

Dress for Success:

Appropriate Professional Attire

Objectives

1. To recognize the importance of proper dress as it relates to interviewing and business situations.
2. To understand the difference between business attire and business casual.
3. To understand the guidelines for proper attire.

The Importance of Proper Attire

Even though we would like to think that our skills and abilities get us the job, appearance does count. First impressions are made within five minutes of meeting someone and help shape all future impressions, so it is important to dress professionally.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) surveyed 457 employers who recruit new college graduates, and an overwhelming 92 percent believe a candidate's overall appearance influences their opinion about that candidate!

When meeting potential employers, dress appropriately. It is helpful to dress for the job you want.

Learn the Employer's Dress Style

Looking the part can help you make a good first impression in an interview or professional work environment. Below are some tips for learning an employer's dress style:

- Research the culture of the employer and organization. A more conservative employer (accounting, finance, law, etc.) will require more conservative dress. A more creative employer (retail, advertising, etc.) might offer more flexibility.
- Look at the organization's brochures, website, and employees to guide your dress. What style of clothes is being worn by the people who work there?
- Trust your instincts when selecting interview attire. If you have to ask, "Can I wear this?" then the answer should always be "No." Err on the conservative side when in doubt about what to wear.
- Avoid extremes. Low-cut blouses, high stilettos, miniskirts, perfumes, etc., are inappropriate.



- Purchase a quality suit. One good suit is better than several inexpensive suits.
- Always try on your entire outfit prior to the interview day. Also, don't forget to look at the back of your outfit to ensure you have a polished look coming and going.
- ASK! It is okay to ask employers what their organization's dress code looks like.

Business Casual Attire

Dress code policies have been changing for the last decade. Dressing more casually is meant to make life easier, but confusion over appropriate attire has caused many employers to adopt some type of business casual standard. Whether it is casual Fridays, shirts with the organization's logo, or a guide for acceptable dress, the casual dress code is becoming more defined.

Business Professional Attire

Business attire suggests a formal, conservative dressstyle. It is expected when interviewing with an employer unless stated otherwise. Attention to detail, impeccable grooming, and a well-fitting suit are vital to make a good lasting impression.

Standard Interview Attire

The Suit

- Choose a classic, neutral suit in charcoal, black, or navy. Avoid suits that conform to trends. For example, skirt suits are appropriate feminine attire as long as the skirt hits or covers the knee, and there are no large slits at the side, front, or back.
- The pant leg should touch the front of the shoe and fall just above the heel in the back. Pants can be cuffed or uncuffed.
- Make sure the suit flatters your body type and fits well, not too tight or loose.

The Dress Shirt

- Choose shirts in a pale, subtle color (i.e., blue, white, ecru).
- Avoid shirts with insignias.
- Long-sleeved, button-up shirts are most appropriate. Your shirt sleeve should extend by half an inch beyond the suit jacket sleeves.

- Pointed collars give a more professional image than button-down collars, yet both are acceptable.
- Wearing a crew-neck undershirt or camisole under your dress shirt is advisable to preserve modesty and add finish to the look.

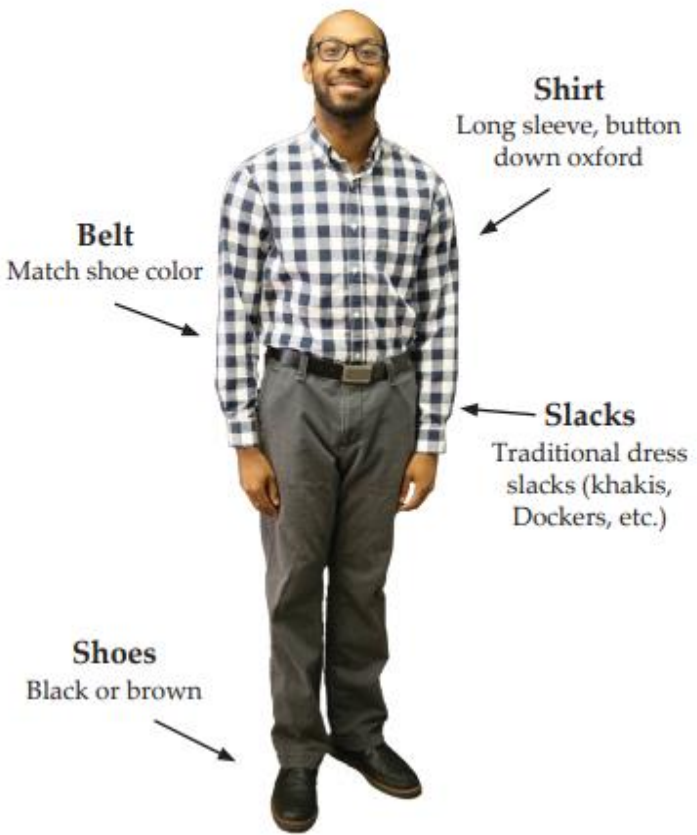
Shoes/Belt

- Shoes that match your suit or are slightly darker are the best choice in colors, such as brown, black, tan, or navy. The shoe should have a real sole (no sneakers, sandals, or street shoes) and a closed toe. Avoid platforms and heels higher than 2 inches.
- Shoes should be polished and in good condition.
- Be sure to wear socks that cover your calves.
- Belts should be in good condition and match the color of your shoes.

Find the balance between showing your personality and dressing according to what is appropriate for the job.

Masculine Considerations for Attire

Business Casual



Business Professional



Feminine Considerations for Attire

Business Casual



Business Professional



Gender Neutral Considerations for Attire

Business Casual



Business Professional



Grooming

First impressions are key to your success in the job search process and good grooming and personal hygiene play a pivotal role in standing out in a positive way!

Hygiene: Practicing good personal hygiene is very important. Showering, maintaining fresh breath, wearing deodorant, and clean, pressed clothes can help you succeed under pressure. As a best practice, avoid perfume or cologne, as you never know other's potential sensitivity to fragrance and want to keep the focus strictly on your conversation.

Hair: When selecting a hairstyle for a career fair or interview, the simpler and classier the look, the better. Ensure hair is well kept and will remain out of your face to avoid distractions. If you have facial hair, ensure it is well-groomed and trimmed. If you are just starting to grow facial hair, opting for a clean-shaven approach may be best.

Makeup: A natural look made up of a neutral color palette for your skin tone is preferred if you wear makeup. Avoid products that glitter or shimmer, as they could detract from your message.

Nails: Nails should always be kept clean, cut short, and painted a neutral color if wearing nail polish.



Body Art: Consider your choice of work environments and industry when deciding your approach to body art. For more conservative or formal environments, it is recommended to remove body jewelry and cover up visible tattoos during the recruitment process.

Jewelry: When it comes to accessories, less is more. The accessories you choose to complement your professional attire should be simple and sleek- think classy over trendy. Always consider the industry and the culture of the company when complementing an outfit with accessories like jewelry. Stud earrings made of pearls, diamonds, silver, or gold, as well as one or two other simple pieces of jewelry, such as one corresponding simple bracelet or classic necklace such as pearls, are professional. If you have a wedding ring or wedding band, that is also acceptable.

Cultural Considerations

Dress is an extension of who you are, including religious or cultural beliefs that often shape your attire and accessories. Finding a professional balance to remain true to your cultural, ethnic, or religious identity and the work environment is key.



The [Equal Employment Opportunity, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#), prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals on account of their religion, birthplace, ancestry, culture, or linguistic characteristics common to a specific ethnic group.

- Most companies have their dress codes and policies stated on their website. If you are unsure, it is important to ask questions. A human resources professional or career consultant can help.
- Some workplaces may have policies or dress codes for the safety of the employees or those which are required for a specific job or type of industry.

Summary

Regardless of the occasion, dressing appropriately is one of the easiest ways to impress potential employers. It may not guarantee you a job, but it should prevent your elimination from the candidate pool.

Additional Resources

Career Services Library Resource

- Reeves, E. G. (2009). *Can I Wear My Nose Ring to the Interview?: The Crash Course: Finding, Landing, and Keeping Your First Real Job*. Workman Publishing.

Other Print Resource

- Morem, Susan. *How to Gain the Professional Edge: Achieve the Personal and Professional Image You Want*. Ferguson Publishing Company, 2005.

Websites

- Understanding Business Casual Dress — <https://ecgcoaching.com/library/ps/casual.php>
- What is Business Casual Attire (With Example And Tips) — <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/starting-new-job/guide-to-business-casual-attire>
- How to Tie a Tie — www.tie-a-tie.net



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