

A Review: Customfit

One of the hardest projects for knitters to make is a sweater that works. Why is that?

1. It has to fit many places well: chest, shoulders, waist, hips, elbows, wrists, and neck. A lot has to go right to make a sweater wearable.
2. When a sweater is knit in pieces you can't try it on as you go to see if it will fit. And then if you knit top-down, the patterns available are somewhat limited, and for some shapes, really hard to do well.
3. If you are off in your knitting gauge by as little as 1/4 stitch per inch, even though you love the yarn and the fabric your needles is making your choices are stark - start over with swatching again, or find that your sweater is too big or too small. Or, you can recalculate the entire pattern to your gauge.
3. Directions can sometimes be byzantine in either their brevity or their loquaciousness.

I haven't even dealt with the issues of whether you like your sweaters snug or loose or in-between. Let's face it, sweater knitting can be *hard*.

Amy Herzog has set out to change almost all of this for 21st century knitters. Her new bespoke online pattern business, Customfit, allows any knitter the opportunity to knit a swatch in yarn they want to use, measure the intended recipient (limited now to adult women, but I bet this expands over time), choose from a variety of options for styles (again, this will expand) and create a custom-written pattern just for this project.

Disclaimer: I signed on as a beta-test knitter back in July, and was in the last wave of beta testers before the preview folks came online. I am receiving a free membership for a limited time in return for my testing.

I wanted to put Customfit to a reasonable test, so I used some very basic Cascade 200 Quattro yarn, and created a 5x1 garter rib stitch pattern. Using a basic yarn meant that I would be testing the software more than the yarn. Also, this stitch pattern, although it is an even number of stitches, has the quality that it actually has one center stitch (because of the 5 and 1 thing). I knit in a couple of sizes of needles to get the fabric that I wanted. Read that again - instead of having my yarn and needles try to fit a pattern, *I get to let the yarn and needles be the best they can be.*



After blocking the swatch (very important!) I entered my own measurement information on the swatch, and my measurements. Customfit provides some great videos to help you along with this.

For a sweater style, I worked from one of the template patterns (there are currently six), choosing a V-neck pullover. It was a little hard to figure out whether I would like how deep the V-neck was - next time I'll check with a sweater I own. I wanted 3/4 sleeves, so I shortened them to a 3/4 sleeve length that I picked in my body measurements, and I picked a mid-hip length.

The pattern generation went well, and the pdf immediately showed up on my iPad, and I was

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able to open it up in Goodreader and save it. Slick. (Ravelry integration is forthcoming). The patterns are also saved on the Customfit website, and you can always have access to patterns that you have generated. There was a beta-test blip for me, when weeks later I went on Customfit and my pattern was gone - but Amy and her team found it and it was returned to my library within a day.

The pattern I chose to knit was in pieces - I'm with Amy in thinking that these sweaters tend to fit better on a variety of frames, and hold their shape better. The pattern also came with directions on how to knit the pattern bottom-up in the round to the armhole, knitting the front and back separately flat, and then picking up stitches to knit the sleeves down. With my very simple stitch pattern, this would have worked, but for other stitch patterns with a noticeable "direction" the user should take care before venturing into this territory.

The front and back of the sweater were each a multiple of the stitch pattern, but the increases came in the middle. The 5x1 stitch pattern actually centers better with a multiple of six stitches *plus one*. I didn't think to do this on the back (and probably wouldn't have as a beta tester), so I had to add in one more increase on the left side, or I would not have had a mirrored effect - as it is, it is a little off-kilter - there's one more decrease on the left side (and later, another increase). Another note is that there is no allowance for the side seam stitches - with another stitch pattern, this might have gotten me into trouble. It's important to understand which stitch(es) in a pattern are the center, so you can put the stitch pattern on the sweater intelligently.

The pattern also assumed I would use the same needles for the body and the 1x1 ribbing. Personally, I think the ribbing tends to look sloppy at the same needle size, so I went down one needle size for all ribbing.

On the front, I wised up and added the one stitch extra to center the stitch pattern, and things went very well up on the whole. Customfit's default decreasing at the edges is just one stitch in and in the line of the decrease (at the right edge, it's an SSK, on the left one, a K2tog). Because I had that center stitch added in the middle, I put that stitch on a locking stitch marker when I got to the neckline shaping, and ignored it doing the decreases for the neckline.

At the shoulder decreases, Customfit does not do any fancy short row techniques, just binding off - I used a little more knowledge to get a better effect by slipping the first stitch at the 2nd bind-offs- the newer knitter might not be happy with the outcome just reading the directions.

The sleeves were knit without incident, after adding in one more stitch to the over all stitch count so I got symmetrical increases and decreases.

Seaming went great, and I actually thought the way Customfit works the increases/decreases at the edge gives a very good edge to the garment - a lovely surprise!

The V-neck went ok - except for some minor beta-tester error (the knitter, not the pattern) - and the resulting neckline was good.

And here's the true test: the sweater on! See that smile?

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If you look carefully, you'll see that the left "dart" looks a little bigger - that is the issue with the increases/decreases that I mentioned above. In this yarn, it's not very noticeable.

Right now I'm at my upper weight swing (I can vary as much as 20 pounds), but I think it will look good at a lower weight too!

Final Thoughts:

- Customfit is currently priced per pattern at \$10. Given the prices of current standard patterns out there, *I think this is very reasonable*, and lets the user try out the program

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without a major investment.

- For an advanced beginning knitter, directions on measuring bodies and swatches is clear, and the resulting pattern is written clearly enough to result in a successful sweater the first time - which is huge! One good sweater means more sweaters will be knit.
- More directions will be needed to successfully incorporate an overall stitch pattern into the Customfit architecture - but this is a development issue, not a setback at all.

Customfit is now live, but there's a little list as they manage the load of all the knitters knocking on their door. I can't help but say - [go get on the list and try it out!](#)