

Podcast 77 – What Australians Wear

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 77 – What Australians Wear

<http://traffic.libsyn.com/slowenglish/podcast77.mp3>

Hi,

Australia does not have a national dress or national costume.

But it is probably true to say that there is still a distinctive style of clothing worn by the average Australian. The style has been influenced mostly by the climate and by the lifestyle we adopt. In this podcast, I would like to tell you a little about what Australians wear.

Most people would agree that Australians don't like to focus much on formality. We are not strong on 'pomp and ceremony'. We prefer to do things in a more casual way. We are often quite happy with a degree of informality, where you are able to take people as you find them. This means not putting too much emphasis on how they are dressed when you make judgments about them. You could say this comes from the fact that the first European settlement in Australia was a convict colony. Because of this, I think Australians have always had a little less respect for authority than say the nations of Europe, including Great Britain, which is where the vast majority of our first migrants came from. This is not to say that we are never serious or formal, but, on balance, I would say that we are certainly more casual in our approach to life.

This attitude flows through to the way we dress. We like to dress 'casual'. If it's a hot day in summer, we will happily wear shorts, a T-shirt, thongs and a cap. On a hot day in

summer, this style of dress will be considered okay for going to a restaurant, going to the cinema, going to a barbeque, going to see your parents or grandparents, going into the city shopping, going to a cricket match, going just about anywhere outdoors and also to most places indoors. I should add that, in summer, most Australians would also put sunscreen on the exposed parts of their body – their face, arms, legs and feet. While we love to dress down in the heat, we also like to prevent sunburn. If the weather is cold, then jeans and casual shoes (or runners) become the basic attire, again with a T-shirt or polo neck shirt, plus perhaps a jumper or a pullover. Keep in mind that I am talking about both men and women here. It is fairly rare to see women and girls in skirts when they are dressing casually. It is almost always jeans or casual slacks of some kind. So in winter, the dress is basically the same as in summer but with extra layers, but only to keep out the cold, not because we want to look more 'formal'. This type of dress would be described as 'casual'. If you get an invitation to a party and it suggests you should come dressed 'casual', then feel free to come dressed like this.



At the cricket – definitely casual attire.

However there are times when you might need to dress just a little more formally than 'casual'. This is known as 'neat casual'. For 'neat casual', you need to be wearing shoes of some kind whatever the weather, although any casual shoes will usually suffice, as long as they are not shabby or dirty. In fact, the more colour there is, the better it is. But they do need to be clean. Once you have the shoes sorted, then going 'neat casual' usually means something that looks just a little bit more stylish, neat or colourful. Something that looks good. I know that is hard to quantify, but I think most people know when they are trying to look 'good' rather than just 'casual'. For both men and women, it will often mean that the shirt, blouse or top will have a collar, and often long sleeves. Most people know which of their shirts, blouses or tops are suitable for 'neat casual'. Jeans are okay for 'neat casual'.

Towards the top end of the dress up scale, and rarely used for

most people, is formal dress. For men, this means a suit and tie with leather shoes.



Australian TV presenter and journalist Peter Overton at Sony Foundation's Youth Cancer campaign in 2012 – a formal occasion requiring a suit and tie.

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>]
, via Wikimedia Commons

For women, it means a dress and formal shoes with maybe some jewelry as well, such as a necklace. One time recently when I dressed formally was for my father's funeral, although many of the people who attended the funeral came dressed as 'neat casual' and even a few 'casual'. There's no problem there. I was grateful that they came and didn't care what they wore. But I think it would have been inappropriate for me not to wear a suit and tie. It was my way of showing respect for my father. Another time recently, two of our close friends got married late in life. I wore my suit with a tie, although again there were people there who were dressed 'neat casual' and there seemed to be absolutely no problem with that.

Our lifestyles and where we live also have an influence on what we wear. If you live near a beach or love water activities such as surfing or swimming, then you might often dress casually in clothes which are inspired by the beach or by surfing. This style is called surfwear. These clothes have designs which remind you of the beach and the water. The three most famous Australian surfwear brands are Rip Curl, Billabong and Quicksilver.

Likewise, if you live in a regional area, or you like outback style leisure activities such as horse riding, there are styles of clothes based around these. One famous Australian brand is RM Williams which makes boots, trousers and shirts, as well as women's clothing, all with an outback feel and look to them.

http://www.rmwilliams.com.au/on/demandware.store/Sites-rmwAU-Site/en_AU/Home-Show?gclid=CjwKEAjsr-6BRCLvrj785rbhTsSJADjUxakM1i2TtLsHFX5I1uGLRW-2YFhFtM-lpCAtrjWMd5LBhoCeIrw_wcB

Another is Akubra hats (see [podcast 75 http://slowenglish.info/?p=2028](http://slowenglish.info/?p=2028)) which makes great hats with an outback look.

Lastly, there is business dress. Depending on what your job is, this can be either casual, neat casual or formal, or somewhere in between. When I was working, I always wore a suit and tie, but that was related more to the type of job that I had, which was a project manager at Australia Post. Of course, if you are a labourer or a truck driver or a child care worker, then often there will be a clear expectation that you can dress pretty much as you please, as long as your employer is okay with that.

In summary, in Australia, what you are wearing is not as important as it might be in some other cultures. In my case, I am just glad that I am retired. I can dress how I like and nobody cares – unless of course I am riding my motorcycle. Then I wear all my protective gear, all the time.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 77 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

Start quiz

Vocabulary

adopt = to take up something as your own

approach = the way you do something

attire = clothing

authority = the people who are in charge, the bosses, the leaders

collar = that part of the shirt which goes around the neck

colony = an area that is controlled by a foreign country (in this case, Great Britain)

convict = a prisoner in a jail, or someone who has been a prisoner in a jail

costume = a style worn by people from a particular country

distinctive = when there are features which show that it is different

dress = a particular style of clothing

dress down = to dress more casually

employer = the person who gives you a job

expectation = when one person wants you to do something a certain way

exposed = out in the sun

focus = pay attention to

formality = when things are done according to strict rules

funeral = a gathering at which a dead person's body is buried or burnt

grateful = thankful

inappropriate = not acceptable, not the right thing to do

influenced = when one thing is affected or changed by something else

informality = no rules apply (the opposite of formality)

inspired = to be the cause of

judgements = when you decide about something (e.g. good or bad)

majority = more than 50%

migrants = people who go to live in another country, never to return

necklace = jewelry which goes around a woman's neck

on balance = when you consider the good and bad points together (or for and against)

outback = those parts of Australia which are a long, long way from the cities

polo neck shirt = a type of T-shirt which has a collar

pomp and ceremony = when things are done according to strict rules, formal

protective = when something keeps you safe

quantify = measure

regional = away from the big cities

related = when one thing is connected to something else

respect = when you admire something or someone

scale = a measure which goes from low to high

shabby = falling to bits, need to be replaced

slacks = pants which are like jeans, but are made of different cloth

sleeves = that part of the shirt which covers the arms

suffice = be enough

suit = a type of clothing worn by men, includes a coat and pants of the same colour

sunburn = when the skin is burned by the sun

thongs = a type of shoe which is fully open, with only a sole and a strap

tie = a piece of men's clothing that goes around the neck