

by *Cat Bordhi*

Answer this Riddle: What is done last but comes first, and changes everything?



Mercurial Colorways provide an answer to this riddle: What is done last but comes first and changes everything.

Imagine a 1-stitch, 3-row pattern that can produce many unique narrow colorbands. The first 2 rows are merely knit, with the 3rd row alone exerting uncanny power to reorient the knit rows in beautiful ways. And the 3rd row appears before the knit rows as well as after them. Below is a sampler of 7 possibilities using 3 colors. Red is limited to row 1, blue to row 2, and gold to row 3. If the colors move, the variations multiply. Experiment with handpaints for lovely surprises (see this issue's [Houdini Mercurial Colorband Socks](#)). *Note: Be sure to knit with relaxed tension in row 2, and use a needle with a long, tapered tip and fine point, like Addi Turbo Lace Needles. Otherwise row 3 is hard to manage. Row 2 may also be worked with a slightly lighter weight yarn if desired.*



**Row 1 is red, which produces dots.
Rows 2 and 3 are black.**



Row 2 is blue. Both sides of the blue stitches slant to the left between row 1's black dots. Rows 1 and 3 are black.



Row 3 is worked last, but appears first and last! Rows 1 and 2 are black.



Row 1 is red, row 2 is blue, and row 3 is black.



Row 1 is red, row 2 is black, and row 3 is gold.



Row 1 is black, row 2 is blue, and row 3 is gold.



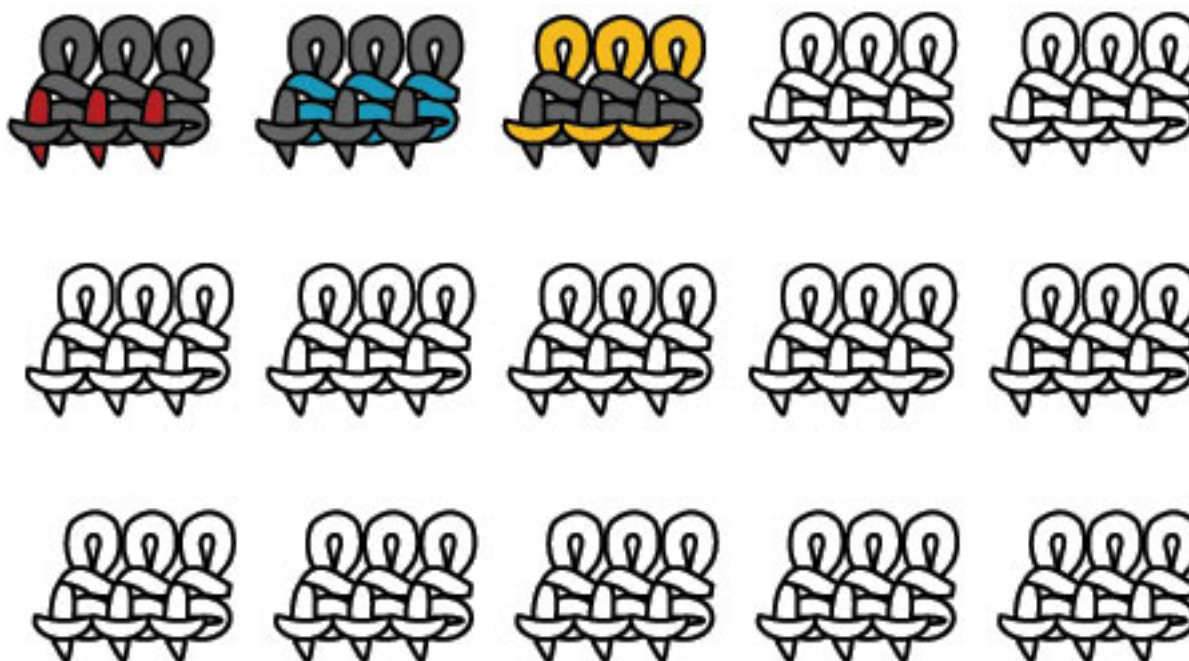
Row 1 is red, row 2 is blue, and row 3 is gold.



Row 3 is worked as follows:

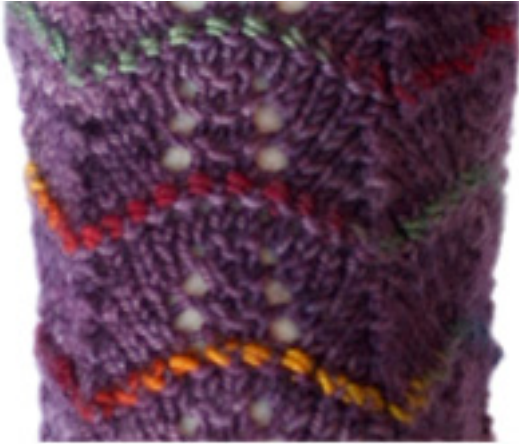
With yarn in front, slip next stitch purlwise, lift bar between stitches from back, slip both stitches purlwise onto left needle (tip to tip), and purl the 2 slipped strands together.

If you'd like to visualize what to expect with different color placements before knitting, here are a dozen models to print out and color in as you wish.



Some tips:

- If you'd like the top edge of row 3 to be more visible, purl the row that follows. This pulls the gold loops into purl bumps which correspond to the gold purl bumps that frame the bottom edge of the color band.



- *Detail of Mercurial Colorbands on the Houdini Sock*

The colorbands do stretch horizontally more than stockinette, so you must compensate for this if it matters in your design. In the Houdini Mercurial Colorband Socks I used a feather & fanlike stitch in between the bands which let them climb and fall, thus using a longer path than an even circumference. Another solution could be to decrease about 10% of the stitches before the colorband, then increase 10% after.

[Download this article as a pdf \(as last 2 pages of Houdini socks pattern\)](#)