



How To Guide - Blocking

The knitting or crocheting is completed and you are keen to wear, use or gift your crafty creation. We recommend that before you do any of these, you block your work. It's a simple process, that we believe is absolutely worth the time and effort. We have collected together a few tips on how to do this, enabling you to transform your work from a charmingly hand-crafted creation to a unique handmade masterpiece!



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What is blocking and why is it important?

Basically, blocking can be simplified as:

1. Get your project wet
2. Lay it flat
3. Let it dry

Wet yarn can be adjusted with gentle straightening and stretching, as the natural hydrogen bonds will begin to break when wet, making it more malleable and, as it dries, new bonds are formed, meaning the piece dries into the adjusted shape. Blocking straightens the stitches and evens the tension, smoothing out the yarn and improving the definition of the knitting or crochet. You can use it to straighten hems and edges that will be seamed together, as it will help to prevent curling.

No matter how simple the project, it will always look better after blocking.

Different ways of blocking

If you are going to block a garment, or something made in a number of different pieces, it can be useful to block it before you stitch together the pieces. This allows you to exactly match the size and shape of identical pieces (such as sleeves and pockets) when pinning them out. Alternatively, you can block the completed piece, after you have stitched it together. Either way, it is useful to do it after you have sewn in yarn ends, as the wetting and drying process will help in bonding the ends to the part of your knitted or crocheted piece you have woven them into.

There are a number of different techniques for blocking - which one you choose will depend on what you are blocking; whether you have certain pieces of dedicated equipment; and personal choice. They include:

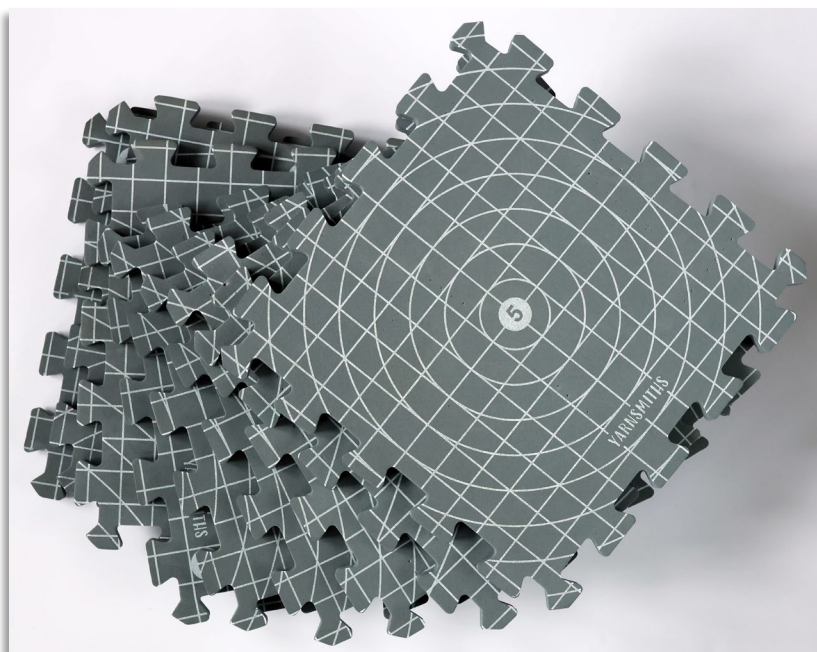
- Using blocking mats with pins or combs
- Using an ironing board with pins or combs
- Using a table top and towels with pins or combs
- Using blocking wires with pins
- Using two towels
- Using sock blockers
- Using a balloon

How to do it

Before you begin, always read the label on your yarn for any recommended care instructions. You can wet your knitting or crochet lightly using one of the following methods:

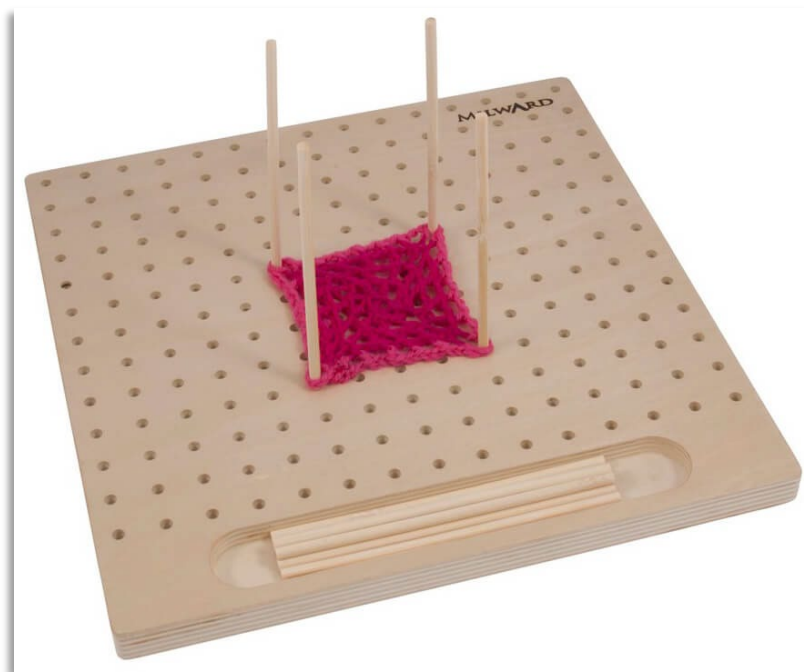
- a misting bottle filled with water or a water/mild detergent mixture
- cover it with a damp towel or towels
- completely immerse it in water and then carefully squeeze out the excess moisture. You can do this by rolling it into a dry towel and very gently squeezing it, and then repeating, if necessary, with another dry towel.

Using blocking mats: Blocking mats are foam tiles, often with circles and gridlines with measurements marked on them. They fit together like a jigsaw, allowing you to create a differently shaped, larger mat if needed. Your piece can be pinned onto them with rust-free T pins or blocking combs (shown in image on next page).





Using a blocking board: Blocking boards are wooden, with a grid of holes into which wooden pins can be inserted. The knitted or crocheted piece can then be pinned out by inserting the pins through it and pushing them into a hole on the board. The regular placement of the holes means that the work will be blocked evenly. They can be very useful for crocheted granny squares, knitted squares and shapes which are completely regular (e.g. hexagonal).



Using an ironing board: You can pin your piece onto an ironing board in the same way as you would onto a blocking mat.

Using a table: Cover your surface with a large towel or towels and pin your work to this.

Using damp towels: When you have no specific equipment available it is possible to block your project between two damp towels. Place one damp towel on a suitable surface such as a worktop. Carefully place your project on it and ensure it is straightened and positioned how you want it to dry. Then place another damp towel on top and leave it until the towels are completely dry.

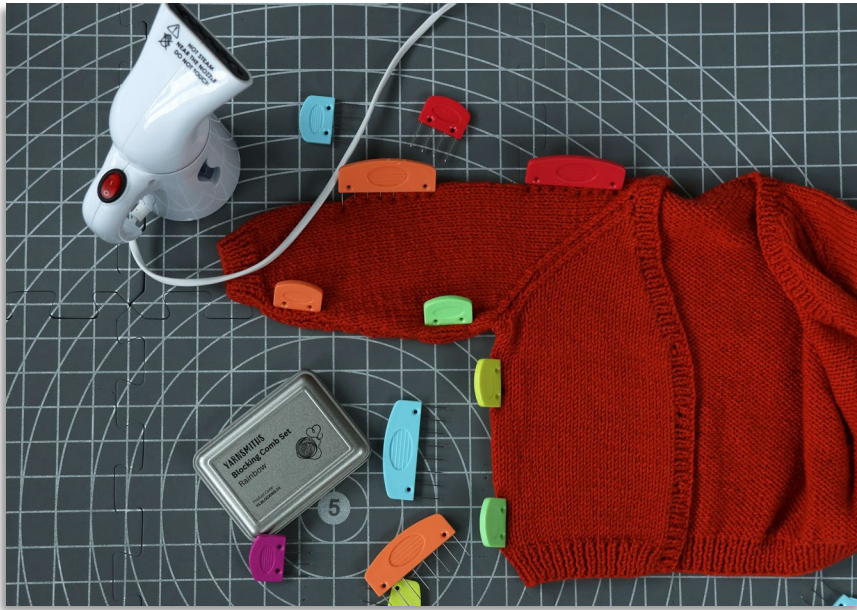
Using sock blockers: These are plastic or metal templates specifically designed for blocking socks. Using them avoids the lines that may develop down the sides of the sock, if you were to block them as a flat piece. If you make pairs of socks in different sizes, you may need more than one size of sock blocker.



Using a balloon: For hats, use an elongated rather than a round balloon, so that there is room to fold down the brim of the hat. Blow up the balloon to the approximate size of head.

Using blocking wires or rods: thread through edges of a blanket to straighten.

Using a steamer or the steam function on your iron: Be careful not to hold the steamer or iron too close to your work to avoid scorching. You can cover the knitting or crochet with damp cloths before applying steam to help with this.



So, you've chosen your preferred method (ours is blocking mats and combs), what next?

Pin out your knitting or crochet roughly into shape, using the lines or circles on your blocking mats as a guide. Make sure matching pieces are the same size. Add more pins or combs, as needed, to smooth edges, and try to avoid pinned points creating a spiky edge.



How different fibres might behave

Wool: Has a lot of elasticity and will hold the new shape very well until it gets wet again, making wet blocking perfect for it. Wool is weaker when wet, so be careful not to overstretch it, as the weight of the water could stretch the fibres and the stitches beyond repair. There is a risk of felting if the water is too hot. Superwash wool will not felt because the superwashing process eliminates the scales that allow wool to felt, but is stretchier than non-superwash, so is easier to stretch out of shape during the blocking process.

Nylon/acrylic: Don't use too hot steam when blocking as there is a risk of the project melting under the heat.

Cotton: Has very little elasticity and is weaker when wet, so it is at risk of irreversible stretching. It is also at risk of 20% shrinkage once dry. Steam blocking works very well for cotton.

Mohair: Is very fragile when wet and has little elasticity, so it is prone to stretching. If it is blended with other inelastic fibres, such as wool or silk, it cannot be reblocked, so whatever shape you blocked it into is how it will remain. When blended with wool, steam blocking works very well for mohair yarn projects.

Alpaca: Is less elastic than wool with little shape memory, so weaker and very prone to stretching when wet, and will not revert to original shape when dry. Steam blocking works wonderfully, particularly if the fibre is blended with wool.

Cashmere: The fibres are fragile and soft, particularly when wet, so spray blocking is the best option here.

Novelty/lurex/metallic yarns: Because there is no elasticity in these fibres, they will not change shape if blocked.

Do's and Don'ts

DO:

- Always dry flat, hanging up wet knits risks permanently stretching them.
- Do leave the project until it is completely dry, or it will spring back to how it was before blocking.
- Test your blocking method on a swatch of the yarn – if in doubt, blocking a swatch will help you to judge how the garment will behave after blocking.

DON'T:

- Overstretch things on your blocking mats – what you see on the blocking mat should be how you want your finished piece to look.
- Attempt to block a soaking wet project which has been fully immersed in water – gently squeeze out the water before pinning. (There will still be enough moisture in it to allow the blocking process to work, and the project will be lighter to handle and faster to dry.)
- If you do soak the piece, avoid rubbing, over-stretching or stirring it.
- Split the yarn with your pins, or stretch out individual stitches – this can result in uneven stitches around the edges.
- Put your blocking mats or towel on a surface you will need soon – it will take time for the piece to dry completely, and it is best not to disturb it until then.

So that's it: we hope we have outlined why you might decide to block your knitted or crocheted creation; how you would go about doing it; and some helpful tips about what to do and, very importantly, what *not* to do in the blocking process.



If you find any of these instructions unclear or just need a little extra help, don't hesitate to email us at sales@woolwarehouse.co.uk or give us a call on 01926 88 28 18.