

CGI.M2.L01.3: Colourwork – Fair Isle Weaving in - Knit and purl rows

Fair Isle essentials

Fair Isle colourwork traditionally uses just two colours per row. In many cases the patterns are delicate with between one to three stitches between each colour change to create the familiar designs that we know and love. With these stitch patterns we can use the normal stranding technique, swapping between colours as we knit. The yarns at the back of the work (the 'floats' or 'floating yarn') can be neatly held in place as the distance between the colour changes is frequent so the floats are short.

However, in some patterns there may be occasions when the colour changes are spread over a greater number of stitches. In this situation, if we were simply to carry the yarns at the back of the work the floats would be much longer. This can have the effect of distorting the stitches as it is difficult to maintain an even tension. It can also mean that fingers and toes catch in the floats (particularly annoying with socks!).

To get round this problem we use 'weaving in'. It's simple to do and avoids the issues caused by long floats. The finished appearance on the right side of the work should be lovely and neat and the back is much tidier and less likely to snag.

Knit row



1. Knit the next row, changing colours as normal until you reach a section with 5 or more stitches worked in one colour. Knit the first two stitches in the new colour (B). Return to colour A and bring it underneath B. Yarn A lays over B.
2. Knit the next three stitches in yarn B, leaving yarn A at the back of the work. Note how yarn A is anchored in the middle of the group of 5 stitches where it was laid over yarn B in step 2.

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3. Make the next colour change to yarn A as normal.



4. Continue to the end of the row, weaving in where a single colour is used for more than 5 stitches. If there is a long stretch of one colour, weave in every third stitch.



5. When seen from the back of the work the woven-in yarn A can be seen trapped by yarn B (in the middle of the five stitches worked in B). This creates a nice even float that shouldn't catch when worn.

Purl row

Weave in on purl rows using the same technique as for knit rows, keeping the yarns to the front (the side of the work facing you). As with knit rows, check for even floats.

TOP TIP

- At the end of each row, gently pull the fabric across the width to ensure there is enough give and the floats are not pulling in too tightly. If they are puckering the fabric or have very little give, it's best to take back the row and re-work.
- Depending on the thickness of the yarn, consider weaving-in if a colour change extends over 4 or more stitches.
- If there is a long stretch of colour (as a guide, over 12 stitches depending on the yarn) you may wish to consider an intarsia technique for that section
- Weaving in does create quite a dense fabric so allow for this when choosing your garment size
- Blocking will help to smooth out stitches in colourwork but take care to make weaving in and stranded floats as evenly tensioned as possible