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Capsule Dressing for Men and Women

How to Have an Easy Wardrobe

By Karen Brunger, BHEc, AICI CIP

Capsule dressing can facilitate and enhance your professional success. It allows you the flexibility of an appropriate, coordinated look for any situation, whether it's a high-powered meeting, a day in the office, a lunch with friends or a cocktail party. It enables a higher-quality, more prestigious image; since fewer pieces are required, your wardrobe investment has more impact. Capsule dressing facilitates wardrobe organizing, planning and shopping, and lets you create a wardrobe that is effortless and timesaving.

Paul's Story

As the president and owner of a business specializing in information technology, Paul sells his products to CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. One CEO told Paul that he should see an image consultant, as he was sabotaging his business. Paul became my client. As a technology person, he had not factored his image into the equation of promoting his product. So, his image was uncoordinated, unprofessional and unflattering. His clothes were put together with no consideration for color, fabric or appropriateness.

We quickly discarded about 95 percent of his wardrobe, then developed some wardrobe capsules that would allow him to be comfortable, appropriate and credible, not only for his important meetings, but for all facets of his life. The colors, fabrics, and styles suited his body type, coloring and personality.

A month after we got him started on his first capsules, I received a telephone call from Paul. He was almost speechless, he was so overcome. He said, “I can’t begin to tell you the difference that this has made in my life.” He reported that his income had tripled, his staff was now treating him with more respect—and the biggest thrill? Women were approaching him!

The great news is that anyone can achieve this dynamic, cohesive and effortless image and wardrobe. Capsule dressing is an easy-to-use wardrobe system that can enable you to:

- Save time, money and space.
- Have something for every occasion.
- Create a “put together” look at all times.
- Eliminate frustrating wardrobe shopping and costly mistakes.

A capsule is a collection of clothing in which each item can be coordinated with the others, creating complete, pulled-together outfits.

Capsule dressing involves a total of eight steps spanning three areas of focus:

- Lifestyle analysis.
- Capsule planning.
- Capsule coordinating.

Lifestyle Analysis

Your wardrobe capsules should serve your current functions and help you achieve future goals. The chart on the following page lists different lifestyles and typical functions for each.

Step 1. Identify the lifestyle categories in which you plan to be involved within the next two years. List the categories in the chart on page 38.

Lifestyle	Typical Functions
Formal Business	High-level meeting; presentation.
Business	Day-to-day business; meeting; networking.
Business Casual	Desk work; teaching; networking.
Smart Casual	Creative work; sightseeing; traveling.
Casual	Shopping; school; visiting; spectator sport.
Active and Leisure	Exercising; lounging; housework.
Evening Informal	Clubbing; casual date.
Evening Semi-Formal	Cocktail party; wedding.
Evening Formal	Gala; ball; black-tie.

Step 2. List the approximate number of hours you would spend in each lifestyle in a typical week. It's easiest if you round the number up to the nearest 10. For each lifestyle that does not occur every week—for example, Evening Formal—assign 10 hours.

Now that you have established how your time is spent, you can calculate the capsules you require. The formula is:

- 10 hours = ½ capsule
- 20 hours = 1 capsule
- 30 hours = 1 ½ capsules
- 40 hours = 2 capsules and so on.

Step 3. List the number of capsules you require for each lifestyle.

Lifestyle/Function	Hours/week	Capsules

When you add together the total number of capsules that you require, it will probably be at least 5, but should not be more than 10. I have cleaned out some closets where there were enough clothes for 30 capsules!

Maria’s Story

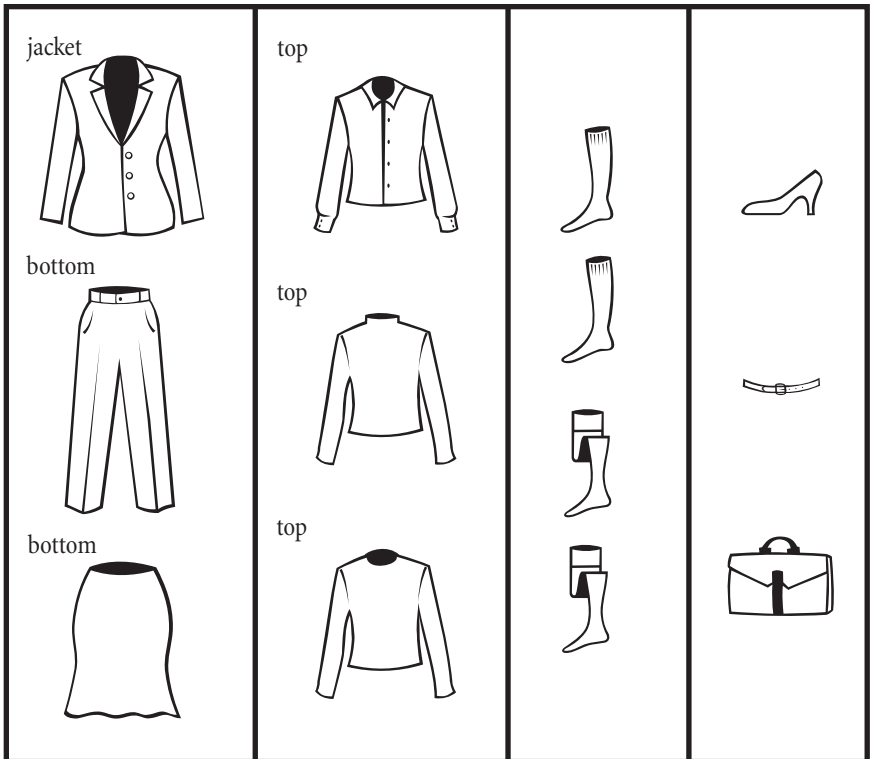
Closet chaos and clothing catastrophes described Maria’s situation. A sales consultant, Maria was told by her supervisor to seek the services of an image consultant. Maria emphasized over and over, “I have no clothes, because I have no money. I can’t afford to buy new clothing.” After six hours of steady closet cleaning, we had barely made an impression in the cavern she called a closet. It was still filled to overflowing, even though our cast-offs could have filled a Mack truck.

Although Maria had “no money to buy clothes,” every week she’d been buying a clothing item for \$5 or \$10. The result was a mountain of garbage-garments. If Maria had taken the same amount of money and used our capsule system, she could have been wearing high-end designer clothes.

Although this was an extreme situation, I've had a similar experience with many clients. They apologize for having no clothing, but they actually have enough items for numerous capsules. The problem is—very little, if any, can be coordinated together into outfits.

Capsule Planning

A sample capsule chart is below. Use this as a guideline for your capsules.



Step 4. Create your personalized capsule charts.

Set up blank charts, using the above formula, for your own capsules. Each capsule can have its own page. Label each capsule with the appropriate lifestyle. If you need clothing for both cold and warm weather, also label each category with the appropriate season.

Capsule Items

Step 5. Choose the items appropriate for each capsule.

Business requires suits, so an extra jacket is added. For women, skirts are dressier than trousers; use skirts in your business capsules. For men, in your business capsule incorporate five ties. For women, with each skirt or trouser, include at least two pairs of appropriate hosiery.

Capsule Colors

Step 6. Label each capsule with a projected color palette.

Each capsule should have one to three colors that coordinate. Use colors that harmonize with your own natural coloring. Neutral colors are long-term and are good for investment items. The higher the contrast between a suit and a shirt, the more professional. The darker, colder and more neutral the color, the more powerful and authoritative.

The chart below can help you choose the most appropriate colors.

Colors	Image
Neutral —dark and cold Black, gray, navy	Professional, authoritative, powerful, formal, sophisticated, conservative.
Neutral —light and warm Brown, taupe, tan, camel	Professional, elegant, practical, sincere, calm, inviting.
Light Ice white, soft white, ivory, eggshell	Light-hearted and open in a casual outfit. Professional and sharp in a business shirt. Elegant in an evening outfit.
Basic Green, blue, purple, burgundy	Creative, comfortable
Accent Red, orange, yellow, fuschia	Active, fun, noticeable, advancing, outgoing, warm, vibrant.

For more about selecting the best colors for your capsules, see Cynthia Bruno Wynkoop's chapter on *The Power of Red, Yellow and Blue: Color's Importance For You* on page 25.

Capsule Fabrics. Use appropriate fabrics for each lifestyle. The finer and silkier the fibers, the more elegant and dressy the fabric. Match the refinement of the fabric to the end use of the garment. Highly refined fabrics are used for business dress and elegant evening. Moderately refined fabrics are used for business casual and informal evening. Low refined or rustic fabrics are used for casual. The fabrics do not need to be listed on the capsule charts. However, they will need to be taken into account when coordinating your wardrobe.

Lifestyle Wardrobe Details. Here are some additional details that may help you develop capsules appropriate for lifestyles.

Formal Business	Color	Material
Suit	Dark, cold, neutral: navy, charcoal, black	Fine wool; solid or pin stripe
Shirt	White, cream	Highly refined cotton. Low-sheen silk acceptable for women
Tie	Burgundy, blue, grey, gold	Silk; solid, pin dot, rep, medallion
Pocket Square	White	Linen

Business	Color	Material
Suit	Neutral or dark	Fine wool; solid, pin stripe or subtle check
Shirt	Pastel or stripe	Highly refined cotton. Low-sheen silk acceptable for women
Tie	May match your personal coloring	Silk; may be stylized or abstract
Pocket Square	May pick up a color from the shirt or tie	

Follow the guidelines below when selecting your capsule items for each of the different lifestyle categories.

Business and Formal Business.

- **Suit.** Sharply tailored and classic. For women, skirt suits are more professional than trouser suits.
- **Shirt.** Classic with long sleeves and a collar.
- **Shoes.** Oxfords for men; classic pumps for women.
- **Hose.** Men: executive length matching trouser color. Women: sheer skin-tone hose.
- **Belt.** Classic leather, matching the shoes.
- **Jewelry.** Gold or platinum; classic, understated, and professional.
- **Pen.** Good quality and elegant.
- **Briefcase.** Good leather; the narrower, the better.
- **Eyewear.** Neutral; a classic style with non-reflective lenses.

Business Casual

- A jacket coordinated with trousers or skirt, or a suit in a non-business style.
- Texture and pattern can be stronger than at the business level.
- Colors can be lighter, softer, brighter and warmer than at the business level.
- Footwear may be less corporate, such as a loafer.
- Individuality can be slightly more expressed.

Smart Casual

- A sweater may replace the jacket.
- Textures, colors, and patterns can be more distinctive and relaxed than in Business Casual.
- Fabrics may be more medium-level refinement—tweed, corduroy, knits.

Casual

- Fabrics can be more rustic—suede, leather, denim, chunky knits.
- Styles are more relaxed—shorts, T-shirts, sandals.

Active and Leisure

- Clothing is appropriate for the beach, exercise or at-home.

Evening Informal

- Clothing is sensual, but casual.
- Fabrics may have some evening detail, such as sheen.

Evening Semi-Formal

- Men wear a dark suit with shirt and silk tie.
- Women may wear a cocktail-length dress; shoes and evening bag are shiny or match the outfit. Jewelry is glittery.

Evening Formal for Men

- Suit is a black evening or tuxedo suit; a cummerbund or waistcoat is optional. In hot weather, the dark suit may be replaced with a white dinner jacket.
- Shirt is white fine linen or cotton; it may have French cuffs for cufflinks, and use studs rather than buttons. The collar may be wing or standard.
- Tie is usually black—either a bow or regular.
- Shoes are black evening slip-ons or lace-ups, usually in patent leather.
- Socks are sheer black.

Evening Formal for Women

- Gown is full-length.
- Shoes and bag are evening.
- Jewelry is glittery.

Creating the Outfits

In coordinating your capsule combinations, the more related the design elements, the easier they are to combine. Here are some obvious matches:

Scale refers to size.

Small with small. Large with large.

Dimension refers to thickness.

Fine with fine. Chunky with chunky.

Line refers to lines within the design.

Straight with straight. Curves with curves.

Shape refers to the outline of a design.

Angular shapes with angular. Rounded shapes with rounded.

Texture refers to the look or feel of the fabric.

Sheen with sheen. Matte with matte.

Smooth with smooth. Rough with rough.

Soft with soft. Hard with hard.

Pattern refers to a printed design, such as a check or a paisley. When a solid is combined with a print, the solid picks up a color from the print. For example, a navy-and-red patterned jacket would be worn with navy or red.

When two or more patterns are combined, the more they have in common, the easier they are to combine. The patterns can relate in scale, dimension, shape, texture, or color.

Colors

When combining solids, use no more than three colors. When two or three solids are combined, then the secondary and accent colors appear two or three times. The dominant color may appear more than three times.

Generally, darker colors are kept lower—such as shoes—and lighter colors are kept higher. Belts and bags tone with shoes, and may be lighter. The eye goes first to the lighter or brighter color.

George's Story

George is a psychiatrist. He loves the outdoors and engages in numerous outdoor sports and activities. His goal was to start a business in a new, somewhat glamorous industry.

George's wardrobe consisted entirely of well-worn and worn-out rugged outdoor active-wear. Although he had the face and body of a romantic hero, they were hidden under a scruffy exterior. He needed help!

As George had a good income and needed a more polished image, it was easy to find capsule coordinates that flattered his deep autumn coloring.

The difference was stunning. His charisma and dynamic personality were enhanced. He got a girlfriend. He achieved his goal of starting a new business. He bought his dream car. And, he said everything was a result of his new image!

Capsule Coordinating

Now that you have planned the details for each of your capsules, let's start putting them together.

Step 7. On your capsule charts, place a ✓ beside the items you already own.

Step 8. Decide which items or capsules need to be purchased at this time. In most cases, it is advisable to buy no more than one capsule per season. For example, you may purchase one-half of a professional capsule and one-half of a casual capsule.

Your Wardrobe Financial Investment

The wardrobe financial investment suggested here would be appropriate for an economy similar to the United States and Canada.

The suggested annual clothing investment for all clothing items—including underwear, outerwear, and accessories—is based on your gross annual income, or the gross annual income that you would like to achieve.

If Your Lifestyle is Predominantly...	Your Investment Would Be...
Casual	3-4%
Business Casual	5-6%
Business	7-8%

How much should you invest in each item? Let’s use a business suit as the guide. The cost and quality of other items would then fall in line accordingly.

Joann is vice president of a bank and wears a suit every day. Her suit would be 1.2 percent—1.5 percent of her gross annual income. Leslie is a consultant and wears a suit once a month for meetings. Her suit is 0.8 percent—1.2 percent of her gross annual income. Gordon is a farmer and rarely wears a suit. His suit would be 0.5 percent—0.8 percent of his gross annual income.

The average duration of a well-made garment is five years. The higher the refinement and quality of the clothing, the longer it will last. Cold weather’s heavier weight clothing may last longer than hot weather’s lighter weight clothing.

Where to Shop

Select the appropriate stores based on price points. Look for the highest quality possible for the price range. Sales or discounts can offer good value, but not always the best choices.

If you have a challenge purchasing ready-made, you may choose custom or semi-custom. With custom—also called bespoke—the garment is fit to the body during a series of fittings. With semi-custom, the garment is cut from a standard pattern and altered to your measurements before it is assembled.

The advantage of custom or semi-custom is that you control the color, style, fabric, workmanship and fit. Especially for suits, if you are not easy to fit with ready-made, your best choice is custom or semi-custom.

Capsule Combinations

Working with capsules can allow you to build a large wardrobe to handle a variety of situations, based on a few pieces. Here are the number of outfits that can be created from capsules of five items—one jacket, two bottoms, three tops. The number of outfits depends on how the items can be combined.

If you like mathematical formulas, and you would like to calculate the number of outfits in your wardrobe, here is my formula:

$$(B \times C) + (B \times J \times T) - (B \times S)$$

B = bottoms

The other letters are tops, jackets and sweaters that can be worn:

C = alone

J = over something else

T = under something else

S = alone and under and over something else

Number of Capsules	Number of Outfits
1	6-18
2	12-120
3	18-378
4	24-859
5	30-1,650

Even if you have some items that are limited in their coordination potential, you can still achieve a wide range of looks.

Helen's Story

Helen is an investment banker with whom I worked on optimizing her image and wardrobe. Helen had a dilemma typical of most of my clients. She had “nothing to wear.”

When I went through her closet, Helen actually had enough clothing for approximately 50 capsules. The problem? Nothing coordinated. She had also invested in low-quality clothing, which sabotaged her confidence, professionalism and credibility.

Within a year of working with me, Helen had a coordinated wardrobe that showcased her credentials and outgoing personality, enhanced her coloring and physical features, and allowed her to be pulled together and comfortable for any situation. She shared, “I spent exactly the same amount on my wardrobe this year as last year. The difference is, at the end of last year, I had nothing to wear. At the end of this year, I have clothing for any occasion that is inspiring and empowering.”

Build your own wonder wardrobe. Coordinate through capsules, and make getting dressed easy, inspiring, and empowering. Capsule dressing will save you time and money and best of all, you will look great and feel confident in every situation.



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*Recognize potential,
embrace possibilities,
and intensify personal power*

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Karen Brunger is a recipient of the Award of Excellence, and the Who's Who Canadian Woman of the Year. International President of the Association of Image Consultants International for 2007-2009, Karen also served as international VP Education for four years. A pioneer in the industry, her in-depth knowledge and broad experience span twenty-five years.

As a holistic image consultant, Karen facilitates authentic transformation. She has optimized the personal and professional development of more than 2,000 individuals on appearance, behavior and communications to ensure they achieve more of what is possible. She draws on a variety of models, including neuro-linguistic programming and energetic repatterning. Her private clients have included executives, entertainers and politicians.

A dynamic, engaging and inspirational keynote speaker and trainer, Karen has conducted corporate seminars and workshops for many Fortune 500 companies.

As an international trainer, Karen has coached some of the top consultants in the industry. The producer of numerous workbooks and tools for image consultants, her systems and products are currently in sixty countries.

Media-trained, and a regular guest expert, Karen has appeared in hundreds of print and broadcast media within Canada and internationally. She is a regular contributor to *B Magazine*.

“Executive Image Power is the key resource for always making a great impression, feeling confident and getting the results you want. Your image matters when networking and building relationships. This book has hundreds of great ideas and insights and is a ‘must read’ for every career-minded professional.”

—Jill Lublin, Author of *Get Noticed-Get Referrals*, *Networking Magic*, and *Guerilla Publicity*

Your executive or professional image is the message you send out to your clients, potential clients and colleagues every time you walk in a room, attend a meeting or talk on the phone. Rev up your executive image power now by implementing the easy tips and techniques recommended by top image experts who have joined together to give you their most powerful career-building strategies.

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