

Cowl Neck Top- Day 3

All that's left is inserting the sleeves and a bit of hemming.

Soooo....what did you decide for sleeve treatment? No sleeves, short sleeves, long sleeves?

No sleeve option

There are a number of options available but let's stick with the two described on Day 1 - faced or bound. You should choose the same method used to finish your back neck edge. Consistency!

Measure your armhole circumference and then subtract 10% to determine the length of your facing/binding. For example, if your armhole measures 20" (50 cm), cut a strip of fabric 18" (45 cm) long .

Divide your armhole into quarters and mark each quarter with a pin or erasable marking pen.

Note: In the illustration the armhole is already finished with a facing. Oops! - forgot to take a picture before finishing, but you get the idea.

Join the ends of the facing/binding strip in a 1/4 inch (6 mm) seam. You now have a circular strip. Divide into quarters and mark as you did for the armhole. Now pin the strip to the armhole matching the pins. You will need to stretch the facing slightly to fit each section. This ensures that the armhole sits snugly and does not gape. Stitch and finish as per the back neck edge.



Tip!

If your pattern was designed for sleeves you should consider cutting the armhole a little bit larger. Lower it slightly at the underarm seam (approximately 1/2 inch or 1.2 cm) and take off about the same amount at the shoulder seam. Of course, you can cut it out more if you want to expose more of the shoulder.

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A *anatomy of a sleeve*

Before cutting and sewing, it helps to understand the anatomy of a sleeve.

Capline - Line drawn from one side to the other at the underarm (also known as the bicep line)

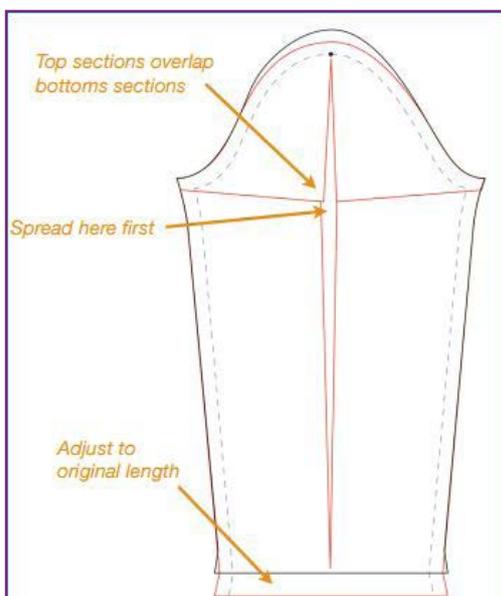
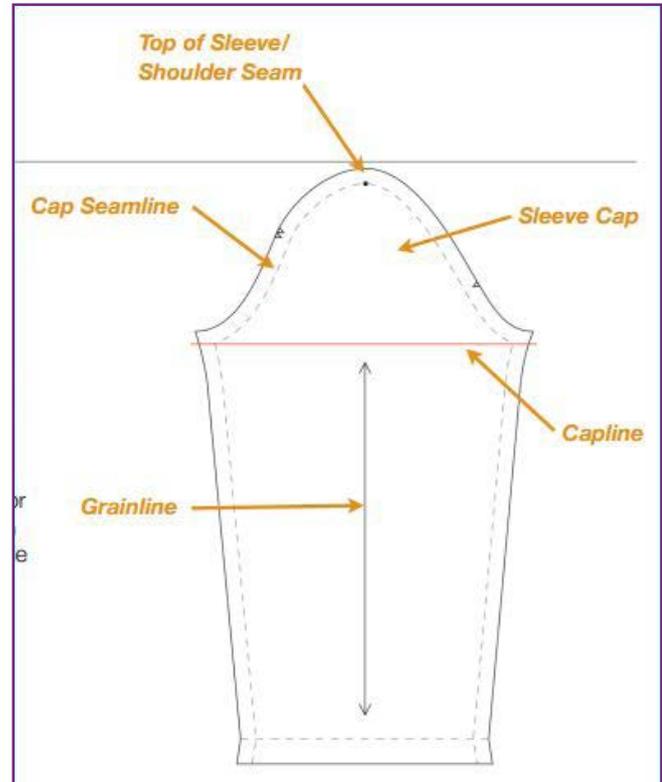
Sleeve Cap - Sleeve section above the capline ranging in height from 8" for a set-in sleeve to 2" or less for a dropped shoulder sleeve. The cap width should measure your arm girth plus ease.

Cap Seamline - Stitching line from front underarm to top of cap and back down to underarm.

Sleeve Grainline - Placed perpendicular to the capline extending from top of sleeve to the hem.

BEFORE YOU CUT OUT YOUR SLEEVE it's a good idea to do a bit of measuring, particularly if your arm girth is large. Yes, your knit fabric will stretch but you may still need to adjust your sleeve to ensure a comfortable fit.

Place the tape measure under the arm and measure the upper arm circumference. When measuring for a sleeve made from a non-stretch fabric, measure over a hand that is inserted under the tape. This adds the appropriate ease for most sleeves. For stretch fabrics don't insert the hand.



To adjust the pattern for your arm girth:

- Draw a vertical line through the sleeve center. Draw a horizontal line perpendicular to the vertical line between the top corners of the underarm seam.
- Cut along these lines up to, but not through, the outer edges, leaving a hinge at the four edges.
- Pull the pattern apart the desired amount of increase and tape in place. Allow the upper sections to overlap the lower ones, forming a diamond shape in the center of the sleeve. Tape in place.



Make any necessary pattern adjustments and then cut out your sleeves.

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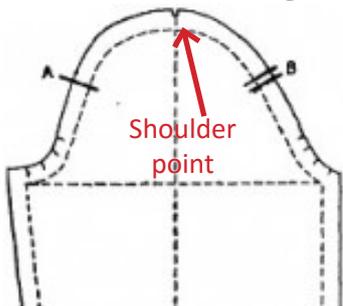
Inserting sleeves

Inserting sleeves in a knit garment is, in my opinion, a whole lot easier than in a garment from woven fabric. Easing in the extra fullness in the sleeve is a breeze when your fabric stretches. You have two methods to choose from - 'on the flat' or 'in the round'. Let's start with the easiest one.

On the flat

Attaching a sleeve on the flat works well for stretch patterns as there is generally less shaping in the sleeve cap. The sleeves are attached to the garment **before** sewing the side seams together.

Make sure you match your front and back notches on the sleeve to the corresponding notches in the armhole. There is a difference between the front of the sleeve and the back. Generally patterns will have a single notch in the front and a double notch in the back. The distance from the shoulder point to the underarm seam is greater in the back than in the front. Sewing your sleeve in back to front will result in a poor fit and a very uncomfortable sleeve.



Begin by matching the sleeve shoulder point to the shoulder seam of your top, **right** sides together (1)



Pin the sleeve to the garment and sew together (2)
Finish the seams using one of the methods described in your previous set of instructions. Press the seams toward the sleeve.

This is what your garment will look like after both sleeves have been attached (3)



Sew side seams and sleeve underarm seams, matching at the underarm (4). Finish this seam using your preferred method.

Tip!

Different seams may call for different seam finishes. It's OK to use more than one method in the same garment.

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In the round

Inserting a sleeve in the round is a bit trickier but still relatively easy with a stretch fabric. As with the flat insertion method, mark your front and back notches and shoulder point on the sleeve cap.

If you have not already sewn your side seams, now is the time to do this. Also sew the sleeve underarm seams and finish the edges.

Pin your sleeve in place:

- To start, match the sleeve seam to the side seam of the garment and pin.
- Match the top of the sleeve to the shoulder seam and pin.
- Place pins to match the single and double notches.



This technique of rolling the fabric over your finger automatically builds in the necessary ease



Placing four pins to start is all you need before beginning the easing process.

Pin with ease:

- Starting at the top of the sleeve (shoulder) and working on the sleeve side, place your finger under the fabric about 1.5 cm (5/8") to one side of the top pin.
- Roll the seam allowance over our finger and place a pin through both layers of fabric, straddling the stitching line.
- Continue down one side of the sleeve to the side seam, pinning about every 1.5 cm (5/8").
- Start at the top again and pin the remaining side.

Note the illustration above shows ease stitching on the sleeve cap (the purple line of stitching). Ease stitching is not really necessary when working with stretch fabrics.

Sew sleeve to garment:

Although most pattern instructions will tell you to sew with the garment on the underside, I prefer to work the other way with the sleeve underneath, against the feed dogs. This helps to ease the extra fullness of the sleeve cap into the armhole. Stitch slowly and carefully, removing pins as you go.

Finish your seams appropriately.

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Coverstitch hems

Nearly done! Just a bit of hemming and your gorgeous top will be finished. Hem stitching needs to incorporate plenty of stretch as your hems are going **around** your body. If you experience popping and breaking of stitches it's most likely to be in the hems.

The lucky people with coverstitch machines probably want to choose this option. This is the hem of choice for most ready-to-wear knit garments. A coverstitch displays as two parallel rows of stitching on the right side and an overlock type stitch on the wrong side. It is a very elastic stitch so is ideal for knit fabrics.

I'm not going to give you a lesson on how to do a coverstitch. If you own a coverstitch machine, or an overlocker that converts to coverstitch, you have hopefully already mastered this. (Is this the appropriate time to gloat about my Babylock Ovation?)

For the less fortunate, here are a few other hemming options.



Twin needle hemming

A twin needle hem is the 'poor man's' coverstitch but not to be sneered at. It is an excellent hem for knit fabrics. You've already seen the twin needle in action for the double-track seam so you know about the zig zag stitch on the wrong side. This allows the fabric to stretch with the body without breaking the stitches.



Pin the hem up to the desired length. Ideally you should stitch the hem so that the needles stitch on either side of the cut edge, as illustrated by the red dotted lines. This encases the raw edge and neatly finishes the hem.

The problem is that you need to do your stitching on the right side of the garment which means this is easier said than done. So let's be realistic and make life a bit easier. Stitch a bit closer to the folded edge, so that both needles fall in the hem allowance. Then trim away the excess fabric on the wrong side. If you don't like to cheat, by all means have a go at achieving perfection and let me know if you are successful.



If you find the top threads keep breaking, try threading the left needle as normal but bypass the tension discs when threading the right needle.



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Overlock stitch for hems

Remember the sewing machine stitches that doubled as overlock stitches? We talked about them when discussing options for side seams (Day 2 of this Sew-Along). Guess what?! - my favourite stitch also works very nicely as a hemming stitch, particularly when you use matching thread. Being a very elastic stitch it will stretch around your body with no thread breakage. Same deal as the twin needle stitching - enclose the raw edge on the wrong side if you can, otherwise stitch closer to the folded edge and then trim away the excess fabric.



I suggest you try a few hemming methods on scraps of fabric and decide which one you like best. Then tackle your top - you just need to hem the sleeves and the bottom.

Tip!

*It's a bit easier to hem sleeves **before** inserting them into your garment, as long as you know exactly what length they should be. For the sake of keeping the flow, in this sew-along we have left hemming until the end.*

Finished! I hope you enjoy wearing your cowl neck top. Be sure to post pictures to Facebook or email to sewalong@aussew.org.au.