

WHAT A WONDERFUL FREEDOM:  
TO CHOOSE WHAT WOMAN WE WANT  
TO BE AND DRESS ACCORDINGLY

Today, like never before, fashion offers us options.  
In this book I show you how best to navigate them.  
Learn how to shop smart, finding clothes that flatter  
and make you feel the best version of “you”. Together  
we can find your clothing happy place, one that will  
serve you well for many years to come.

Anna

“Anna Murphy will get you out and about  
wearing your best smile!”

**DOMENICO DOLCE** AND **STEFANO GABBANA**

“Imagine a garden in black and white?  
This book will guide you through the power  
of colour, and the power of black.”

**DIANE VON FURSTENBERG**

Extracted from *How Not To Wear Black*,  
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For the curious

# HOW NOT TO WEAR BLACK

FIND YOUR STYLE, CREATE YOUR  
FOREVER WARDROBE

**SARAH HARAN**

LUXURY ACCESSORIES

ANNA MURPHY



# Introduction



ANNA  
MURPHY



SARAH  
HARAN

Over and over I hear from women asking me for help in finding their fashion way. I understand all too well how easy it is to get lost. There are so many choices; so many options. And most of us go through periods of our life when we have too many other things going on to allow us enough time properly to keep our eye in when it comes to what's current.

I see the most important part of my job as Fashion Director of The Times as acting as a kind of pathfinder.

“

The forever wardrobe is not an impossible notion. And I am here to help you track it down.

That's also why I wrote my book *How Not To Wear Black*, some of which is extracted here. You can learn to navigate your way to the “you” who feels and looks like your very best self, and I would love to help you do it.

Just as importantly, you can have fun whilst doing so. As women we have so many more

ways than men to celebrate and empower ourselves through our wardrobes. Once you find your compass, that very same choice that once felt overwhelming, burdensome, suddenly starts to feel like the greatest of gifts.

How do you navigate with a compass? By way of the north pole, of course. When it comes to your fashion compass, I believe it's your bag that is your true north pole. Whether you are just embarking on your journey of sartorial self-discovery, or whether you are adept at dressing in a way that makes you feel happy and seen, it's all about the bag. Find a great bag, one that combines form and function, that makes your heart sing, and it pulls together every outfit. Not only that. It pulls together “you”!



# Bodymapping

FIGURING OUT YOUR  
FIGURE, FINDING YOUR TRUE  
FASHION FIXES



**Most of us believe ourselves to be all too well acquainted with our bodies, and in particular its – our – supposed flaws.** But are we really? And do we know how to dress that body to showcase it, to draw attention away from said flaws and towards what makes us fabulous?

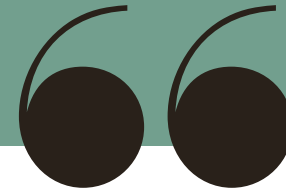
What serves us best in every sphere of our life is self-knowledge, and most of us work hard to develop and expand it as we age. Yet when it comes to our body, and the clothes that will serve it best, we often remain ignorant.

Nail who you are physique-wise, and you'll be perfectly placed to find a style that suits you, and to curate a wardrobe that makes life easier and that makes you feel better in and of yourself. We all know about IQ, but what about "BIQ"? Develop your Body Intelligence Quotient and shopping, dressing, the whole once-fraught business of finding and then enjoying your personal style will become child's play.

Why haven't we sorted it out before? Because it's not easy to get your head around at first, and also because we aren't really told that it matters. Instead it's trends that are thrown at us, from the moment we first become aware that clothes represent choices; that fashion is a thing. Yet above all, as the ever quotable, ever wearable Coco Chanel once said, "Fashion is architecture. It is a matter of proportions." (You'll be hearing a lot from her in this book: she was as good at conjuring up soundbites as designing handbags.)

Coming to understand your proportions, the particular geometry of your body – and it is a kind of geometry – is a process. Many of us have at least one part we consider to be too large and therefore go about trying to disguise. Many of us have an idea that the relationship between, say, shoulder width and hip width, impacts upon how we might look in a particular outfit. Many of us bandy around terms like "pear shape" and "apple shape" as if we were in a fruit shop. In fact there are seven different body geometries, as you'll see later in this chapter.

First, take a leaf out of the book of the famously *soignée* septuagenarian fashion designer Carolina Herrera. "The most



**Fashion is  
architecture.  
It is a matter  
of proportions.**

– COCO CHANEL



essential accessory a woman can have is a full-length mirror,” she once told me. “Then you stand in front of it and ask, ‘What do I need? What is wrong with me?’” If you don’t have one at home already, buy one.

A mirror is key when shopping, too. If you want to find what really suits you, always shop in-store rather than online. Stand in front of the changing room mirror. Is it you, or isn’t it? Only part with money once you are sure it is. And beware of so-called vanity sizing, which can make a theoretically identical size entirely different from one brand to another. It doesn’t matter what size it says on the label, just how it fits your body, how it makes you feel.

A mirror isn’t just a matter of practicality. It’s about seeing yourself in the most profound sense. “You either recognize yourself in the glass, or you don’t,” as Maria Grazia Chiuri, the head creative at the house of Dior, puts it. “Fashion is not only about clothes. There is more to it. For me, anyway.”

One of the most important things to determine is whether you are at heart a formal or a casual person.

Do you tend to overdress or to underdress? If you feel uncomfortable in a suit, it doesn’t matter if you buy a great one; you will never put it on. If jeans always feel too sloppy for you, don’t feel you have to wear them.

Grazia Chiuri told me how, when she was a child, her mother would dress her “in a way that didn’t represent me, like a doll. I hated it. In Italy there is an obsession with looking ‘nice’, and I wanted something different. In my mind a military jacket and jeans was me.” Aged 12, Grazia Chiuri set off unaccompanied to a flea market and, several buses later – “it felt like a big trip” – she found “that jacket, those jeans”. When she got home, she looked in the mirror and saw herself for the first time. “I fought for the



**It doesn’t matter what size it says on the label, just how it fits your body, how it makes you feel.**

clothes that were my clothes.” We all need to find our clothes.

But what if you don’t have a clear sense of what that possessive might apply to? We are bamboozled by choice now in a way that our grandmothers could never have imagined. It can be confusing enough to buy a yogurt these days, never mind a dress.

## BEYOND TRENDS

We are led to believe, in this consumer-driven society of ours, that fashion is about trends. We know we are supposed to keep an eye on them, but in so doing we fail to keep ourselves in focus. Trends are, as their name suggests, fly-by-night affairs. Your body is your lifelong partner. To learn its intricacies, and to develop a sense of what clothes suit it and what clothes don’t, are the most important sartorial tools we can develop.

“Trends are not trendy,” laughs the designer Roland Mouret. “Unless, of course, you want to be a trendy fashion person.” Who wants to be that? Not me. Most of us want to put on a stress-free outfit in the morning and go about our day safe in the knowledge that we look our best. We want clothes we can forget about, in other words.

Is yellow “in”? Who cares if it doesn’t suit you? How about boyfriend jeans? Ditto. As the red-carpet stylist Rebecca Corbin-Murray declares, “We should look for consistency rather than follow this idea, ‘I need to make myself feel better, and pink is in this season, so I suddenly need to buy pink.’ We need to stop going for that quick fix. Figure out what suits your body, what’s your silhouette, then forget everything else.”

Besides, the paradox is that although we think those quick fixes will make us happy – and in the short term, they may well do – in the long term they weigh us down. Corbin-Murray has recently done a wardrobe clear-out with one of her film-star clients. “She told me afterwards, ‘It is like a weight has lifted off me.’”

The style icons of the past didn’t bother themselves with the hurly-burly of trends. Take Jackie Onassis, for example. “She knew exactly what was going to look good on her,” recalls her friend

Herrera. “She knew exactly what she liked. She was never confused. If you look at old photographs of her, she still looks good for now.”

“I wouldn’t dream of following fashion,” the famously idiosyncratic literary woman-about-town Edith Sitwell wrote in 1968. “How could one be a different person every three months?” Coco Chanel – told you – summed it up even better not once but twice. “Fashion changes but style endures.” “Fashion is made to become unfashionable.”

## INTRODUCING THE PERMATREND

What it does make sense to pay some attention to is what I call permatrends. These are deeper shifts in the way people dress, and – precisely because they are so profound – there are very few of them. Permatrends may start off as apparently transient trends, but somehow they properly take hold, usually because there is something about them that chimes with the way we live and/or the way we want to be seen to live. Making them work for you – which can often be pulled off with just the subtlest of tweaks – is a way of looking effortlessly contemporary.

They tend to be broad-brushstroke, a catch-all category rather than a one-off entity. Off-the-shoulder will never be a permatrend, for example. Big shoulders, on the other hand, defined the entire 80s and beyond, albeit in myriad different incarnations. They came of age at a time when women, for the first time in history, were beginning to be allowed to be – and therefore to look – strong. Men had long worn jackets with built-up shoulders to emphasize their alpha-maleness. Newly empowered in the workplace, a 1980s woman wanted – needed – to emphasize her alpha-maleness, too; to signpost that she could compete on a man’s terms. Only later would there come a different kind of realization of strength: that you can be – and present as – 100 per cent woman, and still win.

Athleisure is another, more recent, permatrend that signifies something very different and yet still related. It’s about casualness, sportiness, coolness: all those elements that are seen in the modern world as equating both to youth and to competency. It’s

one of the strange twists in which fashion specializes that a flourish of high-end, office-appropriate athleisure can these days suggest something akin to the power suit of yore. Mix a strong-shouldered jacket with satin track pants and you are pulling off permatrend point-scoring par excellence.

Because permatrends are catch-alls, they can usually be finessed to work for everyone. There is a pair of jeans out there for you, even if you haven’t found them yet, and indeed I am here to help you find them. That said, if you are determined that there isn’t, you can reference denim in other ways, perhaps by wearing the finest chambray shirt under tailoring, for example.

Similarly, athleisure doesn’t have to be exclusively laid-back and teenage-looking, especially if you seek out classy fabrics and add-on embellishment. There are some wonderfully high-end, nay, elegant takes on what was once reserved for the gym and the street. Even if you wear the smartest of iterations it will still give

you a glow of youth.

But, to reiterate, permatrends can also be ignored. Everything can be, apart from what works for your body, which is – ironically – what most of us ignore most of the time. So let’s get a clearer idea of what that might be.



**There is a pair of jeans out there for you, even if you haven’t found them yet, and indeed I am here to help you find them.**



## THE SEVEN SHAPES

As I said, there are seven main shapes: the neat

hourglass, the full hourglass, the triangle, the inverted triangle, the column, the rectangle, and the rounded.

Many of us, myself included, will be a combination of two shapes. Whilst hourglass shapes tend not to coexist – an hourglass



is an hourglass – the others can and do. I, for example, am both a triangle – with full hips and thighs – and an inverted triangle, with square, broad shoulders and (sigh) not much of a waist.

OPERATION HOURLASS

Why does this matter? Because in order to look our best we should all be engaged in a what I call Operation Hourglass or, to be more precise, Operation Neat Hourglass. That is the most in-proportion look of all, and we can all come closer to presenting as such if we develop a few tricks. As with everything else in fashion there are no hard and fast rules, but there are some handy markers.

If you are an hourglass in the first place then obviously you have it easiest. You need to wear clothes that follow your lines, not hide them. If you are a full hourglass make sure to favour fabrics that won't add bulk.

In general colour, pattern, and embellishment are going to draw attention to the section of the body where they are worn. So if you are a triangle you want to keep the focus on your top half; if you are an inverted triangle, on the bottom.

Stripes can be a particularly useful tool. To elongate, use verticals. To amp up a small bust or narrow hips, go for horizontals. Diagonals can bamboozle the eye, and in so doing smooth and balance out-of-proportion elements. Frills and gathers – vertical, horizontal, diagonal – will all function in the same way, but will, of course, add literal volume, too, as will rows of buttons.

TO BELT OR NOT TO BELT?

Bear in mind that a belt is the ultimate horizontal line, spotlighting your waist, or lack thereof. Fashion folk love to exhort us all to belt ourselves a waist, but that only works if you've got an approximation of one in the first place, or can afford to add volume elsewhere in order to fake it to make it.

Even the largest hourglass will look great in a belt. The slimmest column figure, on the other hand – by definition unwaisted – will only be flattered by a belt if they amp things up at the shoulders

The seven shapes

There are seven different body geometries, a number of which can exist in pairs, meaning that someone can be two things at once.



**Neat hourglass:** a defined waist, a defined bust, and a neat bottom and hips.



**Full hourglass:** a defined waist, a full bust, and a full bottom and hips.



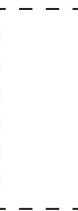
**Triangle:** full hips and thighs, a defined waist, shoulders that are narrow and/or sloping, and a top half that overall appears smaller than the lower.



**Inverted triangle:** a straight, square shoulder line, little definition between waist and hips, flat hips and bottom, and a lower half that appears smaller than the upper.



**Column:** narrow shoulders, a flat chest or small bust, and undefined waist, plus narrow hips and a flat bottom.



**Rectangle:** straight up and down (like the column) but, as the nomenclature suggests, wider, with square shoulders.



**Rounded:** a rounded shoulder line, fullness around the middle, and a flattish bottom.

and/or hips. Even then they might be better served by a peplum jacket or a full skirt. If you are rounded or rectangular, don't even go there.

## SKIM TO WIN

Never swamp a part of your body that you feel is too large. When in doubt, skim. A tapered pencil skirt, for example, can look great on someone with bigger hips, provided there's something on the top half that adds balancing emphasis to the shoulders. Trick the eye into thinking the big bits are smaller, the small bits bigger, and that the relationship between the two is proportional.

For a large bust, choose simple tops that are well cut, plus consider any of the following: wrap styles, narrow lapels, soft fabrics, scoop necks, under-bust seams or darts, or ruching. For a small bust, invest in a padded or moulded bra that has been fitted by an expert, then make hay with detailing on your top: breast pockets, buttons, smocking, statement sleeves, or – if you have got the upper arms for it – spaghetti straps or strapless. V-necks work on almost everyone.

The hardest body shapes to dress tend to be the rectangular and the rounded. It's easy to make the mistake of thinking unwaisted styles will work best, but again you want to skim, not swamp. A dress or top that is fitted to below the bust, then flares into a subtle A-line will probably be a good bet. Always remember to take a look at yourself sideways as well as straight on to check that an outfit flatters there too.

If you have a tummy you should look for semi-fitted styles that cleave to the top of the body, then again become looser – but not too loose – around the middle. When it comes to dresses, try an



**Bear in mind that a belt is the ultimate horizontal line, spotlighting your waist, or lack thereof.**



**Trick the eye into thinking the big bits are smaller, the small bits bigger, and that the relationship between the two is proportional.**

empire line, a semi-fitted shift, a subtle A-line, or a coat dress. Flat-fronted trousers are your friend, and so are prints and patterns, provided you factor in your frame size. A longer cut of jacket can also work well.

## THE ULTIMATE WARDROBE ESSENTIAL

Jackets. You need one. The best bit of tailoring you can afford. There's not a woman in the front row who doesn't have at least one on repeat. To buy well, and to wear it well, for which read in a contemporary way (perhaps undone over a floral dress or paired with jeans and a tee) is a one-stop way to make yourself look current. The fashion pack favours a double-breasted style, but you

need to buy what's right for your shape. Those two rows of buttons can be widening – the stripe affect again – so be careful if you have a medium or large bust or are a bigger size. (Though leaving it casually undone and wearing a more sculpted top underneath may be enough of a re-tool.) A very fitted style with visible seaming can do the trick if you are curvy. If you have a straight shape and a small bust you can try a boxy cut.

The single-breasted approach is more universally flattering but, again, if you are curvy, go fitted, darted, and seamed. And look for a jacket length that works with the length of your torso and legs. If you are short in the torso and long in the leg, search out a longer-line jacket. If you are long in the torso and short in the leg then a shorter jacket will probably suit you better.

## THE FRAME GAME

Measure your wrists, then follow the chart in this chapter to see whether you are a small, medium, or large frame, which refers to the size of your bones, and is unconnected to height or weight.



Pick patterns that chime with your frame, and accessories that do the same. Skinny shoes will make a big frame appear clumpy, clumpy shoes will make a skinny frame seem fly-away. A bold pattern will flatter a big frame, but dwarf a small one. Think middle, middle, middle for everything if yours is a medium frame – a bag that’s an A5 size or a bit larger, for example.

Seek out the brands that work best for your frame and shape, as well as your aesthetic. Often one that serves a country where lots of women share your physique will serve you well. If you are petite, try French brands like Maje and Sandro, and Spanish brands like Zara. If you are tall, Scandinavian labels such as Cos, Ganni, and Arket – all popular with the front row – work well, as do J.Crew and Gap. Good brands for the curvy include Phase Eight and John Lewis’s Modern Rarity plus – if you are ready to invest – Vivienne Westwood and Issey Miyake’s Pleats Please.

Shopping within one brand for a particular look is a great way to find pieces that work well together aesthetically. It is the job of people called merchandisers to make sure a collection functions as a whole: that’s how they hope to tempt the consumer to buy more. Use this to your advantage. You will know you are getting it right, and it will also help you to develop a confidence that will enable you to mix and match brands with panache a little further down the line.

Then there’s your frame shape to factor in, which is different from your frame size. Are you angular – all edges? Are you rounded and soft? Or are you a mix of the two, otherwise known as interjacent. You should be able to work it out by looking in that mirror again. (See? Told you you would get your money’s worth.)

You should go with fabrics that echo your lines, rather than oppose them. Sharp tailoring will look good on the angular, whilst soft lines will make them look more angular still. Soft lines will flatter the rounded. If you are interjacent you can pick and choose, plus you can play with different textures in a way that can be tricky for the other two.

Be realistic too about the fabrics that are going to work with your lifestyle. If you are a machine-washing kind of a girl – I know

## Blazer magic

Magic is a strong word. But a great jacket can deliver something close. It’s a staple for every fashion professional I know because it can effortlessly change up any look. The latest tweak is to wear a mannish style open over a feminine skirt or dress. But the jacket can be your best friend for other reasons. Buy the best cut and the best kind of detailing for your shape and size and it will spotlight you in just the right way.

*Single-breasted works on everyone, but is especially good if you are on the broad side. Change up predictable black or navy for a more interesting, yet still stealth hue like forest green.*



*If you are petite both double-breasting and contrast detailing will emphasize your curves nicely if you have them, endow you with some if you don't. A short cut will add the illusion of height.*

FIGURING OUT YOUR FRAME SIZE			
Height	Small framed	Medium framed	Large framed
under 157cm	wrist less than 14cm	wrist 14cm to 14.6cm	wrist over 14.6cm
157cm to 165cm	wrist less than 15.2cm	wrist 15.2cm to 16cm	wrist over 16cm
over 165cm	wrist less than 16cm	wrist 16cm to 16.5cm	wrist over 16.5cm

I am – then buy as little as possible that is dry-clean only. The good news is that certain female-led brands are now specializing in dresses and tailoring that look to be dry clean but that can actually be put in a cool wash. Bear in mind as well that many brands stick dry-clean-only labels on silks and other delicates that, in truth, can happily be put through a hand-wash cycle.

Once you understand your figure, and how its different elements interact, you will get a better idea as to how the clothes you wear interact too. I am not going to pretend this stuff is easy, although it will become second nature if you practise it. In the meantime, there’ll be some trial and error involved, of course. But one good way to get your eye in is to find a woman in the public eye who has a similar body shape to you and whose style you admire. Look and learn from how she dresses.

BE YOUR BEST BODY

Which brings me to you, the person wearing the clothes. The body. Invest the time and energy it takes to find your way to the best body you can, by which I don’t mean the thinnest. It’s not about changing your shape. Indeed, that’s another fallacy with which we are indoctrinated: that if you just exercise hard enough you will end up with thin thighs, a flat stomach, or whatever it is we are supposed to covet.

I imagine you don’t need to me to tell me that you are unlikely to achieve so-called perfection. But what you can acquire is the healthiest, strongest version of your own beautiful body. It doesn’t

matter what size you are, as long as you are looking after your body as it deserves – as you deserve. The most important thing you will ever wear is your own flesh. That, more than any dress, any pair of jeans, will determine how you feel about yourself.



Find a woman in the public eye who has a similar body shape to you and whose style you admire. Look and learn from how she dresses.

For me it has been yoga that has led me firstly to accept my shape, and then to commit to making it feel the very best I can. If that has also left me able to wear sleeveless tops en route – hurrah! – so much the better. But what I love is that I am stronger, more physically grounded in my mid-forties than in my mid-twenties. My body may not look as “good”, but it feels better, and it looks pretty darn OK. It’s an equation that has left me more at peace with my corporeal self than ever in my life before.

It is not important what your thing is. It is only important that you have a thing. It might be yoga, pilates, or chi gong, all of which – from the women I know in their 60s and 70s who practise them – are brilliant disciplines for age-proofing your mind and body. It might be as simple as a brisk 40-minute walk every day, more than enough aerobic exercise according to many experts, plus some stretching and some work with light weights (which can be far more enjoyable than it sounds).

Strengthening and opening your back and chest in particular will improve your posture. And great posture will transform the way you look, making you stand like Grace Kelly, even in a sweatshirt and combat trousers.

FIND YOUR FOOD HAPPY PLACE

Then there’s eating. So many of us are stuck in a dieting cycle, in a state of famine that is then inevitably followed by an out-of-control feast. We have lost touch with when we are genuinely



## The towel test

*Stand in front of that long mirror of yours and hold a regular towel by the two top corners of one of the shorter sides, the opposite side lightly touching the floor. Now lift the towel gradually upwards, looking at your lower legs as they are revealed. There will be two point of elevations at which – hey, presto! – your pins look their prettiest. Those are the skirt lengths for you.*

*The expensive brands have always been well aware of the power of the long skirt, but the more affordable brands are finally – finally – waking up to it too.*

*Never buy a skirt that's too short, but by all means buy too long, then get it altered.*



hungry, and when we are satiated. Follow the true appetites of your body and you will end up your natural size, which may be precisely the size you are, or may be considerably smaller.

Bear in mind too that each body has its own issues. You may feel you have your crosses to bear, but so do other people whom you might have thought have it easy. The flat-chested may dream of boobs, but as anyone with an ample cleavage can testify, it's hard to find clothes that fit, and any kind of detailing, even something as apparently simple as a ribbed finish, can cause problems. I have always coveted smaller hips. But small hips can make the waist look larger. Make peace with what you have got. Better still, celebrate it.

### TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Simplest of all is to showcase those bits of the body that are the most elegant on us all: our wrists and ankles. That's why cropped trousers tend to work so well, whatever your height. That's why a skirt length that cuts just below the fullest part of the calf, thus drawing attention to the ankles, is often the most flattering.

But – as I said – not always. Most of us have two points on the leg that work best for us, the second being higher up, and around the region of the knee – above it, below it or somewhere actually on the patella. Try The towel test (see left) to ascertain exactly which are the best lengths for you, and, if necessary, alter accordingly.

Indeed, that's the way to go generally. Alter, alter, alter. That's what stylists do. That's what the front row does. If you can't find something that fits, or – as is more often the case – you find something that fits in one area but is too small or large in another, buy the size that best fits your biggest part and get a tailor to adjust the rest. Tracking down and making friends with a professional tailor is almost as important as understanding and making friends with your body.

"I want women to look beautiful," Carolina Herrera once said. "I am in the beauty business, not the fashion business." And, of course, Coco Chanel had something to say on the matter, too. "Beauty comes when fashion succeeds." Dress to look your most beautiful, your most you. That's what matters.

## BODYMAPPING



*There's a dress to flatter every figure*



A patterned lower half and a simple top will balance out an inverted triangle.



Take a full-skirted dress with strong shoulders, add one belt, and a triangle or a column will be transformed into an hourglass.

A v-neck suits almost everyone; ditto flashing your ankles.



A cropped jacket can elongate a short body. Detailing at the hips can add curves to a column or inverted triangle.



She's done The towel test: that skirt hits in just the right place. And she knows that vertical stripes will give the illusion of height to her petite form. Full marks.

# THE TOPOGRAPHY OF YOU

Learning how to navigate your body is the most important skill you can develop when it comes to finding your way with fashion, and turns buying and wearing clothes into a pleasure. We don't get taught this stuff when we are growing up, so at first it might not come easy. But it's like anything else in life: practice makes perfect. This chapter should have helped you identify your particular figure, and given some guidelines as to how best to dress it. Now head to a multi-brand shop and start bodymapping for real. Try two different jacket lengths. See what they do for you. Two different dress shapes. At first it might seem overwhelming. In time it will become second nature.



*A double belt gives a contemporary feel*