>> On your way to the

MASTERS

By Trudianne Temple

Mindful Swatching: Reviewing Your Own Swatches

The Master Hand Knitting (MHK) program is carefully designed to help knitters hone their skills, develop their attention to detail, and take their knitting from the realm of homemade to that of couture hand-made. There are two telltale signs of "homemade" work. First, the project doesn't turn out as expected. It may have sections out of proportion, sleeves that are too long or short, or two pieces that should be identical yet aren't. It may have openings that body parts won't fit through, an unplanned stitch pattern, or perhaps it won't fit the intended wearer. Second, there is an unintentional interruption in pattern or texture that presents as a mistake. Texture is simply a pattern that is regular enough to be seen as a whole rather than as a collection of individual parts. When any pattern is disrupted our eye naturally goes right to the interruption whether it is a light bulb out on a marquee sign, a pulled thread in a piece of fabric, or a stone in a pile of woodchips.

In knitting, we intentionally use pattern interruption to call attention to a design element such as a small, single cable in a sea of Stockinette. However, when the pattern disruption is not intentional we still visually focus on it and it becomes a mistake. One of the most common reasons for a co-chair to request that knitting be resubmitted is a small unintentional pattern disruption that stands out to an experienced eye.

When reviewing your swatches before submission, consider these four areas: knitting errors, tension issues, problems with blocking, and not following directions.

Knitting Errors:

• *Twisted stitches* are usually formed when the stitch is worked, when the trailing leg of the stitch (the stitch leg away from the needle tip) is forced forward and the legs of the resulting stitch cross at the bottom. They should be avoided unless they are intentionally created in stitch patterns such as Bavarian Twisted Stitch patterns. Twisted stitches have a significantly different gauge than untwisted stitches and random stitch orientation on the needles can make working patterns difficult. Also, when the fabric is stretched, there is much more space between columns of twisted stitches than between untwisted stitches. Most of the time twisted stitches happen accidentally when a stitch is dropped and then corrected. To check for twisted stitches, stretch the fabric horizontally. The bases of untwisted stitches will open at the bottom of the stitch "V" but with a twisted stitch, the stitch legs will cross each other and cause the stitch to shrink up when stretched causing a disruption in the fabric's pattern.

• *Dropped stitches* happen when a stitch is not knitted. This can lead to two potential problems. First, the stitch is not picked up again. Second, the repair is faulty and one or more strands are missed when laddering back up. This situation not only disrupts the general pattern by creating what is essentially a slipped stitch but also will affect tension. It is most easily seen on the wrong side where there will be a one-stitch wide float hovering above the fabric.

• *Split stitches* happen when the needle splits the yarn as a stitch is worked. To find them, look carefully at each stitch. If one leg of a stitch appears to have thinner yarn than the rest, and the base of the stitch "V" is obstructed by an errant section of yarn, the stitch has most likely been split. Not only do split stitches disrupt visual patterning, they also weaken that stitch since that small section of yarn is thinner than the rest of the fabric. This could lead to that stitch wearing prematurely and creating a hole.

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Tension:

Nothing screams, "Homemade!" like poor tension because it disrupts the overall effect of a stitch pattern. Areas to watch out for are ...

• *The last bind off stitch* being too loose will show in the final garment as a stitch with a vastly different gauge than the rest of the project unless it is hidden in a seam. By the same token, an enlarged last stitch can make seaming difficult.

• *The cast on and/or bind off edge* being too tight causes edges to draw in, making the garment uncomfortable to wear or even impossible to put on. The elasticity of the CO and BO edges should be similar.

• *The cast on and/or bind off edge* being too loose causes the top and/or bottom edge to splay and prevents the fabric from having straight edges.

• *Edge gutters* show up as vertically alternating big and little stitches at the edge of the work on the right/public side. While they may not appear important while at the edge, when fabric with edge gutters is seamed those alternating big/little stitches appear in the heart of the fabric and cause significant pattern disruption. We also refer to this as rowing out.

• *Tail weaves* badly woven greatly interrupt stitch patterns. To avoid this, they should be on the back of the swatch (not the front), not show through to the front at all, not pull free when the fabric is stretched, and maintain the surrounding fabric's elasticity.

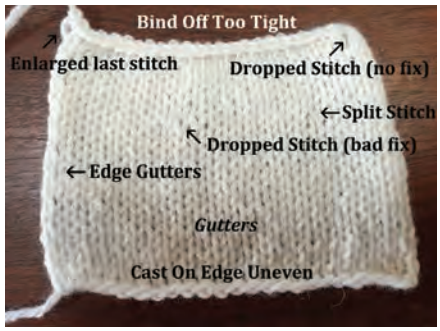
• *Gutters* are caused by knit stitches and purl stitches differing in size from each other. Most often, but not always, purl stitches are larger than knit stitches. Gutters manifest themselves as horizontal stripes appearing within the fabric where they shouldn't be.

• *Loose stitches* to the left of cables and knit columns in ribbing present as gaps or enlarged knit stitches.

Blocking:

• *Curled edges* make seeing columns of edge stitches difficult and therefore seaming and measuring gauge very hard. If seams aren't straight, the pattern will be disrupted; and if measured gauge is wrong, the final project may not be what was anticipated.

• *Pinholes and rust spots* in stitches grab the eye as pattern disruptions.



Bad Swatch RS

Twisted Stitch

Bad Swatch WS

Pattern Interruptions Attract Attention

• *Flattened stitches* remove three-dimensionality of knit fabric.

• *Yarnovers* should be blocked open to bring the desired fabric pattern to light.

• *Corners* must be square, not skewed. This does not necessarily mean 90° when shaping is involved.

• *Edges* must be straight. If edges aren't straight or corners square, the final garment will not hang properly. Fold the swatch or garment section over on itself. If the edges don't match, either the edges aren't straight or the corners aren't square. This does not apply to intentionally non-symmetrical garments.

Following Directions:

• *Appropriate yarn:* The reason the MHK program calls for light-colored, non-heathered, non-variegated smooth yarn is that variations in color mask individual stitches by creating a pattern that overwhelms the subtle stitch pattern. Dark yarn masks problems because the individual stitches simply cannot be easily seen. If you wonder, "Is this too dark/variegated/heathered?" then it probably is. Choose a different yarn or your reviewers may not be able to analyze your knitting and help you develop a discerning eye.

• *Edge stitches* must be worked in pattern:

Special edge treatments can disguise tension problems and make seaming difficult. The most common special edge treatment is to slip either the first or last stitch. However, slipped selvedge edge stitches span two rows and therefore do not provide a sturdy edge for either seaming or picking up stitches for a button band.

• *Bind offs* in pattern: Bind offs that are not in pattern can, like a twisted stitch, break continuity and attract unwanted attention.

• *Measurements* should be accurate: Garments not knit to specified measurements will not fit as intended. Knitting swatches to prescribed measurements shows you can control the size of your knitted pieces.

• *Techniques* to be demonstrated should be correctly executed: No explanation needed!

Through research and practice, along with gentle guidance from your co-chairs, you will develop a more thorough understanding of your knitting and will become better able to produce the lovely garments you desire. Seeing problems is the first step on the road to fixing them.

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