

**BUILT
FJORD
TOUGH**

SEWING NEAT NECKLINES (AND OTHER EDGES)

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There are three basic types of necklines done in the SCA: faced edges, rolled edges, and bound edges. Faced edges, or facings, seem to be the most common, both because they are still seen in modern sewing and because a contrasting fabric can add interest to an otherwise plain garment while still finishing the edge of the neckline. Contrasting necklines can be seen on the Bayeux Tapestry, dating them to the 11th century; facings are one method of achieving this look. Rolled edges are found even earlier, on tunics from as far back as the first century. Bound edges are found in the 13th century, particularly on the shirt of St. Louis, which is now part of the collection at Notre Dame in Paris.

These instructions presume that you already have your neckhole pattern. The one I've been using the most is an oval, slightly egg-shaped, 6" wide by 7.5" long. I haven't done a keyhole neckline in the last couple of years, but should I decide to do one, I will make my neckhole a little more round and add a 3-4" slit to give myself room to get the garment over my head.

FACED EDGES — MODERN METHOD

Modern facings are quick and fairly easy and everyone does them, but the way they're done in the SCA really isn't reflected in any archaeological finds or extant garments, probably because it's wasteful of fabric. That being said, facings can also be the bane of the SCA tailor's existence. Getting the neckhole lined up with the hole in the facing and getting it sewed down without the hole skewing and stretching out of shape is really tough.

You don't have to do that. The secret to sewing a modern neckhole facing for SCA purposes is to sew the facing down *first*, and *then* cut the hole.

The facing fabric should be an inch or so bigger in all directions than your neckhole pattern. If you plan to have an inside facing, you'll want to finish the edges of the facing fabric in some way, either by serging or zig-zagging the edges prior to sewing the facing, or by turning and hemstitching the facing to the inside of the garment. If you're going to do an external facing, you'll want to turn the edges and stitch it down to make it look neat and tidy.

1. Find the center of the shoulder line. I use a center zero ruler. They're not required, but they are handy.
2. For an inside facing, draw a line perpendicular to the shoulder line with a piece of chalk on the right side of the material. Make sure that the line is a bit longer than your neckhole pattern, so you can see it to line it up. I made my pattern out of transparent plastic so I can see what I'm doing. For an external or reverse facing, do the work on the inside of the garment.
3. Pin the facing fabric to the garment. Position your neckhole pattern so that it is centered left to right and so that approximately 1/3 of the hole is to the rear of the shoulder seam or line. You don't want to center it on the seam, because your neck is not centered on your shoulders. Depending on your particular body configuration, you might need to adjust forward or back, but 1/3 behind the shoulder and 2/3s in front is a good place to start.
4. Trace around the neckhole using your preferred method. I usually use tailor's chalk.

5. *Machine instructions:* Sew around the outside of the tracing, riding the presser foot along the marked line. If you are sewing a keyhole neckline, taper the seam allowance to the tip of the keyhole until you can sew one stitch *and only one stitch* across the bottom of the slit.
Hand sewing instructions: Sew ¼" outside the edge of the tracing, using a running stitch or backstitch. Again, taper down to a blunt point at the bottom of the keyhole to give you room to turn the fabric.
6. Cut out the neckhole, cutting through both the facing material and the garment.
7. Flip the facing to the other side of the garment. If you sewed a keyhole, encourage the points on the top of the slit to be pointier with a poky object. (I hope I haven't lost you with all the technical terms there.)
8. Press the edge gently, using steam if preferred. You might want to put down a dampened press cloth to prevent the fabric from getting shiny. Pull the tiny wrinkles out with your fingers. Given that the seam allowance is so narrow, you shouldn't need to clip the curves.
9. Top stitch the neckline. You can do this by hand or on the machine; when I sewed these on the machine, I always covered the machine stitching with a simple embroidery stitch. You may also want to reinforce the bottom of the keyhole with a few buttonhole stitches.
10. Turn and finish the edges of the facing, if you need to.
11. Bask in the approval of your fellows.

FACED EDGES — PERIOD METHOD

Faced edges in period are much more subtle than modern faced edges. 14th century finds from London show a curved edge of woolen fabric faced with a 9mm strip of silk cut on the grain – yes really, *on the grain*. If the seam allowance is narrow enough, you can sew a straight edge to a curved edge and get it to lie flat once it's turned with no puckering (or at least no puckering once you've pressed it).

The raw edges of the silk and wool are overstitched (whipstitched) together, and then the silk edge is turned to the inside and held down with a couple of parallel rows of running stitch, which also lend strength to the edge. Finally, the other raw edge of the silk is turned under and hemmed down. This method lends itself to both hand and machine stitching, though visible stitching looks much nicer if done by hand.

BOUND EDGES

Bound edges are very similar to what you get when you bind an edge with bias tape... except that you don't use bias-cut fabric. Other than that, they're nearly identical. ☺

Raw edges are covered by a silk ribbon or strip of silk, held by slanting hem stitches. This is seen on both straight and curved edges from 14th c London, and the silk is always on the grain; no bias strips binding edges have been found, even on curved or bias cut edges.

ROLLED EDGES

Rolled edges are fairly common in period, specifically from antiquity up through the 14th century (which admittedly, is as late as my research library goes). This finish very often appears on silk, because it makes a lovely, narrow, flexible edge, and it's so narrow that it maximizes the visible surface area of the silk, rather than hiding some of this very rare and expensive fabric in the turned edge.

Extant rolled hems were worked by rolling the fabric between thumb and forefinger, and then fastening it in place with an overcast stitch (also known as a whip stitch). Care must be taken not to stretch the edge as it's rolled, however, or the curve will be distorted.

TURNED AND REINFORCED EDGES

One of the edge treatments unearthed in the finds at Herjofsnes in Greenland can be termed “turned and reinforced”. The edge is turned to the inside and held down with parallel rows of running stitch, as with a faced edge, and then a wool cord is whipstitched along the raw edge to reinforce and protect it from wear. These edges were found on what are believed to be necklines and sleeves.

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