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Knitting for Profit

Three Stages of Steam — Part 2

By Sharon Nani

In the last issue of *Machine Knit America*, I introduced you to the first stage of steam and how it relates to some different fibers. The easiest way to visualize the process of first steam is to follow it through a project. Our project will be a “V”-neck, cap-sleeve shell, knit with rayon boucle in stockinette stitch.

Special Note: In a single bed knit, the selvages (side edges) roll to the purl side, the top and bottom edges roll to the knit side. This is an important observation because it will affect the side on which you apply the steam. I know — (you have heard “never steam on the right side of a garment!” But remember I am speaking of “first steam” where pressure by the steaming device is never applied.) In this series, you are going to be exposed to all “three stages” and when to use them.

Let us assume that our shell has two pieces: a front with a “V”-neck, and a back with a scoop neck. The armhole is easily seen because it has a cap sleeve. A cap sleeve is one that extends approximately two to three inches beyond the shoulder. See Diagram 1.

These are the steps to describe the process of “first steam” as used in professional knitting.

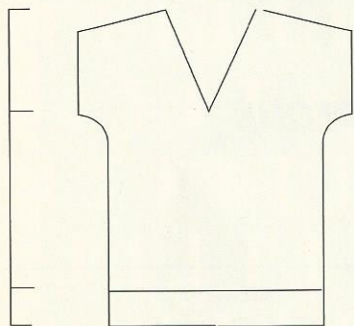


Diagram 1

First Steam Procedure For Back

1. Unroll the selvages: Lay the purl side of the knit upward. Starting at the shoulder edge, pass steam over the rolled edge. Using a downward motion, gently unroll the edge with your hand and pass steam over it again. Finish unrolling with your hand. You do this with a downward motion to bring ‘down’ the distortion that the heel grips cause on your edges. If you just steamed and unrolled the edge, you would set the stitches in a distorted look. Once the knitting has been mis-steamed, the correction is harder to do and sometimes not possible. Once the edge is unrolled, measure the armhole and side seam, compare the measurement to the pattern, then steam the final unrolling of the selvage by actually laying the nozzle of the steamer on the edge. Pat the nozzle up and down on each spot (do not iron in a swinging fashion as this would pull the stitches apart again). Make minor sizing adjustments as you do this. This whole process takes a couple of minutes once you get the feel for it. But again, don’t be in a hurry when you are learning new techniques.

2. Flip the garment over so that the knit side is facing you. Unroll the back neckline in the same manner as above. This time take care to pull slightly upward on the shoulder point so that it really is the high point of your knit. When you get to the shoulder edge, steam and pat downward with your hand so that you don’t get little high points on your edge.

3. Now flip the garment back to the purl side (or which ever side is going to be the right side). Check the measurements against the pattern. Pass steam over the whole body (not the ribbing), patting with your hand to make any adjustments in lopsidedness or any minor sizing adjustments.

4. The general rule regarding steam-

ing of ribs is: DON’T! You can ruin the elasticity in some yarns. When using some stabilizers in the rib, you must steam it to get the effect that the stabilizer produces. See past issues of *Machine Knit America* regarding stabilizers and Lycra®. My suggestion is always try the steam on your swatch to test for effect. When I steam a rib, I always push the ribs together first, pass steam over it, pat with my hand and do not move it until it is cool.

In industry, the cooling of the steamed knit is much faster if a vacuum table is used. This is a rectangular (some come shaped like an ironing board) table. It has a padded surface upon which you lay your knit fabric, then pressing a special foot pedal, cool air is sucked or vacuumed down through the knit and thus cooling it immediately. They can be ordered with special “hams” for armhole and shoulder shaping. This is the type that I personally use. Commercial iron or sewing companies would handle such products. I received mine from Susman; I personally do not know about other brands, so I can not describe them.

First Steam Procedure For Front

Refer to the back except for the “V”-neck.

If you are not used to the use of weights and heel grips, you may have more distortion in this area. You can correct some of this with steam.

REMEMBER: YOUR ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO MAKE SIZING CORRECTIONS BY ADJUSTING YOUR PATTERN OR BY THE USE OF WEIGHTS!! ONLY USE STEAM AS A LAST RESOURCE.

In a production situation, your first gar-

ment may be off in sizing and would be sold as a 'second.' Thereafter the compensations must be made!!

Measure the slope of the "V" before steam. Compare this to the pattern. The pattern should show you the slope measurement - not the depth of the "V." On a size small this is 8". When you steam your "V," make both sides 8".

1. If it is too short: pass steam over the edge, spread it longer with your fingers. Set the stitches by patting the steamer nozzle on the edges, perfect it by hand.
2. If it is too long: push the stitches together evenly with your hand. Pass steam over it, perfect it with your hand, set the stitches by patting with the steamer.
3. The final step of the first steam is to lay the front on the back as if they were sewn together, and see how they match up. Do minor corrections with steam and hand

work.

Once you are comfortable with the process of first steam, it would take approximately 4 minutes per piece, using a garment steamer.

Notice that we did not pin anything. Pinning is rarely done in first or final steam in either cottage industry or in production situations.

When you do your first steam, pay attention to where you had to make your corrections. Write it down as you steam, when you are first learning, because you want to correct your pattern or use your weights differently the next time you make this garment.

In a production situation where several garments are to be knit, the procedure is:

Knit 1 back — first steam and check for sizing.

Knit front to match back even if it was off in sizing. This is sold

as a second.

Knit second back, making sizing compensations — first steam and check for sizing.

Knit front to match back, making sizing compensations — first steam and check for sizing.

Once the sizing has been approved, you can knit all the backs for the order, then all the fronts, without stopping to check for sizing.

IF YOU HAVE TO CHANGE TO A NEW COLOR OR DYE LOT —

RE-SIZE — THIS COULD AFFECT THE SIZE OF YOUR GARMENT!!

Wow, I bet you didn't know that there was so much to first steam. Well, next issue I will teach you more about steaming. Polish Those Knits. ■

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