

# To Uniform, or Not To Uniform

## Capsule Wardrobe Challenge

By Victoria Montalti

Thirteen outfits, three challenges, one exhausted gal. Not a TikTok trend (yet), but a personal challenge to rethink my style, wardrobe, and time management skills. Capsule wardrobes are meant to condense one's closet to their favorite, most versatile pieces. No nonsense. No meandering. It seems the perfect solution for re-immersing into the outside world post stay-at-home orders.

"Seems" is the key word here. It seems that a uniform-tailored wardrobe would uncomplicate the puzzle of getting dressed everyday. It's one less thing to stress about or dwell over. But how do you know what to hone in on or discard? YouTube is saturated with videos entitled "Five Days in the Same Outfit," "Same Top Worn 7 Ways," and "My Work Uniform," offering clickable content that makes you wonder, hmmm, could I do that? Yes, you can! But will you come out of it a uniform devotee? Have I?

So, what were the challenges I took and how did they play out? Well, I essentially wore three different capsule "wardrobes," testing the advantages and disadvantages of each. The purpose of a capsule wardrobe is to tailor your closet to only essential pieces (classic silhouettes, a neutral color palette, enduring fabrics).

Three different wardrobes seems contradictory to that ethos and intended ease. But I wanted to play with this, testing one style, one color, and one silhouette. Each challenge lasted five days, requiring five challenge-specific outfits. The intention was to pick out the week's outfits ahead of time—that didn't last long! First up, business casual wear.



### Week One Business Casual

*Expectations: More motivated and productive, but restricted*  
Rating: 4/5

If business casual clothing wasn't already an increasingly acceptable style for those in the workforce, it certainly is now. Waist-up dressing is the norm, despite cautionary tales of boxer-brief Zoom flashings as people work in their makeshift offices. And yet, I've never felt truly motivated in pajama pants.

So in short, I didn't wear faded sweatpants under my blouses during business casual week. My entry into the challenge was more liberal, though. My best blazer overlaid a ribbed crop top and a light washed pair of Levi's. Okay, I felt like a boss. Throwing on a blazer and zipping the lapels just does something to you! I immediately felt motivated and capable of accomplishing the day's deeds.

The next day was a deep dive. Wearing my favorite silky blouse and a poly-wool skirt, which I'd worn just once before, I was ready for the office—the home office, that is. And lucky me, because as it turns out, the skirt was too big, and I had to hold it taut with a chip-clip. That's right, a keep-your-Doritos-fresh clip! Thank goodness for waist-up Zooms. What can I say? I suffer for my art. Believe it or not, this wasn't nearly as distracting as future outfits.

Trekking into the city for school the following morning, I chose jeans again, but this time a darker, undistressed pair. The big-ticket item that had me strutting down the pavement was a red-striped linen dress that I wore as an open top. This was not my typical college-class style, but it put me into the headspace of participating in my sole in-person class.

Day four was a day of balance. It was a day of school assignments, nail and haircut appointments, and a drive to my New Jersey home. A jogger-slacks hybrid and a crisp white t-shirt was the happy medium between looking put-together and feeling comfortable. A straight-leg or A-line pant is a classy silhouette that can go from day-to-night and from office to hair salon.

My final business casual outfit—well, it didn't exist. I didn't feel it appropriate to wear the style while I ran around setting up for an outdoor family event. I'm sorry to disappoint, but it was a telling part of the process in learning my judgment, limits, and dedication to sticking within the confines of a capsule wardrobe.

## Week Two Classic Black

Expectations: *Less distracted and more confident, but uninspired*  
Rating: 4.5/5



To confirm, black is one of my favorite colors to wear. I predicted that this would be the easiest challenge since I own so many black pieces and generally feel confident in the color. I was wrong. Mostly because our early autumn days reached 75 degrees, and the seemingly least-distracting color of black caused a flurry of hot flashes. Particularly unmotivated the first day, I threw on a black crop top and leggings. Sure, the look read well over Zoom, but under the façade, I was sweating. I now understand how a classic capsule wardrobe with a variety of neutral colors would come in handy.

The second day of the black wardrobe was a blur—so much so that I cannot remember what I wore—though I'm confident it was black. Apparently, I didn't feel motivated enough to even document my look. However, the next day I had a newfound mental awareness, just in time for in-person classes and a rooftop meet-up with friends. My black cami,

jeans, belt, and heeled mules served their purpose of making me feel determined, confident, and classy.

By the fourth day of this challenge, I was scrambling. In a hesitant move, I donned a ribbed button-down V-neck with cropped black slacks. I felt like Rachel Green, and I felt like a waitress, but I didn't feel like Rachel Green as a waitress. This was devastating, as the Rachel-waitress look is nothing short of aspirational.

On the final day for this week's wardrobe, I needed a day-to-night look that was appropriate for a virtual career fair and dinner with friends. I paired a sleeveless turtleneck with jeans, dressing it up with an animal print headband and my grandmother's necklace. This was my favorite blacked-out ensemble. Black is simply bold and consistent. While I enjoyed this part of the challenge the most, the lack of color got slightly dull. Not somber, but dull.

## Verdict:

To uniform, or not to uniform? If you're prepared for a trial-and-error period, then by all means, uniform! For me, limiting my choices and over-planning was extremely stressful. If you're opposed to stripping back your wardrobe—and as fashion students in one of the greatest fashion capitals of the world, it's understandable—then no, a uniform is not the path to a stress-free lifestyle. My conclusion is that while not right for me, capsule wardrobes

## Week Three Dresses

Expectations: *More feminine and empowered, but less comfortable*  
Rating: 3.5/5



Dresses! My thought process here was that I'd exude confidence. I could finally wear those untouched dresses that are always just too formal for any daily occasion. One of my favorite pieces is a navy midi wrap dress, which I paired with a straw belt and white Vans. It's one of those Pinterest ensembles everyone has purchased and worn to semi-casual or semi-formal outings. I felt amazing in the dress all day, especially when I muscled into Walgreen's for my flu shot. No needle was gonna take away my swagger.

For yet another Zoom-filled day, I wore a cold-shoulder neoprene dress, and this was the most annoying outfit of them all. The slippery material and looser construction shifted every other second. I'd adjust on camera constantly and looked like I was fidgeting and distracted. And I was distracted—the antithesis of this challenge's purpose. How could I feel empowered if I wasn't even comfortable? A minor falter.

In for-in-person class, I chose my *Matilda's* Miss Honey-inspired dress paired with sneakers. I felt studious, feminine, and dare I say... ethereal? This outfit provided serious serotonin. Next, in a slightly absurd move, I donned a puffed sleeve, polka-dotted mini wrap dress. Honestly, I loved this look, but solely wearing it around my house to greet visiting family and eat pizza was just unnecessary. I'll tell you something, I accomplished absolutely nothing that day.

In a final push, I wore my staple black fitted midi dress for a four-hour road trip. Surprisingly, I found I was so much more comfortable driving in a dress rather than pants, which can turn too tight and too restrictive real quick. Overall, dresses were tricky to balance but felt closest to playing dress-up. And we all need some whimsy now and again.

can be a minimal, ethical, and beneficial solution to looking and staying put together, especially in this baffling landscape. While I didn't feel put-together for three solid weeks, I certainly looked like it. **PRO TIP:** When curating your wardrobe, stick to your favorite, most versatile pieces for ease, confidence, and success. And if it comes down to a piece where you need a chip-clip, let it go.