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## How To Make Pioneer Petticoats

Petticoats support your dress, insulate you from the environment, and can help keep your skirt from wrapping around your knees. Plain white cotton is an good fabric for your petticoats. If you will be participating during cold weather, consider making a wool flannel petticoat—you'll stay warm just the way the Saints did. Plan for at least one, but up to three full white cotton petticoats for your wardrobe.

### Yardage

- 2½ to 3½ yards white cotton muslin (36" to 45" wide) for each petticoat

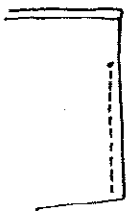
### Determine Your Hem Length

Petticoats are usually 1-2" shorter than your dress. Have an assistant measure from your waist to your desired finished hem at the center front, center back, and each hip. Note these four measurements. To the longest measurement, add 1/2" for a waistline seam allowance, and 3" for a hem allowance. This is your cut panel length. You'll need two panels of fabric (90" total) for a girl's petticoat or very young teen's petticoat; three panels of fabric make a fuller teen's or adult petticoat (135" total).

### Prepare Panels & Waistband

Straighten one edge of your fabric, either by drawing out a thread and cutting along it, or by snipping into the selvedge and ripping across the width. Measure your cut panel length down the selvedge; snip into the selvedge and cut or rip the panel. Repeat for the second (and third, if needed) panel.

Petticoats and dresses sit at the natural waist. To find yours, tie a piece of elastic around your middle, and do a series of bends forward, back, and side to side. The elastic will settle at your natural waist. Measure comfortably around your waist, and add 3" for your cut band length. Cut or rip done band, 3" wide by this length. Press one long edge to the wrong side ½"

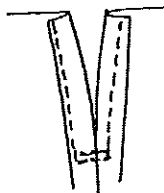


### Seam the Panels

Use a running stitch by hand, or a straight stitch by machine, and stitch the panels right sides together with a 1/4" to 1/2" seam allowance. Decide which will be your hem and your waist edges (it doesn't much matter which—just pick one!) Leave one seam open about 12" from the waist edge (shown in diagram.)

### Hem the Placket Opening

Use a running stitch by hand, or straight stitch by machine. If you have used full widths of fabric, simply sew the selvedge flat. If you have a raw edge, tuck it under, and stitch very close to the fold to secure the hem. Stitch a few times across the base of your placket to prevent it ripping down with repeated use.



### Hem the Petticoat

At the hem edge of the petticoat, press about 1/2" to the wrong side (inside) of the petticoat. Use a hem gauge or ruler to make an even fold. Fold again, about 2 1/2" deep, and press. Secure the hem with a running stitch or straight stitch along the fold.



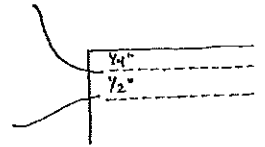
### Balance the Petticoat

Remember those four measurements you took at the beginning? Fold your petticoat in quarters to find the center front, center back, and "side seam" lines. Measure from the finished hem edge, to the waistline, and make a mark equal to your initial measurement. Connect your marks with an even slope. This will be your waist seam line. Give yourself 1/2" beyond the seam line for a seam allowance; cut along the seam allowance line.

### Gather the Petticoat

You can machine gather the waist edge of your petticoats, but you'll end up with a lot of bulk around your waist. Taking the time to work two rows of small running stitch by hand will give you a nice full petticoat without a lot of bulk in the waistband—and, it's the way our ancestors did it!

Hand gathering is easy: thread a needle with a doubled thread, equal to your waist measurement plus 8". Knot the end. Beginning on the inside of the petticoat at one placket edge, rock the needle in and out of the fabric evenly, taking stitches about 1/8" long. They don't have to be precise, but close counts.



Work your way around the entire waistline edge, ending with your needle on the inside. Knot the threads securely. Repeat with another thread, about 1/4" away from your first line of stitching.

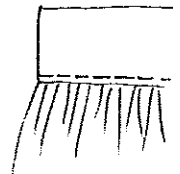
You'll get the best result if you try to line up the stitches as much as possible; close counts. Knot the second thread when you're done.

### Add The Band

Find the center point of the waistband and match it with the center point of the skirts, right sides together. Draw up the threads to fit your waistband piece, leaving ½" of band extending past the skirt on each end. Stitch the seam.



Fold the band over so the long pressed edge covers all the raw edges. Tuck the short inside the band about ½". Finish the band with topstitching or a small running stitch by hand. Add a button and buttonhole to close.



*Note: Petticoat hems for women should reach about the ankle bones. For girls (young women under 18 and unmarried), hem to the lower calf. Petticoats are usually an inch or two shorter than your dress.*

### About the Author

*Elizabeth Stewart Clark is a 19th century dressmaking instructor and historic pattern designer. A member of the LDS Church, she is always interested in helping others more fully appreciate our pioneer heritage. Find more patterns, articles, and books related to living history and the 19th century at [www.elizabethstewartclark.com](http://www.elizabethstewartclark.com)*