



## Nina's Sweater Class

*Introduction: Identifying Goals and Selecting Yarn*

Let's make a sweater!

The first question that you must ask (and answer!) is, "Who is this sweater for?"

If this is your first time custom-designing a sweater, I highly recommend that you make it for yourself. You will have plenty of time to perfect this recipe for gifts later. Your first custom made sweater is an achievement from which you will take great pride, and you deserve to enjoy the fruits of this labor yourself. If you feel strongly that you would like to make this sweater for someone else, bear in mind that you will have to do a bit of questioning and detective work on the recipient—you will need to have one of their favorite sweaters and/or their body measurements handy to follow these lessons. Since I hope that many of you will choose to give this gift to yourself, I have used the pronouns "you" and "your" throughout this pattern; if you are knitting for someone else, please read them as "she" or "he" and "hers" or "his," and bear the recipient in mind as you answer the questions.

We're going to begin by choosing our ideal fabric. We'll cover some areas of consideration in choosing your yarn to achieve your desired fabric or something close to it, and once you have your yarn picked out or narrowed down the contenders to a few likely choices, in Lesson One, we'll discuss the swatching and measuring processes in some detail.

Consider these questions, and the discussion after each, making notes of your own if you find it helpful:

### **What purpose do you want this sweater to serve?**

Take some time to imagine yourself wearing this sweater. What are you doing in it? The sweater you want will vary greatly depending on the context in which you want to use it. The sweaters that will keep you warm while skiing, keep the sun off your shoulders while sailing, keep you looking polished at a fancy dinner, or keep you cozy and comfortable relaxing on the sofa, each have their own specific qualities and we want the sweater you make to be the right one for YOU. A ski sweater will be close fitting, densely knit and worked out of an elastic animal fiber like wool which breathes and wicks away moisture. A sailing cover-up will be a thinner fabric worked out of a cool fiber like cotton or linen, and may have  $\frac{3}{4}$  length sleeves that won't get in the way of your hands. A posh "out to dinner sweater" will be the right length to complement with your favorite style of skirts or slacks, and will probably be knit out of a more luxurious fiber, like a silk or cashmere blend. And a lazy day sweater will probably be relaxed and roomy, with a longer hem and sleeves, might be knit in a super-soft, next to the skin fiber, and might need to be machine washable. And of course, there are other functions of pullovers, so think about what you would most like to wear and then refer to that vision as you explore yarn choices more fully through the following questions.

### **Does this require a thick fabric or a thin one?**

This question is about needle choice as much as about yarn choice. A worsted weight yarn can form a lighter, thinner fabric if knit on large needles, and a sportweight yarn can form a dense, thick fabric if knit on small needles. This is also a question that will address your personal preferences: If you get warm easily then you will want to consider a thinner fabric for your sweater; if you want a sweater for those winter days when you feel you can never get warm, you will want a thicker fabric.

Yarn choice is not limited to the weights that are commercially available; remember that you can double or triple strand other yarns for some fun effects. Love hand painted lace but don't want to make a lace sweater? Pair one strand of luxurious lace with 2 strands of fingering weight for a worsted weight! Below are some rough equivalencies of yarn weights:

2 strands of laceweight = fingering weight

1 strand of laceweight + 1 strand of fingering weight = sportweight

2 strands of fingering weight = DK weight

1 strand of fingering weight + 1 strand of sport weight = worsted weight

2 strands of Sportweight = Heavy worsted or Aran weight

1 strand of sportweight + 1 strand of Dk weight = Bulky weight

For the purposes of this pattern it is not recommended that you go thicker than a bulky weight yarn.

### **A warm fiber or a cool one?**

Generally, fibers that come from animals are warmer than fibers that come from plants. Alpaca is warmer than wool, and cotton is warmer than linen. Silk and Modal are both very cool fibers and are often blended with wool or cotton to give them more drape and to add sheen and durability. Nylon and acrylic microfiber are often blended with light wools and cottons to add durability as well, though cotton/acrylic blends can be warmer than cotton alone.

### **Do you want a drapey, fabric or a more structured one?**

Wool and wool blends (where the non-superwash wool content is greater than 50%) have “memory” so the fibers hold their structure very well. 100% non-superwash wool garments worked at a tight gauge can be quite structured, which is great for ski sweaters. Knit at a looser gauge, wool can be drapey, and with the addition of some silk or alpaca, neither of which has much memory at all, can become very drapey. Cotton has very little memory, which may be mitigated by the addition of microfiber, which gives it more memory, or enhanced by the addition of linen or Modal, which makes it smoother and more drapey.

The structure of any knitted fabric depends both on the fiber and the gauge, so bear in mind when choosing your fiber that you will have some control over the gauge when you chose your needle size in lesson one.

### **How much time do you want to devote to the knitting of this sweater?**

A sweater in fingering weight will take much more time to knit than a sweater in bulky weight. Think about how much time you want to invest in this project and keep that in mind when choosing your yarn. Will you really knit an entire sweater out of laceweight, when you can get a drapey, cool fabric out of a dk or worsted weight cotton blend? Or are you so set on working in a fine gauge that you believe it will be worth all those hours of knitting and the tiny needles? Conversely, are you considering a bulky weight even though you hate thick sweaters? A sweater in Dk weight might be much more comfortable for you, and won't take THAT much longer to knit. Answer these questions honestly—I want everyone in this class to feel the thrill of a completed sweater that they truly love!

### **Do you want it to be machine washable or are you ok with handwash only?**

This is an entirely personal choice. If you absolutely must have a machine-washable garment, choose a plant fiber or superwash wool. Keep in mind, however, that many of the great qualities of wool (such as it's memory and elasticity) are lost with superwash treatment, and many delightful and warm animal fibers (like alpaca and cashmere) are rarely superwash. I believe that if you truly love your sweater, you will not have trouble finding the time to care for it, and woolen sweaters rarely need washing anyway.

### **What is your budget for this piece?**

Keep your budget in mind as you shop for fibers. Your dream sweater can be knit on your budget.

All of these questions will influence your yarn choice. You may refer to your favorite garment for inspiration, but beware, machine-made garments are usually worked at much finer gauges than it is practical to hand-knit at, so if you're favorite

garment is extremely sheer or light, you will probably want to work a thicker fabric for the sake of your mental and physical health!

The following chart contains yardage estimates for common weights of yarn and common bust sizes. If you have a favorite sweater that you referred to in this exercise, measure the bust (or widest part of the torso) on that piece to figure out the bust size you will be making. If you are working from your own measurement, add at least 2 inches (more if you want an oversized sweater) to your actual bust measurement to calculate.

	32"	36"	40"	44"	48"	52"	56"
Fingering	1500	1800	2100	2400	2700	3000	3300
Sport	1200	1400	1700	1900	2100	2300	2500
DK	1000	1200	1400	1600	1800	2000	2200
Worsted/Heavy Worsted	900	1100	1300	1500	1700	1900	2100
Bulky	700	900	1050	1200	1300	1450	1600

Remember that if you are double or triple-stranding to make a weight you prefer, you will need to double or triple the yardage to be sure you buy enough yarn. If you are between sizes, it is safest to round up when purchasing yarn. There is a small cushion added into these requirements for swatching, but if you like to swatch, or if you know you'll need more yarn for a long torso or sleeves, it is always a good idea to buy a ball or two extra.

You may also choose to try a variety of yarns to swatch before you commit to one for your sweater. This can be a great idea, especially if you are having trouble visualizing the properties of the fibers discussed in this handout. Another advantage of swatching first is that you can estimate your required yardage much more accurately once you have a gauge swatch to estimate from. There are some great online yardage estimators—I find this one easiest to use:

<http://www.knittingfool.com/pages/yards1.guest.cfm>

I'll be working a simple stockinette, single color sweater out of Swish Worsted, but you might choose to do something more ambitious! When considering your yarn choice, think about colors, stripes, anything that will make your sweater more "you." I will only be covering stockinette stitch sweaters—if you want a lacey look, try knitting fine yarn on many needles! If you want a ribbed sweater or a cabled one, the things we go over in this course will probably give you enough information to figure it out, but patterned sweaters are too much to cover with the limited time we have! Perhaps the intermediate sweater course will touch on this topic.

When you have selected your yarn or found some yarns to try out, you are ready to start swatching! See you in Lesson One!