

What Not to Wear: Dressing for the Workplace

When it comes to getting a job, we would all like to think that our qualifications speak for themselves. However, it is your first impression that will likely determine your professional fate. In part, you project professionalism through your appearance and manner of dress and when it comes to getting your first job, you can and should be your best professional self.

Most employers agree that overall appearance contributes to their opinion of candidates, so you should present an overall professional appearance that extends beyond the clothes that you wear. Presenting yourself professionally allows potential future employers to focus on the information you present in your interview. They will not be distracted by the way you look, your clothing, or your accessories.

INTERVIEW ATTIRE

First and foremost, consider your audience. Research the nature of the companies and organizations where you will be interviewing; your goal should be to understand both the field in general and the particular employer(s). Not all jobs require a formal level of professional dress, while others require that one wear a suit each and every day. Some companies even have strict dress codes.

Once you have done your homework; plan to dress in such a way that will improve the chances of getting the job that you want. Understand that you should dress more formally for your interview than you will to come to work each day. Also, it is always advisable to err on the conservative side when it comes to interview attire.

Clothing

Men

- Tailored suit in traditional colors: navy blue, charcoal gray, black, solid or subtle stripe patterns
- Long sleeved button-down shirt in white or light blue, with a plain white v-neck undershirt underneath
- Conservative tie in a solid color, tasteful stripe or small pattern
- Dark socks that match your suit in a solid color or small pattern, must be long enough that no skin is exposed while seated
- Leather lace-up shoes, certain loafers may be acceptable



Women

- Tailored suit in traditional colors: navy blue, charcoal gray, black, solid or subtle stripe patterns – while women have somewhat more flexibility in color, avoid non-traditional color choices
- Pants suits are now generally appropriate, but many conservative workplaces expect a dress or skirt suit where the skirt is just below the knee and neutral pantyhose are worn
- Shirts or blouses should be cotton or silk, well tailored, appropriately fitted, tucked in, and in a conservative color to match the suit, with a camisole underneath
- Low to medium heeled leather shoes with closed toes and backs
- Always wear pantyhose with a dress or skirt suit



Overall

Remember the *Rule of 13* when it comes to accessories. Wear no more than 13 accessories, including earrings, rings, watches, AND buttons on your jacket. Additionally, if you have to ask yourself: "Should I wear this?" you should not!

Hair/Makeup

- Hair should be neat and well groomed
- Hair should always be kept out of your face; while you don't have to tie it back, you should ensure that it will not be a distraction to you or your interviewer
- Makeup should be natural and not distract from your overall appearance
- Facial hair should be short and neatly trimmed
- Be aware that some industries prefer men have short hair and no facial hair

Nails

- Clean and neat nails are best
- You do not need to wear polish
- If you do wear polish, use only neutral colors and make sure that it is not chipping off

Perfume

- It is generally advisable to refrain from wearing any perfume to avoid scents that are offensive or overwhelming to the interviewer
- Use soap and wear *only* deodorant

Jewelry

- Wear simple, flattering jewelry in conservative amounts
- Wear no more than one ring on each hand
- Wear no more than one earring in each ear and consider wearing stud earrings or small hoops

Tattoos/Piercings

Think primarily about first impressions when considering visible tattoos and piercings. This may be an automatic disqualifier in some fields and completely acceptable in others. In most cases, opinions and preferences of interviewers will fall somewhere in between and it is advisable to present a conservative appearance by covering all tattoos and removing all visible, non-traditional piercings. Note that you should remove your tongue ring if you have one as it can be very distracting during your interview.

Some employers may have body art policies incorporated into their dress code. It is legal to require employees to cover tattoos and remove piercings as long as doing so does not discriminate against the employee on a religious or cultural basis. Before applying to a company with such a policy, you must be prepared that you may have to take these measures daily.

Purse/Briefcase

Never bring a backpack or casual bag to your interview, but it is appropriate, if not advisable, to bring a briefcase or similarly professional bag to carry a portfolio, pen or pencil, copies of your resume/references and application materials, and work or writing samples. You will also likely need a place to put your wallet and car keys (and possibly tissues and breath mints). If you bring a cell phone, you should turn it off as you enter the building, well before your interview begins. Women are advised to bring either a purse or a briefcase, but not both. Also, your purse should be conservative rather than trendy and should complement your suit (read: avoid bold colors and designs).

BUSINESS CASUAL



Business casual, also known as dressy casual when referring to social events, is a vague term that sometimes challenges seasoned professionals. The first thing to note is that business casual is NOT casual. Consider business casual as a step down from interview dress. You should look neat and your clothing should not be wrinkled or worn.

For men, business casual could be khaki colored dress pants (not cotton khaki pants!) with a button down shirt (but no tie). If you choose to wear a nice polo shirt, it should be tucked in. A sweater or blazer is also appropriate. While you do not have to wear a formal lace up dress shoe, you should not wear sneakers or other casual shoes. Loafers are suitable footwear for men.



For women, rather than pairing your suit pants/skirt with your suit jacket, you can wear a sweater or blouse in a bolder color or pattern. It is still inappropriate to wear sandals, and in many cases, open toed shoes. A flat shoe or loafer is also appropriate for women.

The same guidelines apply for accessories, hair and makeup. You must still make a good impression and avoid an appearance that distracts from your skills and abilities. Make sure you look professional and put together.

TIPS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS ON A BUDGET

- ✓ Plan ahead and shop sales. If you leave things to the last minute, you will pay full price and may not find exactly what you're looking for.
- ✓ Shop at discount stores like Marshall's and TJ Maxx; their selection is somewhat narrower than a department store, but their prices are also much lower.
- ✓ Avoid buying seasonal clothes. For men and women, buy a lighter weight wool gabardine or a wool blend. For women, don't buy $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeved suit jackets.
- ✓ Avoid buying trendy clothes.
- ✓ Be thoughtful in your selections and buy a suit that is versatile enough to be worn with several different shirts, sweaters, ties, or shoes.
- ✓ Choose fabrics that travel well and don't wrinkle easily, particularly for your suit. You *can* get away with only one interview suit, even if you are interviewing with the same company multiple times.
- ✓ While it's not as much fun to get a tie for your birthday, let family and friends know that you're planning for upcoming interviews and need appropriate clothes or contributions to your "suit fund".
- ✓ Consider borrowing a suit if you are in a pinch, but remember; you don't want to look like a little kid in your dad's oversized suit or straight out of the 80s in your mom's shoulder pads!