

# How to Read a Knitting Pattern

Once you've learned the basics of knitting – how to cast on and bind off, how to work the knit stitch and the purl stitch – you'll be ready to start your first pattern. (If you need help with learning the basics, visit [www.LearnToKnit.com](http://www.LearnToKnit.com).) In the beginning, looking at a knitting pattern can be very confusing — is that a foreign language it is written in?

Well, no, but it is the special language of knitting, which uses many abbreviations and terms, which save space and make patterns easier to read. So the first thing you need to do is become familiar with the knitting abbreviations.

Some of them are easy to understand, like these:

## Basic Stitch Abbreviations

K or k = knit stitch

P or p = purl stitch

A complete list of knitting abbreviations and terms and their meaning can be found at: [www.YarnStandards.com](http://www.YarnStandards.com).

Terms represent things you are to do, like these:

<b>CO = Cast on</b>	(This is how you begin each knitted piece.)
<b>BO = Bind off</b>	(This is how you finish most knitted pieces. Binding off is sometimes called casting off. They mean the same thing.)
<b>Inc = Increase</b>	(Add one or more stitches. The most basic increase is to work in the front, and then again in the back, of the same stitch. This can be done in both knit and purl stitches.)
<b>Dec = decrease</b>	(Eliminate one or more stitches. The most basic decrease is to work two stitches together as one. This can be done in both knit and purl stitches. Different ways of increasing and decreasing change the way the project will look, and most designers have a specific method in mind. So usually your pattern will tell you how to do this.)
<b>Rep = repeat</b>	(Do the same thing again the number of times stated in the pattern.)
<b>Sl = Slip</b>	(Slip a stitch or stitches from one needle to the other, without working it.)
<b>YO = yarn over</b>	(Take the yarn over the needle.)
<b>Tog = together</b>	(Work 2 or more sts together, forming a decrease.)
<b>Work even</b>	Continue what you have been doing, without any increases or decreases.
<b>Maintain pattern as established</b>	This is usually used when you are working a pattern stitch and are increasing (or decreasing) at the edges. It means that you keep the center part in the pattern as you have already set it up, and will add (or subtract) stitches at each end without disturbing that pattern. When enough new stitches have been added, they should be incorporated into the pattern.

A complete list of abbreviations used in knitting can be found at [www.YarnStandards.com](http://www.YarnStandards.com).

## Getting Started

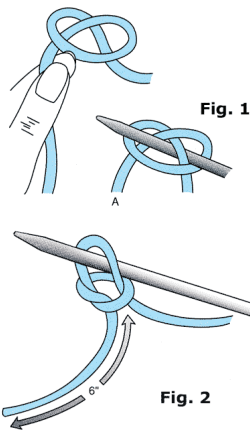
With the abbreviations and terms at hand, let's look at a typical knitting pattern. Knitted items can be worked back and forth in rows to form a flat piece, or in rounds to form a tube with no seams, such as socks or hats. Special needles are used to work in rounds.

Let's start by working a flat piece.

First the instructions will tell you to cast on a certain number of stitches.

But wait – before you can start casting on, you must place a slip knot on one of the needles.

Patterns never tell you to do this – they just assume you know it. Here's how you make a slip knot (**See Figures 1 & 2**).



There are many methods of casting on. Some give a nice stretchy edge;

others give a firm base. Unless the pattern tells you differently, use the method you were first taught.

Now let's look at a typical pattern.

## Instructions

CO 12 sts.

That means that you will first make a slip knot on one needle, then cast on 11 more stitches on the same needle. In knitting, the slip knot always counts as a stitch. If you are a crocheter, be sure to remember this, as in crochet, the slip knot never counts as a stitch.

**Row 1 (RS):** Knit.

**Row 2 (WS):** Purl.

This means that on Row 1, which is the right side of the piece (RS), you will knit all 12 stitches on the needle. Then for Row 2, the wrong side (WS) of the piece, you will purl every stitch.

The pattern may now say:

Rep Rows 1 and 2 until piece measures 4" from the beginning, ending with a WS row.

That means that you will keep repeating Row 1 (a knit row) and Row 2 (a purl row), in sequence until the piece measures 4" from the cast on row. To measure, place your piece on a flat surface and do not stretch it out. Place the end of a ruler or tape measure against the needle, and measure down to your initial cast-on row. If your work doesn't measure what is specified, just keep repeating the rows. Since the pattern says to end with a wrong-side row, that means that the last row you work should be a purl (WS) row.

When you repeat a knit row and then a purl row for a number of rows, you are creating a pattern called stockinette stitch. This is abbreviated St st. You will see that there are definite right and wrong sides to stockinette stitch. Usually the knit side is the right side, but sometimes the purl side is used for the right side. When this is done it is called reverse St st.

When a pattern tells you to work in St st, it means to alternate a knit row with a purl row.

Now let's try another stitch pattern.

CO 12 sts.

**Row 1:** Knit.

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Rep Row 1 until piece measures 4" from the beginning.

You have created what is called garter stitch, made by knitting every row on a flat piece. This is a reversible pattern, as there is very little difference between the right side and the wrong side.

When a pattern tells you to work in garter st, it means to knit every row.

## Asterisks, Parentheses, and Brackets

Now we need to stop and take a look at the symbols that are used in knitting patterns. These too are used to save space and to make the pattern easier to read. They may be confusing at first, but you will soon learn to follow them. Knitting patterns may have a series of steps that are repeated several times across a row. Rather than writing out these steps time after time, asterisks (\*) are used to indicate the repeats.

You will find asterisks used in many different patterns, such as ribbing. Ribbing is that stretchy pattern often used at the bottom and cuffs on a sweater to provide flexibility. Here is a typical ribbing pattern.

CO 18 sts.

**Row 1:** \*K2, P2; rep from \* across, end K2.

That means that you will knit the first two stitches, then purl the next two stitches; then you will knit 2, then purl 2, again, and repeat the steps following the asterisk all across the row until the last two stitches which you will knit.

**Row 2:** \*P2, K2; rep from \* across, end P2.

Note that you will be purling the sts you knitted on the preceding row, and knitting the sts you purlled on the preceding row. Many times patterns will say: knit the knit stitches and purl the purl stitches.

You will be creating ribbing by repeating these two rows in sequence.

Brackets [ ] are also used to enclose a group of stitches that are to be repeated a specified number of times. The number immediately following the brackets tells you how many times to do the step. For instance, [YO, K2tog] 6 times means you will YO, then knit 2 sts together, then do that again 5 more times, for a total of 6 YOs and 6 K2togs.

Parentheses are sometimes used in the same way.

Parentheses are used to indicate a group of stitches that are to be worked together into a stitch, such as: "(K1, P1, K1) in next st." That means you will work all of those stitches in one stitch, which makes a popcorn st.

## Knitting Garments

When you knit your first garment, you may run into some terms that confuse you. Here is what they mean.

### Terms

<b>Left Front (or Left Sleeve):</b>	The piece that will be worn on the left front and left arm of your body.
<b>Right Front (or Right Sleeve):</b>	The piece that will be worn on the right front and right arm of your body.
<b>At the Same Time:</b>	This is used when you are asked to work two different steps (perhaps shaping at the armhole and at the neck) at the same time.
<b>Work same as Left (or Right) piece, reversing shaping:</b>	This can be difficult for a beginner. Let's say you have worked a series of decreases on a left shoulder. Instead of telling you exactly how to do this for the right shoulder, in order to save space the pattern may just tell you to: Work same as left shoulder, reversing shaping. That means you have to figure out what to do! It will be easier if you take pen and paper and sketch out what you did the first time; then do this in reverse for the other piece. For example, the armhole decreases on a left front are worked at the beginning of right side rows. To reverse it for the right front, work the decreases at the end of the right side rows.

## Special Thanks

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