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How to Work Your Wardrobe Workout Chart

Let me introduce you to my best wardrobing tool, the Wardrobe Workout Chart. I've been using this chart to put outfits together for my clients for decades. When these charts are filled in, my clients glance at them, get dressed in five minutes, and feel confident knowing they'll look and feel great in each outfit.

I'd love to show you how to use them. Print out a few Wardrobe Charts and then follow these directions.

General Instructions

On the top right of your Wardrobe Workout Chart fill in the season – spring, summer, winter, fall, or transition, between summer and fall or winter and spring. I like to add the date or month when the chart is created. I write that under the line for "season."

In the large box at the top left, write the key piece around which you'll build one to five outfits. This is a bottom piece from your wardrobe – a pair of pants, jeans, a skirt, or shorts. If you have three pairs of black pants, label each one differently: black wool crepe pants, black cotton ankle pants, black satin dressy pants. You can identify each pant by fabric content (cotton, linen, wool, silk), function (dressy, casual, play, work), designer, or the store where you purchased it.

On the left, you see a box for every part of the outfit – top, outerwear, footwear, underwear, accessories. Working from top to bottom, complete one full column with details for one outfit.

Go ahead and make another outfit using the same bottom piece. Style the same pant in a new way and fill in all the boxes under the next column, column two. You can continue this way, making five different outfits from the same pair of pants.

If you're styling a dress, identify the dress in the Key Piece box and fill in all the rest of the boxes except for "top."

Some people like to be reminded of the type of occasion they'd be going to when wearing each outfit. Make a note of the occasion (work, date, social) or the event (Carl's birthday party, anniversary dinner, ballet) at the top of each column.

Two columns of outfit details made with your black lightweight wool pants may be for work and three columns for date outfits.

If it's a particularly versatile pant, you can devote one whole Wardrobe Workout Chart to work outfits and another chart for date outfits with the very same pant. You can note "date" or "work" under "Season."

Slip each completed chart into a plastic sheet protector and put them in a three-ring binder. Or, you can photograph your charts and keep them in a file on your phone. When you're getting dressed, all you have to do is flip through the charts and decide what would be pleasing to wear. All the details are written out for you, so it's a snap!

If using a 3-ring binder, you can get color-coded dividers and group your charts by activity or occasion. You can group outfits by activity – work clothes, play clothes, social/event clothes, weekend clothes, or divide by season – fall, winter, spring, summer, and transition.

Wardrobe Charts need updating.

You've dated each chart, so you know when you created your outfit combos. I suggest you review your charts and consider removing any chart dated more than two years back. I'd even suggest reviewing charts from one year ago.

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Why? You'll style an outfit differently the second year because styles change, your personal style changes, you've added new pieces and new accessories. That black pant is ready to be refreshed.

Wardrobe charts give you confidence.

Your binder full of outfit charts eliminates stress and saves time. If you have outfits written on charts, you know you have plenty of things to wear. You won't be one of those people who complains about having a closet full of clothes but nothing to wear. Your charts are proof that you've got several choices. When you're stretched for time or not feeling very creative, you flip through your binder and choose an outfit that's tried and true.

Here is a more detailed account of how to create your charts.

Simple Steps for Creating Outfits from Your Closet

1. Grab a Wardrobe Workout Chart. Pull a pant or skirt from your closet. Try it on. Does it fit and flatter you? Great! Let's make outfits with it. Name that item and write it in the "Key Piece" box.

2. Go through your closet and pull out tops that you might wear with that bottom. Choose several. Start trying them on. Once you have a pant/top combination that you like, write a description of the top into the first column in the "Tops" box.

3. Next, what jacket, coat, or cardigan sweater goes with it? A different outer piece (what I often refer to as the "third" piece) can change the outfit's look. There's a big difference between a motocross leather jacket and a vintage sequined cardigan sweater. If they both work, create a separate entry for each combination (moving into the "2" column). Fill in the "Outerwear" box with your selection. Remember, we're completing one outfit at a time.

4. Try on several pairs of shoes with the pant/top/jacket combination. Note what socks or hosiery you'll wear. Write your approved choices in the "Footwear" box in that first column.

5. Next, you want to consider underwear or undergarments. Some pants need thong underwear to work, or they don't work at all! Some skirts need "smoothies" or Spanx, special undergarments that help give you a smooth line in your clothes. Some knit tops need bras with seamless cups, so the knit looks smooth and not bumpy like it would from a patterned lace bra. Make these notes now so you won't forget when it comes time to wear that outfit.

6. Now, look at your accessories. Accessories add personality and polish to an outfit. How are you going to finish this outfit? What earrings, necklaces, or bracelets will you wear? Will you add a scarf? What handbag looks best? You may end up trying on several different combinations before you're satisfied. Once you're happy with your choices, write all those items in the "Accessories" box in column one. Sometimes I use several accessories in a single outfit, and if I run out of space, I often go above to the "Underwear" box and use extra space there. Often you won't be adding anything to the underwear section, and it'll be blank. That's perfect for accessory overflow details.

7. Now view your outfit from head to toe in a full-length mirror. Take in the wonderful work of art you've just created. Make a note at the top of column one to remind you of where you'll wear it. Try to wear it within two weeks of building it.

8. Now take off everything except for the pant and get ready to make your next outfit. Using column two, create another look with a different top or jacket or both. Write down all the details. Take a look in the mirror. Appreciate your excellent work and then go ahead and make a third outfit using the same pant. You have space on this one chart to make five complete outfits. Do you see how you're maximizing your wardrobe investment by creating these ready-to-go outfits before the need to wear them arises? You're prepared and calm!

9. As you're building outfits, you'll discover gaps. Fantastic! This is your shortcut to figuring out what you need to put on your shopping list. You'll be solving mysteries, like why you never wear that tweed pant – because you really need an olive shoe or short boot to go with it! Or you'll discover a specific accessory is about to fall apart because it

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goes with everything in your wardrobe. You might want to start lining up a replacement now. Add it to your shopping list.

10. Create new outfits at regular intervals. I go through periods when I make three new outfits on the weekend. It relaxes me to know I have outfits for the coming week or upcoming occasions that I'm pleased with. I know I won't be in a panic to get dressed, which brings peace of mind. Create a habit of building outfits and charting them.

Let me know how this works for you. Enjoy!