

## What can we learn from the clothes we buy but never wear?

### Level 2: Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

1. Think back to when you were little, in your teens and young adult: what was the fashion like in those decades?
2. Did you use to wear fashionable clothes during those times? Why / why not?
3. Do you tend to follow fashion or have a unique personal style?

#### 2 Key words

a. Choose the correct word to match each definition below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

1. a tall piece of furniture used to keep or hang your clothes  
a. guilty                                  b. blazer                                  c. wardrobe
2. feeling ashamed because you have done something you know is wrong or have not done something that you should have done  
a. wardrobe                                  b. guilty                                  c. ghosted
3. was abruptly cut off contact with someone without explanation  
a. ghosted                                  b. mental                                  c. guilty
4. an unnecessary or wrong use of money, substances, time, energy, abilities, etc.  
a. blazer                                  b. ghosted                                  c. waste
5. causing little or no damage to the environment, so it's able to continue for a long time  
a. sustainable                                  b. waste                                  c. crimson
6. relating to the mind, or involving the process of thinking  
a. mental                                  b. occasion                                  c. pastel

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7. a jacket, not worn with matching trousers, often showing the colours or badge of a club, school, team, etc.
- a. wardrobe                      b. blazer                      c. occasion
8. a deep red colour
- a. pastel                              b. crimson                      c. wisdom
9. not related to or connected with the things or people around
- a. sustainable                      b. mental                      c. disconnected
10. an opportunity or reason for doing something or for something to happen
- a. wisdom                              b. occasion                      c. disconnected
11. a colour that is pale and soft
- a. pastel                              b. blazer                      c. crimson
12. the ability to use your knowledge and experience to make good decisions and judgments
- a. mental                              b. sustainable                      c. wisdom

**b. Complete the sentences with some words from the previous activity. You may have to change the form of the word.**

1. He felt devastated after his friend of five years \_\_\_\_\_ him and didn't call him back without any explanation.
2. When she spends too much time alone, she feels \_\_\_\_\_ from other people.
3. The shopping mall promotes \_\_\_\_\_ fashion by offering repair services and clothing recycling bins.
4. For her job interview, Sophia wore a blue \_\_\_\_\_ with beige trousers and a white blouse.

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5. \_\_\_\_\_ colours, such as light blue and mint green, are popular in spring fashion collections.
6. My grandmother shared her \_\_\_\_\_ and life lessons with her grandchildren.
7. Decluttering your home can provide \_\_\_\_\_ health benefits, like reduced stress.
8. Don't feel \_\_\_\_\_ about buying yourself something nice once in a while.

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*I've set myself a project to wear the neglected items in my wardrobe – from a crimson silk skirt to a mustard coat*

**Jess Cartner-Morley**  
**01 March, 2025**

- 1 Most of us have clothes in our wardrobe that we never wear but can't let go of. I have a yellow dress with buttons down the front that I bought about five years ago. I've worn it, I think, three times. Every time I open my wardrobe, it catches my eye and I feel bad. I feel guilty that I bought a dress that I didn't need and don't even really seem to like. But I also feel bad for the dress, because it really is very pretty, and what has it done to deserve being ghosted by me? That part sounds crazy, I know. But I try to be honest about the thought process of buying clothes and choosing what to wear, even when the truth makes no sense.
- 2 Like lots of us, I hate seeing stuff go to waste. I make dinners using up whatever is in the fridge. I tell myself this is because it is healthier and more sustainable than takeout, but it's also a kind of mental game, to use everything up. Even if no one is going to ask me for my celery and beetroot risotto recipe, I find these dishes strangely satisfying.
- 3 I don't want to give up on the yellow dress. Why did I buy it if I don't want to wear it? If I don't even know what I want to wear, what hope do I have of making good decisions on more important things? And how can I make sure this doesn't happen again?
- 4 So a while ago, I started a project, of wearing the clothes that I hang on to but never actually wear. As well as the yellow dress, there's a sky blue blazer, a crimson silk skirt and a mustard coat. I'm a couple of months in now, and here is what I've learned.
- 5 Firstly: the key to finding your way back to clothes that you feel disconnected from is to try to find what drew you to them in the first place. Think back to what it was that you saw in the mirror to make you hand over your card.
- 6 I realised that, for me, it was about getting dressed up for little outings that could be done perfectly well in jeans and a jumper but would feel more of an occasion if dressed up for. I'm trying this, and you know what? There is something nice about wearing a fancy pastel dress to go out and buy tomatoes.
- 7 Sometimes what you figure out is simply that you made a mistake. Once you've faced that fact, you can stick it on the charity pile and move on. (Note to self: never, ever buy anything in an airport. Always a mistake, usually an expensive one.) But often, the lesson that your taste has changed, but your buying habits haven't caught up. You still reach automatically for pieces that feel familiar, but that person isn't the current version of you.
- 8 As I get older, I wear colour a lot less, but I am still drawn to colourful clothes. I am going to be mindful of not shopping for the person I was 15 years ago. In the meantime, I am questioning all the beige and working on getting back in touch with my inner rainbow dresser.
- 9 At the very least, there is wisdom in the clothes that feel like mistakes. As the saying goes: sometimes you win, and sometimes you learn. Oh, and guess what I'm wearing today?

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What colour is the dress that the author rarely wears but can't let go of?
2. What two emotions does the author feel when she sees the rarely worn dress?
3. What project did the author set for herself regarding her unworn clothes?
4. Besides the yellow dress, what three clothing items does the author mention that she rarely wears?
5. According to the author, what is the key to reconnecting with clothes you no longer wear?
6. What did the author realise about why she was originally attracted to the yellow dress?
7. What advice does the author give about clothes that you recognise were mistakes?
8. Where does the author suggest a bad place to buy clothes?
9. What has the author noticed about how her relationship with colourful clothing has changed as she gets older?
10. What does the author say you can learn from clothing 'mistakes'?

#### 4 Key language

a. Match the phrasal verb to its definition.

catch up  
give up on

think back  
hang on to

let go of  
use up

1. \_\_\_\_\_ : to stop holding something or someone
2. \_\_\_\_\_ : to finish a supply of something
3. \_\_\_\_\_ : to expect someone or something to fail
4. \_\_\_\_\_ : to remember something that happened in the past
5. \_\_\_\_\_ : to hold or continue holding onto something or to wait for a short time
6. \_\_\_\_\_ : to reach the same quality or standard as someone or something else

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**b. Complete the sentences with the phrasal verbs from the previous activity.**

1. She decided to \_\_\_\_\_ her old laptop as a backup after she bought a new one.
2. When I \_\_\_\_\_ to my childhood, I remember fun times with the whole family getting together for holidays.
3. Never \_\_\_\_\_ your dreams, even when things get difficult.
4. You need to \_\_\_\_\_ the old to make space for the new.
5. After missing three classes, Leo had to \_\_\_\_\_ on a lot of homework.
6. Don't \_\_\_\_\_ all the hot water when you take a shower.

**c. Write three personalised sentences using the phrasal verbs above.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## 5 Discussion

**a. Discuss these quotes.**

- 'Out with the old, in with the new.' —Unknown
- 'The less you own, the less owns you.' —Chuck Palahniuk
- 'Letting go is even more important than adding.' —Marie Kondo

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#### 6 In your own words

- a. Pick a decade or time known for its fashion (e.g. the 70s, the Victorian era, the Roaring 20s, etc.). Prepare a short presentation on the fashion of that time. Use the questions below to guide you.
- What were the main fashion themes of the time?
  - How was the fashion different from the other previous period?
  - What was the colour palette for the fashion of that period?
  - What kinds of fabrics were popular?
  - Was male and female fashion similar or very different?
  - What were the 'signature pieces' of the time?
  - How did the fashion of that time compare to the trends that followed after?
- b. Share your presentation with your group or class.