

The Burrito Method: Basics

I first learned about this approach to sewing several typical shirt details from a neat, out of print, book called *Sewing Magic* by Barbara Hellyer, who simply called them all “magic” methods. (The method can be applied to lots of different projects of course.) Apparently it later got the “burrito” name from Margaret Islander, who was explaining it to a student, who exclaimed, “I get it, it’s like a burrito! Unless there’s a filling inside it, it’s just a tortilla.” (For those who don’t know Mexican food terms, think: A soft flat-bread rolled into a tube around a chopped filling.)

Anyway, the main details it’s used to make are collar stands and bands, cuffs, and yokes. I’ve also seen it referred to in pillow-making steps, and no doubt there are other applications...and maybe you’ll invent one. If so, let us know!

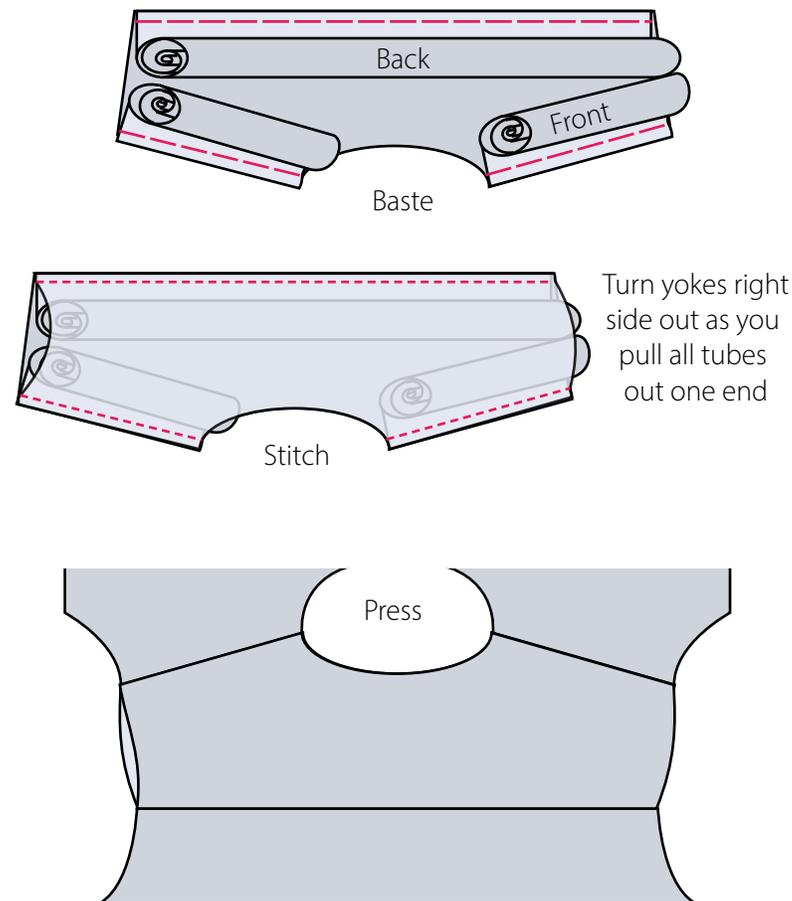
The basic idea is to wrap a larger garment piece into a roll and slip it inside both layers of some smaller detail you’re attaching it to, like a yoke, cuff or band, sandwiching the larger item’s seam-allowance layers between the detail’s inner and outer seam allowances and stitching them all at once, rather than stitching one side of the detail to the larger edge and then folding the detail over the edge and edge- or top-stitching to close it. Either the detail has an open end or other section that you can use to pull the larger piece out when you’re done (yokes are open at the armhole ends), or you leave some of a fully-closed detail’s seams unstitched so you can get the larger piece out, then edge-stitch just that smaller section, after you’ve had simplified access to trickier parts, like corners, before unrolling the burrito. That’s how you deal with a cuff or a band. The diagrams will show you step-by-step.

Preliminary steps: All pieces complete and ready to be joined, such as: Backs, fronts and sleeves gathered, tucked or pleated along edges to be joined, sleeve plackets and front bands finished, curved seams stay-stitched and clipped, etc. Cuffs and bands interfaced, and sometimes partially joined on free edges. I always wait to cut my neckline details until after the neckline is stay-stitched and clipped, then measure that, add seam-allowance width and cut based on the total.

Marked: Bands, stands, and yokes, plus backs and necklines at CB. Cuffs and sleeve ends usually don’t need marking; you just fit the cuff from placket edge to placket edge.

The Burrito Yoke; No Visible Stitches

Either fronts or the back can be done this way, or all three together if there’s room inside the yoke to fit the three pieces rolled up tightly, like so:



Of course, you don’t have to roll up the piece(s) you first stitch sandwiched between the yoke layers, and they’ll be easier to stitch flat, but eventually they’ll need to get partially rolled or scrunched inside if you want to burrito the opposite piece(s). And as you can leave much of each front hanging out the yoke ends but must get the whole back inside, it’s usually most sensible to do the fronts first, whether burritoing them or not.

As all this rolling and scrunching can be stressful (on you and the garment), and will lead to more ironing, and as there are other ways* to wind up with no visible stitching on at least the outside yoke edges, if not all of them, I rarely bother with this method, especially since I also tend to like narrow yokes, both for appearance and when placing the yoke seam for maximum shaping help when draping my rounded shoulders.

*See the Convertible Collar Construction article

The Burrito Stand and Cuffs; Great Bulk Reduction And Edge Accuracy, page 1

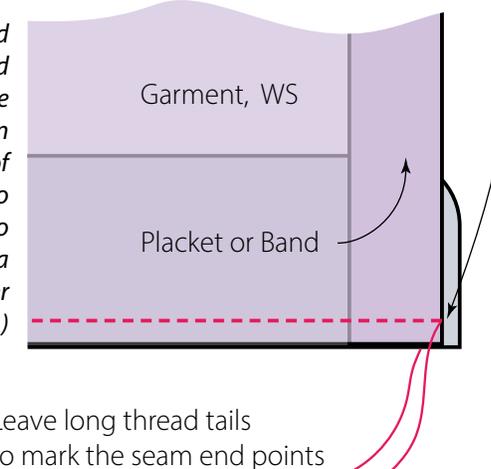
¼”(6mm) seam allowances unless otherwise indicated

These applications are where the idea really shines, in my opinion, as it provides a neat way to closely and safely trim away thick seam allowances right where they most need it and usually aren’t easy to otherwise manage, as well as to guarantee getting the band or cuff end really flush with the placket or band edge coming into it.

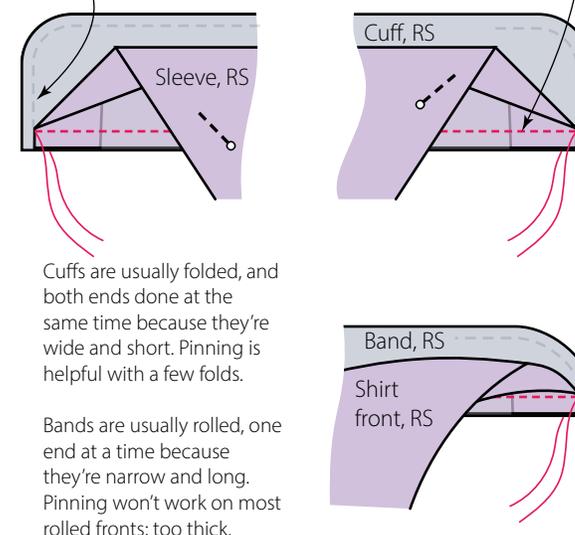
In both cases, these are both in the partial-stitching category, as they have no open ends and there’s typically no way to roll up the full amount of fabric the larger pieces contain. So, you have to do some careful folding and/or rolling right at the corner you’ll be burritoing. There’s also some careful initial stitching to do, so let’s look more closely:

1. Whether a cuff or a band, the standard set-up is to have a finished edge on the larger piece and a raw edge on the smaller one at the critical corner. Start and stop EXACTLY at the finished edge when joining these two, as shown.

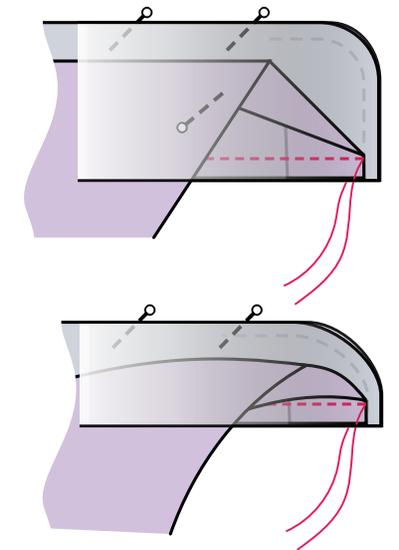
(Note that the finished band length is based on the length of the seam you make to join it, not on the length of the pattern piece, so you never have to worry about a mismatch, yet another burrito benefit.)



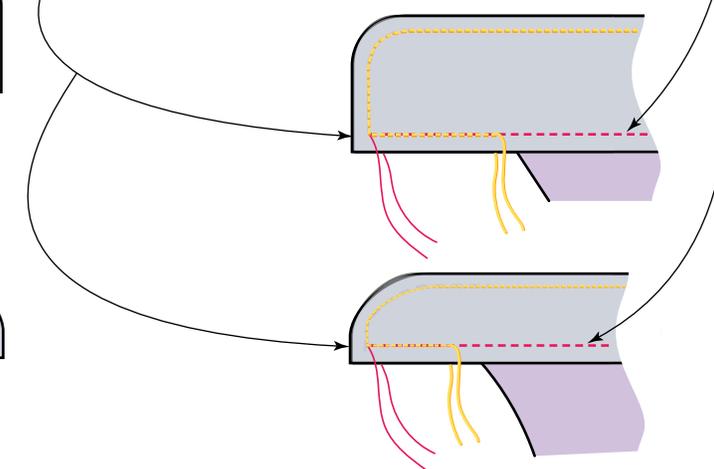
2. Fold or roll the garment exactly at the seam ends so it’s out of the way of both the seam just stitched and the seams to come along the detail edges and ends.



3. Pin or baste the remaining cuff or band layer right sides together over the first one, and over the folded or rolled garment...



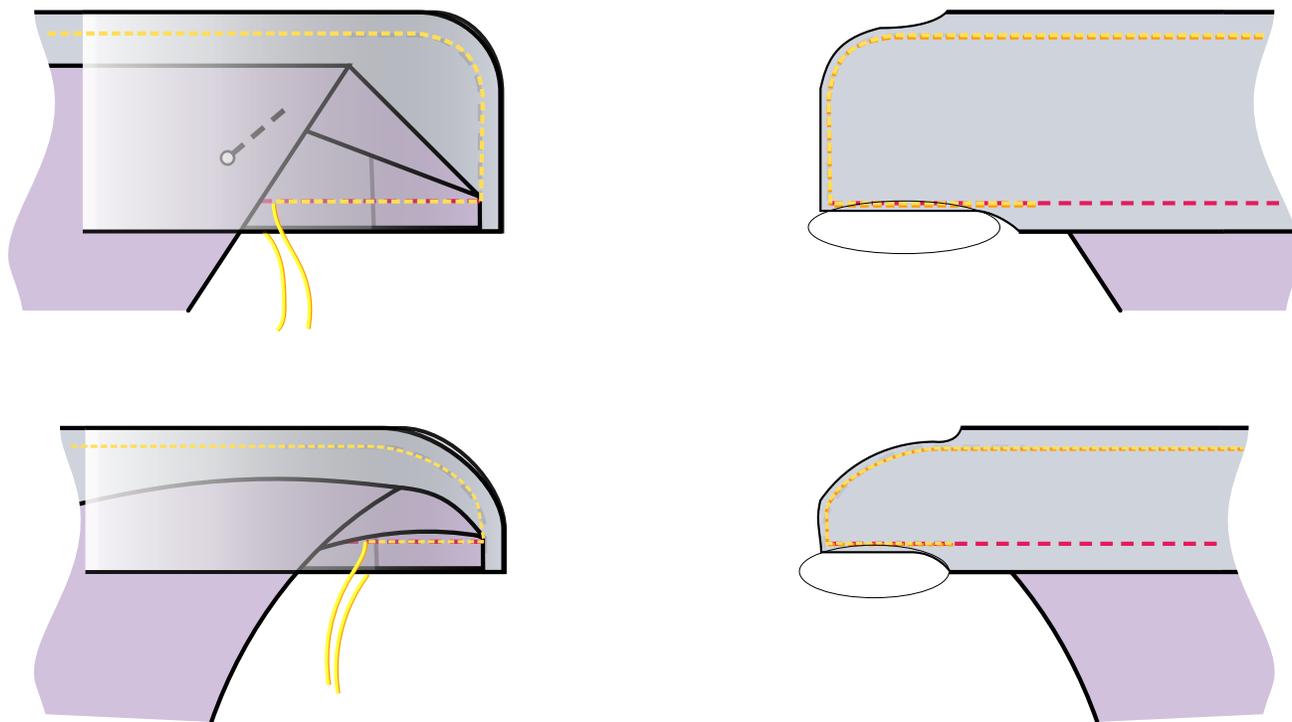
4. ... then flip the layers to the other side so you can see the previous stitching. Stitch exactly on top of it, starting or ending just shy of the folded or rolled garment below and pivoting exactly over the thread-tail-marked corner as you stitch the free edges.



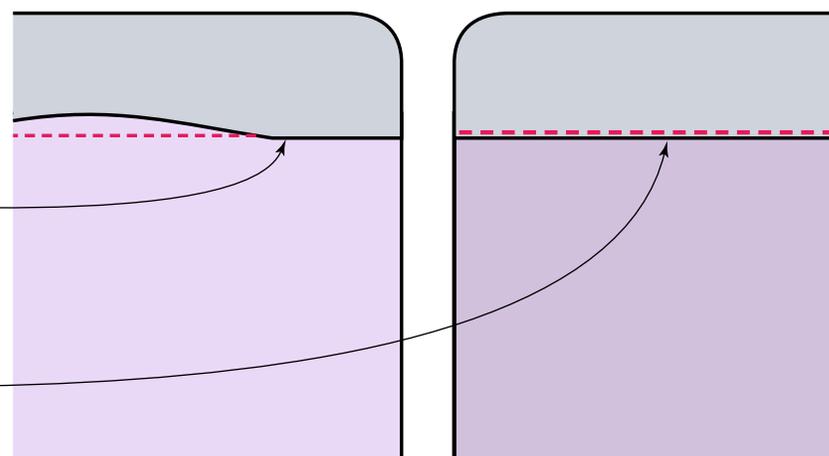
The Burrito Stand and Cuffs; Great Bulk Reduction And Edge Accuracy, page 2

5. When you've stitched all around each detail, treating the corners as shown on each end, but before trimming, feel through the layers at the corners to be sure you didn't catch any of the folded or rolled edges of the inside piece. You can even partially turn them out (easy because you simply pull on the folded or rolled fabric) to check, then un-turn and fix if needed.

When all seems well, note that you can trim these now-double-stitched edges quite ruthlessly, very much as shown below, which is how I do it. Even if you don't want to trim the detail's front and curved edges to this extent, at least go ahead and trim away the bulk that extends out from the placket or band layers (circled), allowing the detail to be as thin and flexible right there as possible, with no interference when you get to the buttonhole and button-adding steps.



6. Once trimmed and turned, you'll find the still un-stitched edge on the inside already partially turned as well as stitched at each end, easy to secure with a little glue basting so it just covers the stitching visible from the finished side. Now you can return to the outer side and do all the edge-stitching and topstitching you want, so long as it includes one row of edge stitching along the detail's seam with the garment, catching that free edge below.



Notice how smooth and precise the join is between my burrito'ed grey cuff and the placket above it, compared to the way this has been fudged on the violet RTW shirt.

Even more impressive, from the sewer's point of view anyway, is how much thinner and more flexible the area around the detail/garment seam is, shown below, comparing cuffs, and below that, comparing the collar stands. The untrimmed RTW seam allowance is clearly keeping the detail's edge stiff and bulky, while mine feels like there's nothing there. Because there isn't.

Haven't had one of these ultra-trimmed seams fail yet.

