

Heels and Thumbs – Options for Nålbinding Socks and Mittens

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Socks and mittens are the most commonly found nålbinding artifacts. In this class we will explore some options for how to construct them. These techniques will work with any stitch you want to use.

Heel 1. Assuming you have started at the toe, stitch the sock until it reaches the top of your instep (you can't add more rows without running into your leg). With the sock on your foot, mark the locations for where the cuff will join. Generally, this is about one-third the circumference of the sock. When you reach the right hand marker, create your stitches detached from the body of the sock. Continue making a "caterpillar" until it is long enough to reach around your ankle without stretching. Join to the body of the sock at the left hand marker. Continue stitching around until you run out of yarn. Start a new piece of yarn at the point where the foot of the sock and the cuff join. Stitch across the bottom of the sock. As you reach the corner, decrease 2-3 stitches, then continue around the bottom of the cuff until you come back to your starting place. Each time you reach a corner, decrease sharply to make the 90 degree turn. Each row becomes smaller until all the space is filled. Try the sock on several times during the process and adjust the fit if needed. This method works equally well if you have started your sock from the cuff rather than the toe. Then, after reaching your foot, make the caterpillar long enough to go comfortably around your instep.



Heel 1b. Stitch the sock until it almost reaches the top of your instep. Mark off the locations where it is flat on the bottom of your foot. Begin the caterpillar at the first marker. Make it long enough to reach all the way around the bottom of your foot, and reconnect at the second marker, and continue around the tube. (This is shorter than the length needed to reach around your ankle.) Attach new yarn inside the caterpillar and work around the inside, decreasing as needed to keep the stitches flat, until you reach the center of the spiral. This method is similar to making the top of a hat. Make the sides and cuff of the sock the same way as heel 2.



Heel 2. Stitch the sock until it almost reaches the top of your instep. Put the sock on your foot and mark the locations where the sock is flat on the bottom of your foot. Continue stitching until you reach the center between the markers. Make a caterpillar that is about two-thirds the remaining length of your foot. Turn the piece and continue stitching along the “bottom” side of the caterpillar until you reach the body of the sock. Connect into the body, turn and stitch around to the other side, decreasing as needed to make the turn and keep the piece flat. Continue adding rows until the flap is the width of the area between the markers, and the total sock is as long as your foot.

To make the sides of the foot, continue going around, however, do not add stitches at the curve. This will make the rows vertical. You will need to decrease as you reach the body of the sock. When the sides are about 2.5 – 3 inches, you will need to add stitches at the “corners” so that the cuff will stand up and have enough room to fit around your foot.





Heel 3: Stitch the sock until it reaches the instep. Put the sock on your foot and mark the locations where the sock is flat on the bottom of your foot. Instead of making a caterpillar, stitch back and forth across the width between the markers. This method works particularly well with the Coptic stitch, or the Danish stitch, but can be used with any stitch. In all cases you will need to add a stitch at the end of each row to maintain a straight line. When the foot flap is almost the length of your foot, stop adding that stitch. It will make the end of the sock rounded. To make the sides, join the yarn at the point where the heel flap and body of the sock meet. Stitch around the heel flap until you reach the other side. Connect to the sock body, turn and work in the opposite direction. Continue in this way until the sides are about 2 ½ to 3 inches (try it on!). At that point you will be able to stitch completely around the circle and complete the cuff.



Thumb 1: Starting at the cuff, construct the tube of the mitten increasing if needed, until you reach the base of your thumb. Disconnect the stitches and create a “caterpillar” that reaches across the space between your thumb and index finger. Connect to the tube again and continue stitching around until the mitten is the required length. Add a new piece of yarn at the thumb slit and stitch around the slit until the thumb is the required length. Add a stitch when you reach the “corners” of the slit, to avoid having a hole in the mitten.



Thumb 1b: This version creates the thumb before the hand of the mitten is stitched. When the mitten tube reaches the base of your thumb, create a small caterpillar. Attach the stitches in a small circle and continue around to make the thumb. Add a new piece of yarn at the base of the thumb and continue around to make the hand, picking up the free stitches of the thumb when you come to them.



Thumb 2: If you started your mitten at the fingertips, when you reach the base of your thumb your mitten will need to get wider. Make a caterpillar loop for the thumb and skip just a few stitches before attaching to the hand. Continue around until the cuff is the desired length. Go back and add the thumb stitches as in Thumb 1.

