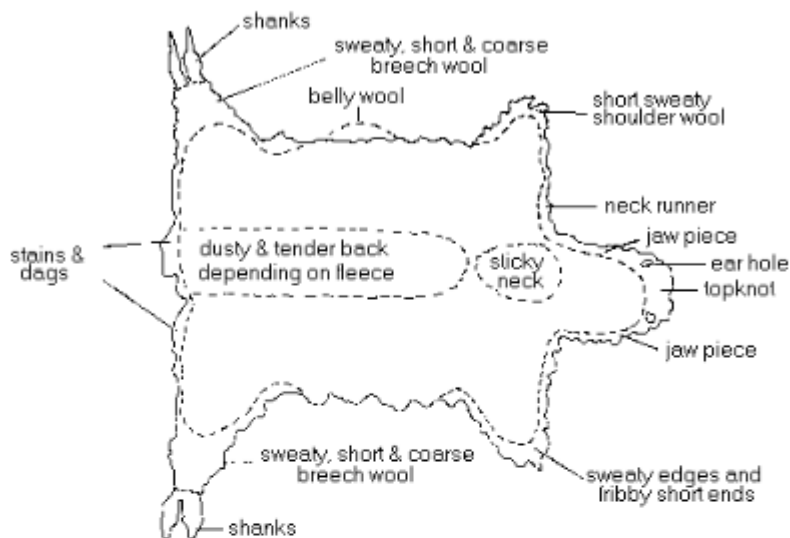


Skirting

It's best to skirt all your fleeces by color, starting with whites and working towards black. Place the blanket on the table with the cut side down and skirt it for excessive variations (such as coarse britch), heavy medullation, abnormal staple length, second cuts, stain, excessive vegetable matter, etc.



For show fleeces, all blankets will be graded at the lowest quality of fiber in that bag. So you will skirt from the outer edges towards the center. Therefore, to obtain maximum value for your fleeces, you should skirt it by uniformity of fineness, color, and staple length.

Remove any belly, face and leg wool. This is short wool. If it is clean and free of VM, you can save it separately for use in felting or even spinning if it's long enough. But it will be considerably shorter than the bulk of the fleece and have a different texture. This should not be mixed with the rest of the fleece to avoid having an inconsistent roving.

Remove any britch wool. Britch wool is the wool that grows on the hind legs up into the rump (and occasionally on the front legs up into the shoulder). The britch is straighter, often longer, coarser in diameter and usually more brittle in texture. The britch can be saved and set apart to be used for felting or spinning by itself. Britch wool makes very hard wearing wool for work socks, gloves, rug yarn, and other hard wearing items.

Remove any areas that are heavily contaminated with VM. This is the hard part! The worse areas for VM contamination are the neck and shoulders. The withers where the neck and back meet is what I call the "snack pack." It's where there's always lots of dirt and VM. I discard this.

Remove all the second cuts you can find. Second cuts occur when the shears are not kept close to the sheep's skin and leave a tall stubble behind. On the next sweep of the shears, this stubble is cut off, leaving a short bit of fleece, or second cut. These second cuts will become noils and neps that need to be removed as the fiber is spun. Second cuts do not make very nice novelty yarn like silk noils do. Second cuts usually wind up as pilling on the garment. Nobody likes that! Even the very best shearer will have a few second cuts. If you're finding a lot of them, however, you may want to find another shearer.