

## ADVANTAGES OF CUT & SEW NECKLINES

Much has been said about Cut & Sew necklines, some is good and some is bad. Teaching the many advantages of well-executed Cut & Sew Techniques, including necklines and their finishes, is part of my mission for this first Series of CMS Home Workshops! Cut & Sew necklines offer the adventurous knitter more freedom and flexibility in the creation of her/his knit garments, while the more conservative knitter benefits from the extra control and precision in the finishing of a carefully planned Cut & Sew neckline. Let's take a closer look at some of those advantages.

1. Procrastinate the decision of a neckline.
2. Concentrate on more important factors than the neckline.
3. Redesign a neckline.

### #1 Procrastinate Neckline

When planning a shaped knit garment, the neckline details have to be plotted and fully calculated prior to knitting, often leaving the knitter in doubt unless the garment was previously knit. Planning a Cut & Sew neckline has many great advantages since details of the shape and style can be determined later. Yes, the opportunity to procrastinate on the final decision of the neckline is quite in order.

Knitters can prepare their knit pieces according to calculations or by following their knit leader or radar and simply omitting the neckline area. Once the pieces are knit and blocked, the knitwear designer (you), has the opportunity to drape the knit fabric and finalize the shape and details of the neckline that will most suit this particular garment. The busyness of a motif, the colours and the weight of the knit fabric are all important factors that may influence the decision for the right neckline!

### #2 More Important Factors

Are you an experienced knitter? Do you avoid projects that involve complex hand-manipulated patterns with colour changes which require holding positions? Imagine the new beginner-knitter! Cut & Sew necklines are definitely the answer. Ideal for garments that require many colour changes, explicit motif or complex patterning. Concentrating on the creation of fabric and freeing oneself from the neckline details (or any increasing or decreasing for that matter), may prevent you from using some of that knitting vocabulary that seems to develop after the purchase of the first knitting machine!

### #3 Redesign Necklines

My absolute favourite! How many times has a customer changed her/his mind in the process of

creating a knit garment: "It's just a little too high, Manon" or "I think I would prefer a V-Neck, it looks best on me". Of course, these requests were made after the knit garment was completed. Being in business to earn a little profit left me with one alternative, "Cut & Sew".

Dealing with a completed or almost completed unwanted neckline is not easy. It requires a little imagination, ingenuity, lots of patience and hopefully, some more yarn! Don't give up on those unfinished projects either. Take them out and consider how they could be saved. I am confident that some of the techniques from the Workshops of this Series, will inspire and encourage you to salvage some of those knit projects.

## NECKLINE TEMPLATE

### CUSTOMIZING NECKLINE TEMPLATES

An important step in creating a successful neckline is to customize ones own personal neckline templates. As individuals, we all have different neck shapes. Some of us have long skinny necks, short and fat, round and stocky, oval or U-shaped, and the list goes on. In taking some simple steps, it is possible to create your own template, and understand why some neckline designs fit and look better than others. How does one customize his/her own neckline templates? With a little time and effort.

In Ottawa, I have my students go back to their basic sweater block (basic patterns). I have them trace the front and back bodices onto paper and then add a 1 cm ( $\frac{3}{8}$ " ) seam allowance all around. A 2.5cm (1") extension is added along the centre front to create an overlap for an opening. The students cut out the paper pattern and then prepare what is called a muslin, out of cotton fabric. I have them cut their basic front and back and quickly assemble the shoulders and side seams on the sewing machine. I then fit them individually. The muslin fitting determines not only the shape of the base of the front and back neckline, but also the shoulder line and slope which are important in the final fit.

I have the student try on the muslin and carefully pin the centre front overlap and add a shoulder pad, if desired. I would recommend building in a shoulder pad if one has sloping shoulders. First, check the shoulder seam. Are the slope and shoulder line properly fitted? Meaning, does the seam lay flat over the shoulder or the shoulder pad? If not, take a pinch and pin, removing the excess. Next, look to see if the shoulder seam is running straight from behind the ear lobe to the shoulder point. Using a coloured pencil, realign the shoulder line, if necessary.

Unfortunately, many knitters and sewers are unaware of the importance of the shoulder line and slope. Yet they are key points for the proper fit and balance of a garment. Do you own sweaters or knit garments that keep falling backwards and/or forwards? It is an indicator that the shoulder line and slope and the back neckline do not fit properly and, therefore, the garment is unbalanced!

Once the shoulder line and slope have been corrected, move onto the base of the neckline. Using a pencil, outline with a dotted line, the base of the front and back necklines. The base of a neckline varies from one person to another, just remember as a guideline, where you would like a crew neck to lay when it is completed. For the front, a good guide is the two clavicle bones at centre front. Be extra careful with the back neckline, since it is again an important factor in the proper balance of a garment. The average drop for the back of the neck, from the neck point, is 1.2cm to 2cm ( $\frac{1}{2}$ " to  $\frac{3}{4}$ ").

Remove the muslin and lay on a flat surface. Re-draw the front and back necklines, connecting the dotted lines using a smooth curve. Make sure that the necklines are squared off for at least 1cm ( $\frac{3}{8}$ ") where they meet with the centre front and centre back. Then proceed with the corrections to the shoulder line, if any.

Transfer all of the corrections made to the muslin to the paper pattern. Take the muslin apart and give it a quick steam. Carefully place the paper pattern under the muslin and pin. Using a tracing wheel and tracing paper, transfer the corrections from the muslin to the paper pattern by inserting the tracing paper between the muslin and paper pattern and rolling the tracing wheel.

This procedure is tedious and does require some time. Rest assured that it is well worth the effort. Perhaps it should be considered as a Club or Guild project. Hire a professional seamstress or someone who is good at fitting others and learn from them. It is the very first step to successful necklines! Once you have determined the actual base of your neck and shoulder line, you have gone an extra step toward a better fitting neckline. It is a procedure that will not be repeated for a long time unless there is a considerable change in your size!!!

## **CALCULATIONS FOR NECK BANDS**

Neck bands are tricky to calculate, whether for a shaped or Cut & Sew neckline. As the main focus of a knit garment, it is important to plan the details on a full-scale paper pattern. A neck band needs to be drawn and dissected from the original body block. The two extremities of a neck band are referred to as the inner and outer edges. The inner edge is found closest to the neck, while the outer edge gets attached to the knit bodice. The area between the inner and outer edges is equivalent to the height of the band. Our book on *The Haute Couture of the Cut & Sew Technique Using Knit Fabric* explains the planning and preparation of a paper pattern for some basic neckline designs. (For a quick review, see pgs 18/25 and 35/38)

Measuring the outer edge of the front and back necklines from the main bodice of the paper pattern (excluding all seam allowances), determines the total neck circumference which is necessary for the calculation of the neck band [i.e. front and back mini templates 48cm (19.2")]. Bands do have more stretch and, therefore, require a reduction of 10% to 20%. The percentage reduction varies according to the tension, stitch pattern and yarn used within a neck band and can only be determined with a little experimenting. Don't be surprised if you have to knit a neck band twice, it is part of the learning process in accomplishing that perfect neckline.

Even though the neck band is calculated from the reduced measurement, the outer edge of the garment neckline keeps its original measurement and will still fit over the head. i.e. CMSHW 48cm (19.2") minus 15% (7cm - 3") = 41cm (16.2") The outer edge of the neck band will be gently stretched and blocked to the original neckline circumference. Keep in mind, a neck band needs to be slightly stretched onto the neckline of a garment, never the other way around.

Subtract the appropriate percentage from the total circumference of the outer edge, then multiply the result by the number of sts/cm (sts/in). This will be the total number of stitches to cast on for the neck band. CMSHW 41cm (19.2") x 3 sts/cm (7.5 sts/in) = 123sts

Stitches have now been taken care of, what about the rows? Depending on the design, if for example, we take a crew neck of 2.5cm (1") deep. This 2.5cm (1") must be multiplied by the number of rows/cm (rows/in) i.e. 5 rows/cm (12.5 rows/in) which equals 12.5 rows so round it up to 13 or 14 rows, which will account for the difference in the tension. Divide the 13 rows between the tension decrease and work out a pattern of rows per tension.

## APPLICATION OF THE CUT & SEW TECHNIQUE

This is the stage all knitters fear. Here you have the opportunity to practice on several samples and get comfortable with the technique. Look at it as an extra egg in your basket.

One does not require any fancy equipment to perform the Cut & Sew Technique. A simple sewing machine with straight and zig zag stitches and/or a 3 - 4 thread serger is all that is needed. A walking foot for the sewing machine is a great help when handling knits because it feeds the top and bottom of the knit fabric evenly and prevents the ripples. Walking feet are available for all sewing machines. Check with your dealer.

Take the blocked mini bodice. Leave the wires in, it helps the rectangles to lay flat and keep their shape. Find and baste the centre of the knit piece using a contrast coloured yarn. If you have waste yarn on both ends of the knitting, figure out the bottom end. Select the appropriate paper pattern template for the knit pieces. Carefully match the centre line and neck points at the shoulders. Pin the pattern into place. Using a tapestry needle and a fine contrast yarn, baste the outline of the neckline. Remove the paper pattern and blocking wires. Get ready to sew.

Swatch A

## METHOD #1

Stitches must be stabilized prior to cutting to prevent them from running. We are actually going to sew and then cut. Choose a good polyester thread a few shades lighter than the garment. Use a regular size 14 sewing needle, make sure it is new. If you have a walking foot attachment for your sewing machine, I suggest you use it.

### Step 1

With a medium length stitch (3 to 3.5), machine stitch 2mm (1/16") away from the basting on the garment side. **I recommend doing this stitching line even if you are planning to use the serger.** CMSHW (red or white thread) Swatch A Pull on the sewing threads so you have tails of approximately 10-15cm (4-6"). Put the sewing needle down and place the knit fabric against the needle of the sewing machine. Put the presser foot down and stitch forward, pull on the tails to prevent the stitching from bunching up. Backstitch a few stitches. Pull on the tails again and follow the basting, again 2mm (1/16") away on the garment side. Make sure to push the knit, never pull. The use of a popsicle stick or a corner poker will help feed the knit to the sewing machine. Sew along, following the basting until you come to the end. Backstitch to secure the stitching. Proceed in the same manner for the rest of the knit pieces.

When waste yarn is used at the bottom of a sleeve, machine stitch into the main colour only. Make sure to catch the very first stitch without catching any of the waste yarn. (Reducing the

stitch length will help). Once the straight stitching is complete, remove the basting. Swatch A

## Step 2

To further secure the stitching prior to cutting, it is necessary to zig zag right on top of the straight stitching. Set the sewing machine for a medium size zig zag (stitch length 1 to 2, zig zag width 3 to 4). Do not use a satin stitch! It will stretch and badly distort the knit fabric as the stitching is too close together. So again, leave some tails. Pull on the tails, zig zag forward and back to secure the end. Continue the zig zag, feeding the knit into the presser foot. Backstitch at the end and get rid of all the threads. The knit stitches have been stabilized. If the knit seems slightly stretched, take it to the iron and steam gently, easing the stretched area back to shape. It is time to cut. CMSHW #5 and #9 (yellow thread) I often use the zig zag method for intricate shapes like V-necks!

If still frightened and/or skeptical of the stabilizing, simply add another row of machine stitching right under the zig zag edge that was just completed. It will reinforce the Cut & Sew edge. The extra row of stitching can be used on Fair-Isle and Tuck fabrics, or when planning to re-hook a neckline directly onto the knitting machine.

Using a good pair of fabric scissors, cut right along the zig zag edge without cutting the zig zag stitches. Clean up the edges with your fingers, removing the excess lint.

## METHOD #2

To prevent mistakes that could be disastrous when using a serger, I recommend straight stitching along the basting, using a contrast coloured thread. (Step 1) Keep in mind that the serger actually cuts first and then sews. CMSHW (red or white thread)

Once the straight stitching is complete, remove the basting. Trim some of the excess knitting contouring the knitted piece to avoid bulk to facilitate the serging operation. Using scissors, cut away the excess knit fabric, leaving approximately 1.2cm (½") from the straight stitching. Take the knit piece to the serger. Run a tail of 10 -15cm (4-6"), line up the knife of the serger to cut right along the straight stitching without cutting it. Serge along carefully, holding and controlling the knit fabric. If you have a differential device, use it! It will prevent the stretching and distortion of the knit edges. Swatch A (Always try the serger on a scrap of the knit fabric first.)

When you come to the end, continue to run the serger to leave another tail of 10-15cm (4-6"). Knot the tails on either end to prevent running. Cut close to the knot or sink back into the serged edge. Steam along the Cut & Sew edges so it lays nice and flat. Using the right colour of thread will make all the difference. Take the time and invest the money for a great looking product.

If you can get comfortable using the Cut & Sew Technique, you will find that many of your knitting problems may be easily solved. I encourage you to keep practicing.

## **APPLICATION OF A SEPARATE NECK BAND**

### **APPLICATION OF A SEPARATE NECK BAND - FOR A CUT & SEW NECKLINE**

The neck band is applied to the neckline area in one operation. This means that we have to prepare the garment and the neck band prior to assembling the two.

- With right sides together, pin the front and the back shoulders of the mini bodices and sew at 1cm ( $\frac{3}{8}$ "") using a thread of the same colour. Press seam allowance open.
- With the sewing machine and a contrast coloured thread, stitch a guideline to indicate the outer edge which is located 1cm ( $\frac{3}{8}$ "") from the Cut & Sew edge. CMSHW (in green)
- This row of machine stitching should be done at a regular stitch length (3 - 3.5).
- Divide the neckline of the garment into quarters by simply matching centre front and centre back and indicate the halfway mark with pins.
- With the wrong side of the garment facing you, bring the cast-on edge (the **under side**) of the neck band and overlap onto the 1cm ( $\frac{3}{8}$ "") guideline.
- Match the centre back, centre front and halfway marks of the neck band to the marks of the neckline and pin into place. The neck band in between should be slightly stretched onto the neckline area along the guideline and not the other way around.
- When the neck band is too large, figure out by how much and instead of fiddling and crying about it, concentrate your energy on knitting a new one. It is the focus point of the garment!
- Baste the neck band along the cast-on edge and remove the pins. Swatch A-B
- With the sewing machine and a thread of the same colour, stitch onto the neck band along the cast-on edge, using a regular stitch length (3 - 3.5). Students have often found the zipper foot useful for this operation, since it lays right along the cast-on edge and facilitates the straight stitching. CMSHW (purple thread) Swatch A-B
- Turn the garment to the right side, position over the ham and gently steam along the stitching line to flatten the 1cm ( $\frac{3}{8}$ "") overlap.
- Fold over the **upper side** of the neck band and carefully pin into place. Make sure that all of the under side stitching is properly covered.
- Baste the **upper band** down, just beyond the waste yarn, into the main colour. Swatch A-B
- Remove the pins.
- This will prevent the upper neck band from moving and biasing when doing the backstitch.
- The **upper side** of the neck band is then backstitched by hand.
- Prepare a tapestry needle with the main coloured yarn. Get rid of the extra waste yarn until only two rows of it remain.
- Carefully remove the waste yarn, little by little, as you perform the backstitch operation. Keep some pressure with your thumb along the open stitches to prevent them from unravelling.
- See backstitching instructions on page 9 of this section.

## EDGE BANDS & THEIR APPLICATION

It is not easy to design knitwear and accomplish the professional look we all strive for. Proper finishing, is without a doubt the key element to any knit garment. No matter how simple or complex the knitting technique and/or the garment is, if the finishing touches are not well done, the garment loses some of its appeal.

In this first series of CMS Home Workshops, you will be introduced to three of my favourite edge trims: the picot edge trim, the double stockinet edge trim and the Oh...mighty mitered corner edge trim. These simple, yet effective edge bands have been a saviour many times through my years of custom designing. I hope that you will enjoy and benefit from them as much as I have.

### Edge Bands in General

There are several ways of knitting and applying knit edge bands onto a garment. The samples from this first series will demonstrate various styles and shapes. Knit bands can vary in height from 0.6cm ( $\frac{1}{4}$ " ) to 5cm (2"), but beware, very narrow and/or very wide bands are always more difficult to handle. The height of the band changes according to the thickness involved, since edge bands can be applied to single or faced layered knit fabrics. For starters, I recommend bands of 2.5cm (1").

It is always a good idea to work those kinds of details on a full-scale paper pattern. For the exercises found in this first series, the stockinet knit bands are started on the **under** side using the crochet cast-on, and removed onto waste yarn on the **upper** side for a hand finish.

### Application of the Edge Band onto the Garment

- Onto the garment piece(s), machine stitch a guideline that is 0.3cm to 0.6cm ( $\frac{1}{8}$ " to  $\frac{1}{4}$ " ) shy of the height of the edge band. The distance varies according to the thickness of the knit fabric. The thicker the knit fabric the larger the variant for the guideline. This allocation is necessary for the creation of a crisp fold along the outer edge of the band.
- The fold line of the edge band needs to exceed the edge of the knit fabric of the main garment by a few rows to avoid that bulky look. CMSHW (in green) [i.e. 2.5cm (1") edge band, the guideline is done at a minimum of 2.2cm ( $\frac{7}{8}$ " )].
- Starting with the wrong side of the main garment, overlay the crochet cast-on edge of the knit band onto the guideline of the garment piece.
- Pin and baste carefully along the crochet cast-on edge without catching the **upper** side of the knit band.
- Machine stitch the under side of the knit band to the main garment using a regular stitch length 3-3.5 (10 stitches on an old Singer), carefully following the inside edge of the crochet cast-on.

- Steam press carefully along the seam and overlap the **upper** side of the knit band onto the right side of the knit garment.
- Pin the **upper** side of the edge band into place.
- Baste just beyond the waste yarn into the first or second row of the main band.
- Remove the waste yarn and finish by hand, using the backstitch technique.
- Steam press the finished edge band.

#### THE BACKSTITCH FINISH

- With the right side of the garment up, poke the tapestry needle from the under side of the garment (along the cast-on edge) and come through to the right side into the second stitch.
- Plunge the tapestry needle back into the first stitch and through to the under side. Try to control the tension by not pulling too tightly on the thread.
- Again, poke the tapestry needle from the under side, forward into the third stitch and then plunge back into the second stitch through the under side.
- Simply repeat this procedure until the neckline is completed.
- Bring the neckline back onto the ham and gently steam.
- The neckline area is now complete and looks great. Swatch A-B

# Design Cards

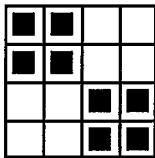


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Workshop # 5, # 6

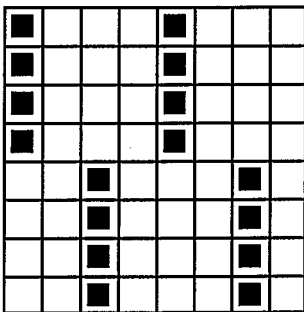


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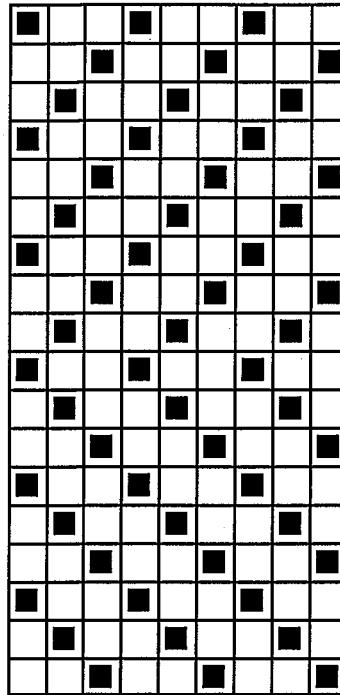


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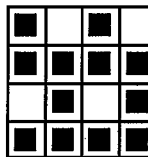


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Card # 3  
(For Tuck, reverse card)  
Workshop # 3

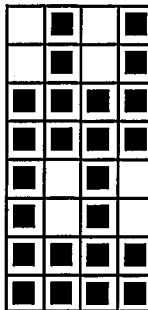


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Workshop # 8

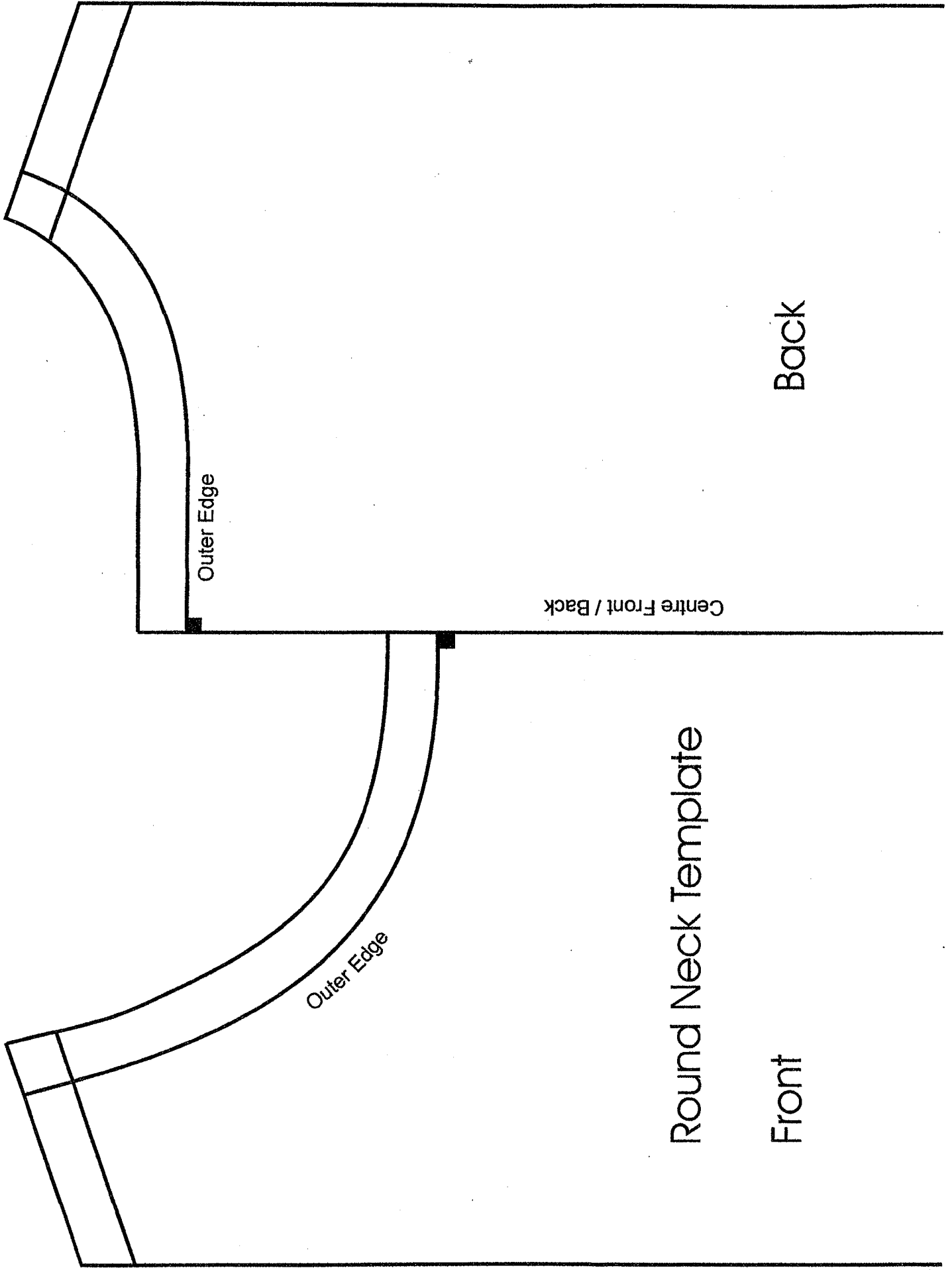


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Card # 5  
Workshop # 9, #10



Card # 6  
Workshop # 9



Outer Edge

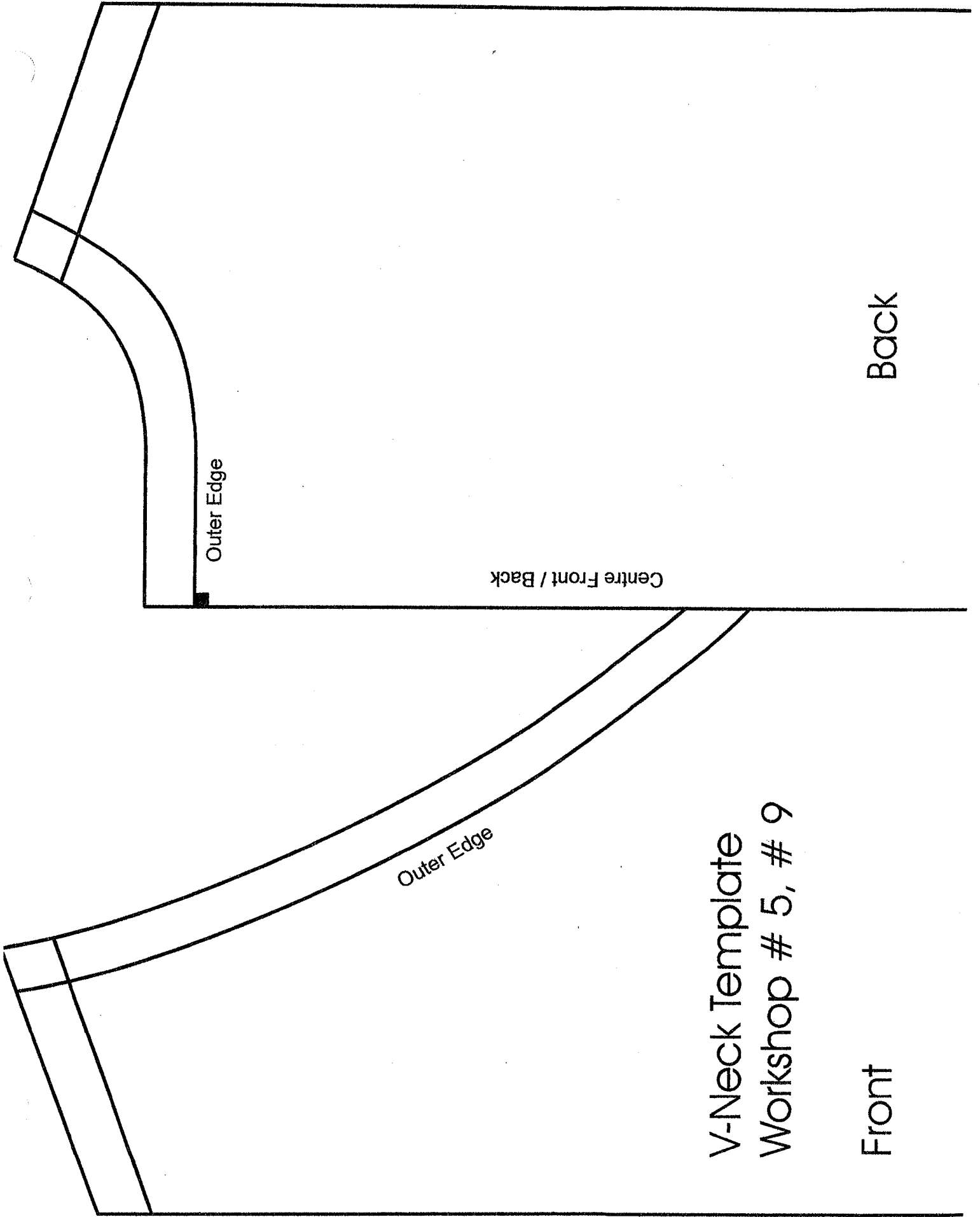
Centre Front / Back

Outer Edge

Round Neck Template

Front

Back



Outer Edge

Centre Front / Back

Outer Edge

V-Neck Template  
Workshop # 5, # 9

Front

Back

Crochet Cast On

Outer Edge (Fold Line)

Centre Mark

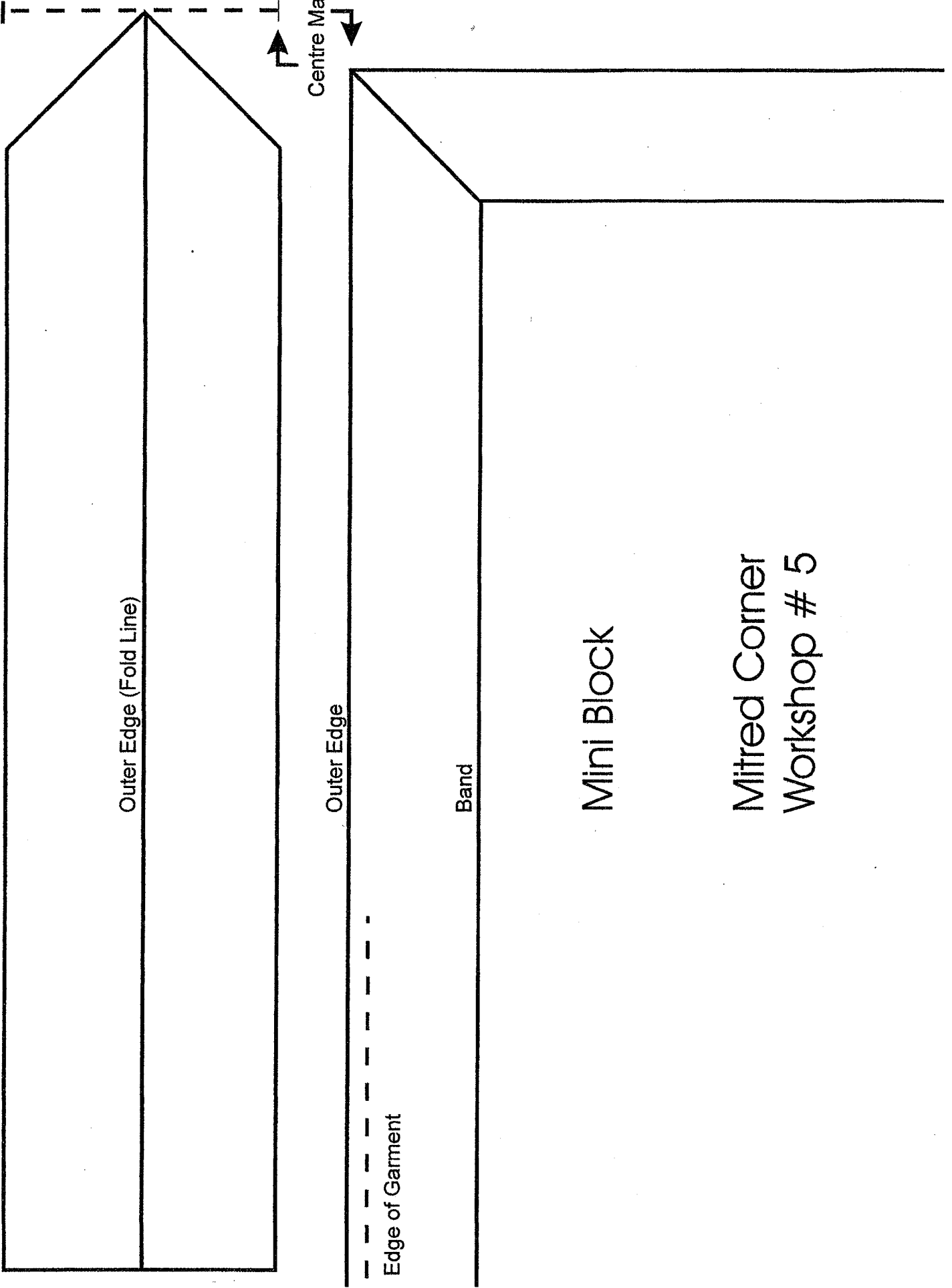
Outer Edge

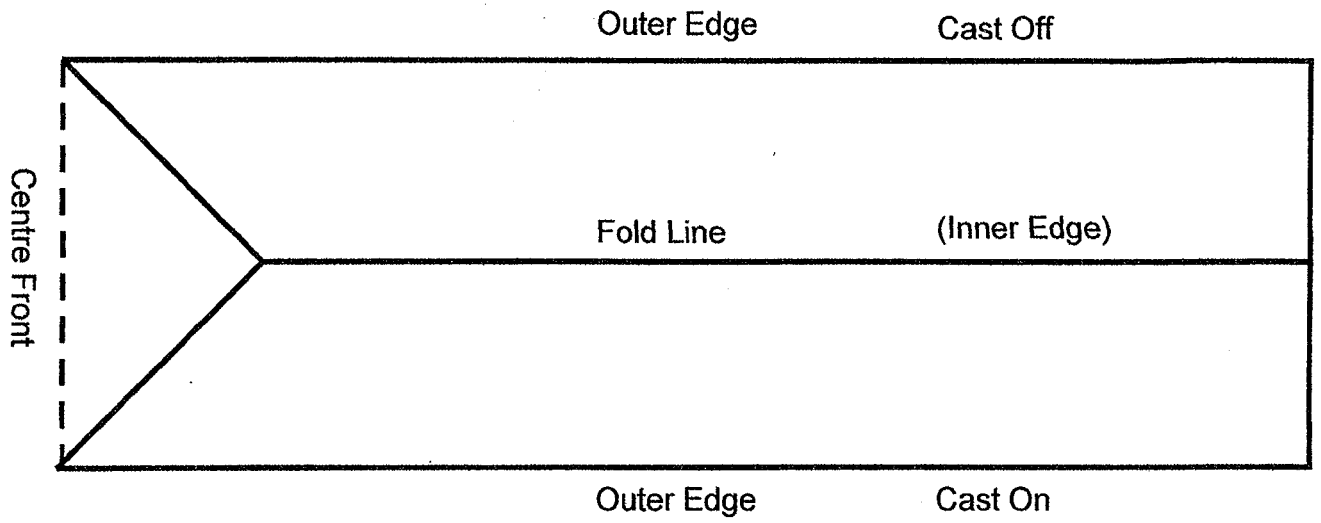
Band

Mini Block

Mitred Corner  
Workshop # 5

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Edge of Garment





V- Neck Band Template  
Workshop # 5