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The 10 Essential Ingredients

Wardrobe Staples Every Working Woman Needs



Every woman who works in an office has been there.

She wakes up in the morning, realizes she's got that big meeting or client appointment, rummages through her closet, but can't find a thing to wear. Or she suddenly remembers it's dress-down Friday and doesn't have the time to assemble a creative casual outfit.

That's where the basics come in.

According to designers, dressing for work has never been easier for women who've got the following 10 classic items in their wardrobe. From the perfect white shirt to a pair of take-me-anywhere shoes, these are the staples that do double-duty for most females. These essentials exude confidence, easily match with other fashion items, and can be dressed up or down with a switch of accessories. And they go from workday to weekend in a snap.

And best of all? They never go out of style.

1 The Perfect Black Skirt

The black skirt is a wardrobe staple every woman must have in her closet. A slim, above-the-knee version looks classic, no matter what it's paired with, and flatters most figures. A bias-cut style, for instance, in a versatile knee length, will add a feminine touch to even the most corporate work wardrobes, and can be dressed down with a more casual top. An on-trend belt added to a basic skirt will give it a more upbeat, fashion look.

2 Flattering Black Pants

There's nothing more essential than black pants. Black pants are slimming and versatile and go with almost everything. A slim, boot-cut variety looks great with everything from boots to heels. Black pants can be worn with a man-tailored button-down shirt to the office, a sheer blouse for a night on the town, or with a pair of sneakers to pick up the kids after school. They're seasonless too. For fall and winter, a flare-leg style in a comfortable black matte jersey works best, while an ankle length is perfect for spring and summer.

3 A Black Turtleneck

The black turtleneck is one top that is a wardrobe must-have. For fall and winter, a form-fitting version with long sleeves can flatter a pair of boot-cut pants or an A-line skirt. In spring or summer, a sleeveless turtleneck looks sleek and polished at the office (and combats air conditioning-induced chill). A cardigan thrown around the shoulders gives a new look altogether. Women can use a variety of accessories, from a print scarf to a string of pearls, to dress this top up or down, creating a fresh and individual look.

4 A Twin Set

This year-round wardrobe staple always looks clean and finished, and you don't have to think too much about it. The cardigan and shell can be worn together or separately. The twin set is also perfect for women who live in erratic climates; the cardigan can be worn when the weather turns chillier, and removed when the temperature climbs. And it's versatile too. Paired with a tank top, the button-down outer layer takes a more casual turn, while a sparkly choker can dress up the shell for a client dinner.

5 The Classic White Shirt

The classic white shirt always looks crisp, polished and sophisticated. What would a working woman do without it? Designers suggest that every closet contain at least two, one fitted and the other a formal silhouette. A tailored style looks great with everything from suits to jeans. A white shirt with interesting cuffs and a collar can act as a stand-alone piece and be substituted for a jacket. For an instant update, add punch with accessories such as jewelry or a scarf. A great white cotton shirt always looks appropriate and works day through night.

6 A Pantsuit

A pantsuit adds instant authority and easy elegance to every woman's wardrobe. It may be worn with a classic white shirt and pumps for the boardroom, or with a tank top and Sabrina heels for a more relaxed look. Women should look for a jacket cut in a style that looks best on their body type, and in a color that complements most of the separates in their closet. Also to look for — seasonless fabrics that won't wrinkle easily.

7 The Right Jacket

Every woman needs one great jacket that she can wear with jeans, slacks or a skirt. It doesn't have to be a blazer, either — it also can be a shapely jacket in an interesting silhouette. A high-quality casual jacket or topper, in denim or an outerwear fabric, is perfect for more laidback office environments, but still looks professional when worn with a nice pair of trousers or over a dress.

8 A Feminine Blouse

The feminine blouse is one basic that allows women to show off their individual style. Whether it's a bell-sleeve silhouette in a new print or a ruffled button-down style, a versatile blouse can enliven almost any outfit. A softer blouse can add a little femininity to any outfit, especially a suit. Later, the jacket can be removed for a chic nighttime look.

9 The Little Black Dress

Every woman should own one great, basic black dress in a high-quality fabric. The simple cut, above-the-knee sheath is comfortable and looks well on a variety of body types. While professional enough to wear to the office, this basic is also easily dressed up or down, depending upon the occasion. A fitted jacket in a brighter color will make you stand out in a crowd, while a more conservative one will add polish and show that you mean business.

10 Accessories

Accessories can go a long way to creating a more versatile wardrobe. Shoes should be of high quality and of the pump or loafer variety with moderate height heels. Ankle or mid-calf boots under pants are appropriate and create a more fluid line. Keep jewelry such as necklaces, earrings and bracelets simple and subtle, in designs chosen to reflect your personal style. A slim black belt in a smooth or textured leather is an absolute necessity. And don't forget scarves — they can add just the right amount of flair and interest to any outfit.

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