

FROM CROCHETSTACK

The Beginner Crochet Starter Guide

Everything to figure out before your first stitch: what to buy, how to hold everything, the four stitches to learn first, how to read a pattern, and the mistakes almost everyone makes early on.

A companion to the free guides and patterns at crochetstack.com

What you actually need to start

You don't need much. A hook, some yarn, and a pair of scissors will get you through your first project.

- **A hook.** Size doesn't matter much for practice, but a mid-size hook (5mm / H-8) is the easiest to see and control while you're learning.
- **Yarn.** Pick a light-colored, medium-weight yarn (labeled “worsted” or “#4” on the label). Dark yarn hides your stitches, and fuzzy or novelty yarn hides them even worse. Save those for later.
- **Scissors and a yarn needle.** For cutting and weaving in ends when you finish a piece.

If you'd rather not piece all that together yourself: [this hook set](#) covers the sizes most patterns call for, and [Red Heart Super Saver](#) (or [Lily Sugar'n Cream](#) if you want cotton for dishcloths and amigurumi) is a solid, inexpensive first yarn. Or skip picking pieces separately with [a beginner kit](#) that bundles the hook, yarn, and instructions in one box — see our full [kit comparison](#) for the honest pros and cons of each.

Holding the hook and yarn

There's no single correct way to hold a crochet hook. Most people use one of two grips.

- **Pencil grip:** hold the hook like a pencil, resting it between your thumb and index finger.
- **Knife grip:** hold the hook like you'd hold a knife, with your whole hand over the top.

Try both for a few minutes each. Whichever feels less awkward is the right one for you. For yarn tension, most people weave the yarn through the fingers of their non-dominant hand so it feeds out with a bit of resistance. Too loose and your stitches will be sloppy. Too tight and your hand will cramp fast. It takes a few sessions to find a tension that feels natural.

The four stitches to learn first, in order

Learn these four in this order and you can make almost anything a beginner pattern asks for.

1. Chain (ch)

Start with a slip knot on your hook. Yarn over (wrap the yarn over the hook from back to front), then pull that loop through the loop already on your hook. That's one chain. Repeat to make more — every project starts with a chain of a length the pattern tells you to make.

2. Single crochet (sc)

Insert your hook into a stitch (or chain), yarn over, pull up a loop (2 loops now on the hook), yarn over again, pull through both loops on the hook. The shortest, densest stitch — good for dishcloths, coasters, and amigurumi.

3. Double crochet (dc)

Yarn over before you insert the hook. Insert into the stitch, yarn over, pull up a loop (3 loops on the hook), yarn over, pull through 2 loops (2 loops left), yarn over, pull through the last 2 loops. Taller and faster to work up than single crochet, common in blankets and scarves.

4. Slip stitch (sl st)

Insert your hook into a stitch, yarn over, and pull through both the stitch and the loop on your hook in one motion. Used to join rounds or move across stitches without adding height — you'll use this constantly once you start working in the round.

Don't try to learn all four at once. Practice single crochet until it's boring, then move to double crochet. Most of what trips people up as beginners isn't a new stitch, it's tension and counting, and those only get better with repetition.

Reading a pattern: the shorthand explained

Patterns look like a wall of abbreviations the first time you see one. A line might read: "Row 1: Ch 15. Sc in 2nd ch from hook and each ch across. (14 sc)" — broken down: chain 15, then single crochet into the 2nd chain from your hook and every chain after that. The number in parentheses at the end is your built-in check: count your stitches against it every row, it's the fastest way to catch a mistake before it compounds.

Asterisks (* *) — mark a section that repeats. "*Sc 3, dc 1* rep from * to end" means keep doing that 4-stitch sequence to the end of the row.

Parentheses () — group a set of stitches worked into the same single stitch. "(Sc, ch 1, sc) in next st" means all three go into one stitch.

Rows vs. rounds — flat patterns (rows) have you turn your work at the end of each row. Patterns worked in the round (amigurumi, hats, granny squares) have you continue in a spiral or join with a slip stitch at the end of each round.

More detail on this in our full [how to read a crochet pattern](#) guide.

Common early mistakes, and the actual fix

Your piece is getting wider or narrower. Almost always what's happening at the start/end of each row — an extra stitch worked into the last stitch, or a skipped first stitch. Count your stitches at the end of every row while you're learning.

Tension is too tight or too loose. This is a hand-memory thing, not a technique fix. It improves with hours of practice. If your hands cramp, you're likely squeezing the hook to compensate for loose tension instead of adjusting how yarn feeds through your fingers.

Losing track of where you are mid-row. Use a stitch marker at the start of each round. And if you get interrupted, finish the stitch you're on before you put the project down — setting it down mid-stitch is the number one cause of “wait, where was I.”

Working into the wrong part of the stitch. Every stitch has two loops on top; most patterns want both unless they say “back loop only” or “front loop only.” Catching just one loop by accident creates a ribbed texture and throws off your count.

Using the wrong hook for the yarn. Every yarn label has a suggested hook size range. Too small makes stitches tight and hard to work into; too large makes the fabric loose and holey.

The real fix for most of these is repetition, not a trick that skips the learning curve. If your supplies might be working against you rather than your technique, our [kit comparison](#) only includes kits with beginner-appropriate yarn and hook pairings.

What to make first

Skip anything with color changes, shaping, or garment sizing for your first project. Good first projects: a simple single crochet dishcloth or coaster, a basic single or double crochet scarf, or a small amigurumi shape like a ball or simple animal, where mistakes are cheap because the rounds are short.

Your companion guide, [5 More Free Beginner Patterns](#), picks up right here with five more projects at this exact level. Or browse the full [free pattern library](#) any time.

When you're ready to buy your own supplies

Once you've practiced with whatever yarn and hook you started with, it's worth picking gear suited to actual projects. Our guides on [choosing crochet hooks](#) and [choosing beginner-friendly yarn](#) cover what to look for. Thanks for reading, happy hooking.