DRESS FOR SUCCESS

No one enjoys being judged for employment based on looks: we would rather be hired because of our skills and abilities. But like it or not, appearance does matter in the interview and on the job. Your appearance sends messages to potential employers about your motivation, professionalism, judgment, and “fit” within the organization. For an interview, you should dress a little more conservatively and formally than employees typically dress at that organization. If you have no idea what employees normally wear and you are too far away from the office to drop by and see, call the Human Resources office and ask about the company dress code.

The Rules:
There are three main categories of business dress: Business, Business Casual, and Casual. While there are no absolute rules regarding dress, here are some guidelines:

- The primary goal of dressing for your interview is to feel good and look professional. If you feel uncomfortable in an outfit - even if people say you look great - don't wear it.
- When interviewing on-campus, always opt for business dress. Likewise, if you interview off-campus, assume that business dress is called for - unless you research and find out otherwise, or unless you are interviewing on the west coast where professional attire is much less formal.
- Quality, cut, and fit communicate a lot: an ill-fitting suit indicates a person who does not pay attention to detail, while a slouchy or too-tight cut may send an alarming message to a conservative firm.
- These guidelines apply to four-season climates. In the south, short sleeves are acceptable - look for cooler fabrics as well.
- Regardless of whether you are dressing in business, business casual, or casual wear for work, you need to avoid rumpled clothes, scuffed shoes, ratty nails, garish print sport or tee shirts, athletic clothing, sneakers, hiking boots, flip-flops, athletic sandals, short shorts, tank tops, low-cut tops, miniskirts, and excessive makeup.

“Business” (or “Business Professional”) Dress means:

- Two-piece business suit and tie: solid, neutral colors are best
- Three-piece suits are fine, but make sure the vest fits well
- Skirt length should be to the knee (or close to it, depending on what length works for you)
- If you wear a skirt, you should also wear tights or hosiery: bare legs and sandals are not considered professional in many industries
- Minimal jewelry, e.g. watch, wedding or school ring, subtle earrings, cufflinks
- Dark shoes with dark socks – if you are unsure which shoe or sock colors “go” with your suit, ask the CDC staff for advice
- Heels are appropriate but should be comfortable to stand and walk in – flats, wedges, or low heels are probably best for most workplaces
"Business Casual" Dress means:
- Wearing a tie is optional
- Sport coats are appropriate, but not required
- Shirts should be collared (polo or button-down)
- Dress pant options include slacks, khakis, chinos, corduroy, or gabardine pants
- Dresses or skirt/blouse combinations are appropriate
- Shorts are not considered appropriate for interviews
- Good casual shoes, like loafers, boat shoes, lug-sole shoes, flats, wedges, or low heels (sandals may be appropriate considering the climate – but no flip flops!)
- Hosiery is not required during the summer

"Casual" Dress means:
Anything listed as business casual, and:
- Jeans (avoid rips or holes, darker washes are generally considered more professional)
- Sandals may be appropriate – but not sneakers, flip-flops, or athletic shoes!
- Clean, plain t-shirts – best to avoid sleeveless tops or tank tops at the office
- Shorts may be acceptable for certain work events, but they should be knee-length - city shorts or Bermuda shorts – and not tight. Check company policy before wearing shorts to work!

Non-dress issues:
Here’s what can really hurt you in an interview, even if you are dressed perfectly. Be sure you pay attention to personal grooming issues before meeting with an employer:
- Make sure to completely silence your phone before the interview! (The vibrate setting can still be distracting and interrupt the flow of your conversation with your interviewer.)
- Iron your clothes before the interview – we get comments on candidates who did not!
- Carry a good briefcase, portfolio, or handbag
- Accessories are great, but should not be distracting to you or your prospective employer
- Empty your pockets of coins or anything that will distract you or your interviewer
- If you have tattoos, consider covering them for the interview
- Personal hygiene is extremely important – employers will expect the following standards:
  - Bathe and use deodorant
  - Hair should be clean and recently cut or styled
  - Facial hair should be clean-shaven or neatly trimmed (Religious exceptions apply)
  - In many industries, brightly colored hair is not considered professional
  - Nails should be clean and trimmed: you’ll be shaking lots of hands at the interview! If you get a manicure before your interview, choose a nail color and length that will be comfortable for you and not distracting to your interviewer
  - If you wear makeup, natural colors are best for an interview
  - Brush your teeth right before the interview, and carry Altoids for last-minute emergencies ... but do not have gum or candy in your mouth when you meet the interviewer!
  - If you smoke, keep your interview clothes somewhere smoke-free
  - Perfume, cologne, or aftershave: avoid or use very lightly. What if the interviewer is allergic or hates it?

Remember, the goal of the interview is to get the job offer. Dress to make sure your potential employer is paying attention to you, not your outfit. Once you get the job, there is plenty of time to be fashionable and let your personal style shine!

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