

10 Essential Skills All Beginning Knitters Should Master First



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Introduction

When you first decide you'd like to learn to knit, you might be overwhelmed by all the skills and knowledge that experienced knitters seem to take for granted. I know I was.

- What knitting needle should I use? Are some better than others?
- What do all those symbols mean on the yarn labels?
- Am I buying the right kind of Yarn?
- This Yarn is so hard to work with, are there better yarns for beginners?
- Which type of cast-on method is the easiest to learn?
- Are there any beginner stitches that are easier to learn than others?
- What is a gauge, and why do so many knitting experts tell you to get it right?
- I'm not even sure how to hold these needles. Is there an easier way for beginners?

- I have a tight budget. Where can I get supplies as cheaply as possible?
- So, I've started knitting, and my stitches look awful? Any hope for me?
- Oops, I just dropped a stitch and can't seem to get it back on my needle.
- How do I decipher these knitting pattern instructions?
- What are all those symbols, and what do they mean?
- OK, I've mastered most of the beginning skills; where do I go now?

Have you heard yourself asking some or most of these questions? It's very frustrating when you first decide to pursue a new hobby and don't know where to go for help. Ideally, you have a best friend who is an experienced knitter and has plenty of time to teach you the ropes (or yarns). But how often does that happen?

Years ago, we were lucky to have a mother, grandmother, or aunt who had plenty of time and motivation to teach the next generation how to knit. If you find yourself in that category, good for you, and, go for it. You are the lucky one. That's not the case anymore, sadly for most people.

What Path Led You to Knit?

You might have received a lovely homemade gift, loved the feel of the Yarn or the intricacies of the stitches, and just felt you need to learn this craft yourself. Perhaps you were lucky to be the recipient of some hand-me-downs from the previous generation and felt a longing to contact these masters who knew how to knit.

Maybe you have some free time on your hands and love scarves, wool sweaters, fashions that only hand knitters know how to make. Many people come into this craft because they are expecting a baby or want to create cute objects for their young child. Perhaps you know someone who is expecting; what's better than a hand-knit baby blanket for that pregnant best friend.

I can tell you what led to my interest in knitting, but I guess that everyone's path is just a little different. It doesn't matter what led you here, but what does matter is that you're here, and I'm so glad that you are.

Possibly, you read somewhere about all the [health benefits of knitting](#).

Now that You Are Here, What Do You Need to Know?

Where do I start? Most beginners start here. What is the best way to learn how to do this craft in the most practical way possible to begin projects asap?

That's where I come in.

There are a few tips and tricks that all beginners eventually learn, but I'm here to speed up the process.

You need to know some things before you even buy a pair of needles and a skein of Yarn.

After those initial quick lessons, I hope the first tutorials will jump-start your path to becoming a successful, competent knitter.

So, by now, you're probably asking, just how much all of this is going to cost?

You're in luck because the cost is minimal. It's free. That's right, you heard me, IT'S FREE.

These first ten steps will get you knitting quickly, and you won't need to pay a dime. No need to purchase expensive books, no classes to join, no need to bother your busy knitting friends; you can learn all of this at no cost to you.

Why am I doing this? Simple, I'm hoping that you will enjoy this needlecraft as much as I do and will come back again and again for patterns and further instructions. You see, I happen to be at a point in my life where I'd like to be your mentor. I want to share my passion with you. I was lucky enough to have received free training at a very young age, and now I feel the need to give back. By doing this, I hope to inspire some of you to do the same thing – teach your children or the next generation to keep this needle art alive for generations to come.

What will you get with this first free tutorial?

I've picked the essential skills any beginner needs to know and include them in this introductory course.

- 1. What You need to know about Knitting Needles**
- 2. What every needle crafter should know about Yarn and wool**
- 3. Choose the correct supplies and tools you will need for almost all projects.**
- 4. Understand gauge and how to make your first gauge swatch.**
- 5. How to hold the needles and cast on stitches**

6. What are the two most basic knit stitches?
7. How can I use these stitches in a variety of patterns?
8. How do I read a knitting pattern? What do all those terms and abbreviations mean?
9. How do I decipher those symbols in a pattern?
10. All the rest

What do you need to Know About Knitting Needles?

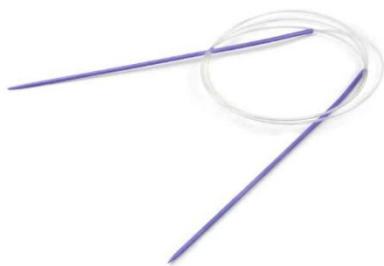
It would be so easy if I told you to go out and buy a pair of knitting needles that looked pretty or felt good in your hands. While that is not a bad bit of advice, it's much more complicated than that. Nowadays, you have so many different choices in the needles you buy that make purchasing decisions a big nightmare.

You will learn that there are different sizes of needles and various types of needles, depending on what kind of project you plan to use them for. What needles we use for socks is different from what we might choose to create a sweater. A scarf, shawl, or cowl, might need an entirely different type of needle.

Once you read the article, consider the types of projects you might enjoy making. Most people cannot purchase an entire set of needles of each type, so narrowing down the options is advisable. Consider the kind of needles that most beginners need.

Learn about [Knitting needles](#)

Beginner Needles



May I recommend that you purchase several pairs, but do so in the most cost-conscious way?

1. Bamboo needles are easy for beginners to use: They are comfortable in your hands, come in almost all sizes, and allow the stitches to move quickly on the needles. Stitches are not so easy to fall off of bamboo needles so that you will be less likely to lose stitches, but you will also not be able to work as fast as you might with other types of needles.
2. You may want to consider purchasing one of the three major types of knitting needles: Straight, double-pointed, and circular. Each type of needle is used for a specific purpose.

Double-pointed needles are needed for projects that are worked in the round, such as socks.

Circular needles are also used to work in the round but can also be used to work back and forth on a solid flat surface. Many large projects such as sweaters and blankets are worked on circular needles.

Everything else is worked on **straight needles**. These needles come in two sizes (10 inches and 14 inches). Obviously, suppose you are working on a project that requires that many stitches be placed on the needle. In that case, you will want to choose a longer needle. Shorter projects such as scarves, washcloths, or shawls can be made easily on 10-inch needles.

3. Should you purchase an entire set of needles at one time? That depends on how serious you are to pursuing this needlecraft. Sometimes you can save money by buying a whole group of needles, such as a set of circular needles in popular sizes. There is a price saving if you care to do it this way. On the other hand, you might find yourself drawn to a set of needles that includes a wide variety of sizes, some of which you may never use.
4. The most popular size yarns fall into the number 4 and 5 yarns, worsted weight, and bulky. If you look at the yarn labels for these wools, you will discover that most in this size requirement, a size US 8 needle. The most popular knitting needles for most projects fall into the range of 7 to 10 US needles. Keep that in mind if you are on a tight budget and consider

purchasing either a set of straight or circular needles in sizes 7, 8, 9, 10, and 10.5 needles.

Do you have questions about purchasing needles? I'm here to help. Please send me a question, and I'll try to help you understand your choices.

What Every Needle Crafter Should Know about Yarn and Wool



There is virtually an unlimited number of yarns, wools, and other fibers out there for creating that next masterpiece. An incredible abundance of choices that most knitters find irresistible. Few ready-made garments on the market can compete with the vast array of wools available to make your own. This assortment of possibilities appeals to do-it-yourselfers making knitting a superior choice for unique designs for your wardrobe.

On the other hand, if you don't recognize what's available out there, you might get lost. There are so many options that knowing a little about what types of wools, synthetics, and other fibers available might make a lesson in and of itself.

- Which fibers are machine washable?
- Which fibers are the softest options?
- Which are the most breathable?
- Easiest to work with?
- Warmest in cold temperatures?
- Cool in warmer temperatures?

You may be inclined to purchase the first wool that looks good to you without understanding its background or even if it would be suitable for the project you are considering.

Most beginners will work with inexpensive yarns made from synthetic fibers, and that is perfectly fine. The end projects can be machine washed and dried quickly. Once you get beyond the beginning stages, though, you might want to investigate the different types of fibers available and branch out into natural wools, cotton, and silks.

Do match your project goals for the kinds of threads you prefer. If you are a wash-and-wear sort of person, expensive wools may be beyond your comfort limits. No matter how beautiful a sweater you create, if you have no interest in handwashing and all the aftercare, that complicated worked sweater's care may be more trouble than it's worth.

There is only one vital suggestion that I can give beginners: to choose a light-colored yarn. Dark blues, grays, and blacks may be fashionable, but you can't see the stitches as well as if you chose a light beige, tan, or white Yarn. Pastels are fine but steer clear of any extremely dark, textured, or bumpy yarns, at least initially.

Learn about [Yarn and Wool for Knitting Projects](#).

Understand gauge and how to make your first gauge swatch



You won't get very far in your knitting career/hobby without encountering the word "gauge"? Or Tension

But what does that even mean?

I'll be the first to admit that I never understood how vital gauge was when I first learned to knit and created an utterly useless sweater. It was supposed to be a gift, but after weeks of work, I finally just abandoned it.

What a waste, and that was when I tried to find out what went wrong. Luckily, I had a grandmother who knitted sweaters every year, and hers always seemed to fit fine. That is the point where I was introduced to gauge for knitting patterns.

Gauge is a degree as to the size of your knit stitches. No two knitters knit the same. Some knit tight stitches, where others tend to create very loose stitches.

Based on our own style of knitting, we can predict that the product will fit us with the gauge. The pattern designer provides a gauge and can make changes based on whether we knit looser or tighter than the designer.

Gauge or Tension includes two parts:

- size of the stitches
- size of the rows

In other words, gauges measure the height as well as the width of your stitches.

Learn [why gauge is important](#) and how to make a gauge swatch here.

Choose the correct supplies and tools you will need for almost all projects.

Every craft involves a list of tools, and knitting is no exception. Yarn and needles are an obvious addition to this crafter's toolbox, but it doesn't end there. What is needed in every knitter's bag to perform all the required tasks that beginning and intermediate knitters perform?

Knitters have a set of supplies that they keep handy in their toolbox, so they will be ready for almost anything a beginner might encounter.

I have provided a basic "wishlist" of supplies for every beginner. The good news is that supplies are minimal, and most beginning knitters can make do with even less. The most common expenses include the first set of needles and a suitable size yarn. But it doesn't end there if you are seriously interested in this niche.

You will need to consider the following items to add to your knitting bag:

- Yarn
- Knitting Needles
- Tapestry Needles
- Stitch holders
- Row Counters
- Stitch Markers
- A Crochet hook
- Knitting Gauge or tape measure
- Straight pins or T-pins and blocking boards.

- Scissors
-

Optional but handy to have:

- Ball winder or Yarn swifter
 - Pop pom maker
 - Bobbins
 - Yarn bowl
 - Yarn wash or detergent for hand washables
-

And I've been around for a while. I can tell you what your grandmother and great-grandmother used before all these beautiful inventions became available.

(Think, light bulb, grandpa's arms, cardboard, safety pins, scraps of yarns, paper, and pencil (i.e., empty side of an old envelope), rubber bands, bath towels,) So, if you don't want to spend a lot of money but may have some of these items still available in your home use them. They worked for generations of knitters.

Discover what [Knitting Supplies](#) are essential to place on your wishlist.

1. How to hold the needles and cast on stitches



If you've watched a few Knitting YouTubers, you've probably figured out that there is no ONE way to hold the needles. Everyone does it a little differently. Remember when you were in elementary school and watched your friends draw a picture or write a sentence? What, you never noticed?

That's OK because it's been a long time for me too. The point is that not everyone holds a pencil the same, so why should they hold knitting needles the same. What is right for you may not be suitable for everyone. If you are just getting started with knitting, you may want to check out our tutorial on how to hold knitting needles. These are just suggestions, though, and you should practice and see what feels right to you.

Casting on is the term used to begin a project by placing stitches on your needles. There are many ways to do this, but I will demonstrate three other methods for you to try.

You will eventually find that one works best for you. You might decide that particular cast-on methods work best with different types of stitches or projects as

you gain a little experience. It's a good idea to learn all three because when you begin to create projects using a pattern, the instructions may call for a specific type of cast-on method.

How to [Cast On](#)

What are the two most basic knit stitches?

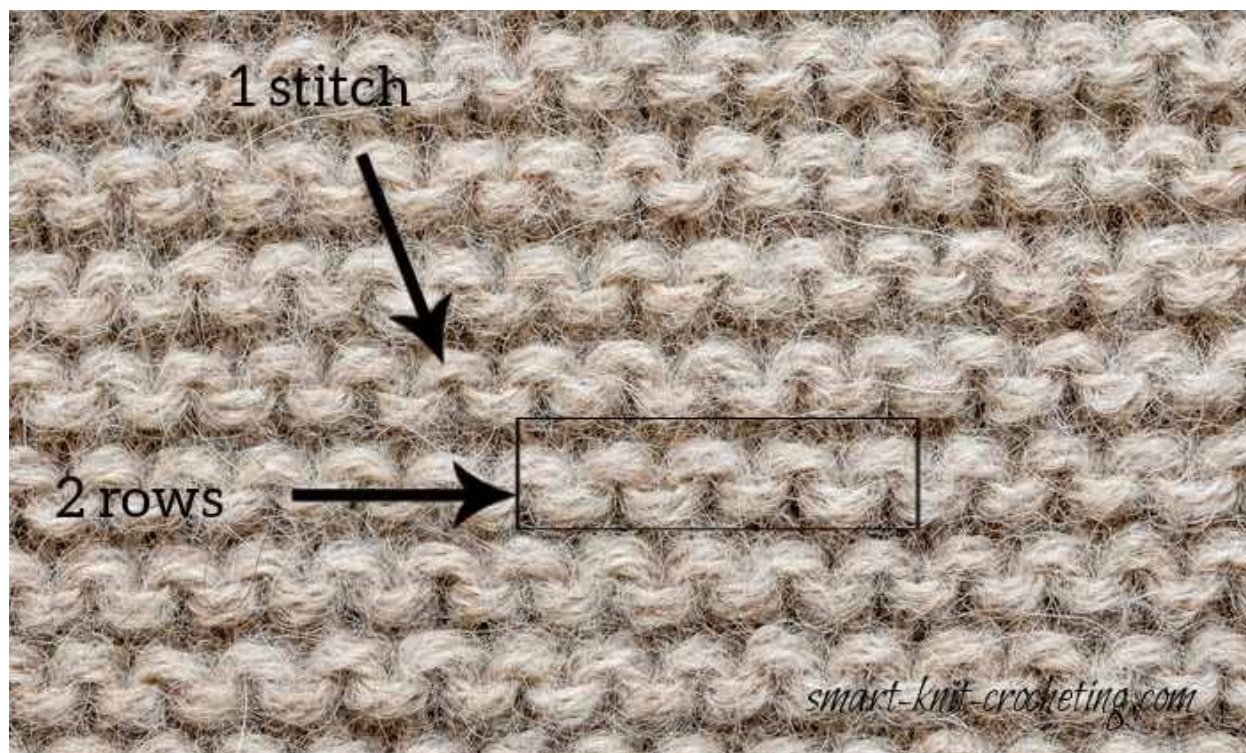
After you master the cast-on method of your choice, you will be pleased to know that two basic stitches build the foundation for all types of projects and additional stitches. Once you master the basic knit and purl stitches, there is no limit to the number of other stitches you can use simply by combining them in different patterns or working them in slightly different ways.

So, before you go off to choose the first project or pattern to follow, start by practicing the knit and purl stitches. To help you along, I've created a series of tutorials to help you learn these two basic stitches and several more so you can practice them in different combinations.

How to [Make the Knit Stitch](#)

How to [Make the Purl Stitch](#)

If you don't yet know how to [cast on stitches](#), you will want to check out this tutorial first.



How can I use these stitches in a variety of patterns?

This is where the real fun begins – combining the knit and purl stitches to create projects. Now, I don't think you would want to tackle a sweater or dress just yet, but it is certainly possible to do so with only the knowledge of these two stitches.

Most beginners want to put their knitting to good use to make things for themselves and their friends, decorate their homes, or even give to charities. The good news is that you can do all these things by combining these two stitches, the knit and the purl stitch. To make it a little easier, I'm going to guide you through progressively more complex challenges, starting with the easiest and moving towards more complex patterns, all of which only use knits and purls. Sounds challenging? It can be, but we will go slowly, and if you follow these steps, you'll feel like an expert in no time. Don't let the names of the stitch patterns frighten you.

Don't be surprised if you discover more than one name for each pattern depending on where you live in the world.

Here is the progression that I recommend, and as I add more pages, I will update this cheat sheet to stay current.

- [Stockinette Stitch](#)
- [Ribbing](#)
- [Seed or Moss stitch](#)
- [Basketweave](#)
- [Waffle Stitch](#)
- [Cable](#)

For this first set of beginner tutorials, I may or may not introduce different ways to alter the stitches to create even more exciting designs. If I feel that they might be too tricky for a beginner, I will leave those changes until later down the road. Just know that there are ways to make even these beginner stitches look quite different in many cases. My goal here is to make you an expert knitter in as short a period as possible.

How do I read a knitting pattern?

Like crochet patterns, knitting instructions may be written down in English (or your native language) or presented in pictures. I learned how to knit using written instructions, but many people begin the knitting journey by studying pictures with little symbols the each represents a stitch. In this segment of the Beginning Knitting Tutorial, I will concentrate on English patterns (translate to your own language).

Before you can completely comprehend all the instructions written in a pattern, you will need to understand two concepts. The first concept is that instructions are written using a massive number of abbreviations. This is done to keep pattern length to a manageable size, but it also creates problems for the beginner who may need to learn what every abbreviation stands for. This would be the first step to understanding a knit pattern. For example, if you encountered a pattern that began like the one below, would you know what to do?

CO 47 (50,53,56) sts. Beg with a (WS) purl row, work in St st for 15 ½ (15 ½, 15 ½, 15 ½ “)/39.5 (39.5, 39.5, 39.5) cm.

Once you understand most abbreviations, these instructions sound relatively straightforward. I have provided a downloadable form of abbreviations that you can place in your knitting bag for quick access in the tutorial.

The second part of the lesson deals with knitting terminology. While both go hand in hand, the terminations may need to be understood, and practices before the abbreviations make much sense. I've added these two concepts together because both are necessary to understand a knit pattern. You may choose to concentrate on one before the other or tackle them both together. Either way, chose the method that makes the most sense to you. For example, take the first line of a pattern that I mentioned above:

CO 47 (50,53,56) sts. Beg with a (WS) purl row, work in St st for 15 ½ (15 ½, 15 ½, 15 ½ "/>

It helps to know CO stands for cast on, but you will also need to know how to cast on.

St st stands for stockinette stitch, which is fine, but if you haven't figured out how to do the stockinette stitch, then the abbreviation is relatively meaningless. Do you see my point? All of this will become clear when you read my tutorial.

[List of Abbreviations, Knitting Terms, and Vocabulary](#)

[How do I decipher those symbols in a pattern?](#)

As I mentioned in the last module, knitting instructions can be written in English (or your language) or presented in pictorial form. Many pattern creators will provide both. But before you throw your hands up and declare that you need a Rosetta stone to decipher these hieroglyphics, read the following tutorial. The most basic instructions will be easy to master because the symbols for knit and purl stitches are simply \square ●.

They do get a bit more complicated but don't let that deter you.

Some patterns also provide color charts that can be extremely useful when creating designs in more than one color or in patterns where the colors change within the row. In this case, the picture instructions are almost more straightforward to use than the written instructions.

You may not need these intricate color diagrams if all you are doing is changing colors at the end of rows. If you plan to make objects that use more than one color in the same row, a color diagram is beneficial.

There are many different types of stranded knitting, including Fair Isle, Norwegian, Swedish, Icelandic, Andean and many more. These techniques are not considered beginner stitches and might be the basis of a more advanced tutorial. Knowing that a basic understanding of symbols will help you decide to move on to more advanced techniques.

[Knitting Patterns](#)

Reading [Knitting Charts](#)

All the Rest

You're probably wondering what "all the rest" encompasses, and that is totally understandable. We've covered quite a bit of ground already. What more do we need to know? The truth is that there are only a couple more skills I feel all beginners need to know, and they are:

1. How to join yarns
2. How to make increases
3. How to decrease
4. How to bind off
5. How to correct mistakes

These five topics are categories in and of themselves and really can't be combined into one article because you could get overwhelmed. I've attacked each one as a stand-alone topic, but as I mentioned at the onset, I wanted to give you 10 lessons, so think of this as a bonus.

Joining Yarns

At some point, you may want to create a scarf or other larger project that requires more than one skein of Yarn. Knowing how to join the new skein is a valuable skill to learn.

Likewise, you may love stripes and want to create a blanket that incorporates more than one color. How will you add that new contrasting color? Joining yarns is a beginner skill that all new knitters need to master and use repeatedly. There are more than one way to accomplish this skill.

Don't neglect to check out the tutorial.

[Read how to Join Yarns](#)

How to Increase

Unless you plan to make straight scarves, dishcloths, or hot pads, you will eventually need to understand how to increase. This skill comes into play when deciding to make a small project for yourself, your baby, or even your dog. Shaping is essential if you expect your project to fit someone and why bother creating a beautiful sweater if it won't fit? Increasing is not complicated, but it is an essential skill that all beginners need to feel competent.

Read, [How to Make an Increase](#)

How to Decrease

This is the opposite of increasing, but the reason behind understanding and accomplishing this skill is the same – Shaping a garment that truly fits. It's also handy for patterns to reduce the number of stitches on the needle. Garments of almost any kind require the knowledge of increasing or decreasing.

As with other skills in knitting, there is more than one way to increase and decrease. The pattern will tell you what to do but practicing beforehand is helpful. After all, you don't want to mess up that expensive sweater you are knitting, especially if you're not entirely familiar with the terminology (i.e., double left-slanting decrease, double vertical decrease, slipping a stitch purl wise, just to name a few.

The simplest way to decrease one stitch at a time is to knit two stitches together. Where you would be knitting a purl row, you would purl two stitches together. There are other ways to decrease so you will want to check out the link below to be taken to my decrease page.

[Learn how to decrease](#)

How to Bind Off

If you are working on each tutorial by making a small, knitted swatch, chances are you might want to bind off your work before beginning a new tutorial? Yes?

Binding off is the term used to remove the stitches from your needles without allowing them to unravel. You can then use all these great little swatches in a new project, say a pillow and show off your remarkable work. Without knowing how to bind off, though, puts you at a disadvantage. There are several ways to bind off, with the basic knit bind off and the basic purl bind off being the easiest to understand and do. There are a few others you might want to learn as well, and this article will help you understand your options and how to do a variety of bind-off techniques.

[Learn how to bind off](#)

How to Correct Mistakes

OK, so no one wants to think about mistakes, but alas, they happen all the time. Stitches are uneven, you've dropped a stitch, the edge stitches don't appear as the others in the row, well, relax... we've all done all of these. We don't want you to abandon your work just because you've found a mistake because there is hope. You can correct your errors.

My knitting experience has shown me that it is not as easy to correct a knitting mistake as it is with crocheting, yet it is doable. No error cannot be fixed if you know how to correct it. With this final tutorial, I will show you how to create even stitches, pick up missing stitches, and correct other minor mistakes. This is one tutorial not to miss.

Learn how to [make even knit stitches](#)

[How to pick up lost stitches](#)

Now it's your turn.

I hope I've delivered what I set out to provide, a basic 10 step approach to help newbies learn to knit. Now, I need your help. Your help in the form of constructive criticism. What helped, what was unhelpful, what was confusing, what could be improved.

This website, [Smart Knit Crocheting](#), is a project based on a passion of mine. Eventually, I do hope that income from ads and affiliate links will add to my retirement. Yes, I am retired, and anyone knows that lives in the US, social security may not cover all your basic needs.

So, please help me improve this site. If you see any mistakes, please take the time to let me know. I will be in your debt. If you can't find what you need on my site, again, I am totally open to suggestions.

In the meantime, I am so thrilled you took your valuable time to get to the end of these tutorials. I thank you very much. But I don't want you to go away empty-handed.

References

These are a couple of my favorite knitting books.

[Vogue Knitting: The Ultimate Knitting Book](#)

[Knit Stitch: 50 Knit + Purl Patterns Paperback](#)

[Knit Stitch Dictionary: 250 Essential Stitches](#)

[Ultimate Knitting Bible: A Complete Reference with Step-by-Step Techniques](#)