

# Tips & Techniques!

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## Tips & Techniques #14

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### DROP STITCH TECHNIQUES

Most knitters cringe at the thought of dropping stitches, but when you are in control of the situation, you'll learn to love dropped stitches and even look forward to watching them run! Drop stitch is a double bed technique that allows you to increase stitch size for a variety of reasons. It will allow your machine to knit heavier yarns (without sacrificing the width you'd lose knitting on every other needle), improve your bind offs, and create a variety of decorative effects. Drop Stitch is one of those techniques that proves that a ribber is not always for ribbing!

**THE BASIC METHOD** is the same for all machines. All of the stitches must be on the back bed before you begin. So, if you begin with ribbing, transfer all of the front bed stitches to the back bed first. Weight is very important and the ribber cast on comb is the easiest way to distribute the weight evenly. If you begin with a single bed fabric, either use a ribber comb and weights or a series of triangular combs and weights. Edge claws will not be enough, especially if you are working with heavy or novelty yarns. You'll have to experiment a bit with stitch sizes, but as a rule the back carriage should be set for a stitch size twice that on the front carriage. For some of the variations, you will need to adjust from there. Both carriages are usually set to knit and the beds should ALWAYS be in half pitch (flow combs alternate) unless you are knitting the 1 x 1 variation that follows. If you own one of the French machines, you will find the

pushing down wheels helpful when working with textured or bulky yarns.

Once you have cast on or transferred all stitches to the back bed, bring two or three needles into working position on the front bed and knit one row. If you look closely at the "stitches" on the front bed, you will see that they are not really stitches at all, just loops of yarn. In fact, when you manually move the needles forward and back, these loops will drop but you will not have to retrieve any dropped stitches because the adjacent stitches on the back bed will absorb the slack that was created by the loops dropping. Now, try knitting several rows before dropping the front bed stitches (they do look like stitches now). Lower the front bed so you can see what happens. The stitches will drop, but only by the number of rows knitted since the first loop was caught by the needles and once again all the slack will be absorbed by the back bed stitches. You see, a stitch can only run back to the point where it began, which is why you must always begin with an empty front bed. The stitches on the back bed are safe and secure and will absorb the yarn from the dropped front bed stitches. Your sample should have a more open look where the front bed stitches were dropped because those stitches are considerably larger than the others.

### CLOSE RIB/FULL NEEDLE RIB DROP STITCH

Now that you have an idea what is happening

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and are not afraid to drop the front bed stitches, bring all the front bed needles into working position as if to knit close rib (full needle rib). \*Knit one row then disconnect the front carriage and move it across the bed twice. Then reconnect the two carriages.\*\* You may need to repeat from \* to \*\* for the entire fabric if you are knitting with very fuzzy yarns. Otherwise, try knitting several rows before dropping, but be consistent throughout a garment and do not wait until the very last row to drop. Make any decreases immediately after dropping. You may need to pull down on the comb or even to add extra weight for textured yarns to make sure all of the stitches drop cleanly. It is much easier to deal with this on the machine than it is when the garment is done. The Japanese machines are supplied with a P Carriage (as ribber equipment) that is designed to drop stitches and there is a GL carriage available in some shops for the French machines as well. Additionally, the bed spacing on the French machines can be adjusted to accommodate the heavier yarns; the Japanese beds are permanently spaced further apart.

### **1 X 1 DROP STITCH**

The close rib arrangement described above is usually satisfactory, but if you are working with an especially heavy yarn, you may want to use a 1 x 1 rib needle set up instead. This will narrow the work, but not as much as working on every other needle, single bed. The basic method is the same, but you will need to make adjustments to the stitch sizes (smaller) and the beds should be in full pitch. This needle set up allows the machine to knit very easily and produces larger stitches than anything on the stitch size dial.

Before we explore any of the variations, let's take a look at some applications for the basic method beyond knitting heavy and textured yarns.

### **BINDING OFF WITH A LINKER**

If the last row of your garment was knitted on the largest stitch size on your dial and you want to use a linker to bind off, you'll be disappointed with the elasticity of the edge. However, if you end with one row of drop stitch, you will be able to use your linker regardless of the stitch size used for the garment itself.

### **BINDING OFF 1 x 1 RIBBING**

With this method, you'll be able to rehang the entire neck edge of a garment to knit the rib and then produce a bind off that will stretch as much as the rib itself! Knit one less row than required for the rib band, ending with the carriage on the right side. Put the beds into half pitch and bring the alternate, empty needles on both beds into working position and knit one row from right to left. Cut the yarn, leaving a short tail to secure the last stitch. Drop the loops from all of the alternate needles that were just brought into working position and transfer all the front bed stitches to the back bed. Use a latch tool to pull one stitch through the next as follows: When removing a knit stitch from its needle, insert the latch tool into the front of the stitch and when removing a purl stitch, insert the tool from the back of the stitch. If you are comfortable working from bed to bed, you can leave the front bed stitches right where they were and just turn the latch tool to alternately remove stitches from both beds.

### **MOCK GARTER STITCH**

Set up the needles and knit as for the close rib method, but set the front carriage to knit in one direction and slip in the other (either way is okay). There will be twice as many rows knitted on the back bed as the front, which will produce a ridged effect on the purl (right) side of the fabric. Mock Garter fabric tends to grow sideways so the ribs need to be knitted on more stitches than the body of the garment.

After knitting the ribbing, you will need to scrap it off and rehang, reducing the stitches by 1/3. Otherwise, the ribbing will be far too narrow.

This stitch can also be used to knit an interesting ruffle. Cast-on 12 stitches and knit with the Mock Garter stitch method, periodically dropping the front bed stitches manually, but NOT dropping the last four stitches on the left because they will form the straight edge of the ruffle. At the end of the knitting, transfer these four stitches to the main bed and bind them off with all of the other stitches.

### **CROSSING CABLES WITH EXTRA EASE**

Work with the beds in half pitch throughout. As long as the beds are in half pitch anyhow, you might want to use the front bed to knit purl stitches along side the cables or for wide ribs between cables. In this case, remember that you will need to drop the selected stitches manually, not with the disconnected front carriage. Knit one less row than needed between cable crossings. Prior to knitting the last row before crossing, bring an empty front bed needle into working position opposite the center of each cable on the main bed. Knit 1 row. Drop the loops just formed and return the empty needles to nonworking position. Cross cables and continue knitting. The dropped stitches eliminate the strain on the machine and the yarn when crossing large cables or working with very inelastic yarns. One extra needle is usually sufficient at the center of a 2 x 2 cable, but you may need two needles for 3 x 3 cables. Do not use more drop stitches than you really need or the crossed cable stitches will appear loose and sloppy.

### **SWINGING DROP STITCHES**

Begin with the beds in half pitch, all stitches on the back bed. The front bed should be fully racked to the left. Bring every 5th needle on the front bed into working position. \*Knit 2

rows, rack front bed once to the right\*\*. Repeat until front bed cannot be racked any further. Drop all front bed stitches and rack bed back to starting position. Bring front needles into working position to continue the pattern in progress and repeat above directions. You will need to add/eliminate front bed needles at the edges of the fabric as the beds are racked. This can easily be varied by the number and position of the needles used on the front bed or by the racking sequence.

### **PATTERNED DROP STITCHES**

**Checkerboard Pattern:** Alternate three working with three non-working needles on the front bed. Knit (for example) four rows and then drop the front bed stitches. Rack the bed or manually exchange the position of the working and non-working needles and repeat. You can vary this pattern by alternating two colors every repeat or every two repeats.

**Checkerboard with Waves:** Do not use the front carriage to drop the stitches because there are some stitches that are never dropped. These are indicated on the charts (Please see following page for Chart #1 and Chart #2) by (x) and are transferred to the back bed at the end of the knitting for binding off. With all stitches on the back bed, bring the front bed needles indicated on chart #1 into working position. There should be three non-working needles between each group of five working needles. Knit 10 rows and then manually drop the center three stitches in each group and put the empty needles into non-working position. Bring the alternate groups of 3 needles into working position (as shown in chart #2) and repeat. The stitches marked (x) provide the first and fifth stitches for both needle set ups and create the wavy lines between the blocks of dropped stitches.

**Tapered Motif:** Arrange groups of three or more needles across the front bed. Knit four

rows and drop all front bed stitches. Eliminate one needle from the edge of each group on the front bed with each successive repeat until only one needle remains.

**Automatic Patterning:** You can also use the punchcard or electronic patterning built into your machine to knit fancy drop stitch patterns! In this case, you must begin with all stitches on the front bed and all (empty) needles in working position on the back bed. The back carriage should be set to slip so that it only knits the selected needles; you can also try setting it to knit in one direction and slip in the other. With this kind of drop stitch it is best to drop stitches after each pass of the carriage. If your machine has a "P" carriage this speeds things up. Check your manual for specific directions for knitting Drive Lace (as this is sometimes called) and Pile Knitting. Pile Knitting is another form of drop stitch that produces a raised pile surface on the fabric.

You may not want to knit an entire sweater in drop stitch, so use bands of stockinette or patterned knitting to separate drop stitch areas, but make sure you check the gauge for each section.

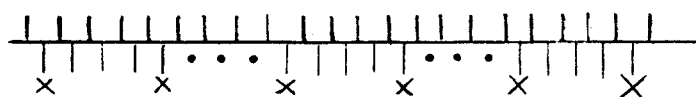


Chart #1

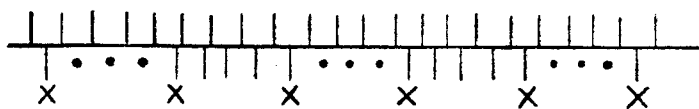


Chart #2