

Fashion: Introduction and Vocabulary

You know, I can talk about English grammar as an expert, I think. But, this week we will be talking about something where I'm not an expert. This week we're going to be talking about clothing, and about the kinds of clothing that people wear. The word for that is **fashion**, and I have to say that I'm not an expert in it. Some of my clothes are ten years old! I wore them in high school!

But, even if I don't know which clothes are **fashionable**, I do know the words to describe them. When I talk to my students about clothing, the best system is for them to tell me *what* clothes are fashionable, and I tell them how to describe them in English!

So, this week we're starting in on a topic where everyone has something to say. Feel free to tell me what you think in the comments. Are there 'fashion' topics that you think got left out? Do you think that you can describe what your fashion or style is? How is your taste in clothing different from the people that you know? Let me know!

Here's the vocabulary that we'll be using this week.

Sleeve: The sleeve is the part of a shirt that holds your arm. Shirts, sweaters, sweatshirts, and coats all have sleeves. When I make a mess eating, I sometimes clean my face with my shirt sleeves, though my wife always tells me I shouldn't!

Short-Sleeved: When a shirt has **sleeves** that come over the shoulder and then stop, it's a short-sleeved shirt. I think short-sleeved shirts are more comfortable in the spring and summer! And most T-shirts are short-sleeved. When you play sports, you mostly want a short-sleeved shirt.

Long-Sleeved: Long-sleeved is obviously the opposite of **short-sleeved**. When a shirt has **sleeves** that come all the way to your hands—or almost all the way to your hands—it's a long-sleeved shirt. I wear long-sleeved shirts with a **collar** to work. If you wear a suit and tie, you probably have a long-sleeved shirt on.

Collar: The part of a shirt that goes around your neck is the collar. Though, technically, every shirt that has an opening for your head has a collar, we normally use the word to refer to the part of a shirt that covers your tie. When you think of a suit, you probably think of it with a **long-sleeved** shirt with a collar.

Crew-neck: T-shirts don't have a **collar**, not the kind you use for a tie. They are what we call crew-neck shirts. Crew-neck describes any shirt with just a round hole for your head. T-shirts are the most common crew-neck shirts, but you can also buy crew-neck sweaters.

Turtleneck: If you wear a shirt that has what looks like a third **sleeve** for your head, you're probably wearing a turtleneck. I wear a turtleneck when it's cold, or sometimes under a jacket,

because it's a less conservative 'formal' look.

Old-fashioned: Do you know anybody who likes things the way they were fifty or a hundred years ago? Sometimes our grandparents talk this way. We say they're old-fashioned. Old-fashioned is the opposite of **modern**. We think of our grandparents as being old-fashioned. I like big, old-fashioned cars and I like old-fashioned clothes—suits with vests and full-length dresses—too!

Taste: You probably know the word 'taste' meaning the way food feels in your mouth. But it has another meaning. Your taste is not what someone else would taste if they were to eat you, it's the things that you like. The cars that are your taste in cars. And, if you only like **old-fashioned** clothes, then you have an **old-fashioned** taste in clothes.

Modern: Do you like new buildings? The ones made of concrete and glass? Then you like modern buildings. Modern means recently made, or with a new design. Computers and iPods are modern inventions, and what you hear on a 'pop' radio station is modern music.

Trendy / Fashionable: When we talk about clothing, we don't normally say **modern**. Because **tastes** change almost every month, the newest **taste** in clothing is called trendy or fashionable. The clothing you can see on MTV, for example, isn't my **taste** in clothes, but it's certainly trendy! Most of my students think my clothing is **old-fashioned**, they prefer fashionable clothes.

Trend: You can use the word 'trend' for more than clothing. A trend is the direction things are going, or the newest thing. It seems, for example, that the iPhone is the newest trend.

Fashionable describes any clothing that most people seem to like, but a trend is the very newest thing on the market. Trendy clothing is, I think, the most expensive!

Fashion: Can you think of clothing that all of your friends like? That's the fashion (or the 'style,' the words mean the same thing) of your friends. Fashion refers simply to clothing that is popular. The clothing you see most people wearing on the street is the current fashion. The current fashion isn't always the newest thing—sometimes old fashions 'come back'—but the current fashion is seldom cheap!

Non-conformist: Almost everyone knows what the newest **trend** is, or what the current **fashion** is, but there are a lot of people who try to wear clothing that is the exact opposite of what is **fashionable**. We call these people non-conformists. If you know the terms 'punks' or 'skinheads,' both groups of people are non-conformists: the clothing they wear isn't **trendy**!