

Teen Choices: Planning Clothes for Prom



Prom dresses and tuxedos are very special. You will probably wear a particular outfit only one time, but chances are you will be photographed in it. The picture will serve as a lasting memory of your teen years. Prom dresses and tuxedo rental cost a lot, so you want to make the best choice possible. This publication explains a few things to think about as you decide on your outfit.

Consider all your prom night activities

Think about what you will be doing before, during, and after the prom and whether there will be time to change clothes when your activities change.

- Dinner before – you need to be able to sit comfortably at a table or booth. Hoops or very bouffant skirts may be a problem.
- Dance – you need to be able to move, lift your arms, twirl, etc. Strapless gowns may slip and become embarrassing. Off-shoulder, portrait necklines may restrict your reach so you can't lift your arms to your partner's height.
- After-prom party – you need to be able to get in and out of a car or vehicle.

Your outfit should be comfortable enough for at least 8 hours of wear if you plan an all-night series of activities without changing.

Consider fabric and garment construction

Be sure to try on the dress or tux to see how you will look in it. Then, test it out to see how it will fit and what will happen when you do your dance moves or bend over.

Although girls may want to go for a sexy look in a dress, the more that is revealed, the less is left to the imagination. Imagination and suggestion are often more powerful in attracting attention than what is revealed.

Fabric does not need to be durable enough for a hike in the woods, but it does have to be strong enough to hold up during an evening of energetic dancing.

Whether a dress is backless, scoop-necked, off-shoulder, or strapless, the “under” construction and/or your lingerie are important. Strapless gowns stay up better if they fit closely and have inside “boning” to make the top stand up stiffer.

Tuxedo coats may have a jacket similar to a suit or a cut-away design with tails. Find out from your friends what style they plan to select, so you won't feel awkward.

Cummerbund, tie, and vests usually are priced separately and cost varies with design. These come in a variety of colors and can be matched to your date's dress if you plan together.

Pants may be adjustable at the waist, but length will not be. Suspenders may be offered (with an additional charge) but may be very useful if the waistline fit is a bit loose for the leg length needed.

Consider design elements

Think about color. Some are classic—red, white, navy, black. Some are fashion colors for this season only. Some seasons emphasize yellow, turquoise, fuchsia, lime, or orange. Very bright colors are sure to attract attention, so sometimes they are used only as an accent.

Contrasting colors in the bodice or skirt or shirt and pants will make you look shorter. Cool colors (green, blue, violet) tend to “retreat” making you appear smaller, while warm colors (red, orange, yellow) tend to “advance” or make you appear larger than you really are. Light value colors (pastels such as light pink, beige, baby blue) tend to make you appear larger, while dark or dull colors tend to make you look smaller.



Think about fabric textures and pattern. Tight, shiny spandex or satin will make you look larger than you are. Clinging fabrics, sequins, bulky, heavy fabrics, pile fabrics, or stiff, crisp fabrics also can add weight, which may be exactly what you want. Dull textures will minimize your appearance or size.

Floral or patterned chiffon prints, checks, lace, and brocades are popular some seasons and may help camouflage features you want to minimize. Large prints, plaids, or spotty designs make your size appear larger; small all-over prints and subdued patterns in dull or dark colors minimize size.

Think about line and length. Silhouettes may be slim, body hugging, or full skirted. The latter tends to conceal unequal or less than perfect body proportions.

In length, prom dresses range from above the knee to floor length. Ankle length or tea length are less trouble to walk in than one that sweeps the floor. Above the knee styles assume you have knees worth looking at, appropriate hosiery, and appropriate lingerie for some degree of modesty. Be sure to try on the dress with the shoes you will be wearing. High heels will raise the skirt hem from the floor—flats may make a long skirt drag.

Consider your friends' opinions

Think about whether you want to dress differently or in a way similar to the way your friends will be dressed. You do not have to wear a short dress just because others may. Individuality in dress is very important. Your dress should make a statement about you, not about everyone else.

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Consider cost

Consider cost of the outfit in relation to how much that amount of money would buy if you needed shoes, a coat, jeans, new underwear or lingerie, etc. Vintage dresses from second hand stores may save money. Shop around comparing price and quality.

Young men might rather invest in a dark suit that can be worn later, rather than renting a tux; however, much of this depends on the local tradition.

Consider accessories

Think about the items you have or will need to go with the outfit.

Shoes. Fabric shoes that match will have limited use after prom. A better investment might be a pair of white or patent strapped sandals or pumps that can be worn all summer.

Purse/billfold. Girls need a small purse for cosmetics, personal supplies, identification cards, and "emergency money." Boys need a trusty billfold for tickets, cash, and identification cards. Emergency money to call home for a safe ride (or another reason) is always a good idea.

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