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How to Walk in High Heels:

The Girls Guide to Everything

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Extract

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How to create the right atmosphere to get ready in

Being stylish takes time, patience, but above all *practice*. Gore Vidal said, 'Style is knowing who you are, what you want to say, and not giving a damn.'

Some people need music, some people need lights, and some people need scent. But, above all, before you even open the wardrobe, with creativity must come organisation and calm.

First a mood must be established. Do this with scented candles, the ultimate being Diptyque. Freesia for day; John Galliano (as the name implies) for fabulous occasions; Tuberose for candlelit dinners; Baises (berries) in black wax for seduction.

Music is a helpful tool but can, if you are in a hurry, also become a hindrance. Sometimes it is not good to be leaping round the room agreeing with Aretha Franklin that you need R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Some songs should have 'handle with care' labels attached, as they can whip you up into an inappropriate frenzy. It is terribly difficult to apply lipstick, brush your hair or roll on sheer stockings with any hope of accuracy while trying to dance to the beat. If music *is* required opt for classical, jazz or synthesised and soothing mood enhancers, rather than distracters, and therefore delayers.

How to get dressed in 5* minutes

1 **Venue:** Always know *where* you are going, and what the dress code is before deciding *how* to interpret it.

You never know where you are going to meet your future boss/boyfriend/best friend* (delete as required) so ALWAYS dress to

impress. Take out a subscription to *Hello!* magazine if in any doubt on this. Stars without their make-up/dressed down/taking out the garbage are images that should never be seen, and are NEVER to be recreated. Imagine you have the paparazzi following you and never give anyone the satisfaction of seeing you on a bad hair day.

That said, the old cliché that 'beauty is lit from within' is true, designer labels and diamonds are merely the frosting to set it off. Sometimes the most mesmerising person in the room is the one with the warmest smile.

2 **Layout:** Ideally you should lay out the look the night before, so you have time to 'live with it', and you're not rushed into a decision. But if you don't have time for this, plan the outfit in your mind while you shower, and hope that when you pull the pieces out they have all the buttons attached and are immaculately pressed.

If struggling, remember a good pair of shoes can make any outfit. Likewise, a bad pair can do irrevocable damage.

3 **Point of focus:** Less is often more. Choose a point of focus and accessorise around this. One day, it could be the waist, or the décolletage, next the derrière. Learn what to exaggerate and which parts of your body to conceal.

To show off waists Wear low slung jeans, cropped tops and, if you really want to push the boat out, a belly button piercing. The latter only if you are on holiday and have a washboard flat stomach. If not, don't; it destroys the line and drape of garments.

To show off bottoms Heels throw the buttocks out and back, and tighten the thighs terrifically. Tight pencil skirts, and anything by Azzedine Alaia, can also prove lethal when showcasing this area. Remember: big is beautiful, ignore the whippets, think Monroe.

To show off the chest All hail the magical powers of the V-neck jumper. Whether it's plunging, or demure, a V-neck draws the eye down to the point and enhances all cleavage. Essential for meetings with accountants.

If in any doubt about what to wear always have a little black dress, a clean crisp white T-shirt (Petit Bateau is a good choice), and a sassy pair of

jeans (Stella McCartney would be my personal choice du jour) on standby. When in doubt keep it simple and chic.

4 **Teeth:** Teeth must be flossed, brushed, scrubbed and, if you will insist on eating garlic, mouth-washed. Do this early in the proceedings as toothpaste stains can be VERY trying to get off clothes, and must be done well before lip-gloss application.



5 **Make-up:** This is one of the most crucial stages in the evening's preparation. If this bit goes wrong there could even be cause, in extreme cases, to develop a sudden acute illness or migraine. Breakouts, blotches and, worst of all, tidemarks MUST be banished.

Aim to look like a girl on the pages of a magazine. But comfort yourself with the knowledge that even they have never seen themselves look that good. A professional make-up artist, hairstylist, fashion editor and photographer will have spent several hours achieving this result and the rest will have been done with photo-shop. Which, when you think about it, makes it ludicrously unfair that the mere mortal is given a paltry five minutes to compete with a supermodel. Is it any wonder they are where they are and you are feeling insecure?

First, wash face with water. The colder it is the more it wakes you up, and tightens the face. Next, cleanse, tone and moisturise.

Learn a routine so you don't really have to think, you just know what follows what. Foundation, concealer, Touche Éclat, then get out the mascara. Apply liberally. Remember there can never be too much mascara; eyes are the window to the soul so enhance and open them as much as possible.

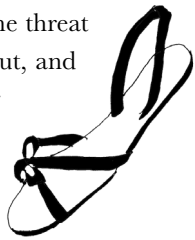
Always pick a feature to exaggerate, either the eyes or the mouth, not both. Red lips need softer eyes, while sockets rimmed with kohl should be counterbalanced with pouting nude lips.

But, as with your outfit, this is all venue dependent. Good lighting is crucial for application, but knowing what lighting you will end up in is even more so.

Find out if you will be:

Up close and intimate? If that is the case you want to fudge the 'nope not wearing any make-up, this is fresh-faced flawless little ol' me . . .' Yeah right.

Look don't touch? For this you need the red lipstick. Red is for occasions when you want to be circled and admired. A note of caution, however: not only is red the trickiest to apply but it *really* is not ideal for dinners or drinks with excessive talking. Lipstick on teeth is a big no-no and, with the threat of this in mind, when lips are red they should be kept, ideally, shut, and only opened when, after discreetly running your tongue over your teeth, you have something really startling to purr.



To avoid lipstick stains on a champagne flute casually lick the glass as you put your lips to it. If this fails, hold glass near rim and wipe stain away with thumb.

False eyelashes and black kohl-rimmed eyes False eyelashes can be the most seductive of accessories; Julie Christie and Audrey Hepburn leap to mind here. Though you should think incredibly carefully before wearing them to go swimming or to a tear-jerking movie. False eyelashes that have come adrift are very difficult to explain with style as they look like spiders. Streaking mascara, however, along with lipstick stains on champagne flutes, collars, etc., can be marvellous mementos to leave when you make a stylish exit.

6 **Underwear:** The choice of styles can be overwhelming, which is why when 'rushing' things needs to be in apple-pie order. (See How to wear the appropriate underwear, page 42.) We're talking sets; the basic rule is bra and knickers must match.

Do you need to wear a bra? Yes or no? And can you in that dress? Do you need to maximise or minimise?

Remember: a black bra under a white T-shirt is a sin. You really should not have colours that show through: dark on top, bright below; light on top, pastel and pale. Fact: white bras are ultraviolet in certain lights, and go grey after a few too many washes; 'nude' colours never show through, and are easier to maintain.

Do not let lingerie go past its 'wear by date'. When it starts to look old, frayed or faded bin it, and start again.

Be wary of a g-string poking out. If knickers *are* on show, make it delib-

erate and something worth seeing. If low slung jeans are your poison invest in hipster g-strings.

7 **Perfume, phase one:** Think of Patrick Suskind's novel *Perfume*, whose narrator is on the 'quest for the intangible scent of a woman'. Okay, so in this case it leads to murder, a little extreme, and not the effect you are after, but perfume is one of the few remaining (legal) sorceries we have left, so use it. Layer a few squirts over the body before your clothes go on so that it can soak into your skin. It should be applied straight after deodorant, masking any cheap synthetic scent that this may have left, and blending with soaps and scented body lotions to create your own unique odour.

Remember: Coco Chanel said perfume should be worn 'wherever one wants to be kissed'.

8 **Dress:** Things really start to feel as if you are finally getting somewhere when you get to this stage. You should have decided what look you are after in the layout phase, but now you apply the labels, albeit Dior or Gap. Dress in a bottom to top, top to bottom yo-yo and you will ensure you forget nothing, and can tuck everything in. Always ensure clothes are well pressed and well maintained. (See How to iron your clothes, page 371.)

9 **Make-up:** Take a quick glance in the mirror and assess the situation. Is the eye make-up heavy enough? Too heavy? Has any coverage been dislodged or indeed have any blemishes appeared? Is this look enhancing the clothes? Is your lighting harsh and honest enough?

10 **Hair:** Tousled or ironed straight? Up or down? This should already have been decided. NOW is the time to comb, tease or tweak it into position. But go easy on the hairspray, you don't want a concrete Ivana-like helmet to asphyxiate your neighbour.

11 **Shoes:** The higher, the more expensive, the better.

'It is totally impossible to be well dressed in cheap shoes,' according to Sir Hardy Amies.

The higher the heel, the tighter the calves, while the thinner the heel the greater the optical illusion. Therefore the overall ratio to apply is:

Heel height + width – thighs + calves x 2 = legs + bum/wiggle

12 **Perfume, phase two:** To avoid the smell being too intense, spray a mist of scent into the air and walk into it. Dab a little behind the earlobes and wrists and at the ankles – well . . . you never know who might want to kiss your feet. Note: the top layer can be a different scent to the one you used as base coat.

13 **Hair:** Toss.

14 **Make-up and mirror:** One last check – teeth, tucked in, pushed up, done up, and face flawless.

15 **Smile:** Here would be when you can call 'Coming! Ready!' to any waiting suitors/attending groupies. This way they are all primed, and ready to compliment you as you glide down the stairs.

16 **Check you have your handbag, and contents.** (See How to fit everything into your handbag, page 13.)

17 **Outer-layering – the coat:** Always opt to be assisted into your coat; it's the best way to ensure people see you and your outfit at close range. Not only can they see the great labels you have put together but, on a practical note, having someone slip the coat onto your shoulders ensures that it is hung at the best angle and the drape and cut is shown off and smoothed out to its full advantage.

18 **Lip-gloss:** Absolutely no point doing it till now – too many obstacles, and it's a good crowd pleaser.

19 **Finale:** One final 'Mirror, Mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?' and you're off.

* So here is the confession. The heading was *slightly* misleading, a female

prerogative. With no fewer than eighteen ESSENTIAL steps it is inconceivable that you could be ready, and up to standard, in much under twenty minutes.

The key is to be realistic, even if you only admit this time frame to yourself, rather than rush to be *badly* ready in five minutes.

The only time it's possible to be ready in five minutes is when going to bed. Do like Marilyn Monroe and wear Chanel No. 5. Providing the perfume is where you left it, how long can it take?

How to avoid confrontation whilst getting ready



'Don't give a woman advice; one should never give a woman anything she can't wear in the evening' *Oscar Wilde*

Remember the ancient proverb, 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned'? Well, double the terror and consequences for a woman rushed. It is hard to focus under pressure. Arrange to meet your date at a venue. Or, if they will insist on collecting you, have freshly brewed coffee or tea, current magazines and TV remote all laid out for them. You can't hurry meringues, couture, or the Hermes Birkin bag waiting list so why try to hurry a vision of loveliness?

If you are living together they can assist with odd jobs, ironing, zips and hard to reach buttons. Getting them involved will make them appreciate that it is truly impossible for you to go any faster. But do be wary of employing them in the 'second opinion' category unless you really truly value their opinion, and are going to take what they say seriously, and not slam the door and refuse to go out. This is particularly crucial advice if the person involved is a man, and even more so if he is *your* man.

To avoid initial confrontation always have at least two clocks

One should be set at least 7–21 minutes fast. NEVER set it to an easily calculable time, as you will eventually make the correct arithmetic adjustments automatically. This 'booby' clock should be displayed prominently in the room: above a mirror is a popular spot. The real time should stay hidden in a drawer and never be referred to.

How to get ready in 5 minutes – really

Okay, sometimes due to your own, or more likely someone else's, bad planning (and downright bad luck on your part) you *really* do only have five minutes to change.

The key to success here is perfume and imagination.

Pull top off, and knot hair (if long enough) on head, and while still undressed, think, wash face, clean teeth, generally 'freshen up'.

Spray on deodorant and perfume.

Throw on nearest, cleanest, top.

Reapply make-up, mascara and gloss. Ensure no make-up spills on top, as this will delay departure; a way to do this is to wrap towel or dressing gown over clothes to catch any errors.

Change into heels, or select pair to change into en route, and slip on pair of flats so you can run.

Empty bag on bed; repack mobile, wallet, keys in evening bag. Perhaps a shawl/scarf/cardigan option could be slipped in here.

Seize first pair of dangling earrings or necklace (that you don't wear every day) and either put them on or have ready to apply at first traffic light in car, if driving. Remember a little bit of crystal will throw extra

light on your face and make you look radiant, even if you feel truly knackered and harassed.

Jacket. Door. Hair down.

GO.

No time to clean teeth? Eat an apple.

No time to dry hair? Comb and turn car air-con on full.

If you are really, really, really late call cab, get someone to call on your behalf to say you are on your way – you don't want to arrive and find they have left. Change in the backseat of the cab, but try to start the process at home so you don't flash all and sundry, and go for a wind-swept look.

Fashion designers Dolce & Gabbana advise:

'If you have no time, and are really late, do not panic! That is the first rule! Choose clothes and accessories that you know you will feel at ease wearing, and do not exceed. Go for basic and natural make-up, add a jewel and a precious accessory, a drop of a sensual fragrance and you are ready. 'What matters most is to be confident and never betray your personality and personal taste. Be yourself and *that* is stylish.'

How to make stylish excuses

'Beautiful people are sometimes more prone to keep you waiting than plain people are because there's a big time differential between the beautiful and the plain' *Andy Warhol.* Too true.

Even with the best will in the world sometimes you just won't make it. It is a myth that timekeeping is unstylish. But while being fashionably late is one thing, being supremely delayed is tardy, chaotic, ill mannered and downright rude.

Only fashion shows, and marriage proposals, can be truly delayed, and even they must have a cut-off point. For fashion shows it's three or four hours max for a new designer, and that's only if it's a really, really hot ticket. Marriage proposals: if it's nine months and there's no action it's time to move on.

This handy guide will help you gauge the appropriate level of apology:

0–20 minutes

No excuse necessary. You have arrived. What is the problem?

20–45 minutes

Disarm irritated faces with compliments and follow with a casual apology, blaming external factors. Your opening gambit could run along the following lines: 'Oh how lovely to see you all again. You look so well. Nightmare getting a cab/traffic/parking isn't it?' (Delete as appropriate.)

45 minutes–hour

Vaguely suggest a day of exciting trauma, but be careful not to elaborate, settle in quickly and become absorbed in the current conversation. 'What a day! You just couldn't imagine. Oh well at least I'm here, so what have I missed? Anyone else have trouble getting a sedan chair to carry them over ce soir?' . . . and so on.

One hour plus

This requires the showstopper entrance, but it is no bad thing as it will remind everybody that you are a special creature and can't be expected to keep to standard timekeeping. As Marilyn Monroe once said, 'I have often been on calendars but I have never been on time.'

For inspiring entrances, or ways to get ready, do your homework. Watch *Grease* for Sandy's jaw-dropping transformation, or how Eliza Doolittle becomes a lady in *My Fair Lady*. Molly Ringwald getting ready for the prom in *Pretty in Pink*, or Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman* are always worth re-watching; it just all depends on the dress code you are prepping. Select appropriate DVD to help you on your way.