

## Blocking Miniature Knits

v. **block·ing** - To shape or mould on a block-type form.

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### Theory

All animal fibres are made up of protein and should therefore be washed in a pH-balanced type of soap. Because we all have some form of hair shampoo at home, and since all hair shampoos are pH-balanced, it is the safest type of soap to wash your miniature knits. And, while you're at it, bring along your hair conditioner (cream rinse), because you're going to need that too!

### Washing

In a clean, small basin or sink, fill with luke warm water and about a teaspoon of your favourite hair shampoo. Swish the mixture around to make sure the hair shampoo is well-dissolved and add your miniature knits. Work the sudsy water into your knits with your hands, but do not rub the item together - rubbing woollen surfaces together will *felt* your items and you'll become The Accidental Felter!

Rinse your items in gently running luke warm water, being careful not to lose any of your knitted bits down the drain (speaking from experience here). Remove the excess water in paper towels or a clean wash cloth. Then, fill your basin back up again with luke warm water and add a couple of tablespoons of your hair conditioner. Swish the water and hair conditioner around so as to mix well and add your miniature knits. You want to make sure the hair conditioner is absorbed into the knit - you'll know when this is achieved as it only takes 10-15 seconds and your finger tips will feel the difference too.

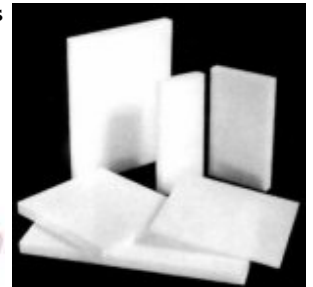
Remove the items from the *hair conditioned* water and again remove the majority of excess moisture by patting between paper towels or a clean wash cloth. Do not rinse out the hair conditioner, you're leaving it in. The mixture of water and hair conditioner relaxes the fibres back to it's normal state before it was knitted (and sometimes, tugged and pulled too).

### Blocking

To block your miniature knits, you'll need some basic equipment: stainless steel straight pins and a sheet of styrofoam. Styrofoam sheets can be purchased at most craft stores. Stainless steel or steel straight pins can be purchased in most notions departments and at craft or quilting stores. It's important to make sure the pin is made out of stainless steel or steel so there is no chance of rust forming on your miniature knit item. I use Clover Appliqué Pins, they are short in length and have a small head for ease of insertion and removal.



Now that you have all the equipment you need, its time to block your miniature knit. The purpose is **not** to stretch it, but **re-shape** the knitted item into it's desired form. If it has to be stretched because it's been knit too tightly or is too small, it's better to just re-knit the item.



Miniature knits are, at best, difficult to drape, especially when used as an effect in a scene. If the item is to be placed on a doll, then yes, if it was knit well, it should fit well and therefore drape relatively well. Again, if the item is used as an effect, the sleeves of pullovers and cardigans can be the most annoying to have drape properly - the sleeves stick out and minimal realism is achieved.

Regardless as to which combination of stitches you use for the foundation or edges of dress and skirt hemlines, or blanket and coverlet edges, these too can also be a problem as they have a tendency to either curl *up* or *in*. Ironing is **not** the solution - **blocking** is.

Ironing a knitted piece, whether it has been knit in cotton, acrylic or wool is seldom recommended. Apart from the possibility of the iron creating a shine or sheen on the item, the heat of the iron will immediately change the composition of the fibres and repeated washings will not return the material back to it's original state.

In the image above, notice where the straight pins are placed and how the shoulder line and sleeves are shaped *along* the length and curve of the body of the sweater.

A hand-knit item can be blocked before or after seaming. Both examples are shown above.

Hemlines and edges are blocked *flat*, as with the lacy pink apron appearing in the image. Once the item is dry and the apron is placed around the waist of a doll, the hemline will not curl up and the side edges of the apron will wrap around to the back of the doll and not *flare out* at the corners.



### **Drying**

The recommended styrofoam is a cell-like structure which allows air to pass through and around it. Try to keep it in a warm, dry area. If the environment you are in is humid, it's going to take longer to dry. You can place the styrofoam block upright with a table fan blowing directly on it - literally just a few inches away - and this will greatly decrease the drying time. Also, don't lay it out in the open in the sun, birds fly up above (again, speaking from experience!).

### **Almost the Last Word...**

The above washing and blocking instructions not only apply to wool fibres, but cotton and acrylic too!

**Questions? don't hesitate to [e-mail me](mailto:joy@miniatureknitting.com) - [joy@miniatureknitting.com](mailto:joy@miniatureknitting.com)**