



Essential Fully Fashioned  
Shaping Techniques  
for Designer Results

# Knitting the Perfect Fit

Melissa  
Leapman

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for Designer Results

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*For* **MPB**

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# Introduction

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**It's all in the details!** The use of what designers call fully fashioned shaping marks the difference between an ordinary ho-hum sweater and an undeniably spectacular fashion garment. Using mirrored increases and decreases—slanting certain stitches toward the left or the right to create design details can easily give a garment a **couture** touch. It is the construction difference between an \$80 J.Crew cashmere V-neck sweater and the one that sells for \$200 in the same catalog. Though both are knitted out of the same soft yarn, the less expensive sweater is usually made by assembling front, back, or sleeve pieces cut from huge bolts of machine-knit fabric and then sewn with a serger, while the more expensive sweater is created with hand-manipulated, machine-made knitting stitches.

Many handknitters already use **shaping details** in their garments: decreases for armholes, necklines, or sleeve caps and increases for sleeves. We don't cut our pieces into shape, we *knit* them into shape! But most knitters do not understand how shaping works or how to use simple increases and decreases to add **visual interest** to their garments. I've taught these techniques to hundreds of knitters, and during my workshop they begin to look at their knitting in a whole new way. I still remember that exciting aha! moment when a student in one of my classes worked her first fully fashioned V neckline a few years ago. "It's so neat and perfect," she proudly proclaimed. In these pages we will explore simple **fully fashioned techniques** and how to apply them to create interesting designer elements and flattering shaping details in garments for any body shape. You will learn that just adding a few extra details can take any project to an entirely new level of sophistication.

**Chapter 1** of this book is a refresher course on all the basics any knitter will need to master, from different increase and decrease methods, to Knitting Charts 101, and the dos and don'ts of figure flattering. **Chapter 2** illustrates simple ways to incorporate fully fashioned shaping in stockinette garments. Included are four wearable—and knittable!—projects to get your needles clicking as you practice these basic shaping techniques. **Chapter 3** provides ways of using fully fashioned shaping for designer details such as decorative raglan seams and figure-flattering vertical lines. Many of the projects include incorporated neckbands and armbands to make the finishing of the garment faster and easier. **Chapter 4** delves into exciting ways to use strategically placed **increases and decreases** to create figure-flattering sweaters. Some of the projects in this section even use fully fashioned details to fool the eye and create the *illusion* of shape: You don't have to have a perfect hourglass shape to look great!



Throughout the book, you'll discover little **body shape icons** ▲▼●■✕ that will direct you to garments that are specifically designed for your individual figure type. Diagonal lines will draw attention to certain sections of the garment—and of your body. If you're going to take the time—and spend the money—to make custom garments, you might as well knit flattering ones!

You'll have fun experimenting with fully fashioned designer details—and using your knitting prowess to create **knockout pieces** that fit and flatter. Let's get started....

# Basics

No matter your skill level, superbly knit and figure-flattering garments can be made by anyone. If you're going to spend your free time (not to mention your precious yarn budget!) to create a sweater, the result ought to be as beautiful on you as possible. In this chapter, you'll learn the ins and outs of increases, decreases, knitting charts, and the simple abbreviations you'll encounter throughout the book.



# What Makes a Garment Fully Fashioned?

Have you ever wondered why some ready-to-wear sweaters cost so much more than others, even when they are machine-knit? Less expensive garments are cut and sewn out of huge bolts of machine-knit fabric: using a template similar to a sewing pattern, the front, back, and sleeves are stamped and cut to size and stitched together using a serger. Fully fashioned pieces, in contrast, are knitted to the size and shape of the individual sweater components, with the shaping details as clearly visible features of the design.



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# Get Your Knitting into Shape: Fully Fashioned How-Tos

Knitters usually try to conceal their increases and decreases as best they can, but in fully fashioned knits we actually want to show off these details. Following are some of the essential skills every knitter should have in her or his repertoire. Later in the book, we'll explore ways to use these simple techniques to create sweaters that are beautiful, figure-flattering, and best of all, fun to knit!

## Decreases

Reducing the number of stitches changes the shape of a piece of knitting and makes it narrower. Each decrease technique results in a different look. Some decreases take on the texture of knit stitches, for example; others look like purl stitches. Also, some decreases slant toward the right while others lean to the left, depending on which direction the top stitch points, since it's the most visible one. Designers often pair mirrored decreases opposite each other on a piece of knitting for a decorative effect. More on that subject later.

### Knit Stitch Decreases

**Knit 2 Together (decreases one stitch and slants toward the right; abbreviated k2tog)**

When this method of decreasing is used, the resulting stitch leans toward the right. It's easy: Just insert the right-hand needle into two stitches at once as if they're a single stitch!

To do: With the working yarn toward the back, insert the right-hand needle from front to back, [knitwise](#), into the first two stitches on the left-hand needle as if they were a single stitch, and wrap the yarn around the right-hand needle as you would for a knit stitch ([illustration 1](#)). Pull the yarn through both stitches, and slip both stitches off the left-hand needle at once. One stitch has been decreased, and the resulting stitch slants to the right.



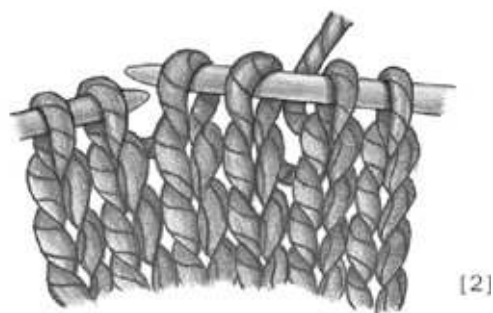
**Slip, Slip, Knit (decreases one stitch and slants toward the left; abbreviated ssk)**

This knit decrease requires an extra step, but it creates a mirror image of the k2tog decrease described above.

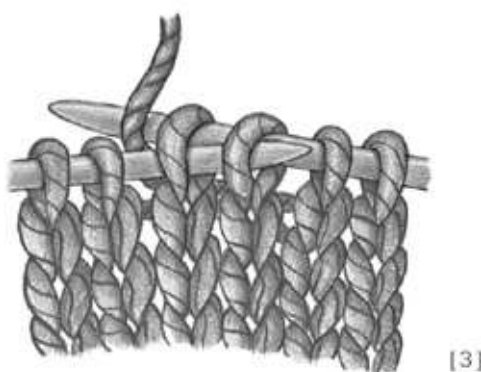
To do: With the working yarn toward the back, insert the right-hand needle from the left to the right, knitwise, into the first and second stitches on the left-hand needle, *one at a time*, and slip

them onto the right-hand needle ([illustration 2](#)).

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Then, insert the tip of the left-hand needle into the fronts of both slipped stitches ([illustration 3](#)) and knit them together from this position, through their back loops. One stitch has been decreased, and the resulting stitch slants to the left.



**Knit 3 Together (decreases two stitches and slants toward the right; abbreviated k3tog)**

This decrease is worked the same way as the k2tog decrease above, except the right-hand needle is inserted into three stitches at once, instead of two. In this case, two stitches are decreased, with the resulting stitch slanting toward the right.

**Slip, Slip, Slip, Knit (decreases two stitches and slants toward the left; abbreviated ssk)**

This decrease uses the same method as the ssk decrease above except three stitches are slipped rather than two stitches, one at a time, from the left-hand needle to the right-hand needle.

The usual method is to slip each of the three stitches knitwise, but some knitters prefer slipping the first stitch knitwise and the next two stitches purlwise in order to achieve a more perfect mirror image to the k3tog, as described for the [modified ssk](#). It's the knitter's choice.

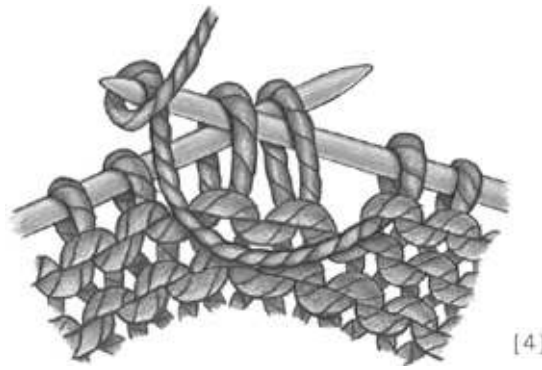
## Purl Stitch Decreases

**Purl 2 Together (decreases one stitch and slants toward the right on the knit side of the fabric; abbreviated p2tog)**

This type of decrease is most often done on wrong-side rows to combine two purl stitches, mimicking the look of a k2tog on the knit side of the fabric. Sometimes, though, designers use it on the right side to cleverly decrease along a purl "valley" as in [Orvieto](#).

To do: With the working yarn toward the front, insert the tip of the right-hand needle into the first

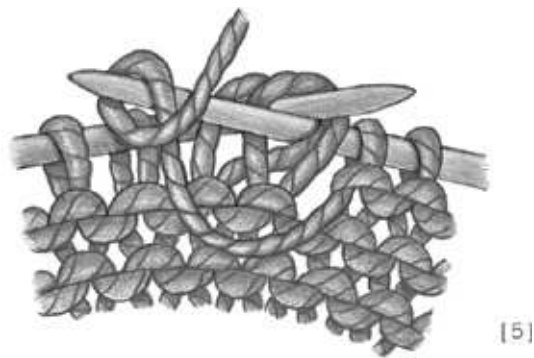
two stitches on the left-hand needle from right to left, [purlwise](#), as if they were a single stitch, and wrap the yarn around the right-hand needle as you would for a purl stitch ([illustration 4](#)). Pull the yarn through both stitches, then slip both stitches off the left-hand needle at once. One stitch has been decreased, and the resulting stitch slants to the right on the knit side of the fabric.



### **Slip, Slip, Purl (decreases one stitch and slants toward the left on the knit side of the fabric; abbreviated ssp)**

This technique is often used on wrong-side rows to mimic the left-slanting look of the ssk decrease on the knit side of the fabric.

To do: With the working yarn toward the front, slip the first two stitches knitwise, one at a time, from the left-hand needle to the right-hand needle. Then slip these two stitches back to the left-hand needle in their twisted position. Finally, insert the tip of the right-hand needle into the back loops of these two stitches, going into the second stitch first, and then the first stitch), and purl them together *through their back loops* as if they were a single stitch ([illustration 5](#)). One stitch has been decreased, and the resulting stitch leans toward the left on the knit side of the fabric.



### **Purl 3 Together (abbreviated p3tog)**

This decrease is worked the same as the p2tog decrease above, except the right-hand needle is inserted into three stitches at once, instead of two. Here, two stitches are decreased, with the resulting stitch slanting toward the right on the knit side of the fabric.

### **Slip, Slip, Slip, Purl (abbreviated sssp)**

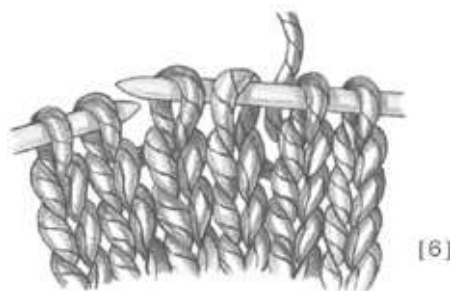
This decrease is worked the same as the ssp decrease above, except three stitches are slipped, one at a time, instead of two. Here, two stitches are decreased, the resulting stitch slanting toward the left on the knit side of the fabric.



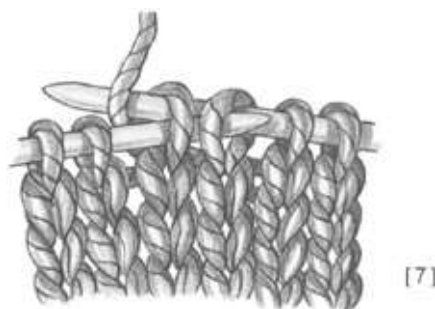
## Give It the Slip

For some knitters, the ssk decrease worked the typical way does not mirror the k2tog decrease perfectly. If you are among them and would like to make your left-leaning decrease look smoother and less like stair steps, try this method:

Slip the first stitch knitwise and the second stitch **purlwise** from the left-hand needle to the right-hand needle (**illustration 6**). Slipping the first stitch knitwise keeps it from twisting at the bottom, producing a smoother and neater stitch; slipping the second stitch purlwise seems to help some knitters achieve a straighter, less choppy line toward the left.



Then insert the left-hand needle into the fronts of both slipped stitches (**illustration 7**) and knit them together from this position, through their back loops.



## Keeping Your Directional Slants Straight

Many knitters find it difficult to remember which decrease slants which way. Here's a simple trick to help you remember which leans to the left and which leans to the right.

Write down the name of the decreases “k2tog” and “ssk.” Then draw a diagonal line through the right slant in the 2 and the left slant in the s as shown. The diagonal lines match the slant of the decreases: The k2tog decrease slants to the right and the ssk decrease slants toward the left. How's that for an easy way to keep them straight?

~~k2tog~~

(Right slant)

~~ssp~~

(Left slant)

## Keep It Simple

When viewed from the purl side, the p2tog decrease and the ssp decrease look surprisingly similar. Neither one slants noticeably toward the left or the right. That's why the p2tog technique is used without a matching ssp decrease in [Jacqueline](#). Working ssp decreases to mirror the p2tog decreases isn't worth the effort in such a case. No sense slowing down the precious knitting when no one (not even the designer!) will notice the tiny detail.

## Increases

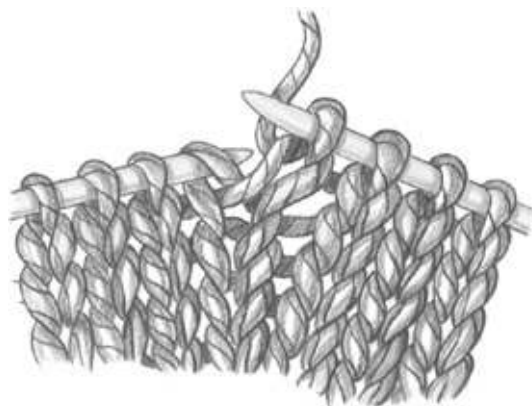
Knitters have many methods for adding width to a piece of fabric. Each technique has a different effect, from making decorative holes to adding various amounts of texture, to barely there increases that are nearly invisible.

### Subtle Increases

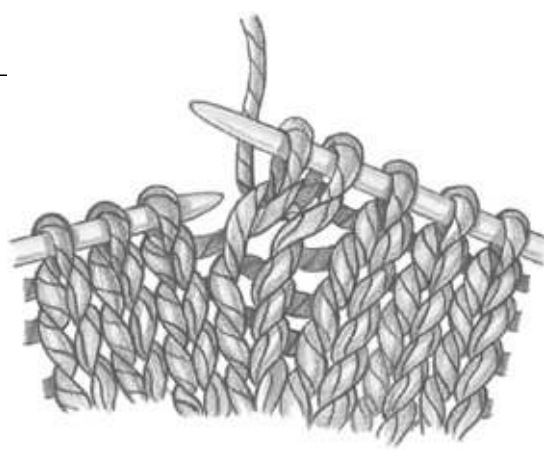
#### Lifted Increases

This type of increase is made by working into a stitch in the row below the stitch that is currently on the needle, and also working into the stitch the regular way. Although nearly invisible, it is handy to be able to perform the lifted increase slanting to either the left or to the right, depending on the desired effect.

**To do a lifted increase slanting to the left:** Insert the left-hand needle into the back of the first stitch on the right-hand needle, just below the stitch just knit ([illustration 8](#)), and knit it ([illustration 9](#)).

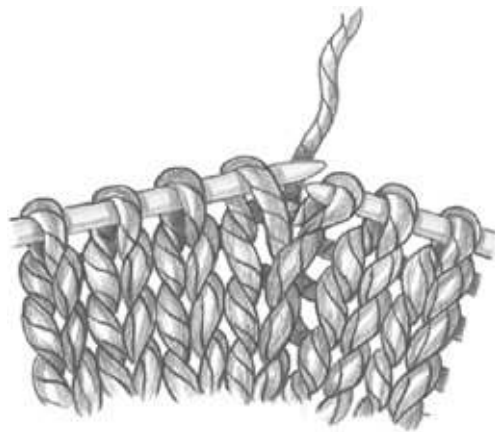


[8]



[9]

**For a lifted increase slanting to the right:** Knit into the back of the stitch (into its purl “bump”) the row directly below the stitch on the left-hand needle ([illustration 10](#)).



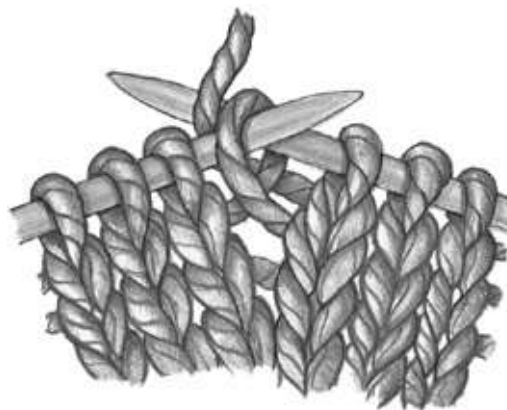
[10]

For a lifted purl increase, work the same as the knit version, except purl instead of knit. Easy!

### **Raised Increases (commonly known as “make one” increases)**

This method of adding stitches uses the horizontal strand of yarn that hangs between the knitting needles. The knitter works into the strand, carefully twisting it to prevent a hole. As with the lifted increases above, raised increases can slant to the right and to the left. Here’s how:

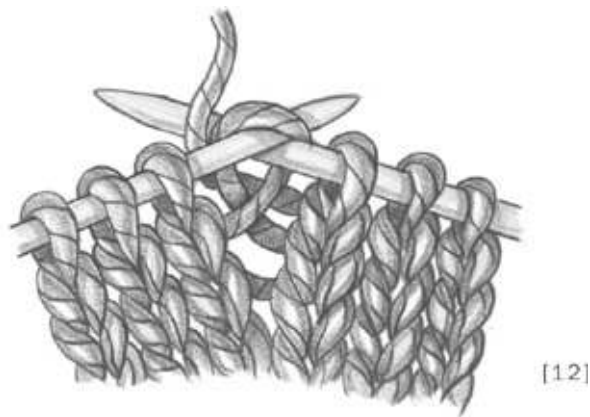
**For a raised knit increase slanting to the left** (*abbreviated M1-L*): Use the left-hand needle to scoop up the horizontal strand that’s hanging between the needles *from front to back*, and knit the strand *through its back loop*, twisting it to prevent a hole in your fabric ([illustration 11](#)).



[11]

**For a raised knit increase slanting to the right** (*abbreviated M1-R*): Use the left-hand needle to

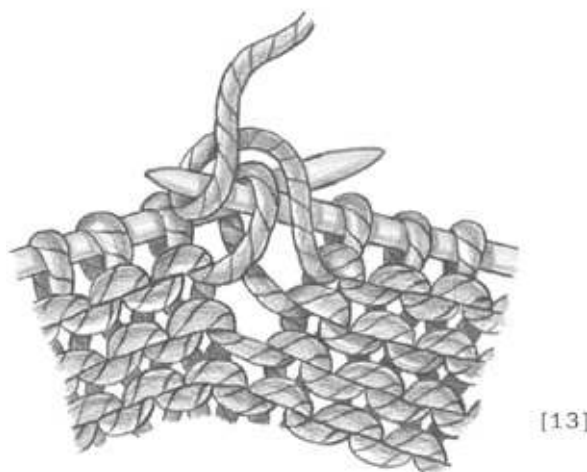
scoop up the horizontal strand that is hanging between the needles *from back to front*, and knit the strand *through its front loop*, twisting it to prevent a hole in the work ([illustration 12](#)).



Note: If no direction is specified, use the M1-L increase.

Sometimes raised increases are worked as purl stitches, such as when increases are made on wrong-side rows as follows.

**For a raised purl increase that slants to the right on the right side of the fabric:** Use the left-hand needle to scoop up the horizontal strand between the needles *from back to front*, then purl the strand *through its front loop*, twisting it to prevent a hole in your fabric ([illustration 13](#)).



**For a raised purl increase that slants to the left on the right side of the fabric:** Use the left-hand needle to scoop up the horizontal strand between the needles *from front to back*, then purl the strand *through its back loop*, twisting it to prevent a hole in your fabric.

However, M1 purlwise increases are usually worked on right-side rows whenever a purl stitch is needed, and in these cases, the difference between left- and right-slanting stitches is hardly visible; no directional raised purl increases are necessary. Just use whichever version is easier for you.

## Decorative Increases

Sometimes, especially when working fully fashioned shaping, you'll want to feature increased stitches prominently in a design. Following are some techniques.

## Bar Increases

This type of increase adds a bit of horizontal texture that looks very much like a purl bump. It is easy to work and is often used when knitting ribbings, since it serves to incorporate new stitches into the pattern quickly.

**To do in a knit stitch** (*abbreviated k1f&b*): First, insert the right-hand needle into the indicated stitch knitwise, wrap the working yarn around the needle the regular way to knit up a stitch *but don't remove the original stitch off the left-hand needle* ([illustration 14](#)).



Then, reinsert your right-hand needle knitwise into the back of the same stitch, wrap the yarn around the needle to knit up a stitch ([illustration 15](#)), then slip the original stitch off. Two stitches are made out of one stitch.

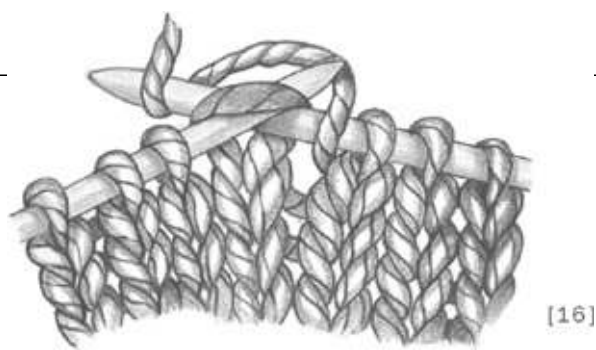


**To do in a purl stitch** (*abbreviated p1f&b*): Insert the right-hand needle into the indicated stitch purlwise, wrap the working yarn around the regular way to purl a stitch *but don't remove the original stitch off the left-hand needle*; then, purl *through the back loop* of the same stitch; finally, slip the original stitch off the left-hand needle. Two stitches are made out of one stitch.

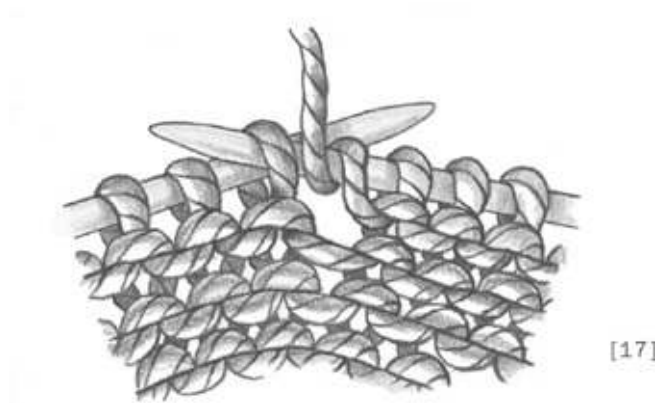
## Yarn Over Increases

This method of increasing places an eyelet hole in the fabric just below the new stitch. The technique is different depending on whether the stitch following the yarn over is a knit or a purl stitch.

To make a yarn over before a knit stitch: Bring the working yarn to the front, between the tips of the two knitting needles ([illustration 16](#)). As you knit the next stitch, the yarn will go over the right-hand needle to create the extra stitch.



**To make a yarn over before a purl stitch:** Bring the working yarn to the front, between the tips of the knitting needles, and then wrap it *completely around* the right-hand needle and back to the front ([illustration 17](#)). Simply bringing the yarn to the front does not add a new stitch; the yarn must go all the way around the right-hand needle to make the increase before a purl stitch.



These increases and decreases are used in various ways throughout the projects in the book. The included Designer Workshop sections highlight many ways of including these techniques in fully fashioned shaping to create flattering knits.

# Knitting as a Foreign Language: Knitting Charts 101

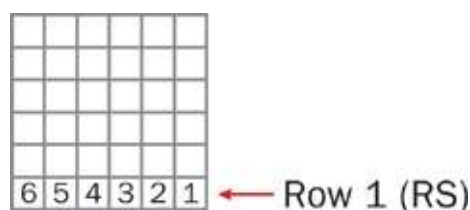
Charts are visual representations of knitted fabric. When I teach workshops around the country, I tell my students that the charts and symbols are just another foreign language, complete with a vocabulary list (the symbols) and syntax (the graphic layout). They're easy to translate, and using them (instead of long black-and-white paragraphs of text) will make your knitting easier, faster, and much more fun.

## A Short Grammar Lesson

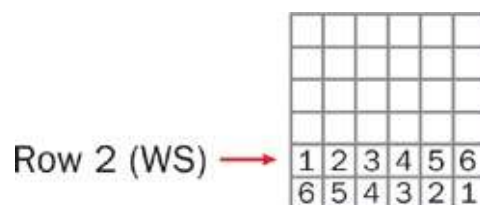
Charts are set up on a grid. Each square of the grid represents one stitch and each row of squares represents one row of stitches.

Because the stitch pattern is being created from the bottom up, the first row is at the bottom of the chart, and the last row is at the top.

Right-side rows are read from right to left. The following illustration shows the order in which stitches will be knit for Row 1, a right-side row, in the chart.



At the end of this first row, you'll flip your knitting so that the wrong side of the fabric faces you. The first stitch of a wrong-side row is the same physical stitch as the last stitch of the previous right-side row. Thus, wrong-side rows are read from left to right.



In all the patterns in this book, the first row knit is a right-side row, and so all right-side rows are odd-numbered rows. I've numbered them on the right-hand side of each chart to keep you oriented.

## The Vocabulary List

Each symbol indicates the way a stitch or group of stitches will be worked; the arrangement of the symbols on the chart determines the stitch pattern.

Of course, every book and magazine seems to use a different set of symbols to represent the

same knitting maneuvers. Usually, the symbols resemble the way the resulting stitches will appear once knit on the right side of the fabric. The symbol for a knit stitch, for example, is a blank box, mimicking the flat appearance of the knit stitch itself; the dot symbol for a purl stitch depicts the bumpy appearance of a purled stitch.

All rows are shown on the chart as *they appear on the public side of the fabric*. Therefore, symbols mean different things on right-side and wrong-side rows. If a symbol is used on both right- and wrong-side rows, the stitch key near the chart will tell you which knitting maneuver to use where.

Usually, wrong-side rows are pretty simple: you just knit the knit stitches and purl the purl stitches as they present themselves to you on the knitting needle. Many students in my classes call them "rest rows"! Scan the entire chart before you begin to see if that's the case. If so, you can zip along those wrong-side rows reading your knitting rather than the chart!

In some charts, bold vertical lines indicate the stitch repeat, and if extra stitches are required on each side to center the pattern on the fabric, they are shown to the left and right of the repeat.



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