



## Testing Your Fabric [www.emmaonesock.com](http://www.emmaonesock.com)

By Shannon Gifford

You've just opened a package of fabric from Linda, and you are itching to get started on your latest gorgeous piece of fabric...but wait! Before cutting into that yardage, take a little time to run some fabric tests. Testing is not difficult, takes about an hour, and you will be glad you protected your fabric investment!

### **What you will need**

- A sheet of typing paper
- Two identical swatches of your fabric, about 6-8 inches square
- Washer, dryer, bleach, fabric softener
- A lingerie bag, or an old pair of nylon hosiery (cut off the legs at about mid-knee and tie the legs into knots at the ankle area)
- Color-magnet washing sheets (Dye Magnet, Color Catcher are two brands)
- Paper towels
- Water
- Your iron
- Assorted scraps of interfacing
- Assorted machine needles and threads
- About an hour of time

### **Step 1 – Cut two identical swatches**

- Cut out two identical swatches of your fabric, roughly 6-8 inches square. You don't have to make the pieces perfectly square, just as long as both pieces are identical. I generally fold the fabric and cut two rough shaped pieces at once.
- Trim off any selvages on your fabric. Selvages are more tightly woven than the rest of the yardage, and will interfere with your testing.
- Trace around one piece of fabric on your typing paper. Set the paper and one swatch aside.

### **Step 2 – Test for fading, bleeding & shrinkage**

- Put your second swatch in a lingerie bag and run it through the washer with detergent **ONLY**, no bleach or fabric softener.
- While you're waiting for the laundry to be done, take the first swatch and set it on a layer of folded paper towels. Drop several drops of water on a corner and rub the water into the fabric with your fingers. Lift the fabric corner and look at the paper toweling. If you see the fabric's color on the paper towel, you'll likely have some fading and bleeding of the fabric when washed. Run to the washer and put a color-magnet sheet in with the laundry bag you're washing. This will catch any fugitive dye on the magnet sheet, and you'll be able to determine the exact amount of fading that will likely occur.
- After the washer is finished, put the lingerie bag in the dryer. A small sample like this takes about 10 minutes in the dryer to completely dry the fabric.
- Check your washed sample against the unwashed sample and the tracing. Do you notice any difference in color? Are the two pieces the same size? Has there been any shrinkage in the washed sample? (Even a fraction of an inch counts. Remember, this is a very small sample, only about 1/8 of the total width of the fabric. Even a 1/8" difference in your sample would equal a minimum of a full inch of shrinkage in width of your total yardage.) Use the tracing you made on paper to check for any distortion in washing. Did the fabric stretch? Did the fabric change shape in any way? If so, make note of the changes on the paper tracing.

### **Step 3 – Bleach test**

- On sample one, still on the paper towels, drop one drop of chlorine bleach. If the color fades, make a note NOT to bleach the fabric. If there is no noticeable fading or damage from the bleach, you might be able to bleach the finished garment.
- If you think you might want to bleach the finished garment, take your washed sample and run it through the washer again, this time with bleach. Check again for color changes, shrinkage, and any damage that might occur as a result of bleaching.

### **Step 4 – Test for iron temperature**

- Crush the fabric in your hand to create wrinkles
- Begin with the lowest temperature on your iron, use steam, and always use a press cloth.
- Press the fabric with the iron at the low setting. Does this remove the wrinkles? If not, raise the temperature on the iron slightly.
- Continue until the wrinkles are smooth; this will be the correct temperature for the fabric. If the fabric crushes, melts, or changes appearance, the iron is too hot!

### **Step 5 – Interfacing test**

- Use a small swatch of interfacing that you are considering for your garment. Apply it to the washed sample of fabric, and to the unwashed sample.
- Do you see a definite “line” on the right side of the fabric where the interfacing ends? If so, you need a lighter weight interfacing.

### **Step 6 – Test your stitch length, thread, and needle size**

- Using your pretreated and your interfaced samples, run several rows of stitching, using the variety of needles and threads you’ve collected for the purpose. Be sure to stitch on the straight of grain, the cross-grain, and the bias in each needle size.
- If your fabric is a knit, stitch along the length of the fabric as well as the stretch (which is generally across the width of the fabric).
- What needle and thread combination provides the smoothest stitching? Would a zigzag stitch provide a nicer finish? Do you need to lengthen or shorten your stitch?
- Mark your favorites on the swatches, and make a note of the size needle, the thread used, and the length (and width, if zigzag) that produces the best results.

### **Some things to consider**

- Minerals in your water can make a difference when you test. While my fabric might not fade in my local water, yours might, due to the differences in the makeup of our water supply. And simple things like differences in detergents can make a huge difference in the results! I generally use the simplest or mildest detergent possible, with no fragrances (fragrances contain oils) and no “whiteners” (another name for “bleach”). Your water may require a stronger detergent to remove soil; therefore, it is best for you to test your fabric in your water.
- Color magnet sheets are wonderful! If I’m testing a red fabric, and the color magnet comes out of the washer tinged pink, I know the fabric will fade. I also know that the color magnet will keep the dye from seeping into the other garments in the washload. That’s why I throw a magnet in every load of dark clothes, just in case....
- Fabric softener: Don’t overlook the possibility that fabric softeners can change the appearance of your fabric. For instance, I once had a piece of royal blue silk that I wanted to prewash, as I wanted to soften the fabric. I used a liquid fabric softener. The blue fabric was streaked from the fabric softener, and I was disappointed. Fabric softeners contain oil-type substances, which can stain certain fabrics. If you plan to use any fabric softener, liquid or sheet, test first with your swatches.