

## An Insider's Guide to Surviving Fashion School

### *Is fashion school right for you?*

Do you often find yourself neglecting all of your academic and personal responsibilities scouring the internet for the next addition to your coat rack that is one hanger away from its demise? Do you spend your weekends outfitted in rubber gloves picking through grimy bins of used clothing in hopes that the Thrift Gods will bless you with the perfect pair of vintage denim? Is your bedroom rug hidden beneath lumpy piles of clothing that stylishly cover what used to be your floor? Do you scoff at the garments of lifelong designers on Project Runway while never having picked up a sewing needle yourself? If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, you may consider applying for fashion school in order to justify these hobbies to your parents as career research and preparation. You may find yourself overwhelmed with where to begin. As a third-year fashion merchandising student, I have compiled this guide to help you decide whether or not to pursue a degree in fashion. While I would encourage you to do so, the decision is ultimately yours to make. Don't just take my word for it—take this quick [quiz](#) to get started. (“Should I Become a Fashion Designer (One Minute Quiz).”) but While the road to fashion school is often less glamorous and exciting as it is portrayed in the media, it is an ultimately rewarding journey that you too can make the most of by closely following this insider's guide to fashion school.

### *How to Begin Your Journey*

Once you have determined your desire to monetize your obsession with style, it is time to begin the application process. With [over 350 fashion schools and 150 graduate programs](#) in the U.S. alone, research is key to finding the program that is the right fit for you ( Find Top Fashion Design Schools & Degrees.”). Compose a list of 5-10 schools at which you envision yourself and ignore the urge to hyper-fixate on one of them so as to reduce the risk of disappointment. Many programs have specific concentrations that allow you to pursue a specific field of interest within the fashion industry. If you are drawn to sewing machines and patternmaking over spreadsheets and problem solving, design might be your path. Merchandising or marketing may suit you over design if delegation is your area of expertise—merchandisers exert a lot of creative control over designs without having to dirty their hands themselves. Youtuber Takara Onea expertly clarifies some of the differences between these two specialties in [this](#) short YouTube video (Onea). Determine which area of focus suits you, but keep in mind any program will undoubtedly demand from you both creative and analytical work. Some schools may require you to send in a portfolio along with your application. I have linked mine [here](#), but this is an excellent opportunity for you to showcase your style and creativity (Smith)! After you send in your application and complete your daily manifestation rituals, you have been accepted and it is finally time to add a comfy, collegiate hoodie to your wardrobe.

Once you have arrived at fashion school, you will need to gather the necessary supplies to ensure you are on the trajectory for success. The following is a comprehensive list of the tools and materials you will undoubtedly need to survive a semester at fashion school.

## Supplies

### *1. An unabashed sense of confidence*

Your ego is sure to be the most necessary flotation device to help keep your head above water as you begin your fashion education. Fashion is a field of study that often is dismissed as vapid and many of your peers will not respect your unconventional schoolwork. You must believe in the “why” that is motivating you to pursue this path. Author and inspirational speaker Simon Sinek’s book [Start With Why](#) is an excellent resource to reference in times of doubt (MeeshToom). The fashion industry is competitive and unforgiving, so you must believe in your perspective above all else. Keep a note on your phone to remind you of these things. Write them on the palm of your hand every day and remember them even as they smear off by nighttime. When you are buried under coursework and feeling like turning back, puff out your chest, sharpen your colored pencils, and repeat your “why” to yourself until you drown out the sound of your self-doubt.

### *2. Copious amounts of expensive art supplies*

Prepare to have the crafting collection of a kindergarten art teacher by the semester’s end. Invest in a [hot glue gun](#) (Amazon). And Neosporin to sooth the inevitable resulting burns. [This](#) YouTube video include a comprehensive list of supplies to help get you started before you have access to your syllabi (Dedios).

### *3. Patience*

Patience is a core trait needed to carry you through the throes of any degree program, especially one that is creatively demanding. Projects can often feel meticulous and time consuming, and it is important to remain levelheaded in times of monotony. Exercise patience with yourself as you will experience a learning curve in most of your courses. Extend patience to classmates as group work is an essential component of any design course.

### *4. Classmates with whom to form an alliance*

Allies are key in any fashion program. Introduce yourself to that edgy girl with the pink hair on your first day of class. She will prove to be an invaluable asset and friend to rely through the rigors and stresses of the program. Exchange numbers, create group chats, and develop relationships with your classmates. Their conversation and laughter may be

the only thing helping you stay sane in the studio at one in the morning on a Tuesday night. These people may very well be your co-workers one day, root for their success as you would your own.

### *5. Tough Skin*

Metaphorically- As you progress through the semester, you will have to withstand rigorous critique sessions on behalf of both your professors and your peers. It is important to not dwell on these comments and keep in mind constructive feedback is necessary in order for improvement and insurance that you will not become an egotistical maniac in the classroom or future workplace. Do not internalize these criticisms as a reflection of your character—your professor does not think you are worthless because your French hem needs work. Refer back to item number one on this list in times of doubt.

Literally-Sewing needles and straight pins are relentless criminals. Developing calluses will reduce your risk of injury as well as the unsightly look of pin-prick scab-covered fingers. Invest in a couple of boxes of your favorite cartoon character-printed band aids.

### *Stops Along the Way*

As with any journey, you will inevitably run into some roadblocks along the way. Remain calm in the face of adversity and take pride in knowing you are well equipped to face any challenges that may arise. Here are a few common problems that you may find in your fashion school experience:

#### *1. Doubt*

In your time as a fashion student, you will be subjected to the doubt of your peers, friends, or even your family. You will face judgement for choosing a career path that does not guarantee financial stability. You will not be understood for prioritizing your passion over your salary. In these times remember to refer back to item number one on your supply list and take comfort in the words of iconic fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi, *“Remember this: No one is looking at your imperfections; they’re all too busy worrying about their own.”* (Team, OM).

#### *2. Sleep*

Time management is your key to a healthy relationship with sleep as a fashion student. It is often tempting to procrastinate and avoid schoolwork. However, you will quickly learn that your coursework is project-based and requires your time and attention. Developing

time management skills will save you from 3am cramming sessions and work of which you are not proud. A strong work ethic=a better night's sleep.

### *3. A Global Pandemic*

The whole world is still trying to figure out this one.

### *4. Finances*

Unfortunately, the cost of higher education comes at a high price. For some individuals and families, the investment is not easily attainable. However, if you do decide to face the economic burden of fashion school, you do not have to do it alone. Resources like this [website](#) are excellent places to find scholarship and grant applications (Scholarships.com) Finding a part- time job may help ease some financial stress and could be an opportunity to find work that allows you to strengthen skills you will use in the fashion industry. Remember that a degree is an investment and one that your future is worth Here are some more financial resources that you may find helpful as the numbers in your savings account dwindle:

[Link to a coupon for JoAnn's Fabrics here.](#) (Joann Coupons)

[Tips for saving money as a college student here.](#) (Citizens Bank)

[Information on the commitment of student loans here.](#) (Nelson)

[Link to a blank "Thank You" card to write out for your parents. The least you could do, really.](#) (Zazzle)

### ***Making the Most of Your Journey***

I spent a lot of time before college questioning whether or not I would regret pursuing a career in fashion. I feared the cliché, yet somewhat realistic uncertainty of a career in the arts. I feared I was accepting my future financial failure. I feared I would not be respected for not obtaining an "intellectual" degree (whatever that really means). I feared I would disappoint my parents. I feared worst of all that I would disappoint myself. Now graduation is closer than ever before, and I cannot truthfully tell you that I do not still have moments where these fears grip and consume me. However, I can say with absolute certainty, these anxious moments are nothing in comparison to the regret I would live with every day had I not chosen this decidedly risky path. Whichever journey on which you chose to embark, make sure to remain grateful for the opportunity to choose your destination and for all of the people who support you along the way. It is an unfathomable blessing to be in the position to pursue any degree, especially one for which you are passionate. Above all else, listen to yourself. Follow that inner-voice closely and your journey will prove worthwhile. Designer Alexander Wang said it best, "Take people's

advice and guidance in the beginning, but always follow your instincts first”  
(Inspiringquotes.us)

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## **It's Not Easy Being Green: *The Issue with Sustainability in the Fashion Industry***

In recent years, the term “sustainability” quickly reached buzzword status in the American retail sphere. Ad campaigns touting commitments to environmentally conscious business practices are now standard and arguably exhausted. It is nearly impossible to exist as a retail company today without the word being written into the brand DNA and company mission. While the consumer demand for environmentally friendly and culturally ethical practices has risen by nearly 85% globally, little action has been taken to hold fashion brands accountable to their claims of sustainability. (Business Wire) Because the term “sustainability” remains largely undefined, fashion brands can stretch and twist the label to their benefit without any legal or social pushback. Retailers are easily able to mislead consumers with false claims of sustainability while still upholding environmentally harmful practices. The fashion industry is a leading producer of waste and with a culture infected by consumerism and overproduction, the pervasiveness of fast fashion, and no legal standardization for the term itself, it is unlikely the fashion industry will ever reach a state of authentic sustainability.

### **The Environmental Impact of Fashion**

The fashion industry hinges on globalization and industrialization and as such is responsible for a vast array of impactful environmental consequences. Since its inception, the industry has been a leading producer of waste and environmental damage. According to an article from Princeton University, the fashion industry alone produces more carbon emissions than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. (The Trustees of Princeton University) Carbon emissions are extremely harmful to the environment for a multitude of reasons. The excessive release of carbon dioxide into the air warms the atmosphere, catalyzing a shift in the climate and creating a carbon pollution crisis with detrimental effects. Climate change is a threat to the existence of our entire planet, “symptoms of which include melting of the polar ice caps, the rising of sea levels, the disturbance of animals’ natural habitats, extreme weather events, and so many more negative side effects”. (Stephosmanski) The climate crisis is urgent, and the fashion industry must make a significant decrease in carbon emissions in order not to be considered a leading culprit.

The University of Princeton cites other sustainability issues in the industry such as excessive water usage and microfiber ocean pollution. (The Trustees of Princeton University) While these issues sounds more abstract than carbon emissions, they are incredibly harmful to both humans and marine life. The fashion industry is the second leader in global water usage. (Sustainable Campus) The majority of garments are made from cotton, which requires a large amount of water to farm and process. For cotton to be a usable textile, it must be spun, dyed, and finished. This process uses large amounts of water while also involving heavy chemical usage that causes water pollution and poses health risks to those living near processing plants. (Sustainable Campus) The fashion industry’s excessive water usage will prevail so long as the problem within textile manufacturing is not addressed with alterative manufacturing processes. Consumers



should look to secondhand stores and products made of organically grown cotton if they choose to act against this issue.

While the research is still underdeveloped, plastic microfiber ingestion is harmful to aquatic life and could contain chemicals that are toxic to humans. The fashion industry commonly uses inexpensive textiles such as polyester, rayon, and nylon to keep garment costs low. These fabrics are made of toxic plastics that seep into the ocean water and create a hostile environment for sea life. The ocean is an intricate and sensitive ecosystem that is integral to the environmental wellbeing of our planet. Cheap textiles composed of plastic microfibers break down quicker than textiles made of natural fibers like linen and organic cotton. Garment developers should seek out longer-lasting textiles that produce less waste. Consumers must invest in garments made of higher quality textiles to combat plastic microfiber pollution.

### **Culture of Consumerism**

Consumerism is an undoubtedly large part of the American identity. American culture has been infected by overconsumption since the economic upturn following the Great Depression and World War II. Soon after, the consumer mindset shifted, “the American consumer was praised as a patriotic citizen in the 1950s, contributing to the ultimate success of the American way of life.” (Public Broadcasting Service) The American consumer was now dutifully concerned with her or his participation in the economy. During this time, purchases were functional, not frivolous. The strength of the economy relied on domestic purchases, and Americans obliged, “Between 1945 and 1949, Americans purchased 20 million refrigerators, 21.4 million cars, and 5.5 million stoves, a trend that continued well into the 1950s.” (Public Broadcasting Service) Americans were thusly launched into a relationship with capitalism that has evolved overtime, yet remains rooted in consumerism.

The American economic system allows this consumerism to unabashedly flourish. Capitalism encourages the accumulation of commodities and enables the pursuit of status through accumulation of these commodities, “...capitalism attaches a value to commodities that cannot be satisfied by their use alone. A good or commodity under capitalism, therefore, becomes something more than what its inherent purpose is. Clothes, for instance, become symbols of status and of belonging.” (Shah, A) This system encourages consumers to conflate buying more things with a sense of self-fulfillment or happiness, creating a constant need for more. Under capitalism, consumers feel constant pressure to maintain their social status with material goods, thus creating a cycle of overproduction and overconsumption. Because true self-fulfillment is entirely unattainable through this avenue alone, the cycle is seemingly endless. American consumerism has only grown since the advent of the internet and social media sites like Instagram, Twitter, and Tik Tok.

In the era of social media, the world is more connected than ever before. The internet allows users to be in constant contact with advertisement, whether it come from a retailer, peers, or a

paid influencer or brand representative. It is now commonplace to visit social apps such as Instagram or Tik Tok to shop or see what one's favorite influencer is buying. Users are exposed to content daily and shopping is as easy as clicking a button. Impulse purchases are easier to make than ever before and research shows that online shopping is a popular avenue. A study shows that 91% of millennials, who are adults aged 25-40 and are the current largest generation of Americans, prefer to shop online than in-store. (Lexington Law) Another study from Forbes found that 80% of millennials are influenced to buy based on price. (Kestenbaum, R.) Though there may be a rising interest for value-based retail brands, low prices remain the most

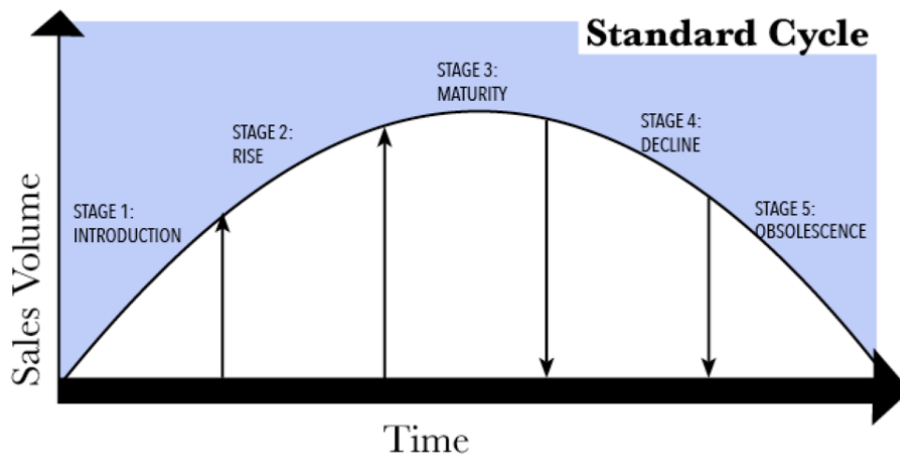
motivating factor for most millennial consumers. This bargain-hunting mentality coupled with a sense of urgency to compete with one's peers over social media means that consumerism remains a pervasive mentality for Americans. Out of this system emerges an issue specific to the fashion industry, known as fast fashion. Fast fashion is mass-produced clothing that is made at an expedited rate based on short-lived fads and trends.

### **The Dangers of Fast Fashion**

The pervasiveness of fast fashion and mass-produced clothing is another leading offense of the industry on the environment. The fashion trend cycle was once defined as a twenty-to-thirty-year period in which trends fell and rose in popularity. The graphic below demonstrates the standard trend cycle as was one accepted across the fashion industry.

The fashion trend in its original form. Source: Google Images

The social media age quickly shortened that period to a mere matter of months. With an abbreviated trend cycle and the pressures of social media, consumers turn toward fast fashion for quick and cheap additions to their closet. As a result, retailers are motivated to over produce poorly made garments at an expediated rate. It's a vicious cycle: social media influences shoppers to keep up with the latest trends and fads, consumers demand inexpensive garments to



mimic these trends, manufacturers rush to produce a mass number of garments which are not made to last longer than the next trend arises, and with a single social media post, the cycle starts again. Because these garments are hastily made to appeal to current trends, they are poorly constructed of cheap materials and quickly discarded after a few wears. A study from the BMC Environmental Health journal describes the sheer amount of textile waste Americans produce annually, “Approximately 85 % of the clothing Americans consume, nearly 3.8 billion pounds annually, is sent to landfills as solid waste, amounting to nearly 80 pounds per American per year.” (Bick, R., Halsey, E. & Ekenga, C.C.) Fast fashion puts an emphasis on trend-driven items that are not made to last longer than the next viral Tik Tok. If consumers turned toward more mindful buying practices and were more willing to invest in well-constructed garments, global textile waste would undoubtedly be reduced. The responsibility also falls on retailers to produce with integrity and turn away from the unethical and harmful practices of fast fashion.

The rising popularity of fast fashion is not only harmful to the environment, but to the ethical health of the planet. Around the world, garment workers are mistreated and underpaid, often forced to work unreasonably long hours in dangerous conditions with little protective legislation. Fast fashion companies, such as Shein, Forever 21, and Fashion Nova, outsource manufacturing to overseas facilities to keep garment costs low and bend labor laws to their will. The popular fast fashion company Shein (\$9.8 billion in revenue in 2020, *Shein Revenue and Usage Statistics*) was recently exposed for violating Chinese labor laws. Not only did the manufacturing facility not have any emergency exits, but workers were mistreated in numerous other ways, “Workers in Guangzhou [Shein’s manufacturing facility in China] also told the researchers they sewed for 12 hours a day, working about 75 hours a week, and only received one day off a month.” (Lieber, C.) Shein’s failure to ensure the safety of their garment workers is not an isolated incident--it is common practice in the fast fashion industry to disregard the rights and wellbeing of garment workers to keep the bottom line low.

The problem is on America’s shores as well. In Los Angeles, California’s garment production sector, it has been reported that “Approximately 85% of garment workers do not earn the minimum wage and are instead paid a piece rate of between 2-6 cents per piece. Most garment workers work 60–70-hour weeks with a take home pay of about \$300 dollars. Workers are not paid overtime and toil in unsafe, cramped, dirty, and poorly ventilated factories.” (Get Informed) The garment production industry is able to get away with this gross mistreatment due to a lack of labor laws to protect the workers. An article from The Fashion Law explains, “One of the biggest problems is that if brands are to eradicate labor exploitation, they must take more control of their supply chains. But if they take more control over their supply chains, they open themselves up to the risk of tremendous legal liability.” (TFL) Because fashion is a sprawling global network, it is difficult for retailers to take direct participation in the creation of the garments without being vertically integrated. Smaller brands can control the means of sourcing and production more easily. A consumer’s turn toward smaller businesses who are more transparent about their supply chain would move the emphasis away from harmful big business practices. Consumers should demand transparency from brands so that their claims of sustainability can be held accountable legally and socially.

## Who defines sustainability?

Despite its overuse in the fashion industry, the term “sustainability” has no clear, standardized definition. As of right now, the term holds no government-regulated definition across the fashion industry. This is problematic as what is sustainable to one retailer may not be to another. Furthermore, retailers are able to tout sustainability when not actually practicing it. Held to no legal repercussions, fashion retailers are often perpetrators of what is known as “greenwashing”. Simply put, greenwashing is when a company who claims to be engaging in environmentally safe practices is truly not. Business News Daily describes greenwashing as when “an organization spends more time and money on marketing itself as environmentally friendly than actually minimizing its environmental impact...it’s a marketing gimmick.” (Business News Daily) Greenwashing can be intentional or not, but regardless is deceitful for the uninformed consumer. Retailers often tout a green reputation when most of their business practices are still environmentally harmful. Examples of greenwashing can include making false claims about how green a product truly is, making claims of a devotion to green practices with no action, or labeling items with untrue generalizations. Fast fashion brands H&M, Boohoo, and Zara all have been found guilty of greenwashing for reasons including making false claims about the sustainability of a specific textile or not being able to evidence their grandiose claims of sustainability. (Assoune, A) Greenwashing is an illegal practice regulated by the Federal Trade Commission, but the march toward a more authentic future should not stop there.

For the word “sustainable” to hold any legitimate meaning, more legislation needs to be put in place. Broad generalizations about a retailer’s sustainability practices are not productive. Brands should have to meet certain government-regulated criterion in order to market themselves as green. Breaking “sustainability” into smaller subtopics would be a helpful alternative that could

help retailers maintain a true sense of environmental positivity. Some researchers suggest abandoning the term altogether, “Less unsustainable is not sustainable...To demonstrate progress, stewardship reports should become mandatory, more quantitative, thinner, more attune to planetary thresholds and be subject to annual external audits.” (Harvard Business Review) Third party verification systems could legitimize claims to sustainability and insure brand accountability. Retailers must revise the language with which they label themselves in order to remain authentic and to appeal to customers seeking value-based companies.

Sustainability in the fashion industry is an extremely complex issue that encompasses many different environmental and ethical topics. The unfortunate reality is that the fashion industry can never truly reach a status of authentic sustainability as the definition stands today; the entire function of the fashion industry and the system of capitalism is inherently unsustainable. To create something new is to put strain on the environment, no matter how many means are supposedly taken to reduce harm. Retailers should focus less on marketing themselves as green and invest in business practices that will truly reduce their environmental footprint. Though the path to ultimate sustainability is not achievable, consumers can make small changes in their individual lives. Firstly, consumers concerned with the fashion industry’s impact on the environment should look to the secondhand market and turn away from fast fashion. Thrift stores

offer an excellent opportunity to buying fashion new and lengthen the product's lifecycle and give the shopper a chance for unique self-expression. If they have the means, consumers should invest in high-quality pieces for their wardrobe that are made to last rather than fall apart after just a few wears. Changing their perspective on consumerism and challenging capitalistic ideals that emphasize consumption will cause a greater shift in the culture of fashion. Above all, consumers should hold fashion retailers accountable. Consumers should no longer settle for anything less than complete authenticity and transparency. If the fashion industry chooses to deemphasize the term sustainability itself and instead focus on research and practical changes, a more productive and healthy future could be in sight.

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## ABLE SMS Copy

ABLE: Looking for new pieces to add to your spring wardrobe? Shop 30% off apparel this week to save big and look good doing it. LINK.

ABLE: 30% off all apparel this week only. Click the link to shop while this deal is still hot. LINK.

ABLE: Able Lovers, don't miss out on 30% all apparel this week only. Grab new styles and ABLE classics like the PRODUCT NAME for less while you can. LINK

ABLE: Warmer weather is just around the corner. Take 30% all apparel this week only for a wardrobe refresh. Click now to shop. LINK.

ABLE: We're doing some spring cleaning. Take 30% of all apparel this week only

ABLE: Just in, the Bailey Jacket you know and love, but in a new wash! Click to see this ABLE signature reimaged. LINK

ABLE: The Bailey Jacket just dropped in the BLANK wash. Just when you thought you couldn't love it more. Click the link below to shop.

ABLE: JUST DROPPED: The Bailey Classic Jacket in BLANK wash. Click the link below to see how we style this wardrobe staple.

ABLE: We reimaged The Bailey Classic Jacket in BLANK WASH just for you. Click the link below to shop the style.

ABLE: Meet The Bailey Jacket in the new BLANK WASH. Your spring capsule wardrobe just got a little bit cooler. LINK.

ABLE: Our Mother's Day sale is almost here. Use promo code X for early access.

ABLE: A gift from us to you. Use promo code X for early access to our Mother's Day promo.

ABLE: Nothing says "Thanks, Mom" like a gift from ABLE. Use promo code X to find a gift she'll love early.



## **ABLE Meta-Descriptions Copy**

Necklaces, bracelets, rings, and earrings handmade for you by extraordinary women in our Nashville, Tennessee studio. These unique pieces are often customizable and make a meaningful gift that's sure to dazzle.

Necklaces- Delicate accents, bold statements, and endless layering options, ABLE necklaces are handmade in Nashville, TN with you in mind.

Bracelets- Add some shine to your wrist with the perfect pieces to complete any outfit. These bracelets are handmade for you by inspiring women in Nashville, TN.

Earrings- Whether you're looking for simple studs, or standout hoops, browse these timeless pieces to find your perfect pair.

Rings- Looking for that last piece to complete your favorite ring stack? Shop ABLE's handmade rings to elevate your everyday look.

### *Leather Bags*

Responsibly sourced and manufactured leather goods made to last. Totes, cross-bodies, backpacks, shoulder bags and wallets for your everyday style needs.

Backpacks- Designed for all day comfort, ABLE backpacks are perfect for travel, school, the office, or for a stylish storage solution.

Totes- Handmade, functional, roomy. Shop totes for all of your storage and style needs.

Crossbody Bags- Shop our collection of timeless crossbody styles that let you go hands free all day and night.