

Script – Working With Hats – RKG Dec 12, 2022

A list of the patterns associated with the photos in this presentation can be found on the last page of this file.

Intro

Hats are great knitting projects. They're on the small size, so they make good single skein items, they knit up fairly quickly, and they're useful. If you can find a hat pattern that suits you – you like all the components and it will give you a size you want in a fabric density you're looking for, that's fantastic. Save yourself the trouble, and go with it. There's no need to reinvent the wheel.

But what if you like most of a hat pattern, but there's an issue? The stitch pattern's perfect, but it's written for super bulky yarn, and you want to use worsted. Maybe the brim doesn't have the look or the functionality you have in mind, or the length of the hat doesn't have as much slouch you want, or it has too much. Maybe you want to use worsted yarn, and it's written for worsted, but the gauge is so loose it's not going to be warm enough? Maybe it's a kid's hat you'd like to make in an adult size, or the person you're knitting for has a 24" head, and everything you like is realistically only going to go up to about a 22". It's possible to rework a pattern so that you can get the result you want.

You may also simply want to knit a hat, without making a big deal out of it, or searching for a pattern at all. Hats are simple garments. With a few measurements and a swatch (yeah, the swatch is going to be unavoidable, whatever you decide to do), you can just knit what you want.

The one thing you really have to be prepared to do is stop and look at your knitting as you go. Problems really won't get better if you just keep knitting. Things that make sense on paper may not quite work on the needles. Just stop from time to time and check that you're happy with what you see, and that it's going to be the size you want. Check the gauge, and calculate the size the hat actually is (as opposed to what you planned for it to be). You can put half the stitches on another circular and try it on after three or four inches, if you have access to the head that's going to wear it, and see if it feels right.

If it's not going well, you have a couple of choices. One of knitting's great strengths is that you can always rip back, make the changes you need, and try again. You could also finish the hat, and give it to someone else, or donate it – the need is constant. Then make the hat again, making the corrections needed to get what you want. In either case, especially before you rip, be sure to take good notes on what needles and yarn you used, what gauge you got, and what the issues were that needed to be addressed. What seems obvious and something you'd never forget may be completely obscure and utterly forgotten very quickly, and there's no reason to waste your work and experience.

When you set out to make a hat, you're most likely to get what you want if you figure out what that is in advance. Who are you making it for, and how is the hat going to function for them? Do they need a fashion accessory to go from the house to the car, so that you can go for lightweight and pretty, or are they going to be going on day-long hikes in February, and you're going to need multiple layers of dense fabric? Is itch sensitivity a problem? Do they have lots of hair, or very little? Once you're clear on how you want a hat to work, you can figure out how to get there.

Yarn – you can make a hat out of pretty much any yarn that pleases you. You can also figure that you can usually get **A** hat out of 100 grams of any weight of yarn, but you may not be able to get **ANY** hat out of that amount. Extra long ribbed brims, extra long slouches, very deep hems, heavily textured stitches, or really thick yarn may need more, so keep that in mind while planning, especially if more than one of those applies.

There are two measurements you're going to need to take. One is the circumference of the head you're knitting for. Don't just assume every designer is using the same numbers for small, medium, and large. Look for, or calculate, the finished measurement and see how that compares to what you need. The other measurement is from the bottom of the ear lobe up and over the top of the head

and down to the bottom of the other ear lobe. Divide that number by 2. That's the total finished length of the hat if you want a hat with no slouch at all, and the ears just covered. If you want them to stay covered, add a half inch to an inch to that.

- A. Hat Structure – hats have five structural components to think about – the cast on, the brim, the body, the crown, and the closure.

[Photo 1]



1. Cast on – It's nice if the hat cast on is attractive (that edge is about eye level for anyone facing you) but it **needs** to be elastic. A hat you can't get on doesn't do you any good, even if the rest of the hat will stretch, and a hat that leaves a pressure line on your forehead isn't comfortable to wear. Think about which side will show if you turn up a brim, and

whether that's still ok – if you use long tail cast on, for example, it has two sides. If you turn up the brim, the bumpy side is what will show.

[Photo 2]



[Photo 3]



That's probably too subtle a point to worry about for most of us, but if you care, you care, and you want to think about it. Another consideration is whether you want your cast on to work with the brim in some way – maybe casting on in rib (whatever your rib sequence is). My current favorite with a 1 x 1 rib is a tubular cast on, because it flows so smoothly.



[Photo 4]

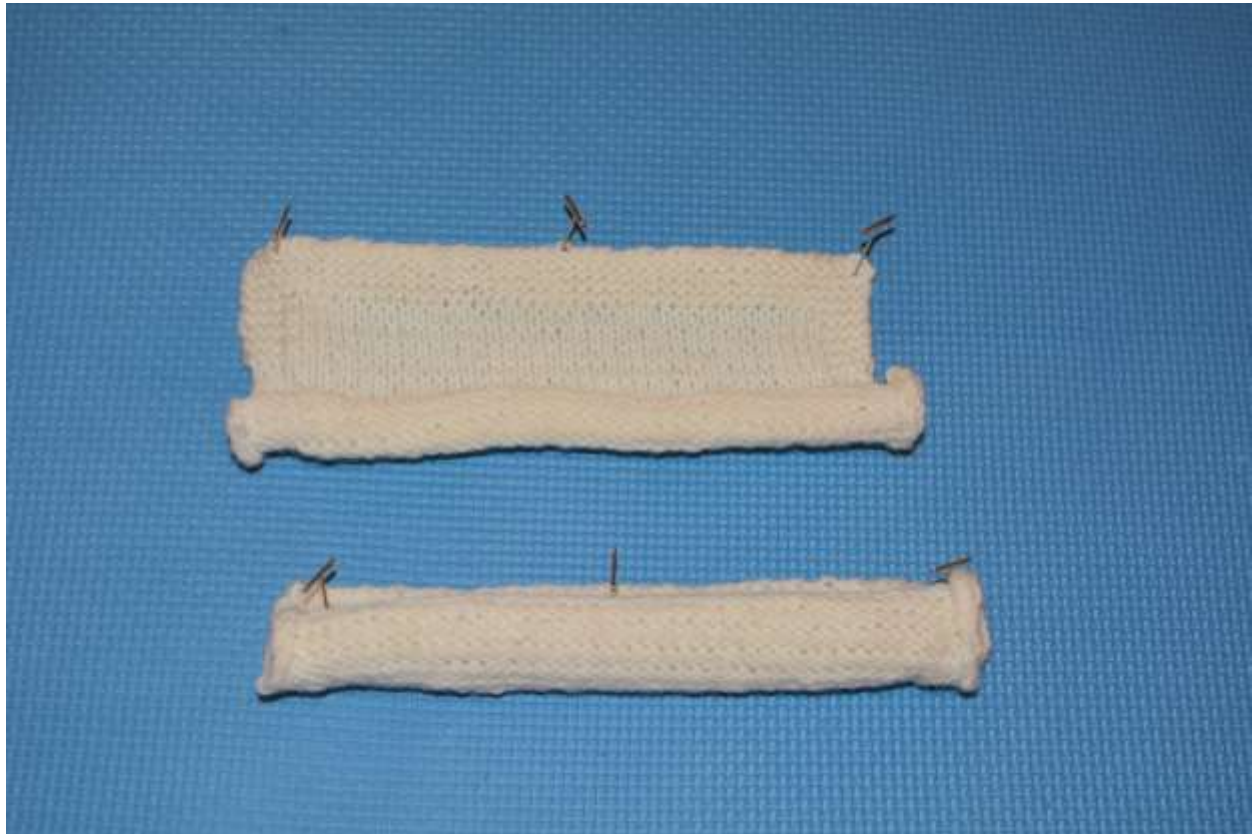
2. Brim - Ribbing is a common choice, in any combination of knits and purls that pleases – 1x1, 2x2, 1x2, 2x3, and so on – or that works well for the stitch pattern chosen for the body. Hems are another option, with or without a turning ridge or picot. You can also do a simple rolled edge.



[Photo 5]

One thing to keep in mind with a rolled edge is that the roll can be uncontrolled without making some provision to stop it. One option is a couple of rows of k1, p1. Another is a couple of rows of reverse stockinette. Either of those may show to some extent, and some of the roll can be controlled in blocking, so it's something to play with, rather than something with a fixed answer - just be aware.

[Photo 6]



[Photo 7]



You'll need to decide how deep you want the brim to be. Are you looking for a tidy 1" edge? A 3" hem that will cover your ears? Four or five inches of ribbing for a really good turn up without worrying about the wrong side showing at the turn?

[Photo 8]



[Photo 9]



[Photo 10]



[Photo 11]



[Photo 12]



It's common to use a smaller needle for the brim, just so it snugs in a bit. I usually go down one needle size, but how much you'll want to shift will depend on your knitting style and the result you want, and it's not a requirement – very little in knitting is. Another choice is to either, or also, cast on fewer stitches, by about 10%, and then increase to the number you want for the body in the first row of the body. If you also used a smaller needle, this is the point to change to the larger size.

3. Body – This is the place where you get to play with a hat. You've got a stretch of knitting in the round with no changes in stitch number (how long that is depends on several other decisions). Anything goes here. You can switch to plain stockinette, and just knit around and around.

[Photo 13]



You can continue the ribbing all the way up for a watch cap.

[Photo 14]



You can use any stitch pattern you like. There are lots of simple variants of rounds of knits and ribs that give nice effects.

[Photo 15]



[Photo 16]



[Photo 17]



[Photo 17B]



[Photo 18]



[Photo 19]



[Photo 20]



[Photo 21]



I like moss stitch; someone else might like a leafy lace (if they don't mind the ventilation on a windy day).

Colorwork is very effective, and will be warm. You just need to be careful about tension with the floats if you're doing stranded colorwork so that the hat doesn't end up too small.

[Photo 22]





[Photo 23]

Slip stitch colorwork is another option, and float tension isn't an issue.



[Photo 23B]

Stripes have great color possibilities, as is something as simple as a contrast brim.

[Photo 23C]



There are also many, many cable patterns that are can be used in hats, both all over and as accents.

[Photo 23D]



4. Crown – This is where you consider how you want to end your hat. You don't actually have to do anything different from what you've done in the body. Just knit an additional length for the crown, and either graft or do a three-needle bind off. That will give you a classic square shape (think the pussy hats of the 2016 election) which has been found in knitting books back into at least the 1940s. You can also join the two points of that square, either on the outside of the hat, maybe with a pompom at the join, or on the inside of the hat, which gives an interesting folded look.

[Photo 24]



[Photo 25]



[Photo 26]



[Photo 27]



If you are decreasing, pick a number of decrease points. Eight is often used, four is also common. EZ used to favor seven. Some other number might work best with the stitch pattern you've used. Life will be easier if you put markers at the decrease points. A common way to do it is to decrease eight stitches every other round until half the stitches are consumed, then decrease every round until you're ready to end.

[Photo 28]



If you make the decrease more quickly – every round from the beginning of the decreases - you'll have a shorter crown that will be more heavily gathered.

[Photo 29]



This is a good fallback if you're running out of yarn. If you're really running out of yarn, you can k2tog around, work a plain round, and repeat until your stitches few enough to close.

If you decrease more slowly – every other round until you're ready to close – you'll have a pointier top, although that pointiness may disappear with blocking and wear.



[Photo 30]

You can make that point pointier (think gnome hats) by knitting more plain rows between the decreases.

[Photo 31]



[Photo 32]



If you're using four decrease points, it's usual to do a double decrease at those four points, so you're still decreasing 8 stitches per decrease round.

To actually work the decreases, you have, of course, options. If you want multiple decrease points to swirl to the right, work until two stitches before the marker and k2tog. If you want multiple decrease points to swirl to the left, work to the marker, slip it, and SSK. If you want to decrease at four points, work to two stitches before the marker, k2tog, slip the marker, and SSK. This will give you straight lines.

[Photo 32B]



You can also leave a few stitches between those decreases, for a wider decrease line.

If you work a k2tog in a ribbing, the stitch that will show is the second stitch of the two, so if you want a clean line, adjust your decrease points so that a knit stitch is second. From that point on, that will be the second stitch, so you don't need to keep adjusting.

5. Closure – If you’re working a square hat, either grafting the top or using a three needle bindoff will work. The most common way to end a hat is to decrease until a small number of stitches is left – say, 6 to 10 or so – and then thread your yarn end on a needle and run it through the live stitches once or twice. My own preference is to take the stitch number to the same point, and then graft. I think it’s neater and more secure.

B. The Numbers To Make it Work

1. How Many Stitches - When you’re planning to adapt a hat pattern, you’re going to want to sit and study the pattern for a bit. Look at the gauge, both stitch and row. Calculate the finished size. Compare that size to what you want. Then you need to work a swatch.

There’s not a good way around this, and you need to work it the way you’ll be knitting it – for hats, that’s usually in the round. There’s a speed way to knit a swatch flat that will give you your gauge in the round. Work on a circular needle, and at the end of the row, slide the stitches back to the beginning end of the needle, pull out a long enough length of yarn that there’s more than enough to reach back to the beginning, and just work the next row. You’ll have long loops hanging off the back, but the swatch will have been worked entirely on the right side, as you would if you knit in the round. Cast on enough for about 5 inches, so that there’s a big enough field in the middle to get an accurate count. This swatch will let you confirm that you like the fabric you’re getting, and let you see how many stitches you’ll need for the hat you want in the yarn you plan to use.

There are a few things to think about when figuring that out. A lot of patterns are written with negative ease. Knitting, after all, has some

stretch, and really loose hats can fall off. But whether to use any negative ease at all, or how much, depends on how firm a fabric you're working, the characteristics of your yarn (a limp yarn might need some negative ease, while very firm or springy yarn will probably need less, if any). Some stitch patterns have a lot of stretch, so the measurement across a hat that fits well when it's lying flat may be less than the measurement you need for your circumference, but you need to be careful about that. Stretching your swatch may give you an idea of whether to make any allowance for that stretch when you calculate your stitch number.

If your reason for reworking a pattern is to make the hat with a firmer, warmer fabric that means it will have less stretch than the designer intended, and thus negative ease may mean you have a hat that will fit a child rather than an adult, especially if you use the same amount the designer called for in a looser fabric. A tighter brim traditionally has been the way to make sure the hat stays on. Fit is a personal preference, though, so bear in mind what is going to suit you, or the wearer.

The other, and really important, thing to think about is how you're planning to work the crown decreases, if you are. If you're going to decrease at 8 points, you need a number of stitches that's divisible by 8. If you're going to decrease at 5 points, you need a stitch number that's divisible by 5. This is particularly important if you're planning your decreases around a stitch pattern in the hat.

As a sample: You found a pattern you like, but it's knit in a very bulky yarn, which is heavier than you want to use. The gauge in the pattern is 12 sts to 4". You're planning to use a worsted weight yarn, and you like what it feels like at a gauge of 20 stitches to 4". The bulky hat calls for casting on 64 stitches for a large adult size (21"). Divide 64 by 3 (the per inch gauge the hat is designed for) to get 21.3" as the finished

circumference the hat is designed to be in that size. 21.3 multiplied by 5 (the per inch gauge you're planning on) will give you 106.5 stitches. Now look at your crown decreases. If you're decreasing at 8 points, you're going to want to adjust up or down depending on the fit you have in mind. 104 stitches is very close, and will probably work well. You could go to 112 if you were concerned about the hat being too tight, or drop to 96 stitches if the head you're knitting for is a little smaller.

Pay attention any time the pattern you're using (if you're adapting one) uses rows rather than inches/cm for length directions. Check your row gauge the same way you checked your stitch gauge, and calculate what length the designer is looking for, then either just work to that length, or calculate the rows you need to stay in line with the pattern.

If you're knitting without a pattern, you just need to calculate the number of stitches, at your gauge, you need for the circumference of the head you're knitting for, with due allowance for the crown decreases as described above.

2. How Long to Knit – This is another personal preference decision. Do you want your ears covered? Do you want a slouch? Do you want a long slouch? The number we calculated at the beginning – ear lobe to ear lobe divided by 2 – is the minimum length if you want your ears just covered.

If you are working crown decreases, this is the time to sit down and calculate how many rows you'll need to get the decreases done that you are planning on. If, say, you have 100 stitches, and decrease at 5 points every other round until half the stitches are gone, and then every round until 10 stitches are left, it will take you 20 rounds until half the stitches are gone, and another 8 rounds until 10 stitches are left. If your row gauge is 5 rows to the inch, 28 divided by 5 is 5.6", so it will take 5.6" for you to get the decreases done. If your finished length measurement is

8.5", you'll start the crown decreases when the hat is 3" from the cast on or the fold point if you're using a folded brim. If you want a slouch, add an inch or more to that number. Note that if you're turning up a 3" brim on a 3" body, the body won't show at all. If you have 104 stitches, and are decreasing at 8 points, you can drop to 56 stitches in 12 rounds, and will need 5 more rounds to get down to 8 stitches. That's 17 rounds for the decreases, or 3.4", so that you'd work ~5" before beginning the decreases.

C. A Few Other Things

1. If your finished hat doesn't seem to be as warm as you'd like, or if it's itchy, you can always knit a lining. You can either use the same yarn that you used for the finished hat, or something else – definitely something else if the problem is itchiness. Just turn the hat inside out, and pick up stitches at the top of the brim. You want the lining to be just slightly smaller than the hat, so pick up about two to four fewer stitches (two for heavier yarns, four for finer yarns), if your yarn is the same yarn or the same weight. If your lining yarn is a different gauge, you'll need to guess or swatch. Then just knit in the round. You can knit until you hit the point where the crown decreases start, and either bind off and lightly tack the edge down, or sew each live stitch onto the inside of the finished hat – be careful that you have the hat really smooth, so that you're sewing in the right place. You can also knit a full hat lining; just work the decreases as you did for the finished hat, fudging as necessary since your stitch number isn't the same – it's not going to show. Work the crown a round or two shorter, again, so that the lining fits smoothly. The last few rounds of this hat's lining are worked in garter so the top wouldn't curl, and the sewing would be easier.

[Photo 33]



2. Be sure to look at both sides of your swatch. Some stitch patterns are attractive (even if not identical) on both sides. You might prefer one or the other.

[Photo 34]



[Photo 35]



3. Garter stitch is also an option, either in a single yarn, or in alternating yarns for a stripe.

[Photo 36]



Pattern List – RKG Hats – Dec 12, 2022

Photos 2 & 3 – Jacques Cousteau Hat by Lalla Pohjanpalo

Photos 4 & 13 – Puro Hat by GK Knits

Photo 5 – Sugar Cane by CityPurl

Photos 8 & 33 – Christian’s Hat by Agnes Kutas

Photo 9 – Tranquil Hat by Black Crow Knits

Photos 10 & 11 – Midas Hat by Laura Reinbach

Photos 12 & 23B – Brick Hat by Aud Bergo (adapted)

Photo 15 – Backtrack Cap by YaYa Lovestoknit (adapted)

Photo 16 – Bulky Caelum Beanie by Amy Kate Sutherland

Photo 17 – The Glen Abbey Hat by cold comfort knits

Photo 17B – Miki by Atelier M (adapted)

Photo 18 – Dustland Hat by Stephen West

Photo 19 – Koko Bean Hat by Judithmarieknits

Photo 20 – Hattywampus by Laura Aylor

Photo 21 – Knobbly Beanie by Amy Kate Sutherland

Photos 22 & 23 (Meg’s) – Lineate by Elizabeth Doherty

Photo 23C – Icehouse Hat by Melissa LaBarre

Photo 23D – Claudia by MJ Kim

Photos 34 & 35 – Naylor Street by Irishgirlieknits

Photo 36 (Meg’s) – Rikke Hat by Sarah Young