



Selecting and Applying Interfacing



Extension Family Development
and Resource Management Specialists

Interfacing is the layer of fabric between the outer fabric of the garment and its facing. Most garments look more professional and wear longer if they are interfaced. Selecting and using interfacing correctly is an important component of clothing construction. Interfacing gives stability, shape and reinforcement to details such as collars, cuffs, waistbands, pockets, lapels and buttonholes. Interfacing prevents stretching and sagging of loosely woven fabrics. Even simple garment styles need interfacing to add stability to necklines, facings or hems. Interfacing adds body to a garment and keeps it crisp through repeated washings and wearings.

All interfacings must be compatible with the weight and characteristics of the garment fabric, the shaping desired, and the care required of the garment fabric. More than one type or weight of interfacing may be suitable for the garment depending upon the desired results. Generally, the interfacing should be the same weight or lighter than your garment fabric.

Selecting Interfacings

Fabrics used as interfacings have a combination of qualities such as body, firmness, crispness, softness, stiffness, give and/or drape. Interfacings may be woven, nonwoven or knit. They are available with or without a fusible adhesive. Interfacings also are available in light, medium and heavy weights and in black, white and neutral colors.

Some garment fabrics—such as solid color sheer fabrics, smooth wash-and-wear fabrics and smooth lightweight cottons—may be used for self-fabric interfacing (using the garment fabric as interfacing). Self-fabric interfacings match the garment fabric in color, care, weight and drapability.

To select an interfacing, shop with your garment fabric. Put the garment fabric, potential interfacing, and any lining fabrics together. Observe the drape and hang of the layers. Decide if the interfacing gives the appearance you want for the garment. Does the interfacing cause the fabric to look different? If crispness is needed, does the interfacing do its share without changing the look or feel of the garment fabric? Remember that a fusible interfacing will give more body and be crisper than sew-in interfacing.

Interfacing should complement and support the garment fabric without adding bulk or too much stiffness. Select the right interfacing based on its compatibility with the garment fabric and design. As you drape the fabric and interfacing together, consider the following:

- **Weight** – Select an interfacing that is lighter or about the same weight as the garment fabric. It should add body, but not bulk. The interfacing should not overpower the garment fabric.
- **Amount of crispness** – A softly styled garment needs a soft, pliable interfacing; a more tailored garment calls for a firmer, crisper one. If the interfacing is too stiff, the garment will look rigid and board-like. If it is too limp, it will not provide the needed support. Determine the degree of crispness needed for each area you interface.
- **Amount of “give”** – Some interfacings roll better and are more pliable than others. For example, collars and lapels call for a gentle roll. Collar and lapel interfacing should help achieve and maintain the effect of a gentle roll.
- **Color** – The interfacing should match or harmonize with the garment fabrics. If the outer fabric is sheer, you may need to use self-fabric to match the color. Another option is a natural-colored interfacing on light colors (including white) and gray or black on darker colors. The interfacing color is also important if the garment has buttonholes. When buttonholes are cut, the interfacing can show through. A white interfacing showing through the buttonhole on a dark fabric is not attractive and gives a “home-made” look.
- **Care** – Select interfacings that require the same care as the garment fabric. Use washable interfacings with washable fabrics and interfacings that can be dry-cleaned with fabrics that will be dry-cleaned. If you are uncertain of the fabric’s properties, wash a test sample to see how it responds.

Since more than one kind of interfacing may be used in a garment, purchase a supply of different interfacings in quantities you are likely to use within a few months. Fusible interfacing should not be stored for long periods of time. Label the interfacing with the name of the product, use instructions and the date of purchase. Preshrink interfacing if necessary; this will save you time when you start a new project.

Types of Interfacing

Even though there are many interfacing fabrics on the market, there are only three basic types: woven, nonwoven and knit. Each type affects the garment fabric differently.

Woven interfacings have lengthwise and crosswise grain. Woven interfacings are usually cut on the same grain as the garment sections they interface. This allows the fabric to maintain its natural drape and feel. Cutting woven interfacing on the bias provides some “give” to garment pieces. Woven interfacing in the appropriate weight and cut on the bias can be used on knits to prevent stretching. Interfacings containing wool can be shaped and molded with steam.

Nonwoven interfacings are usually made of manufactured fibers and are formed by distributing fibers randomly and holding them together with chemical binders and heat. Because of the nature of construction, nonwovens have no yarn direction or grain and will not ravel. They are porous, washable and quick drying. They do not drape as well as woven interfacings of the same weight, and are used for crisper shaping.

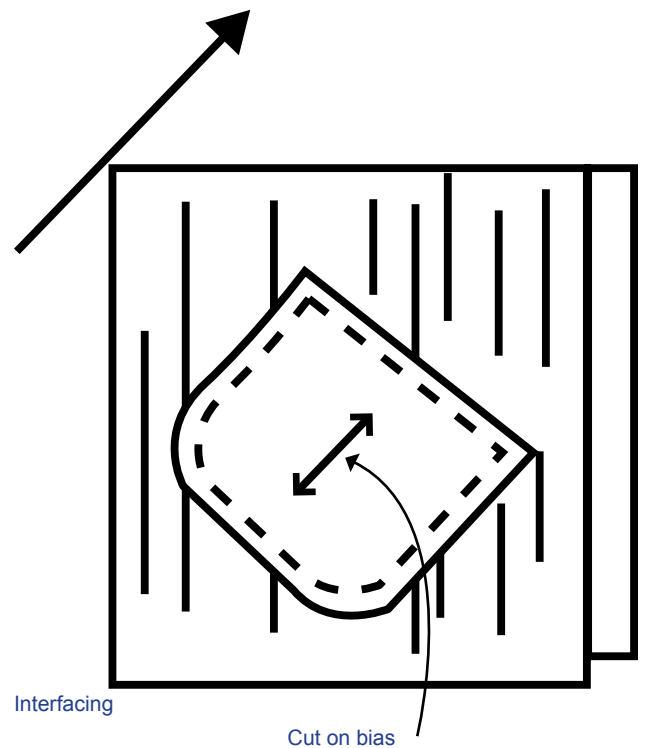
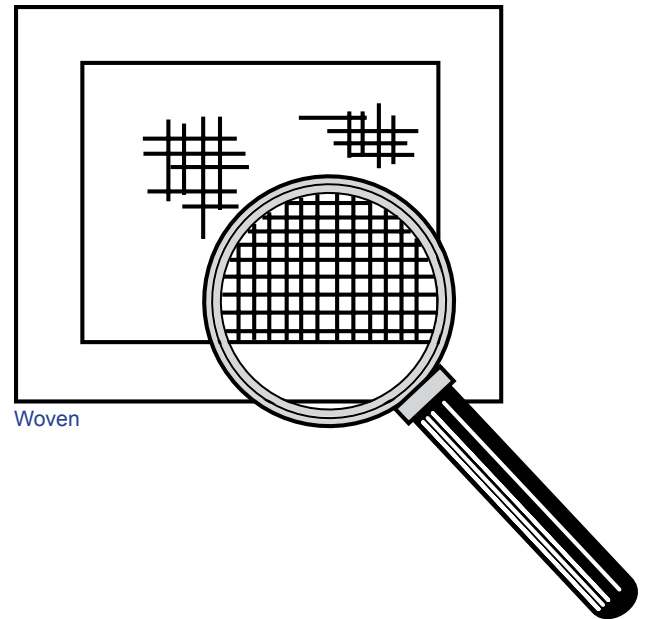
There are several types of nonwoven interfacings:

- **Stable** – which have little give in any direction.
- **Stretch** – which stretch crosswise but are stable lengthwise.
- **All-bias** – which stretch some in all directions.

Knit interfacing is available in three types of construction –tricot or warp knits and warp and weft insertion knits. Each of these has a different amount of give. Most knit interfacings are fusible and tend to be softer than woven ones. *Tricot knits* are used for lightweight fabrics. They have the most give in one direction, making them compatible with soft knit fabrics when both are cut with the same yarn direction. *Warp knits* with a weft or warp insertion are actually tricot with an extra warp (lengthwise) or weft (crosswise) yarn inserted for added stability. *Weft insertion* has the most stretch in the bias. *Warp insertion knits* are considered all-bias because the extra yarn is crisscrossed in the lengthwise direction, making it only a little more stable lengthwise. Warp insertion interfacings can be fused at lower iron temperatures, making them more compatible with fabrics such as silks and micro fibers that cannot take higher temperatures.

Application of Interfacing

Interfacings may be fused or sewn into place. You will need to decide which you prefer to use and which is most appropriate for the intended use. Some fabrics, such as metallic, beaded, raised designs and open work, are not suitable for use with fusibles. The key is always to test a sample of garment fabric with the interfacing for compatible heat, moisture, time and pressure requirements. (Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions for the care and application of fusible interfacing.)



Sew-in interfacings may be woven or nonwoven. To determine which one to use and which weight to use, sandwich it between your fabric and check the body, look, feel and weight. Try this with several weights until you find the one that gives the desired look. A sew-in interfacing should be preshrunk (washed and dried in the dryer) before using.

Fusible interfacings may be woven, nonwoven or knit. They are applied to the garment fabric using heat, moisture and pressure. Always test on a scrap before applying it to your garment. Check the fused sample for water spots, adhesive show through, color changes or shine caused by the fusing process. Use fusible interfacing with fabrics that are firm enough so the edge of the interfacing is not visible on the right side of the garment fabric. If the edge of the interfacing is visible, try using a lighter weight fusible, a low temperature fusible with a lighter adhesive, or a sew-in interfacing.

Remember, fusible interfacings become firmer and stiffer when bonded to fabric. If not fused properly, some fusible interfacings can separate and cause ugly bubbles and bulges after laundering or dry cleaning. Bubbles can also happen if the garment fabric and the interfacing are not properly preshrunk, the temperature is too high during the fusing process, or too much moisture is used.

Test a fused sample of garment fabric and fusible interfacing for durability to cleaning. If you are not sure which interfacing will be the best for your project, test several samples at once and compare.

Preshrinking Interfacings

Many interfacings may shrink; therefore, it is a good idea to preshrink them to avoid problems with bubbling or poor adhesions. (Also preshrink the garment fabric before cutting out the garment.) Surface problems, such as bubbling, show up when the interfacing and garment fabric have incompatible shrinkage. Select a method of preshrinking that avoids distorting the fabric or fusing compound. Common methods for preshrinking fabrics include washing, dry cleaning, immersing and steaming. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for preshrinking interfacing fabrics.

Washing/Dry Cleaning

Sew-in woven interfacings must be treated with the same care procedures that the finished garment will receive. If the garment will be laundered, wash and dry the sew-in interfacing in the same method. If the garment will be dry cleaned, send the garment fabric and interfacing to the dry cleaner for cleaning or steaming before cutting out the garment. You may also thoroughly "steam shrink" the fabric and interfacing at home with good results. Do not preshrink specialty fabrics such as bridal satin or brocade.

Immersing

To preshrink woven, weft-insertion, cool-temperature and knit fusible interfacings, fold the interfacing loosely and immerse it in hot tap water. Let the interfacing sit for 15 to 20 minutes or until the water has cooled completely. Do not agitate the interfacing, as this may loosen the resins. Let the water drain away, roll the interfacing in a towel to remove excess moisture, and unroll. Let the interfacing air dry over a shower rod (wovens) or lay it flat (nonwovens or knits). When dry, fold or roll the interfacing to prevent wrinkles.

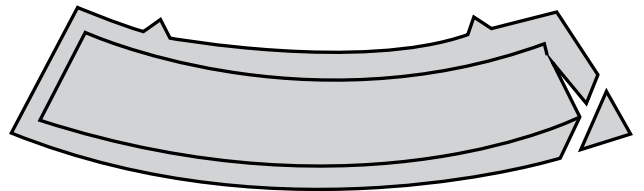
Note: Never wash fusible interfacings in the washer or dry them in the dryer. The washer action may remove the adhesive resin and the dryer may melt the resin.

Steam Shrinking

Nonwoven or dry-clean-only interfacings can generally be “steam shrunk” with a shot-of-steam iron immediately before the actual fusing process. Press the garment fabric with steam to remove wrinkles and warm up the fabric. Position the interfacing (resin side down) over the wrong side of the garment piece to be interfaced. Hold the iron 1 to 2 inches above the piece and apply steam only for about 5 to 7 seconds. Do not rest the iron on the interfacing fabric. You may notice the interfacing shrink up when the steam hits it. After the interfacing is shrunk, fuse the interfacing and garment fabric together following the manufacturer’s directions.

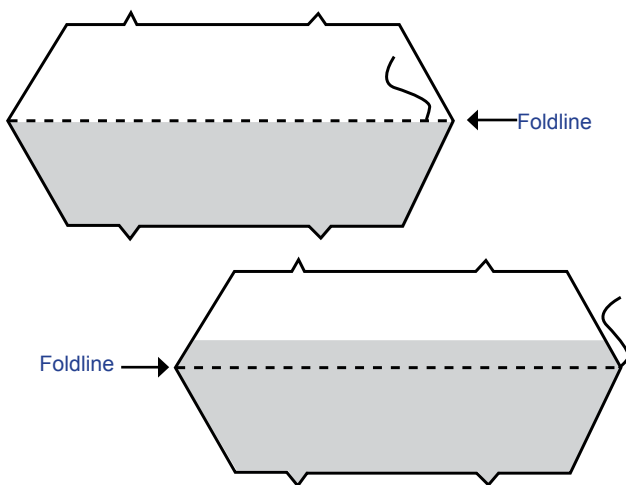
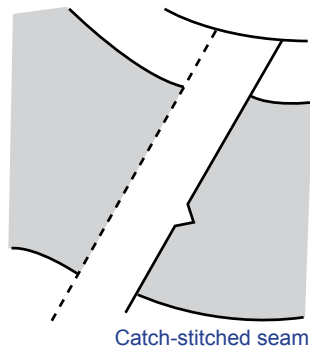
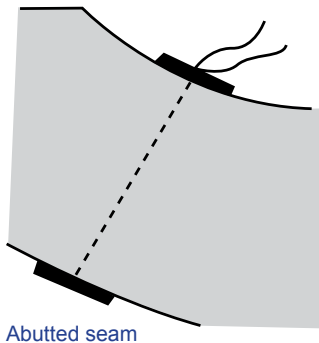
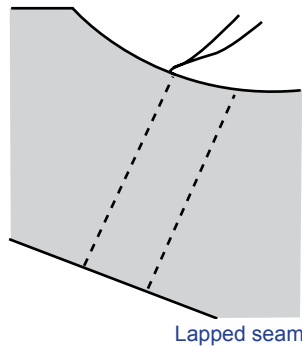
Cutting Out Interfacings

Cut woven and fusible knit interfacings in the same yarn direction or grain as the garment section they will interface. Woven fusible interfacings may be cut on the bias to be more compatible with stable or moderately stretchy knits. Regular no-stretch and all-bias nonwoven interfacings have no grain and can be cut in any direction. Interfacing should extend $\frac{1}{8}$ inch into the seam allowances. To eliminate excess bulk, trim the interfacing corners before stitching the interfacing to the garment piece.



Applying Sew-In Interfacing

In applying any interfacing, you do not want to create additional bulk to the garment. You can stitch lightweight interfacings to the garment seams. You can apply lightweight and medium-weight interfacings to the separate garment pieces before joining the interfaced units together. Or, you can join the interfacing pieces and then apply them as a unit to the corresponding seamed garment unit. Join interfacing seams by lapping them or butting them together.



Lapped seam – Lap corresponding edges of crisp interfacing, aligning the seam lines. Pin it in place. Stitch over the seam line with a wide zigzag stitch or sew a row of straight stitching $\frac{1}{8}$ inch on each side of the seam line. Trim seam allowances.

Abutted seam – If using a medium- to heavy-weight interfacing, cut off seam allowances. Bring the seams together and pin them to an underlay of woven tape or other lightweight fabric. Stitch over the seam line with a wide zigzag or a straight stitch $\frac{1}{8}$ inch from the seam line on each side.

Catch-stitched seam – This seam is the least bulky for heavy interfacing. Cut off seam allowances. Align the seam line of the interfacing with the seam line of the garment. Catch-stitch (by-hand) interfacing to the garment over the seam line. Lift any garment seam allowances out of the way so the interfacing can be aligned.

When interfacing a folded edge such as a cuff, straight collar or hem, position the interfacing along the fold line for a sharp edge or extend it approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch beyond the fold for a softer, rounded edge. If you position the interfacing along the fold, catch-stitch it into place. If the interfacing edge extends beyond the foldline, hold it in place with uneven basting stitches, making the short stitches as invisible as possible on the outside of the garment.

Applying Fusible Interfacing

Fusible interfacing is applied to the garment's facing, not on the outside piece. If this is not possible, interface the entire garment piece to avoid a ridge line. Apply fusible interfacing so that $\frac{1}{8}$ inch is caught in the seam allowance. This makes a stronger seam and reduces bulk while allowing the interfacing to be held by the seam. In addition, trim the corners of the interfacing fabric diagonally. If the interfacing pattern piece includes a dart, cut out the interfacing fabric that would be caught up in the dart.

Decide where the fusible interfacing will be applied to individual garment pieces by considering the type of garment (blouse, skirt or tailored coat) and the weight of the garment fabric. Make a seam sample. On many lightweight fabrics you may want to use a lighter interfacing and fuse interfacing to both the top (upper) and bottom (under) collar, both sides of the cuff, waistband, etc. This makes for a more cushioned seam, and applying a lighter weight interfacing to both sides of the garment piece gives better results than applying one heavier weight interfacing to the one side.

Following the manufacturer's instructions, fuse the interfacing into place. **READ THE DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY. NOT ALL FUSIBLE INTERFACINGS FUSE IN THE SAME MANNER.** Most of the newer interfacings fuse with steam. However, some fuse with a dry iron and steam will prevent them from fusing properly.

Be sure to note:

- Temperature setting – wool/steam or lower
- Moisture – steam or dry
- Time – 10 to 15 seconds
- Pressure – firmness

If you do not follow the manufacturer's instructions, the fusing may not hold. The results may be a puckered, bubbled look. If no fusing directions accompany your interfacing, follow these general directions. Always pretest the fusing procedure on a sample of garment fabric.

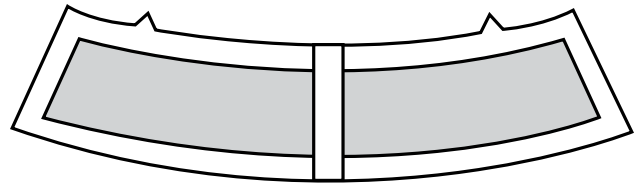
1. Set the iron on the steam or wool setting.
2. Place fusible interfacing with resin side down on the wrong side of the garment fabric.
3. Heat baste the fusible interfacing in place by lightly pressing from the center to the outside edges.
4. Place a damp press cloth over the area to be fused.
5. Fuse about 10 seconds for lightweight and 15 seconds for medium-to heavyweight interfacing. **DO NOT SLIDE THE IRON.** Use firm pressure, overlapping iron positions.
6. Cool before handling.

Fusible interfacings generally adhere best to fabrics that are fairly flat with little surface texture.

Removal of Fused Interfacing

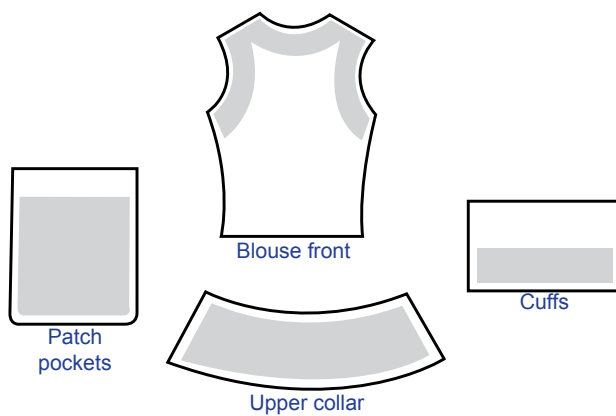
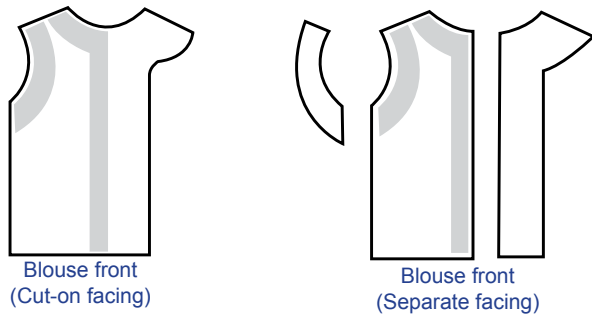
Sometimes you can remove fused interfacing. However, the garment fabric may become distorted and unusable. Handle the fabric gently. To try removing a fusible, hold a steam iron ½ inch above the fused area and steam for about 5 seconds to soften the adhesive. Then try to peel off the interfacing. Some of the fusing agent will be left on the garment fabric. To remove it, place a damp, lightweight scrap of absorbent cotton fabric over the piece and press. Peel off the fabric scrap while still warm. Do this several times if necessary, using a different fabric scrap for each pressing.

If the resins come in contact with the sole plate of the iron, remove them with a mild abrasive or a commercial iron cleaner (available in the notions section of most fabric stores). To restore smoothness to the sole plate, glide the hot iron over wax paper. You may also remove residue by placing about ½ teaspoon of salt on the wax paper (put a piece of newspaper under the wax paper) and running the iron over the salt. Clean the sole plate with damp cloth to remove cleaner and/or salt.

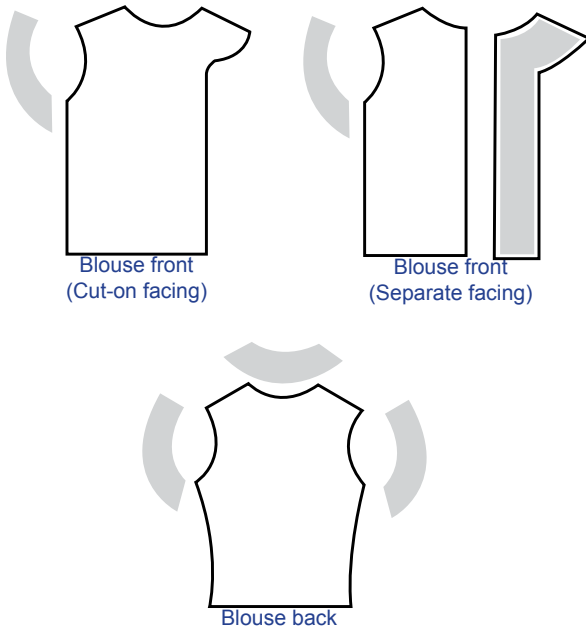


Applying fusible interfacing

Sew-In Interfacing



Fusible Interfacing



Where to Place Interfacing

Sew-in interfacings are placed against the wrong side of the garment pieces, such as the front of a blouse or shirt, the upper collar and upper section of the cuff, and the inside of the pocket.

If using a fusible interfacing, or if the interfacing changes the outside appearance of the garment fabric, place the interfacing against the facing pieces.

Helpful Hints

When Selecting and Applying Interfacings

Selecting an interfacing to create the desired look in garment fabric seems to be a problem for many home sewers. Too often individuals want to use the same interfacing for all fabrics. Learning a few basic principles will help you eliminate much of the guesswork about which one to use.

- Successful use of fusible interfacings requires a combination of steam, pressure and time.
- Keep in mind that an interfacing is usually the same or slightly lighter in weight than the garment fabric. The only time this is not true is if you want to create an exaggerated effect or to change the hang or drape of the fabric.
- Always test the interfacing with your garment fabric. Drape the interfacing over your arm, then place the garment fabric over it. Is this the effect you want?
- A fusible interfacing will create a slightly crisper effect than a sew-in interfacing of the same weight. This is because of the action of the bonding agent when the interfacing is applied to the garment fabric.
- Like garment fabrics, interfacings should be pre-shrunk. It is a good idea to check and see if the interfacing is labeled "preshrunk." Even if the interfacing has been preshrunk, some have been known to shrink after washing or dry cleaning. Do a test sample.
- To test fuse, set your iron on a wool and steam setting. Irons will vary, so you may need to set your iron either higher or lower to find the proper fusing temperature.
- Select an interfacing that is compatible with the garment fabric in terms of color, care and weight. You can use self-fabric when appropriate.
- Consider the heat sensitivity of the interfacing in comparison with the heat sensitivity of the garment fabric. They should be compatible.

- Use an up-and-down motion to press the interfacing into position. Use downward pressure for 10 to 15 seconds on each position. Do not glide the iron back and forth; this may cause the interfacing or garment fabric to shift. The effect of heat and pressure pushes the softened resins into the garment fabric.
- Some moisture is needed; however, interfacing and garment fabric should never be soaking wet. Your press cloth should be dampened or misted only.
- Cooling time is as important as fusing time. Let fused interfacing and fabric cool completely before handling.
- Check the bond for wrinkles and/or bubbles where the interfacing did not fuse completely. Roll the fabric, fold it, feel it and try to pull it apart. If it is correctly bonded, you will not be able to pull the fabric from the interfacing.

The publication was adapted from "Interfacing Selection and Application" by Cynthia Klumpp, Master Clothing Volunteer Coordinator, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas.

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