

Design Your Own Cloth Doll Class

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Taught by Judi Ward of Judi's Dolls

Chapters 5 - STUFFING

You should have a doll or hopefully, dolls, designed, sewn, cut out and turned right side out, ready and waiting for stuffing and assembly. Your hemostats are so helpful for turning your dolls. Just reach inside with them, grab a bit of fabric in their teeth, then slowly, pull and work the doll part right side out. Kind of like putting on panty hose but in the reverse!

Stuffing is soooooooooooooo! important to making excellent quality cloth dolls! It takes practice, and a well-stuffed cloth doll will be HARD. There are only a few places and occasions when soft stuffing is O.K. Soft stuff a very simple, perhaps 2 piece, “Rag Doll” meant for a baby or small child to play with. Soft stuff near the tops of stitched on legs and arms so they will remain mobile, and soft stuff some primitive and country dolls. Also, some arms/hands that you stuff with chenille stems can be left without stuffing, except at the tops, letting the chenille stems do the stuffing. Other than that all of the rest of the cloth dolls need to be stuffed very firmly. Woven fabric dolls need the firm stuffing to work out the wrinkles and shape them.

Firm knit and felt dolls don't suffer from the wrinkle problem like woven fabric dolls, but need the firm stuffing to shape them.

Almost all, well designed, jointed dolls will stand alone in shoes if they are stuffed firmly enough. I even have high heel dolls with the “shoe” designed the way you were taught in the more advanced dollmaker part of the shoe design lesson, who stand alone with just the cloth feet.

Stuffing and shaping your cloth doll can “make or break” your finished doll. The finest design can be ruined by poor stuffing. The simplest design can be made to look very detailed by a good stuffing job.

When you are working with firm knits, like velour, you can actually mold the doll as you stuff, almost like clay. Two dolls from the same pattern can be made to look very different just by altering the stuffing.

Of course, in reality, no two cloth dolls look exactly alike, even if they are made from the same pattern, by the same dollmaker, at the same time. For me that is the pure joy of cloth doll making.

The stuffing you use has a great deal to do with the smoothness of your finished dolls too. Use the more expensive stuffing's that are all soft and downy. Some bargain brands have what I call “floor

sweepings” in them. These are hard, bunches of polyester that didn’t get spun and processed. Every lump that you put into your doll will usually make a lump on the outside.

Stuff each area of your doll with the largest amounts of stuffing that you can get into an area at once. The fewer breaks in the stuffing, the fewer lumps in the doll.

After stuffing it is important to close the openings nicely and in most cases the LADDER STITCH is the best stitch to use. The ladder stitch lets you close straight or even curved openings nearly invisibly! It does take a little practice but once you get it you will never close things with an over-cast stitch again.

When you do the ladder stitch, your needle ENTERS AND EXITS on the right side of the fabric, right along the seam allowance. You take 2 or 3 stitches, then you pull them tight. When you pull the stitches tight, the raw edges will turn inside and the thread will disappear! You will usually need to add a little more stuffing as you close. You will also need to get in the habit of pulling the thread near to the stitches rather than pulling on the needle. As you pull the stitches tight, you will need to poke the raw edges a little to get them to go inside the seam. In my hands on classes we use a little chant “STITCH-STITCH-STITCH, PULL AND POKE”.

When closing a curve, like the tops of legs and arms for a jointed doll, you sometimes need to poke the raw edges to the inside in a few places as you close. CLOSING TIP...Cotton balls are great to add in at the tops of curved closures, to finish filling the tops firmly as you close. They don’t puff out of the opening and they give you a firmer top.

Hand sewing note...I always do all hand sewing and needle-sculpturing using a double or quadruple thread. Some designers use a single thread, but for me, double or quadruple prevents broken thread disasters.

Hand sewing note #2.. Always pull on the thread near your stitching, not at the needle.

Hand sewing note #3...Use good European threads if at all possible for your dollmaking. Using good thread will eliminate lots of broken thread disasters.

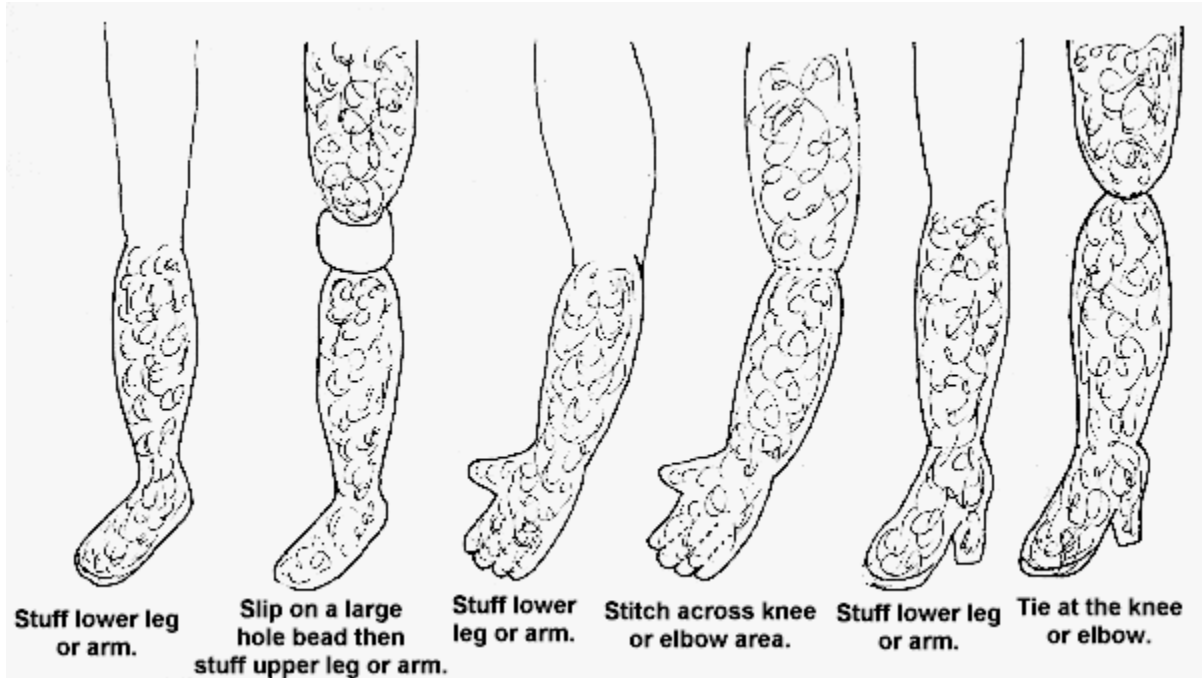


Ladder stitch illustration. The 3 dotted lines represent A stitch under the fabric, not 3 stitches.

PRACTICE PRACTICE PRACTICE, until it comes naturally to have your needle both enter and exit on the RIGHT SIDE of the fabric.

Before you start stuffing, I want to show you:

SOME IDEAS FOR ARTICULATING KNEES AND ELBOWS FOR JOINTED OR UNJOINTED DOLLS.



You can also do the bead, stitch or tie at the ankles and wrists if desired. Note...A doll articulated in this way will not stand alone.

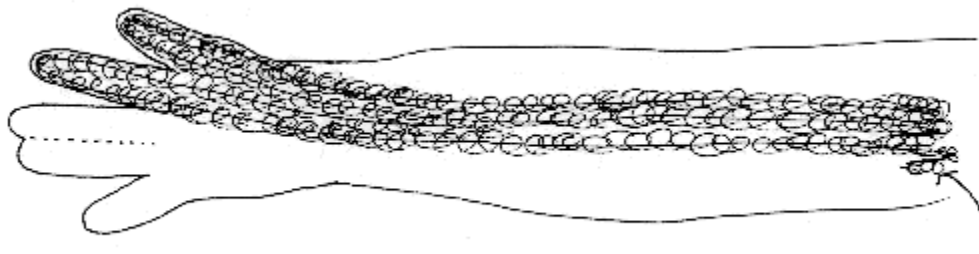
Chenille stems are my favorite for stuffing and articulating fingers of all sizes, and even arms and legs on small dolls. Hook your stuffing fork in the center of the bent chenille stem to help guide the stem into place.



Chenille stem hooked onto stuffing fork. This is the easiest way to get the chenille stem to where you want it.

With chenille stem folded in half, and using your stuffing fork as a guide and holder, guide one chenille stem into each finger, or hand and thumb, depending on the kind of hands you have made. For small hands and fingers use the skinny chenille stems. For bigger fingers, use the big 15mm size chenille stems. If you can't find the big ones, you can use two of the smaller ones. Or use only one, and carefully stuff around the chenille stem.

NOTE... you will need to bend the free ends of each chenille stem, so there are no sharp ends to deal with.



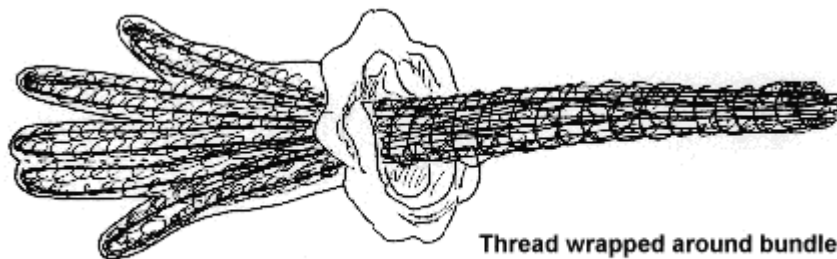
Sharp ends of chenille stems bent over.

Fingers stuffed with chenille stems using your stuffing fork to guide them into place.

If you have stuffed all of the fingers with chenille stems, you will need to bundle together all the ends that protrude into the arm, because they are impossible to stuff around when they are left unbundled. Simply wrap ordinary thread all around the bundle. **NOTE...** If the stems go up past the elbow, you have a bendable elbow as a bonus! If they are too long for a small arm you will need to cut them off.

VERY CAREFULLY stuff the hands, both top and bottom, and stuff the arms all around the chenille stems. You may wish to leave the hands very softly stuffed for delicate lady hands.

BONUS... for some small dolls, the chenille stems are all the stuffing that is needed for hands and arms.



Thread wrapped around bundle.

Arm "skin" rolled down.

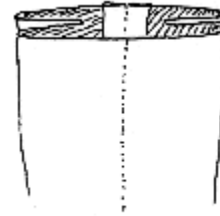
If you don't wish to stuff the fingers with chenille stems, "twirl" small amounts of stuffing on your stuffing fork, by holding the stuffing firmly in your fingers and twirling the stuffing fork into it, thereby making a "Q-tip" on your fork. It will of course be bigger than a real Q-tip. With practice you will be able to judge just how much stuffing is needed for different sizes of fingers. You want to stuff each finger with one "Q-tip". With the "Q-tip" on your fork, guide it down into one finger, then hold the finger tightly and pull your stuffing fork out. Repeat for all of the fingers, and then continue stuffing hands and arms as usual.

Basic/General, Stuffing and Construction of a Stitched on Limb Doll

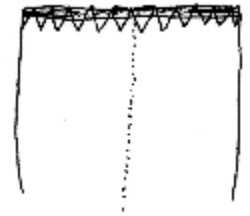
Use any of the methods previously described for giving your doll movement and articulation...or... simply stuff your doll without doing any of the above at the fingers, knees and elbows. This is your design and you choose how you want it done.

Stuff your doll's arms and legs firmly. **...Note...** Don't fill the legs and arms to the top, Leave some un-stuffed so they will stitch on easily and hang nicely.

Pleat the arm tops and the leg tops in at each side, then stitch closed by machine.



Pleat tops in at sides.



Stitch tops closed with a zig zag stitch.

If you have made high heel feet of either type, take great care to stuff down into the little heel. (your stuffing fork is great for this) Stuff carefully and smoothly into the toe area, shaping as you stuff. Don't forget the arch and vamp of the foot.

Remember, you are shaping and sculpting as you stuff, and with a detailed, shapely foot/shoe, you can stuff it all out of shape, probably more easily than stuffing it into shape.

If you have made a foot with toes, be sure to stuff fully into the foot front, so when you sculpt the toes, they will be full of stuffing. If the front of the foot isn't smooth and full, you will end up sculpting just the seam allowance in places and the toes will be wrinkly. Note..Toe sculpting directions will be shown at the end of this chapter.

Stuff your doll's body firmly, especially the neck, then stitch the arms and legs to the body using your favorite method. You have probably used several methods from making dolls from other designer's patterns.

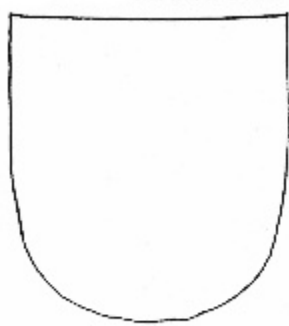
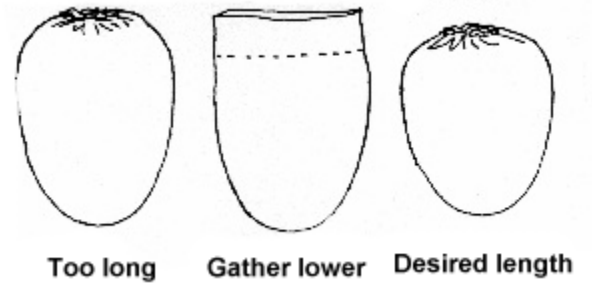
For example, you may want to sew the legs to the body front, then close the body, using the ladder stitch...or...you may want to close the body by hand or machine, then hand stitch the legs on the seam line. Again, this is your design and you choose the method you wish to use.

You may even want to cut slits at the shoulders of the body, and insert the stuffed arms into the slits from the right side, then stitch the slits closed from inside. This method works best with softly stuffed arms and a fairly large body, so you can get the arms inside.

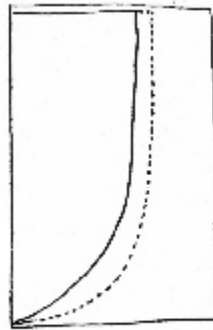
JUST SOME, IDEAS-IDEAS-IDEAS

The head is probably the most important stuffing job you will do. It needs to be smooth and wrinkle free. This is a very simple head type to stuff, but do take care to get rid of all the wrinkles, especially around the jaw line.

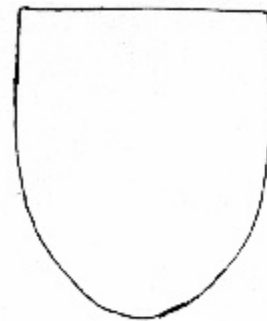
After the head is stuffed, run a gathering stitch around the top and pull the stitches up tightly. Now look at the head and place it on the front of the tab on the stuffed body. Does it look too long? too fat? too skinny? for the doll YOU want to design. Sometimes this is the case, because of drawing around hair, and it is easily fixed. If it is too long, simply run the gathering stitch a little farther down, (1/4" to 1/2") remove some stuffing and close it up again. When you like the look, adjust your original pattern accordingly. If it is too fat, trim your original pattern a little narrower, with it on the fold lengthwise. Make a new head. If it is too skinny, add a little to your pattern on a new piece of paper, on the fold. Make a new head.



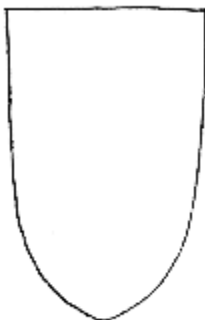
Too Fat



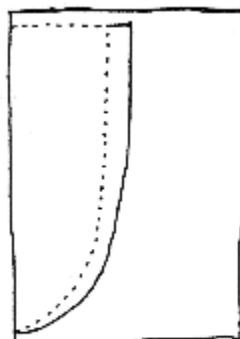
Trim Pattern



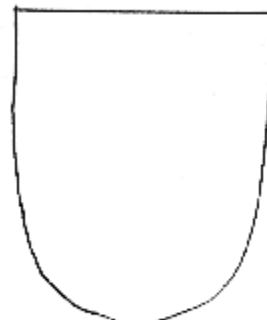
New Head



Too Thin



Add to Pattern



New Head

Just little adjustments like above can change the look of your whole design. The same body can be used with different heads to make lots of different looks.

The bodies can be fattened or thinned too, the same way the heads are, to give you even more designs.

Legs and arms can be made longer or shorter. Fatter or skinnier. Feet and hands can be made larger or smaller. The possibilities are nearly endless! The combinations are nearly endless! The fun is nearly endless!

THINK, EXPERIMENT, ADJUST AND DESIGN! HAVE FUN WITH THE VARIATIONS.

The head will be stitched or hot glued in place on the front side of the neck. You can do it now or wait until you get the face done. Use your favorite method, or see a couple of ideas for head attachment at the end of the next section of this chapter.

The placement of the head on the neck will add more variation to your designs too. You can have a short-necked doll or a long necked doll. (You may need to add to the neck length on your pattern, if a very long neck is desired)

You can create expression by tipping the head to one side.

The Invisibly Jointed Doll

The stuffing etc. for a jointed doll will be much the same as for an unjointed doll, except you will be closing curves with a ladder stitch, so you need to practice and get it down, so your closings are nearly invisible. The bottom of the body needs to be closed with a ladder stitch.

This is a very curved area, and you need to take great care in closing it. Add extra stuffing all along the closing to assure a smooth closing. **ANOTHER IDEA...** Rather than having a closed neck top, make your pattern with a straight neck top. Sew the body all the way around, except at the neck top. Turn and stuff through the neck. It is harder to stuff through the tiny neck, but if closing the pronounced curve at the bottom of the body is too difficult, this design may be the best.

You will be inserting metal shank buttons into the upper arms and legs before you close the arm and leg openings.

For very small dolls, with arms/legs about 3/4" wide or less you don't need the buttons, but for larger limbs the addition of the buttons inside makes a firm, sturdy, flat jointing.

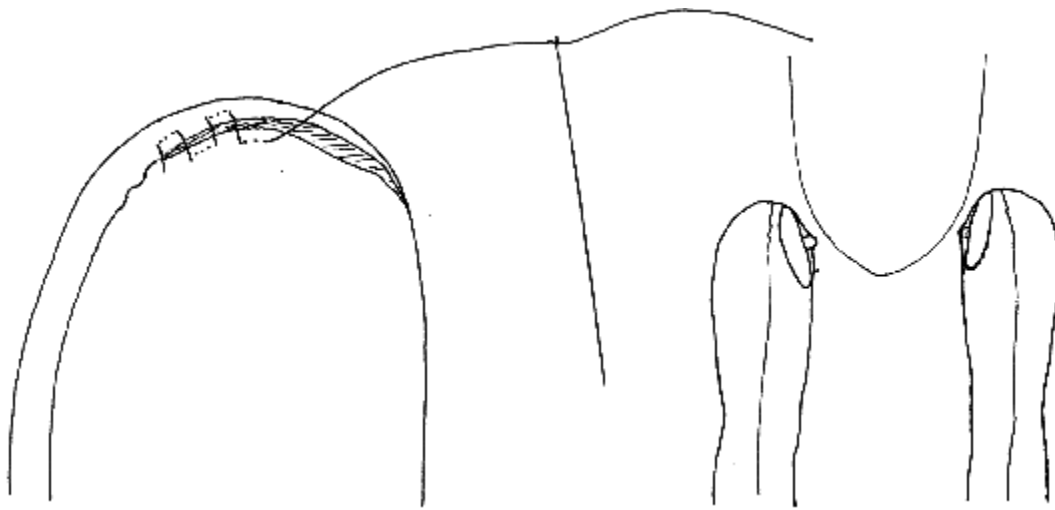
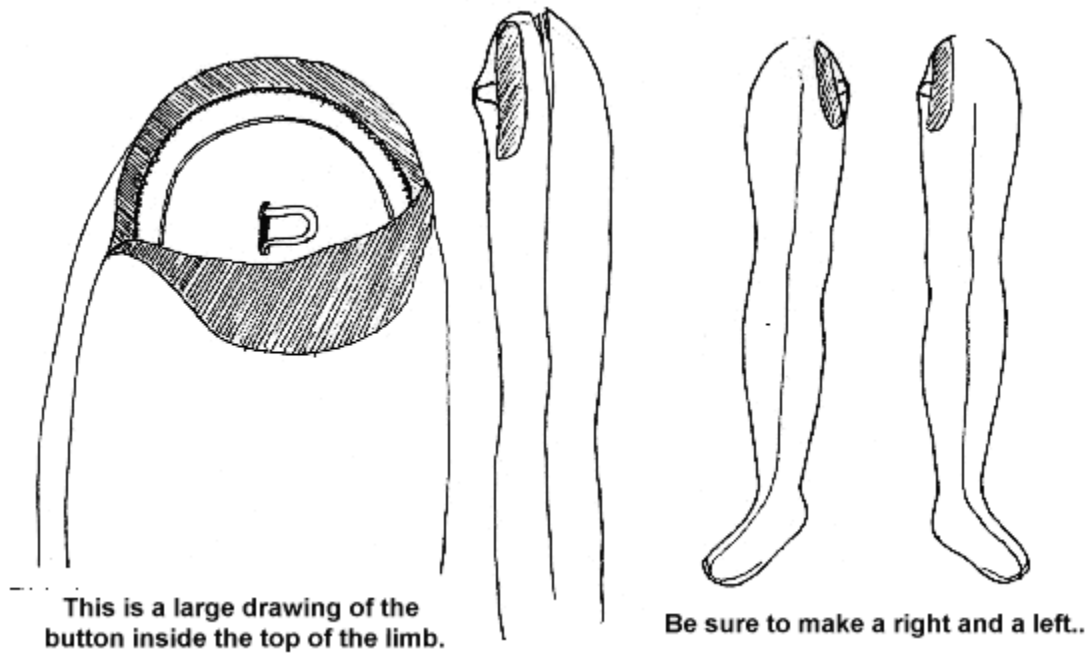
The buttons I like best are made by Prym-Dritz, and they are the ones with the teeth inside the cap. They are available in most fabric stores, in a variety of sizes. I also carry them in my catalog. You want to use the largest size that will comfortably fit into the arm/leg top. For the size dolls that I have designed around for this course, no buttons were needed for the arms, Size 36mm were needed for the legs. Don't try to use the cover buttons that DON'T have the teeth inside the cap. They pull apart as soon as you pull the jointing cords tight, and the shank comes right out of your doll's limbs!

You can also use clothing buttons as long as they have a big metal shank. The shank needs to be big enough to get the upholstery needle through, and upholstery needles are fat. I ran across some old military looking buttons in a thrift store that were great, and I have used some coat buttons too. **ANOTHER DON'T.** Don't use big plastic buttons with a metal shank imbedded in the plastic. The shank will invariably pull out of the plastic just as you get the limb pulled tightly.

As you can tell, I've tried lots of things over the past 20 or so years, and have had several jointing disasters, by using buttons that weren't strong enough to hold up to tight jointing. Prym-Dritz Buttons to Cover with the teeth inside the cap are the best, and the most universally available.

The metal buttons are used after you close them. They are inserted in the limbs, on the "Big Toe" side for legs and the inner arm side for arms, with the shank against the fabric. The top edge of the button will be nearly even with the seam allowance. Be sure that you make right and left arms and legs. The following illustrations show how they are inserted, and positioned. After they are inserted, add extra stuffing or cotton balls, and then close the openings with a ladder stitch.

NOTE... For tiny limbs without buttons, just close the openings with a ladder stitch, adding a little stuffing as you close.



Close the curved opening with a ladder stitch. (LEFT)

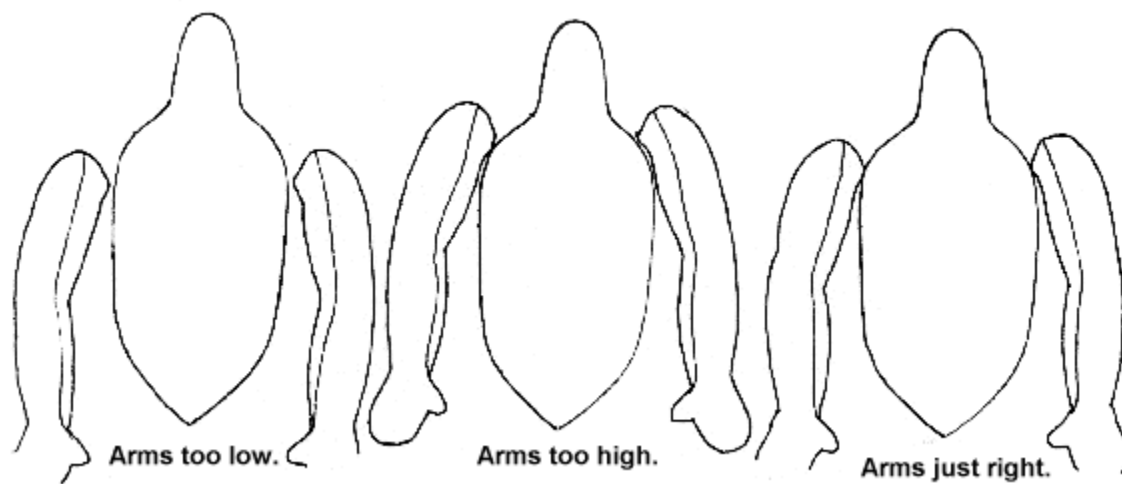
Finished limbs. The shank side of the buttons will be against the body, and the jointing will look like a vinyl dolls jointing. No buttons will show. (RIGHT)

With all of the limbs closed, you are ready to joint your doll. Thread 2, one-yard long strands of heavy nylon cord, (I have it in my catalog for 10 cents a yard) or 4, One yard long strands of nylon dental floss through the eye of your upholstery-jointing needle. Pull it through only a little ways, not half way.

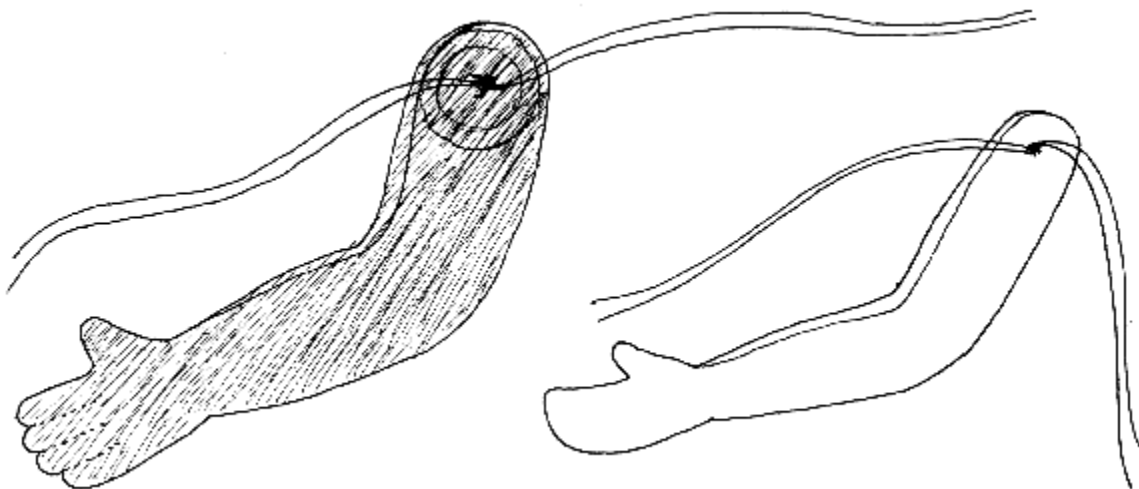


Cords threaded through the jointing needle.

Position the arms at the shoulders of your doll, so a nice shoulder line is created. Look, and mark where the shank of the button touches the doll's body.



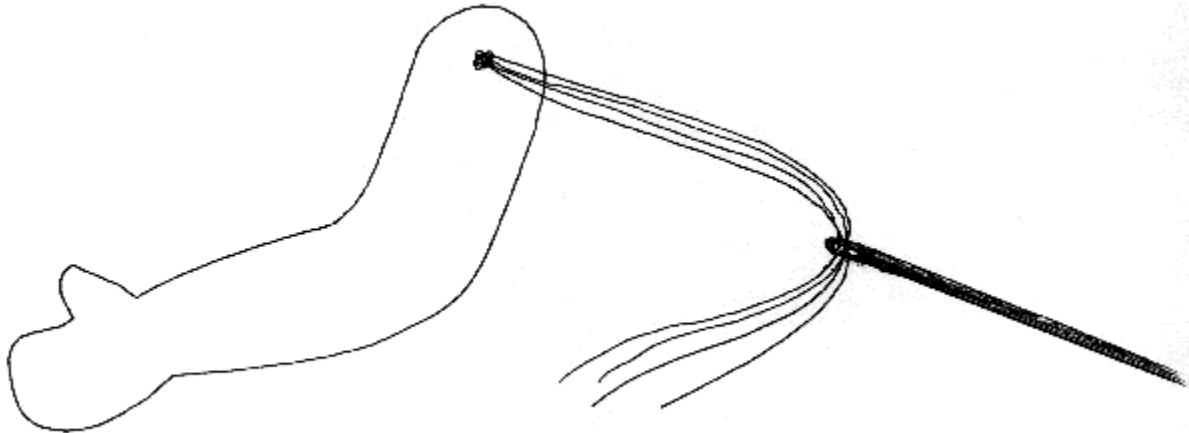
Now put the jointing needle with the cord through the shank of the button in one arm, then pull it 1/2 way through and tie it in a knot. If you aren't using a button, just put the needle through the fabric, catching a little stuffing up for extra strength. Pull 1/2 way through and tie the cords the same way.



Cord through shank of button, which is inside the arm, pulled 1/2 way through and tied. (LEFT)

Cord through just the fabric and a little stuffing. (RIGHT)

Now put all 4 (or 8) cord ends through the eye of your jointing needle, and pull them only a little ways through.



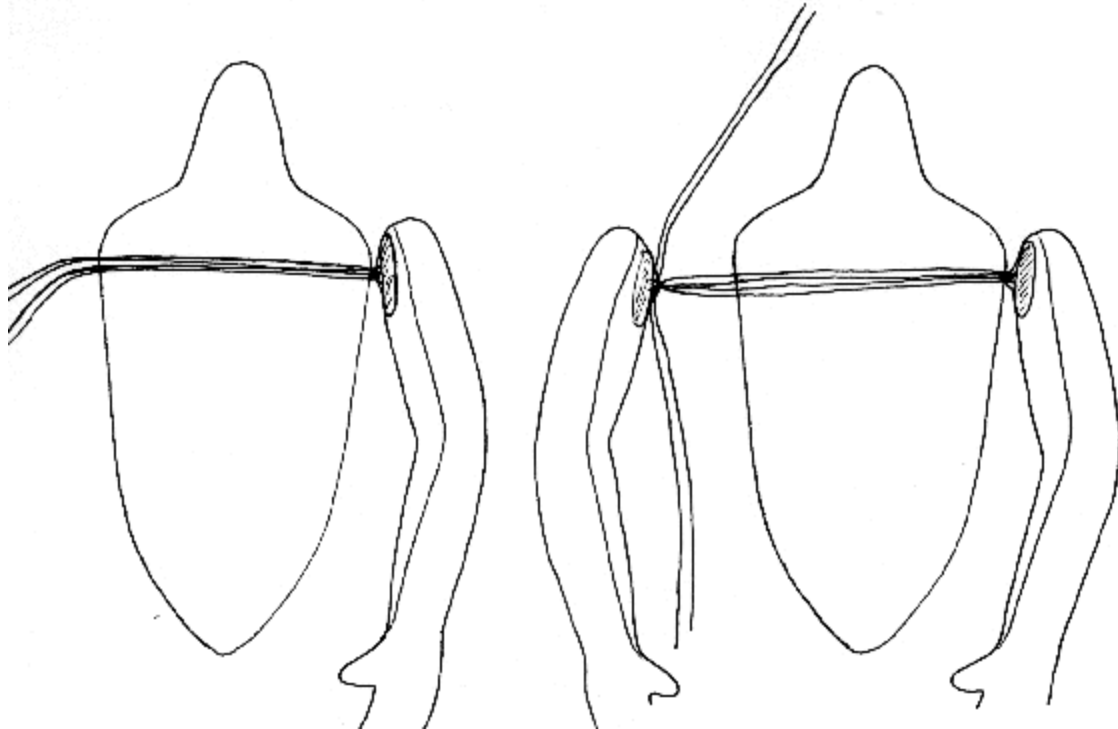
All 4 (or 8) cords through needles eye and pulled just a little ways through.

Now put your needle, with all of the cords, through the doll's body. Enter and exit at the dots you marked on the body. Sometimes it is hard to get the needle through, especially on a large, well-stuffed doll. If you twirl the needle **BACK AND FORTH** between your fingers **AS YOU PUSH IT**, it will go through quite easily, without pushing a blob of stuffing ahead of it. When the cords are through the body, take the needle off.

...VERY, VERY HELPFUL HINTS...

- **DON'T try to jam the needle through. It will jam stuffing ahead of it, and be impossible to get through.**
- **DON'T twirl the needle around and around. It will wrap stuffing around the cord and you will never get it through!**

Now divide the cords in half, and put 1/2 of them (2 or 4) through the eye of the needle, then put the needle through the shank of the button inside the other arm, from the right to the left. Take the needle off, and thread the other 1/2 of the cords through the eye of the needle. Put these cords through the shank of the button from the left to the right. The cords must be coming out of the shank in opposite directions so you can pull them tight and tie them.

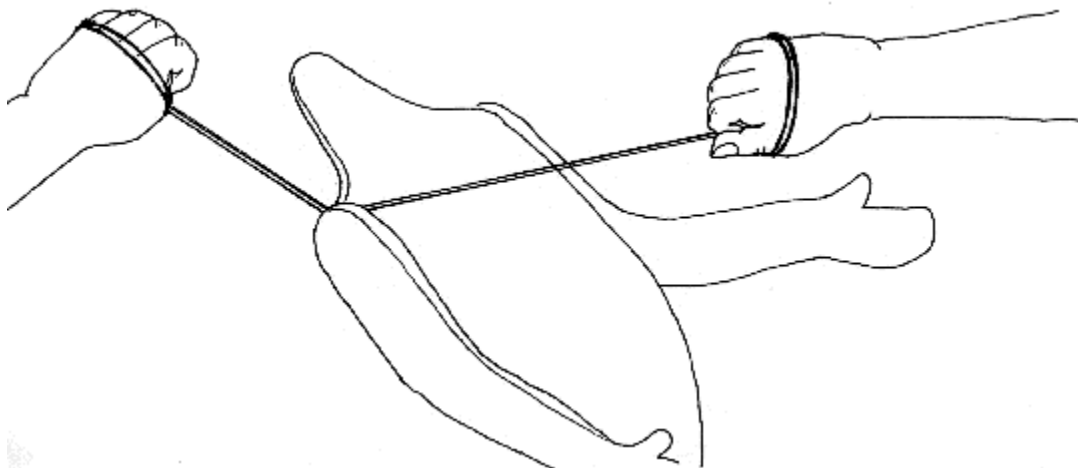


All of the cords through the body. (LEFT)

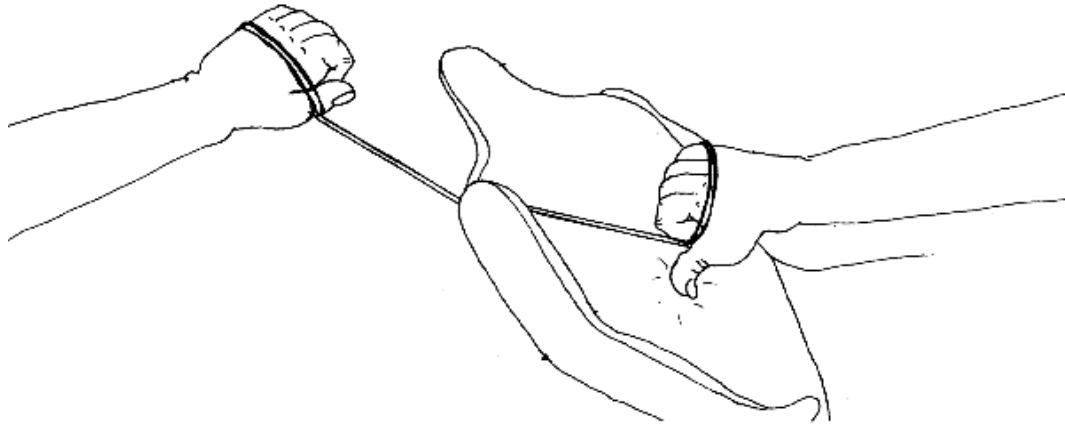
1/2 of the cords through the shank from the right to the left and 1/2 through the shank from the left to the right. (RIGHT)

Now you can pull the cords very tightly, pulling the arms in firmly against the body. BUT, YOU SAY, OH DEAR! How can you keep them tight while I tie them? Here's how.

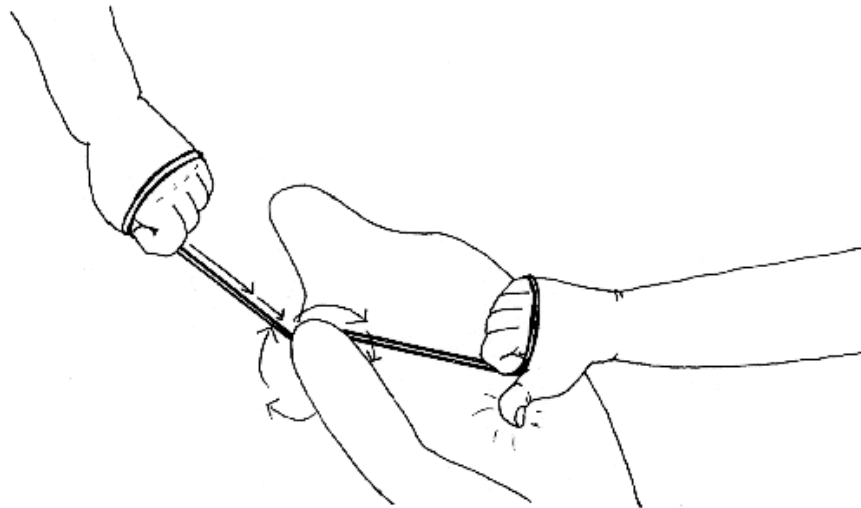
You should have plenty of cord to wrap it around your hands as you pull. YOU DIDN'T CHEAT, AND CUT SHORTER CORDS THAN 1 YARD, TRYING TO SAVE CORD DID YOU? Pull the cords tight, then with one thumb, hold your doll's body down firmly on a table, while wrapping the cords that are tightly held in the other hand around the joint area between the body and arm. You only need to wrap it around twice, and it will hold the arm tightly in place. Now you can tie the cords in a square knot between the body and arm. I like to tie them twice. Cut the ends of the cords, but not right at the knots. Poke the loose ends into the area between the body and arm.



Wrap cords around hands and pull tight.

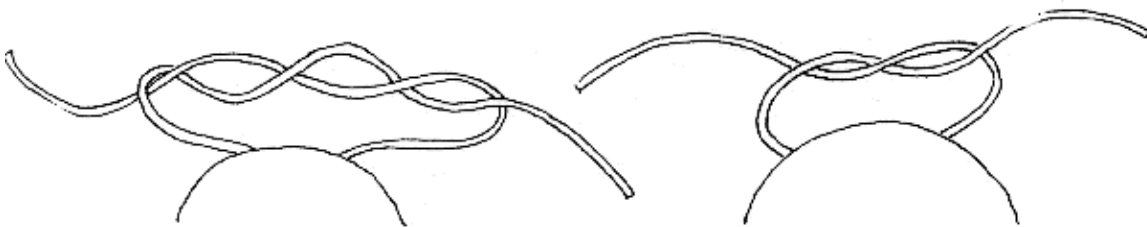


Hold doll down hard with one thumb, while maintaining tension on the cords in both hands.



Wrap cords around twice quickly, between the body and the arm, then tie twice in square knots.

Helpful Hint... To make an automatic square knot, without having to think about “right over left”- “left over right”, simply make the first tie a “nurses knot”. To make a “nurses knot” you pass your cord around twice for the first tie and once for the second tie.



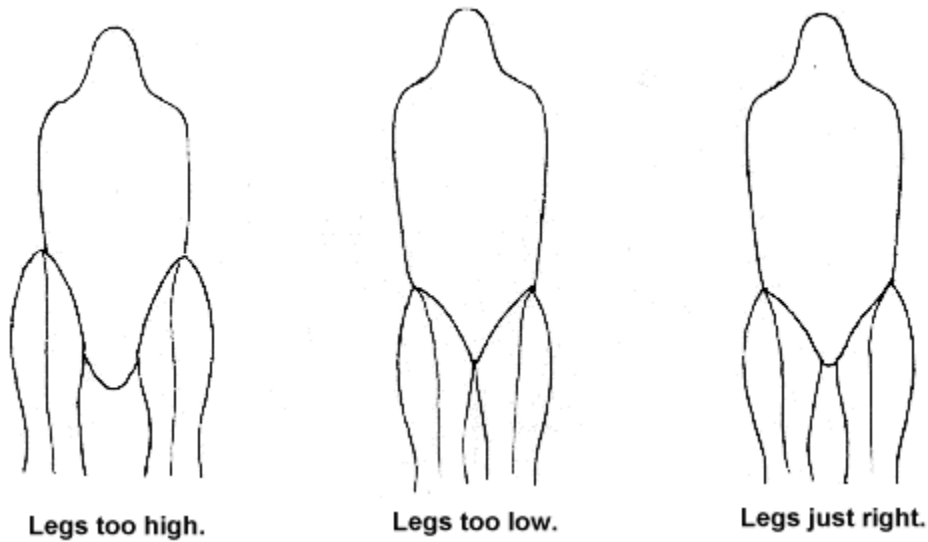
Pass cord around twice for the first tie.

Pass cord around once for the second tie.

Now for the leg placement. You don't want the legs too high or too low. When they are pulled in you want a nice hip line. Place the legs at the sides of the body, and push in on them to see how they will look after they are pulled in. When you like the look, peek under, and mark the spots where the button shank touches the body.

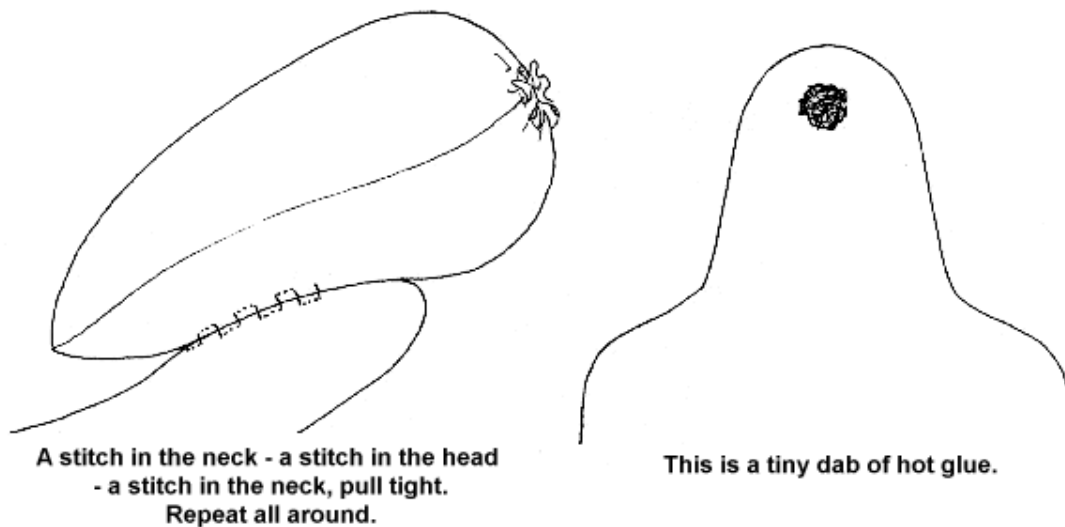
Repeat the arm jointing steps, for jointing the legs. It is easier to get the cords through for the legs because you will have less body to go through.

If you aren't satisfied with the leg placement, clip the cords and start over. Once in a while I will get a set of legs on too high or low and have to do it over too.



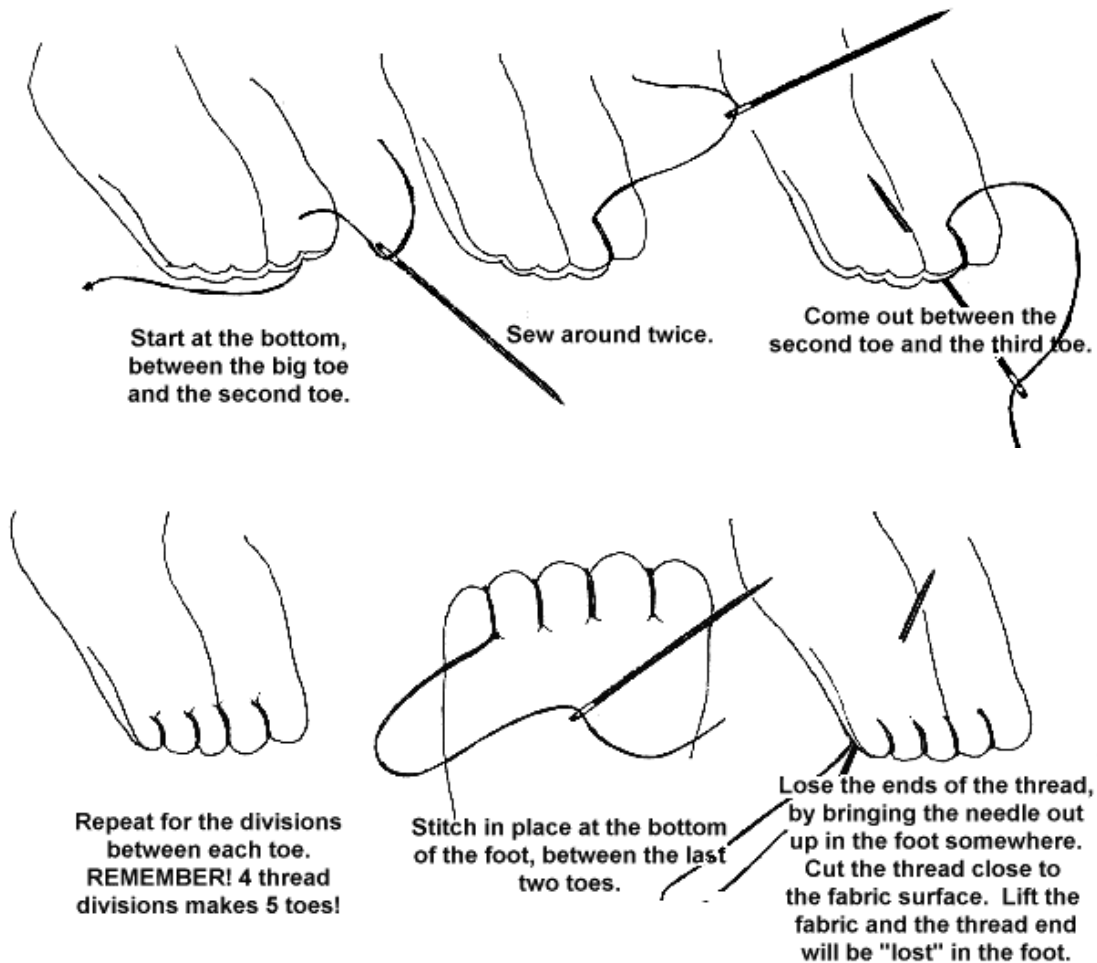
Your original doll is now all designed, stuffed and the limbs attached. Some of you have the heads attached too. Some of you want to wait for face directions before attaching the heads. If you use the ladder stitch to attach the heads it makes a very nice joining. Simply push the head against the neck stub where you want it. Then take a stitch in the head back, right where the neck touches, then a stitch in the neck right where the head touches. Take three stitches this way, then pull them tight. Repeat all around. Anchor off the stitching by stitching in place up on the head where the hair will hide it.

If you hot glue the heads on, put only the tiniest dab of hot glue on the neck stub, then press the head on. You can add a little more glue where needed, after the head is in place. If you put a big blob of hot glue on, it invariably squishes out and shows.



Toe Sculpting

...TOE SCULPTING ILLUSTRATIONS...



ANOTHER HELPFUL HINT...

The "lose the ends" method works all over your doll. Use it any place where you have stitched in place to anchor your sewing, and don't want to cut the thread right at the stitching because the little thread ends will show.

Next Chapter - EASY WAYS TO DESIGN FACES.

In the meantime, practice with your patterns. Experiment with changes in length and width of all the parts. These basic doll designs can be most any character you wish.

HAVE FUN WITH YOUR DESIGNS!

Judi Ward

Judi's Dolls

<http://JudisDolls.com>