

# Working With Napped Fabrics

4.218

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Napped fabrics, like knits fabrics, have their own specific sewing and care requirements. Sewing with napped fabrics can be tricky because the nap will create color-shading when the direction of the fabric changes, and the fabric is prone to “walking” or slipping when you stitch it.

For general information about napped fabrics and tips on identifying napped fabrics, see Guideline 4.120.

## Layout

Because napped and pile fabrics will change color depending on how the light hits them, you must be sure all pattern pieces are laid on the fabric so the nap runs in the same direction on all pieces. Follow the “with nap” layout shown on the pattern guideline sheet. Fold the fabric lengthwise, with right sides together (unless the fabric is very thick, like fake fur, in which case it should be cut in a single layer). Place the pins within the seam allowance to avoid marring the fabric.

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*TIP: After cutting the pieces, use chalk to mark the nap direction on the wrong side of leftover fabric pieces.*

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## Sewing

Match the thread and size of the needle with the weight of the fabric. Generally, a size 65/9 to a 75/11 sewing machine needle and polyester/cotton thread are appropriate.

Practice sewing on fabric scraps first, testing your machine settings. Use a slightly longer stitch length than normal, about 12 stitches per inch. Reduce the presser-foot pressure, and sew in the direction of the nap whenever possible.

## Problem Solving

Be sure you test any sewing techniques on scraps of the garment fabric. Don't skimp here. Use a good size piece of fabric to test. If you have problems, try these tips.

**Creeping or shifting fabric.** After stitching your test seam, if you notice that the top

## Tools That Make It Easy

Napped and pile fabrics are not the easiest fabrics to sew. The nap is easily damaged, and the fabric tends to creep during stitching. Just a few tools make working with these luxurious fabrics easier. These products may not be necessary for short-napped fabrics, like cotton flannel, but when working with velvets and longer naps they are more important.

**Needle Board.** A needle board is essential for deep pile fabrics and velvets; it helps prevent the nap from crushing during pressing. It is a heavy board with closely spaced, blunt metal needles. Because needle boards are expensive, you can use a small one and simply move it around. If you don't have a needle board, use a thick towel or a scrap of the fabric your sewing with, and place it right sides together with the garment so that the naps face each other. A Velva Board is a more economical version of the needle board and can help to reduce pressing damage.

**Specialty Presser Foot.** Purchase an even-feed presser foot, a walking foot or a roller foot for sewing napped fabric. These feet feed both layers of fabric through the machine at the same time to minimize fabric shifting.

layer has shifted ahead of the lower layer when you reach the end of the seam, try test seaming again using the “taut sewing” method. Grasp the fabric in front of the presser foot with one hand and behind the



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foot with the other. Hold both fabric layers taut as you sew. Sew for a short distance, and stop with the needle down in the fabric. Raise the presser foot, and allow the fabric to relax. Lower the presser foot and continue, stopping periodically to let the layers relax.

For velvets and other slippery fabrics, you may need to hand baste the layers. Hand baste the seam first or place pins very close together, all within the seam allowance to prevent pin scars.

**Puckered seams.** If the seams pucker, use an even-feed foot, and reduce the presser-foot pressure. You may also need to reduce the needle-thread tension.

**Presser-foot marks.** Test topstitching on fabric scraps to make sure the presser foot doesn't leave marks. If it does leave marks, place a layer of tissue paper over the seam and stitch through it. Tear away the paper after stitching.

**Pin marks.** Eliminate pin marks by placing all pins in the seam allowance.

**Pressing imprints can ruin a garment.** Press napped fabrics from the wrong side with the fabric face down on a thick towel, or use a needle board. See "Tools That Make It Easy" on page 1.

## Pressing

In general, less pressing is always best! Over pressing can cause an unsightly shine on the fabric. Always test press on a fabric scrap to determine the best heat and moisture settings. Press napped fabrics face down on a thick towel. For high-pile fabrics, such as velvet, use a needle board. (See "Tools That Make It Easy.") Steam press on the wrong side of the fabric, using a lift and lower motion. Do not push the iron back and forth.

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*TIP: If the nap becomes crushed, mist it lightly with water and use a soft brush to fluff the nap.*

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## Garment Care

Store long-nap or high-pile garments on a padded hanger; you might even want to stuff the sleeves with tissue paper to avoid fold marks. To prevent hanger marks, place a scrap of velvet between the hanger clips and the garment. Before wearing, freshen the nap by hanging the garment in a steam-filled bathroom for a while; then allow it to air dry. 🖱️