



# UNIT-4

## Dress Designing Essentials

### Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Choose appropriate materials according to the design's requirement
- ✓ Understand how to choose appropriate colour for a design

## Unit 4

### Dress Designing Essentials

Successful dress designing involves the following:

- The study of the structural lines of the human figure.
- The understanding of individual dress types and suitability.
- The appropriate selection of materials regarding colour, texture and weave.

**Detail** - This is any ornamentation or shaping and the evaluation of the laws of design embracing proportion, rhythm, harmony and the perfect balance of line, mass, and colour.

The design of a garment can be categorised in four areas:

1. Material
2. Colour
3. Design or Structure
4. Decoration

### Choice of Material

The first thing that requires consideration when designing a garment is the occasion for which the garment is intended to be worn. This will determine the type of material to use when constructing the garment, the most appropriate colour, the form or design and the type/amount of ornamentation.

When choosing the fabric, it is important to remember what types of fabrics sit well and which ones should be used for creating particular effects. For example, stiff fabrics do not drape well and are best used for achieving a more tailored effect. It is also very important to consider the type of individual a garment is being designed for. A good example would be designing a dress - in this case it would be wise to avoid stiff, wiry or rough-surfaced fabrics for a larger frame, as they tend to make a person look larger. Using soft or dull fabrics will reduce the appearance of size on a wearer, while materials which do not cling will make a smaller person appear larger.

When choosing materials for a dress, it is important to ensure that they are all of similar quality. Using cheap cotton on a garment which is mostly made of voile will look tacky, and in a way, unfinished. However, there are some materials that can be used together harmoniously, such as certain wool fabrics matched with satin, linen or pongee. In these cases, the appropriate combinations will add variety to a garment and ensure that it is not too severe or monotonous. Even though a smaller-framed wearer will look good in such material, it is better to make sure that the design or pattern is not too conspicuous.

Patterns that are large fitted become tiresome after a while. Fabrics or materials which are plainer can be worn by almost everyone and in small figures will give a quiet effect.

## Choice of Colour

The colour of a garment will attract or repel. If any garment is made of colours that do not harmonise, the effect will be unappealing every time. Combining the right colours when dress designing is an art form, and when done properly will lead to a successful outcome.

When the goal is to achieve a cool combination, greys and blues are the way to go - the colours of an autumn sky. For a summery effect, grey and lavender, pink and blue or grey and rose are effective colour combinations. For a more earthy or forest feel, there are russet browns and dull yellows with a splash of green here or there.

It is important to assess the individual you are creating for carefully, choosing colours that will enhance the person's desirable features while diminishing the less than desirable ones. Bright colours should be selected with care as comparatively few people are able to wear them well. It is also important to take into account a person's age, because what's suitable for younger audiences is not necessarily appropriate for the older person, and vice-versa. Lastly, it is important to mention the initial point again - which is to remember for which *occasion* you are creating the garment.

## Choosing the Design or Structure

Choosing the design or structure of a dress will depend on what the dress will be worn for; i.e. what's the occasion? Is it a house dress, or a more formal evening gown? Is it an afternoon frock, or for a more casual occasion?

The silhouette should follow the lines of the wearer's figure, but not necessarily too closely. Decorative designs and structural lines must be appropriately placed, in order to avoid space divisions. A good example of this would be a dress divided into two unequal parts by a belt or sash. This unevenness will create a more interesting look.



**Fig 4.1** This long jacket and short skirt combination is an example of uneven proportion. Had the jacket been created the same size as the skirt, it would have a 'boxy' look.

As all lines of any human figure are at the least slightly curved, this line is one of power and beauty. For this reason, dress planning must include some degree of curve.

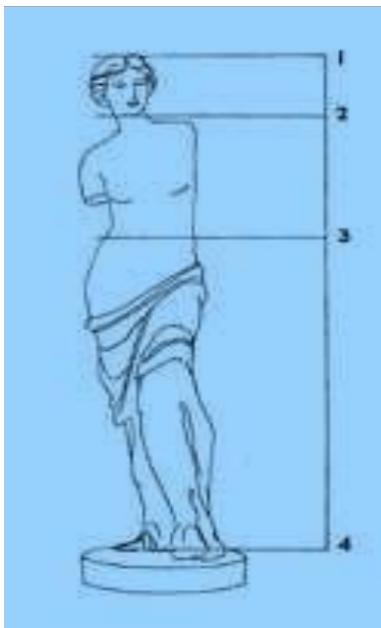
A dress should be designed or structured in a way that displays a clear relationship to the human form. It should cover any features considered imperfect by the wearer (be careful not to place your own opinions here, except in a professional design manner) and it should bring out a person's proudest features.

## Decoration

There are times when a dress which is well-designed and well-proportioned seems to be lacking in something. This may often be a simple decorative addition, which would significantly change the appearance. Something as small as a belt buckle or even a pin of contrasting colour will change the entire scheme of the garment. Over-decoration would be something to avoid, however, as it could easily spoil a beautiful gown. Balance is the key.

Certain fabulous effects can be achieved through decorative tucks, ruffles, plaits or bands of the same material as the dress. Generally, decoration is more a question of how much to add (or not add), rather than the choice of material. The decoration(s) should be in-keeping with the primary material(s). Usually, fine textured materials do not allow much freedom when it comes to decoration, certainly not to the same extent coarser materials do.

### THE PROPORTION OF THE FIGURE



**Fig 4.2** illustrates the structural lines and proportions of the human figure.

In the above picture, point 1 is the top of the head and point 2 is the chin. The area between points 2 and 3 is the most important structural part of the garment. Point 3 shows the correct structural waistline. Using the head as a unit of measurement is a way to work out the correct proportion of a figure. The body, measured from the top of the head to the feet, is ordinarily 8 heads. From the chin to the waistline, it is usually from 2 1/2 to 3 heads, and across the shoulders it is 1 1/2 to 1 3/4 heads.

It is a good idea to study the proportions of the body and the structural points, experimenting with 'heads' as a unit of measurement. You can work with your own figure and find out whether your height is about 8 times the measurement of your head. It could be that you are 6 heads and not 8, which would mean you are shorter than the average person. Or, perhaps you are 10 heads, which would mean you are taller than average.

Whatever the situation with the 'heads' measurement, find the best structural point to resolve the discrepancy in body measurements. The change may be in the line between 2 and 3, or a change in line at points 3 and 4. If a designer wants to add length to the body, it would be best to use a deep V line between points 2 and 3. If the wearer is quite tall, using lots of circles or ruffles between points 3 and 4 will lessen the appearance of the height.

## Unusual Figures

There is only a very small group of people who have the 'perfect' figure, face shape or colouring, and are able to wear almost any type of dress. Most people have certain individual characteristics; perhaps narrow shoulders, a large bust or a squarish face, etc. and so choosing the correct design must be done with care.

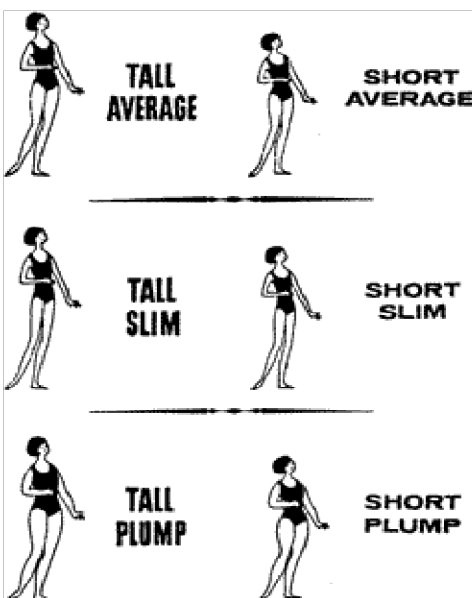


Fig 4.3

## The Thin Figure

For thin figured people, it is best to choose materials which do not cling to the body. Remember also that shiny materials increase the appearance of size. It is best if the lines of the silhouette are not continuous.

Use ruffles and tucks to achieve an effect of horizontal movement in the lines of a dress. Using a wide girdle will make the wearer appear shorter, while light colours on a garment will make the wearer appear stouter.

### What's suitable for the thinner figure?

- Lustrous materials, except if the person is too angular
- Loose clothing
- The silhouette of the dress shown as broken, rather than a long continuous line
- Materials that stand out somewhat from the figure
- Short collars
- Sleeves gathered in tightly
- Horizontal movement in the lines of the dress
- Broken lines and curved lines
- A soft, full line of drapery in the waist
- Patch pockets
- Wearing a hat
- Hats with low crowns

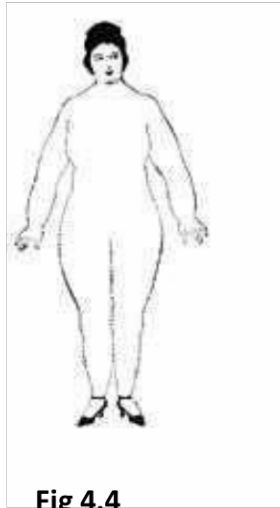
### Unsuitable for the thinner figure:

- Severe straight lines
- Angle in the lines of the dress
- Long, narrow skirts
- Flat, tight waists
- Sleeves so short that the bones of the arm are conspicuous
- High hats
- Stiff trimmings like wings or anything standing out from the hat

## The Stout Figure

The person with a stouter figure has a different set of designs to use or avoid. The use of soft materials with a duller colouring and without shiny surfaces are better-suited to stouter figures.

Dresses or other garments that are too tight should be avoided by those with a stout figure, as these would only emphasise the figure. Creating vertical movement through the use of certain devices will result in the eye travelling up and down, rather than across from side to side.



A person with a stouter figure as in Fig 4.4 above should avoid extremes in dress. These would include very long or very short skirts, very tight sleeves or the loose-flowing variety. What is desirable is a long V line to the neck.

#### **What is suitable for the stouter figure?**

- Choosing one material or colour throughout the garment and not breaking it up into separate parts
- Vertical movement in the lines of the dress
- The use of transitional lines in the dress, rather than extreme curves or angles
- Dull-surfaced fabrics
- Soft yet non-clinging fabrics
- Dull colours in large areas
- Black, or very dark colours if the silhouette is good. If the outline of the figure is poor, it's best to use dark colours to reduce size, but not so dark that they will call attention to the silhouette
- If the figure is 'normal' then the use of an unbroken silhouette is desirable
- The use of a long diagonal line at the waist is ideal for a stout figure, as long as the diagonal is not directed too far out toward the hips, which will widen the waist and hips
- Semi-fitted, not tight effects, in the dress as a whole, and moulded to the hips with some fullness below
- Ensuring emphasis is on the dress vertically (up and down) the centre front, with the principle highlight at the neck and, if possible, a secondary highlight at the bottom of the skirt

- Panels of a moderate width such as pleats, panels, etc. that begin above or below a point where the figure is large
- Reasonably long skirts
- Skirts that flare a little in the centre front with a straight silhouette.
- A normal waist line or slightly above or below it
- A narrow belt or no belt at all
- Slim, long set-in sleeves
- Normal armholes, or a bit higher if the shoulders are broad
- Sleeves that are slit vertically to show the length of the arm and only a portion of the width
- Simple neck lines, preferably long lines and long collars
- Short jackets the same colour as the skirt
- Moderate sized hats or hats that imply upward movement
- Hats with irregular lines in the brim and a fairly high crown
- Hats with transitional lines, rather than extreme curves or angles
- Hair dressed high

#### **Unsuitable for the Stouter Figure**

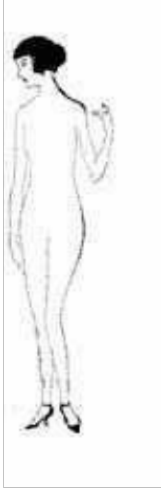
- Any stiff or lustrous fabrics or taffetas
- Large or conspicuous surface patterns or plaids
- Heavy, bulky fabrics
- Fabrics that take round lines
- Bright colours in large areas
- Unnecessarily full, long garments
- Foundation garments that produce bulges above and below the garment
- Very full or very tight garments
- Ruffles
- Horizontal movement in the lines of the dress
- Exaggerated curves or angles (the curves repeat the lines of the figure and the angles contradict them, therefore both call attention to the size)
- Very wide or extremely narrow panels
- Panels, pleats or overskirts that spread or flutter as the wearer walks
- Pleats, panels or any trimming ending or starting at a point where the figure is large
- Very narrow lines of trimming
- Flarey skirts all around
- Thin piping
- Fluffy fichus

- Hats or dresses with large circles
- Short skirts
- Yokes on skirts
- A high waist line, as it makes the waist appear broader
- A very long waistline which makes the upper part of the figure too heavy for the lower part
- Belts or sashes which are noticeable in width or in colour
- Tight-fitted or overly-loose flowing sleeves
- Transparent sleeves
- Kimono sleeves which give an effect of breadth and looseness under the arm
- Ribbons or trimming extending or hanging from the sleeves
- Sleeves ending at an unusual width on the figure
- Wide, light cuffs on a dark dress which will make the eye travel across the figure and add width
- Tight or short collars
- Short jackets that contrast with the skirt
- Strange or very conspicuous shoes
- Slender, high-heeled shoes
- Small, big, round or flat hats
- Hats with long lines or brims drooping on both sides
- Contrasting colours and values in hats, hose and shoes
- A low or broad style in hair dressing
- Tight, small waves or “bushy” hair
- Thin or small pieces of jewellery
- Tiny trimmings on hats and dresses
- Very small accessories

## Long Waists, Slender Figure

### Suitable

- The use of a slight blouse at the underarm seam
- Long lines in the skirt



### Unsuitable

- A long, diagonal line at the waist
- A tight bodice

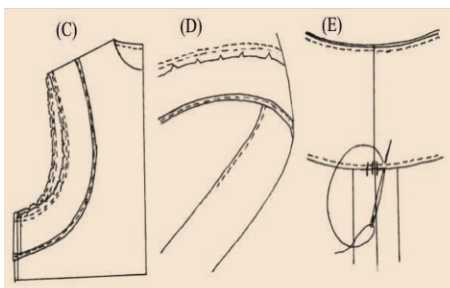
## Narrow Shoulders

### Suitable

- Padded or broadened shoulders
- Broad lines in collars, lapels or yokes
- Placement of armhole seams slightly out or lower than usual

### Unsuitable

- A panel or vest effect, which starts wide at the waist or hips and becomes narrower closer to the neck. This will have the effect of a triangle, with the point at the neck and the base at the waist and hips. This will appear to narrow the shoulders while broadening the waists and hips.
- Placement of armhole seams higher or further in than usual.



## Broad Shoulders

### Suitable

- Pleats that are lengthways, tucks, or folds which extend from shoulder to waist, placed toward the centre line in a way that narrows rather than broadens the figure
- Hats with relatively high crowns and wide brims

### Unsuitable

- Collars, yokes or lapels with wide or horizontal structural lines
- Very small hats

## Round Shoulders

### Suitable

- Set-in sleeves
- Shoulder seams should be about half an inch back of the normal shoulder line
- Collars that seem to straighten the curve of the back. Have the collar long enough to hang loose from the neck to below the highest point of the curve, or have it short enough to fill in the space between the neck and the beginning of the curve. Build out the waistline by allowing the waist to be full and loose, in order to fill in the figure below the prominent curve. This can be done using a panel which hangs from the neck to the waist, turning back under a loose belt, or with the use of a bolero jacket.

### Unsuitable

- Collars ending at the curve of the back
- Collarless dresses that come in tight at the waistline
- Raglan or kimono sleeves
- A hat with a long, dropping brim in the back that forms a continuous line between the crown and the curve of the shoulders

## Large Bust

### Suitable

- Panels or vests
- Silhouettes built out at the waist and hips
- A yoke line, a piece of jewellery, or another type of conspicuous line that stops above or below the bust line

- Long flat collars and jabots

### **Unsuitable**

- A drawn-in waist line
- High fitted waist
- Wide belts
- Trimming at, or near, the bust line

## **Flat Chests**

### **Suitable**

- Soft, full collars
- Jabots and fichus (small triangular shawls)
- Tucking or shirring the material into the shoulder seam and creating fullness over the chest

### **Unsuitable**

- Tight waist

## **Large Hips**

### **Suitable**

- Emphasise the centre front of the dress
- Slanted lines from hem to waist, ending a little to one side of the centre front
- Thin belts placed slightly below the natural waistline
- Average amount of fullness in the skirt
- The skirt flaring slightly from the hips
- The skirt blouse at the waistline

### **Unsuitable**

- A one-piece, beltless dress hanging straight from the shoulders
- Pockets placed at the hip line
- Horizontal lines on a skirt placed near the hips
- Short, tight or very full skirts
- Skirts that are narrowest at the hem
- Tight, closely fitted waist

## Large Abdomens

### Suitable

- Slightly loosened clothes at the waist
- Coats that fill out the sides of the figure

### Unsuitable

- Upper part of skirts including the waist fitted tightly
- Belts or sashes used at the centre front.

### Small Faces

Often, having a small face can seem out of proportion to the rest of the body. When this is the case, it is best for that person to wear a comparatively small hat. Large or "showy" trimmings on the hat will make the face seem even smaller by contrast. The key principles learnt in the study of proportion will be of value here.

### Suitable

- Smaller sized hats
- Fine textured trimmings kept in scale
- A relatively small hair dress

### Unsuitable

- Large or heavy hats
- A large hair dress, because it will make the face seem smaller

## Large Faces

### Suitable

- A large enough hat to form an adequate frame for the face
- A moderate sized hair dress

### Unsuitable

- Hats that are smaller than the widest part of the face
- Trimmings that are too small
- A large hair dress that makes the head look too heavy for the body
- A hair dress that is too small and may emphasize the size of the face

## Squares or Broad Face

### Suitable

- A hat with an irregular line
- Hair dressed high and with a soft, irregular line
- Rouge toward the centre of the face blended up and down

### Unsuitable

- Lines in the hat or at the neck that repeat the lines of the face
- Lines that oppose the lines of the face
- Hair dressed wide over the ears
- Hair parted in the middle

## Round Face

### Suitable

- Collar or scarf worn close to the neck at the back and with a long line in front
- Necklines with an oval effect
- Hats with effects that are slightly irregular
- Hats with lines which attract the eye upward
- Rouge placed high on the cheeks toward the nose and blended down
- Hair worn in an irregular line
- Ears covered (unless neck is short), in which case leave the lower part of the ear exposed
- Hair parted toward the side and arranged in an irregular line
- Hair dressed high

### Unsuitable

- Hats with round shapes and lines that repeat the curves of the face
- Hair parted in the centre and drawn tightly back
- Hair dressed wide over the ears
- Hair dressed in rounded shapes and lines

## Narrow Pointer Face

### Suitable

- Hats with medium-sized brims

- Hats with slightly drooping brims
- Short necklaces
- Moderate sized hair dress
- Hair worn back from the cheeks
- Hair worn low on the forehead and in soft irregular lines
- Rouge high out on the cheek bones and blended toward the nose, quite close to the hair

#### **Unsuitable**

- Hair worn up high, pointer knot at the top of the head
- High hats
- Tall, angular trimmings
- Hair worn so as to cover some of the cheeks

### **Prominent Chin and Jaw**

#### **Suitable**

- Hair worn in a large mass at the top of the head and wide at the sides, above the ears
- Rouge high on the cheeks and toward the nose
- Larger hats
- Hats with soft, irregular lines

#### **Unsuitable**

- Small hats
- Hats which have 'severe' tailoring
- Hair puffed out below the ears

### **Receding Chin and Small Jaw**

#### **Suitable**

- Average-sized hats
- Hats with a brim
- A small amount of rouge on each side of the chin
- Small hair dress
- Hair worn low at the neck

### **Unsuitable**

- Large hats
- Hats that turn sharply away from the face
- Hair dressed to widen the upper part of the head and face

## **Prominent Foreheads**

### **Suitable**

- Hats with brims
- Hats worn low on the head
- Hair dressed low over the forehead to conceal some of it
- A broken irregular line in the hair dress

### **Unsuitable**

- Hair pulled straight back off the forehead
- Hair dressed wide over the ears and temples

## **Low Foreheads**

### **Suitable**

- Hair pulled back from the forehead
- Hair dressed quite high

### **Unsuitable**

- Parting hair in the middle

## **Large Waist and Hips**

When a person has a large waist and/or hips that are out of proportion to the rest of the figure, then he/she should dress in a way that moves the interest away from that area. The head should be made a centre of interest, therefore the dress/garment should be designed so it moves the eyes towards the head.

### **Suitable**

- Built-out shoulders
- The interest kept at the face and away from the waist and hips

- Long skirts which add height
- Hats of average size or even slightly larger

### **Unsuitable**

- Broad panel effects
- Sashes or wide girdles
- Small hats

## **Short Waists**

When the proportion of the figure from waist to neck is shorter than average, the design will need to be lower with the waistline below the normal position. This will improve the proportions of the figure. In this way, a person who is short-waisted will not appear clumsy, awkward or bulky.

Yoke lines or cross-trimming lines that tend to cut the figure in two should be avoided, as well as tight belts at the waistline. Instead, the silhouette should be draped in long, slightly pointed lines that move the eye down instead of around the figure. Remember that long, vertical lines give the appearance of more height and slimness. The straight up-and-down silhouette is definitely the best for this type of figure.

### **Suitable**

- Waistline dropped below the normal line, especially for people whose hips are lower

### **Unsuitable**

- Built-up waist lines

## **Low Waists**

When the measurement from the waist to the neckline is longer than average, raise the waistline in the design and for improvement in the way the dress looks.

## **Long Necks**

It is better for those with longer necks to avoid wearing a very flat collar or a dress with a V neckline, because these will emphasise the neck and bring attention to it. A fluffy collar or one that has a soft roll will detract from this effect and can help ensure it goes unnoticed.

### **Suitable**

- Collars with high or medium rolls

- Round necklines, especially those which fit closely to the base of the neck
- Fluffy collars, fichus or furs
- High close collars
- Scarves
- Short necklaces; bulky pieces in particular
- Hair worn low at the neck or worn over the ears

### **Unsuitable**

- Collarless, without a necklace
- V-necks
- Hats with upturned brims
- Hats with high trimming
- Hair worn high

## **High-Hipped**

When designing for the high-hipped figure, it is best to avoid the short-yoke effect as this will emphasise the hip area. The waistline should be in a position to show a well-balanced figure. Wearing a belt around three inches below the usual waistline is often the correct place for the belt in this case. Using a straight, vertical silhouette from shoulder to lower waistline ending in a full pleat or perhaps a shirred skirt is the most suitable design for this figure type.

## **Sway Back**

### **Suitable**

- Blouse at the back of the waist
- Creating a sense of fullness between waist line and hips
- Belts swinging from loops at the side which do not hug the waistline too closely
- Devices which build out the waistline in the back, such as bows
- Thick jackets

### **Unsuitable**

- Garments fitted tightly in the back, including tightly belted dresses

## Short or Thick Neck

### Suitable

- Flat collars
- Collarless dresses
- V-necks
- Flat furs
- Narrow-brimmed hats
- Hair dressed high
- Hair worn to show the ears, or at least the base of the ears

### Unsuitable

- Collars with high rolls
- Broad necklines
- Necklaces worn closely around the throat
- Drooping hats
- Broad brimmed hats

## Retrouse (turned up at the end) Noses

### Suitable

- Hats with brims
- Lines of the hair that do not repeat the line of the nose

### Unsuitable

- A hat that turns up and away from the face

## Prominent Noses

### Suitable

- Hats with brims - brims may be somewhat wider in the front
- Trimming in the front of the hat
- Hair built out in a soft, largish mass
- Hair built out over the forehead (to balance out the nose)
- Parting hair on the side

### Unsuitable

- Turbans
- Severe, tailored hats
- Middle parted hair
- Hair drawn straight back from the forehead
- Hair dressed high on the head
- The large mass of the hair directly above the nose, as this will move the eye across that line when the profile is seen

## Sharp Angular Features

### Suitable

- Medium sized hats
- Hats with irregular lines
- Hats with brims that droop very slightly
- Hair worn in a soft, irregular line or soft large waves in the hair

### Unsuitable

- Severely tailored hats
- Sharp, angular trimmings, as wings, quills and sharp bows
- Stiff fabrics
- Harsh textures
- Hair drawn severely back
- Hair in tight waves, because it emphasises by contrast

## Large Features

### Suitable

- Hair worn in a broken line around the face
- Hair worn smooth in large, loose waves
- Larger hair styles

### Unsuitable

- Small, close waved curls in hair
- Hair pulled back tightly
- Extremely large hairstyles

**Further Reading:**

- ✓ *Fashion Design Essentials: 100 Principles of Fashion Design (By Jay Calderin) 2017*
- ✓ *Introduction to Fashion Design ( By Patrick John) 2019*