



Career Development Office | Vassar College

Dressing for Success

Professional attire in an interview conveys respect for a potential employer and signals that you understand how to dress in a professional work environment. From high-profile consulting firms to a non-profit organization or trendy clothing company, every work environment has its own unique expectations. By looking the part, you can show your employer that you're a good fit for the position. Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach to dressing professionally, this essential guide outlines some of the basic rules to follow. If you have any questions or concerns about appropriate dress for a particular interview or situation, be sure to schedule an appointment with a career counselor.

Business Professional

Business professional is the most formal attire for interviewing.

Suit: Pant or skirt suit in black, gray, navy blue, or other subdued color. You will get the most wear out of a classic look that complements your body type; trendy styles will quickly become outdated.

Shirt/Tie: Under your suit jacket wear a collared, ironed dress shirt or blouse in a color complementary to your suit. Colors like white, light blue, and cream are the most versatile for pairing with your other garments. Tank tops and low-cut shirts/blouses are inappropriate for an interview. Save the extra buttons in case you lose one. Ties are an essential part of business professional attire. Choose ties in solid colors or subdued patterns that complement the color of your shirt.

Leg Wear/Socks: Socks should be a matching pair in a color one shade darker than your suit. If you wear a skirt, be sure to pair it with nylon stockings even in warm weather. They should complement your skin color.

Overcoat: Consider investing in an all-weather $\frac{3}{4}$ - or full-length wool coat for use in autumn and winter. A tan or black trench coat will be useful for mild or rainy days in spring and summer.

Shoes: Choose black or brown leather dress shoes or a classic pair of pumps in black, brown, navy blue, or taupe. Avoid extreme styles, i.e. excessively pointed or square-toed shoes, or shoes with unusually thick soles or high heels. Shoes should be polished and in good repair. Do not wear brown shoes with a black suit. Be sure you are comfortable walking in whatever heel height you choose.

Belt: Your belt should be leather and should match your shoes. Cloth belts should not be worn with suits.

Business Casual

Business casual is professional and neatly put-together, yet relaxed. Standards vary widely from one field to another, but the following are typically appropriate pieces to incorporate into your outfit.

Slacks or Skirt: Wool, gabardine, khaki, or corduroy slacks. Skirts/dresses should fall to the knee while standing. Despite being slightly more casual, slacks and skirts must still be crisp and wrinkle-free.

Shirt: Collared shirts in solid colors or tasteful patterns. You may keep the collar open under a sport coat, blazer, or sweater.

Sport Coat or Blazer: In some cases you may want to wear a seasonally appropriate sport coat or blazer. Consider corduroy, cashmere, cotton, linen, or wool gabardine fabric.

Sweater: Sweaters should be in good condition (i.e. no pilling or loose threads) and can be worn alone or layered over a dress shirt. A tie is optional.

Shoes: See above. Appropriate and coordinated flats are an alternative to pumps in a business casual setting.

Accessories

The most important thing to be said about accessories is that less is more.

Jewelry: Keep it simple. Use gold and silver colors and avoid extremes of style. No more than two rings per hand. No ankle bracelets. Find a simple watch in a non-athletic style; leather watchbands should match your belt and shoes.

Belt: Wear a belt if your slacks or skirt have belt loops. Belts should be coordinated with the color of your shoes.

Bags: Small and simple purses are best. Structured bags look more professional. Work with basic and inconspicuous colors. Avoid hyper-trendy styles. Leather and finely woven fabrics are best. Canvas and straw are inappropriate.

Briefcase: A leather briefcase can be used to carry pens, notepaper, and business reading material.

Portfolio: A leather portfolio can be used for interviews to carry resumes, notepaper, and other documents.

Pen: Look prepared by carrying at least one nice pen.

Grooming

Here are some tips to complete your look.

Hair: Keep your hair clean, neat, and out of your face. Headscarves are appropriate in understated patterns or tones that match the rest of your ensemble.

Nails: Keep your nails groomed, neat, and clean. Avoid long uncut nails or bright nail polish.

Piercings: Other than one earring per ear, leave your piercings empty while interviewing. They divert attention from what you have to say and are frowned upon in many offices.

Facial Hair: The clean-shaven look is always a winner. If you have facial hair, make sure it is properly trimmed.

Cosmetics: Keep makeup simple and natural looking.

Perfume/Cologne: Use sparingly or not at all.

Clothing Care

It is important to take care of your clothes so you always look your best.

Dry Cleaning: Have your suits, blazers, sport coats, skirts, and slacks dry cleaned regularly. Suits, sport coats, and blazers can be professionally pressed in between dry cleanings.

Alterations: Find a local tailor to handle alterations to your clothing. Most suits will almost surely need some adjustment to look their best on you. Many stores will include tailoring with the purchase of professional clothing—take advantage of this!

Shoe Polish: Polish your shoes regularly so they look great and last as long as possible.

What Not To Wear

- Sandals or athletic shoes/sneakers
- Athletic socks or white socks
- Low cut, tight, or poorly-fitting garments
- Short skirts
- Loud colors or fabrics
- Bare legs
- Shorts
- Capri pants
- Leggings
- Jeans
- Worn, wrinkled, or outdated clothing

Additional Tips

Freshen your breath. Avoid gum and candy during the interview and avoid cigarettes right before the interview. Be sure to shower before your interview and wear extra deodorant! Visible tattoos should be covered to avoid distraction.