

An Afterthought Heel

Sometimes, you may wish to make a sock straight down to the toe, and make the heel later. For example, the stripe pattern is important, or the color work shouldn't be interrupted, or you are on a roll and it is inconvenient to stop and organize the heel just at that time. This heel can be done after the whole sock is finished.

There are two ways to mark where you want the heel, when you do this. One is to decide at a later date where the heel goes, and snip one stitch and ravel out until you have the needed number of stitches on each side of the raveled stitch above and below the thread you removed. The other, much less scary, way is to place waste yarn where you will want to put the heel in the future. Of course, this way means you must decide at the point where you need to put the waste yarn.

Begin by starting the sock you are planning to make. (Remember, much like algebra, what you do to one sock, you should be prepared to do to the other sock. I solve Second Sock Syndrome by knitting my socks modularly—both tops, then both legs, both heels [or waste yarn for afterthoughts], both feet and both toes.)

Knit your sock, toe up or top down, until you come to where you think the heel should be. The afterthought heel works exactly the same way no matter which direction you knit your sock.

As you begin your next round, drop your working yarn and knit the number of stitches you need for the heel. In my samples, I used half the stitches in my sock. There are those who prefer somewhat more stitches than that for an afterthought heel.

After you have knitted across the designated heel stitches with your waste yarn, drop your waste yarn and slide the stitches back to the beginning of the round. Pick up the working yarn and knit the waste yarn stitches. Then proceed to knit the rest of the round, and continue on your way down to the toe of the sock.

Make your favorite toe, graft your stitches, and weave the end.

Now it is time to contemplate the afterthought heel.

Use your favorite method to pick up the stitches below and above the waste yarn, or snip the waste yarn and carefully pick it out, mounting the sock stitches on two double pointed needles, one above the waste yarn and one below. Count your stitches on both needles to make sure you have the number of stitches you intended. If not, go back and look to see if you dropped any. If you did not, pick up a couple of stitches at either end. Remember, you want at least half the number you cast on on each needle, and you want the same number of stitches on each needle.

Now, I like to knit two rounds before I begin the decreases, because it seems to put less stress on the stitches next to the heel stitches.

After two rounds, at the beginning of the round, k1, ssk, knit to three stitches before the end of the dp needle, k2tog, k1. Continue to the second needle. K1, ssk, knit to three stitches before the end of the needle, k2tog, k1. Knit the next round plain. Repeat the decrease round and the plain round until you have eight stitches on each needle. Graft and weave in the end.

You will no doubt notice that this heel is very much like one of the most frequently used toes in handknit socks. It is, in fact, just like the toe. You have knit two toes in your sock.

As with all knitting, there are many adaptations possible with this heel. You can knit more plain rounds before you begin the shaping, if you want a deeper heel. You can designate more stitches than half the cast on stitches for the heel. You can put some short rows in the side of the toe that is nearer to the ankle if you want a longer heel in a short socklet. You can graft on more than eight stitches if you want a wider heel. (Be sure to make sure you knit the heel deep enough first, though.)

And remember, if this heel does not meet your needs in the sock department, there are many other heel methods available.