Dressing for Success

Attire is an important aspect of how you present yourself in an interview to a potential employer. From large multinational firms to small non-profit organizations or trendy start-ups, every work environment has its own unique attire 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 in the workplace, this essential guide outlines some basic suggestions that you can choose to follow. If you have any questions or concerns about what to wear 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 You will get the most wear out of a classic look that complements your body shape; trendy styles will quickly become outdated.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. Ties, if you choose to wear one with a suit, are an essential part of business professional attire. If you are unsure whether you want to wear a tie or not, it is usually better to wear one in order to be and feel over-prepared rather than under-prepared. Choose ties in subdued or small patterns that complement the color of your shirt and suit.

**Leg Wear/Socks**: Socks should be a matching pair in a color one shade darker than your suit. If you wear a skirt, you may want to consider pairing it with stockings even in warm weather.

**Overcoat**: Consider investing in an all-weather ¾- or full-length tan, navy, grey, or black overcoat for use in autumn and winter. A trench coat in any of the aforementioned colors will be useful for mild or rainy days in spring and summer.

**Shoes**: Choose black or brown dress shoes (oxford, brogue, Chelsea boot) or a classic pair of pumps or dressy flats in black, brown, navy blue, or taupe. It may be best, if you are able to, to avoid pointed or square-toed shoes, or shoes with unusually thick soles or high heels. Shoes should be polished and in good condition. 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 match your shoes. Cloth belts should not be worn with suits.

Business Casual
Business casual is professional and neatly put-together, yet more relaxed than business professional. Standards vary widely from one field to another, but the following tend to be typical pieces to incorporate into your outfit.

**Trousers or Skirt**: For business casual, trousers/skirts can be in wool, cotton, or blended fabrics. It is still recommended to avoid large or overly “loud” prints or patterns. Despite being slightly more casual, slacks and skirts must still be crisp and as wrinkle-free as possible.

**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 fine wool, cotton, or linen fabric.

**Sweater**: Sweaters should be in good condition (i.e., no pilling, holes, or loose threads) and can be worn alone or layered over a dress shirt. A tie is optional, as long as the sweater is not too form-fitting.
Shoes: See the shoes section above, under Business Professional. Appropriate and coordinated flats are an alternative to pumps in a business casual setting. Chukka boots, loafers, or penny loafers may also be worn.

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

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

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

Bags: Small and simple purses are best. Structured bags are excellent options. Work with basic and inconspicuous colors. Avoid hyper-trendy styles and backpacks.

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

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

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

Grooming
Here are some tips to complete your look.

Hair: We suggest making sure your hair is cared for so that you feel your best.

Nails: Keep your nails well-maintained and clean. If painted, make sure polish is not chipped/worn.

Piercings: Consider minimizing and choosing subtle ear/nose accessories while interviewing.

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

Cosmetics: Keep makeup simple.

Perfume/Cologne: Use sparingly or not at all.

Deodorant: For interviews in the U.S., it is recommended that deodorant is worn since it is a cultural norm. It is a choice, however, to conform to this expectation.

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 trousers 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, such as Red Cap Cleaners which is near campus. 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
- Driving mocks
- Athletic shoes/sneakers
- Athletic socks or white socks
- Garments that do not fit well
- Loud colors or patterns
- Sequins
- 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! We can offer assistance with tie-tying, and we have an iron, ironing board, and steamer available for in-office use.

Current students who need assistance with purchasing interview attire may apply for a Career Development Grant.

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