



SWEATER SCHOOL

How to adjust sleeve length
in a top-down sweater

SLEEVE LENGTH BASICS

Sometimes you love a sweater, but don't love the length of the sleeves.

No problem!

Sleeve length is easy to adjust. Use these practical tips for getting the length you love on any sweater sleeve.

SHORT SLEEVES

If you'd like your sweater to have short sleeves, simply stop knitting when you reach the length you'd like. Remember that you'll need to cap the sleeve with ribbing or some kind of edging (usually) in order to make sure the sleeve edges lay flat.

If you're working in pattern (like texture or lace), keep in mind that you will most likely want to complete a repeat of the pattern, or at least consider where you stop in pattern so that it looks intentional (i.e. you don't want your sleeve to look like you gave up halfway through a repeat).

A cap sleeve often stops just after the underarm. A short sleeve is generally about 2-4 in/5-10 cm from the underarm. A half sleeve generally hits just above the elbow. Remember to include ribbing/trim and any yarn growth into your length estimate.

3/4 SLEEVES

Three quarter sleeves are a convenient length for many of us who don't want a short sleeve, but who struggle with long sleeves getting in the way.

A 3/4 sleeve is really just a sleeve that sits halfway between the elbow and the wrist. To find this length for yourself, measure the distance from the crook of your elbow to your wrist, and divide that number in half. For example, mine measures about 10 in/25 cm so my ideal three-quarter length is 5 in/12.5 cm past the crook of my elbow. One additional tip: I like my 3/4 sleeve to be just a tad longer, so I'll plan my length so that it hits right at that 3/4 point (including ribbing), knowing that it will grow about another inch (2.5 cm) when I block it.

If you're modifying a sweater that calls for long sleeves, you'll simply stop early and begin your ribbing/trim in order end at the 3/4 point. Remember to adjust your stitch count for the correct stitch multiple you need to work the ribbing or cuff trim (and remember that you will have more stitches on your needles than if you had continued decreasing to the cuff for long sleeves).

I also wrote a blog post about 3/4 Sleeves (with a video!) that you can find here: <https://www.oliveknits.com/34-sleeves-for-everyone/> **If you click right here on this sentence, the blog post will pop up (or if you have a pop-up blocker you can type the address into your search bar).**



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LONG SLEEVES

To create long sleeves, you will want to know approximately the length from your underarm to your wrist, and you will knit your sleeve to this measurement, leaving room for ribbing (or trim).

A long sleeve generally sits a bit longer than your actual arm length (not including your hand). Ideally it will sit at just about the perfect wrist length before blocking, and will then grow to have just a bit of extra length afterward.

The of yarn you use and the texture in the pattern can contribute to the amount the sleeve will grow (superwash can grow 2+ inches/5+ cm). If you know it is likely to grow a lot, compensate for this by stopping just a little bit sooner to leave room.

Decreasing

The general rule of a thumb for a top-down sleeve is to work two decreases on a row (one on either side of the center of the underarm) about once every 1 - 1 1/2 inches (2.5 - 3.8 cm). You will continue decreasing in this manner until you reach the cuff. Ideally you will follow the same decrease instructions mentioned in the pattern, except that you will continue decreasing as you knit toward the cuff.

Always consider that you have the right multiple of stitches to work the cuff - and decrease an extra stitch or two, if necessary.

TRY IT ON AS YOU GO

The best way to decide if you've reached the right number of decreases is to try the sleeve on as you go. If it still feels roomy keep decreasing. If it's starting to feel snug, stop decreasing and continue the remainder of the sleeve without decreases. Then transition to the cuff or trim as appropriate.