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# STYLE FILES

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## A WORKPLACE GUIDE

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/THE SKINNY SCOUT /

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# Introduction

I'm going to say it – being a working adult is tough! While it's true that having a disposable income feels pretty awesome, what with the independence and newfound respect from the people around you, it can sometimes be a pain to decide what to wear to impress.

Hands up, if you're one of the many who stare dismally at your closet in the morning, filled to the brim with tons of pieces you've scored off the sales rack but with nothing that would make you feel special donning it. If only you had space for one more! Why, if only you had one more!

And that's where something needs to be done, pronto. Take the next possible weekend off everything – your laundry, your pet dog's checkup at the veterinary, your garden that needs pruning – and get down to business. The time has come for you to re-invent your wardrobe, and you need to do it efficiently. You'll be surprised at the end of this, at just how much you can get done when you put your mind to it!

To start off, gather a collection of pictures either from magazines or online blogs, featuring outfits that you envision yourself in, or accessories that you can see yourself ever wearing. It's not a rule that you can only pick something you think you can afford; Pick everything you would get if you could afford everything! That's the best way to find out what your style really is. (I'll talk later on in this book about how you can achieve your goal of attaining the look you've always wanted.)

Once you've got a collection going, don't stop. Stopping means you've stopped being inspired, and that's the fastest way to kill your evolution in terms of style. And that's the fun thing about keeping up with appearances. You never stop ageing, which is not necessarily a bad thing. And you probably won't have the same job years from now. Your life will go through several phases, and for each phase, you'll realise that your sense of dressing will change. And if you keep this going for years, you'll find that what you started with will be almost completely different from what you'll have 10 years, or even 5, from now.

Conversely, if you're still wearing that dress to work since 3 years ago, you know it's time to shake things up (or you've been very disciplined in maintaining your shape, and if so, great job!). Life is short – don't make it boring!

Ready? Now let's get started.

# How to Clear Your Wardrobe (Let's Make Some Space!)

It doesn't matter if your wardrobe only fits 5 bags and a season's worth of clothes, or if it's a massive walk-in that houses all your clothes, colour-coordinated from end to end. Every woman, every girl always reaches a point in her life where somehow it seems like some sort of witchery has occurred overnight and all those clothes look mightily better on the table than on her. Oh, if only this spell worked for all those Elie Saab gowns!

Now, when this happens, there are two things left for you to do:

1. Just pick something to wear and get it over with. After all, it's not the first time it's happened and there's work to be done at the office. This time will pass.
2. Just pick something to wear and make a solemn vow to update your wardrobe. If you seem to be gazing into a black hole, where do you think your life is headed?

No prizes for guessing which of the two I would pick if this happened to me.

One of the most overlooked aspects of life is physical appearance. According to a study conducted by Yale University, good looking employees earn an average of about 5% more, while the not-so-lucky ones can earn up to 9% less. It's not easy, always making sure you look put-together but it's necessary if you want to get ahead. Just ask any life guru and they'll tell you the same thing, that anything worth having takes effort and that hard work pays off. So if you want to add a new meaning to your life, you are the one who's going to have to do something and here's where I'm going to help you.

First, you'll need to clear some old stuff to make way for the new. It's like having passengers alight from a carriage before other passengers can board. The theory is simple, but can be difficult for some. However, if you follow these 3 rules, you might go about it more confidently.

## **Rule Number 1**

If it's something you haven't worn in the past 5 months, it's time for it to go.

## **Rule Number 2**

If it's got stains that can no longer be washed off (no matter how many times you've tried to bleach it), or worse, has holes where it isn't supposed to, you won't be wearing it anymore. So, off to the pile it goes.

## **Rule Number 3**

If it's pregnancy-wear and you're no longer going to have kids, you've got to let go. No, your daughter will not wear it for her pregnancy.

If you come across a piece of clothing that reminds you of a time in your past when something significant happened, I've got some bad news. Remember the three rules above? If it fits at least one of them, it goes too. Down that bottle of wine, if it helps. Stash it at the base of the pile and cover it up with all the other old t-shirts you'll never wear again, so that you won't have to see it. Call your best friend over to do the deed for you if it's too harsh to go at it alone (and then cry on her shoulder and eat that tub of Ben & Jerry's over your favourite episodes of The Big Bang Theory). Place a toilet roll over it and call for your cat. In any case, do what it takes to get rid of it. The irrelevant must go!

When you've finally come down to the very last bit in your wardrobe – socks included – give yourself a pat on the back. I know what it's like. My wardrobe isn't huge and clearing it already is a workout in itself! I do this once every couple of years or so (great excuse to get new clothes afterwards, and it really helps if you have to move) and personally love how satisfying it can be when I look at how much space I've created.

Now what?

Before we get to the bottom of what to begin acquiring for your newly-spacious closet, do spend a moment to donate what you've taken out. Bring what you've got to the nearest

Salvation Army post (if it's still in good condition), or get your relatives and friends to come over and pick whatever they like. You never know, someone could benefit from your pre-stash.

And now, the buying begins!

# Picking the Right Outfit

The reason you've cleared some space is so that you can add things in it. But what exactly should you acquire, and where do you start? Oh, all the choices you have out there! Gowns, maxi skirts, navy jeans, button-up blouses, heeled sandals, fascinators, scarves, and the list goes on. Truth be told, I'm getting all excited just writing this!

The trick is to find something that goes with most of the other items you see out there (or already own). If you focus with this in mind, then things become less complicated. Don't worry though, I've got a list of the 5 basic things you need.

## The Five Basic Things You Need in Your Closet

1. The Power Suit – Pants
2. The Power Suit – Blazer
3. Dark-Coloured Knee-Length Pencil Dress
4. Neutral-Coloured Crepe Blouse
5. Knee-Length High-Waisted Skirt

### 1. The Power Suit - Pants

The work suit no longer belongs only to the men at the workplace. Women in recent times have donned the power suit to help add that shot of confidence. And why not? Coco Chanel first wore pants to the beach to protect her modesty and ever since then, pants have grown to become a chic staple, be it for work or play.

And over time, designers alike have responded to the change in tastes. Straight cut, tapered cut, flared, three-quarters. A whole new range of styles gradually flooded the runway and storefronts, and it's all for the better!

A good pair of pants for work fits well but isn't too tight. Practise sitting in the fitting room when you're getting yours. If you somehow can't find one that allows you to stride with confidence and sit cross-legged, go to the seamstress to get your measurements done. It's always better to pay a little more for quality and comfort than for something that only looks good in an ad campaign. Your first pants should be black – it's the safest colour and also your best bet for when your monthly aunt visits. Stay away from linen – it's a material known to crease unforgivingly.

## **2. The Power Suit - Blazer**

A suit without a blazer is not a suit. The best blazer to get is one that matches your first pants, in terms of colour and material. Many stores that specialise in office wear sell suits in sets, and these should be your first purchase. Sometimes, these stores hold offers that give you a discount when you get both items together (that's because not everyone buys suits all the time). The good thing is, you don't need to get your blazer and pants in the same size. Make good use of this!

Now that you've got the blazer to go with your pants, let's get on with the rest of your inventory.

## **3. The Pencil Dress**

Most people stay away from pencil dresses because they think they make them look bad, or that only those with perfect figures can fit nicely in one. Again, if you can't seem to find one that fits like a glove, head to the seamstress!

Your first pencil dress should be dark coloured, preferably something along the lines of navy or muted grey. It should be straight cut with vertical seams and neat hems. Cotton is an ideal material for this, as it's stretchy and does not restrict motion. It also allows for air circulation,

which is something everyone needs during the hot summer months. For something more form fitting, which is what I recommend if you're slim, a polyester-elastane blend would work best.

The skirt should end at the knee level – not above, not below (your seamstress would know) – and there should be a slit at the back for easy walking. If you're top-heavy, the skirt should have more of a pouf at the hips. If you're bottom-heavy, the pouf should be at shoulders. From my experience, cupped sleeves are the most flattering. And if all else fails, Spanx is a saviour!

#### **4. The Crepe Blouse**

Crepe is a fabric that can be made of silk, wool, cotton or polyester. It's light, relaxed and flowy, and adds that touch of style to any office outfit. It reflects just the right amount of light – unlike a sequined top – and is aesthetically pleasing to the eye. A neutral coloured top is a good bet because it can go with most other colours and can therefore match the items you already own.

The best way to wear a crepe blouse is to pair it with a pair of straight cut pants or jeans (if you've got dress down days), or with the next item on our list – the high-waisted skirt.

#### **5. The High-Waisted Skirt**

I know what you're thinking. I can't see my waist! Don't be silly, everyone's got a waist, even you!

The high-waisted skirt makes it into this list, because it takes a confident woman to wear it (and anyone can be confident, no matter your body shape). It's got the underlying connotation like that of someone who wears red lipstick; just that red isn't always suitable for the workplace. That's why your skirt needs to be dark in colour but it needn't be boring.

Designs like pinstripe and houndstooth are perfect for the high-waisted skirt and add another dimension to your overall professional look.

Just like with the pencil dress, the skirt has to end at the knee and has to have a slit at the back. Side slits work fine too but always make sure that they don't go too high up.

## **Some Final Words about Your Closet**

Notice that I didn't include a white blouse in the list. Chances are, you already have one. It's not a surprise then, that almost everyone else has one. The key thing is you need to stand out and a white blouse won't do you justice. To be honest, I did away with mine completely after my very first year of working. If you ransacked my closet, you wouldn't even find it there!

There's an old saying: Dress for the job you want, not the job you have. Dream of what it's like to be successful, and imagine what things would look like if you were (if you aren't there yet). Don't ever feel unworthy of your clothes and your style. Good style isn't only for the rich or for big bosses. What you allow yourself to wear is how you present your inner self to others. Taking time to pick what you wear is a passive display of your self-respect and self-confidence. Let your personality shine through!

# Accessorise the Right Way

Oh, one could write an entire book on accessories alone. Parasols, hand fans, headscarves, watches, belts, and so many more! But this book is all about basics and as far as basics go, there are two things you need. The first is a bag, and the second, some full-time jewellery.

## Wave That Bag!

If I said that your bag didn't contribute much to how others viewed you, I couldn't be more wrong. The reason so many women splurge on that Louis Vuitton Speedy or Hermès Birkin is reputation. Just like how a good pair of shoes can carry you far in life, a good sac de jour can bring you places, and even inspire people you meet.

I'm going to tell you something you may not want to hear but may already know: People are always judging you based on how you look. First impressions count and you only have 7 seconds before someone creates a mental image of what they think you are like as a person. After that time, it will take even more effort to change their perception of you. It's harsh, but that's the way people are wired to be.

It's definitely not necessary to carry a handbag from a luxury brand. For instance, it's not a good idea to be carrying a Prada if you work for a non-profit organisation. The important thing is to be appropriate. Follow these 4 simple steps to find your IT bag:

### 1. Consider what goes in.

The first question to ask yourself is what you will be putting in your hand-carry on a day-to-day basis. If you deal with a lot of paperwork, you'll need something with structure. Your bag also needs to be strong enough to carry everything inside. However, you need to limit what you take with you – a bag that's too bulky signals to others you have a problem with decision making.

## **2. Pick a suitable size.**

Your bag can't be too large but it can't be too small either. After all, it's not a cocktail party you're attending. Make sure you look in the mirror when you're at the store. A general guideline is that your bag should complement your outfit and your frame, not overwhelm them.

## **3. Pick a standard colour.**

A standard colour is one that is easy to match. Remember that you'll be totting it around most of the time, so it has to go with most of your clothes. It also needs to look professional, so colours like nude, beige, brown and black work best. Of course, by all means have more than one bag but if you can only have one for now, then this should be it.

## **4. Leather, leather, leather.**

Personally, I'm all for leather. If you've wandered along the bag section of department stores long enough, or sifted through many a bag sale, you'll know that not all leather is created equal. Lambskin may be smoother, softer and more luxurious than cowhide but it is also more high-maintenance and not practical for an everyday bag. Saffiano is a personal favourite because of the criss-cross texture it gets from the stamping process. It is also resistant to scratches and is fairly easy to clean.

## **Some Final Words about Your Bag**

There are many types of bags out there in all sorts of designs and shapes. Find something that you're comfortable with and that allows you to go about your daily duties as well. Make sure that it isn't only good for work, but can also bring you to the bars after 7, or to the

grocer's for the evening's dinner. No sequins, no glitter, no skulls. Your bag can be the deciding factor as to whether your colleagues consider your suggestions – and we all know that can always help to increase your credibility at work.

You don't need to spend thousands on a branded bag. Of course, it looks good. Who wouldn't want one? But if you're in the midst of saving up for one, or are not considering ever getting one, make sure you ponder upon the steps above. Many brands like Zara or Mango manufacture bags with designs inspired from the runway, so you can still look equally stylish without having to sell your arm!

If you're against leather, a great alternative is canvas. It's heavy-duty, waterproof and long lasting. It's also sturdy when you need it to be, so if you like bags with a fixed shape, go for canvas.

Just remember: Your bag should add a special touch to your whole appearance; it should not be the only thing that looks good on you.

## **Bring on the Bling!**

Jewellery is the one thing that most people often miss out. Try to recall the last time you saw a colleague with some pretty bauble. Chances are, the person that pops into your mind is the new intern at work, or the lucky girl who just got proposed to.

Generally, people who've been in the playing field for more than a year tend to slowly slip away. First, it starts with no longer wearing as much makeup – or even a touch of makeup, for that matter. Then, the clothes will start to turn boring. Then, they no longer wear watches, or earrings, or get their nails done. In other words, they become complacent - or worse, nonchalant - and their priorities change.

Remember the first few times you took your paycheque? Remember how excited you were at the prospects of getting new clothes? Well, topping up your bank account no longer has that

exciting draw to it now that it seems to happen automatically every month, if you've got a steady job, that is (and if you're reading this, you probably do).

That's where you need to change your mindset. Now that we've talked about clothes and your workbag, the next thing on the list is jewellery.

I'm not talking about that thousand-dollar Cartier, though if you can afford it, it's not a crime. I'm referring instead to a significant piece that actually holds some meaning to you. It could be your white gold plated necklace that holds your good luck charm of a rabbit foot. It could be a bracelet you received from a loved one who has since departed. It could even be something your mother-in-law (who isn't exactly your best friend) passed on to you.

I splurged on a piece of jewellery once, some years ago. It's nothing much – just a simple three-diamond pendant on a white gold chain, worn around my neck all the time. I still have it, and it reminds me of the time in my life when I struggled to come to terms with everything that was happening around me. Now, every time I look in the mirror to appreciate its beauty, or to check if it's still as polished, I remember the words I told myself to be strong and make the wise decision.

And that's when jewellery starts to have a deeper meaning than just looking good under dimmed lights. Inanimate objects – even precious gems – don't mean anything unless you place a story within them, and that's what you need to do. When you create something of value, something that you value, you're sending a signal to others that there's a more intimate part of you waiting to be discovered. And when you unfold the story to a selected few, that's when bridges are formed.

Staying stylish with jewellery is a task best accomplished by those who know themselves the best. Take some time to find your next IT piece. Once you have an idea, have it on you almost all of the time, so much so that it starts to become part of your overall look, regardless of where you are and what you're doing. If it seems to fit you when you're completely naked in the bath, then you've probably found the right thing.

## **Some guidelines on wearing jewellery**

1. For your IT piece, pick just one of the following: a simple pendant necklace, a bracelet, a bangle, or a ring.
2. If having one piece of jewellery isn't your kind of thing, you can mix and match. 3. When wearing a statement piece, always wear it alone or with other smaller items. This is so that you don't take the attention away from your main trinket.
3. Experiment and play around with different types and colours of jewellery. This will help you find out what complements your look the best.
4. The colour of your earrings doesn't necessarily have to be the same as your top.
5. Jewellery is sometimes sold in sets. You can wear them all together, on their own, or with other items you also own.

## **Some Final Words about Your Jewellery**

Whether you're a fan of jade or sapphire, jewellery is a very personal thing. It can be used to mark milestones in life, or just add a certain mood to an outfit. Whatever the case, storing your bling needs to be done with care. If it's leather or silver, keep it away from water. When you go to the beach, remove it all and keep it away from direct sun. Spa salons offer lockers for your belongings, so tuck your jewellery in there too. When you take care of what you wear, you'll thank yourself for it years later.

# An Overview of Style at the Workplace

Dressing up for work can be a tedious exercise, especially when you're not yet used to it. However, you should always keep in mind that people automatically make judgments about you when they first look at you, so make it their - and your - worth! You have to get dressed up in the mornings anyway, so why not put your best look forward?

Famous Hollywood designer Edith Head once said, "You can have anything you want in life if you dress for it." I can't agree more. When you dress well, you tell everyone around you, without having to open your mouth, that you respect the work you do and the person that you are. When you dress well, believe it or not, it lifts up your mood for the day. What they say is true - that when you look good, you feel good!

It's best if you have supporters to help cheer you on on days when you feel like dressing up won't make a difference. And if these supporters can take up the challenge together with you, then it's all for the better!

To round things up, in this ebook, I've talked about several steps you can take to level up in workplace styling:

1. Clear your wardrobe.
2. Stock up on the 5 basic pieces of clothing you'll need.
3. Pick the right workbag.
4. Accessorise with jewellery.

As you are already a subscriber to The Skinny Scout, you have free access to my Beauty Resource Library, where there are tons of other beauty-related information and guides that can help you out. I always add more resources every now and then, so you should bookmark the page and

check back regularly. Do make full use of the resources in there, and if there's something you wish to see added, do let me know and I'll be more than happy to help.



Roxanne is the face & brain behind [The Skinny Scout](#), a beauty blog that hopes to inspire women around the world to be more self-confident with weekly emails. She teaches online beauty courses and workshops to help thousands of people present the best versions of themselves. She is also the founder of indie jewellery brand, [Trouvée.Co](#), which specialises in semi-precious gemstone pieces that are classic and timeless in design.

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