

# BUILDING A SWEATER ON A KNITTING MACHINE

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## Which Piece First?

THERE are two approaches to knitting a sweater on the BOND, any other sweater machine, or even by hand. The first is to knit each of the 4 or 5 or 7 garment pieces and stack them neatly on a shelf. Later, when you have the time, you retrieve what is now a tangled, stringy pile of curly things and *finish* the sweater. To *finish* does not mean merely to complete. It means to tackle that frightening and socially significant process that makes the difference between "homemade" (others think you're cute to make your own clothes), and "designer" (they envy your creative flair for life). This approach is the one most often recommended in hand knitting patterns. Usually you are directed to start with the back, but that's just convention. The order in which you knit the pieces is irrelevant.

I prefer the second approach —Using Good Sense. It is the process of thinking through each step before you ever pick up a keyplate. Rather than leave the finishing until the end, you look for ways to join the pieces as you knit. If there is an edge that you cannot join as you go along, you prepare it the best way so that later it will gracefully join to another edge. You have the pleasure of watching a sweater grow in your hands instead of a pile of pieces grow in the closet. If you use good sense the order in which you knit the pieces becomes relevant.

## Using Good Sense

Because each sweater is different, there is no single set of rules to follow. However, you can try organizing projects this way:

1. Sketch the sweater pieces and look at each edge of each piece.
2. Analyze how the pieces go together. Look first at the shoulder seams, then how the sleeves are set in. In general, it's easiest to save the underarm/ sleeve seams for last.
3. Plan to make all shaped edges as clean as possible. Move increases and decreases in at least one stitch from any edge. Use short rows instead of stepped bind-offs. An edge without bumps and glitches is a joy to finish.
4. Decide which seams and edgings you'll do on the BOND. Should the edge be bound off or put on waste yarn? If it's a cardigan will you make the front bands as you go along or will you add them later?
5. Decide the order in which to build your sweater.

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## **Here's an Example**

### Plain Stockinette Drop Shoulder, Crew Neck for a Small Child

1. Begin by casting on with waste yarn for the back. Knit the back stopping only to place yarn markers at each side for the underarm. When finished, put each shoulder and the neck on separate sections of waste yarn.
2. Without removing the weighted hem, rehang and knit the lower ribbing. Bind off.
3. Cast on with waste yarn for the front. Again, place markers at each side at the underarm point. After removing the center neck stitches to waste yarn, knit each side separately to the shoulder and add waste yarn while you're there. Rehang and knit the bottom rib. Bind off.
4. Seam the left shoulder on the BOND.
5. Rehang the entire neck edge, wrong side facing you. I never worry about the number of stitches called for by the pattern. For a crew neck simply hang every stitch and the end two loops of every row around the opening. Knit some rows, convert to rib and bind off loosely.
6. Join the second shoulder seam on the BOND.
7. Put green cards behind the needles you need for the top of the sleeve. Rehang the sweater, wrong side facing you, from armhole marker to armhole marker. Begin knitting the sleeve. When you stop to change the keyplate and decrease for the cuff, find a spool of thread that contrasts in color to your yarn. Knit the first row of the cuff by running the thread through the carriage with the yarn. Knit the rest of the rib row. When you drop down to latch up, the thread marks your starting point. Convert to rib, bind off, pull out the thread.
8. Repeat for second sleeve and your result is a piece of knitting that has only three seams (one is about 1 inch long) to be sewn to become a sweater.

### **Variation:**

All-Over Lace, Drop Shoulder, Crew Neck for an Adult. (Differs slightly from the above example.)

1. After transfer-tooling yourself into a stupor, you find yourself at the top of the back where you will put one shoulder on waste yarn. Put the other shoulder and

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neck stitches on another section of waste yarn. After completing the front, rehang the back neck and shoulder stitches and seam the first shoulder on the BOND. Bind off the seam and neck edge in one long sweep. You want a firm bind off here to support the weight of the sleeves. Little kids, on the other hand, wail in protest unless the necks of their sweaters are elastic enough to slide comfortably over their sweet, **disproportionately** large heads.

**2. Problem:** The sleeves look better knitted from the cuff up because of the lace pattern (true of color and **textured** patterns as well). But I don't want to sew the sleeves to the sweater by hand.

**Solution:** Knit the sleeve from the bottom up, put it on your garter bar and set aside. Take care to keep weight on the stitches so that they stay put on the garter bar. If you don't have a garter bar you can add 5 or 6 rows of waste yarn instead.

Rehang the **armhole** edge (the shoulder is already seamed) on the BOND, right side facing you. Push behind the latches. Transfer the sleeve back to the BOND, wrong side facing you, leaving the stitches in front of the latches. If you used waste yarn to hold the stitches, unravel it now. Close the latches over the stitches and push the needle butts back so that the sleeve stitches get pulled through the sweater edge. Back stitch bind off.

### Confidence Game

To use Good Sense you must ignore a pattern's bad advice and embrace the good. Experiment with techniques. You need to make some mistakes to find out what works best for you. Ask two questions of each step you take: Will this look good? Is there an easier way to do it?

Finally, before starting a project, put a **Keyplate** over your heart and recite the Lazy Knitter's Creed: "I vow to make the best looking sweater I can with the least amount of wasted effort." Then, believe you can do it.