

Modifying Commercial Patterns

by Beth O'Brien 5/22/00



Beth O'Brien lives in the Chicago Suburbs and is an active member of the [Cast Away Guild](#). She teaches knitting at two local yarn shops, *Have Ewe Any Wool* in Elmhurst, IL and *Wool & Company* in St. Charles, IL. Knitting to fit is a constant theme throughout Beth's classes. She strongly believes that with some upfront planning, knitting can be a more enjoyable and rewarding experience. This is a very important subject, and one that all knitters should understand. We sincerely thank Beth for taking time from her busy schedule to share this information with TKGGA members. - *Jean Lampe, Education Director TKGGA*

Have you ever knitted a project to gauge – but it didn't fit?

Knitting to gauge is not the only factor that ensures a proper fit. You should also verify the finished measurements in the pattern and make any necessary adjustments. Too often, we choose a size and blindly knit the garment according to the measurements in the pattern. It is only after we have completed the garment when we realize the sleeves are too long or the body is too short. Why not determine this pitfall before you make the sweater!

Taking Body Measurements

Let's start with a discussion on taking body measurements. Before you can modify a commercial knitting pattern, you need accurate measurements of the person who will be wearing the garment. If the sweater is for yourself, have another person take these measurements for you.

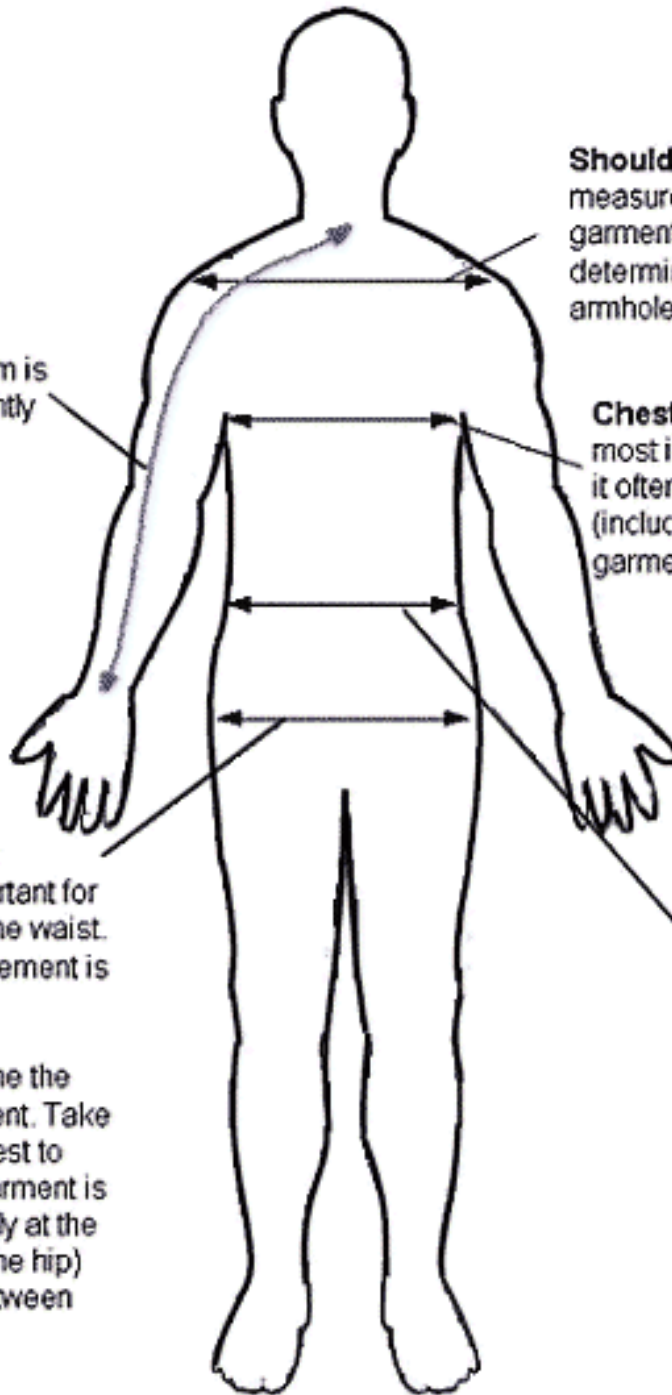
Mid-Back To Wrist: This measurement is crucial in determining the finished length of the sleeve. When taking this measurement, make sure the person's arm is next to their sides and slightly bent at the elbow.

Shoulder Width: This body measurement directly affects the garments fit and look and also determines the shaping of the armhole and sleeve.

Chest Circumference: This is the most important body measurement as it often determines the width (including ease) of the finished garment.

Waist Circumference: For garments that end above the hip, this measurement is less crucial. However, the waist circumference is important for a close-fitting garment.

Hip Circumference: This measurement is only important for garments that end below the waist. Note that if the hip measurement is greater than the chest measurement, the hip measurement will determine the finished width of the garment. Take the hip measurement closest to where the bottom of the garment is going to hit. This is typically at the full hip (the widest part of the hip) or the high hip (halfway between the full hip and waist).



Please Note: The above list includes only those measurements used within the scope of this lesson. There are additional body measurements that are relevant when making more sophisticated adjustments to patterns or when designing your own garment.

Use the chart below to record these body measurements:

Chest Circumference: _____ in.

Shoulder Width: _____ in.

Waist Circumference: _____ in.

Full Hip Circumference: _____ in.

High Hip Circumference: _____ in.

Arm Length: _____ in.

Mid-Back to Wrist: _____ in.

Choosing A Size In The Pattern

There are typically three to four sizes to choose from in a commercial knitting pattern. Most patterns give sizes in terms of finished chest circumference. However, there are patterns where the sizes are given based on the actual chest circumference so look carefully. Labels given to the sizes (i.e. Small, Medium, Large) are inconsistent across patterns. Do not assume that since you always wear a size Medium sweater that this is the size you should make.

Determining which size to make:

- Measure the actual chest circumference with a tape measure.
- Look at the pattern for the choices in finished chest circumferences and choose a size based on how much ease you typically prefer in your sweaters. Ease is the amount of extra fabric allowed beyond the body measurements. A basic rule of thumb is to add 2 to 8 inches of ease to your actual chest measurement depending on the weight of the fabric (light, medium, heavy) and the fit you prefer (close-fitting, classic, over-sized). So if your actual chest measurement is 38" and the sizes to choose from are 40", 44" and 48". The 40" size has 2" of ease, the 44" size has 6" of ease, and the 48" size has 10 inches of ease. Most likely you would choose 44" but once again, this depends on your personal preference.
- Verify your decision by measuring a favorite fitting sweater. You might be surprised at how

much ease it has.

- If a favorite sweater is not available, then hold the tape measure around your chest at the finished chest circumference to see if that is a preferable size. Be careful when verifying the amount of ease by encircling a tape measure around your chest - remember that your sweater is not as thin as the tape measure.
- If the sweater goes over the hips and the hip measurement is greater than the actual chest measurement, use the hip measurement to determine the size.
- If you cannot find a size in the pattern that fits, you can adjust the body width in the pattern.

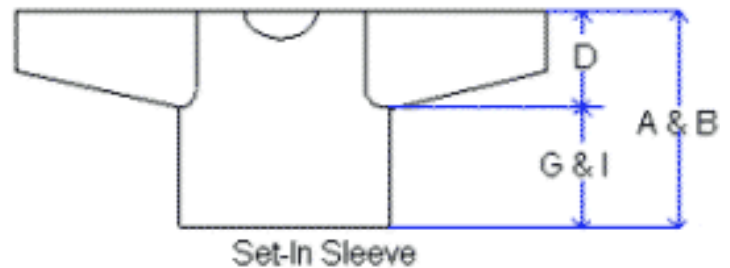
Modifying The Commercial Pattern

You are now ready to verify the finished measurements in the pattern. In this portion of the lesson we will discuss how to modify the body length, body width, sleeve length and sleeve shaping in a commercial knitting pattern. These are relatively simple modifications that do not require in-depth knowledge of sweater design. If you require more sophisticated changes to patterns, (e.g., sleeve circumference, armhole depth, shoulder width, and wrist circumference), I recommend learning the concepts of sweater design so you can modify these areas of a garment as well.

Body Length

This is the easiest adjustment to make in a commercial pattern. The hardest part is deciding how long you want the sweater! Stand in front of a mirror with a tape measure and mark off the length given in the pattern. If you don't like where it hits your body, add or subtract length. Measuring the length of a similarly styled garment that you own is very helpful. When working on a dropped shoulder sweater, adjust the length in the area of the body before the neck shaping. When working on a set-in sleeve sweater, adjust the length in the area before the armhole shaping. If the pattern has a chart (e.g., Intarsia or Fair Isle) or pattern stitches (e.g., knit/purl pattern, cable pattern), take this into account when adjusting length so that the chart or pattern ends at an aesthetically pleasing place in the sweater.

Adjusting Body Length:

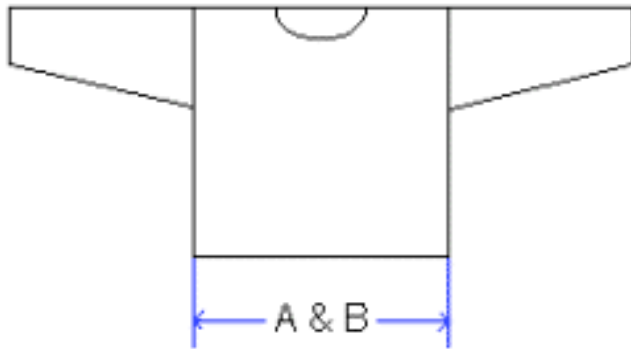


Body Width For a body width greater than the largest size, recalculate the number of stitches to cast on and follow the directions for the largest size. For a body width less than the smallest size, recalculate the number of stitches to cast on and follow the directions for the smallest size. For a body width in between those in the pattern, recalculate the number of stitches to cast on and follow the size closest to the new body width. However, you may be limited in size increments if there is a stitch pattern in the sweater that has a rather large multiple.

Take the following into consideration when adjusting body width:

- The sleeve length must be adjusted when adding or subtracting body width. See **Sleeve Length** section for detailed instructions.
- For a dropped shoulder design, do not to add too much body width or the shoulders will be too wide. This results in the body being out of proportion with the sleeves. If more width is needed in the hip area but not in the chest, consider an A-line shaped sweater.
- For a set-in sleeve design, only make small adjustments to the body width as the shoulder width is also affected. Shoulder width is more critical in a set-in sleeve design because the top of the sleeve hits the end of the shoulder. When adding body width, verify the new shoulder width (e.g., add/subtract the change in body width to the shoulder width in the pattern) to ensure that it is still acceptable.

Adjusting Body Width:



A = New Chest Circumference = ____ in.

B = Chest Circumference in Pattern = ____ in.

C = Stitch Gauge = ____ st./in.

D = Stitch Pattern Multiple = ____ sts

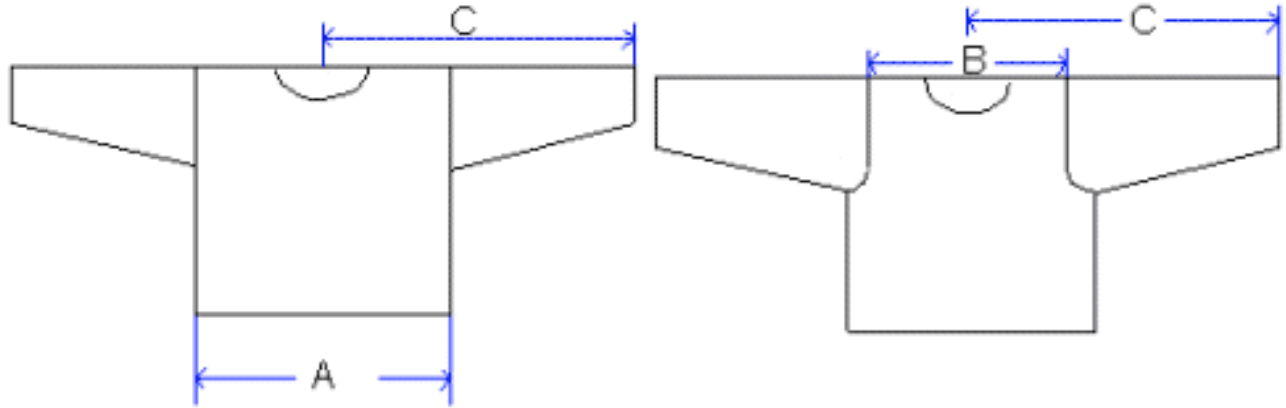
E = Cast on for Front in Pattern = ____ sts

F = Cast on for Back in Pattern = ____ sts

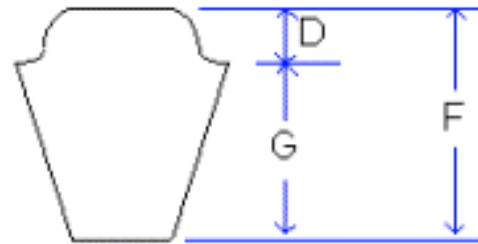
Sleeve Length

Always verify the sleeve length in a pattern before blindly going ahead and knitting the sleeves. Arm

lengths and shoulder widths vary tremendously from person to person. If you have changed the body width of the sweater, you must adjust the sleeve length.



Dropped Shoulder



Set-in Sleeve