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# How To Work With Beads

By Rowan



# *How to work with beads*

## **HOW TO WORK WITH BEADS**

Adding beads to a knitted or crocheted design gives it a really special touch – especially when the beads added are as stunning as those in the Swarovski range. A few well placed beads can turn a simple garment into a real show-stopper.

And knitting or crocheting with beads is nowhere near as difficult as many people think. Not only is it so much quicker than sewing them all on afterwards, but it also ensures the beads will stay securely in place.

## **CHOOSING BEADS AND YARN**

Within reason, almost any bead or yarn can be used – but you **MUST** make sure the hole through the bead is the right size for the yarn! The bead needs to “sit” neatly on the yarn. If the bead is too small for the chosen yarn, it will be difficult to slide the bead into place and there is a risk the yarn will be damaged as beads are “shoved” along it. If the bead is too big for the chosen yarn, there is the risk the beads can “move” within the finished work and disappear onto the wrong side of the garment where they cannot be seen.

When choosing the beads, you also need to bear in mind the size and weight of the beads in relation to the weight of the yarn and the size of the garment. Ideally, the bead needs to be about the same size as one knitted (or crocheted) stitch. If too large a bead is used on a densely beaded design they will distort the knitting and thereby spoil the garment. And, if the beads are too small, they may simply just not show!

## **THREADING THE BEADS ONTO THE YARN**

There are lots of ways that beads can be incorporated into the actual knitting or crochet but most will involve the beads being threaded onto the yarn before you begin. And as the hole through the centre of the bead is often quite small in relation to the thickness of the yarn, it is often not possible to simply thread them straight onto the yarn.

Instead, use a needle and some sewing thread to make the process easier. Start by choosing a sewing needle that will easily pass through the beads and thread this needle with a short length of strong sewing thread. Knot the ends of this length of thread so that it forms a loop, making sure the knot is secure. Now shuffle the knot along the loop so that it sits along the side of the loop, rather than at the end of it.

Take the end of the yarn and pass this end through the loop of sewing thread and fold the yarn end over for 15–20 cm. To thread each bead onto the yarn, thread the bead onto the needle and then onto the looped sewing thread. Now gently ease the bead along the sewing thread and along onto the doubled yarn end. You may need to quite firmly pull the bead over the point where the sewing thread and yarn meet but, if the bead is the correct size for the chosen yarn, it should slide onto the yarn quite easily. Once the bead is on the doubled yarn you can then slide it further along so that it sits just on a single strand of yarn.

When sliding the beads onto the single thickness of yarn take care to ensure the looped end of yarn does not slip out of the thread loop – if it does, all your beads may simply fall off the yarn and you will have to start again. It is often easiest to individually thread 5 or 6 beads onto the doubled yarn end and then slide all of these beads onto the single strand of yarn, firmly holding the point where the yarn and thread meet so that you are sure the yarn does not slip out of the thread loop.

When threading the beads onto the needle, it is easiest to tip the beads into a small dish and pick up each bead with the point of the needle, rather than to pick up and hold each bead individually. Alternatively, you may prefer to tip a few beads into the palm of your hand and pick up the beads from here with the needle point.

Whilst you are threading the beads onto the yarn, you may come across the odd bead where you cannot get the needle to pass through the bead, or you may find the bead will simply “crack” and shatter as it is threaded over the thread and yarn join. This will either be because the needle and the yarn are simply too thick for the chosen bead or

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because you are using a poor quality bead. If you find too many beads are breaking, you may find it best to change to a finer sewing needle or re-think the choice of bead with the yarn. All the designs in this brochure are designed so that the specified beads work well on the specified yarns and, within reason, there should not be too much of a problem threading these beads onto the stated yarn.

The Swarovski beads featured here are different shapes and sizes and some will have their hole at one end of the bead, rather than centrally through it. Regardless of the size or shape of bead or the position of the hole, they should all be threaded onto the yarn in this way.

If you wish to mix the beads so that either the size, shape or colour appears randomly within the knitting or crochet, the easiest way to do this is to simply mix the beads together before threading them onto the yarn. However if you want them to appear in a certain order, remember that the last bead threaded onto the yarn will be the first bead placed within the work – so you will need to thread the beads onto the yarn in the reverse order to which you want them to appear within the work.

### **WORKING WITH BEADS**

Once you have threaded the beads onto the yarn, you are ready to start knitting or crocheting with this beaded ball of yarn. Start by sliding all the beads along the yarn so that there is at least 60–80 cm between the beads and the yarn end. Take the looped end of yarn out of the thread loop and you are ready to begin.

When you work with yarn with lots of beads threaded onto it, you will find you are repeatedly sliding beads up and down the yarn and there is the risk that the beads will start to wear away at the surface of the yarn. To stop this happening, it is best not to thread too many beads onto the yarn at any one time. If the design being made uses hundreds of beads, start by threading some of the beads onto the yarn. Use up all these beads within the knitting or crochet and then break the yarn and thread on more beads. But, of course, you must remember to

break off and rejoin the yarn at the end of a row so that the yarn join does not spoil your finished work!

If a design uses beads in just one or two places, it is best to thread all the beads onto one ball of yarn, joining in and breaking off this ball of yarn for the sections where the beads are to be placed. If this is the case, make sure you tie a large knot in the end of the beaded ball of yarn to stop the beads slipping off whilst this ball of yarn is set to one side.

If you are working with more than one thickness of yarn, don't try to thread the beads onto the multiple strands of yarn. Instead, thread the beads onto just one of the yarns you are using – this will not only make it much easier to thread on the beads but also to slide the beads into place.

If you choose to use a bead with a yarn where it is simply not possible to thread the bead onto the yarn, you could consider adding in another strand of yarn to the design – such as a very fine lace yarn or even a sewing thread. If you decide to do this, remember that the addition of the extra strand may affect not only the tension of the design but also the way the finished design looks and drapes. It is best to experiment first to make sure your combination will work!

### **PLACING THE BEADS WHILST KNITTING**

There are lots of ways beads can be placed within a knitted design, and it is best to check the abbreviations section of the pattern to find out exactly how the beads are to be placed.

The most common way to place a bead within a knitted design is to simply replace a knitted stitch with a strand of yarn with a bead on it. This will usually be referred to as “bead 1” in the pattern – but check this method **IS** the method to be used before you start!

To place a bead in this way, knit along the row to the point where the bead is to be placed. At this stage, all the beads will be between the knitted work and the yarn ball. Once you have reached the “bead 1” point, make sure the yarn is at the

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front of the knitting – depending on the stitch pattern being knitted, this may require the yarn to be brought to the front of the work between the needles. Now slide one bead up and along the yarn so that it “sits” next to the last knitted stitch on the right needle. Slip the next stitch on the left needle purlwise – so that this stitch is not twisted. If required, take the yarn back between the needles so that it is in the right place for the next knitted stitch, and knit this stitch. This will leave the bead sitting on a horizontal strand of yarn across the right side of the knitting at the “bead 1” point. When working the next row of knitted stitches, simply knit (or purl) the slipped stitch behind the beaded strand in the normal way.

When placing beads in this way, try to ensure that the strand of yarn lying across the slipped stitch is not too tight or too loose – it should be the correct length to fit both the bead and the knitted stitches.

As this method of placing a bead does not actually knit the stitch, it is best not to place a bead on the end stitch of a row. Placing beads on the end stitches of rows will also make seaming the sections together messy and lumpy. You may prefer to leave the end 2 stitches of each row without beads to ensure any seam is neat and easy to sew.

Beads can be placed in this way on right or wrong side rows – but remember that the strand of yarn holding the bead should always be on the right side of the work if the bead is to show! You may find that, once the work is complete, one or two beads may have worked their way through the knitting and are “sitting” on the wrong side of the knitting. If this is the case, simply ease them gently back to the right side of the work.

### **ATTACHING BEADS TO KNITTING USING A CROCHET HOOK**

If you are using a fine yarn and fairly large beads, attaching a bead using the “bead 1” method may distort the knitting – as the bead will be much bigger than the stitch it is covering. In these cases, you can attach the beads using a fine crochet hook.

Attaching beads to the knitting using this method does NOT require you to thread the beads onto

the yarn before you begin to knit. And, if the yarn is a very delicate yarn, this can help avoid any damage that might be caused by sliding the beads along the yarn.

To place a bead within the knitting using this method, you will need a very fine crochet hook. You must be able to easily pass the hook section of the crochet hook through the hole in the bead, so you will need to use one of the very fine steel crochet hooks normally used for very fine lace work, such as a size 1mm (10 steel) hook. Remember the hook must pass through the bead hole **easily** – if you have to force it through the hole you run the risk of cracking or breaking the bead.

When placing a bead in this way, knit along the row to the point where the bead is to appear. Now slip a bead over the hook of the crochet hook, and slip the stitch that is to be beaded off the left needle and onto the crochet hook. Gently ease this stitch through the bead hole using the crochet hook and replace the stitch onto the left needle. Now knit this stitch in the normal way – as the bead “sits” around the strands of this stitch, you may find it a little “tight” to knit so take extra care.

The method you choose to use to attach the beads to your knitting can be influenced by the shape of the bead you are using. Using the “bead 1” method to place beads (where the beads are threaded onto the yarn) places the bead on the knitting so that the hole in the bead is **horizontally** placed within the work. But placing beads using a crochet hook means the hole in the bead “sits” **vertically** within the work. Therefore this method of placing beads is only really suitable when using spherical beads. Teardrop shaped beads attached this way will “sit” so they point to one side, instead of hanging down the work. When using this type of shaped bead, it is best to thread them onto the yarn before knitting and place them using the “bead 1” method.

### **ATTACHING BEADS WHILST CROCHETING**

Placing a bead whilst crocheting is surprisingly easy! Start by threading the beads onto the yarn and crochet to the point where the bead will appear.

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Beads within crochet are usually placed either on chain or double crochet stitches. Whichever type of stitch it is, the way you place the bead is very similar. If the bead is to be placed on any other type of stitch, refer to the abbreviations section for details of exactly what to do.

When working a bead on a chain stitch (referred to as “beaded ch 1”), work to the point where this stitch is to appear. Now slide the bead up the yarn so that it “sits” snugly against the crochet hook. Now work a chain stitch in the normal way – the bead will be left sitting on a strand of yarn that makes up the chain stitch.

To work a beaded double crochet, start by working the very first stage of this stitch – insert the hook into the stitch at the base of this new double crochet stitch. Now slide a bead along so that it “sits” snugly against the crochet hook and complete the double crochet stitch. Placing a bead in this way leaves the bead sitting on the back of the work – so beaded double crochet stitches are best worked on wrong side rows. If, however, the beaded stitch appears on a right side row, you will need to gently ease the bead through the work so that it “sits” on the right side of the fabric.

### **MAKING STRINGS OF BEADS**

Sometimes a knitting or crochet design will feature short strings of beads, rather than beaded stitches. These little strings of beads will form tiny tassels or bridges within the work and will add extra dimension and texture to the finished item.

To create a string of beads in knitting, simply work to the point where this string is to appear. Now slide the required number of beads along the yarn (your pattern will tell you how many beads you need) so they “sit” next to the last stitch worked and then simply work the next stitch. This leaves a strand of beaded yarn between the two stitches.

A string of beads in crochet is made in a similar way – except you need to fasten off first. Start by working to the point where the beaded string is to appear. Enlarge the working loop on the hook and pass the ball of yarn holding the beads through this loop and then pull the yarn end, to fasten off

the last crocheted stitch. Now slide the required number of beads along the yarn (your pattern will tell you how many beads you need) so they “sit” next to the fasten-off point. Now pick up the crochet hook again and insert it into the point required for the next crochet stitch. Draw a loop through and elongate this loop to the height of the next type of stitch you will be working – this new loop now forms your working loop and you can continue the crochet as before, leaving a strand of beaded yarn between the two stitches.

Whether making strings of beads in knitting or crochet, take care not to pull the yarn too tight when working the stitch after the beaded string as the beads need to be able to move slightly on the strand of yarn so that they can drape and will hang correctly.

### **ATTACHING BEADS BY SEWING THEM IN PLACE**

Beads can, of course, simply be sewn on to a finished piece of knitting or crochet!

The best way to attach beads this way is by using a matching colour sewing thread, or one of the “invisible” nylon threads specifically designed for this purpose. If you are using sewing thread, choose a colour that matches both the beads and the yarn. If you cannot get a perfect match, opt for a slightly darker shade, rather than a lighter one, as this will “disappear” into the shadows and be less obvious. If, however, the beads and yarn are contrasting colours, choose which of these shades you would prefer to use for the sewing thread. Bear in mind that if the bead is a clear crystal bead the strands of thread running through the bead may affect its colour once it is sewn in place. A clear crystal bead will look totally different sewn on using a dark thread to when attached using a light coloured thread! It is best to experiment with different colours of threads until you find the effect you want. To sew on a bead, start by checking the needle you are using will fit through the beads! You may need to use one of the specially designed beading needles if your beads are tiny – check out your local haberdashery store for these.

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Thread the needle with your chosen thread and start by securing the thread on the wrong side of the work by working a few tiny back stitches. Now take the needle through to the right side of the work and thread the bead onto the thread. Pass the needle back through to the wrong side of the work and fasten it off by making a few more tiny backstitches. Depending on the type of thread you are using and the size of bead, you may prefer to either se the sewing thread doubled, or to make 2 or 3 stitches through the bead before fastening off.

If attaching lots of beads by sewing them on, it is not always necessary to cut the thread and attach each bead individually. You can simply strand the sewing thread across the wrong side of the fabric from one bead position to the next. However you must remember that the knitting or crochet will stretch – and the strand of thread you leave across the back of the work must cater for this! And also bear in mind that if the strand of thread left across the back of the work is too long, you run the risk of this catching and snapping when the item is in use. It is therefore best to secure the thread with a few backstitches before and after **every** bead is sewn on. Attaching beads this way will not only mean that, if the thread snaps, you will not find the beads fall off but also that the beads sit neatly in place without sliding around on loose threads.

## PRESSING THE BEADED WORK

If you have spent many hours knitting or crocheting your design you need to take care when pressing the finished pieces so that the beads are not damaged. Never ever place an iron directly onto an area that features beads! And you may prefer to lower the iron temperature too, just to be on the safe side.

To press your beaded work, place the knitted (or crocheted) section face down onto a soft pressing surface. Cover the work with a pressing cloth (or a soft, clean tea towel) and press the work very gently. If using steam, be very careful how much steam you use – as the heat of the steam could shatter the bead.

If you are hesitant about the amount of heat or steam to use, “press” the work by “blocking” it

instead. To do this, pin out the beaded section, with its right side uppermost, onto a soft pressing surface. Dampen a pressing cloth (or clean tea towel) and lay this over the work, gently smoothing it down. Now simply leave the work until the pressing cloth is totally dry. Once dry, remove the cloth, un-pin the work and complete the making-up process. As this method of “pressing” uses no heat or pressure this is often the safest way to “press” your work without any risk of damage to either the yarn or beads.

## AFTERCARE

Adding lots of beads to a knitted (or crocheted) design will add a lot of weight to the finished garment. And, because of this, it is best NOT to store a heavily beaded design on a coat hanger. Instead, carefully fold the garment and store it on a shelf. This will stop the weight of the beads pulling down and distorting the finished garment.

When you need to launder a heavily beaded item, it is best to either have the item professionally dry cleaned by a specialist cleaner or to hand wash the item. Should you choose to machine wash the item, use the most delicate setting you can on your washing machine and protect the work by placing it in a laundry bag first.

