

ASKFORUM



To avoid looking sloppy, make sure your jeans are slim but not tight and not dragging on the floor

Q- I'm trying not to spend too much money on clothing, but most of my wardrobe is old or dated. What few things can I buy for spring to update my look?

If you buy only one piece this season, make it a soft sportcoat. For 2010, sportcoats are slightly slimmer and less structured (some are totally unlined) with softer shoulders. Some styles feature technical details and inside pockets; others have knit insets and can be worn casually or as an outerwear piece. Bottom line, a soft sportcoat takes you anywhere, and ties together the rest of your wardrobe.

Beyond that, you might want to buy a soft plaid shirt in pale purple or blue, a few new neckties (they're a bit narrower this season and look great for business or partying), slim 5-pocket trousers (a departure from jeans) and new boat shoes. Now you're good to go for spring 2010!

Q- *The Wall Street Journal* recently showed a photo of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev wearing jeans while meeting with President Obama. Is this appropriate? What kind of jeans work best in business situations?

In many circles, dark denim worn with a sportcoat, tie and dress shoes is a perfectly acceptable business look for all but the most formal occasions. Just make sure the jeans are slim but not tight, and a perfect length (not dragging on the floor, not rolled up). Rips, tears, whiskering and very light washes aren't usually acceptable for business (and often look just plain silly!). Don't forget to invest in a really good leather jeans belt that's less formal than the ones you wear with suits.

One caveat, however: Unless you're the president of a large country, don't assume it's okay to show up in jeans. If you don't know the dress code, it's best to stick with a slim-cut suit—always elegant, fashionable and respectful.

Q. My girlfriend is mortified when I wear shorts out at night but I don't see what's wrong with it. When and where should shorts be worn? What kinds of shorts are in style?

Our fashion experts argued this one for hours and still couldn't come to a consensus. Obviously, shorts are appropriate on weekends and for recreational activities (and there are so many great styles available this season, from tailored fits to washed plaids, bold colors to reversibles) but traditionalists still recommend long pants at night. That said, a few fashion magazines (and fashion runways) were touting shorts for all occasions, even showing them with sportcoats for a dress-up look. But bottom line: If your girlfriend is mortified, lose the shorts for nighttime (or dump the girlfriend). As we all know, it's not worth the aggravation...

Q. My wardrobe consists of suits for work, khakis and golf shirts for weekends. Am I missing something?

YES! Trade magazines used to call it "the third wardrobe" and it's essentially that gray area between dressed up and "schlumpy."

It's really less complicated than it seems: Buy a few nice pairs of pants that are neither jeans nor khakis (we love linen, colored canvas, seersucker, subtle patterns), a few woven shirts and/or lightweight knits and one great sportcoat. Throw in an accessory or two (a great scarf, a cool belt, fun socks) and you've made a minimal investment that will totally upgrade your image. Come into the store and we'll make it painless.



IMAGE BY DAMIAN SANDONE