

## PROFESSIONAL DRESS ETIQUETTE

Everyone wants to make a good impression whether you are interviewing for a new job or networking with your colleagues. Professional dress expectations can vary from office to office and supervisor to supervisor. Interpreting professional dress etiquette can feel overwhelming. You can never go wrong with being more formal and conservative in a professional environment. Research the company and see what level of formality they expect in an interview and for business professional attire, this varies broadly. Stringent rules have become lax over the last 5, 10 and 20 years. You want others to focus on your skills and knowledge versus a distracting article of clothing.

**If in doubt, go up to the next level of formality or layer pieces. It's easier to take off a tie or remove a blazer than not to have it at all.**



**Try on your planned outfit before the day of the interview, that way you will know if it still fits and if it is in good shape.**

*This advice is written with a focus on gender-normative expectations. Although things are slowly beginning to change, this is still currently an expectation in many businesses. Use the advice below to dress in a way that allows you to be your most comfortable and confident, while also displaying your highest professional self. Many of the tips listed below are gender fluid and appropriate for anyone to wear, for example, a button-down shirt.*



**INTERVIEW ATTIRE AND BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL FOR WOMEN****DRESS CONVENTIONALLY**

If the company has a formal dress code be conservative. Business professional is the most conservative dress code and appropriate for an interview. Employers use dress as their first judge of professionalism. Even if they say it's business casual, we still recommend respectful and professional attire.

- Wear a matching suit with pants or a skirt and opt for a darker color like black or navy. You can also consider wearing a statement dress in a jewel tone or a dark color like gray or black. If you opt for a statement dress, ensure the dress has sleeves or add a blazer.
- Dresses or skirts should be comfortable, but fitted, with skirts falling just below the knee.
- Pair your suit with a dressy blouse, preferably a button-up, and minimal accessories.
- If it is important for you to show personality or individual style, try incorporating bold colors in moderation like a bold show or brightly colored accessory.

**FOOTWEAR**

- Wear closed-toe shoes.
- Opt for solid neutral colors like black, brown, or blue.
- Make sure your footwear is clean and in good condition.
- Only, in very few formal industries is it expected for women to wear heels, a dressy flat in a neutral color is also acceptable.

**PROFESSIONAL HANDBAG OR BRIEFCASE**

- Select a handbag or briefcase that is sleek and professional.
- Opt for a darker color like black or brown, and if you pick leather, choose one that matches your shoes or other leather accessories.
- If you plan to bring copies of your resume, portfolio, or other documents to the interview, make sure they fit neatly inside and are protected.



**If you do choose to wear a heel it is preferred to be 3 inches or shorter.**

## **INTERVIEW ATTIRE AND BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL FOR MEN**

### **DRESS CONVENTIONALLY**

Business professional is the most conservative dress code and appropriate for an interview.

- It is expected to wear a suit and opt for a darker color like black or navy.
- Always opt for neutral or formal business colors like black, blue or gray.
- It's recommended that you keep it formal with a blazer unless you're told otherwise.
- Pair the blazer with a tie, button-down shirt and slacks.

### **SHIRTS AND TIES**

- It is widely accepted to wear a white or light blue button-down shirt with a dark tie, slacks and a matching blazer.
- If an employer says you can be more casual, select a pattern for your shirt or tie, but not both.
- Be conservative with your tie choice and stick to modest designs such as stripes or checkers.
- If it is important for you to show personality or individual style, incorporate a bold color or pattern, but in moderation.

### **BELT AND FOOTWEAR**

- You should wear a belt with your pants and match your belt to the color of your shoes.
- Wear closed-toe dress shoes, such as a loafer.
- Opt for solid neutral colors like black, brown, or blue.
- Make sure your footwear is clean and in good condition.
- Socks are also expected for a professional interview and should match the rest of your wardrobe.

### **PROFESSIONAL BAG OR BRIEFCASE**

- If you plan to bring copies of your resume, portfolio, or other documents to an interview, use a professional bag or briefcase and make sure your documents are protected and fit neatly inside.



**Create different  
interview looks by  
mixing and matching  
your shirts and ties.**

## SMART CASUAL

Smart casual falls between business professional and business casual attire. This style mixes levels of formality with personal style and is defined by intentionality and attention to detail while dressing.

- Tweed or corduroy blazers and light-colored suits are acceptable.
- Mixing suit pieces is part of this dress style (e.g., chinos with a dark blazer, a suit with a casual shirt with a pattern, adding in colors).
- Pants such as chinos or dress pants are smart options. Dark-wash denim that leans to a more fitted and tailored look is also acceptable, avoid distressed jeans with rips.
- Preferred footwear includes oxfords, ballet flats, loafers, ankle boots, wedges and low-to-mid heel types that are clean and scuff-free. Avoid running shoes or sneakers, which are too casual.
- Sheath dresses, jumpsuits and collared dress shirts can also help you achieve a relaxed and refined look.
- Accessories should enhance a polished and refined look. Statement watches, bracelets and necklaces in moderation are acceptable.



**Your attire should be appropriate for after-work socializing, networking or a professional social event.**

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**Bright colors are acceptable, but use color sparingly to avoid a look that is overly casual.**

**If you're a new employee don't be afraid to ask about expectations and norms for professional attire in your new workplace.**



## BUSINESS CASUAL

Business casual is the most relaxed look for the office and is common as Friday attire. It is still office wear and casual for home is not accepted. Below are a few industry standards for this attire.

- Tops should be comfortable, professional and conservative (e.g., button-down shirts paired with a cardigan, a simple top with a blazer or a knit sweater). Avoid slouchy or oversized sweaters, ill-fitting clothes, plunging necklines and fabric that wrinkles easily.
- If wearing a button-down shirt, you may want to tuck it into your pants or skirt for a polished look. It's also acceptable to wear khaki or cotton pants, as long as they look professional.
- Wear black or brown closed-toe flats, pumps or low heels. Shoes should not be scuffed, scratched or dirty, and avoid strapped sandals, flip-flops, sky-high stilettos, sneakers or brightly colored shoes.
- Keep jewelry choices simple and professional.
- Wear a polo shirt with khakis to present a more professional look.
- If you're not sure if jeans are appropriate in your office, wear chinos or dress pants until you find out.



**Human Resources is a great tool to inquire about dress code if you're not sure or are about to start a new job.**

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**This style provides the most opportunity to add personality through either color or pattern.**



## COCKTAIL ATTIRE

Cocktail attire may be required for holiday parties or formal celebrations. Although more fancy than office attire, it is still a work event so stay away from anything too sporty, tight, revealing, or flashy.

### WOMEN

- Either a dress or experiment with two-piece ensembles and jumpsuits if that is more your style. Dresses should be knee-length, or floor-length for more formal occasions.
- Solid colors are universally flattering and stay away from sequins.
- If possible, opt for heels. The heel height and style can vary, but add that extra touch of formality expected at these events. Flats work if paired appropriately.
- Accessories such as a clutch will complete your look and express your personal style.



**Black is a safe and versatile color for investment pieces.**

### MEN

- A suit and tie are typical, think a toned-down version of a tux.
- Preferably black tie, socks, and shoes, but an interesting pattern on your tie, and in some cases, colored socks can work for cocktail attire.
- Wear well-shined shoes such as brogues, oxfords, or monk-straps.
- Small accessories like a pocket square will complete your look.

