

Pressing Skills

Level
1

Oregon 4-H Clothing Construction Fact Sheets: Basic Skills—Level 1

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Pressing means smoothing and shaping garments or articles with heat, moisture, and pressure with an iron. Pressing gives a smooth, well-made look. It is a different skill than ironing. When pressing, you lower and lift the iron. When ironing, you smooth out wrinkles with a sliding motion.

Pressing while you sew will give your garment or article a smooth appearance. Press each seam and dart before it is crossed with another seam. To make best use of time and electric energy, sew several seams that do not cross each other, and then press all of them at the same time.

Getting ready to press

Control of heat, moisture, and pressure is necessary to protect fabrics and give finished garments a pressed look. Test and adjust the heat, moisture, and pressure for each fabric you use.

Heat is controlled by the settings on the iron (figure 1). Use the setting for the fiber content of your fabric. If the fabric is labeled cotton, use the cotton setting on your iron. If the fabric is a blend of two or more fibers, use the setting for the most heat-sensitive fiber. For a polyester/cotton blend, you would use the permanent press setting for polyester because it is a lower temperature than the cotton setting.

Moisture can be used on most fabrics, but you must control it carefully. Moisture can come from several sources, including a steam iron or a dampened press cloth. Always test on a scrap of fabric before using moisture on the garment or article.

A steam iron will not produce moisture unless it is set hot enough to make steam. The labels for the settings on most steam irons will tell you which settings are hot enough to produce steam. If the fabric requires a heat setting lower than the steam setting on the iron, use a dampened press cloth to give moisture.

Light **pressure** is needed to press most of today's fabrics. It is best to lower and lift the iron carefully, keeping most of the weight of the iron in your hand. Many steps of construction pressing use only the tip or the edge of the soleplate (bottom of the iron). Too much pressure often causes seams or darts to leave a mark or ridge on the front of the fabric.



Figure 1. Heat settings on an iron.

Note: See the Oregon 4-H Clothing Construction Fact Sheet *Sewing Equipment* (4-H 320-11) for descriptions of basic tools for pressing.





Figure 2. Pressing a seam allowance open using a seam roll.



Figure 3. Pressing an armhole seam.

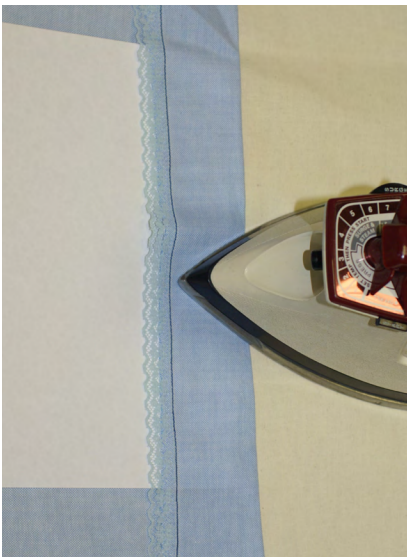


Figure 4. Pressing a hem.

Pressing during garment construction

Tips for construction pressing:

- Press pattern pieces with a warm, dry iron before placing the pieces on the fabric to be sure you will cut the correct size and shape.
- Press the fabric to remove wrinkles, if needed, before placing pattern pieces on the fabric. Some center creases cannot be removed by pressing. Don't place pattern pieces that require a fold on a center crease that cannot be removed.
- Before pressing an area of a garment or article firmly, be sure it will not be changed or altered.
- Don't press over pins. They will leave a mark in the fabric. Press around them, or remove them.
- Hooks and eyes, zippers, and other fasteners may scratch the soleplate of the iron, causing it to damage fabrics. Use a press cloth to cover the fastener and protect the iron.
- Remove bastings that might leave marks before you begin to press.
- Press with the yarn direction or grainline, and press in the same direction the seam was stitched. This will prevent stretching.
- Press each seam, dart, and construction detail before joining it to another part of the garment.
- Use a light touch, usually on the wrong side of the fabric. Do not overpress.
- Clean the iron if it becomes necessary. There are several cleaning products available that remove built-up starch or other residue. Ask your leader or parent about using these products on your iron.

Seams

Press all seams just as they were stitched to set the stitches into the fabric. Next, press each seam allowance back so the seam is open (figure 2). Work first with the tip of the iron.

When pressing seams open, use a seam roll under the right side of the garment or strips of paper under the seam allowance. This will prevent marks on the right side.

For curved seams, such as shoulder seams, hip seams, or yokes, use a pressing cushion or ham under the garment to shape the seam and the surrounding area.

Armhole seams

Press the sleeve side of the seam up (figure 3). Press set-in sleeve seam allowances as they were stitched. Turn, but do not press, the sleeve cap toward the sleeve.

Hems

Working with the hem side up, lift and lower the iron to avoid stretching the hem. Press with the yarn direction or grain from the hemline to the hem edge. Use paper between the hem and the garment to prevent imprinting on the right side (figure 4).

Some garment styles should not be pressed with a sharp crease at the hemline. Use a hem gauge or a piece of paper with the width of the hem or casing marked on it to help you get an even edge.

Casings

Fold-down casings are pressed almost the same as hems. There is an additional step of turning a portion of the fabric cut edge to the inside before you press the casing edge.

Edges and creases

Press from the wrong side, and work on a small area at a time. Wool and fabrics that can be steamed should be steam-pressed and then immediately pounded with a clapper to force steam through the fabric.

Darts

Press darts flat as they were stitched. Be careful not to press beyond the point. Place the garment over a pressing cushion or ham (figure 5), press the garment around the dart as close to the stitching line as possible, and then press the dart in the correct direction. Press vertical darts toward the center of the body and horizontal darts downward.

Bulky darts may be cut open and pressed flat with the point area forming a box pleat. Use strips of paper under the dart to prevent making impressions on the right side of the garment.

Gathers

Press into gathers toward the stitching line (figure 6). Lift folds away before pressing the next area. Never press flat across gathers.

Fusing

Fusing is a way to bond two fabrics together. Fusing uses an adhesive that sticks when heat, moisture, and pressure are applied. The fusible product may be a web of fusing adhesive that will bond almost any two fabrics together or an interfacing with the fusible adhesive attached.

Each brand of fusible web and interfacing has specific directions for use. It is good practice to test the fusible web or interfacing on a scrap of your fabric. Use a scrap that is large enough to leave part of the fabric unfused so you can compare the results.



Figure 5. Pressing a dart using a pressing cushion.



Figure 6. Pressing gathers.



Figure 7. Pressing wool on the right side with a press cloth.

Pressing various fibers

Determining the correct heat, moisture, and pressure will be easier if you know the fabric's fiber content, texture, and weight.

Cotton is the easiest fiber to press. However, durable-press or permanent-press cottons require a lower temperature than the cotton setting on irons. Lightweight cottons may also require reduced heat. Press until the fabric is completely dry. Most cottons may be pressed with moisture on either side. The exceptions are dark colors, dull finishes, and heavy textures; these should be pressed on the wrong side.

Linen is pressed like cotton, except it requires a higher heat setting and more moisture. Press linen until it is dry. Press on the right side for light colors and smooth textures. Press on the wrong side for dark colors and slubbed or uneven textures.

Wool responds well to pressing with moisture but must be protected from direct contact with the iron. Use a wool or wool/cotton double-layer press cloth to prevent shine (figure 7). Press on the right side only when necessary. Do not press wool fabrics dry; leave some moisture in the cloth. Allow the garment to hang or lay flat to dry before continuing construction or wearing.

Silk needs to be pressed with low heat and little or no moisture to prevent water spots. Press with a light touch on the wrong side.

Man-made fibers require varying amounts of heat, moisture, and pressure. Many of these fibers are very sensitive to heat and will melt or glaze if heat is too high. Some man-made fibers are developed to be less heat sensitive and require higher temperature settings.

Always test a sample of your fashion fabric to determine the proper pressing temperature. Know the fiber content, and start with the appropriate setting. Lightweight and sheer fabrics may require reducing the temperature even more, or protecting the fabric with a lightweight press cloth. If moisture is needed with a low temperature setting, use a dampened press cloth.

Blends of two or more fibers should be pressed at the temperature setting for the most heat-sensitive fiber.

Pressing special fabrics

Specific pressing techniques are needed for some fabrics because of their texture, color, or finish.

Crepe fabrics need to be pressed with as little moisture as possible to avoid shrinking or stretching the fabric. Use a press cloth, press with the grain, and do not overpress.

Dull-finished fabrics should be pressed on the wrong side to avoid shine. A press cloth may also be needed.

Glossy and shiny fabrics may be pressed on either side without a press cloth. Little or no moisture should be used.

Raised surface textures should be pressed on the wrong side on a softly padded board or terry cloth. The amount of moisture required depends on the fiber content and amount of pressure needed. Generally, light pressure is needed for laces and woven and embossed designs, and heavier pressure is needed for embroidered designs.

Napped, sueded, and brushed fabrics should be pressed on the wrong side on a softly padded board. They need to be pressed with light pressure and ample steam. If pressing on the right side is needed, use a self-fabric press cloth. After pressing, you may need to restore the nap by brushing.

Pile fabrics such as corduroy, velveteen, and velvet require very careful handling during pressing. Pressing velvet is best done with a needleboard, but self-fabric scraps may be substituted. Large amounts of steam and very little pressure are needed. Use only the point of the iron in a lower-and-lift motion on the fold of seams and darts (figure 8).

DO NOT slide the iron on the fabric, and NEVER press on the right side. After steam-pressing an area, let it dry before you handle it again. Some pile fabrics cannot be pressed, such as fake furs. Finger-press seams open with your thumbnail.



Figure 8. Pressing corduroy fabric.

References

Reader's Digest. (2005). *Complete Guide to Sewing*. (2005). Pleasantville, NY: The Reader's Digest Association.

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Photos by Pamela Rose, © Oregon State University.

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