

Capsule Wardrobe Checklist

Checklist · 88 items · 14 sections

A practical capsule wardrobe is built from a clear audit, a tight color palette, and around 30 to 40 versatile pieces that mix together. This checklist walks through pulling everything out, deciding what stays, identifying real gaps, and rotating by season without restarting from scratch.

Open the editable version online:

<https://genechecklist.com/checklist/capsule-wardrobe-checklist>

BEFORE YOU START - SET THE GROUND RULES

- Pick a capsule size that fits your life: 33 items (Project 333), 37 (Un-Fancy), or 40 for more variety
HIGH
- Decide what counts: tops, bottoms, dresses, outerwear, shoes (exclude underwear, sleepwear, loungewear, workout, special occasion)
HIGH
- Set the capsule length: 3 months per season is standard (spring, summer, fall, winter)
HIGH
- Write down your real weekly activities (office, casual, workouts, social, errands): the capsule must serve this mix
- Note your climate range: lowest and highest typical temperature for the season
- Set a shopping freeze for the audit week

AUDIT YOUR CURRENT WARDROBE

- Pull every clothing item from closet, drawers, laundry, storage, dryer, and chair piles into one room
HIGH
- Try on every item with honest lighting and a mirror
HIGH
- Sort into 5 physical piles: Love and Wear, Maybe, Out of Season, Repair or Tailor, Donate or Sell
HIGH
- Apply the one-year rule to the Maybe pile (not worn in 12 months and not seasonal: Donate)
HIGH
- Check fit honestly: pulling at shoulders, gaping at chest, riding up, sitting wrong all mean it goes
HIGH

- Check condition: pilling, permanent stains, stretched necklines, broken zippers, thinning fabric
HIGH
- Photograph outfits from the Love and Wear pile (reveals your actual style better than Pinterest)
- Count duplicates: 14 black t-shirts is a sign, not a wardrobe
- Bag up the Donate pile and put it in your car the same day so it leaves the house
- Note recurring patterns in items you reach for: fabric, cut, color, length become your buying rules

DEFINE YOUR COLOR PALETTE

- Pick 2 neutrals as your base (navy + cream, black + white, charcoal + tan, olive + ivory)
HIGH
- Pick 1-2 accent colors that flatter your skin and you actually enjoy wearing (rust, burgundy, dusty blue, forest green)
HIGH
- Limit prints to 2-3 pieces per capsule in your existing palette (stripe, small floral, check)
HIGH
- Test the palette: 5 random tops + 5 random bottoms; 20 of 25 combinations should work
- Match metals in jewelry and hardware: warm tones with warm neutrals, cool with cool
- Save a photo swatch of your palette on your phone for shopping reference

CORE TOPS (AIM FOR 8-12)

- 1 well-fitting white button-down shirt in cotton or cotton blend
HIGH
- 1 chambray or light denim shirt
HIGH
- 3 short-sleeve t-shirts in palette neutrals (white, cream, black)
HIGH
- 2 long-sleeve t-shirts or fine-knit tops in palette colors
HIGH
- 1 striped Breton top (long or short sleeve)
- 1 silk or silk-blend blouse for dressier days
- 2 sweaters: 1 lightweight crew or v-neck, 1 heavier cardigan or pullover
- 1 tank or camisole for layering under blazers and cardigans
- 1 statement top in your accent color or a print

CORE BOTTOMS (AIM FOR 5-7)

- 1 pair of well-fitting dark wash jeans (straight, slim, or your preferred cut)
HIGH
- 1 pair of mid- or light-wash jeans for casual days
HIGH
- 1 pair of tailored trousers in a neutral (black, navy, or camel)
HIGH
- 1 pair of casual pants: chinos, wide-leg linen, or cargo
- 1 skirt in a neutral (midi, pencil, or A-line based on what flatters you)
- 1 pair of shorts for warm seasons (denim, linen, or tailored)
- 1 second skirt or pair of dress pants if your job needs more formal options

DRESSES AND JUMPSUITS (AIM FOR 1-3)

- 1 simple day dress in a neutral that works for work and casual
- 1 dressier option for events: little black dress, slip dress, or wrap dress
- 1 jumpsuit or second dress for variety

OUTERWEAR (AIM FOR 2-4)

- 1 denim jacket or utility jacket for mild weather
HIGH
- 1 blazer in a neutral that pairs with jeans and trousers
HIGH
- 1 winter coat suited to your climate (wool, puffer, parka, or trench)
HIGH
- 1 trench coat or lightweight raincoat for transitional weather
- 1 cardigan or kimono-style layer if you run cold indoors

SHOES (AIM FOR 4-7 PAIRS)

- 1 pair of white sneakers (leather or canvas) for casual everyday
HIGH
- 1 pair of ankle boots in a neutral (black, brown, or tan)
HIGH
- 1 pair of versatile flats or loafers
HIGH
- 1 pair of sandals for warm months (flat or low heel)

- 1 pair of heeled shoes or smart loafers for work or events
- 1 pair of weather boots if your climate demands them
- 1 pair of running or workout shoes (often counted outside the capsule)

BAGS AND ACCESSORIES (AIM FOR 3-6)

- 1 everyday tote or shoulder bag in neutral leather or canvas
HIGH
- 1 smaller crossbody or evening bag
HIGH
- 1 belt in black and 1 in brown or tan
- 1 scarf that ties the palette together
- 1 hat for sun protection or warmth depending on season
- 3-5 pieces of jewelry you actually wear (watch, small earrings, simple necklace, one statement piece)

BUILD A 5-DAY TEST RUN

- Lay out 5 complete outfits using only capsule pieces before finalizing
HIGH
- Confirm at least 2 outfits work for each setting you encounter weekly (work, casual, social)
HIGH
- Each top should work with 2+ bottoms; each bottom with 3+ tops
- Photograph the 5 outfits for tired-morning reference
- Note outfits that depend on one specific item: that item is doing too much work

GAP ASSESSMENT AND SHOPPING LIST

- List only the specific gaps found: piece type, color, fit notes
HIGH
- Set a budget per piece and a total budget before shopping
HIGH
- Wait 7 days before buying anything not on the gap list
HIGH
- Prioritize fit and fabric over price (one well-made piece replaces three that pill in a month)
- Shop secondhand first for jeans, blazers, sweaters, and leather goods
- Track each purchase with date, price, and which gap it fills

OFF-SEASON STORAGE

- Box up items not in the current capsule (heavy coats in summer, sundresses in winter)
HIGH
- Store in labeled bins or a separate closet section (out of sight, not gone)
HIGH
- Wash and fully dry everything before storage (food residue and body oil attract moths)
- Add cedar blocks or lavender sachets to wool storage
- Sticky note each bin with contents to avoid digging later

SEASONAL ROTATION

- Set 4 rotation dates per year (first weekend of March, June, September, December)
HIGH
- Pull the new season capsule, audit briefly, pack away the old one
HIGH
- Keep 5-8 year-round anchor pieces that bridge seasons (jeans, white tee, basic sweater, neutral blazer, sneakers)
HIGH
- Swap weights, not styles: linen pants in summer become wool trousers in winter in the same color
- Photograph each season's lineup so next year starts from a real reference
- Add one new accent color or piece per season to keep the capsule current

MAINTENANCE AND LONG-TERM CARE

- Hang or fold properly: knits flat, structured pieces hung, denim hung or folded
HIGH
- Wash less, air more: hang jeans, sweaters, blazers between wears unless visibly soiled
HIGH
- Repair small issues immediately (loose button, snag, lifting hem)
HIGH
- Use a fabric shaver on knits every few wears
- Polish leather shoes and bags quarterly, condition twice a year
- Run a one-in-one-out rule after the initial build
- Review the capsule at each seasonal swap and remove anything that did not get worn