

Designing Fingers Using a Foolproof Method!

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By Judi Ward

Over the years I have tried to advance the cloth doll makers ability to personalize and design cloth dolls that are more original to the doll maker. My patterns almost always give several face and hair choices and some even give different leg and arm styles in one pattern.

I have written articles on changing stitched on limbs to jointed limbs, easy face designing using household objects and templates, face painting techniques, actual doll designing, clothing designing, accessory designing, changing un-sculptured faces to sculptured faces, etc. All of the methods have been something that the non artist-non designer can do with just a little effort and practice.

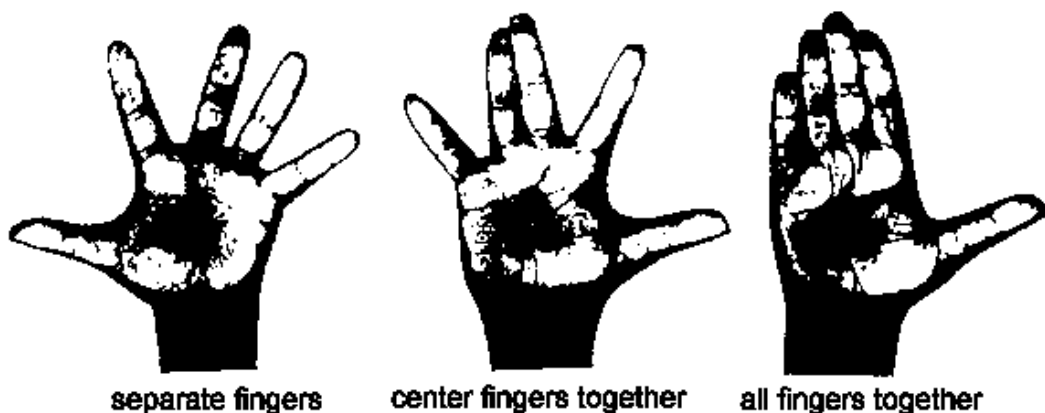
I design and make cloth dolls as a natural part of living. It's as much a part of me as breathing, but I am always trying to think up ways for the non-designer to create either all original, or partially original cloth creations. The following Finger Design lesson and the “Design Your Own Cloth Doll” class will both teach you, as a non-designer, ways that you can design with confidence and success!

SUCCESS EVERY TIME, If you follow the instructions and give yourself permission to stretch a little. Don't think I can't. Think I can! And you can, even if you have never designed anything in your life! In “The Design Your Own Doll” class you will design a doll with mitt hands. With this lesson you can change those hands to detailed hands with fingers. If you have never done fingers before, I recommend that you practice with larger hands to get the feel of sewing around those little curves. If the dolls you are making are very small it is best to make “all fingers together” hands, or leave the hands as mitt hands.

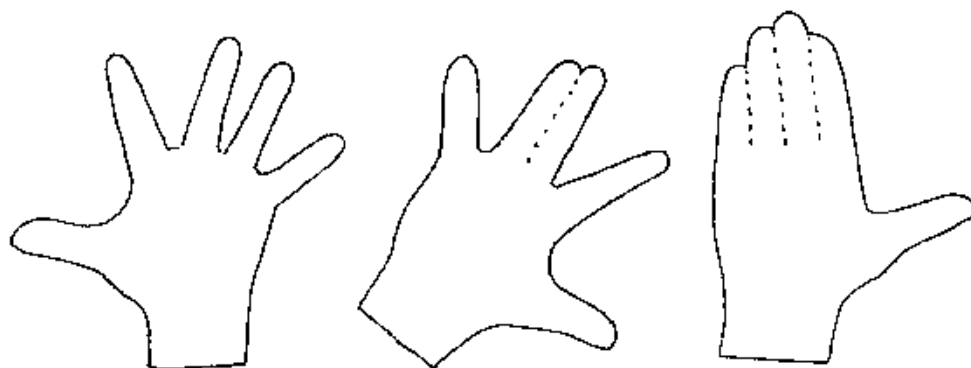
In this free lesson, I will teach you a way to “Design Fingers” that doesn't require one ounce of drawing ability or anatomy knowledge. Go to your local copy shop and put your hand into a copy machine (something you have probably secretly wanted to do anyway!) Kinko's, Mailing Services, Office Supply shops and sometimes your local Drug Stores have copy machines that you can use.

Take a photocopy of your hand with the fingers spread out. Then take a photocopy of your hand with the two middle fingers together and the other fingers spread out. Then take a photocopy of your hand with all of the fingers together but with the thumb spread out. You now have three hand styles in proper proportion and shape. But too-o-o-o big.

Reduced copy machine images so you can see kind of what they will look like after you draw around them and cut them out.



Patterns made from copy machine images



The background of your copies will be dark but you can still see the outline well enough to draw around the shapes. I have found when teaching this method that it is best to draw around the shapes before cutting them out, rather than just cutting around the copy machine image. After you draw around the shapes, cut them out. You now have 3 hand styles to use on your dolls, but I will repeat they are too-o-o-o big! Unless you are making a life-sized doll.

Now put the cut outs in the copy machine and start reducing the size. You can reduce to near infinity by putting a reduced copy into the copy machine and reduce the already reduced copy. To get a pattern for a more child like hand make photocopies of a child's hand, and reduce it the same way.

Make a variety of sizes to use with lots of different dolls.

REMEMBER THAT THE LINE YOU DREW IS THE STITCHING LINE NOT THE CUTTING LINE.

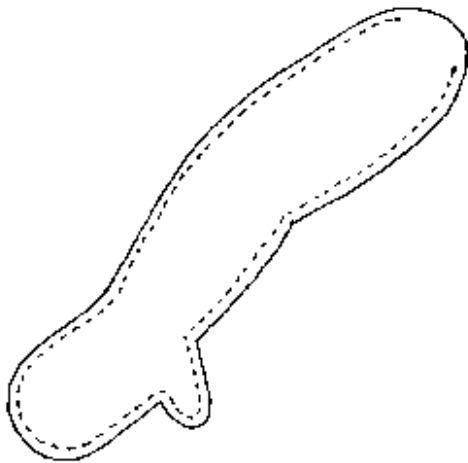
When you draw around the newly designed hands on your fabric leave lots of fabric around the hand area to make sewing the fingers easier, then cut the excess fabric away after sewing. If the pattern you are changing has a seam allowance all around it, cut the mitt hand off at the wrist, and replace it with one of your newly designed hand patterns with fingers. Line up the wrist of your hand design with the wrist seam line on the original pattern. You may have to make the wrist a little wider or narrower to fit the original seam line on your pattern.

...A VERY MINI ANATOMY LESSON...

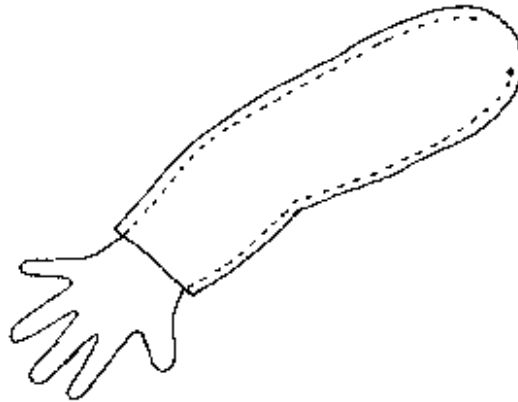
People hands are about the length from the chin to mid-forehead. Doll hands are usually smaller in relation to the head size. BUT... You are the designer this time, so you can do what ever you want.

When you cut out the arm/hand piece, leave lots of excess fabric around the hand area. Draw around the fingers only on your doubled fabric,

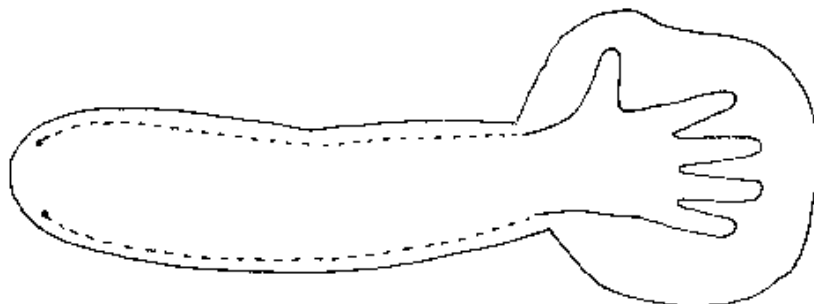
This might be what your original doll arm and hand pattern looks like



Cut the mitt off at the wrist and replace it with a hand design with fingers



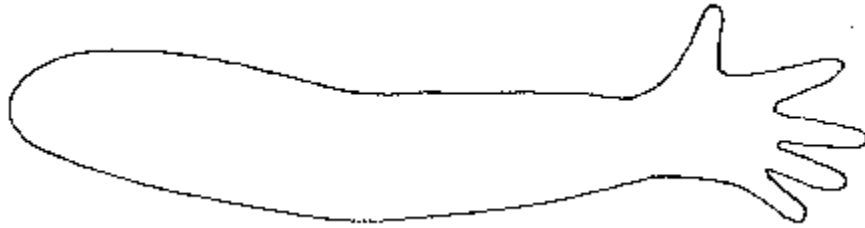
Cut out the arm on the cutting line, but leave lots of fabric around the hand area. Draw around the fingers only on your doubled fabric. Sew just inside the lines you drew. Remember, when you draw AROUND something, it gets a little bigger!



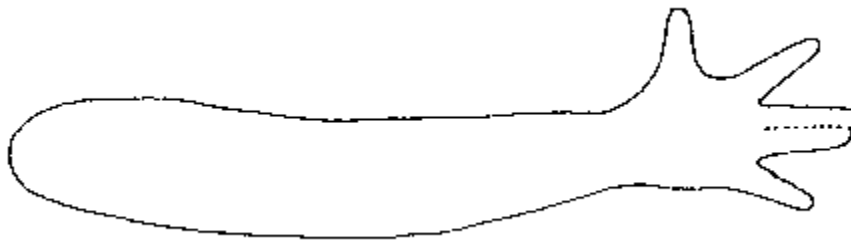
The diagrams below will be what your “Design Your Own Doll” class patterns will look like. They will be draw around, sew, and then cut out patterns.

WHEN YOU DO THIS TYPE OF PATTERN YOU MUST LEAVE AT LEAST 1/2" BETWEEN THE PIECES, SO YOU CAN CUT THEM OUT AFTER SEWING THEM.

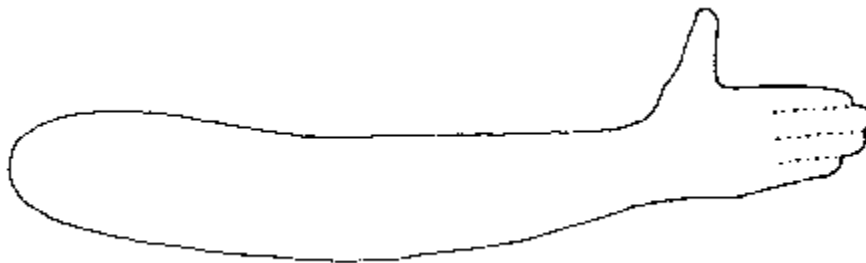
This is what your new doll arm and hand pattern will look like with all fingers separate. You will draw around this pattern on your doubled doll fabric. Sew just inside the line you drew. Remember, when you draw AROUND something, it gets a little bigger!



This is what your new doll arm and hand pattern will look like with the two center fingers together. You will draw around this pattern on your doubled doll fabric. Sew just inside the line you drew. Remember, when you draw AROUND something, it gets a little bigger!

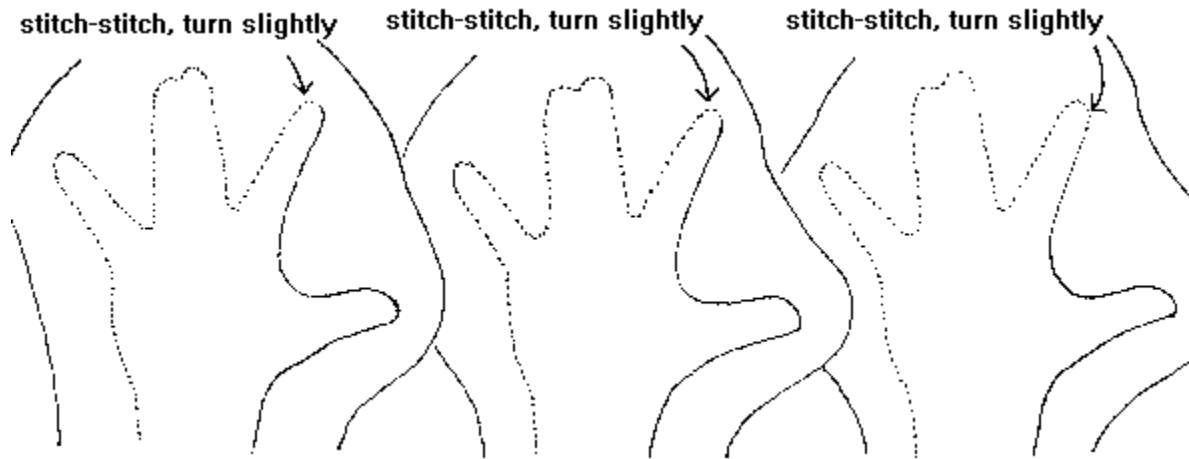


This is what your new doll arm and hand pattern will look like with the fingers together, and the thumb apart. You will draw around this pattern on your doubled doll fabric. Sew just inside the line you drew. Remember, when you draw AROUND something, it gets a little bigger!

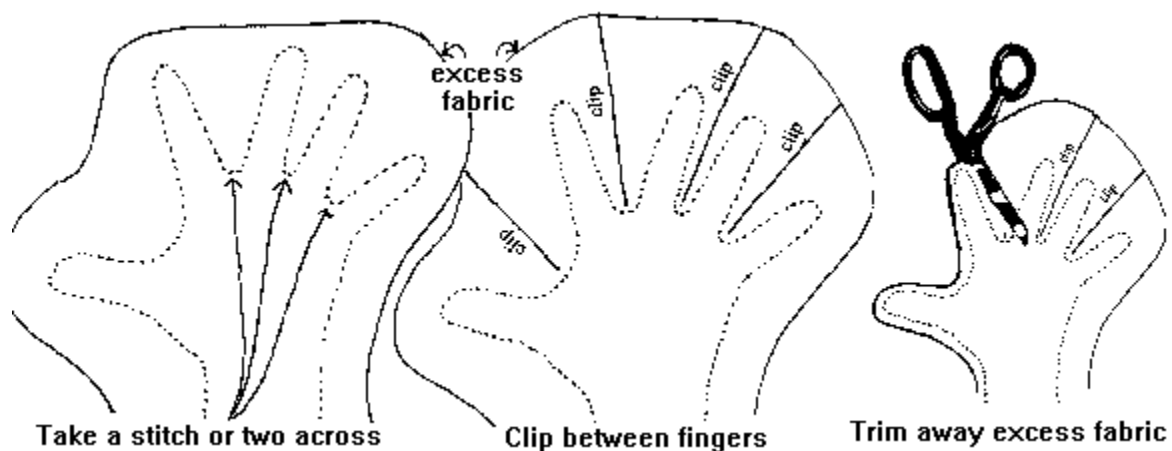


Rather than drawing around the pattern pieces, some dollmakers like to make their patterns from freezer paper, and iron it onto their doubled fabric. Put a pin or two into the various parts to hold the 2 thicknesses of fabric together, then sew around the paper. This is especially good for dark fabrics because it is hard to find something to draw with that will show up well on dark fabric.

Stitching around little fingers takes some practice and care. Use a very tiny stitch length. I use 1.5 on my machine. That translates to about 15 stitches per inch, for machines that are calibrated that way. When you get to the finger tips, take about 2-3 stitches, then with your needle in the down position, slightly lift the presser foot and slightly turn the hand/arm piece so that you will be taking the next 2-3 stitches in the direction of the curve. Continue this lift-turn-sew, all around the tops of the fingers....NOTE...Some machines have an automatic needle down position, some you will have to hand wheel the needle into the down position. DON'T try to "DRAG AND SEW" your fabric around curves. It will always result in pointy places on the fingertips. Use the sew-lift-turn method for any small, curved places you need to sew.

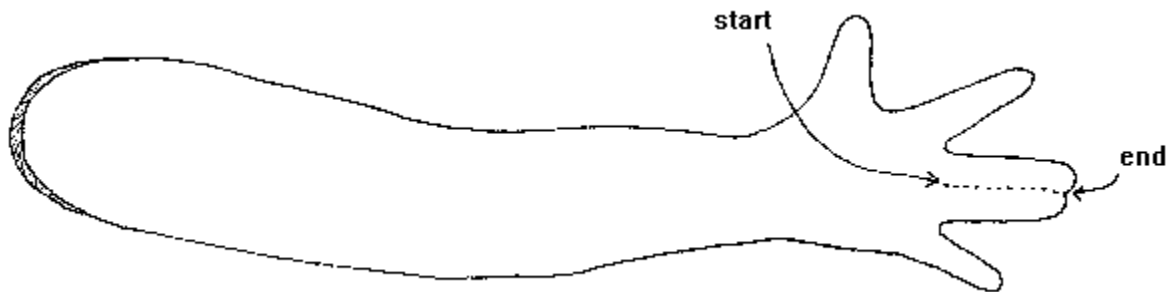


When you get to the V between the fingers, take a stitch or 2 across the V. This stitch or 2 is especially needed when using woven fabrics, to prevent fraying. I often just stitch to the V, turn the fabric, then stitch right back out when using velour, felt or suedecloth, but it certainly doesn't hurt to take that stitch across when using any fabric.



After sewing around the arms/hands, being sure to leave an opening for turning, clip between fingers and trim away the excess fabric.

Use your hemostat, or favorite turning tools for turning the hands/arms right side out. If you have made a hand with any fingers together, stitch between the fingers by machine AFTER turning, but BEFORE stuffing. This makes much nicer, neater between finger stitching. Begin the stitching in the hand and go toward the fingers, rather than beginning the stitching at the fingers and going towards the hand. This eliminates having your sewing machine “eat” the fabric and make thread messes at the thick seam edge. When you stitch between the fingers by machine before stuffing, the stitching nearly disappears after stuffing.



Start the top stitching in the hand and sew towards the fingers.

For dolls with detailed fingers, my favorite fabrics are sleepwear velour, suedecloth and good quality felt. Woven fabrics can of course be used but are a little more troublesome to turn and stuff, especially in very small sized hands.

I will teach you finger stuffing methods and finger articulating methods in the “DESIGN YOUR OWN DOLL” class. DO JOIN THE CLASS, if you haven’t already, at <http://CraftyCollege.com>

Try some detailed hands on doll patterns you already have that have mitt hands and have your selection of detailed hand patterns ready to try on the doll pattern/patterns that you will successfully design in the “DESIGN YOUR OWN DOLL” class

Have fun and happy dollmaking!

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**The fabulous, incredible, miraculous, NEEDLE,
TUBE AND THREAD, finger turning method!**

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Those tiny little fingers are no longer a problem to turn, once you get the “feel” for this method! You don't need any special, expensive tools or gadgets! You can do this method with coffee stirrer straws! Even with 1/2 of the double type of a coffee stirrer straw! You can make the tiniest little fingers, just big enough to put the 1/2 straw into!

Remember, the tinier the fingers, the thinner the fabric needs to be for making your dolls. The hand pattern given here was done and turned from washed muslin, Doesuede, sand washed Silk, and even the pale peach, 60” wide sleepwear velour that I use a lot! There are thicker velour's too, which are 45” wide. They are too thick for very thin fingers. Stiff poly cotton broadcloth, and stiff 100% cotton broadcloth may be too thick and unyielding for tiny fingers too. Washing the broadcloth fabrics will often soften them enough to make tiny fingers though. Felt is also too thick for very small hands.

1. You will need... Small tubes, like coffee stirrers, the tube from canned air, or tiny brass tubes if you have them. Actually any stiff tube that you can put a thin, needle sculpture needle through, and that fits into your sewn fingers. Cut the double coffee stirrers down the center lengthwise, so you only have one tube. Cut the coffee stirrers/tubes just shorter than your needle. Cut brass tubes with a hack saw if they are too long.
2. A long, thin needle sculpture needle.
3. Sewing thread, and the sewn hand/arm that you wish to turn right side out.

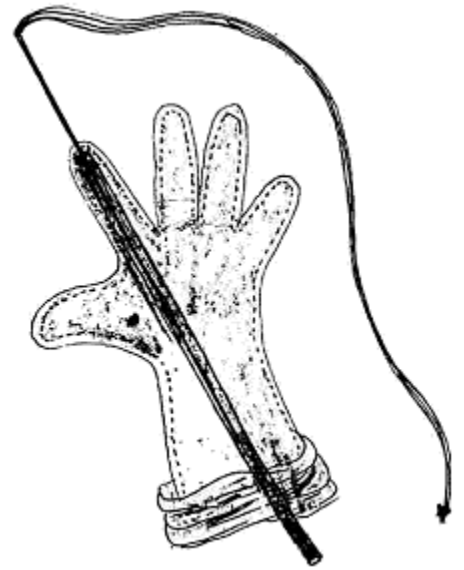


Single coffee stirrer, cut shorter.



A tube from canned air, cut shorter.

1. Put the appropriate sized straw or tube inside the finger to be turned.
2. Put the threaded needle, with a sturdy knot at the end into the tip of the finger.
3. Pass it down the tube, and out of the open end of the arm. You will have to roll the arm fabric up and out of the way.
4. Pull on the thread and the tube together, as you carefully and gently work the tip of the finger to the inside. The finger won't go into the tube, It will just press against it as you slowly pull back on the thread and the tube.



When you first start to pull the tip in, you will think it is not working, and then, POP! The finger turns like magic! It may take you a few tries to get the “feel” of pulling on the tube and the thread, while working the cloth up, so the tip can pull inside, but once you “feel” it, it becomes so fast and easy you will be in shock!!!

5. Remove the tube, cut the thread and re-knot it.
6. Repeat for all of the fingers, turning them all into the palm of the hand.
7. Finish pulling the hand and arm, right side out, and then clip all the threads that are hanging out of the ends of the fingers.
8. Poke the little thread ends that are still visible, into the fingers, with the point of your needle, before stuffing,.

NOTE: Don't use a big, fat needle. It will make big, fat holes in the finger tips!



A hand and arm pattern to try. This is my hand, with the fingers lengthened a little, designed on the copy machine.

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