

ON YOUR WAY TO THE MASTERS

DECREASES - PART I

BY ARENDA HOLLADAY

Decreasing is one of the skills you must perfect on your way to becoming a Master Knitter. A knitter must use decreases not only to shape garments, but also to create decorative work like lace and bobbles. The Master Hand Knitting program requires swatches demonstrating decreases in all three levels. This article discusses simple single decreases made on the public side of the work. "Decreases - Part II," in the Summer 2005 issue, will discuss decreases made on the back of the work as well as multiple stitch decreases.

There are many factors to consider when deciding which decreases to use in shaping a garment. But whatever decreases you use must be well executed, and if they are used on a neckline or sleeve, they must be mirror images of each other. This means that the decreases must be the same type of decrease (twisted or not) but slanting in the opposite directions. This is something the Master Hand Knitting program stresses. When decreases are symmetrical, they are either less noticeable or more decorative, depending on the decreases you use. Compare Swatch 1 to Swatch 2. The decreases in Swatch 2 are mirrored. Mirrored decreases make a garment look "handmade" rather than "home-made." The other thing you must consider when working decreases is whether you want them to be unobtrusive or decorative. This determines what type of decrease to use and where you place it.



SWATCH 1 – Non-Mirrored Decreases

Where?

If the garment is to be seamed or stitches are to be picked along the edge, do not decrease in the first or last stitches. You need to have at least one selvedge stitch next to the decrease. The closer the decrease is to the selvedge stitch, the more unobtrusive it is. The swatches in this article each have two stitches next to the decreases.

Blended or Full-Fashioned?

Another factor you must consider is whether you want the decreases to blend in with the surrounding stitches or

EDITOR'S NOTE:

On Your Way to the Masters articles are prepared by co-chairs of the TKG Master Knitting Program and offer helpful explanations of techniques which those enrolled in the program must master. To learn more about the program, go to www.TKGA.com.

whether you want them to be elements of the design. This determines the **slant** of the decrease. If you want the decreases to be unobtrusive, select a decrease that has the **same** slant as the shaping. A simple rule to follow is to use left-slanting decreases (SSK or SKP) at the beginning of the rows and right-slanting decreases (K2tog or KSP) at the end of rows. Swatch 2 illustrates blended decreases. SSK decreases are used at the beginning of the rows and K2tog decreases are used at the end of the rows.



SWATCH 2 – Blended, Mirrored Decreases

Swatch 3 shows the opposite of blended decreases. Many reference books call decreases which slant in the opposite direction from the shaping “full-fashioned.” For “full-fashioned” decreases, use right-slanting decreases (K2tog or KSP) at the beginning of rows and left-slanting decreases (SSK or SKP) at the end of rows. If you want the decreases to be more noticeable or decorative, make them “full-fashioned.” You can make them even more decorative by using intentionally twisted decreases.



SWATCH 3 – Full-Fashioned, Mirrored Decreases

To Twist or Not?

When the Master Hand Knitting Committee evaluates decrease swatches, it looks to see if the decreases are twisted at their base. For most swatches, this is not

acceptable and the swatch must be redone. Why? In Level I, the knitter is instructed exactly which decreases to use, and if these decreases are worked properly, they will not be twisted. Furthermore, it is important that a knitter recognize twisted stitches. In Level II, the swatches require mirrored decreases. The most common mistake at this level is to twist the right-slanting decreases, as illustrated in Swatch 4. The decreases on the right side of the swatch are twisted and do not mirror the decreases on the left. Twisted decreases are much more noticeable and can be used to advantage in decorative patterns but they do not mirror untwisted stitches. In addition to this problem, twisted decreases can have a different gauge. If twisted stitches are used on only one side of a garment, for example, a V-neck sweater, they can produce a noticeable difference in size.



SWATCH 4 – Twisted, Right Slanting Decreases

The two decreases which are prone to twisting are the SKP and SSK. The stitch or stitches must be slipped **KNITWISE** or those stitches will be twisted. Unless a pattern specifies the manner in which a stitch should be slipped, the general rule to follow is always to slip stitches knitwise for decreases and to slip stitches purlwise in all other cases.

Quality Issues

The Master Hand Knitting Committee also evaluates decreases for proper placement, whether the correct decrease has been used, and how well it is executed. Again, the biggest problem is with SSK and SKP decreases. The goal is that these decreases mirror K2tog decreases. This is more difficult than it sounds. When a stitch is slipped, extra yarn from the surrounding stitches is pulled into the slipped stitch, distorting it, which in turn distorts the decrease making it look loose and sloppy. Most reference books recommend using the SSK decrease over SKP decreases as the SSK tends not to distort the stitch as much. Care must be taken with both of these decreases.

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Refer to Swatch 5. The first three decreases on the right side are SKP decreases and the next three are SSK decreases. No particular care was taken in making these decreases. None of these decreases mirror the K2tog decreases on the left side of the swatch. Compare this swatch to Swatch 2 where the slipped stitch was kept near the needle tip and more care was taken not to stretch it when transferred from one needle to the other.

When you are planning a project which uses mirrored decreases, you should include them in your gauge swatch to help you determine which decrease you will use to match the K2tog decreases. For some knitters, the SKP is a better match to the K2tog.



SWATCH 5 – SKP and SSK Decreases

Alternate Decreases

If you are having difficulties matching up your mirrored decreases, here are some alternate techniques you may want to try. However, don't use these in the Level I swatches; please use the specified decreases.

Try these techniques and compare them to your K2tog decreases. The only difference with these decreases is that they all twist the second stitch. Twisting the second stitch tends to tighten up the slipped stitch. However, since the first stitch is on top of the twisted stitch, it is barely noticeable. If you cannot manage to mirror the K2tog with a SSK or SKP, you may want to experiment with these techniques.

A variation on the SSK is slipping the second stitch purlwise. There is also a similar variation for the SKP. Slip the first

stitch as usual, but knit the next stitch through the back loop instead and then pass the slipped stitch over the knit stitch. The final variation is a bit tricky but worth the effort. With the right needle, go into the first stitch as if to knit, then go into the back of the next stitch. Bring the yarn around the back as for a normal knit stitch and knit them together.

One solution to the problem of matching up left slanting decreases to the K2tog decreases is to use a different right slanting decrease. The KSP decrease is a right slanting decrease that uses a slipped stitch. To make this decrease, knit the first stitch, return it to the left needle. Then slip the next stitch over the stitch just knit and return the stitch to the right hand needle. Since this decrease uses a slipped stitch, it is sometimes a better match for distorted SKP and SSK decreases. Use this technique when you want your decreases more noticeable.

The next article in this series will discuss intentionally twisted decreases, multiple stitch decreases and decreases made on the wrong side of the work.

RESOURCES

Hiatt, June Hemmons, *The Principles of Knitting*, Simon and Schuster, 1988 • Stanley, Montse, *Knitter's Handbook, Reader's Digest*, 1993

Editor's Note: I'd like to thank Master Hand Knitting Committee members Barbara Bacon and Cindy Nelson for their contributions to this article.