

HOMEWORK  
for  
THE COUTURE METHOD OF GARMENT FABRICATION for RED ALDER 2025

This homework is integral to that portion of the class discussion focusing on the knitted fabric and the first steps of garment fabrication. The goal is to reveal the outcomes produced by various swatching and blocking techniques and their consequences for the knitted fabric and the finished garment.

All of the swatches should be worked with the same yarn and needles. Use a smooth, worsted spin wool yarn in a solid, light color that knits at a DK or worsted weight. Do not use a superwash wool: the chemicals and the process used to produce superwash wool interfere with the outcome of the techniques we will be discussing. Likewise, do not use roving, bouclé, variegated, tweed or novelty yarn. Please do not use two different yarns for the swatches, as we need to be able to compare apples to apples. If you are contemplating a project the yarn for which matches the criteria above, feel free to use this homework as an opportunity to gather information about the yarn, your gauge and the fabric it produces. Note, however, that all of the swatches are to be worked in stockinette stitch and in a single color.

Please take careful notes as indicated below and have them with you in class along with the swatches and the ballband from the yarn. Please note the date on which the swatches were knit and blocked as well. The information you are able to gather will contribute to your understanding of the techniques as they relate to your yarn and to the class conversation.

Once you have completed the swatches, store them flat without folding and in a way that will not disturb, stretch or compress them, ideally in a box in which they fit comfortably.

#### Swatch 1

Work a 6"/15.24 cm square swatch in stockinette stitch exactly as you would were this a gauge swatch for a project. If you normally add an edging or selvedge to your swatch, please do so. Note the stitch and row gauge as soon as the swatch comes off the needles. Finish this swatch following your usual method, i.e. wash and block, or only block if your practice is not to wash your gauge swatch, or do nothing further to the swatch if that is your method. Note the stitch and row gauge at the point in the process when you would normally do so to determine your finished gauge for your project and make a note of when in your swatching process you took this gauge.

#### Swatch 2

Work a 6"/15.24 cm square swatch in stockinette stitch identical to Swatch 1. Note the stitch and row gauge as soon as the swatch comes off the needles. Finish this swatch as follows: wash the swatch in a neutral wool wash (do not use a no-rinse wash) and rinse well; pin the swatch to 6" x 6"/15.24 x 15.24 cm; allow the swatch to air dry (no fan or hair dryer) without disturbing it while it is drying; unpin and remove it from the blocking surface only when it is thoroughly dry. Note the stitch and row gauge just after it has been unpinned and removed from the blocking surface.

The goal of Swatches 1 and 2 is to produce two identical swatches, one that duplicates your usual swatching practice and one that has been washed and blocked to its intended finished dimensions. If your usual method duplicates exactly that described for Swatch 2, then you need to make only Swatch 2.

#### Swatch 3

With the yarn and needles used in the previous swatches and based on your intended finished gauge, cast on the number of stitches needed to create a knitted fabric 10"/25.4 cm wide plus 2 stitches. The additional stitches will be used to create a single-stitch selvedge. Follow the directions below to work the swatch. The directions for the selvedge stitch are noted within braces; do not omit the selvedge stitch or substitute a different edging or selvedge. Make sure that the cast-on and bind-off are consistent with the gauge of the swatch and will not restrict or flare the first and last few rows of the knitted fabric.

Row 1 (RS): {with the yarn in front of the work, slip the first stitch as if to purl through the back of the loop}; knit to within 1 stitch of the end of the row; {knit 1}.

Row 2 (WS): {with the yarn in back of work, slip the first stitch as if to knit}; purl to within 1 stitch of the end of the row; {purl 1}.

Repeat these two rows to work the selvedge stitch at the beginning and end of each row of stockinette.

Based on your finished gauge, work the number of rows needed to create a swatch 10"/25.4 cm long, ending with a wrong side row.

Next row (RS): bind off all stitches knitwise making sure that the gauge of the bind-off is consistent with the gauge of the swatch.

Note the stitch and row gauge as soon as the swatch comes off the needles.

Wash the swatch using a neutral wool wash (do not use a no-rinse wash) and rinse well. Pin it to a blocking surface at intervals of 1"/2.5 cm to a length and width of 10.5"/26.67 cm exclusive of the selvages, cast-on and bind-off. You will likely need to stretch the knitted fabric to do this. Please use blocking wires if you have access to them.

If you are using blocking wires, insert them into the knitted fabric before pinning the swatch to the blocking surface. Weave them along the vertical edges of the swatch every row using the running threads between the selvedge stitch and the stitch next to it to guide their placement. Along the horizontal edges, weave the wires into the cast-on and bind-off rows every stitch. Pin the pieces to the blocking surface as directed above, pinning inside the blocking wires so that the wires sit just outside the full blocking dimensions and form a frame that evenly tensions the knitted fabric.

Once the swatch is thoroughly dry (no fan or hair dryer), unpin it from the blocking surface and remove any blocking wires. Do not move the swatch, but leave it unpinned on the blocking surface and allow it to relax for a minimum of 8–10 hours. Note the stitch and row gauge at this point, not immediately upon unpinning from its blocked dimensions.

If you have the time and are curious to learn how other blocking methods affect the knitted fabric, its gauge, and its ability to retain the blocking, work the following swatches and bring them to class with you.

#### Swatch 4

Work a swatch exactly as for Swatches 1 and 2. Note the stitch and row gauge of this swatch as soon as it comes off the needles. Block this swatch to 6" x 6"/15.24 x 15.24 cm by steaming it. Allow the swatch to dry thoroughly before disturbing it. Note the stitch and row gauge once it is thoroughly dry, just after it has been unpinned and removed from the blocking surface.

#### Swatch 5

Duplicate Swatch 4, noting the stitch and row gauge as soon as it comes off the needles. Block this swatch as follows: pin it to 6" x 6"/15.24 x 15.24 cm and spray with water to dampen it. Allow the swatch to air dry (no fan or hair dryer) thoroughly, unpin it, and note the stitch and row gauge just after it has been unpinned and removed from the blocking surface.

#### Swatch 6

Duplicate Swatch 4, noting the stitch and row gauge as soon as it comes off the needles. Block this swatch as follows: pin it to 6" x 6"/15.24 x 15.24 cm and spray with water to dampen it. Cover the damp swatch with a pressing cloth and iron gently. Allow the swatch to air dry (no fan or hair dryer) thoroughly, unpin it, and note the stitch and row gauge just after it has been unpinned and removed from the blocking surface.

### NOTES

#### Yarn

The choice of yarn is up to you. Please follow the guidelines above: wool yarn, worsted spin, solid light color, DK or worsted weight, no superwash, roving, tweed, bouclé or novelty yarn. Use the same yarn in the same color for all of the swatches.

#### Needles

Use whatever size needles you need to produce a stable fabric at a gauge that is appropriate for the yarn you have chosen.

### CLASS MATERIALS

During class you will complete a small project and practice several techniques not included in the project.

Please have with you:

- the ballband from the yarn used for the swatches

- all of the swatches you have prepared

- the notes you made as you prepared the swatches

- an additional ±200 yards of the yarn used for the swatches (to be used for in-class knitting; the in-class project will require ±150 yards of this yarn)

- 2-3 yards of smooth fingering or lace weight yarn that contrasts strongly with that chosen for the in-class project (to be used as waste yarn)

- needles sizes 0 US/2.0 mm through 7 US/4.5 mm, preferably circular; you will need one 24" or 32"/60 cm or 80 cm circular size 0 US/2.0 mm or two

- 8"/20 cm double points that size with stoppers to prevent stitches from slipping off the ends

- your regular knitting notions: tapestry needle, scissors, etc.

Please feel free to contact me – [catherine@catherine-lowe.com](mailto:catherine@catherine-lowe.com) – if you have any questions.