

What Women Wore in 1952 with comparisons to 2022

Who remembers 1952? How old were you then? This is an Extension lesson your mother or grandmother would have had. It was written by Murle Scales, Clothing Specialist at Oregon State College. It highlights the do's or don't of that time for getting dressed.. It could have been stressful with all the rules.

Women wore lots of plaids and plain dresses with flared skirts, a belt encircled their small waists. All dresses went way below the knees. They loved wing collars, blouses with cuffs and the favorite colors were mostly pastels. **They were modest**, words you don't hear anymore.

Here is the first line of this seven page lesson from 70 years ago. *A well-dressed woman is one that has every detail of her costume in harmony.* What is she talking about? What word makes you think this lesson is about Halloween? When did we stop using the word Costume and replace it with the word Outfit?

We're going to lightly hop and skip through this very rigid lesson. Laughing is fine as you discover we have come a long way since 1952. Your teachers added interesting facts, artwork, quizzes and games to lighten the topics.

In 1952, what **accessory** was the most important? Want to guess? **YOUR SHOES!** You certainly can't look charming and comfortable if your feet are hurting. Your face will show the pain. The opera pump and the plain strapless pump go well with any type of costume and makes the feet and legs look more slender. A wide strap on the pump makes the foot look heavy, short and wide.

NOW DRAW WHAT YOU THINK IS A PUMP. Draw a wide strap on your pump.

(A pump is a low cut woman's shoe with a sturdy heel)

A person who is large should avoid small, dainty shoes with extremely high heels, for these make her look top-heavy. Oops!

Lizard or alligator shoes should be worn only with tailored costumes.

Tall women can wear alligator shoes, but short women can not, the pattern is too large.

Short women can wear lizard shoes if they are wearing a plain dress or suit.

Do you have a pair of alligator or lizard shoes? Are they old? Do you wear them?

Okay, laugh at this statement. Bright colored shoes call attention to the feet so should be avoided by the woman who does not wish to draw attention to her feet.

**LOOK AT EVERYONE'S SHOES. WHO FLUNKS THIS TEST?
WHO HAS BRIGHT COLORED SHOES IN THEIR CLOSET?**

HOSE

In 1952, women wore brown, grey or black tone nylon hose to blend with their entire costume. You bought nylons to fit your foot size. Seamless stockings make the calves of the leg appear much larger, but a seam up the back of your leg makes them look more slender and fit better. You had to worry about the heel reinforcements, if they were much darker than the hose they would draw undue attention to your ankles.

Our Extension lesson did not mention the next question. **Did you ever wear nylons with a seam up the back?** How did you keep your nylons up. With the two G words, Garter belt or Girdle with straps that had clips. Remember how those clips left imprints on your tender thighs? *(Have the group share their garter belt and girdle stories)*

There were no pantyhose in 1952. Pantyhose were invented in late 1959 by a man who brought his WIFE'S experiment into the office. Pantyhose didn't become popular until the mid 1960's. Yahoo for pantyhose!

Interesting fact from 1952 – Lead Chemist Helen Diserens develops Ban Roll-On deodorant. She used the same concept as the ballpoint pen. Another Yahoo moment.

YOUR PURSE, this is a big deal.

It is usually wise to choose your purse at the same time as your shoes for the purse often matches the shoes. Buy a purse according to your size. Generally a small person should choose a small to medium size purse. The larger person a medium to a large purse. The small woman looks as if she were weighted down carrying a large, heavy purse and the larger woman looks just as odd with a very tiny purse. Try out a purse before a full length mirror before purchasing to see that it is in proportion with your size figure.

(Choose a tall person, a short person and fluffy person to be models. Have a collection of different size purses, large, small, shoulder strap, envelope, short strap, short handle.

Hand them to the “wrong” persons. As you read, let them find their right purse.)

Who should wear the small purse, who should carry the large purse.

Only a very tall person should venture to carry a shoulder strap bag.

A purse with a strap or handle should be carried with the strap over the left wrist.

A purse with a very short handle may be carried with the handle in the hand and the arm straight down at the side.

An envelope type of bag is carried under the left arm with the left hand balancing the end of it. Clap and than thank our models.

Let's take a break from the strict rules of dressing in 1952 to play a game.

On your paper write down 3, 5 or more fads that women or teens have used in the last 20 years **fads that those women or teens in 1952 would probably not thought of wearing.** An EXAMPLE is paying \$75 for a pair of black jeans with ripped knees.

We will give you a few minutes to write down your guesses.

Okay, let's go around the room, including the teachers, everyone sharing just one of your guesses. If you have the same idea or answer, cross it off your list.

The next person gives one of their guesses. More crossed off. Keep going around until only one person is left with fads that no one guessed.

Who has worn one or more of these fads?

Wouldn't the author of this Extension lesson be horrified at some of our answers.

GLOVES

A costume is not complete without gloves. To be well groomed, gloves must be immaculately neat and clean at all times. If you wear white gloves a second pair should be folded in a tissue and placed in your purse so that you will be sure to have a fresh pair in case that pair becomes soiled in opening doors etc.

Gloves should never match bright shoes and bags, but should be white, neutral color or match the color of your costume. Gloves are not to be carried in you hands.

Always wear gloves when wearing a hat.

HATS

Hats should be chosen with the greatest of care since they frame the face and should be the center of interest of the whole costume. The policy of wearing hats varies from community to community. When coming into a new community you should adjust to the prevailing custom. A hat is always worn when in a large city.

Regardless of where you live, veils should never be worn over the face at night.

TIPS ABOUT WEARING JEWELRY

Jewelry which is shiny on the surface and reflect light emphasizes skin imperfections when worn near the face or arms. Do not combine silver and gold jewelry in a costume. The new fancy eye glasses with silver or gold decoration limit the number of types of jewelry worn.

This lesson has been edited and new facts, games, quizzes and info added.

Written by Anne Engen, September 2022.

Some of the fads that women and teens have used in the last 20 years.

Fads you might not have seen in 1952 (outside of Halloween).

Shopping in grocery stores in PJ's and slippers in the middle of the day

Women and teens wearing bright orange hair, or rainbow colored hair

Women wearing jeans to church and weddings.

Women wearing short shorts (hot pants) in stores. And bending over!

Women wearing combat boots with dresses

Women and teens covered with tattoos

Women with "Enhanced Lips"

Women shopping or site seeing wearing a low cut to-small t-shirt and NO bra

Nose rings, and studs with chains on their face

Very heavy eye makeup

Women and teens wearing a man's tuxedo.

Women and teens wearing thong bathing suits. (no fabric over the buns)

Wearing flip flops everywhere

Women and teens using foul language in public, sometimes screaming it

T-shirts with naughty words or pictures

Strapless bra top with low cut tight pants, bare mid-drift.

Goth black outfits, black fingernails, scary eye make-up

Hoodies

Skin tight knit maternity tops or dresses

"Causal Friday" outfits in the workplace

Tall platform shoes

Young teens wearing dark fake eyelashes

Sports Bras

Bra straps showing (on purpose)