

J-shirt Reconstruction

Project 11

Supplies and Tools

basic sewing supplies
measuring tape
seam ripper
sewing machine (technically optional, but will make your life much easier)
straight edge or ruler (1 for each participant)
tailor's chalk (1 for each participant)

Materials

embellishments
fabric and other scrap clothing to use for spare parts
T-shirts (good to have long- and short-sleeve varieties available)

The first step for all these techniques is to *try your shirt on*. Look carefully at your shirt and think about what you like about it and what you don't like about it. Check the fit—does it need to be tighter or looser? Is there a logo or design on the front that you want to preserve? Is it too long? Too short? Decide how you want to reconstruct your shirt before you cut or sew.

Look through the directions for each technique to get a sense of what you want to do.

Technique 1: Lacing (No Sew!)

Extra materials/supplies/tools: grommet pliers and grommets; ribbon, cording, or some other lacing material.

Lacing will add a more fitted and feminine look to a T-shirt and give you some options on how to accessorize a look. Lace with delicate ribbon for a softer, bohemian look, or lace with leather cording for a sassier, punky look.

PLANNING

To begin, you need to decide a few things:

Where will you put your lacing? The location of your lacing will directly affect the fit of your shirt. If you want your shirt to cinch in and be really structured but you

have a lot of extra shirt, you should do two lacings, one on either side. For easy adjustability, you should have one lacing up the back of the shirt. If you're feeling funky and you want to really play with the look, you can plan your lacing to go across the front of your shirt. Or you could add lacing to the sleeves, or one in the front and one in the back. It's a versatile technique that can be a nice decorative feature.

How far apart will you put your grommets down the line? And how far apart will your rows of grommets be? The spacing of the grommets will affect how tightly and how evenly you will be able to lace. Wide-set grommets work well if your lacing is mainly for decoration. Close-set lacing will give you more control over the cinch and fit of your shirt. For the spacing from grommet to grommet down the line, we recommend no more than 2½ inches and no less than ½ inch. For the placement across the line, no more than 6 inches and not less than 3 inches. Of course, if the lacing is purely decorative, you can deviate from these measurements to your heart's content.

How long should your lacing be? Lacing from collar to bottom hem can be striking, but it is not usually a practical solution for fit.

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MEASURING AND MARKING

For this example we are going to do one lacing up the back of our shirt from the bottom hem to midback with close-set grommets. We are going to have our grommets 1 inch apart down the line and our rows separated by 6 inches.

Lay the shirt out flat on the table, face down. You'll need to draw guidelines with tailor's chalk to mark the placement of the grommets. Start by finding the centerline for the grommets. To do so, measure across the back of the shirt at about midsleeve seam height and divide by two. Using the straight edge, draw a line at that point all the way from the collar to the bottom hem.

Divide the row separation measurement (6 inches) by two. Measure and mark this distance (3 inches) from the centerline on either side. Repeat this at the top, middle, and bottom of your centerline to have as exact a guide as possible. Draw your guidelines on either side, and you should have a pattern on your shirt that looks like the picture in the upper-left corner.

Now you need to mark exactly where the grommets will go. Line up your straight edge across the shirt at roughly the height of the shoulder blade. Make a small mark across each of the two guidelines. Then measure down from that mark in 1-inch increments, marking the spots for all the grommets in each row. Now our shirt looks like the picture in the upper-right corner.

Now, pinch up the fabric at each of these points and use the grommet pliers to insert grommets.

FINISHING

When all the grommets are in place, use a damp cloth to wipe away your chalk marks. If that doesn't work you may need to rinse the shirt in water or wash it and let it dry before lacing.

After the marks are cleaned away, lace (like a shoe) and you are done.

Technique 2: Snip-Tying (No Sew!)

Snip-tying is a really useful, quick way to alter a T-shirt on the fly. It can be quite decorative and adds texture as well as design. It does subtly alter the fit of a shirt, so keep that in mind when snipping your tighter tees.

Our example is going to work a Y design into the back of our shirt, but this technique can work almost anywhere.

MEASURING AND CUTTING

Start by laying the shirt out on the table, face down. Measure across to find the center and mark with chalk. Using a straight edge, draw in the lines of the design.

Now we have our Y in place and it's time to cut. Because we have a design that would come away from the shirt if we cut completely, we're going to start with cutting only the middle line and one of the arms of our Y.

Next, along both raw sides of the cut, snip into the fabric so you end up with a fringe along both edges. The depth of these cuts affects the fit of your shirt. You need at least 1½ inches to tie them off well, but if your shirt is really big, feel free to make the cuts longer. Here we used about 2 inches. There is no need to be precise.

FINISHING

When the entire fringe is cut, go back and tie the two edges together with the fringe. Work your way all the way up until the entire seam is tied.

For our example we repeated the process on the other arm of the Y and then we were done.

Technique 3: Razoring (No Sew!)

Extra materials/supplies/tools: sharp razor or very sharp small scissors; thick cardboard.

Razoring involves adding cuts close together to add pattern and texture to a T-shirt that can then be layered over another shirt. You can use razoring to make simple shapes (circles, squares, hearts, etc.) or to go all the way across the back or front of the shirt. Depending on the shapes you use, this can be a very guy-friendly reconstruction.

DESIGNING

Start by laying the shirt out flat on the table with the part to be razored facing up. If you're using a razor, put the thick cardboard inside the shirt so you don't cut through the other side of the shirt. Use tailor's chalk to sketch out your design. Remember, if you make a mistake with the chalk, you can just rub it away with a damp rag.

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CUTTING

Once you're satisfied with the pattern, you're ready to cut. For our example we traced out a simple flower design.

If you're using the razor, *be very careful*. Make sure you hold the razor safely and pay close attention as you work. Stretch the T-shirt tightly against the cardboard, and cut across your design. Start at the top of the design and move down, cutting lines inside the design as you go. Space your cuts about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch apart. *Do not cut around the edges of the design.*

If you are doing this technique with a group, use scissors rather than a razor. Cutting with scissors will be easier and will give you more control, although the cut edges will look less raw than the razor cuts.

Once the design is filled in with cuts, you're done.

Technique 4: Franken-shirting

Extra materials/supplies/tools: at least 2 T-shirts; spare parts from other pieces of clothing; straight pins.

Franken-shirting is the art of cutting apart different shirts and reassembling them into a new design. This can be as basic as swapping the sleeves or collar from one shirt to another or as complex as creating a patchwork T-shirt from several shirts. You can create some unique fashions, especially if you bring in other types of shirts. For example, you can add the cuffs, collar, and button-up pieces of a dress shirt to a long-sleeve tee and end up with a classy look. This is another guy-friendly technique.

For our example we're going to work on a patchwork tee made from four shirts of about the same size. As an added bonus we'll reassemble each of the shirts and end up with four versions of our patchwork shirt.

PLANNING AND DESIGNING

This technique takes a closer look at deconstruction and planning. You may want to try a few rough sketches of your ideas so you know how to cut and where to sew to get what you want. Also, take time to look at how each piece you're using is constructed and plan how you want to take it apart. Some pieces may work better if you take them off with the seam ripper rather than cutting. Pay extra attention to collars and sleeves.

CUTTING AND ASSEMBLING

Once you have your design firmly in mind, turn your shirts inside out and lay them out to be cut. If you're just cutting and replacing selected parts (sleeves, collars, pockets, etc.), you can remove them from each piece individually.

For our example we're stacking the shirts to make sure we cut pieces roughly the same size and shape. For greater precision, we marked where we plan to cut on the top shirt. Carefully cut the pieces out and pin the layers together. Try to leave the pieces generally in the places they will go.

Once you have all your cuts made, choose which to use and reassemble, pinning the pieces together. Pin everything together to make sure your pieces fit correctly. Once you're sure everything will go back together, remove enough pins so you're dealing with three or four large pieces, each with two or three seams to sew. This will make the project more manageable at the sewing machine.

Sew the seams together, assembling the pieces into a whole shirt.