

# Basic Top-Down Socks, May 2006

by Charlton Wilbur

There are nearly constant requests on the Sockknitters mailing list for basic sock patterns. So I decided to write my own basic pattern.

## Basics

The finished sock can be any size you want, and in any weight of yarn you want. I've worked this sock from women's size 5½ to men's size 13, in yarns ranging from fingering weight at 10 stitches per inch on size 0 needles to heavy worsted weight yarn at 5 stitches per inch on size 7 needles.

This pattern is written with a set of five double-pointed needles in mind. If you prefer to use four double-pointed needles or two circular needles, converting the pattern is entirely up to you.

I don't include a lot of information on technique; I assume you have a good knitting book handy. If you don't, I recommend *The Knitter's Handy Book of Patterns*, by Ann Budd, and *Sensational Knitted Socks*, by Charlene Schurch. *The Knitter's Book of Finishing Techniques*, by Nancie M. Wiseman, also has very good information on a variety of techniques (not just finishing!), but does not have the variety of patterns that the other two have.

For more experienced sock knitters: this pattern uses a French heel and offers a choice between a round toe and a flat toe.

## Gauge & Sizing

Choose yarn and needles, and knit a swatch. Some knitters produce exactly the same gauge when they knit in the round as they do when they knit flat; if you are not one of these knitters, knit the swatch in the round.

The fabric you produce should be dense. Most yarn labels have a suggested needle size on them. When you're knitting socks, this suggested needle size is almost always wrong. It's aimed at the kind of fabric you get in

sweaters, which is looser than the kind of fabric that makes for good durable socks. So if you don't know what size of needles to use, start with a set two sizes smaller than the yarn label recommends – unless you're using yarn intended for socks, in which case you can probably trust the label recommendations.

Measure your foot. The two measurements that you need are the circumference of your ankle at its thickest point and the length of your foot. You can also measure the circumference of your foot at its thickest point around the ball, and use this to custom-fit the foot of your sock. Most people will find that their ankle and foot are the same size. Also, you may want to measure your foot from the middle of the ankle bone to the floor, when your foot is flat on the floor. All the sizing of this pattern is based on these four measurements and your gauge.

(If you're knitting these socks for someone else, measure his or her foot instead of yours, of course! And you can find tables of standard foot sizes on the Internet if you search, or in the front of *Sensational Knitted Socks*.)

## Cuff & Leg

Take the measurement around your ankle in inches, and multiply it by your gauge, measured in stitches per inch. (If you're European or Canadian, or otherwise prefer to keep everything metric, you can do that instead – nothing in this pattern will be altered significantly.) If you want socks that fit snugly, you can subtract up to 10% from that number. Round to the nearest 4 stitches, or to the nearest 4 or 8 stitches if you're using the Round Toe (see below).

Cast on that number of stitches, and divide them among four needles. Work k2, p2 ribbing for 1½ to 3 inches, depending on your preference.

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If you really like the pattern, you can make a donation to my PayPal account at [cwilbur@chromatico.net](mailto:cwilbur@chromatico.net).

Pattern version 1.1, May 12, 2006. Thanks to Sheron Goldin and Margie who found mistakes and offered suggestions.

Work in St st for 2 to 4 inches, depending on your preference for the length of the leg.

## Heel Flap

The heel flap is worked on the first half of the round. Divide the number of stitches that you cast on in half; this is “the right number of stitches” in the instructions that follow. These will all be on one needle. Keep the second half of the round, which will become the instep stitches, on a separate needle or two needles or otherwise set aside.

You have three options for patterning on the heel, described below. The idea behind the two slip-stitch patterns is to create a fabric that isn't particularly stretchy, to improve the fit and durability. (Some sock knitters, including the estimable Elizabeth Zimmerman, do not feel that slip-stitch heels improve durability; the third option is a plain heel.)

For people with average feet and knitters with average gauge, you should work your chosen pattern for a number of rows equal to one-half of the number of stitches you cast on. This will produce an acceptable heel flap in most cases. If you want a custom fit, you can knit the heel flap until it is as long as the distance from the center of your heel bone to the floor, when you are barefoot with your foot flat on the floor. (Or, obviously, the foot of the person you're making the sock for, if it isn't you!)

In either case, you should end with a wrong-side row. If you're working the Eye of Partridge Heel, you can end with row 2 or row 4 – you don't need to work the whole pattern.

### Plain Slip-Stitch Heel Flap

1. \*sl 1 pwise, k1\*. Repeat between \*s until you have worked the right number of stitches. Turn work.
2. sl 1 pwise, p to end. Turn work.

### Eye of Partridge Heel Flap

Some knitters do not like slipping two consecutive stitches. The [k2] in row 3 of the pattern is optional, but keeps the characteristic diamond texture of Eye of Partridge pattern while avoiding two consecutive slipped stitches.

1. \*sl 1 pwise, k1\*. Repeat between \*s until you have worked the right number of stitches. Turn work.
2. sl 1 pwise, p to end. Turn work.
3. sl 1 pwise, [k2], \*sl 1 pwise, k1\*. Repeat between \*s until you have knitted all but the final stitch in the row. k1. Turn work.

4. sl 1 pwise, p to end. Turn work.

### Plain No-Slip-Stitch Heel Flap

1. sl 1 pwise, k until you have worked the right number of stitches. Turn work.
2. sl 1 pwise, p to end. Turn work.

## Heel Turn

### French Heel

1. Knit across  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the number of stitches you cast on, plus 2. (For instance, if you cast on 64 stitches, knit across  $64/4 = 16 + 2 = 18$  stitches.) ssk, k1, turn work.
2. sl 1 pwise, p5, p2tog, p1, turn work.
3. sl 1 pwise, k to 1 before gap, ssk, k1, turn work.
4. sl 1 pwise, p to 1 before gap, p2tog, p1, turn work.

Repeat rows 3 and 4 until you have worked all the heel stitches.

## Gusset and Gusset Decreases

You'll be picking up and knitting stitches in this section of the sock. The number you should pick up on each side is  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the number of stitches you cast on. The stitches you slipped at the beginning of the heel flap rows should look like a neat row of chained stitches, and that's where you will be picking up stitches.

Knit across the sole. On the next needle, pick up and knit the chain stitches from the left side of the heel flap. Pick up and knit 2 more stitches from the two sides of the stitch above the top. (This eliminates the hole at the top of the gusset that would occur if you didn't do this.)

On the third needle, knit across the instep. On the fourth needle, pick up and knit 2 stitches from the two sides of the stitch above. Pick up and knit the chain stitches from the left side of the heel flap.

### Gusset Decrease Pattern

1. k across the sole. k until 3 sts before the end of the needle, ssk, k1. k across the instep. k1, k2tog, k to end of needle.
2. k around.

Repeat rows 1 and 2 until you have the same number of stitches remaining in the round as you initially cast on.

(Alternately, if your foot circumference and ankle circumference are sufficiently different, you can repeat

rows 1 and 2 until you have a number of stitches equal to your foot measurement in inches times your gauge in stitches per inch, reduced by the same percentage you reduced your number of cast-on stitches by, and rounded to the nearest 4, 8, or 12 stitches.)

The last time you knit row 2, rearrange the stitches on the needles so that two of the needles each hold half of the instep stitches and two of the needles each hold half of the sole stitches.

## Foot

To know how long to make the foot, you need to know how long you will need to make the toe. To do this, you need to know what your row gauge is – how many rows you're getting per inch. Measure this somewhere on your sock.

You also need to know how many rows your toe will take. If you will use the Round Toe, look at the table below to see how many rows the Round Toe will take depending on whether you're dividing by 4 or by 8. If you will use the Flat Toe, you will work one-half as many rows as you cast on (or as many as you are working for a custom foot circumference). Divide the number of rows you will need to work by your row gauge in rows per inch to find out how long you need to make the toe.

Knit until the length of the foot is equal to the length you will need to make the foot, minus the length you will need to make the toe.

## Toe

You have two options for the toe.

### Round Toe

If you are working an 8-divisor round toe, start here.

1. \*k2tog, k6\*, repeat from \* until end of round.
- 2.-8. k.
9. \* k2tog, k5 \*, repeat from \* until end of round.
- 10.-15. k.
16. \* k2tog, k4 \*, repeat from \* until end of round.
- 17.-21. k.
22. \* k2tog, k3 \*, repeat from \* until end of round.

### Round Toe Divisors

| Divisor | Toe Rows |
|---------|----------|
| 4       | 10       |
| 8       | 36       |

23.-26. k.

If you are working an 8-divisor round toe, continue here. If you are working a 4-divisor round toe, start here.

1. \* k2tog, k2 \*, repeat from \* until end of round.

2.-4. k.

5. \* k2tog, k1 \*, repeat from \* until end

of round.

6.-7. k.

8.. \* k2tog\*, repeat from \* until end of round.

9. k.

10. \* k2tog\*, repeat from \* until end of round.

Graft the remaining stitches using Kitchener stitch.

### Flat Toe

The row starts in the middle of the sole. Needle 1 is the left side of the sole; needle 2 is the left side of the instep; needle 3 is the right side of the instep; needle 4 is the right side of the sole.

1. on needle 1, k until 3 stitches remain; k2tog; k1. on needle 2, k1, ssk, k to end. on needle 3, k until 3 stitches remain; k2tog; k1. on needle 4, k1, ssk, k to end.
2. k around.

Repeat Rows 1 and 2 until you have half as many stitches remaining on the needles as you cast on (or as many as you are working for a custom foot circumference).

Repeat Row 1 until you have one-quarter as many stitches remaining on the needles as you cast on (or as many as you are working for a custom foot circumference). Knit the stitches on needle 1.

Graft the remaining stitches using Kitchener stitch.

## Final Touches

Weave in the ends. And when you're done, make another sock just like the first one. It helps considerably if you take notes while you're making the first sock, so you can duplicate the first one entirely.