

# Understanding Knitting Instructions

## Sexy Red Eccentric Cable Scarf

### Finished Size

Approximately 8in(20cm) wide by  
76in(190cm) long

### Materials

3 hanks Cascade 220 (100% Peruvian  
Highland wool), each 200m(220yds)  
or any worsted weight yarn to obtain  
gauge  
4.5mm needles  
cable needle  
stitch markers

### Gauge

28 sts and 26 rows to 4in(10cm) over  
pattern stitch

### Eccentric Cable

(Panel of 10 sts)

Rows 1 and 3 (RS): p2, k6, p2.

Row 2: k2, p6, k2.

Row 4: As row 2.

Row 5: p2, sl next 3 sts to cn and hold  
in back; k3, then k3 from cn, p2.

Rows 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18: As row 2.

Row 11: As row 5.

Rows 7, 9, 13, 15, 17: As row 1.

Repeat rows 1 to 18.

### NOTE

Scarf is knit with 4 cable panels  
separated by ribbing.

### Scarf

With 4.5mm needles, cast on 88 sts.  
Knit 6 rows in k1, p1 rib, beg with k1.  
Set up first pattern row as follows:  
Row 1: \*k1, p1, k1, PM, p2, k6, p2  
(eccentric cable row 1), PM, rep from  
\* 3 more times, end k1, p1, k1.  
Continue in pat as set till scarf  
measures 75in(187.5cm) or until  
desired length, ending with pat row  
14.  
Knit 6 rows in k1, p1 rib, as for  
beginning. Bind off.

### Finishing

Weave in yarn ends. Block scarf.

## Introduction

Knitting pattern instructions are like recipes, they provide steps to guide you through the process of making your project. As a beginner knitter, reading a pattern can be daunting, because they are filled with a collection of unusual terms and phrases. Understanding pattern instructions is a skill in and of itself, because you have to get used to the language of knitting. The best instructions are clear and concise, providing all the necessary information that allow you to successfully complete a project. There are an immense variety of knitting magazines and other resources from which to choose projects. As a beginner, try to select projects from sources that have a reputation for well-written and edited instructions, such as Vogue Knitting Magazine, Rowan, and Interweave Knits.

Your first projects should consist of simple stitches, uncomplicated shaping and basic colourwork techniques like stripes. Scarves, shawls, simple shaped garments, and blankets are good projects for learning to read instructions. Once you've worked through some simple projects, you can move on to more advanced ones.

All pattern instructions are divided into sections, following a logical order, using standard abbreviations, terms, and phrases. As you gain experience working through the variety of pattern magazines and books, you'll realize that each source has a particular style of writing instructions, and the amount of information they contain. Over time you'll find favourites, and those that consistently work to your expectations. The following information provides the basics for understanding knitting patterns, including the language of knitting, and typical pattern structure.

## The Language of Knitting

Most knitting magazines, pattern leaflets, and books provide a list of abbreviations or special vocabulary used in their instructions. Abbreviations are a type of shorthand to save space and provide clear direction. It's not uncommon to find slightly different abbreviations for the same term. An abbreviation list often appears in the front or back of the resource, with a glossary that further explains techniques. How detailed an abbreviation list for a specific project, depends on the level of the knitter. For example, "k" and "p" are most likely not included; it's assumed that a knitter knows that these abbreviations refer to knit and purl, the two stitches of knitting. Please refer to ***Knitting Terminology*** in Resources, for a complete list of common abbreviations, knitting terms and phrases.

## Understanding Instructions

The key to understanding written instructions and stitch patterns is to pay attention to the punctuation used: commas, asterisks, brackets, and parentheses.

### **Commas ,**

Single steps are separated by commas. For example, "**p2, k2**" means you purl 2 stitches, followed by knitting 2 stitches; the comma separates these two different steps. Work each step between commas completely, look at your work and think about what you're doing.

### **Asterisks \***

Repeat the directions or sequence of stitches following the asterisk, or those between two asterisks as many times as indicated. \* **k3, p1; repeat from \* to end of row**. This means knit 3 stitches and purl 1 stitch; repeat this sequence to the end of the row.

### **Brackets [ ]**

The instructions within the brackets are repeated the number of times indicated outside the brackets. **[k2, p4]5 times**. Work the sequence, knit 2 stitches, purl 4 stitches 5 times in all.

## Parentheses ( )

Similar to brackets, parentheses enclose instructions which should be worked the exact number of times specified immediately following the parentheses. **(K2, p2)twice**, means knit 2 stitches and purl 2 stitches 2 times in all. Parentheses serve an additional purpose in pattern instructions. They are frequently used to list garment sizes, measurements, yarn quantities, and stitch numbers. The smallest size is given first and appears outside the parentheses, and the larger sizes are within the parentheses in ascending order. The instructions are read with the numbers that apply to a size in the same position throughout the pattern.

**Example:** Knitting Measurements: 30(32, 36, 38). Yarn quantities 2(3, 3, 4): the yarn amounts follow the same sequence as the measurements; 2 balls for size 30, the smallest size, 3 balls for size 32 and so on.

Written instructions for stitch patterns will give you row by row directions for a single repeat, using abbreviations and punctuation. **Example** of a stitch pattern:

### *Double Seed Stitch*

Multiple of 4 sts

Rows 1 and 2: \*k2, p2; rep from \* to end of row.

Rows 3 and 4: \*p2, k2; rep from \* to end of row.

Rep rows 1 to 4 for stitch pattern.

## Knitting Pattern Structure

All pattern instructions, regardless of the source follow a similar structure. They are divided into sections that follow a logical sequence of steps. The best instructions include most of the following sections depending on the complexity of design and style of the writer or source.

### Pattern Name

### Photographs

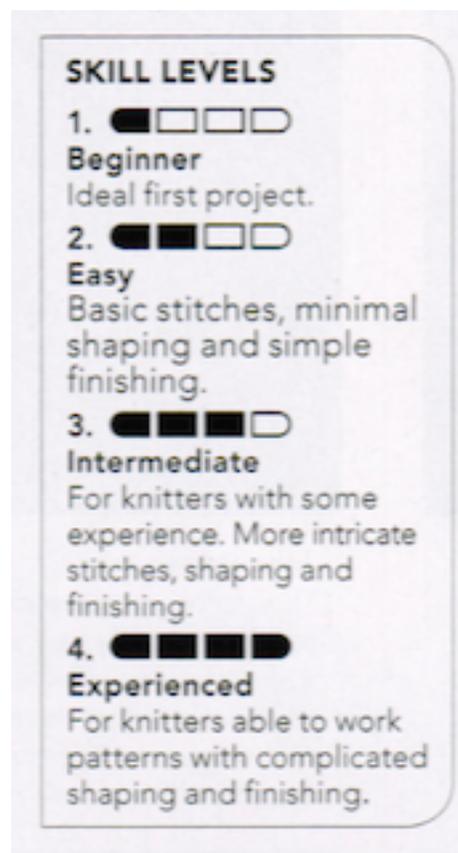
Garments are best shown on an appropriately sized model to give an idea of the fit. Multiple views are helpful to show close-ups of stitch patterns or other details. Lace shawls look best with a photo of someone wearing it, and one of the shawl lying flat to reveal the pattern. Most knitters prefer an image of the entire item.

## Description

A brief description of the project gives an overview of its construction, inspiration, or what's interesting about the design.

## Level of Difficulty or Skill Level

Including this section is a good way to let knitters know what they are getting into. Resources usually choose either difficulty levels based on various attributes found in the project pattern such as the type of stitches used, or the skill level or experience of the knitter.



**Skill Levels found in Vogue Knitting Magazine**

## Size and Finished Size (Knitted Measurements)

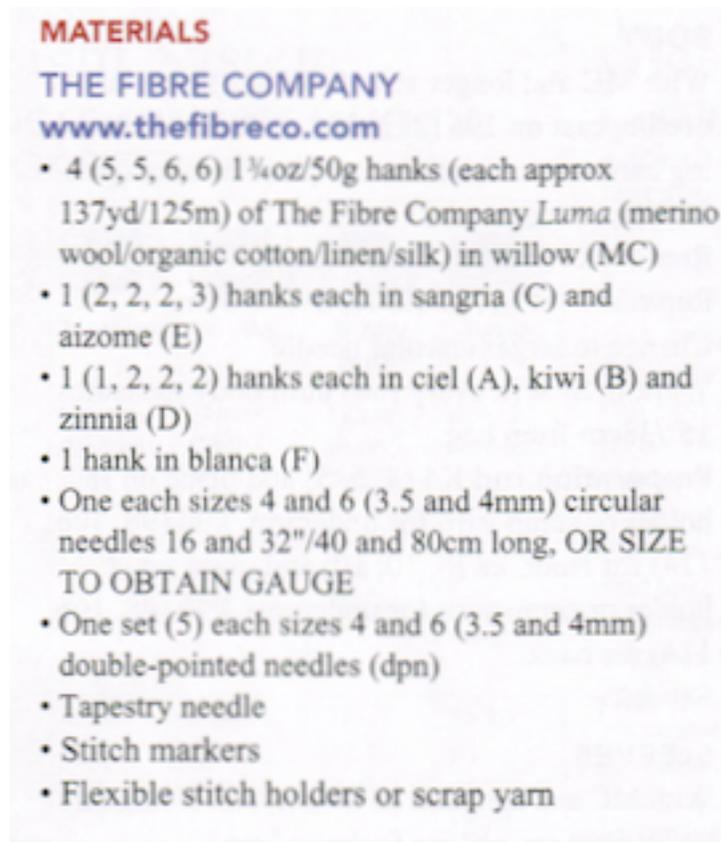
Garment pattern instructions usually provide two sets of size information. One set includes the sizes reflecting actual body measurements. These sizes indicate whom or how the item fits. The second set is the knitted or finished measurements. The finished

measurements should be used to choose the size you're making. For garments with more than one size, the sizes are listed in order as described above. It's a good idea to highlight the size you are making. The finished dimensions are given for other items including shawls or scarves, and may read like "Scarf Finished Size: 15in wide by 75in long".

## Materials and Tools

This section includes all the essential materials and tools needed to knit the project. The yarn information includes the brand (company), the yarn name, the fiber content, the yarn length in meters and yards, the weight in grams and ounces per ball, colour(s), and the number of balls or hanks required for each size. If a design uses more than one colour, these colours are labelled with letters: MC for main colour; CC for contrast colour, and if more than one contrast colour CC1, CC2, etc.; or the letters A, B, C, etc. When substituting yarn, the length in meters and yards, and similar thickness and fiber content as the brand used in the pattern are important to successfully make the project.

Needle sizes, type (straight, circular, double pointed needles) and length, are usually specified here. Other accessories and notions are often listed, including stitch markers, stitch holders, cable needles, buttons and zippers.



**MATERIALS**

**THE FIBRE COMPANY**  
[www.thefibreco.com](http://www.thefibreco.com)

- 4 (5, 5, 6, 6) 1½oz/50g hanks (each approx 137yd/125m) of The Fibre Company *Luma* (merino wool/organic cotton/linen/silk) in willow (MC)
- 1 (2, 2, 2, 3) hanks each in sangria (C) and aizome (E)
- 1 (1, 2, 2, 2) hanks each in ciel (A), kiwi (B) and zinnia (D)
- 1 hank in blanca (F)
- One each sizes 4 and 6 (3.5 and 4mm) circular needles 16 and 32"/40 and 80cm long, OR SIZE TO OBTAIN GAUGE
- One set (5) each sizes 4 and 6 (3.5 and 4mm) double-pointed needles (dpn)
- Tapestry needle
- Stitch markers
- Flexible stitch holders or scrap yarn

## **Gauge**

Gauge is written as the number of stitches and rows that comprise a 4in(10cm) square over a particular pattern stitch and needle size. The gauge is usually given for the stitch pattern used in the design. Some pattern instructions only give the gauge in stockinette stitch, even if the item is knit in a different stitch pattern. To successfully make the item, the knitter must obtain the same gauge as given in the pattern instructions. To check that you achieve the gauge called for in a pattern, you must knit a test swatch. It's important to block this swatch in the same way you will block your project, because blocking along with other factors affect the gauge. Remember that even a half a stitch difference can alter the finished measurements.

## **Notes**

Instructions may contain this section to describe techniques, or any other additional information specific to an individual pattern, that you need to know to complete the project. This often includes which direction a garment is knit or construction, such as “top down”, or “worked in the round to the armholes”.

## **Stitch Guide**

Less common stitch patterns given in this section are written in abbreviated form, not charted, and specific to a particular project. Types of decreases, increases, short row shaping or other techniques used in a specific project may be given here.

## **Abbreviations**

Magazines and other books usually contain a section devoted to abbreviations and a glossary that further explains techniques used in their designs. As with the latter section, less common abbreviations and terms may be included in this section of the instructions, particularly if it's a pattern published singly.

## **Schematics**

A schematic is a line drawing of the pieces, showing finished measurements and what the pieces look like. Not all patterns instructions include schematics. However, they are very helpful, as they precisely show how a garment is constructed, and assist you in choosing the appropriate size. The schematic is also useful as a reference when pinning out pieces to be blocked. Sizing in a schematic is set out in the same order as with the rest of the pattern instructions.

## **Charts**

An alternative to written text, charts are commonly used for colourwork, textured and complex stitchery, cables and lace.

## **Instructions for Working the Project**

This section is devoted to instructions on knitting the various sections or pieces of a project; written in text, abbreviations, and phrases. Classic sweaters and cardigans usually begin with instructions for the back, followed by the front (left and right fronts for cardigan), and finally the sleeves.

## **Finishing**

This section of the instructions include the finishing and assembly steps, such as seaming, neckline edges, and borders. This section may or may not make reference to blocking. The order in which garment pieces are seamed is usually given.

Depending on the complexity of a project, some of the above sections may not be included in the instructions. You can't have too much information given in knitting instructions, since one of the major problems with patterns is the assumption that a knitter understands what you mean, or that they should already know how to work a technique. As with any type of instructions, it's all in the details; understanding the information, so that a knitter can successfully reproduce a project. As you gain experience reading instructions, you'll be able to attempt more complicated ones with confidence, and be able to recognize pattern errors (which do happen!) and address them.

***Note: Many of the sections described above are discussed in more detail in older posts found in Unplugged Topics, including schematics, gauge, deciphering charts, and choosing garment sizes.***