



Ironing Versus Pressing

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The words pressing and ironing are often interchanged. However, these two terms are not equal when you speak with someone who sews. Ironing is what you do to remove wrinkles by sliding a hot iron back and forth. Pressing is the process of lifting and putting the iron down on a specific part of a project.

For example, we iron a garment so that it does not lose its shape. A well ironed garment allows you to look well put together. On the other hand, a quick press takes a specific wrinkle out of something. When learning to sew, it is important to know the difference.

Tools of the trade

For both tasks, you'll need an iron and an ironing board. If pressing only, you may use a press cloth.

For the ironing board that you use, adjust the height of the board or table by some means so that an upright posture can be maintained even while reaching the full width of the board. The goal would be to reduce strain on the neck, arms, and back while ironing. The correct height also helps ensure safety. There used to be many choices of ironing boards but now, in stores, you pretty much only have one selection and adjustment of the height of the board may not always be possible. Make sure the covering on your board is clean and flat to decrease the chances of interference in your pressing or ironing.



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The heat of an iron is controlled by the settings. Always use the setting for the fiber content of your fabric. If the fabric is labeled cotton, use the cotton setting on your iron. If the fabric is a blend of two or more fibers, use the setting for the most heat sensitive fiber. For a polyester/cotton blend, you



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would use the permanent press setting for polyester because it is a lower temperature than the cotton setting. (BE CAREFUL OUT THERE... the heat of an iron can burn fabric)!

Moisture is often used with an iron. Moisture can be used on most fabrics, but you must control it carefully. Moisture can come from several sources, including a steam iron, a dampened press cloth or even a spritz of water. When using an iron on any cloth, test on a scrap of fabric before using moisture on the garment or article. The labels for the settings on most steam irons will tell you which settings are hot enough to produce steam. If the fabric requires a heat setting lower than the steam setting on the iron, use a dampened press cloth to give moisture.



Ironing

When ironing, you smooth out wrinkles with a sliding motion of the iron. This also gives the items a well-made look, but it is all about the finished appearance of the item and how it will look when you put it on. Ironing can involve dampening the material and/or using spray starch to help it to hold the shape in which you press it.

When ironing, try to handle garments as little as possible. It helps to dampen an item prior to ironing. With the advanced irons available now, you simply need to press a button on the iron and spray a mist over the fabric to do this.



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Pressing

Pressing means smoothing and shaping garments or other items with heat, moisture, and pressure using an iron. Pressing gives these items a smooth, well-made look. When you are performing the task of pressing, you lower and lift the iron. When you are sewing, pressing gives the item you are working on a smooth appearance. Typically, you would press each seam and dart before it is crossed with another seam.



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Light pressure is needed to press most of today's fabrics. You should 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 or darts to leave a mark or ridge on the front of the fabric.

Press pattern pieces with a warm, dry iron before placing the pieces on the fabric to be sure you will cut the correct size and shape. Prior to cutting and placing pattern pieces, press the fabric to remove wrinkles. You should not press over pins as they can leave a mark in the fabric (or melt the plastic head). Press around them or remove them. Be careful as hooks and eyes, zippers, and

other fasteners may melt or scratch the soleplate of the iron and could cause it to damage fabrics. Use a press cloth to cover the fastener and protect the iron. Always remove bastings that might leave marks before you begin to press. With practice, you will learn to press with the grain of the fabric and in same direction that 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 over press. Clean the iron if it becomes necessary. There are several cleaning products available that remove built-up starch or other residue.



Sources

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