

Know Your Nomenclature

When you walk into a bridal shop, the saleswomen will quickly pelt you with so many questions in dress language that you'll swear they're speaking a foreign tongue. Why do we waste so many hours in home economics making crapes when we could have been learning something useful like what the hell a crinoline is? Check out a book like *The Bridal Gown Guide: Discover the Dress of Your Dreams at a Price You Can Afford* (by Denise and Alan Fields, Windsor Peak Press, 1999) to learn the difference between a Basque and an empire waist and how a cowl neckline is different from a scoop. Doing your homework first will enable you to accurately describe what you like. Plus, you won't lose precious self-esteem before you're even undressed.

Bring Your Bustier

Speaking of getting undressed, if you have any discomfort being topless in front of total strangers, wear appropriate lingerie when you go to try on gowns. The right undergarments make a noticeable difference in improving how a dress fits, and every bridal shop consultant will offer a bustier for you to wear when you try on its gowns. To ensure the most flattering fit and to avoid having a stranger heave your naked breasts into a used corset, wear your own body slimmers, thigh squashers, waist cinchers—whatever you need—and the best strapless bra you can find.

Ask Yourself: If I Were My Ideal Wedding Dress, Where Would I Hide?

If you'd rather look like a brassy diva than a Barbie doll on your big day, don't waste your time in haute couture dress shops. Check out vintage stores and resale shops, search on-line, and even check out eBay. Also, there are many seamstresses and designers who can make your dream dress for you in any color or fabric that you like. Look into having one custom-made; the price isn't as bad as you would think.

To Thine Own Self Be True

When my cousin was married a few years ago, she confessed to me how uncomfortable and awkward she felt dressed as a princess in her beaded and poofy wedding costume. At the time, she decided she was supposed to look that way, and she shrugged off her sense of self-betrayal. When I looked at myself in the first formal gown I tried on, I cried. Keep your own sense of style and standards of beauty held closely with you as you outfit yourself for your wedding day. It is your day, as they say, so present yourself at the altar as your fullest expression of the beautiful person you are. That's who your man wants to marry, after all.

Tara M. Bloom lives in Portland, Oregon with her soon-to-be husband and their two children. After nearly a decade as a public relations writer and editor for several nonprofit organizations and activist groups, she left the service sector to join the staff of the online women's publication, Betty Magazine. Her essay, "The Pill: Revolutionizing How We Feel" recently won first place for non-fiction in the Celestial Writing Contest, sponsored by the Whidbey Island Writer's Association. She thoroughly loathes wedding planning, but is looking forward to wearing flip-flops under her recently acquired wedding dress.