



## SEW-lutions Guidelines

Your Guide  
to  
Successful  
Sewing

© 2008 Sewing & Craft Alliance  
Permission is granted to  
educators and retailers to  
reproduce these publications  
as-is as a handout for  
educational purposes only.  
They may not be altered,  
changed or added to in any  
manner. No commercial or other  
use, distribution, or  
reproduction is permitted.

Get free projects and  
more SEW-lutions  
Guidelines at  
[www.sewing.org](http://www.sewing.org)



### What to Know Before You Sew: Fabric & Pattern Preparation

One key to successful sewing is careful fabric and pattern preparation. Take time before you cut in order to save yourself much grief later!

Before laying out the pattern pieces, you need to preshrink the fabric and straighten the grain. These two simple steps ensure easy-care garments with straight hanging seams and hems.

---

*Tip: As soon as you bring fabric home, make sure the right side of the fabric is obvious. If both sides of the fabric are similar in color and texture, determine and mark the right side.*

---

Cotton and linen fabrics are generally—but not always—folded with the right side facing out, while wool is usually folded wrong side out. If the fabric is rolled on a tube, most often the right side faces the tube.

If you're having a hard time determining the right side, consider that most fabrics are clearer and more defined on the right side. The texture of textured fabrics, such as doupioni, is more obvious; smooth fabrics are shinier; and prints are clearer. If you prefer the appearance and feel of the wrong side, use it as the right side in garment construction, just be consistent. Choose the side you want for the right side, and mark it with tape, chalk or safety pins, to avoid sewing confusion. Once the pattern pieces are cut out, remember to mark all layers and all pieces.

#### Preshrinking Fabric

When you purchase fabric, take note of the care instructions printed on the end of the fabric bolt; sometimes a printed care label is available with the fabric purchase. Keep in mind that all the elements of the project should be preshrunk, including the zipper, lining and interfacing. Preshrink notions and fusible interfacings in a sink filled with

#### Vocabulary

- **Selvage:** firmly woven narrow border along lengthwise edges
- **Bias:** a line diagonal to the lengthwise and crosswise threads
- **Lengthwise grain:** strong, stable threads that run parallel to selvage
- **Crosswise grain:** threads that run from selvage to selvage
- **Grain:** direction in which fabric threads run
- **Grainline:** arrow marking on pattern tissue that indicates straight grain
- **Press cloth:** plain piece of muslin or cotton fabric used to protect fabric from direct contact with hot iron

warm water, and let them air dry or press them dry. *Do not press fusible interfacings.* Preshrink linings and interlinings in the same manner as the fashion fabric.

If the fabric is washable, you can throw it in the washer and dryer. If the fabric is brightly colored, red or dark black or navy, wash it alone since the dyes may bleed significantly. To check for colorfastness, wash brightly colored fabric with a scrap of white cotton fabric. If the white scrap comes out of the washing machine with a tint of color, wash the fabric again with a new white fabric scrap. If color continues to run, add three tablespoons of vinegar to the wash water to help set the color.

---

*Tip: To prevent the fabric from raveling, serge or zigzag stitch the cut ends before washing.*

---

For dry-clean only fabrics, have the yardage dry-cleaned or steam shrink the yardage yourself. Before trying to steam shrink, test a corner of the fabric to make sure it doesn't water spot.

Dampen either the fabric or a press cloth, and steam press directly on the press cloth over the wrong side of the fabric until it's dry. Or, fold the fabric accordion-like, and then hang it from a plastic hanger. Place the hanger on the shower curtain rod and fill the bathroom with steam; let the fabric hang until it's dry.

Once the fabric is preshrunk, press it to eliminate the wrinkles. Make sure the center crease, created by the manufacturer's fold, is pressed out. If you can't eliminate the center crease, work around it when laying out the pattern pieces.

*Tips: To determine if the fabric shrinks, cut a 2"-square swatch of the fabric. Wet the square, and then press it dry with a steam iron. Draw a 2" square on paper and lay the dry fabric swatch over it. If the swatch fills the box, the fabric did not shrink.*

## Checking the Grain: Woven Fabrics

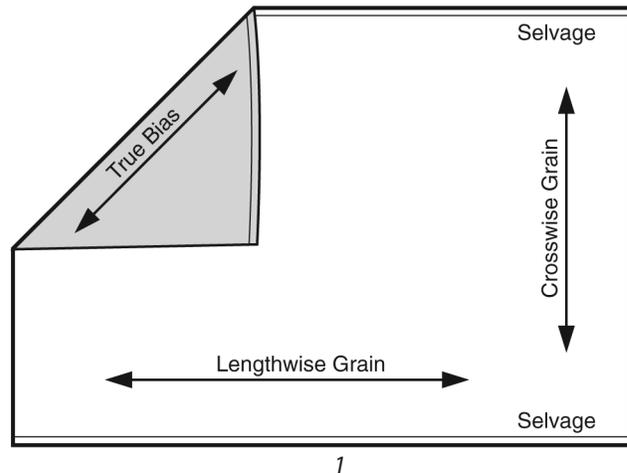
Fabric grain refers to the direction in which the threads run. It's important for the lengthwise and crosswise threads to meet at right angles, or the project will twist or hang crooked.

All woven fabrics feature a lengthwise and a crosswise grain; these should run perpendicular to each other. Along the lengthwise or straight grain, the threads are parallel to the selvage and have little or no stretch. On a garment, the lengthwise grain usually runs vertically from the shoulders to the hem; for a curtain or drape, it runs from top to bottom.

The crosswise grain, or crossgrain, threads run across the width of the fabric—at right angles to the selvage. These threads stretch more than lengthwise threads. Occasionally garments are cut on the crossgrain. This means that the pattern pieces are turned sideways on the fabric. This is usually only done on border prints.

The "bias" runs diagonally across the lengthwise and crosswise grains. The "true bias" is at a 45-degree angle to the lengthwise grain and crossgrain and has inherent stretch, even on firmly woven fabrics (1).

Cutting a garment on the bias gives even crisper fabrics a softer drape; although the hemlines tend to waver.



## Knit Fabrics

Knit fabrics are formed by interlocking loops of thread, like a knit sweater. The lengthwise loops are called ribs and are similar to the lengthwise grain of woven fabrics. The crosswise loops are called courses. There is no bias in knit fabrics; the greatest stretch runs crosswise along the "course."

For information on straightening an off-grain fabric, see Guideline 4.204.

## Folding Fabric

Most patterns require fabric to be folded along the lengthwise grain with the selvages and right sides together. Single layers, partial folds and crosswise folds are also used but not often. Refer to the pattern layout guide for the correct fold for each particular design.

To fold a knit fabric, hand-baste along one lengthwise rib in the center of the fabric. For a lengthwise fold, fold along the basted line. For a crosswise fold, fold the fabric in half crosswise so the basting is aligned, pin along the basted line.

## Preparing the Pattern

Check the pattern guidesheet to determine all the required pattern pieces. Cut them apart leaving extra pattern tissue all around for alterations. With a dry iron, press the pattern pieces so they're flat. 🖱️