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### Say yes to an (affordable) dress

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*7 tips for finding a wedding dress that only looks expensive.*

In 2015, [WeddingStats.com](#) says brides are spending an average of \$1,189 on their wedding dress — but can you spend less and still look like a million bucks?

Yes! With planning and persistence, you can find the perfect (and perfectly affordable) wedding dress of your dreams. Here are 7 tips to help you succeed on your dress quest:

1. **Start early:** Give yourself plenty of time to [find the perfect wedding dress](#), at least nine months in advance of the day, according to AboutWeddings.com. You want to avoid any [rush fees](#), which WeddingsCostHelper.com says can run between 10 to 25 percent extra at a bridal salon. Although there are no longer any hard and fast rules of what's "appropriate" to wear, keeping in mind your venue, the season and the time of day can help you determine how formal or informal you want to look.

**Tip:** If your ceremony is in a house of worship, don't forget to check if there are any attire restrictions (for example, you may need to wear a shawl over a strapless dress).

2. **Research your options:** Are you envisioning a ball gown or a classic vintage style? Flip through Pinterest®, and start a "board" of your favorite styles. You can also find additional dress inspiration at [Wedding Lookbook by The Knot](#) and [Bride's wedding gallery](#). If you're wondering what style

wedding dress will look best on you, [Modwedding.com](#) offers advice on the best silhouette for every body type.

**Tip:** The free iPad app [WeddingDressStudio](#) simulates how a particular style dress will look on you.

- 3. Set your budget:** After you've virtually seen what you like and what looks good on you, it's time to set a price. Build out a budget you can afford — not just for the dress, but for accessories and alterations, too (from \$20 for a small nip or tuck to \$200 or more for major work, according to [CostHelper.com](#)). [StatisticBrain.com](#) estimates the average cost of dress accessories at \$144 and the headpiece/veil at \$119.

**Tip:** Don't forget to add a few lines to the budget for shoes and shapewear.

- 4. Size things up:** Wedding dresses typically run one or two sizes *smaller* than street clothes, according to [TheKnot.com](#). Try on a few dresses at [bridal salons](#) in your area to determine what size is right for you. If they only have sample sizes, be sure to ask their professional seamstress to take your measurements. (This is especially important if you're going to purchase online.) If you get a dress way too small or large, you'll get hit with those significant alteration fees listed above.

**Tip:** Always order a larger size to play it safe — it's a lot easier to take a garment in, than to let it out.

- 5. Shop online and off:** Budget conscious brides should check out sites like [Overstock.com](#) and consignment sellers like [eBay](#) and [Pre-OwnedWeddingDresses](#). You can also find great values at vintage clothing stores, mass discount stores and sample sales. One-night designer dress sites like [RentTheRunway](#) are also gaining traction with practical brides.

**Tip:** Make sure you check return policies carefully and understand just what you're getting (pre-owned, new with or without tags, new with defects). At many stores, once you officially order the dress, it's yours (no matter what).

- 6. Start your own tradition:** Did you know that Jessica Biel, Gwen Stefani, Reese Witherspoon and Anne Hathaway all wore pink on their wedding days, according to [Luckysshops.com](#)? So, if you don't love how you look in white — wear a favorite, tried-and-true color you look and feel great in. You may find it a lot cheaper!

**Tip:** Check out prom and bridesmaid dresses that may work as bridal wear.

- 7. Don't second guess yourself:** You'll know when you've found "the dress" but you may get distracted if you bring an entourage with you. [Bridalguide.com](#) suggests most brides do best by taking their mom and a best friend or sister.

**Tip:** [TheKnot.com](#) advises not to say yes out of sales pressure or fatigue; instead, just walk away.