

Shoe guide about the jungle of shoe sizes and the endless trouble of not finding the perfect shoe.

Andre Gerdes





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## 1. Introduction

This book has been written for all of you, who are asking themselves

### **“Why my shoes don’t fit?”**

My name is Andre Gerdes and I’m a professional shoe- and leather technician from Germany, Managing Director of Andre Gerdes Leathers Pvt. Ltd., with more than two decades of experience.



While working with shoes for such a long time, I’ve realized, that there is a lot of confusions when it comes to shoe sizes and fittings.

The Internet and magazines are full with the latest shoe trends and fashions. On the other side, valid information’s about shoe fittings are much more difficult to find.

Wrong-fitted shoes can cause serious damages to your feet and I’m not talking here about just wearing high heels, which you might enjoy wearing for few hours at a party or for a concert, I’m talking about none-fitting shoes, which we are wearing on daily use.

We are walking in shoes, which are too small, wide, short or long - you name it. Now why is that? There are two main reasons for it.

First, the shoe industry is not giving us enough product information about the shoes. They are providing us with some information about the material with a sticker inside the shoe, it looks like this one:



The label above means, that the upper material is leather, the lining is leather and the sole is synthetic. These are only very basic information's provided to us.

The industry tells us nothing about the kind of leather been used. Is it a kid-, sheep- or cow-leather, etc.? In my opinion, the only information "its leather or it's synthetic", is not sufficient. I like to know, if I'm buying a pig skin leather shoe or some plastic and it's getting worse, when it comes to shoe sizes.

Do you have any idea what a shoe-size means? Let's say, you think, that you have a shoe-size "8". Now first of all, "8" in US is different to "8" in the UK. You might be aware of that coincidence already, but what does a size "8" stands for? Does it mean this shoe is 8 inch long or your feet should be 8 inch long to get the perfect fitting for this shoe? Sorry, "none of that" is the correct answer.

Sometimes you'll find information's for the shoe-width on the internet, but most of the times it's not even stamped into the shoe, more often you'll be able to detect the shoe-width on the shoe box. Why is shoe-sizes or shoe-width named after numbers and characters, which are making no sense to the customer?

This little book is trying to bring in some light to the darkness of this numbering jungle.

Another reason is, why so many of us having trouble to find a pair of suitable shoes, because we are having too little knowledge about our own two feet. Do you know how long your feet are? Did you know that almost 70 % of adults are not having identical feet and that your foot measurements are changing while aging? Don't worry, we are not doing an examination for every bone off your foot, but you should discover for yourself a few things about *your own* foot and we need to clarify some differences with the common shoe sizing systems.

It took me quite some time to write this little book, actually much more, than I have expected. Still, I feel it's far away from being perfect and I had to decide, how much information goes in and what has to be left out. May be in future, I will upgrade the book by adding more stuff into it.

Finally, I like to mention, that this book is not a guide for shoe-making or shoe-designing.

I hope, you'll enjoy the reading and find the answer to the question:

**"Why my shoes don't fit?"**

Best wishes  
Andre Gerdes

## Shoe fitting – Why my shoes don't fit? (Part 1)

"Why my shoes don't fit?" Why is shoe fitting not so easy like to choose a small, medium, large or extra-large shoe?



Why so many people having trouble with their shoes? I'm a shoe-technician and listening very often these questions. "My size is 8 and the shoe doesn't fit, so I go for 8 1/2 and it's not really better and if I take than a size 9 my foot slips out of the shoe".

I will try to explain why you have trouble to find the best footwear for you and why a proper shoe fitting is important. After these articles, you should have a better idea how to choose your shoes in future!

Let's get started: *Why my shoes don't fit?* It's not so easy to answer, because there are many reasons for it. Almost everybody believes that shoe fitting has to do with the shoe sizes and the shoe length. Well, yes of course it has also to do with shoe sizes, but not only and certainly it has not really much to do with the actual length of the shoe, except if you might you have picked up a size 6 instead of a 9 size, in this case it's obvious why your shoe can't fit.

"It's not the length?" I haven't said that, length is important, but the length of the shoes isn't - in most cases, look like these:

*Fig. 34 shows the shoe of the unfortunate Duke Montgomery, a victim of the relentless animosity of Richelieu. It is of black leather, with a large red heel, and entirely covered with ornaments; tradition says it was gathered on the scaffold. Fig. 35 represents a highly ornamented lady's shoe of this period. Awhile Fig. 36 is a shoe worn during the Regency. The heel is very high and not unlike a barber's wig-stand; the front, however, is rather graceful in shape*



Let's try to look at it from a different view. How would you describe to an alien: "*what is a shoe?*"

Most of us would start like ... *a shoe is something which has to protect your feet...*A good start, but than your shoes might look like this:



Industry, safety boot with steel-toe-cap and steel-midplate. We have developed this boot a few years back and sold it also quite well, but I'm doubt full, that we are looking here for these!

So, it's not about protection alone and it's not about shoe length, than what makes it a great fit for you?

If we would like to understand and solve our footwear problems for once and all, we need to look a little bit deeper into two important subjects:

1. *What really is a shoe (and what not!) and how shoes are actually developed*
2. *What type of foot do you have?*

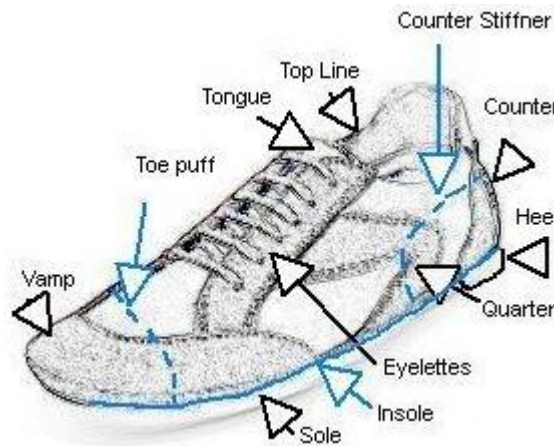
In this book you find some valid information's and introductions. This article series is for ***everyone***, easy to understand and will hopefully give you a good feeling for quality and fashionable shoes, as well it will help you to understand your own foot better, which is very important for you to avoid serious diseases like bunions or Morton-toe.



## Shoe components - Why my shoes don't fit? (Part 2)

In the first part of "**Why my shoes don't fit**", we've discussed, that if we want to understand our footwear problems we require some better ideas of *what is a shoe* and how it is related to our foot. Before we start our foot observations, we'll have a look on the important parts of a shoe – the shoe components.

Have a look at the picture, which shows the most important shoe components. The blue color shoe components are not visible from outside. You really don't need to study them; it's just for your reference.



Of course, you'll make a good impression in a shoe store, if you talk like "I don't like the decoration stitching in the quarter", instead of "...the stitching on the side" or "the vamp seems to be rather short looking" instead "the front of the shoe looks..." - sometimes the sales guys are not having a simple job to do.

Now, let's continue with the question, **what is a shoe**? Easy, we simply google for "Shoe", check with Wikipedia and getting following explanation for us:

*"A shoe is an item of footwear intended to protect and comfort the human foot while doing various activities. Shoes are also used as an item of decoration. The design of shoes has varied enormously through time and from culture to culture, with appearance originally being tied to function. Additionally fashion has often dictated many design elements, such as whether shoes have very high heels or flat ones...etc."*

That's my be really interesting for our alien, but certainly it has no meaning to us, because the only answer for what a shoe is and not what it is doing or looking like, is this:

**A shoe is an item, using different shoe components, where the upper part is lasted (pulled) over a shoe last and a sole is attached/stitched to it.**

Point, that's it. Was not that complicated, isn't It.?

Okay, we have not spoken about a shoe last yet, but no problem, this is how a shoe last looks like.



Now what a shoe last is and why it has such an important role for shoe making we will leave for the next part.

## Shoe last - Why my shoes don't fit? (Part 3)

In Part 2 of this series, we have concluded that a shoe is an item, where the upper part is lasted (pulled) over a shoe last and a sole is attached/stitched to it.



It seems, that there is lot of importance for a shoe last in shoe making, so let's try it again and google for shoe last, we go again to Wikipedia and let's see what comes up this time:

*"A last is a form in the approximate shape of a human foot, used by shoemakers and cordwainers in the manufacture and repair of shoes. Lasts typically come in pairs, and throughout their history have been made from many materials, including hardwoods, cast iron, and, more recently, high density plastics...etc."*

Not bad, at least better than the shoe explanation, except for "Lasts typically come in pairs", well explained, we need a right and a left one! Okay, let's come over this, but what is here of more importance to us is this:

"...a form in the approximate shape of a human foot..."

Now if we look at our picture above, can you see the approximate shape of a human foot? With lots of fantasy may be, anyhow the description "approximate" is quite stretch-able like 10%, 40% or 80% looks like a human foot - sounds a bit strange to me.

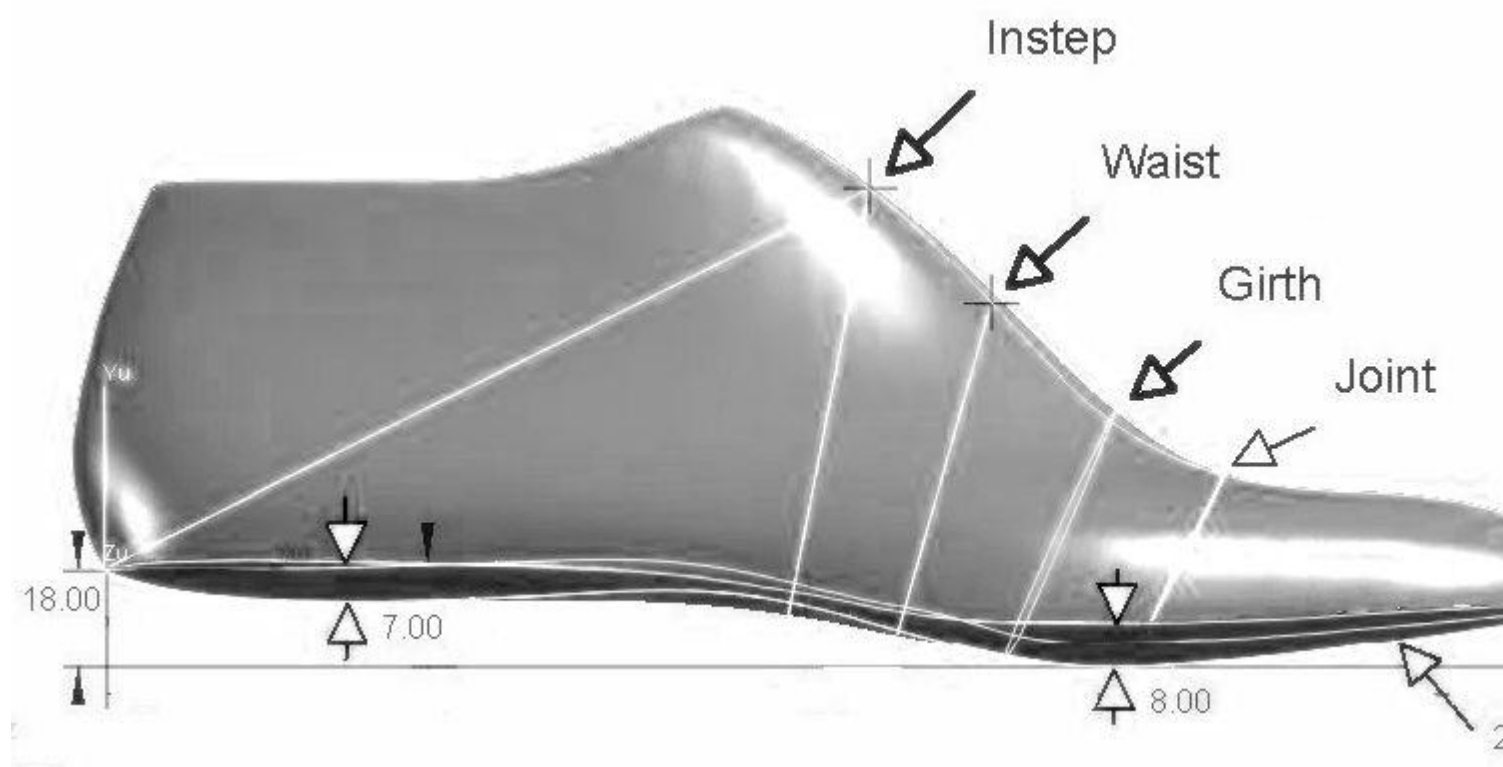
I prefer this definition for shoe last:

**A shoe last is an item, which gives a shoe its shape, form and represents certain measurements of a human foot.**

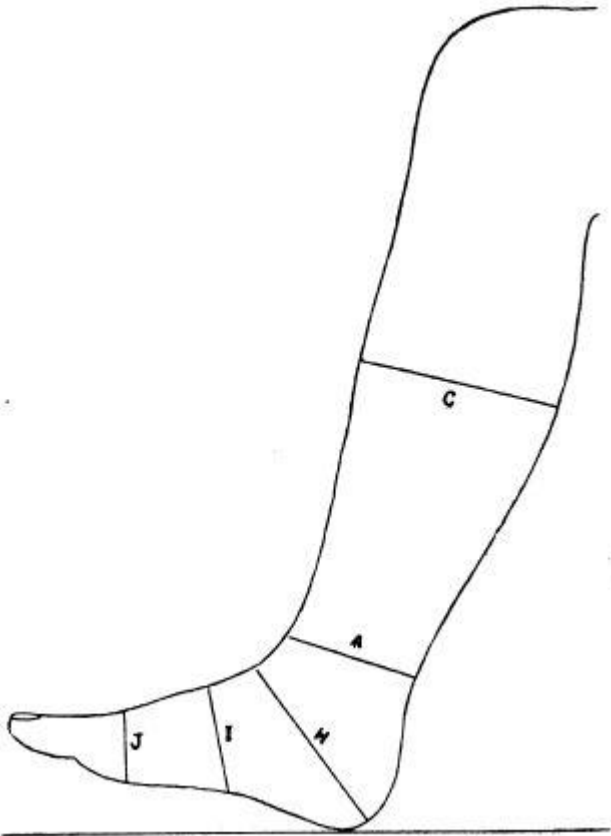
This means, if the measurement points from the last, which have been used for your shoe, don't represent the same measurements like from your foot, your shoe won't fit.

Now, if this sounds a bit strange to you, may be you just have in mind that so far nobody from your favorite brand hasn't spoken to you about your feet keep on reading, we come to this later. Fact is, if the measurement points are not representing your foot, the shoe can't fit.

To make this a little bit simpler, let's have a look at this picture:



Three points on top of the last have to represent the measurement from your feet. This three points are called: 1.) Instep 2.) Waist and 3.) Joint; and here they are on your foot:



J = Joint Measurement, I = Waist Measurement and H = Instep Measurement (you can call it also short Heel). For completion of this picture A = Ankle- and C = Calf Measurements, which are important for boots only and we are leaving at site for now.

**These three points, *Instep, Waist and Joint* have to be identical on your foot *and* from the shoe last.**

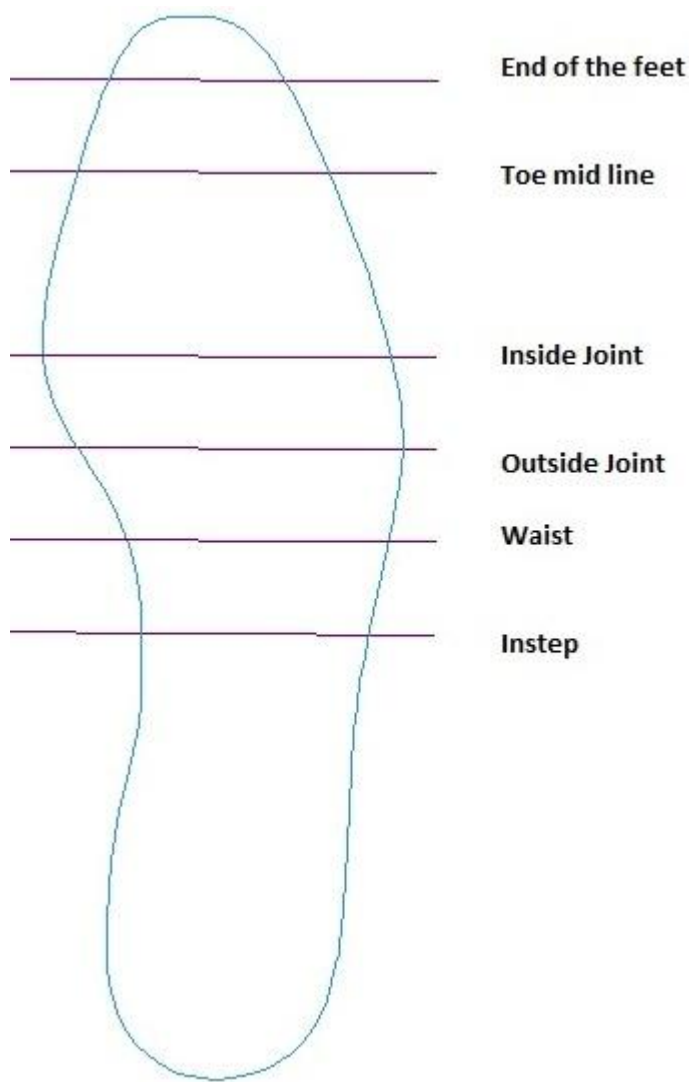
Now there is something more to come and that is the bottom of the last which represents the surface of your foot on the insole of your shoe.

## Shoe Insole - Why my shoes don't fit? (Part 4)

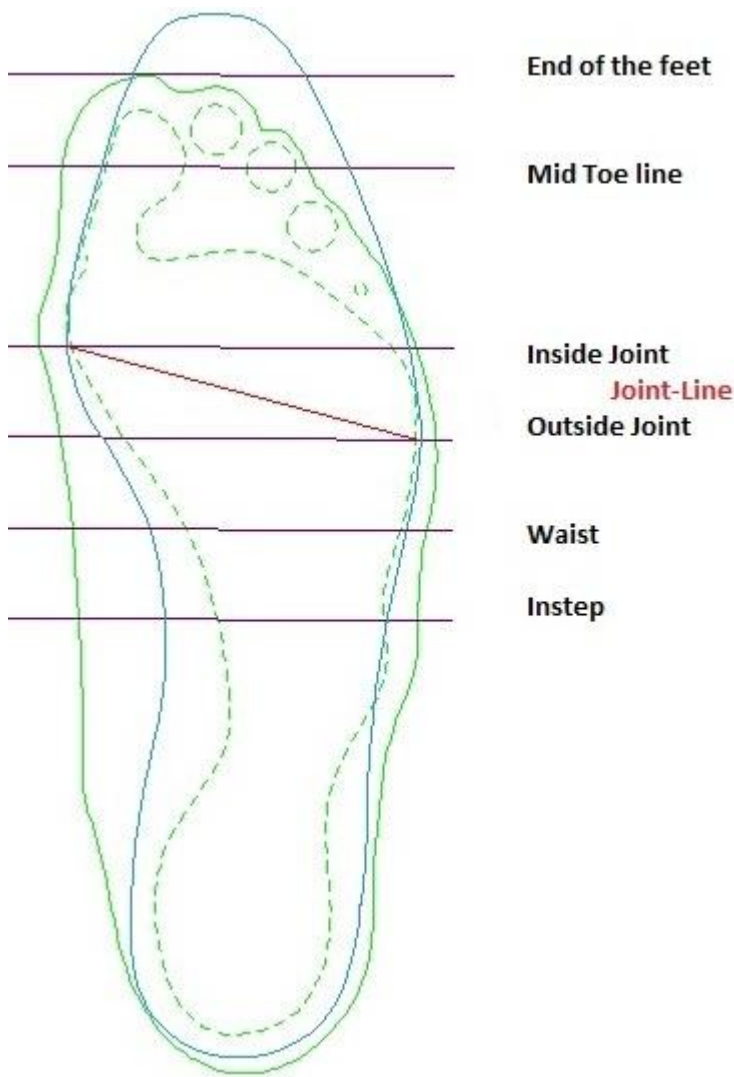
### The shoe insole must represent certain points on the foot surface.

In the previous part, we have learned that the shoe last has to represent three certain measurement points - **joint, waist and instep** - from your foot, only than a shoe can comfortably fit on your foot.

These three points are representing parts of the **volume** from your foot, but the shoe insole is presenting the **width** and **length** of your feet. Let's have a close look to the bottom profile of the shoe last.



The blue line is our shoe insole and the vertical purple lines are representing important points of the insole. Before I'll explain this, let's put some spice into this theory; let's have a look at the next picture below, we are adding here our foot profile as well.



For our right foot we have taken the outer line (in green) and the foot surface of our foot (dotted line) and I have inserted another line in red, the **joint-line**. I don't want to be too technical at this point, like why is been done something and how? Still we can do some simple observations.

First, if you remember in the first part of the series, I have told you, that the actual length of the shoe is not really important for the fitting and here you can see why.

On every shoe last some extra allowance is been added on the toe. How much, that depends on the style and design of the shoe - in this case it's almost 25 mm. The minimum allowance to a shoe should be at least 10 mm. Now, lets asume this shoe would have only a toe allowance of 10 mm, the toe shape would look certainly different, but the shoe would still fit. **But, if your foot is too long or too short, than all the important lines of the insole profile would lie on the wrong positions and will not match with your foot** - the shoe can't fit under any circumstances.

Let's have a look at the inside and outside joints of the foot. (For clarification, these are the big bones on our foot, just behind the toes. In this picture the outside joint is not so prominent, don't mind it. ) The outside line of the foot is of no concern to us here, but it's the inside line, the surface of the foot (the dotted line), which matters here most.

As you can see, the insole (blue line) is touching the joints exactly, inside and outside, demonstrated by the new line I have added, the joint-line. Now this is very important for our shoe fitting.

**The joint-line must connect the inside and outside joints of our foot.**

If the joint-line would be too long and the joints would be outside of the insole, it would compress our foot into the shoe. On the other hand, would the joint-line be too short and wouldn't touch the insole, the foot would slip forwards and the toes would bend for grip, which would give a very uncomfortable feeling while walking.

Finally, let's have a look at the mid- toe- line. It's very crucial for a comfortable shoe fit, that the big toe is located *inside* of the insole. The reason for this is, while walking, you are pressing your weight to the front surface of your foot and the big toe will bend to the *outside* by an average of 3-4 mm - with high heels even more. If there is no space in the shoe for the big toe to expand, it will get compressed to the inside of the shoe and this again will cause lots of stress for the foot.

In our picture above, I'm not too happy with the insole shape; it should leave some more extra room for the big toe.

Waist and instep are important measurements too, but we are leaving them here out of the discussion for a moment. Only so much, they need to fit your shoe as well, if you feel any pressure or the shoe is loose at these points, please don't go for it - it's not meant to be yours!



## Foot problems - Why my shoes don't fit? (Part 5)

Shoe fitting is also about protecting your foot skeleton from harm and long term damages. Fashion is fashion, but wrongly fitted shoes are a serious long term danger and cause foot problems.

In the previous article "Why my shoes don't fit? (Part 4)", we have concluded, that for a perfect shoe fitting, the shoe last has to match at certain mecherment points with our foot skeleton.

*Your shoes are fitting, if the width of the joints (which are the widest part of your foot) and the volume of the shoe last, which includedes instep, waist and short heel, are identical to your foot skeleton. The shoe last length has not such an importance; it just has to provide enough room and space for the toes, but one shoe size up or down in length is not that important to the shoe fitting like it would have for the shoe width.*

We have discussed lots about shoes and shoe lasts, it's time to have a closer look at our foot.

1. Everybody walks an average of about 70 million steps in his life
2. The foot is the most complex bone structure in our body.
3. The foot skeleton is arranged by 26 bones alone
4. With about 70% adults, the left and right foot skeleton is showing mayor differences
5. With 30% the second toe is longer than the big toe
6. And the most growing business of the shoe industry, in the last decade, is the orthopedic sector

You can find thousands of shoe care tips in the Internet, but hardly anybody cares about shoe fitting and the consequences could be disastrous food problems.

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