

What your clothes say about you

- In an interview your attire plays a supporting role.
- Your conduct, your interpersonal skills and your ability to articulate intelligent and well thought out responses to questions are the most important elements.
- Appropriate attire supports your image as a person who takes the interview process seriously and understands the nature of the industry in which you are trying to become employed.
- Be aware that in some industries, customer contact and image presented to the customer is critical. In such industries, your attire will be judged more critically.
- Your attire should be noticed as being appropriate and well-fitting, but it should not take center stage.
- If you are primarily remembered for your interview attire, this is probably because you made an error in judgment!
- Dressing nicely and appropriately is a compliment to the person you meet, so if in doubt, err on the side of dressing better than you might need to.
- Even if you are aware that employees of an organization dress casually on the job, dress up for the interview unless you are specifically told otherwise by the employer.
- Never confuse an interview or business function with a social event. Don't dress for a party or a date.
- Not every contact with an employer requires interview attire. For some occasions business casual is appropriate. See [business casual](#) for when to wear it and what it is.

Interview attire guidelines for men and women

- **Suit:**
A two piece matched suit is always the best and safest choice.
- **But what if the job is in a non-suit-wearing work environment:**
Even if you would or could wear jeans on the job, or the work environment is outdoors and very non-suit, 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. If you think the industry in which you're interviewing would frown on a suit, or the interview will involve going to a work site where a suit would be inappropriate, look for advice through professional organizations, your professors who have been employed in that industry, and/or by asking the employer directly and politely.
- **Conservative colors / fabric:**
Navy, dark gray (and black for women) — are safe.
Other color trends may come and go; avoid the extremes.
Solids or very subtle weave patterns or plaids (the kind that look solid across a room) are safest.
Wool, wool blends, or good quality micro fiber for women only, are generally the best fabrics in all seasons. Avoid acetate / rayon blends.
- **Cost / quality:**
You are not expected to be able to afford the same clothing as a corporate CEO. Do invest in quality that will look appropriate during your first two or three years on the job. One good quality suit is sufficient for a job search if that is all your budget allows. You can vary your shirt/blouse tie/accessories.
- **Details:**

Everything should be clean and well pressed.
Carefully inspect clothes for tags, dangling threads, etc.

Additional interview attire specifics for men

- **Suit:**
A two-piece matched suit is always the best and safest choice. Don't combine a suit jacket with pants that don't match.
- **Conservative colors / fabric:**
Navy and dark gray are safe and are the most conservative for men. Black for men was once considered severe or overly formal, and may still be considered so in very conservative industries, although it is commonly worn by many. Other color trends may come and go; avoid the extremes. Choose a solid or very subtle weave pattern or plaid (the kind that look solid across a room). Wool, wool blends, or very high quality blends with natural fiber, are the only acceptable fabrics for a conservative men's suit.
- **Cost / quality:**
You are not expected to be able to afford the same clothing as a corporate CEO. Do invest in quality that will look appropriate during your first two or three years on the job. One good quality suit is sufficient for a job search if that is all your budget allows. You can vary your shirt and tie.
- **Ties:**
Tie styles come and go. Select good quality silk ties.
Avoid fashion extremes, like character ties, in interviews.
Notice what men in your industry wear on the job, at career fairs, at information sessions, when they meet with clients.
- **Shirts:**
Long-sleeved shirts, even in summer. Choose white or light blue solid, or conservative stripes.
- **Socks:**
Dark socks, mid-calf length so no skin is visible when you sit down.
- **Shoes:**
Leather, lace-up or slip-on business shoes, preferably black or cordovan. Invest in a good pair; even if you don't wear them daily on the job, you'll need them for other occasions and you should expect to get lots of years out of good shoes.
- **Belt:**
Black or cordovan leather, to match your shoes.
- **Facial hair:**
If worn, should be well-groomed. Observe men in your industry if you are unsure what's appropriate or are considering changing your look.
- **Jewelry:**
Wear a conservative watch. If you choose to wear other jewelry, be conservative. Removing earrings is safest. For conservative industries, don't wear earrings. Observe other men in your industry to see what is acceptable.
- **Details:**
Everything should be clean and well pressed. Suits typically have tacking stitches to hold vents — on the jacket back and on sleeves — in place before the garment is purchased. Cut them off if your retailer / tailor doesn't. And that tag stitched on the outside of your sleeve is not meant to stay there like a Tommy Hilfiger label — cut it off! Carefully inspect clothes dangling threads, etc.

Additional interview attire specifics for women

- **Don't confuse club attire with business attire.** If you would wear it to a club, you probably shouldn't wear it in a business environment.
- **Suit:**
Wear a two-piece matched suit.
- **Suit - pants / skirts:**
Tailored pants suits are appropriate for women. Pants suits can be an excellent choice for site visits, particularly if the visit involves getting in and out of vehicles and/or the site is (or includes) a manufacturing plant or industrial facility. If you wear pants, they should be creased and tailored, not tight or flowing. If you are pursuing a conservative industry and are in doubt, observe well dressed women in your industry on the job, at career fairs, at information sessions, etc.
- **Skirt lengths:**
Much of what you see on television shows that masquerades for professional attire is actually inappropriate for a work environment. Your skirt should cover your thighs when you are seated. Showing a lot of thigh makes you look naive at best, foolish at worst. A skirt that ends at the knee when you're standing looks chic and professional. Longer skirts are professional too; just make sure they are narrow enough not to be billowing, but not so narrow that you can't climb stairs comfortably. Don't purchase a skirt or decide on a hem length until you sit in the skirt facing a mirror. That's what your interviewer will see. Ask yourself whether it will be distracting or reinforce your image as a person who looks appropriate for a business environment or gathering. High slits in skirts are not appropriate. A small back, center slit in a knee-length skirt is appropriate. On a calf length skirt, a slit to the knee to facilitate walking and stair climbing is appropriate.
- **Color / fabric:**
Navy, dark gray, brown and black are safe. Other color trends may come and go; avoid the extremes. Women generally have more options with suit color than men. For example, while a woman could look conservative in a slate blue or light gray suit, these colors would be inappropriate for men. Choose a solid or very subtle weave pattern or plaid (the kind that look solid across a room). Wool, wool blends, and high quality blends and synthetics are appropriate for women's suiting.
- **Shirt / sweaters:**
Underneath the suit jacket, wear a tailored blouse in a color or small print that coordinates nicely with your suit. A fine gauge, good quality knit shell is also appropriate underneath your suit jacket. Don't show cleavage.
- **Jewelry / accessories:**
Wear a conservative watch. Jewelry and scarf styles come and go. Keep your choices simple and leaning toward conservative. Avoid extremes of style and color. If your industry is creative, you may have more flexibility than someone pursuing a conservative industry.
- **Cosmetics:**
Keep makeup conservative. A little is usually better than none for a polished look. Nails should be clean and well groomed. Avoid extremes of nail length and polish color, especially in conservative industries.
- **Shoes:**
Should be leather or fabric / micro fiber. Shoe styles and heel heights come and go. Choose closed-toe pumps. Regardless of what is in style, avoid extremes; no stilettos or chunky platforms. Make certain you can walk comfortably in your shoes; hobbling in uncomfortable shoes does not convey a professional appearance.
- **Hosiery:**
Should be plainly styled (no patterns), sheer (not opaque), and in neutral colors complementing your suit. Avoid high contrast between your suit and hosiery color.
- **Purse / bag:**

If you carry a purse, keep it small and simple, especially if you also carry a briefcase. Purse color should coordinate with your shoes. You may choose to carry a small briefcase or business-like tote bag in place of a purse. Leather is the best choice for briefcases; micro fiber or fine wovens are also acceptable.

Grooming tips for everyone

- **Hair:**
Should be clean and neat.
- **Shoes:**
Should be in polished condition. Make sure heels are not worn.
- **Details:**
No missing buttons, no lint; and don't forget to remove external tags and tacking stitches from new clothes.
- **Hands:**
Clean fingernails.
- **Fit:**
Clothes should be clean, neatly pressed, and fit properly.
- **Smell:**
Perfume or cologne should be used sparingly or not at all. No odors in clothes. Don't smell like smoke.
- **Pad folios:**
Preferred over a bulky briefcase. A small briefcase is also appropriate. But if you have no reason to carry a briefcase, don't; you risk looking silly.
- **Book bags:**
Leave it at home for an on-site interview. For an on-campus interview, you can leave it in the waiting area.

Business casual guidelines for men and women

Business casual is crisp, neat, and should look appropriate even for a chance meeting with a CEO. It should not look like cocktail or party or picnic attire. Avoid tight or baggy clothing; business casual is classic rather than trendy.

Basics:

Khaki pants, neatly pressed, and a pressed long-sleeved, buttoned solid shirt are safe for both men and women. Polo/golf shirts, unwrinkled, are an appropriate choice if you know the environment will be quite casual, outdoors or in a very hot location. This may not seem like terribly exciting attire, but you are not trying to stand out for your cutting edge look, but for your good judgment in a business environment.

Shoes / belt:

Wear a leather belt and leather shoes. Athletic shoes are inappropriate.

Cost / quality:

You are not expected to be able to afford the same clothing as a corporate CEO. However, do invest in quality that will look appropriate during your first two or three years on the job for a business casual environment or occasions.

Details:

Everything should be clean, well pressed, and not show wear. Even the nicest khakis after 100 washings may not be your best choice for a reception. Carefully inspect new clothes for tags, and all clothes for dangling threads, etc. (as with interview attire).

Use common sense.

If there are six inches of snow on the ground and/or you are rushing to get to an information session between classes and you left home 12 hours earlier, no one will expect you to show up looking ready for a photo shoot — they'll just be happy you made

it. Just avoid wearing your worst gym clothes and jeans. If you show up at an event and realize you're not as well dressed as you should be, make a quick, pleasant apology and make a good impression with your interpersonal skills and intelligent questions.

Specifics for men's business casual

Ties:

Ties are generally not necessary for business casual, but if you are in doubt, you can wear a tie. It never hurts to slightly overdress; by dressing nicely, you pay a compliment to your host. You can always wear the tie and discreetly walk by the room where the function is held; if no one else is wearing a tie, you can discreetly remove yours.

Shirts:

Long-sleeved shirts are considered dressier than short-sleeved and are appropriate even in summer. Choosing white or light blue solid or conservative stripes is your safest bet. Polo shirts (tucked in, of course) are acceptable in more casual situations.

Socks:

Wear dark socks, mid-calf length so no skin is visible when you sit down.

Shoes:

Leather shoes should be worn. No sandals, athletic shoes or hiking boots.

Facial hair:

Just as with interviews: Facial hair, if worn, should be well-groomed. Know your industry and how conservative it is; observe men in your industry if you are unsure what's appropriate or are considering changing your look.

Jewelry:

Wear a conservative watch. If you choose to wear other jewelry, be conservative. Removing earrings is safest. For conservative industries, don't wear earrings. Observe other men in your industry to see what is acceptable.

Specifics for women's business casual

Don't confuse club attire with business attire. If you would wear it to a club, you probably shouldn't wear it in a business environment. Also, most attire worn on television is not appropriate for business environments. Don't be deluded.

Pants / skirts:

Women can wear casual pants or skirts. Neither should be tight. Fabrics should be crisp; colors should generally be solid; navy, black, gray, brown and khaki are always safe bets. For the most business-like appearance, pants should be creased and tailored; neither extreme of tight or flowing. If you are pursuing a conservative industry and are in doubt, observe well-dressed women in your industry on the job, at career fairs, at information sessions, etc.

Skirt length and slits:

Your skirt should come at least to your knees while you are standing. While you are seated, your thighs should be covered. If your skirt comes to just below the knee, a slit to just above the knee might be acceptable. A very long skirt should not be slit to above the knee. Generally slits in the center back of a skirt — to facilitate walking a stair climbing — are acceptable. Slits to facilitate a view of your legs are not appropriate for business purposes. Slits should not be visible.

Shirt / sweaters:

In addition to tailored shirts or blouses, tailored knit sweaters and sweater sets are appropriate business casual choices for women. Cotton, silk, and blends are appropriate. Velvets and shimmery fabrics suitable for parties are not appropriate. Fit should not be

tight. **Cleavage is not appropriate to business and job search occasions.**

Jewelry / accessories:

Wear a conservative watch. Jewelry and scarf styles come and go. Keep your choices simple and leaning toward conservative. Avoid extremes of style and color. If your industry is creative, you may have more flexibility than someone pursuing a conservative industry.

Cosmetics:

Keep makeup conservative and natural looking. A little is usually better than none for a polished look. Nails should be clean and well groomed. Avoid extremes of nail length and polish color, especially in conservative industries.

Shoes:

Should be leather or fabric / microfiber. Appropriate colors are black, navy and brown (to coordinate with your other attire and accessories); white and pastels are not appropriate. For the most conservative look, toes should be covered. Sandals which are either extremely dressy or extremely casual might be appropriate. Thin straps and high heels are not appropriate. Chunky heels and platforms are not appropriate. Make certain you can walk comfortably in your shoes; **hobbling around a job fair in shoes that are pinching your feet does not convey a professional image.**

Hose:

Not essential for business casual, but are recommended if your skirt is knee length (rather than calf length) and in more formal environments such as hotels.

Purse / bag:

If you carry a purse, keep it small and simple, or carry a small briefcase or business-like tote bag in place of a purse. A structured bag tends to look more professional than something soft or floppy. Purse/bag color should coordinate with your shoes. A briefcase is certainly not necessary for most business casual events. Leather, microfiber and fine wovens are appropriate. Canvas and straw are not appropriate.

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