Thank you for your support! Words to live by when you’re deciding how best to interface a project. Interfacing is one of those behind-the-scenes sewing materials that gives your projects a professional finish. You've probably heard of it, but maybe you don't know exactly what it is, what it does, or how best to choose the correct type for the job. This category is so large and varied, it's impractical to tackle everything at once, which is why we're focusing this article on the most common choices for bags and totes. You'll like the handy, printable chart we developed. Print out one copy to post in your sewing room and another to use when you shop. If you like the information here, leave us a comment below and let us know which additional interfacing categories you'd like us to review.

Simply put, interfacing is a textile that goes behind your fabric (or between the fabric layers) to give it the support it needs to look good and hold up well. Can we cue up Wind Beneath My Wings?

Interfacing comes in a huge variety of options: woven or non-woven, thick or sheer, fusible or sew-in, packaged or on a bolt. And that's even before you look at the specialty options within each of those categories. As we mentioned above, there are so many kinds, we're focusing this article on the varieties you'd most likely use when constructing bag and totes.

A brief backstory on interfacing

For most of early history, people wore garments that draped over the body. In other words, they weren't tailored to fit the human form. Think ancient togas and medieval robes.
But around the time of the Renaissance, the nobility began to wear more fitted garments. By the time of Queen Elizabeth, both men's and women's fashion included features like tailored bodices and elaborate sleeves and collars – things that required tailors to add material under the fabric so it would hold its shape. Okay... exactly how would one walk in the vintage garment shown below?!

In the 1700s, starched linen was the most popular interfacing, giving our Founding Fathers their nice, stiff coattails.

In the 1930s, Dr. Carl Nottebohm, a German researcher, developed a way to create textiles by directly laying down the fibers rather than spinning them into thread and weaving them. These new non-woven fabrics became widely used as backing material and make up the bulk of interfacing today.

**The difference between interfacings and stabilizers**

If you've done machine embroidery or appliqué you've (hopefully) used a stabilizer. Like interfacing, stabilizers also come as sheets of thin, non-woven material. They can even feel similar to the touch. But interfacing and stabilizers are different in what they're designed to do and how they're manufactured.

A stabilizer is a *temporary* backing designed to hold your fabric as still as possible while it's being stitched on. With your sewing machine's needle going in and out as fast as six times per second, the fabric wants to move up and down with it. But even a slight movement can produce uneven stitch quality. Stabilizer gives your fabric extra rigidity during the embroidery, appliqué or decorative stitching process. Once the stitching is done, the fabric no longer needs the support, so the stabilizer can be cut, torn or rinsed away.

On the other hand, interfacing stays put.
Whether it's sewn in or ironed on, interfacing offers support for the fabric throughout the entire life of the item. If it's a garment, it may give collars and lapels rigidity, or help a light fabric drape properly. In the case of bags, it allows them to hold their shape. Without some type of interfacing, a sewn bag would simply collapse into a little pile of fabric.

Another difference between stabilizers and interfacing is how they're manufactured. Even though they both might be non-woven, they have different characteristics. A stabilizer is manufactured to be rigid in all directions, while interfacing may give support in one direction while easily flexing in another.

Even with this wonderfully researched distinction, there are exceptions. Some manufacturers use the two terms more interchangeably than others when naming their products. And, sometimes a “stabilizer” can be a good choice as your “interfacing.” In fact, you'll see in our chart below that we list "stabilizers" as our favorite choices in two sew-in categories. As with most things in the world of sewing, testing is always important and your personal choice wins the day every time.

**Printable reference table: Our Favorite Interfacing Options For Bags and Totes**

We've created *many* bag projects here on Sew4Home, and in the process, we've made lots of trips to stores and visits online to find the best interfacing options.

For your reference, we've created a handy chart you can download and print, featuring the kinds of interfacing we recommend for bags and totes. Along with our favorite in each of five general categories, we've included an alternate, which would also work well.

We've divided the choices into five main categories: Foam Style Interfacing, Fleece Interfacing, Lightweight Interfacing, Mid-weight Interfacing, and Firm Interfacing.

There are no *definitive* rules of when to use which, because there are many variables that come into play in terms of fabric (from cotton to canvas), usage (everyday versus special occasion), and the desired look (structured or slouchy). These are all *completely* personal choices.

Think of this information as a guideline to the most common practices. If you're a regular Sew4Home visitor, you'll recognize many of our favorite choices, and we've linked to several project examples to illustrate our suggestions.

**Foam Style Interfacing**
This is a good solution to provide a soft yet defined shape. Keep in mind that foam has some memory to it; you can bend it easily, but it will pop right back into its original shape. If you want a bag with a slouch or soft gather, foam is not the best choice. We used foam on our Tendi Drawcord Backpack (the body but not the flap) and our Vintage Satchel.

**Fleece**
Similar in softness to foam, fleece better follows the drape of the fabric to which it is being layered. Living up to its name, fleece provides a density like a blanket, and it’s a good choice for totes that feature quilting. Fleece also adds thickness to your layers without adding a lot of weight, which is generally beneficial in the body of a bag. We used it on our Gathered Bucket Bag and Lightweight, Designer Backpack (again for the body, but not the flap; a mid-weight was used on the flap).

**Lightweight Interfacing**

When you need a little help to keep things crisp, a lightweight is a good choice. It keeps a lining pocket stable, gives the proper sharpness to a small flap, and is helpful when a project has multiple layers in a small size. In addition, if your fabric already has weight, you may not want to add much more. Hardly noticeable, lightweight interfacing smooths and sharpens. We used it on our Gathered Gift Bags and Double Zipper Device Sleeve.

**Mid-weight Interfacing**
We draw from this category more than any other when constructing our bags and totes. A good mid-weight is great for creating structure, while still allowing for flexibility. It's our go-to interfacing for larger flaps, and is the perfect layer between a décor weight exterior and a quilting-weight lining. It can crease if folded, so it's best to keep it out of seams. We used it on our Messenger Style Brief and our Zippered Pouch Trio.

**Firm Interfacing**
When we say firm, we mean firm! This type of interfacing is quite rigid and meant for projects where you want a very defined shape. We like to use it for round totes as well as the round tote’s cousin: the structured basket. It can also work well to stabilize the base of a bag. We used it for our Jumbo Fabric Tub and our Tool Tote.

**Best Interfacing Solutions for Bags and Totes Chart Preview**

For a high quality PDF, please click here: Interfacing Solutions for Bags and Totes. After downloading, you can then save and/or print the PDF as a handy reference in your sewing room and when shopping.

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**Buying Guide**

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