

Pressing

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Pressing is the smoothing and shaping of garments by heat, moisture, and controlled pressure with the iron. It is part of constructing most garments and maintaining tailored clothing to give a finished appearance. The pressing technique is one of lowering and lifting the iron, which is a different procedure from ironing used to smooth out wrinkles with a sliding motion of the iron.

Construction pressing should be done as you sew. Each seam and dart should be pressed before it is crossed by another seam. The most efficient use of time and electrical energy is to sew several seams, then press them at one time.

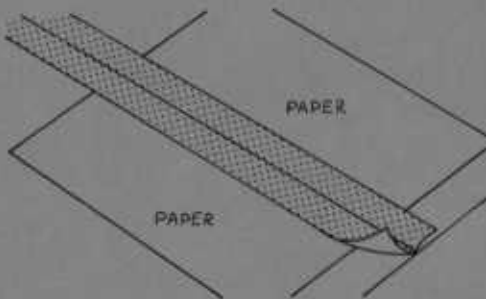
Getting ready to press



Controlling the heat, moisture, and pressure is necessary to adequately press yet protect fabrics. It is recommended that you test and adjust these variables for your fabric, then follow the suggested technique for the area you are pressing.

Heat can be controlled by the settings on the iron. Use the setting specified for the fiber content of your fabric. When the fabric is a blend of two or more fibers, use the lowest heat setting recommended for the most sensitive fiber. Some finishes, such as durable press, also require reduced heat settings. Excessive heat may cause the fabric to soften and melt, or become harsh and brittle. A few fiber modifications such as Qiana® nylon and Arnel® triacetate need higher heat settings than normal nylon and acetate. Be sure to follow care label recommendations and test the heat setting on a scrap of fabric.

Moisture may be used on most fabrics, but should be carefully controlled. Moisture may come from several sources, including a steam iron or a dampened press cloth. Use of a steam iron requires that the heat setting on the iron be hot enough for the generation of steam. If your fabric requires a heat setting lower than the steam setting on the iron, use a dampened press cloth to furnish moisture. Many fabrics will be ruined, have the surface dulled, or be flattened if too much moisture is applied. If additional moisture is needed for some small areas such as edges of pleats, use a brush or spray bottle to apply moisture to the press cloth as needed. Test various combinations of dry iron vs. steam iron and dry press cloth vs. damp press cloth on a scrap of your fabric and compare the pressed and unpressed areas for any changes in appearance and texture.



The pressure needed for most of today's fabrics is very light. 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. Too much pressure frequently causes an imprint of an edge on the front of the fabric. Inserting a strip of paper between the fabric layers will prevent imprinting.



Pressing various fibers

Determining the correct heat, moisture, and pressure will be easier if you analyze the fiber content, texture, and weight of the fabric.

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

Linen is pressed similarly to cotton, except that it requires a higher heat setting and more moisture. It should be pressed until dry. Press on the right side for light colors and smooth textures, 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. Press on the right side only when necessary. Do not press wool fabrics dry but 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 man-made fibers are very sensitive to heat and melt or glaze if heat is too high. The exact temperature should be tested for your fashion fabric. 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. Some man-made fibers, such as Arnel® triacetate and Qiana® nylon, are developed to be less heat sensitive. These require higher temperature settings.

Blends of two or more fibers should be pressed at the temperature setting for the most 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 over-press.

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 to be used will be determined by fiber content and amount of pressure needed. Generally, light pressure is needed for laces and woven and embossed designs, and heavier pressure for embroidered designs.

Pressing during garment construction

Napped, sueded, and brushed fabrics should be pressed on the wrong side on a softly padded board. Generally, 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, the nap may need to be restored by brushing.

Pile fabrics such as corduroy, velveteen, and velvet require very careful handling in pressing. The pressing of 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, darts, etc. Do not slide the iron on the fabric and NEVER press on the right side. After steam pressing an area, let it dry before additional handling.

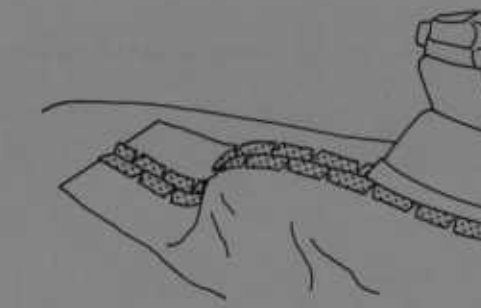
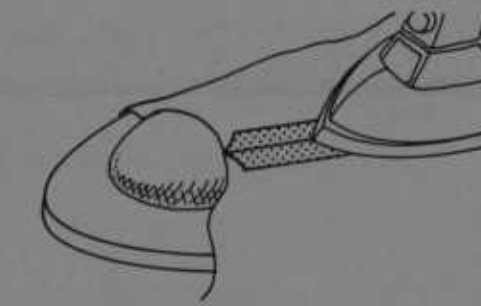
Pressing is a continual part of garment construction. It is used to open and flatten seams, shape parts of the garment, and form creases. Before pressing firmly be sure that the garment area will not be altered. Here are some hints for better construction pressing.

- Press pattern pieces with a dry iron before laying on fabric to ensure the correct size and shape.
 - If needed, press the fabric to remove wrinkles. Center creases may or may not be removed by pressing. Avoid laying pattern pieces which require a fold on a center crease that cannot be removed.
 - Do not press over pins. They will leave an impression in your fabric. Also, pins, hooks, or zippers may scratch the soleplate of the iron causing it to damage fabrics later.
 - Remove bastings before pressing. If it will not be possible to remove the basting use silk thread, hand baste, and press lightly.
 - Press with the yarn direction or grain line, and press seams in the same direction as stitched to prevent stretching. This means pressing from the wide to the narrow part of the garment section.
 - Clean the iron as necessary. Remove built-up starch and fusible with one of the several products on the market, or use very fine steel wool, gentle household cleanser, or very fine sandpaper.
 - Press each seam, dart, and construction detail before joining it to another piece.
 - *Do not overpress.* Use a light touch, usually on the wrong side with the right equipment and technique.
- Some pile fabrics such as fake furs cannot be pressed. Finger press seams open with your tumb nail.

Permanent press fabrics must be correctly fitted before they are pressed. Do not press any seams or darts until you are sure they are correct. Creases and pleats will press more sharply if a small amount of white vinegar is painted along the crease before pressing.

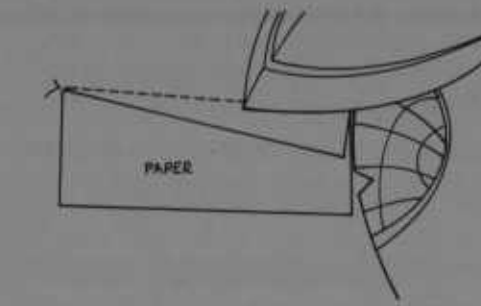
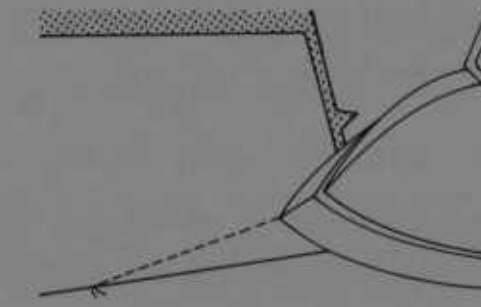
Sheer fabrics should be pressed cautiously. Generally, reduce heat and pressure. Some sheer fabrics pucker permanently if moisture is used.

Seams

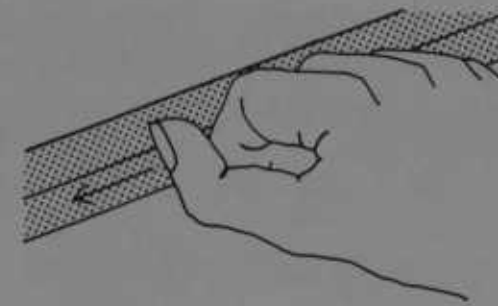


Press all seams flat as stitched to embed the stitches before pressing the seams open or to one side. When pressing seams open, press on a seam roll, or place strips of paper under the seam allowance to prevent impressions on the right side. Work first with the tip of the iron. With curved seams such as shoulder seams, hip seams, or yokes, place the seam on a pressing cushion or ham to shape the seam and surrounding area.

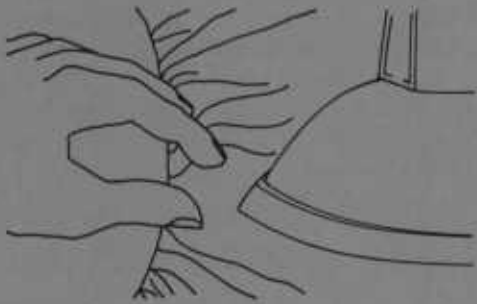
Darts



Press darts flat as stitched, being careful not to press beyond the point. Place a garment over a pressing cushion and press the garment around the dart as close to stitching line as possible, then press the dart in correct direction (vertical darts toward center of 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 impressions through to the right side of the garment.



Gathers

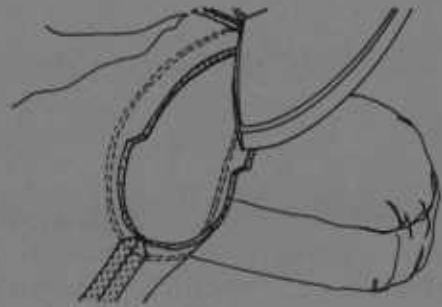


Press into gathers toward stitching line. Lift folds away before pressing next area. Never press flat across gathers.

Edges and creases

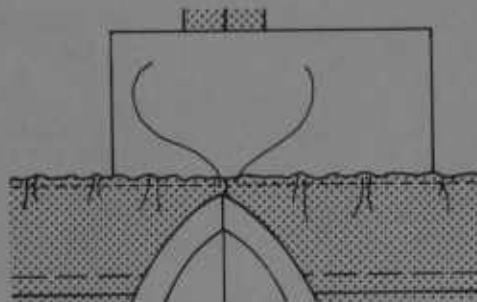
Press from the wrong side; work on a small area at a time. Wool and fabrics which can be steamed should be steam pressed then immediately slapped with a slapper to force steam through the fabric.

Armhole seam

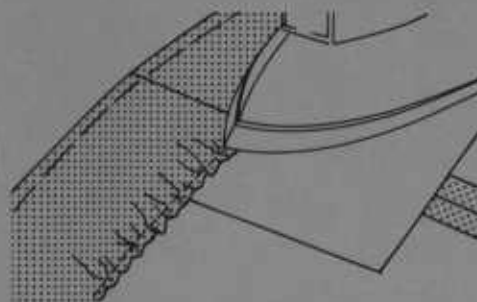


Press with the sleeve side of the seam up. Press set-in sleeve seam allowances as they were stitched. Turn, but do not press, the sleeve cap toward the sleeve.

Hems



Working with the hem side up, lift and lower the iron to avoid stretching hem. Press with the yarn direction or grain from the hem line to the hem edge. Use paper between the hem and the garment to prevent imprinting on the outside. Some garment styles should not be pressed with a sharp crease at the hemline.



*Prepared by Ardis W. Koester
Extension textiles and clothing specialist*

Selected References:

Coats and Clark. *Coats & Clark Sewing Book: Newest Methods A to Z*. Western Publishing Company, Inc., 1976.

Reader's Digest. *Complete Guide to Sewing*. The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 1976.

Simplicity. *Simplicity Sewing Book*. Simplicity Pattern Co. Inc., 1975.



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