



by Ann Shayne and Kay Gardiner

Dear Twist Collective Readers:

The Problem Ladies are forever finding themselves smack up against a deadline, with no questions to answer and the powers-that-be pacing the floor waiting for us. Recently we came up with a scheme to solve this problem. The scheme involved bribery. (Well, not exactly bribery, but a drawing for prizes on our blog, masondixonknitting.com.)

Suddenly, the questions flowed like box wine. So many good questions! So many bad (in an amusing way) questions! Being peppered with three hundred questions made us feel like Britain's Prime Minister standing in front of Parliament with his notebook, and all the MPs shouting questions at him in accusatory tones of voice, and the PM giving as good as he gets and calling them "the Right Honourable Gentleman" in a manner suggesting that they are neither right nor honourable, and snapping his notebook shut. In other words: everyone having a fantastic time.

In this spirit, the Problem Ladies decided to have a go at answering a whole bunch of questions—using only our mental notebooks, which are crammed full of two lifetimes of erratic and perhaps even erroneous knitting information. Take 'em for what they're worth, and keep knitting. It won't hurt our feelings if you ask other knitters the same questions until you get an answer you like.

Q. I just wore a big hole in the first pair of socks I knit. It's on the edge of the foot, and if I try to sew it up, I'm sure there will be an uncomfortable lump and I'll end up with a blister. Ladies, what should I do? I love those socks. They have served me through many a cold day. Should I revel in the fact that in this world of replaceable items I used something up? Should I pout? What is the acceptable thing to do here? — Stephanie

A. Yes, you should revel! Yes, you should pout! Personally, the Problem Ladies would wash these precious socks very gently, respectfully, and archivally, then hang them up in a place of honor, perhaps in a shadowbox with a calligraphy label saying, "My First Socks." If you want to try a blister-free repair, and your socks are not knitted with Superwash wool or another non-felting fiber, we would suggest getting a bit of wool roving, and needle-felting to fill in the hole. This is easy, fun, and weird! Needle felting is also an excellent way of fixing moth holes in wool and cashmere sweaters. If you do it in contrasting colors to the item being repaired, it looks sort of purposeful and modern art-ish.

Q. When knitting lace in the round, what is the best way to knit nupps? Any help here would be appreciated. — S.

A. The usual way, of course. There is no magic to nupping in the round. In other words, we have

no idea, and we strongly suspect that this is a fake question. If you're knitting nupps, you have no need of the Problem Ladies.

Q. Why knit lacy socks with holes in them? I just don't get it. Also, is there a way to knit a sock that will stay on a baby's foot? — Susan

A. Sock knitters, like knitters of any other article, are into it for reasons other than pure practicality. It is fun to knit lace socks with holes in them, apparently. The yarnover is just . . . FUN. Also these holey socks look really sweet on girlish feet in photographs in knitting books. No other reasons are needed. If you want hole-free socks, buy 'em, or knit 'em. It's a free country.

Everybody knows that there is no way to knit a sock that will stay on a baby's foot. Where's the fun in that? It is fun to remember when your strapping son or daughter, who is now a doctor or firefighter with a mortgage, used to gaily kick his or her socks onto the subway tracks. It is no fun to remember how firmly the tiny socks were affixed to the tiny feet. If stopping an infant from kicking his socks off is really important to you, you have got to try to loosen up before you get to the teenage years.

Q. Why does my cat only like to chew on the really nice yarn (i.e., the cashmere/silk)? — Molly

A. Cats are superior animals. (Dogs will chew on no-dye-lot acrylic.) (We love dogs. We are just saying.)



Q. What's the best way to knit while holding a small baby? This two-month-old of mine hasn't really taken to knitting, and I miss being able to sit and knit! — Sarah

A. When the Little Problems were small, the Problem Ladies found it best to hold off knitting until a child was asleep, or at least bored and listless. (Tuneless lullabies and NPR will expedite this process.) Holding the youngster in the crook of the left arm (if you knit right-handed), work as many stitches as you can until squirming or other distracting behavior occurs, then pause. Jostle the baby gently, to see if you can get a couple more stitches in. Steadily increase the number of stitches, until the child is old enough to understand the concept of “the end of Mommy’s row.” In the children of determined needlewomen, this can occur as early as six months, and is a predictor for the child later winning big money on Jeopardy.

Q. Why is there always a hole in my thumb on my fingerless gloves? Is there any way to make it to where there is not one? — Tabitha

A. We know this one! We know this one! First try knitting through the back loops when working the stitches at the spot where the hole forms. If that doesn't work (sometimes it does, sometimes it makes the hole BIGGER—that is how knitting is, people), try increasing in those stitches and then decreasing back down on the next round of the thumb, or (just to mess with your head), try knitting 2 stitches together at that spot, and then increasing back to the right stitch count on the next

round. Often a hole can be fixed when you are sewing in the end of the yarn that you joined to knit the thumb. Basically, keep trying to fill in that hole, by any means that works. Eggspearmint!

Q. I'm looking for tips on how to follow a pattern and count rows. I know Kay knits a lot of square things, but she actually does have the ability to fashion shapes and patterns. Anything beyond the ballband or a plain stockinette mitten cause me to miss TV shows, burn dinner, or lose children. — Lindsay

A. We hate to burst your bubble, but the Problem Ladies do not do much shaping when they have any other matters cluttering their minds, such as TV shows, dinner, reflections on the dreaminess of Robert Pattinson, or keeping a roughly accurate census of the children. We think you are doing very well to be able to knit a mitten in the face of such distractions! However, we do have some tips that will allow you to knit something non-square while “watching” a child’s sport activity or a telephone conversation that you’re only pretending to listen to. Our best tip (which we rarely follow) is to WRITE STUFF DOWN. Figure out how many increase rows you have to work, and check them off as you go. If, like the Problem Ladies, you have a bad attitude toward sensible advice like this, try some other way of visually marking your knitting so that it’s easy to count rows and stitches later on, when you finally realize that it’s necessary to know where you are and what you’ve done. Safety pins are excellent for this, but you can also use short snips of contrasting-color yarn. Knit these snippets into the edge stitch of every tenth row, or every whatever-eth row that helps you keep track, for a visual record that you won’t misplace. Do the same to keep track of stitch repeats across a row. These little bits are easy to pull out when the project is done, and as a bonus, the non-knitters will wonder about them.

Q. I'm about to start a sweater, however I want to add a hem instead of the ribbing, but there's so much conflicting advice out there that I'm having trouble figuring out the best way to do it. Knit up or sew up? Smaller needles or fewer stitches? Purl turning row or picot turning row? The options are endless, and I have a really tough time deciding between options, so please help! — Cheryl

A. Sometimes options are liberating (the half-caf/half-decaf/nonfat latte comes to mind), but sometimes an over-awareness of options is paralyzing. Too many choices will cause a person to waste time and energy figuring out how to reinvent something simple and natural, such as a nice hem on a pullover. We’ve solved this one, guys! Go look at our Perfect Sweater pattern (click on “Perfect Sweater” in the right sidebar at masondixonknitting.com) for detailed instructions on how to make a sweet ‘n’ neat hem, in either the picot or plain style. If you want to find other ways of doing it, knock yourself out, but these ways are tried and true and we don’t feel the need to look for any other ways. We’re old-school like that; minds totally closed to fixing what ain’t broke.

Q. Why does every circular shawl I make look good in the picture and make me look like a bag lady when I wear it? Am I oddly shaped? Do I try to make it too big so that I'm extra warm? It always seems a straight shawl isn't going to warm my back but when I look at myself in a circular shawl, I can't help recoiling in horror! — Mindy

A. This one has gotten the Problem Ladies, too. Although circular shawls are frequently depicted making willowy young women look even more willowy and young, we find that here on planet

Earth, the best place for a circular shawl is the back of a sofa or rocking chair. Which doesn't mean you should stop knitting them. They are fantastic home dec. But as apparel, they add ten years and stooped shoulders to any figure.

Q. How can I get my two-color knitting to stop pulling together and making the bunching that is even less attractive in knitting than in ill-fitting pants? — Susan

A. Another one we know! If by two-color knitting you mean Fair Isle, please consult our second book, *Mason-Dixon Knitting Outside the Lines*, which has a lot of tips for beginning Fair Islers. If you're working in the round, one sure-fire anti-bunch technique is to turn the work inside-out, so that the wrong side is facing you as you knit. This naturally reduces the pulling of the "floats" because they have to fit around the outside of the work instead of the inside.

Q. How can I convince my husband that it's natural to buy a skein of dishcloth cotton every time I'm near a craft store? I mean really, I'm just trying to help our heating bill by insulating the house. He doesn't understand. — Mandi

A. You can't, because it's not natural. ONE skein? Please tell us this is a typo.

