

# A GOOD YARN



*to block or not to block??*

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# Blocking

Blocking involves wetting (in some way) your finished knitted or crocheted project and pinning/shaping into its finished shape. There are several different methods for blocking and it depends on the project and the yarn fibre that is used.

## *Benefits of blocking*

There are lots of benefits to blocking;

- if you block before seaming, then it will be easier to see where you are sewing and the edges won't curl in.
- another benefit of blocking before seaming, is to see if it grows when washed (because most garments are going to be washed at some point) and it's a problem that's a lot easier to fix before you sew it together.
- all those wonky, uneven or loose stitches will even out once blocked (honestly, it does).
- blocking can fix a lot of errors, if your garment isn't wide enough or long enough, then you can increase some of the measurements with blocking.
- knitting and crochet stitches have an energy to them and they can pull your work in directions that you don't want e.g. curling edges, stiffness and wrinkles. Blocking will calm these down and if you've used a natural fibre then can remove these unwanted shapes completely.
- projects that involve lace really have to be blocked to open up the lace pattern and show the piece off to its full potential.
- in general, blocking will make your project look crisp and professional, much like having a crisply ironed shirt.

Blocking has a greater effect on natural fibres than man-made ones. That's why acrylic isn't really recommended for lace because it's difficult to open up the pattern and keep it there. Though blocking on man-made fibres does have an effect and is still well worth doing.

## *Blocking Methods*

There are three main methods to blocking.

*Wet blocking* is my favourite method, and what I use for the majority of projects. However, it is the slowest to dry and not appropriate for some fibres or projects.

1. First, the project needs to be soaked in lukewarm water. If the project is small enough do it in the sink, if not then it will have to be a bath tub. The main point to keep in mind, especially with natural fibres, is don't agitate it. Two ingredients are needed to felt fibre, water and agitation. Fill the sink/tub with lukewarm water, then place the project in the water. Either let it soak the water up naturally or if you're super impatient like me, then gently push it under water until all the fibre has been soaked.
2. Using a no rinse delicate wash, like Soak / Eucalan, pour this over the project and leave to soak for 15 minutes. The beauty of the no rinse wash is you don't have to try and wring the suds out and risk felting your work.
3. After 15 minutes, empty the sink while holding onto the knitting so it doesn't sag. Gently press into the bottom of the sink/tub to remove excess water, do not wring though. Have a big towel ready on the floor, remove the knitting from the sink, while supporting it



so it doesn't stretch. Lay out flat(tish) on the towel and roll it up, then stand on it to squeeze as much water out as possible. The drier it is at this stage, the sooner it will dry during blocking.

4. The project now needs to be pinned into the finished shape that you want and left to dry. For pinning details, see below.
5. This all seems quite complex on first reading but the basic principle is you are washing the project. It'll become second nature after a few times.

*Steam blocking* is the method I use if time is an issue. It takes no time at all to dry but I feel it's not quite as effective as wet blocking.

1. Pin the piece into shape wrong side up.
2. With a steam iron, on maximum steam setting, hold the iron just above the work, do not touch the iron to the work at all. Most irons have a steam button. Press this. Steam the entire surface of the work, then leave to dry.

*Spritz blocking* is very similar to steam blocking and used for fibres that don't tolerate heat or if you just don't have an appropriate steam iron. This method has its downsides for thicker yarns, the water just doesn't get through all the fibre and the blocking doesn't hold very well. It's a lot more useful for thinner yarns, e.g. laceweight.

1. Pin the piece into shape wrong side up.
2. Using a spray bottle, spritz the surface until damp and then leave to dry.

## Pinning

The best type of pin to use for blocking is stainless steel T-pins. They won't leave rust marks and are thick enough to stay in position and the T-shape stops the knitting from pulling off the top of the pin. Other pins can be used too, though it's probably best if they are stainless steel.

Blocking can be done anywhere e.g. spare bed, carpet or specially bought foam mat. For safety reasons, it's probably best to do it somewhere out of the way, where it can dry for a day or two.

The basic gist for blocking out a project is to get it into the finished shape. It preferably wants to be pinned because most fibres will shrink as they dry and will move out of shape unless pinned. If your project contains ribbing edges, then it's best to leave these areas unblocked, still wet them though but don't pull them out and pin them as they need to remain elastic.

Blocking can just be done with pins. For long straight edges though, try and use lots of pins so the edge isn't scalloped.

### Tip

The trick to blocking is to pin it to the exact shape you want. It will look the same as it's blocked so take that little extra effort to get it to as you want it.

Blocking wires can take a lot of frustration out of blocking. The wires are threaded through the edge stitches then a handful of pins are used to place the wires in position. This gives perfect straight edges and a lot less pinning. If you are blocking before seaming, then use the wires a row in so the stitches you are

sewing are not pulled out of shape. For a neater finish, when threading the blocking wires through the stitches of your project, make sure you put the wires into the stitches in the same manner each time.

Blocking wires are particularly great for scalloped edges. The wire is threaded through the tip of the scallop and it allows the scallops to line up with the next.

Lace shawls and scarves are often blocked aggressively. This means to stretch the project out as far as it will go as this increases the airiness and drape of the object.



There are specific sock blockers available to purchase which are super easy to use. For tams, then a dinner plate can be used as a blocking form.

Not everything that is blocked is flat. Many projects are 3D. Use scrunched up newspaper in plastic bags to fill in the 3D spaces. Balloons are a great blocking tool for hats - blow up the balloon inside and the extra cool thing, is the shape of the balloon doesn't stretch out the ribbing either.

There are lots of traditional blocking tools that have been created over the years. There is sweater blocker, which is an extendable wooden frame that goes inside the sweater for it to dry on. There are also mitten blockers and gigantic shawl blocking frames.

## Fibres

Different types of fibre behave differently when wet and also when worn. This is why it is recommended to make a swatch and then wash and block it. This is so you know exactly how your finished garment will behave when washed and worn. Even if you decide not to block, garments can change shape because of our body heat. So really make and block that swatch, if you want your finished project to fit well.

Fibre	Wet Blocking	Steam Blocking	Pin and Spritz
Wool	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Wool blocks very well and has plenty of elasticity, so wool projects can be re-blocked easily. When wet blocking, take care not to agitate the wool as this could lead to felting.</i>			
Alpaca	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Alpaca blocks well and will retain its blocking shape. However, it doesn't have much elasticity, so be careful not to overstretch it as it will not spring back into shape.</i>			
Mohair	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Mohair can be weaker when wet, so wet blocking is probably the least recommended method. However, I've used it without incident. After blocking, brushing the mohair can increase the fluffiness of the yarn (I wouldn't attempt this with a lace pattern though, as you could catch the stitches).</i>			
Cashmere	Yes	Yes	Yes
Angora	Yes	Not recommended	Yes
<i>Both cashmere and angora are weaker when wet, so wet blocking is the least recommended method. Though if handled gently, then wet blocking is a good method. If unsure, then the safest option is to pin and spritz. Angora can felt very easily so steam blocking is not recommended.</i>			
Linen	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Linen is extremely strong when wet so wet blocking is the recommended method. Linen will not felt so it doesn't need to be handled gently.</i>			
Cotton	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Cotton can stretch out of shape easily when worn, so it is often recommended to knit on a size smaller needle than recommended. Any method is suitable for cotton. If it stretches when worn, then re-blocking will bring it back to its original shape.</i>			
Silk	Not recommended	Not recommended	Yes
<i>Silk can be extremely fragile when wet and excessive heat can reduce the shine. Pin and spritz is the only recommended method. Wet blocking can be done with care.</i>			
Man-made fibres, e.g. acrylic & nylon	Yes	Not recommended	Yes
<i>Man-made fibres tend to be some form of plastic so any heat (even at low iron temperatures) can melt the fibre.</i>			
Blends	Yes	Not recommended if it contains artificial fibres	If in doubt, use this method
<i>Depends on the blend. If it contains artificial fibres, then don't use steam blocking. Wet blocking and pin and spritz will be suitable for most blends.</i>			
Fluffy Novelty	Maybe	Not recommended	Maybe
<i>Novelty yarns are often made from artificial fibres like acrylic so steam blocking is not recommended. If the project is for a non-wearable project made from novelty yarns, then it is preferable if it is not blocked.</i>			

