

CHOSEN FOR REDESIGN DIY

KNIT FOR A DESERT ISLAND - UNPICKING DIRECTLY INTO THE GARMENT



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Photo: Aino Ahola



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Aalto University
School of Arts, Design
and Architecture

t-rex



Hi!

I am Saimi Parikka, a textile designer graduating from Aalto University. During my studies, I specialised in knitwear. In the summer of 2024, we did a project in collaboration with T-REX and Emmy.fi, where we came up with ideas and made new products out of the unsold clothes from Emmy's second-hand store. In the summer project, I was working specifically with cotton knitwear, unpicking and reworking these. In these tutorials, I'll show you some ideas I've come up with over the summer to revamp old knitwear.

The majority of secondhand clothes that are not sold are in small sizes. When knitwear is modified by unpicking, it widens as the stitches are dropped and at the same time increases in length as the remaining stitches are loosened. This way, a knitwear in size XS can be modified into a knitwear in size M-L. The unpicked surface becomes slightly transparent, lacy and in my opinion interestingly untidy.

These tutorials are particularly suitable for people who are already knitting enthusiasts, as they have a basic understanding of how the stitches and the structure of knitwear work. Unpicking, like knitting, is a repetitive movement that can even feel meditative. The brain likes repetitive and predictable movement, which is a good counterbalance to mental work, screens and hectic everyday life. Unlike in knitting in general, I think the more irregular and sprawling the surface becomes, the better.

For reworking, it is worth choosing good quality knitwear. For these tutorials I have used 100% cotton knitwear. Smooth-stranded knitwear, such as mercerised cotton or viscose, is easier to unpick than rough, industrially tightly strung cotton knitwear. Thicker yarns are faster to unpick than thinner ones. Fingernails are helpful when unpicking, they can "pluck" the structure open conveniently. When unpicking a garment, you learn to visualise patterns and structures at the same time, when you see what kind of pieces the garment is made of. Unpicking knitwear can feel a little scary - will the whole garment unravel uncontrollably when you cut a hole in it? However, most industrial knitwear is so sturdily made that it does not easily unravel in undesirable spots.

Plenty of great raw materials can be found second-hand. I hope these tutorials will inspire you to save old knitwear and enjoy making things by hand.



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Knit For A Desert Island

Technique: Unpicking directly into the garment without undoing the seams

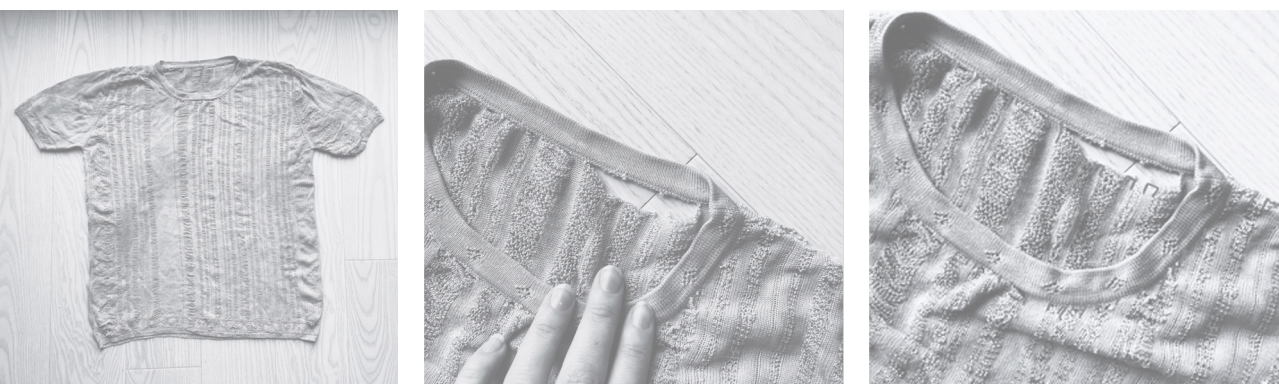
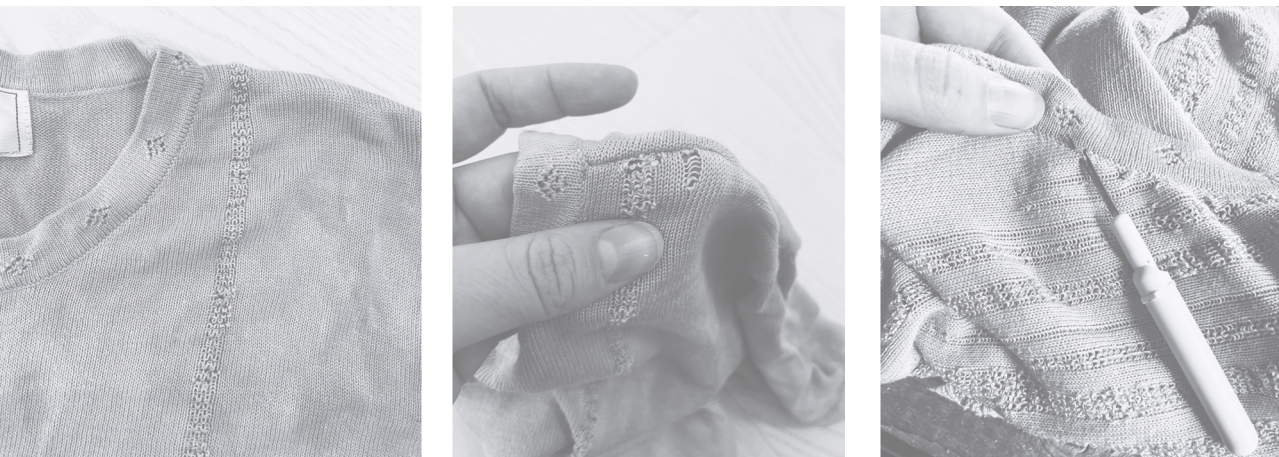
In this tutorial, you will learn how to use the unpicking technique directly on the garment without having to unpick the seams. With this technique, the seams remain the same size and do not widen even though the unpicked surface widens and increases in length. In the tutorial I have also dyed the knit to cover stains and faded colour.

For the tutorial, you need to know how to

- sew a straight stitch on a sewing machine and
- understand what a stitch is in knitwear.

Supplies: Knitwear to be worked, sewing thread of the same colour, seam rippers, scissors, (fabric dye and dyeing accessories)





WORK ORDER

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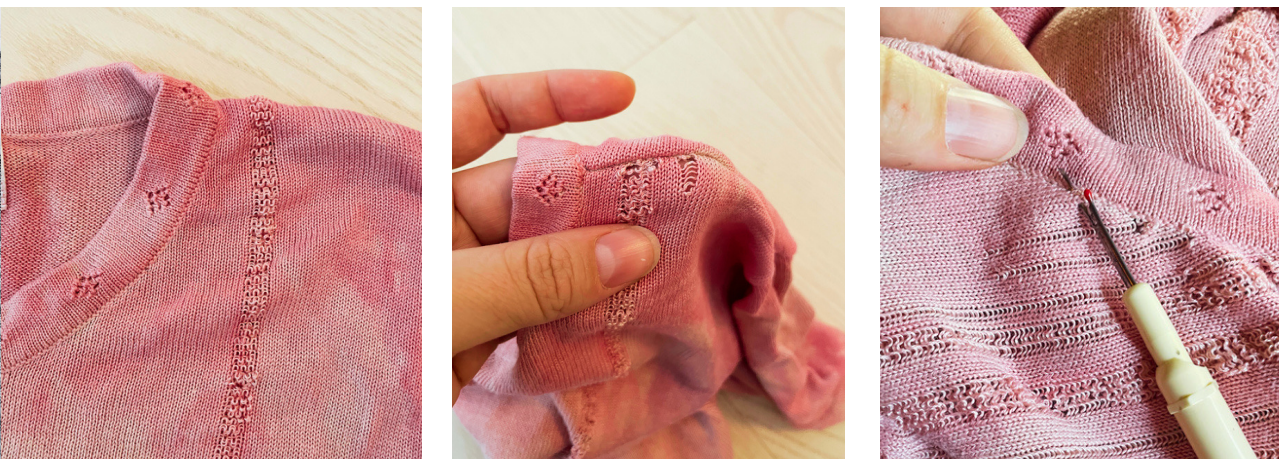


Starting point: Light beige knit t-shirt in 100% silk. The shirt has a few stains and the colour is faded/unattractive, but the material is beautiful and of high quality. The knit to be worked can be made of thick or thin yarn. For this example, a thin silk was chosen. The dyed effect is more graceful on thin knitwear than on thick, but both are equally suitable for the technique. The material can be cotton or viscose instead of silk, for example.

1. Dyeing

Tie-dyeing helps cover the stains and revitalise the colour. You can ignore this step if you are satisfied with the knit's original color. Even if a knitted garment has some stubborn stains, the unpicking technique breaks up the surface and brings it to life, so the stains may not necessarily be as noticeable as on an intact surface.

For dyeing, you need a suitable fabric dye, salt, soda and a dyeing pot. Measure the ingredients into the pot according to the instructions on the fabric dye. Knot the garment loosely with thread, but tightly enough so that it doesn't come undone when dyeing. Wet the knit thoroughly before putting it in the dye solution. Preferably soak the knit in water for a while. Dye according to the instructions. Finally, wash the knit.



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2. Unpicking

Start unpicking by cutting 1-4 adjacent stitches from the top edge of the knit, close to the seam.

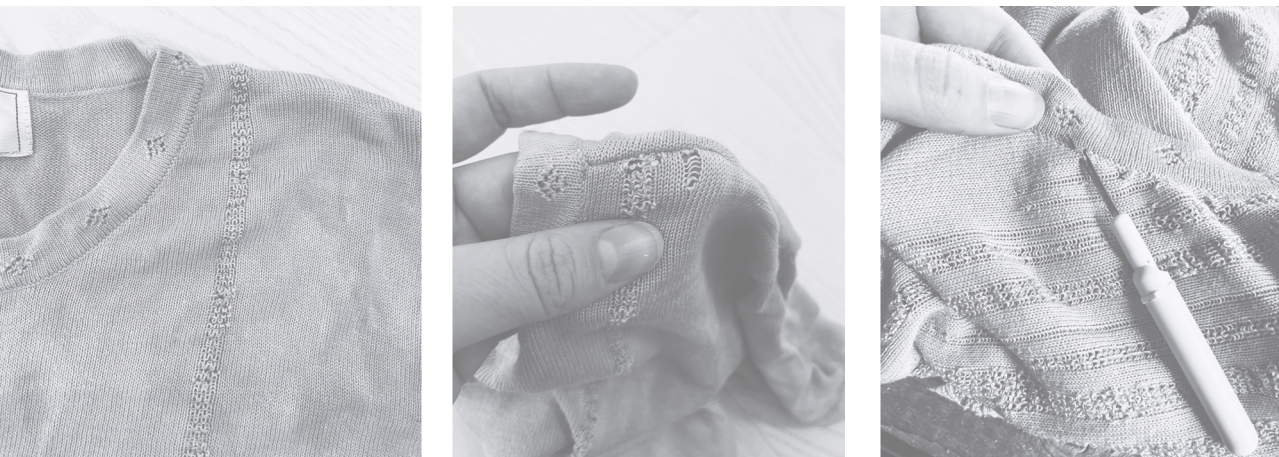
For thin knitwear, it is recommended to use a seam ripper, which allows you to pick up exactly a few stitches at a time. For thicker knitwear, small sewing scissors work best.

You should make the hole right next to the seam. Clearly separate the stitches to be unpicked using the seam ripper. Start dropping the stitches. The stitches drop easily when the knit is stretched horizontally. You can help the stitches to open by “plucking” using your fingernails. Drop stitches up to the hem.

Be careful not to drop any stitches next to the threads cut at the top edge. If the material is slippery and the stitches try to escape, you should use a sewing machine to finish the cut threads as described on the next page, as you unpick. Always leave at least 3 adjacent intact stitches between the holes in a thin knit. In the shirt in the tutorial, the stitches have been unpicked in random order, from 1 to 8 at a time, leaving 3-10 intact stitches in between.

The knit gets wider every time you drop stitches. The denser you unpick the wider it becomes. This technique leaves the shoulder and sleeve seams in their original dimensions, which creates a slight ripple in the area of the seams.

Work the entire surface of the shirt like this.



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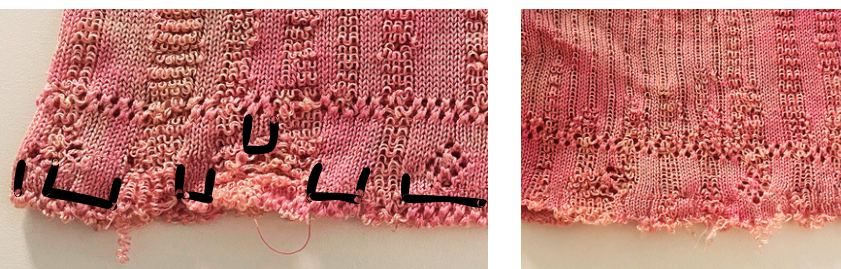
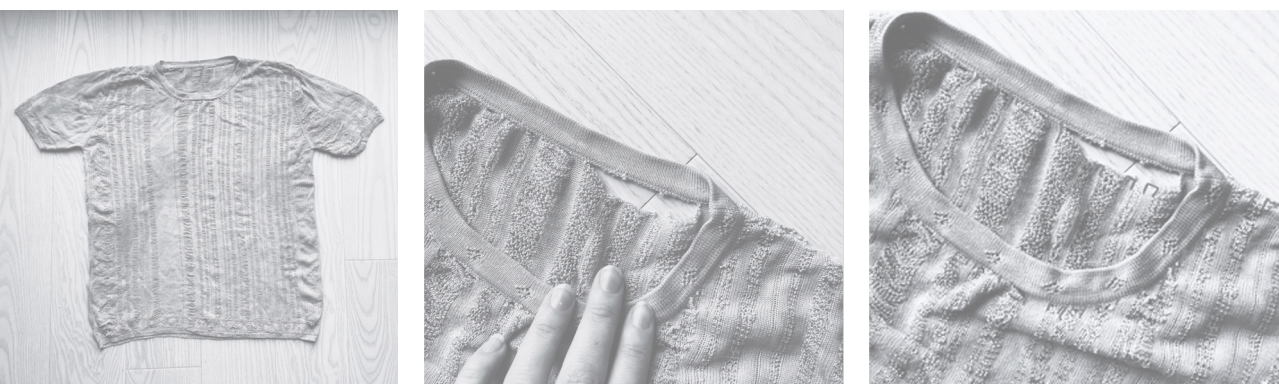
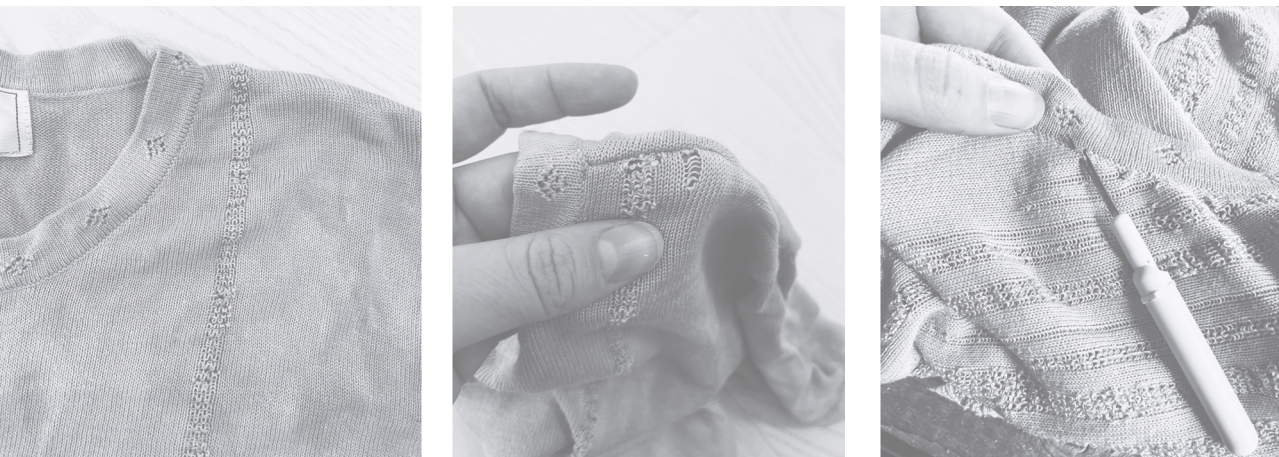


3. Finishing the neckline and shoulders

All cut threads should be finished by sewing back and forth alongside them using a straight stitch on a sewing machine. The black lines in the picture guide you where to sew. Vertical stitching will finish any cut threads and horizontal stitching will finish any open stitches.

Choose a stitching thread of a colour as similar as possible so the stitch will sink into the knit almost imperceptibly.

Sew slightly over the seam where you started unpicking. This ensures that the knit stays attached at the seam and does not unravel, as has happened in the example picture. However, if the stitches are allowed to unravel, this can become an interesting detail in the final result.



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4. Finishing the hem and cuffs

You can finish the hem and cuffs in the same way as the edges of the neckline and shoulder seams. Alternatively, you can add to the unpicked look by cutting away the sleeve ribbing. If your knit doesn't have ribbing, you can cut the sleeve a little shorter.

Finish the cut edge as shown by the black lines. Next to each unpicked point, sew a short distance with a straight stitch lengthwise, then widthwise, closing the open stitches of the hem, then lengthwise again. Repeat this until the whole hem is finished.

Choose a stitching thread of as similar a colour as possible, so that the stitching sinks almost imperceptibly into the surface of the knit. In the second-last photo, the sleeve is finished, but it's hard to see the stitch. After sewing, you can still "pluck" the edge to unpick all open stitches and ensure that no stitches start to unravel in undesired places.

Wet, dry and steam the knit. When soaked, most of the "noodle curl" on the yarn disappears.

Now the knit is ready!



personalisation

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How can you vary the appearance of your product?

You can test how far you dare to go with holes and unpicking. Form larger holes in the knit, for example in the hem and neckline. Asymmetrical detailing adds character to the garment. It's also fun to learn to get out of a neat and regular finish.

Share the picture on social media!

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