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# SEWING FAKE FURS

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Are you ready for the great fur put-on? Try making your next sporty vest, tailored coat, outdoor jacket, hostess skirt, accessory item, throw or pillow out of a fun fake! Bedspreads, scatter rugs and stuffed toys are other items that make up well in fake fur. The possibilities are endless and so are the fabric choices.

## WHAT ARE FAKE FURS?

Fake furs are fabrics that consist of a face or pile and a backing. The face is made up of fur-like fibers or yarns which are usually synthetic. The face fibers vary in length from short flat fur ( $\frac{1}{2}$ " or less) to deep pile. The backing is a flat, woven or knitted fabric that holds the face or pile fibers in place. High quality fake furs have a dense pile that makes the backing fabric invisible from the right side and gives a rich look and feel that is missing on poorer quality fakes with scant pile.

Knit-backed fakes generally are easier to work with because they have greater flexibility. Woven backings tend to be stiffer so handling during construction is more difficult.

Weight of the backing fabric also varies. Heavyweight backing provides shape, warmth and stability which eliminates the need for underlining. A fake fur with heavyweight backing is a good choice for outdoor wear. Lightweight backing on fur-like fabric is generally flexible so it will allow more variety in pattern design than a stiff deep pile. Fake fur with lightweight backing is also suitable for use as a lining.

## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The key to designing in fake fur is to make sure the length, color and design of the fur and the lines of the pattern enhance your figure.

A deep-pile or long-haired fake skillfully combined with a leather-like or knit fabric can be much more slenderizing than a flat, zebra-print fur used alone. The length and thickness of fake fur determines its *actual* bulk. The color, sheen and printed design create *visual* bulk. Both must be considered. Remember that dark, plain furs with a mat or dull texture have the least visual bulk.

If you can't visualize what the finished effect of a design will be, try on ready-to-wear garments made of various types of fake fur and fur-fabric combinations. You will soon develop an eye for what looks good on you.

## CHOOSE YOUR PATTERN AND FABRIC

Select a pattern that features simple lines and one that is suited to heavyweight fabrics. Avoid patterns that have small detail and many seams. Seams and detailing don't show on a fake fur garment. Intersecting seams, ease and gathers, and designs that create overlapping layers of fur should be avoided to reduce unattractive bulk and lessen sewing difficulties.

Fake fur fabrics come in 54 and 62 inch widths and require a "With Nap" layout. Request a pocket-size Fabric Conversion Card at your county extension office to use in determining the exact amount of yardage required. Knowing the exact yardage needed is important for figuring the cost of various fabric possibilities. Buy an additional  $\frac{3}{8}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  yard if a design must be matched. More yardage may be required if the repeat is large.

Because fake fur is wide, it cuts to good advantage. If you are combining fabric and fur or two furs, do an in-store pattern layout before deciding the amount of yardage to buy.

Check the label on the bolt end to determine the fiber content, manufacturer and care requirements. Some fake furs are washable and some must be drycleaned. Make certain you get a care label to sew into your finished garment. Care requirements for all contrasting fabrics, supporting fabrics and notions that will be used with the fur-like fabric must be compatible with it.

Get down the manufacturer's name and address. If the fabric performs well, you may want to buy that brand again. In cases where care requirements are inaccurate or fabric performance proves inadequate, the manufacturer's name and address is needed to make a complaint.

## SUPPORTING FABRIC

Supporting fabrics must be compatible with the fake fur in weight and care required. **Interfacing** is recommended in areas that may stretch out of shape due to wear-strain, particularly in garments made of knit-backed fake fur. Collars, necklines, hems and faced edges, especially those containing closures, should be interfaced. Consider using lightweight hair canvas, non-woven interfacing or unbleached, pre-shrunk muslin. In washable fakes, a permanent press interfacing is a good choice. Fusible interfacing should not be used because the heat and pressure required during fusing can cause fake fur to mat and possibly melt.

**Underlining** is generally not required because the backing of most fake fur has adequate stability. Also the additional bulk added by underlining is undesirable.

The **lining** fabric should be durable and abrasion-resistant, especially when the fake fur has a rough-finished backing. Select colorfast lining fabric that has an anti-static finish. Lining used in sleeves must have a slippery surface so the finished garment will slide on and off easily. Rayon twill, polyester crepe, heavy satin, quilted satin or quilted cotton prints are lining possibilities. Patterned linings rarely show through thick fake fur, but check fabric and lining together before you make your final decision.

## PATTERN AND FABRIC PREPARATION

Fake furs require perfect fitting because they are difficult to take apart. Alterations made on fake furs may leave permanent marks. If you are not sure of the fit of a pattern, do a muslin mock-up. Make all alterations in the muslin. Mark the corrected seamlines and the *wrong* side of each garment piece with a colored pencil. Then take the muslin apart, press carefully and use it as your pattern. Having a complete muslin pattern piece for each part of the garment will make layout on a single thickness of fabric easy.

If the paper pattern will be used, make any alterations that your body measurements dictate. Decide on the seam allowance width. Short furs with lightweight backing can be stitched with  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch seam allowances. The seam allowances can be left the full width, or if the fur is too bulky, seam edges can be trimmed and overcast after stitching. If the paper or muslin pattern will be cut of long, firm-backed fake fur, the pattern seam allowances should be trimmed to  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch before the fabric is cut. The  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch is based on the widest zigzag stitch possible on most machines. For a narrower zigzag or overcast stitch, trim the seam allowance to the depth needed.

To reduce bulk, seams should be eliminated wherever possible. Front facings can be cut as an extension of the garment. Consider removing center back seams. To eliminate a seam, pin the pattern pieces together with the *seamlines* matched. The seamlines must be perfectly straight or they will not match accurately. Facings may be omitted entirely if garment edges are bound with braid.

Preshrink washable fakes and supporting fabrics the way you plan to care for the finished garment. Follow care label instructions. Generally fake furs that require drycleaning are ready to sew as purchased.

Straighten fake furs by cutting along the crosswise thread of a woven backing or along a line drawn at right angles to the rib of a knit backing. Mark penciled arrows on the backing to show the downward direction of the fur.

## PATTERN LAYOUT AND MARKING

Most fake furs require a "With Nap" layout. Make sure that straight-haired fur runs downward — from neck to hem. If pile is brushed in all directions, a "With Nap" layout is not necessary.

Prominent markings on fake fur generally are visible on the backing. Carefully match strips or other markings during pattern layout.

Work with a single thickness of *fake fur spread wrong side up*. Tape the muslin or paper pattern to the backing. (Margins should be trimmed off the paper pattern.) Short-haired fakes may be pinned. If the muslin is used, the *wrong side of each muslin garment piece should face up*. By having the fake fur and the muslin pieces *wrong side up*, each garment piece is cut for the exact side of the body that the muslin was fitted to.

Mark the cutting lines with pencil, tailor's chalk, ballpoint or felt tip pens. If the tissue pattern is used, reverse each pattern piece before it is traced on the backing a second time. This will assure you of having a right and left side to your garment.

Remove the paper or muslin pattern before cutting unless you have a short-haired, flat fur that will be cut with  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch seam allowances. Notches, dartlines and other locations also should be marked on the backing before the pattern is removed. Stick a pin straight down through each pattern marking. Lift the pattern and mark where the pin point(s) rests. Repeat until all locations are marked.

## CUTTING

Long-haired fakes should be cut with a single-edged razor blade. Raise the fur off the table with one hand. Hold the blade at a 45° angle and cut with long strokes, using your free hand. Cut carefully so you cut only the backing. Separate the fur with your fingers after the backing is cut. Remove loose hair. Use dressmaker shears on short-haired furs that will be cut with  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch seam allowances.

## MACHINE ADJUSTMENTS

Read the instruction booklet for details on how to adjust your machine.

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Needle</b> | —Medium (#14) for lightweight furs.<br>Large (#16 or #18) for heavyweight furs.  |
| <b>Stitch</b> | —Long, 8 to 10 per inch.<br>Dense, long-haired furs require the longest stitch.  |
| <b>Thread</b> | —Heavy-duty mercerized cotton or cotton-wrapped polyester thread.<br><i>Before adjusting tension and pressure, test stitching on a folded scrap of fake fur.</i> |

- Tension** —Normal to medium-light. It may be necessary to loosen tension for very deep pile.
- Pressure** —Normal or somewhat lighter. Lighten pressure if heavy furs do not feed through the machine evenly.

## CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES

The techniques used in construction of fake fur basically have one purpose — reduction of bulk. A good rule to remember is to do a test sample of a technique on fake fur scraps before sewing on the garment. If the result is not suitable, try another method. Consider the following techniques before you begin a fake fur project:

- Hand baste or pin pieces together being careful to brush the pile *away* from the stitching line. If a muslin was not made, hand baste to check fit.
- Machine stitch slowly in the direction of the pile whenever possible.
- After stitching use a long needle to carefully lift any pile caught in the seamline. This will hide the seamline. Seamlines on fake fur should never look clipped. Always lift the pile along a stitched seamline before shearing a seam allowance.

### Seams

**Plain Seam** — On flat furs stitch a plain  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam. Finger press. If necessary, use fabric glue or a hand catch-stitch to keep the seam allowances flat.

**Sheared Plain Seam** — Shear pile from the seam allowance with small scissors (Fig. 1). Stitch a plain  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seam using a zipper foot for easier handling. Seam allowance edges may need to be finished with a hand stitch or machine zigzag. Bias binding can be used on seam edges if the garment will not be lined.

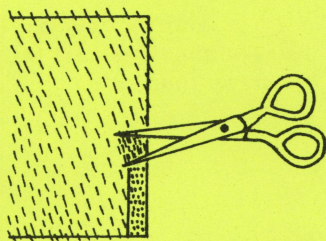


Fig. 1. Shearing pile from seam allowance.

**Sheared Zigzag Seam** — On long-haired fakes, pile should be sheared from the  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seam allowance before stitching. Stitch the  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seam with a straight stitch catching in  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch twill tape if it is needed (see Fig. 3). When twill tape is used it should be hand basted in place before stitching. Zigzag the raw edges of the seam together. (Fig. 2 without tape.)

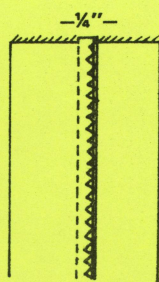


Fig. 2. Sheared zigzag seam.

**Overlock Seam** — If your machine has an overlock or overcast stitch, cut the seam allowance to the width of the stitch. Carefully shear long pile from the narrow seam allowance before stitching.

- Use woven hem tape or  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch pre-shrunk twill tape to reinforce points of strain. Shoulder, neckline, waistline and armseye seams generally should be taped, especially in knit-backed fakes. Catch  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch of the edge of the woven tape into the stitching (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Taping a seam.

- Shear off pile and grade the seam allowances on enclosed seams to reduce bulk. Clip inside curves and wedge outside curves. Reduce stitch length or stitch twice to strengthen seams that require close trimming.
- At intersecting  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch seams, trim away excess layers of seam allowance and shear the pile from the seams. Turn  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seam allowances in opposite directions where they intersect to reduce bulk.

To seam flat, unnaped fabric to a fake fur, have the unnaped fabric on top during stitching. Hand baste the two fabrics together as firmly as possible without creating puckers in the flat fabric.

### Darts

On short-haired fakes with lightweight backing, stitch dart by regular method. Lift hair caught in stitching. Trim dart open as shown in Fig. 4. Shear pile from edges of dart and stitch or glue dart edges to the fabric backing.

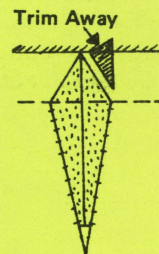


Fig. 4. Open and shear dart.

On long-haired furs, mark a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch (or narrower) seam allowance inside the dart stitching line. Cut out the dart along the newly-marked dotted line shown in Fig. 5. Shear the pile from the narrow seam allowances. Bring dart stitching lines together and stitch, using a machine zigzag or overcast stitch.

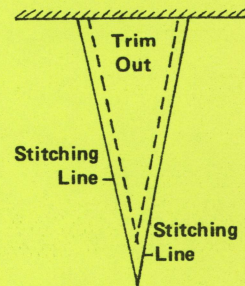


Fig. 5. Cut out dart on dotted line.

### Pressing

Finger press by rubbing along the well of the seam with a thimble-covered finger. If you must use an iron, press a sample seam first. Set your iron to the temperature recommended for the fiber content. Always use a needle-board or several layers of terry toweling under the fur. Keep the weight of the iron in your hand, letting the steam accomplish the

pressing. Pressing should be kept to a minimum and always done from the *wrong* side, following the direction of the pile. If seams do not lie flat with light pressing, they may be hand-tacked or glued to the fabric backing. A mallet or pounding block also may be used to press fur-like fabrics that have stiff backing.

## CLOSURES

**Zippers** can be inserted in long-haired fake furs by using a center lapped hand application. Shear pile from placket seam allowances and apply 1-inch wide grosgrain ribbon over the seam allowances. If  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch seam allowances are used, trim the fake fur seam allowances under the grosgrain to  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch. Machine baste zipper to the grosgrain ribbon. Turn ribbon and zipper to inside of garment along seamline. Hand backstitch zipper tape to the fabric backing of the fur. Then, slipstitch outside edges of grosgrain to backing. Zipper is shown in Fig. 6.

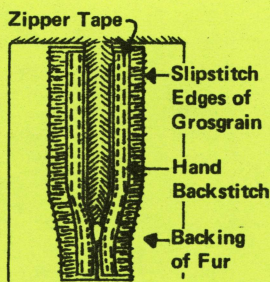


Fig. 6. Fake fur zipper application.

**Bound buttonholes** can be made in fake fur garments. Use corded strips of leather or leather-like fabric to form the lips of the buttonhole. Complement this trim with matching, covered buttons. Attach buttons by making long thread shanks to accommodate the pile thickness.

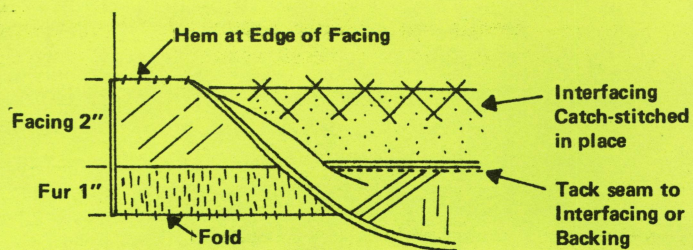


Fig. 7. Faced hem.

## HEMS

Try on the garment. Mark the hemline with transparent tape or large safety pins. Turn the hem up with masking tape to check the length. Transfer the hemline marking to the backing. Trim the hem to an even 1-inch depth. Machine stitch decorative trim, grosgrain ribbon, or about a 2-inch strip of bias-cut lining fabric to the cut edge of the fake fur. Hems that have a slight curve require a bias-cut facing. Hem as shown in Fig. 7.

## FOR FURTHER READING

Everything About Sewing Fur and Fur-Like Fabrics from Vogue Patterns. Copyright 1971. Butterick Fashion Marketing Co., 161 Sixth Ave., New York, NY 10013.

Fashioning Fur Fabrics by Bjorg Frackelton and Evelyn Klug. Copyright 1971. BE Publishers, So. 147 Dynna Dr., Grafton, WI 53024.

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