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When You Press

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When You Press

Pressing is an important part of sewing. Have the iron and ironing board set up and ready to use at the start of the sewing project.

Careful pressing greatly improves the fit and attractiveness of a garment.

There are two kinds of pressing: 1) pressing as a construction step, and 2) pressing to restore or maintain appearance of garment.

Press as you sew
Pressing is done by lifting and lowering the iron, rather than sliding it across the fabric. If there are wrinkles or creases in the fabric, press it carefully before laying on the pattern. Press the pieces of tissue pattern before pinning in place to insure accurate cutting. Use a smooth, well padded ironing board. Special equipment may be useful for shaping curved portions of garment. (See FS 245, Equipment for Pressing.)

Select iron temperature in accordance with fabric care recommendations. Moisture aids in pressing most fabrics. Use either a steam iron or a dry iron with a damp press cloth. Press during construction to: 1) flatten seams and folds, 2) form clean lines, and 3) shape garment.

Always press with the grain. Remove thread basting before pressing. Do not press over pins. Press on wrong side, with or without a press cloth.

Use press cloth of cotton or wool. Press each piece of the construction (seams, darts, etc.) before joining to another garment piece.

Seams
Press seams in the direction they were stitched. Smooth the stitching line of any seam by pressing before opening the seam allowance or turning it to one side, except when pressing seams across gathers. Use only the tip of the iron to press open the seam allowance. Avoid imprints of seam edges on the right side by inserting strips of brown or other unglazed paper between garment and seam allowance before pressing. Do this on darts and pleats also.

Press curved seams over a pressing cushion or ham to give them correct shaping. Press only a few inches at a time.

Always press a seam before crossing it with another seam.

Press underarm seam allowance open.
Press armhole seam into the sleeve using steam only, without pressure.

General
Press all darts toward the center of the body. Press pleats from hem to waist. Press skirt hem up from the lower edge to avoid stretching. Hems will lie flatter if fullness is shrunk out with steam before any finishing is done. Avoid a shine on the right side by using a press cloth for all top pressing.

Underpress
- each construction detail
- each seam before crossing with another
- shape curved areas to fit rounded parts of body
- flatten and sharpen crease lines and edges.

Top Press
- make it the last step in finishing a garment
- press on right side only — use press cloth for many fabrics to avoid creating a shine.

Pressing garments in your wardrobe
Carefully pressed wearing apparel is a mark of good grooming. This kind of pressing is similar to top pressing. Be sure the garment is free from spots and stains. Brush wool garments thoroughly.

Pressing methods
Whether you are pressing as you sew or pressing a finished garment, consider:

1. Heat sensitivity
Always press according to the fiber or fibers in fabric. It may be natural, man-made, or a blend. The amount of heat and moisture needed varies with each fiber. If in doubt, test a seam edge or other hidden area.

All man-made fibers are heat sensitive, so use medium to low heat. When two or more fibers are used, set the iron according to the most sensitive fiber. Many fibers require press cloths for top pressing.

2. Pressure needed
Always keep weight of the iron in your hand and apply only the needed amount of pressure. Press mainly with tip of iron. The amount of heat and moisture needed for a press cloth depend on the fabric.

3. Use of a press cloth
Choose cotton or wool for press cloth. Some fabrics are best when pressed until they are dry. Never press wool completely dry.

Plain Seam
- Press seam open over seam roll (B). With curved seams such as hipline, use rounded edge of board to open. Then press over pressing cushion to mold area. Beater may be used gently to help flatten seams in some fabrics.

Dart
- Press dart in direction stitched, from wide end to point, not beyond (A). Place over pressing cushion and press in same direction to shape and mold dart and area beyond point (B). With bulkier fabrics, you can trim wide darts to ½ inch and press flat to the point as in a plain seam.

Edges and Creases
- Use a beater to sharpen edges and creases on lapels, pleats, etc., when working with wool and other difficult to crease fabrics. Working on a small area at a time, steam, remove press cloth, and immediately slap the fabric with beater. This forces steam through fabric, leaving flat, thin edges and creases.
Pocket Flap

Wrapping paper or lightweight cardboard will avoid marking pocket flaps, facing, seams, darts, etc., in pressing right side of garment. Tissue paper is best for lightweight fabrics.

Fabric Grain

Press with grain of fabric (A). Pressing on crosswise grain or bias may lead to problems in garment fit and appearance.

Press hem up from lower edge to avoid stretching (B).

Molding Sleeve Cap Area

Place sleeve cap area over pressing mitt and steam without touching iron to fabric. Using palm of hand, mold. A damp press cloth held around dry iron also produces steam.

After Pressing Garment

After garment has been pressed, place it on a well shaped hanger (wooden or padded is best). Close top button and all zippers. Depending on garment, close any fasteners that will help keep grain straight. Hang belt from buckle on hanger.