

A photograph of two men in suits standing on a grassy area in front of a grand, classical building with many windows and statues. The man on the left is wearing a dark blue suit, a white shirt, a patterned tie, and sunglasses, and is holding a cigar. The man on the right is wearing a reddish-brown suit jacket, a white shirt, and sunglasses, and has his hand on his hip. A semi-transparent purple banner is overlaid across the middle of the image.

the pillars of style

essential components of dressing well

Bespoke Unit
A GUIDE TO THE DAPPER LIFE

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Foreword

With over a million monthly visits, Bespoke Unit is a leading men's lifestyle resource, which provides some of the most detailed and researched guides for the modern gentleman.

Rather than specialising in a single niche, Bespoke Unit covers the whole spectrum of men's lifestyle topics. With our free resources, you can learn about:

- [Suits & Tailoring](#)
- [Style & Clothing](#)
- [Personal Grooming](#)
- [Fragrances & Cologne](#)
- [Glasses & Eyewear](#)
- [Watches & Horology](#)

You can also learn about a variety of other subjects including detailed guides on [cigars](#), [tobacco pipes](#), [champagne](#), [alcoholic spirits](#), and [whisky](#).

In this free interactive guide of over 20 pages, you will learn the fundamental basics of personal style, which link back to our in-depth resources for further reading. Therefore, we suggest either reading it on a device or printing it out with one nearby so you can use the links when necessary. If you have any questions, feel free to visit Bespoke Unit and leave us a comment.

Be You.

P. Anthony & C.P. Bowles

Introduction To The Pillars Of Style



[Black Lapel Gray Windowpane Custom Suit](#)

Style is a deceptively challenging concept to master. How is it that some men effortlessly look good whereas other men seem to consistently miss the mark as it relates to how they dress?

Is style a natural gift or is it a skill that can be acquired over time? Although it may come naturally to some men, style is indeed learnable.

This free guide will offer you one of the most fundamental personal styling concepts known as the “Pillars of Style”. By learning just these three pillars, you’ll have strong footing for developing your own personal style.

The Pillars Of Permanent Style



[Indochino Hereford Cavalry Twill Suit](#)

We like to think that permanent style -the kind where your clothes are a reflection of your personality and mood rather than a designer's whim- rests on three "pillars:"

- Fit
- Color
- Pattern

These concepts apply to literally everything that we wear. When all three of these components are aligned, you will look both great in a \$2000 suit or a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. Mastery of these concepts frees you up to dress according to your mood or a particular occasion and not get caught up in the whole "does this look good?" scenario.

The important thing to remember is that to look your best, all three of the following concepts need to be functioning simultaneously.

However, this isn't difficult and we have other resources to help you in links to Bespoke Unit throughout the guide.

Much like a piece of music is less enjoyable when melody is played in the absence of harmony or vice-versa, when one or more of the pillars is missing, the positive effect of your outfit is diminished.

Pillar 1: Fit



[Black Lapel Rivington Custom Suits](#)

While all three pillars need to be executed well for maximum effect, the fit is arguably the most important of them all. The best way to describe the importance of fit is to think of suit price ranges. All other things being equal, it's natural to assume that a man wearing a \$1,000 suit will look better than a man wearing a \$300 suit.

If the man in the \$1,000 suit doesn't understand the importance of notions like the proper sleeve length while the man in the \$300 suit [has patronized a tailor](#), the price-to-style ratio is turned on its head.

Tailoring is not just for suits, either. Anything you buy could likely benefit from a trip to the tailor shop. Dress shirts, jeans, and casual trousers rarely fit perfectly right off the rack, so make sure you get the alterations you need.

Indeed, if all fits you well, you're much better going on a date in some nice jeans and a sweater than in slacks and a blazer that are too big. Your colors can be on point and you can make some ballsy moves in terms of the patterns you wear, but if your clothes don't fit well, your outfit is just a house of cards that will fall apart easily.

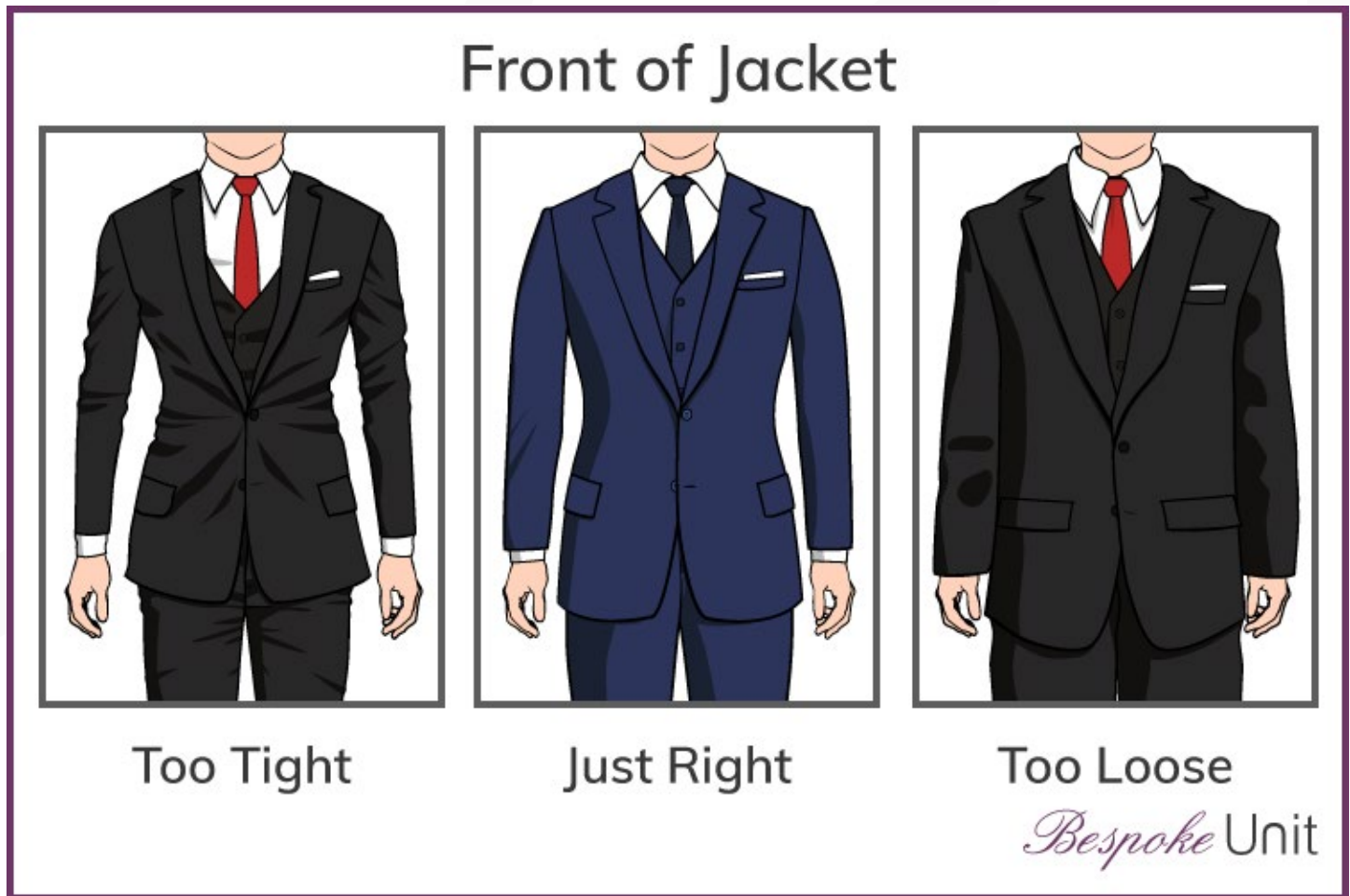
Tip:
Click here &
get a perfect fit
with our favorite
custom suit
brands.

How A Suit Should Fit

If you want your suits to fit you well, it's important to have a good idea on what to look for. From the width of the shoulders to the length of the sleeves, there are many components where you need to be mindful.

Our [dedicated series on how a suit should fit](#) details the following garments:

- [Jacket](#)
- [Waistcoat](#)
- [Trousers](#)
- [Shirt](#)



Rather than explore them here, we suggest that you head to our online resources using the links above.

In our [guides to how a suit should fit](#), we detail at length every single component to check before making a purchase or when considering alterations.

Understanding Your Physical Needs

Whether you're altering an off-the-rack garment or buying a custom suit, it serves to be both observant and mindful of your own body as well as the garment's limitations.

Firstly, your body type plays an important role in how a suit should be made or altered to fit you. While the principles of proper tailoring apply to matter what your body looks like, certain cuts of clothing tend to look better on certain men.

If, for example, you're a tall, thin guy, you'll want to wear blazers that have a bit more length. However, men with stocky builds will want to avoid too much shape in their clothing and go for neatness instead.

To help men identify not only identify their body type but also dress in a way that complements it, we've devised a detailed series of guides.



In [our guides to men's body types](#), we've outlined no less than 9 different templates to work from:

- [Average Height & Weight](#)
- [Average Height & Heavyset](#)
- [Average Height & Thin](#)
- [Average Weight & Tall](#)
- [Big & Tall](#)
- [Tall & Thin](#)
- [Average Weight & Short](#)
- [Short & Heavyset](#)
- [Short & Thin](#)

Once you've established your body type and learned about its needs, you can then begin to look into the various [suit cuts and styles](#) that may best suit you. As well as the fit, you can consider how certain features such as the [different types of lapels](#) may help complement your body.

Finally, you can even begin to research things like your face shape as although it may not directly affect the fit, it can impact the best styles for way your clothes are cut.

Tip:
Click here to identify your face shape for more styling tips.

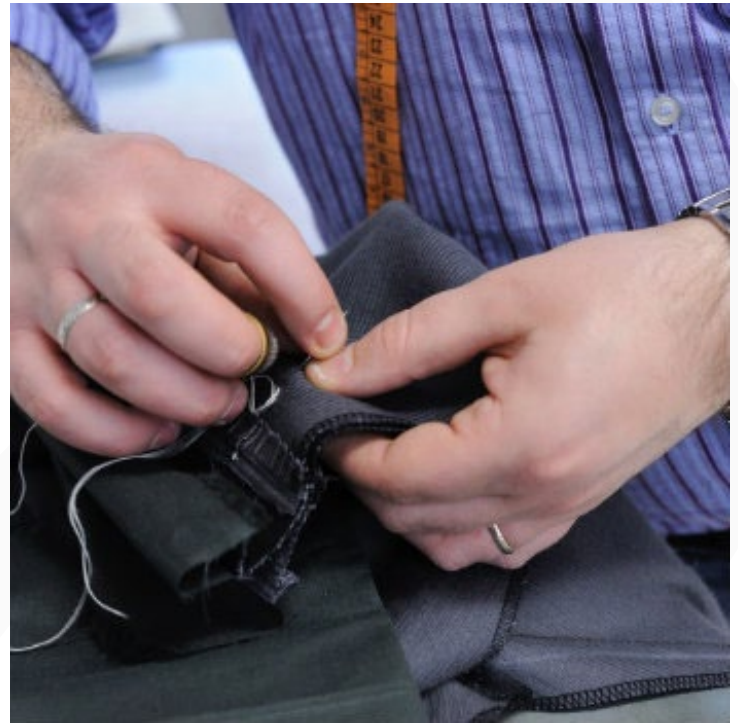
Getting Alterations & Buying A Custom Suit

Once you've identified your body type and chosen the right styles for you, the next step is to make a purchase. In the section above, we highlighted the importance of being observant in both your body type as well as the garment's limitations.

With regards to the latter, we are largely referring by how much an item of clothing can be altered. When buying off-the-rack suits, it's extremely important to take note of the alterations they will need before making the purchase.

This is because what may seem like a minor alteration could in fact be quite expensive. If you do find yourself with an ill-fitting suit that requires a lot of alterations, the resulting cost may be more expensive than buying a custom suit in the first place!

Therefore, it's often worth reading up on which alterations are worthwhile and those that are either too complicated or too expensive to request from a tailor.



Thanks to Bespoke Unit's [in-depth tailoring guide](#), you can see the most common alterations (and even some uncommon ones) that can be done on any alterable menswear garment.

EASY - SUIT JACKET ALTERATIONS

- 1 - Lower / Raise Collar
- 2 - Take In / Let Out Side Seams
- 3 - Take In / Let Out Center Seam
- 4 - Move Buttons (At Waist)
- 5 - Shorten / Lengthen Sleeves
- 6 - Close Vents

[See other tailoring options via our guide](#)

Reading up on this before buying an off-the-rack suit can help you save a substantial amount of money as well as time as finding a good tailor can be quite challenging. However, if you're willing to spend a little more, it's sometimes worth opting for custom-made suits. While it's a service that's often associated with [bespoke tailoring](#), there are more affordable options available.



[Black Lapel Linen Blend Custom Suits](#)

This can be particularly beneficial if you have an unusual body type and require a large range of alterations when buying off-the-rack. For instance, Paul Anthony has a long torso, short legs, and rolled shoulders. Additionally, a custom suit can be surprisingly affordable if you opt for [made-to-measure tailoring](#). In Paul's case, it's actually cheaper!

Thanks to the age of the Internet, you don't necessarily have to spend a fortune in order to invest in properly fitted garments. For instance, [Black Lapel](#) offers impeccably fitting suits for around \$500.

Meanwhile, [Indochino](#) provides a similar but more affordable solution with suits for less than \$350! Additionally, Indochino has the added benefit of showrooms where you can get fitted by a professional rather than doing it at home.

Overall, the best advice we can offer is this: do not skimp on making your clothes fit properly. Alterations or the additional cost of MTM clothing may cause some pain at the time you have to pay for them, but the investment will pay off in droves in the confidence you have and the positive attention you attract as a result. In fact, less is indeed more and it's better to own a few clothes that fit rather than an entire wardrobe of premium yet ill-fitting garments. There's no excuse for ill-fitting garb.

Tip:
Click here for
our custom suit
measurement
guide.

Pillar 2: Color Coordination



Color is incredibly intimidating for men as it relates to dressing. Does this shade of blue go well with that particular shade of yellow? Does blue even go with yellow? Am I supposed to wear pink? How? When? It's not an easy subject to wrap one's head around.

Still, color is one of the Pillars of Style and it's a fundamental concept to grasp even at only a basic level. Thankfully, it's not that difficult. As it relates to suits, the Color Pillar will deal first and foremost with shirts, ties, and handkerchiefs.

When we talk about color as it relates to style, we're talking about a few different things:

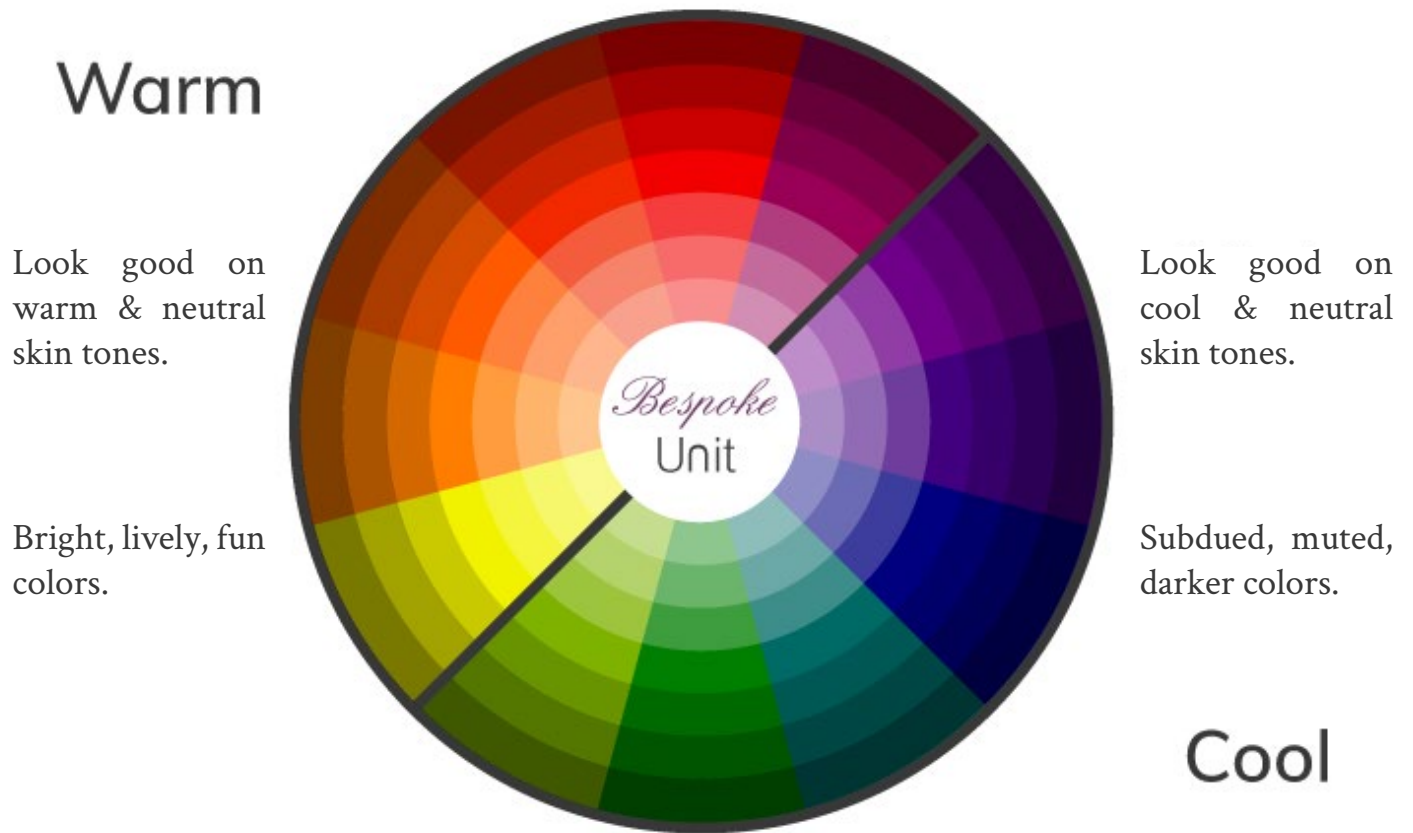
- Your **skin tone** and how the clothes you wear interact with it
- The amount of **contrast** between your skin tone and hair and how that's mirrored in your clothing choices.
- The **color of the clothes** you wear and how they interact with each other.

It's a lot to think about for sure, but once you get started, it's actually quite easy. For further reading, Bespoke Unit has a [whole section dedicated to color theory](#).

Color (or the lack thereof) is something that most humans experience innately, and there are plenty of childhood activities around color that reinforce this.

For instance, fingerpainting, coloring books, and the like are all examples of how we experimented with color at a very early age.

Still, it's rare that we learn about color in any systematic way, and adult men barely ever focus on it.



The best place to start is to think about skin tone. Getting a hold on what your skin tone is will allow you to focus on wearing colors that work best with your undertones as opposed to ones that simply tickle your fancy.

If you don't know what yours is, we strongly suggest you check out [our guide to determining your skin tone](#).

Bear in mind that skin tone isn't the same thing as skin color. In fact, two people with completely different colored skin can have very similar tones.

If you're cool-toned, focus on clothes with blues, blue-reds, cool pinks, grey and black. If you're warm-toned, greens, peaches, golds, and other Earth-tones work wonders to liven up your skin.



Meanwhile, contrast is the degree of difference in color value between your hair and skin. Knowing your contrast type is crucial, so [check out our guide](#) to learn if you're low, medium, or high contrast.

In general, mirroring the amount of contrast in your clothing as you see in your face is key to looking your best. Light-skinned men with dark hair (high contrast) such as Charles-Phillippe look best when their outfits are similarly high contrast.

On the other hand, blond men with fair skin (low contrast) like Paul Anthony benefit from less contrast so that their clothes don't overpower their faces.

Learning to manipulate **colors in clothing** requires a bit more knowledge. The first three pages of our guide to color has plenty of information on how colors work together and how to best pair them. Some general guidelines around color are as follows:

- Neutrals are grey, navy, khaki, and black. These all play nicely with bolder non-neutrals and are important to increase your wardrobe's versatility.
- Blue is a lynchpin of the male wardrobe.
- Primary colors look good together. Secondary colors look good together.
- Save bright, bold colors for physically smaller garments like ties, pocket squares, and socks.
- Also consider the season and its own colors so to find garments that match.



Tip:

Click here to consult our full color wheel & guides.

Color Coordination In Shirts & Ties

Let's start by limiting the discussion to one color among two garments. Because white shirts go with any tie under the sun, we'll take a blue shirt as our starting point. In our one-color scenario, this would leave us with a blue tie.



[TM Lewin Suit & Shirt](#)

The key here is to not wear a tie that's a similar shade of blue to the shirt. If you choose a light-to-medium blue shirt, a navy blue tie will look harmonious.

Note: In general, we're fans of wearing ties that are darker than their coordinating shirts. This always looks smarter than a light tie/dark shirt combination.

Color Coordination In Ties & Handkerchiefs

Firstly, avoid wearing a tie that perfectly matches your pocket square in all circumstances with the only exception being a white-tie event.

We're delighted that the handkerchief has seen a resurgence in the past ten years. It provides an elegant finishing touch to any tailored outfit and is one of the accessories that separate the men from the boys.

While a white pocket square will go with literally anything (you should have quite a few in your closet as they tend to get dirty easily), there's a whole world of color for you to explore. How do you do this without looking silly?

Either way, you want your tie and hanky to coordinate (again, not to match). Let's say you're wearing a solid red tie. You could wear a white pocket square with red around the border, white/red plaid, or cream with red dots. The idea here is to make a connection between both pieces without being obvious or studied about it.

But what do we do when our ties involve more than one color? Many ties that have two colors will have one color as its dominant color and the other as a background color. To see what we mean, [consult our color wheels](#).

Let's assume that we're talking about a navy tie with pink dots. A handsome coordinating pocket square would be one that has the inverse color scheme; in this case, a pink background with blue accents.

Pink with blue dots would work, but pink with blue plaid or pink with navy border would be an even smarter choice.



Coordinating Shirts & Ties With Multiple Colors

Now that you've read a bit about how ties and handkerchiefs play together, you can apply the same principle (switch the dominant and accent colors around in the coordinating garment) to shirts and ties.

If you're wearing a pink shirt with blue check, for example, a navy tie with pink stripes would likely go very nicely, assuming the scale of the patterns sync well ([link to pattern coordination article](#)).

Building Colors Out

The world isn't dichromatic though, and you don't have to be either. This is where knowing about primary, secondary, and [tertiary colors comes into play](#). Let's take the following example:

You're wearing a white shirt with a small blue check. Astutely, you select a handsome blue and gold repp stripe tie.

This works because blue is a primary color and gold is a variant of yellow, another primary color. They play nicely together.

A light blue pocket square with gold trim would be lovely here, but you can also branch things out a bit and try, say, gold with maroon paisley.

Keeping the gold as a connector from tie to hanky while introducing maroon (a brownish variant of red) into the ensemble paves the way for other colors in your socks and, if applicable, cufflinks.

It's kind of like daisy-chaining colors, and this method is a great way to pull off colorful outfits without looking like an easter egg.

A Final Word On Color



We've said it before and we'll say it again: don't just start going crazy with colors all at once. The first thing to do is understand the colors in your face and accent them. At that point, take it one or two colors at a time until you've really gotten the hang of it.

When you do finally introduce additional colors into your ensembles, do so in a way that allows you to experiment without being too loud: a [fun handkerchief](#) is a great way to do this, as are differently-colored silk knot [cufflinks](#).

With practice, you will train your eye and become more adept at creating color combinations you never thought were possible.

Pillar 3: Pattern Coordination



[Indochino Darwen Windowpane Custom Suit](#)

Now that you know how your clothes are supposed to fit and have a general idea of how to make colors work, there's one last pillar of style that's extremely important to menswear: pattern coordination.

With a plethora of patterns available in almost any garment imaginable, this is one of the most frustrating things a guy can try. Can you wear stripes with stripes? How about dots with checks? Windowpanes and repp stripes?

The beauty of pattern coordination is that while there are some tried-and-true combinations that you should start with because they just can't miss, successful pattern mixing is based on one concept: **scale**.

First, let's lay down a couple of ground rules just when getting started:

- Theoretically, you can pair like patterns and unlike patterns.
- When pairing like patterns, their scales must be different.
- When pairing unlike patterns, their scales should be different.
- Whether like or unlike, avoid pairing small-scale patterns with other small-scale patterns.
- Keep in mind your body type as your size affects the pattern's perceived size.

The key ingredient to coordinating or mixing patterns successfully is an understanding of the concept of scale. A good way to define scale is "the relationship between size and spacing."

Pattern Scale

Patterns have two main elements that define their scale: the size of the individual pattern component (stripe, dot, check, paisley, etc.) and the spacing or distance between any two of those components.

When talking about their spacing, we may refer to their “breadth” or “tightness.” Taken together, we have a pattern’s scale.

For instance, [stripes](#) themselves can be thin or thick, and they can be spaced either very closely or quite far apart. A small-scale version would be a pin-stripe with 1/4” of space in between each stripe. A large-scale version, on the other hand, would be a chalk stripe with 7/8” of space in between each stripe.

Meanwhile, [checks](#) can be small and tight or so big as to be referred to as windowpanes. As for [dots](#), they can range in size from polka (large) to pin (small) and be spaced tightly or loosely.

Most pattern-competent men are able to mix two or even three patterns with minimal difficulty. Four patterns at once is expert level, and any more than that is more for sport than anything else.

Tip:
Click here to use our full pattern guides.

How To Coordinate Patterns



Now that we know what scale is, let’s talk about how to coordinate patterns. Generally speaking, the key to successful pattern coordination is to vary the scales of the patterns you’re using.

This is particularly true if one of your patterns is small in scale. While two large scale patterns can work together with enough skill, two small-scale patterns on top of one another look dizzying to the eye and tend not to have great results.

Mixing Like Patterns



[Black Lapel Madison Blue Microcheck Custom Suit & Glen Plaid Tie](#)

This will generally happen with the more common, less loud patterns like stripes and checks. In these cases you must vary the scale of the patterns to be successful.



[Black Lapel Windowpane Saxony Suit](#)

A great way to do this would be to have a large-scale stripe jacket, small scale-stripe shirt, and a repp stripe tie like the aforementioned one.

If, for example, you're wearing a solid navy suit with a pinstripe shirt, your best bet is to go with a bold, large-scale repp stripe tie.

A windowpane suit would be best served with a small-scale check. Both of these options enable the viewer to clearly discern between each garment and let each stand on its own while also creating a look that's great than the sum of its parts.

If you were to be wearing three patterned garments on top of each other - let's say jacket, shirt, and tie - then your best bet is to keep two of the patterns of similar scale and have one be noticeably different.

Mixing Unlike Patterns



We get into more advanced territory when we talk about mixing unlike patterns, but it's still not difficult if you keep scale in mind.

As with mixing like patterns, mixing unlike patterns requires utilizing scale as a way to harmonize them.

The difference here is that the scale size “rule” is inverted. Unlike patterns pair best when their scales are similar as opposed to different.

For instance, a wide-spaced striped shirt would need a polka dot tie as opposed to a pin dot one so as to not overwhelm the neckwear. Bold checks requires equally bold paisleys.

Are you wearing a Bengal stripe shirt with medium-scale dots in your tie? Dots and stripes tend to play very nicely together, so go ahead and do it! However, if you have a small-scale gingham shirt and wish to pair it with paisley, take care when considering a similarly scaled paisley tie with it.

An exception to this rule is when one of the patterns is particularly small, which we allude to above. The reason for this is that two small patterns right next to each other create extreme visual discord, even when the patterns are unlike. The harmony of scale, coupled with proper color coordination, will ensure that you look put together despite wearing unlike patterns.

Mixing Three Patterns

When we get to mixing three patterns, the rules are simple but the execution is more difficult: keep your scales similar to be successful, and utilize contrast amongst the three patterns to differentiate them.

A good trick to keep in mind is to keep your jacket and / or trousers solid rather than patterned. This helps ground the eye and provide a neutral backdrop against which to play with pattern. Navy blue and dark grey are both great, versatile options for mixing patterns.

When all three patterns are alike, the scales must all vary. A great way example of patterns on three consecutive garments (again jacket, shirt, and tie) would be medium-scale striped jacket, medium-scale gingham shirt, and a large-scale paisley tie.

Mixing Four Patterns

Being able to mix four patterns successfully is no small task. If you want to wear a windowpane jacket, gingham shirt, paisley tie, plaid pocket square, and dotted socks, the only way you can pull it off is for all three of your Pillars of Style to be strong.

With such an intense level of pattern mixing, all will be lost of color isn't holding everything together. If your fit isn't spot on, well, you'd need to start back at the drawing board anyway.

Mixing such a number of patterns is generally the realm of dandies (self-proclaimed or otherwise) and you may very well end up breaking some of the rules set forth previously to make it work.

The best-dressed amongst us, however, know when and how to break rules. If you're successful, you will have reached the aforementioned Black Belt Guru status. Keeping the concept of scale variation in mind, the only thing you can do is experiment. Try a checked shirt, striped tie, dotted handkerchief, and paisley socks with a striped suit.



A Final Word On Pattern



As with just about everything we advise, it's best to get into pattern mixing by starting slow. Try subtle accessories and with solid suit to begin with.

You know the garments in your wardrobe better than anyone, and over time you'll learn what works together, what doesn't work together, and what surprises you on either side of that coin.

Start with two like patterns and scale up from there. If you have any questions along the way, you can always consult Bespoke Unit's guides. Don't hesitate to leave a comment if you don't find answers to your questions as we always consult and respond to them personally.

Don't Be Afraid To Experiment

If there's one hurdle that most men have to get over when they're learning about how to best dress themselves, it's fear. We're afraid we'll look foolish, be called out as fussy or effeminate, or simply miss the mark altogether. We'll let you in on a little secret: this happens to all of us. You are going to make mistakes, and sometimes you'll wear an outfit that will have you scratching your head a year later, asking yourself, "What the hell was I thinking?"

It doesn't matter what you were thinking. You had the gumption to try something new and care about your appearance in a way that not enough men do nowadays. Regardless of the outcome, this deserves at least some credit, no? The upside is that in experimenting like this, you will inevitably stumble onto some incredibly handsome combinations of things. You will also learn what your wardrobe's go-to combinations are, enabling you to create awesome looks in a pinch.

Dressing stylishly isn't about shooting from the hip every time. If we may be allowed a musical comparison, remember that Louis Armstrong, arguably the greatest improvisational musician of all time, had tricks up his sleeve that he would call on regularly. Sure, he didn't read off of a script, but not every note he played was off the top of his head, either.

So it is with clothing combinations and colors that work for you. Over time, you'll learn which items in your closet play nicely with others, and those combinations can become the foundation of your entire sartorial operation. You don't have to have just created an excellent outfit off the top of your head. You just want it to look like you did.

Bespoke Unit is an invaluable men's lifestyle resource that can accompany you as you can learn and develop your style. Like this guide, all of our online resources are completely free and cater to different subjects including:

- [Suits & Tailoring](#)
- [Style & Clothing](#)
- [Personal Grooming](#)
- [Fragrances & Cologne](#)

Feel free to consult our resources whenever you need to inform yourself on any men's lifestyle topics. If you ever pay us a visit and don't find what you're looking for, know that we are attentive and respond to all comments that we receive.

Yours,

P. Anthony & C.P. Bowles



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