Understanding Interfacings

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It's tempting to skip it, but it's a lot like the difference between a nicely toned body and one that isn't. Just like you can skip exercising, you can skip interfacing. But, it won't be a secret. Which reminds me... I need to go for a jog!

Interfacing is a textile that is either sewn in or fused on using a steam iron, between layers of fabric, to give it structure and body. Interfacing in itself is not very exciting, but it is one of the keys to achieving a professional look to your project. If you are new to sewing, you may never have run across interfacing because it's not something that shows when your project is done. Most familiar to people is the way a dress shirt has a more substantial collar, placket and cuff. That smooth crispness comes from the interfacing hidden inside. Without interfacing, collars and cuffs would be limp and buttons and buttonholes would rip.

Types of Interfacing

There are many interfacing options on the market, and they are available in a number of weights. A good rule of thumb is to select an interfacing that is a little bit lighter in weight than your fabric:

Knit Interfacing

Usually made of nylon tricot, it's made to use with knit fabrics because it's stretchy like knits. While knits are used more in garment sewing than in home décor, when you do have the need, be sure to lay the stretch of the fabric and the interfacing the same direction.

Woven Interfacing

Treat woven interfacing like you would any woven fabric. Cut along the grainline in the same way you grain.

Non-Woven Interfacing

Because there is no grainline, you can lay out and cut non-woven interfacing however you like. You can also choose between between fusible and sew-in interfacing.

Fusible Interfacing

Also called iron-on interfacing, this interfacing is fused to your fabric using a steam iron. When using pressing cloth between surfaces. This will prevent any sticky residue from welding itself to your iron or damaging your ironing board cover. Fusible interfacing is often what is used to give dress shirts those crisp collars and cuffs. When done properly, the results are beautiful. Fusibles are also good for fabrics that fray. They are less compatible with fabrics like lace or other openwork fabrics, do not adhere well to beaded or heavily embroidered fabric, and iffy with highly textured fabrics. I always test fusible interfacing on a scrap to determine the proper heat setting of my iron and amount of steam. Let it cool and check the final
result. Another consideration is the level of heat your fabric can take must be high enough to fuse the interfacing, or look for Cool Fuse interfacing. Manufacturer’s instructions have specific instructions for each type of interfacing.

Sew-In Interfacing

Sew-in interfacing provides body but somewhat less crispness than fusibles. Sometimes that exactly what you want, like when you want some body, but still want to retain drape.

How is Interfacing Used?

In home décor, interfacing is often used in items like place mats and table runners where you want a more body. You might add interfacing to curtain tie-backs, for example, so they are taut and crisp looking. When you want crispness or “bones” in your project, you’ll probably want to add interfacing. Most fabric store sales staff are familiar with the pros and cons of their products, so don’t hesitate to ask if you are unsure.

Where Can I Buy Interfacing?

Interfacing is available at most fabric stores of any size; and like everything else -- online. Interfacing is generally grouped together in one section of the fabric store, so it’s easy to compare options. Read pattern instructions to understand how much and what kind to buy.

Before You Cut!

Interfacing should be prewashed in the same way as your fabric. This is important so I’m going to say it again. Prewash your interfacing as you do your fabric. If you don’t, when you do launder your completed project, you will find that your fabric and your interfacing shrink different amounts leading to bubbles and warping that can’t be ironed out.

Sewing Tips & Tricks

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