

How to make a circular skirt

Hip measurement (about 10 cms down from waist): _____ cm \div 6.3 = _____ (A)

Length from hip to floor (no shoes): _____ cm $-$ 1.5 cm / $\frac{3}{4}$ inch = _____ (B)

(A): _____ $+$ (B) _____ = _____ (C)

Finished length = hip to top of foot = _____ (D)

N.B. (B) must be at least 2cm / 1 inch more than (D)

This should give a skirt with elastic turned in at the top with minimal gathers around the hip.

What type and how much fabric to buy:

Fabric choice is very personal so you should choose a colour/finish that pleases you. However, filmy fabrics are more suited to classical and matte fabrics seem to have more 'mileage' than super shiny satin, although that's fun for an underskirt. Polyester crepe de chine is a good choice as it comes in a variety of colours, it's very crease resistant, doesn't fray badly, and is good to handle even as a beginner.

The width of fabric you choose must be at least equal to Measurement C - or your skirt will be too short. For example, if 'C' is 100cm/40 inches you need to buy 112 cm/45 inch wide fabric.

You need to buy a minimum of: 4 x Measurement C. So that would be 4 x 100 cm/40 inches or, 4m/4.5 yds. (I always buy a little extra to allow for mistakes!)

Cutting out

Decide which side of the fabric will be your right side. Fold the fabric in half, end to end, then in half again, ensuring the edges are even.

Lay the fabric out making sure it's smooth, not stretched and that all the edges are even and, you know where the folded ends are!

Using string (ideal on a carpet or if you have a cork mat to put under the fabric)

Cut a piece of string 6 inches longer than measurement (C), and tie a knot in one end.

Measure the length of (A) from the knot with a pen. Then measure the distance (B) and mark it. (The distance from the knot to the second mark should be (C))

Stick a glass headed pin through the knot and stick it into the fabric and carpet/cork mat, slightly in from the selvage and very close to the double-folded edge.

Hold the string parallel to the selvage and mark the fabric with a pin, pen or tailor's chalk where mark (A) lies. Continue marking point (A) by using the pin and string as a compass, moving in an arc to the double fold.

Repeat the process with measurement (C), the second mark on the string.

Using a soft tape measure (also good on carpet)

This method is similar to the string method, but push a pin through the hole in the end of the tape measure, and use the tape markings to measure the distances.

Metre stick (easier to use on a hard surface)

Using the same principle of the corner nearest the fold as your pivot point, keep measuring and marking as before, swinging the stick in an arc, and being careful not to ruck up the fabric.

Making up

Side seams

Open out the two half circles and match the side seams, right side of fabric facing each other.

Stitch the side seams about 1.5cm/½ inch in from the selvage, starting 2.5 cm/1 inch from the top. Reinforce at the top and bottom of the sewing. Press open both seams.

N.B. If the selvage is tight, you may to clip it to make the fabric lie smooth. Alternatively, cut it off and neaten with a zig-zag or overlock stitch.

Top edge

Measure and cut elastic to sit firmly but comfortably around your hips, plus a 2.5cm/1 inch overlap. For example, for 36/37 inch hips, 70 cm/¾ yd is probably ample.

(Tip: Use firm wide elastic to give the top 'body'. John Lewis used to sell a good 'anorak' elastic in both black and white. If you use flimsy elastic the top will roll and your skirt will sag away from your body (I speak from experience!). You can also use the type of elastic with a rubberised thread in it (trouser elastic?) which will help anchor your skirt to your hips and stops your top from riding up. Failing that, just elastic 2" wide.)

Pin the elastic into a ring and securely stitch the overlap closed.

Divide the ring of elastic into quarters by folding it in half and then in half again, using a pin to mark each quarter.

On the skirt, fold in 1cm/half inch at the top to the inside and tack in place. Measure and mark the centre-front and centre-back of the skirt (with the side seams you now have 4 quarters to match to the elastic).

With the skirt right sides out, slip the elastic ring inside the skirt, and match each quarter mark on the elastic to the corresponding mark on the skirt, pinning the top edges together.

Pin the remainder of the skirt and the elastic together, stretching the elastic as necessary.

Stitch the elastic and skirt together at the top edge only, using a zig-zag or stretch-stitch, working from the skirt side. You will probably need to stretch the elastic a little as you sew. N.B. There will be a little gap at the skirt seams, just try to keep the edges close – this is to allow for a bit of expansion in case the fit is too snug.

Alternatively, make a casing using spare fabric, attach to skirt, then thread narrower elastic through – 2 channels are better than just one.

Marking and making the hem

Hang your skirt up for several days, a week is preferable, to allow the fabric to drop. You'll probably notice that as soon as you cut the material out that the hem is very uneven; hanging allows the bias to stretch so that you can get an even finish). As hemming a circular skirt is a bit of a pain, it helps to have a good friend/patient partner/dressmaker's dummy at hand!

Marking method 1 – good friend or patient partner

Put on your skirt and have your friend find the shortest length (probably one of the side seams as they're with the grain); the hem should be about 2.5cm/1 inch from the floor. Using that measurement as a marker, your friend should continue to work measuring up from the floor to the hem, all around the bottom of the skirt. For a guide you could use a ruler, cardboard marked with the appropriate measurement, or even a book etc. (It might help if you stood on a chair and pivoted round to save your friend a trip to the chiropractor!)

Marking method 2 – dressmaker’s dummy (if you have one)

This works on a similar principle to the above but you do all the work! It’s easy to stand the dummy on a table and work around it.

Marking method 3 – Norma no-mates and no dummy either!

If you really can’t find a dressmaker’s dummy (alive or inanimate!), you’ll have to settle for the ‘wire coathanger’ method. This only works if you’re very slim or don’t have a pronounced bottom.

Pin the skirt along the top to a wire coathanger, and then measure from top to bottom using your finished skirt length as a guide (you could use the string used for cutting out or a tape measure). Move along the skirt measuring and marking using pins or tailor’s chalk. Just check the hem is level before you trim it!

Trim the skirt, taking into account how much hem you need or want to make. The finished length should sit just on the top of your feet. Too short looks a bit odd and too long is dangerous, as you could trip on it.

Tip: if you have a skirt that’s just the right length, you can use that as a template for the next skirt and measure one against the other.

Hemming

Option 1: Simply finish the cut edge with a close zig-zag or overlock stitch, if your fabric can take it.

Option 3: Turn up a narrow double hem, easing in fullness and stitch in place by hand (depending on your patience) or by machine. This type of hem can give a good ‘weight’ to light material.

Option 3: Narrow rolled hem – if using a machine, you can stretch as you sew which gives a pretty fluted edge: this is lovely on fine fabrics for a classical skirt, but not so good for sha’abi.

Option 4: If time is short you can singe the hem using a candle flame, and works well on synthetics that melt rather than burn. Test the fabric flammability first on a sample. Please do be very careful if you choose this method. Although this is quite quick the melted edge can be rough and irritate your feet, so it’s a good idea to turn up a narrow hem and stitch that down.

But it’s too short!!!! Panic not.

Contingency 1: Unpick the hem and try another method of finishing the bottom (if you turned it up in the first place).

Contingency 2: Unpick the elastic and re-stitch, but this time keep an inch of elastic showing at the top. (You can always ensure your scarf covers that part.)

Contingency 3: Do both 1 & 2!

Contingency 4: Wear it as an overskirt - which always looks lovely.

Don’t forget to work out where you went wrong so you don’t make that mistake again. E.g. Was it in the measurements; your calculations; the cutting out; the levelling?

Storing your skirt

If it’s been allowed to hang and drop you should be OK to continue hanging the skirt. If you’re worried, just roll it up and store flat.

Cutting layout

