

# The Feltmaker's Secret Weapon

A GUIDE TO FELTING WITH A SANDER



Felting Academy

Alisa Bordo • Katerina Korshun • Julia Struzh

■ Felting Academy presents

## The Feltmaker's Secret Weapon

*How a Vibrating Sander Unlocks Speed, Texture, and Precision in Modern Felting*

—with contributions by—

Alisa Bordo

Katerina Korshun

Julia Struzh

*A guide developed by artists, for artists.*



📍 Introduction

Why This Book Exists

Felting is one of the oldest textile crafts in human history — and it has always evolved.

Long before it became an art form, felting was a practical skill. Traditional felting was a communal, hands-on process essential to nomadic life. Wool was laid out, wetted, and rolled into large bundles, then fullled through repeated pressure — often by hand or with the help of horses. The resulting felt was used to make yurts, blankets, and saddles — all built to withstand the rigors of life on the move.

So when we speak today about using a modern tool like an **electric sander**, we are not breaking from tradition — we are continuing it. Felting has never stood still. It has always borrowed from what's available. What matters is the result, the rhythm, and the hand that guides it.

**The electric sander** has become one of the most discussed — and divisive — tools in contemporary felting. Some see it as a breakthrough. Others question its place in such a tactile, ancient process. We understand the hesitation — we've had the same questions. And we've worked through them not just in theory, but through hundreds of hours in the studio.

Interestingly, the sander has been part of the conversation for longer than many realize. Ingegerd Henschen's Swedish book *Filting med ull* (early 2000s) casually recommends using a vibrating sander to speed up layout bonding — without fanfare. And in the U.S., artist and fashion innovator **Thomas Horst** (of Horst Couture) began using a sander in his sculptural garments over two decades ago. He was a true pioneer — blending felting with couture, performance, and movement. Through workshops, shows, and fearless experimentation, Horst helped introduce the sander to a wider creative audience, showing what was possible long before it became common.

**What some now see as “experimental” was already quietly in motion — in art, in fashion, and in education.**

**This book doesn't aim to convince, only to inform. It gathers the experience of feltmakers who've worked with the sander — critically, creatively, and consistently — to offer clear answers to practical questions.**

Here's what we've learned:

- The sander is not a replacement for your hands.
- It doesn't take away the soul of your work.
- It's simply a tool — like your mesh, your rolling mat, your soap — that can make your process easier, safer, and in some cases, more precise.

This book was created by three working artists — **Katerina Korshun, Alisa Bordo, and Julia Struzh** — each with a different style and creative path. What unites us is that we've all come to rely on the sander as a powerful ally in our felting practice.

We've written this guide to share what we know: the good, the practical, the things we wish we'd known earlier, and the mistakes we've made along the way. Whether you are brand new to machine-assisted felting or simply curious about what's possible, this book is for you.

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### From Our Worktables

**“I used to treat my sculpted roses like glass — fragile and untouchable. Then I learned how to use the sander properly. Now I press it directly on them. The form holds, the texture stays, and the layout bonds beautifully.”**

— *Alisa Bordo*

**“I draw with viscose, creating fine lines that echo antique embroidery. The sander allows me to fix every thread exactly where I want it — clean, crisp, and unmoved.”**

— *Katerina Korshun*

“What I value most is precision: smooth surfaces, clean edges, even structure. The sander helps me achieve that, and it does so faster and more consistently than any other method I’ve tried.”

— *Julia Struzh*

👉 Three different approaches. One powerful tool. Countless possibilities.

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## Who This Book Is For

This guide is for felters at all levels — from curious beginners to experienced artists. It’s for those who work small and slow, and for those shaping large panels or garments. You don’t need to be a professional to benefit from this tool — just open to learning.

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## What You'll Find Inside

- How to choose and safely prepare a sander
  - Corded vs. cordless: what you really need to know
  - Step-by-step techniques for wool, silk, and viscose
  - Tips for locking in texture, sculptural work, and fine details
  - Common fears, myths, and how to overcome them
  - Advice from real felters, working in real studios
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## A Word Before We Begin

We’re not here to convince you that everyone needs a machine.

We’re here to show you what’s possible — when you choose to use one **well**.

Let’s begin.

## Chapter 1

### What Is a Vibrating Sander in Felting — and Why Use It?

For many, the idea of using an electric sander in felting may sound like a contradiction. After all, felting is often viewed as one of the most tactile, hands-on crafts in the textile world. But like many traditional processes, felting has always evolved. And when used correctly, the vibrating sander becomes a powerful, precise, and supportive tool — not a replacement for handwork, but a complement to it.

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### What Kind of Sander Are We Talking About?

Not all sanders are created equal. In felting, we use a **flat vibrating sander**, sometimes called a **sheet sander** or **pad sander**. In German, this tool is known as a **Schwingschleifer**.

Unlike orbital sanders, which move in random circular motions and are far too aggressive for textile work, a flat vibrating sander uses a consistent back-and-forth motion across a flat plate. This motion allows us to stimulate surface fibers **gently and evenly**.



The sander's role in felting is not to sand — it is to **vibrate** the wool in a way that mimics careful, repetitive hand movements.

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### Felting vs. Fulling

To understand the role of the sander, we must first distinguish between **felting** and **fulling**, two stages that are often mistakenly treated as one.

- **Felting** is the initial bonding phase — where loose wool fibers begin to open, move, and connect. This is the most delicate part of the process, especially when using decorative or non-wool fibers such as viscose, silk, or silk fabric. The goal here is simply to get the fibers to hold together.
- **Fulling** is the second stage — where the felt is worked more vigorously to shrink, thicken, and harden the structure. This phase involves rolling, rubbing, throwing, or shaping the fabric.

The sander plays a role only in the first phase: helping wool fibers attach to one another and to surrounding materials. Once the layout is stable, the sander is set aside, and traditional fulling methods begin. For the fulling stage, some artists also use a tumble dryer or specialized felting machines — tools that require additional investment but can support larger-scale or repetitive work.

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### What the Sander Actually Does

When used with care, over a damp, soapy surface and through a protective mesh or plastic film, the vibrating sander can:

- Initiate the felting process more quickly
- Help **lock down decorative fibers** like silk or viscose
- Stabilize delicate or sculptural layouts before any fulling
- Distribute gentle pressure across large or uneven areas
- Encourage wool fibers to **penetrate fabric** in nuno-felting
- Reduce strain on the hands and wrists

Rather than disrupting the surface, the sander helps secure it — giving the felter more control and less physical fatigue, especially when working on large or intricate pieces.

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### Why Artists Use It

While some begin using a sander to save time, many continue using it because it offers **greater precision and creative control**. For example:

- You can hold delicate lines of viscose or silk in place without smearing the design.
- You can gently compress sculptural elements — like petals or roses — without breaking their shape.
- You can work across large surfaces evenly, without losing the integrity of your layout.

This makes the sander especially valuable in artistic applications such as:

- Fine texture work
- Nuno-felting
- Multi-layered surface design
- Dimensional or 3D felting
- Helps bond challenging materials like synthetic fabrics, lace, or textured inclusions

### What the Sander Doesn't Do

It's important to be realistic. The sander is not a miracle solution. It does **not**:

- Complete the entire felting process
- Replace fulling or finishing
- Fix a weak layout
- Work safely without preparation

Used with thought and care, however, it becomes a reliable and surprisingly versatile part of the felting process — one that many artists come to rely on.

### Top 3 Myths About Using a Sander in Felting

#### 1 *"It's only useful for large, industrial-scale work."*

Not at all. While the sander is excellent for large layouts, it is equally helpful for small, detailed projects — brooches, collars, cuffs, samples, textural studies.

It provides even pressure and control, especially when working with fine decorative elements or delicate layouts.

The tool is not about size — it's about stability and surface bonding, regardless of scale.

#### 2 *"It flattens the texture and ruins fine detail."*

Only if misused.

With good moisture, foam, and light pressure, the sander can actually help **secure delicate lines**, **lock down sculptural shapes**, and **preserve texture** more precisely than your hands.

It allows for **control**, not just speed.

Think of it as a tool to hold what you've created — not flatten it.

#### 3 *"It's dangerous — electricity and water don't mix."*

Valid concern — but manageable with the right setup.

Many felters use **cordless sanders**, which run on batteries and eliminate electrical risk.

If using a corded tool, always:

- Seal vents
- Keep cords dry and elevated
- Use a **GFCI adapter** to prevent shock

Used responsibly, a sander is **no more dangerous than a sewing machine** next to a steam iron.

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## Summary

A flat vibrating sander is not a shortcut. It is a precision tool that, when properly prepared and used, enhances your ability to create stable, expressive, and well-structured felt.

It works in the felting stage — never the fulling stage — and especially shines when you're working with non-wool fibers or layered design.

In the next chapter, we'll cover how to use this tool safely, whether you choose a cordless or corded model.

Let's move on to the essential foundation: safe setup.

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## Chapter 2

### Safety First: Using a Sander in Wet Felting

Before we discuss how to prepare or use a sander in felting, we must address the most important topic: safety.

Using an electric tool around moisture always carries a level of risk. However, with proper preparation and awareness, that risk becomes manageable — and for many felt makers, well worth the benefits.

This chapter outlines what you need to know to work safely and confidently.

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### Understanding the Risks

Wet felting involves water, soap, and soft fibers. Electric sanders were originally built for dry environments, like woodworking. That means they have features — like suction holes and open vents — that can be hazardous in a moist studio setting if left unmodified.

The two main safety concerns are:

- **Water entering the motor or ventilation system** of the sander
- **Contact between water and live electricity** through power cords or plugs

These can be prevented with careful setup and responsible use.

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### Using a Corded Sander Safely

Corded sanders are common, affordable, and often more powerful than cordless options. But because they draw power directly from an outlet, they **require modifications and extra care**.

**Here's what to do before using a corded sander for felting:**

1. **Seal the ventilation holes.**  
Most sanders have suction ports underneath to collect dust. These must be completely closed using paper and hot glue or silicone sealant to prevent water from entering the motor.
2. **Remove or cover the sanding surface.**  
Many sanders come with a Velcro pad for attaching sandpaper. This should be either removed or completely covered with a smooth, firm plastic surface.
3. **Attach a protective film.**  
Cut and secure a patterned plastic sheet (for example, textured IKEA drawer liner) to the base of the machine. This protects your wool from abrasion and creates helpful surface friction.
4. **Use a GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) adapter.**  
This inexpensive plug device detects any imbalance in current — such as water contact — and shuts off power immediately, protecting you from electric shock.
5. **Keep cords off the floor.**  
Elevate cords on hooks or a chair and always keep plugs and outlets dry. Never let the power cord rest in a wet zone.

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### Cordless Sanders: A Safer Alternative

If safety is your top concern, **cordless (battery-powered) sanders** are the best choice. They eliminate the most serious electrical risks because there is **no live current** traveling through a cord or plug during use.

Cordless models are:

- Safer in damp environments
- Lightweight and portable
- Ideal for small to medium-sized projects

However, they also:

- Have lower motor power
- Require recharging during longer work sessions
- Tend to cost more

Still, for beginners or cautious users, the peace of mind is worth the investment.

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### General Studio Safety

Regardless of which type of sander you use, always follow basic precautions:

- Work in a **dry, well-lit area** with controlled water usage.



- Wear **rubber or latex gloves** for insulation and grip.
  - Never use a machine that has been exposed to water internally.
  - Do not work barefoot in a wet space.
  - Keep your machine clean and dry before and after each session.
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### Safe Preparation = Confident Work

When prepared correctly, the sander becomes as safe as any other studio tool — like your steamer, your heat gun, or your iron.

You are not being overly cautious by setting things up well — you are ensuring that your creativity is supported by confidence, not worry.

In the next chapter, we'll walk through exactly how to prepare your sander: sealing, covering, and turning it into a tool made for wool, not wood.

Let's begin.

## ✂ Chapter 3

### Preparing Your Sander for Felting

Electric sanders were never designed for wool, water, or fiber art — they come from the world of woodworking. But with a few smart modifications, a standard vibrating sander can become a safe, flexible, and highly effective felting tool.


This chapter guides you step by step through proven adaptations — shared and refined by felters from across Europe and the U.S.

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#### ✅ Step 1: Remove or Neutralize the Hook-and-Loop Pad

Most sanders come with a **Velcro-style (hook-and-loop)** base, meant to grip sanding paper. In felting, this surface is a problem: it can catch wool fibers, damage silk, or distort your layout.

- If it's attached with screws or clips, simply remove it.
- If it's glued on, carefully **trim or sand it flat** with a utility knife or blade.

 The goal: a smooth, snag-free surface ready to be customized for textile work.

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#### ✅ Step 2: Seal the Ventilation Holes

Suction holes or dust ports on the base — meant to collect sawdust — are hazardous in felting. They can draw in water, soap, and fibers, risking damage to the motor.

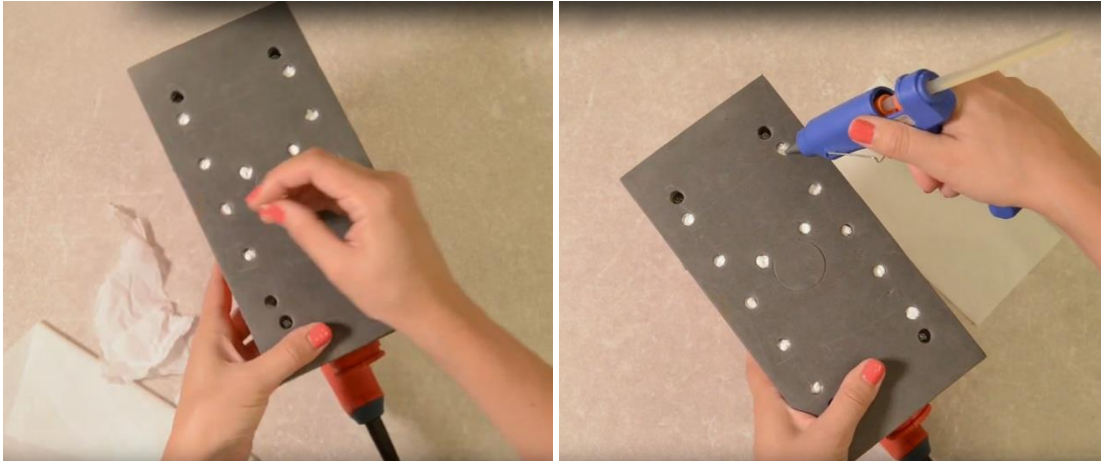
There are two widely used methods for sealing:

#### ● A) The “Eastern European” Method — Simple and Safe

Popular among felters in Russia, Ukraine, and across Eastern Europe:

- **Block each hole** with dry paper, fabric scraps, or paper slightly oiled to prevent sticking
- **Seal over** with hot glue or silicone
- Let it **fully cure** before use

⚠ Always block the holes first — never pour glue or silicone directly, or it may seep into the machine.



### ● B) The “Horst Method” — Inventive & Integrated

Pioneered by fashion artist **Thomas Horst**, this method involves sealing the entire base by gluing a **flexible rubber or plastic sheet** directly over the platform.



#### Benefits:

- Total protection from water

- A larger, smoother working area
- Glides effortlessly over large surfaces

#### Drawbacks:

- May **reduce vibration transfer** on less powerful sanders
- Limits **precision** in tight or small designs
- Over time, silicone or rubber can **degrade or warp**, requiring replacement

◆ Many advanced users maintain **two machines**: one with a wide sealed base, and one “lightweight” for detail work.

### ✅ Step 3: Add a Working Surface for Felting

Once the machine is sealed and smoothed, you’ll need a **non-abrasive surface** to make safe, effective contact with wool.

#### The top recommendation:

A **plastic drawer liner with diamond texture**, such as **VARIERA** from IKEA.

💬 *“The diamond surface gives gentle friction without grabbing fibers.”* — Julia Struzh

Depending on your layout type, alternatives include:

- **Old bubble wrap** (popped): soft, minimal drag
- **Massage mats** or more textured plastics: helpful for thick felts like bags or rugs
- **Foam-backed drawer liners**: smooth yet cushioned for garments

🔧 Try several — your felt, your method.

### ✅ Final Checklist Before Use

- ✓ Vent holes sealed (and dry)
- ✓ Velcro pad removed or neutralized
- ✓ Smooth surface added (secured with clips or tape)
- ✓ Cord kept dry or machine cordless
- ✓ Test vibration empty before first use

When properly adapted, your sander becomes more than a tool — it becomes part of your process.

## ⚙️ Chapter 4

### Choosing the Right Sander

When it comes to wet felting, not just any sander will do. In fact, only one type is truly suitable — and using the wrong tool can ruin your work or even cause injury.

This chapter will help you confidently choose a sander that's safe, effective, and appropriate for felting.


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### Use Only a Vibrating Flat-Base Sander

The correct tool is a vibrating sander with a rectangular base, often called a:

- Sheet sander
- Finishing sander
- Vibrating sander
- (In German: Schwingschleifer)

This tool moves in tiny, fast, back-and-forth or elliptical motions. That gentle vibration helps fibers connect without disturbing your layout.

 **Do not use random orbital sanders (often called simply “orbital sanders” in English). These have round pads that rotate in circles. Their motion is too strong and uncontrolled for felting — they can tear, twist, or drag your fibers.**

 **The rule is simple:  
Flat and rectangular = good.  
Round and spinning = bad.**

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### Speed Control Is a Plus

If possible, choose a model with variable speed settings. Different materials and stages of felting require different levels of intensity.


- Use low speeds for delicate work or light fiber combinations
- Use medium to high speeds when starting large projects or thicker layouts

While not essential, speed control gives you more flexibility and precision.

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### Consider the Weight

The weight of the sander significantly affects how it behaves:

-  **Heavy Models (like Makita BO3711)**
- Often more stable
  - Provide natural downward pressure — ideal for large, flat layouts
  - Help press layers together with less physical effort

However, they typically require two-handed operation and are not ideal for fine detail work or tight spaces.

### ✔ Light Models (budget tools, compact versions)

- Easier to maneuver with one hand
- Better for small sections, narrow elements, or delicate textures
- Allow more nuanced movement and control

💡 Many experienced felters use two machines:  
One for power and coverage, one for finesse and edges.

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### 🔧 Corded vs. Cordless

Both have their place in the studio. Choose based on your priorities:

#### 🔧 Corded Sanders

- Consistent power for long sessions
- Usually more affordable
- Must be used carefully with water — only with a GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) plug
- Keep cords elevated and dry

#### 🔋 Cordless Sanders

- Much safer in wet conditions
- Easier to handle without worrying about cables
- Usually heavier due to the battery
- Slightly less powerful or shorter runtime in budget models

For most felters, a cordless sander is the safest long-term investment, even if the initial cost is higher.

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### 🔧 Try Before You Decide

If possible, test the vibration before buying. Some budget models are loud or unbalanced — others perform very well for the price.

Ask yourself:

- Can I control it easily with one or two hands?
  - Does it vibrate evenly, without shaking the whole table?
  - Is the base flat and easy to modify?
  - Does it feel like something I can trust in wet work?
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### ✔ Summary

Feature	What to Look For
Type	Flat, rectangular vibrating sander
Speed	Adjustable speeds preferred
Weight	Choose based on your work size & strength
Corded/Cordless	Cordless = safer; Corded = cheaper/powerful
Brand	Makita, Bosch, or a reliable budget tool

## ⚡ Chapter 5

### First Contact — Using the Sander on Wool

The first moments of felting are among the most delicate and decisive. This is when your carefully laid fibers begin to bond, your decorative elements are fixed into place, and your layout starts to become fabric.

A vibrating sander can support this process beautifully — but only when introduced in the right sequence, with the right materials, and with a thoughtful touch.

In this chapter, we follow the method taught by Katerina, including her step-by-step approach using soapy water, old bubble wrap, and careful transitions from light movement to direct surface work.

#### Step 1: Soak with Soapy Water

Start by preparing a properly concentrated soap solution. You'll need **a couple of tablespoons of dish soap (like Fairy)** per **liter of warm water**. The mixture should feel slippery, but not too thick or foamy before use.

Use a sponge to apply the soapy water **directly to the entire wool layout**. Press it gently into the fibers — don't rub. Your goal is to **moisten everything evenly**, ensuring that every fiber is wet. Dry fibers will not felt, no matter how long they're vibrated.

This layer of soap creates the right glide and foam needed for effective use of the sander.

#### Step 2: Cover with Old Bubble Wrap

Once the wool is fully soaked, cover your layout with **old bubble wrap**, bubbles facing down.

Katerina strongly recommends this material at this stage because:

- It allows vibration to pass through evenly
- It doesn't stick to wet wool
- It no longer leaves texture marks, since most of the bubbles have already popped
- It helps flatten the surface without shifting decorative fibers

**Do not use mesh, mosquito netting, or synthetic fabric.** Under vibration, these can felt into the wool and damage your piece.





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### Step 3: Slide Gently on the Wrap

Place the prepared sander on top of the bubble wrap. Turn it on and begin with **slow, wide, sliding motions** — from the center out toward the edges.

At this point, you are not felting yet. You are:

- Removing trapped air
- Evenly distributing soap and moisture
- Flattening the layout gently and uniformly

Let the sander do the work. Avoid pressing down. This stage usually takes 1–2 minutes.

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### Step 4: Remove the Wrap

Once the layout looks flat and stable, **remove the bubble wrap completely**. Your wool is now ready for direct but careful contact with the sander.

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### Step 5: Touch-and-Lift: No Sliding Yet

Place the sander directly onto the exposed, wet wool — and hold it still.



Count slowly to three:

**One... two... three.**

Then lift it straight up and move to the next section.

This **press-hold-lift method** prevents any dragging or distortion of your fibers, especially when working with:

- Viscose or silk decoration
- Petal-shaped sculptural elements
- Painted or directional fiber patterns

Repeat this across the layout until you've covered the surface evenly.

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### Step 6: Light Vibration in Place

Once your layout has begun to stabilize, you can let the sander vibrate gently **in one spot** for longer — still without sliding.

You'll begin to see:

- Fine foam building under the machine
- Decorative elements starting to stay in place

- A slight firmness when you press lightly on the surface

If foam isn't appearing, reapply soapy water. You can add a few drops of liquid soap directly or dampen the area again with your sponge.

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### Step 7: Begin Controlled Sliding

Now that the surface has stabilized and fibers are lightly bonded, you can begin to **slide the sander directly over the wool** — slowly, with full control.

Keep the motion smooth and even. This step helps:

- Blend transitions
- Strengthen bonds
- Compact lightly felted areas

This is also the time when you can begin shaping and refining sculptural textures, fixing fine lines of viscose, or securing fabric inclusions.

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### Optional: Micro-Movement Technique

In thicker or decorative areas, you can enhance the bonding by adding **micro-movement**:

- Let the sander vibrate in place
- Gently move it in a very small circular or vertical motion with your hand

This combination deepens the contact between fibers and helps achieve stronger results without applying more pressure or time.

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### Knowing When to Stop

You're ready to move to the next felting phase when:

- The surface no longer shifts under gentle touch
- Foam forms easily with vibration
- Edges and decorative elements hold their position
- The wool feels cohesive — no longer fluffy or loose

At this stage, your piece is **pre-felted** and can safely be rolled, rubbed, or shaped by hand as you move into fulling.

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### Final Notes

Katerina's method — beginning with soapy water, soft bubble wrap, and progressing from sliding to pressing to micro-movement — is designed to protect your work, reduce strain, and create clean, stable felting from the very beginning.

The sander doesn't replace your hands. It extends what they can do — with control, care, and consistency.

## Chapter 6

### From Felting to Fulling — When the Sander Steps Aside

The vibrating sander is an  **Chapter 6**

#### From Felting to Fulling

Felting is just the beginning. The second stage — **fulling** — is where the transformation really happens.

But first, a reminder:

The electric sander plays its role only during the **initial felting phase** — the moment when wool fibers begin to connect and grip. Once the layout is stable and the elements hold together, **the sander is set aside**.

From here on, it's all about **your hands, your touch, and your patience**.

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#### What's the Difference?

- **Felting:** the fibers start bonding. With the help of soap, water, and vibration (like from a sander), wool begins to cling to itself and to other materials.
- **Fulling:** the wool **shrinks, thickens, and stabilizes** into a durable fabric. It's a more active, physical process that finishes the transformation.


You can think of felting as arranging and setting the stage — and fulling as locking it in.

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#### Fulling by Hand

Once your layout is holding together, gently begin the fulling phase. This often involves:

- **Rubbing** the fabric with your hands (or covered palms)
- **Rolling** it in a towel or bamboo mat
- **Shocking** it with warm and cold water alternation
- **Stretching, shaping, and checking** regularly

 This stage allows you to control the final form, texture, and fit. You can shape garments, harden accessories, or stretch wall hangings to size.

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#### Optional Tools for Fulling

While fulling is traditionally done by hand, some artists choose to use other tools to support the process — especially for larger or repetitive work:

- **Tumble dryers:** Items are enclosed in a pillowcase or net bag and tumbled briefly — but must be checked every 2–5 minutes to avoid overfulling or felting distortions.

- **Specialized felting machines:** Industrial or handmade tools that mimic rolling or pressure. These can speed things up but are generally an investment and require training.

💡 Important: These tools assist — they do not replace your eye or your decision-making. You still need to check, adjust, and finish manually.

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### When Is It Done?

You'll know your felt is fully fulled when:

- It no longer stretches or distorts easily
- The surface feels compact and even
- The edges hold their shape
- You feel confident it's cohesive and stable

Trust your hands. Felt will tell you when it's ready.

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### From Raw to Refined

The fulling stage is where your design becomes real — not just a loose collection of fibers, but a unified, functional piece of textile art.

It's meditative, physical, and deeply satisfying.

So take your time. Work with rhythm. And enjoy every squeeze, stretch, and roll. 🤍

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## Chapter 7

### Care and Maintenance of Your Sander

A well-prepared sander can be your felting companion for years — but only if you take care of it. Remember: this machine wasn't designed for wool or water, so a few smart habits will keep it safe, effective, and long-lasting.

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### Keep It Dry (Inside)

**Water is your sander's biggest enemy — particularly inside the motor.**

- ✓ Always seal ventilation holes properly before use
- ✓ Keep the machine upright when not in motion
- ✓ Wipe off excess moisture after each session
- ✓ Avoid letting soap foam pool around the base


If water ever splashes inside the machine by accident, unplug it immediately and let it dry completely before trying to use it again.

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### Check Your Surface Regularly

If you've added a plastic or rubber base (such as the IKEA VARIERA mat or silicone sheet):

- Check it for warping, cracks, or hardening
- Replace it if it starts to catch on fibers or lose flexibility
- Clean the surface gently with warm water and soap — no solvents!

 Pro tip: It's smart to have extra cut-outs ready, so you can replace the top quickly when needed.

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### Cord Safety (for corded models)

If you use a corded sander:

- Always plug into a GFCI outlet or adapter
  - Elevate the cord above your workspace
  - Dry your hands before touching the plug
  - Never drag the cord through soapy water
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### Battery Tips (for cordless models)

- Keep batteries fully charged, but avoid overcharging
  - Store indoors, especially in cold climates
  - If the machine seems sluggish, charge it or let it rest
  - Clean battery contacts gently if needed
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### General Cleaning

After every felting session:

1. Unplug or remove the battery
  2. Wipe the machine down with a soft, damp cloth
  3. Dry thoroughly with a towel
  4. Store in a dry place — never in a damp or sealed plastic bag
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### When to Replace

With regular use, even a well-loved machine may eventually:

- Make unusual sounds
- Feel hot to the touch



- Lose power or consistency
- Smell like burning or ozone

These are signs that it may be time to retire or repair the sander. Many artists replace their machines every 1–2 years if used heavily.

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### In Short

Take care of your sander, and it will take care of your felt.

It's not a delicate tool — but it does need respect. With the right habits, your sander will stay clean, safe, and ready to create alongside you for many projects to come. ❤️

## Chapter 8

### Creative Possibilities with a Sander

At first glance, a sander might seem like a tool of convenience — something to help speed things up. But once integrated thoughtfully, it becomes a tool of intention, of technique, and even of expression.

As feltmakers explore and refine its use, the sander reveals itself as a way to **expand creative range**, **reduce physical strain**, and **support fine design control** — particularly in challenging techniques like nuno-felting or working at scale.

Here's how three different artists incorporate the sander into their process:

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#### Alisa Bordo

Known for her dimensional roses and expressive textures, Alisa uses the sander even on sculptural forms — not to flatten, but to stabilize. She works with a deliberate sequence of lifting, holding, and gentle sliding to preserve volume while securing the base. For her, the sander is a tool of **precision and trust**.

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#### Katerina Korshun

Katerina, now based in Italy, originally worked with garments and surface compositions using viscose and wool fleece. More recently, her focus has expanded to include **large-scale felted artworks** — painterly compositions that echo brushstrokes and layered textiles.

The sander helps her manage large surfaces with accuracy and speed — stabilizing layout without disturbing structure.

Her recent exhibitions, including a show in Milan, reflect a growing recognition of her unique voice in contemporary felting.

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#### Julia Struzh

Julia's work emphasizes **surface quality, structure, and consistency**. She uses the sander to evenly anchor fibers across panels or garments, creating smooth bases for further work. Her approach is grounded in control — making the sander a tool for both refinement and reliability.

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## Working Larger, Working Smarter

The sander offers unique advantages for:

- Garment layouts and yardage
- Joining seams and panels cleanly
- Nuno-felting, where fibers must penetrate delicate fabric
- Complex surface compositions with layered decorative fibers

It enables the feltmaker to work larger, with more confidence — without sacrificing quality or subtlety.

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## A Tool That Listens

What unites all these artists is not what they make — but **how** they use the tool. The sander doesn't impose. It listens. It responds to rhythm, to pressure, to pacing.

In skilled hands, it becomes invisible — just part of the feltmaker's vocabulary.

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## Ideas

This chapter presents real, hands-on examples of how feltmakers apply the vibrating sander in studio practice. These techniques go beyond speed — they unlock cleaner edges, stronger bonds, and greater control in your work.

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## Appliqué

The sander is a powerful tool for creating precise and stable appliqué designs.

For example:

- Cut simple shapes from contrasting pre-felt
- Place a stencil (cut from plastic or thick paper) onto your pre-felt base
- Arrange your cut shapes on top of the stencil
- Wet thoroughly and use the sander gently to bond the layers through the stencil
- Remove the stencil and full the piece by hand or in a dryer

The stencil acts as a clean boundary, keeping edges crisp and avoiding distortion.

You can use this method with:

- Silk or viscose paper
- Yarn or thread lines
- Pre-cut motifs and layered compositions

The sander helps fix these elements quickly and evenly before any fulling begins.

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### Seamless Garment Felting

When creating seamless garments on a resist, the sander helps save time and improve consistency.

Here's how:

- Use the sander across all flat surfaces of the layout
- Avoid folds and resist edges — gently rub those areas by hand
- After removing the resist, open the folds, smooth them, and treat them carefully with the sander
- Continue felting and fulling as usual

This ensures more even bonding and reduces the need for aggressive fulling later on.

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### Garments from Individual Pieces

Many feltmakers prefer to construct garments from individual felted pieces, such as the front bodice, back bodice, and sleeves. This approach makes it easier to:

- Adjust fit
- Shape curves
- Work with fabric-like logic

Here's how the sander helps:

1. Layout and pre-felt each section separately
2. Use the sander to evenly bond fibers — do not full yet
3. Let each piece dry completely, even with soap remaining
4. Join the pieces with overlapping stitches in matching thread
5. Wet the seams and treat **them with the sander to bond the layers**
6. **Then begin fulling the assembled garment, shaping it as needed**

The seams become soft, nearly invisible, and fully integrated into the felt.

This method is ideal for tailored pieces like coats, cardigans, tunics, or dresses.

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### Pattern-Based Layouts

When working from cut patterns, the sander is a valuable assistant:

- Secure layers and edges before they shift
- Fix cut pre-felt elements directly onto the base
- Control bonding area by area, especially on complex designs

This precision is hard to achieve by hand alone — especially on fine layouts.

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## ✦ Final Thoughts

Whether you're placing silk motifs, shaping sleeves, or attaching lace to felt — the sander offers one key advantage: control. You decide when, where, and how much vibration the fiber receives.

The sander is not just a shortcut — it's a new language for working with wool.

## ● Conclusion

### From Nomadic Coats to Sculpted Roses

Felting is one of humanity's oldest textile arts — born not in studios, but in fields and tents, where families and entire communities created strong, weather-resistant cloth for coats, rugs, and dwellings.

They used horses. They rolled felt with their feet. They worked in rhythm.

Today, our goals may have shifted, but the essence remains: we transform fiber into form. Whether making a wearable jacket or a wall-sized textile painting, we're still practicing a craft rooted in utility — and elevated by expression.

The sander isn't traditional, but it's useful. It's not ancient, but it respects what is.

It allows the modern feltmaker to work **larger, longer, and more freely** — whether you are drawing with viscose, sculpting roses, or shaping a jacket sleeve.

And that, too, is tradition: finding tools that support your hand, and let your work speak more clearly.

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Author Notes



### Alisa Bordo

An artist and educator, Alisa is known for expressive textures and sculptural floral forms in felt. She incorporates wool, silk, and layered design, using the sander as a precise tool to stabilize detail and maintain structure in her wearable pieces.

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### Katerina Korshun

A textile artist based in Italy, Katerina creates felted garments and large-format wall works using **wool fleece and viscose fibers**. Her painterly compositions have been exhibited internationally, including in Milan. The sander allows her to manage complex surfaces with control and efficiency — especially across large areas.

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### Julia Struzh

A feltmaker with a focus on structure and smooth finish, Julia uses the sander to support balance and uniformity in her textile pieces. Known for her clarity of technique and modern aesthetic, she demonstrates how the sander can elevate even the most minimal design.



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**Conclusion**

*From Nomadic Coats to Sculpted Roses*

**Author Notes & Acknowledgments**