# VOODOO-TIKI'S
PONY MANE AND TAIL TUTORIAL

One of the most frequent questions I get is how to make a soft sculpture mane and tail for pony plushes. There are so many stylistic variations in the show's characters (and of course, original characters) that it's impossible to make a pattern for everyone. Instead, I'm going to show you how to design your *own* patterns.

Before you begin, have good references of what the mane and tail should look like from different angles. If you're making a pony from the show, you'll have access to plenty of screen shots, but if you're making an OC you might have fewer references. Sketch the pony from the front, back, and both sides (if the mane and tail are not symmetrical) so you can plan the pattern.

SILHOUETTE SHAPES

A simple mane or tail can be made with a two-dimensional pattern. In this example, I'll demonstrate how to make a very basic tail. First draw a silhouette of the side view of the tail. This gives you a starting point for your pattern.
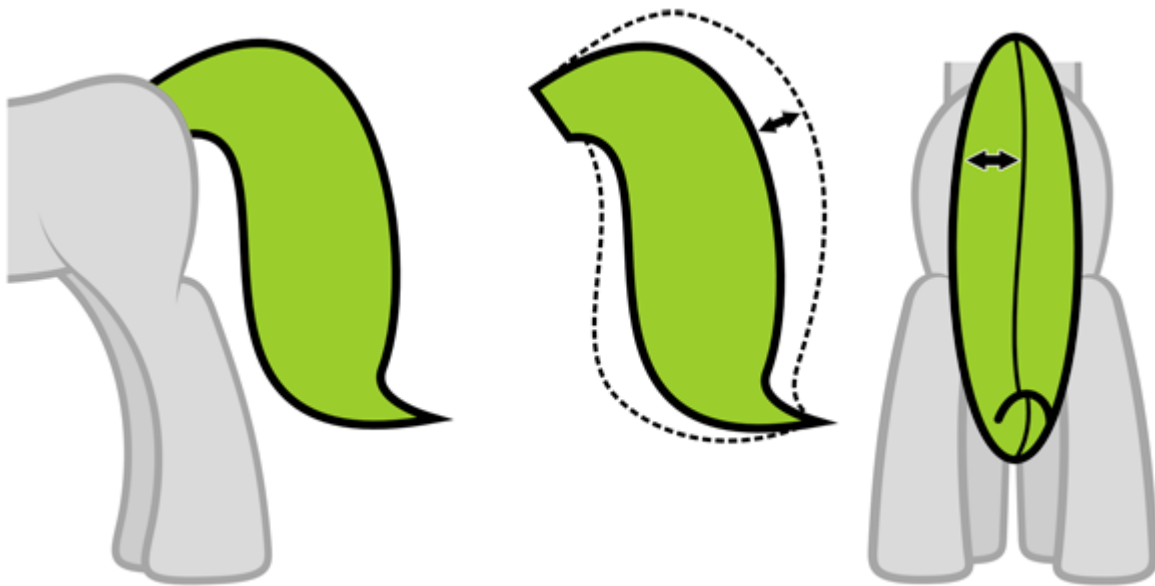
But wait! The tail isn't a flat shape, it has width from side to side that isn't accounted for in drawing a silhouette. If you sewed right from the side view you drew, your tail would come out much smaller and skinnier when you stuff it. You need to add bulk to the silhouette to account for this.

Square off any pointy bits such as the tail tip. Because of the bulk of the seam allowance, a pointed tip will come out slightly rounded.

RIGHT SIDE

LEFT SIDE

← Squared tip
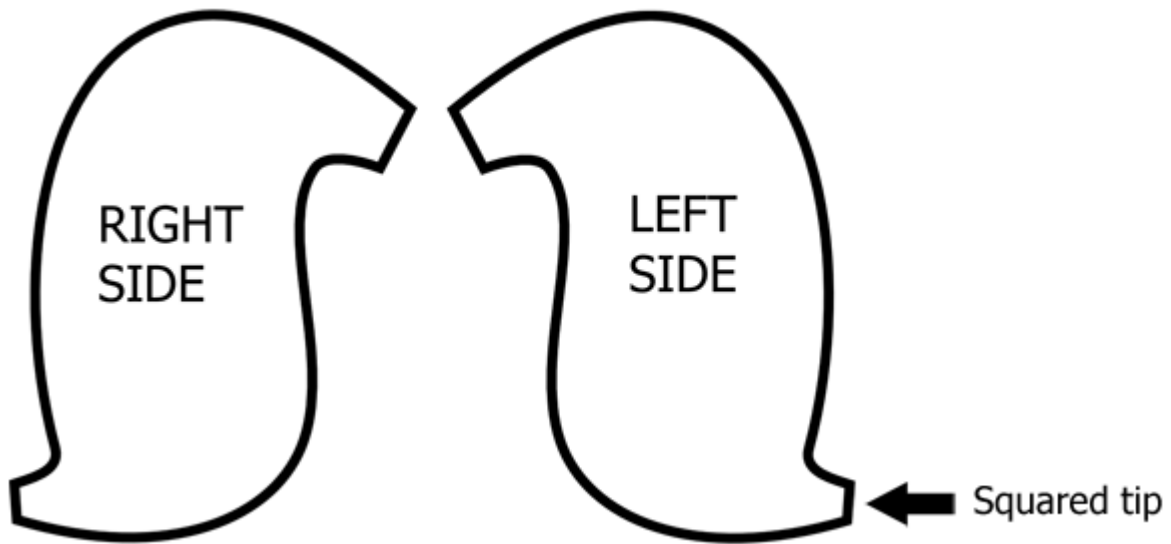
The pattern is mirrored to give a left and right side.

If you're using fabric with a **pile**, like faux fur, minky, velveteen or velour, the fur should point down.

← Leave an opening between these arrows to turn it right side out
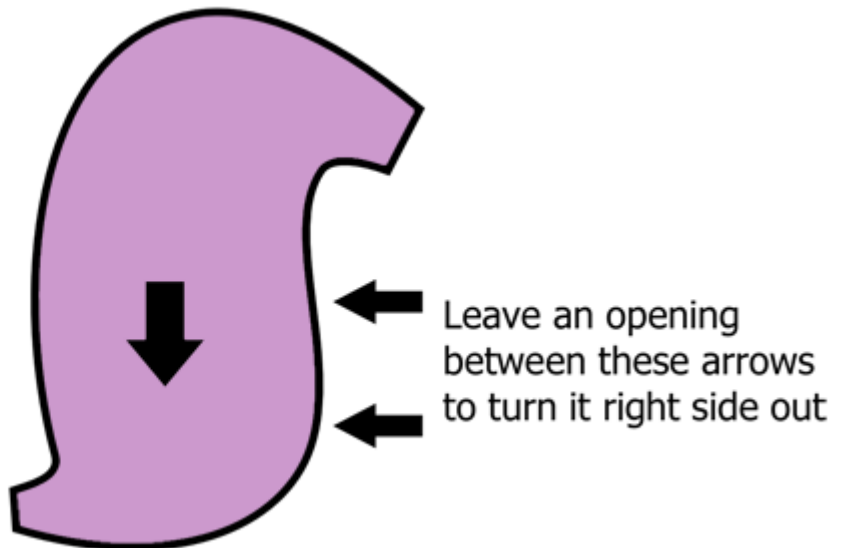
You'll also need to leave an opening in an inconspicuous place to turn the tail right side out. I usually put the turning opening where it will be mostly hidden against the legs. You might be tempted to try and use the base of the tail as a turning opening, but it's too narrow.

Add markings to indicate the turning opening and the pile direction.

Here's a series of photos showing how I made a striped tail using this technique.

I started with the silhouette drawing and modifications shown.

Then, I broke the pattern into pieces to make a brown tail with a tan center stripe. Each stripe has its own piece. I labeled them to indicate what color they should be (B for brown, T for tan). I'm using a short pile faux fur with a lightweight interfacing on the backing.

I sewed the stripes together, first on one side, then the other (the pieces are sewn RST, right sides together, which just means it is sewn with the outer side of the fabric together). Then I sewed the finished left and right sides together, turned and lightly stuffed the tail, and closed the turning opening with a ladder stitch.

The last pictures shows the pattern next to the finished tail, which is attached to the pony's rump with a ladder stitch. I recommend using extra-strong button & craft thread and going around the tail twice to make it very secure, since for some reason people tend to pick plushes up by their tails.

The same process is used to make a simple mane shape.

A horse's mane grows from center line of the neck and usually falls to one side. Remember the mane has to wrap around the width of the neck, so the pattern piece will have to be longer than the silhouette.

The top edge of the side view (A).

The top edge of the mane (B).

Pile direction
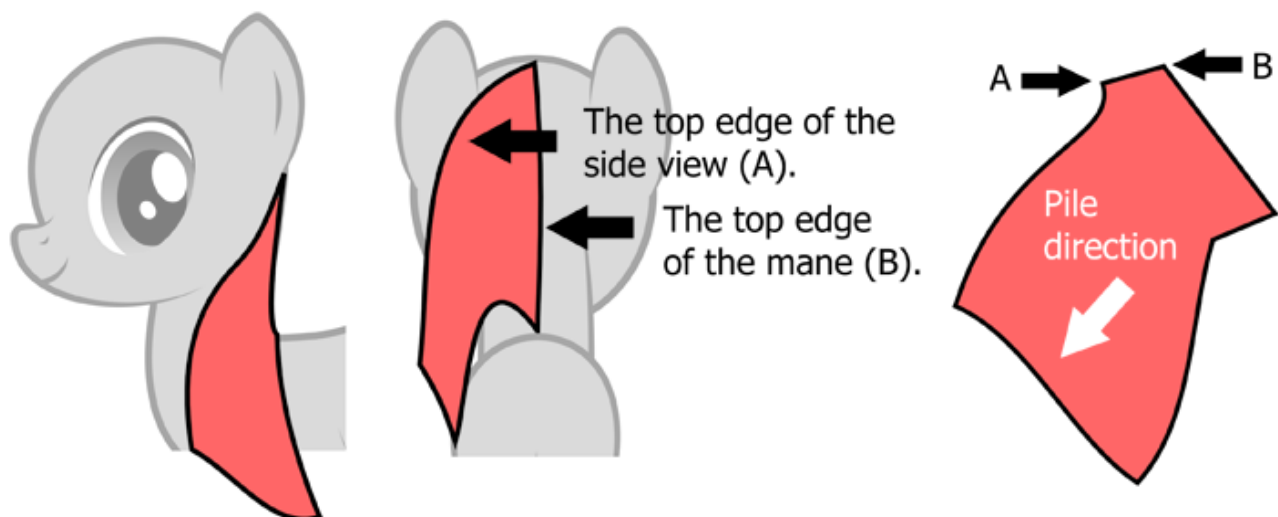
DIMENSIONAL SHAPES

If your mane or tail style has a lot of volume, like Pinkie's afro, you can make it nice and rounded with **single-ended darts**.

To visualize how darts work, think of what a flat piece of fabric looks like draped over a sphere. You can see the fabric doesn't cover it neatly. The excess fabric hangs in folds - you can't wrap the fabric around a sphere and have it lay flat.*
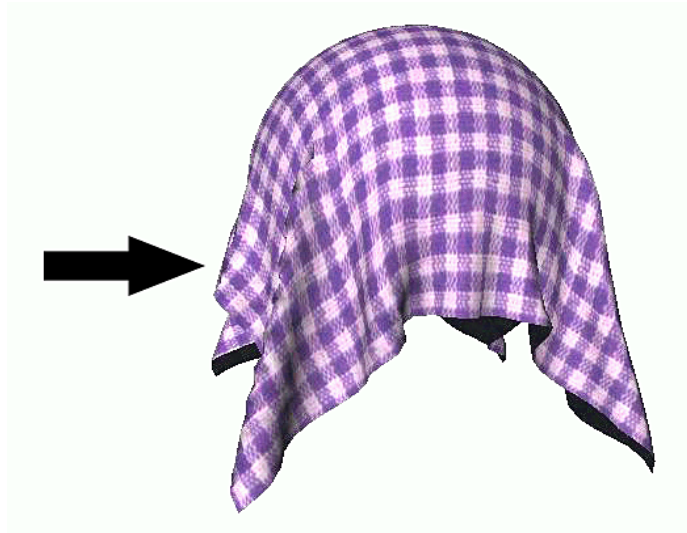

A single-ended dart is a pie slice shaped cut taken out of the fabric to remove this excess material. Basically, you're cutting off those corner folds and sewing the raw edges together.

Now picture a beach ball. To get a sphere, you need six **biconvex lens** (two circular arcs joined at their endpoints). You can see how the combination of narrow ends and out-curved centers combine to give the beach ball its shape.
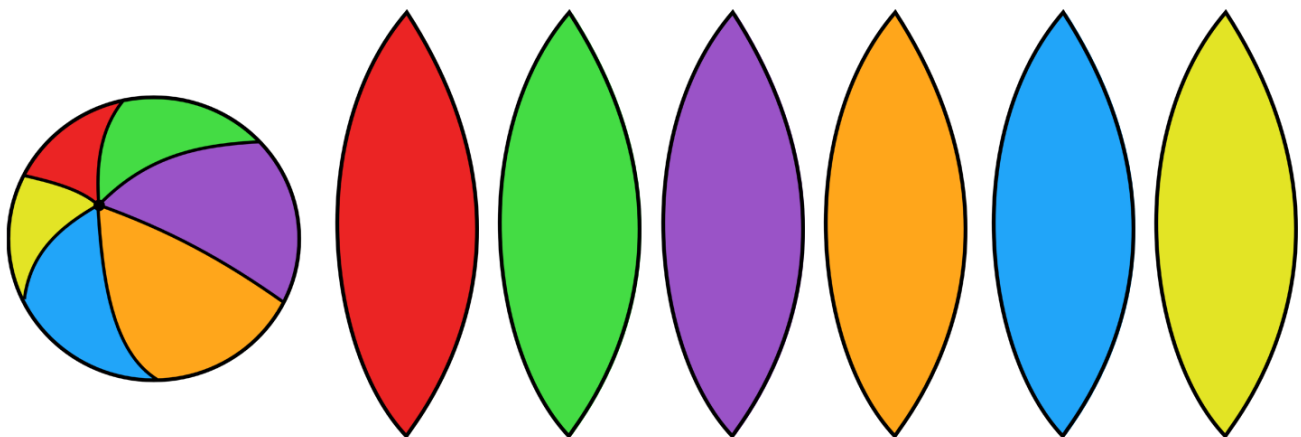

* unless you gather it, but that's not relevant for this lesson

When you join two biconvex lens together, the curves will overlap slightly, and there is a gap between the pointed ends. That gap is the dart, and it will give the pattern a sounded shape. To close the dart, fold the fabric so A touches B, and sew from C to A/B.


Dart →   ← Also a dart.
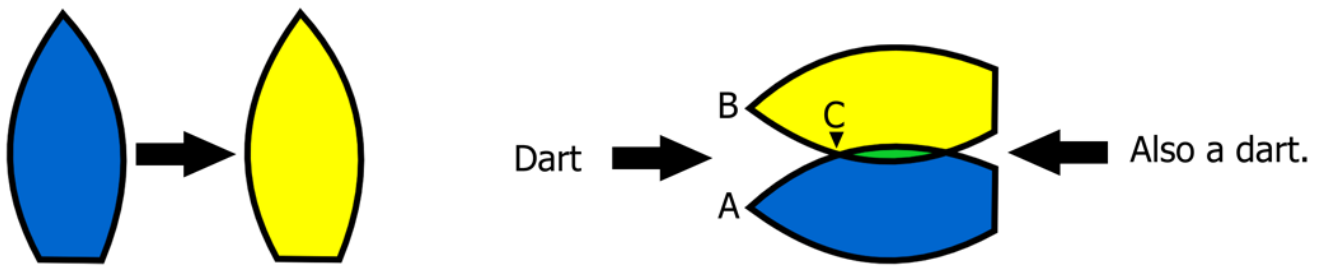
The bottom of the lens in the illustration has been flattened so it will fit nicely against the shape of the neck, but the dart is still there.

Let's see how this looks as a pattern piece. Here I've drawn a pattern for a pony with two distinct, bulging shapes to her bangs (remember, you'll need a right and left side).
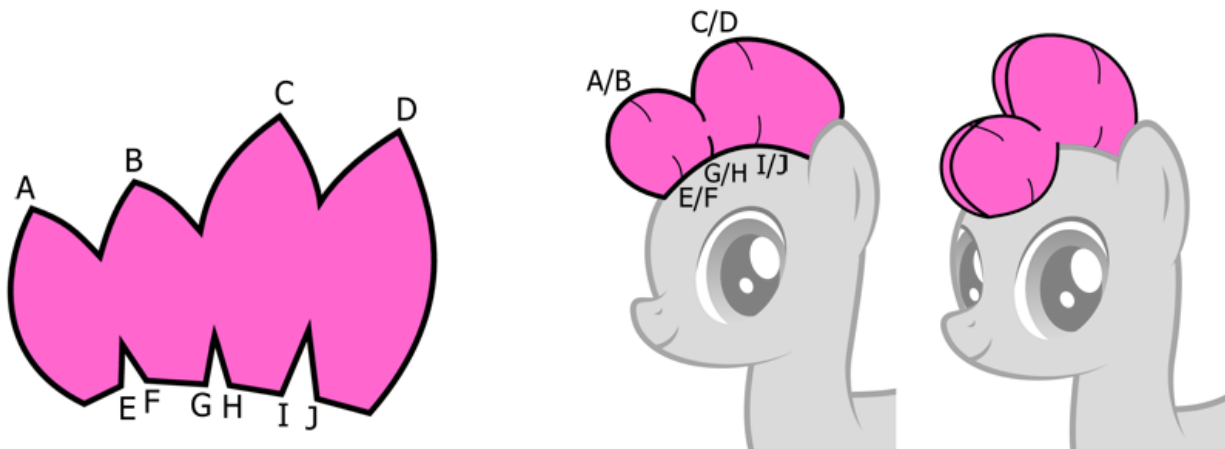

The darts are A/B, C/D. E/F, G/H and I/J. B and C are not sewn together, this is just a curve along the edge of the pattern piece. You can clearly see how the whole thing fits together.

You can add to the effect of a curly hairstyle with a thoughtful choice of fabric. Faux fur comes in wavy (called "distressed") and tightly curled (poodle) textures, and short pile fabrics (minky, velour, velveteen) can often be found with an embossed swirly or wavy pattern.
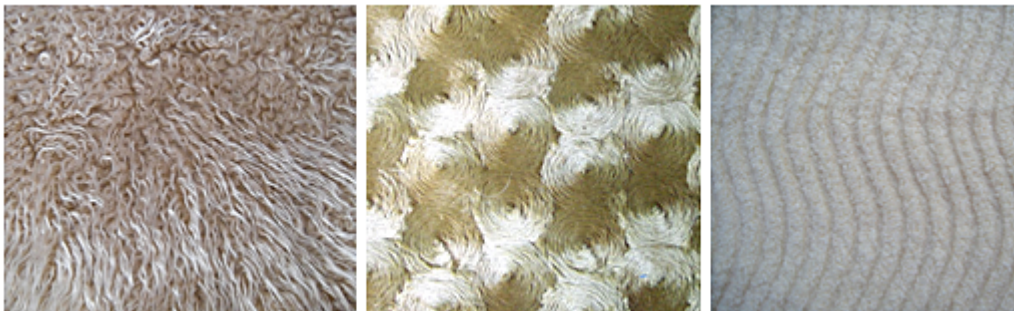
CURLED SHAPES

To create a gentle curve in a mane, you can use a **double ended dart**. As you can guess from the name, a double ended dart is just two single ended darts joined together at the base to make a diamond shape. These darts are used in dressmaking to make clothes that closely fit the curves of a human body.
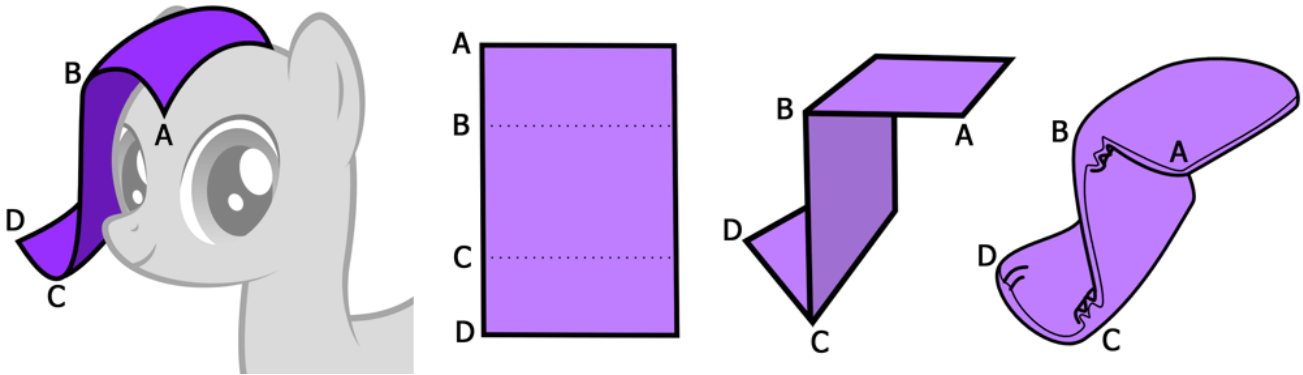
Draw out the shape of the mane, remembering you have to account for the entire length. In the example, the curves are at B and C (indicated with a dotted line). If you were folding the shape from a piece of paper the angles would be very sharp, but because of the bulk and stretch of the fabric, sewing the shape as drawn would mean excess fabric bunches and wrinkles at B and C, as shown in the far right picture. The dart gets ride of that extra fabric.

Underside of mane   Top of mane
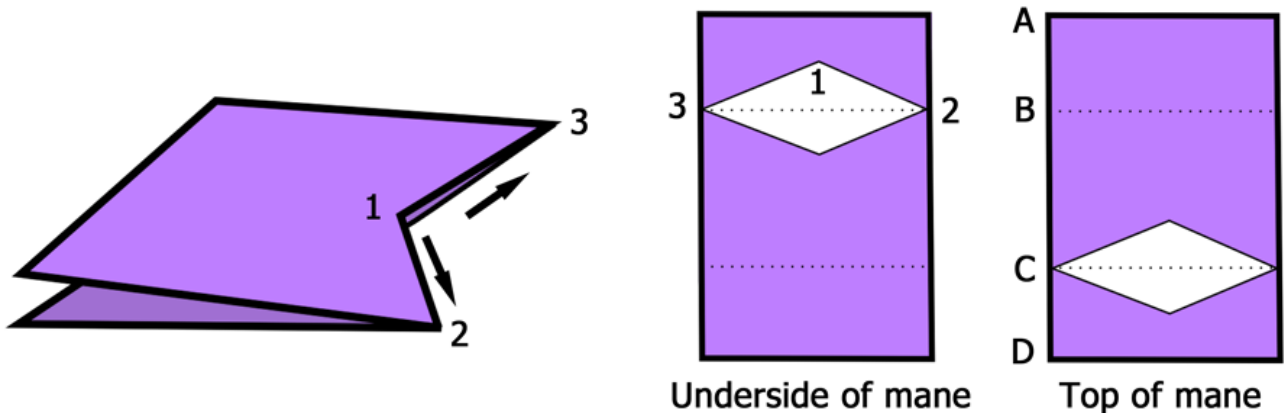
Always sew a double sided dart from the center to the corners - in the illustration, from 1 to 2, and then from 1 to 3. A dart on the underside of the mane at B will curve it in, and a dart on the top of the mane at c will curve it up.

You can make the curve tighter by sewing a tacking stitch to hold the fabric in place.

UNDERCUTTING

Undercutting simply means you remove the part of the pattern where the underside of the mane would naturally lay flat on the neck, hidden from sight. Similar to a dart, undercutting a mane reduces bulk. It also forces a mane to lay flat on one side.
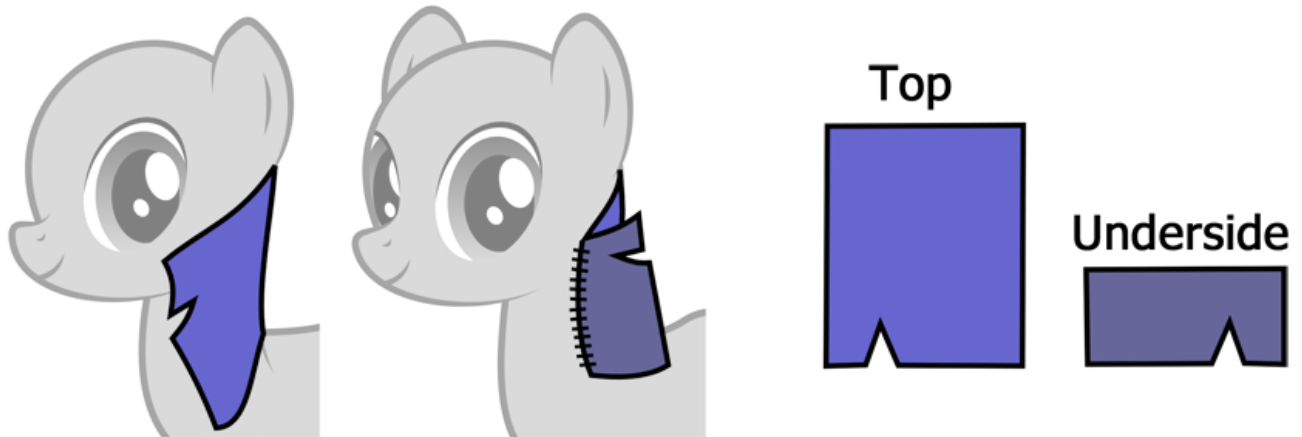

In the picture, you can see where the underside is sewn directly to the neck.

HOLES

You might need a gap in the bangs for a horn to poke through, or holes for a ragged, Changeling style mane and tail. This is done by breaking the pattern into pieces just as you would to make multiple colors and adding a half-circle in each piece where you want a hole.

Sew around each piece completely, turn and stuff the pieces. Then sew the facing edges of the straight line together using a ladder stitch. The illustration shows two different colors, but this is just for clarity. You can use two pieces of the same color.
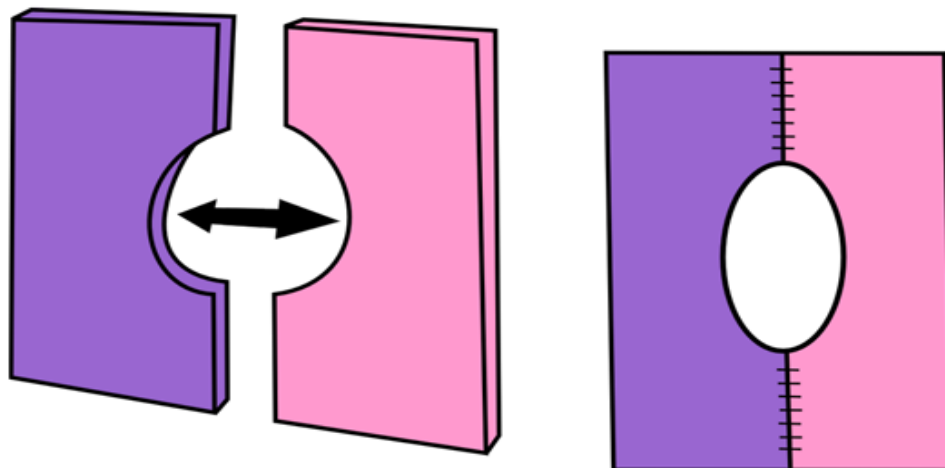
MULTIPLE COLORS

As I mentioned with the silhouette tail, to make a style with multiple colors like Twilight's or Dash's, you need to break the pattern into multiple pieces.

Get your pattern drawn properly first, and then divide it up according to color. I suggest labeling each pattern piece, because it gets confusing very quickly.

Cutting line
Sewing line
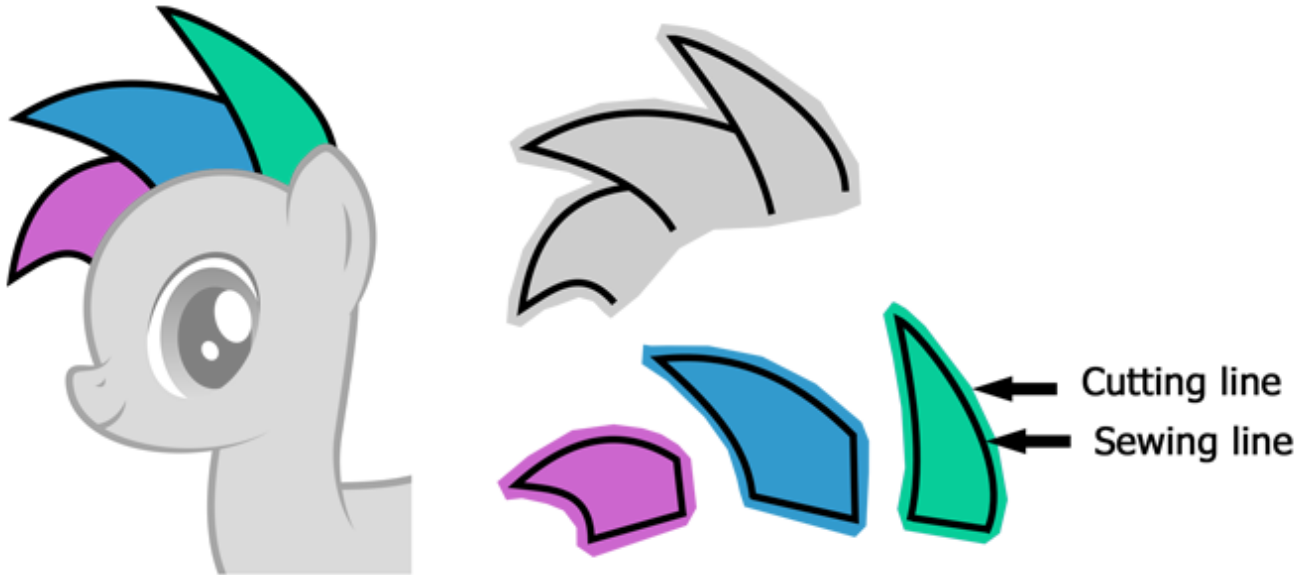
The solid line is the line you sew on. You cut fabric out around it - the distance between the cutting line and the sewing line is called the **seam allowance**. Usually the seam allowance is 1/4 inch or 6.35 mm. Fabric that frays will require a wider seam allowance.

I should mention that with any curved shape, you'll want to notch and clip the curves. This relaxes the fabric so it doesn't pucker when you stitch it. Cut notches in seam allowance of convex curves, and make snips along the line of convex curves. Don't cut the sewn seam!

outside curve

inside curve
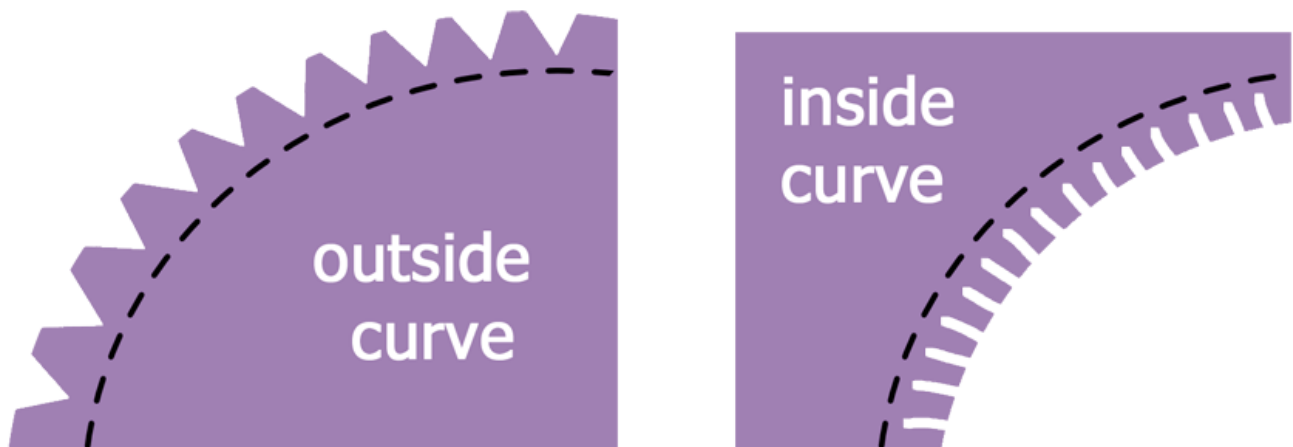
MULTIDIMENSIONAL SHAPES

A 3D, layered mane or tail requires a bit more planning and effort. The example shows a spiky blue forelock with a single aqua spike jutting out from the side. You can get more elaborate than and make multiple different geometric shapes, but I'll keep it simple for this demonstration.

I drew the pony from different angles to figure out how the shapes intersect (we're just concerned with the one side for now, assume the other side is exactly the same, but mirrored). The aqua spike's inner side (colored a darker aqua) intersects with the blue spike.
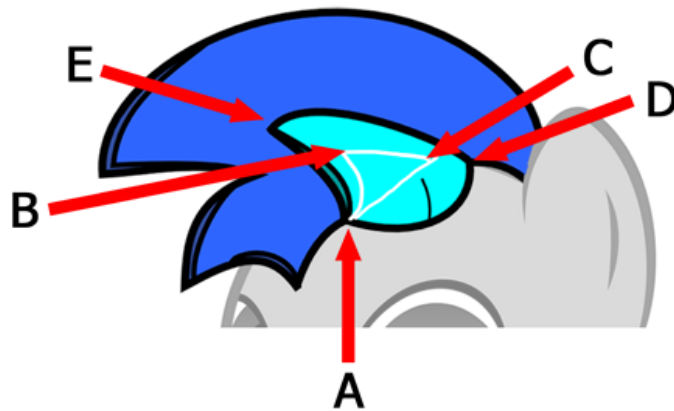
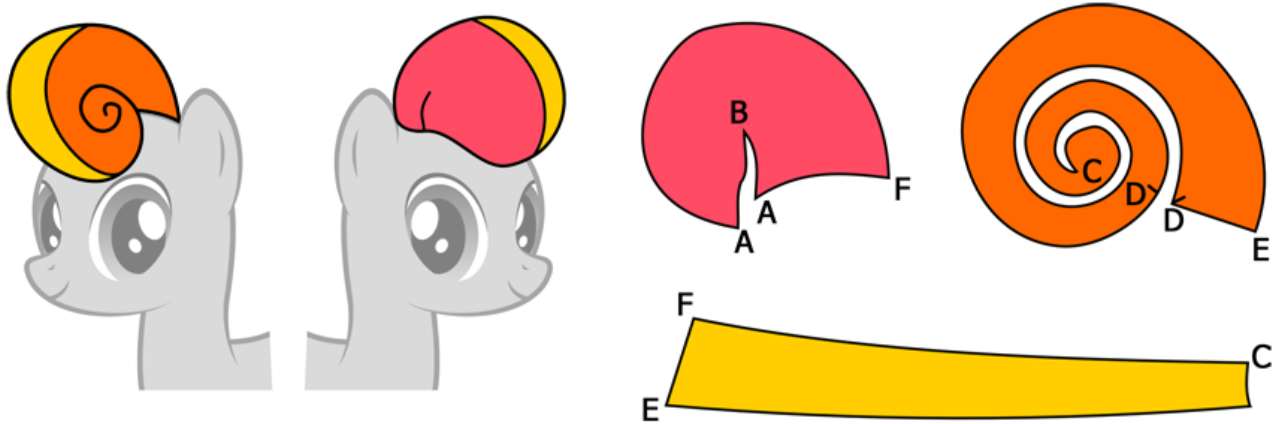The inner face of the aqua spike is undercut where it touches the blue spike.
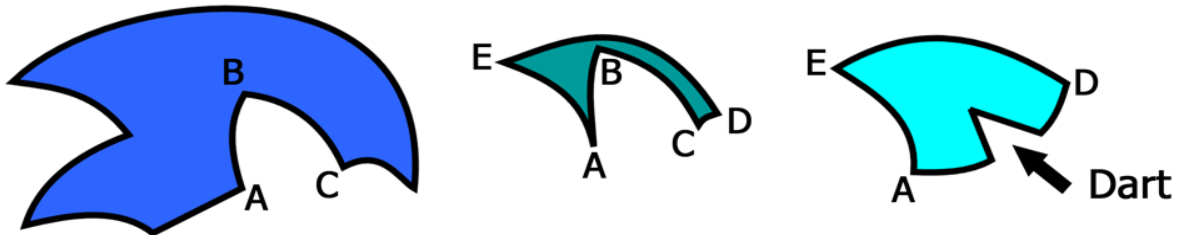
Blue spike   **Inner aqua spike**   **Outer aqua spike**

SNAIL SHELL SPIRAL CURLS

Tight curls can be represented with a sewn spiral that looks like a snail shell.

The way the pattern fits together seems a bit complicated if you've never tried it before, but if you study it carefully it should be obvious.

Sew the two sides of the spiral together from C to D (D on one side will match to D on the other) to make the outer spiral. Sew up the dart on the non-spiral (pink) side, matching A to A and sewing from B to A/A. The long yellow piece gives some dimension to the spiral. The open edges of the shape are, in the example, sewn right to the head with a ladder stitch.

Use this as a guide to make your own spiral designs. There is lots of room for variation. If you prefer, you can make both sides of the shape a spiral pattern. You could also just make a spiral at the end of a longer shape, instead of the spiral being the whole shape (like at the end of a tail. You can also vary the width of the spiral and how many times it loops around. You might even sew two spirals together along the outside to make a very thin, springy shape that sticks out in three dimensions like a curly vine. Have fun experimenting!

PATTERN DRAPING

More hands-on crafters might prefer to design their mane and tail using **pattern draping** instead of drafting a pattern. This method gives you a bit more control and creativity, and allows you to modify your pattern on the fly. It's also handy for replacing the mane or tail of an already-constructed plush.

I'll walk you though the construction of a fairly simple mane to give you an overview of the process.

Here's a bald pony awaiting a new manestyle:

To begin with, you'll make a mock-up pattern using tough but flexible paper or a lightweight fabric such as muslin (which is very inexpensive). I'm using some paper from a shopping bag.


Pin a swath of material in place along the spine of the neck. Roughly sketch the shape you want the mane to be, unpin the paper, and cut it out. Then pin the paper back on the pony and start refining the shape. You can see I had to use two pieces of paper to get the shape correct because I messed up the first time! Add extra pieces of paper with clear tape.

And here is the forelock, with a hole for the horn. I've marked where I want to break apart the pattern for different colored stripes and labeled where the different pattern pieces should match up with letters.
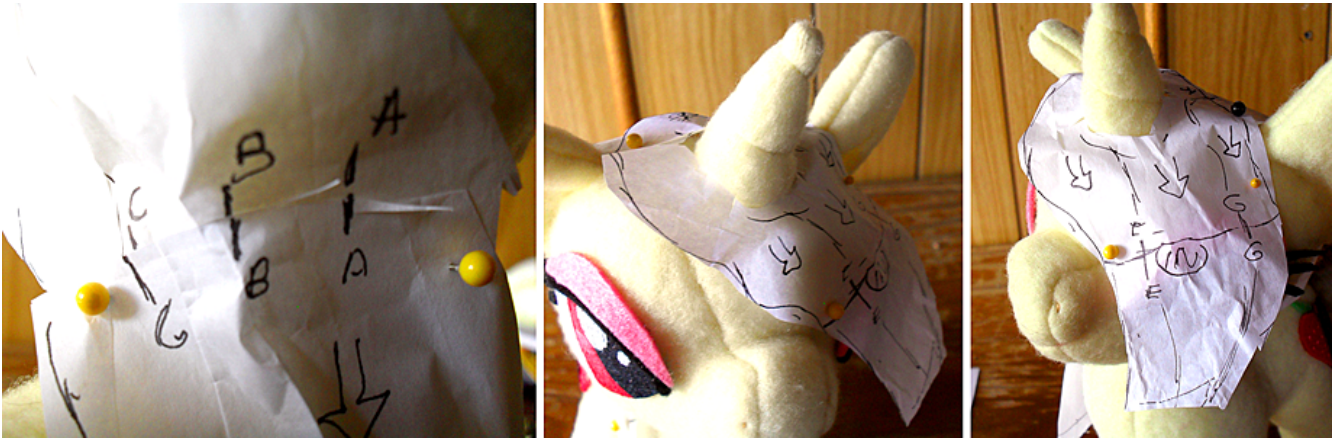
Now you have a basic shape. Remember, the seam allowance will take away from the length, and you will need to compensate for bulking it out. I redraw the pattern larger on a sheet of thin cardboard, then divide it into pieces according to the color. Make sure you label each piece clearly (for example: *"Fr. Br. Top Mane"* for the front, brown stripe of the top/outer part of the mane) and indicate the direction of the pile if you're using a furry fabric.
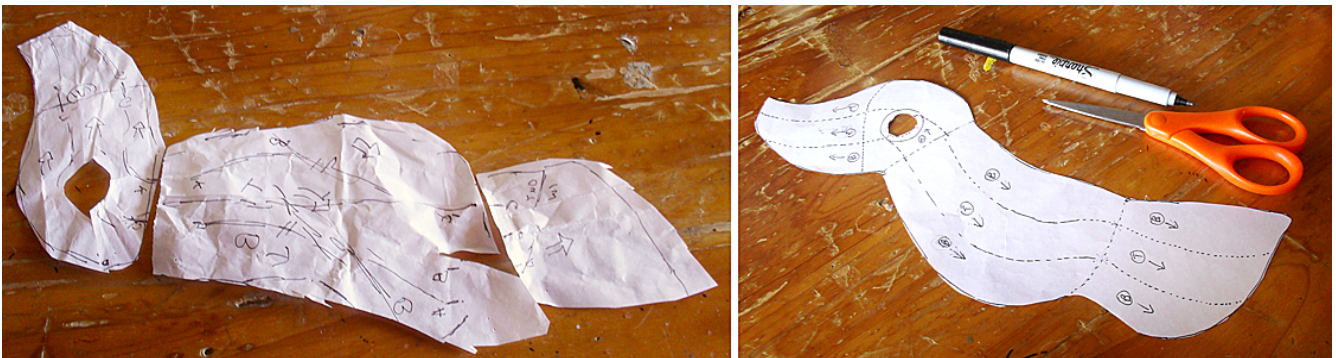
The mane and forelock were undercut to reduce bulk. I also didn't bother to continue the stripes on the underside of the mane because it could hardly be seen.

I lightly stuffed the finished mane with Cluster Fluff (tm), a high-loft polyester fiberfill, to give it some volume. A spiky, poofy or otherwise bulky mane should be stuffed. A flatter, hanging mane won't need stuffing.

You can add a small muslin bag of plastic "beanie" beads or decorator's sand to the tip of a tail to weight it, which also helps compensate for the tendency of ponies to be front-heavy and tippy.

The mane is pinned in place and attached to the body of the plush with a ladder stitch. I recommend using a curved needle for this step, it makes getting around those odd, sharp angles on the head and neck much, much easier.
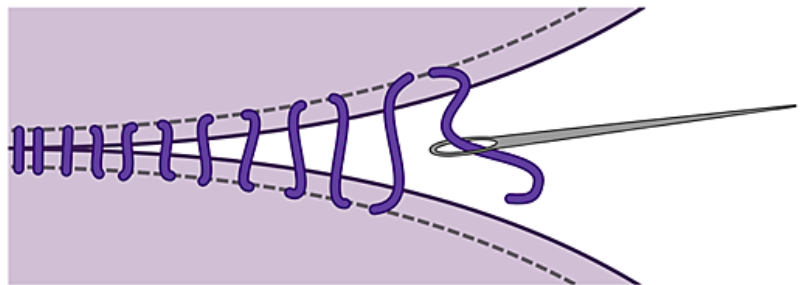
I would also advise going around the seam at the base of the tail twice, at the very least, to make sure it is firmly attached. For some reason people have a tendency to pick plushes up by their tails, and you don't want it to come off!

And here's the finished pony:

And that's all there is to it!
i hope these examples helped
inspire you to create!