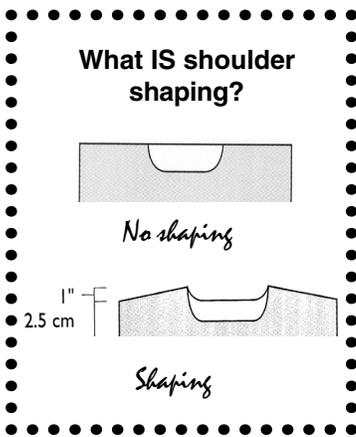


Shaped Shoulders in the Round!

One frustrating aspect of classic Fair Isle-type sweaters and vests is that the shoulders are square, that is, they are not shaped and therefore form a straight line. Although such designs look fantastic on muscular, athletic men and hang well on a dowel, these shoulders tend to flare out like wings or stand away from the body when worn by those with more slope to the shoulder. Even worse, they contribute to the problem of the back of the sweater hiking up. They also add more material to the “drop” of the drop shoulder, adding bulk under the arm.



Unfortunately, the only ways I knew of to shape the shoulders involved purling in color pattern, “knitting back backwards” in color pattern, or abandoning the color pattern altogether and shaping the shoulder in a single color. None of these appealed to me.

But I woke up one morning with a brainstorm—why not use “short rows in the round” to create shoulder shaping without having to knit back in color pattern?? And it worked!

The Concept

You will be knitting in an ever-decreasing spiral up to the neck.

Planning Your Shoulder Slope

1. First off, decide how much rise you want from where your arm meets your shoulder to where your neck rises from your shoulder. A 3/4-inch to 1-inch rise is pretty standard.
2. Measure the rows per inch you’ve been getting.
3. Multiply the rows per inch by the rise you want to determine the number of short rows you need. Add 1 to this number.
4. Count the number of stitches you have allotted for the shoulder (that is, the number of stitches between the armhole steek and the neck steek).
5. Now divide the shoulder stitch count (Step 4) by the number of short rows you need plus 1 (Step 3). This tells you the number of stitches to leave behind in each short row. If this is an even number, great. If not, read the sidebar. This number will be referred to as “X.”

Sometimes it helps to graph this out!

What to do if you don’t end up with an even number!

If your numbers aren’t so neat, all is not lost. Simple paper-and-pencil math will give you the answer. Let’s say you have 41 shoulder stitches and you want an 8-row rise.

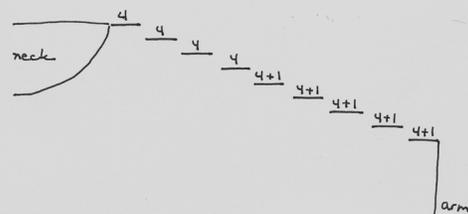
First, add 1 to 8 to find the number you need for calculations. Then, divide 41 by 9.

$$\begin{array}{r} 4 \\ 9 \overline{) 41} \\ \underline{36} \\ 5 \end{array}$$

number to reduce each round
plus
additional stitches

This tells us that we need to make short rows at 4-stitch intervals, adding an additional 5 stitches somewhere. I like to make rise of the angle sharper closer to the neck, so I put the additional stitches near the arm opening.

In this case I would work my short rows by leaving behind stitches in the following pattern:



Now for the Knitting

First, break off 2 × 16-inch pieces of non-fuzzy yarn that is about the same size as the yarn you are knitting with (hereafter referred to as “string”). Put your darning needle where you can reach it. You will also need another circular needle, the same size you’ve been working with, that is at least 24” long, or else a set of double-pointed needles. Find a period of quiet time so you can concentrate. Settle in.

Before beginning shaping: If you choose to do so, on your final round before beginning the shoulder slope cast off the armhole steek stitches. I prefer to bind them off with the shoulder stitches.

Round 1: Starting at the center front (where you no doubt have a neck steek in place), knit in pattern to within X stitches (remember X? See Step 5) of the shoulder edge. Put X stitches on a string (inflexible stitch holders just won’t work here). Put the steek stitches on the same string. Then put X stitches from the back on the string.

Now here’s the trick: Just knit the next available stitch (that is, the next stitch that is not held on a string), which will be a stitch from the garment back. In other words,

your active yarn will skip over the stitches on the string. Snug this up firmly. If you are familiar with Elizabeth Zimmermann’s kangaroo pouch steek, you will see how this is similar.



Making the first short row

Now knit in pattern across the back; when the second color is needed, just bring it across from the front and snug it up firmly. Repeat at the other armhole. Continue to the center front.

There you have it! You have completed a “short row in the round.”

Rounds 2 through however many you need (see Step 3): Repeat the above short row in the round until you have reached the height you want and/or have run out of stitches.

Very quickly the reduced number of stitches will force you to adopt the two-circular-needle method of knitting a small circumference or else resort to double-pointed needles. I find that using two circular needles is the easier method in this technique because you can keep the back and the front separated logically. Instructions for the two-circular-needle method can be found in *Latvian Dreams* by Joyce Williams or in *Sweaters from Camp*, edited by Amy Detjen, Meg Swansen, and Joyce Williams, as well as in many other books

As you spiral around in smaller and smaller circles to the neck, the shortrows will seem to baste the shoulders together with sloppy lengths of yarn. That’s OK!

Joining the Shoulders



*Finished shoulder with
3-Needle 1-Cord Bind Off.*

The sloped shoulders are joined together the same way you would join flat shoulders. Stabilize and cut open the steeks. Put all the active back shoulder stitches (which are on the string) onto a needle and do the same with the front shoulder stitches. Then join them using your preferred method. Any possible distortion caused by the short rows can be smoothed out later by tugging at the offending stitches from the wrong side.

Using a decorative joining technique helps to hide the short-row distortion: 3-Needle Bind Off from the Outside and 3-Needle I-Cord Bind Off are my favorites. These techniques can be found in *Sweaters from Camp*.

I hope you find this technique useful!

If you want to reproduce this somewhere, please ask me first.

Enjoy your knitting!

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The first stitches to be set aside



*Shoulder from above. The
short row crossovers have
been stretched out so you
can see them.*