

Dressing to Impress: 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 in 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. 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.



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- Purchase a quality suit. One good suit is better than several inexpensive suits.
- Always try on your entire outfit prior to the interview day. 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 formal, conservative dress style. 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 lasting good impression.

Standard Interview Attire

The Suit

- Choose a classic, neutral suit in charcoal, black, or navy. Avoid suits that conform to trends. 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 beyond the suit jacket sleeves by half an inch.

- 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.

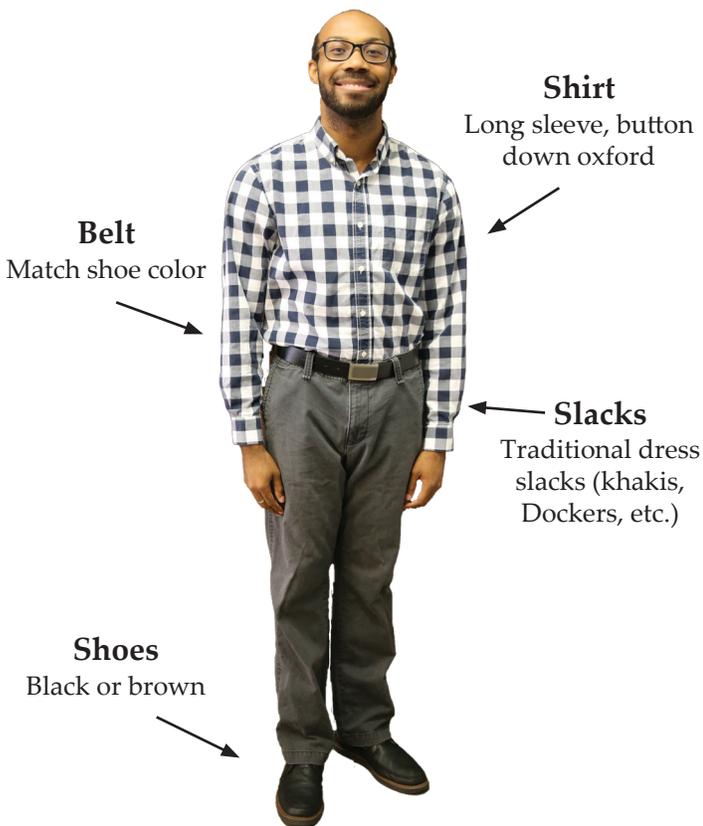
Shoes/Belt

- 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



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 Center Library Resources

Backpack to Briefcase: Steps to a Successful Career...IA A7

Other Print Resources

- Bixler, Susan & Nix-Rice, Nancy. *The Professional Image: From Business Casual to the Ultimate Power Look*. 1999.
- Greenleaf, Clinton. *Attention to Detail: A Gentleman's Guide to Professional Appearance and Conduct*. Greenleaf Book Group, 1998.
- Molloy, John T. *New Woman's Dress for Success Book*. New York, New York: Warner Books, 2002.
- Molloy, John T. *New Dress for Success Book*. New York, New York: Warner Books, 2002.
- 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 — www.ecglink.com/library/ps/casual.html
- How to Tie a Tie — www.tie-a-tie.net

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