



Introduction

A knitted blank is simply a flat piece of knitting (usually machine-knitted) which is dyed, unravelled then re-knitted into the chosen project. It is a quick and easy way to create interesting patterns such as stripes, blocks of colour, graduated colours and simple “Faux Fairisle” designs. It can be used for projects which require a series of pattern repeats.

Introduction

Blanks are normally knitted to 60 stitches wide, but this can be varied for different effects. Most commonly available in 4ply (sock weight) yarn, they are basically a flat knitted fabric which, rather than being cast off in the normal way, is left unfinished on a “lifeline”. Alternatively, a few rows of waste yarn may be knitted and these are simply unravelled before the piece is re-knitted. Blanks can be knitted with two strands of yarn. This makes them popular for socks as both strands are effectively painted together so they should, once unravelled, knit up to make a matching pair of socks. Of course, there is much more to blanks than socks and there are many ways to experiment with different patterns, blank sizes, yarn weights and projects.

Using blanks is very quick and easy. With patience and planning, it is possible to make quite complicated pattern repeats, working with blocks, stripes, dots and other patterns.

A wide range of colours can be incorporated into your blank, including undyed areas. Where a number of colours are used, and particularly where white (undyed) areas are required, it may be necessary to work in sections, painting and fixing sections as you go, rather than doing all the painting at once.

Blanks can be readily used for both flat knitting and knitting in the round. Although more often used for smaller projects such as socks, hats, baby and childrenswear, it is also possible to use blanks for larger projects such as adult garments either by incorporating a patterned blank into a plain pattern, or by making a series of matching blanks.

This method offers a fair degree of accuracy but don't expect perfection! There may still be some slight variation in pattern repeats and minor variations in knitting tension and accuracy of initial measurements will influence the degree of repeatability.

In theory any yarn can be used for this method. However, in the case of machine-knitted blanks, the capabilities of the knitting machine may limit the yarns that can be used. Blanks can be knitted by hand but this does of course add to the time involved. Thicker yarns are more difficult to work with as it is more challenging to achieve good coverage with a thicker fabric.

Dyed blanks are quite repeatable providing good records are maintained. It is handy if you can take a couple of pictures of your blank before it is unravelled as this will be a good reminder of your technique!

Materials needed

As for procion dyeing plus:

- Paintbrushes/sponges/syringes/basters for applying dye to yarn.
- Knitted blank (or knitted fabric) made from a fibre suitable for the dye being used.
- Manutex (optional). For more precise application, manutex can be used to thicken dyes and reduce spread of colour.

Method

Procion MX dye powders are very easy to use, however, there are a few basic safety guidelines to follow (see below). There are just three simple stages in the dyeing process and armed with these basic instructions you will soon be off on your own colour adventure!

1. Plan your pattern and colour scheme

Plan out your colour scheme by sketching out your design using paints or coloured pencils on graph paper. Use an image to guide you if you wish.

Special note for patterns worked in rounds

If you are planning to knit a pattern in the round, remember that the left and right hand edges of your blank will be joined together when knitted. So if, for example, you are painting in vertical stripes, the stripes on the left and right hand edges should be half the width of the remaining stripes as these will form a single full width stripe when knitted.

Patterns involving dots, dashes or similar changes within a row will require a little care and plotting these patterns on graph paper or a sketch is recommended if patterns are to line up as planned.

2. Plan your pattern and colour scheme

Make up your dyes

Once you know what colours you plan to use, make up your dye solutions according to the instructions for multi-coloured skeins in lesson CGI-M2-L02-1. Remember that the strength of the solution will determine the depth of colour on the skein.

Apply the dyes

- i. Prepare your blank by soaking as per the basic dyeing instructions for multi-coloured skeins.
- ii. Lay out a length of clingfilm the length of your blank. If you can't fit all the blank on your table, roll up one end and unroll as you paint.
- iii. Lay a layer of paper towels/kitchen paper on top of the clingfilm to absorb excess dye.
- iv. Lay a section of your blank on top of the kitchen paper.
- v. Paint dye onto your blank. Add dye gradually so as to minimise the risk of excess dye contaminating other parts of the blank. You can use a brush, sponge, syringe or similar tool to apply the dye. Periodically check that dye has penetrated the section you are painting by very carefully lifting it up and peeking underneath. Paint to within a couple of centimetres of the next colour then use your fingers to gently smooch the dye to the changeover point. If the next section is white, be careful not to stray into this section. If you need to roll up your blank because you haven't enough space, mop up any excess dye with a cloth/paper towel to prevent cross-contamination. Lay a second layer of kitchen paper over the blank you've just painted and roll up the painted section like a swiss roll. Unroll the next unpainted section and repeat.
- vi. Repeat this process for each section until all sections have been painted.
- vii. For areas where pastels are next to deep colours, you may wish to set the colours in stages. In this case, after wrapping your blank, microwave/steam it carefully, ensuring that the remainder of the blank does not come into contact with the painted section and that the unwrapped sections do not become dry. This will burn the yarn. Spritz with water if necessary to re-dampen the blank.
- viii. Allow the blank to cool then work on the next section, leaving the clingfilm in place. Repeat until you have completed your painting, then microwave/steam the skein a final time.
- ix. Allow the yarn to cool in the clingfilm then rinse. If you plan to wind your yarn into balls for knitting, unravel the blank and wind it into two skeins on a skein-winder, niddy-noddy (or rounds someone's hands!) whilst it is still damp. Let it dry on the skein before winding into two balls. You may find it helpful to weight the skein slightly to draw out any kinks – not too much or it will make the yarn lifeless and over-stretched. A shower gel bottle with a hook can be filled with water and hung on the bottom of the skein. Adjust the water level until it is just the right weight!
- x. Allow your blank or skein to dry naturally, away from direct heat.

Once your blank is dry you can simply undo the lifeline and either knit straight from the blank or wind off into a ball (or two balls for double-stranded blanks).

TOP TIPS

- For more distinct colours, dyes can be thickened with manutex before application.
- Paste resists such as manutex can also be applied between colours to keep white areas white or to prevent colours mixing at the “joins”.
- Be careful to ensure that colour has properly penetrated, especially with thicker or double-stranded blanks.
- You can use any dye that is suitable for the yarn in the blank. For wools and wool/nylon blends (or other protein/animal fibres) procion dyes (acid dye method), acid dyes, natural dyes or kool aid can be used. Be sure to follow the instructions for preparing theyarn for dyeing and making up the dyes as required by your dye supplier.

Health and safety guidelines

All dyes should be supplied with safety guidelines and these should be read carefully but in general, treat dyes much like any other chemical product in your house:

- Avoid inhaling dye powders – a dust mask is recommended when working with powders.
- Avoid inhaling vapours from dye pots and work in a well-ventilated area.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke while working with dyes.
- Dyes do stain so protect your skin, clothes and your dyeing area.
- Keep a separate set of utensils for dyeing only. Label (or keep clearly separated) all your dyeing equipment and don't use it for cooking or other activities. When using a stove or microwave clean thoroughly after each dyeing session.
- As with all chemicals, label dyes and store well out of reach of children and animals.
- Avoid dyeing if you are, or think you may be, pregnant.
- Please consider the environment when disposing of dyes. The quantities of dyes you will be using should have minimum impact and small amounts of diluted dye in your rinse water should not cause any problems. However, it is advisable, particularly if you plan to dye in significant quantities or have a septic tank, to take your unwanted dye solutions to your local waste disposal site where they may be dealt with according to the guidelines in your area.

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