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Retrofit: Turning Today's Clothes into Period Costumes



1800's Vest, Shirt and Knickers

Create low-sew 1800's-inspired vest, shirt, and knickers from everyday clothing.

Click [here](#) for the full tutorial or visit www.daytonartinstitute.org/retrofit



John Wollaston (English, about 1710–1720, active in America about 1736 – 1769), *Philip de Visme*, 1749–1752, oil on canvas. Museum purchase with funds provided by the James F. Dicke Family. 2000.54



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Materials Needed:

- dress shirt or blouse
- scarf or fabric for scarf
- high-necked 2 pc. pantsuit
- ¼" - ½" wide elastic
- sewing pins
- safety pin
- thread
- scissors
- lace
- **optional:** seam ripper (or scissors)
- **optional:** sewing machine (or hand-sew)



Instructions

1. To turn a jacket into a vest, remove any shoulder pads with seam ripper or scissors by snipping the threads that hold shoulder pads to inside of garment.
2. Run bulb (or ball end of seam ripper) across fabric between serged finishing stitches to easily cut stitches. Then, alternately pull and snip the remaining threads to easily remove. Repeat for the opposite sleeve. Your jacket is now a vest!



Helpful Hint: instead of using a seam ripper, use scissors to cut sleeve off just past the serged stitching to remove sleeve.



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3. Fold the hem for the arm hole over and line up the folded edge with the inside edge of the machine's presser foot. Make a few backward stitches to secure the stitch and then sew around arm hole until you meet your starting point, then backstitch again.

Helpful hint: for no-sew, use iron-on hem tape or hand-sew the arm holes' folded fabric.



4. Open the vest and fold backwards the bottom corners of vest's frontside into a triangle shape. Then, pin fabric on the inside of the vest with sewing pins to hold triangle shape.



5. Hand-sew the triangle by taking stitches through the areas where the vest is two layers thick such as the hem, while taking care to only go through one layer so your stitches won't show. Repeat on opposite side. See [video](#) for an easy finishing knot!

Helpful hint: the idea is to have the triangle hold its shape. We used thread in an opposing color to better show demonstrate the technique, but we recommend using a matching thread. Don't forget to knot thread at beginning and end of stitching.



6. To attach lace to the shirt's cuffs, fold bottom side of the lace over and pin the right side of it to the underside of the shirt's cuff until you have pinned the entire cuff. Trim lace with scissors leaving a half-inch of lace to fold over at end of cuff and pin.



7. Sew along the cuff's existing stitching line or close to the edge, lining up the outside edge of the cuff with the inside edge of your machine's presser foot. Hand-sew if preferred. Don't forget to backstitch at beginning and end of cuff. Repeat with opposite cuff.



8. To make knickers, cut pants at about two inches longer than where you want them to finish below the knee. This will ensure you have enough fabric to fold over and sew and so that there is space for the elastic's channel. Use the part of the first pant's leg you cut as pattern for cutting the second leg. Flip piece over, align onto second leg of pants and follow the cutting line.



9. Pinch $\frac{1}{4}$ " of fabric towards inside of leg hem, then fold another 1" of the fabric inwards and pin. Fold and pin around entire bottom of leg. Repeat for second leg.



10. Line folded fabric up with the inside of the machine's presser foot. Sew hem channel closed, leaving about a 1" opening to be able to run elastic through it.

Helpful Hint: use good sewing habits such as backstitching at beginning and end of stitching and removing pins before sewing over them.



11. Insert safety pin about $\frac{1}{2}$ " from end of elastic and close. Then insert safety pin with elastic attached into the hem channel.

Run the safety pin all the way through until it reaches the other side. Pin and sew ends of elastic together or tie into a knot. Then pull on the fabric to even out where it is bunched. Repeat the process of adding and finishing elastic to the opposite pants leg.



12. You're finished! Don your new garments and enjoy!



Resources

[Hand-sewing basics](#)

[Watch the full Retrofit tutorial](#)

[Explore fashion through the ages](#)

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