

The Sample Was Perfect. Why Wasn't the Bulk?

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Bulk from India drifts from an approved sample for a few repeatable reasons: different material, rushed fabric, or different hands on the bulk. These are consistency problems, not proof the maker lacks skill, and each has a test that catches it before you pay the balance.

Key takeaways

- Approve the pre-production sample made in the exact bulk fabric and trims, then seal and sign it.
- Standard AQL inspection will not catch a stiffener that washes out, so test fabric weight before and after washing.
- Write a maximum shrinkage figure into the order and measure it after washing.
- Draw inspection samples from every lot and every colour, not from a pile the factory lays out.
- The same pattern is reported with Chinese makers, and it tracks order size and leverage, not the country.

Bulk from India drifts from the approved sample for a handful of specific, repeatable reasons: the sample was made from different material, the bulk fabric was rushed, or the bulk was made by different hands. None of them are signs that the maker can't do the job, because the sample proves it can. They're consistency problems, and each one has a test that catches it before you pay the balance.



In June 2026 a sourcing agent who runs production inside India's garment exports described a trick on heavyweight fleece. The quoted fabric was heavier, but "the factory used a cheaper 280 GSM fabric and loaded it with a chemical starch/stiffener during the wash phase to artificially inflate the weight" ([r/streetwearstartup, 2026](#)). The garment felt right in the hand and weighed right on the scale. Then it was washed. I'll carry that hoodie through this post, because it shows the whole problem in one product. The caveat - the agent sells services and is one voice, so treat the trick as a reported failure mode, not a description of Indian factories in general.

SourcingFrom Intelligence

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01 **The most-cited sample-to-bulk failures in buyer threads are about material, not skill:** a different fabric in bulk, two material lots mixed in one order, and sizes drifting between batches. *(Our audit of buyer forum threads, 2023 to 2026)*

02 **Standard AQL inspection won't catch a stiffener that washes out.** It needs a fabric-weight test on washed and unwashed fabric. *(Our reading of ISO 2859-1 sampling against the reported failure)*

03 **The same "great first article, then worse" pattern is reported with Chinese contract makers too.** It tracks order size and leverage, not the country. *(Forum signal, 2023)*

What we don't know yet

- How often bulk drifts from sample, by product and cluster. Nobody has tracked order one against order three on the same spec points, and that's the dataset we want to build.

1. Why Can a Sample Be Perfect and the Bulk Not?

Because a sample answers one question – can this maker hit my spec once? It doesn't answer whether the bulk will use the same fabric lot, the same finishing, the same line or the same people. A buyer on a clothing forum put it simply in 2025: "The fabric you get in sampling often isn't the fabric you get in bulk" ([r/ClothingStartups, 2025](#)).



There's often an innocent reason. A first sample is usually cut from whatever suitable fabric is in stock, while bulk fabric is knitted or bought later for your order. The two can differ in weight, handle and shrinkage, even when nobody is cutting corners. That's why the fix below starts with which sample you approve, not with blaming anyone.

2. The Named Failure Modes, and the Test for Each

These are the ones buyers and production people describe by name. Each pairs with a check you can write into your order.

Weight reached with finish, not fibre. That's our hoodie. The fabric hits the quoted GSM because of a stiffener that washes out. The agent's own fix is to ask for a video of the GSM cutter test on raw, unwashed fabric before cutting starts (same thread). I'd add a second weight test after one wash on the bulk, because that's the number your customer lives with.

Shrinkage from cutting unrelaxed fabric. Knit fabric needs to rest after it comes off the roll. The same agent says a factory rushing a small order will "pull it straight off the roll and cut it immediately", and the garments shrink "by 5–8%" after washing (as reported by the poster). His tech pack sets a maximum shrinkage of 3% and ties the final payment to a post-wash measurement. You don't have to use his number, but you do need one, in writing.

Different hands on the bulk. The sampling room has a maker's best tailors. Bulk may run on a different line or in a partner unit, especially if your order is small. That's normal in Indian clusters and not a red flag on its own (our piece on [job work and subcontracting](#) explains why). The check is inline photos of your goods on the line at about a tenth of the run, and an inspector who visits the unit actually making them.



Mixed lots. Two batches of raw material in one order, one of them fine and one not. Our [quality control](#) section tells the story of a wool order where

exactly that happened, so I won't retell it. The check is an inspection sample drawn from every lot and every colour, not from a pile the factory lays out.

Failure mode	The check
Weight reached with finish, not fibre	GSM cutter test on raw fabric before cutting, and a weight test after one wash
Shrinkage from cutting unrelaxed fabric	A written maximum shrinkage, measured after washing
Different hands on the bulk	Inline photos at about a tenth of the run, and an inspector at the unit making them
Mixed lots	Inspection samples from every lot and every colour

3. Which Sample Should You Approve?

The pre-production sample, every time. One buyer described the difference cleanly: a "PP sample" is "made using exact fabric, trims etc." ([r/ClothingStartups, 2025](#)). Approve that one, seal it, sign it, and keep one copy each. It becomes the yardstick every later check measures against.

If the maker can't produce a PP sample in bulk fabric yet, the fabric probably isn't bought yet. That's useful to know before you agree a ship date.

4. Is This an India Problem?

Not really, and I think it's unfair to frame it that way. A Hacker News commenter describing Chinese contract makers wrote "You might also get great first articles ... then they'll take the A team off of your line" ([Hacker News, 2023](#)). It's what happens when your order is small next to the factory's other work. Defenders of Indian suppliers say the same – the issue is

"inconsistency across too many small players", not skill (an Indian parts supplier, [r/manufacturing, 2025](#)).

So the real lever is your leverage. A buyer whose balance payment waits on a passed test has leverage. A buyer who paid in full before the goods were packed has none.



5. How Do You Catch It Before Paying the Balance?

1. **Write the spec points into the purchase order:** weight before and after washing, maximum shrinkage, colour tolerance against the PP sample, and measurements per size.
2. **Book an inspection while money is still owed.**
3. **Make the balance depend on the report.** How to structure that is on [paying an overseas supplier safely](#), and why many makers ask for a big advance first is on [why Indian suppliers ask for full advance](#).

If the order is too small for an inspection firm's minimum, it's still worth it on a first order, because it's the only record you'll have of how the supplier behaves.

If the bulk is late as well as different, reading 'ready next week' messages helps you find where the order really is.

If you'd rather someone on the ground ran the PP approval, inline photos and the final check, SourcingSync does that for orders of any size.

Questions Buyers Ask

Is a 3% shrinkage limit standard? ^

It's one production agent's number, not a standard. Agree your own limit for your fabric with the maker and your lab.

Will an AQL inspection catch a fabric problem? v

Should I pay for samples? v

Back to the Hoodie

The hoodie that weighed right and felt right would have failed one simple test - weigh it after a wash. That's the pattern with every failure here. The sample proved the maker could do it. Your job is to check that the bulk is the same thing, while you still hold the balance.