

Interfacing 101

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Your Guide
to
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You don't see interfacing in a finished garment, but you can tell if there isn't any!

What is interfacing?

Interfacing is a structural material placed between fabric layers in areas where more stability, body and support are needed beyond the fabric thicknesses themselves.

It's common for interfacing to be found in collars, cuffs, facings, front openings (under buttonholes), and sometimes in hems, or entire garment fronts and upper backs in tailored garments.

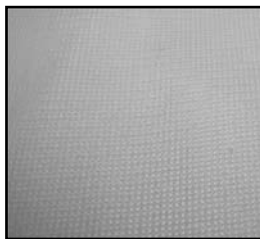
Construction

There are three basic interfacing types—woven, non-woven and knit. No matter what the construction method, all are available in various weights and colors.

Woven interfacings have lengthwise and crosswise threads, just like any woven fabric. When using woven interfacings, cut them on the same grain as the fashion fabric; sometimes on the bias for use in knits, so they have a similar stretch.

Nonwoven interfacings are made by bonding or felting fibers together, creating a mesh without visible direction. Unlike wovens, they don't ravel, but tend to be a little less supple.

Knit interfacings are usually soft and flexible and stretch crosswise, but only slightly in the lengthwise direction. The most common type looks like

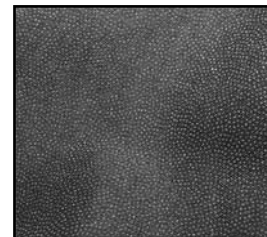


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lingerie tricot (1). Weft insertion interfacing is also knitted, though it then has additional threads passing through the fibers to add more stabilization needed for tailored garments.

Attachment Methods

Two types of interfacings are commonly used by sewers—fusible and sew-in. Fusible interfacing has an adhesive dot coating (2) on the wrong side which is activated by the heat of a household iron to bond it to the fashion fabric. Sew-in interfacing remains separate from the actual garment or project fabric, being only caught in the construction seamlines.



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Selecting Interfacing

With the myriad of choices available, choosing the right interfacing can sometimes be confusing. Keep these points in mind:

- The weight of the interfacing should be comparable to the fabric it's applied to, unless you want to create a purposeful special effect.
- Interfacings come in white, cream, beige, black and sometimes gray. Occasionally, you will find other colors leftover from a clothing manufacturer. A light color fabric should have a light color interfacing, and vice versa. The interfacing color should not alter the fashion fabric color when placed underneath it.
- Read the interfacing care instructions—they should be compatible to the fabric it's applied to.
- In some instances, like sheer fabrics, a second (or third) layer of self-fabric may be the best choice for an interfacing to prevent the show-through and significant color change when using a traditional product.

- Fusibles add more body than sew-ins because of the adhesive needed for melding.
- Some fabrics cannot be used with fusible interfacings—for example, metallics or napped fabrics like velvet, as the heat and pressure needed for fusing will damage the fabric. In these instances, select a sew-in.

To shrink or not to shrink?

Most interfacings perform better if they are pre-shrunk before being applied to the project. If this is not done, and they do shrink, irreparable rippling and bubbling can result.

It's best to soak most interfacings in a basin of warm water for 10 minutes and lay flat on a towel to dry before using. Or, steam-shrink the interfacing by hovering an iron over it (without touching in the case of fusibles) for several minutes. Sew-in woven interfacings can also be run through the washer and dryer on a delicate cycle. Nonwovens tend to shrink very little and may not need pretreating.

Testing 1, 2, 3

Before committing an interfacing to your project, test it with the outer fabric to see if it creates the stability and support you're looking for. Cut a 6" square of fabric and interfacing, fuse (if applicable) or sew together at the edges, and drape the square over your hand to test its compatibility. If the first choice doesn't feel right, try again until you're happy with the feel.

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for a fusible application, as brands vary with requirements for moisture, steam, press cloths, etc. Allow fused pieces to cool thoroughly before moving.

Check fusibles for adhesive show through—sometimes on lightweight fabrics you'll be able to see a dotted pattern from the interfacing bonding agent. In this instance, select a sew-in instead, or try a different brand.

Pattern Check

Most interfacings are narrower than their fabric counterparts, so double check the amount needed on the pattern envelope compared to the width you're purchasing.

The pattern guidesheet will tell you which pattern pieces need to be cut from interfacing, and in some instances these are not the same pieces used to cut the fashion fabric. Some sewers like to trim 1/4" to 3/8" from the interfacing seam allowances to help eliminate bulk.

After cutting, transfer any necessary markings to the interfacing instead of the fashion fabric (in areas where interfacing is applied)—otherwise you won't be able to see them.

Following the pattern guidesheet, attach all interfacings before sewing the fashion fabric pieces, as it helps to stabilize them, especially on loosely constructed fabrics.

Craft Interfacing

If you're working on a home décor project, such as a fabric bowl, or an accessory like a brimmed hat, you may need more stiffness than can be found using traditional garment interfacings.

Look for heavy, dense, non-woven interfacings labeled "craft interfacing" for this purpose. They come in sew-in or fusible options, with fusible adhesive on one side or two, depending on the brand.

Be sure to follow manufacturer's instructions for proper fusing and use a non-stick press cloth if you are using a double-sided version and fusing to fabric only one side at a time in the construction process. ■