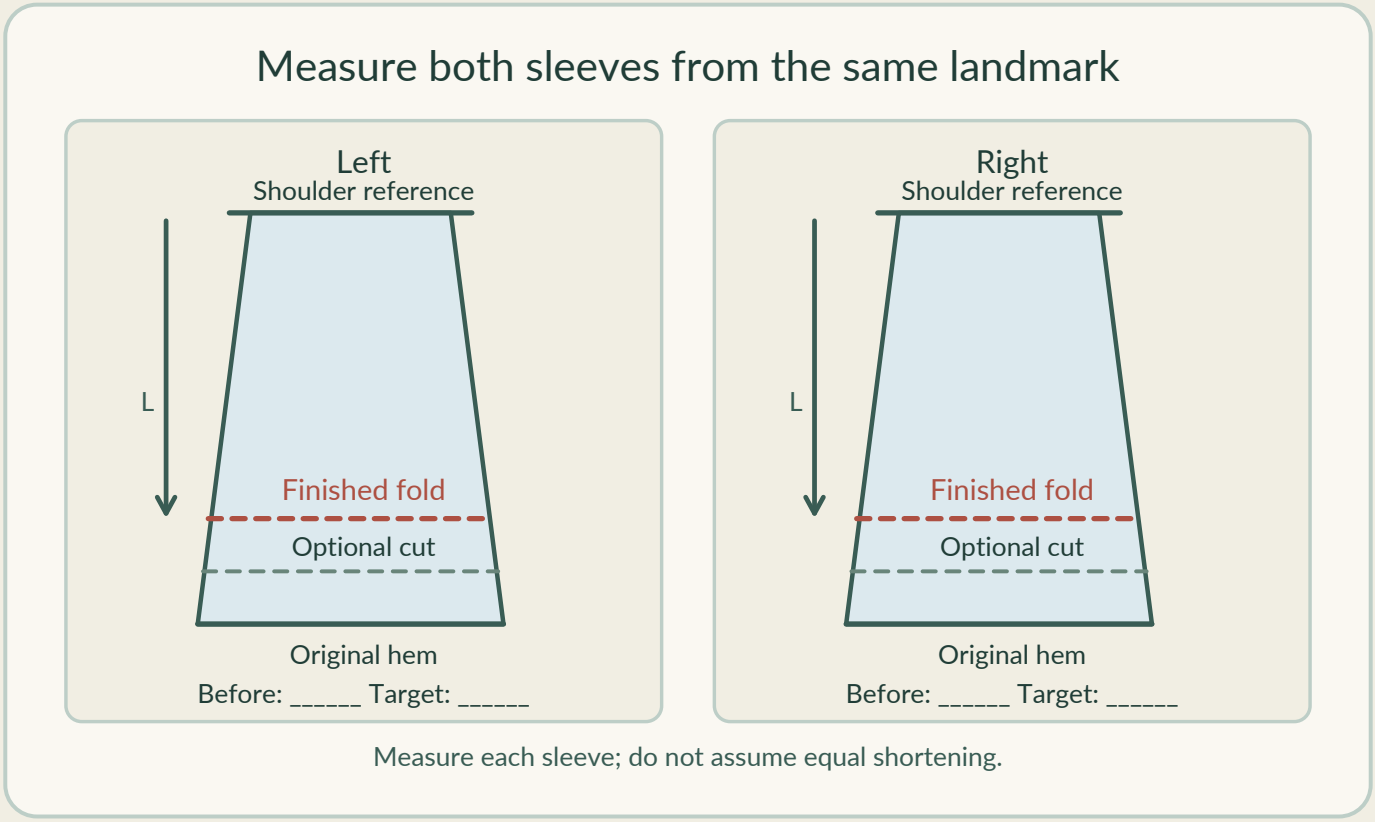
Shorten a Sleeve with a Simple Turned Hem



Measure paired plain woven sleeves from consistent landmarks and form a low-bulk turned hem while preserving comfortable reach.

14 practical steps • Original diagrams and repair records

Illustrative repair plans — not physical test results

Before you start

This method applies to an ordinary adult unlined woven sleeve ending in a plain straight or gently shaped turned hem with no cuff, placket, vent, elastic, lining or trim requiring reconstruction. It assumes sound cloth and a small shortening compatible with the sleeve shape. A strongly tapered sleeve can be wider at the new hem than its allowance can accommodate; do not force mismatched circumferences. Do not use pins while wearing a garment. Prefer a reversible fold if it lies smoothly; trimming is optional only after the final length and allowance are confirmed.

Materials

Clean shirt, care label, flexible tape, ruler, paper, pencil, removable fabric marker, fine clips or pins for the work table, contrasting basting thread, compatible sewing thread, suitable needle, fabric scissors only if a final cut is necessary, and a compatible iron and pressing cloth if care permits.

Plan the repair

Select a repeatable measurement landmark, preferably the sleeve shoulder seam at a consistent point, and measure each sleeve along the same relaxed path to the original finished hem. On the wearer, mark a desired finish using measurements taken with the sleeve unpinned; remove the garment before pinning. Draw the proposed finished fold and a separate cut line toward the sleeve end only if trimming is necessary. A double-turned hem uses a narrow first turn plus a second turn to enclose the raw edge; total needed allowance is their sum, chosen for actual cloth. Example only: first turn 6 mm + second turn 12 mm = 18 mm allowance beyond finished fold. Check that sleeve shape accommodates the turns without gathering. Baste and inspect pin-free fit before deciding whether to cut. Keep the original cloth where a neat reversible fold is possible.

Steps 1–2

1. Inspect the original sleeve

Lay the garment flat and identify the hem type, seam finish and sleeve taper. Exclude cuffs, plackets, vents, lining and complicated shaping. Compare left and right construction.

2. Record original lengths

Choose a named reference such as the shoulder seam at the outer sleeve. Measure each sleeve to its finished edge along a consistent relaxed path. Record intentional asymmetry rather than assuming identical lengths.

Steps 3–4

3. Set the desired finished lengths

Use a comfortable comparable garment or measure with the garment worn normally, without pins or sharp tools. Check the intended reach with the arm in natural positions, then remove the garment.

4. Calculate each shortening

Subtract target finished length from original finished length for each sleeve. Verify that the intended change is small and the hem will remain clear of any construction feature.

Steps 5–6

5. Mark the finished fold

On the table, measure from the chosen reference and mark around the sleeve using removable marks. Compare front and back and keep the fold perpendicular to the appropriate grain or original hem direction.

6. Check the new circumference

Compare the fabric circumference at the finished line and the intended turn area. A taper may leave too much or too little cloth inside the fold. Do not force excess into a pleat; choose a specialist method if needed.

Steps 7–8

7. Plan the allowance

Select a compatible first turn and second turn for a double-fold edge. Add them for the allowance required beyond the finished line. The 6 mm plus 12 mm example is illustrative only; use actual cloth and finish.

8. Fold and baste a reversible trial

If possible, fold existing cloth to the proposed finished edge without cutting, arranging excess neatly inside. Baste loosely through the intended layers and remove every pin or clip. A bulky temporary fold is not the final finish.

Steps 9–10

9. Check pin-free sleeve fit

Try on gently and compare both hems at rest and during normal arm movement. Remove the shirt before adjusting. If the fold twists, the length is uncomfortable or the arm opening is restricted, revise or refer.

10. Decide whether trimming is needed

Keep the original hem and extra material if the reversible fold lies smoothly. Otherwise, only after checking the final fold and required allowance on both sleeves, mark a separate cut line toward the original end. Recheck before cutting; do not cut at the finished fold.

Steps 11–12

11. Form the turned hem

For an approved trimmed hem, cut only along the checked cut line, then fold the raw edge by the first allowance and turn again by the second. For the retained-hem route, keep the original finished edge enclosed without forcing bulk. Press or finger-set only as permitted.

12. Stitch the prepared hem

Work off the body. Sew small relaxed hemming stitches catching a few sound sleeve threads and the inner folded edge, without catching the opposite sleeve. Secure ends discreetly; preserve the side seam and comfortable circumference.

Steps 13–14

13. Inspect the pair

Remove basting and count all pins and needles. Compare both sleeve lengths from the original landmarks, hem depth, edge smoothness and free openings. Make a final pin-free fit observation only after tools are removed.

14. Record final lengths

Record each actual finished measurement, method, retained or trimmed fabric, allowance and ease observation. Follow care instructions and check later ordinary use; refer if the hem binds or distorts.

Fix, care and preserve

The sleeves look uneven

Compare the same landmark and measurement path on each sleeve. Check whether the original sleeves were intentionally different and adjust only after a pin-free trial.

The hem puckers around the opening

The turned cloth may not match the new circumference. Release affected basting or new work and refer for a shaped hem or facing if needed.

The cut line is uncertain

Do not cut. Confirm the finished fold and the total required turn allowance independently on both sleeves.

The original retained hem feels bulky

A reversible fold may be unsuitable for this fabric. Reassess the allowance and desired length before deciding on a cut or professional alteration.

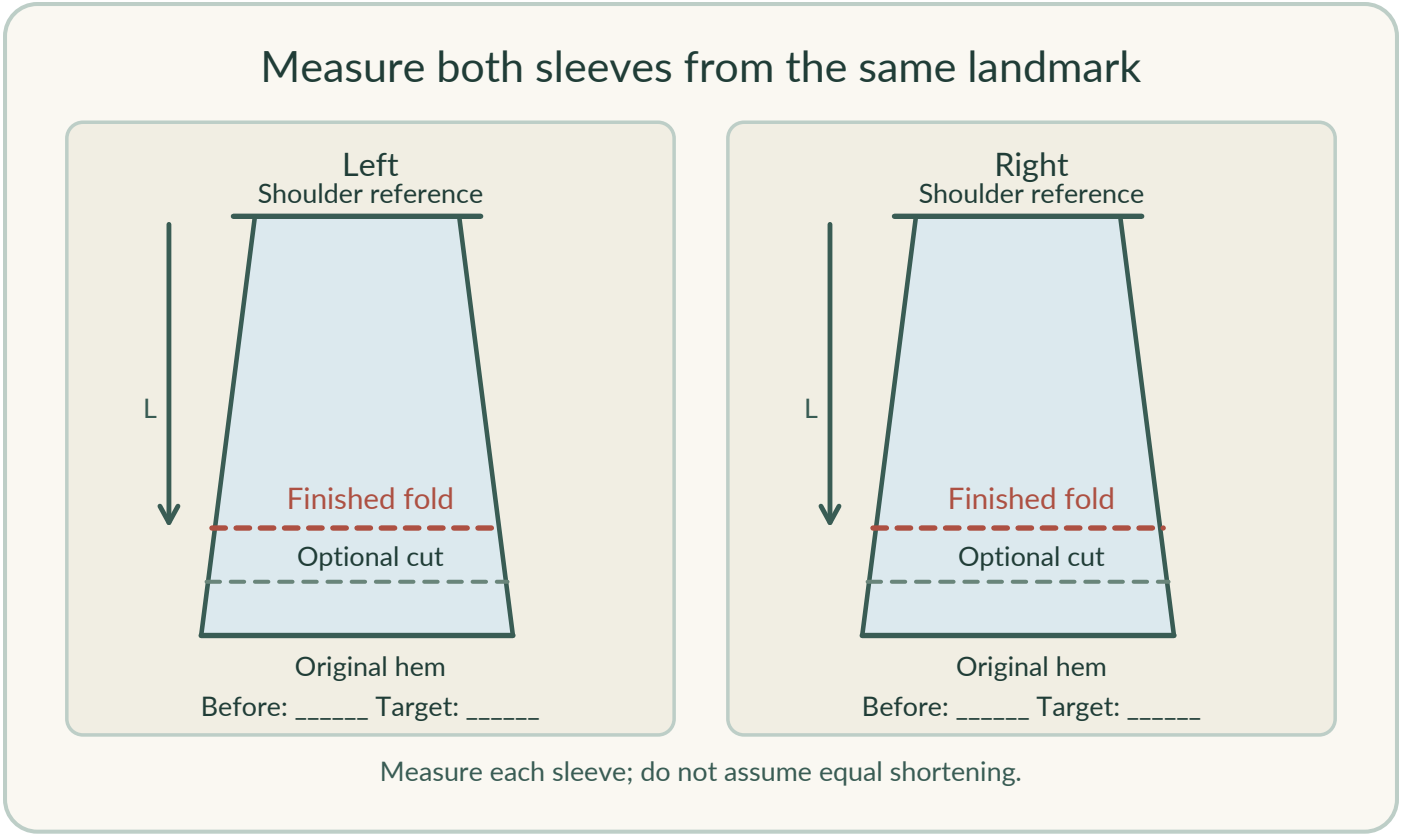
Originality and evidence boundary

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Print the following pages separately if desired. Schematics are illustrative, not full-size cutting patterns. Record only actual observations.

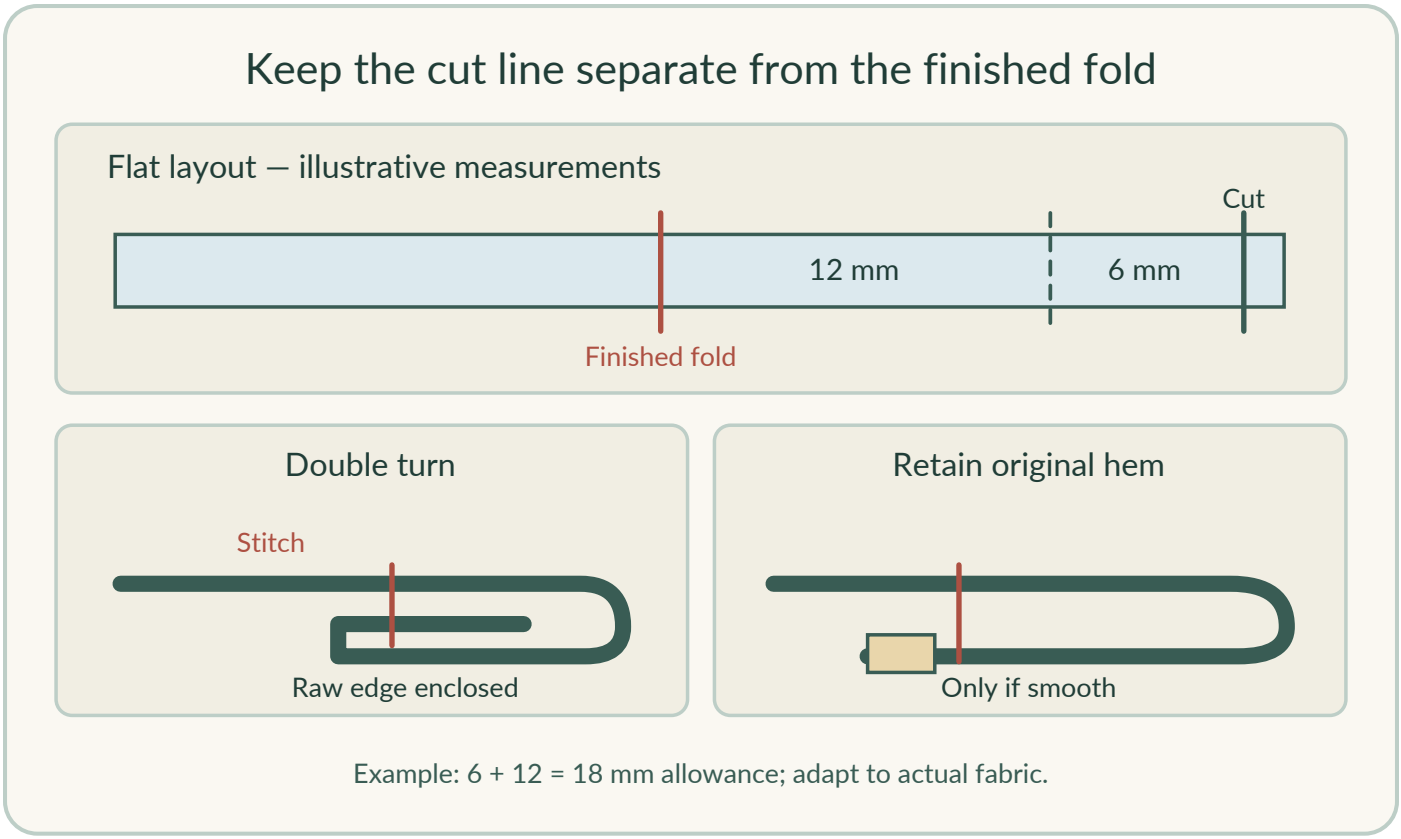
Pattern 1

Paired sleeve measurement sketch: left and right plain sleeves measured from a named shoulder-seam reference to original finished edge and new finished fold. Separate shortening arrows and blank before/target fields. Mark the possible cut line beyond the finished fold toward the original hem, not on the fold.



Pattern 2

Double-turn cross-section: flat fabric shows finished fold, first and second turn allowances and optional cut edge; folded cross-section encloses the raw edge and hemming stitch catches only the intended inner edge and outer sleeve fabric. Example 6 + 12 = 18 mm, not a universal size. Show retained original hem as reversible alternative if smooth.



Record 1 — Materials and repair plan

Record actual observations only. Use UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED for anything you have not established.

Garment / sleeve construction / care

Left reference and original length

Right reference and original length

Left / right target and shortening

New opening circumference and taper

First / second turn / total allowance

Pin-free basting observation

Decision: retain / trim / refer

Record 2 — Finish and follow-up

Record actual observations only. Use UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED for anything you have not established.

Actual finished left / right lengths

Actual hem method and depth

Original fabric retained or cut?

Free sleeve openings / seam alignment

All tools and pins accounted for?

Pin-free reach and ease observation

Decision: retain / revise / refer

Date / follow-up