



## Nina's Sweater Class

Lessons 5 and 6: Working the Yoke--Shoulder and Neckline Shaping

The yoke is the most complicated part of a raglan sweater, but I think you'll find that if you take it slow and work carefully, it is not very hard at all! The trickiest thing is that the raglan decreases and neckline shaping will be worked at the same time, so once you join all the pieces, make sure to read through all of the instructions and do all of the calculations before you begin to work the rest of the yoke. This is also the most exciting part of the sweater--we are nearing the finish line and for the first time, you'll get to see your work really start to come together. Pun intended. Let's get started!

### Joining the body and sleeves

The first step is to join the body and sleeves of the sweater all onto one circular needle. It will feel ungainly at first, but don't worry--any seemingly tight or loose spots will block out, or be tightened up with thread during finishing. To begin, calculate the number of underarm stitches. This should be 5 to 8 percent of the total number of body stitches. I usually multiply the number of body stitches by 0.05 and then round up to the next even number. For larger sizes, multiply by 0.06 or 0.07 instead.

Total number of body sts on needle  $\times$  0.05 = \_\_\_\_\_  
Rounded up to the nearest even number = \_\_\_\_\_ (1)

There will be (1) stitches set aside for each underarm.

Make sure that your body sts are clearly marked at the halfway point, with half the stitches for the front of the body and half for the back (notes for cardigan adjustments are at the end of each section.)

This is one of those situations when I really love having interchangeable needles. All of my sweater pieces are resting on spare cables, and as I am ready to knit them, I just switch out the end caps for the tips. As you work this section, you may find that you need to pull your yarn very tightly between each piece in order to avoid loose stitches. Any loose stitches around the underarms can always be tightened up later during finishing. For extra stability, you may wish to twist the first st of each section around the last st of the sleeve just worked.

Begin with one of the sleeves. Slip the first half of the underarm stitches, or  $(1) \div 2$  sts onto a length of smooth waste yarn. I like to use cotton blends for this as they pose no risk of felting.

Knit across the remaining sleeve stitches until you have  $(1) \div 2$  sts left to be worked. Slide these sts onto the same length of waste yarn as the first set. You should have (1) sts on waste yarn from the sleeve and all other sleeve sts should have been worked.

Now, you will work stitches from the body. This will become the front of the sweater. Slip the first  $(1) \div 2$  body sts onto another length of waste yarn, place a marker, and with the same working yarn you used to knit the sleeve, work across the first half of the body sts, until there are  $(1) \div 2$  sts left before the marker at the halfway point. Slide these sts onto a 3<sup>rd</sup> length of smooth waste yarn, remove the marker, and slide the next  $(1) \div 2$  sts body sts (after the marker) onto the same length of waste yarn. There are now (1) sts on this length of waste yarn.

Now, you will work the sts of the remaining sleeve. Slip the first half of the underarm stitches, or  $(1) \div 2$  sts onto a length of smooth waste yarn. Place another marker, and knit across the remaining sleeve stitches until you have  $(1) \div 2$  sts left to be worked. Slide these sts onto the same length of waste yarn as the first set. You should have  $(1)$  sts on waste yarn from the sleeve and all other sleeve sts should have been worked.

Finally, you will work the remaining body sts. This will become the back of the sweater.

The first set of underarm sts are already on waste yarn, so place a marker and work across the rest of the body sts until  $(1) \div 2$  sts remain. Slide these sts onto the length of waste yarn that hold the first set of underarm sts from the body, and place a marker for the beginning of the round.

Notes for a cardigan: You will work the first half of the front body stitches, then work across the sleeve stitches as described above, then the back body, then the other sleeve, and then the front body. Place markers as indicated above every time you change from the body to the sleeve or vice versa, and work and shape the yoke as described in the next section.

The yoke will be shaped by decrease rounds, which each remove a multiple of 8 sts from the total yoke. The next section of this lesson will walk you through the calculations needed to work the correct number of decrease rounds.

### Decreasing to shape the shoulders

For this section of our calculations we will be working backwards. Begin with the value labeled K on your schematic—the width of the back neck. Multiply by S to find out how many stitches across the back neck of your sweater needs to be.

$$K \times S = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

And round this number to a whole number. It does not really matter if you round it up or down because you may be doing more rounding in the later steps. Essentially, round up if you'd rather your neckline be a bit looser than planned, down if you'd rather it be a bit snugger than planned, and accept that a few sts more or less than planned will not affect the fit of the neckline very drastically!

$$\text{Back neck stitches} = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}(2a)$$

Now, count the number of sts between the final 2 markers placed when you joined the yoke. These are the total number of stitches across the back of the sweater yoke. Do not include underarm stitches in this number.

$$\text{Back Stitches} = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}(3)$$

Now, subtract:

$$(3) - (2) = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

And round this to the nearest even number.  $\underline{\hspace{2cm}}$ (4) sts.

This is the number of sts necessary to decrease. Conveniently, it is also the number of rounds over which the decreases are worked! So highlight it if you need to, it is a very important number!

Do one more subtraction to find the actual number of back neck stitches:

$$(3) - (4) = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}(2b)$$

Use this value for the back neck sts for the rest of the pattern.

Now, let's look at the intended depth of the yoke. This is indicated by J on the schematic. Please note that J should be a vertical measurement, not a diagonal one as it appears on the original schematic. This measurement should be taken from the first row of the yoke (where the underarm seam is) straight up a column of stitches to the highest point of the back neck. Multiply J by R to find the height of your yoke:

$$J \times R = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

And of course, round this number to the nearest whole number. =           (5)

Subtract (4) from (5):

$$(5) - (4) = \underline{\hspace{2cm}} (6)$$

(6) is the number of rounds to work plain before starting your yoke shaping!

Once you have worked these plain rounds, you will decrease as follows:

Work one decrease round

Work one plain round

And repeat until you have worked (4) rounds total. If you decide you want to tighten your back neck a bit, you can always work one or two more decrease rounds at the end of the piece, too.

Even though I have been speaking in terms of rounds, you may actually be working flat at this point. If you are working a cardigan, you will be working flat, so make sure that your decrease row are the RS of the piece and the plain rows between them are on the wrong (purl) side. And even if you are working a pullover, once you have cast off and begun to shape the neckline, you will be working flat as well. If you are careful to work all shaping on knit rows and all plain rows as purl rows, though, this should not give you any difficulty.

Before we actually begin the yoke, we will discuss neckline shaping, which will be worked AT THE SAME TIME.

## Shaping the neckline

The easiest necklines are the square neck, scoop neck, and crew neck, and once these are understood, a v-neck is very easy to achieve as well. The basic principle of neckline construction is to eliminate the same number of sts that make up the back neck (2b) from the front of the garment. These are eliminating either by decreasing on either side on the center front (v-neck), by binding off (2b) sts across the center front and then working straight up from there to the end of the yoke (square neck), or by binding off most of the sts and the decreasing on either side of the BO until the proper number of sts have been eliminated (Crew and Scoop necks—the only difference between these is the depth and the width).

After last week's lesson, you should already have an idea of the type of neckline you want. Mark the center front of your sweater (if you are knitting a cardigan you are in luck because the center front is simply the end of your row) or, if you have an odd number of stitches, the center stitch. You will work the yoke until you reach the height at which you want the neckline to start (for a low v-neck, this might be the very first row of the yoke after joining, for a high

crewneck, this may be only an inch or two before finishing.) When you reach this point, do the following:

For a square neckline: BO the center (2b) sts across the front of the sweater on a plain round with no yoke shaping, knit plain to the end of the row. Continue to work the rest of the yoke (now flat instead of in the round) as determined in the last section to the end of the piece.

For a crew or scoop neck: BO the center (2b) – 8 stitches on a plain round with no yoke shaping, knit plain to the end of the row. On each subsequent RS row, decrease 1 st on either side of the BO sts until the remaining 8 sts have been eliminated. You may work paired or decorative decreases (k2tog on one side and ssk on the other) a few stitches in from the edge for a decorative finish. Continue to work the rest of the yoke (now flat instead of in the round) as determined in the last section to the end of the piece.

For a V-neck: If the number of sts to be eliminated (2b) is odd, BO the center st on a plain round with no yoke shaping, knit plain to the end of the row. If (2b) is even, mark the center front on a plain round with no yoke shaping, and after finishing a plain round with no decreases, continue in k to the marker, which is the new beginning and end of the row. Decrease one st on each side of the marker or the center st every rs row until (2b) sts have been decreased. For a wider neckline, you may work k3tog and sssk as the decreases—this will form a sweetheart-shaped neckline. When (2b) sts have been decreased, continue to work the rest of the yoke (now flat instead of in the round) as determined in the last section to the end of the piece.

Remember, you will be working the yoke and the neckline at the same time! Ready to give it a try?

Work (6) plain rounds as determined above. If you have already begun your neckline shaping, these will be rows not rounds, worked flat.

The yoke decrease round eliminates one stitch on each side of the 4 markers per round, for a total of 8 sts total. For a defined line of stitches running up the raglan “seam,” k2tog the 2 sts before each marker, and ssk the 2 sts after each marker. For fully fashioned seams with decreases that point into the seam, ssk the 2 sts before each marker and k2tog the 2 sts after each marker. Here’s an example decrease round that you may use if you are not sure which you prefer; it creates straight seams that are most commonly seen in seamless raglans:

\*ssk, k to 2 sts before next marker, k2tog, sl m, repeat from \* 4 times more. 8 sts decreased.

These instructions assume that you are still working your yoke in the round. If you are working a cardigan, or if you have already begun your neckline shaping, then you are now working flat. The instructions above, which will be worked on every knit row, will now read as follows:

\*K to 2 sts before m, k2tog, sl m, ssk, repeat from \* 4 times more, k to end, working neck shaping at the same time.

Remember, after the plain section of the yoke, you will work one decrease row, followed by one plain row, and repeat until (4) rows have been worked, working your chosen neckline **at the same time**. When you are done with this, BO all remaining stitches. If you are nervous about the fit, slide all the remaining sts onto waste yarn instead of binding off, and try the sweater on! This way it is easy to rip back to work any adjustments to the neckline. Don’t BO until you are happy with the fit of the yoke.

Next week we’ll have our final lesson, on the finishing touches that will complete your garment, and for our final class, we’ll get to do some show and tell! Enjoy!