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## Writing a course guide “Fashion design: A Guide to the apparel industry”

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WRITING A COURSE GUIDE “FASHION DESIGN: A GUIDE TO THE APPAREL  
INDUSTRY”

by

Rosemary P. Durfee

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Science in Fashion Business and Entrepreneurship  
at  
Lindenwood University

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WRITING A COURSE GUIDE “FASHION DESIGN: A GUIDE TO THE APPAREL  
INDUSTRY”

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art, Production, and Design Department  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Fashion Business and Entrepreneurship  
Degree of Master of Science  
at  
Lindenwood University

By

Rosemary P. Durfee

Saint Charles, Missouri

October 2024

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Writing a course guide “Fashion design: A Guide to the apparel industry”

Rosemary P. Durfee, Master of Science, 2024

Thesis Directed by: Dr. Chajuana Trawick Ferguson, Endowed Chair and Associate Professor of Fashion Business & Design, College of Arts & Humanities, Lindenwood University

This project focuses on improving course materials for the author, among others, to use as a teaching resource for undergraduate apparel design students. The primary focus is to compile information from various resources and industry knowledge gained first-hand by the author. This project aims to create a course guide that can easily integrate with current Fashion Design and Merchandising courses taught at the college level.

## **Dedication and Acknowledgements**

This project is dedicated to my undergraduate apparel design students at Brigham Young University-Idaho. I have found great joy and personal fulfillment by associating with my students daily, and they inspire me to continue to create in a variety of ways. I hope that this guide will be a continuing resource for them throughout their educational journey, as well as throughout their careers.

I want to acknowledge the following individuals for their support: Dr. Chajuana Trawick Ferguson, for serving as my committee chair for this thesis project and for being so supportive and responsive to the many questions I had as I began working on my course guide. Amanda Casarez, for serving as a committee member for this thesis project and for being so willing to go above and beyond throughout my time at Lindenwood so I could be involved with classes that have yet to be offered fully online. I would also like to acknowledge Julann Blake for being a patient and supportive colleague at BYU-Idaho as I have been working on my Masters Degree while juggling the daily responsibilities as a full-time faculty member and for also serving on my thesis project committee. I would not have been able to continue toward my advanced degree if it were not for the ongoing support of these individuals.

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## **Introduction**

Fashion design is a dynamic and influential field that not only shapes the identities of individuals but reflects and drives cultural trends. Those with a strong interest in pursuing an education in fashion design must master both creative and technical skills to prepare for the wide variety of roles within the apparel industry. Based on the researcher's experience in this project, most of those skills were not taught during their time as an undergraduate student but were learned "on the job" in the industry. While these experiences shaped them personally, as well as in their professional career, it was felt that the resources provided as an undergraduate student could have prepared them better before entering the field.

As educators in a growing Apparel Design program, there have been significant gaps within the curriculum that have been discovered, one of which is the absence of a consolidated textbook or foundational guide for students. This absence placed a heavy burden on the instructional process, where those who teach these courses felt most information is only conveyed through lectures and was difficult to replicate between faculty, and even between semesters. While lectures could be informative, this limited the opportunity for more engaged student learning through collaborative and discussion-based learning. Fashion design students need to develop strong critical thinking and creativity to be successful in this field, and class time would be better spent engaging in more enriching activities, rather than reviewing lecture slides each day. By creating a comprehensive fashion design guide, the researcher aimed to provide students with a valuable resource for independent study, thus allowing class time to transform into interactive and engaging discussions based on pre-learned material.

The primary objective of this project was to develop a practical fashion guide tailored for undergraduate students in Fashion Design and Merchandising, as well as the Line Collection courses at Brigham Young University-Idaho. This guide would serve as the foundational text to be used in these courses and will cover essential concepts and skills. The secondary objective was to foster an educational environment where students could independently acquire knowledge and apply it in collaborative classroom settings. The central question driving this project was: how can instructors better and more simply educate apparel design students to provide a more solid foundational understanding of fashion design and the apparel industry?

The guide covered a variety of topics within fashion design, including fundamental elements and principles of design, practical technical skills, and product development processes. However, the scope was limited by the breadth of the field, the author's personal experiences, and the resources available during the project timeline.

A qualitative research study was used to ensure the guide was comprehensive and relevant. This included conducting literature reviews of existing resources related to the subject, industry publications, previous studies related to the subjects of fashion design and education, and feedback from industry professionals as the guide was being developed.

This project primarily aimed to significantly impact the industry by providing a structured and accessible resource to students or others who seek more understanding of how to work in the fashion design field. This guide was designed not only to provide a path for students to engage in self-directed learning but to give each of them a solid foundation on which they can build their educational journey, as well as throughout their careers within the industry. Additionally, aligning the guide's content with current industry practices ensured its relevance in preparing students for professional success.

## State of the Field

Historically, clothing has had great meaning. What people wear reflected “handicraft skills, artistic imagination, and cultural rituals of people” (Wolfe, 2019). However, currently, as well as in the near future, the fashion industry is facing a period of uncertainty. As Wolfe stated, “clothing also has and continues to be an indicator of advances in technology.” (Wolfe, 2019) The industry was at a crossroads where those within it had a strong need to innovate for the future. With the rise of inflation and the lack of disposable income by the masses, consumers were seeking to spend less than they ever had before. The rise of fashion sustainability becoming a popular trend also played a factor in the situation by encouraging people to consume less “new” apparel and focus on recreating looks out of what they already have, or by thrifting items to give them a new life. New sustainability laws in the European Union and the United States, were also in place, forcing a shift in product development practices. According to SyndiGate Media, the fashion industry was expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.4% in 2023 (SyndiGate Media Inc., 2023), and despite sustainability and consumer resource challenges, that trajectory continued to rise.

According to the *Business of Fashion*, “macroeconomic, geopolitical as well as climate-crisis pressures will challenge the industry’s growth” (Amed & Berg, 2023). With the accessibility to media and more open business practices, consumers held more and more fashion companies accountable for their ethical (or unethical) business practices. This had fashion executives expecting to raise the prices of their goods to bolster their businesses as well. The climate crisis was likely the most significant pain point, as companies had to brace themselves

for extreme climate events that can affect importing goods from country to country. Production in China also slowed down last year, and apparel manufacturing is shifting towards other countries. The growing consumer demand for sustainable and ethically produced apparel rose over recent years, and brands were increasingly adopting more eco-friendly materials, not only in their shipping but also in the fabrics and textiles used to create the garments themselves. Ensuring fair labor practices was also a huge driver in the ethical push to improve as an industry. This push had greater effects when there was regulatory pressure, such as laws put in place internationally to implement stricter regulations regarding labor conditions. This also pushed individuals within the industry to a state of innovation, including advances in sustainably sourced fabrics, recycling technologies, and other circular fashion models. These practices quickly became the mainstream for brands pursuing this trend (Rudolph et al., 2023).

Another practice that was significantly affected the industry was the digitalization of the product development process. Companies, such as Hugo Boss among others, were seeking innovative tools for digital color analysis and communication between the designers and production facilities. Communicating color had always been a struggle for those in the design realm of the industry. Seeking these cloud-based solutions “results in a new type of communication between designers, product developers, fabric suppliers, and producers... thus makes decisions in the product creation process, traditionally on the basis of sketches and analogue color cards, obsolete” (Boddenberg et al., 2024). Other areas of digitalization in the industry included the use of media, specifically social media, for general marketing efforts. Social media “affects consumer behavior due to the remarkable marketing and e-commerce opportunities that the internet has provided” (Singhal et al., 2023). The use of social media to

connect consumers more directly to brands, those in the apparel category and otherwise, was a powerful relationship that has not gone unnoticed in the industry.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) was also on the rise and caused waves within the industry. AI was identified as a driving force in sustainability and travel, which may be an area of growth for the industry in the coming year. Also, there was consideration that “the textile and apparel industry has become the second largest polluting industry in the world” (Zhu et al., 2022), which suggested that there is a need for a driving force to address the sustainability issue of the industry. There was a significant talent gap, though, in harnessing the potential for the use of AI in 2024, but many companies report to the *Business of Fashion* that they are ready to “make best use of the technology” (Amed & Berg, 2023). Fashion designers may find AI-powered image generators “can expedite the concept generation process of fashion design, but it may not be universally suited for all users” (Zhang & Liu, 2024). This study showed that AI generation is still in its infancy and may not be ready for widespread use amongst designers.

With the apparel industry being the world’s “most labor-intensive manufacturing sector” (Gangoda et al., 2023), there was a constant need for innovation in ethical labor solutions. With the impacts of AI, there was also a shift in what skills were required of the human side of the workforce and this could impact employment opportunities in all areas of the production and development process (Gangoda et al., 2023). As with any business that deals with a physical product, the quality of these products needed to meet the consumer’s expectation and demand. With rising demands, there was always a risk of losing quality of goods in a mass production setting when “the four major defects... are related to man, machine, method, and material” (Joy, et al., 2024), demonstrating that if AI could assist with less error between the human operator and the machine, perhaps the percentage of faults in production would drop. AI was also being

considered for use in predicting trends within the fashion industry. This could provide forecasters the opportunity to study and refine trends based on AI generation and provide more detailed reports in all categories (Renaningtyas et al., 2023).

There was a surge of e-commerce growth as well since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the shift to online shopping, even among individuals who did not participate in e-commerce style shopping previously. Brands without an online presence suffered, if not completely succumbed, to the massive growth in technology use among consumers. It was also important to note that new younger consumers were beginning to enter the e-commerce scene, thanks to the low start-up costs associated with starting an online business (Granger et al., 2019), and the current generation seemed to prioritize authenticity, sustainability, and social responsibility. This required many brands to increase transparency and traceability in their supply chain practices. As Jafariyan et al. stated, “fashion branding is decisive to create a distinctive image of a product. It is more important in the fashion apparel industry” (Jafariyan et al., 2021), which further demonstrated the importance of brand transparency in the current industry climate.

Academic studies were, and likely are continuing to be, done that study the supply chain process globally using the apparel industry as a case study in the domino effect of disruptions to the process. One study specifically used Fuzzy Cognitive Mapping as a method to help connect a variety of concepts, such as sources of risk, disruption factors, supply chain management practices, etc. The purpose of this study was to provide company managers with a way to “develop a detailed understanding of a system’s behavior and to explicitly consider the mind models of different players in the supply chain” (Bevilacqua et al., 2020). In other words, the study was done to provide some critical data to business stakeholders to help identify areas

where the system could break down in order to increase efficiencies in their supply chain. In other studies, there was analysis revolving around the effects the Covid-19 pandemic also had on areas of the apparel industry. Many jobs were lost due to the downsizing of businesses, though some were able to shift towards the production of personal protective equipment (PPE) in lieu of traditional or previously produced garments (Zhelev, 2021).

Supply chains were also widely impacted by the fast-fashion model within the industry, due to the greater demand to speed up the changing trends across many industries (Seimon & Endagamage, 2022). Backs et al. focused their study on European apparel companies and how the minimization of manufacturing costs with production and shipping affected the industry (Backs et al., 2021). They found that, often, costs will be sacrificed for the sake of time frame to accommodate the ever-changing, fast-paced trends that move throughout the world. There was a significant focus on supply chain strategies as well, since this can be the largest variable in hitting those short timeline markers. This study primarily focused on the difference between the traditional fashion supply chain practices and those in the fast-fashion realm in several markets, despite the greater variety of strategies that can be utilized. Fast fashion was explained as accommodating product development to a responsive, short-term demand (Shaw & Koumbis, 2017). The development of fast fashion was surely a push from the timing of new products entering the market. Competition between fashion brands was a constant battle among businesses in the industry and timing is a significant factor in their success (Zhang et al., 2021). This is where most of the risk for introducing a new product is found.

One strategy to speed up the supply chain in the product development process was the constant innovation of the technical package (tech pack). As noted regarding tech packs in the preface of *Apparel Production Management and the Technical Package*, a tech pack was “a

series of forms that define a garment's specifications and that is critical to ensuring that a particular style is executed correctly and in the most cost—and time—efficient manner possible” (Meyers-McDevitt, 2010). Additional information systems that influenced those in the supply chain process, such as the National Information System for Fashion and Apparel Industry (NISFAI) were considered to be put in place to join members of related associations together for the betterment of relaying updated industry information amongst those in the industry (Rathod, 2023).

Another aspect of supply chains within the industry was consumer acceptance and adoption of a product or trend. Pricing of a product was a key element in adaptation, as well as which commerce channels would be the most effective in converting the customer. Online stores generally only saw “conversion rates of around 3-5% whereas brick and mortar fashion stores achieve 7-25%” (Wood et al., 2021). Finding key pricing strategies within each category of the industry could heavily influence the success of any retailer or brand.

The portion of the industry reflected on and used in the general research portion of this project was the academic factors related to the apparel industry (as the final project is an educational guide written with students or those interested in learning how to enter the industry). Various sources analyzed the topics of sustainability and ethics, especially when artificial intelligence was concerned, and questions about how to prepare the next generation of apparel designers were asked. In Baeza & Quinn's article, they asked the critical question, “...how do we prepare students for the fashion industry in the face of an ethical awakening when issues of climate change are complicated by political turmoil, social injustice, and food insecurity, where advances in technology ignite concerns over surveillance, data privacy, equity, and dependence?” (Baeza & Quinn, 2021). This question was widely multi-faceted, as is the apparel

industry as a whole, but there was a plethora of main points that are mentioned here that any educator preparing students to enter the field should consider to properly prepare them for the state of the industry as it is currently. Overall, a deeper sense of responsibility was needed for how the products or garments that they create affect the world and industry as a whole. Another study by Lapolla and Copeland (Lapolla & Copeland, 2023), specifically relating to education, followed the application of collaborative learning projects with fashion students and how this practice could help prepare them for future industry careers. The study found that with this particular learning method, students were positively impacted, and it could be easily replicated in various micro subjects and environments. Students also better understood the different roles required to have a successful team, which allowed them to be more prepared to work in similar teams in the industry. Working together in physical groups was not the only other method the researcher found for developing curriculum or improving fashion students' learning. Hwang et al. (Hwang et al., 2022) studied the effects of using video as a base instructional tool in the apparel and textile industries. Their study mainly included documentaries on sustainability and ethical responsibilities, further noting the importance of this in future educational resources or tools. Using this documentary style did provide students with an increased understanding of the sustainability crisis the industry is facing and even found a stronger willingness to contribute toward the resolution rather than creating even further issues that the globe faces.

## **Methodology**

The methodology for this project was designed to create a comprehensive guide that addressed the educational needs of undergraduate students in the Apparel Entrepreneurship and Apparel Design and Clothing Construction majors at Brigham Young University-Idaho, as well as to provide an Open Educational Resource (OER) through Brigham Young University-Idaho

and its related institutions. This guide aimed to fill existing gaps in introductory courses within these programs. This project was innovative in that no OER textbooks have been found or available on this subject matter that currently covers these specific topics. Additionally, this project, continued to provide more free resources for students to use, which were readily available online for students taking these courses worldwide.

To analyze current research, a literature review was conducted, reflecting upon resources that both discussed the current state of the fashion industry, as well as evolving educational practices relating to fashion design. This review included academic journals, industry reports, and currently available educational resources, such as textbooks, that covered the fundamental topics of apparel design. The guide would incorporate personal experiences that the author had as a former Technical Designer within the apparel industry. Then, documentation and reflection on standard industry practices observed and implemented by the author provided real-world context and practical insights that complement the foundational content of the guide. These experiences were integrated throughout the guide in a cohesive format to maintain an authoritative text and demonstrate the application to offer students a more practical perspective.

The structure of the guide began with a preface, followed by chapters building upon each other to cover essential topics comprehensively. The first chapter provided foundational information on textiles, including fiber characteristics and properties. The next section would delve into design elements and principles as related to apparel design, exploring how these are used to create cohesive and beautiful designs. Then, the guide covered aspects of technical design and explained the purpose of a tech pack, providing step-by-step guidelines for creating one. Another aspect of technical design is utilizing software, such as Adobe Illustrator, to create professional and detailed technical flats, so this section also included foundational introductions

to fashion flat creation. Finally, a section covering fashion merchandising and design discussed strategies for building a brand, building up or managing brick-and-mortar storefronts, and developing an online, e-commerce business. Each chapter integrated findings from the literature review and personal experiences of the author to provide a well-rounded and practical guide for students that was easy to read and visually appealing.

To ensure the guide's accuracy and relevance, the author gathered feedback from the thesis committee members, as well as professionals in the apparel industry. This involved reviews and feedback provided by experienced professionals, as well as the thesis committee, to validate the content. The established connections within the author's professional network reviewed the guide and provided constructive feedback, which was carefully analyzed and incorporated into the final version.

Ethical considerations were a priority throughout the project. All sources of information were properly cited to avoid plagiarism and to respect intellectual property rights. Open resource images, such as free and purchased images, were used from stock image resource websites and were properly cited.

## **Production**

The main findings of this project included refined direction on the subjects required by the course learning outcomes, the study of relevant images and visuals to support the written text, the discovery of the pressing needs of a current apparel design student, and, ultimately, creation of content related to these topics to educate future professionals in the apparel industry.

The application of the methodology for this project followed the format listed in the previous section. A literature review to understand the current state of the field was conducted, analyzed, and discussed earlier in this report. This information was foundational in

understanding the current needs of those with intentions of entering the workforce in the apparel industry.

After the literature review was conducted, the author began the writing process. Each chapter was written with individual topics for course lessons in mind. New vocabulary words that may be unique to introductory level students were defined as well as bolded or underlined to draw attention to the new vernacular that will need to be familiar to them as they enter the industry. These key terms were positioned in such a way in the text to allow for one to create quizzes and other educational opportunities in the future. Specifically, students were able to interpret the material they read more effectively and expanded their vocabulary using industry-standard terms. This not only furthered their learning but provided a foundation in which they would be effective in potential job interviews or their future career.

A template document was also created as part of this project as the digital and print layout for the course guide. Since design is a deeply visual field, apparel design students appreciate visuals to help reinforce the concepts they are learning about, so this layout needed to flow easily and provide space for images to coincide with the text. This template was created using Canva for ease of editability. The quick and easily available editing capability provided the author, and any future editors, the capability to update information to become as relevant as possible, which is exceptionally critical in the rapidly changing apparel industry. This method of educational resources was a direct contribution to the field and offered a welcome change to the course material sector.

The written text of this guide was first created in Microsoft Word in order to take advantage of the spell check and grammar editing capabilities and then was transferred to the template document in Canva afterward to determine how many pages were needed for each

section. There was also careful consideration for the placement of images to reinforce the text as well as to provide beautiful visuals to the reader.

As a result of this process, a digital course guide was created. By its digital nature, this guide can be conveniently edited in the future as the industry changes and evolves.

## **Conclusions**

Success for this project was an updated course guide that created and successfully covered introductory information regarding fashion design topics including basic textile information, design elements and principles as they can relate to fashion, introduction to technical design including sketching and technical packages, and fashion merchandising. Additional success for this project included a relevant format for both in-person and online learning settings that is informative and aesthetically pleasing. A final measure of success was the normal and natural integration and adoption of this guide within the online learning management system (LMS). Failure for this project would include a lack of introductory information regarding the topics listed and an ineffective format for modern-day university students, especially considering that many of the students who take this course do so in an online, asynchronous manner. This measure of failure also included the lack of student adoption and engagement with the course materials contained within the guide. If a student was not able to properly engage with the material, it would not serve them well long-term.

The direction of this project included gathering sources that provided a foundation upon which the author built upon to create the guide. Not only did this method allow for a solid foundation for the guide to be written, but further improved the knowledge of the author in the subjects they covered. This allowed the author to glean what information would be best included, as time and space were limited for a course guide designed for a short semester period of time.

This project, while being a large undertaking, will have a great impact on how the Fashion Design and Merchandising course is conducted. The objectives of this project have been met including writing relevant text content as well as formatting the guide for aesthetic and practical educational purposes. The author found areas where topics needed to be taught further and elaborated on those topics in the guide. This allowed for a refined reading experience for the students.

This guide was personalized through the nature of the first-hand experience of the author. The particular combination of text with images, as well as current or relatable analogies, allowed students opportunities to create new connections to evergreen design concepts. This guide was also written in a language that can be read and understood easily by first-year undergraduate students. This can open doors for at-risk students, those who may be slightly underprepared for college as well as first-generation college students, as the text is not written beyond a reasonable reading level. This guide differentiates itself from traditional textbooks by utilizing digital-first strategies and accessible language that enhances the learning experience for underprepared students.

Some limitations to consider with this project include the broad spectrum of topics it was required to cover to accommodate the course schedule. Each topic covered in the guide could be a textbook on its own, however, the time restrictions by the length of the course required more surface-level information to take precedence to allow for students to gain foundational knowledge regarding the apparel industry. This limitation was not lost on the author, and other topics were given more time to study more in-depth in the advanced classes within the program. However, the fashion design and sketching for technical design sections specifically were impacted by the time constraints of the course. Students had additional opportunities in the

apparel design program to elaborate on fashion design further in their Pattern Making courses and more time to experience the Adobe Illustrator program first-hand in the Line Collection course as they created their own flats for tech packs as part of their final project.

This guide served as a compliment to other available resources and affirmed the general experience of one who works within the industry. It was not intended to be comprehensive, but rather an introduction to the world of fashion design and the principles needed to continue an education on the subject.

Future iterations of this project should consider the state of the field at the time of revision. As technology is rapidly advancing, the industry will change, and some principles discussed in this guide will become obsolete. Images will also age over time, and careful consideration should be placed when it may seem necessary or appropriate to adjust these images to more contemporary or relatable versions. Feedback loops with industry experts could be integrated with future iterations to ensure the course materials remain current with the rapidly evolving trends in fashion technology and sustainability. The author also did not include sections on augmented reality tools that allow users to visualize fashion concepts interactively. The addition of this section could provide future students with information on this sector of the fashion industry.

Overall, this thesis project was intended to become a foundational resource providing apparel design students with the knowledge needed to begin an educational journey in the fashion design field. The digital format provided a setting where future iterations could be easily created and provided an educational framework that students can benefit from as preparations are made to enter the apparel industry. This project served as a model for modern educational tools in fashion design, offering not only foundational knowledge for apparel students but also

contributing to the ongoing evolution of fashion education by integrating digital trends and inclusive teaching practices. This project not only achieved its objective of introducing fashion design to apparel design students or other readers but also set a benchmark for modern educational tools, preparing students to enter the rapidly evolving fashion industry.

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