

LACE: The Artful Arrangement of Holes

By *Cheryl Brunette*

An EYELET is a small hole that you plant in a piece of knitted fabric. Depending on how many holes you make and how you arrange them, you can create anything from a single buttonhole to a fishing net. If you scatter some across your fabric in a more or less orderly way, you have an EYELET PATTERN. If you throw in some more holes and pay close attention to the direction in which stitches lean on the right side of the fabric, you have LACE.

Mind you, the distinction between eyelet patterns and lace is arbitrary. However, teachers, like the geographers who invented longitude and latitude, must sometimes draw imaginary lines to help their students find the territory.

HOLEY FABRIC

Eyelet or lace fabrics are shorter and than comparable *stockinette* pieces. In other words, if you are tall and slender or if you like to predict the final size of your garment, you must do a gauge swatch in pattern stitch.

You must also block the swatch, carefully stretching the fabric; your goal is to open the holes and get the piece to lie flat without distorting the knitted stitches. Apply the "Goldilocks Principle" here: pull neither too hard nor too gently, but just right.

Some fibers (especially synthetic) may not be able to survive the heat and pressure needed to block some elaborate diagonal lace patterns. My blue alpaca overall lace sweater came off the machine looking more like a lumpy moonscape than the magazine picture I thought I was copying. [you can see a close-up of this sweater and a lace sampler I did for the BOND on [this video](#)] I laid a damp cloth over it and pressed down much harder than usual with the steam iron to get it flat. Your swatch will tell you if your fiber and pattern can peacefully coexist or if your fiber will melt before it lies down.

MAKING THE HOLES

If you can use a transfer tool, you can make eyelets. The process consists of transferring 1, 2 or 3 stitches (depending on which end of which tool you've chosen) to the tool and moving them one needle to the left or right to leave an empty needle. A hole will form on the next row on each empty needle. How big the hole will be depends on what you do with the empty needle before you knit that next row. You have 3 choices:

1. BIGGEST HOLE, LEAST EFFORT. After transferring the stitches, leave the empty needle in WP, latches open. Knit two rows. On the first row, yarn-overs form on the empty needles. They knit automatically on the **second** row.

2. MEDIUM-SIZED HOLE, MEDIUM EFFORT. After transferring the stitches, put empty needles into HP. Knit one row. Push HP needles to **HKP**, latches open. Knit one row. The holes are formed and you're knitting normally.

3. SMALLEST HOLE, MOST EFFORT. After transferring the stitches, put empty needles in **NWP**. Knit one row. With a transfer tool, lift the "ladders" that formed onto the empty needles.

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You'll automatically pull those needles into WP and you'll be ready to resume normal knitting.

Practice all three methods and choose the one you like best for a given project. I generally use method 2 which I find to be a good compromise.

SLANTING STITCHES, THE OTHER INGREDIENT OF LACE

Now that you can make them you need to know that holes alone do not a lace pattern make. To empty a needle for a hole you must "double up 2 stitches" or "decrease"; and *the direction in which those decreases lean* can make the difference between an elegant lace panel or what appears to be a cluster of little sea-anemone mouths nesting in the front of your sweater.

Properly executed and aligned, the decreases form ridge lines that move vertically and diagonally across your fabric defining the space around and between the holes. The result is a pleasing, visually rhythmic pattern, and you need to map it all out before knitting.

ARTFULLY ARRANGING THE HOLES

Many eyelet and lace patterns are available and nearly all of them are written or charted for hand knitters. In your lonesome workroom, facing a **hand knit** lace sweater pattern you've determined to do on the machine, how do you get from that odd line of letters, symbols and numbers to a finished product? You follow three simple steps:

STEP 1) Select an easily adapted pattern.

STEP 2) Map it out.

STEP 3) Sit down at the machine and let your head and hands translate the map into movement.

STEP ONE: Choose an Easily Adapted Pattern

All you need to do is to read through the pattern to see if it meets these criteria for an easily adapted pattern:

- a. The background is stockinette (i.e. knit a row, purl a row rather than knit every row).
- b. Every other row is knit plain, without holes.
- c. Every row has the same number of stitches.

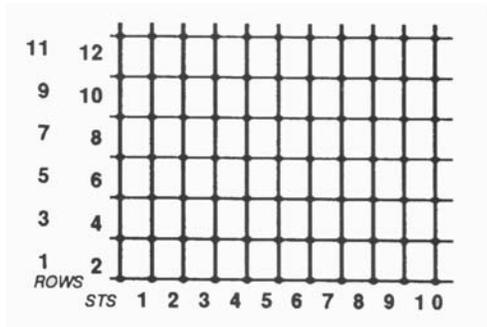
These sound like huge limitations, but they aren't. Hundreds of the most common lace patterns you meet will qualify.

STEP TWO: Draw a Map

Get out some graph paper and a pencil. You're going to map the holes and double-ups of the fabric from the **WRONG** side, the side you're looking at as you knit. You might also find some "triple-ups," 3 stitches that get gobbled into one and leave you with two empty needles.

If you're lucky, the pattern tells you how many stitches and rows per pattern repeat. If not, just draw an upper case "L" and start numbering. The lower left corner is your starting place and it should look something like this:

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Notice that you chart only every other row. Sometimes you work the pattern on the even rows, sometimes on the odd rows. Just write in the set of numbers that fits your pattern.

The in-between rows are plain and you don't need to draw all those hyphens. Also, an **every-other-row** chart is a more accurate picture of the finished knitting than an **every-row** chart.

Now it's time to read the directions and, starting at row 1, stitch 1, mark one stitch, decrease, or yarn over per square using the symbols shown below. Don't think about it. Just count carefully and trust the **squiggles**.

Your pattern may have some funny *'s. They tell you where the pattern begins and ends. Often there are selvedge stitches before or after those *'s, so be careful not to include them in the pattern itself.

Don't be intimidated if you haven't a clue as to what all that stuff means. It's just a collection of hand knitting terms translated into symbols that we can interpret at the machine. The last symbol, , represents the center stitch. I described its **hand knitting** equivalent to keep it consistent with the others.

After you've charted one repeat of the pattern, compare it to the photo of the knitted piece you're imitating. They should look like sisters. If they don't, reread the pattern and try again.

STEP THREE: Following Your Map

The O's mark empty needles. The hyphens are single stitches. The trick is to work on the decreases first, then move the other stitches around to get the O's in the right places. Each decrease makes room for a specific hole; a triple-up has 2 holes that go with it.

Until you get used to reading charts, work the decreases with a single-prong tool. You can use multiple prongs to move plain stitches around.

Remember to do all the transfers from one row of your graph and knit 2 rows before you do the next row of your graph. Put the decrease needles, plus any that seem "strained" from having stitches transferred around them, into **FWP**. The following symbol guide tells you what to do when you meet one of the decrease squiggles.

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The symbols for
STEP TWO 

THE SYMBOLS

— =K (knit)

 =K 2 tog (knit 2 together)

 =SSK (slip, slip, knit) or Sl 1, K 1, pss0 (slip 1, knit 1, pass the slipped st over the knitted stitch)

○ =YO (yarn over)

 =K 3 tog (knit 3 together)

 =K 3 tog TBL (knit 3 together through the back loops)

 =S2SK (slip 2 together knitwise, slip 1 knitwise, insert the left needle into the front of the 3 sts and knit them off)

The Symbol Guide for
STEP THREE 

SYMBOL GUIDE

	(This usually sits left of its paired hole). The long diagonal is the st that will end up closest to you. Start with it. Move it 1 needle to the right; then move the 2 sts back 1 ndl to the left. (This is also called a reverse transfer).	
	If this symbol appears to the right of its partner hole, simply move the st 1 needle to the right.	
	(A mirror image of the above that usually sits rt of its paired hole). Again, the long diagonal is the st that will end up closest to you. Start with it. Move it 1 needle to the left, then move both sts back to the needle you started with.	
	If this symbol appears to the left of its partner hole, simply move the st 1 needle to the left.	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start with the middle of the 3 sts. Move it to the right. 2. Take both those sts and move them back to the center needle. 3. Move the left st to the center needle. 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Move the middle of the 3 sts to the left. 2. Move both of those sts back to the center needle. 3. Move the right st to the center needle. 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Move the left of the 3 sts to the center needle. 2. Move the right of the 3 sts to the center needle. 	

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The drawings are primitive and a little funky, I know, but this system not only works, it opens up a hole* new knitting arena for you. Enjoy!

*[Sorry, I couldn't resist.]

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<http://HowToKnitASweater.com>

<http://sweater101.com>