City & Guilds Foundation Programme - Knitting

CGI.M2.L06.1:   Decreasing –
Slip slip knit (ssk) and slip slip purl (ssp)

Introduction

In addition to the familiar purpose of using decreases as a means of making a knitted fabric smaller, decreases (and increases) are used to shape necklines, armholes and for pockets, buttonholes and other key design features.

From the simplest accessory to the most complex garment, understanding how shaping affects the look and feel of a finished fabric is the key to success. The right shaping technique, whether it is intended to be discreet and inobtrusive or showy and decorative, can really set your pieces apart and give them that designer look.

Shaping isn't limited to the purely functional aspects of knitting design. Interesting effects can be achieved by restructuring knits with shaping. For example, something as simple as making a blanket square from two triangles rather than in a single piece is an easy way to create a surprisingly different look without affecting the finished shape. Shaping is an essential part of sculptural knits such as knitted toys and other 3-d knits.

Whether you are working to a commercial pattern or your own design it can be fun to play around with different ways of decreasing stitches and, even if a designer's pattern is followed, it is useful to understand why a particular decrease has been chosen and to observe the effect achieved when the pattern is completed.

If you are planning to design or adapt your own pattern, you may like to try different decreases by making swatches beforehand and seeing how they work together. Attention to small details such as decreases can really make a difference to the look of your garment.

Depending on the type of decrease used, some are barely noticeable, others intentionally bold for decorative effect. A decrease will normally slant, either to the right or left.

Slip, slip, knit (ssk) - left-slanting decrease

The ideal pairing for a K2tog is a slip, slip, knit (ssk). It gives a neat, left sloping stitch with a slight ridge.

Work to where you want to place your ssk.

1. Insert the right needle into the next stitch as if to knit (knitwise), then slip it onto the right needle without knitting it.

2. Repeat with next stitch on the left needle so that you have 2 slipped stitches on the right needle. Note that the stitches should be slipped one at a time.

3. Insert the tip of the left needle from right to left up into the front of the two slipped stitches (the right needle is behind the left needle).

4. Knit these two stitches together. One stitch decreased.

5. The decrease can be seen here, slanting to the left.

Slip, slip, purl (ssp) - left-slanting decrease

Slip slip purl (ssp) is the reverse of the ssk. To create a good match with the ssk, working the ssp on a purl row means that the stitches the purl two together (p2tog) should be done through the back of the loop. This is quite fiddly but if you try to keep your stitches 'soft' (like Goldilocks – not too tight, not too loose, but just right!) it is a good match and worth the effort.

1. Slip the first stitch knitwise (as if to knit) to the RH needle.

2. Slip the second stitch knitwise to the RH needle.

Note: It is important to slip these two stitches separately. Slipping them together twists the stitches and the ssp will not look correct

3. Transfer both slipped stitches back to the LH needle. This simply changes the orientation of these two stitches.

Work these two stitches by making a purl two together through the back of the loop (p2togtbl) as follows:

4. Bring the yarn to the front as for a normal purl stitch. Take the RH needle behind the LH needle and insert the RH needle through both of the slipped stitches from the back. The RH needle goes up in front of the LH needle from R to L.

5. Purl both of these stitches as one stitch, bringing the working yarn through both stitches. One stitch decreased.

6. Note that these two decreases create a noticeable ridge in the fabric. For a less obtrusive, flat decrease the k2tog (or p2tog) are more often used.