1920s MEN’S FASHIONS (pictures on pages that follow)

1920s men’s suits and tuxedos are not that different from today’s suits and tuxedos, which makes them easy to imitate! The few noticeable differences: waistlines on trousers were a bit higher than today, and most suits included a vest. One way to imitate the vested look is to wear a knit vest underneath, or find a fitted vest at a vintage store that coordinates with the suit in your closet. For casual wear, men and particularly students sometimes wore “plus fours,” that is, golf pants or knickers that hung fluidly around the knee and fastened underneath. These were often worn with sweaters or tweed jackets, as well as wildly patterned socks (e.g. argyle).

Shirts were usually white, but occasionally in a light color with white collar. High, detachable shirt collars were out of style by the early 1920s, and most shirts had attached collars, with the neckline lowering through the decade. Collars were generally medium-sized in length (although a few examples of pointy!) and either set close to the tie or flared slightly away from the tie. No one wore button downs.

Shoes: if you don’t own any dress shoes, lace-up oxfords, two-tone shoes, etc, you can sometimes find old shoes at vintage stores. Costume shops often carry cheap spats. Another option is theatrical character shoes from dance companies like Capezio. A good place to try on and buy character/theatrical shoes is Teddy’s Shoes at 548 Mass. Ave., Cambridge (Central Square), www.teddyshoes.com. You can also find character shoes online. For instance, www.capeziostore.com and www.allaboutdance.com. E-Bay is another option. NOTE: Character shoes can fit differently from regular street shoes, so best to try on first. Also, since the shoes are designed to be worn on a stage, they can be slippery. Add a tread on the bottom to make them less slippery and better for outdoor wear, if you plan to wear them around town. Men also wore boots for workwear.

Hats: Top hats, fedoras, straw boaters, & golf/driving caps

- You can get the Real McCoy at Bobby from Boston, online vintage stores, and e-Bay. Be sure to check the measurements/size.
- You can get modern and retro versions at multiple hat shops online.
- You can get cheap costume versions at costume shops.

Neckwear:

- Silk ties and rayon ties were shorter than ties today and slightly flared, made from light-weight fabric (think women’s silk scarves), thus a tight knot at the top by the shirt collar. Popular patterns were diagonal stripes (especially in school colors), as well as small dots and regular patterns that we today tend to think of as “preppy.” Really wild and asymmetrical patterns came into fashion in the 1930s and 1940s.
- Knit ties: thin (2” wide), and usually striped horizontally
- Bow ties: made from silk or rayon, with a small center knot and slightly flaring bow.
- Cravats and neck-kerchiefs: we tend to think of silent film directors wearing a cravat or scarf under an open-necked shirt. I have yet to find a photo of this, but someone must have worn them (probably Europeans)
- No tie: For casual wear, men wore their shirts open without a tie, often with the collar pointing out from under a sweater. This might be a more accurate casual look for a Hollywood director.

Pocket kerchief or boutonniere

A nice vintage touch is to put a pocket handkerchief into the breast pocket of your suit. Extra fancy is to have it match your tie, but not necessary. White will work. Or, for another jaunty look, put a boutonnière (flower) through your lapel buttonhole.

Hair: Men in the 20s parted their hair in many ways (side, middle), slicked their hair straight back, or sometimes wore it sticking up in puffs. (See PDF of 1920s PHOTOGRAPHS.) To give yourself the slick, shiny look that was so popular, use a wet-look hair product. Do not use Vaseline, which will not easily wash out.
A variety of menswear from the 1920s, from casual to formal. Tuxedo jacket is dated to 1929. Bottom right is a portrait actor William Haines, and next to that a movie still with William Haines from c. 1927-29.
Left: note the “plus fours” (golf pants) with patterned socks, and other man with two-toned shoes. Right: actor William Haines.
The man in the top left photo is wearing “Oxford bags,” a popular style with young men and students, which was derived from the craze for wide pants at Oxford University. Top and bottom right photos are movie stills. Bottom left is portrait of snappy dresser Charlie Chaplin (the detachable collar may date this to the 1910s).
A variety of men’s hats from formal to informal. Driving caps were full. If you lay them down on a table, the top looks like a circle. Also note the tweedy and patterned more casual menswear. Also note in more formal dressing the pocket handkerchief. (The photos on the far left may be from the late 1910s.)
Men’s patterned ties, worn by actors Paul Robeson, John Gilbert, Ramon Navarro, William Powell, William Haines, and Rudolph Valentino.
Stripes and patterned ties worn by actors Ronald Coleman, Rudolph Valentino, William Haines, John Gilbert, and Ramon Navarro.
Bow ties and casual open collars worn by actors Rudolph Valentino, William Haines, Ronald Coleman, Ramon Navarro, and Richard Arlen.
Some slicked back hairdos on Rudolph Valentino, Ramon Novarro, William Haines, and Duke Ellington. Note Ellington’s bowl-cut from the 1929 film *Black and Tan Fantasy* (small inset photo).