

Tips for Dressing Appropriately

Types of Business Attire

There are different types of business dress that you need to understand in order to dress appropriately for various business events. These are probably terms you've heard before, but after reading this, you should have a good understanding of what clothes work for different occasions. Clothing that reveals too much cleavage, your back, your chest, your stomach or your underwear is not appropriate. Clothing should be clean, pressed and free of wrinkles. Torn, dirty, or frayed clothing is unacceptable. Clothing should be comfortable and practical for work, but never distracting or offensive to others. Any clothing that has words, terms, or pictures that may be offensive to others is unacceptable.

Professional Business Dress

This is the most conservative type of business wear. This dress code is required for interviews, Meet the Firms Night, formal classroom presentations, or in a conservative business office. For women, this means a business suit, pants suit, or dress. For men, professional dress means a business suit.

Specifics for women:

- Hats – not normally worn, except for regional variations in climate and season.
- Neck – blouse scarf if desired
- Coat – dark coat, the smarter the better
- Tops – blouse, clean and well pressed. White is the universally preferred color.
- Jackets – should coordinate with pants or skirt.
- Bottom – suit skirt should match the jacket and must be at least knee length. Smart skirts – preferably dark, gray, or beige in color, and be at least knee length.
- Pants – black, gray, navy, brown, or khakis are suitable colors – tailored, with creases.
- Footwear – dress pumps, closed toe, low heel. Hose, no patterns. (May be omitted in hot climates).
- Accessories – a small amount of jewelry may normally be worn but should not be distracting.
- Makeup, Perfume, Cologne – remember that some people are allergic to the chemicals in perfumes and makeup, so wear these substances with restraint.

Specifics for men:

- Hat – not normally worn, except for regional variations in climate and season.
- Neck – tie required. Bow ties are acceptable but are very unusual and should be avoided as should bolo ties. The top button of the shirt must be done up. Tie pins are generally out of fashion. Avoid novelty items (i.e., Disney ties, pocket swatches).
- Coat – overcoat if weather requires.
- Suit jacket – plain dark suits are the safest option. A blazer is not normally acceptable.
- Top – a collared dress shirt. Must be clean and well pressed. No frayed collars. White is the universally preferred color.
- Bottom – suit pants must match the jacket.
- Ankles – dress socks, ideally the same color as your suit, or at least as dark as your suit. Mid-calf length. No patterns, logos, or pictures.
- Footwear – dress shoes: leather, preferably black, or at least as dark as your socks.
- Accessories – cufflinks worn with a French cuff dress shirt. Avoid novelty items or too much jewelry. Belt, with a conservative buckle, should be leather and in good condition.

Business Casual

This is a more relaxed version of "Professional Dress", but it doesn't mean you're actually going to be "casual!" This is likely going to be your office dress code if you work in a semi-conservative workplace, but some interviews and events may also call for business casual. Basically, business casual is a shirt with a collar and/or a sweater, khakis or dress pants and nice shoes for women. Women can also sometimes wear a moderate length dress or skirt (knee-length or longer!). For men, business casual is a polo shirt or shirt with a collar and/or sweater, khakis or dress pants and dress shoes. No tie is required.

Specifics for women:

- Hat – not normally worn, except for regional variations in climate and season.
- Coat – if weather requires. A dark color often looks more professional, the smarter the better.
- Jacket – always optional with casual styles. Again, a dark color often looks more professional.
- Top – blouse, clean and well pressed. (You can never go wrong with white.) A pullover sweater or a sweater set is also appropriate. Avoid too form-fitting and/or revealing styles. Avoid slogans and logos, but fashion labels are generally acceptable.
- Bottom – skirt or dress must be at least knee length. Pants – full length: black, gray, navy, brown, or khakis are the best colors. Ideally tailored with creases. Avoid denim. Hose, no patterns. (May be omitted in hot climates).
- Footwear – dress pumps or pumps, black is the safest, with closed toe and low heel. Leather, fabric, or microfiber. Nice boots are also acceptable.
- Accessories – generally it is best to restrict yourself to a few items of jewelry. Nothing large or extravagant.

Specifics for men:

- Hat – not normally worn, except for regional variations in climate and season.
- Neck – tie, normally optional but discouraged. (Always worth having one tucked away just in case.)
- Coat – If weather requires. A dark color often looks more professional.
- Jacket – generally no jacket, but is always optional with casual styles (suit jacket or sports coat.) Sport coats are very versatile. Invest in one in shades of black/grey and one in tan/brown; add in a navy blazer and you are set for any occasion.
- Top – collared dress shirt is always the safest option. Also acceptable is a Polo shirt or similar collared top, short or long sleeve – and tucked in. Shirts must be clean and well pressed. Avoid logos and slogans, but fashion labels are generally acceptable.
- Bottom – pants must be nice looking and of good quality. Black, gray, navy, brown, or khakis are the best colors.
- Ankles – dark socks, ideally the same color as pants, but normally a darker shade. Mid-calf length. Avoid loud patterns, logos, and images.
- Footwear – Avoid lighter colors. Black and brown are safest.
- Accessories – a watch and wedding ring are always allowed.