

10

Things

**You Need To
Know About**

**Buying
Clothes**

10 Things You Need to Know About Buying Clothes

by
Ana Karina

mimeograph

brooklyn, new york

This ebook is dedicated to my biological mother, who has always, somehow, hated and loved clothes at the same time, and to my non-biological mother who has only ever loved them.

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ISBN# 978-1-61979-831-1

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Introduction

Not everyone loves clothes, but everyone has to wear them. As a result, people spend a lot of money on clothes that they may not like all that much and that may not look very good on them. I happen to love clothes, which means buying clothes is a problem for me only in that I could easily buy too many clothes. However, it also means that it makes me very sad to see people spend money on clothes that do not look good on them or that they do not like.

In addition to being necessary to daily life, clothes are an investment, at least from the wearer's perspective. Whether one has only so much money or so much closet space or time, you can only buy so many clothes. Of course, in the 21st century, clothing designers and manufacturers would like you to think that this is not the case. Rather, the idea of "disposable" and "low cost" fashion is what the clothing industry is promoting. There are various reasons for this, but the main one underlying the actions of all clothing manufacturers, designers, and retailers is the simple fact that fashion and the clothing associated with it are big business. Americans will spend almost half a trillion dollars, i.e., \$500 billion, in 2014 on clothing. In fact, spending on clothing accounts for the third largest spending category after housing and food. This statistic is all the more remarkable when you consider the fact that an average garment costs between \$30 and \$80 and could, in theory, be worn for anywhere from five to fifty years. In the past, the lucrative market in clothing relied on high prices for clothing, which was considered a necessary and durable good. But today, that is no longer the case. Instead, this market now relies on frequent purchasing of "low cost clothing" to sustain itself.

In reality, the phrase "low cost clothing" is both an oxymoron and a myth created and perpetuated by our current global marketplace. Clothes require both high-cost materials and intensive labor to create. Fabrics and the resources required to produce fabrics are created from complex manufacturing, distribution, design, and agricultural systems. Furthermore,

even the crafting of the simplest garment requires hours of labor. If you have ever tried sewing your own clothes, or even mending clothes by hand, this will not come as a surprise to you.

But this is not an ebook about the clothing industry, though this subject does play a minor role. Rather, this is an ebook about how to buy clothes that will look good on you and that you will enjoy wearing. It is a known fact that Americans and Europeans and anyone with a modicum of disposable income spend a lot of money on clothes. It is not my goal to decrease this spending, but to try to assist you in making some, if not all, of that spending slightly more worthwhile to you.

1. Know what looks good on you

What is your favorite outfit? What do you like to wear? What do others tell you looks good on you? The answers to these three questions will help you create a model for your fashion choices. For, believe it or not, clothing styles are not infinite! Dress and skirt silhouettes, for instance, fall into three major categories: A-Line, Straight, and Pleated. Pant styles fall into roughly three categories: flat front, pleated front, side-zip. Furthermore, what looks good on you today will look good on you tomorrow. So start with and use the clothes you like today as a guide to what you should buy in the future.

2. Know what feels comfortable to wear

You should be comfortable in the clothes you wear. Furthermore, you can look good (even to other people) in clothes that are comfortable to wear. These statements may sound somewhat controversial or odd today, but I certainly hope they will not seem so in the future. While everyone has moments when he or she may be wearing a too formal or starchy outfit, people who know and love clothes are most often comfortable in and with the clothes they are wearing. Look at Kate Middleton. She always looks great and appears to wear clothes that do not make her uncomfortable. Of course, she is a lover of clothes. What about non-lovers of clothes? Well, I would argue that it is a question of finding and embracing what you feel comfortable in. With, of course, the one great exception being sweat pants. That said, keep in mind that even sweat pants are a type of pants, so perhaps you can find real pants that are cut in a way that resembles sweat pants?

3. Know your unique look and style

You are cultivating an identity with your wardrobe. Ideally your clothes should be an extension of your unique personality and body. Through careful selection, clothing, though mass manufactured, can be used to cultivate and project your particular attributes. Therefore, make sure that the clothes you wear reflect the identity and personality you wish to project in a specific environment. In the 21st century, we all understand and accept the fact that we may not always be exactly the same person at all times. However, aim generally not to have a split personality. While it is ok to have clothes that you exclusively wear to work and clothes that you only wear on the weekends, there should be some continuity between these two wardrobes. Furthermore, just because you are dressing for work does not mean you have to look (and feel) like a stuffed shirt! From a clothing perspective, a high quality fabric is really all that a more formal or “dressed up” environment requires. This means you can wear styles and cuts that are comfortable for you and that still look professional or formal.

4. You can't wear everything

This simple truth is one that could save you thousands of dollars and Americans, collectively, billions of dollars each year on unworn and unwanted garments. Though you may very well see outfits and styles and fashions that you like or admire, this does NOT mean that you can or should wear them. What looks good on you looks good on you. Embrace this fact. Run with it. Admire the body conscious full-skirt dress from afar. It may look good on a 110 pound model, but it will probably not look good on you. The fashion industry would like you to think that you can wear anything. It is time to face the facts: you can't. And furthermore, you WOULD NOT WANT TO! Because you have your own unique look and style created by matching your personality and body type with fabrics and cuts that look good on you.

5. Make sure that the clothes you buy make you look better wearing them than not wearing them

There are those who look great without clothes who look terrible in clothes and there are those who don't look that great without clothes who look terrible in clothes. Regardless of which body-image category you fall into, make sure that the clothes you buy and wear make you look better wearing them than not wearing them. Whether you like looking at yourself naked or not, your body is your body and it is the foundation for everything you wear. Just as, architecturally, every site or foundation can lead to a site-specific and site-appropriate building, every body can lead to body-appropriate clothing. Only buy clothes that are your true size, that you like, and that are comfortable to wear.

6. Know your measurements

Your measurements—and the proportions of your measurements in relation to one another—are a good guide to the types of cuts and fabrics that will look good on you. Locate or buy a tape measure. Measure your chest, your waist, and your hips. Write these measurements down. Pull your favorite garment or garments out of the closet. Measure these. Write down these measurements.

The current state and history of clothing size standards are fascinating topics, but ones that need not concern you when trying to figure out which clothes fit you well. Instead, it is important to know that your body and its measurements are unique, whereas ready to wear clothing sizes are made to fit people with measurements in a general range. To mass produce and market clothing, it is necessary to have agreed upon sizes based on a de-facto, if not truly official standard range of measurements. (See the clothing size chart on p. 17) Though your measurements will most likely not match exactly with those given for any one size, it is to these measurements generally, not yours specifically, that ready to wear clothes are made. The chart will give you a sense of which size categories your measurements fit into. Be aware that there is no scientific or government body overseeing size standards so there is no true standard. However, each clothing manufacturer publishes the standards it uses for its clothes. It is often the case that one's actual measurements match several different sizes. Unfortunately, it is not possible to order a size 10 dress for your upper body and a size 12 dress for your lower body. One has to compromise...or find a good tailor. And possibly do both. Your measurements and the measurements of the actual clothes you try on and buy are more important than the size applied to the garment by the manufacturer. Follow these measurements, along with what feels comfortable and looks good on you in selecting clothes that fit.

7. Know your brands

While there may come a day when we all go back to making our own clothes or having our own tailors, for the time being, the vast majority of us are reliant on clothing manufacturers as the primary source for our clothes. While styles will always change and while there are many similarities amongst different clothing manufacturers, each brand has its own focus, fit, and fabric profile. “Focus” means how a brand brands itself. Is it “high end” or “value”? Is it “the latest up to the minute styling” or “more traditional,” meaning consistent and less reactive to the latest style trends. What brands do you tend to like to wear? Look in your closet, which brands do you find there? Do you see any patterns? If so, make a note of them and try to figure out the three to five brands that make clothes that you like and that look good on you. Though even the most stallworthy brands like Woolrich or Pendleton may change over time, you can rely on them to change less frequently than some others. Some high-end brands can be relied on to use high-quality fabrics and tailoring. However, just because a brand is expensive or trendy does not necessarily mean it is well-made. High-quality fabrics and a good and comfortable fit should be more important to you than the notoriety or trendiness of the brand.

8. Know your fabrics

Both the quality of the sewing and styling and the quality of the fabric are important to well made clothing and the combination of the three together is itself an important consideration in selecting garments that will look good on you. Just as there are only so many cuts or styles in the world of fashion, there are only so many fabrics. However, for a variety of reasons--fabrics are seasonal, different fabrics require different levels of care, cleaning, and maintenance, new “man-made” fabrics are always being created--the topic can get fairly complicated. So start simply: If you don't like how a fabric feels, don't wear it. Ever. For better or worse, we live in a world in which there are thousands of varieties of fabric types. Some are “natural,” some are crafted from “man-made” materials, and some are a combination of the two. All fabric requires intensive processing and resource allocation to manufacture, even all-natural fabrics like cotton and wool. Therefore, save the world by buying fewer clothes that you like to wear rather than running after the latest ecological fabric fad that may or may not really be all that ecologically sound. Cotton is best for summer. Wool and polyester for fall and winter. Cotton blends are great for spring. New (and old) “high” tech fabrics, all of which are some variety of polyester, should be assessed based on their weight, comfort level, and how well they suit you, your body, your clothing identity/ies, and your life, i.e., care and maintenance time and budget.

9. Your clothes are an investment

Clothes are an investment in several different respects. They represent an investment of time based on how much of your life you spend wearing them, as well as in terms of the time you spend shopping for them and in working for the money to buy them. They also most often—depending on your income and clothing buying habits—account for a fairly significant portion of your annual spending. Finally, they are an investment in a material sense in that each piece of clothing that you buy has, or could have, some relationship to every other piece of clothing that you buy.

Even in the mid-20th century, it was not uncommon for a woman to own only one winter coat, two to three dresses, and one or two pairs of pants. Such frugality regarding clothing is unimaginable at this point in time, but keep in mind that those few pieces of clothing probably cost as much as you spent on all of the clothes in your closet.

“Low-cost clothing” is low-cost for a reason: the fabric and the design of the garment are tailored (pun intended) to the price. “Low-cost clothing” is most often made from low-quality fabrics that will not wear well. Some people can wear low-cost fabrics and look great. Many can’t. Chances are, the less you like clothes, the more unlikely it is that you can afford (in a time, money, and fashion sense) to wear “low-cost clothing.” That said, high priced, designer clothing is not always made from high-quality fabrics or well tailored either. Assess a garment on the quality of the fabric and its tailoring. If cost is an issue, consider buying clothing at outlet and second-hand stores. A well made piece of clothing can be worn for several years or decades, so if you find something that you really like and that looks good on you, it may very well be worth investing in it.

10. Not everyone loves clothes but everyone has to wear them

You will spend anywhere from 80 to 98 percent of your life wearing clothes. Regardless of how much you may enjoy being naked, clothing is, at least for now, a legal requirement in most countries. Furthermore, even if there were a massive and popular nudist movement afoot, the fashion industry would do everything in its power to thwart it. Plus, there is always the fact of that nagging question at the back of even every wannabe nudist's mind: Would you ever, really, want to sit at a meeting with your coworkers naked? Even if you prefer sleeping in the nude, you will, at some point need to cover up for some reason. Therefore, let's just accept clothes as a major fact of life. You must, at least for now, wear them. Therefore, don't let them wear you.

Clothing Size Chart

Women's "Average" Size
Chart

European Size	US Size	Standard	Bust	Waist	Hips
30	0	XS	31-32	23-24	33.5-34.5
32	2	XS	32-33	24-25	34.5-35.5
34	4	S	33-34	25-26	35.5-36.5
36	6	S	34-35	26-27	36.5-37.5
38	8	M	35-36	27-28	37.5-38.5
40	10	M	36-37	28-29	38.5-39.5
42	12	L	37.5-38.5	30-31	40-41
44	14	L	39-40	31-32	41.5-42.5
46	16	XL	40.5-41.5	32.5-33.5	43-44
48	18	XL	41.5-42.5	33.5-34.5	43.5-44.5

Men's "Average" Size
Chart

European Size	US Size	Neck	Chest	Waist	Sleeve Reg	Sleeve Tall
36-37	S	14-14.5	34-36	28-30	32-33	33-34
33-39	M	15-15.5	38-40	32-35	33-34	34-35
41-42	L	16-16.5	42-44	36-38	34-35	35-36
43-44	XL	17-17.5	46-43	40-42	35-36	36-37
45-46	XXL	18-18.5	50-52	44-46	36-37	36-37

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by

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ISBN# 978-1-61979-831-1

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