

Chapter 5

WORKING FROM A CHART

These tips apply to working from any chart, hand-drawn on paper or typed in the computer, a pattern we bought or our own, unique, one-of-a-kind original. Check out the part four chapter “More Charting Tips” as well.

Changes Mirror-Image Knitters Make

As we’ve already seen and as we’ll see while charting the rest of knitting’s basic stitches, **all** knitters convert written-out instructions into charts by assuming public-side rows are worked from right to left. Since private-side rows must be worked in the opposite direction (when we’re working in the flat, of course), then their instructions assume they’re worked from the public side’s left to the public side’s right.

So what changes do MIKs make when they finish charting and start knitting?

To this point, MIKs don’t change anything. Knit symbols are always worked as public-side knits and purl symbols as public-side purls. MIKs will change other symbols when they begin working from a chart, which we’ll see as we come to the affected chapters.

Once MIKs are done constructing a chart, they have to option to move the public-side row numbers to the left edge of the chart, which of course means the private-side row numbers move to the right edge of the chart. This positioning matches the directions they’ll be working each row with needles and yarn.

Charting Rule for Mirror-Image Knitters

After mirror-image knitters have constructed a chart from written-out instructions, which assume public-side rows are worked right to left, they may optionally swap the locations of the row numbers, moving public-side numbers to the left of the stitch symbols and the private-side numbers to the right of the symbols.

If MIKs need to compare the written-out instructions with the chart, they must remember to read the chart rows in the same directions that traditional knitters would.

Make a Photocopy

Instead of carrying an entire knitting book in our project bag, we should work from copies of the project's instruction pages. Most knitting books have a statement on the copyright page that gives us permission to photocopy instructions for our personal use. If we do so, then we don't have to struggle to keep a book open to the correct page while our hands are full of needles and yarn. And of course a few pieces of paper don't weigh near as much as an entire book.

If we're making a project from our own unique design, it would be **much** safer to at least take the time to make photocopies of (and possibly type up in the computer) all the charts and other instructions instead of diving in and casting on. A picture or two in our smartphone wouldn't hurt either. I know, I know, I want to get right to needles and yarn too. But if our only copy of the pattern is the one in our knitting bag, well... Perhaps it's better to not think about the consequences if our bag goes walkabout.

Mark Up the Instructions

Mark up your photocopy to make it easy to avoid errors. Circle or highlight anything that applies to the size you're making. If anything looks tricky or confusing, jot a note to help you get through that portion.

Make Multiple Projects from the Same Book

If we photocopy the charts and instructions, then we can have more than one project in work from the same book at the same time.

Instead of trying to remember to shift the book from one project bag to another as we're dashing out the door to the kids' soccer practice, we already have each project's instructions right in the project's bag.

And making more than one project from the same book doesn't only mean two completely different designs. What if we now need to make a different size of a project we made before? This year we're making a size small, but next year we may need to make a size large, because kids have a habit of growing. If we've marked up the book itself for the small, we'll have a confusing mess on our hands as we try to make the large.

Keeping Our Place on the Chart

When we're working from charts, it's a really good idea to use some kind of marker to help us keep track of the row we're currently working.

Some knitters use **transparent, colored, movable tape**. It comes in a standard tape dis-

penser, but its sticky coating is more like the glue on Post-it Notes. We re-position the strip of tape multiple times, moving it up row by row as we progress up the chart.

We could use **ordinary Post-it Notes** themselves to mark the row in work. It can be hard to find wide Post-it Notes, though, because the square sizes tend to be the ones on the shelves. There are narrow strips useful for bookmarks or other page indicators, but the glue is on one of the narrow sides, not along either long side. It would be easy to dislodge them, especially if we shove the chart into our knitting bag in a hurry.

There are also **steel boards with long, skinny magnets**. The magnets both hold the chart to the board and show us which row we're working on. They might be in the needle-point or cross-stitching area in a hobby supply store.

Some knitters use a **ruler**, like the kind we often had in elementary school. I'd probably have a couple binder clips in my notions bag as well, to keep the ruler firmly and immovably in place.

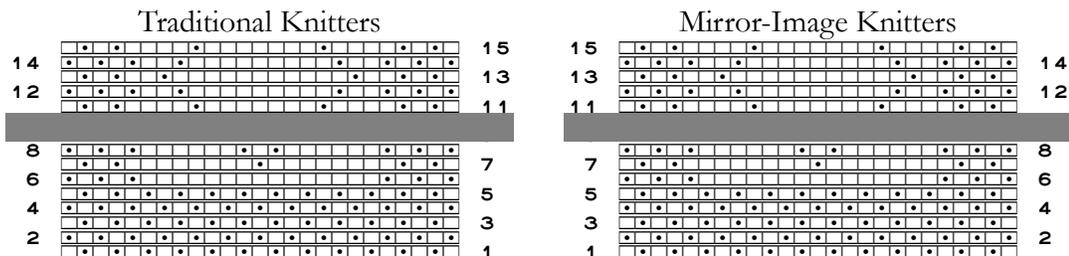
Positioning an Opaque Chart Marker

If we use an opaque marker, we have two options for where to put it: either below or above the row we're currently working. We might be inclined to put it below the current row (and some knitters do so), but that placement will keep us from realizing one of the most important benefits of charts: making sure that **we're working the stitches of the current row in the correct places relative to the stitches of the previous row**.

Let's look at part of a chart we'll see in the next chapter.

Option A: Below

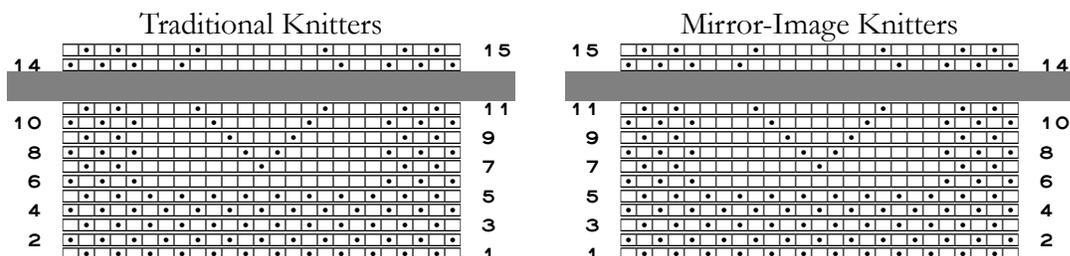
In this option, we're about to work row eleven, with the marker below that row. The locations of the row numbers have been switched for MIKs, though doing so is optional.



We can see that we alternate knits and purls at the beginning and end of the row. We also have some purls in the midst of the central stockinette. But we can't tell exactly where they go, unless we take the time to count the number of knits we have to work before we get to the purls.

Option B: Above

Let's compare that setup with the other option: placing the marker **above** the current row.



Now the relative placement of the two central purl stitches is clear: they're one stitch sooner and one stitch later than in the previous row, so we don't even have to count how many knits we need to work before we make each purl. In addition, we can see at a glance that the edge stitches need to be worked the opposite of what they were in the previous row.

When Working More-Complicated Projects

Clearly, for this small and easy chart of just knits and purls, it really wouldn't make much difference exactly where we put the opaque chart marker. But the placement **will** make a difference when we're working from a chart with longer and/or more-complicated rows.

If we put an opaque marker below the chart row we're currently working, then we won't see that, for example, the K2 that we need to work next must be exactly above the P2 of the previous row. If the next two stitches on the source needle are a purl and a knit, then the fact that the chart shows they ought to both be purl stitches will allow us to recognize **immediately** that we have made an error somewhere. If the opaque chart marker covered up the previous row, we wouldn't realize that we're about to K2 over a P1–K1 instead of a P2.

Don't Mark Through Completed Rows

One way we should never mark our place on a chart is by drawing a line through rows as we complete them. Why? Well, er—*cough*—there is just a **slight** chance that we might make an error and need to frog. If we crossed through the chart rows as we worked them, especially with some kind of felt-tip marker, we might not be able to see the symbols to rework those rows.

Also, some patterns and projects have us work a group of rows over and over again. If we cross through each row the first time we work it, we won't be able to read it when we have to work that row again.

Working Each Row

We work symbol by symbol, reading in the proper direction for the way we knit.

Traditional knitters read public-side rows from right to left. For private-side rows, they have two options. They can read from left to right, or they can turn the chart upside-down to read right to left.

Mirror-image knitters read public-side rows from left to right. For private-side rows, they have two options. They can read from right to left, or they can turn the chart upside-down to read left to right.

If we turn the chart upside-down to work private-side rows, we must turn it right-side up when we start public-side rows.

When a Chart Shows Only Half of a Project

Some projects are symmetrical on both sides of a vertical line drawn down the project's center. The left and right halves of the project are therefore mirror-image. To save space, the chart may show only half of the project.

When we reach the midpoint of a row in needles and yarn, we can flip the chart (turn it a hundred and eighty degrees), which lets us read the chart symbols for the second half of the row in the same direction we're working.

For such charts, we flip the chart at both the middle of the current row and at the beginning of the next row, for both public- and private-side rows.

It is a bit harder to make sure we're working stitches in the correct places relative to the preceding row when the chart is upside-down, but it is by no means impossible to do so. Like most things, it gets easier with practice.