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## TEXT prose

**Nadia Mead**

### *Fight, Flight, Knit*

The knitting machine was a timely arrival. An innocuous mix of mauve and white plastic, it looked more like a child's toy than something that should be taking pride of place on her grown-up table. Nevertheless, it was a thing of beauty and wonder with its cylindrical base rotated by a cranking handle at the side. She was reminded of French Knitting from her youth, of endlessly feeding the gathered pins around the top of a tube, and the satisfaction of pulling a thickened rope down through the centre. And now, the thrill of making more than just rope, of creating pieces of significance, and making a difference – all of this awaited her. As a dedicated knitter, the idea of creating yarn pieces without the lengthy labour of two needles was deliciously decadent. Almost cheating.

For years, she'd used knitting and crochet as tools for thinking through writing projects. An accidental discovery during her PhD showed her how the repetitive motion of knitting helped to unravel tricky writing knots. In the years since, she'd used knitting and crochet as strategies to overcome writer's block, and to navigate the cognitive load of switching back and forth between creative and scholarly writing. Instead of wasting time staring at a screen when the words wouldn't come, she picked up her craft project and waited. Once the yarn started flowing through her fingers, the words crept back, tired of their childish game of hide and seek.

However, with the acquisition of a knitting machine, she wondered if it would still be a useful tool for writing, worried it wouldn't create the same effect as two needles or a crochet hook methodically working their way through stitch after stitch after stitch.

For its maiden voyage, she practised rotating the circular base, turning the handle and watching each hook-shaped tooth move up and down, ready to grab the yarn and create looping chains out of sight. She learnt how to cast on and off, how to change colours, experimenting with tension and different weights of yarn.

Much like her writing, there were false starts and dropped stitches. The slightest tension in the wrong direction could lead to several stitches loosening, drooping from the teeth, and the potential loss of the entire project. Frequently, she had to admit defeat and unravel a project to start again. At other times, she fed her rejects to a box of salvageable mishaps, ready to be re-worked later.

But something happened once she mastered the basics. When the project was safely on its way, her brain settled sufficiently, tuning in to the rhythm of satisfying mechanical clicks as the plastic teeth rotated, spurred on by her determined cranking of the handle. The plastic fangs surged upwards to snatch the yarn before sinking out of sight like a shark with its prey. A black row marker started as a focal point before transforming into a smudged blur as she succumbed to the hypnotic sights and sounds of multicoloured yarn spinning and weaving and growing. Jumbled writing responsibilities settled into neat rows, soothing themselves into achievable goals and ordered structures like the vibrant v-shaped stitches sitting neatly alongside one another.

One afternoon, feeling anxious about a particular paper, she had a sudden urge to create something on the knitting machine. Driving home, she planned her project, eager to start. She wondered if she was procrastinating, avoiding the writing, but needn't have worried. Once the knitting project was set up, the repetitive clacking and mesmerizing blur of yarn weaving itself through white plastic teeth cleared away the detritus of her earlier thoughts. Soothed and calmed, she was able to think more productively – and the writing, both desire and content, sashayed back to her, checking its fingernails and feigning surprise it had ever caused any alarm by its absence.

*Dr Nadia Mead is a creativity professional whose research interests include autoethnography, creative writing, teacher wellbeing, and how storytelling can influence professional practice and wellbeing. Nadia lectures in Education at CQUniversity, Australia.*