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# STEP BY STEP UPCYCLING GUIDE

Get ready for your next pride event by creating an expressive shirt!

The upcycling method shown in this guide can be used for all kinds of outfits. Pride is just an example, as a lot of people wear eye-catching looks for the parade. You can also create a garment for other demonstrations such as climate strikes or for any kind of event you would like to have a unique outfit for.

# Being creative and trying out new things is fun, but just in case you need some motivation before you get started:

Instead of (or in addition to) carrying a protest sign, why not wear a self-made shirt with your message?

Did you know that in order to produce just one conventional cotton T-shirt, about 150 grams of pesticides are used and approximately 2700 liters of fresh water are required? Polyester and other synthetic fibers aren't ecofriendly either, they are even worse.

So, let's safe resources (and money) by upcycling an old shirt instead of buying a new one!

You don't need a sewing machine or special skills for this upcycling method.

# Things you need to create a shirt like this:

- **Old/damaged shirt:** Ideally in black, white or gray so that the added colors will stand out. Preferably choose a washable cotton shirt.

  ➢ Ideas which shirt to use: Maybe you have a shirt with stains or holes (you can cover them during the upcycling process), a piece you don't wear anymore or you buy/get a second-hand shirt from a thrift shop/friend/family member.

- **Pieces of fabric:** In the six rainbow colors red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple (or your preferred pride flag). Different structures and shades add to an interesting look. Make sure the fabrics are washable and do not fuzz too much, so that you can easily wash your upcycling shirt.

  ➢ Ideas where to get pieces of fabric: Use damaged clothes, ask someone who likes sewing if they have leftovers, check out fabric shops (they usually sell remaining stock) or thrift shops.

  ➢ Alternative: If it is easier for you, you can also use a colorful shirt (plain or multicolored) and black fabric for the design.

- **Sewing needle(s), threads** (preferrable matching the colors of the fabrics) and **scissors**. In addition, a **thimble, tailor's chalk, a cake ring** (or something with a similar shape) and a **rubber band** are helpful.

# Let's get startet!

For this guide, I choose "QUEER!" in rainbow colors on a black shirt as an example. Simply adapt the different steps to your own design.



1. **Plan your design:** Would you like a shape, letters or both? Depending on the size and complexity, it can be useful to outline your design on the shirt with tailor's chalk. If your shirt has holes or stains, make sure to place your design accordingly to cover them.

2. **Cut the colored fabric into small, roughly rectangular-shaped pieces:** If you have different shades for every rainbow color, you need smaller pieces (length about 2-5 cm). For just one color, bigger pieces are more efficient.

# The thing with the cake ring



3. Put a cake ring into the shirt: Using a cake ring (or something similar you have at hand) helps you to keep a distance between the front and back of the shirt in order to avoid sewing it together.



Secure the back of the shirt with a rubber band.

The aim is to have the cake ring "wearing" your shirt like this, encircling the part where you start your design.



There are different ways to make sure you don't sew the back and front of the shirt together. You can try out filling the space inside the ring with crumpled newspapers as spacers. Or you put your non-dominant hand into the cake ring from time to time to guide the needle (be careful not to prick yourself). Just see what works best for you, maybe you find a smooth solution. In any case I recommend checking the back of the shirt constantly. It's easier (and less frustrating) to undo the seam during the process and redo that part right away instead of doing it at the end.
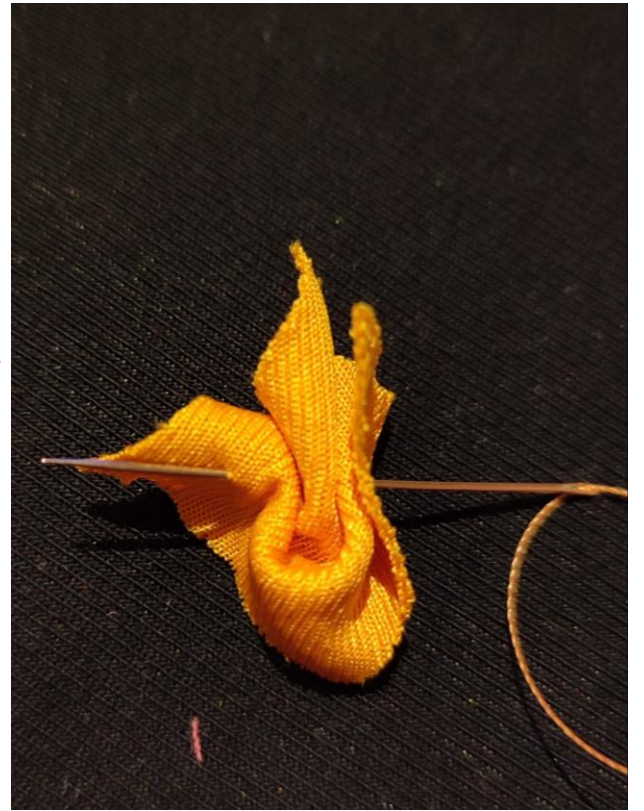
# Main part: Sewing – overview



4.  **Attaching the pieces of fabric:** Starting with the red Q, insert a matching thread into the needle and knot the ends. Sew piece after piece onto the shirt (see close-up pictures on the next pages). If you have different shades of red, alternating them looks more interesting. When your thread comes to an end, make sure to sew it tightly to the shirt before you cut and replace it.
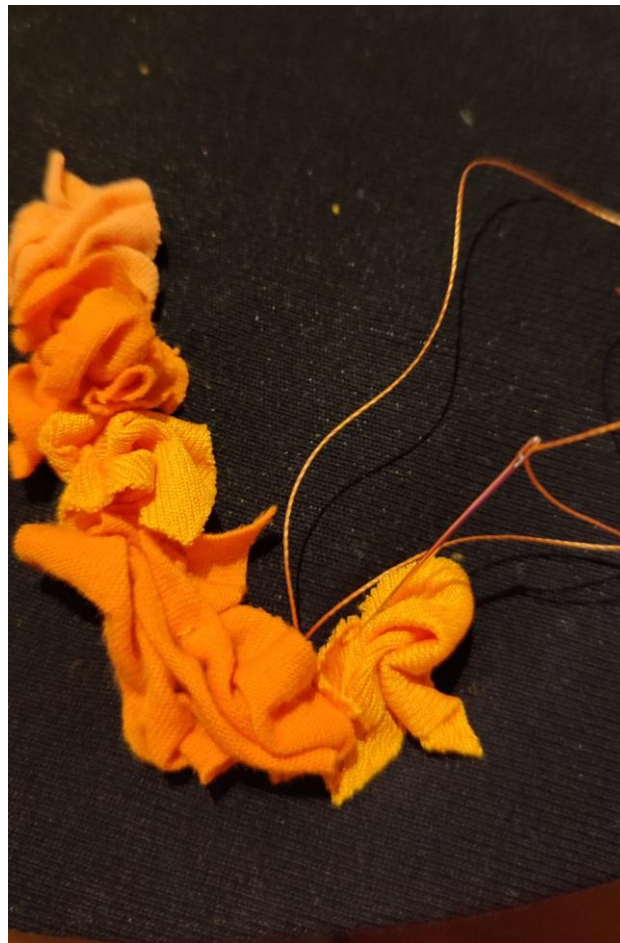
    ➢ When you are done with one letter, move on to the next one using a matching thread.

    ➢ If you chose a shape like a heart, sew row after row instead of letter after letter.

    ➢ Depending on the size of your design and the ring, it might be necessary to rearrange the shirt on the ring. Simply loosen the rubber band, pull the shirt off the ring and secure it in a way so that the right area is encircled. Especially when you haven't outlined your design with chalk, it us helpful to look at the whole shirt without the ring from time to time.

# Sewing on a small piece of fabric
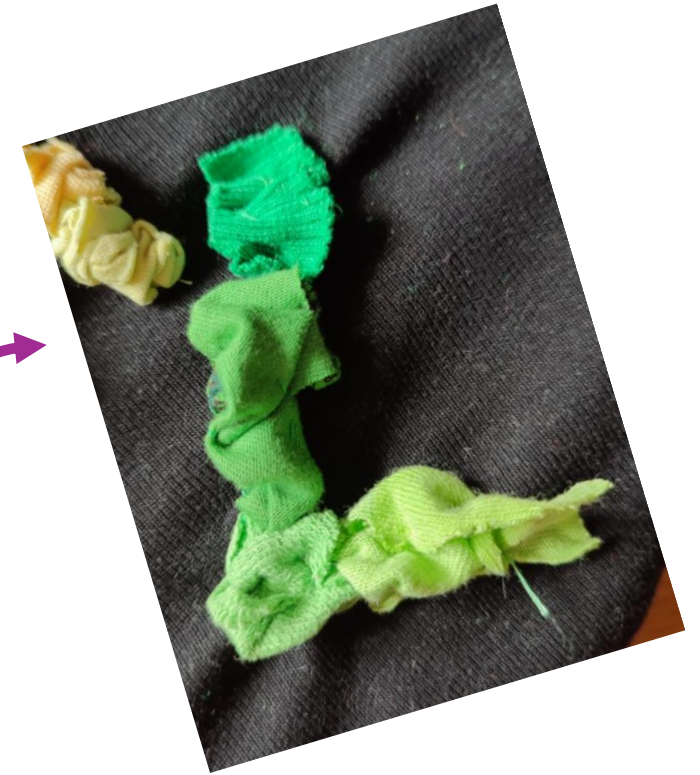
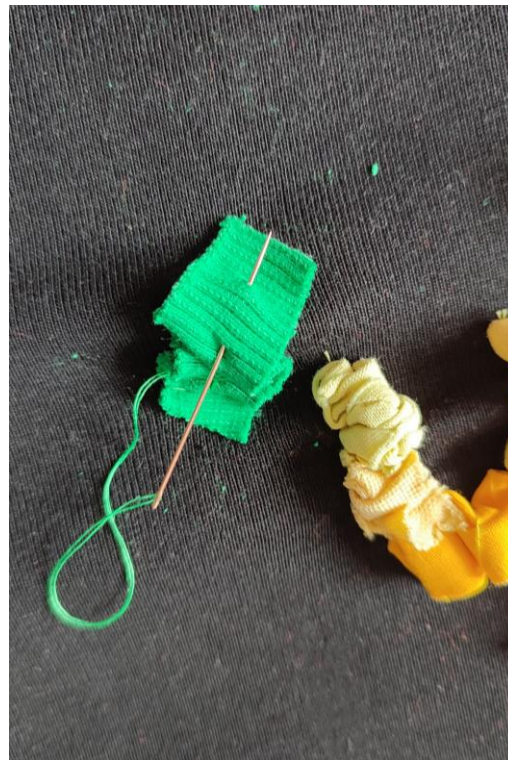# Adding a piece in order to sew the letter U

# Concealing holes or stains

First sew up the hole, it doesn't matter how it looks like. For stains just skip this step.

Then sew a piece of fabric over the spot.



In this case the spot was integrated in the letter E. If there is a hole/stain at a place that isn't part of your design, you can still cover it this way. Just add a few more colorful spots on your shirt and it looks like it's part of the design.

# Have fun with your freshly upcycled shirt!

And in order to keep it fresh and looking good, two final notes:

- You can wash the shirt in the washing machine, but please choose a very low spinning speed and use a laundry bag when you wash it. This way your design is treated more gently and you avoid having lint in the washing machine. If you used synthetic fibers, investing in a special laundry bag (which filters microplastic) is worth thinking about.

- Please don't put your shirt in the dryer. Letting it dry on a hanger or clothesline is better for the environment and for your design.

# References

These are some of the sources I used for the theoretical background of my project at LMU (and for page 2 of this guide). Check them out for information about upcycling, the benefit of reusing clothes and the ecological impact of (fast) fashion:

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**Niinimäki,** Kirsi, Greg Peters, Helena Dahlbo, Patsy Perry, Timo Rissanen and Alison Gwilt, „The environmental price of fast fashion" in *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment* 1, 189–200 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1038/s43017-020-0039-9.

**Woensel,** Lieve van and Sara Suna Lipp, *What if fashion were good for the planet?,* European Parliamentary Research Service, Scientific Foresight Unit (September 2020), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/656296/EPRS_ATA(2020)656296_EN.pdf.