



**chapter**

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# **Getting Started Designing Knits**

Some knitters like to follow patterns down to the last detail, without making any changes. Many other knitters like to alter patterns: They choose a different yarn than a pattern specifies, omit a collar, use an alternate stitch pattern, or add embellishments. This book provides a wealth of modifiable knitting patterns and helps you understand how to create your own unique knit designs.

Using this book to design your own knits is easy: You simply choose an item and a yarn, and then you select from the various master patterns for scarves, shawls, hats, bags, socks, mittens, gloves, vests, or sweaters. The master patterns include instructions for a wide range of sizes and gauges. Particular yarns are not specified, but yarns for the sample projects are listed, in case you want to replicate them.

A large part of knitting design is math; this book does most of the math for you, allowing you to focus on the fun of choosing colors, stitch patterns, and embellishments. Once you've followed a few of the master patterns through, you'll have a good understanding of how hand-knits are designed and constructed. When you're ready to depart from the master pattern and do your own math and invent your own hand-knits, you can consult Chapter 10 for design guidance. Pretty soon, the only things you'll need to start a knitting project will be a few balls of yarn, a pair of knitting needles, and your imagination.





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# Using the Master Patterns

Have you ever found a pattern that you liked in size and shaping, but you didn't like the yarn weight or the stitch pattern? Or perhaps on impulse you bought a beautiful yarn, but you have no pattern to suit it. Or maybe you want to experiment with designing your own knits, but you have no idea where to begin. With the help of the master patterns in this book, you can learn to alter an existing pattern, use that beautiful yarn, or create your very own designs.

## One Master Pattern, Many Options

You may have seen a cookbook that presents a master recipe, followed by ways to change the recipe to create whole new dishes. In this book, the master pattern functions in the same way. Materials specifications, stitch counts, and, in some cases, shaping instructions appear in the master pattern, and alternate shaping, finishing, edging, and stitch patterns accompany it. You can easily design your own knits by choosing the various options you'd like to put together. For example, you start with the same basic pattern to create a pair of mittens or a pair of gloves. You choose a size, find the appropriate directions for the yarn you're using, and then select from a number of cuff options, stitch patterns, and embellishments to make your mittens or gloves uniquely yours.



The master patterns allow you to learn to create your own unique styles without having to tackle too much complicated math. Each master pattern contains instructions and specifications for *at least* three gauges. The master hat pattern, for example, covers six gauges. Combine that with numerous brim styles, crown-shaping options, and embellishments, and you have an infinite array of options. If you're feeling adventurous, you can go beyond using the various options suggested in the master pattern: You can incorporate color work, cables, or textured stitch patterns into your design by referring to the stitch pattern glossary at the back of the book.





## How to Use the Master Patterns

You may have come across some old-fashioned knitting books that use charts and tables instead of long strings of text to present the information you need to knit the items. The master patterns in this book combine the two approaches, using both written steps and tables.

Your first step in using a master pattern is to make some choices. Each pattern in this book includes a wide array of options. For every item, you can choose from many yarn weights, hem treatments, shaping options, and decorative details. After you decide on a pattern—along with shaping and styling preferences—and you are equipped with the appropriate yarn, knitting needles, and other supplies, you need to make and measure a gauge swatch. When your gauge is correct according to the instructions, you can begin.

The instructions for each item are presented in numbered steps, accompanied, where necessary, by tables like the one here. Various hems, brims, ribbings, shaping methods, or stitch patterns are labeled and presented in isolated sections. All you have to do is follow the instructions for your style choice and at the same time follow the information presented in the tables, according to your gauge and size.



Cast On	
<i>Gauge</i>	<i>No. of Sts to Cast On</i>
2 sts/in.	28 (32, 36, 40, 44)
3 sts/in.	42 (48, 54, 60, 66)
4 sts/in.	56 (64, 72, 80, 88)
5 sts/in.	70 (80, 90, 100, 110)
6 sts/in.	84 (96, 108, 120, 132)
7 sts/in.	98 (112, 126, 140, 154)

For example, the table above shows how many stitches to cast on to create a hat with a brim that is 14 (16, 18, 20, 22) inches in circumference. Say that you want to design a hat for a toddler who needs a hat about 16 inches around, using yarn that knits to a gauge of 5 stitches per inch. In the table, you'd go to the 5 sts/in. row and then find the number that corresponds to the second-smallest size. You would therefore cast on 80 stitches. Then, you would follow the directions for the brim style and top shaping options you choose.

### TIP

#### Keeping Track of Where You Are

Before you begin knitting, you might want to photocopy the pages of the master pattern you're using and then highlight or circle all the numbers that apply to your size and all the options you intend to use for your design.



# Choosing the Right Yarn

The yarn you choose for your project should not only match the pattern in gauge and function but also in feel, or what is known as *hand*. Some yarns knit to a stiff fabric, and other fibers work to a soft drape. Always choose a yarn that you like on its own; you will be spending hours knitting with it, and it's easy to lose interest in a project if you don't like the yarn.

## FIBER FOLLOWS FUNCTION

Be sure to select a fiber or fiber blend that is appropriate for the garment's function. For example, you would probably not knit mittens out of cotton since cotton won't keep your hands warm on a cold winter day. Socks and slippers require yarn that maintains elasticity so that they don't immediately stretch out and lose shape. Yarns such as cotton, linen, alpaca, and mohair have little elasticity, so they might not be the best choices for socks.

It is possible to alter and in some cases improve particular characteristics of a fiber by combining it with another fiber. For instance, adding acrylic can improve the body and elasticity of cotton, and alpaca or cashmere can be mixed with wool for added softness. So be sure to consider fiber blends in choosing your yarn.



## CHOOSE YARN THAT FEELS RIGHT

In addition to considering a yarn's gauge and the garment's function, you should choose yarn that has the appropriate feel, or *hand*, for your project. A soft shawl with a lot of drape will not work in wool that knits to a stiff and scratchy fabric. If the item is going to touch your skin, be sure it is soft and not itchy. Hand-knit bags sometimes require a firm, tight fabric. You can achieve this by choosing a dense and tightly spun yarn or by using a needle a few sizes smaller than the yarn calls for. Take lots of time to experiment with gauge swatches before making your choice.



## THE RIGHT YARN FOR THE STITCH PATTERN

Stitch pattern also affects yarn choice. If you're working an item in seed stitch, intricate cables, lace patterns, or detailed color work, you'll probably want to choose yarn that has crisp and clear stitch definition. All that detail will be lost in an overly fuzzy yarn. However, using a fuzzy yarn is a good opportunity to work in a basic stitch, like garter or stockinette, to let the yarn carry the show. Inelastic yarns—containing nylon or linen, for example—can be difficult to work in textured stitch patterns that use decreases to create bobbles and knots; choose a fiber that has a fair amount of stretch for that purpose. Stitch patterns can also get lost in space-dyed or multicolored yarns, so save such novelty yarns for simpler stitch patterns. Always test your stitch pattern on the yarn you plan to use before jumping into the project.



## STANDARD YARN WEIGHTS, GAUGE RANGES, AND RECOMMENDED NEEDLE SIZES

Yarn comes in many thicknesses and is generally labeled—from thinnest to thickest—as fingering, sport, double knitting, worsted weight, bulky, and super bulky. You may come across variations within these categories, as well, such as lace weight, light worsted, Aran weight, heavy worsted, and chunky. These descriptions vary greatly from one manufacturer to the next and from one designer to the next. The table below, based on information from the Craft Yarn Council of America's website, [www.yarnstandards.com](http://www.yarnstandards.com), gives you a more precise idea of the gauge ranges within which these yarn weights fall, as well as the range of needle and crochet hook sizes recommended for each weight.



Standard Yarn Weight System

<b>Yarn Weight Category Name</b>	<b>Type of Yarns in Category</b>	<b>Knit Gauge Range* in Stockinette Stitch to 4 Inches</b>	<b>Recommended Needle, in Metric Size Range</b>	<b>Recommended Needle, in U.S. Size Range</b>
<b>Super fine</b>	Sock, fingering, baby	27–32 sts	2.25–3.25 mm	1–3
<b>Fine</b>	Sport, baby	23–26 sts	3.25–3.75 mm	3–5
<b>Light</b>	DK, light worsted	21–24 sts	3.75–4.5 mm	5–7
<b>Medium</b>	Worsted, afghan, Aran	16–20 sts	4.5–5.5 mm	7–9
<b>Bulky</b>	Chunky, craft, rug	12–15 sts	5.5–8 mm	9–11
<b>Super bulky</b>	Bulky, roving	6–11 sts	8 mm and larger	11 and larger

\* The gauges listed are guidelines only; this table reflects the most commonly used gauges and needle sizes for specific yarn categories.



# Check Your Gauge

After you've chosen the right fiber for your project, you're ready to check your gauge. Before starting any knitting project, you should make a swatch to ensure that you are knitting to the desired gauge. Making a gauge swatch takes only a few minutes, and it can save you from spending hours on an item that ends up too big or too small.

## Making a Gauge Swatch

To make a gauge swatch, you need to use the yarn and needle size, and in some cases the stitch pattern, that the pattern calls for. It's not a bad idea to have handy three pairs of needles: the size called for, the next size smaller, and the next size larger. (If you don't use them for this project, you will need them someday for another project.)

- 1 Cast on the same number of stitches that the pattern says is equal to 4 inches.
- 2 Work in stockinette stitch (knit on the right side and purl on the wrong side) until the swatch is 4 inches long (measuring from the cast-on edge to the bottom of the needle).
- 3 Bind off your stitches somewhat loosely, cut the working yarn (leaving about a 6-inch tail), and pull the tail through the last stitch.



## Measuring a Gauge Swatch

You can use a ruler, a tape measure, or a stitch and needle gauge tool to measure your swatch. Also, if your gauge swatch is curly and won't lie flat, and if your yarn's care instructions allow, take a warm steam iron to the swatch, pressing only lightly. Let it cool and dry.

- 1 Lay your swatch on a flat surface. Place your measuring device so that the first 2 inches are centered horizontally (and vertically, if you're using the stitch and needle gauge tool) on the swatch.
- 2 Count how many stitches there are in a horizontal 2-inch space and how many rows there are in a vertical 2-inch space.
- 3 Divide these numbers by 2, and that is the number of stitches and rows you are getting *per inch*.
- 4 If your pattern lists gauge as a certain number of stitches and rows over 4 inches, multiply your stitch and row counts for 2 inches by 2.



**Note:** If your gauge measurement includes a fraction of a stitch, include that in your gauge estimate. For example, if the 2-inch section of your swatch results in 8.5 stitches, your gauge is 4.25 sts/inch, or 17 sts/4 inches.

## FAQ

### What should I do if my gauge is different from the one listed in the pattern?

If you are getting more stitches per 4 inches than the pattern calls for, try switching to a needle that is one size larger. If you are getting fewer stitches per 4 inches than the pattern calls for, try switching to a needle that is one size smaller. Make a new gauge swatch and measure again. If necessary, go up or down another needle size, create a new swatch, and measure it again.

It is difficult to match both stitch and row gauge, but it is most important to match the stitch gauge accurately. If the row gauge is slightly off, follow the garment's vertical measurements rather than the specified row counts.

