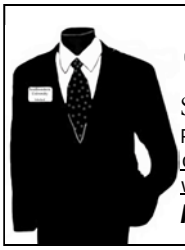
Business Attire Resource Guide

for Interviews and Beyond



Career Services

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Here to help you get ahead.

Not sure what to wear to business events, such as an interview? Know what the difference is between formal busines attire and "business casual" attire? Here is a basic guide to building your business wardrobe for interviewing and on-the-job.

Interviewing

For Women

Suits

- Choose a solid colored suit in a conservative style. Navy, black and dark gray are best for most industries.
- For versatility, consider buying a suit that has a jacket with both matching pants and skirt or dress.
- Pants are becoming more acceptable. Consider wearing a skirt suit for an interview, however, in conservative professions or if you're not sure pants are appropriate.
- Jackets may be single or double breasted; short or long. Choose a style that looks best on your body type. Avoid flashy buttons or trim.
- Knee-length skirts are most appropriate. Skirt should be no higher than 2" above the knee. Test fit by sitting down.

Stockings

- Always wear pantyhose. Choose nude colors.
- Avoid ultra-sheer.
- Make sure there are no runs in your stockings and carry an extra pair in your briefcase in case of emergency.

Tops

- Tailored blouses in solid colors are best.
- Look for fabrics that resist wrinkling and staining. Washable fabrics may be best.
- Don't wear sleeveless blouses and dresses.
- A silk or fine-gauge wool sweater shell can replace a blouse.

Shoes

- Basic pumps (no higher than 2" – 2½" heels)
- Black, navy or neutral colors for shoes
- Make sure leather shoes are well-polished.
- Always look for comfort when purchasing shoes and practice walking ahead of time.

Accessories

- Limit jewelry to two pieces at most.
- Scarves are an inexpensive way to change an outfit's look.
- Carry a neat bag, preferably a briefcase, that matches your shoes. Avoid having multiple bags (e.g. purse, briefcase, etc.). Don't carry your backpack.

For Men

Suits

- Conservative single-breasted, two- or three-button jacket
- The jacket can be with or without a vent, but avoid two-vent jackets.
- Choose dark, solid colors -- black, dark gray, charcoal or navy in a tightly woven fabric. In some industries, olive, pin-stripes, or glen plaid may work. Avoid flashy or showy fabrics.
- Pants should be pleated and cuffed.
- Make sure your suit is altered to fit properly -- sleeves should break just below your wrist.
- Have your suit pressed to keep it looking crisp.

Ties

- Purchase at least two good quality silk ties. Once you have the job, expand to seven or eight.
- Colors should work back into your suit or work well with the shirt. A simple pattern is best for interviews.
- The tie should end at your belt line.
- Use a double Windsor knot to minimize a bulky appearance.

Socks

- Match your socks to your suit, shirt or tie.
- Solid colors are better. Black or navy is best.
- Socks should be high enough so no skin is visible when you sit down and cross your legs.

Shirts

- Purchase at least two good quality dress shirts for interviewing. Once you have the job, expand to seven or eight.
- White or light blue wrinkle-free cotton is a good choice for shirts.
- Never purchase polyester or polyester blend shirts.
- Collars should be stiff but comfortable (too loose looks unprofessional; too tight, you'll feel like you're choking).
- If buying a shirt with a pointed collar be sure that it has collar stays or can be buttoned down.

Shoes

- Have one pair of basic black or brown shoes.
- Always keep your shoes polished and well-maintained.
- Wingtip shoes are more conservative. Lug or platform soles are not as professional. Ground down soles are out!
- Make comfort a priority.

Accessories

- Belts should match shoes.
- If you wear suspenders, don't wear a belt.
- Limit jewelry to watch and wedding ring.
- Carry a neat, matching briefcase or padfolio. Avoid backpacks.

Professional Attire

Women

Business Professional

Suit

- Avoid trendy styles
- Jacket sleeve length should fall ½ inch below wrist
- Neutral Colors: black, grey, brown, navy

Pants

- Pants are good for site visits
- Capris and cropped pants are not appropriate

Skirt

- Skirts should be knee length and not too tight
- Avoid high slits

Shirt

- Blouse or camisole
- Preferred colors are white or light colors
- Cleavage should not be showing

Shoes

- Avoid open toed shoes or sandals
- Wear basic pumps with a low heel, 1-2 inches high
- No stilettos or platforms
- Wear neutral hosiery or trouser socks

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Women
Business Casual

Jacket

- You may wear a blazer or suit jacket with pants or skirt
- Trendier or casual suits are also appropriate

Pants

- Dress pants or khakis are acceptable
- Avoid capris

Skirt

- Should be knee length and not too tight
- Avoid high slits

Shirt

- Blouse
- Sweaters including knit sweater sets and cardigans

Shoes

- Avoid open toed shoes or sandals
- Heels or flats are acceptable

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Men
Business Professional

Suit

- Suit should be solid or have subtle pinstripes
- Jacket should be buttoned while standing and unbuttoned while seated
- Avoid double breasted jackets
- Neutral Colors: black, grey, navy, brown

Pants

- Jacket and pants must match
- The pant leg should touch the front of the shoe and fall above the heel in the back

Tie

- Conservative colors are most appropriate
- Length: tie should reach your belt

Shirt

- White or muted shirt with collar
- Long sleeves
- The sleeve of shirt should extend ½ inch beyond the suit jacket sleeve

Shoes

- Polished, leather shoes
- Wear dark socks that match shoes and are calf length

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Men
Business Casual

Jacket

- A sports coat without a tie

Pants

- Khakis
- Solid color slacks

Tie

- Tie may be worn with long sleeve collared shirt
- Conservative colors are most appropriate

Shirt

- Shirt with collar
- Sweater
- Polo Shirt (this is more casual, appropriate for outdoor or hot temperatures)

Shoes

- Oxfords or loafers
- Wear dark socks that match shoes and are calf length

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Accessories

Women

Jewelry

- Should be simple -avoid big, dangly earrings
- Wear only one pair of earrings
- Maximum of one ring per hand

Handbags

- You may use a small and simple purse or professional bag
- No backpacks or large purses

Men

- Be conservative with watches and other jewelry
- Earrings might not be viewed positively
- Match belt to shoes

Other Tips

- All clothes should be neatly ironed
- Suits usually have tacking stitches to hold vents in place before purchase; make sure these are removed
- You should also carefully inspect for dangling threads, lint, and missing buttons
- Tattoos and piercings (other than ears) should be covered
- Bring a portfolio with copies of your resume, transcript, a notepad, pen, and your list of questions for the employer

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