

The Universal Layering Cheat Sheet

One page. Every trip. Match what the day is doing to what goes on your back.

Nobody turns back because of the weather.

They turn back because they're wet, or cold, or carrying twice what they needed. All three are decisions made the night before — and all three are fixable in about a minute with the table below.

READ THE DAY → WEAR THIS

CONDITIONS	WEAR	WHY IT MATTERS
Clear, mild, calm	Base only	Keep the shell in a pocket — weather turns fastest when it looks settled.
Clear, mild, windy	Base + Shell	Skip the mid layer while you're moving; wind steals heat, effort makes it.
Cool, calm	Base + Mid	Shed the mid layer the moment you start climbing, not after you're damp.
Cool/cold + wind or rain	All 3 layers	Shell goes on before you're wet. Over damp layers it barely helps.
Cold, exposed ridge	All 3 + extremities	Hat, gloves and dry socks decide this one — not the jacket.

THE ONE RULE THAT REPLACES THE TABLE

Start every hike slightly cold. If you're comfortable standing at the trailhead, you're overdressed for moving.

Turn over for the three-layer system and the three mistakes it prevents.

THE SYSTEM BEHIND THE TABLE

Three layers. One decision each.

Learn this once and you'll never need a packing list for clothing again — you'll be able to build one for any trip, in any season, from the forecast alone.

BASE

Against your skin, every single trip. Its one job is moving sweat out so it can evaporate. Cotton does the opposite — it holds water against you and pulls heat out four times faster than dry fabric.

MID

Your insulation, and the layer people get wrong on timing rather than choice. On at rest stops and summits. Off the moment you're climbing hard enough to make your own heat.

SHELL

Blocks wind and rain, lets your heat escape. Ridgelines run 10–15°F colder and windier than the trailhead — which is why it's worth carrying on a clear forecast.



One pack. What changes is which layer is on you.

WHAT THIS FIXES

You were warm at the car

Comfortable standing still means overdressed for moving. Ten minutes into the first climb you're sweating into the layer meant to keep you warm later.

The forecast said the valley

Trailhead numbers don't describe the ridge. Elevation and wind do more to how cold you feel than the temperature on your phone.

You packed for every scenario

Three jackets 'just in case' is a heavy pack and a short trip. One versatile layer system covers more conditions than three single-purpose ones.

AND THEN THERE'S DINNER

Warm, dry — and fed.



Real cooking. One pot. Under fifteen minutes.

Getting your layers right keeps the trip going. What keeps it enjoyable is a hot meal at the end of it — and that's the part most packing guides skip entirely.

TrailReady gives every trip type its own quick recipe: a one-pot pasta for a single small stove, a foil-pocket dinner for the coals, a hot high-calorie breakfast for a freezing morning. Short ingredient lists, no specialist kit, nothing that needs more than one pan.

And when something does go wrong, each chapter ends with the workarounds — a trash bag as an emergency shell, spare socks as gloves, and the signs that mean turn back now.

You've got the rule. TrailReady gives you the whole trip.

Part one: five trip types — day hike, overnight backpacking, car camping, cold-weather and wet-weather — each with what to wear, a tap-to-check packing list, a quick recipe, and what to do when you're caught without the right layer, plus a spreadsheet that turns your trip and the forecast into a layering list. Part two: 89 print-at-home Survival Cards for the day that stops going to plan. Two of them are on the next page.

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SURVIVAL CARDS

Print these eight. Cut them out. Put them in your pack.

Eight cards chosen because they are the ones that matter most and get skipped most: how to be found, when to turn back, what actually goes wrong first when it gets cold, and why food is the last thing to worry about.

QUICK HACKG7 Signal With What Actually Works You need to be seen from the air or a distance. 1 Use a real mirror, a phone screen or polished metal 2 Make a V with two fingers at arm's length 3 Put the target in the V and flash across it 4 Three of anything means distress INSTANT ! A pebble or a stone will not reflect. It needs a genuinely mirrored surface to be seen at any range. TIP A whistle carries further than a shout and costs you almost no breath.	SMART SHORTCUTB1 The Three Minute Rule You never know when to add or shed a layer. 1 Sweating three minutes into walking → take the mid layer off 2 Cold three minutes after stopping → put it back on 3 Do it the moment you notice, not at the next break INSTANT TIP Damp clothing is what makes you cold later. Deal with sweat before you deal with cold.	SURVIVAL SKILLY1 North Without A Compass You are turned around and have no compass. 1 Stand a straight stick in open ground 2 Mark the shadow tip with a stone 3 Wait fifteen minutes and mark the new tip 4 The line between the marks runs roughly east–west 15 MIN ! It is approximate. Use it to hold a direction, not to find a precise point. TIP First mark is west, second is east, in either hemisphere.
SURVIVAL SKILLY11 Food Is The Last Priority You have run out of food. 1 Order of survival: air, shelter, water, then food 2 A healthy adult copes without food for far longer than without water 3 Slow down, work in the cool, sleep warm 4 Spend the energy on being found, not on foraging N/A ! The old 'universal edibility test' is not recommended. Some plant toxins act in tiny amounts or long after the test would have passed. TIP Hunger feels urgent and rarely is. Cold and dehydration are the things that actually kill.	EMERGENCYR5 Getting Cold Shivering, cold hands, going quiet. 1 Get them out of wind and off the ground 2 Swap wet layers for dry, or add dry layers over the top 3 Warm sweet drink if they are fully alert 4 Shelter and insulate — including underneath ACT NOW ! If shivering stops while they are still cold, or they become confused or clumsy, this is an emergency. Handle them gently and call for help.	EMERGENCYR10 Calling For Help You need emergency services. 1 Where you are — coordinates, or a described route in 2 What has happened and how many people 3 Injuries, and whether they are conscious and breathing 4 Weather on the ground, and your phone number 2 MIN ! Give location first. If the call drops, that is the one thing that lets them reach you. TIP Screenshot your position before you lose signal — it stays readable offline.

SAFETY	E3	MULTI-USE	W6
Tell Someone <i>Nobody knows where you are.</i> 1 Give one person your route and your return time 2 Agree what they do if you are late 3 Include your vehicle and where it is parked 4 Message them when you are safely out ! This single habit shortens more searches than any piece of kit you can buy.		The Bandana, Fully Used <i>The most useful cloth you can carry.</i> 1 Towel, sling, pot holder, sweatband 2 Dust mask, or a sun cover for your neck 3 Water pre-filter before boiling 4 Bright marker on a route you will retrace GRAMS <i>TIP Tie it to your pack where you can see it. Kit you have to dig for is kit you will not use.</i>	

Eight down. Eighty-one to go.

The full kit adds fire, shelter, water, camp cooking, a seven-day skills challenge and ten scenario cards with no comfortable answer — plus everything from part one: the layering and packing system.

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