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- Tidying up loose ends
- Blocking your work
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- Fulling (also known as felting) to make study fabric

Chapter 1
Blocking and Felting

Hooray! You're almost done with a knitting or crocheting project. In this chapter, you discover how to neatly secure loose ends and block the pieces of your work so the dimensions and shape reflect your pattern. This chapter also explains how fulling (more often referred to as felting) can turn your knitted or crocheted fabric into a denser, stronger fabric.

Tying Up Loose Ends

The first step in the finishing process is taking care of all the loose ends hanging about. If you've managed to make all the yarn changes at the side edges, that's where you'll find most of the ends. Otherwise, you'll have loose ends scattered here and there that require different techniques for successfully making them disappear.

Although various techniques exist for weaving in ends (and weave you must; there's no getting around it because knots will show on the right side of the work and may unravel over time), keep in mind that your goal is a nice, smooth fabric without glitches or an unattractive ridge in the middle of your work. You can hide your loose ends by doing any of the following:

- Weaving them vertically up the side edges
- Weaving them in sideways on the wrong side of the fabric
- Weaving them in along a bound-off edge

Use whichever method safely tucks in your ends *and* results in a smooth, unblemished right side. Every situation (thickness of yarn, location of join) is different. Try the techniques in this section, and if you discover something that works better in a given circumstance, use it.

TIP

Here are some general tips for tidying up loose ends:

- Weaving in the entire length of a 6-inch yarn end is unnecessary; you need to weave the end over only a few stitches.
- With wool yarn, running a yarn end in over 3 or 4 stitches is enough to secure it. The fuzzy nature of the fibers helps the woven ends "stick" to the rest of the fabric.
- With slick yarns, such as rayon and polished cotton, you need to weave the ends in over 5 or 6 stitches to prevent them from working their way out. Then cut away the excess, leaving about ¼ inch free.
- If an end is too short to comfortably thread through a needle, run your needle through the appropriate nearby loops as if it were threaded. With the eye of the needle at the short yarn end, finagle the yarn end through the eye of the tapestry needle and pull the needle through the loops. The end will be woven in and secured.

Book 3, Chapter 1 has additional tips for tidying loose ends in crocheted pieces.

Weaving ends up the sides

If you joined yarns at the side edges by temporarily tying the two ends together in a bow, follow these steps to weave in the ends:

1. **Untie the bow.**

   Don't worry. Your knitting or crocheting won't unravel.

2. **Thread one end through the tapestry needle and weave it *down* the side loops at the edge of your work.**

3. **Thread the other end through the tapestry needle and weave it *up* the side loops at the edge of your work (see Figure 1-1).**

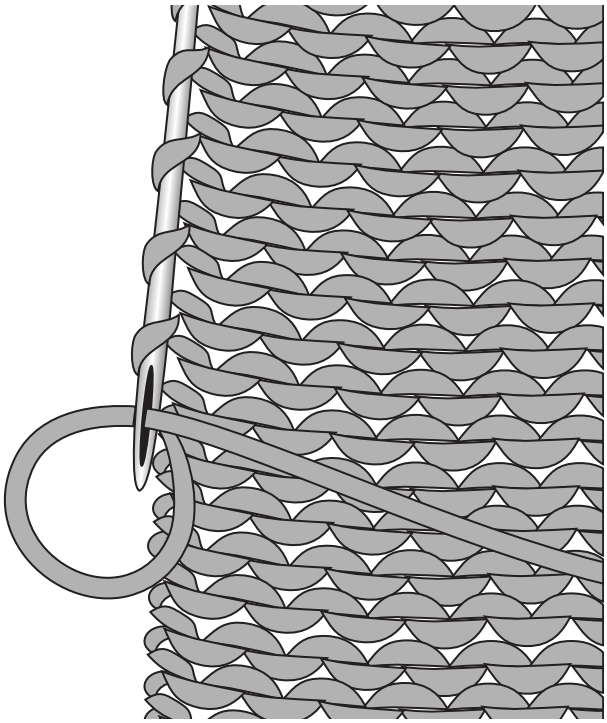


FIGURE 1-1: Weave the yarn end through the side loops.

Illustration by Wiley, Composition Services Graphics

If you joined the ends by working the two strands together for the edge stitch (instead of tying your two ends together), use a tapestry needle to pick out one of the ends and then weave it up the side as outlined in the preceding steps. Weave the other end in the opposite direction. If the two strands are thin and won't add much bulk to the edge stitch, don't bother to pick out one of the ends. Just weave each end into the sides in opposite directions.

Weaving the ends horizontally

If you switched yarns in the middle of a row and have loose ends dangling there, you need to weave the ends in horizontally. Untie the knot or pick out one of the stitches if you worked a stitch with a double strand of yarn.

If you have a knitted piece, take a careful look at the purl bumps on the back side of your fabric. You'll notice that the tops of the purl stitches look like "over" bumps, and the running threads between the stitches look like "under" bumps (see Figure 1-2).

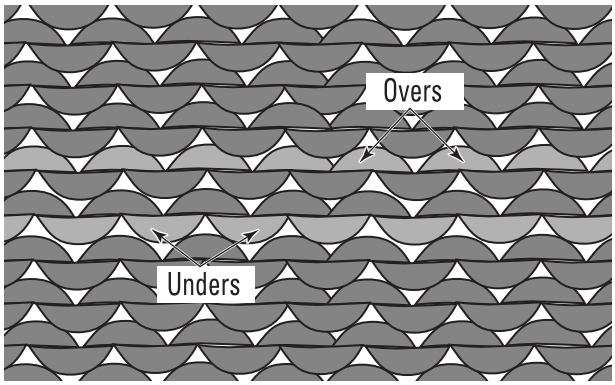


FIGURE 1-2: Identify the over and under parts of the stitches on the purl side.

Illustration by Wiley, Composition Services Graphics

Using a tapestry needle, weave in the ends as follows:

1. **Weave the end on the right in and out of the *under* bump; then continue working to the left.**
2. **Weave the end on the left in and out of the *over* bump; then continue working to the right.**

   The ends cross each other, filling in the gap between the old yarn and the new, as shown in Figure 1-3.

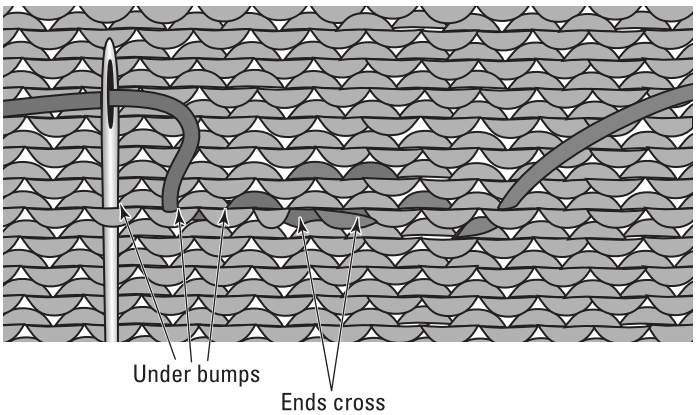


FIGURE 1-3: Thread the strand through the under bumps on the purl side.

Illustration by Wiley, Composition Services Graphics

Work fairly loosely so as not to pull the fabric in any way. Check the right side of the fabric to make sure that it looks smooth.

TIP

If your yarn is particularly slippery, weave in the end by following the path of the neighboring stitches around the under and over bumps, as shown in Figure 1-4. This method creates a little extra bulk, but it completely secures the strand.

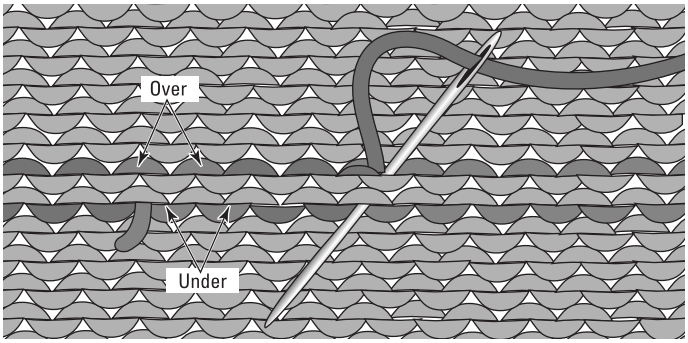


FIGURE 1-4: Follow the path of the stitch.

Illustration by Wiley, Composition Services Graphics

After you work your ends into the fabric, snip them about ½ inch from the surface and gently stretch and release the fabric to pull the tails into the fabric.

Weaving ends into a bound-off edge

When you're weaving in an end at a bound-off edge that forms a curve, you can weave in the end in a way that creates an uninterrupted line of bound-off stitches. You can use this technique, for example, where you've joined a second ball of yarn at the start of neckline shaping or on the final bound-off stitch of a neckband worked on a circular needle. Here's how:

1. **Thread a tapestry needle with the yarn end.**
2. **Find the chain of interconnected Vs that form the bound-off edge (shown in Figure 1-5).**
3. **Insert the needle under the legs of the first of the interconnected Vs, and then take it back through the initial stitch, mimicking the path of a bound-off stitch (see Figure 1-5).**

   Remember to start at the V next to the loose end.
4. **Finish weaving in the end by running the needle under the series of V legs along one side of the bound-off edge.**

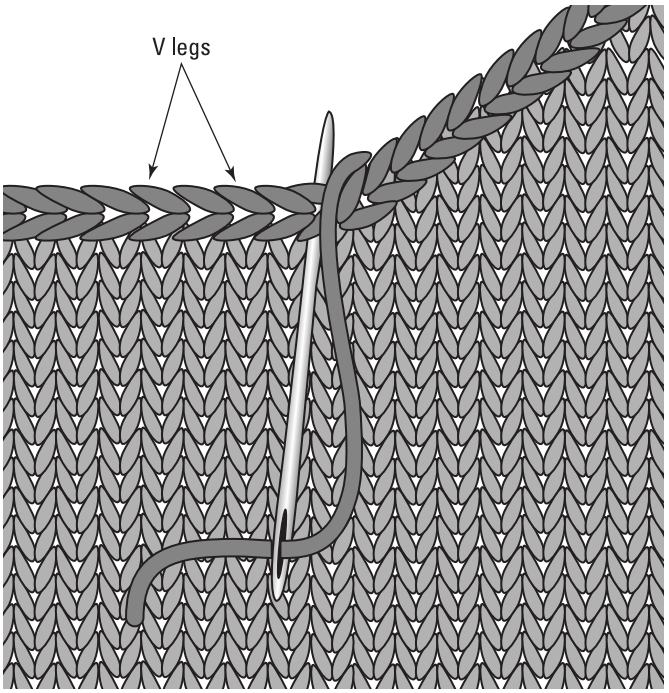


FIGURE 1-5: Weave in an end along a bound-off edge.

Illustration by Wiley, Composition Services Graphics

TWEAKING VS

As you're weaving in ends, keep an eye out for loose or misshapen stitches on the right (front) side of your fabric. While you're holding the tapestry needle, you can tweak them back into line by using the tip of your needle to adjust the legs of the stitch, as shown in the following figure.

Remember that a row of stitches is connected. If you have a loose or sloppy stitch, you can pull on the legs of the neighboring Vs in either direction for as many stitches as you need to redistribute the extra yarn. If one side of the V is distorted or larger than the other, pull slightly on the other side or tweak the stitch in whatever way is necessary to even it out.

You don't need to get too fussy about the appearance of every single stitch. Blocking straightens any general and minor unevenness, but sometimes, especially in color work, the stitches around the color changes can use a little extra help.

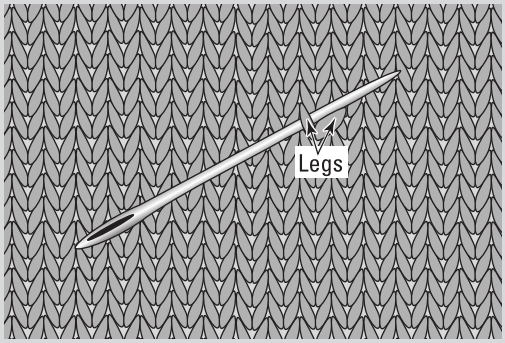


Illustration by Wiley, Composition Services Graphics

Blocking Your Way into Perfect Shape

To get most pieces — especially garments, such as sweaters, vests, and jackets — to match a pattern's finished measurements, you must block them. *Blocking* is a process used to shape knitted or crocheted work. It can be as simple as spraying your design with water or completely immersing it in a tub to get it good and wet. Or you may use some heat by applying steam from your steam iron. Some items, such as cotton doilies or three-dimensional designs, need a little extra shaping help from starch or another stiffening agent.

The final use of your design helps you determine which method of blocking to use. Another consideration is your yarn type. Different types of yarn respond differently to water, steam, and heat, and using the wrong method can have disastrous results. But don't be alarmed; the following sections help you avoid blocking-related pitfalls by explaining the various blocking methods and when you use each one. Of course, before you begin any project, you need to make sure you have the right tools on hand, so you find a list of these as well.

TIP

If your design has pieces that you join together, such as the sleeves and body of a sweater or the different motifs for an afghan, block each piece separately before joining. Doing so makes joining the pieces easier because each one is the correct size and shape. It also gives you a more accurate finished size.

REMEMBER

If the design that you're blocking is a garment and it doesn't fit correctly before blocking (it's too small or too large as is), don't try to stretch it (or squash it) to fit when blocking. Blocking only shapes the garment; it doesn't change its size. If you try to stretch (or squash) your garment during blocking, you may ruin it entirely. If your garment doesn't fit, chalk it up to experience and pass it along to someone who can use it. Don't despair if this happens; it's all part of the experience of becoming a better knitter or crocheter.

The essential tools

You probably already have most of the tools you need to correctly block your designs. First, make sure you have the finished design dimensions from the pattern so you know what shape you're shooting for.

Second, find a flat, padded surface that's large enough to accommodate your design when you stretch it to its finished measurements. (The surface must be padded so you can pin your piece down.) A bed, the floor, a large piece of sturdy cardboard covered in plastic wrap, an ironing board, or a mesh drying rack all work fine as a padded surface.

Here are some other tools you may need, depending on which blocking method you're using:

- Large tub or sink
- Several large, absorbent towels
- Tape measure or ruler
- Rustproof straight pins (always pin designs with this kind of pin to prevent nasty rust stains)
- Spray bottle
- Thin cotton towels (two or three should suffice) or a pressing cloth (an old sheet or T-shirt works well)
- Steam iron
- Spray starch, liquid starch, or fabric stiffener (available at most craft stores)

Wet blocking

To *wet block* an item, you submerge the whole thing in water. This method works for just about any yarn, but read the yarn label just to be sure it's not a dry-clean-only fiber. You can also gently wash your item at this time to rid it of the dirt and oils that the yarn is sure to have picked up from your hands. Use a mild soap made for delicate fabrics (*not* detergent) and rinse well in cool water before blocking. This method is useful for many items, including garments, afghans, and home decor.

WARNING

If you're not sure whether your yarn is colorfast, be sure to test a swatch before dunking your whole design into a tubful of water. Bleeding colors, especially in a striped design, can ruin your work. If you use a solid color, the effect of bleeding isn't as bad, although you may encounter some fading if you continue to wash the piece over time.

To wet block your work, follow these seven simple steps:

1. **Fill a clean, large tub or sink with cool water and immerse your design completely, allowing it to become thoroughly wet.**

   If you want to wash your design, now's the time. Add some soap to the water and swish your garment around. Rinse it well with cool, clean water, taking care not to twist or wring out the fabric.

2. **Drain the water from the tub or sink without removing your project.**

3. **Press down on your work in the tub to remove some excess water and then pick it up and gently squeeze it to remove more water, being careful not to let any part of it hang down and stretch.**


WARNING

   Never wring your wet item. Doing so can cause friction between the fibers and alter the appearance of your design. More importantly, it can stretch the fibers beyond repair, and you could end up with a misshapen piece.

4. **Lay your design flat on top of a large towel and then roll the towel and design together like a jellyroll to absorb more of the water.**

   You don't want to remove too much of the water — just enough so that the material isn't soaking wet.

5. **Place another large towel on your blocking surface and lay your work flat on it.**


REMEMBER

   Your blocking surface needs to be a place where you can leave your design undisturbed for a day or two because it may take that long to dry completely.

6. **Following the schematic (garments) or measurements (afghans or other nonwearables) for the design, use a ruler or tape measure to gently shape and stretch the item to the correct size.**

   If the design has three-dimensional elements to it, such as bobble stitches or popcorn stitches, gently puff them into shape. If the design is lacy, make sure to open up the loops so that the design is evident.

7. **Allow your design to dry thoroughly.**

   If you need to dry your work in a hurry, place a large fan in front of the damp design to speed up the drying process. Don't place it so close that the fan can blow your masterpiece around, though.


WARNING

   Don't ever use a blow-dryer to dry your design. The heat could shrink your piece or melt the fibers in a synthetic yarn.

Spray blocking

Spray blocking is similar to wet blocking, but instead of immersing the piece completely in water, you spray it with water to dampen the fabric. Use spray blocking when your piece needs only a little bit of help with shaping or when you don't want to take the time to wet block. Here's how to spray block:

1. **Prepare a blocking surface that's suitable for pinning down your design.**

   See the earlier section "The essential tools" for ideas on appropriate blocking surfaces.

2. **Lay out your design on the blocking surface, stretching it to the correct measurements; with rustproof pins, pin it in place along the edges every few inches to make sure it stays put.**

3. **Grab a clean spray bottle filled with lukewarm water and spray the design evenly to a uniform dampness.**

4. **Gently smooth the fabric with your hands to even it out, shaping any three-dimensional stitches as needed.**

5. **Allow the design to dry completely before removing it from the blocking surface.**

Heat blocking

You can *heat block* your design by either ironing it or steaming it. Faster than wet blocking and spray blocking, heat blocking works best on natural fibers, such as wool and cotton, but you must take extra care not to burn the fibers. The next sections fill you in on how to iron and steam your work.

WARNING

Avoid heat blocking synthetic fibers because they can melt, thereby ruining your design.

Ironing it out

The ironing method of heat blocking works well for flat items, such as doilies, that have no three-dimensional stitches. To block your design with the ironing method, follow these steps:

1. **Set your iron to the correct temperature as indicated on the yarn label.**

   If the label doesn't recommend a temperature, be cautious and set the iron on a medium-low setting (the steam function should be off as well). You can always make the iron warmer, but burns are irreversible.

2. **Lay out your design on a heat-resistant blocking surface and pin it to the proper dimensions.**

3. **Cover your design with a clean cotton towel or a pressing cloth. Then, using a spray bottle, spray it with water to slightly dampen the cloth.**

   If you prefer to dry press, cover the design with the cloth and omit the spraying step.

4. **Iron the item through the cloth by gently pressing and then lifting the iron and moving it to a new section.**

WARNING

   Running the iron over the design while pressing down flattens your stitches and may harm the yarn fibers.

5. **Allow your design to cool and then remove it from the blocking surface. If necessary, repeat the process on the other side.**

Steaming your fabric

Steaming works especially well for correcting curling edges. It's also quite useful when you have to shape just a small section, such as a cuff or collar that won't behave. All you need to steam press your work is a normal steam iron. To steam block your design, follow these steps:

1. **Set your iron to the correct temperature indicated on the yarn label.**

   If the label doesn't recommend a temperature, be cautious and set the iron on a medium-low setting.

2. **Lay out your design on a heat-resistant blocking surface and pin it to the proper dimensions.**

3. **Holding your steam iron about an inch above the fabric, steam separate sections of the design, being careful not to let the iron touch the fabric.**

4. **Give your design time to cool and dry before removing it from the blocking surface.**

Starch blocking

Doilies, collars, ornaments, edgings, and three-dimensional designs often require a little extra help when blocking to show off the stitches and, in some cases, to create the proper shape. When your design calls for a stiffer finish, it's time to call in the starch. ***Note:*** You use starch and stiffening agents almost exclusively with cotton thread.

For designs such as pillowcases or towel edgings, you want a lightly starched finish, or else your piece may become too scratchy to actually use. Doilies and filet crochet designs require a heavier finish, so use heavy spray starch or liquid starch to show off the stitch detail and maintain the proper shape. To permanently stiffen works such as ornamental snowflakes and other three-dimensional designs, use a commercial fabric stiffener, which you can find at most craft stores.

The following sections cover the how-tos of working with spray starch, liquid starch, and fabric stiffeners.

Achieving targeted stiffness with spray starch

Spray starch is your ticket for a light- to medium-crisp finish. To block a crocheted item with spray starch, follow these steps:

1. **Hand wash the crocheted design with a mild soap and cool water, rinsing several times to remove all the soap residue.**

   Make sure not to twist or wring out the design while rinsing it.

2. **With a clean towel (or several, if you need them), blot out any excess moisture until the design is just damp.**

3. **Prepare a blocking surface suitable for pinning down your design.**

   Not sure what constitutes a good blocking surface? See the recommendations in the earlier section "The essential tools."

4. **Spray one side of your design with starch, and place the starched side down on your blocking surface.**

5. **With rustproof pins, pin your design to the required dimensions, taking extra care to shape stitch patterns as shown in the photo that accompanies your pattern.**

   This could mean opening the spaces in lace patterns or straightening picot stitches.

   
   REMEMBER

   Work quickly so that you get the design pinned down before the starch dries.

6. **Spray the other side of the design, making sure the fabric is lightly saturated.**

7. **Blot excess starch from the design with a clean, dry towel and allow it to dry completely.**

Immersing your piece in liquid starch or fabric stiffener

Blocking a crocheted design with liquid starch allows you a bit more range when determining the desired crispness. Follow the manufacturer's advice on the bottle of starch for the amount of starch you need and whether you need to dilute.

REMEMBER

If your final design has a permanent shape, such as snowflake ornaments, baskets, or other three-dimensional designs, use a commercial fabric stiffener rather than liquid starch. Liquid starch loses its hold over time, whereas a commercial stiffener is meant to last. A design blocked with a commercial fabric stiffener should hold up for years to come with the proper care.

To block with liquid starch or fabric stiffener, follow these steps:

1. **Using cool water, gently hand wash your design with a mild soap, rinsing several times to remove all the soap residue.**

   Avoid wringing out or twisting the fabric as you rinse it.

2. **In a clean tub or sink, prepare the solution as directed on the container.**
3. **Immerse your item in the solution and allow it to penetrate the fabric.**

   The fabric should be soaked through with the solution in a couple of minutes.

4. **Prepare a blocking surface suitable for pinning down your design.**
5. **Remove the item from the solution and, with a clean, dry towel, blot your item to remove any extra solution.**
6. **With rustproof pins, pin the design to the required dimensions on your blocking surface, taking extra care to shape stitch patterns as shown in the photos accompanying your pattern.**
7. **After pinning, blot the design again to remove any remaining excess solution.**

WARNING

   If you're using commercial fabric stiffener, be extra careful to remove as much excess solution from the stitches and between the stitches as possible. When dry, the solution can leave a hard residue that obscures the design.

8. **Allow your masterpiece to dry completely before removing the pins.**

Shaping Three-Dimensional Designs

Not all knitting and crochet is designed to be flat. One of the beautiful aspects of this craft is that with it you can create three-dimensional designs, whether your creation is as simple as a hat or as complex as a decorative, three-dimensional Lilliputian village that you work in many pieces.

Many three-dimensional designs need to be coaxed and shaped after you finish the actual knitting or crocheting. Most patterns include detailed instructions on how to finish and shape your work. If yours doesn't, you can follow the wet-blocking instructions presented earlier in this chapter. But instead of pinning your design out flat, you mold it over the appropriate shape and pin down the edges so it can dry that way.

Here are some of the supplies you should have on hand to shape a three-dimensional design:

- **A kitchen bowl:** Pick one an appropriate size (comparable to the finished design measurements) for wet blocking a hat or shaping a doily into a decorative bowl.
- **Paper cups:** Shape cotton-thread Christmas ornaments, such as bells, with paper cups.
- **Plastic wrap:** Probably the most useful tool, plastic wrap can stuff, prop up, and shape many three-dimensional designs.
- **Preformed foam shapes:** Available in most craft stores, foam shapes, such as cones, can shape the bodies for objects such as crocheted Christmas tree toppers.

As you can see, you don't need any fancy supplies. Just look around your house, and you'll find that you already have many of the items you might need on hand.

Fulling (or Felting) to Make Sturdy Fabric

Many times, you hear knitters or crocheters say they're going to *felt* a bag. True, the end result will be a fabric that's feltlike, but because they're beginning with a fabric and not raw fleece, they're actually *fulling* a bag. These terms seem to be interchangeable in everyday vernacular, but the two are different. Here's how:

- **Fulling:** Fulling is the process of adding heat, moisture, and tremendous agitation to a knitted, woven, or crocheted fabric made of wool to make it

shrink. The fabric becomes much stronger, fluffier, and warmer yet is still very pliable.

- **Felting:** Felting is the process of adding heat, moisture, and agitation to raw fleece to create a fabric that's strong, warm, and typically a lot stiffer than a fulled fabric.

The major difference between the two is that felting uses raw fleece that has no initial structure to get the same result as fulling, which uses a knitted, woven, or crocheted fabric.

Fulling knitted or crocheted fabric makes it much denser. This technique is great for knitted and crocheted bags because your stuff is less likely to poke through the stitches and the stronger fabric holds up well.

You *felt* (or *full*) knitted or crocheted fabric by deliberately shrinking it in the washing machine, so don't put any good sweaters in the same load.

TIP

If you seam the sides of design with yarn *before* you full it (such as the pieces of a bag), the sides will be stronger than if you sew them together afterward. However, if you want a fulled strap for a bag, don't attach it before fulling the rest of the bag — put it in to shrink unattached. Straps can get caught on the center agitator of your washing machine and pull out of shape very easily.

Creating the right conditions to full knitted fabric

Fulling may be the intentional and controlled felting of a fabric, but it isn't an exact science. Too many variables can affect the result. Knowing these variables and maintaining their balance is the best way to ensure a good fulling experience.

Finding a fulling-friendly project

A project made of 100-percent wool can be fulled, but that doesn't mean it should be fulled. Fulling shrinks the stitches and meshes them together. So if your pattern wasn't written with this in mind, fulling may make the proportions of your project all wrong.

REMEMBER

Fulled fabric loses more length than width when it shrinks. To keep a fulled piece the same dimensions as its knit- or crochet-only counterpart, you need to stitch about one-third more rows . . . sometimes even more, depending on the yarn. So if you're supposed to make a piece 22 inches long, you should stitch about 28 to 29 inches instead. It should only shrink a little bit widthwise, but to be safe, add an extra 5 stitches to the width.

Most patterns for a fulled project use stitches that full pretty evenly. You can also full a project that has textured stitches, such as cables or ribbing, but to make sure the fabric doesn't get overfulled and become mush, you need to be vigilant. To make sure textured stitches full consistently, check your piece frequently and take it out of the washing machine at just the right moment — that point when the stitches are visible yet hazy and interlocked to create a solid fabric.


TIP

You can spice up any simple fulled project by adding colorwork to the pattern (such as stripes or mosaics). Sometimes even different colors in the same yarn brand and fiber don't full the same, so make sure you stitch and full the gauge swatch with the colors you plan to combine in your project. Fulling the gauge swatch also allows you to see whether the colors will bleed on one another.

Book 3, Chapter 5 has details about multicolor crochet; Book 4, Chapter 1 explains how to knit stripes; and Book 5, Chapter 4 includes several knitted mosaic patterns.

Choosing your fiber


REMEMBER

Fulling works only with 100-percent wool that hasn't been chemically treated to be a super wash; it doesn't work on any synthetic. However, not all wool fiber fulls or felts well. Some animal fibers work better than others, and sometimes the dye used to color the wool makes the fiber do not want to cooperate.

Some common fiber choices for fulling include the following:

- Sheep
- Angora
- Alpaca
- Llama
- Mohair
- Yak


REMEMBER

Most fulled projects use a bulky or super bulky yarn, but some double a worsted-weight yarn to achieve the bulky weight. Fulled projects also use a larger gauge (see the next section), which requires more yarn. If you're pulling yarn from your stash to complete a fulled project, make sure you have enough yarn.

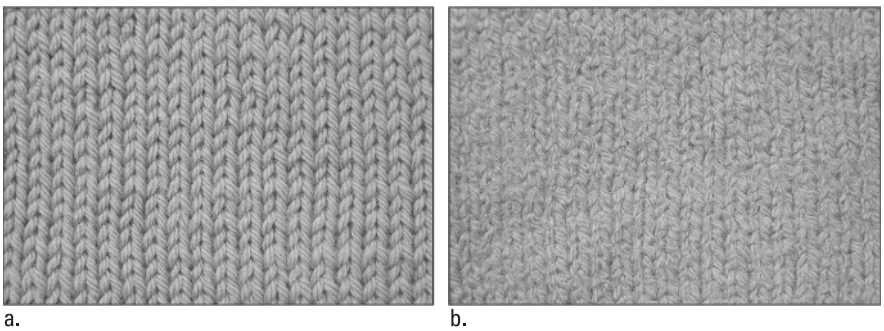

TIP

To make sure your wool will give you the results you want, full the entire gauge swatch. Fulling the gauge swatch shows you how much the fabric fluffs up (also known as *bloom*), how pliable it will be, and how much it will shrink. Knowing that 4 sts per inch and 6 rows before fulling will become 3 sts per inch and 4 rows after fulling is important if you plan on fulling something that needs to fit, such as a hat or gloves.

Getting the right fabric gauge

When you plan to full a knitted or crocheted fabric, you need to stitch it in a loose gauge. Usually, that means stitching about 2 mm larger in size than you normally would for the yarn you're using. (***Note:*** If you're using a pattern for a fulled project, the pattern gives you the exact size of needle or hook you need, so adjusting to an even larger needle or hook isn't necessary.) You want the stitches to be big enough so that the scales of the wool have room to expand and mesh with one another. If the fabric weave is too tight to begin with, the wool doesn't have space to move; the resulting fulled fabric will have textured stitch definition, and the end product can tear and break because it no longer has the stretch of knit.

When the fulling process is complete, not only is the project significantly smaller, but the stitches look hazier, like firm remnants of what they once were (see Figure 1-6) — or the stitches may not be visible at all. The visibility of the stitches depends on the amount of time you full the fabric.



a. b.

Photograph by Wiley, Composition Services Graphics

FIGURE 1-6: Knitted fabric unfulled (a) and fulled (b).

TIP

Some knitters and crocheters love to full because it can hide mistakes. Because the fabric is going to be fulled, a little oopsie will never show up. So don't fret too much if you make a small error; the fulled project won't show the mistake!

Controlling water temperature, soap, agitation, and time

Whether you're using a washing machine or hand fulling, the fulling process relies heavily on four factors: water temperature, soap, agitation, and time. The more you can control these factors, the better your results.

- **Water temperature:** For a more consistent finish, use water that's about as warm as a hot bath if you're new to fulling. As you become familiar with the process, try using hot water. Always rinse with cold water.

- **Soap:** You can use laundry detergent to full, but a soap product works better. The pH balance in soap (like Ivory) helps the fibers open and adhere to one another. A teaspoon of liquid soap is enough to make the scales on the wool open up.
- **Agitation:** Agitation makes the wool fibers mesh together.
- **Time:** The amount of time needed to full something properly depends on the fiber used, the size of the piece, the temperature of the water, and the fulling method.


REMEMBER

You know the fulling is complete when the project appears to be just about where you want it. Even if it's *almost* right, go ahead and take it out to air-dry. Later, you can full a little more if need be, but you can't reverse the fulling process.

The fulling experience: How to full

You can full a knitted fabric by hand or by machine. The two methods result in the same end product. Machine fulling is less work and is definitely faster than hand fulling, but hand fulling offers the most control.


TIP

To see which method of fulling you prefer, make two gauge swatches and try both methods. One way may work better for your project than another. It's best to find that out with the gauge swatches rather than the actual project.

Hand fulling

Hand fulling is a great way to jump into the fulling process because you can stop and check the fabric at every stage and as often as you like. You can also adjust the fulling amount per stitch pattern in any given project simply by agitating select stitches more or less.

To hand full a project, follow these steps:

1. **Fill a basin that's large enough to fit the project with warm to hot water.**
2. **Dissolve the soap in the water.**

   Add only enough soap to generate some suds on the fabric.
3. **Immerse the project in the water.**

4. **Start to knead the fabric.**

   Use your hands to generate friction so that the scales of the wool open and fuse to each other. For more agitation, you can use a plunger on the fabric or even scrub the fabric on a washboard.

WARNING

   Refrain from overstretching the fabric or pulling it too much, and do not rub the fabric together. If you rub the front of a bag to the back of the bag, for example, the two will adhere and the bag won't open.

5. **Remove the project from the water frequently to check on the process.**

   If the stitches pull apart easily, the process isn't complete. Remember, you want the stitches to become a solid fabric but not total mush.

6. **When the fulling is complete, rinse out the soap in cold water. Squeeze out any excess water.**

7. **Roll the project in a towel to soak up any remaining moisture.**

8. **Lay the project out flat on a dry towel, away from sunlight, to air-dry.**

TIP

   If you find that your project is taking too long to dry, change out the towel under it after a few hours. You can also place a fan to blow over it.

Machine fulling

You can full a project in a washing machine as long as the machine lets you open the door to check on the project.

To machine full a project, follow these steps:

1. **Set the washer on a hot water/cold rinse cycle, no spin, and minimum size load.**

   Folds caused by the spin cycle are hard to remove.

2. **Dissolve soap in the water.**

   Add only enough soap to generate some suds on the fabric.

3. **Place the project in a pillowcase or pillow cover and either zip it shut or close it with a heavy-duty elastic.**

   This cover catches fibers that come off in the washing process so they don't clog your machine.

4. **Place the pillowcase in the washer and wash.**

5. **Check the fulling process every 1 to 5 minutes.**

   The length of time required to full your project depends on your machine, soap, and local water conditions. Check frequently. As you do more fulling, you'll learn the amount of time your machine takes to do the work. For now, be vigilant. Don't get distracted and stray from the washing machine, or you could come back to a ruined project.


WARNING

   The fulling process is irreversible. You can always full a little more, but you can't unfull! Remove the project before it's too late. If the project starts to full unevenly, you can always finish the fulling process by hand.


TIP

   If the stitches pull apart easily, then the process isn't complete. If you find that the fibers of your project aren't meshing together well, add a couple of tennis balls, old jeans, or shoes to the basin of the washing machine. These items act as additional agitators and help the fibers interlock.

6. **When the fulling is complete, rinse out the soap in cold water. Do not use the spin cycle.**
7. **Roll the project in a towel to soak up any remaining moisture.**
8. **Lay the project out flat on a dry towel, away from sunlight, to air-dry.**

TAKING A STAB AT NEEDLE FELTING

Needle felting is the art of using special needles to attach wool yarn or fleece to a flat piece of wool fabric, creating a drawing or sculpture. Adding needle felting to a finished project is a form of appliqué felting. You can also use needle felting for sculptural felting or three-dimensional felting.

Needle felting does not require soap and water. Instead, sharp barbs on a needle actually grab at the scales on the wool and make them mesh with the wool fabric. To get started, you need the following tools:

- A thick piece of foam or a felting brush that allows the felting needles to go through the fiber and beyond without damaging the needles or surface below
- A needle-felting tool with either a single barbed needle or many needles
- Wool yarn or roving in a variety of colors
- A fulled or felted project to use as the fabric

Note: New to the market are needle-felting machines. Similar to a sewing machine, these machines use barbed needles to work wool into fabric.

With these supplies, needle felting is as easy as "painting" with the fiber. First think about your design. You can create an easy pattern like stripes or polka dots, or you can create a flower. Better yet, be creative and freeform random shapes.

When you have an idea of what you want to do, place the foam or felting brush under the fabric you want to needle felt. Then tear off bits of wool yarn or fleece. Lay the fiber on the fabric and begin to punch the needles through the fiber and the fabric repeatedly. Be sure to move the needles around so that the fiber attaches itself to the fabric.

As the fiber begins to attach itself, you can add more fiber in the same color or new colors or go in a totally different direction. With the fabric as your canvas and the fiber as your paint, the options are endless.

Not everybody can create freeform shapes, so here's a little tip: Use a cookie cutter as a guide for your needle felting. Place the cookie cutter on the fabric and fill it with fiber. Then punch the needle through both fiber and fabric, filling in the entire space of the cookie cutter. To get dimension, repeat the process with many layers of fiber, and the shape will really pop. Now you have some great shapes with little work!