

Short-Rows: The Sequel

Véronik Avery

Short-rows, also called partial rows or turning rows, are simply rows of knitting that extend across only some of the stitches, hence, the term “short” row. The technique is simple—work across part of a row, turn the needles around, and work back across the stitches just worked. There will be two more rows of knitting along the stitches that were worked in the partial row than in the other stitches. Many knitwear designers rely on this method of selectively adding length (i.e., rows) to certain areas of knitting to maximize their shaping options. In the Winter 2004 issue of *Interweave Knits* (pages 96–98), Véronik Avery outlined the basic mechanics of short-rows and detailed ways to hide the inevitable holes that appear at the turning points. In this issue, we’ll describe the most common ways that short-rows are used in basic knitting patterns. The following examples use the wrap-and-turn short-row method (see box below).

Wrap-and-Turn Method

Knit side facing

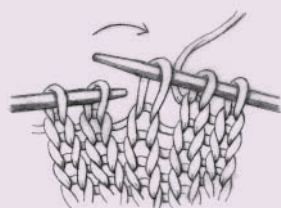


Figure 1

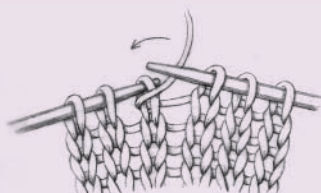


Figure 2

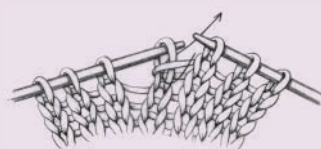


Figure 3

Knit side facing: Knit the required number of stitches to the turning point, slip the next stitch purlwise to the right needle (Figure 1), bring the yarn to the front between the needles, return the slipped stitch to the left needle (Figure 2), bring the working yarn to the back between the needles, and turn the work so that the purl side is facing—one stitch has been wrapped and the yarn is correctly positioned to purl the next stitch. Eventually, you will knit across the wrapped stitch—maybe on the next row or maybe several short-rows later. When you do, hide the wrap (the horizontal bar of yarn across the wrapped stitch) on a knit row as follows: knit to the wrapped stitch, insert the tip of the right needle into both wrap and the wrapped stitch (Figure 3), and knit them together. This forces the turning yarn (the “wrap”) to the back (wrong-side) of the fabric.

Purl side facing: Purl to the turning point, slip the next stitch purlwise to the right needle, bring the yarn to the back of the work (Figure 1), return the slipped stitch to the left needle, bring the yarn to the front between the needles (Figure 2), then turn the work so that the knit side is facing—one stitch has been wrapped and the yarn is correctly positioned to knit the next stitch.

To hide the wrap on a subsequent purl row, work to the wrapped stitch, use the tip of the right needle to pick up the turning yarn from the back, place it on the left needle (Figure 3), then purl it together with the wrapped stitch.

Purl side facing

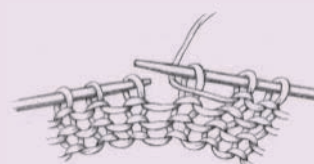


Figure 1

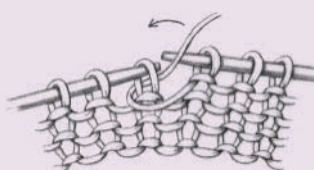


Figure 2

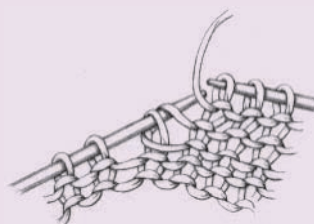


Figure 3

Before beginning, you should be familiar with a few terms. The **turning point** is the place where the knitting changes direction between one row and the next (much like making a U-turn when driving). Unless you do something to prevent it, a hole will form at the turning point. The **turning yarn** (also called the **wrap**) is the small section of working yarn that marks the turn-

ing point. The turning yarn is used to hide or mask the hole on a subsequent row. The **stitch mount** is the direction that the stitches lie on the needle. For the purposes of this article, we’ll assume that the “correct” stitch mount has the right (leading) leg of the stitch on the front of the needle.

Replace Stepped Bind-Offs

Any shaping that is worked by binding off a certain number of stitches at the beginning of successive rows tends to produce a sloped edge that resembles a set of stair steps (Figure 1), and it can be difficult to join this stair-step edge with a smooth seam. Short-rows can be substituted for just about every type of stepped bind-off to create a smooth, even edge. When shoulder shaping is worked with short-rows instead of bind-offs, all of the stitches remain “live” on the needle until the shaping is finished, so a three-needle bind-off (see Glossary, page 136) can be used to join the front and back shoulders together.

Shape shoulders: Let’s say you’re knitting a stockinette stitch sweater with back shoulder instructions that say to bind off 4 stitches at the beginning of the next 6 rows. Instead of binding off any stitches, work 6 short-rows as follows: On the last row (this will usually be a wrong-side row) before you would have worked the first bind off, purl to the last 4 stitches. Wrap the next stitch, turn the work (leaving the last 4 stitches unworked at the end of the needle), then knit to the last 4 stitches at the opposite end of the needle. Wrap the next stitch, turn the work again, and purl to the last 8 stitches (4 stitches + 4 stitches remain unworked). Wrap and turn, and knit to the last 8 stitches. Wrap and turn again, and purl to the last 12 stitches (4 stitches + 4 stitches + 4 stitches remain unworked). Wrap and turn again, and knit to the last 12 stitches. There will be three groups of stitches at each edge of the knitting, separated by the turning points (Figure 2; part of the right back shoulder is shown; short-rows are shaded). To complete the shaping, wrap and turn one last time and purl to the end of the row, closing the gaps (i.e., hiding the wraps) as you come to them by lifting the turning yarn (the wrap) onto the needle and purling it together with the wrapped stitch. Turn the work and knit across all the stitches, closing the remaining gaps (Figure 3). All of the stitches will still be live, but the center stitches will have been worked for more rows than the stitches on the edges, thereby creating the same slant or slope that would have been achieved by binding off three 4-stitch groups at each shoulder. You can bind off the stitches on the next row if you plan to sew your shoulder seams (as shown in Figure 4), or place the back shoulder stitches on a holder until you can use the three-needle technique to join the live stitches to the corresponding live stitches of the front shoulders.

This technique can also be used in the same way for the stepped bind-offs used to shape necks and sleeve caps.

Add Length to Particular Area

Sometimes it’s helpful to add some rows, and length, to a particular part of the knitting. The most common applications for this type of short-row is when you want to raise the back neck of a sweater that’s worked in the round, or to increase the height of a shawl collar gradually.

Raise the back neck of a sweater worked in the round: Sweaters worked in the round often have the same number of rows in the neck area of both the front and back, and therefore the neck is just as high in the front as it is in the back. Look at a schematic for most any of the sweaters in this issue and you’ll see that for

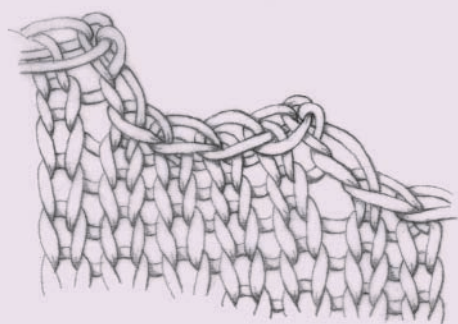


Figure 1

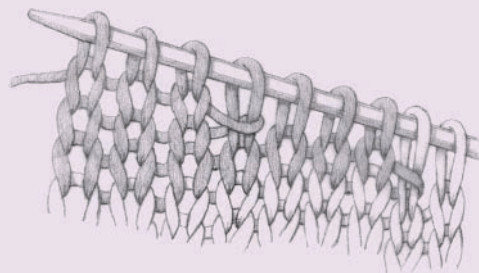


Figure 2

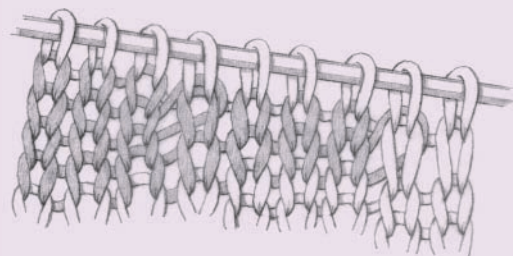


Figure 3

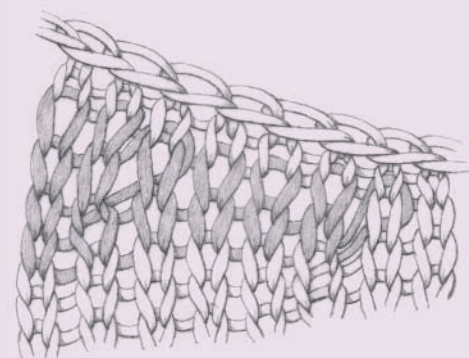


Figure 4

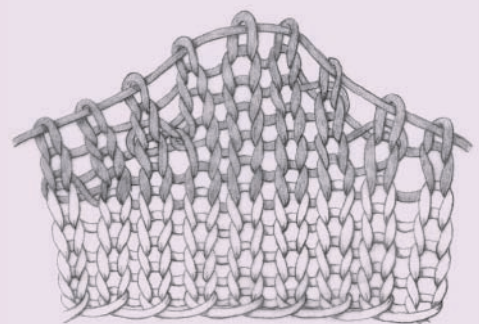


Figure 5

an adult, the front neck is shaped to be about 2½" to 3" (6.5 to 7.5 cm) lower than the back. To get a similar fit in sweaters worked in the round, use short-rows to selectively add height to the back, which creates the same effect as lowering the front neck.

To raise the back neck with short-rows, knit across the back to the left shoulder line, wrap the next stitch, turn the work around, and purl to the right shoulder line. Wrap the next stitch, *turn, knit to about 1" (2.5 cm) before the previous wrapped stitch, wrap the next stitch, turn, purl to about 1" (2.5 cm) before the previous wrapped stitch, and wrap the next stitch; repeat from * as many times as needed to add the desired length to the back neck, then turn the work a final time, and knit all the way to the end of the round, hiding the wraps as you come to them. Knit another round across all stitches, hiding the remaining wraps as you come to them. Figure 5 shows the effect of short-rows worked in this manner—there are progressively more rows in the center part of the knitting than at the edges.

Shape a shawl collar: A shawl collar follows the same idea as raising the back neck. Begin a shawl collar by picking up and knitting stitches around the entire neck opening, beginning and ending at the center front; use a circular needle to fit around the curve of the neck opening. Do not join into a round. Work back and forth in rows, working the pattern stitch for the collar (usually a single or double rib) to the first shoulder, across the back neck, and to the other shoulder. Wrap the next stitch, turn the work, and work back to the opposite shoulder. *Wrap the next stitch, turn the work, and work to one or two stitches beyond

the previous wrapped stitch (hiding the wrap when you come to it). Repeat from * until all the picked-up stitches of the collar have been worked. Work the next row across all of the stitches, hiding the wraps as you come to them. Work a few more rows, if desired, then bind off all of the stitches. The collar will be several inches high in the back and taper to just a few rows in the front (Figure 6).

Create a Pouch

In most cases, the bulk and stretch of knitted fabric make it impractical to sew darts or gussets. Fortunately, short-rows can be used to get the same effect.

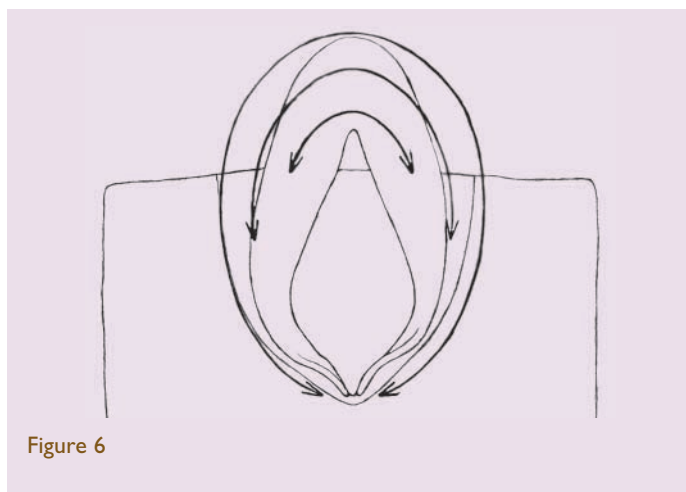


Figure 6

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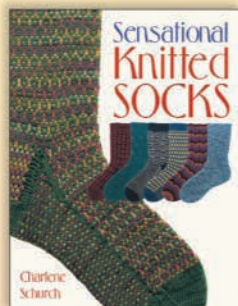


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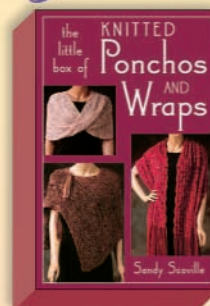
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Add bust ease: In sewing patterns, extra fabric is allotted to the bust area by sewing darts, which in effect take away fabric below (or above) the bust. Knitting works the opposite way by adding extra fabric in the bust area, but the result is the same: more fabric (a “pouch”) at the bust where it is needed, and less fabric above or below the bust where it isn’t.

The number and length of short-rows to work will depend on your gauge and the amount of bust shaping you want to add. In general, work until the sweater front measures about 1" or 2" (2.5 or 5 cm) below the beginning of the armhole shaping. Starting with a right-side row, work short-rows across the center front as follows: Knit about three-quarters of the way across the row (in line with where the center of your right breast would be), wrap the next stitch, turn the work, and work to about one-quarter of the way from the end of the row (in line with where the center of your left breast would be), wrap the next stitch, and turn the work. Work a few more short-rows back and forth, working about 1" (2.5 cm) of stitches beyond the previous wrapped stitch (hide the wrap when you come to it), wrapping the next stitch, and turning the work to work in the opposite direction. Then reverse the shaping by wrapping and turning when you are about 1" (2.5 cm) of stitches before the previous wrapped stitch, for the same number of short-rows as worked previously. (For a less exaggerated pouch, work a couple of regular rows—working from selvedge to selvedge—between the short-rows.) The result will be additional rows (length) in the center of the piece (Figure 7).

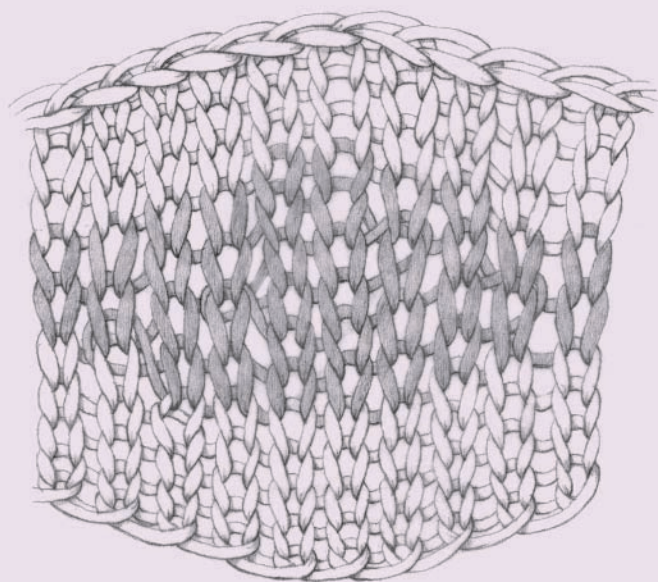


Figure 7



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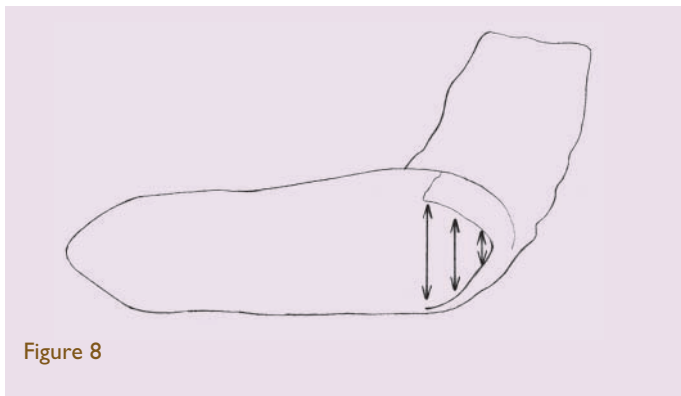


Figure 8

Shape sock heels: Through the ages, knitters have used ingenious and decorative ways to shape the heels on socks. In almost all cases, short-rows are used to form the “cup” that hugs the heel on socks worked in the round. The short-rows typically begin at the center of the heel stitches, and are worked back and forth, adding 1 or 2 stitches at each turning point, until all of the heel stitches have been used. Mona Schmidt’s Embossed Leaves Socks (shown on page 96) have heels shaped by short-rows (Figure 8).

Shape a Curved Edge

You can also use short-rows to create triangular wedges, like slices of pie, that can cause a straight piece of knitting to curve into a circle. In this case, extra rows are added at one selvage without adding rows to the other, so that the longer edge curves around.

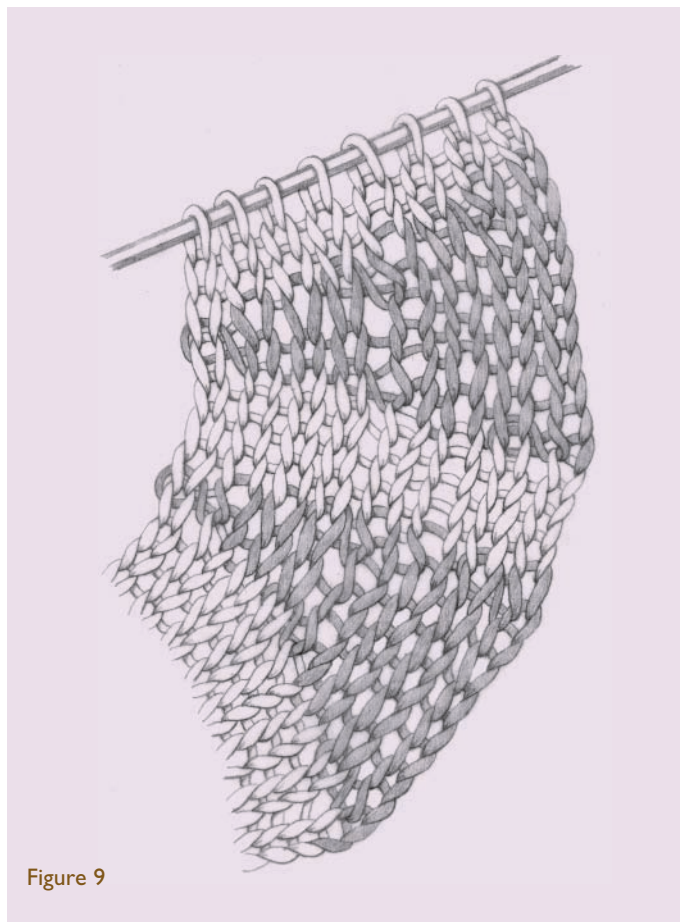


Figure 9

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Shape a hat top: For a hat top that is worked in rows, a series of staggered short-rows are worked to form wedge shapes (triangles) that extend from the center of the crown to the outer edge (Figure 9). For example, at the beginning of a right-side row, work across a few of the stitches, wrap the next stitch, turn the work around, and work to the end of the row. *On the next row, work to a few stitches beyond the previous wrap (hide the wrap when you come to it), turn the work around, and work to the end of the row. Repeat from * until there are only a few stitches remaining before the other selvedge. Then, work the short-rows in the reverse sequence, wrapping and turning a few stitches before the previous wrapped stitch each time. See Erica Alexander's Wedge Hats on page 86 for an example.

Add flair to a skirt: Think of a skirt as a large hat top and you'll get the idea of how to use short-rows to add flair to the lower edge. Depending on how often and how long you make the short-row wedges, the skirt can have a gentle flair or discrete gores.

Cataloging every use for short-rows just isn't possible, as the possibilities appear to be endless. However, the books listed under "Further Reading" are a good start to find more information. Visit our website at www.interweaveknits.com for an ingenious Short-Row Hat that shows some additional techniques. Experiment on your own and you might soon see ways to add short-rows to everything you knit. ∞

Further Reading

Stanley, Montse. *Knitter's Handbook: Reader's Digest*, 1993. Discusses a great variety of techniques and applications, both the commonly encountered and the more esoteric such as gathers and sculptured knitting.

Gibson-Roberts, Priscilla A. *Simple Socks—Plain and Fancy*, Cedaredge, Colorado: Nomad Press, 2001. Delightful collection of pattern formulas for socks with short-rowed toes and heels, as well as a treasure trove of techniques.

Buss, Katharina. *Big Book of Knitting*. New York: Sterling Publishing, 1999. Translated from German, this book features clear photographs of the yarnover and slipped-stitch short-row methods.

Zimmermann, Elizabeth. *Knitting Workshop*. Pittsville, Wisconsin: Schoolhouse Press, 1981. A must-have book that includes seamless sweaters that incorporate short-rows.

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