

The epitome of formality for most of the world remains the suit. In its strictest sense, the modern suit consists of trousers and a lapelled coat made from matching fabric. Yet at its birth in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the suit was the antithesis of formality. The concept of a “suit” first came about in what was the “lounge suit”, which was first created in Scotland from hardy tweeds and worsted wool cloths. Although side-by-side photos with its modern-day counterpart reveal some similarities the: cut, fit and fabric are strikingly different and changes to these terms throughout time reveal much about societal attitudes and fashion.

Cut, which refers to how cloth is cut by a tailor or machine, determines how a garment hangs from a person's body and difficult to alter features such as length. Originally, the “lounge suit” was much shorter than the existing: frock, tail and morning coats which were often knee length as opposed to lounge-suit which would only cover the wearer's behind. Moreover, early iterations of the lounge-suit were very sack-like in appearance lacking any real shape as per the wearers natural body. Excess fabric in the back and chest panels contributed to this sack-like appearance and would persist until the 1920s, in which the concept of suit was much more: defined, mainstreamed and streamlined. The 1920s saw fit, the way in which a garment hugs a body, seeking much of its inspiration from the hourglass body shape. Shoulders and hips were kept the same size, padding was sometimes used to accentuate a man's hips to keep up with the width of his natural shoulders. Moreover, trousers were tapered and had a half break, resting above the outermost shoelace. Front darts were being introduced more which took in excess fabric in the chest and back panel allowing the garment to much better hug the wearers natural body. Changes in fabric from the Victorian period were slight, central heating was yet to be invented so the heaviness of fabrics persisted, and wool weaving technology had improved slightly leading fabrics to be slightly less coarse. Although, the 1900s to 1910s seem to get glossed over as these years lacked the discernable defining features what consisted of a suit drastically changed from this period to the 20s. The number of garments worn with a suit would decrease significantly, the 1900 to 1910s saw men often wearing stiffened detachable collars and cuffs, often made from celluloid and starched industrially. Men would also wear bib fronts which gave the appearance of a stiff shirt-front and spats on their shoes. This practice would fall out of favor and only gave rise to less garments involved in suiting. The 1930s saw suits becoming more V shaped, the equal width with shoulders and hips was deemed less masculine and the prominence of heavily padded shoulders saw the prior fall out of fashion. The trousers became much fuller in cut and fit wise were tapered significantly less than their 20s counterparts often now featuring 2-inch cuffs. It is important to mention very little about the waistcoat that had changed from the Victorian era, yet the 40s would see this essential garment see very little use. Suits in the 40s were much more proportioned, like modern suits, although more square-like in appearance as heavy shoulder padding was still the norm. Fabric rationing during the second world war meant many manufacturers would stop production of waistcoats and as compromise the manufacturing of double-breasted suits increased as showing “too much shirt” was deemed casual. The cut also changed significantly as trousers were now being cut with a shorter rise and rationing of fabric meant brace (suspender) production halt. Trousers would no longer sit at the natural waistline, roughly around one's bellybutton, but sit far below it which gave rise to the belt in suiting. Trouser cuffs would also fall out of favor to save on cloth. As a result, the military began issuing suits to men returning from the second world war, demob suits, yet due to an inconsistency of sizing many men would complain about the fit and sizing being existent, leading many men with much exaggerated features such as jacket length. The 1950s and 1960s saw the rise of the drape-cut, pioneered by British tailoring house *Anderson & Sheppard*, which features a distinctive fullness through the chest and shoulder blades

accompanied with an oversized skirt to promote the view of a fuller broader chest. Waistcoats would almost totally disappear from mainstream suiting by this point, seen more in wedding photography and by older gentlemen; although the rise of “disco-wear” in the 70s saw a small resurgence often in flashy colors. Suiting during the 1970s was experimental in nature, seeing the cut of trousers bottoms becoming wider leading to the invention of bell bottoms and 5–6-inch lapels. Fabric would begin to change rapidly with synthetic materials such as polyester, nylon and rayon becoming a staple in mass-produced suiting. Moreover, fabric weaving had improved significantly, and wool mills could now produce much lighter wool, which ultimately affected how suits draped on one's body; leading suiting from the 70s onward to feature less drape. The trend of “flare, bell bottoms and wide lapels” would not persist and the 80s and 90s sobered in terms of cut and fit, although the power-suit was prominent in wall street which included a lower buttoning point to create a distinct V-shape shirt front and heavily padded shoulders. Modern-day suiting has some holdovers from the 20s especially in terms of taperdness and the slim cut, while trouser rise generally remains low in comparison to pre 40s and jacket length often no longer covers the seat.