

FIT CLINIC

EPISODE 3

HOW FABRIC CHOICE AFFECTS FIT



Welcome to the third episode of our Fit Clinic series! This handy cheat sheet will help you with choosing the right fabric to make sure you get the perfect fit. Follow along with this month's video to see these tips in action.

xoxo, *Gertie*

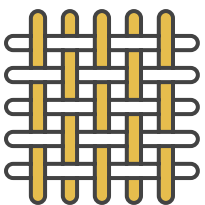
FABRIC 101

Before choosing fabric for your sewing project, it helps to understand the basics of what fabric is and how it is made. Fabrics are described by their fiber and their weave. Common fibers are cotton, wool, silk, rayon, linen, or polyester. Common weaves are twill, sateen, gauze, flannel, charmeuse, crepe, satin, brocade, etc. Combining the fiber and the weave gives you the fabric name and begins to tell you a bit about the type of fabric it is and how it will behave.

Fiber content and weave affect the hand, body, and drape of the fabric. Fabrics with body are best for structured garments, where pleats, darts, precise tailoring, or crisp seam lines are important. Fabrics with drape are best for soft, fluid garments that flow smoothly over the curves of your body.

Another important aspect of weave is related to the stretch content of the fabric, which we cover extensively in this month's video. A woven fabric, where the fibers go over and under each other, generally doesn't stretch at all (unless there is spandex included in the fiber content). A knit fabric, where the fibers loop around each other like a knitted sweater, will usually stretch in at least one direction.

The best way to learn about fabrics is to challenge yourself to sew with lots of different fibers and weaves. Don't be afraid to try new things! Keeping a swatchbook of fabrics you love (with each fabric swatch labeled with its fiber, weave, stretch percentage, and the fabric store) will help grow your knowledge and confidence. You can also order swatches from many different fabric websites to collect in a binder. Or buy a swatch book like *Fabric for Fashion: the Swatch Book*, where the legwork of collecting swatches is done for you.



WOVENS

Woven fabrics are made on a loom that passes threads (or yarns) over and under each other. The style of the weave can be as simple as a basketweave pattern or as complex as a jacquard or damask, with fancy designs woven into the fabric itself.

Wovens generally do not stretch on the straight or crossgrain, although they will stretch on the bias. If spandex is included in the threads, creating a stretch woven, the fabric will stretch in one or both directions. The percentage of spandex is often listed in a fabric's description; it can be as little as 1% for firm denims and as much as 10% for high-stretch wovens. (This spandex percentage is part of the fiber content and is different than the fabric's stretch percentage described on page 3 of this handout.)



KNITS

Knit fabrics are made by hand or on a knitting machine to create interlocking loops of a single long thread or length of yarn. They generally stretch in at least one direction, even without spandex. When sewing, make sure the direction of greatest stretch goes around your body.

Knits will stretch and conform to the body, so you generally don't need darts or closures. You can make a knit garment with zero or negative ease and it will still be comfortable, which is why patterns for knit fabrics are drafted much smaller than patterns for woven fabrics

Single knits, like jersey, look different on each side and the edges tend to curl when cut. They are drapery and casual, and are often used for t-shirts.

Double knits, like interlock or ponte, look the same on each side and are more stable. They have more body and are great for skirts, dresses, jackets, and pants.

SUCCESSFUL FABRIC SUBSTITUTIONS

The most common questions I get asked are about fabric substitutions. There are some cases where this is possible, but you will likely have to make pattern adjustments to get the best fit. The only way to know for sure is to test it yourself! (For example, when testing the Rita Blouse in a knit fabric, I ended up making major fit and construction changes to get it to work.)

If the pattern calls for a drapery fabric and you want to use something with body like a quilting cotton, the finished garment will not fit, hang, or look like the intended design. It's difficult to swap fabrics that are very different in drape or body.

If you want to interchange a woven with a stable knit or a stretch woven, it will likely work without major adjustments (though you may wish to take in the side seams slightly for a more fitted look).

If you want to interchange a woven or stable knit with a stretch woven or 25%-stretch knit, it's usually possible, but you may need to go up or down a size. Make sure you make a muslin using your preferred material, and test along the way.

When the difference in stretch percentage increases, the likelihood that the substitution will work decreases. But the only way to know for sure is to try it yourself! Even if the fabric substitution doesn't work, you learn so much in the process that will help make your future sewing projects a success.

TEXTILE GLOSSARY

Direction of greatest stretch:

Knits usually stretch more in one direction than the other. Knits that only stretch in one direction are called two-way stretch knits (confusing, I know!). Two-way stretch knits usually stretch along the crossgrain of the fabric, and you want this stretch to go around your body. Knits that stretch in both directions are called four-way stretch knits, and are best for swimwear and leotards that need to stretch across your body as well as up and down your torso.

Ease: Ease references how close the garment fits to the body, and it compares the finished garment measurements to your body's measurements. A garment with zero ease will fit the body measurements exactly. A garment with negative ease will have measurements that are smaller than the body measurements, requiring shapewear or fabrics with stretch.

Fabric grain: Fabrics have three types of grain. The straight grain runs the length of the fabric (parallel to selvedge edge). The crossgrain runs from one selvedge edge to the other, across the width of the fabric. The bias grain runs at a 45 degree angle from the selvedge, diagonally across the straight grain and crossgrain.

Selvedge: The selvedge edges of a woven fabric are the bound and uncut edges that run the length of the fabric, parallel to each other.

HOW TO DETERMINE STRETCH PERCENTAGE

Patterns will often call for knits with a certain percentage of stretch, but how do you know what that is? Do a Pull Test!

Using a ruler, or the guides below, grab 4 inches of fabric between your fingers and pull gently to stretch the fabric as far as is comfortably possible. The stretch percentage is calculated by dividing the amount stretched by the amount you started with. For example, if your fabric stretched to 5 inches, it has 25% stretch.

25% Stretch Pull Test

4 INCHES

5 INCHES

37.5% Stretch Pull Test

4 INCHES

5 1/2 INCHES

50% Stretch Pull Test

4 INCHES

6 INCHES

75% Stretch Pull Test

4 INCHES

7 INCHES

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