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# Dress for Success

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## Interview Attire

Making a good first impression during an interview is a must. Therefore, it is crucial that you not only act professional but look it as well! Use this resource as a guide to help you prepare for job and/or internship interviews. Remember, it is OK to ask about the dress code when setting up your interview. You'll also find additional clues when researching the company's webpage and literature.

### The Interview Look

Candidates should **always** interview in suits. It could possibly give you an edge over the other applicants and presents you in the best light. Since interviews are formal interactions, follow these helpful tips. They apply to both men and women. It is helpful to note that there are four basic parts that make up the interview look: the suit itself, the blouse and/or shirt, shoes and accessories.

### Suit

Suits should always be a basic, dark color and of good quality. Although suits are expensive, it is not a purchase on which you want to skimp. Higher quality pieces look and wear better. In addition, if properly cared for, they'll last longer. Remember you can always change a look by wearing different shirts, shoes and accessories.

It is suggested that men and women purchase suits that have 2 or 3 button jackets and that are made up of a minimum 50% wool blend. Women can wear both pantsuits and skirt suits. However, if you choose to wear a suit with a skirt, make sure the length of it is no shorter than knee length.

### Blouse/Shirt

Although there is some flexibility with the shirt or blouse you choose to wear, you should always wear a long-sleeved shirt. For men it is best to wear basic, white shirts with a white undershirt. Women may add some color, but be sure to choose a color that is light, such as pink or beige. Never wear a blouse that is sheer or low-cut. This will not create the impression you are after.

Men, choose ties that coordinate with your suit. You can choose a simple pattern or a solid color. If you can, buy a silk tie or some type of silk blend material. Avoid flashiness and bowties. Tie clips or pins are a great way to keep your tie secured during the interview.

### Shoes

When choosing shoes make sure they coordinate with your suit. Since your suit will most likely be a dark color, it is a good idea to wear dark shoes. They should be freshly polished and in good condition. Men, your shoes should have laces. Do not wear white socks. Women should wear shoes that have a 1-1 ½" heel.

Women should always wear pantyhose. They should be natural, sheer black or navy; whichever coordinates best with your suit. It is a good idea to bring an extra pair. That way you're prepared if you get a run.

### **Accessories**

You will need to carry something that can hold your resume and a notepad for you to take notes. A simple, professional looking portfolio or notebook is a good option as well as a briefcase or attaché case. It is best if these items are made out of leather.

### **Must Dos for Everyone**

Check out the following tips as you begin preparing for interviews. Having purchased the necessary items puts you halfway there. Read on to make sure you cover all aspects.

- Try on your interview outfit ahead of time. Your interview clothes should be comfortable enough to wear for several hours. You may be walking, sitting or standing depending on the style of your interview.
- Make sure that your interview outfit is freshly pressed.
- Make sure you are well groomed. This means a nice, neat haircut, clean nails, and little to zero facial piercings. It is best to err on the conservative side and remove all facial piercings, if possible.
- If at all possible, cover up tattoos.
- Minimize accessories
- Do not wear perfumes or colognes. If you choose to do so, make sure that the scent is faint and not overwhelming.
- Make sure your shoes are in good condition and freshly polished.

## **Everyday Attire**

Once you have been offered and have accepted a position, it is important to dress the part. One thing to keep in mind is that every company, office and even specific jobs have unique dress codes that are part of the work environment. Sometimes it is easy to figure out what the expectations are. For example, you may have a uniform that you are required to wear every day. Other times you may need to ask your supervisor or a colleague. It is ok to ask what is and is not appropriate. A good rule of thumb, if you are unsure, is to err on the side of caution and dress up. Remember you can always adjust once you have a better understanding of the office's climate.

### **Business Casual**

A popular dress code among companies today is "business casual." The trick here is to find the fine line between formal and casual. One thing that you can always count on is that business casual does not mean jeans or sneakers.

For men this typically means a collared shirt, a nice pair of pants or trousers, a belt and a nice pair of shoes. Women have the option of wearing pants or skirts, sweater

sets and other coordinated outfits. A good pair of shoes is essential for women as well.

## Other Helpful Information

### Interview Faux Pas

The following is a list of interview disasters. The list, gathered by employers, occurred in actual interviews.

- Spoke on a cell phone for 38 minutes of the 45-minute interview.
- Fell asleep in the middle of the interview.
- Entered the interview room chewing gum and proceeded to stick it under the interview desk when he thought no one was looking.
- Arrived for the interview poorly dressed and unorganized.
- Appeared for the interview totally unprepared—came late, had no resume, and couldn't recall important dates and events.
- Dressed for the interview in a sequin suit with a gold cowboy hat and white boots.
- Asked the interviewer for a date.

### Does Appearance Matter?

"Yes. Appearance does count. You want to stand out among the candidates for a job—but you don't want to stand out because your appearance detracts from your professional demeanor.

Employers given a list of physical attributes were asked to indicate what type of influence each attribute has on their opinion of a candidate's suitability for employment. The results? Employers say, be conservative in your appearance. In fact, the results of this year's survey show less tolerance for less-than-professional appearance than it has in past year" (NACE, p. 8). See the figure on the next page to see how employers ranked appearance items.

*Information was taken from: NACE Research: Job Outlook 2005—Student Version*

### How looks influence an employer's opinion

	No influence	Slight influence	Strong influence
Grooming	7 %	23%	70%
Nontraditional Interview attire	13%	38%	49%
Nontraditional Hair Color	27%	41%	32%
Body piercing	25%	43%	32%
Handshake	28%	44%	28%
Obvious tattoos	24%	48%	28%
Unusual hairstyle	33%	45%	22%
Earring (male)	49%	37%	14%
Beard	78%	19%	3%
Mustache	88%	11%	1%

### Guidelines for Men's Interview Attire

- Wear a matching suit in navy, black or gray (pinstripe or solid) or wear a navy blazer and gray dress slacks. They serve as a visual background that draws the eye to the face.
- Wear white or a light blue dress shirt that contrasts with the jacket and/or tie. Typically, arms should be covered to the wrist. Exposing arms by rolling up your sleeves is interpreted as less powerful and is less formal.
- A (silk or silk-like) tie should coordinate with the jacket and pant but choose one that strongly contrasts with the color of your shirt; selecting subtle or simple patterns enhances credibility.
- Socks should be calf-length or above the calf. Choose natural-fiber blends that allow a flow of air and do not hold in perspiration and heat. Choose colors such as dark blue, black or gray.
- Wear conservative, clean, and polished shoes.

- Select lace-up (not slip-on) dress shoes. The color should be dark or blend with pant.
- Select a leather belt that visually blends or matches your shoes.
- A short hair cut and no facial hair is expected.
- Minimize jewelry. Avoid a necklace. Wear no more than one ring per hand and a dress watch. Be sure all jewelry supports a focus on the face.
- A full-length coat can be worn over your suit; avoid casual coats.
- Cologne should never be strong. A fragrance can cause an allergic reaction or offend the interviewer. When in doubt, do not wear cologne.
- Your briefcase is part of visual effect; consider a simple portfolio as an effective substitute, and try to select a color that supports your visual effect.
- Learn how to tie men's four in hand and half Windsor knots by visiting HiWay Net at <http://www.tieanecktie.com/>

## **Professional Appearance Checklist for Women**

### **A Quick Check Before Facing the World**

Before you leave for work or a social engagement, examine with your best friend--a full-length mirror--the overall picture you present and the details from head to toe. Make the necessary changes, add or remove accessories and be sure your appearance and grooming are impeccable. This daily exercise will take just a few minutes but the confidence of being well dressed will be worth it. If you can check all the points, you are ready to face the world!

#### **Jacket**

- Does not wrinkle across the back or under the collar
- Buttons easily
- Sleeves at wrist bone
- Does not pull across the back
- Pockets remain closed; any pleat or dart must lie flat

## Blouse

- Long sleeve should be at wrist bone
- Buttons must remain closed with at least one inch of fabric on each side of the bust line
- Longer than the hip bone
- Avoid sleeveless blouses

## Skirt

- Pleats should not pull open
- No crease or pull across break of leg
- Skirt should easily turn around your body
- Straight skirts should hang from buttocks in a straight line and not curve under
- Not shorter than "around the knee"
- Loose enough for two fingers to be inserted in waistband
- No visible lines under skirt

## Dress

- Coat dress, shirt dress or two piece
- Conservative neckline (2" above cleavage)
- Medium to long sleeve
- Medium to small print
- Avoid floral prints

## Slacks

- Pleats remain closed
- Zippers and closings must lie flat
- Long enough to break in front
- Do not wrinkle across the front
- Fall straight from buttocks
- Waistband loose enough to allow two fingers to be inserted
- Panty line must not show
- Worn with jacket for a professional look

## Shoes & Hose

- Select neutral shades
- No sandals or "strappy" shoes
- Avoid too high or narrow heels
- Avoid flats
- Hose color does not bring attention to leg area
- Choose natural color hose that blend with hemline

- Hose color is nude, same shade as shoes or lighter, never darker
- No colored hose (red, purple, pink)
- Avoid patterned or textured hose

### **Jewelry**

- Small to medium earrings, simple styles
- Avoid dangling or large hooped earrings
- Avoid noisy jewelry or pieces that move
- Avoid too many pieces
- No tinted glasses

### **Makeup and Grooming**

- Wear blended, natural makeup
- Choose simple, carefree hair styles
- For colored hair, avoid roots showing
- Avoid extreme fashion styles and colors
- If your hair falls below the shoulders, pull it back
- Keep fingernails short to medium length
- Avoid too bright nail polish colors (fuchsia-orange-purple)
- No chipped nails
- Avoid dark lingerie with light clothing
- No slip showing below hemline
- Avoid high split in skirt
- No slip showing between split in skirt
- Avoid heavy fragrance

Professional image entails maintaining your respectable appearance. Quickly checking these points on a daily basis ensures that you will be ready to present yourself in a professional environment.

## Sites to check out

<http://www.symsdress.com>

<http://amdt.wsu.edu/research/dti/>

This site has some good visuals about what is and is not appropriate

<http://www.collegegrad.com/jobsearch/15-5.shtml>

<http://depts.washington.edu/careers/fair/students/dress/?interview>

<http://www.bsu.edu/students/careers/students/interviewing/dressing/>

<http://www.dressforsuccess.com/index2.html>

Gives men an idea on how the interview items should fit

<http://www.career.vt.edu/JOBSEARC/BusCasual.htm#ATTIREMENWOMEN>

Helpful information on business casual dress

[www.professionalimagedress.com](http://www.professionalimagedress.com)