

Earning Your Stripes

by Maddy Cranley

A "stripe" is defined as "a line or long narrow section differing in color or texture from parts adjoining". Knitting is a natural when it comes to creating stripes. The needles act as guardian of the straight line, that crossover point, where changes in color or texture can be made. It is up for grabs as how to fill in those rows that make up a stripe and the ever-popular horizontal line and color change are just a start in choosing how to stripe a sweater.

It is quite simple to incorporate stripes into an uncomplicated knitting pattern. The more difficult choice is what colors to choose. Once yarns, that are compatible in gauge and fiber content are assembled, the next step is to see how the chosen colors will relate to one another when placed in a striped pattern. General rules will apply such as dark lines on pure color will have the tendency to deepen the entire look of the garment. Light areas will appear larger than dark areas. Warm colors will pop out to the eye more than cool colors.

Woven rugs and fabrics can offer up varied inspiration particularly if they embody a balance of color and stripe thickness to result in an eye-pleasing combination. A hour or two spent flipping through upholstery fabric swatches or wallpaper sample books may result in a dynamite sequence of striped color.

Stripes can vary by size from the bold stripes of a rugby shirt, which may be three or four large bands of color, to pinstripes and all sizes between. The stripes need not be uniform in size throughout the garment. Increasing or decreasing the size of the stripe by one or two rows and repeating the same sequence of those smaller and larger stripes, will definitely add interest.

Stripes can also be distinguished by texture. Rows of garter stitch or seed stitch alternating with plain knitting create an understated stripe when only one color of yarn is used. A few rows of bobbles or of simple lace can create a stripe of interesting effect. Paying careful attention so that the gauge is the same for each chosen stitch pattern will avoid creating an unevenness in the finished measurement. Simple stitches to knit for subtle changes can be found in knitting dictionaries and stitch guides.

Placement of the stripes can also add further appeal. Use vertical or horizontal striping in the ribbing of bands and cuffs. Try a striped collar or pocket to stand alone on a plain-colored background. Begin to work stripes at the start of the garment piece and narrow the stripes to fade into a one-color finish. Stripe one sleeve and leave the other plain. Stripes do not have to remain horizontal. A little trickier to knit, vertical or diagonal stripes add their own flourish. Yarn bobbins will be needed and careful twisting of the yarns at color changeover points will keep your stripes in line.

So to earn your stripes, incorporate several rows or more in your next project. Choose a simple pattern that will easily accept a change of stitch pattern and welcome a color change every few rows. It will all make for a very unique sweater, not to mention the release from guilt knowing that those leftover balls of yarn are being put to such good use.

Maddy Cranley is a professional knitwear designer, who has created exclusive designs for knitting and craft magazines, authored and published three books on the subject of creating felt garments and projects from handknitting, and produces an ever-growing line of maddy laine handknitting patterns. For additional information, see <http://www.maddycraft.com>

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