

How to Make Roll Pleats

I originally learnt how to do roll pleating from Meesteresse Willemynne van Nymegen (Michaela de Bruce). These written instructions are my own interpretation of how I would teach this to somebody in person, to act as a memory aid or distance learning tool.

This tutorial assumes that you are going to be pleating the back section of a skirt onto a bodice if you are making a 16th century kirtle.

1. Decide how many pleats you want to make. At the base of the bodice, mark the start and finish of each pleat section with a pin.

➔ For an uneven number of pleats, measure the length of the area with a tape measure and divide evenly, placing a pin at each point.

i.e., in the picture at right, the area measures 22.5cm long. So for five pleats, you will place a pin at each of 4.5cm, 9cm, 13.5cm, and 18cm - you can also place a pin at the start and finish points, but you will already have a seam at these points to act as a marker.



➔ For an even number of pleats, first find and mark the centre point and then divide each half accordingly.



I usually do this by folding the bodice in half and pinning the middle (at left), then folding each half into the right number of segments and pinning at those points.



So, if I want six pleats, I would fold each half into thirds.

If I want eight, I would fold each half into quarters.



2. Take the section of skirt that you will be pleating and divide it the same way as you have done for the bodice, pinning the end of each section to the bodice at the appropriate point.

The skirt shown here is loosely folded, but as I am pinning I pull everything taut to ensure that the pins are evenly spread.



At left is the skirt pinned onto the bodice, with the sections to be pleated hanging loose.

3. From the start of each pleat, whip stitch the skirt onto the bodice until you reach the pin marking the end of that pleat.



You will have a bunch of extra skirt fabric left that should be a part of that pleat. Match the pinned pleat end to the end of the whip stitching, and continue along whip stitching the pleat together until you reach the middle of the pleat.



4. Begin rolling the pleat back towards the bodice, so that it rolls evenly to fit that section of bodice. You may need to do this several times to get it even.



➔ You can leave the needle and thread in where you finished whip stitching, to use for the next bit - just keep it clear of the rolling process.

5. Sew along the length of the pleat, making sure you go through all the layers of fabric to secure it together.



The skirt pictured here is unlined as it is for extremely hot weather. If you are working with a fully lined skirt, you will need to make sure you are going through both the main fabric and the lining fabric for the entirety of the pleat. A strong needle and a thimble are useful for this.

6. Whip stitch the pleat into place on the skirt, again passing through all the layers of fabric. You may want to go up and down the pleat several times doing this to make sure it's completely secure.



7. Follow steps three through six to complete the rest of your pleats.

- ➔ The kirtle pictured here is following mid-sixteenth century Flemish style, so all the pleats are rolled in the same direction. Depending on the look you are trying to achieve, you may want to mirror image pleats on either side of the centre - e.g. for a court dress to have them all falling toward centre back.





This is the pleating at the back of my court dress, shown from the inside. Note how the pleats lie in different directions. The binding tape is superfluous here as the skirt is fully lined - if it were unlined the tape would be handy to add support and finish the top of the skirt neatly.



An outside view of the pleats on my court dress. Note how they all point in towards the centre back. The stitching attaching the skirt to the bodice is beginning to loosen after three years of solid use for dancing (and having the skirt stood on by clumsy people) - however, the stitching for the pleats themselves is still firmly intact. All I need to do is rework the whipstitching attaching bodice to skirt.

