Fashion Feasibility

Guide C-312

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Cooperative Extension Service • College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

Selecting fashions that present you at your best is not difficult if you apply a few basic principles of design. But in order to apply design principles correctly, you must know your figure type. Which are you?

Tall Average

Short Average

Tall Slim

Short Slim

Tall Plump

Short Plump

Or, perhaps both your height and body type are average. Whatever your figure type, the fashions you wear will be flattering or unflattering depending on their designs.

To help you select the designs best suited for your figure type, consider the following design principles.

LINE

The wise selection of line in fashion design can create optical illusions to flatter your appearance.

Line in fashion is seen in garment details and in the garment silhouette. Details include seamlines and garment features such as pockets, collars, belts, and openings. Silhouette refers to the shape of the garment. A silhouette in fashion is dependant on the design of the garment and the fabric used. Both the detail lines and the silhouette influence the optical illusion created when a garment is worn.

Look at these examples of optical illusion:
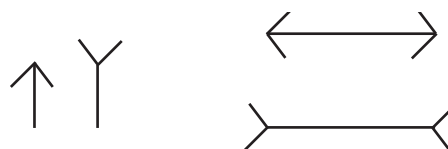
Would you believe the vertical lines are the same length? The horizontal lines are the same length also. The eye follows each line until it meets a line that turns downward or upward. The lines look shorter when lines turn downward and longer when lines continue upward.

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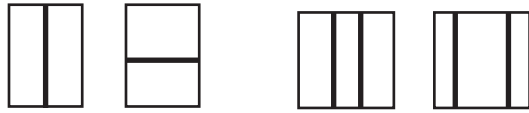
Now, look at the rectangles. The four rectangles are the same size, but the use of a vertical or horizontal line within each rectangle creates an illusion of varied size. When two or more vertical or horizontal lines are used, the spacing between the lines will affect the illusion created.

Generally, vertical lines that carry the eye up the figure without interruption will give a taller, more slender illusion. Lines that stop the eye from traveling upward by moving the eye from side to side or back down will create a shorter and heavier illusion.
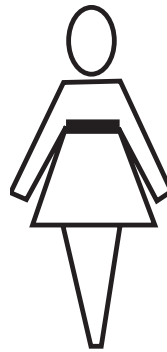
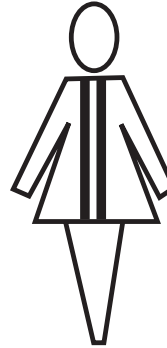**Consider these examples:**
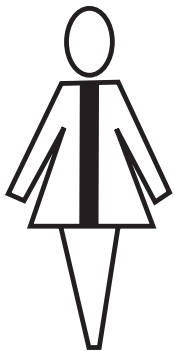
The single vertical line moves the eye upward, with nothing to interrupt its movement.
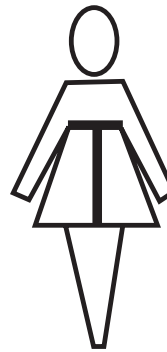

The magic "Y" creates a feeling of height as the eye is guided upward, with nothing to impede its vertical motion.

The longer your eye can travel upward without being interrupted by a horizontal line, the taller the figure will appear.
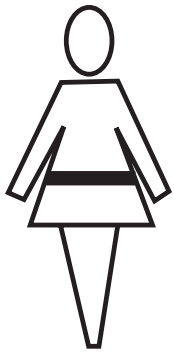

Two vertical lines spaced close together form a narrow panel that moves the eye up the figure.

A vertical illusion becomes a horizontal illusion when a vertical line is topped with a horizontal line, causing the eye to move from side to side.

A vertical line suddenly appears shorter when the eye is forced downward.

The sooner the eye encounters a horizontal line, the shorter the figure will appear.
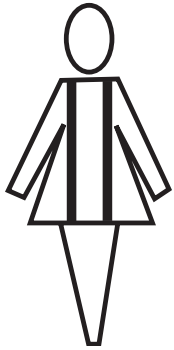
Two vertical lines spaced far apart form three wide panels that move the eye across the figure.

COLOR

Color is one of the first things people notice about clothing. The use of color can create illusions of the figure size in the same way line does. Select colors based on your complexion—hair, skin, eyes—as well as your figure size.

Colors should complement your complexion. A complexion that tends to be sallow (yellow tones) should wear colors that bring out the pink/red tones of the skin. A complexion that is florid (red/blue tones) should avoid colors that emphasize the redness of the skin.

Matching color to complexion is a very personal matter. Old adages like "redheads should never wear pink" are not always valid. Careful selection of the value and intensity of a color, its placement, and the complements used with the color can allow almost everyone to use it.

Colors are classified as warm (reds, yellows, and oranges) or cool (blues and greens). Warm colors tend to create an illusion of greater size. Cool colors tend to create an illusion of reduced size.

The brightness or dullness and the lightness or darkness of colors also affect the illusion created. Dull and dark colors seem to recede and make the figure appear smaller. Bright and light colors have the opposite effect.

In addition to these general characteristics of colors, how they are used will also influence the illusion created. Contrasting colors in tops and bottoms create a horizontal line where they meet and tend to shorten the figure. A single-color outfit gives a vertical feeling and creates an illusion of height and slimness.

When several colors are used in a single outfit, the amount, placement, and contrast between the colors used will determine the effect. If the color is printed in the fabric design, the size of the design, as well as the colors used, must be considered. Generally, the size of print should be selected in relation to your figure size: small figures look best in fabrics with small designs, while large figures look best in fabrics with large designs. These guidelines are especially true if the colors are bright and contrast strongly.

TEXTURE

Because garments have combined design elements of texture, color, and line, each must be selected in relation to your figure and how they affect each of the other elements. The effects of texture in fashion influence how colors appear and how design lines function.

Texture describes the body and surface of fabric. Textures may be rough or smooth, coarse or fine, crisp or clingy, soft or stiff, thin or bulky, opaque or sheer, shiny or dull, heavy or light, or any combination of these characteristics. Because textures have many characteristics, they can enhance or detract from a garment's design. They also affect the illusions of size and shape of the figure.

Here are some general guidelines for selecting appropriate textures for garments:

• Soft or clingy textures reveal the figure and emphasize figure irregularities.

• Stiff or crisp textures stand away from the body and hide figure irregularities. Very stiff fabrics appear to add weight and dwarf small figures. Moderately stiff fabrics are good on most figures.

• Bulky textures seem to add volume to the figure. Small figures are overpowered by these textures, but they are good for tall, slender figures. They can be used to balance an irregular figure. Example: Bulky sweater for figure with small bust and full hips.

• Dull finishes absorb light and generally make the figure look smaller. They are suitable for all figures.

• Shiny fabrics make the figure appear larger and reveal figure irregularities. Shiny fabrics are best for average to slim figures that have regular proportions.

• Coarse or rough fabrics are good choices for average to slim figures. They add volume to large figures and overpower small figures.

• Smooth (not shiny) fabrics hide figure irregularities and are attractive on most figure types.

Tips on Selecting Fashions For You

Most women have special figure problems that they want to de-emphasize. The following suggestions are designed to help you select fashions that will generally camouflage problems and flatter your figure.

To look shorter or heavier select:
• Details extending beyond the silhouette
• Bulky, bunchy silhouette lines
• Curved rather than straight lines

• Crosswise design lines
• Horizontally striped fabrics
• Short, broken vertical lines
• Short diagonal lines
• Combinations of vertical and horizontal lines, as in a plaid fabric
• Full, horizontal drapery across the bustline or hipline
• Soft fullness
• Bloused waistline
• Flaring or contrasting cuffs and collars
• Wide, bulky collars
• Capes
• Separates, two piece effects, overblouses
• Flounces
• Yokes and insets
• Patch pockets
• Off-the-shoulder effects
• Wide belts and cummerbunds
• Dolman sleeves
• Long, full sleeves
• Wide, flowing sleeves
• Three-quarter sleeves
• Gathered, pleated, and flared skirts
• Short skirts
• Short coats
• Long jackets
• Long torso styles
• Double-breasted styles
• Peplums and tunics

To look taller or thinner select:
• Details within the silhouette
• Straight rather than curved lines
• Long, vertical lines, especially near center of figure
• Vertically striped fabrics
• Simple, uncluttered lines

- Long diagonal lines
- Slim, smooth silhouette lines
- Narrow panels or gores
- Narrow, standing collars
- High necklines
- Long, narrow, pointed collars
- Long, narrow V- or U-necklines
- Narrow vest openings
- Narrow belts, preferably to match garment
- Long, straight sleeves
- Raglan sleeves
- Sleeveless garments
- Decoration high on the shoulder or near the neck
- Slim skirts
- Skirts as long as possible to be fashionable
- Boleros or short jackets
- Full-length coats
- Coat with button-down-the-front style
- Princess lines and beltless onepiece dresses

To make your short waist look longer select:

- V-necklines
- Center front closing with collarless neckline
- Narrow center panel in bodice
- Long torso lines
- Overblouses
- Short skirts (within fashion limits)
- Narrow or no belt

To make your long waist seem shorter select:

- Wide belts and cummerbunds
- Vertical lines in skirts
- Wide midriffs
- Skirts as long as possible to be fashionable
- Shoulder yokes
- Boleros and short jackets
- Raised waistlines

To conceal a flat chest select:

- Soft front fullness (gathers, pleats, frills)
- Large collars
- Bows at the neck
- Round, soft details, such as in collars
- Cowl necklines
- Bolero jackets
- Capes
- Pockets and pocket flaps at bustline
- Full sleeves
- Cuffs on sleeves adjacent to the bust line

To conceal a large bust select:

- Soft front fullness, either above or below the bustline
- Jabot or soft full tie at the neck line
- Softly draped bodices
- Lines to broaden shoulders
- Boxy jackets
- Full skirts
- Soft flare in skirts
- Details in skirts

To make narrow hips seem wider select:
• Wide center panel in skirts
• Hip yokes
• Pleated skirts, especially with wide pleats
• Skirts with side drape, especially at hips
• Wide or contrasting sleeve cuffs at hipline
• Side-pleated skirts
• Gathered skirts
• Circular skirts
• Large patch pockets, especially toward side of skirt

To make wide hips or large thighs seem more narrow select:
• Soft fullness or gores in skirt
• Narrow center panels (attracts eye away from silhouette)
• Widening effect at the waistline
• Shallow skirt yokes
• Loose, short jackets
• Bodice emphasis at the shoulders

To hide a swayback select:

• Straight-line jackets
• Short jackets ending below the waistline
• Gathered skirts
• Belts buckled at the back
• Bloused bodices
• Capes
• Peplums
• Crushed belts or cummerbunds
• Lengthened, loose bodices

To hide a prominent abdomen select:
• Details away from the center front
• Styles without belts
• Bodices with easy gathers at the waistline
• Cord belts that tie to the side of the tummy
• Details above waistline
• Overblouses
• Dresses with a side-wrap
• Narrow, self-fabric belts

To conceal round shoulders select:
• Slightly bloused backs
• Blouse gathered at waistline
• Small collars
• Semi-fitted jackets
• Bolero jackets
• Set-in sleeves

To make your broad shoulders seem more narrow select:

• Oval or V-necklines
• Narrow collars and lapels
• Raglan sleeves
• Kimono sleeves
• Flared peplums
• Horizontal lines in skirts
• Full skirts

To make your narrow shoulders seem wider select:

- Horizontal lines at chest
- Shoulder yokes
- Wide, cape-like collars
- High pockets
- Wide lapels
- Diagonal lines to tip of shoulders
- Bateau necklines

To make a short, plump neck appear longer select:
- Narrow, deep V-necklines
- Narrow, flat, and pointed collars
- Cardigan styles
- Low necklines

To make a long, skinny neck appear shorter select:

- Curved, high necklines
- Standup collars
- Square necklines
- Soft, full, or deep collars
- Scarves and ascots
- Ruffled jabots

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If you have a square face select:

- V-necklines
- Deep, oval necklines
- Sweetheart necklines
- Soft, rounded collars

If you have a triangular face select:
- High, square, or round necklines
- High, draped necklines

If you have a long face select:
- High, round necklines
- Softly rounded collars
- High, rolled collars
- Bows, scarves, and ascots

If you have a round face select:
- Narrow, deep V-necklines
- Narrow lapels
- Small, pointed collars
- Low necklines
- Long, narrow collars

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