

Mosaic and Slip Stitch Patterns

by arenda holladay

Level 3 of the TKG Master Hand Knitting Program requires the knitter to research and demonstrate skill in knitting a variety of stitch patterns. Two of these, slip stitch and mosaic involve color work. Distinguishing between these two very similar pattern types is sometimes difficult for knitters.

All mosaic patterns are slip stitch patterns but not all slip stitch patterns are mosaics. This confusion is easy to understand if you look through several pattern books. To research this article, I perused the pattern books I've collected over the past twenty years. These types of patterns are not classified in a consistent manner. They are cataloged among textured patterns, color-work patterns and sometimes placed in their own chapter. Very few books make the distinction between slip stitch and mosaic patterns. Even Barbara Walker, whose definition of these patterns is used in the Master Hand Knitting Program, combines slip stitch and mosaic patterns in one chapter in *A Treasury of Knitting Patterns*, the first book in her series. The next two books, *A Second Treasury of Knitting Patterns* and *Charted Knitting Designs, A Third Treasury of Knitting Patterns* make the differences clear.

Similarities

These two patterns share many similarities. The description "slip stitch" can be applied to any type of pattern that relies on slipping a stitch on one row to work on a following row. When worked in one color, slipped stitches change the texture of the knitted fabric. This is why many slip stitch patterns are grouped in chapters which include rib and seed patterns. Swatch 1 shows a slipped stitch pattern worked in one color.

When worked in two or more colors, slipped stitches give the impression that the color has changed within the row. Swatch 2 shows the

same pattern as Swatch 1 except that the color has changed on each right side row. Despite its complicated and intricate appearance, most knitters find this type of color work easier than Fair Isle or intarsia techniques. In both slip stitch and mosaic patterns, the color is changed only at the beginning or ending of rows and the yarn is carried up the selvedge edge. There are no yarn tails to be woven in, no bobbins to untangle. Slipped stitches can be used to create almost limitless types of fabrics – tweeds, checks, stripes, houndstooth, geometric designs and pictorial, to name a few. All use the same slipped stitch technique. Stitches are always slipped purlwise, unless otherwise specified. If they are slipped knitwise, the stitches are twisted.

Both slip stitch and mosaic patterns can be worked in stockinette, garter or a combination of both. Swatch 2 is worked in stockinette stitch while Swatches 3 and 4 are worked in garter stitch.

What's in a Name?

The name "Mosaic" is the first clue to one of the differences between these mosaic and slip stitch patterns. Mosaic patterns tend to look more geometric than slipped stitch patterns. If you look at Swatches 2, 3 and 4, it is not hard to figure out which one is the mosaic. While Swatches 2 and 3 are textured patterns, Swatch 4 is a very geometric design. When you are looking through patterns for your mosaic swatch, its general appearance is a primary concern, but not the only one. A pattern may have a geometric appearance but may not meet the other requirements for mosaic patterns. Review the pattern carefully before knitting it to make sure it is a true mosaic.

Yarn Forward or Back?

Slip stitch patterns always specify what to

do with the working yarn when the stitch is slipped. Is it held in front of the slipped stitch or behind it? Expect to see abbreviations **wyif** and **wyib** (with yarn in front/back) or **yf** or **yb** (yarn forward/back). Some slipped stitch patterns require the yarn in front on the right side of the work as a part of the general design. Note the horizontal bars visible on Swatch 2. This pattern calls for **wyif** when working right side rows and **wyib** when working on wrong side rows.

Mosaic patterns are always worked **wyib** on the right side and **wyif** on the wrong side. Many mosaic patterns do not even include this instruction. This is another way to distinguish between the two types of patterns.

Patterns

Another way to distinguish mosaic from slip stitch patterns is to look at the patterns themselves. Both patterns use multiples for each row but slip stitch patterns generally have only a few stitches in the multiples. The pattern for Swatch 2 uses a multiple of 2 stitches plus 1. The pattern for Swatch 3 uses a multiple of 3 plus 2. Swatch 4 is an extremely simple mosaic pattern which uses a multiple of 10 stitches plus 2. This low number is fairly unusual. Most require many more stitches to complete a multiple.

Multiples point out another difference between mosaics and slip stitch patterns. The knitter may ignore the pattern multiples for mosaics if she/he wishes to work on fewer or more stitches. The design may not be centered on the fabric but the pattern will still "work" since wrong side rows are all knit or purl.

The difference is also seen in the number of rows required to repeat the pattern. The pattern for Swatch 2 has four rows. The pattern for Swatch 3 has 8 rows. Swatch 4

requires 28 rows to complete the pattern and this is a very simple design. Mosaic patterns require far more rows to complete the geometric pattern.

Charts

Due to the difference in the number of multiples and repeats for these types of patterns, most pattern books use charts for mosaic patterns and provide row-by-row instructions for slipped stitch patterns. Compare the patterns for mosaic patterns in Barbara Walker's *A Second Treasury of Knitting Patterns* to the charts for mosaics in *Charted Knitting Designs*, *A Third Treasury of Knitting Patterns*. The number of stitches in the multiples and the number of rows in the repeats make the patterns in the second book much more difficult to follow. It is very easy to get lost or make a mistake.

The charts Barbara Walker has developed for mosaic patterns bring up an additional difference between slip stitch and mosaic patterns. It always takes two rows to complete one pattern row in mosaic patterns. Every wrong side row is just like the preceding right side row; the same stitches are slipped and the same stitches are worked. For that reason, Walker uses one chart line to represent two rows in her charts. This makes them even easier to use. This is not necessarily the case for slip stitch patterns.

Knitting Tips

Most knitters find slipped stitch and mosaic patterns very easy to knit. There are only a few things to keep in mind. Remember to always slip the stitches purlwise, unless the pattern specifies otherwise. If the stitches are slipped knitwise, they will be twisted.

Since the working yarn must be stranded either in front of the slipped stitch or behind it, knitters must watch their tension. If the working yarn is pulled too tight, the fabric will be puckered. If the working yarn is too loose, the tension will be uneven.

When changing colors at the selvedge edge, drop the old color in front and pick up the new color from behind. This weaves the yarn

neatly around the selvedge edge. For the swatches required in Level 3 of the Masters Program, be sure to select yarns with some contrast. Darker yarn can be used for one of the colors.

Practical Applications

Slip stitch and mosaic patterns tend to produce a more dense fabric due to the yarn stranded behind (or in front) of the slipped stitches. When worked in worsted weight, this makes them ideal for heavier garments like jackets and coats. These patterns also work well for household designs like pillows and placemats. If using lighter weight yarn, slipped stitches and mosaics work well in any type of garment. For an interesting effect, mix and match different types of yarn such as mohair and a smooth yarn (but not for the Master Knitting swatches!).

Sources for Swatches

Swatches 1 and 2: *The Harmony Guide, 450 Knitting Stitches, Volume 2*, Collin & Brown Limited, London, 1998, pg. 43

Swatch 3: *The Knitting Dictionary and Encyclopedia*, Nomis Yarn Company, Stoughton, MA, 1984, pg. 162

Swatch 4: Walker, Barbara, *Charted Knitting Designs, A Third Treasury of Knitting Patterns*, Schoolhouse Press, Pittsville, WI, 1998, pg. 210

References

Walker, Barbara, *A Treasury of Knitting Patterns*, Schoolhouse Press, Pittsville, WI, 1998

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Jean Lampe, "On Your Way to the Masters—Hand," *Cast On*, Winter 1998, pgs. 36-37

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SWATCH 1



SWATCH 2



SWATCH 3



SWATCH 4