GENERAL

how to knit in the round with circular needles

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Introduction

Knitting in the round with circular needles is a game changer for anyone looking to create seamless, smooth projects—think hats, sweaters, socks, or even blankets—without the pesky seams that come from flat knitting. While the idea of working in a continuous circle might sound intimidating at first, the technique is actually straightforward once you understand the fundamentals. This guide will walk you through every step of learning how to knit in the round with circular needles, from choosing the right tools to mastering advanced techniques. By the end, you'll feel confident enough to tackle any circular project, no matter how complex.

Understanding Circular Needles

Circular needles are a pair of long needles joined by a flexible cable, allowing you to knit on a wide range of stitch counts without the bulk of a large flat needle. They come in various lengths (commonly 36, 48, 60, or 72 inches) and diameters. The key to successful circular knitting is selecting a needle that comfortably fits the number of stitches you'll be working with and matches the yarn weight you're using.

Types of Circular Needles

- Standard Circular Needles – These are the most common and are great for beginners. They feature a simple cable and a straight tip.
- Cable Tip Needles – Designed to reduce friction and make it easier to pull stitches through, especially useful for bulky yarns.
- Flexible vs. Rigid Cables – Flexible cables bend easily and are ideal for large stitch counts, while rigid cables offer more stability for tighter work.

Choosing the Right Needle Length

The length of the cable should be long enough to comfortably hold all your stitches plus a little extra slack. A general rule of thumb: **for every 10 stitches, add 6 inches to your cable length.**For example, if you're working with 50 stitches, a 60 inch cable will give you ample room.

Choosing the Right Yarn and Pattern

Before you even pick up a needle, consider the yarn and the pattern. Knitting in the round is best suited for projects that require a seamless finish. Some popular choices include:

- Lightweight fingering or sport weight yarn for hats and lightweight sweaters.
- DK or worsted weight yarn for mitts, scarves, and larger garments.
- Bulky or super bulky yarn for cozy blankets and chunky socks.

Patterns that specify "knit in the round" or "circular" will often include a recommended needle size and stitch count. If you're experimenting, start with a simple ribbed hat pattern to get a feel for the technique.

Basic Techniques for Knitting in the Round

Once you have your needles, yarn, and pattern ready, it's time to dive into the core steps that will allow you to knit

smoothly in the round.

1. Casting On

1. Choose a casting on method that works for circular knitting. Common techniques include the long tail cast on or the knit on cast on.
2. Cast on the desired number of stitches. Remember, the number of stitches you cast on will determine the size of your finished piece.
3. Place the stitches on the circular needle. Keep the needle tip at the back of the stitches, and let the cable lie flat.

2. Joining the Round

After casting on, you'll need to join the stitches into a circle. This step is critical to prevent a seam.

- Use the magic loop method for smaller stitch counts. This involves pulling the cable back through the stitches and forming a loop.
- For larger stitch counts, simply wrap the cable around the needles. The back of the stitches should be on the same side as the needles.
- Secure the join. Many knitters tie a slip knot or use a small piece of yarn to keep the join from sliding.

3. Working in the Round

Now that you've joined the stitches, you can start knitting. The key difference from flat knitting is that you're always working the same direction—no turning the work.

1. Hold the needle with the stitches in the left hand. The needle with the empty tip will be in your right hand.
2. Insert the right hand needle into the first stitch from right to left. This is the same as flat knitting.
3. Yarn over and pull the new stitch through. Slide the new stitch onto the right hand needle.
4. Repeat until the row is complete. Since you're knitting in the round, the last stitch of the row will be the first stitch of the next.

4. Binding Off

Binding off in the round is slightly different because you're working in a continuous circle.

1. Knit the first two stitches.
2. Use the knit through the back loop method. Insert the left hand needle into the front of the first stitch, lift it over the second stitch, and pull the new stitch onto the left hand needle.
3. Repeat until one stitch remains.
4. Cut the yarn, leaving a tail, and pull it through the last stitch to secure.

Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them

Even seasoned knitters encounter hiccups when working in the round. Below are common issues and practical solutions.

Tension Problems

Uneven tension can cause a lopsided project. Keep your fingers relaxed and maintain a consistent wrist movement. If you feel tension building, pause and stretch your fingers.

Loop Formation

Loops that are too tight or too loose can distort the shape. Use a **tension gauge** or a simple ruler to measure the width of your stitches. Adjust by pulling the yarn tighter or looser as needed.

Knotting and Yarn Ends

Knots can form when the yarn end is dragged through the stitches. To avoid this, keep the yarn tail tucked behind the stitches or use a **tension ring** to hold the yarn in place.

Managing Yarn Ends on Large Projects

For projects with many stitches, the yarn end can become unwieldy. Use a **yarn holder** or a small piece of plastic tubing to keep the tail from tangling.

Advanced Tips: Cable Knitting, Colorwork, and Shaping

Once you're comfortable with basic knitting in the round, you can explore more complex techniques that add texture and visual interest.

Cable Knitting

- Use cable needles to hold the stitches you're swapping.
- Plan your cable pattern ahead of time; mark the positions on the chart.
- When you reach a cable stitch, pull the cable needle into the back of the stitch, then knit the front stitch over the cable.

Colorwork

- Use color changing techniques such as introduction and introduction & deletion to manage multiple yarns.
- Keep the yarn ends short and tuck them behind the work to avoid tangles.
- Use a color changing chart to keep track of where each yarn begins and ends.

Shaping (Gills, Decreases, and Increases)

Shaping in the round can be achieved with *decreases* (e.g., knit two together, slip knit, slip purl) and *increases* (e.g., yarn over). Be mindful of the direction of the decreases to maintain a balanced shape.

Projects to Practice

Practice is essential. Here are a few beginner friendly projects that allow you to hone your circular knitting skills.

- Simple Ribbed Hat – A classic project that teaches basic casting on and binding off.
- Lightweight Scarf – Knitting in the round creates a smooth edge.
- Chunky Blanket – Great for experimenting with bulky yarn and cable knitting.
- Sock – A slightly more advanced project that involves shaping and multiple yarn colors.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: Can I knit in the round with a short cable?

A: Yes, but you'll need to be careful not to pull the cable too tightly. A longer cable gives you more room to maneuver, especially for larger stitch counts.

Q: How do I prevent a seam when joining the round?

A: Use a slip knot or a small piece of yarn to secure the join. The slip knot should be placed on the back of the stitches and tightened gently.

Q: What if my stitches look uneven?

A: Check your tension, make sure you're inserting the needle correctly, and consider using a tension gauge.

Q: Can I knit in the round with a single needle?

A: It's possible with a *magic loop*technique, but it's more challenging. Circular needles are the preferred tool for most knitters.

Conclusion

Knitting in the round with circular needles opens up a world of possibilities, from seamless hats to beautifully finished sweaters. By understanding the fundamentals—choosing the right needles, mastering the basic techniques, and troubleshooting common problems—you'll quickly become comfortable with this versatile method. Keep practicing with a variety of projects, experiment with cables and colorwork, and soon you'll be creating polished, professional looking pieces that showcase your newfound skill. Happy knitting!

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