Why we wash clothes
Your clothes can get soiled from the outside or from the inside. It is important to remove soil from both areas regularly to keep your clothes fresh and new looking.

Outside soil comes from things like food and drinks you might spill on yourself, or grass and other stains from playing outside. Sometimes this kind of soiling can cause stains and will require some special treatment before washing. Show these stains to an adult, or treat them yourself before washing your clothes.

Inside soil comes from the oils and perspiration your body produces. Look for this type of soil around collars, in the under-arm area of shirts, and around sleeve cuffs. These areas may need some type of pretreatment to completely remove the soil. Many times a garment that looks clean can have inside soil.

In addition to body soils, some stains from foods and drinks are invisible for a while but will darken over time. For that reason, it is important to wash or dry clean all clothes before storing them. Soil and stains attract insects, which could make holes in your clothing.

How clothes get clean
You clean most of your clothes by washing, but a few need to be dry cleaned. When you wash clothes, you use a soap or detergent with water. In Oklahoma, most folks use detergents, because they are better suited to our water. These cleaners are made to mix with the soil in your clothes and rinse it away.

Use the right amount of detergent with lots of water, so this process can work. Too little detergent will not get clothes clean. Too little water will not give clothes room to move around in the washer and soil can be redeposited on clothes.

Dry cleaning is best left to the professionals, although a few laundromats have coin-operated dry cleaning units. In this process a solvent is used rather than water to remove soil and odors.

Getting ready to wash clothes
The following hints will help you or the adult in your house do a better job with the laundry:

- Empty all pockets when you take off your clothes. If you’ve ever left a facial tissue in your pocket, you don’t have to be reminded of the mess it can make.
- Close zippers and fasteners to prevent snagging. Tie sashes and strings to prevent tangling.
- Turn sweaters and other knits, blue jeans and printed T-shirts wrong-side out to prevent pilling and fading.
- Turn down any pant or shirt cuffs and brush away lint and dirt.
• Mend any rips, tears or snags.
• Sew loose buttons on before they become laundry casualties.
• Put stained items in a special place, so you won’t forget to pre-treat stains. If someone else does the laundry, be sure to tell them about the stain immediately, because some stains can only be removed when treated quickly.

**Sorting the Laundry**

When you sort your clothes, think about color, type of fabric, and construction. Even if you don’t do the laundry yet, you can probably sort your own clothes.

Always read care labels carefully. These are usually located under the manufacturer’s tag or size tag, or they may be in the lower side seam of some shirts. Follow these instructions exactly.

**Sort by color.** Separate whites from colors. Then separate light colors from bright or dark ones. Reds (especially cottons), regardless of their age, should always be washed separately or with other red items. Red dyes are notorious for turning the rest of the wash pink, even after many washings.

**Sort by temperature and cycle.** Fabrics like white cottons and linens need hot water and normal agitation to get really clean. Man-made fibers, like polyester and clothes with a permanent press finish, need a warm wash for removing body oils and a cold rinse for relaxing fibers and preventing wrinkles. Use the warmest water that is safe for the fabric and the recommended amount of detergent.

**Sort by type of fabric.** Loosely knit, lace-trimmed, and hand-washable garments need delicate or gentle laundering. Separate lint-takers (corduroy, velveteen, permanent press, and synthetics) from lint-givers (flannel pajamas, sweatshirts, towels, and terrycloth).

**Sort by amount of soil.** Heavily soiled garments should be washed separately from lightly soiled items. This will prevent graying or dulling of your lightly soiled items.

**Will it come out in the wash?**

There are many products available that make washing clothes easier. The following information will help you choose which products to use in specific situations.

Apply **prewash stain removers** to heavily soiled or stained areas before washing. They come in aerosol, liquid, gel, and solid stick. These products are especially good at removing greasy/oily stains and water-based stains that are difficult to remove by laundering alone.

Use **presoak products** for soaking stained or heavily-soiled articles prior to regular laundering. Enzymes, the major active ingredient in most presoak products, break up and loosen soil and stain particles. Enzyme action in a presoak allows easier removal of soil during laundering. Do not use presoaks with chlorine bleach, because it inactivates the enzymes.

**Soap** is gentle and dissolves light soil in warm or hot water, but it must be used in soft water. **Detergent** is more powerful and works well to dissolve and suspend light, medium or heavy soil. It contains builders and water conditioners. Detergent can be used in all water types and to remove all types of soil. It is available as liquid, powder, and concetrante.

Chlorine bleach destroys the colored components of stains and breaks down molecules in protein-based soil. Dilute it with four or more parts water before adding it to the wash, or it may damage fabrics. Never use chlorine bleach on wool, silk, spandex, non-colorfast, or resin-treated cottons and polyesters without first testing. Oxygen bleach is less powerful than chlorine bleach. In warm or hot water, it provides mild bleaching action on stains and body soil.

Liquid **fabric softener** is usually added to the rinse cycle. Dryer sheets are used in
the dryer. Some detergents contain fabric softeners. These products soften, smooth, and reduce static electricity. Be sure to follow instructions for each type of softener.

What happens after your clothes are clean?
Clean clothes need to be dried – in a dryer, on a clothesline outdoors, or on hangers and lines hung indoors. Read care labels to be sure you are drying your clothes correctly.

Rules for the dryer
• Never overload the dryer. This makes the machine work harder, takes clothes longer to dry and causes wrinkles.
• Dry items of similar weight and construction together to avoid over-drying and under-drying.
• Clean the lint filter after every load.
• Be careful with dryer sheets. Some can coat electric sensors and cause a build-up of lint in the dryer drum and around the motor.
• Hang up clothing as soon as it’s dry.

What about ironing?
If you hang your clothes as soon as they are dry, many will require little or no ironing. Some items – especially those made of 100 percent cotton – will need to be ironed no matter how soon you hang them.
Most cotton needs fairly high heat and steam to remove wrinkles. Iron small, detailed areas first, and then iron the main body of the garment. For example, if you’re ironing a shirt, iron the collar, yoke, cuffs, and sleeves; then iron the rest of the shirt.
Some fabrics, like cotton and linen, will look better if some starch is used. Most people use spray starch at home. It is available in several formulas, from light to heavy, and is applied just before you iron a garment. Commercial laundries use a different kind of starch. The starch is diluted with water: then the item is dipped in the starch mixture, excess moisture is squeezed out, and the item is allowed to drip dry before it is ironed.

Keep your closet tidy
After you go to all the trouble to get your clothes clean, and wrinkle free, you need to store them properly. Be sure the clothes in your closet are not too crowded so you don’t undo all your hard work. The items you fold should be neat and not crowded in the drawer or on the shelf.