

# Dress for Success

In the box office-breaker *The Matrix*, there's a scene where the main character, Neo, is walking down a crowded sidewalk in a city. Each and every person on that street wears a severely conservative black suit, white dress shirt, and black shoes. Then, suddenly, a stunning blonde in a clingy red dress walks by. Neo instantly forgets everything else around him and gawks at the woman as she passes him by with a seductive glance.

These are the two extremes of dressiness. Most businesses call for a style that falls somewhere in between. Being conscious of what you wear, however, will never be as important as it is during the interview. Your choice of clothing is almost as important as what you say, since you get only 5-7 seconds to make a first impression. It's crucial to dress as you wish to be perceived: professional, confident, and competent.

## Interview Dress Tips

- When in doubt about the company culture, err on the side of conservatism and wear a suit.
- An interviewer should remember what you said, not what you wore. Do not wear anything that will distract attention from what you have to say.
- Good personal grooming is equally vital, make sure hair and nails are well groomed.
- Dress in a higher style than the position calls for.
- Stay with neutral colors.
- Buy high quality, long lasting fabrics.
- Cover tattoos, remove facial and body piercings other than your ears.
- Avoid wearing too much cologne or perfume.
- Limit the amount of jewelry you wear.
- Wear clothes that fit you properly.
- Carry a nice briefcase or portfolio.

### Tips for Men

- Wear a classic suit or dress pants and jacket with conservative shirt and tie.
- Shoes should be clean and polished; dress shoes - no sneakers.
- Groom facial hair.
- Get a haircut.
- Remove earrings.
- Wear dark socks that cover your calves.

### Tips for Women

- Select a "classically" tailored skirt or pant suit, avoid trendy clothes.
- Avoid very short skirts, low cut necklines, flimsy fabrics, or tight fitting clothes.
- Always wear hose with your suit.
- Wear conservative dress shoes; avoid ultra high heels.
- Use neutral colored make up & nail polish – less is more.
- Avoid nails that are too long and wild or unusual hairstyles and colors.

## Dressing For Your Career

Just because the interview is over does not mean you stop thinking about what to wear. The impression people have of you by what you wear can make or break your professional reputation. Recognize that you will be judged by the way you dress. Your own definition of dressing should be based on the way you want to be perceived by others and your interest in growing within the organization. A tailored look will get you ahead; wear clothes that give you "presence" and project authority. Take the time to think about your attire in the "larger" scheme of things – who you are, where you want to go, and put it together.

### Career Dress Tips

- Tailored clothes add clout, even if business casual.
- Dress according to your organization's "culture", observe others at the top and dress "one-notch-up" from the position you have.
- Every organization has a dress culture, even if it is an unwritten one.
- Power colors are black, gray, and navy. Fashion fades, style is eternal, avoid the trendy!
- Maintain your clothes, shoes and briefcase.
- Good personal grooming is vital. Your face is the first thing people notice about you; your hands are the second.
- If your industry is creative, you may have more flexibility than someone in a conservative industry.

### Tips for Women

- Accessories should enhance and add presence to your outfit, not distract — limit the amount of jewelry you wear.
- Choose a garment that is flattering to your body shape.
- Wear a blazer/suit jacket to meetings when the men present are dressed in suits or sport coats.
- If you carry a purse, keep it small and simple. Purse color should coordinate with your shoes. You may choose to carry a small briefcase or business-like tote bag in place of a purse.
- Wear hosiery that is the same or lighter than the skirt or pants being worn.
- Makeup should be light and natural looking. Nail color, if worn, should be conservative.

### Tips for Men

- Wear an undershirt under your dress shirt.
- Wear a tie that falls on the belt buckle rather than above or below.
- Button a sport coat or suit jacket when standing.
- Only grow a goatee or beard if you have seen top management with facial hair.
- Wear shined dress shoes or conservative casual shoes — no sneakers.

## **Business Casual**

There are numerous opinions regarding what type of clothing falls within the category of business casual. Some companies consider khaki pants and short-sleeved polo shirts as business casual. Other organizations require slacks or skirts and long-sleeved shirts when they refer to business casual. As always, when in doubt, dress conservatively and lean more toward the business side rather the casual side.

### Business Casual Tips

- Business casual attire does not mean "casual" clothes. Business casual is crisp and neat, and should look appropriate even for a chance meeting with a CEO.
- Do not become known for your cutting edge look, but for your good judgment in a business environment. Khaki pants, neatly pressed, and a pressed long-sleeved, buttoned solid shirt are safe for both men and women.
- Tennis shoes, jeans, sweatshirts, short skirts, t-shirts and untucked shirts are never considered business-casual attire, they are casual. Do not confuse casual clothes with "grunge."
- Business casual does not apply to grooming standards. Your appearance should remain neat and respectable.

### Tips for Men

- Ties are generally not necessary.
- Business or sport jacket is appropriate
- Stylish, solid colored pants
- Long-sleeved solid or striped dark shirt. Polo shirts (tucked in, of course) are acceptable in more casual situations.

- Dark socks mid-calf length so no skin is visible when you sit down
- Matching belt and shoes
- Leather shoes should be worn — no sandals, athletic shoes or hiking boots.
- For conservative industries, do not wear earrings. Observe other men in your industry to see what is acceptable.

#### Tips for Women

- Do not confuse club attire with business attire. If you would wear it to a dance club, you probably should not wear it in a business environment.
- Casual pants or skirts and neither should be tight. Fabrics should be crisp; colors should generally be solid; navy, black, gray, brown and khaki are always safe bets. For the most business-like appearance, pants should be creased and tailored.
- Skirt should come at least to your knees while you are standing. While you are seated, your thighs should be covered.
- Conservative blouse or tailored knit sweaters and sweater sets are appropriate business casual choices for women. Velvets and shimmery fabrics suitable for parties are not appropriate. Fit should not be tight. Cleavage is not appropriate for business occasions.
- Shoes should have flat or low heels. Thin straps and high heels are not appropriate. For the most conservative look, toes should be covered. Sandals that are neither extremely dressy nor extremely casual might be appropriate.
- Hosiery is not essential for business casual, but is recommended if your skirt is knee length.
- Belt, scarf, and accessories should remain understated.

## R·I·T

Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services  
 57 Lomb Memorial Drive · Rochester, NY 14623 · (585) 475-2301 · (585) 475-6905 TTY · (585) 475-5476 fax  
[www.rit.edu/co-op/careers](http://www.rit.edu/co-op/careers)