

Stitch Smarts

by Bethany Dailey

(Originally published in the Loom Knitters Circle Magazine, Summer 2012 Issue)

The Scoop on Seaming

Now that you have the all important skills of casting on and binding off under your belt from the comparisons during our last two sessions at Stitch Smarts, it's time to dive into another essential skill for creating beautiful items with our looms: Seaming!

I'd love to share with you a comparison some of the main methods of seaming that are commonly used today. Some of them are better for certain knitted items than others. Some of them may simply have that particular look you'd prefer for your current project. I hope the following comparisons will make it easier for you to choose which method will be the best one to employ for that special project you've spent so much time knitting with care.

Because seaming is a skill that all needle workers must learn, there is seemingly no end to the excellent tutorials that can be employed for any type of yarn crafting method. I've chosen a few out of the many that I thought would be of particular use to you in your loom knitting endeavors.

This link is to a post containing several how-to seaming videos by our very own Isela Phelps: http://isela.typepad.com/looming_crafts/2006/11/loom_y_q_a_seami.html

The following link is to an article by Vogue Knitting which contains very precise illustrations on how to work a variety of seaming techniques for which you might have occasion to use: http://www.vogueknitting.com/pattern_help/how-to/beyond_the_basics/seaming.aspx



Now let's take a closer look at some different seaming techniques:

Mattress Stitch



This is the most common and widely used type of seaming technique in the world of knitting today. It is very simple to do and creates an invisible seam from the outside of your work, with a selvage edge at the inside. A selvage edge is made up of the outermost stitches of your pieces to be sewn together and when the seam has been created, it forms a bit of a bulky line at the inside of the seam. This type of technique should be avoided if you're creating a project that requires a seam in an area where extra bulk is not desirable, such as at the bottom of a slipper, or the thumb of a mitten; anywhere where that extra bulk to the seams would cause discomfort for the wearer.



(back side of the Mattress Stitch)

There are two different methods that are common with the Mattress Stitch. One involves sewing through one stitch at a time on alternating sides of your knitted panels, as is detailed in this video by Isela Phelps: http://isela.typepad.com/looming_crafts/2006/11/loomy_q_a_seami.html

The second involves sewing through two stitches at a time on alternating sides of your knitted panels, as is detailed in this illustrated tutorial: <http://www.yarn-store.com/technique-seaming-row-to-row.html>



There are two alternative seaming methods, which also fall into the Mattress Stitch family, that I like to use when the seam will be located in a sensitive area, or any place in a project that I do not want that extra bulk on the inside of the seam. The first is created by sewing through the outermost loops of a garter stitch edging. Those little bumps create the perfect place to add a line of stitching, which will pull your knitted pieces directly together in a join without that selvage edge bulk. This seam looks almost invisible from both the front and the back of the knitted piece.



(Garter Mattress Stitch)

The other type is when working a slipped (or skipped) stitch at the first stitch of every row. This creates a running chain along the outside edges of your knitted panels. When seaming these panels together, you can insert your yarn needle directly inside the centers of each of these outside chain links. Bring your yarn needle back out the center of the next chain link in line, then over to the opposite knitted panel to repeat the procedure. This technique pulls the chain edges right up against one another, which creates the look of a knitted chain, at both the front and the back of the seam.



(Mattress Stitch worked on a slipped stitch edge)



Whipstitch/Overhand Seaming:



This is a quick and simple seaming method in which the yarn needle is worked in a circular motion around the edges to be seamed. This can be used as both a hidden seam by working with right sides of your knitting together, or a decorative design choice by working the seam on the outside of your knitting where it will add to the finished look of the piece. The stitches used can be spaced closer or farther apart, depending on the purpose of the seam, as well as the knitter's personal choice.

Blanket Stitch:



Projects can be beautified by the extra touches added to the outside edges. The Blanket Stitch is a technique which is commonly used for just this purpose. It can also be used as a structural seam when joining two knitted pieces together. I also like to use this stitch as a way to secure linings to knitted bags. With its running stitch along the top edge of the seam, this technique is perfect for securely closing that fabric lining.



(Blanket Stitch for purse lining)



To Knot, or Not to Knot...

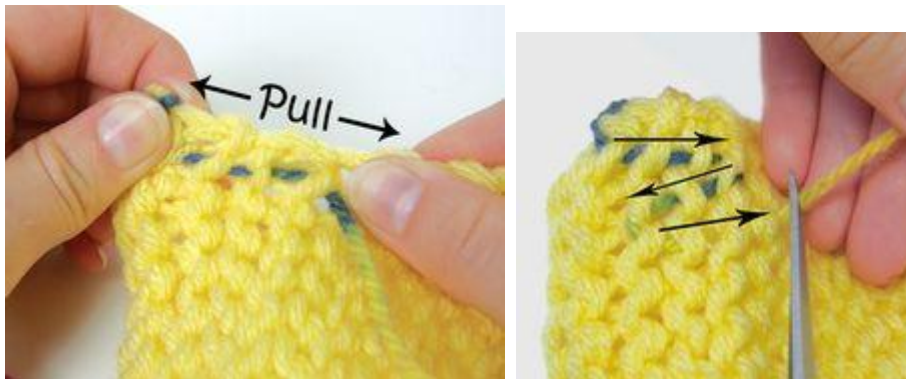
One of the issues about finishing a project that is questioned regularly is whether or not to tie a knot into your knitted work. Some sources state that you should never tie a knot into your knitting. Others use knots regularly to complete their projects. I am of the school of thought that it depends on where that knot will be that will determine if it should be there or not.

When creating craft items, such as toys and novelty items, for which the inside will never be seen or worn next to the skin, a knot is a completely fine thing to do. It won't in anyway detract from the beauty of the finished work of fiber art.

When creating garments to be worn and items that can be seen from both sides (such as scarves or blankets) I am highly against knots. These can be both unsightly and uncomfortable. Instead, weaving in your ends correctly will not only hold your ends securely in place, but will illustrate the time and care taken to create a cherished item, beautiful inside and out.

To weave in your yarn ends correctly takes a little bit of skill and practice, but following these steps should ensure your ends stay in place through many years of loving use:

- First, with your yarn tail threaded onto a yarn needle, stitch through three or four stitches in one direction, then turn and stitch in the other direction twice more. You'll be sewing in the shape of the letter "Z".
- It helps to split the stitches you'll be sewing through with your needle, to help the ends stay secure.
- In between each direction line of the "Z", make sure to pull and stretch the stitches of your knitted piece in the place where you have just stitched. This helps keep your ends from slipping out when the knitted piece is stretched later on during use.
- Trim ends close to work, leaving a ¼" tail.



Some Helpful Hints for Seaming

A few things to consider, no matter what type of seaming method you choose to employ:

- When you know that an edge is going to be seamed to another, leave a long cast on or bind off yarn tail while knitting. This will let you begin seaming right away, without having to add another length of yarn.
- If you're using a novelty yarn which has a lot of thicker elements to it which would make seaming difficult, choose another basic yarn of a similar weight, color, and washing requirements for your seaming.
- When creating a garment or project for which there are a lot of precise seams to join, make sure to block your pieces before seaming. This will help you be able to find those edge loops much easier and will also help you achieve beautifully even seams.
- When pulling your seam stitches together, make sure to only add enough tension to get the job done. Relax while you're seaming and take your time. This will help you achieve seams that lay flat and do not pucker from too much applied tension.
- Using knitting pins to hold the pieces that are to be seamed together helps greatly in achieving a precise and even seam.

Happy Looming to you!

Bethany~



Bethany A. Dailey has loved the art of loom knitting since 2005. She discovered that even with hand and wrist limitations, she was still able to successfully create lots of fibery goodies on her knitting looms. She soon began teaching locally, as well as online through her website, GettinItPegged.com. Bethany has participated in several loom knitting publications over the years and has just released her debut book, *Loom Knitting for Little People*. You can reach her at Bethany@GettinItPegged.com.