

Chapter One



Crochet 101

Chances are, unless you're killing time in some waiting room and the only other choice is a 15-year-old copy of *Reader's Digest*, you picked up this book because you want to crochet. So let's get to it!

To follow along with this chapter, it'll be handy to have some yarn and a crochet hook. Chapter 3 covers all the varieties of yarn *ad nauseum*, but to start with, look for something called "Worsted" or "Aran" and a US G/4.5mm crochet hook. Make sure the yarn has a fairly smooth texture, so you will be able to see what you are doing. You may also want scissors.

The Ultimate Smack-down: Crochet versus Knitting

Since the world began, there've been historic debates. Cat versus dog. Cubs versus White Sox. Coke versus Pepsi. Crochet versus knitting. Before we continue, let's get one thing straight: Crochet and knitting are both admirable crafts. Don't let anyone, even your beloved mother, tell you otherwise.

Knitting may have gotten most of the press in recent years. But crochet is her shy little sister just waiting to debut. Maybe you already knit and are looking for something different? Or, maybe you vaguely remember crochet from your younger days and are wanting to get back into it.

The truth is, crochet and knitting have common ground. Both use some sort of implement to twist fibers together into fabric. But that's where the similarities end. The following table highlights some of the differences between the two crafts.

Knitting	Crochet
Uses two needles.	Uses one hook.
All stitches are on the needles at any point in time.	Only one stitch is worked at one time.
Can work circularly or back and forth.	Can work circularly, back and forth, three dimensionally, or free-form.
Creates a fabric that's typically as thin as the yarn that's being used.	Creates a firm fabric that's approximately three times as thick as the yarn being used. Consequently, crochet eats up more yarn for the same sized project.
With the same yarn and the same needles, every individual stitch will be identical in shape and size.	Individual crochet stitches can vary dramatically in width, thickness, and height.
Well suited to intricate and detailed multi-color knitting.	Because of the thickness of each stitch, carrying multiple colors along one row is less practical.
Allows you to work with a huge range of yarns and patterns.	Allows you to work with the same range of yarns and patterns.
Because of the uniform size of the knitting stitches, it tends to take longer to knit the same sized item than to crochet it.	Crochet tends to be quite a bit quicker than knitting, in part due to the increased height of standard crochet stitches.
Knitted fabric drapes nicely and is ideal for thin sweaters.	Crocheted fabric is quick and thick, and is great for structured garments, toys, and blankets.
Is incredibly, addictively fun and allows for a lot of creativity.	Is incredibly, addictively fun and allows for a lot of creativity.

Working with Yarn

If you just bought your yarn, it may be wound into a ball already. Chapter 3 covers more about the types of yarn and how they are packaged. For now, just remove the ball label and look for a loose end of yarn to work with, whether from the inside or the outside of the ball. If your yarn is packaged into a big twisty thing that almost resembles a Twizzler, you'll need to wind it into a ball before beginning to crochet. For instructions on how to do this, see page 43, "A Tangled Mess: How to Wind a Ball of Yarn," in chapter 3.

It's probably no surprise—if you've watched Saturday morning cartoons at all—that yarn tangles easily. To reduce the risk of your yarn building an immense tangle that will eventually consume your living room, pull out only about 3 feet of the yarn to start.

It All Starts with a Knot

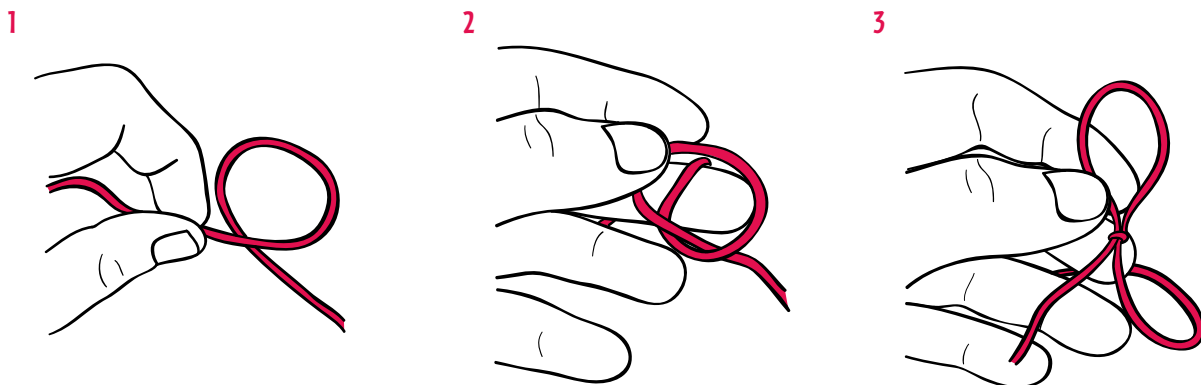
In order to crochet, you need a loop. And in order to keep that loop from just falling off your hook, you need a knot. Specifically, a slipknot that is adjustable in size.

If your knot-making skills aren't up to snuff, here's a reminder:

To make a slipknot:

1. Form a ring-sized loop in the yarn, with the part of the yarn attached to the ball crossed in front of the loose end. See figure 1.
2. Bring the yarn attached to the ball up and behind the ring-sized loop. See figure 2.
3. Use your fingers to pull the yarn through the loop. Tighten into a knot by holding the top of the loop with one hand and pulling on both ends with the other hand. See figure 3.

Et voila! A slipknot! Now, insert your crochet hook into the loop and pull on both ends to tighten. The loop should be just big enough to slide loosely along the body of the hook.

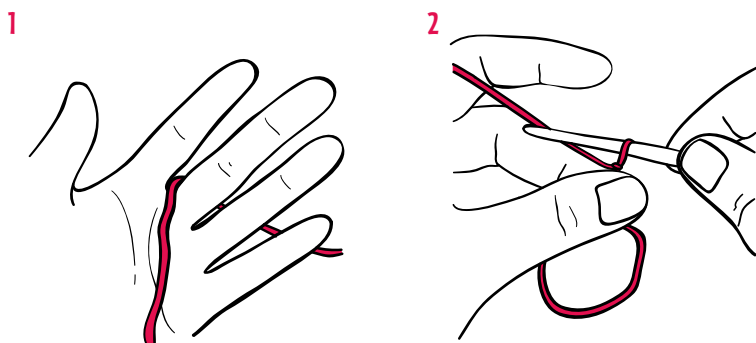


Ch-ch-chains of Love

You've got your hook; you've got your slipknot. Now it's time to make a little chain, the most fundamental of all crochet stitches. Chain stitch is abbreviated as "ch" and is typically the base of any crochet project. For this reason, it's often called a *foundation chain*.

Every crocheter's technique is a bit different. It won't take you long to figure out what finger position and motions work the best for you. But to start with, try it this way. Why? Because I tell you so, that's why.

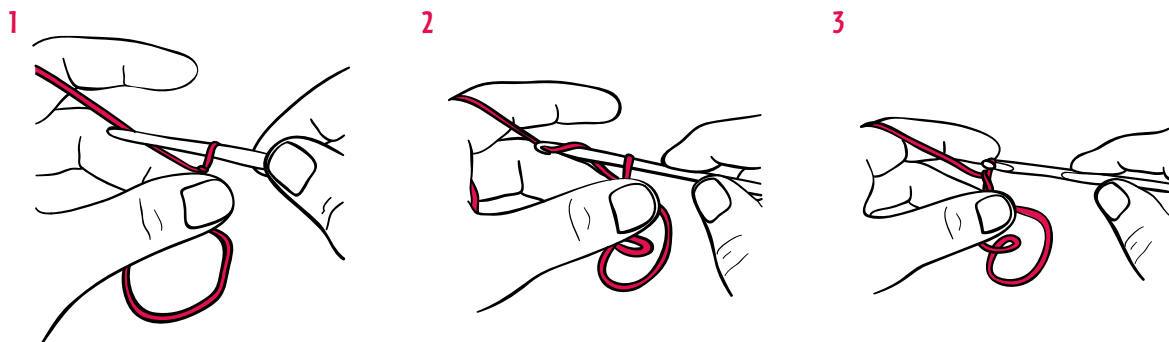
1. Open your left palm and bring the yarn across your palm and between your first and middle finger. See figure 1.
2. Close your fist. The yarn should be caught by your last three fingers.
3. Extend your index finger and thumb like you're a kid pretending to be an outlaw. Bring the yarn forward over your index finger and use your thumb and middle finger to hold on to the bottom of the slipknot.
4. With your right hand, hold the hook so the loop is about an inch from the end of the hook. You're now ready to chain! See figure 2.



Here's how to chain (see illustrations on next page):

1. Rotate the hook so it faces away from you and push up against the working yarn. See figure 1.
2. With the hook pressed against the working yarn, rotate the hook toward you, clockwise. This will wrap the yarn around the shaft of the hook.
3. Continue to rotate the hook another quarter-turn until the hook points down. Pull the hook to the right, and the yarn will catch in the hook. See figure 2.
4. Once the yarn is caught in the hook, continue pulling the hook to the right and through the loop. See figure 3.

You now have one chain stitch completed and a new loop on the hook. Pull a little on the hook to loosen this loop. In the beginning, the looser the loops, the easier it'll be to work the next row.



To continue working in chain stitch, just repeat the same process of rotating the hook and pulling through the loop to create a new loop. Do this 10 or 20 (or 50) times, until the motion becomes more natural.

Your first chains will be uneven and lumpy. Don't worry; with a little practice, your chain stitches will soon be nearly identical in size and shape.

Go ahead and make a really long chain if you want. It's just practice, after all. Remember how, as a kid, your mittens were attached by a bit of yarn that went up one sleeve, across your back, and down the other? In all likelihood, that may have been a crochet chain such as the one you're making now.

Let's say you want one of those chains for your now-grown-up mittens. Here's how:

1. Keep chaining until the chain is long enough to reach from one wrist, up your arm, across your shoulders and down to the other wrist. To tie off, cut the yarn, leaving about six or seven inches.
2. Pull on the hook to make the final loop a bit bigger, and with your fingers, thread the end of the cut yarn through this loop.

Macra-What?

For whatever reason, folks tend to confuse crochet and macramé. Macramé is the art of tying decorative knots. In some cases, it can resemble the dense fabric created by basic crochet stitches. But in crochet, you only ever tie two knots: the initial slipknot when beginning to chain stitch and the final knot after cutting the yarn. If you don't believe me, remove the hook from your crochet-in-progress and pull on the yarn attached to the ball. See it unravel, stitch by stitch? I bet you *wish* you had a knot now!

3. Remove the hook and set aside. Pull the end of the yarn tight to make the final knot. And now you have a lovely crochet chain, ready to be sewn onto any store-bought (or hand made) mittens!

Chaining is great and all, but there's only so much you can do with what's essentially a knotted rope. You need the chain for the foundation row, but after that, you'll need a little something more substantial to actually create the fabric.

Let Them Single Crochet!

Single crochet (sc) is the most basic of these stitches. Although other variations exist, they all rely on the fundamental steps of creating a sc stitch.

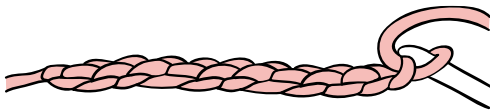
To get started, you'll need a row made of chain stitches. Similar to a house's foundation, this is the groundwork that needs to be done upon which to build the rest of the project. Not surprisingly, it's called the *foundation row*. So, go ahead and chain 11 stitches. (In patterns, this will be abbreviated as ch 11.) Set up by holding the yarn and hook as if you are planning on continuing in chain stitch. However, you're now going to work back toward the initial slipknot to create the first row.

Working into the Foundation Chain

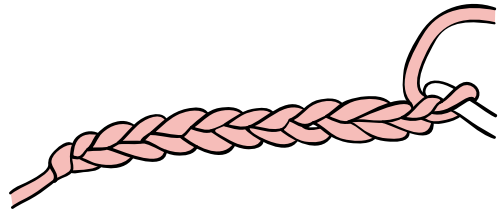
When working *even* (without adding or removing any stitches in each), one or more of the initial chain stitches becomes what's referred to as the *turning chain*, and simply works to create the height needed to match the rest of the row. In the case of single crochet, the turning chain is only 1 ch. You'll see later on how taller stitches require additional turning chains to make a nice even row.

A common question when beginning this first row is, where do you put your hook? The initial crochet chain has two sides: one that's made of ridges, like camel humps (see figure 1), and one that's made of Vs (see figure 2).

1



2



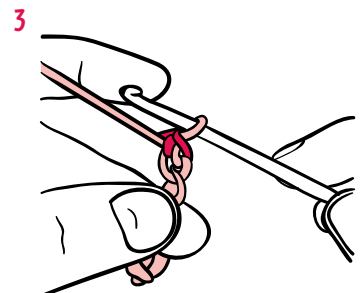
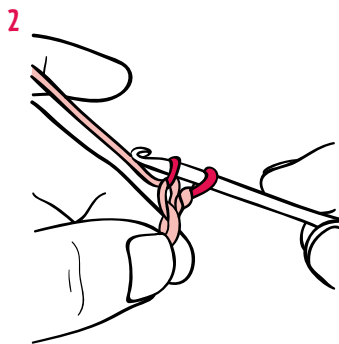
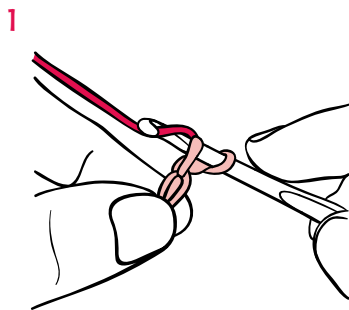
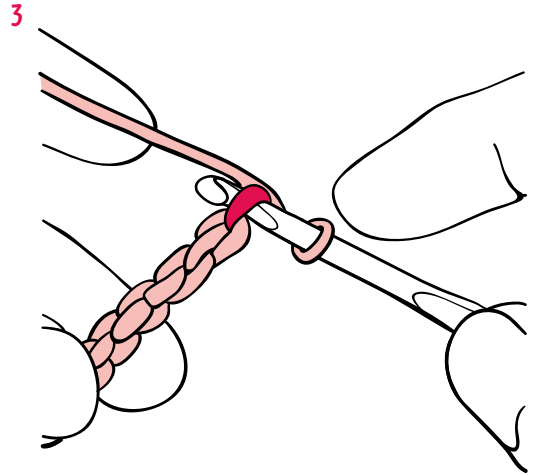
To work any stitches in the first row, you should place your hook under a single ridge. The hook should not split the yarn, but should be inserted into the small hole between the single ridge and the bottom Vs. Let's try it, by inserting the hook under the second ridge from the hook (see figure 3). This allows 1 chain stitch for a turning chain (you'll learn about turning chains in just a minute).

There are many different schools of thought as to the best way of working this first row. Working into the ridges is the way I feel looks best. Whatever way you do it, just be consistent for the best results.

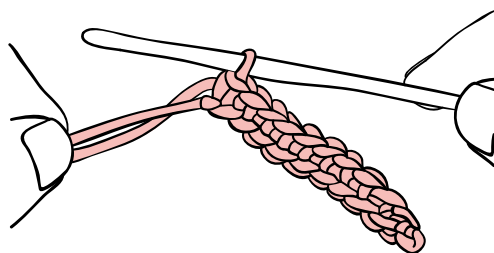
The first row of stitches that you build on the foundation chain is always going to be a bit tough to work. Many problems can be alleviated by ensuring the initial chain stitches are worked loosely.

We'll now work a single crochet stitch into this ridge. Here's how:

1. Rotate the hook to grab the yarn (see figure 1), as you did for the initial chain.
2. Now, pull the yarn through the ridge on the foundation chain, pulling up a loop that's more or less the same size as the loop on your hook. Your hook now has two loops (see figure 2).
3. Rotate the hook to again grab the yarn, but this time, pull it through both loops (see figure 3).

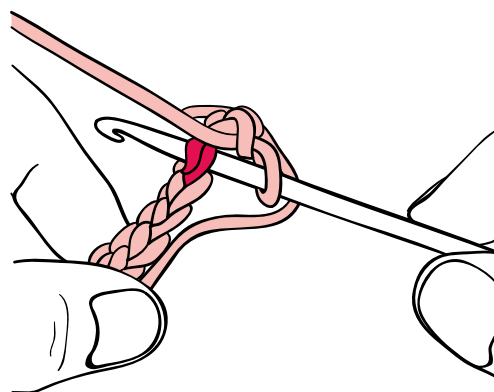


You've just completed a sc stitch. Go ahead and continue to work nine more of these stitches. Assuming you chained 11 stitches in the beginning, this will bring you to the end of the chain (see the top figure to the right). You're now ready to work the second row.



Working into a Previous Row

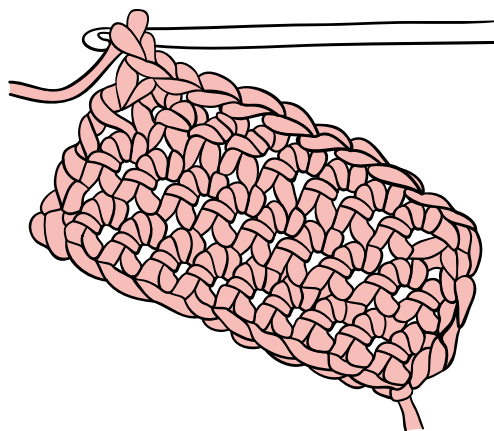
Crochet is typically worked from right to left. So, when working back and forth in rows, you'll need to flip the work over at the end of each row to be set up for the next row. Remember the bit about the "turning chain" earlier on in this chapter? Well, you'll need a turning chain for every row. Since we're working in sc, go ahead and ch 1 stitch to turn the row.



Unlike the initial foundation chain, a row of any crochet stitch is made up only of the Vs that you see on the bottom of the initial chain.

To work a standard sc, insert your hook underneath both pieces of yarn that make up one of these Vs (see the second figure to the right). This is called working in both loops of the stitch. Again, you should skip the chain stitch that's closest to the hook. You'll work the first stitch of your new row into the last stitch of your previous row.

Work a sc in the stitch as before. Continue across the row in this way, working one sc into each stitch of the previous row, until you reach the end. Again, you should have just worked 9 sc stitches. To practice, work a few more rows of sc (see bottom figure). Remember to chain 1 at the beginning of each row to add height, and skip the chain stitch next to the hook on every row to prevent increasing. Single crochet is a fairly dense and compact stitch that creates a firm fabric. For a pattern that uses only sc, check out the "It's a Toque, Eh?" hat in chapter 7. Alternatively, check out the stitch patterns that use sc (or variations of sc) in the following chapter.



Curly Whirly

Let's pretend you're happily crocheting rows upon rows of single crochet to make a simple scarf. You get a few inches into the scarf and notice that the edges are curling up rather unattractively. What have you done wrong?

Nothing!

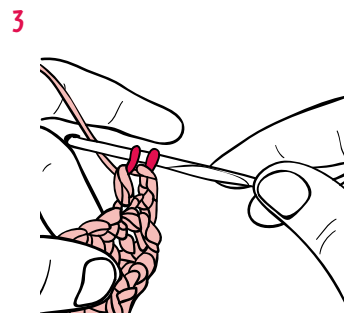
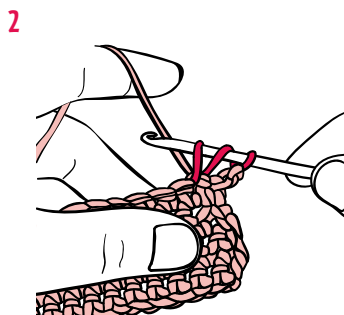
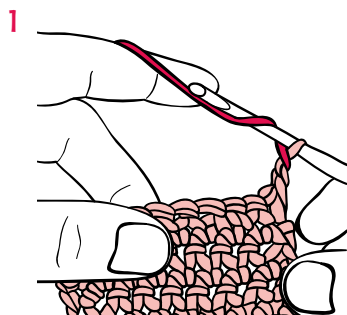
Single crochet, due to its compact shape, will almost always cause the corners and edges of the work to curl and twist. The other basic stitches, half double, double, and triple, are loose enough to prevent this natural curling.

If you really want to work in straight rows of single crochet, try going up a few hook sizes to crochet more loosely. This will alleviate some of the curl. You can also wet-block the piece to temporarily prevent curl-age. To do this, check out the instructions on page 24, "Blocking."

Seeing Double; Double Crochet

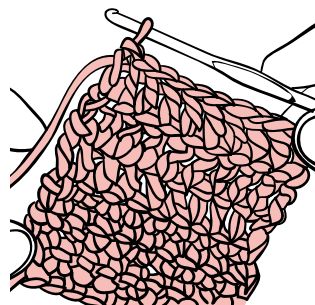
Double crochet (dc) is aptly named. It takes twice as long to work as sc but results in a stitch that's twice as tall. Consequently, the turning chain for a dc is taller—3 chains rather than 1. You'll do some double crochet now:

1. Assuming you're ready to work your next row, chain 3.
2. Rotate the hook to grab the yarn. This is also called a *yarn over*. See figure 1.
3. Unlike single crochet, when you are working in double crochet, you will skip the first stitch in the row (the last stitch of the previous row) and begin working into the second stitch of the row. *The turning chain counts as the first stitch of the row.* Insert the hook into the second stitch. Be sure to keep the loop of yarn from the yarn over on your hook! Rotate the hook to grab the yarn.
4. Pull up a loop, so that you now have three loops of yarn on your hook. See figure 2.
5. Rotate the hook again, doing a yarn over.
6. Pull this yarn through the first two loops on your hook, so that only two loops remain. See figure 3.



7. Do another yarn over.
8. Again, pull the yarn through the two remaining loops on the hook. Only one loop remains, and you're now ready to work another dc.

As with the sc, work across the row in dc. You'll see that the dc stitches are much higher than the sc rows (see the figure to your right). They also have larger gaps between the stitches.

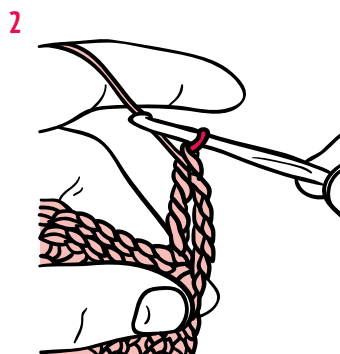
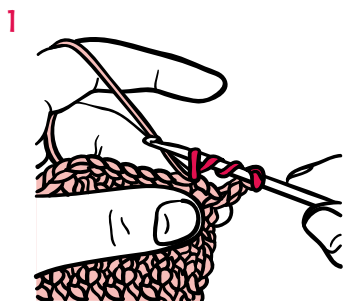


When you work your next row in dc, you'll work your last stitch into the *last ch stitch of the turning chain from the previous row*. Remember that this turning chain counted as the first stitch of the row. Now, go ahead and practice a few more rows of dc, remembering to ch 3 at the beginning of each row and to work into the top of the turning chain of the previous row when you reach the end of a new row.

Triple and Beyond!

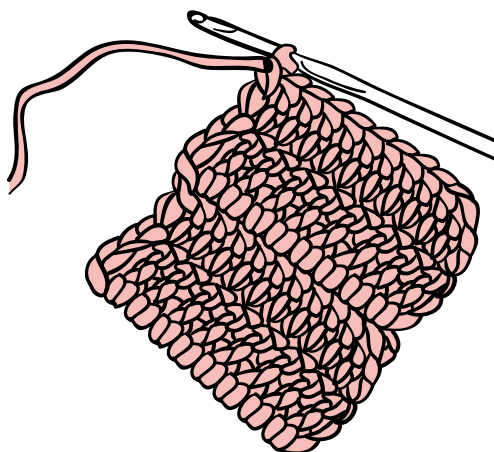
As when working the dc, you can make an even taller stitch: *triple crochet* (tc), also referred to as *treble crochet*. Because tc is taller than dc, you'll want to chain 4 for your turning chain. This time, bring the yarn over the hook two times before inserting the hook into the second stitch of the row. At this point, it'll look just like the beginning of a double crochet, with one extra loopy thing on the hook in the middle.

1. Insert the hook into the stitch, rotate to grab the yarn, and pull up a loop. You now have four loops on your hook. See figure 1.
2. Yarn over and bring through the first two loops on the hook. Three loops remain.
3. Yarn over again and bring through the first two loops on the hook. Two loops remain.
4. Yarn over again and bring through the final two loops on the hook. One loop remains, and you're set to work the next stitch. See figure 2.



As when working dc, the turning chain will count as the first stitch of the row, and the last stitch of the row will be worked into the last ch of the turning chain of the previous row. After completing one row of tc, you'll see the stitches are quite a bit taller than the dc and have even larger spaces between the individual stitches. With tc, you'll make a lot of progress quickly, but the trade-off (because there's always a trade-off) is a less firm fabric.

In the same way, you could work taller and taller stitches by working additional yarn overs before inserting the hook through the base stitch. However, these stitches are far less common and are usually explained within any pattern that uses them.



And Everything Else under the Sun

Crochet, of course, is not only these four stitches. But, the basic actions you've just performed form the basis of every other stitch in crochet. Entire volumes are dedicated to detailing and describing the endless possible variations. In chapter 2 is a selection of the most common and a few of my personal favorites.

Don't worry; you're not expected to learn and memorize them all. Because of the immense amount of possible patterns, it's not unusual to run into something you've never done, even after years and decades of experience. You'll be relieved to know that almost any pattern will give you stitch-specific instructions for anything other than the basics that are covered in "Crochet 101."

What's in a Name?

By now, you may have noticed a pattern between the three most common stitches: single, double, and triple. All of these stitches follow one pattern: yarn over, draw through two loops, and repeat until only one loop remains. The only things that vary are the number of loops initially created by the yarn over, before the hook is inserted into the work, and the number of times the pattern is repeated.

In single crochet, you repeat the pattern just once. In double, twice. And in triple? Big surprise, you do it three times. Sometimes, thinking about these repetitions really helps in remembering which stitch is which.

You Spin Me Right 'Round Baby!

So far, we've been only working back and forth in rows, from right to left. But in crochet, it's also possible to move in a circular direction, or as crochet-geeks call it, *in the round*.

Working in the round allows you to do a few things that flat crochet just can't handle. First, it lets you create seamless garments, such as the “It's a Toque, eh?” ski hat pattern in chapter 7. Although you could do the same hat, almost exactly, by crocheting back and forth in rows, at the very end you would need to sew the two sides together with a yarn needle. The seam would also be visible—not necessarily a good thing when wearing something meant to be seen from all sides, like a hat.

Secondly, circular crocheting allows you to create complex designs that lay flat but radiate from a central point. Think of those intricate lace doilies from your grandmother's house. Although you may not ever have “crochet doily” on your list of lifetime things to do, circular motifs can be fashionable, stunning, and fun to make. Just take a look at chapter 8's “Ramblin' Rosie Cardie” or “Uber Femme Capelet” for an example of some current, and stylish, possibilities.

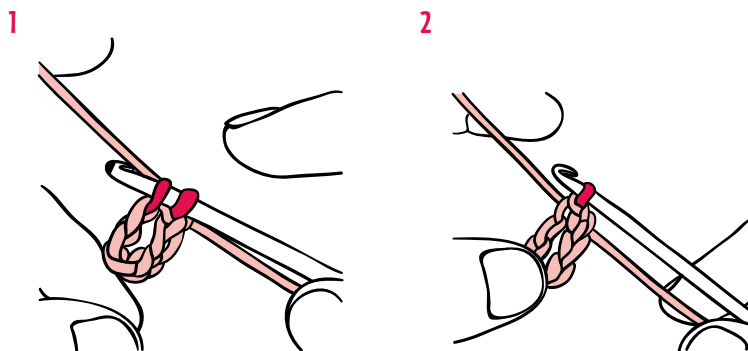
Slipping n' Sliding

Before getting into anything too fancy-shmancy, however, we'll start with a simple crocheted tube.

With your same yarn and hook, ch 6.

At this point, you could just start working stitches into the back loops of the foundation chain as you did before. But then, you wouldn't be working in a circle. So, before you do anything else, you need to join both ends of the chain together to make a ring. To do this, you'll work a slip stitch. Slip stitches tend to be used anywhere you need to move the yarn or join pieces without adding any significant height to the work.

1. Being careful to keep the chain from twisting, insert the hook into the very first chain after your initial slipknot. See figure 1.
2. As with the previous stitches, rotate the hook to bring the yarn over.
3. Draw through both loops on the hook to create one loop. It helps to use your thumb and index finger to hold the ring open while you do this. Otherwise, the ring tends to twist and make it difficult to join. See figure 2.



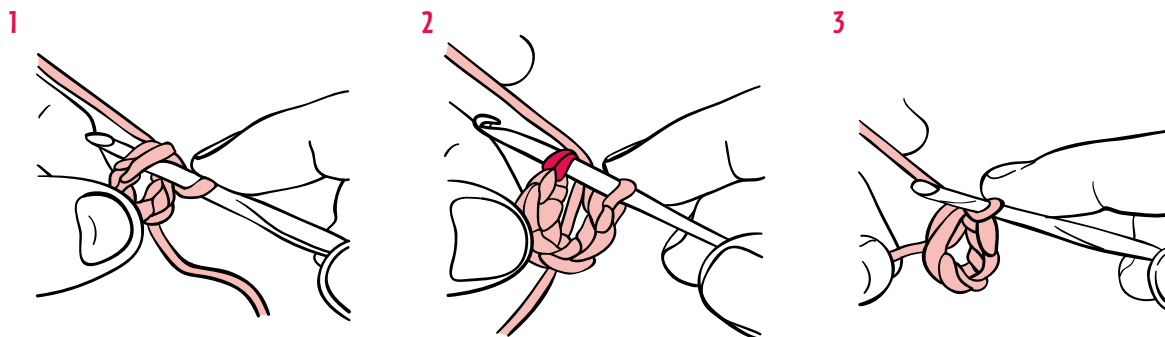
Totally Tubular

Although it's acceptable to crochet into the back ridges of your initial foundation chain, just as you did when working back and forth, for circular crochet, it's actually more common to crochet *around* those chain stitches. Although this allows your first round to slide a bit, the circular structure keeps it in place enough to prevent any issues. Try this on a row worked back and forth, and all your stitches may bunch up unattractively, or even slide off the end of the foundation chain!

1. We'll now work a round of single crochet around this base chain. So, as before, you'll chain 1 to increase the height.
2. This time, no need to worry about inserting your hook through a specific stitch. Instead, put the hook through the center of the ring from front to back. See figure 1.
3. As before, yarn over and pull up a loop, wrapping the foundation chain in the process.
4. Finish your sc by again working a yarn over and pulling through both loops.
5. Continue to work sc into the ring until 6 sc are completed. Use your fingers to evenly distribute them around the ring. Your final sc should be fairly close to the initial ch 1 of the round. Insert your hook into the top V of this initial ch 1. Any guesses what you're doing? Right! You're getting set to work a slip stitch to join both ends of the round without adding any height. See figure 2.
6. As before, wrap the yarn around the hook.
7. Draw through the Vs and the loop on the hook to join together. *Et voilà!* One round completed. See figure 3.

Rounds versus Rows

If you're not sure whether a pattern is worked back and forth or circularly, check out the terminology the designer uses. If she calls the first bit of stitching after the initial foundation chain a "round," you know you'll be working around a circle. If she calls it a "row," you'll be working back and forth.



Work several more rounds in this way to see your tube take shape. Remember to begin each round with a turning chain (ch 1) and to end each round with a slip stitch, joining the first and last stitches of the round. As with back-and-forth crochet, after the initial round you can continue to work each sc in the top of the sc on the round below.

In this way, you can create a tube of any length or circumference. Although this finger-sized tube may not seem practical, it could form part of a fitted glove. Likewise, other tubular shapes can make turtlenecks, hats, or legwarmers.

Be Square

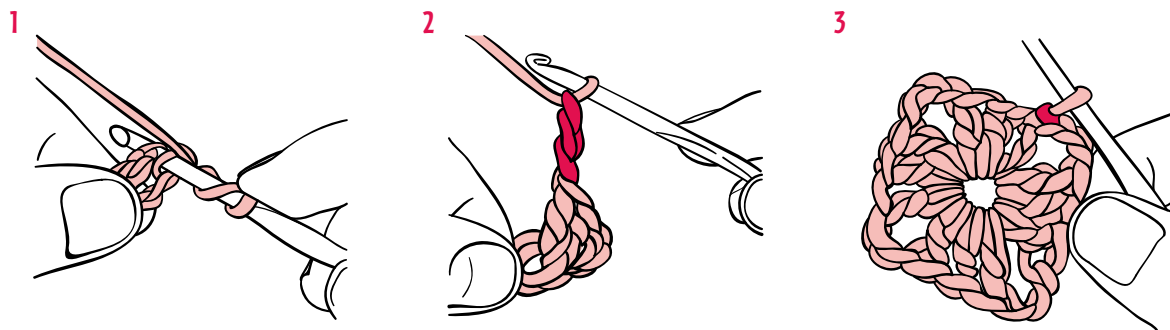
Perhaps the best known crochet motif is called the *Granny Square*. These square-shaped motifs have endless variations. But, even at its simplest form, the Granny Square can be seen in everything from dishcloths, to tacky afghans, to the Fashion Week catwalk. Again, the “Ramblin’ Rose Cardie” builds upon a basic Granny Square to create a bohemian look.

A Simple Square

To make the simplest of Granny Squares, ch 4 and slip stitch to join, as before.

1. Since you’ll be working in double crochet, ch 3 for height. This will take the place of the first dc.
2. You’ll now work a dc into the center of the ring. Yarn over and insert the hook from front to back in the center of the ring, just like you did with the tube. See figure 1.
3. Draw up a loop and complete the dc as described in the previous section.
4. Work one more dc in the center of the ring. Including the initial ch 3, you now have 3 dc.
5. Chain 3. This will make one corner of the square. See figure 2.

6. Bring the yarn over the needle and work three more dc into the center of the ring. Chain 3 for the next corner. Repeat the [3 dc, ch 3] sequence twice more, completing the four sides and four corners of a square.
7. Join with a slip stitch to the last stitch of the initial ch 3. See figure 3.



This is the simplest and least complicated of all the motifs. Typically, Granny Squares will have more than one round, following this basic format. I'm guessing this looks pretty familiar. For more motifs, see the stitch guide in the next chapter.

What Goes Up Must Come Down

Making squares and rectangles and tubes is all well and fine, but they only get you so far. To create more complex shapes, you may need to change the number of stitches worked on each row or round. In the Granny Square example, you already did this by working more than the initial 4 stitches into the center of the ring. If you still have your sample, count 'em.

Did you come up with 12 stitches? Close, but no cigar. Because of the corners, you actually worked 24 sts around: 12 dc and 12 ch. This dramatic increase in stitches allowed you to avoid the tube syndrome and create a perfectly flat square.

Of course, this is a simple example. In reality, there are as many ways to increase—or decrease—stitches as there are patterns that use them. 99.9 percent of the time, your pattern will specify how to increase or decrease, whether at the beginning of the pattern in a stitch key, or as part of the instructions. For example, chapter 7's "Getting Dizzy" scarf creates its spiral shape by increasing on every row.

Increases

Increasing, in needlework terminology at least, means the practice of augmenting the fabric's size by adding one or more stitches. In crochet, this is typically done by working multiple stitches into a single base stitch. In that "Getting Dizzy" scarf, the first increase row is made

Crochet Terms Across the Pond

Hamburgers versus Fish ‘n Chips. Dollars versus pounds. American versus British crochet terminology. You may not be surprised to hear there are two major English-language systems for naming crochet stitches. The stitches are the same, but the names are significantly, and sometimes confusingly, different. This book, like most produced in North America, uses the American system.

American	British
Slip stitch	Single crochet
Single crochet	Double crochet
Half double	Half treble
Double	Treble
Triple/treble	Double treble

Not sure where your pattern was produced? Check the stitch key first. Many times, patterns will explicitly explain how each stitch is made. If the pattern has no stitch key or only covers more complex stitches, check to see whether the pattern specifies “Slip stitch” anywhere. The British system has no stitch by this name, so you know you’re safe proceeding with the American definitions.

by working 2 dc into each sc from the first row. In further rows, the extra stitches are included less frequently.

Try it out on a new sample. Ch 10 or so and then work a few rows in sc without increasing or decreasing. On the next row, work 2 sc into each sc on the row. You’ll have doubled your stitches and created the beginning of a ruffle.

Increases are good for more than just spirally scarves and ruffles. Think of your favorite sweater. Is the sleeve all one size from armpit to wrist? Probably not. Most sleeves gradually increase in width as they approach the body of the sweater. This is done, not surprisingly, through carefully placed increases.

Decreases

Conversely, *decreasing* in crochet means reducing the number of stitches present on a given row or round. There are several methods for accomplishing this, but again, most are specified and in fact, created, for the pattern that uses them. One more common means of decreasing is to simply skip a stitch without working it, and work into the next stitch.

You may remember, when working back and forth in double or triple crochet, how we skip the very first stitch on each row? This doesn't decrease because the chain that lends height to the row actually takes the place of the stitch that would normally be worked into that stitch. But, if you're crocheting along and you skip a stitch in the middle of the row, you'll have to work two stitches into one later on to maintain the same number of stitches.

Try this out on your sample swatch. On the next row, sc into the first stitch in the row, skip the next stitch, and sc into the next stitch after that. Continue this way, working an sc into every other stitch from the row before. If you only worked one row of increases before, you're probably back to the same number of stitches you started with.

Putting It All Together

If you're making anything with more than one piece, you're probably wondering what to do next. You have several pieces of crochet and little ends of yarn dangling. Or, maybe you've run out of yarn and need to join in a new ball. Have no fear, none of this is as hard as it might seem.

Joining a New Ball of Yarn

Stripes are one of the most magical aspects of crochet. You can create a beautiful garment, scarf, or blanket in a hundred different colors if you like. What's magical about that? Stripes are deceptively easy, making the finished project a total mystery to anyone who doesn't crochet or knit.

The process of switching yarn for stripes is actually the same as when you finish one ball of yarn and need to start a new one. All you do is drop the old yarn and start using the new yarn, making sure to leave a tail of at least six inches of each so you have enough to sew in the ends later.

Let's say you're crocheting a simple scarf in single crochet, but you want to add in a few rows of a different color. For clarity, I'll call the dark color A and the lighter one B. To switch from A to B, at the end of a row, work until 2 loops remain on the hook. Drop A, yarnover with B, and draw through the last 2 loops of the stitch. Continue, as normal, with B. It may help to hold the dropped A together with the new tail of B to keep some tension on the new yarn.

Work the turning chains using B, continue to work across the row as set. It's that easy!

For a great project using stripes, check out the "Preppy/Hippy Scarf" in chapter 7.

Seaming

If you're making a project with multiple pieces, you'll have to find some way of joining them together. Seaming doesn't have to be a dreaded task. Although it typically comes at the end of the project when you're itching to see the whole thing done, it doesn't actually take as long as it may sometimes seem.

Different types of crochet and different projects require different types of seaming. Typically, your pattern will specify how to seam the pieces together, if a specific method is required. Otherwise, experiment with the following options to see which one works the best for you.

Generally speaking, when seaming, you have the choice of using a crochet stitch to attach two pieces, or sewing two pieces together with yarn and a yarn needle.

With any technique, it's sometimes possible to use the tail end of your yarn, rather than using a new piece of yarn. Just remember when tying off to leave a long enough tail to sew your seam. The length required will vary depending on the size of the piece. To be on the safe side, plan on at least four times the total seam length. This, however, doesn't work with every yarn—sometimes you will crochet a project with a yarn that is not suitable for sewing up, either because it is not strong enough to be used in this way, or because it is too textured. If this is the case, seam with a smooth, lighter-weight, stronger yarn in a suitable color. If you have worked your project in a machine-washable yarn, be sure to seam in a yarn that is also safe for the machine.

Slip Stitch Crochet Seam

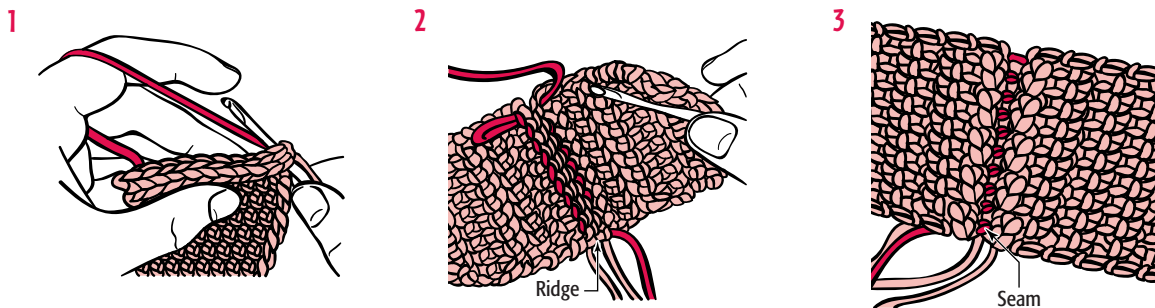
Perhaps the quickest and easiest seam is accomplished by slip stitching the two pieces together using the project's crochet hook and yarn. However, a crocheted seam adds bulk to the project and will never be completely invisible.

In the three example figures that follow, contrasting yarn is used for clarity. In reality, you'd want to use yarn that matches the project.

1. To work a slip stitch seam, first line up the edges of the two pieces, with right sides together. Insert the hook through the top right stitch on both pieces, being careful to go through both halves of the V on the top of each stitch. See figure 1.
2. Draw up a loop.
3. With one loop on the hook, insert the hook through the next pair of stitches.
4. Yarn over and pull a loop through the stitches and right through the loop already on the hook.

Continue to work in this way until the seam is finished. From the wrong side, the surface meant to be worn on the inside, you'll see the ridge created by the seam. See figure 2.

On the right side, the outside of the garment, the seam will be much more flat. Keep in mind that, since you'll be working the seam in matching yarn, the seam will be much less visible than it is here. See figure 3.

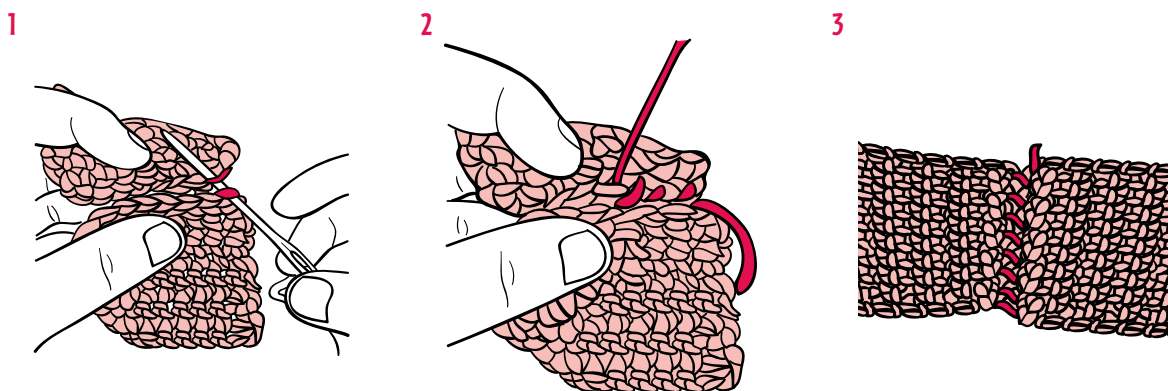


Whipstitch Sewn Seam

For the whipstitch seam, you'll need a yarn needle. These are typically sold everywhere you can buy yarn and can be made out of plastic or metal. Again, place the right sides of the pieces together.

So far, we've only worked through both loops (both sides of the V) of any stitch. For the whipstitch seam, however, we're going to only work with half of the V.

1. Beginning at the top right corner, insert the sewing needle through the two halves of the stitch that are pressed together. Your needle should be going under one loop from the front piece and one loop from the back piece, as shown. See figure 1.
2. Pull the yarn through, being conscious of your tension. If you pull too tightly, the seam will pucker; too loosely, and you'll be left with gaps. See figure 2.
3. Continue to work in this way across the seam until finished. Both sides of the seam are nearly identical. As an additional bonus, the whipstitch seam lies almost perfectly flat. See figure 3.



Other Seaming Techniques

As previously mentioned, there are boatloads of other techniques for attaching crochet pieces. Especially when working with motifs, such as Granny Squares, the means of attaching two motifs together can effectively be a part of the overall design. In these cases, the seaming process will be specified by the pattern.

Sewing in Ends

No one . . . and I mean *no one* enjoys weaving or sewing in all those little ends of yarn inevitably left at the end of a project.

1. If your project will have seams, work the seams first; they make great places to hide the sewn ends. If it has no seams, instead weave the yarn in and out of the edge of the piece for an inch or two in one direction.
2. Next, double back and sew in the opposite direction, toward where you started.
3. Cut the yarn, making sure that the piece isn't puckering from being pulled too tightly.

Yarn, depending on what it's made of, can either be quite slippery, quite sticky, or somewhere in between. The slipperier the yarn, the more careful you should be when sewing ends to prevent them from coming loose. For the slickest cottons, you may want to insert the needle not only into the stitches but right through the yarn the stitches are made of, to provide the largest amount of security. As always, be sure to sew at least a few inches in one direction and then back the other way.

Blocking

In crochet and knitting, *blocking* is a technique for helping the fabric to lay flat, or in the case of lacey patterns, helping stretch the lace to most effectively showcase the beautiful stitch work. Two main methods exist for blocking your work; wet blocking and steam blocking.

Wet Blocking

To wet block, you'll need a tub for water, plus a large towel and someplace flat to lay the project while it dries. When blocking lace, you'll also need some rust-proof pins or, alternatively, a blocking wire set.

1. First, submerge the project in room temperature water and squeeze it gently to fully soak the fibers. Allow the piece to soak for 15–30 minutes, especially if you are using a fiber like wool, which is slow to absorb water.
2. Remove the project from the bath and roll in a towel, pressing to sop up any extra water. You're not trying to fully dry the piece, only to remove enough water so the project doesn't drip excessively. Don't be tempted to wring out the excess water;

wringing, even gently, can seriously distort your project and in some cases, cause the fibers to mat, pill, or shrink.

3. Lay a dry towel down on the surface you've selected for drying. If you'll need to pin the piece to stretch it, a spare bed or large carpet can work nicely for this. Otherwise, if just blocking to relax the stitches and make the piece more flat, anywhere will do.
4. Lay the project on the towel and pin, if desired. If you're in a hurry, it's okay to set a fan to blow on the project to speed up the drying process. Depending on the project, climate, and type of yarn, it can take 24–48 hours to fully dry.

Steam Blocking

Steam blocking is the quick and easy alternative to the wet block method. However, steam blocking is really only effective for flattening or smoothing the fabric, and not for any serious stretching.

As its name implies, you'll need an iron capable of producing steam and something to iron on. I prefer to layer a towel or two on a flat work surface if steaming something garment-sized. For smaller projects, such as a hat or scarf, my ironing board works fine.

1. Lay the project on the towels or an ironing board and cover with a dishtowel or other not-too-thick fabric.
2. With the steam set to medium, hover the iron over the protective cloth. If this seems to be ineffective, you can press lightly on the protective cloth.

Not all fibers take well to steam. In addition, pressing too hard with the iron will overly flatten out the cushy crochet stitches, dramatically impacting the size, shape, drape, and density of the finished product. Generally, steam blocking works well for hardy wools and less well for anything synthetic like 100 percent acrylic. If you're not sure whether it'll steam block, consider testing with the same yarn by making a small 10 or 15 stitch square.

When to Block?

How do you know when blocking is necessary, or even how to block? Your pattern should tell you what to do and how. If the pattern doesn't specify whether or not to block, it's optional. You may choose to lightly steam iron the edges of a piece before you sew them if the edges are curling. Or, if your finished sweater is just a smidgen too small, wet blocking and pinning can help it stretch just enough to fit properly.

When Good Crochet Goes Bad: Troubleshooting

Let's face it, problems happen. You make a mistake. You lose your place. The finished product turns out somehow different than expected. Even the most accomplished crocheters run into problems from time to time. The good news is that crochet can be less difficult to troubleshoot

than knitting or other crafts. Although problems can be as varied as the types of yarn in your local yarn shop, here are a few quick-and-easy tips to fixing some of the more common issues.

Your Edges Aren't Even

If you're trying to crochet without increasing or decreasing, and your edges don't appear straight, most likely you're not maintaining a consistent number of stitches in each row. Remember to skip the first stitch next to the turning chain if working in double or triple crochet, and to work the first stitch if working in single crochet. Work across to the turning chain from the previous row, working into the last stitch of the turning chain if you are working double or triple crochet, and skipping the turning chain if you are working in single crochet. Sometimes it helps to count each stitch on every row to make sure that you end up with the right number every time. Remember also, if you are working in double crochet or triple crochet, to count the turning chain as a single stitch, no matter how many chains you worked to turn. For example, if you had to chain 3 to obtain the height of a dc, it still counts as one stitch.

It's Tough to Get the Hook in the Stitch

Crochet should never feel like a fight. If you have to push, pull, or otherwise manipulate the hook and yarn to work a stitch, your tension is probably too tight. Tension is a way to measure how tight or loose your stitches are. In chapter 3, we'll discuss tension in depth. In general, the thickness of the crochet hook changes the size of the stitches. A bigger hook makes bigger stitches; a smaller one makes them tighter. If your stitches are too small, try switching to a larger hook, even if you were originally using the size recommended.

Some yarns are also more flexible than others. Pure cotton is fairly inelastic. Although often used in crochet patterns, cotton can be harder for beginning hookers than a wool or acrylic. More elastic yarns help compensate for any tension problems.

The Surface of the Crochet Has Loose Threads

Another common issue for novice crocheters occurs when the hook splits the yarn, either while inserting into the next stitch or while completing a stitch in progress. Although this is sometimes not a big deal, most times split yarn will result in a messy looking stitch. Even worse, these loose threads can unravel over time and cause holes.

The best way to fix this problem is to avoid it in the first place. When working each stitch, be aware of what you're doing. You should be grabbing the entire piece of yarn, not just a strand or two, when completing the stitch. If a snag happens, remove your hook from the loop and gently pull on the yarn until the stitch is frogged. (See the "Rippit, Rippit" sidebar.) Now, rework the stitch, being careful to catch the entire strand of yarn.

Rippit, Rippit: The Joys of Frogging

Hang around any obsessed yarn freaks for long enough, and you're likely to hear the term *frogging*. In crochet-speak, this means unraveling your project to fix a mistake. The term *frog* likely developed from the phrase "ripping back," as in to rip back to where you were before the problem occurred.

Don't be afraid of frogging. In most cases, taking the time to unwind and re-crochet to fix an error is well spent. In crochet, the process of frogging or ripping back is straightforward and can actually be fun. To frog, just remove your hook from the crochet and gently pull on the yarn that's attached to the ball so that each stitch is unworked. (Typically, you'll want to pull the yarn away from the crocheted piece, not towards it.) One by one, each stitch will be pulled out. If you're frogging a fair bit of work, stop every once in a while to wind the yarn around the ball to prevent tangles. When you get past the offending stitch (or rows of stitches, in my case), put the single loop back on the hook and keep on working.

The Crochet Curls Unattractively

Most crochet should lie flat, without curling edges. If your crochet is twisting or biasing, you may be working the stitches too tightly. However, if your tension is correct, it may just be the twist of the yarn. Try wet blocking or steam blocking the project to fix any curly edges.

The exception to this is single crochet. A fabric composed of mostly single crochet stitches will curl, almost invariably. Count on blocking your single-crochet fabric and choose fibers like wool, which respond well to blocking.

You Don't Remember Where You Are

This one happens to all of us. You start a project and, at first, are super excited about each and every stitch. Then, time passes, and like many unfulfilling relationships, you put the project aside in favor of something shiny and new. Months pass, and one day, you find that abandoned project and want to start it up, once again. But where are you? What pattern is it from? What hook do you use?

The best remedy for this is prevention. When you start a project, use a tote or empty shopping bag to hold all the yarn, the work in progress, and the pattern book. Mark the pattern with a sticky note or bookmark and make a note of what size hook you'd been using. You may prefer to make a single photocopy of the pattern, for your own use only, and keep these notes on the copy of the pattern rather than marking up the book. This is what works for me. Other crafters keep project notebooks or online blogs to catalog project information.

But, if you haven't already done this, sit down with the project and the pattern and read both from the beginning to see where you left off. If you're mid-row, it may be easier to rip

back to the beginning of a row, rather than guess which stitch should come next for a complex pattern.

When All Else Fails. . .

Don't ever be surprised at the problems you can run into. There's not a book on the planet that can give you the answer to every single issue with crochet. When everything else fails, ask someone who knows. This may be a friend or relative with more crochet experience. This may be doing online research or joining a community such as the ones listed in chapter 12. Or, if you're really in a sticky situation, seek out a quality yarn store in your community. Although yarn stores these days tend to be more geared to knitting, I'd be surprised to run into a yarn store that couldn't at least refer you to a local crochet expert.

What's Next?

Oh, come on. You know you're itching to get started. And it's true that everyone cheats from time to time. So, go ahead and check out chapter 7's delightful newbie patterns. You know you want to. But after that bug wears off, do come back and read the next four chapters. You'll learn crazy stuff about yarn. You'll explore different stitch combinations. You'll read tips on how to make your garments fit properly. It's all good stuff.

But I guess I'll forgive you if you just can't wait to start your first official project. Maybe.