

DRESS FOR INTERVIEW SUCCESS

The first impression you make on a potential employer is the most important one. Many experts agree that 80 percent of an interviewer's opinion of a candidate is based solely on his or her first impression, and that first judgment an interviewer makes is going to be based on how you look and what you are wearing. That's why a well-groomed, professional appearance is essential for a job interview – even if the work environment is casual. The candidate dressed in a suit is going to make a much better impression than the candidate dressed in scruffy jeans and a t-shirt.

There are standards of professional dress in all career fields. In some creative fields, for example, you may have more flexibility in terms of formal vs. casual attire. However, **it is always safe to err on the conservative side.**

Men's Professional Interview Attire

- Suit (dark, neutral color – black, navy, dark gray, or brown)
- Long-sleeve shirt (subtle, light color – like white, light blue, or light gray – coordinated with suit) and undershirt
- Coordinating necktie (solid, striped, or with subtle pattern)
- Matching belt
- Dark socks that cover calves when seated (no white socks!)
- Dark, polished leather shoes to match suit
- Little or no jewelry
- Hair neatly trimmed and styled; facial hair neatly groomed
- Neatly trimmed, clean nails
- Limit (or avoid) aftershave and cologne
- Padfolio or briefcase

Men's Business Casual Attire

- Khaki pants or dress pants (no jeans!)
- Long-sleeved, collared, button-down shirt or polo shirt
- Have a blazer and tie handy

Women's Professional Interview Attire

- Pant or skirt suit (dark, neutral color – black, navy, dark gray, or brown); if wearing a skirt suit, the skirt should be at least knee-length so you can sit down comfortably
- Coordinating, subtle shell or tailored blouse (avoid low-cut tops that show cleavage!)
- Sheer, skin-toned hosiery
- Closed-toe, polished shoes (avoid heels over two inches)
- Simple, minimal jewelry
- Hair neatly trimmed and styled
- Neatly manicured, clean nails (avoid bright polish colors)
- Wear light make-up and limit (or avoid) perfume
- Padfolio or small, plain purse

Women's Business Casual Attire

- Knee-length skirts, khaki pants, or dress pants (no jeans!)
- Knit sweaters, sweater sets, tailored shirts, or blouses

WHEN GETTING READY FOR YOUR INTERVIEW...

- **PLAY IT SAFE** – You may be concerned that you are not the “suit and tie” type. Your individuality is important, but you will have plenty of opportunity to display your unique style once you have the job. Use the interview to determine the culture of the company, including dress policies, but do not give the employer any reason to select someone else over you before they have had a chance to get to know you. Whether you like it or not, you will be judged – at least in part – by your appearance. Though the right attire might not get you the job, you definitely don't want it to count against you.
- **BE PREPARED** – It's a good idea to “try out” your interview suit before the interview to make sure it's comfortable and everything fits well. If it doesn't, have it altered. A well-fitted suit looks professional and gives you confidence. Look for loose buttons, remove tags, and use a lint brush if necessary. Also, get your clothes ready the night before so you don't spend time doing that on the day of the interview. Finally, any clothing that is dry clean only should be taken to the cleaners after the interview so it's ready the next time you need it.
- **PRACTICE GOOD GROOMING** – Shower, brush your teeth, get regular haircuts, and make sure your nails are clean and trimmed. If you smoke, take care that you and your clothing don't smell of smoke.
- **AVOID STRONG FRAGRANCES** – Wear deodorant, but limit (or altogether avoid) aftershave, cologne, or perfume. The interviewer may not have the same taste as you (or could be allergic!), and you don't want to overpower the room.
- **NO GUM** – Bring breath mints instead to use before the interview and in between appointments.
- **TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONE** – Even a cell phone on vibrate can be distracting to both you and the interviewer. Completely shut off your cell phone or leave it in the car.

What Not to Wear to an Interview: Top 20 Wardrobe Malfunctions

What is the worst outfit ever worn to a job interview? For a career services director at the University of Chicago, it was the applicant who sported a Madras tie as a belt and a patterned cotton hat. Other contenders, according to a CareerBuilder.com survey of hiring managers, include candidates with dirty fingernails, micro-miniskirts, t-shirts with offensive slogans and even bare feet! Though you likely know that wearing shoes to an interview is a good idea, could you be guilty of one of these top 20 fashion faux pas?

1. Carrying a backpack or fanny pack instead of a briefcase or portfolio. Some image consultants suggest women ditch their purse, too!
2. Sunglasses on top of your head or headphones around your neck. Remove all "transit gear" before entering the lobby.
3. Too-short skirts. Forget what some of those gals on 'The Apprentice' are wearing. Your skirt should cover your thighs when you are seated.
4. The wrong tie. Ties should be made of silk, no less than three and a quarter inches wide with a conservative pattern. Image consultants say the best colors are red or burgundy.
5. Overly bright or large-patterned clothing. With the possible exception of creative fields like advertising or computer programming, it's best to stick with navy, black or gray.
6. Heavy makeup on women (or any makeup on a man).
7. Earrings on men. In fact, men should avoid wearing any jewelry unless it is a wedding ring, class ring or metal watch.
8. More than one set of earrings on women.
9. Facial piercings, tongue jewelry or visible tattoos.
10. Ill-fitting clothes. Few people can wear things straight off the rack. Spending a little extra to have your garments tailored is a worthwhile investment.
11. Long fingernails, especially with bright or specialty polishes. Nails should look clean and be trimmed to a length that doesn't leave an observer wondering how you keep from stabbing yourself.
12. Unnatural hair colors or styles. Remember, Donald Trump was a billionaire well before he began wearing a comb-over. If you're balding, try a close-cropped cut like Bruce Willis or Matt Lauer.
13. Short-sleeved shirts, even worse when worn with a tie.
14. Fishnets, patterned hosiery or bare legs (no matter how tan you are). Women should stick with neutral color hosiery that complements their suit.
15. Men whose socks don't match their shoes, or whose socks are too short and leave a gap of flesh when they are seated.
16. Rumpled or stained clothing. If interviewing late in the day, try to change to a fresh suit beforehand.
17. Scuffed or inappropriate footwear, including sneakers, stilettos, open-toed shoes and sandals
18. Strong aftershaves, perfumes or colognes. Many people are allergic to certain scents. For a subtle fragrance, use a good-quality bath soap.
19. Belts and shoes that don't match. Shoes and belts should be made of leather or leather-like materials, and the best colors for men are black or cordovan.
20. Telltale signs that you're wearing a new suit. Remove all tags and extra buttons – and remember to cut off the zigzag thread that keeps pockets and slits closed!

Don't be a wardrobe malfunction waiting to happen. You want the interviewer to be listening to what you're saying, not critiquing what you're wearing.