

FANTASTIC NO-GAUGE BAGS

The basic idea behind these bags is very simple: If you start at a point and work out until the bag is as big as you want, there's no need to work a gauge swatch before you start. There are just a few things you need to know before you begin, and then you can let your fingers and your imaginations take over!

Where to Start

Each bag starts at one of three places, and grows from there:

- The point of the flap
- The center of the bottom
- The center of a side

Bag Architecture

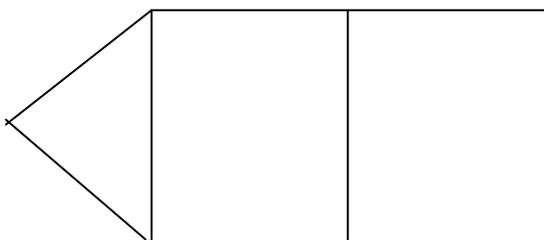
Bags can be either:

- Flat, and then folded and seamed
- Circular, without seams

Many circular bags have the advantage of minimal finishing. Seamed bags, however, have the advantage of the extra support given to their structure by the seams.

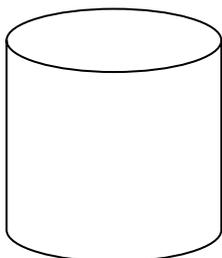
Here are several examples of bag structures you can choose from, or that can inspire you to invent new ones.

Envelope



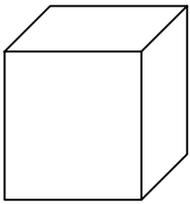
Start at the point of the flap and increase until the bag is the width you want. Work even for twice the depth of the bag. Fold along the bottom of the bag and join the sides. Add a strap or embellishments and you're done.

Circular Bottom



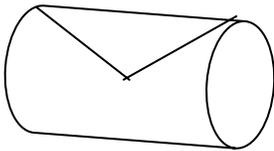
Start at the center of the bottom and work out on a set of double pointed needles to make a circle as wide as you want your bag to be. Then work even until the bag is the desired height. Add a flap, eyelets for a drawstring, a strap, or embellishments like ruffles or sequins.

Square Bottom



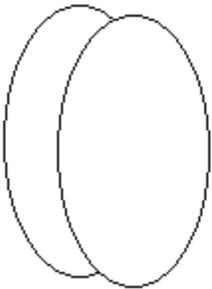
Made just like the circular bottomed bag, except shape the bottom in a square rather than a circle. Actually, the bottom of the bag can be any shape you choose--a triangle, pentagon, hexagon, or octagon.

Barrel



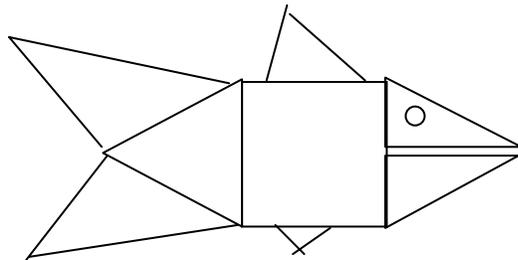
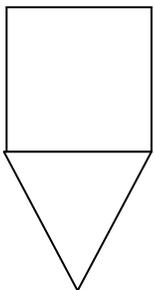
Knit the basic envelope bag, then, instead of seaming, pick up stitches along the end on double pointed needles, then work decreases to make a circle (or any other shape), ending at the center. Add straps and embellishments, of course.

Medallion



Make a circle (or any other shape) the size you want, starting from the center. Make a second piece the same as the first, then join together, leaving an opening at the top. Add flap, strap, etc. These bags can be embellished in any number of ways--add triangles to make the petals of a flower or a sun.

Flat, Bottom-up Bags



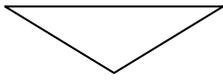
Starting at the center bottom and working circularly, work increases at only two points. When the bag is big enough, begin working even. As always, add flaps and embellishments...This is how the fish were made. If you want a flap that is double thickness, you can also make one this way.

Circular, Top-down Bags

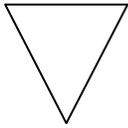
You can reverse the process of making the circular bags by starting with the top flap and making a triangle. Then when the flap is one-half, one-third, or one-quarter the size you want the top of the bag to be, cast on the additional stitches and begin working circularly until the bag is the desired height. Shape the bottom any way you want (square, circle, etc) using decreases to the center point.

Knitting Basic Shapes

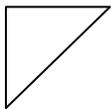
Knitting Shapes Back and Forth on Standard Needles



Squares and rectangles need no explanation, we knit them all the time! Other shapes that are easily knit flat without preplanning are triangles. To knit an isosceles triangle (a symmetrical triangle), increase at the same rate on each side. Begin by casting on 2 stitches, and increase 1 stitch at the beginning of every row to get a shape like the top triangle. You can make the same shape by increasing 1 stitch at each edge on every other row.



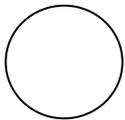
To make a longer point (middle triangle) increase 1 stitch at each edge every 4th row:



To make a right triangle (bottom), work all increases at the same edge of the triangle--the other edge will remain straight rather than diagonal. Increasing on every row will make a steeper slant. Increasing every other or every 4th row will make a gentler slope.

- All of these shapes can, of course, be worked in the opposite direction by decreasing rather than increasing.
- You can use any kind of increases and decreases you like, depending on the look you want to achieve. Yarn overs will make decorative lacy increases. Paired decreases can face "away" from each other, "toward" each other, or be done as double decreases.

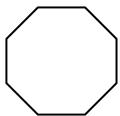
Circularly on Double Pointed Needles



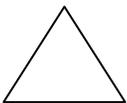
Circle: Cast on 8 stitches and divide between 4 double pointed needles. (You may want to just put them on 2 needles until you've worked a few rounds). Every other round, increase 8 stitches, evenly spaced around the circle (2 per needle). Each time you work the increases, be careful to shift them to a different point--they must NOT line up with the last set increases. You can work the increase rows less frequently by adding 16 stitches every 4th round (this will be 4 increases per needle). Note that this will create a flat circle in garter stitch. If you are working in stockinette or some other pattern stitch, or your knitting is VERY tight, your circle may not be perfectly flat, but, for the bottom or side of a bag, a slight curve will work just fine. If you want a pronounced 3-D bottom, do the increases less frequently.



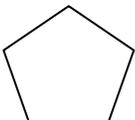
Square: Make just like the circle, but place the increases in pairs at four specific points (the beginning and end of each of the four needles).



Octagon: Make just like the circle, but place the increases at eight specific points (the beginning and middle of each of the four needles). To do single increases, work them every other round. To do paired increases, work them every 4th round.



Triangle: Cast on 6 stitches. Do paired increases at 3 points around your knitting. Work the increases on two out of every three rounds. That is, work rounds 1 and 2 with increases, then work round 3 even. Repeat these three rounds.



Pentagon: Cast on 5 stitches. Do increases at 5 points around your knitting. Work single increases on 4 out of every 5 rounds, or work paired increases on 2 out of every 5 rounds.



Hexagon: Cast on 6 stitches. Do increases at 6 points round your knitting. Work single increases on 2 out of every 3 rounds, or work paired increases on 1 out of every three rounds.

Lots of Different Decreases

The following instructions assume that you have marked the points where you want your decreases to be. The best way to do this is to place a safety pin in the stitch. As your knitting grows, you can move the safety pin up as convenient.

Paired Decreases - Knitted: Work until 2 sts remain before marked stitch. K2tog, K1, SSK
To SSK: Slip 1 knitwise, slip 1 knitwise, insert left needle into front of both stitches, knit together.

Paired Decreases - Purl: Work until 2 sts remain before marked stitch. P2tog, P1, SSP.
To SSP - Sl1 knitwise, Sl1 knitwise, insert left needle into front of both stitches and slip together to left needle, purl the two stitches together.

Note that you can reverse the order of the two types of decreases to make pairs that slant toward each other or away.

Double Decrease - Knitted: Work until 1 stitch remains before marked stitch. Sl1, K2tog, PSSO

Double Decrease - Purl: Work until 1 stitch remains before marked st. Sl1 knitwise, P2tog, PSSO

Raised Double Decrease - Knitted: Work until 1 stitch remains before marker. Sl2 tog, K1, P2SSO

Raised Double Decrease - Purl: Work until 1 stitch remains before marker. Sl1 knitwise, Sl1 knitwise, insert left needle into front of both stitches and slip together back to left needle, insert right needle purlwise into both stitches and slip together back to right needle, P1, P2SSO. Purl to end of row.

The Fabric

To be successful, these bags must be made of a fairly firm, stable fabric. You don't normally want a fabric that stretches a lot or has holes in it. It also makes finishing simpler if any flaps are knitted in a pattern stitch that stays flat. To accomplish this try the following:

- Use simple pattern stitches based on garter stitch, that don't curl
- Use smaller needles than usual
- Double the yarn or use strands of two different yarns

The Aesthetics

Want your bag to look sophisticated? Try these:

- Add black - chenille is particularly good
- Add glitter - metallic strands add sparkle to otherwise uninteresting yarn
- Add sequins, paillettes, beads, or spectacular buttons

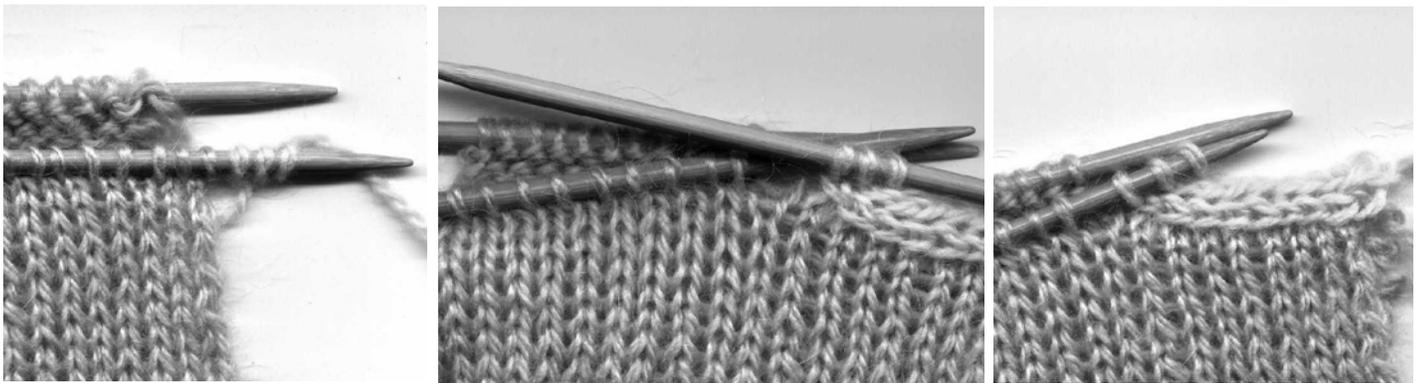
Finishing

Knit eyelets along seam lines, then sew up with a thick twisted cord or yarn or with I-cord.

Use 3-needle bind off to join pieces. If there are not live stitches where you need to join, pick up stitches. Use matching or contrasting yarn. The two edges to be joined must have live stitches on two separate needles (or you can use the two ends of one circular needle). Hold the two needles together in your left hand. Take a third needle and working yarn. Knit together the first stitch from the front needle with the first stitch from the back needle. Knit together the next stitch from each needle. Bind off the first stitch you worked over the second stitch. As usual when binding off, you will need to work slightly looser than normal to prevent it from being too tight. I like this method, because it puts a decorative edge along the seam that helps support the bag and keep it from stretching.

Use the 3-needle technique to knit the two edges together without binding off, then knit a few rows before binding off, to make a neat reverse stockinette cord along the seam

A variation of the three-needle bind off is to knit the two pieces together and finish the edge with I-cord. Cast on three stitches at the beginning of one of the needles holding the stitches (either the front or back one). *Knit 2 of these stitches, Slip 1, Knit the first stitch from the front needle together with the first stitch from the back needle, Pass the slipped stitch over.. Slip the three stitches back onto one of the left hand needles, pull the yarn across the back of them and repeat from * until the two pieces have been joined. Cut the yarn and pull through the three stitches that make the cord.



For straps use I-cord or twisted yarn. Using 2 dp needles, cast on 3 or 4 sts. *Knit across. Slide sts back to other end of needle without turning. Repeat from* until cord measures desired length.

For a flat strap, cast on enough stitches for the length of the cord, work a few rows in ribbing, then bind off firmly. Chains and strings of "rhinestones" can also be used for straps.

Embellishments

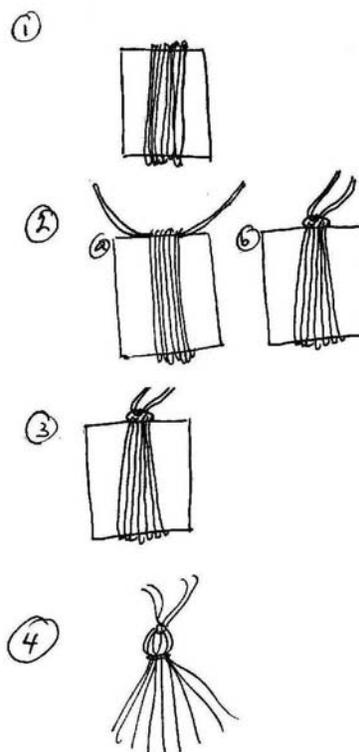
Beads and paillettes can easily be knitted into the fabric as you go, if they have a hole large enough for the knitting needles to pass through. Beads with small holes will need to be strung on the yarn (perhaps just on a fine carrying thread) before you begin, and slipped into position on the front of the work as you knit. The problem with this is you must know how many you will need before you begin working, or you'll have to break your yarn to add more in the middle.

To knit paillettes and beads on without stringing, work to the point where you want to add one, bring the yarn forward and insert the right needle into the stitch as if to purl. Then, place the paillette or bead on the tip of the right needle, wrap the working yarn and pull through the stitch. The paillette or bead will be firmly placed on the front of the fabric. Beware of placing them too densely! The closest they can be placed for practical purposes is every other stitch and every other row, but good effect can be achieved by placing them every third or fourth stitch, and every third (only practical if you are working circularly) or fourth row.

To knit pre-strung beads into the fabric, work to the point where you want a bead. Bring the yarn forward, slip the bead into position, slip the next stitch, bring the yarn to the back of the fabric, and work the next stitch. This places the bead on a strand of yarn in front of the fabric.

Tassels are quick and easy to make in matching yarn, or you can add purchased tassels. To make a tassel:

1. Cut a stiff piece of cardboard into a rectangle about 5½" x 3" (14cm x 7.5 cm), or use any stiff flat object about this size. Using main color, wrap the yarn lengthwise around the cardboard about 50 times. Cut yarn even with edge of cardboard.
2. Cut a 24" (61 cm) long piece of yarn. Fold this piece of yarn in half and pull through between the cardboard and the wrapped yarn. Slide up to one end of the cardboard. With half of the yarn extending on either side, tie the two ends tightly and securely around the wrapped yarn.
3. With a pair of sharp scissors, cut through the wrapped yarn at the opposite end of the cardboard.
4. Cut a 12" length of yarn. Wrap this tightly around the tassel 2 or 3 times, about ¾" (2 cm) from the top. Tie securely. Using a yarn needle, pull the ends of this tie through to the inside of the tassel so that the ends hang down inside.



Shake out the tassel and trim off any uneven ends.

Beads can be sewn on around the edges as part of seaming, or sewn onto the fabric as decorations. They can also be strung on tassels or onto fringes.

Fringes, either purchased or made of the yarn itself can be added around the seams, bottom, or flaps.

Ruffles: If you know beforehand that you want to add ruffles, put a row of purl stitches wherever you plan to attach the ruffle later. Pick up one stitch in each purl stitch, then K1, YO all the way across (or around) the row. Repeat this for a second row. If you can stand it, and there is room on your needle, you may do it for a third row. To bind off: K1 *YO, PSO, K1, PSO* Repeat between * around until all sts have been bound off.

Boning can be added to support key parts of the bag, if it tends to droop.