
THE
KNITTER'S
DICTIONARY

KNITTING KNOW-HOW FROM **A** TO **Z**



KATE ATHERLEY

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Interweave®

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ILLUSTRATOR:
Julie Levesque

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1

INTRODUCTION

I first learned to knit when I was a young girl, at my grandmother Hilda's knee. I was a very confident maker of doll blankets and scarves at an early age. Spurred on by her clear instruction, my ability to form perfect stitches and manage yarn and needles was firmly formed.

When I picked up the needles again, as a teenager, I had moved far away from her. So I found myself a pattern for something that looked easy to knit, chose a ridiculous brightly colored yarn, and sat down, keen to start working

But I was utterly lost. I was fine with the needles and yarn, but I couldn't make any sense of the instructions. Handling the needles and yarn was an entirely different skill than reading the patterns. Although my grandmother had made sure I was a master at the first, we had never gotten around to the second topic in our lessons: the language, rules, and codes embedded in knitting patterns.

There are many books, magazines, online tutorials, and store classes that show you the mechanics of knitting, but very few that address how to read the instructions. That's what this book is all about.

Knitting has its own language: technical terms, funny abbreviations, and familiar words used in very particular ways—"repeat," "even," "right side," etc. Knitting patterns are like little computer programs, with their own rules and notations.

This book is a guide to help you understand that language and patterns. If you're able to read the instructions, you'll be able to successfully knit them.

We've organized items alphabetically, and it's squarely between a dictionary and an encyclopedia. As you're working through a project, you've got a quick way to look up a term you're not familiar with. Some sections are larger, providing not only guidance on the



individual words, but on the larger context to expand your knitting knowledge.

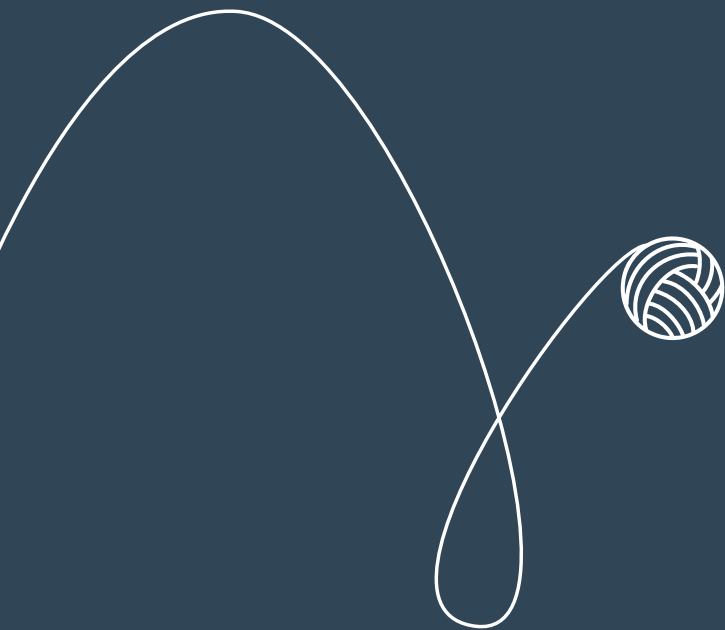
Wonder why designers are always going on about gauge? Want to know more about the differences between a raglan and a set-in sleeve sweater, and why it matters when you're choosing a pattern? And what is "heavy worsted," exactly? This book aims to answer all those questions and more, to help you break the code, and be a more powerful and successful knitter. It's one I think you'll want to keep in your knitting bag, always.



2

GETTING STARTED WITH PATTERNS

Before you pick up your needles and start knitting, it's a good idea to take a moment to familiarize yourself with your pattern and gather all the tools and materials you need.



SET-UP FOR SUCCESS

Before you start working on a pattern, make sure you have the most recent version. If you downloaded it from a website, check for updates. If you're working from a book or magazine pattern, do a quick web search to see if the publisher has posted any corrections (aka *errata*; see p. 41).

If you're working from a digital pattern, make a backup copy; if you're working from a paper pattern or book, print or photocopy the pattern (when permitted under the publisher's copyright statement) and store the original somewhere safe. Put your working copy in a plastic sheet protector to protect it from coffee spills.

If working from paper, keep some scrap and a pencil handy for taking notes and tuck the notes inside the sheet protector. If you are working from a digital pattern, make sure you keep your notes as a separate file or as annotations to the pattern file.

If it's a multisize pattern, go through and highlight the numbers for the size you're working throughout the instructions. At the same time, scan the pattern for things you might want to know before you begin. In particular, look for the phrases “*at the same time*” (see p. 15) and “*reversing shaping*” (see p. 90), as these need some advance planning.

Many patterns offer explanations of terms, abbreviations, and special techniques. It's important to familiarize yourself with those. Keep your *Knitter's Dictionary* handy for anything that might not be explained.

TOOLS

Review the materials, needles, and notions list for the project: put them all in one place so they're ready when you need them. Make sure to include stitch markers, a tape measure, scissors, and a yarn needle (see *notions*; p. 81); these sometimes aren't included on the list, but you'll probably need them.

I also like to make sure that I have some safety pins, a crochet hook for picking up dropped stitches, stitch holders and/or scrap yarn I can use as a stitch holder, a ruler, and a needle gauge on hand as well.

Keep the extra skeins of yarn you're not actively using in a plastic ziplock-style bag, away from moths, dust, and inquisitive pets and children. Keep the receipt, and if you're working from skeins that need to be wound before use, don't wind all of them. If you don't use them all, you may well be able to return or exchange. To that end, it's good to know what your store return policies are when buying yarn. And if they won't take back the leftover skein or two, you can always use them for something else . . . hats and mittens don't require much yarn!

SIZE AND FINISHED MEASUREMENTS

Many knitted items have multiple sizes—socks, mittens, hats, garments. For these, you'll need to decide which size you want to make.

Not all knitting patterns present sizing information in the same way. However, you should be able to find some semblance of the following in any pattern: indicator of sizes, finished measurements, and a schematic. The most helpful patterns will also provide

some kind of fit or sizing recommendation. See *ease* (p. 39) for more information on how to choose what size to make.

size

A pattern may or may not list a “size.” This is sometimes labelled as “to fit.” It’s essentially what you’d see written on the label inside commercially made clothes: simply a rough indicator of the relative bigness or smallness of the piece. It provides a guide to who the pattern is for, but it should be very much a secondary consideration when deciding which size to make. For more information on how to choose a size, see *size* (p. 98).

finished measurements

Names vary, but this section tells you the dimensions of the actual pieces as knitted (once blocked). These are what you’d get if you put the knitted item on a flat surface and took a tape measure to it. See *finished measurements* (p. 47) for more information.

GAUGE

A pattern should list a gauge, which is a measurement of how many stitches and rows you should achieve over a certain distance (usually per inch [2.5 cm]). This information does two things: it helps you choose yarn and helps you identify which size needles to use. Ultimately, the purpose of gauge is to help you make sure that the piece you knit comes out to be the correct size! See *gauge* (p. 51) for more information.

YARN

All patterns should recommend a yarn and tell you the yarn used in the sample shown.

See *fiber care* (p. 45) for more information on the properties of commonly recommended yarns.

yarn substitution

You might want to work the project with the yarn specified in the pattern, but you don’t have to. After all, it might not be available in your area, or it could well have been discontinued.

If you choose not to use the yarn specifically listed in the pattern, find something as close to it as you can in fiber mix, coloring, and texture. Doing so will help you achieve results similar to what you see in the pictures. In general, a project with lots of texture looks better knit with a smooth yarn in solid or nearly solid colors; plainer patterns suit busier colors and more textured yarns. For more information, see *yarn attributes, color* (p. 117), *yarn attributes, textures* (p. 118), and *yarn attributes, weights* (p. 119).

HOW MUCH TO BUY

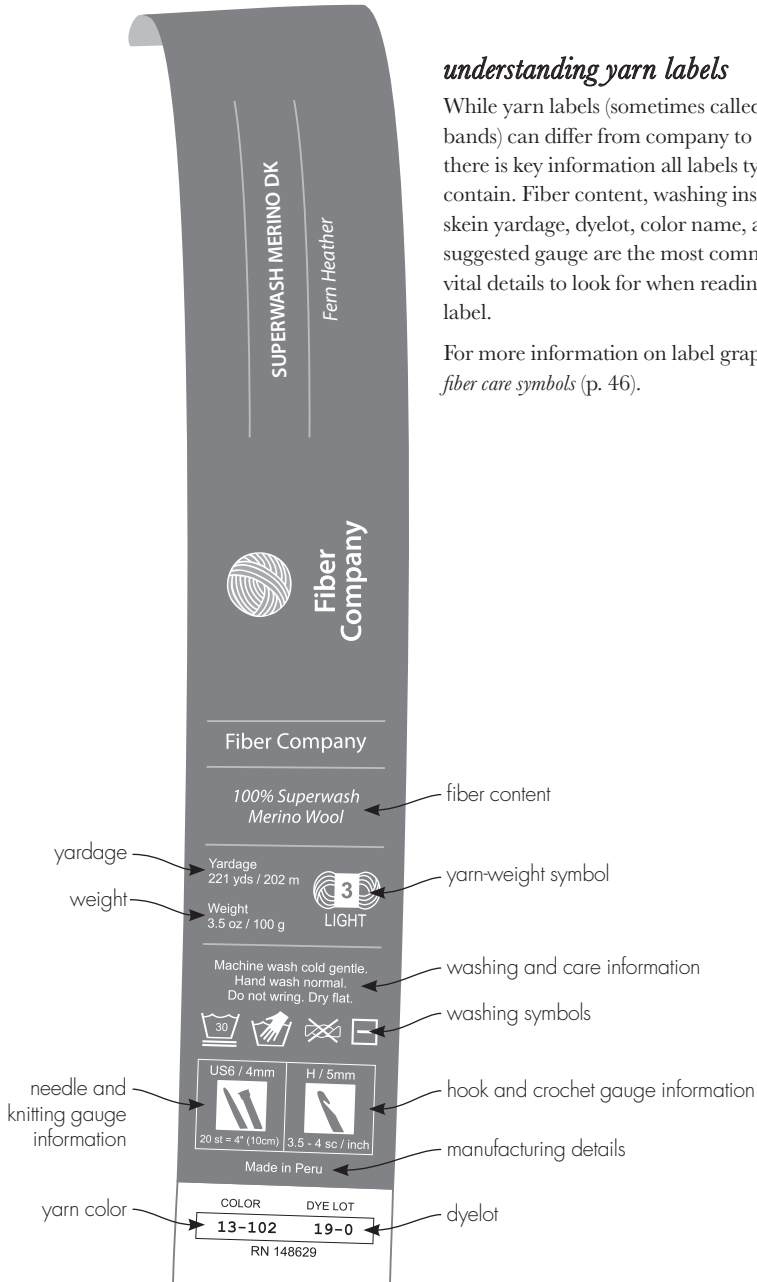
Always buy yarn by length, not weight or number of balls. Weight can differ greatly by fiber (for example, cotton is much heavier than wool), and ball/skein size varies by brand, so neither of these is a reliable guideline when substituting yarn.



understanding yarn labels

While yarn labels (sometimes called ball bands) can differ from company to company, there is key information all labels typically contain. Fiber content, washing instructions, skein yardage, dyelot, color name, and suggested gauge are the most common and vital details to look for when reading the label.

For more information on label graphics, see *fiber care symbols* (p. 46).



YARN RECOMMENDATIONS

For Specific Techniques and Projects

PROJECT TYPE	NEED	LOOK FOR
COLORWORK	A yarn with give for blocking, but that will hold its shape over time.	Wool (regular or superwash), other animal fibers.
LACE	A yarn with give for blocking.	Wool (regular or superwash), other animal fibers, silk.
CABLES	A yarn with give for blocking that will hold its shape over time.	Wool (regular or superwash), other animal fibers.
WINTER ACCESSORIES	A yarn that insulates, provides warmth, wicks away moisture, doesn't freeze.	Wool (regular or superwash), other animal fibers, silk.
SUMMER WEAR	A yarn that breathes.	Linen, cotton, hemp, light wools.
BAGS	Strong yarn.	Wool (regular; felted), hemp.
SEAMLESS GARMENTS	A light yarn that doesn't stretch too much.	Wool (not superwash), wool and man-made blends.
CHILDREN'S WEAR	A warm, breathable, machine-washable yarn.	Wool (superwash), wool/cotton or wool/acrylic blends. Avoid 100% man-made fibers.
DOG SWEATERS	A warm, breathable, machine-washable yarn.	Wool (regular or superwash), other animal fibers.
SOCKS	A washable, breathable, strong yarn blend with elasticity either innate in the fibers or through the addition of elastic.	Wool (superwash)/nylon blends, wool/silk blends, cotton or bamboo blends with added elastic.





3

A-Z OF KNITTING



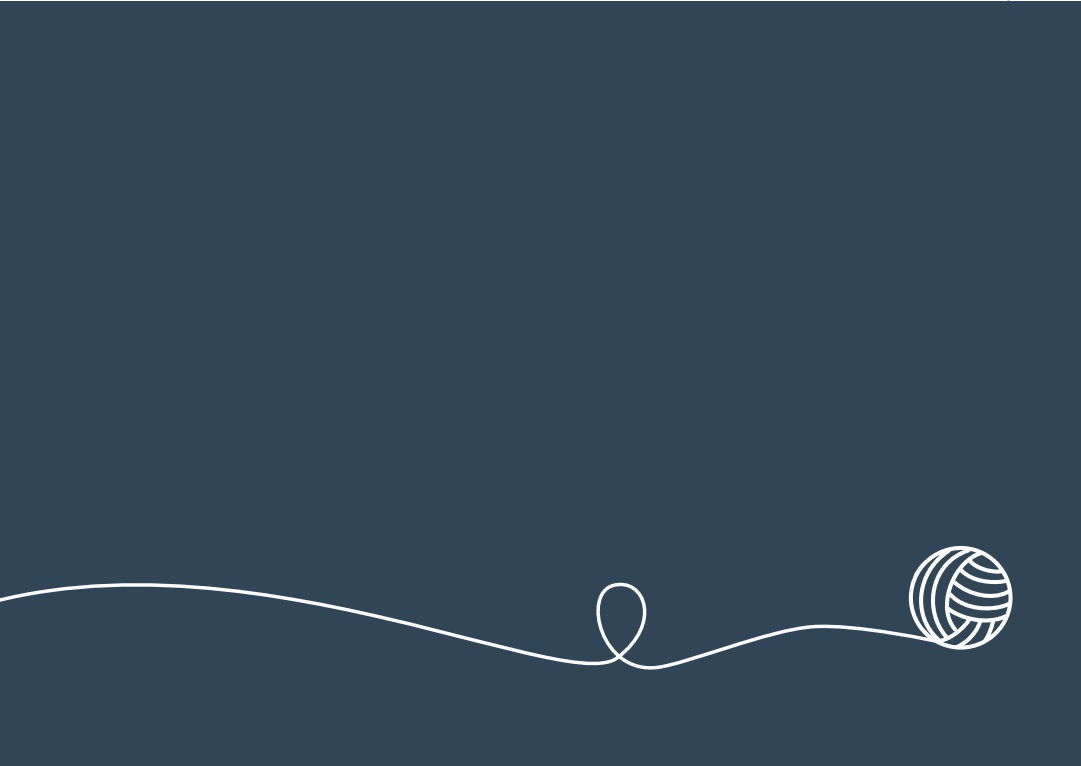
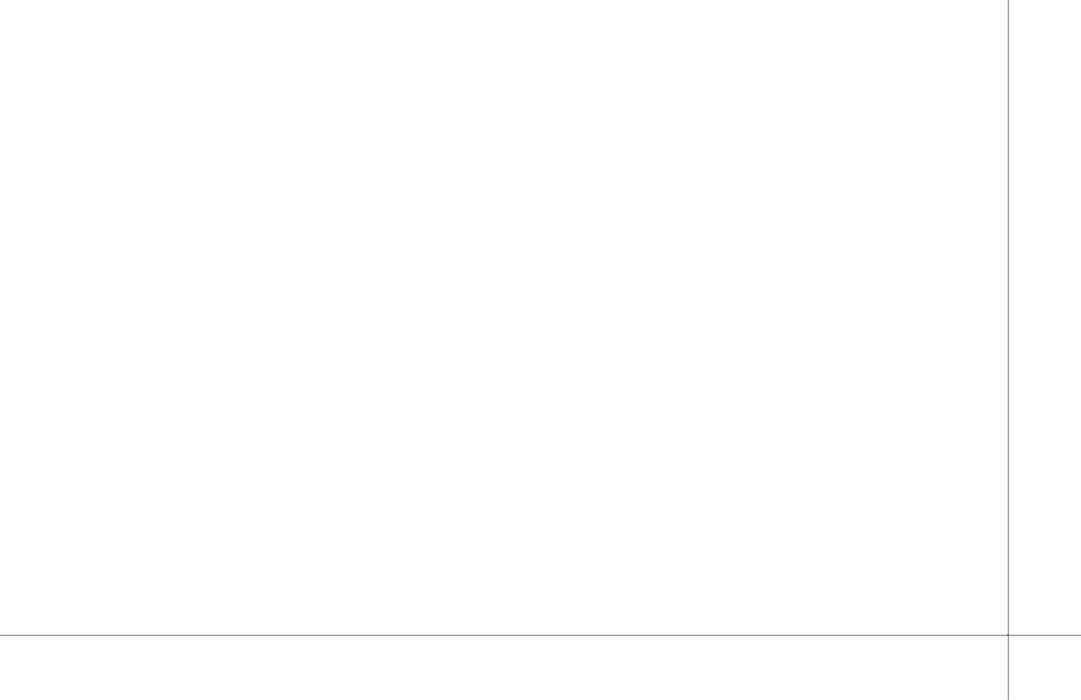




Fig. A1 Aran sweater

ACROSS THE ROW/RND

This phrase is as simple as it sounds. You work in the established pattern to the end of the row or round.

ACRYLIC (FIBER/YARN)

An oil-based polymer used to make yarn. It's colorfast and very stable in that it doesn't shrink, stretch, or fade. However, it is not good for winter wear, since acrylic fabrics can absorb water and freeze. It also doesn't have the give required for blocking, so it is not suitable for lace or colorwork. See also *fiber care*.

ACTUAL

Most often in patterns in the context of measurements. A pattern might list "actual" measurements with the sizing information, referring to the measurements of the finished knitted piece(s)—as opposed to a body-size measurement. "Finished measurements" is sometimes used in the same way. See also *ease; measurements, body; measurements, finished*.

ALPACA (FIBER/YARN)

From the coat of an alpaca, this fiber is warmer than sheep's wool and very soft. It tends to shed and pill and is relatively heavy. Best used for smaller pieces or garments with seams. It's excellent blended with sheep's wool. See also *fiber care*.

ALT

Alternate. Every other.

ANGORA (FIBER/YARN)

Derived from the coat of Angora rabbits, this fiber is very soft and warm, though it tends to shed and pill. Works best blended with other fibers; it adds warmth and a halo of fuzziness. Angora allergies are common. See also *fiber care*.

APPROX

Approximately or approximate.

ARAN (SWEATER)

A heavily cabled sweater, associated with Ireland. (Fig. A1)



ARAN (YARN)

See *yarn attributes, weights*.

ARMHOLE, ARMSCYE

The section of a garment body where the sleeve is attached.

AS EST, AS ESTABLISHED, AS SET

Used when continuing a previously established pattern, most often after increases or decreases, or some other special instructions, to tell you to go back to what you were doing before.

EXAMPLE

Row 1: (K1, p2) across the row.

Row 2: (K2, p1) across the row.

Continue as established until 2" (5 cm) from cast-on edge.

“As established” here indicates that you should keep working ribbing.

AS IF TO KNIT, AS IF TO PURL

Usually refers to slipping stitches, e.g., slip as if to knit, or transferring stitches to another needle. When working “as if to knit” the needle is put through the next stitch on the left needle from front to back coming in from the left, the same as when working a knit stitch.

See also *sl, slip*.

ASTERISK *

Often used in pattern instructions as part of a repeat, typically to indicate the start of an instruction that is to be repeated.

See also *repeat*.

AT THE SAME TIME

Indicates that two sets of instructions need to be worked simultaneously. When you see this phrase, read ahead to make sure you identify the two different instructions and the “trigger point.”

EXAMPLE

Left Front Armhole Shaping

Row 1: (RS) K1, ssk, k to end.

Row 2: (WS) Purl.

Repeat the last 2 rows 6 times. **AT THE SAME TIME**, when the armhole measures 1" (2.5 cm), start the neckline shaping, as follows:

Next row, neckline shaping: (RS) Work in pattern as set to the last 3 sts, k2tog, k1.

Work the neckline shaping row 15 times. When the armhole shaping is complete, work even at the start of the RS rows.

The first instruction is the armhole shaping (the decrease at the start of the row). The second instruction is the neckline shaping (the decrease at the end of the row). “At the same time” alerts you that you’ll need to watch for the point when you have to start the neckline shaping. In this case, it’s when the armhole measures 1" (2.5 cm). This means that the armhole decrease won’t yet be completed when you hit that distance.

As soon as you hit that point, you’ll keep going with the armhole decrease at the start of the row but then also start working the neckline decrease at the end of the row. The key is to keep track of the two things separately: keep count of your armhole decreases, 1 to 6, and keep count of your neckline decreases, 1 to 15.

AYO

Afterthought Yarnover:

B

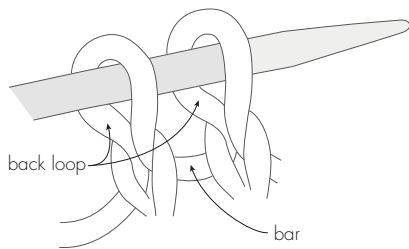


Fig. B1 back loop and bar

BABY (YARN)

See *yarn weights*.

BACK LOOP

Refers to the back of a stitch on the needle; a conventional Western-style knit stitch is mounted on the needle with the right leg positioned at the front and the left leg at the back. (Fig. B1) See also *ktbl*; *tbl*.

BACKWARD KNITTING

Can mean 1) undoing a completed row, sometimes referred to as “tinking” (“tink” is “knit” spelled backward), or 2) working a knit stitch from left to right across a row or round to avoid purling.

BACKWARD-LOOP CAST-ON

Also known as the e-wrap, this is a method to create new stitches that can be used for increasing and casting on. This is a good neutral increase, as it doesn't have a particular lean, and it adapts nicely to be a knit or purl. See also *cast-on*; *increase*.

TECHNIQUE

*Loop working yarn as shown and place it on needle backward (with right leg of loop in back of needle). Repeat from *. (Fig. B2)

BALL

One type of put-up for yarn: a ball shape. Usually wound for the end to be pulled from the center or the outside—knitter's choice. See also *center-pull ball*; *put-up*.

BALL WINDER

A tool to wind yarn into a ball, often used in conjunction with a swift or to rewind untidy balls of yarn or undo larger pieces of knit fabric. (Fig. B3) See also *swift*.

BAMBOO (YARN/FIBER)

A highly processed fiber derived from the bamboo plant. It is shiny like silk and has antibacterial properties. It can stretch out over time and is best for smaller pieces or garments with sleeves. Works well blended with other more stable fibers. See also *fiber care*.



4

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING



GENERAL KNITTING

For general knitting help, I recommend *Vogue Knitting: The Ultimate Knitting Book* (Sixth & Spring Books, 2018) and Montse Stanley's *Reader's Digest Knitter's Handbook* (Reader's Digest, 1999). Stephanie Pearl McPhee's *Knitting Rules* (Storey Publishing, 2006) shares a lifetime's worth of knitting lessons and expertise, in a very readable and encouraging manner.

If you wish to dig further, June Hemmons Hiatt's *Principles of Knitting* (Touchstone Books, 2012) is absurdly and gratifyingly encyclopedic, if slightly less approachable.

YARN

For more about yarns and fibers, I recommend Clara Parkes's two wonderful volumes, *The Knitter's Book of Yarn* (Potter Craft, 2007) and *The Knitter's Book of Wool* (Potter Craft, 2009).

Jillian Moreno's *Yarnitecture: A Knitter's Guide to Spinning* (Storey Publishing, 2016) talks about yarn from the perspective of the spinner.

If you want to dig really deep into fiber, you can't go wrong with *The Fleece and Fiber Sourcebook* (Carol Ekarius and Deb Robson; Storey Publishing, 2011).

READING PATTERNS

To learn more about the language of patterns and how patterns are written, look at my own book *Beginner's Guide to Writing Knitting Patterns* (Interweave/F&W, 2016).

KNITTING METHODS

For more about combination knitting, seek out Annie Modesitt's *Confessions of a Knitting Heretic* (ModeKnit Press, 2004). For more about Portuguese knitting, find Andrea Wong's *Portuguese Style of Knitting History, Traditions and Techniques* (Andrea Wong Knits, 2010).

GARMENTS

Amy Herzog's *You Can Knit That* (Abrams, 2016) is a fantastic introduction to garment styles, sizing, and fit. To dig further into style and fit, Maggie Righetti's *Sweater Design in Plain English* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2011) is a great read, even if you're not looking to design anything.

For more about garments, *Fashionpedia: The Visual Dictionary of Fashion Design* (Fashionary, 2016) is a fabulous resource.

METRIC CONVERSION CHART

TO CONVERT	TO	MULTIPLY BY
Inches	Centimeters	2.54
Centimeters	Inches	0.4
Feet	Centimeters	30.5
Centimeters	Feet	0.03
Yards	Meters	0.9
Meters	Yards	1.1

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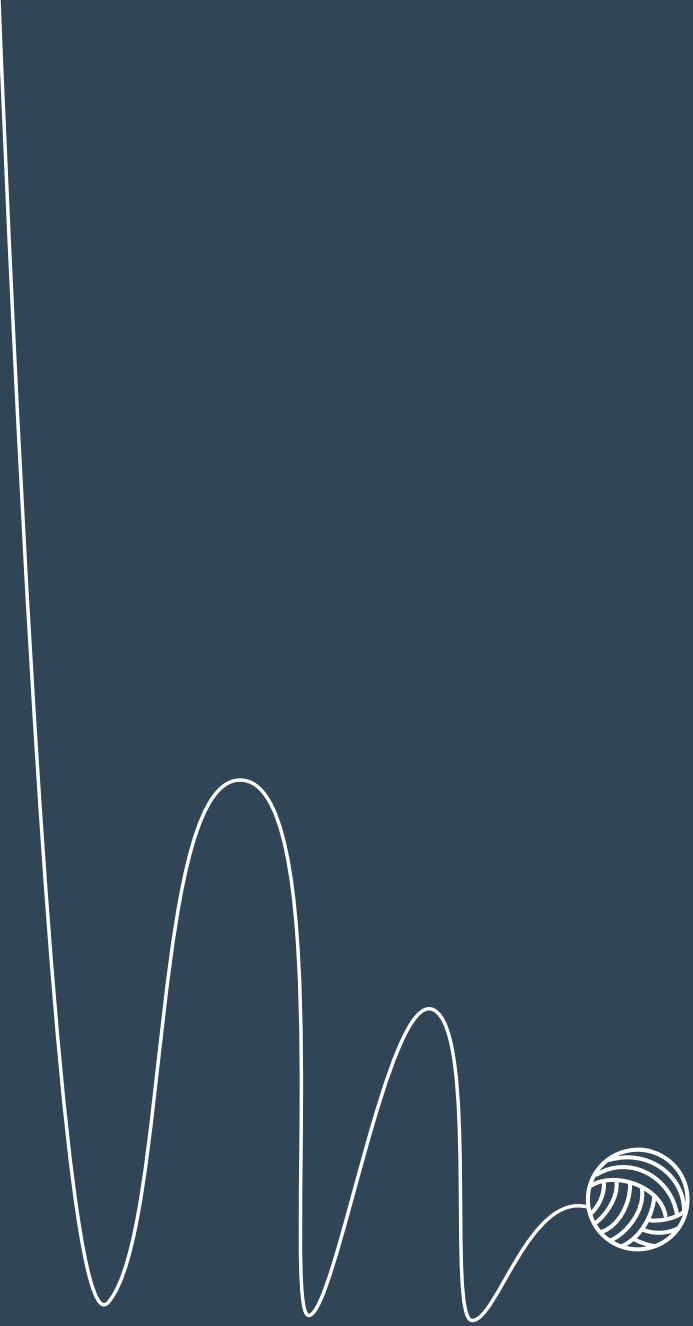
DEDICATION

For my parents, who never refused me a book.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate Atherley is a mathematician and escapee from the technology industry. She has written three other books for Interweave—*Knit Mitts*, *Custom Socks*, and *The Beginners Guide to Writing Knitting Patterns*. She is Knitty's lead technical editor and a regular contributor to books and magazines. She lives in Toronto with her husband and their challenging, but mostly adorable, rescue hound, Dexter.



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- *Fiona Ellis*

“*The Knitter’s Dictionary* is the **handy reference** we all wish we had beside us as we learned to knit. Each page is like having Kate Atherley beside you whispering expert instruction into your ear.”

- *Kim McBrien Evans*

“Knitting is a language, and as such it clearly needs a comprehensive dictionary! Kate Atherley is the perfect knitter to create this . . . her wit, attention to detail, and clarity make this a dictionary you will find useful, amusing, and straightforward. Without a doubt you’ll **become a better knitter** by adding this reference book to your knitting library!”

- *Laura Nelkin*

“Whether you’ve been knitting for months or decades, pattern terminology can sometimes be confusing. But don’t fret, because Kate has you covered! Her clear, friendly writing style (and wealth of knowledge) demystifies everything from fibers to stitches to ease. This book will save you a world of knitting heartbreak and **belongs in every knitter’s bag.**”

- *Amy Hergog*

“*The Knitter’s Dictionary* gives you the what, why, and how-to of knitting abbreviations, techniques, stitch patterns, fibers, yarn constructions, sweater and project styles. Kate Atherley’s years of knitting experience and to-the-point style will help break the secret codes of knitting and make you a more successful knitter. *The Knitter’s Dictionary* isn’t just a reference book, **it’s a lifeline** for your knitting!”

- *Jillian Moreno*



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