

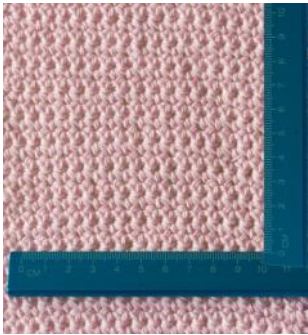
Choosing the Right Hook

Your yarn arrives in the post, and you're eager to get started on your latest project idea. It's all too easy to assume everything will work out fine if you just stick to the hook indicated in your pattern... and a tension swatch takes up time you don't want to waste!

Experienced crocheters, however, are well aware of how vital a tension swatch is to your success (they learnt this via their own impatience!). If you want your garment to fit, and you don't want to run out of yarn with one sleeve missing, you need to make sure your hook is going to get the job done as intended.



When selecting a hook, make sure your crochet pattern and the ballband for your chosen yarn have the same tension (or if not, that the pattern states it's worked tighter or looser than usual). It's also important to check what stitch pattern is used to create the tension for your project.



Then it's time to start on your tension swatch. Tension is usually given as the number of stitches and rows to 10cm, but you want to make your swatch larger than this: 12-15cm is ideal. To do this, you'll need to add half again as many stitches stated in the tension ie. a tension of 22 stitches to 10cm will need an additional 11 stitches for the tension swatch (33 stitches all up).

Make your foundation chain to the length required, adjusting the number of chain as per the pattern repeat, then work in the stitch pattern required until you have a square. *Don't press.*

Use a ruler to measure out 10cm square, then count the number of stitches inside the area. Too many stitches indicate your work is too tight: opt for a larger hook and work another tension square to check the results. If there are too few stitches, your work is too loose: try a smaller hook.

If you find you have the right number of stitches, but too many or too few rows, this is more difficult to correct (but quite rare - usually the entire piece will be either too tight or too loose). Try alternating one row or round with one size hook and the next with a size larger/smaller as needed to modify the row count. However, if the pattern indicates to work to a certain length rather than giving a set number of rows, this is not necessary - just work to the length indicated.

For projects in fancy stitch patterns, your pattern may indicate tension as the number of pattern repeats to 10cm. Create a tension swatch with at least 2 more pattern repeats, then check to see if there are too few or too many repeats inside the given area.

Patterns for projects comprising lots of motifs usually indicate how large one motif should be. Modify your hook as required until you get the right size. For circular motifs worked in the round, patterns usually give a diameter for the first few rounds. Measure the diameter (the width at the widest point) once you've worked the stated number of rounds to check your tension.

Whilst certainly not the most glamorous of tasks, working a tension swatch provides its own rewards, reflected in the beautiful finished item that actually feels and fits as it should!