

Glossary of Important Terms

Aglet: The plastic sheath at the end of a shoelace, which makes the lace easier to thread through the eyelet holes of a shoe.

Aniline: Leather tanning finish.

Ankle Strap: A strip of material that wraps around the leg where it meets the foot in order to secure the shoe to the foot.

Apron Toe: A type of toe characterized by a large overlay that covers the front of the toe and has visible edges or stitching.

Arch: The high, curved part of the sole of the foot, located between the ball of the foot and the heel. This term can also refer to the raised area of the insole of the shoe, for padding and support of the arch of the foot.

Automatic Sewing Machine: Sewing machines that sew a predetermined pattern rapidly and consistently. Used for topstitching uppers, tacking, shadow topstitching, etc.

Back Seam: The vertical seam at the back of a shoe or boot.

Ball: The padded area of the foot between the big toe and the arch of the foot.

Ballet Flats: A soft, slipper-like, closed-toe shoe with no heel height, modeled after the shoes worn by ballet dancers.

Bellows Tongue: A shoe tongue that is attached at both the top and the sides of the shoe.

Bicycle Toe: A type of toe characterized by two stitched straight line accents, so named because of their similarity to professional bicycling shoe detailing.

Binding: Reinforcement of the edge of material used in upper.

Blucher Toe: A type of toe characterized by a smooth, turned stitch border around the toe area, like an apron toe style in reverse.

Boot Heel: Typically found on boots, this is a wide, stable type of heel that usually is not very high.

Booties: A shoe that resembles a boot in style but does not have a shaft.

Boots: Footwear which covers the entire foot and extends to the height of the anklebone or up to the thigh.

Bottoming: bottoming refers to the process of attaching the Sole to the Upper. The basic methods of sole attachment include cementing, molding / vulcanizing, and sewing.

Braided Thread: a thread where the ply are braided rather than twisted together so they have very good ply adhesion.

Brannock Device: A device used to measure the length and width of the foot in order to ensure proper shoe fit.

Break: The natural crease created across the vamp of the shoe from everyday wear.

Breathability: The ability of the upper to transpire, thereby, ventilating the foot.

Buckle: A fastener that secures two straps to each other by allowing one strap to pass through a fitting, attached to the other strap.

Buckskin: Leather or deerskin with suede finish.

Built-up: Construction used in vulcanized rubber process.

Bumper: Material attached over front toe area.

Burnish: The process of buffing a shoe surface to achieve an antiquing effect of the leather.

Calfskin: Leather of young cattle.

Canvas: A closely woven, heavy cloth of cotton, hemp or linen.

Cap Toe: A type of toe style with a full toe overlay and a straight stitching line across the top part of the toe, often seen in dress shoes.

Celluloid: A thermoplastic material.

Cellulose: Natural polymeric.

Cemented Construction: A shoe construction in which the upper of a shoe is cemented, rather than stitched, to the sole of the shoe. Cement construction results in a lighter, more flexible shoe.

Chrome tanning: Leather, mineral tanning process.

Circumference: The measurement around the shaft of a boot/bootie taken at the widest part near the top of the boot/bootie shaft.

Cleats: Studs extended out from the sole.

Clog: A closed toe, open back shoe with a platform sole. Traditionally with a wood heel.

Collar: Top line of the shoe quarters. Many are padded.

Colorblocking: Strategically placed, contrasting, yet complimentary, bold and bright colors.

Column Heel: A type of women's high heel that's round and column-shaped.

Combat boots: Lace-up multipurpose boots originally designed for the military.

Combination Last: A footwear last in which the heel is two sizes smaller in width than the widest part of the shoe, producing a shoe with a narrow heel and a wide toebox.

Combination last: Last with wider forepart and narrow heel fitting.

Compression mold: Shaping materials by heat and pressure.

Contoured Footbed: An insole that molds to the shape of the foot.

Counter: A stiff piece of material placed at the heel of a shoe between the lining and upper in order to retain the shape of the shoe.

Cowboy boots: A boot with a chunky, moderately high slanted heel, usually pointed toe, and decorative stitching or tooling, extending to mid-calf.

Cowhide: Leather from cattle.

Crepe: A natural rubber with crinkled texture, used in shoe soles.

Crepe Sole/Crepe Rubber: A type of crude natural rubber sole characterized by a crinkled texture like crepe paper

Curing: The application of chemicals to animal hides in preparation for the tanning process.

Cushioning: Padding on the insole or outsole of a shoe for added comfort and stabilization.

Cylinder bed sewing machine: A sewing machine having a horizontal cylinder arm or post, which allows a closed upper to be moved freely around the working area.

D-rings: A hardware typically used as a guide for laces or straps.

Denier: Weight of synthetic fibers.

Density: Weight per unit volume of a substance.

Derby: Design quarters overlapping vamp and tongue.

Die cutting: cutting of upper or sole materials with metal dies.

DIP construction: Direct injection process.

Distressed Leather: Leather, the look of which has been artificially aged by means of light abrasion, or other treatment so that it no longer looks new and smooth.

Dressing: The application of polish or gloss to a shoe to maintain its finish and appearance.

Dual Density Midsole: Seen in running shoes, a midsole that employs two different densities of cushioning foam, with denser foam where the foot would normally tend to roll.

Duo process: Method of upper assembly construction by cementing instead of stitching edge.

Durometer scale: A method of determining material hardness on a scale of 0-100, with lower readings indicating softness.

DVP: Direct vulcanizing process.

Elastic Gore: An elastic fabric panel inserted into shoes to provide stretch

Elastomer: Term used for synthetic rubber.

Embossing: Depressing a specific pattern in material.

Energy Return: In running and athletic shoes, it is the response after the foot strikes the ground, a sort of propulsion that helps maintain an effective 'gait' or stride

Espadrille: A shoe or sandal that has a woven rope or similar material covering the wedge or sole.

EVA: Ethylene Vinyl Acetate is a synthetic compound typically used for outsoles. EVA provides cushioning to the foot and is easily shaped by heat and pressure.

Extended eyestay: A design wherein the eyestay is extended to form the toe cap.

Extrusion: Construction method of injecting TPR, nylon, etc.

Eyelet: A hole through which a lace is threaded; may be reinforced with a metal ring or grommet.

Eyeletting: This is the operation where the eyelets are attached to the upper. The machine punches and spaces the lacing holes, feeds and sets the eyelets in proper alignment.

Eyelets: Holes for lacing (blind) with metal reinforcements or eyelet hooks.

Eyestay: Reinforcement around lacing holes.

Fabric: A type of material used on a shoe

Fair stitch: The stitching of the Welt to the Midsole.

Faux Leather: A leather-like fabric which, though man-made, resembles tanned animal hide.

Feather edge: Last bottom profile.

Fiberboard: A material made primarily of wood pulp, which is used for counters, insoles and heel lifts.

Filler: Cheap additive to plastic.

Findings: Small component parts of shoemaking.

Finish: The process by which the final appearance and/or texture of a material is created.

Fitting room: Department where upper parts are prepared.

Flat bed sewing machine: Sewing machine designed for stitching upper components together on flat surfaces.

Flat Heel: Shoes with a very low or no heel height

Flats: Shoes that do not have any heel height.

Flip Flops: A flat sandal which is held to the foot solely by a strap that runs over and between the toes.

Flow molding: The construction method of molding PVC coated materials as an exact replica of original uppers.

Footbed: The insole of the shoe, where the foot rests. Often removable, the footbed is contoured and provides foot positioning, comfort, and insulation. Aftermarket footbeds can improve boot fit and upgrade performance.

Forefoot: The area of foot between the ball and the toes.

Foxing: Material striping bonded to the upper and sole around the shoe.

Friction tape: A tape sewn to the bottom of an upper to strengthen adhesion under the foxing.

Fringe: Suede fabric that is cut into strips to create movement.

Full grain: Outermost layer of the leather still present in finished products.

Girth: The circumference of a shoe last as measured around the ball of the foot.

Gladiator: Designed to resemble the shoes worn by ancient Roman fighters, gladiators are open-toed sandals, distinctive for a single strap that runs down the foot, and several others that run across it.

Goodyear welt: Construction method of stitching upper to sole.

Gore: An elastic panel stitched into either side of a shoe's vamp in order to make it more comfortable and easier to put on and take off.

Grading: Method used to size original patterns.

Grommets: The metal or plastic rings used to reinforce eyelets.

Heel Breast: The forward-facing side of the heel.

Heel Counter: Counters provide support and help the upper wrap around the foot. They also help protect the heel from impact.

Heel height: Measurement taken on a vertical line that extends from the bottom surface of the sole to the floor.

Heel Seat: The part of the shoe directly below where the heel of the foot rests. Also where the sole and the heel are joined together.

Heel: "Heel" can refer to both the rear, padded area of the underside of the foot, as well as the solid part of a shoe that supports the heel cup.

Herringbone: A distinctive fabric pattern in which columns of parallel lines sloping in one direction, abut columns of parallel lines sloping in the opposite direction.

Hidden Gore: An elastic panel at the front of a shoe that is covered by the shoe's tongue. Provides added comfort.

Houndstooth: A distinctive fabric pattern that consists of contrasting, notched squares to form a sort of zigzag checked appearance.

Impregnation: Process of thoroughly soaking material with oil or resin.

Injection Molded Construction: A type of sole unit construction created by injecting melted polymer or a similar material into the sole mold.

Inseam: The hidden seam of a welted shoe holding together the welt, upper, lining and insole.

Insole Rib: The part of the Insole that is used when stitching a Goodyear Welt.

Insole: The part of the shoe that the foot rests upon, usually cushioned

Instep: Medial inside arch area of the shoe.

Instep: The area of the foot between the toes and the ankle, or the top front part of a shoe

Isoprene: Fundamental rubber molecule.

Jellies: Man-made shoes with a soft, rubbery material.

Kangaroo: Leather from Australian Kangaroos.

Kid: Leather from goat skin.

Kip: Leather from young cattle.

Kitten Heel: A low-heeled stiletto shoe, often between 1 and 2 inches in heel height.

Lace up: A string threaded through the eyelets of a shoe used for fastening the shoe.

Laces: A strip of material strung through the eyelets of a shoe in order to pull the shoe closed and adjust its girth.

Lap seam: A simple sewing method where one material is laid over another and sewn through.

Last: A metal, wood or plastic form used to create the shape of a shoe.

Lasting: The process of pulling and shaping a shoe on a last. This can be done by pulling and tacking the upper to the last or by string lasting.

Lateral: The outside area of the foot.

Latex: A milky liquid exuded from rubber trees.

Leather Upper: The bulk of the exterior of the shoe, everything except the sole and interior, made of leather rather than man-made materials.

Leather: The hide of an animal that has been treated and tanned.

Lift: One of the several layers of leather or leather-board used to make a heel.

Lining: The material inside a shoe, often different from the material which comprises the outside of the item.

Littleway: A method of stitching the sole to the upper.

Loafer: A low, step-in shoe without shoelaces or buckles.

Lockstitch: A method of sewing the upper to the bottom.

Low cut or Low Top: Below the ankle shoe design.

Lug Sole: A sole with a heavy rubber sole

Lycra/Neoprene: A blend of stretch fabric and neoprene rubber

Man tailored: Similar to an oxford shoe (a low shoe with laces over the instep.)

Manmade: Not made from an animal.

Mary Jane: A shoe with a strap across the instep that is attached with elastic, Velcro, or buckle.

Medial: Inside area of the foot.

Mesh: Woven or knitted nylon material for uppers.

Midsole: The sole between the insole and outsole.

Moc Toe: A type of toe design with a seam and stitching details, originally seen in moccasins

Moccasin: A slip-on shoe with visible stitching around the perimeter of the toe box, creating a gathered effect.

Mold: A cavity used to shape plastic or rubber by pressure and heat.

Monk Strap: A type of shoe designed like an oxford, but with a strap closure across the instep rather than a lace up front closure

Mono block (casting): An injection molding process that casts upper and sole together (as in ski boots).

Motorcycle Boots: Associated with motorcyclists, motorcycle boots are heavy boots with a low heel and range from ankle to knee height.

Mules: A shoe or sandal characterized by a closed, or nearly closed, toe and a backless heel of any height.

Mulling: the steaming or dampening of leather for stretching purposes prior to lasting.

Negative Heel: Popular in comfort footwear, a type of footbed with a lowered heel area designed for more natural foot placement

Nubuck Upper: The exterior part of a shoe, excluding the sole, made of a durable high-quality cow hide which has been treated to give it a suede or velvet-like texture.

Outsole: The very bottom of the shoe, the part that contacts the ground

Overlay: Detailing on a shoe made by layering material on top of other material

Oxfords: A low shoe with laces over the instep.

Patent: Various materials can be used to create a varnished hard and glossy finish.

Peep toe: A shoe with a narrow opening in the front that exposes the toes.

Perforation: A pattern of small holes punched or bored into the trim of a shoe, for the purpose of decoration or ventilation.

Pinked: Detailing characterized by a saw-tooth edge applied for decoration

Piping: A decorative, narrow strip of leather or synthetic that follows the seam of a shoe

Pitch: The angle of the back part of the heel where it meets the sole, compared to the front part of the heel where it meets the sole.

Platforms: A high heel shoe with a thick sole under the front part of the foot.

Pointed Toe Pumps: An enclosed shoe with a heel of any height, the front end of which tapers into a point.

Polyurethane: A type of manmade material that can be made to have the look and feel of leather

Post sewing machine: A special sewing machine having a small raised working area to allow for easier fitting and stitching on partially closed uppers.

PU: The commonly used abbreviation for polyurethane

Pumps: Women's dress shoes that are typically characterized by a medium or high heel. Styles are typically completely enclosed.

PVC: Polyvinyl Chloride is a semi-rigid polymer, often used in heel counters and outsoles for added support.

Quarter Lining: The lining of the rear part of a shoe, typically made from leather or fabric.

Quarter Panel: The sides of the shoe from the heel to the toe

Rand: Thin rubber bindings that run around the junction of the upper and sole and part way up the boot.

Riding boots: Boots designed for the purpose of riding horses. Styles typically include a low heel and knee-high shaft. The term may also describe fashion boots that resemble riding boots in style.

Rim: The part of the shoe where the foot enters. Another term for collar or topline.

Rocker: The curvature of the sole from the heel to the toe of a boot to facilitate walking.

Ruched: A type of detailing characterized by gathered or pleated material.

Sandals: An exposed shoe style that includes an open toe and open back. Slips on and is held in place with leather or fabric straps across the foot.

Scalloped: A type of detailing characterized by round wavy edges

Scree collar: Lightly padded cuff at the top of the upper that keeps out debris.

Sculpted Heel: A type of high heel molded in one piece, usually out of high-impact plastic

Shaft height: Measurement from the arch of a boot to the top of the boot shaft.

Shank: a strip or plate in the sole that adds rigidity and support. Full-length shanks offer additional torsional rigidity and protection.

Shoe Sizes: The variation between full sizes is one-third of an inch, while the difference between half sizes and full sizes is one-sixth of an inch. This system of sizes is based on a decree made by Edward in 1324.

Silicone: A slippery polymeric material used to waterproof shoes.

Single Sole Pumps: An enclosed high-heel shoe with a very thin sole (no platform).

Siped: A type of outsole with narrow grooves or channels, often found in boat shoes

Skiving: A trimming process used to reduce the thickness of the edges of the upper parts prior to joining them together. The skiving machine cuts a bevel at the edge of the material on the underside as the operator guides the material past a rapidly rotating razor-sharp knife.

Sling back: A backless shoe that is held in place with a strap at the back of the foot. The strap is typically elastic or buckled for adjustment.

Slip Lasting: Where the sock lining is stitched to the upper prior to inserting the “last” giving the upper a partial shaping. After the upper and sock lining have been stitched together, the platform cover is sewn to this unit. The sole is then attached and finished in the same way as other shoes using the cement attaching process.

Slip-On: A shoe which can go onto the foot without use of a lace or strap, and therefore theoretically possible to be put on without use of the hands.

Slipper: A flat, casual shoe that slips on and is typically meant for use indoors. May be lined for added comfort.

Slouched: Not rigid, and thus dragged down by gravity. Slouched boots, for example, fold or wrinkle as they appear to slide down the leg.

Sock-liner: A sock liner is the insole in the interior of the shoe that the foot rests on.

Sole: The outsole, or bottom part of a shoe.

Stacked Heel: A heel comprised of many layers of leather, laid one on top of another, in order to resemble a wood-grain appearance.

Steel Toes: Steel toes are most frequently found in industrial-style footwear that is meant to prevent injury in the workplace. Steel toes are tested by the ANSI (American National Standard Institute) for their ability to maintain a minimum clearance when compressed by different weights.

Stiletto: A very thin, very high heeled shoe, the heel of which tapers nearly to a point where it comes into contact with the ground.

Straight Lasted: A type of last used to create a very straight shoe that helps to prevent severe pronation.

Strappy Sandal: An open shoe comprised of multiple straps that secure the foot to the sole.

Strike plate: Many lighter boots use a strike plate or protection plate to protect against sharp trail debris and provide torsional support. This can be in the toe between the upper and the lining.

String Lasting: The process of serging a string or tape to the lower edge of the upper so once the upper is placed on the “last”, the string can be pulled tight helping to form the upper on the “last” prior to bottoming operations.

Studs: Decorative metal (or plastic) knobs or points, that stick out from the surface of the decorated item.

Suede: Treated leather that comprises a soft, napped surface.

Synthetic Materials: Materials which are man-made and not naturally produced.

Tassel: A knotted rope ornamental piece typically found on a shoe vamp.

Textile: A type of material composed of natural or synthetic fibers.

Thong Sandals: A sandal that passes between the big toe and second toe with a v-strap that connects to the sandal sole at both sides of the foot.

Throat: The main opening of a shoe extending from the vamp to the ankle.

Tip: An additional piece of leather covering the toe of a shoe. May be in several different shapes or patterns. Also known as a Cap.

Toe Ridge: A horizontal ridge added into the footbed of some sandals to anchor and provide support and cushioning for the toes

Tongue: Strip of leather or other material sewn into the vamp of the shoe extending to the main opening. Not only provide padding for the top of the foot, but gusseted tongues keep out grit and debris between the sock and liner. Asymmetric tongues add support and comfort.

Top line: The opening in the upper through which the foot enters. To reinforce the top line, an adhesive-coated fabric tape is often applied to the upper near the top edge.

TPR: Thermoplastic Rubber.

TPU: Thermoplastic Urethane is a polymer typically used for outsoles. TPU provides cushioning to the foot and is easily shaped by heat and pressure.

Tread: Describing the design of a shoe’s sole

Turf Cleats: Permanent or removable plastic or rubber cleats on athletic shoes

Twill: Fabric constructed in a weave.

Unit Bottom: A single shoe bottom made from a mold of rubber or plastic. It includes the sole, platform heel or wedge.

Upper: The part of the shoe that covers the top part of the foot, from heel to toe.

UV Absorptive: Lens that is able to block light with a relatively long wavelength, able to penetrate the deep layers of the skin.

Vamp: The front center part of a shoe's upper

Velvet: A fabric of silk, nylon, acetate, rayon, etc., sometimes having a cotton backing, with a thick, soft pile formed of loops of the warp thread either cut at the outer end or left uncut.

Vibram: A type of durable, non-slip, outsole typically found on hiking boots. Vibram is a registered trademark of Vibram SPA.

Vinyl: Short for polyvinyl chloride (PVC.), vinyl is a shiny plastic often used for coating shoes.

Vulcanized Rubber: Rubber that has been converted from its crude state to one of durability and strength.

Vulcanizing: The process where a thermoplastic or rubber sole is joined to the upper using heat.

Wallet: A flat, folding pocketbook, especially one large enough to hold paper money, credit cards, driver's license, etc., and sometimes having a compartment for coins.

Wedge Heels: A heel that extends from the back to the ball of the shoe, laying flat on the ground.

Welt: A strip of leather sewn between the insole and the outsole to create a greater durability.

Width: The width of a shoe is typically measured in letters (AAA, AA, A, B, C, D, E, EEE, EEEE) and refers to the width of the shoe last as measured at the ball of the foot. Widths are defined in one-sixths of an inch.