# Napped Fabrics

Velvets, flannel, corduroy and satin are all examples of napped fabrics. The rich hand and surface texture of napped fabrics make them ideal candidates for luxury garments and design interest.

The term "with nap" is used on sewing patterns and instructions; it affects the amount of yardage you need, how the pattern is cut, how the item is sewn and pressed, and even how the final garment is laundered. This guideline will help you understand napped fabrics. For sewing tips and garment care information, see Guideline 4.218.

A fabric with "nap" has gone through a finishing process that raises the fiber ends to the surface where they are clipped, brushed or left upright. This creates surface texture that in turn creates a soft hand, a heavier fabric and, usually, a warmer fabric.

The raised fibers of napped fabrics all lie in one direction; this makes the fabric look and feel different when touched or viewed from different directions. If you rub your hand from cut end to cut end, one direction feels smooth and the other doesn't. It's very important to lay out pattern pieces so the nap runs in the same direction on each garment piece or you'll end up with odd color shading as well as other problems.

Pile fabrics are woven or knit with an extra yarn to create their raised surfaces and are not true napped fabrics because they do not undergo a finishing process. They do, however, have "nap" and are usually grouped with napped fabrics. For the most part, pile fabrics require the same fabric preparation and sewing techniques as napped fabrics.

Napped fabrics include melton, flannel, serge, camel's hair, sweatshirt fleece, brushed denim, mohair, lamb's wool and synthetic suedes, just to name a few.

Pile fabrics, which require a "with-nap layout," include velvet, velveteen, corduroy, fleece, terry cloth, fake fur and bouclé amongst others.

To determine if a fabric has nap, fold it right sides together matching the cut ends, then turn one corner back (1). Check that the layers look and feel exactly the same. If they don't, the fabric has nap. If you still aren't sure, use the cutting layout and sewing suggestions for nap fabric, just in case.
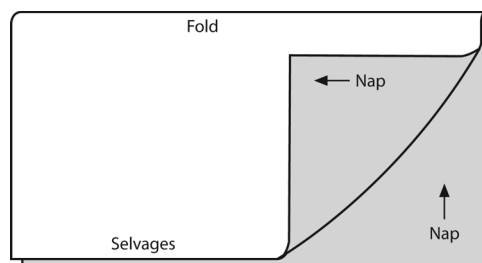


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## Pattern Selection

The beauty of garments made with napped fabric is the texture and hand of the cloth and the way the surface reflects light. Simple designs are most suitable for napped fabrics.

Avoid garments or items that have more decorative details; let the fabric create the interest. Simple designs showcase the fabric better and are easier to sew. Since napped fabrics tend to be bulky and require special sewing techniques, the fewer details, the better.

In general, avoid excessive topstitching and limit the number of buttonholes, which can distort the fabric. Snaps and button-and-loop closures are better choices, as are zippers that are hand stitched in place. If the garment has facings and the fabric is heavy, cut the facings from lighter weight fabric, or line the garment to the edge.

As always, make any fitting and length adjustments to the pattern before laying it out on the fabric.

## Fabric Preparation

When laying out the pattern pieces for cutting, all the pieces must run in the same direction. Position the upper edges of all the garment pieces at one end, with all the lower edges toward the opposite end (2). Extra fabric is generally required in order to lay out the pieces this way. If the fabric is expensive, layout the pattern pieces on muslin or the floor to determine the exact yardage, or check the pattern envelope for a napped fabric layout and yardage requirements.
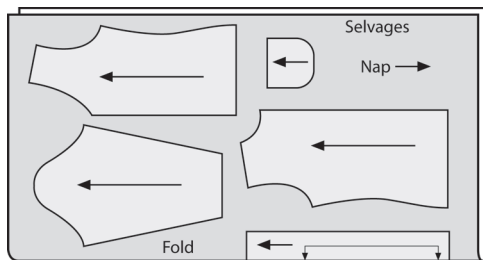


*2*

To preshrink the fabric, follow the manufacturer's care instructions on the end of the fabric bolt. Consider the fiber content as well as the fabric structure. Synthetic suede, wool melton, camel's hair, velvet, velveteen, fake fur, etc. usually require dry-cleaning. If the garment will be dry-cleaned, you must dry-clean the fabric before cutting it because the fabric could shrink.

If the fabric must be stored for an extended period of time, pin it to a hanger to avoid fold marks. Try to avoid excessive handling, which could crush the pile or distort the nap.

*Tip: To revitalize fabric that has been stored, hang it in a bathroom and fill the room with steam. Do not touch the fabric while it is damp, or you could leave a mark.*

## How To Use the Nap

Napped fabrics are normally cut so that the nap runs down the garment, from the top down toward the lower hem. This feels softer, and the fabric tends to pill less and wear better. However, when the nap runs up, the color is richer.

Short-nap fabrics, such as corduroy and velour, can be cut with the nap running up to achieve a richer, deeper color and a more interesting texture.

Outerwear fabrics with heavy and longer surface fibers, such as fleece and camel's hair, should be cut with the nap running down, so the pile is smooth and the garment repels moisture better.

Before laying out the pattern pieces, test for nap direction. You can choose to lay out the pattern pieces in either direction, as long as you are consistent. If you are looking for design interest, cut certain pieces, like patch pockets and yokes, in different directions to create shading.

See Guideline 4.218 for tips on working with napped fabrics. 🎛