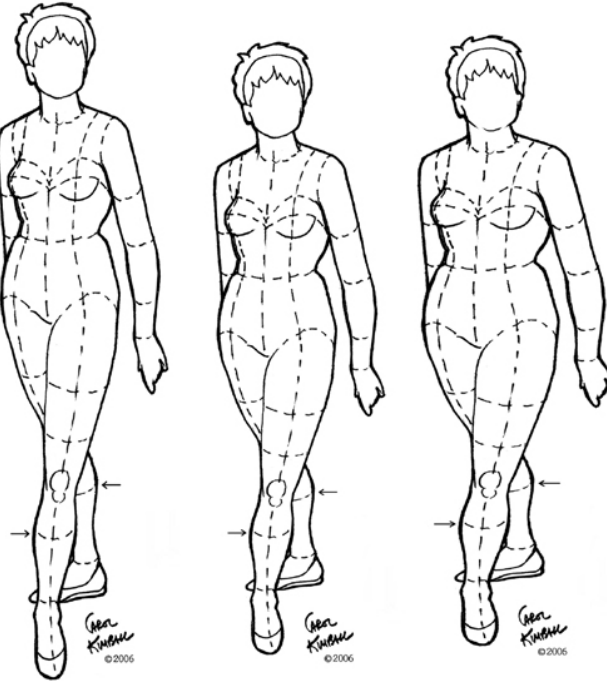Sketching Designs for Any Body
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Proportion is an important element of design, so drawing over a realistic body makes good choices more obvious. It's easier to convey a good design on an action figure, and surprisingly, no harder to learn to do.

Select the figure at right closest to your own and either use tracing paper or make very light photocopies. These are the pose with reference lines that will be with the fourth edition of my Master Sketch Pad. In the meantime, you may copy and use these drawings. Please keep my signature/copyright.

The arrows indicate the fullest part of the calf, at different levels due to perspective. This is not a good place for a hemline. Using the dotted lines as guides, draw your necklines, sleeves and hems wherever they look best (not necessarily at the lines)

Do NOT waste time erasing! You learn nothing when you erase, and paper is cheap. Redraw! With tracing paper, you can copy what works and redraw the rest, or combine different necklines, pants, skirts, tops. Use a permanent pen. Pencil or ballpoint will smear.

Don't bother with details like faces and fingers. This is about clothing designs, not your portrait ability. If you draw a face on a sketch for a client, they'll get sidetracked figuring what's wrong with the mouth rather than working with you on the neckline.

1. Begin by customizing your figure by changing the hairstyle and making other alterations as needed.

2. When clothing the figure, draw outside the edge of the body. For thicker fabric or garments with more ease, draw further away. Thin is shown on the left, thick on the right. Wrap the lines around the edges of the body.

3. Pay attention to the center front line. A neckline's lowest point will be here unless your design is asymmetrical. A "V" neckline should be drawn with curved lines, even if your pattern has straight ones. Left: incorrect, right: right.

4. Get the basic shape of the garment before adding details, color or shading. Skipping ahead confuses the eye and is frustrating to fix. At left, the designer got carried away with details of the proposed embellishment. Also, the garment "without the person inside it" makes the person look like a ghost. When adding color and shading, do the skin tone first, then hair, and only then the colors for the garment. Don't put "smile lines" under breasts unless you're designing corsetry or swimwear that has seam lines there, or you're drawing see-through fabric.

In the second drawing, the basic tunic and skirt were drawn with guidelines for the pattern, and proportional changes suggested themselves. Note that it isn't necessary to do perfect drawings at this stage. When you're happy with the design, trace it to a clean sheet and add detail and color (partially done at right). The more you draw, and the faster you push yourself to draw, the more fluid and graceful your lines will be. Practice!