

COMBINING PATTERN STITCHES

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Many sweater designs combine textures produced by different pattern stitches for practical and esthetic purposes. For example, ribbing is often used as an edging for a garment knitted in stockinette stitch. By itself, a fabric knitted in stockinette stitch will curl at the edges. Ribbing, which is a balanced, flat pattern, will prevent the fabric from curling. In addition, the elasticity of ribbing will help hold the shape of the cuff and neck edges. Worked in a fancy yarn or incorporating cables or twisted stitches for added texture, ribbing becomes a key structural component of a garment as well as a lovely decorative accent.

Pattern stitches can be combined in vertical or horizontal arrangements to add texture, structure, and visual appeal. When combining pattern stitches horizontally, be sure to swatch them together to get a true understanding of how they work as a single fabric in terms of drape, elasticity, total width as a unit, weight, visual appeal, etc. When combining pattern stitches vertically, swatch each one separately to accurately measure the width and length of each. Then combine them in another swatch to see how they work as a single fabric in terms of drape, etc.

THE GAUGE SWATCH

Once you have selected yarn, evaluated its fiber properties, researched and selected the pattern stitch options, you're ready to knit a swatch. Swatches allow you to see exactly how the yarn works as a fabric and to determine the best needle size. They also can be used to estimate the total amount of yarn needed for the entire garment (see page 65). Do not rush this important step. The first time you work with a particular yarn, begin by working a preliminary swatch in stockinette stitch, regardless of the stitch pattern you plan to use in the garment. This will provide a pure, uninterrupted example of how the yarn will feel as fabric. Using the needle size recommended by the manufacturer (listed on the ball band), knit a swatch that measures 6" to 8" (15 to 20.5 cm) square. Block the swatch as you plan to block the sweater (see page 261). When dry, evaluate how the fabric feels (the "hand" of the fabric). If the swatch feels too dense, try again with larger needles; if it feels too loose, try again with smaller needles. Repeat the swatching process until you're happy with the results. You are then ready to knit a gauge swatch in your chosen pattern stitch.

The accuracy in fit of the finished garment depends on a representative swatch and accurate gauge measurement. Although a 4" (10 cm) square will tell you if the needle size is appropriate, it is not large enough to indicate how the stitches and fabric will behave as a garment. As you knit and the yarn flows through your fingers, you will fall into a rhythm. This rhythm will affect your gauge. The rhythm at which you'll knit across 4" (10 cm) is not the same as the rhythm at which you'll knit across 20" (51 cm). You'll want the swatch to be large enough so that you'll hold and manipulate it the same way you'll manipulate the garment pieces. For best results, this swatch should measure about 8" (20.5 cm) square and include two or