



By: Jared Hale

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What to Look for in a Fabric Office Chair.

Pick up any discounted piece of fast fashion and one thing will be instantly clear. Not all fabrics are created equal. A hand-crafted Italian leather recliner just isn't the same as a canvas-covered director's chair.



With all the fabric-covered office chairs on the market, how do you know you're getting the best quality possible?

In this article, we'll explain some of the things to look out for when comparing different types of fabric upholstery on office chairs and screens. We'll also explore the various manufacturing standards in Australia and see which products make the grade when it comes to high-quality materials. By the end of this article, we're confident you'll be a fabric expert and will easily be able to pick the best products available.

Fabric Technical Standards

Like many other materials used in manufacturing, the fabric we find on office chairs and screens also has to comply with regulatory standards and minimum technical specifications.

The Martindale Test (Rub Strength)

Also known as the "Rub Test", the Martindale test is used to measure the durability of a fabric. Using small discs of worsted wool or wire mesh, the fabric is repeatedly rubbed against in a circular motion to simulate natural wear and tear. The test continues until one or more yarn fibres break or there is considerable damage to the fabric.

That fabric is then given a Martindale score, a number rounded down to the nearest thousand rubs. Obviously, the higher the Martindale score, the more suitable a piece of fabric is for heavy or high-traffic usage.

10,000 or less	10,000 to 15,000	15,000 to 25,000	25,000 to 30,000	30,000 or more
Fabric is suitable for decorative use such as cushions	Fabric is suitable for light occasional domestic use items	Fabric is suitable for general everyday domestic use on main household furniture	Fabric is suitable for high levels of everyday use	Fabric is suitable for use on heavy duty furniture suitable for a commercial environment

With a score between 6000-10000, the fabric is rated as decorative only. If a fabric scores between 10000-15000, it's suitable for occasional, light domestic use. General domestic use is when the Martindale value is between 15000-25000.

A piece of fabric is suitable for heavy-duty use when the Martindale value is between 25000-30000. Most household furniture will have a Martindale value within this range. Above this level, fabrics that score above 30,000 are considered suitable for commercial usage.

To appreciate the durability of the materials that OLG use, it's important to note that all of our fabrics have a minimum Martindale value of at least 40,000 rubs, exceeding the standard by at least 33%.

For example, we use a 100% polyester fabric for chair and screen upholstery called "Splice". It's been rated at a Martindale value of more than 40,000, placing it firmly in the heavy-duty/commercial range of fabrics.

One step further still, our Motion Felt is a 50-50 wool/polyester blend with a Martindale value of over 100,000. This makes this fabric the perfect material for high use areas and public spaces.

Flammability

Most fabrics are treated with fire-retardant chemicals to meet fire safety standards and reduce the risk of fire. The various levels of fire resistance are recorded by the International Organization for Standardization or ISO for short.

While each country has their own standard for measuring fire resistance, they ultimately need to be approved by the standards regulators. At OLG, different products meet different standards depending on their country of manufacture and supply chain.

For example, the OLG Breathe Fabric adheres to the California Technical Bulletin 117 or CAL 117 for short. In this standard, fabrics can withstand catching fire from an open flame or smoulder source.

With the Splice range of fabrics, OLG meets various British standards or BS for short. These include resistance to ignition from cigarettes and matches.

It's important to note that regardless of which regional standard each fabric has, there will always be an ISO that governs that particular standard. (For example, ISO 10047 is the international standard for the surface burning of fabrics, but can also be described by CAL 117 or BS EN 1021.1)



Colour Fastness

Sometimes referred to as "lightfastness", colour fastness is a way to measure a material's colour resistance to running and fading as the result of light exposure.

One of the tests performed involves simulating natural sunlight by repeatedly shining a powerful Xenon arc lamp on the fabric and measuring any change in the colour intensity.

OLG Fabrics such as Motion Felt comply with [ISO 105-B02:2014](#).

Colour Matching

Matching identical colours sounds like an easy enough task. Everyone knows what red looks like, right?

Well, it turns out that the red that you see could be slightly different to the red your colleague or client sees. In fact, there are more than 19 decillion different shades of colour in the natural world. Just for reference, a decillion is an impossibly large number containing a 1 followed by thirty-three zeros.

Unfortunately, when it comes to fabric, there can often be slight variations of colour shades between batches.

To minimize the chance of mismatched colours, we try to ensure that each project is manufactured from fabrics in the same batch.

For this reason, many of our fabrics include a disclaimer stating that there is a chance of batch-to-batch variations in colour. These variations are always within the limits of commercial tolerances.



Surface Fuzzing / Pilling

One of the most frustrating degradations experienced by fabrics is fuzzing or pilling. Occurring when broken threads become tangled and clumped together over time, pilling not only looks unsightly but also reduces the integrity of the entire fabric as a whole.

To qualify for the [ISO 12945-1:2020 certification](#), fabrics are run through a rotating pilling box apparatus to measure the amount of pilling, fuzzing, and matting of textile fabrics.

Materials such as the [OLG Motion Felt](#) have been awarded this certification and are classed as commercial fabrics with a reduced chance of pilling and fuzzing.

Something for Everyone

These are just a few of the conditions we use to rate and market our upholstery fabrics. If you're still not sure whether fabric or mesh is the right material for your office chairs, we've put together [a handy guide to help you decide](#).

We're Only a Phone Call Away

If you're trying to find the best type of chair for your office, please give us a call at [02 8188 2732](tel:0281882732) so we can discuss some options. Want to keep reading? Find out [What's New with OLG](#) or head over to the [OLG Learning Centre](#) to explore a curated archive full of educational articles and industry content, all completely free to use.

Still not convinced? These are just some of the reasons OLG is the preferred office furniture supplier for so many Australian resellers. If you need help choosing the best furniture wholesaler for your business needs, feel free to drop us an email at info@olgooffice.com or give us a call on **(02) 8188 2732**.