

# Dress for Success

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## **Importance of Professional Dress**

First impressions DO COUNT when we are evaluating someone, particularly for a professional position. Professional dress is an important component of that first impression. People make assumptions about professional credibility and potential performance based upon appearance during a first meeting, and it is difficult to overcome a first impression, regardless of your knowledge and expertise.

As an interview candidate, you have your foot in the door, but so do all of the other candidates. An interview can distinguish between qualified candidates and the “perfect match.” Professional dress is part of that match.

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## **Business Casual**

Many students get confused by the difference between formal, interview attire and business casual. Defined, business casual is professional clothing that is not as formal as the interview suit. Many times an organization will state that an event is “business casual;” however, if you are unsure of the dress, ALWAYS go with the more formal and conservative.

For men, a pair of khakis or slacks and a button down shirt or sweater define business casual.

For women, business casual can be slacks or a skirt paired with a blouse or sweater. As always, wear appropriate shoes. No sneakers, sandals or open toe shoes.

Remember, the key is to look polished and professional. You should not draw attention to a specific area of clothing or accessory; thus, the same rules for hair, makeup, jewelry and all accessories apply to business casual just as they do with formal, interview attire.

## **Interview Attire**

Professional dress is not just about clothes, but an overall professional appearance. You want an employer to be impressed with your look; however, your clothes should not upstage you in an interview. All attention should be on your interview presentation, not on your clothing and accessories.

## **What if the job is in a NON-SUIT-wearing Work Environment?**

Even if the work environment is scrubs and a very non-suit environment, wearing a suit to the interview shows you take the interview seriously as a professional meeting. Dressing well is a compliment to the person(s) with whom you meet.

The following are dress requirements needed for formal interview attire, as well as suggestions on how to achieve an overall professional look.

Posture is important to make any clothing look professional and assertive!

### **Clothing for Men**

- Long-sleeve shirt - white is best, French blue is acceptable - no less than 55% cotton; sleeves extend 1/2" from jacket sleeve - standard collar - do not wear button-down collar
- Jacket sleeve length should cover the wristbone
- Belt should be a dress belt, not a sport belt
- Tie should be a classic style - not trendy, i.e. skinny ties, etc. Should be 100% silk if possible- Red is the best color - any combination of blues, red/blue, blue/yellow - learn to tie a Windsor knot - bottom of tie should hit middle of belt buckle
- Dark socks - dress sock is thinner than a sport sock or wool sock - wear over-the-calf length sock so your skin does not show between hem and sock when you sit down - should be the same color as shoes
- Leather shoes should also have a leather sole - no rubber-sole shoes - shoes should be freshly polished - shoes and belt should be same color
- Wear only one ring
- Don't wear a sport watch - always wear a dress watch with a suit
- A suit usually needs alteration to fit properly - a slight break in the trouser over the shoes is preferred, a deep break looks sloppy

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### **Jewelry**

Women should avoid dangling earrings and arms full of bracelets, and men should wear little or no jewelry other than a watch and/or wedding band. No jewelry is better than cheap or loud jewelry. When it comes to piercings and tattoos, depending on where you are interviewing, you may want to consider covering tattoos and taking out your rings.

### **Perfume**

Do not wear perfume or cologne as many people have strong, adverse or even allergic reactions to it.

### **Clothing for Women**

- Skirt length should not be more than 2" above the top of the knee
- Skirt should fall straight from the widest part of the hip - should never hug the curves of the hip, derriere, thighs
- Blouse or shirt should be a cotton blend or polyester blend to look like silk - button-front blouses tend to gap if too small - a pullover top looks smoother - be sure a collar will lay nicely over suit collar, or go collarless - white is best - but shades of blue and coral are acceptable - avoid strong fashion colors such as yellow, fuchsia, purple - no sheer fabrics
- No cleavage should ever show
- Closed toe pumps should not have a platform wider than 1/4" - platform heels are not acceptable - shoes should be polished - leather is preferred over patent
- Do not wear boots
- Black works well with any suit - never wear a shoe color that is lighter than color of skirt
- Jewelry - small pearl or gold studs are best - no more than one earring in the ear - earrings should have no movement as you move your head
- Simple gold or pearl necklace works best - do not wear bracelets that move and make noise - one ring on each hand is enough - no costume fashion rings or jewelry - Watch should be classic - no oversized or colored watches
- No underwear lines should ever show - nude is always worn under white - wear body shapers to give your body a more polished look
- Be sure suit fabric will resist wrinkles - never select linen or cotton for a suit
- Suit should be fitted professionally to create the perfect fit - i.e. sleeve length, pant hem, etc.

### **Hair, Makeup, & Nails**

Less is more when it comes to hair and makeup. Be subtle and don't overdo it with makeup. Keep your hair style simple. The same holds true for nail polish. Nails should be clean and manicured. Women do not have to wear nail polish; however, if polish is worn, make sure that it is a natural, conservative color and not chipping off. You don't want the interviewer to even notice your nail color. An example of not accessorizing correctly is the woman who showed up to interview for a job at a company I worked for wearing a bright red dress, matching nail polish, and candy apple red spiked heels.

For men, beards and other facial hair should be neatly trimmed. Also be aware that some industries and organizations may frown on long hair or facial hair.

Women, wear natural looking makeup that will flatter and compliment, not overpower, your outfit.

### **Portfolio/Purse**

A portfolio is a great accessory. You can store extra copies of your resume and your list of references. Or, you may want to consider a large purse or a small briefcase that can hold all your belongings, plus what you need for the interview. Stick to neutral colors, regardless of which option you select.

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### **Suggested professional items to include in your interview**

- **A tablet or some type of notebook to take notes or jot down information**  
Many students like using a portfolio notebook that includes a notepad, penholder, file pocket and business card holder.
- **A good pen or pencil**  
The last thing you want is an ink spill.
- **Wallet, Car Keys & Phone**  
If your car keys are on a ten pound key ring take your car key off; or, if your wallet is the size of a bag itself, just bring in your driver's license and a little money. Leave the rest at home or in the trunk of your car. Leave your phone in the trunk of your car to prevent it from going off during the interview and distracting both you and the person interviewing you.
- **Kleenex**
- **Breath mints or Gum**  
Be sure and remove all mints or gum from your mouth before you go into the interview. Avoid smoking before an interview, gum and breath mints will not cover up the smell.