

## Demise of the tie? Not!

Neckwear—and the knot that secures it—continues to define the gentleman

Despite celebrity and haute couture fashion that shows the likes of Brad Pitt posing tie-less with an open shirt, few serious businesspeople can afford to ditch the tie in the working wardrobe.

In winter, there's a temptation to replace the shirt and tie with a turtle-neck. As comfortable as they may be for casual wear, you risk being mistaken for a Beat poet or a indie film auteur with pretensions.

A well-selected tie and knot complements the stature of the man on the red carpet and in the boardroom. Though they have been disparaged as nonfunctional, ties have rebounded in popularity since the beaded and bell-bottomed 1960s. Dismiss them at your own peril.

### Style rules

Neckwear as we know it has been a menswear staple since George Bryan "Beau" Brummel rejected the lacy frills that were common to an earlier era. He pronounced a man ill-dressed without a clean, crisp, white neckcloth—he was said to change his as many as three times a day—to accompany his dark blue coat, buff-colored pantaloons and waistcoat. This 19th-century British look lies at the heart of the modern business ensemble, which includes a dark suit, crisp white shirt, and neckwear that matches the suit or shirt.

Since Brummel's time, neckwear fashion has allowed for a few modifications, from the flowing Byronic ties of the English poets to the ascot or cravat that accompanies the tuxedo on formal occasions. But bolos should be worn only by Texas oil tycoons and working cowboys, and jabots or bowties—which look great on bookish and authoritative sorts—appear rarely if at all in most men's repertoire. For everyone else, the elongated four-in-hand necktie with a stylish knot rules.

### Step 1: Fabric choices

Next to the standard men's suit in a neutral fabric, the shirt and tie allow for a bit of derring-do in the look. As the first thing people notice about a well-dressed gentleman, the tie and knot should project a positive self-image and sum up your individuality.

Your best choices for ties are soft or crisp silk, wool, cotton, rayon, and blends in bias-cut twill fabrics, which have a bit of give for recovery when the knot is released.

Today, many men prefer stylish patterned neckwear with a patterned shirt; others prefer a tie that coordinates with the suit first and foremost. British regimental stripes announce your social status, but only if you wear one for the military regiment you actually served in, a language almost entirely lost here in North America. Still, the British fashion movement is strong again this fall. Powerful, contrasting colors give a creative spark to a conservative business suit.

### Step 2: Size

Neckwear sizes change from year to year to maintain proportion with suit lapels and shirt collars, but there is a comfortable middle range that can extend the life of a well-loved necktie.

Ties between 2 3/4 and 3 1/2 inches wide offer the longest compatibility as lapels and collars morph from year to year, with 3 3/4 inches an ideal width for most body types.

Ties come in 52 to 58-inch lengths; the length you need is determined by your height and the style of knot you prefer.

### Step 3: Knot it

There are at least 85 styles of knot, according to Thomas Fink and Yong Mao, authors of *85 Ways to Tie a Tie*, with the Windsor, Half Windsor, and four-in-hand knots being the most popular.

The Windsor is named for the Duke who set the standard in the 1930s, and this large knot is not always compatible with today's pared-down fashion. In its place, select the Half Windsor, which is smaller and less prominent. In contrast, the four-in-hand, named for the reins of a horse-drawn carriage, has a timeless quality that is simultaneously contemporary and conservative.



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