FRENCH BLACKOUT HEADER METHOD

By Jessie Lee Miller of Winston's Workroom

INTRODUCTION

Many a workroom has struggled with the challenges of fabricating blackout-lined panels with a white or light-colored face fabric. Blackout lining, whether cotton, cotton-poly blend or polyester substrate has a tendency to heat up when sewn with industrial machines. The heat given off by the machine's needle melts the foam layer of the blackout lining, creating a black line of stitching in the header. Once the blackout layer has melted into the fibers of the face fabric and thread, there isn't a good remedy. Some workrooms resort to fading the black line with chalk or paint pens… but I would argue that the best method is prevention.

In recent years, the lining industry has tried to develop solutions for the blackout melt problem. Notably both Hanes Fabric[1] and Angels Lining[2] have introduced products that are more resistant to blackout melt, but both come with caveats and requirements for sewing speed and needle size.

The *French Blackout Header Method* aims to prevent blackout bleed entirely and return the pleating/tacking stage of panels to an industrial production speed. The *French Blackout Header Method* combines the "melt-proof" lining sandwich of french blackout[3] with traditional blackout lining. The traditional blackout lining remains completely outside of the header area, thus enabling workrooms to pleat and tack according to their own workroom standards – without any need to reduce speed, change needles or thread. This hybridized lining method is the best of both worlds.

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[1] Hanes Fabric created the Nightfall fabric line.
[2] Angels Linings created the Bella Notte Onyx fabric line.
[3] French blackout lining is generally accepted to be a sandwich layer of linings: face fabric, interlining, black sateen and white sateen (or white napped sateen).

MATERIALS

- **Black Wigan**[4]: Wigan is a type of interfacing normally used for hem and sleeve alterations in garment sewing. This poly-cotton substrate is available in pre-cut rolls (0.5"- 4" x 100 yards), which makes it as convenient to use as buckram. The pre-cut rolls of wigan are less likely to fray than workroom-produced cuts of black sateen fabric.

  Wigan interfacing is available in several sizes, colors, and fusible/non-fusible options. It is also offered in both straight of grain and bias-cuts. The *French Blackout Header Method* uses 4" bias-cut wigan in black.[5]

  Wigan is the star and secret ingredient of the *French Blackout Header Method*. It serves as a comparable substitute for black sateen; and while slightly stiffer than black sateen, the hand does not negatively impact the pleated drapery header. In my opinion any extra stiffness added by the wigan is offset by its precut format which saves time and allows for quick fabrication.

- **White Sateen Lining**: Cotton sateen lining is the outermost layer of the french blackout header. It will be visible on the back of the drapery header. And more importantly, it serves to prevent shadowing from the wigan layer of the header sandwich. Use tightly woven white sateen to both prevent shadowing and to prevent the wigan from being pulled through the stitch lines at pleating. I use Hanes Premier Sateen Lining or Angels Premiere Cotton Sateen.

- **Blackout Lining**: Blackout lining will be married to white sateen lining and black wigan to create the header sandwich. I prefer to use a cotton-based substrate for my blackout linings, though I imagine that a poly-cotton substrate would work just as well. Test first to ensure that you don't get blackout bleeding at the seam join between the blackout lining and the french blackout header.

- **Interlining**: Due to the construction of the french blackout header, interlining is optional in most cases. Though, if you like your drapery panels as fluffy as I do, then you will want to add interlining for extra body. My favorite interlinings include Hanes Heavy Flannel and Angels double-wide interlinings.

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[4] Purchased at Wawak: Sew-in interfacing rolls - bias cut wigan (CW4BK) – 4" x 100 yards (black) $43.95/roll.

[5] To date, I have not been able to locate a supplier of 4" non-fusible black wigan sold on the straight of grain. Though this particular combination would be preferable to a bias-cut roll.

YARDAGE REQUIREMENT

Face fabric: Finished length + 12.5" for hems + 3" tabling allowance = cut length x number of widths required

Example: 100" FL + 8" bottom hem + 4.5" low bulk header + 3" tabling allowance = 115.5" CL

Blackout lining: Finished panel length - 1" inset from bottom hem - 4.5" = cut length x number of widths required

Example: 100" FL - 1" hem inset - 4.5" header deduction = 94.5" CL

4" Sew-In Black Wigan (bias-cut): Cut in one continuous piece. Finished width of panel + 6"

side hems + 3" tabling allowance = cut width

Example: 1.5 width panel = 54" + 27" + 3" tabling allowance = 84" CW

White Sateen Lining: Cut 9" strips. Join strips as needed to match the finished width of the panel

Example: 1.5 width panel = 1 @ 54" W x 9" L strip + 1 @ 27" W x 9" L strip

Interlining (Optional): Finished length – 2.25" inset from bottom hem + 3 tabling allowance = cut length x number of widths required

Example: 100" FL – 2.25" hem inset + 3" tabling allowance = 100.75"

MAKING THE LINING

These instructions assume that the 9" long white sateen lining strips and optional interlining are prepared. The lining widths should be joined with seams pressed. Instructions pick up at the point where we begin to prepare the blackout lining.

1. Cut the widths of blackout lining to the FL of your panels minus 4.5." Ensure that both the top and bottom edges of your blackout lining are squared up. Join widths. Finish the bottom edge of this piece of blackout lining according to your workroom standards.

2. *The 4.5" deduction allows for the blackout lining to be inset 1" up from the bottom hem of the face fabric. It also accommodates the 4" french blackout header and the allowance for the seam which joins the blackout lining to the header.*

3. Lay the piece of blackout lining face up and orient the top of the blackout lining toward your work area. Layer the 9" long piece of white sateen
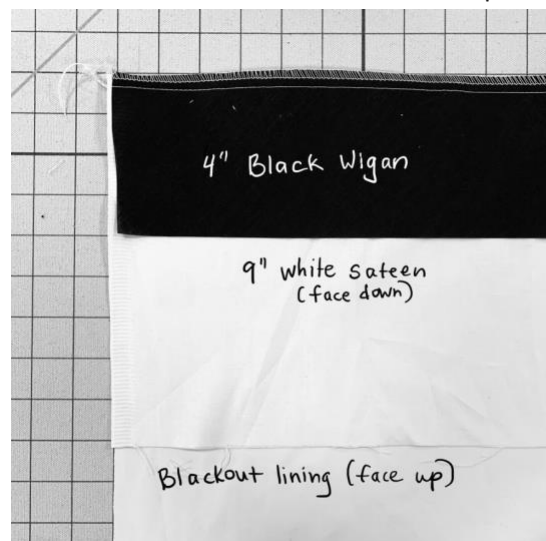

Figure 1

lining on top of the blackout lining, aligning seams at the widths and the cut edges at the header. Right side of blackout lining matches to the right side of the white lining strip. *Tip: Double-width sateen lining is useful to eliminate bulky seams.*

4. Layer the 4" piece of black wigan on top of the 9" white lining strip and blackout lining. Align all edges to the top of the panel. Serge the 3 pieces of fabric together down the entire width of the header (*Figure 1*). *Tip: I use a serger with lock stitch in my workroom.*

5. Once the header is serged to the blackout lining widths, press the serged seam down toward the bottom hem. When the seam allowance is pressed down, it will cover the needle punctures from the join seam and prevent light bleed. *Tip: Press the join seam from the face side of the linings, so as to not mar the foam side of the blackout fabric.*

6. Place the blackout lining face down, so that you can see the black wigan layer. Carefully press the white sateen lining over the black wigan as a single fold. The black wigan, and the seam which joins the blackout lining to the header, should now be encased between two layers of white sateen. *Note: This single fold of white sateen lining replaces the traditional interlining layer.*

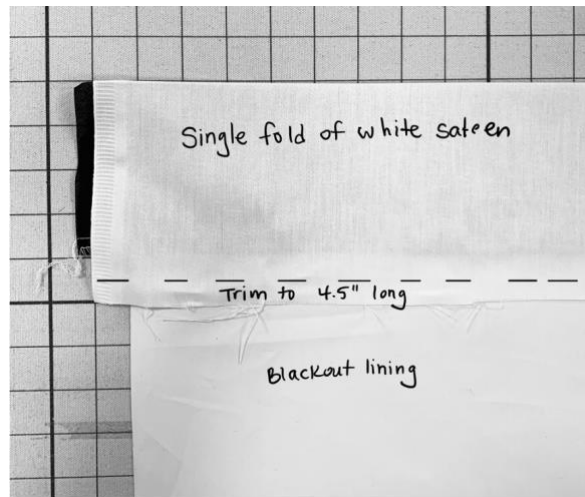7. Cut and trim the back fold of white sateen to 4.5" long. Set aside (*Figure 2*).

Figure 2

MAKING THE PANEL

1. Join necessary widths of face fabric. Hem the bottom of the face fabric with a double 4" hem.

2. Table the face fabric to finished length and turn in the header. This method uses a low-bulk header method.

3. Iron on white 4" fusible buckram[6]. Trim off the excess fabric so that the single fold of face fabric is 4.5" long. *Note: Do not cut the header even with the 4" buckram- you need an extra ½" to cover any shadowing from the french blackout header seam (Figure 3).*

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[6] I use Rowley's 4" fusible buckram (#BXA34) in my workroom.

4. If you are using interlining, this is the stage where you would add it. Working from the bottom up, place interlining about 2.25" from the hemline. Cut the top of the interlining even with your FL and tuck under the buckram header.

5. Working from the top of the panel down, layer in the blackout lining. The seam of the french blackout header should be aligned directly below the bottom of the 4" buckram. Take care that the seam of the french blackout header is pressed toward the bottom hem. The single fold of the face fabric header should cover the entirety of the serged seam (*Figure 4*).

6. You may pin the french blackout header in place without causing pinholes of light. Stab pinning through the panel in the header area will help anchor the panel so that you can carefully smooth the lining and face fabric while tabling. Blackout lining should be inset 1" above the bottom hem.

7. Secure the french blackout header with pins, a strip of dofix or dots of glue (*Figure 5*).

8. Turn in double 1.5" side hems. You may cut out the topmost 1.5" corner of the blackout header's lining to reduce bulk (Figure 6).

9. Finish side hems according to your workroom standards.
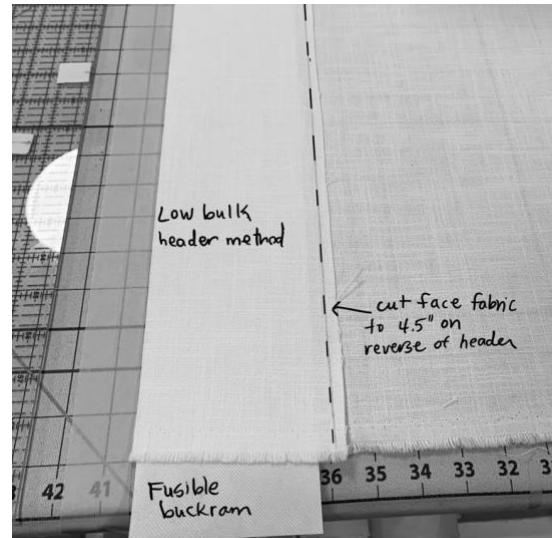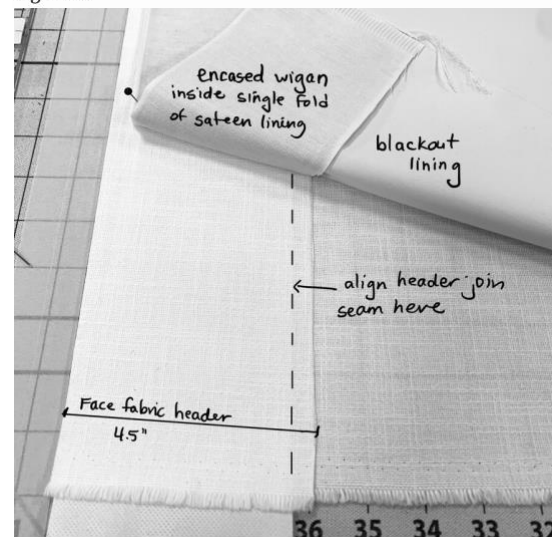

Figure 3

Figure 4

PLEATING AND TACKING

The french blackout header shines at the pleating and tacking stage. You can pin the header as much as needed. And as long as you keep your pleat length 4" or less – i.e. above the join seam between the french blackout header and the blackout lining, you can pleat and tack according to your workroom method.

I have successfully used this method for several years in my workroom. I pleat my panels using an industrial 4-6" bartack machine and tack them using a converted industrial zig-zag machine. I tend to use

cotton-wrapped polyester thread (Tex60) in my pleater; with needle sizes of 100-110. I also use cotton-wrapped polyester thread (Tex40) in my tacker with size 125 needles.
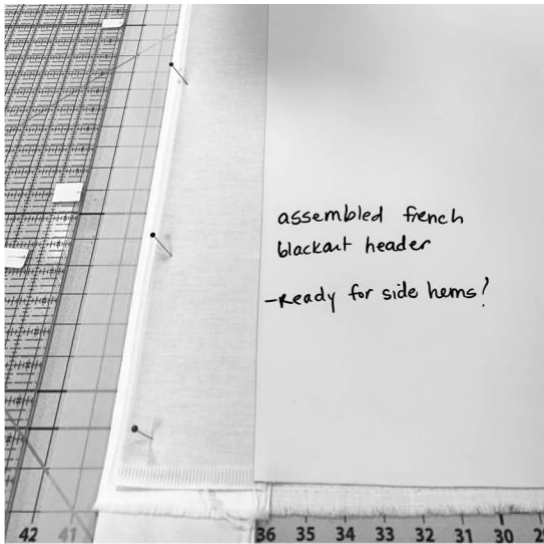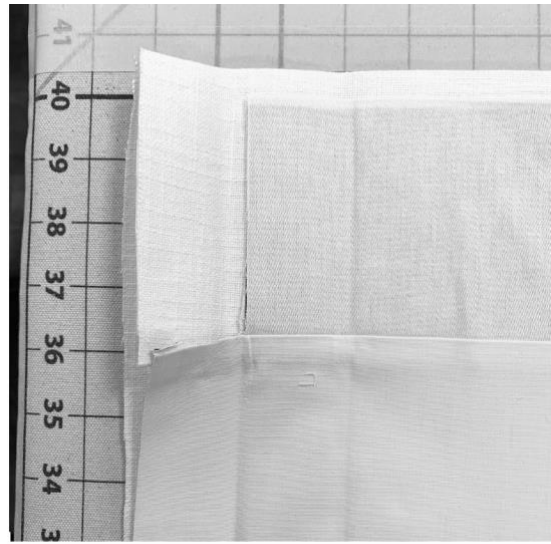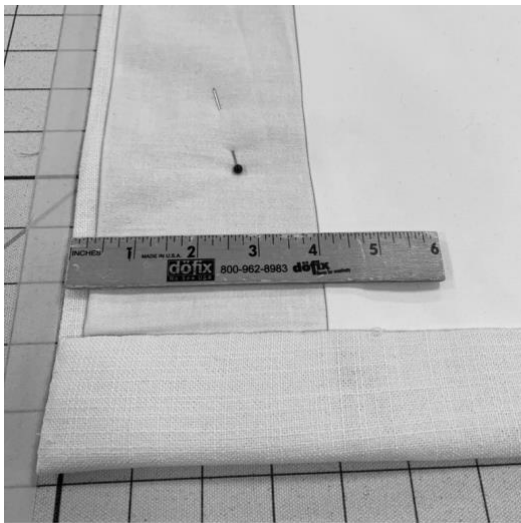

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7