

Appendix G

CROSSING CABLES ON THE PRIVATE SIDE

In part one's Aran sampler project, I said that we could cross cables (and twists) on the private side and still get the proper public-side appearance. Why does crossing a cable on the private side work as long as we hold the cable needle to the front or rear as usual and purl all the stitches?

We have to purl all the stitches, because from the public side, a cable's stitches are all knitted. That means that if we're crossing on the private side, we still swap purls for knits in the normal way. So much for the second point... Now for the first.

This is one of those situations where it may be easier to just prove it yourself with needles and yarn rather than to read in words why it works. But I'll try to explain it anyway.

When we cross a cable to the right on the public side, the stitches **closest to us**, naturally enough, slant to the right; that's what a right-slanting cable is, by definition. And how do we achieve this slant? By holding the cable needle to the rear of the work. Which way do the stitches **farthest from us** slant when we've finished the crossing? The only way they can: to the left.

When we turn the work to the private side, what do we see when we look at the stitches of the two parts of the crossing? The stitches **closest to us** slant in which direction? To the right. And the stitches **farthest from us**, which way do they slant? To the left.

So when we turned the work, what from the public side slanted to the right now slants to the left, and vice versa. But the cable stitches **closest to us still slant to the right**, and the stitches farthest from us still slant to the left. That means that if we need to cross a right-slanting cable **on the private side, we still have to put the cable needle to the rear**.

To get the stitches **closest to us** to slant to the right, we **always** have to put the cable needle on the side away from us, period. That's why **we get a right-slanting cable when we put the cable needle to the rear**, whether we're crossing on the public or private side.

The Absolutely Critical Distinction

Note something very important in the terminology here. Some instructions will define a right-slanting cable as one made when the cable needle is held to the **“wrong” side** of the work. A left-slanting cable is therefore made by holding the cable needle to the **“right” side** of the work. Using “right side” and “wrong side” in cable and twist instructions means the pattern writer has made two potentially inaccurate assumptions, one that's new and one we saw very early in part one.

- ☉ The first assumption is that **the crossing occurs on a public-side row.**
- ☉ The second assumption is that **all knitters are traditional knitters.**

The Results

Let's see what happens in yarn with this kind of definition.

C4F: sl 2 sts to cn and hold to RS, K2, K2 from cn.

The desired result is a left-slanting cable, because that's what a traditional knitter (when the second assumption is true) will get following these instructions on a public-side row (when the first assumption is true).¹

What if traditional knitters follow these instructions literally when they cross the cable on the private side?

When traditional knitters hold the cable needle to the public side while working a private-side row, that's the same as holding it to the rear, the side of the work farthest from them. They'll get a right-slanting cable, not left-slanting, because only one of the two assumptions was true.

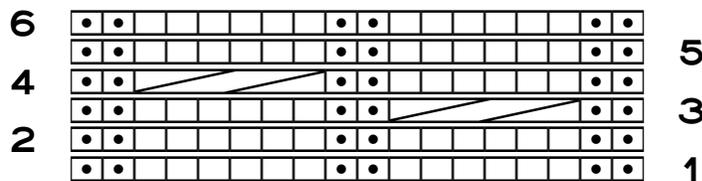
Summary

When you, as a traditional knitter, encounter such a definition, you must interpret “right side” to mean “to the front” and “wrong side” to mean “to the rear.”

As a traditional knitter, then, to get a right slant, you hold the cable needle to the rear, period. To get a left slant, you hold the cable needle to the front, period.

Work a Two-Cable Swatch

Make this little swatch yourself, casting on eighteen stitches with some ordinary yarn and a reasonably sized needle.



¹ The second assumption is given here for completeness, but it really only affects mirror-image knitters. Its ramifications are explained in the MIK version of this appendix.

Cross the Cable on the Public Side

After you purl the first two stitches on row three, put the next three stitches on the cable needle, and put the cable needle to the rear. From the public side, it's clear that the crossing, that is, the cable's **front** stitches, will slant to the right.

Now, having put the cable needle to the rear, turn the work around so you're looking at the private side. If you could watch from the private side as you cross the cable on row three, you would see your public-side self purling three stitches from that self's source needle, then purling the stitches on the cable needle. And which way will those last three purl stitches be slanting? **To the right.**²

Don't believe me? Turn the work to the public side and just slip the three stitches from the source needle to the working needle purlwise. Then turn to the private side.

When you watch your other self complete the cable by what looks from the private side like purling the three stitches from the cable needle, which way will those three stitches slant, as you look at them from the private side? **To the right.**

Still not clear? Then work the crossing in stages, turning several times to look at the work from the private side.

1. Turn the work to the public side, and put the three slipped stitches back on the source needle. Knit the first stitch from the source needle. Turn to the private side. What's happened? It looks like you've purlled the first stitch from the source needle, which your private-side self is currently holding in your working-needle hand.
2. Turn to the public side and knit the next two stitches. Turn to the private side. It looks like you've just purlled the first three stitches of the crossing. Pull the cable needle to the right with your right hand, which mirrors the direction your public-side self will have to pull it to work its stitches. Which way are the three cable-needle stitches going to slant on the private side? To the right.
3. Turn to the public side and knit the first stitch from the cable needle. Turn to the private side. You've effectively purlled the first stitch of the second half of the crossing.
4. Turn to the public side, then complete the crossing and the row. Turn to the private side. You've got three purl stitches crossed over three purl stitches, slanting to the right. You may need to stretch the fabric sideways a little to make the slant clear on the private side, because it's harder to see it in purl stitches.

Now you're going to do the amazing: you will successfully work a cable crossing on the private side!

² I tried both looking in a mirror and shooting video of myself from the private side as I worked the crossing. Neither attempt made the situation any clearer. Again, it's easier to just work the swatch yourself!

Cross the Cable on the Private Side

If you like, turn the chart upside-down for the private-side row so that you read the chart in the same direction that you work. Note that the cable symbol still slants to the right, so we still read, interpret, and work the crossing in exactly the same way as on the public side.

There is absolutely no need for any mind-bending reversals or swapping of which side we put the cable needle on or for trying to remember how to switch things around, because nothing changes in how we interpret the chart or work the crossing.

From the private side, work the first two stitches of row four.

1. Put the next three stitches on a cable needle and put it to the rear, to make the crossing slant which way? To the right. Notice that “to the rear” means “the side away from you,” **not** “the private side of the work.”
2. Purl three stitches from the source needle. Turn to the public side. The cable needle is hanging on the public side. Which way will its stitches slant when you complete the crossing? To the right.
3. Turn to the private side, and purl the stitches on the cable needle.
4. Turn to the public side. Does the crossing slant the correct way?
5. Turn to the private side and complete the row.

Turn the work, and look at the crossing from the public side. It’s exactly the same as if you had worked it from the public side, except that the crossing is done one row later.

But the point is that the crossing still slanted the correct way. You cannot tell the difference between a cable crossed on the public side and one crossed on the private side, except that the crossings naturally won’t be positioned on the same row.

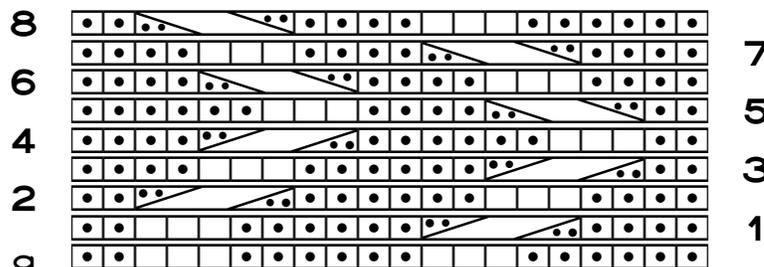
Complete rows five and six, then work all six rows again and bind off. Challenge your knitting friends to explain why the cables look **almost** the same, even though the cable crossings are clearly not on the same row!



So in the picture, which cable was crossed on the private side? The one on the left, the way the swatch was charted, or did I get sneaky and actually cross the one on the right on the private side? I won't tell, and I'm pretty sure you can't tell, either.

Work a Two-Twist Swatch

If we try this same experiment with Wavy Cable, what we do with the cable needle is exactly the same, but when we work the twist's stitches on the private side, we can't simply purl them all. We have to work the stitches as they present themselves, knitting the knits and purling the purls.



To get the correct group of stitches on the cable needle for this particular twist, we have to think in terms of a group of two, the background's public-side purl stitches, and a group of three, the public-side knit stitches that move across the sea of purls.

We put the group of knits or purls on the cable needle as required. Where do we put the cable needle? If the chart shows that the crossing slants to the left, we put the cable needle to the front (**left** and **front** both have an **f**). If it crosses to the right, we put the cable needle

to the rear (**right** and **rear** both start with **r**). As before, **the symbols still slant the same way if we're working private-side rows with the chart upside-down**. We don't have to switch where we put the cable needle or make any other change, physical or mental.

We work each group of the twist's stitches as they present themselves, knitting the knits and purling the purls.

Work the chart a second time and bind off. Once again you can amaze your knitting friends when you explain why the twists are **almost** the same. But don't be surprised if they don't believe you.



Is the Wavy Cable swatch really made according to the chart, or did I switch which one was crossed on the private side? I honestly don't remember.