

Dress for Success



First impressions are key when trying to stand out during the recruiting or interview process. How you dress for those occasions shows how prepared you are and that you are dressing for the career you want.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) surveyed 457 employers who recruit new college graduates, and an overwhelming 92 percent believe a candidate's overall appearance influences their opinion about that candidate!

Success Tip 1: *Learn the employer's dress style, this includes understanding their work environment.*

Success Tip 2: *Understand when it is appropriate to wear certain attire, for example, business professional, business casual or smart/snappy casual.*

Success Tip 3: *Check to see if the organization has a dress code or check with the HR department.*

Business Professional

When your aim is to stand out during the formal recruiting process at a career fair or during a professional interview for a job, or admittance into a graduate or a pre-professional program, business professional attire is highly recommended for most industries. While the majority of work environments are not formal and do not call for professional attire on a daily basis, dressing beyond the typical dress code when trying to make a favorable impression can convey respect for the opportunity before you.



- For everyone, a conservative, two-piece suit in black, navy, or dark grey is appropriate. The material of the suit (blazer and slacks) must be the same color and fabric to be considered business professional. If your pants have belt loops, tuck in your shirt or blouse and make sure to wear a belt that matches your shoes.

Business Professional (cont.)

- Masculine considerations could include crisp white dress shirts and modest ties are necessary, as well as quality accessories like a watch. Also, an undershirt is a good idea. Dark brown or black loafers are best for business professional.
- Feminine considerations could include a two piece suit with a skirt or dress pants. If wearing a skirt, the length should fall just at or barely above the knee. Dress pants/ slacks should be hemmed to skim the top of your shoes. Be sure to wear tights/hose in a neutral tone. Shoes should be a closed-toed, low heel or a flat. Wear a minimal amount of jewelry: small earrings, a watch, a ring.
- For gender neutral considerations, a crisp dress shirt or blouse matched with a blazer and slacks may work great. An undershirt or appropriate undergarments are a good idea. Brown or black loafers matched with a belt is professional along with accessories like a watch or earrings.

Success Tip 1: *If you want to show your creativity and personality, choose one accessory item that has a small amount of flare. For example, an orange tie if you know you will be interviewing with OSU alumni, or small, but bright-colored earrings.*

Success Tip 2: *Be sure that the presentation of your suit is just as professional as the style of it. Making a reasonable investment in a garment steamer will ensure your suit is wrinkle free!*

Success Tip 3: *Business professional dress can be the most difficult to put together. Plan ahead and ask a career consultant for recommendations on where to shop!*

Business Casual

Building your business casual wardrobe will serve you well as this style of clothing is worn in most work environments and is recommended for many networking events, connection sessions, or even organizational meetings where employers or other guests may be present. It is a step down from business professional and a step above casual, which often leads to confusion for this category of dress being misunderstood! Here are some examples to help clarify what it IS and what it is NOT!



Business Casual (cont.)

- All gender considerations can wear dress pants or nice khakis with a collared, buttoned-down shirt. Patterned, collared shirts are a nice option for a less dressy feel than their solid counterparts. This can be paired nicely with dress shoes, loafer-style shoes, or boots for some industries or environments.
- Feminine considerations could include dress pants or khakis with a fashionable top or even a skirt with a fashionable top. To dress up your outfit, wear heels (within reason and that you can walk confidently in, of course).
- Feminine considerations could also include wearing a dress that is solid in color, still in the darker hues of navy, charcoal gray, black or more neutral tones, but paired with subtle pattern or introducing more color that is still not overly loud or flashy for most fields.

Success Tip 1: To easily move from a Business Professional to a Business Casual look, you can remove one item, such as a tie or a jacket.

Success Tip 2: Business Casual is not leggings, shorts, t-shirts, tennis shoes, open-toed shoes such as sandals, jeans or *most often jeans. The exception to jeans may be a set of pressed dress jeans worn in agriculture-based or outdoor environments.

Success Tip 3: Choose to go either more professional on top or bottom, but not casual with both. For example, for more professional on top, pair a nice dress shirt or blouse with khakis. For more professional on bottom, pair slacks or a dress skirt with a polo or more casual blouse.

Smart or Snappy Casual

Smart Casual (or snappy casual) is basically a combination of casual, business casual, and business professional dress codes, where you can combine them into a “smart” ensemble. Employers often use smart casual dress for “casual Friday” attire when employees can wear jeans. Here are some examples to be smart with your snappy casual!



Smart or Snappy Casual (cont.)

- Clothing that is well-fitting, neat and appropriate but slightly less formal than a business casual or business professional dress code. Smart casual is much more elevated and put-together than dressing for off-hours and avoids items that are too casual or loose-fitting.
- Select a top made of fabrics with interesting details, collared shirts, or button-ups with short sleeves or long sleeves. Bright colors are acceptable, but use color sparingly to avoid creating a look that's too casual. Avoid cotton T-shirts or tops with large-printed graphics or slogans.
- It is safest to go with nice slacks or a skirt, though you could also wear a nice pair of dark jeans dressed up with a collared or otherwise dressy top. Throw on a blazer for an extra touch of class.
- This is your opportunity to pair denim with a sport coat. Khakis, trousers, vests, and ties are great options to bring into the mix.

Success Tip 1: For Smart Casual, you should look sharp, stylish, and neatly put together (or purposely put together).

Success Tip 2: If opting for jeans, denim should look dressy, fresh, and sharp with no wear or holes. Also, jeans may only be an option for Fridays.

Success Tip 3: Be sure to not go too casual and avoid shorts, t-shirts, spaghetti straps, flip flops or casual sandals, leggings, and short dresses or skirts.

Research the Employer

For some industries, for instance when conducting business outdoors, a dark-colored sport jacket can also be considered business professional. If your pants have belt loops and you tuck in your shirt, wear a belt that matches your shoes. Shoes should be dark brown or black dress shoes, loafers, or even dressy Cowboy boots for select work environments or industries.

- Understand the culture of the organization to determine if it is more conservative (accounting, finance, engineering, law, etc.), more creative (retail, advertising, teaching, etc.), or has an important safety focus (manufacturing, agriculture, etc.).
- Research the company's LinkedIn profile to see what employees are shown wearing, or website for a dress code policy.
- If you are second-guessing an outfit choice, it's better to think again. Err on the conservative side when in doubt about what to wear.
- Ask the employer! It is okay to ask employers what their organization's dress code looks like.

Success Tip 1: Check out the next page for information on accessories, hygiene, and good grooming tips!

Success Tip 2: Ensure all clothing is well-fitting to look and feel your best! Avoid revealing clothing in all forms such as short dresses, tight pants, or tight shirts. Skirts or dresses that fall just at or barely above the knee are recommended.

Success Tip 3: Look for clues on company websites or ask a career consultant, or career coach, your questions. Often, the more professional the dress code of the environment you wish to join, the less expression you have in determining attire options or even the use of color and patterns!

Grooming

First impressions are key to your success in the job search process and good grooming and personal hygiene play a pivotal role in standing out in a positive way!

Hygiene:

Practicing good personal hygiene is very important. Showering, maintaining fresh breath, wearing deodorant and clean pressed clothes can help you succeed under pressure. As a best practice, avoid perfume or cologne, as you never know other's potential sensitivity to fragrance and want to keep the focus strictly on your conversation.

Hair:

When it comes to selecting a hairstyle for a career fair or interview, the simpler and classier the look, the better. Ensure hair is well kept and will remain out of your face to avoid distractions. If you have facial hair, make sure that it is well-groomed and trimmed. If you are just starting to grow facial hair, it may be best to opt for a clean-shaven approach.

Makeup:

If you wear makeup, a natural look made up of a neutral color palette for your skin tone is preferred. Avoid products that glitter or shimmer, as they could detract from your message.

Nails:

Nails should always be kept clean, cut short, and painted a neutral color if wearing nail polish.



Body Art:

Consider your choice of work environments and industry when deciding your approach to body art. For more conservative or formal environments, it is recommended to remove body jewelry and cover up visible tattoos during the recruitment process.

Jewelry:

When it comes to accessories, less is more. The accessories you choose to complement your professional attire should be simple and sleek- think classy over trendy. Always consider the industry and the culture of the company when complementing an outfit with accessories like jewelry. Stud earrings made of pearls, diamonds, silver, or gold, as well as one or two other simple pieces of jewelry such as one corresponding simple bracelet or classic necklace such as pearls are professional. If you have a wedding ring or wedding band, that is also acceptable.

Examples:



Cultural Considerations

Dress is an extension of who you are, including religious or cultural beliefs that often shape your attire and accessories. Finding a professional balance to remain true to your cultural, ethnic, or religious identity and the work environment is key.



- The [Equal Employment Opportunity, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals on account of their religion, birthplace, ancestry, culture, or linguistic characteristics common to a specific ethnic group.
- Most companies have their dress codes and policies stated on their website. If you are unsure, it is important to ask questions. A human resources professional or career consultant can help.
- Some workplaces may have policies or dress codes for the safety of the employees or those which are required for a specific job or type of industry.