

THE COMMUNITY GUIDE TO THRIFT CULTURE

The *Unwritten* Rules of Op Shopping

Sourced from 190,000+ op shoppers across Australia & New Zealand

There's a particular kind of person who goes to an op shop once and never stops going. They know which shops get new stock on which days. They have a system for the rails. They still think about the leather jacket they put back in 2019. Ask them about it and they'll wince. They are lifers.

Op shopping has its own culture, its own rituals, its own unspoken social contract absorbed rack by rack. We asked two large op shopping communities across Australia and New Zealand to share theirs. Hundreds responded. What follows is their collective wisdom.



THE CARDINAL LAW

If you love it, buy it

Every op shopper has one. The thing they put back. The lamp they assumed would still be there the next Saturday. The Pyrex bowl. The perfect coat. The record they talked themselves out of twice. We don't talk about those losses easily, but every single one of us has them.

If something is on that rack today, there is no guarantee it will be there in an hour. Let alone tomorrow.

Come back the next day and it's gone. Seize the moment. When in doubt, take it out.

MULTIPLE SHOPPERS, INDEPENDENTLY

The flip side works just as well: if you don't truly love it, leave it. Commit fast to what excites you. Release the rest. And never expect something to wait once you've put it down. Once it leaves your hands, it's fair game.

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RACK ETIQUETTE

First on the rail has right of way

The clothing rail has its own road rules. Whoever arrives at one end first works through it at their own pace. You start from the other end and follow the flow, or choose a different rack and come back.

It's like surfing. You don't cut in on someone else's rack. First dibs. And never put your hands in front of someone who is already searching.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS, BOTH GROUPS

Reaching across someone mid-browse was the most complained-about behaviour in both groups. When two shoppers meet in the middle of a rack? Eye contact, smile, swap places.

THE GOLDEN RULE

The thrill of the hunt is meant to be shared. Everyone who's truly in the culture already knows it.

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THE BIG DEBATE

To haggle or not to haggle

Few topics divided the community more sharply. The majority view: don't haggle. Creating a scene, arguing over a dollar, or pressuring volunteers is poor form.

But there's a distinction worth making. *Demanding* a discount is different from *politely flagging* a genuine flaw. If an item has a stain or a missing button the pricer may have missed, pointing it out calmly is fair. Most volunteers are happy to adjust. The key word is *politely*.

Acceptable

Quietly pointing out damage and asking if the price reflects it. Accept the answer and move on.

Not acceptable

Arguing, pressuring, or creating a scene. If the price doesn't work, don't buy it.



LEAVE IT AS YOU FOUND IT

Tidy as you go

Op shops run on volunteer power. Every item knocked off a hanger and left on the floor, every fitting room piled with rejected clothing, is more work for someone already giving their time for free.

THE TIDY CHECKLIST

- If clothing falls off a hanger while you're browsing, put it back
- Return anything you've tried on to the correct rack, not the fitting room floor
- Put things back where you found them if you change your mind
- Don't open sealed packets. If they come open, let a volunteer know
- Keep kids close, especially near glass and china
- Only head to the register when you've finished shopping



THE CULTURE

Someone else's ugly is someone's holy grail

Don't mock the donations. Not the ceramic clown. Not the nautical novelty lamp. Not the extremely confident geometric blouse. The thing that made you laugh in the homewares aisle is the exact thing someone else came in looking for.

Never make fun of things in the store. People's taste is different. No need to loudly put down or laugh at donations.

NEVA, OP SHOPPING AUSTRALIA

The weird stuff, the niche stuff, the aggressively specific stuff — it all belongs here. That's the whole point. Bring your enthusiasm, not your judgement.



THE IDENTITY

We are lifers

Nobody who truly gets op shopping ever stops. They just get better at it. They develop instincts, make friends in the aisles, and have strong opinions about which shops are worth the drive. It's a very specific kind of joy that no other shopping replicates.

It provides a very pure escape. Dopamine full throttle. Then completely off the richter scale when you find a treasure. That's why when you start, you never stop. We are lifers.

AL, OP SHOPPING AUSTRALIA

Be kind to the volunteers. Be kind to fellow shoppers. Don't take things from other people's baskets. The rest, you'll absorb. Rack by rack.

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