

Guidance for making a rag jacket

1. Choice of shirt

Choose a man's shirt that is too big for you, (a) so that you can wear extra layers underneath if necessary and (b) so you have plenty of space to move/dance while wearing it, even when it is done up.

- Ideally the front edges should be able to overlap by a good 6 to 12 inches (15-20 cm) when you put the shirt on and wrap the fronts across your front.
- It should extend down to your hips so that the rags will cover your bottom. Your jacket shouldn't finish at your waist.
- It should have long sleeves.

Choose a shirt that isn't 'old': you want one where the fabric is still strong and has plenty of wear left. Choose a natural fabric: probably cotton or very largely cotton. This will be easiest to sew and won't slide around when you wear it.

Choose a dark or darkish colour of shirt, in a tone that is similar to the colours of rags that you are going to sew on it. If you use a light-coloured shirt, or a shirt that contrasts strongly with your rags, all the gaps between your rags will be very visible. Good colours to consider are bottle green, navy blue, brown.

Wash your shirt before you sew your rags on it. You will quite probably never wash it again!

2. Choice of rags

Give careful thought to the COLOUR range you want, as you will be living with these colours for a long time. Pigsty rag jackets generally have GREEN as the predominant colour, as many of them are also used for the Jack in the Green and green goes well with Pigsty kit. Jackets that are mainly one colour do often have splashes of other colours. You can include other colours by using a patterned material for some of the rags, rather than having whole rags in another colour - the patterned fabric can fit in well with the 'green theme' if it includes both green and the other colour.

Try to include fabrics with different TEXTURES because that is much more interesting to look at: corduroy, upholstery fabric, lace, ribbon, velvet and others can all be brought together. Cut into a fabric and see how much it frays or curls up before you commit to using it. Fabrics with a bit of weight to them are best, as they move most nicely. Be wary of using shiny, satiny, synthetic fabrics because they can curl up and/or fray and lose a lot of impact. It's OK to use pinking shears to stabilise the edges of SOME of your rags but avoid doing it on all your rags as that would look odd compared to everyone else's rag coats. The ends of ribbons will fray but can be stabilised (with care!) by very gently using a flame to seal them.

Wash all washable rag fabrics before you make your jacket. In addition, ironing the fabrics (and the shirt) will make it easier to sew the jacket (but you won't ever need to iron it again!).

Before you start sewing, put all your fabrics together in a big pile and check that they look good together. If you are unsure about any fabrics, don't use them, because you may grow to really dislike them and you don't want to have to cut them out and sew new ones in later on.

3. **Cutting rags** (the longest and most tedious part of the process!)

For a Pigsty/Jack rag jacket, a typical size of rag is 6cm wide (somewhere between 5 and 7cm - it is fine to have variation among the rags on your jacket) and approx 21cm long. **IMPORTANT** this length includes 1cm that is turned over to attach the rag to the jacket (so the length of each rag that hangs free is about 20cm). You need a minimum of 1cm to turn under - perhaps allow more if you think your fabric may fray a bit.

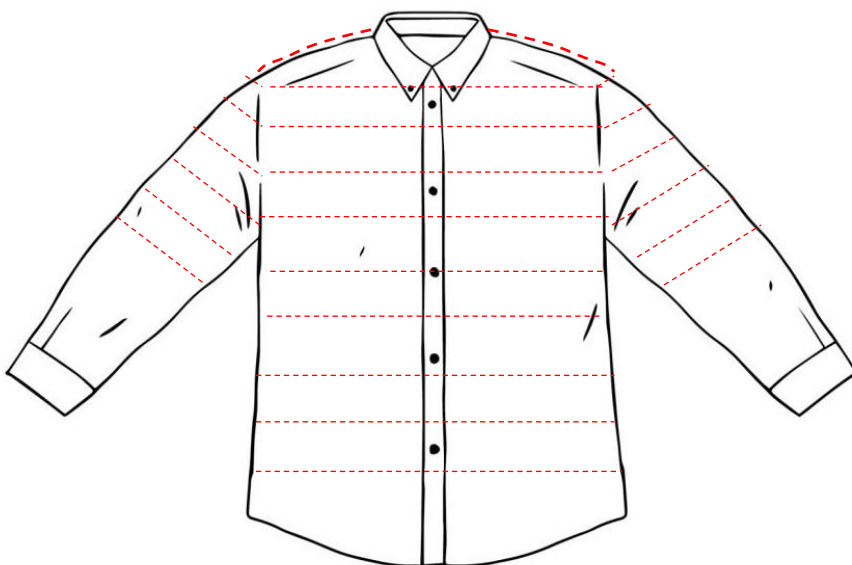
If you want an extra thick/extra heavy rag jacket, cut your rags 6cm wide and 40cm long. Attach the rags by sewing them across their middle (with 20cm either side of the seam), and you will end up with twice as many rags on the jacket for no extra sewing. Remember, this jacket will get even heavier if it rains.

For anyone who is short of time, 'allergic' to sewing or making a jacket for a child, there is the shortcut method of rag coat making that uses very long strips of material 21cm wide rather than individual rags - see below.

4. **Arranging rags on your shirt**

Draw lines on your shirt. The easiest way is to use tailor's chalk (available in lots of colours from sewing shops or online), but you could possibly use pencil. Avoid ink as it may run if your jacket ever gets wet. **The lines should be approximately 6 or 7 cm apart for good coverage and fullness.**

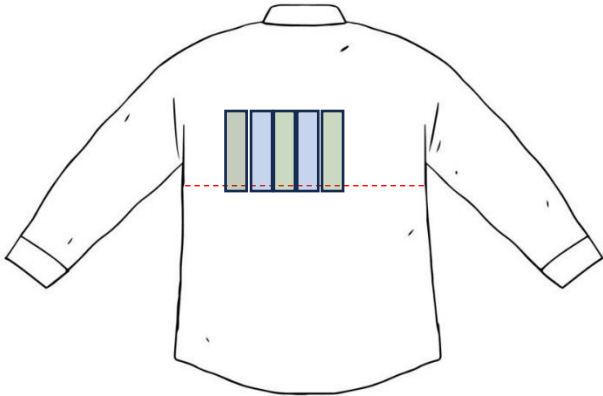
- Try to avoid the lines coinciding with buttons, so you can still button your shirt up
- Make sure there is a line running along the top of your shoulders and along the top of each sleeve (these won't be parallel with the rest of the lines, but will be 'good enough')
- You only need to do lines of rags on the sleeves down to just below the elbow - that's about 6 rows on each sleeve. (You will keep the cuffs on your shirt and roll the cuffs up, like you would on a normal shirt; the rolled-up cuff will be hidden by the lowest line of rags.)
- Do the back just like the front (the lines on the sleeves will form rings going the whole way round)
- See separate instructions below about what to do with the collar - ignore it for now



5. Sewing rags onto your shirt

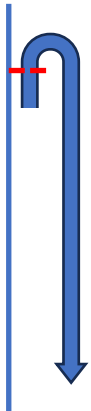
Unbutton the shirt and lie it on a table or the floor, with the right side of the shirt fabric facing you and the collar furthest away from you. Arrange the rags along each of the lines you have drawn on the shirt, so that the right side of the rag material is FACE DOWN on the shirt and 20cm of the rag's length is lying above the line (i.e. nearer the collar), with a minimum of 1cm below the line.

Pin the rags in place along the lines, probably pinning only one row at a time, and then sewing that row before starting on the next.



The rags should be attached such that, when the shirt is being worn, the top edge of each rag is folded over, and NOT just lying flat against the shirt.

RIGHT



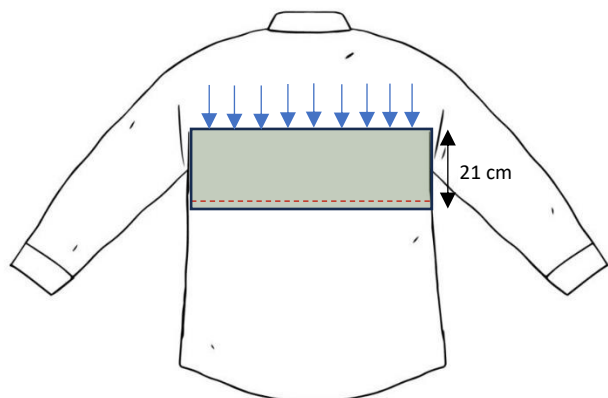
WRONG



6. 'Cheating' method

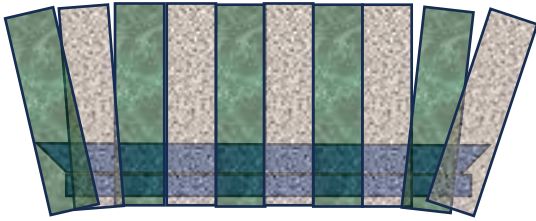
This is a good method of making a rag coat in a hurry (for that unexpected occasion!) or for a child (who is going to grow quickly and need another rag coat in just a few years).

Sew a series of long strips of fabric, 21cm deep and the width of your shirt, along all the lines marked in section 4. Repeat this all the way down the front and the back and along the sleeves. Then cut or rip the material at approximately 6cm intervals, as shown by the blue arrows on the diagram below (NB ripping only works with certain materials, such as polycotton). The result is either a one-colour or a 'striped' rag coat (as each row can be a different material), but it is very effective and quick.



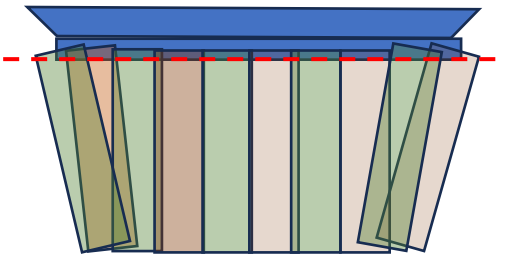
7. Collar

Lie your shirt collar flat, with the inside facing you (shown in blue below) and arrange your choice of rags along it (rag fabric right side up), splaying the rags outwards at the two ends to cover the 'wings' of the collar.

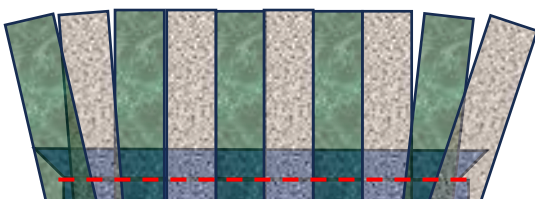


You can simply pin and sew the rags on in this position, but if you do this, there will be a raw edge along the inside band of the collar.

For a neater look, flip the rags over by 180 degrees, so that the 'right side' of the rag fabric is facing down and 1cm of each rag is overlapping the band inside the collar (see diagram). Pin and sew along the red dotted line.



Then flip the rags back over as they were before. Pin them in place and then sew them along the following red dotted line.



Any questions, just ask!

Caroline Brewser
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