

## Big Style, Small Price: Discount Shopping Made Easy

How to find amazing bargains in jam-packed aisles without losing your mind

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**Y**ou read *Vogue*, you want the clothes in *Vogue*, but you're so not living on a *Vogue* budget. What's a fashion-forward girl to do? Head to the local discount store. You can snag [trendy bags](#), designer dresses, and oodles of must-have accessories at places like T.J. Maxx, Value City, Burlington Coat Factory, Marshalls, and Ross. (Or visit a consignment shop in the ritziest neighborhood in town -- bargains and labels in one!)

Those jam-packed aisles may seem more daunting than inviting, but learning the secrets of [discount shopping](#) will help you stay on the top of the trends and try multiple looks, no matter your budget. Follow these expert tips to navigate the discount stores and feel like a super-savvy, [quilt-free](#) fashionista.

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### Shop Your Closet Before You Hit the Shops

The seemingly endless racks of clothes, rows of shoes, and piles of accessories in discount shops can lead to a big case of overwhelm. Prep before you go, says Catey Hill, author of *Shoo, Jimmy Choo! The Modern Girl's Guide to Spending Less and Saving More*.

"Go through your wardrobe to figure out what you already have," says Hill. Think about what you need and once you've done your research, make a list; it'll keep you focused in the stores, reduce anxiety, and won't tempt you to break your spending limit on unnecessary items (because, guaranteed, you're going to find some tempting nonessentials along the way).

### How to Discover Super Fashion Finds

Discount means discount -- but it doesn't always mean bargain.

"The best things to find in a discount store are items that are always pricey," says [Derek Warburton](#), celebrity stylist and personality on *The Real Housewives of New York City*. Coats can really go bargain basement.

"Accessories are usually off to the side and in cases. They're not shopped as heavily and are most likely to get marked down," adds Warburton. Keep the virtue of patience in your arsenal of shopping tools, especially if those displays are stuffed full of bobbles and beads. There are gems to be found and accessories are a surefire way to stay trendy without spending a lot.

Do beware of one specific category in discount shops: [shoes!](#) "These are usually in-demand items and are not discounted as heavily," he says.

"If you're worried about getting a great price, use the [free RedLaser app](#)," says Hill. "Scan the barcode and it'll compare prices across retailers." She also suggests visiting a retailer's website to sign up for their email list where they announce new finds and alert subscribers to sales.

#### The True Definition of Trendy

Just because you're [shopping on a budget](#), no fashion-forward woman should be forced to wear trends from two seasons ago. Have no fear -- discount shops stay on top of what's hot.

"The best spots for discount shopping are really the 'off price' centers like T.J. Maxx and Marshalls," says Warburton. "These stores are filled with items that are current season. The merchandise is bought directly from designers when they have overages or cancelled orders."

But avoid fleeting fads. That leather handbag you'll use over the next decade is an investment, but pricey costume jewelry that only matches one super-trendy outfit is a budget drain.

"Remember to either buy 'your look' or keep it very basic," Warburton explains. "For an image-conscious woman, pick up basics and clearance items like black sheaths, [fabulous shoes](#), and items that are season-less."

[See All Tools](#)

#### Timing Is (Almost) Everything

When you shop is just as important as where you shop. "Avoid weekends at discount retailers -- the selection is the most picked-through then," Hill says. Thursday evenings are often the best time to hunt.

Being the first to buy an item -- even at a discount shop -- isn't doing your budget any favors. "If you go to the store frequently, watch the item. If the supply doesn't seem to be dwindling, you can wait to buy." And if you can stand it, hold off until the season winds down. Even discount stores are making room for the upcoming season and items will be reduced even more. "When you're doing this, consider items that can move through the seasons," Hill suggests. "If you're shopping end-of-summer sales, pick [summer items](#) that also can work for the fall -- like a skirt you can wear tights under -- as well as classic pieces that will still be stylish next [summer](#)."

Also, beware of tricks retailers use to get you to spend more. "Research shows that putting a sale or discounted price on a product or pushing it as being available for a limited time encourages consumers to buy it -- even when the product isn't such a great deal," says Hill. "Ask yourself, 'Do I really need this sale item?' and 'How good of a deal is it really?'"

#### Keep That Budget in Check

Even shopping at discount stores, you're still in danger of breaking the bank, especially when there are so many buys to be had.

Know your spending style. "Most women have a [unique set of triggers that spur them into spending too much](#)," says Hill. For a few weeks, write down everything you buy (even that 4 p.m. Snickers pick-me-up), when, and why -- then look for patterns. Do you shop to reward yourself or feel better? Are you an impulse spender, lured in by sales, or spurred to spend by shopping buddies? Do you always spend too much in one category like shoes or [handbags](#)?

To avoid overspending, Hill advises bringing only cash and leaving the plastic at home. She also suggests practicing the 48-hour rule before buying -- this "cooling off" period lets you think about whether an item truly fits your budget (or if you really even want it).

**Do you have any discount-shopping tips to share? Chime in below!**

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