

# Design Your Own Cloth Doll Class

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Taught by Judi Ward of Judi's Dolls

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## Chapters 3 - DESIGNING THE BODY

Now that you have designed and sewn some arms and legs of various types, I'm sure you are chomping at the bit to get on with the heads and bodies. I am going to show you how to design the tab head type head and body using two kinds of vinyl heads and bodies.

The child doll I am designing around has her neck as part of her head. The lady doll I am designing around has the neck as part of the body.

I made photostats of the actual doll heads and bodies (Like I did for the legs and arms) so you can see better how to draw around them, and add or delete the neck areas. When I cut out the head photostats I cut off the hair. To draw around the real heads that you have, you can just push and pin the hair out of the way.

To design the body of the child doll, simply lay it on your paper and draw around it, again holding your pencil straight up and down. Since it doesn't have a neck, add a neck, rounding it at the top as shown, or leaving it straight across at the top. The doll's hair will cover it, so either round or straight will work. The neck needs to be about 2" long.

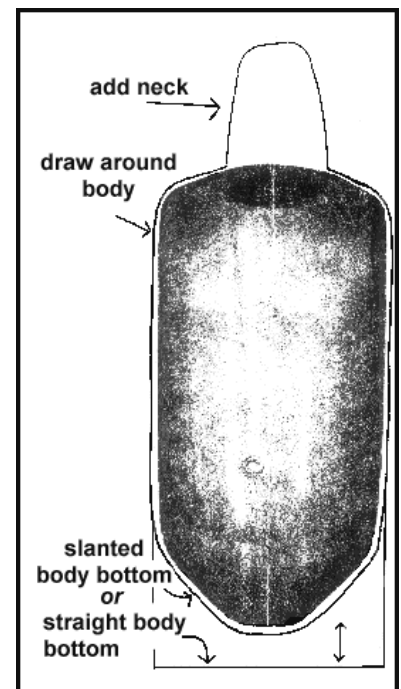
This neck tab will be stitched or glued to the back of the doll's head to assemble the doll.

If drawing the neck freehand bothers you, you can draw around your thumb or a screwdriver handle or some such thing. It is just a little long tube shape so it is really very easy to draw.

If you are going to make jointed legs, leave the bottom of the body with the slanted sides.

If you are going to stitch the legs on, you will need to straighten out the bottom of the body, since the legs will be stitched on here. (If the bottom of the body is left slanted, the straight top legs that you designed will stick out at the sides.)

Add about 1/2" extra at the bottom of the body, like you did for the tops of the arms and legs. This type of stitched on leg is called a swing leg, and you will find it on most simple dolls and country dolls.



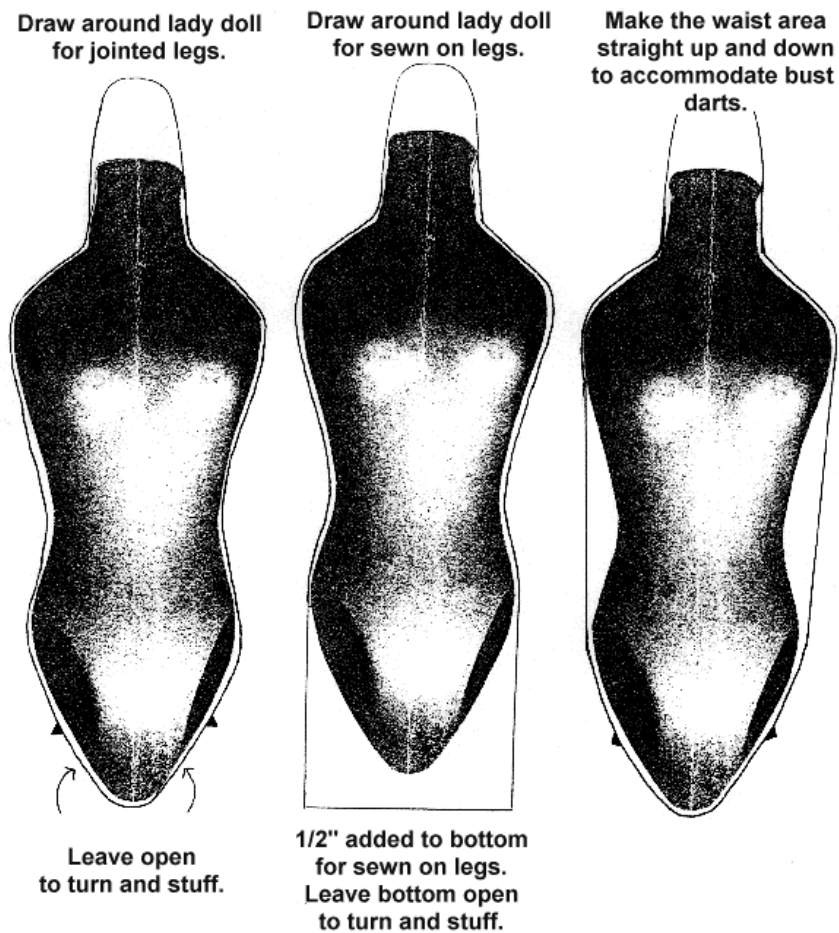
For the lady doll body that has the neck as part of the body you will hold it down on the paper the same as for the body above, and draw around it the same way, just continuing around the neck area too.

The neck area will be a funny shape due to the flange, but you will just cut the area smoother when you fold it in half lengthwise to even up the pattern. The neck area will need to be lengthened to about 2" long too.

*Note: This 2" neck length is good for dolls up to about 17" tall. A longer neck would be needed for larger dolls, and of course a shorter neck length would be needed for very small dolls. The ballerina doll pictured on the class intro page was designed from a cheap "Barbie" type doll, and her neck is only about 1 1/2" long. By the way, she fits into "real" Barbie clothes!*

Now lets get back to the lady type doll. Most of you will want a bust for your lady dolls. With this type of 2 piece body the bust can be achieved with darts, or by adding gathered, stuffed circles to the flat chest.

The red headed doll with the bead knees and elbows, on the intro. pages has the darted bust. To achieve this you will need to make the lady doll pattern straight up and down at the waist, then add 2 darts in front as shown in the following illustrations. You can also add a dart in the center back to give a curved spine and a shaped "bottom".



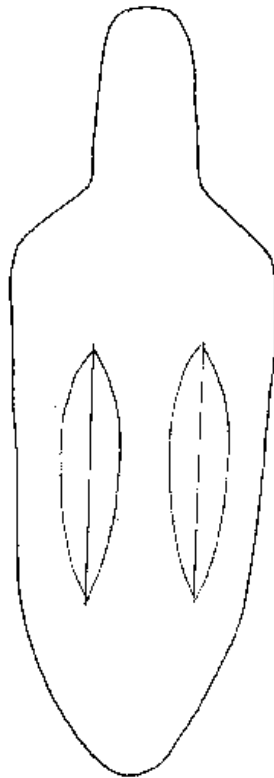
*Note... To be sure that both sides of the body match exactly, cut the body pattern out and fold it in half lengthwise, then trim off any little discrepancies before you use it as a pattern. If you trimmed off a lot, you will need to put the body pattern onto a folded piece of paper and draw around it, adding a little back to it.*

*Another Note... The bust darted body looks, stuffs and shapes much nicer if you make a jointed doll. If you make the flat bottom body with the bust darts, the body distorts at the bottom if you stuff it really firmly like it should be.*

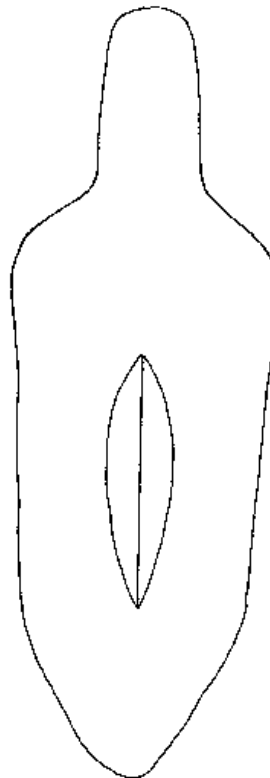
**M**ake a front and a back body pattern for the placement of the darts. You will draw around only one of the pattern pieces on your doubled fabric, then sew just inside the lines you drew, just like for an un-darted body. Cut the sewn body out, and then draw the darts in place, using the “reverse” template method described below. Pinch the darts up and sew them in, taking care not to sew through the front and back of the body at the same time, while you are sewing in the darts!

The “reverse template” method is the best and easiest way to mark the darts on your fabric. Cut the darts out of your pattern pieces, leaving “dart shaped holes” in the pattern pieces for you to draw through. This “reverse template” method also works for some face designs, and for clothing darts. Experiment a little with it to see where it will work for you.

**Add dart to the front  
of your trimmed and  
evened body pattern.**



**Add a centered dart to  
the back of your trimmed  
and evened body pattern.**



### Chapters 3 - DESIGNING THE HEAD

For designing the head, you will hold it down and draw around it just as you have done for the arms, legs and body. **ELIMINATE** the neck if it's there. You will have to freehand the chin for the dolls with the neck attached to the head, but it's just a little area and you can do it!

Draw straight across the top of the head. This is where you will leave open to stuff. I like this straight top design better myself, because after you stuff the head **VERY FIRMLY** you gather around the top, pull the gathers tight and it gives more shape and roundness to the head.

Of course you will want both sides of the head to match, just like for the body, so after you draw around it, cut the pattern piece out, fold it lengthwise, and trim it even.

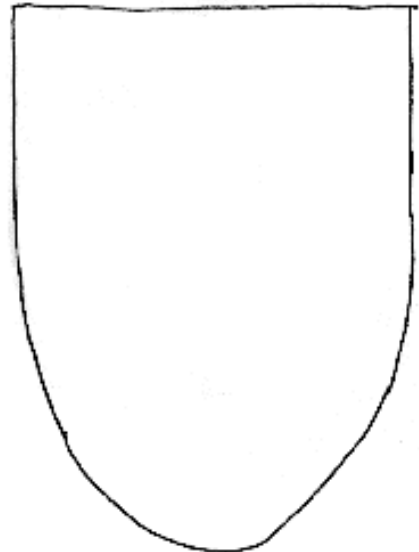
**Draw around head  
without neck.**



**Draw around head  
with neck.**



**Freehand the  
chin area.**

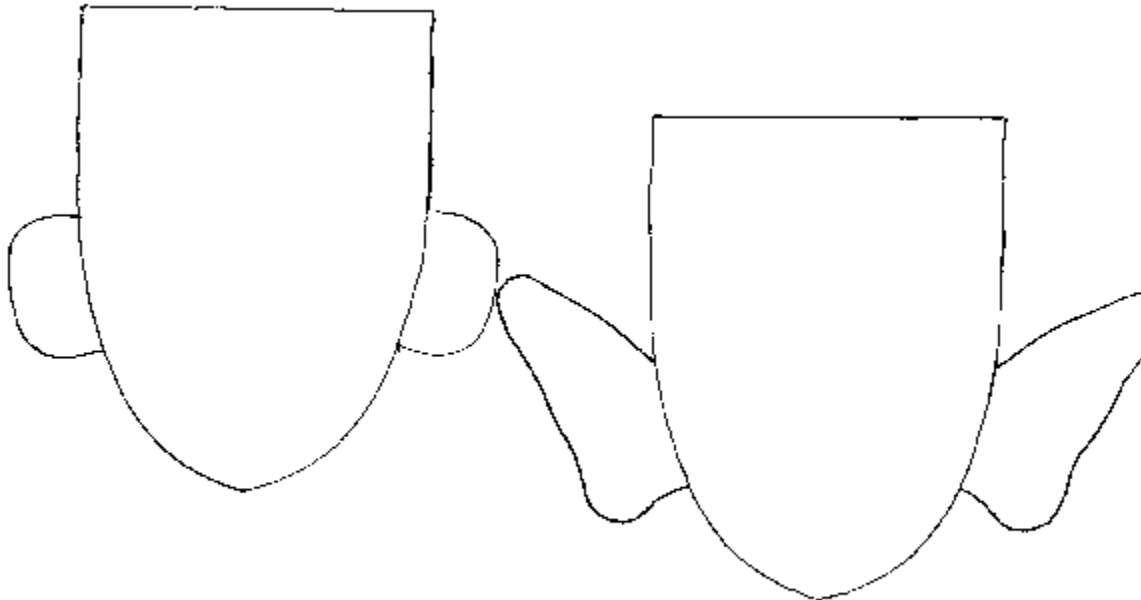


When drawing around the head/heads, you will have to get the hair out of the way as best you can. Some of my students choose to cut the hair off, which is fine too, but it ruins the vinyl doll for any other use. On the plus side, if the hair is long, you might be able to glue it on a cloth doll!

If you want to add ears to the head design, you only need to draw one since you will be folding the head in half lengthwise, as directed above, to be sure both sides match. Ears can be kept simple for this type of doll as they are often hidden under the hair anyway. Simple ears are just an elongated U shape at the sides of the head. For general reference, remember that "people" ears align with the eyebrows at the top and with the lips at the bottom.

The points on fairy or elf ears can be any length you desire. My sister made a 16" tall elf with ears about 4" long! She then placed wire in the outer edges of the pointed ends, top stitched to keep the wires in place, and the ears are folded and twisted so they appear curly!

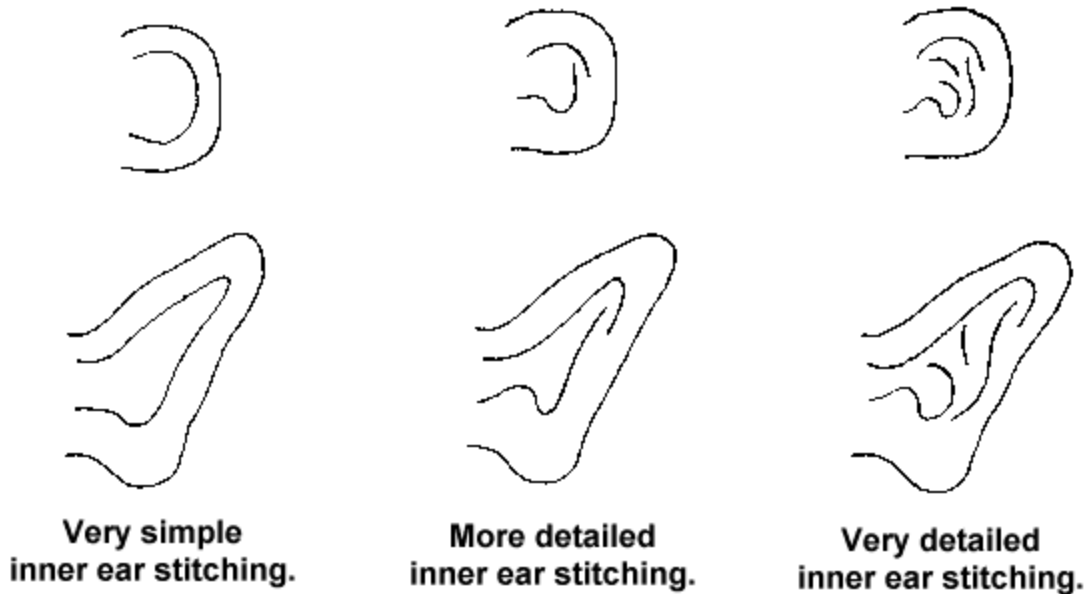
Find some pictures of fairies and elves to see some different shapes. You can trace a shape from a storybook if you wish, and reduce or enlarge it on a copy machine. You can use the ones I have drawn here for starters if you wish, but practice and try to do your own. Don't use an ear from another designer's pattern. It will make you feel guilty, and it is copyright infringement.



**"People" ears added to the original child head pattern.**

**Elf ears added to that same head pattern.**

After you turn the head/heads right side out, do some stitching inside the ears. Either just around the edge or in more detail to resemble the inside of a real ear. Another ear note: You can lightly stuff the ears before you do any inner ear stitching.



**The ears can be tacked back to the head, after your doll is stuffed or left sticking out.**

You should now have patterns for legs, arms, bodies and heads for the doll/dolls you have chosen to draw around and make.

Now simply draw around your patterns on doubled fabric and sew just inside the lines you drew. Of course, make two arms and two legs and leave at least 1/2" between each piece. If you are making a darted bust lady doll follow the darting directions on page 13.

Be sure to:

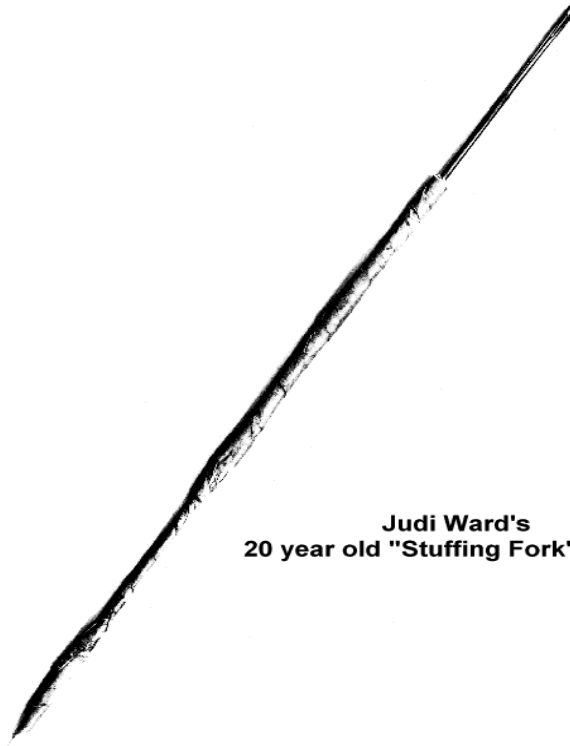
- leave the arms and legs open somewhere for turning and stuffing, depending on the type of legs and arms you have chosen to make.
- Leave the body open at the straight edge for turning and stuffing a swing leg doll.
- Leave the body open at the slanted crotch area for a jointed doll.
- Leave the head open at the top.
- Cut your doll parts out leaving at least 1/4" seam allowances.
- Turn all of the doll parts right side out.

## Chapters 4

### MAKING A STUFFING FORK

Before you stuff the parts lets make a “STUFFING FORK” if you don’t already have one. These are invaluable for stuffing fingers either with stuffing, or with Chenille Stems to make articulated fingers.

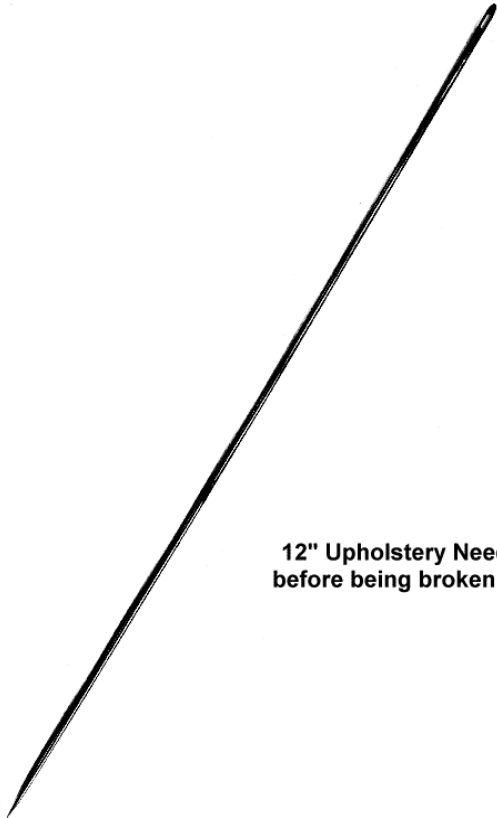
My stuffing fork was made about 20 years ago (pictured below) when I accidentally broke part of the eye off of one of my 12” long upholstery needles, that I used for jointing. I was momentarily devastated, until I realized what a wonderful tool it was now! I had been using a small Phillips screwdriver to stuff fingers with, because I could twirl the tip in a piece of stuffing to make a little “Q-Tip” type piece of stuffing to stuff one finger at a time. With the broken needle I could do the same thing, but it was thinner so I could use it for smaller fingers and it was longer, so I could more easily reach into longer arms with it. I could also guide Chenille stems down into fingers with it thereby solving the “bending Chenille stem” problem!



Judi Ward's  
20 year old "Stuffing Fork" needle.

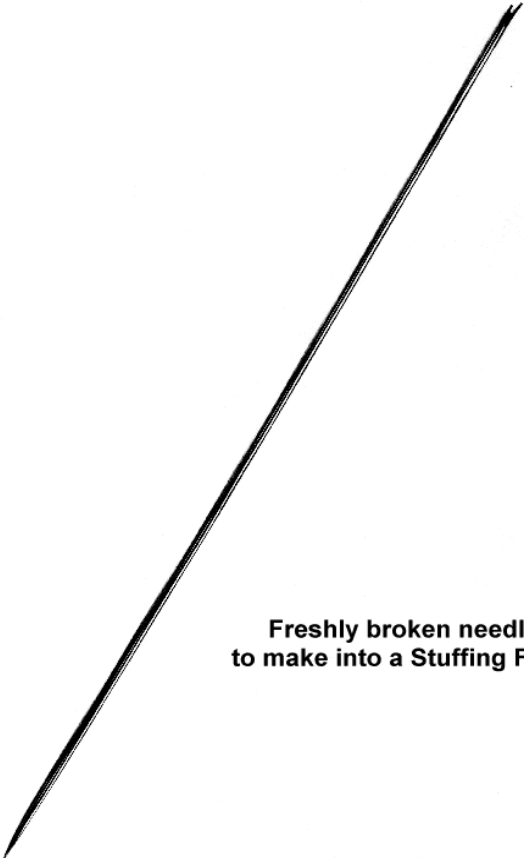
To make your stuffing fork, hold the eye part of the big 12” long needle with 2 pairs of pliers. One pair will be covering most of the eye and the other pair will be at the rounded end of the eye. Exerting great strength and pressure, break off the rounded tip. Some of you won’t have the strength to do this, so enlist the help of a hubby or friend who will be able to break it off. Another way is to cut the rounded tip off with a hacksaw, the way my sister did hers. I don’t own a hack saw, so breaking it off was what I did to make a back up stuffing fork. I also made a smaller one from an 8” needle but find I don’t use it. I am just really attached to the long 12” ones.

**Needle before it is broken.**



**12" Upholstery Needle  
before being broken off.**

**Needle after the tip is broken.**



**Freshly broken needle  
to make into a Stuffing Fork.**

After you get the fork end done, you need to get rid of the sharp point on the other end. I cut just the tip of mine off with a wire cutter. You could also rub it hard on a file or cement sidewalk to blunt it.

Now to make the long skinny needle easier to hold onto, wrap it with masking tape to within about 4-5" of the fork. My 20-year-old masking taped needle still has its original tape on it! I tried floral tape, but it stays sticky, so my floral taped one has a masking tape "slip cover" on it. I'm sure it will now be good for over 20 years too!

After you follow all of the design lessons in the previous 4 chapters you will be ready for stuffing and jointing, (or stitching the limbs on) for the doll/dolls you have designed, sewn, and turned right side out.

Get lots of dolls ready, so you can do several techniques. I will also teach you the wonderful; miraculous "LADDER STITCH" that will let you close all of your dolls openings nearly invisibly!

One of my Grand Daughters is a master of the ladder stitch at only 8 years old, and she is left handed, taught by right handed me, so I know anybody can master this simple closing stitch, if you haven't already.

**Happy Designing!**

*Judi Ward*

**Judi's Dolls**

**<http://JudisDolls.com>**