
Blocking Knits 101 with Faith Hale

Chapter 1 - Blocking Knits 101

Overview

- Hi there, I'm Faith. I'm a resident knitter here at Creativebug and I have been knitting for over 20 years. And one question you ask any knitter is whether or not they are a blocker. If they block their knitting. And the best ones always say yes. Blocking is one of those steps that can take a bit of time but it really lends polish to your finished garment. If you design your own knitwear, you'll want to block all of your swatches so that you can see how they'll behave when the piece is completed. In this class, we'll cover three different kinds of blocking, wet blocking, steam blocking, and spot blocking. And I'll share with you some tips for working with different kinds of yarns and different kinds of techniques. Blocking can feel a bit tedious, but it's also super meditative. And I love taking my time with it as the final step for knitwear that I'm planning myself or giving to someone else. (upbeat music)

Materials

- You'll need a blocking surface, which can be as simple as a bed or a piece of cardboard, but I really prefer these blocking mats. They're interlocking, you can get a budget version as kids play mats. They're made out of this foam and I really like that they break down and you can pack them up and put them away. But if you don't have access to these, you can use a guest bed or even your rug covered with a clean towel. You'll also need stainless steel T pins. You're gonna wanna make sure that they're stainless steel because if you do end up leaving it in your project for a few days, you don't want it to rust. And I also really like the top of the T makes it easy to anchor the fabric into your blocking surface. A wool wash is create, but not essential. This is Eucalan, another version is Soak. And these, you can soak the project in the water with this and not have to rinse it out afterwards. So that prevents any chance of felting. A wool wash is really great to have. You'll also need a clean, light colored towel for squeezing out your project. If you're going to be doing spot blocking, you'll also need another smaller towel. Blocking wires are really handy, but they're not essential. This is great if you're doing a a large project that needs long, straight edges. You can't substitute it with another wire. If you don't have access to blocking wires, just use your T pins. You'll also need a bowl or a sink of warm water, or if you're doing something really large, you might wanna use your bathtub. Just be sure to scrub it first. And for the steam blocking, you'll need an iron that has a really good blast of steam setting.

Wet blocking

- The first technique we're going to cover is wet blocking, and this requires total immersion of your project. I would not suggest this technique for plant-based yarns. I would only suggest this for animal-based fibers like wool. This is a merino shawl. And you will want to go ahead and weave in your ends, but don't cut them all the way down. So these ends have been woven in, but just trimmed to about one inch. This will help when the yarn stretches to really tuck that tail all the way in there. I'm going to add a teaspoon of this wool wash to the water. And the water should be tepid, room temperature, lukewarm. If it's too cold, it won't be comfortable to swish your hands around in it. And if it's too hot, then you can run the risk of felting the fibers. Now, to felt something, you need agitation, soap, and heat. So if you only have two of those, we have soap and water, we're going to

be agitating it slightly, it's not going to felt. So sink the fiber all the way in. I'm just gonna swish it around a little bit to disperse the soap. And you can see this is a hand-dyed yarn, so it's coming out a little bit. The dye's coming out just a bit. And make sure every bit of it is submerged. And you're going to leave it for about 20 minutes. While it's soaking, go ahead and assemble your mat. This one has pre-printed lines, so you can see they match up. But if you don't have pre-printed lines, you can lay over a gingham fabric that has checkers or squares, or you can just use plain. Once it's been soaking for about 20 minutes, you'll want to gently squeeze all the water out. Don't wring. And if your project is much bigger than this, say you're working on a large pullover, you might wanna use a colander to lift it out of the water and let it drain softly. But make sure you're not twisting it. You're just squeezing it out. And when you get as much as you can out with your hands, you'll want to get your clean white towel. You'll lay it flat on your towel and roll it up. You can give this part a lot of force. If you wanna kneel on it or step on it, that's okay. We're just trying to get out as much of the water as possible before you go ahead and stretch it out. So this is a triangular shawl. And I'm gonna show how to use both the wires and the T-pins. So for the wires, you wanna spread it through every few stitches on this top row. So you can see I have garter bumps about every centimeter, so I'm going to go through every other garter bump. If you're not working with something that has garter bumps, just go within one stitch of the edge. As close to the edge as possible is great, but it's also kind of a weak point when it's wet. So if it seems like it's dangerous or it's gonna tear your yarn, go a little closer into the body of the material. (gentle music) I've loaded it on, and I'm going to position this at the very top of my mat. I'm gonna get out my T-pins, and I'm going to pin this center bar in place. I'm pinning it at an angle so that I don't hit the table below me and also so that this kind of traps it into place. I'm making sure it's centered on the mat. And I now that these are going to go off the edge, but not by much, so I'm going to use the T-pins instead of adding a different wire. I'm also going to add a pin at the very bottom here, pulling out this tip. So I move all the way to the edge of the mat, ignoring my tail. Tuck that in later. And because this is symmetrical, I'm going to repeat it over here, going all the way to the edge of the mat. You can see it's fallen off. We're not too worried about that. I'm gonna keep it on the same level. And because I don't want this to collapse once I start pulling out the points, I'm going to add two more pins about every two inches, and over here as well where it's dived off the edge. So usually you're not going to be doing much three-dimensional work. If you're blocking a sweater, you'll be shaping it into straight lines. But because this has these beautiful points, this is the Swallowtail Shawl, we're going to be pulling them out one at a time. So I'll start in the middle, and then I'll go in the center of those pieces, et cetera. Have the center on this side. Now I'm going to go to the center on this side. You can see it really makes the lace pop. So before when it was that mess of tangles, now it's starting to actually look like something lovely. If you are making something lace like this, you'll block it once right after you've made the project, but then you can probably go in every few wearings or so because it'll start to bunch together again. All depends on personal preference. But I think once a year is good for refreshing your knits. You can see here it's kinda slumped over and given up, so I'm gonna go back and put a couple pins underneath this wire just to hold that straight every few inches. At this point, you just have to wait and let it dry. And you'll be able to tell when it's dry when you pull out a point and it doesn't spring back. So it should stay exactly in place.

Steam blocking

- If your project doesn't need to be majorly altered, like with our shawl, you can resort to steam blocking. So this project is just a little bit off of what it's supposed to be. Most patterns will have a

schematic, and the schematic tells you exactly what the finished measurements should be. Now this was knit in this size, so the chest should be 22 inches, that means 11 inches across, and the last time I measured it, it was only 10 and a half, so I'm going to want to apply a bit of steam so that I can stretch it gently into position. For that I'll take my iron, and it's on the steamiest setting. I'm not going to touch the iron to the sweater. I'm just going to hover it over the surface, and shoot it with some steam. (steam crackles) Now while it's still damp, I'm gonna gently press it apart and smooth it out. So see, even with just that little amount it already has evened out our stitches a bit. That got us to 11 inches. I'm just gonna go ahead and gently steam the rest of it so that it has a cohesive look. (steam hisses) After we steam, we push it in place with our hands. See the difference between those two sleeves? And if you do have a steamer, you can use that too, but this works just as well. (steam hisses) Then we'll flip it over and make sure everything is nice and neat on this side too, and it looks like the collar could do with a little bit of steam. (steam hisses) If you need reinforcements, you can go ahead and pin it to your play mat, but we're going to let it dry flat.

Spot blocking and additional samples

- If you only need to block a small portion of your knit piece you'll want to spot block. This is another kind of steam blocking, but instead of putting the steam directly on your garment, you'll first wet a cloth and then iron into that and that'll force steam into your project. I have this wool kerchief, and the stitches are actually laying pretty smoothly, but this edge is curling up, and I'm gonna wanna take care of that. So I have a washcloth, I'm dipping it into water and wringing it out. Now we're gonna lay it over the edge. And I have the steam setting off because this is gonna make its own steam. We'll see that it's nice and flat. It's pretty hot so be careful. At this point we can manipulate it like we did with the other steam blocking. And I'm gonna continue all the way down the edge, rewetting as soon as it dries out, and making sure not to press my iron directly to the knit fabric. (steam hissing) Now because this does rely on the weight of the iron, you wouldn't want to do this to anything cabled, or where you want the stitches to pop out, this is more of a smoothing effect. Look how smooth that is. So it's stopped steaming, so that means I need to check and add more water. You can see these dark portions are still a little bit damp from the steam, so we'll be sure to let it dry flat. I have a few more examples to show you exactly how great blocking can be for your materials. Here is a two-color colorwork panel before and after blocking. This is just did by the steam blocking method, laying the towel over it and ironing it. You can see how much cleaner the stitches lay together. And also if you're going to be seaming something, this would be a lot easier to seam than this wiggly piece. Here is a 100% linen before and after blocking. Now this is an arena in which maybe blocking is not desired 'cause it has a lot more energy and personality. It gets really smoothed out and flattened out when you block it. This is just done by wetting it and laying it flat. And you can see also it's a little bit more limp. This has a bit more spring to it. So this is why you should always block before you are knitting it. This is a great example of why plant fibers don't always benefit from blocking, they can lose a lot of energy and spring. Here is a mohair sample, before and after blocking. Also I think all lace should be blocked, this definitely illustrates this, but mohair especially benefits from a bit of blocking because the fibers end up filling in the blank spaces. And mohair is one of those fibers where once you block it, you shouldn't have to do it too many more times. A lot of people like to block socks. Here's an unblocked sock and a blocked sock. This is a sock blocker, you order it by size. It's totally unnecessary because you're going to be putting it on your feet and instantly stretching it out. But if you are gifting it, blocking is desirable because it makes it look a lot crisper and cleaner. And finally our shawl, having sat overnight, and

unpinned from the blocking mat, look at that, it has these nice, crisp points, and it really opens up the stitch, it's so beautiful. Now not every fiber or project needs blocking, but I really like using it as a last step to emphasize all the hard work you've done. I think it really makes your stitches shine.
(gentle music)