

## CHAPTER 2

# Cultures and Customs

### OBJECTIVES

- Explain how clothing reflects cultures.
- Give examples of clothing symbols.
- Discuss clothing customs and expectations in the U.S. culture.
- Describe appropriate outfits for certain occasions.

### KEY TERMS

appropriate	expectations
culture	heritage
customs	roles
dress code	standards

## EXAMINE THIS ISSUE

### Adapting to new cultures.

Today, increasing numbers of people spend time living or working in countries outside their homeland. Some relocate permanently. In these situations the question of clothing arises. Some people continue to wear the traditional garments of their own culture wherever they go. They feel most comfortable in the clothing they have always worn and believe that others should respect that choice. Some prefer to wear the styles of the culture where they are living. They want to fit in well and eliminate potential barriers.

#### What do you think?

Do people need to adopt a culture's clothing styles in order to fit in? Are other behaviors more important for acceptance?

WITH EVERY PASSING YEAR, PEOPLE say the world grows smaller. Of course, that's not literally true, but what do they mean? They mean that people now communicate across continents and travel to other lands with greater ease. Places that once seemed far away and remotely different are now more familiar. As diverse people share ideas and products around the world, they become closer, which is changing the way people view other cultures.

### CLOTHING REFLECTS CULTURES

Each society has its own **culture**, the collected ideas, skills, beliefs, and institutions of a society at a particular time in history. Food, entertainment, art, religion, politics, and technology—all are elements of a society's culture. Cultural differences are what set one society apart from another.

Every culture has something special and unique about its clothing. The garments that

people wear—the fabrics, designs, and colors—tell so much about the way people think and live. They reveal part of that people's story, much as each piece in a puzzle contributes to the finished picture. See *Fig. 2-1*.

### National Costumes

Over the centuries, many cultures have developed their own distinctive clothing style, or national costume. Most national costumes had very practical beginnings.

Ancient Celts in the highlands of Scotland wove clan blankets with special plaid patterns to identify each clan. In the sixteenth century, they started wrapping these plaid blankets around the body to form a short, belted-on, all-purpose garment called a kilt. The extra fabric was pulled up over the shoulder from the back and pinned in

**2-1** Contemporary fashions can be inspired by traditional ethnic garments and fabrics. This garment reflects the African culture through the style, bright colors, and interesting pattern.



place. Today Scotsmen still wear plaid kilts for special occasions. See Fig. 2-2.

In Middle Eastern countries, where the desert is very hot during the day and very cold at night, the turban became a common clothing item. It absorbed sweat and also insulated from the cold. The turban continues to serve these practical functions in many cultures. See Fig. 2-3.

Over the years, some cultures developed garments with a similar shape, which was comfortable and easy to make. The Hawaiian muumuu, the North African caftan, and the Arabian kibr, a hooded robe with sleeves, are all loose-fitting garments that are still worn today.

Some national costumes, such as the Indian sari and Japanese kimono, feature beautiful fabric designs in colorful silks. Other national costumes have unique forms of ornamentation. Traditional Hungarian clothes, for example, are decorated with leather. Colorful, embroidered designs



**2-3** Turbans are common in many parts of the world, from North Africa, across the Middle East, and into Central Asia. The narrow cloth that creates a turban can be as long as 12 feet.

**2-2** In its original form, the kilt needed no tailoring and didn't need to be replaced as often as breeches. Today the kilt is worn proudly and considered the national dress of Scotland.



accent Scandinavian clothing. Native American garments feature colored beads, arranged in special patterns and sewn to soft leather. See Fig. 2-4.

In some parts of the world, people still wear distinctive national costumes as part of their everyday dress. The African tribal robe and Indian sari, for example, have changed little over the centuries.

## Global Trends

In your school, how similar are the clothes students wear? How do these styles compare to those worn across the country? What about teens in China, Italy, Ghana, Brazil, India, or Australia? If you could travel the world, you would probably see many teens dressed like you.

Today, many people wear similar clothing styles in countries around the world. The Chinese businessman in Beijing wears the same type of suit as the American businessman in New York City. Mass communication and global distribution of the latest fashions have produced this effect.

There are exceptions, however. People who live in countries with very hot or cold climates may



**2-4** Beautiful woven fabrics and designs are typical of Native American costumes. Handcrafted beads, belts, and other adornments add to the beauty of the costume.

find greater comfort in their traditional clothing. Others, such as those in developing countries, may not have the means or the desire to wear Western styles.

In many cultures, national costumes are now worn only for festive occasions, such as holidays, parades, weddings, and dances. Wedding guests in Germany, Korea, or Mexico may celebrate by wearing traditional outfits that have been worn for generations. See *Fig. 2-5*. This is one way for people to reflect their cultural pride in a modern world.

## CLOTHING AS SYMBOLS

Why does a bride in the U.S. traditionally wear a white gown? In the American culture, the color white symbolizes innocence, faith, and purity. By contrast, brides in China wear red garments because red symbolizes joy and permanence. Throughout the cultures of the world, clothing

has many symbolic meanings. Clothing can tell you about a person's heritage, occupation, role, gender, and values.

## Heritage

Every person has a special **heritage**, the cultural background and ethnic traditions handed down from ancestors. Heritage defines identity and produces pride. To celebrate heritage, people participate in ethnic festivals and holidays, often wearing colorful costumes. On Chinese New Year, people don new clothes in "lucky" orange or red, as brilliant as the fireworks that mark the day. At the Navajo Nation Fair, Native Americans display stunning traditional garments, worn with feathered headdress, beaded bracelets, and leather moccasins.

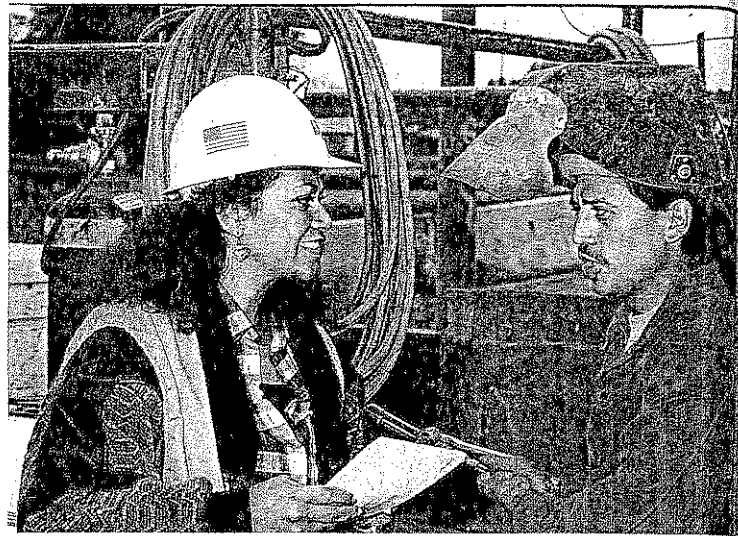
**2-5** National costumes worn for special occasions in Mexico are bright and colorful. Although the bride at a Mexican wedding usually wears white, red is a popular color among the guests. Colorful flowers in the hair complement the dress this woman wears.



Many clothing styles have come to symbolize a particular cultural background. A kimono is associated with Japan, a sari with India, and leather lederhosen with Germany. See Fig. 2-6. Colorful fabrics wrap the heads of African women. South Americans wear distinctive striped ponchos.

Because the United States is a culturally diverse society, no single clothing style symbolizes heritage. Although basic clothing styles were inherited from Europe, many cultures have contributed special items. The mandarin collar comes from China, for example, and the caftan

**2-6** Although the classic Indian sari is made with six yards of fabric, a nine-yard version can be draped to form pants rather than a flowing gown. The graceful, feminine sari can be made from shimmering silk or gauzy cotton in beautiful pastels. Some have bright floral prints.



**2-7** People often wear clothing that symbolizes their occupation. Even in a different setting, you would probably know what work these people do. How can you tell?

comes from Africa. Native Americans have contributed highly prized turquoise and silver jewelry.

Within the United States, regional differences show. A Texan may wear cowboy boots with his business suit. People in Hawaii and Florida usually wear brighter colors than those worn in Minnesota. Can you think of reasons for these regional differences in clothing?

### Occupation

In a courtroom drama on television, how do you identify the judge? You probably notice the traditional black robe. In the same way, clothing identifies many professions. Ministers, priests, and other clergy members usually wear special robes or shawls when conducting religious services. Uniforms clearly symbolize the police force, fire department, and military. Many people in service occupations, including restaurant workers, delivery people, and postal workers, also wear special uniforms for quick identification.

Clues to professions are all around you. Examples are a doctor's white coat, a priest's collar, and a chef's hat. What other clothing symbols are linked to careers? See Fig. 2-7.

## Roles

For high school graduation, you'll probably wear a long robe and mortarboard hat. These symbolize your role as a graduate. Clothing identifies many **roles**, the different positions people have in society.

A bride is distinguished from her attendants by the wedding gown, veil, and special dresses worn. A baby's heirloom gown, passed down through generations, symbolizes baptism. Athletes and members of marching bands wear distinctive uniforms. Many high school athletes wear special "letter" jackets that show participation in sports, as well as positions and honors. Roles are easily identifiable because of the many special garments that act as symbols.

## Gender

For many years in Western society, clothing symbolized gender. Women wore skirts and men

**2-8** In oriental countries, robes have been common attire throughout history. Designs, colors, fabrics, and styles have been modified to suit the culture and the purpose. What versions of the oriental robe have you seen?



wore pants. Since pants are accepted clothing for both genders today, slight differences in design now make distinctions. Compare the buttons on men's and women's shirts. What difference do you notice?

In other cultures, clothing styles worn by males and females have evolved quite differently. For centuries in some parts of the world, pants have been worn by both genders. In Lapland, north of the Arctic Circle, both men and women wear pants to protect against subzero temperatures. In Southeast Asia, such as Vietnam and Thailand, men and women wear pants for work and leisure activities.

In other parts of the world, males wear skirts or long robes just as females do. Men in the South Pacific wear a wrapped skirt called a sarong. Arab men wear long, flowing robes. In many African societies, males wear colorful, wrapped skirts of various lengths. Chinese and Japanese men have worn silk robes for centuries. See *Fig. 2-8*.

## Values

Clothing and accessories can reflect the values of a culture or specific group. A few examples show how.

Membership in a particular religious group might be symbolized by jewelry with crosses, stars, or other religious symbols. Through dark-colored clothing in simple styles, the Amish show regard for their ancestor's way of living. See *Fig. 2-9* on page 42. Some Jewish men wear a cap called a yarmulka (YAH-muh-kuh) at all times; others wear it only for special occasions and religious services. Followers of Hasidism (HA-suh-dih-zum) stand out from others in the Jewish community with their long coats and dark hats. Sikh men, who don't cut their hair, wrap their heads in a turban. Many Muslim women wear a long, scarf-like cloth, called a hijab, to cover the hair and frame the face.

Clothing also reflects cultural views of modesty. In some cultures of the world, wearing very little clothing is acceptable, perhaps only a loin-cloth for men. In others, women must wear a long veil that completely covers them in public. In



**2-9** In an Amish household, the mother usually sews clothing for the family. She makes bonnets, dresses, aprons, and capes, as well as pants and shirts for the males in the family.

Europe, men of all ages swim in very brief bathing suits, and some women don't wear tops. In the United States, most swimwear is less revealing. On the other hand, Americans are more likely to wear shorts in public, while many Europeans don't believe that shorts are proper street attire.

## CLOTHING CUSTOMS

Every society has certain customs, long-established practices that regulate social life. See *Fig. 2-10*. While some customs cover etiquette, others relate to clothing. A clothing custom is

**2-10** The clothing people choose for a date or to wear to a restaurant is influenced by the customs in a society. How would you dress for such occasions?

born when people adopt a way of dressing for a specific situation. Wearing shorts to a rock concert may be one custom, while wearing dress-up clothes to a symphony concert is another. Knowing the clothing customs in society can help you make decisions about what to wear for different occasions.

## Understanding Expectations and Standards

Many people have certain clothing expectations, or thoughts about what is reasonable or justified for people to wear. Custom in American society says that males don't wear skirts. Business suits are out of place on a construction site, just as jeans are out of place in many offices. Swimsuits belong on the beach, but not in school classrooms.

Teens often become aware of what others expect of them. A parent's ideas about clothing, hairstyle, and makeup may differ from what the teen likes. An employer, friend, or team members may have certain expectations about how you should dress. An employer expects a well-groomed appearance. See *Fig. 2-11*. As a team leader you might be expected to set an example that shows other members how to dress.



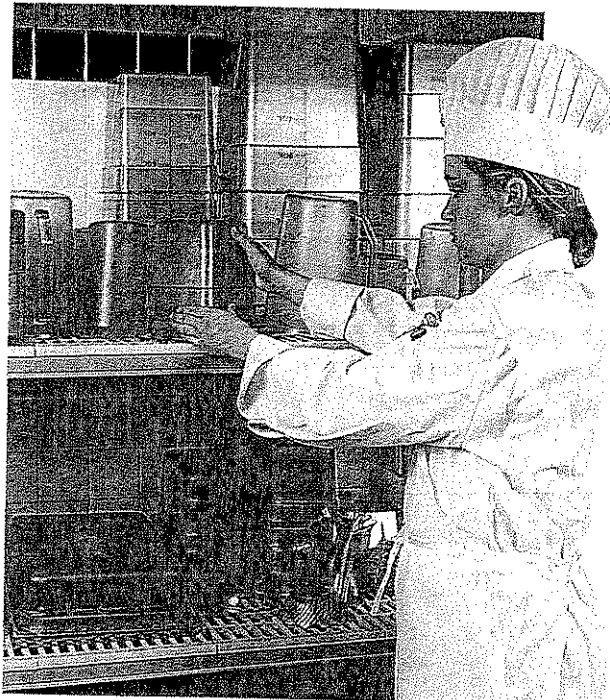
When the majority of people share the same expectations in a society, standards form. **Standards** are the guidelines and principles that set forth what's **appropriate**, or suitable, to wear. Standards may be written or unwritten, and they can change over time.

## Dress Codes

On the doors of businesses, you've probably seen signs that warn, "No shirt, no shoes, no service." This statement is a simple **dress code**, a set of rules that describe acceptable or required clothing. Most restaurants require customers to wear shoes and shirts because of health laws. If you don't follow these rules, the restaurant can refuse to serve you.

Many schools and offices have dress codes for students and employees. A general list of clothing items tells what may not be worn, such as no torn jeans, no bared midriffs, no low-cut tops, no hats, and no T-shirts with inappropriate images or messages. Most schools have formal dress codes, which are written. Informal codes are unwritten,

**211** What does an employer expect concerning clothing and appearance? Here, a clean uniform, confined hair, and personal cleanliness are all likely expectations. Following them contributes to job success.



**COLLAR COLORS.** In the late 1800s, a starched white collar was part of the professional Englishman's business attire. Taking a deep breath was difficult in these high, tight collars, almost ensuring that the wearer could do no physical labor. The manual laborer's shirt typically was blue, including a loose-fitting collar. To this day, the term **white collar** describes professional "office" jobs, while **blue collar** refers to technical trades.

but people are still expected to understand and follow them. When a business has an informal dress code, an employee can usually determine what it is by noting how supervisors dress.

## Differing Standards

If you've ever moved from one part of the country to another, you may have noticed that clothing standards differ among communities and regions. Ideas of appropriateness are not always the same.

In an urban area a man might need to wear suits and ties more often than someone who lives in a small community. For women, dresses and pantsuits may be the standard for social events in some communities, while casual sportswear can be worn in others. In resort areas, both men and women may wear brightly colored casual wear for all types of activities.

## Choosing Appropriate Styles

Matching clothing to the occasion can be to your advantage. When you need acceptance and approval, the "right" clothing makes a difference. It can make you feel comfortable, relaxed, and self-assured, especially in new situations. By following standards in dress, people feel that they fit in better and the group or community accepts them.



## Job Interviews

On a job interview, a good impression counts. The way you dress for an interview sends a message about the kind of employee you'll be.

Dress for the interview, not the job. Even if employees wear jeans, you should wear clothes suitable for a special dinner out. Dress conservatively—no extreme outfits, heavy makeup, or elaborate hairstyles. With flattering colors and styles, you'll feel more confident. Clean and neat hair, hands, clothes, and shoes create a good impression. You'll find more tips on dressing for a job interview on page 386. By following these guidelines, you can focus the interviewer's attention on your skills and less on your appearance. See Fig. 2-12.

## On the Job

The trend toward casual clothing has spread to many workplaces. At first, summer Fridays became casual days. Males didn't have to wear business suits and ties to the office on Fridays. Women could wear sportswear and flats instead of tailored outfits and heels. Soon magazines, newspapers, and stores featured casual fashions for office wear. More recently, "business casual," described on page 45, has become acceptable throughout the year in many offices.

Despite changes, most businesses still have dress standards. In some companies, employees wear casual clothes for office work, but traditional business attire when meeting clients or giving presentations. Typically, employees shouldn't look as though they're headed for a picnic or a formal dance. A good general rule is to wear nothing extreme—not too tight, too short, too low, too thin, too bold, too fancy, or too bright. Such inappropriate clothing distracts others and creates wrong impressions.

## Special Occasions

Weddings, funerals, and religious services have special clothing expectations and standards. For most weddings held in a church, temple, hotel, or club, guests are expected to wear special-occasion clothes. This means dresses or pantsuits for women, and jackets and ties for men. For some ceremonies, long gowns and tuxedos may be expected. At funerals, people should dress conservatively in darker colors and tailored styles. Wearing dark colors shows respect for the family's loss.

Some religions have special clothing requirements for their services. For example, a head covering may be expected. Others may require that the shoulders be covered. For all religious services, conservative clothes are a good choice.

When going to a fancy party, males usually wear a suit and tie, and females wear dressy clothes. A formal dance may request "black tie."



**2-12** If you were an employer considering two equally qualified candidates, would you hire the person who is neat and presentable or the one who is not? Most employers are influenced by an interviewee's appearance. "Putting your best foot forward" can help you get the job.

# How To

## SELECT BUSINESS CASUAL ATTIRE

"Business casual?" the new employee said. "What's that?" Business casual is a dress code used to describe appropriate clothing for many workplaces. Most companies define the code as half way between traditional business attire (suits and ties) and casual clothes (jeans, T-shirts, and athletic wear). Not every workplace interprets "business casual" in exactly the same way, but the ideas listed here are typical. If no written dress code exists, ask your employer what to wear, or notice what leading employees wear.

### Acceptable "Business Casual"

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Collared shirts                                    | Blazer or jacket for presentations and conferences                |
| Sweaters   | Jeans and athletic shoes (sometimes acceptable if clean and neat) |
| Khakis or slacks                                   |   |
| Skirts or casual dresses (women)                   |   |
| Laced or slip-on shoes (loafers, flats, low heels) |   |



### Unacceptable Business Attire

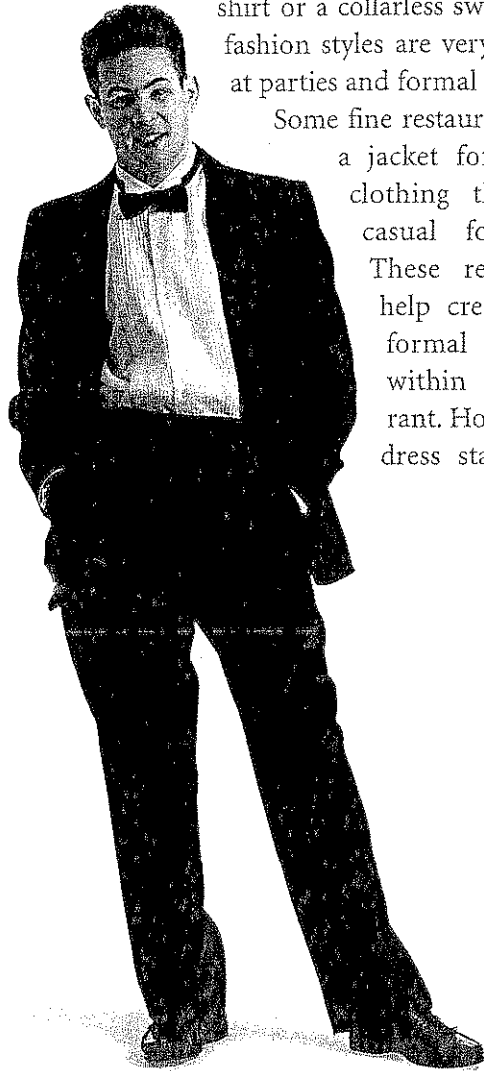
- |                              |                                    |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Faded, worn, or ripped jeans | Shorts, cutoffs, and swim trunks   |
| T-shirts                     | Spandex                            |
| Sweatshirts and pants        | Athletic shoes, clogs, and sandals |
| Cropped tops                 | Any item that isn't clean and neat |
| Micro-mini skirts            |                                    |

### Exploring Business Casual

Ask employed adults about business casual policies. What clothing is worn? Compare results in class.

This means a tuxedo for men and formal gowns or fancy dresses for women. See Fig. 2-13. With the trend toward more casual clothing, some men are not wearing a tie with a tuxedo or suit.

Instead, they might choose a banded shirt or a collarless sweater. High-fashion styles are very acceptable at parties and formal events.



Some fine restaurants require a jacket for men and clothing that is not casual for women. These requirements help create a more formal atmosphere within the restaurant. However, strict dress standards are

changing. Now very few restaurants require a tie and many no longer require jackets. This reflects the general trend in society to dress more casually.

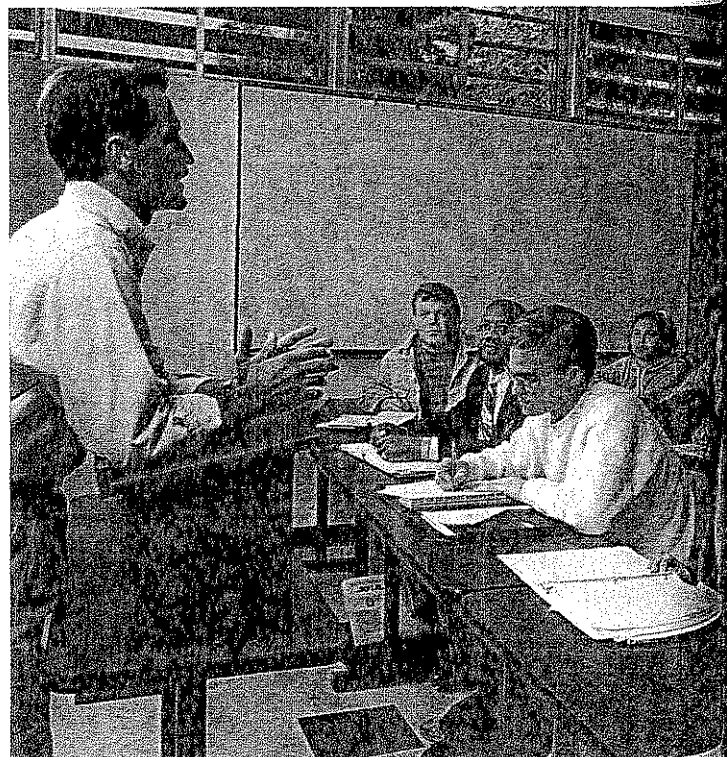
## Respecting Customs

For some teens, following society's clothing customs may not always seem necessary. An individual style appeals to them, or they want the look shared by a group of friends. Teens often use people in movies and music videos as role models, copying their clothing styles. These performers wear outfits chosen for theatrical effect, however, and what works in the entertainment industry might not work in the real world.

Clothing choices can have negative effects. What problems might unconventional clothing choices cause for a teen at home, school, work, or elsewhere? For teens and adults, doing what's expected makes life go more smoothly. Maturity shows when people follow certain clothing customs because they know they need to get along well with others. See Fig. 2-14.

**2-13** For some special occasions, a male might wear a tuxedo. Is that customary for the prom at your school? What do females wear?

**2-14** The students in this classroom are wearing conventional clothing styles, as expected in their school. Unconventional and inappropriate styles can cause problems that interfere with learning. What might some of those problems be?

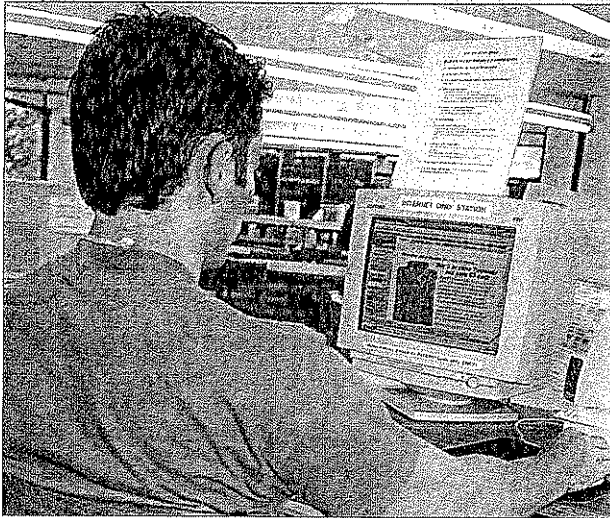


## Trends in TECHNOLOGY

### >> FASHION WEB SITES

When you're looking for fashions, Web sites are both shopping tools and virtual fashion magazines. Look what you can find.

- **A virtual fitting room.** You can match body characteristics to such images as broad shoulders, narrow hips, and short legs. After creating your body image, the computer "dresses" it with the garment you choose. The site may suggest other suitable garments. When you input hair color, eye color, and skin tone, flattering color combinations display.



- **Outfit suggestions.** If you order a top, other items to complete the outfit are suggested.
- **Order memory.** Remembering your last order, the site suggests new products that might interest you.
- **Customizing services.** After providing your body measurements, you can select the style, fabric, and fashion details for a custom-made shirt, suit, or jeans. These are usually expensive. Check the cost and read the return policy before ordering.
- **Special information and activities.** You might find grooming tips, prom fashions, polls about what's in and what's not, and live interactive chats with celebrities.
- **E-mail announcements.** Once you've ordered on-line, e-mails provide special announcements and discount offers.

### INVESTIGATION ACTIVITY

Find Web sites that offer the features described here. Which would be most useful to you?

### Handling Clothing Mistakes

What can you do if you don't know what to wear for a particular occasion? If you know the standard attire for a similar event, you can feel safe wearing that. Otherwise, ask someone. Parents and teachers may know what's acceptable. Friends who have been to similar events might have suggestions. For a party, you can call the host or hostess or ask other guests what they plan to wear. Avoiding extremes—too casual or too dressy—is a good moderate approach.

Suppose you walk into an event and discover you aren't dressed right. That can feel awkward. If you concentrate on talking with other people and getting involved in the activities, the awkward feelings usually lessen. Can you find humor in the situation? Maybe you can joke with someone else who missed the dress "rules." Everyone makes clothing mistakes once in a while, but these are good learning experiences.

## CHAPTER 2

# Review

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

- As an element of culture, clothing often reflects how people think and live, as well as their history.
- Different cultures can often be identified by specific garments.
- Clothing has symbolic meanings related to heritage, occupations, roles, gender, and values.
- A society's clothing customs, expectations, and standards dictate what is considered acceptable to wear in specific situations.
- Following standards for dress in a society can be confusing. Avoiding extremes in attire is the most successful approach.

### USING KEY TERMS

Work with a partner. For each Key Term, take one minute to create a list of ideas or examples that describe or relate to that term.



### RECALLING THE FACTS

1. In general, how can clothing be a clue to what a society is like?
2. Describe two national costumes.
3. Why is the clothing people wear in many countries similar today?
4. Is there one clothing style that reflects the United States culture? Explain.
5. List ways that clothing symbolizes occupations and roles.
6. How is clothing as a symbol of gender similar and different in different cultures?
7. Describe ways that clothing can reflect a society's values.
8. How do clothing customs and dress codes differ?
9. What results when people in society share similar clothing expectations?
10. In general, how do you "dress for the interview, not the job"?
11. How does "business casual" compare to traditional business clothes?
12. Identify appropriate dress for three special occasions.
13. What problem related to society's clothing standards do some teens face? What is a wise response?
14. How can you minimize the awkwardness of choosing the wrong clothes for an occasion?

# and Activities

## THINKING CRITICALLY

1. Do ethnic differences in clothing ever cause people to judge others incorrectly? Explain.
2. Some Asian and African countries are developing their economies through trade with the West. Many people in these societies fear that this contact causes them to lose ethnic identity. Is this an unavoidable result of economic improvement? Explain your answer.
3. Why do you think some workplaces have adopted more casual dress codes?

## APPLYING KNOWLEDGE

1. **Ethnic costumes.** Working with a small group, look through magazines and newspapers for illustrations of people in ethnic garments. Create a display that identifies each country or region and describes its costume.
2. **Sharing clothing heritage.** Along with other class members, locate ethnic garments and accessories. Show these to the class, demonstrating how they are worn and for what purposes.
3. **Personal heritage.** Research clothing styles worn by people of your cultural background. Write a description of a typical garment, explaining its history and special features.
4. **Costume design.** Design a national costume for the United States. Share your design and explanation with the class.

5. **Wearing pants.** Research who and what influenced women to begin wearing pants in the U.S. You might start by locating information on Amelia Bloomer and Susan B. Anthony.
6. **Following the code.** Locate the section on student dress in your school handbook. Compare that description to what students wear. How closely is the code followed?

## CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

A new friend of yours has confided in you. She is a foreign exchange student in your school and comes from a country where the traditional dress is quite different. During the weeks that she has been in your school, she has started to wear American clothing styles much more often. She likes wearing them and feels good about fitting in with the other students, but she feels a sense of guilt and disloyalty to her own culture. She wonders how her family would feel if they knew what she is doing.

### Think Creatively

How would you respond to your new friend? What ideas might be helpful to her?