Hints and Tips

#3 – Do You Have Enough Yarn to Finish

After last month's look at how to block your shawl after it is finished, Julie experienced some mild panic as she neared the end of the final sample shawl of her new Eilidh design: was she going to have enough yarn left?

So, how to work out if you have enough yarn left to finish a design or a section of your work? (I wonder how many of us subconsciously knit faster when we think we might run out?!!)

The standard advice on whether you have enough yarn to complete one more row is to stretch out your knitting and, if the length of yarn is 4 times the width of your work, you should have enough. This is, however, a bit hit and miss - and not easy to do if you have a shawl with 700-odd stitches on the needle and can't stretch it out fully.

What I do is to weigh my yarn – often. Before I begin, at the end of each section/chart and, as the ball gets smaller, after every row. I can then judge roughly how much each row is taking. If you're working a shawl where you're increasing regularly, then you need to take that into account as well. You'll usually find with top-down crescent shawls that the last few rows start to gobble up the yarn really quickly, so you'll need to keep a careful check. You'll also need an accurate set of scales - one that goes down to 1g increments at a minimum.

If you keep a check on your stitch counts per row, you can use the recorded weights to work out how many stitches you get per 1g of yarn. For example, say the last 10 rows I've knitted on a crescent shawl have the following stitch counts, increasing 3 stitches at each end of alternate rows:

200, 200, 206, 206, 212, 212, 218, 218, 224, 224. That's a total of 2,120 stitches worked.

And let's say those 10 rows used 5g of yarn.

If we divide the 2,120 by 5, we have 424 stitches knitted per 1g of yarn. The next row will be 230 stitches and if we have 1g left, we know we can complete that row - but we probably won't have enough for the row after that.

Getting close: at this stage I still had one row and the cast off to manage – with only 2g of yarn left!

Obviously the more rows you can calculate this over, the more accurate the measurement will be. (When knitting lace, knit stitches, yarn overs and decreases use roughly the same amount of yarn. If you're working cables, or knit and purl combinations, you tend to use more yarn.)

I use a spreadsheet when designing, to help work out exactly how many stitches I'll be knitting and how much yarn I'm likely to use by comparing weights and total stitch counts worked on a regular basis. (It's also useful to help calculate the number of beads I'll need.)

If you think you may run out of yarn, then you need to make some decisions. You could start on another skein/ball if

you have it, or you can skip some of the pattern rows. There may be a section of the pattern you can leave out altogether without affecting the design too much. Many of my designs can be stopped a few rows short within the edging and not make a lot of difference to the pattern - usually it just means you won't have quite such pronounced points when you block. You can also opt for a simple bind-off rather than a picot one if the pattern includes it - picots take a surprising amount of yarn.

I hope this helps some of you - if you're interested in seeing how the spreadsheet works, let me know and I'll include it in the next newsletter.

Made it! All cast off – with less than 1g remaining (about 12 metres – enough for a victory lap)