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Wardrobes That Work

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WARDROBES THAT WORK

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LOOK AT YOURSELF

What does this perfectly clothed woman or girl look like? Is she someone you know? Does she fit the current ideal fashion figure—a tall, slender, youthful, young woman? The figure type most clothes are designed for is the ideal. If she doesn't fit the illusion of height and slenderness, if she doesn't fit the ideal, is she still the best dressed person you know?

Linda Manikowske

Extension clothing and textiles specialist

A despairing wail cuts through your house. “I don’t have a thing to wear!”

And somebody else slams a closet door. “This **junk**. Can’t get another thing in there, but half of it doesn’t fit.”

Sound familiar? Do you wonder if somewhere there just **has** to be a woman or a teenager who has in her closet only clothes that fit and who has at least one outfit for any occasion?

Picture such a paragon in your mind. What **could** she be like? Does she have a secret? Would she have hired a full-time closet specialist? Does she have an unlimited clothing budget? Doesn’t her figure ever change?

She **does** exist. And she probably has done only two things differently than the rest of us. She looked at herself—hard! Then she looked at her closet—she not only looked; she mercilessly attacked and mastered it.

She may not have any more clothes than anybody in your household, may indeed have fewer. If she wants to, she has more clothing dollars to spend, because the clothes she does buy or make give her more combinations and variations. And she’s ready for any event.

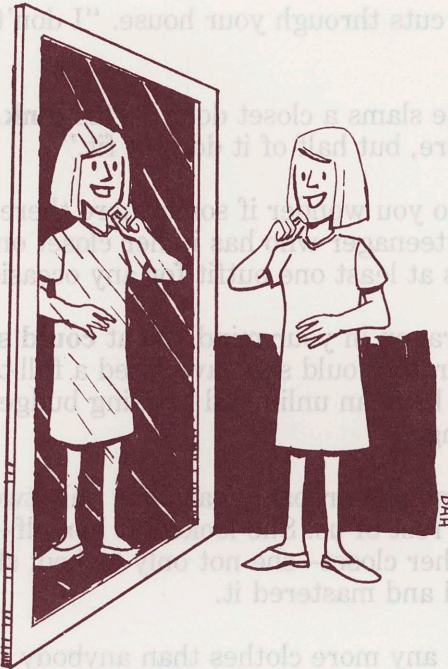
A workable wardrobe doesn’t mean “one for every occasion.” A few, well selected clothes that work together will seem like many outfits and take you to all of the activities in your lifestyle.

Let's turn you into that well-dressed woman. The first essential one that some of us try to avoid, but it is essential.

LOOK AT YOURSELF

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What does this perfectly clothed woman or girl look like? Is she someone you know? Does she fit the current ideal fashion figure—a tall, slender, youthful woman? This is the figure type most clothes are designed for. If she doesn't, has she created the illusion of height and slenderness? If she doesn't fit the ideal, is she still the best dressed person you know?



Let's turn **you** into that well-dressed woman. The first step is one that some of us try to avoid, but it is essential.

Look at yourself.

Are you satisfied with your present appearance? How is your posture? You probably don't have to be told your figure faults. But take heart. Even if you are less than tall, more than slender, and older than young, you can accept it. You can make the best of yourself with your clothing choices.

Look at your proportions

You can enhance or camouflage any figure characteristic. The choice is yours. For example, just because you are short does not mean that you must make yourself appear taller. You may want to emphasize a particular feature rather than minimize it because it brings out your own individuality.

That's why the following suggestions are general. Adapt them to yourself. Be yourself.

If you are tall and average weight . . .

choose

- horizontal lines
- wide belts and yokes
- long jackets
- contrasting colors
- bulky fabrics
- medium to large prints
- large accessories

avoid

- pencil lines
- tight, straight skirts
- short jackets
- small patterns
- very large patterns
- small accessories
- vertical trims

If you are short and average weight . . .

choose

- empire waists
- slightly longer hemlines
- matching belts or beltless styles
- short jackets
- vertical lines and trims
- small accessories
- soft, lightweight fabrics

avoid

- horizontal lines
- long jackets
- lines that break the figure into parts
- border prints
- bulky fabrics
- wide, contrasting belts
- large accessories

If you have a large waistline . . .

choose

- panels that narrow at waistline
- partial or inconspicuous belts
- fullness above waistline

avoid

- pencil slim skirts
- wide belts
- skirts and blouses

If you are heavy . . .

choose

- vertical lines; buttons down the front
- narrow self belts
- simple designs
- V-neck lines
- medium weight fabrics

avoid

- horizontal lines
- wide, contrasting belts
- wide panels
- round necklines
- all-around pleats
- clingy or heavy fabrics

If you have large or heavy arms. . .

choose

- easy fitting, full length or above elbow sleeves
- comfortable armholes

avoid

- tight sleeves
- puff sleeves

If you have thin arms . . .

choose

- puffed, draped, and long full sleeves

avoid

- long, tight sleeves
- sheer fabrics

If you have large hips . . .

choose

- light tops and darker skirts
- accented shoulders
- fullness above waist

avoid

- dropped waistlines
- tight skirts
- horizontal detail at hips
- wide, tight belts

If you have narrow shoulders . . .

choose

- sleeves with fullness at top
- yokes across chest
- wider lapels

avoid

- vertical lines
- small collars
- tight sleeves

If you have broad shoulders . . .

choose

- conventional sleeves
- garments that are not too tight

avoid

- sleeves with fullness at top
- very padded shoulders

Look at colors

Do you have a favorite color? There is true magic in that special color. Wearing it lifts your spirits (you should choose it for a day you know is going to be rough.) You feel better or look better in some colors. Which one is yours?

If you don't know, your closet might give you a clue. Chances are, that color may already dominate all other colors hanging there. You couldn't resist it when you were buying, you see.

Your skin tone and hair and eye color determine your most enhancing colors. Most skin, regardless of race, will have either a blue or gold undertone. It's easy to find out which you have. You need a swatch of orange and a swatch of magenta (a pink/purple). In the daylight, without cosmetics, and with your hair covered, drape each piece around your face.

If you have a blue undertone, the magenta will soften facial lines and bring a healthy color to your face. If you have a gold skin undertone, the orange will do this for you.

Generally, persons with blue undertones look better in navy, gray, and purple, where those with gold undertones look good in brown, orange, yellow, and green.

Of course, people with blue undertones can wear green. But they should select blued greens, such as emerald green or turquoise, rather than the yellowed greens such as olive or chartreuse. Anyone can wear some variation of almost any color.

Wardrobe planning worksheet

Activities & occasions _____

Clothes in closets

Coats, jackets,
topcoats, rainwear

Separates; pants,
skirts, sweaters,
shirts

Suits or
dresses

Spectator sports
or leisure wear

Work, school,
community
activities

Parties,
entertaining,
dinner out

Active sports,
exercise

Other

Name _____

Season _____

Wardrobe planning worksheet

Activities
& occasions

Clothes in closets

Suits or
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Separates: pants,
skirts, sweaters,
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Coats, jackets,
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Spectator sports
or leisure wear

Work, school,
community
activities

Parties,
entertaining,
dinner out

Active sports,
exercise

Other

Name _____

Season _____

Estimated
cost

Clothes to make or buy

Clothing needed for a
particular activity

Accessories: shoes,
bags, gloves, belts,
and jewelry

But it pays off to know your best colors. Otherwise, something with the best fit and the best detailing is going to hang unused in your closet. With a color plan, you save money. You focus on fewer colors, and your garments will coordinate better. If you build your wardrobe around two or three colors, especially neutral or basic colors, most garments will go together. You can add variety with accent colors in accessories—shoes, handbags, etc.

Color can also affect the apparent size and shape of your body. For example:

- Warm, light, and bright colors make the figure appear larger.
- Cool, dark, and dull colors make the figure appear smaller.
- A garment in one color or tones of that color adds to the illusion of height.
- The point where different colors meet draws the eye's attention.

LOOK AT YOUR CLOSET

You've accomplished the easy part. Now comes the real test.

Look at your closet.



Most of us would probably rather avoid this, and getting control of your closet may take a half day or more, but it can be more fun than a clearance sale at your favorite store.

You will discover some items you forgot you owned. You will find outfits that you didn't think would work together. And don't just sort and rearrange. Take everything out and start all over.



Your plan of attack is to make a closet inventory. Use the worksheet in this pamphlet or make up one of your own. Start by listing the occasions and activities for which you might need special clothing. Consider the time spent on these activities, and, as you go through your closet, ask yourself:

- Are most of these clothes used for my major activities?
- Is there at least one garment for each type of activity?
- Is the major part of my clothing budget being spent on the clothing I use the majority of the time?

You will probably end up with three piles of clothes. First are the favorites, the things you wear over and over, that you feel good in and that you have a good time in.

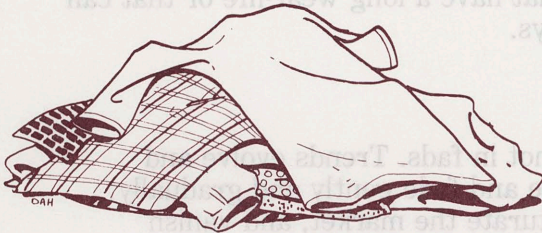
Second are the garments that have some hope, but they need something. The color might be good but the design is wrong. Or you don't have the right thing to wear with them.

Third are the outright mistakes. You bought them on impulse in a weak moment. You got them on sale, or perhaps they were gifts.

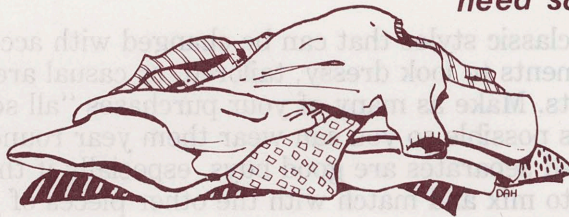
Once you have the **entire** closet sorted into these three categories, begin trying them on and experimenting. Try on parts of ensembles with other things. Try combining different fabrics, textures, and colors. Fashions change; something that didn't go together last year may work this year.

Chart these clothes on your worksheet. You may find that some garments fit into more than one place on the chart. This is good. You should be able to see where you have too many clothes or too few. This is your plan for shopping in future.

In the second group, the "keep but need something" group, try on each garment to find out why you aren't wearing it regularly. Maybe it doesn't fit or just needs repairs. Maybe it could be restyled or recycled. **Don't** put these garments back into the closet until you know what you're going to do with them. For ideas on recycling, see EC 739, "New Life for Old Clothes."



"favorites"



"need something"



"mistakes"

The third group, the mistakes, must go. No matter what, get rid of them. If they have sentimental value, put them away. If not, donate them to a local charity, have a rummage sale, or give them to someone you know who can use them.

Above all, don't make those mistakes again. You won't if you analyze that pile as you discard it.

BUILD A NEW WARDROBE

Now that everything left in your closet is a working garment, maybe you've discovered you really don't need to go shopping at all. Wouldn't that be too bad?

But rarely does a person's clothing needs match the wearable garments she has after a closet inventory. Use your wardrobe planning worksheet to list what you need to add. For budget's sake, list in order of use or importance, buying the necessary or basic items first.

Investment dressing is a term used often today. It means getting the best clothing return for your money. It is based on the purchasing of clothes that have a long wear-life or that can be worn many different ways.

Plan before you go

Invest in fashion trends, not in fads. Trends evolve and mature over a period of time and fade gently and gradually. Fads spring up in a day, saturate the market, and vanish overnight.

Simple, classic styles that can be changed with accessories or other garments to look dressy, tailored, or casual are good investments. Make as many of your purchases "all season clothes" as possible so you can wear them year round. Coordinated separates are good buys, especially if the colors will work to mix and match with the other pieces of your existing wardrobe.

Take another look at your closet.

If you are trying to match something, bring that "something" along. You already know there is navy, and there is navy. The same holds for every other color. You'll save return trips to the store. And you can try on the garments together to really see if they will work as an ensemble.

Choose accessories that will go with several different outfits. Limiting your color focus will save you considerable money on accessories. They are an economical way to add variety to an outfit and to increase its versatility.

Quality in accessories varies greatly. You can spend \$4 or \$40 for a belt. If the design is classic and can be worn for several years, you can invest more than if it is a fad design that will be “out” next month.

Quality in clothing varies, too. Paying a high price does not guarantee good quality. You have your own standards which you must set for each garment in relation to the amount of money you will spend and the wear you expect. For more information on judging garment quality, see FS 797, “What is Quality?”

Price aside, color aside, if the garment doesn't fit (or can't be altered to fit, and how much altering are you willing to do?) don't buy it. If it is not comfortable, you won't wear it often, and you'll be starting the creeping spread of unwearables in your nice, clean closet again.

Pick your time for your shopping expedition so you can tie up the dressing room for a while. Don't be afraid to hand all the tried-ons back to the salesperson.

As you ponder in the dressing room, remember these points:

- Buy clothing loose rather than too tight.
- Make sure the shoulder line sits correctly on your shoulder. If it's wrong, the rest of the garment can't be altered enough to compensate.
- Look to see if the jacket length is flattering for you.
- Check for vertical, horizontal, or diagonal wrinkles.
- Choose a hem length that is best for you.

Think it over again

Looking at the price tag first is a hard habit to break. More important is the cost-per-wearing. An inexpensive dress may seem like a bargain, but if you only wear it once a month during a season, it costs more in the long run than an expensive suit that you wear once a week all year long.

When you get to the point of “to buy or not to buy,” ask these last questions:

- Do I need this item? if not, can I afford to buy it just because I want it?
- Is it flattering?
- Will it be comfortable to wear?
- Do the care requirements suit my lifestyle?
- Is the quality of workmanship worth the cost?
- What is the cost-per-wearing?
- Will the color and style fit my plan to build a wardrobe that works?

Now you know your body proportions. You know what colors you feel good in. You know **exactly** what’s in your closet and what you need to make or buy to have those clothes fit every occasion. You’re a wiser, more discriminating shopper.

Sure, sometimes it’s been hard getting to this point. But you **know** it’s been worth it. Activities are more fun because you’re dressed right for them. You’re getting more compliments on your appearance. Why, just having a well-organized closet would be in itself a good enough reason for going through this exercise.

Think back about that perfectly dressed woman you were sure couldn’t exist. Do you know who she is now?

She’s **you!**

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Cut out and carry with you for quick reference

How does this garment rate?

(Checkpoints for purchase evaluation)

Style

- Flattering to figure?
- Compatible colors for me?
- Classic fashion?
- Appropriate to lifestyle?

Comfort and fit

- Comfortable for size?
- Elasticity for movement?
- No wrinkling or binding?
- Room for alteration?

Quality

- Well-made inside?
- Fabric on grain?
- Suitable for planned use?
- Plaids and stripes match?
- Reputable store and manufacturer?
- Resists wrinkling?

Care

- Label instructions for care?
- Care compatible with time and budget?

Budget

- Affordability?
- Wearing occasions justify cost?

Appeal

- Is purchase impulse?
- Should I buy now?
- If on sale, would I pay full price?