

Appendix B – Fashion Vocabulary

Dress Codes

Formal

Most men will go their entire lives without ever attending a truly “formal” event, which vary in dress requirements depending on when they occur. Daytime formal events call for a morning suit. Nighttime formal events are “white tie,” calling for an evening tailcoat, matching trousers, a white waistcoat, a formal shirt, a white bowtie, and well-shined pumps.

Semi-Formal

Semi-formal calls for a black-tie tuxedo, but most of the time when people say “semi-formal,” they actually mean “black tie optional.” If you’re going to the Oscars, the invitation will say “semi-formal,” and you should wear a tux. If your buddy from high school’s throwing a “semi-formal” event, discreetly double-check with him what he means, because he probably means “wear a dressed-down suit.” If the event is in the daytime (which will be rare), it calls for a stroller, as tuxedos are inappropriate before the evening.

Business

Strict business attire calls for a matched wool suit in charcoal gray, navy blue, or black, worn with a necktie, which can be a different color, but must be conservatively patterned. With the suit, we wear a plain white dress shirt and black oxfords. Socks should match the color of the pants. Pocket squares are appropriate, and should complement, but not match, the necktie.

Business Casual

Business casual isn’t a strict code as much as a range of appropriate dress. Such outfits are appropriate for business, but permit more expression. At its most formal, business casual replaces the suit with an unmatched blazer and pants, keeping all other requirements the same. At least formal, but khakis and chinos are fine, though jeans are not. Neckties are not required, and some businesses might even accept polo shirts. Whatever the attire, keep your colors and patterns subdued.

Sharp Casual

There is a lot of overlap between Business Casual and Sharp Casual. The main difference between them is the implication of the outfit. A sharp casual outfit wouldn’t be appropriate for work. You put it on specifically to go out and look good. A suit worn with a red shirt and no tie is sharp casual because of the boldness of the shirt and lack of tie. If the shirt were blue, it would be business casual. Jeans are appropriate in sharp casual, but only if they’re high quality. If there is visible thought and effort in your appearance and it’s outside the subdued requirements of the office, it falls in this category.

Casual

A catch-all category that includes everything from blue-collar work wear to workout clothes to casual, “comfortable” outfits.

Fabrics

Wool

Wool is the favored material for most men's suits and overcoats. Wool's threads are soft, textured, and hold dyes exceptionally well, allowing for deep colors. Its natural oil lanolin gives it resistance to water. Wool holds its shape well, allowing for an attractive drape across men's bodies. It has more air pockets per square inch than other fabrics, providing better insulation without sacrificing much breathability. On the downsides, it's relatively expensive, easily damaged by heat, heavy, and many people are allergic to it. It makes a fine *outer* fabric, which is where we'll see it used most often.

The most common measure for the quality of wool is the *yarn count*, also called the worsted count or the S-count. This measures how many hanks (lengths of spun thread) can be spun from one pound of raw wool. Most suits fall between 80 and 200, the former being simple and sturdy, the latter being "ultrafine" and light. Suits should be between 80 and 120. Higher than that is either a lie or not sturdy enough for our purposes.

Cotton

Cotton is cheap, light, and easy to work with. It's easy to spin into yarn for sweaters, and it's lighter than wool. It's a porous fiber, allowing sweat to evaporate easily. We can make sharp creases in it with an iron, allowing for a polished look not possible with other materials. On the downsides, it absorbs water like crazy, making it an unreliable outer layer. It doesn't hold its shape well, making it slumpier than wool. If left wet, it grows mildew. Cotton makes an excellent *inner layer*.

The quality of cotton fabric is usually described in terms of *thread count*. Thread count indicates the number of individual threads in one square inch of fabric. More threads means those threads are lighter and thinner, indicating a higher quality material. Unfortunately, this isn't the best indicator, because it's possible to make fine threads out of cheap, scratchy cotton. A more reliable standard is the *cotton count*, which measures the number of hanks needed to weigh one pound. Finer threads are lighter, so the higher the cotton count, the softer the resulting cotton will be. If you're investing in serious quality, ask for both the thread and cotton counts.

Linen

Linen is a light, breezy fabric that weighs less than cotton. It wrinkles easy, but is far less trainable than cotton, so those wrinkles shake out easily as well. It is very breathable, to the point of being billowy. It doesn't retain water like cotton does. Linen is an excellent material for hot climates, and we see it primarily used in jackets, pants, and shirts in Europe and equatorial countries.

Silk

Silk is a luxury fiber rarely used in men's clothing. It is light and breathable. It has a feminine connotation. When used in a man's outfit, it's usually a novelty. A silk garment will always be a statement piece, so make sure you understand it as such if you use it.

Artificial fibers

There is a large variety of artificial fibers. Some are used to increase durability in garments primarily composed of the above materials (like in a wool suit to structure its shape). Polyester is the most common artificial fiber. It is extremely cheap, produces shiny surfaces, and feels plasticky against the

skin. It's notoriously tacky. Modern athletic wear frequently uses synthetic fibers for their flexible qualities. While practical, most artificial materials make for poor style. Use them for their intended purposes and avoid resorting to them as a cost-saving measure. Doing so will cost you in durability and social appeal.

The Most Common Cloths and Weaves

Worsted Wool

Worsted refers to a method of combing and spinning raw wool into thread, and the fabric made from this thread are called worsted wool. Most of the garments made for men are made with worsted wool.

Wool Flannel

When wool is brushed with a fine-toothed metal comb, it pulls on fine broken fibers creating a fuzzy surface. Note that cotton flannel is a different material from this, and is used in work shirts rather than suits and pants.

Tweed Wool

Weed wool is a tightly-coiled worsted yarn usually made from the hair of angora goats rather than fleece from sheep. It's lighter than other suiting fabrics and is more common in tropical settings.

Twill

Twill is a diagonal "tribbing" on one or both sides of a cloth used in both cotton and wool fabrics. Blue jeans and most khakis use a twill weave.

Herringbone

A modification of the twill weave creating a repeating V shaped vertical columns. Can be done with the same or different colors, the latter making the outfit for casual.

Pick-and-pick

A twill weave of worsted yarns, one light, one dark. In the US, this weave is sometimes called Sharkskin due to the shimmering effect the pattern produces.

Houndstooth

Unevenly-shaped checks on plain-woven cloth used in wool suits, jackets, trousers, and overcoats.

Birdseye

A regular pattern of small, round dots popular in less formal business suits.

Nailhead

Like birdseye, but using a different weave producing small and less regularly shaped dots.

Barleycorn

A variation on the twill weave, it shows repeated patterns of small, three-lobed clusters contrasting with a background color. It is a casual style.

Gabardine

A tight weave usually made from worsted wool originally designed to make a tough, waterproof alternative to rubber raincoats. It's most famous as the "weekender" jacket popular in the 50s.

Sunshot

This weave creates alternating columns of short, diagonal lines of one set steeper than the others. It produces a subtle, shimmering effect. Most common in sports jackets and unmatched pants.

Bedford Cord

Uses worsted yarn to produce a tough fabric with a gridded texture. It's most commonly known for horseback riding clothes.

Seersucker

A lightweight cotton weave that's light, breezy, casual, and covered in bumpy waves. It's a summer traditional in the American south.

Oxford

The Oxford involves bundles of thread crossing at right angles like a basketweave. A pinpoint Oxford and Royal Oxford use finer threads, reducing the bumpiness inherent to the style.

Poplin

A simple weave using two threads of different material to create a dimpled, irregular texture. Most poplin shirts are 100% cotton, but may use different thickness in threads to achieve the irregular feel.

Broadcloth

Tight weave with a smooth surface. It uses two different colors of thread, usually white and another color, blending them to produce a lighter color and a faint shimmer.

Madras

Hand-woven fabric most popular in plaid.

Piqué

A knitted cloth commonly used in polo shirts.

Jersey Stitch

The basic cotton cloth used for most t-shirts, underwear, and most other lightweight cotton garments. It's smooth, soft, and stretchy.

Patterns

Pin Stripes

White stripes against a dark background, with the stripes spaced further apart than they are wide. Most common on suits, and the most conservative pattern.

Chalk/Pencil Stripe

Wider than pinstripes but still narrower than the gaps. Light stripes on dark backgrounds are chalk, dark stripes on light backgrounds are pencil. These are less formal than pin stripes.

Candy Stripe

Stripes of two alternating colors of the same width. Usually seen in casual suits and jackets.

Bengal Stripe

Wider version of candystripe, it usually features one color alternating with white, with blue and purple being most common. We tend to see it in casual jackets and pants, especially from South Asia.

Awning Stripe

The widest stripe, usually in novelty clothing at carnivals, or in pajamas.

Rail Stripe

A pattern of two narrow stripes separated by a gap, with a wider gap in between, resembling rails. Sometimes dashed lines connect the narrow stripes.

Variegated Stripe

Multiple vertical stripes of varying widths and colors. It is extremely bold and often overwhelming.

Herringbone

Vertical columns of small, repeating V-shapes. Comes from the way the fabric is woven. It's a popular choice for suits, jackets, pants, and shirts.

Houndstooth

A grid of jagged repeating shapes, usually in black and white or shades of gray.

Plaid/Tartan

A check created by crossing bands of two or more colors. "Plaid" in the US and Canada, "tartan" everywhere else.

Glen Check/Prince of wales

A tartan style that uses different numbers and sizes of bands resulting in an irregular pattern.

Gingham

A two-tone tartan variant that produces a regular gride.

Windowpane

A pinstripe or chalk stripe is laid down horizontally as well as vertically to create a broad check pattern.

Graph Check

A windowpane pattern with smaller gaps.

Microcheck

An even smaller version of graph check.

Tattersall

While the previous check patterns are usually a color against a white background, tattersall uses two colors for its lines, alternating between them.

Birdseye

A series of small, regular dots against a plain background. Light dots against dark background is most common.

Nailshead

Smaller and less regular dots than birdseye, it looks solid from a distance.

Barleycorn

Repeated series of clusters against a solid background producing a flecked, coarse pattern.

Paisley

Repeated patterns against a solid background, includes a variety of patterns, most commonly teardrops.

Polka Dot

Large, solid circles against a contrasting background arranged in a regular grid.

Suit Styles

Single Breasted

The two sides of the suit jacket meet in the middle and do not overlap. There are usually two or three buttons to fasten the suit, but the bottom one is never used. This is the most common kind of suit.

Double Breasted

Double-breasted suits have two sides that overlap, and have two columns of buttons. It is generally considered the most formal of suit options and must be buttoned at all times. Double-breasted suits are referenced according to the number of buttons there are, and the number that fasten, for example, a "6-on-2" jacket would have six buttons, two of which fasten.

Three-Piece

A single-breasted suit with an added waistcoat (vest) made from the same fabric as the jacket and pants. It is more expensive, and more old-fashioned.

The outline of the suit, called the silhouette, sets the tone of the suit. Some suits are better for different builds than others. There are three basic suit silhouette styles.

Suit Silhouettes

The European Suit

European suits are slim and sharp-edged. The waist is tapered, the armholes are high, and the upper torso is snug. It's a great style, but it necessitates a slim or athletic man to pull it off. Men with waists broader than their chests will be incapable of wearing this suit well.

The British Suit

British suits have squared-off shoulders and lower armholes than the European. The waist is less tapered and the hips are often more flared. Most body types can pull off this suit.

The American Suit

Also called the sack suit, the American suit features softer shoulders, a relaxed chest, wider sleeves, and lower armholes than its alternatives. The style looks fine on most men, though slender men will struggle with the looser fit.

Suit Lapels

Lapels are the folding "frame" pieces of the suit on either side of the V revealing the shirt, differentiated by their tips.

Notch lapels

Notch lapels are the most common. The tops of notch lapels angle downwards, connecting to the bottom pieces with a "notch" between them.

Peak lapels

Peak lapels feature outward-angled "peaks." They are generally considered more formal and tend to be featured on double-breasted suits.

Shawl lapels

Often called the shawl collar, because it is all one piece. They are a single, continuous strip of folded fabric that goes around the neck and down the chest. They are fashion forward, usually seen in dinner jackets (tuxedos), but are not business appropriate.

Suit Pockets

Jetted Pockets

The most common pocket you'll see on formal suits, jetted pockets are thin, inconspicuous slits in the fabric leading to a largely hidden pocket. They are mandatory in formal and semi-formal attire.

Patch Pockets

Attached on the exterior rather than interior, patch pockets are flat shapes with an opening at the top. You will see these standard on blazers.

Flap Pockets

Like jetted pockets, except with a downward flap covering the opening. These are standard on business suits, and less formal than jetted pockets.

Accordion Pockets

Also called bellows pockets, these are patch pockets with extra, pleated fabric allowing for expanded room. You will only see these in casual attire, like hunting jackets.

Shirt Collar Styles

Point collars

The simplest and most common collar, it ends in triangular points. They serve smaller, narrower faces best, but are rather small, limiting the size of the knot of your tie.

Spread collars

A point collar with more than 90 degrees between the collar points. This collar serves men with wider, stouter faces, and can both accommodate and require much thicker tie knots.

Button down collars

Refers specifically to the collars themselves buttoning to the shirt, and not to the fact that the shirts button down along the front. These are more casual than the two aforementioned collars. They're widely accepted as appropriate for business in the US, but err on the side of keeping them business casual.

Club collars

Similar to the spread collar, but with rounded tips instead of points. They come across as frumpy and old-fashioned, and are associated with upper middle class prep boys and bankers.

Contrast collars

Any collar that is a different color from the rest of the shirt. They look fine, but dress the shirt down.

Pin collars

A point collar with a metal pin connecting the points to elevate the tie. It's dressy and best to be used with a suit. Use it to class up an already classy outfit, but never wear one without a tie.

Shirt Cuff Styles

Single cuffs

Most common. They are a single band of fabric at the end of the sleeve. Often the pattern on the shirt fabric will turn 90 degrees on the cuffs. Most of the time, double cuffs are more formal than single cuffs, but single cuffs are mandatory for formal (white tie) wear.

Double Cuffs

These cuffs are long enough to fold over on themselves, creating two layers of fabric around your wrist. They usually, though not always, require a pair of cufflinks to hold them together. Portofino cuffs are a

cutaway version of buttoning double cuffs designed for cocktail events. You won't see them much, except in the Connery James Bond films.

Cotton T-Shirt Styles

Crew Neck

The most conservative tee, it forms an arc beneath your neck, revealing little chest.

V-Neck

Extremely underrated. The V should never dip so low that it shows chest hair. Otherwise, it's much sexier than the crew neck, as long as you have the body to wear it.

Y-Neck

Like the V-neck, except with an addition cut at the bottom of the V. Even more casual than the V-neck, and underrated.

Scoop Neck

The scoop neck forms a deep arc from each shoulder down low into the chest. It is explicitly showing off a tremendous amount of chest and skin. It's in the realm of trying too hard. You can pull it off, and it will attract looks if you have the body to show it off, but it's probably best left on the rack at Guess.

Sweater Materials

Cashmere

Luxury fabric made from wool. It's soft, lightweight, and warm. Blending with other materials is a sign of low quality.

Angora

Luxury fabric made from the hairs of the angora rabbit. These hairs are too light and fine to be a quality material, so it is often blended with something more functional. 30-50% angora is quality.

Mohair

A coarse material, it is both warm and lightweight. Highly functional, not very fashionable.

Alpaca

Alpaca fibers are softer than sheep's wool but have no lanolin, leaving such sweaters more vulnerable to water.

Merino

A breed of sheep that produces a popular wool that's thicker than cashmere, warm, and soft against the skin.

Cotton

Appealing primarily for their ease of care, but less insulating and water resistant than wool.

Sweater Styles

Crew Neck

Like the crew neck T-shirt, it's a plain knit body with a round neck opening. It's a neutral, conservative piece.

V-Neck

Like the v-neck T-shirt, it has a triangular opening for the neck. It's best paired with a collared dress shirt. The opening frames a tie well. It's an excellent way to structure a conservative frame around a prominent accent piece.

Turtleneck

A high, soft collared piece that turns down once, forming a thick ring around the neck. It's a casual style, best in dark colors on skinny people.

Polo

A sweater with a pointed turndown collar. Don't pair it with a dress shirt, lest too many collars pile on top of one another.

Cable-Knit

Also called the fisherman's sweater, it has decorative patterns and tends to be bulky and warm. Practical, outer layer sweater.

Cardigan

Cardigans open all the way down the front, closing with a zipper or buttons. Large buttons are feminine, so stick to a zipper or wooden toggles.

Pants Styles

Suit Pants

These accompany a suit jacket, and are made from the same fabric as the jacket.

Dress Pants

Dress pants hang slack and have a smooth drape all the way down to the ankle. They are usually made of wool, but it's not required. They have pressed creases, slim waistbands, and simple pockets. They wrap around your true waist and tend to be worn with suspenders.

Khakis

Khakis were originally tan, which is their namesake. Today, they refer to all sturdy, straight-legged cotton twill pants. Earth tones are most common, but they come in all shades. Khakis tend to have pleats and cuffs.

Chinos

Chinos are lighter than khakis, have tapered legs, and have plain fronts instead of pleats. They're less likely to be cuffed. They are dressier and tend to be darker, more formal colors (though bright chinos are much less formal).

Jeans

Jeans are sturdy, usually blue denim pants. It's common to wear dark jeans with blazers. Dark jeans are dressier than light jeans, though all are casual. They sit lower on the hips than other pants styles.

Cargo Pants

Loose-legged pants with buttoned flap pockets in the front. They are casual and should only be worn for their practical usefulness.

Overalls

Work pants with connecting fabric wrapping up and over the shoulders. Like cargo pants, they should only be worn for practical purposes.

Shorts

Very casual pants that are cut-off somewhere on the thigh.

Leather Shoe Styles

Balmoral Oxfords

Highest formality for most men. "Balmoral" is the construction style, "Oxford" refers to the height of the shoe (low at the ankle), but "oxford" these days refers to any dress shoe, with "balmoral oxfords" being the more formal version. They have a closed-lacing system, which is when the laces are stitched directly into the uppers, rather than in a separate piece of leather on top of them. "Uppers" are the parts of the shoe that covers the toes, top of the foot, sides of the feet, and the back of the heel.

Less Formal Balmorals

Same as above, but oxfords can also have small decorations, like broguing and cap toes, for a more relaxed look. They can also come in colors other than black.

Blucher/Derby Oxfords

These are closed-toe, low-ankle shoes with open lacing. They were not originally meant to be business shoes, but you'll commonly see them worn by businessmen these days, simply because open lacing has become so popular.

Dress Boots

If it's balmoral, but the height of the shoe goes past the ankle, it's a dress boot. They're only slightly less formal than Balmoral Oxfords. In plain black, they're a natural choice for a man wearing a suit in the winter.

Brogues

Any shoes with decorative hole punch patterns in the uppers. Most brogues are bluchers. These go well with jeans.

Wingtips

Also called “full brogue,” wingtips have a cap toe with decorative wings that sweep back around the sides of the shoe. Cap toes are toes with a decorative strip across the leather separating the toe of the shoe from the rest. The cap and the wings are usually perforated with many small hole punch patterns, and may be a different color than the uppers. These are very casual, but fancy.

Loafers

Loafers are leather slip-ons. They are often decorated with a buckle, leather band, or tassel. They can be worn with suits, but are meant to be worn casually.

Bucks

Bluchers made with buckskin. They have a rough surface that resembles suede. “White buck” is made of white buckskin with rawhide laces and a light sole. It’s a traditional Southern USA style that often goes with seersucker pants.

Chukka/Desert Boots

Low suede boots with rubber soles and a small number of eyelets for laced (4). It’s a classic relaxed footwear akin to sneakers.

Cowboy Boots

American icon, and difficult to pull off if you’re not in an American state where the cowboy look is a thing. Paired with jeans, though some Midwestern businessmen wear them with suits. Don’t pair them with other western accents (like cowboy hats) unless you’re actually going to a rodeo.

Saddle Shoes

Two-tone style with a saddle shape arching over the center of the uppers. Best looking ones are suede in two muted colors. Casual.

Boat Shoes

Leather slip-ons with rubber soles. The shoes should stay tied and are pulled on and off like loafers. They’re a summer style best paired with khakis or lightweight pants. Never wear boat shoes with socks.

Work Boots/Shoes

Tough leather uppers with plain rubber soles. The less contrast they have, the more formal they are. Black boots with black laces and soles make for dressed up work clothes, while yellow laces or contrasting boot and sole are for work site only.

Sandals

Leather straps and a simple design. Avoid them unless they’re serving a practical purpose (on the beach).

Non-Leather Shoes

Canvas Sneakers

Converse are the iconic example. Brightly colored pair can jazz up a social outfit. Red sneakers, blue jeans, and a white shirt is a bold look. Very casual.

Espadrilles

Hemp-soled slip-ons that resemble sneakers. They are slightly dressier.

Gym Shoes

Rubber and synthetic material. Use them for practical purposes only.

Slippers

For keeping your feet warm at home.

Necktie Patterns

Diagonal Stripes

The default pattern. Solid base color with thin, wide-spaced stripes of another color.

Solid Colors

Can be bland or bold depending on the color, solid ties looks best when there's a visible texture or pattern. Dark, conservative colors tend to work better than bright ones, which turn them into "novelty ties."

Figure Patterns

Solid pattern overlaid with repeating designs: dots, crests, fleur de lis. The more empty space there is, the more formal the tie.

Paisley

Busier and varied figure pattern. It's communicates a relaxed air.

Grids and Checks

Casual, usually presented in tartan or plaid. Not a good pattern for business.

Knit Ties

Monochrome and bumpy texture. They are more casual than smooth ties. Think hipsters.

Pocket Square Folds

Horizontal Fold

Simple, flat edge of the square emerges from the top of the pocket, running parallel to that pocket. It produces a narrow visible band of color against the backdrop of the jacket.

Peak Fold

A corner thrusts up from the pocket instead of an edge, producing a triangle. Some people fold their square into two offset peaks, called the crown fold.

Puff Fold

The center of the square is bloused outwards to produce a casual, wrinkly dome that emerges from the pocket.

Flute Folds

An inverted puff fold where the tail ends of the square, instead of the puff, are visible. It produces a random shape and will take some trial and error.

Flower Fold

A bundle that looks like a rose is produced through twisting the square. Usually done in red.

Coat Styles

Chesterfields

The standard straight, wool overcoat with small lapels and no tapering or belts. Comes in double and single breasted versions. Most formal versions are a plain, dark color with jetted pockets.

Polo coats

Broad lapels, double-breasted fronts, and built in belts make this American coat resemble a trenchcoat. The classic is beige camelhair, but darker colors are available and more dressy.

Crombies

Straight-sided cut with small lapels, this coat is plain. Crombies end in the mid thigh.

British Warm Coats

Made from Melton wool, these coats are fuzzy and thick. They feature wide lapels that can button closed if necessary. They're less dressy, but could be worn over a suit.

Covert Coats

A British upper class hunting style, covert coats are a single-breasted twill coat with large interior pockets, usually light in color with a contrasting collar.

Inverness Coats

Formal coats with baggy sleeves with fur or velvet trim.

Trench coats

A casual style, but still too formal to wear with jeans. Wear them with social suits, blazers, and sports jackets.

Duffel coats

Military style made from “duffel” wool. They’re long, unshaped, and usually buttoned with wooden toggles.

Greatcoats

Double-breasted military style with turned-out cuffs, usually falling past the knees.

Norfolks

Tweed style from the early 20th century. Short lapels and a built-in belt attached to the front.

Peacoats

One of the most popular sharp casual choices. Peacoats are double breasted with wide lapels and large buttons. They’re naval in origin and usually come in navy blue.

Leather Jackets

Many styles, most common is the moto jacket (tight-fitted with short or no collars), bombers (bulky with turndown collars), and the “easy rider” jacket (lancer-front with conspicuous zippers and snaps).

Fatigue Jackets

Shorter than greatcoats and duffel coats, these military coats end at the hips with a full length front that zips or buttons all the way up. Turndown collars, flap pockets, and epaulets are typical.

Blousons

Dressier, fitted fatigue jacket with cinched waist and slight flair at the hips. Often called “Eisenhower jackets.”

Waxed Jackets

Rainproof, quilted construction. The outside is dark and neat for a dressier look.

Jean Jackets

Can look good when well-fitted, but must never be paired with jeans.