

## DEMYSTIFYING NEEDLE SIZE, GAUGE, AND YARN

### 1. What is knitting gauge?

Knitting gauge refers to the *number of stitches and rows in a given area of knitting*. To obtain the correct measurements for a garment, you need to obtain the exact number of stitches and rows stated in your pattern. The needle size indicated in the pattern is the one which most knitters will use to achieve this gauge with the recommended yarn. Remember however that every knitter knits a little differently and sometimes, even the type of needles, e.g., plastic, wooden, bamboo, or metal, you use can effect your gauge. Remember, it's the knitting gauge that you are trying to achieve, not the needle size.

### 2. Yarn weight? Isn't all yarn the same? Huh?

Yarn comes in different fibers, fiber combinations, and weights. Yarn is classified by weight—the thickness of the strand of yarn, not the number of plies. Yarn is generally classified as Bulky, Worsted, Sport, and Baby/Sock weights with corresponding gauges. Typically, Bulky weight yarn is 3 to 4 stitches per inch; Worsted weight yarn is 4-1/2 to 5 stitches per inch; Sport weight yarn is 5-1/2 to 6 stitches per inch; and Baby/Sock weight yarn is 7 to 8 stitches per inch. (The Craft Yarn Council of America, a trade association of yarn manufacturers, publishers, and guilds, is developing a set of yarn standards for the industry which will be finalized in 2003.)

When purchasing yarn for a project, check the yarn label or band for the recommended stitch gauge and compare it with the stitch gauge specified by your pattern instructions. When the gauges match, you've selected a yarn that will most likely produce desirable results when the stitch gauge specified in the pattern instructions is obtained.

### 3. What needles should I use?

Knitting needles are made in various sizes and lengths. Pattern instructions typically give the size and type of needle required. It is not advisable to change the size unless you find it necessary in order to obtain the correct gauge.

Straight needles are used when working back and forth in rows. They come in lengths of 10, 12, and 14 inches and in sizes 0-1-2-3-4-5-6-etc. The larger the number for the needle, the larger the size stitches that are created. Double pointed needles come in sets of four or five. They are used for socks, mittens, and any articles made in rounds. Circular needles are used in making seamless sweaters, skirts, or parts of garments when a seam is not desired.

### 4. How do I know what my gauge is?

Make a gauge sample starting with the needle size suggested on your yarn label or band. Cast on enough stitches to work a sample at least 5 inches in width. Work in stockinette stitch or in the stitch pattern specified in your pattern instructions for 4 to 5 inches. Break the yarn and thread it through the stitches and slip them off your needle. Do not bind off or measure your sample while it is still on the needles -- sometimes this distorts the stitches and the sample's fabric.

For your stitch gauge, take a ruler and align it along the left side of a column of stitches in the center portion of your gauge sample. Measure horizontally across by counting the number of stitches across two or four inches. Is the number of stitches per inch exactly the same as the stitch gauge specified in your pattern instructions?

For your row gauge, count the number of rows along two or four inches vertically down the center of the sample's fabric. Typically, obtaining your row gauge is less important than obtaining the exact stitch gauge since lengthwise portion of garments are usually given as a measurement.

### **5. Yikes! My gauge doesn't match that specified in the pattern. Now, what?**

If you have more stitches than your pattern instructions require then, your knitting is too tight and you need to adjust to larger sized needles. Work another gauge sample using the larger sized needles and take another measurement.

If you have fewer stitches than your pattern instructions require then, your knitting is too loose and you need to adjust to smaller sized needles. Work another gauge sample using the smaller sized needles and take another measurement.

Keep adjusting your needle size until you've achieved the gauge specified in your pattern instructions. In general, changing your needle by 2 sizes adjusts your gauge by 1 stitch. When you've obtained the gauge specified in your pattern instructions, write down your needle size you used for reference.