
MILES MODELS, LLC

Height and Professional Modeling Guidelines

We hear this all the time: *“I’ve always wanted to be a model. Everyone tells me I ought to be a model. I’m 5’2” tall. Can I be a model?”*

The short answer is “yes”. But for fashion models it is about the as probable as being struck by lightning on the way to cash in your winning lottery ticket. Even for commercial models, the market for short younger models is small. The realistic answer is “no.” *“That’s not fair.”* No, it isn’t, but that’s the way it is. This is a business, it isn’t about what you want or what’s fair, it’s about what the marketplace wants. And for the most part the market doesn’t want short models.

Fashion

Women

Height requirements in fashion are driven by two factors: sample size and preference. Designers and fashion photographers prefer taller models. Dresses for runway shows and editorial and advertising photography are cut to a “sample size” that reflects that preference. Once the clothes are put together it’s a lot easier to hire a model to fit than to redo the clothes for a shorter model.

The requirements for being a major market fashion model are not absolute – they are just (very strong) preferences. Everyone in the industry knows that Kate Moss and Laetitia Casta, among others, don’t fit the “standards,” and yet they have been very successful. So why shouldn’t you say to yourself “Hey, what about them? I’m only 5’7” tall, but so are some other fashion models I could name. That means I have a chance to make it, right?” Yes, it does. But we have to distinguish between “possible” and “reasonably likely.”

Let’s look at some numbers. A study done in 2002 showed that among top editorial fashion agencies in Los Angeles and New York, 81% of their “editorial fashion” models were 5’9” and above; 15% were between 5’8” and 5’9”, and only 4% were below 5’8” tall.

According to the US Center for Health Statistics, only about 3 ½% of all young women are within an inch of 5’10” in height. The average weight for those women is about 145-150 pounds – some 30+ pounds more than the “normal” fashion model. If you add in factors like facial beauty, body proportions and all the other things that qualify a girl to apply as a “fashion model” the competition is a very small part of the population.

By comparison, almost 20% of all young women are within an inch of 5’6”. So when you couple the strong desire of the fashion industry for tall women with the fact that a short girl has 5-6 times the number of competitors, the chances look very small indeed.

When a model below 5’8” or above 6’0” tall is successful it is almost always because someone, typically a photographer, agent or editor, took a special interest in a girl and “made” her career, or because of fame in a non-modeling field. It doesn’t happen through the normal route, but by having a special person with

influence in the industry decide, for whatever reason, to push you to the front of the line. Things like that can't be worked for, planned for, or reasonably hoped for. They simply happen, very, very rarely. The "modeling schools" and the scammers seek out girls who want to believe they can be the exception. They assure girls that they can, but they never say what it really takes to be that exception – because it's almost certain most victims don't have it, and the schools and scammers aren't going to give it to you.

"Petites"

As a rule, any agency or management company that advertises that they accept "petite" models is a scam. It's just one more marketing ploy that allows them to expand their potential base of victims. "Petite" fashion modeling is almost non-existent except at the very lowest levels of the industry, which pay very little.

When it does exist, "petite" fashion models aren't what most people might expect. In the fashion world, "petite" means "under 5'9" tall", and most of them are 5'7" to 5'8" tall. Sometimes shorter models get jobs as fit models, or in mall fashion shows, but there is very little opportunity in fashion modeling for "petites".

There is at least one current legitimate model agency in New York City that has a "petite" division - but it is a "commercial fashion/commercial print" agency - not a "high fashion" agency - and the girls are mostly commercial print oriented. Even in that agency, the majority of the "petite" models are 5'5" or over, and some are as tall as 5'8".

We cannot in good conscience suggest that a girl who does not meet the height standards for a fashion model spend a lot of time, effort and money pursuing that goal when the probabilities of success are so very low. She is better off pursuing some other kind of modeling that uses different standards. If the luck is going to strike, it can do so regardless of what else she is doing.

Men

For men the situation is very different. It's still hard to make it if you're not the preferred six-footer (up to 6'2", but no more than 6'1" preferred), but the numbers tell a different story. Over 25% of all young men are within an inch of being six feet tall. The average weight for young men of that height is 175-180 pounds – not very different from what the fashion community wants. If it's true that a short girl can get taken by an agency simply from the difficulty of finding enough tall girls, the opposite is true for men. There is an abundant supply of men who meet the height criteria, so there is little need for an agency to look outside their preferred bounds.

Commercial Print

The typical reaction when counseling short aspiring models is that, since they can't be a fashion model, they ought to be a commercial model. It's pretty common to hear that "height doesn't matter" in commercial print. The motivation is understandable, and there is some (limited) sense behind the advice. But it's every bit as wrong as it is right. Here's the truth: The criteria are different than they are for fashion, and not as firm. But **height does matter in commercial print.**

For the most part, very tall and very short models (for women, 5'11" and above, 5'4" and below, for men 6'3" and above, 5'8" and below) are not what the print industry is looking for. Yes, there are exceptions, and commercial agencies tend to have some models who will work in those exceptional cases. But for the

most part, commercial work goes to those who are of “middle height”. (Yes, 5’4” is close to the median in the “real world”, and 5’4” girls really are not “short”. But the terms and criteria used here are based on the norms of the modeling industry, not “real life”.) **The average female commercial print model is 5’6 ½” tall, the average male 5’11 ½” tall.**

We did an analysis of who was actually requested for commercial print work, based on thousands of castings. A great majority of the time, height was not specified, but when it was, **96% of requests were for women over 5’6” tall.** Since height is not often an explicit part of the casting request, we took a look at who actually gets hired. The sample size was a lot smaller than for requests, so it’s harder to draw firm conclusions. But based on what we have observed, we can draw some tentative conclusions:

1. Short minorities are more likely to get hired than short Caucasians. That is especially true of Asians.
2. Short older models (over 40) are much more likely to be hired than short younger ones. There is too much competition among the 5’6” and above group for a young, shorter girl to compete.

Again, this is for classic “commercial print” work, not specialties like glamour, promotional or fitness modeling, where height doesn’t seem to matter as much.

The bottom line is this: Except for Asians, **the market for young female models under 5’5” is vanishingly small**, much less than 1% of the market. With rare exception, a taller girl can do pretty much any print job; a shorter girl is limited to a very small subset.

Agencies know that, at least to a rough approximation. And that is why it is so difficult for a short model to attract the attention of a commercial print agency.

Promotional

There is a preference for taller models in promotional modeling (taller people are easier to see in a crowd, and attract more attention), but it’s far from a requirement. Many promotional models who are well under “modeling” height have had excellent careers.

Glamour and Art

There is no height requirement for glamour and art models.

Getting an Agency if You are Short

Fashion agencies want tall models. Commercial print agencies in major markets may have a variety of heights, and so accept shorter models. But agencies in medium and smaller market cities generally are “hybrid” agencies which book a lot of commercial fashion work, and that sets the baseline for their needs.

Many non-fashion clients don’t much care about the height of their models. If models were all 5’4” tall that could be just fine for them. But there are three reasons why print agencies don’t carry many short models on the books:

1. Even though “short” may be OK, a large height disparity between models used in a multi-person shoot is not OK. Since most models are on the tall side, it’s more likely that another tall model will fit in.
2. Very few clients will object to a 5’9” inch model – but many will not want to hire one at 5’3”. So the taller girls can do virtually all the commercial jobs that the short ones can, but the reverse is not true. Shorter models can only do a fraction of the work available.

3. In smaller markets, clients tend not to want to spend a lot of money on models. If they need taller models, they probably need to use an agency to find them. But if short models will work for them, as likely as not they will use family, friends and company employees, who are readily available in heights less than 5'8" (women) and 5'11" (men). Agencies know that too, and they don't try to compete with the client's niece.

Agencies don't want a lot of models that aren't getting much (or any) work – they would much rather have all of their models working as much as possible. So they want to sign models that can work in as much of the market for their type as possible. And that means taller models.

There is one significant exception to the height rules for fashion, however, even though it applies only in a very few cities. "Fashion" is more than just dresses. It also includes accessories and shoes. And there is a robust market for "shoe models" at trade shows and fashion shows. It might be true that shoe designers would also like to use tall, skinny models – after all, the models have to be wearing something besides just shoes, and we already know that looks better on a tall, skinny girl. Still, the point of a shoe show is . . . well . . . the shoes. You want them to look as good as possible. And research tells us that smaller shoes are prettier; size 10 women's shoes bear far too much resemblance to canoes. Not surprisingly, the "sample size" for shoe shows is size 6.

So let's do a little survey. Would all the pretty, size 2, 5'10" girls with size 6 feet please raise your hands? Anyone? . . . Anyone? . . . Bueller?

They pretty much don't exist. There is a rough correlation between height and shoe size, and the number of tall women with very small feet is close to zero. Nature has arranged it that way on purpose; a 5'10" girl with size 6 feet would blow over in a stiff breeze. So shoe designers do what they must: they hire models with size 6 feet, and if that means that no taller girls qualify for their shows, well, too bad for the taller girls, or those who were blessed with sturdier feet.

And so in those few cities where shoe fashion and trade shows hire a significant number of shoe models (of which New York and Las Vegas are two), shorter girls with size six feet do have a chance at representation by "commercial fashion" agencies. And, once you are in the agency, you have the chance of being sent out on other jobs where the client may not care so much about height.

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Ph: (678) 357.7837 | E: contact@milesmodels.com | W: www.milesmodels.com