



PAPER TAPE dress form

MAKE A PAPER TAPE DRESS FORM

This form was recommended by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1920 as an affordable alternative to purchasing a dress form. This is a great form that is body-accurate and very usable as a dress form in its many capacities because it can be pinned into easily—so it is not only a fitting buddy, it is a body you can pattern on.

YOU'LL NEED

- 1–2 rolls of paper tape—the kind that needs wetting to get sticky
 - sacrificial tee shirt that reaches past your bum OR a Garbage bag
 - scrap of fabric or plastic wrap to put around the base of your neck
 - sharp scissors you don't mind getting sticky
 - filling for the form: poly filling, shoulder pads (free, recycled), foam, plastic bags etc.
 - cardboard (free, recycled)
 - a stand or hanger for the dress form (we used a floor lamp from a second-hand store)
- Our paper tape form cost a total of \$22.

This is a two-person project. Since you need to be the “model” for your own dress form, you'll need a friend to tape you up!

The process for this form follows the same format as the duct tape form in terms of preparation of the model, and the process of wrapping the tape, especially around the bust. Some people have found that using narrow strips of duct tape to first outline the bust area assists in getting a good shape.

Please note that it is advisable to use plain paper tape, and not reinforced paper tape. You might look for it at artist supply shops as well as shipping supply stores. If you don't have access to a store that sells the plain tape, it is really recommended that you order it because the fiberglass strings in the reinforced paper tape prevent the tape from wrapping as smoothly. If you are in a hurry and you can only get the reinforced tape, just be aware that smoothing edges and clipping tape to lay flat is a bigger challenge. Permanent wrinkles are likely to happen.

When wrapping the tape, you must first wet the tape. It is advisable to cut many strips before starting. It is also advisable to cut some into narrow pieces. There are different methods for wetting the tape, from dunking it into a basin of water to wetting it with a sponge. Use whichever method works for you and your helper. It is also advisable to work in an easy to clean area (kitchen or outside or bathroom), as you may get it sticky and wet from the taping process. Having a damp sponge or rag is also very handy for smoothing down stubborn tape corners.

Different sources cite 3 or 4 layers of the tape. The extra layer of tape will make the form a bit stiffer, which may be of benefit. It is wrapped in alternate directions like the duct tape form for a uniform surface. Since the behavior of paper tape is different than duct tape, it may be helpful to try using diagonal directions for one of the layers. Chevron shapes will start to appear, and not only does it look nice, the diagonal direction is easy to manage over most curves with the paper tape.

The form must dry on the model for a while. It must be dry enough to hold its shape when cut off, and not so dry that it will not come off. This can take up to an hour (have some tea and treats during this time...but not so much you need to use the facility!). Some people prefer to use a hair dryer to speed the drying process. It should be dry enough so that if you tap the form on the body it should sound “hollow”, or a bit like the Tin Man made out of a box.

The form is then cut off through the center back, and the back re-taped with the packing tape. The form is at its most delicate and vulnerable right now. You may want to place a few anchoring duct tape pieces on the inside of the form while you work with the outer layer. The form needs to then fully dry, so set it or hang it in a safe place where it will not be disturbed. It can become distorted if it dries twisted or flattened. Using a padded hanger with some extra with support through the shoulders might be a good answer to this, and then hanging it on a shower curtain rod gives it plenty of space to dry. The 1920 directions say to leave it on the body until fully dry, and cut it off the front and the back (which you would have to do if it was fully dried and stiff), and then re-tape and let that dry, which seems a bit excessive to us now, and rather time consuming considering you can't move much while wearing the tape.

There is some debate about whether or not to stuff this form, but it seems a good idea to do this if you will use it often, as it will help retain and support the shape of the form. It is advisable to cut cardboard supports for the open armholes and base like the duct tape form, and depending on how you want to hang the form (hanger or stand), a cardboard neck enclosure. Gluing shoulder pads to the bust area is also a good idea for support if you think you might pin into the form there.

The form can also be covered with a thin stretchy fabric, or a more traditional dress form cover of woven linen that is shaped to the form.