

# How to Draft and Sew a Martial Surcotte that Will Fit Well and Look Good

By Tasha Dandelion Kelly

## Introduction

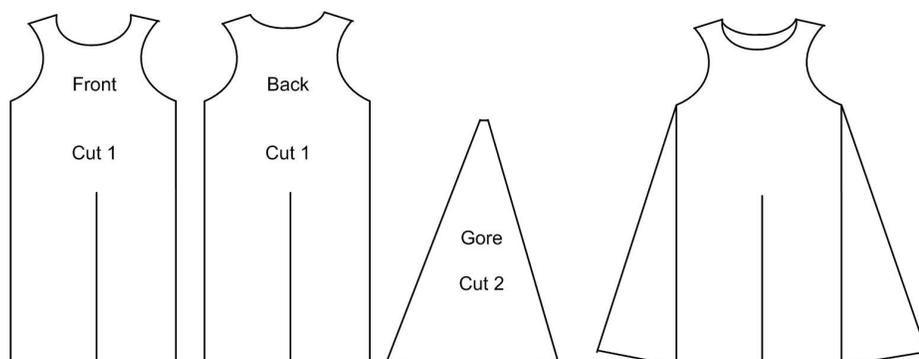
- **Part 1** of this handout provides diagrams of two patterns, Pattern A and Pattern B, both extrapolated from period depictions of **one common style** of martial surcotte seen (with variations like hem length) between the 12th century and the mid-14th century in Europe. Experienced drafters can adapt them to their own dimensions and proceed as they wish.
- **Part 2** discusses materials and preparation needed (taking measurements).
- **Part 3** shows how to draft Pattern B from measurements.
- **Part 4** gives step-by-step instructions for cutting and sewing Pattern B together, no lining included.

## Part 1

Here are a couple of examples of a simple, sleeveless, skirted surcotte with riding split, front and back:

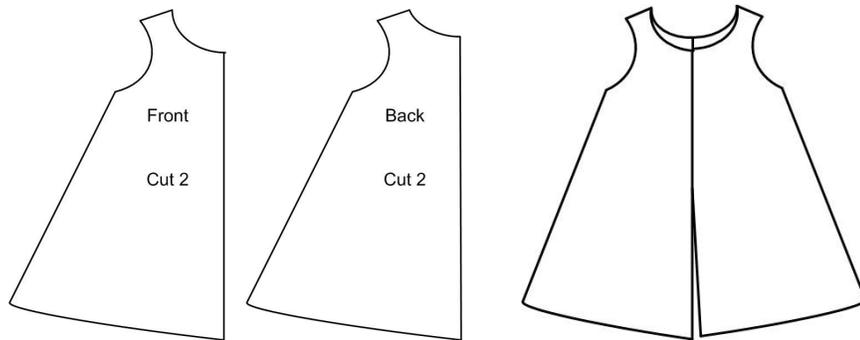


### Pattern A:



Pattern A is how I envision this surcotte was cut in the period in which it was popular. It emphasizes the use of rectangles and triangles and allows for maximum fabric conservation. It requires a little more time to sew, however, and can be tricky to finish when working around the center-front and center-back slits.

### Pattern B:



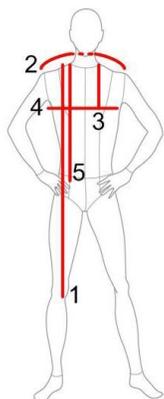
Pattern B is my modern interpretation which does not conserve as much fabric but which is easy to sew together and avoids the finishing problem mentioned above for the center-front and center-back slit. This pattern also allows you to make it parti-colored.

## Part 2

**First: Buy fabric.** I suggest linen that is at least 7 oz. heavy, perhaps heavier (like 10 oz.). Linen can be made of flax (most common) or hemp. A plain weave or a twill weave will work fine. Twill drapes slightly better, though. **I recommend you buy 4 yards if it's at least 50 inches wide.** Better to have leftover fabric than not enough. Wash your fabric in hot water and dry it in a hot dryer. This will soften it up and get the sizing (chemicals) out of it. Snip off any tangled threads on the cut edges and then steam-iron it.

**Second: Acquire wide, large paper on which you can draw the pattern for your surcotte.** You can find white 'butcher' paper at craft stores in rolls. Also have on hand a yardstick, a pen or pencil, and a measuring tape.

**Third: Take your measurements while wearing your armour.** This might be easier if someone else does the measuring. You will need the following measurements:



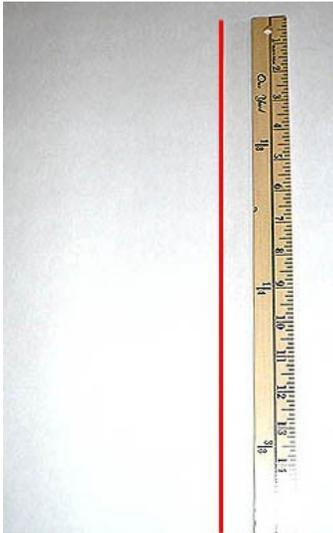
- 1) Shoulder to hem (you decide where you want your hem to be)
- 2) Shoulder width across the back of your shoulders
- 3) Shoulder to chest (stop about two inches below your armpit)
- 4) Chest circumference (measure at the same level where you stopped number 3 above)
- 5) Shoulder to hip

I will refer to these measurements by their number from now on.

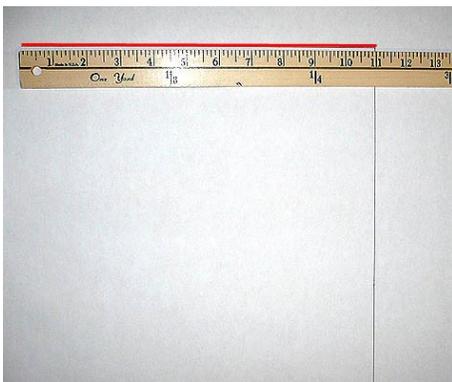
### Part 3

Next comes the drafting process. If you take your time and follow each step below, you will get a pattern you can sew with confidence, knowing it will fit over your armour and look good on you. This method allows for a  $\frac{1}{2}$ " seam allowance on your drafted pattern.

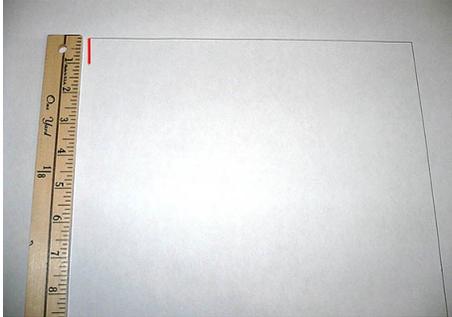
- 1) Unroll a length of paper about 2 yards long on a large, flat surface. Use weights to hold down the corners and secure the roll, so it won't roll closed.
- 2) Using the yardstick as a guide, start close to the right side of your unrolled paper and draw a straight, vertical line the length of **Measurement 1 + 1 inch**.



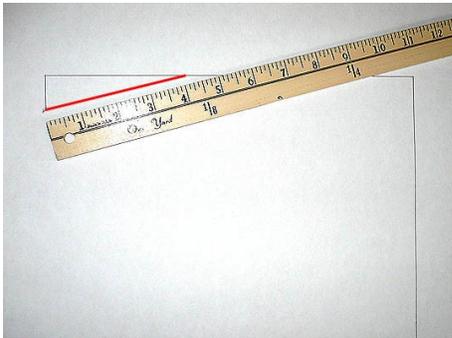
- 3) Draw a horizontal, perpendicular line starting at the top of the vertical line and extending to the left the length of  $\frac{1}{2}$  of **Measurement 2 + 1 inch**.



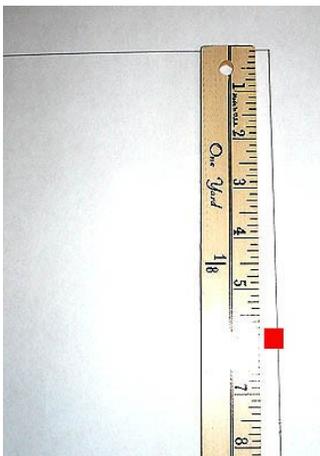
- 4) Draw a vertical line dropping **1 inch** from the left side of the horizontal line.



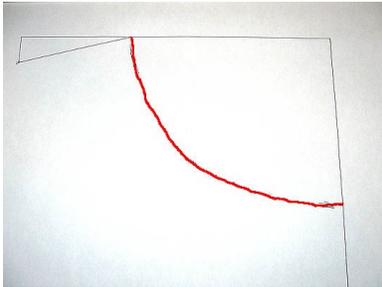
- 5) Draw a diagonal line 4 inches long that starts at the bottom of the last line you drew and ends when it meets the horizontal line. This will be your shoulder seam.



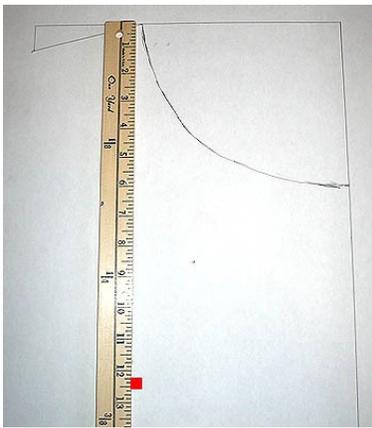
- 6) Measure six inches down from the top of the big vertical line. Mark this spot.



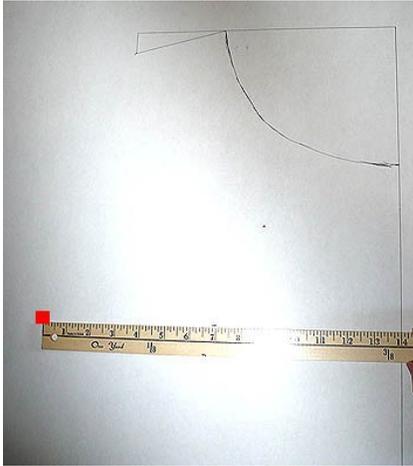
- 7) Use either a curved edge as a guide or hand-draw a curve between the point you just marked and the closest point of the shoulder seam. This is your front neckline.



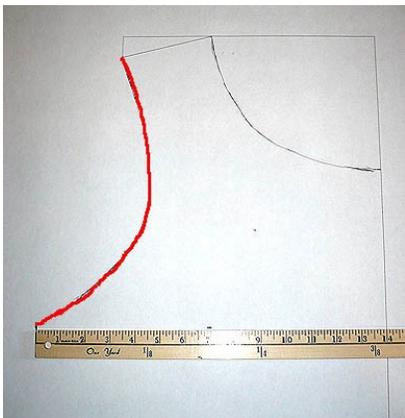
- 8) Measure the length of **Measurement 3 + ½ inch** from the point of the shoulder seam straight down. Mark this spot.



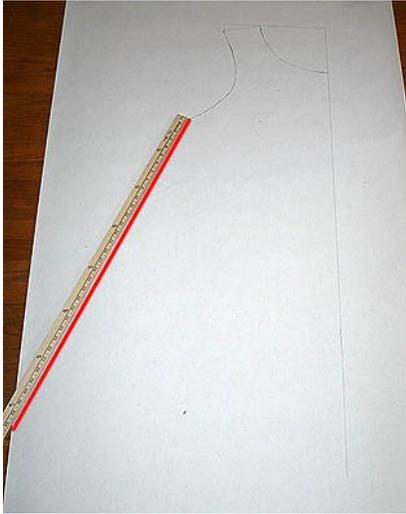
- 9) Measure horizontally from the big vertical line, through the spot you just marked, the length of **Measurement 4 divided by 4, + 2 inches**. Mark that spot.



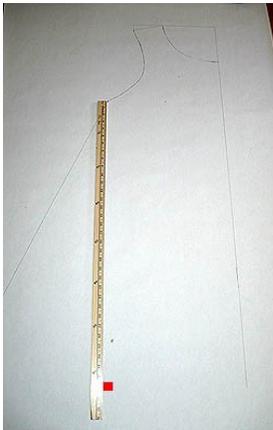
- 10) Use either a curved edge as a guide or hand-draw a curve between the spot you just marked and the closest point of the shoulder seam. This is your armhole. Make the curve deep and pronounced. A too-shallow armhole is a common tailoring mistake. You need to give the arms room to move around.



- 11) Next, **subtract Measurement 3 from Measurement 1** and draw a line that extends the resulting length from the bottom of the curve you just drew to the furthest side of the paper.



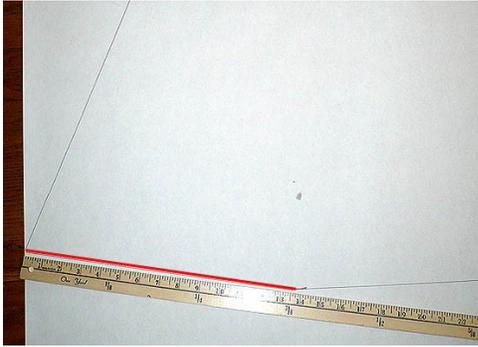
12) Measure the length you found in the previous step from the bottom of the armhole straight down. Mark that spot.



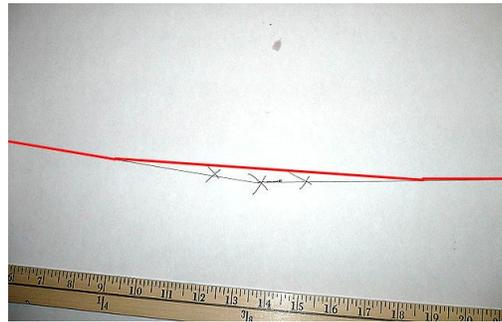
13) Draw a straight line between the bottom of the big vertical line and the spot you just marked.



14) Draw a straight line between the spot you marked and the end of the slanted line. Your hem is beginning to form.

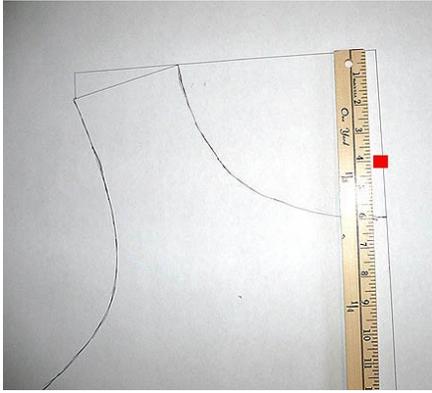


15) To eliminate the sharpness of the lines meeting at the spot you marked, use the yardstick and your pen as shown in the next two pictures.

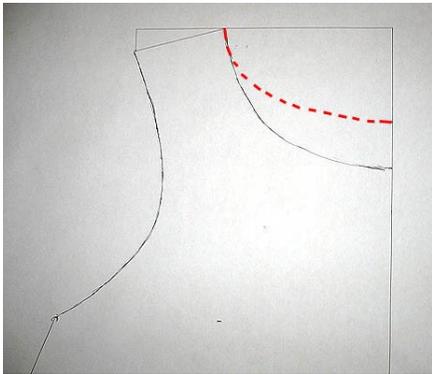


You have completed your pattern piece for the front of your surcote. The back will be exactly the same except for the neckline, which will be two inches higher.

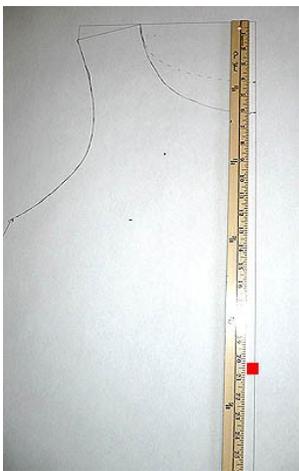
16) Measure from the top of the big vertical line down 4 inches and mark the spot.



- 17) Use either a curved edge as a guide or hand-draw a curve between the spot you just marked and the closest point of the shoulder seam. This is where you should cut the neckline for the back pieces of your surcote.



- 18) Measure the length of **Measurement 5** from the top of the big vertical line. Mark that spot. This is where you will stop sewing and leave the rest open at the bottom for leg movement. (I have heard it referred to as a cavalry or riding split/slit.)

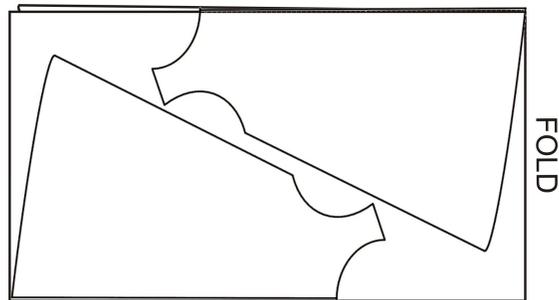


Cut out your paper pattern on the lines you drew. Make sure you cut along the higher of the two necklines.

## Part 4

**Cutting out your fabric using your new pattern:** Fold your fabric in half as shown below. Most plain-weave linen doesn't have a distinguishable front or back side to the fabric. If you use a twill weave, however, take a close look and decide which side you want to face out (the "good" side) and which side you want to face in (the "bad" side). Make sure the fabric is folded so that the good side is folded together and the bad side of the fabric is facing up.

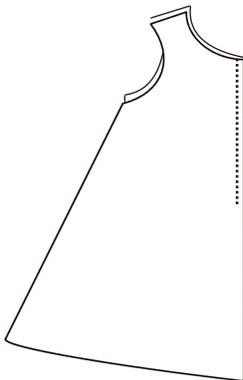
Lay your pattern piece down as follows and trace it on the fabric, preferably using tailor's chalk or plain chalk. On one of the chalked outlines, adjust the neckline two inches lower (for the front pieces). On both pieces, mark where the slit ends (step 18 in Part 3).



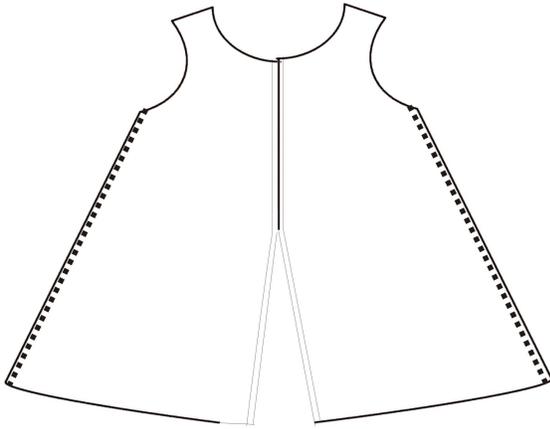
Finally, cut the chalked shapes out of the folded fabric. Now you have two front pieces and two back pieces.

**Sewing your surcotte together:** When sewing, make sure the good sides of the fabric are facing each other.

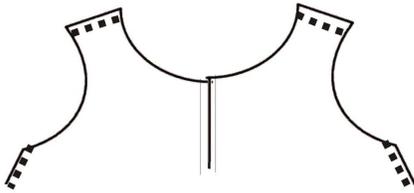
- 1) Sew the two front pieces together from the top of the vertical line to the point you marked as the top of the slit. Do the same to the back pieces. Reinforce the sewing near the bottom on both front and back. This is the first place that will rip when you fight. Iron the seams open and flat.



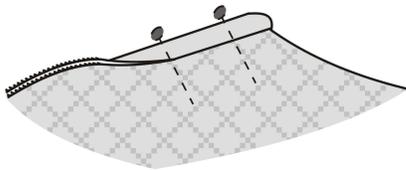
2) Sew the assembled front piece to the assembled back piece at the sides. Iron.



3) Sew the shoulder seams together. Iron.



4) Finish the neckline, armholes, and hem by rolling the fabric to the inside and stitching it down. Iron.



It's up to you whether you want to finish the inside seams or not. If you don't, they'll fray and clump over time but aren't likely to be seen.

**Congratulations! You have made a spiffy new martial surcotte. Do it justice with a nice belt.**