INTRODUCTION

Many knitters are afraid of knitting charts. They think that they could never learn to read such charts, even though reading this sentence is much harder than reading even a "complicated" knitting chart. After all, a sentence will have up to twenty-six letters combined in potentially hundreds of thousands of ways, while most knitting charts will have far fewer symbols.

Many knitters also enjoy other fiber crafts, such as cross-stitch. Even though their knitterly selves balk at trying to knit from charts, they have no problem whatsoever working cross-stitch from charts. After all, it's next to impossible to imagine a cross-stitch project whose entire instructions consist of long lines of numbers and color abbreviations.

We'd never choose a pattern by looking at nothing but long lines of numbers and knitting abbreviations. No. We always choose patterns by looking at **pictures of the finished projects**.

The Mystery Picture

So let's look at a typical knitting pattern. The instructions below form a very simple picture, a picture so simple a kindergartner could identify it instantly. Quick! What is the picture created by following these knitting instructions?

Try to figure it out in your head **before** you turn to the end of the chapter to see the charted version. No cheating! Did you cheat? Or did you really figure it out from looking at the instructions?

What Am I?

CO 13 in white.
Row 1: K13 white.
Row 2: P6 white, P1 red, P6 white.
Row 3: K5 white, K3 red, K5 white.
Row 4: P4 white, P5 red, P4 white.
Row 5: K3 white, K7 red, K3 white.
Row 6: P2 white, P9 red, P2 white.
Row 7: K1 white, K11 red, K1 white.
Row 8: P1 white, P5 red, P1 white, P5 red, P1 white.
Row 9: K2 white, K3 red, K3 white, K3 red, K2 white.
Row 10: P13 white.
BO.

Could you quickly determine what the picture was, or did you really have to concentrate to figure out the simple shape?

If you thought it was hard to figure out what the mystery picture was, how can any of us ever hope to see what line after line of

K4, * P3, C4B, P3, C4F, P3, K2tog, yo, K2, yo, SSK *, rpt betw * to last 4 sts, K4

is supposed to look like?

Why Use Charts?

There are several reasons why charts can be much easier and/or better to use than written-out knitting instructions.

Charts Can Look Like Your Work in Progress

A picture is worth a thousand words, even in knitting. Charted instructions help us visualize the pattern we're working; with just a little practice, we can see the marked similarity between

- 🧶 the project photo

- 🧶 the chart

- 🧶 what's actually hanging off our needles

The chart symbols, though, do make a difference. Poorly designed or very abstract symbols are as hard, or even harder, to read than written-out instructions.

It is also true that charts can't always show all the fine details. (And boy, did I find out some interesting limitations while writing this book!) But overall, a chart with well-designed symbols leaves numbers and knitting abbreviations far, far behind.

Find Typos in Written-Out Instructions

Imagine proofreading page after page of written-out instructions. Your job is to make sure **every** character on **every** line on **every** page is correct. It's about as exciting as reading the phone book.

Okay, so we aren't knitting-pattern proofreaders. Well, actually we are: we just don't get paid for it! We are forced to be unpaid proofreaders because we're the lucky ones who have to work from instructions that caused someone else's eyes to glaze over by page three of a hundred-page book made up of lines like

K4, * P3, C4B, P3, C4F, P2, K2tog, yo, K2, yo, SSK *, rpt betw * to last 4 sts, K4

How hard do you think it would be to find that incorrect "P2" in the middle of, oh, page thirty?

If the patterns are charted, though, the "P2" that should have been "P3" will stand out like an NFL lineman at a nursery school.

Even if we prefer to work from written-out instructions, there's nothing to stop us from charting them so we can be sure they're right before we even cast on.

Catch Execution Errors While We're Working

A knitting chart makes it a snap to see what we're supposed to be doing, and just as important, or maybe even more importantly, **where** we're supposed to be doing it.

A chart lets us see the relationship between the current row's stitches and those from the previous row that they're supposed to be on top of. So if the current stitches are off by one, as in the previous example line having a "P2" instead of a "P3," we'll see pretty quickly that the stitches that follow that incorrect P2 are not lining up with the previous row's stitches.

Some Projects Have Only Charts

Some books and some authors use only charts. If we can't read the charts, we can't make the projects.

Charts-only books are common outside the United States. If we're familiar with charts, we might be able to read charts in knitting books from other countries even if we don't know the languages the books are written in.

We Can Separate Border and Pattern Stitches

Many knitting projects mix instructions for border stitches with those for the pattern itself. But what if we don't like the border the designer used? If the border and pattern instructions are combined, it's difficult to figure out how to change the border, whether we want to narrow it, widen it, change it to something different, or simply remove it altogether.

If we chart the instructions, we can very quickly and easily enlarge, reduce, or eliminate the border, or we can switch to an entirely different one.

We Can Make a Completely Different Project from the Same Instructions

Suppose we find a really cool pattern stitch that's used to make a hot pad. We like it so much that we want to go way beyond a hot pad: we want to make a blanket with the pattern.

But if the pattern stitches are not clearly defined in the instructions, then it's almost impossible to use the cool stitch pattern for anything else.

This same idea goes the other direction too. We might want to make a nifty set of hot pads from a cool blanket. But again, if the instructions are written in the typical way, it's hard to adapt them to make a different project.

We Can Enlarge or Shrink Patterns and Motifs

If we chart a project's instructions, we can enlarge (or shrink) some stitch patterns and motifs by adding (or removing) stitches, rows, or both.

A twenty-stitch/twenty-row motif might be fine for a large blanket, but it would be entirely out of scale for a baby sweater.

We Read Charts in the Same Direction We Work

With written-out instructions, we read left to right and top to bottom, but we work from right to left and bottom to top. Trying to find our place in the middle of a row can get tricky.

With charts, we read **every** chart row in the same direction we work the stitches. And we start reading charts at the bottom, which is where we cast on and start working.[1]

We Can Chart the Shaping for a Cardigan's Other Front

Most cardigan projects will give the shaping for only one of the fronts. There will be thorough instructions for shaping both the armhole and neck of, say, the right front. Then the instructions will have a blithe

Left Front
Work as for the right front, reversing all shapings.

Wow, isn't that so colossally helpful?

If we chart **both** fronts, then we can see exactly where all the shaping occurs.

We could, if we wanted to, actually chart the complete instructions for a project, showing exactly what each stitch of each row would look like.

We Can Design Our Own Motifs, Patterns, and Projects

We can create motifs and even patterns, and we can easily combine small patterns to make a large project.

If we have typed the motif or pattern chart in the computer, we can shrink the font size and copy it repeatedly to see what a large item would look like.

The Bottom Line of Charting

The entire point of knitting charts is to make the chart look as much as possible like both the finished project's photo and especially the knitting in progress as it hangs on our needles.

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[1] OK, it's true that for wrong-side rows, we have to turn the chart upside-down. But that's a trade-off easily made.

This similarity will be apparent when the charts in this book are put next to photos of the samples worked from them.

Why This Book?

Most knitting books that include both written-out directions and charts for their projects more or less assume that every knitter knows how to read the charts. Of course, for those knitters who already know how to read charts, it's not an issue.

And as for written-out directions, well, of course we read those the same way we read anything: from left to right and top to bottom. So even though it's easy to get lost in a sea of

K4, * P3, C4B, P3, C4F, P3, K2tog, yo, K2, yo, SSK *, rpt betw * to last 4 sts, K4
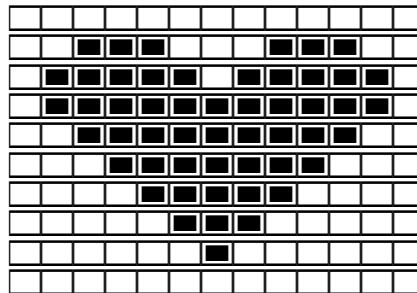
we can eventually, with muttered oaths and some occasional tinking, work through zillions of lines like the one above.

But for those of us who already know how to work from and can even create knitting charts, it can be almost impossible to remember what it was like to **learn** to use them. We have almost certainly forgotten how another knitter showed us what to do, stitch by stitch and row by row, or if we figured it out by ourselves, we forget that we did so painfully and with much hair-pulling.

So for those knitters too intimidated to ask or who haven't been able to find a compre-hensive guide elsewhere, this book should demystify the mysterious and make clear the con-fusing.

The Mystery Picture Revealed

Did you turn back here before you put some effort into figuring out what the picture was just from looking at the written-out instructions?

Yeah, I would have too.