

New and Improved Instructions for All Levels

by arenda holladay

The Master Hand Knitting Program was announced in the Fall, 1987 issue of *Cast On* as a way for the members of The Knitting Guild Association (TKGA) to have their knitting evaluated using specific criteria and guidelines. It was designed as an educational process for advanced knitters, not as a competition or contest. Knitters work through three levels, each of which builds upon techniques demonstrated in the previous level. Level 1 focuses on basic skills, Level 2 on finishing techniques and Level 3 on advanced skills and designing. Each level is completed independently and evaluated by the Master Hand Knitting committee before the knitter goes on to the next level. Although the materials have been revised many times since their creation, they are basically the same as they were in 1987. For a variety of reasons, the committee decided a year ago to completely rewrite the materials. Notes regarding the August 2006 release are posted online in the Masters area of the TKGA Web site (www.tkga.com/mastersprogram.html).

Why Rewrite?

After reviewing hundreds of submissions and thousands of swatches, the committee determined that the instructions could be improved in the following ways:

- General Format
- Objectives for Swatches
- Practical Application
- Consistency

General Format

Many knitters, especially in Level 1, ignore many of the general instructions. Swatches are knit using dark or novelty yarns, borders and selvedge treatments. Some are not tagged or tagged in the wrong corner. No references are provided. Since the general instructions for the program very clearly state what is expected, we would wonder why. Some knitters may not realize the importance of following the instructions – a necessary skill for a knitter who follows or writes patterns. Since many of the instructions we consider so crucial are imbedded in the general instructions, perhaps some knitters overlook them in their haste to get to the “meat” of the program, the swatches. We determined a solution to this problem would be to reformat the general instructions so that the information is easier to see and harder to ignore. Rather than placing this information in long, complicated paragraphs, we have separated each piece of information into sections. Hopefully, this will make it easier to see. A sample from the new instructions follows (See Sample A).

Objectives for Swatches

Many of us on the committee monitor some of the message boards devoted to the Master Knitting Program. In addition, when knitters contact TKGA with comments or a problem, they are referred to us. We are aware that many knitters find

some areas of the program confusing. The most frequent comment is that the swatch instructions do not make it clear what the committee wants. What criteria do we use to pass or fail a swatch? This reminds me of a comment a professor I had in college would make in a similar situation. He thought all universities should change their Latin mottos extolling the acquisition of knowledge for knowledge sake to “What do I need to know to pass? or *Quodne Res Requiro Pergere.*”

Those of us on the committee now and those who preceded us have made the assumption that the knitters going through the program will research each topic. For example, Swatch 2 in Level 1 requires 2.5" in single rib, 5 stitch increases spaced evenly across the last row of ribbing, then 4" in stockinette stitch. Our assumption is that the knitter will research each of these criteria. What makes “good” ribbing? How do you increase evenly and where should you place those increases? What makes “good” stockinette? This is in addition to making sure that the measurements and number of stitches worked are correct. Some of these topics are difficult to research. Very few references ever discuss “good” knitting. Flip through any knitting book and you can find information about how to increase or decrease but no information on what a “good” decrease looks

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SAMPLE: A

Swatches – The following instructions apply to all swatches.

Yarn: Use only smooth, light-colored worsted weight yarn. Heathered, speckled, variegated, tweeded, fluffy, nubby, fuzzy or any type of novelty yarns is **NOT ACCEPTED**.

Selvages: Swatches are to be knit in the pattern stitch indicated without additional borders or selvedge edges.

Stitch Pattern: Always work the **TRADITIONAL** form of the pattern stitches indicated in the swatch instructions. Unless specified otherwise, twisted forms of the stitch are not accepted.

SAMPLE: LEVEL 1A

Swatches 1–3

Knit all of these swatches using the same yarn. Reserve some of this yarn to knit Swatch 14 (horseshoe cable) as well. These swatches test your ability to:

- Knit ribbing, garter, stockinette and seed stitch with even tension.
- Place increases evenly and unobtrusively in the last row of ribbing.
- Accurately measure the gauge of different stitch patterns.

Swatch 1 – K2P2 ribbing and Garter Stitch

Cast on 20 sts and work in K2P2 rib for 2.5". Increase 5 sts evenly in the last rib row (25 sts). Use an increase technique that is unobtrusive and will blend in with the ribbing. Work in garter st for 4". Bind off in pattern.

SAMPLE: LEVEL 1B

Swatches 7–9

These swatches mimic the type of decreases you might use at the selvedge edges of a neckline or sleeve cap. They test your ability to:

- Accurately produce K2tog, SKP, KSP, and SSK decreases.
- Correctly place the decreases.
- Properly mirror the decreases.

Swatch 7 – SSK and K2tog (Blended) Decreases

CO 25 sts and work 1" in stockinette, ending with a WS row. Decrease 1 stitch at both selvedge edges every other RS row 5 times (15 sts). Use SSK decreases at the right selvedge and K2tog decreases at the left selvedge. Place the decreases so that there are 3 sts before the decreases at the right selvedge and 3 sts after the decreases at the left selvedge. After the last decreases, work 1" in stockinette stitch. Bind off in pattern.

Questions 8-11 refer to this swatch

Note: When slipping a stitch for a decrease, keep the slipped stitch at the needle tips. The resulting decrease will be less distorted.

like. Contributing to this problem is the proliferation of knitting books churned out to meet the growing market of knitters. The photographs of knitting patterns in some of these books would not be accepted as a swatch in this program.

The committee has had many discussions of the purpose of this program. Is it to be strictly an evaluation of knitters or an educational tool? Phrases like “I did it with no help, so can they,” “It will be too easy,” and “Do we want to spoon feed knitters?” are frequently invoked. However, after reviewing hundreds of swatches that exhibit exactly the same problems, we have revised this attitude. If you do not state your criteria, it is not fair to expect people to guess what you want. For that reason, we have stated objectives for each group of swatches which should make the criteria very clear. (See Level 1A Sample).

Hopefully, this approach will make the process of knitting the swatches easier. We have always hoped that knitters would approach each swatch as a learning experience. This may require working a swatch several times until the knitters are satisfied that it shows their best work. What we have experienced is that many who go through the program work the swatch once and are satisfied that they completed it. Frequently they are asked to resubmit until it is correct. Our hope is that the new instructions will make it very clear what we are looking for and so that the knitter can work the swatch until it meets the criteria.

Practical Applications

The third goal was to make the swatches more practical; in other words, so that



they reflect what a knitter may need to know to knit an actual project. Many of the swatches, particularly in Level 1, have failed in this area. For example, the decrease swatches seem to serve no practical value. Yes, the swatches do demonstrate that the knitter can make a decrease but not where you might typically make a decrease in a project (See Level 1B Sample).

Another example of how we worked to make swatches more practical is found in Level 2. This Level required a Fair Isle swatch worked in the round. We have replaced this swatch with a simple mitten which includes a Fair Isle motif.

We made other changes based upon what we have observed in submissions. For example, Level 2 requires several swatches demonstrating seams in various pattern types. After evaluating the project vests and sweaters, we realized we also needed to include swatches demonstrating a seam joining horizontal edge to vertical edge seam, and a seam joining bind off edge to bind off edge. These are practical skills a Master Knitter needs.

Consistency

There was an informal consistency to the three Levels in that all required swatches

and questions and reports of some sort. We decided to formalize this structure. In the revised instructions, all Levels require the same sections: Swatches, Questions, Report(s), and Project(s). Previously, Level 1 did not require a project. We have added the knitting of a simple hat to Level 1. We did not include the hat only to make it consistent with the other levels. As the projects in Levels 2 and 3 reinforce the contents of those levels, so does the hat knit in Level 1. It allows the knitter to demonstrate mastery of increasing and decreasing, knitting ribbing and stockinette tension, changing colors, weaving in yarn tails, and accurately following a pattern.

If you were to compare the old instructions to the new instructions, you would notice that some swatches have moved from one level to another, there are more questions, two reports have been combined into one, and other things. None of these changes were made to make the programs “harder” but rather, more comprehensive. Our hope is that knitters going through the program will feel more confident about their work.

Author Note:

Many thanks to the committee members who helped with this article!