



Fashion Hacking

Activity Guide for GSAs



Fashion hacking is self-expression by modifying clothing and accessories. It is about creating unique, personalized garments that express individuality, challenge societal norms, and promote inclusivity and sustainability.

Fashion hacking goes beyond other forms of clothing personalization by exploring a wider range of themes, including gender identity, body positivity, and adaptive fashion for disabilities. By using patterns, techniques, and designs from various sources, people can creatively express who they are in unique ways through their clothing.

Queer youth are often denied the opportunity to fully express themselves through fashion, facing a lack of inclusive options that acknowledge and celebrate their diverse bodies, identities and experiences.

Fashion hacking empowers queer youth to authentically express their identity when mainstream fashion does not. Fashion hacking can take many forms:

- ▶ customizing a shirt with a painted slogan
- ▶ a jacket adorned with iron-on patches that reflect the student's identity
- ▶ jeans transformed into a skirt

Materials needed:



- **Clothes for upcycling** (these can be brought in by students – clothing they would donate)



- **Basic sewing supplies:** needles, thread, scissors, fabric glue, pins



- **Embellishments:** patches, buttons, beads, sequins, fabric paints



- **Tools:** scissors, needle threaders, thimbles

Set up:

- Choose a space large enough for all members to spread out
- Think of accessibility for all – wide aisles, workspaces at varied heights, ample lighting

MINDS ON

Begin with a discussion exploring how clothing creates and reinforces societal norms related to gender, sexuality, attractiveness, and body image. This might include highlighting iconic looks from the past, gendered cultural expectations, or media representations.

Invite students to critically examine how clothing can impact people's perceptions, expectations, and behaviours. For example, how might the same person act, move, and be treated by others if wearing a sport uniform, a lab coat, or gala attire?

Students should now be ready for a discussion on how clothing trends have sometimes been used to deliberately challenge societal expectations and as a vehicle for individual self-expression (e.g., 1960's hippies, 1980's punk).

Allow participants time to reimagine an existing garment they want to "hack". Their re-imagined item should aim to push boundaries while also showing the world something about themselves.

If students need inspiration, have them consider:

- ▶ **Cutting, cropping, or altering the fit of the item**
- ▶ **Applying iron-on patches or other embellishments**
- ▶ **Using fabric paint to design one's own image**
- ▶ **Scratching, ripping, or altering the fabric's texture**
- ▶ **Using dye or bleach to alter the pattern**
- ▶ **Layering various items and textures**

HANDS ON

Once everyone has a plan, get hands-on by having students customize and/or redesign a garment in its entirety to better represent their individual identities and bodies. Encourage learners to set aside any preconceived notions around traditional size and shape labels, and instead focus on fabrics and colours they resonate with.

Basic needle-and-thread skills are helpful to have for this activity, but absolutely not necessary – hot glue and fabric glue can do wonders too! For this exercise, students may need to get creative to work around limitations in making their visions a reality, followed by glueing, pinning, and sewing the fabrics together to form new garments.

To support students of all ability levels, include options such as:

- ▶ **Self-Make Approach** – a garment owner leads, and a hacking partner helps
- ▶ **Foreman Approach** – hacking partners lead the construction, and a garment owner provides direction
- ▶ **Tandem Approach** – both partners work together to reimagine a single garment

Once all garments are finished, a fashion show is the perfect opportunity to celebrate everyone's work!

Collage-Making

If fashion hacking using real clothes requires more resources than are available to you, collage-making can be a more accessible activity requiring fewer resources!

In this version of the activity, students assemble various images, text, and materials to create a work of art. It is a fun way to explore and critique representations of gender, sexuality, and the body in fashion media.

This hands-on exercise encourages critical thinking, and creativity, while deconstructing harmful media messages.

This activity is in two parts:

- ▶ Students will first create a collage,
- ▶ then will “hack” (alter and reassemble existing images, texts, and materials to form innovative visuals) those collages to create a new work of art.

Materials needed:



- **Fashion magazines**



- **Poster/Bristol boards**



- **Craft supplies:** scissors, glue, tape, markers & pens, stickers, coloured paper, glitter



Set up:

- Choose a space large enough for all members to spread out
- Think of accessibility for all - wide aisles, workspaces at varied heights, ample lighting

MINDS ON

Have students flip through the fashion magazines. Ask participants to consider what types of people and bodies are featured and which ones are absent. Discuss what messages fashion magazines share explicitly and implicitly.

HANDS ON

► Part 1:

- Allow students to cut out images from the magazines and paste them onto their poster boards. Distribute craft supplies and encourage creativity. The results should illustrate what students currently see in the media.
- Once the collages are finished, allow everyone to share their intended meaning, decision-making process, and choice in materials.

► Part 2:

- Have students “hack” their original collages by adding to or adjusting it in ways that better represent what they would want to see in depictions of gender, sexuality, attractiveness, and body types in media.
- Once finished, lead another go around the room to explain decisions made.

