



Clothing  
and  
Textiles

# Selecting and using Interfacing

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, MANHATTAN, KANSAS

Marilyn Stryker  
Extension Specialist  
Clothing and Textiles

Interfacing is a critical ingredient in clothing construction. It can make the difference between a professional-looking garment and a disappointment. New developments in interfacing allow consumers to use these supportive fabrics successfully in a wide variety of fabrics and garment designs.

Interfacing is used to:

- add strength to part of a garment;
- add body to the fabric;
- give a crisp feel and appearance to a part of the garment;
- control stretch in part of the garment; and
- prevent seam allowances from showing on the outside of a garment.

## **Where to use interfacing**

Interfacing is used anywhere it is important to add body, crispness, stability, durability, or strength. This includes collar, cuffs, neckline, pockets, hems, button and buttonhole areas, belts, waistbands, armholes, and zipper areas.

In some fabrics and patterns, interfacing is not necessary in all of these areas, but be sure to consider its use with each garment. For example, interfacing is often used in hems in tailored garments, but with dresses and blouses it isn't necessary in the hem and usually would not be desirable. Little interfacing is used with sweater knits, very soft knits, or soft-looking designs.

## **What fabric can be used as interfacing?**

Some fabrics are made specifically for interfacing but almost any fabric could be used. The best interfacing choice depends on:

- the fabric weight of the garment;
- the fabric care;
- the fabric requirements;
- the fabric construction (knit, woven); and
- the purpose of the interfacing in a specific part of the garment.

The interfacing is usually a slightly lighter weight than the garment fabric. It should complement and reinforce the garment fabric without overpowering it. Place the garment fabric over the interfacing and feel them together to decide if the interfacing is heavy enough but not too stiff or heavy.

The interfacing should have the same care requirements as the garment fabric. It does not need to be identical in fiber content, but it should be washable. Hair canvas for fine tailored garments is the exception; it is dry cleanable only.

The interfacing should have the same “give” or stretch as the garment fabric. Woven interfacing is generally used with a woven fabric, and knit or nonwoven interfacing with a knit to achieve the same ‘give.’”

Because interfacing has many purposes, you might use different kinds in different parts of a garment. For example, an interfacing with some “give” might be needed in a knit blazer as general interfacing, but a stable interfacing would be used in a buttonhole area. A dress might need crisp interfacing in the cuffs but something softer in the neckline.

Build up a supply of a variety of fabrics to have the kind of interfacing you need. Instead of purchasing 1/2 yard of an interfacing fabric you use often, buy 3 to 5 yards. This will save time and frustration.

## ***Kinds of interfacing fabrics***

When you select interfacing fabric, you will need to choose among many kinds:

- sew-in or fuse-in;
- woven, knit, or nonwoven;
- stable or stretch;
- crisp or soft;
- washable or dry-clean-only;
- heavy, medium, or light.

Sew-in or fuse-in interfacing: Both types have advantages and disadvantages that should be considered for each garment.

### **Advantages**

#### ***Sew-in***

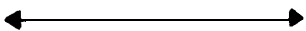

- Softer, more subtle shaping.
- Usable with both woven and knit fabrics.

#### ***Fuse-in***

- Quick to use—no need to baste.
- Shape can be built into a garment, as fusing occurs without hand or machine pad stitching.
- Adds firmness to an area and makes top-stitching easier.

## ***Stretch or “give”***

Today’s interfacings have different types of stretch. Your choice depends on the garment fabric and where the interfacing will be used. You may need to use several different types of interfacing in each garment. Stretch gives compatible flexibility in places where you need greater ‘give,’ such as yoke areas or rolled collars.

- No stretch ( \_\_\_\_\_ )
- Little stretch 
- Much stretch 

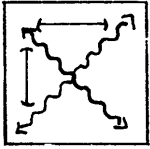
### **Disadvantages**

- May soften somewhat after washing.
- If nonwoven, may buckle in an area where completely enclosed (such as a collar).
- May shrink. Preshrink with the garment fabric before cutting it out.
- May need to be either basted or permanently stitched in place.
- For firm shaping, needs machine or hand pad stitching.

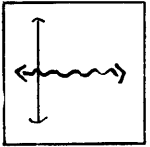
- Gets firmer after fusing. You may be fooled by its weight and crispness. Be sure to test a sample with your fabric.
- Generally cannot be used successfully on napped fabrics because fusing flattens nap, but test a sample. Works well with some imitation suedes.
- Tends to flatten such fabrics as gauze and seer-sucker.
- May damage some fabrics that cannot be steam-pressed. Fusing agent may seep through sheer fabrics.
- May not adhere to all fabrics, Excess moisture used in fusing may cause too much stiffness. Always follow directions on amount of moisture to use.

Arrows indicate directions of stretch in illustration

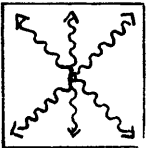
**Bias:** Typical of woven fabrics. The most “give” is on the true bias of the fabric. It will “give” like a woven fabric when fused or sewn in.



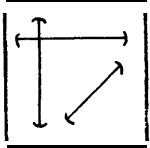
**One-way stretch:** Stretches in the crosswise direction of the interfacing and is stable lengthwise. It can be used in areas that need to stretch, or can be used to stabilize areas such as waistbands. It maybe nonwoven or knit.



**Multi-directional stretch:** Stretches in all directions. This nonwoven fabric is often described as all-bias.

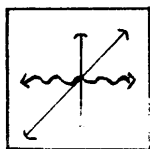


**No stretch:** Nonwoven stabilized interfacing has no “give” and is not recommended for clothing. It is best used in items such as purses, draperies, and craft projects.



**Modified one-way stretch:** Interfacings stretch mostly crosswise but do have some “give” in length and bias directions. This matches the stretch in many knit fabrics.

Use the interfacing stretch to help you. For example, when using one-way stretch interfacing that is stable along the lengthwise grain, cut waistbands so the grainline arrow on the pattern is lengthwise on the interfacing. This will stabilize and stiffen the waistband. Buttonholes and the zipper area can be stabilized the same way. Create a soft roll in a collar by cutting the interfacing so the stretch goes around the neck.



## Preshrinking

Some interfacing may need preshrinking. Woven sew-in interfacings may shrink during cleaning. It is a good idea to preshrink sew-in interfacings in the same way you will care for the finished garment. If you wash the interfacing, be sure to use detergent and dry it in the dryer if that’s how you will care for the finished garment.

Fuse-in interfacings also may shrink. Woven fuse-in interfacing can be preshrunk by soaking it for 10 minutes in hot water. After soaking, carefully roll the interfacing in a towel to blot out excess water. Then dry it over a shower rod or hanger. **DO NOT WRING DRY OR PUT IN THE DRYER** or you will remove or damage the fusing agent.

Fuse-in nonwoven interfacings generally do not shrink as much as the wovens. Fuse-in nonwoven and knit interfacings can be preshrunk as they are applied to the garment. Press the garment fabric with steam to remove wrinkles and warm the fabric. Put the interfacing on the fabric with the fusible side next to the garment fabric. Hold the steam iron 1 to 2 inches above the interfacing and apply steam for 5 seconds **without** letting the iron touch the fabric. You may notice the fusible interfacing shrinking. Then fuse the two together.

**DO NOT PRESHRINK FUSIBLE WEB.** It doesn’t need it and you could destroy the web.

Fusible web is used to adhere two fabrics. When used alone in knit fabrics, it provides a little body, which may be all the interfacing needed in some areas. It does not add the reinforcement needed in some parts such as buttonhole areas. Fusible web also can be used to fuse a sew-in interfacing to the garment fabric. Be sure to try this on a sample of the garment fabric. This technique may give more stiffness than you need.

## Tips for fuse-in interfacing

**Read the directions!** Fusible interfacings do not all fuse the same way. Most of the newer fuse-in interfacings fuse with steam. Some fuse with a dry iron and will defy attempts to fuse them with steam. Check instructions for:

- iron temperature;
- steam or dry iron;
- damp or dry press cloth;
- number of seconds to hold iron on interfacing.

When cutting out fuse-in interfacing, cut it the size of the garment piece to be interfaced. Then trim away 1/2 inch of the interfacing from all seam allowances and most of the interfacing from the darts. Leave enough so you will catch the interfacing in the stitching. Trim the interfacing in corners to eliminate bulk.

If there are no fusing directions with the interfacing you are using, follow these general directions:

1. Set the iron on Steam or Wool setting.
2. Place fusible interfacing with the fusible side next to the wrong side of the garment fabric.
3. Steam-baste the fusible interfacing in place by lightly pressing from the center to the outside edge for about 2 seconds in each location. Now it won’t slip.
4. Place a damp press cloth or paper towel over the area to be fused.

5. Fuse about 10 seconds for lightweight interfacings and 15 seconds for medium to heavyweight interfacings. **Do not slide the iron.** Use firm pressure on the iron. You might even want to bear down with both hands.
6. Move the iron to the next section of the interfacing, allowing a little overlap between sections; press again.
7. **Cool before handling.** If you move the fabric before it has had a chance to cool, you may damage the fuse and have to press again.

Fuse-in interfacings generally adhere best to fabrics that are fairly flat with little surface texture. When sewing with a fuzzy or highly textured fabric, test the fuse-in interfacing on a scrap of fabric before attempting to fuse it to the garment.

### **Removing fused interfacing**

To remove fused interfacing, hold the steam iron above the fused area for about 5 seconds, then peel off the interfacing. To remove the fusing agent left on the garment fabric, place a damp, lightweight scrap of fabric over the excess fusing agent and press. Peel it off while it is still warm. Do this several times if necessary, using a different fabric scrap for each pressing.

### **Tips for sew-in interfacings**

Cut sew-in interfacings the size of the garment piece to be interfaced. Trim it out of the corners before stitching it to the garment piece. To machine-baste, stitch through the interfacing and the garment piece 1/8 inch outside the seam line. Trim away the interfacing seam allowance right next to the stitching before sewing the garment together.

### **Where to place interfacing**

**Sew-in:** usually placed against the back of the part of the garment fabric that shows. For example, the interfacing is placed against the under collar, under section of the cuff, and next to the shirt or blouse front.

**Fuse-in:** the interfacing edge may form a ridge if the interfacing stops part way across a piece of the garment. Results are often better if the interfacing is fused to the facing pieces. This is true with interfacing down the front of a blouse, vest, or jacket, or around the armhole in a vest or sleeveless blouse. If you prefer to fuse the interfacing to the body of the garment, pink the outer edge of the interfacing before fusing. This will soften the ridge.

When fusing interfacing to a collar, cuff, or waistband, fuse to the wrong side of the upper collar, cuff, or waistband. This procedure will make the fabric a little firmer for topstitching and prevent the imprint of seam allowances from showing on the outside of the garment.

When using a one-way stretch interfacing, use the “give” to advantage. A collar will have a gentle roll if the interfacing is cut with the stretch going around the collar. For a heavy fabric or a tailored garment, use a lightweight one-way stretch interfacing on both the upper and under collar. An extra piece of interfacing cut to fit in the stand area of the collar can be fused over the other under-collar interfacing. Cut this strip so the stretch goes the other way.

Buttonholes in knit fabrics may stretch and lose their shape if the interfacing gives with the buttonhole. To stabilize the buttonhole area, cut one-way stretch interfacing so it has no “give” along the length of the buttonhole. Cut a strip about 1 inch long and as wide as the rest of the interfacing. Fuse it to the facing or pink the edge and fuse it to the body of the garment.

Adapted from material prepared by Lois Goering, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Minnesota.

The author wishes to thank Mary Don Peterson, Department of Clothing, Textiles and Interior Design for her review of the manuscript.



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY, MANHATTAN

L-558

May 1981

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, Richard D. Wootton, Associate Director. All educational programs and materials available without discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

File: Clothing and Textiles-3

JR 5-94-300; 5-81-5M; 11-80-10M