



## Swatching (and measuring) in Pattern – A Primer

What does it mean to swatch “in pattern”? And how the heck do you MEASURE in pattern – especially when the pattern makes stitches difficult to count?

### Swatching in Pattern

If you’ve ever knit a cabled sweater, you might have noticed that it takes a lot more yarn than a sweater knit in stockinette stitch or lace. Some patterns create more compressed sections of stitches, while others expand. If the majority of the fabric of your project contains cables or lace, you’ll want to swatch in that pattern to get the most accurate measurement.

### Swatching Flat & Round

A pattern won’t always tell you whether you should swatch flat or in the round. Personally, I leave that up to the individual knitter. It’s your job to decide how to get the best results for you, and if you’re not sure, I recommend doing a round vs. flat swatch test to see if your results vary. If they do, then adjusting your swatches for flat vs. round will be important.

The general rule of thumb is that if you’re going to knit a pattern in the round, you should swatch in the round. If you’re going to knit a pattern flat, you should swatch flat.

But it’s important to note that sometimes swatching in the round can be misleading. I encourage you to consider a variety of factors before you adopt a hard and fast rule, one way or the other - you’ll see what I mean in the next column.

Knitting isn’t about following rules . It’s about understanding the process - and the way you knit - and finding what works best for you.

Knitting a round swatch with any needles OTHER than the same EXACT kind of needles you will use for your sweater can give you misleading results. This means you can’t trust a swatch that you knit with bamboo needles or DPNs or Addi Flexi-Flips, if you’re using regular metal circular needles for your sweater. Magic Loop can change your gauge. Sharp tip needles vs blunt needles can change your gauge. Be sure that whatever you use for your swatch is the same needle you’ll be using for your sweater. The issue relates to different types of needle tip (blunt/sharp), different composition (bamboo/metal/wood/plastic/other), and different type of needle altogether (DPN, straight, circular).

**The reason for this is simple:** Most knitters find that their knit rows and purl rows don’t maintain the same gauge as they go, which means the gauge they knit on a flat sample might vary (possibly a LOT) from the gauge they’ll get when they knit in the round. Knitting in the round means you’ll likely never be working any wrong side rows, and those wrong side rows (usually these are purl rows) are likely to consume a little more yarn and create slightly larger stitches.

This isn’t true 100% of the time – almost nothing in knitting is true every time for every knitter. This is why we learn to adapt the rules to our own needs.

So... should you swatch in the round for a project you'll knit in the round? The answer is: It's up to you. The most important thing is that you swatch. If swatching in the round is a barrier and makes you less likely to want to do it, then swatch flat. A flat swatch is better than no swatch at all.

If you DO want to knit a swatch in the round... how do you do it? [This video](#) shows how to swatch for colorwork in the round - the same method can be done for any stitch pattern (it doesn't have to be colorwork).

**Remember:** No matter how you plan to knit your swatch – but especially if you're swatching in the round – you will need to cast on extra stitches to account for the wonky edges. Give yourself a minimum of 10 extra stitches (Meaning: if the pattern gauge is 21 stitches over 4 inches, then cast on 31). You are always measuring the interior of a swatch – not the edges – so extra stitches are always necessary.

## How To Measure Your Swatch in Pattern (& When)

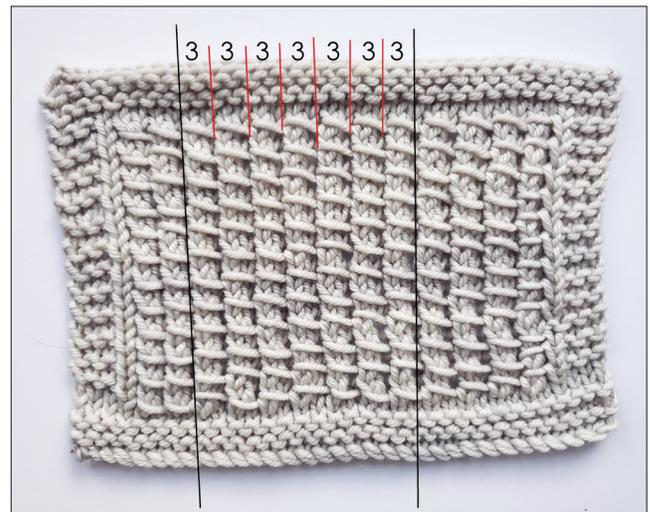
A regular swatch knit in stockinette stitch is pretty easy to measure. If you've downloaded the gauge worksheet (you can find it [here](#)), then you already know my recommendations for standard swatching and measuring.

But how do you measure when you're knitting a swatch in pattern? And when should you swatch in the pattern, rather than in stockinette stitch?

First, a pattern should tell you in advance which stitch you should use to knit your swatch. If it doesn't tell you, the default is stockinette stitch (knit on the right side, purl on the wrong side). But in cases where the garment is knit with an over-all pattern, you'll generally be asked to knit your swatch in the special pattern that covers the majority of the project. In that case, it

can seem a little confusing to know how to measure.

**Here's a trick:** Always look closely at the pattern to track the number of stitches that create the texture. For example, in the photo below the stitch pattern consists of a slipped stitch, and then two stitches. So for every horizontal "pass over," I know I'm counting 3 stitches. You don't have to physically be able to "see" the stitches to be able to count them when you use the stitch pattern instructions as a guide. This swatch is larger than 4 inches/10 cm so I measured over a 4 inch section away from the edges and there are 21 stitches.



One last thing – if measuring in pattern is difficult on the right side, try measuring it on the wrong side. Sometimes that's simpler.

## Should You Block Your Swatch?

Yes. Always yes. Blocking is beneficial for several reasons.

1. Blocking makes it easier to measure your stitches because they are flat and even.
2. Blocking gives you a more accurate measurement. You should always plan to wet block your finished garment, which means you should also wet block your swatch. The goal of blocking isn't to stretch the swatch to make it bend

to your will, but rather to thoroughly saturate it, press out the excess water and pin it flat – just barely taut with the edges smooth. This will help you account for growth in the pattern and will allow the stitch pattern to relax and expand as it will in the finished garment. Many yarns grow when they are blocked, so the only way to account for the finished size is to make sure you block your swatch before you begin.

In the following photo, one mitt is blocked and one is not. Can you tell which is which?



Unblocked

Blocked

You can see the way blocking relaxes the fiber, makes the edges lay more neatly and evens-out the stitches. Blocking works magic on the finished product – it's an important step, and I encourage you not to skip it (not even with your swatch).