

Chapter 175

THE DREADED NO-STITCH SYMBOL

The chart for the sixteen-row swatch in this chapter is going to be broken into two parts, so that we can concentrate on each section individually.


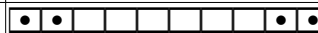
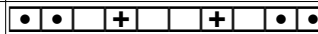
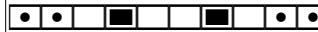
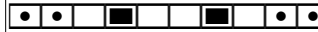
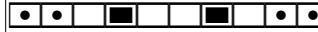
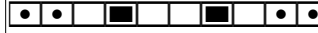

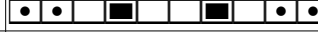
A Small Swatch






Suppose you came across the following instructions, with just two written-out lines plus a chart and symbol key.

Simple Cable Swatch

CO 8.

Work 16 rows of chart, then BO. (Only first 9 rows are shown below.)

		9	
8			
		7	
6			
		5	
4			
		3	
2			
		1	
	J I H G F E D C B A		

Symbol Key	
	Knit on RS, purl on WS
	Purl on RS, knit on WS
	No stitch
	Make one (any method)
	Cable 3/3 Left

There it is: the nemesis of many knitters trying to learn how to work from charts, the No Stitch symbol.

What are we to do on the six rows that otherwise look like stockinette and reverse stockinette stitch? There are ten “stitch slots,” as indicated by the boxed letters A through J. But the instructions had us cast on only eight. What gives?

The First Public-Side Row

When we start working according to the chart, we read row one in the normal way, which for a public-side row is right to left, and obviously we do P2–K1 on the first three stitches, which are sensibly labeled as A, B, and C. Then at “stitch” D, we do...what? Nothing?

Exactly. We do nothing at all. We sail grandly past that non-stitch at position D, and we knit stitches E and F.

What do we do when we get to “stitch” G? Absolutely nothing, just as before. Since there’s no stitch instruction there, we go to the next place where there actually **is** a stitch instruction, which is at position H, so we knit it, then we purl the last two stitches, I and J.

The First Private-Side Row

So we've turned the piece to work the private-side row. We start at stitch J, either turning the chart upside-down or just reading left to right, and since it's a private-side row, what looks like P2–K1 in the chart actually has to be worked as K2–P1, since we have to swap knits and purls on private-side rows.

After we work the first three stitches, we again bump into the No Stitch symbol at, well, position G. We can't really call it "stitch" G since the symbol key says it's not a stitch. What do we do?

We simply go right past that dark box like it's not even there. We purl stitches F and E since they're supposed to be public-side knits, hop over whatever it is at position D, and work the last three stitches as P1–K2 to get K1–P2 on the public side.

Continuing the Chart

We've worked the first two rows, and rows three through six will be done the exact same way. When we complete row six, we'll have a nice little bit of stockinette stitch bordered by reverse stockinette to help stop it from curling, which is what it wants to do naturally.

Row seven is a little interesting. We see two increases spaced approximately equally, and the symbol key says we can do whatever type of increase we like. Since it's a swatch with a cable, as opposed to being some kind of lace where yarnover holes would be deliberate and decorative, we probably ought to do some kind of mostly invisible increase.

We work back on the private-side row, turn the work, and do the cable crossing on row nine.

Finishing the Swatch

Let's now look at the top of the chart.

1 6	••■ ■••	
	••■ ■••	1 5
1 4	••■ ■••	
	••\ ■ ■ /••	1 3
1 2	••■ ■••	
	••■ ■••	1 1
1 0	••■ ■••	
	J I H G F E D C B A	

Symbol Key	
•	Purl on RS, knit on WS
■	No stitch
/	K2tog
\	SSK (or SKP)

Rows ten through twelve are simple enough.

On row thirteen, we see that we do two single decreases, which will mean we have two

fewer stitches after that row. But there are still ten symbols on the row, because of those stupid No Stitch boxes.

Well, let's just muddle through the best we can. So we purl two, K2tog, and knit one across stitches A through...hmm, **position D**, even though we actually need **five** stitches to purl two, knit one, and do a K2tog. That's odd. Should we assume the chart is correct? Let's go ahead and do so, since it's kind of like the situation we run into with binding off at armholes; we have to work one more stitch than the number we're supposed to bind off, but we still just do what the instructions say. So we'll use five actual stitches even though the chart shows we only need to use stitches A through D.

Now we have to contend with that horrible symbol at position...what?! There are **two** of those idiot things right next to each other! What does **that** mean?

Same thing as it meant before: you do absolutely nothing about them except move on to where there **is** an actual knitting operation, which is at stitch G. Huh. How about that? In the first six rows, **position G** was nothing, but now it's actually a **stitch**.

Well, OK, then. So we skip the “nothings” at positions E and F, knit stitch G, then SSK/SKP (or whatever left-leaning decrease we prefer), and finish up the row with P2.

We now have just eight stitches on the needle, since we decreased away two stitches with the K2tog and our preferred left-leaning decrease. In a way, that's kind of reassuring. We had cast on eight, and now we've decreased back down to the same number as we near the end.

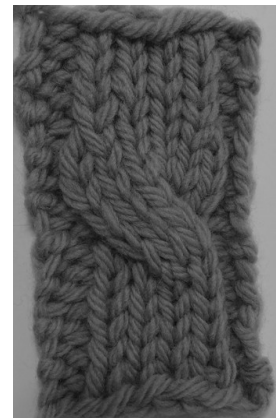
Rows fourteen through sixteen will all be worked the same way we worked rows one through six and ten through twelve: two stitches of reverse stockinette, four stitches of stockinette, and two more stitches of reverse stockinette.

When we've worked through row sixteen and turned, we bind off. We have a nice little swatch that shows us several things.

What the Swatch Shows

The first thing we see is that the two purl stitches on the left and right of the swatch help counteract the thing that always happens to the left and right edges of stockinette, which is that it curls toward the purl side. (The left and right edges of reverse stockinette also curl to the purl side, which means they curl to the **public** side.)

In all probability, your swatch, like mine, is essentially the same width the whole way up. That is an unusual result, perhaps, since we started and ended with eight stitches and had ten for several rows in the middle. But that result shows a fundamental trait of cables (and



twists): they pull the fabric in and make it narrower than good old stockinette would be when worked on the same number of stitches.

Now, about the chart itself. Does the No Stitch symbol seem a little less confusing? Or at least not as strange?

16	••□□■□□□••	
	••□□■□□□••	15
14	••□□■□□□••	
	••\□□■□□/••	13
12	••□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□••	11
10	••□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□••	9
8	••□□□□□□••	
	••□□+□□+□□••	7
6	••□□■□□■□□••	
	••□□■□□■□□••	5
4	••□□■□□■□□••	
	••□□■□□■□□••	3
2	••□□■□□■□□••	
	••□□■□□■□□••	1
	JIHGFEDCBA	

A Different Form of the Chart

Suppose the complete chart had looked like this:

16	••□□□□□□□□	
	••□□□□□□□□	15
14	••□□□□□□□□	
	••\□□□□□□/••	13
12	••□□□□□□□□	
	••□□□□□□□□	11
10	••□□□□□□□□	
	••□□□□□□□□	9
8	••□□□□□□□□	
	••□□+□□+□□□□	7
6	••□□□□□□□□	
	••□□□□□□□□	5
4	••□□□□□□□□	
	••□□□□□□□□	3
2	••□□□□□□□□	
	••□□□□□□□□	1
	JIHGFEDCBA	

Does this version seem more straightforward? In one sense, it is simpler. Instead of having to skip over a symbol that to all intents and purposes says “Move along, nothing to see here,” there are just blank areas. Rows one through six and fourteen through sixteen have exactly eight symbols on them, which corresponds to the exact number of stitches we have on our needles as we begin those rows.

The increase symbols fill in the gaps of the first six rows, and the decrease symbols have had their effects combined into a single gap that’s two stitches wide on the last four rows.

A Third Form of the Chart

In the next version, the rows all have symbols that exactly correspond to the number of stitches on each row, but there are no blank areas within the fields of the symbols.

16	••□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□••	15
14	••□□□□□□••	
	••□□\□□□/□□••	13
12	••□□□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□□□••	11
10	••□□□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□□□••	9
8	••□□□□□□□□••	
	••□□+□□□+□□••	7
6	••□□□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□□□••	5
4	••□□□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□□□••	3
2	••□□□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□□□••	1
	J I H G F E D C B A	

Ten rows have eight symbols, one for each stitch actually present when we finish those rows, and six rows are ten stitches wide, which again corresponds to what we have on our needles for those rows.

What about the boxed letters, which help us talk about what happens at different places on various rows? Should they run just through H, lopping off I and J? Or is it better to go through J after all, since we do have ten stitches for a few rows? Should we have A through H below rows one and thirteen, then have A through J below row seven, since those groups of rows have different numbers of stitches on them?

Those are all valid possibilities, and the chart above isn’t that hard to work from. In a more complicated chart, we might well want to repeat in key places rows of boxed letters (or

numbers) from the knitting font, just in case we have to think about something that happens at a particular spot on a particular row.

One Last Version of the Whole Chart

What if the stitch symbols weren't centered in their table column?

16	••□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□••	15
14	••□□□□□□••	
	••\□□□□/□□••	13
12	••□□□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□□□••	11
10	••□□□□□□□□••	
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8	••□□□□□□□□••	
	••□□+□□+□□••	7
6	••□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□••	5
4	••□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□••	3
2	••□□□□□□••	
	••□□□□□□••	1
	J I H G F E D C B A	

Maybe it's just me, but this one looks more confusing than the one with the stitch symbols centered. The symbols could of course be put against the right edge of their table column, but that just shifts where the blank areas are positioned on the top and bottom rows.

The Bottom Line

All these charting variations are interesting and all are valid, and some might be easier for some knitters to use.

Two variations, the one with the No Stitch symbol and the one with just blank spaces within the fields of the actual stitch symbols, show how the rows before the increases and after the decreases position their stitches relative to one another as we work our way up the chart.

In other words, the only thing No Stitch symbols (or just ordinary spaces) do in a chart is **keep all the symbols aligned with one another when the number of stitches varies from row to row.**

That's it. There's no real mystery about it at all. Our brains are usually pretty good at

seeing patterns, and the No Stitch symbol (or an ordinary space) simply helps our brains pick up those patterns a little bit quicker.

Dread the No-Stitch Symbol No Longer

When we see No Stitch symbols in a chart, we simply skip over it (or them) until we come to a symbol that represents an actual knitting operation.

Some knitters (I am one of them) find the actual No Stitch symbol distracting, because it's so much denser than all the other symbols. If such a chart is in our peripheral vision, it's very easy to see those dark rectangles; they just pop off the page. If there are lots of No Stitch symbols, they will simply overwhelm the rest of the chart.

So if two or two hundred No Stitch symbols would bother us, we have at least two options. One is to simply use ordinary spaces. The other is to change the font color of the No Stitch symbol to, say, a light to medium gray, which will help keep it from overwhelming the rest of the chart.

One Last Trick

In responding to a question posted on Ravelry, Isabeau (Rav handle *isabeautiful*) used a different phrase when referring to this symbol: *no action*. Since you take **no action** at the position of the symbol, you move on to the next symbol that does indicate some kind of knitting action.

For some of us, giving this troublesome little symbol a different name will make all the difference.

Revisiting the Aran Sampler

In my eagerness to do all the knitting for the book, I cast on the number of stitches that the Aran sampler's patterns required, along with stitches for all the reverse stockinette between the patterns and at the left and right edges. I worked the bottom as garter stitch so that when I took photos, the bottom edge would behave by lying flat; if I had made the bottom in stockinette instead, the bottom would have tried to curl upward to the knit side. But did you notice in chapter 150 that the final picture didn't actually **show** the garter stitch at the top and bottom of the sampler? There's a reason for that!

While I was working it, I soon realized the folly of my impatience. Here's the bottom of the sampler.

I ought to have remembered to cast on fewer stitches, and as it turns out, a **lot** fewer

stitches, because I completely forgot about how the cables would pull in and make the fabric quite a bit narrower.



At the top edge, however, I at least tried to make up for my earlier mistake. As I bound off, I did some K2togs at key spots across the piece so that the top edge would be the same width as the main body of the project. Believe it or not, the top edge is only **twenty-five stitches wide**. That's correct. Just twenty-five stitches wide, compared to the forty-five stitches needed for the patterns. I actually had to tinker the bind-off in several places along the way to do a few more K2togs, because I kept thinking to myself, *Oh, surely I've decreased away enough of the stitches*. Nope. Had to go back and get rid of a few more.



For Patterns That Pull In

If you want to avoid flared, ruffled, or wavy top and bottom edges because your pattern fabric pulls in, you have to know the difference between the width of the borders and the width

of the pattern portion. And yes, I shouldn't even need to say it, but I will: you have to swatch.

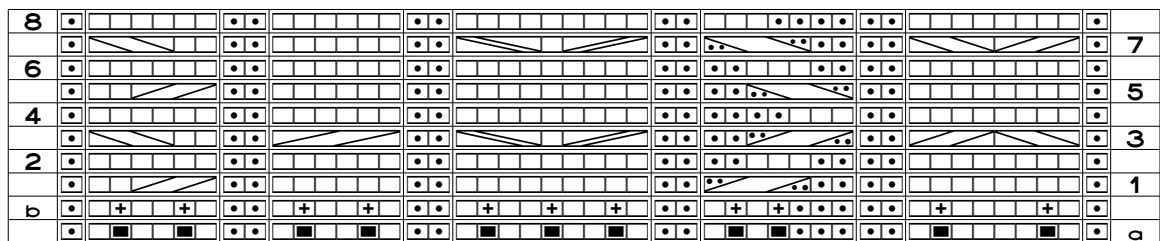
If you work every single project with the same yarn on the same needles (not just size, but manufacturer and needle material), then as you work different pattern stitches, you'll get a feel for what gauge you might get in a new pattern stitch.

But if you like to play around with different yarns (who doesn't?!), it's even more imperative that you find out exactly how a particular pattern works up in a particular yarn on a particular needle. I know. Big sigh.

In my knitting lifetime, I have found that in worsted-weight yarn a four-stitch cable pulls itself to the width of three stitches of stockinette, and a six-stitch cable is usually the equivalent of just four stitches wide. Other knitters may work their cablings more loosely or more tightly, so their cables will be wider or narrower, respectively.

Casting On

Had I used my knowledge and past experience to determine the number of stitches to cast on (instead of rushing into it and merely using the number of stitches the patterns were going to need), I would have cast on fewer stitches (shown in what's labeled foundation row A), then worked most of the bottom border. On the last private-side border row (foundation row B), I would have done increases this way:



Notice that the increases are not “spaced evenly across,” which is so often the directions given for increasing the number of stitches for a sweater’s front, back, and sleeves when we switch from ribbing to the piece’s main fabric, especially if that fabric is stockinette stitch.

Instead, we have to do increases positioned strategically under the cables, so that the cable sections get the extra stitches **they** need.

In such a situation, we would **not** want to do increases evenly spaced across the work. If we space increases for cables evenly across the whole piece, then we'll probably wind up with too many stitches in some places (say, the reverse stockinette between patterns) and not enough right below the cables themselves. Until you know your stitch gauge in the desired border and the equivalent width of each cable, you'd be shooting in the dark to a certain ex-

