

# Hints from Deb

## Some thoughts on Gauge, Needle Sizes and Sizing

I often say to people that the three most important words in knitting are: Gauge, Gauge and GAUGE. I also often tell customers not to worry about the exact needle size in the pattern. What does it all mean and how are needles and gauge related?

First, it is important to remember that we all knit differently; not only in differing styles (European or Continental, vs. English or even some style uniquely yours) but also in tension. Some are loose knitters and some are tight. Some truly blessed individuals knit right at gauge. I find I am a loose knitter most of the time, but am far more likely to get gauge when I use the yarn specified in the pattern. That is not always possible, though, so what to do? Knit a gauge swatch!

Your gauge is defined as the number of stitches and rows in one inch of knitting. This is usually measured over 4 inches (10 cm) for more accurate results. Yarn labels often suggest a gauge for that yarn and express it either as st/inch or st/10 cm and rows/inch or 10 cm. They also usually suggest a needle size. Remember: it is just a suggestion! This information is very useful when substituting yarns.

To knit a gauge swatch, look at the suggested gauge and then cast on a number of stitches that will give you a piece about 5 inches wide. Ex: the gauge is 5 st/inch, cast on 25 st. That will allow room to measure your gauge accurately without using the edges. Knit enough to make a square and then bind off loosely. Always check the gauge with the swatch off the needles.

Here's how to measure. Lay a ruler over the swatch in the middle and count the number of stitches you have in a 4 inch space. Lay the ruler up and down and count the number of rows in 4 inches as well. Compare these numbers to the gauge given in your pattern. If it's right, you are ready to start knitting. If not, it's time to put on the thinking cap.

### **If your swatch measures:**

*too many st/inch, you need to go to a larger needle.*

A larger needle will give you fewer stitches per inch.

*too few st/inch, use a smaller needle.*

A smaller needle gives more stitches per inch.

If the gauge is very close, you may choose to go with it. How close is "very close"? That depends a bit on what you are knitting. Gauge is less important for scarves, shawls, afghans, etc. For a sweater, it can be critical. For example: a mens sweater calling for 100 st on the back. If the gauge is 4 st/ inch, the piece will measure 25 inches wide. If you got 4.5st/inch, the piece would be 22.5 inches wide and the sweater would come out 44 inches around instead of 50. Big difference!

# *Hints from Deb,* con't

## **Some thoughts on Gauge, Needle Sizes and Sizing**

Knit a second swatch on the new needle size and repeat the measurements. If you like, you might wash the final swatch square to test how the finished garment will react to washing and also to see if there will be any shrinking, etc.

If your row gauge is off, it is less critical unless you are knitting a project with a specific number of pattern rows. Then it could make a difference in the depth of the armhole for example. You may have to adjust for that, remembering to also adjust the sleeve cap.

Here are some other things you should know about needle sizes:

**KNIT YOUR SWATCH ON THE NEEDLES YOU WILL USE FOR THE PROJECT.**

Each manufacturer's sizes are different. There is not strict standardization in the knitting needle industry. In addition, different materials handle, feel and knit differently. You would not want to swatch on bamboo needles and then knit on addi Turbo's. The gauge will be different.

Also, be aware that there are at least 3 sizing systems out there. Pay close attention in the pattern to what sizes they are using. US sizes usually are preceded by the "US". They are mostly whole numbers that go up in size as the numbers go up.

In some older English patterns you may see UK (British) sizes-- they are also whole numbers, but the size goes up as the number goes Down. Example: a baby sweater on fine yarn might be knit on a US size 3 or a UK size 11.

Most patterns today use Metric or European sizing. The metrics are expressed as decimals: 4.0, 2.75, etc. A US 3 is a 3.25 needle in metric sizing. Be careful when purchasing your needles to get the right size.

If the project is done in the round, swatch in the round. Most of us do not get the same gauge in the round as we do going back and forth. We purl differently than we knit! You can do a circular swatch on double pointed needles by knitting across, sliding the stitches to the right hand end of the needle without turning the work and draping the yarn very loosely across the back, then knitting again. Get enough yarn. Tighter knitting on a smaller needle uses up more yards of yarn than looser knitting to make the same size square. If you know you are tight or think you want to make the gauge tighter than the pattern calls for, allow extra yarn. Be sure to pick up a Free Woolery ruler when you visit us-- it's very handy for checking gauge! Knit a second swatch on the new needle size and repeat the measurements. If you like, you might wash the final swatch square to test how the finished garment will react to washing and also to see if there will be any shrinking, etc.



[www.TheWooleryNH.com](http://www.TheWooleryNH.com)