

Introduction

Knitting is, loosely speaking, the art of creating a piece of fabric from a (more or less) continuous piece of thread. This is achieved through using one needle to hold stitches, which are then worked one at a time and the worked stitches are stored on the other needle. The work is then turned over, and another row is worked using the same process (more correctly, this is called “flat” knitting). Variations are in the way stitches are worked, using coloured yarns, or knitting in a spiral to get tubes (which can then be shaped into gloves, socks, wigs, et cetera).

“Reading” Your Knitting

There are two main types of stitch, knit and purl (pronounced “pearl”), but they are basically the same stitch either forwards (knit) or backwards (purl). When you knit a stitch, you get a small ‘V’ on the front, and a ridge of loops on the back; purl is exactly the opposite so you get a ridge of loops on the front and a ‘V’ on the back. “Reading” your knitting is just understanding *what* you did on the row below, without having to remember (very few projects can be completed in a short sitting). Once you can see what you’ve done, it is a simple matter to find mistakes (which can almost always be corrected without undoing the last umpteen rows) and fix them.

Combining knit in purl stitches in various ways gives a *textured* form of knitting. Basic textures are:

Garter Stitch Rows of V’s alternate with loopy ridges. Knit every row.

Stockinette Stitch When all the V’s end up on one side, the ridges on the other. Alternate between knit rows and purl rows.

Reverse Stockinette Same as above, but the loopy side is the ‘Right’ side.

Rib Stitches are in columns of V’s and loops. One variant (need multiple of four stitches, plus two extra) is knit two, purl two across (end with knit two); and then do the opposite on the next row, so purl two, knit two across (end with purl two).

Moss Stitch On an odd number of stitches knit one, purl one across for every row.

If you look at some samples, these all behave differently: garter stitch sits flat but is stretchy lengthwise; the stockinettes are stretchy lengthwise but tend to curl; rib is stretchy widthwise, sits flat and is usually softer; and moss stitch is flat, not particularly stretchy and seems almost woven.

Understanding Patterns

Good patterns always list what abbreviations they use, but common ones are: **knit**, **purl**, **repeat**, **Main Colour**, **Contrast Colour**, **stitch(es)**, **st-st** (stockinette stitch), **Right Side**, **Wrong Side**.

The trick to patterns is to *not* read ahead, it often is misleading and confusing. Patterns are usually given row by row, and in a repetitive (hence easier to remember) form. For example, Stockinette stitch would be described by:

Row 1: k

Row 2: p.

And the Rib above is:

Row 1: *k2 p2 rep from * to last 2 sts, k2

Row 2: *p2 k2 rep from * to last 2 sts, p2.

Casting On

Casting on, or getting the stitches on the needle in the first place, can be done in many ways, two of which will be described here.

First tie a slip knot, by making a loop, then pulling another loop through it:



Long-tail Cast-on



Tie a slip knot with a long tail, usually 3–4 times the length of the edge you're going to have, put it on one of the needles and pull it tight-ish. Wrap the tail around your left thumb, and then knit a stitch off your thumb (winding the wool from the ball around the needle).

Backward Loop Cast-on

This is better for rib, since it's a very stretchy (widthwise) cast-on. With a short-tail (~15cm) tie a slip knot and put it on the needle as before. Wrap the wool from the ball around your thumb, as for long-tail cast-on. Put the needle into the loop on your thumb as though you're going to knit it, but just move it onto the needle without doing anything extra (this is technically called a 'slip stitch'). Repeat until you have enough stitches.

Binding Off

Work two stitches (follow your pattern), then using your fingers (or the Left-Hand needle) pick up the first stitch you made, pull it over the other one and off the needle (you should now have just one stitch on the Right-Hand needle). Work another stitch (two sts on Right-Hand needle) and then pull the right-most stitch over the other one and off the needle. Continue until there is one stitch on the Right-Hand needle, and none on the left. Cut the yarn and pull the tail through the loop. Voila!

Some Useful Resources

www.ms.unimelb.edu.au/~paul [This is my website, you can even e-mail me at paul@ms.unimelb.edu.au & I'll answer your questions].

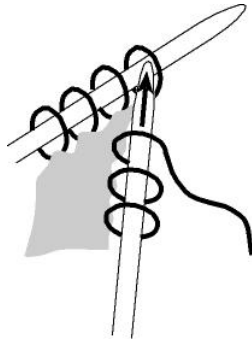
Lesley Stanfield, Melody Griffiths (2000) *Encyclopedia of Knitting*, Running Press [Good book with great pictures, clear instructions and most techniques you'll come across anywhere].

www.knitting-and.com [Great (queer) site with some patterns/techniques/links, includes the GLBT-knit e-mail list which is a great resource for all sorts of obscure techniques & people who are happy to help fix any problems you may come across...].

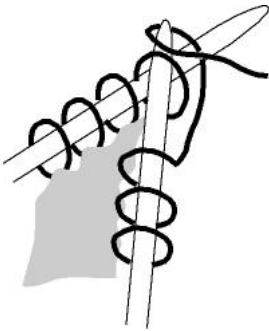
www.knitty.com [Full of all sorts of weird & wonderful patterns].

www.google.com.au [You'd be surprised how easy it is to find patterns/detailed instructions/definitions].

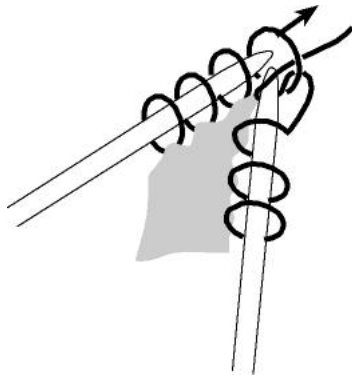
Knit



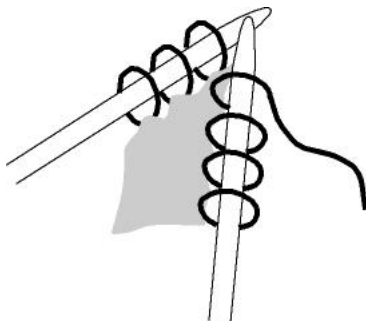
Insert the Right-Hand needle into the loop closest to the tip of the Left-Hand needle, with the needle tips pointing in the same direction.



Wrap the loose wool around the Right-Hand needle, ensuring the wool goes from left-to-right in front of the needle.

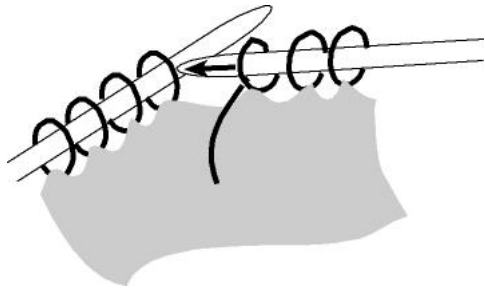


Pull the new loop just created on the Right-Hand needle back through the loop on the Left-Hand needle, *at the same time* slip the loop off the Left-Hand needle.

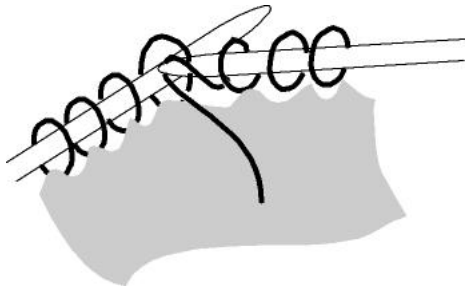


There is now one more stitch on the Right-Hand needle, and one fewer on the Left-Hand needle.

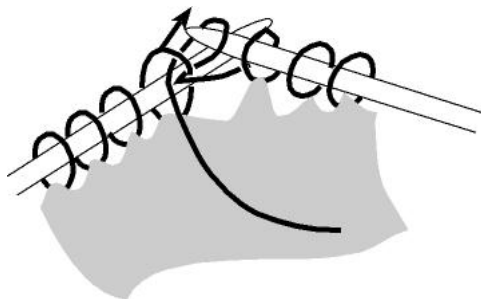
Purl



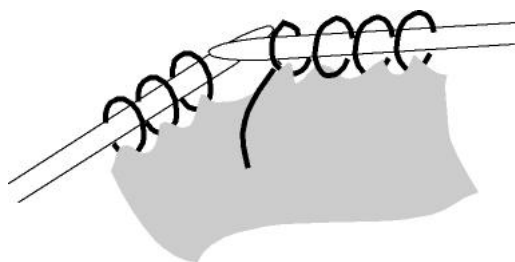
With the yarn in front, insert the Right-Hand needle into the loop closest to the tip of the Left-Hand needle, with the needle tips pointing in opposite directions.



Wrap the loose wool around the Right-Hand needle, ensuring the wool goes from bottom-to-top in front of the needle.



Pull the new loop just created on the Right-Hand needle back through the loop on the Left-Hand needle, *at the same time* slip the loop off the Left-Hand needle.



There is now one more stitch on the Right-Hand needle, and one fewer on the Left-Hand needle.