

# SWEATER KNITS 101

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Even if you don't knit, you can stitch up cozy garments and accessories this winter using sweater knit fabrics. Learn how to select the best patterns, stitching tips and how to care for these specialty fabrics. Plus, create an easy-to-sew hat and scarf set to practice your skills.

Astoria,  
Seamwork







### SWEATER KNIT FABRICS

Unlike other stretch fabrics, sweater knit fabrics look and feel similar to traditionally hand-knit fabric, with thicker yarns, an open structure and more intricate patterns. Most sweater knits are considered a stretch fabric, however, the stretch percentage varies greatly across fabrics. Some are so densely knitted that they're considered stable and treated like a woven. Additionally, sweater knits are available in a wide array of fiber content, textures and weights.



### SELECTION

One of the most important factors when selecting a sweater knit is that it should have good stretch and recovery. When stretched, the fabric should return to its original shape. If it doesn't recover, the fabric will be more difficult to sew and easily stretch out of shape. For beginner sewists, select a sweater knit that has mostly natural fiber content, such as cotton or wool, and a heavyweight knit with dense or a crochet-like structure.

### PREPARATION

Most sweater knits can be machine washed and dried. Serge- or zigzag-finish the fabric edge before laundering to prevent raveling. For dry-clean only wool sweater knit, place one or two towels dampened with hot water in the dryer with the fabric.



Select high heat and dry for 30 minutes. If the dryer has a steam setting, omit the towels and dry the fabric on high heat for 30 minutes. Or pre-shrink the fabric with an iron. Select a wool setting with steam and hold the iron  $\frac{1}{2}$ " above the fabric, steaming the entire fabric length. Always test the pre-treatment method on a fabric swatch.

### **PATTERN CHOICE**

Only use patterns that are designed for stretch knits, unless using a stable knit. Choose a simple design with minimal seams, as complicated details create excessive bulk and the design elements can be lost in the fabric texture. Scarves, hats, sweaters, cardigans and simple dresses are perfect projects for sweater knit.

### **CUTTING & MARKING**

If using a fabric that easily distorts and stretches out of shape, use pattern weights instead of pins to allow the fabric to lay flat and produce more accurate cutting. Use a rotary cutter in lieu of scissors that lift and pull the fabric during cutting. For open-structure knits, such as lacy or crochet-like, or fabric that ravel easily, cut the seam allowances slightly wider than the pattern indicates. After cutting, serge- or zigzag-finish the edges and limit the handling to prevent raveling or stretching. Traditional notches are difficult to see, so mark notches with a pin, tailor's chalk or tailor's tack.

### **CONSTRUCTION**

Always use a new ballpoint needle to prevent holes and snags in the fabric. Size 70/11 works best for finer knits, and a size 80/12 is best for heavier-weight knits. Use a twin needle for topstitching or hems.

Select a .5mm-wide and 2.5mm- or 3mm-long narrow zigzag stitch; increase the stitch width as needed. Thick knits require a longer stitch length, while open-structure knits need a shorter stitch length. To



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prevent wavy or stretched-out seams, loosen the presser foot pressure and install a walking foot or even-feed foot if available.

Shoulder and pocket seams stretch and distort during wear. Stabilize the seams using a scrap of organza, twill tape or clear elastic. Reinforce closure areas, such as buttons, with knit interfacing and a stretch or corded buttonhole. For zipper closures, interface the fabric edge before installing the zipper, and then use double-sided fusible tape to secure the zipper in place before stitching.

Always press sweater knit seams for professional-looking results. To prevent permanent pressure marks, only use the iron tip along the seams until it lays flat or hover the iron  $\frac{1}{2}$ "

above the seam and use steam. Or finger-press open the seams.

If available, a coverstitch machine creates the easiest and most professional-looking hems. For lacy, open-structure knits, fold the hem toward the wrong side and use a zigzag stitch to secure. Typically, the hem buries itself into the knit and is almost undetectable. For other knit types, use a twin needle to secure the hem in place. This method allows for the fabric to stretch and looks very similar to a coverstitch. Another great option is to bind the raw edges using matching or contrasting knit fabric. For best results, make sure the fabric lays flat while hemming. If at any point the fabric warps or stretches out of shape, adhere fusible interfacing along the hem allowance.