

Tuxedo Styles: A Complete Guide



At first glance, suits and tuxedos might seem pretty similar. But before we establish what a tuxedo is, let's talk about what a tux is not. A tuxedo is not just a black suit worn with a bow tie. While that description misses some of the finer details of the tux, it also assumes that all tuxedos are black and white (they're not). And while bow ties are the traditional neckwear match for a tux, they're not your only option.

The biggest difference between suits and tuxedos is the use of silk satin in the design of the tuxedo, most prominently on the lapels. Suits are almost always made with a consistent fabric on both the jacket and pants –no special lapels, no satin leg stripes. And most tuxedos have silkcovered jacket buttons while suits have normal buttons.

So, should you wear a tuxedo to your event? The tuxedo is designed to elevate your appearance above the day-to-day suit. If you're wearing a tuxedo, you're probably celebrating something special. Only you can decide whether a tuxedo is the garment you need. Look deep inside yourself, meditate, wander off into the desert on a spiritual quest for which formalwear best calls to your soul. Or, you know, just take a look at the event, its dress code (if there is one), and what other people you know are wearing—and follow accordingly.

Tuxedo Jacket Styles





NOTCH LAPELS

The standard in men's suiting today, notch lapels are found on everything from sport coats to business suits—which also means they're considered more casual than other lapel types. They have a "notch" where the jacket collar meets the lapel. Despite being a casual lapel type, notch lapels are versatile—you'll find them on both suit and tuxedo jackets. Just avoid wearing them at the most formal black tie events.



SHAWL COLLARS

Shawls aren't just for little old ladies. Shawl (collars, that is) are characterized by a modern, rounded shape, and are primarily seen on tuxedos and dinner jackets. While shawl lapels are pretty much only found on black tie-appropriate garments, some would argue that they are less formal than a peak lapel. You could also argue they have more panache. Use your judgment based on the event and your personal style.



PEAK LAPELS

Peak lapels are slightly wider than notch lapels, with edges that “peak” upward toward your face. Originally seen in highly formal, highly traditional garments like tailcoats, the peak lapel has since made its way into tuxedo and suit jackets alike. It’s generally viewed as more formal than the notch lapel, and, because it’s less common, more of a statement. But don’t shy away—because they point upward, peak lapels have the effect of making you look taller and slimmer. Win, win.

Pro-tip: Looking for a way to elevate the notch? Try a notch lapel bound with grosgrain ribbon.



Tuxedo Materials

For many reasons, wool is the most popular fabric for suits and tuxedos. It drapes beautifully and has a sleek finish that makes for a polished look. It's also known to be insulating, breathable, and durable—basically making it the do-it-all renaissance man of the suiting world. It's hard to go wrong with wool.

In chilly weather, try a velvet dinner jacket for a low-key move to set your look apart. Plush velvet adds rich texture to your look and keeps you feeling and looking warm in the autumn and winter, but it'd look

(and feel) out of place in warmer months. Velvet has a heavier hand feel, but when you're wearing a velvet jacket it wears just as light as a wool jacket. That's good news for the dance floor.



Generally, the fewer the buttons on the closure, the more formal the jacket. Think of ultra-formal tailcoats: the jacket doesn't even close! Tailcoats usually have some buttons, but none of them are functional.

Single-button jackets are the most formal in modern menswear, and not coincidentally, most single-button jackets are tuxedos or dinner jackets. Two-button jackets are more versatile but a little more casual, too. They can be dressed up or dressed down, from a cocktail party to a black tie optional wedding. You can find modern tuxedos with two-button closures, but they're most often used in suiting.

Tuxedo Shirt Collars



WING TIP COLLARS

The most formal collar option, the Wing Tip gets its name from the fold-out collar points that look like wings (and possibly because they have a tendency to make you look classically “fly”).

SPREAD COLLARS

The most common type of collar today, and the most versatile. They work with suits and tuxedos alike, and both bow and neckties. Spread collars also come in a variety of points and angles—from the forward point collar with its narrow spread, to the cutaway collar's wide spread (the “spread” refers to the distance between the collar points). Choose carefully—this is your chance to be the Goldilocks of collar spreads.

Shirt Bibs



Some dress shirts have a rectangular panel that runs up the front of the shirt. It's called a “bib,” : it doubles your shirt's chest fabric, ensuring that anything visible under your tuxedo jacket is bright white, not see-through.

There are two* types of bibs—pleated (where vertical pleats run up both sides of the button placket), and pique (which are made from stiff fabric usually woven with a dimpled pattern, and are considered more formal). Only wear bib-front shirts for formal events that call for a tuxedo.

Shirt Plackets

If you're not a shirt construction hobbyist, you might not know that the placket is the center strip of fabric where a shirt's buttonholes are situated. And yes, you have placket options.



FRONT PLACKET

The most common type of placket style, and one you usually can't go a classic (and symmetrical) look.



NO PLACKET (FRENCH FRONT)

French front shirts don't have that folded-over and sewn strip of fabric along the buttons. Going placket-less gives your shirt a cleaner, more minimalist feel, making it an ideal choice for both formal or casual shirts.



COVERED PLACKET (FLY FRONT)

The fly front is a more formal style of placket in which an extra piece of fabric covers up the buttons on your shirt. Because sometimes you've got to leave a little to the imagination.



TUXEDO FRONT (PLAIN FRONT)

This style looks similar to the French front, except the top four buttons are removable for tuxedo studs. Please, let this style live up to its name, and only wear it with tuxes—it should never make an appearance at the office.

Shirt Cuffs



BARREL CUFFS



FRENCH CUFFS

BARREL CUFFS

Barrel cuffs don't require any rolling or cufflinks—instead, they are held closed by buttons. Most of your shirts probably have barrel cuffs. Unlike the typical, casual barrel cuff shirt that buttons shut, barrel cuff dress shirts have modified buttonholes that can also accommodate cufflinks, bringing them up to tux code.

FRENCH CUFFS

French cuffs are formal shirt cuffs that are rolled back and held in place by cufflinks. If you're getting married or going to another event that requires a tuxedo, formal French cuffs will elevate your look. Besides, you should always take an opportunity to add a set of cufflinks to your look.

Tuxedo Neckwear



Bow Tie vs. Necktie

We've already established that the traditional approach to a tux is to match it with a bow tie, so if you're attending a really formal or strict black tie event, make it a bow tie. But not every event has that strict of a dress code, and modern style means a lot more wiggle room for personal expression.

Colors and Fabrics

Choosing a bow tie based on its fabric can add texture to your look in unexpected ways and firmly place your outfit in the right season and formality level.



SILK (ALSO: SILK SATIN, KNIT SILK, SILK TWILL)

This is the go-to neck-wear fabric for most tuxedo styles or dinner jackets. Silk's light sheen works well with the (usually) silk satin lapels decide to dress your tux down with a necktie, this silk is the best choice.



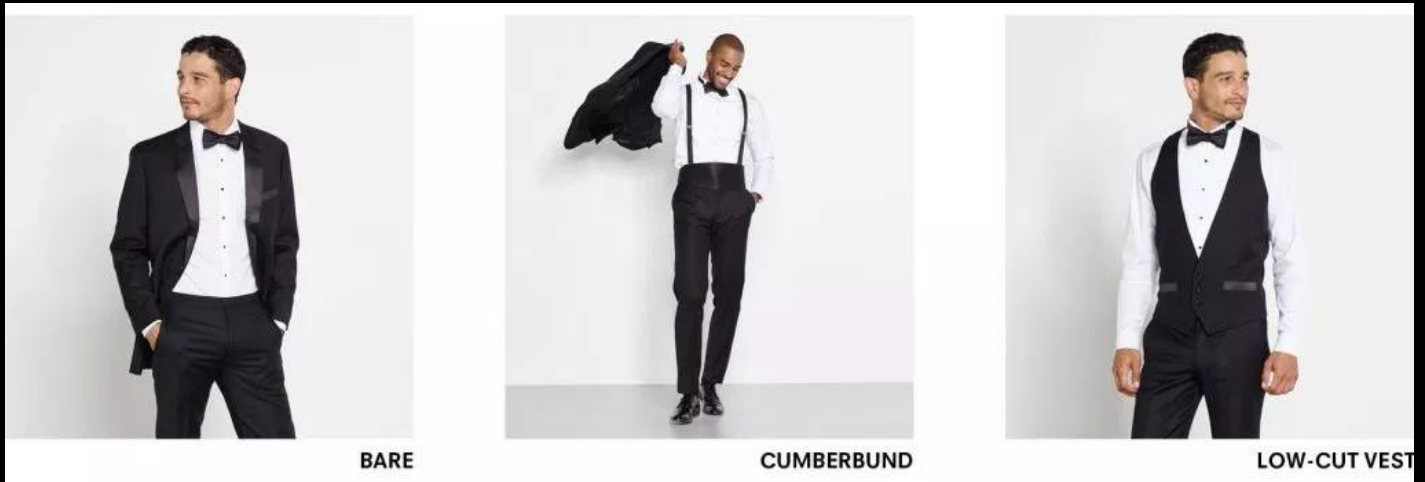
WOOL, VELVET (ALSO: WOOL FLANNEL, TARTAN)

In the fall and winter, we bundle up. That's not to say a velvet or wool tie is going to actually keep you warmer than some other fabric, but visually, these rich materials lend themselves to cooler weather. If you want to try this cozier neckwear material with your tux, stick with a bow tie.

Pro-tip: If you go the bow tie route, don't sweat the shape too much.

Cummerbund or Vest (or Neither?)

One of the traditional guiding principles of a formal dress code is that all the working parts of your ensemble must be covered or dressed. While the rule has become more of a guideline, we still find the rule's offspring in formal wear: vests and cummerbunds.



BARE

If you want a more modern, effortless look, consider ditching the vest or cummerbund altogether. Going vestless is an increasingly popular, contemporary choice, and acceptable with either a tuxedo or a suit.

CUMMERBUND

The cummerbund was invented to cover up your waistband (and the awkward shirt bunching that tends to happen in that area).

Cummerbunds are rapidly approaching “old-fashioned” status, and we won't go out of our way to recommend you wear one. But if you must wear one, do it only with a tuxedo, and match the material of your cummerbunds).

LOW-CUT VEST

Like a cummerbund, you'll usually only wear a low-cut vest— occasionally called a waistcoat—at black tie events. Low-cut vests are viewed as more formal and are cut lower in the front than a typical suit vest—hence the name—to show off your tuxedo shirt. Unlike the fullback vest, it is appropriate to button all buttons.

Tuxedo Pants



Tuxedo Style Options

Four different ways to shine

For many gentlemen, the Tuxedo, also known as the Dinner Suit (or somewhat less precisely, the Dinner Jacket) is the pinnacle of smart menswear.

Regardless, the dinner suit has survived as the go-to gentleman's attire for formal dinners and evening events; essentially anything where it is requested that attendees wear "Black Tie", which is the overall term for this practice and refers to the black color of the bow tie traditionally worn with such an ensemble. There is also the now rather rare and more formal White Tie, but we'll leave that for another time!

Tuxedo Shawl Collar vs. Peak Lapel vs. Notch Lapel



Peak lapels are most traditional and most formal, so if you want to be sure of getting it right, go for a peak! A shawl collar lapel is perfectly acceptable for most Black Tie events, although it is casual. Notch lapels traditionally are a no-no on a Tuxedo, as these are intended for the regular lounge suit. Pockets should always be welt pockets; avoid patch pockets and trouser cuffs as these are innately casual features.

More conservative: Peak Lapels

Perfectly acceptable: Shawl Collar

Not traditional : Notch Lapels.

Bond-ish Navy

Navy Blue or Midnight Blue has become a widely accepted alternative option to the black Tux. More rakish than black, but less rogue-ish than a more colour-rich blue, a Navy dinner suit will stand you in good stead in most circles. This has become particularly popular since Daniel Craig's portrayal of James Bond starting wearing dark blue dinner suits!



Conservative Black

This is the most traditional option and the go-to for most gentlemen. You can't really put a foot wrong here, so it's a safe bet if you're new to formal events, and while some Black Tie events are flexible enough for variations, if the invite says Black Tie: Formal, then black is sure to fit the bill.



Tropical Flair: The White Dinner Jacket

This practice arose from gentlemen attending formal events in warmer climates and is generally considered acceptable in hot weather or summer months. It's a more casual jacket style better paired with a cummerbund, and easily suits shawl collar lapels, although peak lapels are also fine and look quite sharp with the pale fabric. Note that the trousers paired with such a jacket should still be formal dinner suit trousers (with a strip of fabric covering the outer leg seam, and no cuffs) rather than just ordinary suit trousers!



One-Button vs. Two-Button Tuxedos

The traditional dinner jacket has a one-button fastening at the waist for a lower buttoning point and a cleaner look. However, the one-button fastening can be somewhat unsympathetic to men of a heavier build, in which case, there's no harm in opting for two-buttons. Three-button Tuxedos are a faux pas and to be avoided at all costs.

Most traditional: One button

If you're yet to start that diet: Two buttons Avoid: Anything else.

Three buttons is a big no-no. Doublebreasted tuxedos are trendy but very difficult to pull off in practice.



One-Button
Tuxedo



Two-Button
Tuxedo

On The Delicate Matter Of Vents

Traditionally the dinner jacket features a ventless back, again for a cleaner look, however, this can be unflattering on some men - if you are comfortable describing your posterior as slender, you might consider trying the traditional ventless option. But with that said, we've heard stories of old English tailors arguing the point that ventless is all vanity and no function, and that twin vents, while not traditional, is actually their preferred choice. At any rate, double vents and single vents are both acceptable alternatives for the modern gentleman.

More traditional: No vents

Your best choice: Double (side) vents

Also fine: Single vent

Wearing a belt is not at all advisable with a Tuxedo, traditionally the trousers are held up with a pair of braces (suspenders, if you're American) - until recently these had fallen out of fashion, but are now experiencing a trendy revival along with smarter dressing more generally. Some men, however, do find braces uncomfortable, in which case your best bet is making sure the waist measurement of your trousers is spot on!



A cummerbund is the least formal but mostly widely-used and easily-sourced option, it's believed it may have originated from the habits of devil-may-care cavalry officers (probably Hussars, who traditionally wore a sash with their uniform) and/or by military gentlemen attending events in warmer climates, such as India (where the word is believed to have been derived from the Hindu

ALLOWANCE CHART FOR JACKETS, SHIRTS AND PANTS

ALLOWANCE IN INCHES

Jacket & Shirt style	Chest	Waist	Hips
Super Slim	3	2	2
Slim	3	3	2
Regular	4	4	3
Loose	5	5	4

ALLOWANCE IN PANT HIPS

PANTS STYLE	NO PLEAT	ONE PLEAT	TWO PLEATS	Cuff
Super Slim	1	1.5	2	14
Slim	1.5-2	3-2.5	2.5-3	16
Regular	2-2.5	2.5-3	3-3.5	18
Loose	3-3.5	3.5-4	4-4.5	20