

Talking about Fashion



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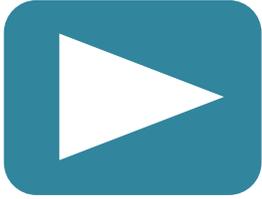
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Talking About Fashion



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You know, I can talk about [English grammar](#) as an expert, I think. But, this week we will be talking about something where I'm not an expert. This week we're going to be talking about clothing, and about the kinds of clothing that people wear. The word for that is **fashion**, and I have to say that I'm not an expert in it. Some of my clothes are ten years old! I wore them in high school!

But, even if I don't know which clothes are **fashionable**, I do know the words to describe them. When I talk to my students about clothing, the best system is for them to tell me *what* clothes are fashionable, and I tell them how to describe them in English!

So, this week we're starting in on a topic where everyone has something to say. Feel free to tell me what you think in the comments. Are there "fashion" topics that you think got left out? Do you think that you can describe what your fashion or style is? How is your taste in clothing different from the people that you know? Let me know!

Here's the vocabulary that we'll be using this week:

Sleeve: The sleeve is the part of a shirt that holds your arm. Shirts, sweaters, sweatshirts, and coats all have sleeves. When I make a mess eating, I sometimes clean my face with my shirt sleeves, though my wife always tells me I shouldn't!

Short-Sleeved: When a shirt has **sleeves** that come over the shoulder and then stop, it's a short-sleeved shirt. I think short-sleeved shirts are more comfortable in the spring and

summer! And most T-shirts are short-sleeved. When you play sports, you mostly want a short-sleeved shirt.

Long-Sleeved: Long-sleeved is obviously the opposite of **short-sleeved**. When a shirt has **sleeves** that come all the way to your hands (or almost all the way to your hands), it's a long-sleeved shirt. I wear long-sleeved shirts with a **collar** to work. If you wear a suit and tie, you probably have a long-sleeved shirt on.

Collar: The part of a shirt that goes around your neck is the collar. Though, technically, every shirt that has an opening for your head has a collar, we normally use the word to refer to the part of a shirt that covers your tie. When you think of a suit, you probably think of it with a **long-sleeved** shirt with a collar.

Crew-neck: T-shirts don't have a **collar**, not the kind you use for a tie. They are what we call crew-neck shirts. Crew-neck describes any shirt with just a round hole for your head. T-shirts are the most common crew-neck shirts, but you can also buy crew-neck sweaters.

Turtleneck: If you wear a shirt that has what looks like a third **sleeve** for your head, you're probably wearing a turtleneck. I wear a turtleneck when it's cold, or sometimes under a jacket, because it's a less conservative "formal" look.

Old-fashioned: Do you know anybody who likes things the way they were fifty or a hundred years ago? Sometimes our grandparents talk this way. We say they're old-fashioned. Old-fashioned is the opposite of **modern**. We think of our grandparents as being old-fashioned. I like big, old-fashioned cars and I like old-fashioned clothes – suits with vests and full-length dresses – too!

Taste: You probably know the word "taste" meaning the way food feels in your mouth. But it has another meaning. Your taste is not what someone else would taste if they were to eat you, it's the things that you like. The cars that are your taste in cars. And, if you only like **old-fashioned** clothes, then you have an **old-fashioned** taste in clothes.

Modern: Do you like new buildings? The ones made of concrete and glass? Then you like modern buildings. Modern means recently made, or with a new design. Computers and iPods are modern inventions, and what you hear on a "pop" radio station is modern music.

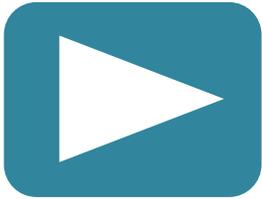
Trendy / Fashionable: When we talk about clothing, we don't normally say **modern**. Because **tastes** change almost every month, the newest **taste** in clothing is called trendy or fashionable. The clothing you can see on MTV, for example, isn't my **taste** in clothes, but it's certainly trendy! Most of my students think my clothing is **old-fashioned**, they prefer fashionable clothes.

Trend: You can use the word "trend" for more than clothing. A trend is the direction things are going, or the newest thing. It seems, for example, that the iPhone is the newest trend. **Fashionable** describes any clothing that most people seem to like, but a trend is the very newest thing on the market. Trendy clothing is, I think, the most expensive!

Fashion: Can you think of clothing that all of your friends like? That's the fashion (or the "style," the words mean the same thing) of your friends. Fashion refers simply to clothing that is popular. The clothing you see most people wearing on the street is the current fashion. The current fashion isn't always the newest thing (sometimes old fashions "come back"), but the current fashion is seldom cheap!

Non-conformist: Almost everyone knows what the newest **trend** is, or what the current **fashion** is, but there are a lot of people who try to wear clothing that is the exact opposite of what is **fashionable**. We call these people non-conformists. If you know the terms "punks" (a person that typically wears metal chains, leather clothes and has brightly colored hair) or "skinheads" (a person with a shaved head who belongs to a gang), both groups of people are non-conformists: the clothing they wear isn't **trendy**!

What's Your Style?



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I am a little bit **old-fashioned**. Or maybe another word is **conservative**. What I mean is that my **taste** in clothes is the same today as it was five years ago. My tastes don't change very much and my younger students tell me I dress like a grandfather. Of course, I try not to be insulted.

My "tastes" refer to the kind of things that I like. I have tastes in music, tastes in clothes, and tastes in food. Maybe you can guess that my taste in clothes means the clothes that I like. And, **old-fashioned** means that I like clothes that are, well, *old*. I like the hats that people wore in the 1950s. I like the suits people wore in the 1930s. I like old clothes.

Normally, the opposite of old-fashioned is **modern**. "Modern" means that something is new, or was made in the last year or two. Of course, a "modern" building can be older than "modern" clothes. Buildings get old a lot more slowly than clothing does!

When we talk about clothing, though, we don't often use the word "modern." More often, you'll hear people use the words **trendy**, **fashionable** and simply "cool." By now you know that "cool" can mean anything good in English! The other two words, though, all have the same meaning.

In the U.S., the tastes that people had in clothing last year, aren't the same as the tastes they have this year. Every year, there are new tastes in clothing. These tastes are called **trends** or **fashions**. Each of these words means the same thing: the tastes that everyone seems to have this year. When you look at advertising, the clothing you see is

probably in the newest trend. If you get a catalog with clothing in it, you'll be able to see the newest fashions.

Of course, not everyone wears trendy clothes. I don't. I wear old-fashioned clothes. Other people try to wear clothes that are as different from the current fashions as possible. We call these people "**non-conformists**," it's a term meaning that they try to be different. Some people (usually the trendy people) like to laugh at the non-conformists. One common line is: "isn't it funny how they're all different the same way?"

Some non-conformist clothing helps people show that they belong to a sub-culture. Maybe words like "goth" (black clothes, black hair, white make-up and dark lipstick), "punk" (metal chains, leather clothes and brightly colored hair), "skinhead" (a shaved head, work-shirts and short jeans, and boots), or "emo" (tight T-shirts, tight jeans and straight black hair) are in your language, too. They are all sub-cultures who identify themselves with their clothing.

What kind of tastes do you have? Are you old-fashioned? Or is your clothing more trendy? Are you a non-conformist? If someone else saw you, how would they describe you?

Do Clothes Make the Man?

"Clothes Make the Man," says a common English saying. The meaning is simple: what you wear decides who you are. After all, you don't see any millionaires wearing old t-shirts do you? (I bet you do.)

Another saying encourages people to "dress for success." That simply means: wear the costume (wear the clothes people expect you to wear) and they'll treat you the way you want.

If you're looking for a job, everyone knows that you don't go to the job interview looking like you need a job. You don't go wearing old clothes, with a ketchup stain on your tie. You go in looking like you have a job: you wear a new set of clothes, polished shoes. The idea is that the interviewer will be so impressed with your appearance that he gives you the job because you "look" like the kind of person he's looking for.

What do you think? Do "clothes make the man?" Is it possible to "dress for success?" How important are clothes to the way people see you? How important are clothes to the way people perceive you? How important are the clothes you wear to the way you see yourself?

My Clothes, My Identity



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I don't think I'm a very fashionable person. In fact, I know I'm not a very fashionable person. Both my students and my colleagues tell me that I'm pretty old-fashioned. I wear some of the same clothes now that I wore in high school, at least the ones that haven't broken or torn since I went to high school. And I like to wear clothes that express who I am.

For example, I went to college. And I like to wear clothes that look like I went to college. I like to wear a collar, sometimes even a tie. I think it makes me look educated and I'm proud of the education I have.

But at the same time, for example, I spent a long time working physically, in a factory and in the Army. And one of the things you do when you do physical work, is you roll the sleeves of your shirt up. And now, when I'm working, without even thinking I roll the arms (the *sleeves*) of my shirt up. It's just a working reflex and I like it, it's part of who I am: I work.

Another good example is that I, like many Americans, was in the Army. And many former soldiers in the U.S. still have different parts of their old uniforms. I would never wear these clothes to work, but, if you come to Dresden (a city in Germany) in the summer, there's a good chance you can see me wearing a camouflage baseball cap I got from the Army. Why? Not because I liked the Army (I hated the Army) but, because it's part of who I am. And, I also think that, if my wife talks very long about me and describes me to someone else, it's one of the things she will say.

My history is a part of my personality, and I like clothes that express that.

I said a moment ago that I have old-fashioned tastes. What does that mean? To be honest, I don't know. I like the clothes that I like. But, I know, for example I like a lot of "earth tones" we say in English. Earth tones are the colors you can find in nature: browns and greens, and blacks, and grays. A dark orange. And these colors are considered "subdued" (not bright) and also a little bit old-fashioned.

Brown, in particular, I like. But I'm told it's a grandpa color. Maybe that's a German thing, I don't know. But, I think I look good in it. I like the way it looks in general. And I don't like clothing that draws attention to me. When I get dressed...

Stop. Back up (go back). Something you should know about me is that I'm very tall. Six feet, six inches. Or, if you think in metric, I'm one meter, ninety-five tall. I... am pretty easy to find in a crowd. And, for that reason, I don't need to wear clothes that make me *easier* to find in a crowd: I already am. I like clothes that blend in. Sort of an "urban camouflage" and those clothes tend to be conservative and, I guess, old-fashioned.

So, here's my question to you: What kind of clothes do you wear? How would you describe your style? Do your clothes say anything about you? Do they describe who you are? I'm interested to hear it.

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This lesson was written by Toby, an American English teacher who lives in Germany. Toby is the creator of [Bite Sized English](#).