

Chapter 2

THE UNWRITTEN ASSUMPTION

There is an assumption made in written-out knitting instructions, an assumption that is very important. I mean **extremely** important. What's worse is that the instructions never actually write this critical assumption down in black and white. It just *is*, and we're all expected to somehow realize it.

It's such an important assumption that it must be made an explicit charting rule.

Charting Rule

Written-out instructions assume public-side rows are worked from right to left. (Private-side rows are therefore assumed to be worked from left to right, when considered from the public side.)

I've never come across written-out instructions that warn the knitter to work public-side rows from left to right. I can't make a blanket statement about pattern instructions written in languages besides English, as I've seen very few foreign-language patterns.

But in English, the assumption is that public-side rows will be worked from right to left. English-language instructions go so far in this assumption that cable and twist abbreviations often incorporate it, as we'll see in a few chapters.

But What About MIKs?

If you're a mirror-image knitter, you may not have been surprised that in the previous chapter, the charts for all the basic fabrics grew from right to left on public-side rows and left to right on private-side rows. But I'm guessing you were expecting at least a **mention** that MIKs draw their chart rows in the opposite direction: left to right on public-side rows and right to left on private-side rows.

Since you obviously work your rows in those directions, which is the definition of *mirror-image knitter* in the first place, it's completely natural that you would draw your charts to match the way you knit.

A Special Edition...or Not?

To accommodate MIKs and their opposite-ness, I decided to make a special edition of this book to show all the MIK changes explicitly. MIKs should not be forced to hold up the book's charts to a mirror or to read over and over again they that "just swap right and left."

I had actually gone quite far in both my thinking about and preparations for this separate, MIK-only edition when I realized my error.

What prompted this realization was something that Rachel¹ said when **she was describing the changes she, as an MIK, had to make to work a particular asymmetrical lace project**. Something in her wording, or at least how I remembered her wording, kind of clicked in my brain during my MIK preparation and made me realize that large parts of this book don't need to be changed for MIKs **at all**.

No Special Edition Needed

There are a handful of things that MIKs must change when they work from a knitting chart, but one thing MIKs **don't** change is the way they **draw** a knitting chart. The changes come only **after** the chart is constructed. Perhaps MIKs who have tried to chart in the past have made this same error and therefore been unsuccessful when they tried to work from charts they drew in this logically opposite way.

The Bottom Line

So what does this charting rule, this unwritten assumption, mean? To put it succinctly, **all knitters, traditional and mirror-image knitters, must interpret written-out instructions in the exact same way**, and that way was demonstrated in how we interpreted the written-out instructions for the basic knitted fabrics.

Constructing a chart is a completely different and isolated activity compared to **working from** the chart. MIKs in particular must keep in mind that difference.

Charting Rule

All knitters must interpret written-out instructions the same way, which is identical to the way that traditional knitters work from the written-out instructions with needles and yarn.

So what changes for MIKs? How can they first chart written-out instructions, then successfully work from the chart?

¹ Her Rav handle is GsCraftsNthings, and her blog is at <http://gs-crafts-n-things.blogspot.com/>.

Charting Rule for MIKs

MIKs chart written-out instructions exactly the same way as traditional knitters, and when they work from the chart, they re-define a handful of symbols.

For Those with Doubts

If you don't believe me when I say that charts must be constructed by interpreting public-side rows as being worked from right to left with needles and yarn, we've already seen this issue in several of the basic knitted fabrics.

Take 1x1 ribbing. The instructions were

Row 1 (RS): * K1, P1 *, rpt btw * across.

All knitters will start row one with K1. Well, duh, that's the first stitch in the instructions. A traditional knitter, working public-side rows from right to left, will therefore have a knit rib, a stockinette column, running up the **right** edge of the swatch.

But an MIK working this swatch from the written-out instructions will have that knit rib running up the **left** edge of the swatch. Here are photos showing both results.

Traditional Knitters



first knit rib ↑

Mirror-Image Knitters



↑ first knit rib

Is it a big deal that the first knit rib winds up on the opposite edge? No, of course not.²

But this opposite-ness, this reversal, this mirror-image result, will be a **huge** deal for a design that is **asymmetrical**. Ignoring the unwritten assumption will **not** lead MIKs to good outcomes.

Still Doubting?

Let's look at a very simple example and chart it the way an unaware MIK would be tempted to.

² MIKs would get this same reversed result on every swatch in chapter 1, except for stockinette and reverse stockinette.

WHAT WILL I BE?

CO 6.

Row 1 (RS): K6.

Row 2 (WS): P1, K1, P2, K1, P1.

Row 3: K2, P1, K1, P1, K1.

Row 4: P1, K2, P3.

Row 5: K2, P1, K1, P1, K1.

Row 6: P1, K1, P2, K1, P1.

Row 7: K6.

BO.

Since an MIK will work public-side rows from left to right and private-side rows from right to left, let's chart the written-out instructions that way.

The MIK will have the source needle in the right hand, so the first stitch worked is all the way at the left of piece. That means the MIK puts the public-side row number at the left end of the chart row.

1

Now the MIK adds the six knit symbols, one at a time, from left to right

1

1

1

1

1

1

For row two, the MIK will turn and again work the row from left to right, which from the public side looks like right to left. So the row number will be all the way to the right, with the first stitch symbol to its left. We still have to swap knits and purls, so the instruction's initial "P1" must be charted to look like "K1."

2

The next stitch is a knit, which we must show as a purl.

• □ 2

Then there are two purls, which must be charted as knits

□ □ • □ 2

and row two finishes with “K1, P1,” which the MIK will chart from right to left as “P1, K1.”

□ • □ □ • □ 2

For row three, the row number goes on the left, and the MIK will chart to its right the two knits the row starts with.

3 □ □

Then the rest of the row alternates between purls and knits.

3 □ □ • □ □ • □

Row four starts at the right edge, grows right to left, and swaps knits and purls, starting with one knit symbol for the “P1”

□ 4

then two purl symbols for the “K2” in the middle

• • □ □ 4

and finishes the row with three more knits to represent the “P3.”

□ □ □ • • □ 4

On row five, the MIK will work two knits to start with, then alternate purl and knit the rest of the way across.

5 □ □ • □ □ • □

On row six, the MIK will switch between knits and purls for almost every stitch.

□ • □ □ □ • □ 6

Row seven is simple, just a row of knit symbols.

7 □ □ □ □ □ □

The Big Reveal

Let's put all the rows together to see what our MIK has charted.

7									
5									
3									
1									

If our MIK was hoping for an initial suitable for Keith or Karen, oops.

Summary

Even though no book or pattern actually says so, written-out knitting instructions assume that we are all traditional knitters, that we all work public-side rows from right to left.

For mirror-image knitters who have been burned by a backwards K or any other asymmetrical design, it should be clear that they must not chart the way their natural inclination would lead them to expect.

All knitters, traditional right-to-left knitters and mirror-image left-to-right knitters, must chart written-out instructions according to the assumption that public-side rows are worked right to left.

It's not just texture designs of knits and purls, either. Asymmetrical lace designs will simply not come out correctly **in yarn** if MIKs chart the written-out instructions in the same direction that they'll work each row. To create shapes like leaves and flowers, the relative positions of the decreases and yarnovers as well as which decrease is done where are all absolutely key. Swapping the order that we work a yarnover and its corresponding decrease or working a decrease that leans the wrong way will obscure or even destroy the design.

The One Exception

There is, of course, an exception. It's highly likely that after being burned a few times, some MIKs will re-write written-out instructions to accommodate the fact that they work all rows in the other direction.

If that's the case, the instructions will almost certainly say that they're written specifically for MIKs. If so, then of course MIKs must chart those instructions the way we charted the instructions for the letter K.

Charts Are Mainly Universal

Since a chart is just a picture of a project, then we can work its rows in either direction. That's what allows us to work from knitting charts whose written-out instructions are in a language we don't know.

But to chart written-out instructions, we must assume they're written for traditional knitters, who work public-side rows from right to left.

Charting Rules

Written-out instructions assume public-side rows are worked from right to left.

When charting written-out instructions, all knitters must interpret them the same way, which is identical to the way that traditional knitters work from them with needles and yarn.

Mirror-image knitters construct a chart from written-out instructions the exact same way as traditional knitters. MIKs must then re-define just a few chart symbols as they work with needles and yarn because they'll be working the stitches in the opposite direction.