

A Knitter's tale

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When I was a tween, I attempted to pick up knitting. The incentive was to earn a badge to adorn my green Girl Scout sash. I distinctly remember struggling to learn the knit and purl stitches. My mother tried to help and impatiently demonstrated the maneuvers. I believe it was after 15 minutes that she declared I was hopeless. I immediately put down my knitting needles, foregoing the badge, and did not pick them up again until 35 years later.

Why I Started, Again

Like most people during lockdown, I needed a hobby. I am not sure why I decided on knitting, but perhaps I wanted to prove my mother wrong. I came across a website called *Studio Knit*, which provided easy-to-understand videos and written explanations on the basics of knitting. I was enticed by the idea that I could create loads of different knitting patterns with only two different types of stitches - a knit and a purl. I am happy to report

that I was finally able to conquer the elusive stitches by watching step-by-step videos. Along with learning specific stitches, I was also introduced to patterns. I soon learned that most patterns are presented in two ways: 1) written out, and 2) in a grid pattern chart.

Written Pattern

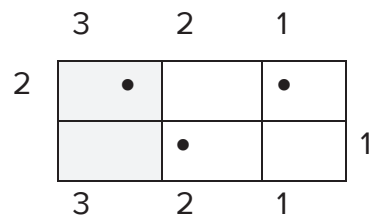
Step 1: Cast on an odd number of stitches.

Step 2: Stitch pattern repeated for every row. (*K1, P1* K1)

Step 3: Continue pattern on every row until you reach the desired length.

Step 4: Bind off.

Grid Pattern



RS: Knit

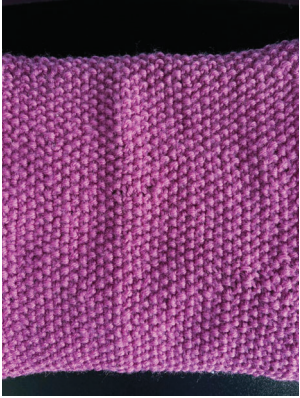
WS: Purl



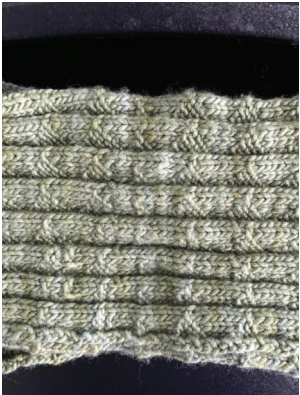
RS: Purl

WS: Knit

It was not long before I created a scarf using a Seed Stitch pattern.



My first project, mistakes and all. A scarf!



My second project, a scarf for my husband (which he never wears) using a different stitch pattern.

Deconstructing How I Learned to Knit

As a professor of secondary education, I constantly reflect on how students learn and make sense of challenging concepts and skills, and how teachers can facilitate the learning process. Reflecting on my own journey through learning to knit has given me the opportunity to think about what worked, what hindered my progress, what sparked my curiosity, and what gave me those aha moments.

The Glory of YouTube

During COVID, I had no choice but to learn via video instruction. While I could have bought a knitting book, I knew I did not have the patience to read written descriptions of learning stitches. Instead, I needed slow-motion demonstrations with voice explanations that accompanied the demos. The benefit of video is that there is no shame in watching it again and again, because no one is the wiser. (The fear of feeling foolish for being slow to pick up on something never leaves someone, no matter how old one is or how many degrees they have.)

My journey went from learning individual stitches to watching “stitch a-longs” to completing a project beyond a rectangular scarf.



My first stitch-a-long, moving on to a hat.

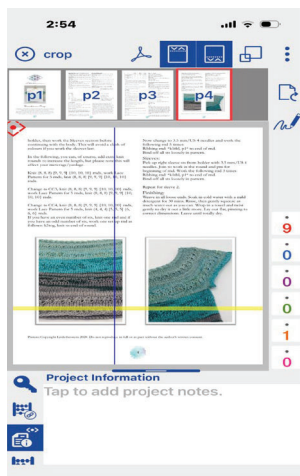
No written directions were included, and I was confused by the four new stitches that I had to master. My progress was slow as I constantly had to *tink* back (undo the stitches). I believe I restarted the sweater at least three times. I was not the only one who almost gave up, but we all finished the four sessions with something that resembled the beginnings of a sweater.

Learning it is Okay to Make Mistakes

I continued taking more classes, which gave me more confidence to try trickier projects. A long pattern that involves multiple components to construct no longer scares me quite so much. I have an array of resources that I continually rely on. Whenever I forget how to do a SK2P or a SSSK, I typically turn to Pretty Pink Knit on YouTube, as I find it offers the clearest, simplest explanations and slow-motion videos. Video with a verbal explanation tend to sink in best for me, rather than a written description. There are silent YouTube clips, but I still need the verbal explanation.

Plan

I know I am “supposed” to read through a whole pattern before I start on a project, but I find myself easily overwhelmed by too much written direction. Instead, I use my trusty Knit Companion app to download a pattern and read through it only to highlight the number of stitches for a given section based on my size.



You are Not Wasting Your Time, You are Learning Through the Process

I have learned to accept that I will probably have to start, unravel, and start again every time I begin a new project. It used to frustrate me that I made mistakes, but I understand now that it is part of the learning process to wrap my head around a stitch pattern. It would not matter if I analyzed a pattern by reading more carefully or slower. I need that mind muscle connection. Besides, I am eager to start a new project, so I tend just to dive in.

It is Okay to Walk Away

I have also learned to step away from a project and accept that it is beyond my current skill level. My nemesis is a lace shawl. While knitting lace is my favorite, I cannot make sense of a particular lace shawl pattern. I took a three-session class on it, made it halfway through several times before realizing it was not quite right, and even tried it with several different yarns. I have made peace that the pattern is complicated and that, with a few more years of knitting under my belt, I can try again with the aid of a human instructor.



Abandoned project mid row

Epilogue

I did eventually finish the Cocoknits sweater, but it was ugly. The mistakes (and there were so many of them) were completely obvious: the buttonholes did not match up, and after six months of taking up space in my closet, I unraveled the whole sweater. I can use it for a new project, albeit not a Cocoknits pattern.

