



by Robin Melanson

By now, intrepid knitter, you are quite confident in picking up your dropped stitches, correcting your stitching errors, and conquering the subtle art of perfection. You have mastered the microcosm of the world of errors. Your garment is perfectly knitted; no mistake has been made that has not also been unmade. What's left to learn?

At some point (it happens to the best of us) you will stitch a garment that, despite careful attention, presents a flaw: the sleeves are too long, the ribbing flips up because it was worked too loosely, the body is too short, or the yoke pattern is not correctly centered. How are you going to fix these things without beginning again? How will you keep this garment off the tragic (and expensive) pile of Things That Must Not Be Worn?

Let us explore....

The Long and Short of It

Sometimes sleeves simply aren't the right length. There are causes to this all-too-common problem. Perhaps your row gauge was off, or the yarn stretched after washing (you did wash your swatch, right?), or you knit the sleeves to the length specified, but that length differed from the length of your arms. Maybe you miscalculated while working your increases, and worked too many or too few rows in between.

The easiest way to correct this problem is to re-knit the cuff. You can either knit it from the bottom up and graft it on, or cut off the existing cuff and work a new one downward from the live stitches of the sleeve. If the sleeves were worked from the top down a length issue is unlikely, but you may have the bigger problem of a sleeve cap or upper arm that doesn't fit correctly. But I digress; back to fixing the cuff. This first option works well if the sleeve fits well in other areas of the arm and you don't mind the cuff being a different length than you had originally planned. Bonus—it will work regardless of the stitch pattern used. If you have a cable with a many-row repeat, adjusting the cuff length will not interfere with your sleeve patterning.

If your sleeve is worked flat, cut the seam yarn at the cuff join, and pull out the seam about 2 inches above and below the cuff join (figure 1). If it is worked in the round, you do not have to prepare it in any special way, but you will want to use circular needles with short tips (such as a 16" length) when weaving in the finer needles as described below.



Figure 1: Pull out the seam above and below cuff join.

To work from the bottom up, cast on for a new cuff, and work to the adjusted length. Line up your cuff with the lower edge of the sleeve (leaving the old cuff on for now), and cut a long strand of working yarn. Use this to graft the new cuff to the first row of the sleeve (after the cuff) using Kitchener stitch (figure 2). After the new cuff is attached, cut the last row of the old cuff in the center of the row and carefully unpick it to remove the old cuff (figures 3 and 4).



Figure 2: Graft the new cuff to the lower sleeve, on top of original cuff.



Figure 3: Cut the last row of the old cuff in the center of the row.



Figure 4: Carefully unpick the yarn to remove the old cuff.

To work a new cuff downward from the cuff join, start with the sleeve upside down and weave a needle smaller than the one used for the original stitching through the first row of stitches (figure 5).



Since this is upside down in relation to the direction in which the sleeve was knit, it will work best if the main sleeve was worked in stockinette stitch, otherwise the stitches will be noticeably offset by half a stitch. Cut the old cuff off before proceeding (figure 6). This will make it easier to see if the stitches were not been mounted correctly and make it easier to fix them. Don't forget to change to the correct needle size! Rejoin the yarn and work your cuff to the desired length (figure 7).



Figure 6: Cut off the old cuff.



Figure 7: Work the cuff downward from the live sleeve stitches.

If you are happy with the length of the cuff, and want to adjust the sleeve length at some other point, the method of working is similar.

- If adding length: Weave a fine needle through the row below where you wish to adjust the length, and a second fine needle in the row above, leaving one row between the needles (figure 8). You will cut and unravel the row in between. Do this between increase rows, so that you will not later have to graft together two differing numbers of stitches.



Figure 8: Weave in a second needle one row above the original needle.

- If removing length: Weave a fine needle through the row below where you wish to adjust the length, and a second fine needle above that (figure 9). The distance between the needles is the length you will remove. If you need to take out so much length that you will run into increases when you graft the sides together again, graft two stitches to one stitch at the beginning and end of the row, so that it will be easier to hide it in the seam.



Figure 9: Weave a fine needle through the row below where you wish to adjust the length, and a second fine needle above that.

If the fabric is stockinette stitch, you can just add or subtract as much length you like. If the fabric is patterned, you may be constrained to add a specific multiple of row repeats in order to get the pattern to line up. Try to arrange it so that the grafting can be done on a plain knit row, because this is much easier to work. If you must graft in pattern, here is a trick that will make things easier: find the matching pattern row one (or several) repeats below, and weave a brightly-colored piece of yarn through it (following the knitted row) so that you can easily see the path the yarn needs to take to joined the row above to the row below (figure 10). Remember that the grafted row will count as one row. If you are adding length in increments of six-row pattern repeats, work the last repeat as five rows; the grafted row will be the sixth row.



Figure 10: Weave a length of brightly colored, contrasting yarn through the pattern row to indicate the path that the grafting must take.

If the sleeves are too tight as well as too short, you can fix them by inserting the length at the upper arm level after the increases, thereby moving all the increases downwards so that the sleeve gets wider quicker, and then continues at the same width. (Note that you can't make the overall sleeve width larger by doing this; you will change the proportion only.)

We've discussed sleeves only, but all of these techniques can be used to alter other parts of the garment.

- If you need to adjust the body length, a good place to do it on a garment with waist shaping is in the center between the last waist decrease and the first bust increase. Undo the side seams and add or subtract the same number of rows on both front and back.
- If the garment is straight from the hem to the armhole, you can either adjust the trim or ribbing length by making a new ribbing and grafting it on (this also works well if you just plain old don't like

the existing trim), or cutting apart the trim and the main fabric and adding or subtracting length from either piece. Remember that if you adjust the main fabric section, you may need to work in specific row multiples.

- If the garment is a cardigan, and you wish to adjust the length, you will probably have to pull out the button bands, depending on exactly how much length you want to fix. If it is only about an inch, you can get away with carefully cutting the pick-up row of the band and pulling it away from the body piece for several inches on either side of where you wish to adjust (put the live stitches on waste yarn so that you don't lose them). Then, adjust the length as you would for a sleeve and graft the band back on, easing it to fit the shorter or longer length.
- If you majorly messed up an entire cable repeat somewhere in the middle of a scarf you were planning to give as a gift, you now know how to cut out that whole repeat and put in a new one.

By now, everyone knows me as the crazy person who cuts up her knitting. I assure you, I am perfectly sane; I just hate to waste yarn and effort. I once designed a patterned-yoke sweater with a keyhole neck that I partly knit myself and gave the rest to a knitter to knit. Long story short, the keyhole ended up not exactly centered on the center front of the garment, and the garment had to be shipped within a couple of days. What was I to do? Well, I cut the yoke off and re-grafted it to the body, centered correctly, thereby saving the day! Crisis averted. On another occasion, I made a terribly intricate garment (from Norsk Strikkedesign), all in colorwork and embroidered on top of that, with steeks and cutting all over—cardigan opening, armholes, sleeve caps. I discovered that the sleeve caps did not fit well into the armholes—they were much too tall. And they were already embroidered and cut. Instead of wasting probably close to a hundred hours of work and tossing the whole thing in the naughty pile, I simply basted a line with thread where I judged would be the correct curve for the cap, then machine-sewed along that line, and cut off the excess cap material. Then I sewed my nicely fitting cap into the armhole, where it now fit perfectly. I am quite happy to cut the grave errors right out of my knitting, and I think if you give it a try, you will be too.

Robin Melanson is a freelance knitwear designer and technical editor living in Montreal, Quebec. She is the author of Knitting New Mittens & Gloves (STC Craft, 2008), and is a production assistant for Twist Collective. Visit her at www.robinmelanson.com.