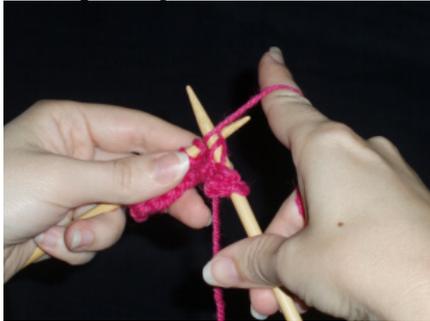


Continental Purling

Why it's hard

Continental purling is tricky because the direction of pull on the yarn makes it want to jump away from the tip of the needle. Here's a comparison of English purling and Continental purling:



See how in the English method, the yarn is nearly perpendicular to the needle, while in the Continental method the yarn is more nearly parallel to the needle? And in addition, it's on the side away from the direction you're trying to make it go, so it doesn't want to come along nicely through the old stitch. It really isn't your imagination that it doesn't want to behave!

Basics of the stitch

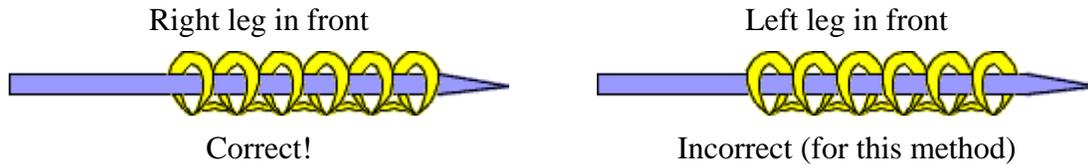
To do the Continental purl, insert the right needle from right to left into the stitch, so that the right needle tip is between the working yarn and the left needle.



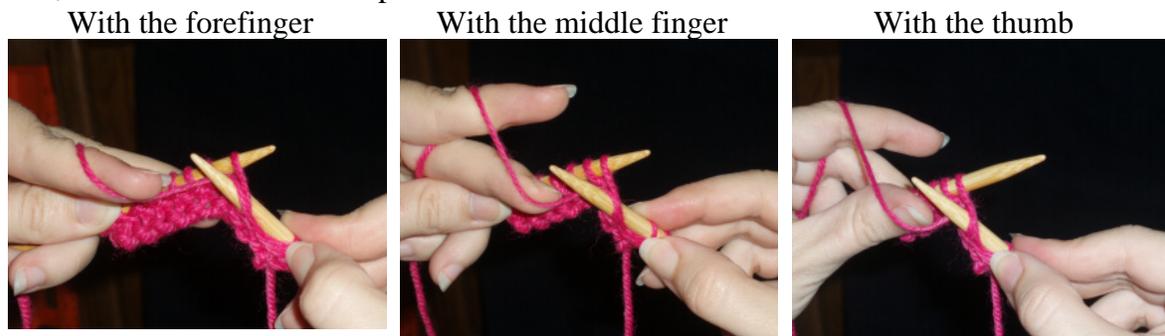
The right needle tip comes under and in front of the yarn, and then pulls it backwards through the old stitch.



Make sure that your yarn is wrapping the correct way around the needle, so you're getting the correct stitch orientation for this method.



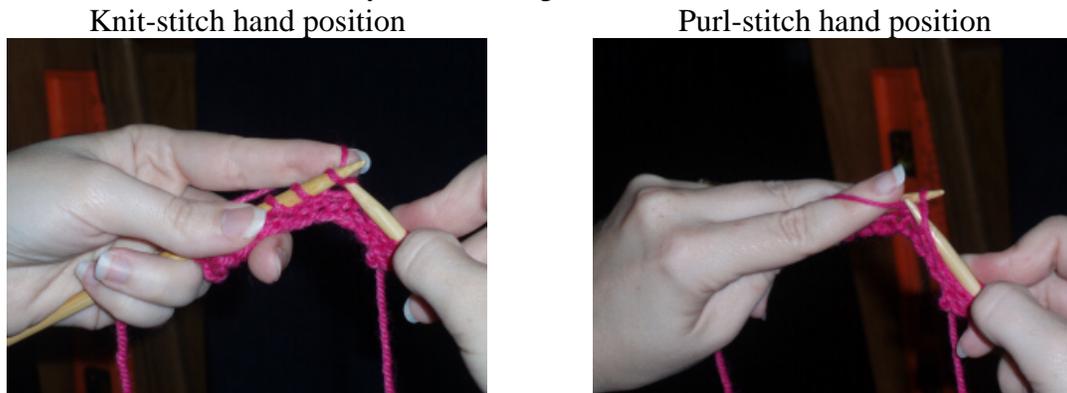
To help the yarn stay on the tip of the right needle, you'll want to push down on it slightly, so that it wraps over the top of the right needle tip. There are many ways to do this, and here are some examples:



Experimentation will let you figure out what works well for you. It is normal to have to push down on it, and does not at all mean that you're doing something wrong, or that you're awkward at this.

Hand positioning

It will be easier to automatically wrap your yarn in the correct direction if you rotate your left hand around the needle, so you're looking at the back of it.



See how this brings the working yarn further forward, and opens up the space between the yarn and the needle?

Many English knitters are accustomed to keeping their left forefinger right at the tip of the left needle, controlling the first stitch. When knitting Continental, because the same forefinger is also controlling the yarn, this tends to put the working yarn further forward. This is a minor issue with the knit stitch, but a bigger issue with the purl stitch. Try to make a practice of putting your left hand just a bit further back, so that your forefinger touches the needle behind the first stitch, or even behind the second one.

Finger out front



Finger further back



See how that changes where the yarn is in relation to the right needle? If it's out front, you're going to have to chase it, so moving it back is a help. Don't be discouraged if you find this difficult; your hand position is an ingrained habit, but the difference that this small change makes is worth pursuing, so keep working on it.

Switching between knits and purls

This is one of the strengths of Continental. In the English method, moving the yarn forward and back requires a separate step which can consume nearly as much time as making an additional stitch. In the Continental method, it can be done in concert with removing the prior stitch from the needle.

As you finish a stitch and remove the old stitch from the needle, you will pull the working yarn past the tip of the left needle:



From this position, it is easy to either allow the yarn to fall on the same side where it started, or to move the right needle slightly forward or back (as applicable) so that the yarn falls on the other side of the work.

“I still really hate this!”

There are some alternatives to standard Continental purling, although each has weaknesses as well as strengths. Although they are beyond the scope of this class, here is a brief description of two popular methods.

Combination method

In this method, the yarn is wrapped the opposite way when purling, so that it comes between the right and left needles. Notice that with this method, the forward rotation of the hand that would bring the working yarn away from the left needle is not needed, or even desirable.



This allows you to push the yarn through the old stitch easily. However, it also results in a stitch that sits on the needle in the opposite orientation:



This requires you to compensate on the next row, by working those stitches through a right leg which is behind the needle instead of in front of it. In addition, decrease methods will change slightly, and on some stitch patterns, you may have to work purls through a back leg. None of these changes is difficult, but they do require a good understanding of how stitch orientation affects stitch formation. If you are interested in learning more about this method, Priscilla Gibson-Roberts' *Knitting in the Old Way* contains some information about it, and Annie Modesitt's *Confessions of a Knitting Heretic* deals with it extensively; Annie also has information about it on her website, <http://www.anniemodesitt.com>.

Norwegian purling

In the Norwegian purling method, the yarn is never brought forward. Instead, the right needle goes behind the yarn before entering the stitch, and then twists back to grab the yarn again and pull it around and through.

This method is particularly good for 2-color ribbing, since it's never necessary to move the yarn that will be purlled, but it does tend to produce a slightly looser purl stitch than the regular Continental method, which can lead to “rowing out” issues in stockinette. It also takes a bit longer than a regular Continental purl stitch, which reduces some of the efficiency that is for many an attraction of the method. If you are interested in this method, there is a nice tutorial available at this website:

<http://www.spellingtuesday.com/norwegianpurl.html>.