



# Stitch 'n Bitch *Nation*

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# Dedication

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*For Shadow, my little bear*



# Acknowledgments

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More than a hundred people were involved in the production of this book—from those who reviewed their favorite yarn stores, to the folks who contributed their favorite knitting tips, to the Stitch 'n Bitch members who sent in profiles of their groups—and I am deeply indebted to them all. But I owe my greatest appreciation to the amazing knitters whose innovative designs are included here, and who deserve the most credit for making this book what it is.

The past six months have been a whirlwind of late nights and working weekends as I raced to meet a series of tight deadlines. I never would have survived it, and this book wouldn't have come together if it hadn't been for the hard work, support, and love of the following people and one dog.

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Big sloppy kisses go out to the lovely ladies of *BUST* magazine for cutting me some slack when this book pulled me away from my responsibilities at the mag, and especially to my co-publisher Laurie Henzel, for being the best business partner a girl could ever hope for.

I want to thank Johanna and Bernard Stoller for their unwavering confidence in me, and especially Michael Uman for always helping me to step away from the cliff, even when the knit hits the fan. His love and support have kept me sane for the past nine years and three books, and I am grateful.

Finally, I wish to thank my seventeen-year-old blind dog, Shadow, one of the sweetest creatures ever to walk the planet, for teaching me more about unconditional love and trust than I ever thought possible. He's brought so much joy to my life in the twelve years while he's been my roommate and companion, and there hasn't been a thing I've knit that didn't have a little bit of him woven into it. As he battles cancer and nears his final days, I know I'll miss him forever.

# CONTENTS

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## PART I

### *I Knit It My Way*

HOW TO MAKE ANY KNITTING PATTERN WORK WITH YOUR YARN, YOUR GAUGE,  
YOUR BODY, AND YOUR STYLE

## PART II

### *The Patterns*

#### SCARVES, HATS, AND MITTENS

Scarf It Up

Yo, Drop It!

Wavy Gravy

Mom's Sophisticated Scarf

Warm Fuzzies

Butterflies Are Free

Bzzz Hat for Queen Bees

Russian Winter

Valentine's Hat and Mittens

Head Huggers: Neckwarmer and Earwarmer

Headline News: Cabled Newsboy Cap

Later 'Gator Mitts

Basic Cable

#### SWEATERS AND PONCHOS

Jesse's Flames

Fairly Easy Fair Isle

Razor's Edge

London Calling

Flower Power

Lucky: Clover Lace Wrap

Spiderweb Capelet

That Seventies Poncho

Bam 13

#### SEXY SUMMER KNITS

Ultra Femme

---

Sexie

Mud Flap Girl Tank Top

Quick and Dirty: 2-Needle Fishnet Stockings

Itsy-Bitsy Teeny-Weeny Purple Polka-Dot Tankini

Accidentally On Purpose: Drop Stitch Vest

Totally Tubular: Miniskirt/Boob Tube

#### **LEGS, BAGS, AND BEYOND**

Candy Stripers: Messenger and Laptop Bags

Letter Have It

Poster Boy

Om Yoga Mat Bag

Saucy Tote

Going Out with a Bag

The Bead Goes On: Beaded Wrist Cuffs

Roller Girl Legwarmers

Felted Furry Foot Warmers

Hurry Up Spring Armwarmers

Belt de Jour

#### **BABIES, DOGS, AND CATS**

Li'l Devil Pants

Baby's First Tattoo

Bunny Hat

One-Hour Baby Booties

Casey's Coat

Catwarming Set

#### **GIFTS AND MORE**

Mobile Monsters

Knit Your Own Rock Star

Knit My Ride: Fuzzy Dice and Steering Wheel Cover

Chill Pillows

Two for Tea

## **PART III**

### ***The Knitty-Gritty***

**PART IV**

***Resources***

**YARN STORE NATION**

**YARN SUPPLIERS**

**INDEX**



# *I Knit It My Way*

**HOW TO MAKE ANY KNITTING PATTERN WORK WITH YOUR YARN,  
YOUR GAUGE, YOUR BODY, AND YOUR STYLE**



When *Stitch 'n Bitch: The Knitter's Handbook* was published last year, I was both proud and relieved. I and so many others had put so much work into it, and now, finally, it was out there in the world. Seeing it displayed in bookstores across the country was exhilarating, but it was even more exciting the first time I saw a project made from the book posted on the Internet. Soon I began spotting all sorts of projects from *Stitch 'n Bitch*: knit wrist cuffs, baby hats, baby blankets, kitty hats, and Skully sweaters. People were even showing up at my book signings wearing items they'd made from the book. It was amazing!

Of course, many of these knitters chose their own colors for their projects, and others used entirely different yarn than the pattern called for. Still other brave souls made more extensive alterations to the patterns—from replacing the star motif on the wrist cuffs with little Pacman figures to lengthening the Under the Hoodie sweater so that it was less cropped, making a mini version of Meema's Felted Marsupial Tote for a toddler, shortening the extra-long sleeves on To Dye For, and adding shaping to the loose, oversized Skully sweater.



It was clear that at least a few knitters were ready to look at patterns, not as a be-all and end-all for their knitting projects, but rather as a starting point from which to make their knitting dreams come true. And from the questions and enthusiastic comments about these revised SnB projects that we

being posted on knitters' blogs, it seemed that many other *Stitch 'n Bitchers* were hungry to do the same, if only they knew how.

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I also found, unfortunately, that some folks who had completed projects from that first book were less than pleased with their results. One knitter discovered that the Skully sweater was much too loose and oversized for her to wear; yet another, posing in her newly completed Skully, proved that the sweater fit her just fine. So why did one knitter get such unhappy results, while another knitter didn't? I realized that if knitters could figure out from a pattern how a sweater might fit them before they made it, they'd encounter less frustration. Better yet, they'd know how to pick the right size to knit from the list of available sizes.

In fact, it seemed that all across the country, a nation of knitters—both brand new and more seasoned—were beginning to get restless. They were crying out for knowledge. They wanted to have the power to really understand what it was they were making, so that they could take their knitting to the next level, and make changes if they wanted to. They yearned to be free to use a yarn of their own choosing, whether or not it matched the gauge stipulated in the pattern. They longed to be able to make simple alterations to patterns—lengthening a body here, shortening a sleeve there. And they were itching to make projects that would fit and flatter their bodies. They didn't want to spend countless hours working on sweaters only to have them be more appropriate for an elephant or a *Olson twin* than themselves.

In this chapter I'll try to arm you with some of that knowledge. I'll help you understand the secret language of knitting patterns and tell you a few things you need to think about when you're choosing different yarn for a project. I'll show you how—with the miracle of math—you can rewrite a pattern to use thicker or thinner yarn than the pattern calls for or make simple alterations so that it will fit you better. I'll even explain the mystery of pattern fit and sizing, so that you can choose the correct size to knit from the get-go. Finally, I'll teach you how to change particular details of a sweater—like switching a turtleneck to a V-neck or replace a ribbed edge with a rolled one. Eventually, you'll be changing so many things about a pattern—using thicker yarn, shortening the sleeves, popping on a crew neck, lengthening the body, adding a different edging, replacing a picture of a rock star with a picture of your doggie—that it may become an entirely different project altogether. In fact, you may have changed it so much that you will have practically designed your *own* sweater. With a bit more practice, and a bit more willingness to take the leap and depart from following patterns to the letter, you'll be ready to do just that.

Very few of the patterns in this book were made by folks who are knitwear designers by trade. Most of them were contributed by knitters who were just brave (or stubborn) enough to get an idea into their head for a project and not let go until they had figured out how to make it. Soon you'll be one of them too, or maybe you already are. And perhaps it will be one of your patterns that will appear in a future *Stitch 'n Bitch* book, for others to knit, and, of course, change completely to suit their whims and fantasy.

So what are you waiting for? It's time to get your knit on.

# HOW TO UNDERSTAND A KNITTING PATTERN

When you first start knitting, a pattern can seem a lot like a pirate's map pointing the way to buried treasure. It promises to give you every bit of information you need—from the brand, color, and quantity of yarn to buy to specific step-by-step knitting directions, which, if followed exactly, will lead you to the treasure: that sweater you've been drooling over in the book or magazine. And it may also seem that unless you follow the directions exactly, you run the risk of landing in quicksand or, at least winding up with something other than that longed-for garment.

But after you've knit enough patterns, you discover something else: Following the directions doesn't always take you to the treasure. You may very well end up with the same sweater the model is wearing, but you didn't realize it would look baggy on you. Or you may decide that the fitted cropped sweater which made the model look so cute and sassy makes you look short and dumpy. How much nicer would it be to foresee these problems and knit the sweater into the exact, flattering shape you actually want?

Alternately, maybe you really like the shape of the mohair hoodie the model is wearing, but you already have a large bag of ribbony rayon you'd like to use. Or perhaps you're a vegan, and would prefer to knit something out of acrylic instead of wool. Finally, suppose you just bought a giant load of gorgeous sport-weight cashmere blend yarn on eBay, and you want to use it to knit up a sweater that calls for worsted-weight yarn. What you really want to do is change the pattern so it will work with *your* yarn. Is that so wrong?

I'm here to tell you that any and all of these things can be done. That's because a pattern is not all like a cryptic pirate's map. Instead, in every pattern the designers have laid bare, for all to see, exactly how the fabric for the sweater is to be made. They have included explicit details about every tiny curve and inch-by-inch information about the exact size it will turn out to be. And they won't mind a bit if you use their instructions as a guideline for working out a sweater that will fit you a bit better, or be a bit longer, or narrower, or in an entirely different gauge yarn than they call for. In fact, they would probably be thrilled to have you do that. Once you understand how to read all the clues that are written out for you in each and every pattern, you'll realize that it's much more than just a way to get to the buried treasure: It offers you the keys to the entire friggin' city!

In order to make changes to a pattern, you need to really understand it—not just the stitches or the instructions, but what makes it tick. Every pattern is jam-packed with numbers: measurements in inches, numbers of stitches to cast on and decrease or increase, and how many rows to knit. But what are those numbers there? What do they mean? How does the jumble of numbers in your pattern relate to the finely detailed pullover in the photo? In this next section, I'm going to walk you through a few simple patterns so that you can get to know them from the inside out. Before we begin, though, you might want to put on your propeller beanie: There's lots of math involved here. It's simple math, for the most part, but there's plenty of it. I believe it was talking Barbie who so famously said, "Math is hard," but pay her no mind. Women have been relying on math in their knitting for centuries, and these days, knitting is even used in certain elementary school programs to help kids understand arithmetic. If you were born with the math gene, have fun with the next section. And if you were born without it, just remember that math is your friend. It's the secret code of all knitting, and it is the shared language that all knitters speak. In fact, math is as powerful and magical as any kind of witchcraft.

# CONTESTANT NUMBER ONE

## A Simple Scarf

Let's take a look at the pattern below for a knit scarf. How can you know what this scarf will look like before you go ahead and knit it? Is it a skinny, '80s-style scarf, or is it wide? Will it be long enough to wrap around your neck twice or does it fit like an ascot? You can tell it has stripes—the name gives that away—but are they narrow or wide? The answers to all these questions lie in the pattern itself.

The key piece of information in any knitting pattern is the **gauge**. Most patterns will give a gauge over 4 inches. The first thing you want to do when reading a pattern is to calculate the gauge: stitches and rows per *inch*. This information can work like a decoder ring to help you understand everything else that's going on in a pattern. Here's how:

### STITCHES PER INCH = NUMBER OF STITCHES DIVIDED BY SWATCH WIDTH

For example, in this scarf pattern, the designer tells me she has to knit 28 stitches in the pattern to get a swatch of fabric 4" wide.

#### WHITE STRIPES SCARF

##### Materials

Cuddly Wuddly Cotton (100% cotton)

**Color A:** 3 skeins Rock Red

**Color B:** 3 skeins "Meg White"

US 9 (5.5 mm) straight needles

##### Gauge

28 sts and 15 rows = 4" in st patt

#### STITCH PATTERN

K3, p3.

#### DIRECTIONS

With color A, CO 36 sts.

\*K with color A in st pattern for 18 rows.

K with color B in st pattern for 18 rows\*.

Rep from \* to \* 5 times more.

*List of abbreviations appears on [page 32](#).*

I pull out my handy-dandy calculator (no old-school long division for me), divide 28 by 4, and get

7. Okay, so that's my **stitches-per-inch gauge: 7**.

Next, I figure out my row gauge.

### ROWS PER INCH = NUMBER OF ROWS DIVIDED BY SWATCH LENGTH

Here, the designer tells me she has to knit 15 rows to get 4" of fabric.

So, I divide 15 by 4 and get 3.75. I like to keep only one digit after the decimal, so I'll round the up to 3.8. Okay, so **3.8 is my row gauge**.

Now, back to that pattern. The designer tells me to start by casting on 36 stitches. I already know that every 7 stitches equals an inch, but just how many inches does that number 36 represent? In other words, how many times does 7 (the stitches per single inch) go into 36? That's easy: just divide 36 by 7, and you get 5.1428571429. This is a bit unwieldy, so let's just say the scarf is gonna be about 5" wide—a nice size for a scarf.

Next, the pattern says to work 18 rows of color A. How long is that? Easy, peasy: Take 18 and divide it by the row gauge, which was **3.8**.  $18 \div 3.8 = 4.73$ . So each stripe is about 5" long. The pattern tells me to make this two-stripe color pattern once, and then 5 times more; in other words, I have to do it 6 times altogether. One stripe is 5", so two stripes are 10". Knitting those two stripes 6 times would result in a scarf that's 60" (or 5 feet) long. I will definitely be able to wrap this cute stripy scarf around my neck and have both ends hanging down to keep me warm.

We've used our decoder ring—the stitches per inch and rows per inch—and figured out what's going on in this pattern. It's all a bit like dissecting a frog: kinda gross, kinda nauseating, but extremely informative. It's super important to understand how things are put together if you ever want to change them.

## CONTESTANT NUMBER 2

### A Straightforward Sweater

If you want to add a room to a house or remodel the kitchen, you need to be able to understand the blueprints. It's the same thing with altering a sweater: To lengthen a sleeve, change a neckline, or shorten the body, you need to understand the pattern. Sweater patterns often include what's called a "schematic"—a blueprint-like line drawing that gives you the exact measurements, in inches, of the completed pieces of knit fabric. So, unlike with the "White Stripes Scarf," you don't need the stitches and row gauge to picture what you're making: It's all laid out for you. But you'll still need your decoder ring—that business about the stitches and rows per inch that you just learned—to help you understand what's really going on in each of those pieces, and it will be the key to changing anything in the pattern.

Let's take a quick stroll through a typical sweater pattern just to see how this works. But I have to warn you: The following section contains plenty of twists and turns, so hang on tight. When we come out on the other side, you might be a bit dizzy, but you'll be a changed knitter. Never again will you blindly increase, decrease, and cast on stitches just because someone told you to; you'll actually understand why you're doing those things, and that knowledge will allow you to do things differently. May the force be with you.

Here is a pattern for a baby sweater:

#### *Li'l Dumplin' Baby Sweater*

##### **DIRECTIONS**

**BACK**

**A** CO 42 sts.

K 2 rows in seed st.

K in St st until piece measures 9½" from beg, ending with a WS row.

**B** Next row: K16, BO 10 sts, k16.

*Working both sides at the same time*, BO 1 st each neck edge EOR 4 times.

BO remaining 12 sts.

**FRONT**

Work same as for back.

**C** SLEEVES (MAKE 2)

CO 21 sts.

K 2 rows in seed st.

Cont in St st, inc1 st each side EOR 2 times, then every 4th row 5 times (35 sts).

Cont in St st until sleeve measures 5½".

**FINISHING**

Sew shoulder seams.

Sew sleeves to front and back, beg and ending 5" down from shoulder seam on each side.

Sew side and sleeve seam.

## Size

12 months

Finished chest = 24"

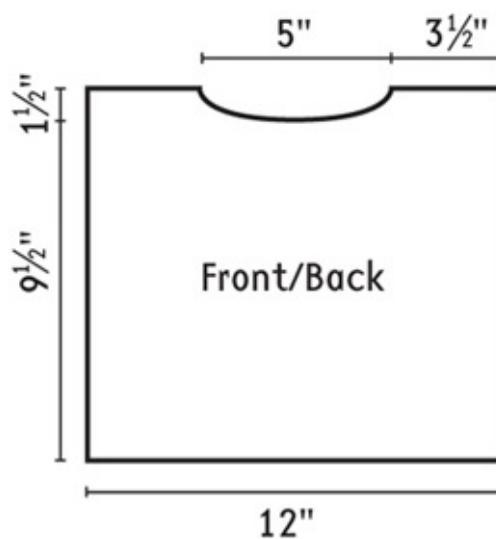
## Materials

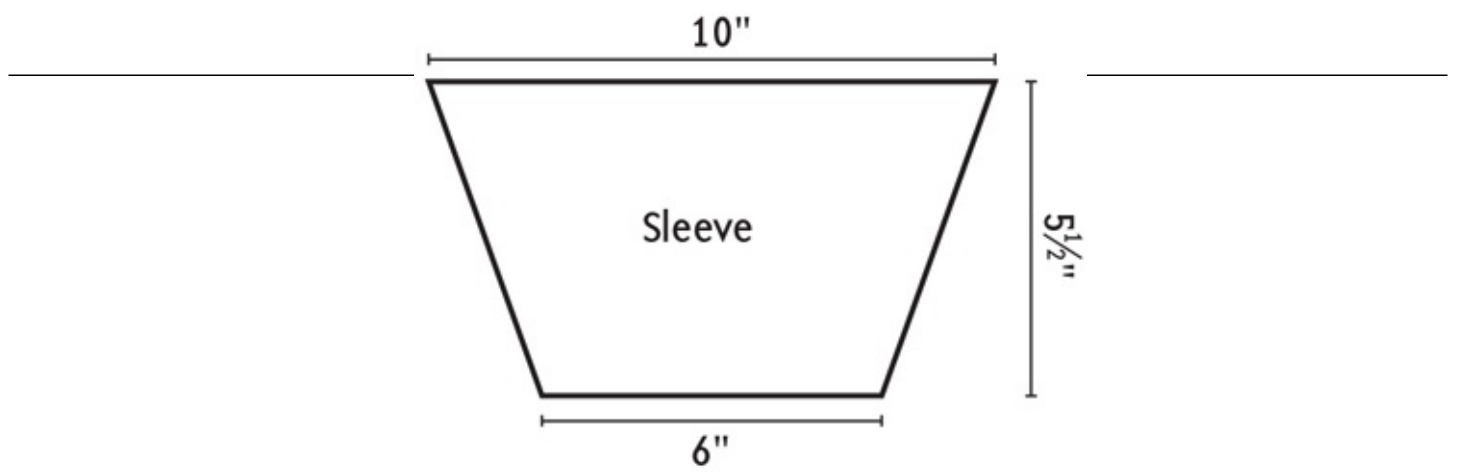
3 skeins Funky Monkey Chunky Yarn (80% merino wool/20% acrylic; 1.75 oz/137 yds)

US 9 (5.5 mm) straight needles

## Gauge

14 sts and 20 rows = 4" in St st





List of abbreviations appears on [page 32](#).

According to the pattern, the gauge for the sweater is 14 stitches and 20 rows per 4".

Before we do anything else, we need to get out that decoder ring. In this case, the **stitches per inch** = **3.5** (14 stitches ÷ 4" swatch). And the **rows per inch** = **5** (20 rows ÷ 4" swatch).

Now, let's take on this sweater piece by piece.

#### **A** THE BACK

The pattern says that to knit the back of this sweater, you start by casting on 42 stitches. If you take that and divide it by your stitches per inch, you should get the width of half of the sweater. Sure enough,  $42 \div 3.5 = 12$ .

Next, the pattern says to knit 2 rows in seed stitch, and then to continue in stockinette stitch until the back measures  $9\frac{1}{2}$ " from the beginning. It does not tell you how many rows to knit to get there, and that's one of the truths about most patterns: row gauge is not as important as stitch gauge.

#### **B** THE NECK

After you have a  $9\frac{1}{2}$ "-long piece of fabric, the pattern tells you to knit 16 stitches, bind off the center 10 stitches, and then knit another 16 stitches. Next, you have to bind off 1 stitch at each neck edge on every other row 4 times—that eliminates 8 stitches altogether. Thus, the neck, which you created by binding off 10 stitches and then decreasing another 8 stitches, is 18 stitches wide. According to the stitch gauge, that makes it  $18 \div 3.5$ , or  $5.14$ " wide. Sounds kinda like 5" to me.

In fact, all those numbers check out with the schematic. It's right, we're right, and all's right with the world (or at least with the pattern).

The back of the sweater is done. For the front, knit another piece just like it.

#### **C** THE SLEEVES

Now that we're at the sleeves, things are about to diverge from the straight and narrow. I just said that row gauge was less important than stitch gauge in most patterns, but that's not to say that row gauge doesn't matter to the pattern designer—especially when it comes to sleeves or other areas with a good number of increases or decreases. She cares about row gauge truly, madly, and deeply, and she's very carefully worked out just how many stitches you need to increase, and over how many rows, so that the sleeves don't wind up so long that you can't find the baby's hands. These numbers have been

calculated with the beady-eyed precision of a child who is being forced to share half her candy with her brother.

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You can see from the schematic that this sleeve gets quite a bit wider between the wrist, where it begins, and the shoulder, where it will be attached to the body of the sweater. Let's see how this is done.

The instructions for the sleeves say "CO 21 stitches."

Okay, that's easy:  $21 \text{ stitches} \div 3.5 \text{ stitches per inch} = 6"$ . The bottom of the sleeve is going to be 6" wide, and that checks out with the schematic.

Next, the directions say to knit 2 rows in seed stitch, and then to continue in stockinette stitch, increasing 1 stitch at each side every other row 2 times, and every 4th row 5 times (35 sts)—so you end up with 35 stitches. Then it says to continue in stockinette until the piece measures  $5\frac{1}{2}"$ .

So what's going on with those increases? Why is it written so enigmatically, with all the "every other row 2 times and every 4th row 5 times"? If I keep saying "there's no place like home" while I'm doing them, will I end up in Kansas?

Well, actually, there is something a bit like magic going on there, and I'll explain. First off, the designer wants a sleeve that starts off 6" (21 stitches) wide, and ends up 10" (35 stitches) wide. She also wants that sleeve to be exactly  $5\frac{1}{2}"$  long, so it can fit that tiny arm correctly. But how does she get from the 21 stitches, at the wrist, to the 35 stitches, at the shoulder, in only 5"? (Remember she doesn't start increasing the sleeves until after about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch of seed stitch rows.) Since we know the row gauge, we know she has only 25 rows over which to add on those 14 stitches ( $5" \times 5 \text{ rows per inch} = 25 \text{ rows}$ ). And, if she is a nice designer, she probably wants to make the increases symmetrically: 7 on each side of the sleeve. She also wants to place them so all the increases are made on the right-side rows, because it's easier to make them on knitted stitches than on purled stitches.

This is where the "every other row 2 times and every 4th row 5 times" mumbo-jumbo comes in. The designer has done some fancy-ass math, and figured out that this is the prettiest way to make those increases work out evenly along the sleeve. She may have used trial and error till she got these numbers, working out the sleeves on graph paper till the numbers worked. She may have used something called "the magic formula" to work out the nice increases (there is such a thing, really, see [page 18](#)). Hell, she may have just punched the numbers into some knitting software she had. Whatever the case, she's sharing the fruits of her calculations with you in her pattern.

I'm just pointing out the fancy footwork that goes into placing increases or decreases in a knitting pattern, because this is one of the places where altering a pattern can get a little hairy. In the next few sections I'll show you a number of ways to deal with this when making changes, and if you can keep your eyes on the prize and your finger on the calculator, you'll be sure to get through it.

The Li'l Dumplin' Baby Sweater is simpler than many patterns you may knit, but not by much. All patterns are based on this business of gauge, from the cast-on to the bind-off and all the increasing and decreasing in between. And now that you understand the real knitty-gritty of all knitting patterns, the power is yours. You can change the gauge. You can change the shape. You can do whatever you want.



# REPLACING ONE YARN WITH ANOTHER OF THE SAME GAUGE

The most common alteration to any pattern, and one you may already have done, is to replace the yarn the pattern calls for with a yarn of your own choosing. Now that you know how absolutely dependent each line of a pattern is on that decoder ring—the gauge—you can also understand why replacing yarn with another *of the same gauge* means that you'll be able to follow the pattern exactly as written. But figuring out what yarn to use as a replacement can be a little tricky.

The first challenge is to find yourself some yarn that knits up to the same gauge as called for in the pattern. But where do you begin? There are thousands of yarns out there; do you just choose one willfully and start swatching like mad?

Well, of course not. The first thing to do is figure out what weight the yarn in the pattern is, then try replacing it with a *yarn of the same weight*. The problem is, most patterns don't tell you what weight yarn was used. They do give you the gauge, though, from which you can probably figure that out.

For instance, a pattern may state at the top:

### Materials

Loonyland Quikstuff (70% wool, 30% acrylic; 3 oz/135 yds)

8 skeins Flamin' Flamingo

### Gauge

12 sts and 17 rows = 4" in St st using size 10½ needles

Just look up that gauge on the Craft Yarn Council's table on the next page, which gives yarn weight standards and categorizes yarn into six weights.

As you can see, there is quite a bit of variety here. "Superfine," for instance, is any yarn whose recommended gauge is between 27 and 32 stitches per 4", knit on size 1, 2, or 3 needles. Although it's awfully nice of the Craft Yarn Council to have come up with these categories, it doesn't do us much good if the yarn companies don't label their stuff with this information—and most of them don't.

Still, with a bit of detective work, you can figure out the weight of the yarn in the pattern. We'll start by looking at our gauge again. In this case, the gauge is 12 stitches per 4", which would place the yarn right into category 5: bulky-weight yarn. We're lucky that this gauge is given over stockinette stitch; if it had been given over a pattern stitch—especially ribbing, which pulls the stitches close together—the gauge would not be so useful. The bulky yarn in this pattern might very well knit up 16 stitches over 4" when it's knit in a k1, p1 rib, but that certainly doesn't mean that it's suddenly transformed itself into a category 4, medium-weight yarn.

But all is not lost. If the gauge is given over a pattern stitch, just look at the needle sizes suggested in the pattern to get a sense of the yarn's weight. In this case, the needle is 10½, which is again consistent with this yarn falling into category 5, bulky.







When determining a yarn's weight by looking at gauge and needle size, you also need to be aware

of the texture of the finished piece. Take a close look at the completed project, or as good a look as you can get from a photo. Does the yarn seem like it's been knit to the recommended gauge, yielding a nice, solid fabric that you can't see through? Or does it look almost netlike, similar to a mesh, so that if the model hadn't worn a T-shirt under that sweater you'd see her bra? If it's loose, then the yarn was likely knit at a larger gauge than is recommended for that yarn, meaning that the designer used needles quite a bit thicker than would normally be used with this weight of yarn so that she could achieve an open, airy texture. Thus, neither the gauge nor the needle size given will help you in your quest to figure out this yarn's weight. What's a knitter to do?

Well, you could head over to your LYS, find the yarn in question (assuming that they carry it), and read the ball band to find the recommended gauge and needle size, and thereby figure out its weight. But, of course, you don't have to actually leave the house to find info about a ball of yarn. Today we have the Internet, and if you can track down information about old classmates and ex-boyfriends on the Web, you can certainly get the lowdown on some yarn. Just enter the full name of the yarn you want to know about in your favorite search engine. Yarn stores that carry the yarn will pop up (possibly even the company that makes the yarn), and at least one of them will list the recommended gauge and needle size. With that info in hand, you can finally figure out the weight of that darn yarn.

The print edition of this book includes a chart called **Standard Yarn Weight System**. Please download a PDF of the chart here: [workman.com/ebookdownloads](http://workman.com/ebookdownloads)

## Standard Yarn Weight System

Yarn Weight Symbol & Category Names	 1 SUPER FINE	 2 FINE	 3 LIGHT	 4 MEDIUM	 5 BULKY	 6 SUPER BULKY
Type of Yarns in Category	Sock, Fingering, Baby	Sport, Baby	DK, Light Worsted	Worsted, Afghan, Aran	Chunky, Craft, Rug	Bulky, Roving
Knit Gauge Range in Stockinette Stitch to 4 inches	27–32 sts	23–26 sts	21–24 sts	16–20 sts	12–15 sts	6–11 sts
Recommended Needle in Metric Size Range	2.25–3.25mm	3.25–3.75mm	3.75–4.5mm	4.5–5.5mm	5.5–8mm	8mm and larger
Recommended Needle U.S. Size Range	1 to 3	3 to 5	5 to 7	7 to 9	9 to 11	11 and larger

## SWATCH WATCH

### What a Gauge Swatch Can Tell You About Your Yarn (Besides Its Gauge)

Of course, the main way to figure out what's going on with your yarn, and whether it will make a good replacement, is to really get to know it. And you do that by making a swatch. After all, yarn can look just so cute in its balled-up state, but you really don't know what it can grow up to be unless you knit up a bit of it and find out. Some yarn shops even have sample skeins of the yarn they carry so you can swatch some up in a corner of the store and get an idea of what the yarn does before you take it home and marry it.

To make a nice swatch, begin with the needle size suggested on the ball band and cast on one and a half times the number of stitches suggested for a 4" swatch. You need to make a sizable swatch at least 6" wide if you really want to get a sense of the yarn. Knit a couple of rows in garter stitch, then continue in stockinette till you have about 3" of fabric. Stop. Count how many stitches are in a 2"-wide

area smack in the center of the swatch. If all you get is one leg of the stitch at the end, count it as half a stitch. Measure another 2" spot; count again. If you keep getting different numbers, take an average. Then double that to get the gauge for 4". If you have fewer stitches in that 4" swatch than the pattern requires, go down a needle size and swatch some more. If you have too many stitches, go up a size. Work another row of garter stitch before you start the new section, so you can keep them separate. Knit another 3" of stockinette and measure again.

Now you can begin learning about your yarn's personality. What is its "hand"? Meaning, how does it feel in your hand? Lay it over your fist or a can of soda. How does it drape? Will a sweater made of it hang nicely on your body or is it so stiff that it will stand away from you like a cardboard box? Feel up your swatch. Does it have some "body" or is it completely spineless and loose? How much elasticity does it seem to have? Is the yarn so slippery and drapery that the lovely poncho you want to make will hang on you like so much wet hair? If it's very colorful or slubby or furry, you may realize that the busyness of the colors will obscure all those interesting (and time-consuming) knit-and-purl patterns or cables that are the coolest thing about the sweater, and you may decide to save this yarn for something knit in plain stockinette. Or maybe, hopefully, you'll think, Hot damn, I love this yarn and can't wait to make this sweater out of it—it's perfect.

## **GOODNESS GRACIOUS, GREAT BALLS OF FIBER**

### **How Much Yarn Do You Need?**

Once you've decided on your replacement yarn, it's time to figure out how much of the stuff you need to make the sweater (or, if it's yarn you already have on hand, whether you have enough of it). This is super easy to do. Just look at the number of yards of yarn the original pattern calls for, and figure out how many balls of your replacement yarn would be required to yield that many yards of yarn. In the Loonyland example, every 3-ounce ball of Quikstuff contains 135 yards, and for your size the pattern says you'll need 8 balls of it. That means you need at least 1,080 yards of Quikstuff to make this sweater (135 yards per ball  $\times$  8 balls = 1,080 yards).

Now let's say the yarn you want to use, Marvelous Munchkin, is sold in 50-gram balls that contain only 60 yards of yarn apiece. If you're in a car traveling at 60 miles an hour on your way to your LY, how many balls of Marvelous Munchkin will you need to buy when you get there? Well, this math problem is no problem at all: You just divide the total number of yards of yarn needed by the yards per ball of the replacement yarn. In this case, that's  $1,080 \div 60 = 18$ . So, you whip out your credit card and take home 18 balls of the Munchkin yarn, and get down to the business of making your new dream sweater.

# KNITTING A PATTERN USING A DIFFERENT GAUGE YARN

Knitting a sweater out of a different yarn of the same gauge is easy because you can use the pattern exactly as written. But sometimes you really want to use a yarn that's just not going to work at the gauge. You may have chosen a yarn that you thought would knit up to the same gauge as the one called for in the pattern, but it turns out that in order to get that gauge, you have to knit it on such small needles, it makes the fabric really tight. You quickly realize that if you knit the sweater at the gauge, you'll end up with a garment that could stand up by itself. You've tried larger needles and found that this gives you a much nicer, drapier fabric, but, of course, that also gives you an entirely different gauge.

Or maybe there's a sweater you want to knit that calls for such lightweight yarn you just know will take too long for you to knit it. You want to knit it in a bit heavier yarn, say a worsted rather than a sport-weight, and you've already swatched up the yarn and know that your sweater would hang just as nicely using this yarn.

Since you know how important gauge is to any pattern, you already know that changing the gauge is gonna require a good number of changes to the pattern. You also know you can do it. With some time, and a calculator, you can knit whatever you want in whichever yarn you want.

Let's start with a simple alteration, by considering a super easy scarf pattern:

### SCARF FACE

#### Materials

3 skeins Free Woolly (100% wool; 4 oz/350 yds)

#### Gauge

24 sts and 28 rows = 4" in garter st

#### DIRECTIONS

CO 42 st, k in garter st till piece measures 50", BO.

Like most scarf patterns, this one doesn't give you a schematic, but you can tell that this pattern is going to make a scarf that's exactly 7" wide by 50". (You know it's 7" because the designer tells you she gets 4" to every 24 stitches, which is a gauge of 6 stitches to the inch; since she's casting on 42 stitches, and  $42 \div 6 = 7$ .)

Now, let's say you want to knit this in some yarn that's got a different gauge—say, an acrylic yarn that gives you 18 stitches and 24 rows per 4" in garter stitch.

First you need to get your decoder ring: In this case, for the acrylic yarn, that's 4.5 stitches per inch ( $18 \div 4 = 4.5$ ) and 6 rows per inch ( $24 \div 4 = 6$ ). Since you want a scarf that's 7" wide, you just multiply your stitches per inch by the number of inches for the width of the scarf:  $4.5 \times 7 = 31.5$ . Since you can't cast on 31.5 stitches, you'll round it up to 32 stitches and call it a day.

For the next part, the pattern tells you to knit in garter stitch till the scarf measures 50". Well, guess what? That's just what you're gonna do. There's no decreasing, no increasing, nothing special that happens in this pattern on any special row, so you can just knit the light fantastic and put your

dang calculator away for the time being. That's that: You've recalculated your first pattern. Good times.

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## THE GAUGE OF CONSENT

### Dealing with Pattern Repeats

Now let's take a look at that White Stripes ribbed scarf pattern we dissected awhile ago (p. 6). The scarf was knit in a k3, p3 rib that had a gauge of 28 stitches and 15 rows per 4". Once we decoded the pattern, we discovered that the scarf was 5" wide and 60" long, with 5" stripes of alternating colors.

Let's say you want to do it in a thinner yarn that gives you 32 stitches and 24 rows to 4". Your decoder ring tells you that means you get 8 stitches to the inch and 6 rows per inch. You might think you just multiply 8 (the stitches per inch) by 5 (the width of the scarf), get the answer 40, and cast on 40 stitches and start knitting.

But you'd run into a problem, because that ribbing pattern (k3, p3) is based on a 6-stitch repeat and that's why the pattern designer so thoughtfully told you to cast on 36 stitches—36 is a multiple of 6.

If you cast on 40, you'll innocently knit and purl along 6 times, and then, after knitting 36 stitches you'll go knit, knit, knit, purl, OH NO! You'll have run out of stitches, and you won't have finished off your purty ribbing pattern!

Don't panic. You have options. One of them is to say, "Screw the ribbing pattern." So what if you have one lone stitch at the end that doesn't get to make a whole rib? Don't worry about it, just knit away.

Another option is to split the difference: Instead of leaving those 4 stitches at the end of your row where they'll be hanging out possibly looking all kinds of wrong, why don't you stick 2 of them at the beginning of your row and 2 at the end?

Or you could just add another 2 stitches to your cast-on, making it 42, then do your k3, p3 rib according to the pattern. The scarf may be a bit wider than the one the designer envisioned, but who's the hey.

Of course, which options you choose will depend on your own taste and on what it is you're knitting. Adding or subtracting a couple of stitches on a scarf might not matter so much, but doing so on a snug-fitting hat may mean you'll have to give it to your friend's small-headed baby, or, if it's too big, to someone with a Charlie Brown head. In sweater knitting, things can also get sketchy if you're adding extra stitches or taking them away willy-nilly. In those instances, evaluate your options and choose what you think is best. It might not matter if your sweater is ½" wider in the front and the back, making it 1" wider all around. On the other hand, you might prefer to have some stitches on either side of your work that don't quite make up an entire pattern repeat, but at least the thing fits right.

## GAUGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

### Knitting a Sweater in a Different Gauge

Of course, you can also rewrite a pattern for something more complicated than a scarf, using a different gauge. Let's try the baby sweater (p. 8). It was designed using yarn that has a gauge of 18 stitches and 20 rows per 4". But say you've got something really lovely and soft you'd like to use for it that's a bit thinner, and it knits up at 18 stitches and 26 rows per 4".

Now, there are two ways to go about this. One would be to take all the measurements from the schematic—the width of the bottom of the sweater, the length of the sweater, the width and length of

the sleeves, the width of the neck—and calculate the number of stitches and rows you'll need in order to knit all those dimensions and shapes. Luckily, there is an easier way to do this: You can just take the numbers in the existing pattern and resize them up or down in the same proportion that your yarn gauge differs from the pattern's gauge.

The first thing to do is to get your stitch ratio; meaning, the ratio of the stitches per inch of your yarn to the stitches per inch of the pattern's yarn. Here's the formula:

**STITCH RATIO = YOUR STITCH GAUGE DIVIDED BY THE PATTERN'S STITCH GAUGE**

In this case, the stitch ratio is  $18 \div 14 = 1.29$ , which you'll round up to **1.3**.

One nice thing about the above formula is that it doesn't matter if you're plugging in your gauge per 4" or per 1" or per 6½", as long as the pattern gauge is for the same measurement.

There is something interesting to notice about the number **1.3**. Namely, it's greater than 1, meaning that you will have to knit all the stitches PLUS MORE to get the same measurement your pattern is calling for. Actually, you already know that, because you had to knit 18 whole tiresome stitches just to get the same 4" that the pattern designer whipped out in a mere 14 stitches.

Seeing what the ratio turns out to be, and whether it makes sense to you, is one way to remember how to calculate this figure. But if you ever have a hard time remembering the order of the numbers, just remember this: As in everything else in life, YOU COME FIRST! It's always YOUR number on top of the division line, and the pattern designer's gauge at the bottom. YOU COME FIRST, she comes last. You're on top, she's on the bottom. (I mean, who the hell is she, anyway?)

Once you have your stitch ratio, you'll also need to figure out your row ratio. You're a pro at this by now, so I bet you already figured out that:

**ROW RATIO = YOUR ROW GAUGE DIVIDED BY THE PATTERN'S ROW GAUGE**

Once again, you come first!

In the example above, the original Li'l Dumplin' pattern called for 20 rows per 4", and your lighter-weight yarn is giving you 30 rows per 4".

So what's your row ratio? It's 30 (your row gauge) divided by 20 (the pattern's row gauge). And here ya go: it's **1.5**.

Now, to really get down to modifying that pattern for this new yarn, all you need to do is take your stitch ratio and multiply all the stitches in the pattern to get the new stitch numbers, and take your row ratio and multiply all the rows in the pattern to get the new row numbers. Basically, you're adjusting the horizontal measurements on the pattern using your stitch ratio, and the vertical measurements using your row ratio.

#### **A FRONT AND BACK**

For the front and back, where it says to CO 42 stitches, multiply that by your stitch ratio. So, you cast on  $42 \times 1.3 = 54.6$  stitches, which you'll round up to 55 stitches.

Next, you'll knit for 9½", just as the pattern says, in however many rows it takes you to get there and you'll end on a wrong-side row.

#### **B THE NECK**

Next, the pattern says to knit 16 stitches, bind off 10 stitches, and knit 16 stitches.

You'll multiply each number by the stitch ratio:

$$16 \times 1.3 = 20.8, \text{ round up to } 21$$

$$10 \times 1.3 = 13$$

$$16 \times 1.3 = 20.8, \text{ round up to } 21$$

This means you should knit 21 stitches, BO 13, then knit another 21. Just to check your math, the numbers should add up to all the stitches you have on the needle. And, indeed,  $21 + 13 + 21 = 55$ , which is how many stitches you cast on to begin with.

Now things get a bit tricky. The pattern says to BO 1 stitch each neck edge every other row 5 times.

We already figured out that this means you have to knit 8 rows, over which you'll be decreasing 8 stitches. Now, let's multiply both of these by your row and stitch ratios:

$$8 \text{ rows (for decreasing)} \times 1.5 \text{ (row ratio)} = 12 \text{ rows}$$

and

$$8 \text{ stitches (to be decreased)} \times 1.3 \text{ (stitch ratio)} = 10.4, \text{ round down to } 10.$$

So where the original pattern told you to decrease 8 stitches over 8 rows, you'll need to decrease 10 stitches over 12 rows. How can you do that? Again, it's easy: You'll just bind off 1 stitch each side every other row 5 times, which will use up 10 of those rows, and then knit 2 more rows plain. Done deal.

## **C** THE SLEEVES

The pattern says to cast on 21 sleeve stitches. Multiplying that by your stitch ratio gives you  $21 \times 1.3 = 27.3$ , so you'll cast on 27 stitches.

Then you'll knit 2 rows in seed stitch before continuing with stockinette stitch.

Now, you need to end up with 35 stitches  $\times 1.3$ , or 45.5, which you can round *down* to 45 (you'll see why in a second). This means you need to go from 21 stitches to 45 stitches—giving you 24 stitches to increase. Since this is an even number, you can make these increases in pairs. (Now you know why we rounded down, instead of up.) But how? You can increase 2 stitches at a time, 9 times.

To figure out how many rows you need to make those increases over, let's go back to the original pattern. It says to increase every other row 2 times, and every 4th row 5 times. In other words, you'll increase 7 times altogether, adding 2 stitches each time, for a total of 14 stitches increased. And the pattern says to make them over 24 rows  $(2 \times 2) + (4 \times 5)$ .

Multiplying that 24 by your row ratio  $(24 \times 1.5)$  gives you 36. Next, take these rows (36) and divide them by the number of increase rows you need to make (9). Or  $36 \div 9 = 4$ . So, you'll increase 2 stitches on each side of the sleeve every 4 rows, and you'll do it 9 times total.



Unfortunately, many times the division won't work out so neatly. When that happens, just tuck those increase rows here and there as evenly as you can. I told you there was magic involved in getting those numbers in the first place—and if we're gonna muck with magic, we need to use a little fudge. So, let's say you had 10 decrease rows instead of 9 to fit into those 36 rows above.  $3$  divided by  $10$  gives you  $3.6$ . Why not just make half of those decreases— $5$  of them—every  $4$ th row, to use up  $20$  rows, and then make the other  $5$  every  $3$  rows, to use up another  $15$ . Sure, it only adds up to  $35$  rows instead of  $36$ , but that's what makes fudge so delicious: You don't need to worry about it. Or, if you have a really strong stomach, you can take a spin on the Magic Formula (above) to figure out the perfect spacing of increases over the rows you have.



## Hocus-Pocus

### USING THE MAGIC FORMULA TO SPACE INCREASES AND DECREASES EVENLY ALONG A DIAGONAL

A long time ago, during the time of the Greeks, some mathematician with a lot of time on his hands came up with a formula that, thousands of years later, is frequently used by knitters to calculate nice increases and decreases along a diagonal.

I've seen this formula explained in a number of ways, but the one I like best is Maggie Righetti's version, in her wonderful book, *Sweater Design in Plain English*.

Here's my variation on her theme:

Say you have to increase  $28$  stitches over  $91$  rows for a sleeve. First, reduce the rows you're working with to the next even number down. So, here we'll make that  $91$  into  $90$  rows. Next, realize that since you'll be making one increase at each side of the sleeve, you really only need  $14$  spaces in the sleeve to make your  $28$  increases ( $28 \div 2 = 14$ ). Now, divide the number of increases you need to make by the number of rows you have available to you:  $90 \div 14 = 6.42$

Obviously, you can't make those increases every  $6.42$  rows. You probably would, however, like to make your increases only on your right-side rows, or on the knit side in stockinette stitch. To make that happen, you need to find the first even number that's less than your result, and the



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