

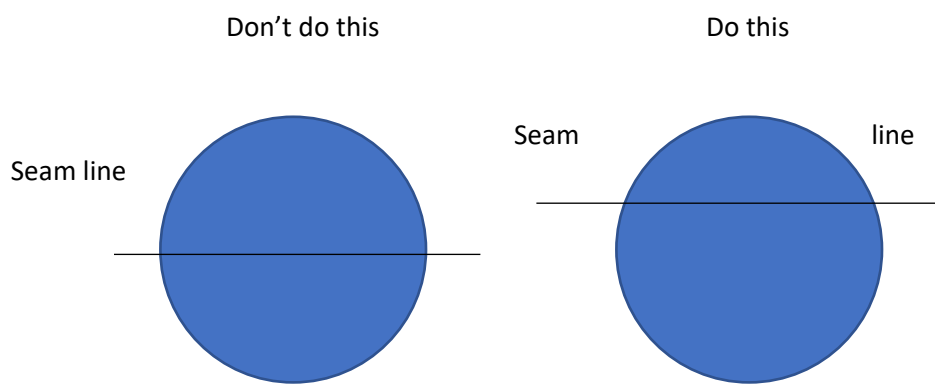
All About Necklines

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Necklines can come in all shapes and sizes. As long as the wearer of a garment can fit their head through, it works! But there are several common elements to a good, comfortable neckline. First, it should definitely, always, no exception, fit over the head without pulling at the fabric. This may mean you want a closure on it, if you want a high and tight neckline. Second, it should generally be deeper in the front than in the back. For a regular round neckline (particularly one that uses a perfect circle as a pattern), the added depth in the front will keep the fabric from choking you.

For example, if you are using a perfect circle as a pattern, you want the shoulder seam to be about 1/3 of the way through the circle, rather than through the center.

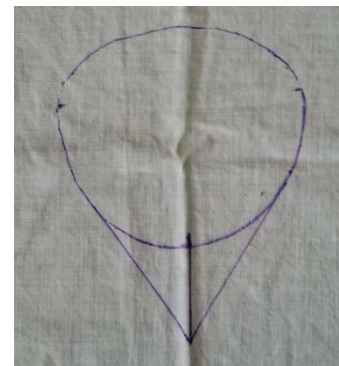


There are also a multitude of shapes for necklines besides round! They will depend on your period and place of interest, and I'm not going to try to cover them all in this handout. Except to say that starting with a good rounded neckline that fits over your head is a good template for any shape.

Drafting a neckline has many variables and is really a subject for its own class. I'm including in this handout my own basic neckline pattern. This pattern is just big enough, when finished (it has a 1/2" hem allowance) to fit over my head comfortably. That means if your head is bigger than my head, you'll want to widen it. If you have the time and inclination, cut the neckline out of a scrap piece of fabric (cut an additional 1/2" off, too) and try it on! If you don't like how it sits, you can use a marker to go ahead and make new marks on it, where you'd like it to sit. Re-cut and see if you like it better. (Remember that a garment is going to sit a little bit differently than a scrap of fabric.)

Once you have a rounded neckline you're happy with, you can make it into other shapes! You can see here how I made a V neck. I measured down from the center of my pattern a couple of inches. I used a triangle as a straight edge to connect my neck edge to the bottom of that point on each side. Voila! I have a V neck!

To make the square neck you'll see shortly, I drew straight lines down from the shoulder marks, and then connected them with a straight horizontal line. I used a triangle to make both of these modifications, but any sort of square edge (ex: the edge of a notebook) will work as a guide.



Basic Hem Stitch

You can hem a round neckline very easily! Just turn the raw edge to the inside by 1/8-1/4", and then turn it again. I find it easiest to hand-stitch this down with whip stitches, rather than using a machine. You can hand hem keyhole necklines by gently rolling the cut edges of the slit, and reinforcing the very point of it with a few whip stitches. However, I strongly prefer using a facing or binding to hem any neckline with points or corners.

To hem: turn the edge of your neckline in once by 1/8"-1/4". Turn it in again. Work in small sections. Stitch down with a small whip or straight stitch.



Raw edge



Fold once



Fold twice



Stitch down



I like to use whip stitch



It's the same movement over and over...



What the reverse looks like



Larger section done



Right side

Try to picture that with white thread. The stitches on the right side just disappear!

Facings

There are two basic ways to use a facing. A facing is a shaped piece of fabric that gets sewn to your neckline, and then turned so that the raw edges are enclosed. Then the remaining edge of the facing is turned up and stitched down, either by hand or machine. A facing is traditionally a single piece of fabric, and can be a contrasting color, or even elaborately embroidered and appliqued. It's a very good idea to do any applique or embroidery to your facing before you cut it out or attach it.

A facing can also be the same fabric as a garment, narrow, and turned to the inside. This sort of hidden facing is a great way to finish a complex neckline shape when you don't necessarily want a contrasting color at the neck. This is a great option for square, octagonal, or sweetheart necklines.

If you really want contrast, though, the outside facing edge doesn't have to mimic the neckline edge, nor does it have to be simple. The facing can be shaped in all kinds of interesting ways, and again, this would be based on your period and place of interest.

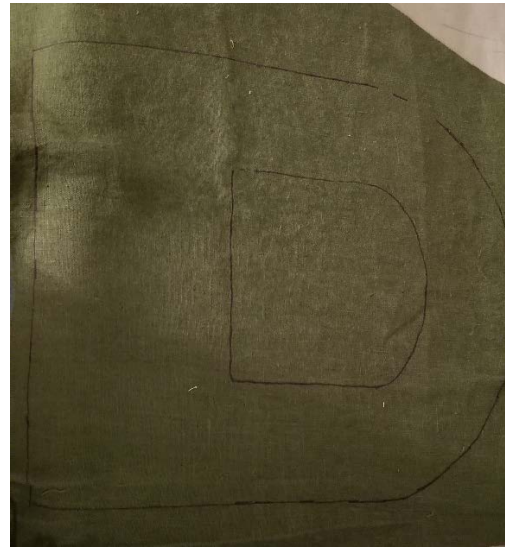
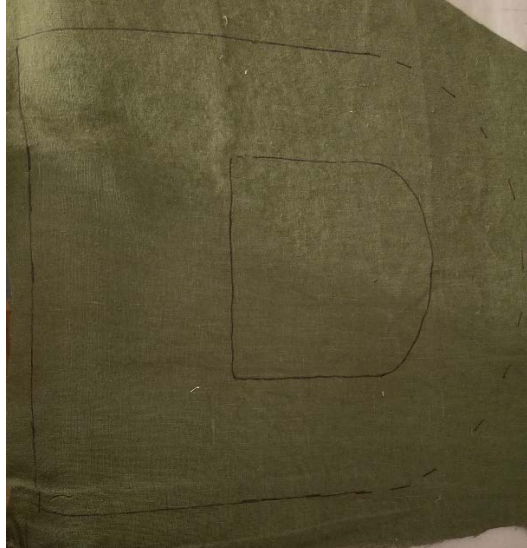
This example is done on a square neckline, so you can see how to handle corners or points. The first thing you want to do is make a pattern for your facing. I did this directly on my fabric, but it can also be done on paper. Transfer your neckline pattern to the fabric (or pattern paper). Then use a seam gauge (right) to mark out your facing, assuming you want it to be the same general shape as your original neckline. You can move that red slide up and down the gauge, to keep a steady distance away from your original line. See below.



I made the front of my facing 2" longer than the rest of my facing, just for fun.



I used a triangle to connect my lines to each other, connecting the short lines drawn with the seam gauge. You do not need a fancy triangle like this. Any sort of square edge will work.



I use a washable marker to make all my marks. Play connect the dots to connect all your marks made with the seam gauge. ***Now is when you want to do any stamping, embroidery, beading, or any other decoration on your facing*** Once you're satisfied with the shape and size of your facing, cut it out!



To cut the center out, fold the fabric and make a small snip. Your finished facing should be one piece.



This step is optional, but really helps! Stitch a line of straight stitches $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the outer edge (or whatever your hem allowance is). I used a machine, this can also be done by hand with running stitch.



Finger press (linen) the outside edge up along that line of stitching (press with an iron if you want to be very thorough, but the example photo shows just finger pressing). Again, this is optional, but it really helps in finishing. Line the facing up with your garment neckline. Right side of facing to wrong side of garment.



Pin the layers together and sew with your preferred seam allowance.



Clip any corners or points.



Notch any curves.

For both of these, clip almost all the way to your stitching line, but do NOT cut your stitches.



Flip the facing to the right side of the garment. Don't worry, the seam line will be bubbly. Use your fingers to pinch down and finger press if using linen. Or, use an iron and press the seam open first, and then press flat. The iron is invaluable when sewing synthetics or silk.



This is where that outside line of stitching and fingerpressing comes in handy! You want to fold that hem under and pin it down. Fold just so that line of stitching is hidden, and you'll have a perfectly even hem. I don't have a photo of this, but I did take small notches out of the rounded edge. I only cut about halfway into the hem allowance, not all the way to the stitching. Again, if using synthetics or silk, iron!



Just stitch that edge down. I'm using contrasting thread so you can see my stitches. You can also straight stitch, but I prefer the look of a whip stitch. You can see that that line of machine stitching is rolled just to the underside, and hidden. You can embroider over this edge or embellish it in any way you'd like. But your facing is done!

Bindings

I'm grouping a whole lot of finishes into this category. It was a practice in some places and some times within the SCA period of interest to use a narrow strip of straight grain fabric sewn to the neckline edge, then turned, similar to a facing, so that the raw edges were on the inside, and then the raw edge was turned up and stitched down. The fabric used was often linen or silk, and was usually incredibly narrow. It must be narrow to lay nicely. This technique was most often turned to the inside, but could theoretically also be turned to the outside for a contrasting edge.

You also find some garments, particularly with gathered edges, hemmed with a straight grain piece of fabric that is sewn on the edge, and then turned over, without folding the garment fabric at all, and then the raw edge turned under and sewn. So the binding can be seen from both the right and wrong side of the garment as a narrow band. There is no hem allowance added to the neck edge in this instance.

Finally, for what's being covered in this handout, there's a modern sewing trim available called bias tape. Single fold bias tape can be easily used to mimic the first type of bound edge I described, and bias tape takes sharper curves much more easily. This is also quite easy to sew on a sewing machine, and would be great for a beginner.

Binding the period way:

Illustrated on a V-neck, because it's cool looking and super period! This example is 12th century.



The first thing I want to do is reinforce the V point with a line of machine stitches. This is optional.



Then I cut my "tape". A straight piece of linen about 1.5" or so wide, long enough to wrap my neckline plus about 6".



The first thing I do place the end of the tape about 2-3" away from the point of the V, on the wrong side of your garment's neckline (this results in the tape being on the outside of the garment, reverse this if you want to hide the tape on the inside), and then hand stitch the tape to the neckline. I'm handstitching this so that I can stitch over exactly where that line of machine stitches is in the garment. Those stitches are on my hem allowance for my neckline. And I need the very point to be stitched precisely.



I use the sewing machine to slowly stitch the tape around the neckline. I use my fingers to guide the tape and the fabric, keeping the edges even. This takes a bit of practice.



When you get to the other side of the V, go very slowly. You may want to switch back to hand stitching. You want the starting end of the tape to stay clear and free hanging, and you want to end your stitches at exactly the point you started, at the very tip of the V. The more precisely you make those stitches match, the better this works.



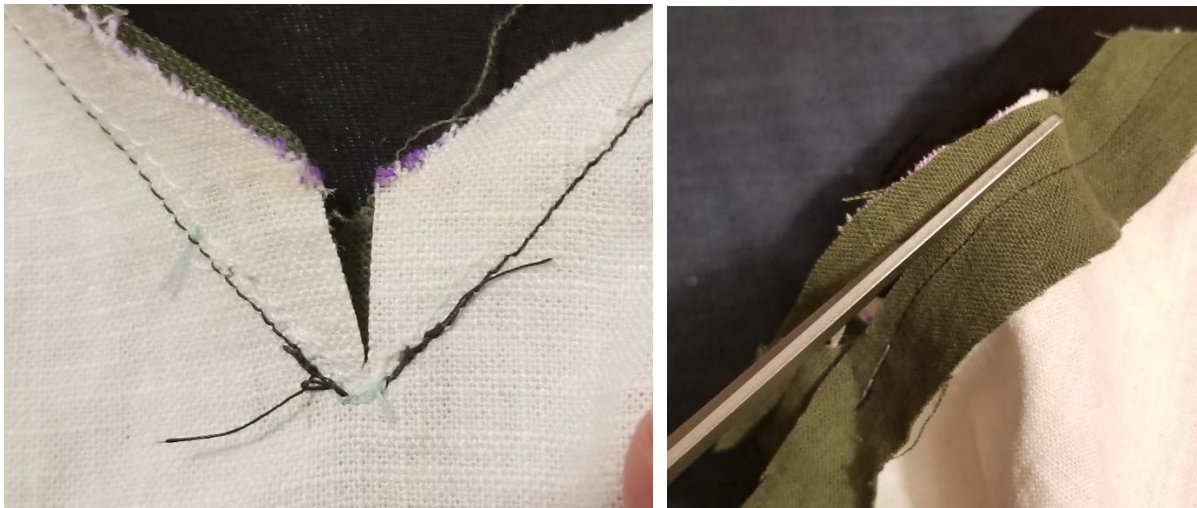
You can see the tape fully attached. Both of the ends are hanging freely at the point of the V, and the lines of stitching just meet. I actually finished the very last point with a couple of hand stitches to be sure they were meeting, but not overlapping.

You can see the hand stitches that I took here with the light blue thread. The black thread is the machine stitching. I got so close!





Here you can see close up what that tape looks like at the point. You can see my hand stitches in light blue.



Make two cuts. 1) Clip the very center of the V, almost to your stitching, but NOT THROUGH your stitching. 2) Trim the seam allowance down to about 1/8".



Here you can see the edge cut down. Alternately, you can trim your neck opening, and start with a $\frac{3}{4}$ " strip of fabric to begin with. It's up to you. Stitching with a machine, I prefer to have a bigger seam allowance and trim later.

(Please note I'm only partially finishing this, as it's a sample for students to look at in progress. Only half of it is done on purpose. That's why the neck isn't trimmed down all the way around in the following photos.)



Flip the tape to the right side of your garment and pin it down. Use the pinching and rubbing motion with your fingers discussed for facings to get the seam looking sharp. You can see how I've just turned down the free edge of the tail and pinned it down. Press with an iron if silk or synthetic.



Fold under the remaining raw edges and start stitching them down. Start your stitching at the inside of the V neck tab. Pin as necessary to hold everything in place, but you'll notice that the tape will really want to curve and fold, especially as you get to the curve. That's why the tape has to be so narrow. Tip: If you use a thin silk, the tape can be even narrower!



Here you can see the tape partially finished. The second photograph shows an approximation of the finished V. (Just pretend everything is all stitched down!) This is a really stable neckline. I used a contrasting tape and contrasting thread so that you could readily see all the moving parts, but this can be done with the same fabric the garment is made out of, and matching thread. Your choice!

Modern bias tape

Bias tape is a product you can buy at any fabric store or online. It's usually around the thread and zippers. It comes in four yard packs, in double or single fold, in two widths. For this method, we want the regular width single fold bias tape. This gets hidden inside the neckline, so it doesn't have to be any particular color, but you may want to match your fabric so it really disappears. This finish is quick and easy and can be done entirely on a sewing machine. It's thoroughly modern, but it's a good alternative to a simple hem if you don't want to hand-sew. (Though you can hand sew it if you want to!)



So this is what we're using. Unfold one side of it and fold the short end down about 1/4-1/2". Pin it so that the open edge is right along the cut edge of the RIGHT side of your neckline. If I have a 1/2" neckline hem allowance, if I'm using bias tape, I want to trim that down to 1/4". This finish only takes the neck in by 1/4".



Sew in that crease from the fold you opened up. I use my fingers to guide and line up the edge of the bias tape with the edge of the neckline as I sew; I don't bother with pins. When you get to the other end, just try to line up the two ends of the tape as much as you can. The cut end should overlap the folded beginning point by about $\frac{1}{4}$ " give or take. Up to $\frac{1}{2}$ ".



Finished attachment. You can see where this is going. You fold the bias tape to the inside of the garment and pin it down. I'm showing how that folded edge folds over the cut edge, hiding all the cut ends.



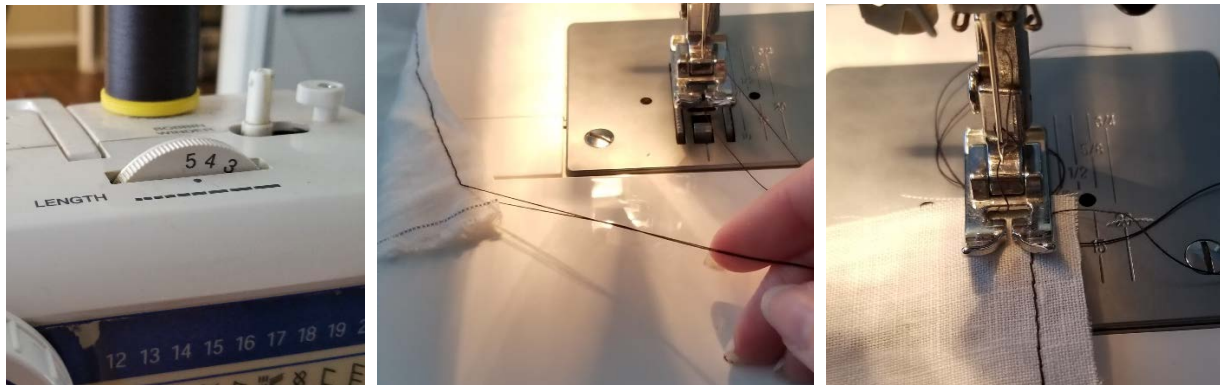
Then just stitch down that outside edge! I'm using contrasting thread so you can see better, but with white thread, this stitching line would all but disappear. Giving you a neat, finished, unobtrusive neck. As a real quick note, you could totally use a straight grain piece of fabric like in the last tutorial, and turn it to the inside of the garment, as well. The two are essentially the exact same technique, it's just a matter of whether you use a period material or a modern one.

Binding a gathered neckline

So this is one more variation on binding with either a straight-of-grain piece of fabric, or a bias tape. You can also make your own bias tape out of your own fabric. There are some great tutorials out there, often geared towards the modern quilting crowd. I'm not going to cover it here, just know that it's not hard!

For a gathered edge, like a late period Italian camicia (chemise), or a Tudor chemise with a gathered neck, this is an option. But I consider it to be within the same family of finish as the last two covered. There are other documentable ways to finish gathers, this is just one. And it's an easy one that can be partially or entirely done with a sewing machine.

As a bonus, I'm going to include how to machine gather fabric! You can also totally do this by hand, but this is my favorite method of making neat, even, quick gathers.



Start with your machine on the longest stitch length. Without backstitching, stitch a line of basting stitches on the edge of your fabric. Leave a longer than average tail when you end your stitches. Stitch a second line about 1/8" away from the first line. (Optional, stitch a third line 1/8" away from the second.) Make sure your lines of stitching stay parallel and do not cross each other.



You can see my three lines of parallel stitches. You can also see that my third line is stitched right around the 1/2" mark. Prior to finishing, I'm going to trim that down by 1/4", so that the first line of stitching is at the very edge.



(Use two hands for this, not one; I was taking a picture.) Hold the top (or bottom) three pieces of thread in one hand. Use your other hand and hold the line of stitching on the fabric. Hold the second hand an inch or so from the start of the stitches. Pull the threads gently, all at the same time. The fabric will start to gather up along the thread. Use both hands together to work the gathers further down the length of fabric, and repeat the process. Pull the threads taut. Work the gathers down the length of fabric. Using three threads (or two, or four) gives you more stability, and makes it easier to make even gathers. It also makes you less likely to pull the threads all the way out. When you're working on a full piece, rather than just a sample, you can work your gathers from both ends, toward the center. In the final photo above, you can see that I have another straight grain piece of linen. It's around 1-1/4" wide. You want your strip to be long enough to go around your entire finished edge by about that wide.



Line up the edge of your tape with the edge of your gathers. Stitch the two together. I'm stitching with a 1/2" seam allowance, approximately along the line where I sewed my last line of gathering stitches.



Fold the tape up. You can see I didn't quite cover my last set of basting stitches. That's okay. If this was a finished piece (rather than a sample), I could go back and carefully unpick those stitches that show. Because the tape is sewn on, I wouldn't lose my gathers. I also didn't specify whether to stitch the tape to the front or the back, that's because it kind of doesn't matter. It'll look substantially the same from both sides. This is the point at which I trimmed down my raw edge to about $\frac{1}{4}$ ". You fold the tape all the way over so that you're covering the gathered edge on both sides.



Turn up the raw edge and stitch it down. You can see that I'm fully covering my basting stitches on this side. And that's the only difference you can see between the two sides of the gathered fabric.