The Essentials of Casting-On and Binding Off:

How to Cast-On and Bind-Off Knitting
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CASTING ON AND BINDING OFF ARE TWO SKILLS THAT ARE ESSENTIAL FOR KNITTERS TO KNOW. IN OUR NEW EBOOK, THE ESSENTIALS OF CASTING-ON AND BINDING-OFF: HOW TO CAST-ON AND BIND-OFF KNITTING, WE PROVIDE YOU WITH A BUNDLE OF CAST-ONS AND BIND-OFFS!

Some of us rely on just two techniques, the long-tail cast-on and the standard bind-off, which are included here, but there are all kinds of cast-on and bind-off techniques that knitters should be familiar with.

Choosing the right cast-on can enhance the success of a project. For example, you might need a stretchy bind-off for some toe-up socks, or you might need to cast on stitches in the middle of a row for a buttonhole; there are definitely instances when one technique is better to use than another.

I hope this helps you with two of the most important parts of your knitting projects: beginning and ending.

Cheers,

Kathleen Cubley
Editor, KnittingDaily.com

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THE ESSENTIALS OF CASTING-ON AND BINDING-OFF: HOW TO CAST-ON AND BIND-OFF KNITTING
A Knitting Daily eBook edited by Kathleen Cubley
EDITORIAL STAFF
EDITOR, KNITTING DAILY: Kathleen Cubley
CREATIVE SERVICES
PRODUCTION DESIGNER: Janice Tapia
PHOTOGRAPHY: Chris Hartlove
(Unless otherwise credited)
ILLUSTRATION: Gayle Ford

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Cast-Ons

Backward Loop Cast-On
This easy method places a single loop on the right needle. The resulting smooth edge has minimal bulk and looks the same on front and back, but lacks the strength of other methods. Take care to cast on loosely so that it will not be difficult to enter the cast-on loops when you start knitting.

Place a slip knot on a needle held in your right hand. Loop working yarn and place it on needle backward so that it doesn’t unwind. Repeat from *.

Cast-On Tips

• If you tend to cast on tightly, use a larger needle than suggested or use two needles held together to open the loops and make the first row easier to knit. Remove the second needle before knitting the first row. This technique will also make the edge more elastic.

• To create a firmer edge, cast on stitches with the yarn doubled. You can also use smaller needles, or cast on ten to twenty percent fewer stitches for a ribbing, then increase to the required number after the last row of ribbing.

• Leave a tail of yarn 12 to 16 inches (30.5 to 40.5 cm) long when casting on pieces to be seamed. Use the tail to sew the seam. To keep the tail out of the way while you’re knitting, bundle it up into a butterfly.

• When working the cable cast-on, insert the right needle between the two stitches before you pull the working yarn for tension.
Long-Tail Cast-On

This cast-on creates a firm, elastic edge that is appropriate for most projects. This method is worked with one needle and two ends of yarn, and it places stitches on the right needle.

Leaving a long tail (about ½” to 1” [1.3 to 2.5 cm] for each stitch to be cast on), make a slipknot and place on right needle. Place thumb and index finger of left hand between yarn ends so that working yarn is around index finger and tail end is around thumb. Secure ends with your other fingers and hold palm upwards, making a V of yarn (Figure 1). Bring needle up through loop on thumb (Figure 2), grab first strand around index finger with needle, and go back down through loop on thumb (Figure 3). Drop loop off thumb and, placing thumb back in V configuration, tighten resulting stitch on needle (Figure 4).

ILLUSTRATIONS BY VICKI SPRING

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Smooth (knit) side of cast-on.

Bumpy (purl) side of cast-on.
Knitted Cast-On
This cast-on adds stitches to the left needle. The resulting edge tends to be loose.
Begin with a slipknot and one knitted cast-on stitch if there are no established stitches.
Place slipknot on left needle if there are no established stitches. *With right needle, knit into first stitch (or slipknot) on left needle (Figure 1) and place new stitch onto left needle (Figure 2). Repeat from *, always knitting into last stitch made.

Cable Cast-On
This method, similar to the knitted method, forms a decorative ropelike edge that is strong and a little more elastic than the standard bind-off. It adds stitches to the left needle. (To use this method at the beginning of a project, begin with a slip knot followed by a single knitted cast-on stitch).
Insert right needle between first two stitches on left needle (Figure 1). Wrap yarn as if to knit. Draw yarn through to complete stitch (Figure 2) and slip this new stitch to left needle as shown (Figure 3).
Old Norwegian Cast-On
This method, also called the English cast-on, adds stitches to the right needle and forms a ropy edge that is both strong and elastic. It is ideal for edges that undergo stress such as waistbands and cuffs.

Leaving a long tail, make a slip knot and set up as for the Continental method (Figure 1). *Bring needle in front of thumb, under both yarns around thumb, down into center of thumb loop, back forward, and over top of yarn around index finger (Figure 2), catch this yarn, and bring needle back down through thumb loop (Figure 3), turning thumb slightly to make room for needle to pass through. Drop loop off thumb (Figure 4) and place thumb back in V configuration while tightening up resulting stitch on needle (Figure 5). Repeat from *.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GAYLE FORD

Long-Tail Cast-On, top, Old Norwegian Cast-On, bottom.
Channel Island Cast-On

**Step 1.** Holding three strands of yarn together, make a slipknot about six inches from the ends and place it on the right needle (this does not count as a stitch). Divide the three strands, using a single strand as the working yarn and the two remaining strands as the tail.

**Step 2.** Place the single strand around the index finger.
Wrap the two strand tail counterclockwise around the thumb so that two wraps are visible below your thumb-nail. Make a yarn over on the needle with the single strand (Figure 1).

**Step 3.** Beginning at the base of the thumb, slide the needle up through both loops on the thumb, then bring it over the single strand, going to the index finger to grab it, then go back down through the two loops on the thumb (Figure 2). Drop the thumb loops and tighten all three yarns. Repeat Steps 2 and 3 for the desired number of stitches; each repeat creates two stitches.

Distribute the stitches over your chosen needles and remove the slipknot from the needles (but don’t undo it) before joining for working in the round, knitting the “beaded” stitches and purling the yarn overs. Undo the slipknot just before weaving in the tails.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GAYLE FORD
Provisional Cast-Ons

Provisional cast-ons (worked with waste yarn) form a secure base that can be removed to expose live stitches to be worked in the opposite direction. Use one of the following methods when you’re unsure of what kind of edge treatment to use on a project—you can come back later and work the edging after the body is complete. Provisional cast-ons allow two sides of a piece, such as a scarf, to be worked from the center out, so that the stitches on both ends face in the same direction.

Invisible (Provisional) Cast-On: Place a loose slipknot on needle held in your right hand. Hold waste yarn next to slipknot and around left thumb; hold working yarn over left index finger. *Bring needle forward under waste yarn, over working yarn, grab a loop of working yarn (Figure 1), then bring needle to the front, over both yarns, and grab a second loop (Figure 2). Repeat from *. When you’re ready to work in the opposite direction, pick out waste yarn to expose live stitches.

Crochet Chain (Provisional) Cast-On: With waste yarn and crochet hook, make a loose chain of about four stitches more than you need to cast on. With needle, working yarn, and beginning two stitches from end of chain, pick up and knit one stitch through the back loop of each crochet chain (Figure 1) for desired number of stitches. Work the piece as desired, and when you’re ready to work in the opposite direction, pull out the crochet chain to expose live stitches (Figure 2).

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GAYLE FORD

Figure 1
Figure 2

Invisible (Provisional) Cast-On method

Crochet Chain (Provisional) Cast-On method
**Bind-Offs**

**Standard Bind-Off**
This is the most common, and for many knitters, the only method for binding off. Use this method for edges that will be sewn into seams or finished in some way (such as stitches being picked up and knitted).

Slip 1 stitch, *knit 1 stitch, insert left needle tip into first stitch on right needle (Figure 1), pass this stitch over the second stitch (Figure 2), and off the needle—1 stitch remains on right needle and 1 stitch has been bound off (Figure 3). Repeat from *

**Bind-Off Tips**
- To prevent an overly tight bind-off, use a needle one (or more) sizes larger than the one used for the body of the project.
- If you have three times the width of your project, plus 10 percent of that total, you have enough yarn left in your ball to bind off.
- When all of the stitches on the needle have been bound off, the last stitch can be quite loose. To tighten and neaten this stitch, work it with the stitch in the row below it as shown in the illustrations below: insert the right needle from the back into the stitch below the last stitch, lift this stitch and place it onto the left needle, then knit the stitch below and the last stitch together. Bind off the last stitch on the right needle, cut the yarn, and pull the cut end through the last stitch to secure it.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GAYLE FORD
Sewn Bind-Off

This method, popularized by Elizabeth Zimmermann, forms an very elastic edge that has a ropy appearance, much like a purl row. Work this bind-off with a tapestry needle.

Cut the yarn three times the width of the knitting to be bound off and thread onto a tapestry needle. Working from right to left, *insert tapestry needle purlwise (from right to left) through first two stitches (Figure 1) and pull the yarn through, then bring needle knitwise (from left to right) through the first stitch (Figure 2), pull the yarn through, and slip this stitch off the knitting needle. Repeat from *.

Illustrations by Gayle Ford

Suspended Bind-Off

This method is similar to the standard bind-off but produces a more elastic edge. Use this method when you want to ensure against a tight bind-off edge.

Slip 1 stitch, knit 1 stitch, *insert left needle tip into first stitch on right needle and lift the first st over the second (Figure 1), leaving the first stitch on the left needle, knit the next stitch (Figure 2), then slip both stitches off the left needle—2 stitches remain on right needle and 1 stitch has been bound off (Figure 3). Repeat from * until no stitches remain on left needle, then pass first st on right needle over the second.

Illustrations by Gayle Ford
3-Needle Bind-Off
This bind-off technique seams two pieces together as they are bound off. It’s great for attaching fronts to backs at the shoulder seams because it makes a strong seam.

Place stitches to be joined onto two separate needles. Hold them with right sides of knitting facing together. Insert a third needle into first stitch on each of the other two needles and knit them together as one stitch. *Knit next stitch on each needle the same way. Pass first stitch over second stitch. Repeat from * until one stitch remains on third needle. Cut yarn and pull tail through last stitch.

ILLUSTRATION BY VICKI SQUARE
Tubular Bind-Off

Worked on ribbing, this bind-off is very stretchy and leaves no visible edge. The bind-off seems to roll the ribbing under the finished piece.

**Step 1.** Insert tapestry needle purlwise into first knit loop on the knitting needle (Figure 1). Draw through, then wrap around side of fabric (not over needle) to the back.

**Step 2.** From the back, insert tapestry needle knitwise into the first purl loop (second loop on knitting needle) and draw it through.

**Step 3.** Insert tapestry needle into first knit loop knitwise, slip loop off knitting needle and onto tapestry needle. Insert tapestry needle purlwise into second knit stitch (the second loop now remaining on the knitting needle; Figure 3). Draw yarn through.

**Step 4.** Insert tapestry needle into first purl loop purlwise, slip loop off knitting needle onto tapestry needle. Wrap tapestry needle to the back of the work, then insert knitwise into the second purl loop (the second loop now remaining on knitting needle; Figure 4). Draw the yarn through. Repeat Steps 3 and 4.

Illustrations by Gayle Ford
I-Cord Bind-Off

This technique, also known as Applied I-Cord, forms an I-cord band along the bind-off edge. It’s attractive along necklines and pocket tops. It also makes a beautiful zipper trim.

Place sts to be BO on left needle, and using the cable method, CO 2 more sts (to form I-cord). Beg with these 2 I-cord sts, *k1, knit next cord st tog with first st to be BO on left needle through their back loops (Figures 1 and 2), replace these 2 sts on left needle (Figure 3); rep from * until 2 sts rem. Break yarn and pull tail through rem sts.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GAYLE FORD

Sources
Interweave Knits magazine, various issues