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How to Fold a Shirt

Fold T-shirts quickly into neat, same-sized rectangles, fold a dress shirt so the collar and front stay smooth, and pack shirts so they come out of a suitcase with as few creases as possible.

3-day guide · 3 chapters · Self-Directed Learning Framework

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Every guide on this site is produced with the Self-Directed Learning Framework: instead of an article that explains a topic at you, it turns the topic into a structure you work through — each chapter with one outcome, a starting action under twelve minutes, the minimum you actually need to know, a worked example, a checklist, and exercises using your own situation. No filler, no re-reading required.

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The Fast T-Shirt Fold for Drawers

> **Outcome:** "I can fold a T-shirt into a neat rectangle in under 15 seconds, and store my T-shirts so I can see all of them."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Take one T-shirt from the laundry basket, lay it face down on a bed or table, and smooth it flat with both hands. That's the first move of every fold.

The minimum you need to know

A good fold is mostly a flat start. Lay the T-shirt face down on a flat surface and smooth out the wrinkles with your hands. Then: (1) fold the left side in towards the middle so that about a third of the body is folded over, and fold the sleeve back along the fold line so it lies flat. (2) Do the same with the right side. You now have a long rectangle about as wide as the middle of the shirt. (3) Fold the bottom up to meet the collar, or fold it in thirds for a smaller, thicker rectangle. Turn it over so the front faces up. Make every T-shirt the same width and height, and the drawer stays tidy, because the folds stack evenly. A sheet of card or a magazine laid down the middle of the back helps you get the same width every time, until you can judge it by eye. For drawers, try storing the folded T-shirts on edge, standing upright in a row like files in a filing cabinet, instead of in a pile. Fold in thirds so each one stands up on its own. You see every shirt at once, and taking one out doesn't wreck the rest of the pile.

Worked example

Worked example: a drawer that stayed tidy. Someone's T-shirt drawer turns into a heap within days, because they always dig to the bottom of the pile for the shirt they want. They refold all twelve shirts with the same third-and-third fold, folding each in thirds from the bottom, and stand them upright in two rows. Each shirt takes about ten seconds once they've done a few. Two weeks later the drawer still looks the same, because taking one shirt out no longer disturbs the others.

Checklist

- [ ] T-shirt laid face down and smoothed flat first
- [ ] Left and right sides folded in by about a third, sleeves laid flat
- [ ] Bottom folded up in half or in thirds
- [ ] All T-shirts folded to the same size
- [ ] Folded T-shirts stored upright in a row, if the drawer is deep enough

Exercises

1. Fold five T-shirts in a row and time the last one.
2. Refold one drawer completely using the same width for every shirt.
3. Try storing one row upright and compare it with a pile after a week.

Folding a Dress Shirt So It Stays Smooth

> **Outcome:** "I can fold a button-up dress shirt into a neat rectangle with the collar and front smooth, ready for a shelf or a suitcase."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Take a dress shirt and do up the top button, a button in the middle and the bottom button. That alone stops the front from twisting while you fold.

The minimum you need to know

Dress shirts are best kept on hangers, but when you need to fold one, for a shelf or for travel, the aim is to keep the collar and the front smooth. (1) Do up the top button and every second button, so the front stays straight. (2) Lay the shirt face down and smooth it, with the collar flat and the sleeves spread out. (3) Fold the left side in so its edge lines up with the outer edge of the collar, then fold the left sleeve down so it lies along that edge. (4) Do the same on the right. You now have a long rectangle the width of the collar. (5) Fold the bottom up about a hand's width, then fold it again up to just below the collar. On a long shirt, fold in thirds instead. (6) Turn the shirt over. The collar sits at the top, the front is smooth, and the creases you made are on the back and the sides, where they're hidden under a jacket or tucked in. Start with an ironed shirt. Folding a creased shirt carefully only keeps the creases. If the shirt is going into a suitcase, keep the collar from being crushed by rolling up a pair of socks or a belt and placing it inside the collar.

Worked example

Worked example: a shirt for a meeting the next day. For an overnight trip, someone folds their ironed blue shirt with the top, middle and bottom buttons done, sides folded to the edge of the collar and sleeves laid flat, then folded in thirds. A rolled pair of socks goes inside the collar. At the hotel, the front and the collar are smooth. Two light creases across the back disappear once the shirt has hung up for the evening, and the jacket covers them anyway.

Checklist

- [ ] Top button and every second button done up
- [ ] Shirt laid face down and smoothed, collar flat
- [ ] Sides folded in to line up with the collar's outer edge, sleeves laid flat
- [ ] Bottom folded up in two or three steps to below the collar
- [ ] Shirt ironed before folding
- [ ] Rolled socks or a belt inside the collar for travel

Exercises

1. Fold one dress shirt slowly, naming the six steps out loud.
2. Fold it again without the instructions and compare the result.
3. Leave it folded overnight, then check where the creases ended up.

Packing Shirts So They Come Out Wearable

> **Outcome:** "I can pack T-shirts and dress shirts in a suitcase so they take up less space and come out with as few creases as possible."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Lay your suitcase open and decide which side is for heavy, shaped items (shoes, toiletries) and which side is for flat layers of clothes. Shirts go in the flat side.

The minimum you need to know

T-shirts pack best rolled. Fold the sides in as in Chapter 1, then, instead of folding up, roll tightly from the bottom to the collar. Rolls fill gaps in a suitcase, and a firmly rolled T-shirt has fewer sharp creases than a flat-folded one under the weight of other clothes. Pack them in the gaps around shoes and along the edges. Dress shirts are better packed flat, folded as in Chapter 2. Lay them on top of the other clothes, or in a flat layer of their own, so nothing heavy presses on them, and put the heavy items at the bottom near the wheels. Packing two shirts together, one turned the opposite way so the collars sit at opposite ends, makes a flatter, more stable bundle. Don't overfill the case. Creases come from pressure and from things shifting. When you arrive, unpack the shirts first and hang them up. A hot shower with the shirt hanging in the bathroom, door closed, releases light creases. For anything worse, the ironing guide has you covered.

Worked example

Worked example: a weekend bag without creased shirts. For a weekend wedding, someone used to squash everything into a holdall and spend the first morning ironing. This time they roll four T-shirts and pack them around their shoes. They lay their two folded dress shirts on top, one turned the opposite way so the collars are at opposite ends, each with rolled socks inside the collar. At the hotel they hang both shirts in the bathroom during a shower. One shirt is ready to wear. The other needs two minutes with the hotel iron on the sleeves.

Checklist

- [ ] Heavy items at the bottom, shirts in the flat layer on top
- [ ] T-shirts rolled tightly and packed into gaps
- [ ] Dress shirts folded flat, collars supported
- [ ] Two dress shirts paired with collars at opposite ends
- [ ] Suitcase not overfilled
- [ ] Shirts unpacked and hung up first on arrival

Exercises

1. Roll three T-shirts and fold one dress shirt, and pack them in a bag as a test.
2. Leave the bag closed overnight, then unpack and note which items creased.
3. Write a short packing order for your next trip: heavy items, rolls, flat shirts on top.

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