

VICTORIAN ERA CLOTHING IDEAS

FOR LADIES

1. **Every lady wore a hat.** Outside, ladies usually wore bonnets of some kind, trimmed with feathers, flowers, ribbons and bows. Create a bonnet easily from an old straw or felt hat from a thrift shop. Indoors, ladies often wore small lace caps that can be fashioned today from lace handkerchiefs, a flower and a few small ribbons. Domestic servants wore mopcaps.
2. **A Victorian dress usually had a high neckline**, sometimes with a collar and fitted bodice, three-quarter length full sleeves and a very full, long skirt worn over layered petticoats or a hoop. With a few amendments, such as adding more fullness to the skirt, accenting with ribbons, braid, lace and flowers, and even adding a collar, any thrift-shop find can be transformed into a lovely Victorian dress. Keep in mind that solids and small prints were more common, but stripes and plaids also were popular. Cotton, lightweight wools or any fabric that looks like silk or brocade would most resemble period cloth.
3. **When choosing a long skirt**, accent it with ribbons, lace and a full petticoat or hoop. A high-necked blouse with a cloak, mantle, shawl or pelerine jacket completes this easy outfit.
4. **A working class woman** would wear simple dress with narrow sleeves and a dark material, with no petticoats. She might wear a bibbed apron over the dress, with a shawl tied over her shoulders.
5. **Dark stockings** and slipper-type shoes or ladies' boots were worn during this period. To complete the outfit, a lady would add a bonnet to match her dress, gloves, a fan and a small purse.

FOR GENTLEMEN

1. **Hats are a must.** A gentleman always wore a hat of some kind when he was outside. Even working-class men are pictured with battered top hats or lower-crowned, broad-brimmed hats. Tweed skimmers were more sporty versions of Victorian attire.
2. **A plain white shirt** can be given a period look by turning the collar up. Add a ribbon, scarf or fancy cravat and knot in front. A working man would wear a collarless shirt or smock, with sleeves rolled up.
3. **A vest** [or waistcoat] of brocade, velvet or silk will help create a gentleman's costume. A waistcoat of wool in bright colored strips or plaid will make any 21st Century man a sporting 19th Century chap or shopkeeper.
4. **Tapered pants** in black, grey or buff with a strip of ribbon running down the outer seam were a gentleman's normal attire. A working man would wear a baggy pair of pants in wool or corduroy.

5. A **frock coat or tailcoat** is easy to create, using a dark overcoat or raincoat. Trim the collar with velvet, silk or brocade, and move the first button to mid-chest, causing the coat to fall in a cutaway fashion. A laborer, fisherman or stallkeeper would have a wool coat with a scarf tied around the neck.

FOR CHILDREN

1. **Boys wore trousers, shirts and coats** as grown men did. A cap or small top hat also was common. The younger boys wore knickers, and the “young men” wore trousers.

2. **Girls wore low frocks fastened behind, and short sleeves.** When they went outside, they put on a cloak or shawl. Upper-class parents dressed their girls like miniatures, reproducing on a small scale each detail of puff, frill and elaborate decoration. The more commonfolk tended to be thrifty, and would reuse garments to make their children’s clothes.

3. **Babies were dressed in layers** of flannel or cotton petticoats to combine warmth and ease of washing. Caps, with rows and rows of lace, looked dear around an infant’s face. It was fashionable to drape baby in a simple circular cape while outside.

TIPS

For additional tips on **Victorian dressing**, visit a public library for books about costuming. Search through old magazines kept on microfilm from the turn of the century and study the clothing pictured in the magazines. Rent an old Charles Dickens classic turned into a movie, such as *Oliver* or *A Christmas Carol*, and try to duplicate the clothing worn by the actors. Remember, a Victorian costume can be custom-made by a professional dressmaker, or pieced together with elements found in many closets or thrift shops. Dressing in Victorian fashion for *Dickens on The Strand* adds to the festival enjoyment, and makes visitors part of the festival instead of mere observers.