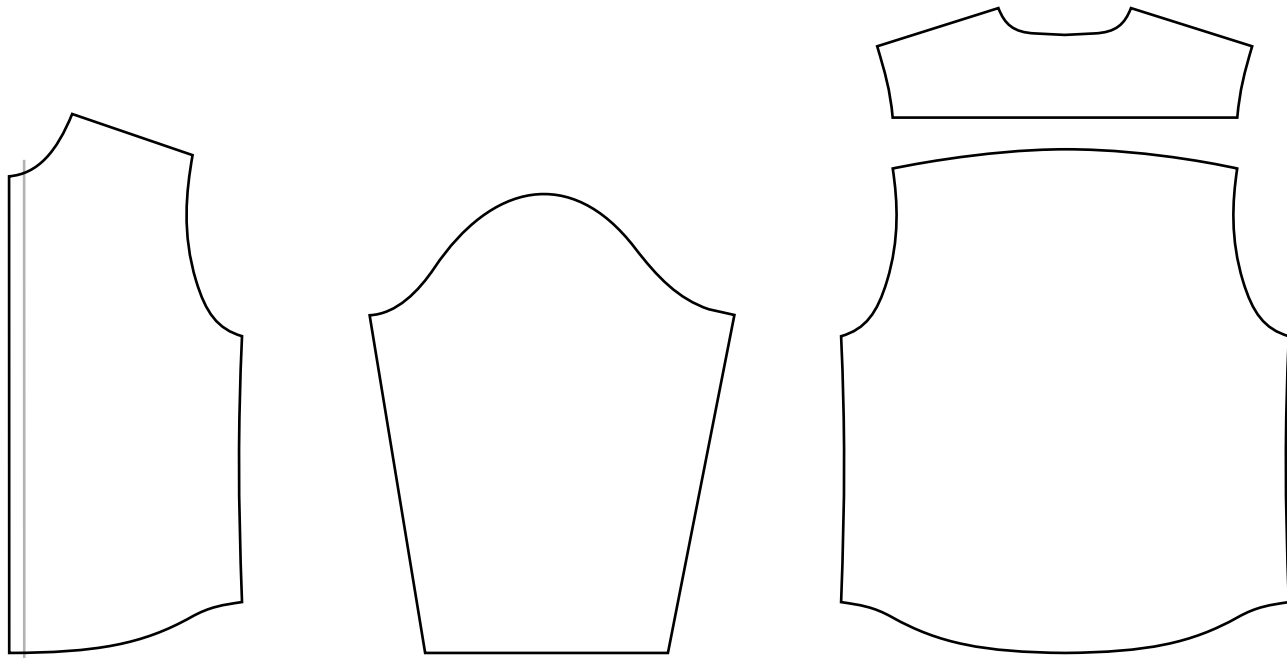
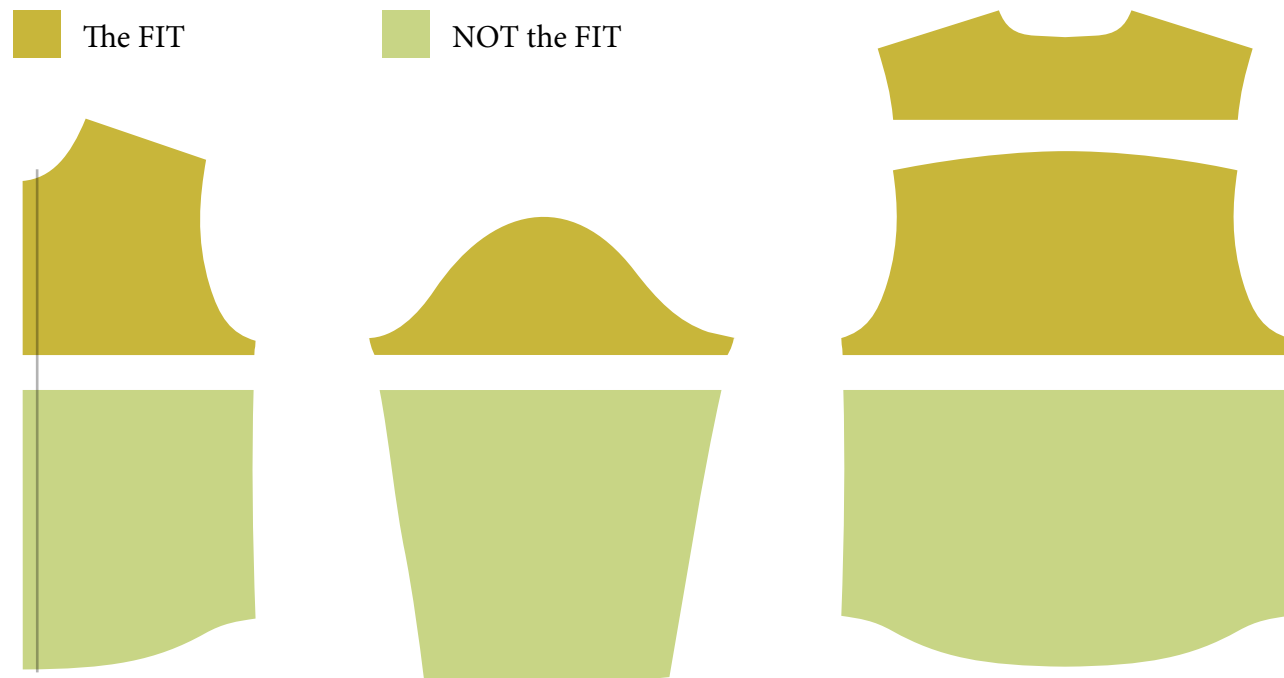


HOW TO USE: A Shirt Pattern as a Block

Here's a stripped-down typical shirt pattern, stripped of any extra details like cuffs and a collar, which is what I'm calling a "block".



Here's how I'd further split each of these pieces to initially separate the parts of each shape that provide the CORE fit from the parts that can be easily reshaped without altering that fit.



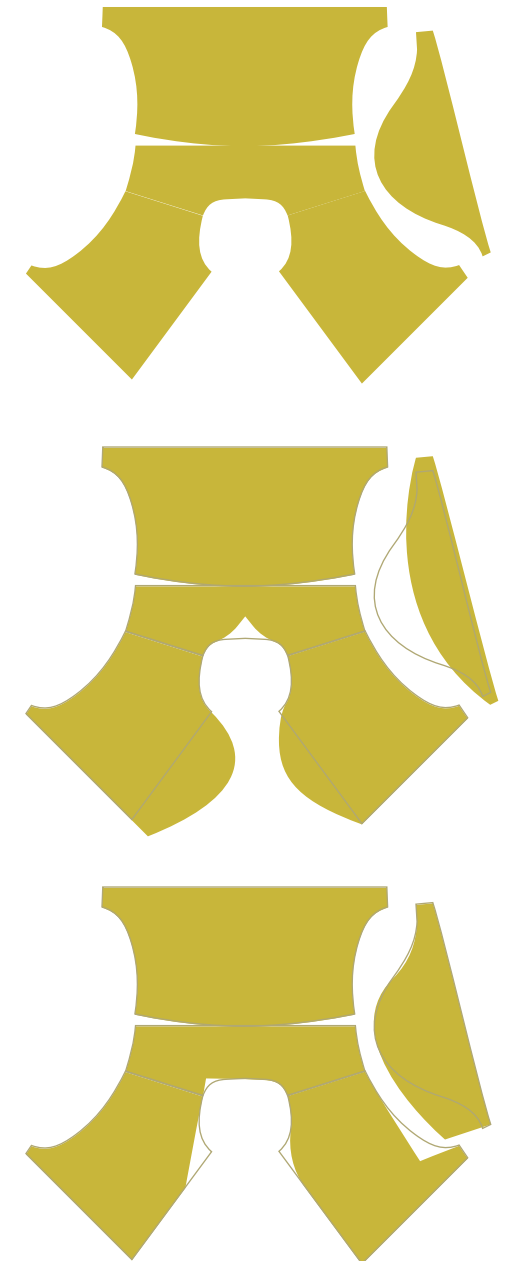
Now I'm sure some readers are thinking, "Wait a minute here! The way my shirts fit is all about how much ease they have from the armholes down, both on the body and on the sleeves!" And these areas are exactly where makers reshape their shirts to create Slim and Traditional fitting differences, right? So what am I talking about?

Well, simply that the difference between a slim and a traditional "fit" is actually a STYLE difference, one that can easily be played with on a single shirt block that fits the same where it actually counts, which is at the shoulders, and around the neck and arms as they join to the shoulders. You can make any sort of ease changes you prefer below these areas, but if these don't fit, the whole shirt will fit badly, regardless of the body ease.

Not getting this distinction is exactly why it's so common to see manufacturers and fashion stylists showing off RTW shirts that fit poorly on models with shoulders that are a serious mismatch with the shirt block, who apparently *think* they're showing how well the shirt fits, when what they're showing is actually how well the garment matches the prevailing style for fashion ease, despite the poor fit.

Of course, with RTW, the shoulders aren't customized or customize-able, so there's little the stylists can do, short of auditioning more models. But as makers, we can certainly do better. And once we do—that is, once we get a shirt to fit in the shoulders—we can also reshape the lower, green-tinted parts of the pattern at left whenever we want to play with various body (and arm) ease effects, as well as hem shapes, lengths, etc. [Here's a detailed blog post in which I demonstrate how I custom-fit the shoulders on any shirt pattern.](#) This article will be about exploring how to make the most of one that already does.

I hope it's clear in these "fit-parts" diagrams below that just by fiddling around with the shapes at the edges of the neckline, and even at the armhole and sleeve cap, as I've done on the two lower versions, we're not really changing the way the shoulders will fit. These, too, are all style changes.



HOW TO USE: A Shirt Pattern as a Block

Seeing the pattern this way is where my concept of the sub-block came from. In other words, once I got that the neckline and even the whole center-front—as well as the armhole—weren't essential to the fit, it was clear that you could further trim down the CORE of any fitting-block front, like so:

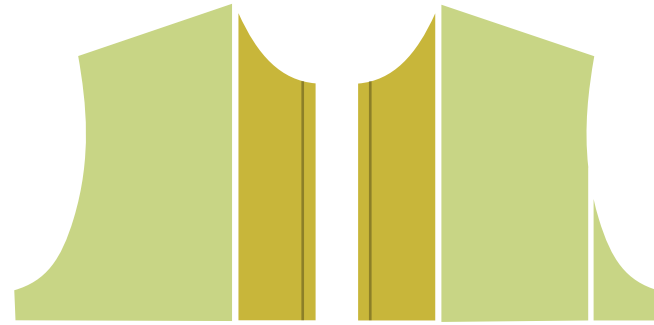


So far, I've been unlikely to want to play with new armhole or sleeve-cap shapes. So, if all I want to explore are collar and center-front reworkings, the un-altered block yoke joined to my pared-down block fronts would be all I needed to represent my entire fitted shirt block during collar and CF try-ons.

Thus, the Shoulder and Armscye Block was born, and for me, right now, anyway, the Armscye part is entirely optional:



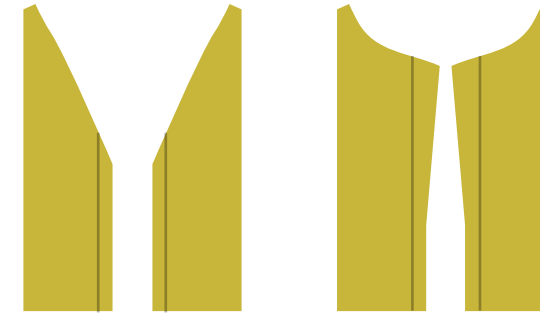
When I'm ready to play with some different neckline and CF ideas, then, THIS is all I really need, a Center-Front and Neckline sub-block:



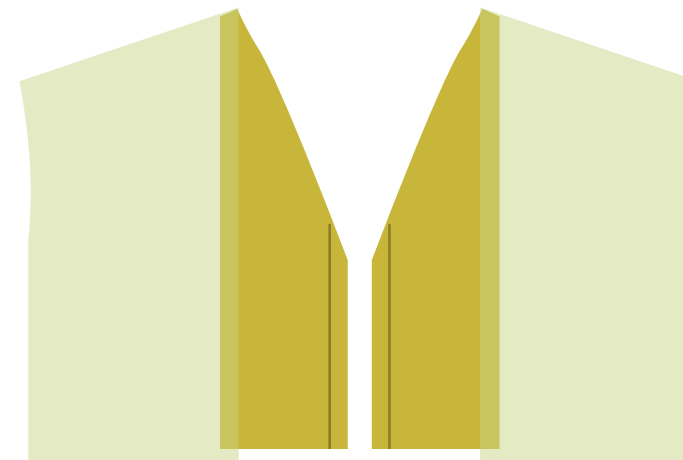
It'll certainly be useful to extend the sides of it a bit, to be sure I can overlap it with my Shoulder and Armscye sub-block when I like my changes, like so:



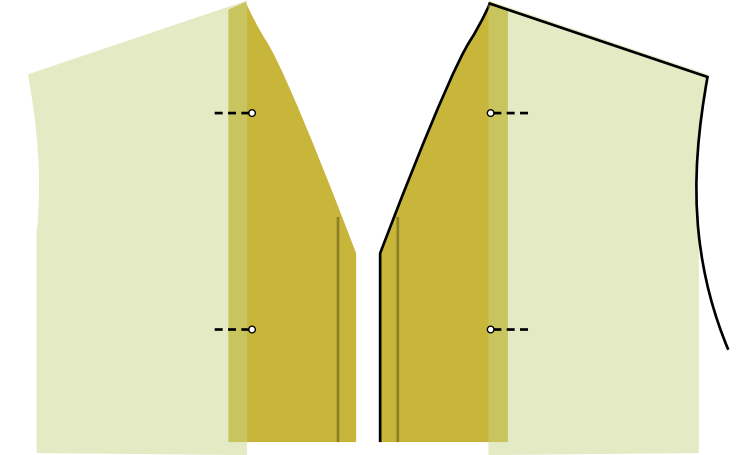
So, NOW, having this pair of sub-blocks means that if I do reshape the center-front overlap and/or the neckline, for example, like this:



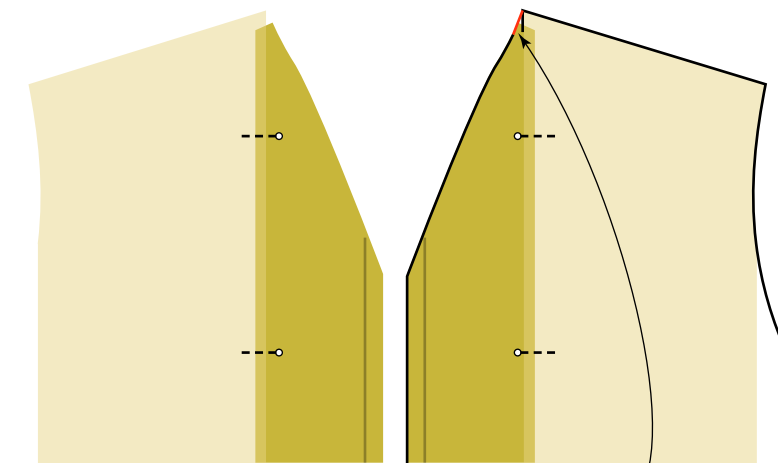
...all I need to do to integrate these new shapes back perfectly into my overall block, is to slip the Shoulder and Armscye sub-block over one of them, like this:



...pin them together as they lay on me or my form, and then, on the table, trace around the pairing to create my new front pattern.



Of course, another really cool part of all this is how easily I can use my new neckline and CF with one of my OTHER blocks simply by slipping its Shoulder and Armscye sub-block over it, pinning and tracing that, like so:

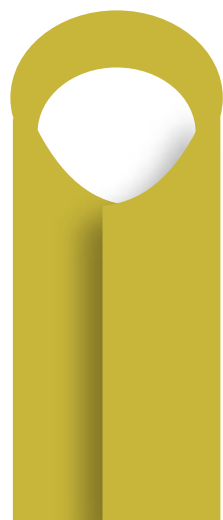


...perhaps with a bit of redrawing at the top if the new block's neckline width is a little different.

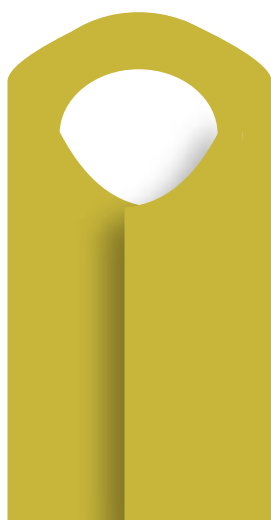
HOW TO USE: A Shirt Pattern as a Block

If all I want to do is play with a different collar, in other words, no change to the neckline and CF, I may not need ANY sub-block, especially for any design that has a close-fitting neckline. I can just use my already established neckline length and my own or my form's neck to test it out.

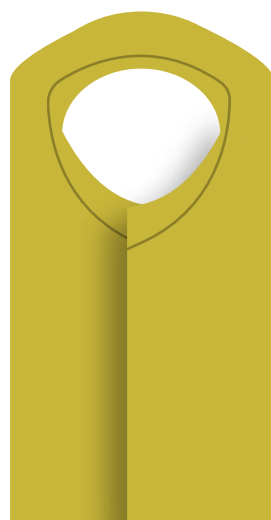
But if I want to perhaps explore how a collar shape might look with different neckline shapes or lengths, I can make good use of my CF and Neckline sub-block by giving it a little bit of back facing, like so (a full yoke usually being over-kill):



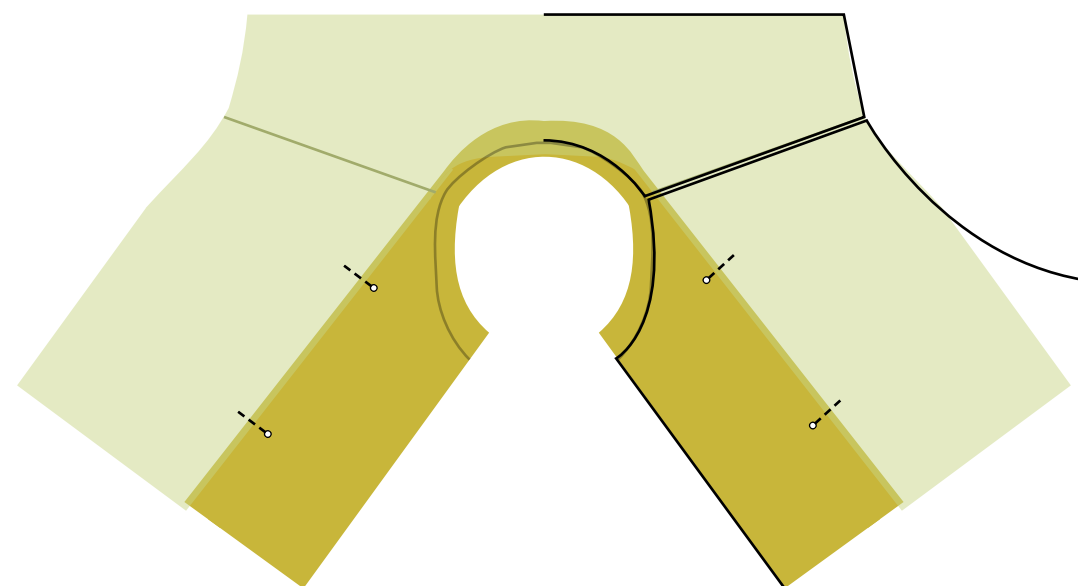
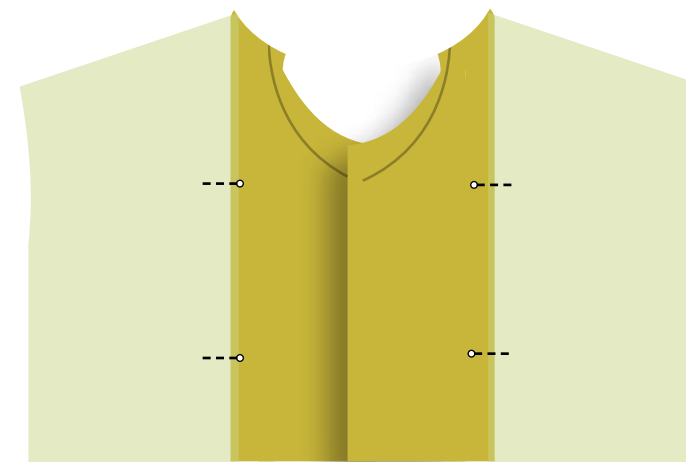
...and maybe adding a bit of extra width overall, for more flexibility:



I can now slip this sub-block on and play with arranging my collar design over it, pinning and tracing any new positions I discover for the collar that don't fit closely in the usual way:



On goes any Shoulder and Armscye sub-block, and my new design is integrated with the entire shirt block, including any changes to the back neckline.



HOW TO USE: A Shirt Pattern as a Block

There are two situations in which I only need minimal sub-blocks for collar testing, both of which I encountered over and over again during the making of this book.

Convertible and **combination** collars are similar in not having separate stands, and in being able to look interesting when fitting the neck in various ways—unlike most dress collars, which with a few exceptions, have to fit the neck or they just look wrong, too big or small.

So, with no stand to support them on their own during try-ons and experimentation, these two both really need a neckline to be sewn to...but because they usually sit close to the neck in back, regardless of how they fit in front, *they don't need a back neckline to be sewn to.*

Taking advantage of this greatly simplified my explorations with the patterns for these styles. Here's all I had to do with **convertible-collar** muslins:

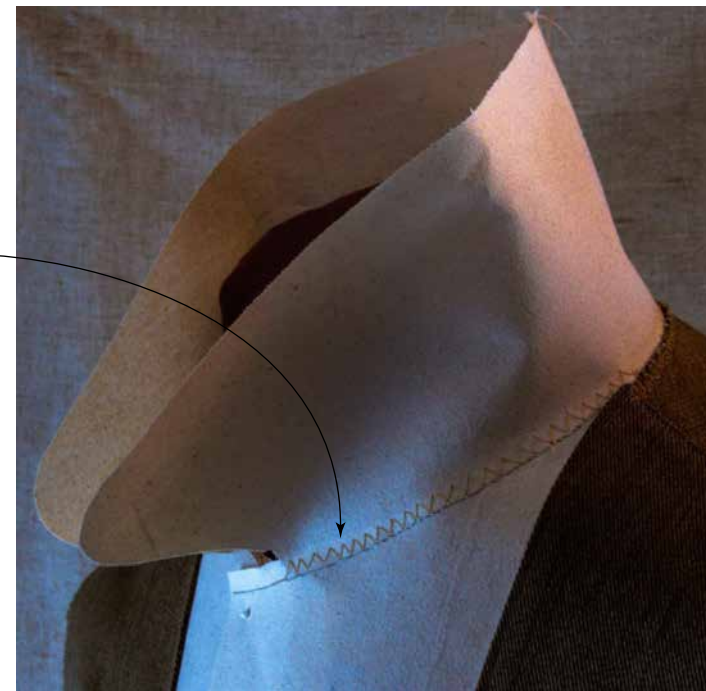
I cut a double-layer center-front and neckline sub-block from my sport-shirt block, marking the center-front overlaps on them, and skipped any back facing, relying instead on the collar itself—measured and cut to match my neckline length from cf to cf—to provide the neckline length and neck support.

The double layering (I usually cut these with a fold at the front edges) enabled me to provide both a front and a front facing when sewing up the collar muslins.

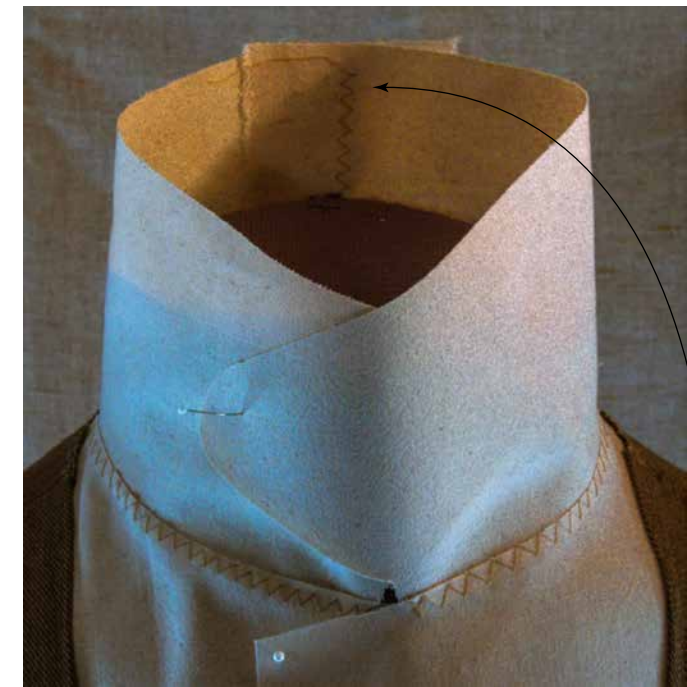


Either way, I made sure to allow enough width on the sub-block so whenever the test bore fruit, I could just slip on a shoulder and armscye sub and it would overlap enough to pin.

But after making a lot of these, I began to just cut both the collars and the sub-blocks from a single layer, with seam allowances only along the neckline edge, onto which I merely lapped and zigzagged the collars (see the jacket-block chapter for many more examples). With a sufficiently beefy muslin (I usually add some starch, too), this works quite well and really speeds up the play.



In practice, unless I'd messed with the collar length or the CF overlap—not that common—I didn't even need the shoulder sub-block to pin to, because I hadn't actually modified anything except the collar edges. The neckline and CF were still just as provided by the block itself.



On the other hand, being able to freely resize the collar, and thus rearrange the neckline and facing overlap at the same time, simply by cutting and overlapping or piecing in extra length to the collar in back, with no facing or anything else in the way, provides great freedom. Having a shoulder sub-block means it will always be easy to stay linked to the original block, no matter what you do with the collar/neckline muslin. Of course, you can cut apart a two-layer collar muslin in back, too. It's having no back facing that makes either easy.

HOW TO USE: A Shirt Pattern as a Block

With **combination-collar** muslins, the process is even easier, since they already include facings.

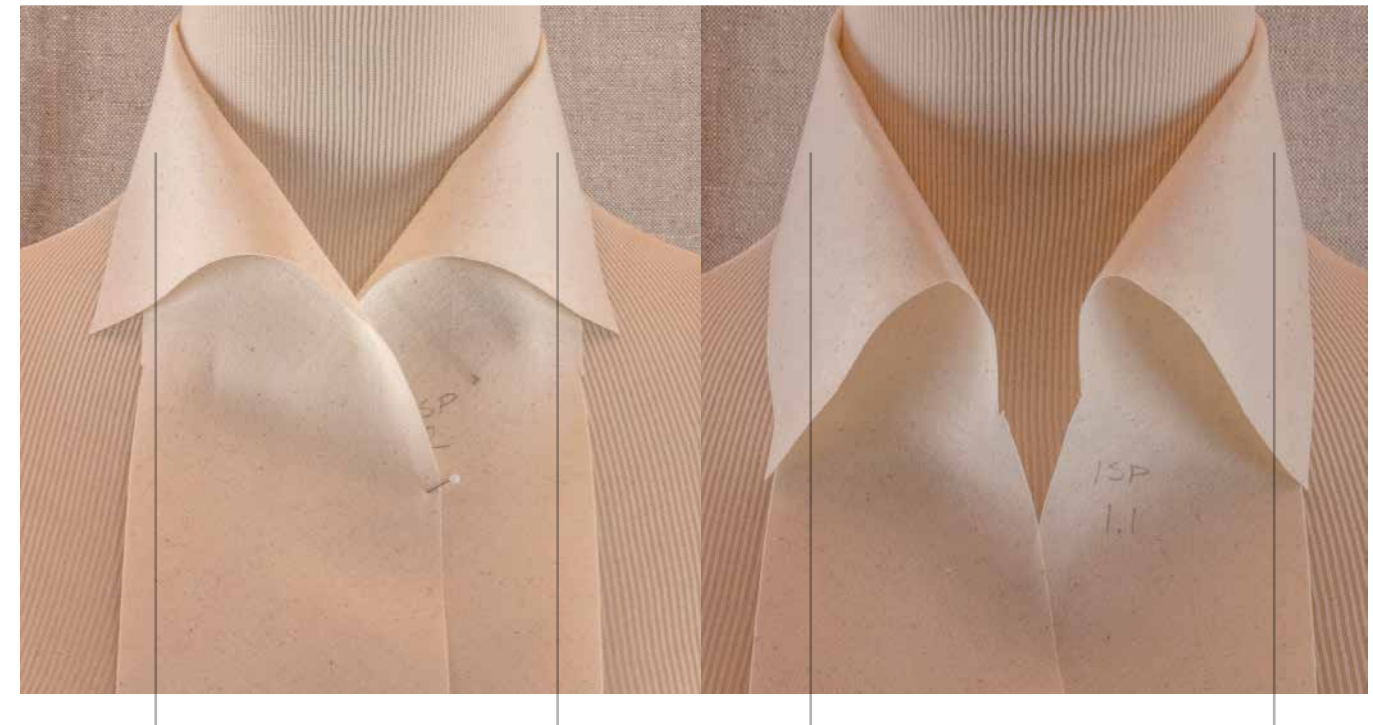
At first, I made these as double-layered tests, too, which was a useful way to get comfortable with the construction at the same time. And I always included a shoulder sub-block in all my experiments, like so:



But as with the convertible collars, the need for speed soon took over, and I realized that with sufficiently wide cut-on facings in case I DID need to slip a shoulder sub on, I'd always be fine. So I dropped using one in every case...AND I soon dropped using double layers for every muslin. As you can see below, it doesn't take much facing width to be wider than the neck width, which is wide enough to overlap with shoulder sub-block.



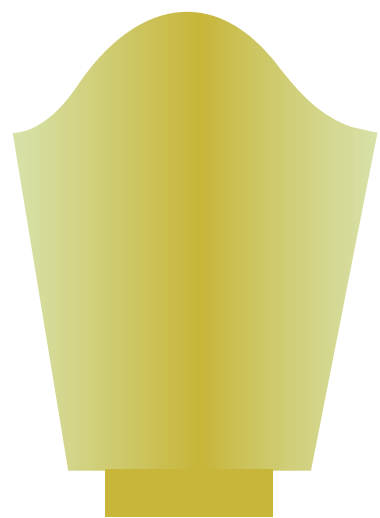
As shown in the book (pgs 102-3) I found it both easy and useful to experiment with CB collar-length adjustments by cutting or pinning. When working with an already-working combo-collar core, it's only when I do mess with the CB that I really need to bring in the shoulder sub, or...



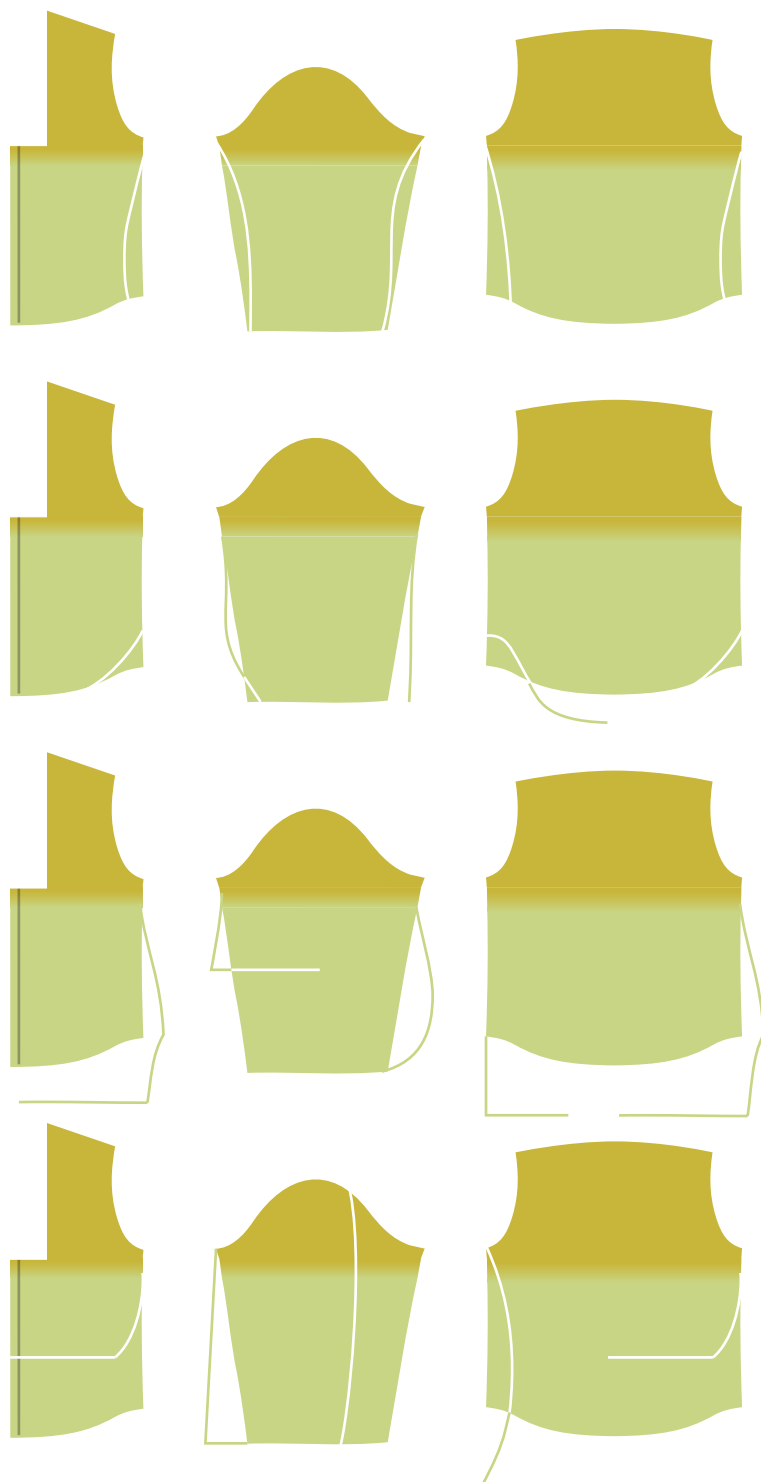
...if I decide to play around with the way the CFs overlap, as I'm doing above.

HOW TO USE: A Shirt Pattern as a Block

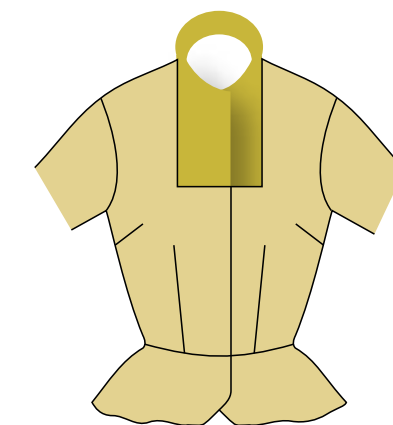
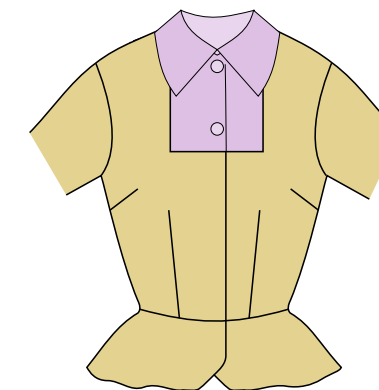
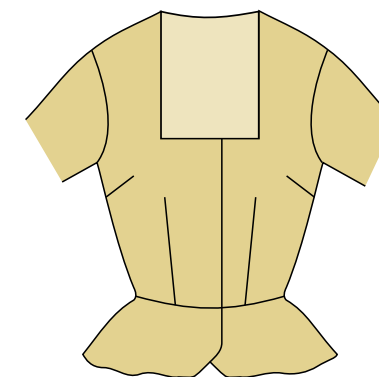
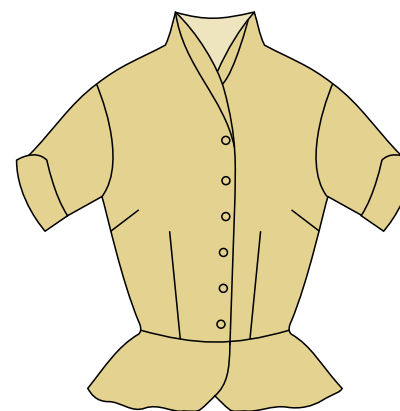
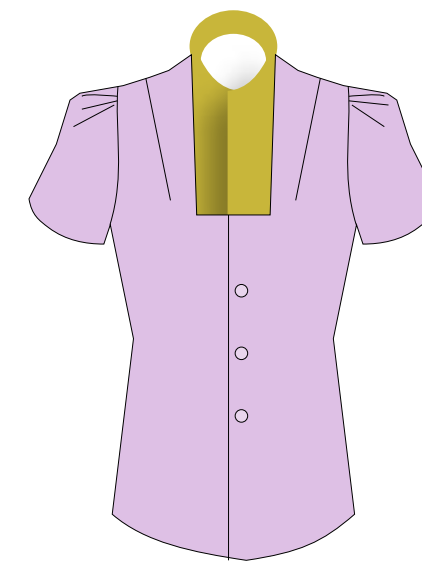
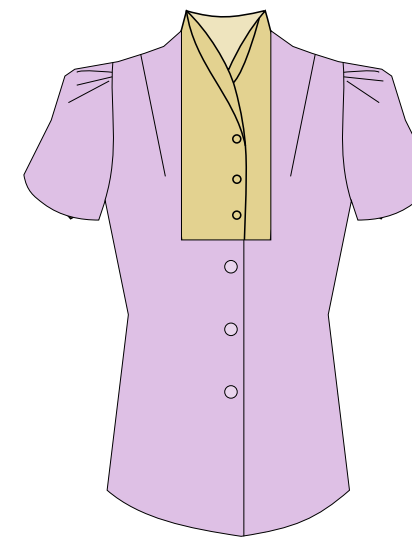
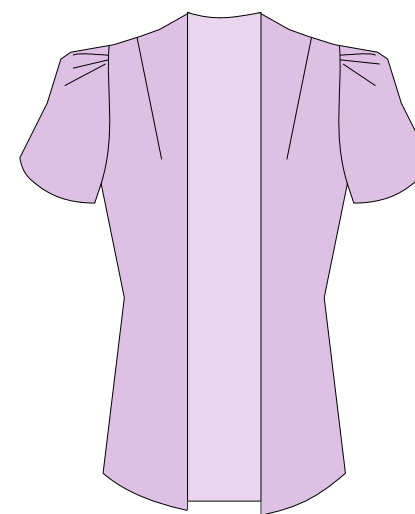
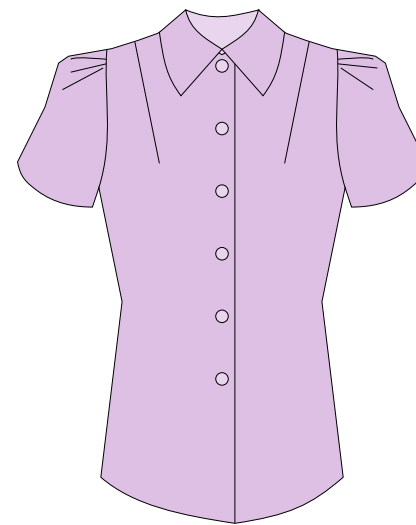
When exploring most placket or cuff designs, I don't really need a block or a sub-block; scraps will usually do the job. If I'm looking at something larger that involves the actual shape of the sleeve, such as when I tested out articulating elbows, I used an entire sleeve pattern. And a fitted cuff that establishes both the total sleeve length AND the wrist circumference, becomes part of the sleeve block, to be the basis for any faced-cuff experiments...which may or may not involve the side and cap shapes of the sleeve itself.



When the body and/or sleeve ease is the target, you can leave out the neckline/CF sub-block if you want (it can still become anything), and if you confine your experiments to the NOT fit areas, no problems!



All these same concepts apply equally to borrowing from or adding to non-shirt styles, and to swapping details between various patterns, shirt-like or not. The key is to get the patterns to fit first!



Looking at the process from this “outside the shirt box” perspective clarifies, I think, how all garments, and patterns for them, offer us both borrowable silhouettes (cores and blocks) and details, and whenever we're able to try them on, many new insights into what “fits” us.