

Working with Unusual Fabrics

by Cheryl Sleboda

In cosplay (costumed play), you may be working with fabrics that may be unfamiliar to you. Some of these fabrics can be a bit tricky, so here's the tips you need to work with each type.

Stretch Fabrics like Spandex

For costume patterns that call for stretch fabrics, there is usually a stretch guide at the top of the pattern envelope that helps you pick the fabric with the appropriate amount of stretch. Look for indicators on your pattern for stings like 2 way or 4 way stretch fabrics, as they are different.

Sewing with Spandex can be tricky in that it's a bit slippery so pinning well using thin pins are important. When sewing, you will want to switch your needle to a ball/Jersey needle, which will pierce the fabric between the fabric weave instead of through the threads, creating a stronger seam.

On your sewing machine, look for your stretch stitch. It looks like a zigzag, but a little more up and down shaped. This stitch actually stretches when you pull on the fabric, so your seams lie properly in your garment.

Liquid Lamé

Liquid Lamé is a special type of stretch fabric that looks like liquid metal. It's great for superhero costumes. However, you should not pin through it or you will create holes in the lamé effect. Use clips to secure your fabric, and make sure your clips do not have teeth that will leave marks on your fabric.

You still will use your ball/Jersey needle and also your stretch stitch to sew this fabric.

Tissue Lamé

Tissue lamé is similar to Liquid lamé but it has a standard weave instead of a stretch weave. It has no stretch to it. It's great for costumes in that it comes in many colors. However, it's easily damaged, and can fray when sewing with it. To help stabilize this delicate fabric for use in costumes, you will want to iron a lightweight fusible stabilizer onto the back side of the fabric. Then you can sew with it as normal. A straight stitch and universal needle are fine for this fabric.

PVC Vinyl or "Pleather"

Plastic "leather" is a common staple in the costumer's arsenal. It's inexpensive and very durable. It can be tricky to sew with. To prevent it sticking to your sewing table, or itself, when sewing, I use pattern paper pieces that are scraps leftover from cutting out my patterns. This paper helps the vinyl slide under the needle and you can tear it away afterwards. You can sew using a straight stitch and universal needle on Pleather.

Faux Fur

Faux fur is another common costuming staple, but cutting it directly with scissors cuts away the fur and can look like you gave your costume a haircut. For that reason, I cut faux fur from the back with a craft

knife so that I keep the “nap” of the fur from being cut. Another trick is to make sure your fur lies in the same direction when sewing it together. This will prevent your fur from looking like it’s laying in strange directions in your costume. Once you sew with your fur, use your fingers or a pin to gently work out any fur that got caught in the seam. You can use a regular straight stitch and a universal needle to sew with faux fur.

I hope these tips help you when designing your next costume!

Cheryl Sleboda (www.muppin.com)

Costumes on set info:

Steampunk Victorian dress created by Cheryl Sleboda (www.muppin.com)

Insect Superhero, Faux Fur suit, and other accessories created by Paul Heid and Angelique Starr Rickhoff of We Are Cosplay (www.wearecosplay.com)