

Knitting Secrets

A beginners guide to knitting



by Sarah Beth Wilkinson

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Yarn Yoga

So you want to learn to knit, huh? Well, what are your qualifications? You think we're going to let you just stroll in here like you own the joint, hand you needles, and let you go at it? You do? Hm. Interesting. Maybe we can go at it that way.

Welcome to the ranks of new knitters! While knitting has been around for centuries and exists in many different forms throughout the globe, it has enjoyed a renewed popularity recently. Knitting may not have the tie to survival it once had for much of the globe, yet new knitters are getting into a needle habit in droves. Why? Some feel it creates a connection with our heritage in a time when

living in the moment is in vogue. Others believe it's a way of separating oneself from the inundation of technology in our lives. Still others feel that it's a pastime, something to do while waiting for the kids at soccer practices and recitals. But why do people stick with knitting?

Once you get into it, you'll be asking why people *don't* stick with knitting. While it gives your hands something to do, it's a hobby that allows you to work and create while your mind can roam free or go blank. It's meditation with

tangible results. Many knitters begin working on a pattern only to look down two hours later and realize that they've finished half of a baby blanket and feel centered, focused, and refreshed.

You don't have to be flexible to pick up knitting. You don't have to commit 10 hours a week. But when you're in need of replenishment or nourishment, you can reach into your knitting bag, get to work, and lose yourself in creativity.

Patience, Grasshopper

As you go through the book, you'll notice that it can be tough to get the hang of knitting from printed instructions. This can be infinitely easier if you have needles and yarn available while you're reading, since then you can go step-by-step along with the book. After you review the "Sizing Up" chapter, head out and get some inexpensive supplies so you can follow along. Remember, the most important piece of equipment you can bring to your knitting is your own patience – knitting is a craft, and it'll take some time to master. You *will* get there, just remember that it's not the end of the world if you don't get it on your first attempt... or even your 50th.

Suiting Up



One of the reasons knitting has again become so popular is because it can be one of the cheapest hobbies to adopt. If you exclude high-quality yarns like angora and mohair, you can easily work up a gorgeous knit piece for less than \$10 (and that includes the price of your knitting needles!).

That same popularity, however, can increase the cost of your hobby through sheer volume. Walk into the craft department at your nearest Super Wal-Mart and you'll understand immediately – the popularity of both knitting and crocheting has encouraged manufacturers to come up with thousands of new textures, colors, and types of yarn that have never before been available to the general public. Now, if the relatively small crafts department at a superstore has such a wide selection, imagine the vast array at a craft or, heaven forbid, yarn store!

Fun Fact

Sweaters are so named because they were once used for athletic wear... and guess what the athletes did while wearing them.

The choices can be daunting and confusing for even the experienced knitter. If you've been knitting for longer than a month, chances are that your closet/dresser/any open storage area is crammed with scraps, leftovers, and even unopened packages of yarn for the hundreds of projects you planned and never had a chance to finish. Ever consider the cost of all of those pieces? Doesn't sound like such a cheap hobby anymore, huh?

For beginning knitters, yarn displays can be an even bigger pit of quicksand. You may not know exactly what you can make, but you know which yarns feel nice against your skin and which ones have the prettiest colors. Just look at all of them! Surely there has to be *something* on your skill level that can be made with such fun fabrics! Wait a second, wait a second, put down the chenille. No, really, put it down. Do we need to call security? Before you max out your Visa card just because something feels soft and smooth, there are a few basic facts you should know about yarn. More experienced knitters can go to the head of the class and skip on to the next section.

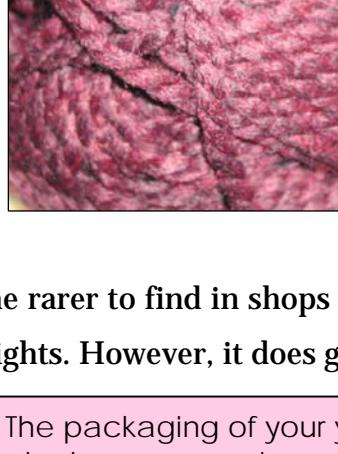
Weight

Not yours, the yarn's. There are several specific weights of yarn, each of which corresponds to different types of projects. You can use unconventional weights for projects when you have a little more experience manipulating it, but for now you'll want to stick to these guidelines:

- *Worsted weight:* This is the most adaptable weight of yarn and therefore the most popular. You can make just about anything with worsted weight, which gives you the added bonus of having more colors and textures from which to choose.
- *Sport weight:* If you like basic projects and find yourself sticking mostly to worsted weight, you can easily switch to sport weight for a lighter, more summery feel. It's a little thinner, so it works perfectly for wispier projects like shawls.
- *Fingering weight:* Some of the most popular knitting projects are for babies, and this thinnest yarn weight is ideal for the smaller, more delicate work involved in baby blankets and clothing. It can also be softer than worsted and sport weights which makes it gentler on baby's skin.
- *Chunky weight:* At a heavier weight than worsted, these yarns usually come in fun, bold colors perfect for making thick sweaters, hats, and other winter clothing. As an added bonus, they also work up more



quickly than worsted weight.

- *Bulky weight:* The biggest, fattest yarn available. If you're looking for a yarn that can become a fully-formed project in about the time it takes you to make and eat a PB&J sandwich, this is it. (It's also fun to pair with big, fat needles and pretend you're a giant!)
 - *Double knit weight:* This weight has become rarer to find in shops since it toes the line between sport and worsted weights. However, it does give you the flexibility to make projects in either of the other two weights without having to adjust the patterns.

The packaging of your yarn also has one very important piece of information listed on it: the dye lot. This indicates



Packaging

Now before you go rushing off to the store with all of your newfound knowledge, you should really be familiar with the way yarn can be packaged. It may seem unimportant, but the first time you come home with a hank of yarn and end up in tears on the floor because it won't unravel properly, you'll get the point of this little review.

The packaging of your yarn also has one very important piece of information listed on it: the dye lot. This indicates when and where the yarn was dyed. Different lots can have what appear to be nominally different shades, but by the time you finish a project you'll realize you have four different shades of green. Always buy all of the yarn you need for a project at one time, and always be sure to double-check that the dye lot codes match.

- **Skein:** Usually any knitter's dream. Skeins are great because most manufacturers have structured them in a way that allows you to pull your working piece of yarn from the center. This means that you don't



have to unwind and ball the yarn, but it also means that you can work in a smaller, more manageable space.



- *Ball:* This should be self-explanatory. If not, you need to find a book even more basic than this one. You usually won't find yarn sold in ball form at the store – you have to wind them that way yourself. More advanced knitters sometimes

have gadgets to help with winding, but you can also do this using a doorknob or a friend's hands.

- *Hank:* A record-setting player for the Atlanta Braves... oops, wrong book. To make a hank, manufacturers or yarn spinners lay out all of the yarn in the shape of a big O. They then twist it into a smaller bunch for easier packaging. Hanks have to be untwisted and



rewound into a ball when you want to work with them.

- *Cone:* Huge projects can become infinitely more affordable by using cones. Commercial manufacturers use this format when they want to sell over a pound of yarn at a time, but the price per pound is often much less than if you bought the same quantity as a skein.



Material

Okay, now you're ready for the fun part – picking the kind of yarn you want to use! Some patterns dictate exactly what weight and type work best for that

project, but exploration and creativity are essential aspects of knitting. Who wants to work word-for-word from someone else's pattern when you can add your own flair? Choosing yarn can be as simple as finding something you think looks fun and experimenting. Other knitters like to know exactly how the yarn was made and from what materials. If you're working on pieces for friends and family, you may want to ask about possible wool or other fabric allergies before picking up large quantities of a yarn just because it's their favorite color. To help you in your search, here's a quick rundown of some of the most common types of yarn (ooo, another bulleted list!):

- *Synthetics/acrylics:* Long the whipping boy of fabric purists for their tendency to pill and fade, acrylics have made a big comeback recently and shown their critics a completely new quality of synthetic. They're vividly colored, nice to touch, aren't tasty to bugs, wash easily, and generally don't need the time and attention wool pieces require. They also tend to be more hypoallergenic,



which makes them a great option for babies and those on your gift list who can't wear wool.

- *Wool:* The old, faithful fabric that has served knitters everywhere for hundreds of years. If you've taken up knitting to make projects that can be passed to your children, your children's children, your children's children's children... okay, you get the

picture. Anyway, if that's your goal, use wool. It'll last forever. On the negative side, some people have severe allergies to wool, it needs more



intensive care (unless you find one of the newer washable varieties), and it sometimes feels a little coarser against skin.

- *Cotton:* Who doesn't love the feel of cotton? While it can be slightly more difficult to work with than synthetics and wool, cotton is easy to wash, wonderful to wear, and looks great. One of the only other negatives is that cotton is pretty easy to stretch out of shape, so you may not want to use it for kids' clothing... unless they're really well-behaved.

- *Novelty:* This category is huge and grows exponentially every year. It includes yarns like bouclé, which is instantly recognizable by its zig-zag appearance, chenille, fun fur,



eyelash, and hundreds of others. If you're looking for something funky and different, you'll find it in this category. But be careful – some novelty yarns are extremely difficult to work with and won't let you see stitches, which may mean you'll end up with a large, funky pile of frustration.

- *Long-haired:* The yarns in this category are like taking a bubble bath surrounded by candles while eating a chocolate mousse pie (yes, the whole pie) without interruption. They're pure luxury and include yarns like angora and mohair. Expect to pay more for these, but you can also expect the end result to be glamorous and unique. Because of the price and the relative difficulty, save these yarns for after you've had some practice with the cheaper alternatives. If you've mastered the standard yarns, try an eyelash or fur novelty yarn before taking on long-haired varieties. Mistakes will be much cheaper.

Fun Fact

In certain countries, knitting needles are called "pins."

- ***Handmade:*** With the newfound popularity of both knitting and crocheting, spinning (the art of making yarn from raw wool) is also gaining popularity. A quick search online will come up with thousands of homegrown websites dedicated to handspun yarn, each one of a kind and beautiful for the effort and care taken in creating it. You have two options here – support the existing spinners and buy their yarn or go full-force and learn to spin your own. Since we assume you can figure out how to do the first on your own, we'll address the second later in the book.

Airline Travel

If you're planning to take your knitting with you on vacation, always, always, *always* call the airline ahead of time and make sure they allow knitting needles. If they do, ask them specifically about the material from which your needles are made. Alternatively, always buy needles marked with an "airline approved" stamp.

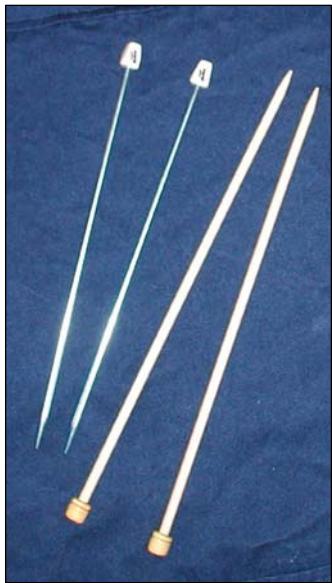
Needles

So you have the yarn, what else do you need? Let's see... hmm... ohhh, needles, right! While there aren't quite as many varieties of needles as yarn, there are a few. The two basic options you'll encounter are whether you need straight needles or circular needles. Circular needles, as both their name and shape imply, allow you to knit in circles, ultimately creating a tube.

Straight needles come in two sub-varieties, single and double-point. Double-point straight needles help create pieces similar to those created using circular needles, typically round or tubular pieces like socks. Single-point straight needles are the stereotypical knitting needles. With a point at one end and a circular nub at the other, single-point needles are used for flat items like afghans or scarves.

After you figure out which type of needle will work best for your project, figure out which size you'll need. Er, need. It may sound more daunting than it actually is, since most patterns suggest a needle size and you'll begin to get the hang of which sizes work best for which projects as you become more and more experienced. The only area in which you may encounter problems is when purchasing needles made by foreign companies, as the US and UK measure needle size differently. To confuse the issue a bit more, many needles are now also marked in metric sizes while the UK measurements are slowly phased out. The easiest way to clarify this is to look at the inside of a running shoe. On the back of the tongue, you'll see a little chart sewn into the fabric that shows the US sizes in comparison to other international shoe sizes. Luckily, needle manufacturers have similar charts you should be able to find on the back of the needle packages. If you can't, you're in luck – there's one along the side of this page!

US	UK	Metric
0	13	2.25
1	12	2.5
2	11	3
3	10	3.25
4	9	3.5
5	8	4
6	7	4.5
7	6	5
8	5	5.5
9	4	6
10	3	6.5
10.5	2	7
11	1	7.5
13	00	8.5
15	000	9



Needles are also available in a variety of materials and colors. Wood and aluminum are the standard materials for today's knitting needles, but, while less expensive, some knitters dislike aluminum's tendency toward temperature conduction. Wood and bamboo are the traditional needles of choice. In recent years, however, some manufacturers have managed to make acrylic needles with grip and feel qualities similar to wood while keeping a price tag closer to aluminum. Your selection in needles really comes down to personal preference. If you're a beginner without a needle to your name, don't go out and buy a full set. Experiment with a few different materials for different projects and decide which you prefer.

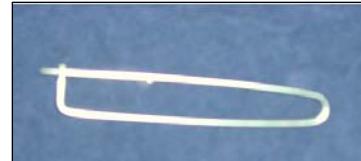
Accessories

What's a hobby without the opportunity to accessorize? As you work your way through the jungle of knitting accessories, the first investment you'll want to make is in a suitable knitting tote. While craft stores and websites sell bags made specifically for knitting, these are often anything but attractive. You want to be able to take your hobby out into public, show it off, live it up, don't you? Check the sketching/drawing/painting section of the craft store instead, as these bags are typically both aesthetically appealing and utilitarian. They feature loops (intended for brushes but often perfect for needles), pockets, and compartments galore to stow all of your paraphernalia in style. And if you don't find something you like there, shop in regular department stores for standard tote bags!

If your knitting is constantly moving from one place to another, getting tangled, and being knocked around, try one of those huge, plastic ice cream pails. Just cut a hole in the top to thread the yarn through while working, then take the top off and shove your needles and everything else inside when it's time to go!

Your second necessity is a tape measure. No, not the huge home improvement metal deal in the garage, a seamstress tape measure. These are about \$1 and can be found in any fabric or craft store. You'll be lost without one.

Next, find stitch holders. You'll need these to grab onto stitches you'll use later in the project, but they're also useful to help count stitches. Safety pins, paperclips, diaper pins, and other little doodads around the house can fill this role easily – you'll figure out what works best for you after a few projects.



If you're working on a pattern with several different colors, bobbins can make the yarn transitions a little bit easier. Think about it. Would you rather have five or six full-size skeins of yarn rolling around on your floor at any given moment or five or six little bobbins sitting on the table next to you? These aren't a necessity, though, just a convenience.

Fun Fact

Archaeologists have found knitted fabric in ancient Egyptian tombs.

As we go further into more specific stitches and types of knitting, you'll encounter a few more fun accessories and tools to make your work quicker and easier. We don't want you going into information overload right away!

Okay, you have all of the equipment you need and then some. In the next section we'll run through some knitting basics, tips, and tricks, then get into the meaty stuff. Are you ready? Let's get a little enthusiasm going – you're getting ready to knit! Now... ***are you ready?*** That's more like it. Let's go!

Boot Camp



Yarn? Check. Equipment? Check. Patterns? Check. Know-how? Know-how? Ohhh, you don't quite have that yet, do you? This chapter is meant to be a kind of boot camp for your knitting needs. You'll learn the basics in how to read and decipher patterns, standard stitches to make simple pieces, and the importance of gauge (no, not in tires). Once you've made it through this section, you should be ready to tackle patterns for single-color scarves and even simpler blankets.

Abbreviations

This may be the first time you've decided to learn to knit. Maybe it's the second, third, or fourth time you've tried. Many people pick up the tools, yarn, and books to prepare, then get discouraged and never follow through. Why? The biggest turn-off is probably the work and translation involved in reading knitting patterns. If you've ever looked at one, you'll understand why. They're riddled with

Equipment

Keep a nail file with your knitting supplies. Hangnails and chipped nails will snag on yarn and drive you batty!

abbreviations, shorthand, and instructions that almost seem to be written in a foreign language. Even the beginning knitter can decipher a few of these phrases, but some are so obscure and rarely used that expert knitters have to look back at references to make sure they're doing the right

thing. It may seem like slow-going right now, but soon enough you'll have the basics of these abbreviations memorized to the point that you'll be zipping through patterns in no time flat.

In the meantime, print out page 20 and cut along the dashed lines. The chart is the perfect size for a standard index card, so glue it to some cardstock and keep it handy in your knitting bag. For even more durability, laminate the card – you can also add new abbreviations you may come across by using a Sharpie marker. By keeping it close at hand, you'll be able to ward off those little hiccups that happen when trying to figure out what a pattern means.

You may still have problems reading patterns even after picking up some of the more common abbreviations. To help learn the rhythm of knitting instructions,

sit down and write the pattern out as you would read it. Once you've "translated" it, compare the longer version to the abbreviated terms in the original pattern. Review it several times before beginning. If you're still having trouble, rewrite the pattern a second time using the abbreviations, but add the translations in parentheses and force yourself to read both while you knit.

Writing everything out may get a little annoying, so use your computer to help you learn. A simple word processor is invaluable since you can make the changes easily and print them out when you're ready to start knitting. If you come across an abbreviation you don't know, hop online and do a little research. Message boards and online communities are great places for beginning knitters since they allow you to communicate with other knitters of various levels of expertise. Don't be afraid to ask questions!

Taking Notes

As you're writing out your patterns, you may want to place them in a binder or notebook to keep track of what you've worked on, which patterns you liked/disliked, etc. You can also use this notebook to record dye lots and care instructions from yarn labels. If you give the item as a gift, write down the recipient's name so you can let them know how to properly care for their item.

KNITTING ABBREVIATION GUIDE

<i>beg</i> : beginning	<i>patt</i> : pattern
<i>bet</i> : between	<i>PM/pM</i> : place marker
<i>BO/bo</i> : bind off	<i>rem</i> : remaining
<i>CC/cc</i> : contrasting color	<i>rep</i> : repeat
<i>ch</i> : chain	<i>RH/rh</i> : right hand
<i>cn</i> : cable needle	<i>rnd</i> : round
<i>CO/co</i> : cast on	<i>RS/rs</i> : right side
<i>dec</i> : decrease	<i>sk</i> : skip
<i>dpn</i> : double pointed needle	<i>sl</i> : slip
<i>eor</i> : every other row	<i>ssk</i> : slip, slip, knit
<i>est</i> : established	<i>sp</i> : space
<i>inc</i> : increase	<i>ST</i> : stockinette
<i>k1b</i> : knit 1 in back loop	<i>st</i> : stitch
<i>k2tog</i> : knit 2 stitches together	
<i>K/k</i> : knit	<i>tbl</i> : through back loops
<i>LH/lh</i> : left hand	<i>wyib</i> : with yarn in back
<i>MC/mc</i> : main color	<i>wyif</i> : with yarn in front
<i>meas</i> : measures	<i>WS/ws</i> : wrong side
<i>ndl</i> : needle	<i>yo</i> : yarn over
<i>p1b</i> : purl 1 in back loop	
<i>P/p</i> : purl	
<i>pss0</i> : pass slip stitch over knit/purl stitch	

": inches

***: repeat inst. after or between number of times indicated

[]: repeat inst. between number of times indicated

(): repeat inst. between number of times indicated

What's that? You still have no idea what half of those terms mean? Don't worry – we'll get to them. Think about this like cooking, and imagine that you've never even set foot inside a kitchen before. Would you know what the difference between a tablespoon and a teaspoon is? How to chop something versus dicing it? No, probably not. You've got a learning curve to face in knitting, and it's a learning curve that'll last for as long as you decide to knit. Even the most experienced knitters can learn something from a beginner, particularly since knitters of different generations tend to have different styles. Just try not to get discouraged and don't worry if you don't pick something up within your first few patterns. Knitting should be relaxing and easygoing, not stressful.

Stitches

Okay, enough background, let's try some knitting! In this section you'll find the most basic of knitting stitches, the stitches that'll allow you to work on simple projects like scarves, blankets, and other patterns that feature more repetitive motions to help you practice the pieces of knitting that make up the foundation.

Now remember, *don't get frustrated*. Every beginning knitter has a moment of weakness, the lowlight of which can be screaming at the needles about your Ivy League education, SAT scores, or your ability to cook a nutritious gourmet meal for 5 in less than an hour. Just don't give up.

Knitting can be difficult to learn, and if you don't think spatially it can be even more difficult to learn from photos in a book. If you can't get the hang of it from the instructions and photos below, ask a friend who knits. No friends? Aw, poor you! Okay, stop into a craft or yarn store and ask for a quick demonstration. The clerks are usually more than happy to share their craft.

Fun Fact

Men were the primary knitters and the only allowed participants in knitting guilds through the Middle Ages.

Casting

This is the basis of knitting. Casting gives you the foundation row you need to build the rest of a project. Even before you cast, you'll need to know how to tie a slip knot. If you failed Rope Arts 101, here's a quick primer:

Slip knot



Lay the free end of the yarn over the end attached to the skein in a loop.



Loop the free end under the original loop to form a pretzel shape.



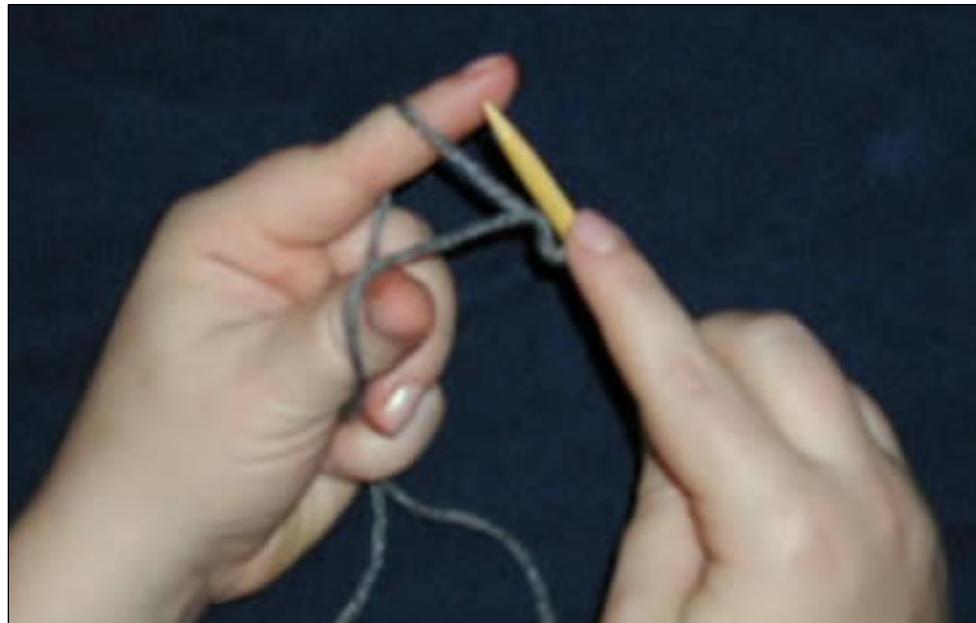
Grab the strand looped beneath the other yarn and pull outward while pulling down on the tail strands.



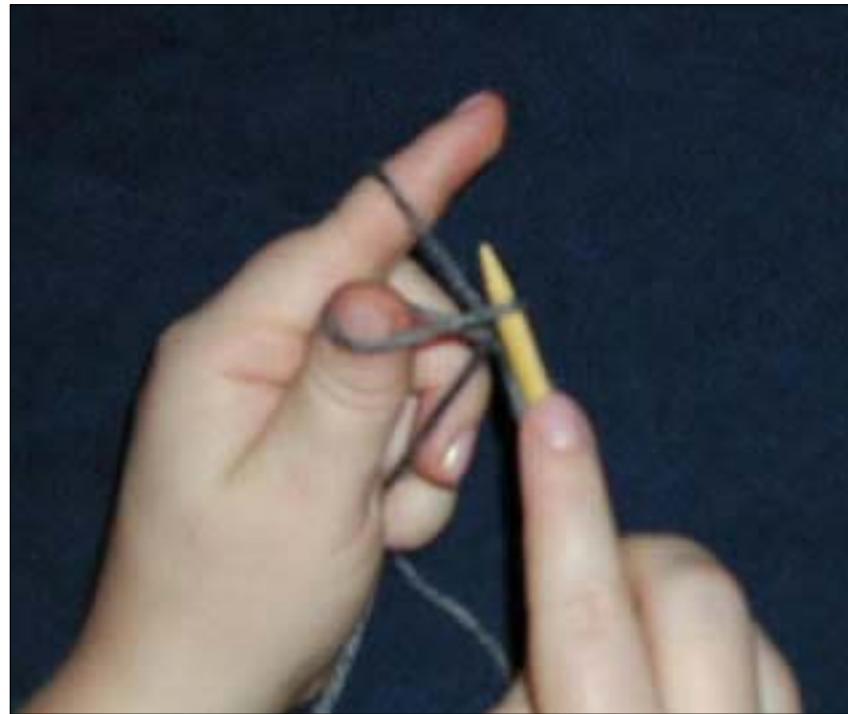
Voila! It's your first stitch! Just slip your needle into that loop and pull down on the strands to tighten.

Casting on: single

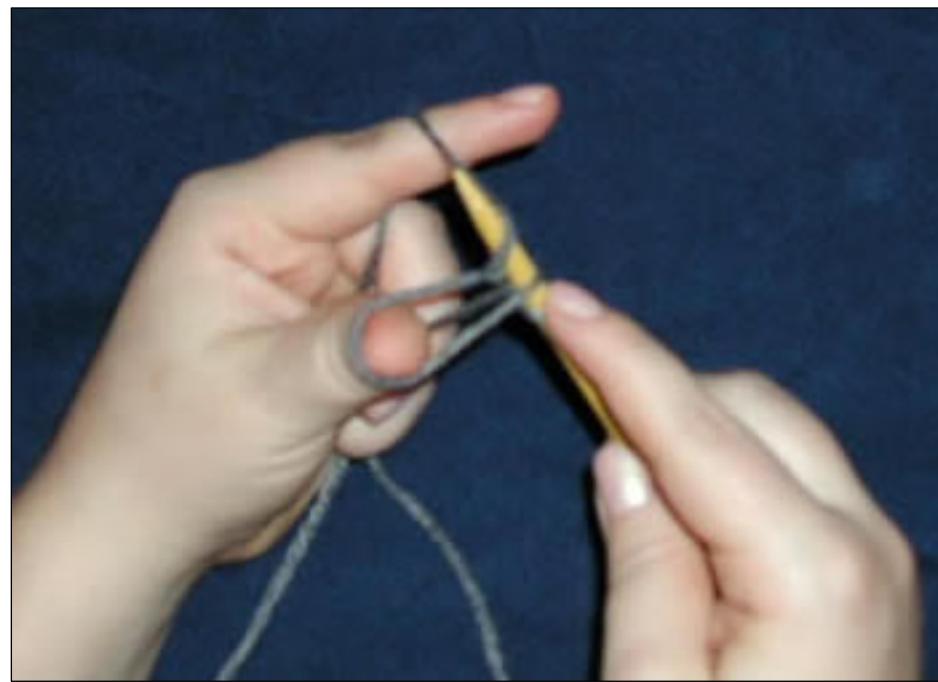
This type of casting is called “single.” It’s the easiest to learn, but we’ll also go through the “cable” casting on method since it’s best for a more solid edge. Start with the single to get the feel of the needles in your hand and how the yarn works.



Hold the needle with the slip knot in your right hand and wrap the yarn around your left thumb (from front to back). Use the fingers on your left hand to hold the stitch on the needle in place.



Insert the needle through the loop in front of your thumb and pull upward.



Now wrap the needle around the back of the yarn on your index finger and move it back toward the middle.



Pull up with the needle and slide the yarn off your fingers, then tug lightly on the tails to tighten. Hey, look at that! It's your second stitch! Repeat that process for as many stitches as the pattern indicates and you're ready to go. Your stitches will look a little messy, but keep practicing and they'll improve.

Casting on: cable

Cable casting gives you a firm, solid edge for pieces, so you may want to use this method for things that need a nice, straight stitch line. It's a little more complicated than single casting and uses two needles, but you can handle it. You'll start with a slip knot, just like you did in single.

Hold the needle with the slip knot in your left hand and insert the needle in your right into the loop under the left needle.

Use your right hand to loop the yarn around the right needle. Thread it under and toward the right first, then bring it over the needle. This can be awkward at first, but you'll get the hang of it.

Slide this second loop from the right needle to the left so you have two loops on the left needle.

Slide the right needle below the left and in between the two loops.

Loop the yarn around the right needle just like you did before, then pull it through the space between the loops on the left needle. Slide this new loop onto the left needle. Lather, rinse, repeat. You've got it!

Casting on can be rough for those who have never tried either knitting or crocheting before, but stick with it. You'll get the hang of it. Keep practicing – make giant chains the length of your needle, then pull them out and start again. Continuing to do this will help you become more consistent, neater, and feel less awkward while you work.

Knitting

Here we go! Are you ready to really knit?



After you've cast a decent row (about 15 stitches), hold the left needle with your index finger gently pressing down on the first stitch and the right needle just like you'd hold a pencil. Weave the yarn in between the fingers on your left hand.



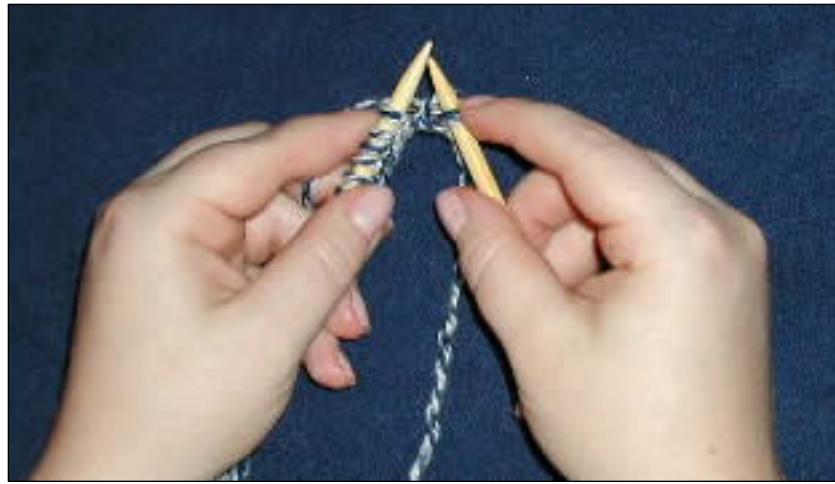
Insert the right needle into the first stitch and under the left needle.



Using your right index finger, bring the yarn under and over the point of the right needle.



Slide the right needle backward and try to “catch” the loop.



Slide the loop off the left needle and onto the right. There's your first stitch! Keep going! The first stitch will feel odd, but you'll get the hang of it as you repeat the motion over and over. Once you've exhausted your supply of stitches on the left needle, you'll get to turn your work and start on a new row.

Turning Your Work

This works just like it sounds and looks – you'll simply turn the work over. While you're doing that, the “full” needle in your right hand will now go in your left hand, while the one that was in your left hand will go to your right.

Purling

This will be a piece of cake once you've mastered knitting. Why? Because it's basically the same stitch done in reverse!

Cast the same way you did for your first knitting stitches. Now here's where the reverse action comes into play: keep your yarn in front rather than in back and insert your right needle into the front of the first stitch on your left needle.

Wrap the yarn around the right needle going counter-clockwise.

Pull the loop through toward the back and allow the stitch to slide onto your right needle. You've got it! Now, want a little surprise? Purl about

three rows, then hold that piece next to three rows of knitting. Look different, right? Turn one of the pieces over. See? They're really just the reverse of each other!

So now you know five different techniques. What? Three? No, you know five. Seriously. There's casting on, knitting, purling, stockinette, and garter... No, really, you already know stockinette and garter! Keep reading, you'll see why.

Stockinette

You probably don't realize it, but you're probably wearing something made with stockinette stitch at this very moment! This is the most common stitch, and it's one you'll pick up very easily once you've mastered knitting and purling. In fact, you don't even need any pictures, because stockinette is just alternating rows of knitting with rows of purling. For each row of knitting, turn the fabric and do a row of purling. This gives one side of your fabric a smooth feel (the knit side) and one a bumpy texture (the purl side). After a few rows, you'll notice that characteristic upside-down V you see on sweaters, hats, and other clothing – this is just the knit side of a stockinette stitch.

Garter

Garter is even easier than stockinette. It's row upon row of knitting and turning the fabric, knitting and turning the fabric, knitting and – okay, you get the idea. You'll get a piece that's the blend of the two sides of stockinette. Since each row is knit, one row will be smooth and the next bumpy. Flip the piece over and you'll see the mirror image.

Binding Off

If you know even the slightest bit about knitting, you know that it unravels as easily as butter melts over hot corn on the cob. Binding off can help prevent this from happening. This is used when you've completely finished a piece.



Knit the first two stitches in a row. Instead of stitching a third, slide your left needle into the first stitch on your right needle.



Use your left needle to lift that first stitch up and over both the second stitch and the tip of the right needle.



You now have only one stitch on your right needle instead of two. Now just alternate across the rest of the row: one normal stitch, one bind-off.

When you're at the last stitch, snip off the yarn so you're left with a tail. Thread the tail through the loop, then pull. You're done!

If the last section of your project was all done in purl stitches, you can adapt the bind-off process just by alternating purling and binding instead of knitting and binding. Remember, if you're binding off something like socks that needs to keep a little "give" in the edge, don't bind too tightly. Leave that little extra in there so your recipients can actually pull their socks on and off.

Gauge

Okay, get ready to do some actual knitting! It's not much, but it's a start. Your gauge is one of the most important aspects of your projects, and it's basically a measure of how many stitches it takes for you to fill a certain amount of space (usually an inch or two). Here's the thing – every knitter works differently, holds the needles differently, and prefers different sizes of needles, so each knitter has a different gauge from others. Heck, your own gauge can change depending upon your mood or where you're knitting! The important thing to remember is that a tight gauge will make a smaller, more compact end result. In other words, you

could end up using twice as much yarn to make a scarf identical to one made by someone with a looser gauge.

If you look at any knitting pattern, you should see the preferred gauge. It'll probably say something along the lines of "Gauge: 4 stitches equal one inch," but it'll also tell you which size needles they feel you should use to get this gauge.

Gauge stitches are actually vertical stitches. So, when reading gauge, read it as "4 stitches high equals one inch" or "4 rows of stitches equal one inch."

While we'll go through a few ways of adjusting your gauge to the one in the pattern, remember that you can always use a slightly bigger needle size for a quick bump up in gauge size.

It may not seem like such a big deal to have a gauge that's slightly smaller than the one indicated in the pattern, but that tiny amount multiplies itself throughout the pattern. If you're making a 40" scarf with a gauge of 5 stitches per inch, what happens if your gauge is 6 stitches per inch? It may not seem like much, but you just tacked on 40 extra rows of knitting to make a scarf the same size as the one in the pattern. If the pattern has you switching stitch types every few rows and you follow those instructions, you just shortened your scarf by 7"!

So how do you know what your gauge is? Easy. You knit a sample. This may seem like too much extra work for each pattern, but, once you've gotten the hang of knitting, a sample or swatch should only take you a few minutes to finish.



Compare that to the extra money you'll spend on yarn or the odd-sized projects you'll finish and it doesn't seem like such a big investment, does it? Unless your pattern specifies a certain stitch to check gauge, use the stockinette stitch and knit as many rows as indicated on the pattern. Now whip out that handy tape

measure and check it. Does it match the length specified in the pattern? If so (or if it's reasonably close), you're good to go. If it's too tight, redo the swatch and make a conscious effort to loosen your stitches a bit. The more you practice this looser stitch the more ingrained it becomes, so you should have fewer problems in the pattern itself. You should be able to figure out what to do if the gauge is too loose.

If you redo the swatch and are still having problems, try the needle trick. Tight gauge? Bump the needles up a size and try again. Loose? Go down a notch and, you guessed it, try again. Also be sure you're keeping a consistent gauge throughout. Having a very loose stitch for five rows and a very tight one the next five can be tough to correct when you're finished as well as looking pretty funky.

Checking gauge can seem like a pain, but it can also be a huge time and money-saver in the long run. I know, I know, that "long run" always seems so far off, and spending 20 minutes making a swatch when you're first learning to knit isn't exactly the most interesting way to spend your time. If you'd rather have a goal or a finished product come from your swatches, save them! Once you have a good collection, you can stitch them all together to form a hand-knit patchwork quilt. If you know how to crochet, you can single stitch around the outer edges of the samples and turn them into potholders or trivets. Better yet, make a commitment to use your new hobby for the community and make small blankets out of your samples. At the end of the year, donate these blankets to a local homeless shelter. They won't care if all of the colors coordinate or if you use fun fur next to plain old wool.

Getting Online

There are tons of communities and websites devoted to needlecrafters interested in charity. Many hold monthly challenges and swatch drives. In addition to being beneficial for the needy, these groups can help inspire you. Having a group of dozens of other knitters working on the same project you are is great for learning and getting quick tips.

Note: As you may have guessed – or noticed on the yarn label – yarn weight factors heavily into gauge. Patterns specify certain yarns for good reason, but

once you're a knitting pro you should be able to change yarn weights in patterns with a few gauge adjustments.

Ch-ch-ch-changes!



What fun would it be if you could only knit with one color of yarn, one type of yarn, one kind of stitch, one needle? None at all. Half the fun of knitting is experimenting with new colors, funky yarn, and changing up your stitches in the middle of a piece. These things add flavor to your projects and keep things new, fun, and interesting for you while you're working.

Changing Colors

Here's the thing – there are plenty of ways you can add color to your work without really needing to know how to *switch* colors in the middle of a project. Try working on these before you add stripes or other designs to your patterns:

- **Use**

variegated yarn. This is by far the simplest way to add a splash or two of color to an otherwise boring pattern, but it can also be a little risky.



While they look awesome on a shelf or even in the demo patterns yarn companies print on the label, some variegated yarns knit up to look like big, giant piles of blah. If you're worried about that, try a two-tone variegated yarn first. They often just add a little dimension and interest rather than in-your-face color. Once you're happy with how well that worked out, give a multi-color variegated yarn a shot... just don't get

completely turned off of them if the first project doesn't come out perfectly.



- **Use multiple strands.** Sound difficult? It's not! Instead of using one piece of yarn, double, triple, or quadruple up. All you need to do is hold all of the pieces together and work them as a single strand. It takes

some getting used to, but once you have the hang of it you won't believe what it can do to make a simple pattern look like a masterpiece. Multi-stranding also works up really quickly and is great for making super-warm scarves and blankets.

- **Fringe it!** If you've made a scarf or afghan, add a fringe in a contrasting color. Even more fun, multi-strand the fringe!
- **Embroider it.** No, we don't mean exquisitely ornate pieces, just a nice, simple freehand addition. This works really well with bags and purses – a freehand embroidered flower looks adorable.

Still want to stripe it up, huh? All right. It's not difficult, but it can feel a little awkward at first (hey, just like knitting itself!). **Note:** This is the simplest way to stripe. We'll cover some more complex methods later.

Striping

When you reach the end of a row, let the first yarn fall flat and cut it about two inches below the working stitch. Use the new color to loop around the needle. Stitch away! Once you've finished the first stitch with your new color, you may want to make it a little tighter than usual. This can help make your color change nearly invisible to the eye.



When you've finished your project, go back and weave the two loose ends into the fabric using a crochet hook. This makes your project look cleaner. If you want your stripes to run vertically on a project like a scarf, just think of your scarf as wide rather than long. Cast on the number of stitches the scarf is meant to be long and then knit as many rows high as the scarf meant to be wide. So, if your original pattern had you cast on 30 and knit 250 rows, you need to cast on 250 and knit 30 rows.

That's all there is to it! If you want to learn about some of the more complex ways to add color, check out the sections about Fair Isle and Intarsia knitting later in the book.

Changing Yarn Weights and Gauge

You won't see this in patterns very often, but you may decide you want to either change the weight of yarn you're using or your gauge to create some custom effects if you decide to freestyle a project.

If your stripes are less than six rows high and you're making a fabric where one side won't be seen, you don't need to cut the old color. Just let it hang and take it up again when you switch back to the first color.

You know how to add new pieces of yarn, right? The only thing you need to know about adding a new weight of yarn is that it'll knit differently. If a pattern specified a gauge of 5 stitches per inch using a particular yarn and you decide to knit in a section with a chunkier weight, make sure you knit up a swatch to check your gauge equivalence first. It's all right if the new yarn only knits to 3 stitches per inch, but you need to be aware of that and make adjustments accordingly to the rows specified in the pattern.

"Freestyling" just means that you've designed a pattern yourself or are designing a piece as you knit.

Same goes for switching up the gauge in the middle of a pattern. This can be fun since you can create single-tone "stripes" on a scarf or afghan, but it'll require a little math on your part to make sure you're keeping the same overall measurements. Again, knit a swatch and see how many rows result from an inch or two of the new gauge you'd like to try. It'll help if you rewrite the pattern on paper with your modifications rather than just keeping it in your head, since distractions and interruptions can make you lose track of what you're doing or what you meant to do.

Changing Needle Sizes/Needles

This goes along with changing gauge, since using a wider or narrower needle often affects your gauge. The thing is, changing your gauge doesn't require nimble fingers and being able to efficiently work the yarn to fit the new needle size.

Once you get to the end of a row, get the new needles you'd like to use. Your right needle should be easy to switch. Set the old one down, pick the new one up. What a pro! For the left, you need to transfer all of the stitches from the old needle onto the new one. Try loosening them a bit with your fingers or the new needle by just working it into the loops and wiggling them out and away from the new needle. To make it easier, have a

Fixing Your Gauge

Since changing needle sizes changes your gauge, you can also use this needle switch to help *correct* your gauge if it seems to be deteriorating.

super-skinny needle handy and slide that into the loops so they just sort of hang off the needle.

Now either 1) slide the new needle into the space in the loops left by letting them hang, or 2) back the new needle up against the nub end of the skinny needle and slide the stitches up over the nub and onto the new needle. If the new needle is really wide, you may need to do some coaxing to get the stitches to the proper width. If it's much smaller than the old needle, try to tighten the stitches by tugging gently on the tail end of the yarn. You've got it!

Changing Stitches

You already know how to switch from knit to purl and back again. Switching to more complicated stitches (which you'll learn later) is no different. Each stitch will correspond to the top loop of the stitch below it, so you should have no problem there. The real difficulty comes in keeping track of your stitches.

If a pattern calls for 20 rows of stockinette, 20 rows of garter, and 20 more rows of stockinette, you have to keep track of those rows while you're working. This seems arduous at first, but that's mostly because your stitches are probably going pretty slowly. If it takes you 20 minutes to knit a row, you may not be able to remember which row you were knitting by the time you get to the end! Develop some sort of system to help with this. Many knitters use markers like we discussed earlier. When you get to the start of a section featuring a different stitch, add a marker to the fabric. All you have to do is count the rows from the location of the marker to the location of your needles to get your bearings when you forget to keep track. If you don't have markers around, use something like a safety pin, paper clip, or even just a twist tie to mark the new section.

While markers are great, get into the habit of counting. Count your stitches across and count your rows going up. Count, count, count, **count**. It may sound like a chore, but you have a better chance of making a cleaner, more accurate piece.

Beefin' Up



So you've had it with the simple stuff, huh? A few stitches and you think you're soooo smooth. All right, you've got it! Get ready for some challenges! In this section we'll discuss some of the more difficult stitches (in other words, the ones that require the Nimblest Fingers in the North), obscure stitches that may have fallen by the wayside as knitting evolved, smaller accent elements like beading and buttonholes, different knitting styles, and how to work with some of the more popular novelty yarns in the stores. See? Don't say we didn't warn you!

Stitch Multiples

You'll see these helpful little guys at the beginning of a pattern. It indicates how many stitches are needed to complete a row of a stitch, and different stitch multiples produce different results. For instance, a stitch multiple of 8 plus 2 would mean that any factor of 8 (16, 24, 32) could be used, then you add 2 to that number (making 18, 26, 34). That's the number of stitches you cast on and knit in every row, even if it means you end up in the middle of a step.

All right, hot stuff, here we go!

Ribbing (stitch multiple: 2 plus 1)

You know how your sweaters have that shorter length at the waistband, almost like a very soft gather? That's ribbing, and its simplicity gives it a big return on your time investment – it doesn't take long to learn, but it adds a look of professionalism to your projects, especially when it comes to creating gorgeous necklines for your sweaters. The instructions below apply to a stockinette stitched project.

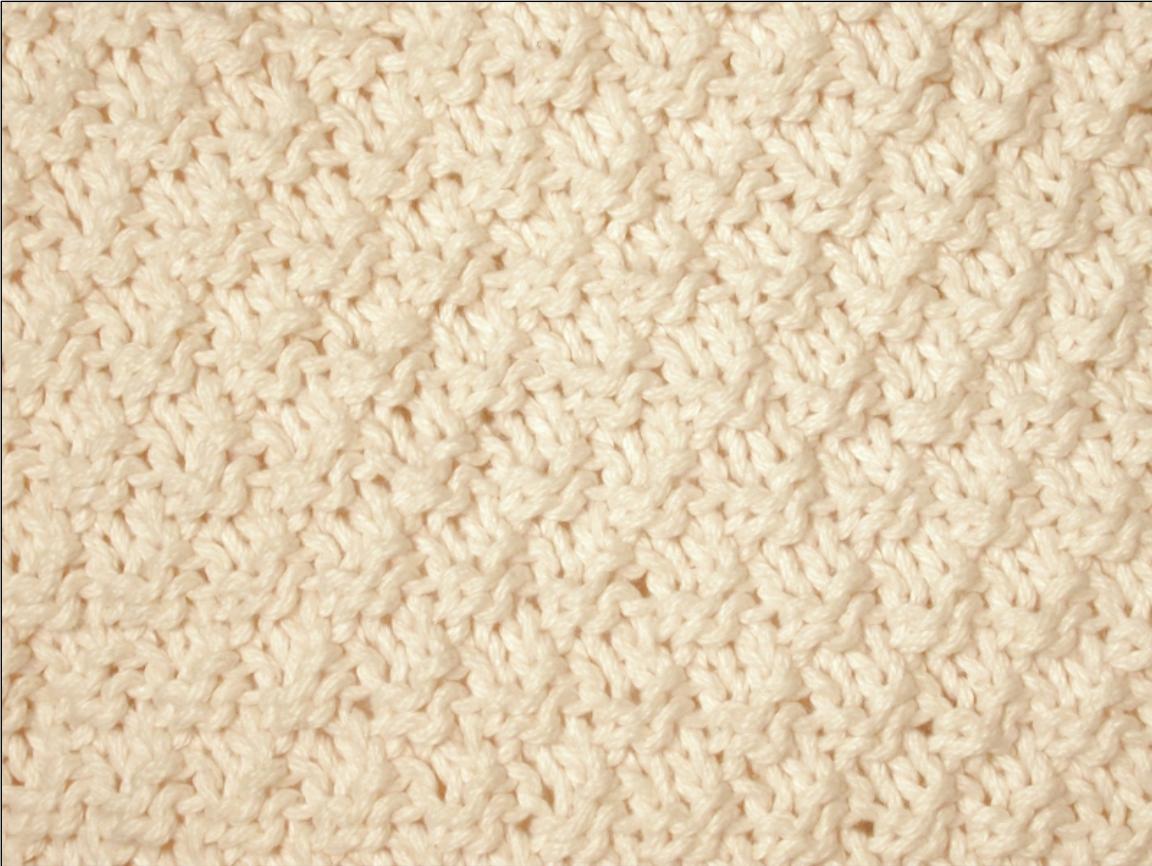


On the right side of the fabric, begin with a knit stitch. Alternate across the row: knit one stitch, purl one stitch until you reach the end. On the next row, begin with a purl stitch and repeat the same pattern. Continue this for as many rows as you like. This will give you a fairly narrow rib.

For a thicker rib, double the stitches with a stitch multiple of 4 plus 2: knit 2 stitches, purl 2 stitches on the right side and vice versa on the wrong side. Looks familiar, huh? This is probably the width of ribbing on some of your heavier winter clothing, like sweaters, mittens, and hats.

Seed stitch (stitch multiple: 2)

It sounds like a funny name for a stitch, but it makes sense as it's named for the appearance the fabric has, almost like little seeds sprinkled across it. This is a little more sophisticated than the basic stitches and has the same feel to both sides, so it's a nice stitch for pieces like blankets, where both sides are visible. This is very similar to the first ribbing pattern we introduced, but the seed stitch changes the look of the whole fabric rather than vertical portions.



On the right side, knit 1, purl 1, and repeat across the row. On the wrong side, purl 1, knit 1, and repeat. Repeat this for as many rows as you'd like.

Checkers stitch multiple: 4 plus 2

If you take the ribbing pattern and work with it in squares instead of vertical lines, you can end up with a texturized checkerboard that's a fun variation for sweaters, but looks great on home décor items like autumn napkins.

Work the checkerboard the same way you worked the double-wide ribbing stitch: on the right side, knit 2, purl 2, repeat. On the wrong side, purl 2, knit 2, repeat. This is a fun stitch to play with – try to figure out how you can adjust the width and height of the squares, add a second color to make a *real* checkerboard, and make other modifications.

Cables

You probably have at least one cable-knit sweater in your wardrobe, right? It looks difficult and advanced and, honestly, some cable knitting *is* quite difficult. You can go seek those out on your own. We're just going to run you through a very basic, very simple cable stitch. First you'll need to pick up cable needles. You should be able to find these in any fabric or craft store.



First row: knit 2, purl 6, knit 2.

Second row: purl 2, knit 6, purl 2.

Third row: knit 2, purl 6, knit 2. (Now bust out that cable needle!)

Fourth row: purl 2. Slip next three stitches onto your cable needle and hold them in front of or behind your knitting needles, which will skip to the next three stitches and knit 3. Slide the three stitches off the cable needle, knit 3 with them, then purl 2.

Fifth row: knit 2, purl 6, knit 2.

Sixth row: purl 2, knit 6, purl 2.

Seventh row: knit 2, purl 6, knit 2.

Eighth row: purl 2, knit 6, purl 2.

Repeat those 8 rows as many times as you'd like and check out your cable!

Duplicate Stitching

Think of this as the clone of knitting. You're mimicking what you've already done on top of your existing stitches, but you're doing it in a different color or yarn type to create cool effects. This is great if you knit a sweater and decide you want to add, say, a huge pink bunny to the front in a faux fur yarn.

Figure out where you want your design to start. Thread a yarn needle – a big, plastic needle you can find in knitting or craft shops – with about two feet of the yarn you want to use. Run the needle through the fabric from back to front and leave a generous end in the back of the fabric.

Insert the needle under the stitch you want to duplicate going from right to left and pull the yarn through. Now run the needle back through the original needle hole, this time going from front to back. Looks like a knit stitch, doesn't it? Make sure you weave your ends into the back when you're finished so it looks nice and clean.

Travel

Circular needles are perfect for any kind of travel. Since they don't necessarily have to be used for round pieces, you can take them with you on trips and avoid losing a needle in the car or plane. Also, circular needles are typically plastic. Plastic needles are airline approved.

The Big O

All right, you've got a pretty decent repertoire going, so why don't we add a stitch that involves entirely new needles – knitting in the round! Think about all of those round-ish pieces you've been dying to make, things like socks, hats, sleeves on sweaters... heck, maybe you're even jonesing for a pair of knit pants. Who are

we to judge? Actually, you can make some pretty great thermal underwear with knitting, but we'll give you some hints about that later.

To get started, practice casting on your circular needles. Each time you finish casting, check the stitches and make sure they're all facing the same way, none of them are twisted or looking funky, and that the yarn from the skein is coming positioned with the right needle. Go through this four or five times, each time unwinding your stitches and starting over. It'll get you used to the feel of the circular needles and how they work.

Slide a stitch marker onto your left needle, then use the needle to slide it onto the right needle. That may sound like an extra step, but it'll get you in the mindset of transferring from left to right. Now knit into the first stitch on your left needle just as you normally would, then continue around the circle. That wasn't so hard, was it?

Two Points are Better than One

Feel like being hard on yourself? Then skip that whole in-the-round hoopla and give knitting on double-pointed needles a shot. Okay, okay, some people really love these things, but they're definitely not something you want to attempt when you're just getting started in knitting. Many people used to use double-pointed needles for round things like socks and hats, but now you can find circular needles small enough to handle both. It's really a matter of style. If you find circular needles difficult or awkward to use, you may want to give double-pointed needles a shot. You're going to need to have at least one in your knitting toolbox anyway – these bad boys are what you'll use to close the top of a circular piece.

Cast onto one of your double-pointed needles. Don't go too crazy and cast 200 for this example, you want to cast just enough to give you a good trial, not so many that you go insane before you really get started. Shoot for something like 90. You're going to use either four or five needles during projects, so let's stick with four for this example. This means that three needles will carry stitches and the

fourth will be empty. To figure out how many stitches will be on each needle, just divide the number you cast by the number of active needles. In this case, you'll have 30 stitches on each needle (90 cast stitches, 3 active needles).

Slide 30 stitches each onto your other two needles – you can do this easily by placing one in front of and one behind your original casting needle – and arrange

all three into a triangle. The corner in which the two needles that aren't linked by the stitches are located is the top of the triangle. Once again, the yarn that's on the skein should be coming from the right top needle.

Faster, Faster!

You have to be pretty patient to take up knitting, but many knitters find that, once they've conquered advanced stitches and patterns, the biggest challenge left is conquering the speed barrier. Everyone wants to knit faster and more efficiently, and everyone is constantly looking for new ways of doing this. There are a few, but the number one method remains the same: practice. You'll naturally get faster as your knitting skill improves, and you'll find a natural rhythm for your stitches. Beyond that, you can try a few of these methods and see how they work for you:

- *Use your legs.* That's not a joke! Quite a few knitters place the left needle under their left leg and find that it increases speed.
- *Go Continental.* Some people report greater comfort with this style, which you'll read about later in the book.
- *Use a knitting belt.* This one will be explained more in depth later, too, but it allows you to position the left needle as if it were under your leg without getting as embarrassed.

Now, closely check your triangle and the stitches on the needles. Are they all facing inward? Are any of them twisted? They should all be facing the center of the triangle and be nice and straight, otherwise you'll end up with a funky twisty thing when you're finished. Okay, rip it all off and start again! Hey, quit the groaning. Practice makes perfect, you know. Just try it one more time so you have the hang of it before you get started.

Once you've practiced casting enough, go ahead and use your empty needle to

knit the first stitch from your left top needle. Pull it a little bit tighter than you normally would since this is the stitch that'll join the knitting round into a circle. Keep going down that left needle and soon enough that'll be the empty one and your first spare needle will be chock-full of stitches. The empty one goes in your

right hand and you keep going around the circle. Voila! Instant roundness. Well, maybe not instant, but it's still pretty cool. Just remember to make each of those first stitches on the spare needles a little bit tighter so your tube doesn't unravel.

Smaller Elements

What good is a cardigan without buttonholes? Sure, you can add a belt and make it a tie-around, but nothing beats a traditional cardigan. The smaller elements of knitting are what can make your projects stand out from others, look polished and professional, and even be more functional.

Buttonholes

For some reason, pattern designers seem to believe that every knitter has an innate sense of how to create a buttonhole. Check out a pattern with buttons – see any instructions on how to create the buttonholes? Didn't think so. There are many different ways of making a buttonhole, but we'll address the simplest to get you started.

Work to the location in your pattern where you want the buttonhole (your pattern should at least indicate where this is). Bind off the number of stitches necessary to make a buttonhole as large as you'd like – smaller buttons usually only require two, while larger can take up to six. Keep working the row. When you get to the same spot on your next row, cast the same number of stitches and keep working your project. You'll notice that the stitches look a little puckered or pulled in, but this is completely normal.

If you're planning to felt a project, make sure you knit it slightly oversized. Felting shrinks the overall size of a garment, so if you don't compensate you could end up with a doll sweater instead of a Father's Day present.

Felting and fulling

Betcha never thought your new knitting hobby would ever have you making your own felt, did you? Felt is simply matted wool, and some of the most beautiful knit projects are felted. This is a very simple process that

most knitters take on once their project is complete and looks fantastic when used to make things like hats, bags, and other accessories.

Try cutting the drying time for your hat using the spin cycle in your washer. Use the agitator post as a form and set the hat on top of it, then let it run through the spin cycle. Air dry afterward.

Place your project in a lingerie or delicate wash bag. This will keep it isolated from the other items in your washing machine, but it's not necessary. If you don't have one, don't worry about it. Toss the project/bag into the washing machine with a pair of jeans or khaki pants. Steer clear of anything like towels, blankets, or anything else that tends to carry lint. Add a small amount of delicate detergent and wash for 5 minutes with hot water. If it doesn't look quite "felt-y" enough after 5 minutes, wash for another 2. Hand-rinse it with cool water and shape it appropriately. If you're interested in felting hats, you may want to invest in a head form like those you see in hat shops. You can also typically find them at dollar stores and thrift shops. Let the hat dry on the head form. Flat or square pieces can be dried on flat surfaces with towels beneath them to absorb some of the excess water.

One of the cooler things about felting is that the fabric no longer has the ability to unravel. It's actually felt. If your project includes buttonholes, you may want to wait until after you've felted to add them. At that point, you can just cut a buttonhole or make a traditional sewing buttonhole.

Beading

This is where you get that "Oooooh" effect from people. A knit hat, scarf, whatever is beautiful and people love it, but add a bit of splash and you'll have them drooling over your work for weeks. There are a few different ways you can approach beading.

The first and easier is to treat the beading as an addition to your project, but it also requires a little bit of sewing know-how. String your beads as

you'd like them – it's best to stick with smaller beads – then arrange them in whatever form you envision on your project. Hats look very interesting with swirls of sparkly beads all over them, but get creative and let your imagination run wild. Hold them in place with pins, safety pins, or sewing tape, then using a coordinating thread color or even fishing line to stitch them in place. A simple whip stitch is both low impact for you and should hold the beading firmly in place for the wearer.

The second method is a little more involved and actually integrates the beads as part of the fabric. You'll want to use a finer yarn for this; even something like embroidery floss or crochet thread would work well. Thread your beads onto the fiber and treat them as if they *are* the fiber by just incorporating them into the knitting. You may need to slide the beads up and down the strands to get an even spacing as you go. This is great for very feminine, very loosely stitched spring and summer hats, but it also works well for period patterns like those used for Renaissance costumes. Don't get frustrated with this method! If it starts driving you bonkers and you want to give up, check online in one of the many knitting communities. There's bound to be someone there who has approached the same type of project and can give you pointers.

Sequins and other doo-dads

You can attach sequins to knit hats and projects just as you attach them to any other fabric – sewing. Some people hear the word “sequins” and instantly think “Ew, gaudy.” But you don’t have to do a full knit dress in sequins in order to use them. Think of



how cute a dark-colored knit winter hat would be with little star sequins scattered all over it, or even a sweater with one small accent line of sequins. Accessorizing doesn't necessarily mean overdoing it.

Furry sections

This is way easier than you may think. You can add a faux fur collar, brim, or cuff to spice up almost any pattern, and it doesn't take any extra time than the pattern itself would. The key is in novelty yarns like eyelash or fun fur. Once you've selected a novelty yarn you like and coordinates well with your project, just begin to work it in by double-stranding it with your original yarn color to finish the section you want to furrify. Your project will be looking fab in no time flat.



Chevron stripes

Who wants plain old horizontal stripes every time you add some color to your patterns? Instead, try chevrons, the zig-zag stripes you see on sweaters, afghans, and many other more traditional knitting projects. They're not as difficult as they may look. Here's a quick overview – change and modify this to your heart's content.

Stitch multiple: 14 plus 2

First row: Purl across row with main color.

Second row: (with main color) Knit 1, *knit into the front and back of the next stitch, knit 4, slip stitch 1, knit 1, pass the slip stitch over the knit stitch, knit 2 together, knit 4.* Repeat section between stars until only 2 stitches are left on row. Knit into the front and back of the next stitch, then knit 1.

Third row: Purl across row with contrasting color.

Fourth row: Repeat second row with contrasting color.

Knitting Styles

If you've ventured into a knitting group during your beginning phases, you may have heard some of the more experienced knitters speaking in what sounded like a foreign language. They mention exotic locations, things that sound high-tech, and just generally make you feel like you don't know what they're talking about. Now you can!

There are many different styles of knitting. Some relate only to specific aspects of knitting, while others are completely different ways of holding the needles and working with your projects. We'll go through some of the main variations.

Continental Knitting

What you've learned so far in this book is one of two main styles of knitting and is often referred to as English or, more technically, "throwing." This is because you use your opposite hand to "throw" the yarn over your needle. European knitters use a style called Continental (or "picking"), in which the needle is used to catch the yarn that is normally thrown over the top.

It's a widely held opinion that Continental knitters are quicker than English knitters – English knitters *can* be fast, of course, but we're talking averages – so that's one of many instigators of the near-grudge matches Continental and English knitters get into when arguing which is better. Both accomplish the same goal, they just have different ways of accomplishing it. If you'd like to try Continental knitting, simply wrap the yarn around your left index finger and use the needle to grab (or "pick") the yarn off of your finger and complete the knit stitch as usual. Hold the yarn in your left hand rather than your right. The simpler movement can help you increase speed.

Fair Isle Knitting

Doesn't that sound like a lovely weekend getaway? "Fair Isle" – ahhh, just imagine the cool breezes, the hammocks swaying, waves crashing on the beach, and the crickets chirping at night. Okay, back to the knitting!

Fair Isle Knitting is a way of bringing color into your projects since two colors are worked in each row. The downside of this method is that the pieces not in use are run along the reverse of the fabric, so there is a definite right and wrong side when the project is complete. Many beginners look at the description of this method and panic, so don't make it more difficult than it needs to be. It's really fairly simple.

Begin working your project in stockinette stitch. After five stitches, let the first color drop and pick up the project with the second color. Knit five stitches, then pick up the first color. Lather, rinse, repeat. You should never go more than five stitches without using one of the colors, otherwise you risk tangling that first strand or pulling it too tightly and encouraging puckers in your work. When you turn your work and begin to purl, you'll be facing the stranded side. Just continue as usual.

If you decide to get daring and work more than five stitches in one color, you need to *twist* your work. This doesn't really involve twisting at all. Instead, it just means that you catch the color you're stranding into your active stitch every four or five stitches to keep it from tangling or getting too loopy. Run the stranding piece through the loop your yarn usually makes when knitting or purling, then continue the stitch as usual. After that, you can continue stranding for another four or five stitches and then twist again. Come, let's twist again! Twistin' time is here! That Chubby Checker association is almost impossible to resist, isn't it?

Intarsia Knitting

Intarsia knitting is another colorful style of knitting. This time each color will be loaded onto an individual bobbin or wound into a small ball before you begin the project. Your best bet is to wind a separate bobbin for each block of color, not for each color in the project. This way the bobbins don't pull on your work and become a pain to handle.

To start, cast and then purl with your first color. When you want to change colors, drop the first color's strand and twist (it's coming back to haunt you) the second color into the first. Keep purling with the second color. When you want to use the knit stitch, make sure you're twisting in the back of the work (the purl side) so you don't see the additions.

Patchwork Knitting

This is exactly what it sounds like – many knit pieces in different shapes, sizes, and colors pieced together to form patchwork garments or projects. You join the pieces the same way you join seams on sweaters or anything else, so this seemingly complex idea is really quite simple. Try an experiment in patchwork knitting by making something simple, like a blanket. Use butcher-block paper to create a pattern for your blanket, and as you create each knit piece cut a separate piece of paper in that shape. Lay all of the knit pieces onto the pattern paper like a puzzle, piecing them together as you go. You may have to work in the opposite order as you're closer to finishing, cutting the paper pattern for a piece first, then knitting it. Once the paper blanket pattern is completely assembled, you can work on assembling your knit pieces. This

Fueling Addictions

It's inevitable – every new knitter also becomes a new yarn addict. You'll find it impossible to pass up a yarn sale or even just a yarn section, no matter how overpriced. Here's a new source for your yarn jones: Goodwill stores and thrift shops. Buy a sweater for \$1 or \$2, take it home, and tear that baby up. Twice the fun!

method is also referred to as *modular knitting* since you can add on to the pieces whenever you want.

Now That's a Novel Idea

Beginning knitters and younger knitters often drool over all of the new, interesting novelty yarns now available in stores. They're gorgeous, interestingly colored, fun to touch, and, most importantly, different. These ain't Grandma's yarns! With the potential to make things like faux feather boas, fur collars, and even just really, really fuzzy hats, novelty yarns are definitely difficult to resist.

Because they're among the most difficult things on earth to resist, they also seem to cause the most frustration with new knitters. They don't work up like regular yarn, they make it hard to see your stitches, sometimes they're slippery... the list goes on and on. If you've already begun accumulating your stash of novelty, read through this list first before you start cursing your impulse buys. If you're itching to buy novelties, use this as your guide.

Chenille

This isn't always classified as a novelty, but it's definitely not what you'd classify as an everyday yarn. If you're buying your chenille in the store, it's



probably much thicker and chunkier than the yarns to which you're accustomed. It's not a good idea to take a worsted wool pattern and just try to adapt it to thick Chenille. Instead, try to find a variation on the pattern that is

written specifically for Chenille or ask a more experienced knitter to help you adjust the pattern you have.



Bouclé

This is the wavy, zig-zaggy yarn you'll see in a variety of widths, weights, and colors. Bouclé sometimes has little nubby pieces on it, sometimes not. In all cases, it takes some getting used to but isn't difficult at all to master. Just remember that the little zig-zag sections make it more difficult to pull the yarn through and over itself, so you just need to be persistent and pay close attention to that while you're learning.

Eyelash

This is just what it sounds like. In fact, if you look at a black eyelash yarn, it looks just like your own eyelashes. These are great for funkier projects and edging, just be aware that the yarn can catch on itself while you're pulling it through the stitches. The eyelash can also flatten against itself and look not at all like what you'd imagined, so when you're finished the

project, gently pick and tug at the stitches to encourage the eyelash to free itself from the stitches. Don't overpick! The eyelashes will naturally free themselves as you wear and use your work.



Faux Fur

This reacts to knitting almost exactly like the eyelash. The added aspect is that the fur can fuzz and flake off a teensy bit while you're working. Don't freak out, this is normal. Make sure you're not pulling too tightly and you'll be fine.

Polarspun/Polar Fleece

This one can cause some *really* big headaches. It catches on itself just like eyelash and faux fur but has the added “benefit” of being nearly impossible to unravel once it’s stitched. The key here is to keep your gauge very loose and let imperfections happen. The yarn is so full and fluffy that they’ll be almost impossible to notice and you won’t drive yourself insane trying to get it perfect.



One final note on novelties: it can be tough to see your stitches in some of the thicker or more feathery yarns. Don’t kill your eyes! Rely on your hands a little bit more and feel your way through the stitches.

Just Keep Spinning, Spinning, Spinning



When you've mastered those two needles, it may seem like there are no challenges left in the art of working with yarn... but what about the yarn itself? It doesn't just grow on trees, and how did people get it before huge factories spit it out fully-formed for consumption by our needles? They – and many people today who want unique, personal yarns for their projects – spun the yarn themselves. Remember the scene in Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* when the princess pricks her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel? It seems antiquated, but many people are returning to the use of those wheels to reestablish their connection with nature, the land, and their heritage. Like knitting, spinning yarn is cathartic and therapeutic. You can lose yourself in your work, and when you're finished you have tangible, obvious results for all of your effort. It's not a craft that's adopted only by those living in communes or the Amish, it's a proud tradition that many younger women are taking up to understand their roots and make a connection with their ancestors. If you decide to take the plunge, you have a big job ahead of you... but it's worth it when you've churned out your first batch of handmade, custom-designed yarn.

Spinning is not something you can pick up in the middle. You have to begin at the beginning, and in this case that means beginning with sheep. While you can spin with other fibers (cotton, for example), the most traditional route is with wool. If you decide to go with wool, you're back to the sheep. No, you don't have to go out and buy one to keep in your kitchen or on the back patio, but you can if you want to! Well, don't keep it in the kitchen. That's kind of mean to the sheep and he'd probably get in the way while you're making dinner.

Supplier Starter List

Custom Woolen Mill:

www.customwoolenmill.com

Earth Guild: www.earthguild.com

Birkeland Bros:

www.birkelandwool.com

The Joy of Handspinning:

www.joyofhandspinning.com

Halcyon Yarn:

www.halcyonyarn.com

Bonkers Handmade Originals:

www.bonkersfiber.com

Pacific Wool and Fiber:

www.pacificwoolandfiber.com

If you decide to get your own sheep as a wool source, do a little research online or in books, then locate another sheep farmer in your area. Be sure you can

Fun Fact

You can thank Christopher Columbus for bringing sheep to America – they weren't indigenous animals.

accommodate them properly before you bring them home. If you can't, there are plenty of online and catalog-based wool suppliers who are willing to send you the raw shearings from their own sheep for your spinning pleasure. We're not going to go into shearing methods or shearing dos and don'ts, so

you're on your own with that one. Just be aware that it's a big undertaking, and you can expect to be extremely sore, somewhat bruised, and sometimes battered by the next morning.

That catalog wool is sounding more attractive already, isn't it? If you go with online or mail-order/catalog wool, make sure you get "carded" wool. This means that the wool has already been washed, detangled, and even combed if necessary. Those who decide to shear their own sheep will be carding their wool themselves.



Once you have the wool, all you really need to get started with spinning is a spindle. You don't need a full-blown wheel unless you get really into yarn spinning, so don't go all-out immediately. Make sure you enjoy the hobby, because a spinning wheel is a pretty big investment. Many yarn-specific stores sell spindles, and you may get lucky enough to find one at a general craft store. Another good source is antique stores, but be sure you check that the spindle is in

good working order before buying it. And, of course, you can find tons of online shops and retailers who sell spindles and spinning supplies. Even online auction sites usually have a decent stock of these elements.

Now the fun begins! When spinning, the key is in your “drafting,” or how much of the wool you allow to be spun at any given moment. This is similar to gauge; it’s a measure of how thick or how thin your wool strand will be when you’re finished, and you can adjust it throughout the spinning process. First we’ll address spinning on a single spindle.

Make your own spindle using those old kids’ toys, Tinker Toys. Just take one of the round wooden discs and slide it onto one of the dowels, leaving a longer space at one end. Screw a cup hook into the tip of the longer end. Can’t find tinker toys? Try using a wooden wheel for a model car and a dowel that fits tightly.

Spinning on a Spindle

As we’ve mentioned, spinning yarn on a spindle is the simplest, lowest-overhead method of getting into making your own yarn and other spun fibers. Once you have your spindle and carded wool, you can dive right in!

First you need to attach the fiber to the spindle. To do this, start with a pre-spun piece of yarn, called a *leader*. It should be about 18” long, and you simply tie it onto the spindle just above the piece called the *whorl*. The whorl is the large disc generally located in the center or of the spindle.

After tying the leader onto the longer side of the spindle, thread it over the whorl, around the bottom part of the spindle (called the *shaft*) twice, back over the whorl, and around the top part of the spindle twice. Now thread it up the spindle, around the tip once, and attach it to the hook at the top of the spindle.

Holding the leader in your left hand and the spindle in your right hand, begin spinning the spindle in a clockwise direction. Let go of the spindle

and allow it to hang and spin freely while you continue to twist the leader to keep the spin going. Practice this motion.

The twisting motion is how the yarn is actually spun. Once you have the hang of the twisting and spinning, fluff out the end of your leader by unwinding a few fibers. This will allow you to join new material.

Alternate Fiber Sources

Alpaca
Angora (bunnies!)
Cotton
Llama
Mohair (Angora goats)
Silk

Overlap your new fiber with the fluffy section of your leader. Do *not* try to overlap with the section of the leader that is already spun – it won’t hold well and you’ll just end up frustrated. The overlap section should be at least two inches long. Begin twisting. You may want to unwind and wind your fibers a few times to practice before you keep the twist moving up the line of fabric.

Styles of Spinning Wheels

Castle Wheel: These are arranged vertically – the flyer and spindle are actually situated above the wheel itself rather than beside it.

Great Wheel: as the name implies, the wheel on the front is very large compared to the body of the machine. This was one of the first types of spinning wheels.

Modern Wheels: If IKEA made a spinning wheel, this would be it. More advanced technologically for greater speed, lighter treadling, and easier handling, but more like a wooden sculpture in appearance than a spinning wheel.

Saxony Wheel: The most common spinning wheel. The wheel is in proportion to the body, which is arranged horizontally and usually has three legs.

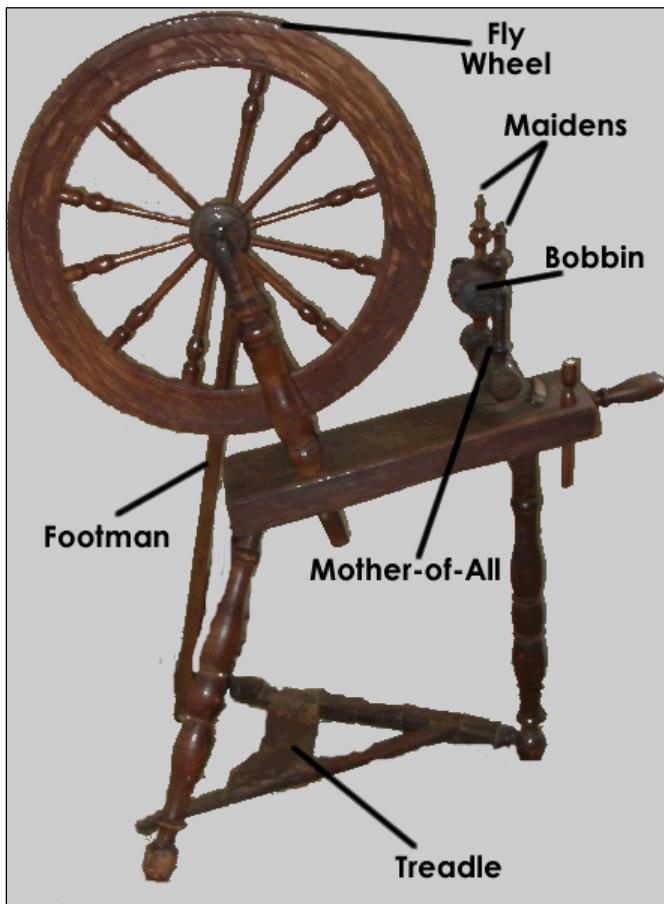
Now remember, your interaction with the yarn is only to the extent that you’re maintaining the width. Many new spinners try to control everything about the spinning process when it’s really more beneficial to give yourself a bit of a break and let the spindle do the work for you. When you’ve spun a good length of yarn and your spindle starts to wobble, it’s time to cut that length of yarn off and begin again with an empty spindle.

Don’t worry if you don’t get the hang of this right away! It’s a very visual activity, and often you’ll be much better at

spinning if you can watch someone do it. Find a few online movies and

illustrations or, better yet, look for craft fairs, heritage demonstrations, and fiber arts exhibits where live spinners may be working. Even if you've gotten the hang of basic spinning, the tips from some old pros will be invaluable.

If you've made the big investment in a spinning wheel, you simultaneously have things easier and harder. You can make a lot more yarn in a shorter period of time, but you also have a whole new piece of machinery to learn. The more elements you add, the more places things can go wrong! We're including instructions for a basic spinning wheel and using the most basic technique. As you get more and more interested in spinning, you can certainly find more advanced resources or communities to inspire you to develop your own spinning style.



First off, get to know your spinning wheel. It'll be much easier to learn to spin if you understand the different parts of your wheel and how they interact with one another.

The large wheel in the front is called the *fly wheel*, and it's the heart of your spinning wheel. When it spins, it makes the rest of the parts do their jobs. So what makes the fly wheel spin? The *treadle*, the pedal at the bottom of the wheel (easy to remember – treadle rhymes with pedal). The treadle and fly wheel

are connected by a long, straight piece called the *footman*. If you've ever sewn or learned anything about sewing, you can probably locate the *bobbin* on your own.

It's the little spool on which the yarn is stored. The *drive band* is a band that goes around the fly wheel and *flyer whorl*, a grooved piece that determines how fast the wheel spins, to help them spin together. The *flyer* determines the thickness of the yarn and has two small hooks to help gather the yarn in more consistent amounts. In order to connect to the flyer hooks, yarn must be threaded through the *orifice*. The flyer and bobbin are held by two posts called *maidens*, and the *mother-of-all* subsequently holds the maidens. The *tension knob* is also located on the mother-of-all, and it adjusts the tension of the drive band by making the mother-of-all go up or down.

Footman, maidens, mother-of-all... it's terribly romantic, isn't it? What a fun hobby to discuss with friends at a party! It's like a little secret code.

Okay, enough with the background, let's get started!

Spinning on a Wheel

Once again, you need to attach a leader, this time to the bobbin. For wheel spinning, the leader should be no less than 24" long. Tie one end of the leader to the very center of the bobbin, then thread the other end through the flyer hooks and out of the orifice. Start pressing the treadle – your leader should begin to spin around the bobbin. If it isn't, try tightening the tension knob.

You can attach new fiber to your leader in one of two ways. The first is similar to the spindle technique: leave a two inch space at the end of your leader, fluff it out, add the unspun fiber, and twist it with your fingers. Some people like to add a little loop to the end of the leader similar to a slip knot. In this case, you just tighten the loop around the unspun fiber and spin!

To begin, you need to determine which hand will hold the yarn and which will draft. In most cases, the drafting hand should be your dominant hand.

The holding hand does just that, it holds the raw fiber at the very back. Your drafting hand will be in front of the holding hand, closer to the orifice.

Start treading the wheel, but at a pace that is comfortable to you. Don't be a speed racer! As the wheel spins, use the drafting hand to move forward and back to help encourage the right twist in the yarn. Continue this motion, just pinching slightly and releasing, to keep a consistent width and twist in the yarn. Look at that, you've got yarn! When you need to add more fiber, just follow the instructions you used to attach the fiber to the leader.

Now remember, these are the most basic of instructions for spinning. Just like knitting itself, spinning is a craft that can be kept as simple or made as complex as you like. You'll find thousands of handspinners online, many who can help you in figuring out new ways of working with your hobby. From actually getting the wool itself to carding, washing, dyeing, and spinning, you'll be amazed at the things you can do. On top of all of that, many spinners have become "fabric artists" who actually handpaint their yarn creations in styles ranging from abstract to impressionist. The yarn itself is beautiful, so imagine what a fully-knit piece would look like!

Topping It Off



Like the side dishes at a salad bar, the hints and help you'll find in this section can either make your knitting experience easier and more pleasurable or just complicate it. There *is* such a thing as going overboard with knitting, and many people end up overdoing it with accessories and all of the fun little gadgets you can buy. While many of them are wonderful and can help make things go faster, seem simpler, and improve the quality of your projects, others are just a waste of your money. In this section we'll cover the different accessories you can buy as well as when you may want to make the investment and when you should keep your credit card in your wallet. We'll also cover the care and keeping of your creations so they stay as beautiful as possible for as long as possible (if you've ever shrunk a sweater, you don't want to miss that section).

Accessories

Who doesn't love accessories? Purses, earrings, bracelets, cufflinks, sunglasses – sometimes a whole outfit comes together just by adding the right accessories. But chances are that you've also seen that hapless person walking down the street who has *definitely* overstocked his or her accessory drawer. You can hardly tell where their clothing ends and the accessory begins... and not in a good way. Just as in fashion and dressing, knitting has a good, healthy level of accessorizing and a level where your friends step back, look at you, and say, "Okay, where did you get the money for all of this? Give us your credit card before you max it out again."

Remember, knitting is a hobby. Sure, there are some people who take it up as a profession, and we're not including them here. For those of you who aren't professional knitters, remember that your hobby shouldn't require that you get a second or third job just to pay for it. A hobby is meant to reduce your stress and entertain you, not make the overdraft protection on your bank account have to warm up for the marathon spending sprees you take.

We've covered the absolute basics, right? You need yarn, needles, a bag, a tape measure, stitch holders, and maybe bobbins. That's your "gotta have" list. If

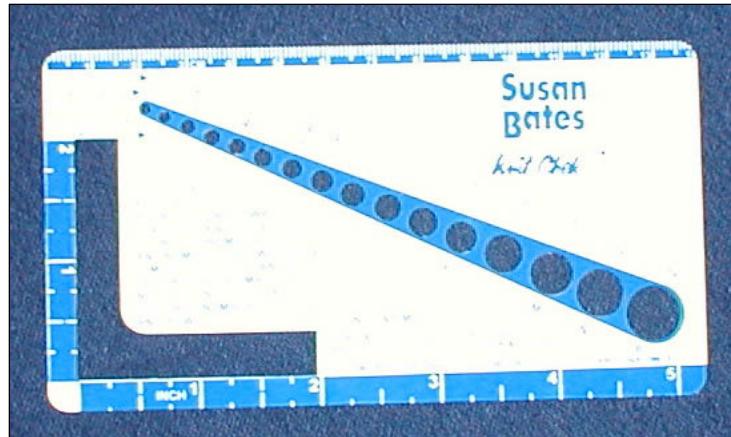
you've made it this far into the book without hitting the craft store, you have no idea what lies in wait. If you've already been through the knitting/crochet/yarn section at your local craft store, you understand the previous warning, and chances are you also want to know what some of the funky things you saw really were. We'll try and cover many of them here.

Various measuring instruments

Knitters with tape measures should be set in this department, but if you just *have* to have some of the other cool little measuring thingies in the craft store, it's a good idea you know what they're called and how to use them, don't you think?

Knitting gauge: The idea here is that you don't have to have a conversion chart for knitting needles. Instead, you slide your needle into one of the holes and it'll tell you its measurement in all of the needle sizes. Here's the thing – many patterns now list the different needle sizes. And if they don't, we gave you a little chart to check the conversions for free earlier. But hey, buy away if you want it!

Plain ol' ruler: Okay, this one isn't that big of an investment, but you're still better off with a measuring tape. A ruler can get you started if you can't afford too many purchases right now, but the next time you have a spare dollar you should pick up a fabric measuring tape. A ruler can't be used easily to measure around heads or accurately figure out the sizes of round pieces.



Gauge markers: These are used to measure your knitting gauge. They can come in handy if your eyes get a little crossed when you're looking at the

stitches, but otherwise you can handle this job with your own counting skills and a measuring tape.

Knitting counters

These generally come in automatic or manual format. The automatic versions are pretty snazzy – you slip them on your needle and it counts your stitches for you. No, not out loud, but all you have to do is glance down to see how many stitches you've done. When you get to the end of the row, just reset it!

Manual counters are similar to the counters people use to count how many people are going into a club or the counter a baseball umpire uses to count strikes and balls. With these models, you click the top of the counter when you finish a row and it keeps track of how many rows you've completed.

Many long-time knitters are pros at keeping track of their stitches and rows in their head. For beginners or the easily-distracted, counters like these can be exactly what they need to stay on track and finish polished pieces. Whether or not you need one of these little guys depends entirely upon your own style. If you're constantly losing track of stitches, make the investment and pick one up. You'll notice a difference in your knitting almost immediately.

Stitch markers

These are teensy little discs or rings that let you know when you need to switch something on a row, whether it's the stitch, the color, or an addition to your work. You can usually find a variety pack of different size stitch markers, and that's your best investment. To remind yourself, you generally slide a stitch marker onto the needle at the transition point, and having only one width of stitch markers handy means that you'll run into trouble with your narrower and wider needles.

Don't worry about picking these up if you're still working on basic patterns. When you move into more advanced work involving many different factors, that's the time to buy stitch markers.

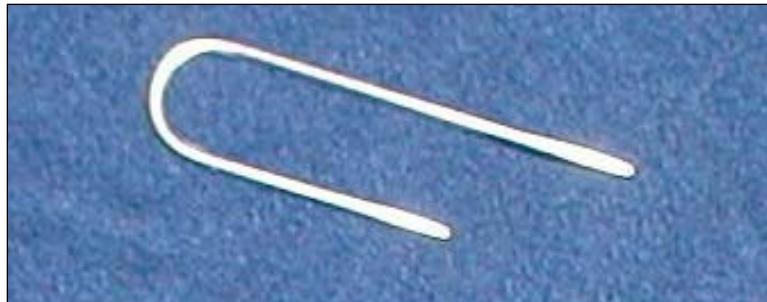
Pins and needles

Hopefully you already have some of these around the house. If not, they'll be a big help when you get into multi-piece projects like sweaters and other clothing. There's no mystery here – pins hold things together so you can stitch them permanently. Needles can be used to weave loose ends into your work or add smaller detailing to your projects.

Cable needles: This subset of needles are used to add large amounts of detailing to your work. If you're new to knitting, you may not be familiar with the term "Aran sweaters." Aran sweaters are very intricately worked pieces said to have been used by Irish fisherman. Each family had a

Around the House

Lost your cable needles? Bend and shape bobby pins or hot roller holders into whatever shape of cable needle you need and keep knitting!



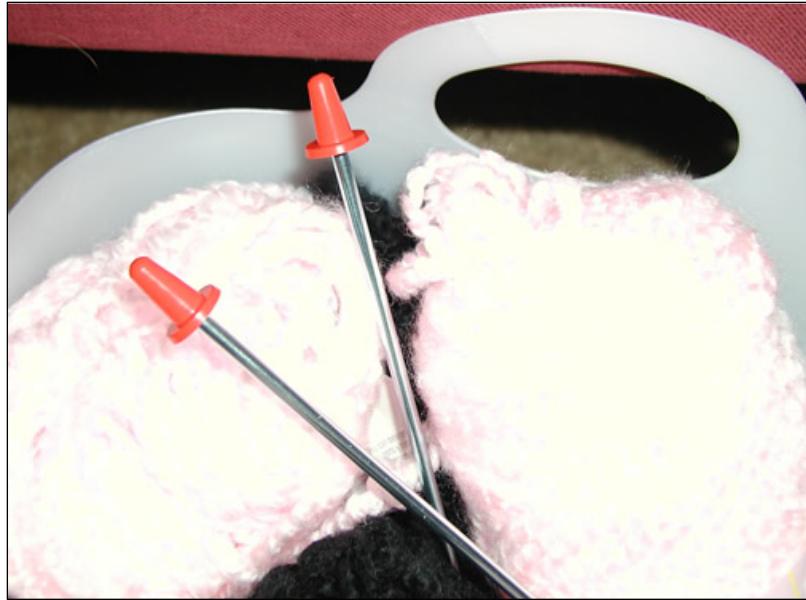
specific pattern so that, should the fisherman be killed in an accident, he could be easily identified

by his sweater. Even if you've never seen them, you can probably imagine how detailed each pattern had to be to serve as an identifying mark – think of coats of arms and how different each one is from the last. That intricate work is done through the use of cable needles. Do you need cable needles? That depends on whether or not you're working a cabled pattern. If so, you definitely need the cable needles specified in your pattern. If you have no ambition to ever work on cabling, then you have no need for cable needles. See? Simple.

Tip protectors

These are generally used with metal knitting needles.

The rubber protector is just slid onto the end of the knitting needle when not in use. It prevents dulling, makes the



needles safer for wandering young fingers or animal mouths, and can keep you from getting a stab wound to the finger when you reach into your knitting bag.

Note: Some knitters purchase tip protectors thinking that airlines will then allow them onboard with their knitting needles. Do not make any such assumption; when you want to travel with your knitting, contact the airline ahead of time and make sure knitting needles are allowed onboard. If you want to avoid this, invest in a travel set of bamboo needles as they have been approved for airline travel.

Yarn guides

Used when you have two or more pieces of yarn working into the same pattern, these

little guys help keep the strands separate and untangled. They can be handy... but they can also be a pain to keep out of your way if you're more of an aggressive knitter. You can keep strands separate through simple home methods like keeping each ball of yarn in a separate bowl/dish on the floor or using top-dispensing tissue boxes as impromptu yarn holders.

Around the House

They may not fit quite as snugly as tip protectors, but rubber erasers can fill the position in a pinch. Just pierce the eraser with the needle tip and you're done!

Knitting spool

This, like knitting itself, has a long history in handcrafts. Knitting spools are often used to encourage kids to get into knitting or crocheting, but lots of adults like them for the volume they produce in a short time. The result of these mini-looms is a thick braid of knit yarn similar to a rope. Because you have one long, strong strand of yarn, you can turn it into anything from rugs to jewelry. They're often very cost-effective and fun, so if you have a little one who wants to participate in your hobby but you're not ready to put sharp needles in those little hands, this is a great alternative.

Around the House

Have an old axe or hatchet in the garage? Don't trash that safety hazard, use it to make a knitting spool! Remove the blade (duh), then hammer 4, 6, or 8 nails into the top of the handle at equal distances apart. Instant knitting spool!

Color wheels

These are the paint chips of knitting. The idea is that you select a yarn color on the wheel and the wheel displays coordinating shades and hues. It's great for the colorblind or if you have trouble selecting mono-tonal yarns for one project, but it also takes a bit of the creativity out of knitting. Definitely an optional buy.

Knitting Belt

This is one of the older knitting accessories you'll find, so consider yourself lucky if you stumble across one in a craft store. Normally you'll only find them in yarn shops or even antiques markets. Knitting belts were traditionally used to increase knitting speed. Rather than holding both needles, you could fasten the belt around your waist, insert the left needle through a hole on the belt, and only have to worry about the right needle and the yarn. The thing many contemporary knitters may find beneficial about knitting belts is that, because they get rid of a lot of the stress on your hand, they work really well in reducing repetitive stress injuries. And

in a world where nearly everyone you meet has carpal tunnel syndrome, that's definitely a big plus.

Care and Keeping

Okay, you know all about knitting, accessorizing, choosing yarns... and then you shrink your best project. Augh! Knitting projects don't usually come with care labels, so it's up to you to look at the care instructions on the yarn packaging for a first step.

Everyone knows (or should know) that pure wool requires handwashing. Machine washing and drying shrinks the yarn itself, so your project could end up looking like Mickey Mouse's shorts by the time you pull it out of the dryer. Instead, fill a sink with cool water and run a capful of a delicate wash detergent under the faucet while it's filling. Place your piece into the water and allow it to soak for two minutes, then gently push and squeeze it with your hands to get the water flowing in and out of the fibers.

Remove it from the water and hang it in a location where it can safely drip dry, like the shower. *Never* wring your knit pieces. If it's a piece like a sweater that has a definite shape and form, lay it on a flat surface (the top of your dryer will work) to dry. Place folded towels beneath it to absorb some of the excess water. Some companies now make "superwash wools," which are fully machine washable. Don't assume that your yarn is a superwash wool, though. Check the label before washing.

Synthetics can be a little simpler in the care department, which is why they're great for baby items that need frequent washing. Again, check your yarn label, but using the gentle cycle on your machine and drying it in low heat should be perfectly fine.

Same goes for cotton, as you probably know. You can probably even get away with regular machine cycles when you're washing a cotton project.

Novelty and longhaired yarns really run the gamut so, again, check that label. Don't throw it away before you make note of the care instructions, otherwise your hours, days, weeks, and months of work can become a giant unraveled mess in the washing machine just because you didn't take a few seconds to read. If you've accidentally tossed the label, check the company's website since many manufacturers now list different yarns and their care instructions online.

Reference



In this final section we'll give you some quick tips and tricks, troubleshooting possibilities, and general reference materials to make your knitting a little smoother and oodles easier. We hope you've enjoyed learning to knit, and once you get into it you'll understand exactly why many people have begun calling it "Yarn yoga." It's a great hobby to encourage creativity, it's portable, it's great to pass onto your children, and your friends and family will fall in love with all of the new clothing and gifts you create!

Increasing

Look at your sleeve. Is it the same width at your wrist as at your shoulder? Nope. As it is, you know how to make sleeves using circular needles, but do you know how to increase the diameter of that sleeve tube so it accommodates a human arm? There are a few different ways of doing this.

Bar increase

This is the most common increase. If a pattern indicates that you need to increase your stitches but doesn't mention a particular increase method, use the bar increase. Start to knit a stitch by inserting your right needle into the front of the stitch on your left needle. Knit the stitch, but don't slide it off your needle. Instead, slide your right needle into the *back* of the first stitch on your left needle and knit again. Now you can slide the stitch off your needle.

Make 1

This is also a versatile stitch, but it has two different variations that can produce very different results. You'll perform this increase in the middle of a row. First, locate the horizontal strand of yarn that is directly between your right and left needles. It'll appear to be on the row below the active row. Slip your right needle through this strand, then slide it onto your left needle. This gives you a pseudo-stitch added to your left needle.

Here's where the variations come in. If you want to be able to see the increase as a cutesy little hole in the fabric, knit your right needle into the front of the left needle. For no hole (an invisible increase), knit into the back of the left needle.

Yarn over

This is the simplest increase and the one you'll see in many patterns designated as *yo*. While it's the simplest, it's really only useful if you're aiming for a lacy, open-holed look in your project. The previous two are better bets for an invisible increase. When you get to the next stitch, loop the yarn over your right needle instead of knitting into the left needle. Your right needle now has an extra loop. Keep knitting the row. You'll be able to see the hole when the row above it is complete.

Decreasing

A decrease is in order if you're going the opposite direction and need to get rid of stitches rather than add them. Just as with increases, you have several options for decreasing. We're going to address the two most common decreases as they can get you through most patterns. There are some less-used decreases that you may run into, but we're pretty sure you can handle them.

Knit 2 together

This is the bar increase of decreases. When a pattern indicates a decrease but doesn't give you a clue as to what type, this is your best bet. The idea here is pretty simple – rather than knitting or purling 1 stitch at a time, slide 2 onto your needle and knit them together.

Slip slip knit

Rather than knitting two stitches from the left needle, just slip them onto the right needle without knitting them. Now slide your left needle into the stitches and knit as you normally would.

There are some instances in which perfectly planned increases and decreases don't end up changing the width of a project. Instead, they lend an open, airy feel to your piece. With the simple increase and decrease stitches you just learned, you can create one of the most complex and beautiful patterns any needlecrafter can hope to make – lace. Because certain increases and decreases leave those small hole, you can use the holes to your advantage in opening up the whole project. Do some research on lace creation and standard lace patterns. You'll be amazed at the variety of things you can make just by knowing the standard library of stitches!

Substituting Yarn

As we've discussed, there are certain instances in which you may decide to use a yarn of a different thickness or gauge than the one specified by a particular pattern. This can sometimes cause problems in patterns with very specific measurements. You can head off a few of these problems at the pass with just a little math and effort on your part. The easiest of these is to take a look at the label of the yarn specified in the pattern. See how many grams/ounces each skein weighs, then multiply that weight by the number of skeins needed. You should come up with the full weight of the finished product. To substitute yarn, go through the same procedure with the new yarn. Make sure the final weights match. This will give you the number of skeins necessary for the finished project. From there, you'll need to adjust your pattern according to any gauge changes (remember how to do that)? Now you can make the same pattern with completely different results just by switching up the yarn!

Changing Pattern Sizes

Many knitting patterns specify several different sizes within the pattern, beginning with one of the initial lines. Often you'll see a notation after the name that looks something like this: Cable-knit Dress for size 8 (10, 12, 14). This indicates that the pattern contains instructions and stitch requirements for all four sizes – just locate which comma set corresponds to your size (outside the parentheses for an 8, the first comma set for a 10, second for a 12, third for a 14)

and follow only those instructions throughout the project. If the pattern *doesn't* include variations for different sizes, you'll have to make the adjustments manually. You can do this by factoring the gauge, finished size, and your size together. A simpler way of doing this with patterns such as sweaters that you'll be keeping yourself is to create a makeshift template from tissue or pattern paper that you can use to check the sizes of your project as you go.

Finishing

This is done most easily with a crochet hook. Just weave the hook in and out of some of the stitches close to the trailing end, hook onto the tail, and pull it through those stitches. This secures the end from possible unraveling and also gives the project a cleaner, more polished look.

To make beautiful seams, use a yarn needle, the same yarn you used to create your project, and sew using a whipstitch or other applicable sewing stitch. These will hold forever and blend in to the fabric seamlessly. If your selvage is looking a little shady and you want to edge it professionally, the simplest way is to whip out your good buddy the crochet hook, insert it at the beginning of the line, and stitch a row of single crochet along your project's edge. This can also make previously boring projects a little edgier if you use a contrasting color of yarn to edge.

Single crochet and/or knitting along the edge are really your best bet for classic, professional-looking edgework. If you want to get daring, you can use nearly any other stitch you've learned, invented, or found online to make your edges look a little more interesting. Since edges often "make" a garment, get a little creative. Try creating an eyelet look with some of the more open patterns you've learned (even a simple buttonhole will work), and even go one step further by threading ribbon or fabric through the holes. Once you've gotten lacework down, you can really add an air of femininity to any project by knitting a simple lace edging for a few rows. You can even crochet or sew pre-made lace onto your sweater... and that really goes for any material you can find. This is your time to really make the project your own, so have fun!

Troubleshooting

No knitter is perfect. Even someone who seems to have been born with needles in hand (ouch) can easily slip up and destroy an entire project in one fell swoop. Of course, these occurrences become fewer and farther between as you improve, but sometimes you don't even realize something has gone wrong until later in the project. While you're learning, try to keep a close eye on what you're doing and figure out what went wrong and how you would properly correct it... then rip the whole thing out. Seriously! The practice is good for you, and now you can start from the very beginning and make it look even better than when you began. Once you get better you can begin to really troubleshoot and correct your work as necessary.

You can also avoid a lot of troubleshooting if you pay attention while you're first learning. Make an effort to count every stitch and row as you make them, then go back and recount them when you've finished each row. It can be time consuming, but it'll encourage you to pay attention to what you're doing. It also helps you head off dropped stitches and other problems before they turn a whole project into a useless pile of yarn.

Dropped stitches

These will be your numero uno adversary as you're learning to knit. These are also why we suggested you count and recount stitches as you're going, because dropped stitches can be a huge pain in the you-know-what. If you go too far without realizing it's happened, a dropped stitch can turn a whole central section of your work into, well, a *hole* central section. When you catch them quickly (within a row or two), you can pick them up without too much of a migraine. When you get to the position on a row that is vertically in line with the dropped stitch, treat it like a horizontal bar increase without the increase. Slip your right needle into the dropped stitch as well as the loose strand floating above it, then slide your left needle into the loop of the *dropped stitch only*. Slip the dropped stitch

over the loose strand you pulled up just as you would if you were binding off a stitch. Now slip it back over to the left needle and keep on truckin'! This method works for both knit and purl stitches.

Shaping/Blocking

It's inevitable. At some point you're going to make something simple like a scarf and hold it up only to realize that your simple rectangle is more of a wavy, soft-edged thingamabob. Don't worry. Stretch and pulling a bit is completely allowed. After all, you made your project by hand and you're bound to have a few sections here and there that have different tensions and styles than others. Use your needles to wiggle some looseness into especially tight stitches, use your hands to stretch out the whole piece, and use whatever you want to flatten it and generally shape it. It's not going to be perfect, but you can help it get pretty darn close.

Blocking is a little more technical and should be used for pieces that need a definite shape, like clothing. The easiest way of accomplishing this is through wet blocking, something you may have already done if you've had experience shrinking sweaters. Fill your sink with water and let it sit for 30 minutes so it'll adjust to room temperature. Now immerse your project into the water and make sure it's sufficiently soaked, but don't agitate it too much. Take it out of the water and lay it on a folded towel, then place another folded towel on top. Roll everything together, then unroll them. Layer a third and fourth dry towel in a place where you can leave your piece to dry, then place it on top and gently stretch it into the proper shape and proportions.

Untwisting stitches

Twisting stitches usually happen just because you were a little absentminded and accidentally knit from the wrong side of the needle. They're very easy to fix when you realize what has happened. Slide the stitch off the needle, untwist it, and slide it back on.

Knitting Terms

We've already covered some of the main abbreviations, and you've been able to pick up the meaning of some of those abbreviations while reading (k4=knit 4, p3 = purl 3, etc.). Those will get you through the meat of your patterns, but there are thousands of knitting terms out there. We'll address some of the additional ones that'll help you get through some of the more interesting patterns.

Main color: you can probably figure this one out on your own. This is the predominant color in a multi-colored pattern.

Contrasting color: this is the accent color in any multi-colored pattern.

Asterisks, parentheses, plus signs: these can drive you bonkers if you don't quite understand them. All three of them are used to indicate how many times you need to repeat a certain section of a pattern. When you see an asterisk, it marks the beginning of the section you need to repeat and the pattern will indicate the number of times to repeat that section. Same goes for text enclosed in parentheses or plus signs – the text inside the marks is the repeating section, and you should see an indicator outside the section as to how many times it repeats.

Bottom selvage: another name for the casting on row.

Stranding: the method used in Fair Isle knitting, in which colors not in use are carried across the back of the fabric.

Freehanding: another word for freestyling, this refers to knitting without a pattern besides the one in your head.

Knitting loom: this is just a supersized knitting spool.

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"I'm sixty nine years young. I have been knitting since I was eight. A blind lady taught me. Some things I remember but bad days I refer to the book. Then I say oh yea, I remember that now. However I see a lot of new ideas and that makes me feel good to think I can still learn something new. I'm going crazy right now as I decided to knit nothing but socks all this winter."

-Beatrice Benoit

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