

Colorwork in Knitting

A Sample of Techniques, Patterns, and Tips from Vicki Skywark, October 15, 2022.

Reference: [The Essential Guide to Color Knitting Techniques](#), 2008, by Margaret Radcliffe

Yarn Tip: Natural/non-superwash yarns work best. Try heathers, tweeds, variegated, space-dyed and marled yarns.

Techniques:

1. The simplest way to create dramatic color is with stripes, single or double. “Passepartout” by Judith Feller and “Newsprint Cowl” by Purl Soho are fun and easy patterns. Both use spiral knitting to remove the need to cut yarn. With flat knitting, drop the yarn and carry each color up the selvedge. Use circular needles to repeat a right-side row with your contrast yarn.
2. Stranded (e.g., Icelandic and Fair Isle) patterns require a larger needle in the patterned area to prevent puckering. Floats should be caught if they span more than 3-4 stitches. Pullovers with simple designs are best for beginners. “Fern & Feather” by Jennifer Steingass is a nice one. Cardigans are often knit in the round with a steek, which is later cut and bound off. The “Emma Hat” by Louisa Harding is a quick and easy place to start.
3. Mosaic knitting uses a similar technique to stranded knitting but is done over two rows. Each color is knitted separately across the rows with skipped stitches knitted later with the second color. I love “The Shift” by Andrea Mowry, which is fascinating in construction and made of gorgeous Dyed in the Wool yarn.
4. Intarsia is great for blocks of color on flat knitting. When changing colors, bring new color from under the old color. It’s more difficult on circular knitting.
5. Embroidery on knitting creates dimension; it’s done much the same as on felt after the knitted fabric is made.
6. Duplicate stitch mimics the shape of knit stitches. Follow the path of the yarn with a contrast color.

Color Basics:

- Use the color wheel. Seek coordination in analogous or complementary hues.
- Don’t feel you must stick to only one method in a piece. Embroider over stripes? Sure!
- Check contrast and intensity of color choices with black-and-white filter on your phone camera.
- Tonal dyes are randomly saturated through the yarn; emphasize them by purling darkest tones.
- Wet-blocking sets the stitches and binds the fibers to lock your colorwork in place.
- Apply your skills to a Christmas stocking for a special person! There are many free patterns on Ravelry which I’ve combined for unique designs; I love “Spindleknitters’ Stockings” by Kristen Hall and Louise Lamarche’s patterns for their elegant finishing techniques.