



By Sandi Rosner

“What size should I make?” Hardly a day goes by without some variation of this question popping up in the knitosphere. It’s understandable. We’ve all had the experience of investing time and money in a project only to end up with a sweater that’s too tight, loose or otherwise ill-fitting. Here’s how to make sure your next knit is just right.

Most sizing problems arise from one of two factors: gauge and ease. We’ll leave gauge discussions for another time (You did swatch, right? And adjust needle size if necessary? Then double-checked your gauge periodically as you worked on the project? Good. I thought so.) For now, let’s clear up the confusion about ease.

Simply put, ease is the difference between the finished measurements of the garment and the actual measurements of your body. Garments are designed with two types of ease: wearing ease, which allows room for sitting, standing, and bending at the elbows and other joints, and intended ease, which creates the silhouette the designer wants to achieve with the garment. The former isn’t so much of an issue with knits—unlike sewn fabric garments, the stretchy nature of a sweater already allows room for bending, sitting, and the like. A garment can be made with positive ease (larger than the body) or with negative ease (smaller than the body). The ideal amount of ease for a particular garment is influenced by the garment style, the characteristics of the fabric, the ebb and flow of fashion trends and your personal preference.

Think of this way: Your favorite T-shirt and your favorite winter coat probably do not measure the same, even if they are the same size. That’s because different garment styles need to fit differently. A garment intended to be worn next to the skin is often sized with little to no ease (in most cases you want a close fit); but a garment intended to be worn over other layers obviously needs to be bigger. Likewise, thick, chunky sweaters are usually best worn with a generous amount of ease—if not, the end result can be an unappealing “stuffed-sausage” look. Lightweight sweaters, on the other hand, can be closely fitted or loose and drapery, depending on the style.

Let’s look at some examples. [Greenaway](#) by Amy Herzog is a fitted top that’s intended to be worn next to the skin. Made in Blue Moon Fiber Arts Peru, a DK-weight alpaca, wool and silk blend, it’s designed to follow your curves and comfortably hug the body. Amy has specified a close fit, with intended ease of 0-1” / 0-2.5 cm.



Photo Copyright Mårten Ivert

Cathy Caron's [Catskill](#) is a great winter layering piece. Made in Tahki•Stacy Charles Montana, a thick and lofty 100% wool, this sweater works best with a loose and roomy fit, sliding easily over shirts and turtlenecks. Cathy has specified an oversized fit, with 5-8" / 12.5-20.5 cm ease.



Photo Copyright Jane Heller

For sweaters, ease is usually measured in relation to the bust. How does this affect designs with unusual shapes? Mona Schmidt's [Tenley](#) jacket is a swing shape – about 6" / 15 cm wider in the hips than in the bust. For a coat sweater in a chunky yarn (Briggs & Little's 100% wool Atlantic), you might expect lots of ease, but Mona has called for only 1-2" / 2.5-5 cm. The extra room in the hip (where, let's face it, most of us could use some extra room) allows for a closer fit through the bust. Without careful fitting through the shoulders and bust, swing and trapeze shapes can be overwhelming.



Photo Copyright Jane Heller

Every few decades, the dolman or batwing shape has a fashion moment. According to recent trend reports, such a moment may be upon us. These sweaters are more fitted through the hip and wider through the bust and shoulders. If you are considering a sweater with this sort of inverted triangle silhouette, choose ease based on the hip measurement, not the bust.

The amount of ease we like in a sweater can vary with changes in fashion. In the 50s and 60s, classic cashmere sweaters were very closely fitted, with smaller armholes than we see today. If you look at knitting magazines from the 80s, you'll see lots of long, oversized pullovers. You may also find that your ease preferences change with age and the impact of gravity on your body. Young, slender women often prefer tighter sweaters. Past 40, most of us will opt for a roomier fit that follows our curves without hugging too close.

The Craft Yarn Council of America (CYCA) has developed standard language to describe the way a knitted garment is intended to fit.

Intended Fit	Amount of ease
Very-close fitting	Actual chest/bust measurement or less
Close-fitting	1–2" / 2.5–5 cm
Standard-fitting	2–4" / 5–10 cm
Loose-fitting	4–6" / 10–15 cm
Oversized	6" / 15 cm or more

If these standards are employed, you can expect that a pattern labeled “close fitting” will measure 1–2"/2.5–5cm larger than the body measurements give for a particular size. While these guidelines are helpful, the use of these terms is inconsistent, and the categories are pretty broad. Some patterns will indicate garment size as Small, Medium and Large; others will indicate size by indicating that a particular set of instructions is designed “to fit size 36 (40, 44)”. Neither of these options tells you much about the actual finished measurements of the garment. You'll have to refer to the schematic (which lists the actual finished measurements of the pieces) to figure out how big the garment will be.

Twist Collective patterns list actual finished measurements, rather than “to fit” sizes. That means that if you are working at the specified gauge and following the pattern as written, the measurements listed in the pattern instructions will indicate how big the sweater will be. We try to be precise with these measurements, rounding to the nearest ¼" or .5 cm. We also ask the designers to tell us how the garment is supposed to fit. You'll see this listed on both the shop page and the actual pattern as “Intended to be worn with 2-4" / 5-10 cm ease”, or “Intended to be worn with 0-2" / 0-5 cm negative ease.” Finally, we tell you about the fit you are seeing in the photographs. On the magazine page, one of the items in the pop-up box that appears when you

roll over the garment name is "Shown with 1" / 2.5 cm ease." This is the difference between the actual bust measurement of the model in the photograph and the measurement of the sweater.



The rollover on the magazine page, will tell you the sample size and amount of ease shown.
Photo Copyright Jane Heller

Sizing Things Up

So, how do you decide which size to make? It all starts with knowing your own measurements. It's hard to measure yourself accurately, so enlist the help of a close friend. Open a bottle of wine, swear a blood oath of secrecy, and measure each other. This can even be a fun activity for your knitting group. No need to get naked; wear a well-fitted bra, a t-shirt and leggings or yoga pants. Use a new tape measure (cloth tape measures can stretch with age) to take the measurements indicated on the measurements worksheets (downloadable below).

[DOWNLOAD THE TWIST COLLECTIVE MEASUREMENT WORKSHEET
\(includes woman, man, children pages\)](#)

Keep the tape snug (not tight) and don't cheat. With the tape parallel to the floor, measure your bust (chest for the boys) and hips at the widest point. For the waist, measure around your natural waistline (if you're not sure where this is, tie a length of string around your middle and see where it falls). With that accomplished you're ready to move on to the next step. Head to your closet and pull out a sweater that fits the way you want your new sweater to fit. If you can, choose the same sort of garment – a fitted top if you are making a fitted pullover, a sweater coat if that is what you have planned. Lay the piece out on a table, smooth it flat, and measure from side to side just below the armholes. Doubling this measurement will give you the actual bust measurement of the sweater. Now compare this measurement to your own bust measurement. The difference is the amount of ease built into the sweater. If the sweater is smaller than your measurements, said it has negative ease. If it is bigger, it has positive ease.

As a final check, compare the fabric of this sweater to your gauge swatch. Are they about the same thickness, with a similar degree of drape and stretch? If so, you'll want to aim for the same amount of ease in your new sweater as in your old favorite. If the swatch is thinner and drapier, you might want a little less ease. If the swatch is thicker with less drape, aim for a bit more ease. If your new sweater will extend to hip length or beyond, check that measurement as well. Most sweaters are the same size in the hip as they are in the bust. If your hips are significantly larger than your bust, you may want to choose your size based on the hip measurement or make modifications to the sweater so it works with your shape.

Finally note the shape of your existing sweater. Are the sides straight? Is it narrower through the waist? Does it flare towards the hip? Compare this to the pattern schematic; which is drawn to reflect the actual garment shape as much as possible. Designers often include waist shaping in both pullovers and cardigans. If you prefer a straighter silhouette, you can simply omit the waist shaping.

Now you're ready to take the plunge. Choose a design, select your size, buy the yarn and get stitching. With a little thought and a couple of key measurements under control, you can be confident that your odds of making a sweater that fits the way you want it to have doubled in your favor. By the time you cast off, you'll have a sweater that makes you feel (and look) great every time you put it on.