

STYLE

ASK TERI

Fashion reporter Teri Agins answers readers' questions

Q: *I'm 5 foot 5, with a 29-inch waistline and a 27-inch pants inseam, and my clothes never seem to fit right. Even when I find my correct waist size, the pants are too baggy. I usually dress in business casual, and at 31, I'm too old for the young men's stores. I can't afford custom clothes. Do you have any ideas?*
—D.T., Bentonville, Ark.

A: Men who are shorter than 5 feet 9 inches must work a bit harder than taller men—and spend more time in the fitting rooms—to find the right clothes. I checked in with Jeff Bova, the owner of Forthefit.com, an online retailer that specializes in clothes for men who are shorter than 5 foot 9. Generally, menswear makers are moving toward roomier cuts for heavier men, he says, which “leaves out a lot of options” for shorter, slimmer types.

When shopping for pants, short men should pay close attention to the “rise” measurement—the distance from the crotch seam to the top of the waist. Shorter men will get a better fit with a rise of 10 inches or less, instead of the standard rise of 11 inches or more.

“The shorter rise takes out the bagginess in the crotch and in the rear,” Mr. Bova says. When you shop, take along a tape measure, he advises.

Casual blazers will likely be too long for smaller guys. So head to the suit department, where blazers come in sizes—such as 36 short—that offer the right proportions. Standard dress shirts are often long, too. When looking for trimmer, shorter shirts, check out “slim fit” and other narrow-cut styles. Don't count on the tailor, Mr. Bova says, because shirt seams “are designed to fit in particular places, like under the arms and shoulders.” If you do alterations, “the shirt starts to move around.”

Some catalog companies, such as Lands' End, let you “custom-order” shirts, as well as pants, specifying a variety of body measurements.

Forthefit.com has found a number of labels, such as Ben Sherman, Calvin Klein suits and Silver jeans, that work well on shorter men. Mr. Bova, who is 5 foot 7, also likes the shirts and pants at Banana Republic.



Getty Images