

FABRIC SELECTION FOR SEWING

Standards

A suitable and well-chosen fabric for a project will:

- have an appropriate fiber content suited to the intended design and use.
- be selected in accordance with the intended pattern design. [It is recommended that you select the pattern design *before* the fabric.]
- be preshrunk and the surface finishes removed by either laundering or drycleaning.
- be made “thread perfect” by pulling and cutting on a crosswise thread on each end of a woven fabric, or cutting along a crosswise course on each end of a knit fabric.
- be properly prepared for cutting by making the fabric “piece perfect” so that the lengthwise and crosswise threads (woven fabrics) or the wales (lengthwise lines) and courses (crosswise lines of a knit fabric) are at right angles to one another.

FABRIC SELECTION

An important step in having a successful sewing project is selecting the appropriate fabric for the pattern and for you. Fabric selection is personal and provides a great opportunity for you to create an individual look. For additional information about pattern and fabric coordination, refer to **CT-MMB.212 *Pattern Selection and Fabric Coordination*** and **CT-LMH.203 *Mixing Prints and Textures***.

Selecting the right fabric for your project will be one of the most important steps in the construction process. If this is to be a garment, think about the items you already have in your wardrobe that you like and receive compliments on when you wear them. This can give you some important clues on

color, fabric texture and style. Take the time to shop around. Looking at ready-to-wear clothing that is well-made and of good quality can help you in this learning process. Selecting clothing that flatters the body and the personal style takes time and practice along with a bit of know-how.

General Guidelines

There are a number of things to keep in mind. As you plan and purchase fabric:

- Begin your project by selecting a pattern design first, then selecting an appropriate fabric. Certain pattern designs dictate and/or limit fabric selection.
- Shop at a reputable or well-known fabric store, fabric department, online web site, or fabric distributor. Talk with other experienced sewers for their recommendations.
- Be aware that some fabric stores may purchase fabric that is not on its original bolt, or they may take the fabric off its original bolt and re-roll or fold it. If in doubt, ask a clerk or fabric manager. When purchasing fabric in this condition, you take a chance of not knowing the correct fiber content or how to care for the fabric. Purchase and use at your own risk!
- When shopping for fabric, be a label reader. Look for and carefully read the information on the bolt for the following:

Fiber Content – This is a listing of the fiber(s) in the fabric and their percentages. For example: 100% cotton or 65% polyester/35% cotton. Fiber content will give you clues on how durable the fabric will be, how to care for it, and what other fabrics can be mixed and matched with it.

Care Information – this may be in the form of written instructions, symbols, or a combination of instructions and symbols.



Other – Manufacturers may include information about shrinkage colorfastness, finishes such as stain repellent, crease resistance, flammability, etc.

Shrinkage– When selecting cotton fabrics, look for information about shrinkage control, such as the term “preshrunk”. *Sanforized®* cotton has been put through a compressive shrinkage control process to prevent further shrinkage not to exceed 1% in either direction.

Colorfast – a term used to describe fabrics that retain their color the normal life of the garment. This is difficult to identify even for the experienced sewer. Natural fiber (cotton, linen, silk, wool) and print fabrics tend to have more problems losing their color (fading) than manufactured fiber fabrics and blends. On cottons, look for the term “colorfast.”

- The fabric suggestions on the pattern envelope are a good guide. However, terms such as “cotton” may be misleading as a lot of fabrics can be made from cotton fiber. In many instances, other fabrics with the same or similar “hand” can work.

Hand – the feel and drape of a fabric.

- Less experienced sewers should talk with a more experienced person before purchasing a fabric not listed on the pattern envelop.
- Look at the fabrics used for the different views on the pattern envelope for a clue to a suitable fabric. If shown in plaids or stripes, then the pattern is suitable for these fabrics.
- The pattern envelope and the

suggested fabrics listed lets you know if the design is suitable for knits and how “stretchy” the knit needs to be.

- When selecting a fabric with a printed design, visually check to see that the pattern has been printed “on grain.” The printed design will be lined up with the lengthwise and crosswise yarns (woven fabric) **or** the wales and courses (knit fabric) which are made at right angles to one another. Experienced sewers train their eyes to look for and recognize the grain.

Choosing Easy-to-Sew Fabrics

When you are learning to sew or have limited time, select a fabric that is easy to handle. Consider these hints:

- Small all-over designs help hide mistakes.
- Fabrics that are firmly woven will ravel less while handling.
- An easy-to-sew knit is one that has limited stretch in one or both directions.
- Medium weight fabrics are easier to handle than very light or very heavy fabrics.



- Tailored style designs/patterns need firm fabrics.
- Soft fabrics work best with pattern designs that are flowing, ones with ease or gathers.
- Cotton and polyester blends are a good choice for a beginner.
- Firm fabrics are easier to handle than loosely woven or slippery fabrics.
- Solid colored fabrics are a great selection to show off a pattern design with a lot of seamlines.
- If the fabric requires matching (one-way design, plaids, stripes, some prints) more fabric and time will be needed to make the item.

Checking the Fabric *before* You Buy

When you have selected your fabric; carefully pull or unroll some of the fabric from the bolt. It's time to put it through some very simple tests:

1. Examine for flaws – snags, spots or defective yarns.



2. Look carefully at the color to be sure it is the same throughout.
3. Examine the fabric for excess wrinkles or creases. Creases and wrinkles may be impossible to remove on some manufactured fiber fabrics.
4. Check the cut edge. Examine how much the fabric ravels. The more raveling, the more time and effort it may take to complete the garment. Raveling fabrics require special seam finishes.
5. Pull the fabric in both directions (lengthwise and crosswise) to feel the stretch. The fabric should return to its original shape.
6. Conduct the wrinkle test. Crinkle the fabric in your hand and release it. How does it look? Does it wrinkle? Do the wrinkles recover after they have been released for a few seconds? How much wrinkling are you willing to handle during a day's wear of the garment?
7. As you handle the fabric do you see any color being transferred from the

fabric to your hand? This is called "crocking" and could mean that the fabric will fade or transfer color during construction or while the garment is being worn.

8. Does the fabric seem to be stiff with sizing or starch? Do you see white powder or flakes coming from the fabric as you wrinkle or handle it? This could indicate a poor quality fabric.
9. Hold the fabric up and drape it over your arm. Does the fabric have the texture or drape needed to carry out the design?

For clothing or other projects in which you invest time and effort, plan to purchase the best quality fabric available. Poor quality fabrics will yield a less than desirable item. In summary, a good quality fabric will be on-grain, even in color, and design, and be labeled as to fiber content, special finishes, and care.

Refer to the list of fact sheets for additional information on selecting and working with special fabrics such as; one-way designs, plaids, stripes, microfibers, etc.

CT-BJD 020 - Prints
CT-MMB026 - Stripes
CT-BJD143 - Sewing with Microfiber Fabrics
CT-LMH165 – Sewing with Knit Fabrics
CT-MMB177 - Border Prints
CT-MMB178 - Soft Fluid Fabrics
CT-MMB179 - Sheer Fabrics
CT-MMB181 - Layout, Cutting and Marking
CT-LMH183 - Interfacing

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