

On Your Way To The Masters: those pesky yarn tails

by Arenda Holladay

An important part of finishing any knitting project is getting rid of those yarn tails left over from casting on, binding off, seaming, changing colors or joining a new skein. These yarn tails should be secured and hidden without using knots, leaving holes, adding too much bulk, or having them show on or pull through to the right side.

When I finished knitting my swatches for Level I of the Masters program, I looked through all sorts of reference materials hoping to find the definitive way to weave in yarn tails as instructed. My first problem was finding the information. I discovered most reference books either ignore this topic completely or gloss over it with “secure all ends,” with no details on how to do it. The reference books that did provide help included this information in either the changing color section or the finishing section. There didn’t seem to be a clear consensus on the right way to weave in ends, although I found a variety of techniques described. After experimentation, I found some to be better than others.

Joining a New Skein

All the reference guides agreed that you should never ever join a new skein in the middle of a row, always join them at the selvedge—bad news for those who knit in the round; and if you ever did have to join a new

skein of yarn in the middle of the row, never ever tie a knot.

Several guides recommended darning the yarn tail either diagonally, horizontally or vertically through the head of the purl stitches on the wrong side. There are several problems with this method. The darned yarn tail does not have the same elasticity as the surrounding knit fabric. When the fabric is stretched or pulled (something that frequently occurs during wear), the yarn tail can pucker and is then susceptible to snagging and pulling loose. If the tail has been darned horizontally or diagonally, it frequently shows through to the right side, particularly if it is a different color.

A method described in both *The Principles of Knitting* by June Hemmons Hiatt and *The “I Hate to Finish Sweaters” Guide to Finishing Sweaters* by Janet Szabo, avoids these problems. Their simple solution is to thread the yarn tails into a tapestry needle and to use Duplicate Stitch on the wrong side to weave in the yarn tails. There are many advantages to this method. First, the duplicate stitches have the same elasticity as the knitted fabric. Second, they do not pull through to the right side—and since they lay directly behind the stitches, they are hidden, even when woven over a different color yarn.

Basic Procedure

When you change to a new skein, be sure that you leave a 6" tail of the old yarn. Start knitting with the new yarn, leaving a tail at least 6" long. Don’t bother to knot the tails, or the hole or the tension of the stitches on either side of the join. You can adjust the tension during finishing.

When you are ready to finish the project:

- Thread one of the yarn tails onto a tapestry needle.
- Look at the right side of the piece and adjust the tension of the stitches at the join so they match the tension of the surrounding stitches.
- On the wrong side, and using Duplicate Stitch, continue the stitch pattern in the same direction that the yarn would have traveled if it had not been cut.
- Continue to make duplicate stitches for at least an inch, if not longer. Trim excess yarn.
- Thread the other yarn tail onto the tapestry needle and work duplicate stitches in the opposite direction.

Since the two yarn tails cross at the base of the stitch, there won’t be a hole at the join. If you stretch the piece, the duplicate stitches have the same elasticity as the knit fabric. The yarn tail will not pull loose.

(cont. on p. 14)



Figure 1 – Stockinette Stitch
(cont. from p. 13)

Examples

These swatches show examples of duplicate stitches on Stockinette, Reverse Stockinette and Garter stitch. The tension of these swatches is very loose so that the duplicate stitches, made in blue cotton, can be seen more clearly. The cast on and bind off yarn tails have been woven in on these swatches. Notice that these duplicate stitches are very difficult to see.

Figure 1 shows an example of this technique on a Stockinette Stitch swatch (wrong side is shown—the duplicate stitches are purl stitches). The cast on and bind off tails are at the right-hand side of the swatch.

Figure 2 shows an example of this technique on a Reverse Stockinette stitch swatch (wrong side is shown—the duplicate stitches are knit stitches). The cast on and bind off tails are at the left-hand side of the swatch. If you use this technique to join yarns, be aware that the actual join is at the base of a purl stitch and more visible in Reverse Stockinette stitch. For this reason, if the pattern has a section of Stockinette stitch, it would be better to join the yarns at that area.

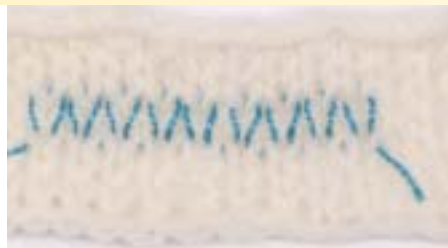


Figure 2 – Reverse Stockinette Stitch

Figure 3 shows an example of this technique on a Garter Stitch swatch. The cast on and bind off tails are at the left-hand side of the swatch.

Changing Colors

Some reference guides suggest a method where yarn tails from both the old and new color are incorporated into the new stitches. Others advocate a technique where the tails of both the old and new colors are “caught” at the back of the work. (See the list of references that follows.) If the project involves many color changes, for example, a Kaffe Fassett design, these techniques can save the knitter’s sanity. Few knitters would have the patience to darn or duplicate stitch those hundreds of yarn tails. However, there are problems associated with these techniques. Both methods add bulk to the garment and the second method makes the piece inelastic. Also, since the ends are woven in while knitting, it is more difficult to correct any tension problems at the join; when working Intarsia designs, the tension of stitches at the join are frequently distorted.

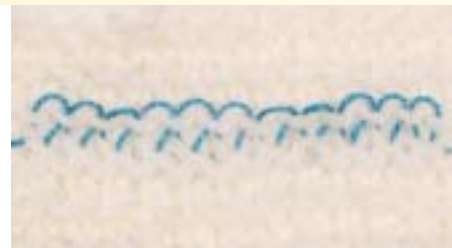


Figure 3 – Garter Stitch

You can use Duplicate stitch method for color changes as well. Although this method is more tedious than other methods, you can correct any tension problems as part of the finishing process.

Figure 4 shows the Duplicate stitch method on Intarsia. Blue cotton has been added to the duplicate stitches so that the path can be more clearly seen. Notice that after the initial duplicate stitch that secures it and maintains the stitch tension, the rest of the duplicate stitches are in an area of the same color so that they do not show through to the right side. If the difference in color is not as extreme, as it is in this swatch, you can duplicate stitch across the other area.

Figure 5 shows the right side of this same swatch.

Seams

If your garment has seams and you have started a new skein at the selvedge edge, hiding yarn tails is much easier. Simply run the yarn tails up and down the selvedge on the inside of the seam. Run the yarn tails in the opposite direction to make the seam less bulky. The tail from the

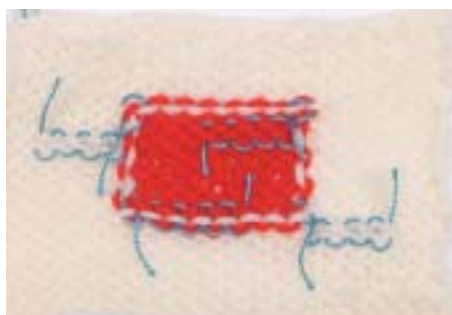


Figure 4 – Duplicate stitch on Intarsia,
wrong side



Figure 5 – Duplicate stitch on Intarsia (same
swatch), right side



Figure 6 – Selvedge edge



Figure 7 – Weaving ends in ribbing

seaming thread must also be woven in. One way to reduce the bulk in seams is to use the yarn tails from the cast on and bind off as the seaming yarn. When you cast on, leave a longer tail than you normally would. Make a butterfly knot to keep it out of the way while you knit.

Figure 6 (on page 14) shows strands of blue cotton woven into the selvage stitches. If this swatch was seamed, the yarn tails would not be visible; they would be inside the seam. The actual yarn tails of this swatch have been woven in with Duplicate stitch.

Knitting in the Round

Although there are no seams when you knit in the round, you still must hide the yarn tail from the cast on and bind off. Do not darn the yarn tail close to the edge, whether the project is a sweater, vest, sock or hat. This edge will be stretched a great deal during wear.

Figure 7 shows a method for dealing with yarn tails in a seamless project. The blue cotton strand shows how the yarn tail is carried away from the edge by weaving it vertically around halves of knit stitches, and then working duplicate stitches across a

row. These duplicate stitches guarantee the yarn tail will stay in place and not ruin the elasticity of the ribbing. This technique is particularly useful for socks that are laundered more frequently than other types of garments.

Additional Considerations

When some references suggest that they should be woven in prior to blocking, I prefer to secure yarn tails after blocking. If the garment has been stretched at all during blocking, the yarn tails can pucker, particularly if darning methods were used.

If the yarn tails from a seam are secured and the seam is too tight after blocking, it is almost impossible to fix without removing part of the seam.

Bulky Yarns

If the project uses very heavy yarn, you can still use the Duplicate stitch method. Before weaving in the yarn tail, separate it into two plies and duplicate stitch each end separately. Use this same technique for weaving in yarn tails in the seams, particularly in armholes of sweaters.

Knots

There is never a good reason to use a knot in hand knits. They almost always work through to the right side and leave a bump. If the holes that are left when you join colors or a new skein bother you, tie a loose knot to secure the tails until you finish the project, then remove it before weaving in ends. If you encounter a knot within a skein of yarn, cut it off, leaving a 6" tail on each end, and treat it as if you had joined a new skein.

Conclusion

However you secure yarn tails in your projects, you should make sure they do not adversely affect the elasticity of your project and cannot be easily pulled free. Use your gauge swatch to test these methods and see how they work.

References

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