

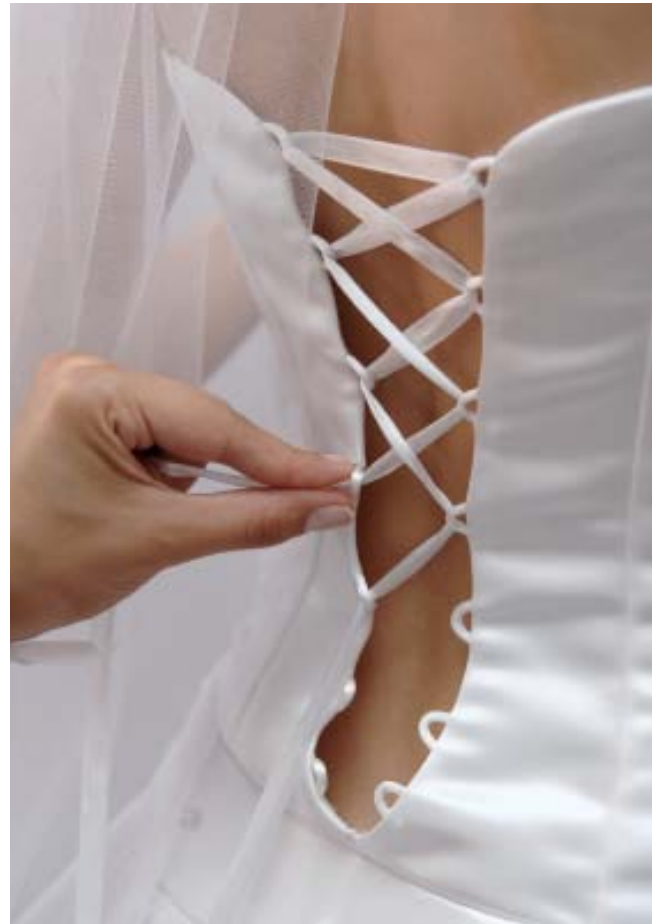


CHAMPION CLEANERS

"Because Quality Counts"

When planning a wedding, the dress is usually the centerpiece of the entire event. Despite the importance of getting the gown to look just right, many brides wait until the last minute to get it altered – and then feel panicked as the days inch closer and the dress isn't finished. Fortunately, we can accommodate extremely tight timelines! We've helped many brides look perfect on their day at the last minute – but even so, it's good to know what to expect and how to prevent getting into a tight situation.

The first two questions that a bride-to-be will ask will be about the length of time it will take for the alterations to be completed, and how much the alterations will cost. There are no straight answers to these questions, simply because each dress and each situation will be completely different. The answers depend on how extensive the alterations will be, and the following information should act as a guide to give women an idea of what to expect when bringing in the dress to be altered.



The Basics – Hemming

Even if the dress fits perfectly everywhere else, you'll likely need at least a hem job. Dress sizes are measured around the body, and the length comes longer than estimated proportions since height is such an unpredictable variable. It's much easier to take up the dress than to find corresponding material and put an extra layer at the bottom!

If the hem is done at the bottom of a simple dress with one layer around, it shouldn't take more than a couple of days – by anyone. However, we know that you might be in a pinch, dates and circumstances can change, or you've been out of town and had a million other things to do. We've completed hems overnight for many brides! Simple hems usually cost between \$40 and \$80, which is a ballpark figure for most places.

However, most bridal gowns don't have simple hems because these aren't simple dresses. There can be several layers of the gown itself, and then slips and crinolines may also need altered if the dress is being shortened considerably and these items were extra long. Just remember that the more complicated your dress is, the longer the alterations will take and the more expensive it will become. This is exceptionally true if there is a great deal of beading or other detail near the bottom.

In some cases, the dress may (key word, may) be taken up from the top of the skirt if the detail work is at the bottom. This would require the bodice and the skirt to be detached, shortened, and reattached at the bodice. Sometimes this works out great, but can only be used on certain dress styles and isn't a viable option for everyone. If the dress is heavily detailed, then this will have to be removed and re-stitched after the hemming is complete.



Tricky Territory – Bodice Alterations

Clearly, a hem is going to be an easy fix and a bodice is going to require more time, effort, and money, but not everyone realizes why.

Some dresses might have a completely plain bodice with no detailing and simple side seams. These can be altered without too much trouble, just like plain hems. Taking the seam in on the side just requires some careful cutting and re-stitching. Not something that can be done by a novice, but definitely something that shouldn't take too long for someone with a little skill and knowledge. What can be a little trickier are alterations that have to be done along the zipper. Although the bodice is usually altered along the seams, sometimes it isn't quite possible due to the design of the gown and the zipper will have to be removed and replaced.

Then there are those dresses that are covered in lace, beads, sequins, or pearls – and maybe all of them. It's totally understandable that you want some intricate detail on your dress, but consider the alterations that might be needed before you buy. We can't just take it in on one side, because the detailing and the neckline have to remain centered, not to mention the skirt. If the bodice needs to be taken in by a matter of inches and there's heavy detailing, some intensive work will need to be done.

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First, the seamstress will have to document the detail work and then remove it. The bodice will be altered in size according to the measurements, and then the detailing will have to be reapplied. The more extensive, the longer it will take and the more it will cost. Delicate work like this can't be rushed, even by someone who has done such work for decades. If you're determined to have the dress and willing to shell out to make it work, then we can and will accommodate you in every way possible. Just be prepared to have it take longer than regular alterations.

The bustline is a little different than the bodice. Sometimes the cup size will have to be adjusted while the rest of the bodice can remain intact. There's usually no way to change the neckline altogether, like changing it from a bateau neckline to a halter. However, straps can be added to a dress with a straight, strapless neckline without much difficulty (adding straps to a sweetheart neckline might look weird, but sleeves are always an option).

As a guideline, prepare to have at least \$150 budgeted for alterations if you need both a simple hem and the bodice taken in. Sleeve hems cost around \$50 depending on the decorations. The more decoration and detail we have to remove and reattach, the more it will cost.

Sleeves – to Have or Not to Have

Most brides go strapless or use spaghetti straps to hold things up and in place – especially young brides. The halter neckline is also extremely popular, and some may opt for the jewel neck (almost like a t-shirt line, normally without sleeves) or even the bateau. However, some women find it uncomfortable to show off their arms and shoulders and want to opt for sleeves. Although it's not a huge problem in the South where we're located in Birmingham, brides in northern locations might find it too chilly to go strapless in a winter wedding. There are many reasons to choose a dress with sleeves, and this must be taken into account when deciding about alterations as well.

Some sleeves will have buttons and detail on them that need to be removed and replaced during alterations. If the sleeves just need shortened, it's not as big of a deal – but if your arms are considerably smaller or larger around than the sleeves that came on the dress, you might be looking at some extensive work.

Ordering the Right Size

Before the dress is ordered, it's a great idea to let us see a picture of the dress and discuss sizing – if, of course, you have the luxury of time to plan ahead. Many brides feel like shops coerce them into ordering a size that's way too big and then charge them an exorbitant amount for alterations. While that may be true of some places, we're actually going to make sure that you get an appropriate size. If you don't have time to discuss it with us, here are a few tips for ordering the correct gown size:

- Look at the designer's sizing chart. Sizes can vary widely among designers, so it's important to know what the exact designer of your gown deems to be your size.
- If the gown you want isn't available in a sample anywhere near your size, try to find gowns of a similar cut and shape close to your size to get an idea of what looks the best and where any problem areas might be. If possible, find another gown by the same designer to try on. Even
- Get measured by someone who knows what they're doing! Someone in a gown shop should be able to whip out a measuring tape and get your numbers in no time flat.
- Try on dresses with different types of undergarments to figure out which option is the best. You might be able to go completely braless. You might want a corset. Maybe cup inserts will suffice. Need Spanx? There are a ton of different options, and some dresses require specific items while others might be worn with any of these options. It's better to know or at least have a direction as you're trying things on.
- Swallow your pride. No size is "perfect." Everyone is made differently and so is every gown. If you need to order a size bigger to accommodate your hips and the waist is loose and flapping in the wind, it's not a big deal. If you're used to wearing an 10 in clothes and you have to order a 16 in the dress, don't feel bad. You're not competing against anyone else or an "ideal" imaginary person. It's going to be your day, and you'll look amazing – especially if you're confident!

When to Order the Dress

If you have a long engagement planned, don't run out and order the dress two years in advance. While a long engagement might seem like the perfect opportunity to plan ahead and have everything taken care of, it also sucks out most of the fun! In addition, things can change so much over the course of a long engagement and women are notorious for changing their minds that any excessive preparation might be moot. Styles change rapidly, and if you choose a dress too long in advance you'll inevitably find something else that you like before the wedding. Some women that plan ahead too far end up with multiple dresses, and you only need one!



Don't start looking for a dress before around 10 months prior to the wedding. This might even seem a little early (and some engagements aren't even that long!), but it will give you more of an idea about what's out there and what you like. Depending on the designer and the shop that you're ordering from, it could take a few months to get the dress in or just a few weeks. Once you've narrowed down your choices, keep in touch with the shop and know their delivery estimates – then give yourself an extra week or two for breathing room if at all possible. We'd suggest ordering the dress about 4 months in advance if you can. The best part about this is that you'll have more time to pay on it. Most places will allow payments, and these can be made while the dress is getting made. Some brides are determined enough to budget and save money before ordering the dress, but extra expenses pop up all the time! It's easier to go ahead and turn the money over to the dress shop when you have it...before it burns a hole in your pocket and goes elsewhere!

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Of course, if you don't have the money available to order the dress right away, have to move up the wedding to get your venue, can't make up your mind, or a million other things that can crop up and cause a delay, you might have to ask for a rush job. Some places are happy to accommodate you, but there might be an extra charge. If there's a delay and you had planned to use the shop's seamstress for alterations, they might jack up the alteration prices for a rush job, even if it's not your fault that the dress didn't come in on time. They know you'll be desperate to get it done.

If you're close to Birmingham, Alabama, we can totally help you out! We'll do rush jobs with a smile, as quickly as possible, and without charging exorbitant prices. While it's better to be prepared to avoid the stress of running around to fix every detail all at once, many brides come to us in a panic without realizing that we can get things done and in plenty of time for the big day. This brings us to...

How Long Will the Alterations Take?

The above information should lead you to realize that the answer has a ton of variables! Most places tell you to give at least 6-8 weeks for alterations. However, we specialize in accommodating brides with tight schedules, so even if you need extensive alterations and don't have this amount of time, we'll work with you. If you're planning ahead, though, here are some general time frames to keep in mind.

A simple hem should take about a week, but if you're pressed for time we can usually complete them in a couple of days. A more complex hem for dresses with several layers or linings that also need to be hemmed might take a couple weeks. If the dress has heavy detailing, expect 4 weeks for us to get it just right, although we'll certainly call you if it's done faster! Taking up the dress from the top of the skirt varies in time.

Bodice alterations with little to no detail need a couple of weeks to be completed. If you need the whole thing taken in and the bust reshaped, prepare for at least 3 weeks. Once detail is added, though, it could take up to 6-8 weeks – or even longer if there is a huge amount of detail that needs to be removed and replaced. Adding on or removing straps is a cinch and can be done during the hemming time without a problem, but strap adjustments are often combined with other bodice adjustments. Use this information as a guideline when structuring your wedding planning schedule, but feel free to bring us a picture or even the dress to get a more personal plan. It never hurts to be over prepared!

Fittings – How many and how often?

Many brides wonder how many times they need to come in for fittings. If you have a time crunch, we're going to need you to be as available as possible. We understand that you'll probably be juggling work, family pressures and a ton of other wedding plans. However, we'll work with you as much as we can to provide a flexible schedule that works with everything else you're doing!

Before we start any of your alterations, you'll have to come in as soon as you can after you get the dress. We'll get everything measured and pinned and get to work. If you're one of the lucky brides that just needs a hem, and even if you're unlucky enough to need it done in a couple of days, we'll get you back in as soon as possible and make sure everything is as it should be.

If your dress requires bodice work, be prepared for at least three fittings and definitely more for extensive work. We'll measure and pin, and then get to work. Because these steps are so touchy and cutting it too small is the worst possible outcome, we'll want you to try it on again before the process goes to far. Most of the time, we can loosen and sew at the original seams on the sides or the back and it might not be that difficult. However, sometimes the dress is made in such a way that we have to alter at the zipper. As you'd expect, cutting out and then replacing the zipper is considerably more work than altering from the existing seams.

The same thing goes for heavy detail and beading. Before we make alterations to the bodice itself the detailing must be removed, and we won't put it back on until the dress fits you to a T! We're in this business because we love to help our brides look their best on the special day, but we understandably want to avoid any unnecessary work. After all, we have other brides to attend to. Even more importantly, too much fiddling with the fabric and beading could weaken and damage it – and no one wants that!



Can't Find the Exact Dress You Want?

Be Creative!

Sometimes when ordering a dress, especially at the last minute, you'll run into snags. Maybe the shop can't get the dress in time, or the one you really wanted has been discontinued in your size. You found the perfect dress, but it's about four sizes too large and has a ton of detail, and you're worried about getting the alterations done in time.

Although we alter existing dresses rather than make them from scratch, there's so much that we can do that you might never have considered. If you want your dress covered in detail but the size of what you find needs drastically changed, consider buying a dress with a similar style in your size (or closer to it) but with no detailing. Then you can bring us the dress and a picture or design of what you want. Even if you're not entirely sure of what can be done in the timeframe you want, we can work with you to figure out an option. We've seen all types of decoration on gowns, and this is a chance for you to exercise creativity without worrying about the bulk of the gown.

Although it has been tradition for brides to wear white and only white, modern trends are beginning to include deep, bold colors in the form of sashes or even entire skirt overlays. These are a great way to incorporate some flair to your wedding, but some brides aren't ready to buck tradition so obviously.

However, there's a great deal that can be done to add some color and flair to the dress without going overboard. For example, we can use colored beads, sequins and lace to cover the skirt and bodice to coordinate with your wedding colors – or even use another complementary color. We'll help you come up with an option that's unique yet still something that you'll feel comfortable in on your special day.

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Many brides who have previously been married or are having a smaller ceremony choose simpler dresses rather than the extravagant bridal gowns that come to mind when someone thinks of a wedding. These dresses are usually light in color and feel, and still offer a bit of a girly air. You can usually find something appropriate at any nice dress shop, but we can still help you alter the dress in size and style.

We realize that the advice and options offered here are extremely general, but hopefully you now have some idea of how your budget and timeline will fit with our alterations abilities. The most important message that we want to convey is that we are flexible and will do anything that we possibly can to assist you in getting your dress perfect for the day. Bring us what you have, and we'll make it all workable as quickly as possible and without charging you exorbitant amounts and creating more stress. It's not a sales pitch for our services – it's the truth because we care about our brides!