Beginner’s Guide to the Chain Stitch & Chain Space in Crochet

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The **chain stitch** (abbreviated as CH) is the first stitch every crocheter learns, it’s the foundation of nearly every crochet project. Building upon that, the **chain space** (abbreviated as CH-SP) is the open gap created by chains within your fabric. Together, these two techniques give crochet its structure, drape, and decorative openness.

Whether you’re just starting out or improving your skills, this guide covers everything from making your first chain to mastering chain spaces in patterns ,complete with step-by-step instructions, examples, common mistakes, and beginner-friendly practice exercises.

The **chain stitch** (US: CH / UK: CH) is the foundation of crochet, it creates the base row where all other stitches are worked. Once you master it, you can build any crochet project, from simple scarves to detailed lacework.

The **chain space**, written in patterns as CH-SP, is an evolution of this same technique. It’s the intentional gap between stitches that adds airiness and decorative design to your fabric. Understanding both is essential to crocheting confidently and reading patterns correctly.

Abbreviation

Step by Step

How to Crochet the Chain Stitch (CH)

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Make a slip knot and place it on your hook.
2. Yarn over ,wrap the yarn from back to front over your hook.
3. Pull through the loop on your hook.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 until you reach the number of chains your pattern requires.

Tip: Keep each chain loop smooth and even , not too tight or loose. Consistent tension ensures straight rows and easier stitch insertion.

UK Equivalent

The chain stitch is the same in both US and UK crochet terminology: CH.

Common Uses for the Chain Stitch

- The foundation chain for most crochet projects.
- Turning chains that bring height to a new row.
- Creating decorative loops or spaces in patterns like granny squares, filet crochet, and lace.
- Building chain spaces (ch-sps) between stitch groups.

Beginner Tips for the Chain Stitch

- Practice long chains (30–40 ch) to learn consistent tension.
- If your chain curls, loosen your grip slightly.
- Count chains carefully , missing even one can throw off your stitch alignment.
- Use a slightly larger hook while practicing for smoother motion.

Common Chain Stitch Mistakes

Chains too tight

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- Why it Happens : Gripping yarn or hook too firmly
- How to Fix It : Relax tension; loosen your grip slightly

Uneven loops

- Why it Happens : Inconsistent yarn feed
- How to Fix It : Keep yarn moving smoothly with even tension

Twisted chain

- Why it Happens : Turning the chain as you stitch
- How to Fix It : Keep your chain flat and stitches facing you

Losing count

- Why it Happens : Not tracking stitches
- How to Fix It : Count aloud or mark every 10th chain with a stitch marker

Practice Exercise : Chain Stitch Swatch

1. Make a slip knot.
2. Chain 20 using scrap yarn.
3. Lay the chain flat, ensure all loops face the same way.
4. Repeat with different hook sizes to see how tension and spacing change.

Tip: Try chaining 30 and measuring it. Then re-chain 30 more loosely, notice how much longer it becomes!

Understanding the Crochet Chain Space (CH-SP)

Once you've mastered the chain stitch, you can use it to form chain spaces, the open gaps between stitches that add texture and design to your work.

What Is a Chain Space?

A chain space (ch-sp) is the open gap created when you make one or more chains, skip a number of stitches, and anchor your next stitch afterward.

Example: `Ch 2, skip 2 sts, dc in next st`

creates a ch-2 space between two double crochets.

Chain spaces are essential in:

- Granny squares (corners and between clusters)
- Filet crochet
- Mesh and lace fabric
- Shells, arches, and picots

How to Read Chain Space Instructions

ch-sp often appears with a number: *ch-1 sp, ch-2 sp, etc.*

The number shows how many chains form that space.

When you see (dc, ch 2, dc) in ch-2 sp, you'll work all stitches into the space (not into the chains themselves).

Step-by-Step: Make a Basic ch-2 Space

1. Work the first stitch (e.g., dc).
2. Chain 2 (relaxed tension).
3. Skip the number of stitches shown in the pattern.
4. Work the next stitch to anchor the space.

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Example: `Dc, ch 2, skip 2, dc in next; rep from ` creates a mesh pattern.

Common Uses for Chain Spaces

- Granny Squares : (ch-2 or ch-3) - Creates corner openings.
- Filet Crochet : (ch-1 or ch-2) - Forms mesh grid
- Shell Patterns : (ch-1 or ch-2) - Separates shell groups
- Lacework : (ch-2+) - Adds decorative gaps
- Picots : (ch-3) - Forms loops or tiny points |

Mini Practice Patterns

1. Simple Mesh Swatch

- Chain 31.
- Row 1: Dc in 4th ch from hook, ch 1, skip 1, dc in next; repeat.
- Row 2: Ch 3, turn. Dc in ch-1 sp, ch 1, dc in next ch-1 sp; repeat.
- → Creates open mesh using ch-1 spaces.

2. Classic Granny Square Center

- Make a magic ring (or ch 4, join).
- Rnd 1: (3 dc, ch 2) six times, join.
- Rnd 2: (3 dc in next ch-2 sp, ch 1) around.
- → Chain spaces form the classic square corners.

Tension & Sizing

- More chains = larger gaps.
- A ch-1 sp gives a small hole; ch-3 sp makes it more open.
- Use larger hooks for airy lace or smaller hooks for tighter mesh.
- Keep consistent tension, uneven chain tension creates irregular spacing.

Anchoring Chains Correctly (Keep Edges Straight)

- Work into the turning chain only if the pattern instructs it.
- When repeating patterns like [dc, ch 1], make sure the final stitch is placed correctly, this prevents scalloped edges.
- For clean borders, work slip stitches evenly into both stitches and chain spaces.

Advanced Chain Space Techniques

- Clusters and shells: Work multiple stitches into a ch-sp (e.g., [dc, ch 2, dc]).
- Bridging: Use ch-sps to join distant points in motifs.
- Overlay crochet: Create color contrast using open ch-sps.
- Blocking: Lightly block lace to even out all chain spaces for a polished finish.

Practice Swatches for Chain Spaces

A. Mesh

- Learn even ch-1 sps
- Ch 20, dc in 4th ch from hook, ch 1, skip 1, dc in next

B. Filet

- Alternate solid and open blocks

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- Ch 30, [dc, ch 1, skip 1, dc] rows

C. Shell Arches

- Work groups into spaces
- Ch 36, [3 dc, ch 2, 3 dc] in ch-2 sp |

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