

# THE JUST. GUIDE TO GOWNING

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For many of us, the gown is a one-time affair, strapped on haphazardly with the assistance of equally befuddled classmates at the Call to the Bar ceremony.

For barristers, though, the gown is a literal weight on our shoulders when taking a client's cause before a judge. It is the only companion that will be with us in each and every major challenge in our careers. It is a symbolic link in the unbroken chain of legal tradition and precedent spanning back to the very origins of the common law and the development of the rights we cherish as a people and a society.

It is also just *weird as hell*, and no one ever tells you what all the doohickeys are for.

Thus, for the benefit of new and occasional barristers nationwide, **JUST.** presents a comprehensive guide to not embarrassing yourself in court regalia.

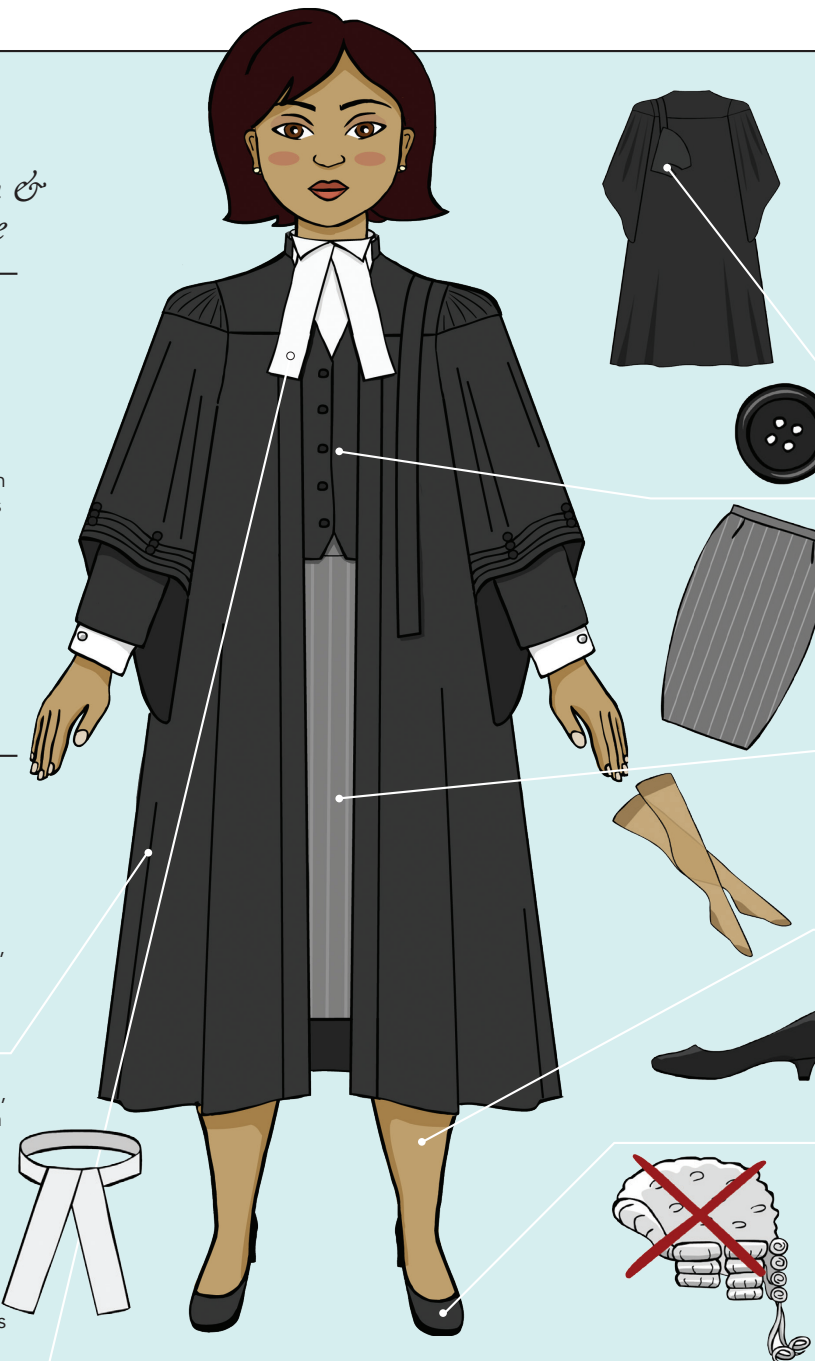
**GOWN:** The barrister's gown was not originally black; our gowns are only black nowadays because *they're not barrister's gowns at all!* They're actually mourning robes: the kind worn by pallbearers in the 17th century.

Junior barristers started wearing these mourning clothes to court in the tense political situation after the death of Charles II in 1685, and never went back to the frilly, furry "proper" robes for the same reason junior counsel have made their style choices since the dawn of time: they were way cheaper!

**TABS:** In Canada they're "tabs". Everywhere else they're "bands", and no matter where you are, they come over the top of the cloth ring, not out from the bottom.

Tabs are academic in origin, and some say they are meant to emulate the two tablets of Moses. Others say they were just a more modest way of tying a shirt together in an age obsessed with lace.

**COLLAR:** Iron the wings down flat. There's nothing more ridiculous than a barrister with a wing waving hello to the judge.



**HOOD:** Tradition has it that this satchel hung from a barrister's shoulder so that a member of the public could lean over the Bar, drop a coin in and pass up a case brief prepared by an attorney.

The story goes that the stylized purse has been retained as a symbolic reminder that we serve the public without prejudging the client, or their case, or the retainer.

Well, 'tradition' is wrong.\* It's just a mourning hood that was used to keep your wigs dry. But the story is great and we should probably keep telling it.

**WAISTCOAT:** It's a 'waistcoat', not a vest or a jacket. Unlike most vests and jackets, it is proper to button all the buttons. No shirt (or skin!) should be showing between this and the belt.

**SKIRT / PANTS:** Skirts should extend past the knee and pants should not be cuffed. (Cuffs are informal, originally used to pin up pants you expect to take outside in the mud.)

Striped grey is traditional, but black or charcoal are also acceptable. Tapered charcoal trousers look great under the gown, but robing companies insist that experienced barristers prefer light, loose materials for comfort at trial.

**STOCKINGS:** Stockings, like pants, leave room for creativity. Some say only black or nude will do, but judges used to wear damask robes in the 16th century – so they can't really complain if you bring a pattern to court. (You try telling them that. We'll sit over here and lend moral support.)

**SHOES (WOMEN):** Controversy! Should heels be kept to 2" out of the traditional modesty of a barrister, or should practicality rule and more diminutive barristers wear taller heels to reach the microphone and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with opposing counsel?

Shoes (men): "A man matches his socks to his trousers, a gentleman matches his socks to his mood." The saying may be true, but remember: barristers aren't gentlemen. Grey socks, black shoes, black-and-silver belt.

**WIG** Wait, what? No. Where did you even get that?

\* See J.H. Baker, "History of the Gowns Worn at the English Bar", Costume, No. 9 (1975), pp. 15-21 before starting a flame war.