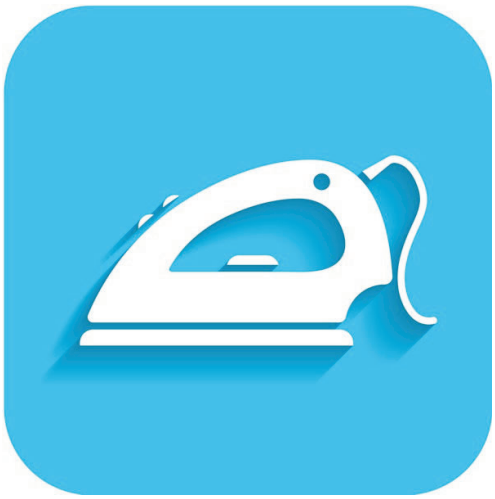
Pressing Tools and Techniques

PRESSING is the same as ironing, right? No. Pressing is a construction technique used to create a tailored, couture finish. To press is to use an iron in a lifting and lowering motion as one creates a garment or item. In contrast, ironing is a sliding and pushing motion used to free a garment or other item of wrinkles. The rule of thumb is "press as you go."



Objective:

Summarize pressing tools and techniques.

Key Terms:

distilled water
dressmaker or tailor's clapper
ironing
iron shine
needle board
pant presser
point presser
press
pressing
pressing cloth
pressing mitt
pressure
seam roll
sleeve board
steamer
tailor's board
tailor's ham
velvet board

Using Pressing Tools and Techniques

Pressing is a construction technique used to create a tailored, couture finish. Pressing is the key finishing detail during construction. To **press** is to use an iron in a lifting and lowering motion as one creates a garment or item. **Ironing** is a sliding and pushing motion used to free a garment or other item of wrinkles. Ironing is generally not used during garment construction. The fabric's long-chain fiber molecules are heated and straightened with the added weight of the iron. The rule of thumb is "press as you go."

PRESSING EQUIPMENT AND TOOLS

Essential pressing equipment includes an iron, an ironing board, and steamers. Other types of specialty equipment are available online and at fabric and craft stores.

Types of Equipment and Tools

The types of equipment and tools include commonly known and used devices as well as more specialized tools.

Iron

An iron is a tool used to smooth wrinkles or straighten fabric or clothing. Steam irons are necessary to press fabric. In contrast, heavy irons produce flatter and crisper seams, and a narrow tip helps get into hard-to-reach areas of a garment. An iron's soleplate needs steam holes; some have anti-drip technology. Also, an iron's soleplate needs an open soleplate tip (steam holes) to properly press pleats and under-button areas. Some have "steam burst" options to remove stubborn wrinkles. In addition, most new irons have an auto-shutoff capability.

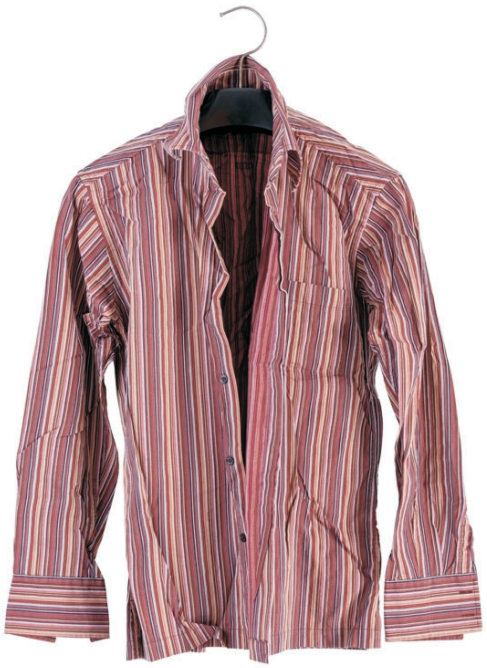


FIGURE 1. A wrinkled garment looks sloppy and unkempt.

Ironing Board

An ironing board is a flat surface topped with cotton or wool padding attached to legs. The flat metal surface usually has holes to vent steam and is topped with cotton or wool padding (rather than foam) for adequate moisture absorption. Many boards are fitted with an iron rest and a cord holder.

Pant Presser

A **pant presser** is a piece of equipment used to take the wrinkles out of pants and put a crease in them. The pant presser has two main pieces: a heating pad and a pressing plate with stretcher bars. The machine holds the pants taut (stretched tight) when pressing to remove wrinkles. Home machine versions are costly but do a professional job without the cost of dry cleaning.

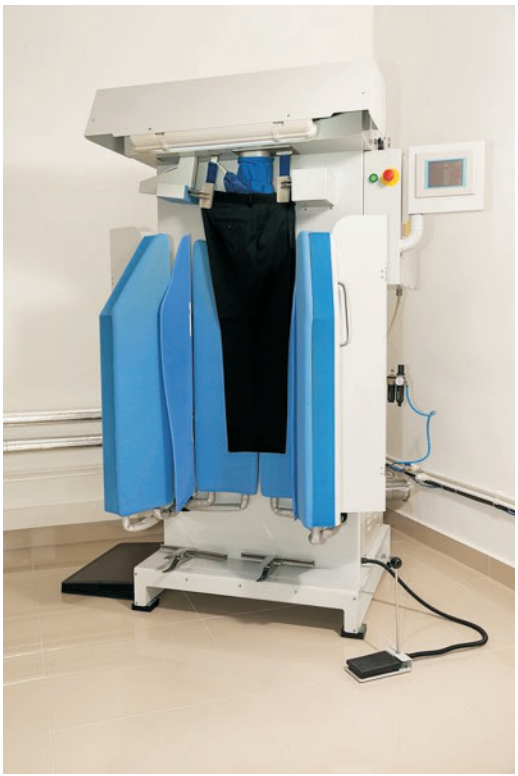


FIGURE 2. A pant presser is a piece of equipment used to take the wrinkles out of pants and put a crease in them. The pant presser has two main pieces: a heating pad and a pressing plate with stretcher bars.

Sleeve Board

The **sleeve board** is a piece of equipment that looks like two mini-ironing boards stuck together. It has small, flat surfaces for pressing narrow areas (e.g., sleeves and pant legs).

Steamer

A **steamer** is a piece of equipment that heats water and uses several passes of steam to remove wrinkles from fabric. The professional steamer is a mainstay of retailers, tailors, dressmakers, and the fashion industry. It has a large tank of water and a long hose with the steamer head on the end of a wand to pass over garments and furniture. Portable and travel steamers are smaller than the professional versions and are handheld. A steamer is used to freshen garments even when they do not need to be cleaned.

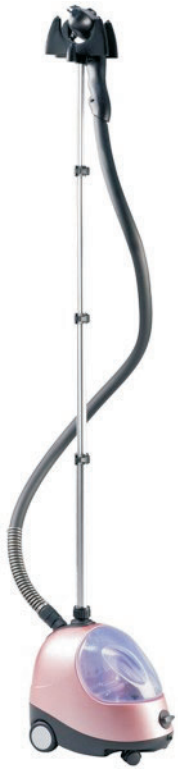


FIGURE 3. A steamer is a piece of equipment that heats water and uses several passes of steam to remove wrinkles from fabric. A professional steamer has a large tank of water and a long hose with the steamer head on the end of a wand to pass over garments and furniture. Portable and travel steamers are smaller than the professional versions and are handheld.

Tailor's Board

A **tailor's board** is a multi-functional piece of pressing equipment made up of variously shaped edges and surfaces for pressing. The pressing tool usually has areas to press points, curves, and flat parts of a garment. The board is usually made of wood. A soft, padded cover is available.

Pressing Tool Jobs

Each pressing tool performs a specific job. The following tools are designed for the purposes of pressing rather than ironing. Pressing tools are available online and in fabric and craft stores. Many can be made at home.

Dressmaker or Tailor's Clapper

A **dressmaker or tailor's clapper** is a handheld round-nosed wooden block used to flatten bulky areas, create sharp creases, and make smooth flat seams. First, the fabric is pressed with a steam iron. Then the steam is removed from the fabric using the block to pound the fabric. A clapper flattens fabric without burning or scorching and leaves a flat crisp area with no shine. Some fabrics will not remain in place after pressing until they cool completely, but waiting for them to cool takes time. Clappers are used to "hold" the seam in place while the fabric cools.

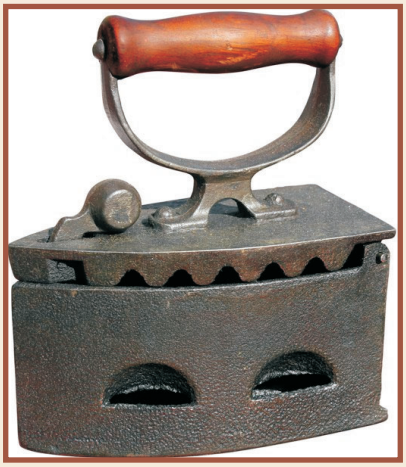
Needle Board

A **needle board** is a length of canvas covered with fine, upright small steel wires used to press pile or nap fabrics. Another term for a needle board is a **velvet board**. The pile side of the fabric is pressed over the wire side of the board to prevent it from matting or flattening.

DIGGING DEEPER...

UNCOVERING ADDITIONAL FACTS: The History of Ironing

What is the history of the iron? Conduct your own research. How long have we used the irons that we use today? What did the first irons look like? Were these early irons easy to use? Continue to investigate information about the iron until you have 10 new facts. Record the facts and cite (name) where you found the information. Turn in your completed "Fact Sheet" to your instructor.



This old iron has no cord. How was it heated?

Point Presser

A **point presser** is a wooden tool that has a flat pointed surface for pressing seams in narrow openings, sash and pocket corners, and collar and cuff points. When turned over, the base works like the dressmaker's clapper.

Pressing Cloth

A **pressing cloth** is a piece of lightweight fabric used to protect fabrics from the heat of an iron. The cloth must be placed between the right side of the fabric and the iron to prevent scorching or fabric shine. Pressing cloths made of a transparent fabric enable you to tell when a garment is free of wrinkles. Also, the pressing cloth fabric must be able to handle various iron temperatures.

Pressing Mitt

A **pressing mitt** is a padded cushion (pillow-like) with an open pocket for a hand to slip into for pressing curves. Most are covered in wool on one side and cotton on the other. Mitts may be used to press curved areas that are too small for a tailor's ham. A pressing mitt may be slipped over the end of a sleeve board to create a stable, rounded pressing surface.

Seam Roll

A **seam roll** (sleeve roll) is a long cylinder (tube) of fabric with rounded edges used to press seams open in sleeves and other narrow areas. The seam roll is inserted in the sleeve and allows the seam to be pressed open without being creased. The rounded surface of the seam roll keeps the edges of the seam from pressing a ridge into the right side of the fabric. The fabric for the seam roll is wool on one side and cotton on the other and is usually stuffed with

sawdust (for ease of shaping and molding). Wool is used when pressing wool as it holds the steam, and the other side of the seam roll is cotton to be used with all other fabrics.

Tailor's Ham

A **tailor's ham** is a firmly packed ham-shaped cushion with rounded edges for pressing curves, sleeve caps, princess seams, and dart details. Like the seam roll, the covering on a tailor's ham is wool on one side for pressing wools, and the other side is cotton for use with all other fabrics. The ham is usually filled with sawdust to easily shape and mold the tool for use in various situations.

PRESSING TECHNIQUES

Using an iron incorrectly can damage fabric and ruin the look of a garment.

Pressing Tips

"Press as you go." Pressing every seam as it is sewn, before it crosses another seam, is the only way to create a truly professional-looking garment or item. Pressing as you sew means less finish pressing on the completed garment or item is required. Another benefit of pressing as you go is that small construction defects are minimized. Pressing the seam flat along the stitching line—on the wrong side of the fabric—blends the stitches. Ask your instructor to demonstrate the correct way to press a seam.

FIGURE 4. Pressing is a construction technique used to create a tailored, couture finish. To press is to use an iron in a lifting and lowering motion as you create a garment or item. Ironing is a sliding and pushing motion used to free a garment or other item of wrinkles. Ironing is generally not used during garment construction. The rule of thumb is "press as you go."

Press on the Inside

Press on the inside (wrong side) of the garment or item (unless otherwise stated in the pattern directions). When it is necessary to press on the outside of the fabric, use a pressing cloth to avoid fabric (or iron) "shine."

Press Seams Open

Press each seam open as soon as it is sewn (unless otherwise stated in the pattern directions). The pressing open of all seams is recommended even if the seam would eventually be pressed to one side, such as for collars, cuffs, or facings. Through this process, the crispness of the seamline is enhanced and the collar, cuff, facing will be easier to shape.

Press with Fabric Grain

Always press with the grain of the fabric.

Test Press a Scrap

Always test-press a fabric scrap first to confirm the correct heat setting.

Miscellaneous Tips

- Press curved darts, curved seams, and eased seams with special care to preserve their intended shape. Curved shaping requires the use of a tailor's ham (or a towel well wrapped in a clean white cloth) to maintain the garments' intended shape.
- Place strips of brown paper between the seam allowance and the fabric when pressing to prevent seam impressions showing through to the right side of the material (especially with fine and fragile fabrics).
- Use light to moderate pressure, depending on the fabric, when pressing during construction. (Heavy pressure may be used during ironing but seldom or never during pressing.)

Pressing Variables

Heat, moisture, and pressure are important factors to consider for creating the desired results.

Heat

Heat re-orients the fabric's fiber molecules. In the case of cotton fabric, heating the long-chain fiber molecules causes them to be "reformed" and temporarily "locked" in place when the fabric cools completely. Heat settings are stamped on most irons (dials or charts) and indicate the approximate temperature of the iron used on the fabric. Heat settings vary depending on the fabric. For example:

- High or 445°F = Linen (dry iron)
- Hot or 400°F = Cotton (dry or steam iron)
- Medium or 300°F = Wool (steam iron), cotton blends, polyester, and silk
- Low or 275°F = Lycra, spandex, and acrylic

FIGURE 5. Heat settings are stamped on most irons (dials or charts) and indicate the approximate temperature of the iron used on the fabric. Heat settings vary depending on the fabric. Notice the steam mist feature on this iron.

Iron Shine

Iron shine is a sheen that occurs when fabric is exposed to heat too high/hot for the fabric; it appears to "melt" the fabric fibers. Iron temperatures too high for the fabric type can leave the garment with an iron shine or, if applied for an extended period of time, can scorch the fabric. REMINDER: Press most garments from the wrong side of the fabric.

Pressing Cloth

Silk chiffon fabric is sheer and makes an excellent pressing cloth, as it is transparent and is able to be used with high heat settings. When it is necessary to press on the right side of the garment, use a pressing cloth. Most pressing cloths are treated with a high heat finish (or you can make your own).

Steam

Steam shapes fabric and is often used during pressing (and ironing). The iron heats water, and the "steam vapor" produced presses seams and removes wrinkles from fabrics. Moisture relaxes the fibers and helps release the fabric wrinkles. Ironing and pressing can be done with a dry iron, a steam iron, or an iron and a spray bottle. The choice of moisture or no moisture depends on the fabric and how deeply the wrinkles are "set."

Some irons and steamers use tap water, but most recommend the use of distilled water. **Distilled water** is water that has many minerals and impurities removed from it. Follow the manufacturer's directions for the pressing equipment when in use. A steamer appliance or a combination of a spray bottle and iron are used to produce steam vapor.

Pressure

Pressure is the weight of the iron plus the force used to press fabric. Assuming the iron is set at the appropriate temperature for the fabric, light to moderate pressure is sufficient to press a garment or item. Light pressure prevents the entire weight of the iron resting on the fabric and potentially leaving marks (iron shine). When working with heavily wrinkled clothes, medium to heavier pressure may be necessary.

Summary:

Pressing is a construction technique used to create a tailored, couture finish. Pressing is the key finishing detail during construction. To press is to use an iron in a lifting and lowering motion as you create a garment or item. Ironing is a sliding and pushing motion used to free a garment or other item of wrinkles. Ironing is generally not used during garment construction. The fabric's long-chain fiber molecules are heated and, with the added weight of the iron, straightened. The rule of thumb is "press as you go."

Essential pressing equipment includes an iron, an ironing board, and steamers. Other types of specialty equipment are also available online and at fabric and craft

stores. Each pressing tool performs a specific job: shaping curved areas, supporting pile and napped fabrics, allowing a sleeve seam to be pressed easily, etc.

Heat, moisture, and pressure are the variables in pressing and ironing. Heat re-orients the fabric's fiber molecules. Steam shapes fabrics and garments. Pressure is the weight of the iron plus the force used to on the iron to press fabric. Assuming the iron is set at the appropriate temperature for the fabric, light to moderate pressure is sufficient to press a garment or item.

Checking Your Knowledge:

1. Explain the difference between ironing and pressing.
2. Which steam iron features are key to a tailored and couture garment?
3. How do wrinkled clothes affect your image?
4. What is a steamer, and how is it used?
5. Would purchasing a pants presser be a wise investment for everyone? Why or why not?

Expanding Your Knowledge:

To learn more about pressing tools and techniques, conduct some online research. Watch tutorials, and take notes. Make your own video about making your own press cloth after you have seen others.

Web Links:

Ironing Tips
http://www.rd.com/home/cleaning-organizing/are-you-ironing-wrong-8-tips-on-getting-it-right/

Steaming a Shirt
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cutDaLcqLg

Ironing Tips
http://www.marthastewart.com/247830/ironing-tips-sewers#247830

Make Yourself a Press Cloth
http://www.didyoumakethat.com/2012/06/04/make-yourself-a-press-cloth

Pressing Versus Ironing
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4xzzohRACU