

Circular clothing definitions

Commonly used terms for the Australian circular clothing economy

These circular clothing definitions are our shared language. They outline the R-strategies and other related terms used across Australia's clothing and textiles industry.

The R-strategies are ten actions that start with 'refuse' and end with 'recover'. They follow circular economy principles and help shift the industry away from the old linear model of 'take, make, dispose' toward a circular system where products stay in use longer and are kept out of landfill.

By using simple, consistent definitions that everyone can apply — from clothing brands and reuse operators to recyclers and government — we make communication easier and support stronger collaboration as Australia moves toward a circular clothing economy.

Common definitions by industry, for industry

These definitions were developed and refined by people working across Australia's clothing and textiles sector to make sure they are practical, easy to use and grounded in real-world practice. The starting framework was created by a Seamless working group of industry experts and checked against recognised international guidance and Australian standards.

We then broadened the consultation, bringing in more than 80 contributors from across the clothing system — including designers, manufacturers, academics, reuse and repair practitioners, recyclers, waste and resource-recovery experts, charities and representatives from all levels of government.

How to use the definitions

These definitions are yours to use and share. You can copy them directly from this document or the [editable Microsoft Word version](#) and include them in glossaries for reports or research, briefs for suppliers and partners, or internal resources for your organisation.

They're a free resource for the sector — and beyond.

About Seamless

Seamless is Australia's national clothing product stewardship scheme.

E: info@seamless.org.au

W: seamlessaustralia.com

Circular clothing definitions

Term	Definition	Sources
	R-Strategies	
Refuse	Refuse refers to the deliberate rejection of materials, products, services, or economic activities that perpetuate overproduction, overconsumption, environmental harm, or social injustice. This refusal signals the limits of endless growth, linear production models, and unnecessary production and consumption, and helps shifts demand away from harmful or unnecessary offerings. Refuse may include consumer and industry actions that prevent or reduce production and consumption, or render certain products, materials, components, or processes obsolete.	Definition adapted from UNEP Circularity Platform .
Rethink	Rethinking systems, products, materials and consumption practices in ways that allow basic needs to be met while minimising impacts on people and the planet. This includes radically adjusting consumption patterns, and exploring new or alternative ways of designing, providing, and using products for longer, thereby reducing the need for more.	
Reduce	Reduce involves minimising the use of materials, resources, and products by making choices that result in less material consumption, less waste, and smaller environmental footprints. The principle of "reduce by design" encourages the creation of resource efficient products, using low-impact materials that can be easily repaired and recycled. This includes reducing the number of products, component parts, chemicals, waste or processes involved in production; and the number of purchases and washes in consumption and use phases.	Definition adapted from UNEP Circularity Platform .
Reuse	Reuse is the repeated use of a product for its intended purpose. Small adjustments or cleaning may be necessary to prepare the product for use. Reuse allows a product to be used multiple times, either by the original user or others, extending its life and reducing the need to make or buy more. Resale, where products are sold again for reuse, can also be considered part of this practice; as can non-commercial reuse forms of sharing, swapping and donating.	Definition adapted from Ellen MacArthur Foundation .
Repair	Repair refers to the process of returning a worn, faulty or broken product to an improved state to fulfill its intended purpose. This can be achieved through various mending or repair techniques, where the primary goal is to keep the product in use and avoid the need to produce or consume a replacement. Additionally, repair by design ensures products are built to be easily repairable, with accessible components, instructions, and services; it considers both reactive repair of faults and proactive design to anticipate and prevent early failure.	Definition adapted from Ellen MacArthur Foundation .

Term	Definition	Sources
Refurbish	Refurbish is to extend a product's life through significant repairs, which may involve replacing parts, updating specifications, and improving the cosmetic appearance, without altering its original functionality. The process of refurbishment often requires more time and resources than simple repair, though maintains the same aim to keep the product in use, with its intended purpose, and avoid the need to produce or consume a replacement.	Definition adapted from Circular Transition Indicators and Ellen MacArthur Foundation .
Remanufacture	To remanufacture is to disassemble, reassemble and remake products and components into as-new condition with the same, or improved, level of performance as newly manufactured ones. This process may involve reassembling components into one or multiple products or combining elements from multiple products into one.	Definition adapted from Circular Transition Indicators .
Repurpose	Repurpose is the process of adapting products, materials or components to serve a different function than originally intended. This process returns the material to the economy and to active use, retaining some (if not all or more) of its value.	Definition adapted from UNEP Circularity Platform .
Recycle	To recycle is to breakdown a product or component thereof into its basic materials or substances and convert them into new products or secondary materials that are returned to productive use (excluding recovery). Recycling can occur in both closed-loop systems (where materials are recycled into the same product-type) and open-loop systems (where materials are recycled into different products).	Definition adapted from Ellen MacArthur Foundation and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water .
Recover	To recover is to extract residual value from waste products and materials to generate useful outputs. This includes for energy recovery or biological recovery, such as composting or applying recovered outputs to land.	Definition adapted from EU Waste Framework Directive .
Related clothing terms		
Collection	<p>Collection refers to the gathering of pre- or post-consumer clothing textiles by retailers, wholesalers, charity-owned businesses, commercial collectors or local authorities. Retailers may initiate their own collection programs through 'take-back' schemes or other customer-return initiatives. In some cases, collection may also involve preliminary sorting, storage and transport.</p> <p>'Separate collection' refers to gathering textiles by type or fibre to facilitate specific next-life processes; this term is also used by local authorities in reference to the separation of textiles from other materials exiting households.</p>	Definition adapted from WRAP and EU Waste Framework Directive .

Term	Definition	Sources
Sorting	Sorting is the process of separating garments into more homogenised categories. This involves an evaluation of the garment's suitability for reuse or other next life pathways. Sorting is a process that typically occurs after collection and may include other processes or minor transformations such as decommissioning or cleaning.	Definition adapted from Maldini et al. 2017 , WRAP and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water .
Wearable	<p>Wearable garments (or 'wearables') can be worn again in their original form for their original purpose. Wearable garments are typically categorised into cascading grades according to factors including but not limited to their quality, signs of wear, brand name, and potential for resale (saleability).</p> <p>Two wearable grades are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High value wearable – Garments in good to very good condition, suitable for resale or direct reuse. May require minor interventions to prepare for reuse or resale, such as cleaning or minor repair. 2. Low value wearable – Garments in worn or heavily used condition, still suitable for reuse but with limited resale potential. Low value wearable garments may require interventions to prepare for reuse or resale, such as repair or refurbishment. 	Definition adapted from Fashion For Good .
Unwearable	Unwearable garments (or 'unwearables') are those which can no longer function in their original form for their original purpose. Unwearables may be deemed unsuitable for wear due to a range of commercial, functional, hygienic or aesthetic reasons. These items are typically directed toward refurbishment, remanufacturing, repurposing, recycling or recovery options, depending on the material specifications, quality, and available end markets.	Definition adapted from Maldini et al. 2017 .