Pressing Skills

4-H Clothing, Skill Level 2

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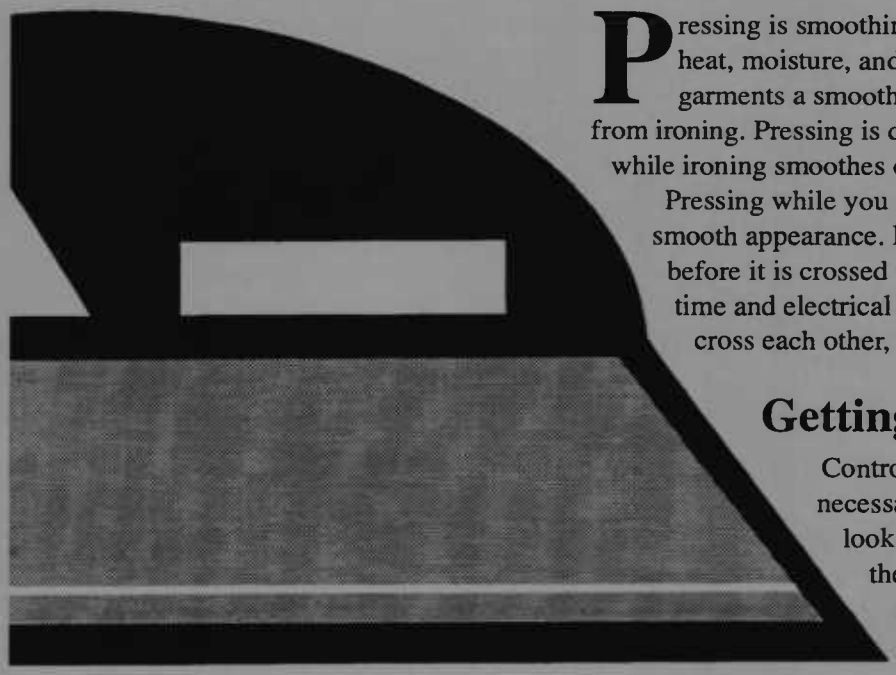

Pressing is smoothing and shaping garments or articles by heat, moisture, and pressure with an iron. Pressing gives garments a smooth, well-made look. It's a different skill from ironing. Pressing is done by lowering and lifting the iron, while ironing smoothes out wrinkles with a sliding motion.

Pressing while you sew will give a garment or article a smooth appearance. Each seam and dart should be pressed before it is crossed with another seam. For the best use of time and electrical energy, sew several seams that do not cross each other, 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 a pressed look to finished garments. Test and adjust the heat, moisture, and pressure for each fabric you use.

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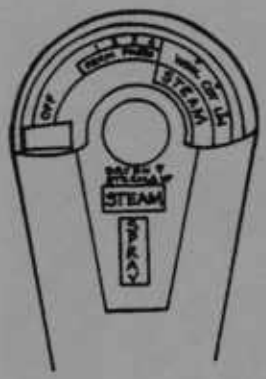

Figure 1

Heat is controlled by the settings on the iron (Figure 1). Use the setting for the fiber content of your fabric. For example, if your fabric is labeled "cotton," use the "cotton" setting on your iron. If the fabric is a blend of two or more fibers, such as "polyester/ cotton," use the setting for the most heat-sensitive fiber. In this case, you would use the "permanent press" setting for polyester since it is a lower temperature than the "cotton" setting. For some finishes, such as "durable press" or "permanent press," you may need to use a lower heat setting than that recommended for the fiber. Too much heat may cause the fabric to soften, melt, or become sticky.

Moisture can be used on most fabrics, but should be carefully controlled. Moisture can come from several sources, including a steam iron or a dampened press cloth. A press cloth is a piece of lightweight cotton, such as muslin, used to protect the garment fabric while pressing.

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 will be hot enough to produce steam. If your fabric requires a heat setting lower than the steam setting on the iron, use a dampened press cloth to give moisture. Test the heat setting and the steam or dry setting on a large scrap of your fabric. Compare the pressed and unpressed areas for any changes in appearance and texture. Some fabric may be ruined or the surface dulled if too much moisture is used.

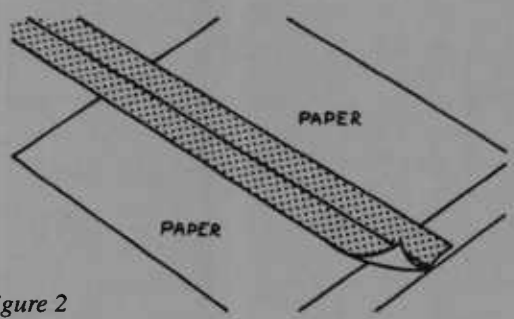

Figure 2

Light pressure is needed to press most of today's fabrics. Generally 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 and darts to leave a mark or ridge on the front of the fabric. Before you press, put a strip of paper in between the edge of the seam or dart and the outside of the garment to prevent imprinting (Figure 2). Remove the paper when you finish pressing.

Pressing during garment construction

Here are some tips on construction pressing:

- To be sure you will cut the correct size and shape, press pattern pieces with a warm, dry iron before laying the pieces on the fabric.
- Press the fabric, if needed, to remove wrinkles before laying the pattern on the fabric. (Some center creases cannot be removed by pressing. Don't lay 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 that it will not be changed or altered.

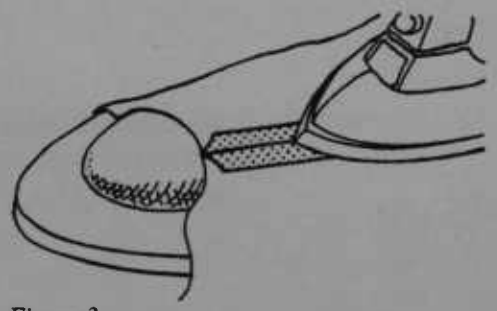

Figure 3

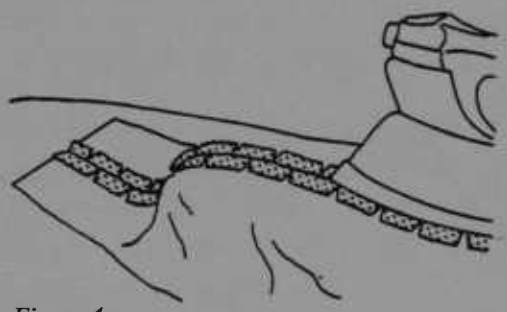

Figure 4

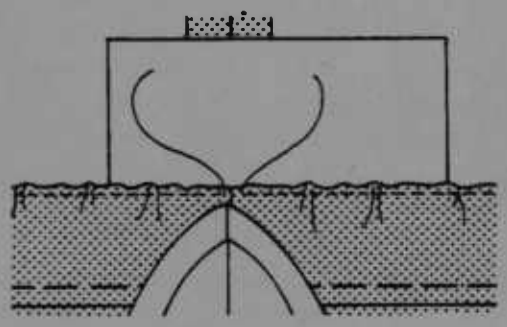

Figure 5

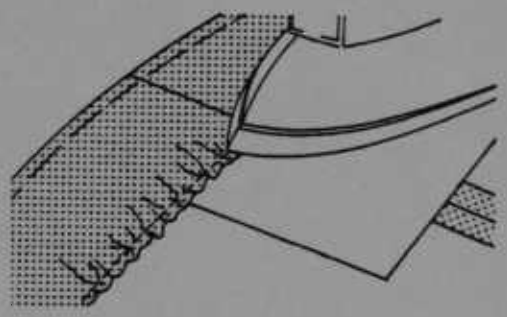

Figure 6

- Don't press over pins. They will leave a mark in your fabric. Press around them or remove them from the area you are pressing.
- Hooks and eyes, zippers, or other fasteners may scratch the soleplate of the iron, causing it to damage fabrics. Use a cloth to cover the fastener and protect the iron.
- Before you begin to press, remove bastings that might leave marks.
- Press with the yarn direction or grainline, and press in the same direction as 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. Check with your parents about removing built-up starch or other residue with one of the several products on the market.

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. When pressing the 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. A seam roll is a long, round pressing tool (Figure 3). You also can roll and tape a magazine, then cover it with fabric, or use a rolling pin covered with fabric.

Work first with the tip of the iron. With 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 (Figure 4).

Hems

Work with the hem side up. Press from the fold line to the cut edge. Use paper between the hem and the garment to prevent marks on the right side of the garment. Lift and lower the iron to keep from stretching the hem. 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 (Figures 5 and 6).

Casings

Fold-down casings are pressed almost the same as hems. There is an additional step of folding 1/4 inch (6 mm) of the cut edge to the inside before you have pressed the casing edge.

Begin by turning the casing edge to the inside 1/4 inch (6 mm) and pressing the fold. Next, turn the casing to the inside the desired width and press the fold. For both the 1/4 inch and the desired casing width, a piece of paper with the widths marked is helpful to get the fold even.

Fusing

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

Each brand of fusible interfacing or fusible web has specific directions for use. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for temperature, moisture, and time. Most fusible interfacings or webs, however, may be used by following these steps:

1. Test several fusible interfacings or webs on a piece of your fabric large enough to leave part of the fabric unfused. Then you can compare the fused part with the unfused part and see how your fabric behaves. If the fused part looks different, too stiff, or shiny, do not use that fusible product on your garment or article.
2. Set the iron temperature hot enough to make steam. Usually this is the "wool" setting.
3. Cut the interfacing or web the size needed.
4. Place the fusible product on the fabric.
5. Pin the fusible product and fabric layers if you want.
6. Heat baste by pressing lightly with the point of the iron between pins to hold all the layers in place. Remove the pins.
7. Complete the fusing following the manufacturer's instructions. As you fuse each section, overlap with the previously fused section.
8. Let the fabric cool before handling it.
9. Keep the same side of the press cloth up and be sure the press cloth protects the iron from touching the fusible product directly.

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