addition to trying to provide a well-fitting suit for my brother, I chose to tailor a man's double knit suit for the personal satisfaction of creating something that
was challenging to make. Personal satisfaction, as well as the appreciation received from the men sewn for, is probably a very strong reason for many home sewers to begin constructing men's garments.

Since the actual construction of the suit was the major part of this creative project, and since a step-by-step explanation of the entire construction would be tedious and unnecessary for anyone experienced in tailoring and in following a pattern instruction sheet, this paper explains only the major areas of construction, especially where my methods differed from the instruction sheet in order to achieve more professional results.

Selection

The greatest problem in choosing fabric for this project was that it was difficult to find coordinating plain and designed fabrics that were suitable for a man's suit with a contrasting second pair of slacks. Initially, gray had been desired for the suit, but a coordinating designed fabric could not be found at the time. The burgandy and tan plaid polyester double knit suitable for cuffed slacks was spotted in Lafayette, and a matching solid tan was finally located in Indianapolis, at half the cost of the gray fabric that was first considered. The tan was therefore purchased for the suit, since it was of desirable texture and a good basic color.

Satin-backed-crepe was selected for the lining fabric, because it was heavier than a polyester, and an appropriate
color of twill lining was not available. The fabric was fairly easy to work with, and had a rich look in the garment.

"Suit-Shape" fusible canvas interfacing was used in the jacket. Traditionally, non-fusible canvas has been pad stitched by hand to the fashion fabric of the suit. That method was best for wool suits, but even tiny stitches in a double knit—especially in a light, solid color—would show or cause "dimples" wherever a stitch was taken. The fusible interfacing became much stiffer after being fused than it appeared before fusing. The use of fusible interfacing saved a considerable amount of hand work.

Non-fusible canvas interfacing was used in the sleeve hems, however. That interfacing supplied more flexible support and probably should have been used in the jacket hem instead of the fusible type. The problem of dimpling might still be present, though.

To pad the front and shoulder area, a layer of Fellen Polyester Fleece was used. Commercially made polyester shoulder pads were used to save time in construction, but could have been made with layers of this same fleece.

As mentioned above, commercially made supplies were available. For this project, shoulder pads, pocket fabric, commercially made facings for the slacks, and finely-woven, pre-shrunk wool made especially for under collar were purchased.

**Fitting**

Simplicity pattern number 5161 was selected in size 36 for the jacket. A test pattern was made out of an old sheet.
To make the test pattern, all parts of the jacket except the upper collar, pockets, and front facing were cut out. Numerous lengthwise and crosswise grainlines were marked with pencil (as well as construction lines) to later check that the garment was hanging on grain. The pieces were machine basted together and tried on to check fit.

The test pattern showed that the jacket would require shortening one-half inch at the waist, and was too wide. The front vertical darts were deepened one-fourth inch which made the waistline a total of one inch smaller in front. There appeared to be extra fabric at the front shoulder, but it was decided that the heavier knit fashion fabric plus the necessary front and shoulder padding would take care of that. (The finished garment proved this assumption to be correct.)

The jacket back required more changes. Vertical wrinkles occurred around the armholes and along the center back seam. Therefore, tucks one-fourth inch deep were taken out of the area around the arms-eye, and the center back seam was deepened. The sleeves had to be re-set three-fourths of an inch towards the front, in order to create a smooth set and grain perfection.

Although the slacks pattern was designed for "baggies" the slacks still needed about one-half inch taken up in the seat and one inch taken out of the upper leg in back, tapering to nothing below the knee to allow for enough flare at the cuff.
Cutting Out

Before the pattern could be laid out, all necessary fitting changes were made. Also, the selvage edge of the fabric did not run parallel with the straight of grain, so the lengthwise grain was marked with long basting stitches in several places, so that the pattern could be placed correctly. Although the knit had a slight diagonal pattern, it was not obvious enough to necessitate reversal of the diagonal in the lapels.

The slacks were cut from the altered pattern. The plaid fabric required more time for matching wherever possible.

Major Construction

Pockets

The pocket flap interfacing was trimmed three-fourths of an inch on all sides and fused to the upper collar flaps. The upper flap was stitched to the under flap, leaving upper edge open. The flap was turned and pressed after the seam was trimmed and clipped. The raw edges were basted together, and the flap was top-stitched one-fourth inch from the other three sides. The flap was basted on the outside of the front, having seam line of the pocket flap along the lower pocket line.

Welts for each pocket were cut from strips of fabric one-and-one-fourth inches wide and the width of the pocket opening plus one-and-one-fourth inches. The welts were folded in half lengthwise, wrong sides together, and basted to the outside of the jacket, one-fourth inch over the lower pocket line.
ith right sides together, one pocket section was pinned over each pocket flap/welt, matching dots, then it was basted in place. The pocket section was machine stitched along the stitching lines, using the setting of twenty stitches per inch, stitching from the wrong side through all thicknesses. (Note--did not stitch across ends.) The pocket section and the jacket were slashed separately between stitching lines, clipping to outer corners, and being careful not to clip corners of flap and ends of welt.

The pocket section was turned and pressed to the inside, being careful to have clipped corners and ends of welt between jacket and pocket section. On the inside, the clipped corners and ends of the welt were stitched together, checking the outside afterward to be sure the corners of the pocket thus formed were square and smooth.
On the inside, with the right sides together, the remaining pocket section was stitched to the pocket, catching in the clipped corners and ends of the welt.

The flap was pressed down. The jacket was turned down above the pocket, and the seam allowances of the flap, jacket, and pocket were stitched together. (This was done instead of topstitching from the outside above the pocket as shown in the instruction sheet.)

Interfacing

Interfacing was cut as shown, cutting out the dart in the interfacing and trimming away seam allowances:

The interfacing was fused to the jacket, cutting
"windows" to pull the pockets through, and fitting the cut edges of the dart in the interfacing next to the dart seam in the jacket. The interfacing was fused to the jacket by steam pressing with an iron held ten seconds in each area.

Although the pattern had no back interfacing across the shoulders, it was necessary to interface this area in order to soften impressions caused by the thickness of the shoulder pads and to reinforce the shoulder area.

Straight strips of interfacing were fused to both sides of the back vent. The lower hem was interfaced by fusing bias strips of canvas two inches wide to the wrong side of the jacket, with the lower edge of the canvas one-half inch from the lower edge of the jacket.

The fly area of the slacks was interfaced with the same fabric used for the pocket lining.

Shaping Fronts and Shoulders

A layer of polyester fleece was cut to fit the front shoulder area and loosely pad stitched in place as shown:

![Diagram of interfacing and fleece placement](image)

Seam tape was hand stitched to the interfacing along lapel fold line and machine stitched into the shoulder seam. The jacket was basted together and the shoulder pads were pinned in to check fit. After the jacket was permanently
stitched together, the shoulder pads were sewn by hand to
the interfacing and shoulder seam allowance. It was found
that the pads were too thick in the back, so a layer was
removed from both of them.

To shape lapels, the lapels were turned back along the
fold line before the front facing was attached. This fold
was then steam pressed and allowed to dry over a pressing
ham in order to create a very gently curve to fit snugly
over the chest area.

Under Collar

An under collar was cut from the wool mentioned above.
The center back seam was stitched, pressed open, and trimmed
to one-fourth inch. Non-fusible canvas interfacing was cut
from the same pattern, but trimmed away three-fourths of an
inch on all edges and basted to the under collar. The fold
line of the collar was machine basted, then seam tape was
hand stitched over this line for reinforcement. The interfacing
was pad stitched to the under collar by hand, shaping the
collar (with it turned down at the fold line) as it would
curve around the neck. With the collar still turned at the
fold line, the collar was pinned to a pressing ham, steam
pressed along the fold line, and allow to dry in shape.
To apply the under collar to the jacket, the jacket was stitched at the shoulder seams and the upper collar and front facings stitched to the jacket. The seam allowances of the upper collar were pressed under, mitering the corners. The seam allowances of the under collar were trimmed away, and it was sewn by hand to the wrong side of the upper collar, covering seam allowances and the neckline seam.

Lining

The front lining was machine stitched to the front facings, and the inside pockets were made through both using a method similar to window type bound buttonholes. To reinforce the pockets, a layer of the pocket lining was stitched to the lining fabric used for the inside pocket itself, and then the two layers were treated as one to make the pocket.

The rest of the lining was attached to the jacket by hand, leaving an ease pleat in the center back and at the hemlines. The sleeve lining was cut one-half inch higher between notches in the underarm area to allow greater ease, also.

Slacks

Fly

The left fly was interfaced and stitched to the left front edge above the small dot. The left pants front was clipped to the dot (which has been reinforced with small machine stitching) and the seam was trimmed to one-fourth inch.
The closed zipper was placed face down along fly, with edge of tape along seam, and stitched twice along left edge of tape with a zipper foot. Fly was pressed to inside, basted in place, then top-stitched as shown:

A three-eighths of an inch clip was made at the small dot on the right front, and the seam allowance was pressed under three-eighths of an inch above the clip. The zipper was opened and basted under right front. (Note that left front lapped one-fourth inch over right front so that small dots and end of opening would match.

With wrong sides together, the right fly section was stitched to lining, the seam was clipped and trimmed, and the section was turned and pressed. The right front edge of the pants was basted five-eighths of an inch over the notched edge of the right fly section, having upper edges even. To finish right side of fly, top-stitching was done through all thicknesses (the right pants front, the right zipper tape, and the right fly section) with a zipper foot.
Waistband

After right side of waistband has been stitched to pants at waist, the upper seam allowance of the band was presses under five-eighths of an inch. a The stiff layer of the commercially made waistband facing was slipped under this seam allowance and basted in place. b The edge of the outer layer of the waistband facing was then pressed under one-fourth inch and stitched over the seam allowance above. c

The front edges (at the fly area) were folded to the inside and slip-stitched, turning raw edges under.

The total cost of the suit with an extra pair of slacks is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tan polyester double knit--4 yards</td>
<td>$17.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plaid polyester double knit--2 yards</td>
<td>15.96</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interfacing</td>
<td>3.98</td>
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<tr>
<td>Polyester fleece</td>
<td>.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lining and thread</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shoulder pads</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thread</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buttons</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under collar fabric</td>
<td>.79</td>
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</table>
Seam tape  .39
Zippers  1.58
Waistband facings  2.00
Pocket lining  2.08
Patterns  2.00
Hooks  .39
TOTAL (plus tax)  $56.62

As shown by the final cost, the suit cost at least half of what a commercially made suit of comparable quality would have. This project took longer to complete than I had originally expected, but this was mainly due to my having to slow down after contracting mononucleosis. I enjoyed making the project, and my brother is quite pleased with the suit. I learned a great deal about constructing a man's suit, and I feel that I will be able to make one in less time in the future, since I have gone through the initial learning experience. I also feel that this project will be of great value to me in teaching clothing construction.